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**“Smart Cities for whom, for which Citizens?”**

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So-called “smart” solutions are changing the way we experience and talk about security in urban environments. The shifting relations between new technologies of information and security therefore deserve increased academic interests. It is in this vein that Lucas Melgaço is skeptical about the positive impact of technophile surveillance policies in cities around the globe. Despite the profound differences regarding practices and discourses of crime and security, Melgaço does outline some similarities between cities of the Global North and those of the Global South (a dichotomy whose explanatory capacity seems today, more than ever, doubtful). These, he argues, deserve taking into account the academic works of authors like Brazilian Geographer Milton Santos, whose thinking - among that of many other researchers - has been marginalized out of the “English-speaking bubble”.

**Frank Müller (F.M.):** Which most important changes in the field of policing and surveillance in the last decade do you observe? Which technological innovations have been important for research in security studies and criminology? And

(how) do these change the way we live in the cities?

**Lucas Melgaço (L.M.):** When one thinks about the connections between policing and surveillance, the first image that comes to mind is that of Closed-Circuit Television Cameras (CCTV). It is not uncommon to think of CCTV systems as centralized in the hands of the state, something Orwellian or alongside the Big Brother idea. However, present and future scenarios seem to indicate a different model. Nowadays, besides these videos, there is an almost infinite number of images generated by a large variety of public and private surveillance cameras, as well as by other technologies such as drones, digital cameras, smartphones, body cams and so on.

What calls my attention today is exactly the possibility of integrating and converging data from all of these different sources. Take, for example, the case of the man in the hat, Mohamed Abrini, the terrorist at the airport in Brussels that did not explode himself. The police asked the general public to send all sort of images they possessed from the date of

the attack. With the images they received (mainly footage from diverse types of private CCTV cameras), they managed to retrace his steps after the event (a video compilation can be found at [youtube.com/watch?v=eha\\_KqdSvCI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eha_KqdSvCI)).

Although this is an example in which information is still centred in the hands of law enforcement agents, the sources involved are multiple and are not limited to those produced by the state. More than a specific technology, I believe that “data integration” seems to be the new keyword to understand the near future in terms of policing and surveillance. Such integration is obviously not limited to images, but includes a wide range of data generated in our daily digital life.

The main challenge for law enforcement agents will be to find ways of making sense of all this different data that are now referred to as Big Data. We do not only have a myriad of information available, but above all, there is the possibility of connecting dots and telling stories. This is at the same time exciting, if one thinks in terms of the possibilities for police investigation (although the increase of surveillance has shown to be very ineffective in preventing recent terrorist attacks), and terrifying, if one thinks about the risks to privacy or the chances of reinforcing racial profiling, xenophobia or other forms of prejudice.

**F.M.:** Smart Urbanism/ Smart City – what do you think of these concepts? Do they have an analytical use for you? Are they

more of a globally circulating label that fuels inter-urban competition?

**L.M.:** Once I heard that Rio de Janeiro, maybe the most complex and unique of Brazilian cities, could become the first Smart City in Latin America. As part of the city’s “preparation” to hold mega-events – such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games – considerable funds are being spent in equipping the city with high-tech urban technology. The best example is the creation of the Integrated Command and Control Centre (CICC).

Among the many functions of the CICC, there is traffic management. However, if one analyses the efficiency of public transportation in Rio, the precariousness with which traffic information is handled becomes obvious. To give but one example, many of the bus stops in Rio de Janeiro do not give any information about the bus lines that serve that spot. Moreover, there are even stops where there is absolutely nothing, not even a pole indicating that there is a bus stop there.

I find this example didactic, as it shows how the Smart City label is embedded with a certain fetishism of the digital, a fetishism that does not necessarily make the city “smarter”. Thus, a city can be at the same time digitized and “dumb”. We have to ask ourselves what are the interests behind the use of such labels. I agree with you that the main motivation behind the term is that of marketing cities. But most importantly, we must ask: Smart Cities for whom, for which citizens?

**F.M.:** However one understands those terms, which are the implementations for urban transformation, considering urban planning, governance and surveillance, for instance? Is the situation in Europe similar or different from Latin American cities?

**L.M.:** Despite being sceptical about the uncritical use of the Smart City label, it is undeniable that cities are changing and becoming more and more digitized. This digitization changes the way we see urban planning, governance and surveillance. One of the main novelties here is the spread of the internet through two main ways: smartphones and the internet of things.

Although smartphones are still expensive and therefore not accessible to all, they are becoming increasingly cheaper and ubiquitous. If in the past we had to sit in front of a computer in order to connect to the worldwide web, today even the expression “connecting to the internet” seems to be losing its utility.

We can always be connected, always be on the internet and, most interestingly, we can bring the internet with us wherever we go. See, for example, the role of the internet in some favelas of Rio, where locals are using social media and smartphones to report all sort of injustices, including police brutality. The second point I wanted to highlight is the fact that once just normal physical structures, like an elevator, for example, today can become part of this so-called internet of things. The elevator

can calculate the number and weight of users, the most frequent accessed floors and so on. It is a physical object that is also a sensor.

The same can be said about our homes. Think about all the gadgets you have at home and how they are collecting your private data. Or even think about how much data and traces a person leaves during a normal journey from home to work: all the CCTV cameras that capture one’s movements, the logs generated by the use of mobility cards, the geolocated data generated by phones embedded with GPS etc.

A new digital layer is covering the “physical”, “tangible” space. For urban planners, it would be interesting, for example, to see how this digital layer is being unequally spread across cities, how certain neighbourhoods are more digital than others, how poor neighbourhoods are finding alternative ways to be connected and digital, and how smartphones are being used, for example, to record acts of police abuse and violence.

In terms of governance (although I have some issues with using this term as a proper concept), I believe there is a new trend of citizen empowerment. Such technologies may boost citizens’ participation in democratic decisions. It must be highlighted, however, that there is a dialectical situation, that is to say, there are two confronting trends: one of data integration and centralization of information in the hands of hegemonic

forces, as I presented before, and one of more democratic and bottom-up initiatives, where ordinary citizens are empowered by new information and communication technologies.

**F.M.:** Thinking of the attacks in Brussels in the spring of 2016, in Paris last year, in London or Madrid, and of the increasing militarization of urban space: What can researchers in the vague field of urban security studies learn from research in Urban Latin America, particularly in Brazil? And even more precisely, what can they learn from the studies of conflict and insurgency in the urban peripheries of that continent?

**L.M.:** This is a difficult question. At first sight, I don't see how one can learn from each other, since the situations in Brazil and in Europe vis-à-vis criminality are very different. Terrorism, for example, is a word absolutely absent in the security discourse in Brazil. This may be changing now in light of the mega sporting events, but it is still not a major priority for the authorities. Brazilians fear different things. Brazil is a divided country where the rich fear the poor, and the poor fear the police. However, in one point they may be indeed comparable and you have already mentioned it in your question: the militarization of urban space.

The militarization of favelas in Rio de Janeiro proved to be a complete failure. It is not only an ineffective strategy against criminality, but also an initiative that criminalizes and punishes the poor even

more. In Rio, militarization is happening mainly in poor neighbourhoods (as the rich can count on private initiatives), whereas in Brussels, you can see that it is more prevalent in the wealthy and central neighbourhoods of the European Union headquarters. In Rio, they try to fight a more predictable target, drug-trafficking criminals. In Brussels, however, they have to deal with the unpredictability of terrorist attacks.

I just don't see how the presence of military officers in a crowded public space or in some of the metro stations could prevent a terrorist from carrying a hidden bomb and blowing himself up. Militarization of public spaces did not solve the problem in Brazilian favelas, and it is not going to solve the problem of terrorism. Such militarization just proves that there is a lack of decent public policies for social inclusion. Moreover, both the intelligence of drug cartels and terrorist networks will not simply surrender to flat law enforcement actions, but may have to be fought through complex strategies that include social policies and counter-intelligence strategies. Thus, the presence of military forces on the streets is no more than a "security theatre". In that sense, we could say Belgian and Brazilian urban militarization appear to be similar in at least one aspect: they are part of a "security spectacle".

**F.M.:** You wrote an article on the discrepancy of the reception of Milton Santos' work in Europe and North America on one side, and Latin America on the other side. Which are the most important

contributions of his work from which urban studies in the “North” can learn from - in what sense is it helpful? How does his work help you in your understanding of new phenomena, such as Smart Urbanism and Big Data, for contemporary security issues?

**L.M.:** You are being very optimistic by saying there is an actual “reception” of his works in Europe and North America. People from what you are calling the “North” (a dichotomy that does not explain the world of today anymore) may have heard about Santos, but his work is not in fact being used. You don’t see his works being quoted or his concepts being applied. Santos’s contributions to urban studies, to geography and, broadly, to human sciences, are very vast. He did not only launch one good idea, one important concept, as many important authors have done, but he put together a set of interconnected concepts that form a very strong theory.

For Santos, geography is the “philosophy of the techniques”. Only this is already enough to show the sophistication of his ideas. His periodization of space through the idea of different technical ages is very useful to understand the world today. In spite of him having passed away in 2001, much before terms like Big Data and Smart Urbanism were in vogue, his theory remains vivid today. Right now, I am finishing an article where I make use of his brilliant concept of “convergence of moments”, that is to say, the possibility of two people sharing the same “moment”

even if they are set apart. I am applying this idea to understand the use of live streaming (like those promoted by the collective Mídia Ninja during the vinegar protests in Brazil) as an act of resistance during street protests.

This is what is outstanding about his theory. Many of his concepts, if not most of them, are still applicable to the understanding of this ever-evolving reality. It is a pity, however, that Europe and North America are imprisoned in this English-speaking bubble.