

Class for itself?

**Shack/slum Dwellers International:
the praxis of a transnational poor
movement.**

by

Leopold Nicolai Podlashuc

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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Abstract

Slums are on the rise around the world. Estimates suggest that ninety-five percent of the world population will be living in cities by the year 2050 and that a large proportion will be living in slums. Given this, it is important to ask what social agency are these slum dwellers able to exercise? The thesis investigates this agency. It does so through a triangulation of intersecting approaches, involving theoretical and historical inquiry, archival and contextual investigation and participant observation. This synthetic approach is founded on the idea of grounded research, which understands that context matters and that theory can be derived from data. The thesis opens up with an analysis of current and expected patterns of urbanisation in order to comprehend the material relations that lead to slum production. It then moves to investigate the class relations that emerge from this modality. This analysis leads the study into an examination of notions of praxis, so as to try and understand ways in which slum agency is catalysed. From this conceptual foundation the thesis focuses on the transnational urban poor movement, "Shack/slum Dwellers International" (SDI). It examines SDI's intellectual and historical roots in various slum-community based organisations around the South, outlining the social movement formation in terms of its own ontology. The thesis then investigates the praxiology that SDI draws from the contours of daily life in the slums, arguing that in the process, slum dwellers are finding ways of constituting themselves as a class acting "for itself." Here the thesis pays particular attention to a number of themes relating to galvanising subjectivity and mobilising agency. These include issues of overcoming alienation, pedagogy, empowerment (particularly of women), legitimation and contestation. The thesis outlines how these are operationalised through savings schemes, slum-to-slum exchanges and mutual federation, and describes key practices the movement engages in, such as self-enumeration, house-modelling, community sanitation schemes and resolute engagement with public authorities. The thesis ends by drawing out the implications of this social movement for understanding social agency today.

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