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**A Decolonial Lens on Cities and Urbanisms:  
Reflections on the System of Petty Production in India**

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## **A Decolonial Lens on Cities and Urbanisms: Reflections on the System of Petty Production in India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is organized at two levels. First it discusses some epistemic concerns that have been recently articulated regarding urban studies and its theories. These relate to the use of the theories of modernity and developmentalism which scholars of urban studies have questioned. In the first part of the paper, I bring into conversation the two discussions-the first of urban studies scholars and the second of the Latin American social theorists whose critique of Eurocentrism, called the decolonial position presents, in my opinion an entry point for a way to do global social science. The second part of this paper looks at the system of petty production; in urban studies literature this was and is still referred to as the 'informal system'.

## INTRODUCTION

‘...within urban studies...there remains an urgent need to develop effective ways to escape and contest power relations and exclusions of the colonial present of our theorizations and practices of knowledge-building’ (Robinson, 2013b:4).

This paper is organized at two levels. First it discusses some epistemic concerns that have been recently articulated regarding urban studies and its theories. These relate to the use of the theories of modernity and developmentalism which scholars of urban studies have questioned. They argue that these theories promote a universalism that makes it difficult to compare cities across the world. They propose a postcolonial perspective to displace this bias inherent in city and urban studies. In the last decade, a similar set of deliberations have been expressed within sociology and particularly in social theory which have not only critiqued modernity’s convergence postulates but also presented various ways to deconstruct Eurocentric thought.

In the first part of the paper, I bring into conversation the two discussions-the first of urban studies scholars and the second of the Latin American social theorists whose critique of Eurocentrism, called the decolonial position presents, in my opinion an entry point for a way to do global social science. The paper argues that three concepts from the decolonial perspective have salience. These are: ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano, 2000); ‘trans-modernity’ and ‘exteriority’ (Dussel, 2002). It proposes that this epistemic design gives us an entry point to understand anew various facets of the urban system.

The second part of this paper looks at the system of petty production; in urban studies literature this was and is still referred to as the ‘informal system’. I think an examination of this system from a decolonial lens helps to comprehend the epistemic and methodological steps needed to reframe the domain of urban studies. Given the location of the term ‘informal’ in colonial binaries and the added colonial meanings it carries within its discursive elaborations, I title the ‘informal system’ as the system of petty production, borrowing this concept and its attributes from Harris-White (2003). In this part of the paper, I use the decolonial perspective to elaborate the architecture of this system using information and analysis from various studies done on the same in India together with my own work (Bremar, 1976, 1996; Harris White, 2003; Harris-White and Gooptu, 2001; Patel,2008). I analyse its historical development in colonialism, its reproduction in the contemporary globalizing world economy, its interconnections with varying technological, economic and social processes, ranging from household production to outsourcing and its embeddedness in reconstructed pre-modern socialities. I indicate in the conclusion how this system organizes mobile persons who straddle, crossover and interconnect production, distribution, consumption and reproduction of work and labour, that of households, families, kin groups and identities with place-making. In sum I describe how ‘assemblage and centrality, territoriality and interconnections’ organize the system of petty production to make it an urban system. I ask at the end, does this reframing help to displace ‘power relations’ inherent in our theorizations as Robison above has stated?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The discussions addressed in the paper are epistemic in character, nature and style. A single paper cannot address the intricacies and complexities being discussed together with the deeply philosophical nature of arguments. The synoptic renderings may miss nuances and subtle distinctions which abstractions may elide if not completely ignore. Thus these debates should not be perceived as complete and definitive as it is presented; rather these should be perceived as being suggestive. The abstractions presented in this paper are structured to bring into dialogue discrete and disparate ideas and positions in order to open a line of query. This paper is written with the hope that this dialogue may help to push further the boundaries of the debate on these complex set of issues.

## URBAN STUDIES AND THE DECOLONIAL LENS: THE CONVERSATION

It is impossible to make a summary of the range of epistemic concerns that have been expressed and articulated in urban studies literature since the late 80s. Scholars have suggested that as a field of knowledge, urban studies is facing one of its most difficult moments; in fact Neil Brenner (2013) while elaborating his project of the Urban Theory Lab has contended, that this domain of study is at crossroads and that as an intellectual field it is in disarray. This turmoil and confusion is related to a recognition by a large number of scholars that the substantive arguments formulated in the 70s identified by Zukin (1980) as New Urban Sociology and further contributions made in the 80s on Global or World cities and city-regions, and on spaces of flows by scholars such as Sassen (1991), Scott (2001), Taylor (2004), Castells, (1989), Soja (2000), to name a few, can be used and applied in limited instances and oftentimes have little to no salience in terms of contemporary realities of underdeveloped regions of the world (Walton, 1993).

Certainly the watershed in this debate has occurred after the publication of Jennifer Robinson's book, *Ordinary Cities* (2006) and the project that she has taken up since then to rethink comparative urban studies through a postcolonial lens. There are two aspects to this project. At one level there is a recognition that substantive urban theories have not been able to comprehend the fluid, differential and contradictory manifestations of unevenly organized transnational urbanism of the 21st century and second is an assertion for a need to capture the distinctiveness of the urban process and the urban experience in the Global South, outside its opaque theorisations. Robinson (2006, 2010, 2011a, 2010b, 2013a, 2013b), McFarlane (2010) and Roy (2011a, 2011b) suggest that the challenge confronting urban studies is not merely of organizing alternative set of substantive comparative theories. Rather the problems lie in framing the means to do the same. And they argue that given that this issue is connected to epistemic questions that have dogged the field as it organized itself in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to make a double movement: not only to reorganize the old theories and structure new ones but also to engage equally if not completely with the legacy of early twentieth century social science. Thus, Jennifer Robinson has argued,

Central elements of conceptualising the urban have relied on formulations which draw strong links between the urban and the modern: the emergence of distinctive ways of being urban has been closely associated with the idea that the city creates new possibilities for social life. However, as postcolonial critiques have demonstrated, these core theoretical strands in urban studies are deeply problematic as analyses of the urban more generally. (Robinson, 2013a:660).

For McFarlane (2010) and Robinson (2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b), the most important methodological issue for deliberation relates to the dearth of a comprehensive comparative perspective in urban studies. They argue that in urban studies, comparison has been circumscribed because of two trends. The first perceives comparisons by constructing ideal types/typologies or 'superlatives' (Beauregard, 2003, Brenner, 2003) of specific cities. Most often this was done of cities of the Global North and thus the subsequent comparisons reduced/obfuscated/misrepresented the nature of similarities and/or differences together with the distinctive characteristics and processes organizing the compared city. This method also was pseudo-scientific; either comparisons had limited salience, or became stretched out or represented methodological slippages. Second, when comparisons were avoided due to the theories utilized, that of modernity and/or developmentalism wherein a distinction of rich and poor cities promoted the need to do case studies (if at all) of poor cities and compare only rich cities. As a consequence there was dearth of research of cities of the underdeveloped regions and that of the socialist world (MacFarlane and Robinson, 2012).

Both agree that the ability to cast one's eye across a range of disparate cases and consider them equivalent for analytical purposes is steeped in colonial legacies. Given this legacy the authors suggest a need to use postcolonial approach. They affirm an imperative to filter all comparisons in urban studies through the lens of the geopolitics of knowledge production. Two proposals are then formulated: first a need to understand the diverse ways in which the urban is constituted and second, to examine difference rather than similarity as a way of doing comparative international urban studies. What should be studied thus is 'a conception of an urban that is flexibly based on specific processes, urban elements or even connections between cities rather than conventional territorial entities' (McFarlane, 2010, Robinson, 2011a, 2013a, 2013b, McFarlane and Robinson, 2012).

The questions that one needs to ask is whether the methodology that they advocate that of provincialisation/deconstruction is enough to ensure the necessary equivalence for comparison. Or to put it into other words, if universalism needs to be discarded because of its association with power relations and if difference is to be acknowledged as a leitmotif to displace it, what theory of power can interrogate these universalisms and simultaneously postulate the connections/interactions/junctions which can be compared? Unfortunately most of their writings do not address this question<sup>2</sup>.

Let me now move to the decolonial perspective also called the modernity/coloniality approach (Escobar, 2007) which seems to have an answer to these questions and to their discussions about the relationship between social theory and modernity. The goal of this perspective is to unravel the universalisms (Wallerstein, 2006) that organize the theory of modernity and its knowledges. This objective is similar to the questions raised by contemporary social theorists such as Ulrich Beck (2006) who wish to create a cosmopolitan social theory and others who argue for a need of a global sociology and thus suggest a need to move beyond theories of modernity that promoted 'convergence'. Like the urbanists mentioned above, Beck and his colleagues have questioned the assumptions embedded in both liberal and/or Marxist formulations which have argued that the structures, patterns and processes associated with modernisation and capitalism and thus industrialization and urbanization (emerging earlier in Europe and later extending itself in the Americas and the Antipodes) were and are universal models of social change and dynamics of the world. The non-western world will merely follow on a similar path (Patel, 2014a).

The modernity/coloniality thinkers address a similar set of questions through a distinctly different methodological and epistemological stance. First, these Latin American theorists, particularly Anibal Quijano and Enrique Dussel, ground their understanding of modernity within Marxist world system theory and more particularly moor their theories in the earlier dependency approach with which Anibal Quijano was associated in the late 70s (Escobar, 2007). Thus an understanding of the capitalist world system is a pre-requisite to their deliberations on analyzing the relationship between modernity and its knowledges. Second, they locate the growth of 'modernity' in 'colonial difference', an epistemic category that is related to Anibal Quijano's theory of 'coloniality of power' which also elaborates how the micro and the macro processes of the global system are connected to each other in the capitalist system. Coloniality of power is a theory of how colonial power straddles an historical understanding of unequal and dependent connections with the episteme of binaries that has organized the knowledge about this capitalist system. Third, this theory affirms that capitalism organizes the various parts of the world in distinctly different ways and that it is important to build knowledge of these differences. And thus fourth, the universalistic understanding of modernity is a

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<sup>2</sup> This is surprising because while deliberating on Raewyn Connell's discussion of comparative method Robinson highlights the different ways Marx and Weber do comparison and Connell does suggest that what they (Marx and Weber) compare relates to their theoretical positions.

theory of power/knowledge that silences the colonial relationship and that is therefore unable to capture these distinctions. Modernity/coloniality theory unravels the sociology and history of this silence. And through this analysis it attempts to create a methodology of understanding the different kinds of modernities and social theory needed to understand the world.

The focus of the modernity/coloniality approach is on colonial difference that is on the way colonialism structured the capitalist system both in terms of organization of the economy and society and the discursive aspects in the form of the social sciences. For Quijano (2000), coloniality of power is a global hegemonic model of economic and social power and knowledge in place since the conquest of the Americas. It articulates the relationships/connections that organize race and labor, space and peoples, according to the needs of capital and for the benefit of white European peoples. This model of power/knowledge has organized the disciplines of history and sociology.

In the perspective of 'coloniality of power', Eurocentrism does not merely embed European modernity's universalism; it is a self-defined ethnocentric theory of history, that of 'I'. It attempts to explain the European narrative of the growth of modernity and asks how its theory of history simultaneously makes invisible and silenced events, processes and actions of violence against the rest of the world, without which Europe could not have become modern. It comprehends the paradox of the world capitalist system that discursively made absent its exploitative processes. The Eurocentric episteme as a theory of power/knowledge, theorizes both the 'I', (the knowledges of the core) and the 'other' (the knowledges of the 'periphery'). The philosopher Enrique Dussel puts this as:

...modernity is, in fact, an European phenomena, but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-modern alterity that is its ultimate content. Modernity appears when Europe appears itself as the 'centre' of *World* history that it inaugurates; the periphery that surrounds this centre is consequently part of its self-definition. The occlusion of this periphery ... leads the major thinkers of the centre into a Eurocentric fallacy in their understanding of modernity. (Dussel; 1993: 65)

This episteme, termed 'categorical imperative', simultaneously creates the knowledge of the 'I' (Europe, the moderns, the West) against the 'other' (as the peripheral, non-modern, and the East) and thereby hierarchizes these as opposites; this is how power integrates itself to knowledge. In the process, it legitimizes a theory of the separate and divided nature of the knowledge of the core now given a geographical location, the West and the periphery, termed the East. A master binary is now organized. This binary divides the attributes of the West and the East by giving value to the two divisions or differences; while one is universal, superior and 'emancipatory', the other is particular, non-emancipatory and thus inferior. Dussel (1993) quotes Immanuel Kant to indicate how the binary functioned. Kant had argued that while European 'Enlightenment is the exodus of humanity by its own efforts from the state of guilty immaturity'...'laziness and cowardice are the reasons why the great part of humanity remains pleasurable in the state of immaturity' (Dussel, 1993: 68). This inferiority, a condition of its not becoming modern, in turn further legitimates the need to emulate the 'moderns' and to accept the colonising process as a 'civilising' process. This was the myth of modernity and led, according to Dussel to the management of the world-system's 'centrality' as an episteme:

If one understands Europe's modernity—a long process of five centuries—as the unfolding of new possibilities derived from its centrality in world history and the corollary constitution of all other cultures as its periphery, it becomes clear that, even though all cultures are ethnocentric, modern European ethnocentrism is the only one that might pretend to claim universality for itself. Modernity's

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Eurocentrism lies in the confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as centre. (Dussel, 2002:222)

Associated with this master binary was the construction of multiple and repeated divisions or oppositions. These oppositions, Anibal Quijano (2000) argues are based on a racial classification of the world population. This principle becomes the assumption to further divide the peoples of the world in geo cultural terms, with which are attached further oppositions, such as reason and body, science and religion, subject and object, culture and nature, masculine and feminine, modern and traditional. While European modernity conceptualized its growth in terms of linear time, it sequestered the (various) East(s) divided between two cultural groups, the 'primitives'/barbarians and the civilized (in the past) as being enclosed in their (own) spaces. No wonder this episteme could not provide the resources to elaborate a theory of space, affirming Karl Marx's insightful statement of 'annihilation of space by time'.

The consolidation of these attributes across the West-East axis and its subsequent hierarchization across spatial regions in the world allowed social science to discover the 'nature' of the various people, nations and ethnic groups in the world in terms of the attributes of the binaries. This structure of power, control, and hegemony termed by Quijano as 'coloniality of power' is founded on two myths:

...first, the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power. Both myths can be unequivocally recognized in the foundations of evolutionism and dualism, two of the nuclear elements of Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2000:542).

These seminal assumptions were embodied in the framing of the disciplines of sociology and anthropology in late nineteenth century. Sociology became the study of modern (European-later to be extended to the Atlantic region) society while anthropology was the study of (non-European and non-Atlantic) traditional societies. Thus sociologists studied how the new societies evolved from the deadwood of the old; a notion of linear time and history were embedded in its discourse. Contrary anthropologists studied how space/place organized 'static' culture that could not transcend its internal structures to become modern (Patel, 2006).

The modernity/coloniality project is primarily interested to understand how the knowledges of the subaltern in the colonized countries have been subalternised and how new subaltern knowledges can be re-formulated. And if it seeks to re-historicize the origin of modernity in the conquest of America and not in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe as it is usually is, it also wants to understand how colonialism was constitutive of the formation of the capitalist world system and of modernity. Thus in this project, it is impossible to understand the global world and its connections without accepting that these are based on colonialism and that these historically constitute the differences between the colonized and the non-colonized and that colonial capitalist knowledge of modernity imposes a universal episteme to silence this understanding.



Like the deconstructionist and postcolonial approaches<sup>3</sup>, the modernity/coloniality approach also wishes to de-centre universal modernity and wants to reconstruct the many diverse ways of conceptualizing new modernities. But its methodology of decentering is distinctly different and so is its methodology of reconstructing new modern knowledge forms. Both are located in the thesis of 'coloniality of power' and/or colonial difference. To restate, this thesis affirms that capitalist system was not only connected through colonialism but that these connections were conceptualized as binaries. Not only does the reconstitution of new knowledges need to recognize coloniality of power, it has to build its architectural foundations in and through it.

The latter is the focus of the work of Enrique Dussel who conceptualizes the reconstruction of new modernities which he calls trans-modernity through the methodology of exteriority. According to Dussel, if the project of modern social theory was formulated through interiority then the many projects of creating new modernities has to be constituted through exteriority. Exteriority is not untouched by the universal-modern and is not outside it. Rather exteriority allows the other to reconstitute itself by dialectically contesting the 'I' in order to liberate itself from being the represented 'Other'. And given that the 'Other' is the colonized other, the reconstitution of the other in terms of 'I' has to be through a new theory of history and sociology that elaborates the ways in which both the micro and macro-economic and social connections are organized together with the binaries that have legitimized 'colonial difference'.

Let me now bring these set of ideas together. The focus of modernity/coloniality approach is to understand the many connections of inequality that have organized the micro and the macro processes since the growth of the capitalist system in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Thus it postulates a theory which outlines the global history of connections and juxtaposes it with modern knowledges which silences this historicity. Thus there are two notions of difference in this perspective and both are grounded in colonialism; the first of how colonialism creates different structures of connections and dependencies between various parts of the globe and second how the knowledges regarding this difference, the social sciences obfuscates this distinctions by constructing a new kind of difference through the binaries of modernity. The modernity/coloniality analyzes the sociology and the history of this episteme and explores how it has and continues to intervene to organize people and spaces of the globe even today.

For the modernity/coloniality theorists the systems of production, distribution, consumption and reproductions are historically different between the two parts of the world: the colonial and non-colonial. And though colonialism has formally disappeared, these continue to imprint themselves in the way actors, objects, institutions and practices are organized, managed and embedded within structures and systems. This makes the articulation of the colonial modernities distinct across the world. Both parts of the world have classes, they have towns and cities, they have political systems and their cultures may be consumerist. However given their separate dependent and uneven histories these are organized in distinctly different ways. In this perspective, the divisions between developed and underdeveloped that Robinson and others has criticized as facetious and superficial are now reintroduced in a new way after it is critiqued and examined for its intimate link with colonialism in the capitalist world system. From the standpoint of this perspective the first task is to use a methodology of exteriority to comprehend the economic, social and discursive connections/interactions that organize the divisions of people and spaces within the global system

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<sup>3</sup> Though postcolonial approaches have many differences, most postcolonial scholars agree that imperialism was critical to the shaping of the modern world; understand Eurocentrism as expert knowledge which is embedded in the colonial enterprise; that Eurocentrism creates the knowledge of the 'other'; that hybridity and mimicry are critical concepts, that nation and nationalism should be interrogated; and that agency and politics need to be elaborated.

and then to explore the many connections that organize them worldwide. How does it work out in practical terms? Let me take the case of the 'informal'<sup>4</sup> sector to initiate this discussion.

The 'Informal' sector or the Petty Production System?

There has been extensive discussion on the 'informal sector' after Keith Hart (1973) who defined this concept described this economy as being part of the African cities. Since then, it has been presumed that in most underdeveloped countries wherever urbanization has been rapid and extensive, the informal sector has been concentrated in cities. Literature has indicated that this economy expresses flexibility and exploitation, productivity and abuse, aggressive entrepreneurship and defenceless workers, libertarianism and greediness. Though being formal citizens, workers in the informal sector do not have substantive rights of social benefits, such as minimum wage, working hours, continuous employment, healthy work conditions; right to organise a trade union, among many other features (Portes et al, 1989).

While earlier it was thought that informal economies are the hallmark of underdeveloped regions of the world, over the last two decades, this term has been increasingly used to study informality in the developed countries and to suggest that these are comparable units and that this system is universal and ubiquitous. Thus the standard work on the informal sector, that of Portes et al (1989), while asserting the need to understand the logic of the process and the social dynamics underlying the production of conditions of such a process continues to place it within the binary of formal/informal. There is little effort here to understand the history of the distinct conditions that organize this production system in the underdeveloped versus the developed economies and the features that structure the same. There is thus an assertion that informality in the developed and underdeveloped parts of the world can be compared.

Portes et al (1989) locate the rise of this economy in the structural crisis of the 70s within capitalism. This affects the way they define the informal economy as an economy not being formally regulated by a legal and social environment<sup>5</sup>. While the concept may have emerged in this context, available historical evidence suggests that in underdeveloped societies this economy emerges in the context of colonialism when land is made a commodity. But is this how we as social scientists understand this system? Do we go back in history and ask such questions? When in certain parts of the world, the entire production system has not become formal and legal, how do we understand its origins and its characteristics? How do we comprehend a system that links alienated and commoditised labour to agricultural activities and which reproduces simultaneously a peasant economy and a manufacturing and/or service one? How do we assess how in this system work and labour organize people and spaces, place-making and identities with family, households and dwellings and how do these interconnect and crossover with each other?

As I stated before I understand informal economy as a system of petty production and start the discussion of this economy with a case study.

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<sup>4</sup> Urban geographers use informality to denote informal (non-formal or illegal) housing settlements. Here it is used to understand an entire economy or a production process which organizes work and labour.

<sup>5</sup> The key attribute of informal economy for the authors is that it 'is unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated' (Portes et al, 1989:12)

Govind (who belongs to the scheduled caste (SC)<sup>6</sup>), is 55 years old, wife Nirmala who is 50 years old have a small plot of agricultural land measuring 1.5 acres which is still registered on his grandfather's name in a village called Nakshet, Taluka Penn, district Raigad, Maharashtra. Govind's mother is 75 years old and is physically challenged and illiterate and is dependent on Govind and his wife for survival. This piece of land is tilled by Nirmala who is able to grow enough paddy that lasts the family (that includes Govind's mother, Govind, his wife, their son, his wife, their five year old son, and Govind's unmarried daughter) for nine months at most. She has to get potable water from an outlet 2 km away and does this work in the early morning to beat the heat. In addition she daily chores of the household, gathering fodder, firewood and cooking besides the work in the field. In times when the paddy has to be sown and transplanted and harvested, she has to employ labour at the rate of one hundred and fifty rupees a day.

Govind has one son and two daughters. The son and one daughter are married. Govind works as a security guard on a contract basis in a private firm at the Taluka headquarters (defined as a town by the census of India) which is around 40 km from his village and earns three thousand rupees a month. His son is also employed in one of the factories in this town has rented a room wherein he, his wife his son and and Govind reside. The son earns three thousand a month and his wife who works as a domestic help in several homes, earns around one thousand rupees a month. They send a part of the money back to Govind's mother who resides in the village.

Govind pays his son for the monthly food expenses. Govind's brother-in-law (cousin sister's husband) stays with his son in the rented room and is also employed on a contract basis. The brother-in-law pays Govind's son for his accommodation (per month on a cot basis). As Govind has paid the initial 'pagadi' (a traditional form of deposit) of fifteen thousand rupees 20 years ago the rented room is in the name of Govind and therefore he does not pay for his accommodation. Govind is able to send back two thousand rupees every month to his wife and mother. The unmarried daughter is also staying at this rented room to help in the daily chores of the household including cooking and looks after her nephew, Govind's grandson, as various members staying in the dwelling are busy doing contractual jobs from morning to night and sometimes in different shifts. She does not pay for accommodation and food given the work she does as a carer for the family. This case study highlights the way Govind's family is integrated in the petty production system. It also gives an understanding how the economy dictates ways through which families reorganize into smaller units of dwellings and households. Additionally these dwellings consist of individuals who are not related by blood to Govind and his family. It seems that the new production system has fragmented families into distinct households and dwellings and connects them across rural and urban domains and between agricultural and service industries. What are the contours for understanding such a system wherein more than 93% of Indian working population labour? (Sakthivel and Joddar, 2006)<sup>7</sup>.

Harris-White (2003) has called this a system of petty production. She does so because the majority of this population are semi-independent peasants who have some land. They may also have small family businesses, small assets and could also be simultaneously petty commodity producers and traders. They exploit their own family members and also hire labour. It is clear that in India this economy is not confined to the urban arena and organised within towns and cities as it is sometimes thought. However given its range and scope, it is best to describe this as an economy which while it organizes towns and cities, it also connects these up with villages into a network of connected nodes

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<sup>6</sup> The scheduled castes (SC) groups were earlier known as untouchables and were defined in terms of their impure status in caste purity-pollution scale. Today they constitute about 17% of India's population.

<sup>7</sup> Half of these are self-employed.

which stretch out across the globe. And though the above case study restricts the migration within one region, such a process could cover the entire world.

This economy covers a range of monetized to non-monetized market transactions involving commodities and services produced, distributed, consumed, and reproduced (sometimes through recycling) in society. It includes household production and other forms of non-capitalist production; market exchanges including gifts (through weddings and festivals), barter and those relating to clientele and patronage. It also includes the manufacturing and service industries where it is difficult to distinguish where work is organized and where it is not. It also includes market transaction of firms and units not registered for direct taxation and licensing. In some countries an entire sector of the economy is not taxed, such as agriculture in India making this the key sector of this economy.

The petty production system is highly flexible, extremely diverse and simultaneously segmented. Flexibility is achieved by capital through casualization and by labour through physical movement. This flexibility combines time, economic sectors, strata, and regional clusters in differential combinations and through this combination or assemblages, builds centralization of places and makes geographical boundaries and thus constructs peripheries. The cycles of organizing these economies are highly competitive, mobile and driven by short term profits and that of time-space compressions. Since the colonial times, it has organized various kinds of technologies (from primitive to mechanized to informational), relations of production together with control and discipline of labour (from unfree/bondage/slave labour to free and self-employed) and sites (households, sweat shops, small scale industrial units, agricultural land) in distinct ways in different times at various places creating many kinds of identities based on place-making. The work in this economy is always low-skilled or unskilled.

Classic concepts of political economy do not give us the frame to understand this economy. In this economy we cannot identify the bourgeoisie and the working classes nor do the latter 'form' themselves in contestation with the capitalist class. Thus it is impossible to find a work force engaged with struggle against capital. Rather the workers are engaged in struggles among themselves for work making possible distinct ways in which pre-modern identities of family, kin and caste and community manifest themselves for access to work and labour.

Thus, this economy articulates pre-modern sociabilities and identities to organize labourers into households which are knitted together as families and kin groups. It arranges its members to participate in a combination of work activities simultaneously and over time with extremely low wages. The most appropriate example is of workers in manufacturing where there are no boundaries between organized and non-organized work. Thus a household/family may have members doing agriculture work, home based production, participate in sweat shops activities, and also do retailing across time and territories. As short term and long term migration increases some families might fragment into two to three households, two to three dwellings and regroup with some others labourers into new households or with new families. In these situation it is difficult to distinguish when the dwelling, household and the family as being separate or together.

Wages remain low and segmented in terms of gender and ethnicity/caste. As a result competitive wages and long term work are never continuously available to all labourers. The system works on the absolute poverty of the workers. This affects the long term stability of households and thus of continuity of dwellings and larger settlements, and in turn investments in housing. Such households generally live in temporary shelters and barracks built with recycled material pieces of wood and cardboard tarpaulin and corrugated sheets. Official discourses term these as slum settlements, whether in urban or rural areas. Most of these economic activities take place outside the formal legal structures of society and are not accounted for in the computation of GDP.

A combination of intermediate classes control this economy in a maze of outsourcing processes that organize production, distribution, consumption and reproduction of commodities and services together with the reproduction of households and families. Outsourcing is not new; it has been there since colonialism brought in the flexibility and connections between the agrarian and urban worlds. The flexibility of the system demands that work is intermittent leading to high levels of insecurity with wages almost never providing real-food equivalence.

It is this vulnerability that allows the system to be controlled by competitive fractional intermediate class and caste groups, including the middleman/fixer who control the market of labour, commodities (including that of consumption and services) and capital and the political system. They control the labour through a system of patronage that combines class subordination through pre-modern ideologies of class/caste/ethnicity/religious identity, gender and sexuality. In the process the labourers become segmented. Thus rarely do we see in this system the classic capital-labour conflict. In most instances the struggle over economic and cultural resources create conflicts and patronage structures between of families, kin groups, castes, ethnic or religious groups. The distinctiveness of this new economy is in the way it organizes the ideologies of pre-modern sociabilities to structure in uneven and diverse ways the processes and sites of production, distribution, consumption and reproduction. As a result, it creates islands/places of culturally distinct systems of organization integrated to each other and yet dispersed across the country. It is important that we recognize this process in order to understand how the urban is being constituted in the underdeveloped regions as assemblage, centrality, territorialization and connections.

## CONCLUSION

I started the discussion with a deliberation on comparison and emphasized the value of doing comparison through differences. I suggested that both differences and similarities that is, what one compares, relates to the way theories articulate the connections between them. Thus comparison cannot be explained abstractly but needs to be grounded in the methodologies of the theories which are being used for doing comparative studies. Additionally I suggested that using the modernity/coloniality perspective, that 'colonial difference' should be the methodological key to comprehend the distinctions that organize the connections between spaces and people across the world. The need of the hour is to de-freeze the typologies organized around the binaries of urban-rural as also industrial-agrarian and use Neil Brenner's (2014) position to argue that entire world is urban but simultaneously to analyze the distinctive apparatuses of colonialism in place in the global capitalist world system. In turn there is a need to evaluate the way the Eurocentric discursive practices intervened to create binaries that obfuscate an analysis of the connected world system. This world capitalist system and its discursive practices have created distinct urban worlds in the colonized part of the globe. This means we are back to accepting divisions within the globe. However we now have a perspective that theorizes the history and sociology of these divisions. The modernity/coloniality perspective presents us with a sociological justification for understanding differences between the colonial and the non-colonial while simultaneously giving reasons for comparing the variations within the colonial regions and non-colonial regions. Suggesting as some commentator's do that all connections can be compared will only lead us back to 19<sup>th</sup> century universalisms in the name of 20<sup>th</sup> century globalization (Patel, 2014b).

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