

approximately 130 slums, sometimes in massive military-style operations.¹³ In Rio de Janeiro, the longstanding conflict between police forces and the "parallel government" of the drug gangs has been described as a civil war.

...and the rise of private security

With police often unable or unwilling to protect civilians in urban areas, public security can become a private commodity. Wealthy elites move into "gated communities" – heavily guarded urban fortresses with sophisticated alarm systems, electrical fences, closed circuit TV surveillance cameras, guard dogs, and private security guards. Elite residential enclaves are increasingly common in societies that are highly divided, whether along racial lines (such as Cape Town) or along income lines (such as Managua). In South Africa, the number of private security guards has increased by 150% since 1997, compared to a 2.2% decrease in the number of police officials in the same period.¹⁴ As a result, private security personnel now outnumber police by three-to-one. Even state police forces have turned to private security companies to protect police stations and headquarters.

For the less privileged, filling the security vacuum is neither as easy nor necessarily as voluntary. Unable to afford private security services, people living in poor communities develop adaptive strategies, ranging from community watch programs to private firearms purchases. Gangs also play a role in filling the security vacuum. In Nigeria, Muslim youth gangs enforce Sharia law in lieu of the state.¹⁵ In Nicaragua, youth gangs have been able to fill the security void, becoming an institutionalized presence in poor communities and protecting residents from inter-gang warfare.¹⁶

However, for many gangs the expansion of the drug trade since the 1990s shifted their activities from vigilante policing to direct violence towards their own communities.¹⁷ In these scenarios, gangs and vigilante groups use extortion and coercion to "sell" security services to community residents, to varying degrees of effectiveness. For instance, in Medellín, militia groups (composed primarily of youth and children) "tax" local businesses by forcing them to pay hefty sums for "protection."¹⁸ This type of black market justice breeds a climate of distrust and fear, in which security is bought and sold,

¹³ Human Rights Watch (2002).

¹⁴ "Security guards outgun cops 3 to 1," April 4, 2006, <http://iafrica.com/news/sa/170380.htm>.

¹⁵ Hagedorn (2005), p.159.

¹⁶ Moser and Rodgers (2005), p.23.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.25.

¹⁸ Amnesty International (2005).