

Economies of Inhabitation: Refugees at the Urban Frontier

The massive flows of migrants across the European and African continents have underlined issues of habitation, livelihood and spatial restructuring in the most violent light for contemporary scholarship. The figure of the 'Urban Refugee' was earlier framed as a local consideration. Specific cases like the Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees in the North American cities, the Palestinian refugee camps and refugee camps in Johannesburg have been studied as examples of the phenomenon. In 2009 the UNHCR addressed the global proportion of this issue by creating a policy document specifically addressing this figure which has become a pivotal object of global governance.

There are two primary themes around which the discussions on urban refugees are centered: a) economic functionality of the refugee population and b) spatial transformations brought about by migration and resettlement. Both of these issues localize a set of broader questions of citizenship, spatial justice and economic participation. The arrival of a displaced population demands responses from the state apparatus in terms of 'producing' the space both to physically house the population and to find an economic niche for the said population. Given these two imperatives, these populations very often find themselves at the frontier of large scale changes of both economic and spatial formations.

This panel considers three moments of such transformations in three South Asian cities. In each of these moments the migrant becomes the pivotal element in the restructuring of the urban landscape that she inhabits. In the first paper the Sindhi refugees in Jaipur provide a new frame for understanding the post-colonial development of Jaipur city beyond the familiar high political discourse of the 'merger' of princely states and changes wrought by the modernizing princely figures. The second paper brings to fore, the role of the state apparatus in apportioning and emplacing the refugee population received by the city of Kolkata. The paper attempts to argue that the transformation of Kolkata's agrarian hinterland came about through simultaneous and systematic efforts of the rehabilitation and urban planning mechanisms. The third paper discusses the restructuring of land markets and massive transformation of marshland ecology in the hinterlands abutting the Mohammadpur Geneva Camp in Dhaka. It tracks the paradoxical transformation of 'new suburbs' into the new centre of real estate, low cost housing and labour markets in the city. All three papers attempt to locate refugees and their habitation at the frontier of contemporary urban transformations.

1. The 'Entrepreneurial' Refugee in the *Bazaars*: Sindhi Migrants in Jaipur's Walled City **Garima Dhabhai**

Jaipur, located well within the North Indian heartland and the capital of a Rajput princely state was never the frontier city for transient migrant populations, who trickled into India after partition. However, the influx of Sindhi Hindu refugees to the city in the 1940s and 50s transformed it politically, culturally and materially. Jaipur is predominantly enframed within another post-colonial moment- that of princely states' merger with the Indian state and subsequent modernization of the

city in the 1940s under Mirza Ismail and its 'modern' ruler Man Singh II. This paper will braid these two frames of history (partition and merger) to understand the fashioning of Jaipur as a postcolonial capital city and subsequent infrastructural developments there. The Sindhi refugees were rehabilitated within the older precincts of Jaipur in newly created bazaars running parallel to the southern wall of the city. Over time, the wall has been declared a 'heritage' structure unleashing a legal battle over spaces claimed by the Sindhi traders of these markets.

The paper will delve into the spatial politics in the walled city of Jaipur that had originally been dominated by Hindu and Jain merchants. The uneasy relation between old traders and new entrants into the bazaar economy was also intensified by diverse social and cultural practices of these communities. The spatial and physical mapping of competing communities, like the Sindhis, Muslims and *baniya* Hindus in the walled city were undergirded by contending claims to 'authenticity' and 'purusharth' (entrepreneurialism). The 'entrepreneur' refugee became the focal point of political enunciations in post colonial Jaipur as also the economies around *capitalization* of the city.

2. Land and Labour at the 'Borders' of Kolkata: Refugee Lives in-between Town and Country.

Himadri Chatterjee

The paper presents an ethnographic snapshot of a peri-urban settlement (*Netajipally*) at the north-eastern border of Kolkata city. Drawing on field-based research, the paper attempts to piece together a historically grounded montage of life narratives that speak of journeys spanning several refugee camps and agriculturist colonies. Kolkata received a significant number of refugees from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) during the 1947 'Partition', the communal riots of late 1950s and 60s and during the *Bangladesh liberation war* of 1971. A significant number of these refugees were from artisanal and peasant castes (scheduled castes) of the *Namasudra* community. This population; categorised as Rural/Agriculturist refugees; were '*dispersed*' from the refugee camps in the city to agrarian colonies and work-site camps in the immediate hinterland. Simultaneously, urban planners were attempting large scale transformation of the agrarian hinterland of the city through planned transformation of land use. These attempts at spatial transformation and *emplacement* of the refugees in the agrarian hinterlands of Kolkata offer a rich context to evaluate the historical and political centrality of *Land* as a source of livelihood and shelter in the peri-urbanization process. The paper attempts to investigate the erasure of the urban hinterland from land and settlement documentation, which Ananya Roy has argued, was *unmapped* by the state apparatus; by focusing on the question of land and (informal) labor. It describes an entanglement of two rather contradictory governmental purposes of housing 'agriculturist' refugee populations in the urban periphery while planning substantial urban transformation of the same spaces. The paper attempts to turn the lens of *quiet politics* proposed by Solomon Benjamin from the population to the state in order to follow spatial transformations and *emplacement* affected by government agencies through myriad acts of *de-peasantization* and *de-agrarianization*.

3. Geneva Camp Mohammadpur and New Suburbs in Dhaka

Rajarshi Dasgupta

This paper studies the making of suburban settlements at the peripheries of postcolonial Dhaka, focusing on the case study of a large refugee settlement known as the Geneva Camp in the Mohammadpur locality. Formerly the western border of Dhaka, an area dotted with marshland and water bodies, Mohammadpur became home to a population of Urdu speaking refugees from India, following widespread violence as Bangladesh came into being. Held at the social and physical margins of Dhaka, however, this population has proved instrumental in the development of elite localities and suburbs in and around the area. Identified for long with the architecture of squatters in south Asia, Geneva camp has of late turned into prime real estate property. It has over the recent years witnessed a curious coexistence of slums and up-market housing projects driven by a large share of foreign investments. The hybrid topography is made more complex and intense by the juxtaposition of civil society associations and a population denied of citizenship. It provides a wide pool of casual and informal though often skilled workforce, willing and amenable to extreme surplus extraction. As a result, the culturally more homogeneous and traditional localities of the capital of Bangladesh are being displaced by these new kinds of suburbs emerging at the border, which offer cheap accommodation to migrant urban professionals arriving every day. Much of the capital, labor and actors fueling the current growth of Dhaka are being drawn from such new suburbs, which paradoxically play a central role from a peripheral location. The paper will try to generalize certain tendencies from this case study about the wider phenomena of the role of refugees in the urbanization of south Asia.