

Introduction

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The papers contained in the present collection are based on lectures and presentations made to a Nordic researcher training course which was held at Sandbjerg Manor in the south of Jutland from 4 to 11 June 1994. The theme for the course was "From Post-Traditional to Post-Modern? Interpreting the Meaning of Modernity in Third World Urban Societies", and before the course the following brief on the theme had been circulated to lecturers and participants:

The growth of urban centres and mega-cities in the Third World brings about new nightmares and new possibilities. The city with its condensation of slums, dislocated people, unemployment, crime and prostitution can be understood as representing a multitude of problems and very few solutions. On the other hand, the city can be seen as a vast resource centre in which the speed of social change calls for human ingenuity, social flexibility and forward-looking cultural forms and practices: A social area which in its dynamism produces agendas for economic, political and cultural development at broader national and regional levels.

In the course, we wish to focus on theories of and methodological approaches to the study of modernising urban institutions, discourses and practices within politics and culture. In urban situations and contexts, social practices and discourses feed into and give rise to significant political and cultural institutions, not least because of the role of cities as local centres and global sub-centres. Third World cities represent a double interface of being at once linked to their local and more far-flung hinterlands and of being frontiers of interaction with Western metropolises. In order to understand the cultural and social dynamics of regional capitals, their histories must be explored and typologies established on the basis of their functions emerging as predominantly colonial and administrative, trade- and market-oriented, industrial or political and representational.

In present-day Sao Paolo, Calcutta, Johannesburg or Brazzaville, one finds a dynamic and sometimes explosive tension between global institutions such as business corporations, development agencies, international media, tourism, metropolitan languages, and institutions with a more parochial base such as local firms, market structures, NGOs, local travel (including that of migrants and refugees), national press publications, popular culture genres, and indigenous languages.

In political terms, Third World cities present as well the opportunity for new types of democratic formulation and organisation as for the modernisation of tradition and the emergence of new forms of fundamentalism. Historically the rise of *nationalisms* has been related closely to the establishment of urban centres - both in the form of "grand" nationalisms linked with struggles for independence and in that of movements and discourses more local, ethnic or communalist in character. Even if these latter forms of representation have been rooted in notions of local cultural specificity, the particular forms which they have taken bear the imprint of modern urban discourse and organisation. Thus both the contents, forms and organisation of "modern" institutions like *party politics* and of "traditionalist" *movements* gathered around markers of ethnicity, caste or religion may be understood as representing to a significant extent the result of tensions between the global and the local as it is being fought out in urban settings.

On the other hand, dispersion and fragmentation in post-traditional society (media, training and education, movement of people) may mean that the role of cities is changing - that features associated with urbanism have come to be diffused more widely, also in regions with less density of population. This might imply that the paradigm to which we have become accustomed of identifying the dichotomy between urban and rural with that between modern and traditional may change and gradually lose its meaning.

In the course we wish to discuss the underlying energies leading to particular urban forms of discourse and institution in the areas of culture and politics and disputes around the meanings of these forms: The significance of the individual in urban settings, the question of multiple identities, the way identities are formed and contested in the framework of global/local tensions. We aim to do this by examining forms of sociality and urban life, social organisation, the emergence, histories and institutions of nationalism, communalism, religious

and ethnic organisation, written and oral discourses as they are represented in modern cultural genres such as theatre, music, and popular writing.

Popular mass culture is a powerful agent in the transformation of urban life. It includes transnational features, but also feeds on and attains its energy and relevance of interpretation from a rearticulation of national and local inputs. Mass cultural production and transmission may have their centralised bases in the powerful industrialised nations of the West, but the reception of mass cultural products and discourses by peripheral nations and Third World local communities is an active process in which groups and communities read localised meanings into the cultural texts made available, and these readings and understandings in their turn give rise to new and more locally rooted forms and genres. Sub-centres emerge which in their turn feed the form and contents of global mass culture. New trends in both high and popular culture may be interpreted as reflecting tensions between a dominant uniform discourse, informed by western, white, male values, and the emergence of diversified discourses, emphasising difference.

The course programme will be structured around a series of confrontations: Approaches from anthropology, sociology, history, media and textual sciences will be counterposed with others originating in political science and development studies. "Classical" studies in Third World urban change from the 1950s and 1960s will be juxtaposed with presentations of more recent theories of and investigations into the meaning of modernity in developing societies. State-of-the-art Nordic research within the field will be introduced alongside major non-Nordic international contributions. Finally, presentations by prominent Third World scholars will balance those made by Western researchers.'

The course was convened by Kajsa Ekholm-Friedman and Jonathan Friedman, University of Lund, Bodil Folke Frederiksen and Preben Kaarsholm, Roskilde University, Timo Kortteinen, University of Helsinki, Gísli Pálsson, University of Iceland, and Helge Rønning, University of Oslo.

25 participants attended the course - the great majority of them PhD students representing all five Nordic countries. They were taught by an international faculty of 15, with a further four senior researchers and lecturing staff members from Denmark and Sweden attending parts of the course as resource persons.

Of special value to the course programme were the contributions of two Indian and two Ugandan academics -

Preben Kaarsholm

professors Nita Kumar and Partha Chatterjee from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and Sallie Simba Kayunga and professor Mahmood Mamdani, Centre for Basic Research, Kampala - who attended as part of an ongoing cooperation scheme between their institutions and International Development Studies, Roskilde, which is funded by DANIDA's ENRECA programme.

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