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"No More Proletariat, or Unhappy People, or Oppressed": Living Besides and the Collective Sensibilities of "Urban Popular Territories"

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If not resilience, rebellion, or redemption; if not the last will become first; if not the romance with the wretched, how to characterize the places where the poor inhabit if the intent is to exceed the terms of victimhood and underdevelopment? While fully embracing the need for comprehensive genealogies about how popular territories—those places of low-income inhabitation—got to be way they are, and engaging the material underpinnings of impoverishment and the adverse power relations at work, how might these popular territories be understood as more complex iterations of calculations aimed at navigating disparate orientations, affective economies, and ambiguous affordances? How to see them as continuous works in progress that exceed assessments of household income, political viability, crime rates, and general social dissolution? Here, notions of precarity—as both volatile exposures to uncertainty and destitution and all the tentative experimentations with livelihood and collective living that offer no guarantees—might offer a socio-poetics capable of grasping the intricate yet fraught methods of problem-solving, even social computation, that is at work day in and day out across such popular territories. Based on the author's experiences with multiple popular territories across the world over many decades, this article examines the doubleness of precarity as an atmosphere of both how life is made marginal and how life exceeds the margins imposed.

Si no usamos los conceptos de resiliencia, rebeldía o redención, si no recurrimos al tópico de «los últimos serán los primeros» y si no recurrimos a romantizar la miseria, ¿cómo podemos caracterizar aquellos lugares donde habitan los pobres cuando la intención es ir más allá de los términos de victimismo y subdesarrollo? Al mismo tiempo que se acepta plenamente la necesidad de crear genealogías exhaustivas en materia de cómo los territorios populares (aquellos lugares donde habitan personas con bajos ingresos) llegaron a ser como son, y se abordan los fundamentos materiales del empobrecimiento y las relaciones de poder adversas que entran en funcionamiento, ¿de qué forma podrían entenderse estos territorios populares como iteraciones más complejas de cálculos, destinados a navegar por orientaciones dispares, economías afectivas y posibilidades ambiguas? ¿Cómo verlos como proyectos en progreso, que van más allá de las evaluaciones de los ingresos de los hogares, la viabilidad política, las tasas de criminalidad y la disolución social general? En este caso, las nociones de precariedad (tanto las exposiciones volátiles a la incertidumbre y la indigencia como todas las tentativas de experimentación con medios de subsistencia y vida colectiva que no ofrecen garantías) podrían ofrecer una visión socio-poética capaz de captar los intrincados y complicados métodos de resolución de problemas, incluso de computación social, que operan día tras día en esos territorios populares. Este artículo parte de las experiencias del autor con múltiples territorios populares en todo el mundo a lo largo de varias décadas y estudia la duplicidad de la precariedad como una atmósfera que refleja cómo la vida se vuelve marginal y excede los márgenes impuestos.

Si ce n'est pas par la résilience, la rébellion ou la rédemption, par la phrase « les derniers seront les premiers » ou par une romance avec la misère, comment caractériser les lieux où les pauvres habitent quand l'on souhaite passer outre les termes de « victimisation » et de « sous-développement » ? Tout en acceptant pleinement la nécessité de généalogies exhaustives quant à l'origine des territoires populaires (où se trouvent les habitations à loyer modéré) que l'on connaît aujourd'hui, et en traitant des bases matérielles de l'appauvrissement et des relations de pouvoir défavorables à l'œuvre, ces territoires populaires peuvent-ils être appréhendés comme des itérations plus complexes des calculs visant à gérer des orientations disparates, des économies affectives et des affordances ambiguës ? Comment les voir comme des travaux toujours en cours qui vont au-delà d'une évaluation des revenus du foyer, de la viabilité politique, du taux de criminalité et de la dissolution sociale générale ? Ici, les notions de précarité—comme exposition volatile à l'incertitude et la destitution, mais toutes les expériences hésitantes avec les moyens de subsistance et la vie en communauté qui n'offrent aucune garantie—peuvent proposer une sociopoétique capable de saisir les méthodes complexes mais inquiétantes de résolution des problèmes, ou même de calculs sociaux, à l'œuvre chaque jour dans ces territoires populaires. Se fondant sur les dizaines d'années d'expérience de l'auteur au sein de multiples territoires populaires du monde, cet article examine la double nature de la précarité, une atmosphère où la vie devient marginale, mais où elle dépasse aussi les limites imposées.

A Refusal?

In an interview with *O Global,* Marcos Camacho (aka, Marcola), a key figure in *Primer Comando de la Capital*, Brazil's main extrajudicial (criminal) organization, reminds Brazilians:

> "No more *proletariat*, or unhappy people, or oppressed. There is a third thing growing out there, raised in the mud, educated through sheer illiteracy, getting their own diplomas on the street, like a monstrous Alien hidden under the crevasses of the city. A new language has already sprung. That's it. A different language. You're standing right before post-poverty…. You will only get somewhere if you stop defending

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> "normalcy." There won´t be any more normalcy. You need to auto criticize your own incompetence. But, to be quite frank, your morality. We are at the center of the unsolvable. The difference is we live here, and you have no way out. Just shit. And we already work in it. Understand me, brother, there´s no solution" (Deterritorialized Investigations 2017).

In part, this interview seems to be a call, not for a more accurate representation of the way "things are" but rather an incitement to produce new ways of narrating what might be taking place besides that which is already narrated as the story of things. For, domains, districts, sectors, institutions, populations, and identities in the city are always moving across each other. Their operations are always interstitial in that the space in which they act upon each other seldom exclusively belongs to a single domain or time. The exigent mixes with the obdurate, bureaucratic lags intersect with arbitrary decisions, and memories pile up amongst erasures. Nothing stays put even when some environments seem to register hardly any change at all for decades. Individuated and agglomerated interests are constantly being mixed up (McFarlane and Silver 2017; McFarlane 2018).

In this essay, I wish to largely reflect upon a long career of engaging urban poor districts, what I otherwise will refer to as "popular territories," in the Global South—as researcher, activist, and policymaker—to consider how the conundrums of everyday living in these districts simultaneously manifest material deprivations and socio-political and aesthetic experiments in shaping urbanization processes themselves. It is a heuristic exercise deployed here to engage what I see as a heuristic process always underway, that is, where the urban poor work through a broad range of contradictory circumstances, to develop political sensibilities suited to situations of flux and uncertainty. It is thus not an academic research article in the conventional sense, even as I will discuss in some detail a "case," which I think reflects the ambivalences, the constraints and possibilities that urban poor residents often carry in regard to urban life and dynamics. Inhabitants of poor districts always are experimenting with new modalities to recalibrate experiences of solidarity and individual initiative, of dependency and autonomy, collaboration and conflict.

Thus, instead of thinking that urban life operates somewhere in the interstices between a sense of the normative and the exceptional, the current political situation seems to demand new practices of "communing" (Esposito 2013). In other words, different practices of identifying and enacting collective solidarity and responsibility. As such, these reflections are part of a larger consideration: What are those points where territories, assemblages, and institutions attempt to go beyond their familiar ways of operating in order to have some kind of traction in the larger worlds in which they operate and actually intersect? Such traction would seem to require a space of active translation where divergent actors, by attempting to convey what they stand for and what they do in a language available to another party, exceed the image of themselves that they attempt to translate.

Sometimes this is a matter of dissimulation, where the performance of certain stereotypical presumptions provides a means of running interference, of circulating surreptitiously in domains where residents otherwise could not access (Kaika 2017; Arican 2020). At other moments, residents feign an intensity of emplacement to detract attention from the ways in which they "spread" their lives across different terrain and opportunities (Koster and deVries 2012; Gandolfo 2018).

Regardless of the specific strategy pursued, this is a process that compels new forms of narrating and/or communing. For many low-income urban residents, this means a position of always living "besides"—besides other kind of territories, besides the predominant norms of value and worth, and besides both the endurance and failures of their aspirations (Bayat 2012; Recio 2020). While residents of popular territories may continue to purport certain solidarities and valorize their capacities to survive, they increasingly seem to jettison such consolidation in favor of a broader register of identifications and collective sensibilities (Das and Randeria 2015;Roy 2014; Sarkar 2016). They may need to perform specific modalities of solidarity to be taken seriously by different external institutional actors, act like a "united community." But this, too, often can be a sleight of hand. While turning the conditions they face into a device for greater recognition and opportunity is often politically pragmatic, residents of so-called urban poor communities also increasingly refuse to be "problem to be solved" and act with indifference to their own marginality or apparent confinement (Lancione and McFarlane 2016).

Thus, the objective of this essay is to de-pathologize precarity. While always mindful of the deleterious effects of precarity, the idea here is to go beyond the structural conditions of uncertainty, unsettlement, provisionality, and resilience that usually characterize the concept, and to rather emphasize precarity as perhaps an inevitable *atmosphere* of attempts to bring something new to the world or keep valued practices alive on the part of those who have little access to the affordances availed to more "normative" innovations. Experiments issued by those whose built environments and livelihoods are largely self-constructed often are situated in-between the predominant social categories and institutional domains, effecting but not yet specifically the purview of households, neighborhood associations, established markets, or political or religious institutions (Chari 2017; Tadiar 2022).

Of course, it is possible to narrate the unfolding of everyday life according to the familiar tropes of extended family and neighborhood solidarities, as well as a collectively shared perception of injustice and moral certainty. There are certainly shared procedures about what can be spoken about and to whom, about responsibilities for contributing to a collectively figured infrastructure of care, as well as a generalized openness to the concreteness rather than simply the principle of being part of the "people," a collective belonging that takes precedence over personal ascription and interest. But this is only *one* modality; and as the common adage goes, *nothing is one thing*. A tremulous, dynamic co-existence is predicated on the simultaneity of seeming divergent modalities of being together, fading in and out, according to unpredictable rhythms and in different locales, so that the "tightness" of ties in one neighborhood is complemented, offset, or counterposed by the "looseness" of ties in another (Minuchin 2016; Zeiderman 2016). In these interchanges, the composition and dynamics of interior spaces do not exist only for those inhabiting within them, but for both known and unknown others as well. Internecine conflicts can erupt from seemingly nowhere in the most socially cohered of spaces, while others constantly hanging on a knife's edge plod along without tipping points.

I will return to this momentarily. The "call" that Camacho issues is very much a call from a generation of poor urban residents who have lived all their lives in the city, and usually in one district of it. They know nothing else, born and bred in a situation of constant quotidian flux and, in many cities, antiblackness—an all pervasive atmosphere that acts

on black residents as those who can regarded as lesser, that are available to all kinds of unjust extractions and exposures to premature death. In fact, regardless of how many things the designation, "black," could mean, it is a term commonly affixed to poor urban residents in contexts not conventionally regarded as black. It is a term that mediates between the idea that cities should be rid of popular territories because they are not fit for human beings, and that, at the same time, they are the "proper place" for urban residents deemed ineligible, whatever the registers of judgment, from normative citizenship in the city (Simone 2016). Such a proper place often assumes the form of an open-air prison (Hartman 2019).

Camacho's "refusal" seems to contrast with the long-term strivings for recognition and justice that have been a critical part of the repertoire of the poor and excluded political claims. Having shifted from simple pleas for inclusion to elaborate demonstrations of the plurality of ways residents of popular territories contribute to the very functioning of urban systems, Camacho's claim of indifference is very much the sentiment of a younger generation of poor urban residents who have grown up without any tangible evidence that the city values their existence in any way, and where recognition is acknowledged only when their existence is construed as some kind of existential threat (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Ferrandiz 2009; Denyer-Willis 2015). It is not simply that urban power structures passively disattend to the realities of the popular territories, but, in many cases, intentionally and brutally work to undermine their resourcefulness, aspirations, and rickety yet viable platforms of economic endurance. Alternately, this resourcefulness is sometimes repurposed as a significant contribution to the profitability of other economic spaces (Gago 2018).

Thickly Textured Terrains

I have spent nearly 40 years working and living in urban popular territories across Africa and Asia. Here, I use the notion "popular territory"—a common vernacular particularly across Latin America—to refer to various compositions of low-income, working-class settlements, sometime homogenous in their appearance as domains of the "poor," and, at other times more uncertain, more mixed in terms of their characterization and stratification (Clare et al 2018; Gaiger 2019). The places where I have worked—Hillbrow, Texas Adjame, Abobo, Nima, Pikine, Chicago (Conakry), Umbadda, Badia, Muara Baru, Kampung Rawa, Seelampur, Sangam Vihar, and Russei Keo—all have quite varied and heterogeneous textures, and it would be difficult to make easy comparisons among them. Having had the opportunity to follow their trajectories over the years only in exceptional cases does a sedentary sameness prevail. Although it is possible to conclude that the re-composition of household units and the circulation of bodies across different trades and practices of livelihood formation are both a constant situation and one replete with difference. Also, for the most part, it is difficult to get a grasp on where these places are headed in the future.

Often, there is the remarkable continuity of a sense of churn, of a steady beat of incremental improvements in physical conditions punctuated by sudden outbursts of renovation, sometimes associated with major infrastructural projects or real estate speculation. Repair is a constant facet of everyday life, but there are also widespread mismatches between the intensity of domestic, economic, and public activities brought to bear on a built environment and its capacity to hold and absorb those intensities over the years.

Since I started to work in urban anti-poverty programs in the 1970s, I have witnessed a steady stream of interventions directed at improving the lives of the urban poor: from sites and services schemes, in situ upgrading, improvement projects, community-managed, labor-intensive urban services delivery schemes, regularization of tenure, land-sharing schemes, community mapping projects to facilitate political negotiations with metropolitan authorities, participatory planning and budgeting, community land trusts and collective tenure, capacity building programs, and housing development. While each of these has usually been deployed with good intentions, generates great expectations and potential multiplier effects, and often is carefully monitored and assessed, the ability of these interventions to register widespread changes at scale has been limited. (Payne et al 2009; Weinstein 2014; Massidda 2018; Harris 2020).

The willingness of residents to invest time, resources and effort to improve conditions is frequently limited by legal insecurity and the prevailing uncertainty as to how long they will be able to retain their current situation. Evictions can be stalled for years only to be carried out swiftly without notice. The game of waiting for eviction can proceed decades without any resolution. Residents have often attempted to establish "facts on the ground"—setting houses at the legally required distance from riverbanks or rails, paving roads, or installing make-shift water and sewage systems to escalate the costs entailed in any effort to remove them. The efficacy of such maneuvers of course depends upon the styles of state rule, as well as the extent to which residents can make these "facts" visible across a wider spectrum of attention (Harms 2013; Bhan 2019).

Local investment is often curtailed in some contexts by the priority to ward off envy, to dissimulate the extent of one's access to money and other resources. Every lane I ever lived on was marked by substantial differences in terms of household access to steady work, networks of support, social and symbolic capital, and access to different kinds of institutional support. Yet, in almost all these instances, there was a leveling of appearance, a concerted effort to not stand out as a household that had more money than others. In part, these differences reflected heterogeneous circuits of arrival, motivations, and life circumstances.

Some residents ran away from oppressive domestic situations elsewhere, some had lost jobs, and others had never had one; some had a house somewhere that they were renting for their basic income; some had experienced debilitating and costly illnesses, some were members of large conflicted families that were excluded from the benefits of membership; some were simply taking their chances on a better life and came from very poor backgrounds in other towns or villages; some were simply priced out of other existences; and some were running away from political violence.

Each of these instances posed a different set of challenges and implications, even if all shared basically the same space and conditions. All were inscribed into an atmosphere of uncertainty, an uncertainty that sometimes fueled the experience of insecurity, but also, at times, provided a sense of opportunity to secure new games of economic accumulation. All knew the volatility of the city, the way in which expectations needed to be tempered, that one needed to always be vigilant, and that one must exercise care in who could be trusted. As such, much effort was made to regularize the ways in which residents reacted to and transacted with each other.

This is, in part, why locally styled savings groups operated through clear rules of turn-taking indifferent to the pressing needs of its members. Relationships of reciprocal indebted-

ness could be useful to steady out the fluctuating rhythms of on and off income or health problems, but it was difficult to govern such relationships, particularly in terms of "pricing" the favors that went back and forth (Brickell 2014). On the other hand, smoothing out the appearances of everyday relationalities—how residents related to each other and the concomitant responsibilities of that connection—meant that residents had to borrow from a prolific array of moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates. There were times that pitched battles occurred when my colleagues and I tried to organize community banking and collective savings systems given that it threatened the interests of brokers who often parlayed their accumulation of debt payments into political power.

As poor residents had limited recourse to institutional mediations—to courts, city halls, and service provision authorities—they were particularly vulnerable to strongmen and strongwomen who sought to control access to resources or monopolize the exercise of violence. Shakedowns by police and military personnel, especially in local markets and workshops, were common. In environments particularly prone to the production and absorption of unanticipated occurrences, there were nevertheless tipping points that would unleash intensive collective anxiety (Jensen 2009; McQuarrie et al 2013; Anwar 2014).

Often minor events were construed as having dire implications for many, and that would be met with harsh punishment. For the most part, a practice of mutual witnessing and abiding prevailed. To sit next to someone else's situations and difficulties was a means of recalibrating one's own. Where often so-called "community effort" took place at a grindingly slow pace and was fraught with multiple suspicions and individual agendas, residents did want to have their daily attempts at regularity registered somewhere, and this was displayed in the constant practice of finding ways for them to appear with each other, to take note, and then to move on. What might be construed as intrusions or interference, as when neighbors might intervene into a domestic argument or a dispute on the street was less aimed at trying to mediate or resolve, but more to see what might ensue from this collective "joining in"—what kinds of information might be derived; what kinds of shared experiences might be garnered.

It is well known that to be poor in the city comes at a high cost, and that those high costs reinforce the experience of impoverishment. Water and electricity costs are higher per unit of consumption, and trying to find a place to live often entails large fees and substantial upfront payments (Desai and Loftus 2013; Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013; Chalfin 2014).

Where residents do not have formal legal standing, it is often presumed that they are completely at the mercy of actions taken by various state apparatuses, and that those apparatuses indeed see such situations as a convenient way to exercise their sovereignty. Yet, in most instances, some form of negotiation takes place, and often in a vernacular through which the poor are able to instigate a moment where the state recognizes them as something more than what they appear to be and is through such momentary recognition that claims and appeals can find some traction (Fernandes 1993; Truelove 2021.) Again, this is a process of exceeding the image they are trying to translate.

For example, Veena Das' (2011) use of the word, *peshi,* means both being called to face a bureaucrat and possession by a hostile spirit. Here, the mixtures of ritual and legal vocabulary create a subject in a manner the state would otherwise not envision. To hold on to its image of itself as acting rationally and applying the rules, the state must then try to avoid being seen, then, as such a hostile spirit, or face threats of possessions itself. Through the dogged persistence of residents to engage courts, government offices, police stations, political parties, and welfare associations, a continuously revised method is employed to seek access to the regularization of tenure or alternative housing. In the process of trying to manage being recipients of this engagement with the poor, these very state apparatuses sometimes then put aside their enforcement of the law to find another set of rules through which problems might be managed (Chatterjee 2011).

Here, Das cites the process of deferral that is accomplished through seemingly interminable surveys or the issuance of formal looking ration-cum-identity cards that are provisionally tenable for residents to get goods or services. These state responses of course set up their own subsequent structures of mediation, reflected in the political brokerage that extends the state into forms that have traction in these communities, but, which in the process, also extract from the scarce resources available to the poor.

Sometimes these political situations are a matter of concretizing new lines of connection, such as how Asef Bayat (2015) describes a particular inner-city poor neighborhood during the advent of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011:

"The ashwaiyyat communities such as Imbaba housed not merely the rural, illiterate, and abject poor but also segments of the "middle-class poor"—government employees, newly married and educated couples, as well as professionals such as lawyers and teachers—who could not afford to secure housing in the formal market. The members of this class, traversing between the "middle-class" world and that of the "poor," critically linked the local struggles of their dispossessed parents, relatives, and neighbors to the world of the universities, journalism, cyberspace, associational activism, and the main streets (S37).

But as Bayat goes on to say, the myriad protests, strikes, collective initiatives, reclamations of space, generation of markets and street enterprises, and appropriation of land and buildings engineered by the poor, both prior to and in the aftermath of the revolution, could not alter the larger institutional biases against the poor or the way in which the management of urban space itself is largely dedicated to ensure the insufficiency of such collective efforts.

In some contexts, the compositions of the life of popular territories, its workshops, its repairs, its appropriation of space for selling and growing, and its public character is mobilized as a moral economy that claims that the poor person is the true citizen, one who can embody and ensure the endurance of the essential character of a nation's identity. For example, the public nature of economic transactions and production in many low-income districts, the fact that these activities take place on the outside, in the streets, that are indifferent to their widespread visibility, is often the basis on which life in popular territories is dismissed as archaic or dirty. But then residents themselves use these grounds of dismissal as the very criteria that legitimate them as the protectors of an essential moral economy (Bhan 2009; Arese 2017). Because, here, there is nothing hidden, no secret and inexplicable forms of accumulation.

On the other hand, popular territories are demeaned for their opacity, that lurking behind the apparent impoverishment is a world of deals with supernatural forces and the occult, that residents are engaged in a myriad of conspiracies—that these are places beyond rational control (Jorhus-Lier et al 2015). Indeed, stealth has been critical to the settlement and advances of many popular territories—

what Bayat has called the silent encroachment of the ordinary (Bayat 2013). While far from constituting effective acts of resistance or revolutionary change, Bayat argues that such encroachment is a means for the poor to constitute an enduring presence in the city even if relegated to its margins. Something on the order of living to fight another day.

Residents must sometimes act quickly to put up buildings in face of competing claims or impending changes in regulations. Certainly, the performance of having connections under the radar, connections to bureaucrats, police, politicians, religious figures, criminal bosses, and brokers is important in terms of the composition of resource "baskets" available to residents. The charting and availing of a replenishment of pathways of access became the very stuff of interactions among residents, as they coaxed, cajoled, challenged, and incited each other into demonstrating what they knew and whom they knew. The viability of the collective atmosphere lay in how it was able to push a district into more intensive engagements with the larger world, not in its ability to multiply opportunities residents to parasite off each other (Benjamin 2000;Perlman 2007; King 2008).

Toward that Which is besides: Popular Territories as Platform for a Vague "Us"

As indicated before, the temporalities of popular territories waver between an obdurate indifference to the various threats made against them, to the active mobilizations to maintain a foothold in place according to various possible scenarios, to a more brutal attempt to stamp them out. In many instances of eviction, housing and its rubble is cleared, only to remain vacant for indeterminant periods of time. Often original or new residents will return to slowly and silently occupy the area again. It is the brutality of evictions carried out time and time again that has become a key feature of "popular" life. Not simply eviction or expulsion takes place, but an *exhumation*—the making of a corpse from the archives of long-honed districts, bringing them to the surface, removing them and thus removing the possibility of recuperation, of any alternative trajectory (Negarestani 2008). Here, eviction acts as if nothing else has ever existed in that place, that it is now its own completion without beginning or end (Soederberg 2018).

The most apparent instance of such practice that I witnessed took place in the peripheries of the Mayo–Mandela camp of Khartoum, an area populated mostly by Nuer and Dinka Sudanese kept at bay from the rest of the city. Although most of the residents lived in mudbrick constructions, there were those at the periphery who could not even afford such minimal constructions and lived in makeshift tents and lean-tos. During one of the many evictions in 1989 carried out by the police, they not only rounded up the residents in trucks but kept them there for hours as they broke apart the sticks and fabrics of their shelters into infinitesimal pieces that were then piled up and burned. In eviction after eviction that I have witnessed, there is the tendency not just to remove people but instead to remove the traces of residency as if it never had occurred or, alternately, to strew people's belongings indiscriminately across the horizon as if they were all the residual property of some faceless mass. This is one reason that grassroots organizations insist upon various forms of counter-mapping and documentation of precarious settlements to constitute an archive of remainders that might be mobilized to makes processes of exhumation visible.

Considering this protracted history of abuse and struggling, of small wins and major losses, of the continuous assaults on everyday dignity in cities where mobility and circulation have become the predominant values surpassing those of tenureship and belonging, a younger generation seeks primarily to eke out spaces of maneuverability in which to practice various crafts of earning money and respect (Thieme 2018). Instead of the popular territory representing a work in progress, something always provisional in the eyes of both residents and authorities, and that aims for enhanced regularization and value as property, increasing numbers of youth view it simultaneously as an "unearthly abode" and a completed architecture of opportunity.

Whether it is in the conversion of "trash into cash," the providing of all kinds of services to both dwellers and outsiders, of turning the popular territory into a nexus of cash flows from all kinds of hustles and illicit trades, of further cultivating it as a domain of circumvention that allows access to things otherwise not available in other parts of the city, or becoming the "muscle" for political games, there is a self-valorization of the popular territory as its own particular *urban being* (Bhan 2017; Turok and Borel-Saladin 2018; Tadiar 2020).

Unlike the ways in which poor residents argued for greater political and economic inclusion based on the ways in which they kept the rest of the city afloat through their cheap labor and resilience, this form of valorization forefronts the popular territory as its own "special breed" disconnected from the logics of operations elsewhere. Such a notion is perhaps close to what Sylvia Wynter (1984) sees as a rupture in the predominant narratives of what it means to be human. In this way, what Camacho refers to in the opening lines of this chapter as "post-poverty" remains a limited formulation since it remains tethered to the residual normative notions of well-being and security.

Additionally, youth will increasingly see the popular territory, not as something that needs to be escaped at all costs—even if such sentiment still exists—but as a launching pad for incursions into the larger city. If the pursuit of viable livelihoods requires a person to be at the right place at the right time, then it is improbable that one can determine this in advance. Instead, it is a task that requires circulations, probing, going around, and the popular territory then becomes a cheap and viable location from which to launch such explorations (Caldeira 2012; Brough 2020).

To offer a more sustained discussion of the antecedents and prospective futures of this revalorization of popular territories, I will draw upon a small case study from Delhi. It is based on collaborative fieldwork with the research office of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements in Delhi, which has long undertaken a series of action research projects in the Sangam Vihar district over the past decade. Here, I attempt to highlight the ways in which the solidarities that were the predominant characterization of both the material underpinnings of everyday life and the basis of a refusal to be both marginalized or normalized in terms of the reigning protocols of urban citizenship have assumed more dispersed and outward looking modalities of engagement. Such engagement is not an abnegation of past refusals but rather reflects the ongoing experimentation with ways in which collaborations can be sustained under the onslaught of pressures for inhabitants to act more as rational individuals pursuing constant betterment in a context of shrinking traditional labor markets and voracious extractions of land and resources (Angelo and Goh 2021). In other words, I want to use this case to suggest a kind of genealogy of atmosphere—

of how precarity generates a particular world of experimental operations.

This sense of the popular territory as base for making a living rather than as settlement begins to pervade many areas. Here, I take the example of Sangam Vihar in Delhi. Sangam Vihar, Delhi's largest UAC (unauthorized colony), estimated now to house over a million people, originated in 1979. The area was developed on the agricultural lands of four villages where the Delhi Development Authority had yet to take possession of land, or which remained strictly designated for agricultural use. As this represented the consolidation of the agricultural lands associated with distinct villages, land brokerage largely took place through the intermediation of property dealers who, from the outset, divided the land into coherent blocks of 50 and 100 square yards.

At least in the allocation process, dealers attempted to mirror formal devices as much as possible. Those plots originally sold for as little as R20 (29 cents) per square yard and, at present, can cost as much as R100,000 ($1500) per square yard. During the 1980s, the first wave of inward migrants took place. These residents mostly worked in the thousands of small factories established in the near-by Okhla industrial complex. The second wave consisted of construction workers building the infrastructure for the Asian Games. Not dissimilarly, a third boom in the mid-2000s accompanied the preparations for the Commonwealth Games. In its early stages, Sangam Vihar retained a largely horizontal, rudimentary built environment, as migrant workers did not usually move with their families (Gupta and Puri 2015).

Later waves of migration included large numbers of contractors accompanied by their families. These latter waves provided new extensions of the area with a slightly more upscale living environment, as plots that once were subdivided were re-aggregated and developed. Not all of the land of Sangam Vihar was plotted according to prevailing norms, as plotting itself was subject to non-geometrical divisions to accommodate different speeds of turnover, capitalize on the rent of more transient populations, or to put land to use that was subject to various disputes. As such, significant portions of the interior of Sangam Vihar are replete with mixtures of various constructions from *pucha*—simple mud and tarpaulin roof houses—to rapidly assembled multi-story apartments employing recycled brick.

Here, access to water, power, and sewage largely remains an improvised patchwork of affordances that are often costly in terms of dependence upon "water mafias" and police shakedowns. Block by block is a patchwork of water lines, largely drawn from private bore wells for a supply whose cost is 20 times the amount of the few provided by the government's Delhi Jal Board (DJB). Supply is intermittent, depending upon the relationship with the private water contractor, and frequently must be supplemented either by tanker or the household drawing water from other sources. Some households have their own bore wells, which are frequently not well situated in their proximity to what are largely makeshift septic tanks. Government provisioning through bore wells and legal tankers is often politically distributed according to loyalties to the predominant political party in each block. Water supply in general has improved in the last several years simply due to residents siphoning off water from the recently constructed Sonia Vihar treatment plant that passes through the colony. What is cruelly ironic in this process is that the DJB is not obligated by law to provide sewer lines in unauthorized colonies, but it is not, however, restricted from doing so, as the DJB has installed sewer lines in other selected UACs (Sheikh et al. 2015).

Additionally, Sangam Vihar, like most unauthorized colonies, is not provided with community toilets. Households must construct their own facilities, which in the absence of an extensive network of sewer lines means that waste is flushed directly into outside storm drains or collected in privately installed and maintained septic tanks. The Government of the National Territory of Delhi has constructed some of these storm water drains, usually under the auspices of flood control. Solid waste management falls under the jurisdiction of Delhi's three municipal corporations. Initially, electricity was provided on a single-point delivery system where blocks are identified to locate transformers; local resident welfare associations hire a contractor to manage the implementation of the system and to determine which households in the block wish to receive electrical connection—a major consideration given that power supply is controlled by three companies that set high connection fees (Sheikh et al. 2015).

Sangam Vihar initially was a settlement that valorized a wide diversity of occupations, religions, caste, and regional backgrounds. It demonstrated a strong collective determination to ensure its continuity and promote multiple ways for residents to work together, especially in providing needed urban services. A residential base that included large numbers of skilled workers proved useful in terms of efforts to continuously refine the built environment and coordinate water access, sewage evacuation, and reticulations to power. Now, after two generations, social and political differentiations have become more elaborated; divergences in capacities for accumulation are increasingly marked in the character of the built environment, as those who can afford more intricate infrastructural amenities simply opt out of what were formerly block or neighborhood-wide solutions. This opting out, however, cuts both ways—that is, as both a real fracture and sometimes as a means of a certain segment of the population moving on, covering new angles, and opening new trajectories for common action.

Sangam Vihar is largely hemmed in by a limited number of entry points. This limited access, coupled to an intense sense of its own vulnerability, cultivated a strong collective identity. But as a younger generation, in particular, looks increasingly outward onto the larger city and must devote more energy to making circulation across this city logistically feasible and economical, there is less interest in cultivating the reciprocities needed for an intensely heterogeneous population to retain any overarching collective sensibility, especially at the level of everyday social practice.

Thus, the area has become increasingly subject to caste-based spatial patterns, with a panoply of distinct turfs and rules for crossing them. The heterogeneity of the district is located less in its variegated forms and ways of doing things than in the identity markers of the residents themselves (Ramakrishnan 2014). The long and increasingly voiced desires for settlement regularization that seem to correspond to the mechanisms that are being availed by the Delhi government for it, as well as the increase and upgrade of services that are provided even without land regularization, pushes many sub districts within Sangam Vihar to a greater uniformity of appearance and function. Probably half the residents of the area no longer express concerns about eviction and so unity based on a sense of common anxiety no longer holds.

The profusion of NGOs and political associations, which are frequently class and caste based, also contributes to this overlay of divides. Yet, at the same time, it is not always clear what it means to be "apart" in Sangam Vihar and a "part" of it at the same time. During earlier times, different neighbor-

hoods paid a great deal of attention to each other: they paid attention to the political proclivities of specific blocks, their provisional infrastructural arrangements, and the distribution of favors and amenities. This was a form of paying attention that necessitated both the presentation of a "united front" and the mobilization of internal differences among neighbors as the basis for information gathering and incursions across the larger district.

But as reference is increasingly made to the larger city and not the constituent neighborhoods of Sangam Vihar, there are slight shifts everywhere in residential patterns, not so much in terms of pressures exerted on one caste or religious group to sell, but rather in terms of the plurality of rental markets, and of the social composition of the in-fills of increasingly dense blocks. These rental markets and infills act as a short-cut to quick income and a labor-saving device by having sources of cheap service labor in proximity—where social background doesn't seem to matter very much.

Here, the mistaken presumption that neighborhoods are homogenous in terms of ethnicity and social class, frees time for households and individuals to focus more on extra-local than local concerns. In this way, residing somewhat apart can be construed just as much as an accomplishment as a loss, a signal of the district's confidence as much as its vulnerability to individualizing or particularizing forces. It is a situation that operates in the interstices between separation and mixture, existing as neither norm nor exception.

Despite the political gamesmanship that has had a substantial impact on the area—the fact that Sangam Vihar has been cut in two across two distinct municipal corporations, and that three sub-districts have been approved for regularization—the district has forged an overarching resident's welfare association (RWA) to retain a sense of historical and administrative coherence. This RWA has consolidated a great deal of authority and respect for its ability to navigate across and suture the proliferating identity-based interests and to maintain a sense of the district's capacity to provide affordable housing for a wide spectrum of incomes. As Ghertner (2017) points out, however, it is through these very RWAs that the state steps on to the terrain of governance in which it otherwise has no formal presence and, as such, then, the borders between state and non-state actors remain ambiguous, a matter of "more or less." The vernacular traces of an everyday sense of "us" thus remain elusive, as has often been the case for a very long time. The situation reflects Jane Guyer's (2013) insistence that apartness and togetherness become something of "more or less" at different times.

The "us" is then not inhabitable as a collective formation that trumps all other identities or that posits a coherent set of ideals and practices. Rather, it is found in the ability to break off and re-suture. Sangam Vihar's lanes can be composed of caste and religious homogeneities that break away into a sudden irruption of heterogeneities that are a byproduct of the division or extension of plots, or where the consolidation of a particular income group sometimes forces disparate residents into new contiguous locations.

Here, even the process of land consolidation by a single group opens up numerous interstitial spaces between new apartment blocks that are provisionally and opportunistically occupied by those providing a range of cheap services. The boundaries etched by ethnic, caste or religious settlement are sometimes crossed by older water lines that originally served a different residential make-up but that yet must still be maintained for the benefit of all. As such, it is important to pay attention to the "lives" of these vague wholes, "*specifying the ways its parts come to life and perhaps die off, identifying the mediations that are important in the "doing" of this vague whole."* (Verran 2007, 181).

Standing by and besides that Which Surrounds: the Endurance of Popular Territories

What I want to emphasize from this small case study is that the endurance of the urban poor was less a matter of "digging in," of securing clearly defined articulations among entities and institutions. Rather, it entailed the creation of *atmospheres* capable of holding the diverse rhythms of many approaches to everyday living (Anderson 2009; Bensusan 2016),which cultivated sensibilities able to risk and wait, plan and improvise, demand and defer. Built environments curated highly differentiated spaces of exposure and withdrawal, as well as a profusion of public and quasi-public spaces where residents could witness each other without excessive intrusions or judgements. Demeanors and gestures came to the fore that demonstrated and elicited not only rudimentary civility but a sense of irony, self-effacement, and joyfulness which would usually accompany any critique or necessary disciplining. These constituted an aesthetics of everyday life, working across the intervals of different regimes of authority, loyalty, and aspiration as a means of different residents and practices appreciating each other (Jones 2011). Not so much for what they represented, but as interesting "characters" to reflect on, gossip about, and figure out an appropriate closeness or distance from.

As such, atmospheres embodied orientations to the future that both staked out clear terms of sufficiency and sustenance and an ability to not experience failure if those terms never were actualized. It entailed a willingness to experience the realization of basic aspirations in unfamiliar forms. As such, everyday transactions are increasingly replete with a turn of phrase or physical gesture that not so much undermines the original intention of that to which people respond, but enforces a suspension of judgement, instantiates a moment of uncertainty where the subsequent unfolding of events might go in very different directions.

For example, in one Jakarta district where I have long worked, a constant series of metacommentaries accompany all kinds of exchange, with word play and mixed-up genres. Teachers handing out exam papers become the unemployed hawking flyers for yard sales; checkout queues at cash registers become waiting lines for electoral voting; women's prayer recitals use Quranic verses as codes to evaluate the sexual capacities of neighborhood men. Constantly self-effacing, enduring the city requires never taking oneself or anyone else seriously, if only to supplement everyday transactions with small surfeits of negotiability. I call this a way of "standing with the promise" (Kemmer and Simone 2021).

So, residents may have continuously pushed their particular agendas and aspirations but were willing to be indifferent to them as well. For endurance was an atmosphere of abiding, of being willing to "stand-by" various trajectories of possible futures. Stand-by, both in the sense of waiting to see how things unfold and as a commitment to see through various initiatives to improve livelihoods and environment; a willingness to operate "in reserve," prepared to make something out of dispositions seemingly out of their control. Part of what sustains this is an abiding commitment to "common sense," that is, an enduring opportunity for residents to contribute their experiences and sensibilities in a continuously re-arranged set of operating procedures. It is one based on the capacity of residents to also "go their own way," pursue

initiatives beyond the confines of the settlement, and then contribute the perspectives garnered to this continuously evolving common sense.

By atmosphere, I follow Gandy's (2017) sweeping review, where atmosphere is a heterogeneous array of materials and perspectives. It is a force field that blurs the boundaries between environmental affordances, corporeal functioning, and, as such, requires conduits of transfer and communication among neurological, cognitive, biochemical, spatial, socio-economic, and linguistic operations. If atmospheres are constituted through a multiplicity of entities and ways of being, seeing, and navigating, which raise the possibility that everyone is the site of multiple subjectivities (Jiminez and Estalella 2013), then it is difficult to define just exactly what or who would inhabit an atmosphere.

Specific locales are punctuated by divergent atmospheric textures depending on the architectural landscape of exposures and enclosures, as well as what Gandy (2017) calls "shifting geometries of perception." These geometries of perception range from various forms of direct corporeal apprehension to technically engineered and ideological inducted alterations in perceptible luminosities or the cultivation or sudden experiences of the imperceptible origins of dread. Cities are then "promising machines," always holding out prospects for better lives, always attempting to guarantee that things will not remain the same and that whatever changes do ensue are for the better, however fictional this assumption might be. The significance of actions in the present are continuously reframed in terms of the prospects of multiple futures so that residents are implicitly encouraged to go ahead and spend, consume, risk, and instigate, because what these things mean now will soon no longer hold (Tsing 2014).

I have long canvassed the attitudes of residents within poor districts of Jakarta, particularly attitudes about how their living conditions have evolved over time. What is striking in these accounts is the degree to which residents became the recipients of promises of a better life but also avoided becoming preoccupied with whatever was promised. Through their own steady, incremental efforts to continuously work on their conditions, to turn them into resources, and to recalibrate relations of all kinds in face of the volatilities of the larger city, promises became something else besides lures, manipulations, or meaningless inheritances of citizenship.

Rather, promises were induced as the by-products of the districts' own efforts to prompt municipal governments to "show their cards ", to divulge their weaknesses in face of the capacity of these districts to attain a certain self-sufficiency. This self-sufficiency was manifested in the capacity of these districts to ensure large levels of variation in ways of doing things while not devolving into incessant conflict. Residents sought to attain a sense of progress without being overwhelmed by specific measures or fears of failure. Promises were important then less for what they offered than for their presence as a particular modality of disclosure, as something that kept matters open for deliberation rather than as the specification of a destination to which residents were committed.

Endurance is a messy affair difficult to attribute to specific criteria. The districts where I work are replete with intensely differentiated household compositions, entrepreneurial networks that hold too many one-room operations, too many workers looking out for each other. Eating, sleeping, working, and deciding take place along shifting transversals of indoors and outdoors, entangled spaces that have no clear identities, but which are sometimes fought over by clear sides. As I sought to demonstrate earlier, all prove a thick fabric difficult to alter and reweave.

At the same time, residents are constantly doing something but are increasingly unsure about what that something is, what it means, and what value it has. Those who attain middle class status usually feel they have reached an iron ceiling and attempt to continue the process of remaking themselves through fixating on the authenticity of their rediscovered religious identities. Yet, the repetition of all these entanglements provides the semblance of stability and seemingly inexhaustible resourcefulness. Endurance then seems something overly leveraged rather than being a clear consolidation of discernible assets. Yet, it generates a life that cannot be considered precarious even when it affixes itself to sentiments and expectations that clearly would seem to induce precarity (Berlant 2011).

Perhaps this is because a singular logic is at work, a specific yet mutable way of calculating the odds, assessing the terrain, of paying attention to all of these feelings and facets that seem imcomputable, or that rely upon forms of everyday computation that open up to indeterminate dispositions—something "down and dirty" in how different actors, events, and preceptions are brought together.

Dirty Computing

If forging viable practices of urban collective living within the realm of contemporary urban politics requires more effective adaptations to the increasingly computational orientations of urban governance, while continuing to "stay with the promise" regarding specific collective aspirations, what might constitute important areas of future emphasis in terms of thinking about the trajectories of continuous experimentation that have characterized the lives of popular districts? If settlements of the poor are increasingly subject to an expanding array of metrics which buttress their vilification and legitimate the enfolding of residents into more standardized and formatted built environments, how can a long-term indifference to being "counted" to "count" be sustained? How can the pragmatics of being recognized, to secure necessary infrastructural and political affordances be reconciled with the ontological anchorage of many poor settlements within a constantly shifting notion of "common sense," of the assemblage of heterogeneities as the critical underlying substrate rather than negotiated social contracts?

Perhaps here we might glean some small insight from the preoccupations of urban popular culture. In Janelle Monae's opening cut, "Dirty Computers," of the album similarly titled, reference is made to black queer life being the equivalent of a dirty computer whose processor must be wiped out, cleaned, not so much of specific data and files but of the specific way in which calculations, computing, and processing is conducted. The dispositions of such queer processing may indeed be hard to handle, but what is more dangerous is their capacity to generate outcomes that normative regimes of sense-making and sense-enforcement cannot readily anticipate; that they surface propositions for the world that appear to come from the world in ways that disrupt the ability to know in advance just exactly what that world comprises of. This is why Monae talks about being subjected to, made a subject from the erasure of processing, to be reduced to a body that does not compute. Such a body can seemingly do anything and nothing at the same time, be available for all uses, many of which will remain undefined. What Monae indicates is that, yes, queer all the computations, but be prepared for living outside any prospect of fig-

uring. The exigency then is to find a way to modulate being inside and out at the same time.

The question becomes then how poor settlements participate in the increasing emphasis on "smart cities," where governance is based on measuring the interrelationships among large data sets and scores of discrete variables? Relations are drawn among demoraphics, infrastructural functioning, budgets, tax bases, commuting practices, and household consumption—and the list can appear endless. How do poor settlements retain the hope of being "counted" as an important facet of urbanization processes and economies in such smart cities, while also remaining outside of the "count"?

There is a literal dimension of dirty here. Seelampur, a vast working-class district on the near-eastern shores of the Yamuna River in Delhi, is the place where dirty computers go to die, to be cannibalized for their parts, where wires are stripped, melted; screens are converted, mother boards are resoldered—where the individual unit is stripped of recognition. This is an extremely dirty job performed by a dirty people, a common appellation for Muslims. Here, the body of the machine is what generates value—its neodymium, gallium, lutetium, tantalum, rutherfordium, and zirconium, its plastics and alloys. Workspaces are replete with toxic dust, child labor, rough words, long hours, and dirty cops.

Within the popular imagination this is a business that epitomizes environmental and human catastrophe, yet it persists unabated in part because it generates enormous profits for the big brokers and end-use corporations, but also in part because it generates a wide range of consumables otherwise unaffordable for poor and working-class residents. Rather than being completely captured by predatory supply chains that access important raw materials for cheap prices, the process of dismantling, recycling, and remaking acquire their own vast networks of complementarity that utilize apparently disadvantageous positions to grow their own "popular economies." These entail specific calculations for diverting materials into intricately distributed chains of manufacturing specialization that support their own markets, conduits of distribution, and retailing systems.

Very little of these arrangements are found on paper. Relationships among bulk suppliers, sifters, burners, truckers, welders, manufacturers, brokers, buyers, and marketers may be governed by long-standing norms and implicit regulations, but each position is always being re-calibrated in relationship to each other, recomputed in terms of the prevailing local and international trends, demands, regulatory changes, and political alliances. This is dirty computing where different components all offer specific propositions for the world that enjoins them, is not simply the recipient or enactment of a stalwart or imposed logic of relations, but an active agential force in the stretching and contraction, intensity and extensiveness of the shifting interfaces that lend distinction among these components.

Here, computation is a process of different kinds of actors—human and non-human "feeling out" each other (Hayles 2017). As Massumi (2017) suggests, each occasion of sensing, of apprehension always proposes for the world a surplus of patterned potential, a surplus of sensibility, a way of taking the combinations of the past and finding within them the potential of the recombinant—for sociality is always a matter of recomposing, recombining. This is why the dirty operations in Seelampur manage to persist through albeit half-hearted attempts to shut them down, or at least curtail them to strictly monitored regulatory frameworks. For all kinds of propositions are unpredictably "taken up" within the circuit of exchanges that occur among the competencies, impulses, histories, and materials that make up this trade.

These propositions are not so much generated to represent what is really going on, or to make determinate judgments in a crowded field of representational possibility, the best or most definitive rendering of what is taking place. Rather, as Whitehead (1967) considered propositions, they are a form of definitiveness for actualities yet to be formed whose value is based on the correspondence between what is experienced as physically actual and what conceptually felt as possible. This is a matter of exploring with people ways in which the conditions they aspire to and struggle for are already evident, operative in what it is they do.

In long-term engagements with a wide range of "precarious" urban districts in South and Southeast Asia, practices of proposition-making have increasingly come to the fore; something that residents do with each other across an array of public spaces. Propositions that might appear outlandish, infeasible, but valued for their prospects of bringing new improbabilities into the world. "The love you are looking for is four blocks away, ring the bell, ask for Rudi, and he will give you the key to the heart you have been looking for, if not, come back here at 6, we will have a snack, and go see my sister about the job;" such propositions may mostly be responded to with indifference or fleeting curiosity, yet, now and then, are taken up as a means for generating surprising connections between things or scenarios that are not supposed to go together, or for accounts of events that might be taking place but exist beyond the known conventions of verification.

Propositions are not simply rhetorically issued, but also take the form of extended tongues, various hand gestures, stylized ways of walking, thrust hips, kicked feet, and exaggerated vocalizations of satisfaction or disgust, an entire panoply of glossarial and haptics that instigate an interruption of flow, that punctuate the attentional field. Who knows what all these propositions do? What kind of computation could render them deliverable as plausible explanations or causal effects? If everyone were to be tallying the results, evidence of failure would be everywhere, but few seem to care.

Conclusion

While the collective insufficiencies and oppressions of daily life for a still burgeoning urban poor are well known, this knowledge remains to be translated into the radical dismantling of an urbanization conventionally understood as real estate and the materialization of credit relations, which is necessary for any real improvement in livelihoods (Moreno 2018). Yet, how these insufficiencies are lived, how popular territories are not simply the repositories of cheap labor, ineligible residents, or discarded lifetimes but rather particular modalities for living *besides* intensely discrepant spatial products and political histories remains an important task of engagement.

Popular territories are strategic devices that not only feed the political–police–military–developer–strongmen–broker rackets usually necessary to govern urban regions, but also continuously materialize forms of urbanization that keep open spaces for a plurality of use and value. They are not only the testing grounds for creative destruction or for how human life itself can be culled and reconfigured as cheap capital but also point to a world of details and inclinations that cannot be "framed," that is, that are not subject to easy explanations or capture. As many residents of popular territories demonstrate, endurance is a matter of "standing by and besides" all the promises for a better life that will never

materialize but, which, nevertheless constitute a field of politics, sometimes embraced and sometimes refused.

For the task of endurance entails an always oscillating navigation of the tensions between being really part of an urban system, however configured, to get basic resources from it, and, at the same time, maintain a position apart, not available for integration or translation. How to navigate those categorical and experiential spaces—those spaces of precarity—that fall between a social exclusion that extracts from the vitality of a generative collective life and a social inclusion that demands the relinquishing of critical differences. How to go beyond a cinematic conceit in which the unruly and abject lives of others are apprehended—in terms of both seeing and capture—through an apparatus of witnessing that "generate both confirmation and enjoyment for those convinced that the world needs to be saved as a work in progress, as a trajectory of virtuous futurity" (Colebrook 2022, 169). How to maintain a sense of generosity in conditions where negotiation, tolerance, and reciprocity are increasing fraught. This is the work of popular territories.

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