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THE CITY OF ETERNAL HOPE: Analysis of the subjective dimension of inequality associated with the process of self-production of urban space in Lima, Peru (1990-2024)

Studies in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Holston, 2008; Roy and Alsayad, 2004; Miraftab, 2012; Simone, 2010, among others) show that urban social movements generate and sustain democratic practices, broadening the sense of contention beyond class struggles. However, as one of the perverse effects of the massive land titling policies implemented by international agencies since the late 20th century, it has also increased the mercantile logic of access to land and housing, reconfiguring social practices (Rolnik, 2017; Roy, 2011). How do the urban poor access housing and make sense of their lives in this new context?

Through a sequential mixed methodology –participant observation, in-depth interviews and spatial analysis– I analyse self-urbanised neighbourhoods in Lima (Peru) that seemed to democratise access to housing and politicise everyday life, but, paradoxically, in the last two decades, modes of commodified urban land production have intensified, generating more constraints for poor people and greater spatial precariousness.

I take stock of structural inequality in access to housing and the micro-sociological readings of residents of Lima's auto-urbanised neighbourhoods and argue that market relations and contestations over space are central to people's everyday lives and have shaped people's narratives of entitlement, naturalising their conditions of socio-spatial inequality, over-demanding them to deploy day-to-day strategies and reducing collective resistance.