Public lecture
Research project on

**Understanding the Tipping Point of Urban Conflict:**
*Violence, Cities and Poverty Reduction in the Developing World*

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Introduction:
The project and the event

- Project rationale
- Search for new paradigms and concepts
- Significance of primary field research
- Importance of Southern research partners
- Different research methods - different findings
- Policy related results from four cities
- The challenges of identifying new solutions

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The project rationale

1. Causes of violence: conventional wisdom associated with four factors:
   - Poverty;
   - youth bulges;
   - political exclusion;
   - gender-based insecurity

2. Conflict versus violence: cities are inherently conflictual spaces:
   - Conflict is understood as a situation where individuals or groups have incongruent, or differing, interests that are contradictory and potentially mutually exclusive
2. Conflict generally ‘managed’ peacefully by a range of mechanisms:

- Sometimes these cannot cope and different forms of violence can emerge

- Violence is understood as the forcible imposition, by individual or group, of their interests to the disfavour/exclusion of others
Search for new concepts: 
*Tipping points*

- **Project hypothesis:** The transition from conflict to violence happens when a **tipping point** is reached
  - *Notion originated in 1950s, and refers to the moment a given social process becomes generalised rather than specific in a rapid rather than gradual manner.*

  - *Usually seen to occur as a result a social process acquiring a certain critical mass and crossing a particular threshold, but ultimately it is the possibility that:*

- ‘**Small events and actions that produce big changes’**
  
  *(Gladwell)*

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Search for new concepts: Violence chains

- Builds on concept of ‘commodity chains’ to identify processes that increase the scale and inter-connectedness of different types of violence
- The ‘knock on’ effects of different tipping points

- Research focus on qualitative process factors
  - Includes systemic transformations, paradigmatic events, evolution of perceptions, and existence of particular networks of social agents as possible causal factors.

- Concern with temporal dimension of tipping points and value chains:
  - These are not static concepts, but inherently dynamic
  - The notion of a tipping point can apply to both increases as well as reductions in violence.

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The primary fieldwork sites

Santiago de Chile, Chile
Nairobi, Kenya
Dili, East Timor
Patna, India

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## The importance of Southern research partners

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- Each city paradigmatically associated with one factor, but displaying different levels of overall violence:
- City case studies chosen on basis of four factors conventionally identified as causing urban violence

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Combined research components

1. City profile
   - City-level data to contextualize the study as well as urban violence trends based on **quantitative secondary data**

2. Sub-city study
   - Perceptions within informal settlements of types of conflict and violence, tipping point factors that result in violence, and chains linking different types of violence
   - Based on **qualitative and quantitative primary data** using different methods, include participatory violence appraisal (PVA), interviews, FGDs, surveying
   - Primary research undertaken in low-income areas in Nairobi and Patna
     - **Santiago**: 3-fold study in low, medium, and high-income areas,
     - **Dili**: particular focus on broader institutional context in Timor Leste
Participatory methodology (PVA): Nairobi and Santiago

- **Origins**: Includes work of Chambers, Freire, Indian Environmental NGOs, and Moser & McIlwaine on violence in Colombia and Central America
- **Principles**: Reversal of power - learning from local people rather than extracting: shift from verbal to visual, individual to group
- **Robustness**: Purposive focus group sampling: representative of community members, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, culture

Mapping hotspots in Kibera, Nairobi

Visual representation of violence hotspots in Kibera, Nairobi showing multiple forms of violence

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Participatory methodology (PVA): Nairobi and Santiago

Problem of domestic violence because of drug trafficking

- Women work a lot
- Drugs & alcohol consumption
- Overcrowding
- High drug sales & consumption
- Exodus of families
- Consumption generates fights
- Suicides
- Attempted murder
- Femicides

Violence chain, group of adult women, aged 35-56, El Castillo
Urban spaces have particular dynamics that can exacerbate both conflict and violence. These can facilitate local-level instances of conflict tipping over into broader, city-level expressions of violence.

The co-existence of multiple authority and security systems leads to a situation of “institutional multiplicity.” This can be both a driver of conflict and violence. It can also be an entry-point for keeping conflict and violence in check through a balance between traditional beliefs and liberal democratic values.
Patna: Key policy insights

- The spatial distribution of both conflict and violence is critical:
  - Conflict can tip into violence; but also can contain violence.
  - Conflict both aggravates and mitigates violence.

- Mundane, everyday forms of conflicts and violence can link to more extreme and wide-ranging instances,
  - It forms chains that are a consequence of violence, but can also contribute to conflict tipping into violence.
  - Attempting to break a violence chains is potentially an ideal entry point for violence-reduction initiatives.

Deficient infrastructure in Mansoorganj Musahartoli

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Nairobi: Key policy insights

- Policy makers need to recognise the importance of political violence as an ongoing phenomenon.
  - Use of PVA to identify different categories of violence beyond crime statistics – as well as tipping points.
- Local government priority to spatial slum improvement programmes provides an opportunity to “mainstream” security and violence reduction into interventions to build physical and human capital.
  - Through the provision of water, sanitation, housing and roads.
- Initiatives to break the links within violence chains include:
  - Addressing youth unemployment
  - Regularising informal settlements
  - Recognition of the importance of ethnic intermarriage to alter tribal organisation of space in local settlements.

Solo’s 7’s graffiti: A vote for the constitution is a vote for peace

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Santiago: Key policy insights

- Comparative results from different income groups showed that:
  - By defining urban violence only as a problem of poor areas, other existing manifestations of violence become invisible.

- Policy that focuses on direct violence, particularly as it affects the poor, ignores structural indirect violence
  - such policies have limited impacts. Social cohesion, and citizen participation must be incorporated as crosscutting urban policy themes,
Comparative findings: 1. Conceptual insights

- **Tipping points:**
  - In all 4 cities grounded local-level findings in broader city-level processes
  - Showed importance of moving beyond static measures of violence – aggregated crime statistics – to processes
  - Documented how tipping points can be reversed

- **Violence Chains:**
  - Showed interconnectedness between different forms of violence
  - Focusing on one type of violence in isolation from others offers incomplete reality and obscures causality
Comparative findings:
2. Challenging conventional wisdoms in all cities

- **Poverty**: A contextual factor; while lack of assess to scarce resources can generate violence: *Nairobi; Patna*
  - Poverty linked to violence when the non-poor perceive poverty as a problem and menace—inter-class hostility; *Santiago, Patna*

- **Youth**: No natural correlation between youth bulges and violence
  - Young men become instrumentally involved in violence when manipulated by others, including political parties: *Nairobi, Dili*

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Comparative findings:
2. Challenging conventional wisdoms in all cities

- **Political exclusion**: Violence less related to exclusion and more to the elite obtaining or maintain power: **Nairobi, Dili**
  - Includes adverse integration into segregated urban spatial regimes: **Santiago, Patna**

- **Inadequate consideration of gender-based insecurity**:
  - Entry point for **Santiago** study, emerged as major concern in all **4 cities**
  - Clear interconnections between private and public spheres
Cross-cutting policy themes

1. Space:
   - Lack of public space where different social groups can interact leads to ‘hotspots’
   - Generate integrative spaces of negotiation for greater social cohesion
   - Mainstreaming awareness of spatial manifestations into violence reduction – such as slum upgrading

2. Land:
   - Dysfunctional land tenure systems and land sub-markets closely associated with violence
   - Clearly establish rights & obligations of owners and tenants with necessary documentation
   - Reduce land sub-market gaps
3. Governance:

- Highly complex because of multiple and competing forms of authority within city
- Exclusionary forms of neo-liberal governance creates city where particular social groups lose out
- Need to promote inclusive, participatory bottom-up integrative measures including social amenities

- City level securitization of violence fails to provide permanent transformation of violence reduction
- Directly tackle violence by interventions to break chains, reverse tipping points
Overarching recommendations

1. Mainstream conflict and violence into development debates and policy
   - Use non-violence entry points such as slum upgrading to recognize that violence is not a separate domain

2. Recognize that urban violence is urban: specificity of urban space with socio-economic and political processes intensified
   - Use Participatory Violence Appraisal to identify violence that goes beyond crime and rapidly diagnose and monitor spatially different violence chains

3. Engage with the police as development partners
   - Collaborate with police beyond narrow remit of criminal justice

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Overarching recommendations

4. Experiment with innovative ideas as means to prevent conflict tipping into violence
   - After 50 years, small innovations rather than blueprints required

5. Addressing the political economy that underpins conflict and violence: as an end to the issue of distribution of power in society
   - Public policy must shift from addressing specific problems to determining the kind of society urban citizens want
   - Are cities privileged spaces in which to reverse unequal power relations?
“Tipping Points are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push – in just the right place – it can be tipped.” (Malcom Gladwell, 2000: 259)