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# MANIFESTO

for our

# URBAN FUTURE

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**RANABIR SAMADDAR**





# **A Manifesto for Our Urban Future**



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**Ranabir Samaddar**

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This manifesto for a common urban future was composed in February-March 2026. The Kolkata round of deliberations on urban future held in January 2026 inspired many of the themes propounded here, though I was toying with the idea of drafting a new urban manifesto for nearly a year. The series of dialogues under the aegis of CIFAR's (Canadian Institute for Advanced Research) "Humanity's Urban Future" (HUF) programme and the continuing work at the Calcutta Research Group's (CRG) work on cities and migrants provide the backdrop to this manifesto. CIFAR and the Institute of Human Sciences, Vienna, also enabled CRG to hold a workshop in 2024 on Alternative Histories of Urbanisation after Antonio Gramsci. My debt is all my colleagues at CIFAR involved in HUF programme, the Institute of Human Sciences, Vienna, and the Calcutta Research Group.

While drafting the manifesto, I was concerned with the desirable text size. Urban manifestos range from the briefest (e.g., The Urban Emergence Manifesto of the Academy of Urbanism) to long ones (e.g. Manifesto for a New Urbanity consisting of 56 pages). In the end I settled for a mid-size text. I removed the notes and references, so the text can go straight to the heart of the matter. The notes and references are at the end as an addendum of annotations. I hope readers will find them equally interesting.

It is a Southern manifesto in spirit. That is how this manifesto will make its appearance and be counted. I gave the draft to a few colleagues and friends to receive initial input. It has been pointed out also that the text should be modulated a little bit to

remove any possible misunderstanding on the part of readers in the West. I have heeded to their advice.

Finally, my debt is to Samata Biswas and Arup Sen who have made it possible for the document to appear in print with as little error as possible.

**Kolkata**

**27 March 2026**

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# A Manifesto for Our Urban Future

## I

Humanity's urban future will depend on the way urban future in the Global South will be forged. The global Southern urban is the urbanism of our time. The general trends and characteristics of Southern cities of the world will influence and shape the overall urban condition of the world today. Humanity's urban future is anchored in this way to the South. Evidence of this global condition is to be found in cities in all continents, in North and South, East and West.

Twenty-first century world is witnessing an unprecedented urban growth. New cities are popping up in many parts of the globe, old cities are expanding furiously, small towns or even smaller towns with around ten thousand population (known in some countries as census towns) are emerging as the bridge between old, big cities and the countryside, and giving push to the already accelerating urban growth. Much of this urbanization is happening in the non-Western world, often known as Southern countries. By a rough estimate seventeen out of the first twenty cities with largest population are in the non-western world. Same is with respect to density of urban population. Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is one of the densest cities with over 30,000 people per square kilometre. The urban push is mainly a southern push.

This southern push to global urbanization is reflected in the global nature of the big cities of the South. Rivalling the scale of cities like New York, London, or

Tokyo, cities of the South like Mumbai, Bangkok, Kolkata, Jakarta, Sao Paolo, and of course cities in China like Shanghai, have become crucial nodes of global economic activities in the form of supply chains, monetary linkages, data centres, and other logistical points, such as ports servicing container traffic, likewise expressways and high-speed corridors. Digital connections along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), connectivity of ports, roadways, etc., have made urbanisation of the world an interlinked phenomenon.

Along with this, cities of the South flag two more important phenomena:

(a) Cities in a major way are based on informal labour. The feature includes informalisation of many of the operations of the giant formal enterprises like Adidas or car manufacturers in Detroit who get their air filters, cabin filters, oil filters, or diesel engines from production centres in cities like Delhi marked by informal conditions of work, or the fashion industry of Italy or France getting their products or part their products from Dhaka or Kolkata. Informal processes of production materialise through the ancillarisation of manufacturing, service, and even digital production centres. These new labour forms, popularly called as informal, are distinct and have specific structures. At the same time, these informal labour operations are housed in slums that are no longer out there at the far end of the city functioning as the periphery of urban existence. Slums house a great part of the informal economic operations including waste-reprocessing activities. The

economy and locality in this way are intermeshed.

(b) Labour of migrants, refugees, stateless population groups, contribute to the making and remaking of the cities. Yet often migrants, refugees, and stateless population groups lack *de jure* citizenship. They have no voice regarding the ways the city should be run. They are forever consigned to live in ghettos. The city is divided in to a *de jure* city and an underground, below-the-law, shadow city.

In some ways, the present story of the South resembles the chronicle of early urbanization in the North when labour regulation was minimum or non-existent, and a crude factory form of production influenced the urban form. However, in many other ways, contemporary southern urbanization presents new features such as mixed production process, mixed forms of labour, globalization of the services offered by the city, large size of the territory and population of the city, continuing links with the villages in the form of circular migration, continuing imprints of the colonial past and the efforts of the postcolonial city to strike a new path, and not the least new forms of urban politics that include new dialogic modes of governance, dynamics of claim making around issues of urban justice, and a realization that the fault lines on which the city is based call for continuous attention. These features suggest the path of a dialogic future, a dialogic management of the city.

The preceding point is crucial. Experiences of Southern urbanization force us to acknowledge that the city is not a harmonious entity brimming with energy of its citizens. It is based on cleavages, antagonisms, and perpetual struggles for justice. The urban is not a gesture

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towards a seamless existence. On the contrary, it is based on fundamental fault lines of race, caste, religion, gender, and labour. Urban realities are contentious. Hence to the question of what is a good city, the answer is in the form of a counter-poser: what is a just city? In the imaginary of urban future, urban justice is the stake.

Cities carry different legacies and heritages. Some cities live with their national heritages of revolutions; often they live with their own histories of insurrections and upsurges at heart. These histories are suppressed in official public histories of the cities, but these histories live in the city's souls. Some grapple with their pasts of religious, communal, and racial violence. Some pride with their educational and public health institutions, while some may have forever lived with territorially segregated migrants' quarters as the city continuously attracts immigrants whose arrival is facilitated by what has been called as "transplanted networks". Some pride in their cosmopolitan nature. The future of these cities will be marked by the pasts they inhere. Or will they completely bypass the pasts? The special attachments these cities carry remind us that there are cities and cities, much like when we speak of railway towns, steel towns, port towns, trading towns, etc. It is an immense variety. All these calls for a flexible and plural approach that can nonetheless generalize our desire for a just city.

In a way, our imagination of urban future is thus bound by different histories - hence different labour and work forms, different temporalities.

## II

Urban future is shaped by our desires and dreams, but that is not all. Future is anchored to specific temporalities. This is not to say that dreams and desires of a liveable city are not important. These desires and dreams produce material apparatuses for the journey towards the future. These dreams are not homogeneous. Classes, groups, individuals have their specific dreams. Likewise, planners and administrators harbour grand designs for the urban future. The heterogeneity of desires, dreams, and outlooks calls for a dialogic journey – a different kind of administration of the city, a different kind of urban power.

Urban governmentality clogs the dialogic process. As a result, labouring classes are pushed out of the processes of running the city. Popular neighbourhoods become places to be feared by rest of the city. The educated, the literati, the cultured class, and top layers of bureaucracy avoid these places. In fact, these places become headache for the urban planners. These are nightmare places in as much as cities become nightmare cities. They become objects of planning for a better future of the city so that these neighbourhoods can be cleaned or altogether removed – for instance by constructing a road that will cut through such neighbourhood or by relocating the residents of these popular neighbourhoods to distant parts of the city, so that a supermarket can be built, or an office complex, or a cultural complex in the cleared area.

Yet these popular neighbourhoods in time have built social infrastructure of solidarity, care, and informal

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education. These neighbour-hoods have generated income through petty and informal jobs, and have been the training ground of social leadership. In this way, which is only one of the several instances, our future making practices happen in our present time, and enable the present time to connect with the future. Likewise, popular leaders of the city like mayors and city elders try to improve social infrastructure of solidarity by promoting clubs and associations and other forms of people's organization including cultural platforms; encourage social leadership among women and youth belonging to lower or subaltern classes of society; adopt, implement, and strengthen schemes for spread of education and public health; harness resources for the improvement of the living conditions of the popular classes of the city; ensure security of the vulnerable sections of population; negotiate and build relations with migrants; and most importantly educate the urban subaltern masses to assume leadership of self-governance. These all gesture towards making our urban future robust. These also enthuse and enable the popular classes to resist the mindless developmental schemes which often ruin the condition of the former and put them "off the map" of development. Resistance by subaltern classes becomes the most significant element in democratizing the city and suggesting the possibility of a better urban future. Popular neighbour-hoods become the building blocks of a dialogic spatial order of the city. The notion of infrastructure is capacious. It allows us to look into the strategies of urban popular classes to get on with life and combat adversities in

a new way.

Promises of better future can work in negative and positive - both ways. When they fail, they turn people into cynic entities. Hopelessness becomes widespread. Resistance declines. The situation breeds gangsterism and proto-fascist mentality. This happens particularly when there is a simultaneous decline of radical politics and weakening of popular mobilization and alliance of popular classes.

On the other hand, when promises are kept even when not fully but in a major manner, hopes soar. Solidarities strengthen. Bonds reinforce. Daily dialogues between horizontal solidarities and vertical solidarities mark urban life. Trust reinforces; trust network also widens. Trust and dialogue become the basis of a new form of public power - a combination of horizontal and vertical forms of power. Promise of a better future is actualized in the reality of the improvement of daily life of popular classes. The banal becomes the basis of the exceptional. In most of the illustrative instances of radical democratic governance of the cities, the administration inheres the features mentioned in the preceding lines. The form of such governance may be a new form of urban leftism or in the current language, left-populism. Marx had said of workers' cooperatives that under a capitalist order cannot bring socialism, but these cooperatives are the training schools for the battle for socialism. Likewise, the measures taken by the Leftist or Left-populist mayors cannot make the city just given the unequal relations between countryside and the city, south and the north, agriculture and industry, extractive practices

and digitized finance, and global divisions running along regions, religions, races, ecologies, economies, and gender. However the said measures are the training ground for moving towards a just urban future, which will be a common future. Leftist mayors of Thiruvananthapuram, Athens, Beijing, Santiago, Barcelona, Ankara, and several other cities in both South and the North have added to the present history of the urban a rich repertoire of reconstructive, dialogic, and just practices. Women mayors are still a minority. However, these populist and Leftist mayors have initiated new housing policies, transportation networks favouring the city commoners, expanded city facilities and the common properties of the city, and significantly steered their cities towards being “cities of refuge”.

The basis of a modest, realistic, and patient working towards a better and just urban future as reflected among others in these positive trends, is the understanding that urban temporality is plural. Temporality is plural in two senses: globally urban time is not same everywhere. Singapore’s rhythm will not be of Kolkata. Likewise, within a city time does not function in a homogeneous way. Urban geography is often fragmented. Time could not therefore be anything but heterogeneous. The bourgeoisie connects cities in homogeneous time to serve the interests of capital. Think of the temporal connections between the cities of Los Angeles, Singapore, and Sydney and way the clock operates and binds the economic schedules of these cities. Yet time works in popular lives of these cities in heterogeneous

manner. The first accomplishment of a radical urban future will be freeing cities from the prison of homogeneity of urban time. Urban time moves towards the future along differential rhythm, tempo, dynamics – nonetheless predicated by visions of justice. Digital technology with new logic can facilitate the arrival of such flexibility and operation of heterogeneity instead of strapping in the cold logic of homogeneous time.

In a similar way, past is layered in the present time of cities in different ways. The concept of a palimpsest city conveys a powerful image of urban areas being constantly rewritten and restructured over time, with layers of previous historical development visible beneath the current cityscape. Contemporary city planning and social structures are built upon, and often influenced by, older physical and cultural remnants. Cities often accumulate history in layers, with new development overwriting but never completely erasing past influences.

Yet the concept does not tell us adequately the dynamics of the historical formation of the city. In some cases, traces of the violent and conflictive past of a city are buried by the dynamics of a transformative present, a revolutionary upheaval, or a remorseless working on the maladies of the past. It is a melancholia pervading every family, street, generation, even a work of art. In other cases, the city may cling on to the memory of its radical past and live endlessly under the pathos of a past whose promises have not been redeemed. Conversely, this past may force a moribund present to rise and work towards redeeming the promise of historical legacy. There is a time when nothing

**PAST IS LAYERED IN THE PRESENT TIME OF CITIES IN DIFFERENT WAYS. THE CONCEPT OF A PALIMPSEST CITY CONVEYS A POWERFUL IMAGE OF URBAN AREAS BEING CONSTANTLY REWRITTEN AND RESTRUCTURED OVER TIME, WITH LAYERS OF PREVIOUS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT VISIBLE BENEATH THE CURRENT CITYSCAPE.**

happens, a time with no internal necessity forcing it into action. On the other, there is a time of conflict induced by time's internal contradiction to produce the city's development and an accelerated journey towards a revamped life. This dialectic may not be always pronounced. It may appear marginally, somewhere, intermittently, and may never arrive fully. The times are never fully integrated. Forms of temporality do not achieve union. They co-exist, but they do not necessarily relate to each other. They may be interlaced in a connection which is localized, momentary, apparently not firmly grounded. Time in such cases is marked by an internal dissociation, an unresolved alterity. In still some other cases, national traditions, heritages, and promises, orient a city's present. The possibilities of the working of time are many. But on this there is no doubt that the interfaces of different times mark urban temporality. The daily practices of rebuilding the future do tell upon the secular feature of urban planning, the continuous rebuilding of the city, and the possibility of constituting public power along popular and dialogic lines, where bio-political issues of public life, that is the life of the lower classes, prompt a different kind of self-governance. There is thus no ideal city, no modular city, no timeless imagination of a city, no city that is not predicated and conditioned city, hence no "untimely city".

In this sense, knowing a city involves unknowing. But it means also, being aware of how time plays its part in forming and framing historical knowledge of a city. Likewise, a city's imagination of itself is again predicated by

fractured temporality. Making and unmaking of a city similarly are not unbroken processes. What is equally important: these three registers - knowing, imagining, and making the city - they all imply subject positions. They are important tools to understand a city and how a city works out its own future. They are however delicate tools to be handled with care and rigour. However, they by themselves are not transformative processes.

Of course, the city cannot think of itself as an oasis or an independent island or a city-state of yesteryears, separated from the destiny of the countryside, or its hinterland, or the trajectory of the nation, and global linkages. Scales cross each other in urban existence. Times are intertwined. The city negotiates its future through these interlinked trajectories. Only the money banks and corporate giants think that the future of “their” cities will be safe with ensuring security of “their” cities. Yet, pandemics, climate change, massive economic downturn over an entire region, large wars, or a spreading agrarian insurgency prove, no city can live and prosper by itself alone. Future is interlinked. Urban future is connected to the future of humankind, or more accurately global future, planetary future.

The argument must be deepened, and we must go back to the point where from we started. Given the crucial position of southern cities and southern urban experiences in the general history of urbanism, urban future depends on the way cities of the South will give shape to their own future. From the points of forms of labour, life forms, patterns of solidarity and care, fate of popular

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power, and bio-politics as practised by the lower classes - southern urbanism will influence and substantially determine the trajectory of humanity's urban future.

Once again, therefore, studying and recognizing fault lines in city making is important. Some of the urban relations are necessarily antagonistic. Collective claim makings make justice a contentious issue. The subaltern city is arraigned against the corporate, neo-liberal city. Black urbanism must contend with the hegemony of white urbanism. Black urbanism cannot exist as a pure cultural phenomenon and cannot co-exist with white urbanism. Likewise, the postcolonial city of the South is historically situated against the modular reality of the Northern metropolis. Equally importantly, the city is at times divided from within. There is a South in the North, in as much as there is a North in the South. The future making practices of the lower classes cannot therefore afford to drop the sword of contention. There is no synthetic city, or a synthetic urban future, or even an inherently sympathetic city. The antagonism of the present shapes the form of the future. Social classes are getting ready for the final battle ahead. Muffled beats of an impending social war reach the ears as we watch the unsteady ground underneath us.

In this context it is important to point out that since the city was always conceived of a flattened time, theorists of the city never thought of the city as an entity caught in a social war - an entity that foments further the ongoing war, and thus fragments time. City appears in scholarly imagination like a life in a state of nature that requires a

public authority. Sanitized theorists never reconciled to the fact that the continuing civil war was actually a reverse projection of that state of nature onto the city. Yet the city has often looked like a war of all against all, against the peace of the commonwealth. The history of the city is littered with bodies of the victims of “citizen massacres”. In these massacres handy instruments of daily life became weapons to kill. The city hence thinks that as a great invention of human society it must be the prophet armed. Riots are socialized in this way. Civil war is normalized. War continues as the essential frame of urban life. Securitisation and governmental technologies of managing the war-like urban life become the two principal pillars of making the city a place where we must live howsoever precariously.

Once we accept social war as an essential part of our urbanity, we shall realize that the context of social war makes dialogues on issues of justice an urgent part of the future making practices of our time unless we want our cities to be drowned in bloody battles over claims and counter-claims. The relative failure of legal logic in containing, governing, and solving urban conflicts makes a dialogic order an imperative of our time. Hence justice will be contingent, historically predicated. We shall come to the specific issue of urban justice as this manifesto ends.

### III

Here we reach the crux of city making and the fundamental stake that the ecology-economy relationship has in the making of our urban future. In the making and unmaking of a city there are internalities and externalities, which provide the frame of urban re-composition. By internalities we mean changes in urban class composition, class struggles, popular movements and rebellions, economic relations in the city, land use pattern, claim making dynamics, urban rules and regulations, urban zoning, and social infrastructure of the city. By externalities we mean climate, ecology, epidemics, logistical networks connecting the city to world trade and commerce, urban corridors, links with contiguous urban settlements, perhaps a war, and of course the nation form in which the city is located. The internalities and externalities however do not have a clear separating boundary between them. They intermesh. Abstracting them in two categories is only to help our thinking.

Ironically, while we remember the once economic prowess of a city, and history books and fictions abound with such legends, our urban memory distances itself from its ecological roots from which some of the most vulnerable landscapes have sprung. Mumbai, Kolkata, Jakarta, Kathmandu, are examples of such vulnerable cities. Yet urban land making still proceeds in these cases on silt, mud, marsh, water bodies, sand, and hills with brittle formation. Secrets of property making hide the ecological aspect, while law, bureaucracy, money, and technology occupy our

attention in the continuing process of city making. The amnesia extracts revenge. Ecology reaches the body of economy below the skin. Tall buildings often lose balance after some years and lean to one side. They fall like nine pins in case of tremors even as high rises emerge on a routine basis in low-lying or hilly cities and towns. New satellite townships are constructed as part of the global information economy with promise of green living and the pursuit of a homogeneous, smooth space of an urban life. In this eternal land-recycling exercise, the city is in the cusp of an intriguing play of economy and ecology condensed in the fluctuating category of rent. What is more, this play of ecology and economy in some cases takes historically the form of an “inland empire” building by a metropolis, particularly a port-city. The phrase “inland empire” of course refers to the metropolitan area and region inland of and adjacent to coastal Southern California, centering around the cities of San Bernardino and Riverside, and bordering Los Angeles County and Orange County to the west and San Diego County to the south. The phrase however is evocative. The image of a city expanding in the form of enclaves, townships, corridors, new zones, and securing supply sources and routes, captures the process of an empire-making city. More than reaching out across the sea to the greater world, the city expands inward. It gobbles up the countryside, as if the city does not need the hinterland. The city creates suburbs for its own needs, otherwise, suburbs have no reason for their separate existence. Commercial activities in an ecological milieu briefly described above dictate the logistical dimension of

**THE IMAGE OF A CITY EXPANDING IN THE FORM OF ENCLAVES, TOWNSHIPS, CORRIDORS, NEW ZONES, AND SECURING SUPPLY SOURCES AND ROUTES, CAPTURES THE PROCESS OF AN EMPIRE-MAKING CITY.**

the city. The port, railway junction, lay out of streets, commercial marts, stockyards and warehouses, banks and other financial centres, information processing units, and the central business district form a distinct zone co-existing with the “black” or native quarters in other parts of the city. Meanwhile the city’s modern cosmopolitanism originating in the early colonial time now thrives with arrival of new merchants, adventurers, money makers, fortune hunters, vagabonds, technocrats, characters of entertainment industry, and various distressed and dispossessed groups of people. The colonial city and postcolonial developments add to the existing fault lines. The process is based on the interplay of ecology and economy.

But this is not the only way in which a city is made and re-made. Global warming and ensuing climate change are bringing in “never-before-recorded” temperatures and rainfall volumes that result into flash floods submerging large parts of the city. Growth of new towns, smart cities, and extended urbanization marked by various infrastructural projects cause greater environmental damages to the city in the long run. Development and modernization of the city go together aided by infrastructural projects and financial assistance from international agencies like World Bank (WB) or the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Real estate development and the ever-increasing concrete surface, flyovers, metro railway tracks, highways, expansion of roads, construction of bypasses, high rise buildings, film and entertainment studios, special economic zones mainly for digital industry,

data centres, super speciality hospitals, university zones, and not the least hotels and other hospitality business units feature new urban development. Concrete constructions clog water channels. Not only that, in cities of the South poor sewerage facilities, rampant use of chemicals, and continuous mix of putrid waste with water lead to widespread presence of arsenic in sub-soil water leading to diseases among urban populations using water for various purposes including cooking. Children die in these towns due to pollution of drinking water. Water's infrastructure is minimal as land is converted to various "modern" urban uses, and no one is ready to bear the cost of providing water's infrastructure. Mixed land-use pattern and the rising demand for homes and commercial buildings (with planning for environmental protection always lagging behind real estate development) at the cost of water bodies, green space, vacant areas and grazing lands of contiguous villages, push the city towards further environmental disaster. In short, infrastructural development and urban growth are at odds with a city's ecological vulnerability. "Urban heat island effect" due to reduced ventilation, heat-trapping buildings, and limited vegetation add to the paradox. Increasing population pressure, ever-increasing volume of solid waste, and changes in land use pattern add to ecological vulnerability. Yet the city survives and economically thrives on the basis of reprocessing ecological attributes of a city.

The interplay of ecology and economy makes rent a critical factor in urban economy. Rent accrues from the "recycling of land". Land recycling is today one of the most

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critical factors of urban economy dictating the dynamics of re-composition of a city. Yet in discussions of urban land, we are hesitant to probe the relation between ecology, land, and rent. The materiality of land still eludes our urban understanding. But modern urban economy is unthinkable without taking in account the factor of rent. Recycling of land means renewed access to land with greater productivity due to greater investment in land and development of infrastructure contiguous to a particular land. Thus, establishment of a new town and all other developments (like new connections associated with the growth of a new town) are a case of massive recycling of land. The ecological factor in the recycling of land is present all through. Evicted migrants are on the run from one place in the city to another and administrative decisions to evict the squatters are contingent on the “price” of land. Who are these migrants? Many of them are the ecologically marginalized people from the urban hinterlands who arrive in great metropolises in the wake of ecological disasters to find one or another job – be it domestic service or rickshaw pulling, or auto-rickshaw driving, or earth cutting and digging, or a small mechanic’s job, or a construction labourer’s work, or day care job. Or, they continue beyond the city, which will be then their transit station only. In this way, many such migrant women finally vanish in the flesh market of a city.

Commerce, industry, retail business, recreation, religion, education, health care, and administration are features guiding land use pattern in the city besides the

“self-explanatory” uses, such, as residence, slums, burial ground, cremation ground, tram and bus depot, park, tank, and vacant land. Squatters’ colonies and places do not feature in maps. Nor, is there any indication in usual studies that the rental dimension of land may have influenced its use, or the “quality of land” has dictated the land use. Likewise, urbanists do not anticipate the spatial organization of informal convenience stores now dotting the postcolonial city including the newly expanded areas servicing the clientele from eight in the morning to ten at night. But think of their importance. These are distribution hubs – the congealed symbol of both space and time, a response to the expansion of work hours and de-structuring of work routines of workers many of whom are migrants. These convenience stores are run very often by migrants themselves.

The urban economy often is no longer an industrial economy. It is a platform economy, where workers (such as lorry drivers, delivery boys and girls, time keepers at toll plazas on highways, guards, employees in supermarkets, cooks at food joints ready to supply food at instant notice, workers in hotels, construction industry, waste cleaning, and above all in care, entertainment, and domestic services) in thousands make a beeline to the city to return to these marginal areas at night. Alternatively, we can say that these workers are normalizing the expansion of the city taking place on the deathbed of a pristine ecology. These convenience stores and pathways of joining the labour market by thousands of young men and women are a case of what can be called “counter-logistics” – counter to the

corridors and developmental routes the city has developed over decades. Ecology plays a double role in this dynamic: a facilitator as well as a hindrance.

“Counter-logistics” is the defence strategy of the subaltern population in this ecological quagmire, since their own position is one of ecological marginality.

The great site of the interface of ecology and economy is the issue of waste, which is seen as a marker of Southern cities, or a “Southern” problem in a city of the North. However, the early history of modern cities is characterised by municipal anxiety about waste and a variety of throw-away practices. Historians tell us of findings - on riverbeds, below demolished buildings, in extant artbooks of the time, and in archival documents - of ash-theft, tax for waste-collection, figures of dustmen and night-men collecting nightsoil and clearing pits, remnants of sewn, stitched, and mended clothing, or broken teacups gathered in one place and lying below the ground. Modern history of many a city is marked by violence over control over waste and waste management. The way waste is produced, managed, reprocessed, or allowed to mingle and vanish in time as “waste”, raises the question of interrelations of bodies, boundaries, and waste. How does waste entangle bodies, reconfiguring boundaries and barriers? It is important to remember that in the South technologies of waste are corporeal. Historically, configurations of waste and bodies have operated as core strategies for the reproduction of colonial and extractive systems. Waste management has produced toxic multi-

species relationships. Colonial economy embodied waste through producing human disabilities. It altered life and death dynamics. It produced the figure of a wasted being whose suffering, mourning, and extinction became the feature of colonized society. It transformed death into a wasted life. The challenge for cities of the South is to unearth the social relations around waste, so that realities of waste, decay, and contagion can be transformed into sites of resistance and generating conditions for alternative encounters, ecologies, and new social relations.

Nonetheless, it is important to inquire: Given that waste is irrevocably related to land, are waste and such other materialities then a case of incomplete urbanization or one where rent plays the role of Ceaser in the making and unmaking of a city – a process in which ecology’s critical role is still largely untheorized? Is it because, we are still unable to fully grasp the significance of the irremediably extractive nature of economy’s relation to ecology? In any case, given the fondness of the urban elite for greening the city, we must acknowledge that while the “right to the city” is universal, only, this right is perpetually negotiated, accessed, and institutionalized in a contentious manner.

Three questions emerge in this perspective of the interplay of economy and ecology:

(a) If new cities or towns are coming up at the expense of old cities and towns with some of the latter becoming ghost cities or towns, and the metamorphosis continues within the body of a city itself as some parts decline and some flourish, is this how the urban future will be made? What then will be the principles of this economy of cost or sacrifice? How are

we to negotiate the bind?

(b) Also, if at stake in what we term as “urban metamorphosis” is the rent question which acts as the basis of recycling of land without which the making/unmaking of a city cannot materialize, how are to conceptualize the economy of the urban future? Extractive activities related to land, mining, water, data, body, air – finally must produce rent and interest (though it may be released in various forms). Classically, land produces rent, credit produces interest, and production produces profit. All are forms of surplus. But city-making demonstrates the process of rent extraction that envelops the entire economy. Extraction defines territories of governance. With every asset of life subjected to extraction ranging from human body to air, land, and water, it is extraction now that defines the threshold of habitability. Urban accumulation takes the form of rent in a massive way. The urban as consequence is now overbuilt, overtaxed, overused, vastly over-leveraged, and under serviced. The city produces wastelands. Hence, the inquiry: what happens to land in these deserted settlements, or as opposed to that, land recycled through say establishment of malls or a data complex? How to avoid or bypass the irreducible question of rent in envisioning a city of the future? Hence, how to make the urban habitable?

(c) Finally, what will be our way of conceptualizing the notion of “urban climate”, which is caught in the crossroads of ecology, extraction, climate hazard, unequal access to urban resources such as water or land, with differential fortunes of economic professions, leading to an all-round

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precariousness of life? In other words, how to conceptualize the unstable dynamics of the interlinked phenomena of ecology and economy as we envision a desirable urban future? Remember, popular political intervention in this context marked by ecological marginality is of no small importance in guiding a city's future.

These questions emerging from our study is important, because our dominant consciousness about urban development – from the magnificent to the apocalyptic – can be sourced among others to “abstraction of the city as a huge, isolated problem”. Only, popular politics defies this given abstraction. Farmers converge on the city to demonstrate the unequal relation between the city and the countryside. Think of the massive farmers’ protest around Delhi in 2020-21, or the regular protest assemblies of farmers in the European capitals. Popular politics negotiates this paradox growing out of the abstraction. The paradox cannot be wished away, nor can be wished away popular interventions in scientific urban procedures of administration, to which we can give the name, urban governmentality.

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## IV

City is where the migrant continuously arrives. Migrant arrival unsettles the city as the migrant crosses boundaries within the already bordered city. The presence of the migrant forces the city to face the reality of its own fractious existence. Realities of borders come out in the open against the ideal of a cosmopolitan city. The border is a site of ungovernable population flows. Borders in a city manifest as lines on the city map, at times a crossing, at times a marker separating the civilized from the unruly. They also mark economic zones. They function as corridors in the form of highways cutting the city in parts. Finally, they indicate urban frontiers inhabited by mixed populations of various origins engaged in a similar variety of work. In a great variety of cases the southern cities bear the imprints of the requirements of the colonial administration of cities, and the increasingly interconnected urban economy with dispersed hinterlands. Yet, these urban borders are undergoing a profound change in meaning - from the outer limits of urban territories to peripheral zones, dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people, and things is happening and controlled. In this situation, probably the urban slum, the refugee camp, and the border zone may be the prime locus of cosmopolitanism.

Boundary-making exercises within a city remain, to date, one of the most intractable difficulties in imagining a cosmopolitan city. The cosmopolitan city pretends that it is not a territorial entity, or that it is an entity whose internal

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structure does not have territorial rationale. Not that the idea of a cosmopolitan city, a cosmopolis, is based on a denial of the institution of such internal borders, in fact there is a strange acquiescence of the cosmopolitans to the reality of borders. Yet cosmopolitanism avoids any direct encounter with the reality of territory which indeed is the kernel of the city. Dedicated, left-liberal urbanists think that notwithstanding these borders inhabitants of a city can become members of a single urban community, on the grounds of belonging to same town/city, and inhabiting the same urban space. However, cosmopolitanism as an ambitious ideal is put in its place by population movements. The institution of the border proliferates in various forms and multiplies differences to cope with migrants. These differences congeal the anxiety produced by the fragmented geography of the city. Migrant hamlets strike at the heart of the city as an ideal of an integrated community. At the same time, they also signal ever-new places of intermingling of peoples of different backgrounds. Borders and boundaries thus both prohibit and provoke human mobility and entanglement. This double function of borders is not new and should not surprise us. In the ancient and medieval days, peoples of various countries met and intermingled in bazaars, trading towns, ports, and harbours. It was an everyday practice, and nobody thought that this practice produced a cosmopolitan society. It is only after the rise of nation-states and modern cities that borders have become an issue for urban governmentality, especially with the more recent securitization and digitization of border spaces and urban identities. Philosophers face a challenging task,

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namely how to conceptually make the two ideas and if we like realities - border and a cosmopolis - sit with each other. Policy solutions run ahead of philosophical thought. These solutions are in the form of differentiating lines that will be never clearly drawn. They will overlap and superimpose on each other. They are re-purposed to manage, modulate, calibrate, and regulate differences (of composition, territorial identity, control, etc.) and passages through these differences. Such passages may be of people, information, money, commodities, and cultural and social artifacts. These passages are mediations through which the institution of a city becomes a reality. Much of what is understood as cosmopolitanism depends on the management of these differences, in other words, on how these intra-city borders are managed, they are passed.

The rival demands of security and flexibility produce contradictions. The figure of the migrant acquires the status of the abnormal in this paradoxical milieu. Bodies and borders characterize the interdependent but opposite poles of the global mobilities of our time. These opposite poles signify the specific dynamics in the global relation between labour and power. They show that while the administration of migratory flows to the city seeks to control population movements in a way so that they remain congruent with the existing regime of differential zones of mobility, the mobile subjects refuse to be governed in such a manner. They refuse to be the docile subjects. They do not measure up to the standard of modern, disciplined labour. The sudden emergence of the migrant in a labour market

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and subsequent disappearance from the latter is a feature of Southern cities. Migrant labour also congeals in its figure metropolis-periphery relations.

Yet, as suggested earlier, the great consequence of migration to the city is that people are thrown together. “Thrown togetherness” is a new term. But this term says exactly what as an image it is supposed to convey. Think what happens to, say, urban citizenship as various people who most probably did not know one another before the other day when they arrived are now thrown in a place called a city after they have crossed all sorts of borders and boundaries to reach the place? We know this condition by the term, precarity. Precarity and cosmopolitanism are conjoined by the reality of southern urbanism.

The framing of the problematic here is propelled by a certain understanding, namely, that the current story of the city is not one of seamless hyper-urbanization, although the impact of urbanization in terms of resource transfer and perceivable increase in employment opportunities (particularly in the unorganized sectors) is far greater than what official figures suggest – at least in several cities of the developing world. There is also a deep-seated contradiction between the two images of the city—as an engine of economic growth and as an inadequate and extremely contested and conflictive civic space for interaction among its inhabitants. The paradox is stark today as Southern cities begin to appear as sites of continuous fragmentation and gentrification after the advent of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. We can notice the following features:

(a) infrastructure is re-organizing the city in a way

that not only fragments work and reproduces the old social conditions, but calls for the permanent presence of the migrant as the intolerable but necessary factor in this process;

(b) this reorganization of the city is also a reorganization of space that depends on a rent economy;

(c) yet, in terms of urban governance, the reorganized city (always in the process of reorganization) has a permanent problem posed by the anomalous figure of the migrant, who cannot be dispensed with and who cannot be settled; and

(d) consequent to all these, the city, which produces violence, struggles, agitations, and movements, is an extremely contentious place marked by groups of people fighting for resources, space, rights, claims, and justice.

In short, the migrant is forever the abnormal, forever a threat to urban security. While no modern city can do without migrant labour, in most cities the theme of security/insecurity frames the native-migrant relation. For the native, the migrant is the source of insecurity. For the migrant, the city itself is an insecure place. The policeman watches the migrant on the road; the migrant similarly must watch the policeman, the gangster, the extortionist, and the developer who is ever on the prowl for land from which the migrant will be evicted and land will be developed. Nonetheless crime survives policing methods, indeed flourishes with police help, and the entire pattern of storage and circulation of commodities including human organs breeds crime. Slum dwellers are the carriers. They are the

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foot soldiers, guards of formal and informal warehouses, and at the same time they are subjects of protection rackets.

The problem of urban security then is linked to the reality of police planet where urban configuration of police power forms a critical component, and *de jure* membership of a city (citizenship) is further linked to security and the police as if in a chain. The paradox is that while police function to provide security to the population depends on the former's ability to secure territory, this is essentially a function of military nature. Hence two results: first, the city is featured by a civil-military continuum, it is never a purely a civil entity; second, the task of providing protection to the population results in police and the people constituting each other.

Thus, illegal immigrant labour, a refugee who has been refused asylum, the stateless – they will never be the subject of *de jure* protection. Race, caste, religion, gender – these not only compound the problem of security by accentuating the sub-legal/illegal nature of the existence of a large part of urban population, these also prove time and again to be the axes along which police power operates. What will be the way to think of an urban future where race riots will be relegated to the pre-history of our city? In the task of a thorough restructuring of the meaning and apparatus of security, the word policing either must be dropped to the dustbin of outlawed words or must acquire a new meaning and decentralized expression.

Fortunately, urban imagination of the security problematic is not only around the phenomenon of *insecurity*, but also at times built around love, compassion,

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and solidarity. Is the theme of *City Lights* a denial of the real world? Love, compassion, solidarity are virtues of the lives of subaltern or the lower classes. Or at least these are common virtues of society to which these classes can claim to be having as others. Right at this moment as this manifesto is drafted, cities across the United States are showing the two realities mentioned above – (a) police power trying to straighten the society along some fictive line (as answer to the question, who is an American?) and (b) the power of solidarity and fellow feeling cutting through boundaries of colour, ethnicity, and country of origin. Recall in this context also the race riots that pulverized cities and town of France in 2005 and 2023 particularly Paris and Marseilles. Both are realities emerging from the interlocked urban world of security/insecurity. Security for the state is insecurity of the popular classes. Our urban future will depend on how rigorously the cities will delve into the issue of security affecting people's lives.

The importance of this issue cannot be exaggerated. Displacement of population, destruction of cities, and homelessness mark cities along a large chunk of the South. From Beirut to Gaza, Aleppo to Kabul, Khartoum to Kandahar – cities have witnessed destruction and uprooting of millions in the wake of civil wars and outright wars of aggression much like the old colonial wars. In such condition, resilience of victim populations is the greatest asset in any reconstruction of these war-torn cities. Yet this can never be enough. In the neoliberal reconstruction of these cities, tasks of return, relief, rehabilitation, and

resettlement of the displaced are most likely to be accorded only secondary importance in financial plans, and only to the extent they become parts of a great financial bonanza. There the greatest concern of the tycoons will be to make the plan viable, in other words, reconstructive investment must beget profit from day one. Marshall Plan and reconstruction of cities of Europe happened in another age.

Meanwhile, in such a situation at times of hopelessness, what will happen to the mobile bodies? In the philosopher's language these mobile bodies will be compelled "to live dangerously". Biopolitics from below emerges in such precarious background. One of principal gradients in this politics is a strong sense of practical ethics. The migrant presence in subaltern neighbourhoods, presence of informal sex workers, truck and carriage drivers, small shopkeepers, maids and informal care givers, machine tool workers in small lathe machine factories, and the solidarity, conviviality, and a sense of collective responsibility among the lower depths form the core of bio-politics from below. Protection takes the place of rights. Women in neighbourhoods of subaltern classes cross borders of various types. Their fragile mobilities stretch borders. The solidarity one finds in the urban slums, refugee camps, and the informal settlements may very well be the expression of the difficult-to-understand concept, namely, practical ethics. The refugee, the paperless, and the stateless are at the heart of urban security. They are the outsider, the abnormal, of whom the settled city is terrified. They are the sex-workers, the meandering laborers surviving precariously, the informal worker whose relation to the city is informal.

## V

Imaginariness of the urban always prizes the future. The urban, it is told, is the natural place for imagination of the future. The imaginaries of future carry imprint of the individual, the class, also the time, when these imaginaries took to their wings to appear in the city as urban subjects. People confront their own imaginations in the form of objects. These imaginaries are often products of desire, for the city is nothing if it is not a machine that endlessly produces desires. The philosopher tells, desiring machines obey a set of rules governing association. Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. And further, desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows. Capitalism transforms the city into a place where fragmentary objects will be found, also a place that will connect the urban subject to imagine their possession, to desire their possession. The process is relentless and the city becomes a desiring kingdom. Neoliberalism under which the society becomes a market aims to make everyone a participant in market activities. This is enabled through turning the urban subject into a desiring subject. This has also brought about an urban turn in our thinking – the urban which will be the final place of our desires, lives, and deaths. We cannot think of desire, life, and death without the context of the city.

It will be instructive to note how studies in capitalism have had to negotiate this “urban turn” through

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decades. The modern city in our theoretical awareness emerged with Frederick Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1844. Engels had squarely linked the city with the condition of the working class. The focus was on the condition of the working class and the city was the site of depraved life condition of the worker. The next significant turn came with Walter Benjamin's writings, which as we know, had focused on the city as a place of desire of commodities produced by capitalism and a place of the wanderer with little roots who keeps on watching and desiring the commodities. The shift thus started from the site of class to the site of commodities and commodification. It was followed by the great urban theorist Henry Lefebvre who had focused on the city as a produced space. The space produced had an actuality and a possibility: it was a bourgeois space, but also a place with the possibility of becoming a common. And in recent time, David Harvey's works have asked us to emphasize the city as one having what we may call the rights dimension. Perhaps the bleakest perspective in this history of the urban turn in our thinking came from Rem Koolhaas' imagination of the generic city in the time of what some say as one of "ultimate capitalism", when the city does not labour under the load of historic legacy, and can continuously reinvent itself according to the needs of the time. Koolhaas presents different figures of the Generic City, including Shenzhen, Shanghai, Singapore, also Lagos. Singapore embodies the transformation from colonial relic to a laboratory for the 21st century city. The city represents the ideological production in the past three decades of its pure form uncontaminated by surviving

contextual remains. In *Singapore Songlines* Koolhaas critically discusses the Singapore Model as the “Portrait of a Potemkin metropolis”, and points out that the planning regime has kept pace with the rapidly growing population by perpetually uprooting, leading to a state of permanent cultural disorientation. As Koolhaas said, from one single, teeming Chinatown, Singapore has become a city with among others a Chinatown. The city’s tabula rasa developmental logic took out any perceivable contextual background, adding only glamorous foreground. It became a model for rapid urbanization in the South – perhaps elsewhere too - where priorities may have ranged from issues of tackling food inadequacy, mending defective infrastructure, and coping with flash floods that continue to shape the reality of many cities of the world. Singapore, Koolhaas pointed out, developed by betting on qualities that rarely push cities to greatness along historical lines. It implemented a rigid, authoritarian ethos that appealed more to the immediate conditions than to the cosmopolitan lifestyles of urban elites. The city-state renowned for its prosperous economy, the banning of chewing gum and effective strategies against crime remains the odd man out within a broader geographical context accustomed to hardship and scarcity. The generic city in this way permanently reinvents itself, from top to bottom, without any concern for its own identity background. “The Eden” (The garden in the paradise), Koolhaas says ironically, “does not precede development, it follows it”. “Identity” of the city, the theorist Livio Boni tells us in a commentary on

Koolhaas, “is a fiction that can be changed according to circumstances”. But this seeming ability of the city to function in the way it likes and invent itself hides not only its function as a special economic zone, conditioned by global market forces, but also hides the labour regime on which the generic city stands.

The generic representation of the city is at odds with postcolonial studies of the city, which for instance, ask us to see it as a site of the politics of the governed. The postcolonial city is not a bourgeois city. It is characterized by endless negotiations between the subaltern, unorganized masses populating the slums and the governing class. It is a feature of postcolonial politics – a feature reinforced by popular, if you will, populist politics, and electoral democracy. Through these little more than one hundred and fifty years we can note the increasing dissociation of the city and a class angle. More fundamentally it is a dissociation of two dimensions: city as a site of production and city as a site of circulation. The urban turn emerges almost as an accomplished and sovereign reality, as the city increasingly appears as a site of circulation, hence a non-class site, almost autonomous by itself.

Today, the inter-linkages between urban policy, governance, forms of labour, migration, urban rent, and neoliberalism as the political ideology of urbanization are getting clearer. City along with sea and the ocean are redefining the frontiers of migration. These links define urban accounts today. They speak of neoliberal growth built on migrant labour that reshapes the space-making practices on which the city rests. Yet more than any other theme the

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focus on the outsider, the migrant, will tell us the implications of the links just mentioned. Thus, only with the eyes of an adversary of the city, and the migrant figure is an adversary, we can speak meaningfully of a neoliberal milieu, and reflect on the critical questions of our time, such as, what is a new town? What is a service village? What is an airport city, or who is an urban refugee or an urban homeless person? What is the true significance of phenomena like urban renewal, urban recycling, rental economy, and the servicing of a city with the migrant's body?

The ultimate city may be based on a desire to do away with the encumbrances of the past, and it may dream of becoming the "ultimate" urban form, that is to say in its modular form it will be able to adapt to a variety of conditions to come out as a "city", as "urban". Yet as critics tell us with instances of how such visions of an ultimate city have murdered new dreams and visions of a variety of urban forms. Delirious New York, to refer to Koolhaas again, built around the Manhattan, realizes the concept of the grid, which will be able to house all innovations within its grid-like existence. Welcoming human density and adopting technological innovations, the grid allows a mythical laboratory for the invention and testing of a swirling lifestyle, namely the culture of congestion. Thereby, precisely at the moment Manhattan had found the final form of city making it had destroyed other forms, other visions. New York has become a graveyard of every utopia of comprehensive public control over the urban structure.

Yet buildings in New York do not produce dream, but they crush or crash every single one of the dreams.

Yet escaping the tentacles of finance, capital, and market induced dreams, innovations, and futuristic undertakings, there are other dreams and outlines of a desirable future that have appeared in colonial and postcolonial histories, and other radical histories. For instance, the historian of Red Vienna tells us, how Red Vienna was not the model for a housing program, but rather for a more just urban society. The individual apartments in the housing blocks were to be only a small part of the actual dwelling space provided by the city. They provided each family with its own hygienic, private living space. The individual unit was embedded in the larger socio-spatial matrix of the city, which in Red Vienna was considered the full measure of the proletarian home. In the brief period from 1923 to 1934 the broad institutional network and 400 new buildings erected throughout Vienna created social and spatial environments that conferred new political and economic status on Vienna's working class. These were testimony to the political control that the urban poor of Vienna had acquired over the shape and use of space in their city. Red Vienna gave the Viennese workers what they had voted for. It showed them that they had a voice; that they counted. It showed them how their own power, as fully enfranchised citizens of a democratic society, could be deployed. Ultimately, it granted them "the right to the city," which meant that they had right not merely to live in the city, but to participate in shaping the latter according to their own needs and desires.

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Other dreams may have been more from banal to the maudlin, from the literary to children's drawings to the carnivalesque. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) spoke of a feminist utopia, in which the city we are habituated with was replaced by a place called Ladyland, and in which women ran everything and men were secluded - in a reverse mirror-image of the traditional practice of purdah. Women were aided by technology that enabled farming without hard labour; women scientists had discovered how to trap solar power and control the weather. It would be a sort of gender-based world where roles had been reversed with men locked away. Or, we have another kind of dream – this time a dream of Ustad Mangu, an illiterate horse carriage driver in a city, dreaming of his country free of colonial rule, and getting excited on hearing the news that a new constitution has been framed and published. We can have yet other visions of future. In 2024 October during the annual autumn festival in the city of Kolkata when giant marquees are set up with idols of goddesses inside, there was a commotion one evening in a small area of the city. People, mostly festival goers from suburbs and villages were rushing towards a large pavilion. The loudspeaker was blaring: Behold, after fifty years Kolkata would look like this, there will be helicopters on the rooftop of large public hospital buildings to ferry patients in emergency condition from their houses to the hospitals. Festival hopping public had gathered in the sprawling lawn where the marquees had been set up. People were watching a helicopter atop a tall structure. Then all on a sudden, they

noticed the humming sound of a possible drone nearby. Behold, inside a structure, a drone was flying up, roaming above the cordoned field for a while and then coming down to the ground. The announcement was going on: Fifty years later drones would watch the city and conduct surveillance, lest any inhabitant should pollute the city by throwing plastic bags and other material on the streets. The drone would identify the house-number and the resident would be duly summoned and penalized. Kolkata would be clean of plastics.

Dreams work in strange ways. The future was here, materializing in the desires exhibited in the carnivals.

In some sense then we are suggesting the methodological need to focus on the figure of an outsider to understand the dynamics of neoliberal growth and the city as a desiring machine. Remember, the city has been usually studied from inside, say from within finance, trade, or the software industry, or from within the world of urban culture. These internalist view make the neoliberal city appear without fail to be a great consumption site bubbling with the energy of extraction and newer revenue-gathering exercises. All the more therefore, methodologically we need this figure, the figure of the outsider, in making sense of urban transformation, and for lack of better words, the urban turn in our thinking. This critical figure of the outsider may be the migrant, or a sex worker, or an educationist, or a horse-driven carriage driver, or even a popular festivity designer.

## VI

Recall the statement made in the early part of this manifesto: In our imaginary of urban future, urban justice is the stake. The idea directs us to clarify the idea of urban justice. Clearly, we do not begin here with an abstract notion of justice, but with an effort to find out certain principles and issues emerging from contemporary urban world characterised by contentious claims, demands of the subaltern or lower classes, and the fragmented nature of this urban world occasioned by the faultlines in the structure of urbanity itself.

Self-mobilization of a collective of the subaltern classes such as a slum or an informal settlement is often for physical survival. Solidarity in all such cases is predicated by circumstances, such as a conjuncture of events and forces, intermittently appearing as crisis of life. It is thus an issue of practical ethics, which is anchored to life that is at stake, and not to any new moral economy or, for that matter, any chain of classical values. Indeed, the cry for justice is today louder as our urban world is caught in a series of crises and a situation of conjuncture in the wake of technological, political, economic, demographic, institutional, and ideological transformations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The neoliberal transformation of the city that has appropriated many of the colonial features of city-making has deepened the fractures. The call for justice emanating from the popular classes is anchored to these fault lines. To use the philosopher's

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insight, justice begins from addressing injustice. Such understanding promotes new collective goal of the subaltern classes based on a revised series of measurements or tests of what will be considered as urban development. For instance, will this development do away with racial, caste, gender, or religious injustices? Invariably, calls for justice will strengthen Identities and will put the latter into service of this new collective goal. This is how the horizontal form of power can complement vertical form of power in governing urban society.

Admittedly this is not the path of old urban revolutions, but one that integrates the idea of revolution that is a radical transformation of society with pragmatism or the term we have used, namely, “practical ethics.” This practicality guides reconstruction along the line of acknowledging the autonomies of society. Practical ethics or transformative practice hinged to pragmatism makes power efficient. Therefore, whatever name we give to this - decentralization, devolution, federalization - transformative power, while always having a general thrust and capacity, must combine with autonomy generating from collective practices of life. In this process, justice is transformed into a biopolitical argument. Life can be improved only when we know the impact of our life practices. Practical ethics inhering values of solidarity, care, protection, and responsibility is not simply a continuation of the rights argument framed in the language of “urban rights” or “right to the city”. It goes beyond the issue of rights, indeed moves away as it invokes new values emerging from the biopolitical existence of the popular classes.

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AND  
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THE DWELLING  
REALITIES**

Hence is the persistent question for city rulers, namely, how can the unruly settlements of the city be governed? Biopolitics from below erupts in the background of resultant policies, in-and-out condition of life that is life in limbo, enmeshing of production and circulation, the informality of the conditions of life and economy, and the dwelling realities. So, as we speak of “counter-conduct” as response to governmental conduct of urban affairs, we have to be aware of the spaces of such counter-conduct to locate the latter. These are not pure oppositional spaces. These cannot be easily termed also as clear spaces of resistance. For, they transcend the accepted binaries of resistance and obedience, utopia and dystopia, and direct practice of politics and politics through representation. They present a model of politics, which can be best termed as biopolitics – as practiced from below. Not only they throw light on the governing power, they throw light also on how people modify, escape, and resist through less visible practices, not always manifest in representative political registers. In the process they show an alternative idea of life, of how life can be differently governed. Thereby they put in question the way people are governed. This is the nature of biopolitics from below - a form of counter-conduct. It does not look for a chief enemy, but for the immediate enemy, not always the state, but those who govern them, those they know have made their lives unbearable. The immediacy of response is the immediacy of an endangered life. Yet with all its immediacy, the overall pattern of various responses shows an ethical dimension because of its capacity to suggest other

possible ways of conducting life. Biopolitics from below is like a hinge poised on the borders of ethics and politics.

The biopolitical nature of the existence of the popular classes is acute in a time of crisis. The Covid-19 crisis brought out, among others, a strong pattern of solidarity in the public life of the subalterns. The impact of the social practices of subaltern solidarity spread to other sections of the population. Information on the condition of migrant workers, workers employed in logistical services, caregivers, people living in slums and shanty settlements, and the activities of various solidarity groups involving these sections of population in the first year of crisis (2020) enthused many more in the second year of the pandemic (2021). Solidarity groups sprang up in cities involving members of victims' families to relay and coordinate information on availability of oxygen cylinders, beds, nurses to work at home, and most importantly food. Youth teams became prominent. In short, in moments of crisis, popular mechanisms of solidarity activate. Suffering was also shared. There is thus no god given or inherent mechanism of urban ethics. Practices of solidarity, borrowed from popular memory to respond to pressure in ways people are already familiar with come to life in times of crisis. Take for instance the historical tradition of mutual aid, or other collective ways of coping with adversities. Thus, as never before, cities witnessed in Covid-19 time the emergence of "frontline workers" - doctors, nurses, paramedical staff, ayahs (female caregivers), waste disposal workers, community workers of various types, and intrepid reporters and citizen journalists. These members of society

become heroes and heroines in the landscape of solidarity. The saga of solidarity reflects a form of social capacity that is an excess of the capacity of the ruling order. Urban forms of Solidarity, thus, assume a life question, but one of life at its limit. Solidarity reflects the biopolitical nature of a collective at a time of crisis. Solidarity is life in crisis.

Urban justice in this way exhibits two dimensions: (a) the vision of justice extends beyond the idea of rights to those of protection, care, and solidarity; (b) in addressing issues of injustices, urban politics of justice cannot but be contingent, dialogic, and predicated on specific time and circumstances. This may be called minimal justice. There are thus no grand principles of urban justice guiding urban reconstruction across the globe. There is no new metaphysics of urban justice. By the same measure, the ethical aspect of justice is practical. Minimal justice is informed by practical ethics. Both bear the birthmark of crisis and conjuncture, a specific correlation of contending forces, also of the state of popular forces in alliance.

We may now summarize elements that make urban justice.

First, urban justice must contend with the formidable reality of urban power. Urban power is built on exclusion and differential inclusion of various sections of population, such as refugees, migrants, stateless groups of people, labour engaged in extractive practices, other population groups discriminated on grounds of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, the dis-propertied – primarily, the unorganised sections of labouring poor and women.

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Urban power draws on the strength of financial oligarchy, a severely skewed urban property system, technocratic prowess, a specific legal-administrative regime, power of surveillance, securitisation of the city buttressed by machinic intelligence and algorithmic power, and the capacity to supervise the collective life of a densely congealed phenomenon, called urban population. Urban justice stands against each of these elements of urban power and is inspired by the biopolitical desires of the popular classes of the city.

Second, popular imaginations of urban justice are important, for they propel practices towards a desirable future.

Third, claims and imaginations of urban justice are triggered by the figure of the outsider to city – the migrant, stateless, illegal immigrant labor, the runaway rebel, the famished peasant, unemployed youth, the women, the marginalized races and communities, and the care giving population.

Fourth, urban justice is built on the historical knowledge that from the early modern age to our time, cities have repeatedly produced imaginative practices towards sharing of resources. These practices negotiate the tension between city and the countryside to the benefit of both and have formulated ideas of urban justice that refuse to respect the logic of scales.

Fifth, if the city is some kind of commons with various claimants to the common space and resource called the city, then justice must be dialogic. Justice therefore will be not maximal, but what is possible that is minimal. Yet

there remains the question of supplement, the issue of potency, potentiality. Thus, the tension between the possible and potential for transformation will forever mark our journey to a desirable urban future. This is because contentions will not die down.

Sixth, minimal justice places the urban as a heterotopic space where scales and degrees of possibility are merged in a fuzzy reality.

From these six angles, this manifesto is unashamedly a Southern manifesto for a common urban future, a manifesto for minimal justice, for a just city. The South in this way denotes a series of relations, a way of seeing, a way of understanding the relational existence of time and space in a fold to which we have given the name South. South in this way is a form of existence, and the problem of form as we know is crucial to the practice of future. It is, to quote from an unforgettable manifesto, the “invisible ray” on the time ahead...; living and ceasing to live... are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere.”

Speaking of the possible form of urban future, crucial will be to never remove from our focus the form of the cities of the South, be it of the Mexico City or Mumbai, or Jakarta. Equally crucial will be not to forget that these metropolises want to escape the destinies of the nations to which they belong, countries they are parts of. With the nationalist imagination of the reconstruction of the entire country now lying in tatters, the idea of “smart” cities occupying statist imagination, southern metropolises appears to need the nation only as hinterland, at times even

the hinterland is not required. Cities become aware of the reality of the nation only when rumblings of rural discontent reach them – in form of blockades or march-ins. Otherwise, as in the case of Mumbai in the preceding twenty years the city will prosper, while less than two hundred kilometres away farmers' suicides in districts and villages will continue. The grotesque size and nature of the city overshadow a diverse reality of the nation. Subaltern urbanism exists in such milieu. Many southern cities (including census towns as well as middle range cities) are like urban shadows, their existence is a challenge to urban theory. Slums indeed are on the periphery of urban theory. One urbanist reminds us, peripheries, urban informality, zones of exception, and gray spaces together present the possibility of a different valence of Southern theory. Yet the challenge is that as reality and concept, these four features exist outside the map of urban cognition. They always tell us what the city should not be.

In this surreal situation, designing and making the urban future may appear as a sovereign enterprise by itself. But make no mistake, the urban future as shaped by Southern conditions will depend on common future of the nation. By the same token, urban future will depend on the global and the planetary future. Justice has been always contingent. A just urban future will be contingent from this perspective too. In an immediate sense, a radical future of the nation, a radical democratisation of the country, will be the path for a just future of our cities.

Clarity of the issue crucial to existence is at stake here. We may remember B.R. Ambedkar, who recalling the

**BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE, THE URBAN FUTURE AS SHAPED BY SOUTHERN CONDITIONS WILL DEPEND ON COMMON FUTURE OF THE NATION. BY THE SAME TOKEN, URBAN FUTURE WILL DEPEND ON THE GLOBAL AND THE PLANETARY FUTURE.**

spirit and the compulsion driving him to write the great anti-discrimination, anti-caste manifesto, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) commented, "...the world owes much to rebels who would dare to argue in the face of the pontiff and insist that he is not infallible. I do not care about the credit which every progressive society must give to its rebels. I shall be satisfied if I make the Hindus realize that they are the sick men of India, and that their sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians."

[Note: (a) This manifesto does not refer to the Chinese experiences of city making in this century. These experiences with mixed results are exceptionally important for Southern cities of the world in their journey to bypass the great divide discussed here and develop their urban future. Can the contemporary path of urbanization in China offer the cities of the global South a way to escape the southern condition? What is the general significance of contemporary Chinese urbanization for humanity's urban future? Important though this issue is, this however remains beyond the conceptual scope of this declaration. (b) In this note, subaltern classes and lower classes have been used interchangeably. For this note, they mean the same. (c) In this text the word South indicates "Global South" while drawing its genealogy from the use of the term since the end of colonialism and earlier to that, discussions on the European South, close to the Mediterranean.]

## Notes and references

### (pp.1-4)

*p. 1...By a rough estimate...* “The World’s Cities in 2025, Data Booklet”, *World Urbanisation Prospect*, 2025, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (UN DESA/POP/2025/TR/NO. 14)

*p. 1...Rivalling the scale of cities...* Saskia Sassen categorized New York City, London, and Tokyo as global cities in *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (NJ, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); as distinct from that, Marie-Caroline Saglio-Yatzimirsky, *Dharavi: Mega-Slum to Urban Paradigm* (London and New Delhi: Routledge, 2013)

*p. 3...The economy and locality in this way are intermeshed...* Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (London and Delhi: Routledge, 2007); Ankhi Mukherjee, “Slums and the Postcolonial Uncanny,” in *Unseen City: The Psychic Lives of the Urban Poor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Ritambara Hebbar and Mahuya Bandopadhyay, “Migrants, Vigilantes, and Violence: The Making of New Urban Spaces in Mumbai,” in Ranabir Samaddar, *Migrants and the Neoliberal City* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2027); Camillo Boano, William Hunter, and Caroline Newton, *Contested Urbanism in Dharavi: Writings and Projects for the Resilient City* (London: Development Planning Unit, University College London, 2013); Swapna Banerjee-Guha, “Shifting Cities: Urban Restructuring in Mumbai,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 2 (2002): 121–28; Amita Baviskar, “Between Violence and Desire: Space, Power, and Identity in the Making of Metropolitan Delhi,” *International Social Science Journal* 55, no. 175 (2004): 89–98. Rishi Jha, *Unsettled City: Neoliberal Redevelopment, State Crisis, Slum Resettlement, and Biopolitical Struggle in Mumbai*, PhD dissertation, Lund Dissertations in

Social Work no. 68, Lund University, 2023.

p. 3...*The city is divided in...* Luca Queirolo Palmas and Federico Rahola, *Underground Europe: Along Migrant Routes* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022)

p. 4...*In the imaginary of urban future...* Ranabir Samaddar, *Biopolitics from Below: Crisis, Conjunction, Rupture* (Budapest, Amsterdam, and London: CEU Press, Amsterdam University Press, Routledge, 2025)

p. 4...*Some cities live with their national heritages...* Mark R. Beissinger, *The Revolutionary City: Urbanization and the Global Transformation of Rebellion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022)

p. 4...*immigrants whose arrival is facilitated by what has been called as "transplanted networks"...* Charles Tilly, "Transplanted Networks," in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79–95

p. 4...*Or, will they completely bypass the pasts?...* Ashis Nandy, "Time Travel to a Possible Self: Searching for the Alternative Cosmopolitanism of Cochin", *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 1 (2), November 2000, 295-327

**(pp 5-13)**

p. 5...*Popular neighbourhoods...* Read on this, Nicholas Hewitt, *Wicked City: The Many Cultures of Marseille* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2019)

p. 6... *the mindless developmental schemes which often ruin the condition of the former and put them "off the map" of development.* Jennifer Robinson, "Global and World Cities: A View off the Map", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 26 (3), 2002, 531-554

p. 6... The notion of infrastructure allows us to look into the strategies of urban popular classes to get on with life and combat adversities in a new way. AbdouMaliq Simone has written, "... I wish to extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people's activities in the city. African cities are characterized by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These intersections, particularly in the last two decades, have depended on the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure—a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city." AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg", *Public Culture*, 16 (3), 2004 (407-429), 407-408

p. 7...*Marx had said of workers' cooperatives...* "The co-operative factories run by workers themselves are, within the old form, the first examples of the emergence of a new form, even though they naturally reproduce in all cases, in their present organization, all the defects of the existing system, and must reproduce them. But the opposition between capital and labour is abolished there, even if at first only in the form that the workers in association become their own capitalists, i.e., they use the means of production to valorise their labour." - Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1981), 571; "[A]s far as the present co-operative societies are concerned, they are of value only insofar as they are the independent creations of workers and not protégés either of the governments or of the bourgeoisie." - Karl Marx, *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), vol. 24, 93–94

p. 8...*Leftist mayors of Thiruvananthapuram (in Kerala, India), Athens, Beijing, Santiago, Barcelona, Ankara...* Factsheet, "City Mayors", <http://www.citymayors.com/politics/political-parties-mayors.html> (accessed on 14 February 2026)

p. 8...*significantly steered their cities towards being “cities of refuge”...* The International Cities of Refuge Network established in 2006 is based in Stavanger, Norway. On the idea of cities of refugee, the noted discussion by Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2001)

p. 9... *The first accomplishment of a radical urban future will be freeing the cities from the prison of homogeneity of urban time...* This draws from Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) - “Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it masters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous empty time” – “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, 262; see on plural time/space formations, Teresa P. R. Caldeira, “Transitoriness: Emergent Time/Space Formations of Urban Collective Life” in Ash Amin and Michele Lancione (eds.), *Grammars of the Urban Ground* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 126-149

p. 9...*Cities often accumulate history in layers...* Read the evocative account by Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and City* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2010)

p. 9...*In other cases, the city may cling on to the memory of its radical past...* In such a melancholy state, poet Mirza Ghalib wrote after the British destroyed the rebel city of Delhi in 1857 after they recaptured the city from the mutineers –

*The heart is not stone or steel but will be moved.  
The eyes are not lifeless cracks in a wall but will shed tears at  
the panorama of death and at India’s desolation. The city of  
Delhi was emptied of its rulers and peopled instead with  
creatures of the Lord who acknowledged no lord  
As if it were a garden without a gardener, and full of fruitless  
trees.*

...

*Delhi meant the Fort, the Chandni Chowk, the daily bazaar near Jama Mosque, the weekly trip to the Jamuna Bridge, the annual fare of the Flower-sellers.*

*These five things are no more.*

*Where is Delhi now?*

*Yes, there used to be a city of this name in the land of Ind.*

- Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Dastanbuy: A Diary of the Indian Revolt of 1857*, trans. Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi (Mumbai: Asia Publishing House, 1970)

*p. 9-10...There is a time when nothing happens... Ascribed to V.I. Lenin, "There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen."*

*p. 10...hence no "untimely city"... On the idea of the untimely city, Atig Ghosh, "The Importance of Being Siliguri: Border Effect and the 'Untimely' City in North Bengal" in Brett Neilson, Ned Rossiter, and Ranabir Samaddar (eds.), *Logistical Asia: The Labour of Making a World Region* (Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 133-154; the idea of "untimely city" recurs in postcolonial urban studies. The famous Indian anthropologist Nirmal Kumar Bose wrote of Kolkata in a similar vein, that at very point of time, city dwellers "live in a state of immature or imperfect urbanisation" - *Calcutta, 1964: A Social Survey* (Calcutta: Lalvani Publishing House, 1968), 85*

*p. 13...The history of the city is littered with bodies of the victims of "citizen massacres".... Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books), 136-137*

**(pp 14-23)**

*p. 14...Yet urban land making still proceeds in these cases on silt, mud... Debjani Bhattacharya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The**

*Making of Calcutta* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018)

*p. 17... Children die in these towns due to pollution of drinking water...*

See the seminal report, Mélanie Gittard and Irène Hu, *Mining Leaks, Water Pollution, and Child Mortality in Africa* - HAL Id: halshs-04685390, 3 September 2024 -

[https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04685390/file/wp202424\\_.pdf](https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04685390/file/wp202424_.pdf) (accessed on 16 September 2026); also the report, "State of Africa's Environment: Death Rate due to Unsafe water Sources 1,000-fold of that in Developed Countries: Safe Water and Sanitation is an Economic Imperative for Africa", *Down to Earth*, 16 September 2024; on the very recent (January 2026) Indore tragedy, Sameer Khan and Abhishek Dey, "Indian Families Grieve Deaths caused by Contaminated Tap Water" – BBC report on Indore water contamination and children's deaths, 2 January 2026 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c98jy990l37o> (accessed on 2 February 2026); Filip De Boeck has written in "Corpus Vile" of "death and expendable youth in urban Congo" in Veena Das and Clara Han (eds.), *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World: A Compendium* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 743-769; for the most recently evident theme of death and erasure in/of the city, there are several analyses of the situation in Gaza; for instance, Rafeef Ziadah, "Development as Erasure: Palestine, Genocide and 'Reconstruction'", *Development and Change*, 56 (4-5), July-September 2025, 597-618

*p. 20... However, the early history of modern cities is characterised by*

*municipal anxiety about waste and a variety of throw-away practices...* Franziska Neumann, "The Realm of Cloacina? Excrement in London's Eighteenth-Century Waste Regime", *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, Vol. XLIII (2), November, 2021, 30–56; also, her interview with Manuela Lenzen, "Waste and Resource – London's Waste in the 18th Century", *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin*, 21, March 2026

*p. 23...Think of the massive farmers' protest around Delhi in 2020-21, or*

*the regular protest assemblies of farmers in the European capitals...*

Surinder S. Jodhka, "Agriculture and Citizenship: Making Sense of the Farmers' Movement, 2020-21", *Journal of Sikh and Panjab Studies*, vol. 29 (1-2), Spring-Fall 2022, 187-206; Hillary Angelo, Kian Goh, and Kasia Paprocki, "Climate Change and Urban-Agrarian Solidarities", *City*, Vol. 29 (5-6), 2025, 714-743

**(pp 24-29)**

*p. 28...In short, the migrant is forever the abnormal, forever a threat to urban security... Fanon wrote in the great manifesto, *The Wretched of the Earth*, "The atmosphere of permanent insecurity in which the refugees exist is kept up by frequent invasions of French troops, applying "the right of following and pursuit," bombardments from the air, machine-gunnings—it is well known that no further attention is now paid to bombardments of Moroccan and Tunisian territories by the French army, of which Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef, the martyred village in Tunisia, was the most appalling—together with the break-up of homes which is a consequence of the conditions of the evacuation. To tell the truth there are very few Algerian women who give birth in such conditions who do not suffer from mental disorders. These disorders take various forms. Sometimes they are visible as states of agitation which sometimes turn into rages; sometimes deep depression and tonic immobility with many attempted suicides; or sometimes finally anxiety states with tears, lamentations, and appeals for mercy. In the same way the form which the delusions take are many and divers. We may find a delusion of persecution against the French who want to kill the new-born infant or the child not yet born; or else the mother may have the impression of imminent death, in which the mothers implore invisible executioners to spare their child." – Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 279*

*p. 28...The policeman watches the migrant on the road; the migrant has*

to similarly watch the policeman... Julie-Anne Boudreau, "State Theory from the Street Altar: The Muscles, the Saint and the Amparo", *IJURR (International Journal of Urban and Regional Research)*, 43 (3), May 2019, 405-422

p. 29...the task of providing protection to the population results in police and the people constituting each other... Recall Bertold Brecht here. His play, *Three Penny Opera (1928)* was on the rise of the London criminal Macheath who had to finally accept death sentence as punishment for his misdeeds. As he prepared to die, he lamented his fate and asked, "What's picking a lock compared to buying shares? What's breaking into a bank compared to founding one? What's murdering a man compared to employing one?" Macheath then asks everyone for forgiveness, then there is a happy reversal: As Macheath is ready to walk to gallows, a messenger arrives to inform that Macheath has been pardoned by the Queen and granted a title, a castle and a pension. The cast then sings the Finale, which ends with a plea that wrongdoing not be punished too harshly as life is harsh enough. Urban crime and punishment remain a persistent tale of city life. Brecht wrote, "You are about to hear an opera for beggars. Since this opera was intended to be as splendid as only beggars can imagine, and yet cheap enough for beggars to be able to watch, it is called the Threepenny Opera".

On the same theme of urban security, we can refer to another play by the postcolonial revolutionary dramatist, Utpal Dutt's *Duswapaner Nagari (Nightmare City, 1974)*. It is one of Dutt's intricately structured plays containing political satire, physical violence, vaudeville routines, melodrama, and farce. Amongst the swirling mass of characters, we find intellectuals, clerks, business executives, lovers, beggars, gangsters and a blind man. A violent mob rushes in one of the scenes and surrounds a young couple sitting on a bench. They hit the couple and throw them on the floor. The murder of a policeman follows this violent action. By staging the grotesque at the exposition of the plot, the play introduces us to issues of social conflicts, violence, and political unrest in the city of

nightmares. The stage is set in the late sixties and early seventies of the last century when Kolkata became known as the rebel city and the collusion between gangsters and political leaders against the rebellious students, youth, and militant workers, was a daylight secret. Krishnachura in Dutt's *Nightmare City* embodies conventional middle-class morality. In the play, Krishnachura protects Swapan, a Leftist worker from the police and the gangsters, on two successive occasions. Much in the manner of Moni in the first half of the *Nightmare City*, Krishna in the second half represents a character who is not motivated by any political ideology, yet feels the urge to protect the life of a young revolutionary, Swapan. The play delves into the reality of social deprivation and suffering of the working masses, but also empathy and protection. The play then goes further and shows how the political class uses the resources of power through the functioning of the police. Dutt's portrayal of the police in *Nightmare City* reminds one of the Foucauldian notion of police power. The philosopher had argued that although the police as an institution was organized in the form of a state apparatus, and linked directly to the exercise of political sovereignty, police power embodied mechanisms and elements that were specific to the capillary needs of protection. The police was an apparatus that had to be coextensive with the entire social body - by the minuteness of the details it was concerned with. *Nightmare City* ends with the scenes of brutal physical aggression and political violence. One is brutally stabbed, while another who had desired to disclose certain evidence against the exploiter to a reporter, is strategically killed by the police. Others mourn the deaths in a hypocritical manner. The gangsters terrorise the helpless Krishnachura, whom they consider to be a supporter of the communist movement. Power is thus no longer identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery. Class domination can be exercised because power has been delinked from individual might.

*p. 29...Fortunately, urban imagination of the security problematic is*

...also at times built around love, compassion, and solidarity... Recall Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931). Chaplin's Tramp again falls into misadventure. He falls in love with a blind woman and through a series of trials and tribulations the two unite, with the girl regaining her eyesight and recognising the tramp who had helped her earlier.

**(pp 32-39)**

p. 32...*The urban, it is told, is the natural place for imagination of the future...* Raymond Williams wrote, "Out of an experience of cities came an experience of the future. At a crisis of metropolitan experience, stories of the future went through a qualitative change... In all recorded literature there had been the land after death: a paradise or a hell. In the centuries of exploration and voyaging, new societies were discovered... in new lands, often islands: often the happy island, itself a shaping element in the myth. But within metropolitan experience these models, though widely drawn on, were eventually transformed. Man did not go to his destiny, or discover his fortunate place; he saw, in pride or error, his own capacity for collective transformation of himself and of his world" – *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 272

p. 32... *These imaginaries are often products of desire, for the city is nothing if it is not a machine that endlessly produces desires...* In the context of *The Southern Question*, Antonio Gramsci quoted Matilde Serao's, *The Belly of Naples* (1884), The lottery "is 'the great dream of happiness', the Neapolitans 'dream every week anew', 'living for six days in a growing hope that invades every corner and transcends the boundaries of real life', the dream in which there is everything that they are deprived of, a clean house with healthy fresh air, fine warm sunlight shining on the floor, a high white bed, a gleaming chest of drawers, meat and pasta every day, and that litre of wine, and that cradle for the baby together with the wife's linen and the husband's new hat'". - Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed.

Derek Boothman, 1995 (Delhi: Aakar books, 2014), 58-59

p. 32...*The philosopher tells, desiring machines obey a set of rules governing association...* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 1-8

p. 34...*"Identity" of the city, the theorist Livio Boni tells us in a commentary on Koolhaas, "is a fiction that can be changed according to circumstances"...* The studies referred to here: Frederick Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) - <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/condition-working-class-england.pdf> (accessed on 24 December 2026); Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" and "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" in Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, and Harry Zohn, and ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 30-133; Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) and the collection of his various writings and interviews, *Writings on Cities*, trans. and eds. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), see in particular his recall of the Greek city as a common site of art and aesthetics, "No salvation Away from the centre?", 205-208; David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2013); Rem Koolhaas, "Singapore Songlines" in *S,M,L,XL* (New York, Monacelli Press, 1995); Livio Boni, "The Generic City: Meta-political Remarks on the Future of the City at the Time of Absolute Capitalism", CRG paper series, *Policies and Practices*, 96, February 2018

p. 35...*It is a feature of postcolonial politics – a feature reinforced by popular, if you will, populist politics, and electoral democracy...* Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in*

*Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), Chapter 3, “The Politics of the Governed”, 53- 78, and Chapter 7, “Are Indian Cities becoming Bourgeois At last”, 131- 147

p. 37...*Yet buildings in New York do not produce dream, but they crush or crash every single one of the dreams...* Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1974); read in this connection, Gabriele Mastrigli, “Rem Koolhaas and the Bourgeois Myth of New York”, *San Rocco Magazine*, 8, Winter 2013 -

<https://socks-studio.com/2014/12/05/rem-koolhaas-and-the-bourgeois-myth-of-new-york-gabriele-mastrigli-2013/> (accessed on 19 February 2026); Rem Koolhaas was perhaps only following William Blake (1757–1827) who portrayed London as a desolate, chartered landscape of poverty and industrial oppression, where the human imagination was imprisoned by fear, restriction, and institutional corruption.

p. 37...*Red Vienna gave the Viennese workers what they had voted for. It showed them that they had a voice; that they counted...* Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working Class Culture, 1919-1934* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1991); of the many analyses and accounts of a socialist urban experiment in an overall conservative national milieu, for a concise account, Veronika Duma and Hanna Lichtenberger, “Remembering Red Vienna”, *Jacobin*, 2 October 2017, <https://jacobin.com/2017/02/red-vienna-austria-housing-urban-planning> (accessed on 19 February 2026)

p. 38... In 1905, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who was then most likely between 25 and 28 years old (her exact birthdate is unknown), published “Sultana’s Dream” in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, a Madras-based English-language periodical edited by and for women. While most of the contributors were Hindu, Hossain was Muslim. Even more unusual was her story’s championship of women’s liberation. Like the story’s author, the narrator of “Sultana’s Dream” practices purdah,

whereby women are sequestered in a home's zenana area. Whisked away to a future city-state known as Ladyland, Sultana is at first hesitant to venture into the street. Isn't it unsafe for women out there? Her host, however, reassures her that she has nothing to fear... because, 30 years earlier, during a war that killed off most of the nation's menfolk, the surviving males were ordered to isolate themselves indoors, where they've remained ever since... Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag* (New Delhi: Penguin Classics, 2022)

*p. 38...an illiterate horse carriage driver in a city, dreaming of his country free of colonial rule, and getting excited on hearing the news that a new constitution has been framed...* The new constitution in this story is something corporeal, something the coach-driver can touch or grasp and hold on to, like the "splendid brass and gilt paraphernalia he had purchased a couple of years ago for his tonga". The disappointment of the subaltern does not take time to come. Mangu's ideas of freedom and the new constitution did not meet the possibility of justice. Sadaat Hasan Manto's "Naya Qanoon" was written around 1938-40 and translated as "A New Constitution" by Khalid Hasan and published in S.H. Manto, *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and stories of Partition* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1997). The story spoke of the subaltern dreams of freedom and the possibility of justice.

**(pp 40-45)**

*p. 40...Solidarity in all such cases is predicated by circumstances, such as a conjuncture of events and forces, intermittently appearing as crisis of life.* – See in this connection, Ross Beveridge, Roger Keil, and Maryam Lashkari, "The Modalities and Politics of Crisis Urbanism: A New Reparative Conjuncture?", *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 2025 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206251398556>

*p. 40-41...To use the philosopher's insight, justice begins from addressing injustice...* Etienne Balibar, "...discussion by Marx's notion of

concerning the condition of the ‘victim’ and the place of the discourse: we are not justice brought before the ‘political institution of justice’ with the claim of the victims, or their vengeance, but we must take into account the conflict itself (the reality of injustice and the necessity of injustice) is made visible and audible only by the ‘void’ that the victims create or perform within the ‘plentitude’ of the social fabric. The analogies that I suggest here do no amount to delineating a new metaphysics of justice. But they share a family air, which I believe, makes it easier to understand in which sense (to imitate a Spinozistic formula) the ‘jus’ effort or struggle or ‘non-justice’ is already justice itself.” – E. Balibar, “Justice and Equality: A Political Dilemma? Pascal, Plato, Marx” in Etienne Balibar, Sandro Mezzadra, and Ranabir Samaddar (eds.), *The Borders of Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 29

*p. 43...Biopolitics from below is like a hinge poised on the borders of ethics and politics...* The argument of biopolitics from below is detailed out in R. Samaddar, *Biopolitics from Below: Crisis, Conjuncture, Rupture* (Budapest, Amsterdam, and London: CEU Press, Amsterdam University Press, Routledge, 2025)

*p. 46...Existence is elsewhere... Andre Breton, Manifesto of Surrealism, 1924*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor Paperbacks, The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 46

*p. 47...The grotesque size and nature of the city overshadow a diverse reality of the nation. In this surreal situation, designing and making the urban future may appear as a sovereign enterprise by itself...* This remark is against the backdrop of debates around the idea of urban sovereignty. See, Diane E. Davis and Nora Libertun de Duren (eds.), *Cities and Sovereignty: Identity Politics in Urban Spaces* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011); see also for an argument for greater urban sovereignty, by Vojislava Filipcevic Cordes, “City Sovereignty: Urban Resistance and Rebel Cities Reconsidered”, *Urban*

Science, Vol. 1 (3), 2017 - <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci1030022>

p. 47...*One urbanist reminds us, peripheries, urban informality, zones of exception, and gray spaces together present the possibility of a different valence of Southern theory.* - Ananya Roy, "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35 (2), March 2011 (223-238), 235

p. 48...*their sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians...* B.R. Ambedkar, *The Annihilation of Caste*, Preface to the Second Edition, 1937 in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 2014), 25

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Humanity's urban future will depend on the way urban future in the Global South will be forged. The global Southern urban is the urbanism of our time. The general trends and characteristics of Southern cities of the world will influence and shape the overall urban condition of the world today.



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