

Urban as palimpsest: neoliberal environments, fishing livelihoods, and toxic landscapes in Mumbai, India

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Abstract: This paper illustrates the significance of the palimpsest as a conceptual and representational tool to analyze urban transformations over time. Focusing on urbanization in Mumbai, India, this paper examines the growth of the service sector through the re-shaping of an urban periphery. Based on qualitative field-based research for ten months in 2015-16, I examine how Malad, formerly a periphery dotted with fishing villages became a service sector hub, and an area epitomizing Mumbai's urban modernization. Through a series of collages, I illustrate changes in Malad's urban morphology resulting from a long history of colonial and postcolonial land transactions that facilitated infill and land reclamation, and their acceleration since the 1990s. The layers of the palimpsest make visible the environmental and livelihood damage in the form of toxicity, reduced fish availability and loss of other environmental resources, otherwise absent in the dominant narrative surrounding Malad's transformation. Through the palimpsest, embodied environmental associations of livelihood and loss are uneasily juxtaposed with narrower neoliberal conceptions of sustainability that frame service sector development. I show how the palimpsest as an analytic can represent the power nexus embroiled in transforming urban environments with repercussions on urban ecological systems and erase embodied associations of indigenous communities.

Keywords: *collage, environmental change, palimpsest, toxicity*

Introduction

A walk around Mindspace Malad in Mumbai, India reveals glass-and-steel buildings that house call centers and ongoing construction activity that has continued relentlessly for the past two decades. Wending their way through the streets within this service sector hub, one ends at a park, which abuts the creek leading into the Arabian Sea. On the street separating the activity of call centers from the park and water beyond, one often gets a malodorous smell. Often nothing more than an ephemeral whiff, this smell provides a sign of the history of land transformations in this area. This smell is a vestige of the conversion of wetlands into a garbage dump, which was concretized to create a service sector hub.

This paper draws on data from my qualitative field-based research in Malad's fishing villages for ten months in 2015-2016 in the form of qualitative interviews with fishing village residents (n=7) and community leaders (n=3), transect walks with fisher folk in and around Mindspace Malad (n=4), and participant observation over several hours in Malad. This was complemented with a document analysis of the real-estate developer's website as well as fifty-six media articles and reports prepared by non-government organizations on land transactions in Malad, the real-estate boom in and around Mindspace Malad, and the impacts of this development in the form of environmental harm and toxicity. I also draw on interviews with call center employees (n=3).

I analyze this data to trace the contemporary development of a service sector hub within a sedimented power nexus between colonial, nation-state and elite private actors. The development

relies on a long history of colonial and postcolonial land transactions to facilitate infill and land reclamation, which have accelerated since the 1990s. These processes are accompanied by mangrove removal, toxin release, and reduced fish availability, which negatively impact bodily and environmental health. Indigenous environmental associations are disregarded, and livelihoods erased. Within this milieu, I use the palimpsest as a conceptual and representational tool to show how urban development has reworked land-water boundaries, damaging bodily and environmental health, erasing environmental associations, and leaving behind vestiges of struggle and contamination.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: I begin with an explanation of the palimpsest, and its significance as a critical analytic.¹ Next, a set of collages illustrate the palimpsest of land transformations in Malad, Mumbai, wherein I provide a description of each of its layers. The article then elaborates on land transactions, toxic landscapes, and other natures as gleaned within and across the layers of the palimpsest. Through this reading, I use the palimpsest to represent and analyze power struggles and its impacts on land, environmental associations, and health. I argue that the palimpsest as an analytic holds significance to represent and analyze complex developmental processes, understand relations across time and between different stakeholders, and make visible erased narratives.

Palimpsest as analytic

¹ Thanks to Jeenal Sawla, whose undergraduate thesis in architecture first demonstrated to me how powerful the palimpsest was as a tool in exploring and visualizing alternative histories and their resultant built environment.

Fisher folks' embodied histories of associations with and use of the boundaries between land and water in Malad, Mumbai are accretions that can unsettle dominant development narratives of contemporary urbanization schemes. These accretions form layers of a palimpsest, a "scroll of parchment on which a new text is written after the original writing has been made invisible, or the canvas on which a new painting is painted over the old one, [wherein] the old texts and paintings come shining through the surface" (Engbersen 2001, 126). As a conceptual analytic, the palimpsest is a "multilayered structure that emphasizes the coexistence of multiple visions of different cultures on the landscape" (Mitin 2017, 2). Here, I extend the notion of co-existing multiplicities in palimpsests to depict the different actors who participate in land transformation over time and their relative presence and visibility in the site and discourses surrounding its transformation. Such multiplicity, as seen in the renderings, often lingers in the form of traces that are "resistant to effacement and which, instead, underpin or haunt the imprint of superimposing layers" (Samuelson 2008, 63) allowing one to recover and make visible otherwise effaced histories and actors. Such histories rely on "forensic traces of memory" wherein one leaves a little behind and carries a little away (Bolland 2015, 201–2). With traces that have been "carried away" in the form of oral histories and environmental associations, the palimpsest here depicts what gets left behind and imprinted on the site.

The use of the palimpsest to represent such accretions produces a "submerged" analytic of the site which allows a reading against the grain, to "see local knowledge that resides within what power has constituted as extractive zones" (Gómez-Barris 2017, 11) undoing and reworking "unilinear historical narratives that erases its subjects" (Gómez-Barris 2017, 12). A submerged reading of changing land use and associations and its representation through collages that

collectively form a palimpsest reveals the complex nature of land with its multiple affordances, its varying associations and social character (Li 2014, 600), becoming a “repository for people’s experiences, aspirations, identities, memories, and visions for alternative futures” (Safransky 2018, 503). The historical power struggles entailed in the translation of land into a resource also shows the entangled workings of capitalist and colonial processes (Safransky 2018).

As a submerged reading, the palimpsest allows for a deeper, situated understanding beyond developmentalist discourse, presenting Mindspace Malad as a site undergoing “ruination,” a place experiencing “dislocation, disinvestment or even destruction” (Gandy 2016, 435). Such ruination, as I show, unfolds through slow violence; a “...violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space... incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (Nixon 2011, 2). The slow violence takes the form of toxicity, an entanglement of insidious imaginaries which eviscerate embodied associations through land expropriation and transformation, and whose peeling away reveals alternative relations with nature that challenge existing ascriptions of “sustainable” development to this site.

Layers of the palimpsest

I depict Malad through a set of four collages that collectively constitute the palimpsest of its history and land transformation. In each collage, I distil the wide-ranging temporality – from the fast-paced building construction, the tidal and seasonal patterns of fishing livelihoods, and the slow toxicity – into “sticky” moments that mark the coalescence of ongoing transformation and dispossession processes. The coalescence of these processes also helps situate Malad within

significant shifts in governance structures; from colonial to postcolonial regimes, and from state-led to increasing privatization within development. Describing each in turn, I provide a glimpse of the land transactions that define “moments” in the site’s history. In each layer, I depict embodied associations with the land-water edge using motifs that are identified primarily through interviews with fisher folk, complemented by document analysis.

Collage One



Figure 1: Fishing in pre-British Malad

In figure 1, I juxtapose narratives of fisher folk with document analysis to present a collage of pre-British impressions and associations with what is now Mindspace Malad. Fisher folk in Malad explained that their ancestors had engaged in fishing activities since a “long, long time, since before the British arrived, before what we know as Bombay [or now Mumbai] existed.” Located close to what is now Mindspace Malad, they lived in the villages of Malvani and

Bhandarwada – two of several fishing villages in the area that continue to dot Mumbai’s urban landscape.

Fisher folk explained that their ancestors used the wetland (now Mindspace Malad) as an ecological common prior to the British “gifting” of the site to an elite Parsi family. I draw on this understanding to depict the ecological common and demarcate it amorously from its watery and land-based surroundings. The motifs that constitute this collage include a boat, mangroves, fish, an agricultural crop, a man fishing while standing in the wetland, and a woman preparing a meal at some distance from it. These motifs draw on collective impressions that fisher folk had of their community’s ancestral associations with this site. The boat is central to their livelihoods and the lynch pin around which their community is organized. The mangroves form the edge between land and water, and mangrove sticks an important source of fuel for household functions in the community. The crop depicts the use of the wetland as a source of agricultural yield, albeit limited to subsistence. Impressions of men and women in the fishing community reveal that while men in the fishing village stepped into the wetland, conducted leisure activities with their friends and community members there, and fished as well, women primarily skirted around its edges to gather mangrove sticks and crop yields. Women did not hold deeply embedded associations with *entering* the wetland, in their living memory or within their impressions of family history. This gendered division of household and livelihood roles, and its translation into differential associations with the land-water edge continues to the present day – where men go out into the sea to fish, and women cook and sell fish.

Collage Two



Figure 2: Malad as a colonial periphery

Figure 2 consists of the second collage, depicting a transaction that occurred between the British colonial government and the Dinshaws, an elite Parsi family. The British gifted the Dinshaws the wetland for their loyalty. The presence and influence of these two actors is made visible through two “stamps” towards the top. The stamps signal the actors through the use of architecture resonant with these groups: the first that of state enterprise, present here through colonial architecture, and the second, bungalow architecture that is closely associated with the Parsi community. These two stamps, while distinct, are closely imbricated in the transformation of this area. The use of the stamp as a motif is used to indicate their lack of embodied engagement with the site.

The British-Dinshaw transaction was to have short- and long-term consequences for this area and for the fishing community. In the short run, Bhandarwada residents could continue to fish in the wetlands, but had to pay rent to do so. They were stakeholders in property transfer too, wherein

they were to sign a no-objection certificate if a land transaction were to occur. Other activities, however, abated somewhat, with reduced practices of already small-scale subsistence agriculture. This reduced engagement in small-scale subsistence agriculture is depicted through the slight fading of the crop from the first collage to the second.

The long-term impacts of the British-Dinshaw transactions can be witnessed in land sales that occurred in the 1990s, which I elaborate on in conjunction with the fourth collage. Before that, I explain what transpired in Malad during the early decades of the postcolonial state.

Collage Three



Figure 3: Postcolonial transformations

In the third collage, as seen in figure 3, I turn to the third pivotal moment that marked the transformation of this area. Continuing the motifs shown in the previous collage, I use stamps to signify the presence and impact of the government and elite private actors. The disengaged presence, albeit with grave impacts, of the colonial nation-state in Malad has been replaced by

the visceral presence of the Indian nation-state through the dumping of garbage. The dumping occurred under the postcolonial state, who acquired this wetland in 1968. This area was then used as a garbage dump for three decades, from 1972-2002. In 1970, EF Dinshaw died, leaving the estate to his sister, Bachoobai Dinshaw, on whose death the corpus was to be divided between two U.S.-based trusts: Society Salvation Army, New York, and the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In 1972, Bachoobai Dinshaw made Wadia the administrator of the estate.

During its use as a dump, waste began to overtake the wetland. The changing color of mangroves and surrounding water reflects the impact of toxins being dumped onto the wetland. The dumping of garbage significantly slows down fishing activities in the wetland. However, fisher folk explained that the presence of a dump did not fully end fishing activities. To signify this small remainder, I leave one corner of the wetland unmarked by garbage and retain the presence of fish in another corner, even as the color of the water has greyed in both instances.

Collage Four

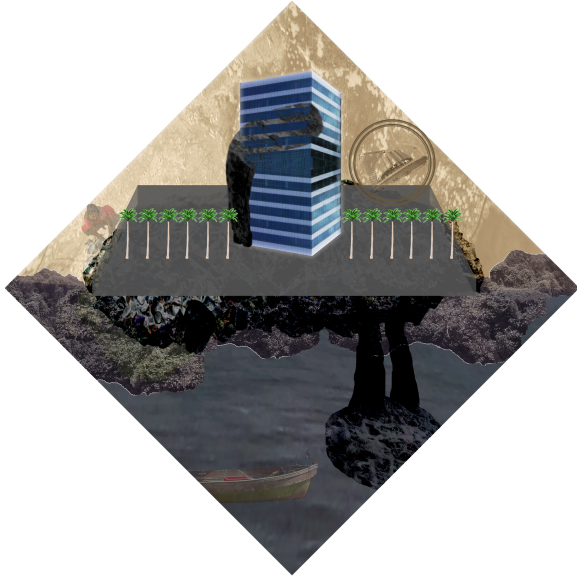


Figure 4: Neoliberal environments

The final collage, seen above in figure 4, in the series depicts the series of fast-paced changes that have occurred in this area in the last two decades. After the garbage dump closed in 2002, the Wadias (who were acting on behalf of the Dinshaws) sold the land to K.Raheja. The agreement was that K.Raheja would develop it and pay twelve per cent of the sales, as well as a sum of \$11.5 million [₹750 million] over ten years in return to the Wadias. The Wadias claimed that Dinshaw's original will was incompatible with the Indian Succession Act, and hence was invalid. The two U.S. trusts collectively contested these claims in 2002, and then subsequently dropped the case in 2003 (FE Bureau 2015).

When the Dinshaws, represented by the Wadias, sold the land to K.Raheja, Bhandarwada residents were unaware that the transaction had occurred. These residents only realized something was underway when K.Raheja began construction activity. The construction involved

heavy securitization, including security guards² and dogs. The developers also used metal sheets, which served not only to fence off the site, but also prevented visibility of ongoing activity. The fishing community went to court and managed to get a stay order to stop construction activities. However, the developers continued their reclamation activities in direct defiance of the court order. With tremendous difficulty, community members managed to obtain photographic proof of this defiance despite the metal sheets that barricaded the construction site. Fishing village residents approached the site from the sea side by boat, put a jute sack over the registration number of the boat to prevent the developers from knowing who was documenting the illegal construction activity, and managed to obtain photographs of it. The contempt of the court order was duly observed, and once again put a halt to the construction. Thus, a series of starts-and-stops has characterized the development of this site.

Following such pushback to the construction process, the real-estate developers took advantage of the complexity of land ownership in Bhandarwada. Some community members were landowners and leased out land to others in the village. The developers bribed a member of a landowning family to obtain no-objection certificates. In conversation with Kay, Bhandarwada's community leader, I learnt that his younger brother was the key pawn in these transactions. He was no longer on speaking terms with community members, nor did he live in Bhandarwada anymore. What he thought was a good deal, proved to be a low price for the developers to obtain a no-objection certificate and carry out their construction activities. Subsequently, the Wadias and K.Raheja had a falling out, which ensued in a series of court cases for over a decade. On the one hand, the Wadias wanted the land back and wished to halt further development on it. On the

² The fishing village residents had heard that the security guards were being paid \$15 [₹1000] a day, wages the residents considered extremely high. I was unable to independently verify this information.

other hand, K.Rahejas claimed that Bachoobai Dinshaw's death meant that the Wadias were no longer legitimate administrators of the estate. In 2008, the Wadias went to court, claiming that K.Raheja were making fraudulent sales by selling the property at prices lower than market value to their sister companies, and demanded a compensation of \$210 million [₹13.7 billion rupees]. K.Raheja denied these allegations. There was significant back and forth. In response to the 2010 High Court ruling in favor of the Wadias, K.Raheja filed a plea in 2011, as a result of which they were allowed to continue making sales. The Wadias then appealed to the Supreme Court (Narayan and Nandy 2012).

Ultimately, K.Raheja prevailed in the dispute over the site. The Supreme Court claimed that Wadia's case was time barred, relying on a state law that set up a time statute of three years for such litigations (arZan 2015). At that time, the value of the plot was conservatively estimated at \$3.5 billion [₹230 billion rupees] (Express News Service 2012). There are also several other cases in court, with the fishing village demanding rights to land that they lost through the builder-led development process. Kay described their court procedures as a revolving door, with many lawyers willing to take up their case but often unwilling to go through with it, due to bribes or threats they faced from the developers.

While these contestations were underway, the site was undergoing rapid transformation. The K.Rahejas concretized the site directly over the garbage dump and built Mindspace Malad, a large master-planned business district, as is seen in the fourth collage. This call center hub is 110 acres, with 0.7 million sq. ft. leased for commercial and IT services (Raheja n.d.). Described as a "perfectly blended ecosystem," on the company website, Mindspace Malad is constituted by

numerous tinted glass and steel buildings, separated from the street by a compound wall or metal fence. Security guards at the gates monitor entry and flow. Through some fences, one can view palm trees and ornamental lawns in the spaces between the sidewalk and the building front. While these were not the first glass-and-steel buildings in Mumbai, they marked a period of the style's growing ubiquity, signaling modern architecture for the city's growing service sector, as well as Malad's position as an area emblematic of modernization.

As the collage shows, the construction of Mindspace Malad has led to a leaching of toxins from the dump into the surrounding water and into office buildings within Mindspace Malad, with perilous effects on fishing livelihoods and communities, as illustrated through the fading of the boat and fisherwoman.

Across these collages, I read the wetland's material and symbolic transformation through changing environmental associations and embodied experiences of toxicity. These concerns undergird the formation of each collage and provide fungible links across them. I now turn to each of these themes in turn, to consider the learnings across the blurry temporal boundaries that separate the collages. I also discuss the potential of the palimpsest as a tool to analyze such changes and make visible submerged narratives.

Emergent themes

The illustrations collectively constituting the palimpsest are organized chronologically, seen below in figure 5, with each collage marking a "sticky" moment in the ongoing process of the wetland's history and transformation. Across these layers, the palimpsest helps make visible the

stakeholders and power struggles involved in land transactions, the increasing yet uncertain toxicity and its seepage into land and water, and varied associations with the environment.

Figure 5: Series of four collages titled “Malad’s palimpsest”

Transactions and transformations: The palimpsest usefully represents effects of land transactions in erasing and constructing the urban built environment over time, and stakeholders involved in these processes. Stakeholders include the state and elite non-state actors who hold power, and fisher folk whose embodied associations with land and water is prioritized and made visible in the palimpsest layers. Such relations are juxtaposed, often uneasily so, with the use of disembodied stamps and other elements of the built environment, which are identified from a combination of fisher folks’ narratives and document analysis.

The transformation of water into land in Malad is aligned with Mumbai’s long colonial and postcolonial history of expanding its boundaries through land infill and wetland reclamation projects. In Malad, these transformations involved a changing role and involvement of the state. The colonial state first engaged with this site by gifting it to the Dinshaw family. This marked the first moment that this wetland became visible in the eye of the state. This visibility led to a conversion of the wetland into a lot that the state could transact. Even as this transaction occurred, the boundaries of the lot remained unclear as was its status of land or water. Such ambiguity meant that the transaction of this lot did not immediately signal buildability or a potential to develop it as real-estate, even while laying the foundations for doing so.

The postcolonial state acquired this wetland and played a more active role in its conversion into a garbage dump, signaling a “public” use while ignoring its “community” value. Under the postcolonial nation-state, the transformations in the wetland signaled an active involvement of the state while leaving open contestations regarding value and constitution of the public. However, while the dumping of garbage caused trouble for the fishing community, issues came to a head under the neoliberal regime. The state was a broker in the real-estate transactions that took place in the 1990s, facilitating private development and disregarding the flouting of regulations involved in the construction of Mindspace Malad. The challenges faced by these communities in accessing and managing land and associated livelihood resources serves to demonstrate the powerful nexus formed between the state and elite actors in the private sector within a neoliberal regime, and the related fast-paced changes in land transformation as depicted in the collages.

The fishing community was completely cut out of the 1990s land transaction, accompanied by increasing pressures to their livelihood activities. The decreasing ability of fisher folks to manage and access land and water is depicted through their slow fade across the series of collages. The palimpsest as an analytic shows the partial erasures that have accompanied land transformations over time. In placing emphasis on activities of fishing, mangrove sticks, small-scale agriculture, and fisherwomen’s household activities, these layered histories unsettle dominant state and non-state actors whose narratives have shaped the more legible history of this area.

Water flows and seeping toxicity: The palimpsest helps visualize the toxic flows that leach into the water, float somewhat uncertainly into the building, and are not fully identifiable, yet are

posited to have grave impacts on human and environmental health. This toxicity, as I explain in this section, is part of an absent presence that characterizes the site. Through the palimpsestic analytic, I make visible the toxicity in the soil and air that is absent not only to the eye but also largely in discourse.

Historically, the water in the wetland ebbed and flowed with the tide and varied across seasons as well. The circulation of water permitted the growth of rice. This water, which reached a maximum depth of 1.7 meters, was typically much shallower. Fishermen used their embodied memory of being in the water to recollect these flows. They marked out the height of water on their waist and shoulders, explaining how they made decisions about entering and fishing in the wetland depending upon its depth. Thus, their engagement with the wetland varied by tide and season, and their decisions relied on their intricate embodied knowledge of the same. The first collage illustrates the interaction of fishermen with the wetland.

The postcolonial nation-state acquired these shallow flats in 1968 and used it as a garbage dump from 1972-2002. During this time, about 1000 tons of garbage was dumped daily in this site, as is depicted in figure 3 (Nair 2007). This garbage consisted of a combination of “putrefied waste, bio-medical waste, hazardous waste, construction and demolition debris, animal manures and even animal carcasses” (Sahu 2007). This garbage dump was shut down by a Supreme Court order in 2002, in response to a Public Interest Litigation filed by middle-class residents in Malad who complained about the dump’s smell (Correspondent 2012).³

³ My research participants had heard that real-estate developers instigated middle-class residents to file litigations. I was unable to independently verify this information.

The closing of the dump in Malad facilitated the transfer of land for building Mindspace. Construction work began immediately, and directly on top of the dump, as shown in figure 4, in defiance of the central government's Municipal Solid Waste rule that required a fifteen-year waiting period for any human settlement on a garbage dump after its closure (Nair 2007). The grave repercussions of this defiance were brought to light because of the constant failure of electronic equipment, including computers and air-conditioners, which frustrated companies who had to repair their brand-new equipment. Some companies had to replace up to eighty per cent of equipment, which was significantly higher than standard failure rates of two to five per cent (Nair 2007). They sent faulty parts to an environmental consultant in Singapore, who tested these in U.S. and Australian-based laboratories and found that elevated levels of sulfur in the air and water was ruining the equipment. In fact, this led one of the providers to create a geographically specific warranty, stating that they would only attend to twenty per cent of the complaints from Mindspace per year. The efficacy of air-conditioning systems, for example, was reduced from the typical fifteen years to a few months. Companies were subsequently advised to fit sulfur filters in their buildings, which have exorbitant installation and maintenance costs.

Some companies have considered moving to other locations because of toxicity and its related costs. The air and water in this area is also seen to be highly contaminated (Majumdar and Srivastava 2012; Sahu 2007; Vijay et al. 2010). Since this site was untreated prior to construction, bio-degradable solid waste decomposed anaerobically, resulting in a release of hydrogen sulfide, methane, and mercaptan, which has not only contaminated the soil, but also the air and water (Sahu 2007). Such widespread contamination is also posited to have impacts on

human health, especially over the long-term (Sahu 2007). However, the long-term health effects of Mindspace Malad's development lie unexamined thus far.

The loss of fishing grounds and the failure of electronic equipment in this area signals the toxicity of this area. Such toxicity is also palpable through the ephemeral smell I referenced at the start of this paper, that exists within otherwise highly manicured spaces. The oozing of toxins onto the land surface, through the buildings and into the water cumulates in the bodies of workers, in electronic equipment, and in fish and other creatures living in the sea. The palimpsest layers depict the increasing toxicity which seeps into the concrete slab, the built form and water, and the changing color of the water signals the leaching of the waste dump into the sea. Despite its embodied and visceral presence, toxins are largely absent in the characterization of this area. Instead, and as I elaborate in the next section, this area is characterized as a model for modern development in the city and country.

Competing Natures: In the palimpsest, I juxtapose differing associations and relations with the environment. Such juxtaposition complicates narrow aesthetic conceptions of the environment and illustrates how the prioritization of narrowly framed “sustainable” development can detrimentally impact indigenous practices that treat the environment as a resource for subsistence and livelihood.

Despite the environmental damage and health impacts described in the previous section, it is important to note the enduring associations of Mindspace Malad with sustainable modernization. K.Raheja pursued green certification in response to criticism from environmentalists regarding

the hazards caused by toxicity from reclaimed land (Retailers Association of India 2014).

K.Raheja's notions of sustainability are constituted by "a parallel consideration of human well-being, healthy environments, and a fruitful life overall." Specifically, they have adopted a "Green Vision," which includes various initiatives to design projects with minimal environmental impact. This vision translates into a commitment to obtain green certification for their buildings, as well as membership in the Indian Green Building Council and the U.S Green Building Council. The pursuit of "sustainability" also involved participation in the Clinton Climate Initiative's retrofit building program. These steps have enabled the developers to receive numerous national and international accolades, and the state has held this development as a model for others (Gokhale 2005; Zee Business Pinnacle Awards 2006).

K.Raheja have marketed Mindspace as a sustainable development project, and have used cues from it to design and advertise other projects under the overall aegis of Mindspace as a concept with brand status. On their website, K.Rahejas have described Mindspace as a concept that has:

revolutionized working environments into thriving communities for global business, offering a fusion of work and recreation. Through world-class infrastructure, lifestyle amenities, and leisure facilities, Mindspace helps grow and nurture business by providing added impetus through the finest commercial landscapes.

My research participants who worked in call centers were impressed with the development of Mindspace Malad, while being aware of its implications on their health. One of my research participants commented on Malad's transformations, explaining:

earlier when I used to take a bus past there, it used to stink. No light, no real roads. It's been a dramatic change, took place over ten years. Now look, it's so developed. All other suburbs [of Mumbai] should follow this example.

The newfound importance of Mindspace for Malad caused a dilemma for another research participant, who was aware that this was potentially occurring at the cost of employees' health. However, she was impressed with "how this dump has grown into such a global-type of development" and she believed that that is what mattered in the "larger picture." Thus, it appeared that in wrestling with the contradictions presented by Mindspace Malad's development, the achievement of modernity and world-class status provided solace for her impaired health. Another research participant presented a similar view, but with more reservation:

...It's not any different really from other jobs, I mean to say, not different from Indian jobs. Oh, you're working for foreigners, so you expect, you know, more modern. But it's all the same. Inside. Outside, it's professional. Like modern-looking. All clean, with glass and all.

The modern appearance of Mindspace provides some consolation for the call center employee, even if this does not resolve her dissatisfaction with the job. The superficiality that these research participants identify with the patina of modernity in Mindspace Malad's buildings cohere with its engagement with sustainability as well. In the palimpsest, I depict K.Raheja's brand of "green" through palm trees in the final collage. While the trees on site are real, their representation as

plastic-like is intended to depict the limitations of their appeal to sustainability. Further, it shows how their role in marketing the site as being environmentally sustainable is problematic, particularly given the fallacy of these claims, and because it conceals other forms of associations with nature, as an environmental resource – as depicted in the earlier set of renderings. As such, I show the competing claims to the environment present at this site, and the power flows that prioritize one form at a significant cost to the other.

Conclusion

This paper uses collages to create a layered palimpsest, making visible oft-erased narratives of fisher folk as they grapple with and make sense of urban environmental transformations in Mumbai, India. In doing so, I depict uncertainty, competing environmental understandings, and varying temporal scales. First, the seeping toxicity in Mindspace Malad is characterized by uncertainty. Such toxicity extends beyond failed equipment – and enters the bodies of fisher folk through the fish they catch and call center workers through the office buildings they work in, and the air they all breathe. Through the layers of the palimpsest, I visualize the material nature of uncertainty as it inhabits in bodies and their intertwined built environment (cf Murphy 2006). Second, I place different associations with the environment in uneasy juxtaposition with one another. The plastic-like rendering of palm trees in the final rendering calls into question the superficial nature of claims to sustainability; especially in light of the greying of the mangroves and sea, the loss of fish and wetland, and the leaching of toxins into the built environment evidenced all around it. The perspective of fisher folk, and their long engagement with the site calls into question flimsy appeals to nature under schemes for sustainable development, providing a different starting point for representing and analyzing urban transformations. Third,

across the palimpsest, I note different temporal registers. The last layer of the palimpsest, titled “neoliberal environments,” captures the intensity of contemporary development and its contrast with earlier modes of change in this area. The quick developmental shifts lie in contrast with the pace of fisher folk’s livelihoods, in tune with tidal and seasonal shifts. The toxicity in land, water, and air – as well as in the bodies of those who work in Malad is constituted by a temporality that is slow and seeping.

I use collages to create a palimpsest that can help visualize embodied associations that diverge from dominant narratives of development and urban transformation and restore vestiges from changes in the built and natural environment. In depicting transformations resulting from land transactions, I illustrate stakeholders who are differentially engaged with the site and hold varying degrees of power. I also show different alliances that are formed over time between state and elite non-state actors, and depict the concerns and associations of comparatively marginal actors that otherwise often fall through the cracks. As such, the collage is used to invert dominant tropes and present the narrative of Mindspace Malad’s transformations through perspective of fisher folk. I posit that the collage as a medium is useful in counterposing these views against information from document analysis that predominantly highlights the workings of elite actors in altering urban morphology. The collage allows an “enlargement” or provides a heightened valence to the ephemeral impressions and embodied associations of fishing communities with a site whose historical arc is often dominated by elite actors, including that of the colonial state and wealthy native families, or ignored because of Malad’s peripheral location outside the colonial city.

As I show, the palimpsest holds potential for critical geographic enquiry and is complemented by the use of the collage as a visual medium. The collage can help juxtapose elements to illustrate power circuits and highlight less visible perspectives in three ways. The collage facilitates the depiction of vestiges that might otherwise fall away, an “enlargement” of marginal impressions, and the proximal placement of subjects and objects to suggest intertwinement across temporal registers. In doing so, the collage complements the material engagement with the palimpsest to provide pathways to represent pathways of power, make visible uncertainty, and grapple with different temporal scales. Such material engagement provides an opportunity not only to articulate the skewed visibility of dominant actors, but also to rework such renderings and contribute to critical geographic scholarship.

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