

# The Making of Global City Subjects Neoliberal Spatial Redevelopment and Interpellation in Bangalore, India

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## Abstract

This paper analyses global city discourse and neoliberal spatial transformation in Bangalore, India. The paper contributes to the neoliberal urbanism literature by highlighting the importance of subject-centred analyses of urbanisation, and uses the Althusserian theory of the 'Ideological State Apparatus' to examine subject making in Bangalore, India. It is argued that, although the ideology of the global city has Western provenance and is colonial or neocolonial in nature, a host of urban actors in India have been 'interpellated' by it—as in, internalized its logics and values, and now serve to reproduce it. The neoliberal ideology underpinning Bangalore's transformation into a 'global city' prescribes the spatial redevelopment of its urban periphery through expropriation of farmland and dispossession of farmers. All in all, the paper argues that focusing on neoliberal subjectification can facilitate a broader understanding of neoliberal spatial redevelopment in urban contexts.

## 1. Introduction

Global capitalism, specifically its neoliberal variety, appears inseparable from the contemporary urban. Everything from the city's physical built environment, to the socio-spatial relations that occur and arise from within that environment, to the creation of urban spatial forms via development and construction are implicated—in one way or another—in the material and ideological apparatuses of global neoliberal capitalism (Soja & Kanai, 2014). To arrive at an understanding of the production of urban spatial forms under what is a genuinely universal and hegemonic neoliberal capitalism, then, is to conceive of 'processes of neoliberalisation' as 'inescapably embedded and context-contingent phenomena' (Peck et al. 2009, pg. 52). This is to say that neoliberalism must not be conceived of as only a top-down, elite-driven process of structural change that simply happens to

one-dimensional, passive subjects, but also as a structure that creates new subjectivities when individuals interact with hegemonic neoliberal discourses.

This paper focuses on a massive effort to redevelop the urban peripheries of Bangalore, India—the nation’s fifth-largest city and its principal information technology hub (Pullanoor, 2022)—in order to showcase it on the world stage as a “global city.” It is argued that Bangalore’s redevelopment demonstrates how contemporary neoliberal capitalism, as a hegemonic paradigm of global governance that is ultimately focused on deregulation, privatization, and increased movement of capital across geographies, interacts with and produces urban space and urban subjects at local scales. Specifically, the paper shows how the neoliberal ‘global city’ paradigm, with its constituent discourses of normative, teleological ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ (Escobar, 1995; Robinson, 2006) facilitates the reconfiguration of Bangalore’s urban peripheries into spaces for consumption and spectacle via, among other things, interpellating Indian citizens as subjects (Althusser, 1971; also see Robbins & Sharp, 2006). This is to say that by reflecting the values of the ‘global city’ externally as if they were their own, officials across India are ‘hailed’ as its cooperative subjects. The paper closes with the argument that considering the context-contingent nature of neoliberal subjectivities in contemporary urbanisation processes facilitates a broader understanding of the relationship between neoliberalism and urbanization that is more analytically useful.

## **2. The Global City Project in Bangalore**

For around the past 20 years, Bangalore has been undergoing a program of massive spatial redevelopment in pursuit of reaching ‘global city’ status. Aiming to attract international capital and distance itself from the undesirable archetype of the overcrowded, overpolluted Global South ‘megacity’ (c.f. Davis, 2005), it has embarked on a series of enormous infrastructure projects in its urban periphery. This effort is promoted to a large extent from outside by international financial institutions like the World Bank, and imbued with a neoliberal/pro-market ideology that advocates for “ditching the slow-churning and much-maligned Indian state bureaucracy” in order to “[blend] efficiency with good governance” (Goldman, 2011, p. 562). In the name of such ‘efficiency,’ key governance functions in Bangalore have been privatized and outsourced to ‘parastatals:’ non-governmental entities that work in tandem with local and state government to perform functions typically considered state responsibilities. Case in point is the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor (BMIC), a megaproject that aims to construct five new townships in between its two namesake cities to attract global real estate capital, alleviate overpopulation, and encourage speculation (Chandola, 2023). Increased inter-urban connection is being facilitated by the construction of a massive

expressway, which reduces travel times and raises property values on the land surrounding it.

From its financing to its actual construction, the BMIC is a private project. The extent of the Karnataka state government's involvement extended only as far as approving the sale of the land to private developers: namely, the US-financed Nandi Infrastructure Corridor Enterprises, which is the chief construction firm spearheading the project (Goldman, 2011). Far from the traditional understanding of connective infrastructural development as a state responsibility, the BMIC represents a neoliberal paradigm of urban governance in Bangalore that enriches private stakeholders and aims to attract international capital before serving the needs of the urban working class, all while sidelining the role of the state.

The aforementioned ideology that accompanies and motivates Bangalore's spatial redevelopment is composed of a set of colonially-derived discourses. These discourses are, according to postcolonial urban studies scholars such as Jennifer Robinson (2006) and Arturo Escobar (1995) part of a wider colonial paradigm whereby the West/Global North wields its own epistemological power, acquired through colonial violence, to universalise its own experience and the historical trajectory of its urbanisation. Western civilisation is thus portrayed as the 'standard' for civilisations, and the West a final, inevitable stage of development that every society must attempt to reach.

The production of Bangalore's urban periphery as 'global city' space—practically involving the construction of 'global' infrastructures such as the BMIC—necessitates the dispossession of farmers already living there. To meaningfully respond to this pragmatic concern, 'global city' discourses veer from depoliticized, normative understandings of 'modernity' and take on a darker, decidedly settler-colonial tone, with the aim of manufacturing consent within the population for the expropriation of peasant land. International real estate developers seeking to engage in speculative investment in Bangalore portray land on the city's outskirts, under the stewardship of farmers, as 'below its full potential' (Raman & Denis, 2025). Developers assert, to the government and the public, that granting them power over land management would enable the land to be used to its 'maximum efficiency' (Goldman, 2011). Peasants, like the land, are also viewed as not having reached their 'fullest potential,' something which the 'global city' initiative would solve by "nurtur[ing] freedom of investment and the entrepreneurial spirit amongst the whole population, right down to the ready-to-be-unleashed 'poor'" (p. 560). In other words, the vanguards of this global city initiative characterize peasants themselves as embodied obstacles to urbanization-as-progress; deeming their livelihoods static, backwards, and of the past, and discursively framing peasant bodies and practices as sites of intervention. The reterritorialization of Bangalore's urban periphery also

exemplifies capitalist creative destruction—socio-spatial forms deemed structurally inefficient for capital accumulation are targeted and physically destroyed to make way for new forms better suited to that moment's surplus-value-generation needs. In this case, such creative destruction has acquired a neoliberal inflection, seeing as the global city's ideal forms are those that sufficiently advertise Bangalore on the world stage as a suitable host for global finance capital.

However, Bangalore's redevelopment is not solely a top-down, externally-imposed phenomenon. As geographer Michael Goldman shows, across India—and in Bangalore specifically—the call for a global city has been taken up by large sections of Indian society itself. In other words, and following Louis Althusser (1971), the global city paradigm has interpellated individuals within the sectors of society that support it—namely urban business elites, figures within the software industry, international financial institutions (IFIs), Indians living abroad, and aid agencies—as its subjects. These subscribers to the global city paradigm 'work all right 'all by themselves', i.e. by ideology (whose concrete forms are realised in the Ideological State Apparatuses). They are inserted into practices governed by the rituals of the ISAs' (pg. 181). In this case, the collection of institutions implicated in Bangalore's 'world-city making' constitute what Althusser calls an 'Ideological State Apparatus: a collection of institutions that 'function massively and predominantly by ideology' (Althusser, 1971, pg. 145). This includes IFIs, NGOs, aid agencies, and the non-state or parastatal organisations to which democracy is outsourced for the sake of 'ditching the slow-churning and much-maligned Indian state bureaucracy' in order to '[blend] efficiency with good governance' (Goldman, 2011, pg. 562). The 'ideology' in question here is that of the global city, involving a normative, depoliticised 'modernity' and 'development,' which interpellates individual subjects within which the ideology has become internalised. This externally-imposed-yet-internally-adopted normative ideal of Indian society as 'modern' and 'developed' has facilitated Bangalore's developmentalist reterritorialisation and served to justify the violent dispossession inherent to it.

However, this is not to suggest that the internalization of 'global city' discourse is a totalizing process or occurs unanimously across social classes in India. As Goldman (2011) shows, positive conceptions of the 'global city' on an aesthetic level within Indian society are closely tied to particular class positions and new channels to materially benefit from neoliberal urban redevelopment. In his words, since the advent of the global city paradigm, "the career trajectory of an ambitious administrative civil servant has changed, such that it is now imperative that one's track-record should include training programs on making cities globally competitive, run by international agencies" (pg. 560). Given this context, the interpellation of 'global city subjects' is evidently, among other things, contingent on

proximity (or potential proximity) to global capital as a means of obtaining political power.

### 3. Conclusion

The subjective dimensions of neoliberal globalization and urbanization must be taken into account in order to reflect how the subjects and agents involved in these processes internalize and reproduce its logics in space. In the example of Bangalore, the acceptance of developmentalist discourses on a local level facilitates the violent dispossession inherent to projects of neoliberal spatial restructuring such as the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor. Neoliberal urban spaces are made in conjunction with the creation of neoliberal urban subjects, as evidenced by how the collection of international, local, state, and private institutions that comprise the Ideological State Apparatus of the 'global city' facilitates peri-urban redevelopment in Bangalore. Tacit or overt promotion of the inherent virtuousness of the idealized global city by local actors obfuscates its colonial origins and may serve to pacify contestation of the dispossession inherent to it based on the colonial origins of the project's underlying ideological motivations. Analyses of neoliberal logics and how they are internalized within neoliberal subjects add depth to our collective understandings of neoliberalism and expand it beyond overly simplistic top-down framings.

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