Thematic Section
Urban Anthropology / Anthropologie Urbaine

Introduction: Class and State in Urban Settings

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According to the United Nation's Population Division, the world's population became more than half urban in 2006 for the first time in history. This proportion will increase to more than 60% by 2030, with 90% of the world's population increase in the next generation being accommodated by urban settlements in less developed regions (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2007).

This thematic section of *Anthropologica* is intended to both commemorate this historic milestone and to challenge anthropology to revitalize its theoretical and substantive engagement with urban realities and prospects. Anthropology, as a discipline that has "traditionally" studied the least urbanized parts of the world, faces distinctive challenges in its efforts to understand the social, political, economic and spatial transformations of an urban world. While anthropologists increasingly work in urban settings, it appears that a decreasing proportion of those who work in cities orient themselves towards interdisciplinary urban studies. Thus, most anthropologists who conduct research in cities do not consider themselves as engaged in "urban anthropology" but rather as specializing in medical anthropology, studies of popular culture or transnationalism, to name just a few popular approaches. This lack of engagement with "the urban" and urban studies does not only miss opportunities for anthropology to challenge its analyses in ways that might better suit it for the emerging urban world, but also deprives urban studies of the distinctive methodological and theoretical approaches that anthropologists can offer. This thematic section presents work that has been done on questions of urbanization by anthropologists who explicitly engage with paradigms of interdisciplinary urban studies. For perspective, I am delighted to have been able to include a commentary by Neil Smith, a major contributor to urban studies from our cognate discipline of geography. He is perhaps ideally suited to provide this commentary, both because of his important contributions and,

since his appointment is now in Anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. His insightful comments both acknowledge the contributions that these articles make and challenge us to apply our ethnographic sensitivities in ways that engage even more effectively with important contemporary and past perspectives on state, class and violence from other disciplines.

A small set of papers cannot hope to encompass the diversity of contemporary work in urban anthropology, much less the full complexity of urban processes and transformations. Our approach here has been to concentrate on a set of issues that were central in earlier efforts in urban anthropology, but have more recently been eclipsed by an efflorescence of work on issues such as urban culture and identity. This will focus on some of the basic processes by which cities and towns are structured and restructured: state interventions and class dynamics, and particularly the interaction between these processes. Neil Smith adds "violence" to the dyad in his commentary, a phenomenon that does link these studies, but perhaps is inevitably tied up with the processes of state and class.

While a lot of work continues to be done in the broad area of urban political economy, anthropologists seem to be less likely to engage in interdisciplinary debates and development of the field. As an example, I could identify only two articles written by anthropologists out of 173 (1.1%) in the 2002 volumes of three main urban studies journals: *Urban Studies, Urban Affairs Review* and *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

It is not that urban political economy is not addressed by urban anthropologists, but the trend has been to emphasize how political economic processes such as globalization, transnational migration, neo-liberalism and restructuring are experienced by people, and particularly how already marginal groups may be further marginalized or how they resist these tendencies. It is not suggested here that these issues and perspectives are not important, nor that they do not produce often brilliant insights into the urban condition, which they certainly do. Indeed, it is precisely because of the high quality and distinct trajectories of anthropological research in urban settings that I find it to be unfortunate that anthropologists do not engage more regularly or broadly in dialogue with urban scholars in other disciplines. When anthropologists fail to communicate the results of their urban work to other students of cities, and shy away from engaging in the debates that continually invigorate the field of urban political economy, both sides lose. One motivation behind this thematic section has been to encourage greater engage-

ment in the exciting debates in urban studies on the part of anthropologists, and to stress the benefits of seeing the city as more than just an accidental setting in which ethnographers conduct their fieldwork.

Anthropologists were first drawn to urban research by following the cityward movements of people they had worked with in the countryside. The connections forged by migration meant that even if anthropologists wanted to restrict themselves to non-urban sites, a full understanding of a village required consideration of the impact of urban ties. The intensification of these translocal linkages means that distinguishing urban and rural has become increasingly difficult. Satellite television, internet shopping and digitally mediated outwork means that most aspects of the urban lifestyle are available in at least those parts of the countryside with good digital infrastructure. In rural Alberta, for example, the declining numbers (and increasing average age) of farmers has meant that the vast majority of the population is engaged in the energy industry and related service sectors rather than agriculture. In the rural municipality of Bonnyville, for example, the children of a farm family I did research with said that they were usually the only farm kids in their classes every year. Even for the farm families themselves, off-farm employment has become indispensable to the viability of the farm. The largest beef producer in this area had a sideline as a veterinarian and a plaque in his house reading "Behind every successful rancher is a wife who works in town." Many cattle producers are convinced that the domination of their industry by huge transnational corporations means that the only way that they can survive is by bridging the disconnect between themselves and urban residents by farm-gate or direct sales to consumers who are also increasingly distressed by the environmental, health and food quality results of global commodity chains. The challenge is to bring these groups together, and the internet is seen as a key medium for doing so.

The countryside of poorer countries such as China is not, for the most part, so privileged with access to "urban" ways of life and livelihood, but the contribution by Tan and Ding shows in other ways how difficult it can be to make distinctions between urban and rural. They also show that the distinction itself, in the form of the official designation of a place or a person as urban, has consequences. The interaction between industrialization and the administrative labelling of places is a central focus of their analysis. Since China's industrialization and urbanization is having a huge impact outside its borders, in terms of almost every export industry, commodity prices, emissions of greenhouse gases, and even the sustainabil-

ity of America's current account deficit, understanding the kind of cities that are emerging there has considerable significance. Labrecque's discussion of Ciudad Juarez provides a comparable case of urbanization through migrant labour, with differences and similarities being almost equally compelling. She addresses the consequences of export-oriented manufacturing in Ciudad Juarez, one of the most important manufacturing centres in the U.S.–Mexico border zone (and which has been significantly challenged by the competitive pressures resulting from the "rise of China." There has been a great deal of attention paid to the high rate of homicide among women in a city where the manufacturing workforce is predominantly female, and commentators have seen it as an indictment of the global factory and transnational corporations. Labrecque provides a more nuanced account of this "feminicide," showing that the dangerous conditions in the city are a product both of state practices such as the poor provision of street lighting and ineffective policing, and the class dynamics of a deeply divided social structure. The kinds of city that are being constructed to facilitate the offshoring of production are a product of both state and economy, and different states can result in very different platforms for export production in Mexico, China, Indonesia or elsewhere.

The conditions of production of low-wage labour are the main theme of Newberry's article. She concentrates on Indonesian *kampung* (neighbourhoods) as spatial containers for a reserve army of labour, while not neglecting their operation as places of rich lived experience and social solidarity, as well as forms for the state's administration and control of urban space. What Newberry endeavours to do is to avoid a functionalist account of the entanglement of class with non-class social relations while still demonstrating their mutual constitution. The complexity of achieving this, of simultaneously building on the important contributions of Marxian class analysis and considering how new conditions might require new conceptualizations is reflected in the reaction to her article in Neil Smith's commentary. From this we can get a sense of both the challenge and the significance of an anthropological re-engagement with class analysis. For Newberry, spatial considerations need to be worked in with class analysis. She considers in particular how kampung "entrap" labour, but also permit it to be reproduced with home-based forms of employment while producing a way of life worthy of personal commitment and reproduction. Her account of the complex social spaces that result provides an example of one way in which urban anthropologists can move between the terrains of global capital, the state and embedded local life, while providing a strong sense of "being there."

Nonini's contribution also focuses on the nexus between urban space, state practices and class, but complicates things further by concentrating on how these are influenced by the ethno-racial policies of the Malaysian government. Among other things, his rich historical and ethnographic analysis highlights that class is not only about production and consumption, but also about the extraction of rents through the actions of the state. Strategies to counter such predatory extraction by state officials included illegal practices, "taking the dark road," another critical element of urban formations that does not always receive sufficient attention.

Whitehead's essay also explores the complex texture of urban local spaces, but concentrates on the way in which these spaces are threatened by local and global forces that are driving the transformation of Mumbai, a key gateway city in the global circuit of capital. Restructuring and downsizing in the textile industry has contributed to large "rent gaps" between rental values for the mill lands and the workers' slums associated with them. She examines the political economy by which the state and other agents are attempting to capture the vast profits made possible by the gap between rents for current uses, and the glossier uses such as convention centres, malls, offices and expensive apartments, planned for in a rising global city. As Neil Smith points out, the scale of gentrification underway there "dwarfs anything imaginable in North America" and deserves much greater attention from mainstream urban studies which is still too preoccupied with North American and European cities, as a glance at the table of contents of most urban studies readers will quickly demonstrate.

Together, these essays span the scale from shared meals to vast urban redevelopment projects, from careful analysis of ways of speaking (or not speaking) to the projects and policies of the state. They reflect the challenges facing anthropologists who wish to understand the complex human constructions that we call cities, but they also suggest the intellectual rewards that responding to these challenges might offer. They show how the nuanced observation of the routines of people in their local spaces can help inform an examination of the global political economy, but also how a neglect of these broader forces can result in misunderstandings of local "tradition" and "culture."

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Reference

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