

**[Book Review] The durable slum : Dharavi and the right to stay put in globalizing Mumbai, by Liza Weinstein**

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carriats. By inclusively examining the factors of employment relations, the social reproduction of migrant labor, and worker resistance, Swider provides valuable insights into how the dynamics and mechanisms of informal work are shaped by the interactions of the state, capital, and labor. The book makes fascinating and illuminating reading for those interested in labor politics, migration, or China studies.

My only substantial criticism is that Swider simplifies the social reproduction of labor as a spatial arrangement and equates the spatial separation of family members with broken families or the loss of family connections. Compared to her rich, detailed data concerning the migrants' employment, the data on their social reproduction of labor are quite thin. By adopting a few extreme cases to depict migrant workers as isolated laborers who are cut off from family connections, Swider may distort the whole picture. This danger is especially clear as a rich literature has documented the capacity of migrant workers for challenging the spatial constraints imposed either by immigration policies or by employers and for maintaining their family or romantic relations from a distance (e.g., Cara Wallis, *Technomobility in China: Young Migrant Women and Mobile Phones* [New York University Press, 2013] and Joanna Dreby, *Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and Their Children* [University of California Press, 2010]). Although a full discussion of family interactions and dynamics is beyond the book's main theme, it may be overly simplistic to view the migrant workers' relationships with their families, hometowns, and the countryside primarily in terms of geographic co-presence. Such a perspective fails to reflect the migrants' agency and resistance in their ongoing social production of labor.

*The Durable Slum: Dharavi and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai.* By Liza Weinstein. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. Pp. xvi+216. \$25.00 (paper).

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*The Durable Slum* reads like a fascinating story, the story of a “sparsely populated fishing village” that developed into the “largest slum in Asia”—as it is frequently referred to (p. 52)—the compelling narrative of a megaslum that has resisted grand plans for its redevelopment. But it is much more than that.

Liza Weinstein rightly and skillfully intertwines the development of Dharavi with the economic and political transformations occurring on a global, national, and local scale and the interactions between them (particularly in chaps. 1–3). She propounds “a political economy of the megaslum, rooted in both history and ethnography” (p. 21), based on her in-depth fieldwork in Mumbai in 2005–6, and completed with archival research, follow-up visits, and updates. The catchword “megaslum”—which appears in Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* (Verso, 2006), forms part of the title of another book on Dharavi—

*Dharavi: From Mega-Slum to Urban Paradigm* (by Marie-Caroline Saglio-Yatzimirsky [Routledge, 2013])—which describes a specific urban form “with huge gatherings of the poor, that presents a new articulation of social ties in the city, and the fact that it organises itself around original models of interaction and production” (Saglio-Yatzimirsky 2013, p. 11). Weinstein uses this concept to characterize the settlement’s integration into larger networks of powers and institutions, referring to a political category rather than to size and density. From the outset, the history of this “city-within-a-city” demonstrates how the informal became normal and reveals the economic and political centrality of settlements like Dharavi in the Indian city’s functioning, exposing the myth of their seeming marginality (chap. 1).

The book also has a theoretical reach. It seeks to provide an analytical frame to explain the durability of slums like Dharavi and of other settlements (including smaller ones) in cities throughout the world. Although the author acknowledges the impact of macrolevel forces of neoliberal globalization and the shift toward entrepreneurial strategies of urban governance, she contends that “[David] Harvey’s concept of [capital] accumulation by dispossession may not be the most appropriate frame for understanding the shifting place of slums in Mumbai’s global economy” (p. 114). She emphasizes instead “the political and institutional entrenchment of slums in the city” (p. 114) and the fixed structures, local institutions, embedded political networks, autonomous agents, and popular mobilizations that produce space-specific configurations that mediate the forces of global capital and strive to maintain their places in the city. This central argument, well documented and presented with the required nuances, is convincingly developed throughout the book. Weinstein prefers the framing of the “right to stay put” (with reference to Chester Hartman’s work, e.g., “The Right to Stay Put,” in *Land Reform, American Style*, edited by C. Geisler and F. Popper [Rowman & Allanheld, 1984]) that acknowledges the residents’ and activists’ focus on resisting displacement (p. 19) to Henri Lefebvre’s revolutionary framing of the right to the city.

Weinstein highlights, through the history of state interventions in Dharavi and in other slum settlements in Bombay/Mumbai, including the analysis of policy failures, the enduring factors that have contributed to the entrenchment of slums in the fabric of the city, namely, bureaucratic weakness, diffuse power arrangements, and institutional fragmentations (chaps. 2, 4). Even after the shift, from the 1990s, to new profit-oriented schemes for slum redevelopment (whose context and emergence are aptly described in chap. 3), these factors continued to undermine the planners’ efforts to transform Dharavi and to put the highly valuable land it occupies to more profitable use (chap. 4). The mobilization of slum residents and housing rights activists, who employed various strategies ranging from confrontations to negotiations, using the streets, the courtrooms, and electoral politics, further challenged the implementation of the redevelopment project (chap. 5).

Weinstein avoids the trap of romanticizing the struggle over the right to stay put. She considers the empowering as well as the detrimental, including exploitative consequences of durability, best captured by a condition of “pre-

carious stability, . . . in which the threats of dispossession remain” (p. 23). Indeed, the “right to stay,” caricatured as the “little people rights” by planner Geeta Dewan Verma (*Slumming India: A Chronicle of Slums and Their Saviours* [Penguin, 2002]), is not a “great privilege” (Verma 2002, pp. 65–67). Verma denounced it as an approach that obliterates the distinction between the problem and the solution.

I have few remarks about this otherwise highly commendable narrative of the durable slum. The impact of communal violence (especially of the communal riots in December 1992 and January 1993) on the social fabric of Dharavi and its further consequences for social mobilization needed to be developed. The author also overlooked the role of the media, including the international media, in the dynamics of resistance to the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP)—what Saglio-Yatzimirsky (2013, p. 306) calls, “The *Slumdog Millionaire* effect,” with reference to the 2008 Hollywood movie that helped propel Dharavi as a “slum super star” on the international scene. And though the book admittedly had to put a provisional end to a story that “has not reached a conclusion” (p. xiv), the author’s detailed account of the DRP stops in late 2009, when the state government put the redevelopment project on hold (p. 168). Weinstein then condenses the next four years into four lines by simply mentioning that “although various proposals have been floated in the four years since, including the government of Maharashtra’s seemingly viable plan to undertake the redevelopment of Sector 5 itself, continuing opposition and waning interests have kept these proposals from moving forward” (p. 168), which leaves the reader feeling somewhat frustrated.

Despite these reservations, *The Durable Slum* remains a remarkable and stimulating study. Its significance reaches far beyond the case of Dharavi, as it tackles many essential questions in relation to slums and policy interventions in slums that are relevant for globalizing cities in India and around the world. The theoretical argument of the book invites us to undertake other case studies of slums, including of smaller settlements, in order to further explore the dialectics of change and stability, displacement and entrenchment, in the context of global urban development.

*Family Secrets/Secretos de Familia: Stories of Incest and Sexual Violence in Mexico.* By Gloria González-López. New York: New York University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv+321. \$28.00 (paper).

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In *Family Secrets/Secretos de Familia: Stories of Incest and Sexual Violence in Mexico*, Gloria González-López courageously examines the agonizing details of dozens of incest and sexual violence accounts in Mexico. With