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Idealization, capitalization, securitization

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This article offers an analytical reflection on how urban futures have been imagined throughout history and into the present. Considering this question at a global scale, it examines the place of urbanization within the development of the modern/colonial order, accounting for the imagined futures that have supported this world-historical process. Three thematic sections—idealization, capitalization, and securitization—frame the discussion. Capturing desires for societal betterment alongside attempts to extract economic value and imperatives to govern anticipated threats, these heuristics provide insight into forms of urban future-making and future-thinking that continue to reverberate across contemporary projects, debates, and struggles. This lays the groundwork for the critical analysis of urban futures that identifies what is at stake in imagining the future of cities in one way rather than another.

The future is everywhere

A consensus has emerged in the first decades of the twenty-first century: the global future is an *urban* future. Commentators frequently cite the rather meaningless but incontrovertible fact that, for the first time in

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history, the majority of the world's population now lives in cities. At the same time, there seems to be agreement that the urban *future* is a centrally important problem. As opposed to other possible temporal orientations, of which there are many, the future has become a preeminent focus of contemporary urban policy, planning, design, development, and governance. To grasp something of the ubiquity of this peculiar space–time construct, consider the frequency with which 'urban futures' or 'future cities' appear in contemporary public culture.

Most media outlets, from CNN to the *Guardian* to the *Atlantic*, have a webpage or blog on urban futures. Publishing houses have book series organized under this heading. Major universities have research initiatives, degree programs, and faculty positions dedicated to this pursuit, while some have created entire centers or institutes. Schoolchildren are encouraged to participate in 'future city' simulations and competitions. There are multiple Future Cities Labs (one in San Francisco, another split between Zurich and Singapore), a Future Cities Catapult, and cities-of-the-future exhibitions have taken place in London, Shanghai, and New York. Multinational corporations specializing in energy (like Shell), technology (like Siemens and IBM), and management consulting (like Ernst & Young) offer expensive future-city scenarios and solutions. City-branding and place-making agencies offer to 'curate' or 'design' the future of your city while think tanks disseminate handbooks on how to make cities 'futureproof.' If one takes time to notice, it can easily begin to feel like the urban future is everywhere (Rosenberg and Harding 2005, 3).

The COVID-19 pandemic intensifies this trend by producing uncertainty and provoking reflection about the future of cities (Florida, Rodríguez-Pose, and Storper 2021). Established principles of urbanism, such as density, circulation, and exchange, are thrown into question by the epidemiological dictates of 'social distancing,' 'self-isolation,' and 'shelter in place.' These measures, which render cities unfamiliar and unsettle core values of urban life, contribute to the widespread sense that cities may never again be the same. Yet despite the cloud of uncertainty hanging over the urban future, efforts to imagine the 'post-pandemic' city inevitably bear traces of the archive of experiences, images, and ideas from before COVID-19 hit (Colomina 2018). For example, discussions about how to manage the next new variant and other future biothreats draw on preexisting repertoires of urbanism, such as 'smart-city technologies' (Sonn and Lee 2020). Likewise, the controversial notion of 'herd immunity' aligns with the equally contentious idea of 'resilience' and its goal of making cities capable of bouncing back from exogenous shocks while absorbing an acceptable amount of loss (Howell 2020; Schwab and Vanham 2020). Commentators who find glimmers of hope in reduced air pollution, increased wildlife activity, or flourishing mutual aid networks follow an established tradition of seeing utopian potential in urban crisis (He, Pan, and Tanaka 2020; Moss 2020; Tolentino 2020). And media forecasts of panic-buying publics and overcrowded hospitals harken back to dystopian scenarios that have long been in circulation (Chandran 2020). Even demands to 'return to normal' by ending lockdowns envision the future by invoking the past, and in doing so effectively naturalize the gendered, racialized, and classed privileges that structure access to affordable healthcare, quality housing, and secure livelihoods, and which are responsible for unequal mortality rates in

the first place. It will be some time before anyone fully understands how the imperative to control the spread of the virus has reshaped urban life. But as the world looks anxiously ahead to the 'post-pandemic' city and prepares for the next outbreak, engaging critically with the historical archive of urban future-making and future-thinking is especially timely.

If the current conjuncture indeed demands deeper reflection on the future of cities, it is worth taking stock of the conceptual resources we possess by looking back to historically influential ways in which the urban imagination has taken shape.[1] Our objective in selectively reviewing a wide spectrum of urban thought and practice is to offer an analytical reflection that would prove useful for studying contemporary cities and their imagined futures.[2] We cast our net widely in recognition of the central place of urbanization within the development of the modern/colonial order and to account for the imagined futures that have supported this world-historical process (Gandy 2014; King 1990; Mignolo 2007; Quijano 2000). Our organizing principle is to highlight texts, authors, and ideas that, in our estimation, have profoundly shaped prevailing assumptions, continue to influence current debates, and elucidate dynamics that deserve critical attention. The examples we engage with in this article provide strategic entry points for thinking through—indeed, dismantling where desired—those forms of urban future-making and future-thinking that have aspired to global dominance, appealed to universality, and wielded substantial power in the coeval unfolding of modernity and coloniality. Here we focus on three prominent themes—idealization, capitalization, and securitization—which are recurrent in the history of the urban imagination and continue to reverberate throughout contemporary discussions of future cities. In doing so, we lay the groundwork for the critical analysis of urban futures that identifies what is at stake in imagining the future of cities in one way rather than another. The ultimate objectives are: to equip urbanists to think critically about how the future of cities has been thought about and acted upon in different times and places; and to reframe the ever-expanding historical archive of urban thought and practice to inform contemporary debates.

The future as urban fact

In *The Future as Cultural Fact*, Arjun Appadurai (2013, 5) calls the future a 'cultural horizon' that different societies organize in different ways. Societies also organize themselves in different ways in relation to the future, which is to say, 'the future is a part of how societies shape their practices' (Appadurai 2013, 292). Humans are 'future-makers,' which means the social sciences and humanities should treat 'future-making' as an object of analysis (Appadurai 2013, 285; Munn 1992). Though many scholarly and professional fields have dedicated themselves to studying how humans construct their future (e.g. economics, environmental science, disaster management, design, architecture, and planning), Appadurai laments that social and cultural analysis has not followed suit. This is curious since the future is 'not just a technical or neutral space, but is shot through with affect and with sensation,' a 'culturally organized dimension of human life' (Appadurai 2013, 286–87, 294). It is about hope, the 'good life,' and what people

want to achieve; just as often, it is about what they want to avoid. And there are ethical and political stakes attached to the different ways in which the future is organized. Appadurai (2013, 295) characterizes this as a struggle between the 'politics of probability' and the 'politics of possibility.' The former is the domain in which the future can be bought, sold, and controlled, where it becomes an object of capitalist speculation or governmental management. The latter is about ordinary people's everyday practices of imagining, anticipating, or aspiring to different futures. In short, the tension between different ways of constructing the future, and of organizing the present in relation to it, is a central feature of social and political life.

These concerns take on historical depth if we consider Reinhart Koselleck's (2004) thesis that concepts of time and temporality are historically dynamic. Koselleck argues that past generations (or societies) have particular kinds of futures that go through changes over time but that also get passed along to their successors (cf. Luhmann 1998). This is demonstrated through a comparison of different ways of envisioning the future during the shift from the Middle Ages to modernity in Europe. Koselleck shows how the Christian idea of prophecy, which foresaw the End of the World and was the sole property of the church, was overtaken by a secular idea of prognosis, which predicted political events and belonged primarily to the state. This shift involved intense competition between different ways of imagining, foreseeing, and anticipating the future. Eventually the state achieved a 'monopoly on the control of the future' by 'gradually eliminating from the domain of political consideration and decision making the robust religious expectations of the future' (Koselleck 2004, 16).

Following Appadurai and Koselleck, the future can be understood as a historically specific cultural horizon that defines how societies organize themselves and their institutions. But what does the future have to do with cities? In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams (1973, 272) connects the two: 'Out of an experience of the cities came an experience of the future.' Williams argues that the social experience of urban life provided the possibility to imagine that the future could be created or transformed through collective agency (and was not the result of destiny). The examples Williams uses are writers like William Morris and H. G. Wells, who drew on the transformations occurring all around them in late-Victorian London (cf. Graham 2016). While Morris's vision was utopian and Wells's dystopian, both came from their experience of the city, the crises produced by urbanization and industrialization, and the movements for social change emerging around that time. The future is not only a *cultural* fact, but also an *urban* fact.

From this perspective, the urban experience and its perpetual crises create the collective consciousness of the future. Williams argues that this continued throughout the twentieth century, with writers such as Aldous Huxley and George Orwell depicting urban futures as a way to comment on the movements for social change motivating their predecessors. On the one hand, Williams (1973, 278) suggests that the possibilities are infinite: 'In a sense, it seems, everything about the city—from the magnificent to the apocalyptic—can be believed at once.' But for Williams, there are always historical conditions shaping how and why the future is envisioned one way rather than another, and diverging future

visions have different material consequences. Following this line of inquiry, we might ask: What forms of urban future-thinking and future-making have recurred and endured, and how might their histories inform contemporary debates about the future of cities in times of profound uncertainty?

Guided by these questions, the remainder of this essay is divided into three thematic sections, which correspond to historically influential ways in which the future has shaped cities and urban life throughout the expansion of the modern/colonial order. The first, 'Better City, Better World,' refers to the urge to break free from the past and the present in order to create something new, different, better. The second, 'Urban Futures, Bought and Sold,' refers to the process by which the urban future is rendered available as a source of economic value. The third, 'The Future is Our Enemy,' refers to the imperative to govern the city in anticipation of future threats. These themes are not exhaustive, absolute, or universal: there are many reference points that are not captured here, there could be other ways of organizing the ones that are, and they should all be situated in historical and geographical context. These themes are also not mutually exclusive, as they have often appeared simultaneously, nor are they necessarily compatible, as they have sometimes reinforced each other and sometimes moved in opposite directions. The thematic sections should not be understood to constitute a whole, but rather as three heuristics that enable thinking with the history of urban futures as they have taken shape and continue to reverberate across contemporary projects, debates, and struggles. We intentionally highlight the political and ethical implications of dominant ideas, sensitive to the inequality, exclusion, and violence that divides cities, and we encourage readers to engage further with the central place of urbanization within the modern/colonial order. Although the discussion is grounded in the conviction that there is an important association between the 'urban' and the 'future,' we do not wish to make that association seem necessary or automatic. And while the focus here is primarily on grand visions of the urban future that have supported the co-constitution of modernity and coloniality, other scales and perspectives deserve to be taken into account. Despite these qualifiers, which will be addressed in the conclusion, what follows is an attempt to open pathways for research and teaching on a problematic poised to remain urgent for the foreseeable future.

Better city, better world

The pursuit of improvements to the human condition has a long and winding history in which the city has consistently played a fundamental role. It is somewhat clichéd to begin this discussion with ancient Greece, but ideas emerging in that context were central to the development of the modern/colonial order and continue to profoundly influence prevailing assumptions about ideal social, spatial, and political formations. One of the most influential is Plato's (2002 [375 BCE]) depiction of a city whose spatial arrangement and political system would enable the perfection of the soul. This model figured centrally in Plato's conception of ethics and politics, as the ideal city was understood as the physical expression of the ideal society and state. Aristotle (1984 [350 BCE]) also based a theory of politics on a concept of the city, as both originated in the

human desire to enter into partnerships, which formed the basis of the *polis* (translated variously as 'city,' 'state,' or 'city-state'). The *polis* was the necessary outcome of the human search for fulfillment, which was only possible in the city. This ideal applied to a specific category of person (the property-owning and slave-holding patriarch) who was the beneficiary of the advantages of urban political life. As Aristotle (1984, 37) famously wrote of the *polis*, 'while coming into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well.'

The assumption that the city is the endpoint of a natural progression—that the nature of society is to self-organize, both spatially and politically, in urban form—is taken for granted in almost all subsequent models of human and social development. So, too, the idea that a city's spatial order reflects (even determines) the physical and moral constitution of its inhabitants and their social relations is deeply ingrained in urban planning, design, and governance. These models speak the language of universality while frequently presuming a subject with certain characteristics (usually adult, male, white, able-bodied, and propertied). Uniting these long-lasting ideas is the enduring belief that the desire for a better world—either the interior world of the individual or the exterior world of society—can be satisfied by creating a better city.

The emphasis on the city as the key to human flourishing takes on another important dimension in religious texts, in which the city served to illustrate the contrast between the divine and the profane. Augustine's (2005 [413-426 CE]) opposition between Civitas Dei, the heavenly city inspired by the love of God, and Civitas terrena, the earthly city of non-believers, offered a lasting inspiration. Likewise, Quranic references to Paradise motivated attempts to work out the ideal spatial form, such as the original circular plan (762-766 CE) for Baghdad (Eaton 2002, 37). Renaissance architects also derived their notion of the ideal city from the heavens: if the universe was arranged rationally according to mathematical laws then the city's physical design and political authority should follow the same principles. Common to these diverse systems of religious thought is the tendency for the city to serve as a batteground for the struggle between good and evil.

The ability to conceive of cities as inventions, and to break with the past in order to create them, owes much to Sir Thomas More. *Utopia*, in which More (1989 [1516]) claimed to depict the ideal city of Plato's *Republic*, was inspired by contempt for More's own society as well as by imperial expansion and the 'discovery' of the so-called 'New World.' The first book of *Utopia* is an explicit critique of contemporary England, while the second contrasts it with an imaginary, distant world superior in every way. Whether or not More's description of the fictitious island was meant as a model—after all, More did not provide a program or plan for how to achieve what the Utopians had—*Utopia* offered a way of thinking that inspired much debate and imitation. It allowed existing legal systems, social relations, political institutions, and spatial forms to seem strange, and that sense of estrangement is what makes it possible to imagine them otherwise. More's work remains a paradigmatic attempt to imagine alternative arrangements of society and space that could serve as a model for the future.

This search has taken many forms, but a common one is to pair the critique of existing urban conditions with the plan for an altogether superior alternative. The utopian socialist William Morris (1905) complained about the 'sickening

hideousness' of 'irredeemably vulgar' London and longed for cities to be replaced by towns and villages surrounded by fields and gardens. Morris's future imagination was shot through with nostalgia for the pre-industrial and the pastoral, which inspired his vision of a socially and environmentally balanced world where money, property, and government disappeared and everyone lived in harmony. Morris's vision joined the outpouring of utopian ideas that emerged in response to the social upheaval caused by early industrial capitalism. Among them was the Garden City movement founded by Ebenezer Howard (1965 [1902]), which sought to integrate the social and economic benefits of the city with the moral and aesthetic values of the countryside. Howard and many of his contemporaries saw the cities of their day as 'unhealthy' and used organic and biological concepts to diagnose their ills. Appealing to 'natural laws,' they argued that the city was a living organism out of balance and in need of medical intervention. This line of thinking led to theories of sanitation and hygiene, as well as to eugenics: all forms of intervention that were dissatisfied with the current state of cities and sought to 'improve' their social, moral, and environmental conditions simultaneously (Pinder 2005, 32).

Just as More's *Utopia* was inspired by the European conquest of the Americas, Gwendolyn Wright (1991, 1–2) argues that the history of colonial urbanism reveals European notions of how a 'good environment … should look and function.' Like the interventions being pursued in the cities of the metropole, colonial cities were planned and built with the aim of creating new social and spatial orders. For instance, the Garden City was proposed as a model to be extended across British colonial space, with its proponents desiring 'not only England but all parts of the Empire to be covered with Garden Cities' (King 1990, 44). In colonial sub-Saharan Africa, in addition to undermining the culturally specific historical links between house building and community life, the Garden City model served to polarize segregated urban environments, with the low-density spaces becoming the preferred residence of white governing elites (Bigon 2013). Through the logics of modernity/coloniality, attempts to envision and create an ideal city were predicated on a racially stratified social and spatial order.

An impulse to remake the city and society also animated decolonization processes as newly independent nations sought to establish their political objectives in the urban sphere. Decolonization itself might be considered an urban ideal, as the city was often the place in which the identity of the postcolonial nation-state could be fostered. This is evident throughout the 'architectures of independence' that span postcolonial Africa, which were important symbols of independent nations inserting themselves into the global sphere of modernity (Herz et al. 2015; Hess 2000). The same impetus animated efforts of postcolonial governments to replace the fragmented infrastructures inherited from the colonial era with universalized systems of service provision that would reach even the poorest citizens (Kooy and Bakker 2008).

The search for better arrangements of society pursued through cities arguably reached its apex in what Susan Buck-Morss (1995, 1) calls the 'industrial dreamworlds' that 'dominated the political imagination in both East and West for most of the [twentieth] century.' Despite the significant differences between capitalism, socialism, and fascism, Buck-Morss argues that they all mobilized

dreamworlds that provided optimistic visions of 'mass utopia' by using aesthetic forms (architecture, fashion, arts, music, film, and so on) to compete for the loyalty of the masses (Zarecor 2018). From the arcades of late-nineteenth-century Paris to the artistic and architectural styles flourishing after the Russian Revolution, Buck-Morss (1995, 8) argues that common to modernity's aesthetic forms, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, was the 'premise that new social environments would create new inhabitants.'

This premise was at the heart of modernist urbanism, epitomized by Le Corbusier's (2011) famous assertion that the destruction wrought by World War I resulted in conditions perfect for building cities that could lead to an ideal social order and an improved individual. Le Corbusier's ideas were universalized with the establishment in 1928 of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which facilitated the application of standardized principles across scales, regardless of context, from the house to the city. Le Corbusier believed that the creation of cities along modernist lines required a strong, authoritarian state, and the fascist movements arising in Italy and Germany around this time pursued their quest to create new social orders by intervening in urban space (J. C. Scott 1998). In the Soviet Union, the city and its material forms were central to the project of building a future according to socialist principles (Boym 1994).

According to the universalist theory of modernization propagated by Washington in the post-war period, urbanization was 'a teleological process, a movement toward a known end point that would be nothing less than a Western-style industrial modernity,' as James Ferguson (1999, 5) puts it. The city was believed to be the ultimate endpoint of history, but not just any city. It was the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Euro-American city (especially Paris, London, New York, and Chicago) that became the symbol of the 'modern' (Parnell and Robinson 2012; Robinson 2006). While the specifics of this vision were contested, there was consensus that history was advancing toward a better or more complete condition, and that this process was linked to urban and infrastructural forms, which were the most tangible manifestation of having arrived at the stage of civilizational achievement known as 'modernity.' The profession of city (or town) planning played an important role in the circulation of this idea by propagating visions of desirable futures that could be attained by intervening in urban space (Hall 2002). Even with the end of the Cold War and attacks on modernism coming from all corners, the city's centrality to pursuing a better future and to improving the human condition remained intact.

Among the many contemporary iterations of this paradigm, the 'smart city' is perhaps the most pervasive (Datta 2019). While ambiguous in definition, the smart city aspires to a technologically-infused urban sphere, with technology companies holding the key to creating an efficient, sustainable, and inclusive world (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020; Caprotti 2019; Marvin, Luque-Ayala, and McFarlane 2016). According to their sleek and shiny proposals, a combination of sensors, apps, and platforms can generate the data needed to build the cities of the future, and to manage them better (Kaika 2017). Consulting firms like McKinsey promise that smart-city technologies can reduce commute times, save lives, cut crime rates, improve health, reduce inequality, lower carbon emissions, detoxify the air, speed up emergency response, and much more (Angelo and

Vormann 2018; Woetzel 2018). As an all-purpose technological solution to social ills, the smart city is only the most recent in a long line of future visions that seek to make the world a better place, one city at a time.

Urban futures, bought and sold

Entangled with the paradigm of human-through-urban betterment is the process by which the urban future is leveraged to create profit. This process also features prominently in the urban imagination over the past few centuries, and continues to exert profound influence. Timothy Mitchell refers to this process as 'capitalization' (Abourahme and Jabary-Salamanca 2016). The common definition of capitalization, Mitchell reminds us, is the provision of capital for a company, or the conversion of income and assets into investments. However, capitalization also names a speculative process, equally central to modern forms of political economy, whereby the future is rendered available as a source of economic value (Bear, Birla, and Puri 2015). This often happens through the building of durable structures that promise future revenue and the selling of that promise to investors in the present. We see this unfolding across the contemporary urban world, but also throughout the historical relationship between capitalism and the city.

A classic example is the transformation of Paris under the reign of planner Baron Haussmann. As David Harvey (2003a) recounts, Paris in the 1850s was tormented by class struggle, corruption, crime, and cholera. It was a city mired in crisis with ageing infrastructure that was incompatible with emerging forms of production and consumption. To resolve these problems, Haussmann began an urban transformation of vast proportions. One of the first priorities was to construct a new road system to improve the circulation of goods and people, which would also enable the military and the police to access areas infamous for revolutionary activity. But Haussmann's vision for the future was one in which more than just the circulation of goods and people was liberated—capital, too, needed to be set free. As Walter Benjamin (1978 [1955], 159) pointed out, these reforms favored finance capital, and Paris under Haussmann began to experience 'a great speculative boom.' This speculative efflorescence was integral to the capitalist mode of production described by Henri Lefebvre (1991), in which urban space itself was a commodity to be bought and sold.

To highlight the degree to which commodification was coming to dominate not only the material production of urban space, but urban cultural life more broadly, Benjamin focused extensively on the Parisian arcades: precursors to contemporary department stores where the mass commercialization of luxury goods was first introduced. Benjamin saw the arcades as having initiated a 'cult of commodities' that offered 'the promise of happiness for the urban masses' (Buck-Morss 1995, 2). Desirable products were not the only thing on display; so, too, was an optimistic vision of 'mass utopia' to be achieved through collective consumption. World Exhibitions, which Benjamin (1978 [1955], 151) called 'sites of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish,' also performed this operation by creating a fascination with the world of objects, imbuing them with supernatural powers, and obscuring the human labor that went into producing them. In both

the arcades and in World Exhibitions, visitors encountered the 'phantasmagoria of capitalist culture,' or the enchanting, dreamlike visions of future fulfillment that could be acquired for a price (Benjamin 1978 [1955], 153; M. Cohen 1989; Hayden 2012). Though operating at a different scale, this phenomenon was deeply entwined with the commodification of urban space.

Neither the reforms spearheaded by Haussmann nor the attendant transformations of urban social and cultural life were unique to Paris, or for that matter to European cities. After all, nineteenth-century European metropolises were linked to empires whose colonial territories represented problems of rule but also promises of aesthetic inspiration, scientific discovery, and (perhaps most importantly) economic reward. As Wright (1991, 2–3) shows in the case of French Morocco, Indochina, and Madagascar, the colonies became 'a terrain for working out solutions to some of the political, social, and aesthetic problems which plagued France,' with urbanism forming the 'core of such efforts' and cities serving as 'laboratories' for testing ideas that could eventually be brought 'home.' Solutions to ills plaguing the French city, such as overcrowding and poor sanitation could be trialed overseas, with economic stagnation in the metropole being of preeminent concern (Wright 1991, 54). To rectify the crisis of overaccumulation at home, colonial administrations and allied private ventures often deployed a spatial fix with temporal dimensions: they sought to remake the colonial city to facilitate speculation on the promise of future revenue (Harvey 2003b; Mitchell 1991).

Just as colonialism was a complex historical phenomenon, with different strategies of rule manifesting in different approaches to urbanism, the phenomenon of decolonization encompassed an equally diverse set of histories. However, one common thread recurs throughout anti-colonial movements: breaking free from oppressive structures of the past involved imagining a future in which the city would play the role of protagonist. Frantz Fanon's (2004 [1961]) analysis of colonial power recognized the linkage between urban space, social relations, and the colonized body and mind, and his attempt to conceptualize a decolonized future implied a simultaneous transformation across these interrelated domains (D. Scott 1999, 211). However, the field of postcolonial studies has consistently shown that decolonization never entailed a clean break with the past, especially in geo-political and geo-economic terms.

Filip De Boeck's work on Kinshasa demonstrates how colonial institutions of governance and planning continued to shape postcolonial cities long after formal decolonization. While colonial Kinshasa was marked by division between *La Ville*, the home of the European population, and the surrounding, peripheral African city, commonly known as *La Cité*, urban growth after independence in 1960 followed the same logic. Although there were some shifts away from the spatial layout, work ethos, time management, and linguistic order of colonialism, urban reforms and public works programs continued to be 'inspired by the earlier moral models of colonialist modernity' (De Boeck 2011, 273). Even contemporary urban development projects remain entangled with the social and spatial forms of colonialism, such as the segregationist model of *ville* and *cité*, but now with a twist: 'Kinshasa … is again looking into the mirror of modernity to fashion itself, but this time the mirror no longer reflects the earlier versions of Belgian colonialist modernity, but instead it longs to capture

the aura of Dubai and other hot spots of the new urban Global South' (De Boeck 2011, 274). This pivot away from Europe, Ananya Roy (2012, 10) observes, is characteristic of new 'practices of inter-referencing' that are guided by 'South-South coordinates and emergent South-based global referents.' Although this shift undoes certain colonial legacies, such as the idea that Northern cities are the final stage in an evolutionary process of development, it leaves others untouched, such as the degree to which the urban future is embedded in capitalist political-economic orders.

Efforts to challenge this trend have been repeatedly overwhelmed by the historical conjuncture that has structured the global urban imagination from the 1970s onwards. On the one hand, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) across the global South decoupled urbanization from industrialization, even from development, setting the stage for rapid urban growth to result in the mass production of poverty (Davis 2006). On the other hand, economic restructuring throughout the cities of the global North encouraged a shift away from industrial production and towards more flexible modes of capital accumulation (Harvey 1990). This conjuncture destabilized the social objectives of post-war urbanism, which had promised benefits like full employment and decent housing, while embracing urban fragmentation and celebrating 'urban entrepreneurialism' (Harvey 1989). The competition between cities and regions was animated by the 'regulating fiction' of the 'global' or 'world-class' city, which became the 'authorized image of city success' and the 'end point of development for ambitious cities' (Robinson 2002, 246). Across the urban world, this concept has motivated efforts by a wide array of actors to make themselves and their cities 'global' or 'world-class' (Ghertner 2015). The dominant strategy for doing so is an intensification of the long-standing process by which speculative development becomes the dominant mode of capital accumulation, and the urban future is rendered a profitable commodity (Goldman 2011)—increasingly at breakneck speed (Shin, Zhao, and Koh 2020).

With the adverse effects of climate change looming on the horizon, the commodification of the urban future has taken on new dimensions. While the fields of 'green architecture' and 'ecological urbanism' represent a significant shift in the urban imagination in response to the 'urban climate emergency' (D. A. Cohen 2020), some versions, such as the work of French botanist Patrick Blanc, who designed and patented 'living walls' or 'vertical gardens' in late 1980s, remain complicit with the speculative dynamics of capitalist urbanization and the aspirational excess of elite consumption (Gandy 2010; Lovins and Cohen 2011). And like the concept of 'sustainable urbanism,' which once aspired toward a future of socio-ecological transformation without fundamentally questioning existing tenets of economic growth, the climate crisis has been met by what Sarah Knuth (2014) calls 'speculative urbanism in the green economy.' The new paradigm of 'climate urbanism' centers on the management of carbon alongside investment in resilient infrastructure, both of which offer a broad spectrum of initiatives that can serve as targets for investment and development (Long and Rice 2019). Energy-efficient retrofitting practices in the United States, for example, are 'being positioned … as at once a decarbonization strategy, frontier for green innovation and entrepreneurialism, and prop to capitalist accumulation-as-usual' (Knuth 2019, 488). Though wrapped in a cloak of moral

and ecological superiority, the most attractive feature of these emerging urban environmental solutions may be their promise of lucrative returns. As it turns out, the urban future of a climate-altered world need not be depressingly scary; creating the 'eco-city' of tomorrow can also be wildly profitable.

The future is our enemy

The previous two themes have often appeared in parallel, sometimes working in tandem and sometimes at cross-purposes, while frequently intersecting with a third: the imperative to govern cities and urban life in anticipation of future threats. This outlook owes much to political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1996 [1651]), who presumed that humans, in the state of nature (that is, in the absence of authority), inevitably engage in a struggle for dominance—a war of all against all. Having experienced the bloody English Civil War, Hobbes believed that such horrific violence was caused by the absence of sovereign power. To avoid conflict and bloodshed, as the argument goes, we have no choice but to enter into society and into contract with the state. Hobbes did not describe the spatial form of such a society or state, but the print that accompanied the original publication of *Leviathan* offered clues. It depicted the sovereign with sword and staff, exercising absolute power over an orderly, fortified city. As wilderness lay just outside the walls, the potential to revert back to chaos and conflict was always looming. Hobbes's view of human nature has since been central to urban future scenarios. Fast-forwarding to the present, many contemporary forms of urbanism can be seen as Hobbesian in their focus on securing the city against unwanted eventualities and in curtailing freedom in return for protection.

Cities are now increasingly understood as spaces of convergence for multiple threats, as strategic sites that must be secured. The phrase 'city-as-target' captures the dual nature of an urban imagination that sees the city both as something to aspire to and to protect from, or in other words: 'The city is … something to shoot for as well as shoot at' (Bishop and Clancey 2008, 55). Stephen Graham (2010, xv) has argued that this has become the new normal: '[F]or the first time since the Middle Ages, the localized geographies of cities and the systems that weave them together are starting to dominate discussions surrounding war, geopolitics and security.' While Graham's focus is the 'new military urbanism' that has spread across cities of global North and South, an orientation toward 'security' in a broader sense has saturated urban policy debates, infrastructural systems, and popular culture (Zeiderman 2016). Across these domains is the imperative to eliminate, minimize, or manage threats to the city and urban life.

While concerns about urban security may be currently ascendant, their relationship to the future emerged at key moments in the history of urbanization. In his genealogy of the mechanisms of power operating in contemporary society, Michel Foucault (2007 [1978], 12) identified the growth of cities (or towns) as an important factor. In medieval Europe, towns were separated legally, administratively, and physically from one another, and this strategy worked to prevent unwanted things from happening within their walls. For Foucault (2007, 15–16), these were juridical mechanisms, or the system of laws, regulations, and punishments designed to prohibit the undesirable from occurring. As new

towns were built, their spatial layout was meant to encourage certain desirable behaviors and functions by enabling inspection and control. Such disciplinary mechanisms comprised techniques of surveillance, supervision, and correction to ensure prescribed outcomes. In the eighteenth century, both juridical and disciplinary power were challenged as urban growth, the birth of nation-states, and the increase of extra-local economic exchange combined to force the city to open up to circulation. These developments posed a political question: How to secure cities without being able to seal off their borders or closely supervise daily activities? In response, new mechanisms were invented for organizing circulation and minimizing losses (Foucault 2007, 19–20). These mechanisms began to treat objects of concern (theft, disease, famine) as future events whose probability could be calculated and managed according to an average considered optimal or acceptable. This approach to governing the city, which Foucault alternately called 'security' and 'governmentality,' came to influence urban politics and society, though it did not replace juridical and disciplinary power. All three coexist in the contemporary city as ways of governing urban life in anticipation of future threats.

While Foucault's genealogy was primarily concerned with the history of Europe, colonial cities presented another sort of problem. On the one hand, they were spaces to be managed in relation to the threat of anti-colonial resistance. In the case of British colonialism in Africa, administrators feared that rural-urban migration would 'detribalize' African populations and undermine indirect rule, and they devised techniques for keeping colonized populations in place and under control. On the other hand, colonial cities were seen as the breeding ground for disease. In colonial Lagos, for example, the threat of malaria jeopardized the goal of making the city, in the words of a colonial governor, the 'greatest emporium of trade in this part of the continent,' and the response was a combination of swamp drainage and mosquito control projects alongside official and unofficial policies of racial segregation (Gandy 2014, 89). Fanon's (2004 [1961], 3–5) famous depiction of the divided cities of the colonized world pointed to the civilizational hierarchies and racialized inequalities that underpinned European colonialism at large, and which were reflected in attempts to govern the colonial city in relation to future threats.

Today, some of the same logics continue to reassert themselves in discussions of the so-called 'megacities' of the global South. In certain circles, these cities have become potential hotbeds of disease, terrorism, organized crime, political upheaval, and economic migration. From influential texts like Robert Kaplan's (1994) 'The Coming Anarchy,' Mike Davis's (2006) *Planet of Slums*, or Laurie Garrett's (1994) *The Coming Plague* to reports by the US Army on how to prepare for 'a complex and uncertain future' (Harris 2014), cities of the developing world are seen to pose a threat not only to their host countries, but also to rich nations in the global North. The modern environmental movement emerged with a similar concern, as evidenced by the influential book, *The Population Bomb*, by biologist Paul Ehrlich (1968). Its dismal outlook on the global environmental future treated the growth of cities in the developing world as a sign of 'overpopulation,' which would eventually lead to ecological crisis and mass starvation if left unchecked. Here Fanon's depiction of the hierarchies and inequalities endemic to colonial cities is scaled up to the urban world as a

whole, and the walls that once separated the 'native' and European sectors are erected at international borders to keep external threats at bay. These spatial divisions are also rendered temporal, with poorer cities (and especially their slums, shantytowns, and squatter settlements) symbolizing a dystopian future that may eventually spread beyond their borders.

Such anxieties, taken to their logical extreme, have led to the development of 'fortress cities,' which Mike Davis (1990, 224) has described as cities 'brutally divided between "fortified cells" of affluent society and "places of terror" where the police battle the criminalized poor,' and where the defense of wealth and privilege is translated into repressions of space and movement. The fortification of the urban landscape to which Davis refers has occurred across multiple scales. In the domestic sphere, fortified enclaves, which Teresa Caldeira (2000, 83) defines as 'privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work,' have been marketed as an 'escape from the city' where one can live among people of similar social class in a 'secure domestic environment.' In the public realm, concepts like 'defensible space' and 'hostile architecture,' which aim to discourage certain people and activities through design, have often translated into blatant exercises in criminalizing poor, racialized urban citizens and the spaces they inhabit (Kipfer 2015; Newman 1973). Uniting these fortification projects is an urban imagination that sees the city as a space of potential danger, and whose effects are unevenly distributed: some more frequently enjoy a sense of security, while others are more frequently identified as security threats (Browne 2015).

With climate change and the notion of the Anthropocene, the future has become increasingly menacing to urban life. Along with mounting scientific evidence, a series of climate-related disasters have drawn attention to 'a wide range of hazardous, even deadly, conditions that now face urban citizens and ecosystems' (Gotham and Greenberg 2014, 3). In response, Ash Amin (2013) notes that a 'new lexicon of words with ambiguous meanings' (such as preparedness, resilience, adaptation, and mitigation) has emerged to prescribe how urban governments and citizens should deal with 'the inevitability of danger and disruption' on the horizon. These concepts foresee an inherently volatile future that cannot be controlled or managed according to existing frameworks and institutions, hence the need to redesign the social and infrastructural systems of cities to withstand and bounce back from any and all eventualities. The 'smart city' is being positioned as a potential solution to this urban fear, offering technological solutions to emerging threats that appear poised to disrupt the city's political stability and economic success. So, too, what Joshua Long and Jennifer Rice (2019, 1004) call 'climate urbanism' assumes a defensive posture, with the environment coming to serve as 'the chief justification for preserving, securing, and promoting the livelihoods of some cities and their citizens over others, leaving landscapes of inequality and violence in the name of security and safety.'

But alongside these dystopian visions of the urban future are what Matthew Gandy (2014, 211) calls 'counterdystopian' projections, which 'present an avant-garde response to climate uncertainty as a space for reinventing relations between society and nature.' Gandy (2014, 213) cites imaginative renderings of London in 2090 adapted to a permanently flooded state, which he says contains

'an optimism almost entirely lacking in much contemporary environmental discourse about human capacity to create a better future.' Likewise, visions of 'sunken cities,' according to Paul Dobraszczyk (2017), contain both dystopian and utopian representations of urban life submerged by the forces of climate change, specifically rising sea levels. The broader implication, Dobraszczyk (2017, 885) notes, is that 'the imagination of urban futures is not simply a game to be played—a diversion from life in the real world—but rather an essential way in which we can cultivate resilience for ourselves, not in order to wallow in pessimism or justify inaction, but rather the opposite—to nourish mental lives that *resist* the increasingly polarizing political and social discourses that are emerging out of radically uncertain urban futures and the threat of catastrophe.' While acknowledging that the threats from climate change are real and serious, these projections question the assumption that the future is our enemy, and instead envision a better version of human society emerging from the ruins of the contemporary city.

Ways forward

If engaging critically with the urban future is now more urgent than ever, we believe the time is right to look for conceptual resources and analytical tools that can help make sense of the current conjuncture. We began by highlighting the consensus that the global future is an urban future, and that this future presents a pressing problem. Whether or not these perspectives are accurate, they do point to an emerging reality—that the urban future is everywhere, so to speak. Departing from this observation, we outlined an approach for conceptualizing the future as a historically specific cultural horizon that defines how societies organize themselves and their institutions, and one that is inextricably bound up with the modern/colonial history of urbanization and with the city as both idea and spatial form. We argued that it is worth taking into account the archive of urban future-thinking and future-making, and considering how that archive might inform contemporary debates about the uncertain future of cities. We then shifted to a wide-ranging discussion of influential ways in which the future has shaped cities and urban life. This discussion was organized into three thematic sections that correspond to recurring themes in the history of the urban imagination, and that continue to resonate today.

In conclusion, we would like to return to the four qualifiers mentioned briefly at the outset, as they point to possible ways forward. The first is that the themes elaborated here are by no means exhaustive, absolute, or universal. Our focus on idealization, capitalization, and securitization was motivated by our sense that these processes remain fundamentally important to the urban imagination, but we are aware that our account is partial and incomplete. And many of the visions we discuss, while asserting their universality, aspiring to global dominance, and wielding substantial power, are products of specific historical circumstances and geographical contexts. The co-constitution of modernity and coloniality has produced profoundly uneven and unequal urban conditions throughout the world, and these have given rise to innumerable ways of envisioning the urban future. With this in mind, we hope to inspire others to consider the wide

spectrum of alternative future visions that were not discussed, or to reorganize (and, in so doing, reconceptualize) the ones that were.

If this analytical reflection does have potential utility beyond what has been presented here, we want to suggest that may be for analyzing the ways in which idealization, capitalization, and securitization relate to one another. Although this article's structure might give the impression that these are independent, unrelated processes, we encourage others to track the moments in which they intersect, sometimes working toward the same objective and sometimes working at cross-purposes. For example, the process by which the urban future is embedded in capitalist political-economic orders hinges on the notion that the human condition can be improved through interventions in urban space. Likewise, the imperative to govern the city in anticipation of future threats draws its ideological power from the fact that the urban future is both morally and economically valuable. Yet efforts to protect the city against undesirable eventualities can also turn out to be unprofitable and may indeed work against values integral to the notion that a better city will lead to a better world. In other words, there is more work to be done in examining both convergences and divergences in processes of idealization, capitalization, and securitization in the domain of the urban future.

Although we stand by our claim that the 'urban' and the 'future' are tightly linked, we find it equally important to stress that this link is by no means necessary or automatic. Many contemporary urbanists treat the urban condition as a foregone conclusion for the planet, and in doing so elevate their authority and expertise while rendering obsolete other rich traditions of thought and practice. In contrast, we urge urbanists to question the teleological inevitability of the 'urban' and to remain open to future visions emanating from outside their purview—that is, from beyond the urban world, however defined.[3] We believe this is especially necessary at a historical moment in which the urban future is radically uncertain, given ecological and epidemiological concerns of a global nature—concerns that force us to contend with the possibility that the city as we know it may be threatening the future survival of humanity.

Finally, while our focus has been on grand visions of the urban future, many of them underpinning the development of the modern/colonial world, we want to end by reminding our readers that other scales and perspectives are of fundamental importance. We do not wish to romanticize ideas emanating from the everyday, the quotidian, or the grassroots—they can sometimes be quite unsavory—or to treat them as categorically distinct from the realm of governmental management and capitalist speculation—politicians and capitalists are human actors, too, after all. And we do not advocate uncritically embracing models from elsewhere in the quest to counter a simplistic notion of 'Western' or 'Northern' hegemony. We do, however, want to suggest that the truly transformative ideas, which contemporary urban society so desperately needs, are unlikely to come from the privileged and the powerful—those who got us into this mess in the first place!—but rather from those whose voices have been silenced and whose existence has been marginalized. While we have sought to offer critical resources for grappling with the urban imagination by returning to the historical record, we urge others to advance this pursuit by engaging with the archive of future visions that have been willfully ignored, woefully unappreciated, or systematically erased.

Looking ahead, we suspect the urban future will remain a strategic terrain of social and political struggle and we hope that this approach will support the efforts of urban scholars, practitioners, activists, and citizens alike to engage—critically, creatively, and constructively—with the city of tomorrow, today. This will involve grappling not only with the presence of forms of future-thinking and future-making that have continually shaped the urban imagination, but also with the emerging contours of the future visions presently unfolding—some of which are potentially promising, others downright troubling. By taking stock of both historical perspectives and contemporary possibilities, we can learn to better understand the imaginary and material processes that bring cities into being, and perhaps even how to shape them in widely beneficial and truly inclusionary ways.

Notes

1 For a parallel discussion, see Dobraszczyk (2019). For an argument in favor of using 'critical excavations of the past with views to future urbanisms,' see Sankalia (2012). For earlier efforts to track the history of urban futures, see Lewis Mumford's work (Kornbluh 2003, 1965).

2 This article emerges from a postgraduate course in which both authors have been actively involved (one author designed and taught the course; the other was first a student and later contributed to the teaching). This pedagogical context provided a dialogical space in which to construct and refine the analytical reflection offered here as well as to evaluate the sources discussed in terms of their relevance to contemporary urban debates.

3 We are referring primarily here to debates surrounding the concept of 'planetary urbanization' (Brenner and Schmid 2015).

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