Introduction: Urban revolutions in the age of global urbanism

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Abstract
This special issue, papers presented at an Urban Studies Foundation-funded conference in Jakarta (March 2011), examines the current 'urban century' in terms of three revolutions. Revolutions from above index the logics and norms of mainstream global urbanism, particularly the form they have taken as policymakers work with municipal officials worldwide to organise urban development around neoliberal norms. Revolutions from below refer to the multifaceted contestations of global urbanism that take place in and around cities, ranging from urban street demonstrations and occupations (such as those riveting the world in early 2011 when these papers were written) to the quotidian actions of those pursuing politics and livelihoods that subvert the norms of mainstream global urbanism. It also highlights conceptual revolutions, referencing the ongoing challenge of reconceptualising urban theory from the South – not simply as a hemispheric location or geopolitical category but an epistemological stance, staged from many different locations but

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always fraught with the differentials of power and the weight of historical geographies. Drawing on the insights of scholars writing from, and not just about, such locations, a further iteration in this 'southern' turn of urban theorising is proposed. This spatio-temporal conjunctural approach emphasises how the specificity of cities – their existence as entities that are at once singular and universal – emerges from spatio-temporal dynamics, connectivities and horizontal and vertical relations. Practically, such scholarship entails taking the field seriously through collaborative work that is multi-sited, engages people along the spectrum of academics and activists, and is presented before and scrutinised by multiple publics.

Introduction

It has become commonplace to observe that the 21st century is an urban century. With the urbanisation of the Global South, it seems that the globe is completing what Lefebvre (2003[1970]) dubbed the 'urban revolution' and Brenner and Schmid (2012) call 'planetary urbanization': the urbanisation of everything, everywhere. Indeed, from their beginnings cities have been bound up with revolutions, large and small, fast and slow. The emergence of cities as a novel form of settlement (in what we now call the Middle East, Asia and Latin America); the rapid urbanisation of

Figure 1. Students occupy Indonesia's Parliament Building, demanding the end of Suharto's rule, Jakarta, May 1998.
Source: By permission of the photographer Eddy Hasbi.

industrialising, capitalist Europe (and subsequently North America) during the 19th and early 20th centuries; the unprecedented rapid urbanisation of the postcolonial world during the last three decades: each of these simultaneously reflected and reinforced revolutionary societal change. In the process, cities became experimental spaces for top-down initiatives of societal engineering and transformation, of local and global resonance – but also key spaces for grass-roots contestations and alternative visions seeking to transcend dominant governance regimes (Figure 1).[1]

This special issue takes up these interrelated vectors of societal revolutions from above and below, but also explores the potential of a *conceptual* revolution in urban theory, one that challenges the presumption that urban theories and policies, developed since the 20th century in the North Atlantic region, suffice for making sense of the urban and improving urban living everywhere.

Revolutions from above index the logics and norms of mainstream global urbanism. This mode of urbanism 'explicitly or implicitly relies on cities in North America and Western Europe as the norm. It bears the imprint of previous rounds of domination and capital accumulation, when European colonial authorities sought to remake Asian, African, and Latin American cities along the
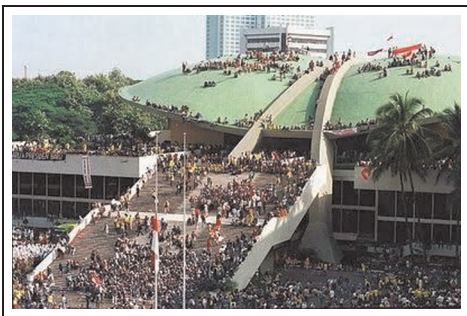
lines of emergent principles of the European urban planning' (Sheppard et al., 2013: 894). During the last three decades, this teleological imaginary has come to be dominated by neoliberalisation, emphasising market-led solutions to problems faced by capitalist cities, with inter-urban competitiveness becoming the key to economic growth and prosperity. The conjuncture of urban elites' desires to live in global cities modelled in the image of London, New York or even Singapore, with supra-national institutions' promotion and propagation of global urban norms and city governments' facilitation of fast policy transfer, has intensified this normalising vector.

Revolutions from below refer to the multi-faceted contestations of global urbanism that take place in and around cities. The most visible of these are actions subverting urban spaces for subaltern purposes, transforming them into venues for popular unrest, resistance and revolution. Again, these have taken different forms, with both local and global aspects. The moment when we conceived this special issue was one of spectacular revolutions. The initial conflagrations were in postcolonial societies: the 2011 social mobilisations across the Middle East and North Africa threatening autocratic regimes and demanding political change. In a dusty town close to Tunis, young Mohammed Bouazizi, trying to survive as an informal vendor, had his unlicensed vegetable cart confiscated. Such tense confrontations happen daily in metropolises where 'informal' merchants risk dispossession as governments experiment with strategies to valorise elements of urban street life, but his response had global consequences. Immolating himself in protest, he ignited the imagination of thousands belonging to what Elyachar (2005: 27) has called the 'generation of structural adjustment'. Triggered by the diffusion of this urban revolution to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and Libya, related social

movements emerged in many cities. Throughout 2011 and 2012, urban space was being transformed into sites of revolt in cities as diverse as Mumbai, Durban, Manila, Madrid and Tel Aviv, and the 'Occupy Wall Street' phenomenon spread from New York to cities worldwide. While we do not suggest that these varied protests were all part of a singular global process, we read these contestations as responding, in diverse and divergent ways, to the urban confrontations and humiliations triggered by neoliberal global urbanism: forced evictions, dispossessions and housing demolitions, among many others. They also were bound up with a larger critique of corporations and the global financial system, both as driving forces behind these humiliations and more generally as undermining democratic urban governance. Whether or not globalising capitalism was the immediate object of protest, these revolutions were directed against the vectors of power put in place through globalising capitalism and the state.

Revolutions from below also include many less visible and localised events: the quotidian actions of those finding ways to live that subvert norms of global urbanism. In cities across the globe, unions of informal workers, federations of shack dwellers and poor people's movements directly challenge global urbanism and its exclusions. Various scholars have conceptualised revolutions from below, as acts of 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston, 2008), as forms of 'occupancy urbanism' (Benjamin, 2008) or as the often unseen and unrecorded 'street politics' (Bayat, 2009) that claim and transform space.

Conceptual revolutions refer, here, to the challenge of reconceptualising urban theory from the South – by now an active area of urban research (Edensor and Jayne, 2012; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014). In his important intervention *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 8–9)

notes that European historicist thought has often consigned non-Western nations to the 'waiting room of history': 'we were all headed for the same destination … but some people were to arrive earlier than others'. So it is, perhaps, with the discipline of urban studies, where the mantle of urban modernity too often has been denied cities in the Global South. Thus Robinson (2002) notes a persistent division within urban studies between the study of 'global cities' (represented as command and control nodes of the global economy) and of 'megacities' (represented as concentrations of underdevelopment). Focusing on global cities obscures the 'differential and dynamic developmental pathways' (Olds and Yeung, 2004: 489) through which cities come into being. Emphasising megacities as a 'planet of slums' (Davis, 2006) similarly obscures how these cities are also complex and contested formations of urban modernity: places of 'inventions and interventions' (Robinson, 2006a).

Recalling that cities were invented within what we now call the Global South should remind us how problematic it is to reduce urbanisation to a European transformation that then diffused across the world (the revolution from above imaginary). Following Leitner et al. (2007) and Sheppard et al. (2013), we take seriously the notion that the imagining of alternative urban futures rests at least partly upon new and transformed understandings of the urban condition. Rendering the familiar as strange is thus an important challenge in the age of global urbanism.

The papers in this special issue originally were presented at the Urban Studies Foundation-funded *Urban Revolutions in the Age of Global Urbanism* conference in Jakarta, March 2012. The participants and themes of this conference reflected a longer genealogy. They were an outgrowth of conversations among a network of urban scholars, from different parts of the globe, participating in a series of conferences and workshops that we were involved in co-convening: *Inter-referencing Asia: Urban Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (Dubai, 2008), *The Making of Global Cities* (Minneapolis, 2008), *Making Global Cities and the Global Economic Crisis* (Shenzhen, 2010) and *Provincializing Global Urbanism* (Asolimar, CA/Philadelphia, PA, 2011 − a Social Science Research Council-sponsored Doctoral Pre-Dissertation Fellowship Workshop).

In the spirit of provincialising global urbanism, we conceived of this network-in-making as a means for bringing together scholars (university faculty, researchers, activists, graduate students) studying and writing *from* cities located in the Global South/post-colony, not just North Atlantic scholars writing about such places. Inevitably, this is a particular network involving a small minority of such scholars and activists, shaped by our personal connections, participants' ability to communicate in English and their availability. We deliberately utilised postcolonial cities as venues, wagering that visiting participants' direct experience of these places would trigger different kinds of engagements with urban theory. We worked with local organisers, encountered different cultures of conference organising, and created opportunities for local scholars (particularly students) to participate. Seeking to remain acutely aware of how the geographies and hierarchies of our network-in-making shape knowledge production and its politics, this has been an effort to re-conceptualise urban theory. The Global South, or the post-colony,[2] become not simply a hemispheric location or geopolitical category but rather an epistemological stance, one that can be staged from many different locations, but always fraught with the differentials of power and the weight of historical geographies.

An age of multiple global urbanisms?

Although nurtured by longer conversations, this collaborative project was born in 2011, in the midst of what seemed to be a time of revolution. Across the Middle East and North Africa, social mobilisations were threatening autocratic regimes and demanding political change. By the following year, austerity protests and movements of dissent were flourishing in the North Atlantic, from 'Occupy New York' to the *Indignados* in Spain. Social and political transformations were underway in the streets of cities around the world; we were interested in how studying and conceptualising such processes could enact transformations of research and theory within urban studies. As Allegra et al. (2013: 1675) argue, such 'contentious times' are an opportunity to 'rethink cities': 'to develop a critical approach based on the observation of the nexus between an event (a punctual expression of dissent) and a site (the urban environment in which the former takes place)'. Jakarta provided just such a site. Jakarta, where a violent 1998 uprising was organised against the authoritarian regime of Suharto and its close alliances with transnational capital and the IMF's structural adjustment policies (Figure 1), represents the prehistory of today's Cairo or Tunis. Meeting here thus pushed us to situate our rethinking of cities within a longer, complex history – not only of global capital and its circuits, but also of revolutions from below (from the austerity riots of Buenos Aires to the people's power revolution of Manila).

From Jakarta, we convened a set of dialogues connecting various locations in the Global South – Brazil, India, South Africa, Singapore, Egypt and China. These South–South dialogues were not meant to project the Global South as a coherent geography and singular history. Rather, following Simone (2010: 10), we think of the South as an 'invented latitude', one that makes us attentive to 'shared colonial histories, development strategies, trade circuits, regional integration, common challenges, investment flows, and geopolitical articulation'. Such latitudinal analysis allows us to rethink EuroAmerican urban theory, and provides what we hope are some novel insights into urbanism and urban politics. This is an example of what Vanessa Watson (2009), in the pages of this journal, has described as the charge of 'seeing from the South'. It is also the work of what, again in this journal, Steve Pile (2006: 306) has described as 'provincializing the West'. Following Pile, we re-envision Western cities as a 'strange case' in an age of global urbanism.

Today, as a renewed military dictatorship consolidates its iron grip in Egypt, the optimism about 'networks of outrage and hope' (Castells, 2012) may have to be reconsidered. Nevertheless, as Nezar AlSayyad and Muna Guvenc (2013: 1) argue in their essay in this volume, that riveting moment makes possible new analysis of 'the geography of urban uprising'. Focusing on Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, they argue that this geography must be understood not only as physical space but also as virtual space. Virtual practices, they note, are the 'new types of performances' (p. 11) at work in social movements, expanding the 'old repertoire … based on street demonstrations, vigils, rallies and public meetings'. But AlSayyad and Guvenc (p. 3) also remind us that the so-called Arab Spring was preceded by 'five decades' of 'other social protests', especially struggles of the labour movement. Relatedly, in a paper originally presented at the Jakarta conference, Salwa Ismail (2013) challenges dominant narratives of the Arab Spring by foregrounding 'the politics of the urban everyday'. She draws our attention to the 'infrastructures of oppositional action' that were developed in the popular quarters of Cairo, where informal livelihood is widespread and distinctive

modes of community organisation were honed in the context of a prolonged era of structural adjustment and political violence. Her work is a call to rethink urban politics and its imagined figure of the 'oppositional subject' (Ismail, 2014: 271).

We see this task of reconceptualising the oppositional subject of urban politics as important and urgent. Writing against the continued fetishisation of the 'male industrial worker as the revolutionary subject', Richard Pithouse (2012: 486) foregrounds the 'urban poor living outside of waged employment, be it in the ghetto or the shack settlement'. This, he emphasises, is not a romanticisation of the emancipatory potential of such oppositional politics. He shows how, in contemporary South Africa, the shack settlement has been the site of movements such as the Landless People's Movement and the Unemployed People's Movement, but also of violent 'xenophobic pogroms' (Pithouse, 2012: 485). Note how Pithouse conceptualises the significance of the shack settlement for a rethinking of cities and urban politics:

> This is not because of any ontological difference amongst the people living there, or because life there is entirely other at the level of day-to-day sociality. It is because it is a site that is not fully inscribed within the laws and rules through which the state governs society. Because its meaning is not entirely fixed it is an unstable element of the situation. The unfixed way in which the shack settlement is indexed to the situation opens opportunity for a variety of challenges – from above and from below, democratic and authoritarian, in the name of the political and tradition, and from the left and the right – to the official order of things. (Pithouse, 2012: 486)

The relationship between the urban everyday, oppositional politics, and social and political transformation is also evident in the essay in this volume by Teresa Caldeira and James Holston. Their concern is with 'participatory urban planning' as a 'new vision for ordering urban space' and a new mode of 'governing the city' in Brazil (2014: 2). With a focus on the master planning process in São Paulo, they examine how urban policy has become a space to 'counter entrenched social inequalities' (p. 2). Such urban policy came into being, they note, because of the 'insurgent movements' of the working classes across Brazilian cities. Urban residents 'built these cities physically brick by brick and also socially by organising into insurgent movements to fight for housing, property, infrastructure and services; to fight, in other words, for the right to the cities they were making' (p. 2). They became urban citizens and in doing so transformed the very terms of democratic citizenship in Brazil.

Caldeira and Holston situate the emergence of participatory urban planning in Brazil at a distinctive historical conjuncture: the entanglement of democratisation and neoliberalisation in the late 1980s. Seeing these as 'coincident and contradictory' projects (p. 4), they analyse both the context and limits of insurgent urban citizenship. Here, as in Egypt and South Africa, it is necessary to hold in simultaneous view revolutions from above and revolutions from below. The contemporary revolution from above, as Hall et al. (2013: 5) note in the Kilburn manifesto, entails a 'restructuring of state and society along market lines' and 'the redistribution from poor to rich'. Yet, as they also note, 'neoliberalism never conquered everything' (Hall et al., 2013: 6). It is in this spirit that we pay attention to the revolutions from below.

Yet, even as revolutions from below offer vitally important disruptions of the order of global urbanism, that order requires continued analysis. In their essay in this volume, George Lin et al. (2014) investigate rapid contemporary urban development in China as a revolution from above is not reducible

to neoliberalisation. Examining the commodification of urban land, they argue that the central-local reshuffling of state power is vital. Local governments are crafting land markets – the leasing and transfer of land use rights – in order to create sources of municipal revenue. In making the role of the state central to this urban revolution, they invite us to conceptualise its role as much more complex and varied than the land grabs that have dominated the urban studies literature. Lin et al. (p. 3) argue that Chinese urbanisation is 'a particular variety of neoliberalism in which increased marketization and commodification of land-based resources have taken place, not to undermine state power capacity but rather to function as a means for local governments to contest the rescaling of state power'.

It should be obvious by now that we are arguing that the analytical theme of 'urban revolutions' not only makes possible a rethinking of the relationship between protest and urban space but also that of the broader question of global urbanism. This is the conceptual revolution we have in mind. It is interesting then to read Lin et al.'s essay on neoliberal urbanism in China alongside that by Tim Bunnell in this volume. As Lin et al. reframe the analysis of neoliberalisation, so Bunnell (2013: 8) calls for urban studies to move beyond 'EuroAmerica-centred antecedence and neoliberalisation from above'. Studying how cities in Asia reference one another, Bunnell argues that the effects of such inter-referencing cannot be reduced to a neoliberalism on the move. Instead, as in the case of Brazil, neoliberal city-making is deeply entangled with developmental states. Bunnell's (p. 11) call for a conceptual shift is compelling: 'Recognition of extended histories and alternative genealogies is another way in which to think about urban policy models as more-than-neoliberal or, indeed, as not necessarily neoliberal at all'.

Such a shift, we believe, also makes possible a transnational understanding of urbanism and urban politics in the Global North, as is the case with the essay in this volume by Nik Theodore (2014). Tracing the 'continental travels' of the methodology of popular education, Theodore (p. 1) shows how strategies of organising in the Global South are being deployed and adapted to organise immigrant day labourers in US cities. In the process, seemingly 'unorganisable' contingent workers become oppositional subjects, producing transnational repertoires of political practice. A similar story unfolds in the essay by Biju Mathew (2014) in this volume. Studying labour organising strategies in the taxi industry in New York, Mathew (pp. 5, 15) shows how a 'predominantly Third-World immigrant workforce', implicated in precarious relationships of independent contractorship, has developed categories, concepts and practices of mobilisation that depart from the 'collective bargaining contract'. Like Theodore, Mathew (p. 15) emphasises how 'shared histories of political struggles and material living conditions' extending to the Global South (Mathew's phrase is 'Third World') makes possible such organising frameworks. At stake, here, is an understanding not only of new conditions of contingent work and new practices of politicisation but also of global urbanism itself. As Theodore (pp. 14–15) notes, the 'global visions' emanating from 'sites of popular resistance' are quite different from the global travels of 'tried and tested models'. They are 'a relational geography of social-movement activism'. They require, in our opinion, a relational understanding of such global processes.

In calling for a conceptual revolution, we are keenly attuned to how difficult it is to forge relational geographies of knowledge production. As we draw inspiration from the transnational worlds of social movements, so we acknowledge the stubborn boundaries and hierarchies of the global university. Thus, in her essay in this volume,

Sophie Oldfield (2014: 1) poses the challenge of urban research and theory that is produced with activists in 'multiple sites in and beyond the academy'. If we are to stage a conceptual revolution in urban studies, exploring such relational knowledge practices seems important and urgent. These alliances are not easy to create and maintain – 'not utopian, nor easy' is how Oldfield (p. 12) puts it. But they are necessary, she argues, if we are to generate new ways of theorising the 'urban as political terrain': 'multifaceted and scaled, these practices trouble universal or singular stories of urban revolution and its politics that too easily dominate the theoretical and analytical registers of social movement and urban political scholarship' (Oldfield, 2014: 12). Indeed, to call into question the universals of global urbanism requires ongoing work in urban studies. We follow Carlos Vainer, also a valuable participant in the Jakarta conference (2014: 53), in noting that such work cannot simply replace 'a Eurocentric, mono-topic epistemology by another one − a global southern one − also mono-topic in nature, though centred instead in Latin America or elsewhere in the periphery'. Instead, we endorse his call for 'new decolonizing perspectives' that are 'anchored, located, rooted, and engaged', and acknowledge 'that all knowledge inexorably has a location, and, consequently, is not universal'. This is the foundation for destabilising the taken-for-grantedness of northern theory.

New iterations of urban theorising: Toward a spatio-temporal conjunctural approach

As Johannes Fabian (1983) and several post-colonial scholars since have demonstrated, a cognitive revolution in the thinking of time began in the 17th century, as 'Europe' gradually formed its self-image as the geopolitical and epistemic centre of what it perceived to be the 'first' world-system (Dussel, 1999). These discursive moves presented geographically disparate societies and people as temporally backward. This ideological ruse, which the philosopher Charles Taylor (2001) labels 'a cultural theory of modernity', saw a particular 'European' experience with attendant ideas, institutions and ideals displaced, via colonialism and its afterlives, into the universal – the Truth of history, as it were – that beckoned Europe's Others, the non-West. In Europe's newly ascendant temporal and geographical imagination, geographic placement was transformed into temporal location, reframing difference as deficiency rather than empirical diversity. With Europe now firmly installed in the present, its conceptual sentinels of 'culture' and 'reason' were put in service to mark what is lacking in the non-West. This confirmed the non-West's present as Europe's past, when Europe was still in the process of maturing. The implication, now copiously documented, was that Europe's stewardship became indispensable for the non-West to mature as Europe had, giving fillip to a series of spurious (if not outright racist) templates, from social Darwinism and cultural evolutionism to modernisation theory and development. No object of knowledge escaped this straitjacket of history and geography, now tabulated as stages of growth. Within the emergent field of urban planning, cities in the non-West were rendered as inferior and decidedly degenerate by comparison with cities in the West, themselves now anointed as the regulative ideals worthy of emulation.

There were dissident voices, of course, arguing that cities in the non-West were different, rather than simply upstream in a civilisational flow of time toward Europe as its *telos*. Radhakamal Mukerjee's innovative forays on rural and urban habitations in India (1940, 1951) are paradigmatic. His 'cultural and processual approach softened the geographical and climatic determinism'

of thinkers such as Friedrich Ratzel, Frederic Le Play and Edmond Desmolins by bringing them into engagement 'with a detailed application of ecological thinking to India (and Asia more broadly) from the Indian point of view' (Celarent, 2013: 1736–1737). Subsequent interactions with the Scottish sociologist and city planner, Patrick Geddes (who was to become the first professor of sociology at University of Bombay in 1917), added new layers to Mukerjee's human ecological approach. The so-called Manchester School of Anthropology, under the founding supervision of Max Gluckman, was another example. As Richard Werbner (1984), Bruce Kapferer (1987) and Jennifer Robinson (2006b) have shown, among others, this Manchester School sought to understand social problems in British Central Africa as products of colonialism, disrupting the ruling temporal dichotomy of 'traditional tribal' versus 'modern industrial' forms of livelihood. They demonstrated that migrants and labourers in African cities were creative agents, drawing on behaviours and resources from both systems to meet the demands of the specific social situations they encountered. The Manchester School's keen empirical research thus revealed African cities as 'spheres of articulation' rather than occupants of a readily apparent stage of transition. Ultimately, though, Mukerjee's environmentalism and the Manchester School's structural-functionalism both fell prey, for different reasons, to equilibrium frameworks that fail to give adequate account of the social reproductive and transformational dynamics of cities. This had the unintended yet ironic effect of reinforcing the hegemony of a temporal scheme in which Europe retained its vanguard status.

We recognise such early, albeit problematic, efforts to carve out 'new geographies of theory' (Roy, 2009) for understanding how cities work as important precedents for contemporary efforts to craft a southern turn in urban theory. In many respects, this was a project of social anthropology, geography and sociology that sought fidelity to the empirical particulars of place. By showing how these particulars problematise the universal prognostications of northern urban theory, this project did stalwart work in unsettling Europe's pieties.

Over the past decade, a new iteration of theorising has sought to 'provincialise' northern urban theory from the perspective of the South. This has involved demonstrating that modernisation never quite operated in the teleological manner proposed by northern theory. It also shows how, once Europe is 'provincialised' and its modernity ceases to be understood as *telos*, 'the question of rank is de-developmentalised, and the stark status differentiations of the global social system sit raw and naked, no longer softened by the promises of the "not yet"' (Ferguson, 2006: 186). In her influential salvo at northern urban theory, Robinson acknowledges the contributions of the Manchester School; for its proponents 'there was not a progressive dichotomy between tribalism and urban modernity … Rather, tribalism and urbanism each shaped and reinvigorated and, in some very practical economic as well as personal ways, depended on the other' (2006b: 49). Their contributions to urban theory, she argues, lay in their 'sense of city life as mobile, diverse, actively associational and concerned with making personal connections that reflect dynamic ways of living in cities' (Robinson, 2006b: 52). This emergent complexity of urban life also is captured in AbdouMaliq Simone's invocation of concepts such as 'people-as-infrastructure' and 'cityness'. Such commitment to the generation of mid-level concepts also is witnessed in Roy's (2005) renovation of the term 'urban informality'. These must be read as efforts to reverse the historical gradient of power-knowledge, whereby the metropolitan North produces 'theory' for

which the peripheral South supplies 'empirics' that re-animate this theory's value. In sum, this iteration of southern theory seeks to de-colonise – and in so doing provincialise – the universals of northern urban theory (cf. Sheppard et al., 2013). It often goes the extra step of trying to produce a constellation of alternative universals (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, 2011), asking: Why not understand cities in the North using concepts fabricated in and for the South?

While obviously sympathetic to these moves, we use this collection as the occasion to continue the work of crafting urban theory, prompted by the 'moment of revolutions'. The task at hand is not simply more nuanced and finer-grained urban historical geographies. In her declarative introductory chapter to the influential edited collection, *Geography Matters! A Reader*, Massey (1984) lists four key tasks that confront geographical investigations of cities, as places: (1) the theoretical problem of analysing the unique, since geography studies variation; (2) grasping the generality of events and the wider underlying processes without losing sight of the individuality of their form of occurrence; (3) the dialectical intertwining of the particular and the universal; and (4) explaining uniqueness without effacing interdependence, and vice versa. Massey's injunctions admirably sum up the challenges for southern theory. To avoid the dead-end of replacing, as Vainer (2014) says, one monolithic epistemology (northern urban theory) with another (southern urban theory), we advocate for a new iteration of urban theorising.

Seeking to move beyond a North–South dualism, we argue that urban theory must go beyond the city as unit of analysis, to understand how what happens 'in' cities is shaped by broader processes (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Sheppard et al., 2013). These processes are spatio-*temporal* and are expressed through multiple spatialities. In terms of

spatialities, it is important to acknowledge how multiscalar processes condense in particular places, in particular ways. But it also is vital to pay attention of the uneven connectivities that long have characterised globalising capitalism: How the conditions of possibility faced by, and the nature of, cities reflects (too often reinforcing) their unequal and unevenly empowered positionality with respect to the global system (Amin, 2002; Sheppard, 2002). Avoiding the temptations of 'methodological cityism' (Brenner and Schmid, 2015) also means attending to how intra-urban heterogeneity and inequality reflects unequal ways in which the inhabitants of places are connected across space and scale (Massey, 2005, 2007). In terms of temporality, we emphasise how contemporary differences and inequalities reflect the (to date) ineradicable after-effects of colonialism (and its supplementary logics: e.g. slavery, orientalism and racism). But is it also vital to attend to shorter-term dynamics – the ways in which processes come together around cities with particular force, and uneven impact, during particular moments such as those of economic and political crisis. In this view, cities are social formations stitched together by the threads of 'contingent necessity' (Gidwani, 2008): a spatio-temporal conjunctural approach to theorising cities. One of the motivations for exploring the analytic leverage of this approach is precisely that it affords a way to think about the composition (and re-composition) of forces and elements – local and trans-local, and of different temporal provenances – that enter into the making of cities and urban revolutions.

Whereas Scott and Storper (2015) emphasise a universal intra-urban process (agglomeration), and Peck (2014) presents universal (northern) political economic theory as confronted by particularistic southern postcolonial alternatives, we find ourselves closer to Brenner and Schmid (2015: 164): 'all

engagements with urban theory, whether Euro-American, postcolonial or otherwise, are in some sense "provincial", or contextual, because they are mediated through concrete experiences of time and space within particular places'. Yet this conjunctural approach is not reducible to the uneven geographical urbanising imprint of globalising capitalism, modified by context; it takes seriously more-than-capitalist processes: those of colonialism, racialisation, gendering, etc. These are presences that mark capitalism's edges and failures to deliver, as well as potential sources for disrupting capitalism from below.

Such spatio-temporal conjunctures might have included the collision of colonial laws governing business and commerce with customary local economic practices (e.g. Bayly, 1988; Birla, 2008); disease and epidemics confronted with early 20th-century projects of urban hygiene and social reform (e.g. Geddes, 1915; Goubert, 1989; Joyce, 2003; Reid, 1993; Sharan, 2014); Ford Foundation sponsored Master Plans for cities such as New Delhi in the 1960s (Sundaram, 2011); urban uprisings and revolutions of the kinds previously noted; and, most recently, the global financial crisis and the rush to 'speculative urbanism' (Goldman, 2011).

Spatio-temporal conjunctural thinking emphasises how the specificity of cities – their existence as entities that are at once singular and universal – emerges from spatio-temporal dynamics, connectivities and relations, both horizontal and vertical. This is why thinking from Jakarta and its historical geographies proved an important way for us to conceptualise the urban revolutions of 2011.

The financial–urban conjuncture

To illustrate this approach, we highlight themes emerging from the conjuncture of the new regime of finance and its crises with new forms of urbanisation and mass revolt – the moment of the Jakarta conference. Behind the spectacular revolutions of 2011 are pre-histories of structural adjustment, financialisation and dissent. Two recent conjunctures are particularly relevant: The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2008 Wall Street/City of London global economic crisis.

Leading up to the 1997 Asian financial crisis, as rapid entries and exits destabilised currency and property markets, urban policy encouraged speculative capitalism as the basis for the urban economy. A surge of net private capital flows (more than US$90 billion) into short-term speculative investments in South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines in 1996 (Mah-Hui and Chin, 2010) reversed just a year later; private capital fled the scene of the crime, with a net turnaround of more than US$105 billion. Across the region, property, stock and currency markets collapsed. Food shortages triggered food riots, job cuts led to union mobilisations, and the streets of the region's major cities were jammed with protest. The IMF stepped in with demands of public- (but not private-) sector austerity, triggering sharp cutbacks in access to public services and goods and more protests. The more actively involved the IMF became, the more the 'Asian contagion' spread, with pushback from populations also in China, Russia, Argentina and Brazil, whose governments had experimented with deregulated financialisation and were sucked into the widening crisis. Indonesia was perhaps worst hit. By May 1998, after his seventh election, Suharto confronted widespread protests. When troops fired into a university crowd in Jakarta, killing six students, the streets exploded and Suharto was forced to resign. Soon thereafter, South Korean cities also were brought to a standstill by a nationwide union-organised strike.

By contrast, throughout much of Africa banks were neither allowed to experiment with risky financial tools, nor able to

wantonly lend far more than their holdings; the Asian tsunami barely touched Africa's cities. Yet by the time currencies rebounded, with countries such as Malaysia reinstating more stringent regulations on the ebb and flow of global finance capital, new speculative instruments of finance and new forms of deregulation of finance capital were clearing a path to Western Europe and the USA, and eventually to African sites for land speculation and more. Emboldened and left undisciplined, global financial firms consolidated power through large-scale investments into urban real estate, stock markets and local currencies, increasing their investments while dramatically shortening their commitments to stay invested.

Uneven circuits of finance were carved out by the 2000s, based on highly differentiated government strategies that articulated with domestic politics, opening up new fields of possibilities. Many SE Asian countries, for example, passed legal and banking reforms to improve financial regulation and supervision, reduce debt, and increase savings throughout the economy down to the household scale. Governments limited short-term investment practices, directing national banks to shift funds from speculative into the (longer term) productive side of the economy.

This shift, combined with urban-based social programmes focused on public housing, underwrote a recovery particularly in such cities as Bangkok, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, which are both national capitals and pivotal sites for industrial production.

By 2008 a global financial crisis had broken out, centred this time in the heartland of global finance capitalism. Again, this crisis was uneven in its geographical impact; places badly hit by the 1998 crisis, such as Jakarta, were left relatively unscathed after 2008.

Reflecting upon both financial crises as conjunctural moments, it is possible to identify how these shape particular cities in differentiated and interconnected ways. For example, even as urban protests catalysed by these crises created obstacles for capital accumulation in some cities (e.g. Jakarta and Seoul after 1998, Cairo and Tunis after 2008), a disturbing politics of 'asset hunting' entailed inter-urban flows of finance capital into urban land speculation elsewhere (e.g. Madrid and Chicago after 1998, Istanbul and Bangalore after 2008). Such urban land speculation, converting urban commons and rural peripheries into urban real estate assets, has triggered rapid wealth accumulation by elite minorities, even as urban majorities face a loss of affordable housing in some cities, and mass displacement in others. The dialectics of urban revolution and speculative urbanism thus have unpredictable, volatile and life-altering implications for urban residents. With cities shaping and shaped by spatio-temporal conjunctures, in ways that cannot be reduced to prototypical North–South or 'global-city' metrics, a sobering reality comes into view that should wean urban theorists away from universal and developmentalist accounts of urban change.

The aspiration for collaboration

As we have already outlined, this collection emerges from a network-in-making. Of global scope, connecting very different places, unequally resourced institutions and distinctly positioned researchers, such a network-in-making manifests the very uneven geographies that we seek to analyse through networked research.

For example, logistically, assembling the resources to convene a global network in place for several days – for face-to-face interactions necessary for rich engagement – itself is difficult. The Urban Studies Foundation is unusual in its willingness to support this kind of interaction: state funding agencies lean strongly to supporting national-scale

research (or national participants in international networks), and large foundations have their own agendas, positioned from the usually wealthy countries where they have accrued their wealth. Otherwise, we have had to rely on smaller grants and in-kind contributions from participating universities.

The face-to-face conversations can also be fraught, seeking to cut across very different theory and academic cultures, with differently empowered participants within and between these cultures (including the power to access and provide the financial resources for convening scholars), and running up against the constraints of language. Both implementing a lingua franca (usually English) and simultaneous translation have distinct disadvantages (cf. Belina, 2005; Rodriguez-Pose, 2004; Timár, 2004; Vaiou, 2004). Mutually respectful disagreement is essential, and conflicts can be productive, but might also be disabling, particularly as different theory cultures rub up against each other to generate friction.

We recognise that the spatio-temporal conjunctural approach advocated for above requires access to far-reaching knowledge and perspectives. As such, it can only be pursued dynamically through collaborative work that is multi-sited, engaging people along the spectrum of academics and activists, and is presented before and scrutinised by multiple publics. For this to work, urban scholars have to both realise and interrogate the aspiration for collaboration. We hope that such an aspiration becomes an open conceptual space, one that can inhabit and even transform the uneven geographies within which it is necessarily embedded. This too might be a revolution of sorts.

Funding

Notes

1. Our use of 'revolution' is deliberately expansionary – going beyond the Marxian sense of 'Overthrow of an established government or social order by those previously subject to it' to embrace 'Alteration, change; upheaval; reversal of fortune' more generally (Oxford English Dictionary: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/164970?rskey=275jyn&result=1#eid, accessed 12 May 2015). Even with respect to the former definition, we argue that the events triggering such revolutions are generally unpredictable, often rooted in grassroots practices overlooked by authorities prior to, for example, the Arab Spring. Thus studies of such revolutions from below should include attention to '"non-movements"– the non-deliberate and dispersed but contentious politics of individuals and families to enhance their life chances' (Bayat, 2013: 588–589).
2. On the distinction between these, see Mbembe (1992).

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