

## Betrayal in the City: The State as a Treacherous Partner

### Epilogue to the special issue “Betrayal in the City: Urban Development across the Globe”

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This special issue, “Betrayal in the City: Urban Development across the Globe,” presents studies of urban development that include practices and experiences of betrayal. In the introduction, we argued how betrayal is inherent to urban development. The ensuing articles brought together debates from both urban anthropology and the anthropology of the state. Questions about the urban—and how it is changing—are thus entangled with questions about the state.

Lanari’s study of a large-scale urban redevelopment program in Sandy Springs, a suburb of Atlanta, USA, shows how the program’s Master Plan presented beautiful promises of an inclusive neighborhood with all the amenities that the future residents and other stakeholders could desire. The local authorities, together with their private-sector partners, produced a compelling vision of a future in which “everybody’s neighborhood” would emerge. Lanari narrates how residents and activists felt betrayed when aspects of the plans that would have specifically benefited working-class residents were eliminated in favor of solutions for middle-income residents. Her analysis shows how the project, for a very long time, left residents and other stakeholders uncertain about the future of their neighborhood and how, ultimately, it excluded working-class residents from having a viable future in the city.

In her contribution, Salmi shows how, in the city of Ahmedabad, India, state-sponsored urban development plans promised the creation of a slum-free, world-class city. For relocated slum dwellers, the personalized image of these promises coalesced in the figure of Prime Minister Modi, who evoked dreams of improved living conditions and a better future but then betrayed and abandoned the slum residents. The residents were aware of the growing gap between the world-class image of their city—an image to which they also aspired—and their material reality, which they experienced as being excluded from that city, as being “thrown into the jungle.” Salmi also shows how betrayal “trickled down” from the state to the neighborhoods of marginalized urban areas, as residents adopted and adapted policy discourse to discriminate against their poorer neighbors, categorizing them as “third class” citizens—people who did not, and never would, belong to the “world class” city.

Kolling zooms in on a slum-upgrading and relocation project in Salvador, Brazil, in which residents were transferred from their informal settlements to new houses. She describes how the residents felt betrayed by the authorities because their new houses were sloppily built with sub-standard construction materials. Furthermore, the state did not keep its promise of providing tenure rights. Meanwhile, the long-term residents of the area treated the newcomers as inferior. The authorities presented its slum-upgrading policies as catalysts of social inclusion, but the relocated residents ended up in a site of exclusion that resembled the place from which the authorities had removed them: an informal settlement where they had to invest their scarce resources in (re)building and maintaining their precarious dwellings, while being stigmatized by the other, more established, residents.

Endres shows how small-scale traders in a state-run market in Lào Cai, Vietnam, disagreed with and protested against an intervention that set out to turn their market into a modern indoor commercial space. The stallholders distrusted the state and criticized its top-down policies. While they wanted progress, they did not share the state's vision—especially plans to significantly increase the stall rent in order to cover part of the construction costs, which caused much economic uncertainty amongst the traders. In their view, the state not only threatened to increase their debts but also broke the “socialist contract” in which the state recognizes people's contribution to the nation-state and offers them social protection and services in return (cf. Schwenkel 2015). As law-abiding and tax-paying citizens, they felt betrayed by the state because their rights were not respected and because they were not included in the narrative of progress and development espoused by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

These different studies give rise to the question: How should we understand feelings of betrayal against the backdrop of people's imaginations of the state? If practices and feelings of betrayal are part and parcel of state interventions, how do people imagine the state and its role in the interventions? The state is also pivotal in urban development in most countries, given its partnerships with private actors such as project developers, construction companies, and real estate investors. Local authorities, in tandem with national jurisdiction, approve substantial changes to the living and working environments of many city residents, with significant consequences. The state (directly) intervenes in people's lives, or (indirectly) allows for interventions. Residents and other stakeholders (e.g., workers in commercial areas) hold the state accountable for the interventions that give rise to their grievances, claims, and protests.

Urban development, as we argued in the introduction, often comes as a package wrapped in a dream of modernity. Before, during, and sometimes even after an intervention, the state promises order and progress. The message of urban development is one of modernity, beauty, and redemption; it is presented as a solution, for example, to urban afflictions: you have suffered enough, now better times will come—we will change

this neighborhood and make it healthier, safer, and more attractive. It also, as Kolling and Lanari (this issue) show, often contains a message of social inclusion, generating fantasies of egalitarian cities.

In urban development projects, it seems that betrayal has become an intrinsic feature of how people imagine the state. The state has different, nonexclusive faces (Navaro-Yashin 2002), and the face of betrayal is one such face that it shows to its subjects. It can simultaneously be a provider of goods and a punitive force, warm and cold, intimate and fearsome (Koster 2014). The state provides social assistance to the urban poor, but it also serves the interests of multinational companies that destroy the poor's living environment, livelihoods, and health. The relationship between the state and its subjects, as Insa Koch (2015) argues, can be compared to a relationship between a married couple, a metaphor introduced by one of her female informants. Her study focuses on women in an English council estate who depended heavily on state allowances. The women compared their situation to the past, when men—who were mostly unemployed at the time of Koch's study—provided the family income. Hence, as her informant said, "the state has replaced the man" (2015, 84). Given the examples the studies in this issue have described, it is clear that if one of the faces of the state is that of a husband or partner, then it is the face of a partner who lies, breaks promises, and is unfaithful. It is also a partner who admits to having made mistakes, promises to improve their behavior, and then fails to keep their promise. The state, as such, is a partner who betrays, time and again. Salmi's study (this issue) shows how this idea became very personalized for the slum residents of Ahmedabad, for whom the state became conflated with the figure of Prime Minister Modi.

Each of the articles shows how, from the other side of the relationship, city residents criticize the state for its betrayal. Their previous experiences tell them to doubt its beautiful promises. They are filled with aversion and suspicion. Yet, they also embrace the hope that, this time, its promise of a better future is for real. Looking at the state-subject relationship through the lens of an intimate relationship between partners enables us to see how this relationship is problematic because betrayal is an intrinsic element. Sooy Kim (2010), in a study of contemporary English literature, argues that people always find betrayal immoral and despicable, but that it occurs frequently and is, in that sense, ordinary. This resonates with the relationships between the state and the urban residents we studied. Intimate relationships, Lauren Berlant (1998, 281) argues, "inevitably meet the instabilities of sexuality, money, expectation, and exhaustion." These may produce "moral dramas of estrangement and betrayal, along with terrible spectacles of neglect and violence even where desire, perhaps, endures" (Berlant 1998, 281). Indeed, the state keeps desire alive, time after time, through its promises, its representations of the future, and its allegiance to moral notions of care and solidarity. Endres (this issue) argues that the state communicates its policies around urban development in such a way as to create a narrative of

progress and development, often masking the sense of betrayal sparked by specific interventions. In spite of its estrangement and betrayal, the state persistently generates hope and instills aspirations in its subjects (Nuijten 2003; Jansen 2012).

As discussed in the introductory article to this issue, “institutional betrayal” also seems relevant here, as the state, as an institution, can engage in violent betrayal through its “protocols, policies, or failure to fulfill the promises of these procedures” (Gentile 2018, 649). Institutional betrayal occurs in an intimate context, when the state deceives individuals who, both affectively and materially, trust and depend upon it (Smith and Freyd 2014; Doyle 2015). This closely resembles what happens to many people who are affected by urban development interventions that leave them vulnerable to the state’s treachery. They trust that the intervention will bring them a better future and they often depend upon it for their livelihood. However, in the end they are abandoned and feel deceived.

Betrayal is an act of violation, as it violates a contract, trust, or confidence. Sometimes, residents and other stakeholders protest against the state and try to force it to keep its promises (e.g., Endres, this issue). In other instances, they are too afraid or too battered to go against the state, fearing the violence that may follow their resistance. As an untrustworthy partner, the state makes violence an intrinsic element of the state-subject relationship. This resonates with the basic Hobbesian principle of modern state theory: The subjects grant the state its monopoly on violence, as such creating a situation in which the state protects them from other (violent) powers while also imposing its violence upon them. This violence often comes disguised as “education” or “civilization.” Urban development, as shown in the introduction to this issue, often means subjecting the urban poor to middle-class ideas of beauty, proper behavior, and cleanliness. The state, as a treacherous partner, imposes the parameters of this relationship on its subjects. Even worse, our studies show how building citizenship—as a contract between state and subjects that bestows the latter with obligations and rights—often results in yet another betrayal when these rights are ignored.

Finally, it is important to ask what the consequences are of seeing the state as a treacherous partner. Endres (this issue) shows how the traders in Lào Cai already distrusted the state before its intervention. During my own fieldwork in Brazil, I saw a similar attitude amongst residents whose houses were targeted for “upgrading.” I argue that it is useful to think about this from the vantage point of the sociological imagination. The sociological imagination, according to C. Wright Mills (1959), is where people’s personal experience becomes connected to their understanding of wider society. It makes people aware of how individual histories and practices are connected to society as a whole. Imagining the state as a disloyal partner, as this special issue shows, has become commonplace amongst low- or no-income city residents faced with urban development interventions. Their feelings of betrayal have become part

of how they make sense of the state. Moreover, as Salmi (this issue) illustrates, betrayal, as a common state practice, has become translated into a betrayal of neighbors amongst themselves. As such, state betrayal has considerable knock-on effects. It would be going too far to argue that the state is the principal instigator of neighborly betrayal, but it is imperative that studies of urban development—or state representatives who work in the sector—account for the harmful consequences of the state’s (institutional) betrayal. These consequences not only affect residents’ present and future place in the city, but also have socially disruptive impacts—even if unintended.

## Notes

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