

## Dispossessing vulnerable consumers

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## **Dispossessing Vulnerable Consumers: Derealization, Desubjectification and Violence**

### **Abstract:**

This paper draws upon the work of Judith Butler to explain how violence is deployed against vulnerable consumers. It examines a site in which a shopping mall is to be constructed in Bangalore, India by displacing the poor from their slums. It offers insights into the mechanisms of violent dispossession that inhere liberal modes of governance of consumers. Moreover, this study attends to derealization that desubjectifies vulnerable consumers. It further helps to comprehend why violence remains in the zone of ellipsis without any popular revulsion against it.

**Key words:** Vulnerable Consumers, Violence, Derealization, Desubjectification, Power

In recent years, scholars have examined consumer vulnerability as an important area of concern in marketing theory (Baker, Hunt, and Rittenburg, 2007; Baker, Labarge, and Baker, 2016; Saatcioglu and Corus, 2016; Visconti, 2016). These researchers have critically analyzed how market processes make consumers susceptible to exploitation. In addition, several critical scholars have attended to how vulnerability inheres poverty at the base-of-the-pyramid (Chatterjee, 2013; Varman, Skalen, and Belk, 2012; Khare and Varman, 2016). Yet, the question of how violence is inflicted on vulnerable consumers is elided. Moreover, scholars in examining consumer vulnerability have not studied how derealization is linked to violent dispossession inherent to capitalism (Davis 2006; Harvey, 2003; Roy, 2012; Sassen, 2014; Varman and Al-Amoudi, 2016). Extant writings on consumer vulnerability do not examine how the dehumanized are denied the status of subjects, or desubjectified. Addressing these lacunae, we explain how vulnerable consumers are derealized, desubjectified, and violence is inflicted on them. This research offers insights into how vulnerability is used by a private firm and the State to further dispossess and displace consumers in the name of progress. In short, we offer a correction to consumer vulnerability scholarship that fails to explore macro-social forces which perpetuate vulnerable states and market exclusion.

We draw on the writings of Judith Butler to comprehend how sovereign violence is inflicted in such settings. We understand sovereign violence as both the use of force through suspension of law to harm someone by clearly identified actors, and as more insidious – but equally harmful – lawful forms of systemic coercion that go unnoticed in the smooth functioning of political, social, and economic systems (Butler, 2004a; Butler, 2004b). We particularly build on Butler’s (2004a) idea of derealization. Violence in the contemporary world creates popular revulsion unless it

is legitimized as being inflicted against an entity that is derealized or made sub-human (Butler 2004a). Derealization is an approach that makes people less human and is deployed to desubjectify the vulnerable. We provide a detailed account of the violence in Ejipura, in Bangalore (India), where a shopping mall is being constructed by displacing vulnerable consumers from slums. More than 90% of urban household growth in South Asia in the last few decades happened in slums, and India has the second highest population of slum dwellers, who are often violently dispossessed of their housing (Davis, 2006). This makes our study of consumers of housing and civic amenities that accompany it extremely relevant to understand consumer vulnerability. It further helps to understand an under-researched issue of the role of spaces in contributing to consumer vulnerability (Saatcioglu and Corus, 2016).

This study makes two important contributions to marketing theory. First, it provides an understanding of sovereign violence that is elided in discussions of consumer vulnerability. Second, it explains how derealization leads to dehumanization of vulnerable consumers and subsequent denial of the status as subjects. These insights help to understand how vulnerable consumers are further exploited, displaced, and dispossessed without creating popular revulsion.

## **THEORETICAL ISSUES**

In recent years, several critical scholars studying the base-of-the-pyramid in marketing theory have specifically drawn attention to how poverty, markets, corporations, and the State contribute to consumer vulnerability (Chatterjee, 2013; Khare and Varman, 2016; Varman et al., 2012). These scholars also analyze the base-of-the-pyramid discourse (e.g. Prahalad, 2005) or subsistence marketplaces (e.g. Sridharan and Viswanathan, 2008) and are critical of the role of profit-based

initiatives in alleviating conditions of vulnerability. Despite these critical insights, these researchers do not attend to how vulnerability at the base-of-the-pyramid is exacerbated by conditions of violence that go unpunished.

Such an analysis is needed in our context because neoliberal capitalism in the name of economic growth over the last 30 years has destroyed several welfare measures that the State had earlier instituted in India (Kurien, 2012; Patnaik, 2007). Neoliberalism has failed to improve the poor's living standards and has helped the rich get richer with an increase in private accumulation (Chandrashekhara and Ghosh, 2002; Patnaik, 2006; Sen and Himanshu, 2005). These observations concur with Harvey (2005), who sees neoliberalism imposed through structural adjustment programs in the name of progress as a system of governance that restores the power of economic elites. If the new systemic logic of capitalism is based on violent expulsion as a form of progress (Sassen 2014), then it becomes necessary to interrogate the relationship between neoliberal governmentality and consumer vulnerability.

*Consumer Vulnerability.* Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg (2005: 134) define consumer vulnerability as “a state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products.” Saatcioglu and Corus (2016) further describe two different approaches to consumer vulnerability. The first perspective interprets vulnerability as a temporary and fluid state (Baker et al., 2007; Hill, 2001), while the second focuses on more persistent and systemic forms of vulnerability (Commuri and Ekici, 2008; Shultz and Holbrook, 2009). We attend to the latter, systemic form of vulnerability that manifests in poverty at the base-of-the-pyramid.

Baker (2009) suggests that vulnerability has been understood through demographic, taxonomic, situational, and contextual analyses. Although in our

analysis, we attend to poverty as a demographic condition that structurally contributes to vulnerability, we also draw on the situational perspective to understand how slum demolitions further exacerbate poverty (Cardona, 2004; Commuri and Ekici, 2008). Moreover, Baker et al. (2016) point to three methodological approaches to vulnerability analysis by emphasizing how researchers can identify vulnerable populations, understand environmental conditions that create it and comprehend its meaning. We unify the three approaches by understanding the experiences of slum dwellers who are violently evicted.

We agree with Visconti (2016) that vulnerability is a condition exposing one or more individuals to the risk of obtaining limited utility from market transactions, with implications for their well-being. Furthermore, Hutton (2016) and Falchetti, Ponchio and Botelho (2016) delineate experiences of vulnerability and how consumers cope. Vulnerability emerges from a sense of disempowerment that consumers experience in interactions with other stakeholders. Although researchers attribute consumer vulnerability to individual characteristics, they also acknowledge it as a social outcome (Baker et al., 2007). Moreover, we agree with Baker et al. (2016) that vulnerability is not necessarily a condition of weakness that requires eradication. Concurrent with Butler (2004b), we argue that shared precarity or vulnerability can be a source of human empathy and solidarity.

Researchers have examined different facets of vulnerability from a critical perspective and have attended to the question of conflict. Visconti (2016) notes that vulnerability is created through conversations and interactions among actors in different positions of power. Similarly, Woodall (2011) calls for a critical analysis of the misbehavior of marketers and their role in creating consumer vulnerability. Drawing on a critical theory of space, Saatcioglu and Corus (2016) analyze

vulnerability as a condition of powerlessness that arises because of conflict that exists across multiple material, socio-spatial, and ideological interests over social space. Specifically, we draw upon Saatcioglu and Corus' (2016) observation that social exclusion of certain groups from accessing and using spaces can lead to vulnerability.

While these critical studies offer insights on conditions that contribute to consumer vulnerability, they do not explain how vulnerable consumers are derealized, dehumanized and denied the status of subjects. We closely examine the issues of violence, dispossession, derealization, and dehumanization in the subsequent sections to develop insights into these questions.

*Violence, Dispossession and Derealization.* Capitalism in the Global South is characterized by accumulation through violent dispossession (Harvey, 2003; Roy, 2012; Sassen, 2014; Varman and Al-Amoudi 2016). Moreover, liberal capitalism accumulates through dispossession and is presented in public discourses as humane and peaceful while its challengers are portrayed as enemies of progress who need to be stopped with violence. This form of violence, which occurs in societies that claim to banish violence in the name of civilization, often requires very specific modes of derealization of vulnerable consumers.

Butler (2009: 156) incisively observes that “justified violence” is perpetrated against the vulnerable who are made *unreal or sub-human through derealization*. Lives are by definition precarious or vulnerable, and *norms determine which lives are counted as real and which ones are to be violated as unreal and derealized* (Butler, 2004b). She observes that norms are often violently implemented. Accordingly, and importantly for our analysis of consumers in Ejipura, the difference between vulnerability as an existential condition that is equally shared, and vulnerability as a

condition of induced inequality and destitution through the implementation of norms should be understood (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013).

We draw upon Butler's (2004a) observation that vulnerable consumers are derealized through discourse of dehumanization in which some are not treated as humans and can be subjected to violence. In this form, dehumanization of some consumers becomes a condition for others to become human. Hegemony over what gets discussed in the public sphere regarding what people see, hear, and talk becomes central to these ellipses. Therefore, recognizability of a vulnerable consumer as a subject is the key to understanding whose life counts and whose is negated. Butler further believes that media's framing of violence shapes how sufferings and ungrievable lives are presented to us. She notes that hegemonic ideas of time, progress, and modernity are deployed in media frames to justify violence against those who are considered pre-modern. Butler (2004b: 76) calls this a process of 'deeming' and observes, "the license to brand and categorize and detain because of suspicion alone, expressed in this operation of deeming, is potentially enormous." Deeming also means that it is a challenge for vulnerable consumers to present themselves as viable speaking subjects in discourses in which others represent them. As Butler (2004a: 91) asks, "how to present yourself in a discourse that is not yours, a discourse that effaces you in the act of representing you, a discourse that denies the language that you might want to use to describe who you are." Therefore, deeming can be a method of derealization through which vulnerable consumers are denied the position of subjects.

Butler (2004b) agrees with Foucault's (2008) assessment that governmentality, a diffused form of lawful management of populations, and the creation of subjectivities operating through state and non-state institutions and



discourses, coexists with sovereignty or unaccountable operation of domination. Butler adds two important points to our understanding of governmentality. First, she suggests that the contemporary management of populations does not limit violence; instead, we witness a reanimation of sovereignty as it comes to operate on the very field of governmentality. The resurgent sovereignty makes itself known primarily in the instance of the exercise of prerogative power or rogue power in which the rule of law is suspended. Second, governmentality not only creates subjects, but it also leads to desubjectification of certain vulnerable consumers on whom violence can be unleashed. While disciplinary regimes are used to transform people into self-governing subjects, those who are dehumanized are denied the status of subjects and are derealized. These derealized vulnerable consumers are inflicted with violence that is considered legitimate. In the case of Ejipura, we draw upon the idea of derealization of vulnerable consumers to understand violence.

### **RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY**

Our field site was in the southern metropolis of Bangalore, the third most populated city in India, with 8.5 million residents (Census, 2011). In this study, we examine the demolition of 1512 houses in the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quarters in Ejipura by the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the administrative body for civic and infrastructural needs of the Greater Bangalore Metropolitan Area. These houses were demolished to clear land for the construction of a shopping mall.

The BBMP employed private contractors to construct 1512 EWS flats on 11.2 acres of BBMP land in Ejipura during 1987-1992. These flats were built in 42 blocks, each block having 36 flats. Despite sub-standard quality, between 1993-1994, the BBMP selected and allotted lease-cum-sale agreements for these flats. Many

beneficiaries rented their quarters out, while others sold their flats to third parties because of poor conditions such as the absence of water, electricity, and sewage lines. In 2003, one block collapsed, resulting in injuries and loss of possessions. The BBMP recommended that some other blocks also be demolished because of serious construction flaws. In 2004, the BBMP demolished seven blocks and constructed temporary tin sheds on the same land, with the promise of permanent housing. These tin-sheds were 10 feet by 12 feet in size and were built in contiguous blocks without windows or attached toilets. A survey conducted by the BBMP to identify the original house owners revealed that 1101 were occupied by tenants, 258 were owner-occupied, and the rest were vacant (The Hindu, 2007).

In 2004, without consulting residents, the BBMP decided to demolish and reconstruct the EWS quarters through a Public Private Partnership (PPP), the bid for which eventually went to Maverick Holdings and Investment Private Limited (hereafter referred to as Maverick), a private builder. As per the PPP, Maverick could commercially exploit 50% of the land and the remaining 50% would be used for apartments for economically weaker sections. Of the 50% allotted for commercial use, at the end of a concession period of 32 years, Maverick had to return 50% of the land to the BBMP. The area proposed for the PPP was approximately 15.64 acres of prime property in Bangalore (including areas adjacent to the EWS quarters). The commercial use of the land is intended for the construction of a commercial complex including a shopping mall. Such shopping malls in India are elite sites of consumption that largely exclude the poor (Varman and Belk, 2012; Voyce, 2007).

In 2007, after five deaths caused by the collapse of more blocks, the BBMP demolished the remaining blocks and shifted the residents to 1500 tin sheds on the same land (PUCL Report, 2013). Since the award of the PPP, the project is mired in

legal cases by the other PPP bidders as well as by EWS residents. On 24<sup>th</sup> August 2012, the Karnataka High Court directed the BBMP to hand over the land to Maverick. BBMP used this court order to proceed with demolitions over four days in January 2013. The BBMP completed the eviction and handed over the land to Maverick after barricading and securing the site (Further background details of the research setting are provided in the Web Appendix A).

*Methods.* We chose phenomenological interviews to understand our participants' lived experiences (Thompson and Troester, 2002). Our participants included thirteen vulnerable evicted consumers in Ejipura, two state officials, ten activists, one journalist, and a promoter of Maverick. We used secondary data sources such as media articles (n=174), relevant legal documents (n=3), and the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) report. Media sources included relevant articles published between years 2000 to 2015 that referred to the Ejipura EWS, Maverick, and/or any exchange between these actors and the BBMP. Secondary data sources enabled the construction of a chronology of events predating the eviction and helped us elicit details of specific events from our participants during interviews.

A research assistant who helped us with interviews was given a broad discussion guide to follow. The issues discussed in these interviews evolved as we came across a newer set of issues during fieldwork. A typical interview started with a conversation about the Ejipura evictions and proceeded to questions about participants' interpretations of the event, their roles, and its impact on their lives. Our sampling was purposive, looking at various relevant actors, to ensure that we uncovered different facets of the violence inflicted. We reached out to residents who were evicted and were then living on the road bordering the eviction site. No incentives were offered for participation in the study.

We identified activists who were involved in relief and rehabilitation efforts. Five activists belonged to well-known domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGO). Five others were citizens who were not affiliated with an organization but had independently volunteered for relief work. We contacted these activists based on referrals by evictees, on-site meetings, or from available media accounts that named organizations engaged in relief work. We also reached out to Karnataka Slum Development Board Officials for their accounts of the rehabilitation process. We interviewed Uday Garudachar, a promoter of Maverick Holdings (he stepped down after the demolition to contest the parliamentary elections in 2013), questioning him about the eviction to elicit his version of the event. Key officers of the Indian Administrative Services and the BBMP did not respond to our repeated requests for appointments. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. A significant part of the data collection occurred between August 2013 and March 2014 over repeated visits to the eviction site. Two interviews were conducted in April 2015 and March 2017 during follow-up visits to the site. Since evictees and activists are vulnerable participants in our study (Lee, 1993), we have used pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Our interpretation of the interview texts was through a hermeneutical process that involved continuous movement between transcripts and the emerging understanding of the data set (Gadamer, 2004; Thompson and Troester, 2002). The theoretical understanding presented by us reflects a stage of the analysis in which it is possible to establish linkages between meanings expressed by participants and a broader set of economic, political and theoretical issues. Analysis began alongside the data collection stage, with data organized into summary forms representing different narratives and behaviors. In the following section, we present our findings.

## FINDINGS

In this section, we analyze the sovereign violence inflicted on vulnerable consumers by the State in collusion with Maverick. We examine why violence against vulnerable consumers does not create a popular revulsion. We then uncover apparatuses of derealization to answer this question.

### **Sovereign Violence against Vulnerable Consumers**

According to Butler (2004a: 54), sovereign violence stems from the exercise of “prerogative power,” which is the power to reframe and suspend rules within a framework of existing rules. This form of violence is evident in state officials’ decision to enter into an agreement with Maverick to construct a commercial complex and evict vulnerable consumers.

*Inflicting Sovereign Violence.* On January 18<sup>th</sup> 2013, the BBMP commenced demolition of the EWS quarters at Ejipura that rendered approximately 5000 homeless. The EWS quarters’ residents were caught unawares. They had no time to save their belongings and had to scramble to save their children from the bulldozers. Several witness accounts and reports, such as the PUCL report 2013, document the use of *lathi (baton)*, and the humiliation meted out to residents and protestors who joined the residents’ cause. Thus, the vulnerability in our context is systemic because of poverty (Commuri and Ekici, 2008) and is also situational due to the eviction (Baker, 2009).

EWS residents believe that Uday Garudachar, a promoter of Maverick is the new sovereign and the law is suspended at his behest (Butler, 2004a). Vulnerable consumers have no faith in the law and the State that is expected to safeguard it. An evictee, sharing her lack of faith in the political establishment, said,

They haven't done anything – a new MLA [Member of Legislative Assembly] has come over, it has been so long, but nothing has happened. These MLAs and councillors are on the payrolls of Uday Garudachar. Every one of them.

There is a belief among evictees and activists that Garudachar pays local politicians and legislators for supporting his business. This is ironic because legislators are democratically elected through elections held every five years in which the poor vote in large numbers. However, many legislators are often connected with local businesses and criminals, who help them get votes with money and intimidation. It creates an axis of power in which the nodal positions are occupied by businesses, political leaders, and criminals and is used to periodically suspend the law or use sovereign power to make gains (Butler, 2004a). On local elected representative (MLA) Harris' culpability in violence, a volunteer for the relief work observed, "*he is a partner in Maverick. During elections, he made promises that he'll get them houses and they voted for him*". Harris may not be formally on the payrolls of Maverick but is perceived as a partner, reflecting widespread beliefs that the State and its laws can be manipulated to serve particular interests (Mehta, 1997). Harris represents an extension of state sovereignty by wielding the discretionary power to decide fundamental concerns of life, death, and justice (Butler, 2004a). According to a PUCL member, Harris said in a public meeting:

You all have to move from this place, and there is no other alternative. That is my word, and you must heed it. You have just to say 'yes' to this. Nod your head like this (nod yes), but if you choose to nod your head like this (no), then your head will not remain on your shoulders.

Accordingly, Harris' actions are not subject to scrutiny by any higher authority. Because of this suspension of law, and the abetment of the State's executive

and legislative arms, vulnerable consumers face multiple forms of violence.

Through all four days of demolition, there were 500 policemen and 20 policewomen on the site along with BBMP chief engineer B.T. Ramesh, and MLA, N. Harris. On 19<sup>th</sup> January 2013, two local activists protested the forced eviction along with 21 women from the EWS quarters. These 23 women were arrested and detained by the police. Our participants, who were among those arrested, recounted how they were forcefully pulled out of the site, beaten, hauled into police jeeps, and remanded in judicial custody for three days. Karpagam, Joshi and Selva (2014) document accounts of women who were forced to strip at the police station. The arrested women were produced in court without an opportunity to apply for bail and were detained until the next afternoon while their families were unaware of their arrests. A civil rights activist, describing police presence during the demolitions, said, "*They were mute spectators, uniformed killers, uniformed rogues, uniformed thieves...they are not the protector of law and order.*" Police violence here is consistent with other routine instances of police force deployed by politicians for their partisan interests, be it religion, development, riots or fake encounters (e.g. Jagannathan and Rai, 2015, Subramanian, 2007), and represents yet another rent-seeking interest in the prevalent politician-relator nexus (Davis, 2006).

After the demolitions, most residents had no place to go and were staying on the footpath around the outer periphery of the now barricaded quarters. The police tried several times to get those evicted to leave, prevented volunteers with relief materials from reaching evictees, and were often abusive. There was a constant threat of the police removing their remaining belongings from the footpath. On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2013, the police arrested for violating prohibitory orders another 150 people from the EWS Quarters and affiliated NGOs who were protesting the land-grab (DNA, 2013).

Even during our data collection phase a year later, evictees were wary of police surveillance and explained that cops were watching the site.

A 38-year-old evictee, showing us a scar on her scalp, told us of the time MLA Harris' goons attacked her on the head and arm. She lamented the sovereign power wielded by Uday Garudachar, a promoter of Maverick:

It is all Garudachar's money. Garudachar pays all the rowdies and goons – he pays the police and goons extra to cause all the damage here. Earlier there was an incident in which women were assaulted by goons, and one woman was assaulted and killed. I got hit in the head. Because I was hurt I could not work any longer. My 16-year-old son had to drop out of school and work because of this. He must work so we can eat.

This nexus of politicians, bureaucrats, police, and realtors must be understood considering Bangalore's rapid expansion over the last decade. Besides placing pressures on land availability for residential and commercial uses, a rapid expansion of the housing market led to private players swooping in to fill the void created by state inadequacies. Politicians play an active role in securing permits for private players through their involvement with local bodies in return for financial gains (Pellisery et al., 2016). This violence unfolds in the name of beautifying the city, making it more inhabitable for elite dwellers, economic development, and progress.

However, Uday Garudachar defended his position by stating:

[Maverick is] serving the public, the society by implementing new things, new projects and so on. Shopping centers, I was one of the pioneers in Bangalore... There were so many guys who followed us, and I am the pioneer of shoppertainment in shopping centers. There are people who are emulators, but that does not stop me from innovating new things.



Shopping malls epitomize the local elite's goals of experiencing capitalist modernity as a cocktail of economic progress, consumer culture, westernization, and privatization (Varman and Belk, 2012). Garudachar describes the shopping malls he builds as spaces for the "public" to socialize and get entertained. Here we encounter the paradox of privately-owned "social fortresses" typically devoted to elite consumerism (Voyce, 2007: 2055), that will be constructed by expelling a vulnerable population that occupied the land. Verma (2002: 13) observes, "the root cause of urban slumming seems to lie not in urban poverty but in urban wealth." The evicted poor are invisible in globalized India and are excluded from normative conditions that make a viable life. For Garudachar, these vulnerable consumers are failed subjects who did not comply with the norms of neoliberal governance and could not be reformed by disciplinary processes (Butler, 2010).

*Destroying Lives and Creating Death Worlds.* An immediate consequence of the eviction was extensive loss of personal property and jobs. People could not join work because of the loss of clothing and places to bathe. While those who could afford, started renting out houses nearby, these efforts were challenging. The monthly rent for any house near Ejipura was INR 3000 with an advance of at least INR 20000. Rents surged with increased demand. Those who finally got houses often landed back on the footpath because they could not work for about six months.

During demolitions, the BBMP allegedly provided INR 30000 as compensation to around 300 families who claimed to be the original allottees of EWS quarters. The remaining 900 families were promised alternative housing in a village 18 kilometers from Bangalore. However, these apartments that were to be constructed by the Karnataka Slum Development Board would take at least another two to three years (The Hindu, 2013b). State agencies provided no temporary or long-term relief

and rehabilitation. For the sovereign state, the norms that support a viable life do not apply to this vulnerable population that must be expelled to make way for spatial practices of neoliberal governance and globalization.

After the demolition, residents struggled for necessities. Their socio-economic vulnerabilities, compounded by the destruction of personal property, implied that most did not have money to transport their belongings. Families bundled belongings and put up small polythene shacks over available space (The Times of India, 2013a). These roadside shacks, including over a covered drain, were about ten by ten feet, in some cases even six by six feet. Some families started living in concrete water pipes, about six feet in diameter. Shacks were propped up by poles and constructed almost entirely of plastic and tarpaulin. Within a few days, residents were served an ultimatum by the State to pull down the shacks and move out (The Times of India, 2013b). While these decrees of demolition and eviction appear merely as various agents acting as per diffuse practices and policies of a large state apparatus deploying tactics they do not fully control, these actions are sovereign since they are unconditional, final, and without any recourse of appeal for the displaced (Butler, 2004a). These sovereign acts constitute a 'spatial purification' that forge elite identities around consumption while negating the needs of the poor (Voyce, 2007).

Sovereignty is reanimated within these diffuse bureaucratic apparatuses. During the demolitions, evicted consumers allege that Harris' henchmen misled about 50 families that they would be get housing from the Karnataka Slum Development Board at another locality about 15 kilometers from Ejipura. Upon arriving, families were tricked by local conmen who broke open empty flats belonging to absent owners, claimed advances on the houses, and disappeared. Within a month when the owners returned, the Ejipura evictees were once again on the road. At the intervention

of local activists, the Karnataka Slum Development Board permitted these 50 families to stay in a local community hall. However, given the distance from Ejipura where they were employed, evictees incurred about INR 100 (an exorbitant expense in these conditions) per day in transportation costs. Many lost jobs and children discontinued schooling. This violated one of the basic tenets in extant national policies (e.g. JNNURM in 2005 and Rajiv Awas Yojana in 2011) on rehabilitation and resettlement of slum-dwellers, which states that relocation distances must be minimized to reduce impact on livelihood

A year after the demolition, there were still about 100 people living near the eviction site. An evictee lamented, “*we are staying like cows and goats.*” This was clearly a sign of being denied the position of a human subject and of derealisation (Butler, 2004a). There are well established legal frameworks to deal with illegal tenants. However, these economically and socially vulnerable evictees are unreal and do not even fall within these legal frameworks. They are less than human, and as the evictee laments, are reduced to an animal status.

The evictees were denied access to basic services. Water supply came from a single tap in the neighbourhood in a cluster of slums across the road near the construction, and they had running water only between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. Earlier, residents had a set of 10 taps installed within the EWS quarters. Residents could not wash dirty clothes unless necessary to conserve water. An increase in diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases impacted almost every household (Karpagam et al., 2014). Within ten days of eviction, increase in malnutrition and gastro-intestinal conditions, as well as stress-related ailments such as high blood pressure in a few women were noted.

Health and hygiene-related issues particularly affected women, children, and the elderly. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2013, Rosemary, a 60-year-old woman died of severe

cold after three days in the open. Two elderly women evictees died in July 2013. Neelamma, a 60-year-old woman who was suffering from gastrointestinal and respiratory infections after the eviction, died in a plastic tent that got flooded when it rained. 70-year-old Maqbool Jehan died on the pavement outside the area police station. Too old to work, and with a mentally disabled daughter, Maqbool Jehan slept outside the police station for safety. In September 2013, a seven-year-old boy drowned in a large ditch at the eviction site (The Hindu, 2013c).

In the year post eviction, activists witnessed women giving birth on the footpath and new-borns dying because of unassisted home-births. Pregnant women were unable to get medical check-ups despite discomfort and injuries. Children stopped attending school because of sickness, absence of toilets, and places to bathe. Participants lamented the complete deterioration of sanitation, increase in garbage, and lack of public toilets because of which they had to defecate in the open.

In summary, the violent dispossession in Ejipura that destroyed livelihoods, and contributed to diseases and deaths had a long-term impact on these vulnerable consumers. The vulnerability in Ejipura is physical, economic, legal, spatial, and social. Despite such conditions of destruction, death, and disease, the State has refused to help these consumers, and there has been no popular outcry against it. This was, as Davis (2006: 136), describes “living in shit.”

### **The Apparatuses of Derealization**

Under what conditions and by what mechanisms are some human lives so violently dispossessed with such impunity? According to Butler (2004a), derealization is a process of denying the status of a subject to a human being. We identify three apparatuses by which vulnerable lives in Ejipura are derealized and rendered ungrievable: juridical mechanisms, discourse of encroachers, and ellipses.

Here, we elaborate on these apparatuses of derealization (Further details of the three apparatuses of derealization are provided in the Web Appendix B).

*Derealizing through juridical mechanisms.* As Butler (2004a) observes, the law is actively deployed to support and reanimate sovereign power within governmentality in Ejipura. In the years before the demolition, and in its aftermath, the BBMP and Maverick systematically resorted to juridical mechanisms to wield sovereign influence, use rogue power, inflict violence and derealize vulnerable consumers of Ejipura.

With the collapse of a few blocks in 2004, when the BBMP decided to demolish EWS houses, it passed a resolution in 2005 stating that all persons residing in the EWS area, original allottees or not, would be identified and provided with permanent housing, the construction of which would be completed at the earliest. Accordingly, the BBMP issued beneficiary identity cards to the residents in 2006. In 2007, when all blocks were demolished, and residents were shifted to tin sheds, the BBMP again assured residents of permanent housing (PUCL Report, 2013).

A few original allottees filed a writ petition (number: 11912/2008), in response to which, in 2009, the Karnataka High Court directed the Housing and Urban Development Department and the BBMP to expeditiously proceed with the construction of quarters. Another group of allottees filed a writ petition (number: 45915/2011) in 2011 seeking a directive for the State to release funds for residential units. While this petition was pending at court, the BBMP and Maverick executed an agreement on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2012. The High Court passed an interim order on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012 holding (as per the writ petition 11912/2008) that the BBMP was not permitted to enter any contract with third parties for the reconstruction of flats. A settlement was arrived at in the writ petition 45915/2011 among some petitioners, BBMP, and

Maverick (PUCL Report, 2013). The High Court disposed of the petition (45915/2011) on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2012, with the directive that only the original allottees were entitled to newly constructed houses. The unusually swift disposal of the interim stay order within 15 days by the High Court and the fresh directive favoring eviction is noteworthy given the timelines of prior petitions. In India, such cases usually drag for years without any resolution, and the backlog for civil litigations varies from nine months to 5.4 years (Kasturi, 2009).

According to the court order, those desirous of taking an offer of INR 30000 instead of alternative rehabilitation could do so within two weeks. Based on information submitted by the BBMP on five acres of land available at another location for original allottees' rehabilitation, the Court directive indicated that the BBMP had undertaken to handover the site to Maverick for the construction of temporary transit sheds and other necessary infrastructure for original allottees. With these arrangements in place, the High Court directed the BBMP to clear all occupants from the EWS quarters by 8<sup>th</sup> October 2012. The BBMP used this order for demolishing the tin sheds in January 2013.

*Derealizing through discourse of encroachers.* Vulnerable consumers are derealized through an active discourse of encroachers invoked by the sovereigns. This discourse creates a differential subject formation through which vulnerable consumers are deemed as illegal and undeserving of any state support (Butler, 2004a).

Terms such as “illegal occupants,” “illegal squatters,” and “encroachers” were attributed to the EWS quarters' tenants because they did not own the property on which they lived. Immediately after the demolitions, a few evictees sought an urgent hearing of their pending petition at the Karnataka High Court. Refusing the hearing, the Division Bench said, “*if it is the case of allottees of EWS quarters then it would*

*have considered the plea for urgent hearing, but it can't be responsive to encroachers*" (The Hindu 2013a). In this rhetoric of sovereignty, constitutional rights can be invoked for allottees or owners, but the law does not apply to the 'illegal', the encroachers. Through the issue of property rights, state agencies deemed that the Ejipura tenants were "encroachers." This "deeming" of residents as encroachers justified their violent displacement, the denial of access to relief and rehabilitation, and to the sanctity of sovereign actions (Butler, 2004a). This also creates conditions for differentiating between more or less entitled subjects. An activist informed us,

The BBMP went to the court and claimed that these rentees were actually encroachers, they are illegally occupying. In fact, the judge kept on referring to them as illegal occupants and immigrants and all that. The [petitioners'] lawyer said, "Sorry, but, there is no term like 'illegal' in our Constitution. Can you please use the term 'citizen' and not 'illegal'?" The next day – the judgment came out against them.

We see how the BBMP that had passed a resolution in 2005 recognizing all residents as eligible for housing and issuing identification cards for both tenants and original owners toward this end, goes back to court in 2012 preemptorily and arbitrarily deeming the residents as encroachers. This discourse of illegality strips away the humanity of these vulnerable consumers who were earlier residents with access to housing, sanitation, livelihoods, and education. While the State may have otherwise had to provide relief and rehabilitation to the evictees on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, deeming evictees as illegal and encroachers creates a permanent space outside the rule of law where these vulnerable lives are derealized and made ungrievable. The legal process is no longer due for them. No representation needs to be made for them, and no evidence needs to be provided. The evictees,

deprived of any rights, undergo a suspension of their status as subjects (Butler 2004a). Given the distortion of evidence and suppression of facts by the State during past hearings, such as the 2011 court order that sanctioned demolitions, such legal processes nullify the meaning of a legal process.

In an interview with us, Uday Garudachar absolved himself of all responsibility for the demolition, squarely placed the blame on the BBMP and the State for the use of police force, and the lack of rehabilitation. He reiterated the issue of encroachers, differential subject formation, and claimed that the people evicted were “not the original allottees. They were unauthorized occupants.” From his sovereign position, he decides who can stay and who gets what. He added,

We gave them abundant money to all these unauthorized people; we have photographs and proof and documents to that effect. We gave INR 5000 to some, INR 10000 to some, and so on, I was not obligated to give them, but I gave them on humanitarian grounds.

Garudachar recognizes the vulnerability of the evicted consumers when he offers them some meagre monetary compensation. However, he frames his support as a paternalistic favour. As Butler (2014: 15) warns, vulnerability is also prone to paternalistic disavowal by dominant groups through which, “some of the injuries may get repaired, [but] the political agency of the so-called vulnerable populations gets effaced.” Indeed, such ‘favours’ help Garudachar claim an exalted position and condemn the evictees to a lower status of entities who need help. Moreover, despite having no legitimate authority, Garudachar exercises a prerogative power, “a “rogue” power par excellence” (Butler, 2004a: 56). Garudachar claims to have paid some compensation to those consumers who were evicted. However, in Bangalore rents and house prices are much higher, and evicted consumers could not find another place



with the paltry compensation they received. The PUCL report (2013) documents Garudachar as saying, “*As for the allegations that the encroachers have been injured in the eviction, they are fake. They are all acting; they’re very good kalakaars (actors).*” Thus, vulnerable consumers are not only desubjectified as encroachers, but are also made unreal as con artists who fake injuries.

*Derealizing through Ellipses.* The violence against vulnerable consumers was marked by ellipses in the accounts of state officials, elected representatives, Maverick Holdings and the media. These ellipses are exemplified by the State in maintaining silence on some of its guidelines and policies that pertain to slums.

The Union Government’s Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) earmarks funds for slum development and rehabilitation. Activists allege that the BBMP denied the requisition of a detailed project report from the JNNURM for EWS Quarters, and instead went for a public-private partnership (PPP) model. Although as per JNNURM guidelines for PPP projects, community involvement, and participation is encouraged right from planning to implementation, EWS residents were not consulted in this decision. Thus, they were denied recognizability by the State to become real subjects (Butler, 2004a). This is a case of an omission that contributes to a situation of trauma for vulnerable consumers (Bennett et al., 2016). In this trauma, we witness violence that has not been adequately theorized in marketing. A member of an international NGO involved in relief efforts informed us,

As per the JNNURM guidelines, you must take the consent of the people whose slums you are removing. Here they build some 20000 houses and keep it ready, whenever they want, they evict the slums and give them houses ten or fifteen kilometers from their livelihood. There is no consent of people being taken here.

Therefore, vulnerable consumers were denied the status of viable speaking subjects (Butler, 2004a). As mentioned above, BBMP officials and the police used the court order to justify their actions. When residents and activists asked for copies of the eviction order, some were threatened or arrested by the police; others were told to come to the BBMP office or to file a Right to Information (RTI) appeal. Notably, the demolitions were carried out between Friday and Monday, which meant the residents could not access government offices and courts that were closed over the weekend.

The silence maintained by the State and misinformation spread by some officials exacerbated the condition of structural vulnerability for the poor (Commuri and Ekici, 2008). During demolitions, evictees were not clear that they had no place to go. They were misinformed that there were houses in another locality, so some families moved with their belongings only to find houses locked. Some tenants had filed a review petition on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 2012 High Court directive. Given that this petition was pending for hearing, and the residents did not receive any eviction notice from the BBMP, they were caught unawares. Many EWS residents shared that in fact, the BBMP Commissioner had assured them that the BBMP would delay demolitions until April 2013 when their children finished school exams. State officials passed the buck from one department to another. A Karnataka Slum Development Board officer told us,

We shift a slum with government's permission and under the court's direction. With government's permission, we used the police to clear them. While shifting, we put up temporary sheds to house the people near the site, usually within two kilometers. They will have to put up with these troubles

*Interviewer:* Does the KSDB take care of the problems of shifting? The education of their children and so on?

*KSDB Officer:* No, these problems are not under the KSDB ambit. We give financial compensation where necessary, that's it.

This exchange exemplifies how the law is used partially to suit the State's requirements. The 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment and subsequent national policies on urban housing such as JNNURM 2005 and Rajiv Awas Yojana 2011 emphasize decentralized participatory structures, community participation, and a role for local bodies at every stage in the discharge of functions of slum improvement and upgradation, poverty alleviation, public health and sanitation. However, the KSDB officer's views reflect wider patterns of disenfranchisement and denial of slum-dwellers' participation on issues of the location and nature of development projects, their size, magnitude of displacement and rehabilitation involved in policies and programs intended for them (Das, 2003). In Ejipura, vulnerable residents "have to put up with these troubles" as the State protects and preserves its territoriality. Therefore, sovereignty is reanimated within the field of governmental apparatus (Butler, 2004a).

These ellipses get particularly exposed when sovereigns let caste identities slip. Consider the contradictions in Uday Garudachar's statement,

Because I am an upper caste, I have had to incur the wrath of these people, what can I do? (laughs) It is very difficult for us to survive in this society, my friend, and you know, by and large, I think the caste we belong to, we don't mean to oppress anybody, in history we have not done in the past, nor will we do it in the future.

Garudachar represents himself as a victim of "these people," who are the poor and low caste vulnerable groups (See the Web Appendix A and Appendix C for backgrounds of evictees). It is "these people" that were evicted in Ejipura. However, Garudachar tries to appropriate vulnerability by claiming to be a victim of

contemporary political discourses that question caste-based discrimination. Unlike the low caste evictees who are labelled as encroachers, he projects himself as a right-bearing citizen who follows the law of the land. As Butler (2014: 13) observed, dominant actors use discourse of vulnerability to "shore up their own privilege."

Local activists also pointed to ellipses in the media discourse, especially in the first four days. Activists followed up on the Ejipura case before the media started reporting. A journalist who covered the demolition shared that he had tried calling other journalists, but no one came. This is not surprising, given that private media corporations own most newspapers in India. As Roy (2004) observes, "[t]he embedded, corporate media in which the doctrine of Free Speech has been substituted by the doctrine of Free If You Agree Speech." Thus, media contributed to the state of ellipses by maintaining silence in the crucial period of dispossession (Butler, 2010).

Thus, the State derealized vulnerable consumers by creating ellipses about its policies and the steps taken to displace the EWS residents. These consumers find it difficult to create recognizability and to attain the status of viable speaking subjects in this zone of ellipsis. This form of derealization helps the State and Maverick as sovereigns to inflict violence and to dispossess vulnerable consumers.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, we examine how violence is inflicted on vulnerable consumers. We draw upon Judith Butler (2004a, 2004b, 2010, 2014) to attend to the inscription of violence within a governmentality that emphasizes autonomy, management of populations, and individual rights. This helps to cast in high relief the exploitative roles of the State and private corporations in a base-of-the-pyramid setting. It offers critical insights into the functioning of a Third World political economy. Our paper

makes important contributions to the literature on consumer vulnerability, critical marketing theory, and the base-of-the-pyramid.

*Inflicting Violence on Vulnerable Consumers.* Several researchers within the broad field of critical marketing theory have examined the dark side of markets and have called for systemic analyses of the functioning of capitalist markets and consumer cultures that pertain to vulnerable populations (e.g. Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2013; Tadajewski, 2010). Similarly, several critical writings on the base-of-the-pyramid and consumer vulnerability have closely attended to power and exploitation of vulnerable groups (Chatterjee, 2013; Saatcioglu and Corus' 2016; Varman et al., 2012; Varman and Khare, 2016). These researchers, however, have overlooked violence against vulnerable consumers. The use of violence in the process of accumulation is an important feature of contemporary capitalism as it exists in Ejiyura. Our attention to violence helps to comprehend the broader configurations of power as they determine the position of vulnerability.

We show how sovereign power gets revitalized within the framework of governmentality. Foucault (2008) explains governmentality as the way in which political power manages and regulates populations by controlling bodies and by structuring the life of a population. Several scholars have examined governmentality and its role in shaping markets and entrepreneurial, responsible, and prudential subject positions in India (Varman et al., 2012; Varman, Saha, and Skálén, 2013). We contribute to this scholarship by showcasing the role of sovereign power within the broader framework of governmentality.

Sovereign power is enacted through laws that give sovereigns the right to inflict violence. Sovereigns also inflict violence by suspending the law on the pretext of dealing with enemies who do not follow the law. Our participants allege that the

rule of law is suspended in Ejipura, and violence with the use of state forces and goons is inflicted on vulnerable consumers. Therefore, Maverick and the local State officials deploy violence against vulnerable consumers by invoking the law through a court order and then suspending it to create a zone of, what Butler (2004a: 62) calls, “law that is no law.”

Contemporary processes of accumulation through dispossession by Maverick ensure that a sphere of unpunishable violence is maintained despite a liberal discourse founded on human rights and the rule of law. The outcome is, as Butler (2004a: 56, emphasis in original) notes, “a lawless and prerogatory power, a ‘rogue’ power *par excellence*.” Vulnerable consumers get further disenfranchised, and privileged actors, such as Maverick, state inspectors, and local government officials contribute to the broad mechanisms of sovereign power. Existing literature on consumer vulnerability examines systemic forms of vulnerability (e.g. Commuri and Ekici, 2008; Shultz and Holbrook, 2009). However, it does not examine how in the categorization of different population groups, conditions of vulnerability are created. In the governmental process of categorizing people as encroachers and illegal, the seed of violence was sowed in Ejipura. Any systemic understanding of consumer vulnerability (cf. Commuri and Ekici, 2008; Shultz and Holbrook, 2009) has to pay attention to how governmentality as a process of categorization, hierarchization, and management of population groups reanimates conditions of sovereignty and violence. Further, we point to how consumer vulnerability is created in the name of capitalist development and progress. Therefore, we broaden the understanding of consumer vulnerability by attending to the role of violence and by developing a comprehensive understanding of the macro-social forces that perpetuate vulnerable states and market exclusion.

*Derealizing Vulnerable Consumers.* Several researchers have drawn attention

to the subject of consumer vulnerability in marketing theory (Baker et al., 2005; Baker et al., 2007; Falchetti et al., 2016; Hutton, 2016; Visconti, 2016). For example, Saatchigolu and Corus (2016) point to spatial vulnerability and how access to spaces often signifies privileges and power. They draw attention to how vulnerability is created through restriction and denial to social spaces. Consistent with their reading, we find that the poor were forcefully evicted from their homes to construct a shopping mall for the rich. While these scholars discuss disempowerment, restrictions, denial, and conflicts, they do not attend to how the vulnerable are dehumanized and subjected to violence in conflicts. More specifically, they do not address how vulnerable consumers are derealized. Such derealization of vulnerable consumers is necessary to maintain status quo or to displace and dispossess them further. Because violence against recognized subjects can lead to a popular revulsion that emanates from shared grief, there is an effort to derealize and desubjectify vulnerable consumers.

The violence in Ejipura does not lead to a popular outcry, media scrutiny, or any intervention by other State agencies designed to protect the interests of recognizable subjects. According to the evicted residents, the State and Maverick have derealized dispossessed consumers through discourse of encroachers and have used juridical mechanisms to desubjectify them (Butler 2004a). By making vulnerable consumers unreal and by reducing them to animal status, violence can be unleashed on them, allowing Maverick to create a shopping mall for elite consumption.

Our findings further show how vulnerable consumers are denied recognition that is necessary to create viable speaking subjects (Butler, 2004a). The State creates ellipses in the processes of dispossession in which it is complicit with Maverick by suppressing information. Further, the juridical process denies the status of the viable speaking subject to vulnerable consumers by deeming them as illegal (Butler, 2004a).

The media provided some coverage to the events after the dispossession but maintained silence during the eviction period allowing for a zone of ellipsis to exist on the crucial frames of violence (Butler, 2010). Thus, the process of accumulation in Ejiyura depends on violence but, also crucially, on derealization and the production of ellipses about vulnerable consumers. Theorists point to how access to spaces is dependent on privileges and power and is a creator of vulnerability (Saatcioglu and Corus, 2016). We expand the compass of this theorization on consumer vulnerability by attending to how spatial disempowerment requires specific apparatuses of derealization. The derealized, who are denied the status of subjects, can be displaced and expelled from spaces with impunity. Thus, we contribute to the existing literature on vulnerable consumers by attending to processes through which some consumers are denied the status of subjects and how it results in the recreation of vulnerability.

Our analysis helps to deepen our understanding of omission as marketplace trauma. A recent writing by Bennett et al. (2016) examines consequences of omission and resulting social trauma. We add to this work by attending to violence as a form of marketplace trauma. The violence we draw attention to is not confined to loss of identity but involves physical violence and death. Further, we attend to derealization as a form of omission. We show how derealization leads to desubjectification and violence. In this form of omission, vulnerable consumers are not just excluded by marketers, but the State and a private enterprise use their might to violently cast aside a group of vulnerable consumers who are denied the status of subjects.

Drawing on the work of Butler (2014), we add to writings on consumer vulnerability (Baker et al., 2006; Baker, 2009, 2016) by pointing to how its usage can create circuits of disempowerment. We found that Garudachar disavows and appropriates vulnerability in two conflicting ways that further weaken the position of



evicted consumers. On the one hand, he paternalistically claims that vulnerable consumers are dependent entities in need of his support. Therefore, the vulnerable are lesser beings who cannot be treated as full right-bearing citizens. On the other hand, he appropriates vulnerability by claiming that as an upper caste Hindu he is at the receiving end of political discourses that challenge caste-based discrimination. Thus, we add to the literature on consumer vulnerability by highlighting the discursive limits of how vulnerability can be used to get justice for disempowered groups.

Our study broadens the writ of Butler's theory on violence by including the context of vulnerable consumers. In understanding norms, Butler (2004a) does not differentiate between norms of the dominant and the dominant norms of a majority. Unlike the context of gender and sexuality in which the two may coincide, in the case of poverty, the norms practiced by a majority can be different from the norms of a dominant upper-class population. We show how the elite represented by the BBMP and Maverick do not normatively recognize vulnerable slum dwellers. Therefore, we draw attention to the difference between dominant norms and norms of the dominant that Butler glosses over in her analysis. Moreover, unlike Butler's understanding of violence that stems from the implementation of norms or normative violence, we found that violence is also extra-normative. Norms are frequently suspended to allow the rich to access public spaces without labelling them as encroachers. However, when the poor use public spaces, they are labelled as encroachers and are derealized. Therefore, we add to Butler's theory by offering insights into extra-normative violence and by separating norms of the dominant from dominant norms.

In conclusion, residents of Ejipura are subjected to practices of derealization that render violence unpunishable, facilitating profit-making in situations of extreme poverty. This research draws attention to the critical issue of violence as a form of

trauma and derealization that have not been understood in existing theories of consumer vulnerability. This conclusion leads to several questions that future studies should examine. How do derealized groups engage in resistance that can create real subject positions that are recognizable? Under what conditions does resistance by the derealized become effective in countervailing domination? How should recognizability be articulated in alternative discourses that creates viable speaking subjects? Some answers to these questions may help to counter violence and to create effective articulation of consumer vulnerability. Until then, the words of the poet Manazir Aashiq Harganvi (Pandey, 1997: 27) ring true:

*Nothing is left anywhere  
Man has become a dwarf  
Unable any longer even to delude himself about his height  
We have been emptied (of meaning)  
Half people, incomplete people*

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