The 21st Century Metropolis: The Making of Urban Futures

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Essen: Our Common Future Conference
November 6, 2010

The 21st century will be an urban century, one where the human condition will also be an urban condition. The 21st century will also be a Southern century and perhaps even an Asian century. Much of the urban growth and urbanization of this century will take place in the cities of the global South, including those of the newly emergent economic powerhouses, India and China. I am interested in understanding how at stake in the 21st century metropolis is the making of urban futures, the making of collective futures, the making of common futures. To understand this it is necessary to conceptualize the 21st century metropolis as a mass dream. I borrow this term from Suketu Mehta who has argued that "just as cinema is a mass dream of the audience, Mumbai is a mass dream of the peoples of South Asia." What does it mean to study the future itself as a mass dream? To answer such questions we have to of course pay attention to how the cities of the global South are narrated in academic and popular discourse.

In the urban imagination of the new millennium, the "megacity" has become the shorthand for the human condition of the global South. Cities of enormous size, they are delineated through what Jennifer Robinson has called "developmentalism." Their herculean problems of underdevelopment –

poverty, environmental toxicity, disease – are the grounds of numerous diagnostic and reformist interventions.

And it is the slum, the Third World slum, that is the iconic geography of this urban and human condition. It is the "recognizable frame" through which the cities of the global South are understood and understood, their difference mapped and located. If we are to pay attention to what postcolonial critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has identified as the "worlding of what is now called the Third World," then it is necessary to confront how the megacity is worlded through the icon of the slum. In other words, the slum has become the most common itinerary through which cities of the global South is recognized.

I do not use the term itinerary casually. Today, the Third World slum is a touristic itinerary, with reality tours available in the favelas of Rio, in the townships of South Africa, in the kampungs of Indonesia, and featured in travel guides ranging from Frommer's to Lonely Planet.

Such itineraries of recognition are interesting because they disrupt apocalyptic stereotypes of the megacity. Against academic and popular renditions of the megacity as a planet of slums, marked by the warehousing of surplus humanity, slum tours present the Third World slum as places of enterprise and economic activity. Here for example is how Pukar, an experimental research group based in Mumbai, presents Dharavi, Mumbai's famed slum:

Dharavi is probably the most active and lively part of an incredibly industrious city. People have learned to respond in creative ways to the indifference of the state … Dharavi is all about such resourcefulness. Over 60 years ago, it started

off as a small village in the marshlands and grew, with no government support, to become a million-dollar economic miracle providing food to Mumbai and exporting crafts and manufactured goods to places as far away as Sweden. No master plan, urban design, zoning ordinance, construction law or expert knowledge can claim any stake in the prosperity of Dharavi.… Dharavi is an economic success story that the world must pay attention to during these times of global depression.

This too of course was the theme of the controversial film, *Slumdog Millionaire*. While protested in India as an instance of poverty pornography, the film can be read as an allegory for the 21st century metropolis and its dhandha, a Hindi word that means transactions, hustles, business. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, everyone is out to make a deal: the traders in misery who maim children so that they can beg on the sidewalks of Mumbai; the traders in space who replace the slums of Dharavi with skyhigh condominiums; the traders in dreams who create the television programs and films that create a world of fantasy for those who need it, rich and poor.

It is thus that the Third World slum becomes central to the making of urban futures. Suddenly, the horizon of urbanism is no longer in New York or London or Los Angeles, but rather in the global South.

It is thus that star architect, Rem Koolhaas interprets the urbanism of Lagos as a "culture of make-do." In his encounter with Lagos, part of Harvard's Project on the City, Koolhaas is taken with the inventiveness of its residents as they survive the travails of the megacity. He sees such experimental responses as generating "ingenious, critical alternative systems," a type of "self-organization" creating "intense emancipatory zones."

It is thus that Asef Bayat argues that "informal life," characterized by "flexibility, pragmatism, negotiation, as well as constant struggle for survival and self-development" is the "habitus of the dispossessed."

And it is thus that Hernando de Soto presents the Third World slum as a "people's economy" populated by "heroic entrepreneurs." For de Soto such economies are rich in assets, albeit in the defective form of dead capital. The "mystery of capital" is how such assets can be transformed into liquid capital, thereby unleashing new frontiers of capital accumulation.

There is a striking resemblance between such arguments of economic libertarianism and the utopian schemes of the left. For example, in a sketch of "post-capitalism," geographers Gibson-Graham celebrate the "exciting proliferation of … projects of economic autonomy and experimentation." They showcase these as the performing of "new economic worlds," an "ontology of economic difference."

I am highly sympathetic to these renditions of Third World urbanism – those that place the megacity and its slums at the heart of the making of urban futures. I see this approach as an important correction to the silences of urban historiography and theory, the "sanctioned ignorance" – that has repeatedly ignored the urbanism that is the life and livelihood of much of the world's humanity. I see it as an instance of what Vanessa Watson has called "seeing from the South."

However, in my work, I also argue that it is time to think beyond the geography of the slum. To world the cities of the global South through the slum means

that we remain bound to the study of spaces of poverty, to essential forms of popular agency, to the habitus of the dispossessed, to the entrepreneurialism of self-organizing economies. These are ontological and topological understandings of urbanism, those that associate the slum with poverty, and that associate poverty with self-organizing economies.

I am interested then in how we can understand the inevitable heterogeneity of Southern urbanism, that which cannot be contained within the familiar metonymic categories of megacity or slum. How can we produce a different worlding of the cities of the global South and thus more broadly of the 21st century metropolis?

With this in mind, I want to briefly discuss four emergent concepts that I believe make possible new understandings of the 21st century metropolis. The concepts are periphery, urban informality, zones of exception, and gray spaces. Each concept has a distinctive genealogy and therefore cannot be seen as new or novel. For example, the idea of "periphery" can be traced to Latin American *dependista* frameworks of world system. The idea of the informal sector was first put forward in the context of East African economies and then traveled to explain forms of deproletarianization and deregulation in many other parts of the world. My claim is not that these concepts are new and therefore worthy of attention. Rather I am interested in how scholars, working in a variety of urban contexts, are using such concepts to chart new itineraries of research and analysis.

Peripheries

In a recent treatise on city life, Abdoumaliq Simone makes the case for the importance of the periphery in urban life. By periphery, he means a "space in-between" that has "never really been brought fully under the auspices of the logic and development trajectories that characterize a center."

I am interested in the periphery as a space of both rule and insurgence. On the one hand, the periphery is the site of what James Holston has called insurgent citizenship, the claims-making of urban residents, an anticipatory urban politics. But on the other hand the periphery is a space produced through the interventions of humanitarianism, urban restructuring, capital flows, policing, control.

Such is the case with a periphery that often garners international attention, the southern suburbs of Beirut, al-Dahiya, or the Shiite ghetto. Here, the de facto state is Hezbollah, the party of God, a religious militia that has matured into one of Lebanon's most important political parties. Al-Dahiya is the space of what Hezbollah calls the resistance society, where poor, downtrodden, and displaced Shiites can create an autonomous urbanism. With this in mind, Hezbollah has built up an infrastructure of urbanism and development that defies the logic of the center and intervention by the Lebanese state. From schools to health clinics to microfinance institutions to Jihad al-Binaa (or Jihad for construction), Hezbollah's al-Dahiya demonstrates how the periphery is a "potentially generative space – a source of innovation and adaptation … potentially destabilizing of the center."

Yet the periphery is also a space of rule, one where Hezbollah seeks to implement norms of civic governmentality and a vision of the good city. As

the work of Hiba bou Akar and Mona Harb shows, Hezbollah today is both insurgent militia and real estate developer. In its latter guise, Hezbollah supports and implements projects of urban development that can transform al-Dahiya, the Shiite ghetto, into a city center worthy of a global city. Hezbollah frames the issue of urban renewal as one of the modernization of space, linking it closely to the imperative of development, of progress for the Shiites. The language used by Hezbollah is that of "tamaddun," or "civilization." It derives from the term "medina," which in Arabic means both city and civilization. This is the equivalent of city as "civitas" - not in the sense of citizenship but in the sense of modernization. In the resistance society, no resistance is possible to the making of urban futures. The periphery then embodies the contradictory impulses of rule and insurgence that are constitutive of the 21st century metropolis.

Urban Informality

In his much discussed text, *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis states that "informal survivalism" is "the new primary mode of livelihood in a majority of Third World cities." In my research, I have used the term urban informality extensively to explain the workings of the 21st century metropolis, but I have done so in a manner that departs sharply from Davis's ontological and topological analysis of Third World urbanism. I argue that the informal is not a distinct and bounded sector of labor, housing, and governance, but rather is an idiom of urbanization, a logic through which differential spatial value is produced and managed.

Urban informality then is not restricted to the bounded space of the slum or deproletarianized/ entrepreneurial labor; instead, it is a mode of the production of space that connects the seemingly separated geographies of slum and suburb, favela and enclave. The splintering of urbanism does not take place at the fissure between formality and informality but rather, in fractal fashion, *within* the informalized production of space. In short, informal urbanization is as much the purview of wealthy urbanites as it is that of slum-dwellers. The analytical and political question at hand is how and why in the 21st century metropolis, elite informalities are valorized and subaltern informalities are criminalized.

Take for example the case of Indian cities. In the case of Delhi, Asher Ghertner notes that a vast proportion of the land-use of the city, from so-called farm houses to shopping malls, violates some planning or building law, such that much of the construction in the city can be viewed as "unauthorized. But while the law has come to designate slums as "nuisance" and the residents of slums as a "secondary category of citizens," the illegal and informal developments of the urban middle classes and the urban elite have come to be sanctioned by the state as the making of urban futures.

I am arguing then that is often through informality and illegality that, in India, the world-class city is produced. This is the story of evictions and displacement, the sheer dispossession of peasants, slumdwellers, squatters, sharecroppers that is at work in the carving out of new towns, special economic zones, and urban-industrial enclaves. But it is also the bold aspirations of what is increasingly designated, at least in India and China, as the Asian century, the sense that the future belongs to Asian economic powerhouses. In this self-

referential imagination, world-class Asian cities compete with one another. Mumbai is imagined as the next Shanghai, inevitably slum-free. Singapore circulates as a frame of success.

Dubai in particular serves as the dream-image of an Asian hyper-urbanism. Billboards lining the street of Delhi, and photographed by Gautam Bhan, mark the partnership between Indian and Dubai property capital and read: "Burj Dubai, the World's tallest tower. The only thing taller is our dream for India." I want to emphasize that such formations of urban meaning must be understood as mass dreams, those claimed by middle-class consumer citizens who are seeking "leisure, safety, aesthetics, and health." But such mass dreams are also subject to contestation and informality is an important axis of such contestation.

Take for example Quarter no. 4/11 in Kolkata. Occupied by Shambhu Prasad Singh, this factory quarter was the last hold-out in a tract of factory land that had been converted into the city's upscale South City retail and residential complex. The workers were evicted from their living quarters with no prior notice and with meager compensation. Shambhu Prasad Singh refused to make way. For a while, with the towers of South City rising around him, he was the blockade. Soon it became evident that the South City complex had been built in violation of environmental laws and through the enclosure of some of southern Kolkata's largest waterbodies. For a moment, Shambhu Prasad Singh's blockade made visible the South City complex as "towers of violation," thereby presenting a challenge to elite informality and calling into question the criminalization of subaltern informality.

I am interested in how these struggles over territorialized informality conjure up what Walter Benjamin titled "the law of dialectics at a standstill." In Kolkata, there have been civil insurrections that halt car factories and chemical hubs. There are hold-outs like Shambhu Prasad Singh who refuse to make way for the towers of urban development. But there is also the blockade that can be understood as "standing still."

I borrow the term "standing still" from a photographic exhibit by artist Simryn Gill. The Standing Still exhibit is made up of photographs taken in Malaysia between 2000 and 2003 of "ambitious development projects … abandoned before completion." They capture what Gill calls a "place in time": "A place in time, where, one might say, the past lies in ruins, unkempt and untended, and the future also somehow has been abandoned and has started to crumble. No way forward, no way back."

Such is the case with the new towns that line the eastern periphery of Kolkata, ambitious public-private partnerships that were meant to serve the "Global Indian." Take for example the city's showpiece township New Town. It is here that Kolkata's middle class had hoped to find a world-class urban lifestyle, with many investing their entire savings here. Today New Town is described as a "nightmare without an end" – bad roads, dirty water, poor drainage, insufficient electricity. In many of the housing complexes, there is no water supply or connections to the power grid. Residents are quickly moving out and the area is becoming deserted. Those who remain survive in the ways in which slum-dwellers and squatters do in poor, informal settlements – by buying water from vendors, using diesel generators, and making do with unpaved streets.

These ghost towns return us to Benjamin's notion of a "dialectics at a standstill." Ruins of a world-class future, they expose the ideology of progress and rupture the enchantment of development. This too is the 21st century metropolis.

As an analytical concept, urban informality then makes evident the fractal geometries of contemporary urbanism. But it also demonstrates how informalism as a spatial mode is widely deployed in the making of urban space, and how its differential use signifies class power. But such deployments are subject to blockades. Dialectics at a standstill, rather than the teleology of development, may be the appropriate frame through which we can plot the space-time coordinates of the 21st century metropolis.

Zones of Exception

I have suggested that the concept of urban informality denotes fractal geometries of metropolitan habitation and that this is a quite different analytics than those that are concerned with the bounded slum and its ontologies. A similar spatial theory is provided by the work of Aihwa Ong on zones of exception. Ong studies "market-driven strategies of spatial fragmentation," tracing patterns of "non-contiguous, differently administered spaces of graduated or variegated sovereignty," what she calls zones of exception. From special economic zones to special administrative regions, these zones both fragment and extend the space of the nation-state.

Such zoning practices have been particularly visible in China, where liberalization has coincided with "zone fever." George Lin thus reports that the thousands of Chinese zones together cover a territory that exceeds total urban built up area in China. Indeed, one may ask: in a territory where zones of exception proliferate, what then is the city?

This question becomes poignant in a setting like Dubai where the entire city itself can be understood as a free trade zone, a speculative frontier of state capitalism disguised as free enterprise, an ambitious remaking of the relationship between city and nature – through islands in the sea, underwater hotels, and the transformation of the desert into mega-development. Such free enterprise zones are also of course, paradoxically, zones of bonded labor. Dubai's towers rise on the backs of South Asian workers hoping to make their own futures in this 21st century metropolis.

But the zone of exception that most captures my attention is Shenzhen. Shenzhen after all is not only one of China's first Special Economic Zones, it is also the "world's workshop." It is in Shenzhen's factories that the world's favorite commodities – from ipods to iphones – are churned out. This assembly line is usually invisible to us except at rare occasions when the invisible workers whose labor makes possible our cosmopolitan lifestyles become visible. This happened a few years ago when a Shenzhen migrant worker, completing the assembly of an iphone, left a photograph of herself on the phone. Dressed in a pink and white striped uniform, smiling, making a peace sign, in the circuits of cybercirculation, she came to be known simply as "iphone girl."

Shenzhen reminds us that zones of exception are not only spatial configurations but also distinctive temporalities. Widely celebrated in Shenzhen is the idea of Shenzhen Speed, a phrase that refers to the city's incredible pace of growth – from about 25,000 people in 1980 to nearly 14 million people in 2010. But the phrase also suggests that "no other place or time has experienced the transformations that have characterizes this city." In Shenzhen today, the revolution is urban. Everywhere there is construction; everywhere the new becomes old; everywhere factories and paddy fields give way to condominiums and malls; everywhere fast-speed infrastructure inhabits the city. All that is solid melts into air. Paul Virilio had once noted that ""No politics is possible at the scale of the speed of light." In the 21st century metropolis, what politics is possible at the speed of light?

In the last year or so, a series of suicides have plagued Shenzhen factories, including Foxconn, the world's biggest contract electronics supplier. The deaths have been seen as a symbol of the dark side of Shenzhen speed: migrant workers working 11 hour overnight shifts, seven nights a week, forging plastic and metal into electronics parts amid fumes and dust, living eight to a room in cramped dormitories. The suicides have been seen as symbol of a new generation of workers unwilling to make unending sacrifice for the Chinese economic miracle, a part of a rapidly changing context of labor strikes and mobilizations. After all Shenzhen too is a mass dream, the place where China's peasants come to make an urban future. But it turns out that such a future must be negotiated through what Achille Mbembe has called necropolitics, the politics of life and death. In the 21st century metropolis, zones of exception then are zones of subjectivation, where the making of urban subjects is evident.

Gray Spaces

In his provocative and haunting work on the Bedouins of the Israeli Negev, Oren Yiftachel describes "gray spaces" as "those positioned between the 'whiteness' of legality/approval/safety, and the 'blackness' of eviction/destruction/death." He notes that these spaces are tolerated and managed but "while being encaged within discourses of 'contamination', 'criminality' and 'public danger' to the desired 'order of things':

> The understanding of gray space as stretching over the entire spectrum, from powerful developers to landless and homeless 'invaders', helps us conceptualize two associated dynamics we may term here 'whitening' and 'blackening'. The former alludes to the tendency of the system to 'launder' gray spaces created 'from above' by powerful or favorable interests. The latter denotes the process of 'solving' the problem of marginalized gray space by destruction, expulsion or elimination. The state's violent power is put into action, turning gray into black.

To illuminate this final concept of gray spaces let me take a closer look at social landscapes in America, and especially at the gray space that is the global border. In America, the spring of 2010 saw the gathering storm of the "tea party" movement, a conservative fury against Big Government and its purported failures. As spring rolled over into summer, so in the border state of Arizona, a new law was passed. Titled "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act," it is a bold assertion of state intrusion, of the police state. Aimed at wiping out undocumented immigration, the law initially required police to determine the immigration status of those detained, stopped, or arrested.

Arizona's law is an example of a firmly territorialized and racialized framework of citizenship, one that erodes understandings of urban citizenship based on

cosmopolitanism and difference. In this sense it marks the end of the idea of the city. The Arizona law is also an example of the border, the global border. It is a remaking of the U.S.-Mexico border, the world's most policed border, in the heart of cities and towns. It is the making of all neighborhoods as border neighborhoods. It is the creation of a series of gray spaces that remain suspended between legality and illegality, between safety and destruction.

Gray spaces proliferate in the 21st century city. But gray space is also the terrain of politics.Take for example, architect Teddy Cruz, who along with the community organization Casa Familiar, has sought to create "living rooms at the border." In his design practice, Cruz tries to transform the San Diego-Tijuana border into the urban laboratory of the 21st century. Global borders and border neighborhoods are, according to Cruz, the "paradigmatic out-of-place places of the 21st century." Working here, Cruz undertakes "urban acupuncture" to subvert the alliance between militarization and urbanization.

Like Cruz, I am interested in the technologies of crossing that can disrupt the social legislation of fear and thus the securitization of space. At the global border, artists in particular have experimented with technologies of crossing. These experiments are perhaps visible symbols of the everyday (and extraordinary) practices of border crossing through which this space is lived and negotiated. Such ruptures, or "urban acupuncture" – to return to that phrase of Cruz – are evident in the work of the transnational art project, inSITE. Taking place at various venues along the San Diego-Tijuana border, inSITE performs transient pieces of art in places where art is not typically exhibited. Each performance punctures the global border and weaves a new

transnational fabric of meaning and habitation. Each performance transforms gray space into political space.

For example, in 1997, Marcos Ramírez Erre, a Tijuana artist, rolled an enormous Janus-headed Trojan Horse into the middle of traffic waiting to cross the border at San Ysidro, perhaps the busiest international border crossing in the world. The horse appeared seemingly out of nowhere, straddled the border with two legs resting on the U.S. side and two other legs on the Mexico side. One head looked north, the other looked South. And after a while it vanished. Cruz writes of the performance:

> Erre inserted his horse into the de-centered, de-territorialized, and multi-directional flows that constitute the border, where it dwelled for a brief moment, (impossibly) occupying both sides at once in defiance of the dialectic forces that govern the space … The Trojan Horse was the fragile 'anti-monument'….It reminds us that the contemporary city is still able to elude the absolute ordering devices that attempt to render it homogeneous and one-dimensional … that the most derelict and unexpected places have the potential to become sites for light occupations that challenge the massive colonization of traditional urbanism.

For me the 21st century metropolis is a space that requires both critique and hope. The 21st century metropolis is a space that far exceeds the boundaries of the slum. Better understood as peripheries, zones of exception, gray spaces, and urban informality, the 21st century is made up of fractal geometries of metropolitan habitation. The 21st century is time at the speed of light and it is also dialectics at a standstill.

But most important the 21st century is a terrain of politics. The fractal geometries of the contemporary city also constitute the grounds for negotiated

subjectivities, contested spaces, and claims to the urban future. In this sense the 21st century metropolis may just be, to borrow Erre's allegory, a Trojan Horse.