

Contribution to the PhD seminar: *Place in the Global South*, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies (ToRS), University of Copenhagen 8 - 9 May 2014

Local bodies in global cities

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Recent years has seen a surge of writing about processes of gentrification and urban upgrading. They spell out the consequences of acute “class wars” in rapidly growing cities. These new spaces of privileged sociality tend to push poor people to the margins of the city.

In contrast to this dominant narrative, this talk engages with the aspirations and actions of poor people and discusses the way they inscribe their presence into the urban landscape. It takes up the notion that the middle class is both exclusive and expansive. Anti-poor drives are coupled with pedagogical interventions that invest in the education of poor people, discipline them to develop a more suitable urban habitus and allow them to generate and realize new aspirations. How do poor people position themselves in the emerging urban landscapes saturated with dreams about the good life? How do they navigate the city that is largely built by their own hands, but to which they have limited access? How do they relate to benevolent and patronizing interventions for their improvement?

The paper uses case studies from the Indian metropolis of Delhi to discuss acute negotiations about the meaning and experience of urban citizenship in a post-2010 environment, when investment friendly politics meets a growing concern for social welfare and inclusive growth. In line with the aims of the workshop the talk will focus specifically on the position of bodies in reconfigured urban spaces, and examines the ways in which “poor bodies” provoke and reshape the urban dream through their very material presence in the cities.