**The Entrenched City:**

**Institutional Fragmentations and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai**

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Introduction: A Mansion in the Slum

The narrow lanes and pathways through Dharavi’s densely packed central neighborhoods open up in front of Aneesh Shankar’s house. A flower garden and a courtyard—seemingly out of place in a part of the city where nearly every bit of space is used to either house someone, make something, or sell something—give way to a freshly painted two-story bungalow with a brick-shingled roof. The door to the house, an almost three-inch thick piece of intricately carved teak wood, is the building's most striking feature and its most conspicuous display of the owner’s wealth. On the other side of the door, the home's interior is equally striking, but more for its sparseness than for any of its particular features or furnishings. One rarely finds this much open space in Dharavi.

Aneesh Shankar ushered me inside and into his formal living room. He wore a plain gray t-shirt and a brightly colored *lungi*, a sarong-like skirt worn by South Indian men. Looking as if he had just woken from a nap, he was visibly relieved when his wife entered with a tray of South Indian coffee and sweet biscuits. After just one sip of coffee, he looked refreshed, and launched, practically unprompted, into a story he appeared to have told a hundred times: Dharavi’s early history and the role played by his community, the *Adi Dravidas*, in its economic and social life. A lifelong Dharavi resident and President of the Bombay South Indian Adi Dravida Mahajan Sangh (ADMS), one of the settlement's oldest social organizations, Shankar is both de facto historian and official spokesperson for Dharavi’s long-established South Indian dalit, or untouchable, communities. As we sipped coffee in his comfortable living room, Shankar relayed the history of migration to Dharavi from his native place of Tiruneveli, in the southern part of Tamil Nadu. Since the 1930s and 1940s, several waves of migrants have come to Dharavi to escape caste persecution and gain secure employment in the expanding tanning and leather manufacturing industries. His father was among the first wave, settling in Dharavi in the late 1930s and sending for his new bride, Aneesh’s mother, soon after that. By the 1950s, the senior Shankar had built his own factory and was employing dozens of newer migrants driven by a similar set of push and pull factors. As he relayed the almost universal immigrant story of persecution, opportunity, adversity, and upward mobility—but with a distinctly Dharavi flavor—Shankar's tale also conveyed equally classic narratives of urbanization, enclave formation, and city building. Just one of more than a dozen ethnic, caste, and religious communities who have settled in Dharavi over the past century, the Adi Dravidas formed organizations and political parties, built schools and temples, constructed homes and factories, and, in doing so, helped build the settlement of Dharavi and city of Bombay.

From inside Aneesh Shankar's spacious bungalow, Dharavi looked much different than slums are supposed to look. It looked more permanent, possessing a dynamic stability that comes with *pucca*,[[1]](#footnote-1) or well built, buildings, economic vitality, and established social institutions. As Shankar described his family’s role in Dharavi’s leather industry and later showed me his 30,000 square foot factory adjacent to his home, it seemed wealthier and less marginal to the economic life of India's richest and most global city. From here, the slum did not seem to be quite synonymous with poverty, as it is often treated in both popular narratives and dominant scholarly accounts, and Shankar did not resemble the “surplus humanity” depicted in these writings: excluded, exploited, and expendable (Davis 2006). From this vantage point, Dharavi, and the experiences of at least some of its residents, seemed to complicate the typical accounts of the slum.

The now notorious settlement of Dharavi—immortalized in several recent magazine cover stories[[2]](#footnote-2) and in the popular film *Slumdog Millionaire*, which includes several iconic shots from the slum—was a prominent site in Mumbai’s social landscape before it attracted the attention of film producers and magazine editors. The 535-acre area of Dharavi once contained a small fishing village and, in the eighteenth century, housed a small and relatively insignificant British fort. It made the transition to a tannery town, a working class enclave, and later to a slum, over the course of the twentieth century as Bombay grew into a major industrial city. The combination of accessible yet difficult to develop marshy land and limited administrative oversight fueled the settlement’s growth as a site of unregulated industries and informal housing, particularly in leather tanning and garment manufacturing that drew thousands of families like Aneesh Shankar’s. Intersecting webs of governance and political power, traversing the often-opaque lines between formal and informal and legal and illegal, fortified the bourgeoning settlement and brought its residents into broader networks of political and economic power.

Despite a series of slum schemes attempted once the State of Maharashtra enacted the *Slum Areas Act of 1971*, the government has invested very little in the settlement’s basic infrastructure, and Dharavi is bursting at the seams with its expanding population and thriving (but highly polluting) industries. The area today houses upwards of a million residents (although population estimates vary widely) and almost innumerable industrial and commercial enterprises in tens of thousands of buildings of varying quality—from the most *kutcha* structures in the marshy settlements of Rajiv Gandhi Nagar along the Mahim Creek to Aneesh Shankar’s *pucca* bungalow in Dharavi’s interior neighborhoods. Most of these buildings are technically illegal constructions, built by squatters on government-owned land. Although some communities and families—including the Shankars—claim to have legal titles to their property, the validity of most of these documents remains in dispute.

Once located on the metropolitan fringe, decades of suburban sprawl and municipal agglomeration have placed Dharavi in the geographic center of Mumbai. Its central location and accessibility to the city’s rail and highway routes has generated developer interest in the settlement and has prompted numerous government initiatives to “solve the Dharavi problem.” In fact, every few decades, ambitious, “transformative” schemes have been proposed to redevelop Dharavi’s infrastructure and housing stock. Yet despite the initial enthusiasm and apparent government commitment to each effort, these proposals failed to garner the requisite financial backing or political support and were left unimplemented or dramatically scaled back.

In February 2004, the Maharashtra Government launched another effort to redevelop Dharavi. This two-billion dollar project to bring consortia of international and domestic developers to the area to construct new infrastructures, housing, and office buildings for lease or sale on Mumbai's highly valued property markets has aligned with broader imperatives to attract international capital and global prestige to India and to its commercial capital of Mumbai. This time, my informants told me, it was going to happen. Aneesh Shankar, for example, recalled, “My father told me since childhood that Dharavi will develop. And now it will develop . . . And if it’s done right,” he added, “it will be good for the people.” An even greater sense of optimism was expressed at the project's launch, as bold pronouncements were made that Mumbai would become slum-free, Dharavi would be transformed into a hub of innovation, and the world would look to India for new models of development. But nine years later, construction has yet to begin, political support for the project has waned, and investor and developer interest, once enthusiastic, has dwindled. With the fate of the project unclear, Dharavi remains intact. Its stability is rooted in Dharavi’s complex political economy of labor, land, and infrastructure that helps to explain both why domestic and global property speculators have descended upon the iconic settlement and how its residents, political representatives, and community leaders like Shankar are, at least for now, keeping them at bay.

Dharavi’s durability seems to contradict the dominant understanding of the effects of capital—and particularly global capital—on urban space, which tends to emphasize its obliterating character. This understanding can be traced to Marx and Engels’ (1978: 476) classic statement from the *Communist Manifesto* that “all that is solid melts in to air, all that is holy profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.” The widely quoted passage continues that “all old established industries have been destroyed or are being destroyed” with the expansion of the world market. This destruction, Marx and Engels noted, sends social and spatial relations into flux, sweeping away once fixed, fast-frozen institutions. This assessment of modernity has been cited extensively and applied by Marxist geographers and critical urban theorists to the contemporary urban condition. These contemporary theorists have conceived of the built environment of the global or postmodern city, similarly to Marx and Engels’ characterization of the modern city, as “friction, fragmentation, collage, and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos” (Harvey 1990, p. 98). Although a compelling description that captures an important set of dynamics, this perspective on the contemporary urban landscape fails to account for the actually existing durabilities and the solidity of structures that refuse to melt.

This paper uses the case of Dharavi and the ongoing Dharavi Redevelopment Project to explore the relationship between change and stability, ephemerality and entrenchment, in the context of global urban development. It explores how Dharavi and its seemingly marginal residents have held on, for over a century, to some of the most valuable land in this dramatically unequal city. But beyond Dharavi, it seeks to explain how cities and their residents, more generally, are responding to the potentially obliterating and totalizing forces of global capital. While these forces are locally contingent, mediated by distinctive local institutions and forms of resistance, similar sets of processes are underway in cities across the globe, from public housing transformations in Chicago, to Olympic stadium constructions in Rio de Janeiro, to new town planning throughout China. In each of these places, homes being demolished and residents are being dispossessed, as networks of global investors and local actors build new structures and create the demand to fill them. Yet it is likely that even in these places, more remains durable than prevailing wisdom or our existing theories suggest.

Globalization and Slums

While it may be impossible to identify an informal settlement that is representative of slums in general, Dharavi is an importantly distinctive space. The settlement's size and the diversity of its populations, activities, and industries distinguish it from almost all of Mumbai’s other slum settlements, most of which house a few dozen or a few hundred families in hutments or shanties built along railway tracks or highways. Its size and scale place Dharavi in the category of settlements Mike Davis has called “megaslums,” which includes other iconic settlements like Kibera in Nairobi, Tondo in Manila, Orangi Town in Karachi, and Cité Soleil in Port-au-Prince. These megaslums are all distinctive spaces in their own right, but the economic and political power that their formal and informal leaders have amassed, which I posit contributes to their durability, requires an analytic insertion into this category. In many of these settlements, as in Dharavi today, the longstanding interests that have protected the spaces, their residents, and their mostly unregulated activities, are facing a new and more powerful set of opponents, backed by both global capital and national state power. As urban property markets have expanded and demand for new commercial construction has tightened, the land on which many of these slums sit has become a potentially valuable resource and a land grab is now underway.

This characterization of slums as the newest strategic site of a global land grab is rooted in the assumption that globalization and neoliberalization are having new or transformative effects on slums and on the experience of residential informality. Yet while, as urban theorist Nazer AlSayyad (2004: 15) points out, it may be “easy to argue that globalization and liberalization are today giving rise to new geographies...the relationship between globally driven liberalization and locally based informality is often ambiguous.” Some writers, such as Mike Davis (2006), posit a strong relationship, asserting that while globalization may not exactly be *causing* informality and the emergence of slums, it is certainly contributing to their planetary proliferation. This “strong program” of global slum studies suggests that as countries throughout the global south adopted structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and early 1990s, they were compelled to shift resources away from both rural employment schemes and state supported industrial development. As domestic markets became flooded with foreign agricultural surpluses, displaced farmers and peasants migrated to cities to seek new opportunities. But with the Washington Consensus pressuring these national governments to redress perceived urban biases in their political economies by halting industrial subsidies and lifting trade protections, the industrial economies that had once absorbed these new urbanites had also been decimated. Davis refers to this double bind as “urbanization without industrialization,” explaining that:

Since the mid-1980s, the great industrial cities of the South—Bombay, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Belo Horizonte, and São Paulo—have all suffered massive plant closures and tendential deindustrialization. Elsewhere, urbanization has been more radically de-coupled from industrialization, even from development *per se* and, in sub-Saharan Africa, from that *sine qua non* of urbanization, rising agricultural productivity. (Davis 2006, 13)

The dislocated urban poor have been incorporated into the informal economy and have come to reside in slums, residential repositories of this “surplus humanity.”

While Davis makes this case persuasively, his critics point out that globalization and liberalization, even the structural adjustment programs prescribed by the IMF and World Bank, are contingent and highly localized processes (Gilbert 2004, Ong 2011).[[3]](#footnote-3) Alan Gilbert (2004: 52), for example, makes the important observation that “what governments say they’re doing [with respect to liberalization] is not the same thing as what they often do.” While officially adopted policies may resemble the liberal orthodoxy of the New Economic Program, actually existing neoliberalisms may be more loosely coupled from these structural adjustments. This recognition demonstrates the importance of supplementing Davis’ broad analysis of these processes with more place-specific accounts of globalization’s effects on the slum.

Neoliberal globalization in the Indian case is nothing if not ambiguous, and the notion of loose coupling aptly describes the disjuncture between discourse and practice in the regulation of many economic sectors. 1991 is generally identified as the watershed year in which India was “structurally adjusted,” adopting the mix of regulatory and monetary reforms typically required to qualify for an IMF-backed loan. Liberal advocates like Jagdish Bhagwati and Gurcharan Das describe “the golden summer” of 1991 as profoundly transformative (Bhagwati and Panagariya 2012, Das 2000), but most assessments are more tempered, noting that India actually began dismantling its system of industrial licensing at least a decade earlier and continued to introduce reforms more gradually throughout the 1990s and 2000s (McCartney 2010, Nayar 2001, Nayar 2006). As much as any specific reforms, however, liberalization entailed an ideological shift, both reflecting and producing the sense that India had become global.

The idea of newly globalized India could be seen in the exuberance of the country’s urban property markets in the immediate aftermath of liberalization. As documented by anthropologist Llerena Searle (2010), this perception was created in part by Indian real estate firms working with global investors to generate interest in India’s property sector and direct flows of speculative capital to Indian cities. Characterized by some as “casino capitalism,” property prices in the commercial capital of Mumbai skyrocketed after liberalization, rising four to six times between 1991 and 1996, and fell dramatically after this peak (Nijman 2000). While some observers were quick to attribute the volatility to economic liberalization, and particularly to the entrance of foreign real estate speculators into India’s newly opened real estate markets, as well as to multinational corporations clamoring for commercial space in the city, geographer Jan Nijman (2000) cautioned that the actual explanations were more complex. While acknowledging that economic liberalization, including the ideological shifts that accompanied the national level reforms, created new demands for Mumbai real estate, Nijman found that local land use regulations and continued restrictions on foreign ownership and investment in real estate resulted in pent up demand and the rising prices. It was less liberalization and deregulation and more the continuation of regulation in this sector that produced Mumbai’s property price bubble in this period. The context, meanwhile, continued to shift in the 1990s and 2000s, as the property and development sectors were gradually liberalized and markets were shaped by broad reaching networks of local and non-local actors (Searle 2010). As Nijman and Searle’s inquiries into India’s post-liberalization urban property markets demonstrate, local political factors shaped these conditions as much as globalization did throughout this period.

Amidst these shifts, Marxist geographers like David Harvey and the late Neil Smith were beginning to note evidence of gentrification and the dislocation of the urban poor as a consequence of this new real estate activity. In a cautious statement on the emergence of gentrification as “a global urban strategy,” Smith (2002) acknowledged that neoliberal globalization can have quite contradictory consequences for large, densely populated cities like Mumbai, resulting in both the bypassing or uneven inclusion of cities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia and the pooling of capital, often in the form of concentrated luxury housing, in some of their urban cores. Although still relatively rare, he noted that “gentrification as a process has rapidly descended the urban hierarchy” and could be found in a set of cities that included Mumbai (Smith 2002, 439).

David Harvey (2008: 35), meanwhile, has recently identified a similar process underway in Mumbai’s slums:

Dharavi, one of the most prominent slums in Mumbai, is estimated to be worth $2 billion. The pressure to clear it—for environmental and social reasons that mask the land grab—is mounting daily. Financial powers backed by the state push for forcible slum clearance, in some cases violently taking possession of terrain occupied for a whole generation. Capital accumulation through real-estate activity booms, since the land is acquired at almost no cost.

While not the first to characterize the ongoing Dharavi project as a land grab, Harvey situates these developments in his framework of “accumulation by dispossession;” and, in doing so, uses this case to demonstrate a broader shift away from capital accumulation through production and toward growth built on displacement and dispossession. Mike Davis, meanwhile, has referred to this process as “Haussmann in the Tropics,” where by “squatters and renters, and sometimes even small landlords, are routinely evicted with little ceremony or right of appeal” (Davis 2006, 99). He notes that while slum clearance has gone on in some places for generations, Davis, like Harvey and Smith, associates its intensification and geographic spread with the process of economic globalization underway since the early 1980s.

While these authors associate slum clearance and residential displacements with globalization and the workings of capitalism under conditions of neoliberalism, most scholars of urban India tend to ground their explanations of these processes in local politics, and particularly in the growing influence of middle class residents in urban affairs.[[4]](#footnote-4) Among these assertions that Indian cities may be “becoming bourgeois at last,”(Chatterjee 2004), Asher Ghertner (2011) has characterized the process as the “gentrification of the state.” “If gentrification consists of the usurpation of formerly lower-class spaces by the upper class,” Ghertner explains, then the middle-class “good governance” programs he researched, “achieve nothing less than the gentrification of state space, or of the channels of political participation more generally” (Ghertner 2011, 505).[[5]](#footnote-5) While most studies of this political usurping, including Partha Chatterjee’s (2004) now-classic framing, attribute this development to the heightened political consciousness and global ambitions of India’s new middle class, Ghertner identifies a series of institutional reconfigurations within the Indian state that have allowed this population to capture urban political agendas. But regardless of how urban India’s middle classes are acquiring the influence necessary to facilitate slum demolitions—and even, in one extreme case, to get away with murdering a presumed slum resident (Baviskar 2003)—this literature generally attributes the emerging geographies of informality more to internal political factors (even if those politics are rooted in global aspirations) than to neoliberal globalization.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Between abstract analyses of global capital and ground level considerations of India’s emerging urban politics sits Dharavi and the Dharavi Redevelopment Project. In order to understand the current efforts underway to transform the megaslum, the account presented here demonstrates that we must consider political and economic developments underway on multiple scales—along with the interactions between them—that include the machinations of global property investors, the liberal reformers in India’s central Planning Commission, the political party coalitions that govern at the state level, and the varied local actors struggling to get or retain their piece of the slum. While it is important not to overstate the effects of neoliberal globalization, including the regulatory reforms that presumably facilitated a rush of foreign investors into Mumbai’s newly liberalized land markets, neither should we overlook these developments and their potentially dramatic effects on the city.

The Right to Stay Put

Amidst these efforts to usurp urban space and appropriate, demolish, or transform the slum—whether with the tools of global capital, local politics, or a combination of both—counter movements to retain these spaces are also under way.[[7]](#footnote-7) These counter movements have been widely recognized among those writing on the Indian city, as well as in the larger fields of urban studies and social movements, as an opposing—although admittedly unequal—set of forces. Implicit in these writings—and often made quite explicit—is an engagement with Henri Lefebvre’s (1968) classic call for a “right to the city.” While primarily a scholarly frame, Lefebvre’s revolutionary demand to not just appropriate or retain city space but to also capture the tools or assemblages of city making (referred to in much of his writings as the *oeuvre)* has also become part of the activist repertoire in many parts of the world, particularly in urban based struggles in Latin America.[[8]](#footnote-8) An effective rallying cry, Lefebvre (1996 [1968]: 173-4) writes, “The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the *oeuvre*, to participation and *appropriation* (clearly distinct from the right to property) are implied in the right to the city” (emphasis in the original). Yet despite the widespread use of this framework to analyze urban claims making (and, at times, to make claims), mentions of Lefebvre are relatively scant in writings on Indian cities.[[9]](#footnote-9) Poor people’s politics and struggles for urban based rights in this region have tended to be understood as less sweeping, as a series of daily transgressions—some quite unconscious—that challenge existing configurations of space and power. These actions are more likely to be framed in terms of Asaf Bayat’s (1997, 2004) “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” than they are in Lefebvre’s language of the right to the city.

In much of the writing on Indian cities, the act of squatting, or illegal habitation, is understood as a potentially powerful counter movement. Within the frame of urban populism, Ananya Roy (2003: 145) uses “the broad rubric of ‘squatting’ to indicate an ensemble of informal and tenuous rights.” This rubric is employed—although perhaps less tentatively—by Solomon Benjamin (2007, 2008), in his recent writings on “occupancy urbanism.” Characterizing the occupation of potentially valuable urban property as a direct challenge to the interests of global capital, Benjamin (2008: 723-724) writes:

Master Plans designate large territories for development in higher-level policy documents, but in reality these territories remain ‘occupied’ by pre-existing settlements and see newer ones developing. ‘Occupancy’ refers not just to physical space but also to the appropriation of real estate surpluses made possible by the ‘embedding’ of municipal government into popular society. Much to the dismay of globalized financial institutions and large developers, this reflects the diversion of their potential profits into an economy of small firms.

This process, which Roy (2003) has also called “informal vesting,” undermines objectives of “accumulation by dispossession” both by resisting displacement and by subverting processes of capital accumulation.

Most of these scholars recognize that the question of whether these legal transgressions reflect deliberate acts of resistance is a complicated one. Roy (2004a: 165), for example, who examines the militant refusal of poor female commuters in Kolkata to purchase railway tickets as the usurpation of space, acknowledges that “these narratives of contestation are ultimately unable to transform the structural realities of the rural-urban interface.” Similarly, Nikhil Anand (2011: 557) has clarified that the establishment of illegal water connections in Mumbai’s slums should not be understood as resistance, but more tentatively “as politically mediated acts of unequal and inclusive settlement.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Despite these authors’ caution—resonating with Bayat’s (2004: 92) warning that these activities are carried out “not as a deliberate political act; [but rather] by the forces of necessity”—they still imbue the acts of encroachment, settlement, squatting, and illegal appropriation with a kind of political power, comparable to, but distinct from the more revolutionary claims for the right to the city.[[11]](#footnote-11)

These considerations of quiet acts of resistance are grounded in the recognition that the forms of politics and political engagement available to India’s urban poor are distinct from those available to the middle class and urban elite. These political disparities are made explicit in the distinction Partha Chatterjee draws between civil society and what he terms “political society.” Criticizing the imprecision with which political theorists have employed the concept of civil society, using it to describe practically every form of association outside of government, Chatterjee calls for a return to the classic understanding of “civil society as bourgeois society, in the sense used by Hegel and Marx” (Chatterjee 2004, 38). This concept, he maintains, is grounded in the liberal tradition, in which associations of citizens are endowed with equal rights ensured by a sovereign state. Although a broadly inclusive political ideal, he argues that civil society in India today refers only to “a small section of culturally equipped citizens” whose interactions with the state are shaped by the “normative values of modernity" (ibid, 41). The democratic politics available to the majority of Indians are more accurately captured in the concept of “political society.” Part of the welfare state tradition, political society refers to the associations of the population, many of which “transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work” (ibid, 40). While the state engages with civil society through the high ideals of liberalism, government agencies—and the NGOs acting on their behalf—administer to political society because of the “moral assertion of popular demands” (ibid, 41).

Noting that urban politics have been the almost exclusive property of political society for the past several decades, Chatterjee suggests that that the bourgeois revolution underway across urban India is amplifying the influence of civil society at the expense of the urban poor. While numerous researchers have found evidence for this position, documenting successful middle class movements to dismantle squatter settlements and evict illegal street vendors, others have noted that a more empowering set of political developments may also be under way in the neoliberalizing or globalizing Indian city. In a widely cited pair of articles, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2000, 2001) has identified a successful counter movement underway, which he terms “globalizing from below” or “grassroots globalization.” Bringing together “highly specific local, national, and regional groups on matters of equality, access, justice, and redistribution”(Appadurai 2000, 15), he highlights an alliance of Mumbai-based NGOs that are partnering “with other, more powerful actors—including the state, in its various levels and incarnations—to achieve their goals of gaining secure housing and urban infrastructure for the urban poor in Mumbai, in India, and beyond” (Appadurai 2001, 41). Through these partnerships, Appadurai argues, globally linked, but locally rooted, NGOs are helping to produce a kind of global urban democracy.

Despite what is basically an upbeat assessment of these developments, Appadurai (2000: 15) acknowledges some of the contradictions entailed in this type of politics, including the ways that such groups may at times be “uncomfortably complicit with the policies of the nation-state.” Roy (2009b), meanwhile, has presented a more critical assessment of some of the same groups, characterizing them not as democratic exemplars but as representative of a politics of “populist mediation.” Employing the lens of governmentality, Roy (2009b: 168) argues that this new type of politics produces “governable subjects and governable spaces,” and may even be helping facilitate urban renewal and the violent remaking of urban space. Despite this more critical assessment, numerous scholars have analyzed the growing influence of pro-poor NGOs as evidence of a broader movement to challenge the influence of both “Haussmann in the tropics” and urban India’s bourgeois revolution.[[12]](#footnote-12) Although still rarely framed in the Lefebvrian language of the right to the city, these accounts emphasize the transformative power of struggles to both inhabit the city and to contribute to its construction.

In the remainder of this paper, I examine these struggles in the context of Dharavi. While I recognize the mediated forms of power entailed in the subversive act of squatting, I also find evidence of more deliberate democratic practices akin to Appadurai’s “grassroots globalization.” Like most of these other scholars, I choose not to ground my analysis in the sweeping frame of the right to the city. Rather, I employ the more restrained language of Chester Hartman’s (1984) “right to stay put.” Based on his ethnographic inquiries of land grabs and community resistance, primarily in San Francisco, Hartman (1974, 1984) argued "that government [should] plan housing and prevent displacement instead of simply compensating the victims after the fact...to make government policies responsive to existing residents, not to financial interests or the mobile gentry” (Swanstrom and Kerstein 1989, 270; see also Newman and Wyly 2006). Distinct from the revolutionary aims of the right to the city, this framing acknowledges that the activities of residents and activists are usually more narrowly focused on simply resisting displacement.[[13]](#footnote-13) While some housing rights groups active in Mumbai have more revolutionary and socially transformative aspirations, the near-constant threat of eviction keeps these groups focused on a more immediate set of objectives.

Both historically and in contemporary Mumbai, struggles around the right to stay put are a key feature of the city’s built environment and political landscape. These democratic struggles, as I demonstrate in the context of Dharavi, are waged in a variety of arenas, including the ballot box, the courtroom, the government planning agency, and on the street. In the electoral arena, these struggles often manifest as so-called "vote bank” politics—as a bank into which politicians make the occasional deposit or political favor and then can cash in when elections come around.[[14]](#footnote-14) Yet counter to this rather cynical narrative, electoral politics have tangible consequences for the urban poor and working classes, and participation in this arena constitutes a deliberate act of political engagement with the built environment (Bjorkman 2012, Benjamin 2008). Without regularly held, contested elections at the national, state, and municipal levels, displacements would certainly be more frequent and more violent.

Among their effects, elections can be powerfully disruptive, as resources are diverted in the lead up to elections and all else falls to the wayside. While often lamented as an inefficiency of democracy, elections can have a much needed slowing effect. Projects are suspended out of fear of "politicizing" development, and residents remain in place, at least for the duration of the election season. After the election dust settles, newly elected officials take their time “getting up to speed” and project suspensions remain in place. Similar delays are produced by legal challenges, or public interest litigations (PILs), that can hold projects up for decades, as well as by contentious street politics and more deliberative negotiations. While these delays may be protective, the uncertainty they produce can also be harmful. Residents and administrators fail to make needed repairs to homes and infrastructures not knowing how long they will remain in place.[[15]](#footnote-15) Residents and activist groups, meanwhile, work to maintain obstructions, enacting their right to stay put, rather than promoting progressive social change. What is often gained in these struggles is the right to remain in limbo.

The empowering and exploitative dimensions of staying put were characterized to me by Aneesh Shankar during our sprawling conversation in his bungalow. Discussing Dharavi Redevelopment Project, he reasoned, “there will be give and take. If they accept our proposals, we will accept theirs.” Pausing for a moment, he warned that if his group’s proposals were not incorporated into the plan, then “we will not accept theirs.” The types of demands, or “proposals,” he and his organization were making generally concerned the interests of Dharavi's Tamil laborers, including the leather workers, garment manufacturers, and producers of farsan, or snack foods, made practically around-the-clock in Dharavi’s questionably hygienic, windowless factory spaces. Shankar’s role appeared to be one of protector and preserver of Dharavi's ways of life and avenues of upward mobility. Acknowledging that the fortunes of his own family were made in the dingy factories of the slum, he was working to ensure that similar opportunities remain available to the settlement's newer migrants and laboring communities. (And if his own businesses profit from the ready supply of migrant labor, then all the better.) Maintaining this way of life, Shankar acknowledged, requires pragmatism and the ability to situate himself in the overlapping and intersecting networks of power and sovereignty that traverse the boundaries of the slum.

Political Economy of the Megaslum

Beyond the populist politics that can undermine the ambitions of global capital, Dharavi’s durability is a product of these overlapping and intersecting networks that connect the city and the slum and help keep the settlement in place. I use Davis’ concept of a megaslum to characterize this integration and institutional reach. Yet while the megaslum for Davis is primarily a matter of size and density—he notes that they arise “when shantytowns and squatter communities merge in continuous belts of informal housing and poverty, usually on the urban periphery”(Davis 2006, 26)—I employ the concept more as a political category. Analyzing diverse institutions and processes underway on multiple scales, I argue that Dharavi’s growth and emergence as a megaslum, which took place gradually over several decades, occurred alongside and intertwined with the political and economic development of Mumbai as a whole. Institutionally embedded and politically entrenched, Dharavi has simply become (to use a catchphrase of recent years) too big to fail.

The megaslum is also a product of institutional and political fragmentations. Broadly speaking, cities are sites of fragmented sovereignties, divided loyalties, and diffuse power. Unlike the national state, where authority generally goes undisputed (except during extraordinary moments of revolution), urban space is comprised of multiple, distinct but overlapping jurisdictions (Davis 2011, Brenner 2011). While these multiple sites of power can be useful for urban claims making—i.e. appeals can be made to the most strategically relevant and sympathetic site—they also produce fragmentations and institutional gaps when lines of authority are unclear. Mumbai exemplifies this condition, particularly inside its slums, where numerous government agencies are responsible for aspects of land use, planning, and construction, each with incomplete authority, inadequate resources, and representing a distinct set of constituencies and interests. At times, the slum and its residents slip through the cracks between these administrative layers; its durability a product of institutional neglect and administrative inattention. But fragmented sovereignties can also manifest as fierce political contestations and result in forced evictions and other forms political violence (Davis 2011, Hansen and Stepputat 2005).

The megaslum can be an empowering place, where seemingly marginal city residents make homes and livelihoods in strategically important and potential valuable locations. Yet the right to stay put often means the right to remain in dangerous, inadequate, and inhospitable conditions. In addition to remaining in poorly serviced settlements, residents make political compromises to stay put, becoming dependent on corrupt and extractive institutions and individuals. Nor is the durability the residents experience a meaningful form of security. Rather, it comprises a condition I refer to as “precarious stability.” With most still lacking secure tenure and legally binding protections, residents live amidst uncertainty, as new plans will eventually be proposed and will threaten again to dispossess them.

Precarious Stability

Almost a decade after the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) was announced amidst media fanfare and bold proclamations that Mumbai would be made slum free, the project’s promises have yet to be realized and it seems poised to become another illustration of Mumbai’s planning pathologies. Caught between the pressures to pursue globally-oriented urban development and struggles around the residents’ right to stay put, the government has put the project on hold as it works to craft compromises between competing interests and to ease the fears of risk adverse investors. But more than just an example of popular insurgencies thwarting the state’s modernist—and increasingly globalist—imaginings, the stalled DRP demonstrates the deep integration, and ultimately the inseparability, of the slum and the city, even in an era of global real estate speculation and world class aspirations. While most analyses of global financial hegemony and neoliberalizing governance, in both the academic and mainstream press, emphasize the fragility of places like Dharavi in the face of these totalizing forces, I have noted their durability, pointing to deep histories, embedded politics, institutional fragmentations, and popular mobilizations.

As with earlier efforts to redevelop Dharavi and undertake similar large-scale planning efforts in Mumbai, progress on the DRP has been halted. Although not completely abandoned, the fate of the project certainly looks bleaker than it did in mid-2007 when the Government of Maharashtra was issuing its global tender and inviting developer interest in the scheme. At the end of 2007, nineteen developer consortia, comprised of global and domestic real estate developers and financiers, had expressed interest and had been deemed financially and technically viable by the Government of Maharashtra to submit bids on the scheme. While the consortia were preparing their bids and drafting designs for the sector layouts, a global recession hit. With the financial crisis created, in part, by overly risky investments in housing, real estate, and development, several of the consortia were forced to withdraw from consideration on the project. Receiving the most attention at the time was the departure of the consortium comprised of Mumbai-based developer HDIL and the American investment firm Lehman Brothers, after the American firm’s famous collapse in the late summer of 2008. The other consortia forced to withdraw were those that included Reliance Engineering Associates, L&T Limited, and the South Korean firm Hanhwa Engineering. The remaining fifteen consortia made requests that the government reduce the scope of the project and the expectation that they provide most of the financing up front. Meanwhile, public fights between elected officials and civil society members, combined with continued pressure from Dharavi’s residents and activists, were continuing to shake the confidence of the remaining bidders. By late 2009, more than half of the remaining consortia determined that the project simply wasn’t worth the risk and withdrew from consideration. With few interested investors remaining and diminished support within the government, the Chief Minister put the DRP on hold. Although various proposals have been floated in the intervening years, including a seemingly viable proposal that the Government of Maharashtra undertake development in Sector 5, continuing opposition and dwindling support has kept these proposals from moving forward.

For many, these developments simply affirmed suspicions they’d had when Mukesh Mehta began drafting the DRP’s plans more than a dozen years ago, that the project would never actually be implemented. For a brief moment, their skepticism seemed unwarranted and it looked like economic liberalization, deindustrialization, and the ascendancy of a new entrepreneurial urban agenda had produced a development context in Mumbai. Meanwhile, it appeared that Mehta had built the requisite support within government, brought civil society on board with his vision, successfully courted international investors and developers, and co-opted project opponents. But these tenuously assembled threads began to unravel when the financial crisis hit. While Mehta and official spokespeople within the government attribute the project’s delays to the volatility of the international real estate industry and temporary obstructions in the flow of global capital, the causes are clearly more local in nature. And viewed from within the long history of attempted development plans and slum housing schemes, the project’s failures seem remarkably familiar.

This case offers an important corrective to the dominant narrative of the sweeping and totalizing effects of globalization on poor communities. While these forces can certainly be destructive and poor people around the world are clearly being dispossessed, local political institutions, state structures, and autonomous agents are also inhibiting, or at least mediating, these transformations. The more abstracted focus on the structural underpinnings of transformation can capture only a small sliver of this story, missing the messy and imperfect politics that keep at least some people in place. It is these imperfect politics that have allowed Dharavi’s seemingly disempowered residents to retain some of Mumbai’s most highly sought after real estate.

But in the absence of an alternative vision for Dharavi, the area’s durability appears less victorious and its residents remain trapped in a state of precarious stability. Recognizing that the project may soon be revived or replaced by an even grander vision, lives in Dharavi are shaped by perpetual uncertainty. A visual representation of this condition can be seen in an unfinished seven-story concrete structure that has stood just off Dharavi Cross Road for almost fifteen years. The Janata Housing Society, habitable only in the lower four stories, sits in a suspended state of construction. Meanwhile, social and political rifts, both in and outside of the building, mirror Janata’s crumbling appearance.

As with much of Dharavi, the building’s precarious state dates back to the late 1990s, when land prices were soaring and developers all wanted to participate in the newly launched slum housing scheme. One of these developers was Promod Sharma, a midsize builder who had been constructing residential buildings throughout the city since the early 1980s. In 1998, Sharma approached the roughly one hundred families living in the chawls where Janata now stands. Although they now speak of him with disdain, the residents recall that he seemed trustworthy in those first few meetings. Sharma promised to build them a pucca building with indoor plumbing, ample water supply, and other amenities, all in less than two years. Complying with SRS protocols, the residents organized themselves into a housing society and elected an eleven person governing committee to oversee the arrangements. Sharma gathered the required consent from the society’s residents and filed the requisite paperwork and permits. The residents were moved to temporary accommodations in a nearby transit camp and construction began in early 1999.

But conditions in the transit camp were bad. Some of the residents now describe it as frightening and “full of goondas.” Although the policy stipulates that the SRA is to certify the transit accommodations, Janata’s residents were living in an unauthorized slum and after two years there, the slumlord ordered the residents to leave. The building Sharma was constructing was not yet complete, but, because they had nowhere else to go, he allowed them to move in, assuring them that construction would soon be complete. The building was uninhabitable above the fourth floor, and Janata’s families doubled up in apartments on the building’s lower levels. The elevators had not been constructed and the plumbing system was still incomplete, but the residents tolerated the imperfect situation, believing it to be temporary.

Around the time the residents were moving in, officials in the SRA discovered that Sharma had not submitted the requisite paperwork and ordered that construction be halted. Although Sharma, the SRA, and the residents have conflicting accounts of what happened to the “missing paperwork,” it appears that certain forms never reached their destination at the MCGM. Members of Janata’s governing committee attribute the conflict to party politics and administrative breakdowns between the state-level SRA and the municipal corporation. According to their account, Sharma was an active member of the Shiv Sena party at the time, which was in power at both the municipal and the state levels at the time construction began. Given that he was on good terms with municipal officials, most of whom were also Shiv Sainiks, the residents believe that Sharma was simply lax about filing the requisite paperwork with the MCGM. In 1999, the Congress Party returned to power at the state level and a new administration took charge of the SRA. All of the builders who had been active with the Shiv Sena were now being held to close scrutiny. Many of their construction projects were halted. Sharma’s missing paperwork, which, just a few years earlier, would have likely posed no problem, became grounds for suspending the entire project.

Eventually, this relatively small construction project became entangled in the DRP’s much larger political and institutional web, keeping it locked in this suspended state of construction and making permanent the residents’ “temporary” situation. In early 2004, when the state government announced its backing of the DRP, it ordered a suspension of all slum rehabilitation constructions currently underway in Dharavi. Although some exceptions were granted, and some buildings nearing completion were allowed to be finished, Sharma was not given an exemption to complete the construction of Janata. Due to the vast amount of work still required on the building, along with the problem of the missing paperwork, the SRA ordered that Janata remain incomplete until bids were selected on the DRP and the entire sector was redeveloped as part of the project.

Meanwhile, Janata’s residents had made their lives in the incomplete building. Electrical connections were established and a water tank was installed on the roof, providing the residents with water for drinking and cooking. The society’s governing committee collected maintenance fees from the residents and organized the payment of the water and electricity bills. Sharma, complying with SRA regulations, gave the governing committee much of the money required to pay these bills. Except for a few committee members, the residents had no contact with Sharma and remained unaware of the building’s administrative limbo, assuming that construction would soon resume. In fact, the society’s treasurer acted as the exclusive point of contact between the committee and Sharma, carrying communications back and forth and ensuring that bills were paid. Although the treasurer had been on the governing committee since the housing society was first formed, he had never resided in the chawl and even now did not live in the incomplete building. Rather, he owned a business, a medical clinic, on the ground floor of Janata. Given his level of education and higher social status, the members of the governing committee selected the doctor to be the society’s point of contact with the builder.

Despite the continuing delays and limited information, the doctor and the rest of the governing committee maintained their support for Sharma. Even as the other residents continued to lose patience, the committee urged them to wait. The committee’s support, however, did not seem to be rooted in trust but rather fear of the builder and his associates. Like most small and midsized builders in the city, Sharma reportedly had connections to local organized crime groups and so-called land mafias. Usually accompanied by a sizable entourage, Sharma was rarely seen without his associate, Babu, who the committee members regularly referred to as a goonda. As the situation dragged on and the committee members sought meetings with Sharma, pressing for updates on the building’s progress, Babu would apparently order the men away. Meanwhile, the governing committee continued to assure the other residents that the situation would soon be resolved.

After several years, some of Janata’s residents began to work around the governing committee. One of these residents was a middle-aged homemaker named Sitamani. Like most of her neighbors, Sitamani was originally from the Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu, coming to the city when she was married in the late 1970s. Recalling her first impressions of Dharavi as a young bride, she remarked that “it was a dirty, smelly place. I didn’t like it here it all.” Eventually, she grew comfortable in Dharavi. Like many women in the area, Sitamani remarked on Dharavi’s convenience, with everything she could imagine needing available right outside her door. From within her crumbling room in the Janata Housing Society, Sitamani now speaks longingly about life in the chawl:

The chawl was better than this building. There we had proper water supply and current. The chawl was our own place. Some people in the chawl had big rooms and many people were getting rent from first floor apartments. If this building had been good, we would prefer living here. But look at this! [She made a waving motion around the room.] We wish we had stayed in the chawl.[[16]](#footnote-16)

As the ones most severely impacted by the building’s conditions, many of the women had grown tired of living two families per flat, carrying groceries and water up stairs on account of the unfinished elevator, and going outside to use the toilet. Sitamani pressed the men of the governing committee for an explanation. In early 2006, after living in the incomplete building for almost seven years, she brought the issue to her local women’s group, or mahila mandal. Mahila mandals are generally not political organizations, usually providing basic supports to their members, such as rice and legumes when needed, and organizing computer and sewing classes, in exchange for a small membership fee. But after Sitamani discussed Janata’s situation at a meeting of the area-wide mahila mandal, the members decided to take up their plight.

The members of the mahila mandal went to Sharma’s office and requested information on the status of the building. When he refused to meet, they went to the SRA, whose staff explained the issue of the missing paperwork and the suspension of construction activities. Learning of the situation for the first time, Sitamani and the other women requested that the SRA demolish the building and resettle them until it could be rebuilt. As Sitamani explained:

We trusted the committee members and they lied to us. So now we will wait for government to build the sectors. If the government builds the building, it will be a proper building. Not like this one. If it takes ten years, it will be better than the conditions we’re living in today. If MHADA doesn’t destroy this building, the mahila mandal will tell them to and they will listen.

Soon after the women met with the SRA, Sharma reportedly stopped paying the electricity bills as retribution. Babu came to Janata and ordered the residents to stop complaining to the authorities and threatened to evict them if they continued agitating. The governing committee told Sitamani to “stop making trouble,” although this only emboldened her and the other women. Meanwhile, the mahila mandal reached out to the nuns at the Dharavi-based St. Anthony Church who put together a coalition that included the Committee for the Right to Housing (CRH) and other housing rights organizations. The coalition organized a series of direct actions with the objective of compelling the SRA to demolish the building and resettle the residents. When the protest marches began to attract media attention, officials attempted to resolve the issue as quietly as possible. In the meantime, the residents filed a PIL, petitioning the Bombay High Court to order the building demolished. In July 2008, the court ruled on behalf of the women and declared the building inhabitable. Yet still four years later—14 years after construction on Janata began—the unfinished building still stands. Many of the original residents remain there, trapped in a suspended state, caught between the government’s grand visions of a globalized Mumbai and their efforts to maintain their homes and livelihoods.

Struggles like these are underway across Dharavi, revealing that entrenchment can be as detrimental as it is empowering. The Janata case demonstrates that the megaslum is not necessarily an inclusive or a just place. Disparities exist, living conditions for many are deplorable, and the most vulnerable residents live in a liminal state, possessing neither opportunities for mobility nor security. While political fragmentations, administrative weaknesses, and the influence of local activists have erected useful barriers to potentially destructive development schemes, they have also kept some residents locked inside the slum. As these residents engage in bitter struggles to stay put, many remain unable to make meaningful improvements to their living conditions or to make longer-term demands for security.

The history of state interventions in the slum presented here reveals that grand plans routinely fail. Politics are fragmented; local institutions are disempowered; and slum residents have too much local power to allow these plans to gain much traction. And it is often a good thing that they fail. If the grand visions of master planners—referred to by critics in Mumbai as hallucinations—were realized, then the social dislocations and the violence they would bring about would be unimaginable. Holding aside the essential question of where they would all go, if the hundreds of thousands of “unauthorized,” “unregularized,” or “ineligible” Dharavi residents were evicted, the city would simply stop working. If the megaslum was to disappear, then Mumbai would lose so many of its drivers, domestic workers, garment manufactures, garbage collectors, and office workers, that India’s commercial capital would simply cease to function.

The political and economic centrality of the megaslum requires that we make an analytic insertion into this category, rather than condemn these spaces as repositories of surplus humanity. While the spatial arrangements, institutional configurations, and politics presented in this book are unique to Dharavi, equally complicated, historically embedded yet powerfully dynamic settlements can be found in cities throughout the world. While the concept of the megaslum is usually reserved for iconic townships like Nairobi’s Kibera, Manila’s Tondo, Orangi Town in Karachi, and Port-au-Prince’s Cité Soliel, the social, political, and spatial entrenchment discussed in this book can be found in smaller, and more mundane spaces. While longstanding interests and entrenched political networks have protected these spaces, their residents, and their mostly unregulated activities for decades, many of these settlements are facing a new and more powerful set of opponents, backed by both global capital and national state power. As urban property markets are tightening and cities are under new pressure to be “world class,” the land on which many of these slums sit has become a potentially valuable and exploitable resource. And while Dharavi—at least for the meantime—remains in place, many of these other settlements are, in fact, being wiped off the map. With distinct interests and political configurations at work in these places to both preserve and eradicate the megaslum, further place-specific analyses are required to reveal the complex developments underway in the globalizing city.

1. The term *pucca* literally translates to cooked. Its antonym *kutcha*, or raw, is often used to describe the partial or unfinished built structures typically found in slums. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for example, *National Geographic,* May 2007; *The Hindu Sunday Magazine*, November 2007, *Outlook Magazine*, March 2011; and several longer pieces on the *BBC* and *BBC.com* since 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is also the case that these dynamics most accurately describe the experience of structural adjustment in Latin America. A problem arises in Davis’ argument, in my opinion, when he applies these dynamics to explain processes underway in nearly all other regions. See Ong 2011 for a useful discussion of the Asian experience of neoliberalization. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See for example Desai 2012; Ghertner 2011; Anjaria 2009; Baud and Nainan 2008; Zérah 2007; Nijman 2006; Harriss 2005; Fernandes 2004; Chatterjee 2004; Baviskar 2003; Benjamin 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See also Desai (2012) who identifies the emergence of “flexible governing” strategies whereby state authorities use negotiation and cooptation to create a process of slum resettlement that may appear inclusive but ultimately facilitates the gentrification of Ahmadabad’s riverfront. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A similar argument is made by Gavin Shatkin and Sanjeev Vidyarthi (2013) who discuss the reluctance of many theorists of urban India to embrace political economic approaches, and particularly “global city theory,” to analyze processes of urban change, working instead within post-colonial or subaltern political frameworks. While this effort to “decolonize” urban theory or at least tread lightly while “transnational trespassing” (Roy 2004b) has resulted in a more careful and measured consideration of the impacts of globalization on Indian cities, it has also made it more difficult to engage in comparative reflection or reveal the field’s contributions to scholarly inquiries on other regions. There are, of course, important exceptions to this, as some influential writings on the region have engaged with these more abstract frameworks (See, for example, Goldman 2011, Dupont 2011, Benjamin 2008, Roy 2004a, Appadurai 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Polanyi 2001[1944], p 136. The discussion of these two developments as comprising a “double movement” is consistent with the characterization of contemporary processes of globalization as a second “great transformation” to use Polanyi’s term. See, for example, Burawoy 2000, Burawoy 2010, Hettne 1999, Howard-Hassmann 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The question of why this frame has taken hold more in some regions and national contexts than others is an interesting one. Centner (2011) has recently noted that Lefebvre’s work was translated from French to Spanish before English language translations appeared and the timing of its Spanish-language appearance coincided with the emergence of anti-state movements in Latin America. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Here I am using Lefevre’s framework as a stand in for a broader argument about the revolutionary power of urban social movements. Another, closely related, perspective on this was offered by Castell’s (1983) in his classic, and highly influential, *City and the Grassroots*. Despite his earlier characterization of Lefebvre as “a left wing exponent of mainstream urban sociology” (Kipfer, S., K. Goonewardena, C. Schmid, and R. Milgrom 2008, 6), Castells’ 1983 work highlighted numerous “urban-orientated mobilizations that influence structural social change and transform the urban meanings” (quoted in Mayer 2006, 202). Like Lefebvre, Castells is frequently employed in the broader urban studies literature on political mobilization but receives more limited treatment in the writings on urban India. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See also Lisa Bjorkman’s recent (2012) writings on “vote bank politics,” which suggest “neither a heroic narrative of subaltern resistance to bourgeois capitalism, nor a dystopic scenario of mass exploitation in which forces of ‘marketization’ empty the act of voting of meaning.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See for example Bjorkman 2013; Doshi 2012; Anand 2011; Anjaria 2011; Anand and Rademacher 2011; Anwar 2011. Saskia Sassen, meanwhile, has located these politics—or, rather, the possibility of politics—in the strategic site of the global city. She writes. In the context of a strategic space such as a global city, the types of disadvantaged people described here are not simply marginal; they acquire presence in a broader political process that escapes the boundaries of the formal polity. Their presence signals the possibility of a politics. What this politics will be will depend on the specific projects and practices of various communities (Sassen 2006, 319). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See, for example, Ramanath and Ebrahim 2010; Nijman 2008; Chatterji 2005; Burra 2005; Ramanath 2005; McFarlane 2004; Madon and Sahay 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Another, and perhaps even more important, advantage of this framing over Lefebvre’s and Castells’ is the more general focus on space. As opposed to the “right to the city” or “urban social movements” framings, the “right to stay put” can also include rural struggles against forced evictions. This is particularly relevant in the Indian case, where movements frequently transcend spatial boundaries, as represented, for example, by the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) which has taken up both struggles against rural river dam projects and those against urban slum demolitions. It is also relevant to struggles against displacement underway on the periurban fringe that defy dichotomous distinctions between urban and rural (See Roy 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. According to this rather patronizing narrative, voters are easily bribed and ultimately manipulated by cunning politicians. Although politicians are understood to “pander” for votes in this context, their actions are understood more nobly, as representative democracy, when they represent the interests of “civil society.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Meanwhile, the populist promises made during election times often get translated into protective measures that exist on paper alone. Examples include the litany of development restrictions on the books in Mumbai—such as rent control, the Urban Land Ceiling Act, and various environmental protections. Rather than creating more equitable distributions of land and housing, these laws have produced healthy markets of exemptions and backdoor modes of development, frequently managed through the practice of *goondagiri* (i.e. corrupt practices overseen by *goondas* or thugs). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Fieldnotes: July 8, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)