Spatial and organizational aspects of anti-eviction strategies

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ABSTRACT Informal urbanization is inherently tied to threats of eviction. This article contributes to the expanding study of evictions by depicting and framing anti-eviction strategies taken by informal inhabitants in two interrelated evolving aspects: collective organization and production of space. The former is analysed as a gradual weaving of social–political connections, starting from the community level and maturing into a trans-local network of connections and collaborations against eviction. The latter is composed of placing facts-on-the-ground, acting to produce alternative knowledge, and acquiring symbolic recognition. These themes have been mentioned and debated in the literature but have not yet been integrated under a theoretical umbrella that covers both elements, to allow a comprehensive understanding of how anti-eviction strategies fundamentally shape current urbanization around the globe.

KEYWORDS assemblage theory / collective organization / evictions / informality / production of space / trans-local networks

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is characterized by the widespread rise of informal urbanism and, with that, the proliferation of evictions of informal inhabitants to make way for expanding metropolitan land uses. Evictions, which are becoming a global phenomenon, (1) often involve the use of brutal force and the loss of (informal) property, shelter, livelihoods and community. Along with the growing number of evictions, political anxiety and acts of resistance are growing. (2) Anti-eviction struggles have become the focal point of metropolitan politics in many places throughout the global South but also in the global North. (3) Existing studies provide a robust account of this phenomenon, bringing up various questions about the connecting points between different places and contexts: what connects the multitude of practices, how they appear in everyday routines and in episodic moments, and how they evolve over time. Moreover, these studies question whether anti-eviction struggles are a place-specific phenomenon, each unique due to the circumstances engendering it, or whether they stem from similar sources and therefore share common themes.

Here I contribute to the study of informality and evictions with an attempt to find conjunctures among the numerous accounts of anti-eviction struggles accumulated within the pages of global urban studies.

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2. Agbola and Jinadu (1997); Bhan (2014); Brickel et al. (2017); Durand-Lasserve (2006); Ghertner (2014); Islam and Wahungai (2016); Kuyucu (2014); Mathur (2012); Ocheje (2007); Ortega (2016); Pilis (2016); Rahman (2001); Roy (2011); Searle (2016); Wu et al. (2013).
3. Chiodelli (2019).

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The point this paper makes is that, despite the multiple manifestations of anti-eviction strategies throughout the globe, there are some spatial and organizational themes underlying most or all of them.\(^{(4)}\) The paper’s findings are gathered from an integrated reading of the academic literature, focusing specifically on informal urbanism and anti-eviction struggles. While these findings are not exhaustive, given the extent of the relevant literature, careful attention was devoted to key writers and to drawing from the literature on multiple locations. Special effort was given to representing the scholarship, for each part of the paper, from as many countries/world regions as possible. This broad emphasis should suffice for finding and depicting clear common features and drawing general conclusions.

Attempting to generalize a theory for such diverse contexts as China, Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America may seem like an overreach. Every context, naturally, has its unique features and driving forces – physical, political, social or economic.\(^{(5)}\) Nonetheless, I reject the idea that the particularities of each case overshadow the similarities. This parallel reading of studies from different contexts should enable us to make new connections, to draw insights from other places and to see elements of informality – which might otherwise appear neutral – in a new light, as anti-eviction strategies.

Eviction is prevalent throughout multiple settlement types – whether they house (formal) urban renters, refugees or indigenous communities – but due to limitations of space, this paper focuses solely on urban or peri-urban informal settlements. This is by no means an account of the structural or political causes of informality or eviction – but only an analysis of the strategies employed by informal dwellers to avoid eviction.

The paper starts by pointing to two separate but interrelated aspects in the evolution of anti-eviction struggles: the sociospatial product (the production of space) and the organizational framework producing it (collective organization). It continues with an attempt to classify various themes of struggle that are evident in the literature, in relation to the evolution of the production/organization aspects. Among the identified themes are the production of facts-on-the-ground, symbolic recognition and alternative knowledge, and the organization of political and instrumental networks. Locating these themes on an evolutionary scale of anti-eviction struggles, I identify two interrelated trends, generalized as ideal types: from sparse encroachment to denser settlements along with the production of alternative knowledge and symbolic recognition; and from atomistic groups and communities to trans-local networks. (Importantly, the proposed strategies do not imply success in preventing eviction.)

**II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RESISTING EVICTION**

This paper focuses on one central aspect of informal urbanization: the low (legal, procedural, political) assurance of the inhabitant’s security of tenure, housing, community, livelihood, preferred location and so forth, in the event that an agent with formal authority and rights (state, private owner) wishes to contest his or her claims and claim the land for this agent’s own uses. The underlying reasons for initiating evictions vary. It can be claimed that most cases stem from the wish of private owners
to capitalize on the land’s value. It may be that the owners evict so as to assert their hold on the land, preparing for future potential use of it. Sometimes, eviction takes place to uphold the rule of law. At other times, the collective imagination of city builders and bourgeois classes cannot stand the existence of "filthy" slums. Of course, it is frequently the case that informal populations are made up of groups of different races, ethnicities or nationalities, and it is xenophobic, racist or nationalistic motivations that underlie their eviction. The motivation behind a particular eviction is of importance, yet arguably, it does not matter much for the evicted. The inhabitants need to act strategically no matter whether their possession is contested by development coalitions, strict governments or corrupt regimes.

The fear of eviction is a prominent feature shaping informal urbanism, but it is frequently overlooked by researchers. The latter are sometimes convinced, as are some informal dwellers in certain places and periods, that the status quo will remain stable – a view that is often found to be tragically wrong. Indeed, the poor have various informal arrangements, alternatives to formal state law, which may seem to researchers to be equally valid – an affordable proxy for land/housing market mechanisms. This is often untrue. If and when conditions are ripe for eviction, informal arrangements hardly suffice to keep the bulldozers at bay. This truism must be vigorously asserted whenever certain scholars praise informality as an alternative way of life or a redistributive order.

From the outset, most informal inhabitants – squatters, villagers with no tenure deeds, and so forth – are acutely aware of this risk hanging over their heads, and act strategically to minimize it and ultimately to abolish it with formalization. Evictions can occur in so-called classic informal settlements, urban slums with rural-to-urban migrants squatting on land. But a growing literature portrays how informality, as well as evictions, is spreading throughout diverse spatial contexts, such as urban villages in China or peri-urban regions with indigenous villagers in India, Israel, the Philippines, Pakistan and many other places. The risk changes considerably between contexts, of course, as do the strategies taken to mitigate it.

While acknowledging the heterogeneity of experiences, we can also identify common trends and similarities, and analytically classify them. As Lovering and Türkmen explain, “for all their geographical and socioeconomic differences, poor people in areas targeted for development face similar prospects and problems, and they often react in similar ways”. Importantly, the different strategies are not all always available to inhabitants but are the product of gradual evolution over long time periods, and in relation to large-scale regional, national and global dynamics. Therefore, the theory I provide will concern spatial as well as temporal changes as the context for different strategies.

The classification analyses the strategies concerning both the types of collective organization and the actual product sought by the inhabitants – a settlement with little or no risk of eviction. This analysis, tying the social with the spatial, draws mainly from Lefebvre, who asserted that every society must produce the space it needs to function and thrive in. The struggle over eviction is inherently political and is obviously tied to the ability of inhabitants to organize and mobilize efficiently. Yet space is often overlooked, seen as just a platform for the unfolding of the struggle. In fact, the production of the informal settlement is always at the heart...
of the struggle, its means and its objective. Organizing well depends on producing a well-functioning habitat and a consolidated community; building a habitat and a community requires people organizing collectively. The two spheres – social and spatial – are inherently entangled. To represent this reality, the analysis conceptualizes how the production of social capabilities (organization) is part and parcel of the production of space. The following description separates the two sections only to allow a step-by-step process of analysis, not getting lost among the multiple “moving parts” of the various strategies of various struggles.

This does not mean that there is a deterministic relation between the two: for example, that certain spaces are produced by certain organizations (according to the types portrayed below). The analysis outlines each stage of organization and each dimension of spatial production as a potential strategy to be taken. These are only ideal types. Informal inhabitants may, for instance, not pursue certain spatial products (e.g. alternative plans) or ever organize in a specific mode. They can fail to network efficiently to reach a higher stage of collective organization, or start directly from a higher stage. Nevertheless, drawing from multiple examples from around the globe, the analysis does make assumptions and generalizations as to the probability of the evolution of the stages and their codependence with the levels of spatial production.

III. COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION

Studies of informality traditionally see informal inhabitants as unorganized collectively and as somewhat passive objects when confronting state policies. This view is beginning to change in the face of accumulating evidence of efficient and decisive mobilization. While some researchers claim that there is still, as Gillespie puts it, a “lack of research that explores to what extent and how the urban poor have been able to move beyond quiet encroachment and successfully engage in collective action”, we can find numerous descriptions of such mobilization in accounts from across the globe. Perhaps a more accurate statement is that we still lack a comprehensive view of such engagements, which are often described outside their context as anti-eviction strategies of the informal urban poor.

An important question is whether the integration of informal dwellers into various social movements should be interpreted in relation to the goals and ideologies of the movements or as an anti-eviction strategy. Some, for example, claim that slum dwellers merge into fundamentalist, anti-apartheid, or anti-colonial and indigenous movements. Bayat, on the other hand, argues (regarding Egypt) that they tend to prioritize the urgent material interest of keeping their shelter intact and use wider movements only instrumentally to gather practical support. Collaborating with networks of activists is not seen as a method to fight for grand ideological purposes, but first as an anti-eviction strategy. Ghana’s informal dwellers, for instance, have been described as voting their political party into power and supporting their community leaders so they can access basic goods and services, like housing. In a similar vein, Koensler shows how informal Bedouin communities in Israel collaborate with human-rights NGOs. Their political struggle against what they have framed as the colonial state tends to dissolve when proper (individual household) housing arrangements are reached.

14. Landy and Bautès (2014).
15. Yiftachel (2009).
16. Ortega (2016).
17. Ahmed and Tahseen (2017).
18. Lovering and Türkmen (2011), page 94.
19. Lefebvre (1991).
20. E.g. Landy and Bautès (2014).
21. E.g. AlSayyad (1993).
22. Bayat (1997).
23. Gillespie (2017), page 978. Gillespie refers to “multiparty liberal democracies”, but this statement can also apply to other types of regimes, even where the ability to mobilize and resist may be more limited (e.g. Ahmed and Tahseen (2017) on Pakistan; Pils (2016) on China).
24. Davis (2006).
25. Skuse and Cousins (2007).
26. Yiftachel (2009).
27. Bayat (2015).
28. Paller (2015).
29. Koensler (2013).
A slightly different angle to this view is the rise of the “right to the city” as a focal point of various movements.\(^{(30)}\) They relate to the most practical concerns of the right to shelter, housing, services and opportunities in the familiar urban space they inhabit as an origin for other rights. According to Holston, “They articulated [informal] appropriation as rights of urban citizenship, the right to inhabit the city becoming a right to rights that constituted an agenda of citizenship […] rights to urban residence, for the right to reside with dignity, security, and mobility”.\(^{(31)}\) Either way, the common fact is that informal inhabitants usually start at a political disadvantage, lacking political support for their causes, and the gradual collaboration with other political actors reinforces their stand, their claims against eviction and their ability to negotiate alternatives.\(^{(32)}\)

The following four-part scale of evolution of collective organization should not be seen as some deterministic description of struggles everywhere. Nonetheless, as an ideal type with broad outlines it can shed light on common processes, while maintaining the contextual specificity of each case. The model draws from multiple studies that portray the gradual building of political–organizational capacity as a key component of the mobilization of the poor. They often learn and adapt through experience, moving from one practice to another to achieve better solutions. At its core, then, is the concept of evolution. This emphasis shifts the analysis from an understanding of informal dwellers as passive, to seeing them as active agents who take strategic actions – an emerging view that is gradually taking hold within global studies of the urban poor.\(^{(33)}\)

### a. Atomistic encroachment

Informal inhabitants act individually, on the basis of (extended) family or some sort of small-scale grouping, with no developed connections with other actors. Their weak social capital makes them highly vulnerable to enforcement, with no outside actor to enlist for their help, sound their cry, or struggle by their side. Bayat is the most emblematic writer on this organizational mode. He described the collective organization of “quiet encroachment” as a “largely atomized and prolonged mobilization with episodic collective action – open and fleeting struggles without clear leadership, ideology or structured organization”.\(^{(34)}\) When threatened, inhabitants collaborate through “passive networks” to protect their “gains already won”.\(^{(35)}\) Bayat mentions that in a slightly more developed stage, the squatters form localized “passive networks” with their immediate neighbours and adjacent communities that enable them to collaborate spontaneously in riots against enforcers and so forth, but these are still not “active”, structured or sustained organizations. Some demonstrations of such weak political capabilities are evident in examples from throughout the world.\(^{(36)}\) For example, in India, Bautès et al. describe mobilization efforts in Delhi and conclude that “the protests observed are more often forms of resilience, or sporadic contestation, rather than (well-organized) resistance”.\(^{(37)}\)

### b. Local politics

Inhabitants organize themselves in squatter groups or settler committees and engage with local politicians and bureaucrats in an instrumental manner to negotiate for services, and especially to obtain assurance that no eviction will take place. Benjamin,\(^{(38)}\) writing on India, effectively
described this mode, calling it “occupancy urbanism”, where bribes and “vote-bank politics” (assuring the settlement’s votes in exchange for security and amenities) are the dominant ways that informality flourishes. Similar patterns have also been identified in Argentina (39) and in Ghana, where residents who align with powerful nonstate providers (the local informal network led by a political entrepreneur) have greater opportunities to access and secure housing (40).

Similar but slightly different are the prevalent criminal structures of patronage. In the grey space of informality, where state law tends to be ignored, corruption flourishes and local gangsters, strongmen and mafias become the main agents through which the poor secure themselves against evictions. At times, a gangster may informally occupy a plot and rent it to migrants (41); frequently, these arrangements overlap with tribal territories, making the local chiefs the beneficiaries of the informal use (42). The extreme face of this is described by Weinstein (43) for India, where large mafias take control of huge parts of the informal development process. Recently, Chiodelli (44) described this process in Italy, portraying the spillover of informal urbanism into the global North. Naturally, such arrangements both promise some protection for the dwellers and leave them highly vulnerable if they confront their informal landlords. This organizational mode – whether depending on criminals, chiefs, or connections with local politicians/bureaucrats – provides some assurance to the inhabitants. But it cannot necessarily aid them when large-scale developers and governmental agencies have an interest in evicting them.

c. Grassroots mobilization

Informal communities throughout a city (or region) form networks of acquaintanceship and solidarity, establish civic organizations and councils, agree on shared goals, and recruit to their side other local actors from social movements, religious institutions, NGOs and political parties. These organizations and coalitions negotiate with the state when eviction schemes arise and push it to allocate resources for development and formalization. This is a much more structured and broad-based organizational form. Importantly, it has a much more consolidated ideology and commitment to social goals, aiming for comprehensive change in policies, and not only at the local isolated community level (45). Some examples of this are the Society for Preservation of Shelters and Habitations in Nepal (46), Istanbul Neighborhood Associations Platform in Turkey (47), National Slum Dwellers Federation in India (48), Society of Friends of the Neighborhood in Brazil (49) and Coalition for the Urban Poor in Bangladesh (50).

In South America, given that fresh occupations frequently are quickly counteracted by force, people organize in squatting groups before the occupation of land (51). They investigate and target the plot in advance, plan the invasion, and recruit allies to help them hold on, especially during the harsh first period after the invasion and until politicians interfere to hold back the eviction threat. The initial mobilization endures and helps residents to organize better during this struggle (52). In other contexts, mobilization is a gradual process, full of contention. It often takes clear shape only when the threat of eviction becomes concrete and imminent (53). It can provide informal inhabitants with considerable leverage against evictions, but at the same time can be manipulated.
by stronger state and market actors or disregarded when the political alignment of state and developers has a clear interest in eviction.\textsuperscript{(54)}

\textbf{d. Trans-local networks\textsuperscript{(55)}}

At a highly advanced stage, informal inhabitants integrate their struggle into parallel regional, national and global struggles.\textsuperscript{(56)} They form sophisticated collaborations among local councils, grassroots organizations, professional NGOs, nationwide social movements and political parties, international funds and institutions, and global solidarity movements. They push an anti-eviction demand to the front of the political agenda and assert their claim to the “right to the city”. Their struggle becomes a prominent issue in the city’s and nation’s politics, and politicians battle to win their votes by promising to adopt their causes.

References to such modes of organization can be identified in accounts of “insurgent citizenship”,\textsuperscript{(57)} “anti-eviction movements”\textsuperscript{(58)} and “trans-local civic networks”.\textsuperscript{(59)} Several prominent examples have been described in the literature: in South Africa, the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign\textsuperscript{(60)}; in Israel, the Regional Council of Unrecognized Bedouin Villages\textsuperscript{(61)}; in Brazil, the Alliance of Housing Movements\textsuperscript{(62)}; in Kenya, the urban poor federation Muungano wa Wanvijiji\textsuperscript{(63)}; in Thailand, the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights\textsuperscript{(64)}; and in India, the National Slum Dwellers Federation,\textsuperscript{(65)} which later became a member of Shack/Slum Dwellers International and acted in collaboration with multiple informal settlements in cities across Africa,\textsuperscript{(66)} including in Ghana\textsuperscript{(67)} and many other countries. In all these examples, the movements collaborated with various actors to withstand evictions, and they achieved significant results. Their actions ranged from the everyday and mundane (supporting the inhabitants, facilitating services, organizing routine meetings, etc.) to the episodic and provocative (rioting, appealing, producing a documentary, etc.).

This four-step organizational scale may be thought of in evolutionary terms. A squatter community cannot create a complex trans-local network overnight. It is necessarily a process carried out over a long time period, perhaps decades, in which small atomistic communities gradually integrate themselves into the local politics, and later into wider and wider networks of civil society, municipal, regional and national politics, and eventually collaborating with foreign actors. The process is not predetermined, and within different contexts such progression can be faster or slower, and some aspects will be of different quality and magnitude than others. In some cases, for example, the local politics may be more powerful than the connections with NGOs.\textsuperscript{(68)} Nonetheless, this generalized temporal framework can be seen as largely inclusive. Such evolution over time, from dispersed groups to mass mobilization against evictions, has been repeatedly described in such diverse places as South Africa,\textsuperscript{(69)} Turkey,\textsuperscript{(70)} Israel,\textsuperscript{(71)} Brazil,\textsuperscript{(72)} Ghana,\textsuperscript{(73)} India\textsuperscript{(74)} and Argentina,\textsuperscript{(75)} among others.

\textbf{IV. PRODUCTION OF SPACE}

Anti-eviction struggles are not waged in some abstract political–bureaucratic arena. The organized actors struggle for specific places
(settlements, neighbourhoods) that they must produce at the same time. From the first brick that is informally laid down, informal builders must provide practical defensive measures against demolition. They do so with the assistance of available organizational frameworks, but it must be noted that these are co-produced by the act of building itself. To create a slum committee, a slum must be erected, populated, publicly named and placed on maps. To convince interested outside agents to recognize it, it must become a mature settlement with a population and structures worth fighting for. It is a feedback process since without proper organization the settlement cannot be sustained or developed.

To spatialize anti-eviction strategies, I adopt Lefebvre’s perspective on the production of space, and specifically, the current “third wave” of its interpretation as laid out by Schmid (76) and further developed by Meir et al., (77) to analyse the interrelations between different aspects of the informal settlement. Compared with previous (narrower) understandings, this “wave” reads “the production of space” in two different ways. First, there is a constant dialectical (actually, triadic) relations among three dimensions, each of equal significance:

- the perceived, material production of structures, practical activities and bodies;
- the conceived, the production of knowledge, paradigmatic configurations such as plans, tenure rights, laws and so on; and
- the lived, the production of meaning, emotions, ideologies, and symbols that are attributed to space.

Importantly, these three are not different spaces or social groups, but, according to Schmid, “dialectically interconnected processes of production of space”. (78) Put in plain terms, the settlement is not just a cluster of people and structures; it is also, simultaneously, the way they understand their experience as a community, how it is understood by outsiders, and how this understanding is translated into formal – or informal – arrangements.

Second, this “wave” of analysis claims that there is no single spatial product that is comprehensive and hegemonic, but different spatialities that Meir and Karplus describe as “desired by people from within the same grand culture who seek and struggle for alternative codes of spatial conduct”. (79) This means that different social groups can produce different spatialities than the hegemonic one, smaller and more marginal perhaps, which coexist in tandem, sometimes harmoniously and often in competition. There could be more than one spatial law, tenure system, or narrative of space, and they always exist one on top of and beside each other. (80) Informality, by its nature, is insurgent to some degree (81) since it does not conform to formal state-imposed structures of spatial production. When the threat of eviction is a fundamental organizing aspect of space, the informal inhabitants must use their collective organization as a social platform to produce the different dimensions of space that serve the anti-eviction goal.

This reading of Lefebvre links us to Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory and its implications for the study of urbanization and informality. (82) As Anderson and McFarlane explain, “In contrast to Foucauldian notions like apparatus, regime or governmental technology, assemblage connotes emergence rather than resultant formation”. (83) Assemblage refers to the act of creating constellations of heterogeneous elements that have been selected from a
milieu, organized and stratified to hold together – but can easily change, break and be reassembled. This is how informal inhabitants can creatively produce their space as an assemblage of various material, conceptual and emotional items, to aid in their anti-eviction struggle.

Combined with Lefebvrian thinking, we can identify how different dimensions are co-assembled under this strategy: the “perceived” biophysical assemblage of the informal settlement (its buildings, streets, people), its “conceived” paradigmatic assemblage as alternative knowledge (arrangement of informal tenures, place naming, local knowledge), and its “lived” symbolic assemblage of recognition (an act of defiance or rather of loyalty, attachment, resistance). An assemblage will not be sustained long without purposefully consolidating all three dimensions. Schmid explains, “Space is to be understood in an active sense as an intricate web of relationships that is continuously produced and reproduced. The object of the analysis is, consequently, the active processes of production that take place in time.” (84) This theoretical framing allows us to link the multiple elements (physical, paradigmatic, symbolic) that constitute informal space and to comprehend a crucial rationale underlying their production.

Importantly, I keep in mind that assemblage theory rejects concepts of structure in favour of multiplicity, thus failing to account for wide contexts (global capitalism, colonialism) under which the variety of assemblages take shape and respond. (85) This forces us to use assemblage theory carefully, grasping that meta-structures impose strong confinements on what seems to be a stormy ocean of informal places and practices. With such careful reading, using the above theoretical frameworks, we can explore whether different anti-eviction struggles, in different places and circumstances, align under similar spatial or organizational patterns and create similar assemblages. The following description conceptualizes each Lefebvrian dimension as creating specific assemblages, in relation to various globally studied practices of informal inhabitants.

a. Perceived: facts-on-the-ground

The informal building, in most cases, is highly vulnerable in the immediate period after its erection – the concrete visible violation of formal law. Depending on context, there are two choices to deal with the risk: first, stealthy construction or “quiet encroachment”. (86) This means building small huts, camouflaging them with rubble, hiding them behind curvy topography or disguising them as animal pens. (87) This strategy, however, is viable only when small populations spread over large areas or in small urban pockets, while faced with limited enforcement. This mode will commonly relate to the first stage of collective organization, atomistic encroachment, since strong organizations are hard to maintain with this type of sociospatial dispersal. When the population grows, and/or enforcement measures develop and are implemented, informality cannot be hidden anymore and it turns to a second path, from “quiet” to “bold”. (88)

Informal inhabitants are aware of the implications of a concrete presence on the ground, and with it the advantage of size, which is achieved by producing larger and denser biophysical assemblages: structures and people. Cuenya et al. describe an informal settlement in Argentina: “It was important for the settler to continue building on the invasion site, so that
the settlement would become more established and appear to outsiders as a well-organized, consolidated settlement”. (89) Even governmental infrastructures obtained through manipulation, bribe, political lobby or public protest are seen and portrayed as symbolic justifications for the settlement’s right to exist. Ranganathan writes on India: “the situated meanings ascribed to paying for water pipes were leveraged as a means to bargain for tenure legality and citizenship” (90); and in Israel, coauthors and I write: “When insurgent buildings [and infrastructures] were placed, it was seen as a symbol of bold resistance and as a fact-on-the-ground”. (91)

According to the rationale portrayed in the above examples, which aligns with the Lefebvrian framework, the more explicit an eviction threat is, the more incentive there is to densify the informal settlement with higher and more expansive buildings and infrastructure and more inhabitants. Such dynamics were noted and theorized particularly in South America by scholars who asserted that the economic rationale is to raise the costs of eviction, compensation and resettlement to a point where eviction is unprofitable, and it is better to proceed with business as usual. (92) Larger populations can also gather larger crowds to riot against eviction, or serve as larger vote banks for local politicians aiding them. In contexts where “quiet encroachment” is difficult (because enforcement is tight), there is a shift to mass squatting in hordes, to deter enforcers with the group’s numbers. (93) Informal settlements are often overcrowded, guarded by the inhabitants or local mafias, surrounded by dikes, barbed wire, or walls. The “squatting organizers” or informal owners invite more inhabitants to join them, invest in infrastructure, and invest more and more in establishing concrete “irremovable facts” in order to deter eviction and hold their ground. (94)

b. Conceived: alternative knowledge

The settlement is structured by informal property titles and rules based on internal agreements, creating paradigmatic assemblages. These contradict the superimposed state assemblage of regulations, laws and property rights that deem the informal counterparts illegal and facilitate eviction. To counter this, the inhabitants need to promote their paradigms as legitimate alternative knowledge. Lovering and Türkmen (95) describe, for example, how gecekondu (Turkish informal settlement) associations, assisted by friendly planning professionals and academics, published an alternative plan for formalization and negotiated it with the government. Similar processes are described for South America, (96) Israel (97) and Thailand. (98)

A prevalent practice, often complementary to the alternative plans, is enumeration and mapping. The informal dwellers leverage the fact that their settlements are often unfamiliar, unmapped or undocumented by authorities. For example, Ahmeda and Tahseen describe how a research institution in Pakistan worked with informal communities to produce “Graphical representation of location and statistics of each Katchi-Abadi [informal settlement] with a mention of total lanes, houses, population, area and documentation of internal development by people efforts and external development by government for sewerage lines, drains, canals, water supply lines, clinics, schools and thallas [small workshops]”. (99)
Shack/Slum Dwellers International, a movement leading anti-eviction campaigns throughout the globe, has made enumeration into a pillar strategy. In this process, the alternative is based not on an opposing idea, but on offering an alternative source of knowledge production (the inhabitants). Farouk and Owusu explain the rationale behind this, based on enumerations held in Ghana:

“The process has helped [the informal dwellers] to see themselves in a new light, giving them confidence and a strong information base when engaging with city officials about their needs and rights. It has also helped others to see them in a new light, including those in city and national government. The informational power created by the enumerations, as well as the confidence and organizational capacity that they have supported within the community, has changed the balance of power, increasing the leverage of the residents of Old Fadama to have a say in planning their future.”

Enumerations are often complemented with local historical and sociological surveys, court appeals and legal objections. Promoting such projects usually requires large amounts of capital, employees (lawyers, planners, etc.), and professional skills. And their success also depends on having the right connections and familiarity with the relevant institutional bodies that are to inspect and adopt the alternatives (city and state planning committees and authorities, development agencies, etc.). In Gabon, to illustrate the breadth of networking with various agents on specific cases, the community was aided, when filing an appeal against eviction, by multiple organizations: the Nkuzi Development Association, the Community Law Centre and the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape, which were represented by the Legal Resources Centre, and the Gabon Informal Settlement Network. Rahman describes similar collaborations in Bangladesh. An even more elaborate network of agents collaborated in Israel to demand tenure rights for informal Bedouin communities. This network included a council of settlements, Palestinian movements, academic institutions and individuals, a complex web of third-sector human-rights organizations, Western donors, and European institutions and states. This demonstrates that efficient alternative knowledge can be produced only in developed organizational stages (IIIc and d) when the inhabitants form relations with financing bodies (funds, parties) and NGOs offering professional skills.

c. Lived: symbolic recognition

Eviction is often the product not only of cold economic interests but also of (bourgeois, ethnic, racial, colonial) movements, ideologies and emotions that reject the informal inhabitants and demand slum clearance for the sake of beautification and development as “world-class cities”. In many cases, the ethnic–national affiliation of the informal inhabitants is seen by hegemonic groups as intimidating and unwanted, and this perception drives them to demand the eviction of the residents. Informal inhabitants must counter these trends with their own ideological–emotional projects,
producing *symbolic assemblages*. At the centre of their struggle is the quest to bring the public and policymakers to recognize their rights. Recognition can manifest in changing the (conceived) law and policy, but it is first an emotional experience of identification, of acknowledging the inhabitants’ membership in and contribution to society, and feeling empathy for their plight. Such efforts target emotions, worldviews and group identities, seeking to influence them through media coverage and public reports, provocations, demonstrations and marches, outdoor art, graffiti, storytelling and so forth.\(^{109}\) In two examples, eviction was resisted in Brazil by using photographs of women residents on the favela’s walls and streets, and in India, by building a cultural centre with artistic activities for children, film screenings, and a DJ performance for the residents.\(^{110}\)

Using their networks, the inhabitants sign mass petitions against eviction,\(^{111}\) raise awareness in publications, social media or documentaries,\(^{112}\) and advance public discourse about human rights.\(^{113}\) Histories of deprivation become raw material for mobilization, as \*the legitimacy of struggle in the present aligns with the legitimacy of past conflicts*.\(^{114}\) The inhabitants’ existential suffering due to lack of services, poverty, government harassment, etc. is presented as a symbol of entitlement.\(^{115}\) These goals are addressed through sophisticated public campaigns, orchestrated by specialized NGOs, parties and movements, but they are also the method to reach these agents, affect them ideologically, and recruit them to the inhabitants’ side. Finally, the will and capability to use provocative violence (riots, blockades, sabotage, etc.) is also crucial in deterring enforcers, by creating a symbolic image of threat from enraged evacuees.\(^{116}\)

### V. PRODUCING COMPLEX ASSEMBLAGES – THREE REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES

Researchers of informality and evictions should be aware of the multiple complex aspects of the production of space aimed at avoiding eviction. Things that may look banal and pass unnoticed may in fact be prominent features of anti-eviction strategies.\(^{117}\) To illustrate the way diverse elements are placed and produced together – biophysical (perceived), paradigmatic (conceived), symbolic (lived) – in order to weave complex assemblages that can withstand eviction, it is worth quoting at some length a few examples from around the globe. Each of the following is unique to a certain place and context, but as a group they also contain similarities in the way they portray the multidimensional production of space. Further, each puts emphasis on a different (Lefebvrian) dimension of this production.

First, in Van Gelder’s detailed research from Argentina, the emphasis is on the perceived, the production of biophysical assemblages, while the relation of these assemblages to other dimensions is clearly portrayed. Further, not only do we see how the production of space by the organized group leads to the settlement’s formalization, but we also grasp the long timeline, the evolutionary process, in which multiple elements are interwoven strategically with the explicit goal of taking eviction off the table.
“When performing an invasion, a group of squatters [...] collectively invade a vacant tract of land, parcel it out, and overnight build precarious dwellings on the site. The critical mass of the collective and the construction of dwellings to create facts-on-the-ground, together with establishing an internal administration to manage daily life in the barrio, serve to reduce likelihood of a forced eviction [...] Once the direct threats to its tenure security have waned, the focus of a settlement will shift from noncompliance to adaptation to the state system to further its legitimacy and gain access to services and infrastructure [...] It then] becomes interwoven with the official legal system, up to the point of actually merging with it when a settlement is legalized [...] which] may take decades to complete.”(118)

What we see here is an evolution from contentious engagement with the state by an organized but isolated group, through a subversive production of physical elements over long time periods, to a prolonged negotiation with state bureaucracies, weaved into local political contacts.

Second, an apt example of the way the conceived, alternative knowledge is produced in tandem with other dimensions comes from du Plessis, who writes on anti-eviction struggles in Thailand. He shows how the community organized and networked to act in multiple dimensions, not only to publish an alternative paradigm (a plan), but to arrange physical space in accordance with this plan, and to charge this space with symbolic meanings, made visible to the wider public. The description also portrays the centrality of networking with powerful actors who can aid the complex effort.

“Working with a coalition of NGOs, professionals and human rights activists, [the informal inhabitants] put forward a highly innovative land-sharing plan as an alternative to eviction and relocation. The plan included the renovation of the older buildings and the integration of the residences into an historical park [...] The residents even started implementing aspects of their plan by creating meandering pathways among the buildings and ancient trees and turning the oldest house in the settlement into a museum and exhibition area for their proposals. In response, many outsiders rallied to their support.”(119)

Third, Miraftab’s account from South Africa is illustrative of how lived, symbolic recognition is targeted as a prime anti-eviction strategy among many. The campaign combined instrumental actions to support the community and (re)build services and structures, legal appeals, and symbolic provocative actions, drawing from common values and emotional sensitivities, aimed at disrupting public opinion and recruiting political supporters.

“While some Anti-Eviction Campaign actions [...] directly pursue redistribution, other practices aim for recognition of poor residents’ plight, their histories, their struggles and their plea for justice [...] They turn to] both the court and judicial systems and formal politics [...] Their activism ranges from] operating weekly soup kitchens to
feed children, to defiant collective actions such as reconnection of disconnected services by so-called ‘struggle plumbers and electricians’ and relocation of evicted families back into their housing units, to mass mobilizations and protests, sit-ins, and land invasions – as well as the use of courts and legal claims [. . . They] turned the bureaucratic legal procedure into a spectacle. Instead of going one by one to the court to register their claims for housing, the 1600 residents and their supporters massed in front of the courthouse [. . .] filing and stamping the paperwork [. . .] on the street. Singing anti-apartheid protest songs on the steps of the courthouse, they made their presence and demand visible and strong.”(120)

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As cities around the globe expand and thrust against informal peripheries, threatening informal residents with evictions to make way for fresh development, anti-eviction struggles become a central theme of local, national and international politics. Observing the seemingly chaotic chains of events that characterize these struggles, it is often difficult to identify connections and shared themes and trends. This article draws such connections within a new encompassing theoretical framework for anti-eviction strategies, building on a thick survey of literature on multiple locations from around the world.

Two aspects were identified and elaborated. First, there is an evolution of collective organization, beginning in atomized encroachment, proceeding to connections within local politics, to grassroots mobilization and inter-community interactions, and culminating in robust trans-local networks. These are composed of NGOs, social movements, parties and institutions, stretching from the local to international arenas.

Second, drawing from Lefebvre, three facets of the production of space were identified and conceptualized:

a. Facts-on-the-ground, the production of dense biophysical assemblages – people and structures – that deter enforcers due to increasing eviction costs and symbolize functioning settlements that deserve recognition.
b. Alternative knowledge, producing documents, arrangements, enumerations and schemes to compete with official plans, promoting formalization as a professionally crafted solution.
c. Symbolic recognition, promoting ideologies and igniting emotions, through various media such as reports, articles, films and the other arts, and through protests and provocations, to recruit political supporters, affect policymakers, and mould a symbolic space of rights and of struggle.

As mentioned, the issue of collective organization (or mobilization) frequently overlaps in the literature with the study of informal communities and, more broadly, the urban poor. Three emblematic writers represent three distinctive stages of collective organization of informal communities (stages 3 and 4, which represent the establishment of movements and networks, are combined). Bayat’s key analysis refers to the organization of the poor in their “life as politics”.(121) The continuous efforts of the poor to create their habitats and life chances are conceptualized, cumulatively, as a structured
mobilization, crawling under the state's skin and despite its counter measures. Benjamin's\(^{122}\) “occupancy urbanism”, contrary to Bayat's scheme, understands informality as woven into the state's structure. The sprouting of informal settlements is constituted by the will of local officials to collect the votes of these residents, or other kinds of benefits. This can be termed mobilization through the state's body. Miraftab's\(^{123}\) “insurgent citizenship” differs from the other two concepts, claiming the poor learn to assert their demands for proper habitats, to politicize and mobilize ideologically, like a straightforward social movement confronting the state.

How should we interpret the gap among these three theories? A reasonable answer would be that it is the particular context in each case that determines the scope of the mobilization and defiance of the poor (Bayat writes on Egypt, Benjamin on India, and Miraftab on South Africa). But the survey of worldwide evidence given above reveals another angle to this. Different collective organizational modes were recorded not only across different regions and states, but also across cities, neighbourhoods and, importantly, different periods or specific situations.

This brings us to two important insights. First, the structural context (political economy, government apparatus, etc.) does not determine the way the poor organize – it only influences it. Informal dwellers may adopt different organizational modes if the conditions are ripe and they creatively succeed in overcoming the multiple barriers in their path. This means that any mode of collective organization on the part of informal dwellers is a strategy taken – not a structural property of their social existence (as the three theories above may imply). We can find an accurate reflection of this in Mitlin, who synthesizes the seemingly separate types of mobilization: “even when movements negotiate and then collaborate [with the state], they balance this positioning with both contentious politics and subversive actions that can advance interests alongside the outcomes of direct engagement”\(^{124}\). When comparing Mitlin’s analysis with that of this paper, subversion clearly overlaps with encroachment, collaboration with occupancy urbanization, and contention with insurgent citizenship. All three modes are always potentially available to informal residents. They are taken (many times, simultaneously) on the basis of practical abilities and strategic considerations. This conclusion is important since it emphasizes the adaptive agency of informal dwellers as it appears throughout the globe and not just in specific places.

The second conclusion, under this framing, is that the production of space can be interpreted as collective organization. Here, we may end the artificial space/organization separation (made earlier for the purpose of theoretical clarity) and see these elements as co-constitutive. “Quiet”, “occupancy” or “insurgent” informality – these are all described by their theoreticians as modes of urbanization, manners through which the poor create and defend their habitats. In other words, the way the poor organize determines the way they produce space. The building of a settlement is fundamental to the building of it as a community, as a vote bank, or as a parcel of wider resistance campaigns. The material blocks of the informal huts or apartments are, therefore, also the abstract blocks of the neighbourhood committees and trans-local networks. To fight for the “right to the city”, the city’s space must start being occupied first (an abstract claim without facts-on-the-ground can hardly be taken seriously by the state). To challenge the state’s maps of property and zoning, alternative maps must be drawn – on paper, on the ground, and in the minds and hearts of people, collectively organized as movements.
Collective organization is both the means of producing space and its goal, and these cannot be understood separately. This conclusion illuminates the fact that the threat of eviction is not some random situation imposed on helpless informal residents, but an inherent attribute of their habitat and society – one that they continuously adapt to, in order to resist in multiple and creative ways, spatially and organizationally.

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