



# Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics

Arjun Appadurai

Arjun Appadurai is Samuel N Harper Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, where he is also Director of the Globalization Project. His publications include *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, 1996. This paper is also being published in *Public Culture* Vol 14, No 1 (2002).

Contact: e-mail:  
a-appadurai@chicago.edu

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**SUMMARY:** This paper describes the work of an alliance formed by three civic organizations in Mumbai to address poverty – the NGO SPARC, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan, a cooperative representing women's savings groups. It highlights key features of their work which include: putting the knowledge and capacity of the poor and the savings groups that they form at the core of all their work (with NGOs in a supporting role); keeping politically neutral and negotiating with whoever is in power; driving change through setting precedents (for example, a community-designed and managed toilet, a house design developed collectively by the urban poor that they can build far cheaper than public or private agencies) and using these to negotiate support and changed policies (a strategy that develops new "legal" solutions on the poor's own terms); a horizontal structure as the Alliance is underpinned by, accountable to and serves thousands of small savings groups formed mostly by poor women; community-to-community exchange visits that root innovation and learning in what urban poor groups do; and urban poor groups undertaking surveys and censuses to produce their own data about "slums" (which official policies lack and need) to help build partnerships with official agencies in ways that strengthen and support their own organizations. The paper notes that these are features shared with urban poor federations and alliances in other countries and it describes the international community exchanges and other links between them. These groups are internationalizing themselves, creating networks of globalization from below. Individually and collectively, they seek to demonstrate to governments (local, regional, national) and international agencies that urban poor groups are more capable than they in poverty reduction, and they also provide these agencies with strong community-based partners through which to do so. They are, or can be, instruments of deep democracy, rooted in local context and able to mediate globalizing forces in ways that benefit the poor. In so doing, both within nations and globally, they are seeking to redefine what governance and governability mean.

## I. GLOBALIZATION FROM BELOW

POST-1989, THE WORLD seems marked by the global victory of some version of neoliberalism, backed by the ubiquitous presence of the United States and sustained by the common openness to market processes of régimes otherwise varied in their political, religious and historical traditions. At the same time, more than a decade after the fall of the Soviet order, it is clearer than ever that global inequality has widened, intra-

national warfare has vastly outpaced international warfare (thus leading some observers to suggest the image of a Cold Peace) and various forms of violent ethnicization seem to erode the possibilities of sustainable pluralism. All this in a period that has also witnessed increased flows of financial capital across national boundaries, and innovations in electronic communications and information storage technologies. The paradoxes abound and have led to the proliferation of new theories of civilizational clash and of global gaps between safe and unsafe physical zones and geographical spheres. Fears of cyber-apartheid mix with hopes for new opportunities for inclusion and participation.

In this confusion, now exacerbated by the knowledge that neither the most recent innovations in communications nor the defeat of the Soviet Union have created the conditions for global peace or equity, two great paradigms for enlightenment and equity seem to have become exhausted. One is the Marxist vision, in all its global variants, which promised some sort of politics of class-based internationalism premised on class struggle and the transformation of bourgeois politics by proletarian will. This is an internationalist vision that nevertheless requires the architecture of the nation state as the site of effective struggle against capital and its agents. In this sense, Marxism was, politically speaking, realist. The other grand vision, salient after 1945, was that of modernization and development, with its associated machinery of Western lending, technical expertise and universalist discourses of education and technology transfer, and its target polity of the nationally based electoral democracy. This vision, born in such experiments as the Marshall Plan, has been subjected to intense criticism on numerous scores but the starkest challenge it faces is presented by the fact that today, over half a century after the Bretton Woods accords, more than half of the world's population lives in severe poverty.

In this context, a variety of other visions of emancipation and equity now circulate globally, often at odds with the nationalist imagination. Some are culturalist and religious, some diasporic and non-territorial, some bureaucratic and managerial. Almost all of these recognize that non governmental actors are here to stay and somehow need to be made part of new models of global governance and local democracy.

The alliances and divisions in this new global political economy are not always easy to predict or understand. But among the many varieties of grassroots political movements, at least one broad distinction can be made. On the one hand are groups that have opted for armed, militarized solutions to their problems of inclusion, recognition and participation. On the other are those that have opted for a politics of partnership-partnership, that is, between traditionally opposed groups such as states, corporations and workers. The alliance of housing activists whose story occupies the bulk of this essay belongs to the latter group and is part of the emergent process through which the physics of globalization is being creatively redeployed.

## II. THE STORY

WHAT FOLLOWS IS a preliminary analysis of an urban activist movement with global links. The setting is the city of Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra, in western India. The movement consists of three partners and its history as an alliance goes back to 1987. The three partners have different histories. The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource

Taylor and Peter van der Veer. In a separate vein, I owe thanks to various members and supporters of the Alliance in India and the Shack/Slum Dwellers International network for their critical support and encouragement of the research process and in the direction of the first draft: Arputham Jockin, Srilatha Bailiwala, Somsook Boonyabancha, William Cobbett, Celine D'Cruz, Ellen Schaengold, Marjolijn Wilmink and Patrick Wakely, in addition to Joel Bolnick, Sundar Burra, Diana Mitlin, Ruth McLeod and Sheela Patel, whose own draft papers have helped me to get a more balanced picture of the Alliance's activities.

Centres, or SPARC, is an NGO formed by social work professionals in 1984 to work with problems of urban poverty in Mumbai. NSDF, the National Slum Dwellers Federation, is a powerful grassroots organization established in 1974 and is a CBO, or community-based organization, that also has its historical base in Mumbai. Finally, Mahila Milan is an organization of poor women, set up in 1986, with its base in Mumbai and a network throughout India, focused on women's issues in relation to urban poverty and concerned especially with local and self-organized savings schemes among the very poor. All three organizations, which refer to themselves collectively as the Alliance, are united in their concern with gaining secure tenure of land, adequate and durable housing and access to elements of urban infrastructure, notably to electricity, transport, sanitation and allied services. The Alliance also has strong links to Mumbai's pavement dwellers and to its street children, whom it has organized into an organization called Sadak Chaap (Street Imprint), which has its own social and political agenda. Of the six or seven non-state organizations working directly with the urban poor in Mumbai, the Alliance has by far the largest constituency, the highest visibility in the eyes of the state and the most extensive networks in India and elsewhere in the world.

This paper is an effort to understand how this came to be, by looking at the horizon of politics created by the Alliance and by seeing how it has articulated new relations with urban governmentality. It is part of a larger ongoing study of how grassroots movements are finding new ways to combine local activism with horizontal, global networking. It is also, methodologically speaking, a partial effort to show how the anthropological study of globalization can move from an ethnography of locations to one of circulations. In my conclusion, I use the story of this particular network to discuss why it is useful to speak of "deep democracy" as a concept of wider potential use in the study of globalization.

### III. THEORETICAL POINTS OF ENTRY

THREE THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS underlie this presentation of the story of the Alliance in Mumbai.

First, I assume, on the basis of my own previous work<sup>(1)</sup> and that of several others from a variety of disciplinary perspectives,<sup>(2)</sup> that globalization is producing new geographies of governmentality. Specifically, we are witnessing new forms of globally organized power and expertise within the "skin" or "casing" of existing nation states.<sup>(3)</sup> One expression of these new geographies can be seen in the relationship of "cities and citizenship",<sup>(4)</sup> in which wealthier "world cities" increasingly operate like city states in a networked global economy, increasingly independent of regional and national mediation, and where poorer cities – and the poorer populations within them – seek new ways of claiming space and voice. Many large cities, such as Mumbai, display the contradictions between these ideal types and combine high concentrations of wealth (tied to the growth of producer services) and even higher concentrations of poverty and disenfranchisement. Movements among the urban poor, such as the one I document here, mobilize and mediate these contradictions. They represent efforts to reconstitute citizenship in cities. Such efforts take the form, in part, of what I refer to as "deep democracy".

Second, I assume that the nation state system is undergoing a profound and transformative crisis. Avoiding here the sterile terms of the debate

1. Appadurai, Arjun (1996), *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis; also Appadurai, Arjun (2000), "Grassroots globalization and the research imagination", *Public Culture* 12, pages 1-19; and Appadurai, Arjun (2001), "Spectral housing and urban cleansing: notes on millennial Mumbai", *Public Culture* 12, pages 627-651.

2. Castells, Manuel (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell, Cambridge, Massachusetts; also Held, David (1995), *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California; Giddens, Anthony (2000), *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives*, Routledge, New York; and Rosenau, James N (1997), *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

3. Sassen, Saskia (2000), "Spatialities and temporalities of the global: elements for a theorization", *Public Culture* 12, pages 215-232.

4. Appadurai, Arjun and James Holston (1999), "Introduction: cities and citizenship" in Holston, James (editor), *Cities and Citizenship*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina.

about whether or not the nation state is ending (a debate to which I myself earlier contributed), I nevertheless wish to affirm resolutely that the changes in the system are deep, if not graspable as yet, in a simple theory. I suggest that we see the current crisis as one of redundancy rather than, for example, as one of legitimization.<sup>(5)</sup> By using the term “redundancy”, I mean to connect several processes that others have identified with different states and regions and in different dimensions of governance. Thus, in many parts of the world, there has been undoubted growth in a “privatization” of the state in various forms, sometimes produced by the appropriation of the means of violence by non-state groups. In other cases, we can see the growing power in some national economies of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, sometimes indexed by the voluntary outsourcing of state functions as part of the neoliberal strategies that have become popular worldwide since 1989. In yet other cases, activist NGOs and citizens’ movements have appropriated significant parts of the means of governance.

Third, I assume that we are witnessing a notable transformation in the nature of global governance in the explosive growth of non-government organizations of all scales and varieties in the period since 1945, a growth fueled by the linked development of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutional order and, especially, the global circulation and legitimization of the discourses and politics of “human rights”. Together, these developments have provided a powerful impetus to democratic claims by non-state actors throughout the world. There is some reason to worry about whether the current framework of human rights is serving mainly as the legal and normative conscience B or the legal/bureaucratic lubricant B of a neo-liberal, marketized political order. But there is no doubt that the global spread of the discourse of human rights has provided a huge boost to local democratic formations. In addition, the combination of this global efflorescence of non-governmental politics with the multiple technological revolutions of the last 50 years has provided much energy to what has been called “cross-border activism” through “transnational advocacy networks”.<sup>(6)</sup> These networks provide new horizontal modes for articulating the deep democratic politics of the locality, creating hitherto unpredicted groupings: examples may be “issue-based” – focused on the environment, child labour or AIDS – or “identity-based” – feminist, indigenous, gay, diasporic. The Mumbai-based movement discussed here is also a site of such cross-border activism.

Together, these three points of entry allow me to describe the Mumbai Alliance of urban activists as part of an emergent political horizon, global in its scope, that presents a post-Marxist and post-developmental vision of how the global and the local can become reciprocal instruments in the deepening of democracy.

#### IV. SETTING: MUMBAI IN THE 1990s

I HAVE RECENTLY completed a lengthy examination of the transformation of Mumbai’s cultural economy since the 1970s, with an emphasis on the brutal ethnic violence of December 1992-January 1993.<sup>(7)</sup> That essay contains a relatively detailed analysis of the relationships between the politics of right-wing Hindu nationalism – seen mostly in the activities of India’s major urban xenophobic party, the Shiva Sena – the political economy of de-industrialization and the spectral<sup>(8)</sup> politics of housing in

5. Habermas, Jürgen (1975), *Legitimation Crisis*, translated by Thomas McCarthy, Beacon, Boston.

6. Keck, Margaret E and Kathryn Sikkink (1998), *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.

7. See reference 1, Appadurai (2001).

8. The term “spectral” is intended to capture the ghostly way in which the materialities of housing for the poor meet their aspirations and fantasies about the possibilities for such housing.

Mumbai. I analyze the steady expansion of anti-Muslim politics by the Shiva Sena, the radical inequality in access to living space in the city and the transformation of its industrial economy into a service economy. I argue that Mumbai became a perfect site for the violent rewriting of national geography as urban geography through a paroxysmal effort to eliminate Muslims from its public sphere and its commercial world.

I will not retell that story here but I will review some major facts about Mumbai in the 1990s that are not widely known. Mumbai is the largest city in a country, India, whose population has just crossed the one billion mark (one-sixth of the world's population). The city's population is at least 12 million (more, if we include the growing edges of the city and the population of the twin city, New Mumbai, that has been built across Thane Creek). This means a population totalling 1.2 per cent of one-sixth of the world's population. Not a minor case, in itself.

Here follow some facts about housing in Mumbai on which there is a general consensus. About 40 per cent of the population (about 6 million persons) live in slums or other degraded forms of housing (the term "slum" is a formally defined settlement category in India and its use here follows that designation). Another 5-10 per cent are pavement dwellers. Yet, according to one recent estimate, slum dwellers occupy only 8 per cent of the city's land, which totals about 43,000 hectares. The rest of the city's land is either industrial, middle- and high-income housing or vacant land in the control of the city, the state (regional and federal) or private owners. The bottom line is 5-6 million poor people living in sub-standard conditions in 8 per cent of the land area of a city smaller than the two New York City boroughs of Manhattan and Queens. This huge and constricted population of insecurely or poorly housed people has negligible access to essential services, such as running water, electricity and ration cards for food staples.

Equally important, this population – which we may call "citizens without a city" – are a vital part of the urban workforce. Some of them occupy the respectable low end of white-collar organizations and others the menial low end of industrial and commercial concerns. But many are engaged in temporary, physically dangerous and socially degrading forms of work. This latter group, which may well comprise 1-2 million people in Mumbai, are best described, in the striking phrase of Sandeep Pendse,<sup>9</sup> as Mumbai's "toilers" rather than as its proletariat, working-class or labouring classes – all designations that suggest more stable forms of employment and organization. These toilers, the poorest of the poor in the city of Mumbai, work in menial occupations, almost always on a daily or piecework basis. They are cart pullers, rag pickers, scullions, sex workers, car cleaners, mechanics' assistants, petty vendors, small-time criminals and temporary workers in petty industrial jobs requiring dangerous physical work, such as ditch digging, metal-hammering, truck-loading and the like. They often sleep in (or on) their places of work, insofar as their work is not wholly transient in character. While men form the core of this labour pool, women and children work wherever possible, frequently in ways that exploit their sexual vulnerability. To take just one example, Mumbai's gigantic restaurant and food service economy is almost completely dependent on a vast army of child labour.

Housing is at the heart of the lives of this army of toilers. Their everyday life is dominated by ever present forms of risk. Their temporary shacks may be demolished. Their slumlords may push them out through force or extortion. The torrential monsoons may destroy their fragile shel-

9. Pendse, Sandeep (1995), "Toil, sweat and the city" in Patel, Sujata and Alice Thorner (editors), *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay.

ters and their few personal possessions. Their lack of sanitary facilities increases their need for doctors to whom they have poor access. And their inability to document their claims to housing may snowball into a general invisibility in urban life, making it impossible for them to claim any rights to such things as rationed foods, municipal health and education facilities, police protection and voting rights. In a city where ration cards, electricity bills and rent receipts guarantee other rights to the benefits of citizenship, the inability to secure claims to proper housing and other political handicaps reinforce one another. Housing – and its lack – are the stage for the most public drama of disenfranchisement in Mumbai. In fact, it can be argued that housing is the single most critical site of this city's politics of citizenship.

This is the context within which the activists I am working with are making their interventions, mobilizing the poor and generating new forms of politics. The next three sections of this essay are about various dimensions of this politics: of its vision, its vocabularies and its practices.

## V. THE POLITICS OF PATIENCE

IN THIS SECTION, I give a sketch of the evolving vision of the Alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation as it functions within the complex politics of space and housing in Mumbai. Here, a number of broad features of the Alliance are important.

First, given the diverse social origins of the three groups that are involved in the Alliance, their politics awards a central place to negotiation and consensus-building. SPARC is led by professionals with an Anglophone background, connections to state and corporate élites in Mumbai and beyond, and strong ties to global funding sources and networking opportunities. However, SPARC was born in 1984 in the specific context of work undertaken by its founders – principally a group of women trained in social work at the Tata Institute for the Social Sciences – among poor women in the neighbourhood of Nagpada. This area has a diverse ethnic population and is located between the wealthiest parts of south Mumbai and the increasingly difficult slum areas of central and north Mumbai. Notable among SPARC's constituencies was a group of predominantly Muslim ex-sex trade workers from central Mumbai, who later became the cadre of another partner in the Alliance, Mahila Milan. The link between the two organizations dates from Mahila Milan's founding around 1986, which received support from SPARC.

The link with the NSDF, an older and broader-based slum dwellers' organization, was also made in the late 1980s. The leadership of the three organizations cuts across the lines between Hindus, Muslims and Christians and is explicitly secularist in outlook. In a general way, SPARC contributed technical knowledge and élite connections to state authorities and the private sector. NSDF, through its leader, Arputham Jockin (who himself has a background in the slums), and his activist colleagues, brought a radical brand of grassroots political organization in the form of the "federation" model, to be discussed later in this essay. Mahila Milan brought the strength of poor women who had learned the hard way how to deal with the police, municipal authorities, slumlords and real-estate developers on the streets of central Mumbai but had not previously had any real incentive to organize politically.

These three partners still have distinct styles, strategies and functional

characteristics. But they are committed to a partnership based on a shared ideology of risk, trust, negotiation and learning among their key participants. They have also agreed upon a radical approach to the politicization of the urban poor that is fundamentally populist and anti-expert in strategy and flavour. The Alliance has evolved a style of pro-poor activism that consciously departs from earlier models of social work, welfare and community organization (an approach akin to that pioneered by Saul Alinsky in the United States). Instead of relying on the model of an outside organizer who teaches local communities how to hold the state to its normative obligations to the poor, the Alliance is committed to methods of organization, mobilization, teaching and learning that build on what the poor themselves know and understand. The first principle of this approach is that no one knows more about how to survive poverty than the poor themselves.

A crucial and controversial feature of this approach is its vision of politics without parties. The strategy of the Alliance is that it will not deliver the poor as a vote bank to any political party or candidate. This is a tricky business in Mumbai, where most grassroots organizations, notably unions, have a long history of direct affiliation with major political parties. Moreover, in Mumbai, the Shiva Sena, with its violent, street-level control of urban politics, does not easily tolerate neutrality. The Alliance deals with these difficulties by working with whomever is in power at the federal and state level, within the municipality of Mumbai or even at the local level of particular wards (municipal sub-units). Thus, the Alliance has earned hostility from other activist groups in Mumbai for its willingness to work with the Shiva Sena, where this is deemed necessary. But it is resolute about making the Shiva Sena work for its ends and not vice-versa. Indeed, because it has consistently maintained an image of non-affiliation with all political parties, the Alliance enjoys the double advantage of appearing non-political while retaining access to the potential political power of the poorer half of Mumbai's population.

Instead of finding safety in affiliation with any single party or coalition in the state government of Maharashtra or the municipal corporation of Mumbai, the Alliance has developed a complex political affiliation with the various levels of state bureaucracy. This group includes civil servants who conduct policy at the highest levels in the state of Maharashtra and who run the major bodies responsible for housing loans, slum rehabilitation, real estate regulation and the like. The members of the Alliance have also developed links with quasi-autonomous arms of the federal government, such as the railways, the Port Authority and the Bombay Electric Supply and Transport Corporation, and to the municipal authorities who control critical elements of the infrastructure, such as the regulations governing illegal structures, the water supply and sanitation. Finally, the Alliance works to maintain a cordial relationship with the Mumbai police – and, at least, a hands-off relationship with the underworld, which is deeply involved in housing finance, slum landlordism and extortion, as well as in the demolition and rebuilding of temporary structures.

From this perspective, the politics of the Alliance is a politics of accommodation, negotiation and long-term pressure rather than of confrontation or threats of political reprisal. This realpolitik makes good sense in a city like Mumbai, where the supply of scarce urban infrastructure – housing and all its associated entitlements – is entangled in an immensely complicated web of slum rehabilitation projects, financing procedures, legislative precedents and administrative codes which are interpreted

differently, enforced unevenly and whose actual delivery is almost always attended by an element of corruption.

This pragmatic approach is grounded in a complex political vision about means, ends and styles that is not entirely utilitarian or functional. It is based on a series of ideas about the transformation of the conditions of poverty by the poor in the long run. In this sense, the figure of a political horizon<sup>(10)</sup> is meant to point to a logic of patience, of cumulative victories and of long term asset-building that is wired into every aspect of the activities of the Alliance. The Alliance maintains that the mobilization of the knowledge of the poor into methods driven by the poor and for the poor is a slow and risk-laden process; this premise informs the group's strong bias against "projects" and "projectization" that underlies almost all official ideas about urban change. Whether it be the World Bank, most Northern donors, the Indian state or other agencies, most institutional sources of funding are strongly biased in favour of the "project" model, in which short-term logics of investment, accounting, reporting and assessment are regarded as vital. The Alliance has steadfastly advocated the importance of slow learning and cumulative change against the temporal logics of the project. Likewise, other strategies and tactics are also geared to long-term capacity-building, the gradual gaining of knowledge and trust, the sifting of more from less reliable partners and so on. This open and long-term temporal horizon is a difficult commitment to retain in the face of the urgency, and even desperation, that characterizes the needs of Mumbai's urban poor. But it is a crucial normative guarantee against the ever-present risk, in all forms of grassroots activism, that the needs of funders will gradually obliterate the needs of the poor themselves.

Patience as a long-term political strategy is especially hard to maintain in view of two major forces. One is the constant barrage of real threats to life and space that frequently assails the urban poor. The most recent such episode is a massive demolition of shacks near the railroad tracks, which has produced an intense struggle for survival and political mobilization in virtually impossible circumstances in the period since April 2000, a crisis still unresolved at the time of writing. In this sense, the strategies of the Alliance, which favour long-term asset-building, run up against the same "tyranny of emergency", in the words of Jérôme Bindé,<sup>(11)</sup> that characterizes the everyday lives of the urban poor.

The other force that makes it hard to maintain patience is the built-in tension within the Alliance surrounding different modes and methods of partnership. Not all members of the Alliance view the state, the market or the donor world in the same way. Thus, every new occasion for funding, every new demand for a report, every new celebration of a possible partnership, every meeting with a railway official or an urban bureaucrat can create new sources of debate and anxiety within the Alliance. In the words of one key Alliance leader, negotiating these differences, which are rooted in deep diversities in class, experience and personal style, is like "riding a tiger". It would be a mistake to view the pragmatic way in which all partnerships are approached by the Alliance as a simple politics of utility. It is a politics of patience, constructed against the tyranny of emergency.

To understand how this broad strategic vision is actually played out as a strategy of urban governmentality, we need to look a little more closely at some critical practices, discursive and organizational, through which the Alliance has consolidated its standing as a pro-poor movement in Mumbai.

10. "Political horizons" are the outer limits of aspiration and inspiration within which concrete plans, strategies and hopes among the poor are nurtured.

11. Bindé, Jérôme (2000), "Toward an ethics of the future", *Public Culture* 12, pages 51-72.



## VI. WORDS AND DEEDS

AS WITH ALL serious movements concerned with consciousness-changing and self-mobilization, there is a conscious effort to inculcate protocols of speech, style and organizational form within the Alliance. The coalition cultivates a highly transparent, non-hierarchical, anti-bureaucratic and anti-technocratic organizational style. A small clerical staff conscientiously serves the needs of the activists, and not vice-versa. Meetings and discussions are often held with everyone sitting on mats on the floor. Food and drink are shared during meetings and most official business (on the phone or face to face) is conducted amidst a tumult of other activities in crowded offices. A constant undercurrent of bawdy humour runs through the members' discussions of problems, partners and their own affairs. Conversation is almost always in Hindi, Marathi or Tamil, or in English interspersed with one of these Indian languages. The leadership is at pains to make its ideas known to its members and to the residents of the actual slum communities who are, in effect, the coalition's rank and file. Almost no internal request for information about the organization, its funding, its planning or related matters is considered out of order. Naturally, there are private conversations, hidden tensions and real differences of personality and strategy at all levels. But these are neither validated nor legitimized in either bureaucratic protocols or organizational charts.

This style of organization and management produces constant tensions among members of the Alliance and various outside bodies – donors, state institutions, regulators – who frequently demand more formal norms of organization, accounting and reporting. To a very considerable extent, the brunt of this stress is borne by SPARC, which has an office in central Mumbai where the formal bureaucratic links to the world of law, accountancy and reporting are largely centralized. This office serves partly to insulate the other two partners, NSDF and Mahila Milan, from the needs of externally mandated book-keeping, fund management, reporting and public legal procedures. The latter two organizations have their own headquarters in the compound of a municipal dispensary in Byculla. This office is in the heart of a slum world where many of the core members of Mahila Milan actually live, an area where Muslims are a major presence and the sex trades, the criminal world and petty commerce are highly visible. The office is always filled with men and women from the communities of slum dwellers that are the backbone of the Alliance. There is constant movement among key personnel between this office, the SPARC office in Khetwadi and the outlying new suburbs where the Alliance is building transit facilities or new houses for its members – Dharavi, Mankhurd and Ghatkopar.

The phones are in constant use, as key members of the Alliance exchange information about breaking crises, plans and news across these various locations in Mumbai – and also across India and the world. Every few hours during an average day, a phone rings in one of these offices, which turns out to be one of the members of the Alliance checking on or tracking down something – a call as likely to come from Phnom Penh or Cape Town as from Mankhurd or Byculla. Because everyday organizational life is filled with meetings with contractors, lawyers, state officials, politicians and between Alliance members, spatial fixity is not valued and the organization functions in and through mobility. In this context, the telephone and e-mail play an increasingly vital role. The key leaders of the Alliance, with a few significant exceptions, either use e-mail or have

access to it through close colleagues. The phones are constantly ringing. Schedules shift at the drop of a hat as travel plans are adjusted to meet emergent opportunities or to address the presence or absence of key members. The general impression is of a fast game of ice hockey, with players constantly tumbling in and out of the most active roles in response to shifting needs and game plans.

Nevertheless, through experiences and discussions that have evolved over 15 years (and, in some cases, more), there is a steady effort to remember and reproduce certain crucial principles and norms that offset organizational fluidity and the pressures of daily crisis. These norms and practices require a much more detailed discussion than can take place in the current context but some impression of them is vital to understanding the political horizon of this form of deep democracy.

Possibly, the central norm is embodied in a common usage among the members of the Alliance and its partners around the world, namely the term "federation" (used as a noun) or "to federate" (used as a verb) or "federated" (used as an adjective). This innocuous term from elementary political science textbooks has a special meaning and magic for the Alliance. At its foundation is the idea of individuals and families self-organizing as members of a political collective to pool resources, organize lobbying, provide mutual risk management devices and, when necessary, confront opponents. Members of the Alliance often judge the effectiveness of other NGOs, in India and elsewhere, by reference to whether or not they have learned the virtues of federating. The National Slum Dwellers Federation is clearly their own model of this norm. As an image of organization, it is significant in two ways. It emphasizes the importance of political union among already pre-existing collectives (thus federating, rather than simply uniting, joining and lobbying) and it mirrors the structure of the Indian national state, which is referred to as the Indian Union but which is, in fact, a federal model whose constituent states retain extensive powers.

In the usage of the Alliance, the idea of federation is a constant reminder that groups (even at the level of families) that have a claim to political agency on their own have chosen to combine their political and material power. The primacy of the principle of federation also serves to remind all members, particularly the trained professionals, that the power of the Alliance lies not in its donors, its technical expertise or its administration but, rather, in the will to federate among poor families and communities. At another level, the image of the federation asserts the primacy of the poor in driving their own politics, however much others may help them to do so. There is a formal property to membership of the federation, and members of the Alliance maintain ongoing debates about recruiting slum families, neighbourhoods and communities in Mumbai (and elsewhere in India) that are not yet part of the federation. For as long as the latter remain outside, they cannot participate in the active politics of savings, housing, resettlement and rehabilitation that are the bread and butter of the Alliance.

"Savings" is another term that takes on a special meaning in Alliance usage. Creating informal savings groups among the poor – a process that the donor establishment has recognized under the term "microcredit" – is a current technique for improving financial citizenship for the urban and rural poor throughout the world. Often building on older models of revolving credit and loan facilities that are managed informally and locally, outside the purview of the state and the banking sector, microcre-

dit has its advocates and visionaries in India and elsewhere. But in the life of the Alliance, savings has a profound ideological, even salvational, status. The architect of the Alliance's philosophy of savings is the NDSF's Jockin, who has used savings as a principal tool for mobilization in India and as an entry point to relationship-building in South Africa, Cambodia and Thailand. He sees daily savings as the bedrock of all federation activities; indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that in Jockin's organizational exhortations wherever he goes, federation equals savings. When Jockin and his colleagues in the Alliance speak about savings, it becomes evident that they are describing something far deeper than a simple mechanism for meeting daily monetary needs and sharing resources among the poor. Seen by them as something akin to a spiritual practice, daily savings – and its spread – are conceived as the key to the local and global success of the federation model.

In this connection, it may be noted that Mahila Milan, the women's group within the Alliance, is almost entirely focused on organizing small savings circles. For in putting savings at the core of the politics of the Alliance, its leaders are making the work of poor women fundamental to what can be achieved in every other area. It is a simple formula: without poor women joining together, there can be no savings; without savings, there can be no federating; without federating, there is no way for the poor themselves to enact change in the arrangements that disempower them. What is important to recognize here is that when Alliance leaders speak about a way of life organized around the practice of saving – in Jockin's words, it is like "breathing" – they are upholding saving as a moral discipline. The practice builds a certain kind of political fortitude and commitment to the collective good and creates persons who can manage their affairs in many other ways as well. Daily savings, which do not generate large resources quickly, can therefore form the moral core of a politics of patience.

A final key term that recurs in the writing and speech of the leaders of the Alliance is "precedent-setting", the ramifications of which strategic locution I am still exploring. What I have learned so far is that underlying the bland, quasi-legal tone is a more radical idea, whereby the poor need to claim, refine and define certain ways of doing things in spaces they already control, and then use these practices to show donors, city officials and other activists that their "precedents" are good ones, and encourage such actors to invest further in them. This is a politics of show-and tell but it is also a philosophy of "do first, talk later". The subversive feature of this principle is that it provides a linguistic device for negotiating between the legalities of urban government and the "illegal" arrangements to which the poor almost always have to resort – whether the illegality in question pertains to structures, living strategies or access to water, electricity or anything else that has been successfully siphoned out of the material resources of the city.

Precedent-setting moves practices such as these, along with new techniques for accessing food, health services, police protection and work opportunities, into a zone of quasi-legal negotiation. By invoking the concept of precedent as enshrined in English common law, the linguistic device shifts the burden for municipal officials and other experts away from a dubious whitewashing of illegal activities to a building on "legitimate" precedents. The linguistic strategy of precedent-setting thus turns the survival tactics and experiments of the poor into sites for policy innovations by the state, the city, donor agencies and other activist organiza-

tions. It is a strategy that moves the poor into the horizon of legality on their own terms. Most importantly, it invites risk-taking activities by bureaucrats within a discourse of legality, allowing the boundaries of the status quo to be pushed and stretched – it creates a border zone of trial and error, a sort of research and development space within which poor communities, activists and bureaucrats can explore new designs for partnership.

But the world is not changed through language alone. These key words (and many other linguistic strategies not discussed here) can be positioned as the nervous system of a whole body of broader technical, institutional and representational practices that have become signatures of the Alliance's politics. Here, I will briefly discuss three vital organizational strategies that illustrate the ways in which technical practices are harnessed to the Alliance's political horizon. They are: self surveys and enumeration; housing exhibitions; and toilet festivals.

Contemporary scholars, led by Michel Foucault, have drawn attention to the use of censuses and other techniques of enumeration by political regimes from the seventeenth century onward. Indeed, Foucault and others have observed that the modern state – and the very idea of a countable population – were historical co-productions, premised alike on distinctively modern constructions of governance, territory and citizenship. Censuses are salient among the techniques identified by Foucault as lying at the heart of modern governmentality.<sup>12</sup> Tied up by their nature with the state (note the etymological link with statistics) and its methods of classification and surveillance, censuses remain essential instruments of every modern state archive. They are highly politicized processes, whose results are usually available only in packaged form and whose procedures are always driven from above, even when many members of the population are enlisted in the actual gathering of data. Given this background, it seems all the more remarkable that, without adherence to any articulated theory of governmentality – or opposition to it – the Alliance has adopted a conscious strategy of self-enumeration and self-surveying. Alliance members are taught a variety of methods of gathering reliable and complete data about households and families in their own communities. In codifying these techniques for ease of use by its members in the form of a series of practical tips, the Alliance has created a revolutionary system that we may well call governmentality from below.

Not only has it placed self-surveying at the heart of its own archive but the Alliance is also keenly aware of the power that this kind of knowledge – and ability – gives it in its dealings with local and central state organizations (as well as with multilateral agencies and other regulatory bodies). The leverage bestowed by such information is particularly acute in places such as Mumbai, where a host of local, state-level and federal entities exist with a mandate to rehabilitate or ameliorate slum life. But none of them knows exactly who the slum dwellers are, where they live or how they are to be identified. This fact is of central relevance to the politics of knowledge in which the Alliance is perennially engaged. All state-sponsored slum policies have an abstract slum population as their target and no knowledge of its concrete, human components. Since these populations are socially, legally and spatially marginal – invisible citizens as it were – they are by definition uncounted and uncountable except in the most general terms. By rendering them statistically visible to themselves, the Alliance takes control of a central piece of any actual policy process – the knowledge of exactly where individuals live, how long they have lived

12. Foucault, Michel (1979), "Governmentality" in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, edited by Burchell, Graham, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

there, how they make their livelihood and so forth. Given that some of the most crucial pieces of recent legislation affecting slum dwellers in Mumbai tie security of tenure to the date from which occupancy of a piece of land or a structure can be demonstrated, the collection of such information is vital to any official effort to relocate and rehabilitate slum populations.

At the same time, the creation and use of self-surveys are a powerful tool in the internal practice of democracy, since the principal form of evidence used by the Alliance to support slum dwellers' claims to space is the testimony of neighbours, as opposed to forms of documentation such as rent receipts, ration cards, electricity meters and other civic insignia of occupancy that can be used by the more securely housed classes in the city. The very absence of these amenities opens the door to radical techniques of mutual identification in the matter of location and legitimacy for slum dwellers. For, as Alliance leaders are the first to admit, the poor are not immune from greed, conflict and jealousy and there are always slum families who are prepared to lie or cheat to advance themselves in the context of crisis or new opportunities. Such problems are resolved by informal mechanisms in which the testimony of neighbours is utterly decisive, since the social life of slums is in fact characterized by an almost complete lack of privacy. Here, perpetual social visibility within the community (and invisibility in the eyes of the state) becomes an asset that enables the mechanisms of self-monitoring, self-enumeration and self-regulation to operate at the nexus of family, land and dwelling that is the central site of material negotiations in slum life.

To those familiar with Foucault's ideas, this may seem to be a worrisome form of auto governmentality, a combination of self-surveillance and self-enumeration, truly insidious in its capillary reach. But my own view is that this sort of governmentality from below, in the world of the urban poor, is a kind of counter-governmentality, animated by the social relations of shared poverty, by the excitement of active participation in the politics of knowledge, and by its own openness to correction through other forms of intimate knowledge and spontaneous everyday politics. In short, this is governmentality turned against itself.

Housing exhibitions are the second organized technique through which the structural bias of existing knowledge processes is challenged, even reversed, in the politics of the Alliance. Since the materialities of housing – its cost, its durability, its legality and its design – are of fundamental concern to slum life, it is no surprise that this is an area where grassroots creativity has had radical effects. As in other matters, the general philosophy of state agencies, donors and even NGOs concerned with slums has been to assume that the design, construction and financing of houses requires the involvement of various experts and knowledge professionals, ranging from engineers and architects to contractors and surveyors. The Alliance has challenged this assumption by a steady effort to appropriate, in a cumulative manner, all the knowledge required to construct new housing for its members. This has involved some extraordinary negotiations in Mumbai, involving private developers and contractors, the formation of legal cooperatives by the poor, innovations in urban law pushed by the Alliance, new types of arrangements in housing finance between banks, donors and the poor themselves, and direct negotiations over housing materials, costs and building schedules. In effect, in Mumbai, the Alliance has moved into housing development and the fruits of this remarkable move are to be seen at three major sites, in Mankhurd,

Dharavi and Ghatkopar. One of these, the Rajiv-Indira Housing Cooperative in Dharavi, is a major building exercise that stands as a decisive demonstration of the Alliance's ability to put the actual families who will occupy these dwellings at the centre of a process where credit, design, budgeting, construction and legality come together. It is difficult to exaggerate the complexity of such negotiations, which pose a challenge even for wealthy developers because of the maze of laws, agencies and political interests (including those of the criminal underworld) that surround any housing enterprise in Mumbai.

Housing exhibitions are a crucial part of this reversal of the standard flows of expert knowledge. The idea of housing exhibitions by and for the poor goes back to 1986 in Mumbai and has since been replicated in many other cities in India and elsewhere in the world. The exhibitions organized by the Alliance and other like-minded groups are an example of the creative hijacking of an upper-class form – historically developed for the display of consumer goods and high-end industrial products – for the purposes of the poor.

Not only have these exhibitions enabled the poor, especially the women among them, to discuss and debate designs for housing that suit their own needs, they have also allowed them to enter into conversations with various professionals about housing materials, construction costs and urban services. Through this process, slum dwellers' own ideas of the good life, of adequate space and of realistic costs were brought to the fore and they began to see that professional housing construction was only a logical extension of their own area of greatest expertise – namely, building adequate housing out of the flimsiest of materials and in the most insecure of circumstances. Poor families were enabled to see that they had always been architects and engineers and could continue to play that role in the building of more secure housing. In this process, many technical and design innovations were made and continue to be made. Perhaps more significantly, the exhibitions have been political events that have drawn poor families and activists from different cities into socializing with each other, sharing ideas and simply having fun. State officials were also invited, to cut the ceremonial ribbon and give speeches associating themselves with these grassroots exercises, thus simultaneously gaining themselves points for hobnobbing with "the people" and giving poor families in the locality some legitimacy in the eyes of their neighbours, civic authorities and themselves.

As with other key practices of the Alliance, housing exhibitions are deep exercises in subverting the existing class cultures of India. By performing their competencies in public, by addressing an audience of their peers – of representatives of the state, other NGOs and, sometimes, foreign funders – the poor families involved entered a space of public sociality, official recognition and technical legitimation. And they did so with their own creativity as the main exhibit. Thus, technical and cultural capital are generated collaboratively in these events, creating leverage for further guerrilla exercises in capturing civic space and areas of the public sphere hitherto denied them. At work here is a politics of visibility that inverts the harmful default condition of civic invisibility that characterizes the urban poor.

Running through all these activities is a spirit of transgression and bawdiness expressed through body language, speech styles and public address. The men and women of the Alliance are involved in constant banter with each other and even with the official world (although with

some care for context). Nowhere is this carnivalesque spirit educed more clearly than in the toilet festivals (*sandas mela*) organized by the Alliance, which enact what we may call the “politics of shit”.

Human waste management, as it is euphemistically termed in policy circles, is perhaps the key issue where every problem of the urban poor arrives at a single point of extrusion, so to speak. Given the abysmal housing, often with almost no privacy, that most urban slum dwellers endure, defecating in public is a serious humiliation for adults. Children are indifferent up to a certain age but no adult, male or female, enjoys defecating in broad daylight in public view. In rural India, women go to the fields to defecate while it is still dark; men may go later but, nevertheless, with some measure of protection from the eyes of the public (with the exception of railway passengers, inured to the sight of the squatting bodies in the fields, whose attitude is reciprocated). But the fact remains that rural defecation is managed through a completely different economy of space, water, visibility and custom from that prevailing in cities, where the problem is much more serious.

Defecating in the absence of good sewage systems, ventilation and running water – all of which, by definition, slums are lacking – is a practice that is not only humiliating but also enabling of the conditions under which waterborne diseases take hold and thus, potentially life-threatening. One macabre joke among Mumbai’s urban poor has it that they are the only ones in the city who cannot afford to get diarrhoea. At the few existing public toilets, the lines are often so long that they involve waiting times of an hour or more; and of course, medical facilities for stemming the condition are also hard to find. In short, defecating and its management are a central issue of slum life. Living in an ecology of faecal odours, piles and channels, where cooking water, washing water, and faeces-laden water are not carefully segregated, adds material risks to health to the symbolic risks incurred by defecating in public view.

The toilet festivals organized by the Alliance in many cities of India are a brilliant effort to re-situate this private act of humiliation and suffering as a scene of technical innovation, collective celebration and carnivalesque play with officials from the state, the World Bank and middle-class officialdom in general. The toilet festivals feature the exhibition and inauguration not of models but of functioning public toilets, designed by and for the poor, incorporating complex systems of collective payment and maintenance with optimal conditions of safety and cleanliness. These facilities are currently small-scale and have not yet been built in anything like the large numbers required for India’s slum populations. But they represent another performance of competence and innovation, in which the “politics of shit” is (to mix metaphors) turned on its head, and humiliation and victimization are transformed into exercises in technical initiative and self-dignification.

This is nothing less than a politics of recognition from below.<sup>13</sup> When a World Bank official has to examine the virtues of a public toilet and discuss the merits of this form of faeces management with the defecators themselves, the condition of poverty moves from abjection to subjectivation. The “politics of shit” – as Gandhi showed in his own efforts to liberate the lowest castes, whom he called *Harijans*, from the task of hauling upper-caste ordure – presents a node at which concerns of the human body, dignity and technology meet, a nexus the poor are now redefining with the help of movements such as the Alliance. In India, where distance from one’s own faeces can be seen as the virtual marker of class distinc-

13. Taylor, Charles (1992), “The politics of recognition” in Gutmann, Amy and Charles Taylor (editors), *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

tion, the poor, for too long living literally in their own faeces, are finding ways to place some distance between their waste and themselves. The toilet exhibitions are a transgressive display of this faecal politics, itself a critical material feature of deep democracy.

In June 2001, at a major meeting held at the United Nations to mark the five years that had passed since the 1996 Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul, the Alliance and its international partners built a model house as well as a model children's toilet in the lobby of the main United Nations building. The models – which were only erected after considerable internal debate within the Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and official resistance from the UN – were visited by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a festive atmosphere that left an indelible impression on the officials of the UN and other NGOs who were present. Annan was surrounded by poor women from India and South Africa who sang and danced as he walked through the model house and toilet that had been placed at the heart of his own bureaucratic empire. It was a magical moment, full of possibilities for the Alliance and for the Secretary-General, as they engaged jointly with the politics of global poverty. Housing exhibitions and toilets, too, can be built, moved, refabricated and deployed anywhere, thus sending the message that no space is too grand – or too humble – for the spatial imagination of the poor.

These organized practices sustain each other. Self-surveys form the basis of claims to new housing and justify its exhibition; model housing built without due attention to toilets and faecal management makes no sense. Each of these methods uses the knowledge of the poor to leverage expert knowledge, redeems humiliation through a politics of recognition and enables the deepening of democracy among the poor themselves. And each of them adds energy and purpose to the others. They enact public dramas in which the moral directives to federate, to save and to set precedents are made material, are refined and are revalidated. In this way, key words and deeds shape each other, permitting some leveling of the field of knowledge, turning sites of shame into dramas of inclusion and allowing the poor to work their way into the public sphere and visible citizenship without resort to open confrontation or public violence.

## VII. THE INTERNATIONAL HORIZON

THE LARGER STUDY of which this essay is part is concerned with the way in which transnational advocacy networks (associations of grassroots NGOs) are in the process of internationalizing themselves, thus creating networks of globalization from below. We have seen such networks mobilized most recently in Seattle, Prague, Göteborg, and Washington DC. But they have been visible for some time now in global struggles over gender issues, the environment, human rights, child labour and the rights of indigenous cultures. More recently, there has been a renewed effort to link grassroots activists in such diverse areas as violence against women, the rights of refugees and immigrants, the employment of sweatshop labour by multinational corporations, indigenous peoples' claims to intellectual property, the production and consumption of popular media, mediation between combatants in civil conflicts and many other issues. The underlying question for many of these movements is: how can they organize transnationally without sacrificing their local projects? When they do build transnational networks, what are their greatest assets and their



greatest handicaps? At a deeper political level, can the mobility of capital and of the new information technologies be contained by, and made accountable to, the ethos and purpose of local democratic projects? Put another way, can there be a new design for global governance that mediates the speed of capital, the powers of states and the profoundly local nature of actually existing democracies?

These large questions go beyond the scope of this paper, and the detailed analysis of the efforts of this activist network, and others like it, to globalize from below must be left for another occasion. But a brief account of this global context is certainly in order. For more than a decade, the Alliance in Mumbai has been an active part of a transnational network concerned with "horizontal learning", sharing and exchanging. Given official form as the Shack/Slum Dwellers International, or SDI, in 1996, the network includes federations in 14 countries on four continents. The process that led to this formalization goes back to the mid-1980s. Links among federations of the poor in South Africa, India and Thailand appear to have been the most vital in the gradual building of these grassroots exchanges and, to a considerable extent, they still are. Key to these exchanges are visits by groups of slum or shack dwellers to each others' settlements in each other's countries, to share in ongoing local projects, give and receive advice and reactions, share in work and life experiences, and exchange tactics and plans. The mode of exchange is based on a model of seeing and hearing rather than of teaching and learning; of sharing experiences and knowledge rather than of seeking to impose standard practices, key words being "exposure", "exploration" and "options". By now, a large body of practical wisdom has accrued about how and when these exchanges work best and this knowledge is constantly being refined. Visits by small groups from one city to another, either within the same or another region, usually involve immediate immersion in the ongoing projects of the host community. These range from scavenging in the Philippines and sewer-digging in Pakistan to women's savings activities in South Africa and housing exhibitions in India.

These horizontal exchanges now function at four levels. First, they provide a circulatory counterpart to the building of deep democracies locally. By visiting and hosting other activists concerned with similar problems, communities gain a comparative perspective and provide a measure of legitimation for external efforts. Thus, activist leaders who are struggling for recognition and space in their own localities may find themselves able to gain state and media attention for their own, local struggles in other countries and towns, where their very presence as visitors carries a certain cachet. The fact that they are visiting as members of some sort of international federation further sharpens this image. In fact, local politicians feel less threatened by visitors than by their own activists and sometimes open themselves to new ideas because they come from outside.

Second, the horizontal visits arranged by the federations increasingly carry the imprimatur of powerful international organizations and funders such as the World Bank, state development ministries and private charities from the Netherlands, England, the United States and Germany, and increasingly involve political and philanthropic actors from other countries as well. These visits, designed and organized by the poor in their own communities and public spaces, become signs to local politicians that the poor themselves have cosmopolitan links – a factor that increases their prestige in local political negotiations.

Third, the occasions that these exchanges provide for face-to-face meet-

ings between key leaders in, for example, Mumbai, Cape Town and Bangkok, actually allow them to progress rapidly in making more long-term strategic plans for funding, capacity-building and what they call “scaling up”, which is now perhaps their central aim. That is, having mastered how to do certain things on a small scale, they are eager to expand onto a broader canvas, seeking collective ways of making a dent in the vast range of problems shared by slum dwellers in different cities. In a parallel movement, they are also exploring ways of “speeding up”, by which they mean shortening the times involved in putting strategies into practice in different national and urban locations.

There is some evidence that speeding up through horizontal learning is somewhat easier than scaling up. In support of the latter goal, the core SDI leadership is working on ways to build a transnational funding mechanism that would reduce the federations’ dependence on existing multi-lateral and private sources; putting even long-term funding in the hands of the SDI so as to free its members further from the agendas of project planners, donors, states and other actors, whose aims can never quite be the same as those of the urban poor. Elements of such a mechanism exist among the South African and Thai members of the SDI but the structure is yet to be realized on a fully global scale. That will require the current leadership of SDI to proceed with a demanding mixture of political cooperation, willingness to negotiate and stubbornness of vision in their dialogues with the major funders of the battle against urban poverty worldwide. The objective of creating a worldwide fund controlled by a pro-poor activist network is the logical extension of a politics of patience combined with a politics of visibility and self-empowerment. It is directly pitched against the politics of charity, training and projectization long recognized as the standard solution. As such, it represents a formidable wager on the capacities of the poor to create large-scale, high speed, reliable mechanisms for the change of conditions that affect them globally. The proposal for a coordinated funding mechanism inaugurates a new vision for equalizing material resources and knowledge at one stroke. The self-organization of this network is very much in process and constitutes an ongoing experiment in globalization from below and in deep democracy.

The fourth, and most important, level at which the traffic among local and national units functions within the Shack/Slum Dwellers International is that of the circulation of internal critical debate. When members of the SDI meet in each other’s localities (as well as on other occasions, such as meetings in London, New York or the Hague), they have the opportunity to raise hard questions about inclusion, power, hierarchy and political risk or naiveté in their host’s local and regional organizations. This is because their role as outsiders allows for frank questions based on real or rhetorical ignorance – questions that would frequently be regarded as unacceptable coming from closer quarters.

Who handles the money? Why are there not more women at the meeting? Why are you being so nice to the city officials who oppress you? How do you deal with defaulters on small loans? Who is doing the real work? Who is getting the perks of foreign travel? Why are we staying in one kind of hotel and you in another? Why are some poor people in your city for you and others against you? Why did your savings group start falling apart? Are you happy with this or that leader? Is someone getting too big for their boots? Are we beginning to take up partnerships that might fail us in the long run? When we agree to a global agenda, which

national partner is really setting it? How far should we go in trusting each other's intuitions about partners, strategies and priorities?

These are some of the tough questions that are asked by friendly but skeptical visitors and usually answered frankly by the local hosts. And when the answers are weak or unsatisfying, they continue to reverberate in the locality long after the visitors have returned to their home communities. This critical exchange is a long-term asset, a vital part of globalization from below. The visits, and the e-mails that sustain the interim periods, incorporate a crucial dimension through which the challenge of facing internal criticism can be mediated, namely distance. The global network of poor communities turns out to be, among other things, a constant source of critical questions about theory and practice, a flow of irritating queries, doubts and pauses. But coming from a distance, they sound less harsh than the same queries do when coming from local opponents. At the same time, coming from communities equally poor, their moral urgency cannot be ignored.

It is this last consideration that now allows us to return to the relations between risk, creativity and depth in the democratic experiments of the Alliance and its global network, the SDI. The Alliance and the transnational network of which it is part belong to a group of non governmental actors who have decided to opt for various sorts of partnerships with other, more powerful actors – including the state, in its various levels and incarnations – to achieve their goals of gaining secure housing and urban infrastructure for the urban poor in Mumbai, in India and beyond. In opting for the politics of partnership, such movements consciously take certain risks. One is the risk that their partners may not hold even some moral goals in common with them. Another is that the hard-won mobilization of certain groups of the urban poor may not be best invested as political capital in partnership arrangements, as opposed to confrontation or violence.

And there is an even larger gamble involved in this strategy. This is the gamble that the official world of multilateral agencies, Northern funders and Southern governments can be persuaded that the poor are the best drivers of shared solutions to the problems of poverty. What is at stake here is all the energy that has been invested in setting precedents for partnership at all levels, from the ward to the world. The hoped-for payoff is that, once mobilized and empowered by such partnerships, the poor themselves will prove more capable than the usual candidates – the market, the state or the world of development funding – of scaling up and speeding up their own disappearance as a global category. In the end, this is a political wager on the relation between the circulation of knowledge and material equalization, and about the best ways to accelerate it.

In making this wager, activist groups, such as the Alliance in Mumbai and its global counterparts, are also striving to redefine what governance and governmentality can mean. They approach their partners on an ad hoc basis, taking advantage in particular of the dispersed nature of the state as an apparatus of local, regional and national bodies to advance their long-term aims and form multilateral relationships. Moreover, in a country like India – where poverty reduction is a directive principle of the national constitution, and the tradition of social reform and public service is woven into nationalism itself – the Alliance can play the politics of conscience to considerable effect. But even then, it hedges its bets through practices of building on, sharing and multiplying knowledge – strategic practices that increase its hold on public resources.

## VIII. CONCLUSION: DEEP DEMOCRACY

ONE OF THE many paradoxes of democracy is that it is organized to function within the boundaries of the nation state – through such organs as legislatures, judiciaries and elected governments – to realize one or another image of the common good or general will. Yet its values make sense only when they are conceived and deployed universally, which is to say, global in reach. Thus, the institutions of democracy and its cardinal values rest on an antinomy. In the era of globalization, this contradiction rises to the surface as the porousness of national boundaries becomes apparent and the monopoly of national governments over global governance becomes increasingly embattled.

Efforts to enact or revive democratic principles have generally taken two forms in the period since 1970, which many agree is the beginning of globalization (or of the current era of globalization, for those who wish to write it into the whole of human history). One form is to take advantage of the speed of communications and the sweep of global markets to force national governments to recognize universal democratic principles within their own jurisdictions. Much of the politics of human rights takes this form. The second form, more fluid and quixotic, is the sort that I have described here. It constitutes an effort to institute what we may call “democracy without borders” after the analogy of international class solidarity as conceived by the visionaries of world socialism in its heyday. This effort is what I seek to theorize in terms of deep democracy.

In terms of its semantics, “deep democracy” suggests roots, anchors, intimacy, proximity and locality; and these are important associations. Much of this essay has been taken up with values and strategies that have just this quality. They are about such traditional democratic desiderata as inclusion, participation, transparency and accountability, as articulated within an activist formation. But I want to suggest that the lateral reach of such movements – their efforts to build international networks or coalitions of some durability with their counterparts across national boundaries – is also a part of their “depth”.

This lateral or horizontal dimension, which I have touched upon in terms of the activities of Shack/Slum Dwellers International, seeks direct collaborations and exchanges between poor communities themselves, based on the “will to federate”. But what gives this cross-national politics its depth is not just its circulatory logic of spreading ideas of savings, housing, citizenship and participation, “without borders” and outside the direct reach of state or market régimes. Depth is also to be located in the fact that, where successful, the spread of this model produces poor communities able to engage in partnerships with more powerful agencies – urban, regional, national and multilateral – that purport to be concerned with poverty and with citizenship. In this second sense, what these horizontal movements produce is a series of stronger community-based partners for institutional agencies charged with realizing inclusive democracy and poverty reduction. This, in turn, increases the capability of these communities to perform more powerfully as instruments of deep democracy in the local context. The cycles of transactions – both vertical (local/national) and horizontal (transnational/global) – are enriched by the process of criticism by members of one federated community, in the context of exchange and learning, of the internal democracy of another. Thus, internal criticism and debate, horizontal exchange and learning, and vertical collaborations and partnerships with more powerful persons and

organizations together form a mutually sustaining cycle of processes. This is where depth and laterality become joint circuits along which pro-poor strategies can flow.

This form of deep democracy, the vertical fulcrum of a democracy without borders, cannot be assumed to be automatic, easy or immune to setbacks. Like all serious exercises in democratic practice, it is not automatically reproductive. It has particular conditions of possibility and conditions under which it grows weak or corrupt. The study of these conditions – which include such contingencies as leadership, morale, flexibility and material enablement – requires many more case studies of specific movements and organizations. For those concerned with poverty and citizenship, we can begin by recalling that one crucial condition of possibility for deep democracy is the ability to meet emergency with patience.

