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From capitalist-urbanisation-as-politics-of-refuge to planning as planetary politics-of-care

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In the final episode of the sixth season (July 2018) of *Orange Is The New Black*, a TV series depicting life in a US women-only federal prison, one of the main characters, Blanca, is handed over to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) at the moment of her release. At the same time, in an elegant party nearby, the predatory company responsible for the management of the prison announces it will expand its operations to immigration detention. Far beyond a mere anticipation of future developments of a popular show, this episode is indicative of how migration and its discontents have become a central crux of popular imagination – and commercial entertainment – in Trump's America, and beyond it.

Dedicating a PTP Interface to spaces of refuge, migration and border enforcement is a very timely decision. The six pieces collected here set out a truly global picture of the nexus of human mobility, politics of citizenship and planning amid turbulent processes of capitalist urbanisation – or, to put it with Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, 'planetary' urbanisation. I particularly appreciate the way the contributors were able to open up the 'immigration and refugee crisis'. For one, the authors indirectly expose the pathetic cry of Western politicians and media for the tiny fraction of the world refugee population their wealthy countries have to deal with. More importantly, the six pieces also provide a clear picture of the real 'crises' at stake: crises of housing, urban development, dispossession and extraction, imperialist war – the latest, and most hideous, crisis of capitalism-as-urbanisation (cf. Rossi, 2017), in short.

The six pieces contribute to two main threads: Synne Bergby, Romola Sanyal and Kelly Yotebieng discuss the urbanisation of refuge in the Global South; M.M. Ramírez and Henrik Lebuhn focus on the multiplication of borders in the West and the contradictions of local 'liberal/progressive'

politics/policies. In my view, Pedro Neto's piece constitutes a sort of rejoinder to the other contributions. The contribution provocatively compares emerging spaces of refuge/seclusion for the displaced and for the wealthy,¹ showing the centrality of neo-extractionism in this process. On the one hand, Pedro's suggestion that spaces of refuge and enclosure constitute a disturbing prototype for our urbanised future remind and update Mike Davis' classical reflections on Los Angeles. Moreover, it opens up toward a possible theorisation of what we may call 'capitalist-urbanisation-as-politics-of-refuge', a concept that may help us chart the links between the urbanisation of refuge in the Global South, on the one hand, and racial banishment in liberal democracies and Western cities, on the other.

If one takes this opening seriously, and uses it to rethink the various contributions to this Interface, a number of theoretical points emerge. First, at the intersection of planetary urbanisation with the global politics of human mobility, the very West/South distinction seems to fade out. If decades of post-colonial thinking have been crucial to open up toward fields of vision that urban and social theory had long marginalised; it seems to me that it is time to reconsider the idea of geographically stable 'abyssal lines' (in Boaventura Sousa Santos' words). In a way, Jean and John Comaroff's call for theorising *from* the south (2012) – that is, looking at the Global South as the new forefront of socio-economic transformation – has been an important step in this direction. And yet, the multiplication of borders depicted by this Interface shows that there are as many 'souths' and 'wests' as there are walls, lines of segregation, and racialised and class cleavages. In my opinion, a truly global and post-colonial thinking should aim at unravelling the relational characteristics that adjoins and separate places and social groups at many scales, from the local to the global.

Second, and directly stemming from the former, the very multi-scalar nature of capitalist-urbanisation-as-politics-of-refuge puts into crisis many long-held understandings of vertical relations. In particular, I am increasingly concerned by the tendency of many on the left² to retreat to, indeed seek 'refuge' in, the 'local' in the face of increasingly despairing global and national politics. This is the case, for instance, of the very dichotomy between xenophobic nations *versus* progressive cities suggested by Henrik Lebuhn and problematised by M.M. Ramírez. Not only does this dichotomy downplays the role of uneven developmental relations between 'progressive' cities and 'regressive' rural/suburban areas in creating the roots of the current xenophobic backlashes (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). But, moreover, I wonder what is the local, as ICE waits outside city jails for deporting people detained for minor misdemeanours (see Armenta, 2017); as the calls of Italian mayors for opening their ports to rescue boats have no practical effect whatsoever; and as social movements increasingly understand that they need to become transnational if they are to make any change.³

Third, the contrast between Synne Bergby's call for the need to intersect humanitarian and planning perspectives, and Romola Sanyal's concern about the emergence of the 'humanitarian city' seems to me to be symptomatic of the present troubles for defining transformative politics and the role of planning therein. Didier Fassin's account of the tensions and contradictions of the 'humanitarian reason' (2010) perfectly fits here, reminding us of the way humanitarian logics can – and indeed do –

¹ I am particularly emphatic to this point as I have come across this paradox when exploring spaces and exclusion and gated communities in my research on the urban spaces of fear in Southern Europe (Tulumello, 2017, ch. 4).

² To be honest, I am sceptical of the possibility to consider liberal and progressive perspectives as 'left' to begin with.

³ The latter reflection is inspired by Ananya Roy's works on Poor People's Movements, and a conversation we had in 2018 and forthcoming as interview (Tulumello & Pozzi, forthcoming in 2019).

legitimise structurally unjust systems. This seems to me to resonate with the contradictions and tensions of the current progressive/liberal hegemony in normatively-oriented planning theory/research/practice. As climate change hits with the multiplication of environmental crises – and their effects in terms of forced mobility –, planning seems to be above all *pragmatically* concerned with increasing *resilience*, indeed *adapting* to the changes to come. In so doing, we may indeed provide some relief, but possibly at the same time as legitimising and stabilising those very forces that push our urbanised/urbanising planet toward crisis and catastrophe. Indeed, if we accept that capitalist-urbanisation-as-politics-of-refuge is to shape our common future, planning and humanitarian logics will have to increasingly converge as urban development and displacement/refuge will.

But maybe there is also the space to challenge the seemingly inevitable path toward socio-environmental crisis and authoritarianism actually-existing-capitalism is pushing us toward; and to envision an urbanisation-as-politics-of-care for our shared future, be it in a post-environmental catastrophe planet (cf. Frase, 2016) or not. If we wish to do so – indeed, it is high time to do so – we should seek a radically different planning theory/research/practice. Inspirations and examples are not missing, for instance in the experience of Black reconstruction after the US Civil War, in the feminist politics of care, in the transnational networks of Poor People’s Movements and insurgent planning experiences in slums around the world. Can planning become truly abolitionist in its understanding of borders, from the national to the urban level? Can planning become normatively oriented toward the construction of a common planetary shelter? If, as this Interface suggests, these questions will increasingly become decisive for the capacity of planning to actually make a change, it seems to me that we should start exactly by abandoning the comfort of local resistance and progress, and assuming the global as the only meaningful – indeed hopeful – scale for thinking and acting, as late capitalism and neoliberalism decline and uncharted territory awaits.

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