

Doctoral Dissertation

**Towards an Understanding of the Subaltern Struggle
for a Right to the City:
A Critical Analysis of Urban Subaltern Resistance
in the Global South**

(Summary)

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This dissertation aims to celebrate and understand the urban subaltern struggle for a right to the city for all. It renders visible subaltern histories and spatialities of exclusions and resistances, and sociologically outlines the social conditions of possibilities of collective politics within the neoliberal urbanism.

Using works on neoliberal governmentality, Marxist critical urban studies, and subaltern urbanism as theoretical guideposts, this dissertation traces the processual and performative nature of the subaltern political resistance and sociality building. By considering urbanization as a provincialized and historical process within neoliberal capitalism, it locates generative solidarities within heterogeneous grassroots politics and the neoliberal production of urban space and consumer-citizenships. Its contribution is to look at the undercurrent of this urban neoliberalization process, at the slum community level, to reveal the histories, interrogations, negotiations, fragmentations, violences and potentialities of subaltern politics. This research advances studies of marginality and resistance by marking a processual and co-constituted conception of subaltern politics within neoliberal urbanism.

This dissertation draws from an almost six-years of engaged ethnographic study of subaltern life and politics in a large slum in the Philippine capital city continuously facing forced evictions, demolitions and relocations. The evictions are to make way for a public-private partnership between the state agency tasked to produce housing for the poor and elite real estate corporation for the development of a Central Business District. Using an ethnography of a community barricade for an initial itinerary of recognition, it proceeds to mark the practices of neoliberal governmentalities in urban land allocation, the commodification of socialized shelter, and the construction of consumer-citizens. It then traces the penetration of neoliberal urbanization on heterogeneous slum politics and marks the spatialities and histories of radical subaltern movements.

It argues that neoliberal urbanism as the privatization of urban planning can be understood as a complex process that includes commodification of politics, financialization and de-democratization of urban planning, and state repression. Coupled with the commodification of socialized housing, these neoliberal urban processes result in the unmaking of poor people's homes, and the erasure of

subaltern histories of the production of pro-poor communities and economies, and the re-making of these homes (as shelter) within spaces and temporalities congruent with capitalist accumulation.

These neoliberal governmentalities, in turn, engender their negotiations and resistances in the slum. Heterogeneous subaltern politics are reconstituted in several aspects. First, the politics of confrontation co-constitutes the politics of engagement. Confrontative politics spatially manifested as community barricades expand legal democratic spaces. Second, the contradictions of capitalist accumulation and subaltern dispossession are rescaled unto slum communities and inevitably increase intra-community conflict. Third, some subaltern groups are compelled to enact 'pragmatic' disentanglement of local from extra-local politics in exchange for concessions on land and housing. Fourth, grassroots home-owner associations are constrained to perform two contradictory economic functions in their engagement with the neoliberal urban government. On the one hand, they struggle for a greater share of the urban surplus to access better relocation for their members. On the other hand, they implicitly functioning as neoliberal frontiers that facilitate de-radicalization of slum politics and segregate untapped consumer populations into market segments where those without capacities to pay are relocated in peri-urban resettlement.

Within this neoliberalization of slum politics, militant subaltern activists produce spaces for generative solidarities—educational discussions, organizational and community meetings, community cleanings, protest production works, mobile propaganda, cultural productions, street protests, community house watches, community barricades and Occupy movements. These enactments draw from the collective capacities and resources developed within the everyday of the slums and are critical for subaltern knowledge production and political education. Yet focusing energies against the structural foundations of subaltern exclusions produce its own tensions—the neglect of local struggles of the slum which is itself co-constituted by neoliberal urbanism—that weakens militant politics. The study moreover locates collective movements within activist-leaders' lives using *testimonios*. These life-histories highlight informal and incremental home-making as the foundation of subaltern communities and economies, and militant politics. When the home, its preservation and protection are not highlighted, even the most committed activists are constrained to withdraw their social movement involvement.

The study forwards a notion of subaltern struggle for a right to the city for all as a collective struggle for inclusive urban surplus redistribution through a continuous and difficult process of sociality-building in defense of informal and incremental home-making processes of the poor. Subalterns interrogate and overcome the exclusions that arise out of land and housing market transactions by advocating for socialized redistribution of urban resources where informality and incremental home-making are foundations of inclusive economies.