GENDER DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENT URBAN CONTEXTS: BRIDGING THE GAPS IN THEORY AND POLICY

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BACKGROUND PAPER

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Abstract

The gendered dimensions and impacts of violent urban contexts are neither well understood nor measured, and the relationship between violent urban contexts and violence as experienced by women in the public space – when women are victims and survivors of violence – remains largely unexplored. We understand violence as experienced by women as both violence against women and violence affecting women. Whilst violence against women is gender-based violence that target women because they are women, violence affecting women are forms of interpersonal violence that are not gender-based. The latter are experienced by women and by men, but in gendered ways.

This paper explores the gender dimensions of violent urban contexts and related public policies in four steps. The first section reviews the three main strands of literature that inform the debates, in particular, urban violence, feminist urban studies, and violence against women. Bridging these literatures advances the understanding of the relationship between violence against or affecting women in the public space and violent urban contexts. The second section reviews policy frameworks, including VAW, citizen security, and safe cities approaches in Latin America, based on a desk review of security policies complemented by the information provided by Igarapé’s Citizen Security Dataset. The third section presents selected city cases to highlight how different policy frameworks shape interventions at the city level (Quito, Ecuador; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Bogotá, Colombia). The fourth section concludes, summarising findings and extracting some policy recommendations.

Keywords: Violence against women, gender, violent cities, inter-personal violence, Latin America
**Introduction**

"…the evolution of female homicide in Honduras shows a continuous upward trend… The latest figures from the Observatory for Violence in Honduras …suggest that lethal violence against women continues to escalate in the country… Close to 40 per cent of killings took place in a public space, while 28 per cent occurred indoors; more than 75 per cent of these crimes involved the use of a firearm… This confirms what some human rights activists in Honduras have noted, namely that the majority of female homicides are not related to domestic violence…. Rather, some activists link the rise in the number of female homicides to the insecurity generated by the 2009 institutional crisis and the targeting of women human rights activists.” Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2015: 95)

A growing number of cities in the South – particularly in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa – are sites of violent ‘civic’ conflict, including gang warfare, riots and violent crime (Beall, Goodfellow, and Rodgers, 2013).¹ These forms of conflict often build up over state failures to provide services such as security and welfare, in cities where horizontal and vertical inequalities are at the root of social tensions. The city itself has become ‘fragile’, as forms of urban violence (murder, assault, and sexual violence) combine and escalate (Muggah, 2012; 2014). Indeed, urban violence is increasingly recognised as an obstinate development problem (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014) and a security challenge (Jütersenke and Krause, 2013). There is also consensus that urban inequality and poverty are closely associated with urban violence in non-linear, complex ways, and that the urban poor experience higher risks of and vulnerability to violence, compared to the well-off (Feuerschütz, 2012).

Although recognised in the literature, the gendered dimensions and impacts of violent urban contexts are neither well understood nor measured. The acknowledgement that men are several times more likely to be killed than women in violent urban contexts obscures the fact that the highest murder rates of women are also observed precisely in these contexts (Alvazzi del Frate, 2011). Case studies indicate that both women and men are exposed to non-lethal forms of violence, with men more likely to suffer assault or robbery and women more likely to be victims of sexual assault (World Bank, 2011). Evidence from masculinity studies indicates that violence against women is more prevalent when men themselves encounter high levels of interpersonal violence (Jewkes et al., 2015). And impunity to violence against women feeds the culture of impunity towards violence more generally (Bunch, 2004). Yet, the relationship between violent urban

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¹ Whereas sovereign conflict is about international actors involved in armed violence, and civil conflict is one in which politically and military organised forces engage in intra-state warfare, civic conflict is defined by violent expressions of grievances, typically reactive and taking place in the city (Beall et al., 2013: 4-5).
contexts and violence as experienced by women in the public space\(^2\) – when women are victims and survivors of violence – remains largely unexplored.

In this chapter, we understand violence as experienced by women as both violence against women and violence affecting women. Violence against women “means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993). Violence affecting women, in turn, are forms of interpersonal violence that are not gender-based, i.e., are not directed to women because they are women. They are, however, experienced by women and by men, but in gendered ways. These are forms of violence associated with poverty and lack of citizenship, like the various forms of violent crime. As Wilding and Pearson (2013) point out, conflating these two different types of violence as experienced by women might not be helpful in conceptual terms. However, “the continuing invisibility of women’s gendered experience of urban violence in both the public and private sphere makes it difficult to avoid such conflation”, as these forms of violence are not independent from one another.

Indeed, women living in violent urban contexts – in particular those living in ‘slums’ and other very poor and underserviced neighbourhoods who are least protected by the state (Manjoo, 2011) – experience violence that targets them as women and other forms of violent crime, and they put in place individual and community strategies attempting to protect themselves from both (de la Cruz, 2008). The consequences of these forms of violence go beyond actual victimisation to include the impacts of fear and feelings of insecurity – from constraining mobility and agency to limiting social interaction, curbing the ability to earn a living, access health and justice services, or engage at the community level – all of which further impoverish those women who live in the city’s poorest areas (McIlwaine and Moser, 2007; Taylor, 2011; Dammert, 2012; Cruz, 2000, 2013).

Violence as experienced in violent urban contexts is not independent of unequal gender relations either. Even though violence in public spaces is often characterised by forms of male-on-male violence, women are also actors of violence as gang members, police officers or owners and users of arms (SAS, 2014). Their involvement, however, follows gendered structures in which they are frequently bound and which make them negotiate the various forms of violent control imposed on

\(^2\) The ‘urban public space’ refers to “streets and other public neighbourhood spaces (i.e. neighbourhood squares, alleys, etc.); public spaces of work, both in terms of women’s productive and reproductive roles and responsibilities (e.g. markets, water distribution sites, river beds); (…) pedestrian paths between different parts of the district (…); public transportation (e.g. buses, taxis, trains); (…) temporary public spaces (e.g. carnivals, festivals, fairs); internet cafes, public parks and other recreational and sports facilities; (…) (large open spaces, unfenced) which potentially could be used for recreation; and other public recreational spaces, such as key public facilities and infrastructure” (UN Women, 2011).
them (Wilding and Pearson, 2013). Indeed, not only is violence experienced in gendered ways, but violence against women takes particular forms in violent urban contexts. As Wilding and Pearson (2013) note, women living in Rio de Janeiro favelas experience overlapping forms of violence, as street violence invades the households and intimate partner violence (usually termed ‘domestic’) is played out in public spaces, blurring the borders between the private and the public space. Moreover, violence against women becomes yet another dimension of the civic conflict – similar to that of conflict and post-conflict situations – in which rape and sexual assault are used as “weapons of war” to those involved in direct or indirect ways with the antagonist groups, or a “pedagogy of cruelty” on those who are not (Segato, 2014; Marcelin, 2015).

The current analytical separation between the violence against women and violence affecting women in violent urban contexts has its origins in a criminal typology of forms of violence (sexual violence, petty crime, violent crime, domestic violence, etc.) that also has divided fields of inquiry (urban studies, criminology, violence against women, etc.) and practitioner communities. Indeed, a comparative reading of academic and policy-oriented literature presented below reveals little cross-disciplinary dialogue between knowledge production on urban violence, feminist urban studies, and violence against women experts. Although possibly justified by the different underlying causes, and sustained by different disciplinary approaches and methodologies, such separation obscures the related risks and vulnerabilities of women to different forms of violence in public spaces, and the broader institutional settings that structure and perpetuate them (Moser and Horn, 2011). It also translates into a policy focus on targeting specific forms of violence without formulating cross-institutional approaches.

This chapter addresses these gaps in knowledge and policy, and explores the gender dimensions of violent urban contexts and related public policies in four steps. The first section reviews the three main strands of literature, in particular urban violence, feminist urban studies, and violence against women. Bridging these literatures advances the understanding of the relationship between violence against or affecting women in the public space and violent urban contexts. The second section reviews policy frameworks, including VAW, citizen security, and safe cities approaches in Latin America, based on a desk review of security policies complemented by the information provided by Igarapé’s Citizen Security Dataset. The third section presents selected city cases to highlight how different policy frameworks shape interventions at the city level (Quito, Ecuador; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Bogotá, Colombia). The fourth section concludes, summarising findings and extracting some policy recommendations.

**Bridging Theoretical Gaps: Violence Against Women and Violence Affecting Women**

What a violent urban context is, when and why civic conflicts arise, and what perpetuates or ameliorates them has been extensively discussed in the emerging literature on urban violence (Beall et al., 2013; Moser and Horn, 2011). The most widely used indicator to identify a violent
context – be it a country or a city – is the number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in a year. Homicides >10/100,000 population make levels of violence epidemic according to WHO (UNDP, 2013a). Many countries in the world present figures that double or even triple that level, and that is the result of the countries’ main cities – usually the actual or former capital district – reaching even higher levels (UNDOC, 2013; Homicide Monitor, 2015). Cities in Venezuela (Caracas), Honduras (San Pedro Sula, Honduras City), Brazil (northeast state capital cities), El Salvador (San Salvador3), Colombia (Palmira), Mexico (Acapulco), and South Africa (Cape Town) figure at the top of rankings, with homicide rates of or above 60/100,000 population (SAS, 2015; Seguridad, Justicia y Paz, 2016).4 The same countries figure at the top of the rankings of high (3-6) or very high (>6) female homicides per 100,000 women (SAS, 2015).

However, even though homicide rankings help identifying violent contexts, and eventually monitor the success of public policy interventions, they only represent extreme manifestations of violence (UNDOC, 2013). Most victims survive violence but suffer its long-lasting consequences. Indeed, while it is well-known that young men bear the brunt of homicide, it is less known that women, children and the elderly suffer the brunt of non-fatal violence (WHO, 2014). Therefore, an exclusive focus on homicide rates, on female homicide rates or even on ‘femicides’ – the killing of a woman because she is a woman (SAS, 2011) – obscures the full scale of violence.

Beyond its lethal/non-lethal consequences, typologies of interpersonal violence typically evolve around its intentionality (political, social, cultural, ethnic, gender-based), its spatiality (rural/urban, private versus public spaces), the kind of aggression (sexual violence, arms use), or the perpetrator (institutional violence, intimate partner violence, stranger violence) (Muggah, 2012). This enumeration makes clear that any violent event can fall into many categories, which are in effect overlapping. Several researchers have pointed out the complexity and overlapping nature of violence (Luckham, 2015; Beall, Goodfellow and Rodgers, 2013; Feuerschütz, 2012; McIlwaine, 2012). Still, these typologies frequently set boundaries in practitioner communities that make them look as if they were strict and clear-cut. And that this further shapes public opinions and policy interventions.

A case in point is the field of violence against women (VAW). Specialised VAW literature differentiates between intimate-partner violence (IPV), and non-intimate partner violence (non-

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3 After a gang truce that succeeded in reducing killings even if only temporarily (Valencia 2015).
4 Cities move along, in or out of the ranking. For the previous 4 years, San Pedro Sula was the most violent city in the world. Medellin (Colombia) and Ciudad Juárez (México), long known for their homicide rates, have left the ranking this year.
IPV) (UN Women, 2013a). But within these binary categories, IPV can be physical and/or sexual abuse, while non-IPV (whose perpetrator might or might not be a stranger) is confined to sexual violence (WHO, 2013). Based on this narrower definition – as compared to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 – in practice VAW in the public space is confined to sexual violence.

An obvious result of this differentiation is that violent events other than sexual violence in public spaces fall beyond the purview of VAW scholars. Measurement efforts have been directed to measuring and shedding light onto IPV, with non-IPV being less accurately measured and possibly even more underreported (WHO, 2013). The diagnosis that VAW ultimately derives from inequitable gender norms places analyses – and prevention policies – at the individual level (Ellsberg et al., 2015). The recognition that social norms are “embodied in and emerging from historical, social, political and economic dynamics” (SAS, 2014) finds little echo in policy design. VAW is ultimately a (criminal) misconduct, so interventions emphasise victim protection and criminal justice ones the prosecution of perpetrators. For VAW scholars and practitioners, the ‘context’ of VAW is the history of a particular violent relationship, and the facilitators that accompany the violent events (for instance, alcohol consumption), with a pessimistic view – certainly backed by experience – on the capacity of male perpetrators for change. The social and economic environment, conflictive social pasts, the working of institutions like the police or criminal justice, among other structural causes of violence against women, are hardly factored in.

Violence scholars also mirror the strict differentiation between VAW and other forms of violence affecting women. For example, in a report about the situation of post-conflict Liberia, authors Barnes Robinson et al. (2015) signal the paradox of a more stable country experiencing improvement in personal security, i.e. the state of being free from physical threats or the fear of physical threats, where nevertheless “sexual violence remains widespread.” But sexual violence primarily affects women and girls, as reflected in a separate text box on VAW. Along the same lines, the recent UNDP (2013b) extensive report on citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean – strong in bringing a gender perspective to the fore – also separates sexual violence (IPV and non-IPV) from other forms of non-sexual victimisation (in particular robbery) as suffered by women in the public space.

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5 Public health research has examined different forms of violence in the public space beyond sexual violence. Typically, this research has focussed on specific and marginalised groups such, as sex workers or drug users (see for example, Decker et al., 2015).

6 The Box text reads: “[T]his exceedingly high prevalence of gender-based violence severely limits the extent of Liberia’s progress and contributes to an underlying culture of violence that permeates all spheres of life. Despite efforts to address this (…) SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence] must be recognised as a key factor preventing women and girls from achieving a real degree of personal security” (Robinson et al., 2015: 18).
But it is important to note that women themselves do not share this separation. When asked about which groups constitute the main threat to their safety, women ranked regular criminals, gang members and organised criminals high, irrespective of the forms of violence these groups could exercise upon them in a recent regional opinion poll (UNDP, 2013b, Statistical Annex). On the contrary, less than 1 percent identified members of the family, a figure that would be at odds with IPV incidence rates. This is partly the result of how the question is worded (‘main threat’) but also the fact that women understand ‘safety’ as something that pertains to public spaces, where strangers are (or can become) threatening.

Also, as Marcelin (2015) excellently puts it for the case of Port-au-Prince, “women reported that when they step outside the home, they are at risk for multiple forms of violence, the predominant one being sexual aggression and rape, with perpetrators ranging from known individuals (including family members) to strangers.” In other words, violence as experienced by women is a continuum, both across spatial borders (the household, the public spaces, see below) and across forms of violence. In public spaces, violence against women takes other manifestation, like human trafficking, human smuggling, sexual exploitation, and institutional violence (UNDP, 2013b).

The fluidity of violence across urban spaces is increasingly recognised by urban scholars and practitioners. Indeed, “the blurring of lines between different expressions of violence and the actors may be one of the most striking characteristics of violence in urban areas” (World Bank, 2011) – a fact that further challenges the usefulness of violence typologies. Moreover, violence transforms the urban space: the segregation of neighbourhoods, the proliferation of private security and the emergence of an “architecture of fear” are all, in fact, (individualistic) attempts to stop violence fluidity and generate “safe spaces” for upper and middle classes that exclude the poor (Koonings and Kruijt, 2007; UNDP, 2013b). The reverse of the coin is the emergence of the so called “no-go zones”, where law enforcement does not hold and services provision is weak or non-existent (Perlman, 2009). Clearly, such spatial segregation can fuel further violence, as it exacerbates violence risks factors, in particular, structural inequalities, discrimination and poor service provision, and hinders protective ones such as community participation, social cohesion, etc. (World Bank, 2011).

Feminist urban analyses have long established that cities are gendered spaces, reflecting and reinforcing unequal gender relations (Löw, 2006; Falú, 2009). For example, urban spaces are shaped in ways that limit women from accessing certain public spaces, or make them submit to particular dress codes or behaviours. In turn, assumptions about masculinity and femininity are deeply ingrained in the way the urban space is planned, utilised, managed and governed, still mostly by men and for men (Chant and McIlwaine, 2013).

Violent urban spaces cannot but show both the marks of violence and those of unequal gender relations – a fact that is frequently overlooked by urban violence scholars. Although urbanisation processes do not per se cause violence against women, they can increase the risks and
vulnerabilities faced by women in the city (McIlwaine, 2013). For example, in places where drugs are dealt, or where gangs are present, women are more at risk of violent sexual attacks (Tacoli, 2012). Where dwellings are flimsy and there are no security patrols, women are more vulnerable to break-ins, theft and rape in their own homes (Chant, 2013). And poor quality of transport, infrastructural deficits like poor lighting or bad road quality all increase women’s vulnerability to violent threats (Taylor, 2011). The urban space also shapes the consequences of violence as experienced by women (Rainero, 2009). For example, inadequate infrastructure and services make it difficult for women to reach the necessary services when they are victims of violence. And avoiding “dangerous places” or complying with (informal) forms of territorial control by organised criminals for fear – as mentioned before, also a consequence of violence – translates into further restrictions to women’s mobility (UNDP, 2013b).

The acknowledgement that the urban space “serves as the physical and cultural setting where these forms of violence transpire”, as Falú (2009) puts it, does not mean that interventions in the urban space, even from a feminist perspective – i.e., improving roads and lighting, creating “safe corridors”, or providing better and safer transportation services – would suffice to prevent violence against or affecting women in violent urban contexts. But it does mean that without such perspective, urban interventions re-emphasise the (artificial) separation between violence affecting women and violence against women in the public space.

**Bridging Policy Gaps: Citizen Security and Safe Cities Approaches**

Policy frameworks to tackle violence against or affecting women in violent urban contexts correspond to the different strands of knowledge and practitioner communities outlined above. These are the citizen security approach, espoused by IADB (2014) and UNDP (2013b), the safe cities approach, supported by UN Habitat (2014) and UN Women (2015a), and the policies and initiatives on VAW (WHO, 2012). The first two approaches focus on security interventions – i.e., the maintenance of law and order by the State – and have increasingly incorporated some of the VAW policies within their purview. How this has happened, though, has consequences in practice, which are outlined below.

Traditionally, security interventions include both the legal frameworks and the actual security policies, typically “pacification policies” involving the police and the military, and institutional strengthening policies, focussing on the judiciary and the penitentiary systems (Muggah, 2012; UNDP, 2013b). They also include social and situational prevention policies (IADB, 2014). In turn, these interventions might or might not pay attention to women’s security dimensions.
Women’s security is an international framework focussed on gender issues related to war and post-war transition. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)\(^7\) and succeeding resolutions on women, peace and security concentrated on the protection of women and their inclusion in all public institutions and processes from the peace process to all levels of governance, including violence prevention measures and security sector reforms.\(^8\) But women in violent urban contexts in “peaceful countries” are not included in these concerted efforts or in international and national action plans to prevent violence and address women’s needs. The disconnection between the women, peace and security resolutions and other agreed commitments of women’s rights, like the CEDAW (1979), and, for the case of the Americas, the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (Belém do Pará, 1994) means that the women’s rights and gender equality agenda is disconnected from the security agenda when countries are not “in conflict” (CIM, 2011). The uptake of UN SCR 1325 has been slow in some regions, in particular Africa, were women’s security agendas and the governance of security are completely separated (Funmi and Okech, 2011).

Nation states have responded to violence in different ways. Security policies have targeted gang-related crimes in Central America, and recent evidence from sub-Saharan Africa shows that “iron fist” approaches\(^9\) are also emerging there. “Softer handed” approaches, in turn, include community policing, restorative justice, or prevention interventions (Muggah and Aguirre, 2013) that try to

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\(^7\) “The Security Council adopted resolution (S/RES/1325) on women and peace and security on 31 October 2000. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts. It also calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. The resolution provides a number of important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and the entities of the United Nations system.” [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/)

\(^8\) Security sector reform is typically defined as a process that aims at ensuring effective and efficient security and justice services that meet people’s needs. The security sector should be accountable and operate within a framework of democratic governance without discrimination and in compliance with human rights and the rule of law (DCAF, 2011: 2; Valasek, 2008).

\(^9\) *Mano dura* interventions in the 1990s and early 2000s, mostly in Latin America, consisted of assertive approaches to advance security and justice by focussing on deterring real and potential components of crime. The rationale of this approach was that more penalties and harder sanctions would dissuade criminals and reduce criminality (Muggah and Aguirre, 2013: 2-3). It laid a strong focus on policing, harsher sentencing and more incarceration. This increasing militarised approach led increasingly to criminalisation and stigmatisation of entire communities and social groups (see also, Jütersonke and Krause, 2013: 6). However, the criminal and justice systems were not able to deal with the increased demands; evidence exists on collusion of private and public security forces with the criminal groups they were supposed to confront. Furthermore, the norms and practices under this approach clashed with human rights standards (Muggah and Aguirre, 2013: 3).
“address both short term needs as well as the structural vulnerabilities that lie behind crime and violence” (UNDP, 2013).

Since the 1990s, the citizen security approach has emerged in Latin America and is slowly advancing in Africa (Muggah and Alvarado, 2015). The citizen security approach attempts to bridge different scholarly approaches, and the public/private divide to security policies from the perspective of citizenship rights that are granted to all, in all spaces. More specific than human security – widely applied in the context of peacebuilding and development in sub-Saharan Africa – citizen security offers a human rights-based approach to security policies that go beyond police and military interventions, understands violence as multi-dimensional – involving structural and social dimensions as well as micro-level drivers – and privileges responsible statehood and proactive citizenship (UNDP, 2013).

Within this framework, women’s security interventions comprise the “strategies, practices and policies with the goal of reducing gender-based violence and women’s fear or insecurity to violence” (Whitzman et al., 2013) –a definition that comprises violence against and affecting women (UN Habitat, 2012a). To guarantee women’s security, states are required to take specific action on several fronts, ranging from the adequacy of legislation to the allocation of technical and financial resources to guarantee the right of women to live free from all forms of violence and enjoy a “culture of peace” (de la Cruz, 2008; PNUD/ONU Mujeres, 2013).

Several women’s security interventions can be analysed in the Latin American context within the citizen security approach. Amongst them, violence observatories are some of most widespread data-gathering/research strategies implemented in the region by both civil society organisations and states at different levels – be them local, provincial or national (UNDP, 2013b). By 2014, there were almost 200 observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean, with at least 12 having a specific focus in violence against or affecting women (Srur et al., 2014). Regional agencies also have well established observatories, like OEA’s “Hemispheric Security Observatory”10 and IADB’s Standardised Regional System of Indicators for Citizen Security and Violence Prevention (SES).11 Regretfully, the information on sexual violence (based on victimisation surveys) presented by the SES is dated,12 scattered (only some countries have data) and not gender-disaggregated.13 On the contrary, OEA’s observatory presents data on sexual violence (as reported to the police) disaggregated by sex, and the incidence of violence by type of threat and sex, based on

12 Newest data presented refers to the year 2012.
13 The technical note does not say whether this information pertains only to women.
victimisation surveys.\textsuperscript{14} ECLAC’s “Gender Equality Observatory”\textsuperscript{15} also compiles information on femicides based on police, judicial, women’s machineries and ministerial sources (CEPAL, 2015).\textsuperscript{16}

In the last 10 years, several Latin American countries have passed legislation that typify different forms of violence against women – including femicide – as crimes, mandating specific policies as part of coordinated action plans to curb VAW incidence and attend women victims/survivors (CEPAL, 2015). Yet, it is still the case that most of these laws focus on domestic violence (PNUD/ONU Mujeres, 2013). Action plans comprise several state actors, including the judiciary system and specialised police units – the “women’s police stations” or Comisarías de la mujer (UNDP, 2013a). Many interventions as reported by the Igarapé database have supported the judiciary system to better implement these new laws and expand judges’ investigative capacity on VAW and femicide crimes (Igarapé, 2016; CEPAL, 2015). In turn, Comisarías de la mujer have expanded in numbers in Argentina, Brasil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Perú and Paraguay (DCAF, 2008). Comisarías de la mujer personnel are all women police officers who specialise in attending VAW cases, a fact that has contributed to expand the numbers of women in the security forces (Ministerio de Seguridad de la Nación, 2012). This is in itself a positive outcome, as evidence indicates that the presence of female security officers has positive impacts such as increasing communities’ trust in the security forces (Denham, 2008).\textsuperscript{17}

Social interventions are by far the most widespread interventions directed to tackle violence against women, as registered by specialised literature and also by the Igarapé database.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, most are not security policies as such but interventions in line with the VAW framework, typically comprising protection, prosecution and reparation measures focussed on IPV (Igarapé, 2016). These interventions include refuges and attention lines for victims (CEPAL, 2015) and the support of different state departments to develop a rights-based approach to appropriately respond to VAW victims/survivors. Prevention strategies mentioned are fewer, and the most prominent are media

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\textsuperscript{14} Demographic and Health Surveys or Reproductive and Health Surveys focus on IPV, with only a section (or sometimes only a question) on lifetime forced sexual relations, and type of perpetrator. In a number of selected cases in Latin America, Most of the times, the perpetrator is someone known, but in approximately 7 percent of the times (depending on the case study) the perpetrator was a stranger (PAHO, 2012: 80). Where the violence episode took place is not reported in these surveys.

\textsuperscript{15} \url{http://www.cepal.org/oig/}, accessed 02.08.2016.

\textsuperscript{16} The Igarapé database also lists victimisation surveys at the local level, supported by non-for profit organisations, as a first step towards designing local interventions (Igarapé, 2016).

\textsuperscript{17} Relatedly, feminist security scholars have also argued that the fact that there are still only few women working in the field of security studies makes it difficult to push gender issues in the security agenda of states and international organisations (Tickner, 2011).

\textsuperscript{18} Out of the 1060 policies listed by the Igarapé database with starting date in the last decade (2006 onwards), 123 policies have “Gender Crimes” as their primary focus, and 17 as their secondary focus. Out of them, 95 are classified as “social interventions” (Igarapé, 2016).
campaigns and dedicated helplines (CEPAL, 2015; PNUD/ONU Mujeres, 2013). Interestingly, though, the laws and action plans that have spread in Latin America to tackle all forms of VAW include within their prevention strategies the creation of safe urban environments – following the safe cities approach (see below). In other words, these plans effectively recognise the social dimensions of VAW and its interplay with violent urban contexts in the region (CEPAL, 2015). From a citizen security perspective, policies that tackle violence as experienced by women – be it violence against women or violence affecting women – require women’s active participation in decision-making bodies and in institutional capacity-building strategies, in order to remove gender stereotypes and cultural patterns that condone and perpetuate it (de la Cruz, 2008). It is not evident that this is happening based on the sources reviewed, though. The Igarapé database lists only 8 policies/programmes which directly or indirectly focus on gender crimes, out of the 175 listed that follow a participatory strategy (Igarapé, 2016). Put in another way, these figures show that participatory strategies in security policies are pursued without seriously paying attention to women’s security dimensions.

Indeed, the almost complete absence of a gender perspective in security policies beyond those that focus on IPV underscores the fact that, in security policy circles, women tend to be viewed as persons at risk, along with other at-risk groups such as the youth or aboriginal peoples (IADB, 2014). Such view translates into policies that focus on particular women in order to “neutralize their risk factors and prevent crime incidence” (IADB, 2014) – as if violence against women was an “individual” problem (Albuja, 2016). This is a framework foisted from the VAW literature that identifies certain community and social risk factors that put women at risk of suffering IPV (PAHO, 2010). It is, however, an inappropriate framework to tackle non-IPV violence against or affecting women in public spaces, and results in interventions that re-emphasise the public/private divide by considering violence against or affecting women solely as a private (and criminal/judicial) problem, thus failing to attend the whole of women’s security needs (CIM, 2011; PNUD/ONU Mujeres, 2013).

It is precisely with the aim to tackle violence in public spaces that the safe cities approach has emerged. Launched by UN Habitat 20 years ago, the Safer Cities Programme is rooted in the idea that urban insecurity can be tackled by a combination of institutional crime and violence prevention at the local level, social interventions and enhanced safety through the planning, management and

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19 Data from 7 countries in Latin America shows that the more violent the country, the more femicides are not perpetrated by intimate partners. The cases of Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Puerto Rico, where less than half of all femicides are perpetrated by current or previous partners, illustrates this point (CEPAL, 2014).

20 Guarderas Albuja (2016: 55) sees in the criminalisation of VAW a new round of “domestication” of VAW, as victim’s access to justice is translated into the filing of a complaint with the police or the judiciary system, placing VAW as a problem between a victim and a perpetrator.
governance of public spaces (UN Habitat, 2016). Within this approach, insecurity perceptions and fear are as important as actual victimisation (Ortiz Escalante, 2014).

In the last decade, the programme has incorporated a strong gender perspective, reflected in its strategic planning and framework for action, drafted in collaboration with UN Women (UN Habitat, 2014).21 UN Women’s own “Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme”22, in turn, aims at “preventing and reducing violence, particularly sexual VAW and girls in urban public spaces, enabling women and girls to move freely and safely, and ensuring the exercise of their rights and fundamental freedoms” (Posadskaya, 2015, in UN Women, 2015). This global programme expands the Latin American UN Women’s “Safe Cities” programme, which ran in collaboration with the Women in Cities network and other NGOs for several years (Falú and Segovia, 2007; Falú, 2009).23

UN Women’s Safe Cities Global Programme starts with a city-wide “scoping study” to understand local forms of sexual VAW in public spaces and supports the development and implementation of public policies to tackle it. It also supports investment in the safety of urban spaces, based on “women’s safety audits” (UN Women, 2015a). Women’s safety audits are participatory strategies aimed at facilitating the joint planning and action to improve safety. Unsafe places are visited and walked through, noting the elements that make that space unsafe and making recommendations to improve it (UN Habitat, 2012b).

The Safe Cities approach is critical of the “excessive emphasis on policing (…) ; [on] criminalisation versus prevention and civil/administrative remedies; (…) [and] on protection of women and girls rather than [on their] empowerment and rights” (Posadskaya, 2015). Possibly because of this, there is little engagement with security policies – an element initially present in UN Habitat’s programme – and an almost exclusive focus in sexual violence against women. Interventions tend to be “women-specific” and piecemeal (Whitzman et al., 2013, Peake and Rieker, 2013). They can focus, for example, on transport – the women and children take only “pink” subway wagons and taxis in Mexico City – on access to essential services, or on street lighting (World Bank, 2011). But these interventions fail to consider women’s experience of

21 The “Safe and Sustainable Cities for All Joint Programme” (2012-2017), by UN Women, UNICEF and UN Habitat works in Great Beirut (Lebanon), Dushanbe (Tajikistan), Metro Manila (Philippines), Marrakesh (Morocco), Nairobi (Kenya), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), San José (Costa Rica) and Tegucigalpa (Honduras).
22 The “Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme” (2011-2018) includes Cairo (Egypt), New Delhi (India), Kigali (Rwanda), Port Moresby (PNG), Quito (Ecuador), Dublin (Ireland), Sakai (Japan), Winnipeg (Canada), Cape Town (South Africa), Reykjavik (Iceland), New York (USA), Mexico City (Mexico) and Rabat (Morocco).
23 The programme compiled and produced several of the strategies, planning and intervention tools and training materials that are still a reference (UNFEM/ Safe Cities, 2010).
violence in a holistic manner and might not be enough to tackle violence as experience by women in violent urban contexts.

City-Level Policies: The Cases of Quito, Rio De Janeiro and Bogotá

In order to illustrate how these different policy frameworks shape interventions at the city level, we selected Quito (Ecuador), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Bogotá (Colombia), three cities that are part of the Safe Cities Programme and follow the citizenship security approach to security interventions.

Quito, Ecuador

Ecuador is marked by a history of political instability, and problems today include high rates of poverty and income inequality, in particular among indigenous and other marginalised groups. Violence against women in Ecuador figures high, and most incidents are unreported (Amézquita Ochoa, 2013). The Ecuadorian constitution (2008) embraces the citizen security approach – even without defining it properly, as the concept is combined with others like human security and public security (Torres, 2010). The concept appears clearly regarding the functions of the police, whose duty is to support “citizen security and public order” (art. 163). The Ecuadorian constitution has followed up and supported the legal progress made in Quito, the Ecuadorian capital city. Quito’s “Ordinance 201”/2006, a local regulation, defines citizen security as a “public order (…) capable of eliminating all forms of violence”, and understands violence “… also as a subjective phenomenon, as insecurity perceptions” (art. II-2, cited by Torres, 2010).

Ecuador does not have an integral law to tackle violence against women, but it does have a law on domestic violence (CEPAL, 2015). It also has a National Plan to Eradicate VAW in place, framed within the citizen security approach, as a result of the Constitutional mandate for the State to “implement all necessary measures to prevent, eliminate and prosecute all forms of violence, particularly those against women, girls, boys and adolescents, the elderly, persons with disabilities and all other persons in a vulnerable situation” (art. 66, cited by Torres, 2010). The plan illustrates the citizen security’s approach to VAW: it emphasises protection over prevention, and victims’ access to justice over women’s empowerment (for the characteristics of the programme, see Torres, 2010; for a criticism, Albujas, 2016).

24 The references to Brazilian and Colombian cities in this section are based on Sampaio, Segura and Stocker (2016).

In turn, Quito’s “Ordinance 235”/2012 makes up for the lack of an integral law to tackle VAW at the national level. The new ordinance has a precise definition of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment in public spaces (Pizani in UN Women, 2015b)—a triumph from the safe cities approach perspective, as it contributes to de-naturalise sexual violence in the public space as an invisible (and socially-accepted) form of gender-based violence (Vargas, 2007). The ordinance has an accompanying plan that “involves [strategies aimed at] the strengthening of the capacities of institutions and community actors, and the creation of information gathering systems, the development of media campaigns to promote equity in public spaces, civic participation and gender-responsive budgeting.” (Sanchez in UN Women, 2015b).

The Plan components follow the blueprint of UN Women’s Safe Cities programme, of which Quito is part: “safe neighbourhoods for women and girls”, “public transportation free of sexual harassment”, “girls, boys, youth and families engaged in equality” and “strengthening of prevention and care centers for victims of gender-based violence” (Sanchez in UN Women, 2015b). The Plan makes progress where policies at the national level are found lacking. Yet, it evolves in parallel with citizen security policies decided at the national level and implemented in the city. The components do not include the engagement with policing or judiciary policies, which are left for the national state to handle. And they might clash with some citizen security social interventions, like the replacement of existing care centers for victims with new (and un-specialised) “citizenship centers” (Albuja, 2016).

**Rio De Janeiro - Brazil**

The Brazilian “megacity” Rio de Janeiro has experienced a long history of urban violence. Like many Brazilian cities, it has high rates of inequality, poverty and exclusion, and violence is particularly related to very poor areas, the favelas. There, women experience interlocking forms of violence (Wilding and Pearson, 2013). In response to its high rates of violence against women, Brazil has enacted a range of policies, most prominent and path breaking was the “Maria da Penha Law” (2006) at the national level. This law focuses on violence against women in the domestic sphere, and includes the establishment of special courts, stricter sentences of offenders and instruments of prevention and relief. In 2007, Brazil also put in place its National Security Programme (Pronasci), combining security interventions with social actions to prevent, control and punish crime. That same year, a “National Pact to Tackle VAW” was launched and coordinated by the National Women’s Secretariat, focussing on prevention, victims’ support, protection and the guarantee of women’s rights (Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulheres, 2007). Like Ecuador, Brazil also put in place its “National Plan to Address VAW” in 2011 without having a

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26 Note that prosecution is not one of these dimensions.
comprehensive VAW law\textsuperscript{27} (CEPAL, 2015). The Plan followed up on the Pact’s emphasis on domestic violence, under the assumption that women are relatively more affected than men by the latter. VAW in public spaces is only mentioned once by passing (Presidência da República do Brasil, 2011).

Pacification policies have played a central role in Rio de Janeiro, and have contributed to diminish its homicide rate substantially (Waiselfist, 2013). Dedicated police stations (Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora or Pacification Policy Units) were installed at the heart of favelas in order to decrease crime rates in neighbouring areas (Moura, 2014). The gender dimension of these initiatives is weak, and possibly contradictory, though. An accompanying programme, Mulheres da Paz (Women of Peace), trained women living in highly violent neighbourhoods as conflict mediators, in the hope that they would stop adolescents from getting involved in criminal activities. The programme paid them a small stipend. The programme conceives women as “pacifiers”, instrumentalising them without tackling their own security needs (Rocha and Tavares, 2014).

Following national directives, security interventions to tackle VAW are few and centered in domestic violence, with no relation to public spaces.

In parallel, Rio is also part of the Safe Cities Programme. Initiatives within this programme have included an app to report urban safety risks – like faulty infrastructure or deficient lighting – and “pink wagons” in trains and subways exclusively used by women during rush hours (UN Women, 2013b). Yet again, these initiatives appear as uncoordinated with the city’s security policies – and possibly cater to different population groups.

**Bogotá, Colombia**

Colombia’s capital city Bogotá was one of the world’s most violent cities in the 1990s. Being a post-conflict country and having been ridden by drug-related criminal activities for many years, security is a top priority in Colombia, as stated by the National Development Plan 2014-2018 (DNP, 2015). 74 percent of local municipalities have integral Citizen Security Plans, which cover prevention, policing, technology upgrades and information-sharing interventions (DNP, 2015). The latter include information collected by the judiciary system on intra-family violence and sexual violence (DNP, 2015). In a different section and without cross references, the National Development Plan also mentions the implementation plan of the Integral Law to tackle VAW (Law 1257/2008) which only started last year (DPN, 2015).

\textsuperscript{27} Although a recent law (Law 13.104/2015) has criminalised femicide (Waiselfist, 2015).
This implementation plan includes a guide to monitor compliance to the Integral Law to tackle VAW at the municipal level. Among several monitoring dimensions, two are particularly significant for tackling violence against or affecting women: i) whether security policy decisions at the municipal level take into account the existing knowledge about VAW, including incidence indicators; and ii) whether VAW is an issue treated in the Municipal Security Council (Alta Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2014). Both monitoring dimensions point to the need to coordinate citizen security plans and plans that tackle VAW at the city level. They look promising, even though it is too early to evaluate whether this monitoring dimensions will actually trigger compliance.

This coordination is evident in the capital city of Bogotá, which was also part of the first round of the Safe Cities for Women and Girls programme. The main dimensions of that programme are mainstreamed in Bogotá’s current development strategy, “Human Bogotá”, including both citizen security actions and actions to prevent, protect and prosecute VAW (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2012). The recent creation of a city women’s secretariat (2012) allows for improved coordination. An integral plan to prevent, protect victims and follow up cases of VAW (called “SOFIA”) aims at being an inter-institutional strategy that does not sit only within the secretariat (Secretaría Distrital de la Mujer, 2014). As at the country level, though, these are all initiatives that have only recently started, look promising but cannot be evaluated at this stage.

A private initiative, implemented in 2011 by the city’s private transport provider, Transmilenio, shows the disputed meanings of VAW in the public space, in particular sexual harassment in public transport. Initially supported by UNIFEM Safe Cities’ programme, the campaign “You don’t touch/cut/rupture a rose” (“Una rosa no se roza”) did not explicitly take a rights-based approach. That women were like “roses” to be protected, instead of equals to be respected, was counterproductive, and did not serve the purpose of denaturalising sexual violence in the public space. The main message of the campaign, for women to adopt measures to “prevent” becoming a victim of violence, placed the blame on women and not on perpetrators (Rozas, Babontín, and Arredondo, 2015).

Conclusions

The separation between the scholarship on violence against women and violence in violent urban contexts – including violence affecting women – translates into public policy initiatives which run

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28 It should be noted, as we did in the case of Rio, that Bogotá was able to curb its homicide rates enormously, so much so that it is not “anymore” amongst the 50 most dangerous cities in the world (Seguridad, Justicia y Paz, 2015). “Human Bogotá” aims at keeping a homicide rate /100,000 lower than 18 (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2012: 412).
in parallel and are implemented by specialised offices with little contact with each other. However, “the different types of violence share many underlying risk factors and important inter-relationships” (WHO, 2014). And “the current policy approach of treating different forms of violence separately clashes with the reality that the lines between different expressions of violence — from domestic to collective political violence — are very blurry” (World Bank, 2011).

The citizen security approach seems to have been embraced in the Latin American region. The presence of dedicated police units, staffed with female officers, has been a huge step forward. Yet, they do not seem to guarantee that women are free from sexual or other forms of violence in the public space, though, as they are more apt to take action against IPV. In turn, the safe cities approach is comprehensive, rights-based and of course gender aware – yet the initiatives seem to be too narrow, constrained to particular neighbourhoods or particular places (i.e., public transport), and with little or no dialogue with security policymakers.

Yet, the city-level examples illustrate the potential for complementarity between these two policy frameworks. In Quito, the fact that the citizen security approach is embraced at the constitutional level provides the platform for the safe cities approach to be implemented, even if improvements can be made in policing practices and in the judiciary. In Rio de Janeiro, the safe cities approach could be conducive to bridge the strong VAW legal framework with security policies that currently lack a strong gender perspective. In Bogota, the establishment of explicit coordination mechanisms, not only across sectors but also between the national and municipal levels, has allowed for promising cross-sectoral coordination.

Our findings suggest the need for multi-disciplinary dialogue, for breaking down barriers brought about by a narrow focus on specific types of violence, for creating synergies between the policies inspired by the citizen security approach and the safe cities approach, and for establishing explicit cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms. Only then will interventions to tackle violence as experienced by women be effective.
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