

Müller, Frank I.; Weegels, Julienne

**Article**

## Illicit city-making and its materialities: Introduction to the special issue

Journal of Illicit Economies and Development (JIED)

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

LSE Press, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)

*Suggested Citation:* Müller, Frank I.; Weegels, Julienne (2022) : Illicit city-making and its materialities: Introduction to the special issue, Journal of Illicit Economies and Development (JIED), ISSN 2516-7227, LSE Press, London, Vol. 4, Iss. 3, pp. 230-240, <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.169>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/320660>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



# Illicit City-Making and Its Materialities. Introduction to the Special Issue

**FRANK I. MÜLLER** 

**JULIENNE WEEGELS** 

\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

COLLECTION:  
ILLICITIES

**EDITORIAL**



## ABSTRACT

Provoked by Charles Tilly's analogy of state-making as organized crime (1985), this issue aims at better understanding the material conditions of illicit city-making – that is, of urbanization and criminal governance, as well as the criminalizing discourses and strategies that underpin them. In opposition to the liberalist paradigm of states vs. illegitimate enemies, Tilly proposed to see the dynamics of state-making (and the negotiation of protection and extraction involved therein) as akin to the dynamics of organized crime. After all, both seek to establish territorial sovereignty based on their capacity to monopolize violence. More importantly, this analogy illuminates the way in which states can enact their protection rackets without a pre-established legitimate authority. Bringing this analogy to the urban realm – seeing city-making as continuously imbricated in attempts to foster the legitimacy of heterogeneously authored protection rackets – this special issue elicits the practices, flows, extraction, and actors involved in illicit city-making, as well as the processes that deem them so.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**Frank I. Müller**

University of Amsterdam, NL  
[f.i.mueller@uva.nl](mailto:f.i.mueller@uva.nl)

---

## KEYWORDS:

Crime; Urban Development;  
Urban Planning; Materiality;  
Authority

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Müller, FI and Weegels, J.  
2022. Illicit City-Making and  
Its Materialities. Introduction  
to the Special Issue. *Journal  
of Illicit Economies and  
Development*, 4(3), pp.  
230–240. DOI: [https://doi.  
org/10.31389/jied.169](https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.169)

According to investigations of the prosecutor's office in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Flavio Bolsonaro—Brazilian president Jair Messias Bolsonaro's oldest son and senator of the Liberal Party in Rio de Janeiro—redirected public funds for investment in real estate developments in Muzema, a residential area in the city's west. The investment supported the illegal and unlicensed construction of condominiums for low-income clients (Intercept 2020). The construction was executed by 'militias', local armed racketeers who historically have been expanding their economic portfolio from acting as death squads to protection and extortion more broadly and now include urban services like real estate construction. Not only did the case of Muzema receive much public attention when two of the militia-constructed condominiums collapsed in 2019, killing 24 inhabitants, but also it is said leftist politician Marielle Franco's engagement in uncovering the close ties between these criminal actors and government officials in that area ultimately triggered her politically motivated murder.

Analysing militia-authored urbanism in Rio de Janeiro not only opens a window to speak to a new set of illicit practices tied-up with urban development (e.g., Benmergui & Gonçalves 2019; Müller 2021) but also allows us to discern the state's involvement in organising extraction to substantiate 'state violence' (e.g., Alves 2015). Provoked by Charles Tilly's (1985) analogy of state-making as organised crime, this issue<sup>1</sup> aims at better understanding the material conditions of illicit city-making—that is, of urbanisation and criminal governance, as well as the criminalising discourses and strategies that underpin them. In opposition to the liberalist paradigm of states versus illegitimate enemies, Tilly proposed to see the dynamics of state-making (and the negotiation of protection and extraction involved therein) as akin to the dynamics of organised crime. After all, both seek to establish territorial sovereignty based on their capacity to monopolise violence. More importantly, this analogy illuminates the way in which states can enact their protection rackets without a pre-established legitimate authority. Bringing this analogy to the urban realm—seeing *city-making* as continuously imbricated in attempts to foster the legitimacy of heterogeneously authored protection rackets (much like the abovementioned militias)—this special issue elicits the practices, flows, extraction, and actors involved in illicit city-making, as well as the processes that deem them so.

In this introduction, we territorialise this critical account of state and criminal power and propose to take as an analytical lens the materialities through which such power manifests. First, we complete our proposed shift from state-making to city-making, conceiving of the latter as a contested social and political attempt to materialise diverse actors' control over an urban territory and its population. We then situate ourselves within the urban and criminal governance debate and propose a material approach to illicit city-making to draw out the political and criminal interests at stake. We argue that materialising illicit city-making not only provides a powerful analytical lens but also allows for novel methodological approaches to the urban governance debate, as the ten contributions to this special issue illuminate in detail.

## FROM STATE-MAKING TO CITY-MAKING

Cities concentrate economic wealth and political power, and urbanisation has historically spurred conflict over social organisation, political participation, and the distribution of resources, investment, and development. In the social sciences, and urban geography in particular, the unequal modes and effects of value production and extraction in cities have received long and critical attention, highlighting the close connection between cities' material, built environment and capitalist interest, neoliberal deregulation, and global flows of investment capital (Harvey 1976; Miraftab & Salo 2015; Storper 2016; Weber 2002). From places all over the world, they have addressed the exploitative nature of neoliberal urban development and city-building (e.g., Parnell and Robinson 2012; Rolnik 2019). Yet because cities are arenas in which not only conflicts but also collaborations between the formal state and illicit actors take place, the deep structural enmeshment of the illicit and city-making, in both social and material terms, demands a closer examination.

To do so, we bring the contested attempts of competing governance actors to establish territorial control over the means of violence to the urban arena. We thereby simultaneously

---

1 This special issue is the result of the establishment of the ILLICITIES Research Network on Illicit City-Making and its first set of colloquia, initiated in 2019 with the support of a seed grant from the University of Amsterdam Centre for Urban Studies (CUS).

‘urbanise’ literatures on everyday state formation (e.g., Ballvé 2012; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Scott 1996) and ‘materialise’ literatures on urban and criminal governance by looking directly at their material, infrastructural, and urbanist manifestations. By bringing the process of state-making to the city, we see city-making as a particular form of claiming sovereignty which takes seriously the ‘political materiality of cities’ (Pilo and Jaffe 2020: 8). As criminal(ised) organisations and groups also seek to impose themselves or benefit from these city-making processes, infrastructural and other materialities stand out as both temporary condensations of power relations and as contested vehicles to stake claims to political authority (e.g. Peñaranda Currie 2021; Uribe 2019; von Schnitzler 2016).

Facing increased urbanisation worldwide, states and markets have been expected to adequately respond to growing demands and guarantee access to essential goods and services to all (Turok 2014). Yet on the one hand, our intervention is critical of the liberalist promise that urban growth creates more equal distribution and access to urban services, infrastructures, and housing, and on the other hand, it is also critical of the materialist wish that (urban) commons be commonly owned and shared by urban communities. Co-ownership, just access to, and equal participation in managing resources are undoubtably desirable political goals (Harvey 2012; Manfredini 2019; Ostrom 1990). However, we hold that value creation from and management of urban services, land, infrastructures, and buildings are always already materialising power relations beyond individual property protection. Herein, illicit processes strongly impact the possibilities of co-owned, justly, and equitably built cities. Because cities are ‘privileged sites of the politics of the common(s)’ (Enright and Rossi 2019: 35), political contestations over the control of access and distribution of the commons beyond the legal are thus also redefining social inequalities and the (collective) right to the city.

Contested city-making appears in many ‘shades of grey’, oscillating between the legal and the illegal (Chiodelli & Gentili 2021; Telles 2010). It can be discerned in urban governance, planning, and development, where the illicit plays not only a transitional but also an undeniable and sometimes constitutive role. When states seek to claim legitimacy by passing laws and thus to create ‘an illusion (at least) of social order’ (Chambliss 1989: 196), they purportedly fulfil their role to protect persons and property. Yet a neo-Marxist, historical perspective on the state’s claim to legitimately centralise the means of violence distrusts the assumption that states act within the laws that they themselves pass, particularly in situations of (ideological) contestation or counter-hegemonic insurgency (Agamben 2005; Schulte-Bockholt 2001). Therefore, the dynamics of defining the licit and the illicit, and its overlaps, can be studied particularly in situations in which sovereignty is contested, that is, when diverse actors strive for political authority.

Cities thus assume a crucial role as arenas for contested sovereignty, where ‘parallel powers’ flourish (Leeds 2007). Prone to struggles between the formal state apparatus and illicit actors, such as militia, paramilitaries, gangs, and other irregular armed groups for the distribution of resources and political influence, cities are oftentimes stages of modern-day urban warfare (Kaldor and Sassen 2020). Particularly in cities where state sovereignty is ‘fragmented’ (Davis 2010), plural regimes of capital accumulation (through exploiting the benefits from material urban development) and of coercion (by ‘offering’ protection services and taxing residents) suggest revising Tilly’s conceptualisation of state protection rackets in novel, urban ways and in modes that include the material production of urban space. Such revision is particularly urgent in view of the state-crime nexus in urban planning processes and real estate markets, and of the often repressive and violent effects on the livelihood of marginalised populations, which caution against optimistic assumptions on the beneficiary impact of urbanisation on human development.

So how are illicit city-making practices produced and negotiated? In which ways does state violence materialise amidst these heterogeneous claims to sovereignty, and what are the effects of irregular armed actors exerting extractive violence? How are different materialities and objects, such as urban utilities, housing, bodies, technologies, and weapons, tied into illicit city-making and the negotiations, conflicts, or collaborations that arise between state authorities and criminal(ised) groups? To critically examine the issues that these questions point toward, we propose a material approach to illicit city-making.

Motivating these questions is our assumption that criminal(ised) governance arrangements, including those that challenge the state's claim to legitimately monopolise violence, impact urban development in ways that affect citizens' abilities to collectively own, access, and manage urban resources or urban commons. As urbanisation unfolds via master planned new communities and renewal projects, 'auto-construction' (Caldeira 2017), and state-subsidised housing and infrastructures, 'irregular actors' (Davis 2010) find and create ways to satisfy their economic and/or political interests to expand their (illicit/drug) markets, as well as their territorial control over such markets, including via electoral campaigns, popular support, and citizens' loyalty. In recent years, the phenomenon of 'organised crime' has received growing interest within different social science disciplines, ranging from political science to anthropology and urban geography (e.g., Arias and Barnes 2016; Davis 2018; Felbab-Brown 2011; Hall 2013). It is often studied in relation to illicit economies in business improvement districts (Schouten 2012), policy making (Arias 2018), the 'infiltration' of public security institutions (Cruz 2016), the cross-border movement of migrants, arms, and drugs (Muehlmann 2014), as well as the ways in which it discursively and materially justifies military and police responses (González 2021). Although there is no common definition, the United Nations conceive of organised crime as groups of three or more people who form to commit several crimes over a longer period of time (UNODC 2004: Art. 2). Yet in the context of this special issue, and exploring the intrinsic links between the illicit and the state within city-making, we oppose conceptions of crime that present it as entirely separate from the state.

In doing so, we build on work that has attempted to decentre clear-cut definitions of governance actors as either formal or informal, state or non-state, licit or illicit, foregrounding conceptualisations that allow us to think state and criminal(ised) actors *together*, such as 'hybrid governance arrangements' (Colona and Jaffe 2016), 'plural governance' (Arias and Barnes 2016), 'collaborative governance' (Arias 2017), 'criminal governance' (Lessing and Willis 2019), or 'co-governance' (developed in relation to prison studies, e.g., Sozzo 2022; Weegels 2019), which allow us to focus on how heterogeneous actors with diverging claims to sovereignty relate to one another. Instead of isolating or essentialising the identity of 'criminal actors' and without assuming that crime can be clearly circumscribed as anything that is illegal, we build on dialectical and relational perspectives that look at the interplay of heterogeneous actors as they emerge in the (dis)organisation of crime or criminalised activities (like smuggling or protesting).

As sites of economic power, cities are also nodes in flows of finances and goods and thus are constructed and shaped by them. The turn to use socio-material conditions as a lens to examine contestations of political powers and authorities has furthered Michael Mann's (2008) sociological and materialist approach to 'infrastructural power'. More recent approaches in Science and Technology Studies, for instance, suggest that infrastructural development is closely linked to the history of state building (Passoth and Rowland 2010). Building on the rich scholarly engagement with infrastructures and its close ethnographic examination of materialities' and objects' affective role in city-making (e.g., Barry 2020; Kemmer and Simone 2021; Larkin 2013; Pierobon 2020), we wish to expand this view towards other and diverse urban spatial formations, such as neighbourhoods, prisons, houses, borders, and sand pits. Alongside infrastructures, all these material-spatial formations facilitate connections, trade, networks, and mobilities that also reconfigure urban politics and contestations of power and authority.

In doing so, we draw from a range of interdisciplinary work that has foregrounded particular built structures as sites for critical reflection about territorial sovereignty, such as spaces of confinement (Moran 2015; Shabazz 2015), enclave architectures (Scott 2016; Sood & Kennedy 2020), public spaces (Schuilenburg & Peeters 2018), technologies (Munn 2020), public housing (Müller 2019) and indeed urban service infrastructures (Kaika & Swyngedouw 2020). In the peripheral areas of cities and as the countryside urbanises, it is relevant to note that illicit actors also benefit from roads, seaports, and airports to flourish (Peñaranda Currie et al. 2021; Uribe 2019). Yet it is important to keep in mind that state, private, and illicit actors and their particular (economic) projects are *co-dependent on building and maintaining material infrastructures* that shape the economic, political, and geographic terrain according to their respective needs and interests of exploitation. In a sense, then, states do sometimes benefit

from illicit practices by outsourcing, or at least tolerating, other actors to perform protection and security practices, providing urban services informally. Yet as states tend to condone illicit and informal constellations, although not necessarily endorsing them explicitly, these often disintegrate when levels of non-state violence, and public attention, flourish (e.g. Davis 2012).

In all, by locating illicit practices and actors in the material processes that make cities livable and urban territories and populations governable, the term ‘city-making’ seeks to highlight the intrinsic relation between urbanisation and the illicit and addresses the influential role of the extra-legal in urban planning and organisation. We thereby follow a definition of illicitness where legitimacy is fluid and perspective-dependent, because what may be considered legitimate in the view of citizens, consumers, or other actors might be deemed illegitimate (and even illegal) from the perspective of formal political authority, and vice versa (Van Schendel 2005). Placing the illicit on a continuum with the licit allows us to not only traverse the legal/illegal dichotomy but also locate materially the workings and contestations of this continuum in city-making. In doing so, we argue that it is human practices and activities that grant urban materialities the status of being licit and/or illicit, which implicates these materialities in contestations and performances of legitimation (Beetham 2013).

As these material-spatial formations facilitate connections, trade, networks, and mobilities, they also make cities. By unpacking the ‘logics and systems’ of criminal(ised) governance arrangements from the perspective of urban materialities, we conceive of illicit city-making as a material process in and through which governance arrangements take new shape. In doing so, we address the interdependency of licit and illicit actors in urban development, which in some cases urges us to understand illicit city-making as an ‘organising logic’ too—‘a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself’ (Roy 2005: 148), creating temporary and shifting systems of norms and more or less established governance arrangements between formal state, private security, and ostensibly not irregular armed actors. Theoretically, then, we claim that the material-discursive dimensions of urban sovereignty and the reliance on, collaboration with, or containment of illicit practices, provide an important shift in the analysis of urban/criminal governance, and we have built our conceptualisation of illicit city-making on these grounds.

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS

Each paper in this special issue develops its argument by focusing on materialities and urban spatial formations as a focal or starting point of their analysis, tracing the ways in which these locate practices and activities on the licit-illicit continuum and produce varying modalities of illicit city-making. In doing so, they largely use ethnography to explore diverse empirical settings, ranging from urban forms and patterns to the material and architectonic production of cities’ housing and infrastructure, security initiatives, urban regeneration projects, street markets, barricades, and security fairs. All contributions share an interest in expanding approaches to urban governance to grant urban materiality an active role in city-making. Moving deeper in examining the ‘informalization of the state’ (Boudreau 2019), the contributions to this special issue by and large suggest that political and economic elites’ also benefit from illicit city-making. Urbanisation has become a vehicle for criminal(ised) actors to expand business, and the more they do, the more their acting cannot be seen as separate from formal, or licit, public planners, or private actors such as providers of urban services, real estate developers, and construction firms.

Urban governments’ authority is territorially contested, but local governments deploy urban development projects in urban peripheries in different shades of collaboration and conflict with local criminal actors. In cases of extreme abandonment, such arrangements might be less visible and less directly beneficial for state officials, yet they nevertheless reproduce hardships for populations who need to navigate through ever tighter bottlenecks to keep their city, businesses, and commodity exchanges running on these abilities to navigate their social and economic lives depend (see Hilgers & Davis, Hochmüller, and Fernandez in this issue). The modes in which public state and organised criminal(ised) actors relate to, deploy, benefit from or (parasitically) disrupt urban materialities, however, differ strongly across the papers. Felipe Fernandez’s ethnographic case study of peripheral urbanisation in Colombia’s Pacific coastal city Buenaventura complicates the often-told narrative of incremental informal urban



development (Fernandes 2007; Friendly 2013) by resisting or coping with public abandonment and self-organising the flow of commodities and urban services. He shows that, as ‘parasites’, local criminals’ on-and-off presence does not fill a void left by the state but rather produces increased uncertainty and shapes residents’ creativity in developing novel forms of ‘coping’ with a local state that continuously turns a blind eye to extortion. In Francesco Ginocchio’s case, it is rather the state itself (in the form of the local municipality) that deploys racketeering practices to glean ‘taxes’ from street vendors, which exemplifies Tilly’s conceptualisation of state practice as akin to criminal enterprise. Ginocchio’s take on the governance arrangements in place at Lima’s massive Gamarra street market provides us with an example in which the municipality constructs a dynamic of threat and solution, criminalising street vending and legalising extortion under the guise of ‘taxing’. In this arrangement, state actors act in unison with organised criminal actors, effectively melting together and becoming indistinguishable, to profit from the expansion of the state’s fiscal capacities by legitimising extortion through ‘taxation’. The dynamics of such a socio-economic contract and its inherent practical overlap, beneficial to both sides, points to the slipperiness and malleability of the licit-illicit divide.

Moving to a different context, but staying with purportedly criminal state behaviour, Erella Grassiani discusses collaborative security governance arrangements that involve the weapons industry and Israel’s armed forces. In her article, she demonstrates how the marketing of non-lethal weapons aims at legitimising the use of such weapons in ‘anti-riot’ missions, that is, against anti-government protests. While reproducing the racist imaginary of state’s ‘Muslim’ enemies in its marketing strategy, the state-commercial liaison within this security industry sets the scene for broader anti-democratic deployments, criminalising protest in urban spaces more generally. Equating the criminal-as-terrorist with political opponents, based on the allegedly less violent materialities and affordances of non-lethal weapons, these nonetheless produce harmful bodily effects, which suggests the need to further study the state’s role in not only ‘countering’ illicit city-making but also producing scope for illicit state action (i.e., the repression of constitutional rights). More structurally, it hints at the ways in which urban materialities can be being misused by the state to produce polarised imaginaries of law and order versus the ‘criminal’ Other.

It is in this vein that Ricardo Díaz and Julianne Weegels explore illicit city-making through the emergence of material infrastructures of care and repression during the massive anti-government protests that rocked Nicaragua in 2018. Focusing on the re-emergence of historically symbolic protest infrastructures (like barricades), as well as the circulation of digital and material survival products (like cell phone minutes and foodstuffs) across both digital and material realms, they juxtapose these infrastructures of care with the infrastructures of repression levied against them. In this context, the illicit also becomes malleable and is stretched as the state moves to criminalise protesters, protesters move to call out state crime, and ‘regular’ criminals mobilise as violence specialists on both sides. Staying close to the politics and aesthetics of security (Ghertner, McFann, & Goldstein 2020) yet switching the urban war scene to Baghdad, Bret Windhauser discusses the visual, or better said counter-visual, defensive architecture that reshaped the city during the US invasion of the country from 2003 to 2016. By erecting walls to protect and homogenise neighbourhoods based on political and religious opposition, state and supra-state actors, militias and armed actors benefitted territorially by constituting a scheme of isolated communities under respective control. In Windhauser’s case, the arrangements between Iraqi security forces and the external military alliance were on the forefront of materially rebuilding the city under the principle of segregation, yet militias knew how to create senses of segregated identities, also based on local loyalties and legitimacy. Both the erection and maintenance of walls and the controllable porosity of checkpoints then led to shifting balances, negotiations, and temporary alignments of legal (state/international alliance) and illegal (militias) forces.

Turning to a quite distinct form of urban militias and moving to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, three papers in this issue examine the ways in which paramilitary-like actors have undermined real estate development and the control over ‘peripheral urbanization’ (Caldeira 2017) more generally. While Araujo and Petti look at the micro-scale of contrasting valuation regimes between auto-construction and resettlement processes overlooked by local strongmen, the militia, Hirata and colleagues suggest looking at militias’ city-wide territorial expansion in relation to the distribution of social housing developments, tracing the close entanglement of social

housing and the presence of militias in Rio de Janeiro. Militia urbanism, as mentioned in the introduction, forms an emergent theme in the studies of Brazilian urbanisation. Expanding and shifting their profile, militias emerged some decades ago as pro-state security providers at the urban margins; composed of often violent *justiçeros* or vigilantes, they fought drug traffickers and quickly evolved as a state-tolerated hybrid protection racketeer. Once established as hegemonic security providers in certain areas, they became more of a provider of urban services of all kinds and morphed into a more ostensibly criminal actor (Misse 2018). Despite political efforts to contain the empowerment of this paramilitary actor, for instance through the 2008 Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, which led to judicial processes and the incarceration of some leaders, militias now hold control over more than half of Rio de Janeiro's population (see Araujo & Petti and Hirata et al., this volume). Importantly, the militias' historically state-supported or at least tolerated presence prevails, despite militias' now criminal agency. By mapping both militias' hold on social housing condominiums and police raids, the authors interpret that the current political conjuncture in the city rests on illicit arrangements between militias, police, and local politicians.

A third paper that addresses housing and security in this issue looks at criminal actors' involvement in social housing schemes more generally. Taking Brazil's federal housing program, *Minha Casa Minha Vida*, as an example, Frank Müller comments on shortcomings of Latin American state's social housing policies. He finds that the strong liaisons between local politics, law enforcement, and criminal actors undermine the policies' promised improvements for low-income communities. His commentary suggests that the effects of state-subsidized housing scheme's massive scale, peripheral location, disconnection from labour opportunities, and the presence of violent actors must be evaluated in the way they mutually aggravate social exclusion in these developments.

In this direction, Gutierrez and Delgado turn more directly to different levels of female social leaders' agency in responding to the co-presence of criminal actors in the comunas of Medellín, Colombia. The authors make it clear that the rackets that those gangs span install a system of threat, fear, and 'protection' that limits women's room for navigation. However, female community leaders astutely establish different forms of connection to gang members' presence. Thus, women with certain standing in their community can actively shape the impact of the protection rackets, which have persisted in the aftermath of state-led social urbanism and its liberal impetus to overcome conflict by development. Both economically privileged and impoverished areas of cities can then become stages and territories of contestation between actors whose diversity ranges from private security guards, gangs, and militias to more organised mafias. As authors in this volume demonstrate (Araujo & Petti; Davis & Hilgers), the redistribution of governance tasks to these diverse authorities, including the management and composition of infrastructures, residential properties, and other spatialities, can hinder inhabitants' practices of social and political participation, while sometimes also offering opportunities for engagement, as Markus Hochmüller (this issue) argues. In any case, illicit city-making practices may reinforce residents' sensed need for specific protections, provided by state and non-state actors alike, in various arrangements of complicity and competition (Davis 2007; Koonings & Kruijt 2015; Moser 2004).

Taking up Kaldor and Sassen's notion of urban capabilities, Markus Hochmüller traces intraurban smuggling routes and demonstrates their effects on residential inequalities. Aligned with more recent attempts to see security materialise not only in walls, surveillance systems, and borders but also in more habitual, civic spaces of parks, and neighbourhoods (e.g. Rieken et al. 2020, in Kaldor & Sassen 2020), he argues that security production and the militarisation of urban space sometimes deepens the marginalisation of the urban poor, particularly in borderlands where irregular armed actors span territorial control across two state constituencies. However, the border city is also a space to better understand different kind of populations' responses to illicit city-making. Beyond attracting illicit practices such as smuggling, borders also have a structural agency in that they offer opportunities for new spatial formations such as clandestine border crossings, neighbourhood expansions, and citizen involvement in the securitisation of public space.

Expanding on the transnational dimension on illicit flows, Gregory Salle comments on UNEP reports on the global sand crisis from 2014 and 2019, respectively. Because sand is increasingly scarce, its exploitation is limited and guarded by environmental concerns, and illicit exploitation



has become, if not the rule, then at least a widespread practice around the globe. In now unprecedented and hardly controllable ways, illicit sand economies harm the environments. Although the exploitation as such is not an urban phenomenon per se, Salle's contribution is clearly demonstrating that to adequately conceive of illicit city-making, the material bases of it must be considered as well. No (illicit) city-making is possible without sufficiently providing sand and cement for civil construction; Salle's commentary points to the importance of the named reports but also critically engages with them, arguing that a look only on legalistic and normative issues around illicit sand exploitation fails to grasp the more profound capitalist process of commodification of nature so drastically driving ever new ruinations of beaches and other landscapes.

Finally, taking up the conundrum of state sovereignty in illicit city-making, Hilgers and Davis demonstrate how cities are nuclei in the global economy of flows, exposing poorer parts of the population more vulnerable to crises of circulation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As outright criminal actors implemented their own local health protection measures, limiting access to and circulation in Brazil's favelas, they challenged the assumption that the protection of citizens is primarily the task of formal state actors. With informal activities increasing in the peripheral areas of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro alike, locally articulated sovereignties gained in importance after April 2020, producing health-oriented 'protection rackets' of sorts. Yet the virus, and its own fluid, ungraspable materiality, also empowered residents to question historically established sovereignty regimes and, accordingly, security governance arrangements between traffickers, militias, private guards, and the police.

## IN CONCLUSION

This introduction has outlined a framework to study illicit city-making, suggesting a close consideration of urban materialities to illuminate entangled forms of collaboration and contestation between a variety of state, criminal(ised) and criminalising urban actors. Building on these ten contributions, we argue that urban materialities shape on-the-ground claims of those actors to and performances of fragmented sovereignties. In these, citizens struggle to participate and foster forms of engagement, opposing and/or figuring themselves into 'protective arrangements' (Segura 2020) by building new alliances of self-protection (e.g., Díaz and Weegels; Hochmüller, this issue) or coping strategies (e.g., Fernández; Gutierrez & Delgado, this issue). That said, illicit city-making still generally engenders a deepening of unequal distributions of goods and commons, as well as access to housing, infrastructures, and (public) spaces (e.g., Araujo & Petti, Hilgers & Davis; Hirata et al.; Windhauser, this issue). Urbanising Tilly's take on state-making thus complicates the idea of necessarily adversarial claims to legitimise violence and competition over the control of extractive means by non-state actors. It remains crucial for future research to examine how individual and collectives of citizens (including civil society organisations and social movements) cope with and oppose illicit or state-criminal alliances of coercion and capital accumulation. In this direction, this issue's focus on the everyday practices, encounters, and negotiations between state and criminal(ised) actors (who are of course also citizens) through a serious engagement with the city's materialities empirically supports the analytical purchase of illicit city-making. We therefore urge scholars of illicit economies and development to engage our framework to explore more deeply the interlocked and material development of the city, so as to move beyond the narrow agenda established by urban scholarship to date and incorporate new ways of understanding urbanisation and city-building in the contemporary era.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has received generous support from the Centre for Urban Studies, University of Amsterdam. We also wish to thank Diane E. Davis for her critical and inspiring comments on the theoretical objectives of this special issue.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Frank Müller's work on this project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 898538.

## AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

**Frank I. Müller**  [orcid.org/0000-0003-4829-7184](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4829-7184)

University of Amsterdam, NL

**Julienne Weegels**  [orcid.org/0000-0001-7988-9903](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7988-9903)

University of Amsterdam, NL

## REFERENCES

- Agamben, G.** 2005. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Alves, JA.** 2015. 'Blood in Reasoning': State Violence, Contested Territories and Black Criminal Agency in Urban Brazil. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 48(1): 61–87. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X15000838>
- Arias, E.** 2017. *Criminal enterprises and governance in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316650073>
- Arias, E.** 2018. Criminal organizations and the policymaking process. *Global Crime*, 19(3–4): 339–361. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2018.1471990>
- Arias, E** and **Barnes, N.** 2016. Crime and plural orders in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Current Sociology*, 65(3): 448–465. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116667165>
- Ballvé, T.** 2012. Everyday state formation: territory, decentralization, and the narco landgrab in Colombia. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30: 603–622. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1068/d4611>
- Barry, A.** 2020. The Material Politics of Infrastructure. In: Maasen, S, Dickel, S and Schneider, C (eds.), *TechnoScienceSociety. Sociology of the Sciences Yearbook*, 30. Cham: Springer. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43965-1\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43965-1_6)
- Beetham, D.** 2013. *The Legitimation of Power*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-36117-2>
- Benmergui, L** and **Soares Gonçalves, R.** 2019. Urbanismo Miliciano in Rio de Janeiro. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 51(4): 379–385. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2019.1692986>
- Boudreau, J-A.** 2019. Informalization of the State: Reflections from an urban world of translations. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 43(3): 597–604. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12701>
- Caldeira, T.** 2017. Peripheral urbanization: Autoconstruction, transversal logics, and politics in cities of the global south. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35(1): 3–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816658479>
- Chambliss, WJ.** 1989. State-Organized Crime. *The American Society of Criminology. Criminology*, 27(2): 183–208. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1989.tb01028.x>
- Chiodelli, F** and **Gentili, M.** 2021. The many shades of grey in urban governance: How illegality shapes urban planning, policy and development. *Political Geography*, 84: 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102309>
- Colona, F** and **Jaffe, R.** 2016. Hybrid governance arrangements. *European Journal of Development Research*, 28(2): 175–183. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2016.5>
- Cruz, JM.** 2016. State and Criminal Violence in Latin America. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 66: 375–396. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-016-9631-9>
- Davis, DE.** 2007. Conflict, cooperation, convergence: Globalization and the politics of downtown development in Mexico City. *Politics and Globalization. Research in Political Sociology*, 15: 139–174. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0895-9935\(06\)15005-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0895-9935(06)15005-6)
- Davis, DE.** 2010. Irregular armed forces, shifting patterns of commitment, and fragmented sovereignty in the developing world. *Theory and Society*, 39(3): 397–413. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-010-9112-6>
- Davis, DE.** 2012. Analytical foundations for the study of informality: A short introduction. In de Alba, F, and Lesemann, F (eds.), *Informalidad urbana e incertidumbre: Como estudiar la informalizacion en la metropolis?* Mexico, DF: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico.
- Davis, DE.** 2018. The routinization of violence in Latin America: Ethnographic revelations. *Latin American Research Review*, 53(1): 211–216. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.425>
- Enright, T** and **Rossi, U.** 2019. Ambivalence of the urban commons. In *The Routledge handbook on spaces of urban politics*, 35–46. Abingdon: Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315712468-5>

- Felbab-Brown, V.** 2011. Law enforcement actions in urban spaces governed by violent non-state entities: Lessons from Latin America. Western Hemisphere Security Analysis Center. *Working Paper*, 49.
- Fernandes, E.** 2007. Constructing the right to the city in Brazil. *Social and Legal Studies*, 16(2): 201–219. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663907076529>
- Friendly, A.** 2013. The right to the city: Theory and practice in Brazil. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 14(2): 158–179. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2013.783098>
- Ghertner, A, McFann, H and Goldstein, D.** 2020. *Futureproof. Security aesthetics and the management of life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478007517>
- González, YM.** 2021. *Authoritarian police in democracy: Contested security in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108907330>
- Hall, T.** 2013. Geographies of the illicit. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(3): 366–385. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512460906>
- Harvey, D.** 1976. Labor, capital, and class struggle around the built environment in advanced capitalist societies. *Politics & Society*, 6(3): 265–295. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/003232927600600301>
- Harvey, D.** 2012. *Rebel cities. From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. London: Verso Books.
- Intercept Brazil.** 2020. *Pica do tamanho de um cometa*. <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/25/flavio-bolsonaro-rachadinha-financiou-milicia/>.
- Joseph, G and Nugent, D.** (eds.) 1994. *Everyday forms of state formation: Revolution and the negotiation of rule in modern Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822396666>
- Kaika, M and Swyngedouw, E.** 2020. Fetishizing the modern city: The phantasmagoria of urban technological networks. *The Urban Geography Reader*, 343–352. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203543047-43>
- Kaldor, M and Sassen, S.** (eds.) 2020. *Cities at war*. Columbia University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7312/kald18538>
- Kemmer, L and Simone, M.** 2021. Standing by the promise: Acts of anticipation in Rio and Jakarta. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 39(4): 573–589. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775820982997>
- Koonings, K and Kruijt, D.** (eds.) 2015. *Violence and resilience in Latin American Cities*. London: Zed Books. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350223820>
- Larkin, B.** 2013. The politics and poetics of infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 42: 347–343. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522>
- Leeds, E.** 2007. Cocaine and parallel polities in the Brazilian urban periphery: Constraints on local-level democratization. *Latin American Research Review*, 31(3): 47–84. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100018136>
- Lessing, B and Willis, GD.** 2019. Legitimacy in criminal governance: Managing a drug empire from behind bars. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2): 584–606. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000928>
- Mann, M.** 2008. Infrastructural power revisited. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 43(3–4): 355–365. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-008-9027-7>
- Manfredini, M.** 2019. Urban Commons and the Right to the City. *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(4): 1–4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32891/jps.v4i4.1231>
- Muehlmann, S.** 2014. *When I wear my alligator boots. Narco-culture in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mirafteb, FW and Salo, KD.** 2015. *Cities and inequalities in a global and neoliberal world*. London: Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315887593>
- Misse, M.** 2018. Violence, criminal subjection and political merchandise in Brazil: An overview from Rio. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 7: 135–148. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2018.07.09>
- Moran, D.** 2015. *Carceral geographies: Spaces and practices of incarceration*. London: Routledge.
- Moser, C.** 2004. Urban violence and insecurity: An introductory roadmap. *Environment & Urbanization*, 16(2): 3–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/095624780401600220>
- Müller, F.** 2019. Securing the home: Crime, state sovereignty and social housing in Medellín. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 107: 95–115. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32992/erlacs.10387>
- Müller, F.** 2021. Standby urbanization: Dwelling and organized crime in Rio de Janeiro. *ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization*, 21(1): 137–172.
- Munn, L.** 2020. Red territory: forging infrastructural power. *Territory, Politics, Governance*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2020.1805353>
- Ostrom, E.** 1990. *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807763>
- Parnell, S and Robinson, J.** 2012. (Re)theorizing cities from the global south: Looking beyond neoliberalism. *Urban Geography*, 33(4): 593–617. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.33.4.593>

- Passoth, J-H and Rowland, N. 2010. Actor-network state: Integrating actor-network theory and state theory. *International Sociology*, 25(6): 818–841. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580909351325>
- Peñaranda Currie, I, Otero-Bahamon, S and Uribe, S. 2021. What is the state made of? Coca, roads, and the materiality of state formation in the frontier. *World Development*, 141: 1–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105395>
- Pierobon, C. 2020. Clandestine connections: Water as the center of dispute. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. Emergent Conversations 13. <https://polarjournal.org/2021/02/10/ clandestine-connections-water-as-the-center-of-dispute/>.
- Pilo', F and Jaffe, R. 2020. The political materiality of cities. *City & Society*, 32(1): 8–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ciso.12252>
- Rieken, J, García-Sánchez, E and Bear, D. 2020. Navigating Security in Bogotá. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7312/kald18538-009>
- Rolnik, R. 2019. *Urban warfare. Housing under the empire of Finance*. London: Verso Books.
- Roy, A. 2005. Urban informality: Toward an epistemology of planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2): 147–158. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360508976689>
- Segura, R. 2020. Protective arrangements across class: Understanding social segregation in La Plata, Argentina. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 45(6): 1064–1072. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12889>
- Schouten, P. 2012. The art of separating out. *St Antony's International Review*, 7(2): 32–50.
- Schuilenburg, M and Peeters, R. 2018. Smart cities and the architecture of security: pastoral power and the scripted design of public space. *City, Territory and Architecture*, 5: 13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-018-0090-8>
- Schulte-Bockholt, A. 2001. A neo-Marxist explanation of organized crime. *Critical Criminology*, 10(3): 225–242. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015752506566>
- Scott, F. 2016. *Outlaw territories: Environments of insecurity/architectures of counterinsurgency*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv14gphs0>
- Scott, J. 1996. *Seeing like a state*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Shabazz, R. 2015. *Spatializing blackness: Architectures of confinement and black masculinity in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5406/illinois/9780252039645.001.0001>
- Sood, A and Kennedy, L. 2020. Neoliberal exception to liberal democracy? Entrepreneurial territorial governance in India. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 8(1): 23–42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2019.1687323>
- Sozzo, M. (ed.) 2022. *Prison, inmates and governance in Latin America*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98602-5>
- Storper, M. 2016. The neo-liberal city as idea and reality. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 4(2): 241–263. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2016.1158662>
- Telles, V. 2010. *A cidade entre as fronteiras do legal e ilegal*. Argvmentvm Ed.: Belo Horizonte.
- Tilly, C. 1985. War making and state making as organized crime. In: Evans, P, Rueschemeyer, D and Skocpol, T (eds.), *Bringing the state back*, 169–191. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511628283.008>
- Turok, I. 2014. The urbanization-development nexus in the BRICS. In: *Handbook on Cities in the Global South*, 122–138.
- UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). 2004. Transnational organized crime. <https://www.unodc.org/ropan/en/organized-crime.html>, last accessed 16 June 2022.
- Uribe, S. 2019. Illegible infrastructures: Road building and the making of state-spaces in the Colombian Amazon. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37(5): 886–904. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818788358>
- Van Schendel, W. 2005. Spaces of engagement: How borderlands, illegal flows, and territorial states interlock. In van Schendel, W and Abraham, I (eds.), *Illicit flows and criminal things: states, borders, and the other side of globalization*, 38–68. Minneapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Von Schnitzler, A. 2016. *Democracy's infrastructure. Techno-politics and protest after Apartheid*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691170770.001.0001>
- Weber, R. 2002. Extracting value from the city: Neoliberalism and urban redevelopment. *Antipode*, 34(3): 519–540. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00253>
- Weegels, J. 2019. Prison riots in Nicaragua: Negotiating co-governance amid creative violence and public secrecy. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 30(1): 61–82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057567719849485>

#### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Müller, FI and Weegels, J. 2022. Illicit City-Making and Its Materialities. Introduction to the Special Issue. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 4(3), pp. 230–240. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.169>

**Submitted:** 23 June 2022

**Accepted:** 03 November 2022

**Published:** 21 December 2022

#### COPYRIGHT:

© 2022 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

*Journal of Illicit Economies and Development* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by LSE Press.