Right2Know Campaign – Mapping SA's (Growing?) Climate Of Secrecy

Twenty years into South Africa's democracy, the right to know faces apparent threats.

The right to know – to access and share information, to organise, protest and speak out – is the foundation of a just society. Information rights were a driving principle in the struggle against apartheid, and at the centre of the democratic gains achieved in the 1990s.

Twenty years into South Africa's democracy, these gains appear to be facing greater limits.

Climate of secrecy

At the heart of this is an emerging trend towards security-statist approaches to governance.[i] An expansive 'national security' mentality encroaches on democratic principles by stifling debate,undermining accountability and protecting the powerful from scrutiny.

The best-known embodiment of this securitystatist mentality is the Protection of State Information Bill (the Secrecy Bill), which sits on President Zuma's desk, awaiting signature. Few laws have so focused the public mind on the problem of secrecy in our society and what appears to be a resurgence of the 'securocrats'.

But the Bill may merely be a symptom of a broader climate of secrecy and securitisation:

– The use of secrecy to shield political actors, in particular President Zuma, from embarrassment and accountability;

– Increasing limitations on protest, with an extraordinary spike in police violence and growing signs of criminalisation of protest;
– Apparent increase in the use of state-security policies such as the National Key Points Act;
– Lack of democratic oversight of surveillance tools which are vulnerable to abuse.

Ordinary people, ordinary secrets
Secrecy is not only about the political machinations of major institutions. At the heart of possibly every grassroots struggle for social, economic or environmental justice, there is a need for information. This is often basic information about bread-and-butter issues, which people need in order to exercise control over their own lives. Here we see worrying signs of the obstacles to accessing information:
– Access to information mechanisms are failing;
– There is too little proactive release of information;
– The transparency obligations of the private sector, particularly in industries with a serious environmental impact, are largely overlooked.

All of these developments undermine democracy. It is a given that secrecy is sometimes necessary to protect human life or a person's legitimate claim to privacy. But secrecy is easily misused, and when this happens, it becomes a tool to protect the powerful.
This report's findings highlight the need for greater transparency so that the public can monitor the use of state secrecy, as well as the need for a greater commitment to transparency both from the state and the private sector. These conditions have made it very difficult to even research this short report.
But our findings also underscore the need for continued, unified action to resist a growing culture of secrecy and authoritarianism. The recent regeneration of information activism in South Africa must continue: South Africans must continue to challenge the increasing power and influence of the country's securocrats in our politics and in
our daily lives.

Right2Know Campaign, September 2014

Read the full report: http://www.r2k.org.za/

JWTC Announcement: Volume Seven Of The Johannesburg Salon Goes Live!

We are pleased to announce the publication of the next volume of the *Johannesburg Salon*. Volume 7 centres on a collection of essays convened for *Achille Mbembe's African Future Cities Seminar*, held at Harvard University in Autumn of last year. Edited by Stephanie Bosch Santana, the pieces explore the continent's diverse urbanisms with an eye towards future trajectories of inventiveness, fortification, resilience and segregation.

In our Editorial section, artist Raimi Gbadamosi remembers the late Stuart Hall, Ashleigh Harris discusses style in recent diasporic African fiction, Helena Chavez Mac Gregor explores emergent political formations in Mexico and elsewhere, Lewis Gordon ruminates on the philosophical blues, Jonathan Klaaren reflects on the limits of the South African legal system and Ellison Tjirera makes a case for Windhoek's city-ness. Catherine Portevin interviews Achille Mbembe (in French) about how his book *Critique de la Raison Negre* draws on the theories of Frantz Fanon and others to enter into dialogue with Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The AFC symposium is complemented by Bregtje van der Haak's exclusive interview with Rem Koolhaas, in which the architect meditates upon the meanings and possibilites of his Lagos Project, now fifteen years old.

Juan Orrantia's Dialogues. A southern conversation, which makes up the ZONE 3, incorporates the following two conversations and accompanying images:

A conversation between Lola Mac Dougall and photographer Gauri Gill about developing her practice beyond a Euro-centric paradigm, about privacy and the multiple readings of her work, particularly the Birth Series (2005), reproduced

herewith.

A dialogue between critic/curator Renuka Sawhney and artist Naeem Mohaiemen who have been speaking to each other for some time now about the role of memory as part of a critical approach and form of work(ing) with(in) contested political spaces is unpacked through its manifestation in various locations.

A project of the *Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism* (JWTC), *The Salon* is an intellectual, political and cultural digital magazine. It is open to scholars, writers, artists, designers, architects, activists and public intellectuals who want to shape conversation from the global South while testing their works and ideas against unanticipated modes of everyday life in an uncertain world.

The Salon blurs the lines that separate print from digital media. It combines maximum elegance and minimum ornamentation, transparency, minimalist aesthetics and ease of use.

Its platform has been designed by The Library, with funding from The Prince Claus Fund and support from the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa).

The Salon's editors are Megan Jones and Achille Mbembe.

Volume 7 and previous: http://jwtc.org.za/volume_7.htm

# BBC Documentary ~ The History Of Racism

Reaching back across the centuries, this program sheds light on historical attitudes toward human differences. It assesses the significance of Biblical narratives, including the curse of Ham, in the evolution of European concepts of race, and goes on to examine the basis of institutionalized racism—entwined with

fervent capitalism—on which the transatlantic slave trade operated. The destruction of Americas indigenous civilizations and the dehumanization and exploitation of Africans are studied alongside the writings of Enlightenment philosophers and historians. Experts interviewed include Dr. Orlando Patterson of Harvard University, Dr. Barnor Hesse of Northwestern, and Professor James Walvin of the University of York.

New York Times ~ Forum For New Diplomacy – Marlise Simons In Conversation With Fatou Bensouda (ICC)

Fatou Bensouda, chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court, in conversation with Marlise Simons, correspondent for The New York Times

# Adam Nowek – Celebrating South China's Urban Villages
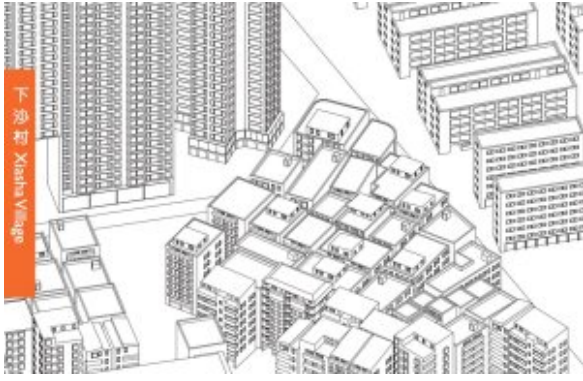
Axonometric view of building typologies in Xiasha Village (Image: Villages in the City, edited by Stefan Al)

theprotocity.com. September 2014. Urban informality is hardly a new reality for the world's cities. The term itself has a young theoretical life, being championed by urbanist Ananya Roy as a lens with which to think about how cities are planned and made without the need to approach an urban planning department. Informal settlements exist in a huge variety of forms, from the gradual occupation of the Torre David skyscraper in Caracas to the built-overnight towers of outer Istanbul, and offer ad hoc solutions for housing, retail, and community space alongside questionable building quality.

The Chinese manifestation of urban informality is the urban village. As Stefan Al, architect and Associate Professor of Urban Design at the University of Pennsylvania, sees it, China's urban villages bear few, if any, similarities to the favelas of Brazil. "They're actually fully intertwined, although they look like the polar opposite," notes Al. "From an economic perspective, the urban villages and the city are completely related. The only reason urban villages exist is the inability of the Chinese government to provide adequate housing for millions of people."

Read more: http://theprotocity.com/celebrating-south-chinas-urban-villages/

Sanjeev Sanyal – Why India Needs To Slum It Out
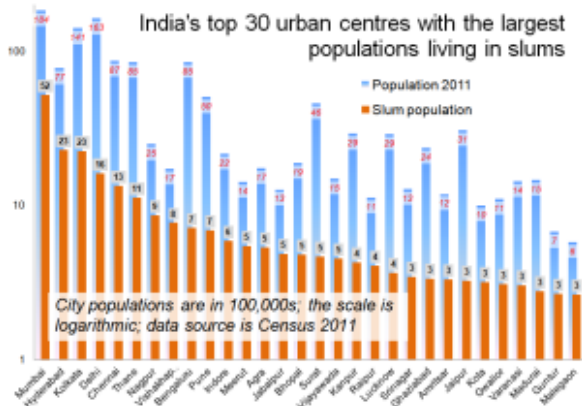
Graphic: makanaka.wordpress.com

indiatoday.intoday.in. September 2014. Indian policymakers have at last accepted that urbanisation is an essential part of economic development. Indeed, current trends suggest that India will be an urban-ma-jority country by 2040. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi succeeds in implementing his plan for rapid industrialisation, the country would hit the milestone even sooner. The implication of this shift is that 300-350 million additional people will have to be accommodated in urban centres within a generation. The Prime Minister clearly appreciates the issue and his plan to create a hundred smart cities should be seen as an attempt to create urban infra-structure in anticipation of the deluge.

While it is good that policymakers are paying more attention to cities, it is important to recognise that urbanisation is a dynamic process. In particular, we need to think about how millions of people will get matched to jobs, homes and amenities, according to their needs and abilities. India's predicament was faced by today's developed countries when they urbanised in the 19th and early 20th centuries. So what was the mechanism that sucked in millions of people and slotted them into the urban landscape of Europe, North America and Japan?

Read more at: http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/up-front/1/382421.html