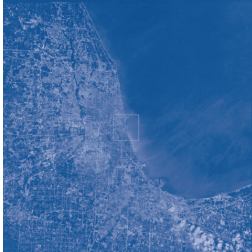


## ANANYA ROY

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*Ananya chose to picnic on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. After we finished the picnic, we took the elevator 100 meters up to the top of Sather Tower to survey the campus. During all of the debates, struggles, and protests that the California public school system has been going through, Ananya Roy has been close to the center. She was part of a radical alliance of faculty, workers, and students who led a walk-out as well as teach-ins in defense of public education in 2009. In an acceptance speech for outstanding teaching, she declared that “conflict, antagonism, and debate are essential mechanisms for shaping society, not blueprints.” The importance of public universities as a place for learning is best understood when we see so many willing to fight for public education. From 100 meters high, you can see all of campus, and imagine it full of students, faculty, and staff demonstrating and standing and fighting as one.*

**AMY:** We have aligned your research with 10<sup>5</sup> power. In the *Powers of Ten*, this frame is the first time you get a glimpse of the city of Chicago as it is growing out into the greater landscape and region of Illinois and the Great Lakes. Can you describe your field of research as aligned with this frame?

**ANANYA:** I grew up in the city of Kolkata in India, which made me very interested in cities and how the world’s twenty-first century megacities, with their rapid growth, were going to house much of the world’s population. Would those cities provide better futures for the people who moved to them with such great aspirations? Some of my early research was with very poor women working in Kolkata, and their struggles to make a better life for themselves. More recently, I’ve been very interested in research at a global scale, thinking about global flows of capital and global flows of “truth” and expertise. So after the Kolkata work, I turned to look at the study of poverty. I’ve spent a lot of time studying very poor communities and their struggles and aspirations; this time I wanted to zoom out and think about what it meant to study poverty from the bird’s-eye view of something like the World Bank, for example, and what would it mean to

come to terms with that sort of institution. So the book *Poverty Capital*, here on the blanket, is an attempt to come to terms with this new global order.

In the mid-1990s, discussion of poverty became really fashionable as a new global conscience emerged. And I see that particularly in the generation of millennials, the undergraduates in my class. They are very taken by the idea that they can make social change and that they can alleviate poverty, if not eliminate it. So I was interested in studying this global order, which is why we have this *Time* magazine “Persons of the Year” issue – Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono, these global celebrities who have been leading global poverty campaigns. I wanted to understand this global order in a way, inspired by a painter like Wassily Kandinsky, as a composition, as these colliding worlds. Kandinsky talks about his compositions as this thundering collision of worlds, but this composition on the cover of my book is called *Small Worlds* – I’m interested in how this global order also makes for small worlds, and these strange interactions. So one of the reasons why we have Whole Foods cookies on the blanket is because this book starts with an image of a woman I’ve never met, or rather I met her only in one of

these small worlds. I tell the story in my book of how one evening while shopping at Whole Foods I came across a really colorful flyer with this woman Felicita's image on it. She was portrayed as the microfinance client of the month, one of the many microfinance programs in South America sponsored by the Whole Planet Foundation, which is the philanthropic arm of Whole Foods. So when one was buying groceries at Whole Foods one could donate one or five dollars as one checked out, and the idea was that that money would go to poor women like Felicita, far away. This is an example of these small worlds of globalization that have been created that also tie in with how we think of ourselves in the world; these practices of micro-philanthropy are a way of thinking about what we might call *spatially distant neighbors*. We don't know Felicita and yet we think we know her. In the book I also tell the story of when I tried to get the permission to reproduce Felicita's photograph. I contacted Whole Planet Foundation, and usually it's really hard to get this permission, but it turned out the photograph had been taken by a young man named Alex Crane, who'd spent the summer interning in Guatemala, and who was in my class that semester. So that was a wonderful example for me of these small worlds.

MICHAEL: I love this idea of the bird's-eye view. One bit of information that we found out in the research of this film is that the picnic was staged in Los Angeles, where the Eames offices were, but in the movie when they zoom out, they relocate the picnic to a park in Chicago. This makes me think of the Chicago School, the urban sociology movement of the 1920s–30s, as this interesting starting place for America's view of poor people and how that affected this frame of urban planning.

ANANYA: Well I'm trained as an urbanist. And for almost a century, the Chicago School was so influential in shaping how academics, scholars, and policy makers thought about cities and poverty. One of the key aspects of the Chicago School was that they really struggled to come to terms with the persistence of poverty in American cities. The most traditional Chicago School theorists thought that immigrants moved to the city and were assimilated into this great American urban fabric, and as their lot in life improved, they moved out into better parts of the city. And of course, that's not how it worked. One of my favorite texts from the Chicago School, something I teach about, comes from a critique within the Chicago School. *Black Metropolis*,

by St. Clair Drake and Horace Roscoe Cayton, takes on the idea that Chicago has this ghetto that has never gone away, and how do we explain this ghetto if not through racial redlining, through policies of segregation, through this long history of exclusion? So I am very interested as an urbanist in trying to retell the story of our cities and to rethink the legacy of the Chicago School.

One of the reasons I wanted tea and sugar on the picnic is because of Stuart Hall, one of my favorite postcolonial theorists. He writes in the British context and has this lovely line about how English identity is so anchored by certain rituals like drinking tea. And having grown up in India, it's also a legacy that I've inherited. I have to have my cup of tea at four in the afternoon, and it has to be done in a certain way. Hall makes the point that there isn't a single tea plantation in Great Britain. Their tea comes from the former colonies – Sri Lanka, India. So he wants us to think about who makes that cup of tea that is the basis of English identity. And one can say something similar about sugar because there aren't sugar plantations in England. So he asks, quite literally, who is that sugar at the bottom of our teacup? I'm really interested in how we think about this *outside*

history that is *inside* all of our histories, and how can we think about cities in that way. What is that hinterland of resources and labor that make up these cities?

AMY: Can you talk about shifts in your field of study in terms of this time span between 1968 to now?

ANANYA: Urban studies in general has been paying much more attention to the global dimensions of urbanization. For example, there has been tremendous work around postcolonial urban theory, paying attention to the long histories of colonial and postcolonial connections. I have a book coming up, co-edited with Aihwa Ong, called *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*. We were really interested in the very ambitious making of the Asian world-class city, in what is claimed to be the Asian century. These are experiments not only with space, but also with time. The idea of making an urban future now happens at the very grand scale of city planning and architecture and design, but also on an everyday basis. You see this through the recent protests and actions in Egypt, young men and women who felt that the future just didn't arrive are claiming their own future. That social revolution is a claiming of public spaces like Tahrir Square, but it's also a claiming of the future.



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MICHAEL: A side note, it's beautiful talking about time in front of the sun and the Campanile, this epic tower with such a big clock.

(FIG. 1) Sather Tower is a campanile (bell and clock tower) on the University of California, Berkeley campus. It was designed and completed in 1914 by John Galen Howard, founder of the College of Environmental Design, and it marks a secondary axis in his original Beaux-Arts campus plan.

ANANYA: What is lovely about our Campanile is that usually each face has a different time on it. Sometimes two to three hours late, so we are used to the

relativity of time on the Berkeley campus.

(FIG. 2) Serendipitously, a group of students walk by with a boom box playing the song, *Rock Around the Clock* by Bill Haley and the Comets.

MICHAEL: How would you describe the tools you use as an urbanist studying poverty?

ANANYA: The tools I most use and cherish are ideas. When I teach my large Global Poverty class on campus, I start with a piece that Subcomandante Marcos wrote at the height of the Zapatista struggle, called *Ideas Are Also Weapons*. This is a very



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empowering notion, that ideas actually matter. It's important, particularly at this juncture in American history, to reclaim the power of ideas. And this is why I love Karl Polanyi's *Great Transformation* because it shows that within capitalism, not just outside of it, all sorts of struggles are possible – that double movement of capitalism. It's a very empowering book, because it helps my undergraduates to think that the world does not always have to be as it is. And so that notion of ideas – everything from design practices to a particular analytical argument to a scientific experiment – remains one of the most important tools that shapes

my life. Now there are all sorts of other tools of imagination, I have a particular weakness for fiction, for example. But also as you can tell from the Kandinsky on the cover of my book, I see art as a way to imagine a certain politics of the possible. I don't want to suggest that it's an instrumental relationship with art, but I do think that art in the broader sense of the term allows us to step outside of certain safe ideas and allows us to reimagine what we thought we knew. So I think all of those are tools, and are particularly important in teaching.

AMY: Speaking of teaching, I would imagine that teaching



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is a tool that you use. Can you tell us why you chose this particular place on the University of California, Berkeley campus for our picnic?

**ANANYA:** I feel very lucky to have a quite global life, I grew up in Kolkata and go back regularly, and my spouse grew up in Cairo, so we spent a lot of time in Cairo. And yet, at the center of all of that is Cal, and Berkeley is a city but Cal is a campus. I've been very committed to the idea of a *public* university. I think this is one of the greatest public universities in the world, and we are at a moment where we have to work hard and fight

hard to maintain the idea of a public university, which is why I wanted this picnic to be right in the heart of a place that I love very much, so we have the plaque (*FIG. 3*), we have the Campanile.

**AMY:** Looking away from Berkeley, and the campus now, how does San Francisco factor in as a city?

**ANANYA:** Well, I joke that San Francisco is a lovely little quiet village. The Bay Area is such a beautiful cosmopolitan place, one with its own inequalities of course. One of the challenges is not everyone that lives here can enjoy the quality of life that

the Bay Area offers. One of my ongoing conversations with my students is that many of us have been committed to the idea of slow food and organic food, but even in a city like Berkeley you think about whether slow food and organic food is available for those who are not well-off. You go to shop at Whole Foods, and it's impossibly expensive. The question of who has access to that beautiful quality of life is a pressing one in the Bay Area.

**AMY:** Can you talk a bit about currents in the making and remaking of cities? It seems to be an interesting moment in terms of the death and rebirth of American, postindustrial cities. Will we be seeing more of this or will we be seeing more rapidly emerging new cities like Shenzhen, China?

**ANANYA:** That's a great question, and it's a political question because ultimately it's going to be about how these cities are shaped by certain sociopolitical forces, but it's an open-ended question. I was just in St. Louis last week and folks there are thinking about the experiments in Detroit. I'm fascinated by the fact that artists and activists have been flocking to Detroit. There is an opportunity to rethink the paradigm of the postindustrial cities, maybe they need not go a certain route

but can rather become more inclusive places with a more creative economy. But there's a very complicated relationship between artists and gentrification in these circumstances, where artists often lead the way in terms of social experimentation and then those neighborhoods become the new hip fashionable places to be, like the Lower East Side in New York, among many other places. Whether or not these social experiments in Detroit will become co-opted by broader forces of commodification and commercialization remains to be seen. But at the moment, it is a way of rethinking the paradigm.

**MICHAEL:** Speaking of co-optation, reminds me of your writings about microlending, microcredit, and this idea of bankers in America and Europe seeing this as a potential market.

**ANANYA:** This is very important, the question of how an idea with some amount of revolutionary capacity can become one of the primary tools of globally circulating finance capital. But the flipside of that co-optation is the fact that there is also quite a bit of troublemaking and subversion going on within this global order. In my book, I talk about characters inside the system as *double agents*, as folks who work in really powerful institutions

but who are able to make change from within, or at least articulate critique from within. I find that idea very useful, and I try to present that idea to my students because in some ways, I work for a very powerful knowledge-producing institution, and I like to think of myself as a double agent, where I'm completely sold on the mission and mandate of this place and yet there's a lot of troublemaking to be done within this institution. So that idea, which is how we can make change within structures that are completely co-opted, which is the flipside of co-optation, for me an important political endeavor.

MICHAEL: I guess we all have potential to be double agents, but are there some really interesting double agents out there?

ANANYA: Yes, I think all institutions have double agents. The Gates are double agents. Clearly they've built up the world's wealthiest foundation and that foundation is hegemonic and powerful, but they've also challenged billionaires around the world to step up and give away large pieces of their fortune. So in that sense they've transformed what it means to be rich, now being rich is not good enough, you also have to be a philanthropist. Bono is an interesting double agent

because he quite strategically uses his rock-star celebrity to make all kinds of change and to get commitments from folks across the political spectrum. That's what I find interesting, that he's just as comfortable with George Clooney as he is with George Bush. One can say that it's a selling out, or one can see it as a really brilliant strategy that works.

AMY: In thinking about when this movie was made, if we zoom into the idea of poverty in 1968 as compared to ideas around poverty now, what's the shift of perception?

ANANYA: Two points: One it's fascinating to note that in the mid-1990s, poverty became a global issue, but many of these ideas come from the mid-1960s and early 1970s. The World Bank in the 1990s, under James Wolfensohn, remade itself as a kinder and gentler institution committed to poverty alleviation, but much of that was in fact a financialization of development, so not very convincing in the end as an actual strategy for ending poverty. The Wolfensohn World Bank was really a re-creation of the Robert McNamara World Bank of the late 1960 and early 1970s, which was itself an interesting contradiction because McNamara engineered the architecture of the Vietnam War, but then as

president of the World Bank, decided to take on poverty as his main focus and he became one of the most progressive presidents the World Bank has ever had. Inevitably his ideas were shaped by his experience in running the war in Vietnam, which points to a link between something called global security and poverty, something that is very much with us in a post 9/11 era as well.

The other point is that the late sixties were a time of great social turmoil, which one could say was co-opted. The whole notion of what social turmoil or protest looks like is so shaped by what we think we know about the sixties, and clearly as we had our campus protests and our California protests around public education recently, there was a lot of talk about whether this was the sixties all over again, whether from the right or from the left. That was the critique of the right – that we were simply recreating the sixties. But in that sense, that moment of social turmoil linked to certain co-optations is a similar moment.

AMY: Why do you think IBM made this movie?

ANANYA: I don't know the answer to that, but the question is an important one, inasmuch as it allows us to think about the role

of powerful corporations and the production of images and knowledge. I say this because we are the heart of the campus and every building is named, and we are a public university but we spend a lot of time thinking about how we can cultivate donors and find resources for the things we care about. I am very much a part of that enterprise and I don't apologize for it; I hope I do it ethically but I recognize that's a part of our lives. IBM is an interesting example because it's part of this larger knowledge economy itself, right? So how do we think about corporations like that? Google would be the current-day equivalent of that, and we tend to think they are not the Chevrons and Monsantos of the world, but we have to figure out what that connection is between these knowledge economy companies – the creative, entrepreneurial companies – and the political and social work we do as academics and artists.

AMY: Thinking about those corporate identities, returning to the Subcomandante Marcos text for a moment, he also talks about the power of the media and the image. We're here making an image to represent an exchange of knowledge, on this picnic blanket. How do you think about representations of

knowledge and their distribution as images in the public sphere?

ANANYA: I have to say, as someone trained as a scholar, that we don't do a very good job of thinking about images, and in America we don't have a strong enough tradition of public intellectuals. There are some, but we have been overwhelmed by the talking heads – well, really the screaming heads – on television and radio. I think it's important to think about how we counter that, and one of the points I make to my students in the Global Poverty class is that I'd like them to think of themselves as public scholars. I'd like them to think about how their work travels and how we can do a better job with that.

MICHAEL: Thinking of research, you mention doing research in a squatter village when a man there asked you an unexpected question?

ANANYA: That was a very formative moment for me because it was right at the end of the Kolkata research. I knew these squatter settlements well, but on this particular occasion a young man of maybe nineteen or twenty came up to me and said, "Well you've been asking us all these questions, can I ask you one instead?" And he asked me why there is homelessness in America.

This is a young kid living in a very poor squatter settlement on the edges of Kolkata, but he kept talking to me about the politics of housing and how he and his family and other families in that settlement had the right to build on public land and create shelters for themselves. And he wondered how in America, which he understood to be this most prosperous country on earth, the homeless were homeless. He kept insisting that if one is a citizen one cannot be homeless, so for him there was something dreadfully wrong with American ideas of citizenship. So that question prompted me to take up what I call asking third-world questions about the first world. But the sad irony of the story is that a couple of weeks after that exchange, his entire settlement was demolished. And I never found him again and I don't know to where they were moved. So his claim, the bold one, was quite fragile itself, I don't want to romanticize that piece of it. The questions he asked were very important and I came back and took his question seriously and spent a couple of years studying homelessness in the Bay Area and studying policies related to homelessness in the Bay Area. It was a way of coming to terms with the poverty that existed here.

AMY: It seems there is a lot

of interest in poverty and humanitarian aid elsewhere, and I'm wondering about the concern for poverty right here on campus.

ANANYA: It's a huge part of what we try to do in the Global Poverty and Practice minor. Students come to that minor with a real interest in working in the developing world and helping alleviate poverty, and through the course of the minor we encourage them to think about working here, these are not mutually exclusive but rather connected fields. In my class, I try to get them to move from thinking about how to end poverty to asking questions about how poverty is produced to then asking questions at the end of the semester about how wealth, power, and privilege are produced. And to me that is a rather radical shift, because we need to better understand how well power and privilege are produced if we are to get serious about poverty. It's too often that we see this as an act of benevolence, but however wonderful that is, structural change will not happen until we can face up to these forms of wealth, power, and privilege which this university also embodies.

MICHAEL: It seems like it has gotten worse, that the percentage of wealth is held by an even smaller and smaller group of people.

ANANYA: Yes, worldwide it has gotten worse, and in the U.S. it's really stunning. There have been so many Berkeley faculty that have worked on this issue, in economics, political science, and in public policy. And they have shown that in the last ten years or so inequality in the U.S. has dramatically increased. The top one percent of American households now holds more share of the income than at any other time in American history since 1928. The new wave of books coming from this scholarship will talk about how that sort of inequality shapes politics as well. The implications are huge, and we see this play out in our country all the time, play out in discussions around the national budget, we see it in our everyday lives as well.