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Space and Resistance: Participation in the Periphery

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Abstract

Suburban spaces in modern urban landscapes are often reduced to residual areas left behind by the flow of development. However, this study shows that behind these stigmas, fringe spaces hold complex and meaningful social dynamics. This study aims to understand how residents in the suburbs of Makassar City produce, interpret, and maintain their living space amid the pressure of urban development. Using a descriptive-critical qualitative approach based on urban ethnography, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and narrative documentation. The results of the study show that citizens are not only passive residents but also as active actors who create alternative spaces through social practices and everyday symbolic resistance. Concepts such as perceived space, lived space, and everyday resistance are key to reading this dynamic. This research confirms that the right to the city must be seen from below, from the perspective of those who live and survive in the narrow alleys of the city. These findings are important for building a more inclusive and fringe approach to urban planning.

Keywords: Periphery space; Resistance; Space production; Urban ethnography

Introduction:

In every city that continues to grow and change, there are always spaces left behind. Suburban areas-both spatially and socially-are the most obvious markers of how cities shape and at the same time forget some of their citizens. In Makassar, a coastal city that is one of the centres of economic growth in Eastern Indonesia, this phenomenon seems increasingly obvious. Behind the rows of buildings, malls, and apartments that tower in the city centre, there are narrow alleys, semi-permanent houses, and communities that live in limitations but are full of solidarity. They are not at the centre of the development map, but instead become the pulse of the city itself (Pratomo et al., 2023; Tirtosudarmo, 2013). This is the fringe space-a place that not only houses the rest of the space, but also houses dreams, anxieties, and resistance.

The underlying problem of this study is the existence of structural and symbolic gaps between urban centres and suburban areas, which continue to be maintained and strengthened by urban planning, development discourse, and the logic of urban capitalism (Boschken, 2022; Thörn, 2023). In Makassar, areas such as Biringkanaya, Tamalanrea, and parts of Panakkukang are the locations for the growth of settlements that are called "unsuitable", "not following spatial planning", or even "wild" (Surya et al., 2020). However, for the citizens who live there, the space is a home, a place where history and solidarity are built, and not just a place of refuge. Evictions for the sake of infrastructure projects, unilateral changes in land status, and penetration of investors with the support of municipal policies are part of the daily reality they

have to face (Onyebueke et al., 2020). This process is not just about losing physical space, but also losing identity, social networks, and the right to determine the direction of life within one's city (Jacklin-Jarvis & Cole, 2019; Robinson, 2019).

Scientifically, the study of urban space has long been the focus of critical thinkers. Henri Lefebvre (1991) introduced the concept of the production of space, where space is understood not as a neutral container, but as a social product created through power relations. Lefebvre also divides space into three dimensions: conceived space (space designed by authority), perceived space (space experienced daily), and lived space (space interpreted symbolically and emotionally) (Misoczky de Oliveira, 2020; Rutanen, 2017). Meanwhile, David Harvey (2012) emphasizes that in urban capitalism, urban space becomes a tool for capital accumulation through what he calls accumulation by dispossession—the takeover of space by the state and capital at the expense of vulnerable groups (Wang, 2018). Anthony Giddens (1984), with his structuring theory, added that even though structures dominate, social actors still have the agency to resist and change those structures (Ferdoush, 2020; Lippuner & Werlen, 2009). These three ideas are an important foundation for understanding the dynamics of suburban space as an arena of conflict between power and the daily lives of citizens (K. Turhanoglu, 2014; Saleh & Rauws, 2022).

However, although theoretical studies of space production have developed widely, some gaps are still rarely explored in depth, especially in the context of Indonesian cities outside Jakarta (Haryanto et al., 2020; Panjaitan et al., 2022). Studies of suburban spaces in large cities such as Makassar often focus on technical aspects—such as spatial planning, poverty statistics, or land legality—without delving deeper into the lived experiences, narratives of citizens, and everyday resistance strategies that shape the meaning of space socially and culturally (Nur, 2020; Surya et al., 2021). In addition, the dominance of technocratic approaches in urban research makes the voices of citizens almost inaudible (Dusek, 2012; Rittberger, 2019). In fact, in the periphery, there are meaningful social practices, ranging from cooperation, and village forums, to self-help reading parks formed by local youth (Suwignyo, 2019; Winardi, 2020). This is the gap that this study aims to answer.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that combines spatial ethnography with spatial production theory, as well as using the Makassar case study to highlight how marginalized residents are not only victims of the system but also active actors in creating alternative spaces and counter-narratives (Hammersley, 2010; Till, 2009). This approach allows for a more humanistic and contextual reading of urban dynamics, while shifting the focus from the state and capital to citizens as producers of space (Smith, 2009, 2020). By exploring the testimonies, daily practices, and resistance strategies of marginalized citizens, this study aims to show that the periphery space is not the "garbage" of the modern city, but rather a living, empowered, and full of transformational potential (DeVerteuil et al., 2009; Thurber, 2024).

This research also offers a critical reflection on the discourse of development that often wraps the practice of exclusion with the language of progress and modernity (Herath, 2009; Northover, 2024). In the context of Makassar, strategic projects such as toll roads, industrial estates, or large-scale property development often come at the expense of old villages that are decades old (Surya et al., 2021, 2023). Residents were not talked to, only given warnings. They are considered illegal, despite having lived and lived collectively on the land longer than the term of office of the mayor who displaced them (Kahlmeter et al., 2018; Kirk, 2022). It is a form of symbolic violence that works through the labelling, neglect, and erasure of the social history of a space (Chapple et al., 2005; Villarreal, 2021).

Because of this, this research is not only academically important but also politically and ethically. It invites us to listen to voices from the periphery, not just as data, but as authentic knowledge (Gillion & Posey, 2019; Xydias, 2023). He invites us to understand the city not only from its centre but from its edges—the place where the

real life of the city takes place (Leoni, 2022; Phelps et al., 2006). Using a qualitative-critical approach and departing from case studies in the suburbs of Makassar, this paper wants to offer a new reading of space, resistance, and citizen participation in an unequal urban landscape (Surya, 2014; Surya et al., 2021).

Method:

This study uses a descriptive-critical qualitative approach with urban ethnographic design, which allows researchers to observe, excavate, and reflect in depth on social dynamics in the lives of residents in the suburbs of Makassar. This approach was chosen because it follows the purpose of research that seeks to understand the meaning of space from the perspective of the perpetrators themselves, as well as to reveal forms of citizen participation and resistance that are often not recorded in the official narrative of urban development.

This research was carried out in stages. The first phase begins with initial observations to identify suburban areas that are under pressure due to urban expansion and development projects. The selected area is one of the semi-permanent settlements on the outskirts of Biringkanaya District, Makassar, which has been affected by the construction of toll road projects and new industrial areas in recent years. This observation aims to recognize the social context, local actors, and spatial dynamics that live in the daily lives of residents.

The second stage is the main data collection, carried out through in-depth interviews, participation in citizen activities, and recording of narratives of daily life. For approximately two months, the researchers were directly involved in various social activities of the residents—ranging from community service, and village forum discussions, to informal activities such as night patrols and religious events at local mosques. This stage is important to build trust and open up an equal space for communication between researchers and the community.

The research subjects are suburban residents who live and work in the area, consisting of various backgrounds: housewives, informal workers, community youth, traditional leaders, and RT/RW administrators. Meanwhile, the object of the research is the meaning of space and the form of participation and resistance of citizens in responding to changes and pressures due to urban development.

This study uses several conceptual indicators to help map spatial dynamics. Among them:

1. Spatial dimension: how space is constructed and used by citizens;
2. Social dimensions: forms of interaction, solidarity, and social networks within the community;
3. Political-symbolic dimension: narratives, discourses, and actions of citizens in defending living space;
4. Dimension of resistance: the strategy used by citizens to resist, negotiate, or adapt to state and capital intervention.

The data sources in this study are divided into two:

1. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and field notes.
2. Secondary data were obtained from policy documents (Makassar RTRW, zoning regulations), local news articles, NGO reports, and academic literature related to urbanization and space production.

The main data collection techniques are:

- In-depth interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner to give space to citizens' narratives;
- Participatory observation to record the experience of space directly;
- Documentation through field photos, maps made by residents, and researchers' diaries.

To determine key informants, purposive sampling techniques were used, taking into account the involvement and knowledge of informants in spatial dynamics in the region. Informants are selected selectively based on their social role in the community—for example, residents directly affected by development, youth leaders who are

actively organizing village activities, or RT administrators who have administrative and historical information.

Once the data is collected, the analysis is carried out thematically and interpretively, with the following steps:

1. Transcription of interviews and field notes,
2. Initial coding based on themes that emerge from the data,
3. Categorization of data according to conceptual dimensions (spatial, social, symbolic),
4. Interpretation of narratives to find the meanings of space and forms of citizen resistance,
5. Dialogue the data with the theories of Lefebvre, Harvey, and Giddens to produce sharp, contextual critical analysis.

To maintain the integrity of the research process, research ethics are strictly carried out. All informants have explained the objectives and process of the research openly. The researcher obtains participatory consent (informed consent) before conducting the interview, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of the informant's identity. Sensitive data is disguised and only used for academic purposes. The researcher also tries to maintain a reflective attitude and not intervene excessively in the social life of residents.

The method used in this study was prepared based on the suitability of the purpose of the study, which is to understand in depth how suburban space is produced, interpreted, and maintained by residents in the context of an ever-changing city. The ethnographic approach is considered the most appropriate to capture the nuances of daily life and small narratives that are often missed by quantitative approaches. The reliability and validity of the results were maintained through triangulation of data from various sources, direct involvement of researchers in the field, and testing of meaning with informants during the research process.

With this strategy, it is hoped that the results of the research will be able to provide a complete and reflective picture of the suburban space not as a residual space, but as an active, meaningful social space, and a field of struggle for residents to reclaim the rights to the city.

Results and Discussion:

1. Periphery Space as a Space Created and Lived

The results of this study show that the suburban space in Makassar City cannot be understood only as a geographical location outside the city centre. It is a social space that results from complex historical, economic, and cultural dynamics. Residents in the suburbs—especially in Biringkanaya District—show that they not only occupy space but also create and live it meaningfully.

In field observations, narrow alleys, which are not technically recorded on official maps, become vital spaces for citizens to socialize, trade, and build community. The yard is used as a small stall, a self-help reading garden, or a place to study with children. It shows perceived space—how citizens experience and organize space based on their daily needs, not on the technocratic plans of the city.

As expressed by Mrs Haryati (45), a housewife, "Our kitchen is small, but we can cook with our neighbours when there is an event. The hallway behind the house is usually used for drying and chatting in the afternoon." This testimony shows how physical space is transformed into a relational and collective space. A periphery space, in this context, is not just a place to live, but a social fabric built through daily practice.

2. Daily Resistance as a Form of Downstairs Production

This research also shows that marginalized residents actively produce space in the form of cultural and symbolic resistance. They create lived spaces—spaces full of meaning, emotion, and personal history—through a variety of social practices. Starting from community service, RT artisan, and community prayer rooms, to village murals made by young people, everything is proof that this living space is not the result of chance but was created together through social processes.

Pak Reza (52), a local community leader, stated, "This is where I grew up, married, had children. If

this place is lost, not only my house will be lost, but my life as well." This statement emphasizes that space has not only economic value but also existential value.

During pressure from toll road projects and industrial estates, residents continue to protect their villages, clean up the environment, repair waterways, and even organize citizens' forums to voice their rights. This is a form of everyday resistance (Scott, 1985), where small daily actions become a means of maintaining a living space without having to be directly confrontational. This strategy proves that space production is not only monopolized by the state or capital but also emerges from below, by those who live in structural uncertainty.

3. Symbolic Dominance and Structural Removal

Another finding is the existence of a form of symbolic hegemony carried out by the state and the media in framing the periphery as a "disorderly", "slum", or "vulnerable" space. This labelling is the basis for the relocation or eviction policy. In an interview with Mrs. Rika (42), she said, "The first time I lived here, the government didn't care. But after entering a new road project, suddenly we were considered illegal." This kind of narrative reflects how conceived space works—a space defined by authority based on the logic of development, without considering the life that has taken place within it.

This is in line with David Harvey's (2012) idea of accumulation by dispossession, where public space and community space are seized for the sake of capital accumulation, and the citizens who inhabit these spaces are removed symbolically and physically. In the context of Makassar, large infrastructure projects such as toll roads or industrial estates push the suburbs out of their living spaces, citing "development".

However, this resistance to domination also appears in the form of counter-narratives. Young people are starting to create digital content that displays the face of their village, not as a slum, but as a creative and empowered space. It is a form of struggle for meaning, in which citizens refuse to be merely objects of other people's narratives, and begin to define their own space.

4. Consistency and Unevenness with Previous Studies

Theoretically, this finding is in line with the concept of the right to the city proposed by Lefebvre (1991), that the right to the city is not only about physical access but the right to produce and interpret space. Residents of the suburbs of Makassar, although not legally recognized, have exercised this right in their daily lives.

However, in contrast to several previous studies that photographed the periphery as a passive zone that needs to be fixed (see: Sudaryo, 2019; Rahmawati, 2020), this study found that the fringe space is a dynamic arena full of social agencies. Citizens don't just survive, they create, adapt, and resist—on a micro but significant scale. This underscores the importance of turning the lens of urban studies: from the centre to the periphery, from the state to the citizens, from structure to practice.

5. Implications and Direction of Further Research

The results of this study have important implications, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, he emphasized that spatial studies cannot only be based on technocratic structural or spatial approaches but need to be explored from the life experiences of citizens themselves. In practical terms, these findings challenge exclusive urban planning practices and suggest a more ethical and humane participatory approach. Planning that ignores lived space will only create a beautiful city on the map, but limp in reality.

For further research, there is room to further explore the relationship between citizen resistance and local policy transformation. Can the small movement of suburban residents affect urban spatial planning? Can the production form of the basement be integrated into inclusive urban planning? These questions are important to explore in the context of Indonesia's continued urbanization.

Conclusion:

This research has succeeded in showing that the periphery space is not just a physical area that is left

behind from the flow of urban development, but an active, lively, and meaningful social space. It contains the daily practices of citizens that not only fill the space, but also recreate it—through cooperation, counter-narratives, and resistance to symbolic domination and exclusionary policies. By using an ethnographic approach and a theoretical framework of spatial production, this research can capture the spatial, social, and symbolic dimensions of the lives of residents in the suburbs of Makassar City completely and reflectively.

The purpose of the research to understand how suburban spaces are produced and interpreted by their citizens has been achieved through live recordings of the actions of citizens that often go unnoticed by urban planners. They are not only victims of capital expansion or victims of unjust spatial policies, but also actors who shape alternative spaces—through cultural resistance, informal participation, and community solidarity. This process shows that the right to the city is not a central monopoly or an elite, but belongs to all those who bring the city to life in their way.

These findings also open up a new understanding that resistance does not have to be frontal or large-scale. In the context of the fringe space, resistance comes in subtle yet powerful forms—from murals on hallway walls to citizens' forums that protect villages from eviction. All this is a form of the production of the basement that affirms that the city is formed not only from above but also from below, by its citizens.

Another important conclusion is that the development narrative that has been dominated by technocratic language needs to be criticized and reorganized. The city is not only made up of wide streets, high-rise buildings, or elite areas, but also of narrow alleys full of sounds, stories, and struggles. If urban development continues without involving the suburbs as subjects, then what happens is not progress, but disappearance: the loss of space, history, and life.

Thus, the main contribution of this research is not only on a theoretical level but also on the ethical reading of urban spaces. He invites us to see that a just city is not a city that is clean from the "slums", but a city that can accommodate the diversity of ways of life, values, and meanings that its inhabitants attach to space.

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