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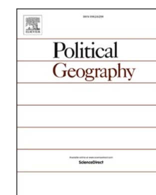

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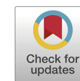

Necrosettlements: Life-threatening housing, necropolitics and the poor's deadly living in Mumbai

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ABSTRACT

Global megacities are rapidly transforming through slum redevelopment and alternative resettlements of evicted poor. Resettlement is broadly seen as enabling, a basis of improved housing and even a pathway towards urban citizenship. This article offers an alternative perspective on urban resettlement, whereby the urban poor are subjected to life-threatening housing interventions. It builds on Mbembe's (2003) 'necropolitics' through an ethnographic study of Mumbai's Mahul case to theorise state powers in unleashing life-threatening housing circumstances. In doing so, this article introduces the concept of *necrosettlements* to account for the particularity of necropolitical-economy, material reality, unfolding subjectivities, and political possibility of life-threatening settlements. First, it theorises a political economy that extracts economic surplus and creates urban growth from poor-exclusive housing in uninhabitable places and with a life-compromising built environment against general residential developments. Second, the material details of life-threatening housing comprise of place-based, local biosphere, township's architecture, infrastructural and constrained dwelling, and their cumulative effects. Third, subjectivities of living included physiological suffering, compromised survival, socioeconomic and political vulnerability, comorbidity and death. Fourth, and finally, rather than representing absolute sovereign domination, however, these settlements also emerged as potential sites for residents to invoke their right to life, question extractive urbanism and demand settlement justice.

1. Introduction

Recent urban redevelopment trends in Asia, Africa and Latin America have accompanied new configurations of state power across two broad axes. First, states have promoted world-class city-making through massive infrastructure development projects that lead to large-scale land dispossession (Harvey, 2003). Simultaneously, neoliberalising states manage dispossessed populations and implement new inclusionary and welfarist provisions (Chatterjee, 2011). India's financial capital, Mumbai, is an exemplar of these processes. In the decades since liberalisation in 1991, the state has envisioned Mumbai's transformation from a post-industrialist city into a world-class urban centre through internationally funded projects and massive redevelopment of its inner-city slums. In parallel, the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRS) introduced in 1995 has aimed to provide formal housing, facilitated resettlement and social and economic rehabilitation to the poor evicted from slum areas.

SRS is broadly seen as progressive, welfarist and inclusionary compared to the uncompensated slum clearances, and limited slum upgradation through basic services, that were formally the rule. Influenced by Foucault's (1978) notion of 'biopolitics', the state's exercises to manage and foster the population's lives, scholars have approached these interventions as enabling housing consolidation, improved urban living and pathways to urban citizenship (Appadurai, 2002; Roy, 2009). Possibility of resettlements facilitated displacements from inner-city (Doshi, 2013). Anand and Rademacher (2011: 1769) argue SRS as a 'neoliberal solution' to urban poor's housing that has emerged through decades of mobilization and state-market collaboration and offers certain inclusion and equality. The policy introduced 'complimentaries and conflicts' in state-led interventions that allowed inclusion, but left 'little scope for negotiation or modification' (Jha, 2011, pp. 6–7). SRS offered a 'development alternative' towards housing and state intervention (McFarlane, 2011) or 'compensation' (Roy, 2009) for the slum poor. However, the state's overt biopolitical intensions have also been critiqued based on unfolding urban marginality in post-resettlements period in Mumbai (Bhide, 2017; Jha, 2020), and in the global South more generally (Beier, Spire, & Bridonneau, 2021).

In this article, I argue for an alternative theorisation of state power in urban redevelopment and slum rehabilitation. My arguments are based

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on empirical research in Mahul township, located in Mumbai's M-West administrative ward. Mahul is the biggest of the city's 45 relocation sites, has an accommodation capacity exceeding 85,000 but which is currently inhabited by about 35,000 people. Other townships in M-West ward can potentially house over 200,000 people. The ward is severely polluted by heavy industries and has been deemed 'unfit for human habitation' by environmental authorities (NEERI, 2017). During my fieldwork the residents themselves described the township as *maranvashan*, or 'death settlements' (translated from Marathi). They referred to it as a 'hellhole', a 'living cemetery', a 'place where they are sent not to live, but to die'. Beyond toxicity, many of those relocated highlighted the substandard and claustrophobic built environment. These conditions have led to over 300 deaths and a plethora of diseases and socioeconomic and political vulnerabilities since relocations began in 2017. Lately, residents have begun to mobilise and negotiate for a rehabilitation alternative. In exploring the case of Mahul, I ask, how have resettlement planning and interventions engendered life-threatening settlement conditions for the poor? What practical materiality constitutes these life-threatening conditions, and what political possibilities emerge from these?

To interpret the above empirical case of Mumbai's redevelopment-linked slum resettlement programmes in Mahul, this article draws on Mbembe's (2003) concept of 'necropolitics', which builds on Foucauldian biopolitics, and is defined as the state's power to subjugate population to death and death-like situations. To this end, I introduce the concept of *necrosettlements* to examine the settlement-based impacts of death-politics in domestic geopolitical and political-economic orders. I use the term necrosettlements to account for the state power involved in urban redevelopment that engenders life-threatening housing and living circumstances for Mumbai's poor. The article explicates four dominant and interlinked aspects of Mumbai's necrosettlements: political-economy, material reality and unfolding subjectivities, and political possibility.

First, urban resettlement regimes, constitutive of the state and market forces, enable institutional conditions of accumulation by necropolitical dispossession through housing development. The article theorises a political economy that explains the extraction of economic surplus by creating poor-exclusive housing in uninhabitable places with lowest land prices and with a life-compromising built environment as compared to general residential developments. These extractive economies create urban growth. However, it also unleashes a new governance of the poor through their subjection to life-threatening housing. Second, the residents see mundane life-constraining and critical death-enabling material reality of these settlements in its place-based (toxic enclosure), local biosphere (air, water), township's architecture (built environment, dysfunctional infrastructures, pathogenicity) and dwelling circumstances (constrained living, comorbidities), amongst others. Third, the residents also experience housing materialities through physiological suffering, compromised survival, socioeconomic and political vulnerability, slow harm, disease, comorbidity, and death. These settlements approximate an urban 'death world' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40) with life-threatening consequences. Fourth, and finally, the poor politicise the state interventions that infringes upon their right to life through judicialization and tend to negotiate alternative. Necropolitical subjection is, thus, contested. It enabled some rehousing alternative, however, without systemic or policy-level changes. Through its analysis, this article contributes to the political-geographical scholarship on postcolonial sovereignty and state powers vested in capitalist urban transformation that create camp-like settlements and unleash governance conditions – however, contested – of bare urban living.

The article is based on six months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2018 and 2020 and on two datasets. The first comprises Mumbai's SRS policy; government reports; the city's Development Plan; large-scale evaluation surveys of resettlements, including architecture, planning, socioeconomic profile and health; judicial documents and non-governmental reports on resettlement contexts; and the creation and material details of life-threatening settlements. The second comprises ethnographic interviews with 30 residents, numerous informal conversations and observations that brought out the experiences of living in Mahul township and unfolding contestations. The state intervention should be seen as racialisation of urban poor population from marginalised castes and classes that are subjected to state-sanctioned life-threatening situations (Gilmore, 2007). Access to the township was facilitated by my long-term research engagement in Mumbai. Research participants who were vocal about local problems, or who faced socioeconomic or health issues and death in their families post-resettlement, were recruited by developing networks and referral. Further, observations, transact walks with residents, and inputs from key informants – a legal expert, a local medical practitioner, a civic activist and an urban planner – as well as government statements supplemented the data. I then used an inductive thematic analysis to build connections amongst the urban resettlement processes, their real-world implications, vernacular expression and efforts at politicisation (Biehl & McKay, 2012).

This article is organised into seven sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 discusses in detail the spatial, settlement-based and economic derivatives of necropolitics. Section 3 builds on these discussions to theorise necrosettlements within Mumbai's redevelopment contexts. Section 4 discusses the embedded bio-necropolitical registers, i.e., life-fostering and life-constraining potentialities, of Mumbai's resettlement housing contexts. Section 5 presents Mahul township as a typical case of necrosettlement and illuminates its material details. Section 6 presents the empirical details of deadly living and alternative negotiation in four sub-sections. The final section 7 provides some concluding remarks on how necropolitical lens in settlements orders helped explore the situated political-economy, materiality, subjectivities and possibilities.

2. Political geographies of necropolitics

According to Foucault (1978), 'biopolitics' alludes to the state's 'making live' exercises that aim to protect, regulate and manage human lives. These interventions are often directed towards legitimate populations (Lemke, 2011). Biopolitical rationalities underpin urban politics, planning and governance. While slum formalisation, upgradation, service delivery and tenure security tend to improve the vitality of urban poor populations (Di Muzio, 2008; Jha, 2011), such endeavours become subtly repressive for populations deemed illegitimate through governmental designs. Thus, rather than a 'murderous splendor' (Foucault, 1978, p. 144), a negative racialised relation enacts 'letting die'. Foucault (1978) calls this a politics of death, 'thanatopolitics'. Gupta's (2012) study on the governance of health amongst India's rural poor, Murray's (2006) work on suicide bombers and the emergent biopolitics of death, and Esposito and Hanafi's (2013) immunity-based protection and negation of life, are some interpretations of thanatopolitics.

Critiquing Foucault's (1978) concept of biopolitics, Mbembe introduces 'necropolitics' to argue that the sovereign power, beyond making live and letting die, also enacts 'making die' in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Necropolitics involves a generalised destruction of human bodies and lives, or a population's subjection to 'death-in-life' circumstances (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21). Following Schmitt's (2005) discussion of sovereign exception, Mbembe (2003) argues that spatial appropriation acts as the material basis for the establishment of juridical, political and social orders. Sovereignty means occupation. Colonial occupation created 'camps par excellence', where vast populations were subjected to violence and living conditions that gave them the status of the 'living dead' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40; cf. Agamben, 2005). Below, I discuss spatial, settlement-based and economic vectors of necropolitics to theorise life-threatening housing in contemporary contexts.

The spatial denomination of necropolitics is helpful to enquire into the spectacular and mundane forms of death-causing institutional practices. In *Splintered Urbanism*, Graham and Marvin (2001) explain the

forms of networked space and infrastructure that lead to heightened inequalities in megacities. Following this logic, Mbembe (2003) argues that spatial urban fragmentation and the compartmentalisation of settlements unfolds into splintered occupation and repression. Such splintering routinely alienates some zones from the city's circuits of infrastructural exchange, and deprives certain populations of basic needs, rights, protection and legitimacy. Non-western cities have entered an era of war under neoliberal globalisation, with the introduction of structural adjustment programmes and linked violent spatial configuration (Graham, 2009). For Mbembe (2003), these restructuration models create spatio-political logics that disproportionately affect marginalised populations and could potentially create generalised life-compromising conditions. Alternatively, the state powers vested in capitalist urban restructuration could unleash biopolitical control and necropolitical brutality by marginalising racialised urban populations and subjecting them to 'toxic spaces' (Davies, 2018) or 'camps' (Minca, 2015) like urban spaces.

Next to spatial denomination comes settlement-based necropolitics. Fanon's (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth* hints at colonial urbanism and reciprocal differences between the settlements of the coloniser and the colonised. Unlike the exclusive, infrastructure-rich and well-planned urbanism reserved for the former, 'the town belonging to the colonized (…) is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, (…) a town on its knees' (Fanon, 1963, pp. 37–39). These reciprocities highlight differences across material and spatial properties, resources and life-forms. Likewise, Mbembe (2003) argues that townships acted as structural forms for the colonised populations and caused severe oppression across racial and class lines: physical spacelessness, intolerable density, starvation, restricted mobility and the termination of property, civil or citizenship rights. Black towns in Indian colonial cities, including Mumbai, took on a similar structural form that unleashed impoverishment, alienation and subjugation onto the Indian subaltern (Kosambi & Brush, 1988). Weizman (2012) documents the mundane destruction of Palestinian land and lives under the Israeli occupation and the latter's use of restrictive cartography, oppressive architecture and limiting infrastructural flows. Nevertheless, there has been limited settlement-based enquiry using necropolitical theory in contemporary postcolonial contexts.

Finally, Marxist scholars and geographers bring forth the economic rationales of deadly consequences. Banerjee (2008) describes necrocapitalism as the imperial practices of organisational accumulation involving violence and death-inducing dispossession. Unlike colonial sovereignties, postcolonial sovereignties are shared amongst states institutions, market forces and other actors (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006; Ong, 2006). New organisational formations unleash accumulation that involves the population's dispossession from resources essential for health, living and livelihoods, and create new death worlds of the dispossessed (Banerjee, 2008). Similarly, Tyner (2019: 63) holds that ongoing capitalist accumulation make certain lives 'surplus' and vulnerable to 'premature deaths'. Haskaj (2018: 1150) discusses destructive industries that produce growth and argues that, rather than the extractive exploitation of 'living labor', a biopolitical intensification of death is a new space of capital: value is produced from death, and labour is valued in its negation. Beyond these exceptional practices, Mitchell (2000: 74) highlights deadly economic exploitation as a generalised occurrence, and encourages us to track empirically how death and associated violence has become 'a foundation of the economy'.

This article builds on the above discussion to expand on the necropolitical theorisation of urban accumulation and dispossession in the management of slum resettlements. Capitalist exploitation has led to an unprecedented proliferation of slums that warehouse 'this century's surplus humanity' (Davis, 2006, p. 201). Slums have a negative relation with the urban polity, allowing economic exploitation, political repression and social stigmatisation of the slum poor (Roy, 2011). The structural powers vested in slum management unleash a complex amalgamation of welfare, abandonment or repression that affects the poor's lives (Chatterjee, 2011). Beyond this slum exceptionalism, I am particularly concerned with slum rehousing developments within neoliberal urban restructuring. Concerns with metropolitan redevelopment and becoming 'world class' imbricate the political economy of slum clearances, and the forceful displacement of their populations. As well, capitalist forces are capable of creating a distinct or even amorphous spatiality of biopolis and necropolis, and the production of surplus populations that could be disregarded as 'waste' (McIntyre & Nast, 2011, p. 1468). In Manila, Ortega (2020) observes that redevelopment underlies the violent dispossession of the poor from the 'inner city' into dystopian suburban fringes, which he dubs 'necroburbia', under a benevolent veneer of resettlement. In a dialectic relation, while 'necroburbia serves as a key fulcrum upon which urban accumulation is hinged', the poor are subjected to precarity, socioeconomic and political vulnerability, and widespread uncertainty (Ortega, 2020, p. 1183). Building further on and beyond slum clearance and urban displacement-based capitalist accumulation, urban redevelopments and the linked marginalisation of the urban poor, I propose a novel theorisation of capitalist accumulation from the creation of life-threatening rehousing developments and its dispossessive effects.

3. Mumbai's necrosettlements

Drawing on necropolitical theory, I develop *necrosettlements* as an original concept to explore the racialised spatiality, violent materiality and life-threatening housing and living conditions experienced by Mumbai's poor. Although the term could broadly refer to a settlement-based interpretation of circumstances that 'make death', in this article, it emphasises the necessary 'particularity' (Mbembe, 2003; Leshem, 2015) – of housing – within which the neoliberal state exercises its right to expose some racialised populations – of the poor – to the powers of death within the urban redevelopment and governance milieu. The particularity relates to theorizing from elsewheres (than the dominant global North), and localised articulations of necropolitical-economy, material reality, unfolding subjectivities, and political possibility. Mumbai's necrosettlements show how the organisation of state and market forces, or urban resettlement regimes, generate capital by creating life-threatening housing exclusively for the poor. The regime functions through a political economy of 'reciprocal' (Fanon, 1963) urban lands and resettlement developments rather than general urban developments. This dual unevenness – of land development and the built environment – creates an economic gradient that, ideally, compensates for financial investments, and makes resettlement construction profitable for the state-market axis (see Section 4). This political-economic logic arguably creates possibilities for a new governance of the poor, with housing compensation following displacement, access to housing and welfarism, and pathways to urban citizenship.

Instead, the resettlement regime unleashes 'accumulation by necropolitical dispossession' (Banerjee, 2008; Haskaj, 2018; Tyner, 2019) in the production of new urban housing through legal political-economic logics and linked planning imperatives. Through these skewed logics, sites of housing accommodation become sites of novel extraction. The regime prioritises economic rationality and engages in surplus value creation and expropriation through life-constricting and death-enabling housing developments, thus becoming necroeconomic. The sovereignty vested in resettlement planning allows 'inscriptions' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 12) of powers in salient technologies of place (uninhabitable, hazardous, peripheral lands, sacrifice urban zones), local biospheric conditions (air, water, soil), and architecture and the built environment (housing form, density, open space, dwelling unit, infrastructures), amongst others, to create life-threatening settlements. Uniquely, while the regime necessarily allows for formal housing 'entitlements' or 'compensation' for the poor, it simultaneously disallows the population's access to the atmosphere, infrastructure and resources required for survival and optimal

dwelling. Necropolitical settlement 'fix' (Harvey, 2003, p. 145) is a salient outlet of postcolonial urban capital and governance. These predatory political-economic relations exhibit a crisis of urban redevelopment, whereby the extraction of the highest capital surplus from resettlement construction outstrips the potential limit of liveability for inhabitants. State-led extraction makes these settlements 'legal, but lethal' places (Gregory, 2010, p. 57). The subjecthood of the 'poor' has a dual rationality for the regime: the poor are indispensable for the regime's operation, but are simultaneously disposable to its effects. In this way, the regime treats certain racialised populations as waste, even as their management, through rehousing, generates value (cf. McIntyre & Nast, 2011).

Necrosettlements are an allegorical roadmap of housing forms that potentially become *maranvashan*, life-threatening. Using this concept we are able to look deeper into the crisis of sovereign biopolitical mediation, going beyond created housing materiality to subjective reality. We go beneath an articulation of the state's benevolence, its formal housing interventions, to expose the concatenation of underlying powers reflected in enclosure, architecture and built environment, amongst others, and linked subjectivities whereby specific life-compromising and limiting conditions dominate over life-fostering conditions (Mbembe, 2003; cf. Foucault, 1978). These settlements unfold lived realities that approximate Mbembe's (2003) 'death worlds', as places of generalised destruction of human bodies. This destruction relates to slow attrition of human lives or evolve as everyday emergencies (Berlant, 2007). Like Mbembe's (2003) colonial 'townships', these postcolonial settlements unleash a gradual colonisation of human lives and institutionalised banishment.

Finally, scholarship on necropolitics aims to disrupt absolute sovereign domination. I build from my empirics to argue that locating the practical materiality of Mumbai's death settlements, i.e., to deconstruct its structural logics and expose its material and lived reality, opens possibilities of localised mobilisation, resistance or negotiation. Beyond the despair that usually overshadows necropolitical theory (Lesham, 2015), violent extra-legal abandonment or unfolding emergency can allow for a reconfiguration of conditional human agency and social formation towards new forms of re-politicisation of life (cf. Agamben, 2005; Mbembe, 2003; also see, Berlant, 2007). Thus, racialised death-inducing spatiality may foreground a new politics for the 'living' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 39). New political possibilities emerge from attempts at deconstructing the multiple state powers that conjointly allows life-fostering and constraining consequences under the thicket of the state's policy and practice, or of bio-necropolitical mix of powers. It happens by exposing such materialities and politicising deadly consequences to shift the dialectic entanglements towards alternative biopolitical interventions, and the possibilities of legal action against the suspension of life-threatening powers or of aggressive life-fostering interventions within the governance fold. In the sections that follow, I analyse Mumbai's resettlement contexts and the material, experiential and resistive registers of this illustrative case of necrosettlement.

4. Mumbai's slum resettlement contexts and embedded bio-necropolitics

Mumbai's slums are 'spaces of exception', where legal rights of urban citizenship do not apply, and where the state restricts the capacities of the poor to determine their own well-being (Bhide, 2017, p. 76). Postcolonial slum governance has included a mix of violent, regulatory and disciplinary interventions: slum censuses, photo-passes, cut-off dates for eligibility for basic services exclusively for slums (from 1976 to 2000), clearances and limited improvement schemes. Currently, 6–8% of the city's land (over 48,000 ha) is occupied by over 3000 slum clusters, housing over 9 million people. The largest slum population is in Mumbai M-Ward, which houses two-fifth of the city's slum-dwellers. The Mumbai Human Development Report (MCGM, 2009) documents institutional denial, the lowest human development indicators, and infrastructure deficiency in M-Ward. The life expectancy here is also around 39 years.. The risk of 'premature deaths' (Tyner, 2019) is far higher (over 50%) in this ward's slums than in the city as a whole.

In 1995, the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRS) introduces new political-economy of slum resettlements with possible life-allowing and constraining effects. With India's New Economic Policy (1991), the city had embarked on neoliberal urbanism through a new Development Plan (1991) and market-based planning instruments (see Nainan, 2008). These included a Floor-Surface Index (FSI), or the ratio of built-up area of all floors and land area, and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), a non-monetary compensation, through development rights, for additional development. These two instruments were first applied to slums via SRS. To explain, slum areas were allocated a higher FSI (above 4) than Mumbai's Island city (1.5) or suburbs (1), creating scope for vertical and dense housing (with lesser area per dwelling unit) development on slum land. Slum-dwellers were resettled vertically, on a third of the land they had previously occupied (called *in-situ*). The extra development could be transferred (using TDR certificate) for private development on the remaining two-thirds of the land, generating profits for the developers and land owners and incentives for the state. While, enabling, benevolent, welfarist and overtly biopolitical consequences are detailed yet, below I attend to how policy and materiality of SRS brings life-constraining effects.

The political-economy of comparatively low land prices and higher (denser and vertically stacked) housing development potential made the wholesale redevelopment of slum land highly profitable and generated extra floor-surface that could not be consumed on site. In subsequent policy shifts, the extra floor-surface was moved (as TDR) and was utilised especially in the vertical redevelopment of western suburbs with a high land value and an even higher permissible FSI (up to 8). This process unfolds differential effects of the powers of FSI: slum resettlement housing with smaller dwelling units and amongst the highest housing density, and elite urban dwelling with higher available floor-space but low tenement density. Floor-surface was thus delinked from its source and made fungible, highly valuable (as it was multiplied with the value of the receiving land-plot) and tradable in the city's real-estate market. Indirect slum land financialisation cross-subsidised *in-situ* SRS, generating revenue for the state and profit for the private developers.

SRS also allowed for differential development parameters compared to general urban development, especially with respect to density and floor-surface. As Table 1 shows, this 'politics of architecture' (Weizman, 2012) legalised hierarchical, unequal and oppressive built environments for the poor. It instituted higher tenement density, less space between

Table 1
A comparison of requirements for general residential and resettlement developments. It allows for capitalist accumulation through the production of a constrictive built environment in resettlement areas, and has the potential to create housing with serious environmental constraints. Produced by Author using the Development Plans for 1994–2014 and 2014–2034.

Development Parameters	General Residence	Resettlement
Permissible FSI	2	≥4
In-situ FSI consumption	2	≥4
Minimum density (units per hectare)	200	500–650
Maximum density (units per hectare)	450	No limit
Building height	≤2 times the adjoining street	No limit
Inter-building separation	≥1/3 of the building's height	3 m
Open-space requirement	15–25% of plot area	8% of plot area
Building setback and step-back areas	Front: 3–7.5 m; Side and rear: minimum 1/3 of building height	Front: 1.5 m; Side and rear:minimum 3 m

buildings, reduced requirements for open space, and no obligation to reserve space for public infrastructure, towards a mechanical aggregation of buildings with unsustainable heights. Together, the 'accumulation' underlying land and architecture politics facilitated slum 'rehabilitation'.

As neoliberal urbanism deepened during the 2000s, SRS was dramatically transformed. The neoliberal state introduced several World Bank-supported mega-transport and infrastructure projects – such as the Mumbai Urban Transport Project and Mumbai Urban Infrastructure Project – towards the city's renewal. This led to two significant changes. First, the World Bank required the state of Maharashtra, where Mumbai is located, to relax its urban zoning laws, revise no-development zones and make industrial land available for urban redevelopment (Banerjee-Guha, 2010). Second, the Bank instituted a resettlement policy for large-scale evictions. With the Bank's advocacy, SRS was linked with *ex-situ* resettlement as an innovative, investment-independent and self-reliant approach to the governance of housing for the poor (Nainan, 2008). A new political-economy of capital accumulation from resettlement construction, and the simultaneous governance of the poor through peripheral relocation, unfolded with this *ex-situ* resettlement planning.

Mumbai's M-East and later M-West became optimal choices for *ex-situ* resettlement. Bhide (2017) argues that M-Ward continued to have undesirable land uses and racialised spatial development in the post-colonial period. M-East is categorised in Mumbai's Development Plan as having undesirable land-use: it has the highest (3/4th of the ward's population) slum settlements, India's biggest landfill site, an abattoir, several polluting industries and a medical waste incinerator, and it is located close to hazardous zones in M-West. While land values were extremely low, rezoning made over 1000 ha available for alternative uses. In parallel, state institutions doubled the ward's FSI (from 0.5 to 1) against its 'low human activity' status. This unleashed a two-fold extraction of development surplus. First was the commodification of otherwise uninhabitable land-plots and the expropriation of development surplus through massive resettlement construction. Over two-thirds of SRS tenements (upwards of 200,000) were created in M-Ward and released millions of square metres of high-end urban space, bringing premiums for the state and financial benefits for developers. Thus, power inscriptions in differential FSI uses created reciprocal 'spatial-social' (McIntyre & Nast, 2011) impacts: tradable TDR created commercial, luxurious and elite-centric urban spaces at the cost of substandard settlements and compromising built environments for the poor.

While SRS enabled formal housing, certain life-compromising effects also emerged in M-East. Large-scale architectural and household surveys conducted in the five biggest townships suggest that constrictive architecture, poorly built environment and faulty building design correlated with lack of airflow, cross-ventilation and sunlight in up to five floors of these seven-storied buildings (Jana et al., 2020). Such factors contribute to indoor pollution (Lueker, Bardhan, Sarkar, & Norford, 2020), high prevalence of tuberculosis (Pardeshi et al., 2020), and reduced liveability especially amongst the lower-floors of these buildings (Sarkar & Bardhan, 2020). Medical experts rightly described some of these buildings or resettlement townships as 'designed for death' and related the spread of diseases to proximity to the toxic dump (Bharucha & Iyer, 2018). Thus, the materiality of these settlements has life-fostering and constraining effects: it is eviction-free and provides some security of tenure, but it also has substandard built environment that nests disease and strained socio-physical living. These spatial, settlement-based and social outcomes are outcomes of the underlying political-economy of slum resettlements that has visible bio- and slow and hidden necro-political effects. As I discuss below, the power inscriptions in slum resettlements – land commodification and housing form – created a distinct materiality of life-threatening settlements in Mahul case.

5. Necrosettlements: materiality of place & built environment

One such death settlement was Mumbai's Mahul township, located within an industrial zone of M-West ward. The land-plot is surrounded by three petroleum refineries, 17 petrochemical installations and numerous heavy industries (see Fig. 1). It can be argued that, in Mahul, neoliberal urban planning created a racialised spatiality that facilitated two-fold metropolitan accumulation: slum relocation and inner-city

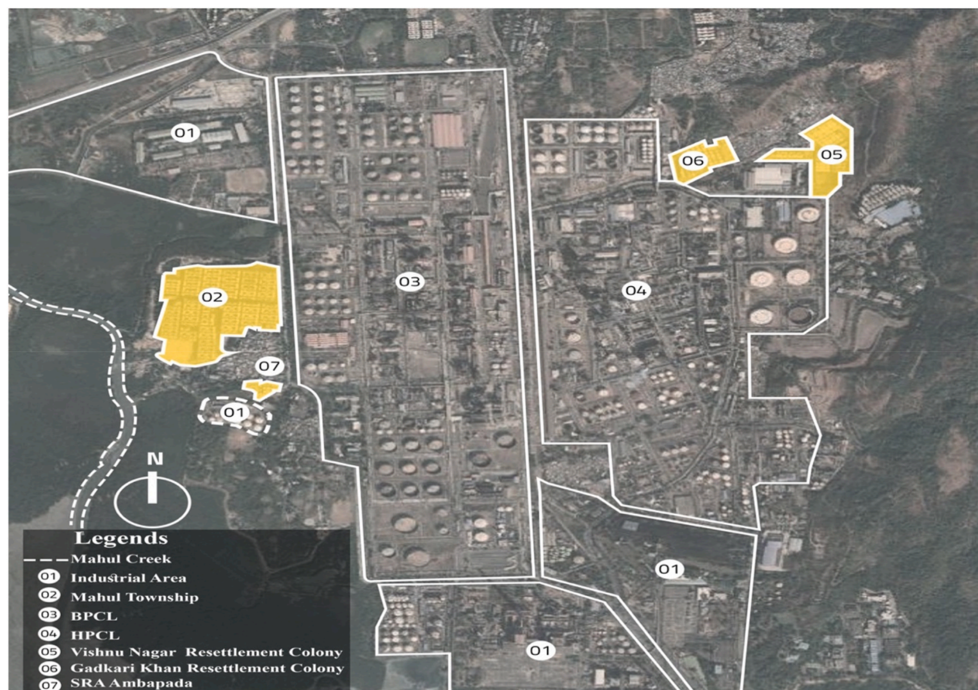

Fig. 1. Mahul township (02) is surrounded by an industrial area (north); industries, petrochemical installation, chemical storage reservoirs and a thermal power plant (south); petroleum refineries (east) and Mahul Creek (west). Source: Google Earth image modified by Author.

Fig. 2. In Mahul, the architectural footprint dominates the land-plot. Densely packed buildings and restricted open space prevent ventilation and sunlight. Source: Google Earth image modified by Author; inspired by Indorewala and Wagh (2017).

regeneration, and accumulation from resettlement developments in Mumbai's 'necroburb' (Ortega, 2020). The city's first-ever Development Plan (1964), Regional Plan (1984) and the revised Development Plan (1994), all designated M-West a 'low human activity' ward owing to its high levels of pollution and toxicity. Instead, they allowed for heavy industrial use, which then proliferated in this peripheral ward. However, in line with its neoliberal urbanism and World-Bank-led land-use adjustments, between 2000 and 2010 the state of Maharashtra relaxed its Coastal Regulation Zone rules, revised no-development zones and made industrial land available for resettlement in both M-East and M-West (Banerjee-Guha, 2010). In 2006, a Land Gazette Corrigendum changed the land-use reservation of Mahul land-plot from industrial to residential, and allowed it to be used for resettlement development.[1] As I discuss below, new political economy of accumulation unfolds through housing construction in this apparent necroburb.

Mahul land-plot is a place of multiple exceptions. First, as Fig. 1 shows, it is only 34 m from petroleum refineries instead of the required minimum separation of 500 m under the current Development Plan. Second, it has no buffer zone separating it from the industrial enclosure. Third, although the Development Control Regulations (DCR) in the city's Development Plan prohibits change of land-use from industrial to residential if it might be 'deleterious' to human habitation, this legal provision has been bypassed to enable massive resettlement construction in this ward. Fourth, and last, under the SRS Mahul is exempted from the DCR that reserves a quarter of open space from a change in land-use (see Fig. 2). The cumulative effect is that Mahul land-plot is a favourable site for resettlement. It is within these political-economic logics that the regime instrumentalises necropolitical accumulation as greater and denser construction on an otherwise uninhabitable plot – instead of general development – generating the greatest possible developmental surplus. The government of Maharashtra leased Mahul at no cost to a developer, one with close links to the ruling political party, who constructed the township during 2007–2010 (see Fig. 2).

The SRS also allows for architectural modelling at the township level. The developers aimed to maximise land-use and tenement density to achieve the greatest possible development surplus. Within these accumulative equations, life-compromising settlements have emerged in Mahul. This massive township now has 72 buildings, with 17,205 tenements in one-third of the land-plot (16.15 ha against 53.8 ha) otherwise reserved for general residential development. The open-space reservation in general residential developments is here used to construct more tenements. As Indorewala and Wagh (2017) report, the township has a quarter of the required inter-building space, 16 times less open space and no spatial consideration for infrastructure for hospitals, markets, schools or other services. The buildings are of uniform height (24 m), cuboidal and uniform in shape, and aggregated in rectangular blocks to maximise the architectural footprint. The lack of open spaces (see Fig. 2) prevents proper air circulation, sunlight or cross-ventilation. Like Mbembe's (2003) colonial townships, this postcolonial township engenders new physical spacelessness.

Before delving into the lethal spatial and architectural aspects of the township, let us first consider the nature of extraction from its development. According to the developer's reports, Mahul township generated over five times the floor-surface than had previously existed. This generated 'movable' TDR, which the developers used to create more valuable urban space in an elite enclave that was locally branded as 'Swiss-Style living'. The developers made millions of dollars from these premium urban spaces during 2010, and the state also received a premium.[2] In this political economy of necroeconomic extraction, some of the dispossessed urban poor also benefitted to a degree through formal housing entitlement (cf. Banerjee, 2008; Tyner, 2019). Nevertheless, the

[1] Mumbai Urban Development Department Notification No. CS/TPB: 4396/121/CR-263/96/UD-11, Dated 20th March 2006.

[2] Mahul's floor-surface area is 147,169 sq.m., the applicable FSI is 4.17, developed floor-surface area is 613,960 sq.m., and the corresponding TDR is 808,401 sq.m. In 2010, the selling price of TDR was INR 3000–4000 per square metre. The builders used the fungible TDR in the upmarket Hiranandani Gardens township, amongst other places.

FSI created a distinct spatio-social configuration through reciprocal development. In Mahul township, excessive extraction for premium urban space as a new financial currency, presupposed life-threatening settlement forms for the poor. While this institutionalised extraction privileged the state, market and consumer citizens (Ong, 2006), the resettlements became a 'legal-lethal' place (Gregory, 2010, p. 57) for the poor.

Together, the toxic place and architecture created deliberate life-constraining circumstances in Mahul. With reference to its toxic spatiality (Davies, 2018), Mahul is one of India's 17 critically air-polluted zones. The hazardous industries surrounding it emit 21 different volatile organic compounds (VOCs), heavy elements, non-criteria pollutants, vapour emissions, and nuisance smells, well over national and international limits. Of the VOCs measured in this area, nickel is eight times, benzopyrene 16 times, benzene 17 times, xylene 19 times, diethyl-benzene 118 times and styrene 471 times higher than the national standard (NEERI, 2017). These organic compounds have numerous metabolic, teratogenic and mutagenic effects on human beings. For other hazardous gases, like chloroform, neither the source nor evaluation parameters are available, making chemical surveillance almost impossible and cohabitation with toxins unavoidable. Violations of the odour threshold, water pollution in the surrounding Creek area, and unassessed toxic leakage from heavy industries, are common occurrences.

A medical study by Mumbai's KEM Hospital (2015) on emission-related comorbidities in Mahul, taking the refineries as reference sites (located 34m from the township) found pulmonary ailments, significant levels of breathlessness, restricted lung functioning and significant respiratory comorbidities. The report also found that over 67% of the respondents experienced breathlessness and 85% had felt choking sensations (KEM Hospital, 2015). Mahul was thus an area that inflicted bodily attrition and lethal effects on its inhabitants (Nixon, 2011). These findings led the National Green Tribunal, India's apex agency for environmental issues, to declare Mahul as equivalent to a 'gas chamber': a 'severely polluted' area that was 'unfit for human habitation'.[3] Although the extent of the hazards faced by residents of M-West ward was contested,[4] the development of slum rehabilitation townships was unfettered.

Building on the architectural discussion (Section 4), the materiality of the grievous health consequences of Mahul's settlements is clear. With its density and lack of airflow, and as Murphy (2013) notes in her work on chemical infrastructures and their residual effects on populations, the organic compounds, smells, air pollutants from industries and indoor pollution from households remained trapped in Mahul's built environment. Following Jana et al. (2020), a low sky-view factor – an architectural parameter to gauge natural sunlight – kept the tenements in perpetual darkness. Architecture-linked indoor pollution was 12–40 times higher (Lueker, Bardhan, Sarkar, & Norford, 2020) in Mumbai's resettlement townships and even higher in Mahul. This potentially worsened pulmonary diseases, including tuberculosis, which was already up to 47 times higher in some townships than in other human settlements, including slums (Pardeshi et al., 2020). Also, the infrastructure was 'grossly inadequate to support urban life' (Indorewala & Wagh, 2017, pp. 12–13) and up to half of the buildings should be demolished to allow for healthy living (ibid., 27). Such measures would not, however, reduce the impacts of toxicity. Overall, the material conditions of Mahul's architecture-pollution complex were the outcomes of the complex accumulative registers underlying resettlement developments, which also engender experiences of compromised living.

6. Necrosettlements: deadly living and political possibility

6.1. Life-constraining built environment

To understand the human effects of the underlying extractive political economy in resettlement development, and explicate the materiality of housing, we need to observe how the poor lived in Mahul. The poor were allocated tenements across the 22 buildings in 2017. Upon arrival, they were met with broken windowpanes, cracked floor tiles, chipped walls, missing bathroom fittings, choked toilets and no piped water supply. The floors were covered with garbage, the bathrooms infested with cockroaches and leeches, rodents had dug holes in the lower floors, the lifts didn't work, and the stairs were broken. Until late 2018, the residents were dependent on a storage tank in the basement for water. A pipeline was put in by the municipal authority in 2019, but water supply remained erratic and low pressure. The narrow spaces (3–5 m) between buildings left little room for supply infrastructure and the water supply pipeline and storage tanks were located alongside household, kitchen and toilet outlet lines (see Fig. 3a). During my fieldwork, the residents showed me the garbage-filled corners, choked and overflowing sewage lines, leaking water pipes and human excreta and household waste. Contamination in the form of *kachra* (foreign particles), dead flies, mosquitoes and an oily film was common in the supplied water (see Fig. 3b).

As a result, waterborne diseases were common. Mahesh, a resident, has seen the overflowing sewage from the township and oil leached from the surrounding petroleum industries would contaminate the storage tanks and leaking water pipes.[5] He described everyday concerns: 'drinking this water does not quench thirst, you always feel thirsty. It causes throat irritation, rashes, and stomach sickness. Regular bathing causes skin allergies. Cleaning utensils and clothes leaves oily stains.' He found the widespread contamination 'disgusting'. Residents could not afford to buy bottled water so had to boil the supplied water to make it 'somewhat useable'. And Mahesh was not alone to perceive these metabolic effects. An architectural survey found that over 90% of Mahul's residents considered the water unfit for drinking and the cause of gastrointestinal, digestive and skin diseases (IIT, 2019), which worsened during monsoon season. These complex interactions of water, infrastructure and diseases amounted to a kind of 'bacteriological' (Gandy, 2006) living that corresponded to minimal urban living standards and contributed to the infrastructural politics of dispossession.

The dense construction caused a feeling of 'entrapment' amongst residents. Santosh, who lived in a second-floor tenement, describe it thus:

> Santosh: The building is surrounded by other buildings from all sides. Only a narrow *gully* [alley] separates them.
>
> Researcher: How does it impact you?
>
> Santosh: We only see tenements, but no open space. We use electric lamps even during the daytime. Sunlight never comes to our corridor. It always feels cold and darkish [inside the tenement]. We feel 'entrapped' here. (Emphasis mine)

Santosh's feeling of entrapment reflects a vivid fragmentation of resettlement space that allows dense tenements but disallows open space. One could see perpetual darkness at the staircases, inside tenements, and corridors across many buildings, especially towards the inner sides of the township.

Echoing Santosh, Kavita from a ground-floor tenement in another building shared her observation and experiences:

[3] National Green Tribunal, Application No. 40/2014 (WZ), Judgment dated 18th December 2015, [WWW document]. URL http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/industry%20pollution%20Ambapada%20Mahul%20NGT.pdf [accessed 04/06/2021].

[4] The grievances of fishing villages (*Gaothans*) from Mahul's toxicity remain unaddressed as the state institutions consider those settlements 'auto-constructed'. See, Footnote 3.

[5] All names have been changed.

Fig. 3. a) Overflowing sewage lines between buildings; b) contaminated drinking water; c) An unlit corridor in the daytime, with chipped flooring and dark tenements on either side (photographed using a flash); d) pollution around Mahul township. Source: Author.

> It feels *band-band* [claustrophobic], humid and cold. It is *damghutna* [suffocating] here. Stored grains rot within a week and pest infestation [inside tenement] is common. We need thicker bedding [on the floor] irrespective of the weather. One quickly loses the day-and-night rhythms inside the tenements … how could we live in their 'dark homes' forever? (Emphasis mine)

These experiences of 'entrapment' and 'dark homes' signify the structural dimensions of built environment that causes constriction and repression, rather than allowing dwelling.

The residents pointed to the only open – marginal – spaces in the township (shaded green in Fig. 2). In an architectural sense, these were residual spaces that allowed an incremental density of tenements, but subtracted air circulation, ventilation and sunlight. They served as negative spaces (Jana et al., 2020). The only designated open space (marked yellow in Fig. 2) in the township was initially located at the centre but had been moved to the township's corner to allow dense construction. This made the space indirectly inaccessible for the residents, but kept it available for other uses by the city's municipal authority in the future. Across the township, 'block after block of "concrete brutalism" is packed so tight that sunlight is at a premium' and only on the rooftop could one 'see sunlight, and a view of spire after spire of chemical and fertiliser factory chimneys on the horizon turning the air viscous' (Chandrasekhar, 2020, emphasis mine). This spatial and architectural brutalism – the outcomes of violent dispossession from built-form – unfolded experiences of spacelessness and inflicted physiological harm.

The residents described their compromised living through 'slow observation' (Davies, 2018) of the settlement and its enclosure. Those living on lower floors highlighted the garbage-laden, unsanitary and pathogenic 'extra-household' space, infested with rodents feeding on rotting waste. These rodents entered living spaces through the inter-building spaces, corridors, broken windowpanes, gaps between doorways, damaged doors and burrows running through concrete walls. Or they entered through the perennial standing water mixing with the water supply or stored foodstuff. The rodents were encountered through what some residents called 'raids' and 'rounds' – similar to zoonotic dominance. A private healthcare provider remarked that 'it is a new public health concern. You cannot even drink water there. Leptospirosis and typhoid are common, especially during monsoons. However, it remains ignored for weeks before their late diagnosis and treatment. Many residents complain of fever, stomach issues and vomiting.' The pestilence and toxicity in the area led two health workers at the recently opened government health centre to resign, leaving the facility barely functional for months during 2019. An urban planner related these widespread unsanitary conditions to 'defective' architecture that made it impossible to keep in working order.

Upper-floored residents had a slightly different experience. Rekha, from a second-floor tenement, frequently observed effluent splashing inside her tenement. She argued that 'these buildings are not to be lived in, but to give away. What is the utility of living in buildings [rather than horizontal slums] and having a kitchen space when effluent flows through it?', 'when it surrounds refineries?' or 'when you cannot open windows?' Rekha's use of the words 'give away' signifies housing that serves less than optimum utility. It is a vernacular way of arguing against dispossession 'from' their built environment (cf. Harvey, 2003). Echoing Rekha, Mahesh described olfactory overload: 'Mahul stinks of the sewer gas of toilets, and of pollution and smoke from the industries. Be it inside or outside [the tenement], morning or night, it's unbearable. Only the smell changes here, it [the township] always stinks'.

Upper-floor residents, like Anita, emphasised Mahul's architecture-pollution complex:

> The chimneys thunder frequently, shine crimson-red with flames, emit dark smoke and foul smells late at night. I feel asphyxiated in the early mornings, and wake up to carbon dust inside the tenement. What can we do? Sealing windows with paper, plastic and sackcloth makes the tenement claustrophobic. Foul smell inside [their home] replaces the chemical smell of outside. It's disquieting.

These observations capture the wounding nature of these settlements. Here, pathogenicity and toxicity conjointly permeated everyday spaces and physiologies. The effect on inhabitants was cumulative.

6.2. Slow deaths

The ambient air was toxic. The residents shared that the smell was of acids, cooking gas, fertiliser or unidentified chemicals. Others called it *bass* or 'smell of gas'. They were constantly exposed to organic compounds, pollutants and smells that subjected them to 'sensory siege' (Hesse, 2017), an inability to distinguish toxicity while being unconditionally and unconsciously subjected to it. These smells were symbolic of the unfolding harm, psychological suffering and the unseen risks that residents faced. Rather than using a scientific vocabulary, residents highlighted their corporeal engagement with toxicity through observations and vernacular expressions of their bodily functions. They shared that 'even breathing normally is difficult in Mahul', and 'we feel asphyxiated as we undergo slow death here'. Upon being asked to explain the phrase 'slow death', many promptly said that they 'gasp for fresh air', 'there is a choking sensation in our throats', they 'feel unwell on a daily basis', 'it is not air, it is slow poison for us.' They 'have also become more *sust* [lethargic] than ever before', 'always feel tired and intoxicated', 'feel exhaustion with no hard work', and 'suffer from sleeplessness, drowsiness or lethargy around the clock'. The resident's experience of 'slow deaths' (Berlant, 2007) and its multiple expressions explain the physiological effects of the ambient air.

These physiological impacts were rooted in Mahul's architecture-pollution complex. Kavita who referred her tenement as a 'dark home', described, through wheezing breaths and with intermittent pauses, that four tuberculosis patients, including two who were multiple-drug resistant, periodically moved between Mahul and the hospital. Her own asthma was aggravated by constant exposure to toxicity. The doctor had advised that patients should be taken 'out' of Mahul to recover, but this was not possible, with the increased economic vulnerability that had followed resettlement. The colonising effect of necropolitical violence made its subjects gradually succumb to its effects.

Indeed, architecture-induced tuberculosis was also endemic. The township's dense environment prevented cross-ventilation and instead circulated infectious bacteria across micro-neighbourhoods (see, for example, Fig. 3c). In a biopolitical sense, institutional exercises pertaining to ventilation, removal of pathogenicity or isolation of contagion were life-fostering interventions (Foucault, 1978). By contrast, there was in the township an aggravated pathogenicity, an enduring incapacity to manage basic requirements of air and a kind of 'cessation of breathing' (Mbembe & Shread, 2021). These effects are especially applicable for these hyper-dense especially on the inner-sides of the township (see Fig. 2).

Mahul induced a generalised physiological incapacity for its inhabitants. Mahesh had seen his father die (aged 53) after resettlement. He witnessed a gradual attrition of human lives in Mahul:

> Many people first complain of cold, cough, digestive upsets and weakness. Within weeks, some become feeble, discontinue their jobs, and become homebound and their condition deteriorates here. It is especially common amongst the old and people with underlying diseases. Others say 'they don't feel well'.

The situation speaks of slow harm. Mahesh was twice tested for tuberculosis and was now taking medication. During my fieldwork, residents showed me itching and pustulated skin, their medical reports and medications for cardiovascular disease. Many said that these diseases were endemic here, as they either remained untreated for long periods or reappeared as soon as the medication was stopped. Meanwhile, gendered suffering remained hidden from the public gaze. 'Menstrual cycles are imbalanced. Abortions, miscarriages and diseases of the reproductive organs are common,' said Kusum, who had had two miscarriages in the last two years. A family member lamented, 'even if we survive, who will marry into our family? Unknown complications might affect the newborns. They might cease to thrive.' These vulnerabilities, beyond their physiological manifestations, were intensified by the psychological horrors of emplacement. These health complications and bodily degradations speak compellingly about how certain population are subjected to states of 'injury' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21) under so-called slum rehabilitation, and underlines capitalist urban redevelopment.

Precarious health affected the resident's ability to endure their vulnerability. Ill health made it hard to perform the drudgery required by the informal labour market, and the long commutes from this peripheral location. Kadam a *hamal* (loader), found himself: 'unable to work like before, and incapable of supporting my family.' He equated Mahul to a 'jail' where they were confined, with restricted mobility, lost economic networks, significantly increased transport expenses, and immersed in a toxicity that 'makes them weak and sick gradually.' Over two-thirds of Mahul's residents reported significant wage losses, and over a third lost their jobs following resettlement (IIT, 2019). Most participants I met had at least family member experiencing ill health and they found it difficult to cope with the increased medical costs amidst worsened economic vulnerabilities.

6.3. Premature deaths

Mahul expanded the geography of sovereignty by gradually colonising human lives, moving beyond life-threatening subjections to inflicted 'premature deaths' (Tyner, 2019). Over 300 *achanak* (unexpected) post-resettlement deaths were reported by 2020. Kusum described this experience of deadly living:

> My father died, mother died, I lost my job, and now, I am grappling with diseases. I feel angry and hopeless. In the name of *punarvashan* [in Marathi, meaning, re-settlement], they gave us concrete walls and took away our lives from us. This is a living crematorium. It's the government's way of saying 'die here [in Mahul]'!

Slowly, Kusum recovered from the numerous diseases that afflicted her, including depression, taking seven pills daily. She was grieving and broke, and had to be helped by other residents. Her description of being given 'concrete walls' and in exchange for 'lives' locates the violent materiality and brutal side of resettlement construction. For her, the brutalism had two faces: first, the loss of her parents, and second, compromising living circumstance post-resettlement.

Members of another family whose 28-year-old daughter, the primary earner, had suddenly died of tuberculosis, said that 'people with underlying health conditions are dying quickly. While someone dies, others are also at risk, and many suffer from diseases. We don't know what will happen. Deaths are unavoidable here.' The deceased member had a medical history of pulmonary and haematological complications, which the family related to the resettlement. During an informal visit, the father of the deceased woman asked me, 'who is dying here?' I answered, 'relocated people.' He corrected me, saying, 'death is cheaper here. People who have nowhere to go live here, and also die [in Mahul].' Upon further enquiry, I learned that hundreds of families, those with many earners and/or better economic capacity, that could afford housing elsewhere (cheap rental housing or slum dwellings) had abandoned Mahul. Families that were bigger, more economically vulnerable, had sick or elderly members, or could not afford to rent elsewhere, stayed on. While these resettlement effects engendered differential subjectivities, the most vulnerable amongst these racialised populations remained trapped, forced to live here, and suffered the most.

6.4. Negotiation and containment

Amidst widespread desperation, Mahul also emerged as a unique site of negotiation. The residents approached state institutions for re-

resettlement, but their petitions went unheard, with acknowledgement only of an 'occasional' or 'tolerable' smell nuisance, with no or little mention of toxicity. The residents, by contrast, said 'it is frustrating. If action is not taken, there will more deaths here'. Some of the active residents from the former *jhoppadpattis* (slum areas) approached the Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan (GBGBA) for intervention. GBGBA, a sister organisation of the National Alliance of People's Movements and led by activists that regarded the capitalist redevelopments to make it a world-class urban centre as neo-colonialism, catalysed anti-eviction movements and advocated for fair resettlement compensation. GBGBA instituted community awareness programmes and mobilised residents around the deteriorating conditions in Mahul, as well as resettlement law, rights of the resettled and the state's responsibility.

GBGBA-led mobilisation had variegated effects across the resettlement subjects (Foucault, 1978). It began with politically aware and economically solvent persons affected by resettlement, both those who had vehemently opposed or rejected resettlement, and others who were vocal about the emerging issues in Mahul. GBGBA legal advisors counselled them to document their suffering for use in legal action. The hope of alternative resettlement led to the inclusion of 204 families experiencing diseases and deaths, and support of hundreds of other families, for legal action. The remainder included hundreds of families that had moved elsewhere in Mumbai or returned to their villages, temporarily abandoning their housing entitlement, as well as the very poorest, who were sceptical of losing their 'free' 'formal' housing, or uninterested in joining a struggle that might be time-consuming, futile and even dangerous. Housing entitlement received under the SRS makes squatting elsewhere illegal. And 'what if they [government authority] took back their formal tenement in Mahul', some wondered. Others rationalised that a slightly bigger, *pukka* (concrete) tenement was preferable to a smaller *jhopda* close to sewers or on pavements. Residents from arterial side of the township also felt the township less constrictive than others. Thus, the poor related differently to their subjection. Moreover, the situation demonstrated the brutality of power, the prevalent systemic indifference of the regime, and the fear of oppression engendered in the poor. The activist mobilisation by the GBGBA, and propelled by politically aware community members, led to the inclusion of hundreds of families that were willing to relocate from Mahul and thereby improve their living conditions.

In 2018 Mahul residents entered a unique appeal in the High Court of Mumbai against the state of Maharashtra and its various institutions involved in urban development, slum and urban governance. Their litigation framed resettlement as state interventions, for formal rehousing, had infringed their 'right to life' as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. In practice, slum governance is treated as an exception to this right. Owing to state-inscribed informality and illegality, the slum residents could not usually use right to life to question their abandonment in perilous circumstances, or demand services at par with citizens (Chatterjee, 2011). However, legalised slum residents have judicialised right to life to contest eviction, destruction of shelter and loss of livelihoods in Indian cities.

Mahul residents used their legal agency based on two factors (for theoretical discussion on agency, see, Berlant, 2007). First, SRS is a statutory law whose *mala fide* implications may be challenged, and the state was involved in resettlement. The litigation argued that resettlement to Mahul township had increased socioeconomic vulnerability and led to diseases and deaths that infringed upon their Right to Life. As evidence they provided lists of deaths, death certificates, and medical records. Thus, the state-subjected *maranvashan* and subjective attributional lethality were flipped into potentiality towards a new 'necropolitics for the living' and the demand for urgent state response (Mbembe, 2003). This new conditional agency arose within the state's interventions in the lives of the poor, allowing for a possibility of an alternative interventions. It contested the state's sovereignty in the subjection of the poor to racialised spatiality and demanded an alternative. However, these efforts were localised within the exceptional realm of the SRS law, and aimed towards partial, rather than absolute, inclusion in the urban political community.

The Court empanelled the publicly available environmental survey (NEERI, 2017) and medical reports (KEM Hospital, 2015) alongside the cases of death and diseases provided by the appellants. These reports led the Court to commission a scientific enquiry into Mahul township. Two of the recommendations that emerged are particularly worth noting (IIT, 2019). First, regarding the medical emergency: breathing issues affected over three-fourths of the township's inhabitants, and severe pulmonary ailments over two-thirds. Over 30 illnesses, including haematemesis (vomiting blood), pneumonia, depression, ulcers and cancer were prevalent. Each family reported 4–6 diseases, rising to 16 when the family's median size was five. A generalised bodily destruction thus became official and 'legible' truth (Foucault, 1978).

The second finding related to the township's structural form:

> While [infrastructure development] may improve the situation *somewhat*, these are unlikely to address the serious problems of air and water pollution from nearby factories, refineries and petrochemical storage facilities. *Hospital and healthcare facilities can treat people after they fall ill, but not prevent illnesses and diseases*. *It is clear that health has been seriously affected leading to higher health care expenditure, loss of lives and livelihoods*. Hence, …, *to prevent further harm to lives and livelihoods, there seems to be no option other than to shift the entire population or sections of the population to safer places.* (IIT, 2019: 113, emphasis mine)
> *Structural demolition of some floors and buildings are necessary* to allow for greater air flow and sunlight, …widening of alleyways is necessary. (IIT, 2019: 112, emphasis mine)

The use of death-politics for the living had two significant impacts. First, it exposed the complicity of state and market in creating death settlements, and second, it provided a somewhat 'legal' basis to contest subjection and/or demand life-fostering interventions. Importantly, however, these political-judicial events neither lead to any significant changes in Mahul township or pollution and toxicity levels to make it somewhat liveable, nor did it affect the policy or the regime that normalised these interventions.

The Court ordered state institutions to immediately relocate the poor from Mahul township.[6] However, the state of Maharashtra has, as of 2022, allocated only 800 tenements in another peripheral township. This led to differential subject formation, where limited provision coopted litigants and prioritised families with diseases and deaths. While these efforts unevenly refined the conditional agency for some – the politically tenacious and those categorised as suffering – thousands nevertheless continued to suffer. The residents are highly vulnerable to health emergencies (like that of COVID-19), a generalised slow bodily attrition and their multitudinous effects. Towards containment of further mobilisation, the state authorities directed 'no renting' and 'no selling' in Mahul township, otherwise the tenements would be seized, and it rejected the possibility of further relocation. Moreover, state institutions continued resettlements in Mahul and other townships, in violation of judicial orders. Further uses of death-politics for the living are yet to come.

7. Concluding remarks

This article builds on necropolitical theory and introduces the concept of *necrosettlement* for a settlement-based theorisation of life-threatening circumstances for racialised urban populations in Mumbai. Using the concept, I explore neoliberal state powers in urban redevelopment and governance across three interlinked aspects: political-economy and institutional conditions, practical materiality,

[6] High Court of Mumbai, Writ Petition No. 874 of 2018, Judgement dated 2nd and 3rd April 2019.

subjectivity, and emergent political possibility. Regarding the first, I show that the sovereign power inscriptions invested in slum resettlement planning, and delineate the institutional arrangements across the state-market axis that allows accumulation through necropolitical dispossession in poor exclusive settlement developments. The political economy materialises through reciprocity between, on one hand, extraction from land commodification in uninhabitable, undesirable and toxic urban geographies, and, on the other, a constrictive built environment meant exclusively for the poor, contrasting with general urban development. I argue that urban necropolitical-economic and government logics prioritise the extraction of development surplus (as incentive floor-space and transferable development rights) through life-threatening settlement developments. Connectedly, the extracted surplus is circulated in bourgeois urban centres through a localised political-economy of resettlements based urban transformation.

Second, connected to the underlying necropolitical-economy is the created materiality of these settlements that I explore through the lived realities of the poor. Using necropolitical lens and ethnographic gaze, I lay bare this underlying cruelty through the case of Mahul settlements: unbreathable air, ambient toxicity and polluted water on one hand, and concrete brutalism, lack of basic infrastructure, acute spatial constraints, contaminated water, lack of sunlight and excess waste on the other. Third, the article uncovers the sensory, corporeal and everyday encounters of Mahul's inhabitants with these dehumanising material realities. These cruelties unfold into metabolic and physiological suffering expressed through bodily exhaustion, extreme precarity, wearing down of the body, disease and mortality. The presence and proliferation of life-compromising and death-inducing settlement forms deconstructs the façade of formal housing and basic life-making resources (such as air and water) through improved urban living as part of slum 'rehabilitation'. Instead, it exposes the settlement-based 'topography of cruelty' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 24) in its mundane and extreme forms. In this new governance of urban poverty, the poor are uniquely disposable vis-à-vis the resettlement regime, however, but also indispensable to the effects. They are devalued both from political subjecthood and as living labour as outcomes.

Fourth, and finally, this article opens up political possibilities emerging from the necrosettlements. Rather than the absoluteness of death, these settlements, their materiality and subject formations, render certain mobilisation possible. Political formation and judicial activism can emerge to contest the state's unfettered power, albeit with uneven and limited social impacts. Such contestations result in alternative biopolitical mediation for the resisting poor and for families that have suffered grievously. Yet others continue to experience enduring harm. Overall, this conceptualisation of necrosettlements, and the theorisation of its underlying political-economic logic and linked material, subjective and resistive consequences, problematises the mechanisms of racialisation and banishment. These efforts push the boundary of post-colonial thinking on state power and its political-geographical impacts. As necropolitics continues to shape urban reality in Mumbai and beyond, and usually remain temporally sensitive and contextually significant, further scholarly efforts are crucial to problematise this proliferation and theorise possibilities of alternative and just urban futures.

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