



CODESRIA

TITLE:

Urban Violence and Gender (Re)construction in Africa: Case Studies in Johannesburg, Nairobi and Lagos

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SUMMARY

This study is a comparative ethnography of men (males) and women's (females') responses to urban violence and fear thereof in three African contexts – Johannesburg, Nairobi and Lagos. The thrust of the investigation is to examine how urban violence invokes or is invoked by different kinds of (and mutations of) masculinities and femininities. Violence, is defined within a minimalist – maximalist continuum; the minimalist version of violence being physical and most visible, while the maximalist version is symbolic and structural (see Chidester 2012). Significant to us is how the crucible of physical - visible violence and symbolic- structural violence mediates experiences of the city by men and women.

This comparative study is worthwhile because these three cities are the largest and most economically vibrant metropolises in Southern Africa (Johannesburg), East Africa (Nairobi) and West Africa (Lagos) respectively. Johannesburg, Nairobi and Lagos can be considered as prototypes of urbanity and major centres of violence in their countries and regions. These three metropolises are, in all sense of the word, microcosms of their respective nation-states in terms of ethnic, racial, religious, economic, gender and political demographics.

This study therefore aims to: a) identify the forms of violence affecting men and women in selected African cities; b) examine the connections between urban violence and constructions of manhood and womanhood; c) compare and contrast patterns of changing and persisting masculinities and femininities in the face of urban violence in the three selected cities; d) discuss the mediation of intersectional indices such as age, class, ethnicity, religion, socio-political affiliations, spatial positionalities in the configuration of urban masculinities and femininities in the context of violence.

Theoretically, the study is founded on the hope of contributing to debates on the agency of African urbanites [this time in violence and fear laden contexts] (Murray and Myers 2006; Myers 2010; 2011; Simone 2001; 2004a; 2004b; 2005); connecting these to conceptualisations of African womanism and the binary complementarity of men and women's roles (Amadiume 1987; 1997; 2006; Nnaemeka 2004; 2005; Oyewumi 2000; 2002; 1997); as well as Butler's performativism (Butler 1988; 1993).