Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains
Université Libre de Bruxelles

Inside a Construction Boom:
Politics, Responsibility
and the Temporalities of Urban Development

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Institut de Sociologie - Building S - Room Janne - 15th floor
44, avenue Jeanne - 1050 Bruxelles

With Manuel AALBERS, Pushpa ARABINDOO, Judith AUDIN,
Marco DI NUNZIO, Tom GOODFELLOW, Llerena GUIU SEARLE,
Erik HARMS, Daniel MAINS, Claire MERCER, Sabine PLANEL,
AbdouMaliq SIMONE et Ezana Haddis WELDEGHEBRAEL
DISCUSSANTS : David BERLINER, Solange GUO CHATELARD,
Luisa MORETTO and Sasha NEWELL

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Panel 1

Discussant: Luisa Moretto, Faculté d'Architecture La Cambre, Université libre de Bruxelles

 Claire Mercer - Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics

States of uncertainty: building and demolishing suburban Dar es Salaam

In this paper I discuss the relationship between the middle classes, land and housing in suburban Dar es Salaam. While much attention has rightly been paid to rural land-grabbing in Africa, all the while middle-class suburbanites have also been engaging in an 'urban land-grab'. I consider how and where land is being accumulated and for what purposes (building, speculation and agriculture). Middle class accumulation is highly precarious, however. The second part of the paper explores some of the current challenges to the accumulation of land and buildings and looks at the varying attempts made by middle class suburbanites, and the state, to extract different kinds of capital from the suburban landscape.

Pushpa Arabindoo- Department of Geography, University College London

A spectral city in the making: The urbanity of a pseudo-welfare state in India

For almost all through the last two decades, the southern Indian city of Chennai has been a relentless construction site, witnessing all kinds of urban development projects (mega or not), and many of an infrastructural nature. Most have been launched by the regional government of Tamil Nadu, often emerging out of random political announcements aimed at proclaiming Chennai as a world-class city, with the state asserting a brutal hand in the form of evictions to ensure the realization of these visions. At other appropriate moments, the state paradoxically turns benevolent, simultaneously announcing welfare schemes aimed at the city's urban poor and sometimes even extending to the middle classes, contradicting the very projects it has undertaken at tremendous financial cost. Few of these have seen completion so far with prominent ones such as the Metro Rail slashing through the city in incomplete bits and pieces, and others such as the new international terminal at the Chennai Airport so shoddily put together that tales of roof collapse and similar construction failure began to circulate almost from the day of its inauguration. With little evidence of worlding itself, Chennai is slowly turning out to be a spectral city in the making, signposted by veritable infrastructural ruins, and a collateral to the poorly conceived urbanity of a pseudo-welfare state. This paper is an effort to unravel this relationship between the falling apart of the city's urbanity and the irrationality of the state, and in doing so suggests that there is a longer historiography to this ill-fated affair, one that cannot be simply defined by the at hand logic of neoliberal urbanism.

Ezana Haddis Weldeghebrael– Planning and Environmental Management, SEED The University of Manchester

Aspiring "Developmental" State's Spatial Strategy towards Slum for Accumulation and Hegemonic Purposes: The Case of Addis Ababa

The overwhelming majority of the housing stock in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, is sub-standard. Since 2009 more than 480 hectares inner-city slums have been erased displacing residents to the periphery. This article will interrogate the process of state-led inner-city redevelopment by authoritarian aspiring "Developmental State" of Ethiopia using Spatialised "Strategic-Relational Theory" of Bob Jessop. Accordingly, the article argues that the Ethiopian State is using the slum redevelopment as one of its state spatial strategies to facilitate wealth accumulation and as a hegemonic project to legitimize its authoritarian rule. As a hegemonic project, the ruling party uses slum redevelopment as a vehicle to manifest the emergence of a "developmental" state and to make slums more governable. The slum redevelopment is also used by the state to facilitate wealth accumulation in two ways. First, accumulation process materializes through path-dependent and context-contingent neoliberal urbanization guided by an aspiration to build "Diplomatic Capital" of Africa to attract a specific group of people, such as diplomatic community, tourists and upscale developers. Second, the accumulation by dispossession transpires during inner-city redevelopment in Addis Ababa when the state artificially creates a "rent gap" between current and potential land value through the public ownership of land and housing. Therefore, this article concludes the Ethiopian authoritarian aspiring "developmental" state, uses slum redevelopment not only to facilitate accumulation but also to consolidate their tight grip on power.

Panel 2

Discussant: Sasha Newell, Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains, Université libre de Bruxelles

Manuel B. Aalbers - Division of Geography, KU Leuven
Urban Redevelopment as a Space of Exception: Land as a Financial Asset in Brazil

The financialization of real estate and urban re/development is an increasing trend, not only in the Global North but also in the Global South. The cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil use a federal policy scheme, named "Urban Operation", to enable large redevelopment projects to be implemented in a "space of exception". Within these projects additional development rights, known as "CEPACs", are traded as a pure financial asset, contributing to the financialization of urban redevelopment. Although the basics are the same in both cities, Sao Paulo sees the active involvement of large construction and property development companies, while in Rio a quasi-governmental fund, named "FGTS", has bought up *all* the additional development rights. In the end, land ownership and development, urban redevelopment and planning, finance, and in Rio also various arms of the local and federal state, have become entangled in a speculative logic.
* This presentation is based on two papers in preparation, one with Laisa Stroher and one with Mayra Mosciaro and Alvaro Pereira

Erik Harms – Department of Anthropology, Yale University

Megalopolitan Megalomania: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's Southeastern Region and the Speculative Growth Machine

Vietnam's Southeast Region is widely celebrated as the "engine" of the country's economy. Encompassing rapidly developing Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding provinces, the region's economy is primarily fueled by export processing zones and numerous master-planned development projects known as New Urban Zones. This paper documents the ambitions Vietnamese planners have of transforming the region into a Megalopolis or super-city (siêu thành phố) consisting of a series of integrated satellite cities with Ho Chi Minh City at its core. Because this region of Vietnam does not have any important preexisting secondary cities of major consequence, this megalopolitan model is increasingly dominated by new large-scale development projects funded by powerful real estate companies and managed by parastatal construction and development authorities known as management authorities (ban quản lý). The paper discusses how the collusion between real estate developers and such management authorities leads to the emergence of parallel governance structures that reduce rather than increase transparency in urban development and governance. Because decision-making power in these authorities is increasingly dictated by the demands of powerful

real estate interests, the development of a regional megalopolis is increasingly driven by megalomania, that is to say, obsessed by the exercise of power.

Tom Goodfellow - Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield,

Urban fortunes and skeleton cityscapes: Real estate and late urbanization in Kigali and Addis Ababa

In many parts of Africa, societies that are still primarily rural are experiencing accelerated urban growth and highly visible booms in property development. Investment is pouring directly into what Lefebvre and Harvey characterized as the 'secondary circuit' of capital, in the absence of significant industrialization. Debates about the drivers of investment in real estate are longstanding in relation to the global North, but have given little consideration to low-income and late-urbanising countries in Africa. Yet such contexts offer important opportunities to reflect on existing theory. Focusing on Kigali and Addis Ababa, which have transformed virtually beyond recognition in the past two decades, this article explores the drivers and consequences of investment in urban real estate in countries striving to structurally transform their economies. It argues that a range of formal and informal incentives and constraints have led to high-end real estate being viewed as the 'safest bet' for those with resources to invest, even where demand is limited and governments are promoting other kinds of investment. While some people are reaping urban fortunes in largely untaxed rents, much of the construction is merely speculative, creating landscapes of unused and underused high-end properties in contexts where investment is desperately needed elsewhere.

Panel 3

Discussant: Solange Guo Chatelard, Science Po Paris / Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains, Université libre de Bruxelles

Llerena Guiu Searle – Department of Anthropology, University of Rochester

Betting on the Future: Speculative Knowledge in an Indian Building Boom
A spectacular building frenzy swept through India in the early 2000s. Developers built new malls, office complexes, and high-rise apartments in India's major cities and bought hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland in order to build more. Foreign investors committed billions of dollars to these efforts, working deal-by-deal to connect Indian land to circuits of global capital. This paper examines the speculative knowledge that informed real estate producers' activities and precipitated the real estate boom. I argue that real estate producers developed a remarkable congruence in their communications: a shared vision of India's economic and social future that they called the "India story." This paper traces the circulation and the logic of the "India story" in order to understand how it generated consensus and guided investors and developers in deciding what to fund and build. In particular, it argues that the "India story" relied on logics of comparison that differentiated India from other places in the world only to project convergence in the future, resulting in buildings designed for a future that resembles elsewhere in the world today.

Judith Audin – French Centre for Research on Contemporary China

Surviving spaces, suspended spaces, an ethnography of non completion in Chinese cities: the case of an urban reconversion in progress in Datong (Shanxi)

This presentation will analyse the socio-spatial dimensions of non completion in Datong, a medium-sized city in Shanxi, nicknamed China's « coal capital ». In 2008, the city centre became the object of an ambitious plan of urban makeover around the theme of the "historical and cultural city", put in motion between 2008 et 2013, which led to a large operation of demolition-reconstruction. The project was suddenly interrupted because of a difficult political transition. In the half-demolished half-rebuilt city centre, long-term inhabitants still live in the rubble.

In Datong's mining district, the state-owned company TM progressively absorbed numerous mining sites during the growth of the coal industry. In 2006, the miners, who used to live on the coal mine sites in precarious and uncomfortable self-built houses, were relocated in a new urban area, built and financed by TM. But the company's activity suddenly slowed down in the context of the coal crisis. Many places in the city reflect the traces of this trajectory of expansion, and then decline. The mining area is now a protected land which still carries remains of the mining town residential ruins, where the last miners still wait for relocation. In the city centre and in the mining district, the urban space reveals a state of waiting, without a clear deadline.

This research reflects on these liminal spaces, these transitional and unfinished places, in order to develop an ethnography of Datong's urban reconversion in progress. The state of non- completion the city of Datong will be analysed following three temporal dimensions: the political temporality of urban planning, the economic temporality of the coal economy, and the social temporality of urban renewal operations. These three temporalities illustrate the origins and evolution of two massive projects, still non completed.

- *The political temporality of urban planning, from expansion to suspension, from ambitious planning to unfinished constructions*: In 2008, the good results of the coal- based economy of Datong led the former mayor to launch massive investments in real- estate and in construction, in order to achieve an ambitious remodelling of the city centre, turning it into a « cultural historical old city » (*lishi wenhua gucheng*). However, after the mayor was transferred to Taiyuan, the period of expansion was followed by a sudden suspension of all projects, in a context of local public finance rationalizing, anti- corruption campaigns, and crisis of the coal industry. Because of its size and of its numerous unfinished buildings, the half-built half-demolished city centre constitutes a revealing case study on the temporalities of urban construction in China. [SEP]

- *The economic temporality of the declining coal industry, from prosperity to the crisis*: our ethnographic study shows how a massive state-owned company (TM) faced challenges of legitimacy after the "ten golden years" (2003-2012) of the coal industry in Datong. The mining areas, where the issue of sinking villages and mining towns became an object of public policy in 2006, reveal the difficult financial situation TM [SEP] and its shifting social responsibility toward the miners, delaying the moving of the last inhabitants. The interrupted urban renewal project of solving the issue of sinking houses in the context of industrial decline brings out the connection between an economic crisis and an interrupted project.

- *The social temporality of housing evictions and relocations*: by studying the way the last inhabitants of "shantytowns" both in Datong city centre and mining district in Datong appropriate their own spaces in the ruins, our presentation also reflects on the traces of life, on neighbourhood attachment, on the fading away processes revealed by an extending period of residential ruination. This thin temporality of relocation is rarely seen in China because it is usually a fast process. But in this case, the housing renewal operation was interrupted in progress. How do the inhabitants of the city centre continue to invest the ruins of their former neighbourhood and how do the last coal miners wait for their relocation, when most people have already moved away from the coal mines, leaving these few behind?

Our research follows two urban renewal operations both in the city centre and in the mining district to highlight this immobile moment, in order to explain more clearly the dynamics of social change in 21st century post-socialist industrial China. By studying interrupted and uncertain processes of displacement, demolition and (re)construction in

two districts of Datong, this ethnographic study goes deeper into the spatial and social processes of urban transformation in the context of industrial reconversion, from the temporality of expansion to the temporality of decline

Marco Di Nunzio – LSE Cities, London School of Economics

Not My Job? Architecture, Responsibility and Inequalities in a Booming African Metropolis

Calls for professional ethics and lawful conduct pervade the ways architects value their contributions to urban development and ground their sense of responsibility towards the city and its dwellers. However, the centrality of professional ethics in architectural practice constitutes a way of delimiting the extent of this responsibility, rather than triggering a commitment to achieve greater social justice. By investigating the place of architecture in the development of Addis Ababa, a booming African metropolis, this paper documents how a limited number of architects seek to *break rank* to take responsibility for the ways social inequalities are reinforced in the process of urban change. I explore whether individual attempts to change the terms and narratives of one's relatedness to unknown others can make achieving social justice a potential objective of urban politics.

Panel 4

Discussant: David Berliner, Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains, Université libre de Bruxelles

AbdouMaliq Simone – Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Compressed Construction

Urban tissue becomes increasingly flickering in the dark, pulsations here and there without regular pattern, as ways of life and built environments are ripped up, displaced, wasted. As cities continue to "look outward", beyond their own peripheries to which inhabitants are increasingly pushed, look for their possibilities beyond themselves, are themselves this constant hunt for attention and money, and thus diminish paying attention to those who inhabit the administrative territories to which they are responsible, what kinds of practices of "looking out for" endure? What are the affordances of care, of people looking out for each other? How does this take place across "compressed" urban tissue?

Taking a cue from Alexander Galloway, compression is about asymmetric encounters, where things operate in the same space but which have no obviously discernible relationship with each other. Rather, the ground on which they are encountered and encounter each other embodies a generic orientation—a ground that has no particular definition. It is ground where things can show up in various formats without contradiction, that does not need to be realized empirically according to specific criteria but yet which engenders a sense of being-in-concert. Compression is a mode of appearance that need not constantly "announce" itself and its networked positions. It is a mode of appearance that circumvents the imperative that everything must relate. As such compression is not the simultaneous folding in of the powerful or the weak; it is neither one thing nor another, but, rather, a *withdrawal from distinction*—a kind of darkness.

Concomitantly, ambivalence prevails in the ways that some urban residents consider their situations and prospects. Without the distance of perspective, it is not clear how they should anticipate or plan, what they think is possible or viable. What is familiar, relied upon, insists upon showing up in "strange ways."

Between now and 2021, 750,000 units of new, so-called affordable housing are scheduled to appear across Jakarta. Although this number is unlikely to be realized, this would seem to indicate the consolidation of vertical living as the predominant form of residential life. But what does this mean? Here, in this presentation, I will offer some clues.

Sabine Planel- Institut de Recherche pour le Développement/ DALVAA Project

Financial inclusion, socio-spatial exclusion and political participation in access to housing. The Ethiopian construction boom from below.

This presentation exploits results of a research project DALVAA on Right to the City (http://dalvaa.hypotheses.org). It presents fieldwork material conducted in various condominiums of Addis Ababa, mainly in Jemo site, by a research collective (IRD, Paris-Nanterre University and Addis Ababa University), from 2015 to 2016. Enquiries have focused on concrete housing policies deployed by public authorities as well as on the collective and individual strategies and initiatives of the citizens concerned by urban redevelopment, more specifically by residential mobility. We used our empirical research to unravel the politics of every day life and offered a political 'grassroots' analysis of urban change, from the standpoint of materiality of space.

For the purpose of this presentation, I will mainly develop materials related to:

- the implementation of housing public policies: state-led actions and incentives processes ; land/housing speculation.

- strategies/adaptations of urban dwellers to access housing: management/refunding of the debt and others financial arrangements.

- individual representations/perceptions: complains and hopes voiced by urban dwellers to silently express their rights to be (ie. work and settle) in town.

Condominiums are blooming in the outskirts of Addis Ababa, they represent an unprecedented type of reality in Ethiopian socio-economic space, the symbol of a recent developmental transition. By gathering together diverse economic populations, by encouraging them to reinvent their daily and social practices, and by offering them an institutional framework, condominiums in peripheral urban spaces reshape urban societies. Also, it is still hard to say whether they crystallise new political aspirations or reproduce – albeit with slight differences – a more authoritarian way of ruling public or private spaces.

Ever since the 2000's, Ethiopian urban change has been underpinned by evolving governmental conceptions of development. Policies that promote access to housing are a key tool to the Ethiopian government's economic planning strategy and its political project. They are highly problematic as they are connected to two opposing ideological registers. They attempt to combine the benefits of pro-poor policies with those of a more market-oriented approach. In order to face a rapid growing need for urban housing and to mitigate weak municipalities budgets devoted to infrastructures, the system of housing allocation was then designed to drive individual savings and to promote a 'culture of savings' amongst the poor.

On the ground, we observe similar tensions between a top-down and state-led management of access to public housing and the variety of individual/entrepreneurial strategies/bricolages that dwellers daily implement to answer or bypass state's requirements. Considered as key experimental spaces for the construction of

developmental agendas, condominium spaces- once appropriated by dwellers - reveal to be social and potentially political laboratories.

Within this specific construction boom, this presentation intends to focus on a third set of dynamics where financial inclusion and social exclusion are deeply intertwined and transform practices of political participation in contemporary Ethiopia. It considers to what extend the overwhelming private indebtedness toward the State can impact or reshape urban citizenship.

On one hand, the expansion of refunding difficulties in urban societies nurtures shared frustrations amongst low and middle incomes dwellers. It echoes the tremendous rural debt that is known to reproduce the past status of farmers as servants to the State, and then provides a political dimension to the housing credit. The development of 'waiting lists' registering potential condominium beneficiaries that monthly deposit payments into bank accounts disrupts a fair/balanced access to housing and reinforces the dependency of candidates.

On the other hand, access to housing appears to be more and more uneven and results from individual abilities to answer governmental incentives or to negotiate within a semi-public rental market. Inside condominiums, the ability to access to apartments increases social polarisation (potentially segmentation) between tenants and owners. As urban rents rise up and lead poor owners to "sale" their houses, this polarisation evolves rapidly. It then questions the rise of a middle class and the relegation of the poorest. But most of all, it impacts for both categories their reactions to political/governemental mobilisation.

Daniel Mains – Honors College, University of Oklahoma/ Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO)

A Cobblestone Boom: The Temporal Politics of Cobblestone Roads in Urban Ethiopia

Between 2007 and 2015 the Ethiopian government, the German Development Cooperation Office and the World Bank invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the construction of more than 670 kilometers of urban cobblestone roads and created over 100,000 temporary jobs. Cobblestone is a different kind of construction boom. Cobblestone road construction enacts a particular vision of development, in which change occurs slowly and is driven by manual labor and seemingly simple technologies. Ethiopian government administrators often claimed that the process of building was more important than the finished product. The material qualities of cobblestones are thought to reduce the corruption and rapid fluctuations in real estate prices usually associated with construction booms. I examine the particular manner that a cobblestone boom builds states, cities, and the lives of young men. International NGOs seek to use cobblestone to build transparent governance within urban Ethiopia. The Ethiopian state seeks to build a relationship with urban youth. The young people who labor on cobblestone roads seek to build their own lives and experience progressive changes in their relationships with others. These different agendas interact in complex ways to both support and undermine each other.