

The Field of Struggle, the Office, and the Flat: Protest and Aspiration in a Mumbai SlumFlat

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This article recounts a struggle over the demolition of Golibar, a slum in Mumbai. Such struggles are not uncommon in contemporary India. Urban space is being reorganized across the country, both to meet the needs of economic growth and to take advantage of rapidly growing real estate values. The struggle in Golibar situates global capital and state actors in opposition to slum dwellers who occupy land that has suddenly become extremely valuable. The Slum Rehabilitation Act of the state of Maharashtra provides Mumbaikars with better tools than other Indian slum dwellers have to make their voices heard in urban redevelopment. In contrast, for example, Delhi slum dwellers are often simply evicted violently. But the case is not simply interesting as an example of such struggles. Instead, we are interested in the case because it represents a challenge to the way we think about cities and the struggles that take place in them. Today urbanists think about cities not as integrated wholes but as agglomerations of balkanized communities, economies, and ways of life. Among these, the poor are often thought to be characterized by narrow materialistic concerns with few aspirations for the city as a whole.

The case of Golibar challenges this thinking and suggests that slum dwellers are potential agents for realizing a universalist, liberal, and egalitarian city, an ethos that rests on an aspiration for inclusion in the Global City, not simple economic well-being. It is often assumed that the expanding middle and professional classes will be the agents for realizing such an integrative and cosmopoli-

All translations in the text are by the authors.

1 tan urbanism. However, in Mumbai civil society organizations representing the
2 expanding middle and professional classes are engaged mostly in a cultural war
3 to define civility in ways that marginalize the practices of the poor. Urban plan-
4 ning firms often propose plans for attractive public spaces that bear a striking
5 resemblance to Central Park in New York on a slow day as if these are the only
6 appropriate uses of public space (of course the costs of constituting such a space
7 in crowded Mumbai are not represented in the proposals or planning documents).
8 Protests against the government have been shifted from the street to a pen next
9 to the Press Club in the name of moderating noise levels near middle-class resi-
10 dences. At the same time, the wealthy are increasingly barricading themselves in
11 luxury concrete towers—turning their backs on the city even as they endeavor to
12 remake it in the image of their enclaves.

13 In modernist accounts of the city, the city was presented as a whole in which
14 the various components, whether ecological, cultural, or economic, contributed
15 to the creation of a distinctive and holistic entity. Contemporary urban theory, for
16 the most part, disrupts this classic account of the city. Today's cities are no longer
17 amenable to overarching urbanisms or developmental narratives. Contemporary
18 urban geography is "postmodern" or "medieval" in its fragmented form (Soja
19 1989; Alsayyad and Roy 2006). Within cities themselves, the varying and lay-
20 ered historical geography of the city reflects different developmental stages and
21 different modes of economic and social integration (Massey 1984; Brenner and
22 Theodore 2002). Alongside this social and geographic fragmentation is a theoret-
23 ical fragmentation. Because of the variety in urban space, different urban spaces
24 must be analyzed using theories that account for their particularity in order to
25 achieve analytical coherence and credibility. While this approach certainly tells
26 us more about the city than overly general systemic theories like urban ecology
27 do, and also breaks out of the problems that come when analysis proceeds from a
28 tacit developmental narrative, there are costs. Most importantly, theoretical frag-
29 mentation tends to overemphasize the distinctiveness of different urban spaces
30 and simultaneously justifies abandoning efforts to integrate spaces and popula-
31 tions into general political and social accommodations that sustain urban social
32 solidarity (Amin 2012).

33 Mumbai, and more specifically the slum of Golibar, is useful for thinking about
34 these theoretical assumptions. Mumbai, the largest city in India, is overrepresented
35 in literatures on poverty, international development, megacities, globalization,
36 and, perhaps most of all, informal settlements (e.g., Mehrotra 2011). There are two
37 sides to this discourse and, indeed, two sides to the city itself. Mumbai—long a
38 center for trade, manufacturing, and finance—is increasingly a global city. At the

1 same time, many have noted that becoming a global city does not entail a whole-
2 sale realization of affluence and modernity. The historical geography of Mumbai
3 is complicated, and the population is spread across territories with very different
4 resources and opportunities. The city is home to five of the ten wealthiest Indians;
5 it is also home to tremendous poverty and deprivation. Pavement dwellers, street
6 hawkers, and informal slums abound. Practically across the street from Bandra
7 Kurla Complex, a corporate office space that houses Dow Chemical, Citibank, and
8 the US consulate, is “Asia’s largest slum,” Dharavi. Because it symbolically rep-
9 represents urban poverty in the global South, Dharavi attracts so much of the atten-
10 tion of scholars and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that it has produced
11 “Dharavi fatigue” among activists and commentators in Mumbai (Patel 2012). As
12 Arjun Appadurai quipped, in Mumbai one “can have breakfast in Dharavi and
13 dinner at Indigo,” one of South Mumbai’s flashiest restaurants (Mahadik 2007:
14 31). This polarization between (and proximity of) wealth and poverty is difficult
15 to overlook. Nonetheless, the ways slum dwellers are constructing an integrative
16 urban imaginary—even while elites seek to render them invisible—complicate
17 this binary. Slums like Dharavi and Golibar, the latter the focus of this article,
18 are global slums wherein “the advanced economies and large cultural sectors of
19 global cities have developed a range of working connections with slum dwellers . . .
20 [because] parts of the traditional small enterprise sector and of the informal econ-
21 omy service particular components of the advanced sectors in a city” (Sassen
22 2011). This social position on the territorial edge of a globalized urbanism is the
23 site of the construction of new urban subjectivities that are not reducible to com-
24 munal attachments or socioeconomic position alone (Sassen 1999; cf. Rancière
25 1989; Calhoun 2012, chap. 5).

26 One outcome of all of this attention is that Mumbai’s slums are often under-
27 stood in terms of readily available narratives about the urban poor. Slums are
28 ghettos that concentrate social dysfunction and criminal behavior; slums repre-
29 sent an illegal appropriation of land for personal use; slums are occupied by rural
30 migrants whose “village” practices—superstition, political clientelism, and sub-
31 sistence production—maintain backward and antimodern identities and behav-
32 iors. At a more basic level, urban modernity represents “civilization” in Western
33 discourse in opposition to “nature” (Gandy 2003; Kaika 2005). In this regard,
34 slum living prevents people from constituting themselves as individuals free to
35 develop aspirations and identities that go much beyond simple biological reproduc-
36 tion. Bourgeois individualism can be said to depend on confining bodily necessi-
37 ties to specially demarcated private spaces separated from spaces of sociability,
38 yet slum dwellers are rarely able to separate the biological and the individual in the

1 spaces they occupy. Slum society, it is assumed, does not incubate a civil society
2 beyond the development NGOs that regularly take up residence in them. Even
3 if “global slums” incubate new political subjectivities, the assumption is often
4 that these don’t reach far beyond the imperatives of survival or populist politics.
5 Slum dwellers represent the continuing presence of an uncivilized “nature” in
6 the global city, one that is not capable of reasoned deliberation or liberal political
7 subjectivities. These narratives sustain the territorial stigmatization of slums and
8 slum dwellers, such that in some Indian cities the mere existence of a slum has
9 been legally constituted as a “nuisance” that is subject to removal irrespective of
10 demonstrated harmful effects (Ghertner 2008).

11 At the same time, another prominent discourse inverts this stigmatization.
12 Mumbai’s slums do not actually look like the ghettos or banlieues of the West.
13 Walking through them at night, one does not worry about personal safety since the
14 streets are often filled with people of all ages. The slums sustain retailers, manu-
15 facturers, temples, mosques, and schools. There is indeed much to celebrate about
16 many of Mumbai’s slums. Above all, the fact that they seem to work so well even
17 though they are created and sustained mostly through the autonomous activity
18 of the poor has caused them to be celebrated as “Wikicities,” to borrow from an
19 urban planning firm headquartered in Mumbai (Srivastava and Echanove 2009).
20 Slums incubate the creativity and entrepreneurship of the poor, practices that
21 sustain a discourse of “human potential urbanism.” In light of such celebratory
22 perspectives, the political action of slum dwellers does not appear as backward or
23 communal; rather, slum dwellers’ defense of their authentic and autopoietic com-
24 munities is entirely rational. The slum, therefore, sustains an alternative way of
25 life that potentially produces mobilizations to defend it against the intrusions of
26 the state and the market.

27 Critics of this all-too-easy romanticization note that the isolation of the poor
28 sustains the stigmatization of impoverished spaces and their populations, justify-
29 ing disciplinary strategies of governance instead of efforts to secure their social
30 welfare (Wacquant 2008; Amin 2012). At the same time, the struggles of the
31 urban poor are often assumed to be in pursuit of their distinctive values rather
32 than waged in the name of integration into the city as a whole. Theories of urban
33 protest often see contention as resistance to the disruptions of community caused
34 by the “restless flow of capital” (Harvey 1989: 238). In a related but distinct argu-
35 ment, Partha Chatterjee argues that the politics of the poor in India is an expres-
36 sion not of civil society but of “political society.” In political society, government
37 accommodates the moral criticisms of the marginalized through localized agree-
38 ments that provide resources rather than through the passage of universal legisla-

1 tion or an expansion of representation and rights (Chatterjee 2004). In contrast,
2 the “normative values of modernity” are only possible among the cultural and
3 economic elite in a city like Mumbai (Chatterjee 2004: 41). While they have many
4 differences, all of these theories situate the poor as active agents, but as particular-
5 istic ones, limited by their social and geographic positions in the city. Universality
6 is a characteristic of either capitalist urbanization or a transnational cultural and
7 economic elite. The idea that we can learn much about the possibilities of the city
8 from slum dwellers is not widespread. Other accounts of similar struggles are
9 only marginally concerned with the aspirations of the poor themselves and instead
10 focus on either the organizational capacity of the poor or emerging forms of more
11 inclusive governance (Appadurai 2002; Roy 2009; Weinstein 2009).

12 To recover the possibilities contained in these struggles, we focus on slum
13 dwellers in Golibar. We want to show how urban institutions combine with the
14 space of the slum to produce a distinctively urban subjectivity. This subjectivity is
15 not particularistic but universal, inclusive, and reflects a faith in liberal institutions
16 such as equality before the law. Moreover, this is not merely a derivative subjec-
17 tivity, appropriated from the powerful. Most other Mumbaikars have abandoned
18 this faith, and, indeed, the subjectivity incubated in Golibar operates as critique as
19 well as aspiration when the state is becoming less coherent and the rule of law is
20 weakening. Of course, the circumstances of the slum do not produce infinite pos-
21 sibilities and must not be romanticized, but reconstructing the struggle over Goli-
22 bar supports our argument that the slum is a space that can yield a more expansive
23 political subjectivity than the literature assumes. The built environment of the
24 slum, we argue, can provide an “infrastructure” of urban citizenship that imagines
25 a more inclusive and cosmopolitan city. By examining the spaces that slum resi-
26 dents use and tracing their connections to urban institutions and the public sphere,
27 we want to reenchant the city as a space of political possibility that can sustain
28 an inclusive and tolerant urban imaginary—in direct contrast with the way these
29 struggles are usually presented (Sassen 1999; Taylor 2002; Simone 2009).

30 To reconstruct the subjectivity of Mumbai’s slum dwellers we focus on three
31 spaces within the slum. These spaces have material characteristics that shape the
32 way they are used. However, they are also canvasses for aspirations and tools
33 that slum dwellers use to transform themselves from inert object—the poor, the
34 masses—into creative political actors. Two of these spaces are not usually avail-
35 able to slum dwellers but, ironically, were created by housing demolitions. This
36 spatially grounded analysis enables us to capture the possibilities of the slum
37 without romanticizing it and without succumbing to the assumption that need must
38 trump aspiration in the politics of the poor.



Figure 1 The Field of Struggle. Photo by Cassim Shepard

We start with a location that seems unremarkable, a space that Golibar residents call the “Field of Struggle.” It was the site of a showdown between the slum dwellers and bulldozers sent to demolish the shanties of Golibar. Focusing on this space reveals how contemporary accounts of struggles over urban space are constructed and, indeed, how Golibar residents make use of them to make claims in the public sphere. At the same time, this space is only one among several in sustaining the aspirations of Golibar residents. Another important space is the “Office” of the Ganesh Krupa Society, one of many housing societies in the slum. The Office demonstrates how Golibar residents are sophisticated citizens who skillfully navigate the Byzantine institutions of the city to realize their goals. Finally, we turn to the Flat. The Flat is a spatial object of aspiration that illuminates much about the sort of urbanism Golibar residents hope to create. Working from these spaces, we hope to trace out the connections between slum dwellers and the various discursive, experiential, and institutional materials they use to constitute a subjectivity more expansive than the slum itself.

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The Field of Struggle

In Hindi, *golibar* means “firing range.” A vast swathe of Golibar’s 140 acres is owned by the Indian Defense Forces, which, until the early 1950s, conducted rifle drills here. Because it lies between the tracks of the city’s Western Railway, used by more than 3 million commuters daily, and the Western Express Highway, the

1 main vehicular access to Mumbai's airport and far beyond, Golibar is a blind spot
2 that middle-class Mumbai never sees. It is also a real estate developer's dream.
3 The slum lies across the tracks from the very desirable neighborhood of Khar,
4 home to film stars, hip Mediterranean restaurants, and a lively bar scene. Three-
5 bedroom flats here sell for approximately \$400,000. The informal settlements of
6 Golibar are to be redeveloped under the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme formulated
7 in 1997 by the government of the state of Maharashtra, of which Mumbai (for-
8 merly Bombay) is the capital. Golibar is the largest project under the scheme.

9 According to the 2001 census, Golibar is home to approximately twenty-six
10 thousand people. Starting in the late 1960s, it was settled primarily by people
11 from rural Maharashtra and the northern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar,
12 though as in any Mumbai slum people from other parts of the country found
13 their way to Golibar too. Several families obtained identity cards, known as photo
14 passes, after the slum census of 1976.¹ From then on, they began to pay compensa-
15 tion for the services they received. Golibar was officially declared a slum in 1995,
16 setting the stage for redevelopment under the provisions of the Slum Rehabilita-
17 tion Act of 1995.

18 On November 24, 2010, a demolition team massed on a bumpy piece of cleared
19 ground in the center of Golibar. They were accompanied by a team of police per-
20 sonnel, stout batons in hand. The empty lot — which, by the end of the day, would
21 be rechristened Sangharsh Maidan, or the Field of Struggle — had until recently
22 been occupied by a slum settlement within Golibar called Milan Society. Its resi-
23 dents had moved away after accepting an offer by a developer called Shivalik
24 Ventures, but work on their new homes is nowhere near getting started. A wall
25 of blue metal sheets about fifteen feet high lines one side of the field and blocks
26 it off from passersby on the street. The boundaries are marked on the east by the
27 shells of a demolished cluster of huts and to the south by a group of intact homes.

28 The field is a rare stretch of open space in a dense neighborhood crowded with
29 shanties, and thus it provided a convenient staging ground for the police vans and
30 wrecking crews attempting to make their way into the area to secure yet another
31 site for Shivalik. But they didn't get very far. Blocking their entry to the settlement
32 were scores of vociferous slum residents who were determined to stay put in the
33 homes in which many of them had lived all their lives.

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35 1. In 1976 a slum census was conducted, and families were given photo passes. These established
36 that they lived in a particular shanty but did not give them title to it. The government appointed an
37 official known as the controller of slums to ensure that the squatters paid their compensation fee. The
38 compensation fee included service charges, compensation for occupying land, and nominal taxes,
with different rates for residential, commercial, and industrial uses.

1 “We are the owners of this house,” they chanted. “It isn’t yours, it isn’t your
2 father’s.” Another slogan went up in rhyming Hindi: “The word is out in every
3 little lane: Shivalik is a thief.” As their neighbors stopped the police from entering
4 their slum cluster, a few men walked into the field, where they confronted a group
5 of housing board officials. “When we came to see you in your office, you had no
6 time to listen to us,” they said angrily. “How come you’ve got so much now?”

7 On the border of the field, Prerna Gaekwad, a schoolteacher, and her neighbor
8 Sudesh Paware tried to negotiate with government officials. They asserted that
9 the police had refused to proceed in cases of fraud filed against the developer
10 and asked why they were acting so aggressively against slum dwellers. They had
11 already broken down the homes of seventy-five hundred people all around them
12 but hadn’t built new houses for them, the residents of the slum asserted. Why
13 didn’t they rehouse them before breaking down the slum residents’ homes? The
14 officials of the state housing board had sold them out, they said.

15 The officials pleaded with the slum dwellers to let them put up the appearance
16 of doing their jobs. Let them demolish only two homes and then they’ll go, they
17 said. But Gaekwad and her neighbors were adamant. If they let them demolish two
18 homes now, they reasoned, what was to stop them from returning to pull down
19 more homes later? After a standoff lasting several hours, the wreckers backed off
20 by 5:30 p.m. Cheers went up as the police vans drove away.

21 Significantly, in a city in which low-level politicians are quick to seek out
22 aggrieved people in an attempt to demonstrate patronage and build influence, no
23 representatives of political parties came forward to help Gaekwad and her neigh-
24 bors. Gaekwad’s analysis is clear: “They all probably support Shivalik.”

25 Two months later, on January 20, 2011, the wrecking crews returned. As the
26 bulldozers gathered in the Field of Struggle, residents of Golibar congregated on
27 the periphery. Waving their clenched fists in the air, they sang “We Shall Over-
28 come” in Hindi. They were galvanized by the presence of the veteran activist
29 Medha Patkar (2011), a fiery leader of the National Alliance of People’s Move-
30 ments (NAPM), which had been helping organize the agitation. A round of slo-
31 gan shouting followed. “We won’t leave,” they chanted. “We’ll make the builder
32 leave.”

33 When the police finally marched up to the settlement, the women of Goli-
34 bar, both sari-clad Hindus and burqa-clad Muslims, formed a phalanx around the
35 entrance of their settlement. The policemen used their batons to attempt to break
36 through the human shield, but the women refused to yield. Amid the melee, one
37 young man waved the Indian tricolor, as if to reinforce the claim that their resis-
38 tance was an act of patriotism. The police had to change tactics and call in the

1 groups of policewomen waiting behind them. The women didn't give up easily.
2 They sprawled on the ground, and it often took eight policewomen to drag each
3 protestor away into the vans parked on the Field of Struggle. Police slapped the
4 faces or pulled the hair of women who were especially energetic in resisting.

5 Twenty homes were demolished that day, and forty-eight people were detained
6 for the day, among them Patkar and Gaekwad, who returned from the police sta-
7 tion bruised but completely energized. Six days later, on January 26, 2011, more
8 than three hundred people from across Mumbai whose slum clusters were also
9 under threat of demolition gathered in the Field of Struggle to celebrate India's
10 Republic Day, a national holiday that marks the formal adoption of the coun-
11 try's constitution in 1950. This was not the time to listen passively, Patkar urged
12 the crowd. It was time to raise their voices so that their rulers could hear their
13 demands. They needed to be able to hear the voices of people in the detention cells
14 of police stations, from their hutments, and from the Field of Struggle.

15 For a slum, Golibar is a well-functioning community. It is bisected by a lane
16 lined with shops selling food, cloth, electronics, and even new housing in the
17 city's suburbs. The commercial lane is active well into the night and accommo-
18 dates activities as diverse as children playing, water deliveries, and impromptu
19 deliberations over the state of the slum. It is home to temples and mosques. Most
20 Golibar residents are working-class: teachers in municipal schools, government
21 clerks, street vendors, electricians, plumbers, or shopkeepers. Most live in one- or
22 two-story brick and cement structures. Residents have electricity connections and
23 regular access to water and use common toilets.

24 Golibar seems to be a place worth fighting for, especially for people who have
25 been living there much of their lives. "We will win this struggle," Gaekwad said.
26 "After all, without us, there's no government. We've been paying taxes on this land
27 since 1974. That gives us the right to stay here. No one was involved with activism
28 before. . . . We learned that you first need to know the facts. Only then can you
29 speak with conviction."

30 The slum dwellers mobilized on the Field of Struggle to defend their homes, but
31 defend them from what exactly? Developers see Golibar as a gold mine of oppor-
32 tunity, which plays into the larger project of many politicians, corporate leaders,
33 and elite citizens' groups to transform Mumbai into a global city. Golibar's rede-
34 velopment potential is so high because of its location: wedged between two of the
35 city's transport arteries, the airport, and a fashionable neighborhood, all within a
36 quick train ride to the central business district in South Mumbai. While ostensibly
37 preserving the rights of slum dwellers, the Slum Rehabilitation Act is primarily
38 designed to open up slums like Golibar for redevelopment. As in many other parts

Public Culture

1 of the world, accomplishing the feat of urban redevelopment requires aligning
2 elected leaders, bureaucrats, private capital, NGOs, and even organized crime
3 syndicates in support of the project (Weinstein and Ren 2009). Shivalik benefited
4 from this type of support. The incentive for most of these actors is making money,
5 not rehabilitating slum dwellers. The residents of Golibar felt vulnerable to being
6 exploited in the process.

7 This localized drive for profits is nested within a broader effort to transform
8 Mumbai into a world-class city, a process that entails making the city attractive
9 not just to residents and entrepreneurs but to foreign investors, who have replaced
10 the state as the primary driver of “development” (Nayar and Bombay First 2003).
11 And, indeed, Shivalik is an expression of these interests. Shivalik has situated
12 itself as the developer of all of Golibar. In doing so, it has drawn the attention
13 and investment of a host of actors that link Golibar not only to local but also to
14 national and international interests. The redevelopment of Golibar is to be done
15 not just by Shivalik but also by its partners in the project, including Unitech, a
16 New Delhi–based, publicly traded developer of luxury resorts and luxury develop-
17 ments across India. Unitech, in turn, is a favorite of foreign investors, including
18 Western mutual funds and, until the firm’s collapse, Lehman Brothers (Nandy
19 2008).

20 With the battle reaching a peak in May 2011, Patkar staged a hunger strike in
21 Golibar. Having some sense of the configuration of forces arrayed to transform
22 Golibar, slum dwellers sought out their own allies. Perhaps tellingly, they allied
23 not with established local slum dweller advocates but with a newer organization,
24 an affiliate of NAPM. NAPM is a nationwide umbrella organization for activist
25 groups with interests ranging from safeguarding fishermen’s rights to opposing
26 new nuclear power plants to questioning large-scale land acquisitions for special
27 economic zones. As such, NAPM—an organization whose symbol, the clenched
28 fist, signals popular solidarity and a willingness to fight—is familiar with battling
29 the multinational forces arrayed against Golibar in addition to local bureaucrats
30 and developers. Its most prominent figure is the white-haired Patkar, best known
31 for her work with tribal residents of the Narmada Valley who were to be displaced
32 by a massive dam project.

33 Patkar started her fast on May 20, the day after the bulldozers returned and
34 twelve Ganesh Krupa residents had been arrested for resisting eviction. For nine
35 days, national TV crews crowded Golibar’s narrow main street as the Gandhian
36 activist stopped eating. Sympathizers from across the city—trade union mem-
37 bers, residents of other slum pockets, a smattering of students—gathered to show
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their support. Patkar’s hunger strike brought Golibar to national attention. It made the prime-time news on several channels and found prominent mention in most newspapers.

It is easy to see this Gandhian protest as an example of what Chatterjee would call “political society.” The hunger strike can be used just as easily to shame a government into making local concessions as it can be to win emancipation from imperial rule. States, uncomfortable with such calls for social justice, are often interested in negotiating local solutions that facilitate governance but that don’t necessarily alter the institutions that produced the problem in the first place. By the sixth day of the strike, as Patkar was visibly weakening, a huddle of government officials came by to negotiate. It took three more days to hammer out the fine print.

Figure 2 NAPM’s symbol, the clenched fist, is stenciled on walls throughout Golibar. Photo by Cassim Shepard



Figure 3 Ganesh Krupa Office at night. Photo by Cassim Shepard

On May 28, nine days after she had started her fast, Patkar ate her first meal after the chief minister of Maharashtra agreed to set up two committees, one to investigate the contentious 3K clause of the Slum Rehabilitation Act of 1995, under which Shivalik had been granted the project, and another committee to investigate the irregularities at various sites in Golibar.² With no mechanism available for slum dwellers to hold the chief minister accountable, the government retracted its promise one month later. Struggles over demolitions have continued in Golibar. On some occasions the demolition crews are resisted, and on others they manage to knock some houses down. Despite little response from elected

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2. Shivalik Ventures had been authorized in August 2008 to develop the entire swathe of Golibar when the state government invoked a little-known clause of the Maharashtra Slum Areas (Improvement, Clearance and Redevelopment) Act of 1971. Chapter 1A, Section 3K of the act permits the state government to issue the Slum Rehabilitation Authority policy directions “it may think necessary or expedient for carrying out the purposes of the act” and the authority is “bound to carry out and follow these directions”(Accessed at housing.maharashtra.gov.in/Sitemap/housing/pdf/actsrules/Maharashtra_Slum_Areas_Improvement_Clearance.pdf).

1 officials or the Slum Redevelopment Authority but with the help of documentar-
2 ians and a sympathetic local television station, slum dwellers have taken their call
3 for justice to the public.

4 As an avatar of this conflict, Gaekwad celebrates the collective defiance of
5 Golibar, in particular the engagement of children, who are presumably sensitive
6 to the core moral issues at stake. In this fight, slum residents receive help from
7 important social justice NGOs, such as NAPM, which magnifies the voices of
8 slum residents in the public sphere, especially since a Gandhian hunger strike
9 by a well-known, professional activist helps ensure that the government comes
10 to the table. This account is uplifting but conventional. It situates slum residents
11 as committed but politically unsophisticated, in need of NAPM's help. There is
12 much more—in spatial, social, and practical terms—to this story. Reconstructing
13 an account of the urban imaginary of the poor on the basis of the politics in the
14 Field of Struggle would be misleading. It is necessary to look at the other spaces
15 of the slum to properly understand the action in those spaces as well as to recon-
16 struct the politics of Golibar residents. If
17 we don't, it is too easy to fall into the trap
18 of characterizing the struggle as one of
19 particularistic political society or some
20 other reductionist explanation of politi-
21 cal action.

22 23 **The Office**

24 Exclusively focusing on the Field of
25 Struggle as the central space of the
26 conflict between Shivalik and the resi-
27 dents of Golibar does not fully account
28 for how the practices employed in this
29 struggle instantiate an integrative urban
30 imaginary. While the slum residents' use
31 of the Field of Struggle to resist a power-
32 ful, police-backed developer is instruc-
33 tive, investigating that space alone gives
34 the appearance of a relatively conventional story of slum residents attempting
35 to defend their community against the depredations of capital or of the distinctive
36 political culture of the poor. To put the Field of Struggle in proper perspective, we
37 turn to another space that is even more important in enabling the Ganesh Krupa
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Figure 4 A Golibar resident holds up his photo pass, proving his residency in the area since before 1976. Photo by Cassim Shepard

1 Society to face Shivalik. Residents refer to this second space as the “Office.” The
2 moniker “office” simultaneously misleads—its physical reality is a tarp thrown
3 over some poles with a few benches and a table underneath—and illuminates
4 both the nature of the conflict and the citizenship practices Ganesh Krupa per-
5 forms. In treating the Office as a space that enables Golibar residents to act as
6 citizens of the city, we begin to move away from conventional narratives about
7 such struggles.

8 To understand the Office, it is first necessary to understand whose office it
9 is. The vanguard of the protest against Shivalik in Golibar is the Ganesh Krupa
10 Society, which represents a specific tract within Golibar. Forming the organization
11 was a necessary step to make a deal with a developer under the Slum Rehabilita-
12 tion Scheme. Thus the Ganesh Krupa Society is not an organization constituted to
13 realize the values of a solidaristic community. Instead, it was constituted by a law
14 for the express purpose of facilitating the governance of slum redevelopment (Roy
15 2009). The law itself was instrumental in constituting the agent that was holding
16 it accountable in Golibar; it was not some autonomous or authentic expression of
17 slum-dweller politics. Importantly, however, in doing so the state constituted an
18 actor that took seriously its claims to legitimacy: accountability to the people, the
19 rule of law, equality before the law. The question that is implied in the practices
20 of the Office is whether government in Mumbai is legitimate on its own terms.

21 While Gaekwad is the personification of the politics of the Field of Struggle,
22 a longtime Golibar resident named Aba Tandel personifies the practices that take
23 shape in the Office. Tandel’s weapon of choice in the struggle over Golibar is the
24 Right to Information (RTI) petition, which gives citizens access to state docu-
25 ments. Tandel filed his first RTI petition in 2006, when his slum tract, Sambhaji
26 Society, came up for redevelopment. Since then, he has filed more than 250 RTI
27 petitions to help his neighbors acquire copies of survey maps and documents from
28 the collector, the municipal corporation, the urban development ministry, and
29 the city survey department. Tandel learned to file the petitions after obtaining a
30 booklet issued by the state government’s information officer after the RTI Act was
31 passed in 2005. But he soon realized that officials did their best to stall him, so
32 over the years, he’s perfected the art of ferreting out the information he requires.
33 Questions, he realized, had to be posed in a specific way, leaving no room for
34 ambiguity. If you’re going after really sensitive information, it makes sense to do
35 so in two or three stages, like steadily climbing a ladder, he said, so that you don’t
36 give the whole game away in one shot. Tandel has used the RTI Act to point out
37 several contradictions in Shivalik’s proposal and forgeries in the consent letter for
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1 Golibar. Patient navigation of bureaucratic and legal rules, mastering paperwork,
2 and building legal arguments characterize the political practice of the Office.

3 The tent was erected in May 2011 on a plot of land cleared by the demolition
4 of several homes. Like the Field of Struggle, Golibar residents have opportunisti-
5 cally seized the spaces temporarily opened up by redevelopment to construct an
6 infrastructure of slum-dweller politics. The use made of these spaces reveals much
7 about the people using them. The Office is fifty yards off the main road and is sur-
8 rounded mostly by slum dwellers' housing. It feels like a courtyard that is imme-
9 diately accessible from the surrounding homes while at the same time functioning
10 as a sort of public square. The one solid wall of the Office is the side of a home
11 previously hidden by other, now-demolished structures. The wall is sparsely deco-
12 rated with the charter of the Ganesh Krupa Society and a stencil of the clenched
13 fist of NAPM (which appears on walls throughout the area). Indeed, the demoli-
14 tions seem to hang over the courtyard in a way that gives purpose to the activities
15 in the Office. While there are many intact and occupied structures surrounding
16 the courtyard — where neighbors engage in routine household activities, children
17 appear and then disappear just as quickly, and TVs flicker in windows — there are
18 also the remnants of half-finished demolitions. Knocked-down walls reveal the
19 floor tiles of what were once bathrooms and kitchens, and the nooks created by
20 incomplete demolitions are used to hang laundry. The debris, it seems, serves as
21 a motivational reminder to those who remain that their effort to create a home in
22 Golibar would amount to nothing if they lost the battle.

23 The Office itself is not organized for the public performance of slum-dweller
24 outrage. The tarp draped over wooden poles shelters some makeshift wooden
25 benches and an old desk. It's used as a meeting room for small conferences with
26 visitors, as a community center for larger conclaves (the audience sits on brown
27 canvas sheets laid out on the ground), or as a theater for children to stage plays
28 (sometimes about the demolitions they've experienced). It is where the behind-
29 the-scenes work of slum-dweller protest takes place.

30 Indeed, the work in the Office is the core of the protest. Rather than a simple
31 morally grounded expression of outrage at the assault on their community, slum-
32 dweller strategy centers on holding the Slum Redevelopment Authority account-
33 able to its own regulations and guidelines. Established by the Slum Rehabilitation
34 Act of 1995, the authority is responsible for the implementation of the act. The act
35 itself favors slum residents in many ways. While slum dwellers with long tenure,
36 such as those in Golibar, usually take the view that their homes have been "regu-
37 larized" through the payment of taxes and fees, securing permission to build,
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1 and various other interactions with government entities that implicitly recognize
2 their legitimacy, Golibar is still an informal settlement that exists because people
3 appropriated land that they did not have title to. Its informality is perhaps belied
4 by the fact that slum-dweller “shanties” in Golibar actually look permanent. They
5 are constructed mostly with brick and concrete, and they have been improved in a
6 variety of ways including tiling on walls and floors and the installation of windows
7 and doors with locks. Nonetheless, it seems inevitable that the combination of
8 growing real estate values, Golibar’s location, and the aspirations of the city’s elite
9 to become a world city would inevitably combine to open the slum to redevelop-
10 ment. The Slum Rehabilitation Act facilitates this process.

11 The act functions primarily to incentivize private developers to produce new
12 housing for slum dwellers by providing them the opportunity either to develop
13 slum land more intensively than would otherwise be possible or to develop land in
14 other parts of the city. Essentially, developers are freed from normal regulations or
15 offered “transfer of development rights” that function as securities backed by the
16 right to intensively develop urban land. While the act provides many opportuni-
17 ties for private developers, it also places many requirements on their treatment of
18 slum dwellers. Most importantly, the developer must provide housing in situ. To
19 secure land for market-rate development on the site, the in situ requirement leads
20 the developer to rehouse slum dwellers in multifamily buildings that are usually
21 seven to ten stories tall. The flats provided must be a minimum of 225 square feet
22 and have indoor plumbing. The flats are provided free of charge, and the devel-
23 oper must pay the building maintenance fees for ten years, after which time the
24 resident pays. The developer also must provide temporary housing — called transit
25 housing — for slum dwellers until they can be placed in their new flat. Finally, and
26 perhaps most onerously for the developer, plans must be approved by 70 percent
27 of the residents of the slum tracts that are to be redeveloped. Effectively, the law
28 regularizes slum dwellers — at least those who can demonstrate residence in the
29 slum prior to 1995 — but only as a way to ensure that redevelopment can proceed
30 in a way that respects slum dwellers’ need for shelter. Nonetheless, using Susan
31 Fainstein’s (2010) criteria of justice, equality, and inclusion, the law compares
32 favorably to those in other Indian states and many Western nations.

33 The conflicts in the Field of Struggle must be understood as merely one com-
34 ponent of a broader campaign to realize slum-dweller rights in the context of the
35 Slum Rehabilitation Act. The activities in the Office indicate that the protestors’
36 primary dispute is with illegalities in the implementation of the act and the lack of
37 enforcement by the Slum Redevelopment Authority, which oversees the process.
38 Indeed, there were many irregularities.

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<COMP: Please see Figure 24 about here.>

When the Slum Redevelopment Scheme was announced in 1991, Golibar’s residents began to organize themselves into housing cooperative societies to take advantage of the plan. By the mid-1990s, forty-six societies had been formed. Ganesh Krupa, a collection of 323 homes, was among them. Of the 323 families in Ganesh Krupa, 283 were declared eligible; that is, they could demonstrate residence before the cutoff date of 1995. In March 2003, an official survey found that 199 of the 283 families of Ganesh Krupa had given their consent for the scheme—which made up the mandatory 70 percent. Their right to the land was clear: in 2003 the state government indicated in a letter that it had acquired the land and that the plot could be transferred to the Ganesh Krupa Cooperative Society. In January that year, the residents paid property tax of Rs 504,920 and were ceded legal ownership of the land.

In April 2003, Ganesh Krupa signed a deal with a firm named Madhu Constructions, and little changed until some surveyors appeared in 2009, saying that they represented Shivalik Ventures. Many Ganesh Krupa residents, who until that moment had never heard of Shivalik, were concerned. They maintained that

Figure 5 Aziz Khan, a former slum dweller, rehoused in a 225-square-foot flat near his former home. Photo by Cassim Shepard

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1 since they had signed a deal with Madhu Constructions, not with Shivalik, they
2 were under no obligation to follow its instructions. Assisted by neighbors from
3 surrounding slum pockets and by representatives of NAPM, which had already
4 started working in Ambewadi, a cluster of shanties across the street, the residents
5 of Ganesh Krupa began to take stock of the situation—and to figure out how to
6 get what they wanted.

7 For Gaekwad, this entailed far more than learning to lead protests and the most
8 effective strategies for beating back demolition crews. Over the next few months,
9 the schoolteacher would find herself becoming a student in a variety of subjects:
10 the Slum Rehabilitation Act of 1995, the Criminal Procedure Code, the RTI
11 Act, the hierarchies of the Collectorate—the office that administers land records
12 in Mumbai—and the art of making concise media statements.

13 The first learning experience came in January 2010, when 178 residents of
14 Ganesh Krupa were sent a demolition notice from Shivalik. The residents counter-
15 ed this by filing a RTI petition with the Registrar of Cooperatives demanding
16 to know how Shivalik had come to replace Madhu Constructions in the deal. The
17 reply revealed that Shivalik had signed a deal with Madhu in 2008 to execute the
18 project as a joint venture. But when Gaekwad and her neighbors studied the agree-
19 ment letter that Shivalik had submitted to the authorities, they realized that the
20 documentation of Ganesh Krupa’s consent to this arrangement had been forged.
21 “People who didn’t speak English had signed in English, [and] the signatures of
22 people who weren’t in town had been shown,” said Gaekwad. Most tellingly, the
23 consent list had the signature of Sulochna Pawar, who had died four years before
24 she supposedly signed her name at the general body meeting. Gaekwad explained
25 that they then “filed a forgery complaint with the police.” Upon examining the text
26 of the Slum Rehabilitation Act, Ganesh Krupa residents were happy to learn that
27 any fraudulently derived consent rendered a letter of intent void. Unfortunately,
28 the Slum Redevelopment Authority chose to overlook the violation. The police,
29 for their part, refused to investigate the case, and ultimately a court had to order
30 them to do so. The investigation has still not been concluded despite the presence
31 of what the Ganesh Krupa Society says is prima facie evidence of fraud (Khar
32 East Andolan 2012).

33 The residents also filed a civil case against Shivalik, claiming that they had not
34 given their consent for the project, that they would be unable to afford the main-
35 tenance costs of tenements in the fifteen-story building that Shivalik planned (the
36 taller the building, the higher the maintenance costs), and that they had doubts
37 about the viability of the transit accommodation they were being offered. Because
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1 Shivalik illegally built much of its transit housing on land owned by the Indian Air
2 Force (a fact that a Ganesh Krupa RTI petition brought to light), residents worried
3 that the transit housing would be torn down at the very moment they would need it.

4 The conflict in Golibar is as much about the successful navigation of the
5 bureaucracy of the Indian state as it is about protest tactics. Success in this strug-
6 gle depends upon utilizing the few levers slum dwellers have to move the govern-
7 ment bureaucracies. One such lever is the RTI petition mobilized by Tandel. Under
8 the provisions of the RTI Act, passed in 2005, any Indian citizen may request
9 information from a public authority using a specified form. The state entity is
10 required to reply within thirty days. Across Mumbai, slum dwellers have been
11 using the RTI Act to obtain data about the projects and developers that threaten
12 to displace them. The petition that was most damaging to Shivalik was the one
13 that revealed that 12.2 acres of land slated for transit housing were actually owned
14 by the Indian Air Force. The defense services have since taken Shivalik to court.
15 The RTI petitions have served to arm Ganesh Krupa with the weapons necessary
16 to pursue legal challenges against Shivalik as well as make its case in public. Its
17 critique is not moral; it is legal. Indeed, Ganesh Krupa has set up a website that
18 diligently lays out timelines and legal documents that demonstrate Shivalik's ille-
19 gality. The assumption is that this material and not poignant pictures of children
20 supporting a protest is more important for arbitrating the issue.

21 The second lever is electoral politics. Unlike in the United States, the poor vote
22 in India and political parties usually work to maintain their populist credentials.
23 Indeed, voter participation might explain why the Slum Rehabilitation Act makes
24 the provisions it does for slum dwellers. Improvements in slums, such as the provi-
25 sion of water taps or communal toilets, are often provided by politicians to boost
26 their popularity. However, in this case the politicians were not useful, and, indeed,
27 Mumbaikars often assume that politicians have their own deals with developers
28 (Gaekwad 2012; Tandel 2012).

29 The third lever is the courts, and, indeed, the outcome of the struggle in Goli-
30 bar ultimately was a judicial decision, not a political one. The court case of great-
31 est significance concerned the validity of demolitions by Shivalik given the dubi-
32 ous basis of its claim to have secured the consent of the Ganesh Krupa Society.
33 Arguing that the residents had a legitimate case but that rectifying the fraud would
34 serve no useful purpose, on December 23, 2010, the High Court ordered the evic-
35 tion of "nonconsenting" residents, after which the residents of Golibar had to
36 face down demolition efforts on the Field of Struggle. In doing so, they received
37 considerable support, not least because of outrage caused by the failure of state
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1 institutions to abide by their own rules and standards of conduct. The Slum Rede-
2 velopment Authority, which exists ostensibly to protect slum dwellers, overlooked
3 its own rules, and the High Court overlooked a legal finding, in allowing the
4 developer to proceed with demolitions.

5 The efforts of Ganesh Krupa ultimately failed in the face of collapsing state
6 institutions. Developers in Mumbai are able to build without demonstrating, what
7 Americans would call, “site control,” and the facts on the ground are mostly
8 respected by the institutions that exist to ensure the legality of slum redevelop-
9 ments: the Slum Redevelopment Authority and the courts. State institutions
10 themselves operate at cross-purposes and ignore not only the law but their own
11 regulations. As for development, the rule of law does not prevail in Mumbai. And,
12 indeed, this was the greatest miscalculation of the Ganesh Krupa Society. Its
13 members assumed that things like laws and regulations mattered and that if they
14 could mobilize them against Shivalik, they would win. Consequently, from their
15 base in the Office they invested countless hours mastering bureaucratic systems in
16 the manner Tandel did with the RTI. As a consequence, Gaekwad says, “Now peo-
17 ple whose homes are in danger in other parts of the city come to us for advice. . . .
18 We tell them not to put their names to any documents they haven’t read.” How-
19 ever, what is relevant here is not that they lost. After all, this article is not about
20 social movement outcomes. What is relevant is the aspirations, values, and ideals
21 evident in their practice. Far from acting in defense of the particularistic values
22 and solidarities of “community,” Ganesh Krupa acted on the basis of a faith in
23 the rule of law and the blindness of the law in a democratic society to the social
24 standing of the parties concerned. Ganesh Krupa acted out of faith in liberal
25 institutions rather than out of the desire to have its particularistic moral critiques
26 or narrow socioeconomic interests recognized. In doing so, its members acted as
27 prototypical bourgeois citizens of the Modernist City. In resisting the allure of the
28 particularistic claim, this mode of action advances an integrative urban imaginary
29 in which institutions, laws, and the built environment present opportunities for,
30 and infrastructures of, citizenship.

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31
32 **The Flat**

33 In Mumbai, the premium on space (intensified by Mumbai’s peninsular and longi-
34 tudinal physical geography) promotes the perceived necessity to replace low-rise
35 shanties with flat towers to free up land for more development. Indeed, this idea
36 is built into the Slum Rehabilitation Act, which utilizes development rights as the
37 “payment” to developers for rehousing slum dwellers. This logic differs greatly
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from current thinking in the United States, for instance, where federal incentives are encouraging local governments to replace the large flat blocks built for the poor and working classes in the 1950s and 1960s with low-rise, scattered-site, and mixed-income developments. Justifications for this policy shift include the negative effects of concentrated poverty and growing real estate values. Thus, to an American eye, Mumbai's ranks of shoddy flat towers, separated by trash piles and disconnected from the main economic activity of the city, appear as a monumental policy mistake. This perception makes it easy to romanticize the slums that, whatever their shortcomings, appear to be much healthier communities than the ghettos and banlieues of the West. From this perspective, mobilizations to stop demolitions and defend slums make sense. But that view underplays the complex meanings of flat dwelling in contemporary Mumbai. Flats signal respectability, urbanity, and privacy. At the same time, Mumbaikars are aware that moving into a new flat does not automatically produce this transformation—a fact that opens the door to competing meanings and discourses that are rooted in different experiences and social circumstances.

Figure 6 On Golibar's main street, developers and real estate agents offer flats in distant Virar, more than two hours' drive north. Photo by Cassim Shepard

1 The flat, then, is the third space that underpins the political activism of Golibar
2 residents. The flat is not a spatial “infrastructure” in the same way the Field of
3 Struggle and the Office are. It is not a physical space that is appropriated for slum-
4 dweller protest. Rather, the Flat is the spatial grounding of the aspirations of the
5 slum dwellers. The idea of the Flat links together both the indignities of the slum,
6 even a relatively affluent slum like Golibar, and the possibility of a new mode of
7 living that would enable slum residents to overcome those indignities. Recogniz-
8 ing the Flat as the core aspiration of slum-dweller activism in Golibar suggests an
9 aspiration for an urbanism that is rarely attributed to them.

10 But the Flat is not perceived as an end in itself. Looking closely at the moti-
11 vations of the Golibar protesters reveals their nuanced awareness of other com-
12 munities’ experiences with slum rehabilitation and rehousing projects throughout
13 Mumbai. Two recent examples help explain the skepticism in Golibar about Shiva-
14 lik’s proposal, despite the widely shared aspiration to flat living.

15 Mankhurd, in northeastern Mumbai, is among the neighborhoods in the city’s
16 administrative M Ward, which has the lowest human development indicators in
17 the city: 77.5 percent of its population lives in slums (compared to 54 percent for
18 Mumbai overall); average life expectancy is thirty-nine years (compared to a city-
19 wide average of fifty-two years); and the ward’s population density is 66,881 peo-
20 ple per square kilometer (compared to 20,898 citywide). M Ward is home to the
21 city’s biggest garbage dump, two petrochemical refineries, and a fertilizer plant.
22 Over the past decade, it has also become home to about 60,000 “project-affected
23 people,” or people relocated to around one hundred buildings, seven to fourteen
24 stories high, after their previous dwellings were demolished in road construc-
25 tion or other infrastructural projects. Also moved here were people who lived on
26 pavements along arterial roads as well as people whose homes were dangerously
27 close to the Harbour Line railway tracks. In June 2011, a team of activists declared
28 that the sixty-five buildings in the Lallubhai Compound area of Mankhurd were
29 no better than “vertical slums”: they noted that the buildings have little light or
30 ventilation, that they violated fire-safety regulations, and that they had erratic
31 water supply.

32 Residents of Mankhurd, people who had previously been living a precarious
33 existence alongside railroad tracks, have many complaints about their new homes,
34 homes that were provided for free. In interviews, complaints included the distance
35 of Mankhurd from their places of work—Mankhurd is, economically speaking,
36 in the middle of nowhere. For many residents, their wages are too low to allow
37 them to travel to jobs elsewhere. The trash filling up the spaces between build-
38 ings does not arouse much ire, but many say that living in shanties was better. In

1 the shanties, it was easier to accommodate large families; indeed, one oft-noted
2 difference between the shanty and the flat is that the former is a flexible space
3 that can be adapted to meet different needs, while the latter is fixed and seems
4 to require a certain type of family (nuclear), employment (waged), and sociabil-
5 ity (taking place outside the home). Along with communities, large families are
6 necessarily broken up in the transition to housing in Mankhurd.

7 Another common complaint is that the indoor toilets in the flats are actually
8 worse than slum accommodations. Public toilets are better able to accommodate
9 large families, and, more importantly, having an indoor toilet is only an improve-
10 ment if you have running water. Unfortunately, in Mankhurd and other slum reha-
11 bilitation projects running water is only available very intermittently. Slums had
12 more safe space for children, and stealing is a bigger problem in Mankhurd, both
13 problems related to the fact that no one knows one another. Elevators are not
14 maintained, transforming flat buildings into prisons for older residents. Finally,
15 living in the slum was cheaper. Some contest this negative portrayal—notably
16 people who are living with nuclear rather than extended families—by noting that
17 the buildings themselves are safer. Perhaps more importantly, the regularization
18 of their status by being provided with flats to which they have title free of charge
19 (though they pay maintenance fees) is considered an improvement.

20 Sangharsh Nagar, located in the Chandivali area of northwestern Mumbai, is
21 another slum relocation scheme, designed by the accomplished architect P. K.
22 Das with the express purpose of overcoming some of the problems in Mankhurd.
23 The people of Sangharsh Nagar were relocated from shanties they had built in the
24 Sanjay Gandhi National Park. (Like people who lived in shanties along railroad
25 tracks, the park dwellers could not be rehoused in situ.) Rather than the uninter-
26 rupted ranks of housing separated by large, trash-strewn open spaces that prevail
27 in Mankhurd, the buildings in Sangharsh Nagar are organized around courtyards
28 that provide relatively sheltered spaces for children to play and other leisure activi-
29 ties. The lower tier of space in the buildings is reserved for nonresidential activi-
30 ties including the offices of the housing society, a politician's office, a nursery
31 school, and a small shop selling candy and drinks. The development is designed
32 to allow more light and facilitate more sociability than the buildings of Mankhurd.

33 And yet the complaints of these relocated slum dwellers are just as vehement
34 as those in Mankhurd. As in Mankhurd, water is rarely available—according to
35 some, water is only available at the taps once per day for about thirty minutes—
36 despite the payment of maintenance fees of around Rs 300 per month. Many feel
37 that more water is actually available but that their current representative to the city
38 legislature, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC; formerly the Bom-

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1 bay Municipal Corporation), is punishing them for a lack of support. The state
2 representative has tried to help by digging bore wells, but the water quality is poor
3 and the new tanks are located in the courtyards that are supposed to be spaces of
4 leisure. The development is in what was once a quarry, and it is graded poorly.
5 As a result, water that runs off the hill collects in the courtyards and becomes a
6 breeding ground for disease. The buildings are shoddily built; one resident says,
7 “If you hit a nail into the wall, it cracks.” For the forty thousand people living in
8 the development there are no schools, no big hospital, no gate for the compound,
9 and no playground; there is only one underground water tank for every eighteen
10 buildings; and, finally, residents are getting billed for things that they think the
11 developer should be paying for. The problems are great enough that some residents
12 are choosing to return to their shanties in the national park. Another resident of
13 Sangharsh Nagar says: “The SRA [Slum Rehabilitation Authority] doesn’t check
14 the work of the builder. It only exists on paper; it doesn’t do anything in reality.”

15 Perhaps the greatest indignity is that at the bottom of the hill is a massive city
16 within the city. Downtown Las Vegas seems to have been plunked down on the
17 edge of Mumbai. Several huge luxury flat buildings flanked by indoor malls occu-
18 pied by American and European retailers dominate the area of Powai, adjacent to
19 Chandivali and Sangharsh Nagar. Ironically enough, this playground for the afflu-
20 ent was built on land originally allocated for a low-income development. (NAPM
21 was central in exposing this scandal, which motivated an ongoing court case.)

22 Residents of Golibar are aware of these issues. In addition to connections made
23 through family and work, Mumbai’s scattered slums are linked by a number of
24 NGOs engaged in providing social services, advocating for slum dwellers, and
25 conducting research to inform policy. However, despite the problems in many
26 slum redevelopments, the idea of the Flat remains a powerful aspiration. To see
27 how this aspiration functions as a conceptual infrastructure of citizenship—that
28 is, as an organizer and motivator for political practices based on an integrative
29 urban imaginary—we must first break with the idea that slum-dweller activism
30 in Golibar is a defense of the slum community. Of course, real reasons for such
31 a defense are manifest: Golibar is in many ways a much better place to live than
32 Mankhurd; residents have access to water, electricity, employment, transportation,
33 shopping, temples, mosques, graveyards, businesses, and schools. And all of this
34 exists in a space that can be traversed in a fifteen-minute walk. For these reasons,
35 slum redevelopment will not be as traumatic as it was for those who had squatted
36 on the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, for the simple reason that the slum redevelop-
37 ments in Golibar will be in the same place. Even as the landscape is transformed,
38 many of the faces occupying the new buildings will be the same. Moreover, unlike

1 the residents of Mankhurd and Sangharsh Nagar, eligible Golibar residents will
2 remain in a relatively central location with easy access to one of the main railways
3 and a highway. But this difference merely muddies the question of the motivation
4 for the protest.

5 In conversation, Golibar residents insistently communicate both the various
6 injustices that have been perpetrated on them and the admirable solidarity the com-
7 munity has demonstrated in defending itself. The battles with police, Gaekwad's
8 celebration of the militancy of the children, the self-proclaimed Ganesh Krupa
9 guard who moved his light manufacturing business into Golibar so he could
10 immediately respond to any demolitions, the willingness of the other societies to
11 stand with Ganesh Krupa, all are things that are narrated in the Office with obvi-
12 ous attention to impressing outsiders as well as to meeting the need to renarrate
13 the struggle to one another. The involvement of organizations like NAPM adds to
14 the tendency to romanticize community solidarity in the face of gross injustice.

15 Yet when residents are pressed to explain what motivates them to engage in
16 this extended and perhaps quixotic struggle, the answer is surprising. Tandel, the
17 expert on RTI petitions, summarizes the difference between perception and real-
18 ity nicely:

19 People think that we want to stop the progress of Mumbai. That is not
20 true. We want to ensure that our rights are guaranteed and that the builder
21 doesn't exploit us. After all, this is our land. Why should we give it up
22 if we aren't going to get a good deal? People think we are getting free
23 houses. That is not true. We are actually giving up one house in exchange
24 for another — sometimes it's a smaller house.

25 A frequent refrain in interviews with members of the Ganesh Krupa Soci-
26 ety was that they "want development too." But the discursive context in Mumbai
27 makes this easy to overlook. Mumbai has developed rapidly over the past twenty
28 years. Infrastructure and institutional reform both lag, but the attractiveness of
29 Mumbai to foreign capital is not lost on anyone in the city. Active projects, sup-
30 ported by organizations like the strategic corporate organization Bombay First,
31 attempt to facilitate Mumbai's transformation by characterizing development as
32 an unqualified good to be pursued, while those who question it are portrayed as
33 anticivic or backward. This powerful coalition of growth-oriented elites includes
34 real estate developers, newspapers, foreign investors, middle-class activists, poli-
35 ticians, and even gangsters (Logan and Molotch 1987; Weinstein 2009). More-
36 over, this coalition's discourse regularly situates slum dwellers as impediments to
37 growth, not necessarily because they contest development, but because many of
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1 the greatest opportunities to reorganize urban space profitably involve slums. In
2 a different register, local elites understand the behavior of the poor of the city as
3 the greatest obstacle to making the city attractive for foreign investment and for
4 a global cosmopolitan cultural and economic elite (including a new generation of
5 wealthy Indians).

6 In saying that they “want development too,” Golibar residents are not nodding
7 to a dominant discourse, much less performing fealty to it. After all, Golibar
8 residents, or their parents, migrated to the city to improve their economic well-
9 being. While the slum has been effective in facilitating socioeconomic mobility,
10 the associations of slums with poverty, desperation, and a lack of respect for urban
11 civility mean that the idea of residence in an flat signifies something very potent:
12 respectability. This respectability comes in the form of both social status and legal
13 regularization.

14 Developers understand the striving of slum residents. This is evident in the
15 storefronts they have established on Golibar’s main lane to sell flats on the out-
16 skirts of the city. The advertisements promise comfortable living in new buildings
17 that won’t leak in the monsoon. They hold out the promise of greater physical
18 comfort, the most important aspect of which is the promise of a private toilet and
19 bathroom. Even in a relatively well-off slum like Golibar, meeting the needs of the
20 body entails a number of negotiations with one’s neighbors. Privacy is notoriously
21 hard to come by and doing something as mundane as relieving oneself before
22 work can involve waiting in lines or waking up early to beat “rush hour” at the
23 communal toilet. The promise of running water and a private toilet is unrivaled
24 as the most commonly invoked positive aspect of flat living. The possibility of
25 improved status, respectability, or comfort in a flat without running water, how-
26 ever, is limited.

27 The struggle in Golibar, then, is being waged to ensure that the promise of
28 the flat is actually realized by a developer that honors its promises and the provi-
29 sions of the law. Ganesh Krupa’s constituents are familiar with the problems in
30 Mankhurd and even in Golibar itself. Their effort is not a defense of the status quo
31 of their community. Rather, it is an elaborate negotiation, designed to ensure that
32 the problems of other developments won’t be their problems. As a negotiation, it
33 is extremely sophisticated. Ganesh Krupa uses diverse communications technolo-
34 gies, NGOs, the courts, organizational skills, and knowledge of relevant govern-
35 ment agencies and regulations to achieve its goal. Ganesh Krupa wants to realize
36 the possibilities of living in the city. These possibilities are endangered less by the
37 destruction of the slum than by the bad faith of the developer and the failure of gov-
38 ernment to enforce its own laws. When pressed on what it wants out of the struggle,

1 a housing society, Meena Cooperative Society, with mostly Muslim members on
2 the end of Golibar opposite Ganesh Krupa, takes us to an unremarkable building
3 that is nonetheless less run down than many slum redevelopment projects. We are
4 told that inside the water actually runs. Members want a modest flat in a building
5 that functions. Ismail Ibrahim Patel, of Meena Society elaborates:

6 We are all educated people. We have lived here since our childhood. All
7 around, we can see Mumbai developing—but that development never
8 seems to benefit us. We want to live in solid buildings too. We want our
9 children to have gardens to play in and to be able to walk safely in the
10 street without being knocked over by cars. Our forefathers have built this
11 city. They were the carpenters and masons who built all the big buildings.
12 It's time that we also enjoyed the rewards.

13 14 **Conclusion**

15 On February 29, 2012, just past 1 p.m., a wrecking crew was once again ready to
16 march into Ganesh Krupa Society. The workers, carrying crowbars and sledge-
17 hammers, wore badges identifying them as being “on collector’s duty” and had
18 on yellow safety helmets.

19 The workers were preceded by a platoon of policemen and policewomen in
20 special riot gear: they bore plastic canes and transparent shields, even though
21 bamboo batons and protective gear are standard issue for the force. Accompany-
22 ing them was a representative of the collector, the government official in charge
23 of land tenure in the district. Bringing up the rear was an ambulance, just in case
24 the people whose homes were slated for demolition put up any especially energetic
25 resistance, as they had done on previous occasions.

26 But this time was different. This was the fifth time the wrecking crews had
27 been at work at Ganesh Krupa Nagar since 2010. The first time the bulldozers
28 attempted to force their way in, in November 2010, the residents of Ganesh Krupa
29 Nagar formed a phalanx on the lane leading into their cluster and refused to let
30 the wreckers pass. Even the police couldn’t tear them away.

31 However, in the two years on, their resolve had been chipped away a little. Of
32 the 323 homes that stood in the cluster in 2010, only 184 remained. Some homes
33 had been demolished; the owners of the others had succumbed to incentives or
34 couldn’t take the pressure of the uncertainty. A senior police official, G.T. Padwal,
35 used a cordless mike to make an announcement. He asked the residents to cooper-
36 ate with the authorities and to leave their homes peacefully. “Please make your
37 protests in court,” he urged. “We request you to please clear your homes.”
38

1 The wreckers had brought along big white tarpaulin sacks, and the residents
2 meekly stuffed their belongings into them. The organizer of the local NAPM
3 affiliate, Simpreet Singh, put a brave face on this denouement, presenting it as part
4 of a game of cat and mouse. Nonetheless, with the courts unwilling to intervene,
5 despite acknowledged misconduct by the developer, and state officials refusing
6 to abide by the agreement they made during Patkar’s hunger strike, the outcome
7 seemed clear.

8 However, the theoretical significance of the struggle in Golibar does not depend
9 on this outcome. Rather, the significance is what it reveals about the discourses
10 that surround slum dwellers in a globalizing city like Mumbai and, crucially, what
11 these discourses exclude. In this case, Golibar’s story suggests the possibility that
12 the precariat of the modern global city can aspire to an urbanism that is inclusive,
13 egalitarian, mutually beneficial. For developers and their allies, the slum dwellers
14 stand in the way of an urban transformation that, it is claimed, will make Mumbai
15 a twenty-first-century city. Whether or not it does this, the potential profits to be
16 realized have attracted the interest of multinationals and investors as far afield as
17 the United States.

18 Academic and intellectual observers have mostly abandoned the very idea
19 that a liberal and inclusive urbanism is even possible. Instead, the fragmentary
20 and disconnected nature of the city is emphasized with the result that geographic
21 propinquity corresponds to conceptions of urban citizenship that are radically
22 different. Urbanism in the global era is more than simply “postmodern”; it is
23 ironically “medieval” and narrowly “telescopic” (Soja 1989; Alsayyad and Roy
24 2006; Amin 2012). Scholars who are interested in the possibilities of the global
25 city note that the new social relations the global city engenders are likely to pro-
26 duce as-yet unimagined identities and discourses, or they mine the everyday inter-
27 actions of the poor on the street and find their orientation to opportunity to be
28 potentially valuable (Sassen 1999; Gandy 2005; Simone 2009). At the same time,
29 other voices find urban spaces of exclusion to be hopelessly limiting. Slums can
30 sustain communal self-defense and political society but not civil society or a more
31 expansive urbanism (Chatterjee 2004). Of course, these analyses all offer possible
32 interpretations of the struggle in Golibar. The former would point to the opportun-
33 ism evident when Ganesh Krupa acknowledges that it is negotiating for a better
34 deal. The latter would point to how Ganesh Krupa shows itself to be a form of
35 political society in its interactions with the government and, perhaps more impor-
36 tantly, in its limited efforts to organize the other housing societies of Golibar. But
37 looking at this struggle more expansively forces us to question the limitations of
38 these characterizations.

1 Addressing this question is complex. It is necessary to confront the literature on
2 politics in the globalizing city that, whether positive or not, has a tendency to see
3 the city producing a hodgepodge of distinct urbanisms for distinct socioeconomic
4 and cultural territories. The scholarly task from the perspective of this postmodern
5 narrative is to find language to describe the particularistic identities and aspira-
6 tions that are rooted in the varied and unconnected geography of the city. If there
7 continues to be such a thing as urban civil society and a liberal social imaginary
8 that privileges the equality of citizens before the law, a notion of mutual depen-
9 dence that can underpin a market society and self-government, a civil society and
10 a public sphere, it is assumed to persist only among an economic and cultural elite.

11 Another complexity is the nature of the struggle in Golibar itself. The Field of
12 Struggle was home to a number of highly visible and dramatic confrontations and
13 protests. These protests captured the attention of documentarians and a television
14 station and became a tempting object for analysts and scholars. The skill of Goli-
15 bar residents in deploying a repertoire of protest in such a way as to convey the
16 justice of their cause in the public sphere merely adds to the attractiveness of the
17 Field of Struggle, but this unintentional misdirection also masks a more complex
18 and interesting mobilization. Residents of Ganesh Krupa and of Golibar also used
19 other spaces, skills, and aspirations. If we zoom out to consider these various
20 spaces and practices, the nature of the overall action comes into view.

21 Once we include the Office and the Flat in our consideration, we can see that
22 the three spatial bases of the struggle reveal a more complicated political action
23 underpinned by a social imaginary that is rarely attributed to slum dwellers. Using
24 the space of the Office allows us to see a more prosaic and strategic engagement
25 with the Slum Rehabilitation Authority and the courts. In engaging these state
26 institutions, the residents of Ganesh Krupa display the sort of political skills that
27 are often associated with middle-class activism in Mumbai. Action here depends
28 on the ability to research, build logical arguments, and manipulate the levers of
29 various state institutions. The Office itself has become a space that is premised on
30 a faith in democratic institutions. In the Flat, we find an object of aspiration that
31 contains both all the possibilities of an inclusive and affluent urbanism and the
32 nightmare of a more constrained and externally determined existence.

33 Focusing on the use residents of Ganesh Krupa make of the spatial morphol-
34 ogy of the slum, an aspirational social imaginary comes into view. But it is not
35 radically new. Indeed, in many ways it reflects a traditionally liberal view of the
36 city. The practices and discourses of Golibar residents reveal a faith in the rule of
37 law, the accountability of state institutions to citizens, the effectiveness of citizens
38 organized as a collective agency, and the idea of a social contract. Moreover, these

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1 practices are extended in the aspiration for an flat—a setting where individuality
2 can be distinguished from biology and the private from the public in a way that is
3 hard to sustain in Golibar.

4 Of course, one possible interpretation of these practices and aspirations is that
5 they are hegemonic and, therefore, predictably appropriated by slum dwellers.
6 However, contemporary Mumbai is no longer a liberal democratic society. State
7 institutions are less invested in the rule of law and do not act with a single interest
8 in mind. Politicians mobilize populist sympathies along particularistic lines and
9 ally with those who want to eliminate slums in the most profitable way even as
10 they court poor voters. Indeed, real estate development in Mumbai is a free-for-all
11 in which developers build profitable structures, often on land they don't own or
12 have a right to, and hope to work out the details at a later time. In this context, the
13 Slum Rehabilitation Scheme, which on paper is quite accommodating of the rights
14 of slum dwellers, in practice, does little to moderate the drive for profits. Private
15 interests are organized into development partnerships and strategic projects in the
16 name of reshaping Mumbai to be a space that yields profits, while being a home
17 to the specific urbanism of foreign investors and the city's economic and cultural
18 elite. In this context, slum dwellers are constituted as the problem to be addressed,
19 not by inclusion but by further marginalization. In this struggle over the future
20 of the city, institutions like the rule of law, the equality of all citizens before the
21 law, and the accountability of the state to organized citizens are not merely a
22 hegemonic carryover. These institutions take on a new meaning in globalizing
23 Mumbai. They become necessary tools for slum dwellers to realize their right to
24 the city. Beyond strategic considerations, it is only with such institutions in place
25 that slum dwellers can hope to become more than slum dwellers. The payoff of
26 living in an flat is not merely to have running water; it is also to overcome the
27 predetermination of their existence as slum dwellers and possibly achieve real
28 social mobility in the city. The struggle may be singular, but it is possible that
29 slum dwellers constitute the most likely social position in the globalizing city to
30 reject “telescopic” and particularistic urbanisms in favor of an urbanism that is
31 expansive and aspirational.

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1 **Methodological Appendix:**
2 **Trappings and Tracings**

3 *Naresh Fernandes*
4 *Michael McQuarrie*
5 *Cassim Shepard*
6

7 Our examination of the infrastructures of citizenship began with a question: how
8 is political action enabled or constrained by the built environment? The conver-
9 sation that sparked this inquiry began as a comparison of political organizing
10 strategies and techniques in the United States and the ways in which the physical
11 geography and transit infrastructure of Mumbai constrained tactics that are com-
12 monly taken for granted in the United States.

13 A principal reference point for this discussion was Michael McQuarrie's per-
14 sonal experience as a community organizer in the South Bronx. So one of the
15 initial, informal research exercises of our project took place there, a walk through
16 a diverse collection of built environments and social conditions that informed
17 subsequent research trips. One of the key themes that emerged from this journey
18 through the South Bronx concerns the history of American ideas for how society
19 should address poverty and how such ideas manifest themselves in the built envi-
20 ronment. Put simply, different eras have variously emphasized services, power, or
21 resources, and the distinct typologies of low-income housing reflect those different
22 emphases.

23 Our collaboration set out to explore that idea in the context of citizenship, a con-
24 cept vexed in urban studies by normative, hierarchical, electoral, or transnational
25 political definitions and debates. Our goal was to advance and critique the con-
26 temporary literature on citizenship by moving away from discussion of a familiar
27 but limited cluster of terms: *rights*, *duties*, and *practices*. We wanted to assert the
28 importance of physical materiality and the uses of space to this discourse. Thus
29 an interrogative emphasis emerged: how do hard and soft infrastructures enable
30 and constrain the ability of the city's users and residents to become civic actors?

31 The first attempt at this exploration took place in Berlin. We visited a range
32 of well-studied sites in Kreuzberg and Neukölln — two neighborhoods struggling
33 with the ramifications of rising property values, displacement, socioeconomic
34 and ethnic interaction and perception, and the new political alignments that have
35 emerged from these conditions. We looked for physical traces of these limits and
36 possibilities at the widest possible range of scales, from the scale of the metro-
37 politan system — such as networks of transit or public spaces — to the scale of the
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1 artifact—the advocacy pamphlet, graffiti, and even the tote bag. This research
2 yielded a collection of sociological observations and photographic documentation
3 of objects, spaces, and their uses.

4 This focus on objects, on what we call the trappings and tracings of citizenship,
5 bears a methodological bias toward visual representation and a conceptual bias
6 toward sites that evince conflict and copresence. Therefore, our insights about how
7 citizenship is constituted physically in Kreuzberg and Neukölln privileged mark-
8 ers of neighborhood myth creation, communal identity, and spatial membership.
9 In our interviews with representatives of a wide range of institutions — primarily
10 immigrant and minority advocacy groups—a recurring theme concerned a peculiar
11 relationship between these institutions and the state. Most interviewees attempted
12 to mask the extent to which the state is directly intervening in or enabling much of
13 the work in Berlin around ideas of community and political participation.

14 Our next collaborative research trip took us to Mumbai. Our project began with
15 a comparative framework, but its first scholarly product deals with a single site,
16 Golibar, the largest slum redevelopment scheme in Mumbai. As the project has
17 evolved, its core emphasis has remained: to reenchant the city as a landscape of
18 possibility, as a physical space that simultaneously provokes individuals’ instinc-
19 tive as well as affective reactions and arranges the possibilities for civic action
20 in particular ways. To that end, we focused on some traditional avenues of schol-
21 arly inquiry: conflict, poverty, political practice. But we sought to recontextualize
22 these in new ways. The case of Golibar, described in our article, provokes difficult
23 questions about how certain forms of citizenship practice resist the tendency to
24 distinguish and compartmentalize the politics of the urban form.

25 Golibar stimulates such questions because of its territorial and economic
26 position on the edge of globalized urbanism and the ways in which new urban
27 subjectivities—irreducible to communal attachments or socioeconomic condi-
28 tions alone—are constructed within it. Thus careful analysis of this case argues
29 for a more holistic reading of the urban, wherein cities are landscapes of political
30 possibility where unique constellations of institutions, laws, and built environ-
31 ments present opportunities for, and perhaps even infrastructures of, citizenship.

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