

# URBAN JOURNAL

VOLUME 9



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Front Cover: *Dead End* by Xinyu Yan

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## FROM THE EDITOR

James Dallape

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Urban Studies concentration at Brown. 50 years of students have moved through the program, each with their own outlook on the messy, beautiful, and ever-shifting nature of cities. This year's edition of the Urban Journal contains works that interrogate memory, change, and the persistence of history in the present. They pose questions about who shapes the built environment and who they shape it for. They consider the mark that the university leaves on the urban space it inhabits. They explore the limitations of current academic methods for investigating urban phenomena. These are just a few of the themes that are explored in the pages that follow.

The contributors to this year's journal come from a variety of backgrounds, and each brings aspects of their background to their work. Each writer falls back on linguistic habits shaped by the people they know, the places they spend time, and the languages they speak. Each artist employs a style shaped by the techniques they practice, the details they notice, and the subjects they seek to capture. In curating this collection, I sought to highlight not just each contributor's hard work, but also their history and their place in history, the things they do and the ways they do them. These works are snapshots of each contributor's perspective on urban topics, and they are snapshots of the contributors themselves. I hope you find them as fascinating as I do.



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## For Us, by Whom? The Case of Detroit and Descriptive Representation in Today's Cities

Ellis Clark

Long known for having one of the largest concentrations of African Americans in the country and a correspondingly deep bench of Black elected officials, Detroit has neither a mayor nor any representatives in Congress who are the same race as the overwhelming majority of city residents for the first time since 1955. Does that matter?



*A mural in Detroit, Mich. by the artist Waleed Johnson. Descriptive representation in this city is being tested by population shifts and a rising resonance of non-racial descriptors like class, gender, and ideology. Courtesy of Sylvia Jarrus.*

In 2023, for the first time in 68 years, neither the city's mayor nor any of the members of Congress who call Detroit, Mich. home are African American, unlike roughly three in four of the 670,000 residents who were counted in the 2020 Census. The most recent chapter in this decades-long demographic and electoral shift began in 2013, when former hospital executive Mike Duggan mounted a long-shot campaign to be mayor of the country's most beleaguered big city. The story is well-known: once America's fourth largest city with nearly two million inhabitants and famed as an industrial and cultural behemoth at its peak, the city had badly suffered the effects of white flight, automotive decline, and economic disinvestment. The city lost more than half its peak population by 2010, with the remainder spread across 138 square miles and countless neighborhoods. Designed for sprawl, not density, Detroit struggled with vast numbers of vacant buildings, empty blocks, crumbling schools, and crime—all before it hurtled towards the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history, with not even the streetlights turning on nor the trash being collected. You might say that, on all these counts, the City of Detroit had failed. Perhaps, some began to think, a well-heeled manager removed from the sometimes dysfunctional Black political class might be just the thing to turn it all around.

By 2013, enough Detroiters appeared to agree, as Mike Duggan, a white, former hospital executive, was able to mount an audacious write-in campaign for mayor after initially being disqualified for failing to meet city residency requirements. He then beat the popular (and Black) county sheriff that November by ten points, becoming the first white mayor elected since 1969. Today, Mayor Duggan is halfway through his third term in the Manoogian Mansion, presiding over the city's uneven revival, with significant development and transformation in the city's center but many far-flung neighborhoods still awaiting the promised renaissance. Duggan is said to be clear-eyed about being a white mayor in a Black city and has spent years ingratiating himself in the traditional community centers for African American life in Detroit, from Black churches to block clubs. These nuclei have rewarded him handsomely in turn, with Detroiters now having twice re-elected him with over 70% of the vote each time.

That durability has presaged a change: for decades, Black voters have elected Black leaders as the most stirring manifestation of the progress made since the Civil Rights generation of the mid-twentieth century, electing icon after icon of Black politics to City Hall, the State Capitol, and Congress. Charles C. Diggs Jr., John J. Conyers Jr., Coleman A. Young, Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick—each of them would become doyens of local society and pillars of community life both during and after their times in office, on par with Motown stars and automotive giants, their names today immortalized on streets, schools, even City Airport. But as the city continued to struggle despite the ubiquity of its Black leadership, residents who supported Mayor Duggan were clearly open to overtures beyond descriptive representation—that is, electing representatives that share a descriptive characteristic with their constituents, often racial identity.<sup>1</sup> Duggan was, after all, elected the same year that former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, son of a pioneering congresswoman and in so many ways the protégé of that first generation of Black local elected officials, was convicted of racketeering and extortion after a tumultuous early-aughts tenure presiding over the eleventh floor of the Coleman A. Young Memorial Municipal Center.

Enter Rashida Tlaib. The first Palestinian-American and Muslim woman ever elected to Congress got her start as a crusading local attorney and state legislator, building a rapport with voters in the Thirteenth Congressional District for her fiery advocacy of some of the Westside's poorest neighborhoods—despite not being Black herself. In 2018, Tlaib narrowly won a hotly contested election over several Black candidates to succeed John J. Conyers Jr., the longtime dean of Black Detroit politics who had served in the U.S. House for a staggering 52 years. Tlaib has gone on to become a nationally-recognized force in progressive politics and a founding member of The Squad, highlighting her predominantly Black residents' struggles with unaffordability and environmental injustices and earning reelection time and again with overwhelming Black support.

Not long ago, Detroit had several concurrently-serving Black members of Congress, an all-Black city council, multiple Black state legislators, and a Black mayor. With the demographic and political changes that brought Tlaib to power, that number of Congresspeople representing the city had dwindled to just two women of color by 2019: Tlaib and Brenda

Lawrence, who, though Black, called suburban Southfield home—leaving the city without any Black Detroiters in Congress for the first time since 1955.

Still, Brenda Lawrence had grown up in Detroit, and her gerrymandered district comprised half the city, giving Black voters in the area a descriptively-representative voice in Congress. Lawrence herself was a popular representative and had been expected to continue serving for many years to come. However, in a shocking decision, Lawrence announced she would not seek re-election in 2022, citing family obligations. In private, she had expressed dissatisfaction with the recent implementation of a statewide ballot initiative that had passed in 2018, the same cycle as her colleague Rep. Tlaib's first election. The proposal transferred redistricting power from the State Legislature to an independent citizens' redistricting commission, drawn from everyday Democratic, Republican, and nonpartisan Michiganders who had applied from all over the state.

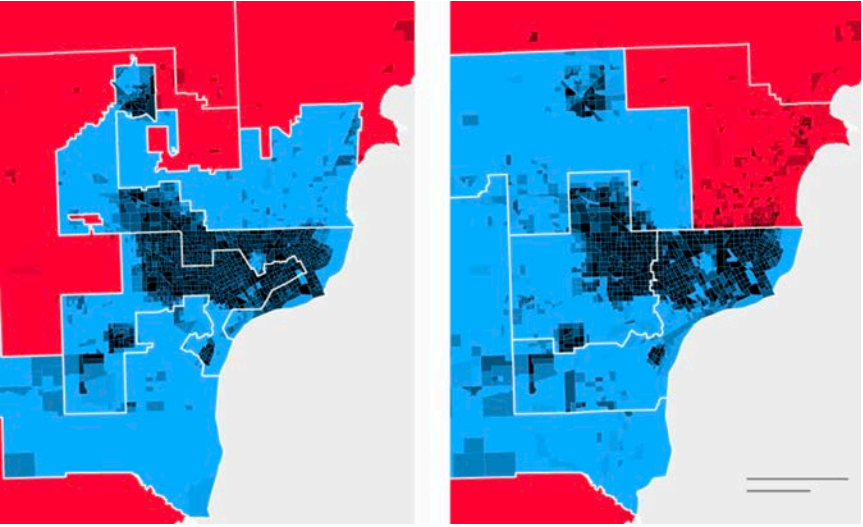
Many Democrats had campaigned for the measure, while Republicans, who had substantially gerrymandered the state in 2011, were vociferously opposed. But the new commission also received somewhat unexpected criticism from one particular community: Detroit's Black political establishment. The Republican-led maps had decimated Democrats all over the state in 2011 in favor of maximizing districts that "packed" as many Democratic voters into the fewest districts possible. Although these majority-Black districts dilute Black voting power across states by packing the voters together into so-called vote sinks, these districts ultimately ensure that African Americans have the opportunity to send to Washington and their respective state capitals a representative that uniquely responds to their interests.

In states that utilize packing methods, Democratic districts tend to be centered in the state's densest cities, which has meant that most Democratic officials were elected by Black Detroiters, who in turn elected Black Democratic legislators and representatives. Instead, the independent commission agreed on new districts that were likely to lead to more balanced partisan representation statewide, but they did so by scrambling Detroit maps to "stretch districts north of Eight Mile" into majority-white suburbs, as one pundit put it to WDET-FM. The spreading of voters across traditionally-entrenched county and municipal divides effectively eliminated ten majority-Black state legislative districts. It also dissolved both majority-Black congressional districts that had long anchored Detroit, ultimately raising the mathematical possibility that none of these new districts would elect Black representatives. Black Democrats cried afoul at the dilution of Black voting power, and Congresswoman Lawrence decided she would rather go home than take part in one of two new Detroit districts that were un-gerrymandered but that united unfamiliar territory for her (Michigan also lost one of its House seats after the 2020 Census, setting off a game of congressional musical chairs that further threatened Metro Detroit's representation).

The state's political class was completely caught off guard by Lawrence's announcement so close to the filing deadline, with nearly a dozen decidedly B-list candidates jumping into the contest to replace her. Sensing the potential for the loss of Black representation in the seat, a committee organized by Detroit's highest-ranking Black elected official, Wayne County Executive Warren Evans, sought to endorse a "unity" candidate, picking a Black



## For Us, by Whom?

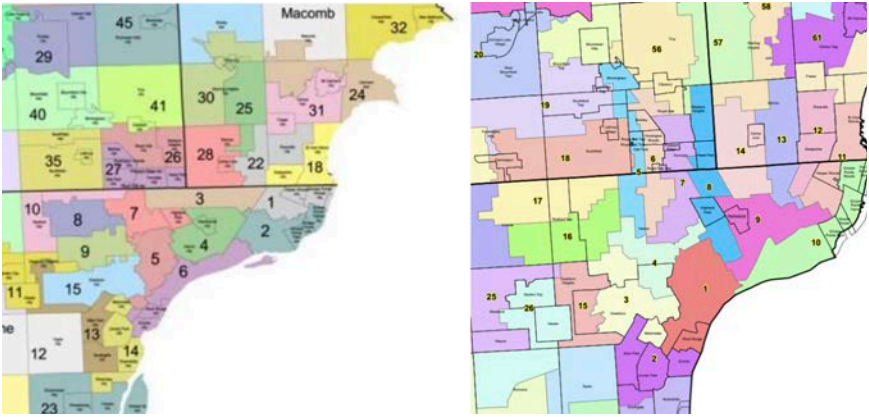


*A side-by-side comparison of Detroit-area congressional districts, showing incumbent representative blue (Democratic) and red (Republican) partisanship and the concentration of African American residents in black. The maps at left were gerrymandered by Michigan Republicans in 2011 and were in place for the Congresses between 2013 and 2023. The maps at right were designed by an independent commission in 2022 and will remain in place from 2023 to 2033. Reproduced from FiveThirtyEight and the Redistricting Data Hub.*

Detroit State Senator, Adam Hollier. But Black women in the district, emboldened by their increasing recognition nationally as the “backbone” of the Democratic Party, scoffed at replacing a Black congresswoman with a Black man, and Representative Lawrence and the local Democratic Party apparatus instead endorsed Portia Roberson, a nonprofit executive and former Obama administration official.

That divide helped a single candidate, despite the several other quasi-notables in the race: Shri Thanedar, a South Asian businessman and chemist who had immigrated to Ann Arbor, home of the University of Michigan, in the 1980s and who was willing to spend millions of his own money to win the election. And that he did, putting a staggering \$8 million toward a congressional race that saw barely any other candidates break \$1 million in donations. “There was a train everyone could see coming, but no one could seem to get off the track,” said William Higbie, a white voter in the district who wanted to support the legacy of descriptive Black representation but lamented the overwhelming number of candidates and spending splitting the vote. “It’s everything that’s wrong with politics today.” Thanedar wound up defeating Hollier, Roberson, and the others with 28.3% of the August 2022 primary vote, a tally which correlated to just 22,302 voters of all backgrounds across the city and suburbs. He would go to hold his Republican challenger to a 47-point margin of victory in November.

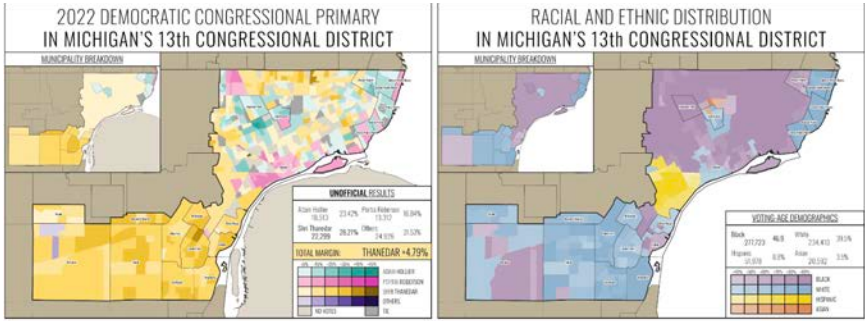
Not all is lost, however, for the voters that powered now-Congressman Thanedar’s rise and thus ended an hitherto unbroken seven-decade streak of Black representation in Congress.



A side-by-side comparison of Detroit-area state legislative districts. The maps at left were gerrymandered by Michigan Republicans in 2011 and were in place for the State House sessions between 2013 and 2023. The maps at right were designed by an independent commission in 2022 and will remain in place from 2023 to 2033. Courtesy of the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission.

After three high-profile elections of non-Black officials serving Black Detroit, and with the emergence of statistics that in 2022 more Black Michiganders lived outside the city of Detroit than in it for the first time ever, Thanedar's elevation begs the question of how much descriptive representation actually matters to the day-to-day life of underrepresented Americans in 2023. One Detroiter said he'd "give the man a chance" when asked about Thanedar in *The New York Times*. He argued, "[L]et's go back years and years and years, and see that when we had those people in office," referring to Black elected officials, "they all didn't meet up to what they said they met up to." Another said, "Kwame Kilpatrick broke my heart" and "I can't take another chance" on Black leadership after years of corruption, economic turmoil, and a new machine politics that has swapped the Irish tavern for the Black church.

It's as if Black voters in this city are saying their Black leaders have had their time, just as the mayors of the four largest American cities are Black for the first time simultaneously: Eric Adams of New York, Karen Bass of Los Angeles, Brandon Johnson of Chicago, and Sylvester Turner of Houston. And even the Black representatives who seemingly drew the short straw see some potential in the unpacking of majority-Black districts. One Black state representative, Helena Scott (D-Detroit), told a reporter at Bloomberg that she was optimistic about the potential for less racially-polarized voting and better relationships between Blacks and whites in the city and its suburbs. "Maybe that's the good thing that might come out of it," she said, "even if we lose Black representation, which is horrible. But maybe we can help bring down the division." Scott would go on to win re-election in both her primary and general elections in 2022, despite her district going from 4% to 43% white. But in Scott's overlapping state Senate district, Sen. Mallory McMorro (D-Royal Oak) defeated Sen. Marshall Bullock (D-Detroit) along racially polarized lines in the primary after the commission combined their districts. Bullock is a Black Detroiter; McMorro is white and only recently relocated to Oakland County's northern suburbs from New Jersey and Indiana.

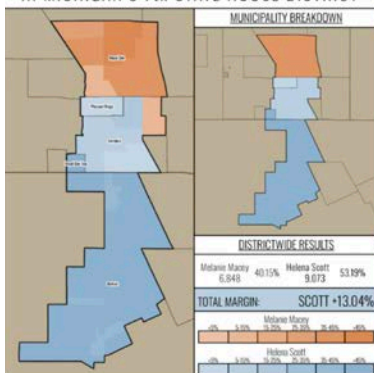


A side-by-side representation of Michigan's 13th Congressional District. The map at left shows estimates of voters' selections in the 2022 Democratic primary election. The map at right shows the district's voting-age demographics. Courtesy of Jackson @im\_sorry\_wtf on Twitter.

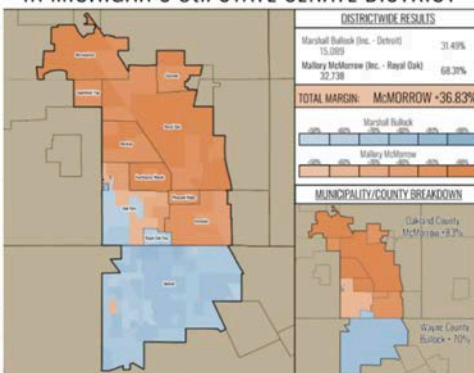
The difference between Detroit and other American cities that are celebrating a new era of Black leadership may lie in the uniqueness of Detroit's overwhelming Blackness. Large-scale Black leadership has simply been less quick to materialize in the racially polarized but more diverse metropolises that have Black mayors today. As a result, the Black elected officials that have recently emerged there have proven deft at navigating their cities' many racial and ethnic fault lines to form durable coalitions. In Detroit, the opposite is proving true: after decades of a lockstep Black vote elevating Black candidates, non-Black politicians are adroitly exposing fault-lines of class, gender, and ideology to cobble together new coalitions and establish themselves as the next generation of a perhaps more substantive version of descriptive representation. Mayor Duggan's white working class roots, Congresswoman Tlaib's Muslim faith, and Congressman Thanedar's immigrant success story all have clearly resonated with their voters in the last decade, and from this African Americans are not immune.

Maybe these three non-Black Detroiters are the future of how cities will prove more substantive in electing their leaders on traits beyond color. Or maybe they are indeed an aberration in America's Blackest city, and a new generation of Black leadership is actually waiting in the wings to pounce. There is not even a guarantee that the next generation of Black leadership will be Democratic: although Detroit no longer has a Black representative in Congress, its northeast suburbs in Macomb County elected John James (R-Mich.) to the U.S. House in 2022, the same day Detroit voters elected Congressman Thanedar and reelected Congresswoman Tlaib. Nationally-recognized as the longtime home of the so-called Reagan Democrats, Congressman James' election as a Black Republican in a diversifying but still predominantly white, blue-collar county (after his two failed U.S. Senate bids) may eventually point to an evolution of Black ideology across the two political parties, after decades of near-universal Democratic affiliation. Or maybe it won't—we'll just have to see. With statewide positions like U.S. Senate seats and the governorship opening up in the next two election cycles, there's even the possibility that prominent Black Detroiters like Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, State House Speaker Joe Tate, and the actor Hill Harper might try scaling up to serve all of Michigan, not just Detroit. There has never been a Black Michigan governor, attorney general, or U.S. senator; few have even been Detroiters.

### 2022 DEMOCRATIC STATE HOUSE PRIMARY IN MICHIGAN'S 7th STATE HOUSE DISTRICT



### 2022 STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY IN MICHIGAN'S 8th STATE SENATE DISTRICT



A side-by-side demonstration of racially-polarized state legislative districts. The map at left shows results from state Rep. Helena Scott's win in 2022 Democratic primary election, while the map at right shows how state Sen. Mallory McMorrow prevailed in an incumbent-vs.-incumbent contest covering the same territory. Note: Eight Mile Road is the horizontal black line between the dark and light blue on the left-hand map, and between the blue and red on the right-hand map. Courtesy of Jackson @im\_sorry\_wtf on Twitter.

Detroiters like Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, State House Speaker Joe Tate, and the actor Hill Harper might try scaling up to serve all of Michigan, not just Detroit. There has never been a Black Michigan governor, attorney general, or U.S. senator; few have even been Detroiters.

Electing a Black Detroiters to any of the statewide offices up for election in 2024 and 2026 should therefore be a critical aim for anyone who still believes in descriptive representation as a powerful conduit for delivering public resources to underserved communities. As Lenin said, there are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks when decades happen. Detroit's politics are currently having a decade—time will tell which kind it will be, the former or the latter. Regardless of which Black Detroiters find themselves elected in the years to come, Michigan has, at the very least, entered the next chapter in its unbroken line of Black elected officials with Congressman James in tow. It may just be that his Blackness is the only thing this new era still has in common with the past.

# Medellín: An Investigation of the Urban “Miracle” in the City of Eternal Spring

Emily Saxl

*About the Work: This paper discusses urban transformation in Medellín, Colombia at the turn of the 21st century. It was originally written for Professor Logan’s course on comparative urban political economy this past fall, and it has been shortened from its original form for publication in the Urban Journal. In the paper, Emily focuses on the “miracle” that is often mentioned in discussions of recent changes in Medellín. She looks into what this “miracle” really entailed, if it can accurately be called a miracle, and why the city was in need of such significant change in the first place.*

## Introduction

Medellín, Colombia is the capital of the state of Antioquia and the second largest of the nation’s cities. Medellín is often referred to as “the city of eternal spring” because of its temperate climate, with temperatures that fall in the low 70° fahrenheit range year-round. The city is located in the Aburrá valley of the Andes mountains, with its downtown built on the flattest ground around the Medellín River and newer neighborhoods constructed on the sloping hillsides. While always recognized for its beauty and rich culture, Medellín’s international reputation in the last few decades of the 20th century was defined by crime, violence, and the city’s status as a hotspot of narcotics trafficking. Medellín was known as the most violent city in the world, and holds the historical record for the highest murder rate of 381 deaths per 100,000 people in 1991.<sup>1</sup> The governments of Medellín and Colombia struggled to gain control of the city, whose neighborhoods, especially those that were poorer and situated on the steep hillsides, were primarily under the control of violent non-state actors. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a series of alterations in governance, public works projects, participatory planning, and stages of peace among violent organized groups enabled Medellín to emerge a decade into the twentieth century as a city renowned for its urban planning and a top tourist destination. The city’s renewal is often referred to as “the Medellín miracle.” Violence reduction, city beautification, and infrastructural improvements confirm that Medellín has changed markedly since the early 1990s. Medellín’s turn-of-the-century transformation was enabled by changing attitudes in governance, a prioritization of upgrading and integrating poor neighborhoods, and a landscape of reduced violence caused by changing relations between non-state actors.

## A Brief History

Understanding why Medellín needed an urban transformation requires a look into the nation’s history and how the past influenced contemporary policies and governance. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a “ring of poverty” was established on the hillsides surrounding the city center. These poor *comunas* were infrastructurally underdeveloped and were hotspots for crime and gang control due to a lack of economic activity, jobs, schools, and connectivity with the rest of the city. The city’s unregulated expansion can be traced to mid-19th century nationwide and municipal policies, outlined in Colombia’s 1886 constitution, which stressed individual and property rights as well as non-interventionist

government. Because the government was legally prescribed to leave city residents to their own devices, urban planning lacked top-down regulation and authority. The space left empty by city governments, referred to by professor Luisa Sotomayor as an “institutional void,” was filled by often violent non-state actors who fought for territorial control without government intervention.<sup>2</sup> A new 1991 constitution granted additional powers and jurisdiction to local governments, specifically mayors, while also stipulating the right to dignified housing, setting the tone for government conduct with regards to informal settlement upgrading.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to rapid urban expansion and informal neighborhoods that lacked infrastructure, Medellín needed to overcome the violence and crime carried out by non-state actors. Colombia as a nation has a history of struggle between the state and violent independent groups. Leftist guerrilla groups, such as the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in opposition to the Colombian government, who these civilian armies saw as continuously failing to implement solutions to socioeconomic inequalities as it had pledged to.<sup>4</sup> These politically motivated groups, their violent conflicts with one another, and their battles with the state threatened urban safety and made it difficult for local governments to enter poor neighborhoods. Armed groups involved with the drug trade began to organize in the late 1960s, rapidly gaining control of territory in Colombian cities. The Medellín Cartel, headed by Pablo Escobar and officially founded in 1976, controlled Colombia’s cocaine trafficking network, significant amounts of territory in Medellín, and hundreds of millions of dollars often used to bribe city officials to turn a blind eye to the Cartel’s activities.<sup>5</sup> The territorial control held by the Cartel made it difficult for municipal administrations to enact real change in poor neighborhoods, and the organization’s decline comprises an interesting element of Medellín’s transformation that was essentially out of the hands of the government.

### **Explaining the Miracle: Violence Reduction**

While the city government was responsible for the implementation of policies and programs to assist poorer communities, violence patterns were largely dictated by the trajectory of control held by armed groups in Colombia, disconnected from governmental action. Near the end of the 20th century, Escobar and the Medellín Cartel held considerable power and influence over the city, specifically in poorer communities, where the Cartel cemented authority through provision of cash, housing, and public works.<sup>6</sup> The control held by the Medellín Cartel is affirmed by the fact that following Pablo Escobar’s death, homicide rates immediately declined from 381 per 100,000 in 1991 to around 201 per 100,000 between 1993 and 1998. The Colombian government took advantage of this lack of control to negotiate demobilizations with hundreds of people involved with local militias, a policy that furthered the trend of violence reduction but would not have been possible without the disintegration of top-down control that came with Escobar’s death.<sup>7</sup>

In the wake of the Medellín Cartel’s nearly absolute control of the city in the early 2000s, territorial disputes between other non-state actors became more common. Political Science professor Eduardo Moncada frames the Medellín landscape of territorial control

in terms of low versus high coordination. Low coordination refers to periods of time where territory is particularly disputed, between the state and non-state actors but specifically among non-state actors, while high coordination refers to times when one group has relatively complete control over a neighborhood or district.<sup>8</sup> While Escobar's control over Medellín was never quite matched, other groups and their leaders did exert enough coordination to dictate trends of violence and peace. One pertinent example is that of Diego Fernando Murillo, aka Don Berna, who became head of the criminal group Bloque Cacique Nutibara (BCN) in the early 2000s, granting him a powerful, hierarchical, and highly organized structure of control.<sup>9</sup> An 81% decrease in the murder rate between 2002 and 2007 can be explained by Don Berna's high coordination of Medellín. Don Berna and the BCN received judicial incentives from the local government in exchange for demobilization, which centered around a reduction of the homicide rate. Thus, Don Berna was able to keep control over a tightly organized network of criminal activity in which city residents followed the order "do not kill."<sup>10</sup>

This background of relative peace dictated by high territorial coordination in the early 2000s provides the context for the parts of Medellín's urban transformation that can be credited to the local government. Ultimately, Medellín's redevelopment efforts were so successful in implementing change because of the drop in violence in the urban landscape. While the government did play a role in negotiations with non-state actors, these actors held their own power that was essentially beyond the reach of governmental control.

### **The Fajardo Administration**

Medellín's redevelopment would not have been possible without the hard work and innovative policies of national and local governments. Sergio Fajardo, mayor of Medellín from 2004 to 2007, played an undisputed leading role in Medellín's urban economic, social, and infrastructural transformation.<sup>11</sup> Fajardo combined his elite, educated background and connections with a populist approach, a campaign run by left-leaning activists, and a man-of-the-people style to appeal to members of all social strata.<sup>12</sup> Fajardo implemented a program of "social urbanism," which stressed the importance of high-quality public space and physical upgrading as a pathway to remedying socioeconomic inequalities.<sup>13</sup> The accomplishments credited to Fajardo include significant combating of corruption, opening city planning to increased public participation, crackdowns on tax evasion, and the implementation of venerated public works projects.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars and journalists who critique the Fajardo administration's urban transformation efforts see the changes implemented as an attempt to craft a city climate that would attract tourism and foreign capital investment.<sup>15</sup> While Fajardo framed public works projects in poor neighborhoods as a sort of redistribution of the city's resources, there was undoubtedly an element of desire to also have these spectacles appeal to non-residents.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the public works projects credited to the Fajardo administration have garnered acclaim from not only newly-attracted tourists but locals as well. Fajardo left office in 2007 with an unprecedented mayoral approval rating of 90%, demonstrating the respect he garnered from residents across Medellín's socioeconomic landscape.<sup>17</sup>

### Transportation Upgrades and Public Works Projects

Under the Fajardo administration, numerous public works projects were constructed to fortify and integrate hillside lower-class neighborhoods with Medellín’s downtown. Transportation systems intended to promote social and economic interconnectedness became a priority for city officials. The Medellín Metrocable has come to be the symbol of the city’s transformation. The idea for a cable car that would connect Santo Domingo, a poor neighborhood in the Northeast part of the city, with downtown Medellín and the existing metro system was proposed in 1998. The utilization of a cable car was thought to enable social and economic connectivity without having to build new roads or train tracks on the steep terrain. In 2002, the municipal government and the private entity Metro de Medellín agreed to split the cost of the project, and the first line, Line K, opened in July 2005.<sup>18</sup> As of 2009, the Metrocable transported 67,000 people daily, and it has been estimated that the value of investment generated by the existence of the Metrocable has already exceeded the construction cost by a factor of six.<sup>19</sup> The map below shows how the six Metrocable lines (Lines H, J, K, L, M, and P) connect to the existing metro system, and extend into neighborhoods further from the downtown area that are situated up on the hillsides.



Figure 1. Map of the Medellín Metro system, including the Metrocable lines  
 Source: <https://www.medellincolombia.co/getting-around/medellin-metro/>



The construction of the Metrocable brought about numerous investments in businesses and public spaces in the areas surrounding the cable car stations. Neighborhoods with Metrocable stations have seen a revitalization of community establishments and have attracted clients from other neighborhoods as well as tourists. The Medellín Metrocable has been praised as one of the most innovative urban solutions to navigating difficult topography and integrating higher-income and lower-income neighborhoods. Medellín residents on the whole are incredibly pleased with the Metrocable system, which has been found to have reduced the average commute time for a city resident from 90 to 30 minutes.<sup>20</sup>

### The PUI Model

PUI (Integrated Urban Project) development included transportation and mobility infrastructure, construction of indoor and outdoor public spaces, and street upgrades. The first PUIs were established in 2004, in the northeastern area of Medellín (Comunas 1 and 2) as well as Comuna 13, in the western part of the city. From 2008 to 2011, three additional PUIs were established, in the center-eastern area (Comunas 8 and 9), the northwestern area (Comunas 5 and 6) and the center-western Comuna 7. Standout PUI developments include the Santo Domingo Library Park in Comuna 1 and the outdoor escalators in Comuna 13 (pictured below). The outdoor escalator system, like the Metrocable, was built to increase urban mobility and make it possible to commute from hillside Comunas to downtown Medellín. At the end of construction, PUIs boasted the construction of nine library parks setup for community programming, childcare centers, green spaces, community recreation centers, and some street and housing revitalization.<sup>21</sup> PUIs are often seen as the strongest embodiment of Fajardo's principle of social urbanism, which seeks to bring capital and infrastructural investment to neighborhoods previously ignored and disadvantaged by municipal government.



Figure 2. Santo Domingo Library Park, Comuna 1

Source: <https://www.world-architects.com/en/architecture-news/reviews/library-park-santo-domingo>



Figure 3. Outdoor escalators, Comuna 13

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/colombia-medellin-neighborhood/index.html>

PUI development was highly visible and intended to evoke a sense of transformation on a large scale.<sup>22</sup> However, PUI development was not purely aesthetic or for tourism purposes: spectacles such as the outdoor escalators and library parks served to bring economic prosperity to neighborhoods that greatly needed it, while also granting residents a sense of pride in their landmarks and the impression that the city government cared about their quality of life.

## Conclusion

It is impossible to deny that Medellín's urban fabric experienced significant change in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the question of whether or not the urban transformation should be referred to as a "miracle" must be asked. Professor Tobias Franz questions the effectiveness of governmental policies in terms of poverty alleviation, pointing to the fact that 27% of Medellín's population falls below the poverty line, with 5% belonging to the category of "extreme poverty" as of 2017.<sup>23</sup> These statistics make it evident that the city could continue to do more with regards to employment and inequality. Nonetheless, many of the city's reforms were enacted for the benefit of impoverished residents, not just with the purpose of attracting tourism and foreign capital. While Medellín's urban transformation wasn't perfect, it is undeniable that urban development in Medellín in the late 20th and early 21st centuries provides a fascinating and relatively successful example for other cities looking to solve similar problems.

## Icicle

Charcoal on Paper, 18in x 24in

Sarkis Antonyan

*About the Work: This piece explores chaotic disorientation and anonymity felt in the urban landscape.*



## Demolition in the Name of Liberal Education: The Construction of Wriston Quadrangle

Devan Paul

*About the Work: This piece was originally written in response to an assignment for Professor Lauren Yapp's seminar on urban heritage. It comprises both a historical narrative of Wriston Quad's construction and a proposal for a public interpretive element to make that history more visible today.*



Figure 1. Still from *The Quadrangle Story* showing a bird's-eye view of the completed quad.

### I. Historical Narrative

Wriston Quadrangle is one of the most distinctive elements of Brown's housing stock. It occupies a large swath of campus and has a unified residential character that many other dorms lack. The quad was the product of a concerted effort by Brown administrators, particularly President Henry Wriston, to increase the university's competitiveness, exercise more control over fraternities, and realize certain ideals about liberal education.

Henry Wriston arrived at Brown as president in 1936 and quickly got to work broadening the university's scope and mission. He was previously president at Lawrence College, in Appleton, Wisconsin—there, he gained familiarity with managing collegiate residential life. The construction of a new quadrangle responded to a few key needs for Wriston, including the expansion of the concept of the residential college.

## The Construction of Wriston Quadrangle

Wriston was strongly ideological and saw liberal education as a bulwark against the ravages of fascism. In a speech to a meeting of alumni at Brown on June 18, 1945, Wriston proclaimed that, bearing in mind the fascist challenge to the liberal ideal of education and upright citizenry, that Brown's "educational purpose must be evident in the structures themselves; it must be reflected in the manners and customs which they promote."<sup>1</sup> Through the provision of a strong residential experience, Wriston believed, young men would be receptive and engaged in a liberal education.

At the same time, increased state monies were flowing to public schools in the wake of World War II, and Wriston felt that Brown needed to adapt to compete successfully with other colleges. "It is our responsibility," he wrote in a 1948 report to the Student Housing Board, "to see that the liberal education which our Charter promoted not only survives in the new environment, but advances in power and influence."<sup>2</sup> A chart in Wriston's 1946 report "The Size of Brown University" shows a stark plateau in Brown admissions from 1920 through 1945 as national college enrollment simultaneously shot up.<sup>3</sup> He believed the world was in the midst of a "moral crisis," and liberal arts colleges had a "decisive role to play."<sup>4</sup> "Brown should carry a heavier share of the load," he said, framing a higher population and loftier mission as nothing less than necessities.<sup>5</sup>

Maintaining competition was not the only benefit of expansion. At Brown, during the late 1930s and 1940s, all fraternities lived off campus, causing somewhat of a logistical headache for the university. In the years leading up to 1950, colleges like Harvard and Yale pushed more of their students onto campus.<sup>6</sup> Brown administrators felt a similar pressure; the university's residential capacity was dismal. Dormitories on the main campus block bounded by Prospect, George, Thayer, and Waterman Streets were full.<sup>7</sup> Off-campus fraternity houses were falling apart; some were deemed "almost uninhabitable" by the university.<sup>8</sup>

Of great concern to the university, too, was fraternities' culture. Their grade point averages were generally lower than the GPAs of students not involved in Greek life: In the 1939-1940 school year, the non-fraternity student average was 2.426 compared to fraternity students' 2.156.<sup>9</sup> Wriston said in a 1948 report that the fraternities, in their current state, were "anti-intellectual."<sup>10</sup> Alcohol consumption was also a concern for the university. A 1951 survey by the buildings and grounds department, ordered at the request of Dean of the College R.W. Kenny, details copious numbers of beer cans and broken glass at twelve fraternity houses.<sup>11</sup> However, amidst national criticism of Greek life for its debauchery, Wriston and other administrators believed that fraternities needed to be reformed rather than abolished altogether. He saw great potential in their ability to shape young men's lives. Consolidating them onto campus, under the watchful supervision of the university, with dorms and a new refectory to stimulate their learning, he thought, could improve their behavior.

The process required massive changes to the urban environment and was thus extremely expensive. After plans were drawn up, the university had to acquire every structure on the two blocks of Benevolent Street between Brown and Thayer Streets. This process cost \$11

million.<sup>12</sup> Wriston wrote in 1948 that the only way the university could be expected to raise the significant funds required to construct the quad was “to make the project sufficiently dramatic in its educational implications.”<sup>13</sup> “Only if we and [donors] really believe this is a tremendously important undertaking [...] can they be induced to give adequately,” he went on to say, providing a small window into his thinking.<sup>14</sup> His ideological conviction was likely strong, but he also realized the importance of selling the quad as a product to potential donors.

Many structures with long histories in Providence were demolished, including the Thayer Street Grammar School. Notably, the school is commemorated in the new quadrangle—it is remembered in a small, mostly nondistinctive plaque where the school used to stand. There is another plaque at the northwest corner that mentions the site of Thomas Goddard’s house. These two inscriptions are the only acknowledgement of any buildings that were destroyed or relocated anywhere in the quad.

The quad was completed in 1952 and dedicated on June 1. Wriston gave a speech about the merits of the project, touching on the long legacy of Brown men like former President Francis Wayland. “The quadrangle,” he spoke, “embodies the ideal which [Wayland] stated with explicit clarity 100 years before the date incised on the weather vane over the tower of Wayland House.”<sup>15</sup> He was, again, referring to the liberal ideal of education. “Now there is opportunity, unparalleled in the history of Brown University...for social, cultural, moral, and intellectual gains,” he concluded, casting the quad as a realization of pedagogical goals.<sup>16</sup>

While the quad was not named for him until his retirement in 1955, it was immediately evident to those involved that he played an outsize role in its construction.<sup>17</sup> Chairman of the university’s Housing and Development Campaign Claude Branch wrote in a draft of his quad dedication speech, “I have no hesitation in saying...the man who is chiefly responsible for this project is [Wriston].”<sup>18</sup> Although the praise in the final rendition of his speech was toned down, he closed the draft by saying “To many of us who have worked with him, this will always be thought of as the Wriston Quadrangle.”<sup>19</sup>

The legacy of Wriston Quad is intriguing to me because of the silences around it. It is beautifully laid out and feels quintessentially collegiate. Anecdotally speaking, if you ask someone to guess when it was built, you will often get an answer in the 19th century, or perhaps the early 20th century. Its style disguises the fact that it is an extremely recent development. There is essentially no accessible physical nor virtual history behind the quad, particularly to the undergraduate who might be living there.

## The Construction of Wriston Quadrangle



*Figure 2. Still from The Quadrangle Story showing the quad's groundbreaking.*



*Figure 3. Still from The Quadrangle Story showing construction.*

## II. A Proposal for Interpretation

The history behind Wriston Quad calls, I believe, for some kind of intervention in the landscape. My proposal for an interpretive element consists of a multi-part audiovisual modification of Wriston Quad. It is less a memorial or a monument than a sort of artistic change to the architectural context.

The first part is an auditory construction, where small speakers would be installed on each of the three small commemorative structures denoting Patriots Court, Hughes Court, and Field Terrace. These structures, and the naming of the areas they exist in, while mostly ignored by students, were meant to honor various individuals. As such, the intervention would be minimally disruptive as to avoid any overly disrespectful change to the environment.

The speakers would play a few different things. Brown students, preferably ones who live on Wriston Quad, would record themselves reading selections from Wriston's writings. The excerpts would be from his quad dedication speech, his work discussing liberal education, and his report on housing in which he argued the quad should be built. The students would have creative license to change the structure of his writings. They would be encouraged to read it in whatever cadence, tone, or volume they would like—as long as the tone was not too jocular. They could also chop up the writings into a poem, or a spoken word piece. Of course, they could also keep them as they were written. Additionally, these Brown students would change each year, so that one's experience of the audio would never quite be the same. The recordings would be played at a very low volume, so that they would not substantially disrupt the flow of other people's conversations, but they would be loud enough to hear when walking by. They also would not be loud enough to annoy any people living nearby. They would not be played constantly, but rather would come on at random times, including late at night. Because they would be played year-round, they would not occur very frequently to avoid viewers becoming fatigued of their presence. Their frequency would be something closer to a few times per day.

The audio would ideally provoke questions and interrogation among listeners. Wriston's words on liberal education as well as the need for a quadrangle were quite opinionated. Giving students who live on the quad the ability to speak them aloud as well as remix them strips some of the power away from baldly presenting his words to the public. It also empowers current students to consider their views and feelings towards Wriston and the quad. Listeners would be invited to contemplate: Do these words still ring true? How did these words shape the environment around me? Do they seem to have had an effect?

The second part of the project would be a projection component. Once per night, approximately an hour or so after sunset, once it is sufficiently dark, the twelve-and-a-half-minute short film *The Quadrangle Story* would be projected onto the Sharpe Refectory and played silently. The newsreel tells the "story" of the quad's construction and is currently housed in the Brown Digital Repository. Crucially, this intervention would only occur during the move-in period each semester. This element is a bit more disruptive, and it also risks becoming unremarkable with repeated exposure. Playing it during move-in would specifi-



## The Construction of Wriston Quadrangle

cally ask viewers to consider their place, and the nature of the structures they are about to live inside. They would see clips of demolitions of houses in service of the quad's construction. They would also be able to watch groups of predominantly white men in fraternities walking through the quad, eating in the Ratty and lounging in dorms. They would be able to think about the intentions behind the creation of the space they inhabited, and their place in it.



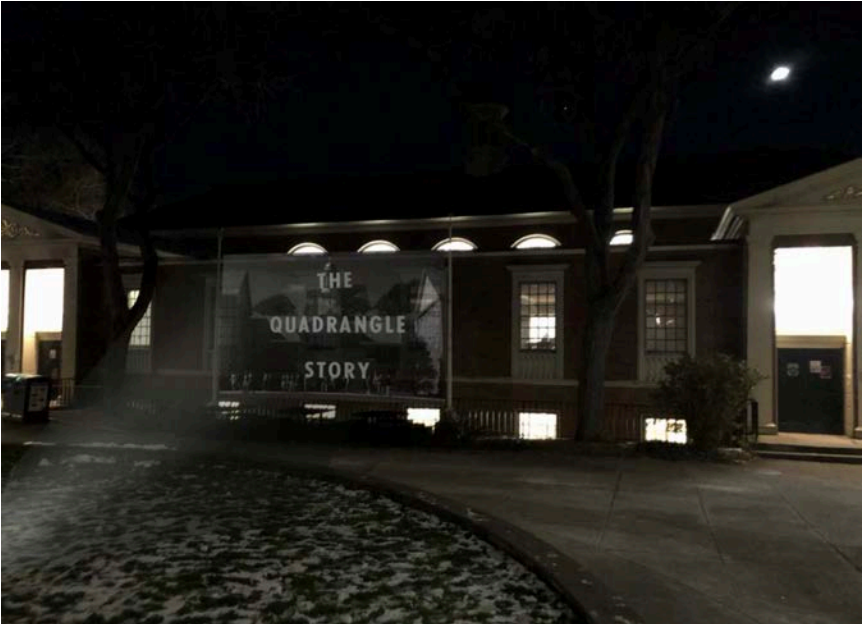
Figure 4. Rendering of the audio component of the proposed project, where voices emerge from the small structures around the quad.



*Figure 5. Still from The Quadrangle Story showing students entering the new refectory.*



*Figure 6. Still from The Quadrangle Story showing students in a fraternity lounge.*



*Figure 7. Rendering of the visual component of the proposed project, where The Quadrangle Story is projected onto the Ratty.*

### **III. Reflections on the Proposal**

There were a few things that were on my mind as I thought through this interpretive element. I knew my theoretical audience was mainly fellow undergraduates, especially those living on Wriston Quad. My intentions would both be to present the history to them as well as to provide a chance to interpret or critique. I especially would want to avoid resurrecting Wriston's ideology without providing any kind of modification or context to his words. I am not of the opinion that they are necessarily entirely wrong or harmful, but they are certainly a bit archaic. Having current Brown students interpret and read his words could allow for a more modern understanding of his views. Having them reconceptualize it also would give them some agency when it comes to presenting his ideas.

I also thought about how conspicuous I wanted the intervention to be. To some degree, there is significant benefit in making something that feels inescapable. At the same time, because people spend so much time on the quad, there is the problem of it becoming yet another unchanging part of the landscape that people take for granted. It could also become too disruptive to a degree where no one wants to engage with it. The other end of the spectrum is something small and unnoticeable. I think my final element strikes this balance well: It is always permeating the landscape but remains new and intriguing due to the changes in voices and quotes. In a way, it realizes ideology as something inhabiting the landscape.

Hopefully, this monument/art object/element would inspire students to learn more about the contested history they are a part of. It would resurface old histories that receive little acknowledgement and inform viewers' and listeners' conceptions of the school they call home.

#### **IV. Connections to Existing Discourse**

Questions of memory and forgetting in the city seem to me to be the most salient here. Universities are inherently transitory places. Students and professors alike come from all around the world to live in one place and grow together. Yet many of them only last a few short years before moving on to other places. What does it mean to live in a place like this? And how does an institution communicate its history to newcomers? These sorts of difficult questions permeate my thinking towards the quad. There is a perhaps-surprising history behind the area that exists to be found nowhere, essentially, besides university archives. There are smaller nods to the quad's history, like the plaques I mentioned above, but they functionally contribute little to nothing to a student's experience. Some of them I had never noticed until this project.

Wriston Quad feels like an example of dissonant heritage where forgetting pervades. I resist labelling the construction of the quad as completely negative or positive. My goal is more to communicate the history itself rather than judge it. While I am not sure I would go so far as to call Wriston Quad "trauma," the idea of trauma's impact on a people and a landscape can be incorporated here. What happens when a physical space is wholly replaced by another? How can we read the history of an event in a new structure? In a sense, the mere existence of Wriston Quad alone is yelling history in your face—it just requires some interpretation.

How does a school like Brown grapple with a history that may not be uniformly positive? We have certainly seen a reckoning with slavery and racial injustice. The publication of the landmark Slavery & Justice Report in 2006 showed at the very least a general commitment to uncovering more about the institution's connection to historical atrocities. But more recent history, like the destruction of swaths of the East Side and the influx of Brown students into Fox Point, appears to go mostly ignored. The idea of authorized heritage discourse, where only a certain narrative is officially endorsed or presented, is also useful here: Brown tends not to address the histories behind its built environment as much as it does the social impacts it has had a longer time ago. Keeney Quad has a similar story to Wriston Quad, and yet you would be hard-pressed to find an accessible acknowledgement of its construction anywhere.

There are shades of nuance in this conversation, of course. It is not necessary for every single building to have its history printed and readily available for understanding. Cities change. However, the unique positioning of college students living in dormitories necessitates an acknowledgement and a communication of history. It is also a tremendous learning opportunity for students, who are here to expand their perspectives and worldviews. In that sense, dredging up this history to the surface is almost in accordance with Wriston's ideals for an education that shapes a student into a critical, thoughtful person. What is

one's relationship to land? How about making a home, building relationships, and growing on that land? We can begin to unpack that relationship through a critical examination of history.

I also thought about commemoration and acknowledgement of history. Traditionally, monument construction is often seen as the start and end of memory work. I read the smattering of plaques on Wriston Quad this way—once they were put up, the site could be officially designated as “remembered” and we could forget about continuing the conversation or making heritage accessible.

I also pondered James Young's idea of the “counter-monument.”<sup>20</sup> How could I commemorate a history without glorifying or idealizing the figures involved? What creative approaches could I take to interpreting the stories of the past? The audio and visual components were intriguing to me due to their ability to bring a sense of the past so vividly into the present.

I drew from Krzysztof Wodiczko's work with Soviet monuments when thinking about my approach to visual imagery. His projections of contemporary images onto old monuments dispute notions of settled constructions, and literally superimpose more modern ideas onto old representations. Unlike his pieces, though, my interpretive element calls for a projection of old media. However, I would argue that the footage is significant due to its inaccessibility. It is readily accessible via the Brown Digital Repository, but I would imagine only a few have searched it out or stumbled upon it. Mapping it onto the landscape it is describing brings the history of Wriston Quad directly into the present. Unlike a Soviet statue, the Ratty is heavily used in the modern day, and as such, is more a representation of a Brown student's modern experience. Introducing an artifact dating from its construction in such a bold way challenges its naturalization. Additionally, though the film could be thought of as uncritical of the construction, its presentation to a much more critical audience, without sound, so that the images are the only thing that are communicated, accomplishes a more critical representation.

### **V. A Note on Sources**

I consulted a variety of sources for this project, including many primary sources. My main source of primary source material was the Henry Wriston papers on file at the John Hay Library. Being able to examine his letters, speeches, schedules, and meetings was enormously beneficial to my research.

My primary source research also felt quite intimate in ways other research has not. I was able to get a small sense of Wriston's personality and his dreams for Brown. Some of his letters made me laugh; once, a student representative expressed in a letter his “wish... to recommend” that fraternities be kept open in the summer of 1942 under the specter of World War II, and Wriston snapped back with “This letter...contributes nothing to the solution of our fraternity problem, since we all have wishes, but wishes without programs are not very useful.”<sup>21</sup> At times, I did desire more information and context. I wished I had more of Wriston's words that were not so directly related to his job. I also thought about

the organizing system the papers were under, which was somewhat jumbled. I chose to request boxes that seemed relevant from their titles, but I also worried that I was missing things in boxes I would not even know to look in. With more time, perhaps, I would have been able to dig up even more information.

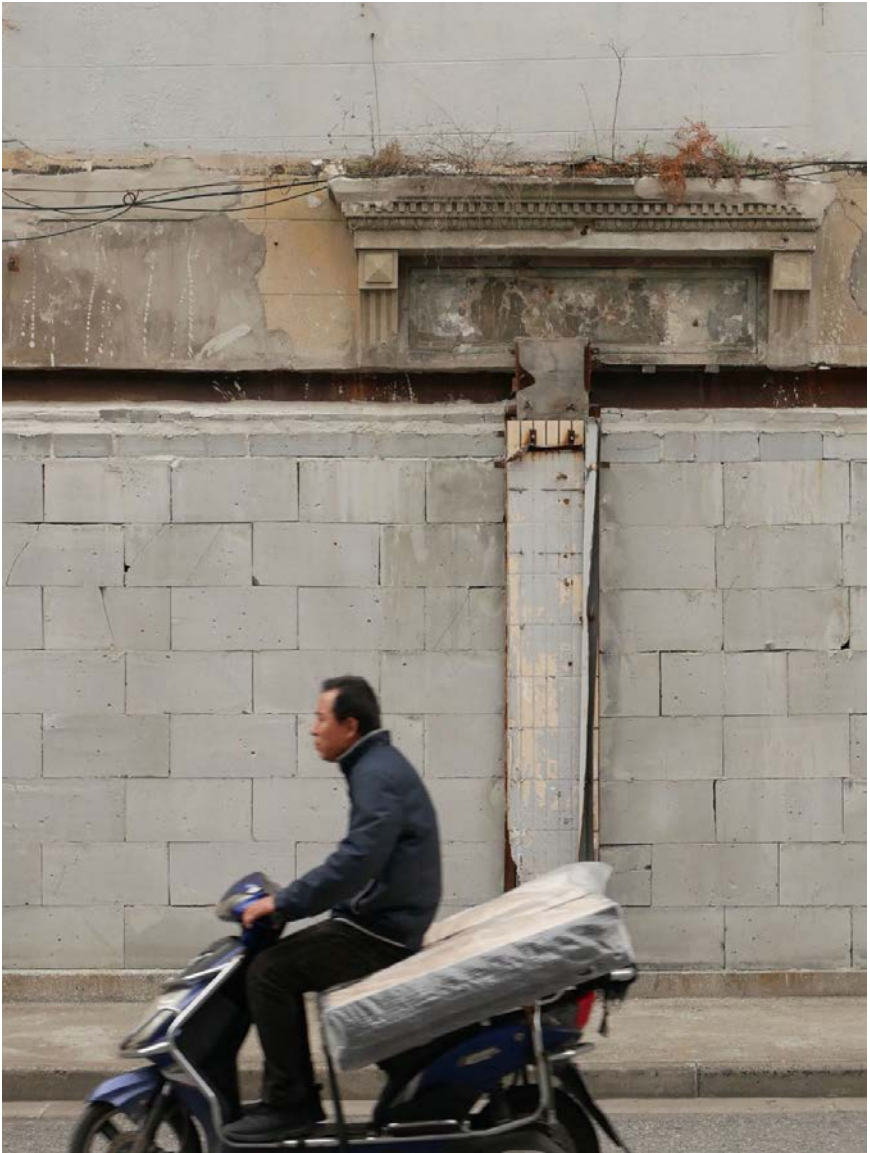
I spent a good deal of time trying to think through the motivations behind the project while looking through his letters. Was the quad's construction really all in service to a lofty ideal about the role of a college and the fraternity? Or was it more of a way to bolster the school's marketability? I think the answer is probably both—Wriston probably did really believe the things he claimed to, but he also could recognize that it was all connected to business and the school's financial standing. This idea could really only poke out between the lines of the sources I examined.

I also leaned on secondary sources for context, including two honors theses that helped shape my perspective. Nathaniel Philip Pettit wrote an excellent and thorough honors thesis on Brown housing and expansion in the 20th century in 2020. He, evidently, looked at a lot of the same sources I did, but with more time and dedication to the project, he was able to analyze and interpret at a deeper level than I was able to. Peter Schermerhorn's 2005 thesis on preservation and expansion was also quite useful. Both theses gave me more of a historical view of Wriston's presidency.

## Palimpsest

Digital photography, shot on DSLR

Xinyu Yan









# Planning As Participation: Prioritizing Experiences of Marginalized Communities in the Urban Development of Mumbai

Niyoshi Parekh

*In August 2022, I conducted interviews with two marginalized communities in Mumbai to learn about people's experience with public spaces. These were conducted with the support of Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) in 2020, a rights based advocacy and youth development NGO active in urban space issues in Mumbai since 1984. First was Behrampada, a slum located in the upscale commercial and residential neighborhood Bandra. It has densely packed informal structures built by residents since the 1950s, for residential and commercial use.<sup>1</sup> The second was Lallubhai Compound (LLC), a resettlement colony (colloquially considered vertical slums) located in Mankhurd, an eastern peripheral suburb. It has 65 buildings densely built on an industrial brownfield site around 2004.<sup>2</sup> It lies in the highly neglected M-East ward where more than 72% of the population lives in slums.<sup>3</sup> In the interviews, frustrations with development policies immediately arose when talking about experiences in public space, because the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRS) implemented since 1995 has majorly shaped slum socioeconomic conditions and quality and access to space.*

*These excerpts from my honors thesis highlight the findings from a historic and ethnographic analysis of marginalized communities' experiences in public space in Mumbai. They reflect the class dynamics underlying city planning in an era of neoliberal urbanism and demonstrate the need for participatory planning that delegates power to marginalized communities to make decisions informed by their lived experiences.*

- Niyoshi

## Neoliberal Urbanism in India

The global export of neoliberal development has had devastating impacts because of its economic and urban policy that recreates homogenous patterns of consumption and development without considering local sociocultural and political dynamics. In critiquing contemporary Indian urban policy, Swapna Banerjee-Guha discusses how the National Urban Renewal Mission (NURM, launched 2005) promoted national and foreign capital investment in urban development while villainizing poverty as "the chief cause for unregulated urban growth, environmental damage, and growing crime rates in cities."<sup>4</sup> She observes that this "echoed the rationale of a neoliberal order: creating a global, secure, and homogenized urban society."<sup>5</sup>

The restructuring of cities occurred through large infrastructure projects, globally funded through public-private partnerships under NURM. These projects were disconnected from a majority of the urban population's needs and benefitted only a small section that was integrated into the global society. Current policy does not account for different ways of experiencing and navigating space, which in a country as socioculturally diverse as India depends not only on class but also on caste, gender, religion, sexuality and other commu-

nal identities. The question who is the 'public' cannot be an afterthought due to the sheer density and diversity of social and cultural groups in India.

In India, personal identities are drawn from collective identities, and collective identities influence one's role in social and political life. Sarbeswar Sahoo outlines that Indian "social relations are inherently hierarchical, and certain groups are denied of basic liberties to education, freedom of speech, freedom of opinions, and the equality of opportunity in the civil society on the grounds of ascribed identity."<sup>6</sup> To understand this hierarchical Indian public sphere, S. Harikrishnan builds on Henri Lefebvre's notion that "social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space."<sup>7</sup> He notes that "Space is where power manifests itself" and "In India, this 'power' includes state and capital, but also the invisible social hierarchy of caste."<sup>8</sup> Hence, he says "by turning attention crucially towards space—and thereby human experiences—one can help expand the scope of the public sphere beyond the 'mainstream' to include the counter-publics."<sup>9</sup>

Sahoo also states that "a stratified and multicultural society like India" might hold "multiple public spheres."<sup>10</sup> This implies that diverse public spaces might exist to support public spheres of different communities. Neoliberal urban planning does not consider marginalized communities within the 'public,' and hence the public spaces it creates do not represent their needs. So, how do these communities use these spaces? What other spaces do they use that do fulfill their needs? Specifically, the unique socio-spatial conditions of slums that house a majority of the working poor in developing cities can offer a different conception of public space.

### **Public Space in Slums**

Dipesh Chakrabarty outlines the inapplicability of "modernist categories of 'public' and 'private'" in studying Indian open spaces.<sup>11</sup> He points to the limiting nature of "the language of modernity, civic consciousness and public health" which prevents the separation of public space from "ideals of public health and hygiene."<sup>12</sup> Due to sanitation challenges in slums, these modernist ideals do not allow a consideration of their public spaces as legitimate, precluding them from analysis. However, navigating spaces is an integral aspect of daily life in slums, due to the proximity of residential, commercial and social activity, and the lack of adequate utilities within the house. Densely built structures also make the boundary between 'public' and 'private' uses of space ambiguous. In streets and chaurahas (street intersections) between homes, economic activities occur alongside social life. Spaces are also often temporarily converted for private use by residents, like weddings or religious events.

Here, the publicness of space differs based on identity, since social restrictions of gender, religion, age, caste, etc. manifest more strongly due to the close proximity of residents. This effect is heightened because slums in India are often organized by communal identity, as migrants who have very few connections in the city settle beside people sharing their linguistic, religious or cultural backgrounds. The working class culture, nuanced

social norms and diversity of activities are not considered in the government's conception of slums.

Social welfare schemes have suffered due to the government's overreliance on the private sector for public infrastructure, with developer incentives far exceeding benefits to the public. The SRS aimed to rehouse slum residents by incentivizing developers to create rehabilitative housing, but as architect and activist PK Das said, "the larger the announcement in the name of the poor, the greater is the attack on them."<sup>13</sup> SRS incentivized developers to rehabilitate slum residents on their land itself or in a resettlement colony elsewhere, by providing bonus Floor Space Index (FSI) for development, which permits building higher on the same plot. These bonus development rights can also be sold in the open market, as Transferable Development Rights (TDR), or used to build higher on a different plot.<sup>14</sup> This scheme is extractive, and monetizes poverty by making land under slums profitable, under a false promise of upward mobility and an improved quality of life for slum residents. Resettlement colonies like LLC are built on the outskirts of the city where land and construction costs are low, while TDRs allow developers to build more in the city center, which provide much higher returns.

The residents of resettlement colonies spend most of their lives fighting for better social and health infrastructure, since they are only provided a 300 sq.ft flat,<sup>15</sup> without adequate provision of schools, hospitals, transportation, job opportunities, recreational spaces or waste management in the area. Since slum residents often construct additional floors to accommodate growing families, or create rental and retail revenue sources, 300 sq.ft is also insufficient and does not reflect actual socioeconomic needs in slums. A Bharat Nagar resident, another slum in Bandra, explained that his 4 brothers and parents lived in a multi-storey house, and if rehabilitated, they would sell or rent out the new flat and split the profits. Each family would find housing elsewhere, on the urban periphery or in a different slum. A Behrampada resident also stressed that the "the biggest problem of slums is that the temporary accommodation (locally, 'shifting') allotted under SRS are of the worst condition." Another interviewee recalled that some slums demolished near Behrampada have remained undeveloped for 15-18 years, as projects often get stalled due to developers' legal and financial issues.

As Amita Bhide and Tobias Baitsch outline in *The Politics of Land Use Regulations in Mumbai*, using market mechanisms like incentive FSI and TDR as planning tools increases inequality.<sup>16</sup> It does not "ensure that the benefits of the development reach all levels of society," as advocates of the status quo and firm believers in the saving power of the market would propose.<sup>17</sup> The experiences of slum and resettlement colony residents contradict the portrayed win-win situation, where "the state receives infrastructure, amenities and housing at no cost, the developer makes a profit on the free market and the people of Mumbai get the benefit of amenities and housing for the economically weaker sections."<sup>18</sup> The inadequate rehabilitation provided by developers actually increases pressure on government authorities to provide more services to poorly rehabilitated communities. Stuck in this cycle of government ineptitude and private sector indifference, marginalized communities are repeatedly harmed.

### Bureaucratic Challenges to Public Space Advocacy in Slums

Interviews in LLC and Behrampada showed that community members mainly used spaces within their own neighborhoods, with citywide public spaces only occasionally used, due to financial and logistical constraints of time and transportation. Interviewees expressed lack of space, sanitation, health and safety as critical concerns of public space in their neighborhoods. These concerns are direct consequences of the government's neglect towards utility and social infrastructure in the slums and resettlement colonies, and their dismissal of residents' demands and advocacy efforts.

There was a foundational movement to democratize planning in Mumbai, during the drafting of the 2014-34 Development Plan (DP).<sup>19</sup> Large scale mobilization of slum residents was facilitated by civil society and grassroots advocacy organizations, "to take the DP out of the planners' realm and 're-politicise' it—i.e. re-establish planning as a political tool."<sup>20</sup> The movement forced an acknowledgement of planning's social, ecological and political implications, especially on vulnerable populations. Interviews with YUVA's youth advocates in both areas showed how the DP engagement process has shaped their approach and tools for advocacy, and also highlighted the daily bureaucratic challenges they face in improving their public spaces. Although many of their demands were not met during the DP engagement process, mapping as a planning tool became common in YUVA's work in slums, with youth members taking on the work of mapping their communities. Unlike official plans where maps simplify and thus obscure on-ground conditions, maps were used here to increase visibility of the complex internal networks and structures, overlooked by the government's Existing Land Use maps that denote slums as homogenous outlined shapes.

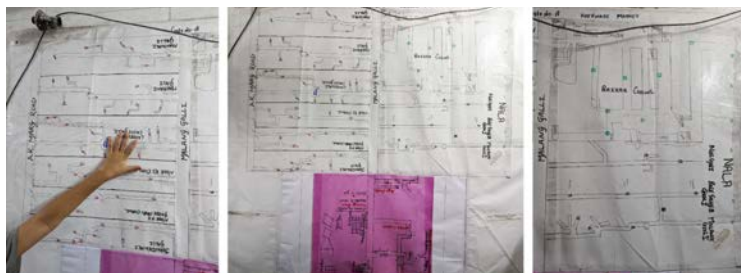


Figure 1: Map made by Behrampada youth documenting existing and needed streetlight locations, put up on the wall of YUVA's office in Behrampada.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 2: Internal lanes in Behrampada

Mapping was used to substantiate demands for better provision of utilities by concretely documenting where services were lacking. In Behrampada, YUVA youth mapped out every formal streetlight and informal light bulb to document safe and unsafe spaces in their neighborhood (Figure 1). Behrampada 4-storey structures are so closely built that even during the day, minimal light penetrates the in-between lanes (Figure 2). A youth involved in the mapping explained that “many of the girls from the youth group live in the gullies (inner lanes), they feel uncomfortable to come and go from these gullies. The entire team went into the gullies, observed where light was not there, which places were not good, and made a whole map. It took a lot of time to make this, going to all the gullies, we did this all for safety.” The maps (Figure 1) were made to show the corporator (local elected official) where more street lights were needed and they also reflect the disappointing response, with the lights installed circled in green.

Attempts made by slum residents to improve their surrounding conditions are frequently met with resistance and inaction from the government. Three elderly men in Behrampada expressed their frustration with sanitation services, as a bulldozer moved trash from the center of the road to a growing pile on its right (Figure 3). They said the garbage was cleared as infrequently as once a month, only after repeated requests from residents. He explained the conflict over land ownership between government authorities that prevent either from providing services. “No one comes to clean, neither the BMC<sup>22</sup> nor the railway authority. They both say it is not their land so no one comes, they only come for votes.” The government authorities usually avoid responsibility by denying land ownership, but also conversely claim ownership when it benefits them. For example, another Behrampada resident mentioned how the Railway Authority sometimes prevents BMC from providing them basic utilities because it would support further encroachment by slums on their land. This forces residents to create improvised connections to utilities like electricity and water, with pipes lying above ground and cutting through the rare sidewalks or open spaces (Figure 4).

This relationship between utility provision and public space does not exist in middle and upper class conceptions of public space, since citywide waterfronts and parks are not interwoven with housing like spaces in slums are. Due to inadequate/improvised utilities for surrounding high density residences, public spaces in slums are few or difficult and unsafe to use. Slum residents are compelled to familiarize themselves with political and



Figure 3: (left) BMC bulldozer moving trash at the periphery of Behrampada, (right) abutting open drain.

administrative processes of appeal and implementation to access basic survival needs like water and sanitation

**Lack of Understanding Spatial Needs in Slums**

The BMC bulldozer lifting trash from the road and discarding it onto the side without removal reflects a common view among slum dwellers—that the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme is the government simply picking what it considers ‘trash’ from one place and throwing it in another.

The disconnect between policy and lived experience, evident in the previously discussed policy failures, stem from a lack of understanding of people’s needs.



Figure 4: Cables forming improvised connections to utilities running through a street in Behrampada.

Spaces outside the home in slums are used fluidly in public and private ways. Uses even differ at different times of the day and during periods of festival or celebration. Traditional planning policy is rigid and prescriptive, and does not understand these fluid, shifting uses of space. For example, chowks are usually used by adults and youth to gather, play and hang out. However, sometimes they are also turned into private spaces by families holding wedding and birthday celebrations or death ceremonies. Hence, when the Railway Authority demolished a community-made chowk (Figure 5) in Garib Nagar (slum opposite Behrampada) claiming they needed space for new development, they impacted community activity more than they realized. A resident explained how they celebrated Independence Day this year in a more informal space closer to the railway tracks, since the chowk was demolished a couple years earlier (Figure 7).

Similarly, practical needs of space are not considered when building resettlement colonies. The buildings in LLC were built by 2 developers—half by SV Patel and half by Hiranandani. The buildings are densely packed, with low levels of light and ventilation in every home. The SV Patel side is considerably worse, with barely 2 feet of space between buildings and no public space (Figure 6). The Hiranandani side has a couple of internal courtyards, but their potential for gardens or grounds have remained unexplored, despite years of demands by residents (Figure 6).



Figure 5: (left) Demolished community chowk, (right) Independence Day celebration next to railway track



Figure 6: (left) LLC's high density structures<sup>23</sup> (right) Laal Maidan, undeveloped courtyard on the Hiranandani side

Resettlement colonies also do not provide space for the promised upward socioeconomic mobility of residents. As an LLC youth pointed out, "With time, people have started buying cars, but where will they park them? No parking lot is provided here." The spatial consequences of improving economic conditions are not accounted for, pitting essential needs against one another. She elaborated, "If people park under the building, where will kids play? If they don't play there, they're playing on the road where accident chances increase and safety is an issue." Upward mobility of resettled slum residents also requires social acceptance by middle and upper class communities. However, they continue to struggle with this due to resettlement conditions. As a woman shared about how her life changed after moving to LLC from a nearby slum, "If someone comes then it feels like yes, we are living in a good place now. There are just some difficulties with trash here [...] so if you go out or if some good people come, then we face the challenge that we live in this society, and saying that we live here sometimes feels shameful." Planning authorities do not consider these social consequences of poor physical maintenance.

### Conceptions of Space in Community Initiatives

The primary concern of youth advocacy in Lallubhai Compound and Behrampada is claiming spaces to make them safer for children. This benefits the entire community, because the maps made by children in LLC of spaces they found safe and unsafe showed that "except for their house and school, children found most of the other spaces in the basti unsafe." The impact on the community is also positive because the youths' approach to safety is not through policing, but play. A youth advocate explains, "We were trying to identify spaces that children found unsafe, so that we can go there and hold daily activities to make the space start feeling safe—whether it's the space outside buildings, a ground, a street corner, intersection or any other space that we felt was unsafe, so we can make it safe through the medium of games." So in shared spaces where people were often found harassing children or using substances, they would "set up a kiosk and take toys there, and the mats we had in the kiosk, we would put the mats down and play chess, carrom, or with the toys." He describes how some children played football or catch on the side and "the space would get claimed and people [who harass] would not come there and interfere because they know that there's some game going on there." Through play, they created an atmosphere which implies safety, instead of waiting to use the space until it was made safe by external actors like the police.



One of them illustrated the sequential and slow process through which spaces are claimed. Describing an environmental project by YUVA to improve Laal Maidan, one of Hiranandani's courtyards (Figure 6), she said "if we keep the space clean, then indirectly people will start coming, if it feels clean people will gather and talk amongst each other, if people are talking then if chairs are provided there, like what should be there in a garden, then people will sit there, then the space will slowly slowly get claimed." These initiatives reinforce the role of the community, showing that spaces can be physically constructed, but only become meaningful if they are accepted by the community and integrated into their lives.

### **Gendered conceptions of space**

Alongside class equity, public space discourse in India also focuses on the various social, cultural and religious norms of gender that regulate women's access to and use of public space. *Why Loiter*, a book based on 3 years of ethnographic research on women's experiences in public space in Mumbai, indicates the specific issue of gender and space in slums—"The moral concerns with regard to young women in slums are the same as elsewhere, only here, they are heightened by the proximity in which people live and the impossibility of anything being a secret."<sup>24</sup> These moral concerns are often wrapped in paternalistic notions of safety, positioning women as a lesser group that needs to be protected in public space through increased policing. However, interviewees brought up other measures like community acceptance, that also help make public spaces safer for females.

Recognition of girls' right to be in public space and use it as freely as their male counterparts, was an important factor in increasing access to public space for members of YUVA's girls-only netball team in Behrampada. For training, the only space available nearby was Colgate ground, a public ground adjoining a park, about a 5-10 minute walk from Behrampada. Despite it being close by, the girls faced many challenges in accessing the ground—reluctance from parents who prioritized girls' safety over physical and social activity, resistance to sharing space from boys who regularly played on the ground, and harassment faced while walking to the ground and while playing there. The difference in 'publicness' of the ground is evident, seeing as the boys were already allowed to play there without restrictions or safety issues, even recently playing on the road outside since the ground is under renovation. The girls continued to practice in the construction rubble, with the minimal netball equipment. Over two years, the girls developed greater confidence in their right to be on the ground, and are able to advocate for themselves.

However, they still experience differential treatment, and their use of the space is awarded less legitimacy and support than the use by boys. They approached local police officials to patrol the area during their practice times, to increase safety and as a sign of official support for their use of the ground. They have also requested their local corporator to support their team by providing individual netball kits, which hasn't happened yet. As one girl explained, "The politicians come to give prizes and donations to the boys' cricket games. Even though we have a team, they don't come to watch our matches, they can at least give us the kits." Recognition was demanded from both community members and local of-

ficials, to legitimize the ways in which the girls wanted to or were already using the space. This recognition was necessary because the use of public space by girls is not assumed to be the norm. The default is for girls to move “from one ‘sheltered’ space to another,”<sup>25</sup> with girls in both localities interviewed rarely spending time anywhere outside their home and school. The publicness of a space raises concerns of safety for both young boys and girls, but for girls, there is the additional question of whether they are even permitted to be in the space. Making spaces safe for girls is to first affirm their right to be there.

For older women, another common public space outside the house was the market. However, two women from LLC said that the frequency with which they visit the market has reduced due to inflation. They are able to afford less and hence go out less. The social, physical and economic factors are rarely discussed in discourse on women in public space and the interviews highlighted the limited radius of publicity these factors allow for girls and women alike. Within this limited access to public space, it is important to consider what spaces girls and women do use in their community to reap the social and psychological benefits that public space is intended to provide.

### **Investing in Community Spaces**

The demands made by youth advocates during the DP movement were grounded in practical conditions and informed by actual needs of their community. A youth advocate from LLC said they recognized that “there is a problem of space in Mumbai. If we are making demands we have to think practically, if we are demanding grounds then that is not possible because there just isn’t that much space that they can give grounds to everyone who demands one.” Instead, they demanded that community spaces like a youth learning center, a crèche and a child resource center be allocated in every slum and resettlement colony, which would provide more holistic support to the community.

These community spaces can also be safer and more beneficial than playgrounds. The LLC youth advocate explains that “We asked for a child resource center because there is no place in the community where we kids can come together and learn something, talk, it’s not necessary to learn, at least if we can come and have a discussion or play. Because in open spaces we don’t feel safety, it feels unsafe, so we wanted a four-walled enclosed room, a space with different resources like computers, technology-related, or books, a library, we had demanded a child resource center where we can play indoor games like carrom, chess, etc.” She went on to connect other pressing issues related to public space, like harassment, education, drug abuse, safety and skill development to the provision of a learning center. “We had demanded a learning center for youth, for the youth that are [roaming around] here who get addicted to drugs and get distracted, due to which harassment increases. If there was a learning center here for youth, then youth could come here and learn different things, the youth doing timepass outside, we could bring them to this center. Girls could come and take henna classes, beautician and sewing classes, whatever they are interested in.” These could also serve as spaces for discussion, where more people can bring up concerns, build coalitions and strengthen further advocacy efforts.

NGO offices in slums also provide youth wider opportunities to engage in public life. When asked about her favorite place in the city, a girl from Bharat Nagar chose the classroom run by Red Boys Foundation, an education-based NGO in the slum. Many youth in Behrampada also mentioned stopping by YUVA's office in the slum in their daily routine, to meet friends and YUVA facilitators. NGOs also facilitate the use of space in the slum for activities that bring community members together. For example, the independence day celebration organized by YUVA and a local welfare organization in Garib Nagar mentioned earlier (Figure 5). Since families themselves often cannot afford frequent excursions, NGOs are also a medium for slum youth to access other public spaces (malls, nature hikes, places outside Mumbai, etc.) in the city through excursions for Children's Day, International Youth Day, and other occasions.

Investing in such community spaces is a viable and valuable method to support the social development of slum residents. Ethnographic research on community libraries in Bangalore slums reaffirms this need as parents in a focus group admitted that "that one motivation to attend the library [...] was its offer of a temporary respite from domestic duties, as a space outside the home to be active and social."<sup>26</sup> Pyati and Kamal observe that this is especially important since marginalized populations "do not have the luxury of patronizing the 'public' spaces of upper middle class and rich Indians, such as malls and public parks with admission fees."<sup>27</sup> The few existing community spaces within LLC confirm these benefits.



Figure 7: (left) Buddha Vihar in Lallubhai Compound outside (right) BASS activity inside

All my group interviews were held in a Buddha Vihar, a Buddhist temple. It was initiated by the Buddha Vihar Committee, a local residents' group, in 2005. It took 12 years to build just a raised platform surrounded by metal grates and a roof, with a statue and some floor space (Figure 7). It was built by persuading politicians to provide support for construction, and is not entirely legal. Even though it is a barebones structure, it has already become a gathering space, hosting family celebrations, different organizations' meetings, and even serving as the space for my interviews. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Chowk (locally Samvidhan Chowk, because the Samvidhan (Constitution) is placed there), was also built by the Committee at a major intersection in LLC. It serves as a space for elderly men to socialize and a site for protests (Figure 8).



*Figure 8: Elderly men sitting and BASS youth protesting on Independence Day at Samvidhan Chowk*

As Pyati and Kamal state, understanding marginalized communities' conceptions of public space is "not merely a call for assessing community needs, but is rather an effort to highlight the types of services and facilities that matter to communities on the margins," and "by focusing on the margins, new grassroots conceptions of public and community space might be given the air and space they need to take hold and grow."<sup>28</sup>

## Isometric Brown

Digital

Lucia Tian



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## Transantiago: Fare Evasion, Governance, and the Limits of Transportation Sociology

Tuyva Bergson-Michelson

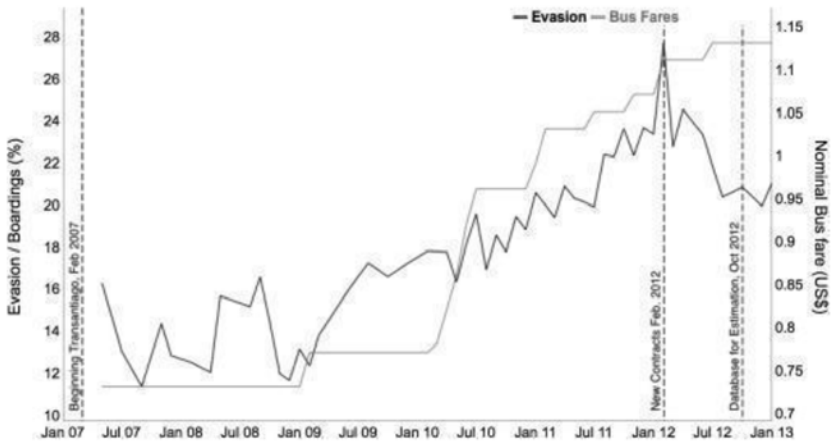
### Abstract:

*Santiago, Chile's bus system suffers from some of the highest rates of fare evasion in the world. While many details of this phenomenon continue to baffle scholars, several competing methodologies have emerged to explain residents' underlying dissatisfaction with the system. This literature review analyzes their findings in the context of broader questions about disciplinary research within the interdisciplinary field of transportation studies, arguing that transportation sociology has been overshadowed by historical, geographical, and psychological approaches to understanding mass transit. It concludes with a brief comparison to the state of transportation sociology in Bogotá, Colombia and reflections on what more assertive sociological research could contribute to our understanding of Santiago's bus system.*

On October 7, 2019, a group of high school students hopped the turnstiles of their local Santiago Metro station to protest a 30-peso subway fare increase. Over the next few weeks, the movement spread across the city, leading to clashes with police, burned-out metro stations, and calls for constitutional reform. So dramatically did the so-called *estallido social* (social uprising or, more literally, social explosion) mobilize the Chilean populace that protests continued well into the height of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> All sparked by a few teenagers' use of fare evasion as a form of civil disobedience.

The students' choice of tactics did not come in a vacuum. Santiago's bus rapid transit (BRT) system, Transantiago, had long boasted what may be the highest fare evasion rate in the world. 28 percent of trips on the system are unpaid. Not only is this higher than fare evasion in the Global North, (typically under 10 percent), it is nearly double the rate on Bogotá, Colombia's TransMilenio system—the BRT system on which Transantiago's designs are based. Mendoza, a smaller city just over the border in Argentina, has only a 3.9 percent evasion rate.<sup>2</sup> Even Santiago's subways have a more typical rate. Clearly, the sky-high rates of fare evasion cannot be brushed off as inevitable consequences of public transportation in Latin America or of a BRT system. Something is convincing a unique number of bus riders in Santiago not to pay for their tickets.

What is that something? Different disciplinary approaches offer different answers.



When Transantiago first opened in 2007, fare evasion already hovered around 15 percent.<sup>3</sup> By the time Tirachini and Quiroz measured it in 2015, it had reached 28 percent.<sup>4</sup>

### Methodological approaches to Transantiago

Transportation research has long been an interdisciplinary field. Engineers, its originators, have been joined by economists, geographers, historians, and even psychologists, each leaving their own mark on academic discussion. Sociologists are far from newcomers, but they have suffered from their discipline's neglect of the topic. One 1967 paper complains that:

*Despite the great amount of aggregate time that people in modern industrial society spend on short-run public transit, there is relatively little sociological understanding of the phenomenon or of the meaning it has for its participants. There is also no readily available theoretical framework in which to embed a transit study.*<sup>5</sup>

A 1983 literature review of transportation sociology reveals how thoroughly other disciplines shaped its development. Despite a title of "The Sociology of Transportation," the paper primarily reviews research in other disciplines that the author finds "relevant to sociological inquiry." He identified several categories of transportation research: **geographical and "ecological" research** focused on the links between levels of urbanization and transportation technology; **economic and political science research** focused on how politicians and consumers made choices about transportation; **local and comparative historical research** focused on transit policy, industry, and labor in particular cities; and a heterogeneous category that focused on the social impacts of transportation, including **public policy research, race class, and gender analysis, and social psychology.**<sup>6</sup>

In the context of Transantiago specifically, I identified three scholarly approaches that help to explain the prevalence of fare evasion in the city: historical approaches trace the development of Santiago's public transportation system before, during, and after the transformative reign of far-right dictator Augusto Pinochet; geographical approaches ana-

lyze the spatial relationship between transportation and the city, especially in the context of segregation; and psychological approaches examine why individuals make the choice to evade paying fares.

### **Historical approaches**

Santiago offers urbanists a convenient case study in changing transportation policies over time. During the past half-century, the city has seen two different ambitious attempts to transform its bus system, the first under Pinochet and the second with the creation of Transantiago in the mid-2000s. Each was ambitious in its own way—the Pinochet-era reforms in their attempt to build a radically neoliberal society, and Transantiago in its attempts to re-imagine the lived experience of bus passengers. For writers with a stake, positive or negative, in either vision for the future, especially those who want to emphasize the failures of neoliberalism, a historical approach can be appealing: it allows them to compare paradigms for transportation to each other directly and argue for one over another.

#### *Pinochet*

Some historical context is necessary before discussing Pinochet's reforms. The economy was in bad shape when he overthrew the socialist Salvador Allende in a 1973 coup. To fix it, he implemented a neoliberal "shock therapy" program of austerity and economic deregulation that reshaped entire industries, including the bus industry. Publicly owned tram and bus companies were dismantled. The administration slashed regulations across the board. Operating licenses became easier to attain; drivers could choose their own prices; eventually, operators could even change their routes from day to day on a whim.<sup>7</sup> A new constitution, adopted in 1980, even banned public bus systems: if the government wanted to engage in "entrepreneurial activity," it now had to run an entire referendum and receive voter approval to proceed.<sup>8</sup>

For some scholars, this is the point. Surafel Geleta positions the resulting chaos as proof that "it should never be assumed that privatization will serve the needs of all people."<sup>9</sup> He details a laundry list of negative social impacts. Operators set their fares high, pushing bus fares from 8 percent to 20 percent of poor residents' income. Riders responded by leaving for alternate forms of transportation, walking or, if they could afford it, driving a car. As new drivers flooded into the industry, the market's overcorrection produced the comedic sight of lines of buses that could reach the hundreds stuck in traffic gridlock of their own creation. With no fixed schedule, bus drivers' earnings depended on how quickly they could drop off and pick up passengers, incentivizing bad and often dangerous driving.<sup>10</sup> To Geleta, the historical narrative clearly links deregulation to human suffering.

Oscar Figueroa, who has a background in economics, sees both riders and operators as rational actors making choices about how to spend their money. He emphasizes a key weakness of the pre-Pinochet system: operators responded to low government-mandated fares by scrimping on the quality of their vehicles and service. Riders responded to the worsened experience by complaining to the government, which was then forced to raise fares again to pay for a return to the previous quality of service. Meanwhile, ridership declined during the low points and never really recovered during the high points. By



keeping prices high and service low, operators maximized short-term profits but shrank their ridership.<sup>11</sup>

Juan Carlos Muñoz emphasizes how the experience of riding on Pinochet-era buses eroded public trust in buses as a form of transportation. Rather than blame the government, many riders villainized the bus drivers as the public face of greed and dysfunction in mass transit. Ominously, fare evasion started to emerge as a response to the poor conditions.<sup>12</sup>

### *Transantiago*

The Transantiago project modeled itself on two famous Latin American bus systems. Curitiba, Brazil was the initial pioneer in BRT systems, and set the precedent for a separate bus lane that helps its buses avoid traffic and maintain their timetable. Bogotá, Colombia supposedly brought BRT into the 21st century with its TransMilenio system, which acts as a central spine along major avenues accessible through separate “feeder” bus lines that ply the surface streets. Santiago planned its system in Bogotá’s image, with the metro as its backbone, fed by five main “trunk” bus lines, which were in turn fed by two “feeder” lines. With the 1980 constitution still in effect, rights to each of the fifteen bus service areas, which did not connect except through the metro, were auctioned off to private companies separately. The government had other ambitious ideas, too, including GPS tracking for a proto-transit app and, crucially, collecting payment through a smart card rather than cash.<sup>13</sup>

Muñoz and Antonio Gschwender portray the subsequent rollout of the system as a slowly worsening disaster caused by bad planning. Their most important critique is that Transantiago pushed to start service before many of its key elements were in place. When rides started in February 2008, there were almost no separate bus lanes, the GPS system was not in place, and many old, dilapidated buses had not yet been replaced by new ones. And ominously for the question of fare evasion, the smart card system had not yet been installed on the buses. Though riders were sometimes able to fit in two rides while paying for just one ticket, the government promised the same payment to operators for a few months no matter how low the quality of their service fell. In trying to keep all the stakeholders happy, they built a perfect environment to incentivize fare evasion.<sup>14</sup>

Figueroa points a finger at the companies, not the government. Analyzing both the Pinochet era and Transantiago, he labels Santiago a “veritable laboratory of public transport policies” whose experimentation is limited only by the contradiction between operators’ continued focus on short-term profits and their continued dependence on low-income riders. He largely concludes that the struggles to maintain a functional bus system are less about any particular ideology and more about consistently poor management.<sup>15</sup>

Like Geleta, Manuel Garretón explains Santiago buses’ dysfunction as the result of neoliberal deregulation. Unlike Geleta, he places it in a much wider context. Garretón argues that the Santiago metropolitan area offers academics a unique case study in neoliberalism given not only its history as a laboratory for the Chicago Boys, but also how distinctively Chile’s history has shaped its expressions of neoliberalism. He details not only transportation history but also that of housing, environmental, governance, and even tourism policies

in the post-Pinochet era, examining how the dictatorship's fundamental transformation of the role of government has created a "unique combination of modernity and underdevelopment."<sup>16</sup> Thus, he emphasizes different aspects of governmental failure with regards to Transantiago, especially the way the 1980 constitution forced it to rely on private companies. He blames the paralysis of the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications not on poor leadership but on a lack of institutional capacity.<sup>17</sup>

The historical format frees its authors to focus on a wide variety of topics in order to provide appropriate context. Though sometimes problematic, historical approaches probably provide the most holistic view of Santiago's transit situation and proneness to fare evasion.

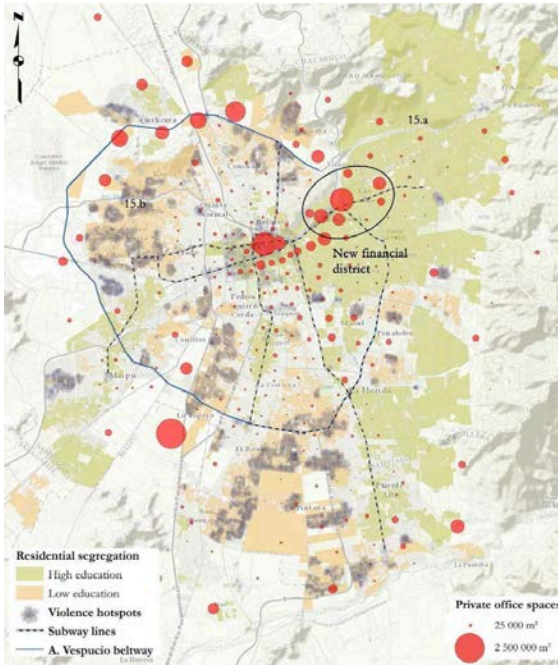
### **Geographical approaches**

If historical approaches tend to examine the legacy of Pinochet in transportation directly, geographical approaches typically take an indirect route to eventually arrive in the same place. A whole body of work looks at the relationship between the location of public transit, income levels, and behavior in Santiago across contexts ranging from rioting to school choice. Unlike the historical thread, geographically-based scholarship on transportation in Santiago often fails to sufficiently problematize segregation and income inequality, instead taking it as a given. However, it tends to avoid the pitfall of lumping all riders together, teasing apart distinctions in income and location that underlie much of the social tension in the metropolis.

The prevailing method is cross-sectional analysis, as it has been for decades.<sup>18</sup> Luis Herkovic breaks down school selection by the distance from students' homes to their schools in order to argue that access to public transportation increases the equity and effectiveness of school choice programs.<sup>19</sup> Ernesto López-Morales et al. look at rent capitalization rates by proximity to metro stations.<sup>20</sup> Kenzo Asahi uses cross-sectional analysis repeatedly in a PhD thesis that tackles the new metro lines' effects on employment, education, and crime.<sup>21</sup>

The method has flaws when used in isolation. Yago's 1983 review of transportation sociology, the one that reflected on other disciplines' potential contributions to the field, argued that "research based solely upon cross-sectional data for the most recent census years cannot capture the social, political, and economic dynamics creating the built environment of cities."<sup>22</sup> It is an important critique when studying Santiago's geography. The Pinochet administration's city planners reshaped the spatial dynamics of income distribution in Santiago. They cleared the northeast portion of the Santiago metropolitan area of low-income residents, moving 150,000 of them to its southern and eastern peripheries, and re-drew municipal boundaries along class lines, exaggerating and reinforcing segregation.<sup>23</sup>

Another strand of geographical research has found that many of the spatial effects of the metro development add to class divisions. A lack of regulation allows large developers to turn larger profits on property near metro stops than small landowners, leading to a real estate boom in the central city driven "by capital, not people."<sup>24</sup> Students prefer to attend schools near metro stations,<sup>25</sup> driving up class sizes and thus leading to a drop in test



*Subway lines play a role in maintaining segregation.<sup>26</sup>*

scores.<sup>27</sup> Not all of the findings are as straightforward, however. Asahi also finds that access to the metro has a much larger effect on female than male employment.<sup>28</sup> Since low-income neighborhoods have much worse metro access than the high-income urban central business district and northeast cone, this has an intersectional impact on poor women in peripheral neighborhoods. Perhaps the most interesting findings come from a study on the spread of riots as the *estallido* social turned violent. Cartes et al. apply a spatial model to the riots that considers both access to metro lines and neighborhood income. They find that the subway network only increased riot density in low- and high-income neighborhoods, not upper middle- or lower middle-income ones.<sup>29</sup> Though odd at first glance, this reflects the patterns of segregation in Santiago quite closely. As the authors point out, neighborhood income designations are based on residency, and so they miss the temporal dimensions of segregation. Their findings suggest that low-income rioters may have been rioting not just where they lived, but also where they or their family worked.<sup>30</sup> On the whole, though, geographical work focused on Santiago's public transportation system remains dominated by an econometric approach that cuts straight to the numbers without stopping to ask bigger questions.

When used appropriately, a geographical approach is a powerful tool for studying the role of public transportation in a city. It also has crossover appeal into fields like economics that typically eschew qualitative data. When isolated from context, though, it loses much of its power.

### Psychological approaches

A more recent trend in transportation research is the emergence of scholarship that blends social psychology with existing methods of analysis. Santiago has been on the cutting edge of psychological fare evasion research, in part because its sky-high evasion rates confound traditional methods of analysis.<sup>31</sup> This scholarly approach distinguishes itself through its analysis of individuals rather than systems and its insistence that individuals who broke the law had reasons worth studying for doing so. Thus, like a historical approach, its Chilean proponents tend to map out a position that is highly critical of the transportation policy establishment, but the field is often even less likely than geographical scholarship to tie its findings to fundamental issues with Chilean society.

Most of the pioneering psychological work in Santiago has been done by Alejandro Tirachini. His first study on the topic, commissioned by the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications in 2010, was notable for one of the first psychological typologies of fare evaders, which primarily distinguished between circumstantial and chronic evaders. He also found that lower-class passengers were least judgemental towards fare evaders.<sup>32</sup> His later work has investigated riders' reasons for evasion at a more granular level. A survey he ran in 2017 found that 73 percent of Transantiago passengers had failed to pay at least once. The most common reasons were issues boarding or finding the right place to pay, but perhaps in line with his earlier findings about class, 20 percent reported evading fares because they did not have the money to pay for a ticket.<sup>33</sup> Crucially, work on typologies in other parts of the world has found that a small group of fare evaders disillusioned with the transit system are responsible for most unpaid trips. Deliberate fare evasion was "linked to the ideological belief that transit was a commercial service run to make money. This motivated a minority of users to question why they are paying fares to make these businesses richer."<sup>34</sup> Though Tirachini's work has not explicitly explored this possibility, it seems plausible that the greed-soaked experience of Pinochet-era buses has given a disproportionate number of Santiago residents this cynical attitude. Was their disillusionment what made fare evasion such an effective form of protest?

A social psychology approach offers important benefits to those studying fare evasion on Transantiago. While some historical approaches tie fare evasion to the low quality of service, they lack an ability to prove that link or to speculate effectively on which policy changes (if any) might convince more riders to pay. Given the widespread breakdown of public trust cited by Muñoz & Gschwender, mere engineering fixes to bad service like replacing old buses may not be enough. Psychological approaches could offer a better guide to potential structural and cultural solutions to fare evasion.

### Conclusion

None of these three methodological approaches can explain the prevalence of fare evasion in Santiago on its own. Though each offers valuable insights, they are not necessarily well-equipped to offer insights about group behavior motivated by a strong sense of systemic injustice in society. Sociology potentially is. It offers a disciplinary bridge between psychology's study of individuals and the study of big data that I labeled the "geographical approach." We can see some nascent examples of sociology's contributions to the

study of Bogotá's TransMilenio system. In addition to important work quantifying the relationship between BRT and social fragmentation,<sup>35</sup> some scholars have begun engaging in discourse or ontological analysis, questioning the role of political and social narratives in shaping Bogotá residents' understanding of infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> This kind of analysis is sorely needed in a context where riders' socially constructed "knowledge" about the bus system clearly influences their willingness to pay. Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of ethnographic research on the experience of transit.

## Intersections

Photography

Ciprian Buzila

*About the Work: This image captures a view from inside the Louvre Museum's glass pyramid, designed by architect I M Pei. The contrast between the modern pyramid and the historic Louvre Palace creates a fascinating palimpsest, where the old and new intersect.*



## Heritage Commodification and Displacement in Lijiang, China

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*About the Work: This paper, originally written for John Logan's course on Comparative Urban Political Economy, explores the heritage commodification and displacement of the Naxi, an ethnic minority, in Lijiang, China. The impacts of tourism on local residents are analyzed through the lens of ethnic tension, economic incentives, and authoritarian local power structures.*

China's first UNESCO world heritage site, the Old Town of Lijiang, was dubbed the "Venice of the Orient" and "one of the few remaining authentic ancient towns in China" by *Forbes*. Yet the designation of Lijiang as a significant cultural landmark commodified its intangible cultural 'resources' and exposed its lauded authenticity to destructive forces. The Naxi people, the local ethnic minority and source of 'authenticity,' have been ensnared by the ironic tension between economic exploitation and cultural preservation. The Naxi residents' social fabric and sense of home were irrevocably damaged by tourism commodification, calling into question the veracity of the local government's preservation efforts. Market incentives combined with authoritarianism empowered the Chinese ethnic majority (Han) government to displace the Naxi people with a highly-profitable caricature of their culture, destroying the intangible fabric of the Naxi people in Lijiang.

### Background

Lijiang is a prefecture-level city in northwest Yunnan, a province in Southern China, with a population of around 1.2 million in 2020. The UNESCO world heritage site is made up of three "Old Towns"—Dayan, Shuhe, and Baisha. I will focus on Dayan, the most traveled, and will refer to it as Dayan or "the Old Town." Lijiang bears 22 ethnic minority groups in total but is primarily populated by Naxi, who made up about 54 percent of the region's residents in 2000.

Until the late 1990s, Dayan was a small town that accommodated local residents and rural peasants in the area. China began a project of market reform in 1978, rapidly constructing a middle class and propelling domestic demand for tourism. In 1994, the central government decentralized tax responsibility to reduce fiscal pressure on the central government.<sup>1</sup> The byproduct was fervent interlocality competition. Local governments were incentivized to invest in urban heritage and tourism to attract visitors, revenue, and secure 'place-specific locational advantages.' Authorities latched onto the Lijiang Old Towns as its unique industry. A 7.0 magnitude earthquake in 1996 devastated much of the town's physical infrastructure, and as tourism was central to their development plan, the city was rebuilt in the government's vision. In 1997, UNESCO recognized Lijiang's Old Towns as a World Heritage Site. Tourism exploded from a few hundred thousand annual visitors in the late 1990s to over 30 million in 2015.

## Heritage Management

Authorities in Lijiang internationally claim to prioritize preservation, but in actuality emphasize a curated aesthetic optimized for tourist consumption. Heritage management's monopoly on governance, heritage, and the economy enables authorities to unilaterally make decisions about the city's future without reference to history. As Lijiang's authorities are predominantly Han Chinese, their connection to Naxi culture is minimal and authenticity is traded for consistency and ease of consumption. These economically-incentivized decisions about what parts of Naxi heritage to present are disconnected from the authentic culture, and fundamentally alter Naxi cultural presentation and the community.

### *"Traditional" Aesthetics*

The city focuses on preserving the aesthetics of physical infrastructure, enforcing stringent regulations on window styles, door locations, external decor, living room styles, the room height, and more aspects of the built form.<sup>2</sup> In the early 2000s, dozens of modern-style concrete buildings that were constructed in the mid-20th century were demolished to make way for new, small traditional-style houses, displacing existing residents in the process. The government also paved streets with polished marble, widened main streets, and decorated canals with new greenery to anticipate tourist traffic. These changes have been criticized by local scholars for misinterpreting traditional Naxi architecture and for being an ingenuine attempt to recreate the aesthetics from the mid-1800s.

### *Invented Heritage Projects*

One example of an invented built heritage is Mu Palace, a cluster of ornamented buildings that housed the family that governed the surrounding area. While both the family and their dwellings are a unanimously recognized part of Lijiang's history, by the time tourism development began in Dayan, no such structure existed. Accuracy was doomed from the project's conception, as no photos or illustrations of the original buildings were available. New plans were drawn up in the style of Han Chinese architecture, reminiscent of the Forbidden City in Beijing.<sup>3</sup> This imagined heritage explicitly contrasts against surrounding building styles and reinforces the superiority of Han Chinese influence, revealing the ethnic background of local ruling elites. Despite the clear disconnect to its place or history, the palace is marketed as a piece of ethnic pride for the Naxi. The head of Lijiang County stated, "Mu Palace... is a microcosm of the town's 800-year-long history, displaying the rich cultural connotations of the Naxi ethnic group and the fall and rise of this group."<sup>4</sup> However, ethnographic interviews revealed that locals had never entered the palace because of high admission prices and because it is viewed as a tourist product that has no connection to their heritage.

### *Cultural Representation through People*

Perhaps the most evident way that local elites have commodified culture is through their reshaping and exotification of Naxi people's lives. Elaborate rituals that used to only be conducted when worshipping religious entities have been condensed and mandated by heritage management authorities to be performed at the top of every hour to fit into tourists' schedules. Private contractors host religious festivals and "weddings" in the town



several times a year.<sup>5</sup> The city's economic development strategy hinges on extracting profit from Nazi bodies and using them as a spectacle.

Another project that treats the Nazi like museum objects is "Encountering a Nazi Family," where the government selected 10 courtyards occupied by Nazi residents and set up the space with Nazi handicrafts, food, clothing, and other themed elements. The residents are reimbursed by the government to perform for tourists.<sup>6</sup> Those that live in these courtyards are required to wear ethnic garments during visiting hours and allow visitors to enter their homes. These experiences collect hefty fees, and the locals do not get to determine what they share with visitors or how they present themselves, emphasizing the agency that is stripped from the Nazi people.

### **Economic Management**

Heritage management authorities in Dayan claim to prioritize preservation but contradict themselves through a willful disregard for authenticity in exchange for profit-seeking decisions. The restructuring of subnational governments as tax collectors in 1994 has pivoted them to act as industrial firms that maximize revenue. However, while cities in capitalist nations have to follow market practices and rely on public-private partnerships to push their agenda, local governments in China are not as restricted by such mechanisms and can "replace and monopolise the market to enhance [their] capacity and secure [their] objectives."<sup>7</sup> Lijiang's government asserts its aim of economic development at the expense of locals through urban planning, real estate, and debt instruments.

### *Urban Planning*

Starting in the 1980s, tourism development in Dayan rapidly encroached on essential infrastructure such as markets and homes. As all land in China is subject to government ownership, one of the most prominent examples of political power being leveraged for economic gain is through the built environment. The government began shutting down markets to make way for tourism-focused amenities. Si Fang Jie, the central square of the Old Town, was slowly shut down as the government rented out individual storefronts to outsider businesspeople who serviced tourists instead of locals.<sup>8</sup> Local stores eventually became completely replaced by souvenir shops and restaurants. By 2010, only 20 percent of Dayan shops served both tourists and locals, whereas 70 percent solely targeted tourists.<sup>9</sup>

### *Real Estate*

Property is a central aspect of how the city's valuation appreciates. The local government owns over 300 homes, all of which are rentals for tourism businesses or private residences. In 2010, the government began allowing customers to publicly bid on rentals, skyrocketing housing prices. This phenomenon is not novel for capitalist economies, but the sudden conversion of government-owned property to market pricing in a World Heritage Site cultivated a battlefield of speculation. As an illustration of this phenomenon, the rent for one property in 2008 was 60,000 RMB, but in 2010 escalated to 590,000 RMB.<sup>10</sup> These changes have rippled across the makeup of the town, as high prices of property increasingly push out residents and can only be sustained by commercial uses.

### *Debt Instruments*

The ultimate representation of the financialization of heritage is the government leveraging the Old Town's tourist value to finance its debt. In 2012, local authorities raised 700 million RMB in China's domestic capital market through bonds. In order to secure these bonds, authorities emphasized their monopoly on the cultural industry in Lijiang and how lucrative it could become, essentially betting on their ability to extract more profit from the city in the future.<sup>11</sup> By using the city as collateral for bonds and demanding Dayan deliver consistent returns, the local government trapped the Old Town into becoming increasingly commodified and become more uninhabitable for locals. The local's needs were forever supplanted by capital interests, as "the financialisation of urban heritage has allowed private investors to penetrate deeply into Lijiang's heritage management as a flood of interest-seeking capital pours into Lijiang's debt instrument."<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, much of this debt financing was not even reinvested in the Old Town or in heritage preservation. Out of the 700 million RMB raised through bonds in 2012, 350 million RMB was spent on a social welfare housing project in the new city and 150 million RMB for urban redevelopment along Fuhui Road in the new city.<sup>13</sup> This re-emphasizes the extractive nature of "heritage authorities" in Dayan. The Old Town is a product for capital accumulation, which can be reinvested in the new city, increasing amenities for elites and increasing the economic reputation of the city.

### **Effects on the Naxi people**

Dayan's forceful transition from a place of residence to a tourist wonderland unsurprisingly displaced the Naxi people. It is unclear how many original inhabitants are presently in the Old Town, but one account claims that there were about thirty thousand original residents living in Dayan at the end of 1996. By 2013, that number dropped to fewer than 100 original residents.<sup>14</sup>

### *Explanations for Lack of Resistance*

Before diving into the reasons the Naxi left the Old Town, their political standing in Lijiang must be explored. Many studies on how the Naxi have been affected by local authorities' actions treat the locals as passive recipients of their fate without explaining the dearth of backlash. This lack of vocal resistance and grassroots effort to preserve their community could potentially be attributed to the government's gradual relocation of families around the edges of the Old Town. The effort appears to have occurred repeatedly over the course of decades, as "the government relocated residents of the Dayan Old Town to the far-north area in 1986, 1989, 1992, and 1995, and to the new town area in the east in 1985, 1996, and 1999."<sup>15</sup> This slow chipping away of the neighborhood could have prevented a more consolidated political coalition from forming.

### *Local Displacement*

The reasons why the Naxi left, besides forced relocation, are plentiful. Local authorities' aggressive push to cultivate the area for tourist satisfaction profoundly intervened in the physical structure of the city and displaced locals physically, financially, and socially. Heritage authorities opened tourist facilities, moved government offices, closed public spaces,

and shut down grocery markets, removing necessary infrastructure for the Naxi to reside comfortably in the town. Locals' connection to Dayan "eroded as local ruling elites have shaped Lijiang's built heritage exclusively for the tourism industry."<sup>16</sup>

As other people in the community left, people's ties to the neighborhood weakened because the social fabric was dissolving. As stated by Wang, a retired scholar in his 60s, "There are fewer and fewer acquaintances. They all move out and I don't know where they move. We don't have connections anymore. Living in a very noisy environment is not good. It is not my life."<sup>17</sup> The streets of Dayan became a place of discomfort due to the lack of community and oppressive crowds of strangers. When the Naxi people are positioned as museum objects in the Old Town, the tourist gaze becomes inescapable. Inevitably, "streets stop functioning as a comfortable place to saunter and a site to facilitate social relations; rather, they become a space of pressure and fear."<sup>18</sup> Congestion, noise, and air pollution were driving factors in pushing many people out of Dayan.

Thus, with soaring property values, the most intuitive option for locals became renting out their property in the old city to external businesspeople and moving into the new developments outside the old city. The returns from rent were stable and didn't require the struggle of competing against hundreds of shopkeepers with more significant business backgrounds, so it became difficult to justify staying.

### *Impact on the Naxi who Left*

Moving out of their original homes is often a source of shame and disappointment for the Naxi, and many locals who moved away emphasized that they had no choice. Lisi, a local resident, stated, "I have lived here for 55 years. I was born in this courtyard house. I have been in the town ever since and have developed a special sentiment for the town, but I don't know how to explain this sentiment."<sup>19</sup> As elements of their homes and lifestyles that were a source of comfort became highly sought after commodities in the tourism market, it was impossible to assert the same ownership over their space, culture, and sense of home.

The Naxi that left have had fundamentally different upbringings and understandings of their culture as those before them. As large culturally specific festivals like the Sanduo are now held by private contractors in the Old Town for tourist enjoyment, many Naxi no longer participate. Some traditional activities were able to move to the new town, but they were more difficult to consistently maintain because people were scattered across the larger Lijiang area. For instance, Ah Li Li, a form of improvisational singing contest usually conducted in Si Fang Square, was lost by 2005 because of the transformation of the public space into a tourist shopping area.<sup>20</sup> These place-based rituals rich with the Naxi verbal language and depictions of Naxi life were no longer part of their upbringings and experience of the culture. In fact, those raised outside of Dayan visit the Old Town as tourists and relearn the culture incorrectly due to the inaccuracies that plague the heritage authority's official dialogue. According to an experienced Naxi tour guide, "The Old Town is performing a different version of traditional culture for tourists. Young Naxi people are learning about the culture that most Naxi people (in the new city) are not practicing anymore."<sup>21</sup>

The three iterations of Naxi culture (old, new and tourist) clash in the younger generation, making it difficult to preserve authentic culture or allow it to evolve organically.

However, new cultural practices have arisen out of the rapid urban changes in Lijiang. Previously, male rural residents in Dayan had little time to participate in regular rituals because they were too busy with physical farm labor. Stable income from rental properties and the developing new city allowed Naxi men to leave farm work behind, freeing up time to engage in new practices. Huachong is a form of community based financial support, where people in the group gather to help each other with large events, distribute funds from a monthly pool, and gamble and socialize.

### **Conclusion**

The Lijiang local government's intentional fixation on economic development has irreversibly sacrificed the cultural authenticity and intangible social network of the original Naxi residents. Domestic market reforms that took over local governments created conditions where the prioritization of tourism, local displacement, and destruction of the Naxi culture were almost inevitable. Interregional competition fueled the town's physical transition into a commodity, and thus the Naxi's unwilling transformation into objects of consumption.

The government's methodical displacement of the Naxi people prevented grassroots resistance. Dayan became unlivable for the Naxi residents and their place-based rituals, leading to displacement and the permanent loss of cultural practices. Albeit vastly different from the idyllic rural lifestyle of generations before, new generations of Naxi have found resilience by developing new cultural practices and a sense of home through community.

## Towering Towards Heaven

Photography

Brenda Subilhaga

*About the Work: "Towering Towards Heaven" suggests that the buildings are reaching towards heaven or something taller than humans. It also refers to the human desire to build something that goes toward the sky, creating a sense of movement and dynamism.*



# Competing Visions for Bangkok's Informal Economy

Karis Ma

*About the Work: This paper, originally written for Professor Logan's course on comparative urban political economy, details the dynamics of Bangkok's urban informal economy with a focus on street vendors and sex workers. It has been shortened from its original form for publication in the Urban Journal.*

## Introduction

From 2015 to 2018, Bangkok topped Mastercard's Global Destination Cities Index as the most visited city in the world, with nearly 22.78 million international overnight visitors in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Amidst devastating COVID travel slowdowns, the city has taken the time to further revamp its international image, "clean[ing] up its act [to] become cleaner, greener, and more walkable"<sup>2</sup> in an effort to "entice travellers to rediscover one of the world's favorite cities."<sup>3</sup> Part of those cleanup efforts included addressing the quandary of the city's infamous informal economy—a sector that brings value to locals and tourists alike, but also one that connotes the informality, disorganisation, and underdevelopment that Bangkok is trying to shift its national narrative away from.

I analysed the politics of Bangkok's informal economy through the case studies of street vending and sex work. In each case, two main levels of analysis were conducted—the first at the high-level, addressing the policies of Thailand's national government and the city-level Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, and the second on the district-level, addressing the intricate interaction of local protest and the district administrations' forms of calculated informality.

## Background & Methodology

Bangkok is Thailand's capital and primate city, holding more than 13% of the country's population<sup>4</sup> and contributing 31.88% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018.<sup>5</sup> For clarity, this paper will be discussing the Bangkok metropolis when it speaks of Bangkok, and not the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR), a region including the metropolis and five adjacent provinces.

Politically, the Bangkok metropolis is subject to a few levels of government. At the national level, since the 2019 dissolution of the National Council for Peace and Order's (NCPO) 5 year military junta rule,<sup>6</sup> Thailand has been run by a civilian government. At the local level, a 1985 amendment to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Act placed the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) in charge of formulating policies for Bangkok specifically.<sup>7</sup> Bangkok itself is further divided into 50 districts that are each managed by a District Council and local administrators, as per the same 1985 amendment.<sup>8</sup> This multi-level governance structure gives rise to significant policy complexity.

While Bangkok is well-regarded as a financial hub, the contribution of the informal economy to these statistics is either under- or unrepresented. However, the size of size of

Thailand's informal economy is estimated to be equivalent to around 46.2% of the nation's formal GDP,<sup>9</sup> with much of this activity either based in or moving through Bangkok. Thus, while urban sociology has often been rightfully concerned with housing as a major area of analysis, "the location of informal economic activities is [also] crucial, particularly in Southeast Asian cities like Bangkok, and therefore spatial planning [and any field contributing to it] should take into account employment issues."<sup>10</sup> Understanding where and under what circumstances workers in the informal labour market work is crucial to understanding the lived experiences of Bangkok's urban denizens, and it is also key to understanding a significant portion of Bangkok's economic narrative.

While Bangkok's informal economy consists of a wide array of activities, I will focus on two case studies—street vending and sex work. Both activities are often thought of, particularly within the international community, as integral components of Thailand's cultural image. However, both activities also carry connotations of uncleanness, vice, and underdeveloped chaos, running counter to the image of modernisation that many developing global cities, Bangkok included, hope to cultivate. Thus, to different extents, both case studies represent a tension between the vision of a typically-conceived modern, globalised city, and the vision of a less organised city that flexibly caters to the needs of its locals and tourists. Further exacerbating this tension is the broad demographics of workers in each industry, that makes it impossible to deal with an industry as a monolithic entity. In each industry, we therefore see livelihoods eked out to varying successes between international pressures, official governing priorities, district-level informality, and worker pushback. Unlike other aspects of Bangkok's informal economy that are often far-removed from the international eye or locals' regular lives, these activities are intertwined with everyday experience at both levels, and it is precisely this tension that I study.

### **Street Vendors**

Street vendors, particularly those vending food and drinks, are an integral part of the everyday lives of Bangkok locals as well as the tourist experience. For my purposes, street vendors in Bangkok are demographically bifurcated into two general groups. The first group, that I refer to as local vendors, consists of vendors who are either Bangkok locals or have lived in Bangkok for enough generations for the difference to be essentially moot. Many such vendors "inherited their businesses from their families and are working as second or third generation operators," and accordingly "have generally operated in the same location over many years [with] regular clients."<sup>11</sup> Given that "family support, capital, or a social network [were all] deemed important by vendors enjoying higher levels of [economic] success,"<sup>12</sup> it is unsurprising that these local vendors "do not necessarily represent a 'community of the poor,'"<sup>13</sup> and are instead often lower-middle or middle-class. The second group of vendors, who I will refer to as migrant vendors, consists of rural-urban migrants who have come to Bangkok from surrounding provinces because "street food vending still provides viable earning opportunities for rural migrants."<sup>14</sup> While these vendors are often better off than they would otherwise have been in their rural communities, they work at subsistence levels, "generally operat[ing] on relatively low margins" and "not [being] prepared to manage costs in the event of sudden shocks to earnings."<sup>15</sup> In the

latter half of this section, I will explore how the district administration's form of calculated informality has led to and exacerbated uneven outcomes between local vendors and migrant vendors.

### *High-Level Policy*

In 2014, the BMA, under the edict of the NCPO, introduced a "Reclaiming Pavements for Pedestrians Plan"<sup>i</sup> that "obliged [the] District Council and the City Law Enforcement Department to clear vending stalls on the pavements and return the pavements to pedestrians by 31 August 2014."<sup>16</sup> While this plan took time to implement, by 2016, official numbers indicated that nearly 75% of informal markets and 12,000 vendors had been shut down.<sup>17</sup>

The BMA's narrative surrounding this plan reflected oft-quoted tropes in urban sociology, particularly the revanchist city narrative. Coined by Neil Smith, this narrative describes the "‘vengeance’ of cities [...] [intent on] creating a positive image to attract highly mobile capital in an increasingly competitive global market," and is often first mediated by "the issue of public space, and its consequence in terms of reclaiming it from the poor, minorities, and progressive movements who are aggressively displaced from it."<sup>18</sup> Here, the BMA's justification for their plan directly "appeal[ed] to the Act on Maintaining Public Cleanliness and Public Order," and promised "to bring 'safety and orderliness' to the city."<sup>19</sup> This plan was framed as one prioritising city residents, "who have suffered abuse of their sidewalks for decades" by morally degenerate vendors with "an attitude of selfishness [...] [who] seem not to care that their actions cause others inconvenience and put them in harm's way."<sup>20</sup> In addition, it was hoped that such a plan would further the image of Bangkok as a modernised city—by making the streetsides "a new location for the BMA to hold Loy Krathong festivities,"<sup>ii</sup> the BMA essentially hoped to make the area "more like a theme park."<sup>21</sup>

However, the plan faced significant backlash from the international community. Instead of receiving praise for modernising the city, the BMA was "accused of trying to sanitise the atmosphere that [made the city] such a draw for millions each year," with the international perception being that "something vital and culturally ineffable [was] being lost in Bangkok."<sup>22</sup> Evidently, the BMA's vision for a global Bangkok clashed with the perceptions of international tourists—while the BMA desired a modern image of cleanliness and order, the international community had irrevocably associated Bangkok with the quaint chaos expected of an Asian cultural other, and responded with outcry when such expectations were breached in the name of sanitising the city.

This quandary has led to rather mixed messaging in recent years. While frequent statements are still made by Bangkok governors who "want to 'clean up' [their] city and remove 'ill-mannered' cooks,"<sup>23</sup> practical policies lean more towards the hawker centre model of another Southeast Asian city, Singapore, with "Kessara Thanyalakpark, the governor's chief strategy and financial adviser, [stating] that Singapore's creation of special centres

<sup>i</sup> Sometimes referred to as the "Clean Up the Streets" or "Return the Footpath to Pedestrians" plan.

<sup>ii</sup> A popular cultural festival where floating lanterns are released into waterways and the sky.



for hawkers to sell their wares serves as the ideal model for regulating footpath vending in Bangkok.<sup>24</sup> Instead of completely evicting street vendors, the BMA therefore now permits vending “along zoned areas,” and aims to “promote [these areas] as major tourist attractions in Bangkok.”<sup>25</sup>

The softening of the BMA's initial policies and its shift to Singapore's hawker centre model is not surprising. With Singapore's hawker centres having been awarded UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status<sup>26</sup> and the city's streets and public spaces being considered “remarkably clean,”<sup>27</sup> such ostensible success forms an alluring draw for a city facing Bangkok's dilemmas. Bangkok's adoption of this model depicts the extent to which its high-level policy surrounding street vendors is shaped by an awareness of the international eye.

### *Local-Level Resistance & Calculated Informality*

While this new policy clearly represents a moderation of Bangkok's initial stance, it still faces significant pushback from vendors who argue that this move “disrupts [their] trade and revenue” by moving them away from their regular clients and concentrating them in locations with greater competition from other vendors.<sup>28</sup> Such street vendors display an array of resistance strategies that often show dual awareness of their cultural context and the importance of appealing to the international gaze. As has come to be expected in Western literature, these vendors do engage in the marches, riots, and petitions typical of such grassroots movements. However, they also engage in less typical forms of resistance that involve the mobilisation of cultural narratives and norms. In one case, upon realising that standard modes of protest were futile, vendors in Tha Chang leant on the Thai state's “shibboleth of ‘Nation, Religion, King’” and the practice of “Thai people request[ing] support from respectful [sic] public figures and religious leaders.” By inviting “a senior Buddhist monk [...] Luang Pu Buddha Issara, to represent them and negotiate with the authorities,”<sup>29</sup> the vendors managed to secure an additional two months to move out of their original vending locations. In another case, vendors along Soi Ari “decided to band around an ancient tradition of colour coordinating clothing to bring beauty to the pavements, and show the value they bring to Bangkok's streets.”<sup>30</sup> With each day of the week being traditionally associated with a certain colour in Thai culture, vendors decided to coordinate their clothing to match. While it is challenging to definitively state that this aided their case, Soi Ari's vendors were eventually permitted to continue vending along the street. Critically, street vendors in both cases demonstrated flexibility, creativity, and an awareness of the need for visible demonstrations of their cultural value. In so doing, their protests show a keen grasp of how to garner local and international support in the process of resisting high-level policy.

Often, district-level administrators also demonstrate a similar unwillingness to enforce eviction policies. An awareness of the impossibility of policing street vendors, the economic and social value that such vendors bring, and the possibility of obtaining bribes motivates district administration to instead develop a system of calculated informality that enables a significant number of vendors to continue operating under legal carve-outs. One example of this is in Soi Rangnam, where “local authorities actively and purposefully organize legal gray zones.”<sup>31</sup> There, vendors are split into three distinct groups—those who vend with full

legal status, those who vend illegally, and vendors who are “waiting for regularisation.” This last group is not legally permitted to vend, but pays the district administration a monthly fee in exchange for the chance to vend uninterrupted. Through this system, a flexible limit on vendor numbers in an area is created, that allows the district administration to adjust vendor numbers based on tourist density, and collect bribe money while governing over a fairly docile vendor population).<sup>32</sup> Effectively, they have therefore constructed a system of informality that reconciles practical demands with the need to maintain some modicum of control.

However, this model is not without its limitations. Since “waiting for regularisation” spots can be inherited and held onto for decades, local vendors disproportionately hold these positions. On the flipside, migrant vendors often find it challenging to obtain informal licence to vend, and are therefore forced to vend illegally, under constant disruption that is deliberately heightened by district administrators to incentivise local vendors to continue paying fees for their informal spots. These migrant vendors are thus forced to run extremely mobile operations involving goods with lower profit margins, which makes their incomes highly unstable. District-level systems of informality therefore create uneven patterns of success, and they privilege those with the local savvy to play the game.

#### *Street Vendors: Conclusion*

On a macro-level, the seeming incoherence of Bangkok’s systems of policy-making, administration, and resistance coalesce into a system that effectively serves disparate needs. While the Thai government and BMA is publicly seen to be following a successful international model of street vendor management, street vendors are able to mobilise in innovative ways that garner international attention, and district-level administrators ensure that the practical needs of the city and the demands of the street vendors are met. However, at the micro-level, this produces inequality—the system works for enough people that it can continue functioning, but does not work for everyone.

#### **Sex Workers**

The tourism minister of Gambia once off-handedly commented that “[Gambia is] not a sex destination. If you want a sex destination, you go to Thailand.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Thailand, and Bangkok in particular, is often tied to sex work in the international imaginary, with websites dedicated to providing guides on the best brothels by type of service provided<sup>34</sup> and furnishing tips on how best to negotiate for cheap deals on sexual services.<sup>35</sup> Demographically, most of Bangkok’s sex workers are women<sup>36</sup> Within this population, one of the most significant divisions is between those who wish to leave the trade, and those who are willing agents who wish to remain in the trade. In enumerating this distinction, I do not imply that those who are willing agents in sex work do not ever experience or fight against unsafe labor conditions, nor do I imply that some sex workers are to be blamed for their condition while others are to be saved from it. On the contrary, I set up this distinction to illustrate the ways that Thailand’s current enforcement practices can have differing effects on those in the industry who consent to providing sexual services in their transactions with clients and would like to continue working in the industry, and those who do not. The first group, who I will refer to as unwilling sex workers, often hail from neighbouring rural

provinces or other Southeast Asian countries and generally “enter [the sex trade] willingly, lured by the promise of better working opportunities,”<sup>37</sup> only to realise too late that the promised career as a waitress or hostess is instead one of sex work. These unwilling sex workers then often attempt to leave the trade, but are mired in debt or physically unable to leave. On the other hand, the second group, who I will refer to as willing sex workers, are those who knowingly enter the trade and take pride in their work. Given that Thailand’s gendered labour market often bars women from low-skilled jobs in regulated workplaces,<sup>38</sup> women are often left with sex work as one of the most viable means of income generation. While there are some caveats on the level of free choice these willing sex workers are truly afforded, the fact remains that there is clearly an analytically significant difference between women who wish to stay in the sex trade and those who wish to leave it. I will analyse how this demographic bifurcation has resulted in a bifurcation of policy and practical outcomes.

At the high-level, the Thai government and BMA face significant international pressure to both crack down on sex work and legalise it. In 2014, the U.S. State Department “named Thailand as one of the world’s worst centres for human trafficking, saying it was “not making significant efforts” [in helping the] “tens of thousands” exploited in the commercial sex trade.”<sup>39</sup> This resulted in a flurry of NGOs and academics calling for a harsh shutdown of the sex trade, and ultimately caused Thailand’s Tourism Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul to pledge “to eradicate the sex trade.”<sup>40</sup> Of particular note was Wattanavrangkul’s telling language—rather than pledging eradication for the sake of trafficked victims, she suggested that “[we] want the sex industry gone [because we] want Thailand to be about quality tourism,” and echoed “hopes [that] the government’s push to rid the country of brothels could purify the country’s international image as a tourism destination.”<sup>41</sup>

Officially, Thailand has thus adopted a legal stance that essentially criminalises sex work. Through the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act and the Entertainment Places Act, the Thai government criminalises activities associated with sex work, including but not limited to the solicitation of sex and the housing of sex workers within entertainment venues.<sup>42</sup> In recent pre-pandemic years, these laws have seen increased enforcement, with the country ramping up crackdowns on gangs involved in the sex trade following an increase in foreign media coverage,<sup>43</sup> resulting in “more than 24,000 people [being] arrested, prosecuted and fined for sex work-related offences” in 2019.<sup>44</sup>

However, there are dissenting voices in the international community, with many NGOs conversely advocating for the rights of willing sex workers to have their careers legally recognised. In 2018, a United Nations statement suggested that “a main obstacle to protect [sic] sex workers against human rights abuse is the hidden nature and criminalization of sex work under the Suppression and Prevention of Prostitution Act.”<sup>45</sup> This led to increased NGO and international advocacy for the legalisation of sex work.

In response to these twin pressures, the Thai government unofficially allows red light districts to continue operation<sup>46</sup> while officially continuing to criminalise activities associated with sex work. Furthermore, it often utilises a “raid-and-rescue” model that is “meant to check [for the] trafficking of migrants and underage prostitution and that authorities

have provided sex workers with healthcare and vocational training,<sup>47</sup> and ostensibly only takes individuals into custody if such guidelines are violated.<sup>iii</sup> Here, as in the case of street vendors, high-level policy demonstrates significant malleability in line with contradictory international pressures.

#### *Local-Level Resistance & Calculated Informality*

This noncommittal nature of high-level policy has led to dissatisfaction amongst sex workers, who feel that their needs are not being adequately represented. For obvious reasons, the voices of unwilling sex workers are less directly represented, with their opinions often mediated by NGOs with their own agendas. NGOs also influence the protest forms of willing sex workers, with their resistance leaning less on local cultural norms than the resistance of street vendors. In one instance, a petition to decriminalise sex work was submitted through Empower Foundation, a Chiang Mai-based group whose director received initial advocacy training in New York.<sup>48</sup> With “[thousands] of Thai and migrant sex workers [...] [learning] from Empower [...] to lobby the government to decriminalize their work,” it is unsurprising that the resistance of Bangkok’s sex workers is highly shaped by Western forms of sex worker resistance, and largely utilises strategies including legal petitions and pride parades.

In formulating district-level policies towards sex workers, administrators are keenly aware of the prevalence of such protests, as well as the importance of sex workers to the tourist economy and the lives of locals. Thus, district-level policies often take a stance on sex work that is even more lax than those of high-level policies. In response to tip offs, some genuine raids are in fact conducted on certain brothels, and do occasionally succeed in rescuing unwilling workers.<sup>49</sup> However, systems of calculated informality often unevenly select the brothels that are raided. Brothels whose proprietors pay bribes to the district administration are often removed from the list of premises to be raided, and where raid quotas have to be met, “corrupt police officers often didn’t bother raiding a brothel and instead phoned the manager and requested five sex workers come to the police station and pay a fine.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, when raids are conducted by national or international teams, such brothels are often given advance warning by district administrators, giving them the time to relocate underage and unwilling sex workers. With bribes being logged in “account book[s] [...] [that are] very clear in detailing which agencies and persons received the money,”<sup>51</sup> it is evident that this is standard business practice for savvy brothel proprietors. Systems of calculated informality therefore allow certain brothels to continue operating, while subjecting others to raids and arrests.

As with street vendors, uneven patterns of success among sex workers are thus created, with diametrically opposing results for unwilling versus willing sex workers. For unwilling sex workers, working in a “protected” brothel reduces their chances of rescue and often emboldens proprietors to commit increasingly egregious acts of exploitation. However, for willing sex workers, working in such brothels is often considered an ideal situation since they can ply their trade without the threat of disruption. Of course, the opposite occurs for

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iii *In clear contradiction of their legal mandate to arrest anyone engaged in the solicitation of sex.*

each group when working in “unprotected” brothels. Given that most brothels in Bangkok house workers from both groups,<sup>52</sup> winners and losers inevitably exist in every brothel.

### *Sex Workers: Conclusion*

Given the greater international incoherence surrounding this issue, I would argue that Bangkok’s policies less effectively cater to the interests of all involved in the sex worker case as opposed to the street vendor case. At the high-level, the Thai government strives to strike an uneasy balance between condemning the sex trade and legalising it. At the district level, administrators often recognise the resistance efforts of the relatively vocal willing sex workers, but also face moral, national, and international pressures to rescue unwilling sex workers. Typically, practical considerations win out at this level, leading to more permissive forms of calculated informality. Again, this system broadly works, with the Thai government ostensibly catering to international concerns of human trafficking and sex worker rights, while the district administration provides the flexibility necessary for sex work to bring practical value to Bangkok and responds to the protests of its vocal constituents. However, this produces uneven outcomes for different groups of sex workers.

### **Conclusion**

I have argued that Bangkok’s system of dealing with its informal economy works precisely because high-level policy allows the city to gain recognition on the global stage, while district-level resistance and calculated informality allow for practical needs to be flexibly met. However, this is clearly an imperfect system that produces inequitable outcomes, which then begs the question of why Bangkok chose to make these specific tradeoffs. While there are few objective answers, in closing, I would like to present a hypothesis for why this system is uniquely suited to Bangkok’s needs.

Bangkok does not have a strong history of successful and strong governance that permits little local voice—instead, the city is well-known for a “protest culture [that] makes political change possible through civil disobedience,” to the point that “public demonstrations in the capital city of Bangkok have become a national pastime.”<sup>53</sup> Coupled with lingering corruption at the district level, it would be nearly impossible for the city to eradicate local resistance and district-level informality. However, Bangkok’s economic dependence on the tourist trade means that it must also pander to the international eye, which it does by using strategies that aim to “make the city one of the three leading innovative-cultural cities in the region.”<sup>54</sup>

Overall, I would argue that Bangkok adopts this balancing-act strategy because it must balance the demands and realities of its local population with the need for international recognition and growth. Lacking geographic, socio-cultural, and economic traits that would make either need irrelevant, the city must acknowledge both competing visions and weave them together into a system that enables the city to function as a whole, while sacrificing micro-level equity along the way.

## Panoramas, Greenhouses, and the Natural Sciences in the Nineteenth Century: Between Knowledge Acquisition, Education, and Entertainment

Carlotta Gessler

*About the Work:* In this essay, Carlotta analyzes the influence of two types of nineteenth-century buildings—the panorama and the greenhouse—on the natural sciences. In the piece, she pays particular attention to their role in knowledge acquisition, education, and entertainment. She illustrates that while these buildings advanced scientific inquiry and science education, they were also used to propagandize imperialist expansion and perpetuate a eurocentric vision of the world. The piece was originally written this past fall for Professor Neumann’s course on nineteenth-century architecture.

The panorama and greenhouse both helped lay the foundation for today’s understanding of the environment. The two nineteenth-century building types share the ability to display and connect natural landscapes from all over the world. Both construct immersive spaces that project illusions of reality onto their audience, allowing them to see landscapes and plants from far beyond their home. These buildings’ unique ability to store and visualize information has shaped both the acquisition and communication of scientific knowledge, while also serving as a form of entertainment.

Their influence, however, made these building types powerful tools for imperial nations to justify their expansions, exoticize foreign environments and cultures, and construct and project a eurocentric vision of the world.

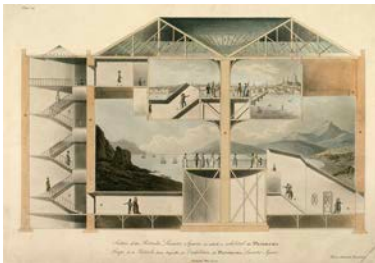


Figure 1. Cross Section of a Panorama Building on Leicester Square (1801)<sup>1</sup>



Figure 2. Temperate house at London’s Kew Garden (built 1897)<sup>2</sup>

### Panoramas and Greenhouses as Results of Scientific and Historical Development

Robert Barker patented his idea of the panorama in 1787, noting both the technical instructions to draw a bird’s-eye view and the conditions of displaying one to the public. The quintessential panorama building contained large canvases with landscape drawings attached to the building’s inside and a central platform from which viewers could not only observe but stand amidst the surrounding scene. Panoramas were considered a global medium, which was not only because of how they immersed viewers in distant landscapes, but also because of their global impact. Throughout the nineteenth century, panorama

buildings all over the world attracted millions of visitors and were considered a very influential visual medium for entertainment and education. Moreover, the ‘panorama’ can also refer to a way of seeing and even understanding. In his 1997 work *Panoramas: History of a Medium*, Stephan Oettermann uses the term ‘panoramic vision’ which he defines as “a way of getting a grip on things, a grip that leaves what is observed undamaged, but surrounds and seizes the whole.”<sup>3</sup> According to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, this exact vision is required for the natural sciences: “the elimination of all obstacles to achieving a cool and level-headed view of things, a view unclouded by subjectivity or physical frailty.”<sup>4</sup>

The history of greenhouses goes back to the Roman Empire. However, this building type had resurging importance in the nineteenth century when the invention of the iron and steel structures and the growing imperial plant trade stimulated their transformation. The great greenhouses of the nineteenth century were especially influenced by the explorations of botanists and scientists like Bougainville, Cook, Bonpland, and Humboldt, who brought samples of tropical plants back with them from their travels. Architects and engineers like Loudon and Paxton experimented with and ultimately developed the delicate cage design. Further technological developments made the invention of precise steam and heating systems possible. Along with these structural changes, the nineteenth-century greenhouse also experienced a transformation of function. While it originally served the purpose of protecting tropical and Mediterranean plants from the harsher northern European winters, nineteenth-century conservatories became places for scientific research, education, and entertainment. In addition, their function changed from being gardens for the pleasure of the few to being spaces accessible to the public.

In essence, both buildings required high structural precision to create their immersive effects—the panorama needed to be drawn and built precisely to create a realistic illusion, and the greenhouse structure needed to have the strength and insulation to make the building weather-resistant and suitable for tropical plants. Most importantly, they visualized natural landscapes and plant species, which made far-away places real for their audiences.<sup>5</sup>

### **Visualization and Knowledge Acquisition**

Visualization does not solely present existing knowledge—it also aids and catalyzes new scientific discoveries.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, as much as the panorama and greenhouse were a result of natural science advances, they also shaped new scientific understanding.

Some of the first panoramic drawings were created in an attempt to depict mountain chains realistically and with scientific accuracy.<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin has described this desire to depict things accurately and close to reality as key elements of the nineteenth century’s history.<sup>8</sup> Scientists of the nineteenth century desired to understand the complexity of ecosystems by understanding ‘the whole.’ The Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt is described as perhaps “the most significant intellectual influenced by the experience of immersion in panoramic vision,” and he advocated for an all-encompassing view of nature through visual conception.<sup>9</sup> Humboldt wrote in a letter: “I have hit on the fantastic idea of portraying the entire world—everything we know today about the heavens and life on earth, from nebulae to the geography of mosses and granites [...]. It must reflect a whole

epoch of human intellectual development—in its knowledge of nature—in its full scope.” His lifelong project *Cosmos* can be considered a panoramic project, where Humboldt is the observer that understands the world by viewing it from above. Humboldt’s work is exemplary of how panoramas became an integral part of the nineteenth century’s approach to the scientific process, not only by motivating new discoveries, but also by shaping how those discoveries were communicated.

Greenhouses, in contrast, have a more active and practical approach to natural science. Greenhouses do not present mere illustrations, but actual living exhibits—they are themselves knowledge acquisition tools, as they “constitute botany as such.”<sup>10</sup> While nurturing plants, gardeners gathered knowledge about them by experimenting with environmental conditions. Moreover, greenhouses played a role in plant transfer and distribution and even actively altered the physical environment, especially in colonized nations. The greenhouse’s scientific contributions allowed for the acquisition and circulation of knowledge, and imperial nations used this knowledge to catalyze their agricultural profits.<sup>11</sup> Experimentation and crop cultivation in greenhouses thus shaped the agricultural industry of the nineteenth century. The greenhouse functioned like the panorama as a visual catalyst for knowledge acquisition, creating a new understanding of the environment, which imperial nations exploited for their own purposes.

### **Education and the Transfer of Knowledge**

The visualizations that panoramas and greenhouses created supported not only scientific discovery but also knowledge transfer. By illustrating knowledge, information becomes more easily understandable—it can be understood in a “flash of intuition.”<sup>12</sup> Panoramic vision allows one to understand the whole, by making it possible to observe all components and their relations. Hence, the panorama allows its viewer the immediate comprehension of diverse geographic regions.<sup>13</sup> A visitor of a London panorama described this sort of knowledge transfer with the following words: “there are aspects of soil and climate which are conveyed to the mind with a completeness and truthfulness not always gained from a visit to the scene itself.”<sup>14</sup> The presentation of varying climates and geographic regions allows the audience to draw connections between their own experiences with nature at home with the impressions that they gained through the panoramic illusions. This comparison between geographically distant yet similar natural characteristics is exactly what Humboldt was able to do on his travels, and it is what shaped his revolutionary understanding of ecosystems and climates. In his *Naturgemälde*, Humboldt constructs a panoramic vision and condenses this information into one visual that depicts nature as a web of connections and interactions. His maps made information that would normally only be accessible through highly technical scientific tables “as easily recognizable as a face.”<sup>15</sup> Alexander von Humboldt also understood the pedagogical use of panoramas for scientific education.<sup>16</sup> He expressed his desire in *Cosmos* that “a number of panoramic buildings, containing alternating pictures of landscapes of different geographical latitudes and from different zones of elevation, should be erected in our large cities.”<sup>17</sup> Humboldt furthermore understood the panorama’s effectiveness as an educational tool to “raise the feeling of admiration for nature.”<sup>18</sup>



Like the panoramic view, the arrangement of plants in greenhouses guided the viewer's perception and understanding. Specimens were arranged in rows so that the viewer's impression was similar to the view from above that one could gain from the top of a mountain or a high tower.<sup>19</sup> This overview allowed the direct comparison of plant species, which in turn encouraged the viewer's acquisition of new botanical knowledge. The intention of "botanical institutions" is comparable with Humboldt's vision to capture everything, as these institutions gained "global relevance from the utopian ideal of achieving an overall picture of the plant world."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, greenhouses enabled unique encounters not only with plants but also with botanical knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, the arrangement of plants changed from an aesthetic focused on beautiful geometric shapes to the categorization of plants into functional, geographical, and ecological units, or what Humboldt referred to as 'plant communities.'<sup>22</sup> Plants were "arranged to be read" and labeled to display different climates and plant types. By placing tropical plants in spatial proximity to local plants, their differences and similarities could be more easily comprehended. Therefore, the glasshouse—along with the panorama—played a vital role in transferring scientific knowledge about plants and ecosystems, not only within a society but also between different countries.

### **Immersion and Natural Admiration**

The education of audiences about the natural world allows for an increased appreciation and admiration of nature. Moreover, panoramas and glasshouses replicate almost entire landscapes or climates, and by doing so, they immerse viewers in the knowledge they present. Immersion is a powerful tool that unites knowledge transfer with entertainment and creates connections between audience and subject.

Oettermann describes the panorama as "a surrogate for nature and a simulator and an apparatus for teaching people how to see it."<sup>23</sup> He alludes that the panorama was built so realistically that it could replace people's actual experiences with nature and also teach them how to understand it. In order to make the audience feel immersed in the scene, the panorama's structure is critical. Elements like the rounded and 360-degree canvas that presents the scene to scale, the real objects in the foreground, the distance of the audience to the canvas, and the central position of the platform all play key roles in creating an illusion of reality. An umbrella-like feature covers and darkens the viewing platform, and this shields the outlines of the canvas from the viewer's eyes. These features reduce disturbances, which increases the panorama's illusion of reality, transports the viewer directly into a different world, and creates an entertaining experience. A visitor described the experience as so realistic that he felt the urge to put on his hat as if he was actually standing outside in the wind.<sup>24</sup> Panoramas became alternatives to traveling by bringing nature into cities and evoking the feeling of distant places. Although the panorama originally targeted the upper classes, decreased entrance fees and separate low-cost viewing platforms increased the spectrum of viewers. In this way, a larger part of society was eventually able to benefit from the enriching experience of viewing far-away landscapes.

Greenhouses also brought nature closer to people who otherwise would not interact with it. They directly addressed the growing disconnection between humans and nature, by

exposing people to the natural world and stimulating natural admiration. Visitors could appreciate rare and tropical plants, and the greenhouse “became an object of wonder, offering a glimpse of the exotic and indefinite plant life of countries that for most people, there was little hope of visiting.”<sup>25</sup> Greenhouses were designed for a large spectrum of society and people of all ages could immerse themselves in nature. The greenhouses not only exhibited tropical plants but also were built in a way to capture heat and create tropical climates. While panoramas controlled the visual space and created a visual illusion, glasshouses created a physical illusion and controlled the climate. The iron and glass-covered roof trapped the heat that gets created by a boiler and steam system and created a tropical and consistent climate. Visitors could not only observe plants but also immerse themselves in “a world in miniature.”<sup>26</sup> Glasshouses were designed to be multi-sensory, immersive experiences, where “plants could be smelt, occasionally touched, marveled at” and “the sense of wonder is reawakened with that first breath of humid air and nurtured with every step through a garden under glass.”<sup>27</sup> The additional sensory experiences of warmth, humidity, and smell cause intense immersion. The tropical touch of greenhouses fulfilled visitors’ search for entertainment while providing a space for relaxation and leisure.

### **Imperialism and the Presentation of Nature**

The nineteenth century was a central period in the history of European colonization, and panoramas and greenhouses emerged as a part of it. Panoramas and greenhouses were inextricably linked with the natural sciences, and in this regard, colonization can be said to have played a significant role in the exploration and display of the natural sciences. Many explorations—like Charles Darwin’s *Journey of the Beagle* and Alexander von Humboldt’s travels—were financed by imperial rulers. Furthermore, imperialism stimulated Europeans’ interest in distant landscapes, and their desire to demonstrate imperial power led to their increased display of colonial oversea scenes. Accordingly, both panoramas and greenhouses presented an elevated perspective of foreign territories that demonstrated the imperialists’ power and wealth. Plants and landscapes were often portrayed as being “exotic,” which emphasized their unfamiliarity and foreign-ness. This, in turn, reinforced the notion of Europe as the center of the world. Despite the panorama and greenhouse’s purportedly accurate displays of information, the scenes and plants were ultimately chosen by colonial nations in a way that distorted their veracity. The painted scenes and the arrangement of plants were thus viewed through a distinctly European perspective. The panorama and greenhouse often displayed landscapes and plants to justify colonial actions, and the scenes they presented often portrayed pristine distant landscapes that concealed their Indigenous inhabitants and colonists’ conflicts with them. In these ways, both the panorama and greenhouse were not only influenced by colonialism, but they were themselves instruments of colonial expansion. This imperialist perspective of nature portrayed within panoramas and greenhouses is something which continues today.

### **Natural Immersion and Education in the Twenty-First Century**

While only a few nineteenth-century panoramas still exist unchanged today, the concept of panoramas is still widely known and used in our society. Greenhouses are even more common and still play an important role in today’s conservation science. However, the role that panoramas and greenhouses played in the nineteenth century in the acquisition and trans-

fer of natural knowledge and admiration through immersion continues nowadays through new visual media. Mediums like film and virtual reality are able to create an even greater sense of immersion, and their ability to capture the flora and fauna of entire ecosystems is superior to that of panoramas and greenhouses. Naturalists like David Attenborough have shaped entire generations' connection to nature through documentaries that take people to rainforests or deep under the sea. These documentaries make entire ecosystems and their species—from those as small as insects to those as large as the blue whale—real to hundreds of thousands who otherwise would never interact with these living beings. Furthermore, exhibitions like the Gasometer in Oberhausen or the Amazonien installation by Yadegar Asisi continue with Humboldt's vision of panoramic education and bring the entire ecosystem closer to the audience through advanced technologies.<sup>28</sup> Visitors can "virtually explore the world's largest rainforest reserve, Tumucumaque National Park, and slip into the role of various inhabitants of [the] jungle," or they can delve into a plentitude of foliage, interacting with both flora and fauna.<sup>29</sup> These places serve as modern travel replacements and create immersive experiences that evoke emotional reactions and make distant ecosystems accessible. As in the nineteenth century, visual technologies and architecture continue to educate audiences about the natural sciences and create personal connections that foster natural admiration. With this, they too visualize nature from a "distant" perspective that often continues to create a skewed idea of pristine natural environments.

### **Conclusion**

The panorama and greenhouse are united by their ability to entertain and educate, while being both products and catalysts of scientific development. Their revolutionary portrayals of landscapes and climates made them two of the most influential immersive buildings of the nineteenth century. At the same time, the influence of the panorama and greenhouse was leveraged by imperial nations to justify colonial expansion and to perpetuate a skewed perspective of the world outside Europe. That legacy persists to this day.

## The Windswept Mansion

Acrylic paint and pebbles on canvas

Neelam Ahmed





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