

The ordinariness of struggle and exclusion: a view from across the north–south urban ‘divide’

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Comparative literature on subaltern urbanism neglects inequalities among the poor that mimic exclusionary processes to which they have been subjected, what we call ‘scalar imitation’. Using Robinson’s ‘launching’ tactic towards ‘generative comparison’, we identify and explain the evolution of class differentiation within a resettlement colony in Delhi’s periphery, reference ‘glimpses’ of similar processes in literature on subaltern urbanism, and discuss epistemological underpinnings of our analysis. We revise ‘local uniqueness’, which Massey developed early in her career, and adhere to her later topological sensibilities and Foucault’s ‘ascending analysis’. We conclude by highlighting the blurring of worlding and place making processes.

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Despite lingering claims of unique processes in global-south cities as a critical reaction to longstanding Western ethnocentrism, comparative urban research nonetheless has burgeoned to examine differences between north–south contexts while calling attention to wide-ranging similarities among cities worldwide, from policy (Peck and Theodore, 2015) to informality (for example, Borén and Young, 2020; Chiodelli, 2019; Durst and Wegmann, 2017; Jaffe and Koster, 2019; Parker, 2020; Parkinson et al., 2020; Roy, 2011; Sheppard et al., 2020; Tucker and Devlin, 2019). We suggest that enduring tendencies of people towards exercising power to reap rewards at the expense of others along multiple axes of difference broadly explain why cities of different sizes, demographic and

institutional configurations and historical processes across the so-called ‘north–south divide’ share features that frame lived experience. Inequalities and the power relations that constitute them are ubiquitous, manifesting in context-specific ways.

In the context of dramatically increasing socio-economic polarisation worldwide, critical urban research has focussed in various ways on inequalities between privileged and unprivileged populations. Pervasive encroachments on the poor in urban life through eviction and indirect displacement (for example, Davidson and Lees, 2010; Marcuse, 1985) have led to research across the global economy on the victimisation of the poor through processes of capitalism (for example, Addie, 2013; Chatterjee, 2014),

racialised capitalism (for example, McClintock, 2018; Pulido, 2016), anti-blackness (for example, Alves, 2013; Mele, 2013), patriarchy (for example, Schütte, 2014), nationalism (for example, Bhagat, 2019) and heteronormativity (for example, Oswin, 2008, 2014; Yue and Leung, 2017). Some of this research highlights ‘differential citizenship’, a system that rewards some and punishes others for the same actions (Foucault, 1995, 257–92), highlighting the informality of urban life that permits such illegal processes (Can, 2019; Holston, 2008; Jaffe and Koster, 2019; Kinder, 2016; Meehan, 2013; Pow, 2017). Other research has emphasised the aspirations of the poor to become part of, despite their ejection from, urban projects that promise a better life (Ghertner, 2015; Spence, 2012). Another strand of urban research has focussed on how the marginalised ‘make do’ under constraints that often are extreme—how they construct their lives in places cast as blighted, marshal resources in resource-poor areas, and express their agency despite exclusionary processes that have rendered their lives so difficult. Coping strategies among the marginalised in cities across the global north and south are diverse, including tactics of self-provisioning in areas of disinvestment (regarding Detroit, Kinder, 2016; Mumbai and Cape Town, McFarlane, 2018; Chicago, Venkatesh, 2008); informal property markets (regarding Chennai, Raman, 2016; Detroit, Kinder, 2016); informal housing solutions where affordable housing is unavailable (regarding Bangalore, Benjamin, 2008; Chioldelli, 2019; Parkinson et al., 2020; regarding Istanbul, Kuyucu, 2014); self- or ‘auto’-constructed informal settlements (regarding Istanbul, Santiago and São Paulo, Caldeira, 2017; Holston, 2008; Parker, 2020); informal street vending as a livelihood (Crossa, 2009; Tucker and Devlin, 2019); the commodification of poverty through slum or disaster tourism (for example, Mumbai, Nisbett, 2017; New Orleans, Gotham, 2017; Delhi, Kalyan, 2017; see also Frenzel, 2016 for wide-ranging examples); and aestheticisation of slums or

sites of disinvestment (Delhi, Ghertner, 2015; Detroit, Kinder, 2016; Rao, 2018). Critical urban research in the global north and south is replete with insightful accounts of inequalities between the privileged and unprivileged and the ways that the marginalised cope with imposed constraints. Yet, this article raises a different type of question about inequalities, namely how they develop *among* the marginalised—how the marginalised themselves can become agents of internal differentiation—and relatedly, how such inequalities transcend the construct of the global north–south ‘divide’.

Our theoretical point of departure is to agree with Pratt (2019) that the everyday in cities in the global south and north alike lies in the realm of the informal, yet we diverge from the view that informality necessarily gives rise to commoning (Sheppard et al., 2020), which we recognise as one of many possible trajectories. Struggles over the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1996) are not necessarily a radical process with inclusive and ‘progressive’ undertones; rather, struggles are ordinary and often evolve in an exclusionary fashion, even among actors who themselves have been marginalised. Pointing to this reality does not necessarily reflect a negative or pessimistic view of social relations; rather, we recognise wide-ranging possibilities on which comparative urban research has shed light. Our aim is to open inquiry to one type of trajectory that is important, yet commonly overlooked or de-emphasised, and to both identify and explain its role in the production of urban inequalities in wide-ranging urban contexts.

The common casting of inequality as generating tension between groups based on class, race/ethnicity, gender, caste, religion and the like is problematic insofar as it implicitly essentialises groups and overlooks the ways uneven power relations can evolve internally. Intersectional and queer urban analyses have been helpful in dehomogenising groups (Oswin, 2014; Yue and Leung, 2017), although the sense of inequalities from these analyses tends to be partial, emphasising problems of differential

citizenship as a function of a differentiated external gaze onto such groups. The differentiated gaze is a useful insight because it identifies and explains varying conditions among members of a formal or informal collective relative to externally imposed constraints. Appreciating this contribution, it would be a mistake, however, to assume that marginalisation necessarily characterises power relations between groups that are pre-defined and implicitly conceptualised in a static fashion. Indeed, as uneven power relations evolve within groups, the *a priori* definition of the group itself warrants revision as it splinters into different, unequal parts. Inequalities ripple throughout society at multiple scales and require critical attention as much within, as between, groups.

Although poststructural theoretical scholarship, specifically regarding deliberative democracy, has highlighted tensions wrought of difference within communities (for example, Young, 1996), and empirically based research on ‘community’ has recognised intra-community differences and tensions (DeFilippis et al., 2006; England, 2008), research on subaltern urbanism has, however, circumvented this issue. We know as well from analyses of formal and informal social movement organisations and counter-cultural groups striving for democratic life in diverse contexts that internal hierarchies often develop along multiple axes of difference to threaten a group’s sustainability (for example, Fraser and Ettliger, 2008; Randall, 1994; Schor, 2017). Bosco’s (2006) research has shown how groups with significant internal differences can develop mechanisms to engage conflict to enable sustainability. Developing such mechanisms, let alone recognising and dealing constructively and inclusively with internal differentiation along any of many axes of difference and their intersections, is nonetheless an enduring challenge to all groups. As we will elaborate, urban research sometimes mentions or provides clues about uneven power relations among the marginalised, yet nonetheless glosses over them to emphasise other

issues such as those reviewed at the outset of this introduction.

Epistemologically, we link our argument regarding the development of inequalities within marginalised places to the general project of comparative urbanism by pursuing an epistemology inspired by Robinson’s (2016) ‘generative approach’ to comparative urban research. The generative model deploys an analytical tactic Robinson coined as ‘launching’, which inserts a singularity—an outcome of complex, context-specific processes—into wider conversations. In light of little attention paid to the development of inequalities among the marginalised, we glean ‘glimpses’ of inequalities within impoverished zones in global-north cities, notably in the USA, from the critical urban literature where such inequalities are mentioned in passing but not pursued. Our strategy affords recognition of context-specific processes while eliciting similarities to demonstrate the generality of the pattern, and like Can (2019), we move from the ‘south’ to the ‘north’ to elicit similarities.¹ We utilise a singularity, specifically the development of inequalities in Savdha, a resettlement colony in peripheral Delhi (Bose, 2019), and then ‘launch’ this singularity to identify instances of similar circumstances in vastly different urban contexts. Regarding the Savdha case, we recognise persistent inequalities regarding gender, for example, across Delhi and its periphery, notably the subjection of women to domestic violence in the central city and in peripheral colonies where evictees are resettled, but our focus is on *emergent* inequalities in informal life within a purportedly homogeneous population of resettled slum dwellers. Specifically, we call attention to the development of inequalities among the marginalised that mimic those responsible for displacement and resettlement, a situation whereby processes of differentiation and subjection operating between the privileged and unprivileged throughout cities repeat in the microspaces of peripheralised life,² a pattern we call *scalar imitation*.

Whereas the purpose of the section on scalar imitation is to identify similar patterns across the north–south ‘divide’, the purpose of the subsequent section is to provide a critical epistemology that affords an explanation of one instance of scalar imitation in Savdha. The mode of analysis is intended for use, however, in any context. Following the identification of scalar imitation in diverse urban contexts, our epistemology approaches power relations from a bottom–up topological vantage point. We make use of the literature on the topology of power relations (for example, Allen, 2003, 2011; Massey, 1999, 2005), as well as Foucault’s (1980) bottom–up and multiscale ‘ascending analysis’ that begins analysis with on-the-ground practices across space, over time, and then connects them with processes operating at different scales. We explain processes in Savdha through an analysis that departs from Doreen Massey’s early scholarship on local uniqueness (Massey, 1984) but is consistent with her later scholarship on ‘power geometries’ across space (Massey, 1999), and follows a Foucauldian approach to scale and space. Crucially, Massey’s concept ‘local uniqueness’ aligns not with historical particularism, but rather with the agenda of generalisation while recognising context-specific processes. Our approach leads us to explain the dynamics that produce Savdha’s uniqueness with reference to the intersection of power relations within Savdha with those that have developed across space, over time, as opposed to a focus on the effects of macroscale changes on pre-existing socio-economic relations within the confines of a specified place. A topological, bottom–up approach to power geometries reveals how urban spaces constantly are re-made through processes of investment and disinvestment, with consequences for the uprooting and replacement of marginalised populations *along with* transformations in the nature of power relations within places and across space. We begin below by introducing the case of Savdha, and subsequently ‘launch’ salient points from the Savdha case to relate dynamics in Savdha

to ‘glimpses’ of similar dynamics in different urban contexts. In the following section, we further elaborate the case of Savdha to explain its uniqueness in terms of power relations within Savdha relative to those across space and, in light of scant research on this issue, we discuss the epistemological underpinnings of this type of research and call for empirical research in this domain. Hereafter, we use ‘scare quotes’ around global ‘north’ and ‘south’ to direct attention to different contexts while recognising the problematic use of these constructed categories, which we consider to have lost currency.

Following a brief introduction to the Savdha case, we then ‘launch’ salient points from the Savdha case to relate dynamics in Savdha to ‘glimpses’ of similar dynamics in different urban contexts, affording the identification of scalar imitation in diverse contexts. Whereas the section on scalar imitation identifies patterns in wide-ranging contexts, the subsequent section provides a critical epistemology to explain one case of scalar imitation—Savdha—that can be deployed in any case. We approach power relations from a bottom, up topological vantage point and discuss the epistemological underpinnings of this type of research. We make use of the literature on the topology of power relations (for example, Allen, 2003, 2011; Massey, 1999, 2005), as well as Michel Foucault’s (1980) bottom, up and multiscale ‘ascending analysis’ that begins analysis with on-the-ground practices across space, over time, and then connects them with processes operating at different scales. We explain processes in Savdha through an analysis that departs from Doreen Massey’s early scholarship on local uniqueness (Massey’s 1984) but is consistent with her later scholarship on ‘power geometries’ across space (Massey, 1999), and follows a Foucauldian approach to scale and space. Crucially, the concept ‘local uniqueness’ aligns not with historical particularism, but rather with the agenda of generalisation while recognising context-specific processes. Our approach leads us to explain the dynamics that produce Savdha’s uniqueness

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The case of Savdha: context

The project of constructing Delhi as a 'world-class city' (Ghertner, 2015; Roy and Ong, 2011) has focussed on central Delhi, prompting the city government, planners and local governing bodies to invisibilise the poor by evicting them from the central city and resettling them in spatially concentrated areas in the city's periphery. The process of 'peripheralisation' (Gururani and Dasgupta, 2018; Kundu, 2012) or 'plebianisation' (Chatterjee, 2014) is common across large cities in India.³ With increasing numbers of resettlement colonies, resettlement has been located at increasingly remote sites (Displacement Research and Action Network, 2014). Savdha, in Delhi's western periphery, is the most remote of all colonies.

Existing literature on urban resettlement either tends to cast the resettlement process and its outcomes through a dystopic lens, focussing on processes of spatial and socio-economic marginalisation of displaced slum dwellers, or complicates the experiences of resettlement among slum dwellers relative to intersectional constraints posed by gender, caste and class (Jervis Read, 2014). Scholars adopting the

latter approach acknowledge slum dwellers as victims of displacement while also recognising their agency and abilities (Jervis Read, 2012; Rao, 2010, 2013). Selected findings from field research in Savdha during the summers of 2015 and 2016 and from 2017 to 2018 offer fresh insights into the survival, coping and accumulation strategies of resettled slum dwellers and their connections with other urban actors in simultaneously producing urban space and exclusionary practices (Bose, 2019). We do not presume that findings in Savdha necessarily characterise all sites of resettlement; rather, we identify and explain important processes to prompt questions about processes across many cities.

The eviction-resettlement strategy in Delhi began in 2005 when the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) evicted slum dwellers from central Delhi in preparation for the Commonwealth Games 2010. In 2006, evictees across slums in Delhi were relocated to Savdha, which then was a barren rural area of 250 acres without housing, amenities and jobs. The Slum and JJ (*jhuggi-jhonpri*) Department of Delhi's city government,⁴ the slum-development wing of the DDA, allocated plots of land to resettled slum dwellers in Savdha who were entitled to *use, but not own*, their properties for the relatively small fee of 7000 Rupees, about 100 US dollars.⁵

The resettlement policy mandated that displaced slum dwellers build houses or habitable structures within 3 months of the allocation of plots and, further, that empty or abandoned plots are subject to cancellation by officials. Most resettled men had worked long hours in factories in the central city, and lost their jobs once they moved to Savdha, in contrast to women, many of whom had worked in the central city as domestic helpers with flexible hours and, therefore, were able to retain their jobs, working fewer hours in light of the long commute. The absence of jobs in Savdha at the outset of resettlement prompted many men and their families to abandon their allotted plots between 2006 and 2008 to access jobs

in the central city, often with the intention of returning to recoup their fee of 7000 Rupees. However, the DDA aggressively pursued cancellation of plots at the outset of the first wave of settlement in Savdha: over 80% of all cancelled plots were cancelled by 2008. To date, 3059⁶ households lost their allotted plots by official cancellation.

Abandonment of plots was more frequent at the outset of resettlement because many households eventually sold their plots illegally (as they had use but not ownership rights) at a low rate, with the assistance of fellow Savdha residents who emerged as informal property dealers. Most of these nascent property dealers were men who had been leaders in protests to evictions in the central city. They used the social capital they had developed among fellow slum dwellers to become leaders in Savdha, specifically through an informal property market, a privileged position facilitated by lower-level government bureaucrats whom slum dwellers came to know in central Delhi when these bureaucrats visited to deliver notifications of evictions. Once in Savdha, slum dwellers often bribed these officials to secure more than one resettlement plot. Sometimes these plots belonged to neighbours who had temporarily abandoned their plots, a case of dispossession by fellow 'slum dwellers'. Further, some officials engaged in the informal sale of land by accepting bribes and, in return, they provided emergent property dealers with original or forged documents of proof of allotment of plots to specific individuals. These documents are required to transfer the plots through the General Power of Attorney (GPA) to ensure that buyers have both the document for a plot and the GPA transfer certificate to protect themselves against any land-related conflicts in the future. Selling land *as if it were owned*, and more generally *mediating* sales, became an important means by which to accumulate wealth in Savdha, an earnings strategy that the majority of men eventually accessed. Women as well entered into the property market by

buying and selling property but not, however, mediating transactions, which remained a male activity; women's singular and critical contribution to the informal property market is in using their social capital in Savdha to gather market information regarding potential buyers and sellers to assist the men in their households who became 'dealers'.

The informal property market that emerged in Savdha also entailed relations with the adjacent agrarian community, the Jats. The DDA had purchased Savdha land from the Jats, which constitute a dominant and mostly wealthy caste in the northern Indian subcontinent despite being classified as 'Other Backward Castes' in some Indian states. The 'Shokeen' clan within the Jat community traditionally engaged in real estate and property markets across west Delhi, and they eventually partnered with emergent property dealers in Savdha to expand their real-estate opportunities, while Savdha property dealers gained access to the Jats' pool of market information to broaden their contacts of potential buyers in the nearby region.

Housing development burgeoned in Savdha as well as the region overall as the informal property market transformed Savdha from a desolate landscape to a bustling settlement. Between 2006 and 2014, the number of household units in Savdha increased from 5302 to 20,000 ([Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, 2010](#); [Housing and Land Rights Network, 2014](#)); by 2010, crowding prompted a change in land use for housing from plots of land to multi-storied houses. While most households in Savdha incrementally built two-storied houses, only the property dealers who accumulated wealth through mediating sales of abandoned plots built two to three-storied houses in the initial 4 to 5 years after resettlement. Currently, the built environment as well as the economic status of the residents are highly differentiated by class due to the dynamics of the informal property market that emerged at the outset of resettlement as well as the strategic use of pre-existing social capital.

Ironcially, dispossession of plots among those who had abandoned them by neighbours within Savdha reflects a process of internal differentiation through exclusionary practices that resemble those whence the slum dwellers came. Efforts towards social justice to claim space in the central city morphed into acts of investment in land and instances of social injustice in the ‘periphery’. Although the city–government–planning complex of Delhi conceptualised Savdha as a resettlement colony to contain evictees as a homogenised class of ‘slum dwellers’, the population in Savdha nonetheless over time splintered internally.

We draw attention to Savdha residents, not external corporate and government agents, who drove the commodification dynamic by transforming social into land-based capital, sometimes in partnership with government officials and with the Jats in the adjacent agrarian settlement who previously had owned Savdha land. Transformative processes from rural to urban land use by *local* actors, as seen in Savdha, have been uncovered elsewhere. For example, Balakrishnan (2019) found in western Maharashtra, India, that agrarian elites transformed agricultural cooperatives into real estate companies, and Kan (2019) found that the state is now replacing state-sponsored land grabs in peri-urban Guangzhou, China, with state enrolment of rural communities in the commodification of land and practices of speculation and rentiership. The urbanisation of Savdha occurred similarly as in western Maharashtra, insofar as the process was internal, not driven by external manipulation by government or corporate agents as in Guangzhou, but it differs insofar as transformative processes occurred initially through the efforts of resettled slum dwellers rather than agrarian elites. Recognising that urban frontiers have been cast as remote places or as frontiers for commodity production (Moore, 2003; Woodworth, 2012), we conceptualise the urban frontier as potentially both remote *and* a locus for commodity production over time

with reference to the informal commodification of land as a means to accumulate wealth in the absence of jobs.⁷ Consistent with some literature on frontier urbanism (Gurunani and Dasgupta, 2018; Sarkar, 2015; Woodworth, 2012), the remote space of resettlement became a site of placemaking that mimicked processes of uneven development in Delhi’s urban regime.

Once peripheralised, the ‘class’ of slum dwellers became internally differentiated by class, *across* longstanding defining axes of difference in India such as gender, caste and religion. Although we anticipated and prepared for important findings in Savdha relative to gender, caste and religion, the remarkable findings, to our surprise, aligned overwhelmingly with emergent class differentiation. Appreciating Oswin’s (2018) point that so much of comparative urbanism emanates from a singularly economic vantage point, we conceptualise findings in Savdha as reflecting one of many processes associated with marginalisation. Our position is poststructural insofar as we depart from totalising explanation by a singular axis of difference, recognising that salient factors explaining inequality can differ from one context to another and, more generally, that explanation can incorporate multiple causal factors (Foucault, 2000, 226–9).⁸

Scalar imitation across the ‘divide’

The common analytical focus on gentrification, displacement, evictions and ‘worlding’⁹ in urban ‘cores’ overlooks the possibility of similar processes across apparently dramatically different urban spaces. Worlding is a term that emerged in urban studies situated in the global ‘south’, as local governments, business communities and the middle class advocated the construction of their cities to become ‘world class’ or, more precisely, particular investment zones, as part of neoliberalisation processes. The aspirational element of worlding speaks to the immaterial dimension that in part drives the material project

of investment, which commonly results in evictions. Worlding is not about a specific category of cities designated as ‘world-class’ cities, but rather pertains to both subjective and objective processes by which actors with resources try to ‘keep up with the Jones’ in the global economy. Competition among neighbours once described US suburban social processes by the mid-20th century but increasingly has come to represent scaled-up processes of competitive coalitional efforts at sites of investment in urban cores in the global ‘north’ and ‘south’ alike. We suggest that worlding processes can occur outside urban cores, including in urban spaces of placemaking where marginalised actors are left to ‘make do’ with inadequate resources.

Exclusionary practices that evolved in Savdha resulted in class differentiation, and in turn, the dispossession of land, mirroring practices in the central city, although the agents of differentiation in the two locales are distinct. Whereas class differentiation in Savdha derived from exclusionary practices in the informal property market as emergent property dealers grabbed and ‘sold’ their neighbours’ plots, it derived in central Delhi from external agents such as the government, city planners, the middle class and the judiciary. We call attention to the remarkable transformation of power relations whereby those who became leaders in Savdha through the informal property market, which permitted land grabs and dispossession of neighbours’ land, previously had protested exclusionary processes in central Delhi.

We can find glimpses of similar cases in selected urban research in the global ‘north’. For example, Kinder’s (2016) ethnographic research in disinvested areas of Detroit focussed on a complex system of self-provisioning, while briefly mentioning exclusionary tactics. In her discussion of how an informal property market developed whereby local residents would operate as ‘matchmakers’ between vacant properties and homebuyers, she commented that longtime residents would engage in tactics to ensure ‘desirable’ neighbours and exclude

people judged to be ‘problematic’. Kinder noted that, “Despite the sympathy matchmakers felt for low-income families climbing the housing ladder, matchmaking was fundamentally about replacing faltering market mechanisms of class-based exclusion with personal judgements about the people residents felt would make good neighbors” (Kinder, 2016, 46). The match-making system also extended to issues regarding the duration of stay of newcomers, such as squatters in vacant houses whom longtime homeowners judged and cast as undesirable, along with anyone perceived as potentially criminal (Kinder, 2016, 65). So too, ‘resident watchers’ policed their neighbourhoods and challenged anyone who seemed suspicious at a glance while welcoming people with proof of external authorisation or some appropriate or ‘ethical’ reason for being in the neighbourhood (Kinder, 2016, 146), echoing the profiling practices of official police, city government, as well as the middle class.

Another glimpse of inequalities within neighbourhoods commonly occurs in artist colonies, where poor, struggling artists spatially concentrate, often around disinvested brownfield sites in central cities that afford substantial space for art works. Lloyd’s (2004) account of an emergent art district in Wicker Park, Chicago, documents the eventual displacement of (white) artists who created a sense of ‘cool’ and thereby attracted gentrifiers who eventually displaced them. The cycle of poor artists colonising central-city zones of disinvestment, followed by their own displacement, has become an increasingly common scenario in the US cities since ‘cultural policy’ in ‘revitalising’—*worlding*—urban neighbourhoods or even whole towns has become the go-to strategy in the absence of alternatives in the wake of deindustrialisation (Zukin, 1997). Although artists represent a group of outsiders who displaced local residents in Wicker Park, both the colonisers and the colonised struggled with lack of resources; this is the point of similarity with processes in Savdha. Artists struggle both to pay

their rent and ‘make it’ by working multiple, low-level jobs and trying, often in vain, to develop stature as artists, but this situation did not preclude their engagement in displacing others within the neighbourhood in which they settled who also struggled, for different reasons.¹⁰ Similarly, an *Atlantic* short documentary *Gentrification ‘Without the Negative’ in Columbus Ohio*¹¹ shows struggling artists moving into Franklinton, a neighbourhood of disinvestment. An artist interviewed in the film commented that the artists are like “pioneers”, settling uncharted territory in urban space. The allusion to the Wild West where settlers claimed space occupied by Native Americans is inadvertently apt because artists in the emergent arts district in Franklinton have claimed space that, since the production of the film, has appreciated considerably in value, resulting in displacement.¹² Significantly, an arts space anchors Franklinton development at the former site of a public housing complex that was demolished to make space for ‘creatives’.

More generally, longstanding processes of gentrification in the USA offer clues regarding internal differentiation and conflict within urban places of disinvestment, especially at the outset of neighbourhood change when urban residents, sometimes with few direct resources, begin to colonise a neighbourhood. This process, the gentrification of slums or sites of disinvestment, is considered common specifically to ‘global-north’ cities, yet also has been documented in cities across the ‘global south’ (Lees et al., 2014). Representations of this type of gentrification¹³ generally show a struggle between those with and without resources: the rich against the poor, sometimes with the help of city government via exclusive zoning legislation that spurs displacement of longtime neighbourhood residents. The common scenario is one in which urban residents who move to a neighbourhood of disinvestment eventually buy the properties of longtime residents who become displaced and subsequently refurbish and flip their properties for a profit. Although

gentrification, displacement and the indifference of gentrifiers the circumstances of those they displace are well recognised, one dimension of this scenario lacks attention, namely that urban residents who colonise a disinvested area do so because they cannot afford to buy a home elsewhere. They often struggle themselves, yet display no empathy for the struggling population they displace. They might be strained economically, yet still maintain a position of relative privilege compared with longtime residents.¹⁴ Beyond financial strain, gentrifiers also might struggle with discrimination, as in the case of many dispersed gay men who eventually spatially concentrate in disinvested zones to construct a new social dynamic and neighbourhood image.¹⁵ Such placemaking comes at the expense of the longtime residents unable to maintain their properties, pay their increasing rents on apartments or taxes on homes or deal emotionally with the loss of conception of their neighbourhood.¹⁶ Although gentrification processes differ from those in Savdha because of the coloniser–colonised relation in association with immigration of the former to the latter’s space, the crucial point we make is that people who struggle do not always engage in ‘commoning’ or even discursively display concern for others who struggle. Rather, the marginalised can become agents of internal differentiation, mimicking the kind of power relations with which most of us are familiar, namely those between the privileged and the unprivileged.

Other pathways of exclusion include the organisation of repression and oppression from among the poor. Examples include ‘loan sharks’ in US and other global-north cities, and analogous activity in the global south (for example, *coyotes* in Latin America and *mahajans* in India). Sociologist Venkatesh’s (2008) ethnographic research with a street gang in Chicago revealed that gangs, commonly understood as agents of domestic terrorism and criminality, productively operate as a shadow state for disinvested neighbourhoods in their territory that

have been left by city governments to struggle for basic needs. He also discovered that while gangs take on the role of protection and provisioning, their structure bears striking relation to corporate hierarchies (Venkatesh, 1997). Analogously, Roy (2009) found that Hezbollah takes on the role of provisioning while gesturing towards worlding processes in Beirut.

The ordinariness of struggle and exclusion where multiple groups share resource-poor space materialise in wide-ranging cities. We find it remarkable that those who have suffered discrimination and have fought for social and economic inclusion, whether in Detroit, Chicago, Columbus, Delhi, Beirut and many other cities, implicitly have pursued a path of internal differentiation at Others' expense, locally imitating broader processes of exclusion to which they have been subjected. Interpreting this ironic dynamic within marginalised zones requires a topological reading of power relations beyond dynamics internal to neighbourhoods, an epistemology to which we now turn.

Explaining context-specific scalar imitation: topologies and topographies of power relations

Massey's (1984) early scholarship argued that places are individuated in a larger system as successive rounds of investment sweep across space, and that each place nonetheless is unique in light of its pre-existing social and economic relations, which condition new developments. Savdha indeed is unique, but due less to the pre-existing context in Savdha and more to conditions of living once evicted slum dwellers arrived, as well as the exigencies of the moment and the nature of power relations as they unfolded within Savdha and across space, over time. Taking a cue from Massey's (2005) later scholarship, we stress that pre-existing conditions can pertain more to the pre-existing organisation of power relations *across* space than to particular conditions *within* a place.

Explaining Savdha's local uniqueness with reference to scalar imitation in a world of dramatically increased physical mobility—forced and voluntary—requires an epistemology that works from the ground, up rather than imposing assumptions on real-world practices. Connecting with Massey's later work on space, Michel Foucault's approach to multiscalar analysis is instructive. He argued for what he called 'ascending analysis' (Foucault, 1980, 99–102), in contrast to a 'descending analysis'¹⁷ that begins with theory and fits case studies to pre-conceived theory. Foucault worked with a particular ontology of power that directs analysis to "infinitesimal mechanisms" of power, "which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics" (Foucault, 1980, 99). His epistemological objective, then, was to "see how these mechanisms of power have been – and continue to be – invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc. by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination" (Foucault, 1980, 99).

Despite the relegation of slum dwellers to a remote colony, Savdha never functioned as a 'container' of former evictees as a homogenous group because power relations across space influenced local dynamics. First, the city–government–planning complex relocated evictees to Savdha from different slums across Delhi, rendering Savdha's population fragmented from the outset. Second, historical processes outside Savdha conditioned placemaking insofar as those who became property dealers did so on the basis of the immaterial, social capital they developed in central Delhi. Third, the external gaze on Savdha produced a system of differentiated citizenship that both enabled and reinforced the locally developed internal class differentiation. Lower-level government officials had come to know that the Savdha property dealers through bribes they accepted from them to secure extra plots and overlooked the sales of (unowned) land in Savdha

by participating in the ‘popular illegality’ (Foucault, 1995) for profit. These same officials confiscated use rights from those who opted out of the informal property market and temporarily left Savdha to access jobs. This differential treatment of members of the ‘class’ of slum dwellers rendered those working in the informal property market as productive citizens who were able to urbanise Savdha without government investment, albeit illegally, while rendering those unable to compete as criminals punishable for their temporary abandonment by way of land confiscation. From this vantage point, the scalar imitation of processes of exclusion in central Delhi produced through processes within Savdha is relative; absolute autonomy is not implied because processes of internal differentiation have been contingent upon the negligence and corruption of state officials.

The Savdha–Jat relations constitute another important underpinning of unfolding, transformative dynamics within Savdha relative to a topology of power relations. Those who became property dealers often collaborated with the Jats, despite an initial hostile relation. Upon arrival in Savdha, the resettled slum dwellers initially confronted discrimination and indeed violence by the Jats. The Jats considered their new neighbours ‘impure’ because of their low status in the hierarchy of the urban population and their apparent sub-standard living conditions in the central-city slums. For the Jats, the ‘impurity’ of their new neighbours overall was a matter of class, while gender emerged *temporarily* as a defining boundary. The Jats are infamous across India for their misogyny, and they responded to Savdha women travelling for daily work by raping them as a ‘lesson’ as to what happens to women who leave their households.¹⁸ However, despite the devastating treatment of Savdha residents, especially women, the Savdha–Jat relation became transformed by the end of the second year of resettlement. The real-estate contingent of the Jats, the Shokeen clan, began to look upon Savdha residents as

agents of opportunity when they discovered that some Savdha residents vacated their plots. The Jats then (illegally) purchased plots to use for a variety of purposes—as storage facilities for their businesses in nearby villages, for shops to cater to their new market (Savdha residents), and as a means for speculation for future profit. As opposed to seeing slum dwellers as lower class, the Jats began to see Savdha residents as potential collaborators towards economic ends. The emergence of an informal property market transformed the power dynamics.

Despite the initial hostile relations with the Jats, the Jat–Savdha relation became one of economic partnership, albeit indirectly because the Jats remained generally removed from everyday life in Savdha. Rather, property dealers in Savdha simply utilised the Jats’ market information about potential buyers. As a result, most land transactions never directly involved the Jats. Further, women became important actors in the informal property market that involved the Jats indirectly by collecting and communicating market information over informal conversations while doing their chores, such as filling up water from a tanker or simply over chats with neighbours. Women also play a significant role in managing household savings through investing in community-based self-help micro-credit systems, either through NGOs¹⁹ or local moneylenders who operate as informal banks and lend credit through mortgaging. This activity connects with the informal property market insofar as Savdha women use the money from micro-credit to invest in male householders’ property business, other businesses as well as to build houses incrementally. The informal contributions and support that women provide to men enable the process of property dealing, dovetailing with other means of empowerment when they lived in central Delhi. There too, women engaged with local NGOs, notably as health and educational personnel, and further were able to save money through bonuses from their employers.

Foucault's topologically sensitive ground, up 'ascending analysis' helps interpret the scalar imitation that underscores Savdha's uniqueness, which was due less to the pre-existing context and more to conditions of living once evicted slum dwellers arrived in Savdha and the opportunities that unfolded in the context of scarcity. Connecting well with Massey's (2005) later scholarship (see also Allen, 2003, 2011), pre-existing conditions can pertain more to the pre-existing organisation of power relations across space than to particular conditions within a place. Crucially, however, a pre-existing landscape of power relations does not necessarily predict how power is used and to what ends, relative to local contingencies. Women remained subject to domestic violence in Savdha, for example, and they were uniquely subject to an unsafe and violent ambiance vis-à-vis the Jats at the outset of resettlement. However, although the initial two years in Savdha were shattering, especially to women, the Jat-Savdha relation ultimately changed from one of violence and misogyny to one of mutual gain through indirect economic partnership, often between people who never met.

The development of the informal property market that underwrote lived experience in Savdha derives, then, from a variety of processes across space, over time, encompassing the ironic partnership that developed between Savdha residents and their neighbours, the Jats; linkages developed between slum dwellers and negligent and corrupt government bureaucrats in central Delhi prior to resettlement; and social capital developed among those who led protests to evictions, also in central Delhi prior to resettlement. Conventional demarcations of differences in India, such as gender as well as caste and religion, became secondary to class in the dynamic topology of unfolding power relations. Women were able to transform their material central-city experience into financial planning and management of the property market in Savdha. Men drew from their relations with government bureaucrats as well as

from the social capital they developed in central Delhi towards considerably different ends as they shifted from leaders of protest claiming their right to the city to leaders of informal land transactions to accumulate wealth. The Jats, in turn, re-constituted their relations with Savdha residents as did government bureaucrats, revising the topology of power relations to yield productive results—instances of what Fraser (2010) has called 'scalecraft'.

Although dynamics in Savdha may seem a world apart from those in the US and other 'global-north' cities, the theoretical lesson about local uniqueness—that local uniqueness may derive more from the intersection of the exigencies of the moment in a place with power geometries across space than pre-existing conditions in that place—nonetheless is relevant to all contexts, and in the case of Savdha affords an explanation for scalar imitation. Urbanisation processes in particular commonly entail the *re*-making of places that can entail exclusionary processes. As Deutsche (1996) long ago emphasised, urban residents in the USA who colonise and gentrify a neighbourhood re-make place, erasing local history and replacing it with a history and image specific to their social dynamic. New approaches to gentrification since the 1990s, such as 'new-build gentrification' enacted by corporate actors, self-consciously ignore the local context because the intent is to construct islands of luxury living units for investors and speculators with access to downtowns and airports (Davidson, 2007). Mixed-income planning in the US cities, through different processes, also aims to construct places anew, first by razing low-income and public-housing units, and then building new complexes using the '80-20 rule' (80% market-rate and 20% below market-rate units), ensuring that minorities remain such. As a result, segregation and discriminatory practices within mixed-income housing complexes ripple through the microspaces of everyday life, commonly resulting in the attrition of minorities from planned housing complexes designed to

achieve ‘social mixing’ (Chaskin and Joseph, 2013; Fraser et al., 2013).

The above examples of ‘worlding’ of places of disinvestment via gentrification in the USA pertain to placemaking and topologies of power relations, yet the focus is on the colonisers rather than those displaced. Rather than forced resettlement on the urban fringes, dispersion of poverty in the USA has been a precept of urban planning consistent with the logic of planned mixed-income neighbourhoods (Addie, 2013; Crump, 2002). In part, the priority in research to focus on colonisers may follow from context-specific dynamics insofar as resettlement in the US cities is an individualised burden on those displaced, resulting in dispersal rather than spatial concentration and rendering field research on the displaced apparently difficult. However, the urban poor in the USA nonetheless remain highly spatially concentrated in segregated spaces throughout cities while gentrification and displacement occur in pockets (Stancil, 2019), consistent with patterns and processes in other cities of the ‘global north’. Despite context-specific variation regarding resettlement processes, the fragmented population in Savdha drawn from across slums in Delhi is not unlike pockets of poverty in the US cities to which people migrate following displacement from neighbourhoods across city space. Research, then, is needed on the dynamic relation among *in situ* power relations in pockets of poverty, the external gaze and the landscape of pre-existing power relations in which the poor are entangled prior to arrival in a new zone of residence.

Conclusions

Although processes of investment and disinvestment, displacement and resettlement materialise differently across urban contexts, an important commonality among wide-ranging types of cities in the global ‘north’ and ‘south’ alike is the rapid pace and continual nature of both worlding and placemaking projects

that reshuffle urban populations. While the power of worlding projects in any context denies access to place for the subaltern, the power of placemaking is productive as it entails the everyday construction of life in places of investment as well as in impoverished zones that become destinations for the displaced. Placemaking specifically in zones of resettlement is not, however, necessarily cozy or communitarian, but rather, as we have argued, can imitate the exclusionary processes of worlding that produce displacement and resettlement.

The Savdha case reveals that the discursive worlding aspirations of displaced slum dwellers (Ghertner, 2015) have material grounding. Making use of Robinson’s (2016) ‘launching’ tactic toward ‘generative comparison’, we gleaned glimpses of placemaking among the poor in cities in the ‘global north’ that reveal a similar pattern, namely that exclusionary practices of the privileged relative to the unprivileged throughout a city repeat in the microspaces of peripheralised life as internal differentiation develops. We refer this pattern as ‘scalar imitation’ and conclude that identifying this pattern leads analytically to the blurring the distinction, either implicit or explicit, between worlding and placemaking as categories of urban life, a pivotal point for critical urban research. Returning to a point made several times throughout this article, processes that result in scalar imitation, specifically of exclusionary practices, are not necessarily ubiquitous, but rather represent one of a number of possible trajectories and, further, the axes along which scalar imitation occurs also are variable relative to context-specific processes.

Towards explaining scalar imitation, we elaborated the case of Savdha by focussing on power relations within Savdha in connection with pre-existing relations among Savdha residents and between them and government bureaucrats when they lived in central Delhi, as well as evolving relations between actors in Savdha and their agrarian neighbours with real-estate interests. More generally, explaining

scalar imitation requires recognising the continually evolving organisation of power relations across space, over time, in places whence displaced persons originated prior to resettlement and in places of resettlement relative to those in adjacent spaces, as well as centres of ‘official’ power in, for example, planning and government offices and conceivably in middle-class associations. Crucially, topographies and topologies of power relations require attention to current as well as pre-existing power geometries (Massey, 1999) across space. The evolution of the landscape of power relations explains processes unique to Savdha while clarifying that Massey’s (1984) early conceptualisation of local uniqueness—effects of macroscale changes on pre-existing ‘sediments’ of socio-economic relations—requires revision in the context of dynamic urban processes of worlding, placemaking and their interrelation that shape transformations in power relations across space.

Finally, we have uncovered an empirically based twist to Foucault’s (1997, 298) critique of utopia. He argued that: “The problem, then, is not try to dissolve them [power relations] in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will then allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible.” Foucault’s point was that it makes little sense to aim for pure transparency, and we might add, inclusion, both of which are unattainable; rather, it makes sense to make use of the existing system towards constructive ends and towards setting an agenda. Yet, sometimes the ends implicitly may resemble those against which one once struggled, a case of scalar imitation that is a useful insight for anyone interested in obstacles to democratic life in any context.

‘Launching’ the case of Savdha to other, quite different, contexts supports the more general project to illuminate the importance of similar processes across the global ‘north’ and ‘south’

despite context-specific differences. Ultimately, the goal of such an analysis is to elicit general points from variable circumstances. Specifically, we have called attention to the ordinariness of struggle and exclusion that can evolve as much among the marginalised as between the privileged and unprivileged, underscoring the need to dehomogenise those cast as marginalised as well as to recognise marginalisation in any context as subject to wide-ranging permutations that may or may not speak to social justice.

Endnotes

¹ Our substantive focus nonetheless differs from Can’s (2019), which focuses on collaborative relations among squatter households.

² ‘Peripheralised life’ can be understood topographically in cases of impoverished areas or peri-urban development as dumping grounds for central-city evictees, as is the case with Savdha, as well as topologically regarding those at the margins of urban hierarchies anywhere in a city (Sassen, 2014).

³ Other, less frequent strategies include *in situ* redevelopment or slum upgrading.

⁴ In 2010, the Slum and JJ Department was taken over by the newly established Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) under the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi to govern slums, squatter settlements and other settlements such as the resettlement colonies.

⁵ Saving in India is widespread, including among slum dwellers. Unlike in the USA, savings accounts in Indian banks come with high interest rates, enabling even the poor to accumulate cash. The fee for the allotted land, therefore, was something slum dwellers were able to pay. That said, the fee was enough that Savdha residents wanted to make use of their investment, either by using or selling the property.

⁶ Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (2020). List of Cancelled Plots in Savdha Ghevra (http://delhishelterboard.in/main/?page_id=3573).

⁷ The informal commodification of land as a means to accumulate capital is not unique to Savdha, although processes are context specific. In South Africa, for example, Indian immigrants, ‘stuck in the middle’ between whites and blacks, became ‘shack

lords' (Vahed and Desai, 2017), informally renting small shacks to as many people as possible. The case of Savdha differs insofar as land is commodified informally as a means to earn a living for land transactions, not rentals, and further, property dealers in Savdha do not actually own the properties they sell.

⁸ Scholars often presume that the poststructural departure from totalising theory necessarily means that it is atheoretical and particularistic. Although some poststructural analyses self-consciously pursue description, many pursue explanation, notably those inspired by Foucault. Like most perspectives, poststructuralism is highly differentiated internally.

⁹ 'Worlding' has been used in different ways (Sheppard et al., 2013, 5–6). Although worlding can be discursive, as in the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (Roy, 2011), we use it in the sense developed in Roy and Ong (2011) to refer to urban projects that break with tradition to set a new standard, often regarding the transformation of a city to achieve the status of 'world-class city', or at least attempts in that direction (Ong, 2011, 4). Such worlding projects encompass an immaterial dimension that speaks to actors' aspirations to see themselves as part of the material project that commonly focuses on investment in central cities, which also commonly results in displacement of marginalised populations—the urban subaltern—in such zones.

¹⁰ Further, Lloyd (2004, 353) mentioned that the artists displaced Hispanics and Poles when they arrived in Wicker Park, and further, that they concentrated in Wicker Park rather than in other central-Chicago neighbourhoods of disinvestment because locating in an African American neighbourhood was "a deterrent"—a discriminatory lens on the artists that falls far afield from 'progressive', inclusive sensibilities.

¹¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/382568/gentrification-without-the-negative-in-columbus-ohio/>.

¹² The emergent arts district actually is in east Franklinton; west Franklinton remains a site of extreme poverty, deprivation and disinvestment. Mona Gazala, an artist living in west Franklinton, indicated that she knows several people who have had to leave east Franklinton because they can no longer afford to live there (Thompson, 2017).

¹³ This type of gentrification is second-wave gentrification in the USA that began around the 1970s.

The first wave began in the 1950s and 1960s with slum removal, orchestrated by businesses with the help of local governments declaring eminent domain and enabled by the Fair Housing Act in 1949 (Kleniewski, 1984). Neighbourhood change by way of the colonisation by urban residents, followed by displacement, differs considerably from slum clearance insofar as the lead actors are urban residents, not businesses, but the two waves share common ground insofar as the lead actors partner with local governments to implement exclusive zoning legislation to oust longstanding residents. Second-wave gentrification, which is ongoing through the present, also differs from third-wave gentrification that began in the last decade of the 20th century and, like slum clearance earlier in the century, entails lead actors in the corporate sector, either through mixed-income planning (for example, Chaskin and Joseph, 2013; Fraser et al., 2013) or new-build gentrification (for example, Davidson and Lees, 2010).

¹⁴ As Wiener (2020) pointed out in her memoir about living and working in Silicon Valley, there is a distinction between being broke yet able to access resources through various networks, and being poor.

¹⁵ Focussing specifically on San Francisco, Castells (1983) long ago discussed the common occurrence of gay men spatially concentrating in cities. See Podmore's (2006) discussion of lesbian geographies and their tactics towards visibility in Montréal.

¹⁶ As Marcuse (1985) has pointed out, indirect displacement encompasses the emotional toll and feelings of alienation on the part of longtime residents of neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification, often prompting them to leave.

¹⁷ Foucault's main criticism of descending analysis is that looking for case studies to support theory can overlook important empirics that lack a fit with theory, notably when theory predicts, rather than prompts, observation of microscale dynamics.

¹⁸ The traditional norms among Jats designate the *ghar*, meaning the 'home' or the 'inside', as the ideal 'place' for women, a difficult situation for resettled women who had been comfortable in central Delhi sharing public spaces such as street markets with men.

¹⁹ One of the 17 registered NGOs in Savdha since resettlement, Chetanalaya, recruits and trains women in Savdha to open bank accounts and create self-help micro-credit groups with other local women; to

date, local women working at Chetanalaya have recruited around 24 self-help micro-credit groups since Savdha's establishment.

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