

Entrepreneurialism and the Southern City: Renewals and Refusals of/in the Informal Economy

In the current conjuncture of global capitalism, cities have become emblems and hubs of entrepreneurialism. In this paper, I aim to interrogate how the neoliberal entrepreneurialism of the Southern cities in India and South Africa reimagines the informal economy of rural and semi-urban areas. I consider the cities of New Delhi and Cape Town specifically, focussing on scavenging ethnographic vignettes of enterprise intermediaries working with the informal economy in rural and semi-urban spaces. In doing so, the paper will contribute to a comparative perspective of the current conjuncture of the southern city as spaces of entrepreneurial mediation to address demands for development by the informal economy.

The comparative perspective of India and South Africa enables us to reconsider Gramsci's analysis of the social organisation of the Southern society in the 21st century – as more than just a vast agrarian bloc with three social strata of the peasantry, the rural intellectuals and the great landowners and prominent intellectuals. The emphasis here is on the informal economy and its historical socio-spatial organisation as a consequence of primitive accumulation, alongside the entrepreneurial civic organisations functioning as enterprise intermediaries.

Kalyan Sanyal, writing about postcolonial development, spoke about the construction and renewal of the informal economy as a key recipient of development initiatives due to a shift to a neoliberal development industrial complex. Relatedly, Partha Chatterjee refers to the socio-political relationship between what he refers to as the civil society (or the urban middle classes) and the political society (the rural, marginalised, and migratory labour). Both Chatterjee and Sanyal continue that the State is invested in addressing the demands of the political society, particularly in terms of generating livelihoods, while at the same time renewing the informal economy.

In South Africa, the critiques of Thabo Mbeki's two economy discourse – one modern and advanced, while the other backward and racially segregated form the basis of critical scholarship. Mbeki's theory states that the South African State should create a ladder from the second to the first. Research, however, points out that the State does not produce adequate

resources for the second economy to reach the first, even though the discourse sets in motion the aspirations for climbing the metaphorical economic ladder.

In the 21st century, the formal economy cannot achieve full employment for those marginalised and displaced in the informal economy due to primitive accumulation. Scholars point out that the democratic state must initiate measures to manage the demands of the informal economy. The entrepreneurialism mediated through Southern cities thus helps renew and manage the aspirations of the informal economy. At the same time, assuming that the informal economy has no political consciousness or pre-history would be misleading. After all, the entrepreneurial approaches supported by intermediaries find their basis in *jugaad*, the survivalist economic activities of the informal economy.

Taking into consideration the layered relationship between entrepreneurialism, the Southern city and the informal economy is crucial for repoliticising the informal economy, recognising the counter-hegemonic projects to neoliberalism that are grounded in space and place, as opposed to focussing solely on universalised discussions of counter-hegemony. My paper embarks on such exploration by scavenging narrative vignettes from my existing ethnographic data based on the work of Sophie Marie Niang. These narratives focus on the refusals of dominant, neoliberal entrepreneurial ethos within the informal economy and mediating entities. Attentiveness to these refusals and challenges to dominant entrepreneurial ethos helps make more real to us the experience of entrepreneurialism in shaping the Southern cities – not as mere recipients of the narratives of global capitalism and development, but as spaces that can influence broad narratives as well.