Subaltern urbanism in India beyond the mega-city slum: The civic politics of occupancy and development in two peripheral cities in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Spatial inequalities, in terms of basic services, infrastructure, housing, and livelihood space continue to intensify in many cities despite formal processes of decentralisation, mechanisms for greater private sector and civil society participation, and increasingly geo-referenced databases on the different aspects and scale of urban poverty and inequalities. The motivation of this thesis is to better understand how spatial inequalities are made. How do they come to be in the places we find them rather than some other part of the city, and which actors are involved in the production of these inequalities and why? This point of departure differs from those that view spatial inequalities as deriving from neoliberal policies, capitalism, population growth, or poverty. These are all significant factors that affect inequality, but on their own they cannot carry out the work and conduct the practices and perceptions of the configuration of actors whose succession of activities produce the geography of uneven development on the ground in different cities. To better account for how spatial inequalities take the form and the geography they do, this study explores the civic domain in two peripheral cities in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region: Kalyan-Dombivli and Mira-Bhayandar to examine the civic politics, or local political order, shaping the production of spatial inequalities. Civic politics refers to how power and authority are de facto constituted, distributed and deployed in the city in matters affecting public welfare, public goods and services and the city's general development (Davies, 2009). Researching civic politics requires examining the local political institutions, their sources and expressions of authority over the everyday and primary needs of housing, basic services, and security as well as the characteristics of municipal government in practice. The civic domain thus refers to the places where these public issues and power-relations are worked out and the institutions and political culture guiding these processes. This is the terrain where, 'rights to the city,' both in terms of access and citizenship today, and in terms of whose needs and wants are included (and how) going forward are negotiated in ways that can be both complementary or contradictory to the policies and plans worked out at the state, central, or international level (cf. Stone, 2009; Gottdeiner and Hutchison, 2011; Gudavarthy and Vijay, 2011: 49; Magnussen, 2014: 10-11).

While many scholars agree that local everyday politics is important to grasp and engage with, it rarely takes centre stage. When it is taken up in research on cities in the Global South, a common analytical coordinate is Chatterjee’s (2004) ‘political society’ argument that places the civic politics accessible to the urban poor-whose livelihoods and modes of spatial production are illegal and/or unsettle the vision of modern and orderly cities—as a separate practical and epistemological domain that sits in contradiction with civil society where citizens whose livelihoods and residences conform with laws and modern norms can operate through rights-based liberal institutions in the civic domain. Chatterjee theorises a polarised civic domain with two parallel meta-modalities of local politics (cf. Gudavarthy, 2011: chapter 1). One populated by 'citizens' adhering to norms of 'modern civil society' and a rule of law
local state and one containing 'populations' adhering to informal institutions and secret clauses of 'political society' with a compromised or mediated local state. However, the large majority of residences in Indian cities are likely technically illegal, or at least legally ambiguous (cf. Roy, 2009; Bhan, 2013; Ghertner, 2011a; Zalsloff, 2011), and upwards of 90 percent of Indians work in the informal or unorganised sectors (Harriss-White, 2010). These indicate that political society—if taken to refer to the informal politics, marked by ad hoc and contingent negotiations and arrangements with various local authorities around securing space, services, as well as occasional efforts to reshape urban space more extensively—is a circuit of civic politics and knowledge that extends far beyond slums. This means that much of the work on urban governance, civil society and inequality are marked by an 'absent presence' that needs to be rendered more visible. The empirical goal of this thesis is to make political society's presence, institutions and practices in Kalyan-Dombivli (KD) and Mira-Bhayandar (MB) more visible. To do this, I focus on the spatial manifestation of political society Benjamin (2008) terms ‘occupancy urbanism’. Occupancy urbanism refers to settlements produced through the informal to illegal appropriation of space, services, and markets. The dimension of particular interest here is the local political and bureaucratic facilitations of these ‘appropriations.’ The main interest within this dimension is the political actors or operators involved in the housing market and locality development and what their motivations are for facilitating informal to illegal forms of occupancy urbanism. These political actors’ capacities, practices and relationships are examined to analyse if and to what extent they are able to achieve structural domination in ways difficult to formally challenge. In other words, following Sammaddar (2010) this thesis is interested in the politics of political society as it pertains to development and democracy in the city. I contend that how and to what extent political society, rather than civil society, dominates politics in the civic domain is knowledge critical for both designing and implementing suitable reforms and for organising political actions for the purposes of reducing spatial inequalities.

Development in this thesis is defined in line with how these cities’ development codes and plans define it. For example KD defines it thusly:

**Development with its grammatical variations means the carrying out of buildings, engineering, mining or other operations in, or over, or under land or the making of any material change, in any building or land or in the use of any building or land or any material or structural change in any heritage building or its precinct and includes demolition of any existing building, structure or erection of part of such building, structure of erection and reclamation, redevelopment and layout or sub-division of any land and to develop shall be construed accordingly (Development Code Regulations, 2004).**

Development is taken from this definition to refer to housing, infrastructure, and services, i.e., serviceable and serviced urban land. These dimensions of development represent the material processes that both necessitate the civic domain and are produced by it. The extent these processes are marked by inequality and competition indicate a civic politics not motivated by norms of inclusive development in practice.
The bulk of this thesis is comprised of published or submitted journal articles (chapters 4-8). Space restrictions of journal publications precluded discussing all the literature, debates, and dilemmas informing the chapters of this thesis. I will take the opportunity to cover this ground here. I begin with discussing how the lacklustre results of changing forms of urban governance to reduce poverty and inequalities are being understood in academic debates, as well as what direction present research is taking. For the Indian context, I argue that insights from subaltern studies referencing state-society relations and civic political cultures should be more centrally incorporated in our analyses of urban governance to better account for the presence and capacities of political society. This chapter closes with an explanation for choosing to focus on the role political society plays in spatial inequalities and operationalizes political society for political institutional analysis.

1.1 Urban Governance, Inequality Reduction, and Poverty Alleviation

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century the table seemed to be set for drastic reductions in urban poverty and inequalities. There was a conjuncture of economic liberalisation, decentralisation and democratisation combined with a new ethos of participatory development and inclusive growth coming from the World Bank, the UNDP and national development authorities. This period also saw a growing wealth of case studies and livelihoods profiles covering how local governance organisations and the poor themselves were making progress on reducing various ‘deprivations’ in their localities or livelihoods respectively (Rakodi & Llyod, 2002; Moser, 2007). The ways NGOs, funders, and governments could support the activities of the urban poor (or at least not undermine their efforts) received increased attention (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2004). New forms of urban governance that included mechanisms for citizen participation and cooperation with civil society organisations and private firms were being experimented with in many cities (cf. Devas, 2004; Baud and de Wit, 2008; Beall et al., 2009). Although with likely setbacks, an urban development era marked by enhanced accountability, knowledge, efficiency, and equity was thought to be reachable. The gist was that if the appropriate institutional and organisational reforms could be implemented then benefits of globalisation and economic growth would materialise for hitherto marginalised groups and localities within cities.

Evidence of the ‘pro-poor’ or social or spatial inclusiveness outcomes of the neo-institutionalist governance turn is mixed with much geographical and sectoral variation. When poverty lines reflect more realistic costs of living and take into consideration other deprivations or vulnerabilities in addition to income, we see that aggregate urban poverty levels remain high (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013). Inequality within many cities, particularly in terms of infrastructure, services and housing, has increased to the point where Graham and Martin’s 2001 thesis of ‘fragmenting urbanism’ may be the new normal. There is a general consensus that in the last 20 years Indian cities have seen intensifications of fragmentation and division in multiple scales and domains: economically, spatially, ecologically and politically (Rurarelia et
al., 2011: 3-5; McFarlane, 2012). Optimistic goals of inclusive cities are starting to be replaced with more conservative goals such as: securing the poor’s ‘right to survive’ (Argawala, 2008) with efforts being directed at rolling-back trends of criminalalising aspects of ‘informal’ livelihoods. Along the same lines, goals of ‘resilience’ have gained resonance with efforts directed at how vulnerable groups and places can keep hold of what meagre functionings they have managed in the face of increasingly precarious economic and environmental times (cf. Amin 2013a).

1.2 ‘Lack of Interest’ In Poverty Alleviation and Inequality Reduction?

We believe that the scale and depth of urban poverty is ignored within most low-income nations, many middle-income nations and globally. We believe that this reflects considerable misrepresentation and underestimation of urban poverty, and occurs because of the very narrow ways in which poverty is usually conceived, defined, and measured. This also reflects a lack of interest from governments and international agencies in seeking to understand urban poverty and many deprivations that it causes or contributes to […] at core our criticism is the use of inappropriate frameworks, tools and methods for defining and measuring poverty (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2013: 2-3 emphasis mine).

Those tracking the macro political economy of urban development attribute this ‘lack of interest’ Mitlin & Satterthwaite speak of to miss-allocations of capital in non-productive assets (eg. gold, art, real estate, Facebook, derivatives) and capital intensive industry (IT, insurance), and to financialisation in general that combine into low-job producing growth, especially for low-skilled labour (cf. Breman and Agarwal, 2002; Harvey, 2008; Chatterjee, 2008; Nijman, 2012; Sassen, 2014). It is argued that too many resources are being circulated in what Lefebvre coined as the ‘second circuit of capital’:

‘Real estate’ (speculation, building) as it is called, plays the role of a second sector, of a circuit parallel to that of industrial production […] Capital initially makes fabulous profits, but it soon founders. In this sector, the ‘multiplier’ effect is slight: few induced activities. Capital comes to a halt in real estate. The general economy soon suffers from this. However, the role and the function of this sector continue to grow. Whenever the main circuit, that of common industrial production of ‘movable’ goods slows down, capital goes to be invested in the second sector, that of real estate. Property speculation may even become the main source, the almost exclusive place of the ‘formation of capital,’ that is to say making a capital gain (1970: 211–212).

Investment portfolios, building-booms (especially of relatively upper-scale commercial, tourist, and residential areas) and the push to ‘world-class and slum-free’ cities in India indicate the significance of this second circuit. The high demand for developable urban land make it unnecessary to invest in infrastructural or other built

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1 Sen (1999) defines functionings as what one is able to do and be.
environment improvements to turn a profit, especially in periods of speculation (Gottdeiner and Hutchison, 2011). Sassen (2010) points out that unlike in earlier phases of capitalist production of space, where lower income people on the land were included as labour and consumers, today a trend is emerging for the property to be the main or only concern to the investors, developers, and eventual buyers. The people are too often expelled via a variety of mechanisms, such as predatory mortgages, priced out, bought out, evicted, zoned out or resettled (Sassen, 2014). Also, the trend towards cost-recovery or profit making from infrastructure development and basic services provision can lock-in disincentives to develop these in deprived areas where profit margins are believed to be smaller (cf. Bakker & Kooy, 2008; Sangameswaran 2009).

Meta-level analyses suggest that we have entered a ‘network society’ that is increasingly able (due to technological advances and liberalisation policies) to bypass areas and people that are not of ‘value’ or are superfluous to the value(s) being generated and distributed within and between networks (Castells 2009, pp. 19-24). Castells foregrounds the social to pinpoint which actors within a network and/or which network within a configuration of networks are ‘programming’ the goals and processes of value formation, and which actors or networks are ‘switchers’ within and between networks who can alter flows. Network society tends to produce a new meta-geography of development that Sidaway (2007) termed ‘enclave space’. Those looking at urban development dialectically with changes in governmentality focus on how the spaces and people rendered surplus or redundant (cf. Giwandi and Reddy, 2011; Li, 2009) by these political-economic shifts are being disciplined ‘to make do’ on their own. Two trends dominate here. One is how these spaces and people can be ‘empowered’ to connect themselves into the circuits or networks of the globalising economy through cultivating local entrepreneurialism often jump-started with micro-credit (cf. Roy, 2010) or tenure (cf. de Soto, 2001). The other is to spatially concentrate the ‘urban precariat’ neighbourhoods and livelihoods by increasingly punitive techniques of de facto segregation, exclusion, or expulsion (cf. Wacquant, 2008; Davis 2006; Mezzadra, et al. 2013; Bhan, 2009; McFarlane, 2012: Sassen, 2014).

Research on the local or civic politics in cities that have ostensibly undergone processes of decentralisation, where the relatively poor and marginalised have an electorally significant majority, finds that electoral pressure is rarely mobilised to push for more just geographies of development (Khemani, 2008 & 2010; Wood and Gough, 2006). Many modes of clientelism and various levels of political or elite capture of state agencies or municipal departments remain, and poorer groups rarely engage in horizontal politics focused on longer-term development of public goods and services (cf. Keefer and Khemani, 2004; de Wit & Berner, 2009; Berenschot, 2010). Another strand of literature focuses on the emerging class dynamics of spatial politics to analyse how the new middle-classes organise to benefit from the ‘spaces’ decentralisation and participation open up. Findings show that these spaces can be used to both participate in how their neighbourhoods are governed and to influence the general direction of citywide development (cf. Anjaria, 2009; Harriss, 2006;
Ghertner, 2011a and 2011b; Baud and Nainan, 2009). Middle Class activism tends to bypass the poor or to see them (their neighbourhoods and civic politics) as antagonistic to their entitlements as citizens being better discharged. Rather than middle-classes facilitating a better social contract for everyone, in terms of development, in postcolonial states they often pursue politically “illiberal” interests (Chakrabarty, 2009; Hadiz & Robison 2005; Fernandez & Heller 2006; Chatterjee 2004). Together these point towards ‘development without the poor’ (Ballard 2012) and ‘enclave urbanism’ (Wissink 2013; Kaker 2013), as playing a role in urban governance actors’ ambivalence towards poverty and inequality. City governments are pushed and encouraged from above and below to be entrepreneurial, concerned with developing a good business and investment climate, and accommodating more ‘consumer citizens’ (Harvey, 1996b; Banerjee Guha, 2009; Bhan, 2009; Lauermann & Davidson, 2013).

In “Telesopic Urbanism,” Amin (2013b) argues that it is not only the state and large-scale capital interests that are combining to produce urban fragmentation, but well-meaning researchers and activists as well. He claims that the ‘telesopic urbanism’ of both those focused on ‘business consultancy urbanism’ and of those focused on cultivating the ‘human potential’ of the (existentially) self-reliant, entrepreneurial and improvisational slums are both:

> Implicated in preventing the scale and severity of human existence from being considered as anything other than a problem of autochthonous development […] they reinforce that the city in a global age only exists as a collection of settlements with varied geographies of affiliation, rather than as the sum of its parts […] only particular parts of the city are projected as spaces of potentiality or attention for such a future, eschewing any obligation to think the city as field of shared life and common rights (477).

These arguments challenge the notion that you can address areas of urban poverty and inequality without also looking at areas of urban prosperity and privilege and how they are implicated in one another’s trajectory. The people and places actively supported by policies and projects and those left largely to their own devices need to be looked at as being co-constitutive of each other. Development requires resources, surpluses if you will, bundled by iterative political processes and technologies of creation, extraction, deployment, accumulation, and distribution that are spatially and socially uneven, never benign, and at some level institutionally connected. How to better understand, track and perhaps help shift these connections towards fairer processes and outcomes become crucial. On this point, Loïc Wacquant (2002) argues that:

> The task of the social scientist is not to exonerate the character of dishonoured social figures and dispossessed groups by ‘documenting’ their everyday world in an effort to extract sympathy for their plight […] It is to dissect the social mechanisms and meanings that govern their practices, ground their morality, and explain their strategies and trajectories (1527).
This requires developing our sensitivity to the formal and informal institutions organising perception, practice, and thus the production of space. This would help move scholarly and applied work past the ‘autochthonous development’ impasse built upon the process of seeing inequalities as derivatives of individual or group economic and social achievements or assets, and the spatial counterpart of discussing ‘neighbourhood effects’ of ‘problem areas’ like slums. On this task Pierre Bourdieu notes:

One can break with falsely evident notions, and with errors inscribed in substantialist thinking in terms of places, only on condition of affecting a rigorous analysis of the relations between the structures of social space and the structures of physical space (1999: 123-124).

We should not presume that what manifests in a particular area or for a particular group stems only, or even predominantly, from their actions and attributes. How things appear, and how things work, are also conducted from elsewhere in ways and means and by actors we are not aware of. In these situations issues of sufficient information, consent or accountability become non-sequitor. The practice of endowing the perceptions and livelihood strategies of the poor and marginalised privileged status can become counterproductive to stated goals of empowerment. Individual and localised activity is in large part conducted by broader configurations of institutions, actors and spatialities of power (cf. Allen, 2009; Latour, 2005).

While new forms of governance and nascent spaces of citizen participation draw most scholarly attention, how pre-existing forms of governance such as: vote-bank politics, patronage, clientelism, brokerage, bossism adapt and develop strategies to benefit from (or capture) these institutional shifts, are too often ignored, i.e., regarded as anachronistic or aberrant forms vulnerable to the incentives and rules being forged by decentralisation, democratisation and liberalisation (Hadiz, 2004; Hansen and Stepput, 2006). However, growing evidence indicates that local political actors and forms of informal public authority can successfully adapt to changing institutional landscapes without incurring significant reductions in influence. This raises issues of money politics, muscle politics and varieties of patronage functioning quite well within ostensibly democratic, decentralised, and liberalised formal institutional contexts (cf. de Wit, 2011; Hadiz, 2006: pp. 631-632). For example, de Sardin (2011) discusses eight modes of local governance commonly found to be co-existing in cities in West Africa:

The coexistence of many modes of local governance seems to us to be a central characteristic of Niger as well as many African countries. The process of ‘piling up’ types of power in local arenas has become generalised: when a new form of political authority is set up (either by the state or by development agencies) it does not substitute for the layers of institutionality already in place but adds to them [...] There are layers of power and legitimacy dating from different periods which all coexist in the same sociopolitical space,

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displaying a complex mixture of mutual recognition and blind competition, of tolerance and masked rivalry (23).

Already existing modes of local governance and civic politics with different modes of accountability, operating logics, and capacities, no doubt play a role in how policies like decentralisation are taken up on the ground and with what consequences for cities becoming more or less civically and spatially inclusive. These findings highlight how institutional reforms coming from elsewhere tend to miss the importance of already embedded modalities of civic politics and public authority at the local level. Too often it is taken for granted the extent to which an organised and powerful enough social base in support of these reforms is needed to mobilise these institutional fixes in the direction of envisioned progressive outcomes (Hadiz, 2005).

The missing or dismissing of existing fields of local governance and civic politics when designing, implementing or championing formal institutional reforms (even in the era of supposedly ‘bottom-up’ development) remains a problem. Policy-makers who only know areas on paper, if at all, have little idea, and thus little control, over what processes and which actors these reforms will strengthen in practice. In other words, the civic political culture shaping practices and interactions on the ground between citizens and between citizens and public authorities may be incongruous with the civil society or ‘social capital’ required for liberal-democratic-capitalist institutional reforms to take root and flourish (cf. Putnam, 1992). Civil society, and thus civil politics, marked by internalised norms of political equality, individual rights and autonomy from state and social domination, and public accountability cannot be presumed to be universal, even in nascent forms. Further, civic politics around organising individual and group needs in ways that, as much as possible, promote rather than undermine the common good of the city, presupposes both that citizens of the city accept in practice the authority of the ‘rule of law’ and the state it constitutes, and a generalised sense or feeling of civic responsibility (Almond and Verba, 1989). The theorised necessary connection between civil society and a functioning democratic state leads Partha Chatterjee (1998: 10) to refer to Nehru’s modernisation-development projects as having the common underlying purpose of trying to create a civil society. By this metric (creating civil society) he failed in large part because these projects “were reinvented at the District and Block levels by politicians and lower-level bureaucrats who often did not share the world-views of their English-educated superiors” (Corbridge et al., 2005: 189). On civic political culture in India, Dipankar Gupta (2007) argues:

Whether one goes to a hospital, school, government office, or participates in politics, there is no escaping the fact that the mode of relations among people in our country is still not modern. Family connections, privileges of caste and status, as well as the willingness to break every law in the book characterise our social relations very deeply. True modernity is about how people relate to other people, and likewise, true ethics is all about a concern with ‘others’ as equal citizens. Modernity is an attitude, which represents universal norms where the dignity of an individual as citizen is inviolable and not diminished by family background or lack of connections. Once modernity is understood in this fashion, it is apparent that India has a long distance to go (8).
Leaving aside this likely overly stylised definition of modernity, the point here is its association with civic political culture, where civil society’s values being dominant and prevalent are taken to be synonymous with modernity and how India’s civic political culture is thus not modern. Civic politics still very much faces the political-ethical conundrum of the stranger, i.e., what do we owe to those, in terms of civility, recognition, and distribution, not directly related to us, and to whom we have no tacit affinity or social mutuality. De Tocqueville (1945) argued that civil society supportive of democracy and expansive public welfare requires a homogenous (enough) public in order for feelings of solidarity and trust to emerge. Without sufficient trust and solidarity (social capital in today’s parlance) common good projects that inevitably require give and take and acting against parochial interests for the good of the whole are less likely to emerge and succeed. Contrary to liberal notions of multiculturalism or pluralism, diversity can be the death knell of civil society and lead to forms of electoral democracy at the state and federal level with everyday tyrannies at the local level (ibid.). Reaching this point differently, Marx notes that civil society (what he normally referred to as bourgeois society) cannot bring about equality in conditions of pronounced economic, social and cultural inequality (2005). State authorities and auxiliaries treating citizens the same is great for those with enough economic and cultural capital to hold their own in societies rife with relations of exploitation and exclusion in the economy, in the family, and between castes and ethnic groups. In some contexts, formal political equality and autonomy from the state can lead to less protection from everyday forms of private or social dominations. This scenario is more likely where governments engage in salutary neglect. Chandavarkar (2007) argues that from the colonial period up to today that salutary neglect—where laws or conditions attached to grants are not enforced—is a common tactic at the federal and state level in India. Most issues pertaining to public order and welfare at the everyday material level are, in practice, left to local political actors and elites, with the social institutions supporting their standing as arbiters and access points to the state rarely targeted for reform (cf. Nirmal et al., 2009; SARC, 2007). The crux is that passing laws and funding for projects with lists of conditionalities cannot be taken at face value to represent the collective intentionality of a particular level of government. What happens later in implementation and evaluation phases are arguably much better indicators of intent. The extent acts and programs are passed along with an implied ‘wink’ that only certain things need to be acted on, while others should be ignored or dragged out as long as possible obscures which links in the institutional chain of governance are at fault for ‘implementation deficits’. Žižek (2008) argues that rules and norms that are not supposed to be followed, or at least not supposed to be followed by some, are numerous. He refers to these as secret clauses—the unwritten, disavowed, but necessary rules that every legal edifice or set of social rules or relations require to be durable (ibid.: 7). These secret clauses communicate what needs to be taken seriously, what can be ignored, and what is only for the sake of appearances. For Žižek, substantive and durable change is achieved when changes occur in this domain of legally or publicly disavowed, but nevertheless followed norms and rules (2010: 165). This indicates that the room to manoeuvre or space of elaboration that exist where institutions are to link up in practice, and in terms of principal-agent
relations, are shaped by formal, informal and secret institutional caveats. In the realm of civic politics, this means that the local state cannot be counted upon to be a neutral arbiter of conflicts or distributor of the privileges of citizenship—making other relations or connections necessary in these matters. Knowledge exists on the degree formal institutional measures link up or not, but very little exists in terms of how this process is shaped by much harder to trace norms and tacit, but publicly rebuked, understandings. To the extent understandings and social relations are framed by the level of informal institutions and secret clauses, the greater the degree that knowledge framed from within the coordinates of formal institutions and civil society will miss many drivers of civic politics and the actual levels of social integration.

This section briefly reviewed literature covering factors that are likely combining in ways to block the reductions in urban poverty and inequality that the nexus of liberalisation, decentralisation, and democratisation-cum-participation are thought to have the capacity to bring about. The macro-level political economy trends of allocating capital to non-productive and low job-producing investments, and the societal changes brought about by ‘network society’ leading to ‘enclave geographies’ of development (or vice-versa), middle-class activism, and existing forms of de facto governance and every-day civic politics arguably interact to limit the inequality reducing capacities of these reforms. This thesis focuses on the last factor of de facto civic politics at the municipal and locality level; both because these factors are under-researched, and because the effects of the others can be amplified or softened by local institutional configurations and the political actors who fashion them (cf. Anjaria 2009; Harris, 2008; Wilson, 2004).

1.3 Subaltern Studies

Subaltern Studies’ main subject matter is the durability and magnitude of institutions rendered informal or secret (subaltern in their lexicon) in relation to liberal-capitalist political and economic institutions that dominate higher-level state processes, corporate capitalism, and the ‘new middle-classes’. They argue that these informal institutions and secret clauses, referred to as political society by Chatterjee (2004), are both incompatible with western derived theories and practices of governance, development and urbanism in particular, and incompatible with western derived universalism’s of capitalism, liberalism, and the enlightenment in general. Basically, the productive, political, and cultural lifeworlds of the majority of Indians cannot be sufficiently known by applying western theories and concepts, whether they be Marxist, neo-liberal, or those that fall in between—the subaltern remains minimised and marginalised; it cannot speak (cf. Spivak, 1989). From this cultural and historicist understanding it logically follows that reforms based on sanitised and depoliticised western institutional coordinates fall short. They fall short because they mistake

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3 Subaltern Studies includes many theorists and writers. This section is a summary based on Chatterjee (2004); Guha (1997); and Chakrabarty (2009) and is not intended to be an exhaustive review.
institutions that are dominant in official documents and in elite economic, political and social circles to be prevalent throughout society. Subaltern studies is adamant on the point that India is not a society economically and politically integrated along liberal-democratic-capitalist norms and relations. This mismatch is unlikely to be reduced by only retooling best practices or including 'local partners'. For example, popular development economist Jeffery Sachs, upon reflecting on the misadventures of structural adjustment, discusses the need for better knowledge of the areas models and best-practices are going to be applied; he realised that without adequate geographical, social-anthropological, historical, and political bearings we are likely to continue to conceive erroneous solutions to pervasive problems (Sachs, 2005: 89-92). This knowledge he speaks of is likely for formatting applications of solutions, and likely not for critiquing the solutions themselves, or to be used as the basis for devising different solutions. In this sense, Sachs misses the main point of subaltern studies. On this topic, David Harvey\(^4\) writes:

> All universalisation projects, be they liberal, neo-liberal, conservative, religious, socialist, cosmopolitan, or rights-based run into serious problems as they encounter the specific circumstances of their application. Noble phrases and ideals [slum-free cities] crumble into shoddy excuses, special pleadings, misunderstandings, and too often into violent confrontations and recriminations...[For example] the failure of neoliberals to imagine the consequences of imposing private property rights and monetised market solutions on divergent geographical, ecological and anthropological situations is one of the more astonishing conceits of our times (2009, pp. 8 & 55).

Subaltern studies claims that capitalism, liberalism and the other hallmarks of modernity are dominant, but not prevalent in the daily lives and lifeworlds of the majority of Indians. They are dominant because they are the espoused economic, political and cultural values of the elite. Guha (1997) argues that the 'bourgeoisie' in India did not bother to integrate lower classes by making the case that their interests and norms, if institutionalised, would overtime benefit everyone. He argues this was the case in Europe, where the bourgeoisie reached hegemony through integrating all groups (over time) into liberal citizenship, private property and capital. In this manner, the bourgeoisie replaced the ancien régime based on feudal relations and numerous interpersonal dominations, and paved the way for capitalism and liberalism to reach hegemony. In India, this process never happened; the bourgeoisie revolution over the ancien régime did not happen. Rather, the new elites, those that emerged during the colonial and post-independence period, carved out spaces for themselves via mechanisms of avoidance, accommodation and co-optation. These tactics resulted in forms of neo-feudalism and clientelism for the majority, and a sphere of ostensible political equality, contractualism and private property for the post-independent elite and bourgeoisie. This is not to imply that power structures and institutions outside this elite sphere of the political-economy are fixed in time, only that the transition and integration into a commonly understood and practiced

\(^4\) It should be noted here that while sympathetic to subaltern critiques, Harvey considers capital to be a general condition.
political-economy along the lines of what happened in Europe did not happen, and will not happen in India. The historical, economic, and urban strands of subaltern studies have been critiqued theoretically and empirically (cf. Chibber, 2013; Smith, 2013). It is not the goal of this thesis to contribute to these discussions. Rather, I am interested in the subaltern studies thesis that there is an elite civic political sphere and a popular one, side by side, or territorially co-present, which are theorised as being different at an ontological, epistemological, and practical level. In particular, I am interested in what this means for how we conceptualise and research urban inequalities. Regarding urban studies and development, subaltern studies helps bring to light what tends to remain ‘indecipherable’ to most standard conceptualisations of politics, the state, and citizenship applied to cities of the Global South. It is the field of the ‘unknown unknowns’ of western derived scholarship on these matters. Regarding urbanism there is a growing, somewhat disparate sub-body of work on the postcolonial: state, state-society relations, and everyday politics in cities, increasingly aggregated under the banner of ‘subaltern urbanism’ (Roy, 2011a) that aims to unsettle western derived epistemologies that are not sensitive to the opaque processes informed by informal institutions, secret clauses and ‘money and muscle’ politics. To make this more tangible, let us consider the following two arguments:

In Mumbai razor-sharp inequalities constitute a malevolent urbanism that is simultaneously political, economic, social, moral, and ecological. Here, the political and economic elites — with some exceptions — literally step over, ignore, exploit, dispossess, punish, and take from the poor. The poor are punished for sanitation poverty through demolition and other processes [...] it is also the case that many elites simply do not care, or choose to ignore, or have become inured to severe sanitation inequality, and know little of the commoditisation of water, the charging of users for toilets, the particularly dire provisions and higher costs for women, and the torment of daily sanitation illness and disease for those often characterised as ‘dirt’. Such sharp juxtapositions of material wealth can only be sustained through capitalism joined to an architecture of malice that I’m calling here malevolent urbanism. To echo Don Mitchell (2001), this marks a shift from malign neglect to punitive post-justice urbanism, where the poor and marginal are increasingly seen as incompatible with elite visions of urban development and are often violently displaced or regulated (McFarlane, 2012: 1288).

With the continuing rapid growth of the Asian economies, the hegemonic hold of corporate capital over the domain of civil society is likely to continue. This will inevitably mean continued primitive accumulation […] But most of these victims of primitive accumulation are unlikely to be absorbed in the new growth sectors of the economy. They will be marginalised and rendered useless as far as the sectors dominated by corporate capital are concerned. But the prevailing political climate makes it unacceptable and illegitimate for governments to leave these marginalised populations without the means of labour to simply fend for themselves. That carries the risk of turning them into the ‘dangerous classes’. Hence, a whole series of governmental policies are being, and will be, devised to reverse the effects of primitive accumulation […] The fact, however, is that the bulk of the population in most Asian countries still lives outside the orderly zones of proper civil society. It is there [political society] that they have to be fed, clothed, sheltered, and given work, if only to ensure the long-term and relatively peaceful survival of society as a whole. (Chatterjee, 2008: 125-126)
These two assessments convey a very different explanation than that of Mitlin and Satterthwaite's (2013) focus on inappropriate measurements. The quote from McFarlane gets at the inconvenient practices or disavowed norms of civil society, which he argues in combination with contemporary capitalist relations, are producing a 'malevolent urbanism.' The quote from Chatterjee is indicative of the inconvenient and publicly disavowed 'secret clause' that India’s variety of (neo) liberal capitalist urban development, which currently takes the form of ‘world-classing’ and ‘slum-freeing’ cities and enabling the ‘entrepreneurialism’ of the poorer classes, cannot deliver in terms of improved and more equitable and sustainable levels of well-being across the board. These theorists present urban inequalities as stemming from contradictory and asymmetrical political and ideological dimensions. Presently, the discussion of slum-free cities, for example, circulates around what should be done to slums (i.e., demolish, relocate, in situ development, regularisation etc.) in order to have slum-free cities. This technocratic and administrative framing of the issue obscures how elite institutions of private property, liberal citizenship, and capital are constitutive factors of slums as well. The extent that slums and what to do about them are defined from the point of view of these current conditions that are constitutive of the 'malevolent urbanism’ generating slums is a serious contradiction. In other words, to the extent that in the urban Indian context private property, liberal citizenship, and capital are to blame for slums and urban inequalities in general, the more problematic it becomes to design policies and programs based on the expansion and intensification of this type of political-economy. As long as this contradiction remains unaddressed, it limits everyone’s capacity to both critique current political, economic and social relations and to imagine alternatives that might actually address causes rather than symptoms of urban spatial inequalities and inadequacies (cf. Žižek, 2009).

Taken together, the quotes from McFarlane and Chatterjee, place political society central to both processes. This domain eases the bite of primitive accumulation and inadequate absorption into the dominant political economy and is thus a facilitator of ‘post-justice urbanism’. This reading implies that the fate of the poor and marginalised will be considerably shaped in and through political society. The section below delves into literature focused on local level details of political society shaping this study and highlights the particular issues or gaps to be explored.

**Political Society**

It cannot be assumed that the rule of law, formal institutional arrangements, and planning protocols are both dominant and prevalent in practice in India’s cities. The ‘state-idea’ originating in the West and codified by Max Weber as an autonomous and rule-bound state separate from the biases and power-relations within society, where bureaucracies are not tainted by politics, is a productive illusion in many developing or postcolonial countries (cf. Ferguson and Gupta, 2004; Wood and Gough, 2006; Chatterjee, 2004). The boundaries between informal (social) institutions and formal state institutions are ‘blurred’ (Gupta, 2012). Bureaucracies, especially at the local and
district level, are ‘porous’ (Benjamin, 2008) and vulnerable to elite or political capture (cf. Hackenbroch and Hossain, 2012). Municipalities are easily ‘vernacularised’ by local politics (Kivijari, 1988), ‘informal sovereigns’ (Hansen and Stepputat, 2006) or ‘arbiters’ (Chandavarkar, 2007). Roy (2009 & 2011b) places informality as the Indian state’s prevalent mode of spatial production.

These conditions lead to two important ‘open secrets’ demonstrated in everyday practices. First, state agencies, policies, and projects can be easily made into tools or platforms of extending private authority and accumulating resources. Many state institutions and departments are politically mediated to function in line with local power structures and interests (Witsoe, 2013). This situation is what often gets referred to as the land or water ‘mafias’ colloquially and in the media (Ranganathan, 2014). Secondly, a membrane of netas, bosses, patrons, brokers, and fixers mediates many everyday state-society and civic relations. This fixed, brokered, and policed zone is what Chatterjee (2004) tries to capture with his concept political society. Political society accounts for governmental regulation (in effect) of those whose livelihoods and/or residency practices are illegal or unsettle the vision of modern and orderly cities. It also accounts for how the poor must negotiate informally with local government for ad hoc and contingent basic services arrangements and occupancy in the city, what Chatterjee refers to as the ‘politics of the governed’. Their claims are filtered and handled through political society because they lack the necessary cultural capital to be seen as legitimate citizens, thus they are treated with less esteem and as not having rights to many public goods and services. Hansen and Stepputat (2006) describe this arena as being populated by ‘informal sovereigns’ who insert themselves to facilitate implementation of public goods and services to accumulate economic and political gains and cultural standing. Benjamin’s (2008) ‘occupancy urbanism’ refers to the informal to illegal appropriation of services, occupation of land, and access to markets that the poor manage through ‘vote-bank politics,’ i.e., where they negotiate local political and bureaucratic facilitations of services and protections against intermittent threats in exchange for votes and other obligations. The formal laws and public norms that political society operations bend or break indicate salutary neglect and disavowed rules that enable the prevalence of political society in the domains of occupancy, locality development, and civic politics in general. For example, Chandavarkar (2007) argues that:

Salutary neglect was to create social arenas that were removed at least partially or intermittently from the systematic rule of law and where the play of power and negotiation of dominance achieved a measure of impunity from its operation. The expansion of the state and the fuller integration of these domains into the political system in the late twentieth century did little to breach these immunities and may even have paradoxically increased the scope for the arbitrary exercise of power (453).

To the degree that political society rests on tacit understandings of secret clauses and informally instituted salutary neglect, reforms that target formal institutions and public norms will fall short of enabling greater civic and spatial equalities.
Scholarship on political society and its manifestations, like occupancy urbanism, also has telescopic shortcomings. The positive or progressive aspects for the poor are highlighted, in terms of access to services and protection, and some times more provocatively as being an evolving realm of 'postcolonial democracy' (Chatterjee 2013). Negative or regressive issues of domination, violence and uncertainty are sometimes acknowledge, but always minimised (eg. Appadurai, 2002, Manor, 2004, Jha et al. 2007, Benjamin, 2008; Krishna, 2011; Vasudevan, 2014b). Political society and spaces of occupancy urbanism are also shaped by exclusion, exploitation, and domination. When aspects of public services and goods are commodified or occupied, this excludes people without sufficient economic, cultural and political capital access even if they officially qualify (Gupta, 2012; Pattenden, 2011). Securing occupancy and arranging development through political society institutions is not paperless; they often facilitate access to public resources requiring documents. The ability to secure ‘clean fakes,’ the right signatures, stamps, informal notes from local notables or their visiting cards is also time consuming and requires certain resources and connections (Srivastava, 2012). Conflict resolution and claims making in this field also require a lot of time and patience. Lesser clients or contacts will need to come back multiple times before securing the note, signature, stamp, phone call or other assistance they require. Waiting is particularly telling here. Who waits for who, for how long, with what assurances, and who has to wait regardless of how they are treated are important indicators of social norms and power-relations (cf. Auyero, 2010 & 2011). Why one’s efforts manifest in success or failure remain largely a mystery; because the relations and codes of conduct between political society and state agencies and functionaries are not transparent (cf. Nuijten, 2006). If one breaks official statutes you can be fined or denied access. If one breaks informal or disavowed rules, he or she can be extorted from, verbally or physically harassed, denied assistance, or simply be thwarted by obstacles difficult to understand. The quotidian practices by which domination is communicated and reinforced in political society warrants equal attention with its proposed stealth capacity to democratise access to the state and to space in the city.

Another telescopic aspect is the focus on the urban poor with the political actors of political society often reduced to means to an end. Craig (2009) points out how, ‘the accumulative tactics of these ‘middling sorts’ are rarely the explicit object of discussion in Chatterjee’s analyses or in the work of anthropologists concerned with state/society relations in the Global South” (85-186).\(^5\) The deontology (structure of obligations) between supply-side political actors and demand-side actors remains under researched. Additionally, recent research shows that political society is utilised by the state, private sector, and middle-class actors as well as by poorer groups (Roy, 2011b; Shatkin et al., 2014; Sami, 2012; Craig, 2009 respectively). Political actors play a role in the making of elite, standard, and deprived spaces. The structure and content of obligations between these actors is not a given. The possibility of Janus-faced

\(^5\) See Ranganathan 2014; Witsoe 2013 for notable exceptions.
political society actors and institutions, in terms of how they address claims and in what manner, is likely tied to the degree they respond to political-economic shifts on the ground more than to a democratising ethos. Political society can function as a publicly disavowed, but nonetheless active, auxiliary of state and capital interests as well (cf. Ranganathan, 2014). The extent to which political actors who deal with residents in political society negotiations may have their own spatial projects and power plays, and how organised these are is rarely explored (Hackenbroch & Hussain, 2011).

Most scholarship presents these actors as either non-aligned political entrepreneurs used instrumentally by the poor, or as functionaries of elected politicians or local elites who connect to corrupt processes and protocols: to acquire rents or to increase caste power (Jeffrey, 2002), to distort policies or projects (de Wit 2010; van Dijk et al., 2012), to exchange votes for protection against eviction or loss of services (Benjamin, 2008), to push through real estate development projects (Weinstein, 2013), to exploit migrant workers (Mosse, 2011), to ‘democratise’ access to particular local state resources (Appadurai, 2002, Benjamin, 2000), or to influence human resource management in public agencies (Blunt et al., 2012). These actors and the arena they inhabit are often reduced to one dimension—mediation. This rationalises their marginalisation in many studies of urban governance; where they are often treated as aberrant or residual forms vis-à-vis the formal institutions of governance. However, some argue that political society warrants a more central role in state formation, especially at the local level. Mehta (1992) discussed how local leaders ‘netas’ who broker between their localities and state and central actors are critical to the formation, and continuing formation of the Indian State. Witsoe (2012) argues that, “brokers are central to the everyday functioning of the Indian State” (49). Regarding Ahmmedbad, Gujarat, Berenschot (2009) argues, “that political intermediaries—mediating between bureaucrats, citizens and service providers—are a constitutive part of the state” (885). Chatterjee (2004), Guha (1997), and Chakrabharty (2009) would argue that political society is the de facto state at the level of material needs and personal (in)security. Sovereignty refers to the generalised capacity to take decisions and to implement them collectively at certain scales—to govern (Davis, 2012). Following Lund (2011), I view the prevalence of mediation as indicating an operative political institution. Forms of mediation, i.e., arbitrage, gatekeeping, brokering and fixing, are instigated by claims being made to those perceived as having de facto sovereignty in these domains or access to those who do. The extent and the regularity with which these claims are met imply recognition of the claimant’s political subjectivity, i.e., whether they are perceived as a citizen, client, constituent, inconsequential, consumer, and so on. Making claims, recognising claims, and the regular addressing of claims, over time, establish a political institution.

Political society and the political actors who constitute it play a role in: the extension (or not) of infrastructure and access to public services, targeting of development projects, vulnerability to demolition or evictions, and in human resource management of government agencies. This certainly qualifies as the taking of decisions that have a
collective impact, and thus as a de facto sovereignty that demands more exploration. In particular, issues of mediation and mediatory institutions, occupancy urbanism, salutary neglect and capture, and secret clauses facilitating coordinated actions require empirical and conceptual work.

**Subaltern Urbanisation**

Most scholarly and journalistic accounts of urbanisation in the Global South focus on mega-cities and the dramas unfolding between slums and forces coalescing behind the goal to “world-class” the city. Some are starting to question the trend of Mumbai and Mumbai’s slums becoming metonymic for urbanisation in India and beyond (Roy, 2011; Harris, 2012). Recent demographic analysis shows that much of India’s urbanisation over the last 20 years has been occurring outside mega-cities (Kudhu, 2011). Dupont (2007) discusses how urbanisation occurring in the periphery of large metro regions should not be presumed to be over-determined by their proximity to the centre. Denis et al. (2012) refer to subaltern urbanisation as being largely autonomous from metros, state planning, and corporate enterprises (52-53). These areas may not be recognised by the state as urban, or the status of that recognition may be in dispute. This means that many urban areas have not gone through the process of municipal incorporation and are still operating within rural governance structures, or that urbanisation was occurring in the absence of bylaws and urban development code regulations for quite some time before municipal incorporation. Both cases make endogenous governance, and the extent it is akin to political society, an important factor in the dynamics behind the morphologies of uneven developments between and within urbanised or urbanising areas.

The aspect of subaltern urbanisation most relevant for this thesis is related to Roy’s argument of informality being the prevalent mode of urbanisation for state and non-state actors alike. However, those leveraging Roy’s work normally focus on mega-cities and do not account for social and spatial differences beyond broad strokes between political society and civil society or between slums and gentrifying areas. In this study, both the spatial entrepreneurialism and the political mediations of political society that make informality urbanisation possible are the focus to the extent they are constitutive of forms of occupancy, locality development, and civic politics in general. While political society is seen as crucial to subaltern urbanism, the role it plays in urbanisation via its actions and interests in the ‘second circuit of capital’⁶ tend to be overlooked. Benjamin (2000 & 2008) discusses the importance of the ‘localised economy’ comprised of micro to medium enterprises in the informal productive sector and how it binds economically weaker groups and the local state together. Chatterjee (2008) discusses the ‘non-corporate economy’ in reference to the informal productive activities geared more towards providing use values than accumulating exchange-value. No doubt that when considering production, exchange and consumption within the localised informal economy many interdependencies exist.

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⁶ Investment and speculation in real estate and the built environment in general.
However, making profit and taking rents from investments and speculation in real estate development and the property and housing market are more zero-sum games (cf. Desai & Loftus, 2012; Johnston, 2013; Weinstein, 2008). Studies on gentrification or neo-liberalising Indian cities focus on formal and large-scale actors involved in real estate development or speculation, while most people in cities live in slums, chawls, or flats, built by local smaller scale ‘contractors’ or ‘builders,’ of ambiguous legal status.\(^7\) Many slum residents are renters or lessees. Desai and Loftus (2012) argue that:

Rather than informal settlements being seen as blank spaces shaped solely by the waves of land invasions that have occupied a clearly delimited zone, they are better understood to be structured by isolated and sometimes overlapping land claims (9).

These indicate a sizeable informal, but networked, localised real estate development and speculation circuit, enabled and in part made by political society and porous municipalities (cf. Nainan, 2012; Sami, 2012; Srivastava, 2011). Observations and anecdotal evidence of political society actors investing in real estate development and speculation, beyond only taking bribes and other forms of quid pro quo (Nanain, 2005; van Dijk, 2006), indicate that the interests and practices of builders, political actors and municipal actors are intertwined over longer periods of time; they need to remain sufficiently in sync in order to accumulate value from the city’s informal second circuit of capital accumulation. The complementary and contradictory relations between the first circuit of production and the second circuit have been discussed concerning the globalising formal economy and accumulation by urbanisation (Harvey, 1996a, 1996b & 2008; Smith, 2008; Brenner, 2013). Gottdeiner and Hutchison (2011) argue in The New Urban Sociology that the property sector is the leading edge of uncoordinated and uneven spatial production. However, these processes and relations receive little attention in analyses of the informal economy and political society regarding the production of serviceable or serviced urban land and housing stocks and variety.

1.4 Parameters of This Study

Some scholars see political society as being a constitutive part of the state. Chatterjee focuses on how the poor are regulated through political society as populations, rather than on how civil society and ‘elite politics’ may be susceptible to political society as well. Significant for urban development, in particular for better understanding of the dynamics of civic and spatial inequalities, is what figuration of formal, informal and disavowed institutions are guiding the politics and practices generative of different formations within cities. This thesis contributes to our understanding of the territorialities of political society in relation to uneven development. To this end fieldwork was carried out in three representative types of urban formations: slum, gaothan (urban village), and standard. Slums are informal to illegal formations that

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\(^7\) Most are not licensed or likely have fake licenses.
are either encroachments on public land or unauthorised development on private land that are considered unsuitable for residence because of sanitary, locational, or other hazards. Gaothans are non-formal formations on land that was originally the shared built-up areas of agricultural or fishing villages that have become incorporated into the territory of municipalities. Standard formations refer to those that comprise most of the city (land wise) that are usually perceived to be authorised developments, or at least treated as such, by local authorities, landowners, and flat owners, renters, or lesasers. Looking at three different types of formations allows for the possible heterogeneity of political society and its dimensions to come through. The main question guiding this work is how extensive and intensive is political society’s presence within different types of urban formations in terms of occupancy, locality development, and civic politics in general. The question guiding the ‘so what’ or evaluative thrust is to what degree do the practices, capacities and agendas of political actors coalesce with the interests of different residents, how contingent are these complementarities, and to what extent are these relations based on domination or some form of democracy.

In human geography the appearances, treatment, uses, and meanings attached to different spaces are considered products of human activity and therefore marked indelibly by power relations. So it was logical to select cases based on objective development differences. The challenge was to capture and discuss the dialectic between how these spatial formations are constituted through political society and to what extent these formations come back to shape civic politics and development. In other words, how these urban formations become generative, rather than only generated by political society is the theoretical horizon of this endeavour. Insights in this regard, broaden our conceptions and perceptions of what comprises these formations and how they come to be and to endure. Both sorts of findings are helpful for those wanting to unmake spatial inequalities. The practical relevance of this thesis is to provide insights into how political actors through political society shape the capacities of residents’ resources and the viable pathways they have for effectively improving development and strengthening the institution(s) of municipal citizenship. Somewhat counter-intuitively, in order to better facilitate the empowerment of many urban residents we should not focus on the residents specifically, but rather on the political institutions that in practice limit or increase their capacities and the actors who seem to benefit from these limitations or contribute to capacity building. To research these questions an ethnographic and political institutional analysis were combined to both (1) expand empirical research on political society relations beyond the point of contact and beyond the expressed understandings of the individual actors and (2) to elaborate on present functionings of livelihood ‘capitals’ related to occupancy, citizenship and locality development in terms of the constraints embedded in the political-spatial organisation of urban formations. Figure 1 illustrates the general conceptual framework.
**Figure 1: General Conceptual Frame**

![General Conceptual Frame Diagram]

**Political Society as an Institutional Phenomenon**

In order to both better understand how slums, for example, are made and the role political society plays, we need to connect constitutive practices and processes to the institutions that guide them, i.e., that provide reasons for modes of perception, behaviour and authority. This thesis considers institutions as mechanisms for how actors are prevailed upon to act in certain ways independent of their needs and interests. This brings us to the question of what makes a phenomenon an institutional phenomenon rather than a social, individual or physical phenomenon? Something is social if it requires the collective intentionality of two or more people (Searle, 2006: 56). Collective intentionality refers to shared knowledge, beliefs, goals, fears, and desires that link people in an action in situations where one can only do what he or she is doing because of others doing what they are doing, believing, or desiring (Searle, 2005: 6). Patrons cannot do what patrons do if there are no people doing what clients do and who perceive each other accordingly. This makes clientelism a social phenomenon. If some object, place, person, or set of conditions takes on attributes or capacities that do not come from their internal structure, but by virtue of the social situation, this is indicative of the institutional. For example, in a slum resident X is treated as a landlord, but when X enters the municipality he is treated as a squatter. The person has not changed, but how he is treated has in line with a change in context. In other words, the institutional context of the slum assigned the function of landlord, and the context of the municipality assigned the function of squatter or slumlord. These assignments impose a capacity on an object that only has this capacity because of the function assigned to it by an institution (ibid.). Functions are assigned in institutions according to status, rather than according to intrinsic properties. The logical structure of an institution is: a person, object, or condition X takes on the function Y because of the status assigned to X in
context C (ibid.). This social process can only function if enough people accept, in practice, the functions (i.e., sovereign, banker, police, landlord, citizen, public, or private) assigned to status indicators. Institutions, then, are mechanisms with the capacity to solidify power relations because of the deontic power embedded in status functions. Deontic power refers to obligations we have to others, or the reasons we have for “interest or desire-independent action” (Searle, 2006: 59). Through the assigning of status functions: rights, duties, authorisations, certifications, permissions, and requirements form between different actors (individual and collective). Institutions are best able to solidify power relations when they are part of a structure of interlinked deontological relationships. For example, someone (X) is born, she becomes a daughter (Y1), a member of the Koli jati (Y2), a member of the varna Vaishyas (Y3), a resident of Kalyan-Dombivli (Y4), a scheduled caste citizen of Maharashtra (Y5), and a citizen of India (Y6). Which one or set of these statuses take on the most significance for power relations depends on the context and which institution is dominant, in terms of setting the norms or limits of deontic relations. For example, in a consolidated nation-state, we would expect the formal institutions of the state to have this role. Status indicators, such as insider or outsider, are context dependent. For example, socially or collectively the residents of locality X are perceived as belonging to the city as they have lived there for many years. Locality X indicates membership. However, legally locality X is an encroachment on state land and is indicative of non-membership or unauthorised dwelling in the city in contexts where law dominates. Social recognition in certain contexts trumps legal recognition and vice versa. Together this elaborates the structure of institutional phenomena to be: X counts as Y in C and we consent that by virtue of being assigned this status X has capacity set A.

From Searle’s exposition, the following questions can be used to determine if political society is an institutional object of inquiry: Is political society defined by a set of X is Y in C rules, do these rules assign status functions which are sufficiently collectively recognised and acted upon, and do these status functions include deontic powers? Political society is comprised of practices of arbitrage, brokering, fixing, and gatekeeping. This implies contexts where person X takes on the status as a mediator or intermediary with certain recognised or expected capacities and practices. If this were not collectively accepted between the fixer, the person who approached the fixer and the people the fixer then approaches, fixing would not exist as such. Duties, claims, and authorisation relations certainly exist between actors engaged in political society. If this were not the case, why would clients go to patrons and why would municipal officials oblige local politicians and vice versa? These indicate operative deontic relations. Institutional change then is fundamentally about shifting status functions and status indicators. Institutional inequalities are fundamentally about the distributive and recognition effects of status functions and status indicators in different contexts. This brings institutionalisation and institutional reform into the realm of the political (as power relations) and the practice of politics.
The subaltern studies thesis that India has two general (but incongruous) political cultures—political society and civil society—would be indicated at the institutional level by contradictory status functions, status indicators, and most importantly, contradictory deontic functions. This situation, to the degree it exists, provides logical reasons for the high level of mediation found in state-society relations. In other words, the quality and quantity of mediation—how much and in how many domains or sectors, determines the quality and quantity of structural or cultural gaps between different groups or places and the government that can be occupied by political actors. Political society can be logically defined as a configuration of institutions oriented to occupying or managing gaps between those excluded from civil society (or trying to work around it) and the state. Mediation in all its forms (e.g. arbitrage, brokering, fixing, gatekeeping) is a dimension of political society. Occupancy urbanism, settlements that contravene development codes, regulation, or private property norms in general, is then a more spatial dimension of political society. Salutary neglect and elite or political capture are the third dimensions of political society. Lastly, secret clauses are the fourth dimension of political society. Looking at the level of mediation, occupancy urbanism, salutary neglect and capture, and secret clauses we can gauge the balance of power in any city in India between political society and the formal authority of the municipality in general. This step is important as it guides us to which political realm is more central to the dynamics of urban inequalities in different formations for further inquiry.

Academically, this thesis contributes to filling in some of the blind spots of research on political society and its spatial manifestations, namely its: focus on the urban poor and slums in mega-cities, the focus on the democratisation prospects over issues of structural domination, and the focus on reproduction and production in the informal or non-corporate economy, while marginalising informal investment, development and speculation in housing and real estate. This thesis also speaks to discussions regarding local political and spatial bottlenecks to urban governance becoming more responsive to reducing inequalities. Additionally, network approaches to urban inequalities and splintering urbanisation of all sorts can benefit from more insights on the processes within political society that contribute to the making, maintaining, or unmaking of urban formations, and the networks adapting or forming to create and accumulate value(s) from these processes.

1.5 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 goes over the critical realist method of conceptualisation used in this study and discusses my research design in general. Aspects of research design specific to different entry-points are covered in chapters 4 through 8. Chapter 3 introduces Kalyan-Dombivli and Mira-Bhayandar and discusses the processes and present status of urbanisation, decentralisation, and municipalisation and how these indicate the presence of political society. It also offers profiles of locality development for the cases selected and socio-economic profiles of the residents. Chapter 4 is adapted from a journal article and presents a socio-spatial conceptualisation of livelihood capitals
and achieved functionings based upon Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptual nexus of fields, capitals, and habitus, retooled with Andrew Sayer’s critical realist conceptualisation and insights from topological approaches in human geography. This chapter argues that the social-spatial context and the fields of activity residents are encompassed by constitute actors’ practices and the capacities of their capitals. It outlines how individual resources and tactics are largely derivative on their own; meaning that they are not good candidates from which to infer future actions, agency and outcomes, or for understanding past ones. Chapter 4 justifies my choice to look at the context and arrangements residents live in and respond to, rather than the attributes of residents themselves to better understand the civic politics of occupancy, development and municipal citizenship. This chapter also develops my methodological approach in greater detail. Chapter 5 is adapted from a journal article and focuses on municipal councillors (MCs), a key mediator between the urban poor and the local state and a key actor in political society. This chapter examines how their actions can both obstruct or facilitate development of their wards and of the city in general. Chapter 6 describes the ‘networks of urbanisation’ involved in the production of different urban formations in these two cities, and is also adapted from a journal article. It shows that political society operations are present across different urban formations, albeit with some different characteristics and network ties. Chapter 7 is adapted from a submitted journal article and works to show how water provision is effectively politically captured and which actors and practices figure prominently in this ‘organised encroachment’ of the municipal water department. It contributes to our understanding of the more quotidian practices and powers involved in the compromising or political cultural embedding of municipal departments. Chapter 8 is based upon a submitted journal article and builds upon the previous chapters to discuss how the dynamics of subaltern urbanism and urbanisation, and the players enabling these through political society, significantly shape the spatial morphology of development and the forms of existing municipal citizenship. Given that the data and analysis chapters come in the form of journal articles that were produced throughout my doctorate, there is not a complete one to one match between these chapters and one specific dimension of political society that one would expect to find in a typical thesis manuscript. Rather chapters 4-8 contribute findings that crosscut between these dimensions. These findings, claims and insights are collated and presented as summary findings in chapter 9. This concluding chapter also reflects back on the issues raised in this introduction and offers recommendations for future academic research.