

DISRUPTING AND (RE)CONTEXTUALIZING 'URBAN INFORMALITY'

Two Day Workshop
September 10-11 2014

International Graduate Program Berlin - New York - Toronto
Center for Metropolitan Studies
Hardenbergstraße 16-18, 10623 Berlin
Room HBS 0.05 (ground floor)

Organizers: Afia Afenah, Marcela Arrieta, Christian Haid, Meisen Wong

Urban Informality and Power

Power is undoubtedly integral to informality studies given that the early definitions of 'informality' arose only in relation to the hegemonic sphere of the 'formal', and the practitioners of informal activities as those marginalized and excluded by formal institutions. However, with the exception of a few studies, power is mostly employed in the Urban Informality scholarship as something that is inferred from the respective analysis. Furthermore, as Urban Informality gains greater complexity and nuance through more recent conceptual development such as "periphery", "cityness" (Simone, 2009), "occupancy urbanism" (Benjamin 2008), "gray spaces" (Yiftachel 2009) or Urban Informality as an "idiom of urbanization" (Roy 2009), the analytical utility of such concepts could be easily limited or even lost. Therefore, in this workshop, we revisit these newer approaches to Urban Informality through the more traditional category of power in order to hopefully (re)gain analytical territory for the concept.

Thus, the aim of this two-day workshop is to address analytical limitations and potentials of Urban Informality concepts via the lens of power. We intend to return to a more explicit and systematic engagement with the complex and multifaceted nature of often overlapping and conflicting power relations in informal spaces and practices, through research settings of the South and North, East and West. The social and symbolic arenas where power is exercised, contested, and mediated may be both material and discursive in nature, and thus provide multiple sites of investigation. Manifested power relations in informal spaces and practices will be investigated through three platforms:

I. Conflict

Urbanism can be perceived as a political experience because interactions with power and conflict are inevitable. These interactions can result in conflicts in which individuals/groups with varied vested interests collide. As researchers, we ought to closely examine conflicts so as to analyze inherent power relations; specifically, what are the idiosyncrasies of power relations in these conflicts within and over informal practices and settings?

II. Representation

The second thematic focus seeks to develop further popular discourses and forms of representation of urban informality. Which power relations can be revealed in processes of stigmatization of informality, of informality disrupting the aesthetics of the clean and orderly modern city, yet also in forms of romanticization and aestheticization of informal practices and settings?

III. Discipline and Control

Like much of the newer literature on informality, we agree with moving beyond a limiting definition of informality being a condition outside legality. However, we are still interested in relating informality to rules and regulations, but aim to concentrate on how these exclusionary practices are executed. Therefore, in this platform, we seek to discuss varying degrees of disciplining and controlling of informal everyday practices and settings, and the power relations that can be detected within. Principally, we want to scrutinize how rules and regulations are - at times uneven - executed across different locations (within different scales, both locally and globally), upon different types of informal practices, and upon different actors involved (disparate in terms of class, gender, and/or ethnicity).

We particularly welcome ethnographic accounts engaging with one of the inter-related platforms, and which disclose intrinsic power structures by reflecting on questions of class, gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, we also wish to continue the discussion beyond the workshop and ideally work towards a joint publication with interested participants.

References:

- Benjamin, S., 2008. Occupancy Urbanism: Radicalizing Politics and Economy beyond Policy and Programs. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(3), pp.719–729.
- Roy, A., 2009. Why India cannot plan its cities: informality, insurgency and the idiom of urbanization. *Planning Theory*, pp.76–87.
- Simone, A., 2009. *City life from Jakarta to Dakar: movements at the crossroads*, New York: Routledge.
- Yiftachel, O., 2009. Theoretical notes on "gray cities": the coming of urban apartheid? *Planning Theory*, 8(1), pp.88–100.

PARTICIPANTS

Afia Afenah, Marcela Arrieta, Solomon Benjamin, Ayona Datta, Felipe de Alba, Christian Haid, Melanie Lombard, AbdouMaliq Simone, Andrea Varriale, Meisen Wong.

PROGRAM

DAY 1 September 10 2014 Room HBS 0.05 (ground floor)

- 9:30-10:15 Welcome and Introduction
- 10:30-12:00 **Panel I: Conflict**
- Ayona Datta: "Another Rape? - Intimate Violence And 'Toilet Wars' in India"
 - Felipe de Alba: "The Construction Of "Water Power" - Intermediaries And Informal Political Usage In Mexico City"
 - Meisen Wong: "The Gray World Of Transport Services In A Ghost City"
- 13:15-14:45 **Panel II: Representation**
- Christian Haid: "The Politics Of Representation - Discourses Of Informal Practices In Berlin"
 - Melanie Lombard: "Representations Of Urban Informality: Evidence From Provincial Mexico"
 - Solomon Benjamin: "Materializing Representation: Cities Beyond High modernist Developmentalism and 'Resistance'"
- 15:00-17:00 **Plenary Debate:** If urban informality is merely a heuristic device for the analysis of power, what then is its theoretical significance?
Inputs (10 mins each) by
Solomon Benjamin, AbdouMaliq Simone, Melanie Lombard, Ayona Datta

DAY 2 September 11 2014 Room HBS 0.05 (ground floor)

- 9:30-11:00 **Panel III: Discipline and Control**
- Marcela Arrieta: "Community Water Systems Between Cooperation And Radicalization In Bogotá."
 - Andrea Varriale: "Spatial Informality In Naples - Formality And Informality In The Times Of The Commons"
 - AbdouMaliq Simone:
- 11:15-13:00 Roundtable Discussion: Wrap-up and outlook
- 14:00-17:00 Individual consultations - roundtable
- 17:00-19:00 Urban Informality Tour Kreuzberg

PARTICIPANT'S BIOGRAPHIES

Afia Afenah (afia.afenah@metropolitanstudies.de)

Afia Afenah is an urban scholar with a BA in Social Anthropology/Economics from the School of Oriental and African Studies and an MSc in Urban Development and Planning from the Development Planning Unit, University College London. Her research interests include changing patterns of social organization in the city, urban inequality and the political economy of forced eviction. Her PhD thesis ethnographically explores the complexities of social and economic relations and asymmetries of power in Old Fadama, Accra's largest 'informal settlement'.

Marcela Arrieta (marcela.arrieta@metropolitanstudies.de)

Marcela Arrieta is an urban anthropologist from the Andes University, Colombia and holds a Masters in historical urban studies with a research focus on environmental history at the Center for Metropolitan Studies, TU Berlin. Her dissertation investigates the sustainable development of cities through an ethnographic examination of communal water supply systems, the discourses of the local habitants, their uses of water, and the input of local knowledge(s) towards city planning and resource management. The relations between the local habitants and their territory, human beings and their environment, and culture and nature, have taken a central position in her research work.

Solomon Benjamin (solly.benjamin@gmail.com)

Solomon Benjamin is Associate Professor in the Humanities and Social Science Department at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, in Chennai, India. His research interests include the politics of space as shaped by economy, land, the digitisation of land records and the construction of poverty. Benjamin has published in academic journals, more extensively read online forums, and a book on the land politics of East Delhi's industrialised neighborhoods. Benjamin has coordinated several international research projects on issues of politics of economy, poverty, and land. He has coordinated a project of environmental planning involving municipal councils in coastal South India and followed by leading a team on an economic development plan for small towns in the Kolkata metro region. Benjamin has also been associated with the City as Studio program connected with the Delhi based RAQs Media Collective, to work with visual and performance artists, poets in exploring the politics of space via 'city walks'. He obtained his PhD from MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning.

Ayona Datta (a.datta@leeds.ac.uk)

Ayona Datta's research and writing broadly focuses on the gendered processes of citizenship and belonging and the gendered politics of urban renewal and urbanization across the global north and south. She uses interdisciplinary approaches from sociology, anthropology, feminist and critical geography combining a number of qualitative and visual research methodologies to pursue her

research questions.

Felipe de Alba (fdealbam@gmail.com)

Felipe de Alba is a postdoctoral fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He works on metropolitan problems in North American metropolitan areas, focusing on the water political problems, water provision and public security. He studied Political Science in the UNAM (Mexico) and holds a Ph.D in Urban Planning from the University of Montreal. He is coordinator of the Continental research network on informality in metropolitan spaces (RECIM, www.recim.info) and member of the Scientific Committee of The Intercontinental Network on Knowledge Economy/Society (RICEC, www.ricec.info). He is peer-review of articles for some international journals (United Kingdom, Australia, United States, Colombia and Brazil).

Christian Haid (christian.haid@metropolitanstudies.de)

Christian Haid's academic background is in Urban Sociology, Architecture and Urban Planning. His first Masters degree in architecture is from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. After practicing as an architect and urban planner Christian graduated in the interdisciplinary Masters degree in Urban Studies from University College London. His research interests are centered around diversity and difference in public space, local articulations in global urbanization, everyday life, and urban informality in contexts of both Global South and North. In his doctoral dissertation "City Life in Limbo - (In)stabilities and Conflict in Informal Urban Practices" he ethnographically explores the stabilities and instabilities within informal activities and practices that come into being in multicultural public spaces in the city of Berlin.

Melanie Lombard (melanie.lombard@manchester.ac.uk)

With a background in political theory, planning and urban studies, and previous experience in UK social housing, Melanie Lombard's research interests involve connecting the built environment to social processes through exploring the everyday activities that construct cities, often neglected by formal theories and practices of planning and urbanism. Building on doctoral research at the University of Sheffield exploring the construction of urban informality through social geographic conceptions of place, her recent research examines the conflicts arising from land tenure regularisation, and shelter informality in UK cities. Since January 2014, she has been Lecturer in Global Urbanism at the Global Urban Research Centre in the School of Education, Environment and Development at the University of Manchester.

AbdouMaliq Simone (abdoumalisimone@gmail.com)

Professor AbdouMaliq Simone is an urbanist and a critical geographer who has been affiliated with the African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town, professor of sociology at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and most recently, University of South Australia. His most notable publications are *For the City Yet to Come* (2004) and *City Life from Jakarta to Dhaka* (2009). His latest, *Jakarta: Drawing the City Near* (2014) has just been published. Prof. Simone focuses on practices of social interchange, cognition, local economy, and the assembly of power relations that have affect

how heterogeneous African and Southeast Asian cities are lived. His work has also transcended academic expertise, himself participating in the concrete challenges of remaking municipal systems, training local government personnel, designing collaborative partnerships among technicians, residents, artists and politicians.

Andrea Varriale (andreavarriale@hotmail.it)

Andrea Varriale is a PhD student at the Bauhaus University of Weimar since 2012. His research focuses on informal spatial processes at their intersection with legal and political discourses at the city level. He received a BA in Political Sciences at the "Orientale" University of Naples and a bi-national MA in European Studies at the University of Southern Denmark and University of Flensburg.

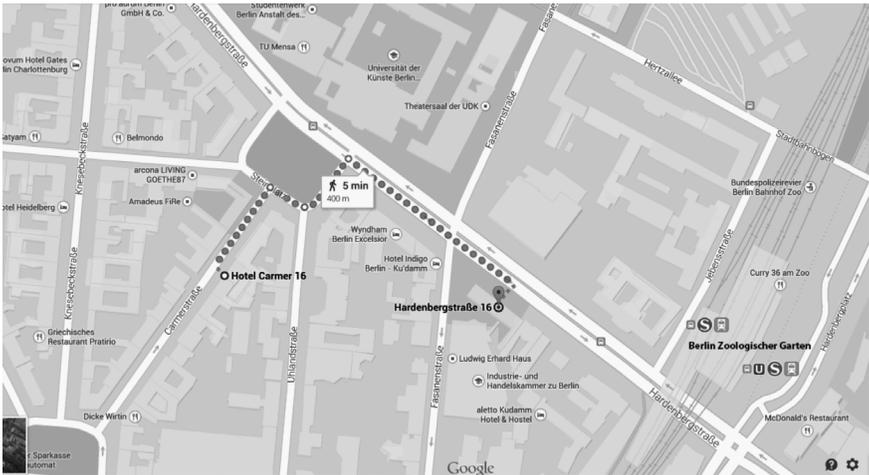
Meisen Wong (meisen.wong@metropolitanstudies.de)

Having graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) with her Bachelors and Masters degree, Wong's academic background is in Sociology and Cultural Studies. Her research interests include class and consumption patterns, popular culture, political economy and everyday life. The focus on her doctoral dissertation is on ghost cities in China, examining the relationship between 'cityness' and the imaginations and constructions of 'future' of residents who reside in these cities. Using the case study of New Ordos in Inner Mongolia, her dissertation is an ethnographic exploration of the temporal experiences of residents who live in a state of 'suspended futures' and the informal practices of production and consumption which they undertake to manage a global future which appears and recedes simultaneously.

DIRECTIONS

The workshop will take place at the Center for Metropolitan Studies, Hardenbergstr 16-18, 10623 Berlin, Room 0.05 (ground floor).

It is a 5 minutes walk from Hotel Carmer 16 and from the train station Berlin Zoologischer Garten.



Directions to the Center for Metropolitan Studies, Hardenbergstraße 16:

With public transport from Tegel Airport (TXL): Bus X9 to “S+U Zoologischer Garten“

With public transport from Schönefeld Airport (SXF): Train RB14 (destination: “Nauen”) or RE7 (destination “Dessau” or “Bad Belzig”) to “Berlin Zoologischer Garten“

With public transport from Hauptbahnhof: S-Bahn: S5 (destination „Spandau“), S7 (destination „Wannsee/Potsdam“) or S75 (destination “Westkreuz“) to “Zoologischer Garten“



INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATE PROGRAM
Berlin – New York – Toronto



Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft



CENTER FOR
METROPOLITAN
STUDIES