

Planet of Slums



MIKE DAVIS



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for my darlin' Roisin

The Urban Climacteric

We live in the age of the city. The city is everything to us – it consumes us, and for that reason we glorify it.

*Onookome Okome*¹

Sometime in the next year or two, a woman will give birth in the Lagos slum of Ajegunle, a young man will flee his village in west Java for the bright lights of Jakarta, or a farmer will move his impoverished family into one of Lima's innumerable *pueblos jovenes*. The exact event is unimportant and it will pass entirely unnoticed. Nonetheless it will constitute a watershed in human history, comparable to the Neolithic or Industrial revolutions. For the first time the urban population of the earth will outnumber the rural. Indeed, given the imprecisions of Third World censuses, this epochal transition has probably already occurred.

The earth has urbanized even faster than originally predicted by the Club of Rome in its notoriously Malthusian 1972 report *Limits of Growth*. In 1950 there were 86 cities in the world with a population of more than one million; today there are 400, and by 2015 there will be at least 550.² Cities, indeed, have absorbed nearly two-thirds of the

1 Onookome Okome, "Writing the Anxious City: Images of Lagos in Nigerian Home Video Films," in Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds), *Under Siege: Four African Cities – Freetown Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2002, p. 316.

2 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects*, the 2001 Revision, New York 2002.

global population explosion since 1950, and are currently growing by a million babies and migrants each week.³ The world's urban labor force has more than doubled since 1980, and the present urban population – 3.2 billion – is larger than the total population of the world when John F. Kennedy was inaugurated.⁴ The global countryside, meanwhile, has reached its maximum population and will begin to shrink after 2020. As a result, cities will account for virtually all future world population growth, which is expected to peak at about 10 billion in 2050.⁵

Megacities and *Desakotas*

Ninety-five percent of this final buildout of humanity will occur in the urban areas of developing countries, whose populations will double to nearly 4 billion over the next generation.⁶ Indeed, the combined urban population of China, India, and Brazil already roughly equals that of Europe and North America. The scale and velocity of Third World urbanization, moreover, utterly dwarfs that of Victorian Europe. London in 1910 was seven times larger than it had been in 1800, but Dhaka, Kinshasa, and Lagos today are each approximately *forty* times larger than they were in 1950. China – urbanizing “at a speed unprecedented in human history” – added more city-dwellers in the 1980s than did all of Europe (including Russia) in the entire nineteenth century!⁷

3 Population Information Program, Center for Communication Programs, the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, *Meeting the Urban Challenge*, Population Reports, vol. 30, no. 4, Baltimore 2002 (Fall), p. 1.

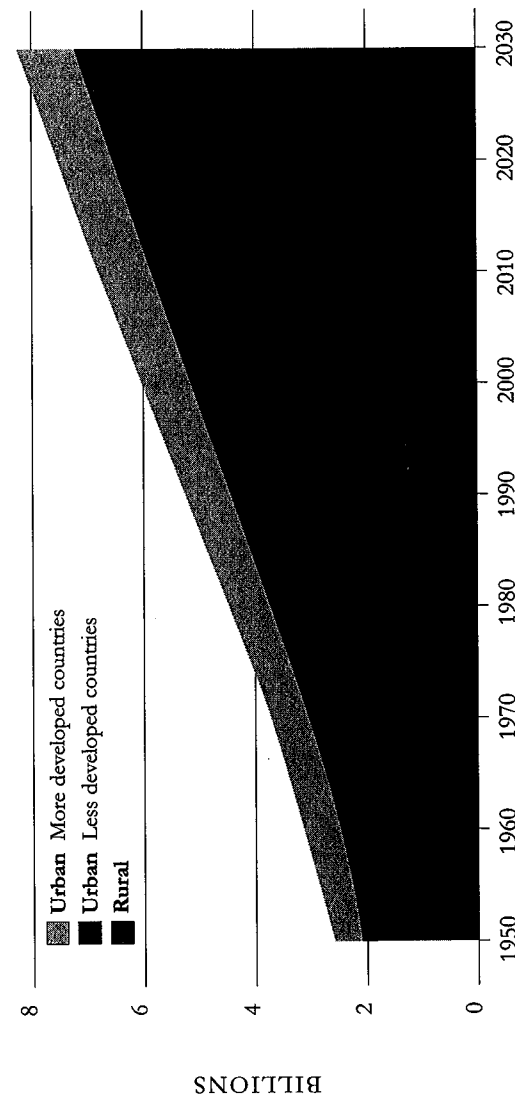
4 Dennis Rondinelli and John Kasarda, “Job Creation Needs in Third World Cities,” in John D. Kasarda and Allan M. Parnell (eds), *Third World Cities: Problems, Policies and Prospects*, Newbury Park 1993, p. 101.

5 Wolfgang Lutz, Warren Sanderson, and Sergei Scherbov, “Doubling of World Population Unlikely,” *Nature* 387 (19 June 1997), pp. 803–04. However, the populations of sub-Saharan Africa will triple, and of India, double.

6 Although the velocity of global urbanization is not in doubt, the growth rates of specific cities may brake abruptly as they encounter the frictions of size and congestion. A famous instance of such a “polarization reversal” is Mexico City, widely predicted to achieve a population of 25 million during the 1990s (the current population is between 19 and 22 million). See Yue-man Yeung, “Geography in an Age of Mega-Cities,” *International Social Sciences Journal* 151 (1997), p. 93.

7 *Financial Times*, 27 July 2004; David Drakakis-Smith, *Third World Cities*, 2nd ed., London 2000.

Figure 1
World Population Growth



Source: United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision* (2002): tables A.3 and A.4.

Figure 2⁸
Third World Megacities
(population in millions)

	1950	2004
Mexico City	2.9	22.1
Seoul-Injon	1.0	21.9
(New York)	12.3	21.9)
São Paulo	2.4	19.9
Mumbai (Bombay)	2.9	19.1
Delhi	1.4	18.6
Jakarta	1.5	16.0
Dhaka	0.4	15.9
Kolkata (Calcutta)	4.4	15.1
Cairo	2.4	15.1
Manila	1.5	14.3
Karachi	1.0	13.5
Lagos	0.3	13.4
Shanghai	5.3	13.2
Buenos Aires	4.6	12.6
Rio de Janeiro	3.0	11.9
Tehran	1.0	11.5
Istanbul	1.1	11.1
Beijing	3.9	10.8
Krung Thep (Bangkok)	1.4	9.1
Gauteng (Witwatersrand)	1.2	9.0
Kinshasa/Brazzaville	0.2	8.9
Lima	0.6	8.2
Bogotá	0.7	8.0

8 Composite of UN-HABITAT Urban Indicators Database (2002); Thomas Brinkhoff "The Principal Agglomerations of the World", www.citypopulation.de/World.html (May 2004).

The most celebrated phenomenon, of course, is the burgeoning of new megacities with populations in excess of 8 million and, even more spectacularly, hypercities with more than 20 million inhabitants – the estimated urban population of the world at the time of the French Revolution. In 2000, according to the UN Population Division, only metropolitan Tokyo had incontestably passed that threshold (although Mexico City, New York, and Seoul-Injon made other lists).⁹ The *Far Eastern Economic Review* estimates that by 2025 Asia alone might have ten or eleven conurbations that large, including Jakarta (24.9 million), Dhaka (25 million), and Karachi (26.5 million). Shanghai, whose growth was frozen for decades by Maoist policies of deliberate underurbanization, could have as many as 27 million residents in its huge estuarial metro-region. Mumbai (Bombay), meanwhile, is projected to attain a population of 33 million, although no one knows whether such gigantic concentrations of poverty are biologically or ecologically sustainable.¹⁰

The exploding cities of the developing world are also weaving extraordinary new urban networks, corridors, and hierarchies. In the Americas, geographers already talk about a leviathan known as the Rio/São Paulo Extended Metropolitan Region (RSPER) which includes the medium-sized cities on the 500-kilometer-long transport axis between Brazil's two largest metropolises, as well as the important industrial area dominated by Campinas; with a current population of 37 million, this embryonic megalopolis is already larger than Tokyo–Yokohama.¹¹ Likewise, the giant amoeba of Mexico City, already having consumed Toluca, is extending pseudopods that will eventually incorporate much of central Mexico, including the cities of Cuernavaca, Puebla, Cuautla, Pachuca, and Queretaro, into a single megalopolis with a mid-twenty-first-century population of approximately 50 million – about 40 percent of the national total.¹²

Even more surprising is the vast West African conurbation rapidly coalescing along the Gulf of Guinea with Lagos (23 million people by

9 UN-HABITAT Urban Indicators Database (2002).

10 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Asia 1998 Yearbook, p. 63.

11 Hamilton Tolosa, "The Rio/São Paulo Extended Metropolitan Region: A Quest for Global Integration," *The Annals of Regional Science* 37:2 (September 2003), pp. 480, 485.

12 Gustavo Garza, "Global Economy, Metropolitan Dynamics and Urban Policies in Mexico," *Cities* 16:3 (1999), p. 154.

2015 according to one estimate) as its fulcrum. By 2020, according to an OECD study, this network of 300 cities larger than 100,000 will “have a population comparable to the U.S. east coast, with five cities of over one million ... [and] a total of more than 60 million inhabitants along a strip of land 600 kilometers long, running east to west between Benin City and Accra.”¹³ Tragically, it probably will also be the biggest single footprint of urban poverty on earth.

Figure 3¹⁴
Urbanization of the Gulf of Guinea

Cities	1960	1990	2020
over 100,000	17	90	300
over 5000	600	3500	6000

The largest-scale posturban structures, however, are emerging in East Asia. The Pearl River (Hong Kong–Guangzhou)¹⁵ and the Yangze River (Shanghai) deltas, along with the Beijing–Tianjin corridor, are well on their way to becoming urban-industrial megapolises comparable to Tokyo–Osaka, the lower Rhine, or New York–Philadelphia. Indeed, China, unique amongst developing countries, is aggressively planning urban development at a super-regional scale using Tokyo–Yokohama and the US eastern seaboard as its templates. Created in 1983, the Shanghai Economic Zone is the biggest subnational planning entity in the world, encompassing the metropolis and five adjoining provinces with an aggregate population almost as large as that of the United States.¹⁶

These new Chinese megalopolises, according to two leading researchers, may be only the first stage in the emergence of “a

13 Jean-Marie Cour and Serge Snrech (eds), *Preparing for the Future: A Vision of West Africa in the Year 2020*, Paris 1998, p. 94.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

15 See Yue-man Yeung, “Viewpoint: Integration of the Pearl River Delta,” *International Development Planning Review* 25:3 (2003).

16 Aprodicio Laquian, “The Effects of National Urban Strategy and Regional Development Policy on Patterns of Urban Growth in China,” in Gavin Jones and Pravin Visaria (eds), *Urbanization in Large Developing Countries: China, Inonesia, Brazil, and India*, Oxford 1997, pp. 62–63.

continuous urban corridor stretching from Japan/North Korea to West Java.”¹⁷ As it takes shape over the next century, this great dragon-like sprawl of cities will constitute the physical and demographic culmination of millennia of urban evolution. The ascendancy of coastal East Asia, in turn, will surely promote a Tokyo–Shanghai “world city” dipole to equality with the New York–London axis in the control of global flows of capital and information.

The price of this new urban order, however, will be increasing inequality within and between cities of different sizes and economic specializations. Chinese experts, indeed, are currently debating whether the ancient income-and-development chasm between city and countryside is now being replaced by an equally fundamental gap between small, particularly inland cities and the giant coastal metropolises.¹⁸ However, the smaller cities are precisely where most of Asia will soon live. If megacities are the brightest stars in the urban firmament, three-quarters of the burden of future world population growth will be borne by faintly visible second-tier cities and smaller urban areas: places where, as UN researchers emphasize, “there is little or no planning to accommodate these people or provide them with services.”¹⁹ In China – officially, 43 percent urban in 1993 – the number of official “cities” has soared from 193 to 640 since 1978, but the great metropolises, despite extraordinary growth, have actually declined in relative share of urban population. It is, instead, the small- to medium-sized cities and recently “city-ized” towns that have absorbed the majority of the rural labor-power made redundant by post-1979 market reforms.²⁰ In part, this is the result of conscious planning: since the 1970s the Chinese state has embraced policies designed to promote a more balanced urban hierarchy of industrial investment and population.²¹

17 Yue-man Yeung and Fu-chen Lo, “Global restructuring and emerging urban corridors in Pacific Asia,” in Lo and Yeung (eds), *Emerging World Cities in Pacific Asia*, Tokyo 1996, p. 41.

18 Gregory Guldin, *What's a Peasant To Do? Village Becoming Town in Southern China*, Boulder 2001, p. 13.

19 UN-HABITAT, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003*, [henceforth: *Challenge*], London 2003, p. 3.

20 Guldin, *What's a Peasant To Do?*

21 Sidney Goldstein, “Levels of Urbanization in China,” in Mattei Dogon and John Kasarda (eds), *The Metropolis Era: Volume One – A World of Giant Cities*, Newbury Park 1988, pp. 210–21.

In India, by contrast, small cities and towns have lost economic traction and demographic share in the recent neoliberal transition – there is little evidence of Chinese-style “dual-track” urbanization. But as the urban ratio soared in the 1990s from one quarter to one third of total population, medium-sized cities, such as Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, Ludhiana in the Punjab, and, most famously, Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, have burgeoned. Hyderabad, growing almost 5 percent per annum over the last quarter century, is predicted to become a megacity of 10.5 million by 2015. According to the most recent census, 35 Indian cities are now above the one million threshold, accounting for a total population of nearly 110 million.²²

In Africa, the supernova growth of a few cities like Lagos (from 300,000 in 1950 to 13.5 million today) has been matched by the transformation of several dozen small towns and oases like Ouagadougou, Nouakchott, Douala, Kampala, Tanta, Conakry, Ndjamena, Lumumbashi, Mogadishu, Antananarivo, and Bamako into sprawling cities larger than San Francisco or Manchester. (Most spectacular, perhaps, has been the transformation of the bleak Congolese diamond-trading center of Mbuji-Mayi from a small town of 25,000 in 1960 into a contemporary metropolis of 2 million, with growth occurring mostly in the last decade.²³) In Latin America, where primary cities long monopolized growth, secondary cities such as Santa Cruz, Valencia, Tijuana, Curitiba, Temuco, Maracay, Bucaramanga, Salvador, and Belem are now booming, with the most rapid increase in cities of fewer than 500,000 people.²⁴

Moreover, as anthropologist Gregory Guldin has emphasized, urbanization must be conceptualized as structural transformation along, and intensified interaction between, every point of an urban–rural continuum. In Guldin’s case study of southern China, he found that the

countryside is urbanizing *in situ* as well as generating epochal migrations; “Villages become more like market and *xiang* towns, and county towns and small cities become more like large cities.” Indeed, in many cases, rural people no longer have to migrate to the city: it migrates to them.²⁵

This is also true in Malaysia, where journalist Jeremy Seabrook describes the fate of Penang fishermen “engulfed by urbanization without migrating, their lives overturned, even while remaining on the spot where they were born.” After the fishermen’s homes were cut off from the sea by a new highway, their fishing grounds polluted by urban waste, and neighboring hillsides deforested to build apartment blocks, they had little choice but to send their daughters into nearby Japanese-owned sweatshop factories. “It was the destruction,” Seabrook emphasizes, “not only of the livelihood of people who had always lived symbiotically with the sea, but also of the psyche and spirit of the fishing people.”²⁶

The result of this collision between the rural and the urban in China, much of Southeast Asia, India, Egypt, and perhaps West Africa is a hermaphroditic landscape, a partially urbanized countryside that Guldin argues may be “a significant new path of human settlement and development ... a form neither rural nor urban but a blending of the two wherein a dense web of transactions ties large urban cores to their surrounding regions.”²⁷ German architect and urban theorist Thomas Sieverts proposes that this diffuse urbanism, which he calls *Zwischenstadt* (“in-between city”), is rapidly becoming the defining landscape of the twenty-first century in rich as well as poor countries, regardless of earlier urban histories. Unlike Guldin, however, Sieverts conceptualizes these new conurbations as polycentric webs with neither traditional cores nor recognizable peripheries.

25 Guldin, *What's a Peasant To Do?*, pp. 14–17.

26 Jeremy Seabrook, *In the Cities of the South: Scenes from a Developing World*, London 1996, pp. 16–17.

27 Guldin, *What's a Peasant To Do?*, pp. 14–17. See also Jing Neng Li, “Structural and Spatial Economic Changes and Their Effects on Recent Urbanization in China,” in Jones and Visaria, *Urbanization in Large Developing Countries*, p. 44. Ian Yeboah finds a *desakota* (“city village”) pattern developing around Accra, whose sprawling form (188 percent increase in surface area in 1990s) and recent automobilization he attributes to the impact of structural adjustment policies. Yeboah, “Demographic and Housing Aspects of Structural Adjustment and Emerging Urban Form in Accra, Ghana,” *Africa Today*, 50: 1 (2003), pp. 108, 116–17.

22 *Census 2001*, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India; and Alain Durand-Lasserve and Lauren Royston, “International Trends and Country Contexts,” in Alain Durand-Lasserve and Lauren Royston (eds), *Holding Their Ground: Secure Land Tenure for the Urban Poor in Developing Countries*, London 2002, p. 20.

23 Mbuji-Mayi is the center of the “ultimate company state” in the Kaasai region run by the Société Minière de Bakwanga. See Michela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in the Congo*, London 2000, pp. 121–23.

24 Miguel Villa and Jorge Rodríguez, “Demographic Trends in Latin America’s Metropolises, 1950–1990,” in Alan Gilbert (ed.), *The Mega-City in Latin America*, Tokyo and New York 1996, pp. 33–34.

Across all cultures of the entire world, they share specific common characteristics: a structure of completely different urban environments which at first sight is diffuse and disorganized with individual islands of geometrically structured patterns, a structure without a clear centre, but therefore with many more or less sharply functionally specialized areas, networks and nodes.²⁸

Such "extended metropolitan regions," writes geographer David Drakakis-Smith, referring specifically to Delhi, "represent a fusion of urban and regional development in which the distinction between what is urban and rural has become blurred as cities expand along corridors of communication, by-passing or surrounding small towns and villages which subsequently experience *in situ* changes in function and occupation."²⁹ In Indonesia, where a similar process of rural/urban hybridization is far advanced in Jabotabek (the greater Jakarta region), researchers call these novel landuse patterns *desakotas* ("city villages") and argue whether they are transitional landscapes or a dramatic new species of urbanism.³⁰

An analogous debate is taking place amongst Latin American urbanists as they confront the emergence of polycentric urban systems without clear rural/urban boundaries. Geographers Adrian Aguilar and Peter Ward advance the concept of "region-based urbanization" to characterize contemporary peri-urban development around Mexico City, São Paulo, Santiago, and Buenos Aires. "Lower rates of metropolitan growth have coincided with a more intense circulation of commodities, people and capital between the city center and its hinterland, with ever more diffuse frontiers between the urban and the rural, and a manufacturing deconcentration towards the metropolitan periphery, and in

28 Thomas Sieverts, *Cities Without Cities: An Interpretation of the Zwischenstadt*, London 2003, p. 3.

29 Drakakis-Smith, *Third World Cities*, p. 21.

30 See overview in T. G. McGee, "The Emergence of *Desakota* Regions in Asia: Expanding a Hypothesis," in Norton Ginsburg, Bruce Koppel, and T. G. McGee (eds), *The Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia*, Honolulu 1991. Philip Kelly, in his book on Manila, agrees with McGee about the specificity of the Southeast Asian path of urbanization, but argues that *desakota* landscapes are unstable, with agriculture slowly being squeezed out. Kelly, *Everyday Urbanization: The Social Dynamics of Development in Manila's Extended Metropolitan Region*, London 1999, pp. 284–86.

particular beyond into the peri-urban spaces or penumbra that surround mega-cities." Aguilar and Ward believe that "it is in this peri-urban space that the reproduction of labor is most likely to be concentrated in the world's largest cities in the 21st century."³¹

In any case, the new and old don't easily mix, and on the *desakota* outskirts of Colombo "communities are divided, with the outsiders and insiders unable to build relationships and coherent communities."³² But the process, as anthropologist Magdalena Nock points out in regard to Mexico, is irreversible: "Globalization has increased the movement of people, goods, services, information, news, products, and money, and thereby the presence of urban characteristics in rural areas and of rural traits in urban centers."³³

Back to Dickens

The dynamics of Third World urbanization both recapitulate and confound the precedents of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe and North America. In China the greatest industrial revolution in history is the Archimedean lever shifting a population the size of Europe's from rural villages to smog-choked, sky-climbing cities: since the market reforms of the late 1970s it is estimated that more than 200 million Chinese have moved from rural areas to cities. Another 250 or 300 million people – the next "peasant flood" – are expected to follow in coming decades.³⁴ As a result of this staggering influx, 166 Chinese

31 Adrián Aguilar and Peter Ward, "Globalization, Regional Development, and Mega-City Expansion in Latin America: Analyzing Mexico City's Peri-Urban Hinterland," *Cities* 20:1 (2003), pp. 4, 18. The authors claim that *desakota*-like development does not occur in Africa: "Instead city growth tends to be firmly urban and large-city based, and is contained within clearly defined boundaries. There is not meta-urban or peri-urban development that is tied to, and driven by, processes, in the urban core," p. 5. But certainly Gauteng (Witwatersrand) must be accounted as an example of "regional urbanization" fully analogous to Latin American examples.

32 Ranjith Dayaratne and Raja Samarawickrama, "Empowering Communities: The Peri-Urban Areas of Colombo," *Environment and Urbanization* 15:1 (April 2003), p. 102. (See also, in the same issue, L. van den Berg, M. van Wijk, and Pham Van Hoi, "The Transformation of Agricultural and Rural Life Downstream of Hanoi.")

33 Magdalena Nock, "The Mexican Peasantry and the *Ejido* in the Neo-liberal Period," in Deborah Bryceson, Cristóbal Kay, and Jos Mooij (eds), *Disappearing Peasants? Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, London 2000, p. 173.

34 *Financial Times*, 16 December 2003, 27 July 2004.

cities in 2005 (as compared to only 9 US cities) had populations of more than 1 million.³⁵ Industrial boomtowns such as Dongguan, Shenzhen, Fushan City, and Chengchow are the postmodern Sheffields and Pittsburghs. As the *Financial Times* recently pointed out, within a decade “China [will] cease to be the predominantly rural country it has been for millennia.”³⁶ Indeed, the great oculus of the Shanghai World Financial Centre may soon look out upon a vast urban world little imagined by Mao or, for that matter, Le Corbusier.

Figure 4³⁷
China's Industrial Urbanization
(percent urban)

	Population	GDP
1949	11	–
1978	13	–
2003	38	54
2020 (<i>projected</i>)	63	85

It is also unlikely that anyone fifty years ago could have envisioned that the squatter camps and war ruins of Seoul would metamorphose at breakneck speed (a staggering 11.4 percent per annum during the 1960s) into a megalopolis as large as greater New York – but, then again, what Victorian could have envisioned a city like Los Angeles in 1920? However, as unpredictable as its specific local histories and urban miracles, contemporary East Asian urbanization, accompanied by a tripling of per capita GDP since 1965, preserves a quasi-classical relationship between manufacturing growth and urban migration.

35 *New York Times*, 28 July 2004.

36 Wang Mengkui, Director of the Development Research Center of the State Council, quoted in the *Financial Times*, 26 November 2003.

37 Goldstein, “Levels of Urbanization in China,” table 7.1, p. 201; 1978 figure from Guilhem Fabre, “La Chine,” in Thierry Paquot, *Les Mondes des Villes: Panorama Urbain de la Planète*, Brussels 1996, p. 187. It is important to note that the World Bank's time series differs from Fabre's, with a 1978 urbanization rate of 18 percent, not 13 percent. (See World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, 2001, CD-ROM version.)

Eighty percent of Marx's industrial proletariat now lives in China or somewhere outside of Western Europe and the United States.³⁸

In most of the developing world, however, city growth lacks the powerful manufacturing export engines of China, Korea, and Taiwan, as well as China's vast inflow of foreign capital (currently equal to half of total foreign investment in the entire developing world). Since the mid-1980s, the great industrial cities of the South – Bombay, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Belo Horizonte, and São Paulo – have all suffered massive plant closures and tendential deindustrialization. Elsewhere, urbanization has been more radically decoupled from industrialization, even from development *per se* and, in sub-Saharan Africa, from that supposed *sine qua non* of urbanization, rising agricultural productivity. The size of a city's economy, as a result, often bears surprisingly little relationship to its population size, and vice versa. Figure 5 illustrates this disparity between population and GDP rankings for the largest metropolitan areas.

Figure 5³⁹
Population versus GDP: Ten Largest Cities

	(1) by 2000 population	(2) by 1996 GDP (2000 pop. rank)
1.	Tokyo	Tokyo (1)
2.	Mexico City	New York (3)
3.	New York	Los Angeles (7)
4.	Seoul	Osaka (8)
5.	São Paulo	Paris (25)
6.	Mumbai	London (19)
7.	Delhi	Chicago (26)
8.	Los Angeles	San Francisco (35)
9.	Osaka	Düsseldorf (46)
10.	Jakarta	Boston (48)

38 World Bank, *World Development Report 1995: Workers in an Integrating World*, New York 1995, p. 170.

39 Population rank from Thomas Brinkhoff (www.citypopulation.de); GDP rank from Denise Pumain, “Scaling Laws and Urban Systems,” *Santa Fe Institute Working Paper* 04-02-002, Santa Fe 2002, p. 4.

Some would argue that urbanization without industrialization is an expression of an inexorable trend: the inherent tendency of silicon capitalism to delink the growth of production from that of employment. But in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and much of South Asia, urbanization without growth, as we shall see later, is more obviously the legacy of a global political conjuncture – the worldwide debt crisis of the late 1970s and the subsequent IMF-led restructuring of Third World economies in the 1980s – than any iron law of advancing technology.

Third World urbanization, moreover, continued its breakneck pace (3.8 percent per annum from 1960 to 1993) throughout the locust years of the 1980s and early 1990s, in spite of falling real wages, soaring prices, and skyrocketing urban unemployment.⁴⁰ This perverse urban boom surprised most experts and contradicted orthodox economic models that predicted that the negative feedback of urban recession would slow or even reverse migration from the countryside.⁴¹ “It appears,” marveled developmental economist Nigel Harris in 1990, “that for low-income countries, a significant fall in urban incomes may not necessarily produce in the short term a decline in rural–urban migration.”⁴²

The situation in Africa was particularly paradoxical: How could cities in Côte d’Ivoire, Tanzania, Congo-Kinshasa, Gabon, Angola, and elsewhere – where economies were contracting by 2 to 5 percent per year – still support annual population growth of 4 to 8 percent?⁴³ How could Lagos in the 1980s grow twice as fast as the Nigerian population, while its urban economy was in deep recession?⁴⁴ Indeed, how has Africa as a whole, currently in a dark age of stagnant urban employment and stalled agricultural productivity, been able to sustain

40 Josef Gugler, “Introduction – II. Rural–Urban Migration,” in Gugler (ed.), *Cities in the Developing World: Issues, Theory and Policy*, Oxford 1997, p. 43.

41 Sally Findley emphasizes that everyone in the 1980s underestimated levels of continuing rural–urban migration and resulting rates of urbanization. Findley, “The Third World City,” in Kasarda and Parnell, *Third World Cities: Problems*, p. 14.

42 Nigel Harris, “Urbanization, Economic Development and Policy in Developing Countries,” *Habitat International* 14:4 (1990), pp. 21–22.

43 David Simon, “Urbanization, Globalization and Economic Crisis in Africa,” in Carole Rakodi (ed.), *The Urban Challenge in Africa: Growth and Management in Its Large Cities*, Tokyo 1997, p. 95. For growth rates of English industrial cities 1800–50, see Adna Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Statistics*, New York 1899, pp. 44, 52–53.

44 A. S. Oberai, *Population Growth, Employment and Poverty in Third-World Mega-Cities: Analytical Policy Issues*, London 1993, p. 165.

an annual urbanization rate (3.5 to 4.0 percent) considerably higher than the average of most European cities (2.1 percent) during peak Victorian growth years?⁴⁵

Part of the secret, of course, was that policies of agricultural deregulation and financial discipline enforced by the IMF and World Bank continued to generate an exodus of surplus rural labor to urban slums even as cities ceased to be job machines. As Deborah Bryceson, a leading European Africanist, emphasizes in her summary of recent agrarian research, the 1980s and 1990s were a generation of unprecedented upheaval in the global countryside:

One by one national governments, gripped in debt, became subject to structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionality. Subsidized, improved agricultural input packages and rural infrastructural building were drastically reduced. As the peasant “modernization” effort in Latin American and African nations was abandoned, peasant farmers were subjected to the international financial institutions’ “sink-or-swim” economic strategy. National market deregulation pushed agricultural producers into global commodity markets where middle as well as poor peasants found it hard to compete. SAPs and economic liberalization policies represented the convergence of the worldwide forces of de-agrarianization and national policies, promoting de-peasantization.⁴⁶

As local safety nets disappeared, poor farmers became increasingly vulnerable to any exogenous shock: drought, inflation, rising interest rates, or falling commodity prices. (Or illness: an estimated 60 percent of Cambodian small peasants who sell their land and move to the city are forced to do so by medical debts.⁴⁷)

45 United Nations Economic Programme (UNEP), *African Environment Outlook: Past, Present and Future Perspectives*, quoted in *Al Abram Weekly* (Cairo), 2–8 October 2003; Alain Jacquemin, *Urban Development and New Towns in the Third World: Lessons from the New Bombay Experience*, Aldershot 1999, p. 28.

46 Deborah Bryceson, “Disappearing Peasantries? Rural Labour Redundancy in the Neo-Liberal Era and Beyond,” in Bryceson, Kay, and Mooij, *Disappearing Peasantries?*, pp. 304–05.

47 Sébastien de Dianous, “Les Damnés de la Terre du Cambodge,” *Le Monde diplomatique* (September 2004), p. 20.

At the same time, rapacious warlords and chronic civil wars, often spurred by the economic dislocations of debt-imposed structural adjustment or foreign economic predators (as in the Congo and Angola), were uprooting whole countrysides. Cities – in spite of their stagnant or negative economic growth, and without necessary investment in new infrastructure, educational facilities or public-health systems – have simply harvested this world agrarian crisis. Rather than the classical stereotype of the labor-intensive countryside and the capital-intensive industrial metropolis, the Third World now contains many examples of capital-intensive countrysides and labor-intensive deindustrialized cities. “Overurbanization,” in other words, is driven by the reproduction of poverty, not by the supply of jobs. This is one of the unexpected tracks down which a neoliberal world order is shunting the future.⁴⁸

From Karl Marx to Max Weber, classical social theory believed that the great cities of the future would follow in the industrializing footsteps of Manchester, Berlin, and Chicago – and indeed Los Angeles, São Paulo, Pusan, and today, Ciudad Juárez, Bangalore, and Guangzhou have roughly approximated this canonical trajectory. Most cities of the South, however, more closely resemble Victorian Dublin, which, as historian Emmet Larkin has stressed, was unique amongst “all the slumdoms produced in the western world in the nineteenth century ... [because] its slums were not a product of the industrial revolution. Dublin, in fact, suffered more from the problems of de-industrialization than industrialization between 1800 and 1850.”⁴⁹

Likewise, Kinshasa, Luanda, Khartoum, Dar-es-Salaam, Guayaquil, and Lima continue to grow prodigiously despite ruined import-substitution industries, shrunken public sectors, and downwardly mobile middle classes. The global forces “pushing” people from the countryside – mechanization of agriculture in Java and India, food imports in Mexico, Haiti, and Kenya, civil war and drought throughout Africa, and everywhere the consolidation of small holdings into

48 See Josef Gugler, “Overurbanization Reconsidered,” in Gugler, *Cities in the Developing World*, pp. 114–23.

49 Foreword to Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin Slums, 1800–1925: A Study in Urban Geography*, Dublin 1998, p. ix. Larkin, of course, forgets Dublin’s Mediterranean counterpart: Naples.

large ones and the competition of industrial-scale agribusiness – seem to sustain urbanization even when the “pull” of the city is drastically weakened by debt and economic depression. As a result, rapid urban growth in the context of structural adjustment, currency devaluation, and state retrenchment has been an inevitable recipe for the mass production of slums. An International Labour Organization (ILO) researcher has estimated that the formal housing markets in the Third World rarely supply more than 20 percent of new housing stock, so out of necessity, people turn to self-built shanties, informal rentals, pirate subdivisions, or the sidewalks.⁵⁰ “Illegal or informal land markets,” says the UN, “have provided the land sites for most additions to the housing stock in most cities of the South over the last 30 or 40 years.”⁵¹

Since 1970, slum growth everywhere in the South has outpaced urbanization *per se*. Thus, looking back at late-twentieth-century Mexico City, urban planner Priscilla Connolly observes that “as much as 60 percent of the city’s growth is the result of people, especially women, heroically building their own dwellings on unserved peripheral land, while informal subsistence work has always accounted for a large proportion of total employment.”⁵² São Paulo’s *favelas* – a mere 1.2 percent of total population in 1973, but 19.8 percent in 1993 – grew throughout the 1990s at the explosive rate of 16.4 percent per year.⁵³ In the Amazon, one of the world’s fastest-growing urban frontiers, 80 percent of city growth has been in shantytowns largely unserved by established utilities and municipal transport, thus making “urbanization” and “favelization” synonymous.⁵⁴

The same trends are visible everywhere in Asia. Beijing police authorities estimate that 200,000 “floaters” (unregistered rural

50 Oberai, *Population Growth, Employment and Poverty in Third-World and Mega-Cities*, p. 13.

51 UN-HABITAT, *An Urbanising World: Global Report on Human Settlements*, Oxford 1996, p. 239.

52 Priscilla Connolly, “Mexico City: Our Common Future?,” *Environment and Urbanization* 11:1 (April 1999), p. 56.

53 Ivo Imparato and Jeff Ruster, *Slum Upgrading and Participation: Lessons from Latin America*, Washington, D.C. 2003, p. 333.

54 John Browder and Brian Godfrey, *Rainforest Cities: Urbanization, Development, and Globalization of the Brazilian Amazon*, New York 1997, p. 130.

migrants) arrive each year, many of them crowded into illegal slums on the southern edge of the capital.⁵⁵ In South Asia, meanwhile, a study of the late 1980s showed that up to 90 percent of urban household growth took place in slums.⁵⁶ Karachi's sprawling *katchi abadi* (squatter) population doubles every decade, and Indian slums continue to grow 250 percent faster than overall population.⁵⁷ Mumbai's estimated annual housing deficit of 45,000 formal-sector units translates into a corresponding increase in informal slum dwellings.⁵⁸ Of the 500,000 people who migrate to Delhi each year, it is estimated that fully 400,000 end up in slums; by 2015 India's capital will have a slum population of more than 10 million. "If such a trend continues unabated," warns planning expert Gautam Chatterjee, "we will have only slums and no cities."⁵⁹

The African situation, of course, is even more extreme. Africa's slums are growing at twice the speed of the continent's exploding cities. Indeed, an incredible 85 percent of Kenya's population growth between 1989 and 1999 was absorbed in the fetid, densely packed slums of Nairobi and Mombasa.⁶⁰ Meanwhile any realistic hope for the mitigation of Africa's urban poverty has faded from the official horizon. At the annual joint meeting of the IMF and World Bank in October 2004, Gordon Brown, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer and heir apparent to Tony Blair, observed that the UN's Millennium Development Goals for Africa, originally projected to be achieved by 2015, would not be attained for generations: "Sub-Saharan Africa will not achieve universal primary education until 2130, a 50 percent reduction in poverty in 2150

55 Yang Wenzhong and Wang Gongfan, "Peasant Movement: A Police Perspective," in Michael Dutton (ed.), *Streetlife China*, Cambridge 1998, p. 89.

56 Dileni Gunewardena, "Urban Poverty in South Asia: What Do We Know? What Do We Need To Know?," working paper, Conference on Poverty Reduction and Social Progress, Rajendrapur, Bangladesh, April 1999, p. 1.

57 Arif Hasan, "Introduction," in Akhtar Hameed Khan, *Orangi Pilot Project: Reminiscences and Reflections*, Karachi 1996, p. xxxiv.

58 Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, New York 2004, p. 117.

59 Gautam Chatterjee, "Consensus versus Confrontation," *Habitat Debate* 8:2 (June 2002), p. 11. Statistic for Delhi from Rakesh K. Sinha, "New Delhi: The World's Shanty Capital in the Making," *OneWorld South Asia*, 26 August 2003.

60 Harvey Herr and Guenter Karl, "Estimating Global Slum Dwellers: Monitoring the Millennium Development Goal 7, Target 11," UN-HABITAT working paper, Nairobi 2003, p. 19.

and the elimination of avoidable infant deaths until 2165."⁶¹ By 2015 Black Africa will have 332 million slum-dwellers, a number that will continue to double every fifteen years.⁶²

Thus, the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks, and scrap wood. Instead of cities of light soaring toward heaven, much of the twenty-first-century urban world squats in squalor, surrounded by pollution, excrement, and decay. Indeed, the one billion city-dwellers who inhabit postmodern slums might well look back with envy at the ruins of the sturdy mud homes of Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia, erected at the very dawn of city life nine thousand years ago.

61 Gordon Brown quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 2004.

62 UN statistics quoted in John Vidal, "Cities Are Now the Frontline of Poverty," *Guardian*, 2 February 2005.