The Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South

Edited by Gautam Bhan, Smita Srinivas
and Vanessa Watson

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Is there a typical urban violence?

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Introduction

During the last 25 years, violence has become one of the most important issues for Latin American cities due to changes in its nature, its social and economic impacts, the increase in its magnitude and the appearance of new types of violence. Violence extends throughout countries and cities of the region with differing characteristics, causing changes of urbanism (construction of walls in cities), new behaviour in the population (anxiety, helplessness), changes in social interactions (reduced citizen participation and socialisation) and the militarisation of cities (heavy-handed policies, military in the streets), as well as a reduction in the quality of life of the population (homicides, property loss). However, the current model of cities also produces violence that has never been seen before, such as 'non-criminal' violence that arises from fragmentation, exclusion, density, the dispute over public space and access to services. In other words, the problems of transportation, services, environment, poverty and housing have incorporated violence, so much so that they have become an additional urban problem, which requires new urban planning explicitly tied to policies of public safety.

Despite the rise of violence in Latin American cities, it has not been given the importance it deserves, nor has it been incorporated into discussions on the problems of development and the characteristics of urban life. The relationship between cities and violence has been overlooked; this oversight can be attributed to a methodological problem that arises from violence being defined and understood as rooted in certain attributes and not in social relationships. Therefore, every extremity of the relationship has been researched independently, without having been able to create the desired connections. And when there have been attempts to create links among these social relationships, they have been done under an unequivocal determinism of the urban toward violence (aetiology).

How violence is defined remains an unresolved issue and is something that needs to be addressed. Defining the methodological starting point is crucial; in this chapter we pose questions that are relevant to understanding violence and will provide some clarity on the definitional issues. Given the prevalent anti-urban positions, the starting point for understanding violence is to analyse if there is a causal relationship between cities and violence.

Cities are vessels for criminal acts, which supposes an autonomy of cities when facing violence. This is why asking the question if cities are sites of crime is pertinent in as much as the *locus* of social practices has a spatial expression. As violence is plural, is it possible to find specifically urban violence if we understand cities as places of concentration of the highest density of heterogeneity and, therefore, where the rituals of daily life can produce friction, conflicts and contradictions that lead to typical 'city' acts of violence?

From these reference points the structure of the analysis is organised as follows: first, should we address violence from its aetiology? Is the city the cause of violence or is it a relationship? Does the city contain violence or does it generate it? Second, is there a causality of the city toward violence or is violence expressed in it because of its geographic locus? Are the so-called classical causes of violence – inequality, unemployment, poor education and lack of family unity – urban in nature? Third, the chapter examines the transition between public space and private space and how these generate specific types of violence. Finally, in the conclusion there is an attempt to understand how we should address violence in the city: with urban policies, with public safety policies or a combination of both?

Cities and violence

Two misconceptions about their relationship

Violence and cities change constantly because they are historic: however, ignorance about the transformation of the relationship between violence and cities – and vice versa – has created many misconceptions, among which we can point out two. There is a predominant vision caused by the temptation to find the causality of violence in cities, through an anti-urbanism that leads one to believe that urban violence is synonymous with violence and that cities are the origin of violence, through which cities end up being criminalised. For a long time, cities were considered a problem because they were assumed to be a source of chaos and anomie and an artificial product that challenges nature. Today, this opinion is trying to be overcome because there are trends that have begun to see cities as a *solution*, in as much as women become visible and public,[1] poverty is reduced,[2] there's better quality employment and unemployment is lessened (OIT 2003: 16), services are better and the rates of violence are different than in the rural areas. That is to say, it isn't cities in abstract but rather the concrete model that is related to a particular type of violence; in other words, *urban violence* can be reversed under a model that is distinct from that of current urbanism. Good urban policies could be transformed through good safety policies to improve life quality in cities, and to integrate people fostering citizenship.

Due to a lack of studies of the relationship between cities and violence and a deterministic vision of the urban as violence, a number of proposals have been developed that are not based on reality. Two proposals include:

- *Situational prevention*, which seeks to reduce the opportunities for violence (routine activities) and the incentives for the perpetrators (rational choice) in the spaces or sites where crime normally occurs (urban design) (Crawford 1998: 8). Three types of actions have defined situational prevention in public spaces. First, video cameras, community police and rapid response. Second, the expulsion of certain segments of the population (youth, homeless) under the pretext of privatisation and strict right of entry. Third, the provision of services and equipment in certain spaces previously considered dangerous (the classified and stigmatised city of 'others').

- *Broken windows*, which derives from the causal logic established between disorder in the streets and violence. This disorder comes from the neglect or lack of interest in repairing a broken window (something negligible), that later turns into a kind of public waste dump (something important), that brings in gangs, beggars, alcoholics and drug addicts and causes the neighbourhood to demand security (Kelling and Coles 2001: 20).

These kinds of proposals show a misunderstanding of the relationship between cities and violence, as the next section suggests.

Cities and violence: cause or relation?

Without studies that document the reality of this relationship, there is the danger that socially stigmatising images will be created along with policy proposals that circulate independently of the real processes,[3] born in the mass media and/or in the demands of the public.

Violence cannot be understood based on natural (biological) or moral (religious or traditional) causes, nor through exclusive consideration of the legal deviation (anomie). Nor is it understood through the existence of one or several attributing causes (so-called *risk factors*) that define it. Rather, it should be thought of as a particular social relationship of social conflict (Carrión 2008: 24) and, as such, as a *complex social and political construction* (Sozzo 2008: 10) that takes shape in specific territories and times.

This type of affirmation leads us to understand violence as a social condition that has multiple direct and indirect actors that change with time and space; and that a 'before and after' the violence doesn't exist because it is an ongoing continuum. There is not a single cause of violence, nor multiple causes for multiple episodes of violence, because this indisputable determinism does not exist.

Violence is more than a criminal act; there are forms of violence that are not legally classified due to there being a "mass of events" (Sozzo 2008: 19) that are undistinguished from each other. Criminality is a powerful feeling that incites real violence while being part of that violence. Fear is a powerful feeling that guides daily life, be it as a social mechanism (solidarity), an individual response (being armed, personal defence) as well as a factor organising time and space in cities.

Violence is not a social pathology that comes from certain attributes (risk factors or causes). The information that comes from the indicators of this paradigm (risk factors) does not reflect the reality (suicide, gender, contract killings) and the plurality of violence; but the indicators do create stigmas, for example, that Latin America is the most violent continent in the world. If it is viewed according to the definition of violence used by the WHO (2002: 4), one should ask why homicides (violence toward another) and not suicides (violence toward oneself) are the measure that quantifies the degree of violence in a country. In 2000, deaths caused by war were 18.6 per cent, homicides were 31.3 per cent and suicides were 49.1 per cent of violent deaths (WHO 2002: 8). If that's so, why do homicides and not suicides determine which are the most violent neighbourhoods, cities and countries? Rather, it is a specific social relationship of conflict that is plural,[4] historical and relational. In other words, if violence cannot be understood based on aetiology (Carrión 2008: 12), cities should not be considered as the cause of violence. However, this does not mean one should ignore the relationship between violence and cities or cities and violence.

Cities and violence: particular violence or vessels for violence?

If one accepts the statement that there is a historic relationship between cities and violence, one must also ask if there is particular violence that is experienced in cities and/or if they are a

vessel for violence. To understand the relationship between violence and cities requires going beyond the methodologies that interpret the relationship as if it were a pathology rooted in certain attributes (factors), when in reality it has to do with social relationships. Thus, we have to take into account:

- *Violence* – as defined by Alvaro Guzman (1994: 170) – should be understood as "a product of a social relationship of conflict that, as a consequence, ties together at least two opponents, actors, individuals or groups that are passive or active in the relationship".
- *Cities* – as understood by one of the classic scholars of modern urbanism, Louis Wirth (1988: 4) – should be seen in terms of a "relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals".

If the city brings together the greatest diversity of people in a relatively reduced territory (density), it is possible to think that it gathers an arena of relationships, where, on the one hand, social conflicts arise, some of which can result in acts of violence that are typical of cities (urban violence) and on the other hand, there is a tendency toward a concentration of violent events (geography of violence).

Urban violence dates from time immemorial, it is inherent to cities; however, the violence of the past is distinct from that which exists today because the relationship between violence and cities has a history; and every incident of violence is historical. For example, "during the Garcia era there was more emphasis on the public good and crimes that affect the functioning of the theocratic State, (while) liberalism is more concerned with crimes that threaten the individual and property" (Goetschel 2005: 97). During the last 25 years, the most important change in crime has been the shift from the *traditional* to the *modern*. The former is that developed by a culture of strategies of survival or asymmetries of power; the latter has an explicit predisposition to commit a criminal act and, therefore, is organised, international and technologically developed (Carrión 2008: 26). The statement that violence is historical therefore carries with it the recognition that violence is in a constant process of change, whether through a change in magnitude or a transformation of its characteristics.

The Latin American city suffers a significant transformation caused by decreasing rates of urbanisation (return to the 'constructed' city),[5] internationalisation (global cities), and state reforms that assign more power to the municipality in relation to the national government, albeit less compared to the cities itself since the private sector, in the form of real estate or big transnational companies, have emerged as key actors for privatisation.

While the levels of urbanisation (city size) in Latin America have generally decreased, the rates of homicides have increased.[6] For example, countries with the highest levels of urbanisation are not the most violent: Chile, Argentina or Uruguay – which have high levels of urbanisation – have lower rates of violence compared to countries that have a lower level of urbanisation such as Ecuador, Guatemala and Honduras. In addition, the biggest cities are not those that have the highest rates of violence. In Mexico, Mexico City itself does not have more violence than Guadalajara; in Colombia, Medellín and Cali are more insecure than Bogotá; in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, despite its high rates of violence, doesn't have higher rates than Recife and São Paulo doesn't have as much insecurity as Rio de Janeiro. In other words, it cannot be said that the greater the city size, the greater the violence.

However, the urbanisation of violence produces a double effect: cities produce a particular type of violence – urban violence – and are also a vessel of violent scenarios in the sense that these are social practices that are developed and expressed in that space. There are growing urban violences compared to those in the rural areas due to a subtle differentiation between

both: while in the rural areas violence is against people, the family and traditions, violence in the city is related to public space, property, gangs, labour struggles, vandalism and squatting, linked to social coexistence.

Mutual relationships: cities and violence

Violence has become a component for understanding cities and this instils violence with certain explicit qualities. It is impossible to deny that violence creates a particular type of spatial organisation, for example, through the projection of images of fear, that change into an integral element of cities, or to deny the conflictive nature of cities that produces specific violence types. This supposes that there is a dialectical relationship and not a unidirectional determinism between violence and cities, born out of the so-called risk factors.

From the city to violence

The social production of territory is an important element in the behaviour of certain types of violence. It is clear that there exists a geography of violence that comes out of the social division of space and a particular logic of urbanism.

Land uses have an important significance in the production of some types of violence. The statement is as simple as "they rob banks where there are banks" and this becomes a key element in understanding that certain types of violence have a direct relationship with spatial organisation. For example, car theft occurs near banking and commercial areas, during working days and hours. The most common street crimes have patterns and identified points connected to some collective transportation hubs, urban centralities or public spaces. These facts of violence cannot be disassociated from the variable of time. This observation should lead to the formulation of security policies based on the essential need to tie physical planning with security policies; that is to say, security actions to land use,[7] as well as urban planning that reduces inequalities, constructs multiple centralities and recognises distinct orders. It is necessary to recover the geography of violence, not from socio-territorial stigmatisation, but in order to have geo-referenced information that allows for reality-based decision-making.

Residential segregation creates a symbolic and real violence that ultimately is expressed in exclusionary relationships between the places where those with more economic resources settle versus those with fewer economic resources. The existence of unequal urban space increases insecurity, as well as vandalism, social reprisal, stereotypes and the search outside the market for that which others have legally. Residential segregation creates barriers that drive inequality and violence, but security policies also increase the fragmentation. The city of the 'others' – the city of the poor, the 'savage city' – is criminalised, and as a result, is further 'othered'. For example, "in a socio-economically segregated city like Santiago, the perception of insecurity in public spaces implies a near inexistence of interactions between habitants that belong to distinct social strata" (Rodríguez and Winchester 2004: 132). Cities – essential places of encounter with the other – end up being places of exclusion. The significant polarisation between rich and poor makes it so that the "relationship of dependence, or at least of compassion, that until now underpinned all the forms of inequality, now shows itself as a new *non-place* in world society" (Beck 1998: 122). Residential segregation confirms that while the habitants of poor neighbourhoods find security in the sense of belonging, identity and community participation, on the other hand the inhabitants of the rich neighbourhoods contract private security and create 'bunkers' in order to defend and preserve the neighbourhood's internal homogeneity. Thus, when one talks of the fears of the city, those who experience these fears are those that are integrated more so than those that are excluded (Castells 1999: 63).

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Cities have started to change their structure and become 'foreign', in ways suggested by Castells:

- Cities go from the classic *urban segregation*, in which the parts are integrated through the public space and urban centrality, to *urban fragmentation*, producing ruptures of the previous socio-territorial unity to give way to the formation of cities converted into "discontinuous constellations of spatial fragments" (Castells 1999: 438).
- Cities shift from having public space that is a fundamental element for meeting, to a city where mobility represents a shift "from the space of places to the flow of places" (Castells 1999: 422), creating agoraphobia and the return of nomadism.

That is to say, the *city of borders*, with its limits and impassable barriers, where exclusion is a way of being outside of oneself (of the city), is achieved through territorial, generational, ethnic, migratory and gender ruptures. One should keep in mind that borders are synonyms of separation, in which for some their path is regulated while for others it is denied – not all can pass. This causes the city inhabitant to behave like a foreigner or stranger because they don't walk the familiar paths and when they leave their habitual territory they are asked for their identification: a passport or a national identity document.

Nowadays our cities are not of the citizens but of the foreigners because fragmentation leads to the loss of reference space for social construction and the feeling of belonging. As a result, insecurity is perceived in the space of the other and security in the space of oneself; it is for this reason that space is defended from the other and why the other is always outside, excluded, strange: foreign.

Fear has become the strongest urban image in Latin America. The unequal city expresses a symbolic fear, a consequence of the daily risk of living there, although the fear differs according to the social condition of the inhabitant. In seeking safety, closed, single-purpose, autonomous and specialised enclaves are developed and people abandon the public space to seclude themselves in the domestic space that, in many cases, is more violent and dangerous. The images of fear that cities produce are sometimes linked to places of natural origin, embedded in the urban centrality, such as hills and rivers and those of human production like informal markets, transport stations and main streets. One of the noteworthy elements of these cases is that urban policies, brought about for rehabilitation efforts, do not have immediate effect because there exists a social inertia that gives a permanent feeling of insecurity (Silva 2004: 25).

From violence to the city

While cities are not a determining factor of violence, it seems appropriate to engage in a reverse methodological exercise: to think of the impact that violence has on cities. It cannot be ignored that the increase in insecurity leads to violence being one of the most destructive problems to the quality of urban life and that it erodes the condition of the public sphere of cities. The worsening of life conditions is part of the process of urban violence, where the safety reactions of the population bring about a new social behaviour that leads to more violence: self-interest, anxiety, uncertainty, marginalisation, neglect, isolation, mistrust and aggression. From this perspective, important explicit impacts emerge from the violence in cities: citizenship, time and space.

Citizenship is borne historically in the city, due to the population's affiliation or belonging to the political community that grants it rights and responsibilities. Since the city is where citizenship is constituted, we can agree that violence restricts the origin and the source of the quality of citizenship.

> Violence increasingly affects more settings of our social life: work, family, school; and for this reason has become one of the factors that most deteriorates the habitability and quality of life of the city. Social coexistence is one of the most worrying issues for citizens.
>
> *(Corporación Región-Medellín 1993: 13)*

One cannot ignore the effects that violence and the fight against it have on the population: the erosion of citizenship, and the modification of citizens' daily conduct, including changes to daily routine and the paths and spaces travelled daily, the limitation of social relationships because all that is unknown is suspicious, reducing personal vulnerability by getting guns, dogs and alarms or learning personal defence.

There is a *chronology of violence*, borne out of the relationship between time and violence that is expressed through two modalities. On the one hand, some crimes are more common during certain hours, for example, homicides are nocturnal and linked to holidays, juvenile suicide occurs more often at the end of school semesters, and firework accidents more at the end of the year. A chronology of this type produces restrictive human behaviour and focalised urban policies that tend to increase the individual attitudes of the population that, in many cases, turn into the instigating elements for acts of violence or inhibition of social or economic activities. On the other hand, some crimes limit the times that the city is utilised by inhabitants, causing cities to disappear at night.

Cities are losing public and civic space, and private/walled urbanisation is widespread. As a result, cities are becoming increasingly more private and domestic. Proof of this is the significant increase in home life, for example, watching movies, eating and working at home. Today there are parts of the city that the police cannot enter. Objective and subjective violence unfold in the territory in unequal ways, producing different impacts; closed housing developments, closed social and athletic clubs, as well as verticalisation and urban centralities have much to do with violence and the fear that it has created. Fear would seem to have made itself the driving force of the contemporary city. Today, fear is an urban principle.

Public space/private space

In Latin America, public spaces are being consumed by the private sector that privatises everything, leading to segmentation that causes people to never be in the same place at the same time. Also, agoraphobia is expressed most clearly in the quintessential symbolic element: the plaza, but also in the streets, parks and sidewalks. In this context, to mention *situational prevention* is, to say the least, a contradiction because if 'public space is the city', what must be done is not to cover up public space but rather propose a new urbanism based on the construction and production of cities, that is to say, the public space.

The nexus between poverty and wealth has been lost. According to Bauman this is caused by the division of the world population between the globalised rich that dominate the time, and the localised poor that are stuck in the space (cited in Beck 1998: 121). Public space loses its sense of inclusion and becomes a *non-place of the poor*[8] and is subject to a permanent attack (agoraphobia), to the extent that plazas are on the road to extinction. Meanwhile, the rich build their private spaces exclusively for themselves: the social club, the sports club, the supermarket and the closed neighbourhood. The dual city finds its new dimension.

Without quality public spaces, coexistence is not possible nor is urban structure satisfactory and, as such, neither is public safety. This is why land management and construction of public spaces is not a task for the police (repression) nor is it a process for social control (discipline). Public space is the space of dispute for liberty, integration, visibility and representation (Carrión 2007a: 16). From this, we can see three examples of interesting cases that move from the private to the public, though these are not without conflicts.

Gender violence

Until very recently, gender violence wasn't historically recognised as a specific type of violence (crime). The current recognition of gender violence is happening through the lens of public safety, which produces two important changes. First, it is registered as a right, particularly related to the citizenship of women; and second, it is recognised as a way to allow the private-domestic world to become more visible as a part of the public landscape, eliminating the public–private dichotomy (Carrión 2007b: 1). In other words, the recognition of gender violence is linked to democracy, to respect for diversity, to the fulfilment of rights and the creation of a community with an urban sense. Violence isn't defined by the space where it occurs but by the asymmetries of power that exist between the sexes. However, it is correct to recognise that in cities it has been feasible to change the unequal patterns of gender, because while in the rural areas there are traditional cultures that assign distinct and specific roles to women, in the city women become public, visible and their rights are recognised.

Gang violence

Gangs become an institutional substitute for that which prepares young people to be part of daily life. It is a mechanism to face the scarce liberty that they have in the private-domestic space, obligating them to fight for the public space, which is elusive for them because their social and symbolic appropriation has a condition of exclusionary occupation for authority. In this unrest, it becomes a diffuse conflict in terms of the plurality of actors (other gangs, the community, police, the city governments); different to a conflict of polarised actors in which safety policies define gangs as the new enemy. This is the case of the 'Maras', a gang in El Salvador and Honduras.

   Young people separated from their families find in gangs a public collective space of symbolic expression and social integration. "A gang is a type of fraternal organization that gives young men autonomy from adult authority. These young men that lack freedom at home, create their own privacy in urban public spaces where they feel protected from authority" (Goubaud 2008: 36). That is where they feel belonging and authority, and part of an elite recognised by the media and public policies. From this perspective, public space is a defining element of safety and group identity where they construct their street, neighbourhood, urban and even virtual communities. The migratory phenomenon, new communication technologies and the opening of international markets give way to new strategies for the groups of emigrant youth that establish ties between their place of origin and destination as territories that are initially differentiated and later united, thanks to virtual integration. This means that the gang ends up transforming its neighbourhood space into a virtual space.

Private security

This grows with state reforms when the minimal conditions for security privatisation are introduced and there is a noticeable increase in violence. Since the mid-1980s, there has been an expansive increase in the market for private security goods and services. According to Frigo (2003: 2):

> In Latin America, private security is a rapidly expanding economic sector ... In the last 15 years, private security has gained a relevant place in the world as well as in our region ... The world market for private security has a value of 85 billion dollars, with an average annual growth rate between 7 per cent and 8 per cent. In Latin America the estimated growth was 11 per cent.

This economic condition positions a new political actor on the scene of public safety and does so under a new precept: the profitability of capital investment. In addition, it turns into an actor for control of public order. Today in Latin America, private security companies (more than 4 million) have more than twice the number of enforcement personnel than the police (approximately 2 million) (Frigo 2003: 2). A situation such as the one described introduces two elements that we should highlight: the change of the right to public safety to an object of economic transaction, a process that creates a highly segmented and exclusive market. Paradoxically, the state itself is one of the principal consumers of this service turned commodity and those who have the money can get security and those that lack resources don't have access to this 'service'. Is this private security or deprivation of security?

Conclusion

Today, the central debate about violence and public safety centres on the need to break the unilateralism of dominant views because social phenomena cannot be understood from the natural sciences or the restrictive point of view of the aetiology.

While cities once were conceived as merely a catalogue of problems, they are also places where citizenship is constructed, where better innovations are produced, and are the quintessential places for productivity. Cities are the places where services are provided in the best way, the scenes of growing employment and decreasing poverty, as well as where women are free to be in public, young people can express themselves, and where politics evolve. Such a consideration is fundamental so as not to fall into the prejudice of causality and also to understand that good urban policies can do a great deal from the perspective of 'de-securitising' interpersonal relationships and satisfying public and individual liberties.

If we consider that the crisis of public space is a significant expression of the urban crisis, we can conclude that urban policies and urban planning can truly contribute to the reduction of crime. In other words, the development and construction of new public spaces − such as significant and symbiotic spaces − will only be possible with a new urbanism and new public safety policies.

There is a dialectical relationship between the city and violence that allows for the structuring of two important analytical perspectives. One has a dynamic borne out of the changes in the elements of the equation that seek to alter the relationship; that is, that violence, cities and their relationship are historic. The other perspective is that it is evident that there is violence that is part of the city (urban violence) as well as the view that the city is a space where multiple violent acts occur. It should be also understood that violence creates many problems in the city, therefore there is a need for more work on public safety and urbanism.

Notes

1 "According to Anderson, this growing presence of women in cities reveals social factors and complex social and economic processes, among which can be included that cities provide conditions of 'viability' for single women, women that want to become independent and single mothers, in other words, the so-called 'vitality' of cities" (Arboleda 1999: 24).
2   In all countries, poverty tends to be greater in the rural areas than in the urban areas, and it tends to be less in the biggest cities than in the medium and small cities. On the other hand, in the majority of countries the urban concentration hasn't been a negative factor, as it has allowed for the access to goods and services to a much greater degree than was the case in the time of rural predominance.

(Jordan and Simioni 2002: 15)

3 There are a number of public and private actions that can be mentioned: the privatisation of public space, autonomous closed neighbourhoods, video surveillance, restrictions on alcohol sales, the quadrant plan, lighting, trash collection, urban mobility, which in the long run represent a logistical burden, in the absence of real security strategies.

4 Just as there is gender violence or juvenile violence that takes place, the first in the asymmetries of power and the second in the conflict created by generational borders within age groups, urban violence can also exist.

5 Latin America has 82 per cent of its population living in the cities, which means that the migration from rural to urban areas is decreasing. The demographic pressure in the peripheries of cities will decrease causing a re-urbanisation of what already exists inside the cities.

6 While in 1980 the rate of urbanisation was 1.2 per cent per annum, in 2005 it was 0.5 per cent per annum, which means that it has decreased by half in 25 years (United Nations 2014: 9). During the same period, the homicide rate doubled: "In 1980, the average homicide rate was 12.5 per 100,000 habitants per year. In 2006, it was 25.1, which means delinquency has doubled in the last quarter of a century" (Kliksberg 2008: 5).

7 The planning of urban infrastructures includes the dimension of civil security.

8 "A *non-place* can't be defined as a space of identity nor as relational nor historic" (Augé 1998: 83).

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