

Parallel session 3A-2.2

Contesting urban developments

Tuesday 12 November, 14.00 – 16.00

IAS Common Ground

Chair/ discussant: **Prof. Jennifer Robinson**, Chair of Human Geography, UCL

Fireflies of residual urbanity: Surviving fast urbanism in the European South

Prof. Ugo Rossi, Associate Professor, University of Turin

In this paper I look from below at improvised forms of urban dwelling as a form of survival, considering shelters created by refugees in Belgrade in the construction site of the Savamala waterfront project, and the remaining ground-floor dwellings in Naples's ancient centre that have not yet become vacation homes for tourists. Engaging with the work of Didi-Huberman (2018), I reflect on these dwellers as fireflies of residual urbanity, wondering whether under neoliberal urbanism fireflies are all bound to disappear, or they might survive in spite of the violence of urban transformations.

Unlike functionalist conceptions that associate urbanity with the mix of activities and uses co-existing in urban spaces, a post-essentialist understanding lays emphasis on fragmented, dissonant determinations of urbanity (Simone and Pieterse, 2017). In this perspective, urbanity lies in survival presences persisting on the urban fabric in spite of systemic transformations abruptly imposed from outside (i.e. market-driven and colonising forces brought on by neoliberal globalisation). While large-scale struggles resisting abrupt transformations take place in the public realm of cities, survival presences inhabit the urban interstices, mostly in secluded places, nurturing a sense of residual urbanity. In this paper, I look comparatively at residual urbanity across Southern Europe, particularly in two historical urban areas of Naples (Italy) and Belgrade (Serbia) deeply affected by processes of capital valorization. In Belgrade, I look at Savamala, where a contested mega-project of urban renovation is rapidly transforming the neighbouring waterfront, turning it into a space of leisure and luxurious dwelling. In Naples, I focus on its ancient centre (the Decumani's old Greek-Roman grid), a socially mixed area where touristification processes have accelerated impressively over the last few years.

Necrosettlements: Urban Poor's Rehousing and Death-Worlds in Mumbai

Rishi Kumar Jha, PhD candidate, Lund University

In an infinitely exclusionary megacity-Mumbai, the developmental turn of the postcolonial state has been widely welcomed by the academia. A spectacle of inclusive urban development, towards a just future, through institutional reworking, state-market-civil society synergy and participatory resettlement and offered formal housing, and ensuing

possibilities of civic, economic and political rights against brutal slum clearance and uncompensated eviction have engendered much celebrated academic theorization on 'invisible' urban's poor's rights, entitlements and citizenship through phenomenal 'deepening of democracy', 'civic governmentality' and 'graduated urban citizenship'. These narratives, however, conceal the unintended, yet inherent, inter-institutional tacit agreements, official manipulation, engrained violence in the institutionalization processes, unleashed marginalities and resulted substandard living circumstances for the urban poor. Could an inquiry into inherent logics and processes guide us towards a new framework arising from the postcolonial urban?

The case in focus is Main pipeline in Mumbai which is one of the biggest, also contested, urban infrastructure securitization project. For the security and safety of pipeline, more than 15,000 urban poor have been evicted and resettled following a public interest litigation by a civil society organization, intervention by the High Court and administered by the municipal authority. The paper tends to enquire: Firstly, what kinds of juridical-administrative logics and institutional narratives fostered by the urban institutions essentialize clearance of legal settlement branded as illegal and dangerous encroachers? Secondly, how does the exceptional redevelopment regime, through its planning, policies and politics conceptualize and legitimize the creation of life-threatening (re)housing situations as a technique of management of displaced urban population? Thirdly, in what ways the architectural, spatial, environmental components of resettlement manifest and engender everyday subjectivities of survival (and death)? And finally, what is the scope for mobilization and utilization of the political, civic, juridico-legal institutions in resisting or negotiating an(y) alternative.

This paper is based on a six-month ethnographic engagement with affected urban poor of Mumbai's pipeline project displaced from seven administrative wards and twenty locations and rehoused in a resettlement township, located in peripheral industrial zone unfit for human habitation. It also includes an analysis of more than 500 pages of institutional documents and reports from courts and other law enforcing agencies and parastatal organizations. The study aims to argue that the redevelopment regime acts as an exceptional site of the postcolonial state's sovereign power and the resettlement process exposes the resettled urban poor to violence, marginalities, vulnerabilities and death. In doing so, it would offer a re-reading of the State of Exception, Necropolitics and Necrocapitalism in its material ramification as housing – as necrosettlements – for the poor in the urban spaces.

River and the Riverfront: Towards anthropological inquiry of an urban infrastructure project

Yogita Naruka, PhD candidate, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

This paper makes a contribution towards the anthropological understanding of urban infrastructure projects to unearth the way these projects get shaped by the interplay of multiple perspectives and ideologies. It explores the decision-making processes, various strategies and practices associated with the planning of 'Yamuna Riverfront Project' in Delhi. The riverfront project is known for its 'world-classing' characteristics as it aims to create a

strong image of the city at the global scale. However, the project has been criticised for several reasons such as flouting the planning laws, displacing the families residing at the banks of river and for its foundation on the extremely sensitive floodplains of a nearly dying river of the city. Multiple actors such as civil society groups, urban environmental activists and the judiciary of the state have been at the crossroads regarding the design of the project. This paper aims to uncover the micro-political world of the planning of the riverfront project by capturing the conflicts, exceptions and negotiations taking place amongst the various actors. The paper draws its findings from the ethnography conducted in the project implementation unit along with detailed qualitative interactions with other stakeholders.

Small city and big task: (re)worked lakeshore in Dali, southwest China

Yawei Zhao, PhD candidate, Department of Geography, University of Calgary

Critical voices in urban studies have over the past two decades called for decentralisation from a narrow focus on Western cities of the highest global reach and influence to a cosmopolitan approach that includes all world's cities. Southern cities that had previously been off the map have been brought into view, with their distinctiveness and creativeness being acknowledged. Yet most discussions are centred on large cities for their eye-catching population size and/or impressive economic prosperity, leaving small cities insufficiently researched.

This paper interrogates what smallness means and entails when multiple processes interact with small cities based on the case of Dali. Dali heavily relies on tourism revenues, and thus it encourages any economic activities within and surrounding tourism. Guesthouses mushroomed along the shore of Erhai, the mother lake of Dali, until President Xi's visit in 2015. He commanded the city government to restore and protect Erhai as part of China's environmental protection endeavours. Since then, the government is pressed to try out different methods, even at the immediate expense of tourism and economic growth, including demolishing all buildings on the lakeshore to avoid the discharge of untreated sewage. The analyses of this story recognize that Dali is like other cities, large or small, for its aspiration of climbing up the ladder of urban hierarchy, and it possesses three distinct features as a small city: 1) the absence of diverse pillar industries; 2) a high degree of urban-rural integration owing to spatial proximity and socioeconomic connectedness; 3) subject to powerful influences of the central state, unlike large cities or city-regions where state power appears decentralized and dissolved. In sum, this paper draws attention to small cities, in particular the dilemmas and challenges associated with their smallness.

Suturing Luanda after the boom: Recomposing associational life in a city on hold

Dr Chloé Buire, Researcher (CNRS), Les Afriques dans le monde, Sciences Po Bordeaux

Following the end of the civil war in 2002, Luanda quickly became a buzzing building site fed by petrodollars and orchestrated by the uncontested oligarchic network that surrounded President dos Santos. Skyscrapers reshaped the skyline of the city centre while new settlements sprawled in the periphery, from luxury condominiums to minimalist self-built

programmes. In that fragmented landscape, political dissent grew through social media and heavily repressed marches, but the streets of Luanda never became the theatre of mass protests, as fear and hope to get a share of the cake insured a minimal level of consent. In 2014 however, falling oil prices brutally interrupted the scenario of the boom city tightly controlled by a 30-year-long ruling clan. Dos Santos stepped down in September 2017. Surprisingly, his successor launched a vehement anti-corruption campaign that ignited new hopes for democracy and transparency. The sudden economic crisis also shut down the engines of building cranes and fancy cars, and the urban utopias (dystopias?) hastily built around Luanda soon started to crumble.

Based on ethnographic material gathered through an ongoing project mixing visual and participatory methods, this paper sketches the portrait of a city put on hold. It seeks to understand how a so-called 'developmental state' builds legitimacy when its redistribution channels are drying out, but also how the heroic protesters of yesterday recalibrate their voice when their gatherings are suddenly tolerated. What are the real-and-imagined spaces of conviviality in Luanda today? Can the failing promise of urban renewal wire new collective identities?

Without providing definitive answers, the paper sheds light on the ambiguous production of political subjectivities, shaped simultaneously by hopeful democratic aspirations and daily experiences of vulnerability and powerlessness.