New cities: Power, profit, and prestige

Abstract

In the past two decades, over 150 new cities built from scratch have been launched in more than 40 countries. As this trend has intensified in recent years, scholarship on new city projects has expanded significantly in exciting new directions. There is now a conceptually robust and empirically vibrant body of scholarship that critically examines new city projects around the world. This article provides an overview of an emerging subfield and introduces important new approaches to understanding the proliferation of these urban mega-developments, and how the study of new cities can yield insights into both international urban, economic, cultural, and political trends, and specific local dynamics. In this article, we highlight key contributions and insights from recent scholarship on new city projects and map out areas for future research.

Key words: new cities; urbanization; economic development; entrepreneurial urbanism; social exclusions; urban mega-development

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, new cities built from scratch have been launched in over 40 countries. New city projects announced since the late 1990s now number over 150, far higher if China is included[1], and are located almost exclusively in emerging economies (Moser et al., 2015). In contrast to Chandigarh, Brasilia, and other master-planned cities created as part of post-colonial nation-building efforts, new city projects today have a more entrepreneurial focus and tend to be collaborations between the state and the private sector. New city projects continue to be announced regularly and many countries have multiple new city projects underway, including Indonesia (over 10), Kuwait (12), Malaysia (4), Morocco (20), Saudi Arabia (5), Tanzania (over 10), and many more. If built according to plan, the number of people living in new cities could top 50 million in several decades and cost an anticipated 1 trillion USD to construct.

Over the past several years, there has been an explosion of media articles about new city projects in high-profile media outlets including *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Bloomberg*, *National Geographic*, *CBC*, *Le Monde*, and *BBC*. In Europe and North America, the public is particularly fascinated by these extravagant utopian visions, especially given the crumbling and underfunded infrastructure in major cities of many advanced capitalist countries.

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[1] China, which has had a vastly different city-building trajectory from the rest of the world, has defined a 'new city' in administrative terms so that a new city may include tracts of agricultural land and villages (Shepard, 2015).

Media articles particularly focus on the futuristic features of new city projects, the (often unrealistic) aims of their builders, and their human and environmental costs. Published scholarship on new city projects has expanded significantly in exciting new directions in the past five years and there is now a conceptually robust and empirically vibrant body of work that critically examines new city projects around the world.

Scholarship on new cities has not coalesced around a consistent vocabulary for projects that are intended by their builders to become 'cities'[2], and there is no single definition of what constitutes a 'new city'[3]. In our own research, we treat new cities as ideological and discursive constructions and define them based on the aspirations of their builders: urban mega-developments built from scratch on a tabula rasa[4] that are designed to be both geographically and administratively separate from established cities, while projecting a distinct brand, architectural identity, and vision of the future, a sort of 'mirror opposite' (Murray, 2015a) of nearby cities. However, we are less concerned with pinning down a definitive meaning of 'new city' or establishing a typology of new city forms and functions (although see examples of typologies in Keeton, 2011; Keeton & Provoost, 2019b; van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018) than critically examining how and why decisions to create projects branded as 'new cities' are being made, how new cities are being normalized as a development strategy, and with what consequences.

While new master-planned cities have been created since antiquity, construction has spiked at particular moments in history, particularly during periods of imperial expansion and settler colonialism (Morris & Winchester, 2005; Wright, 1991), and in the years following independence from colonial domination (Rossman, 2017; Vale, 2008). Following the second World War, many 'new towns' were constructed at the periphery of established cities around the world, including in the United States, the Soviet Union, Iran, United Kingdom, France, and a number of former British colonies in response to an urgent demand for new housing and as a rejection of rapidly expanding 'megalopolises' (Abou-Zeid, 1979; Chaline, 1997; Choay, 1965;

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[2] While critical urban scholars critique the use of the term 'city' as reductive and inaccurate (Merrifield, 2013), it is still relevant for powerful elites building new 'cities', for whom the terms are both aspirational and ideological.

[3] Terms used by scholars to describe contemporary new master-planned developments include: new cities, new towns, new communities, satellite cities, new urban poles, new centralities, new urban peripheries, future cities, urban fantasies, instant cities, neoliberal utopias, parallel cities, private cities, urban enclaves, fast cities, and pop-up cities.

[4] It is important to note that many new cities are not being built on unused tracts of land as their builders claim; many sites have villages, farms, religious structures, Indigenous reservations, and more, all of which are cleared by builders to ensure the purity of vision of the future city (Das, 2012; Steel et al., 2019; Van Noorloos et al., 2019).

Evans, 1972; Fishman, 1982; Forsyth & Peiser, 2019; Merlin, 1971; Osborn & Whittick, 1969; Underhill, 1976). Scholarship from this time optimistically presented these new towns as effective means for relieving overcrowding, housing shortages, and other urban problems.

The wave of new cities constructed as seats of political power after former colonies won independence such as Chandigarh (India), Brasilia (Brazil), and Islamabad (Pakistan), which captured widespread attention within and beyond academia, were broadly treated by scholars as living examples of the Modernist doctrine that embodied the visions of their iconic European creators (Kalia, 2000; Tauxe, 1996; Yakas, 2001; Hall, 2014). Earlier research on these projects by scholars of architecture and urban planning focused on technical and aesthetic aspects, while in the 1980s and later, some landmark critical studies were published, including Holston's (1989) *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*. Holston's ethnographic investigation of the new Brazilian capital sheds light on the problems and contradictions of the state-driven urban dream and the underwhelming reality of its implementation, and Scott's (1998) subsequent critical analysis emphasizes the authoritarian logics of order and social control that underpin 'high modernist' cities. Despite some continuities with the muscular monumentalism and top-down planning approach of Modernist new cities, contemporary new master-planned cities present a departure from earlier projects. Unlike state-led postcolonial capitals, new cities today are driven and financed by an increasingly complex network of foreign and domestic actors, among which the private corporate sector plays an unprecedented role. The civic and socialist-infused ethos that drove projects like Brasilia and Chandigarh and which was reflected in their design, is today superseded by a prevailing urban entrepreneurial logic characterized by exclusionary new city plans and escapist urbanism, largely for the economic elite.

The sudden proliferation of new city projects since the late 1990s can be understood as a symptom of broader global conditions that have aligned in recent decades. The financialization of real estate and infrastructure and the emergence of housing as a key investment vehicle (He et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2017; Mouton & Shatkin, 2020; Schindler & Kanai, 2019; Shatkin, 2016; Yu, 2014), neoliberalization and the deregulation of economies globally (Harvey, 2007, 2013; Weber, 2002), the 'infrastructure scramble' of capital inflows that have intensified since the 2008 global recession (Kanai & Schindler, 2019), the growing role of technology companies in pushing 'smart' urban development (Das, 2019; Rebentisch et al., 2020; Wiig, 2015) mean that

the creation of new cities is currently particularly appealing and profitable for many actors. Furthermore, new cities are overwhelmingly being constructed in authoritarian contexts[5] with entrenched clientelism and corruption (Moser, 2020), which is now being intensified and scaled up, thus enabling the booming trade in black market sand (a key ingredient in concrete construction and artificial land) (Lamb et al., 2019), large-scale money laundering (Zinnbauer, 2017), land grabbing on unprecedented scales (Levien, 2013; Zoomers et al., 2017), the exploitation of foreign migrant workers (Caprotti, 2014a), and the urbanization of ecologically sensitive areas and indigenous land (Datta, 2012). Facilitated by 'fast' policy (Peck & Theodore, 2015), projects can be planned and constructed within a couple of decades or less, thus preventing careful consideration of contested land claims and citizen debate, while steamrolling over laws governing land use and urban development (Cugurullo, 2016; Datta, 2015, 2016a; Goldman, 2011).

While there is extensive scholarship on the early 20th century new town movement, including recent critical research (Hull, 2012; Singh et al., 2019), only a handful of books examine the emergence of new cities, taking a variety of thematic perspectives. Vale's now classic book *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (2008 [1992]) examines new capital cities constructed since World War II, and how architecture and urban design are manipulated in the service of politics. Rossman (2017) investigates the rationales behind the relocation of capital cities and their final outcomes in order to inform policy makers and governments, while exploring what role new capitals might play in conflict resolution among clashing populations. Wakeman's (2016) historical analysis of the new town movement recontextualizes contemporary new city developments within the legacy of urban utopianism by investigating earlier attempts to improve society through brand new urban environments around the world, and how these utopian impulses are perpetuated in today's ambitious urban mega-developments. Datta and Shaban's (2017) recent edited collection examines the contemporary new city phenomenon using the rubric of speed as a distinct characteristic of the urban utopias developed by (increasingly) entrepreneurial states in postcolonial contexts. The collection explores a variety of 'fast cities' legitimized as responses to urban crises and driven by ambitions to jumpstart economies and

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[5] However, Schindler and Kanai (2019) argue that the turn to urban investments as development strategies cuts across authoritarian and democratically elected regimes in low- and middle-income countries, and that this is part of an infrastructure-led development strategy that is more broadly supported by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the G20 in order to facilitate capital flows into infrastructure projects in the Global South.

investigates how speed is variously embodied in new city ventures, in their vision, plans, governance, and development process. Several recent studies examine new cities emerging in a region, particularly Asia (Keeton, 2011) and Africa (Keeton & Nijhuis, 2019; Keeton & Provoost, 2019; van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018). However, the recent surge of scholarship on new cities principally examines individual new city projects, leaving the field ripe for comparative studies (see Chen et al., 2009 for example).

In this article, we examine recent contributions to the study of new city creation in three main sections. First, we outline the broad narratives and discourses that frame new cities as appealing investments and development strategies and how scholars have investigated the rationales behind the creation of new cities. Second, we identify some of the ways in which scholarship on new cities is connecting to, building on, and, in some cases, challenging key debates in critical urban studies. Finally, we offer some directions for future research on new city projects.

2. Selling the future: Motivations, rationales, and rhetoric

How ideas for new cities circulate internationally and become mobilized in various contexts has been examined through an urban policy mobilities and assemblage theory framework. A number of analyses of contemporary new city projects investigate the human (consultants, architecture and planning firms, government officials) and nonhuman agents (reports, models, presentations, websites) that circulate urban policies and ideas about new city projects, and the process of 'serial seduction' in which ideas are crafted in an appealing way and sold repeatedly to multiple actors in different countries (Bunnell & Das, 2010). For example, Rapoport (2015) analyzes the global diffusion of sustainable urbanism and eco-city plans through international private-sector planning firms that represent the 'global intelligence corps' (GIC) of planning elites and starchitects. These agents and the new city imaginings they put into circulation are part of a fast-growing market for new city models that is sustained by commodified urban policy exchanges taking the form of policy tours, consulting services, and elite conference events (Bunnell & Das, 2010; Moser, 2019b) organized by new city-builders and stakeholders. Watson (2020) has also demonstrated how new city building across Africa is shaped by the increasingly widespread use of digital visualizations by international planning

firms, which promote seductive visions of urban futures that are detached from the material and social realities of local urban contexts.

The global circulation of the new city model is facilitated using trendy urban concepts and seductive narratives, as well as elaborate city branding strategies and forms of place promotion, which reinforce the appeal of new cities and provide grounds for their legitimization (Kim, 2010; Shoaib & Keivani, 2015). These narratives promote new cities as a cure-all to address inefficiencies and solve a variety of urban problems plaguing cities, particularly in the Global South. Analyses of new cities draw attention to the pervasive and frequently inter-connected narratives on 'smart' tech-driven urbanism (Bunnell, 2015a; Cugurullo, 2013; Das, 2019; Datta, 2016b) and 'green' urbanism, which claim to address contemporary urban challenges while modeling a new way of building and living through better connected, more efficient, 'low-impact' urban environments (Rapoport, 2014) with an increased resilience to climate change (Ajibade, 2017). A growing body of scholarship critiques the rhetoric of these 'eco' and 'smart' cities by juxtaposing the promises made through promotional material with realities encountered in the built projects, which remain well under their population targets with dramatically scaled-back 'eco' or 'smart' objectives (Brooker, 2012; Datta, 2012; Cugurullo, 2013, 2018; Caprotti, 2014b; Singh & Singh, 2019)

The creation of new cities as a development strategy has become normalized across the Global South and this assumption is now circulating globally through various agents and narratives (Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019; Shwayri, 2013), a dynamic that brings attention to the emergence of new South-South networks and actors that circulate new city models and ideas. A new set of countries not historically known as international urban innovators are now selling their urban expertise globally. For example, Saudi Arabia has claimed expertise in new city-building (Moser, 2019b), and South Korea has become a key producer and exporter of a new 'ubiquitous-eco-city' model (Mullins, 2017). These and other examples disrupt long-standing assumptions about conventional flows of urban policy from the Global North to the Global South and uncover new modes of corporate urban management and techno-utopian solutions to urban challenges prevailing in rapidly urbanizing countries of the Global South (Datta, 2016a).

At this stage in the current proliferation of new cities, there is growing scholarly interest in understanding why new cities are being built, why so many powerful people are buying into the idea of new cities as a solution, and what are the rationales offered to justify the projects. In

the subsections below, we expand on scholarship that examines three important rationales for new city building.

2.1 Economic rationales

Recent scholarship critically examines the economic rationales driving the creation of new cities and demonstrates the importance that states are placing on massive urban projects meant to spark economic growth or 'leapfrog' economies into new sectors. King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC) is one of four 'economic' cities the Saudi state has launched to help transition the country away from petroleum (Shoaib & Keivani, 2015). Similarly, Masdar in the UAE (Cugurullo, 2016) and Yachay in Ecuador (Childs & Hearn, 2016) are part of broader national strategies to foster resilient 'post-oil' competitive economies, particularly globally connected and competitive 'knowledge economies'. A growing body of scholarship investigates new cities as a strategy to boost a burgeoning information and communication technologies (ICT) sector in such places as Malaysia (Bunnell, 2002, 2004; Lepawsky, 2009; Rizzo & Glasson, 2012), Kenya (Van Noorloos et al., 2019), South Korea (Mullins, 2017; Mullins & Shwayri, 2016; Shwayri, 2013), India (Datta, 2015), and Palestine (Dreiblatt, 2020). Conversely, other new cities are developed to support extractive economies or are the result of a resource boom and advantageous commodity prices of oil and minerals (Cain, 2014; Cardoso, 2016; Childs & Hearn, 2016; van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018).

A driving motive for building new cities as an economic development strategy is the desire to attract investment capital, industries, and business headquarters to enable sustained growth and productivity. Many new city projects are conceived as ideal business and investment environments and designate new cities as part of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), as seen in KAEC (Saudi Arabia), Songdo (South Korea), Cyberjaya (Malaysia), or HITEC City (India). These 'zones of exception' (Easterling, 2014) provide a freer business environment than the rest of the country as a way to attract capital and cater to foreign and national interests with favourable legislation and tax incentives. Some more radical forms of SEZ, including charter cities and the more recent Zone for Economic Development and Employment (ZEDE) in Honduras (Lynch, 2017), challenge notions of national territory and sovereignty.

Scholars have raised concerns about the mode of speculative urbanization driving new city building for political or economic purposes rather than to meet real demographic demand

(Marcinkoski, 2015), which is producing a surplus of residential units, some of which are unsold, but many of which have been purchased as investments and left empty. The case of China's 'ghost cities', in which hundreds of new cities have produced a glut of housing that remains under-utilized or vacant (Yu, 2014; Shepard, 2015 Jiang et al. 2017), underscores the prominent role played by real estate speculators and the Chinese state in the development of new urban centralities that remain far under population targets (He et al., 2016; Sorace & Hurst, 2016; Yu, 2014). Chinese property developers have exported this unprecedented scale of urban speculation to Chinese real estate projects overseas, such as Forest City in Malaysia, which is expected to be 30% occupied at any given time even if the properties sell out, meaning that ghost cities are possibly being replicated internationally (Moser, 2018).

New city projects demonstrate state-enforced processes of 'urbanization as a business model' through which the conversion of rural agricultural land is legitimized and facilitated by the promise of growth and development associated with urbanization (Datta, 2015: 8). Recent research highlights the prominent role of the state and governments in the development of new cities and the increasingly entrepreneurial strategies they adopt to make these projects possible (Acuto, 2010; Datta, 2015, 2016b; Moser et al., 2015; Pitcher, 2017; Van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018; Watson, 2014). These modes of entrepreneurialism are shedding light on the role and mechanisms of 'investor states' in the development of new cities as profitable development projects for the state (Pitcher, 2017), as well as on new regimes of dispossession in which land is increasingly expropriated for private activities that generate higher returns than agriculture, namely real estate (Levien, 2013). In this sense, new cities can be understood as one more expression of broader systemic logics of expulsions underpinning the global economy (Sassen, 2014).

2.2 New opportunities for experimentation in governance

Another key motivation for many builders of new city projects is the development and implementation of new strategies and systems for their management. Recent studies of new cities have focused on the various ways that new cities introduce novel and unprecedented modes of urban governance and norms of city-making, both to facilitate new city creation and better achieve the urban imaginary that the master-planned projects promote (Datta & Shaban, 2016) . Research has interrogated the bold claims accompanying new 'smart' cities, whose builders

suggest more efficient urban management and governance can be achieved through ubiquitous tech (Rebentisch et al., 2020). Other analyses point out the ideological appeal of new cities for centralizing and streamlining decision-making, as their builders see the opportunity to free these new spaces 'not just from infrastructure struggles but of the messiness of democratic politics' (Bhan, 2014, p. 234).

Private new cities are a key format that allows for a high degree of experimentation, and recent scholarship has provided insights into city-scale private developments (Fält, 2019; Herbert & Murray, 2015; Shatkin, 2011). Although they come in many forms, private cities are often justified as a strategy to overcome the perceived inefficiencies, lack of resources and capabilities of states and municipal governments, and their 'flawed' modes of urban management (Fält, 2019).

Recent research reveals that the vast majority of new cities have a corporatized management structure, headed by a CEO, rather than an elected mayor and city council (Moser, 2020; Moser et al., 2015). Private new cities are governed by separate rules from the rest of the country, and in many cases have banned local police from entering, employing only private security (Moser, 2018; Moser et al., 2015; Murray, 2015b). In other cases, the private nature of new city developments and their distinct regulatory landscape enables the promotion of a distinct lifestyle for residents, from fostering a comparatively socially liberal hub in KAEC, which is exempt from clothing norms for women and sex-segregated public spaces imposed in the rest of Saudi Arabia (Moser et al., 2015), to imposing conservative Islamic values and restrictions on the use of space and property in an otherwise secular state like in South Africa's Waterfall City (Murray, 2015b). A more extreme example of experimentation in urban governance through private urban development is the Seasteading Institute's proposal for floating cities, intended as libertarian enclaves to 'exit government' and foster alternative forms of 'competitive governance' (Lynch, 2017; Steinberg et al., 2012).

As opportunities to experiment with new forms of governance, new cities represent spaces where both state and corporate power are deployed in new ways, and through increasingly complex and entangled arrangements (Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019; Pitcher, 2017). A number of scholars explore how new city projects are normalizing private urban governance, while undermining the possibility for democratic participation and reducing transparency in decision-making (Datta, 2015; Fält, 2019; Moser, 2018; Moser et al., 2015; Murray, 2015b). Other

research emphasizes the role of the state and municipal governments in spearheading changes to legal frameworks and regulations to fast-track new city development and land acquisition, circumventing existing democratic institutions, laws, and actors (Barthel & Planel, 2010; Datta, 2015; Goldman, 2011).

2.3 Nation building and cultural politics

Despite the important economic functions of new city projects, many serve important political and ideological functions for states. New federal- and provincial-level capital cities such as Putrajaya (Malaysia), Dompak (Indonesia), Nur-Sultan (formerly called Astana, in Kazakhstan), and Naypyidaw (Myanmar) are vehicles for state ideology, and often strategically employ symbols of culture, ethnicity, and religion in the service of nation building as a way for the state to project and legitimize its power, normalize ethnic and religious hierarchies, and to justify new city projects as a 'natural' expression of nationhood (Koch, 2013, 2014a, 2018; Vale, 2008). For example, Naypyidaw is designed as a purely Buddhist capital, as manifested in many overtly Buddhist symbols, including statues, architecture, and many cosmological features (Seekins, 2009), while the design of Putrajaya similarly projects a purely (Arab) Muslim image (Moser, 2012). Both symbolically exclude religious minorities and physically discourage diversity through a lack of amenities and institutions for practitioners of minority religions. A number of new cities and urban mega-developments are also being crafted to foster communities of religious conservatives (Batuman, 2020; Wilbur, 2020) or, conversely, to encourage more moderate religious practices in the face of rising fundamentalism (Côté-Roy, 2020; Dreiblatt, 2020; van Camp & Moser, 2020).

While many new cities are designed to look generically global, particular cultures, ethnicities, religions, and ancient kingdoms are frequently referenced by city builders in an attempt to project a sense of authenticity, and thus preclude criticism of the state (Moser and Wilbur 2017; Wilbur 2020). New cities can therefore provide insight into various social tensions and render transparent forms of deliberate exclusion. Despite the rhetoric of 'improvement', 'progress', and 'development', many new city projects embody the 'dark side' of urban planning (Yiftachel, 1995), which is used strategically by the powerful to favour some, while marginalizing others.

3. Contributions to critical urban studies

   Recent scholarship on emerging new cities has added fresh perspectives to key themes in urban studies and is a particularly fertile subfield through which scholars are contributing new ways to think about urban development, urbanization, and the production of urban space, while challenging previous knowledge or assumptions. Within the burgeoning scholarship on new city projects, we identify four main contributions to key themes in urban studies. First, scholarship on new cities reveals a variety of new actors and new configurations of state power involved in the development of new cities (Datta & Shaban, 2017; Koch, 2018; Shwayri, 2013). Political economic analyses of new city projects demonstrate the increasingly entangled interests of city-building actors, whose roles, opaque partnerships, and new 'hybrid' identities blur the distinction between the public and private sectors (Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019). Rather than diminishing state power in the face of growing transnational dominance of corporations, new city projects reveal new ways in which states and municipal governments are consolidating power under the guise of urban 'progress' and narratives about the 'common good'. Recent work has outlined the indirect role of global consultancies and non-governmental organizations or foundations in new city ventures and reveals how there is much more to learn about the foreign interests being served through the creation of new cities.

   Second, recent scholarship on new cities reveals new scales and modes of entrepreneurial urbanism in which the resident is increasingly treated as a customer and consumer, rather than as a citizen, and many new cities are treated by elites as spaces of investment, rather than prioritized as places to live. The study of new cities brings a variety of broader trends into sharp relief such as the financialization and foreignization of real estate and infrastructure in the Global South (Fauveaud, 2019, 2020; Schindler & Kanai, 2019; Shatkin, 2017), the normalization of 'bypass urbanism' where new 'world class' projects draw focus away from the pressing needs of existing cities (Bhattacharya & Sanyal, 2011), the new scales and speed at which projects are executed (Cugurullo, 2016), and also underscores the continued relevance of frameworks on the right to the city, the just city, and spaces of exception (Caprotti, 2014a).

   Third, recent research builds on the work of Parnell and Robinson (2012) and others, who point out the limitations of neoliberalism as an explanatory tool for urban transformation in the Global South (Bunnell, 2015b; Watson, 2009). In many cases, cultural politics and nation building supersede economic drivers in new city projects and neoliberalism is one of many

forces driving new city development (Koch, 2014c). This observation is echoed by Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer (2018) who emphasize the variability of contexts from which new cities in Africa emerge, ranging from strongly neoliberal to not neoliberal at all. In the context of new cities in Ghana, Korah (2020) demonstrates that while neoliberalism play a role in the cities' broad development context, local factors, actors, and rationales for the cities' construction are also influential. Similarly, other analyses draw attention to the incomplete explanation provided by neoliberal critiques, which do not adequately account for the roles of centralized regimes, authoritarian states, and monarchies that are closely involved in new city development worldwide (Croese & Pitcher, 2019; Kanai & Kutz, 2011; Koch, 2014c). By departing from the predominant explanation of contemporary urban change through the lens of neoliberalism, this research more broadly aligns with the call for 'dislocating the EuroAmerican center of theoretical production' (Roy, 2009: 820). By shedding light on an urban phenomenon that is concentrated in emerging economies of the South and sustained through new South-South networks of urban exchanges, research on new cities provides welcome opportunities for the development of urban theory from the perspective of the Global South (Watson, 2009).

Finally, despite pervasive promotional rhetoric about new cities being 'smart', 'eco', and sites of innovation and experimentation, recent research demonstrates how some new cities sustain planning ideals and assumptions introduced by colonial powers (Keeton & Nijhuis, 2019; Moser, 2015, 2019a) and further entrench social divisions. The study of new cities provides insight into how elites are marshalling a variety of resources, often using colonial-era laws and institutions, to facilitate the creation of new city projects from which they can financially profit as well as maintain their social dominance. The legacy of colonialism is also apparent in the ways in which new city projects are rationalized, as elites in former colonies justify lavish urban spectacles as their 'right to development', owed to them by years of colonial subjugation (Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019).

4. Conclusions and directions for future research

New cities are an important lens through which to understand transnational flows of capital, labour, ideas and expertise, international land grabbing, and the variety of actors that collaborate to execute and profit from such projects. Yet while there are long stretches of shelf space in university libraries dedicated to scholarship on Chandigarh and Brasilia, contemporary

new city projects, dozens of which far eclipse 1960s new city experiments in scale and budget, have received no or comparatively scant attention. There is much more to learn about the current wave of new city projects including: why they are being adopted with such enthusiasm in particular locations and not others, the identity and configuration of the key actors and why they are advocating for the creation of new cities over other development strategies, how support is garnered for these projects, and the political relations and social hierarchies they (re)produce. Comparative research across regions and economic and political contexts derived from cross-disciplinary synergies can offer novel theoretical insights about new city projects that may appear to share significant similarities on the surface, yet are shaped and sustained by vastly different political and economic factors (Koch, 2015).

The various social, economic, and environmental impacts of each new city project under development urgently requires critical attention from a variety of disciplines using a range of theoretical frameworks, particularly given the sheer number and scale of projects and the speed at which they are unfolding. With a significant proportion of new cities developed as elite enclaves and escapist utopias, private new city projects and their consequences could be analyzed fruitfully by engaging with the theoretical insights stemming from the abundant literature on gated communities. A number of analyses of projects in their early stages have already critiqued the affordability of housing (Keeton & Provoost, 2019), the symbolic and material erasure of the urban poor (Carmody & Owusu, 2016; De Boeck, 2011; Smith, 2017), social inequality and spatial fragmentation (Moser, 2020; Watson, 2014), increased environmental risks and degradation (Ajibade, 2017; Moser, 2018), as well as the fiscal deficit in existing cities if economic elites move to new private enclaves (Van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018). As new cities materialize, there will be opportunities to expand investigations of these and other consequences. Further scholarship will also shed light on the broader patterns of projects at the national level as many states have adopted a strategy of creating multiple new city projects simultaneously. Given the acceleration of land grabbing for new city projects, further research is needed in many national contexts about the specific policies and laws, sometimes dating back to the colonial era, that are enabling land acquisition for private urbanization schemes, particularly by foreign states and companies.

Many new city-building actors have emerged from countries not historically known for selling urban expertise globally, revealing new networks in the transnational circulation of urban

policies and planning. New city-building giants such as Korea Land and Housing Corporation (LH), a South Korean state-owned company, have been neglected by scholars to date, despite developing new city projects in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East and selling, in the case of LH, what it terms 'the Korean new-town model' to countries across the Global South (https://www.lh.or.kr/eng/index.do). Further research will shed light on how state companies like LH find local partners, secure financing, develop 'Korean-style' projects in foreign contexts, and how their projects are shaped by local forces. Wholly private foreign companies are also creating new city projects including Rendeavour, an international company that calls itself 'Africa's new city builder' and is developing over half a dozen new cities in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (www.rendeavour.com). More attention also needs to be paid to the many new city projects and urban megadevelopments developed by companies from China in such countries as Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Oman, Morocco and more, how they are financed, and what sorts of urban models are being circulated.

A growing number of new city projects play important geopolitical functions, particularly as tactical maneuvers to normalize claims over contested land, resources, and strategic coastlines. Morocco is building Foum el Oued, a new city in Western Sahara, constituting a formal claim over territory that has been disputed for decades. Kuwait is building a port and city on Bubiyan Island, an uninhabited island along the border with Iraq, in the fear that Iraq may attempt to claim it due to its strategic location near Iraq's limited access to the sea, through which the bulk of its oil is shipped. Israel continues to claim Palestinian territory through the construction of massive settlements in the West Bank, now numbering over 200, with the settler population approaching close to 400,000 (Handel et al., 2017). Rawabi is a Palestinian effort to construct a new city that aims to provide housing and jobs for Palestinians, while laying formal claim over territory that many Palestinians believe risks being claimed by Israel (Roy, 2016). While the economic dimensions of the many infrastructure investments associated with China's Belt and Road Initiative have received a great deal of scholarly and media attention in recent years, the geopolitical function of the many Chinese new city projects in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean remain under-examined.

More research is needed on how the creation of new cities is used as a populist strategy to quell revolt and gain the support of the citizenry in particular contexts. There is evidence that new cities have been announced in response to Arab Spring protests in Bahrain and Egypt, and

ongoing projects in Morocco and Tunisia were revamped after the Arab Spring under a developmentalist discourse and altered modes of operation to be more appealing to a suspicious and angry public (Barthel & Vignal, 2014). However, further investigation is needed into the various ways in which new city projects globally are both reshaping and further entrenching hierarchies of power and modes of non-democratic rule through new configurations of actors and the crafting of new legislation to facilitate new city development, circumventing of democratic processes and legitimizing authoritarian action (Bhan, 2014; Koch, 2014b).

Given that a large portion of new cities can be characterized as 'PowerPoint cities', or new city projects that have not yet or barely broken ground and exist only in PowerPoint presentations and websites, it is therefore not surprising that research to date has concentrated on policies, plans, and rhetoric of new cities, rather than on their residents. The embodied aspects of new cities, particularly the inclusions and exclusions sustained through policies, practices, and discourses, require a great deal more attention given that the body, as feminist geographers have long pointed out, is a key scale at which power is inscribed (Longhurst, 1994; Lynch, 2018; Nast & Pile, 1998). Further investigation would shed light on how the designs of master-planned cities are challenged, transformed, appropriated, or resisted by residents (Martin et al., 2020), what Kundu (2017) refers to as 'perforations' of the master plan, or adapted and reinterpreted in ways unanticipated by planners. Longitudinal studies will demonstrate how projects are scaled back and compromised from initial plans resulting in an incoherent 'Frankenstein urbanism' (Cugurullo, 2018).

The new city building trend continues to accelerate as more states and private corporations view new cities as prestigious and calculate the potential profits that can be made. It is unclear how global events such as COVID-19 and the recent Saudi-Russia oil feud will affect these extravagant endeavors, or whether these global challenges combined with growing criticism of new cities will encourage a turn to a more incremental and modest urbanism. Scholarship on new cities has an important role to play in guiding policy and shining a light on the actors supporting this trend, the power structures that undergird it, and those who either benefit or are further marginalized by these projects.

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