

Paying for Pipes, Claiming Citizenship: Political Agency and Water Reforms at the Urban Periphery

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Abstract

This article interrogates the nature of political agency deployed at sites of market-oriented water reforms. It presents a case study from Bangalore, India of a water project mandating significant 'beneficiary' cash contributions from lower-middle-class dwellers for the capital cost of extending piped water to the city's peripheries. Drawing on quantitative and ethnographic data, it illustrates why property owners who lack formal water access and land tenure — groups referred to in this article as the 'peripheralized middle class' — consent to paying for pipes rather than resist all together despite the high cost involved. It argues that far from reflecting an internalization of a 'willingness to pay' or 'stakeholder' ethos celebrated by development practitioners today, payment for water provides an insurgent means to bargain for greater symbolic recognition, respectability and material benefits from the state. In particular, payment for pipes enables peripheral dwellers to strengthen their claims to secure land tenure in an era of exclusionary and punitive spatial policies. Payment thus comprises a terrain of contested meaning making and political struggle, at the heart of which lie the stakes of urban citizenship. In documenting the process by which property related interests and tenure claims are advanced under a scenario of reforms, this article contributes to Gramscian political-ecological conversations on subaltern political agency and the lived character of hegemony in urban environments.

Introduction

In 2003, the city of Bangalore in the southern Indian state of Karnataka launched the Greater Bangalore water project to connect over a million peripheral residents to the piped water network. For the first time in the history of the city's infrastructure, a market-oriented cost recovery framework was experimented with by the public water utility. Unlike previous grid extensions that were funded by the state, this time peripheral 'beneficiaries'¹ — also dubbed 'stakeholders' by project proponents — were told that they had to bear part of the burden of paying for the pipes connecting their homes. Despite the high cost relative to incomes in the area, over the next 6 years nearly double

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1 Following the convention used by Katherine Rankin (2010: 195), I place 'beneficiaries' in quotations throughout this article to signal my interrogation of the use of this term by project proponents.

the anticipated amount was collected across the peripheries, largely from property owners with informal land tenure. In many neighborhoods, residents kept careful rosters of the amounts they paid, and leveraged this information to engage with state authorities over the status of their settlements. How are we to understand the nature of political agency deployed at sites of market-oriented water reforms at the peripheries of cities today?

Development practitioners might understand the case of the Greater Bangalore water project as evidence of consumers' 'willingness to pay' for improved services in which they have a stake. Indeed, the best practice rhetoric accompanying the project insisted that collections from citizens were predicated on their sense of 'ownership' in the project.² Governmentality scholars, however, might interpret the conduct of peripheral dwellers through the idea of neoliberal moral 'responsibilization' — or the successful inculcation of an ethos of self-care in subjects in line with rational market principles (e.g. Rose, 1999; Lemke, 2001; Ong, 2006).

This article takes a different view. It shows how peripheral 'beneficiaries', most of whom are property owners with tenuously legal tenure, used payment for water pipes under the project — often in excess of one month's household income — as a way to bargain for legitimate tenure and recognition in the eyes of the state. Struggles over tenure have taken on a particularly urgent tenor in the current moment in light of moralizing policies that penalize illegal settlements at the fringes. The analysis here lends insight into the little studied political agency of India's informal peri-urban middle class, or members that I group under the term 'peripheralized middle class'. It also reveals how market-oriented water policies win consent and legitimacy because they harness 'the general *interests* of the subordinate groups' (Gramsci, 2000: 205, emphasis added), articulating *with* their claims to recognition and belonging. The conduct of paying for water pipes thus needs to be situated within a history of micro-politics and citizenship practices at the urban periphery.

The broader relevance of this work lies in the ubiquity of cost recovery-driven water-pricing policies, especially at the outskirts of cities where massive new infrastructural investments are needed. As Karen Bakker (2011: 353) has noted, with the 'partial retreat' of the private sector in the water sector since the early 2000s following multiple financial crises and anti-privatization protests, a host of alternatives are being considered today. Instead of — or sometimes as a precursor to — privatization, public water utilities across the developing world are implementing institutional reforms that call on consumers to take an active role in the financing and management of services. This 'second wave' of water reforms, as Laila Smith (2004: 375) refers to it, still has neoliberal echoes in that it involves the 'incursion of private sector principles into a traditional public sector ethos'. Although the literature has reported on the modalities of second wave neoliberalism, it has not probed how such rationalities become intertwined with existing micro-political formations, the cultural meanings attached to payment, and the grounded negotiations that enable new policies to take root. In documenting the process by which tenure claims are advanced under a scenario of water reforms, the article's goal is to improve our understanding of why and how market-oriented pricing logics in infrastructure sectors, rather than simply being 'resisted', ultimately *do* gain legitimacy. Such an endeavor is crucial for challenging technocratic constructions of success and for contributing to theoretical debates on 'how top-down schemes "take" in everyday situations' (Barnett, 2005: 9), or how rule is compromised over and accomplished (Li, 1999).

Theoretically, this article takes up the call of Ekers and Loftus (2008: 710) for a research approach to water politics and power that leverages the productive tensions

2 See for instance how the UN Habitat's best practices database (2008) lauds the Greater Bangalore water project: URL <http://www.unhabitat.org/bestpractices/2008/mainview.asp?BPID=1932> (accessed 25 March 2012).

between Foucault and Gramsci — between the subjectifying rationalities of rule and the broader struggles and compromises surrounding rule (see also Moore, 2005; Li, 2007). It contributes to Gramscian political-ecological conversations on the lived character of hegemony in the urban waterscape (Loftus and Lumsden, 2008), and, in particular, the role of meaning making among marginalized groups. I understand hegemony, following Roseberry (1994) and others, not as a monolithic ideological formation, but as a problematic, contested, political *process* of struggle. Specifically, I understand it as the process by which the subordinated are recruited into projects of their own rule through ‘identifying their particular interests with a more universalizing one’ (Moore, 2005: 11). I show how peripheral agents consent to water reforms because they identify their interests in claiming propertied citizenship with the neoliberal push for devolving costs on marginalized users like themselves. The situated meanings they ascribe to the act of paying for water pipes are key to the production of consent. Pricing reforms in the water sector thus evolve through ‘parasitical co-presence’ (Peck *et al.*, 2010: 96) with existing socio-cultural rhythms and political formations.

To grasp the workings of hegemony and explain the contradictory and historically molded political agency of peripheral dwellers, I navigate the literature on urban politics and resistance, drawing in particular on notions of ‘occupancy urbanism’ (Benjamin, 2008), ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ (Bayat, 2000) and ‘insurgent citizenship’ (Holston, 1999; 2008). While the actions of peripheral dwellers cannot be read as counter-hegemonic, we will see how their payment strategies nonetheless open up the ‘room to maneuver’ — i.e. the space of political possibility — within the operation of hegemony (Hart, 2002: 36).

I start with my research methodology and then move to a theoretical discussion of political agency at the urban periphery. I then address the evolution of ‘second wave’ water reforms in urban India, focusing on the multiple (neoliberal and liberal) rationalities that animated the Greater Bangalore water project. Following this, I turn to the quantitative data I collected between 2007 and 2009 on the payment behavior of peripheral citizens and triangulate this with ethnographic findings on how peripheral agents constructed a meaningful and material framework through which to interpret and act on their payments for water pipes. I conclude by returning to the question of political agency and what the Bangalore case tells us about a philosophy of urban water praxis.

Methodology

This article stems from a larger multi-sited ethnography on the politics of water reforms in peripheral Bangalore, research for which was conducted between 2007 and 2009. Data on the rationalities of the Greater Bangalore water project, including the ‘beneficiary’ contribution policy, governmental technologies and decision-making processes were gathered through 50 in-depth interviews with technocrats at the Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation (the main state agency through which financing for urban reforms flows), engineers at the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), bureaucrats at urban development line agencies, private consultants, and development practitioners. These interviews were corroborated through a coding of project documents, meeting minutes and news articles.

Data on the payment behaviors and political strategies of peripheral dwellers were collected through fieldwork conducted primarily in the peripheral zone of Bommanahalli, located roughly 15 km from central Bangalore on the southeastern fringes. This area was selected because of its density of informal, poorly serviced settlements along a major radial highway leading to the city’s premier technology park, Electronic City. Formerly a cash-strapped city municipal council (CMC), Bommanahalli now forms one of eight zones officially incorporated into the Greater Bangalore City Corporation as of 2007. To collect payment data, I made routine visits to the zonal head

office in Bommanahalli to build enough trust with frontline workers for them to share payment profiles with me. To understand the political practices of peripheral agents, I carried out 44 semi-structured interviews with residents, several of whom belong to homeowner associations known as ‘resident welfare associations’ (RWAs) in India. The semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed me to probe forms of engagement with the state, perceptions of the new water project, reasons for and bargains made by paying, and the situated meanings attached to payment. I also collected petitions filed by residents to government agencies and attended neighborhood and city-wide meetings in which they discussed their involvement in the water project and their struggles against ‘regularization’ drives — periodic punitive moves by the city government to formalize or ‘regularize’ land tenure via monetary penalties. In sourcing multiple modes of self-representation, these ethnographic approaches yielded insights into the complex contours of political practice.

Urban peripheries and political agency

The urban periphery is a critical milieu for the enactment of citizenship struggles and the exercise of hegemony (Simone, 2007; Holston and Caldeira, 2008; Roy, 2011). As Ananya Roy (2003: 217) argued in her study of Calcutta’s fringes, the inherent volatility of peripheries ‘shapes the logic, mechanisms, and possibilities of hegemonic articulations’. In recent scholarship, peripheries have been interpreted as the physical space fringing cities — the constantly evolving, equivocal boundary between urban and rural, between the city and its other, referred to by practitioners as the ‘peri-urban interface’ — and as a metaphor connoting myriad ‘site(s) for remaking urban life’ (Simone, 2010: 39). In this section, while focusing on the periphery as the physical space encompassing Bangalore’s outer municipalities and villages, I am also interested in how peripheries shape the possibilities and limits of particular forms of agency.

Bangalore’s peripheries are perhaps best known for concentrating large-scale land speculation and illegalities (Nair, 2005; Goldman, 2011). Michael Goldman’s (2011) research on ‘world-city making’ projects in Bangalore has recently shown that speculative global investment in the real estate sector and land brokering by government parastatals at the outskirts have combined to dispossess farmers of their land. Such dark renditions of contemporary processes are crucial for understanding how Bangalore’s peripheral land is shaped by global capital flows and rescaled regulatory regimes. Yet they do not capture the ordinary, everyday nature of claim making at the peripheries that implicates not only the global rich, but also a variegated middle class and a host of local and regional state actors. In other words, ‘informal’ or ‘illegal’ dealings around land are neither exceptional nor are they restricted to the poles of the income spectrum. Rather, they describe the actually existing tenure conditions and settlement patterns of 40–70% of urban dwellers in most Indian cities (ALF, 2003: 98).

In Bangalore, informal settlements are referred to colloquially as ‘revenue layouts’ because they are built on land officially designated as agricultural or ‘revenue’ land in colonial census language. My archival review shows that although such layouts can be traced to the 1960s, they experienced a spurt in growth in the 1990s following India’s liberalization. Widely prevalent at the peripheries, revenue layouts are affordable, minimally serviced peripheral settlements occupied by a wide spectrum of lower- and middle-class urban buyers who yearn to own property. Born out of the ‘the oldest dream of owning a house’ (*Citizen Matters*, 2008), the vast majority of homes in revenue layouts are owned rather than rented.

Formed by private fly-by-night developers who buy parcels of land from farmers seeking to avoid acquisition by the state, revenue layouts are deemed ‘unauthorized’ in the eyes of the main parastatal planning entity, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA). This is because revenue layouts have not been formally approved by the BDA

and do not conform to its planning norms. As a result, unlike the more expensive planned BDA-approved layouts that are pre-serviced with utility connections, in revenue layouts, people move in even without network connections and paved roads. Revenue layouts can still acquire a certain degree of legitimacy if residents convert them to residential land use via a regional authority (the District Commissioner), pay taxes and fees to local governments, and make small investments in infrastructure over time. The legality of such settlements is highly fluid, entailing opaque transactions between residents, politicians, middlemen, landowners, and municipal and regional authorities. As I have argued elsewhere, rather than a clear demarcation between 'legal' and 'illegal', revenue layouts exhibit a spectrum of land tenure conditions ranging from 'more unauthorized' to 'less unauthorized' (Ranganathan, 2011).

The political agency of those inhabiting such spaces is inextricably linked with their fluid land tenure conditions and the material and symbolic borders that they inhabit. Solomon Benjamin's (2008: 723) notion of 'occupancy urbanism' aptly captures the 'subversive politics on the ground' deployed by those living under dubiously legal tenure. 'Occupancy urbanism' constitutes a politics that is materially centered on land relations through which the lower bureaucracy is leveraged to negotiate infrastructural improvements and regularize tenure over time. For Benjamin, it is these processes that explain the 'extensive political consciousness' of the poor and that, in turn, pose 'stringent resistance to neoliberal globalization' (*ibid.*: 720). My ethnographic research confirms the centrality of land relations to the political agency of Bangalore's peripheral residents and the deep implication of local and regional state entities in mediating the materialities of peripheries. However, my interpretation of the political agency of peripheral dwellers differs from Benjamin's in two respects.

First, rather than being confined to the poor, I find that occupancy urbanism describes a much broader set of groups, including the vernacular and lower middle classes. These vernacular groups are not contenders for India's gentrifying, securely propertied, English-speaking 'new middle class' on which important scholarship exists (e.g. Fernandes, 2006; Upadhy, 2009; Ghertner, 2011), but they are also by no means the poor. Rooted in regional cultures and languages,³ educated, and crucially, *property owning* (though not securely so), these are groups that I refer to as the *peripheralized middle class* — groups that are far more numerous than their elite counterparts. This is urban India's 'missing middle' (*cf.* Skocpol, 2000), its 'lumpen middle class' (Bayat, 2000), which includes, among others, those who have witnessed a decline in their social positions accompanying the decline of the public sector and concomitant rise of the new global economy. Several inhabitants of peripheral revenue layouts, for instance, are retirees from public sector factories once located in distant townships. For these retirees who moved to the peripheries because there was 'no other option' if they wanted to secure the dream of 'a small place to own'⁴ on a modest pension of US \$125–200⁵ a month, revenue layouts were far more affordable and accessible than planned BDA areas. Today, many among the peripheralized middle class are retired, self-employed or work in lower-level white-collar jobs (e.g. as technicians or nurses) with uncertain scope for upward mobility. It is the peripheralized middle class and their propertied dreams of citizenship that are being targeted by many new infrastructure policies today.

Second, rather than see the 'occupancy urbanism' strategies of the peripheralized middle class as 'resisting' neoliberal governmental schemes as Benjamin does, I found that the strategies of this grouping are politically far more ambiguous. Resistance is simply not a comprehensive description of agency in this case. Sometimes the strategies

3 Bangalore's location between four linguistic regions contributes to its linguistic diversity. In the Bangalore urban district, Kannada is spoken by about a third of the population, followed by Telegu, Tamil and Urdu. As in other major Indian cities, English is also spoken but tends to be the conversational language for an elite minority (Srinivas, 2001).

4 Interview, 17 July 2008.

5 All dollar amounts are stated at the 2008 exchange rate of US \$1 = Rs 40.

of this grouping *do* pose resistance to market-based governmental programs, but at others, they appear to be rehearsing elements and discourses of those very programs ‘so as not to jeopardize their standing within the rubrics of hegemonic power’ (Rankin, 2010: 187). Strategies of the peripheralized middle class tend to move between ‘invited’ and ‘invented’ spaces of public participation (Miraftab, 2009), typically involving organized collective action in the form of RWAs to lobby for neighborhood improvements and to ‘build good rapport with the government’.⁶ As one resident (a retiree of a public sector automotive parts factory) of a Bommanahalli revenue layout told me:

Everyone here has the same problems — no UGD [underground drainage], no roads, no streetlights, no water. In 2003, we formed an association and got it registered under the Societies Act.⁷ Now for a complaint, we go through the association; otherwise no work gets done. We have to coordinate between society and government. We contacted the *panchayat* [village elected council] and the councilors⁸ about our complaints. We also got peoples’ donations for streetlights and metalling of roads.⁹

As this quote depicts, forming an association and getting it officially registered so that it is recognized by the state, and liaising between residents and government officials over civic complaints, are key tactics deployed by peripheral homeowners. Such tactics were mentioned repeatedly in my interviews. In addition, residents engage in performative street protests and blockages [*horatas* in Kannada] to direct media attention to the state’s neglect of peripheral areas.¹⁰ Importantly, collecting donations for community infrastructure and organizing property tax payments are also key strategies, an aspect of political agency that we will revisit later. In brief, the political agency of the peripheralized middle class does not show signs of resistance so much as it demonstrates a range of tactics and strategic positionings to advance material interests and respectability *vis à vis* the state — often in ways that reproduce rather than challenge given power structures. In this way, agency here resembles Asef Bayat’s (2000) ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ — a nebulous politics that involves action to acquire the basic necessities of urban livability, but one that is expressly *not* a politics of resistance. However, in contrast to the largely individualized nature of Bayat’s ‘quiet encroachment’, in Bangalore, the actions of the peripheralized middle class are largely collective.¹¹

Thus, while both ‘occupancy urbanism’ and ‘quiet encroachment’ are useful in clarifying aspects of political agency at the periphery, they do not by themselves describe the political ambiguity and collective nature of agency in this context. It is James Holston’s (1999; 2008) ‘insurgent citizenship’ that perhaps best captures both missing aspects. For Holston, insurgence is found fundamentally in struggles over substantive membership in the modern state. It is characterized not by acts of radical resistance to the status quo, but by acts that in some way ‘empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas’ (Holston, 1999: 167). Crucially, insurgent citizenship involves the formation of organized collectivities. In his study of Sao Paulo’s peripheries, for instance, Holston finds that informal residents invested in ‘new and reinvented forms of organization . . . in which the criterion of membership is residence and the core agenda the articulation of claims to resources’ (Holston, 2008: 247). Once formed, however, neighborhood

6 Interview, 12 August 2008.

7 The Indian Societies Registration Act of 1860 enacted under British Rule provides for the formal registration (and thus state sanction) of charitable, voluntary or educational organizations.

8 Note that the very fact that village *and* municipal elected representatives were mentioned in the same breath is evidence of the fluid rural and urban jurisdictions that characterize Bangalore’s peripheries.

9 Interview, 1 September 2007.

10 See for instance *The Hindu* (2007).

11 Bayat himself recognizes that the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East (the context for his research) prevents organized collective action among urban informals.

associations advance their interests at the expense of new poorer immigrants; in other words, insurgent citizenship can also act to maintain social hierarchies.

It is precisely because insurgence presents such a complicated picture of agency — as advancing material interests, yet operating within and reinforcing prevailing relations of power — that it provides such a useful vocabulary for understanding the texture of political consciousness or ‘common sense’ as Antonio Gramsci put it. Grappling with the failure of the revolutionary project in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, Gramsci wrote that common sense — a mode of conceiving the world created through fragments of folklore, religion and philosophy — must be overcome for radical social change to occur. Because subaltern groups belong to ‘multiple social worlds . . . composed of heterogeneous fragments of fossilized cultures’ (Gramsci, 1989: 217), their common sense is not ‘critical and coherent¹² but disjointed and episodic’ (Gramsci, 2000: 325), leading to a type of ‘contradictory consciousness’ (*ibid.*: 333). While contradictory consciousness may contain the seeds of radical critique, most often people use it to justify and thereby reproduce the hegemonic relations in which they are embedded (Crehan, 2002; Loftus, 2012; Perkins, 2013). This incoherence is, for Gramsci, typical for classes trapped in structurally subaltern positions (Thomas, 2010). Similarly, I see the political consciousness of Bangalore’s peripheralized middle class — a group that is subaltern relative to the securely propertied, wealthier middle classes and subordinated to new reform rationalities — as profoundly contradictory. The associations representing the peripheralized middle class aim to improve living conditions while simultaneously reinforcing social hierarchies; they oppose particular governmental schemes while also buying into others to advance their property-related interests; and they recognize their subjection to cost recovery even while making bargains with it as I show below. Understanding the complexity of subaltern agency is crucial because it serves as an avenue through which to analyze the dynamics of rule itself, a subject to which I turn next.

The rationalities of water-pricing reforms in peripheral Bangalore

Over the last 30 years, areas like Bommanahalli have witnessed profound transformation from scattered villages, farms and pastureland to traffic-jammed roads and densely populated informal settlements overshadowed by glimmering technology offices. The ‘unauthorized’ status of Bommanahalli’s residential settlements and the fact that it did not formally fall within Bangalore’s jurisdictional orbit until recently have meant that the area was not connected to the BWSSB’s piped water and sewerage network. Within the core city, the public utility services around half a million household connections by treating, pumping and distributing around 1,000 million liters per day (MLD) from the Cauvery River, located approximately 100 km away from the city. Most households in the core still have to supplement utility-provided water with groundwater derived from a variety of sources. In places like Bommanahalli, however, its burgeoning population is still wholly dependent on groundwater sourced through water tankers, private borewells, and municipal borewells — all of which are unregulated and erratically supplied (Ranganathan *et al.*, 2009). By the early 2000s, a growing concentration of technology industries, real estate ventures and job opportunities, combined with limited water supply, had all contributed to fears of an imminent water crisis at the periphery.

To address this crisis and the bevy of infrastructure shortcomings that were threatening the city’s ‘world class’ aspirations,¹³ in the early 2000s urban bureaucrats in

12 As Alex Loftus (2012: 81) recently pointed out, ‘coherent’ for Gramsci did not signify ‘logical’ or ‘rational’, but rather a fusion of theory and practice.

13 In the early 2000s, articles such as *Indian Express* (2004) were lamenting the ‘crumbling’ of Bangalore’s infrastructure and the tarnishing of its image as a ‘world class’ city.

Bangalore began to initiate a series of infrastructure and governance reforms through external loans. One of these reform-driven projects was the Greater Bangalore water project,¹⁴ a project to extend piped, treated Cauvery water to the peripheries via a market-based financing framework. Instead of relying on the government of Karnataka to fund this project as was the precedent, decision makers — influential bureaucrats and technocrats — experimented with financing 29% of the project's capital costs (roughly US \$90 million at the time) through municipal bonds and 35% through peripheral 'beneficiaries'. In other words, it was expected that over \$30 million would be raised from the residents who were to benefit. The main financial architect of the project was the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), already active in creating a municipal bond market in India, even in less credit-worthy municipalities. Meanwhile the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Program financed the 'willingness to pay' study that supported the project's cost recovery policy (World Bank, 2005).

To understand the emergence of this water project and its constellation of domestic and international actors, let us briefly consider the political-economic context in which the project was born. This is not simply to read off transformations in water policy through macroeconomic change, but to locate water relations within a wider historical geography (Heynen *et al.*, 2006). By the turn of the millennium, the state of Karnataka was emerging from a financial crisis. While the state's financial health had been in decline for several decades, policy changes in the late 1990s mandating higher salaries for civil servants across India catalyzed a sharp deterioration in its fiscal deficit (Toshniwal and Vyasulu, 2008). Karnataka was certainly not the worst hit. Yet, owing to its political leadership and longtime familiarity with international lenders, Karnataka's crisis provided a window of opportunity for external agencies to step in with reform-tied structural adjustment loans. Given this atmosphere — and the broader shifts at the federal level realigning infrastructure policy along commercial principles — the Greater Bangalore water project adopted a model that was strongly market based and fundamentally pro cost recovery.

The main vehicle through which cost recovery was to be achieved was the 'beneficiary capital contribution' policy. Known in some countries as an 'infrastructure charge', capital contributions are designed to partially offset the cost of a public works project by charging future users a lump-sum fee. Frequently justified via participatory rhetoric, a 'beneficiary' capital contribution is levied over and above income or property tax, and is in addition to the cost of a service hook-up and meter costs, not to mention recurring water consumption bills.

Bangalore was not the first developing city that experimented with such a policy. In Buenos Aires in the late 1990s, for instance, an infrastructure charge ranging from \$43 to \$600 for water and up to \$1,000 for sanitation was levied by the private concessionaire on unserved lower-income urban households. Given average incomes at the time, residents were hard pressed to contribute such amounts, even when payments were staggered over several months (Loftus and McDonald, 2001; Estache *et al.*, 2002). The devolution of costs from the state to citizens, regardless of whether privatization has occurred, is what Smith (2004) refers to as a 'second wave' of neoliberalism in the 2000s — the 'first wave' being a more dogmatic emphasis in the 1990s by international agencies on privatization. In India, first- and second-wave water reform approaches have proceeded simultaneously. However, by far the most common approach in the last decade has been to institute cost recovery and a host of institutional and regulatory

14 Officially, the project is known as the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project or GBWASP. The sanitation component of the project, financed through a loan from the World Bank, was executed separately from the water component. Since I do not address the sanitation component here and to minimize acronyms, I use 'Greater Bangalore water project' throughout the article to refer to the project.

reforms without necessarily privatizing the water sector (Coelho, 2005; Gandy, 2008; Sangameswaran, 2009).

Although privatization was pursued initially in Bangalore, it was strongly opposed by the water board and activist groups, and ultimately the capital contribution policy went ahead without privatization. Under the new policy, peripheral residents were required to pay between \$60 and \$375 towards the capital costs of network expansion (mainly for feeder lines and distribution pipes) based on the dimensions of their properties.¹⁵ Property dimensions were divided into four categories: less than 600 ft², between 600 and 1,200 ft², between 1,201 and 2,400 ft² and greater than 2,400 ft². Each category was charged progressively higher amounts which had to be paid years before the anticipated delivery of water. To 'enforce compliance' (GoK, 2004), if payment was not made by the deadline of 31 July 2005, each category accumulated a penalty ranging from \$1 to \$8 per month. This coercive dimension of the policy was complemented by an attempt to cultivate consent: a non-governmental organization was recruited to promote participation in the peripheries and generate awareness about the importance of paying on time. In other words, both coercive and consensual aspects of rule — to be executed via what Gramsci called the 'integral state', or an amalgamation of the state and civil society — were written into the very design of the project.

How did the project justify devolving costs historically borne by the state on certain marginalized users? What were its political rationalities? Foucault's (1991: 82) methodological preoccupation with grasping the logics that underlie particular governmental technologies or 'programmings of behavior' and constructions of the subject can be put to use here. Under a heading titled 'Why should we pay?' in a 'Frequently asked questions' pamphlet circulated about the water project by the Government of Karnataka, the logic was stated as follows:

The project has a very large capital expenditure with the primary benefits of this expenditure flowing to the households that take the connections. The burden has to be, therefore, shared by the beneficiary citizens to some extent. In this process, the status of citizens is elevated to that of stakeholders which will facilitate their participation in the management of the assets created under the project. Further, by these improved facilities the value of properties will improve and this will be a direct benefit to citizens. There is therefore a good case for citizens paying for capital costs as envisaged in the project (GoK, 2005: 9).

The language embedded in this justification says much about the multiple political rationalities that animated this water project. First, the suggestion that the 'burden' of the capital expenditure has to be 'shared' by beneficiaries invokes the neoliberal proposition that citizens must take responsibility for services, since the state can no longer be relied upon for its welfarist role. The promise that 'the status of citizens' will thereby be 'elevated to that of stakeholders' is reminiscent of 'Third Way' discourses under Britain's New Labour that called for an active and self-reliant stakeholder society to replace welfare dependence on the state (Rose, 1999). Second, in saying that the benefit of paying is that 'the value of properties will improve', the payment policy plays on decidedly *liberal* and bourgeois ideals of property ownership and the enhancement of value through individual effort. In effect, the logics of cost recovery interwove neoliberal rationalities of self-reliance with a much more deeply rooted liberal political ethos celebrating private property. It is thus that programs of rule are never singularly neoliberal, but exhibit unplanned outcomes from the intersection of one governmental technology with another (Rose and Miller, 1992). Just as Gramsci understood the character of hegemony as 'multi-dimensional and multi-arena' (Hall, 1986: 15), so too was Foucault alert to the 'multiple, intertwining' nature of rationalities within any given

15 The beneficiary capital contribution policy underwent multiple downward revisions. These amounts reflect the final revision announced in 2005.

regime of rule (Donzelot, 1979: 77).¹⁶ We will see how the co-presence of plural rationalities in this project, in turn, ignited struggles along multiple axes at the grassroots.

In sum, this section situated the emergence of the market-oriented Greater Bangalore water project in a particular political-economic moment and discussed the project's cost recovery logics. The cost recovery policy sought to offload part of the financial burden of building a new piped water network onto peripheral 'beneficiaries' well before the anticipated arrival of water. While the project's rationalities displayed overtones of a second wave of neoliberal water reforms, it also tied payment to liberal principles of property ownership — a marriage that, in turn, shaped the terrain of political struggle for homeowners in Greater Bangalore. Having discussed the nature of agency at the periphery as well as the rationalities of rule that targeted peripheral dwellers, the following section addresses how these aspects became articulated together at a key conjunctural moment.

Bargaining with hegemony: paying for pipes as insurgent struggle

As I argued above, resistance does not describe the insurgent agency of peripheralized middle-class groups because it does not account for the heterogeneous and often contradictory nature of their political practices. Moreover, it does not anticipate how or why people '(sometimes) act as neoliberal subjects' (Larner, 2003: 511) or 'routinely make bargains with hegemony even as they might realize their own subjection to it, or the contradictions within it' (Rankin, 2010: 187). In this section, I return to the question of political agency by assessing the payments collected from peripheral dwellers for the water project both quantitatively and ethnographically. I show how historically embedded fiscal relations between citizens and the state in 'unauthorized' revenue layouts shaped meanings attached to paying for the water project.

Between 2007 and 2009, I made routine visits to the municipal headquarters of Bommanahalli because this local office maintained careful records of how much money had been collected under the water project's capital contribution policy. Residents were required to pay their contributions in cash at the branches of two banks in the area; these banks, in turn, forwarded copies of all receipts to the municipal headquarters for recordkeeping. Every receipt from 2003 onwards stacked neatly and tallied manually in a spreadsheet was kept under lock and key in a heavy stainless steel cabinet. As I built trust with local officials, this cabinet became my archive. I surveyed the receipts and spreadsheets for cumulative amounts collected per month, per ward, and per category of property in individual wards. I compared this with secondary data on average household income for each category. This archive provided an aggregate profile of payment, while ethnographic research was needed to historicize payment and uncover its meanings.

By 2008, \$60 million — double the amount originally anticipated by USAID and government experts — had been collected from 'beneficiaries' throughout the peripheries, well in advance of the actual date of water delivery. In Bommanahalli alone, my calculations showed that approximately \$12 million had been collected largely from

16 Although I bring Foucault and Gramsci into conversation in this article, I also recognize the tensions between them as flagged by Barnett (2005), Ekers and Loftus (2008) and others. In particular, Ekers and Loftus (2008) point out that while Gramsci affords a prominent role to struggle among the subordinated classes, Foucault questions the inevitability of struggle. Instead, Foucault (1994: 143) is interested in the 'perpetual linking' and 'perpetual reversal' between 'a relationship of power' and 'a strategy of struggle'. I have tried to bring this more cautious view of struggle to bear on my largely Gramscian reading of the political agency of the peripheralized middle classes by showing that their insurgent strategies are volatile and always constitutive of a new 'frontier of the relationship of power' (*ibid.*: 143).

Table 1 One-time cash contributions for water pipes by households in Greater Bangalore, 2005-7

Property dimensions (ft ²)	Average Payment per Household including Penalty (\$) (n = 1,864)	Average Monthly Household Income* (\$) (n = 8,000)	Payment as a Proportion of Monthly Income (%)
Less than 600 (n = 104)	120	150	80
601-1,200 (n = 193)	140	200	70
1,201-2,400 (n = 381)	270	220	120
More than 2,400 (n = 68)	440	280	160
Low-rise apartments (n = 1,118)	330	430	80
Average	260	260	100

*Reported in World Bank (2005).

Source: Calculated from author's survey and World Bank (2005).

revenue layout residents and new apartment buildings. That said, not all peripheral households contributed; some could not afford to pay and others preferred to wait until the water arrived. Part of this larger-than-expected collection can be explained by the fact that developers could not get their plans approved without contributing to the project. Nevertheless, a significant sum came from 'unauthorized' revenue layout residents. Surveying 1,864 receipts from one ward in Bommanahalli, I found that on average, residents contributed a one-time amount of over \$260 per household (see Table 1). On average, this translated into roughly one full month's household income and at times as high as one and a half times one month's income. Such costly payments were made despite the fact that other groundwater supply options existed. In many neighborhoods, associations kept careful rosters of who paid how much and were able to furnish these on demand. In brief, not only were significant payments made for water pipes relative to incomes; these payments were also diligently recorded and monitored by grassroots organizations.

How should we understand this outcome? Instrumentalist views espoused by development agencies might claim that marginalized groups were 'willing to pay' for improved services, especially when their current levels were so inadequate and expensive. According to this prevailing perspective, this is precisely why the poor should be charged more to connect to formal networks (e.g. World Bank, 2004). Along similar lines, USAID's best practice rhetoric insisted that people in Greater Bangalore paid for the project because of their sense of 'ownership' in upgraded water infrastructure, a reasoning that echoed the original 'stakeholder' justification in the information pamphlet quoted above. Foucaultian theorists on the other hand might examine the numbers in Table 1 and suggest that the conduct of peripheral dwellers was successfully programmed or 'responsibilized' via the neoliberal governmental technology of cost recovery (e.g. Rose, 1999; Lemke, 2001; Ong, 2006). As Aihwa Ong (2006: 172) comments, the rules set by neoliberalism 'enforces the internalization of ideals of "self-responsibilization"' in realms that were previously subsidized by the state. This claim would not be out of the question in Bangalore's case: after all, the rationale accompanying the cash contribution policy explicitly advocated that citizens 'share' the financial responsibility of the state's 'very large capital expenditure'.

While tempting, I argue that both these positions neglect the micro-politics of the periphery and, in particular, the meanings ascribed by peripheral dwellers to the act of paying. Readings of neoliberal moral responsabilization do not always account for the fact that human agency was not Foucault's prime preoccupation. As Bevir (1999: 357) points out, Foucault was interested in 'the ways in which the social world makes the subject, not the ways in which the subject makes the social world'. By contrast, Gramsci

was primarily interested in the ‘common material and meaningful framework’ subjects construct for ‘living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination’ (Roseberry, 1994: 361). To get at the material and meaningful framework attached to payment, then, I asked a series of questions about the fiscal and monetary transactions peripheral residents have historically engaged in with the state. I discovered that payment of various kinds, including property taxes and betterment charges (fees levied by the local state for local public works), confer a certain degree of legitimacy and respectability on residents — both in terms of their land tenure and their social standing *vis à vis* the state. Holston (2008) finds in Sao Paulo that it is precisely because the land titles of peripheral dwellers are in doubt that they want to pay property taxes as proof of good citizenship. This propertied vision of rights, wherein residents advance claims ‘on the basis of their contributions to the city itself’ (*ibid.*: 260), is the crux of what marks insurgent citizenship.

Similarly, for the peripheralized middle class living under informal tenure in Bangalore, a paying citizen is a good citizen. Historically, once residents moved to ‘unauthorized’ revenue layouts, they began to pay property taxes and other fees to the local municipality because ‘once you start paying taxes, you can start demanding things’. That is, for informal residents, tax payments provided a means through which to garner symbolic recognition and material benefits from the state: ‘Don’t we pay taxes, aren’t we important?’ one peripheral resident demanded in a 2005 newspaper article (*The Times of India*, 2005).

Conversely, peripheral cash-strapped municipalities were only too happy to collect taxes, despite the fact that the taxpayers’ properties were not ‘authorized’. In exchange, municipalities installed some basic amenities (for instance, a community borewell) and issued a temporary document proving property ownership [*khata* in Kannada] which homeowners needed for obtaining bank loans. As several other studies have shown, lower-level state functionaries play crucial roles in brokering services for informal urban residents, often in return for various types of small payments (e.g. Benjamin, 2004; Chatterjee, 2004; Anand, 2011; Anjaria, 2011). These state actors constitute the ‘ordinary spaces of negotiation’ through which substantive citizenship arrangements are made in practice for most people (Anjaria, 2011: 58). Payment in this case not only allowed residents to form a paper trail of good citizenship practices, but also to forge bonds with lower-level functionaries. Once payments are made, proof of payment is often presented to officials as proof of residence, which can also be mobilized in times of crisis as I show below. It is important to keep in mind, however, that such insurgent forms of citizenship are fragile: with each spatial expansion in Bangalore in which fringe municipalities and villages get swallowed by the city (as in 2007), forms of recognition issued by local entities are invalidated overnight. Payment thus comprises an unstable, volatile terrain of struggle at the heart of which lies the stakes of citizenship.

This historical set of state–society relations helps us to understand the cultural inflections and situated meanings of payment in the context of the Greater Bangalore water project. Contrary to USAID’s ‘best practice’ assertion, people paid not because they were won over by the ‘stakeholder’ rhetoric. In fact, when the ‘beneficiary’ capital contribution policy was first announced, most were highly skeptical of the project’s use of the term. One member of an RWA (a retired advocate) had paid the capital contribution for the project when it was first announced. But rather than internalizing his subjectivity as a ‘stakeholder’ in the project, he contended adamantly:

There’s no meaning in the word stakeholder in this Greater Bangalore water project . . . We cannot pay for the service *and* be a stakeholder! Simply they are putting a levy on a fundamental right of the citizen which is the duty of the government to provide and for that calling you as a stakeholder [*sic*]?!¹⁷

17 Interview, 9 July 2008.

Nor did people agree with the project's internal logics. For instance, I was repeatedly asked: 'Why only those in Greater Bangalore have to pay capital contributions and why with penalty?'.¹⁸ To make matters worse, the actual delivery of water to the peripheries was severely delayed on account of engineering hurdles, resulting in the grossly inequitable situation of 'beneficiaries' having paid for a service that they did not, in fact, 'benefit' from (water was delivered to some areas in 2009, but most are still waiting for new bulk supplies to come on line). Despite realizing their subjection to rule and the contradictions within it, however, many paid up rather than resisting all together. Like taxes and other fees, payment for water pipes provided an insurgent means to claim citizenship and fight for respectability: 'We paid because we are law-abiding people' explained a resident, rather ironically, in an 'unauthorized' layout when I asked him why he paid for the water project.

Crucially, the collection of payments is a practice that neighborhood RWAs organize and take great pride in. 'We are the best tax payers in this CMC!' an association president proudly declared to me after explaining how he personally knocks on people's doors every year to encourage them to pay. Much like taxes and miscellaneous fees, associations were involved in organizing payment for water pipes and in creating a meaningful framework for interpreting payment, thereby building legitimacy for the project. A quantitative regression analysis of factors influencing willingness to pay for piped water for 8,000 households in Bangalore reported that the presence of RWAs was strongly positively correlated with higher willingness to pay and was statistically significant (World Bank, 2005). Ethnographic findings support this result. Associations distributed pamphlets and collected contributions for water pipes through door-to-door visits. One association member described her role as follows: 'We were involved in raising awareness and in educating the members about the Cauvery water scheme. We told everyone they must pay. See, if we all pay we can raise our voice in a better manner!'¹⁹ Further, as a result of lobbying and petitions filed by associations, the water board waived the requirement of showing formal, permanent proof of tenure for a water connection and meter; proof of payment for the water pipes alone was considered sufficient to demonstrate residence. In other words, as a result of RWAs' political maneuverings, formal tenure was successfully removed as an eligibility requirement for actual service delivery.

My findings thus show that in reconfiguring the relationship between payment for infrastructure and land tenure, consent for cost recovery was produced in the process. The role of an 'ensemble of organisms commonly called private' — that is, 'civil society' (Gramsci, 2000: 306) — was pivotal in the creation of consent. Greater Bangalore's RWAs served the intellectual function of organizing, educating and persuading members about the symbolic and material importance of paying, not because they were submissive to an externally imposed neoliberal calculus, but to 'raise their voice' and be regarded as 'law abiding'. If, as Gramsci (2000: 211) put it, 'hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised', then RWAs recognized that a strategic positioning within the rubrics of hegemonic power allowed them to further their interests. As Donald Moore (2005: 11) reminds us, hegemony implies that subaltern subjects are enlisted into projects of their own rule not because they are duped, but because 'emergent interests' are produced 'through compromises, consent, and coercion'. In this case, hegemony works by enlisting 'unauthorized' residents to shoulder the financial burden of new water infrastructure, while also enabling them to bargain for citizenship, belonging and recognition in the process.

These bargains assumed high stakes when peripheral dwellers found their properties threatened by punitive policies seeking to clamp down on unauthorized development

18 Interview, 30 July 2008.

19 Interview, 15 July 2008.

between 2005 and 2007. In 2005, in a bid to prevent illegal settlement, the state government banned the registration of residential sites on agricultural land, targeting all revenue layouts at Bangalore's peripheries. It also banned local government entities from issuing property titles to revenue layout dwellers. A newspaper dubbed the move as one that 'badly hit many middle income families who have bought plots to construct their dream house' (*Deccan Herald*, 2005) and quoted one peripheral resident as protesting:

I have paid development charges . . . for my property, paying property tax regularly, have a *khata* issued by the CMC and *paid beneficiary contribution for Cauvery water connection* [*sic*]. But how fair is it to say that the property is illegal?' questions Mr Puttaswamy, who owns a house on a revenue plot here (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

Here, Mr Puttaswamy is making an insurgent claim to citizenship by leveraging his payment of various fees, including the capital contribution under the water project, to further his property-related interests. This quote vividly portrays that Bangalore's 'unauthorized' property-owning peripheralized middle-class residents have situated understandings of what payment for water pipes carries: in this case, payment carries the right to *not* being considered illegal.

My own interviews in 2007–09 mirrored this situated cultural interpretation. Again, in 2007, shortly after the Greater Bangalore City Corporation was formed, an even more punitive policy known as *Akrama Sakrama* ['Make Right what is Wrong' in Kannada] mandated that revenue layout dwellers — the prime targets of the scheme — pay exorbitantly high penalties to get their properties regularized. Without paying a one-time penalty that amounted to as much as one year's annual income on average, residents risked eviction and demolition. A flurry of debate and critique erupted in citywide meetings and the media over this policy. This became a key conjunctural moment marked 'by the simultaneity of symbolic and material struggles' (Moore, 1999: 674) in which battles over the right to water and tenure legality were articulated together. Just as multiple rationalities were cobbled together in the project's payment policy, so too were struggles surrounding governmental policies waged along the 'multiple axes' (Ekers *et al.*, 2009: 289) of access to services, land tenure, and urban citizenship. One of my informants captured this entanglement when she, much like Mr Puttaswamy, argued with respect to *Akrama Sakrama*:

We are always fined; we are always taxed. Property tax we pay. Betterment charges we pay . . . all the connections are being paid — e.g. BESCOM [electricity] and *Cauvery water charges* — so what's so illegal about it? *If you're calling us illegal, how do you collect all these charges?*²⁰

As in the quote above, my informant reinterpreted the logic of state policies through her own insurgent citizenship practices. It was clear that, to her, payment of various kinds by residents — including for water pipes — should nullify the so-called illegality of their settlements. At citywide meetings organized by a federation of peripheral RWAs known as the Citizens Action Forum (CAF), citizens similarly demanded: 'what about the money that the government collects under various heads like water, electricity, registration, etc? The state government has no right to declare layouts which are paying these fees as "unauthorized"' (*Citizen Matters*, 2007). Moreover, at a time when the city of Bangalore was attempting to maintain its grasp on footloose global capital, this punitive regularization drive was seen as disproportionately harsh on the small violator while it 'catered to the needs of big businesses that have violated building laws by constructing and occupying immense structures in residential areas' (CAF, 2007: 6). In an information booklet published by the CAF, the regularization drive was denounced as

²⁰ Interview, 21 August 2009.

egregious, particularly since small violators ‘have waited for over three years after paying “beneficiary contribution” to BWSSB for water supply and have been given no indication as to when they would get the supply’ (*ibid.*: 7, emphasis added). The booklet goes on to complain:

It is indeed sad that governments . . . link the citizen’s right to the supply of a basic life-giving necessity as water to adherence to . . . such devices [as the beneficiary contribution policy]. Don’t they understand that denying water is like passing a death sentence? Such callousness coupled with the justification for *Sakrama* is rubbing salt into the citizen’s wounds (*ibid.*).

As a result of these and other intertwined criticisms and a public interest litigation launched against the *Akrama Sakrama* policy, the harsh penalization of peripheral properties was stayed in the High Court of Karnataka in late 2007 on the grounds that the policy was fraught with inconsistencies and constitutionally untenable (*Citizen Matters*, 2007). Although still controversial, today *Akrama Sakrama* has been revised by state legislators to decrease the financial burden on lower-income residents living in unauthorized layouts. One of the main reasons cited for its revision was to ‘fill the government’s coffers without causing much hardship to owners of illegal properties’ (*Deccan Herald*, 2009). It is thus that the more punitive, ‘eviscerating’ forms of urbanism in India (Gidwani and Reddy, 2011) can sometimes be stalled through citizenship battles, even if only partially and temporarily. Although citizen groups registered this temporary victory, capital contributions for the Greater Bangalore water project have proceeded unabated with no guarantee as to the delivery of water for the majority of peripheral dwellers. Hence, while the insurgent discourses and practices of the peripheralized middle classes cannot be thought of as counter-hegemonic in that they did not successfully overturn cost recovery (nor did they primarily seek to), their agency nevertheless opened up spaces of political possibility for advancing their interests within a regime of rule to which they were subordinated.

To summarize, the analysis here shows that consent to cost recovery in the urban waterscape was achieved by harnessing the interests of the peripheralized middle class, particularly with respect to property. The failure of the hegemonic state to ultimately deliver water in time, however, catalyzed a series of critical challenges and a reworking of state policies. The central insight for Gramscian debates is that key to the creation of consent and compromise were the situated meanings subaltern groups ascribed to paying for water pipes. Insurgence is a relevant concept for understanding the nature of meaning making and grassroots maneuverings within hegemony. Insurgent bargains with hegemony allowed subaltern groups to make the best of a constraining situation — in this case, to appropriate payment for pipes to fend off threats to their legality. For those who are not winners in the new global economy and who inhabit unstable peripheral spaces, consent to cost recovery in the water sector in an era of increasingly exclusionary spatial policies might be one of the few ways left to fight for a foothold in the city.

Conclusion: towards a philosophy of urban water praxis

Reality looks quite a bit different from the visions portrayed in the glossy briefs proclaiming the Greater Bangalore water project as a ‘best practice’. It was a ‘best practice’ only to the extent that it managed to successfully raise the cost of capital for a water network on the backs of subaltern groups. Yet, several years after the collection of cash contributions first begun, a majority of Bangalore’s outskirts (80%) still do not have access to piped water via this project (*The Times of India*, 2010). Given how popular cost-sharing participatory models have become for financing infrastructure, it is imperative that we interrogate why such models win legitimacy despite their contradictions.

To do this, this article questioned the agency of marginalized groups recruited in and subordinated by cost recovery regimes. It argued against a narrow view of political agency as circumscribed by the project's rationalities and micro-governing techniques — those that ostensibly constituted a responsible, paying neoliberal 'stakeholder' subject. Instead, it studied through a Gramscian framework the situated practices of peripheral agents, including their forms of collective action, historical fiscal relations with the state, and cultural interpretations of payment. Insurgence was found to be a useful grammar here for characterizing a kind of subaltern agency that is at once collective, derives from land relations, and is not always a politics of resistance. The article contended that payment for pipes by insurgent, 'unauthorized' property-owning agents and their associations — much like other types of fiscal transactions with the state — provided an avenue to demand recognition and respectability. With the current spate of regularization policies penalizing illegal dwellings at the periphery, the situated meanings ascribed to paying for water pipes were leveraged as a means to bargain for tenure legality and citizenship.

The analysis here supports the thesis that neoliberalism does not stand separate from other political projects (e.g. Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Peck *et al.*, 2010). There is no simple binary between neoliberalism and its 'others', between power and resistance. The case study demonstrated how neoliberal and liberal rationalities were entangled in the water-pricing agenda, and consequently, how struggles at the peripheries unfolded along multiple axes: the demand for water and the right to legitimate property. Market-oriented logics thus always operate 'in environments of multiplex, heterogeneous and contradictory governance' (Peck *et al.*, 2010: 104). At the same time, the particular historical geography of Bangalore's frontier — with its prevalence of 'unauthorized', economically marginalized, property-owning agents — and the concrete realities of its lived environment shaped the articulations of hegemony in specific ways.

To close, to what extent does a discussion of political agency help us to think through a more viable 'philosophy of praxis' in urban water — what Gramsci (2000: 334) saw as a tighter 'unity between theory and practice', a critical consciousness of socio-ecological relations? It is difficult to envisage radical critique emanating from peripheral groups in Bangalore given their localized and narrow interests. Still, there are a few seeds of such a critical consciousness that stem from the everyday, lived experiences of nature and society that are worth pointing out. First, even over the timeframe of this research, there grew to be greater realization of the limits of a paradigm of centralized water pumped from as far as the Cauvery River. Documentary filmmaker Swati Dandekar whom I worked with while she was making *Water and a city* (2009), a film about Bangalore's water challenges, captures residents' understandings of the troubling ecological dimensions of the city's hydrological cycle, as well as their more politicized views on distributional justice, pricing and governance. The inherent contradictions of the Greater Bangalore water project have triggered critiques by the peripheralized middle class about the uneven geographies of money, power and water in the city — critiques that were not possible even 5 years ago. Such critiques, as Gramsci reminds us, are immanent within the materiality of practices and the very project of hegemony (Thomas, 2010; Loftus, 2012). Second, while still embryonic, there is growing recognition about the intersections between water and land tenure. Citizens and frontline bureaucrats are acknowledging that a historically formed patchwork of land tenures in the city dictate 'if water, when water and why no water' (*Citizen Matters*, 2008). While such observations have not amounted to an explicit challenge of hegemonic policies, they nonetheless expose that rulemaking surrounding water and land can never be solely about market processes, and that water, in particular, is as much a symbol of citizenship, identity and power as it is an economic resource.

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