Navigating the city:
dialectics of everyday urbanism

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Abstract

How might we conceptualise and research everyday urbanism? By examining the making of everyday life in a low-income neighbourhood in Uganda, we argue that a dialectics of everyday urbanism is a useful approach for understanding urban poverty. This dialectical approach examines how marginalised urban dwellers navigate the city in the relative absence of formal infrastructure systems, service provision and state welfare, and in turn exceed those limitations through forging connections, capacities and opportunities. We reveal the 'social infrastructures' that people put together to sustain life, as well as the limits of and placed on these infrastructures, from the legacies of structural adjustment to ongoing forms of demolition and disinvestment. We identify a set of practices that operate alongside social infrastructure – 'coordination', 'consolidation', and 'speculation' – important in the composition of everyday urban life. In doing so, we reflect on how we might research the dialectics of everyday urbanism, and here a 'Follow Along Participant Observation' (FAPO) methodology has significant potential. Our arguments emerge from research with residents in Kampala, but open out questions for how we conceive and research everyday life and urban infrastructure more generally.

Keywords: Everyday urbanism; infrastructure; popular neighbourhoods; dialectics; Kampala.

Introduction

This paper asks a seemingly straightforward question: how do marginalized residents learn to navigate the topographies of everyday life in the city? An old question for research on cities, development, and poverty, to be sure, but one that now has a new urgency. In particular, the growth of informality – i.e. precarious housing, labour and lives in predominantly the global South, but increasingly in the global North too (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012) – demands that we develop a better understanding of how people make their lives in the city, and for how we understand contemporary urbanism. Our concern is with how people cope, work together, deal with threats and develop opportunities, and invest their energies in the making of urban life, often in conditions of poverty and marginality. To do so, we investigate the relations between people and space in and beyond one informal settlement – we prefer the term 'popular neighbourhoods', as we set out below - in Kampala, Uganda. We seek to contribute to debates on urban poverty by demonstrating that a focus on how residents navigate the city can extend our understanding of the experience of urban life, and by examining the role and limits of 'social infrastructure' for coping with poverty and reproducing urban life.

Our opening question above has been with urban research in one form or another throughout its history. Whether Friedrich Engels on Manchester (1987) or Jane Jacobs on New York (1961) or AbdouMaliq Simone on Jakarta (2014), or in the landmark writings of – to name a few – Walter Benjamin (2002), Michel De Certeau (2011), and Henri Lefebvre (1991), the nature, relations and potential of the everyday life of the city has been interrogated from an array of different political and intellectual perspectives. There is a growing literature focused largely on the global

South that examines the making of everyday life in economically marginal urban contexts (see, for example, Bayat, 2010; Banks, 2015; De Boek, 2015; Gill, 2000; Kihato, 2011; Lomnitz, 1977; McFarlane *et al*, 2014; Moser, 1996, 2009; Simone, 2010, 2014; Silver, 2014). These debates are increasingly being drawn upon to understand everyday urban life in global North contexts, especially in the context of growing forms of precarious urban living, from that produced by austerity to the Syrian refugee crisis (Hall, 2012, 2015; Lancione, 2014; Roy and Crane, 2015; Vasudevan 2014a, 2014b).

Our context is on everyday life at the margins of global urbanism. 'Margins', of course, are produced and experienced in different ways in different cities. As Janice Perlman (2004) has argued, the term marginality is sometimes used interchangeably with 'social exclusion', at other times in connection to curtailed citizenship rights (e.g. Holston, 1999), or even 'capabilities deprivation' (following Amartya Sen). Others use the term 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant, 2008) to denote the combination of neoliberal exclusion and punitive criminalisation in stigmatised urban places. While Perlman had argued in 1976 in *The Myth of Marginality* that marginality was a 'myth' in that favelas in Rio were not separate from society, but fully integrated, even if they were economically exploited and socially stigmatised, by 2004 she used the term to describe the changing forms of exploitation in favelas, from growing violence and inequality to stigmatisation and a reduced sense of community life. In 2010, in *Favela*, she distinguished between material, cultural, historical, socio-psychological, and political dimensions of marginality, which she takes to be mutual, reinforcing, and differentiated across favelas. What this underlines is the need to understand marginality as a multidimensional struggle of but also beyond poverty, a

struggle to get by and get on in cities that too often materially and discursively place limits on urban lives through capitalist and social inequalities.

The popular neighbourhood is an economic margin, but a social centre of life in the urban 21st century, and is radically differentiated across the urban world economically, politically, socially, and culturally. The term 'popular' has a double meaning: an emphasis on populous and on a play on the notion of choice – a forced choice, of course - to locate in a particular place, given that other more expensive areas of the city are often off limits. The term 'neighbourhood' rather than 'settlement' serves to remind us that informal settlements are more than just sites and shelter; they are actual urban places with lives and going ons, much like other neighbourhoods (eg see Hansen and Verkaaik, 2009).

As the world becomes evermore urban, and as more and more of that urban population lives in some form of popular neighbourhood, it will be increasingly vital that we develop conceptual vocabularies that helps us to make sense of how everyday life is made. In our previous work in Indian, South African, Ghanaian and Ugandan cities, we have examined on how people learn to live in cities under conditions of precariousness and uncertainty (McFarlane, 2011; McFarlane *et al*, 2014; McFarlane and Silver, 2016; Silver, 2014; Zeiderman *el al*, 2015). In this paper, we argue that everyday urbanism is produced *dialectically*, i.e. through an ongoing, coevolving movement of contradiction, reinforcement, fragmentation, and reconstitution (Harvey, 2009; Loftus, 2012; Merrifield, 2002).

These dialectics give rise to key processes through which urban life proceeds, but they take shape differently for different people, as we will see. In the relative absence of key provisions from the state – basic welfare, social services and infrastructures – residents cope with the challenges of life in the city, and seek to improve their conditions, through the development of infrastructures and practices of different sorts. In particular, we identify four: *social infrastructure, coordination, consolidation,* and *speculation*, all of which are experienced to a greater or lesser extent, in distinct ways and through different geographies, by different people as they are produced dialectically in the shifting assemblages of urban life.

In the next section, we introduce the research project, reflect on the methodology, and introduce the neighbourhood and residents we worked with. From there we explore the practice of social infrastructure, using the experiences of the participants to show, in this case, how it developed primarily around care. This is followed by a reflection of other social practices that are differentiated across the residents which exceed social infrastructure even as they, in part at least, emerge from and shape those infrastructures and which are differentiated across residents. The conclusion draws together the key arguments of the paper and its contribution to research on everyday urbanism, urban poverty, and infrastructure in popular neighbourhoods and the wider city.

Navigating the city: the project and the residents

Kampala is the capital and largest city of Uganda, located on the northern shores of Lake Victoria. A city with an annual growth rate of 4 percent and over 2.1 million residents (UN-Habitat, 2011), Kampala is not a megacity, nor is it particularly

prominent in the trajectories of global urban policy or research debate (eg Roy and Ong, 2011). Nonetheless, like many cities in the global South it has ambitious plans. Re-development plans connected to the establishment of a new port, and attempts at 'beautifying' the city - particularly through the all-too-familiar clamping down on street traders and other ongoing 'urban renewal' processes - reinforce and create new precarious conditions that often painfully align everyday life inside and outside the popular neighbourhoods of the city with broader (and often global) urban trajectories, circulating policy mobilities and moments of heightened political repression (Branch and Mampilly, 2015).

Urban policy orientations across Kampala are now directed through a city-regional structure in the form of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) (Gore and Muwanga, 2014, Goodfellow, 2013). The KCCA has increasingly focused on projects that "try to appeal to Uganda's urban middle class and elite, managing the city in their interest" (Branch and Mampilly, 2015;146). Yet 60 percent of Kampala's residents live in over thirty informal settlements across the city, with 39 percent living below the poverty line (Mukwaya et al, 2010; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Life in the city, for many, is a shared experience of a lack of basic service provision, the ongoing threat of evictions, and multi-faceted land and resource conflicts, and a sense that the dominant renderings of the city's future are not for them (Kareem and Lwasa, 2011).

Namuwongo is a centrally located popular neighbourhood to the southeast of the city centre. It is an industrial zone, partly built on a wetland and adjacent to an unused railway track leading to Port Bell (the port is one of the important elements of the redevelopment plans, although the work is yet to start). It has become a dense and

diverse neighbourhood that sustains many different trajectories of urban life. In a city in which newcomers account for over 50 percent of the total population (Lwasa, 2011), Namuwongo has become a crucial space in which migrants are able to find cheaper sources of housing, connections to kin, and economic opportunities – a popular neighbourhood.

Until the early 1980s, Namuwongo was dominated by mud and wattle structures (Mann and Andabati, 2014). 'Slum upgrading' work by the Government of Uganda and UN-Habitat began in 1984 leading to parts of the area above the railroad tracks being formalised and divided into plots. Many of the original beneficiaries sold their newly acquired land title or were marginalised from the process (Mann and Andabati, 2014). The population increased due to migration from across Uganda and beyond, often driven by conflict and insecurity, and poorer residents moved to the wetland and railroad tracks. Today, an estimated 15,000 people live in Namuwongo (Mann and Andabati, 2014), with few services and infrastructure (such as road access), leading to patchwork combinations of formal and informal infrastructures such as energy and waste (eg Brown, 2015 on sanitation).

The occasional enforcement of building controls within ten metres of the railway track and wetland locations has meant that the threat of demolition and eviction continue to cast a long shadow over the future of the area (Kagenda, 2014). In a household survey undertaken in Namuwongo nearly 80 percent of participating residents are fearful of their dwellings being demolished and over 70 percent of resident households consider their dwellings to be semi-permanent or temporary (Silver *et al*, 2015). With partial demolition in 2014 by the KCCA and Rift Valley

Railways near the tracks (aiming at a 30 meter clearance) and ongoing rumours concerning enforcement by the National Environment Management Agency (NEMA) of the wetlands circulating regularly, the only certainty is that the uncertainties and rumours are not going to go away. Given this backdrop, the few attempts at development in Namuwongo have tended to be small scale and led by NGO's such as Hope for Children that have built facilities to address issues like waste disposal, including open defecation (Brown, 2015).

The aim of our research was to examine the ways in which different residents in Namuwongo navigate the multiple topographies of city life, where 'topography' refers to the material geographies of the city in its different forms (routes, markets, public spaces, transport hubs, workplaces, home, etc). Between January and June 2015 we worked with local researcher and resident Joel Ongwec to recruit resident participants, and undertook situated fieldwork that created cartographies of urban navigations. Recruitment was based on Joel's existing, extensive networks and predicated on a need to find a sample that would reflect the diversity of Namuwongo in terms of age, gender, income, time in Namuwongo and where residents might have migrated from within Uganda.

We focussed on six residents. The decision to focus on six, and not a smaller or larger number, was to allow for a research approach that was able to delve into the details of people's individual lives and build up a relationship with individuals, while also retaining the possibility of bringing a manageable group of people together on occasions to reflect on the neighbourhood, the city, and the issues the research presented. Over several research trips covering a period of seven months, working

with six residents meant we were able to conduct repeated interviews, follow-along mini-ethnographies, focus groups, workshops with the residents and civil society groups, and work with the residents to develop and reflect on the process of exhibiting the six stories at an event in the Uganda National Museum. During all of this we talked with other residents too, conducted a larger survey, and drew on a range of views as we progressed.

We selected a range of people that reflected some of the diversity of the neighbourhood: two widowed women with children to support (one younger and one older, with grandchildren), one late teenage man who had lost his parents and depended on extended family, two men in their late 30s who had young families but had different levels of income security, and one older man who was economically the most secure and politically well-connected. This is not a 'representative sample' of this incredibly diverse neighbourhood, and caution needs to be used in building generalisations about life in Namuwongo from a small group. Nonetheless, the stories that emerge allow us to identify how different residents mobilise and use practices that enter into the making of everyday life in the area.

Our initial interviewing was extended into mobile methods through 'follow along participant observation' (FAPO). This included days with residents as they navigated the city, observing from a distance or sometimes in close proximity how they negotiated a series of everyday topographies, and how those experiences were shaped in part through issues ranging from family crisis through to traffic jams, dealing with the authorities, and income generation. We worked with local photographer Josephine Namukisa, who provided a visual documentation of the navigations that served both

as a means of pinpointing key moments, encounters and other significant processes, and as a resource that then levered into different conversations with the residents about ways of portraying their and other urban navigations. We then brought the residents into focus groups and workshops that discussed, debated and shared the initial findings.

Finally, we worked with the photographer and the residents to develop an exhibition at the Uganda National Museum entitled 'Celebrating Namuwongo', documenting the six sets of navigations and experiences. This enabled both a wider communication of the research process and for the participants an opportunity to communicate experiences and visions of Namuwongo beyond the negative representations the neighbourhood regularly faces in Kampala – typically depicting the areas as violent, crime-ridden, and/or populated by unemployed drug-taking and potentially explosive young men. At the launch of the exhibition over 100 residents from the neighbourhood attended and a short article was released (see Ongwech, 2015). This was followed the next day with a workshop that brought in local NGOs operating across the city to debate some of the issues that the exhibition had generated. The exhibition remained open for over a month and attracted visitors from across the city and beyond, and we concluded it with a set of evaluative interviews with the residents on what had gone well or less well in the research and exhibition process.

Our mixed method approach – interviews, focus groups, workshops, follow-along, and of course the exhibition – echoes approaches aimed at building insight through different forms of data on precarious lives in other cities (eg see Gough *et al*, 2016, on Lusaka). This includes the use of 'walkabout' methodologies, for example in Katri

Gadd's (2016) work on street children in Pelotas, Brazil, who draws on actor-network theory (Latour, 2005, 2011) and time geography (Hägerstrand, 1985) to understand the encounters, spaces and networks through which street children, over a seven-year period, differently navigated the challenges and possibilities of urban life. Langevang and Gough (2009) draw attention to the 'tactics of social navigation' for youth in a suburb in Accra, prompting researchers to consider how mobility can be brought explicitly to the fore of methodological considerations (and see Jones and Evans, 2012).

Our own use of the follow-along method echoes Vigh's (2009:421) work on social navigation, in which the 'everyday' in the city is not akin to the taken-for-granted version of 'life as usual', but to a movement of proximity and distance, routine and disorder. FAPOs allowed us to build on the interviews through observation of how people meet the small and large challenges of the neighbourhood and city over the day, of the different routes people are able to take (whether for financial or safety reasons, or just through preference), and the extent to which daily encounters mattered or not for how people get by and get on in the city. While our research process was sometimes challenging, both for us and the residents who at moments – engaged for instance in selling wares on the street or chatting to family and friends – wanted to ensure we kept a distance, the FAPOs both built relationships and provided insight into the textures of living in the city. Figure 1 shows the six routes through the city. While the range of routes may at first sight appear narrow (mostly within Namuwongo and/or between Namuwongo and the city centre), each route reveals distinct-if-related worlds of encounters, densities and struggles, as we will see.

Figure 1: Six routes through the city

Figure 2: The residents of Namuwongo involved in the research (Josephine/Jennifer/Ali on top row and Masengere/Ismail/Amiri - on botton row)

The residents

Residents in Namuwongo often weave together a range of skills, knowledges and economic pursuits, and the six we worked with reflect some of that (Figure 2). Jennifer has worked in many different ways to earn income from bead-making to catering. She has also set up a woman's group and helps local families apply for scholarships to schools. Just as there has been an uncertainty in her economic life, so too has there been insecurity at home and she has moved away from the house she proudly built herself. Ali, the second resident, moved to Namuwongo to be with his sister when he first arrived in Kampala from eastern Uganda. He started by selling fruit and eventually established one of the most popular stalls at the neighbourhood market. Ali's fruit and vegetable stall at the entrance to Namuwongo Market is an economic investment first and foremost, but it is also a lively social space where people chat, swap stories, laugh, debate, and discuss the latest gossip. Ali is at the centrally located Nakesero Market that supplies traders before dawn and does not leave his stall back in the neighbourhood until after 9pm.

Josephine moved to escape insecurity and conflict in northern Uganda. She has benefitted from informal contacts with women in the neighbourhood that have helped her with selling fruit and vegetables in the city, a difficult and precarious livelihood with little income. Not having a reliable income is immensely challenging, especially

when everyday needs – charcoal, paying for toilets, buying basic foods –take up almost all daily earnings. The Pentecostal Church has helped with school fees for her family. She and her neighbours often help each other, from looking after each other's children to finding a reliable bricklayer to repair the house after a storm.

Isamail sadly passed away in May 2015 due to poor health, at the age of 36, leaving behind his wife and four children. He was a matatu (privately owned mini-bus) driver who travelled the route between Namuwongo and the city centre. He started very young as a taxi conductor, and later became a driver. The matatu's are important and cheap forms of travel for residents, but work was not always certain for Isamail. He had no guarantee that a matatu would be available for him to drive every day, or if he'd be well enough to work. If he did work the driving involved long, tiring hours often stretching between 5am and 10pm. Like many residents, Isamail struggled to take care of his health, pay for medical treatment, provide for his family, and maintain a steady income.

Masengere was a chief in his village in western Uganda, and is now a chairman in Namuwongo and elected official for his part of the neighbourhood. He plays a vital political role in the area, and with his stamp can provide the approval needed for a wide range of local issues or economic pursuits from job references through to identity documents. In 1991 he was elected to the position of chairman and has since helped to create facilities in the neighbourhood. He believes that in time Namuwongo will become very different as part of a modernising and beautifying city, but hopes that he will be able to carry on grazing his few cattle on the nearby wetlands, because it helps him feel connected to his rural home.

Finally, Amiri is proud of Namuwongo and its youth having lived here for most of his life. He is young and stylish, and understands the challenges many young people in the area struggle with. Amiri lost both parents when he was young, and school didn't work out well – he finished early and started to earn money by collecting and selling scrap materials in and around the local area. Through the help of his uncle he was trained as a carpenter, producing an impressive range of different wood products in his Uncle's workshop at the edge of the neighbourhood. Sometimes he leaves Namuwongo to work on sites across the city, including recently the large new Hilton hotel being built in city centre. He lives with friends in a tiny, rented dwelling in the 'Soweto' section, the densest and one of the poorest parts of the neighbourhood.

Social infrastructure and its limits

'Infrastructure' has become a dominant lens through which to conceptualise the urban condition and research urban life (e.g. Appel et al, 2015; Amin, 2014; Bjorkman, 2015; Gandy, 2014; Graham and McFarlane, 2014; Silver 2014; Simone, 2008; De Boek, 2015; Larkin, 2008; McFarlane and Silver, 2016). 'Social infrastructure', however, has received less attention. We define it as a practice of connecting people and things in socio-material relations that sustain urban life. It is not just a context or a noun, but a verb: social infrastructure is made and held stable through work and changing ways of connecting. It is a connective tissue, often unpredictable, anchoring urban life in popular neighbourhoods across the urban world (e.g. see De Boek, 2015; McFarlane *et al*, 2014; Simone, 2014; Silver, 2014), varying in form and content.

Our use of the term 'social' in the couplet 'social infrastructure' is designed to underline that these infrastructures are 'peopled', to echo AbdouMaliq Simone's (2004) influential arguments in his wonderful piece, 'people as infrastructure'. The terms 'network' or 'social capital' are less useful here. We are not concerned with narrow valuations of social interactions, nor are we solely focussed on the economic potentials of social collectives (Putnam, 2001). Our focus in on the wider sets of ways in which people manage and navigate the city. Moreover, infrastructure is more effective at capturing flows, movements, congestions, and internments of people and things than a term like network or capital.

We are motivated here by the rich and varied debates in practice theory, from Bourdieu's (1977) emphasis on how everyday life was formed, performed, and disrupted through wider cultural, economic and political dispositions, to Schatzki's (1996) emphasis on how people come to know and use the world around them in particular but changing ways, and– if we can stretch practice theory a little more widely – Latour's (2005) emphasis on the making of worlds through actor-networks. We value the focus from practice theory on socially produced practices that are delimited but not defined by power, and which are forged through corporeal and material worlds. However, just as we aim to bring a stronger sense of the social to debates on infrastructure, so too do we wish to bring a stronger sense of the individual – in this case the residents – to practice theory, which too often loses sight of the differential experience (Reckwitz, 2002). Our concern in using the term 'social infrastructure' is with *both* practices and individuals, and *both* the material conditions that shape everyday practice and the ways in which practice exceeds those conditions to open out ways of coping with poverty.

In this reading, social infrastructure becomes a way to stretch long-standing work on urban poverty and 'assets' in popular neighbourhoods to account for the movement and geographies of life in and beyond the margins of global urbanism. For Caroline Moser (2009), local assets are vital resources through which residents in popular neighbourhoods are able to cope with and perhaps even move out of poverty. These include physical (eg infrastructure, resources), financial (eg savings, credit), human (eg education, health), social (eg norms, reciprocity), and natural (eg land, environmental conditions) capital, and it is through household and community accumulations within and between these assets that people move from vulnerable to more stable positions (see also Bebbington, 1999; Banks, 2015; Wilke, 2006).

Care is a crucial social infrastructure in Namuwongo. Moments of caring are visible throughout the participants everyday lives as friends, family and neighbours come together to secure essential needs, sharing and supporting each other during heightened moments of crisis and the challenges of each day. Each of the six residents both called upon and enacted these social infrastructures in different ways reflecting their capacities, backgrounds, networks, experiences and empathies.

Through past experience as an elected chair woman in the nearby town of Jinja, and her struggles as a widow to sustain a family and links to a range of individuals and organisations inside and outside the neighbourhood, Jennifer has found herself at the centre of numerous moments of care that make a substantive difference to many people. Jennifer has worked with the local Pentecostal Church to build sanitation facilities for collective use by the congregation, helps out her family members to start

businesses, and seeks out sponsorship for Namuwongo children to attend school. And then there is the more informal work of checking up with people, seeing how they are getting on, identifying problems and providing contacts to help – much of this picked up while moving through streets and lanes of the neighbourhood.

These relations have been in large part developed through her prominent role in a women's group, which includes the making and selling of crafts for sale, and a savings group covering everything from everyday essentials such as food or fuel when times are tough, through to exceptional needs such as funeral costs and, in some cases, saving towards a small business. These social infrastructures of care are at once social and material, ranging from food and fuel to craft skill training, basic services, school access and contacts for informal employment.

Care should not necessarily be seen as a species of altruism. Jennifer has positioned herself as locally important, and as such often benefits in a range of ways, from small donations from parents for whom she has secured a school place, through to selling her handmade beads to local and international contacts. The time and work that Jennifer puts in to creating and sustaining social infrastructures of care is also an investment in herself and in a wider reciprocity that is at once ethical and economic. This story of reciprocity repeats-with-difference in popular neighbourhoods globally. For example, reciprocal exchanges form the basis of insurance systems through which people borrow, lend, buy or sell between themselves, as has been documented in classic anthropological works such as Carol Stack's (1974) *All Our Kin,* which highlights the dense networks of reciprocity, debt and circulation of objects, favors, and services in poor neighborhoods (and see Gill, 2000; Moser, 1996).

Social infrastructures of care vary both between and within cities. For example, Josephine's caring infrastructures are far less extensive than Jennifer's, yet they are all the more important because Josephine and her children are less able to secure the basic necessities of survival. Social infrastructures enable Josephine to work, for instance as neighbours look after her children, and at times of intensified crisis social infrastructures are absolutely vital for her survival. In situations of crisis the social infrastructure can spatially widen, including to rural family hinterlands, pulling in distant family alongside neighbours and friends. For example, on one occasion while selling fruit in town she seriously injured her leg, and family from her village in the north of Uganda sent food, while locally neighbours and friends helped when they could.

Again, there is a measure of reciprocity here: Josephine too will occasionally look after the children of neighbours, and she had also taken responsibility for the care of her niece, who has HIV and was unable to secure treatment in the village where she had lived. This meant another mouth to feed in a context where food is often scarce and where she can seldom scrape together the money to get her children into school, placing yet more pressure on her and making the social infrastructures of care all the more vital.

Or take the example of Amiri. His relative security in his carpentry job is assured through his Uncle. He has moved in and out of essential social infrastructures of care, from his early experience of losing his parents and becoming a waste-picker and later a carpenter. Amiri spoke of a growing realisation that he lives in an urban space in

which caring infrastructures are necessary, whether in finding employment through contacts, or to look out for each other when the police are in the neighbourhood. If conditions for Amiri stay the same, and if he is able to continue helping his friends, then he too may well become a node in infrastructure of care, as well as being someone who is beginning to move *beyond* a dependence on infrastructures of care (see below). Whilst Jennifer is able to draw upon a lifetime of experience to construct such infrastructures, Amiri is aware too of the potential and limits of constructing and sustaining social infrastructure. It is to these limits that we now turn.

The limits of social infrastructure

We started to think of everyday life in Namuwongo dialectically precisely because we found ourselves returning to the limits of social infrastructure. There is no starker limit on social infrastructure than demolition. Jennifer witnessed the late night demolition and eviction of homes by the authorities in 2014. Soon later, she relocated to a safer space in the neighbourhood. Her relocation outside of the designated zone of demolition protects the infrastructures she has worked so hard to develop over the years, despite the loss of close association with her neighbours, the effort in building the house, the costs of moving and subsequent renting and the peripheral location of her new home in the neighbourhood. As Doshie (2013) has argued, the experience of displacement in popular neighbourhoods unfolds in distinct ways for different residents (and see Gillespie, 2016).

Beyond demolition, everyday interactions with the state expose residents to harassment and intimidation, often focused on people's efforts at generating income. Josephine faces the harassment of KCCA officials tasked to stop any street trading in

the central city. Whilst some days might involve helpful support and advice from other sellers about the movements of municipal enforcement teams, other days may leave her vulnerable, and occasionally she will drop what she's selling and rapidly move for cover when she sees the dreaded yellow shirts in the distance. This is the nature of everyday urbanism for many of Kampala's street traders as they navigate what Lindel and Ampaire (2016) term, after Oren Yiftachel (2009), 'grey space'. Meanwhile, the ongoing harassment of youth in Namuwongo by the police, common across many popular neighbourhoods (Kimar, 2014), limit Amiri's social infrastructures. While he is able to call upon his friends there is little that they can do to stop the police detaining them and demanding money for release. For Josephine and Amiri, and in relative contrast to Jennifer or Masengere (see below), the dialectical production of everyday urbanism often leaves social infrastructure as a weak resource.

Another limit to social infrastructure is crime. A house robbery soon after his arrival Namuwongo meant that Ali lost much of the capital that he had built up during the early days of his business. While social infrastructure kicked in here in that his friends and family rallied around to offer emotional and financial support, the realities of crime in a popular neighbourhood such as Namuwongo remain an ongoing threat, despite the introduction of policing units to the area. Many residents, despite knowing neighbours intimately, are not prepared to walk to nearby toilet blocks at certain times, especially at night. Social infrastructures cannot provide adequate protection from crime and high levels of violence against woman (Viswanath and Mehrotra, 2007; McFarlane *et al*, 2014). Navigating the city is not just about knowing and mobilising various forms of social infrastructure to get by and get on but also being

aware of the limits of these forms of support, to know when and where one is moving. We should, of course, be very wary of representations of 'slums' as inherently dangerous spaces in relation to the wider city (Lombard, 2015), but it would be wrong to deny that the threat and actuality of violence of different sorts is often more common in popular neighbourhoods given the desperate poverty that sometimes exist (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014).

Finally, social infrastructures of care are both undermined by and emerge as vital through the violence inherent in different forms of policy. Arguably most destructive have been the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP's) imposed by the World Bank/IMF, partly responsible for years of under-investment in Kampala (Branch and Mampilly, 2015). This history inevitably meant that a disparate tissue of civil society groups, missionary enterprises and private practitioners - alongside and often interacting with the social infrastructures we describe here - have filled the voids. This is most tragically visible in the ways in which the Uganda health sector has been under-invested in over decades (Pfeiffer and Chapman, 2010) and particularly in the challenges faced in relation to the HIV/Aids epidemic (see Wallman, 1996). SAPs pushed fee-driven government health systems resulting in the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS (HIV prevalence increased from 6.4 percent in 2004/5 to 7.4 percent in 2012/13, and is higher in urban areas and amongst working class groups, Uganda Country Progress Report, 2014). Isamail was unable to secure the life saving drugs and treatment needed after a series of complications and period of bad health. Here the limits to social infrastructure are made visible in the most profound ways possible, and the precarious nature of life in Namuwongo exposed at its most bare.

Set against these challenges, social infrastructures are vital forms of life support. But they are supplemented by other practices that are important to the making of everyday life and ways of navigating the city. *Consolidation* is the differential capacity to enhance position, while *coordination* is a role that emerges from consolidating position. These practices move beyond social infrastructure, but they are related in that they can provide enhanced capacities that may help shape social infrastructure of care. *Speculation* is an orientation to urban life itself which is not determined by social infrastructure, consolidation or coordination, but which can be enhanced by them. Social infrastructure, consolidation, coordination, and speculation are forged dialectically in relation to one another and the wider city: they coevolve, sometimes reinforce, sometimes contradict, and emerge in distinct ways for the different residents.

Urban capacity: consolidation, coordination, speculation

Social infrastructure is a differentiated set of sociomaterial practices that make provisions for some of the basics of urban life: being able to get to work, to access schooling, to get basic healthcare, and so on. Consolidation, in contrast, refers to a greater level of economic security, a position where social infrastructures do not cease to matter, but where the conditions of everyday life have exceeded those infrastructures, where people are less dependent on them, even as consolidation can enhance their capacities to develop those social infrastructures.

Of all the residents, Masengere was the one who was the most consolidated. His position in the wider area is relatively secure, ensured by his role as a local party Chairman for the ruling branch of the country's dominant political force, the National

Resistance Movement (NRM), and the financial benefits, political and social contacts, and reputation the role brings. Indeed, such is his relative security that he was the least concerned about possible future development of all the respondents, a security added to given that he can use political power to manoeuvre into a better position than most and the fact that he resides outside demolition target areas. Still, even his consolidated position has its limits; he believes, for instance, that the area will eventually become too expensive for current residents and that KCCA will have to pay compensation to those who will lose their homes.

For Jennifer, consolidating her economic security and social position was about learning how to make jewellery using beads, and here external NGO training had been vital. Josephine, in contrast remarked that there didn't seem to be opportunities for this kind of training, and it's true that NGOs or government programmes are thin on the ground. Consolidation allowed, Jennifer said, a more secure position in relation to food: "This is a big problem. There is nowhere to plant your own food, so you have to buy it and that's more expensive" (and see Pottier, 2015).

Amiri learned skills that helped bring a measure of security through training from his Uncle in woodwork. Working with materials, in this case wood, is even more important for Amiri's livelihood than working with beads is to Jennifer's, because Jennifer has a more diverse social infrastructure of care that includes other ways of supplementing her income, from helping neighbours – for a small fee - to get their children into school, to cooking for local occasions. The more experience and skills Amiri gets of different kinds of woodwork through his Uncle, the more he secures his position in the present and into the future.

But it would be wrong to give the impression that Amiri was simply in a position of growing security and confidence, or that learning skills is a straightforward ticket out of poverty. Uncertain futures press up against consolidating practices. Like Jennifer, Amiri is aware of how the city's inequalities limit opportunities, and he alluded to a vaguely felt threshold in the capacity to consolidate further: "I sometimes feel positive about changing things, but then I think no: I cannot change anything". To some extent, this is about the KCCA and the limits it puts on urban opportunities - "if you have a small plot of land the KCCA will say it doesn't meet standards and move you on" – and about the impact of urban change more broadly: "All of the changes made have hurt someone. Change is never smooth". He is acutely aware of a lack of jobs for young people. The dialectics of everyday urbanism are forged as much through what is *absent* as through what is present.

Amiri's position reflects the wider 'intergenerational bargain' through which young people's life chances are supported by reciprocal responsibilities of care from adults (Day and Evans, 2015). As stable employment opportunities recede for many young people in increasingly competitive and precarious global labour markets, family care can be vital or even the only forms of support for a 'lost generation' of youth that Honwna (2012) has characterised as remaining in a state of 'waithood' (see Tranberh-Hansen, 2005; Jeffrey, 2010). Uganda has the highest poverty incidence amongst young people (between 18-30) in sub-Saharan Africa, with 94 percent living below US$2 per day in a society in which 78 percent of its population are under 30 years of age (UNFPA, 2015). This situation in Uganda reflects the broader urban African experience for many young people, left shunting repeatedly from limited social

infrastructures of care to efforts to consolidate some measure of often precarious economic security (Banks and Sulaiman, 2012; and see De Boeck and Honwana, 2005; Gough *et al*, 2016).

For Ali, the ability to work with customers, build rapport, or know how to negotiate to buy the best products for the right prices to sell in his stall, are all capacities that have helped him consolidate a relatively stable economic position. His vision for Namuwongo revolved around growing business opportunities, including connections to the rest of the city and its hinterlands. He was, for example, enthusiastic about the new road KCCA had built through Namuwongo. Indeed, he connected the construction of the road, in the same breath, to a more secure neighbourhood– a big concern for Ali given that he was once robbed: "KCCA has constructed the road in Namuwongo to Bugolobi, and the problem of sanitation and robberies has stopped". It follows that the concerns he had about this consolidating position was the stability of the market. In a neighbourhood with frequent demolitions and uncertainties about who owns what land, it is hardly surprising that there are also rumours about the market being demolished. At one workshop, Ali was partly reassured by an NGO representative that this was only rumour and that the market's future was supposedly secure.

Ali was in quite a different position from Isamail and Josephine in this respect. Isamail struggled to consolidate his position due to poor health and the unreliability of available taxis when he was well enough to drive, and so his income stream was far more unpredictable and his ability to ensure provisions of food, water, schools fees, and other costs for himself and his family were more curtailed. Kampala, for Isamail,

was less a space of consolidating and more an exhausting struggle of negotiating traffic, knowing how and when to pay the municipal officials a little to jump the queue, working out where the short cut mud roads are and when to take them, and being at the taxi park (and see Goodfellow, 2015). From the age of 13, his life had revolved around the main taxi park, with friends, waiting and talking, but consolidation largely eluded him. He was planning to start a retail shop selling food, in an attempt to find other ways beyond depending on limited social infrastructures. In the end, not only was Isamail far form consolidating any security, even social infrastructures of care were not enough. His death has made it harder still for his young family to consolidate into the future. As Day and Evans (2015) show in their work on familial care in Zambia, the loss of a parent can accentuate other difficulties, for instance with children often then dropping out of school, having to spend more time on household labour and caring duties for siblings – especially for girls - or migrating to live with relatives.

For Josephine, for whom everyday life is about survival and being able to spend adequate time in the city to sell enough fruit to put food on the table for her children, niece and herself, the potential to consolidate exists largely as a dream. Josephine's income is unpredictable and almost entirely spent on basics – charcoal for cooking, toilets, food, maintaining the house, and school fees if possible. The KCCA placed a severe restriction on Josephine's hopes of consolidating, and she connected the municipality to gender, opportunity, and urban space: "KCCA does not find a way of collaborating with women who sell goods in town. They don't think of the women". As Gina Porter (2011) has shown, if poor provision and maintenance of roads, transport services, and safety are concerns across many African contexts, these issues

are exacerbated for women, and further still given the cultural constraints on women's mobilities. Josephine is developing plans, however, and spoke of setting up a business to buy fish in the town and sell it back in the village.

These practices of consolidation are highly differentiated. They are not consolidation to the extent that Moser (2009) identifies in her work on low-income neighbourhoods in Ecuador, in which the built environment is consolidated alongside improved livelihoods and education. And while for some residents consolidation is a rare or perhaps never achieved hope, there are those whose capacities have gone beyond collaborating with others to a more organizational role of *coordinating* different economic, social and political processes.

Coordination and speculation

Coordination is the capacity to organise social, economic or political activities in the neighbourhood, and emerges through a more consolidated position in the neighbourhood. Coordination can take the form of enacting a social infrastructure of care, or can be influencing other trajectories in the neighbourhood, and like care and consolidation it too is radically differentiated across the residents.

Jennifer, for instance, sometimes coordinates people and jobs, or brings women recently widowed into the informal social support of other women, or links up parents and schools. Masengere, meanwhile, coordinates activities characterised more by profit and prestige through his role as a key community gatekeeper to officialdom, though which he has the power to allow or block developments in the area. Compare this to Josephine, whose struggle just to survive leaves her with little capacity to

coordinate urban life. Still, there was some coordinating roles for Josephine, for example in sharing information with other women in the city selling fruit about the location of KCCA officials, or about where they did or did not have much success selling fruit.

Isamail was in a similar position to Josephine, in that his health prevented him getting into a position of consolidation that would then open out the possibility of coordination. He was, however helping to pay for his younger brother to be trained as a lawyer, and in this way coordinating family members and opportunities in the limited way that he was able to. Ali, in contrast, coordinates food through the market, neighbourhood, city and beyond.

Alongside consolidation and coordination is *speculation*. Speculation is a practice of imagining and acting into the future and it occurs through various moments of calculation about how to navigate the city. It can refer to everyday and relatively limited forms that may influence the success of a day, through to longer term speculating around livelihoods and material arrangements that involves potential risk (Simone, 2014; Zeiderman *et al*, 2015). It is a way of opening out opportunities and capitalizing on changing circumstances, and depends on the socioeconomic position and perceptions that different residents bring to the often turbulent currents of everyday life. Namuwongo is made up of many different types of migrants to Kampala whose trajectories are orientated around building contacts, skills and spaces needed to navigate urban life. The neighbourhood presents a set of densities that feature not just as challenges, but opportunities for the immediate and future (Wallman, 1996).

There is always a risk with speculation, a chance that an investment of money or time or hope might not pay off, that the expected outcomes may fail to materialize and that the resident is left worse off. Ali, able to quickly acquire knowledge about the food business and the market in Namuwongo from the other traders who discuss, exchange and reflect on how the place operates according to perceived principles, rules and rhythms, makes constant, long and short term speculations in the hope of enhancing his livelihood. For example, he decided to pay an extra 10,000 shillings a month (£3) to acquire the front stall, visible upon entry to the market from its main entrance, in order to interact with a wider number of customers and therefore increase trade. The decision paid off and his turnover increased. Josephine performs a different kind of speculation in that each day she makes small but important decisions about which part of the central city to work and which parts to avoid and when (in relation to KCCA offocials), bearing in mind the distributions of customers and urban flows. For Josphine, speculation operates on registers of anxiety and hope, as opposed to the relatively more secure business decisions made by Ali.

Conclusion

Social infrastructure, consolidation, coordination, and speculation are vital and closely inter-related processes through which residents navigate Namuwongo and the wider topographies of Kampala, and the ways in which they cope with and seek to move beyond urban poverty. Without these processes it is difficult to see how life in this often precarious, uncertain context could be reproduced. They operate not separately but dialectically, shaping one another, placing limits and forging different

assemblages of urban life for different residents that open up important considerations concerning the geographies of poverty and the shifting terrains of everyday urbanism.

Jennifer's centrality to social infrastructure enhances her ability to consolidate, while Josephine's limited access to social infrastructure is both vital but also reflective of the struggle she has to consolidate, coordinate, or speculate in the ways that, for instance, Ali can. The limits placed on Isamail's social infrastructure by the political economies of health, services, and infrastructure left him bereft of life-sustaining support. His sad death is not an uncommon story in the neighbourhood, and the consequence of course is that his wife and children are all the more dependent on social infrastructures, all the more limited in their chances to move beyond them into consolidation or coordination. Amiri, in contrast, was rescued by his social infrastructure of care in the form of his Uncle, and he inhabits a quite different assemblage that opens out a potential future in which he increasingly consolidates and perhaps coordinates, for example in relation to youth groups or training other youngsters in woodwork. Masengere was the most secure of all respondents, with relatively little need for social infrastructures of care, he is well consolidated and is a key coordinating node in the area, including in other people's social infrastructures and capacity to consolidate or speculate.

The dialectical relationship between the city, state and everyday life in popular neighbourhoods is crucial to the ways in which urbanism is produced and how poverty is shaped and navigated. In Namuwongo, the visible gaps in state provision of health, education (spending on which more than halved between 1998 and 2002, World Bank 2015), and physical infrastructure means residents either expend

enormous energies to make up and/or are left unable to secure basic provisions. It is at these moments that forms of collaboration with the state become vital in providing the type of support and opportunity that is so difficult, and in many cases impossible, through the efforts of residents individually and collectively. This is complicated by the dual role of the state – one the one hand, KCCA, alongside the wetland and railway authorities, are planning to evict and demolish many parts of Namuwongo, partly in view of a major redevelopment plan for the city that extends to Lake Victoria (Guma, 2016). But on the other hand, the municipality has also been responsible for providing at least some essential urban services - even if they are partial and temporary - such as waste collection and road improvements. The state too is dialectical, and the consequence is an uncertain future for the neighbourhood.

A fundamental challenge lies in the state's unwillingness to engage with the residents, their experiences and perceptions, and their potential to help remake the city. This illustrates both ongoing national political tensions (Branch and Mampilly, 2015) but also the ways in which communities like Namuwongo are stigmatised and marginalised by the state and private sectors partners (Wacquant, 2008). One of the most striking features of the research process was that the residents we spoke to were eager to contribute to the development of their neighbourhood and to have a voice in urban planning in Kampala more generally, as other (more secure) popular neighbourhoods are doing (Dobson, 2015). Amiri spoke about forming or becoming involved in youth groups, and Jennifer and Josephine spoke about the need for training groups for widows and organisations to support children into schools. Ali spoke about setting up an association that could represent the interests of the market to the KCCA, and which would perhaps generate some security in an area where the

rumour of demolition is never far from the surface. There was talk about setting up a forum of some kind that would bring together these different issues, ideas for action and opportunities for interaction between residents, the state and NGO's. There were questions raised about how the city might be redeveloped with the aspirations of ordinary residents, rather than in the interests of the middle and upper classes (Branch and Mampilly, 2015), more centrally in mind. Ambitious plans, to be sure, for residents so often squeezed of their time and resources.

It is clear that if the state were to approach Namuwongo in a spirit of partnership and openness, many residents would be willing to work with it, especially in the context of growing recognition by governments and urban authorities to attempt in-situ upgrading of residents in marginalised urban spaces (see for example Abbot, 2002; Turok and Borel-Saladin, 2016). There are at least some scraps of evidence that parts of the local state are prepared to do this. For example, KCCA is forming collaborations with NGO's, most notably ACTogether, across the capital, based around compensation for rehousing of those facing the bulldozer, and promoting the role of the urban poor in building housing and infrastructure in secure conditions (Dobson *et al*, 2015). The future for Namuwongo is profoundly uncertain and precarious, as it is for so many popular neighbourhoods globally.

At least part of the role for critical urban scholarship is to understand how everyday life is shaped on the margins of global urbanism. Doing so reveals, for example, that both the challenges of urban life, and the solutions to them, are radically differentiated even within a neighbourhood. Yes, there are some staples we can all get behind: decent secure housing, water, sanitation, energy, education, healthcare, and

opportunity, all of which have featured in our account. But the ways in which these are developed and delivered often requires an understanding of the diverse needs and trajectories of the actually existing urban geographies within and beyond the neighbourhood. Policy, practice, activism, and scholarship are all more effective with a stronger grasp of how they might operate through social and spatial difference, and with people in the lives and neighbourhoods they invest in. For urban research, we need a richer conceptual and methodological repertoire for developing this understanding; we hope this paper makes some contribution here through the concepts derived from our FAPO approach.

Our findings, to be sure, are heavily situated amongst six residents, one neighbourhood, one city. The form and content of social infrastructure, its limits, and the attendant practices that help sustain everyday life, vary across the residents and across Namuwongo and Kampala. Far from invalidating this kind of work, we want to say that in fact it is precisely our point: to draw attention to the variegated ways in which the city becomes a site of navigation for urban dwellers across multiple topographies. If the empirical stories are place-specific, the infrastructures and practices we point to repeat-with-difference in form and content across popular neighbourhoods in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and South America, and increasingly in the global North. They do not 'add up' to a singular, larger process, but they resonate and demand future research that examines the dialectics of navigating the city.

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