

A Recipe for Disaster: Framing Risk and Vulnerability in Slum Relocation Policies in Chennai, India

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This article investigates how governments use dramatic natural events such as disasters to justify potentially unpopular policy interventions. I use the case of the southern Indian city of Chennai to explore how different arms of the government have historically engaged with the question of slum tenure from the 1960s until the present moment. Using archival methods, I analyze policy documents to excavate how slums have been framed within the context of political and policy imperatives. I show that slums are framed as risky to themselves and the broader urban public, and are portrayed as dangerous, messy, or illegal. I analyze the role of the disaster moment in catalyzing slum relocation policies, and I argue that this moment allowed the government a new modality to frame slums as not just risky but also *at risk*, or vulnerable to disasters in their original locations. I make the case that the anti-poor policy of slum relocation has been justified as pro-poor by framing slums as not just risky, but also at risk. The framing of slums as at risk in Chennai has been necessary within the extant political matrix, which has historically courted slums for electoral success. The analysis of shifting slum policies offers new insight into how urban policy and politics of disaster vulnerability frame and interact with the urban poor in cities of the Global South.

In this article, I explore how governments use dramatic natural events such as disasters to justify potentially unpopular policy interventions. I evaluate the treatment of slums in the southern Indian city of Chennai from the middle of the 20th century until the present, with a focus on the role of disaster in catalyzing policy shifts. At the turn of the millennium, the government began to relocate slum residents from their original locations in the city to rehousing colonies outside and along city limits. The government increasingly began to use the possibility of disaster-induced destruction to justify the systematic draining of slums to the urban periphery. Slums were framed as particularly *at risk* in the event of disaster due to their physical, geographical, and socioeconomic vulnerability. At the same time, the government continued, as it had done previously, to frame slums as *risky*. Slums were configured as risky to their own residents because of hazards posed by their physical and built environment, as well as the limitations posed by the slum environment to residents' socioeconomic betterment. Slums were also framed as risky to broader society due to the purported threats of crime, filth, and nuisance generated by the discursive imagination of the slum within the city.

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I take the case of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to investigate how Chennai's urban policymakers variously deployed frames such as slums as "at risk" and "risky" to justify slum relocation in response to the real and imagined threats of disaster. I embed the explanation of slum relocation in Chennai within a broader historical explanation of shifts in policy agendas. In this article, I employ an archival approach using government policy documents. An archival approach affords a historical explanation of the role of disaster in foregrounding a government response that sought, and continues to seek, the accommodation of political interests spanning various classes of stakeholders. The case of Chennai is particularly important in underscoring how the disaster moment was invoked to shift policy direction. The disaster rhetoric has allowed the government to thread the needle between satisfying middle class and business agendas, while emphasizing its reliance on slum votes. The use of a disaster moment in Chennai captures a political turn away from a stridently pro-poor agenda to one encompassing a wider variety of political agendas.

The case of Chennai's slum relocation has growing importance in light of the discourse on world-class city making within Indian cities, and more broadly, the Global South. This article contributes to the literature on how cities are fashioning themselves to fall in line with the image of "global cities". At the same time, this article urges the global city-making literature to take more seriously local political and social configurations that impact policy agenda-setting, particularly around discourses of disaster preparedness and vulnerability, as evidenced by the Chennai government's efforts to reconcile various political agendas.

The outline of this article is as follows. First, I briefly review the literature on world-class city making, and point to its lacuna in the ability to explain the pro-poor discourse so distinctive to Chennai. Second, I outline the data and archival methods used in this article. Third, I chronologically describe the trajectory of slum policies in Chennai from the 1960s until the present, tracing in parallel the rise of the slum and disaster agendas. Fourth and finally, I address the role of the disaster in the government's attempt to resolve what appears like a contradiction between a pro-poor slum discourse and the antislum policy of slum relocation. I conclude with the assertion that the case of Chennai highlights how governments utilize discourses of preparedness and vulnerability to natural disasters in order to change policy discourse, particularly in the balancing of conflicting political imperatives.

SLUM EVICTIONS IN THE "WORLD-CLASS" CITY

The early 1990s were a moment of profound change in cities worldwide, but particularly in Indian cities. In 1991, the Indian economy was liberalized under mounting global pressure, thus integrating Indian cities into the global market for the first time since the country's independence in 1947. One of the most important consequences of India's newly liberalized economy was the rise of the great Indian middle class (Bhan 2009), which grew rapidly as a result of newly minted economic opportunities within the private sector and the global economic order. The rise of the middle class began to be reflected in the mandates of Indian urban policy, with a growing aspiration to fashion urban landscapes in the image of "world-class" or "global" cities. While "world-class" has been variously interpreted by urban planners in different contexts, the world-class city is broadly characterized by an expectation of urban policy to alter the visual aesthetics of

the city's built environment to match a modernist western aesthetic (Baviskar 2011). Visions of world-class cities imagine urban terrains and public spaces free of slums, potholes, waste, and all other markers connoting disorder (Arabindoo 2011a, 2011b). World-class city making has become the predominant mode of fashioning urban environments not just in Indian cities, but in cities across the Global South such as Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, Lesotho, and Lagos, among others.

Within the project of world-class city making, the city has increasingly become a site on which class wars are waged. Middle class aspirations to refurbish the city are articulated as efforts to remove “eyesores,” or aesthetically unpleasant markers of a less-than global city. In effect, world-class city making is often an attack on visual markers of urban poverty. “Squatters” along waterfronts; slums in parts of the city that might otherwise be developed to house malls, theaters, restaurants, residences; street vendors crowding sidewalks: they are all deemed offensive to the new aspirational urban aesthetic. The slum, in particular, has come increasingly under attack since it is constructed in middle-class imagination as the perceived source of squalor, crime, and illegality within the city.

A striking piece of evidence that the middle class characterization of slums has achieved salience is in the easy, singular conflation of the slum with illegal occupation. In delegitimizing slum residents' claim to land and space, the slum must first be demonstrated as a source of “nuisance,” or in some way or form, obstructing, damaging, or harming the surrounding urban environment (Ghertner 2008). The simplistic equation of slums with nuisance, informality, and squalor finds its resolution in urban policy, as evidenced by an alarming increase in slum evictions since the turn of the millennium. The rise of slum evictions has been well-documented in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore and other major Indian cities (Benjamin 2000; Bhan 2009; Baviskar 2011; Manecksha 2011; Desai 2012; Kamath 2012; Weinstein 2014).

In the translation of a mere aspiration for world-class spaces to tangible, large-scale eviction policies, the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has become one of the most instruments to delineate middle class antagonism to slums as more broadly “public interest.” The PIL is an instrument that was developed within the judicial system in the late 1970s and early 1980s, ostensibly giving “ordinary citizens” the opportunity to use the courts to remedy civic issues (Bhan 2009). However, the most active constituency for the PIL instrument has been the middle class, particularly in cities like Delhi. As a result, middle class litigators have filed PILs that have effectively translated into large-scale slum evictions that are framed as being in the interest of enforcing order and tackling informality. The slum resident, the pavement dweller, the street vendor: these marginal urban residents are categorically framed as “encroachers,” “unscrupulous citizens,” and “polluters” (Bjorkman 2013; Bhan 2009).

The framing of the attack on slums as a battle against “informality” has a history in many cities of the Global South. Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*, for instance, have been handled with violent state repression on the pretext of remedying informality, and for challenging a paradigm of modernist urban planning (Jaguaribe and Hetherington 2004). Rio's “Shock of the Order” program directly attacked this purported informality, on the assumption that informality produces “disorder,” degeneration, and decreased economic activity (Doherty and Silva 2011). The language of informality thus allows the act of eviction to be depoliticized, by characterizing the issue as merely legal, in which slum residents are portrayed as offenders and encroachers. The language of informality does not capture the complexity of the urban phenomenon in cities like Delhi, Rio de Janeiro,

or Mumbai, and it allows for a modernist re-envisioning of the city under the banner of redevelopment and beautification.

Another approach to tackle slums emerges through the middle class demands for green and “clean” spaces. The environmentalist rallying cry for slum removal depicts the purported “squalor” and waste produced and often deposited at slums as directly damaging to water bodies, surrounding neighborhoods, and their residents. In the city of the Global South, which is associated with congestion, traffic, and few spaces of respite, the environmentalist rhetoric gains salience as it pushes for the cleaning of natural bodies of polluting settlements. The poor, who depend on rivers, oceans, and waterfronts for their livelihood, are systematically removed from their locations of proximity for purported offenses such as defecation, overcrowding, and infringement upon natural water bodies (Desai 2012). In 2004, for example, the Delhi High Court ordered that all working-class settlements along the banks of Delhi’s River Yamuna be removed for polluting the river, ignoring the pollution caused by industrial effluents and domestic sewage (Baviskar 2011).

The enactment of slum evictions is also a direct result of city planning that prioritizes a very particular aesthetic for development, comprising five-star hotels, restaurants, and malls. In the quest for land upon which to build these markers of a certain urban modernity, city governments have repeatedly characterized the slum as dangerous and risky. Over time, there has been a shift in understanding *for whom* the slum is risky. Constitutionality once ensured the right to shelter and housing for the urban poor, but analyses of Indian cities’ legal contestations show how the mid-1980s saw a dramatic shift in the characterization of the slum resident as an “encroacher,” and thus an illegitimate occupier of land and space within the city (Ramanathan 2006). The slum resident has always had a precarious relationship with the state, but initial articulations portrayed the slum resident as in need of the protection of right to housing and shelter. However, as middle-class definitions of “public interest” shifted the tide in favor of slum evictions, coupled with the state’s own imagination of modernist, “developed” cities replete with sources of revenue, the slum’s singular trait became illegality. The fundamental right to shelter has thus been rearticulated in terms of the slum as causing negative externalities, as being risky and undesirable for the broader urban environment and its “public.”

While thus far in this section, accounts of slum eviction have painted an antagonistic picture among slums, the middle class, and the state, this does not capture the entire story. For instance, sprawling slums in Mumbai such as Dharavi have persisted despite demands for slum evictions as in aforementioned cases. The case of Dharavi reminds us of the agency of slum residents in seeking their own political accommodations, and in preventing the arbitrary removal of these settlements with the effect of winning the “right to stay put” (Weinstein 2014). However, these hard-won battles fought by activists and residents are not wholly indicative of the broader state of insecurity that slum residents face in most Indian cities. In most cases, these accommodations provided by the government, which allow slums to persist in their original locations, might as easily be revoked. The state itself thus performs “informality” in alternatively and arbitrarily providing and revoking temporary accommodations to slum residents, but also to land developers and private contractors in the form of say, “exorbitant public subsidies that underwrite capital accumulation” (Roy 2009). While the state occupies the role of informality to provide developers gifts of nearly free land, tax subsidies, corporate houses, at the same time, it might revoke its allowance of temporary accommodation for slums in their existing

locations. The arbitrary and ambivalent nature of government accommodations for slums keeps their residents in a state of near-permanent insecurity and precariousness.

The explanations for the mercurial rise in slum evictions mentioned so far in this section depict the state of affairs in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai, which have been studied extensively by urban scholars. Furthermore, these explanations of slum eviction hinge upon the framing of slums as risky, not only to their own residents but to what is more broadly defined as “public interest.” This public interest is constituted by the middle class, articulated in demands for beautification, green spaces, and the removal of “informal” settlements. The interests of the state in creating world-class cities replete with visual markers of modernity are also presented as one of the foremost reasons for the rise in slum evictions. Thus, existing explanations center upon a particularly antagonistic relationship between slum and city, using the cases of cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

However, in this article, I argue that the portrayal of slums as risky cannot explain the case of Chennai, whose political leaders have historically felt a greater impetus to present slum relocations as pro-poor. In other words, the case of Chennai shows us that another frame has developed alongside the portrayal of slums as risky in justifying slum relocation, namely, that slums are *at risk*. The rise of the disaster discourse has laid bare the political configurations within Chennai, animated by a pro-poor discourse and relying heavily on slum votes. Using the example of Chennai, I make the case that slum eviction and relocation, in this particular matrix of political and social commitments, requires the government to portray slums as not just risky, but also at risk and therefore in need of government intervention.

DATA AND METHODS

In this project, I use an archival approach to policy documents as my primary analytic method. The main body of data consists of around 70 policy documents and 10 maps collected from central, state, and city-level governments. This corpus also includes reports by related international funding agencies and nongovernment organizations (NGOs). I collected this data from government web portals, initially using a snowballing approach to map the existing long-term guidelines for both disaster management and slum clearance. By “snowballing,” I imply that if Document A mentioned Documents B and C as precursors or products, I would include Documents B and C in my analysis. I began with city-level policy documents concerning both realms and then used their references to move upward to the state and then central levels. These documents also made references to reports by the World Bank, which I included in my analysis since the guidelines for lending appeared to have a material impact on the execution of disaster management and slum clearance programs. Finally, I used informal conversations with relocated slum residents at a rehabilitation site in the summer of 2016 to substantiate these findings and corroborate my understanding of relocation’s consequences with stories of their own experiences.

I collected the policy documents starting from 1956, when references to slums first appeared in policy documents (Government of Tamilnadu). I then proceeded to collect any relevant policy documents addressing the issue of urban slums for Chennai, for Tamilnadu, and for India as a whole. Scaling the data in this way allowed me to gain access of the multiple levels of administration impacting slum-related policies. In the 1990s,

disaster management was mainstreamed, or made a central policy initiative, in national and state policies, which is where my documentation of disaster-related policies begins. These constitute long-term discursive policies, but to gauge how decisions are made during and after the disaster event, I used contingent government orders released in response to disaster events and newspaper reports together to construct what decisions were made about slums in the aftermath of disasters. I juxtaposed contingent orders for immediate government execution alongside long-term discursive policies to develop a well-rounded picture of how urban policy engages with slums postdisasters.

My use of newspaper reports is event-based to supplement contingent orders. As a result, I have used newspaper article analysis to confirm the execution of planned or announced government action and to study the effects of government action as reported in the media. I relied on targeted sampling of an English newspaper to supplement policy analysis. I used information from articles in *The Hindu*, which is the most popularly read English daily in Chennai. My use of NGO reports and conversations with slum dwellers too was a supplement to my primary method of archival policy analysis.

I required a procedure that would help me get a sense of the institutions and actors involved in making policy decisions at the discursive and contingent levels. To this end, I decided to use textual exegesis to carefully mine through my data and analyze the policies of institutions, state actors, and related stakeholders across different levels that together produce discursive effects with material consequences for slums in the event of disasters. An interpretive approach to texts does not “use highly structured methods to code individual words and utterance in detail” (Hodges et al. 2008). Rather, I look for broader themes giving social and political context to sentences rather than any semiotic approaches. Employing an interpretive paradigm allows me to observe the relationship between discursive statements in policy and their material effects on the urban landscape. More specifically, it creates a broad canvas for the discovery of linkages between various policy framings, and these linkages come together to explain the confluences between disaster preparedness and slum policy discourses.

Finally, with the help of implementation reports from government projects, NGO reports and newspaper reports, I pieced together the social effects of disaster-related slum relocation to make the case that relocated slum residents undergo an extenuated experience of disaster. The findings from my archival analysis are presented in this article.

SLUM POLICY: A HISTORY

Indian metropolitan cities experienced rapid growth well before the country’s independence from British rule in 1947. Cities like Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay were developed as ports and served as gatekeepers of colonial trade for over 400 years before India’s independence. Chennai was born of a plot of land granted to the British East India Company in 1639 by a local governor, and was given the Anglicized moniker of “Madras.” In the late 17th century, Madras was consolidated into a bounded urban center. Within the city, European-owned textile and railway carriage industry emerged with a concomitant rise in employment opportunities. As a result, lower-caste migrants from surrounding villages began to migrate to the city, particularly to residential settlements surrounding industrial compounds. By 1933, there were 189 “hut” colonies in Madras and housed 202,910 people (Hancock 2008). These hut colonies comprised the antecedents to

modern-day “slums,” and their existence points to the weight of the housing issue well before 1947.

This article, however, engages with the housing situation specifically in postindependence India, in order to capture the changing status of slums within the planning process of a newly autonomous government. Under the British regime, there had been no comprehensive national and state-level strategy to address slums. The emphasis on planning in early independent India brought the question of slums to the fore, articulated as a plan to tackle the national problem of acute housing shortage. The arc of this chronological narrative follows the historical responses to the dilemma of what to do with slums: clear the houses away from near waterbodies and denser areas, and relocate them elsewhere; or allow them to stay in the same location while upgrading the built environment and infrastructure of the area? The policy responses to this dilemma have oscillated over time, depending on various pressures of political, economic, and social natures, but the two approaches can be broadly categorized as the choice between slum clearance and relocation, or in situ slum upgrading. This section follows the modalities of slum management from the 1960s until the present, taking into account how slum policy shifted from a preference broadly for in situ upgrading to slum relocation in the present moment.

1960S AND 1970S: A RESTORATIVE APPROACH

Shortly after independence, the Planning Commission was formed in order to create plans to deal with a host of socioeconomic issues that plagued the country. Of these issues, slums were highly prioritized on the planning agenda. Prior to the 1960s, slums were included in the first and second national plans, and national policy recommended the deployment of slum relocation as the primary modality. In cities like Bombay and Calcutta, the slums that had formed over the decades prior to independence were razed and then relocated to the city’s periphery. However, national slum policies rapidly shifted away from slum relocation due to the exorbitant costs of relocating slums, and the concern that slum residents would not be able to pay any form of rent in compensation. Moreover, national slum management policy at this time favored minimal displacement of slum residents in order to preserve their education, employment, and social networks (Ghertner 2008).

In the 1960s, state-level politics in Tamilnadu mirrored national politics. Kumaraswami Kamaraj, who had been an active participant in the Indian independence movement, assumed office as the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. Kamaraj remained in office until 1963, when he was succeeded by another Congress candidate who held term until 1967. Kamaraj was the leader of the Congress party, which was also the ruling party at the center, as a result of which state-level policies reflected the thrust of national policies. This dovetailing of policy perspectives was evident in the bent of Tamilnadu slum policies in the 1960s and 1970s, which preferred a restorative approach as the solution to the question of slums. The primary focus of the restorative approach was on slum improvement at site, so that slum residents would not have to be displaced.

In situ slum improvement thus emphasized preserving the location of slums rather than shifting them outside the city. The restorative angle to this phase of slum policy ensured safeguards so that slum occupants were, for the most part, protected from

eviction. If a site was slated for an improvement project, residents could file a declaration to be replaced in occupation of the improved building, *at site*, once the improvement work was completed. The operative focus for slum policy was thus on investing in rebuilding tenements and engaging in in situ redevelopment of slums.

At the same time, slums were also framed as risky to the residents themselves. The conditions in which slum residents lived were deemed unsatisfactory and “unfit for human habitation” (GOI Slum Clearance and Improvement Act 1956). The volume of migration into Madras city was so high in this period that the imperative of slum policy under the Congress regime was in providing free, modernized housing with significant public investment for the poorest residents living in squalid conditions. The Congress party that dominated Tamilnadu politics between 1954 and 1967 followed the national stance of the party in stressing nationalism articulated as modernization. The Congress campaign strategy involved courting low-income migrant and slum populations with the promise of modernizing and improving their living conditions. This modernization angle was reflected in the emphasis on providing water taps and latrines and electrifying slum areas (Tamilnadu State Housing Board Act 1961). The solution to the slum question was thus configured in the form of improving living conditions for slum residents at site as a welfare measure. The restorative in situ approach to slums hinged upon the framing that the built environment and social environment of slums was risky for its own residents, and thus needed to be modernized or improved to meet specific standards of acceptable living conditions.

In 1967, the Congress regime fell apart in Tamilnadu, and gave way to the rule of the Dravidian political party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The Dravidian brand of politics distinguished Tamil politics from the rest of the country, since the premise of Dravidian rule was based on the construction of a glorious Tamil past that flourished separate from the rest of the country. The Dravidian movement had gathered steam in the lead up to independence, and its primary distinguishing character was its demand for rule by non-Brahmins. Members of the Brahmin caste group, Dravidian leaders argued, had for too long dominated positions of socioeconomic, cultural, and political power in Tamilnadu. The Congress, with its primarily Brahmin and upper caste leaders and constituency, was not exempt from this criticism by Dravidian leaders. The Dravidian movement had begun as a radical Tamil separatist movement, demanding a state called Dravidasthan with a casteless society. By the 1950s, the program of the Dravidian movement had mellowed as it entered electoral politics, no longer asking for a separate state and moderating its stance on anti-Brahminism. Furthermore, as the Dravidian movement coalesced into a political party, it began to cultivate a populist image that was based on Tamil cultural nationalism and pride.

The leaders of the Dravidian movement used the medium of cinema to reach out to the “ordinary man,” the archetype of the constituent support base for the DMK. DMK’s propaganda films became wildly popular on account of their political message that upheld Tamil, non-Brahmin culture and the socioeconomic uplift of the downtrodden lower-caste, lower-class masses. DMK films like *Tangaratnam* (1967), for example, showed the love story between a woman from a previously untouchable caste and a man from a higher caste. These movies were released around campaigns to court the votes of people from previously untouchable castes, or Dalits, most of whom lived in the slums. Another movie, *Nam Nadu*, had scenes of slum huts flying the DMK flag (Hardgrave 1973).

The success of DMK's film propaganda in securing slum votes cannot be underestimated. MG Ramachandran, a wildly popular film star and DMK leader, often starred as the benefactor of the poor and the downtrodden. His public image aligned with his cinematic character as the messiah to the downtrodden. After a particularly bad monsoon season that resulted in flooding, MGR organized a public event in which he gave raincoats to 6,000 rickshaw drivers. This instance of MGR as provider of disaster relief is illustrative of some aspects of Dravidian politics. First, the propaganda films greatly contributed to the populist character of the DMK and its leaders, whose pin-up star was seen as the benefactor to the "ordinary man," the archetype of DMK's film fan and political supporter. The rise of Dravidian politics was precipitated by the medium of film, and Tamil politics has always had "a touch of California" (Hardgrave 1973). Second, this particular instance highlights the emphasis on magnanimous acts of welfare in DMK's political approach. In the absence of a disaster management organization or a clear agenda, the DMK's leaders had to adopt the mantle of a populist welfare state to maintain their image among the poor as the benefactor of the masses.

In 1967, a new era of Dravidian politics was born after the demise of the Congress party in Tamilnadu. This particular moment is significant because it represents a divergence between national politics and regional politics in Tamilnadu, with the latter positioning itself as the Tamil-speaking, Dravidian bulwark against the Hindi-speaking North. The DMK successfully maintained its power in the 1970s, dominating Tamil politics with its particular brand of welfare-based populism. The slum population precipitated the DMK's success. A report from an official at the Planning Organization in Delhi stated, "It is understood that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) came to political power with the massive support of urban slum dwellers" (Bhargava 1975).

In terms of slum policy, the establishment of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) was the defining feature of this era. The TNSCB was set up in 1970 in response to a series of fires that devastated slums across the city, and whose residents were rendered homeless overnight. The mandate of the TNSCB was to provide a statewide framework for tackling the problem of rapidly growing slums. The Tamilnadu Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act was passed in 1971 to grant this institutional body the powers to frame and enact slum policies. The 1970s saw the continuation of slum welfare in the form of a restorative approach. Shifting slums away to the city's periphery was not an option for the DMK-based institution due to the potential political fallout of antagonizing slum votes. The focus still remained on improving slums in situ on the basis that their existing conditions were unsatisfactory for the residents or the public of that neighborhood:

[a slum is] any area that is or may be a source of danger to the health, safety or convenience of the public of that area or of its neighborhood, by reason of the area being low-lying insanitary, squalid, over crowded or otherwise (p. 843, Slum Clearance Act 1971).

Under the aegis of the TNSCB, an extensive audit was undertaken in order to identify all slums in the city, and policy guidelines were instituted for the procedures for slum improvement (Slum Clearance Act 1971). The guidelines reiterated the restorative focus of this policy era with increased financial commitments toward increasing shelter stock. The motivation for slum management was articulated by the TNSCB secretary in the following way:

Cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras have along with its credit of successful industrialization and urbanization also the problem of a sizeable portion of the urban population living in depressing conditions of poverty, misery spreading the cancer of insanitation, juvenile delinquency, crime and prostitution (Logavinayagam 1975).

The TNSCB developed as an organization with a focus on the welfare of slum residents, apparent in its motto: "God we shall see in the smile of the poor." The focus of the TNSCB in the 1970s was trained on slum improvement at site, without shifting slums to far-flung areas. The displacement of slum residents was only used as a last resort, since slum relocation would damage their networks of employment and education. A report by an executive engineer at TNSCB remarks, "Shifting the slums outside the city is practically impossible as the migrants who formed the slums on getting employment within the area will be thrown out of employment and the pressure on transportation will be increased. As a result, the slum dwellers are to be rehabilitated in the same areas where they live now" (Mariappan 1975).

In the mid-1970s, the entry of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in development funding and assistance signaled a new era of slum policy. The World Bank became involved in development aid for Tamilnadu in 1975. The impetus of the World Bank was to provide aid for urban planning and development in cities such as Chennai, that they saw as fairly new to the process of urbanization. Through various schemes, the World Bank provided conditional aid to government agencies that were committed to policy arenas such as infrastructure development or mitigating urban poverty. In 1975, the World Bank offered \$24 million in aid for slum improvement programs, inducing the government to spend less on providing housing free-of-cost. The World Bank urged the government to extract user costs from beneficiaries of slum improvement programs instead of providing these houses on the state's dime. A World Bank report on the cost recovery approach stated:

... the policy impact of Madras Urban Development Project – 1 (1971) could be understood as a shift of priorities in favor of slum improvement whose conception was at the same time considerably enhanced particularly through the introduction by the project of the concepts of security of tenure and cost recovery (p. 22, World Bank Report 1986).

The new orientation in slum policy thus heralded an era of in situ slum upgrading characterized by user costs, as opposed to the earlier regime that offered upgraded housing free of cost to the slum residents. In other words, slum residents now had to pay some fee for the upgrading or improvement of their housing settlements through either a "betterment fee" or in the form of rent. The World Bank attempted to advance user-cost driven Sites and Services schemes instead of entirely government-funded in situ slum upgrading that would employ slum clearance instead, in order to save costs. However, the early phases of the World Bank's financial involvement saw tremendous pushback from the political regime and in situ slum improvement persisted as the predominant policy stance. A World Bank report cited that between 1977 and 1985, only 1,010 households were cleared or evicted, while 15,750 households were improved in situ due to the pre-existing political commitment to slum improvement (World Bank MUDP-I Report, 1985). The same report highlighted the inability of the government scheme to recover costs due to delayed or damaged cost recovery from beneficiaries, and urged government agencies to be more exacting in cost recovery or forego its aid.

... the issuance of tenure agreements ... not only delayed, but severely damaged cost recovery from beneficiaries. Cost recovery in the slums was an innovation of the project ... and the revenue side of TNSCB will have to be strengthened to improve the collection rate further (World Bank MUDP-1 Report, 1985).

Despite these reported inadequacies, this era of slum policy in Chennai (1960s–1970s) was characterized by a restorative approach to slums. Slums were framed in policy documents as risky to their residents, the surrounding area, and in need of modernization and upgrading. As a result, the preferred mode of dealing with slums was in situ slum improvement, with minimal displacement of slum residents. The World Bank shifted slum policy away from free housing provision to the extraction of a betterment fee from beneficiaries, but the DMK government offered tremendous pushback against a more aggressive sites and services scheme that would displace entire slums to the urban periphery. The pro-poor agenda of the government was most salient at this point in time, and the next phase of slum policy would slowly orient itself to concerns of other urban stakeholders.

1980S AND 1990S: THE WORLD BANK ERA

Between 1975 and 1977, the Prime Minister of India at the time, Indira Gandhi, declared a state of emergency across the country. During this time, citizens' rights were suspended and President's rule was imposed at the state level. The DMK violently opposed the draconian rule of the central government within the state, but was met with harsh reprimand and imprisonment of top functionaries within the DMK government. At the same time, the DMK began to be seen as a party of excesses, riddled with corruption at the higher echelons of the party (Anandhi 1995). MGR, the political and cinematic hero of the DMK, had a falling out with the Chief Minister, Karunanidhi, and left the DMK to form a rival party: Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK). This party is now known as All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), and as of October 2019, remains in power in Tamilnadu. In the emergency period, ADMK under MGR challenged the DMK regime, and finally overturned DMK's run in government with a sweeping victory.

The 1980s thus heralded yet another significant era in Tamilnadu politics with the emergence of the ADMK under the rule of the sensational leader, MGR. This phase of politics was characterized by a "live-and-let-live" formula, known as the "MGR formula." The MGR formula was starkly different from the DMK, which had cultivated an image of the central government as distant and oppressive. Rather, the MGR formula radically diminished the Tamilnadu government's antagonism toward the center and advocated a policy of accommodation with national party politics. As a result, slum policy under the MGR regime pivoted to the prevailing national stance in accepting development aid from IFIs. 1980s slum policy was inflected with the demands of the World Bank to reduce state spending and increase user costs.

By the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the inducement to establish user-cost based sites and services schemes grew more salient in urban policy. Redeveloped slums now had to pay higher rents in order for funding agencies to recover the cost of housing construction and allotment. It was in this era that the political ties of the DMK-related TNSCB also weakened due to the change in regime, and the TNSCB began to fall more in line with the Bank's recommendations (Arabindoo 2009; Coelho and Raman 2010).

The increased congruence of World Bank goals and TNSCB policies in the 1990s is attributed to a quantum leap in the size of the loan being offered by the Bank (Coelho and Raman 2010). For the second urban Master Plan, developed in the late 1980s, the World Bank offered a loan of \$300 million as opposed to the \$24 million provided for the first urban Master Plan of the 1970s. The raised corpus of funds for aid gave the Bank a sizeable bargaining chip with which to push its agenda for reduced state spending and a heightened impetus for Sites and Services Schemes. A change in political power from the DMK to the AIADMK also resulted in lowered “inviolability,” or protection against eviction, that slums had enjoyed under the DMK regime (Coelho and Raman 2010).

As a result, the funding for low-income housing was massively cut in the second urban development plan despite an acute housing shortage for low-income groups. The 1990s were also characterized by a turn to urban renewal nationwide and globally. Urban renewal is predicated on a diagnose-and-dissect approach, where urban decay is identified and then eliminated through land redevelopment programs. This turn to urban renewal was reflected in the hardening stance of national policy toward slums. This decade marked the dying embers of slum improvement as the preferred mode of slum governance although by this juncture, the improvement programs had come to look starkly different from those of the early 1970s. Whereas the 1970s witnessed massive public spending on free housing provision for slums, by the 1990s, slum improvement programs were largely user cost-driven.

The 1990s were a period of dramatic transformation in Indian economy and politics. Politically, DMK had regained power in Tamilnadu from the ADMK in 1989. The ADMK had split into two factions after MGR’s death, and the party weakened considerably (Anandhi 1995). However, the DMK regime lasted only two years. The DMK-led government was dismissed in 1991, and was wildly unpopular for its misogynistic political rhetoric and empty promises to the poor (Geetha and Rajadurai 1991). DMK’s scheme of providing free rice to those below the poverty line had failed to deliver, and there was a tokenistic attempt to build free, concrete houses for the poor which remained just a token (Suresh 1992). As a result, the AIADMK was elected in 1991 under the popular leadership of MGR’s female successor, Jayalalithaa.

At the same time, the Indian economy also experienced a massive shock. The Indian economy liberalized in 1991, and subsequently, the government invited private players to enter the housing and infrastructure markets. Consultations, construction bids, and environmental audits for urban development began to be outsourced to corporate developers and agents through public–private partnerships (PPPs). The PPP model is a method of engaging private participation, investment, and execution in projects that had previously been solely within the government’s domain. The PPP approach began to be applied to the slum clearance and improvement schemes. For example, the Tamil Nadu Urban Development Fund (TNUDF) was established, along with private investors such as Wilbur Smith Associates Pvt. Ltd., in order to manage urban infrastructure projects in Tamilnadu with a deployment of funds on a management contract basis (TNUFSL Report 2004).

The TNUDF was established to manage urban infrastructure projects, and it constituted funds that could be borrowed by local urban government, public undertakings, and most significantly, private investors (TNUFSL Report 2004). The TNUDF widely advertised its commitment to “environmental soundness by conserving natural resources,

preserving biodiversity and ecological equilibrium; minimizing release of polluting wastes and integrating mechanisms within projects". It is relevant to the changing tides of slum policy that the rise of private development funding and consultation was tied to a new environmental turn in policy articulation. Development projects were evaluated on two major criteria: the environmental impacts of the project; and the social impacts of the project. Resettlement of slums became the *de facto* turn of phrase in articulating the scope of the development project.

The fear of environmental damage far outweighed the concern of displacing entire colonies of slums, as emphasized in the "risk management" rhetoric of the private developer. TNUIFSL devoted an entire chapter of its charter to the management of potential risks, particularly in "the possibility of being held liable by third parties for environmental damage" (TNUIFSL Report 2004). Protection against this risk of liability became the surmounting thrust of these private developers. The social responsibility of the developers was thus attenuated on the basis of numbers of people affected by the project. The charter required a "Social Assessment Report" and a resettlement plan if 200 or more persons were physically displaced, but if only "10 percent of productive assets are lost," the TNUISFL was only required to include an abbreviated resettlement plan, or a Social Management Plan (TNUISFL Report 2004). The regulatory framework of the TNUISFL was thus set against the backdrop of newly developed and broadcasted environmental policies of the 1990s, such as the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 1990; the National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development, 1992; and the Policy Statement for Abatement of Pollution, 1992.

The rise of private development and an environmental rhetoric in planning in the 1990s was compounded with major reforms to the international financial system. IFIs debated the effectiveness of development assistance, and concerns about inefficiencies in cost recovery pushed the World Bank to adopt a more selective approach to the allocation of aid (World Bank 2005). The new strategy thus allocated aid selectively, based on the government's show of commitment to reform, rather than merely allocating aid to improve the conditions and levels of poverty in developing countries. Such a strategy heralded a new era of "good governance," or an incentivizing of local and state governments to display reduced state spending and increase private involvement in development. In Indian governance, this translated into an increased devolution of central state powers to local government. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were passed in 1992 in order to grant local governing bodies higher powers of decision-making, and the imperative was to involve civil society actors such as NGOs and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs).

Good governance in Tamilnadu fell in line with national directives to devolve and distribute decision-making powers while maintaining transparency and accountability. As a result, the medium of the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) was encouraged by the government among both middle- and lower-class neighborhoods to facilitate "accountability." The number of middle-class RWAs rose sharply in this time, with concerns over protecting the neighborhood against "encroachment." The rise of RWAs also coincided with a greater push to beautify the neighborhood in the form of building parks and playgrounds, often guarded by high walls and tall gates (Arabindoo 2009; Coelho and Venkat 2009). The finding from Chennai that middle-class RWAs are often antagonistic to the "encroachment" of slums in their neighborhood is consistent with studies from

other cities in India described earlier, which emphasize the framing of slums as risky and dangerous. Whereas earlier, slums were framed as risky to their *own* residents, the 1990s saw a turn in the framing of slums as risky to the wider urban public, particularly the middle-class.

Much of the literature on “new” modes of governance engendered by the good governance reforms posits RWAs as the instrument of the middle-class to pursue its class interests often at the cost of antagonizing their low-class counterparts. However, studies in Chennai show that welfare associations abounded in lower class areas in the city in the 1970s and 1980s, with a steeper decline since the 1990s. These slum-based welfare associations emerged both spontaneously in response to threats of eviction, but also at the behest of political parties. As a result, many RWAs emerged in slums through the brokerage of local individuals affiliated with political parties. The success of associational groups such as RWAs in Chennai slums certainly presents a case that runs counter to the grain of much civil society literature, which traditionally posits RWAs as the preserve of middle-class neighborhoods.

Slum-based RWAs, which were closely connected with political functionaries in the DMK, were most robust in Chennai during the 1970s and 1980s. The resistance to evictions was led by groups such as the Madras Slum People’s Organization and Pennurimai Iyakkam, which were all autonomous slum movements that used the instrument of the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to appeal against arbitrary evictions (Coelho and Venkat 2009). It is no surprise that the predominant mode of slum management in the 1970s and 1980s was in situ slum improvement, since there was an active welfare society in slums with ties to the DMK. The DMK’s own political commitments thus deterred the deployment of eviction, in the fear that these associations would politically organize against the party.

The research by Coelho and Venkat on slum associations notes the sharp drop-off in their robustness in the early 1990s, with the increased activity of the Community Development (CD) wing of the TNSCB to persuade slum residents to accept relocation. The authors explain the withering away of slum associations as a function of a more authoritative urban policy strategy to rid the city of squatters. At the same time, the decline of confrontational slum movements against eviction in Chennai has seen the corresponding rise in the urban poor’s cooptation of legal resources to make claims to land and property. After the death of MGR, politics in Tamilnadu since the 1990s has experienced a bipolarization, with the DMK and AIADMK emerging as the two major parties who have alternatively formed the state government. As a result, the two parties compete to expand their base among urban constituencies such as slums, who no longer present confrontational approaches to slum eviction, but still represent a constituency that must be courted by DMK and AIADMK functionaries. This situation of mutual dependency between political parties and slums in Chennai results in the need for presenting slum relocations as favorable to the slum residents.

I argue in the next section that this mandate of urban policy and Tamil politics is reconciled at the moment of disaster policy mainstreaming. The framing of slums as “at risk” in their current locations, as well as being “risky” to themselves and the general public, becomes the mode through which the government presents slum relocation as a disaster welfare measure. Such a move allows the political interface between the government and the slum to remain intact at least on the surface.

2000–PRESENT: SLUMS ARE AT RISK

The restorative approach toward in situ slum upgrading began to take a different tone by the early 2000s. By this juncture, a number of actors had emerged on the horizon of urban planning in Chennai. Whereas in the 1970s, the city and national governments solely managed slum improvement operations, by the late 1990s, changes in development funding had led to a new constellation of actors and institutions that made their impact felt in slum policy. One of the prime movers of this arrangement were the private developers who began to approach the urban planning bodies with construction bids for constructing slum relocation colonies (PUCL 2010). Another major force in determining slum policy were the middle-class environmental activists who began to articulate a vision for a “slum-free” city as part of their environmental conservation efforts. For example, a call to restore the Adyar River and clean its banks emerged from middle-class activist groups that characterized slums as part of the pollution affecting Chennai’s waterways. An application before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) from one such activist reads:

The river within Chennai city limits is degraded due to unauthorized settlements and slums along the river banks and its flood plains (Memorandum of Application 2014).

Environmental rating agencies, both private and public, began to frame slums as part of the pollution problem. The rise in framing of slums as problematic was compounded by a sharp decline in welfare associations protesting arbitrary evictions from the slums. 6000 families living in slums along the riverfront were slated for resettlement in slum resettlement colonies on the outskirts of the city. The report detailing the resettlement plan argued that in situ redevelopment would not be advised since it would “consolidate and worsen the existing situation” (LKS India Report 2014).

Slum policy, in turn, began to bend to the interests of these powerful stakeholders in the early 2000s. A year after the environmental agency called for slum relocation, the Chennai city government commissioned 60 projects under the Integrated Cooum River Ecorestoration Project to construct tenements for 14,257 families outside the city boundaries. The government order sanctioning the project stated:

The removal of encroachments is a critical activity without which many of the other activities cannot be initiated. The encroachments fall on the bank of the river where cleaning, creation of walkways, cycle tracks, and parks are to be done (GO 2015).

Additionally, slum policy also materialized a push by private developers to secure high-valued land that slums had currently occupied. Using the legal tool of Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs), the government has made available certain additional built up area in lieu of the area relinquished or surrendered by the owner of the land. In other words, the city government has been acquiring tracts of land occupied by slum residents using TDRs in order to develop these areas with modern amenities and commercial or residential complexes (PMAY 2015). In lieu of their existing location, the government offers displaced residents alternative housing in tenements constructed by private developers along the periphery of the city (GO 172 2005). Between just 2006 and 2011, the Tamil Nadu government commissioned 80,000 tenements at a cost of Rs. 30 billion, of which 46,650 were built or were under construction by 2010 (Coelho and Raman 2010; Diwakar and Peter 2016). In contrast, the total number of *all* tenements built up until

2007 in Chennai's entire urban history was 81,038 settlements. In other words, the same number of slum rehousing tenements were built just within the five-year period between 2006 and 2011 as throughout the city's entire legacy up to that point in time.

This constellation of actors that have come to flank slum policy decisions fuel the frame that portrays slum residents as essentially *risky*. Middle-class activists and private developers have both come to articulate their demands for slum clearance and resettlement on the basis that slums are undesirably crowding an urban landscape that these stakeholders envision being used differently. The image of a "world-class city" with modern aspirations such as green spaces and high-rises is posited persistently as urban utopia and slums are framed as eyesores. Consequently, in 2012, the slum clearance agency of Tamil Nadu initiated the Vision 2023 Scheme for a "slum-free city" along a Housing-For-All project that presented a new approach to slum management that involved slum clearance over in situ slum redevelopment or improvement (Vision 2023 Report 2012). While these accounts of slum clearance draw strength from a portrayal of slums as risky, I contend that framing slums as also *at risk* was a decisive factor in promoting slum clearance as the new predominant mode. In other words, slum clearance is enabled not only by a frame that presents slums as risky to their immediate surroundings, but also by articulations that present slums as *vulnerable* to vagaries of the environment by way of their geographic precariousness.

The most catastrophic disaster event of the early 2000s was the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The World Bank had incorporated emergency relief as part of its operations ever since its inception, with its name officially the International Bank for *Reconstruction* and Development. However, the resources and planning devoted to disaster management had been considerably lacking until 1998, when the World Bank established the Hazard Risk Management team to streamline and monitor disaster-related investments (Arnold 2006). The destruction caused by the tsunami in South and Southeast Asia resulted in a greater preoccupation with mitigating poorer populations' vulnerability to disaster in development and planning realms. The World Bank's disaster management agenda was articulated by way of reducing and mitigating risks. This approach has been criticized for focusing on long-term risk reduction at the cost of neglecting short-term recovery funding. Displaced communities thus end up living in a permanent state of "temporary relief" since disaster aid has been allocated to mitigating future risk rather than providing emergency recovery funding for the construction of permanent shelters.

In short, the emphasis on long-term over short-term recovery funding is reflected in development agendas that privilege mitigating future risk. Disaster policy mainstreaming implies that a focus on disaster management has pervaded all arenas of urban policy, particularly that of slum policy. At the heart of the risk reduction narrative in the World Bank's disaster discourse is the concept of vulnerability. Vulnerability as a heuristic has been instrumental in separating conceptually the occurrence of disasters from the physical hazards that might otherwise have been mitigated (Wisner and Luce 1993). An enormous amount of scholarship on the sociology of disaster has paid keen attention to the social and political aspects of interactions between state and citizens in the determination of what poses risks; what counts as a disaster; and who is then seen as vulnerable (Quarantelli 1985; Fischer 1998; Vaughn 1999; Steinberg 2000; Klinenberg 2002; Fischer 2003; Pelling 2003a. and 2003b.; Auyero and Swistun 2008; Lakoff and Klinenberg 2010; Arnold 2016). Natural disasters, through this conceptual lens, are said to occur when

there is a coincidence between natural hazards and conditions of vulnerability (Maskrey 1989). Framed in another way, vulnerability is produced through social and political interactions and development initiatives, which impact the poor and those without resources to protect themselves or recover from the physical and sociopolitical effects of disasters (Arya and Srivastava 1988; Wisner and Luce 1993; Pelling 2003; Bankoff 2003; Bankoff et al. 2004; Bankoff and Hilhorst 2004; Jigyasu 2005). Literature on the sociology of disaster would benefit from insights from political configurations in cities of the Global South, which shed light on how various policy agendas, stakeholders, and institutions often dovetail in producing conditions of vulnerability, risk, and disaster. This study explores a case study evidencing this conflation of disaster mainstreaming with slum policies, leading to a coincidence of interests: slum clearance and relocation was presented as the way forward for slum management as a way of reducing the geographic vulnerability of slums in their present locations along riverbanks or the oceanfront.

In 2005, the Indian government released a Disaster Management Policy for the first time in its history, stressing the importance of mainstreaming disasters throughout all levels of government policy. Subsequently, disaster mainstreaming was reflected in state- and city-level policies. The 12th Five-Year Plan of Tamilnadu stated, “Disasters both natural and manmade are the biggest threats that humanity is facing today.” The Second Master Plan of Chennai, formulated in 2008, reported, “The problem before us is how to cope with them [disasters], minimizing their impact.” The state- and city-level disaster management committees incorporated in the early 2000s were in response partly to the disaster management thrust of the World Bank, but also to the death and destruction of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Kumaran and Negi 2006).

The push for disaster mainstreaming led to the emergence of stakeholders acting in concert, producing a depiction of slums as at risk. The disaster preparedness discourse coincided with the envisioning of slum-free and “world class” cities, and in the overlapping interests of various institutional and civil society stakeholders. Key institutional actors involved in implementing slum policies began to galvanize at this time around the new disaster management agenda. Concurrent with the increased emphasis on disaster management emerged a greater focus on ensuring that slums’ vulnerabilities are reduced in the event of disaster.

The rise of the slums “at risk” rhetoric was fueled by the appointment of slum management policy actors as chairmen or secretaries of disaster relief and mitigation committees. The overlap of slum and disaster agendas is evidenced by organizational correspondences. For example, the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board chairman was appointed as the head of the Disaster Management Committee in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. As a result, the contingent or executive orders from the government directed to disaster-affected slums focus on shifting slum tenure as an approach to mitigate their vulnerability to future disasters. The process of vulnerability mitigation is attributed to a new approach in disaster management that attempts to preempt the disaster by prevention and mitigation strategies, one of which is slum relocation:

There has been a paradigm shift in the focus of Disaster Management, from response-centric covering rescue, relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction to laying greater emphasis on the other elements of disaster management cycle – prevention, mitigation, and preparedness – as a means to avert or soften the impact of future emergencies (p. 749, Tamilnadu Disaster Management Policy 2014).

Disaster planning is predicated on the geographical risks presented by settlement along precarious locations:

People have continued to live and settle in disaster-prone areas, in spite of knowing about the risk and occurrence in the past may be due to certain cultural and historical reasons coupled with advantages of living in these areas. The risk gets amplified when the population increases, the area gets densified and activities increase thereby aggravating the situation and putting a large number of lives at risk. To cope with the disasters, preparedness and planning are the only ways (Second Master Plan 2008).

The disaster preparedness discourse emerged not just from government actors at the TNSCB, but also newer appointees to disaster preparedness, mitigation, and relief programs. A spate of programs was initiated by executive order shortly after the 2004 disaster: the Emergency Tsunami Rehabilitation Program (ETRP) and the Coastal Disaster Risk Reduction Program (CDRRP) (CDRRP Report 2016). These programs advocated rehabilitation measures for slum residents as a way of reducing their future vulnerability to other disasters. Taking their cue from World Bank agenda-setters, the focus of these programs was not so much on short-term recovery measures but on long-term rehabilitation toward the end of reducing vulnerability. Subsequently, the edicts of these executive orders lay in shifting slum residents out of their current geographic locations, which were ostensibly precarious, and into slum relocation colonies built in the style of townships on the outskirts of the city.

The Tsunami Housing Reconstruction Programme envisages the construction of about 130,000 concrete houses at an approximate cost of Rs. 1,50,000 each. Each house will have 300–325 sq. ft. of built-up spaces. The houses will have all disaster-resistant features (GO 172 2005).

To highlight how the new modality of slum clearance operates, I use the case of Thideer Nagar, a slum along the Marina Beach. The residents of Thideer Nagar were relocated to Okkiyam Thoraipakkam (OT), a slum relocation site built on an expedited emergency footing following the 2004 disaster. This case is illuminating of the new bent in urban policy that favors slum relocation over in situ slum upgrading. Funded by the World Bank and private developers, OT on the outskirts of the city was slated as a township of high-rises to house resettled slum residents. After the 2004 tsunami, executive orders issued the construction of this township so that families in “vulnerable” areas might be offered alternate housing in less vulnerable areas to prevent future damage during natural calamities (GO 708 2006). In 2008, the TNSCB constructed 13000 tenements in Okkiyam Thoraipakkam with funding assistance from the World Bank (GO 371 2008). The case made in these executive orders was that despite being far away from the original location of the slum, these tenements would provide security against an ostensibly natural predilection to vulnerability that the geographic locations created. Thideer Nagar was a fishing village with a community that had settled along the oceanfront for decades, but had been recognized in the 1971 audit as a slum (Slum Clearance Act 1971).

The conditions of tenements built for slum relocation throw into question the actual benefits of the new tenements constructed on the outskirts of the city over the existing locations. For one, the executive orders circumvent due process in declaring a state of emergency precipitated by disaster, thus allowing modifications to existing caveats that prevent construction of housing in certain zones. The slum rehousing colony built in

OT is located in wetlands that flood every monsoon season. An executive order recommended that the government empower land collectors to acquire wetlands for slum rehousing colony construction in contradiction of existing rules that no residences may be built in wetlands (GO 326 2005). The TNSCB chairman (and head of the disaster management committee) recommended in the same order that after careful examination, the government gave sanction for rehabilitation measures to be placed on a fast track. In other words, the order exempted tsunami slum rehousing colonies from needing to obtain prior permission to acquire wetlands.

The Government after careful examination consider that in order to put the rehabilitation measures on a fast track, exempt the tsunami affected districts from obtaining prior permission from the Government to acquire wetlands for housing to rehabilitate the tsunami affected people, [which is] imperative (GO 326 2005).

Additionally, reports from NGOs and community audits show that the construction of OT slum resettlement colonies was supply-driven. Private land developers and construction agencies approached the government and the contract to build OT slum tenements was awarded to the cheapest bid (PUCL 2010). Thus, this hints at a nexus of agents involving private developers operating in tandem with slum and disaster bureaucrats in developing a spate of slum relocation tenements before the need for alternate housing was even established. This is further clarified by an executive order that advocated relocation of Thideer Nagar slum residents to OT without even verifying whether or not they were equally affected by the tsunami: “Out of 1286 families [relocated to OT], only 1228 families are stated as tsunami-affected and the status of the remaining 58 families is yet to be verified.” To compound the exodus, slums from North Chennai were also relocated to OT despite northern parts of the city being landlocked and far from any locations of geographic precariousness (GO 261 2008).

Since the 2000s, slum policies have been moderated by two frames. The first frame perceives slums as risky, not just to the residents themselves, but a wider public that comprises, among others, the middle-class residents of the city and private land and real estate developers. The antagonism toward inner city slums is articulated as a social problem obstructing ideals of world-class city-making, beautification, environmental wellness, legal land occupation, and returns to investment on land development. This frame has been well-documented as prevalent in other cities of India and the Global South in justifying slum eviction and relocation to the urban periphery. However, Chennai witnessed the development of a new frame of slums as not just risky, but also at risk in their existing geographical locations. I have argued in this section that this frame emerged as a result of the World Bank’s emphasis on disaster mainstreaming in urban policy, and the development of a disaster discourse generated by various policy actors, political parties, and stakeholders such as middle-class activists and private developers. The purpose of this section was to illustrate the radical pivoting of Chennai’s slum policy away from in situ slum improvement in the 1960s and toward an approach that prefers the relocation of slums to the urban periphery. The slums “at risk” discourse, which employs a rhetoric of the vulnerability of slum residents, has effectively created a paradoxical situation in which slum residents are adversely affected as a result of massive displacement and isolation on the fringes of the city. The deployment of slum relocation as a response to the disaster moment is premised on a political display of slum relocation as a pro-poor solution to the vulnerability of slums to potential risks of disaster. In the next section, I discuss the

import of these findings and explain the seeming contradiction between an antislum policy framed by a pro-poor discourse within the context of Tamilnadu politics.

DISCUSSION

The swing of slum policy from in situ slum improvement to slum relocation reflects the changes in the relationship between slums and political parties in Tamilnadu from the 1960s until the present moment. The character of Tamilnadu politics has been distinct from national politics since its inception as the radical Dravidian movement, well before independence. However, postindependence Tamilnadu has been characterized as practicing a sort of “machine-style politics,” involving brokers and mediators to keep intact a system of voters and cadres through material inducements (de Wit 1996). The role of charismatic authority in political leaders of Tamilnadu such as Kamaraj, Karunanidhi, MGR, and Jayalalithaa cannot be underestimated in the story of Tamil political belief and expression. Dravidian leaders have fashioned themselves in some way or form as being pro-poor in appealing to the public, and thus constitute a political elite that remains attached to the slum as an important political constituency.

Furthermore, the two major Dravidian parties—DMK and AIADMK—have taken turns alternatively to form state government, particularly since the late 1990s. Both parties have abandoned their more radical claims made at inception, such as a separatist Tamil state or a militaristic attitude toward the central government. In fact, both parties have formed coalitions with national political parties such as the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at various points since the late 1990s. Furthermore, the political scenario in Tamilnadu has undergone tremendous changes as a result of new political parties that have emerged since the 2000s with specifically caste-based agendas. Newer Tamilnadu-based political parties have platforms that comprise the interests of poorer, lower-caste or Dalit voters, thus requiring the DMK and AIADMK to step up the expression of commitment to the poor and the Dalits. The concentration of the poor and the Dalits in slums obligates the political setup to frame slum policies as pro-poor.

The existing scholarship on slums and cities, as outlined earlier, explains how aspirations to a world-class city have laid claim on urban governance. Competing sets of stakeholders, like the middle-class and private land and real estate developers, have pushed the state to enact slum eviction and clearance by framing slums as risky, dangerous, illegal, and messy. However, as this article shows, the case of Chennai slums presents a different picture. Middle-class articulations of the slums as environmentally polluting, or illegally encroaching, have fueled the drive to relocate slums. The government, acting in concert with IFIs and private developers, has also created a regime that works toward a “world-class city” devoid of slums, as evidenced by Vision 2023’s slum-free hope for Chennai. However, the political expediencies of Tamil politics necessitate at least a tokenistic framing of slum relocation as pro-poor. The cornerstone of Tamil politics has been a concern for its image as represented in electoral campaigns, film, and the media as pro-poor. As a result, the framing of slums as at risk of disaster-induced destruction has become an additional modality through which political parties preserve their image as being for the “common man” while simultaneously appeasing other competing stakeholders in the electoral process.

Clearly, despite the framing of slum relocation as pro-poor, the actual relocation of slums to far-flung townships has been anything but beneficial to the displaced slum residents. Slum relocation to the city's outskirts has led to an extenuated experience of disaster, some of whom did not even experience the effects of natural disaster. Displacement has resulted in loss of employment for the low-income slum population that was previously employed in the urban center as marginal laborers, domestic helps, or other informal service providers (Kumaran and Negi 2006; Diwakar and Peter 2016). Children and adolescents have experienced attenuation in their education, since the provision of infrastructure services is yet to follow the relocation of slum residents to many of these townships (PUCL 2010). An official audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India revealed that the slum relocation colonies suffer from a series of shortcomings, such as improper and shoddy construction that leads to flooding during the monsoon season (Auditor's Report 2014). In spite of these shortcomings, slum relocation is rapidly becoming the singular configuration of slums within Tamilnadu's political matrix remedied occasionally through grandiose populist gestures such as the provision of free blenders, televisions, and bicycles to appease this important electoral constituency. Further, the decline in slum associations has meant that there is reduced confrontation between slum residents and slum clearance officials during relocation drives. This decline in dissent might be a factor of the heightened role of the Community Development arm of TNSCB in convincing and persuading slum residents to accept relocation, but also might be attributed to the role of individuals from slums that join party cadres and seek the acquiescence of their neighbors in bending to political will.

In conclusion, the relationship between slums, state, and civil society in Chennai remains a highly important and complex configuration that literature on world-class city making and urban disasters must take seriously. This article addresses a serious shortcoming in the existing literature on the treatment of slums in cities of the Global South by pointing to how political pressures are translated into the presentation of policy. Slum residents are important political constituencies in the story of urban growth, and the history of Chennai's slum policy illustrates how policy variously deploys frames of slums as risky or at risk in order to balance competing interests of urban stakeholders. The findings of this study add new insights to sociological scholarship on disaster by demonstrating the political power of disaster preparedness and risk framings in enacting a variety of urban development agendas, which have resulted in the displacement and diminished political power of the urban poor. This article also shows how urban sociology would benefit from the understanding that policymakers mobilize framings of risk, vulnerability, and disaster toward resettlement of the poor in the process of creating urban landscapes that correspond to images of "world-class" cities.

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