

Research Article



Settling with the Settlement- Stories of Assembling Infrastructure in Delhi's Resettlement Colonies

November 29, 2023

Issue: [Rethinking the Multiplicity of Urban Infrastructure](#)

Nooreen Fatima

Abstract

Sarla (34 years) and her family of five were relocated to the Savda Ghevra resettlement colony in the 2006 slum evictions during Delhi's Commonwealth Games redevelopment process. When she moved to Savda, it was merely a barren piece of land, with only agriculture fields around. There were no buildings, only public toilets and taps. Bit by bit, she and her family built a house and assembled everything to survive in their new home. Sarla's story exemplifies the experience and process of resettlement in the peripheries of Delhi and the failed promises of planned housing and adequate infrastructure that the *bastis* (slums) frequently lack. In the absence of such provisions, residents build their own infrastructure. They constantly and dynamically assemble and reassemble it using whatever they can access in terms of material, space, finance, and socio-political networks.

Focusing on the assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, 1987) of the body (particularly the female body), things, and space, I explore how people build infrastructure in Savda Ghevra, using their learned and lived experience of living in marginality and limited availability of resources (people, space, time, material, and finance) as well as sensible predictability of future needs. This gathering is "make-shift" (Simone, 2017), "weird" (Lancione, 2019), mobile, cost-effective, and easily altered yet durable. Using participant observations and unstructured interviews, I explore the spatiality, materiality, sociality, and temporality of displaced people's decisions to navigate the inadequacy of infrastructure. Building on existing scholarship in urban studies and urban anthropology on subaltern infrastructure, I highlight the gendered material and spatial realities of living in the peripheries and *settling with the settlement*.

Introduction

"...When we moved here, we came with nothing, we had nothing...it was a barren land for as far as you could see...I slept on rags we use for storing vegetables, holding my one-year-old daughter...there were no buildings, no toilets...today, I have built a house with a toilet, with my own money, using our own resources...the government left us here to die, with nothing..." recalls Sarla (34 years), who, along with her family of five was relocated to the Savda Ghevra resettlement colony during the 2006 eviction drive in preparation for the Common Wealth Games (CWG) redevelopment and city beautification process. Sarla's story exemplifies the experience and process of resettlement in the peripheries of Delhi and the incremental "autoconstruction" (Holston, 1991) of infrastructure, or what I call *settling with the settlement*. Resettlement colonies are planned to house the evicted residents from slums in Indian cities. Residents are relocated to the city outskirts with fractured socio-political ties, and with inadequate mass-built housing units and infrastructure. Building resettlement colonies has become a common quick-fix trend in Indian cities, where the urban poor are relocated to the city peripheries for "imminent" (Thomas, 2014) planning and development for the urban elite. According to the Planning Commission of India, about 60 million people have been internally displaced in Indian cities since independence (1947) for 'development' projects. However, experts estimate the number of displaced populations to be way over 70 million (Habitat International Coalition, 2014).

The main principle of state-led resettlement is that these locations should include essential utilities like drainage, sewage, and water, which *bastis* frequently lack. In practice, the planning authorities (in Delhi's case, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement

Board, or DUSIB) bring critical infrastructure incrementally over the years and only after displaced residents arrive, resulting in the same haphazard and inadequate services as the bastis. Therefore, resettlement colonies have many characteristics of informal and unplanned settlements despite being planned. As a result of this reality, scholars have also called them “planned slums” (Sheikh et al., 2014).

During the most recent wave of resettlement in Delhi, in preparation for CWG, approximately 20,000 families were evicted from more than 25 different parts of Central and South Delhi. Savda Ghevra was one of the chosen sites to resettle these basti residents in 2006 and is located on the western peripheries of Delhi, near the Tikri (Delhi-Haryana) border and the Mundka industrial area, about 30 to 40 kilometers away from the center of Delhi (Habitat International Coalition, 2014). It was developed over three phases: the first two phases of the colony included 8,686 plots, and the third phase of the settlement only started in 2013 and constructed about 7,620 Economically Weaker Section (EWS) flats (Center of Policy Research, 2015). When fully occupied, it is estimated that the site’s population will be approximately 20,000 families (Habitat International Coalition, 2014).

The planning and development of Savda Ghevra colony could be categorized into three phases (phase-I is plot allocation, phase-II basic is services and connectivity, and phase-III is improvement of services and connectivity). The plot allocation in the settlement was done in 2006 with two different plot sizes, i.e., 18 square meters and 12.5 square meters. Residents describe that the site was covered in dried remnants of a mustard field, completely devoid of any buildings or infrastructure, including roads, water, electricity, and basic sanitation, at the time of relocation. Before building houses on the plots DUSIB assigned to them, the early settlers had to level the fields and make temporary pathways for themselves. Residents also recall that services like metered electricity connections were provided in 2008, community toilets were built in 2009, and roads and drainage lines were constructed in 2010. They were completely devoid of any buildings or infrastructure, including roads, water, electricity, and basic sanitation.

Taking Savda Ghevra as a case, I document and analyze how in the urban peripheries of Delhi, people build their own infrastructure, using their learned and lived experience of living in marginality and limited availability of resources (people, space, material, and finance) as well as sensible predictability of future needs. I explore how service delivery gaps are particularly filled by women through heterogeneous collaboration and coproduction of “makeshift” (Simone, 2017) assemblages of infrastructure. These collaborations consist of multiple actors, including but not limited to street-level professionals, non-government organizations (NGOs), and state actors working outside formal structures of the government (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Jaglin, 2014; McFarlane, 2017; Roy, 2011; Simone, 2004). To address the hybridity and heterogeneity of components involved in infrastructures in such contexts, I adopt the framework of “assemblages” [2] (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, 1987), reflecting these dominant characteristics of subaltern infrastructures [3].

My main objective in this essay is to capture women’s processes and experiences of 1) assembling infrastructure from scratch and 2) the ongoing process of reassembling,

repairing, and maintaining infrastructure. I do so by drawing from Simone's "makeshift life and living as logistics" (2017) and building further on it, I introduce the notion of *settling with the settlement* to capture three aspects of life around infrastructure in Delhi's resettlement colonies. The first is the ongoing labor of women to assemble, repair and maintain infrastructure starting from the time of relocation and continuing to the contemporary times. The next is the incremental and make-shift nature of infrastructures, and the final is the "weird" (Lancione, 2019) assemblages of makeshift infrastructures. The stories I present here are based on my first encounter with Savda in 2018[4], followed by visits in 2020, 2022 and 2023. Additionally, I spent significant time engaging in participant observation, and general street observation. I also conducted unstructured interviews with the residents, with a particular focus on women, in 2018 and 2020, and conducted general street observations in 2022 and 2023.

The Ongoing Gendered Labor and Experience of Infrastructure

When I first met Wasiya (35) in 2018, she was sitting on a big plastic bag full of rubber scraps from the Katta (sheet) she cuts for flip-flop straps. She lives in the Savda Ghevra JJ colony with her husband and nine children (six boys and three daughters) in a two-room unit with an approximately 15 sqm floor area. She cuts rubber slipper straps from adjoined sheets that a dealer delivers to her doorstep daily at noon. Wasiya, along with her eldest stepdaughter Alina (17), takes on responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and tending to the family's needs. They wake up around 6:00-7:00 am to cook breakfast for the kids before they head to school. Together, they cook meals, wash clothes and dishes, store water for drinking and domestic use, and do various other household chores. Alina primarily takes charge of most domestic labor, while Wasiya cuts rubber Baddhis and manages the household. Wasiya's husband has been unemployed since their relocation to Savda, and he suffered a severe accident soon after, leaving him with limited mobility. As the family's sole breadwinner, Wasiya carries the financial burden while also shouldering the household's caretaking responsibilities.

It was only in 2020 that Savda Ghevra got a piped water supply, and residents had to live without it for about 14 years (2006 – 2020). Before the piped water connections, residents accessed domestic water through the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) water tankers, private water tankers, and Automated Teller Machines (ATMs). Currently, there are 15 water ATMs in Savda, with one ATM located on each block. However, collecting and transporting water from ATMs, water tankers, or taps (private or public) is a process that requires planning and labor that predominantly falls on women in the household. Madiha (25) shares that private water tanker workers start roaming in her block from 9:00 am onwards, and she has to wait for them to arrive in her lane. They usually blow a horn upon their arrival, but occasionally when they fail to do so, she has to hail them or call them via phone. She is bound to organize her day and life around the timings of water supply, electricity, and bathroom availability (shared between the families of her brothers-in-law, which equals a total of five households and approximately 17 people).

Additionally, the reinforcement of household hierarchies in the gendered division of labor and the excluding of men from domestic infrastructure assembly (e.g., water-fetching

tasks) are particularly evident in these stories. In Madiha's case, there is a fuzzy demarcation of labor in arranging types of infrastructure as well as everyday politics, tactics, and techniques involved in achieving them. She is responsible for calling the water tanker guy and her husband for calling the septic tank cleaning guy. Whereas in Wasiya's case, running the household and arranging basic necessities falls entirely on her and her stepdaughter, as the men in the family refuse to participate in such tasks. This is the most simplistic, static, and linear reading of the gendered labor in creating these infrastructure assemblages. Further, women's sensibilities (material, spatial, and cultural), knowledge (hard and soft, tacit, and technical), as well as communicative channels and networks, or what Elyachar (2010) calls "phatic labor," produce forms of infrastructure in the margins. In Savda Ghevra, women, individually and collectively, fight for infrastructure and assemble the resources to build, repair, and maintain it. They work with various state actors, service providers, and engineers around all kinds of infrastructure.

These infrastructure arrangements create new social connections, such as a network of residents who collaborate to contact the water tanker provider in their neighborhood. The water tanker provider regularly visits blocks where multiple households purchase water, while a prior phone call is necessary for one or two households. In Madiha's block, a group of women has formed a collective to coordinate with the water tanker provider and ensure daily delivery of drinking water. Further, in instances of breakdowns, women in these households reach out to government representatives to file a complaint. A WhatsApp group of the constituency is set up by the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) where these women send their complaints and seek resolutions. Recently, the taps in Savda have been dispensing sludgy and foul-smelling water. Madiha recalls sharing several videos of the contaminated water from their faucets in the WhatsApp group. A few weeks later, the MLA's office arranged for a Jal Board (Water Board) representative to collect a water sample for testing.

When it comes to infrastructure in precarious contexts, knowledge about diverse circulations, destinations, diversions, costs, and networks is dispersed across different organizations and scales (Cowen, 2014). The above examples reflect communicative channels and sensibilities applied at both the neighborhood and settlement scales. However, these networks and sensibilities also function at the household scale, where women know when, where, and how to arrange the necessary resources to fill infrastructure gaps in their surroundings. For instance, when Samina (Madiha's sister-in-law) visits her maternal home with her children and her kitchen remains unused, Madiha temporarily uses the kitchen on a condition to cook for her brother-in-law, in-laws, and her own family. This arrangement accommodates the needs of both women: Madiha has a makeshift kitchen in her room, while Samina has someone to prepare meals for her husband and in-laws. These everyday practices unveil the intricate aspects of life in urban peripheries, highlighting women's unnoticed contributions, networks, negotiations, and sensibilities.

Incremental and Makeshift Infrastructures

As I walked into Wasiya's house, it smelled of the food Alina was cooking. It was a hot

summer day, yet the exposed brick walls and no natural light somehow made the house feel colder than it was. The rooms were exceptionally dark, even with a crisp white CFL bulb. Nails and ropes were hanging by the walls in all the rooms and in the corridor to hang bags for storing clothes, kitchen stuff, and other personal belongings. I noticed that their kitchen was a makeshift arrangement on the first-floor corridor of the house leading to the toilet and was between the staircase landing and the only room on the upper floor where the kids sleep. A big plastic tub was on top of the cooking gas cylinder, used for utensil storage. There were no shelves in this space since it was a makeshift arrangement meant to be made and shifted as and when required.

After she showed me around her house, I mustered the courage and asked, *“Where do you bathe?”*

“Right here,” she said and pointed to the little space between her makeshift kitchen and the toilet door, facing the street as she pulled the curtain made from old bedsheets. *“Isn’t it where you do prep work for cooking and wash your dishes?”* I reminded her. *“Yes, but we also use it for bathing and washing clothes. I close the house’s doors, draw the curtains, and bathe here.”* This space in Wasiya’s home incorporates four main functions: washing clothes and dishes, kitchen prep work, and bathing. The arrangement of this space is shifted at different times of the day. Additionally, the floor space on the ground floor is a multi-functional space used for work during monsoons and sometimes during summers when the heat outside gets unbearable. It transforms into a dining and bedroom space for the couple and all the toddlers during non-working hours. The plastic mat on the floor here is moved around several times during the day depending on the desired use of the space.

On the first day of my visit to Madiha’s home, as I was removing my shoes to enter her home, I looked around and thought there would be something beyond the room she was showing me. A hidden door behind a curtain, perhaps, or a passage behind the cabinet. As I sat on her bed and continued our conversation, I asked where her kitchen was. Without saying much, she immediately bent down and pulled the cooking stove from under her bed. *“This is it,”* she said. There was silence in the room. When I walked into Madiha’s home, I did not expect this. I asked her again, *“Where do you store all your utensils and spices?”* *“Right here, under the bed,”* she said. I looked around her approximately 2.5 X 2 sqm room, did a quick tentative measure of circulation space, and realized there was not much. In fact, there was barely any space, as per the standard measures of a habitable room (see Kundu Committee Report, 2012). I followed up with her, *“Where do you pray then?”* With a wider smile, she replied, *“Here! I do everything in this corner.”* I noticed she did not say ‘little,’ only ‘corner.’ *“Everything?”* I asked. *“Yes, everything. This corner is my everything,”* she finally said. This, however, was not the end of this conversation. I looked around and noticed a big, round, uneven cement patch on the floor, which appeared to be the septic tank opening right on top of which Madiha assembled her makeshift kitchen. On further inquiry, I learned that the septic tank was shared between her extended family, a total of five households, and approximately 17 people. On the days when the tank needs to be cleaned, Madiha wakes up earlier than usual and finishes all the cooking for the day. She puts all the kitchen stuff away from the tank for it to be cleaned and puts it all back

together when it is done.

Like many others, Madiha's family by no means considers it an ideal situation for them. In fact, they demand a bigger space and work towards it every day. These practices come with great difficulty and challenges. However, they are *making it do*. It appears there are three points here: First, this 'unhabitable room' is currently a habitat for a family of six. There are shifting practices of assembling and reassembling infrastructure by which this space becomes 'habitable' for them. This, in a nutshell, is what Simone (2017) calls make-shift infrastructure, which is quite literally making and shifting. Madiha and Wasiya's constant rearrangement of small spaces in their homes to accommodate multiple types of infrastructure, like storage, cooking, dining, bathing, praying, home-based work, sewage, etc., reflect this makeshift, logistical life. There is perceptive thinking, preemptive planning, materials, objects, space, and multiple actors involved in making a workable assemblage of infrastructure here. This leads to my second point: the assembled infrastructures, as exemplified in Madiha and Wasiya's homes, respond to lived histories, temporalities, anticipated needs, and logistical knowledge and sensibilities. And lastly, these infrastructure practices and their outcomes are assembled incrementally, over time, little by little, as and when residents can gather resources. In such contexts, infrastructures are always in the making, continuously constructed and deconstructed, and never truly finished (Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1992; Silver, 2014; Simone, 2017, 2022).

Ananya Roy claims that, in a neoliberal climate, "the rich have state help and the poor have self-help" (The #GlobalPOV project, 2014). This is evident in Savda Ghevra, where displaced urban residents are left to fend for themselves and assume the responsibility of building affordable homes and vital infrastructure, which is primarily undertaken by women like Sarla, Wasiya, and Madiha. As previously discussed, much of what is produced here is self-built, self-provisioned, and incremental, reflecting the precarious nature of resettlement colonies. These women's diverse infrastructure practices embody informal strategies, logistical living, open-endedness, and tacit knowledge. Wasiya and Madiha's stories highlight how flexibility and uncertainty are thoroughly internalized and transformed into a resource for piecing together a life of survival in the urban peripheries. The everyday logistics observed in these cases are based on internalized spatial and material logic and have been learned by these women through their lived experiences of life in marginality. The makeshift assemblages created by these women demonstrate that infrastructure is more than technical objects; it is a language that individuals must learn to access the opportunities and desires embedded within its materials (Mrázek, 2002). The everyday life of these women in Savda embraces the intricate folds of urban practice, exposing what is often unseen or nested (Gandy, 2008; Graham & Marvin, 2001; Larkin, 2008; Simone, 2004, 2017, 2022; Star, 1999).

During my last visit to Wasiya in January 2020, their makeshift kitchen and bathing area were covered with blue plastic sheets. They had a second-hand washing machine placed on bricks next to the gas cylinder and steel shelves hung on the wall for utensil storage. This incremental approach is evident across various types of infrastructure in Savda, including housing, water, electricity, sewage, and sanitation. Faraz (35), Madiha's brother-in-law, shares how his family built the house incrementally when they could afford it and

when his brothers married one by one. Initially, as a family of six, they were allotted a single plot. After a decade, five families now occupy that plot, with each brother and his family occupying one room. They added rooms one by one, built a shared toilet and bathing area, created makeshift kitchen spaces for each household, and expanded with a bamboo and thatched roof extension as their family grew. Their father, Anwar (57), then built a bamboo and thatched roof extension for himself outside their house as the family grew. When I last visited the family, I discovered a small vegetable garden patch in the poorly maintained ‘public park’ behind their bamboo dwelling. Anwar had cleaned the space, leveled it, and was growing vegetables and herbs in an area typically plagued by waste and sewage accumulation. In Faraz’s recollection, when they moved to Savda, “...*the land was uneven, and there was nothing here. We built temporary huts on the Kutcha land that would flood whenever it rained. Our belongings, plates, clothes would float in the water...*” In 14 years, they have built a pukka house that accommodates six households, with a shared toilet, a bathing area, private makeshift kitchen spaces, a community outdoor dwelling, and a garden patch that grows bottle gourd, bitter gourd, and tomato, among other things.

Weird Assemblages of the Makeshift Infrastructure

The 1.2 m wide makeshift kitchen/corridor space in Wasiya’s home consists of many objects, like a cooking range, an LPG gas cylinder with a plastic bucket on top that is used as the ‘storage’ for the kitchen utensils, nails on the wall with hanging plastic bags of family’s belongings, old bedsheets used as curtains, and *dalda* (a brand of popular vegetable oil in India) containers bought cheaply from the nearest general store for storing water and *ration*. Similarly, Madiha’s makeshift kitchen is made around and under the bed in her bedroom, and a 20ml water cooler rests on top of the LPG gas cylinder connected to her mini cooking stove. A long rope is hung across the room on the wall to hang clothes. Hooks and nails on the wall hang school bags and plastic bags full of freshly bought green chilies, garlic, and tomatoes. A red colored plastic toothbrush holder is hung next to these. Members of each of these households collect and store their daily water supplies separately in a dense agglomeration of water containers (drums, tubs, water coolers, buckets, and vessels made of diverse materials and collected from strange places), reflecting the diversity of objects involved in making an infrastructure workable.

These spaces bring our attention to the odd materialism of these assemblages, or what Lancione (2019) calls “weird exoskeletons.” Homes and infrastructure in Savda Ghevra are made of “weird stuff” (nails and plastic buckets as storage, high-density thermocol containers, dalda containers for water storage, bed as a cooking space, waste rubber sheets as seating, etc.). Maintaining the “weirdness” (Lancione, 2019, p. 247) and “dirty literalism” (Lea & Pholeros, 2010, p. 191) of these assemblages prevents a sanitized and romanticized reading of these spaces and lives in the urban peripheries. The weirdness of these objects allowed them to fall “through the cracks” (Lancione, 2019, pp. 247–248) of neoliberal Delhi and be used for making homes in the margins. These complex assemblages of materials, things, and objects are reflected in both Wasiya and Madiha’s infrastructure practices.

A common way to understand infrastructures is as a “system of substrates” (Star, 1999, p.

380), i.e., the individual-built components, particularly objects and things involved in putting together a particular type of infrastructure. Larkin (2013), however, brings to our attention that this assumes a linear, static, and clear relationship between underlying objects in the system. If anything, we know from Wasiya and Madiha's story that these relationships are far more dynamic and are fuzzier to define. Therefore, while it is essential to identify the individual material components within an assembly of infrastructure and their literal material conditions, the co-entanglement of human and non-human things is more central to my research in Savda. For instance, simply describing a bed's normative physical and material attributes as an object within and outside the assembly of Madiha's makeshift kitchen space does not capture much in terms of its usability as an infrastructure. However, observing the dynamic association between Madiha as a subject and the bed as an object within those associations and assemblages reveals not only its materiality, sociality, and politics, but also her dynamic relationship with it in making those assemblies possible. The non-human entities present in this case have a co-constitutive relationship with human agency, meaning that Madiha's actions and reactions are shaped by the material context in which she is situated. Therefore, our understanding of infrastructure in these settings should surpass the linear system of substrates, materials, and objects, leading to the co-entanglement of people and things in co-producing subaltern forms of infrastructure.

These stories bring our attention to "an assemblage of increasingly heterogeneous elements" that Simone imagines through "people as infrastructure" (2004) in complicated urban collectives such as this. In Savda Ghevra, physical artifacts and spaces bring together residents and urban actors, resulting in infrastructural outcomes. This weird "gathering" (Lemke, 2021) of people, things, space, and environment is unexpected and challenges the notion of mundane material objects in subaltern spaces. Everyday objects and materials in Wasiya and Madiha's homes surpass their intended use through social interactions, transformations, coupling, and proximities, which were overlooked in the planner's imagination. Madiha's case exemplifies this phenomenon through the diverse non-conforming uses of her bed and the *everything corner*.

Conclusion: Settling with the Settlement

As observed by scholars, the delivery of infrastructure in cities of the Global South is not uniform or integrated (Anand, 2017; Anwar et al., 2019; Chalfin, 2014; Elyachar, 2010; Fredericks, 2018; Graham & Marvin, 2001; Jaglin, 2014; Larkin, 2008, 2013; Lemanski, 2020; Simone, 2010; Silver, 2014; Sultana, 2009; Von Schnitzler, 2008), and are "neither pure material extensions nor pure social constructions" (Jaglin, 2014, p. 436). Scholars studying southern urban conditions unanimously agree on the diversity of infrastructure practices as well as the inevitability of their provisional, temporal, and arbitrary nature (Jaglin, 2014; Roy, 2011; Simone, 2004, 2017, 2022), or what Simone (2017) refers to as makeshift life. From Wasiya and Madiha's experience, we see that infrastructures in contexts such as Savda are flexible, provisional, relational, dynamic, and embodied and constitute a complex mix of technical, material, spatial, political, and social entities. The displaced urban residents in resettlement colonies like Savda Ghevra settle with the

settlement in the peripheries of a neoliberal city and, through their own efforts, make a “home” from scratch in a barren piece of land.

In Delhi’s resettlement colonies, ‘settling with the settlement’ entails the intricate process of individuals and communities adapting, surviving, and building a life within the constraints of limited resources, socio-cultural dynamics, and institutional arrangements prevalent in these urban peripheries. This process encompasses various aspects, such as forming new social networks, forging connections with fellow residents, and navigating communal norms and practices unique to the resettlement context. It entails grappling with the challenges and limitations posed by rudimentary infrastructure, restricted access to critical resources, conditional tenure, and potential lack of social services. Moreover, it involves advocating for the rights and needs of the settlement’s residents, ultimately striving to improve their quality of life and well-being. Many invisible interfaces and intersections of people, things, and space structure the everyday lives of the city’s displaced residents. Their dynamic, ever-changing collaboration and coproduction illustrate how Delhi’s biopolitical government operates not merely at a distance or through self-governing citizens, but also through intimate emotional and physical forms of labor carried out predominantly by women.

While scholars across disciplines focus on the distinction between formal and substantive rights (Bayat, 2013; Fainstein, 2010; Gandy, 2014; Roy, 2003; Peck, 2014; Sassen, 2003; Simone, 2010), the case of Savda Ghevra highlights the ‘incremental’ forms of rights and entitlement. In this regard, building their dwellings incrementally with their own resources and networks, or what Holston (1991) calls autoconstruction, brings temporal and incremental forms of agency, authority, rights, and belonging to the displaced urban residents as they slowly invest more in their dwellings. This discursive sense of authority and agency is equally reflected in my conversation with Sarla, who prides herself on building her home incrementally on an empty piece of land with her own money and resources. Through their “quiet” (Bayat, 1997, 2000) everyday infrastructure practices, residents create a form of “in-between” (Swerts, 2017) politics, simultaneously within and outside the state’s sight, enabling them to assert some form of political claims in their precarious position. While building their own infrastructures in the city’s peripheries, the working class also develop new forms of agency and subjectivity under precarious circumstances, limited materials, means, and in legal tensions with the state.

Madiha and Wasiya’s stories capture the spatiality, materiality, sociality, and temporality of displaced people’s decisions to navigate the inadequacy of infrastructure as well as highlight the gendered material and spatial experience of living in the urban peripheries and settling with the settlement. Therefore, in such a context, the process of ‘settlement’ itself becomes a form of politics. Nevertheless, settling with the settlement and the ever-evolving makeshift subaltern infrastructures present two main challenges: i) Despite their elusiveness, how can these infrastructural practices be incorporated into the current policy debates? Can they change the way we look at service provision in informal settlements that is both efficient for state authorities and equitable for the marginalized urban residents? And ii) How can the agency and subjectivity demonstrated by working-

class women in building their own infrastructures under precarious circumstances inform future approaches to urban development? Can they further change how we look at planning and infrastructure?

[1] Following Bhan (2017), I use the term ‘basti’ as opposed to ‘slum’ as a counter practice to subvert the dominant state narratives, much in conjunction with several scholars (Ramanathan, 2006; Rao, 2006; Roy, 2004) who argue that the use of the term ‘slum’ itself can serve as a means through which specific types of settlements are devalued and deprived. Further, it is the colloquial term most prominently used by the residents of these settlements, therefore reflecting their own understanding of their habitats extending beyond the statutory definitions by the state.

[2] Drawing from Caldeira (2017), I use the notion of peripheries to not simply invoke spatial margins but also social margins.

[3] Due to the focus on co-constitutive human-material agency and power distribution in assemblage thinking, I find the use of the term ‘assemblage’ to capture the practice of arranging infrastructure in Savda Ghevra most fitting. While I cannot do justice to the conceptual multiplicities and debates that make up this framework and therefore remain outside the scope of my research, I follow parts of assemblage thinking to capture the deeply entangled human-material, temporal, provisional, embodied, political, and sensorial aspects of urban infrastructures in the Global South.

[4] I use “subaltern” as an analytical term borrowed from post-colonial theory to reflect the makeshift, sociotechnical practices of assembling infrastructure by historically marginalized groups. I situate my understanding of the subaltern in contemporary discussions and critiques of the Subaltern Studies Group (see Jazeel & Legg, 2019).

[5] This research was conducted in the summer of 2018 as part of a study commissioned by WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing). I documented cases of temporal work-home spatial relationships for women home-based workers. Observations and arguments in this essay are drawn primarily from the stories I collected (from a different perspective) during this project (2018, 2020) and general street observations from the preliminary fieldwork (2022, 2023) for my doctoral thesis at Rutgers University-Newark. I greatly acknowledge the help and support of Mahila Housing Trust (MHT), Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), and WIEGO, particularly Ms. Shalini Sinha (WIEGO) and Ms. Veena Bharadwaj (MHT). Pseudonyms have been used in the stories presented in this essay to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

References

- Anand. (2017). *Hydraulic city : water and the infrastructures of citizenship in Mumbai*. Duke University Press.
- Anwar, N., Sawas, A., & Mustafa, D. (2019). ‘Without water, there is no life’: Negotiating everyday risks and gendered insecurities in Karachi’s informal settlements. *Urban Studies*. 57. 004209801983416. 10.1177/0042098019834160.
- Bayat, A. (1997) *Street Politics: Poor Peoples’ Movements in Iran*. Columbia University Press: New York.

- Bayat, A. (2000). From 'Dangerous Classes' to 'Quiet Rebels': Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South. *International Sociology*, 15(3), 533–557. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026858000015003005>
- Bayat, A. (2013). *Life as politics how ordinary people change the Middle East* (2nd ed.). Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804786331>
- Bhan, G. (2013). Planned Illegalities: Housing and the 'Failure' of Planning in Delhi, 1947–2010. *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 48.
- Bhan, G. (2017). From the basti to the "house": Socio-spatial readings of housing policy in India. *Current Sociology*, 65(4), 587–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392117697465>
- Caldeira, T. P. (2017). Peripheral urbanization: Autoconstruction, transversal logics, and politics in cities of the global south. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816658479>
- CHALFIN. (2014). Public things, excremental politics, and the infrastructure of bare life in Ghana's city of Tema: Public things. *American Ethnologist*, 41(1), 92–109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12062>
- Certeau. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Cities of Delhi. (2015). Categorization of Settlement in Delhi policy brief. Retrieved December 21, 2021, from <https://www.cprindia.org/system/tdf/policy-briefs/Categorisation-of-Settlement-in-Delhi.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=4579&force=1>
- Cowen, D. (2014). *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* University of Minnesota Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt7zw6vg>
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980). *Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (1987). *Dialogues*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- ELYACHAR, J. (2010). Phatic labor, infrastructure, and the question of empowerment in Cairo: Phatic labor. *American Ethnologist*, 37(3), 452–464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01265.x>
- Fainstein, S. S. (2010). *The just city*. Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801460487>
- Gandy, M. (2008). Landscapes of Disaster: Water, Modernity, and Urban Fragmentation in Mumbai. *Environment and Planning. A*, 40(1), 108–130. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3994>
- Gandy, M. (2014). *The fabric of space : water, modernity, and the urban imagination*. The MIT Press.
- GRAHAM, S., & MARVIN, S. (2001). *Splintering urbanism*. London, Routledge.
- Habitat International Coalition (Ed.). (2014). *Forced to the fringes: Disasters of "resettlement" in India* Housing and Land Rights Network.
- Holston, J. (1991). *Autoconstruction in working-class Brazil*.
- Jaglin, S. (2014). Regulating service delivery in southern cities: rethinking urban heterogeneity. (2014). In Oldfield, S., Parnell, S. (Eds), *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 456–469). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203387832-51>
- Kundu, A. (2012). *Report of the Technical Group on Urban Housing Shortage 2007–12*. New Delhi: Government of India
- Lancione, M. (2019). Weird Exoskeletons: Propositional Politics and the Making of Home in Underground Bucharest. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 43(3), 535–550. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12787>
- Larkin, B. (2008). *Signal and noise : media, infrastructure, and urban culture in Nigeria*. Duke University Press.
- Lea, T., & Pholeros, P. (2010). This Is Not a Pipe: The Treacheries of Indigenous Housing. *Public Culture*, 22(1), 187–209. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2009-021>
- Lefebvre H., (1992). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. London and New York: Continuum, 2004. ISBN 0826469930
- Legg, S., & Jazeel, T. (2019). *Subaltern Geographies* (S. Legg & T. Jazeel, Eds.). University of Georgia Press.

- Lemke (2021), *The Government of Things. Foucault and the New Materialisms*, New York, New York University Press, ISBN : 9781479829934.
- McFarlane, S. (2017). Navigating the city: dialectics of everyday urbanism. *Transactions – Institute of British Geographers* (1965), 42(3), 458–471. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12175>
- Mrázek, R. (2002). *Engineers of happy land : technology and nationalism in a colony*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691186931>
- Peck, J. (2014). *Constructions of neoliberal reason*. Oxford University Press.
- Ramanathan, U. (2006). Illegality and the Urban Poor. *Economic and Political Weekly* (pp. 3193–3197)
- Rao, V. 2006. “ Slum as theory: the South/Asian city and globalization.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.
- Roy, A. (2003). *City requiem, Calcutta gender and the politics of poverty*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Roy, A. (2004) *Transnational trespassing: The geopolitics of urban informality*. In: Roy, A., Al-Sayyad, N. (Eds), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*. Boulder, CO: Lexington Books.
- Roy, A. (2011) *Slumdog cities: rethinking subaltern urbanism*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35.2, 223–38.
- Sassen, S. (2003). *The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics*. Michigan State University Press. http://muse.jhu.edu/content/oai/journals/new_centennial_review/v003/3.2sassen.html.
- Sheikh, S., Banda, S., and Mandelkern, B. (2014). *Planning the Slum 77C Resettlement in Delhi and the Case of Savda Ghevra*. Cities of Delhi. Centre for Policy Research.
- Silver, J. (2014). Incremental infrastructures: Material improvisation and social collaboration across post-colonial Accra. *Urban Geography*, 35(6), 788–804. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2014.933605>
- Simone, A. (2004). *People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg*. Public Culture.
- Simone, A. M. (Abdou M. (2010). *City life from Jakarta to Dakar : movements at the crossroads*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203892497>
- Simone, A. (2017). Living as logistics: Tenuous struggles in the remaking of collective urban life. In: Watson, V, Bhan, G, Srinivas, S (eds) *Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South*. London: Routledge.
- Simone, A. M. (Abdou M. (2022). *The surrounds : urban life within and beyond capture*. Duke University Press.
- Star S.L. (1999) *The Ethnography of Infrastructure*. *American Behavioural Scientist*
- Sultana, F. (2009). Fluid lives: Subjectivities, gender and water in rural Bangladesh. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 16(4), 427–444. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690903003942>
- The #GlobalPOV Project (2014). “Who is Dependent on Welfare”
- Thomas P. (2014) Railways. In Adey, P., Bissell, D., Hannam, K., Merriman, P., & Sheller, M., *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (pp. 214–224). Taylor & Francis Group.
- VON SCHNITZLER, A. (2013). TRAVELING TECHNOLOGIES: Infrastructure, Ethical Regimes, and the Materiality of Politics in South Africa. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(4), 670–693. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12032>

Authors



Nooreen Fatima

PhD candidate » Rutgers University–Newark

Nooreen is a PhD candidate in the Global Urban Studies Program at the School of Arts and Sciences Newark at Rutgers University–Newark. She is a licensed architect and urban designer and has worked on several distinguished planning, design, and policy research projects in the past. She has also served as an Adjunct faculty at the School of Global Affairs, Ambedkar University Delhi, and currently teaches Urban Sociology at Rutgers University–Newark. Her research lies at the intersection of infrastructure, citizenship, and governance in Delhi's resettlement colonies. Her research explores socio-technical responses, everyday negotiations, and make-shift assemblages by the displaced urban residents to access infrastructure and make claims to citizenship and belonging in Delhi's resettlement colonies through visual ethnography. Her scholarly interests also include spatial injustice, politics of space, politics from below, community organizing, informal urbanism, and the Global South.