Urban Popular Economies: Territories of Operation for Lives Deemed Worth Living

THE URBAN POPULAR ECONOMY COLLECTIVE
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Introduction

This article proposes a set of operative concepts associated with *urban popular economies* by showing their diverse territories of operation. We understand urban popular economies to be platforms of alternative value creation where economic practices, forms of livelihoods, behavioral tactics, and strategies of connection, extension, and expansion coalesce to produce livable territories for the urban majority. Urban popular economies consolidate attempts by the urban majority to carve out lives deemed worth living. In that sense, urban popular economies entail value creation beyond the strict economic sense of jobs or other income- generating activities, to include ways people care for each other, share resources, and capitalize on each other's connections to operate cities together. By mobilizing diversity as a generative rather than a descriptive resource, our examples show that urban popular economies capitalize on multiple points of intersection among people, places, and materials to bring forth forms of care essential for the reproduction of urban life.

Constituted through ongoing struggles for territory, urban popular economies expand amidst extractivist logics of development at local and global scales. Their strength lies in their production through forms of collectivity based on shared opportunity and resourcefulness rather than organized forms of collective action. Such struggles against de-densification and emptying of spaces deemed problematic keep populations in place constructed as displaceable if not expendable. These struggles assemble social groups with intersecting memberships in workplaces, friendship networks, land statutes, ethnicities, religious organizations, various tenancy arrangements, and unions, who create an infrastructure of transactions mobi-

lized to influence political authorities, invest in affordable housing, and improve urban services. In these compositions, the struggle for territory unfolds along six dimensions: composing *commons*, expanding *domestic territories*, building *popular institutions*, countering *technologies of urban governance*, strategically mobilizing the *multiplication of temporalities*, and using *land as an active space*. These struggles expand possibilities for accumulation, social reproduction, and livelihood, and they rework relations with the bureaucratic state for individuals and households alike.

As a research collective, we draw on our experiences in the various geographies where we live, work, and think to develop our understanding of these dimensions of struggle as a composition. A group of scholars and activists across the world, we have been meeting monthly since September 2020 to discuss research. The dynamic collective discussions of our research have led us to conceptualize the relationship between economic accumulation and social reproduction to understand how urban life is created from the ground up. In our exchanges, we proceeded with juxtaposition rather than comparison of our fields, emphasizing commonalities in disparate urban dynamics. More than the content itself, the effort has been to generate knowledge collectively while being attentive to the limits of our positionalities in the fields we think in and from. As a result, the concepts generated are not necessarily in sync, and emphasis is put on articulations rather than systematic correspondences.

In this article, we start with a discussion about the changing conditions that restructured the lives of the urban majority, focusing on the generative potential of diversity. The following section introduces popular economies with examples that illustrate these formations. Next, we specify territories of operations and terrains of being in common as material ways that urban popular economies are consolidated. The rest of the article delves into dimensions of the struggle for territory with examples from cities across the world. We conclude with reflections on visibility, invisibility, and opportunities that urban popular economies open for urban majorities' self-valorization.

Dispersed Urban Life

Across massive urban regions in the Global South there has been a shift in the spatial positioning and sociopolitical characteristics of what we have called an *urban majority* (Simone and Rao 2012). While roughly corresponding to the intertwining of poor, working-, and lower middle-class residents, the term referred less to specific identities than to a mathematics of combination. Here, economic practices, demeanors, behavioral tactics, forms of social organization, territory, and mobility

intersect and detach, coalescing into enduring cultures of inhabitation, occupation, and appropriation of institutional spaces, or proliferating as momentary occupancies of short-lived situations making up a kind of a recombinant process. Such a process is dynamic and open, producing new functions and new values for individual and collective capacities, backgrounds, and ways of doing things; again, a process of reinventing the terms for lives worth living. This corresponds to different manifestations of super-diversity (Meissner and Vertovec 2015), which emphasizes looking beyond social composition to composing practices. As practices, we thus emphasize the instrumentalization of multiplying points of intersection among people, materials, and places; considered as diverse ecologies, we turn our attention to the contingent interdependence of heterogeneous differences. Here diversity, far from simply reflecting the characteristics of urban social fields, is a key element in the production of urban economies and assemblages for the majority. Diversity is generative, not merely descriptive, part of the process of always reconsidering how lives are worth living.

The urban majority was never a static entity, never a class-in-the-making, never so much a sociological or political entity as it was a manifestation of the possibilities and affordances that urbanization "lends" to inhabitants bearing the structural onus of having to make "their own way" in urban life. Less the generalized antagonism of an undercommons and more the enfolding of what actually might be present as resource and potential (Harney and Moten 2013). Even when states provided the basic conditions for livelihood and residence—land, shelter, public employment, support for private enterprise—these conditions were insufficient for making a life worth living. Consequently, this majority, as constellations of entities with diverse territorial assemblies and materialities, points us toward ideas of property as extensions of relations dispersed across an expanse, rather than as discrete exchangeable connections.

In the Indian context, for example, land tenurial practices become entangled with varied state spaces. The ambiguities of presumptive land titles can help open property's radical aspect, mobilizing real-estate surpluses to fund, for example, small firm manufacturing economies (Tang and Benjamin 2021). Together, these constitute a "Neighborhood as Factory" where networked production is premised on a majority coalesced via lobbying and the politicizing of bureaucracies (Benjamin 1993). Materially, this extension of property relations might expand a new electrical transformer, open a water line, or facilitate a toilet inside a home as part of land regularization into a majority space, blurring "spatial products, edges and interstices as situated histories of inhabitations" (Gupte and Rajguru 2021).

The urban majority refers to practices that establish contingent connections

within discernable administrative districts or long-honed popular neighborhoods throughout Africa and Asia. More recently, such practices are in flux. Residency in urban cores and near-suburbs has been subjected to maximized land valuation strategies, forced displacement, and heightened labor intensity, as well as greater degrees of individualization and self-responsibility. Many residents—particularly those with some savings or access to capital—are moving toward urban peripheries, looking to acquire fungible assets and more affordable everyday amenities. In Latin America, the urban majority—which grew rapidly through the occupation of peripheral city spaces through country-to-city migration beginning in the mid-twentieth century—negotiates similar economic transformations.

While the collective efforts that characterized the ways of doing things for most urban residents are compromised, there is still the need for residents to find ways to operate in concert. Strategies of accumulation, livelihood, and household organization may have grown more particular, but reliance on steady waged work has not expanded sufficiently to obviate the importance of everyday collective action. Global economic shifts have imposed these conditions in cities throughout the world. As intensified value accumulation and urban restructuring measures take hold, similar dynamics might be at work, although they play out differently across different territories and scales.

To give an example: Pradeep runs a mobile repair business on Lamington Road, a major electronics hub in south Mumbai and one of the largest "gray markets" for IT goods in India. Although the globalized manufacturing economy and transnational trade have dampened his business, he refuses to leave. He enjoys his work and so has decided to subdivide his property, allowing him to continue his business while making ends meet by renting out space (Gupte and Shetty 2020). This extension of property relations generates thick occupancy of urban space, and cumulatively reshapes urban form. Whereas urban renewal processes tend to harden boundaries through clearing, formalizing, and homogenizing city spaces, the accumulated acts of people like Pradeep challenge this trajectory, blurring and morphing spatialities through layered practices of subdivision and extension. This extends the usual story of small-scale landlording and rent extraction by opening up new articulations among different livelihoods and activities.

Neighborhood spaces and urban majorities must find room to maneuver and extend territorial connections in the face of unequal and increasingly complex structural forces. In the "China Bazaars" of Indian cities, interlocking rental spaces of electronic businesses, and new arrangements of connectivity and extension create infrastructures of opportunity locally and transnationally.

The livelihood tactics of social reproduction—not to mention the components

and marketplaces—of Chennai's "China Bazaar," a cluster of four blocks each specializing in specific items and otherwise known as Ritchie Street, re-constellate "neighborhood space" as a territory of connection that extends to Shenzhen's Hua Qui Bei electronics markets. A daily footfall of twenty thousand service engineers and technicians visit long-established contacts of suppliers and specialists. The specialists, or *ustads*, are funded to visit Hua Qui Bei every three months. Such "connected spaces" have their own trade rules and specificity: "Ritchie Street" is actually a cluster of at least four streets each specializing in particular components. Each street is said to have its own language built around shorthand electronics specifications, which consolidates specific networks and connections. These linguistic formations carry to Shenzhen, where ustads visit Hua Qui Bei's markets and these same micro-languages are spoken on specific blocks and floors (Benjamin 2019). In transnational ways, intense commission-based trade, trips, and connections foster a popular economy that bridges geography, ethnicity, and language (Gupte and Shetty 2015).

Often popular economies display a very different form of collectivity than earlier forms of cooperatives and collective action, one based less on political solidarity than mutual resourcefulness and shared opportunity. In the case of electronic clusters in Mumbai and Delhi, one finds homegrown technological intervention by which hundreds of shops are connected through an internal telecom system, reducing the need to maintain expensive inventories. Each business may use tactical measures such as displaying empty boxes to look like business is booming, even when very few items are in stock. But the interconnected networks ensure that no customer is turned away: a quick call will produce the requested item in return for a marginal cut that sustains the business. There are other instances where ustads leave "secret" marks, putting their signatures inside a mobile phone after attempting to fix a phone that is beyond repair. This mark tells subsequent ustads to whom the phone might go for repair not to waste their time (Gupte and Shetty 2020).

Popular Economies

In recent years, urban majorities have been subject to intense levels of extraction and surveillance as part of financialized renewal processes that rely on techniques of visibility and mapping, cartographic logics reliant on GIS and digitized land titling, smart city-making, and forms of public participation. The very cooperativeness of social relations, skills at improvising, making and repairing things, the freewheeling give-and-take among different kinds of actors all become resources for states and other institutions attempting to cut costs, demonstrate efficiency and smart-

ness, shed their responsibilities for guaranteeing social welfare, and find ways to profit from creativities from below (Gago 2017). As development priorities of urban cores emphasize logistical hubs, transport relays, financial and service centers, and upscale leisure and consumption skewed heavily toward foreign investment, majority populations find themselves increasingly displaceable or eliminated. By moving populations around through evictions and regeneration, mandating austerity measures, and criminalizing many ordinary livelihoods, states and other regulatory apparatuses demonstrate their capacity to control, measure, and contain, particularly for an audience of investors and multilateral institutions (Garmany and Richmond 2020; Ortega 2020).

We argue that diversity is constructed by urban majority residents as a means of constituting possibilities of livelihood and social reproduction in the interstices of straddling apparently contradictory logics of accumulation (Saiag 2011, 2020). Neither outside capitalist logics nor beyond the reach of extractivism, nor inside wholly coherent frameworks of tradition or even makeshift improvisation, urban popular sectors, nevertheless, generate spaces of relative autonomy through diversifying the "points of contact" where disparate logics intersect (Sarria Icaza and Tiriba 2006, Gaiger 2019). While the concept of urban majorities allows us to identify intersections, possibilities, and rearrangements that combine into cultures of connections, the notion of *popular economies* stresses these dynamics in the context of unequal diversities, understood as a plurality of identities and practices in consistently alternating proportionalities of the structural forces with which they contend (Tassi et al. 2012; Amougou 2018).[1]

As residents find themselves distributing their households across multiple geographies, hedging their bets on how they will deploy available income, and maximizing circulations through different forms of livelihood across different parts of the city, their rootedness becomes more tentative even as their articulations to diverse urban elements and spaces become more intense. As the innovations in connectivity in India's China Bazaars indicate, urban residents seek to configure *territories of operation* through which they move and attempt to sustain themselves, where forms of affiliation and cooperation take shape, where statuses, identities, and functions are aligned in ways that do not necessarily line up with a conventional sense of neighborhoods or communities (Caldeira 2017; Simone 2020).

A terrain of *being in common*, of being connected in the pursuit of livelihood, social support, mutual care, and shared activity is forged across places but main-

1. See the debates in El Grupo de Trabajo CLACSO 2022; Gago, Cielo, and Gachet 2018; Giraldo 2017; and Persco and Grabois 2015 for the development of the concept of popular economy.

tains a sense of felt coherence. The critical aspect of putting together such territories is that it entails multiplying positions through which various lines of articulation are attempted (Clare, Habermehl, and Mason-Deese 2018; Clare 2019). It is not just that common membership in a church or mosque may draw people from various geographies and walks of life; rather, the church acts as a locus to connect other aspects of the lives of its membership. It draws cross-cutting connections with unions, women's groupings, savings clubs, or recreation centers. Each entity acts as a crossroads for the multiple memberships and affiliations of those who participate in these entities.

In Ritchie Street, there is a habit for shopkeepers, visiting traders, service engineers, ustads—across ethnicity and class—to converge every evening at 5:00 p.m., at a set of shops that sell north Indian samosas, sweet ginger tea, and sugarcane juice. These congregations generate new encounters, gossip on trade and family alliances, but also—through subtle indications of body language—suggest who is connected to whom, and who is backing whom. This site of samosas and tea lays out transnational gossip from those who have recently returned from Shenzhen and those soon to venture there. The urban popular economy is a social economy of articulation, in which the multiple positions of any household are drawn together in varying degrees of mutual implication.

On Territories of Operation

In cities and urban regions across the world varied forms of collective organization have shaped particular *territories of operation* as well as *terrains in common*. Urban majorities across disparate terrains of the Global South have used specific locations, infrastructures, histories, and material and social resources to carve out spaces supportive of their values and aspirations for promises of a better life (Benjamin 2008; Chattopadhyay 2012; Lombard 2014; Lindell 2019). They have assembled territories that are platforms for more than survival. They support shared imaginations of justice, equanimity, and flourishing (Escobar 2016). All territories are forged from negotiations, practices, and instruments that are problematic, sometimes contradictory, and which reflect a politics that entails messy compromises, settlements, and unequal distributions of power. No matter the aspiration, no matter the integrity of collective spirit, urban matters are complicated mixtures of the discrepant (Halvorsen 2019).

What we call *urban popular economies* are particular manifestations of these mixtures. They are efforts on the part of shifting, emergent *collectives*—as articulations more or less explicitly organized—to consolidate lives they deem worth living. Com-

mon sentiments of fairness and egalitarian possibilities require the organization of effort, production, and allocation that may not embody these sentiments. As such, territories of operation are not seamless. They entail frictions and settlements but they aim for continuous transformations. How to work; organize living spaces; constitute households; treat neighbors and strangers; value people's time and initiatives; use, share and navigate everyday spaces; and confront new forms of extraction of value are all aspects of popular economies as they seek to maintain their terrains (Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Señorans 2020). Urban popular economies, as means to configure territories of operation, entail how various experiences, connections, and positions are composed as a kind of "living archive," which is deployed to produce specific dispositions of mobility, and access to resources and opportunities. It is the moves toward expanded diversification of possibilities of accumulation, social reproduction, and livelihood formation based on concerted "looking out for diversities" incumbent through multiplying points of contact on the part of individuals and households (Lemaître and Helmsing 2012; Nelms 2015; Gago 2018).

Instead of social relations being primarily based on establishing what persons have in common, this is supplemented by attention to *differences* to highlight that the assumptions any individual and household might make about factors, rules, and actors that play a role in determining their conditions may be significantly different for others. Taking these differences into consideration might amplify the overarching diversity of things, forces, institutions, regulations, and places at work in lending shape to the city. Finding ways to interrelate such discrepancies might produce different everyday life scenarios (Le Polain and Nyssens 2013; Dürr and Müller 2019; Fernández-Álvarez 2020). Territories of operation are interconnected spaces in which the articulation of diverse elements, energies and affects—human, social, ecological, technological, and material—takes place (Mitchell 2002). The interdependent multiplicity that emerges from difference (Aitken and An 2012) is the basis of the contemporaneity of plural modes of organization to sustain life (Tapia 2009). A focus on these territories as terrains of being in common highlights the political dimensions of spatialized and expanded reproduction in dispute (Sandoval, Robertsdotter, and Paredes 2017).

The political is not simply defined by structural forces of law, investment, and policy. It takes into consideration how regions are multiply exposed to a range of financial, logistical, and cultural flows at a global scale and the subsequent contestations about how these exposures will be used or avoided by different actors with different kinds of access and capacities to operate within them. Urban built environments, spatial arrangements, and economic and administrative functions medi-

ate and provisionally resolve often contradictory, or at least not easily synthesizable, forces from above and below.

At the same time, these territories produce zones of opacity through the multiplication and superimposition of practices "increasing the density of the communes, of circulation, and of solidarities to the point that the territory becomes unreadable" (Invisible Committee 2009: 107). Opacity fosters flexibility beyond officially designated boundaries or demarcations. Urban regulatory environments are replete with exceptions, loopholes, and temporal qualifications. Popular economies are aimed at straddling the divides between apparent compliance with or subsumption within normative frameworks of operation while they stand aside and reserve something not quite "on the books."

For example, the vast networks of textile production in Jakarta reflect the decentralization of large-scale factory production into hundreds of small units, each working on specific facets of clothing production—from cutting, patterning, sewing, stitching, buttoning, designing—all vertically integrated into a few large corporate structures. But there is also a substantial lateral chain of production and marketing from these same units that has developed through intersecting memberships in religious and women's associations, impromptu popular markets, unions in the ports, and eating places where truckers congregate. All in their own way have paid attention to how loopholes, tenancies, friendship networks, land statuses, and ethnicities could be capitalized upon to supplement the incomes of the players involved and to create an infrastructure of transactions that can be mobilized for influencing political authorities, investing in affordable housing, and improving urban services.

Another example is the complex politics of settling land via settling the bureaucracy. In India, land as majority space materializes as vast terrains of small plots with additive building methods. Adding a floor, subdividing a room, or subletting part of the footprint can be a way to speculate within very local markets. More extensive negotiations and understandings might ensue: extensions for small shops, workshops, or other activities mean construction, wiring for lighting and power, and ad hoc change of land use. The charges paid to the municipal corporation generate receipts for monthly electricity connections which then form archives of claims to space (Benjamin 1989). If receipts for paying a commercial rate for electricity can be woven into a set of claims or acts of tenure-making, then tenure is not predetermined as a state bureaucratic category. Rather, it is actively worked on through incremental adjustments and additions to everyday infrastructures that become claims to new kinds of sociality and subject positions (see also Das and Walton 2015). Tenures are a form of claim-making through which property is worked: property is

transformed into a social dynamic rather than a thing, opening real estate surpluses not just to landlords but to tenants and subtenants as well (Keenan 2010; Elliott 2016).

The struggle for improved livelihoods and quality of life is the struggle to put together territories in which those lives might operate. States have long attempted to define and manage those territories—from the status of and access to land, housing, and work, to the responsibilities and rights of citizens, to regulatory frameworks about how people reside and work. At the same time, they have been party to implicit social compacts that allowed majority populations to inhabit cities largely fending for themselves in ways that depended on circumventing legalities and on the ambiguities of regulatory systems. As long as they do not constitute an existential political threat, occasional riots and incivility are allowed. Majority populations provide essential goods and services to the larger city—a capacity derived from their own figuring and ways of doing things.

Many facets of this tacit compact were already being dissolved prior to the pandemic as regimes sought to demonstrate their creditworthiness by clearing unruly populations framed as deterrents to investments from extractive infrastructures. Transport hubs and networks, storage and port facilities, export processing zones, administrative districts, high-end zones of elite and internationalized consumption are all commonly prioritized over urban majorities. In the wake of the pandemic, what will likely emerge is an acceleration of this process in the name of securing health, even as economic hardships, austerity, and recession may reinforce the need for a broad range of popular economic practices.

Dimensions of the Struggle to Assemble Territories

A key question centers on the nature of *struggles for territory* that will ensue in efforts to de-densify designated problematic spaces, to further displace majority populations, disinvest from the social welfare of the poor and working class, and racialize those who deserve recognition and support. How will certain spaces and practices be deemed insalubrious and thus delegitimated? In all the work of ordering, cleaning, cooking, caring, and policing that continues to ensure middle-class and elite consumption, undoubtedly dangerous in viral terms, what justifications will be made for controlling popular processes that are the very basis for such required labor? If urban popular economies are contingent on the identification, production, and deployment of diversity, such an economy must, in turn, be adept at managing the varied ramifications such deployment generates.

A. COMPOSING A COMMONS

If diversification is key to forging territories of operation, what nevertheless remains are questions of the glue that holds diverse actors together in such pursuits. If an underlying ethos of popular economy, at its most minimal conceptualization, concerns who "we" understand ourselves to be in common, what kinds of work are entailed in substantiating that "we"? How do the dynamics of work—compositions, power arrangements, forms of valuation—shape particular instantiations of that collective "we"? How are struggles for the recognition of particular collectivities expressions of collectivity itself? Is it possible to differentiate the coherence of the collective from the struggles—the political effort—necessary to establish it?

Here, examples from Latin America, and Argentina in particular, may prove instructive. They point not to some overarching social movement that collapses the possibilities of a collective "we" but to alternating expressions of a multiplicity of formations at different times (Castronovo 2018, 2019; Felder and Patroni 2018; Filho et al. 2018). Sometimes issues particularly pertinent to migrants will take the fore—questions of access to basic rights related to residency or exploitation. At others, various cultural organizations will assemble to express the concerns of indigeneity and the preservation of heritage. At other moments, members of the widespread popular education sector will demonstrate to advance claims for extending legitimacy and resources for educational institutions that go beyond recognized schooling. And at still other times, unions of popular economy workers, drawn from different sectors and trades, use the performance of public demonstration to bring themselves into being.

Multiple memberships cross these different formations. They draw upon the different roles and positions individuals play to give voice to territories that are essentially multifaceted, where individuals are simultaneously parents, workers, teachers, students, and members of specific religious, racial, and ethnic groups. This is fundamentally a question of how to speak in many different names, of how to operate under many different auspices as a means to create space sufficient for urban residency. Not only do human and social agencies take part in composing the commons, so do material, ecological, regulatory, and infrastructural elements. Such commons are shaped by varied energies that contribute to an expanded reproduction in which terrains in common "emerge from inhabitants' historical relationships of interdependence, co-responsibility and co-constitution with nature that makes the reproduction of human and non-human life possible" (Cielo and Carrión Sarzosa 2018: 9). In Belo Horizonte's housing occupations, social reproduction and urban nature are redefined by practices of sharing and reciprocity that sustain auto-constructed

common spaces such as community gardens and parks, communal kitchens, social centers, and daycare facilities (Tonucci and Castriota, forthcoming). It is in composing the commons as affective, strategic, and collective efforts that reproduction can be more clearly theorized in terms of its political agency (Barca and Leonardi 2018; Gutierrez and Salazar 2015; Valdivia 2018).

B. DOMESTIC TERRITORIES

If territories are not simply geographical or administrative, but reflective of the coordinated instrumentalities of care—who we are caring for and where—then the household is far from the only site of care. How can care be distributed across more dispersed social arrangements? How is it that cities, which generate a wide range of infrastructures of care, living arrangements, and modalities of social reproduction, fall back on models of heteronormative households and extended kinship systems during crises such as the recent pandemic (Cavallero and Gago 2020)? The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced how many districts of the urban South are provisional arrangements of fragments of extended families, invented kin, groups of workers in a common industry, or collections of short-term boarders. There is nothing new in the often haphazard and transgressive ways through which household "units" are forged. It is rather the persistence of the modernist dream that imaginarily segments populations into cohesive familial, usually heteronormative units that mistakes the composition on the ground (Hillenkamp 2015).

This is not to deny the persistence and salience of such familial units. Only that they do not necessarily embody a majority. That said, we see how women continue to carry arduous roles in the maintenance of households and processes of social reproduction (Hill 2010). Lockdown procedures have taken a particularly high toll on women, from the steep rise in domestic abuse to the claustrophobic physical and psychological conditions of massive increases in domestic labor, including childcare, education, and caring for vulnerable persons.

Globally, 45 percent of women surveyed said that they or a woman they know has experienced gender-based violence since the pandemic began; 23 percent of women surveyed affirmed that violence and conflict in the home have increased during this period (Emandi et al. 2021). These numbers are exacerbated for women in vulnerable conditions: a UNHCR-led network of NGOs and UN agencies providing protection to those affected by humanitarian crises reported that gender-based violence was occurring at a higher incidence in 90 percent of its operations (UNHCR 2020). The increase in domestic work has also been disproportionate for women (OECD 2021). For many, limited accumulated savings means households dissolve as mem-

bers retreat to other places of origin—as witnessed by the mass exodus of low-paid industrial and service workers from Indian cities.

The effects of the pandemic on the urban majority, as well as the ramifying economic and social challenges it sparked, unraveled many mutual arrangements, and stretched others beyond their elastic limit. This revealed a broad range of fragilities that cannot be compensated by intensified collaborative actions of the majority itself. Particularly important is how attention to the political dimension of reproductive labor is producing/disputing a vocabulary about "essential" work (Verschuur, Guérin, and Hillenkamp 2020). As violence remains a critical grammar in domestic territories it is important to understand how domestic violence acts as political violence, thus opening the domestic onto a wider range of considerations.

Domestic territories are further reconfigured by the spread of new and emerging technologies ingrained in day-to-day life. Digital infrastructures and technological artifacts provide means for residents to navigate urban landscapes and bypass certain infrastructure vulnerabilities. Mobile Internet connectivity as well as relatively simple, text-based applications and services such as mobile money accounts are disrupting socio-technical geographies. Spatial immobility is in part offset by digital platforms for dispersed and fragmented micro-income opportunities that also engender heightened surveillance of domestic terrains.

Cities have witnessed a boom in infrastructure-led investments, strategies, and plans, often under the remit of "world-class" or "smart city" directives (Moore and Smith 2020). State-driven and rooted in neoliberal blueprints for the privatization and financialization of urban space, these infrastructures are often corporate-funded projects to monetize, commodify, and modernize urban citizenship and basic services. Integrated with ongoing slum upgrading and renewal programs, ICT-led infrastructural development becomes part of large-scale technological urban assemblages. Of course, this is not to say that such projects are always technically "smart" as they often do not adhere to the newest or highest standards. Nevertheless, they speak to the urge by city authorities to recalibrate infrastructure, service delivery, and urban life by leveraging smart technologies, with repercussions across all urban scales and territorial assemblages.

The situated articulation of such digital infrastructures and technological artifacts is shaped by a wide range of motivations and speculations from both professional and amateur actors. There are multiple interest groups: the state that seeks to remodel or upgrade its slums; city practitioners that seek to reframe urban agendas and modernize the urban citizen; international donor communities that seek to formulate sustainable solutions to urban dilemmas in the developing world; globalist and private technology companies that seek to experiment with their own variants

and imaginaries of the smart and sustainable city; and of course, service providers including utility companies that seek to create new and expand existing markets, maximize profits, and stabilize revenue streams.

All these groups speculate on the vitality of digital infrastructures and technological artifacts. Perhaps none more than urban majorities themselves who through everyday use, repair, disruption, improvisation, and reproduction, as well as through contestation, contradiction, and sometimes eradication (i.e., trashing and discarding) have opened technological systems up to continuous possibilities (Guma 2020). Majorities give meanings to their form, deploying different logics, skills, and tactics to navigate risks and dangers, opportunities and openings of urban life often with the help of, or in tandem with, a wide array of actors at the interstices of the governors and the governed (community leaders, subversive agents, ad hoc power brokers). These developments reflect the actual dynamics of settlements and work at ground level; they are imbricated in the perpetual reworking of territorial assemblages and the connectivity that underpins popular economies.

Digital infrastructures and technological artifacts are embedded in ways of living and assembling domestic territories via instrumentalities of care and dispersed arrangements of opportunity, even as they usher in new regimes of labor within the home. Domestic territories become primary sites of/for extended social reproduction and materialization—manifested through incremental and contingent refashioning, redefinition, and reengineering. Pandemic conditions have intensified such trajectories, providing new incentives and legitimacy for attempts on the part of states to formalize, straighten out, or curtail a wide range of settlement and work practices. We can then underline a double meaning for "domestic territories" in the pandemic crisis. On one side we can point to the expansion of the domestic, both its spatial expansion and the expansion of spaces for social reproduction (Gago 2020). On the other side, we see the inverse movement: capital redefining domesticity and directly inserting itself inside of homes (Cavallero 2021).

C. POPULAR INSTITUTIONS

Collective efforts that operate based on a diversity of entities, practices, and actors, which reciprocally fold each other into their own logics, face particular challenges in terms of whether or not to institutionalize their collaborations over the long run. The question is how such collaboration might endure with or without the ambit of institutions that would serve to rationalize the details of reciprocity and mutual responsibility. Given the provisional character of self-organization, even for long-term initiatives, what would constitute potentially viable infrastructures for

institutionalizing emergent popular collective efforts? What would be the relation between processes of formalization and the power of the provisional that characterizes urban popular economies? If collectives are created through struggle and the provision of care, and if their modalities of operation are often provisional because of how they are situated in relation to wider power structures, what strategic practices and political economic considerations are necessary to consolidate collective efforts beyond preoccupation with their own inventiveness and precarity (Azzellini 2016)?

While social movements remain mobilized to address specific matters of concern—policing, or economic precarity, for example—various organizational manifestations of urban popular economy have tended to prefigure possible modes of institutionalization, as if in prolonged rehearsals rather than consolidation (Larrabure 2013; Gaiger 2019). In many respects this reflects an assessment by activists, workers, entrepreneurs, and educators that the position of popular economy is as an articulator between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of accumulation, as a locus of strategic unsettlement. It simultaneously carves out spaces of autonomous functioning to allow for the self-valorization of inventive social collaborations and encroaches on the functioning of existing institutions. The doubleness of intent means that while popular economies may produce their own unions, schools, housing cooperatives, and factories, they also act as platforms to intrude on various aspects of the formal economy and governance. The institutional forms of these autonomies are continuously recalibrated to deal with new situations while remaining sufficiently elastic to participate in changing arrangements among specific work sectors, civil society organizations, or local and municipal governments (Hull and James 2012; Ruggeri and Vieta 2015; Vieta 2018).

D. TECHNOLOGIES OF URBAN GOVERNANCE

In light of pandemic conditions, states have found new legitimation, even urgency, to further develop and deploy tools of surveillance. In cities possessing tightly structured mechanisms of registration at local and national levels, the suite of structural and population shifts has, over the years, revealed significant holes in these apparatuses of accountability. Even when rights and benefits of citizenship were predicated on registration, many residents preferred to exist without them. The pandemic makes access to tenure, services, and rights contingent on continuously updated accountability. New criteria of eligibility will likely be rolled out. Already individuals and districts in many cities are being measured and recorded as to their degree of compliance with state-mandated restrictions.

Health has long been a key instrument of urban ordering, leveraged through the organization of territories and the management of which residents might be deemed worthy of care. But current algorithmic logics informing technical instruments of assessment take this further, emphasizing the interoperability of data sets capable of assigning more specific valuations of individual and household behavior, measuring their prospective vulnerabilities, and placing additional onus on individuated protocols of "normative performance" (Bigo, Ewert, and Kuşkonmaz 2020; Leese 2020).

Decisions, questions of value, negotiations about valuable demeanors and practices that were the purview of everyday, face-to-face social negotiations, are shifting to matters of statistically mediated probabilities and individual "scores" derived from correlations among variables. For example, migration, instead of reflecting an oscillating and autonomous process of difference-making, is marketized according to corporate logics about which differentiations count (Taylor and Meissner 2020). While pandemic conditions may have necessitated the formation of new social solidarities, these arrangements intersect with an enlarged mode of governmentality based on disregarding, and even actively fragmenting, these very solidarities. Within the enhanced visibilities that exigencies for surveillance bring, it is reasonable to anticipate an enlarged stratum of underground operations, as subaltern experimentation attempts to circumvent detection, opening up a new and potentially more dangerous modality of popular economy.[2]

Substantially reduced operating budgets of states and civil sectors curtailed the speed and breadth of restructuring underway long before the pandemic set in. But states, developers, and investors will be compelled, given present exposures, debt financing, and contractual commitments, to keep a certain momentum going. As states have proven their creditworthiness, in part through highly visible and punitive disciplining of urban majority populations—bringing larger numbers into formal credit systems, demonstrating the ability to shift populations around—local urban "growth coalitions" may become more brutal in their attempts to assert authority, even when they may have little capacity to develop and act on any long-range plans (Tadiar 2022).

All of these moves toward greater formalization, calculation, and surveillance significantly affect the kinds of diversities that popular economy draws on to produce a diversity of dispositions for livelihood creation and social reproduction. Even if a diversity of land statuses, licensing procedures, policing apparatuses, and applications of rules persist, efforts by government to make these diversities *interoperable*—

2. See for instance www.inmovilidadamericas.org.

that is, interrelatable within a single logic of evaluation—as part of its legitimate ambit of rule may have the effect of criminalizing popular economies and driving them underground.

E. THE MULTIPLICATION OF TEMPORALITIES

The material economies of urban life do not adhere to linear trajectories of progressive development toward continuous improvement and stability. A large volume of provisioning—food, water, sanitation, housing—is autogenerated and makeshift. Many built environments are remade on the basis that the operative materials, designs, and arrangements are no longer functional or safe; that they are deteriorating or responsible for a panoply of social problems. But in the end, what they are replaced with is hardly any better, generates more problems, and amplifies the ways in which the former arrangements may have been viable after all. Still, many majority populations report a sense of going back in time via trajectories of deprovisioning. That is, housing, sanitation, and access to necessities were felt to be more secure, or at least more workable, in the past (Smith 2019). How does popular economy intersect with temporalities where outcomes are not always subject to clear demonstrations of accumulation nor dispossession, where the nature of social demand wavers between inclusion in, and exemption from, structures of well-being? How, in such circumstances, might popular ecologies in diverse urban spaces produce different notions of social wealth (Fernández-Álvarez 2018)?

Perhaps one of the clearest attainments of popular economies is the way they foster and transmit ideas and ethics about what constitutes a life worth living. By emphasizing and materializing the importance of diversity as a resource—how differentially positioned residents facing various difficulties and opportunities offer something concrete to the aspirations and practices of others—residents discover themselves as more than they thought they were. They discover within themselves a wide range of roles, as revealed through an expanding set of networked relationships and encounters. What ensues is a more textured form of solidarity, one that exceeds merely enhanced tolerance of difference and manifests instead as a possibility of making differences count for something—in the sense of the individual's own objectives and of instilling confidence that what one does is a potential resource for others (Stavrides 2014; Calvo, Syrett, and Morales 2020).

Of course, intensely precarious situations may remain. Economies may contract, inducing plunging wages and job security; governments may prove restrictive and heavy-handed. Nevertheless, popular economies have become continuous rehearsals for resilience and struggle. Residents not only dance around deleterious condi-

tions or become recipients of impositions but find ways to continuously push back and work the system, while remaining cognizant of the limited horizons and the proliferating dependencies on technologies of rule.

F. LAND AS AN ACTIVE SPACE

Popular economies have enabled thinking about land beyond its status as terra firma, property, or financial asset. Rather, land is the materialization of settling by heterogeneous inhabitants, spatial linkages, surplus value, and tenure (Ghertner 2020). Urban occupations in Brazil reveal that housing struggles, when inspired by tenure security, right to housing, and social functions of property, can enact collective claims to land beyond public or private, disturbing the homeownership model (Tonucci and Castriota, forthcoming). The conventional framing of a "pristine commons" as something to be commodified falls apart. Rather, land emerges as a complexity of terrains, open to varied logics around institutional entanglements (Tang and Benjamin 2021).

One way to think about this is as *tenurial sociality:* a dynamic that entangles land, urban majorities, and lower and middle bureaucracies in forms of appropriation, with consequent implications for popular economy's embedding into society and politics. Consider the vast refugee rehabilitation housing blocks in Central Delhi. Built in 1953 and long-leased to Punjabi refugees fleeing the turmoil of India-Pakistan partition, these were extensive two-storied apartments built around a large square courtyard with common toilets. By the mid-1980s, these blocks looked completely different (Benjamin 1989): rooms were extended onto the common roofs, while the common rear courtyards were built into through everyday improvements. Underpinning this spectacular transformation was the complexity of land tenures that spurred another type of negotiation: for one resident to extend their upper floor room into a balcony protruding over another's ground floor apartment meant paying for a concrete roof to replace a temporary asbestos panel—thus, a material upgrading of the temporary into the permanent.

These kinds of tenurial socialities are reworked at immense scale, despite such neighborhoods not aligning with standard descriptors of being different from the mainstream, to be slums, unplanned, informal, or then, a product of some mythical common state of territory soon to be commodified and fictional. It turns out, as public authorities in Bangalore realized when the Supreme Court was petitioned by elite groups to act against the regularization of land encroachers, that these territories refer to 570,000 properties—almost always on very small plots of converted agricultural land (Ramani 2021). The numbers may be at least a third higher

if estimates of electricity connections are used. For such connections extend the grid in ways that disregard planning norms and are a fundamental tenurial form underlying popular economies. Tenure and property as they are worked and produced on the ground—in all their layered, interlocking, blurry materialities—are several times removed from how territory appears on municipal plans and strategies, a gap in which new opportunities may emerge. Tenurial sociality blurs distinctions between owners, tenants, and subtenants, opening spatialities of institutional claiming entangled in histories of territorial transformation—whether in Kowloon or in East Delhi (Tang and Benjamin 2021).

The extensiveness of these tenurial practices and the frictions they produce can be highly effective, even if unpredictable, in reworking real estate surpluses and processes of financialization (Christophers 2015). Progressive politics is not just about social movements to protest a neoliberal policy, but also, and far more commonplace, about how to act on bureaucratic procedures to allow such complex entanglements into mainstream spaces of administrations. This is tacit, often unintentional, politics where the thickness of claims and counterclaims shape land tenurial practices and embed various constellations of groups in close physical proximity across class and caste. It is this thickness that is seen by big business as an obstacle, since legal entanglements deter foreign investors seeking clean, cartographically orderly terrains without political clutter. It is this clutter, made possible by what English media, academics, and anxious activists term "touts, agents, thieves, rowdy sheeters turned saviors" (Dhareshwar and Srivatan 1998), that remains instrumental to opening up political spaces for the majority.

The proliferation of diversities and the elaboration of infrastructures of alternative material articulation seem to be key defining features of popular economies. This can be seen in the potentialities of ambiguous land tenures that underpin informal land markets, shifting relationships between the legal and illegal, dispossession and infrastructural reorganization, variegated forms of production and reproduction, shifting articulations with emergent and increasingly mobile class, racialized, and gendered populations, and new forms of extractivism and auto-construction (Gidwany and Reddy 2011; Herlambang et al. 2019; Wiig and Silver 2019).

While tenure might crystallize a particular sociality, the specificities of tenure often occlude how collective spaces of operation are constituted and protected (Steel, van Noorloos, and Klaufus 2017). Instead of regarding the primacy of land politics as a relationship between household and territory, land is often lived as collective space, conjoining different temporalities, crafted within the cracks of regimes of titling and property. Despite the clear debilitative impact of more comprehensive forms of land surveyance, registration, regulation, and appropriation,

these coexist with widespread and largely tacit forms of claim-making. They generate their own economies because the modalities of everyday exchange, reproduction, and sociality go beyond the household form, developing their own particular financial underpinnings and communicational circuits. Working the diversities generates its own diverse dispositions.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have contributed operative concepts for popular economy and identified territories of operation within the rubric of the popular economy itself. We understand this as an intersecting patchwork of livelihoods, social reproduction, and apparently contradictory logics of accumulation made to work as everyday practices of the urban majority. We forwarded six dimensions of the struggle for territory as constitutive of the popular economy. These operate as provisional constellations to understand the complex work of navigating provisioning, politics, and land. These terrains of struggle become urgent political questions in the face of disinvestment in social welfare, increasing financialization of urban spaces, gendered and racialized territorial struggles, and the compounding of all of this by pandemic conditions.

The six dimensions examine methodological approaches in these territories as well as their political implications in terms of how practices operate on the ground and the politics of knowledge production itself. These dimensions rest on our collective knowledge production, drawing on our situated research and connections to popular economy experiences in various urban sites around the world. As a collective our "we" is composed of difference that draws on diverse geographies, research, and experiences.

Popular economies point to specific temporalities and rhythms expressed spatially through changing dispositions of livelihood and territories of care. They are diversity-machines. States and corporate apparatuses continue to colonize specific territories, to settle questions as to who is eligible to inhabit what kinds of spaces and under what conditions, and to efface or displace urban majorities around the world. But these efforts in large part remain *unsettled*. They remain unsettled in light of the tensions between visibility and invisibility—that is, the imposition of colonial sensibilities that attribute absence of viable life from specific places as a means to develop them, and oscillations between displacement and emplacement as majorities find new vehicles to become visible while reconfiguring long-honed practices and institutions of care via new connectivities and platforms.

Whatever the predominant means of conceptualizing and appropriating space,

these oscillations generate open-ended currents that support specific urban majorities and territories in different ways. Relations of visibility and invisibility are key. Rendering once invisible capacities and resourcefulness (that is, the urban majority) visible threatens to make only them responsible for their survival and further marginalizes their presence, even as it constitutes an important opportunity of self-valorization. Urban popular economies, as a social economy of articulation, assemble territory, diversity, and ambiguity in specific but not clearly translatable ways. Urban popular economies open possibilities for majorities to become something more than they have recognized themselves to be.

The Popular Urban Economy Collective is made up of researchers and activists across the world that have been attempting to conceptualize and engage the relationships between economic accumulation and social reproduction in ways that put social collaboration front and center. This piece has been collectively written by the participants.

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