Grassroots intermediaries in urban informal trading:
Brokering for development or stifling dissent?

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In many Global South cities, informal hawkers occupy public spaces to earn a living. They often face eviction, resulting in uncertain income and insecure access to workplaces. Inevitably, many vendors nurture a clientelist link with political brokers to cope with their precarious street life. In some cases, vendor groups engage with state agencies to resist eviction and push for social inclusionary policies. While the informal vending literature has examined the strategies and outcomes of various state-vendor relationships, there has been scant scholarly account on the role of intermediaries in the engagement channels. In this paper, I ask: How do grassroots intermediaries facilitate and sustain engagement channels between street vendors and state actors? What role/s do they play in the engagement practices? I draw on the experience of Baclaran hawkers to demonstrate how grassroots intermediaries perform four functions: a) conduit to power structures; b) instrument of control; c) facilitator of social dialogues; and d) channel for policy advocacy. I argue that these critical roles reinforce grassroots democratic entanglements where collective action practices contain progressive and regressive democratic elements as well as conflicting motives or routines in a context of acute inequality and informality.

Key Words: urban informal economy, Baclaran hawkers, grassroots intermediaries, grassroots democratic entanglements, urban citizenship

Introduction

About 2.5 billion people, or half of the global labor force, work in the informal economy (ILO, 2017). In developing Asian countries, over 50% of the urban labor force is informal (Vanek et al., 2014). Within the urban informal employment, street vending is seen as the most visible livelihood. Yet, there are no accurate statistics on the volume of street vendors. Informal trading activities are not included in official planning documents; they are "off the map." This invisibility largely stems from state rules that consider street vending illegal.

Amid the harsh policies, vendors occupy public spaces to earn a living. They often face eviction, resulting in precarious income and insecure

access to workplaces. State officials, who associate vending with filth and congestion, prefer relocating hawkers to regulated market spaces away from busy locations. When the eviction-relocation approach fails, the state-vendor relationship is characterized by conflict or constant negotiation. As a result, many vendors nurture a clientelist link with political brokers, which entrenches their uncertain situation.

In some cases, street hawkers collectively undertake activities that promote their welfare. In India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, for instance, vendor coalitions and allied groups engage with state agencies to stop eviction, gain legal recognition, and push for social inclusionary policies. While the outcomes from these engagements have been diverse due to a number of issues (e.g., organizational capacity, divisive politics), the collective efforts indicate how street vendors demand legitimacy for their livelihood.

While the informal vending literature has examined the strategies and outcomes resulting from various state-vendor engagement practices, there has been limited focus on the role of grassroots intermediaries in the engagement channels. In this paper, I ask: How do grassroots intermediaries facilitate and sustain engagement channels between informal vendors and state actors? What roles do they play in the engagement practices? I draw on the experience of Baclaran hawkers to demonstrate the key functions that grassroots intermediaries play as local brokers. Four roles emerge as critical: a) conduits to power structures; b) instruments of control; c) facilitators of social dialogue; and d) channels for policy advocacy. As I will show later, there are strengths and constraints embedded in these roles, illustrating how brokering contributes to what I call "grassroots democratic entanglements." In what follows, I situate the intermediaries in the literature and explain the notion of grassroots democratic entanglements.

Revisiting grassroots intermediaries

Throughout Philippine history, various organizations develop out of volunteerism to confront state power, oppose policies, and propose actions on different issues. These organizations that intersect with the state domain without being part of its apparatus are commonly referred to as civil society organizations or CSOs (Constantino-David, 1997). CSOs are vital to democratization as they enable and widen citizen participation, protect citizens from the abuse of state power, and help guarantee state political accountability (Krut, 1997). CSOs are viewed as independent non-governmental and non-profit groups that interact with the state and

business sector. These groups are categorized into socio-civic organizations, professional associations, cause- oriented movements, people's organizations (POs), and non-government organizations (NGOs).

NGOs are defined as intermediary groups between the people and the state, speaking for or on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged without being from among them (Cariño, 2002). By contrast, POs come from various sectors including the poor and disadvantaged (Cariño, 2002). POs are membership-based organizations formed on a voluntary basis, functioning as community-driven and/or issue-oriented grassroots groups (Tuaño, 2011). They have identifiable leadership, membership, and structure with the capacity to promote the public interest. Some POs may partner with NGOs, but they remain autonomous from such partner organizations (Abao, 2011). Street vendor groups can be considered POs as they collectively address their needs and demand recognition.

The informality literature has noted how street vendor organizations deal with state agencies. In Mexico City, the vendors' encounter with the government's *Departamento del Distrito Federal* paints a relatively good picture of informal associations. One hawkers' organization acts as a negotiator and a manager of social assets (Peña, 1999). The Johannesburg case (South Africa), however, unmasks the undemocratic and rent-seeking side of informal groups. In this city, accountability issues hound vendor groups that seem to wield substantial power on who is able to trade in the city's strategic locations. The group determines the rental which "favors more affluent traders, who might also be more organized, at the expense of those who are poorer and less organized" (Hlela, 2003, p. 2). In Bogota (Colombia), the government's engagement with vendors is tokenistic. Vendors' involvement in state negotiation is valued not for its potential to arrive at better policy outcomes, but for its educational quality, participatory nature, and the legitimacy it lent the government (Hunt, 2009).

In addition, Tucker (2016) has chronicled the role of political intermediaries known as punteros in the Paraguayan border economy. In India, Routray (2014) has documented how the intermediaries, locally called pradhans, simultaneously embrace solidarity, patronage, and exploitation of the urban poor. In the Philippines, my previous studies (Recio, 2010; 2014; 2015) have shown how some NGOs act as intermediaries in advancing the rights of street vendors. Intermediaries serve as conduits between marginalized groups and the more powerful actors like state officials. They often link local struggles with the broader socio-political milieu (Kritsanaphan & Sajor, 2011) and enhance the urban poor's social capital

(Routray, 2014). They can include academics, politicians, journalists, and NGOs (Evans, 2002; Lee, 1998). In this paper, intermediaries are confined to those who connect Baclaran vendors to power structures and governance processes. These grassroots intermediaries consist of local political leaders and vendor organizers. I will present later how these intermediaries undermine and/or introduce change in Baclaran's unequal socio-spatial relations.

I view local intermediaries as key actors in what I have called "grassroots democratic entanglements" (Recio, 2018), which possess progressive and regressive democratic elements as well as conflicting motives or routines in a context of entrenched inequality and informality. Grassroots democratic entanglements are grounded in two strands of scholarly literature. One is the literature on grassroots agency in which a running thread underscores the contingent and context-specific nature of grassroots initiatives. This argument resonates with Chatterjee's (2004) politics of the governed, Honwana's (2008) strategic and tactical agencies, Kerkvliet's (2009) everyday politics, Musoni's (2010) adaptive resistance, and Bayat's (2013) non-movement of the dispossessed. The other stream of thought stems from Quimpo's (2005) contested democracy and Caldeira and Holston's (1999) disjunctive democracy. While Quimpo has emphasized the importance of grassroots struggle in Philippine history, Caldeira and Holston have pointed out how actually-existing democracies in the Global South are diverse, uneven, and contain contradictory elements. Thus, examining grassroots democratic entanglements entails looking at how grassroots actions might constitute resistance and coping strategies while being attentive to factors that impede transformative collective action in a democratic context. In the empirical discussion, I will illustrate how the roles and routines of local intermediaries are embedded in grassroots democratic entanglements. In the next section, I present the case study area and research methodology.

Studying Baclaran street vending

The findings in this paper are part of a qualitative research that interrogates urban governance and informality issues in the Baclaran vending district. I employed the case study as a research strategy to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1994). It has allowed me to understand complex social phenomena and explain what has transpired and how it occurred (Duminy et al., 2014). While the case study has received criticism on its supposed inability to produce scientific generalization, it is generalizable to theoretical

propositions and not to populations or universes (Yin, 2014). A case study does not represent a sampling unit and the researcher's goal is to shed light on some theoretical concepts/principles or analytic generalization (Yin, 2014). In this paper, analytic generalization pertains to empirical themes on the roles of grassroots intermediaries in Baclaran's informal trading.

Baclaran district (see Figure 2) refers to the area occupied by informal hawkers, encompassing one barangay[1] in Parañaque (Barangay Baclaran) and five barangays in Pasay (Barangays 77, 78, 79, 145, and 146). The 2015 Philippine census reveals that 38,306 residents live in these six barangays.
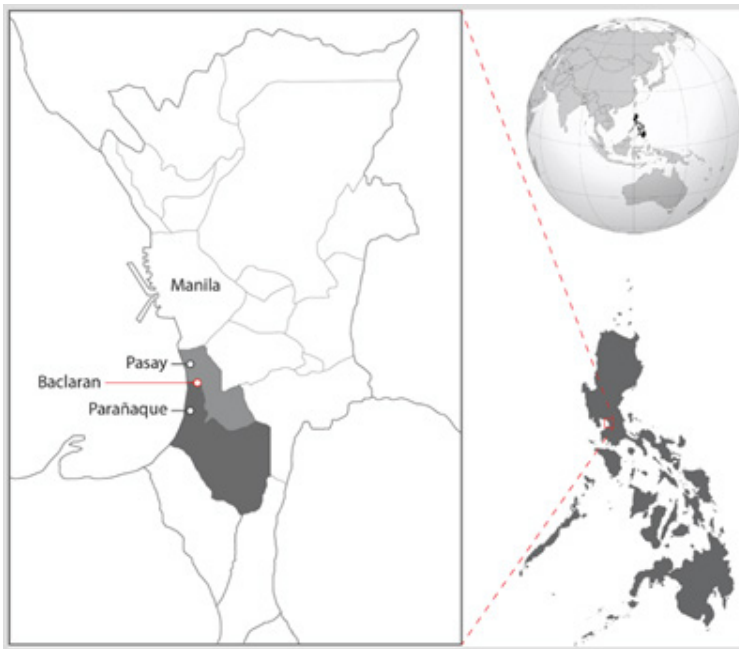
Source: Author

Figure 1 – Baclaran borders Pasay and Parañaque Cities in Metro Manila

Studying "informal" livelihoods is fraught with empirical ambiguities that elude neat conceptual categorizations and methodological approaches. Even the ways of collecting data involve ethical considerations as some street vendors thrive on learned habits that evade the state's watchful gaze. Although this poses challenges to urban scholars—who want to lend voice to marginalized groups—academic work can still be a vital tool for

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[1]Barangay is the smallest political administrative unit in the Philippines with elected executive and legislative officials.

articulating issues that are often muted in the government's cost-benefit calculations. Given these considerations, I used multiple data gathering methods to examine the views and experiences of those involved in urban informality: document review, in-depth interviews (55 respondents), focus groups discussions (20 participants), life-history accounts (7 vendors), and repeated site observations (between February 2015 and February 2017).

Interview respondents—chosen through purposive, quota, and snowball approaches—included: a) national and local government officials, b) members and leaders of organized vendors, and c) unorganized vendors. Three FGDs took place involving vendors who were not part of the interviews. FGD participants, identified through the snowball approach, comprised the following: a) members and leaders of vendor groups; b) unorganized vendors with varied religious affiliations; and c) unorganized Muslim vendors. Lastly, life-history entailed chronicling the narratives of seven vendors—five women and two men, with different backgrounds and who became part of the conducted interviews. I used the Nvivo software in coding and analyzing key themes from written materials, transcripts, and field notes. In what follows, I examine some empirical threads on how grassroots intermediaries broker socio-spatial ties between vendors and state authorities.

Baclaran street vendors

If you don't allow street vendors to sell, it is tantamount to killing them. They sell to earn a living; their family members depend on vending. They get their food from vending. (Myra[2] , a stallholder)

The statement above captures the precarious claim of many urban poor on the right to livelihood. It is a common sentiment among Baclaran vendors. Informal vendors began occupying Baclaran streets in the 1950s, and their number started rising in the 1980s. At that time, hawkers were using carts, *bilao* (a round native woven container), and small pieces of cloth to display their wares. They were on the roads near the Baclaran Church. Julie, an old vendor leader, shared how hawkers have multiplied over time, "It's because we were allowed by the mayor, the Mayor of Pasay… It seemed related to politics."

Different estimates on the current number of Baclaran vendors abound. Local officials say there are 1,000 to 3,000. Vendor leaders peg it

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[2]All the names that appear in this paper are pseudonyms I have used to protect the research participants' identity.

at 1,500 to 2,000. My own repeated calculations using a digital tally counter reveal over 1,500 semi-fixed stalls and ambulant hawkers during ordinary days and almost 4,000 on peak days (Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday) and during Bermonths[3] (September-December).

Vendors put up semi-fixed kiosks (see Figure 2) or roam around four Baclaran road networks: Taft Avenue Extension, Harrison-Quirino Avenue, Redemptorist Road, and Roxas Boulevard Service Road. They sell clothes, shoes, housewares, toys, gadgets, street-food, fresh fruits and vegetables, among others (see Figure 3). As vendors occupy streets, they generate an urban environment that makes people think they are a homogenous group with common needs. Yet, as what has been observed in other contexts (Etemadi, 2004; Bhowmik, 2005; Recio, 2010), Baclaran vendors are heterogeneous with diverse interests, issues, and relations.

Figure 2: Vendors with semi-fixed stalls in front of shopping malls

In terms of mobility, two types of vendors occupy the Baclaran spaces. The first consists of ambulant vendors who use *bilao,* carts, steel panels, and plastic bags (see Figure 4), which they easily pack up when there is eviction. Dubbed as *"haging"* or "sniper," some of these unorganized vendors are mobile; others occupy certain "territories" they have marked off using electric posts, building facades, and street lines.

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[3]On ordinary days, vendors earn between PhP 100.00 (US $2.17) and PhP 500.00 (US $10.9). On peak days, they earn over PhP 500.00 (US $10.9) a day; a few of them even take home around PhP 3,000.00 (US $65.22).
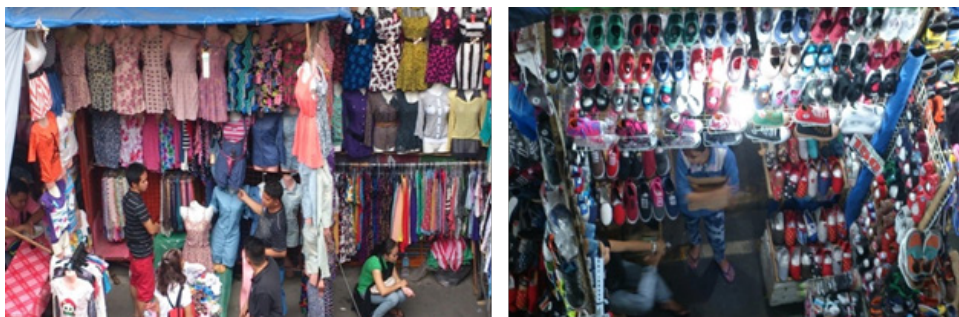
Figure 3: Baclaran street products

Figure 4: Ambulant hawkers in Baclaran

Figure 5: Vendors under the LRT1 rail track

A second group comprises hawkers who have semi-fixed stalls[4]. They can be considered organized in that they have leaders who coordinate with local state officials. Equipped with informally-granted permits from the local governments, many of their kiosks (see Figure 5) have been informally-built while some were installed as part of a local government's livelihood programs. In some areas, the presence of semi-fixed stalls has left only about a two-meter-wide space for the pedestrians and slow-moving vehicles. The congested space is under the LRT Baclaran station.

Mobility is also linked to security of vending spaces. The itinerant hawkers are less secure than those with temporary kiosks who have political ties. No less than the city mayor is their key ally. As Jason, a local government staff, narrated: "If there's a vendor who is a relative of a Barangay official, that official will go to the Mayor. Then, the Mayor will instruct us to allow [the vendor/s]. We cannot do anything. It's the instruction of the Mayor." This statement illustrates how vendors occupy Baclaran streets and nurture tenuous ties with local government officials. Two grassroots players help vendors grapple with Baclaran's precarious environment. They are examined in the following section.

Baclaran's grassroots intermediaries: Brokering amid informality

While street vendors often operate in political society (Chatterjee, 2004), an engagement space mostly created by those on the margins of power, some of them use the available spaces within formal governance structures. Others transcend the limits of legal norms and embrace "informal" relations that enable them to earn a living. These formal and informal channels are sustained by grassroots intermediaries: the local political leaders and the vendor organizers. What follows presents how these intermediaries operate in Baclaran.

Local political leaders

In Baclaran, local political leaders or operators are usually part of the electoral machinery of local government officials or politicians vying for state positions. They sometimes occupy appointive positions in the city or barangay bureaucracy. Some act as Barangay Intelligence Officer (BIO) and Barangay Intelligence Support (BIS)[5] volunteers who gather information

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[4]A vendor typically owns one stall. The exceptions to this are the leaders and old vendors who have occupied the streets since the 1980s and acquired more than one stall over the years.

[5]BIO and BIS volunteers are informally mobilized as part of an ad hoc electoral machinery of incumbent local state officials and/or politicians. They operate during the 45-day local campaign period until the election day.

on the electoral support of politicians in barangays. They help strengthen the latter's political base during election season. In exchange, some BIS ask their political patrons to allow some people they endorse to sell on the streets. Jenny, a vendor and a BIS, admitted that she can also facilitate the release of confiscated products after an eviction. "If someone's products got confiscated, we can get them back. They [vendors] just need to approach a BIO who is part of our network."

Local official, Jason, acknowledged the presence of this informal channel and linked it to the rising number of Muslim vendors.

> *Some of them [Muslim vendors] got involved in politics. [They have become] barangay leaders, political leaders of the Mayor… So, that's the problem… they use the political leverage. We are trying to be non-partisan in the [Anti-vending Ordinance] implementation. But some people within the city hall tell us we should be less strict with the vendors since they are also our voters.*

Jess, a political leader for local politicians, confirmed this arrangement.

> *We got in touch with leaders of Muslim residents who got evicted from their settlements. We helped them register as barangay residents in Pasay. This assistance forged a relationship between political operators and Muslim leaders who have later on capitalized on their growing number as an electoral leverage with politicians vying for government positions.*

Armed with this political influence, the Muslim leaders have gained concessions from local officials such as an access to vending spaces for Muslim residents. The same strategy has occurred in Parañaque. As city official, Krisha, explained, "Since many vendors have been there for a long time, they got [their voter's] registration there. Their purpose is to have a link to the barangay, to the city [government]."

Lastly, there have been instances when political leaders link up with vendors to undermine the latter's collective initiatives. As vendor organizer, Leo, shared,

> *We were coordinating with the [Parañaque] Mayor [for vendors' social protection programs]. But they [political operators] were doing something else, [an] underground [move], involving other vendors. But their leaders were not vendors, they were political operators. They slowly disbanded [the vendors'] federation. They would say there will be clearing operation.*

> *During the clearing [operation], the political operator would intervene. [S/he would say], "These [vendors] are [our] political allies. Do not disturb their area." The vendors witnessed that and [they thought] these [political operators] have power. Some vendors began to cling [to the operators].*

Belinda, a vendor organizer, also recalled how local government officials undermined vendors' organizing efforts.

> *They [local government] did a divide-and-rule strategy. [In Baclaran], they appointed new leaders to be able to control the vending spaces. If you're an ordinary member, you would simply follow even if it's difficult. You must obey otherwise you would not have an income… One leader was asserting her leadership. She was still the president, but they could not come up with decisions. The local government was disrupting the organizational process.*

Hector, an academic who has worked with vendor groups, offered an explanation on this political move.

> *It occurs because there are parties who want to maintain the situation… [T]he government is the main player who does that… Why? Isn't that a divide-and-rule [strategy]? They know that once the urban poor gets organized, they [erring state officials] will fall; so, their strategy is to disrupt the process. It's a divide-and-rule [strategy]… [T]hey initiate and nurture it.*

The insights above illustrate how local political leaders capitalize on their access to governance structures by serving as brokers between the powerful and the marginalized. While they may have helped vendors gain access to streets, they also feed on the latter's insecure conditions. In other words, they act simultaneously as a vendors' conduit to power structures and as a dominant players' instrument of control over the vulnerable groups. To a certain extent, these political leaders operate in the "realm of calculated self-interests" (Osella, 2014) by using their socio-political capital to satisfy certain wishes of their political bosses, respond to the urgent needs of the marginalized, and advance their own interests. This echoes Routray's (2014) observation on how some intermediaries employ skills and knowledge to gain power and respect in a neighborhood. At other times, however, these intermediaries, like Baclaran's local political operators, are denounced as money-makers and cunning manipulators.

Vendor organizers

Besides the local political leaders, the role of vendor organizers needs to be examined to understand the complexity of relationships among different groups and the nature of collective action in Baclaran. While political leaders are tied to state officials and politicians, vendor organizers are part of informal worker coalitions and advocacy NGOs pushing for reform-oriented socio-economic agenda for hawkers.

Belinda, a vendor organizer and former sectoral representative in the National Anti-Poverty Commission – Workers in the Informal Sector Council (NAPC-WISC)[6] , shared their approach.

> *[Our approach] was issue-based organizing... We wanted them [Baclaran vendors] to articulate their own issues because they know their situation better. We don't want to represent them. We would only facilitate their representation… We touched base with them… Then they [started] joining us [in WIS Council meetings] and even in rallies. [There were] 48 organizations, [which] we got registered at SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] and DOLE [Department of Labor and Employment] so they could be [recognized] as workers' associations.*

When a series of evictions took place, Belinda was at the forefront of mediating work.

> *They [Baclaran vendors] became more active [during the evictions]. We had media coverage… We were on the streets until 2:00 AM when there were demolitions… My approach then was to bring in the [national] agencies such as the DOLE, the PCUP [Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor], the DSWD [Department of Social Welfare and Development].*

Apart from dealing with national government agencies, vendor organizers helped vendors engage with local governments. Leo, a vendor leader-organizer and former NAPC-WISC member, explained some of their activities in Baclaran from around 2002 to 2004.

> *We helped them create a channel to the LGU [local government unit of Parañaque]… We engaged in an LGU conference ...We invited them to meetings with the NAPC, LGUs for them to explain their situation on the*

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[6]The vendor organizers who used to work with the NAPC–WISC were technically not part of the state bureaucracy as government workers. They were sectoral leaders who represented informal worker groups pushing for social inclusionary policies and programs.

> *ground… Some LGUs sent their [Mayor's] Chief of Staff, which helped us get an access to the [Mayor's] office. Sometimes, during the WISC meetings, we invited vendor leaders and city officials… One outcome of these dialogues was the formation of an Informal Sector Desk in some local governments…*

In Parañaque, the LGU engagement produced two local regulations on informal workers' welfare. Executive Order (EO) No. 02-04 (Series of 2002) establishes a local Task Force that will promote and protect the informal workers in the city by identifying programs that address the issues of their issues. Meanwhile, City Council Ordinance No 826 (Series of 2003), which builds on EO 02-04, identifies the local government offices constituting the Task Force. These offices/officials include the City Council Committee on Social Services, Planning Officer, Health Officer, Social Welfare and Development Officer, and Public Market Office, among others. While these two regulatory instruments provide key steps in responding to informal workers' issues, there is limited evidence on whether the Task Force has undertaken any meaningful programs for Baclaran vendors since its establishment.

Although the LGU engagement produced some encouraging outcomes, the vendor organizers like Leo were aware of the need to navigate the local political dynamics.

> *When we started, they [vendors] had different groups. They said they wanted to form a [vendors'] federation for the whole Baclaran area… We challenged them to continue forming the federation and we supported them in dealing with the barangay and city governments… [We focused] on what we call social dialogue, social insurance, social protection... security of workplace... There's nothing about "politics."*

Leo's point on "politics" refers to how they avoided confronting the political leaders/operators in Baclaran. As he clarified, "I told them (vendors) 'whatever discussion you have with others, it's different [from our talks]. Let's concentrate on our agenda. I won't meddle in your negotiations with them.'" This evasive tactic stems from the entrenched patronage relations in the area. Maura, a long-time vendor organizer, described how she experienced dealing with the political relations in Baclaran. "At one point, it became a matter of life and death... I remember, before in Pasay area, our group was being monitored… Some vendors even whispered to us, 'Maura, please take care, some eyes are watching you.' That's the situation." Leo and Maura's concerns are linked to the divide-and-rule strategy, as previously discussed, which has eroded democratic collective action initiatives in Baclaran.

Based on the foregoing account, vendor organizers help Baclaran hawkers in two ways: as facilitators of social dialogues and as channels for policy advocacy. They were with vendors when a series of "clearing operations" occurred, creating channels with key government agencies. As vendor organizers brokered for democratic politics and policy change, they had to contend with local politics in the area—apparent in the divide-and-rule strategy. In addition, they needed to manage the resistance of other local stakeholders and the internal dynamics in their own organizations. The subsequent paragraphs expound on the last two issues that vendor organizers had to face.

Besides dealing with local political operators, vendor organizers have to consider the role of the Baclaran Vendors' Development Cooperative (BVDC) in providing economic resources to some vendors. Established in 1976 by 250 street vendors to address the usurious lending arrangements with loan sharks, the BVDC now requires a business permit if one wishes to apply. Thus, they have only accepted hawkers as associate members who can only avail of certain loan packages.

For old vendor, Julie, it is beneficial to be a BVDC member: "Yes, it [BVDC] is a big help. We have savings and shares in the cooperative." Hannah, another vendor, agreed but pointed out a concern: "I'm a member of the Baclaran Cooperative. I pay them daily [for my past loan]. [But] during lean season, I could hardly pay." Apart from the payment issue, Myra, a former street vendor and now a stallholder, raised another concern: "I used to be a Cooperative member; but I left because it is not really an association that protects [vendors' welfare]. It's more about loans, livelihood stuff. It is not focused on promoting the interests of vendors [beyond economic concerns]."

Mayeth, a social worker who tried organizing Baclaran vendors, explained the deeper implications of Myra's concern.

> *Before, we tried to organize [Baclaran vendors] but it was difficult because the cooperative is strong… They reacted adversely… because our approach [to vendor organizing] is [it should be seen as] a mass struggle… [We believe], they [vendors] must assert their rights and exert pressure on the local government to address their problems… Their traditional approach is not like that. They (BVDC) are not after the security of tenure… Still, the members keep paying. Yes, they have big [financial] asset but it's purely economic. It is not concerned with governance; they don't think about how to be political [about other issues] … The [vendors] are fine with it as long*

as they receive annual dividends. Of course, the government likes it because they [vendors] do not resist."

Mayeth's explanation captures the constraint of BVDC's economic-oriented engagement with vendors. It reveals the Cooperative's limited role in the broader local political relations. As BVDC leader, Nelson, admitted, "We are an accredited NGO [by one barangay in Baclaran] so we attend their meetings… But we don't want to interfere when it comes to implementation [of policies on vendors] since we know how complex the situation is."

Intersecting with local concerns, the internal dynamics within the vendor organizers' institutional affiliation contributed to the decline of reform-oriented collective action in Baclaran. As vendor organizer, Belinda, noted, "After our term [at NAPC-WIS Council], they [new leaders] focused on other things they wanted to pursue." This change in priority reflects the wider sentiment within many Philippine labor unions, which focus on formal employees. Belinda and Mayeth, members of two of the country's largest trade union federations, have been struggling even within their own labor groups to justify their engagement with informal workers. In Belinda's words, "They [labor unions] support the informal sector but on a project-based arrangement."

The preceding discussion points out how vendor organizers, serving as intermediaries, engaged with government units to push for vendors' welfare. They capitalized on existing formal spaces and created new paths for state engagement. Yet, the local power relations and the internal dynamics within their groups proved too much to sustain their efforts.

Conclusion

Street vending is a precarious urban livelihood. Vendors endure harassment and eviction resulting from hostile and unresponsive state policies. In Baclaran, land use plans are notably inattentive to informal vendors. This concern underscores how the urban planning process often "seeks order in simple mappable patterns, when it is really hiding in extremely complex social organization" (Webber, 1963, p. 54). Such a depoliticized approach fails to consider how grassroots players are entangled in messy socio-spatial relations. In this paper, I have shown how local brokering operates in a context of entrenched informality and inequality. The power asymmetries manifest in a tapestry of ties where grassroots intermediaries generate informal engagement channels and/or employ the spaces afforded by formal state rules.

On the one hand, some vendors and political leaders engage in fragile political bonds with local officials. Their link to the Mayor's Office rests on one agenda: temporary access to streetscape. While this may appear particularistic for outsiders, it is a fundamental agenda for many vendors. On the other hand, the narratives by vendor organizers show the potential of hawkers, when organizing assistance is sustained, to resist and break the cycle of uncertain relations. They formed a federation, joined rallies, and attended meetings with government agencies. Alas, their collective action encountered fierce resistance from political leaders and local officials. In other words, while local political leaders sustain clientelist ties, vendor organizers enhance the civil component of citizenship (Caldeira & Holston, 1999), leading to a fragmented urbanity in which citizens interact differentially with state authorities to claim (the rights of/ to) urban citizenship. This phenomenon reveals how urban citizenship is not simply a set of laws delineating proper behavior; it is more importantly about social relations on the ground (Hammett, 2017). The various spaces for political and policy engagements generate uneven experiences of urban citizenship. As the street traders fight off eviction and inhabit contested sidewalks to earn a living, they also learn to engage with local state officials not as rights-bearing citizens, but as a client or a part of a network hinged on mutual exchanges and loyalty.

Indeed, there seems to be a paradox in the roles grassroots intermediaries play in Baclaran informal trading, where they act as: a) a conduit to power structures; b) an instrument of control; c) a facilitator of social dialogues; and d) a channel for policy advocacy. These somewhat contradictory roles demonstrate how vendors rely on conflicting motives and routines, embracing social inclusionary agenda as well as tenuous clientelistic ties. This is inevitable in a contested environment where players simultaneously collaborate and compete to maintain their insecure access to coveted workplaces. Amid a deeply unequal socio-spatial environment, local brokering may stifle resistance and, at the same time, inspire developmental aspirations. In this sense, the empirical insights show how political brokering between informal vendors and state authorities is embedded in grassroots democratic entanglements in which cooperation, contestation, and co-optation generate a mosaic of problem-solving strategies undertaken by marginalized groups. Put another way, the Baclaran case reveals how grassroots democratic entanglements are both an offshoot and a driving force of diverse and uneven experiences of urban citizenship, rights, and development.

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