

This talk will survey the political economy of today's digital capitalism, discussing how, on the one hand, data and artificial intelligence have emerged as important geopolitical battlefields of the global order, with the city - one of the main sites of data extractivism - becoming one of the key battlegrounds of ideological struggles which have ramifications stretching far beyond the usual problems of housing or of urban planning.

The first part of the talk will discuss how the ongoing concentration of power in the hands of Big Tech (most of America or Chinese provenance) has profound consequences for democratic politics as well as the economy at large. The second half will explore how the city has become an attractive target for Big Tech, with investors, venture capitalists, and technology firms seeing the city as the platform of platforms on which many of the latest digital services, from transportation to food delivery, will be tested and offered. On the other hand, it also figures quite prominently in the imagination of both cosmopolitan democrats - who see the open city as a bulwark against xenophobic politics of the right - and of many neoliberal and right-wing ideologues, who look upon Dubai or Singapore as role models that combine authoritarian and hierarchical politics with a hyper-capitalist and hyper-technological outlook. What, then, can be done to ensure that the democratic city - not the technocratic smart city dystopia - becomes a potent force for egalitarianism and solidarity in global politics writ large?