

Urban Climates: Power, Development and Environment in South Asia

University of Cambridge, 7-8 June 2019

Organised by:

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Venue:

S1/ SG1, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DT

Description

In South Asian cities, as with their counterparts in the global north and south, processes of neoliberal urbanization and climate change are bound up in wider social, environmental, and political contestations, just as they are layered with the sediments of colonial and postcolonial histories. Accordingly, concerns with environmental effects, resources, risks, or conservation are inseparable from the constitution of social identities, forms of citizenship, racial and ethnic divides, processes of militarization or securitization, uneven development, and so on. The persistence of these entanglements and accretions unsettles the futuristic modus operandi of developmentalist visions and sustainable planning, necessitating closer attention to messier pasts and presents. In this seminar series, we deploy a multi-faceted view of ‘climate’ — in its environmental, political, aesthetic, material, and historical registers — to build a transdisciplinary conversation about the relationships between power, development, and the environment in the South Asian context.

In thinking about the climate in South Asian cities, and region more broadly, we draw inspiration from Christina Sharpe’s articulation of the weather, as the “totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is anti-black” (Sharpe, 2016). In this sense, we want to foreground ways that atmospheres, bodies, and landscapes are historically weighted and politically differentiated, with violent and harmful structures, circulations, and afterlives (Baviskar, 2002; Gidwani and Reddy, 2011; Butt, 2017), but also how engagement with their materialities, ecologies, and histories might offer latent possibilities for progressive alliances or alternative politics (Ahmed, 2013). In this seminar series, we will structure discussions on climate around three key themes: *entanglements*, *liminality*, and *eviscerations*. Through engagements within and across these themes, this seminar series aims to build an interdisciplinary conversation between critical scholars who conduct research on South Asian urban environmental politics and facilitate conversations on cutting edge scholarship on its climates.

Entanglements

In the first instance, we want to think about the multi-scalar and historically-constituted entanglement of bodies and landscapes. As perspectives from (urban) political ecology, anthropology, and STS have established, the long-held conceptual distinctions that divide culture and nature or subjects and objects become increasingly tenuous when we consider the inter- and intra-relationships of socio-ecological processes (Swyngedouw, 1996; Whatmore, 2002; Latour, 2004; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016). Hybrids proliferate as the dichotomy of material and discursive domains is denaturalized. Thus we are drawn to how “changes in bodies reverberate through landscapes and vice versa” in contexts of infectious disease, rising seas, toxicities of soil, air, and water, or infrastructural fracturing (Nading, 2014, p. 10). Attention

to entanglements can help reveal flows of power, and the interconnections of scales and spaces that constitute urban climates.

Liminality

While entanglements help consider the interrelations between the different actors and scales of urbanization, in our second theme we prioritize liminal space as an investigative take-off point. A liminal positioning, we believe, can help interrogate the production of such dichotomies as ‘the urban’ and its constitutive outsides (Jazeel, 2018; Roy, 2015), as well as designations of legality and illegality as they manifest in questions of citizenship, informality, and the right to inhabit and claim space in the city (Anjaria, 2016; Bhan et al., 2016; Ranganathan, 2018). Rather than taking oppositional positions as a given we emphasize instead the processes of their production, how these get operationalized, and their impacts on resultant urbanisms and subjectivities. We argue that such a focus helps glean what otherwise might “fall away” from urban capitalist processes (Tadiar, 2009). We propose that such a positioning can highlight the differential, uneven, and often violent climates produced through urban transformation.

Eviscerations

Finally, we draw on Gidwani and Reddy’s (2011) conception of “eviscerating urbanism”, which they use to examine the interlinked production of waste and value. Eviscerating urbanism describes the collective deleterious impacts of “urban parasitism” through ecological colonization and enclosure; processes of “speculative urbanization” through which capital brings underutilized spaces into the realm of value; and the differentiated landscapes of “techno-ecological urbanization.” We extend this conversation to consider the histories and forms of erased or hyper-visible difference that are produced within South Asian cities while being relegated as its excess. We thus seek to attend to histories and processes of socio-environmental injustice, splintered geographies of access to networks and resources, but also the ways in which materialities of waste processes might unsettle development trajectories.

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Friday, 7th June 2019

Alison Richard Building, Room S1

9:00am – 9:45am **Tea and coffee**

9:45am – 10:00am **Welcome and introduction**
Aparna Parikh (Dartmouth College)
Nida Rehman (University of Cambridge)

10:00am – 12:45pm **Session 1: Entanglement**
Krithika Srinivasan (University of Edinburgh)
Harshavardhan Bhat (University of Westminster)
Nida Rehman (University of Cambridge)
Discussant: Sujit Sivasundaram (University of Cambridge)

12:45pm – 1:45pm **Lunch**

1:45pm – 4:30pm **Session 2: Liminality**
Maan Barua (University of Cambridge)
Anu Sabhlok (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research)
Anthony Powis (University of Westminster)
Siddharth Menon (University of Wisconsin Madison)
Discussant: Charlotte Lemanski (University of Cambridge)

4:30pm – 5:00pm **Tea and coffee**

Friday, 7th June 2019

Alison Richard Building, Room SG1

5:30pm – 7:00pm **Keynote lecture: “The Anthroposea”**
Nikhil Anand (University of Pennsylvania)

Saturday, 8th June 2019

Alison Richard Building, Room SG1

9:30 – 10:00am **Tea and coffee**

10:00am – 12:45pm **Session 3: Evisceration**
Waqas Butt (University of Toronto, Scarborough)
Aparna Parikh (Dartmouth College)
Shweta Wagh (Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute for Architecture)
Discussant: Bhaskar Vira (University of Cambridge)

12:45pm – 1:45pm **Lunch break**

1:45pm – 4:30pm **Closing session and discussion: Practices**