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Marco Cremaschi

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The Politics of Splintering: Research Notes on Immigrants and Urban Developments in Rome, Kolkata and Buenos Aires

Marco Cremaschi

Dipartimento di Architettura

Università degli Studi Roma Tre, marco.cremaschi@uniroma3.it

0657339650

This paper seeks to make a comparison of urban change in three distant cities, presenting a preliminary review of current planning practices that deny or erase proximity in the wake of waves of immigrants that are flooding these cities. The three cases are studied from the point of view of urban development policies. These policies reflect local issues but are also heavily affected by political expectations, the neoliberal turn and evolving technical mind-sets. All these components are more intertwined than one expects and only direct inquiries and rigorous comparisons can advance the understanding of the combinations presented by each case. However, a general point arises concerning the nature of urban citizenship in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

At the core of the urban experience is the practice of people living in contexts of physical proximity. Clearly, proximity is at danger in all cities of the world. Current planned developments run the risk of splintering the city, and keeping people and social classes in different zones and housing conditions.

This process of fragmentation happens in a context of consistent demographic change. Despite the growing literature, the process of change of world cities due to the process of globalization has still not been fully explored. On the one hand, immigration and poverty contribute to the congestion of cities, overcrowding contributing to the alarming rise of a feeling of insecurity and danger. On the other hand there is a growing middle class that is striving to emerge as a potential political actor, pressing for urban issues so that different policies can come about (Cremaschi 2012a). The emergence of a strong middle class affects metropolises such as Buenos Aires and Kolkata, where for the first time policy options are being forced to be redefined, as a third voice surfaces in the traditional political polarisation.

Ordinary cities

Even as Rome, Calcutta and Buenos Aires are located on different points of the globe, they display some common features, which are relevant in the context of the social and political changes brought about by globalization. Robinson terms cities such as these “ordinary”.

Scholars from different backgrounds have in fact revealed original patterns of urban growth and socialisation in these cities, the porosity noted by Benjamin being just one of the possible examples. Mediterranean cities exhibit certain traits (family networks, weak state, and political populism) (Leontidou 1993) that are now being recognized in postcolonial cities. The three cities have some similarity vis-a-vis their difficult relationship with modernity; emerging as they are from the dark side of colonialism (and, in a fearful symmetry, fascism in Rome), though under the overwhelming bias of an Eurocentric narrative. Contemporary planning techniques are meant to modernise cities. Colonial cities should be rationally and efficiently re-built to fulfil this aim.

There has been substantial research on urbanisation that has pointed out the process of ‘fragmentation’ in Buenos Aires (Pirez 2002), the increasing segregation of Kolkata (Chen et al. 2009; and Wang et al. 2010), and the growing isolation of new peripheral neighbourhoods in Rome (Cremaschi 2012b).

New developments have accommodated global activities and affluent residents, disrupting the social fabric of old neighbourhoods. Forced relocation of the poor in faraway settlements has led to poor sanitation of central slums or informal areas. New housing estates, often enclosed and private, provide decent houses for the middle class in the outer ring of the cities. Both these developments annihilate the basic requirement of one’s job arena being close to one’s residence, and increase the need for commuting, depleting at the same time social variety and cohesion. In different ways, recent urban developments have disrupted proximity in all three cities, regardless of long term consequences.

Urban decisions in Buenos Aires, Kolkata and Rome have affected three main issues: the informal settlements that have mushroomed in the post-war cities; the reorganisation of the infrastructure, mostly highways and bypasses that serve the metropolitan scale; the fate of central core, the old districts of the colonial cities. All three urban and policy fields have been the source of social conflicts, with profuse efforts by governments and plans to regulate and oust the poor, a practice of zoning for the rich, and growing dissatisfaction amongst the emergent middle class. In all three cities, modern infrastructures have brushed off (or were meant to brush off) vast parts of the city, failing however to impose a new order.

The issue of Immigration stands at the centre of this debate, and the attitude towards immigrants is the key to development decisions. Immigration policies are part in fact of an international debate that arises from failure of many policies, based both on integration and on multiculturalism. At least three different mind-sets vis-a-vis immigration that have influenced development choices in subsequent decades can be discerned.

The first consistent paradigm change has been the ‘recognition’ of informal housing as an area that needs



change. Historically, immigration policies had to face informality – which requires consistent reconceptualization – and deal with the informal provision of housing (in the three cases: villas miseria, bustees, borgate). In many different, experimental ways, policies of recognition and empowerment have been designed and implemented, and have become part of the social history and political identity of the cities.

Recently, a second representation has prevailed, which has to do with ethnic and folkloric neighbourhood, and offers vibrant “ethnoscapes” to urban residents. In fact, multiethnic cities show some positive signals of veritable intercultural processes coming frequently from civil society and non-institutional actors. This second turn well illustrates the shift in attitudes between different modalities of recognition, where a negative stance is implied (Yiftachel *et al.* 2009) by the process of cultural gentrification of former popular neighbourhoods (Annunziata 2011).

Finally, development policies have embraced spatial fragmentation and housing segregation as a tool of growth, and a way of accommodating divergent claims on public space. For example, the emergent middle class’s keenness for urbanism is reflected in the production of *torres jardín*, *country en barrios*, *barrios encerrados*, new towns, etc.

The prevailing attitudes in planning and developers’ policies support the splintering process ignited by modernism and rationalist techniques. Social geography tends to complicate the lives of millions of migrants. At this juncture, the tension arises because current cities seem no longer able to convert the denizens into citizens.

In the following sections we will tackle each city separately.

Buenos Aires

The city of Buenos Aires is Argentina’s capital and also its largest city. At the turn of the twentieth century a horde of emigrants from Europe, especially Italy and Spain, came to Argentina and made the country their home. The national culture postulated that Argentina was to be constructed out of the “melting pot of races”. The selection on the profile of perspective immigrants, as well as the control on their political opinion, has always been a constant of the Argentinean regimes. That is the reason why double citizenship is not admitted (neither voting at local elections). An immigrant has to renounce his citizenship of home country in order to acquire the full legal status of citizen of Argentina.

By 1914, 42 per cent of the population of Buenos Aires was of foreign origin, mainly European (mostly Italian and also Spanish). Today, roughly 13 per cent (i.e. 380,000 people) of the inhabitants of Buenos Aires is an immigrant (up from 11.5 per cent ten years earlier), with the majority coming from neighbouring nations (the 2010 census reports a total of 2.9 million). The population of Area Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (AMBA) in 2010 was 13 million; of this 9 per cent is foreign-born, again with a small increase from the previous census. More than half of these foreign-born residents have been residing in Buenos Aires for more than 20 years. Besides, the Argentine government had declared several amnesties during the main periods of political change i.e. 1974, 1984, 1993-94.

Only the most vulnerable reside in the pocket slum areas inside the core city. Most parts of the metropolitan areas are interested by complex social and demographic processes. However, the number of villas has increased by 50 per cent in a city which is not growing any more, while “neoliberal towers” account for most of the new constructions (Sehtman 2013).

Informal settlements have a long history in Buenos Aires, due to the many political and economic crises that the city has witnessed. However, a major effort in towards informal housing was undertaken by the military since the 70s when the brutal dictatorship enforced a redesign of the urban hierarchy. The army wanted urban restructuring that would address the issue of political control and forcibly demolish most of the central informal settlements. There is vast literature that documents the significant restructuring of the social geography of the city and the AMBA.

Democratic governments have tried to address the issue of informal housing by laying down some social rights that have been included in the city’s constitution. The return of the villas was in part supported by

activists and civil servants as a way of offering a housing solution in areas close to jobs to those without alternatives (Sehtman 2009). As a matter of fact, policies of regularization were less effective, and the economic crisis put paid to most efforts of improvement. However, place-base social struggles have since then signed the development of movements in the city (Gatti 2010). Regularization policies meant first delimiting the boundaries of the settlements, then providing entitlement to land ownership, and finally improving buildings and services. However, a crucial part was the appointment of formal representatives from the settlements. In order to institutionalize old patterns of political clientelism, representatives of the barrios were hired in the early 90s by the government (Sehtman 2009).

Later, elected governments adopted a clear neoliberal agenda that paved the way for rapid transformation of the city through painful displacement processes. Spatial fragmentation denies the universality of a modern city. Fragmentation was fostered by the construction of gated communities on the outskirts of the city, the beautification of tourist places, and the gentrification of old central neighbourhoods.

As a result, the city is divided into smaller communities even as urban life is projected on a larger scale. To some extent, this affects the balance between centre and periphery. As the Brazilian economist Pedro Abramo wrote, the city is today con-fused. Compact settlements, as in the historic European city, and dispersed settlements, as in the North American sprawl, are combined in a perennial restructuring of urban regions, where social classes might become spatially closer but increasingly socially divided.

Political coordination of Latin American states into organisations such as MercoSur has eased the immigration process. It has also made the sharing of linguistic and religious ties (Spanish and Catholicism) easier. Today immigrants are perceived as far less politically dangerous and far more socially tolerable, due to greater social mobility and easier urban inclusion. In fact, the ethnic connotation of neighbourhoods is limited, even if the mass culture tends to romanticise some features or events which bear ethnic connotations (religious festival, vegetable markets), such as those of the indigenous Andes people, mostly Bolivians. Bolivian immigrants often concentrated in southern neighbourhoods, often in poorly-built and scarcely-equipped villas miserias. However, the dominant political narrative does not include these immigrants as protagonists of the progress of the nation (Grimson 1997), unlike those of the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.

The city of Buenos Aires is Argentina's capital and largest city. Argentina is mostly remembered by the movement of European emigrants to the country (especially Italians and Spaniards) around the beginning of the twentieth century. The national culture postulated that Argentina was to be constructed out of the "melting pot of races". The selection on the profile of perspective immigrant, as well as the control on their political opinion, has always been a constant of the Argentinean regimes. That the reason why the status of double citizenship is not admitted (neither voting at local elections), the renounce of national attachment being a condition in the process of acquiring the full legal status of Argentinean citizen.

By 1914, 42% of the population of the inhabitants of Buenos Aires was of foreign origins, mainly European (Italian mostly and Spanish). Today, still a consistent share of 13% (380,000 people) of the city inhabitants is foreigner (up from the 11.5% of ten years before), the majority coming from the neighbouring nations (the 2010 census reports a total of 2.9 million). Considering the Area Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (AMBA), of a total of around 13 million (as of 2010), 9% of the population is foreign-born, again with a small increase on the previous census. More than half of these foreign born residents have been residing in BA for more than 20 years. Besides, the Argentine government declared several amnesties in the main period of political change (1974, 1984, 1993-94).

Only the most vulnerable population resist in the pocket slum areas inside the core city, while vast sectors of the metropolitan areas were invested by complex social and demographic processes. However, the population of the villas has increasing by 50% in a city which is not anymore growing, while "neoliberal towers" account for most of the new constructions (Sehtman, 2013).

Informal settlements have a long story in Buenos Aires, due to the subsequent political and economic cri-



ses. However, a major effort in contrasting informal housing was enacted by the military, during the brutal dictatorship that enforced a redesign of the urban hierarchy since the 70s. The army imposed a process of urban restructuring addressing explicitly the issue of political control and eradicating by force most of the central informal settlements. A profound restructuring of the social geography of the city and the AMBA has been documented by a vast literature.

New democratic governments tried to address the issue of informal housing, recognizing some social rights into the new constitution of the city. The return of the villas was in part supported by activists and civil servants as a way of offering a housing solution in areas close to jobs to those without alternatives (Sehtman, 2009). As a matter of fact, policies of regularization were less effective, and the following economic crisis stopped most of the efforts of improvement. However, place-base social struggles have since then signed the development of movements in the city (Gatti, 2010). Regularization policies meant first delimiting the boundaries of the settlements, then providing entitlement to land ownership, and finally improving buildings and services. However, a crucial part consisted in the appointment of formal representatives from the settlements. Institutionalizing old patterns of political clientelism, representatives of the barrios were hired in the early 90s by the government (Sehtman, 2009).

Later on, elected governments adopted a clear neoliberal agenda that paved the way to a rapid transformation of the city through painful displacement processes. Spatial fragmentation apparently denies the alleged universality of the modernist city. Fragmentation was fostered by the construction of gated communities on the outskirts, the beautification of tourism places, the gentrification of old central neighbourhoods.

As a result, the city is divided in smaller communities; and, at the same, urban life is projected on a larger scale. To some extent, this affects the balance between centre and periphery. As the Brazilian economist Pedro Abramo wrote, the city is today con-fused. Compact settlements, as in the historic European city, and dispersed settlements, as in the North American sprawl, combined in a perennially restructuring urban region, where social classes might become spatially closer and increasingly socially divided.

The late process of political coordination of Latin American states into organisations like the MercoSur has eased the immigration process; as well as the sharing of linguistic and religious ties (Spanish and Catholicism). Today immigrants are perceived as far less politically dangerous and far more socially tolerable, due to a greater social mobility and a comparatively easier urban insertion. In fact, the ethnic connotation of neighbourhoods is limited, even if the mass culture tend to romanticise some features or events which bear ethnic connotations (religious festival, vegetable markets), such as those of the indigenous Andes people, mostly Bolivians .

Bolivian immigrants often concentrated in southern neighbourhoods, often in poorly built and scarcely equipped villas miserias. However, the dominating political narrative does not include these immigrants as protagonists of the progress of the nation (Grimson, 1997), unlike those of the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth.

Kolkata

The British founded Calcutta and built it along the lines of a European city, capital of the Asian Empire. It was inhabited by the whites and was separated from the local villages where the natives lived. Both building and urban voids were majestic and familiar to Europeans. Colonial domination was displaced while incorporating romanticised features of the Indian architecture. Being the capital, the city rapidly created an Indian, educated elite that participated in business and civil service and adopted many traits and habits of the British. The ambivalent dialectic of colonialism was reflected in the education system, sports, and the architecture of the middle-class houses, allowing at the same time an experimental “border thinking” as well. Today, the political and ceremonial grand public spaces are far removed from the everyday street life in Kolkata, where managers and barbers, lawyers and shoe-cleaners rub shoulders with each other, and limousines and rickshaws vie for space on the roads. Hawkers and street kitchens are mostly seen as a nuisance, or worse. On the contrary, the benefits of proximity are largely exploited without mention: the abundance

of services, and the flexibility of the labour market. This has produced the most extraordinary social mix ever seen in a city. At the same time, this has undoubtedly contributed to the growing congestion and overcrowding, and is likely to put a strain on the urban middle class.

Since India's independence, Kolkata has been growing rapidly, making it one of the world's largest metropolitan areas. India's urbanisation increased to 31 per cent in the 2011 Census, about 1/3 more in the last 20 years. West Bengal is the fourth most populous state in India, with a historically high density of population and a traditional concentration in Kolkata, which decreased from 70 per cent to 55 per cent in the state since the 60s. As of 2011, the city has 4.5 million residents and an urban agglomeration of approximately 14.1 million. It ranks third, behind Mumbai and Delhi, in terms of population and GDP.

The city has been steadily exposed to a consistent influx of migrants from the countryside, both from the two Bengals (the state of West Bengal and Bangladesh, formerly part of the British Raj province); and from the neighbouring states (mainly Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa). Such constant flows of immigration are powered by the employment opportunities available for skilled and unskilled workers in industries in Kolkata, business outsourcing, IT services, medical transcription, etc. Often male migrants come without their families. Kolkata's literacy rate of 87 per cent exceeds the all-India average of 74 per cent.

Though Bengalis form a majority of Kolkata's population, in the last 50 years massive waves of migrants have reached the city. Partition, wars and continued political and economic turmoil in East Bengal has forced many Bangladeshis to seek refuge in India, particularly to West Bengal and Assam. Besides Bangla refugees, Marwaris and Biharis comprise the other large minorities. Ethnic diversity is reflected by the variety of languages (Bengali 55 per cent, Hindi 20 per cent, English 10 per cent, others 15 per cent).

Refugees, immigrants and re-settlers have invaded the porous spaces, which include the neglected spaces of the existing neighbourhoods, buildings and railways, vacant lots, and public gardens. This has undoubtedly contributed to the growing congestion and overcrowding, perhaps putting a strain on the urban middle class. Kolkata has been the turning point of an important experiment in the transfer of good practices in urban policies. In the late 1960s, Kolkata was the first city to adopt policies for upgrading rather than demolishing informal settlements. This change came about with an odd combination of factors¹ that have hardly been investigated by historians and political scientists. Effects of the new policies have been consistent and have permitted an extraordinary process of political integration of all strata of society into the city and the civic community. This experiment, not fully explored, has a global value, and concerns precisely the informal sector. Far from being achieved, the target of inclusion has however created a new mind-set of social dialogue both in planning and politics.

Immigration and the policy of regularization have produced the most extraordinary social mix ever seen in a city. Kolkata is a city where people from all professions and from every strata of society mingle with each other. This interaction is far from harmonious; On the contrary, poverty and differences in cultures between outcastes and the middle class give rise to social and class frictions. Hawkers and street kitchens are seen as a nuisance and this hostility relates mostly to rights and the uses of urban space and the environment. And does not involve the real well-off who have been able to (literally) distant themselves and live in secluded and purified places. On the contrary, the benefits of proximity are largely exploited: the abundance of services, cheap labourers, flexibility of the labour market...

As a result, contemporary Kolkata is an odd mosaic of strident urban fragments: historical urban structures abutting rigorously planned neighbourhoods; gigantic infrastructure networks close to precarious or consolidated slums. However, all mega cities in India grow in the periphery or on the outskirts, close to medium and large level industrial units, since a large majority of the people can't afford to stay in the core or main areas of the cities due to high costs of living.

1 Such as: the presence in force of the Ford Foundation in India for global political reasons; the turn towards self-help policies in Latin America; a decision to promote new institutional arrangement for planning in Bengal; a curious mix of technical cultures and political activism; a non-obvious dialogue between committed US intellectuals and Kolkata intelligencija (Oberlander and Newbrun 1999).



The city's situation has changed considerably in the last two decades. After 1991, following India's acceptance of neoliberal economic reforms, significant investment was focused on Kolkata. The spotlight was on the city's service sector as well as on manufacturing in its industrial suburbs. Private and public-private partnerships have mushroomed in this period as a way of redeveloping the city through new urban housing projects aimed at an emerging and global middle class.

The state, in conjunction with municipal authorities, has also emphasized a cosmopolitan and business-friendly attitude among young entrepreneurs through educational and trading incentives. Cosmopolitan attitudes are reminiscent of the status of capital that Kolkata enjoyed up to 1911. There was an openness to international ideas because of the link with the British Empire, the high level of literacy, the local habit of intellectual dialogue, and the link with the Bengali Diaspora across the world. To compensate for the liberalisation stance, the leftist government re-named the city, the state, and most of the main roads after their original names in Bengali, and promoted the teaching of Bengali in schools (as opposed to English). Recent development policies deliberately deny all value to proximity. For fifty years the city has been supporting, and sometimes forcing, the divorce of the middle and upper classes from traditional neighbourhoods. A few new towns – Salt Lake City, Rayarhat today – are the subsequent steps of a progressive estrangement from the city core (Chen *et al.* 2009; and Wang *et al.* 2010). The urban modernist myth is actively deployed to attract the growing middle class out of the city's historical core as well as from the compact surrounding neighbourhoods, promising infrastructure, reasonable mobility, and access to adequate urban facilities.

Rome

The metropolitan area of Rome occupies a prominent place in the regional hierarchy both in terms of population and employment, in particular the service sector (public sector, white collar, business services). Rome has often been considered a backward metropolis, a divided and dependent city, suspended between the modern and industrial North and the (comparatively) rural and traditional South. Since it is the capital of Italy, and therefore replete with people holding government jobs, it had a comparatively weak industrial base and a very large inflow of poor immigrants from the Southern countryside.

In the post-war years, many informal settlements were built by Italian immigrants in the city's first belt, where eventually half a million people came to live. Most of these neighbourhoods were started as informal hamlets or small township (the "borgate") where the fascist regime had relocated part of the poor living in the city centre. Thus, the location was peripheral, the intention being to segregate the potentially dangerous working class, while the central area had been sanitized and cleansed.

Though the first constructions were precarious and were basically shacks, most of these areas were progressively consolidated and improved. A twisted interplay between informal networks and regulatory powers allowed for the exploitation of market opportunities and flaws in planning regulation. Most of these areas lacked basic urban services and infrastructures. Eventually, leftists and Christian-social activists started a civil rights movement demanding renovation of housing in the city. Henceforth, informal neighbourhoods became the object of consistent policies of regularisation and upgrading since the 70s, when the first progressive coalition came to power.

The informality of new policies and the motive to upgrade influenced the politics and policies in Rome. The political priorities of the main left party, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), were reoriented towards urban issues and a concern for the quality of life. There was a substantial move away from labour and class subjects, which characterised its counterparts in the Northern cities. Though not necessarily the working class, immigrants were considered rightful citizens, and their urban claims (housing, schools and transport) reframed the political agenda to some extent. A certain critique of the Vatican's real estate interests allowed for a redirection of Rome's local church pastoral worries in favour of the poor. Implementation of upgrading policies took more time than expected and was hampered by lack of public investments. In the meantime, post-war economic boom brought about a new sense of wellbeing and optimism. The expectations of the people went well beyond the administration's capacity and it was unable to fulfil even the original

strategy. The history of the Roman periphery has since been the history of divorce between declining collective policies and growing individual claims.

In the last 20 years, the city has lost nearly half a million inhabitants, notwithstanding the increase of immigrants. Most of them reside in the old suburbs around the ring-road, while some Roman families have occupied new neighbourhoods built nearby. Simultaneously, another half a million people have moved into the province, mostly in the municipalities of the first belt. Because of housing costs, families once residing in the urban core are moving out, although they rely on the city for services, trade and jobs. So rather than a phenomenon of “metropolisation”, the city is witnessing a phenomenon of “peripheralisation”.

Immigration in the region has gradually become structural, with growth rates hovering above the national average (the annual increase is 9 per cent, the national average is 7.9 per cent). The capital has played an important role in attracting migratory flows in the last three decades, and now hosts more than 50 per cent of the immigrants of the region. Rome’s province has the largest number of foreign residents in Italy (about 450,000 in 2010), most of whom live in the city; a quarter live in the small towns of the first belt and commute daily to Rome. The main labour sectors in which immigrants are traditionally employed are the construction sector (17.4 per cent) and services.

Rome’s immigrants come from the former Eastern Europe states such as Romania, Albania, Poland and Bulgaria and are employed in the construction industry. The pattern of residential integration of these groups is going in the direction of suburbanization, with a distinction between place of residence and labour location (in the case of Romanians, construction sector by definition has no fixed location), and depends on housing availability. Thus, the localisation patterns depend on real estate choices: both in the case of rent or private ownership, immigrants draw from second choice stock that often need to be restructured. Transport system is also crucial, especially for highly mobile populations.

The city stopped to grow in the 70s. Since then, the population has remained stable at roughly 2.7 million. The compact, old, twentieth century neighbourhoods inside the ring road lost nearly half a million inhabitants (another half a million moved to townships in the first metropolitan belts), although the city received 300,000 new foreign immigrants. Immigrants also live in the old neighbourhoods around the ring road, adjacent to the new neighbourhoods built for Roman families.

Twenty years later, Italy has become the target of a consistent inflow of foreign immigrants; a second progressive coalition adopted an entirely different stance towards urban development. Housing for the new immigrants is not a direct concern of today policies. Instead, leading coalitions have fostered the construction of new peripheral “districts”.

Such new districts and neighbourhoods have proliferated in Rome, and become a common feature of the metropolitan scene since the 80s. The city management, which includes policy makers, planners and investors have jointly designed more profitable strategies, and have framed the new spatial organization of late neoliberal capitalism.

Definitions of these new urban neighbourhoods are far from being consolidated (Cremaschi and Eckardt 2011). Neither is there any coalition on the effects in terms of social polarization, which have to be considered in light of changes in lifestyles and cultural attitudes, but also structural trends involving the dispersal of inhabitants, the hollowing out of state politics, and growing (albeit individual) mobility. Eventually, such new dispersed settlements are not comparable to the traditional city, neither in positive nor negative terms. They are not similar to the old, dense, urban political order; nor to any rural setting. Urban and natural parts of the metropolitan area are coalesced in a varied mosaic.

The politics of splintering

The global logic of financial markets generates the known phenomenon of speculative bubbles, as well as an increase in inequality. In this process, the poor are placed outside, not being able to interact with a purely monetary rush.

But it should be noted that splintering is not only the result of the process of liberalisation. It is not exclu-



sively due to the return to the market of the previously administered sectors of urban development, though financial markets increasingly affect the investment decisions. It depends upon a change in planners' paradigms and technical cultures.

The three cities, amidst obvious dissimilarities, show a common trend, as if a global pendulum had shifted. Dictatorship and colonial powers, though never conciliatory to informality, abundantly tolerated informal housing as long as it is not visible. Sometimes the pace of eradicating slums and shacks accelerated though displacement has always been the first option.

Initial policies of recognition of informal housing have consistently improved the state of immigrants and places, but have changed the politics of cities. Most of all, a study of the three cities elucidates that informality is the result of a web of relations between state, market, and political discourses. And that politics penetrates heavily into the process of urban change. Or it may be said that proximity enters the process of social construction of political actors. As Merklen (2005) pointed out, neighbourhoods represent the chance for "people" ("classes populaires") to get spatially inscribed in society while facing precarious job markets, i.e. when social inscription fails to work.

Eventually, the regularisation of informal sectors has given way to more profit-led development projects. Through very different spatial solutions (neoliberal towers, new towns or peripheral districts), a process of restructuring of the city ordering was started 20 years ago. Part of this process was the return of real estate investors to some parts of the city centres. This process may entail the thorough gentrification, or a softer romanticisation of popular neighbourhoods, adding to the costs and stresses of the urban poor.

This is when international immigrants start to add to the equation. Not surprisingly, international immigrants are caught between the interrupted process of recognition and land security, on one hand; and the turn of urban developers towards profit investments inside the city core, with the usual consequences of displacement and gentrification. Not surprisingly again, urban policies in front of immigrants are far from linear, and they find it hard to deliver even the basic results.

However, one general conclusion is possible, which suggests the need to rethink the nexus between ordinary cities, (post)modernity and post-colonialism. There was a time when the narrative was of a positive expansion of rights due to the process of urbanization. The accelerating pace of globalization has broken the link between urbanisation and democracy; moreover, inequality and segregation have become visible both at the top and at the bottom of the hierarchy of cities. Questions arise about the failure of the democratisation process, and the end of expansion of the bourgeois public sphere, which marks a critical turn of the modern project.

Trends in contemporary societies contribute to this rupture. For example, social bonds – the capacity of societal integration – are weakened by increasing individualization, and the persistence of (wrongly considered) pre-modern ties, such as community, neo-tribalism, religious or national identities..., and the weakness of public action. Consequently, the formation of a collective identity is uncertain. Not surprisingly, the physical characteristics of concentration and proximity are lost in the new urban phenomena. In this context, the nature itself of the city seems to be moving away from the historical function of expanding the rights which legitimized European urbanism.

Eventually, the cases highlight the gap between the paths of citizenship and those belonging to housing. These two processes were woven together during the process of constructing the industrial city, expanding the sphere of rights and the social democratic polity. Now that housing is scarcely a public policy priority, and the finance markets have taken over, the balance has changed. Neither denizens, nor citizens; and more important, not anymore citizens through housing.

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