11.947 Urbanization and Development

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Part A

A.1 (12.5%)

Gugler states that "[t]he foremost conclusion of our systematic approach is how problematic most generalizations about world cities are." Illustrate this limitation with an example.

Analysis of "world cities", traditionally focused on the global economic centers of London, New York, and Tokyo, is now widening to include those cities situated within "periphery" or poor countries and regions. This widening of the analytical lens beyond the traditional "core" countries of the West has on the one hand enhanced our ability to understand global cities as more than simply subunits projecting the importance of their globally dominant states, while on the other it has presented social scientists with a far more disparate and unwieldy sample of locations to study.

Drawing on Gugler's introduction to "World Cities Beyond the West: Globalization, Development and Inequality", it is clear that simply qualifying two cities, such as Moscow and Mumbai as "world cities" does little to reconcile their vastly different histories, demographics, characteristics, and roles within the global system. While Moscow was largely developed as a planned capital for the Russian empire, Mumbai's emergence in its current form was due to its strategic location as a port city as well as its colonial history under the British Empire. While Moscow now operates as a primate city under a government characterized by extreme centralization, Mumbai is one of many large urban centers in India which itself has an extremely diverse and decentralized political system. These disparate conditions and histories greatly call into question the extent to which

the term “global city” is best utilized to simply describe extant conditions of influence and activity within the global economic, cultural, and political networks rather than suggest systemic similarities across cities characterized by such conditions.

A.2 (12.5%)

What, if anything, can we learn from Blockman’s article for an analysis of cities in economically deprived settings?

Blockman’s article, “Reshaping Cities: The Staging of Political Transformation”, focuses on the role that cities play as the physical environments which represent and project their inhabitants ideals and identities, as well as the political power of the government which rules them. While Blockman is specifically interested in the historical development of European cities, his analysis is particularly relevant to contemporary “peripheral” cites on two fronts.

First, Blockman argues that a unique form of citizenship tends to develop within urban settings and, he argues, it has accounted for many of the most significant cultural shifts and revolutions the world has seen. One must look no further than the current uprising on the streets of Bangkok to see how vulnerable many governments in the periphery are to large scale civil unrest in large and often overcrowded urban environments. This is only exacerbated by the tendency of political power and urban density to inhabit the same space within developing countries.

Secondly, Blockman elaborates on the ways in which governments exercise their power by controlling the development of the urban arena. While it is certainly possible to view the fingerprint of certain governments in the monuments and urban development trajectories dominated by the physical and tangible construction projects of many peripheral cities, it is perhaps more important to note the significance of the large areas and entire districts that often operate beyond the official projection of state power and governance in poor countries. This void presents likely poses the most significant challenge to urban governance in economically deprived settings.

A.3 (12.5%)

Which phenomena described by Xu and Yeh in their article on Guangzhou can be explained by revisiting Cockburn's main arguments? Which phenomena remain unexplained?

In their piece on Guangzhou, Xu and Yeh assert that the strong presence of China's central government in the creation of local development strategies, as well as the propagation of "soft budgeting" practices under its oversight, ought to diminish the perception of local city governments as the truly free and "entrepreneurial" in nature. This central claim certainly evokes Cockburn's earlier focus on the role of the local government as unit within a larger state directed effort to control and reproduce the conditions necessary for capital accumulation within its borders. While Xu and Yeh do clearly establish the connection between overarching state direction on the one hand and

development policy elaboration at the local level on the other, which Cockburn describes as all parts of government fundamentally working "as one", they also continue on to explore the spaces in which city governments in China are in fact free to pursue their own development policies, often for local political gain, as they compete to attract global capital. This concept of the local government as an individual actor free to navigate, and manipulate when possible, the structure in which it is functioning is hard to account for within Cockburn's limited view of local government agency. Finally, Xu and Yeh are fundamentally concerned with the way in which local governments take massive risks in order to subsidize physical development and thus capital accumulation in their cities while largely ignoring issues of social welfare. Cockburn's argument on the other hand is much better suited to explain why it is in the best interest of government to invest in these welfare systems that help maintain the status quo of class and labor relations.

A.4 (12.5%)

How does Mitchell's account of the local politics of nation-making sit with Simone's depiction of the potential of urban politics in (North) Africa?

Mitchell's account of local politics of nation-making outlines the ways in the government seeks to create heritage and national identity through the demarcation, destruction and re-creation of physical space in Egypt. At the local level, the state's prolonged campaign to redevelop the village of Gurna in the name of "nation building" failed to come to fruition, succeeding instead in uniting

the residents of the area and bolstering their own sense of national identity. Though this national identity was somewhat removed from that promoted by the Egyptian national government, it was none-the-less deeply entwined with a sense of place as well as the relationship between the history of life in Gurna and the tourist industry which supports their present-day livelihoods.

Mitchell's concept of identity formation as a process of differentiation, struggle and opposition is not far removed from Simone's assertion that within Africa's fluid urban environments the creation of "publics" is not simply the achieved through the organizing of pre-existing identities, but rather a process of conflict where argumentation and opposition legitimize certain actors and viewpoints. That said, Mitchell's article is far more concerned with the direct interplay of formal government policy and local resistance than the narrative presented by Simone. While Simone does touch on how national and urban identities in Africa were at one point created in opposition to colonial administrations, his article places far more emphasis on urban space as an arena within which individuals from varying backgrounds and cultures collide and, through social, political, and economic interactions, create public identities.

Part B

How can politics cause urbanization? And conversely, what kinds of politics are caused by urbanization?

Any survey of development literature and discourse from the 1950s through to today will reveal one unavoidable fact: the world is rapidly urbanizing. Over time there have been various positive and negative recapitulations of the process, either as the logical reordering of society necessary to accommodate economic efficiency and growth, or the harbinger of increasing inequality, marginalization, insecurity, and a wide range of other "urban problems" (Slater 27). Regardless, urbanization remains universally accepted by both its proponents and detractors as a process that is underway and one that will only continue in the coming years. The impetus then, amongst both theorists and practitioners of development planning, has turned towards understanding the factors driving rapid urbanization, as well as how best to manage its effects within the Global South.

This essay will explore the nexus between "politics" and rapid urbanization. Inherently this requires moving beyond the "Rostovian" tendency in the early development literature to draw on the historical experience of Western Europe and North America and designate urbanization as an afterthought in the larger, linear project of industrialization and modernization. While there is no doubt that the global shift away from agricultural economies and towards industrial modes of production remains a primary driver of urbanization throughout the world, more recent works highlight the importance of understanding the how political systems, as well as various national-level policy decisions, shape the disparate nature of urbanization patterns throughout the developing world. Finally, because urbanization is not a self contained or static phenomena, it will be critical to examine the ways in which the growth of urban populations is not

simply a product of politics, but also itself influences politics at the local and national level.

Politics as a Driver of Urbanization

Ades and Glaeser divide what they see as the forces that drive urbanization into three subgroups: trade and commerce, industry, and government and politics. While this model is useful in their attempt to differentiate the exact affect of each on either urban growth (the extent to which a country's urban centers increase in population), or urban concentration (the extent to which a country's urban population in consolidated in one "primate city"), it is somewhat limited in its conceptualization of politics as simply a system with varying degrees of stability, analytically separate from commerce and industry. Instead, their findings point to the fact that government's policy choices with regard to commerce and industry have tangible effects on urbanization levels. For example, investment in transportation infrastructure lowers the cost of taking goods to market in various locations and thus encourages more evenly distributed population growth throughout a region, while neglecting transportation infrastructure has the inverse effect (Ades and Glaeser 198). The central statistical finding that dictatorships and highly centralized political systems, particularly when unstable, cause increased urban *concentration* also indicates that, even in the absence of pro-urban development policy, politics can influence the process of urbanization (Ades and Glaeser 199). Davis (366 -367) builds on this concept of political systems as determinants of urban growth patterns in her analysis of how Mexico's government structure allowed for a simultaneous policy of rural-urban

migration and large-scale urbanization, and Mexico City's own, somewhat contradictory, commitment to mitigating density and development in the city center. By exposing the various coalitions between otherwise opposing interest groups within Mexico City which formed in order to respond to the myriad of urban problems created by rapid in-migration and subsequent strains on urban infrastructure, Davis' narrative also begins to elaborate the critical ways in which urbanization itself can profoundly shape political allegiances and processes.

Urbanization as a Driver of Politics

Despite what Glaeser (39) points out as a "strong correlation between urbanization and democracy", one must look no further than a simple comparison of political systems in rapidly urbanizing states such as India, China, and Brazil to see how difficult it generalize about the large-scale effects that urbanization has on politics. Subsequently, to assume that simply because urban centers *have* traditionally played host to major social revolutions and the realization of democratic power in Europe and North America (Blockman 8) again leads us dangerously close to the logical fallacy of presuming that this *will* occur similarly elsewhere. That said, the agglomeration of population within cites does create unique problems and challenges for politicians and policy makers and, due to the fact that urban areas are far more likely to experience civil unrest and rioting (Glaeser 39), local political structures must adapt to facilitate these changes. Most apparent here is the increasing move towards the decentralization of urban governance in many developing countries. With reference to Chinese cities in particular, Xu and Yeh explore this trend in their

article on Guangzhou, arguing that increased control over development strategies often leads local governments to recklessly pursue large-scale physical development while ignoring social programs and issues of urban welfare (303). While this decentralization of urban management is meant to increase the ability of government to respond to local needs, as well as increase the dynamic nature of cities within the global economy, it can also produce and further entrench inequalities and exclusion in urban centers (Libertun De Duren 309).

Conclusion

Politics and urbanization are fundamentally intertwined processes. While political policies and regime types play a major role in determining the individual nature of urbanization from country to country, the process of urbanization subsequently demands new policy imperatives as well as further structural elaboration of political systems. With the era of global industrialization nearing its end, the role that politics plays in urban growth and population distribution will only increase. The major remaining question must be to what extent the influence of urbanization on politics within the global south will produce normatively positive outcomes and systems capable of humanely managing growth, or further cement the move towards fragmented and exclusionary urban environments.

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