Poverties, urban spaces and States in Latin-American metropolises

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Good afternoon. It is an honor and a pleasure to be here and I thank the organizers (and especially Talja Blokland) for the invitation to give this speech about poverties and the States in Latin American cities recently, with special emphasis on Brazil.

Having said this, I must start by saying that although I regard it as a challenge, I also deem it a great opportunity to talk about this, considering the general theme of the Conference. The challenge resides in the fact that the idea of Latin American cities as a group must be enhanced. On the other hand, if we account for the differences and similarities between cities in Latin America, we have a very good material for theory building, in the meaning given to the term by Jennifer Robinson. This is so because in Latina American metropolises a considerable proportion of the resoureces available for people, and especially for poor people, are provided by the city, in formal and informal ways. This speech intends to start to develop this exercise by comparing Poverty, State, Urban space in the region, with the important feature that they are to be considered in the plural, not in the singular.

I will depart from a short discussion of the main theories developed to analyze cities in the region. In those theories, these three elements – poverty, State and space - had a central role, but without accounting for the multiple possible forms of connections between them. Then I develop a strong statement in the second part of this speech, considering our general theme: in strict terms, there is no Latin America, consequently there are no Latin American cities. There are several different countries with distinct historical, political and geographical legacies. But at the same time, there are similarities and common processes between groups of countries and cities "nested" in those differences. Finally, I discuss some of the most recent dynamics in the

region, with special emphasis on Brazilian cities. Intense transformations have recently happened in a substantial part of the region, but again specificities are present, especially in the way those three elements interacted.

1. Latin America in a comparative perspective

A good point of departure for discussing resourceful cities in Latin America is an operational definition of poverty. Here, poverty is considered to be a multidimensional state of relative absence of social and material well-being that generates a reduction of choices and, therefore, of liberty. What the word "relative" means obviously varies historically and geographically and is subject to political struggles and social interpretations that lead to socially accepted visions of social justice, as well as to the establishment of rights. People might have low levels of social and material well-being because they cannot access resources, both by formal and by informal means. At least three sources of resources must be considered in modern capitalist societies – markets, States and sociability/community. Additionally, the access to these sources may be facilitated or blocked by middle level structures such as social networks (which mediate the access to the three sources already mentioned, although people usually associate it only with the third) and residential segregation, what brings space to the center of the equation. So, in order to understand the production of resourceful cities (and their spaces) we must consider the presence of those three sources, mediated by these two intervening mid-range structures in cities.

The existing macronarratives ignore these elements almost completely, focusing only on economic or quasi-economic processes. The limits of these macro-narratives were not associated with their arguments as such, but with two main failures: they were too systemic, failing to capture the role of national and local processes, and they undermined the role of politics, of institutions, of political actors, their strategies and choices, as well as of States, at both the national and local levels.

The first theory to connect our three elements was 'development theory', which suggested that development follows capitalist modernization. The prevalence of underdevelopment, therefore, would be caused by 'accommodation effects', which should fade away with time. Modernization

would bring to the cities people with rural behaviors, who were detached from their rural origins, social connections, authority relationships and economic activities. As a result, they would develop anomic, provincial, unsubordinated and lazy behavior, ending up as 'urban marginals'. In the 1970s, this was a kind of structural substitute for the 'culture of poverty' concept, 'below the Equator'.

Development theory was intensely criticized both by Eclac economic theory, and later by dependence theory (Cardoso). In a complementary line of analysis, others departed from Marxist structural analysis to sustain that those supposedly 'marginals' were in fact functional to the peripheral capitalist economies of those countries (Chico de Oliveira). The contribution of those countries to the world capitalist division of labor would be providing low paid and poorly regulated labor forces. This was only possible due to the presence of a large informal economy that kept (alive) a large reserve industrial army. This situation was helped by the authoritarian political regimes that characterized the region between the 1960's and the 1980's. Therefore, in the moment of most intense economic growth, poverty was produced in large amounts: growth and poverty were two faces of a same coin (Lúcio Kowarick), and the spaces of Latin American Metropolises were marked by this (Ermínia Maricato, Nabil Bonduki). This literature dialogued (from afar) with the French urban sociology school (Manuel Castells, mainly), but was produced independently of it.

In all these theories, countries and cities of the region were shown as examples of general theories associated with the variation of development (in the first case) and the similarities of capitalist development (in the second). In both cases, political processes and the State were left out of the analysis or were treated as products of macro-economic dynamics. Cities were characterized by what they lacked (given cities on the North and the theories about them), and not by what they had. The several forms of informality present in the labor market, in housing roduction, in political participation, and in sociability (since people are infraestrucures as stated by Simone) were considered as anomalies instead of constitutive features.

Since then, the region was rarely thematized comparatively, although these two macronarratives continue to be present implicitly in theories which sustain the supposed affinities between national and local urbanization

processes, echoing the analyses of the 1970s. Local elements, actors, conflicts, institutions and struggles tended to be treated as peripheral details, leading to conclusions about the inevitability of processes and leaving to no-room for contingency, for politics and for the greater part of the characteristics of Latin American cities themselves.

And what other elements should be accounted for?

2. Similarities and nested differences in Latin American cities

The region contains both similarities and differences, sometimes in the same issue. Even when general processes point to similarities, the actions of political actors, the effects of institutions or space production dynamics end up constructing specificities. In fact, one of the major sources of differences and similarities between cities are the processes of State formation and of the creation of Social Protection Systems, or the different Welfare regimes, if we want to name them that way, following Andersens. These elements influenced the formation of social institutions, social classes and, as a consequence, of political actors, as well as the construction of the institutions that regulate political conflicts and socialize wealth and resources. A similar point could be made concerning the processes of space production in each city. There are several sources of differences and I had no choice but to focus only on some, dropping the majority of country details. Let´s discuss the most important elements:

a. The historical formation of Latin-America

This included two colonial projects, two different languages and several ethnic and cultural heritages over a broad geographical region. The two colonial projects involved different urbanization strategies for the colonies, considering different economic goals, captured by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1995) with the use of the metaphors of the sower, spreading seeds (Portugal), and the tile-layer, projecting and 'squaring' the territory (Spain). This was combined with very different areas in geographical terms (at least three large regions must be considered – the Caribbean, the Andes and the Lowlands). For those who doubt the importance of the legacy of this long term history, it is enough to

observe that the four largest metropolises today in Latin America outside Brazil are the four capitals of Spanish vice-kingdoms – in historical order Mexico City, Lima, Bogotá and Buenos Aires.

Obviously, several micro-geographical and topographic elements have also been key for the development of each city, but it is impossible to account for them in a general overview.

b.   Ethnicity.

The differences started from the distinct relationships between each State and its indigenous populations throughout time. Additionally, some economic cycles were later associated with slavery and marked countries and cities differently in economic, political, ethnic and cultural terms. A substantial part of the legacy of social inequality in the region is associated with this. If slavery was important to some regions and cities, Latin America also received intense international migration since the end of the XIX century. If speaking Guarany was prohibited in the city of São Paulo at the end of the XVIII century, speaking Italian became a felony in the second decade of the XX century in the same city.

New international migration waves have been occurring since the 1990´s bringing people from the poorest countries of the region to cities such as São Paulo, Buenos Aires and Mexico City. All these processes influenced family structures, solidarity schemes, community organization and sociability, with very important consequences to resources, social conditions, to the way politics was played, to sociability (and its social networks) and how space was occupied.

c. Diverse urban networks and scales

Latin America has 6 of the 29 cities which are expected to be world megacities by 2025 - although with decreasing population growth rates. The largest cities tend to be in Brazil, a country which has 12 cities among the 22 in the region with at least 2 million inhabitants – against 4 in Mexico, 3 in

Argentina and 3 in Colômbia.[1] At the same time, urban primacy is smaller in Brazil than in the other countries, although the country has the largest metroregion (São Paulo with 20 million) and the fourth (Rio de Janeiro with 12 million). So, Brazil is not only a highly urbanized country, with 84% of its population in cities in 2010, but also a country of many very large cities.

d. Nested differences in political and institutional processes.

Looking back to the history of the region, on the other hand, several amazing parallelisms arise. A first parallelism included the transitions from colonial rule to independence. In the Spanish-speaking Latin American countries independence came between 1810 and 1830 as a result of Spain´s incapacity to sustain its colonies after Napoleon invaded the country. These processes happened with low presence of liberal ideas and with the strong political presence of rural landlords (and substantial political decentralization), which marked the processes of nation State formation in several countries.[2]

The Brazilian case is similar, but it happened differently, since the royal family crossed the Atlantic in 1806 fleeing from Napoleon. This halted the installation of a Republic, but prevented the desegregation of the vast territory of the Portuguese colony. Independence came in 1822, but with the creation of an Empire. The Republic would come only in 1889 (and the end of slavery in 1888), again with low presence of liberal ideas, with strong political presence of landowners and very low centralization in the formation of the Nation State.

The second and crucial moment of parallelism concerns economic modernization and State formation in the first decades of the XX century. Economic modernization came mainly in the 1930´s and 1940´s with strong presence of the State in processes of industrialization by substitution of imports, not only as direct producer of intermediary goods and infra-structures, but also

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[1] In Brazil, they are Brasília, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Salvador, Recife; Fortaleza; Curitiba; Campinas; Belém and Goiânia. In Mexico: Ciudad de México, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla. In Argentina, Buenos Aires, Córdoba and Rosário. In Colombia, Bogotá, Medellin and Cali. (United Nations, 2009)

[2] Independence came to Argentina in 1816 (Saint Martin); Chile in 1818 (O´Higgins and San Martin); Colombia/Venezuela/Ecuador/Panama in 1819 (Venezuela and Ecuador became separated countries in 1830, with Bolivar's death); Peru in 1820; Bolivia in 1809, but consolidated in 1825; Mexico in 1821; Paraguay in 1811; Uruguay in 1810 (from Spain) and 1828 (from Brazil and Argentina).

as the political conductor of the process. The best "success cases"? (Brazil, Argentina and Mexico) managed to create relatively diversified industrial sectors and relatively capable State structures. Even among those countries, however, in some cases the political strength of the agricultural elites made industrialization less generalized and more incomplete, reducing the stability of State strategies, such as in Argentina, especially during the military period, enhancing heterogeneity. In other cases, rural elites were included peripherally in the modernization processes, boosting industrialization and capitalist modernization, but maintaining peripheral regions of the country under the old forms of political control and economic development, such as the case in Brazil.

In the majority of the countries, social policies, labor legislation, and social rights were granted by the State under authoritarian regimes. The formation of the Latin American Social Protection Systems involved the selective granting of rights subordinated to the positions of the individuals in the occupational structure, leading to a kind of 'regulated' citizenship (Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos). In these cases, social rights were granted before the full acquisition of civil and political rights, inverting the classical order proposed by Theodore Marshall (1950) and leading to a kind of 'Stateship' instead of citizenship (José Murilo de Carvalho). The Southern cone – Argentina, Uruguay and Chile - presented a kind of stratified universalism, marked by more inclusive policies, at least in health, social security and labor legislation (Mesa-Lago).

The third and closest parallelism concerns the authoritarian governments and the return to democracy in recent decades. The majority of the largest and most important countries experienced authoritarian regimes between the 1950s and the 1980s.[3]

Some of those governments, especially Brazil and Mexico, intensified import substitution policies and conservative modernization. Urbanization and

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[3] The list of coups d'état is long – Brazil (1930, 1937, almost in 1954, almost again in 1963 and finally in 1964), Argentina (1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966, 1970 and 1976), Uruguay (1933, 1973), Chile (1932, 1973), Peru (1929, 1948, 1968 e 1975), Paraguay (1954, Strossner stays until 1989), Bolivia (1970 and again 1980), Venezuela (1945, 1992), Ecuador (1963, 1976). The only important country with no coup d'état – Mexico – experienced the longest de facto authoritarian regime (from the 1920's to the 1990's), as the PRI (former PRN) occupied the presidency since its creation in 1929. The choice of the PRI's candidate, inside the organization – the 'destape', was the only really important political competition in Mexico for 70 years.

metropolization went to its peak, creating the Latin American metropolises we see nowadays. Therefore, fast urbanization, intense migration and proletarization happened under authoritarian political conditions, with civil and political rights suspended or seriously hampered. Obviously, that combination has left dire consequences until today.

The presence of right-wing authoritarian regimes, however, did not define what kind of economic modernization was introduced, nor what kind of political system was developed, generating more heterogeneity. A comparison between Argentina and Chile on one side and Brazil and Mexico on the other illustrates the point.

A last moment of historical parallelism dates from the 1980s and 1990s, when all those countries moved back to democracy, introducing elections and new social actors. Social inclusion in a broader sense, after decades of increasing social inequalities under authoritarian governments, and more specifically the fight against urban poverty, housing precariousness and the provision of social services have been seriously impacted by these processes of return to democracy. Once again the differences between countries emerge, though.

Several transformations were introduced in the Latin American Social Protection Systems with different degrees of decentralization, participation (including institutionalized participation), privatization and the growth of the third sector. The different combinations of these elements between countries, however, varied substantially. In some countries, the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s had clear neoliberal designs, Pinochet's Chile being the most prominent case. Peru, Bolivia and Argentina, this especially under Menen, also included privatization and neoliberal instruments, particularly in their pension systems (Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Sonia Draibe). Brazil went in the opposite direction, strengthening a significant part of its social policies, under strong federalist regulation (Marta Arretche). The stable presence of left-wing political coalitions recently contributed to a general decrease in inequalities (Evelin Huber).

Access to policies and services has been improving, especially among the poorer, but very important differences of quality are still present, and are actually increasing. As a whole, poverty has been declining in urban areas. The

single social process in evident and alarming increase is urban violence, with important consequences to urban segregation. We shall come to those processes later on when we discuss the Brazilian case deeper.

Therefore, the recent period of democratization enhanced accountability and enlarged political participation in Latin America. This coincided with the moment of dissemination of neoliberal ideas internationally. However, their appropriation locally differed from place to place, with obvious consequences over State policies and poverty conditions. These are not captured by the mere use of the concept of neoliberalism and should be accounted for in comparisons in the region.

e. Urban structures, peripheries and urban precariousness

As is widely known, urbanization in the largest part of Latin America is a relatively recent process, dating from the 1940s. The process happened over a very short timespan, driven primarily by fast and massive migration from rural areas to the major metropolises in the wealthiest parts of the countries. Those waves of migrations were absorbed only partially by urban markets and industry. As a consequence, unemployment and precarious jobs (the informal economy) became prevalent features of those cities.

The spaces of poverty where those people lived were marked by large-scale precarious settlements and favelas (shantytowns) in peripheral and highly segregated spaces, where the inhabitants themselves built their own houses. Living conditions in those places were highly vulnerable and access to resources, including public policies and services low or non-existent as a result of the authoritarian political environment of the time. Local social networks were central for the provision of resources and the construction of survival strategies (Gonzales de la Rocha). All those places were associated with negative cultural labels and territorial stigmas, impacting social integration and also labor market participation. The State classically reinforced segregation by constructing large scale housing projects in extreme peripheries, instead of creating policies to regulate land and reduce segregation.

During the same period, and in part associated with these processes, cities such as São Paulo became highly industrialized metropolises. Therefore,

these inequalities did not stem from a lack of economic development, but from the success of a certain kind of economic development, which produced inequalities continuously.

This urban scenario formed the paradigm of Latin American metropolization. Their spatial structures were marked by heavy segregation with the wealthier social groups located in central areas (where scarce infrastructure and policies were abundant), while the poor and recently migrated population lived in vast, quite homogenous and segregated peripheries. This segregation structure expresses spatially a clear pattern of social avoidance between social class and racial groups (superposed). This was called by Carlos Nelson dos Santos the "Brazilian metropolitan model", but it might as well be called the Latin American metropolitan model.

Another common feature of those cities is urban precariousness caused by the combination of low wages industrialization and scarce public policies. In Brazil, for example, while the public policy created by the military governments (and marked my mistargeting, corruption, clientelism and low quality) produced around 3 million housing units between 1964 and 1979, the urban population jumped from 31 million persons in 1960 to 80 million in 1980.

So, basically three precarious, and so called "informal", housing solutions were developed by the population - tenements (already present in the pre-industrialization period), favelas and irregular and clandestine settlements. According to UN estimates, the region has 24% of its population living in irregular or precarious settlements. Although very high, this figure is lower than the average of developing regions (33%) in 2010, and is declining – it was 34% in 1990 and 29% in 2000 (United Nations, 2009). The presence of precariousness varies substantially between cities, or even within countries, but is significant everywhere. In Brazil, studies developed by the Ministry of Cities state that around 12 million persons lived in precarious settlements all over the country in 2000 (11% of the urban population) and around 6 million housing units should be produced to end all kinds of housing precariousness. The existing preliminary data suggest that this percentage stayed the same or decreased slightly in 2010.

In sum, those metropolises were historically constructed in a broadly radial and concentric urban fabric with vast and homogeneous peripheries only minimally assisted by State policies. We shall see in a moment that since the return to democracy, Brazilian peripheries, at least, have become more heterogenous, although with insignificant changes in the general structure of segregation.

Now I am going to focus attention on Brazil and discuss the recent changes in the relationships between poverty, State and urban space.

3. Transformations in the Policy, State and space in Brazilian metropolises

Since the return to democracy, several major political changes have happened in Brazil. Civilian government returned to power in 1985 and direct presidential elections were held in 1989 following intense political mobilization across the country. Both the labour movement and local urban grassroot movements were very important agents in the regime transition, pushing for more participation, accountability and public policy reform, both nationally and locally.

The 1988 Constitution consolidated many of these demands for democratization, including the redesign of several public policies. Since then, Brazilian federalism has been reformed through a policy-specific transference of implementation capacities and resources in several policies to states and municipalities but with the federal government retaining broad financial and decision-making capacities.

This is an important point to be stressed, because neoliberal ideas arrived late in Brazil – at the beginning of the 1990s, and became important in economic policies. The core of social policies – education, health and social assistance – however, received a neoliberal approach only in the Collor government. The two longest and most important administrations of the period – Cardoso and Lula (and now Dilma) – did not implement neoliberal social policies. In fact, there were clear processes of policy learning between these governments in the constitution of federal universalist policy systems.

Consequently, despite their many problems and weaknesses Brazilian social policies have never been as strong as they are today and the amount of resources delivered by the State has never been as relevant. At least in the case of basic policies and services, social indicators have risen and access to public services and policies has improved in all metropolitan areas in a clear trend towards universalization, although with increasing problems of quality. Poverty and economic inequality also have fallen substantially in the last years, in part as a result of State actions.

In this same period, however, urban policies were treated with a clear neoliberal tone until the end of the Cardoso administrations (1995-2002), but received an opposite treatment in the Lula governments. In fact, between the 1980s and 2002 the federal government disappeared from housing and urban policies. This reduced financial resources, but allowed the creation and dissemination of alternative policies by local governments, in a wide-ranging process of policy innovation, since municipalities are politically autonomous units. The responsibility for providing housing is shared between different levels of government, but planning is local.

In institutional terms, municipal governments developed elements such as participatory councils, new financial arrangements and redistributive zoning. In housing, the list includes social rent, renovation of housing projects, but mostly slum upgrading; regularization of irregular settlements; self-construction associated with the State, all with a clear redistributive tone.

Since the 1990s, however, local governments also incorporated some neoliberal policy tools, such as public-private partnerships or the production of large projects of urban renovation with international consultants in what Carlos Vainer called 'acupuntural urbanism'. However, if partnerships are flourishing, large projects until now are more important for political discourses than for city transformations, probably due to the small size of the local land markets, even in the most important cities. The novelties concerning the issue are associated with the Mega Events of the next years (World Cup and Olympic Games). They are already having a major impact in Rio de Janeiro, but only future research will show if they will also affect other cities.

Several of the local redistributive policies produced since the 1990s were federalized after 2003, with the creation of the Ministry of Cities. This ended a period of complete lack of federal housing or urban policies which started in 1986, with the extinction of a federal bank created by the military. In this period, the urban population leapt again from 80 million in 1980 to 161 million in 2010. You can imagine the results.

The formation of the Ministry led to the creation of several new institutions, including Laws, Funds, Councils, National Conferences and the National Plans for housing, sanitation, garbage and transportation, as well as changes in mortgages and financial regulations which liberated market housing production for middle income families. Also two major infrastructural and housing investment programs have marked the return of the federal government to the urban policy sector since 2006 and 2007.

The two programs experienced some implementation problems (which reduced their pace), but also problems of design. The housing program introduced important innovations – open subsidies for very poor families for the first time in history; and a quite fast implementation strategy. But there are also important problems: the lack of federal regulation on the projects location and on the necessary infra-structure, may be producing a new wave of segregated projects and neighbourhoods.

Regardless of these improvements, Brazilian metropolises continue to be marked by intense land irregularity. In spatial terms, the structure of macrosegregation, specially, has changed little and the centres of the metropolises have remained highly exclusive. Data from the 2010 Census (from a book I have just concluded) show a slight increase in the isolation of the elites in São Paulo.

However, peripheries are becoming increasingly heterogeneous, not only in urban terms, but also in terms of the social groups they house. This is caused by three associated processes: i. the presence of high income gated communities (Caldeira), but also ii. the increasing presence of State infra-structure investments and iii. changes in social structure, with small, but clear processes of upward social mobility. A similar phenomenon is happening in the shantytowns, making it more accurate to talk about peripheries and favelas in

the plural (Valladares and Preteceille). The effects of these processes on sociability and on social networks are not clear yet, since only some studies have been developed (some of them by me).

In economic terms, Brazil experienced an important opening of its economy in the 1990s, which led to a strong economic restructuring in the following decade. Regardless of the important economic changes in activities that occurred in São Paulo (Brazil's most important economic centre), however, the existing data suggest no signs of polarization in social structure and in income distribution. In fact, the comparison of occupational data from three censuses (from the book I have just concluded) indicate a superposition of an increase of tertiary professional activities and a maintenance of a substantial (although smaller) amount of secondary, fordist positions. This is probably a result of a superposition of economic roles in the city, instead of a substitution.

Urban violence and a widespread sense of insecurity have become central features of urban sociability in recent times, leading on one side to the production of gated communities and enclaves of wealth, and on the other impacting the sociability and social organization of the poor in the peripheries. But also in this case, general narratives do not grasp what has been happening in the ground, and the situation in each city is a complex combination of local policies and local conditions. Massive incarceration, for example, was a policy in São Paulo (with unintended negative impacts), but not in Rio de Janeiro, only to stay within Brazil. In any case, the complex ways in which police and crime mingle explain a significant part of the phenomenon, and not general international trends in State policies.

Regarding civil society, major transformations have happened since the return to democracy, again with country variations. In the Brazilian case, the issue involves the reform of public policy sectors, which created many new arenas for participation. In analytical terms, it is important to abandon theoretical models based on 'authonomy' and focus on the linkages (or on fit, as suggested by the neoinstitutionalists) between activism and the State, incuding using social network analysis.

Urban social activism has become more heterogeneous since the 1990s, in part due to the presence of other channels for participation and political

action under democracy, including NGOs and participation in public policies implementation. The recent period also saw the dissemination of identity-based social and cultural movements, not only the Afro-Brazilian movement, but also underground literature and rap. As is widely known, Brazilian cities have been experiencing very substantial waves of civic protest since last June. They have involved a superposition of demands, some local and urban, and other national and triggered probably by an expectation crisis with the federal scenario, mainly centered in the economy. The larger part of the local demands was associated with urban mobility, although in some cities protest against the future Mega events was also present. In my opinion, it is really difficult, however, to support a single and simple explanation to that recent protest surge.

Taking into account all these processes, therefore, it is not enough to describe Brazilian metropolises merely in terms of widespread poverty in homogeneous peripheral spaces lacking basic State services and policies. Also, the idea of a radial and concentric urban form may give a general description of its structure, but does not describe a significant part of the metropolitan territory. And urban life is produced in the details, not in the general patterns.

On the other hand, it would also be inaccurate to state that poverty and spatial precariousness are now over. Poverty has been reduced, but inequality is still a major characteristic of Brazilian cities (and society). The provision of State services happens in incomplete and selective ways, and local policies against spatial segregation are practically non-existent. All this increases the heterogeneity of social situations and shows that citizenship construction is an often contradictory process. Even considering just one single national case, therefore, the plurals in Poverty, State and space are necessary to understand how resources are produced and accesses in the city.

Thank you