Unpacking State Practices in City-Making,in Conversations with Ananya Roy

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1. Preamble – a conversation with Ananya Roy

This special section originates in a reading group organised around the visit of Ananya Roy in the School of Architecture and Planning, at Wits University, in May 2013. Focused around the politics of informality and city-making, participants reflected on the echoes of Roy's work with their own research. All authors were interested in interrogating state power, its modalities and its effects in building Southern African cities. They grounded their interrogation in a shared regional context, Southern Africa, where ambitions for the reconstruction of society and space, after apartheid in South Africa and a long civil war in Angola, are driven by relatively resourced and interventionist states. Those ambitions of reconstruction however stand in tension with accounts of neopatrimonialism, authoritarian temptations, and deeply rooted politics of resistance and contention, albeit in different ways in the democratic South Africa and authoritarian Angola.

Engaging with Roy's work helped us navigate these broad understandings of post-colonial states, at city level. There, the difficulty in understanding how state power shapes spaces and society is further complicated by several elements: the multi-layered nature of state intervention, the juxtaposition of bold and ambitious public interventions directly reconfiguring urban spaces, and evidence of state inconsistencies and efficiencies in shaping urban spaces, which cause some to dismiss its relevance (Landau and Monson 2008; Simone 2004). Roy alerts us to both the reductionism of these narratives, and their relevance as multiple facets of states' interventions (2009a).

Papers in this collection have approached this shared interrogation in two different ways, that can aptly be described as the *governability* of cities on the one hand, and the uses of *governmentality* in

cities, on the other. "Governability" is a fuzzy but useful concept that refers both to the capacity of the state to steer society, and to the capacity or inclination of societies to comply or to resist being governed. Although the two are linked, we focus here on the first meaning (state's ability to steer society), as we are attempting to direct an analytical gaze towards the state and its practices. "Governmentality" on the other hand is a more classic, Foucauldian concept that we understand here as the ways in which governable subjects are produced through the internalisation of urban policies' dominant visions and norms. These two ways of interrogating state practices correspond to two threads in Roy's work. Although not using the term "governability", she explicitly questions "why India cannot plan its cities" (Roy 2009a), building on previous work excavating the role of the state in framing urban informality (2003, 2005). In other work (Roy 2009b), she analyses the ambiguities of "civic governmentality" and how the politics of cooperation of NGOs in India and Lebanon are caught between dynamics of genuine empowerment, the perhaps necessary pragmatism of constrained negotiations, and a problematic contribution to the manufacture of consent amongst the poor in the city. In so doing, she coins two concepts that were relevant for this collection. The one is the "politics of un-mapping", a deliberate confusion maintained by the state around the status of ownership of urban land, enabling the state to retain flexibility in its future intervention and engage in land speculation. The second, related but broader concept, is "informality as an idiom of urbanisation" (Roy 2005, 2009a) which politicises informality as a purposeful modality of state's practice in governing cities, thus innovatively applying the concept of informality to the state itself.

This overview frames the papers' engagements with these concepts and questions: Governability and Governmentality, The Politics of Un-mapping, and the Question of Intentionality. It ends by consolidating a reflection, based on the collection, that contributes to emerging debates on Informal Practices of the State.

2. Governability and governmentality

Governability and governmentality could be seen as contrasting but complementary ways of analysing power in cities, in this case specifically the role and place of "the state". This echoes Clarence Stone's (2006) suggestion to study the "power to" in addition to the more traditional "power over". By this, he means that in order to understand who governs cities, we need to not only interrogate domination, influence, coalitions and contentions (power over), as is done classically, but also comprehend what is produced in the city through these relationships – what directions and shapes are given to cities, if any (power to act). Governability considers the productive dimension of power, in contrast to governmentality which focuses on the ways in which power travels, is incorporated, naturalised and diffused in multiple sites. All papers in this collection question the importance and limitations of the state's ability to shape cities, in relation to public housing delivery, street trading regulation, informal settlement management or urban land release. Some papers focus more directly on the issue of governability, in particular looking at processes through which "the state" constructs its policy instruments.

The collection concentrates on unpacking "the state" through its practices. The state is understood in the broad sense, as government and a vast array of public and semi-public agencies; as a multi-levelled, multi-departments, multi-layered entity that is complexified by both decentralisation and neoliberalisation dynamics. We argue however that it cannot be understood solely in terms of

diversity, centrifugal forces, heterogeneity and arbitrariness; and that the tensions we explore in this issue (sometimes under the concept of informality) emerge precisely from constant attempts by diverse state agents and units to construct direction, unity, consistency and control amongst its diverse arms, units and agencies.

Bénit-Gbaffou interrogates states' abilities to govern contemporary cities. In a sector often described as ungovernable, the regulation of street trading in city centres, she asks what produces this ungovernability. The state's incapacity to govern the sector manifests in its practical (but failing) attempts to limit street trading in congested urban centres, and in its claimed (but limited) endeavours to support micro-enterprise by recognising its permanence and social, if not economic, utility. Using the case of Johannesburg, she contests easy explanations of "policy-implementation gaps", where well-intended policies are betrayed by their implementation challenges. Instead, observing continuity in municipal practice in the form of two decades of repression against street trading, and analysing internal processes framing its policy instruments, Bénit-Gbaffou shows how the state has manufactured its own incapacity to govern, hiding behind a progressive but superficial public policy to continue a self-defeating politics of repression, one that is embedded in institutions, budgets, tools and officials targets.

Charlton describes an impressive South African state machinery, in terms of policy, budget, multi-levelled administration, established to deliver mass public housing as promise by the ANC coming to power in 1994, and its relative efficiency in delivering on this to low-income citizens. This narrative of success in state intervention is however disturbed by beneficiaries' uses of their houses, deviating from policy intentions. Charlton is interested in what officials make of this variation between state intent and beneficiaries' use, and shows how they oscillate between criminalisation and understanding, but mostly how state institutions fail to measure, acknowledge or reflect on the phenomenon that could question the framing, and possibly the legitimacy, of existing policy. Charlton interrogates the lack of reform of this programme, indicating that the state's acknowledging existing beneficiaries' practices and the reasons for them, and attempting to adapt its policy accordingly, could compromise its capacity to act. The state is understood as not having the technical, administrative and financial capacity to directly accommodate complex social dynamics that reflect more fundamental socio-economic conditions, and limits its investigation of these in line with what it can achieve.

Butcher analyses the spatial and sectoral limits of state intervention, interrogating the governability of the abundant mining land that bisects Johannesburg. She studies the dominant mining company as a quasi-state that has captured most of the capacity to govern this strategic metropolitan asset, through the power of both superficial and subterranean land titles and monopolistic spatial knowledge. The state, in this instance the municipality, appears hollowed-out, its planning documents directly influenced by the mining company's objectives prior even to public comment. It appears incapable of steering how land should be used, especially in the short periods where municipal objectives do not coincide with the company's. In contrast, the company is able to manipulate this land asset on a long-term basis, playing on variations in mining technologies, gold price, housing markets and to some extent only, constraints imposed by the policy environment. It is definitely easier to manage an urban space as a business, than it is to govern it as a city. This highlights by default that state (in)capacity to steer urban spaces might be less technical than political: unlike businesses, states have to hold together the needs to frame, maintain and update

technical capacity, but also to respond to multiple accountabilities, and to drive planning objectives that are publicised and contested.

Rubin analyses the limits of state's capacity to govern, in relation to the messy and fluid urban dynamics of informal settlements and urban growth. There, shifting and contested state objectives, fragmented and diverging positions, between repression, tolerance and development, added to the technical complexities of engaging with informal local politics (embedded in in-situ upgrading and community engagement processes), create uncertainty amongst state officials. The state's attempts to govern these areas involve at times acknowledging, incorporating, and even adopting locally-framed instruments of regulation: informal land registers, locally-crafted criteria for housing allocation. In other cases, it means delegating its governing powers for the tasks that it cannot openly or directly perform: containing settlement growth, possibly through community violence; constructing a local administration, potentially through forms of local extortion. In terms of governability, this practices and instruments depicted reflect the limits of state capacity, but also paradoxically the extension of the state's realm of intervention (Hibou 1999). In terms of governmentality, Rubin shows how the state both learns from and adopts categories framed by civil society, and how civil society groups mimic state instruments to govern local spaces. Governmentality operates in both directions, even though the power to eradicate, evict or ignore remains predominantly in the hands of the state.

Buire is more interested in governmentality. She interrogates state power in producing the city, through practices of "slum clearance" twinned with public housing construction in urban peripheries by focusing on "the state-in-society" in Luanda. Her paper examines how the state penetrates every-day and intimate lives - through party branches, social surveillance and the promise of clientelistic access to resources, rather than reticulated administration or consistent public intervention. Buire shows how, although elusive, the state remains powerfully present through the dominant party it is intertwined with, manufacturing consent amongst its actual or would-be local clientele.

3. "A politics of un-mapping" – state knowledge and the capacity to govern

Four of the papers in the collection engage with the issue of state knowledge in its relation to state power: but this engagement is less in terms of social control and governmentality, than in terms of governability, capacity to act. Here Roy's concept of "un-mapping" is productive. This concept is framed in the specific context of Kolkata's urban peripheries and their uncertain, blurred and opaque land legal and institutional status. Roy argues that this uncertainty is deliberately maintained by the state, to facilitate flexibility in its interventions, and possibly forms of land speculation. Through this concept of "unmapping", Roy contests the Foucauldian understandings of the knowledge-power nexus, where knowledge is the condition and instrument for the state exerting control over populations and spaces. Roy contends on the contrary that the lack of knowledge, purposefully produced and reproduced, can be a powerful instrument of state power (Roy 2009a). But she adds that this lack of knowledge is simultaneously the state's demise, as this legal uncertainty is also the basis for a multiplicity of particular private claims to emerge as soon as state intervention crystallises, *de facto* impeding, delaying or blocking its projects.

Butcher explicitly engages with Roy's concept, as the mining company's power relies on spatial knowledge and a monopoly on "mapping", built on land ownership but also technical expertise: mapping mining land requires an understanding of the underground, and not only the superficially

visible environment. Her argument would seem to run contrary to Roy, in line with Foucault – mapping equates to power, and the state's incapacity to get, record, archive knowledge on mining land *ipso facto* deprives it of the capacity to act. Reversely, mining companies owning spatial knowledge (embodied through maps) are in a dominant position to strategise, resist state's or civil society's claims and effectively decide on land release, retention or development. This power is not absolute: reality resists, broader environmental dynamics affect the underground beyond the company's control. But this knowledge is constitutive of the capacity to govern.

Rubin argues that the state is limited in its intervention due to its lack of knowledge of informal settlements population, movements and transactions. This lack of knowledge has been partly manufactured by the state's own approaches towards informal settlements, unmapped as un-wanted, ignored, categorised as temporary and therefore not worthy of attention. Hence local officials rely on locally-crafted registers, verbal or informal recognition by key local leaders, constructing rather messy but at least existing forms of knowledge on which to base their intervention. Here too, even in more complex ways, knowledge (in the form of registration and mapping) is the condition for intervention, an instrument of control (of population growth in particular) but also of distribution of benefits (access to formal housing, title deed, infrastructure and services).

Bénit-Gbaffou and Charlton, on the other hand, examine the linkages between knowledge and power in line with Roy's contention – state's deliberate ignorance of information or data, in order to act. This argument was broadened by Breckenridge (2012), showing, contrary to Foucault's nexus of knowledge as power, how population registration under apartheid was linked to the granting of social benefits, and therefore how groups excluded from (segregationist) welfare states were also excluded from these registration efforts. What Breckenridge terms "no will to know," in reference to a state content with containment and indirect rule and not needing to keep a thorough register of excluded groups, Bénit-Gbaffou reframes as "will not to know": deliberate resistance to hearing, seeing, counting and recording certain facts, groups or areas. In the case of street traders in Johannesburg, the state's politics of un-mapping is understood as the refusal of the state to take responsibility for unauthorised traders, whose existence is denied. It is also a form of disempowerment of such traders, not aware of their own mass, as shown *a contrario* by the politics of enumeration from below (illustrated in Roy 2009b), where pavement dwellers' self-driven census provide them with self-awareness and local expertise that proved empowering in negotiations with the state.

Charlton's case of the state "not seeing" why housing beneficiary practices deviate from that intended by the state shows a less malevolent intent. In her argument, integrating unemployment complexities, urban movements, shifting households and livelihood strategies into the housing policy is too demanding, given the state's already stretched administrative capacities to steer a housing programme that remains seen as globally of benefit to the poor. As argued by Ferguson (2010), complex policy instruments may appear just in theory but less so in practice, as states are unable to implement them. Ignorance as the condition for the state's continued ability to act; selective knowledge as enabling a constrained intervention (Scott 1998); deeper knowledge as paralysing intervention, are paradoxical conclusions of her interrogation.

4. **The vexed question of intentionality**

The provocation from Roy's work that inspired the most debate in this collection is the question of state's intentionality, or purposive use of informal practices to achieve specific objectives. Adding to the debate is the fact that Roy's case studies mostly depict the state as malevolent, developing neoliberal, oppressive, possibly corrupt and certainly speculative objectives, using planning flexibility in sinister ways (2009a, 2009b). In the Southern African context, we aimed at conceptualising state intentionality in a wider variety of directions.

The authors grappled with the choice of a concept to describe purposefulness, that does not personify the state as a unified and individual agent. Concepts abound in this respect, none of which was entirely convincing to the authors, especially as they are often framed by analysts viewing the state from the outside (from its margins, its effects, its representations), rather than from the inside. Neo-marxist approaches look for conflicting *interests,* attributed to groups and institutions. Liberal approaches emphasise *rational choice* or constructed and shifting *preferences*. Foucauldian perspectives excavate state *rationalities* through studies of their policy instruments, flirting with the not-so-clear concept of *strategies* without agency. Policy and public administration studies conceptualise policy *objectives*, that they increasingly understand as complex processes marked by a variety of *agendas*, again possibly framed in terms of interests, preferences or rationalities. The papers in this collection adopt one or the other approach to discuss whether informal practices of the state are purposefully framed and used by state agents, or if they are the arbitrary outcome of complex processes.

The state is crossed by multiple rationalities, interests and objectives, and in particular internally: between multiple levels of the state, diverse departments and units, different professional and political positions within them (Charlton, Bénit-Gbaffou, this issue). Yet, state interventions often appear more bluntly, consistent and continuous, powerful in their effects and intentions, to the victims of eviction or beneficiaries of welfare (Bénit-Gbaffou, Buire, Charlton this issue). How to understand together the messiness of state's internal policy processes, and the experienced continuities in state's interventions in the city? And how to account for persisting internal contradictions in state's policies: why are they allowed to endure, why are they not resolved?

Charlton explains how state officials are able to ignore the contradiction between policy vision and implementation realities: out of the fear that confronting these would paralyse state intervention; because of their confidence in the overall developmental effects of a policy that delivers (housing and political support); and based on the absence of any vigorous contestation of the programme on the basis of this gap. There is indeed no opposition from below, as it might be more efficient for beneficiaries to rely on state laisser-faire than to overtly confront the hand that feeds. Opposition from above is equally limited: the housing policy is too central in the ANC post-apartheid vision to be challenged, even if the National treasury starts questioning whether this is the best use of public resources. State officials ignore the contradiction because they can. Sticking to the policy as it is, ignoring its shortcomings, is rewarding politically and development-wise. They persist in their actions in spite of the contradictions they are aware of. They might respond to it through informal practices on the ground, and this grey area certainly opens a space for corruption. But officials do not seem to use the contradiction as an "idiom of urbanisation", to fulfil collective objectives, developmental or speculative.

Rubin analyses how state officials on the ground purposefully use informal practices, to respond to the practical needs of their jobs, of the social and urban realities they are mandated to deal with. The discretion they use (in line with Lipsky 1971), intentionally, is sometimes oppressive, reflective of prejudices and preferences, engaging in patronage networks for personal benefit, using manipulation to sedate social opposition. But Rubin argues that discretion can also be pragmatic and developmental, embedded in participatory practices, innovatively aimed at problem-solving.

Buire, from the study of the history of the residential trajectory of a household in Luanda, shows how state control is internalised through a vast, opaque and elusive social control network that becomes integrated in the intimacy of family spaces. Even if this consent functions as a form of "remote control", she contests any notion of state calculation in the way this process operates. She rather explores how this consent is essential to the reproduction of hegemony (Hibou 2011), and argues that its pervasiveness is far more difficult to confront than a direct or overt state intention.

Bénit-Gbaffou similarly contests that the contradiction between progressive street trading policy and repressive practices has been crafted purposefully. However, this contradiction proves functional for certain interests within the state: shielding the state's dominant objective of restricting street trade from the public gaze limits collective debate and mobilisation, especially from traders' organisations. This usefulness might explain the limited interest for the state to resolve its internal contradictions. Furthermore, like in Roy's account, the contradictions that are used (even if not purposefully framed) to facilitate state action simultaneously produce ungovernability: unresolved policy reform leads to criminalising both traders and officials, consolidating space for informal and illegal arrangements between them.

5. "Informality as idiom of urbanisation" – interrogating state practices as informal

Roy's framing of informality (Roy 2005) shows that it is essentially a political construct, dependent on how legislation defines the boundaries between formal and informal: its contours can shift at the stroke of a pen. She further coins informality as "an idiom of urbanisation", referring to the deliberate use by the state of informality to govern the city (Roy 2009a). Roy does however not elaborate much on *what* informality is used by the state, and *how* it is used, beyond her mention of "un-mapping", the deliberate production and reproduction of legal and institutional uncertainty on land status. Furthermore, she looks at the issue mostly from outside the state, from the effects of its choices, policies and practices. She comments on the absence of a map, the blurriness of land status, the lack of state response, the shifting planning regulations issued, that she encounters during the process of research. In the same line, she deducts rather than observes the purposeful use of informality by the state, inferring it from its strategic usefulness and economic profitability.

5.1. Taking "informal practices of the state" seriously

The study of informality in relation to state practices is not new. It has been theorised mostly around the state-society porous borders (in literature on governance, clientelism, lobbying and corruption, or on street level bureaucracy). An array of scholars has explored the "grey area" surrounding state intervention, but t the state is seldom their primary object of enquiry. For instance, Auyero is interested in the construction of domination by the state over the subalterns - he writes about "the gray zone" to describe the obscure relations linking state officials and its police apparatus, social movements and criminal elements, in violent public interventions (Auyero 2007) – but he does not

further unpack state practices, nor does he go "beyond the counter" when he analyses the politics of waiting (Auyero 2010a), or beyond the patron when he unpacks the dynamics of clientelism (Auyero 1999) – the state he invokes remains a black box, one of "visible fists, clandestine kicks and invisible elbows" (Auyero 2010b). Lund (2006) crafts the concept of "twilight institutions" to refer to the multiplication of non-state institutions that parallel, mimic and compete with the state in performing social regulatory functions; but similarly, he does not expand on what this does to state institutions and practices. Yiftachel (2009) coins the term "gray spaces" to characterise areas and groups living in limbo, in a permanent state of uncertainty, under the threat of eviction; a theme further developed by Chatterjee (2004) under the concept of "political society", referring to a specific mode of relationship (uncertain, temporary, clientelistic) between state institutions and informal population groups. Chatterjee does mention the world of petty bureaucrats and local politicians, in direct contact with informal urban groups, but does not explore beyond this "margin" of the state (Das and Poole 2004). This theme is further explored by Benjamin (2004), who observes the "politics by stealth" exerted by "porous bureaucracies" in Indian cities, often at the interface between civil society and junior politicians and bureaucrats; but also, interestingly through the contradictory interplay between local and regional state institutions. Similar to Roy, McFarlane (2012) suggests considering the informal as above all a practice (interrelated to the formal), but unlike her, he does not refer specifically to the state as the agent of such practices. Te Lintelo (2017) is one of the few authors explicitly using informality to describe state practices, but (as do Yiftachel and Chatterjee), he tends to limit it to the management of urban informality. He proposes three types of "informal state practices" (te Lintelo, 2017: 85-86), ranging from *ad hoc* street bureaucrats' discretion (*a la* Lipsky), the production of "policy short circuits" to directly contradict existing legislation (*a la* Roy), and the laisser-faire, tolerance or even reproduction of informal settlements and activities through temporary (turning permanent) arrangements, as a way to manage urban poverty (*a la* Chatterjee). There is a growing interest for rethinking the state through the concept of informality, as announced in the concluding sections of recent publications on urban governance (Boudreau 2016; Davis 2017; Morelle et al. 2016) or on the state (Radnitz 2011). This interest is often, actually, inspired by Roy's work. The present collection contributes to this emerging field of study, by offering a conceptualisation of "informal practices of the state", debating its usefulness and limitations, and proposing a typology of such practices.

To further unpack what informal practices of the state might entail, it is important to distinguish informality from illegality. Informality, unlike illegality (breaking the law), refers to a "grey area" where there is no clarity on a course of action from state officials' perspective. State officials may understand that some urban dweller's practices cannot comply with legislation, at least not immediately, that such practices have a degree of social legitimacy that could even be defining "the norm" as they become dominant in urban spaces, and that state capacity and will to act upon such practices might be lacking for a variety of reasons. It is from this perspective that some informal activities and spaces can be legalised or formalised, tacitly accepted and tolerated (Yiftachel 2009, Roy 2009c), encouraged and reproduced (Chatterjee 2004, Benjamin 2004). This understanding builds both flexibility and uncertainty into state officials' practices. Indeed, informal practices always take place in a gap, a contradiction, a tension (a "grey area") between different rules and norms. It is partly this "problem of gap" that Olivier de Sardan (2015) makes the central issue of his reflection on state practices. For him, there is always a "gap" between what is expected from state officials and what is observed in reality. He usefully proposed the term of "practical norms" as opposed to

"official" ones, encouraging us to look for a multiplicity of norms shaping state officials' practices: official and practical but also social, political and professional norms. The body of work he leads mostly looks at state-society interface to understand these gaps and the contradictory or multiple norms that explain the gap. We suggest that, beyond state-society interface, the quest for such multiple norms is also useful to characterise state internals processes.

All papers in the collection deal with contradictions or tensions in state practices when governing the city: synchronic (Bénit-Gbaffou, Charlton) or diachronic (Buire, Butcher); pertaining to several levels or components of the state (Charlton), different departments or branches of government (Bénit-Gbaffou), or inscribed as contradictory norms in individual officials' practices (Charlton, Rubin); perceived as contradictory by urban dwellers (Buire, Bénit-Gbaffou, Rubin, Butcher), or by officials themselves (Charlton, Rubin). Few authors however explicitly use the term "informal practices of the state", beyond un-mapping (Butcher, Bénit-Gbaffou) and local arrangements at the interface between state and social groups (Bénit-Gbaffou). It is Rubin who most directly engages with the term, proposing a typology of informal state practices. Analysing state officials' practical acknowledgement of community-based instruments for local regulation (that are replacing, complementing or expanding ill-adapted official instruments), she distinguishes three types of informal state practices. The first ("negotiability") acknowledges the validity of informal land and population registers and transactions, paralleling impractical or outdated official ones. The second ("porosity") is officials' direct use of the informal registers, in the absence of existing official instruments to that effect. The third ("exceptionality") refers to the adoption of instruments (e.g. categories of beneficiaries) that run contrary to existing policy requirements, but have local legitimacy and practical efficiency.

5.2. Towards a typology of informal state practices

Reflecting back on the collection of papers, the wide array of practices of the state they depict and invoke, explicitly or not, as informal, and confronting them to existing literature starting to frame what "informal state practices" might mean, we wish to propose, as an opening for discussion and further research, a typology of informal state practices.

To do so, we frame a definition of 'informal practices of the state' that is narrower perhaps than what its loose usage might have come to draw. Looking for informal practices of the state means examining the 'grey area' of uncertainty and indeterminacy of officials' practices, and this can be done in two main directions, connected but often contrasted as belonging to different theoretical and disciplinary traditions. On the one hand, it is about focusing on officials' practices: analysing how they navigate this grey area, how they choose a course of action, how they determine their own practices – finding patterns (Olivier de Sardan 2015), but also possibly paralysis, fluidity or arbitrariness (Gupta 2012). On the other hand, it is about examining the politics of policy instruments (Lascoumes and Le Gales, 2007), to better unpack the multiple and contradictory norms that generate this grey area in which officials find themselves -- what these norms are, where they are located institutionally and instrumentally, and what incentives or sanctions are attached to their adoption or breach.

We distinguish here between six different meanings and modalities of such grey areas, zones of uncertainty that trigger informal state practices: (1) Framing exceptionality, (2) Navigating policy

contradiction, (3) Manufacturing uncertainty, (4) Playing on porosity, (5) Delegating public mandate / Developing a politics of mediation, (6) Engaging in co-production.

Framing exceptionality - Informal state practices as the state acting outside its own legislation: suspending it (in time or in space), or acting in breach of its own legislation (purposefully or not). This is the main type outlined by Roy (2009a), by te Lintelo (2017), illustrated by Rubin and Bénit-Gbaffou (this issue).

Navigating policy contradiction - Informal state practices resulting from multiple and contradictory policy instruments and directions, for reasons such as the sedimentation of successive documents in time (Bierschenck 2010); the lack of coordination between different levels of the state (Benjamin, 2004); different departmental priorities and their related professional norms, and misalignment between policy instruments and policy guidelines (Bénit-Gbaffou, this issue).

Manufacturing Uncertainty - Informal state practices exploiting a gap, confusion or opacity in knowledge, as framed by Roy's "un-mapping" (2009a) and Breckenridge's "no will to know" (2012). This gap in knowledge has several drivers, from the quest for simplification and legibility of reality in order to act (Scott 1998, and to some extent Charlton this issue), the choice of ignorance as a way to keep flexibility in state intervention (Roy 2009a), the abdication of responsibility through denied recognition of specific marginalised groups (Bénit-Gbaffou, this issue), and the delegation of knowledge and operation to the private sector (Butcher, this issue) or to specific social groups (Buire, Rubin, this issue).

Playing on porosity - Informal state practices arising from state agents' different identities, positions, and networks straddling state and society (Benjamin 2004; Stone 2006; Bawa 2011; te Lintelo 2017; Rubin, this issue). Multiple identities not only explain specific official behaviours (sympathy or interest in accommodating non-compliant urban practices), but also might assist the state in relating to social groups, in particular in the case of contentious politics. This porosity can also be problematic, leading to undemocratic state capture by opaque party and business interests (Olver 2017).

Delegating public mandate, developing a politics of mediation - Informal state practices as delegating (explicitly or not, voluntarily or not) core public functions to non-state agents and institutions, formal and informal (Lund 1996, Cuvi et al. forthcoming). This delegation has profound effects on the state's capacity to act, opening a gap between strategic direction and operational capacity and knowledge (Butcher, this issue), as highlighted above. However, it also sometimes allows the state to expand the realm of its intervention at limited cost, as a form of indirect rule (Hibou 1999): enabling it to enter spaces or groups it had limited purchasing power in through the brokerage of local leaders and groups (Rubin, Buire, this issue); through the indirect recruitment or co-option of additional administrative, technical or political capacity (Rubin, Roy this issue); or through the use of modes of interventions that its own policies or legal requirements would interdict (e.g. community violence as delegated means to regulate settlement growth: Rubin, this issue).

Engaging in co-production - Informal state practices as flexibly and incrementally co-produced with non-state agents, as theorised by Ostrom (1996), who defines co-production of urban services as a process in which state officials depart from their mandates and job description, and frame their intervention in complement with that of local communities (or other partners). This dimension is

best illustrated by Rubin (this issue), although it talks to the limit of the notion of "informal practice of the state": how relevant is it to frame such flexibility in state practices as "informal", if this flexibility is inscribed into the official process of incremental and participatory engagement with communities?

6. Conclusion

Collectively, on the basis of Roy's inspiring work, the papers extend and deepen engagement around informality of the state, conceptualised in an Indian urban context, then applied and debated in a Southern African urban context. The differences emerging, as Roy's concepts and approaches travel, serve to underline differentiated state capacities, institutional and political histories, and various insertions into globally-funded programmes. They also might highlight different relationships between academia and the state.

The recent character of the liberation moment in South Africa has to some extent opened up the State to researchers' gaze, based on the penetration of anti-apartheid activists in various levels of the State in the post-apartheid era, aiming at reforming institutions, policies and practices to better society, often in close conversations with supportive academics. Those activists-turned-officials or politicians, driving progressive change in cities from the state rather than from the street, could be called "activists in the state", following Clavel's "Activists in City Hall" (2010). One may find an equivalent opening in Brazil under Lula, where a significant number of social movement activists became government officials, and have opened to sharing with researchers their experience in driving policy and social change from this institutional position (Abers and Tatagiba 2014). Such opening of the state to the researcher's gaze is highly uneven, obviously biased, restricted to selected sections of the state, and possibly short-lived. But it assists in complexifying our understanding of state intervention in the city beyond a sinister and malevolent one, as is dominant in most literature studying the state from the outside.

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