

BESIEGED CITIZENSHIP – THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF INEQUALITY IN GANGNAM DISTRICT, SEOUL¹

Abstract. Through an illustrative comparison of squatter settlements and gentrified spaces, this study traces the genealogy and formation of extreme poverty at the heart of the most affluent district in Seoul. A site of urban struggle, the villages of Poi and Guryong did not start as spontaneous informal settlements, but as relocated camps of deprived social groups whose dislocation was forced by state authorities. After three decades, the Poi and Guryong villages have grown to become contested sites and polar opposites of the housing complex of Tower Place that has today one of the trendiest neighbourhoods in Seoul. On one hand, the Poi and Guryong villages provide a solid community space for those displaced, yet one which has now become exceptionally valuable real estate that officials wish to reclaim for new development. The article analyses the conflict between residents and entails more than any simple narration of the poor's disenfranchisement and raises the question of the social construction of inequalities and poverty in Seoul.

Keywords: *squatter settlement, urban development, state planning, Gangnam, citizenship*

Introduction

Modern-day Seoul contains rare and sparsely dispersed enclaves of urban squatters, a few of the last relics of past urbanisation (Cho, 1997; Chung and Lee, 2015; Yonhap, 2017). Paralleling contemporary scenes of urban poverty in East Asia, those urban enclaves of poor people and their everyday life juxtapose manifestations of inequality and injustice against

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¹ *This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) grant (Grant ID: NRF-2016R1A2B1012415).*

the image of the state's economic success and rapid urbanisation appearing in the past three decades. Similar situations may be found all around the world, where for various reasons the spatial social inequalities inherent to favelas, slums, shanty towns or squats (e.g. global sports events, economic investments, political meetings) are suddenly deemed aesthetically uncomfortable, awkward for authorities wishing to portray an ideal image of the city. In this setting, the existence of small numbers of urban squatters provides an important glimpse into the legacy of the city's earlier urbanisation and gives insight into the ways specific state actors are today shaping the social construction of citizenship.

Through a case of the urban poor in Seoul, this study evokes a well-known theme raised in Lefebvre's *Right to the City* (1968) and *Production of Space* (1974). More specifically, we consider the urban poor through the lens of access to housing. Modern conceptualisations of social change denote housing as a vital category affecting contemporary inequality and deeply influencing a person's activity, social status and identity (Saunders, 1990). An apartment, i.e. housing, thereby integrates "work, home and policy" (Dickens et al., 1985: 11). The squatter settlements found in Seoul, as "spaces for representation" (1974: 245), are in this sense valuable sites for recording the desperate claims to adequate housing by the underprivileged whose stories become barometers countering the qualitatively new, i.e. socially constructed, visions of ideal everyday (Lefebvre, 1991; Mitchell, 2003). Lefebvre suggests experts like architects and planners often try to create physical spaces to represent their cultural, political and economic agendas, but these spaces of representation do not remain static and become dynamic representational spaces marked by lived experiences, appropriated by citizens in the creation of an alternative everyday life in which "another attitude of the human being towards himself" can be fully-fledged (Lefebvre, 2008: 246). Through this dialectic extrapolation from the representation of space towards representational space, space is viewed as "socially produced and productive" (Stanek, 2011: 12). In particular, by incorporating the discussion of the poor's urban rights, his arguments advocate open characteristics of those spaces in which struggles for political representation can alter that space's normative use, giving birth to a novel relationship in the production of space or the "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 25). Situating this malleable condition between space and everyday life within the contemporary urban landscape, David Harvey (2012: 14) adds "the logic behind Lefebvre's position has intensified in our own times" in that fragments of urban spaces and of urban infrastructure are now present virtually everywhere (in rural, suburban and even natural areas), which means urbanised spaces have become the central locus of struggle in the time-space, compressed, capitalist, and inter-connected globe. He argues

that the persistently widespread injustice and inequality inherent to global production are sustained by deteriorating labour conditions. For him, attention should be given more to the transforming configuration of labour played out in such urban theatres. Chiefly for the urban poor, Right to the City asserts “their right to change the world, to change life, and to reinvent the city more after their hearts’ desire” (2012: 25).

Speaking about the urbanising characteristics of the modern struggle of the dispossessed, Hardt and Negri (2011: 25) emphasise the non-place and networked quality of “immaterial” labour in their notion of Empire. They push this broadened class notion beyond factories into the emerging dimension of right that now goes quite beyond the imperialist tendency of Western modernity and the geographical limits of nation states. For them, a tripartite dimension of right, the right to global citizenship, a social wage, and re-appropriation, must move to centre stage of the urbanised world where a new form of struggle against the regime of property, i.e. the biopolitical productivity of the self against modern capitalism, is empowering the multitude. On the other hand, relevant but diametrically opposing Hardt and Negri, Sloterdijk (2016: 77) espouses that in developed Western states, including the recently affluent South Korea, the talk of ‘right to the city’ or ‘justice in the city’ cannot be explained or understood without reckoning with the state’s clandestine ‘pampering’ of the multitude. By calling Hardt and Negri’s militant anti-capitalist stance an oppositional binary, Sloterdijk argues that their solutions fail to resolve the intrinsic problems of the multitude’s struggle. His “Foams” (2016: 26, 171, 1003) thesis argues that any new vision must reconcile itself with contemporary capitalism in that “the multitude cannot separate itself clearly from the world of capital it seeks to escape” (ibid.). Alarming to many, his disheartening argument nevertheless warns of the all-encompassing and circular nature of capital that dominates our latest understanding of rights and citizenship.

Viewed through the threads of ‘Right to the City’ talks, the article highlights some captivating struggles in Seoul that include urban settlements of the indigent in Gangnam – one of Seoul’s wealthiest districts – where former leftover state lands are currently being claimed and negotiated through the voices of those legally dispossessed. Surrounded by wealthy modernist housing, these urban pockets of the poor provide valuable entry points to discussion of the failures of past socio-spatial policies and the long-anticipated implications for future implementation of urban rights. Within these parameters, the article first analyses the formation of spatial identities for selected locations with regard to diverse groups of users, particularly in terms of the social construction of space or how these spaces are perceived by different population groups. Second, the article views the mentioned social construction of selected spaces in the perspective of spatial policies

in Seoul, policies that are generating urban struggles and drawing parallels with uneven urban development based on neoliberal urban planning and populist nationalism. Third, building on case-study analysis, the article tries to elaborate fragments of social processes that look for the production of an updated sense of meaningful citizenship whose ethic-political claims demand a new frame of thoughts as well as the search for novelty in the construction of a 'more just everyday life' for socially diverse groups of Seoul citizens.

Constructing the 'modern image' of Seoul

The juxtaposition of urban poverty against luxury boutiques, fancy plastic-surgery hospitals, and icy office towers raises unavoidable questions about the nature of urbanisation as conducted by the so-called South Korean developmental state (Woo, 1999). The paradox and complexity of the developmental state is widely discussed in scholarly circles (Johnson, 1982; Koo, 1993; Evans, 1995; McMichael, 2000; Chang, 2006). The rapid economic growth that has lifted South Korea's standard of living has often focused on the role of a strong capitalist state, but those discussions have yet to fully confront the legacy of the polarising urban disparity left from the embryonic period of state-driven urbanisation. What impact will the "state reason" of the past, homogeneously immersed in the social environment of extremely speculative capitalism, have on our current mode of citizenship? Was its purpose to collectively embody the structure of feeling and to marry with an indispensable form of civic identity? Equally important in answering this question is the need to expose the schisms and ironies in the still-evolving and still-vibrant "state reason".

In terms of urban development, the contemporary image of Seoul as an economic miracle is represented by the state's drive towards modernisation. However, seen from a distance, the dazzling city lights of the triumphant, high-modernist towers invoke mixed feelings among the various groups of citizens. For some, the fulfilment of Seoul's economic miracle is still in abeyance. In the current era of populist nationalism, when diverse social groups within national boundaries seem to be losing their faith in a progressive urban future, many are rallying around the regressive, nationalistic idea of monolithic identity (Smith, 1986; Anderson, 1991). Since the Korean War, in its drive for industrialisation South Korea has made a good case study of the nationalist construction of a built environment, doing away with the long-established way of living for the utilitarian purpose of nation-building (Koo, 1993; Choi, 2002; Moon, 2005; Shin, 2006). From modernism to historicism, or to postmodernism, Seoul's cityscape has rarely been the product of politically 'neutral' artistic endeavours, but instead a chosen set of

aesthetics that support the political establishment's legitimacy (Park, 2011). By framing megaprojects as a national priority to be done speedily, the state has created political imperatives to push the fledgling urbanisation forward. Architecture and urbanism on a massive scale were undertaken with the tacit goals of nation-building and consolidating those in power. This process was abetted by the careful deployment of meta-narratives adopted from Western urban theories or architectural discourses of historical continuity, rupture, or national utopia (Hong, 2005).

Because it was generally agreed the nation's spectacular economic performance was due to the well-formulated plans of the national leadership, elite South Korean urban planners and architects enjoyed exalted platforms and helped rationalise the emerging structure of economic domination. Their elitist message – that use of modernist architecture and urbanism would bring affluence and an improved living for all – insinuated itself in public discourse and was fully exploited to remove any public doubt. Having demonstrated their prowess and efficacy with mega-urban projects like Gangnam, national leaders set their sights on the city's largest river, the Han. Referred to as "The Miracle of the Han River", these projects epitomise the state's vision of successful economic development. Reinforced by the geopolitical situation of a South Korea that was and remains under a perpetual threat of disastrous war, elitist and militant top-down planning has over the last three decades become normalised, producing a totalitarian view of the environment (Moon, 2005; Scott, 1999). In the area of housing, the state chose a modernist urban project strictly in a national domain and used it to boost private sector speculation (Park, 2013). In the last few decades, this has contributed to the structuring of capitalist urban spaces, exacerbating the income gap between rich and poor, and solidifying the splintered urban geography (Graham & Marvin, 2001). In this nexus, the story of extreme poverty and improvised shacks makes up only a small part of the overall urban picture of Seoul, yet it still offers a critical narration of Seoul's enigmatic urban modernity. By 2017, most of these scattered shanty towns had disappeared from Seoul's urban landscape to make way for new developments like large apartment complexes (KIHASA, 2017). While those remaining informal settlements are under the constant threat of demolition, the Poi and Guryong villages still stand as a beacon of urban struggle and a reminder of state violence.

Constructing the image of the 'urban poor'

Methodology used for analysing selected locations in the Gangnam district

The main purpose of the analysis was to expose specific elements of the social construction of poverty by using illustrative cases of neighbourhoods in one of the richest parts of Seoul. It is important to note the analysed locations are used to illustrative specific contextual situations of the urban poor and are not elaborated in detail. The primary methodological tool was unstructured interviews with inhabitants of selected neighbourhoods, complemented by observation methods. This inductive approach allowed us to gradually (de)construct the system of complex interdependencies between the various stakeholders constituting the relations between privileged and deprived groups of neighbourhood users. By focusing on local interpretations, we tried to establish an approach that would simply and adequately explore and reveal the fabric of meaning production in the case of the different groups connected to the social urban transformation issue.

In this regard, we explored "patterns in argumentation" (Cruikshank, 2003: 4) in the sense that opinions on a specific subject are connected to other opinions on related subjects. Based on the numerous connections between related subjects, the themes gradually acquired the form of 'solid' structures, which have "an intrinsic logic between different opinions and meaning connected to them" (ibid.). The main subjects of such thematic analysis that arose during the interviews are therefore not fragmented opinions emerging in conversation, but entire patterns of meaning, i.e. meaning systems. The analysis of meaning systems within the various groups enabled us to differentiate between real (actual) and potential (apparent) interests, relations and processes generated by the debate on the pressures for the social transformation of neighbourhoods in the Gangnam district. The analysis sheds light on the great variety of communication, i.e. argumentation techniques, used by specific groups to try and legitimise their interventions in space and gather sufficient public support for them. By emphasising some themes and arguments and silencing other, unpleasant ones, keeping them below the threshold of attention, these groups try to steer the public discussion towards 'desirable' topics.

In total, 21 interviews were performed with inhabitants of selected neighbourhoods², including some core members (neighbourhood leaders) and

² In the case of South Korean urban planning jargon, the spatial category of 'neighbourhood' is synonymous with the term "town" or "village", referring to its similarity with the nucleus of a small town/village. For the purpose of this article and in order not to confuse the reader, we apply the terms neighbourhood and village and avoid use of the term town.

representatives of other social groups. Observation analysis was performed over a longer period, entailing numerous visits starting in spring 2006 and lasting till autumn 2017.

Comparing the locations of Poi Village (Poidong), Guryong Village and Tower Palace in the Gangnam district

Seoul's unprecedented urban expansion over the past half century has produced a starkly contrasting urban scene in specific locations of the Gangnam district. Examples include Poi Village, Guryong Village and the Tower Palace housing complex where small enclaves of squatters may be found among the vast grids of luxurious modernist residential towers. Although divided by the administrative borders of two wards, with the Poi and Guryong villages being part of the Gaepo ward and Tower Palace being set in the Dogok ward, all three locations are close together, creating huge discrepancies given the social context of the various inhabitants (Figure 1). The huge contrasts between wealth and squalor remind one of South Korea's destitute past and belies the city's self-proclaimed modern image. Surrounded by luxury high-rise modernist apartments, this slum settlement, home to 98 households in the city, reveals the real legacy of state operations that not only created Gangnam during the nation's intense industrialisation, but also established a 'Koreanised' style of urbanisation – epitomised by the state's intense property speculation, rapid urban expansion, and social repression (Son, 2003).

Figure 1: MAP OF LOCATIONS INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS



Source: Jung In Kim, 2018.

The story of the Poi and Guryong villages dates back to 1979 when the state introduced a social programme relocating orphans, the homeless, and garbage collectors from the most visible centres of the city, and then

organising them in militaristic regiments called “Jaewhalgunrodae” (rehabilitative labour platoon). Jaewhalgunrodae jobs mostly entailed janitorial chores on the streets and in public parks, primarily collecting recyclable materials and reselling them. The government’s intention was clear – to enlist the homeless and ‘undesirables’ as the custodians of modern Seoul in order to regulate and control them. When, in the early 1980s, the nation won the bid to hold the 1988 Olympics and embarked on massive construction and renovation projects, these custodial regiments were seen as a blight upon the city and targeted for removal. They were soon relocated to the city’s periphery, away from modern spectacle of the Olympic city and gaze of the global audience. The result of this forceful relocation included the urban shanty towns of the Poi and Guryong villages, which sprang up in the southern-most vacant lot of dust-filled Gangnam. The locations were some of the many unattended, empty sites in the grand plan for Gangnam whose tabula-rasa approach and ‘instant city making’ had created a large amount of unplanned public land. Especially along its peripheries, still unassigned and unused lots were easy to find. Excluded from Gangnam’s blueprint and without any immediate promise of development, these two villages were formed in areas temporarily disconnected from the *modus-vivendi* of the time: property speculation.

Once relocated, the urban poor had no choice but to settle down in the spaces available. Since it was an improvised solution on city-owned land, typically called “Chaebiji” – a form of payment by private land owners for the state’s infrastructural project – the resettled urban poor resorted to building shelters made of recycled wood scraps and slate panels salvaged from the streets. Under constant surveillance of the authorities who, while providing them with transport to the city centres, set strict curfews, these “rehabilitative labour platoons” were ordered to continue their hard labour: cleaning the streets of Seoul, and collecting metal scraps and plastic pieces to sell back to the authorities. With paltry compensation, the people of the two villages continued a life of stark poverty under the constant threat of police harassment and punitive actions. Recruited to these ‘platoons’ to do necessary menial work to help make the city more beautiful, the city’s poor were nonetheless marginalised and oppressed by officials from the very city they were serving (Holston, 1989; Kelbaugh and McCullough, 2008).

Beneath the modern and polished veneer of the image Seoul presented to the sports world at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the urban poor living in these two villages, a blemish on the city’s otherwise immaculate landscape, were placed under the most vigilant form of surveillance. They were frequent targets of “hurigari”, a police practice of randomly imprisoning the destitute without any evidence of illegal activity. Police brutality compelled some villagers to dig underground shelters to escape from the torture the

police often inflicted upon them in custody. In order to meet official quotas for ‘criminals’, the police viewed these garbage collectors as the target group for investigation, and used the daily payments to ‘platoons’ as a premise for routine inspection. In these conditions, constant terror became the norm. With the opening days of the Seoul Olympics approaching, the police imposed a curfew on the village locations, strictly prohibiting travel beyond their precincts, thus restricting the poor’s access to the streets upon which their livelihood depended. Preparing the podium for a global audience, the state authorities saw the shanty towns as antithetical to the modernised Gangnam cityscape, the apotheosis of the nation’s urbanism. The newly-built modern district of Gangnam was then turned into the ‘revanchist’ face of the nation; it continually relied on events like the 1988 Summer Olympics for speedy urbanisation, while at the same time cleansing the city of the urban poor (Smith, 1996).

As part of a dramatic facelift, especially the neighbourhood of Poi Village was rapidly absorbed within Gangnam’s expansion (Figure 2). Within a decade, it had transformed from an unattended area of official interest to an item in the city’s hot real-estate market, with many speculators being attracted by its proximity to Seoul’s most privileged school zones and wealthy apartment complexes.

Figure 2: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF POIDONG IN THE FINAL STAGE OF GANGNAM’S DEVELOPMENT, CIRCA 1980



Source: Image courtesy of the Seoul Metropolitan Government.

After the Seoul Olympics, the area surrounding Poi Village was also no longer devoid of any urban infrastructure. Along with the transformation brought by the construction of modernist apartments, the life of the Poi Village residents was also challenged by the democratising social milieu ignited by citizen protests in 1987. Within 2 years of the 1987 Democratic Movement, the 'platoons' were finally dissolved and residents of Poi Village were freed from the constant police surveillance and perennial control. Still, freedom came with a price. Without notifying anyone at Poi Village, the city government clandestinely eliminated the old lot numbers of Poi 200-1 and renamed them Poi 266 (Shin, 2011). This meant the current Poi Village settlers living at their old addresses were no longer recognised as legitimate occupants. Removed from the official map, the squatters were soon informed of their illegal occupation. They faced an unstable future whereby their homes could vanish at any time (Figure 3). This realisation ignited a struggle to defend their housing rights and led them to demand they be issued with national residency registration cards (NRRCs). Created in 1968, NRRCs have long acted as the sole proof of all South Koreans' national membership and legal residency, the indispensable item a person needs to carry to prove their domestic identity (Park, 2007). The card must be carried at all times and is often required to complete banking transactions and to board airplanes.

Figure 3: VIEW OF POI VILLAGE, 29 SEPTEMBER 2017



Source: Jung In Kim, 2018.

At the same time as removing their residency from official records, the Gangnam county government began to impose 'indemnification fines' on the inhabitants of Poi Village due to the 'illegality' of their residency. These fines (*Tojibyunsanggum*) were part of the city's new approach to expel Poi village settlers non-violently amid the democratising milieu following the 1987 event (Shin, 2011). Once only suitable for street cleaners (*Nungmajui*: a derogatory term for street labourers), Poi Village was being transformed into prime real estate whose skyrocketing value justified city officials' steps to start a new housing project and vacate the poor living there (Park, 2015). Despite government pressures and following standoffs, the energy of the residents was channelled into the task of acquiring an NRRC. They seemed to believe that, once their current place was thereby granted official recognition, they would no longer have such unjust fines imposed on them.

During the interviews, residents answered questions about the national residency registration card. Many respondents pointed out similar problems, such as:

All we want is simple; we want to have our National Residency Registration Card. We deserve to be exempted from the unfair fines imposed on us for the last 20 years. It's unfair to be treated this way (by the authorities) solely because we were forced to live here.

Another interviewee similarly stated:

To someone without any National Residency Registration Card, what would be the use of knowing (my name)?

As the inhabitants of one of the last urban squatter settlements in Gangnam, many interviewees seemed defeated, resigned to remaining formally invisible; for them, the only way to affirm their very existence would be by way of official acknowledgement and legalisation of their residency rights as symbolised by a National Residency Registration Card. In this respect, some interviewees regard mentioned:

The authorities will have to recognise us equal, as part of society or we will vanish. They should not tolerate this injustice...

When explaining their day-to-day hardships, they paid much attention to the challenge of securing adequate housing for the village's children, some of whom faced even greater difficulties than those which had confronted the first generation of squatters. Targets of peer harassment, the children of this squatter village were constant forced to conceal the addresses of their

actual homes. Children of specific groups of residents had to attend school in a remote location because the authorities did not recognise their home addresses. Despite these difficulties, the residents reiterated the positive aspects of living in the squatter settlement. The residents emphasised they did not want to leave their current location since it was the only place to which they were emotionally attached³ (Figure 4). In particular, the strong bonds among the people were often mentioned by the interviewees:

For me, they (other inhabitants) are like a family and I do not want to leave them. I feel like part of a community, I feel good between my people here and I do not want to leave the neighbourhood...

Figure 4: SIGNS OUTSIDE OF POIDONG CALLING FOR THE LOST RESIDENTIAL IDENTITY TO BE REINSTATED AND THE UNFAIR LAND INDEMNIFICATION FINE TO BE ABOLISHED



Source: Jung In Kim, 2006.

The removal of their homes from the official urban map profoundly impacted their understanding of the outside world and thus their view of the situation. This tense situation ended in 2009 when the South Korean Supreme Court ruled in favour of granting NRRCs to the squatter settlers. This decision led to many squatter settlers in the nation finally acquiring an NRRC that referred to the state or private land they were currently occupying. However, the granting of registration cards did not automatically translate into residency rights stating current addresses. City officials treated registration cards and residency rights as separate matters, so nothing really changed. The official pressure to evict continued unabated and the villagers' lives were made much harder by the growing fines. To make

³ Throughout the visits, the several village representatives proudly explained that the squatters cared for each other and faced challenges collectively, as a community.

matters worse, a fire broke out in the western corners of the settlement in 2011, leaving many settlers vulnerable to a new wave of eviction attempts by the Gangnam district government. The Gangnam authorities succeeded in evicting some residents, and continued to impose fines on those who had survived the fire. The fines given to these residents since 1990 have accumulated to the point where paying them back in their entirety is impossible, putting those remaining in the settlements in a more precarious situation (Shin, 2011; Park 2015). Faced with a growing economic burden, their hopes of defending their residency rights in their current abode, a place in which they have lived for nearly three decades, have been reduced.

In comparison to Poi Village, Guryong Village entails a somewhat different context due to the different origin, i.e. the previous status, of the land use (Ji, 2012; Han, 2016). Located adjacent to apartment complexes owned by the Korea National Housing Corporation (KNHC), Guryong Village had amassed the biggest concentration of poor people in Gangnam, gradually evolving from temporary greenhouses designed for agricultural purposes into a human settlement (Figure 5). Despite the impression Guryong Village and the nearby KNHC apartments were just a larger version of Poi Village, the stories of the Guryong Village's dispossessed took a quite unexpected turn. There was rampant land speculation underway among informal settlers, many of whom anticipated future development by the state and hoped for compensation, called a "ticket", by which the squatters could acquire the existing residents' privileges and convert them into financial form (Song, 2012).

Figure 5: THE GURYONG VILLAGE WITH TOWER PALACE AND GANGNAM BUILDINGS IN THE DISTANCE



Source: Jung In Kim, 2013.

The responses of the squatters of Guryong Village, even those who seemed to hold leadership positions, were quite cynical and hostile compared to those of the residents of Poi Village. While the village's everyday life appeared to be as destitute as that of Poi Village, the residents were reluctant to reveal information about themselves for far different reasons. One interviewee claimed:

Outsiders including journalists and people like you have ruined our life. A couple divorced because their daughter's face was in the media but without concealing her identity. She became entirely isolated from her classmate.

He continued:

I was also a victim of the media's insensitive treatment that I found my name in the newspaper. My social relationships were entirely ruined by this... Some treat us like swindlers whose aim is only to make money...

While analysing their complaints concerning victimisation at the hands of “outsiders”, it was discovered that the question of the settlement's ‘purity’ had played a big role in their residential identity. In Guryong Village, prospective legal land possession rights were based on uninterrupted squatter status, which had already been confused with those who had snuck into the village and traded with land speculators. Owing to widespread rumours of the development of apartments, scrap wood houses in Guryong Village were informally traded by speculators. In the process, village residents were divided on these ‘purity’ issues as well as on individual interests concerning who should be granted title to the “ticket”. It was difficult to establish trust within the community. One interviewee mentioned his reputation had been destroyed by having his identity and poor economic status exposed to his friends, but the fact he then drove away from the interview in a luxury car gave a bizarre impression of poverty. Although the village outlook created the impression of stark poverty, the representation and residential claims here were often placed outside any straightforward demands for the right to housing. The village was becoming more and more a settlement of charlatan squatters simulating poverty. There was talk among villagers saying:

Fraud with land sales and the issuing of ‘tickets’ is dividing the village. We should not give up our resistance to those who are trying to fake residency...

Abandoning traditional attacks on speculative interests, the interviewees' 'resistance' was expressed in spatial terms of property values that were now the norm among the village's many middle-class residents.

This prevalence of exchange value over use value characterised the village as the epitome for the reification of space symbiotically unified by money. By this time, squatting was not so much about the acquisition of urban services and respectable social status as it was the right to private possession and individual interests. Ignored by the public authorities, squatters internally organised to legalise their residency rights to the "ticket" and did so by embracing one of the most hegemonic values of the city's social order: speculative property ownership.

When the process of urban renovation related to the Olympic Games and the government's suppression of the urban poor had mostly been forgotten, the speculative potential of the area's possible development triggered the collective mobilisation of the squatters. In an extremely agitated mood, one interviewee said:

In fact, the people in Guryong are not poor anymore. They have been trading squatter structures and letting poor foreign manual (Chinese) workers live in them, so that the owners of the squatter houses (living somewhere else) can avoid demolition and claim their right by having their properties occupied in case of development.

It is important to note that, despite being victims of the state's urban policy, the squatters were acting in line with a bureaucratic and speculative frame of mind. That is, with the distant hope of capitalising on the squatters' settlement space, they were calling for compensation as part of the authorities' sanctioned marketable "ticket" policy: the sole token of calculable and monetary value. The squatters' right to the city was then transformed into something entirely new, whereby the legitimacy of the 'pure' squatters became leverage that could be negotiated with public officials to secure monetary compensation. In Guryong Village, there was a spatial dialectic that took a wrong turn in its engagement with social practice; victims of the system credulously looked to the official system for their salvation, and the residents' representational space was contained by the representative power of private property.

In comparison to the locations of the Poi and Guryong villages, the luxurious housing complex of Tower Palace is an antipode prototype of how to reshape an urban landscape according to the logic and whims of speculative capital. At breakneck speed of urbanisation, the entire district of Gangnam as the nation's most affluent urban space has splintered off from the rest of Seoul, becoming a congregation of exclusive properties that for

most people, especially the young, embody unreachable wealth and status (Figure 6).

Figure 6: VIEW OF THE FINANCIAL CENTRE OF GANGNAM – TEHRAN STREET



Source: Jung In Kim, 2018.

With unsightly neighbourhoods and old structures wiped from their field of vision, the residents of these vast apartment complexes and luxurious high-rise towers like to imagine they are living in a utopic and conflict-free metropolis. For many of them, other less affluent districts in Seoul outside of Gangnam might well be more distant than other global attractions on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Like with several ongoing national projects, the upper-middle classes in Gangnam have been the greatest beneficiaries not only of past state-led urbanisation, but of the current globalisation. For them, New York's hip SoHo district, or the idyllic suburban streets of Orange County in California are much more closely aligned with their everyday lifestyle, for example, their choice of car, food and fashion. In this sense, Gangnam is the only real 'Global City' in Seoul, one whose residents, with their border-crossing financial power and transnational spatial mobility, have achieved an instantiation of culture (Sassen, 2001; Robinson, 2006). The Tower Palace housing complex is in this sense a typical representation of the urban developmental mode described. Within 5 minutes'

walking-distance of the shanty towns of the Poi and Guryong villages, Tower Palace, 66 formidable storeys of wealth and power, is visible from all around Gangnam and stands as a gigantic panoptic pylon (perhaps an inverted version) in a sea of property speculation (Figure 7).

Figure 7: NEW ROUND OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT: TOWER PALACE AND THE I-PARK



Source: Jung In Kim, 2017.

As the vanguard of a new typology of residential architecture, this tall glass tower signalled the city's new wave of verticalisation, conveying the city's new direction of affluent housing. It also opened the flood gates for the demolition of old apartment structures built in the 1970s and 1980s, replacing them with towering office-like, central-core residential skyscrapers. Like a phallic colossus declaring the power of property, Tower Palace pompously draws people's gaze and attends to their hidden desire for greater status and wealth. Isolated from the neighbouring apartments, and completely inaccessible to outsiders, the tower is an urban monolith located at the opposite extreme of the Poi and Guryong villages. Segregated even from the surrounding upper-middle class neighbours, this tall, all transparent, crystal-like structure hides the deepening polarisation brought by newly acquired wealth in the astoundingly short span of recent modernisation. Behind the sleek and glistening image of the apartments, Tower Palace produces an unrealistic scene of economic disparity within its close proximity, a stunning contrast between the city's nouveau riche and its extreme destitute.

Discussion

While the area around Tower Palace is more prosperous, poverty in the Poi and Guryong villages has ossified. Within the context of an esoteric, high-end culture, the shanty-town residents have been more deprived of their mobility and freedom to communicate. In a homogenised urban environment, the immobile have-nots exist on a lone island that seems destined to disappear. The close proximity of these two polarised spaces reveals the consequence of time – three decades of urban development that has produced a propertied citizenship without sympathy with the urban poor and lacks the will to recognise and resist injustice (Holston, 1998). In the tightly controlled networks of the property market, Tower Palace and the many other fresh high-rise structures demonstrate the domination of rentier capital and mesmerise the public, stoking their unattainable goals of affluence and prestige (Figure 8).

Figure 8: TOWER PALACE OVERLOOKING THE POI VILLAGE SETTLEMENT



Source: Jung In Kim, 2006.

Among the deprived groups of these shanty towns, the social construction of the beneficial influences of urban redevelopment has been modified in a very complex and often ambiguous manner. During

interviews with two village leaders, one could detect the presence of some conflicts and confrontations between groups of residents. The overall dispute was focused on 'disguised' outsiders who had moved into the Poi and Guryong villages with the intention of later acquiring government compensation. This ignited fierce scuffles between leaders of the village, including all of the interviewees, and the suspected 'impure' squatters.

In the eyes of the authorities, this fight was to ensure the identity for residency remained uncompromised, a goal to which the existing settlers of Poi Village also desperately clung. Rising land prices for this southernmost patch of Gangnam in the past three decades had created conditions in which the squatters themselves had to defend their residential legitimacy by culling out fraudulent squatters. In this struggle, the residents faced what Appadurai (2001) calls the "tyranny of emergency" where a form of grassroots energy erupts because people fear appearing illegitimate in the eyes of state officials. Fearing their insecure living conditions might be worsened, the original inhabitants of the Poi and Guryong villages seemed to be looking to establish themselves as the legitimate poor and secure their housing rights via a bureaucratic assessment. Even if were they to be given their desired official compensation, it is unlikely the political energy of their grassroots 'resistance' would be able to hold them together or that the new political identities created in this struggle could be sustained.

Accepting the middle-class inertia of speculative urbanisation, the squatters of the Poi and Guryong villages seemed unable to offer a more creative answer to the city's deepening spatial ethos – the alteration of urban places into the marketable real estate that is uneven and hierarchical. The potential financial compensation for their collective action completely overshadowed the squatters' civic pride and actual experience of collective cohabitation. Preoccupied by reducing their financial burdens and possibly securing future monetary compensation, the squatters adopted their identity within the limited space of a bureaucratic negotiation governed from the outset by rules framed by state entrepreneurialism – the cultivation of exchange values on public land (Lett, 1998). In articulating their current situation, the Poi and Guryong village residents had accepted the existing socio-spatial constructs, which unleashes upon them the very source of their entrapment-spatiality defined by speculative capitalism, and locks them in a recurring cycle of poverty and violence (Negri & Hardt, 2011). The next possible step for overcoming this pitfall might be a more advanced form of resistance that not only asks for fluid and mobile possibilities concerning residential identity, but also demanded an entirely different approach to the negotiations. If squatters take this critical nexus of "representational space" and transform the existing rules into something new, they will resolve their extremely precarious existence, one in which truer opportunities are made to create the

“space for representation” (Mitchell, 2003). A new frame of resistance is desperately needed; one that goes well beyond the rules set by the authorities.

However, if the people of the Poi and Guryong villages chose to make ‘purity’ a key component of their defence against the state aggression, this would unquestionably have weakened their claims. Their politics of difference may have precluded any genuine contact with various underprivileged groups whose inclusion in the struggle might have bolstered their representative power (Caldera, 2000; McGuirk, 2014). ‘Purification’ in this sense, in a milieu subsumed by the ubiquitous presence of propertied consciousness, established an untainted version of poverty as the only inviolable category to be used in the official assessment, thereby disregarding the complex experiences of the urban poor. This reasoning seemed to bring the squatters closer to receiving possible government compensation but, conversely, it narrowed their creative potential to produce other alternatives to the state’s vision. Instead, poverty in this case has never been an unspoiled or unadulterated category. The city’s managerial elite has tried to reproduce a category of the poor by promulgating the hierarchical property spaces where the squatter settlers’ claims for ‘purity’ enervated the very ideas for their struggle. Rather, to counteract this chronic nature of poverty, the people of the Poi and Guryong villages face the imminent challenge of developing an all-inclusive outlook whereby they connect with other disaffected or marginalised groups deemed to be associated with their objectives. This will include developing a new language that will reframe the nature of their struggle, the ways in which they can fundamentally restructure their everyday life. In this understanding, the Poi and Guryong villages remain key urban monuments in the city, symbolising a stark dichotomy, i.e. the state’s structural suppression during the past era of modernisation, as well as a potential site for provocative and proactive actions that hold remarkable promise for the future.

Conclusion

The observation analysis of the three locations in Gangnam highlights the problematic multi-layered structure of the social construction of inequality. The selected locations show the process of the social construction of poverty is not formed solely within the sphere of ‘outsiders’ but also ‘insider’ groups which, due to social, cultural and political pressures, often succumb to the prevalent discourse of poverty in society. In this regard, the analysis reveals that social pressure influences the expectations of deprived groups of citizens which (self)destructively affects their everyday life and reduces their possibilities of social engagement or political empowerment.

The origins of the described process of the socio-spatial transformation

of neighbourhoods in Gangnam has a long history. Its origins can be traced to the massive scale of planning and its implementation by the South Korean state that has been a dominant paradigm since the 1960s. It was conceived within a modernist fashion and managerial ideology that envisioned a new society through the novelty of space (Scott, 2010). In the “State Reason” of ‘the catch-up drama’ in city planning, externalities often became conjoined, assuming complete control of the new space and achieving public consensus in order to quell the dissent of the underprivileged and the poor. South Korean national planning has thus generated a society of extreme vigilance, competition and, above all, a fear of disorder amongst the privileged groups. As Keller Easterling (2016: 147) argues, the state has operated like “a war machine that produces a terrifying peace”. For both ideological and material purposes, it has been able to mobilise experts and operators in unison, thereby immersing the citizens in total state planning.

In 2017, the citizens of Seoul were back out on the streets and in public plazas. Indignant about swindling and the abuse of oligarchical national power, street protestors again demanded a more “democratic national future” and for the president to step down. Ever since the nation’s first modern democratisation in 1987, many characteristics of Seoul’s urban space have been transformed. With the ultra-modern cityscape of Gangnam and the high-rise towers sprouting on the banks of the Han River, as a 25-million-resident metropolis Seoul has now become the nucleus of the nation’s economic power, where the traditional structure of work has mostly been supplanted by service-oriented post-industrial activity. Sprinkled amongst the 2017 street demonstrators were many students and young families who, in the extremely competitive and precarious conditions of everyday life, have lamented the loss of the earlier generation’s job security and future certainty – qualities that many of their parents’ generation, who occupied the same streets 30 years ago, took for granted in their struggle to save national democracy.

Along with the wide participation and festive atmosphere of these latest demonstrations, those young, grassroots protestors seek the unfilled promise of a ‘just and fair society’ and a ‘new democratic nation’ for which their parents also perhaps fought so hard 30 years ago. However, while the tainted national powers as the familiar Leviathan have been easily recognisable targets against which citizens can effectively organise, the hegemony of propertied spatial order and its subsequent speculation-driven cycle of creative destruction has undeniably exacerbated the gap between rich and poor (Smith, 1984; Roy, 2003). Protestors’ incredible civic energies, mostly channelled to combatting obvious forms of state power, have thus eschewed the broader goal of altering the material base of their precariousness: the broad presence of oligarchical power in the city. Increasingly in the wake of

neoliberal globalisation and the stronger populist nationalism, those forces are replacing the state's 'pampering' of the multitude in every sphere and deepening the mechanism of marginalisation facilitated by the long habits of state-driven modernist planning. Possibly unaware of the existence of the Poi and Guryong villages and other hidden archipelagos of poverty in the city, this new generation of street protestors seems to be calling for a foundational change in national power, even though their everyday life and its genuine "qualitative" condition – to live life as 'yet another attitude of the human being towards himself' – have continuously deteriorated. Deeply entrenched in the city's ubiquitous propertied citizenship, a great disparity in space persists, while recently the up-scaled, green and beautified projects dissemble the chronic injustice perpetuated through the inertia created by past state practices. After 30 years of rapid urban growth, the squatter settlements of the Poi and Guryong villages stand today as an indelible tribute to the limitations on citizenship and everyday life in Seoul.

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