The production of informality and everyday politics: *Drinking water and solid waste management in Jagdamba Camp, Delhi*

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Urban informality is a complex phenomenon and recent literature points towards the need to develop a new theoretical framework to analyse and interpret empirical observations. This paper uses Bourdieu's practice theory to conceptualize informality as a set of practices, analysing two case studies from Jagdamba Camp, Delhi (India), and its surrounding neighbourhoods. The first case centres on practices around a community-managed water supply system and the second on practices around solid waste management. The case studies, based on data collected through qualitative fieldwork in 2015 and 2016, point to multifaceted interactions between formal and informal practices that result in manifestations of in/formal practices in the locality's everyday politics. The paper argues that informality is not linked to particular people or places in an essentialist way, but dependent on the field in which these actors operate.

Key words: Informal practices, urban informality, everyday politics, Bourdieu, Delhi

Introduction

In June 2015, an NGO started cleaning the garbage dump in Jagdamba Camp, to convert it into a community space so that it could be used as an open classroom for the neighbourhood children. The local leaders of the Jagdamba Camp, vehemently protested against this appropriation of government land. However, the municipality sided with the NGO, despite the informal and arguably illegal land appropriation.

Two questions or puzzles emerge from this situation that provides a backdrop for this paper: Why would a state actor support informality? And why would the local leaders oppose garbage clearing that leads to the betterment of their own neighbourhood?

Such a questioning derives its roots from an unblemished understanding of what is objectively good, in this case, a clean open classroom being better than a garbage dump. This further implies a critique of modernity's ethnocentric understandings that disenfranchise many parts of developing cities by labelling them informal (Jones 2011). In *Ordinary Cities*, Robinson (2006) builds on Santos' (1979), appeal for a shift towards a more situated theoretical approach to study cities in the developing world. This call for more theoretical projects from the South and the already existing focus on informality from cases situated in the South presents the theoretical premise for this paper.

Urban informality, furthermore, has largely been studied using two empirical categorizations. The first conceive urban informality through confining it to specific classes of people (e.g. the urban poor, subalterns, etc.); the second, to specific places (e.g. slums, unauthorized colonies, etc.). Yet, the vignette above suggests that these associations are not always clear-cut. Attempting to breaking this association and following a grounded approach, this paper proposes to analyse urban informality

through practices. I argue that the role of fields in which actors operate is as central to informality as the actors themselves or the places they inhabit.

This argument is built upon two case studies located in and around Jagdamba Camp (hereafter JC), a squatter settlement in Delhi, that look at the practices and everyday politics around water supply and solid waste management. JC's water supply is a community-based system managed by the local community leader(s) and maintained by the state government's Water Authority[i] while solid waste management is officially under the purview of the municipality. These interlinked case studies will point to the role of various practices in reshaping the formal service delivery systems, thus co-producing urban informality and influencing everyday politics.

Drawing upon the case studies, I will discuss three aspects of the production of urban informality: (i) its unintentional character; (ii) the amorphous nature of what is rendered formal and/or informal and its interchangeability; and (iii) the different fields in which production of informality is facilitated or contested. These three threads do not represent different categories of the production of informality but rather point to its plurality more generally, using urban service delivery as an entry point and Bourdieu's (1977) Theory of Practice as a heuristic tool.

The following theoretical section provides first a literature review on informality arguing against actor- and place-centred approach and for practice-oriented views of informality. This is followed by a section describing the qualitative methods used to study in/formal practices and one that presents the case studies on water supply and on solid waste management in JC. The section thereafter articulates the two case studies to reinforce the arguments for a practice-oriented view of informality. Finally, I conclude the paper by linking the cases back to the politics of informality.

Towards a practice-centred thinking of informality

Cities (or parts thereof) that defy the Western norms of modernity (or that of the developmentalist state) form separate categories in the literature. Robinson ascribes this to the "biased assumptions and practices of contemporary urban theory" (Robinson 2006, 2), largely drawing from the understanding of modernity. Challenging the idea of taking modernity as a synonym of the 'West', she reiterates:

> "Assisted by the expansion and dominance of Western economic, political and cultural forms, the assumption that being 'modern' involves being 'Western' proliferates both in the academic literature and in popular discourse…" (Robinson 2006, 19).

The resulting bias of urban theory marginalizes cities of the developing world and their informality, thus overshadowing the nuances of informality vis-à-vis its amorphous nature with respect to who practises it and why, its complex power relations beyond state agencies, and social aspects of desirability and avoidance of informal practices.

A. Informal people and informal places

Discussions of informality have their roots in 1970s debates on the informal sector. The focus at this time was on labour migration, unemployment and poverty (Moser 1978). Hart's (1973) famous delineation of informality[ii], which resonates in multiple sources as a definition, clumps together the urban poor, their livelihoods and their habitat, and puts these at the centre of the discussion on the informal economy. He claims that having been "denied success by the formal opportunity structure, these members of the urban sub-proletariat seek informal means of increasing their incomes" (Hart 1973, 67). Informality thus got attached to the urban poor or, more generally, to the marginalized and disenfranchised sections of society, and the places they inhabited.

This association with particular social groups and with particular places has ever since dominated empirical frameworks for studying informality, even of those in critical contemporary academic literature. More recently, authors such as Roy have broadened the scope to bring to light the informal and illegal means employed by urban elites as well:

> "Informal urbanization is as much the purview of wealthy urbanites as it is of slum dwellers. These forms of urban informality — from Delhi's farmhouses to Kolkata's new towns to Mumbai's shopping malls—are no more legal than the metonymic slum. But they are expressions of class power and can therefore command infrastructure, services and legitimacy" (Roy 2011, 233).

The enquiry into the differences within practices of informality (by elites and the poor) leads her to use urban informality as a heuristic device to understand the hegemony of the developmentalist state. This hegemony is expressed through the 'valorization of elite informality' and the 'criminalization of subaltern informalities'. This theorization aptly highlights how the state and its agencies mobilize informality to delegitimize the urban poor. Other authors have added to this perspective. For example, Ghertner (2015) examines the judiciary-assisted demolitions of Delhi slums showing how state actors' aesthetic sensibilities become a tool to judge and govern informality of the marginalized and thus criminalize it. Baviskar (2003) makes the links between the planning logic and the criminalization of the marginalized, specifically urban migrants, on the one hand, and Delhi's middle-class desire to be a 'world class city' driven by what she called 'bourgeois environmentalism', on the other. This set of theorizations has two major implications. First, they position informality as a mode of urban governance or governmentality (Roy 2011, 2009, 2012; Nijman 2008). Second, they see the actions of

those involved in informal practices primarily as negotiations with the state; as Roy and AlSayyad argue:

> "If formality operates through the fixing of value, including the mapping of spatial value, then informality operates through the constant negotiability of value and unmapping of spaces." (Roy and AlSayyad 2004, 5).

These negotiations are conceived with respect to its practitioners, such as in the formation of collective bargaining structures (Raman, Denis and Benjamin 2016; Mahadevia 2010); conflict with state or other agencies (Paul 2006; Dupont 2008; Arabindoo 2016); or circumventing the state for its operation (Bayat 2007; Babere 2015). Despite the diversity of these perspectives, they have in common the focus on the informal actor's (collective or individual) capacity to negotiate and navigate with and within the state.

In the context of deceptive linking (by the media) of poverty to radicalization and Islamic militancy, Bayat (2007) articulates informality as the habitus of the dispossessed. He argues how the urban poor opts for informal practices because they are compelled to do so:

> "It is true that many of the inhabitants of informal communities pursue an 'informal life.' … they tend to function as much as possible outside the boundaries of the state and modern bureaucratic institutions… This is the case not because these people are essentially non- or anti-modern but because the conditions of their existence compel them to seek an informal way of life. That is so because modernity is a costly enterprise. It requires a capacity to conform to the types of behaviour (adherence to strict disciplines of time, space, contract and so on) that most poor people simply cannot afford." (Bayat 2007, 587)

It is important to unpack what Bayat (2007) calls the 'habitus of the dispossessed' in light of Roy's (2011) highlighting of 'elite informality'. If the habitus of the urban poor pushes them to practise informality, then how do we understand elite informality? If informality is not to be understood as a domain of a specific set of people and those involved in informality are practicing it due to the 'conditions of their existence', then we need a different framework to understand this. Rodgers, in his discussion of the co-production of urban spaces in the Global South, presents a more complex picture of the actor-independent nature of urban informality:

> "Focusing on individual agency is also obviously a means of bridging the binary thinking about formal and informal processes that dominates mainstream thinking. Even if these different domains can be conceptually distinguished, they are generally populated by the same individual social agents who move from, and participate in, different events, situations and processes, sometimes sequentially, sometimes at the same time or sometimes as connectors." (Rodgers 2016, 398)

The fact that the same individual social agents participate in practices of both formality and informality makes it necessary to look beyond the habitus of these agents. Why does the same individual practice informality in one case but formality in the other? To overcome this conundrum, we need to look at the practices of these agents (focusing on individual agency, as Rodgers put it) to understand informality, formality and their relationships. A practice-oriented perspective will allow for a conceptualization of informality where the individuals are not labelled informal, but rather are seen as actors who can practice both informality and formality. By contrast, it is easier to define a practice as either formal or informal. I define formal practice pragmatically as something that is registered with the state, and informal practice as something that is

not. However, it should be noted that the state here is not a monolith, but a topological state, which incorporates informality within, as argued by Ghertner (2017).

This conceptual and empirical focus on practices can be further justified by a brief description of JC. The settlement began with the squatting of an empty piece of land. Occupying this land was an informal practice. Today, however, the houses are equipped with metered electricity supply and the residents pay their electricity bills. Paying the bills is a formal practice that includes going through formal financial systems. Furthermore, many JC residents work without formal contracts as housemaids in the surrounding settlements. Simultaneously, some residents are government employees working within the formal wage system. One could list many other formal and informal practices (and I will do so in regard to water supply and solid waste management), but these examples already point to the difficulty in defining JC or its residents as either informal or formal. It is easier to delineate individual practices through this binary, but the settlement and its residents as a whole seem to be situated in the mesh of in/formal practices.

B. Informality as a set of practices

McFarlane's (2012) work on the 2005 Mumbai floods proposes to study informality and formality through practices. He takes a cue from Ingold's (2011) idea of 'meshwork' and conceptualizes the informal-formal as a mesh of practices that is perpetually in the making and without fixed identities:

> "…framing informality and formality as practice means dispensing with both the idea that informality belongs to the poor and formality to the better off, and the associated idea that informality and formality necessarily belong to different kinds of urban spaces. Thinking of informality and formality as practices rather than as pre-existing geographies allows us to understand the ways in which geography

helps to determine the particular politicisation of these practices."(McFarlane 2012, 105)

In this paper, I draw upon Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice as a heuristic framework to extend McFarlane's theoretical perspective on informality. This theoretical extension allows for going beyond the non-contextualized association of informality with specific people and places to include the consideration of not only practices, but also fields. Building on Bourdieu, Schatzki (2012, 14) has elaborated practice as "an open-ended, spatially-temporally dispersed nexus of doings and sayings." Bourdieu's theory of practice builds on the concepts of field, doxa, habitus and capital. These four key concepts are interrelated and therefore need to be defined with reference to each other. Society is seen as a set of fields within which agents carry out their practices. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of a sports field, which constitutes an arena with its own social identity and a positional context in which particular practices appear reasonable:

> "the field … is clearly seen for what it is, an arbitrary social construct, an artefact whose arbitrariness and artificiality are underlined by everything that defines its autonomy…" (Bourdieu 1990, 67).

Fields are not mutually exclusive and different fields intersect. The key aspects that define them are their rules, which Bourdieu calls doxa. Doxa is the historically produced understanding (the rules) of the field that are socially shared. Doxa and field are interrelated, "the fundamental presuppositions of the field … is the very definition of doxa"(Bourdieu 1990, 68).

However, the socially shared doxa is not universal. Not all agents in a field necessarily accept the doxa voluntarily. Rather, doxa is imposed by those who have more capital (power):

"Doxa is a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view…" (Bourdieu 1994, 57).

Bourdieu sees power as embedded in the actors by virtue of the capital they accumulate. He understands capital beyond its Marxist material association with economic activity and theorizes it to include social and cultural frameworks (Jeffrey 2001). Furthermore, capital is an endowed resource and its value depends on the field in which the actor is acting. Additionally, power is enacted through habitus, which guides actors' practices. The habitus is internal to the actor: as Dovey (2010, 32) explains, "The habitus is not cognitively understood but rather internalized and embodied".

I conceptualize informal and formal practices unfolding in multiple fields, each with their own doxa. There are certain fields where the doxa favour formal practices and other fields where the doxa favour informal practices. Theorizations of informality as a governmental tool (discussed in the previous subsection) suitably highlight state brutality and its ideological bearings. However, the centrality of the state in these analyses inhibits attention to the plurality of informality that we find in a number of studies. For example, Arabindoo (2016) studied the cultural and socio-political aspects of informality's link with a lack of governance in a middle-class context; Schindler (2016) highlighted the nexus between the middle-class and informal service providers, which legitimizes the latter. Furthermore, a practice-oriented framework not only allows the decentering of the state from the study of informality, but it can also depict the state as a set of multiple fields. Finally, the practice framework makes it possible to: (i) analyse the same actors who indulge in both formal and informal practices; (ii) outline the socio-cultural aspects that inform the understanding of the state and relationships with its agencies; and (iii) point to the multifaceted interactions of various actors in the production of informal practices.

Informality as a practice is dependent on both the doxa of the field and the habitus of the actors. However, the habitus has different values depending on the field in which it is operating. Therefore, informality as a practice has more bearing on the doxa than on the habitus. Informality in this framework is not seen as an oppressive device used by the state, or as a condition in which people are stuck because of their socio-economic class. Hereafter, I will use these theoretical understandings to examine the practices as they unfold in and around JC. First, however, I will outline the methods that were applied to collect data on contextualized practices in JC.

Methods

For the study of informality as a practice, I take everyday politics as an entry point, following Kerkvliet's account of how

> "Everyday politics involves people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources and doing so in quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that are rarely organized or direct." (Kerkvliet 2009, 232)

This article looks at everyday politics around two service systems in JC; that is, water supply and solid waste management. The material aspects of water supply and solid waste management are seen here as mediums to uncover practices, in line with Schatzki's (2012, 24) methodological outline:

> "Practices are more ethereal than are material entities. Whereas material entities and activities can be directly perceived (this requires knowledge of the bundles to which they belong and of teleology as well as motivation), practices must be

uncovered… To acquire this knowledge, the investigator has no choice but to do ethnography, that is, to practise interaction-observation."

The ethnographic data presented in this paper stems from qualitative fieldwork carried out from May until August 2015, with follow-up work done from October to December 2016. During these periods, 33 semi-structured interviews with individual inhabitants, and three unstructured group interviews with a total of 11 respondents consisting of residents and local shopkeepers, were carried out in JC. These interviews were conducted in Hindi and later translated. A female research assistant supplemented the interviews to moderate biases due to my positionality as a male. This was helpful for gaining insights into the activities and preferences of female community members and for triangulating the understanding of practices and of everyday politics from different actor positions. The interviews were complemented with participant observation, particularly observations and informal conversation with people in JC over a cup of *chai* (tea). All the respondent names mentioned here are pseudonyms.

In the first phase of fieldwork, life stories of people in and around JC were collected and archived. Based on initial interviews and conversations, the water supply and solid waste management cases (or fields) were identified as relevant cases illustrating the meshwork of in/formality. In a second phase, more in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. The respondents were selected through maximum variation sampling (Patton 1990). The fields of solid waste management, water supply, and democratic representation were introduced and explained to the respondents with a signifier, i.e., the *dhalaon* (garbage dump), *nullah* (drain), water availability, and the RWA (Resident Welfare Association), respectively.

The case study site

JC's inhabitation started with migrating construction labourers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These migrants came to build the Apeejay School, Sheikh Sarai, which was then in the South Delhi outskirts. Nearby villagers provided makeshift rental housing. The workers soon got out of the rental cycle and built their own shacks between the school's southern boundary wall and the drain (locally called *nullah*) that flows at some distance (less than 10 metres) parallel to the wall. This took place in the mid-1970s, arguably the most brutal period of massive slum demolitions in Delhi (Tarlo 2001). But the drives to demolish slums did not affect the JC settlers, as their shacks were sufficiently far outside the city at the time.

As the land slope increases close to the *nullah*, the residents constructed their shacks as far away as possible from the *nullah,* thus filling up the settlement's periphery close to the school wall first. The settlers coming later built their houses ever closer to the *nullah*; some who arrived after the 1990s even erected their shacks over the channelled *nullah*.

Government housing and prime real estate surround JC today. The southern boundary has shifted across the *nullah* to the boundary walls of Pancsheel Vihar, a planned settlement. Malvia Nagar, another planned settlement, lies to the west of JC. High boundary walls from all sides and defined entrance points surround the settlement today and 'hide' it from the main access roads.

Like most other Delhi neighbourhoods, JC has its own Residents' Welfare Association (RWA). RWAs may or may not be registered with the state, but they all work collectively on neighbourhood issues. While JC's RWA is not registered, the residents elect its executive members every five years. The community organizes these elections themselves but a police officer is called in to ensure law and order during these often-

tense times. JC refers to the RWA chairperson as *Pradhan* (a Hindi word for head/chief). The current *Pradhan*, Abdul Haq, is serving his third term.

Community-managed water supply system

In the 1980s, the local MP (Member of Parliament – at the national level) put in place JC's water supply system, a service that the community had been requesting for years. The system is constituted by two water-pumping stations that extract local ground water, a pipe network and several community water taps along the neighbourhood lanes. The Delhi Government's Water Authority was assigned to run the pumps twice a day for two hours each and to maintain the infrastructure. A technician from the Water Authority was designated to operate the motorized water pumps for the allocated time and to report technical faults of the water supply system. However, checking the quantity of water delivered was not under anyone's purview.

The motors ran for the stipulated hours, but the water quantity varied each time, predominantly due to the electricity fluctuations. Due to this problem, the women from the community, who generally are responsible for collecting water, were in constant conflict with the technician. As a consequence, the technician stopped coming to the neighbourhood in the late 1990s. As the motors were encased in locked pump houses, JC was without water.

At that time Abdul Haq was already JC's RWA *Pradhan*. He and other RWA members started negotiating with the Water Authority. As the technician vehemently refused to operate the pumps in JC, the RWA offered the Water Authority its free service to operate the pumps. This offer was eventually accepted and the keys to the pump rooms were handed over to the RWA, and *de facto* to the *Pradhan*. The RWA now operates the pumps, but the ownership of the water supply system still lies with the Water Authority, which also repairs any defects.

However, some inhabitants are not happy with the way the RWA manages the water supply system. In particular, the *Pradhan* is seen as partisan when it comes to reporting technical defects to the Water Authority, leading to uneven and poor maintenance of the system. Ahmad, a resident, for example, has a water pipe leaking next to his house. As he is not 'in good terms' with the *Pradhan*, he believes that the pipe is not being repaired due to the *Pradhan's* strategical and deliberate inaction. The *Pradhan*, on the other hand, portrays himself as neutral and fair. Water supply is still limited, but the *Pradhan* in general acts on the residents' complaints and runs the motors, when necessary for altered hours in order to compensate for power cuts. There is general agreement that water supply is now more regular; criticism is directed mostly at the fact that the RWA and its *Pradhan* dominate the system.

The *Pradhan* himself regards it as one of his major achievements to have improved water supply and brought the system under community control. He maintains that the water supply system is better managed now, not least because he has a personal interest in it as a JC resident. He also claims to be very accessible to the community in case of any water supply (or other) issues. There are display boards at both entrance gates to JC that show all RWA members' names and photographs. Clearly, there are differing local views on the community-based water supply management. Such discords and disagreements also reflect the relationship the community has with the RWA more generally. While some residents were satisfied with the RWA and identified it as their own, others pictured it as a hub of favouritism and power.

Solid waste management

Solid waste management is another important JC community issue. Some residents dump their household solid waste directly in the *nullah*, which flows through the centre of the neighbourhood. This causes the drains to clog, resulting in neighbourhood flooding

during heavy rains. The RWA started to negotiate with local politicians and eventually managed to get a municipal garbage dump (locally called *dhalaon*) built on the small access road connecting the settlement and the main road near the entrance to JC. This position renders the *dhalaon* invisible from the main road, which is probably also a reason for its irregular clearing.

Despite the *dhalaon*, garbage is still dumped in the *nullah*. All the residents we talked to condemn this practice as it adversely affects the whole community. The blame for this practice is invariably put on the 'other': long-settled residents accuse the more recently arrived residents, who live closer to the *nullah*; the latter claim that some residents would ask their children to take the garbage out to the dump but that their children would just dump it in the nearer *nullah*. One older resident, Giriprasad, puts it as follows:

> 'Earlier it used to be nice and very clean here. Now the new residents came and made this settlement crowded and polluted. They don't have any civic sense and dump their garbage in the *nullah*.'

Conversely, the residents living near the *nullah*, claim that they are the ones who suffer the most, as they are closer to the *nullah*. Therefore, they would use the *dhalaon*. The settlement layout is narrow and long, which means that anyone can reach the *nullah* within less than a minute's walk. Everyone practically has access to the *nullah* for throwing garbage.

The other major problem related to JC's solid waste management is the irregular clearing of the *dhalaon*, leading to garbage overflows. An NGO running education programmes in JC took note of this. The NGO head, Sushila Patidar, negotiated directly with the municipality and was able to convince them to install garbage bins on the main road next to JC with the intention of replacing the *dhalaon*. By changing the location of

the garbage collection point, from within the neighbourhood with a narrow access road to the more visible main road, the NGO expected that the municipality would feel obliged to collect the garbage regularly.

The NGO workers also planned to clean the old *dhalaon* site and to convert it into an open classroom-cum-community space. The idea was that this would encourage the community to take ownership of the site and to keep it clean. The NGO managed to organize volunteers from various schools in Delhi and a few municipal workers for the day-long task in June 2015. However, as the team started the operation, the *Pradhan*, joined by some RWA colleagues, asked the volunteers to stop the work. A violent conflict arose between the NGO and the RWA, and only after a police intervention could the *dhalaon* be cleaned. Sushila and the NGO volunteers were perplexed and did not understand the reasons for this opposition. Conversely, the *Pradhan* claims that he believed that the NGO was trying to grab their land. He took issue with the fact that the residents helped the NGO and circumvented him and the RWA. The *Pradhan* further claimed that the JC residents are ignorant and may fall for tricks by outsiders (referring to the NGO). Furthermore, it proved to be a challenge to motivate the JC inhabitants to use the new bins. Again, the *Pradhan* was behind this resistance. He used his community influence and asked people to keep using the old *dhalaon*. Many followed suit; others dumped their garbage in the newly allocated bins. Thus, there came into existence two solid waste collection points.

Informality beyond people and places: Who practises it, why and when?

From the case description in the previous section, four main sets of actors are identifiable: (i) *Pradhan* and the RWA (ii) Sushila and her NGO; (iii) state actors, that is, the Water Authority and the Municipality; and (iv) the JC residents. Each of these actors are related through the cases of water supply and waste management in JC.

The JC RWA is neither registered nor does it have a charter of association. Thus, the RWA could be labelled as an informal group without formal legitimacy or accountability. Still, the Water Authority negotiated with the RWA and the community accept the *Pradhan* as their representative despite some discords. For example, Ahmad, a resident who has his issues with the *Pradhan*, explains: "The *Pradhan* does what he wants and does not listen to us. But what to do, we have to tolerate him." Despite his dislike, Ahmad still accepts the *Pradhan* as the legitimate community leader. The *Pradhan* defends his legitimacy through the election process:

> 'Our RWA is not like others. We have regular elections and a policeman is called to make sure that the elections are fair. No one can doubt the process. We work for the community and anyone can contact us at any point as we live here itself.'

While the elections to the unregistered JC RWA are unchartered, they follow the formal election practice. First, they imitate the five-year formal electoral cycle to the local councils and to the state and national parliaments, a practice which Homi Bhabha (1984) might call 'mimicry'. Second, the presence of the police officer renders the elections legitimate to the residents. This is a formalization of the political identity of the informal *Pradhan* and the RWA. This is further reinforced by the display boards at the entrance of JC with contact details of all RWA members. In a different context, discussing the (illegal) access to the composite resource of local ponds, Cornea, Zimmer and Véron (2016) discusses the relational mechanism of political identity. They illustrate how "A mechanism of control that is generally reserved for the state is mimicked and enacted by a private actor in his attempt to use capital disincentives to control access" (Cornea, Zimmer and Véron 2016, 405–6). Such practices are further discussed by Varley (2002) where she shows how, for land transactions, people often mimic the legal framework, thereby making these more legitimate if not legal.

The perception of legitimacy by the Water Authority, in turn, is linked with acceptance from the JC residents. Thus, the apparently informal RWA is able to render itself legitimate in a field with a doxa of formal practices, illustrating the amorphous nature of what is termed as formal and/or informal. When the water supply system in JC stalled after the departure of the appointed technician, the RWA started negotiations with the Water Authority. Despite its ostensibly informal nature, the RWA was seen by the Water Authority as a viable alternative water supply system operator. Being an elected representative (as seen by the community), the *Pradhan* has a highly valued cultural capital. This allowed him to negotiate with the Water Authority and eventually it appeared legitimate that he would possess the keys and operate the municipally owned pumps. As the *Pradhan* recalls:

> 'There was no water and something needed to be done. I am the *Pradhan* whom people elected to act on their behalf. I had to fight on behalf of the people. Not having water even for a day is difficult, so we negotiated with them [Water Authority]. When the technician refused, I asked the authorities to give the keys to me, and I told them that my men and I could operate it. They saw the logic of this and accepted the proposal. Now I operate the pumps without any payment.'

It can be seen here that the *Pradhan* presents himself as the community's sole and legitimate representative and he showcases his interventions in terms of voluntary work and engagement for the larger communal good. Residents, on the other hand, resorted to their collective body for addressing the issue when they suffered from deficient water supply. Ramu, a local inhabitant, explains:

> 'When there is no water, which is the basis of our life, then dissent [between the residents] disappear. When so many people live together, of course, there will be issues among them. But during crisis, we had to stand together and support the

Pradhan. Everything said and done, he at least restored the water supply in a situation when no one listens to us anyways.'

Ramu pointed to individual residents' powerlessness; they need someone like the *Pradhan* to represent them in front of the authorities, due to the lack of cultural capital accrued individually.

The handover of the water pumps' operation in JC has not been registered with the state. It represents an informally negotiated deal between the Water Authority and the RWA. The operation of the pumps by the *Pradhan* represents an informal practice, i.e., the water supply system has become informalized without any actor specifically aiming for it. Informality in this case goes beyond the understanding of it as a hegemonic governance tool; rather its legitimacy is accrued by various factors, including that of the doxa of the field.

The *Pradhan*, being the point of contact between the community and the Water Authority, elevated himself as the most important figure in the informally elected RWA. As the RWA is now responsible for reporting the water supply system's faults, the *Pradhan* uses this social capital to gain community allegiance. However, he acts selectively to report the supply system faults, based on the actor who is affected. In the above-cited example of Ahmad, the *Pradhan* has never reported the issue to the Water Authority, although the water leakage next to his house leads to damp walls, structural damage to the house and other maintenance issues. The majority of people who are not politically active, find it more convenient to follow the *Pradhan*'s instructions than opposing him. This leads to a situation where the *Pradhan* can mobilize the community on various occasions. When his power is contested (e.g., by the NGO's initiative to clear the *dhalaon* without his consent or involvement), the *Pradhan* stages a conflict.

The *Pradhan's* legitimization of his position vis-à-vis and due to the Water Authority, and in turn the usage of this legitimacy to demand community allegiance, presents a specific case of citizenship formation. It is not the habitus of the individual community members, but that of their collective tolerance of and taming by the *Pradhan* that gave the JC community access to water. The helplessness presented by Ramu and the community backing portrayed by the *Pradhan* not only presents the complexity of urban resource access but also the varied forms of citizenship claims (both collective and individual) made with or without regard to the state.

Apart from the RWA's role in governing the conduct of the residents, there are certain customs that developed over time in the community. According to our observations, only a few residents still dump their garbage in the *nullah*. It has become customary not to throw garbage in the *nullah* or to portray this practice as 'bad' due to its harmful consequences for the whole community. Interestingly, the residents portray this practice as 'uncivil' rather than as physically harmful for the settlement; e.g., due to flooding. Garbage dumping in the *nullah* thus becomes a sign of incivility, which degrades the residents' social capital rather than residents' health and physical conditions. This position of earlier residents towards new settlers within JC is very similar to Ghertner's (2015) illustration of the attitudes of the middle-class and of the judiciary towards slums. The habitus of the urban middle class in Delhi is very different to that of the JC residents, yet the power relationship manifests in similar manner when analysed over different fields, illustrating the perception of a certain practice leading to the creation of certain doxa that further controls this practice. The residents adhere to this custom, at least insofar as showing outrage at the practice of garbage dumping in the *nullah* and blaming the 'other', in order to safeguard their own social capital. This makes the residents value the formal practice of garbage dumping in the *dhalaon,* even though it is not regularly cleaned.

As described above, the NGO wanted to clear the *dhalaon* site and transform the place into a community space. To this end, the municipality was mobilized to help clean the *dhalaon* and to install garbage bins in an alternative location. The registered NGO and the municipality are primarily formal actors, and the *dhalaon* is a government property. Depositing garbage in, and the organized collection from, the government-owned *dhalaon* can thus be seen as a formal practice. The *dhalaon's* conversion into a community space initiated by the NGO and municipal actors, however, can be interpreted as an intended shift from formal practice (dumping and collecting garbage) to an informal practice (extra-statal community space). The involvement by the NGO legitimized this project of informal land grabbing for the municipality. Schindler (2016) showed a similar pattern when he illustrated how the informal street hawkers and waste pickers were legitimized by interventions from middle-class organizations (in their own interest); such patterns call for a relational approach to the complex overlaps between various formal and informal practices.

Nonetheless, the NGO represented this project as an attempt to improve the physical condition of the neighbourhood, as Sushila, the NGO head, states:

> 'It is terrible to see the huge garbage pile in front of the slum. We are into education, and if we can reclaim the *dhalaon,* then it will benefit everyone. The children will have a classroom; as well the community will have an open space.'

Due to her highly valued habitus, Sushila convinced the municipal officials of her plans. However, the *Pradhan* vehemently opposed this project:

> 'She [Sushila] is provoking residents here. She has a big house in Malviya Nagar. She just wants to stage shows so that she can get money for her NGO. She was planning to illegally acquire our land. As she lives in a concrete house and speaks English, she sounds legitimate to the municipal officials.'

The *Pradhan*'s observations of Sushila's house in Malviya Nagar, an adjacent planned settlement, and her speaking English are indicative of her habitus. His comment about 'provoking residents' show that he feared that the NGO project could undermine his own cultural capital. Furthermore, the *Pradhan's* claim of illegal land grabbing was not only ignored by the municipality; it helped the NGO clean the *dhalaon* and provided bins for the project. The *Pradhan* who was perceived as legitimate by the state agencies to oversee the water supply was discarded when it came to the cleaning of the *dhalaon*. Contrarily, the *Pradhan* successfully mobilized the community to continue their practice of using the *dhalaon,* despite the NGO's efforts to promote use of the alternative bins.

To sum up, we see three main patterns emerging here: (i) subjugated by the *Pradhan,* the community was not able to question his authority in negotiating with state actors on their behalf, for services they legitimately accrued as a citizen group; (ii) even though in an ostensibly informal position, the *Pradhan* was able to legitimately garner access to the formal water supply system from the state; (iii) contrarily, the same *Pradhan* failed to stop the illegal land-grabbing by the NGO, which was aided by state actors. The habitus of the actors involved did not change in the cases discussed above, but the field in which they operate did. Informality, therefore, is to be read as a manifestation of the doxa governing certain fields and not completely dependent on the habitus of specific actors.

Conclusion

Through the water supply system and solid waste management cases in JC and its surroundings, I have discussed the shifting production of informality. These intertwined cases show, firstly, how theorizing informality in terms of practices disrupts the need to associate informality with specific groups of people or places. This opens the analytical possibility to understand how the same actors practice formality and informality in

different fields. Secondly, this approach allows us to reveal a more nuanced understanding of urban informality that is different from both a state-centric view of informality as a governance tool and a poverty-centric view of informality as being a way of life in which actors are trapped. It questions the politics of defining informality, as well, the multiple positionalities that frame it, arguing for a situated, plural and provincialized mode of enquiry.

If urban theory needs to move towards the so-called global South, as Robinson (2006), Connell (2011), Watson (2014) to name a few, have argued, then urban enquiry needs to start by overcoming fixed categories based on the pre-existing ideologies of the developmentalist state that ignore the plurality of actors. Pointing to the binary drawn between western and other cities, Robinson illustrates that the former become "sites for the production of urban theory" and the latter "objects for developmentalist intervention"(Robinson 2006, 2).

This paper took an entry point in the everyday lives of JC via what Schindler (2017, 60) calls "city-specific metabolic configurations which impact the everyday lives of their residents in particular ways". If non-western cities are to become sites for the production of urban theory, then these cities need to be engaged with, to challenge our existing categories developed elsewhere; formal-informal being one such epistemological categorization.

Urban informality is ever-present in the ways cities operate and urbanization processes unfold in many of the agglomerations around the world. These informal practices, as shown in this paper, are collectively produced by multiple actors in everyday life and through their everyday politics of access to social, cultural and economic capital. Further research on urban informality through this framing and via various other entry points

will surely show more complex interactions between formal and informal practices, as well as the complexity of what is to be perceived as formal or informal.

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[i] The water supply system in Delhi is under the purview of the Delhi Jal Board, which was constituted in 1998, incorporating the previous Delhi Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Undertaking. As the cases discussed in this paper stretch over a period of both before and after 1998, the term 'Water Authority' is used.

[ii] "It is this world of economic activities outside the organised labour force which is the subject of detailed examination here." (Hart 1973, 68).