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Fictions of Possession: Land, Property and Capital in Colonial Calcutta c. 1820 to c. 1920

By

Debjani Bhattacharyya

Doctor of Philosophy

History

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Master of Arts, Jadavpur University, 2003

Advisor: Prof. Jeffrey Lesser, Ph.D.

An abstract of

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Abstract

Fictions of Possession: Land, Property and Capital in Colonial Calcutta c. 1820 to c. 1920

By Debjani Bhattacharyya

This dissertation studies the creation of a market in urban land as a central project of colonial urbanism in Calcutta from 1820 to 1920. It explores how a complex set of human-land-water relations was translated into a recognizable language of property. Broadly, it charts the birth of a specific juridical notion of property bolstered by an economic narrative of use shedding light upon colonial liberalism's unsettled relation to property rights. More specifically, by analyzing instances of land-acquisition, property disputes and regulation of housing speculation in colonial Calcutta, it charts the process through which ownership became financialized. Through this process of financialization, a *monetized* value of land replaced a *social* value in land as a possession involving a complex system of patronage, gifting practices, ancestral spirits and gods.

As Calcutta expanded from a trading post of the East India Company to the second capital of the British Empire from 1757 to 1911, the politics of land as social capital was transformed into a political economy of ownership. The decades following 1820 marked a crucial period in establishing laws pertaining to land acquisition, land titles and property rights over "alluvions." The legal ordering of spaces through the nineteenth century created new narratives of law to render fictitious earlier existing authorities and thereby delegitimizing various ways of dwelling in spaces. By the early twentieth century, another kind of fiction emerged encapsulated in the promise of a future value in land: a fiction that made speculation possible. Through an intricate negotiation of value as an economic, social and moral entity, land in colonial Calcutta was transformed into capital. Simultaneously, various narratives of possession authorized through maps, notarized government paper, and property deeds restructured the urban power networks.

In studying the transformation of the non-revenue generating marshes into property this dissertation demonstrates that law provided an important epistemological framework in the development of imperial cartography and a propertied geography throughout the nineteenth century. In mapping this particular history of the production of urban property this dissertation revealed the gap between the *necessary* and *possible* juridico-economic definitions of property: a gap where multiple ownership patterns exist.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: The “Land” Question: Property, Market and Law 1

I. Knowing the Land 1

II. Where is the “Land” in Colonial Urban History? 12

III. Property, Law and Market: 32

Chapter 1/ Story-telling as Owning: The Many Histories of Calcutta 46

I. Calcutta as Narrated by its Historians 46

II. Calcutta’s History as Imperial Allegory.. 50

III. Between “British Enterprise” and Planning Nightmare... 59

IV. Historical Closures: Calcutta’s Many Origins... 72

VI. Historical Disclosure: Fluid Poetics of the Urban 79

VII. Conclusion: Narrating Spatially and Framing the Project.................................... 88

Chapter 2/ Fabricating Symbols of Possession: Translating Calcutta’s Riverbank 92

I. Limiting the Fluid City 92

II. Writing History with the Knots and Folds of the River 99

III. The Curious Case of the Land that Grew: The Company as General *Zamindar*. 117

IV. The Many Biographies of One Plot of Land 130

V. Concluding Remarks: Muddying Property 135

Chapter 3 / Value’s Other: *Maidan* as a Hollow Core of Calcutta.......................... 140

I. Possessing the *Maidan*... 140

II. *Terra Economica*: Neoliberalism and Environment 147

III. The Time of the Park: The Unconsumable Open Space in Calcutta: 152

V. “This Wicked and Foule Fayre”: Spectacles in the Green 166

IV. The Politics of Open Space 169

VI. The Haunted *Maidan* 179

VII. Conclusion 188

Chapter 4/ Speculation and Land-Profiteering: Fixing the Fiscal Geography of Calcutta 192

I. Introduction: A Financial Activity in Search of a Lexicon 192

II. Between Native Mendacity and Colonial Economicity 201

III. A Twentieth-Century History of Necessities 206

IV. A Long History of “Hoarding” 214

V. Land as Fictitious Capital: “Squeezing and Profiteering” 221

VI. Conclusion: Fatalistic Future Vs. Developmental Futures 240

Conclusion: “Fictitious” Possessions 245

Glossary 256

Appendix 259

Fort William, Judicial Criminal, 1820, April 1st, No. 15 259

Bibliography 273

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: THE EARLY EUROPEAN SETTLEMENTS IN AND AROUND CALCUTTA REPRODUCED FROM SINHA, CALCUTTA IN URBAN HISTORY. 52

FIGURE 2: "CONJECTURAL MAP OF CALCUTTA AT THE TIME OF BRITISH ADVENT," REPRODUCED FROM RAY, SHORT HISTORY OF CALCUTTA: TOWN AND SUBURBS, CENSUS OF INDIA 1901, VOL. VII, PART 1. 63

FIGURE 3: THIS COLORED LITHOGRAPH IS TAKEN FROM PLATE 12 OF SIR CHARLES D'OYLY'S "VIEWS OF CALCUTTA AND ITS ENVIRONS" [VICTORIA MEMORIAL ARCHIVES, KOLKATA] 69

FIGURE 4: A PRESENT-DAY PICTORIAL SCROLL FROM MANASAMANGAL USED AS ACCOMPANIMENT WHILE RECITING THE POEM N.D. FROM DISTRICT MEDINIPUR, IN WEST BENGAL. [ACQUIRED BY THE AUTHOR IN 2011] 108

FIGURE 5: WATER-COLOUR DRAWING OF THE VIEW OF CALCUTTA FROM GARDEN REACH AFTER THOMAS AND WILLIAM DANIELL DATED C.1810. THIS PICTURE IS A COPY OF PLATE 49 FROM "A PICTURESQUE VOYAGE TO INDIA BY THE WAY OF CHINA." INSCRIBED ON THE FRONT IN PENCIL: "CALCUTTA FROM THE GARDEN REACH;" ON THE BACK IN PENCIL: "CALCUTTA. WILLIAM DANIELL R.A. PLATE 49. VIEW OF CALCUTTA FROM THE GARDEN REACH." [BRITISH LIBRARY COLLECTION, LONDON] 109

FIGURE 6: PEOPLE BATHING AND PRAYING IN THE HOLY RIVER GANGA, GOUACHE PAINTING ON MICA BY AN UNNAMED INDIAN ARTIST. DATE UNKNOWN IMAGE 15.8 X 19.8 CM. COURTESY OF WELLCOME LIBRARY, LONDON, © COPYRIGHTED WORK

available under Creative Commons Attribution only license CC BY 4.0 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/. 112

Figure 7: Arial Image of wetlands of Kolkata on the eastern fringes 2009. © Pradipta Ray 149

Figure 8: Land use Pattern of Wetlands of Kolkata (2003), courtesy http://www.keip.in/bl3/wetlands.php 150

Figure 9: Plan for the intelligence of the military operations at Calcutta, when Attacked and Taken by Seerajah Dowlet, 1756, a map by John Call and J. Cheevers, London, 1756 [Columbia University Map Collection, New York] 154

Figure 10: Engraved map with pictorial inserts of Calcutta by an unknown engraver published in 1842 under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. [British Library, London] 156

Figure 11: Plate 1 from the second set of Thomas and William Daniell's 'Oriental Scenery,' Victoria Memorial. [Victoria Memorial Archive, Kolkata] 163

Figure 12: Watercolour of a view of Calcutta from the Maidan by Stanley Leighton (1837-1901) dated 24th October 1868. Inscribed on the mount in pencil: "Calcutta from the Maidan." Fri. 24 Oct. 1868. Government House, Law Courts. Ochterlony Monument. [British Library, London]. 164

Figure 13: Uncoloured lithograph of a panorama of Calcutta drawn after nature by Frederick Fiebig and prepared, printed and published by T. Black of the Asiatic Lithographic Press in Calcutta in 1847. The sixth section of

THE PANORAMA SHOWS CHOWRINGHEE ROAD. IN THIS VIEW, WE CAN SEE THREE OF THE WATER TANKS PLACED ALONG THE MAIDAN TO SUPPLY WATER TO THE CITY. [BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON] 173

FIGURE 14: (81) MORNING RIDE OF A LADY OF CALCUTTA IN HER PALANQUIN, INDIA. FROM NOTES OF TRAVEL 1904, UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD. INDIA, VOL. I AND II, STEREOSCOPIC IMAGES MOUNTED ON GRAY. ALBUMEN PRINTS. [ALKHAZI FOUNDATION, DELHI] 184

FIGURE 15: E. P. RICHARDS, THE EXISTING STREET AND MAIN ROAD SYSTEM OF CALCUTTA, (CALCUTTA: CALCUTTA IMPROVEMENT TRUST 1910) [BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON]. 228

FIGURE 16: ROUTE MAP: CALCUTTA AND HOWRAH (CALCUTTA TRAMWAYS AND COMPANY CO., 1910) COURTESY OF HARVARD MAP COLLECTION, CAMBRIDGE MA 228

FIGURE 17: RAJARTHAT, KOLKATA © PRADIPTA RAY, 2008 249

Introduction: The “Land” Question: Property, Market and Law

> Property is nothing but a basis of expectation…. There is no image, no painting, no visible trait, which can express the relation that constitutes property. It is not material, it is metaphysical: it is a mere conception of the mind.
>
> --- Jeremy Bentham, *Theory of Legislation*

I. Knowing the Land

Since the 1980s India’s urban revitalization has revealed its darker side. This shadowy specter of development is known by the name of “land-grabs.”[1] All the major cities in India, including Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai boast satellite towns for high-skilled service sector workers, a world-class airport, information-technology cities, high-priced malls and wide roads.[2] Built by a handful of multinational companies, these satellite towns (also known as “new towns”) replicate one another in their layout and availability of services for upper-middle class families. These homogenous spaces take pride in having rid themselves of the problems of cultural heterogeneity and tradition that beset Indian metropolises. In their bid to thrust their cities

---

[1] In 2006 the Government of West Bengal enacted the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to facilitate an eminent domain take over of 997 acres of farmland for a car factory owned by a private business in an area called Singur, about 30 kilometres from Kolkata. A year later, in 2007 the Government of West Bengal allowed Salim Group to set up a chemical hub in Nandigram, a rural area about 70 kilometres away from Kolkata, under the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy. This resulted in violent clashes between the villagers and the police leaving fourteen unarmed villagers dead in police firing. This event galvanized a massive citizen’s movement, which toppled the thirty-four years of left rule in the state.

[2] When I refer to the contemporary city I use the new names of Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and while referring to the colonial city I use Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

into the global information economy and financial circuits, the chief ministers of the states and mayors of each of the cities operationalize the stamping out of difference in the production of these "uncoded spaces."[3] These new towns become sites where law retreats into the background and non-sovereign entities like multinational companies take over. The relation between law and the global economy is constantly restaged in these spaces of exception, reconfiguring the relation between sovereignty and territoriality.[4] The construction of these satellite towns resulted in the displacement of peri-urban farming populations and enabled massive transfer of government and public lands to the private sector.

Countless human rights organizations, NGOs, and citizens' movements' reports point to the secrecy and lack of transparency that shroud the transfer of public or government lands to private corporate hands, laying the blame squarely on the state and the politicians, revealing their discontent with postcolonial capitalist development.[5] Yet,

---

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theorization of smooth and striated spaces explains how contemporary flows of financial capital encode and homogenize spaces, especially in the global South in *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have labeled it the "smooth spaces of uncoded and deterritorialized flows," in *Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 327; Saskia Sassen has theorized the informational city in similar terms in *Global Networks, Linked Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Architect Rem Koolhaas reads the landscape of what remains after modernization especially by focusing on malls in India, Brazil and Lagos as "junk space." Rem Koolhaas and Hal Foster, *Junkspace/ Running Room* (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2013).

[4] Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[5] Medha Patkar et. al., "Fact Finding Report on Nandigram," December 8, 2007 http://development-dialogues.blogspot.com/2007/12/fact-finding-report-on-nandigram-by.html; Rajarshi Dasgupta et. al, "Final Report of an Independent Citizens' Team from Kolkata," March 8, 2008 http://development-dialogues.blogspot.com/2008/03/final-report-of-independent-citizens.html; Kalyan Sanyal and Rajesh Bhattacharyya, "Bypassing the Squalor: New Towns, Immaterial Labour and Exclusion in Post-colonial Urbanisation," *Economic Political Weekly* 45, no 31 (July 30, 2011): 41-48; Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2007) 105-168. For instance, one of the most popular and controversial political movements in India currently is to free politics of corruption and the culture of secrecy known as the Anna

at the beginning of the twentieth century, during another period of capitalist globalization under imperialism, the British Raj blamed the governed natives for their lack of transparency as far as landholding was concerned and accused them of impeding colonial developmental efforts in the city of Calcutta. For instance in 1923, in spite of extensive colonial legal codification, some of the British municipal officials and members of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce lobbied the Bengal Legislative Council for four years for a specialized Land Court in Calcutta. The purpose of the Land Court was to efficiently assess the supposedly incomprehensible land titles through which the natives held their property in order to facilitate land acquisition for road development projects.[6] These officials insisted that the property and housing crisis in colonial Calcutta that ensued during World War I could be tackled only by disciplining indigenous forms of ownership, and enabling an easy transfer of land to the municipal body for public works:

> […] in the background there lurks the greater danger of dubious titles with its restricting influence on the number and extent of all transactions in land, while there are also special difficulties inherent in the law and customs of Bengal, such as joint-family ownership, widow's rights, *wakf* [Muslim charitable property]and *debattar* [property dedicated for Hindu religious purposes]. We have considered whether these difficulties might not be met to some extent at least by the establishment of a Land Court, which would at all events ensure a prompt and certain title…[7]

Hazare Movement against Corruption.

[6] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1924), Progs. §§ 16 -21.

[7] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, Prog. § 21.

Historians like Ranajit Guha and A. G. Hopkins, writing about colonial South Asia and Africa respectively, argued that establishing the propertied citizen was one of the defining hallmarks of British colonialism.[8] Yet, even after a century of legal and economic consolidation of ownership and property rights, there remained a disjuncture between how the colonial state thought urban property should be held and how the colonized population held onto property. While the colonial government recognized that intervention into familial and religious modes of landholding would result in clashes, indigenous forms of ownership practices nonetheless required a radical makeover. After three centuries of colonial rule, British officials still struggled to render indigenous ownership patterns transparent. As a result, property remained an unsettled and unsettling question even in early twentieth-century Calcutta.

Concerns about indigenous ownership practices can be seen through the nineteenth century legal, economic and urban improvement discourses. This was a period of unprecedented urbanization and economic standardization in colonial cities of British India. Colonial officials invested enormous energies in assessing land titles for revenue-generating land in the early years of colonial encounter. During the revenue settlements in the late eighteenth century the problem of impenetrable land titles, and traditions recorded in memory, customs and local usages, thwarted the agents of the British East

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[8] Anthony Pagden argues that John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* secured the justification of British colonialism in the New World in *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Ranajit Guha's classic work demonstrates how early colonial historiography served the dual purposes of knowledge formation about property patterns and enabled a rule of property in Bengal in *A Rule of Property in Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); A. G. Hopkins stresses the importance of the analytic of property in empire making in his seminal essay exploring the British annexation of Lagos in " Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain's Annexation of Lagos, 1861." *The Journal of Economic History*, 40, no. 4 (Dec., 1980), 777-798.

India Company from developing a coherent and uniform revenue policy.[9] Colonial, nationalist, Marxist and postcolonial historical scholarships have widely documented the British efforts at deciphering agricultural landholdings.[10] Yet, we know very little about the history of urban land, even as major restructuring of land tenure and forest landscape provided the basis for understanding the economic and cultural effects of colonialism, offering the background for recovering the rebellious peasant, the tribal population, the *coolie* [native laborer] and plantation worker.[11] What political and economic principles of land and property were shared across the agricultural fields, the forests, the plantation and ecological urban spaces? The history of land in colonial India is overwhelmingly narrated

---

[9] Guha, *A Rule of Property*, 13

[10] For early colonial history see Frank David Ascoli, *Early Revenue History of Bengal and the Fifth Report, 1812* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917); William Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs, particularly respecting the present state of Bengal and its dependencies* (London: J. Almon, 1772); Harry Verlest, *View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal, including a reply to the Misrepresentation of Mr. Bolts and other writers* (Cornhill: J. Nourse, 1772); for histories by the Cambridge School see Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Christopher J. Baker and David Washbrook, *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880-1940* (Macmillan: New Delhi, 1975); for histories on land and revenue by Subaltern Studies Group see Guha, *A Rule of Property*; Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947: The Land Question* (Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi, 1984); a recent article links the creation of a market in alienable land titles with the development of the military-fiscal complex of the East India Company in Bengal during the turn of the nineteenth-century, Tirthankar Roy, "Rethinking the Origins of British India: State Formation and Military-Fiscal Undertakings in an Eighteenth Century World Region," *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (2013): 1125-1156.

[11] For agrarian history see David Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 649-721; David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*; for histories of peasant rebellion see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 1999); Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984); for histories of forest settlement see Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: "Primitives" and History-Writing in a Colonial Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forest, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Archana Prasad, *Against Ecological Romanticism:Verrier Elwin and the Making of Anti-Modern Tribal Identity* (Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2003); Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860-1914* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200 – 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

in terms of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 in eastern India,[12] Thomas Munro's *ryotwari* revenue settlement in southern India,[13] the various Forest acts, and the settlement of the itinerant population in the plantation as acts of violence and conquest.[14] However, beyond the major projects of conquest and extraction, what do we know about the everyday maneuvers that wrested land from the indigenous population to develop colonial cities?

The processes through which a market in urban land was consolidated and regulated in colonial Calcutta open up rich genealogies of colonial economy, urban ecology and environment. This dissertation is a history of how a complex set of human-land-water relations was translated into a recognizable language of property in the marshy and deltaic space of Calcutta from roughly 1820 to 1920. Presenting an overlooked archive for colonial urban history of South Asia, my dissertation charts three interrelated processes. First, I begin by mapping the translation of a politics of belonging to spaces into a political economy of property through the nineteenth century. Second, I demonstrate that by the latter half of the nineteenth century colonial officials made every effort to produce a juridico-economic notion of property out of various regimes of social, spiritual, ancestral and political value systems vis-à-vis ownership. Finally, I conclude by demonstrating that, by the turn of the twentieth century, a financialized market in urban

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[12] Guha, *A Rule of Property*.

[13] R. C. Dutt, "Munro and the Ryotwari Settlement in Madras 1820-27," *The Economic History of India Under Early British Rule: From the Rise of the British Power in 1757 to the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837* Vol. 1 (Keegan and Paul: London, 1902), 153-171; Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*.

[14] Skaria, *Hybrid Histories*; Banerjee, *Politics of Time*; Aditya Pratap Deo, "Spirits, State Effects And People's Politics: Negotiating Sovereignty In 20th Century Kanker, Central India," (PhD Dissertation: Emory University, 2013).

property rescripted vernacular power circuits and produced new modes of governance, which ushered in a developmental, rather than merely a civilizing colonial state.[15] Understanding this move from a civilizing mission to a developmental state adds a longer genealogy to the complex inheritance of postcolonial development in India.

The processes of codifying an urban property market are illuminated by a study of how colonial town-planning destroyed urban life-worlds and restructured ecological spaces through Victorian sanitarian drives. Through an analysis of the colonial regulation of how urban land was to be held, bought, sold and speculated I show how indigenous commercial value systems were reformulated, especially in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In this manner, the chapters that follow shed light, through a study of the urban property market in colonial Calcutta, on the legal rationale and economic imperatives that ordered and maintained the Company and Raj rule on the ground. Rather than focusing on master-plans of urbanization I chart the everyday enactments and displays of power that transferred land from the indigenous population through multiple legal fictions, and masqueraded pecuniary gains as civilizing missions in the nineteenth century and developmental agendas in the twentieth century.[16] My dissertation attempts to "write into the history of [modern property rights] the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it."[17]

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[15] David Ludden hinted at this developmental shift in "India's Developmental Regime," *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicolas Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992), 247-87.

[16] The British East India Company ruled till 1857 and then the Crown took over. I mark these two distinct entities by calling the corporate-sovereign the Company or East India Company and the imperial sovereign the British Raj.

[17] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 43.

Calcutta expanded from a trading post of the East India Company to the second capital of the British Empire between the years 1757 and 1911. In 1805 the shifting course of the river Ganga resulted in the sedimentation of “shoals and mudflat” along Calcutta’s western bank. This deposit created a large strip of land and rendered obsolete the first survey of urban property conducted by the revenue officials in 1797.[18] The sudden emergence of a new strip of marshy lands provides an entry point into the myriad ways of living in and with a transient landscape of wetlands and its gradually disappearing history. The decades following the emergence of the strip of land, especially from 1820 to 1860, marked a crucial period in establishing and amending land acquisition laws in Bengal and the creation of the idea of eminent domain. My work delineates the messy and uneven percolation of land acquisition regulations into the municipal ventures of ordering space in colonial Calcutta.[19] 1857 marked an important shift in the nature of colonial power as the joint-stock corporation of East India Company turned into a sovereign power and began a project of standardizing market practices and organization in all fields of governance. I conclude this dissertation at this moment of financial

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[18] The Chief Engineer of Calcutta Mark Wood and William Baillie prepared a map with details of property measurements in 1797. The appendix with the property measurements were attached to the Extract from the Proceedings of his Excellency the Most Nobel the Governor General in Council in the Territories Department, 24 March 1820, Judicial [Criminal], 1 April 1820 WBSA, Kolkata.

[19] In 1824 the colonial authorities first passed the Regulation 1 of Bengal Code, which had two clear purposes. First, it laid down the rules to acquire land at a “fair value” for “roads, canals, or other public purposes,” and second it sought to arrange and systematize procedures for claims by landlords relating to what they defined “the peculiar circumstances of the lands required for the purpose of salt manufacture.” *Bengal Code of 1824*, *Regulation* 1, no. 1. Various reformulations of the Bengal Code over half a century culminated in the Land Acquisition Law enacted in 1884; for a detailed history of the land laws of Bengal in the nineteenth century see, Sarada Charan Mitra, *The Land-Law of Bengal, Tagore Law Lectures – 1895* (Calcutta: Thacker and Spink, 1898); see also Priya S. Gupta, “The Peculiar Circumstances of Eminent Domain in India,” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 49, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 445-489 for a critical reading of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the eminent domain debate and its messy entanglement in questions of sovereignty, democracy and the Indian Constitution.

standardization with the crisis of urban property speculation of the 1920s. This moment of crisis crystalized the emergence of urban property as fictitious capital and an entity for forms of market governance for a developmental colonial state.

By analyzing instances of land-acquisition, property disputes and regulation of property speculation, I chart the processes through which ownership became thoroughly financialized as the British sought to render the intractable spaces transparent. I argue that, through these processes of financialization, a *monetized* value of land replaced a *social* value in land and water as a possession involving a complex system of patronage, gifting practices, ancestral spirits and gods. Unlike previous histories of Calcutta, which have treated the terrain as an inert background, my dissertation attempts to follow the cracks in the archive which reveal a dynamic, mobile and a shifting deltaic space. At the same time, I remain aware of the pitfalls of fixing and capturing in writing a densely lived, affect-saturated fluid landscape.[20] Yet, if we admit that in writing we condense multiple natures of the fluvial space, which is both land and water and always moving, then this dissertation reveals a changing reconfiguration of land and variable ownership patterns. It sheds new light on the history of colonial capitalism by illuminating the processes through which colonial officials legitimatized certain ownership patterns and delegitimized others.[21]

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[20] On the difficulties of writing about fluid nature see Hugh Raffles, *In Amazonia: A Natural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), esp. 7-11 and 28-33.

[21] In the case of the changing understanding of property as things in the nineteenth century to property as entitlements in the twentieth century legal scholar Thomas Grey suggest that one can note different temporal and spatial realities of property in "The Disintegration of Property," *Property* eds. J Ronald Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 69-85.

Calcutta is situated in combined river system comprised of the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna, creating the world's largest delta. Each year this river system carries about 40 billion cubic feet of silt on the journey to the Bay of Bengal, in the process creating new transient lands called *diaras* and *chars*.[22] Moreover, Calcutta is on the edge of this world's largest mangrove estuary and forms the rim of the critical wetlands of eastern India.[23] Located within this shifting terrain, the city's history is also a history of fortifying a moving landscape, creating a *terra firma* and translating Bengal's specific wetland ecology into that of a fixed geography of a colonial Presidency town and second capital of the British Empire.[24] Hence it is not surprising that historians have repeatedly employed the trope "from marshes to a metropolis" to define British enterprise in the face of a shifting and fluid landscape.[25]

The transformation of the marshes into property in colonial Calcutta offers a unique vantage point for intervening into the debates in colonial legal studies,

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[22] Iftekar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State and Social Change 1840-1943* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2010), 1. According to him this river system carries the highest portion of annual sediment of any world river system amounting to about 25% of the world total.

[23] Sundarbans is one of the largest tidal halophytic mangrove forests in the world, about 110 miles from present Kolkata and enlisted as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1997. The East Kolkata Wetlands that link up the city to the mangrove estuary of the Sundarbans were classified as Ramsar protected sites in 2003. However, due to entrenched governmental corruption all the stipulations about building on a protected site are flouted and the wetlands are becoming "real-estate-in-waiting." I would like to thank Prof. Dhrubajyoti Ghosh for coining this term.

[24] Presidency towns were administrative units of the British East India Company through the nineteenth century. Prior to that they were often known as Factory Towns. Apart from Calcutta, Bombay too met a similar fate since it consisted of wetlands and archipelagos which were fortified into an island, joined with the mainland during colonialism. See Mariam Dossal, *Theatre of Conflict, City of Hope: Mumbai 1660 to Present Times*, (New Delhi: Oxford University press, 2010).

[25] Oneil Biswas, *Calcutta and Calcuttans: From Dihi to Megalopolis* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1992); Biren Roy, *Calcutta, 1481-1981: Marshes to Metropolis* (Calcutta: National Council of Education, 1982).

geographical knowledge production and development of the colonial economy.[26] The shifting reconfiguration of water-land-human relation is the tissue that connects nineteenth-century ecological changes in the Bay of Bengal region to the legal and economic history of European colonialism. Recent scholarship has noted how the marshy and transient *char* and *diara* lands were often treated either as great environmental laboratories or as wastelands during agricultural land settlement in the Bengal region.[27] Following the twenty-year custom used to determine adverse possession, *chars* could only be legally considered land if they had a continued existence of twenty years.[28] Very few *chars* met this twenty-year requirement of geographical stabilization necessary to gain legal recognition, although people lived on and harvested these lands. Unfortunately, however, since they were not legally recognized as land, they have left only marginal archival traces.[29] The history of urban marshy land in colonial Calcutta remains an untold story and is critical to understanding the birth of a market in urban land. The separation of land and water and the creation of property frame the discussion of colonial economic, legal and ecological ideology that produced a market in urban land.

This is not simply a history of colonial technological design and intervention upon a vibrant and untouched terrain. As I show in Chapter 1, populations living in the villages

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[26] Lauren Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*: *Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[27] Christopher V. Hill, *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Change in Riparian North India, 1770 – 1994* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1997); Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta*; Kuntala Lahiri-Dutta and Gopa Samanta, *Dancing with the River: People and Life on the Chars of South Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[28] For an understanding of *khas*-land (government owned), *char* land and *benami* land (land without titles, often char lands were known as *benami* land) see Mitra, *The Land-Law of Bengal*.

[29] Lahiri-Dutta, *Dancing with the River*, 50.

and marshes which became Calcutta before the advent of the Europeans dug or widened canals for navigation. These populations moved with the fish and lived with the ebb and flow of the water. Traces of these anthropogenic canals have been sedimented in the naming of the city, like Creek Row, a central street in Calcutta, supposed to be on top of a disappeared man-made canal or Ultadanga, a Calcutta neighborhood, signaling dry land close to the river.[30] This of course reveals that humans living here in pre-colonial times intervened in nature, however, that intervention operated through ways which were aware of the dangers of drying the land. The history that I am tracing is a particular history of the drying of this wetland, the concomitant formation of colonial topographical knowledge, and the economic and legal ordering of spaces.

II. Where is the "Land" in Colonial Urban History?

Although the dynamic nature of urban ecology and its interaction with colonial capitalist town planning provides a salient case study for economic and urban environmental history, these interactions have been largely ignored in the scholarship on urban histories of South Asia. Both colonial Bombay and Calcutta are built on distinct ecological landscapes. For instance, the terrain upon which any city stands, especially cities such as Calcutta, Bombay, and New Orleans, deserves not to be treated as a mere backdrop in the sedimentation of a long history of urban ecology, colonial urban economy and present environmental movements that define them. As I will show in chapters two and three, without an understanding of the role played by marshes in the formation of topographical knowledge during the colonial period, we cannot appreciate

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[30] The affix *danga* comes from the Bengali same Bengali word meaning dry land.

why postcolonial environmental movements have forgotten the wetlands that surround and protect Calcutta. In a recent exhibition following the devastating flooding in Mumbai in 2005, urban planners and landscape designers Anuradha Mathur and Dilip DaCuhna pointed out that the difficulties surrounding flooding arises only as a "problem" based on a misguided notion of water-land division. Instead Mathur and DaCuhna offer the concept of "soaking" to understand what they called the aqueous terrain of Mumbai.[31] According to them:

> An estuary demands gradients not walls, fluid occupancies not defined land uses, negotiated moments, not hard edges. In short, it demands the accommodation of the sea not a war against it, which continues to be fought by engineers and administrators as they carry sea walls inland in a bid to both, channel monsoon runoff and keep the sea out.[32]

Such aqueous landscapes remain a murmur in the backdrop of colonial urban histories of plague, cholera, miasma, and there is hardly any engagement with the specificity of that particular landscape and forms of living with it. The watery terrain, the disappeared canals of Calcutta, the negotiated moments that created the "hard edge" of the riverbank and the legal fictions that were employed to create fictitious capital out of this watery terrain will provide the overarching framing for the dissertation.

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[31] Anuradha Mathur and Dilip DaCuhna, *Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary* (New Delhi: Rupa Publishing, 2009). I would like to thank Scott Gabriel Knowles for drawing my attention to this exhibition. Raffles has termed a similar landscape in Igrape as an amphibious universe where the lines between land and water are fluid and uses the term *terra anfibia* in *In Amazonia*, 16.

[32] Mathur and DaCuhna, *Soak,* 6.

Keeping the frame of the watery terrain, I discuss the scholarship on South Asian cities in broad strokes in order to situate my work within the field. The major themes of urban historiography may be summed up into three large groups. The first section briefly discusses the early scholarship on colonial cities which focused mostly on the architectural history of ancient cities, touching upon themes of urban settlement patterns, demographics, and growth of colonial port towns. The second group of works borrowed from the sociological analytic tools developed in village studies and often uncritically applied it to study colonial and post-independent cities in India. I show how the imagination of the village continues to endure in recent scholarship on working class politics and urban violence. Finally, I focus in greater detail on the third group comprising recent scholarship, which explores the spatialization of power in the built environment of colonial cities. Despite their remarkable contributions to the field of colonial urban history, their focus has largely remained on epidemiological and disciplinary town-planning practices. Moreover, while this body of literature has borrowed from Michel Foucault's theorization of space and its relation to power,[33] I show how their application of Foucault falls short in viewing power as localized within the state or the municipal body.

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[33] The following works by Michel Foucault influenced much of the scholarship about colonial and postcolonial urbanism: *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977); *History of Sexuality Volume 1: An introduction* (London: Allen Lane, 1979); *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77* (Harvester: Brighton, 1980); "Questions on Geography: Interviewers: The Editors of the Journal *Herodote*," *Michel Foucualt: Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-77*, ed. C. Gordon (Harvester: Brighton, 1980); "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22-27; "Governmentality," *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Power*, Vol. 3, ed. J.D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 2001), 201-222; *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76* (London: Penguin, London, 2003); *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian: 2007).

Epidemiology and epidemic crisis have animated municipal planning through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result, urban historiography has turned primarily to the rich municipal and medical archives to produce a history of segregated black and white towns in colonial cities.[34] Such approaches to the history of South Asian cities have primarily mapped urban spaces as sites of power and resistance. Moreover, following the much-needed cultural turn in postcolonial historiography, the question of economy has been largely elided in recent scholarship.[35] I argue that the tendency to disregard the question of landownership in these studies has resulted in the production of a landscape of cultural difference without a serious analysis of economy and power. Due to this oversight, the challenges of how to locate and understand the processes through which mud, silt and wetlands enter and exit various circuits of value, including social, political and economic systems, remain largely unaddressed.

South Asian urban history is a relatively new field in comparison to agrarian, economic, political and social histories. From the early 1970's there was a scholarly debate on whether there was indeed a field called urban history. The research during this

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[34] Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Like Oldenburg's, Narayani Gupta's work on Delhi deals with the militarization of the city following the Uprising of 1857 in *Delhi between two Empires 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); See also Sandip Hazareesingh, *The Colonial City and the Challenge of Modernity: Urban Hegemonies and Civic Contestations in Bombay City 1900–1925* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan 2007); Steve Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2007); Janaki Nair, *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore's Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[35] For a review essay on the cultural turn and rethinking of South Asian history see Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (Dec., 1994):1475-1490. Exception to this are Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Vinay Gidwani, *Capital Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); see also the recent debate between Vivek Chibber and Partha Chatterjee regarding the question of economy within subaltern studies in New York Conference of Historical Materialism, April 28, 2012 at http://kafila.org/2013/05/07/partha-chatterjee-on-subaltern-studies-marxism-and-vivek-chhibber/.

period was primarily based on studying port towns, temple cities, ancient cities and the urban morphology of these spaces. Two important conferences and publications marked the beginning of this new field of urban studies. The first of these was a conference held in Santa Cruz (USA) in June 1976 themed "Origin and Development of Colonial Port Cities of Asia." The second was the founding of the Urban History Association of India in 1978, followed by the subsequent publication of two edited volumes of their first conference proceedings.[36] Hedged in between the first conference and the publications, there was an emergence of what can be called a "field" on the writing of history of cities and towns in India, with a focus on the port towns of India,[37] temple-cities of southern India,[38] ancient and Mughal cities of north Indian,[39] sacred Hindu cities,[40] and colonial Presidency Towns.[41]

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[36] Indu Banga, *The City in Indian History: Urban Demography, Society, and Politics* (New Delhi: South Asia Publications, 1991) and *Ports and Their Hinterlands in India (1700-1950)*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992).

[37] Susan Lewandowski, "Changing Form and Function in the Ceremonial and Colonial Port City in India: An Historical Analysis of Madurai and Madras," *Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (1977): 183-212; Dilip K Basu ed., *The Rise and Growth of Colonial Port Cities in Asia*, Monograph Series No. 25, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[38] *Indian Economic and Social History Review: Special Number on South Indian Temples* 14, no. 2 (Jan-March 1977); Burton Stein, "Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country," *Journal of Asian Studies* 37, no.1 (Nov. 1977): 7-26; Arjun Appadurai, "Kings, Sects, and Temples in South India 1350-1700 A.D," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14, no.1 (Jan-March 1977): 47-73; Susan Lewandowski, "The Hindu Temple in South India" *Buildings and Society: Essays on the Social Development of the Built Environment,* ed. Anthony D. King (London: Psychology Press, 1984).

[39] Kalyan N. Chaudhuri, "Some Reflections on the Town and Country in Mughal India," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1978): 77-96; Gregory L. Possehl, *Ancient Cities of the Indus* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979); Amita Ray, *Villages, Towns and Secular Buildings in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1964).

[40] Lalitha Prasad Vidyarthi, *The Sacred Complex of Hindu Gaya* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961); R. L. Singh, *Benaras: A Study in Urban Geography* (Benaras: Nand Kishore Brothers, 1955); and a more recent study by Diana Eck *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2012).

[41] Nirmal Kumar Bose, "Calcutta a Premature Metropolis," *Scientific American* 213, no. 3 (1965): 91-103; S. N. Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Myths and History* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1977); Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in*

In urban history's early phases, a city as disciplinary objects of historical enquiry were studied through the lens of transition from a rural aggregate into what was imagined to be urban.[42] The prism of inter-connected world economic systems and the dependency relationship that bound the west or the metropole as the "core" to the less developed "eastern/southern nations" of the periphery produced the dominant category for understanding colonial cities.[43] The major concerns that animated this literature were the nature of the relationship between the city and its hinterland, the role and character of mercantile elites, and urban forms.[44] Early scholarship on cities focused on demonstrating the evolution of cities through continuous settlement patterns from an archive of archaeological excavations and artifacts which include "extensive public works in palaces and granaries; careful and exact systems of town design set in grid patterns; extensive

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Urban History (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1978); Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Calcutta a Living City* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1993); Surajit Sinha, *Cultural Profile of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Indian Anthropological Society, 1972).

[42] Janet Abu-Lughod and Richard Hay, eds. *Third World Urbanization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); John Friedman and Robert Wulff, *The Urban Transition: Comparative Studies of newly Industrializing Societies* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976); and for India, see Richard G. Fox ed., *Urban India: Society, Space, Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970).

[43] Influenced primarily by concepts of dependency theory developed in the works of Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

[44] Influenced by the "central place theory" of G.W. Skinner, ed. *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974) scholars studied the city as regionally connected to its hinterland. See, Ellen McDonald Gumprez, "City-Hinterland Relations and the Development of a Regional Elite in Nineteenth Century Bombay," *Journal of Asian Studies*, no. 33 (1974): 581-601; Howard Spodek, *Urban-Rural Integration in Regional Development: A Case Study of Saurashtra, India 1800-1960*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976); other works that deal with urban morphology are John E. Brush, "The Morphology of Indian Cities," *India's Urban Future,* ed. Roy Turner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 57-70.

plumbing and drainage facilities; *stupa* mounds apparently for worship."[45] These studies also drew centrally upon the frameworks developed by the twentieth-century urban planner and visionary Patrick Geddes who popularized the study of town morphology during his two visits in India in the early twentieth century.[46] One important criticism of these early studies on ancient cities questioned the verifiability of the archival material, since these studies drew upon ancient treatises on architecture like the *Agni Purana*, the *Sukranitisara* and the *Manasara*. Critics argued that these treatises perhaps say more about the ancient imagination of the city rather than its actual social history.[47]

Some of these studies were primarily concerned with assessing the impact of the urban on the rural with analytics developed about the rural from within village studies.[48] Therefore the village continued to haunt studies of Indian cities.[49] In post-independence Nehruvian India the village became the site of social engineering, and likewise the city

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[45] Howard Spodek, "Studying the History of Urbanization in India" *Journal of Urban History* 6, no.3 (1980): 251-294, 254.

[46] Patrick Geddes came to India at the invitation of Lord Pentland in Madras and then visited and stayed in various cities and princely states and prepared town-planning and morphology reports. See Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, *Patrick Geddes in India* (London: Lund Humphries, 1947); Hellen E. Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1975).

[47] Prabhakar V. Begde, *Ancient and Mediaeval Town-Planning in India* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1978); Binode Behari Dutt, *Town Planning in Ancient India* (New Delhi: New Asian Publishers, 1977).

[48] See Mysore Narashimachar Srinivas, "The Industrialisation and Urbanisation of Rural Areas," *Urban Sociology in India: Reader and Source Book,* ed. Madhugiri Saroja Rao (New Delhi: Orient Blacksawn, 1974), 488-499.

[49] Both Howard Spodek and Doris Meth Srinivasan eds., *Urban Form and Meaning in South Asia: The Shaping of Cities from Prehistoric to Precolonial Times* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1993) and Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge, 1976) explain urban phenomenon through the lens of the village. In a recent interview Ashis Nandy discussed Mahatma Gandhi, Mysore Narashimachar Srinivas, and Satyajit Ray understandings of the relation between the city, the village and the Indian self, see "An Ambiguous Journey to the City: A Dialogue with Ashis Nandy" in *Pratilipi: A Bilingual Literary Journal*, no 6, (2010), http://pratilipi.in/2010/06/an-ambiguous-journey-to-the-city-a-dialogue-with-ashis-nandy/.

was approached through the lens of planning, with its long colonial legacy.[50] The five-year Planning Commissions, which characterized the newly independent Indian nation, and demographic studies of urban spaces as sites of population crisis went hand in hand.[51] The refugee migration following the partition of British India in 1947, especially to Delhi and Calcutta, compounded the view of cities as sites of population explosion and crisis, and planning as its remedial measure.[52]

Ashis Nandy furthered the urban-village rhetoric in a novel direction by counterpoising the city between two notions of villages – one of them is the infantilized, pastoralised village and the other coordinate being the "village as a geriatric responsibility."[53] He analyzes the two predominant metaphors of journey to cities that had organized the psychogeography of the "Indian [Hindu] self." One of them was the pilgrimage to explore the limits of one's self, but which was complete only with a return to the village; and the other was the movement to the nineteenth-century colonial Presidency towns. The latter was a journey where the promise of return was not secure. Nandy puts forth a powerful critique of the imagination of the village which organizes much of the semiotics of narrating the urban in social sciences, literature and film. He

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[50] Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India administered through five-year plans of development. This particular form of developmental ideology came to be known as Nehruvian development. See for instance, S. Gopal, "The Formative Ideology of Jawaharlal Nehru, *Economic and Political Weekly* 11, no. 21 (May 22, 1976): 787-789+791-792.

[51] See, for example, Satish Saberwal ed., *Processes and Institutions in Urban India: Sociological Studies* (New Delhi: Vikas Publication, 1978); Bert F. Hoselitz, "A Survey of the Literature on Urbanism in India," *India's Urban Future,* ed. Roy Turner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), 425-43.

[52] Jean Racine, ed., *Calcutta 1981: The City, Its Crisis and the Debate on Urban Planning* (Delhi: Manohar Publication, 1990).

[53] Ashis Nandy, *Ambiguous Journey to the City: The village and other odd ruins of the self in Indian imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

points out that the "cultural logic of an Indian city demands the presence of the village."[54] In popular culture, slums emerge as a site of escape from the traditional fetters of caste and gender politics of the villages of India. As an escape opportunity slums often became an idealized pastoral space of an imagined village defined by compassion and communitarianism in contrast to heartless urbanism. Such a representation elides histories of deprivation and contestations that defined the life of the urban working-class.[55] Therefore, it is not surprising that planning commissions and urban histories have apprehended the so-called non-modernity of the slums, and working-class neighborhoods, as a residue of the rural landscape and not as a by-product of industrial, colonial urbanism.

This rural-cultural trope also dominates scholarship on urban violence, presenting it as expressing the primordial passions of community being mobilized in the slums of Bombay, Calcutta or Rangoon.[56] Working class histories therefore also turn to the idea of community ties that bind the urban worker to the village patronage system to explore the

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[54] Nandy, *Ambiguous Journey to the City*, 20.

[55] See Ashis Nandy, "Introduction: The popular Cinema as the Slum's Eye View of Indian Politics" in Nandy, eds. *The Secret Politics of our Desire*: *Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema* (Delhi: Zed Books, 1999).

[56] Exceptions to this are Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and *Wages of Violence: Naming and Indentity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). The British administrative assessment of the working-class tension within the city focused critically on housing conditions. Early twentieth-century colonial Rent Commissions in Calcutta read the agitation in Bombay's working-class neighborhoods as a cautionary in *Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the land value and rents in Calcutta 1919* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1920); *Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923*; *Speech by the Hon'ble Surendra Nath Banerjea introducing the Bill to amend the Calcutta Municipal Act*, *1925* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1925).

working class politics of early-twentieth-century colonial cities.[57] It is interesting to note that urban ethnographies increasingly turn to slums and street life as a site of culture.[58] When historical studies focus on slums it is as a background to labor, epidemiological and sanitary histories. The culturalization of the slums through a village rubric reproduces the colonial imagination of spaces. In such an imagined urbanscape the British owned and managed the administrative spaces, the civil lines, the urban parks and the colonial bungalows which were hedged in not by a city, but instead by a "native town" – a cultural and epistemological confusion of spaces, forms of dwelling and architectural forms.

Architectural historian Swati Chattopadhyay's work challenged the idea of the duality of the black and white city. However, in the process, her work also reproduced a *bhadralok* [elite] cultural logic of space unhinged from the materiality of the very production that underlies it.[59] Histories, which have focused on slums, *chawls* [working-

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[57] For works that address the urban working-class see for Calcutta Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and L. Fernandes, *Producing Workers: The Politics of Gender, Class, and Culture in the Calcutta Jute Mills* (Philadelphia, 1997); for Bombay, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900– 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Morris David Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labor Force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854– 1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); for Ahmedabad see Markand Mehta, *The Ahmedabad Cotton Textile Industry: Genesis and Growth* (Ahmedabad: New Order 1982).

[58] Arjun Appadurai, "Street Culture," *The India Magazine* 8, no. 1 (December 1987):12-22; Nikhil Anand, "Disconnecting Experience: Making World Class Roads in Mumbai," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, (2006): 3422-3429; Ananya Roy, *City Requiem: Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[59] Apart from Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2005) other works that challenge the dual city imagination are W. J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*; Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890–1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

class tenement in Mumbai] and *bastis* [working-class housing in Kolkata and Delhi] have addressed these sites as spaces of hybrid or indigenous modernity and celebrate the distinct cultural difference of each of these locales.[60] In the process, often "culture" comes to stand in for the city and the city for "culture."[61] Within another body of scholarship on the social history of Indian cities there is a conflation of the city's culture with its luminaries, producing exclusive figures of the *dilliwalla* (inhabitants of Delhi), or the *banarasipaan* (ways of being an inhabitant of the city of Benaras), or the *bhadralok-Kolkata* (cultural elites of Calcutta), figures produced through erasures of heterogeneity.[62]

The late twentieth century restructuring of urban spaces worldwide, movements of informal labor transnationally and the birth of what has been called a "global city" have generated a fresh approach to the idea of the urban in recent decades.[63] Broadly, these studies have viewed the urban space in terms of a history of segregation,[64]

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[60] Preeti Chopra, *A Joint Enterprise: Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernity.*

[61] Gupta, *Delhi between two Empires*, 6.

[62] See especially Gupta, "Portrait of the City," *Delhi between two Empires,* 39-69. For a study of *Benarasipan* see Nita Kumar, *The Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); for a history of *bhadralok* Calcutta see Chattophadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*.

[63] For studies of global cities see for instance, Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban–Regional Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989); Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996); and Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006); to explore how these frames have produced a distinct theory of South Asian urban modernity see, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essay in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Gyan Prakash, and Kevin Michael Kruse. *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Eric Lewis Beverley, "Colonial urbanism and South Asian cities," *Social History* 36, no. 4 (November 2011): 482-497.

[64] Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow*.

nationalism,[65] modernity/governmentality,[66] and, more recently, what Gyan Prakash has termed the neo-liberal noir urbanisms.[67] Urban histories of colonial cities have focused on the emergence of the novel infrastructure and technologies of governance generated out of the colonial encounter and urban modernity. Prashant Kidambi has called this moment one of "imperial globalization," wherein the "fabric of urban life in many colonial cities was transformed by the rise of a global economic system based on industrial capitalism and its attendant technologies of power."[68]

Urban spatiality of colonialism has been literally read in the architectural changes in the colonial bungalow,[69] Lutyen's Delhi [named after the twentieth-century architect Edwin Lutyen],[70] the native bourgeois houses of Calcutta,[71] or the technocratically

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[65] Christopher. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) and *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Douglas E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City,1852–1928* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880 to 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Jim Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974).

[66] Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*; Hazareesingh, *The Colonial City and the Challenge of Modernity;* Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*; Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*; Nair, *The Promise of the Metropolis*; Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities.*

[67] Gyan Prakash "The Urban Turn," *The Cities of Everyday Life: Sarai Reader* (Delhi: Sarai 2002), 2-7.

[68] Kidambi, *The Making of the Indian Metropolis*, 1.

[69] Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (Routledge: London, 1976).

[70] Legg's study on Delhi uses a Foucauldian lens of control, discipline and governmentality to develop geographical models to study spatial control in "Biopolitics and the Urban Environment," *Spaces of Colonialism*, 149-209.

[71] Chattopadhyay's fascinating exploration of Calcutta's culture and indigenous modernity turns away from the British administrative spaces to the wealthy native houses and their architectural ideology, *Representing Calcutta*, 136-224.

planned smaller towns of post-independence India.[72] Frustrated with the restrictive nature of the concepts developed in western urban studies to be applied to the context of India Anthony King turned to village architecture in his study of the bungalow, to portray it as a form of hybrid architecture born out of colonialism.[73] Another set of scholarship has viewed urban modernity by studying the emergence of modern penal colonies, museums, leisure and travel.[74] Colonial urbanism has shed light on the historical processes that trace the emergence of modern state power, urban governance, the growth of civil society, the networks of knowledge production and circuits of governmental technologies.[75] In the last ten years there has been a resurgence of scholarship that explores the urban space as a site to analyze colonial power. In the following pages I will discuss the major contributions of these studies which link urban planning to disciplinary state power.

Kidambi's study of Bombay focuses on the negotiation of European modernity in the colony in order to demonstrate the contested nature of urban modernity. He shows how "governing" the city was not on the colonial agenda until the late nineteenth century and argues that the lens of "crisis" allowed urban governance and disciplining to come to the fore. His study focuses on the plague outbreak in Bombay through the 1890s and how discourses of epidemic, sanitation and slums coalesced into the theme of improvement

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[72] Notions of technocratic planning and its limits have dominated the study of the north-west Indian city Chandigarh. See, Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: The Making of an Indian City* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Vikramaditya Prakash, *Le Corbuiser's Chandigarh: Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2002).

[73] King, *Colonial Urban Development.*

[74] David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Stanford: University of California Press, 1993); Nandy, *Ambiguous Journey*; Gyan Prakash, "Science "Gone Native" in Colonial Native," *Representation* 40, Special Issue: Seeing Science (Autumn, 1992): 153-178.

[75] Kidambi, *The Making of the Indian Metropolis*.

and gave colonial India the civic body of the urban Improvement Trust, which was first founded in 1898 in Bombay. This body was mimicked under a very different set of conditions in Calcutta and Delhi in 1911.[76] Focusing on the projects of the Bombay Improvement Trust, he explores the changes in the built environment of the city and how the residents contested these changes, as well as the criminalization of an array of activities in the public space. In a similar vein, Stephen Legg's study of twentieth century Delhi reveals the rich archive of planning to sketch the contours of colonial urban governance. Drawing upon various planning documents, he explores how municipal officials responded to everyday and extraordinary threats to public order to reveal officials' and planners' concerns. Viewing the city from the perspective of an increasingly embattled colonial state illuminates how urban governance inscribed powerful notions of hierarchy upon urban space.

Kidambi's investigation of similar planning material from Bombay overturns Legg's narrative to raise questions about the limits of the "state." Kidambi demonstrates how local society and the "state" interacted through the various agencies thereby arguing that the "state" was imbricated within the formation of the city rather than external to it. Borrowing from Timothy Mitchell's conceptualization of "state-effects," Kidambi shows how "the state" must be studied as diffused in operations of various local agencies to produce both material and ideological "structural effects" that set it apart as a transcendent entity.[77] Kidambi's study greatly contributes to an understanding of the

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[76] For Delhi Improvement Trust see, Legg, *Spaces of Control*; for Calcutta Improvement Trust see Partho Datta, *Planning the City: Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta c. 1800 – c. 1940* (Delhi: Tulika Books, 2012).

[77] Kidambi, *Making of an Indian Metropolis*, 12; for theorization of "state effects," see Timothy Mitchell,

changing rationalities of urban governance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. He argues that the epidemic changed technologies of urban governance and simultaneously resulted in the development of civil societies through the early twentieth century. His work also provides a corrective to nostalgic representations of a cosmopolitan and egalitarian Bombay vis-à-vis the turbulent space of the present Mumbai, by showing how Bombay's society was always stratified according to caste and class. In this manner, he opens up the concern with urban violence in recent Mumbai in novel ways by studying the limits of cosmopolitanism, rather than viewing it as a rural relic of the slums.[78]

William Glover's study of Lahore problematizes the spatialization of colonial power, and native resistance and contestation to argue for a nuanced approach to colonial urban planning. He traces how modernity, defined as both danger and promise, as both unprecedented human depravity and the highest cultural attainment, became a constitutive feature of colonial urbanism in South Asia. In his work the urban is constituted both out of an imagined cultural space, as well as out of a built environment in which each is intricately tied to the other in an inextricable manner. Building upon the idea of "cultural difference," he lays out how the project of colonial urbanism in Lahore centered on bringing modernity and difference into a common frame.[79] This common

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"Society, Economy and the State Effect," *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn,* ed. George Steinmetz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 76-97.

[78] Similar moves have also been made by Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence*; in the case of Hyderabad the relation between the walled old city of Hyderabad and the spatial remnants of pre-colonial city became the lens to view the new urban political identities Ratna Naidu, *Old Cities, New Predicaments: A Study of Hyderabad* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991).

[79] Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*, xviii.

frame was constituted by both professional town planners and lay people, by both Indians and British. These two groups worked from the shared assumptions that the "material world embodied immaterial qualities that were both tangible and agentive."[80] Through a meticulous reading of the architectural world, the town-planning materials, the built environment, as well as works of architectural pedagogy, housekeeping manuals, and local urban histories, Glover foregrounds the materialist outlook of liberalism which connected the natural environment with pedagogy and character-building as central to town-planning debates.[81]

Glover's study claims to show that "with conscious attention to design and organization, the ordinary material fabric of a village or city might be harnessed to a broader program of social improvement," what he has called the "object lessons of urban fabric."[82] Glover's "object-lessons" of urban fabric – "buildings, natural landscape features, and the entire physical infrastructure that went into the making of a street"[83] – departs from earlier studies of colonial urban expansion as the spatialization of power and native resistance to it, through a close attention to the materiality of building and the negotiated terrain of knowledge production about urban planning. Yet, Glover does not expand upon this notion to show how planning had larger ramifications beyond issues of

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[80] Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*, xx.

[81] Glover shows how Swiss educationist and social reformer Johann Pestalozzi's curriculum of "object-lessons" were imported to the colonial classrooms and gradually adopted into the everyday parlance of colonial life. *Making Lahore Modern*, xxv.

[82] Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*, xxv.

[83] Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*, xxv.

cultural difference and negotiated knowledges by impinging on economic and legal ordering of spaces.

Instead of arguing for a negotiated or contested practice of urban modernity, Swati Chattopadhyay's work on Calcutta focuses on the translation of European "modernity" in colonial Calcutta and the consequences following the impossibility of such a translation. The failure of transposing colonial modernity onto Calcutta soon turned it into a "disastrous city," an "urban-planner's nightmare," and a place where "modernity went awry." Within this failed modernity, she locates the urban uncanny for the colonialist as well as the nationalist conception of space. In her analysis of the ambivalence of being both colonized and modern, she turns her attention to the nationalist imagination of the city. Thus the city becomes the site to be viewed through spaces of control and spaces of [elite] resistance. As Chattopadhyay writes:

> The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a number of important spatial and cultural changes in Calcutta that led to the formation of a significant and identifiable body of Bengali literature, paintings, plays and films as well as literary and art criticism that dealt with various notions of nationalism and modern Bengali identity and claimed the city as its own. Such a cultural space was in turn made possible by the proliferation of a number of public places for getting together – theatres, cinemas, cafés, and parks – which, from the 1920's, often borrowed European Modernist and Art Deco architectural forms to announce their novelty.[84]

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[84] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta,* 5.

Thus the modernity of the urban space of Calcutta is born out of forms of governance and colonial institutions, as well as the spatial ambitions reflected in the nationalist, literary, and artistic imaginations of the elite Bengali population. Contrary to this depiction, Partha Chatterjee's recent work on the practice of colonial power deftly demonstrates the impossibility of such a decoupling of modern and pre-modern with the moment of colonial encounter.[85]

Each of the above-mentioned studies offers unique and rich accounts of a chronological and statist ordering of spaces and indigenous resistance to colonial urban modernity. In this manner these works have argued for viewing urban modernity through a plural lens of multiple modernities, hybrid modernities, and vernacular modernities.[86] For instance, the stimulating and productive tensions that arise in Glover's wonderful reading of colonial planning and Urdu-language urban literary tropes are collapsed in his conclusion by holding onto a framework of colonial modernity in order to "acknowledge that the colonial practices that brought a modern form of urbanism to Indian cities increasingly constituted the very grounds through which difference, resistance, incompletion, paradox or creativity could be recognized as such in an urban setting."[87]

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[85] Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Sheldon Pollock makes a similar assessment of the early modern period as a threshold where multiple possibilities were arrested before the ascendency of Western modernity took place, see "Introduction," *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500 – 1800*, ed., Sheldon Pollock (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

[86] For works highlighting hybrid modernity see Prakash, *Le Corbuiser's Chandigarh;* Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*; Hazareesingh, *The Colonial City and the Challenge of Modernity*; Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*; Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*; Nair, *The Promise of the Metropolis*; Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities.*

[87] Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*, 201.

While pluralizing modernity has provided rich theoretical tools and analytic concepts, it still fails on two accounts. Pluralizing fails to decenter the political and ideological charges of European Modernity, and most studies of urban histories uncritically collapse the urban and planning with modernity. This collapsing serves to gloss over modernizing impulses of agricultural settlements and forest conservation, as well as to obscure a whole host of colonial projects beyond the urban centers. This leaves one critical question that still remains unanswered: how do we understand issues of planning in ancient, medieval and early modern cities?[88]

My work intervenes in these planning debates to show that, by analyzing the different regimes of value through which urban land moves, a complex picture of changing power nodes and social networks of land ownership emerges. Michel Foucault's elaboration of the spatialization of power has been a critical tool for analyzing the technologies of power in shaping colonial urbanism across Asia and Africa.[89] For this reason, most of the above works focus on Foucault's theorization of power to map the discursive shifts in power's operations. Yet, since most often these works operationalize the framework of domination versus resistance, they eventually end up producing the colonial state as a concentration of power contra Foucault, who offers a diffuse and non-coercive notion of power.[90] In this manner they fail to also situate individual cities within a connected network of global capitalism and modern liberal governmental knowledge

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[88] Answering this question remains beyond the purview of this dissertation, but hopefully I have demonstrated the limits of the planning-as-modernity framework.

[89] Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Legg, *Spaces of Control*.

[90] Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Power, Vol. 3*.

formations. Therefore, instead of exploring the limiting lens of modernity and planning, my study departs from these works by concentrating on the historical circulation of land, water and mud in colonial Calcutta while tracing the consolidation of these discrete natural elements into an economic and juridical entity known as "property." The lens of property is helpful in following the conglomerate of land-water-mud in order to analyze the various trajectories of human transactions, translations and calculations that enliven these elements as they navigate various regimes of values: social, political and economic.[91] Moreover moving away from the focus on epidemiology, culture, architecture and the built environments, reveals the understudied swamps, marshes, bogs, wetlands, mud, soil and disappeared landscapes that constitute the material bases of our cities and ideological bases surrounding the politics of property.

Attention to the different regimes of value through which urban land moves is critical to comprehending the classical shift that marked colonial capitalism in South Asia: how the economic subject went from being a land-owner through the eighteenth and nineteenth century to a financier in the twentieth century. Although this classic shift from a feudal landowner to a capitalist businessman is by now a truism, the literature has nonetheless not explored how the economic figure of the financier was grafted upon the feudal landlord, which a detailed study of urban land and housing offers. Instead, studies

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[91] My thinking about urban space and property relation is informed by the contributions of critical geography studies and rights to the city discourse. See Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso Press, 1989) and *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: BlackWell, 1996); David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001); *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (New York: Verso, 2006) and *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

of agrarian economy focusing on the *zamindar* or the feudal land system,[92] and business histories focusing on merchants, traders and financiers located in the urban settings, have developed as two separate fields in South Asia.[93] As a result the important overlap between these figures has been often overlooked.

III. Property, Law and Market:

Property is a complex issue. Long before Jeremy Bentham, whose epigraph about property as metaphysical begins the chapter, a seventeenth-century legal logician from Bengal named Raghunath Siromani also analyzed the metaphysical nature of property. Property, he claimed in his text *Swatva Vichara*, was a "settled impression deriving from a particular knowledge that this is mine."[94] Siromani, who belonged to the *Navyanaya* [New Logic School], argued that property was one of the sixteen *padartha* or categories of knowledge.[95] The settled impression or knowledge about property, according to him,

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[92] For studies of land settlement in the agrarian world see, Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India"; Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*; Ludden, *Peasant History in South India.*

[93] For studies of traders, merchants and what is increasingly being labeled as business history see, B. R. Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India: From 1860 to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Amiya Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900 – 1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Rajat Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1880-1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 3 (1995): 449-554.

[94] J. Duncan M Derrett, "*Svatva-vicara* or a Discussion of property," *Essays in Classical and Modern Hindu Law*, *Volume 1, Dharmasastra and Related Ideas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 333. There is a debate about the approximate date of this text as well as its authorship. Although scholars prior to Derrett have attributed its composition to the sixteenth century, Derrett argues that the text was composed either at the end of the 17th or early 18th century. The original manuscript of this text has not been located and the one Derrett discusses is attributed to Gokulnatha. For a discussion of the mysteries of authorship of the text see Derrett, *Essays in Classical and Modern Hindu Law*, 336-337.

[95] I would like to thank Professor Velcheru Narayana Rao for generously reading this text with me and contextualizing Raghunath Siromani's thoughts within the larger context of the *Navyanaya* thought.

preceded ownership and was the basis of the self. In Sanskrit all three operative words, property (*swatva*), self (*swa*) and ownership (*swamitya*) share the same root word *swa*.[96] Without the sense of the *swa* or self that is intrinsic to the idea of the *swatva* or property, one would not be able to determine that which did not belong to that particular self, or demarcate that which belonged to the other (*paraswar*).[97] Therefore, in Siromani's doctrine of property, which was reflective of popular practices throughout early modern Bengal, personal property was recognized in the acknowledgement of the relation between ownership and personhood.[98] In the early nineteenth century, this particular epistemology of property became a site of contest in the Company courts in colonial Bengal, which were in the process of regularizing ownership practices among the natives.

It is, therefore, not surprising that during the early nineteenth century colonial legal knowledge was made to confront its own limits when put to the task of determining the ownership of a person returned from the dead. At a time when the revenue department of the Company was in the process of regularizing property through a survey of the marshy river bank, a challenge to their notion of property came from another quarter. In 1834 a dead person came back to life to claim his property in Bengal. This famous (or infamous) person was known as Jal (fake) Raja Pratapchandra in Bengal, a man whose life produced

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[96] For a discussion of the relation between ownership, self and possession, and how an awareness of the self of possession is critical to Shiromani's theory of property see Gautam Bhadra's excellent reading in *Jal Rajar Katha: Bardhamaner Pratapchandra* (Kolkata: Ananda Publisher, 2002) esp.17-19.

[97] Notice also the *swa* in the word *paraswar*, which reveals that the constitution of the other happens through a demarcation of the self.

[98] In the German language *eigen* (self) and das *Eigentum* (property) share a common root, which could be translated into English as ownness and ownership.

countless histories and plays.[99] Pratapchandra was the son of Maharaja Tejchandra of Barddhaman in Bengal and he died of some mysterious illness in 1821. Thirteen years later, a *sanyasi* (religious mendicant with matted hair) appeared in Barddhaman and claimed that he was Pratapchandra. This resulted in a long battle over property rights that lasted from 1834 to1838. Late nineteenth-century British accounts referred to the *sanyasi* as the Tichborne of Bengal, alluding to the famous British case of impersonation for the purposes of swindling.[100] The crux of this legal debate was whether property was encapsulated in personhood as Siromani had explicated, versus property rights guaranteed through the materiality of paper deed. During the four years when the case was being fought out intensely in the British courts, the *sanyasi* Pratapchandra managed to gather some family members, villagers from his *zamindari* [landownership] and a whole host of people who recognized him as the returned son and their *zamindar*.[101] The case became an oft-memorialized scandal because of the various self-narratives that were used to establish both the property of the person and the person of property.[102] This

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[99] Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay wrote a historical novel entitled *Jalraja Pratapchand* (1883) and later a fictional narrative on the same plot entitled *Madhabilata* (1885); Bhadra, *Jal Rajar Katha*; John R. McLane's magisterial account of the early modern history Bardhamman Estate ends with this event and he called it one of the most celebrated episodes in the history of the zamindars of Bengal. *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-century Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 318.

[100] William Hunter first compared pretender Pratapchandra to Roger Tichborne in "The Territorial Aristocracy in Bengal, The Burdwan Raj," *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 54, 108 (1872): 192; George Toynbee, *A Sketch of the Administration of Hooghly District, 1795-1845* (Calcutta 1888), 150-152; Hoaratio Bickerstaffee Rowney, "Jal Rajah of Burdwan," *The Young Zemindar, His Erratic Wanderings and Eventual Return being a record of Life, Manners and Events in Bengal of between Forty and Fifty years ago in Three Volumes*, Vol. 11 (London: Remington and Co. 1880), 192-203.

[101] Zamindar or Zemindar means landlord and comes from the Persian word, *zamin* means land and *dar* means holding. Zamindars were usually small landlord who leased out their lands to tenant farmers and collected revenue. With the advent of colonialism and the revenue settlement conducted by the British in Bengal known as the Permanent Settlement of 1793 they became a very powerful class and started taking on the title of Raja, which means king. The Barddhaman Estate was one such *zamindar*.

[102] Bhadra, "Smriti, Shakhya, Parichiti," *Jal Rajar Katha*, 141-200.

property dispute in the early nineteenth century made the British acutely aware of the whole host of meanings associated with property and the need for legal codification to render them transparent in the colony. Yet, as I showed earlier in this introduction, a century later property was anything but a settled issue.

For instance, the Land Development Report from 1923 to control the housing crisis in Calcutta, rather than revealing an environment of well-defined individual rights to property and a clearly demarcated state arena, illuminates the recurrent attempts to render the domain of indigenous ownership legible. As the dissertation will show, imperial legal and economic thought was repeatedly challenged in the face of multiple ownership practices in which property could not simply be defined as a concern for law, or a concern for the municipal revenue department alone. The above vignette exemplifies the multiple epistemologies of ownership and the challenges the British attempts at standardization of property confronted. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that multiple understandings of ownership were not peculiar to the Indian subcontinent. For instance, in ancient Greek thought there was no one word to understand property the way it has evolved since sixteenth century in modern Western thought. Aristotle described property in Book 1 of the *Politics* through concepts such as *oikos* (things that belong to the household), *ktesis* (obtaining [possessions]), and *chremata* (things used, or goods, or money).[103]

The fact that, in spite of the codification of personal Hindu and Islamic laws, the legal regulation of urban property continued to be a protean issue that vexed the colonial

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[103] Katherine Verdery and Caroline Humphrey, eds., *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2004), 21.

government through the nineteenth century and even in early-twentieth century housing debates, serves as a salient counterpoint to comprehending colonial liberalism and its unsettled relation to property.[104] In his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), John Locke laid the groundwork for establishing the relation between property and a liberal and just governance, in the process offering the justification for the nature of British colonialism in the New World.[105] Within Western thought Locke is credited with foregrounding the concept of property within the domain of classical liberalism and political economy, as well as clearing the ground for understanding property as an institution and as a set of relations.[106] As Anthony Pagden has argued, British colonialism during the early modern era sought to differentiate itself from other European forms of colonialism, especially Spanish colonialism, by framing their colonial ideology of civilizing missions, expansion of commerce, and a just rule of law based on the

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[104] For a study of colonial codification see: Michael R. Anderson, "Classification and Coercions: Themes in South Asian Legal Studies in the 1980s," *South Asia Research* 10 no. 2 (1990):158-77 and Michael R. Anderson, and Sumit Guha, eds., *Changing Concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Bernard Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia", in Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 224-254; Neeladri Bhattacharya, "Remaking Custom: The Discourse and Practice of Colonial Codification," *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar,* eds. R. Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996) 20-51; Nandini Bhattacharyya-Panda, *Appropriation and Invention of Tradition: The East India Company and Hindu Law in Early Colonial Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[105] Paschal Larkin, *Property in the Eighteenth Century: With Special Reference to England and Locke* (Dublin: Cork University Press, 1930). Larkin explores how Locke's theory was transported to the Americas and also offers a contrast to the English theory of property and the French theory of land.

[106] Larkin points out that Locke's theory confuses the "fact" of private property with the "right" to private property, *Property in the Eighteenth Century,* 65. For a discussion of the development of eighteenth-century political thought in England and the Atlantic world and its relation of land, trade and credit see the classic work by J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), see esp. 423-461 and 506-552.

protection of property rights.[107] British imperial ideology sought to act as the midwife in birthing the modern propertied subject in the supposedly uncivilized colonies.[108]

An analysis of colonial urban space through the framework of property is therefore important for three broad reasons. First, the rubric of property is significant for understanding modern governmental reasoning as something other than a negotiated terrain between the colonial and the colonized. My work focuses on how property as the basis of just rule emerges at a certain historical moment as a "regime of truth" to see how the rule of property in urban land operated.[109] Second, in order to move away from urban and planning as synonymous with modern, I shift the focus to the analytic frame of property relations. My contention is not that modernity is not a concern of colonial urbanization, but that, by focusing on the question of modernity as planning and as urban, we elide the other modernizing impetuses of colonial rationalization. Therefore, by beginning from the position of the regularization of property relations as the basis of ushering modern governance into cities, agricultural spaces, forests as well as economic and legal thinking, we can move away from the myopic lens of modernity as something inherently urban. Finally, I expand Guha's classic proposition of the "rule of property," which focuses on the Permanent Settlement of agricultural revenue, to an understanding of the creation of a market in urban property as a site of governance. I mark the distinct

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[107] Pagden, *Lords of all the World.*

[108] Hopkins, "Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain's Annexation of Lagos, 1861."

[109] Foucault marks the mid-eighteenth century as a moment when political economy as a particular regime of truth came to exist. "The point […] is to show how the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus (*dispositif*) of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false," *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures At the Collège de France 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2008), 19.

differences in the colonial rule of property in non-productive, non-agricultural land. I draw upon Foucault's discussion of the mid-eighteenth century emergence of political economy as the internal self-limitation to modern governmental rationalization to understand how technologies of market governance staged colonial liberalism as a just rule of law.[110]

Even though I am arguing that there were two (or even multiple) competing epistemologies of property relations, either possibility confronts us with difficulties in attempting to arrive at a coherent definition of property.[111] I demonstrated earlier through Siromani and the case of Jal Raja Pratapchandra that property within discourses of law and within customs charted multiple paths. This is the same for Anglo-Roman legal thought. Property has been understood to mean various things. For instance, property has been defined, "as things, as relations of persons to things, as person-person relations mediated through things and as a bundle of legal rights."[112] This further demonstrates the

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[110] Foucault marks the mid-eighteenth century as the time for the emergence of political economy as a form of modern government. *The Birth of Biopolitics,* 1-27.

[111] I elaborate on the possible multiplicity of ownership ideas in the conclusion.

[112] Verdery and Humphrey, eds., *Property in Question,* 1. Anthropological literature on property have been attuned to what we might call its life-world, see Elizabeth Povenelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), see esp. chaps. 5-6; C. M. Hahn ed. *Property Relations: Renewing the Anthropological Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); for new currents in rethinking property see literature on indigenous knowledge and biodiversity see Cultural Survival, "Genes, Peoples, and Property" Furor erupts over genetic research on indigenous groups," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 20, special issue (1996): 22-57; Brownyn Parry, "Bodily Transactions: Regulating a New Space of Flows in "Bio-Information"," *Property in Question,* eds. Verdery and Humphrey, 29-48; for studies on intellectual property rights see Stuart Banner, "End of Property?" *American Property: A History of How, Why and What we Own* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011) 276-292; Rosemary Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation and the Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); for a rethinking of biology and property see Richard E. Gold, *Body Parts: Property Rights and the Ownership of Human Biological Materials* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

multiple regimes of meaning-making when we speak of property. Thus it cannot always be bracketed off into a neat juridico-economic framework.

Beyond the framework of economic jurisdiction, ideas of waste, value, sacral belonging, and vernacular networks of kinship are also ways for understanding ownership. The regulation of the colonized people through a rule of property is widely acknowledged, but narrowly explored in urban spaces.[113] Although the archive is replete with minor cases of battles over small patches of land between both British and Indian owners, the everyday modalities of conquest remain largely overlooked in the literature. The few studies on urban property focus too narrowly on the legal purview of litigation and indigenous agency in the British Court to celebrate native resistance against municipal ventures. These studies have failed to locate the politics of ownership as an investigation of power both within and outside the structural logic of the state.[114]

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[113] Some of the most significant contributions in South Asian history have come from exploring the disciplining impetus of colonial law regarding property. However, this body of scholarship has predominantly focused on the agrarian world, or the forest, gender and personal law. Similar scholarly exploration into the nature and peculiarities of urban property is largely missing. See for instance: Eric Lewis Beverley, "Property, Authority and Personal Law: *Waqf* in Colonial South Asia," *South Asia Research* 31 (2011):155-82; Partha Chatterjee, *A Princely Imposter? The Strange and Universal History of the Kumar of Bhawal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Nicholas Dirks, "From Little King to Landlord: Property, Law and the Gift under the Madras Permanent Settlement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (1986). 307-33; Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Kasturi Malavika, "'Asceticizing' Monastic Families: Ascetic Genealogies, Property Feuds and Anglo Hindu Law in Late Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no.5 (2009): 1039-83; Gregory Kozlowski, *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and "Muslim Women and the Control of Property in North India," *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader vol. 2*, eds. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 20-43; Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Mytheli Sreenivas, "Conjugality and Capital: Gender, Family, and Property under Colonial Law in India," *Journal of Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (2004): 937-60; Rachel Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India: Liberalism, Religious Law and Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[114] See for instance Neils Brimnes' work on indigenous litigation in Madras and Mariam Dossal's on Bombay. Both these work have excellently revealed that the archive of the Presidency towns are replete with property litigation. Neil Brimnes, "Beyond Colonial Law: Indigenous Litigation and the Contestation of Property in the Mayor's Court in Late Eighteenth-Century Madras," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003) 513-550; Mariam Dossal, *Theatre of Conflict, City of Hope*.

Viewing urban space as an ecological terrain is helpful in considering how law provided an important epistemological framework in the development of imperial topography and cartography throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, as this dissertation reveals, the British officials on the ground were not above employing inventive and circuitous legal reasoning for their routinized conquests of small patches of land, fortifying marshy spaces and establishing both their *rights* and *knowledge* over that land. Development in geographical knowledge was in turn intimately interlinked with the changing economic thought in England and its colony as revealed in the expansion of the notarial geography of Calcutta through the nineteenth century.[115]

Ritu Birla recently argued for an approach that returns to Max Weber's conceptualization of the economic sociology of law. Instead of treating law and economy as two separate facets her work examines both the legal regime and the political economy of modern colonialism in order to demonstrate how they were embedded within one another.[116] Keeping this particular framing of colonial economy, my dissertation reveals how various forms of living on and with the marshes were translated and legally codified into property relations. The story of this translation remains an untold story that does not emerge in the epidemiological and sanitarian colonial urban histories.[117] My study

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[115] Daniel Lord Small expounds the concept of notarial cartography in discussion late medieval French spatial imagination in *Imaginary Cartography: Possession and Identity in Late-Medieval Marseille* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) 69-94.

[116] In 2011 Birla offered an argument for the concept of "law as economy" in an essay titled "Law as Economy: Convention, Corporation, Currency," *University of California, Irvine Law Review*, 1, no. 3 (2011): 1015-1037; and in 2013 she furthered that concept by stressing the importance of doing an "economic sociology of law" in the colonial context, "Maine (and Weber) Against the Grain: Towards a Postcolonial Genealogy of the Corporate Person," *Journal of Law and Society*, 40, no. 1 (March 2013): 92-114.

[117] Exceptions to these are works on the Mississippi and New Orleans in the North American context, see Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from*

demonstrates that cities are also sites for the study of everyday forms of power as an intermeshed network which plots the town planner, the property profiteer, the tenants and the dispossessed "squatter" in the same grid.[118]

However, in order to narrate the history of legal codification I begin by troubling the dominant definition of property. I do so by focusing on the fissures in the archival documents, literary material and popular thought where the governing distinction between property and ownership, mud, land and water, and the entrepreneur, the speculator and the (undisciplined) economic subject become contingent. Most studies take property for granted without asking the question of what exactly property is: is it the revenue, the harvest, the land, or the sub-soil, the forest as a whole, or the trees, or the tribal people who use the forest? For this reason I employ the strategy of beginning with the land-water-human relation and not immediately looking for a categorical definition. As we will see, land is property, but it is not always property in the same way. It traverses various regimes of values and sometimes these regimes overlap. Thus land along the river is at once sacred and without material value. It is extremely valuable as a ship harbor, yet valueless for being an undefined mixture of mud and water.

Chapter 1 explores the relation between history, geography and language through anecdotal fisherman narratives about the disappeared canals of Calcutta. After narrating the history of Calcutta as told by its historians, I show how the notion of anecdote reveals

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Hernando de Soto to Hurricane Katrina (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ari Kelman, *The River and its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and in the European context, Sara B. Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[118] Such an understanding of spaces borrows from Foucault's notion of "regimes of truth," and Soja, *Postmodern Geography*. Soja conceives of the analytic of spatialization as being able to expose "how geography becomes filled with politics and ideology," 6.

the limits of the normative legal frameworks of ownership, and thereby lays the groundwork for understanding the life-world of the spaces where both actual and potential inhabitation takes place. The anecdotes reveal a fluid geography of marshes and wetlands, as well as heterogeneous ways of belonging in spaces that exceed our juridical and economic configurations of property. This chapter foregrounds both the conceptual ephemerality and the contingent nature of the genre and subject of anecdotes as evidentiary materials. The geographically contingent marshes and wetlands thus serve to reflect the relation between evidence, history and law.

Chapters 2 and 3 reinforce the arguments of Chapter 1 in order to explore the creation of value and the production of waste in private and public property respectively. Chapter 2 demonstrates how the so-called "shoals and mud-flat" deposited on the western banks of Calcutta by a meandering river Hooghly around 1804-5 entered the political modernity of property.[119] I argue that the sedimentation of the river, which unfolded as a crisis of ownership, set in motion the process whereby possession was converted into private property as a measurable, taxable entity, backed by the authority of a bureaucratic paper-regime of property deeds, leases and cadastral mapping. The two river surveys and legal battles of land acquisition that ensued in the wake of the changing river course constituted critical moments in the process of converting *squatting* into legal ownership and creating what I contend are new fictions of legitimacies. Along with the colonial surveys, maps and records of legal disputes, I analyze pre-colonial maritime poetry and

[119] This parcel of land has been termed variously as alluvion or the land opened up the meandering river in the Survey of 1820. Extract from the Proceedings of his Excellency the Most Nobel the Governor General in Council in the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Prog. 15, WBSA, § 71. After the survey when the Strand bank Fund was set up the land was called "shoals or mud flat." Letter from S. Wauchope, Commissioner of Police to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal 27 April 1863, Strand Bank Funds, Judicial [Judicial], October 1863, Prog. 123-131, WBSA

artisanal paintings of the riverbank to situate this process of translation of a sacred and multilayered riverine geography into an asset in the financialized market in the context of the emergence of the fields of colonial law and economy. This chapter charts the incongruent circulation of the material property and property-as-paper, to which we will return again in Chapter 4.

If Chapter 2 explored how value was conferred upon private property in land, Chapter 3 explores the very recalcitrance of public property in the city. I analyze municipal papers, town-planning reports and literary writings about the *Maidan*, a central public space in the city, to show how town planners viewed it through a rubric of waste, while contemporary vernacular writings produced it as uncanny and spectral. Contrary to conventional arguments about the value of urban parks in colonial town planning, I interrogate the shifting understanding of “waste” in military, sanitary, revenue and town-planning debates through the nineteenth and early twentieth century and place the notion of waste in its social-historical milieu in order to narrate the history of the *Maidan* as a spectral shadow of the city itself. This chapter shows the changing symbolic economy of waste and value and how the man-made, dried-up *Maidan* emerges as the centerpiece of twentieth-century environmental movements, instead of the ecologically critical and fast-disappearing wetlands.

Chapters 4 extends the narratives of the uneven economization of space to economically deviant figures who existed in the interstices of law, morality and ethics, carving out an independent space for themselves through the possibilities afforded by the novel arenas opened up by the colonial judiciary and market. This chapter proposes that the various moments of economic crisis generated by the volatility of the market-space

meant that urban land entered capitalist circulation through various fictions of deferred 'value': as an asset or resource, as an investment and as speculative capital. This chapter focuses on land-profiteering during the 1920s and places the colonial discussion on property speculation in the larger scholarship on gambling, speculation and the changing nature of colonial economy. The appearance of speculators, which for the colonial government were something like a bellwether for financial crisis, highlights how crisis became a generative blind spot in colonial legal and economic knowledge production. Discourses surrounding economic crisis in the early twentieth century elicited narratives legitimizing certain forms of ownership and obfuscating other lineaments of authorities and historical possibilities. My analysis of the trajectory through which urban property emerged as an entity for swindling, investment and profit during the early twentieth century shows how intricately developments in econometrics, the birth of the concept of calculable financial risk and comprehensive town-planning were implicated in the process of the financialization of the property market.

I conclude by showing that the legal ordering of spaces in the earlier half of the nineteenth century created new narratives of law to render fictitious earlier existing authorities. By the early twentieth century, another kind of fiction emerged encapsulated in the promise of a future value in land: a fiction that made speculation possible. By rendering the two kinds of fictions disparate, the modern idea of property could emerge in strictly juridico-economic terms. Through an intricate negotiation of value as an economic, social and moral entity during the long nineteenth century, land in colonial Calcutta was transformed into capital. Simultaneously, various narratives of possession authorized through maps, notarized in government paper, and legitimized through

property deeds restructured the social networks of urban power nexus. I conclude by proposing that spurious operations of law in the colony provided an economic scaffolding, which filtered knowledge about spaces and subjects. In the next chapter I turn to the narratives about the disappeared canals of Calcutta to mark the elisions in the traditionally told history of the city.

Chapter 1/ Story-telling as Owning: The Many Histories of Calcutta

> The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lighting rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations and scrolls.
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> ------ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities.*

I. Calcutta as Narrated by its Historians

Calcutta's urban history has been written as the story of an administrative city, of a colonial port town, and of a Bengali city of cultural renaissance. Medical reports, municipal documents, planner's vision and cultural practices all support these representations.[120] Such narratives begin with the building of the city often without intimating what existed prior to the construction of the city.[121] The terrain and topography of what became the second capital of the British Empire is critical to its history, while contemporary concern with land-grabs and environmental movements define the politics of living in present-day Kolkata. This opening chapter will stitch together minor archival

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[120] For histories of Calcutta as administrative city see Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*; Nisith Ranjan Ray, *City of Job Charnock* (Calcutta: Victoria Memorial, 1979); Rajat Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflicts of Interests in Calcutta City Politics 1875-1939* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979); Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Calcutta as a Living City*; for histories of Calcutta's focusing primarily on the elite class see Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*; Shibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalin Bangasamaj* (Kolkata: Deys Publication, 1976); for a history of planning see Partha Datta, *Planning the City*; for a history of Calcutta's prostitutes and artisanal population see Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteen-Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Publishers, 1998).

[121] Pollock's formulation marks the early Modern as thresholds of historical possibilities, "Introduction," *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia,* 3.

traces, stories and anecdotes to gesture to a landscape of dwelling that came prior to the landscape of building. Before I narrate the history of the soil, earth, mud and water that produced the city and its inhabitants into citizens of a propertied geography – a story that has gone largely missing in the scholarship on colonial cities of South Asia—let us turn to the history of Calcutta as it has been told thus far.

Histories of nineteenth-century colonial cities do not usually begin with a "city." Often they begin with a mass of uncultivated wasteland with proximity to water and channels of mercantile circuits.[122] It is no surprise then that the draining of bogs, wetlands and swamps has been integral to the growth of cities.[123] The mixing of land and water in the South Asian context has been so central to the topography of the two major colonial towns of Bombay and Calcutta that the lens of the "port-city" became one of the dominant ways to approach the space, its morphology and patterns of urbanization.[124] In Europe, on the other hand, urban histories predominantly begin with guilds, towns and the crown.[125] As W. J. T. Mitchell's work on landscape and power shows, a temporally and spatially untranslatable frame developed for studying European cities was superimposed, sometimes rather spuriously, to produce particular narrative tropes for

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[122] Calcutta, Bombay, Hong Kong, New York and New Orleans, to name a few, all had similar patterns of establishment.

[123] Kelman, *A River and its City*; Morris, *Big Muddy*; Mathur and DaCuhna, *Soak.*

[124] Meera Kosambi and John E. Brush, "Three Colonial Port Cities in India," *Geographical Review* 78, no. 1 (1988): 32-47 and "Early European Suburbanization in the Indo-British Port Cities," Frank J. Costa *et. al*. eds. *Asian Urbanization: Problems and Processes* (Berlin: Gebruder Bornträger, 1988).

[125] Medieval towns which have become present day metropolitan cities share this history, for instance Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998); Simone Roux and Jo Ann McNamara, *Paris in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

colonial landscapes.[126] In the case of Calcutta it began with a pestilential region along the river Hughli, where: [127]

> The territory which Job Charnock [known as the founder of Calcutta] selected for the site of British settlement in 1690 was a pestilential region like so many other cities in their origin. It can be presumed to have been a relatively "empty" region where settlement was in the form of straggling hamlets in the neighbourhood of or with jungles or marshes, while the older settled area, a ribbon of high caste settlement, stretched in a thin line along the old course of the river for four to five miles to the south of the core of the British settlement.[128]

Pestilence was one of the central tropes for recounting the urban history of Calcutta. The trope of contagion is not peculiar to Calcutta, but has been the basis for the production of early nineteenth century medical topographies of colonial towns and therefore has been a template that was transplanted to countless urban histories.[129]

In the first section of the chapter I shall lay out the two predominant frames of writing Calcutta's history. The first frame is that of an imperial history of Calcutta, which begins with its foundation in 1690. These early imperial histories often end at 1757 with what is known as the Battle of Plassey, a skirmish that enabled the British to firmly lay

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[126] W.J. T. Mitchell ed. *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

[127] The British spelling for Hughli is Hooghly. Since it is a distributary of the river Ganga, it is also called Ganga or Ganges.

[128] Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, 2.

[129] See for example Dossal, *Theatre of Hope / City of Conflict*. I will elaborate on the medical topography later in the chapter.

down their rights to collect revenue in Bengal.[130] Thus, for example, when H. H. Beverly conducted the first census of Calcutta he noted "Modern Calcutta began in 1757."[131]

If colonial historians crafted the early histories of Calcutta as an imperial allegory, then the second frame is that of planning and disciplining.[132] These histories are often nostalgia-ridden paeans to Calcutta's glorious municipal past and its unspectacular present. Each of these frames further speak to their underlying premise: the first body of scholarship produces Calcutta's history as a parable of England's ascendency in the East, and the other focuses on collapsing colonial modernity and planning to narrate a history of colonial power's spatial manifestation through epidemiology and infrastructural expansion. Such histories partake in the larger scholarship on cities which primarily view the urban space as a background to narrate hydraulic histories of water-service, drainage, sewerage, road-building, expansion of railway, and electrification.[133]

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[130] H. E. Busteed, *Echoes from Old Calcutta: Being Chiefly Reminiscenes of the Days of Warren Hastings, Francies, and Impey* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1905); C. R. Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal being the Bengal Public Consultations for the First Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1895).

[131] H. Beverly, *Report of the Census of the Town Calcutta, Taken on April 6th 1876* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1872).

[132] Three most notable works are Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*; Partho Datta, *Planning the City*; Ishita Pande, *Medicine, Race and Liberalism in British Bengal: Symptoms of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[133] Sara Pritchard, *Confluence*; Mathew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003); Swati Chattopadhyay, *Unlearning the City: Infrastructure in a New Optical Field* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Ravi Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire, Circulation, Public Works and Social Space in Colonial Orissa c. 1780 to 1914* (Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009); Sunila Kale, *Electrifying India: Regional Political Economies of Development* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

II. Calcutta's History as Imperial Allegory

On a hot sultry afternoon in 1690, Job Charnock, an agent of the East India Company [hereafter Company] who had unsuccessfully tried to build a factory along river Hughli, docked his boat on an "uninhabited swamp" to sit down and smoke *hookah* under a banyan tree. Subsequent generations memorialized this site of Charnock's afternoon peregrination as Baithakhanna [meaning a place to sit and rest]. Charnock, it is often recounted, selected this site rather randomly to build his factories in an "empty" expanse away from the Dutch, Portuguese, Armenian and French competition on the other side of the river. This founding narrative ends with the famous phrase: in a "fit of absentmindedness" an Empire and its colonial capital were founded in an "unhealthy swamp" full of "pestiferous ponds" infested with "wild boars, crocodiles, alligators [*sic*], reptiles and leopards."[134]

By 1696 agents of the Company had constructed a mud fort where they lived with other British merchants which also housed their administrative office and a counting house.[135] In 1698, the agents of the Company purchased three villages, Gobindapur, Sutanati and Kalikata from their former landlords [*zamindar*] for a paltry sum of Rs. 1500.[136] This purchase laid the foundation for early colonial Calcutta. The agents boasted about the acquisition of these villages in the following words: "the Best Money that Ever

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[134] Binay Krishna Deb, *The Early History and Growth of Calcutta*, (Calcutta: Romesh Chandra Ghose, 1905), 9.

[135] Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal 1757-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 90-95; P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[136] Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, 1.

was spent."[137] During this time, settlement in this region was sparse with the huts of fishermen and falconers in the midst of jungles and marshes. Wealthier merchant communities had also settled down along the river, which was a busy channel for international commerce since the sixteenth century.[138]

The British, however, were not the first Europeans to arrive in this region. As the map below depicts, by the time the British established their factory in 1690 several foreign merchants were already trading in Bengal. Indian and Armenian merchants had been trading on the Hughli River with settlements in Sutanati, Cossipore and Baranagar. Armenians were the first foreign merchants to arrive in Bengal.[139] The Portuguese merchants followed the Armenians and settled in Howrah, Hidglee, Salkia and Bettor directly opposite Calcutta in 1550. In 1653 the Dutch arrived and built their settlement in Chinsura, which was the northern point of European settlement in the Bengal Delta. Further upstream from the Portuguese was the Danish settlement in an already thriving pre-colonial town known as Serampore, while the French were in Chandannagore from around the same time as the British in 1690.

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[137] Extract from Chuttanuttee [Sutanati] Diary and Consultation, October 3, 1698. Factory Records, Calcutta, no. 3 in C. R. Wilson, *Indian Record Series: Old Fort William in Bengal – A Selection of Official Documents Dealing with its History* (London: John Murray, 1906*),* 39.

[138] Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, 2.

[139] Armenian merchants arrived before the European merchants to Calcutta. See Mesroub Jacob Seth, *Armenians in India from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Calcutta, 1937); also Harishadhan Mukhyopadhyay, *Kalikata shekale'r o ekale'r* (Kolkata: P. M. Bagchi, 1985).

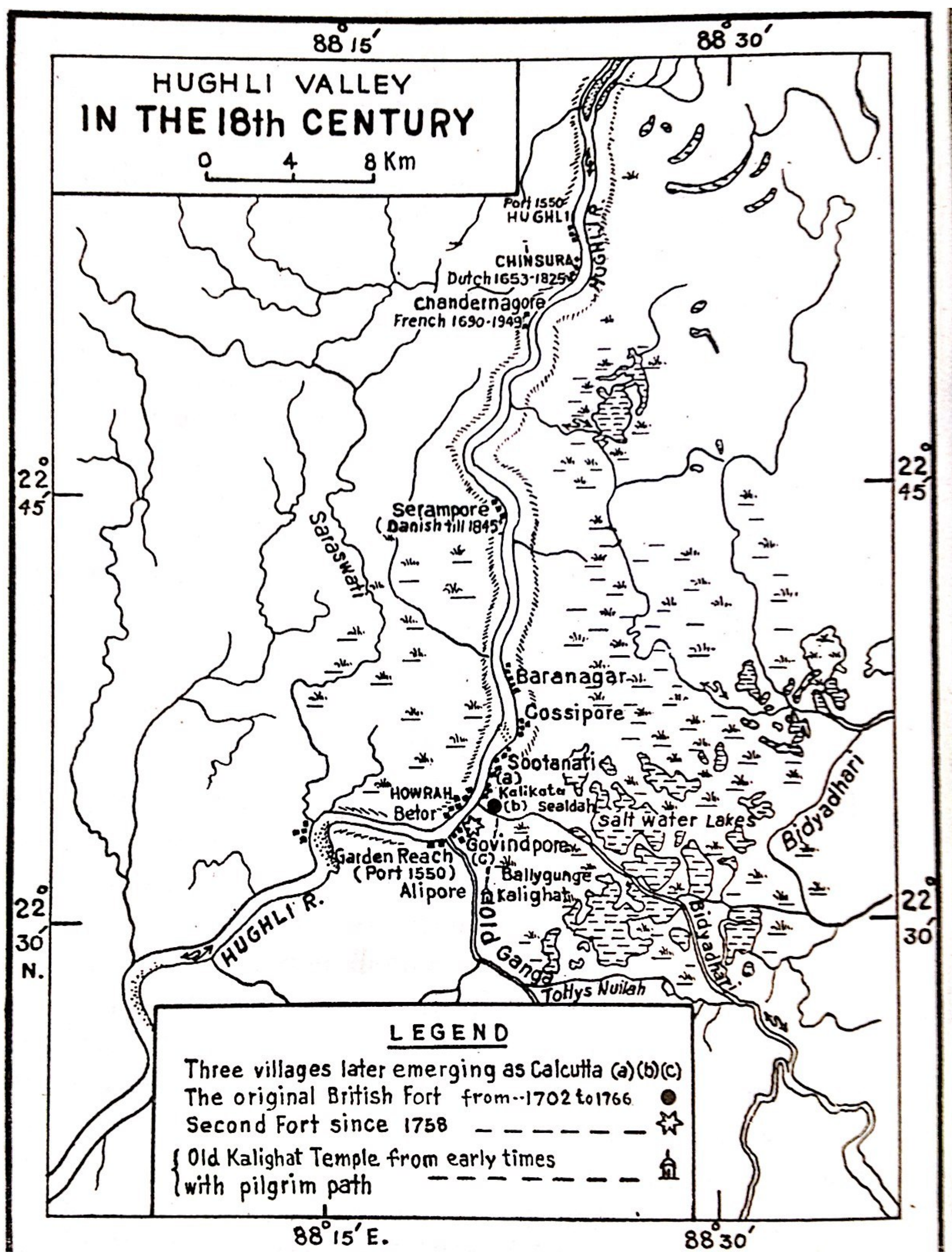

Figure 1: The early European settlements in and around Calcutta reproduced from Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*.

As a frontier province of the Mughal Empire, Bengal had a strong agricultural economy, a wide financial and communication network, a stable administrative structure instituted by the Mughals and a highly skilled population of artisans. The superabundance of money, gold and silver bullion in the Bengal region had successfully widened the market for silk and muslin in the seventeenth century, and by the eighteenth century there was a surplus market for textiles, grain, saltpeter and cash crops. Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) and Murshidabad were established centers of Mughal power, and powerful landlords [also known as *zamindar* or *rajah*] dominated Krishnanagar, Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh) and Bardhaman.[140] It was in this vibrant economic climate that Job Charnock finally managed to establish his factory in 1690, after two unsuccessful attempts.

The Fort (also known as the Old Fort), where the British lived was situated in the village of Gobindapur. During that time the Fort was the center of the town and housed a trading hall or factory, as it was known then, warehouses, the governor's residence, armory and magazine, barracks and the Company officer's lodgings.[141] The agents of the Company were keen on encouraging the local population, primarily the weavers and wealthy merchant families like the Seths and Basaks, to settle around the Old Fort and engage in trade and contribute to the revenue.[142] To that effect, the London Court of

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[140] Peter J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead Eastern India 1740-1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 48-69.

[141] Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 6.

[142] Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, 16-17, Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets*, 20; for a detailed account of the emergence of the neighborhood of Bhawanipur in Kolkata and its growth around trading centers see Keya Dasgupta, "Genesis of a Neighbourhood: The Mapping of Bhabanipur," *Occassional Paper 175,* Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (March 2003).

Directors of the East India Company wrote to Charles Eyre, the governor of the Old Fort of Calcutta in 1699:

> The protected should pay an Acknowledgement to their Defenders […] We recommend to you the raising a standing Revenue by the Methods above mentioned […] well knowing that when they shall find the Impartiality and Mildness of the English Government, They shall be easily induced to betake themselves of your Protection, and in a short time render the Territory within your late Grant the most fflourishing Spott of Ground in Bengall.[143]

A 1707 survey of the city revealed that there was a great market of about four hundred *bighas* (533.2 square kilometers), and residential houses accounted for roughly three hundred and fifty *bighas* (466.5 square kilometers). Jungles surrounded the market and the houses.[144] According to the historian Pradip Sinha, by the beginning of the eighteenth century Calcutta's urban morphology could be divided into roughly four overlapping sectors: the European part in central Calcutta, the indigenous residential part in north Calcutta, the indigenous market settlement which later became the Barrabazar (Great Market) and the riverine market specializing in textile trade. "These," Sinha adds, "were surrounded by peripheral hamlets (*dihis*), forming a varied range of agricultural and fishing settlements, sacred spots, trading halts or nodal points and jungles of various densities."[145]

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[143] Instruction from the Court to Sir Charles Eyre, London, December 20, 1699, quoted in Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 347, n 7.

[144] Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, 284-86.

[145] Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, 7.

By the middle of the eighteenth century there was a noticeable commercial growth around the Old Fort, with settlements expanding to an area over roughly two hundred and fifty acres.[146] The British population around this time was comprised of a group of merchants, agents of the company, and mostly soldiers accounting for the four hundred residents, while the total population, counting the British and European merchants, and Indian residents was about one hundred thousand.[147] There was a small British settlement outside the Fort, with a church, a hospital, a mayor's court and a playhouse.[148] Apart from the weavers who were integral to the British trade, a great many scribal groups, who were traditionally employed as administrative functionaries in the Bengal Province of the Mughal Empire, moved to the various towns and centers with a concentration of European merchants [see fig. 1]. They were chiefly employed as agents, translators and, later, partners in trade. The Indian merchants, primarily Gopinath Seth, Ramkrishna Seth, Shobharam Basak and Amirchand supplied cotton textiles, silk, saltpeter and other commodities to the British, as well as rented property to the Europeans around the Old Fort, or the "white town." These Indian merchants continued to wield enormous power and gradually their family and kin became an important Bengali elite class within the city.[149] However, this spatial intermixing of population continued up until 1745 when, through an order from the Fort, the native inhabitants were asked to leave the "white

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[146] Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* 5.

[147] Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 6

[148] Wilson, *Early Annals of the English*, 6.

[149] Sinha; *Calcutta in Urban History*, 17; Dutta, *Planning the City*, 13.

town."[150] This marked an important moment in the accelerating tension between the English merchants, and the Indian kings and his power brokers in the late-eighteenth century.

Frictions between the English and the kings of Bengal began after 1717, when the merchants of the East India Company secured a *farman* (grant) from the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar of Delhi to trade without paying any customs or duty in Bengal. This *farman* also allowed them to rent thirty-eight villages around Calcutta and mint coins out of their imported bullion. The English merchants began to routinely abuse the stipulations in the *farman*. Many of the dictates of the *farman* remained open to multiple interpretations resulting in a confusion over the limits of the Company's trading powers in Bengal. This confusion gradually precipitated numerous skirmishes with then *nawab* [king] of Bengal Murshid Quli Khan (1717-1727) which was protracted over the next half century.

For instance, although Murshid Quli Khan allowed the Company's goods to be transported without duties, Company servants routinely carried out private trade under the seal of the Company to avoid taxes. The servants and agents of the Company did not make a sizable salary, but it was the lure of private trade that brought them to the much-hated tropical town of Calcutta. After spending ten to fifteen years in Bengal, they could retire and live the life of a small squire in England.[151] Therefore, they had set up lucrative private trade in Bengal. Apart from avoiding taxes through such trade, the Company Merchants also bought additional villages without Murshid Quli Khan's permission. In

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[150] Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 6.

[151] Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 9.

retaliation, the infuriated nawab refused to permit the minting of coins under his jurisdiction.[152] Analyzing the tension between the merchants and the *nawab*s of Bengal, Partha Chatterjee argues, "whether these imperial pronouncements [in the *farman*] were merely advisory, or whether the nawab of Bengal was required to implement them, remained a matter of dispute."[153]

The strained situation in Bengal was further aggravated when the British began to make arrangements to fortify themselves beginning in the 1750s. In order to maintain their thriving trade in Bengal and manage the growing mercantilist rivalries among the European powers, the Company Directors in London sent fifty-nine cannons to Calcutta in 1754.[154] The frays that resulted upon the arrival of the cannons finally led to the Battle of Plassey in 1757. In this battle Siraj-ud-dulla, the then nawab of Bengal, marched from Murshidabad to the Fort in Calcutta to face the mercenaries of East India Company headed by Major-General Robert Clive.[155] The Battle of Plassey, also known as the Conquest of Bengal, ended with the death of Siraj-ud-dulla and the defeat of his army.[156] This battle became the founding moment for the Empire in both material and mythic terms.[157] During the Battle of Plassey, Sirah-ud-dulla's army rounded up around one

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[152] Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 7.

[153] Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 7.

[154] Brijen Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company, 1756-1757* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1962), 38.

[155] For the immediate reasons involving deceit, treason and fuelling anti-Siraj-ud-dullah sentiments among the other factions in Bengal that catalyzed the war see Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire* and Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company*.

[156] For a detailed history leading to the war see Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company,* 60-64; for a bold reading of the various accounts of the war see Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire,* 14-26.

[157] I use the word mythic terms in a euhemeristic sense, as a framework to render legible a certain historical moment.

hundred and forty-six British inhabitants who had sought shelter in the Fort and locked them up in a small room. Apart from two people everyone else suffocated to death. This infamous event became known as the Black Hole tragedy: and the epitome of oriental barbarity, Mughal brutality and willful cruelty and the need for a liberal British government.[158] It is telling that one of the early histories of the city by H. E. Busteed, considered a foundational text, begins with the following words:

> The twentieth of June (destined to become a very auspicious date in the Victorian Era) is associated with a tragedy which occurred in the infancy of the chief city in India, for which it will be forever notorious. So universal is this notoriety, that perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that the words "The Black Hole of Calcutta" have grown into a proverbial expression of comparison, peculiarly suggestive, among all English-speaking and European nations.[159]

Chatterjee returned to this now-neglected Black Hole trope to show how this founding myth operated against the background of a much larger canvas of imperial ideology fuelling the civilizational impetus of British liberal thinkers.[160] The British victory in the Battle of Plassey was soon followed by the grant of a *diwani* (right to collect revenue) for the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal court.[161]

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[158] Chatterjee shows that there were thirteen memoirs and accounts of the Black Hole tragedy and analyzes how that narrative seeped into colonial accounts of the East, *The Black Hole of Empire,* 17-25.

[159] Busteed, *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, 3-4.

[160] Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire*, 25-32.

[161] For a detailed history see the following: Michael Fisher, *The Politics of the British Annexation of India 1757-1857* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); Rajat Kanta Ray, "Colonial Penetration and the initial Resistance: The Mughal Ruling Class, the English East India Company and the Struggle for Bengal 1756-1800," *The Indian Historical Review*, 2 nos. 1-2 (July 1985-January 1986): 1-105.

The imperial plot of Calcutta's history thickens in 1757. Following the battle, Major-General Clive, who led the British mercenaries to victory in Bengal, commissioned a new Fort William to fend off further attacks from the Indian nawabs. The burning down of the Old Fort and the building of the new Fort William are the two organizing nodes which trace the disparate events of British trading in Bengal into a single narrative plot resulting in the founding moment of the British Empire. In these early colonial histories the time of the colonial memoir interweaves itself repeatedly with the time of imperial historiography to narrate the birth of a *British* Calcutta in a *terra nullius*.

III. Between "British Enterprise" and Planning Nightmare

Imperial accounts of the early beginnings of Calcutta often end at 1757, while planning histories begin with the construction of the new Fort William. It is no wonder therefore that colonial urban histories represent Calcutta, Bombay and Madras as British creations.[162] Nishit Ranjan Ray, a historian of Calcutta, has commented that since the publication of the first Census Report of Henry Beverly, Esq. in 1876 the significant production on the history of the city is highly repetitive:

> They tell the story of how Charnock "a block of rough British manhood" bodily, as if, lifted a city from out of a marshy unhealthy place on the river, how the Settlement

[162] For Calcutta see: Busteed, *Echoes from Old Calcutta*; Kathleen Blenchynden, *Calcutta: Past and Present* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co. 1905); H.E.A. Cotton, *Calcutta: Old and New: A Historical and Descriptive Handbook of the City* (1907 repr. Calcutta: General Publishers, 1980); S.W. Goode, *Municipal Calcutta: Its Institution in their Origin and Growth* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1916); Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta: Towns and Suburbs*; for Madras see, Talboys J. Wheeler, *Madras in the Olden Time Vol. 1 1639-1702* (Madras: J. Higginbotham, 1861); Henry Davidson Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640 – 1800: Traced from the East India Company's records preserved at Fort St. George and the India Office and from other sources* (London: Murray, 1913); for Bombay see, John Bunnell, *Bombay in the Days of Queen Anne*, (London: Samuel T. Shephard, 1933).

> grew to be the centre of a mighty empire and a city of palaces, how successive British rulers adorned the city with splendid edifices, on models imported from their homeland, how the city grew to be the busiest trade emporium, east of the Suez, how streets and squares were laid, and above all, how it grew to be the nerve-centre of cultural activities. Behind the entire facade built by the British writers, and following them the Indian authors, there lurks, dim and distant, the shadow of the Indian town in Calcutta and its inhabitants. Not only authors, but artists too, treated the Indian town as out of bounds. The *picture* which thus emerges is largely that of a *colonial city par excellence—exotic and even bizarre*.[163]

Ray's statement pithily summarizes the tendencies of early colonial histories of Calcutta. The architectural historian Swati Chattopadhyay critiques this imperial narrative of the city's founding trope as an attempt to produce and sustain a myth of British enterprise and efforts in turning marshes into a metropolis.[164] Witness for instance the colonial frame that informs Binoy Deb's nationalist history of Calcutta: "The healthy example of British energy, British farsightedness, pluck and perseverance, is indelibly written upon the history of Calcutta."[165] Pre-colonial life and labor in and with the marshes of Calcutta is the unarticulated background to this particular narrative of British "pluck and perseverance."

Let us now turn to the process through which marshes were turned to the "Second Capital" of the British Empire. Although a Royal Charter from London in 1726

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[163] Nisith Ranjan Ray, "Introduction" to Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta,* vii-viii. [emphasis mine].

[164] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 7

[165] Deb, *Early History*, 3.

established a municipal body consisting of a Mayor and nine Alderman, their work was primarily judicial in nature. Since their primary function was policing the city, initial municipal ventures were mostly based on an economics of punishment. In fact, one could even say that municipal and penal measures under the Company rule went hand in hand. This judicial body functioned by levying fines on the native population in order to defray the costs of town improvement:

> [a]s early as 1704, the Council [settled in Sutanati] ruled that the amounts realized from fines levied upon the 'black inhabitants' for misconduct, should be expended in filling up and obliterating the foul pits and ditches that abounded in the settlement.[166]

Municipal histories recount that feeble attempts were made to cut down trees, make the "drains sweet and wholesome," rebuild washed-away wharfs, and repair roads.[167] However, through most of eighteenth century there were no comprehensive statutes for town management, which was often of a piecemeal nature. In 1753 the Corporation was reorganized, its members were reduced, and an unsuccessful proposal was made to collect taxes to defray the costs of "sanitation and internal ornamentation of the town." Even if sanitation and construction work remained unremarkable and in need of reorganization, the intensification of the policing of the city was critical to the presence of the Company employees who, according to Ray, "were not forgetful of the fact that

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[166] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 146.

[167] Beverly, *Report of the Census of the Town of Calcutta*, 41; Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 148.

they were mere *squatters* on the soil of Calcutta by the good-will of Jagirdar [Mughal title for landlord], and had no legal right or status."[168]

Following the Battle of Plassey in 1757 the English settlement began expanding and town improvement became a serious and critical issue. Another Royal Charter in 1763 expanded the primarily judicial and policing functions of the municipal body to civic administration and town management. Town management functions included lighting and conservancy, laying of roads, drainage and, more importantly, building the new Fort William and clearing and draining the swamp around the Fort to give birth to the *Maidan*, an open green space of almost three hundred and fifty acres—a unique space which will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 3. The families living in and around Gobindapur were moved to the neighboring areas in the north known as Sutanati to make room for the Fort and the surrounding *Maidan*. In 1770, when the construction of the Fort was well underway, the Company took steps to develop the space and make it into a "habitable" port town. One of the initial ventures undertaken to this end was to cut down all the trees (except for fruit-bearing trees) so that the sun would shine through and dry the damp ground.[169] As depicted in the map in figure 2, the pilgrim road led from the north of Gobindapur to the south up to an ancient Hindu shrine at Kalighat.[170] This north-south axis slowly became the central road and the site of multiple public works ventures

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[168] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 39. [italics mine]

[169] Chattopadhyay points out that in replacing the walled city of the Old Fort with an open space surrounding the new Fort William, one could spatially read the changed status of the British East India Company in Bengal, in *Representing Calcutta*, 46-49

[170] Gaur Das Bysack, "Kalighat and Calcutta," *The Calcutta Review* 183 (January 1891): 305-327.

through the centuries. New settlements, both European and Indian, grew up around this road.

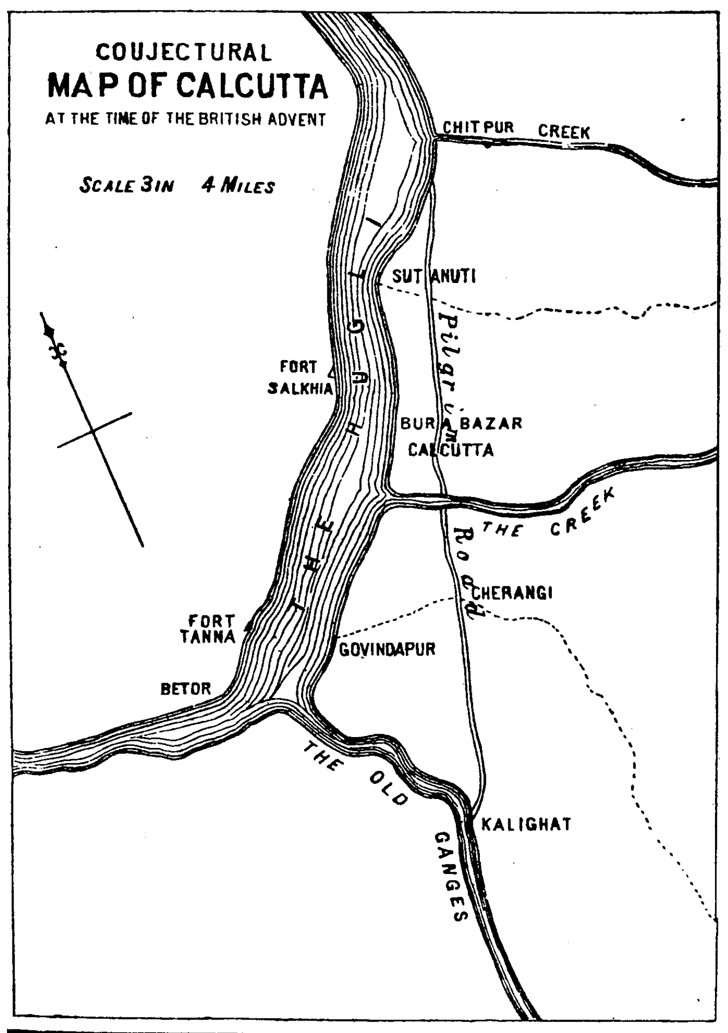

Figure 2: “Conjectural Map of Calcutta at the time of British Advent,” reproduced from Ray, *Short History of Calcutta: Town and Suburbs, Census of India* 1901, Vol. VII, Part 1.

Steps were taken to settle people down and develop this space as a Company center. To that effect, in 1764 the Court of Directors in London ordered Calcutta to become a Presidency town.[171]

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[171] Orme to Mitchell, 29 October 1764, *Private Papers of Orme*, vol. XV, 4134. India Office Library, London.

From this period onwards town-building activity prospered, resulting in a marked diversification in the markets in Calcutta. The expansion of the settlement demanded proper town-planning measures, not least because the Company servants and soldiers were dying like flies in the tropical marsh. An anonymous traveller from the 1760s described the city: an "undistinguished mass of filth and corruption, equally offensive to human senses and health, compose the capital of the English Company's Government in India."[172] Even after the early corporal and municipal reorganization, Busteed, an early colonial historian of Calcutta, recollects that between 1760 and 1780 the roads were bad, those along the river did not exist, while dust and "unsavoury sights" interfered with taking walks along the river.[173] The unsavory sights included mostly the dead humans and animals lying around or floating in the river and sometimes washed out of their shallow graves.[174] In order to manage death in the midst of a tropical swamp and to organize town management, the Company officials undertook the following steps to register lands and establish sanitary measures.

From 1780 the Company begun a project of registering lands, houses, and estates, as well as a project to name and map the streets of Calcutta with the help of the Commissioners of Police, who began to maintain a record of land holding in their *pattah* [land-title] offices. There were rudimentary moves to map the space by a draftsman and fortune-seeker named Aron Upjohn in 1742.[175] Fifty years later, William Baille, an artist

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[172] Cotton, *Calcutta Old and New*, 132.

[173] Busteed, *Echoes From Old Calcutta*, 125 and 157-59.

[174] "Calcutta: Its People in the Olden Times," *Calcutta Review* 35, no. 69 (January- June 1860): 164-227, 172.

[175] Keya Dasgupta, *Mapping Calcutta: The Collection of Maps at the Visual Archives of the Centre for*

and cadet of the Bengal Infantry under the aegis of Captain Mark Wood in 1792, undertook the first serious attempts at surveying the ground and mapping Calcutta.[176] However, as the next chapter will show, his project of surveying land-holding and early attempts at formalizing property was completely derailed by the moving river and its shifting marshy landscape. Apart from the shifting landscape the Company's financial situation limited any serious town improvement activities. In 1793 agents of the Company began to raise funds for town improvement through a lottery scheme. The very same year, the Royal Charter of 1793 granted town management duties to a body known as the Justices of Peace which functioned for almost a century from 1794 to 1876.

The Justices of Peace, which combined the office of the Police Commissioner and Chief Executive of Municipality, continued to lack in funds through the early days. Thus, most of its early ventures at policing and improving the town of Calcutta were unsystematic in nature. It was not until 1803 that the Governor-General of Bengal made any concerted efforts at a comprehensive town-planning project.[177] Governor-General Lord Wellesley (1798-1805) issued a "Minute on the Improvement of Calcutta" in 1803, which founded the hugely expanded Town Improvement Committee with thirty members in 1804.[178] Lord Wellesley played a very important role in turning East India Company

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Studies in Social Sciences (Calcutta: CSSS, 2009), 5-7.

[176] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 107; for the detailed history of the surveys and the governing impetus behind it see R. H. Phillimore, *Historical Records of the Survey of the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (Dehradun: Survey of India, 1954); for a critical history of early surveys see Chattopadhyay, Representing Calcutta, 76-135; for a history of the twentieth-century surveys see F. C. Hirst, *A Brief History of the Large Scale Surveys of Calcutta and its Neighbourhood 1903-1914 and 1926-1927* (Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1939).

[177] Samita Gupta, "Theory and Practice of Town Planning in Calcutta, 1817 to 1912: An Appraisal," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 30, no. 1 (March 1922): 29-55.

[178] Montgomery Martin, ed., *The Despatches and Minutes, and Correspondence of the Marquis Wellesley,*

agents and a small group of English merchants and factory owners into empire builders. A spate of imperial construction projects followed Lord Wellesley's tenure in the East India Company. In 1798 the construction of the Government House began with funds raised through the lottery. Once the construction of the Government House was completed in 1803, the Justices of Peace began the construction of the Town Hall in 1804, which was completed in 1813.[179] In 1817 the administrators of the city officially set up a Lottery Committee to raise funds for the administration of the city.[180]

The effect of Wellesley's tenure in Calcutta is best summed up in the following statement made by the traveller Viscount Valentia George on the extravagant Government House construction executed by Wellesley:

> The sums expended upon it have been considered as extravagant ….but they ought to remember that …. India has to be ruled from a palace, not from a country house; with the ideas of a Prince, not with those of a retail-dealer in muslins and indigo.[181]

Even to this day, historians consider Wellesley's 1803 Minute on Calcutta as the moment that "anticipated modern town planning in the country."[182] Urban histories map out Wellesley's imprint upon the city as one of rationalization of military and political

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K.G. during his Administration in India, Vol. III (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1836), 84.

[179] For a detailed architectural history of the place see Sten Nilsson, *European Architecture in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968); Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta,* 111-114 ; Datta, *Planning the City,* 25-32.

[180] Goode, *Municipal Calcutta*, 12-13; Datta, *Planning the City*, 28.

[181] Viscount Valentia George, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt in the years 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806* (F. C. and J. Rivington: London, 1811), 192.

[182] Datta, *Planning the City*, 18.

control.[183] Indeed, in this Minute the productive power of imperial aesthetics becomes apparent, as it facilitated the mapping of racial ideology and imperial ideas upon the public space through tropes of dirt, disease and cleanliness.[184] Histories of Calcutta's urbanization are narrated through an interplay of imperial spatial control and native resistance and discipline.

Clearing and fortifying the swamps for the purposes of the health of the officials soon became integral to the urban management in Calcutta. Some of the early activities of the Lottery and Town Improvement Committee involved draining the marshes and producing usable land for building purposes. Epidemiological concerns drove these draining projects and also attempted to segregate the city. As will become clear in the later chapters of this dissertation, the translation of the marshes served another purpose beyond epidemiology. It produced a market in urban land that restructured existing configurations of land and power. Planning histories argue that surveying and fortifying the marshes was coterminous with attempts to medicalize the landscape according to the principles Victorian racist science.[185] However, for the company agents the link between medicine and economics was far clearer than existing historiography grants them. From 1807 they employed medical practitioners to survey their territories. Francis Buchanan was the first surgeon to map the terrain, living conditions, people's diet, disease, land-

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[183] Gupta, "Theory and Practice of Town Planning in Calcutta."

[184] Both Dipesh Chakrabarty and Sudipto Kaviraj have noted this in their works on the colonial public sphere. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Open Space/ Public Space: Garbage, Modernity and India," *South Asia* 14, no. 1 (1991):15-31; Sudipto Kaviraj, "Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices about Space in Calcutta," *Public Culture* 10, no.1 (1997): 83-113.

[185] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 68-75.

tenure and animal husbandry practices in eastern India.[186] Buchanan was followed in 1813 by the surgeon James Johnson, who arrived in Bengal to investigate the peculiar diseases that afflicted the tropics. After surveying Calcutta he offered his utopic vision of what British enterprise can achieve:

> But what do not industry and perseverance accomplish? The marshes are drained, the rivers flow in their disencumbered channels; the axe and the fire clear away forests; the earth furrowed by the plough is opened to the rays of the sun, and the influence of the wind; the air, the soil, and the waters acquire by degrees to a character of salubrity; and vanquished nature yields its empire to man, who thus creates a country for himself.[187]

Following Johnson's recommendation James Ranald Martin wrote his seminal *Notes of the Medical Topography of Calcutta* in 1836, which had a lasting effect in producing a particular sanitary history of the city and led to the establishment of the Fever Hospital in 1848.[188] Urban histories focusing predominantly on this report depict the role played by miasma and "olfactory imperatives" in planning the city, the working class neighborhoods and the markets.[189]

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[186] Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, 25-26.

[187] James Johnson, *The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions: Being a Treatise on the Principal Diseases Incidental to Europeans in the East and West Indies, Mediterranean, and Coast of Africa*, (Philadelphia: Evert Duyckinck, 1826), 21.

[188] James Ranald Martin, *Notes on the Medical Topography; Report of the Committee Appointed by the Right Honourable the Governor of Bengal for the Establishment of a Fever Hospital and for Inquiry into Local Management and Taxation in Calcutta* (London: G. H. Huttmann, 1837); Partha Datta, *Planning the City* shows how important the medical topography was to planning histories; and Arnold, *Colonizing the Body* argues that medical ideology was central to the molding of an idea of occidental cures versus oriental therapeutics.

[189] There is an overreliance on this document to produce a particular narrative of colonial Calcutta. See for

Thus nineteenth-century history of Calcutta's planning is focused on the growth of the city as an important center for British trade, a seat of government and migration of working-class populations to the city. The fear of fevers mapped out in Martin's *Medical Topography* had already initiated projects for clearing jungles and draining marshes. This was followed by a period of road improvement and clearing of *bastis* (slums) from 1830 to 1890.[190]

Figure 3: This colored lithograph is taken from plate 12 of Sir Charles D'Oyly's "Views of Calcutta and its environs" [Victoria Memorial Archives, Kolkata]

As the image by Charles D'Oyly [fig. 3] shows, the brick (*pucca*) houses and thatch huts (*kutcha*) were mixed in together in 1835 in an area in the white town known as Clive

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instance, Pande, *Medicine, Race and Liberalism*; Dutta, *Planning the City*; Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*. I borrow "olfactory imperatives" from Alain Corbin, *Foul and Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988), esp. 5-16

[190] Dutta reveals how Calcutta grew fastest during this period, *Planning the City*, 127-170.

Street. From 1837 onwards concerted efforts were made by the Justices of Peace, through a body known as the Municipal Committee on Fires, to evict the *kutcha* houses, open up land for public works purposes and clear the slums.[191] Large-scale displacement of the working-class population to the fringes continued until almost the latter half of 1860s.[192] However, by the late nineteenth century new developments in economics and the fear of working-class riots had direct effects on urban planning. For instance, from 1882 Municipal Commissioners in Calcutta moved away from eviction of working-class populations and demolition to slum improvement drives. This is the period when they initiated a project of registering the slums and preparing guidelines for slumlords to ensure basic living conditions.[193]

The 1880s ushered in a season of epidemics in Calcutta and a spate of municipal activities, whose focus moved away from road building to slum improvement and development of the suburbs to relocate the "epidemic-prone" population out of the city.[194] The municipality established a Building Commission in 1897 to prepare reports to improve the slums.[195] However, it would be another decade before the municipal bodies undertook any serious improvement work. In 1911, when King-Emperor George V announced his decision to move the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi, the Bengal Legislative Council passed the Calcutta Improvement Bill, which led to the

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[191] Dutta, *Planning the City,* 140-177.

[192] Dutta, *Planning the City,* 164.

[193] Dutta, *Planning the City*, 187.

[194] Dutta, *Planning the City,* 187-189.

[195] *Report of the Calcutta Building Commission* (Calcutta: Government of Bengal, 1897).

foundation of the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT). With the CIT, the ideology of imperial planning redirected its energies to a comprehensive town planning project rather than piecemeal conservancy, sanitary and epidemiological drives.[196]

Nineteenth- and early-twentieth century municipal and planning histories of Calcutta are woven around the various municipal ventures and the construction of various colonial monuments which document the rise of British power from a mud factory to the "city of palaces." Colonial histories glorify the implementation of health and the creation of order in a chaotic pestilential space through various punitive and municipal measures, and postcolonial histories turn to the same medico-municipal documents to analyze the violence of the racialization of spaces within the city.[197]

The marshes and swamps, "the nature" that had to be "vanquished," remain an inert background in this history. We know very little about human interaction with the watery landscape, with only anecdotal gestures towards a riverine market and fishermen colonies hinting at a rich life-world in this "amphibious terrain."[198] In the following section I will turn to these anecdotes to read what has been left out in the above narratives of Calcutta. I will analyze a ubiquitous and oft-repeated tale about Calcutta's ghost canals to ask what it opens up within the historiography of Calcutta. I am not presenting this narrative as historical evidence to foreground a fluid historical geography for Calcutta. Instead, the stories about the ghost canals of Calcutta function more like a frame that

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[196] For a history of Calcutta Improvement Trusts' projects from 1911 to 1940 see Datta, *Planning the City*, 201-288.

[197] Rabinow, *French Modern*; Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*; Janet Abu-Lughold, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[198] Mathur and DaCuhna, *Soak*, 6.

refocuses the traditional bent of urban histories as one of built environments, epidemics and protest movements. If a historian studies "the shape of evidence […] how its form outlines the contour of an absence, a void, or a silence which in turn is assumed to be the ground of history," then how does this fantastic story about ghost canals operate within historiography?[199] The sayings about the disappeared canals capture a cultural world and translate as well as *betray* for us the signs and interconnected meanings that texture this world. This helps recover a history of the city which municipal and planning histories fail to unfurl.

IV. Historical Closures: Calcutta's Many Origins

There are many historical accounts of the origin of the name of Calcutta. It is a contentious issue within the historiographical debates about Calcutta's origin, as well as a problem of framing the historical teleology of the city's narrative. Therefore most municipal, colonial, postcolonial and amateur histories of Calcutta dedicate a chapter or at least a substantial section to the origin of the name of Calcutta. These histories recount the various versions and typically weigh in on what they take to be the most "convincing" theory in order to set the date of Calcutta's founding and thereby bestow historical relevance upon the geographical space of the city. By analyzing these narratives I investigate "history's capacity to render thinkable the documents which the historian inventories."[200] While earlier accounts of the origin of the name were impressionistic in nature, the later ones are incrementally infused with scientificity. The ones that come

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[199] Tom Conley, "Translator's Introduction: For a Literary Historiography," Michel de Certeau *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), viii.

[200] de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 35

down to us as presenting an authoritative account for the origin of the name are the ones that most successfully unground previous theories. In narrating the various versions of the origin myth and the anecdotal narrative about ghost canals, I raise two interrelated questions: can the fantastic and historical overlap in urban historiography, and out of what archive can one write a polysemic history of a city?[201]

Early propositions about the origin of Calcutta's name ascribed, in a somewhat facile manner, the act of naming to Job Charnock's letters, and thus constructed the British origin of the city. Meanwhile, the numerous contending debates in the twentieth century pointed towards varied directions in a language of scientificity, a language geologically rich in 'evidence' and etymological complexity. The name 'Calcutta' in its current orthography finds its first documentable mention in the letter of Charles Eyre and Roger Bradyll to Job Charnock dated June 22, 1688.[202] Early British mentions of the place were variously spelled as Calicata, Kaleaghatta, Calicotta and even Golgottah and so on.[203] Kalikata (vernacular pronunciation of Calcutta which continues to be in circulation) was one of the first three villages which the British agents bought from the Seth family. Only after 1689 did Job Charnock use the name of Calcutta in official documents as an administrative center of the East India Company: any reference before

[201] Writing about the multi-layered history of Manhattan, Rem Koolhaas used the term polysemic history to foreground the arrested possibilities in the landscape which the built history elides in *Delirious New York* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

[202] *Records of Fort St. George: Letters to Fort St. George for 1688,* Public Sundries No. 3, Madras 1915, 91, Kolkata, WBSA; Tarun Kumar Mukhopahyay, *Hickey's Bengal Gazette: Contemporary Life and Events in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1988).

[203] Beverly, *Report of the Census of the Town of Calcutta*.

that tends to use the name Chuttanutee (Sutanati).[204] Charnock's orthography of 'Calcutta' came to be standardized from c. 1704 onwards in the wills of the servants of the East India Company.[205]

The moment of orthographical standardization became coterminous with the moment of the founding of colonial Calcutta in the received literature. Popular British myths often recount a story of an encounter and misunderstood conversation between Job Charnock and a farmer resulting in the birth of the name. As the story goes, Charnock landed on the banks of Calcutta and asked a farmer what the name of the place was. On being posed a question in an unknown tongue, the farmer thought it might have to do with his stack of paddy which he was harvesting and said "*kal kata*" – which means that he cut them the day before. In this particular narrative one cannot look for a repressed imperial ideology. The story betrays nothing, but tests the historian's limits of interpretation. Paul Carter warns against attempting to "interpret a place name according to some kind of preconceived historical etymology."[206] It empties the name of the multiple meanings the act of naming carries with it. Names of colonial spaces, even imperial names, are never descriptive, he tells us. Rather, they are metaphorical.

Orientalist theory ascribes the origin of the name to a Puranic Hindu legend, sanctifying the city by placing it among the fifty-one *pithas* (sacred Hindu sites), the temple of Kalighat in present Calcutta being one of them.[207] Legend has it that the

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[204] P. Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta: The Origin of the Name* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1985), 2-3.

[205] Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, 221.

[206] See, Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Faber, 1988), 13 and *passim*.

[207] Wilson, *Early Annals of English in Bengal,* 129-33.

goddess Kali, or Sati, was dismembered into fifty-one pieces. These pieces were scattered through the world. Wherever the pieces fell, that spot became a sacred Hindu site. One of Kali's left toes fell in a place called Kalighat, which later became a famous Shaivite pilgrimage site and a temple was built there. According to A. K. Ray, Kalikata is a derivative of the term Kalikshetra, meaning the abode of Kali, linked to the name of the sacred *pitha* of Kalighat.[208]

Sanskrit scholars, on the other hand, turn to Kavirama's sixteenth-century text *Digbijayaprakasa* to explain the geological production of the riparian town formed through tidal waves. According to this medieval text:

> During the churning of the ocean, *Kurma* (the tortoise) too heavily pressed by the Mandara Mountain on his back and by *Ananta* (the infinite), gasped out a deep breath in order to stupefy the *Daityas* (non-Aryans); and the country of "Kilkila" was formed, and it extended over the whole tract that was covered by his breath.[209]

In this Hindu legend Calcutta is supposed to be a derivative of the space "Kilkila." Ray interprets this legend as a description of an earthquake which collapsed a hill and resulted in the churning of the ocean. However, that assumes the existence of a town where there was only a tidal village. The social historian P. Thankappan Nair has shown how the text of *Kalikapurana* dealing with this legend does not mention any place called Kalikshetra, the name from which the word Kalighat and later Kalikata is said to have derived.[210]

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[208] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 1-4.

[209] Quoted in Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 2

[210] Nair, *Origin of the Name*. 7-8.

Recent historians generally turn to two early-modern Bengali literary sources to support the argument that Calcutta is a corruption of the name Kalighat, depicted as a pilgrimage and trading town in the site of present-day Calcutta.[211] However, as Radharaman Mitra and many others have shown, this argument is part of the Brahmanical revival of Bengal's history.[212] Indeed, the earliest extant mention of Calcutta in any language is in the Persian language, contained in a Mughal transfer deed, or *bainama* from 1698*,* whereby Prince Azim-uz-Shan, grandson of the Mughal Emperor Aurangazeb, granted the zamindari rights to the English over the villages of Sutanati, Kalikata and Govindapur.[213] The *nishaan*, or the original document authorized by Azim-uz-Shan granting the British zamindari rights to the three towns of Dihi Calcutta, Sutanutti and Govindpur, has been lost.[214]

Mughal revenue records, mainly the *izaradars* and *ihtimandars* [tax collector's records] for the latter half of eighteenth century reveal that Dihi Kalikata [village

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[211] Among the two puranic texts, one is Bipradas Pipilai, "Manasa-Vijaya" in *Mansamangal Kabya* (dated. 1495-96). This is cited in Subodh Chandra Sengupta and Anjali Bose eds., *Sansad Bangali Charitabhidhan* (Calcutta: Bangiya Shahitya Parisad, 1976) [hereafter BSP]. Scholars of Bengali literary history cast doubt about the date of composition and ascribe it to mid-17th century;). The other text is Mukundaram Charabarty, *Chandi Mangal (Kavikangkan Chandi)* (Calcutta: BSP, 1963).

[212] Radharaman Mitra, "Kalikata'r Naam Sankranto," *Ekshan*, 7, no. 4, 1970.

[213] Nair, *Origin of the Name*, 3-7. Nair also mentions that there were debates between the three translators of *Ain-i-Akbari*, viz. H. Blockmann, H.S Jarret and Jadunath Sarkar about the reading of a particular line within the text debating whether the name of the place under discussion is *Kalna* or *Kalkatta*. For details, see Nair, *Origin of the Name*, 4-5. Nisith Ranjan Ray also mentions that the earliest Persian mention of Calcutta is found in Raja Todar Mall's *Asl-i-Jumma Tumar*, in *Calcutta the Profile of a City*, (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1986), 5. The Persian origin is also attested in the writings of Sripantha (Nikhil Sarkar), *Kalikata* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 2006), 2; Radharaman Mitra, *Kalikata Darpan* (Calcutta: Riddhi, 1986), 7.

[214] Standard historical works take this as the beginning of the colonial history of urban Calcutta, however this assumption is based on the *bainama* (sale deed) and not the *nishaan* which has been lost. A copy of the *Bainama*, or deed of purchase from the Savana Mazumdar dated November 9th, 1698 is preserved at the British Museum (Addit. MSS 24039). See Durgaprasad Bhattachara and Archana Bhattacharya, "Records relating to Calcutta, 1750-1800," *Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Session*, Vol. XLVII, *Indian Historical Records Commission*, Delhi (May 1981): 11-17.

Kalikata] was part of the pargana [District] Adilabad which was later brought into the jurisdiction of Calcutta. Revenue records from 1758 reveal that there was a Calcutta pargana, but surprisingly it did not contain the Dihi Kalikata. A part of the village Govindapur was in the Calcutta pargana. The present localities of central and eastern Calcutta like Sealdah, Tiljala, and Ultadanga were among the villages in the Calcutta parganas.[215] This confused and diffuse set of references shows the fantasy involved in the historian's search for origin myths to render a coherent spatial history.[216]

One of the most recent and protracted debates on the origins of the name was between the linguist and litterateur Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and the social historian Radharaman Mitra spanning almost fifteen years from 1955 to 1970.[217] According to Chatterjee, Calcutta's name cannot be a corruption of the word "Kalighat," the pilgrimage site. As a linguist he demonstrates the impossibility of the original word Kalighat (or even Kalikshetra) and the derivative word Kalikata (vernacular pronunciation of Calcutta) existing simultaneously within the same linguistic space. For the derivative to appear, the original has to disappear.

Somewhat surprisingly, he turns to chemistry and geological findings to establish the "pure Bengali" origin of the name Kalikata, which comes from the word Kali, a term for wet lime, and *kata,* which could mean six different and equally convincing things according to him. He chooses one meaning for *kata* which means factories where shells

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[215] Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya, "Records relating to Calcutta, 1750-1800," 13.

[216] See Joan Scott on the fantasy involved in origin myths, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[217] Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, "Kalikatar Naam" in *Sahitya Parisad Patrika* 45th Year, no. 1, 1955 [BS 1345], later republished in *Desh*, March 9, 1968.

were burnt to produce lime. He then goes on to assert the existence of a thriving lime trade in Bengal by referring to names of streets and squares named after various versions of lime, or *chuna*: Chunagully and Chunaritolla, for example. In order to straighten out any contradictions in his account and produce a neat line of argument for the origin of name along economic and trade lines, he refers to the name of Sutanati, one of the villages which comprise modern Calcutta, which attests to the presence of cotton trade, since *suta* means cotton.

Mitra dismantled Chatterjee's theory in an essay on the name of Calcutta in a Bengali journal called *Ekshan*.[218] Mitra does not offer us any substantial argument about the origin of Calcutta's name. Instead, he attests mostly to the British origin of the name, by showing how during the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century some English merchants travelled to the neighboring district of Amta, found a small village, and called it Calcutta. This trend of naming new places after an already existing place-name was, according to Mitra, a particular British predilection as attested by the names of northern American cities.[219] Mitra critiques Chatterjee's claim and the premise of the claim by detailing the arbitrary nature of name-giving. Mitra's critique, in turn, is followed by a rebuttal from Chatterjee in the very next issue of *Ekshan.*[220] Each argument in this exchange becomes more 'scientific' in depth, more etymologically sophisticated, and is notable for the almost acrobatic shoring up of the official archive and evidentiary claims. In the din of these arguments, the specificity of Calcutta, the story of a city, and its

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[218] Mitra, "Kalikata'r Naam Sankranto"; a more detailed version can be found in Mitra, *Kalikata Darpan*, 1-39.

[219] Mitra, *Kalikata Darpan*, 37-38.

[220] Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, "Kalikatar Naam," *Ekshan*, 7, no. 5, 1970.

character are all lost, leaving us with little more than dates, etymological theories, trade routes, geological facts and a table of historical documents.

The accumulation of these various debates takes on such formidable proportions that most histories of Calcutta, amateur, municipal or academic, begin by engaging with these various naming narratives and choose the most "rational" arguments as the likely explanation for the origin of the name of the city, each account thereby seeking closure in the debates.[221] However, all of these narratives mention the anecdote of the ghost canals, to narrate and then summarily dismiss them as fantastic tales.

VI. Historical Disclosure: Fluid Poetics of the Urban

One particular myth explains that Calcutta consisted of many canals and fishermen's villages, most of which have now either disappeared or become subterranean, and that—to quote one typical account—the earliest settlers of Calcutta were "aboriginal peoples like the Jeliyas, Duliayas, Nikaris and Bagdis – fisherman, falconers and hunters by profession."[222] Ray's introduction to the 1901 census of Calcutta asserts that this narrative is within the genre of "dark legend" and not an "*enlightened* historical discourse".

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[221] *Descriptive Guide Book to Calcutta and its Environs*, in Fifteenth Session of the Indian Science Congress (Calcutta: Locale Secretaries of the Congress, 1928); P.C. Bagchi ed, *The Second City of the Empire*, in Twenty-fifth Session of the Indian Science Congress Association, (Calcutta: Locale Secretaries of the Congress, 1938); S.N. Sen ed., *Calcutta*, in Thirty-ninth Session of the Indian Science Congress, (Calcutta: Locale Secretaries of the Congress, 1952). The contents of all these books remain the same with mere stylistic changes. The section on the history of Calcutta with its subsection on the origin of the name comes down to us unchanged. Similar narratives about the origin of the name of Calcutta are also found in Goode, *Municipal Calcutta,* 1-4.

[222] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta,* 5.

> This would appear to be about all we can discern of Calcutta between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, though [*sic*] the gloom of the traditions of Bengal and the mist of its social chronicles, before the light of history dawned upon its soil and illumined the horizon with the advent of the British merchants.[223]

Scholars like Ray refute this story without going into detailed treatments of the narrative. Interestingly, it is only in the genre of the essay that the narrative of the ghost canals is dwelt upon as one of the possible beginnings of Calcutta. Writer and essayist Atul Sur and journalist and historian Sripantha (Nikhil Sarkar) recount that, according to this particular narrative, the above-mentioned population comprised the original inhabitants of the place and that the name originates from the canals they dug throughout the city for navigation, canals in Bengali meaning *khal* and the act of digging them being *kata.*[224] To attest to the likely authenticity of this narrative, they mention the presence of Creek Row, a street running through the heart of Calcutta which stands on top of a now-disappeared manmade canal.[225] Atul Sur adds the following details to this particular history of the ghost canals that have disappeared under the city, yet still haunt the naming narrative of Calcutta:

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[223] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 25.

[224] Ray, *Calcutta the Profile of a City*; Atul Sur, *Kalikata'r Chalchitra*, (Calcutta: Shahityalok, 1982), 10-13; Sripantha, *Kalikata*, 5-7; Shankar De (Dnere), *Samajik O Rajnaitik Prekhapete Jele Kaibarta: Adi Kolkatar Jelepara, Jelepara-r Swang* (Kolkata: Offbeat Publishing, 2006).

[225] See fig. 2 for the route of this creek in the Conjectural Map of Calcutta at the Time of British Advent.

> This is *not a story, it is a historical truth*, that the office of the (newspaper house) Anandabajar Patrika is built upon a land under which the ancient canal of Calcutta used to flow.[226]
>
> *eta golpo noy, nichak oitihashik satya je aaj anandabajar patrikar barikhana je bhoomikhander opore dnariye aache, tari taladeshe diye ek samay prabahita hoto kalikatar prachin khalta*.

Sur does not engage with the metaphoricity at the heart of the narrative, but instead seeks to ascribe to it 'historical truth' through the presence of a geographical trace. He deploys the word *prachin* [ancient] to bring forth the sense of historical consciousness and the passage of time,[227] and recounts further details to depict the subterranean riverine landscape on which the city now stands, all the while trying to grapple with the verifiability of his proposition. This particular story of canals is also narrated in a particular folk genre known as the *shonger -gaan* [also spelt *swanger*], the songs and dances of the *kaibarta* groups (fisherman caste). Before I turn to the work by an amateur historian of the *kaibarta* caste to explore how memory, fantasy and oral traditions are employed to narrate history, it is first necessary to say a few words about *shong* and *shonger-gaan* (songs accompanying *shong* performances).

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the popular culture of Calcutta was comprised of folk elements which followed the courtly traditions of Bengal mixed in with the motifs of city. The artisanal classes mainly practiced these traditions. As cultural historian Sumanta Banerjee points out, there were primarily three kinds of popular

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[226] Sur, *Kalikatar Chalchitra*, 10. [emphasis mine]

[227] Banerjee, "Introduction," *Politics of Time*.

performances: one group was *Bratas, panchalis* (verbal recitations) performed by women during rituals and poetic contests known as *kobi-gan* and *kathakathan*; second were the pantomimes, theatrical performances in the streets and market places called *swang*; and the third group comprised various forms of humor, proverbs and doggerels. Among the spectacular performances, *shongs* and *shonger-gan* were the most popular, and were mostly performed by people from the *jelepara* (fisherman colony) and *kansaripara* (brazier colony).[228]

Sankar Dnere, an amateur historian of the fishermen inhabitants of Calcutta who claims to have descended from one of the earliest *shong* performers, elaborates upon the subterranean riverine landscape of the city in a book published in 2007. Although he titles his book a social and political history of the old Calcutta's fisherman colony, during a conversation I had with him in 2012 he called it a work of memory (*smriticharan*) written out of the desire to textualize a world he knows, as well as a world that has disappeared.[229] In the title and throughout his book, he calls the *jelepara* a part of *adi* Calcutta and not *puratan/purano* Calcutta. While *puratan/purano* means old, temporally *adi* comes before *purano* and can be translated as ancient, primordial, or even 'ur'. Although a descendant of the early fishermen settlers of the city or even the ur-city, he does not stake any claim to these originary name narratives. Furthermore, he does not try to establish his people as the original inhabitants of the area. For him this story exists

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[228] Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets,* 78-146; while his work focuses on the practices and performances, others have worked on the popular press and the extant texts of these performances. See for instance, Sukumar Sen, *Battalar Chhapa O Chhabi* (Calcutta: Ananda Publication, 1984); Sripantha, *Battala* (Calcutta: Dey's Publication, 1997); Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society* (Kolkata: Oxford University Press, 2006); Gautam Bhadra, *Nyada Battalai Jai Kaw'bar?* (Kolkata: Chhatim, 2011).

[229] Sankar Dnere, in discussion with the author on April 8, 2012.

among and alongside the many things narrated about the city. Indeed, as he mentioned to me, he believes that Calcutta is said in many ways.[230] Moreover, Dnere's narrative is a history redolent with the disappeared rivers and canals of Calcutta, not in order to attest to any geographical veracity to his historical claim, but instead to depict how the space is experienced and remembered by the people of his caste-group. The following phrase is scattered and repeated like a refrain throughout his book:

> There is a saying in English that – the fish follows the water and the fisherman follows the fish. This means that wherever there are rivers, canals, streams, there are fish, and the fishermen always inhabit spaces close to those water bodies. The present area of Creek Row and Lenin Sarani was once a canal. […] Bhagirathi [a disappeared river] once came up to the present New Secretariat Building. From here, meaning from Chandpal Ghat, this canal would flow upstream towards the West. It would flow through Hastings Street and take a turn at the present Registry Office towards Great Eastern, Anandabajar Patrika Office, to the north of Chandni Chowk and flow over Wellington Square through Creek Row and Sealdah and flow into the Salt Lakes. In those days Salt Lake came up to Sealdah. It was a broad canal. […] In 1737, during a massive thunderstorm, huge boats capsized into the canal, giving the area around Subodh Mallik Sqaure the name *Dingibhanga* [literally meaning: broken-boats].
>
> *Ingrejite ekta katha acche* – The fish follows the water and the fisherman follows the fish. *Arthat nadi, khal, bil, jekhanei acche shekhanei maacher bashastan aar maach dhora jelera shei saab jalasayer kaccha-kaachi baash kare. Bartaman* Creek Row

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[230] Dnere, discussion.

> *ebong* Lenin Sarani *ekangsho ekada khal chilo* […] *Paschimbanga sarkarer* New Secretariat Building *parjanta chilo Bhagirathi bistrita ebong ei stane arthat chandpal ghater kaach theke purbadike ei khaltir jatrarambha chilo.* Hastings Street*er upar diye eshe bartaman* Registry Office*er kaache bak niye* Great Eastern Hotel, Anadabazaar Patrika*r* Office, Chandni Chawk*er uttor,* Wellington Square*er upor diye* Creek Row *dhore* Sealdah Station*er nikat laban rade eshe mishe chilo.* […] *1737 shaler ek pralayanker jhode ei khale bada bada nouka dube giyechilo, ja theke* Shubodh Mullik Squar*er dakshin anchaler naam hoyechilo* 'Dhingibhanga.'[231]

The rivers and canals take over and lead the narrative to mark the fluid space, always shifting and moving. In this account, many of the place names are reminiscent of the disappeared riverine culture of the place. This simple expressionist recollection does not seek evidentiary or historical status. Like a memory fragment, it contains both a reality as well as the ritual of narrating pasts. However, if one listens closely to this narrative, one hears echoes of other stories. These stories carry with them echoes of the everyday life around the riverine culture and the histories of the city that have been handed down. This is the only account of the origin of the name of the city where the historicality and "texture" of the space are alive within the narrative.

> Texture takes us into the warp and weft of a text and demands attention to each of its threads. A historical quality is something that makes itself felt in the weaving of the work as a whole on the basis of markers internal to its frame or process.[232]

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[231] Dnere, *Jelepara*, 66. [translation mine]

[232] David Schulman, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Velcheru Narayana Rao, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011), 253.

A name like *Dingibhanga* – broken boats—provides traces of life and loss in this riverine landscape, traces of a reticular pattern left by human labor and frustration upon the land. According to the theorist of space Henri Lefebvre, such "traces embody the 'values' assigned to particular routes: danger, safety, waiting, promise."[233] These traces speak to the texture of the city, rather than merely to its textual presence and afterlife.

What possibilities does this anecdote open up about the terrain of Calcutta within urban historiography? What manner of historical knowledge is kept valid and alive by not seeking to resolve the tensions that emerge in the debates? Instead of marshaling evidentiary material to prove either the anecdote's veracity or failure as a scientific claim, I open up the possibility of a different historical reading of the narrative that, instead of seeking closure, will open up a historical *dis*closure.[234]

The narratives about the ghost canals and the one I am about to recount elicit different kinds of responses to the object and the knowledge that the object can produce – a response of wonder perhaps. In a discussion of wonder, Ranajit Guha shows us how the problem of credibility becomes acute precisely because the correspondence between knowledge and its object, between intellect and the thing it wishes to grasp, comes unhinged.[235] This unhinging enables a different form of historical opening – one that is not a metaphysical grasping of the purported object of historical knowledge. It is within such an opening that another form of history can happen, one that attempts to go beyond

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[233] Henri Lefebvre, *Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 118; for a study of geographical naming and the hidden routes of history, see Carter, *Dark Writing,* 5-6 *and passim.*

[234] Joel Fineman, "The History of Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction" in H. Aram Veeser, ed. *The New Historicism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 49-76.

[235] Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 64.

the boundaries of the archive of town plans, municipal papers, governmental debates, and the built environment. Such a history is attentive to the ephemeral stories often told about the city. The city is produced in the moment of the telling.

Eighteenth-century geographical writings which often constitute the archives of urban histories operated like contemporaneous legal thinking through a form of inductive reasoning.[236] Similar tools of inductive reasoning that were employed in the arguments about the origin of the name of Calcutta reduce and erase the sense of "elsewhere" that is present in the "where" of our locations. These "elsewheres" haunt the narrative of the city. The early historical accounts of the origin of Calcutta's name fail to accommodate the poetic substrate which is present in Dnere's narrative.

Though perhaps of no apparent historical importance, with very little geographical "evidence" to support its entry into the realm of history, there comes the space of an "elsewhere," a place called Kalaburo in the history of Calcutta in Dnere's account. The point is not to search for geographical coordinates to Kalaburo. This space exists in stories handed down to and narrated by the inhabitants of *jelepara* area. Indeed, Dnere even claims to have visited the place as a very young boy. In these stories, Kalaburo was a village linked to Calcutta on one side through the Bhagirathi (the river that has disappeared); on the other side, the village was linked to the sea, the water flowing through it was the salt-water of the seas, and the fishermen of the *jelepara* bought sea-fish (*bhetki*) from the boatmen of Kalaburo to sell in the Hogg Market in

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[236] Benton, *Search For Sovereignty*, 9-22; see also Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*; Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches. Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawai'i, 1980); Mathew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Calcutta. Kalaburo was situated by a river (whose name is never mentioned in the narrative), and one could walk two miles to the Ghuntiyari Sarif station on the local train line to Canning, a port town close to Calcutta. That is as much as we can gather about the site's geographical location from Dnere's account.

This village neither had a pond, nor a tap for potable water. The villagers would send a huge boat with drums to the south where there was a pond to collect drinking water for the villagers every morning. However, due to inadequate dredging and the expansion of the city, the Adi Ganga, a tributary of the Hughli flowing through Calcutta became a subterranean stream and was officially declared dead by 1926. In the *jelepara* narratives, the disappearance of the river is narrated metaphorically through tales of a dwindling trade in sea-fish, and the slow death of the village of Kalaburo. In 1947 a boatman from Kalaburo who had become a religious mendicant came to the *jelepara* and narrated the story of the gradual disappearance of the village upon losing its connection to Calcutta in 1943. The dates are important since there are many narratives to be heard within this story – the death of villages during the Bengal famine of 1943, the wandering refugee following the Partition of 1947 – although Kalaburo could not possibly be anywhere in the eastern part of undivided Bengal, and neither could it have been significantly affected by Partition.[237]

It is perhaps not for the historian to seek to correlate and establish one line of explanation for the appearance of the boatman from Kalaburo within the urban space, as Kalaburo receded out of the geographical horizon of Bengal. In fact, the space of Kalaburo haunts the text of Dnere's account; it de-synchronizes the space of Calcutta,

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[237] Dnere, *Jelepara*, 67-68

introducing an element of anachrony. These ghosts canals that haunt the archive of Calcutta need not be exorcised, nor should they be explained through geological findings. Indeed, perhaps different histories of living with the land, water, marshes and the receding sea are even buried in the ghost canals that gradually disappeared under the expanding city. Dnere writes that the evidence of the disappeared canals of Calcutta is the disappearance of the village of Kalaburo: one absence pointing to another.[238] The anecdote about the disappearance of Kalaburo marks "an absence, a void, or a silence,"[239] and opens new ground to write a different history of Calcutta.

VII. Conclusion: Narrating Spatially and Framing the Project

The myth about the ghost canals disrupts the archive of our cities and the claims that inhere in them. These narratives reveal the many ways of remembering the city. The status of this anecdote as a genre is situated in the interstices of history, reality and fiction. The story of these ghost canals resists any attempt at a closure in history. Traditional vernacular historical writing about South Asian cities have often mined anecdotes and what in common parlance would be known as hearsay to write histories of the city.[240] These semi-literary elements played a very important role in Indo-Islamic historiographical tradition.[241] Etymologically, anecdote (from the Greek *anekdota*) refers to unpublished items: *an* (not) *ekdota* (published) and *ekdotos* also means "given up" or

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[238] Dnere, *Jelepara*, 68

[239] Conley, "Translator's Introduction," de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, viii.

[240] See Glover's discussion of *Tahqiqaat Chisti*, in "Thinking with the City," *Making Lahore Modern*, 185-191.

[241] See Carla Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals: The Shahr Ashon," *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 25, no. 1 (1990): 99-110.

"betrayed."[242] The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that an anecdote is the "narrative of a detached incident, or of a single event, told as being in itself interesting and striking." Widely used throughout the nineteenth century vernacular histories of South Asia, the term came to designate a kind of historical writing that deliberately eschewed totalizing and large-scale narrative views in favor of the situated personal ways of telling.[243] Writer and satirist Kaliprashna Sinha's *Hootum Peynchar Naksha* (1862), one of the richest accounts of nineteenth-century Calcutta, is a collection of gossip.[244] Benoy Ghosh penned his history of Calcutta under the various titles translated as "musings of *kalpeyncha"* [dark-owl, or time-owl] and the titles of his books were *Sutanati* [another name for Calcutta] *Charcha*, *Town Kolkatar Kedcha* – where *charcha* and *kedcha* mean gossips, tales or stories.[245] In the last decade Renaissance historiography has turned to figurality and metaphoricity in the language of anecdotes to understand the hidden textures of their times.[246]

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[242] Fineman, "The History of Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction" 49-76.

[243] The richest archive of North Indian Classical Music are the anecdotes that were passed down from the maestros to their students and audience and have both a literary and an extra literary status. Presentation by Professor Amlan Dasgupta at the Oral Narratives Workshop: Methods, Meaning and Ethics at Jadavpur University, March 24, 2011.

[244] There is a debate within Bengali literary history about the exact text. For this dissertation I have used the recent edited version that gives us the book and print history of the text. Arun Nag ed. *Shatik Hootum Peynchar Naksha*, (4th edition, Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2012).

[245] Benoy Ghosh, *Kalpeynchar Naksha* (Calcutta: Bak-Sahitya, 1961) and *Town Kolkatar Kedcha,* (Calcutta: Bak-Sahitya, 1964).

[246] Stephen Greenblatt reads renaissance anecdotes as discursive reciprocities and negotiations of "social and linguistic energies," in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 66-93; for a counter argument to this see Fineman, who argues for releasing the potential of an anecdote from the narrow fetters of New Historicism, "Shakespeare's Will: The Temporality of Rape," *Representations*, 20 (Fall 1987): 25-27; and "The History of Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction."

What would happen if one were to remain with the fantasy geography of the *jelepara* accounts of the city? Unlike in the other narratives, in Dnere's account the claim of semantic metonymy that would transform the narrative of Kalaburo into a national drama is absent, for his account of the fishermen's memories, claims to spaces, and Kalaburo's destruction are neither fictions, nor are they histories of the state. There can be many possible readings of the narratives regarding the origins of Calcutta. Read in a certain way, the content of Suniti Kumar Chatterjee's argument about the lime trade could sound just as fantastic as the one about Kalaburo's existence. The difference, however, perhaps lies in the rational language employed by Chatterjee in comparison to Dnere's metaphorical account. While Dnere's account textualizes an oral tradition, the rest of the arguments turn to the text as the source of origin and authority, thereby textualizing the origin of a geographical space and producing its textual history. Dnere's account refuses to fix an origin, and his narrative is as fluid as the space he narrates. Moving beyond the textual life of Calcutta, the texture of the city comes alive in the symbols and narrative strategies deployed in Dnere's account. These names and the stories that are embedded in them tell a different story of belonging by refusing to make fixed claims on the geography.

Dnere's story is keenly aware of the claims that the river makes on the land and knows how to read the history of space in human labor – literally in the canals that were dug, in *khal-kata.* The fisherman's anecdotes about living with the water open a gap within history which teleological narrative plugs. A polysemic history of human relation to marshes beyond "vanquished nature" is revealed. Dnere's articulation of the impossibility of thinking ownership of a land where the river has the highest claim

reveals an intimate life-world of the river and land. These forms of belonging to the marshes parse open a fissure in modern ideas of property.[247] Dnere's account of living with the river does not strictly conform either to the traditional power-base of landed proprietorship or the rights-based liberal discourse of private property ownership.

Large parts of this geographical space in the lower-Ganga delta basin have been covered over by "architectural mutations," "utopian fragments," as well as "phantom architecture in the form of past occupancies, aborted projects and popular fantasies."[248] Taking the materiality of the soil, mud, ground and the disappeared canal as the archival basis of this history interrupts traditional understandings of property. Ownership is a dense concept and its thickness and density haunt the margins of the contractual property deed. Yet it is these very deeds as graphic texts that are available as textual traces in the shelves of the archives. Therefore, what lies beyond the shelves are anecdotes, fantasies, and imaginations. They hint at the arrested possibilities and lost histories of the city. In the following chapter I turn to the process whereby the layered historical geography of the space between the river and the city was translated into a recognizable landscape of riverfront property.

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[247] Studies from Australia and Canada help us re-think land ownership beyond the recorded deeds and documents. Paul Carter shows that, while juridical property rights formalize use and possession of land, native rights in Australia being founded on occupation and connection gives rise to other representations of land and makes us rethink exclusive property rights. Carter, *Dark Writing*, pp. 103-139; Paul Nadasdy, "Boundaries among Kin: Sovereignty, the Modern Treaty Process, and the Rise of Ethno-Territorial Nationalism among Yukon First Nations," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 3 (2012): 499-532.

[248] Rem Koolhass develops a particular way of reading the polysemic history of space in his Manhattan manifesto in *Delirious New York*, 9.

Chapter 2/ Fabricating Symbols of Possession: Translating Calcutta's Riverbank

How does building belong to dwelling?

---Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking"

I. Limiting the Fluid City

From 1864 to 1870 a sub-cult Hindu deity enshrined on the riverbank became a plaintiff at the Privy Council in colonial Calcutta waging and winning a protracted judicial battle.[249] Before we understand how the rational bureaucratic colonial state in British India found itself face to face with a Hindu god in the court, we need to return to the Hughli River and the history of lower-Ganga delta region of Bay of Bengal. "An Indian river in its old age," said historian C. R. Wilson, "is a thing full of caprice."[250] Considered holy by many Hindus, the river Hughli flowing along Calcutta was no different. Hughli is one of major tributaries of the River Ganga. However, Ganga and Hughli (also spelt Hooghly) are often used interchangeably. Around 1804-5 the river Hughli started changing in its course as it flowed to the Bay of Bengal. Calcutta, located at the edge of this active delta, was exposed to the vagaries of the shifting river course. By the 1820s, the Hughli had meandered so far west that it had deposited alluvial land approximately four miles long and roughly half a mile wide along the western banks of

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[249] Legal Tussle with Strand Bank, Judicial [Judicial], 1 June 1870. Prog. 161, WBSA, Kolkata.

[250] Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, 103.

Calcutta.

"More land is being yearly added,"[251] bemoaned an earnest Company servant out of frustration at both mapping and estimating costs of turning marshes into riverbank. While we do not have an exact official estimate of how much land was added, we do know that the land kept growing, which the newly formed Territories Department under the aegis of the Justices of Peace designated as "shoals or mud flats."[252] The fickle river had rendered the existing forms of land and ground measurements conducted in 1797 redundant.

This chapter is about the process through which the "shoals or mud flats" deposited by the capricious river Hooghly along the western stretch of Calcutta entered political modernity as "property." The movement of the river resulted in a spate of surveys and protracted legal and municipal debates about property rights over the newly formed space from the 1820s.[253] In 1825 the Governor-General in Council at the Fort William of Calcutta passed a new regulation under the Bengal Code stipulating the rules to be observed in assessing claims and property rights to land gained by the shifting

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[251] In a letter dated September 26, 1854 from C. T. Cockburn, the Chief Magistrate of Calcutta to the Hodgson Pratt, the Secretary of Bengal, Cockburn complains about the difficulties and expense in levelling and laying out the constantly shifting limits of the city. "In reply I beg to state that the Strand Bank in question is I think sufficiently consolidated for the purpose stated, but having been formed through a succession of years, some trouble and expense will be necessary in levelling & laying it out." Judicial [Judicial], April 19, 1855, Consultation No. 71-72, WBSA, Kolkata.

[252] This parcel of land has been termed variously as alluvion or the land opened up the meandering river in the Survey of 1820. Extract from the Proceedings of his Excellency the Most Nobel the Governor General in Council in the Territories Department, 24 March 1820, Judicial [Criminal], 1 April 1820, Prog. 15, WBSA, § 71. After the survey when the Strand bank Fund was set up the land was called "shoals or mud flat." Letter from S. Wauchope, Commissioner of Police to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal 27 April 1863, Strand Bank Funds, Judicial [Judicial], October 1863, Prog. 123-131, WBSA, Kolkata.

[253] Magistrate to Direct their Surveyors to Survey and Report on the Bank of the River mentioned by the Mint Master, Fort William. Judicial [Criminal], June 25 1807, Prog. 1, WBSA, Kolkata.

course of the river.[254] The emergence of the new strip of land opened up a discussion of property rights upon that space, and a larger debate about the East India Company's ownership status within colonial Bengal. It also made the importance of the materiality of paper, in the form of title or property deed, the basis of ownership and in the process eclipsed older forms of authority, sacred, moral or otherwise. At the same time, the shifting river constantly unmade the stability that paper deeds sought to bestow upon the idea of property. The "unruly" ownership practices among the indigenous population with property circulating between the human proprietors, their gods and ancestors did not help matters in the fluid spaces of the city. The colonial struggle of converting marshes into property provides an excellent angle for documenting how British bureaucratic rationality managed geographical indeterminacy and the angry Hindu deities. In the process, British *squatters* became landlords through the spurious operations of law.[255]

Following the shifts in the course of the river the Conservancy Department of the Justices of Peace was charged with the responsibility of the sanitation in the city. Specifically, the Conservancy Department was responsible for technologically separating the land from water and fortifying the marshes into a recognizable geographical formation – the riverbank.[256] The fortification of the land gave impetus to carrying out a

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[254] A Regulation for declaring the rules to be observed in determining claims to Lands gained by Alluvion or by Dereliction of a River or the Sea. Regulation XI of 1825 in C. D. Field ed., *The Regulations of the Bengal Code With a Chronological Table of Repeals and Amendments, an Introduction, Notes and an Index* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1875).

[255] Lauren Benton shows how elsewhere in the colonies, the merchants and officials often resorted to an open-ended legal discourse and fluid geographical epistemology producing enclaves of sovereignty, *Search for Sovereignty*, 22-23.

[256] David B. Smith, *Report on the Drainage and Conservancy of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1869).

survey of the riverbank which was conducted by the Territories Department in 1820 to ascertain which part of the ground along the river could be considered the property of the Company.[257] The Territories Department recommended improvements in the riverbank area by establishing a Strand Bank Fund to raise money to improve the river bank, which would also be named the Strand Road. However, a functioning Strand Bank Fund was not established until 1837, a full seventeen years after this initial recommendation. Through the efforts of the Strand Bank Fund, the Territories Department gradually secured the appropriation of riverfront lands from the wealthy Indians and British residents for beautification, trade and warehouse purposes.[258] No residents with property along the riverbank (*ghat*)[259] were ready to give up their land to the Company without a fight.

The legal battles turned the Hindu deity into a plaintiff in the Privy Council of Calcutta. A new *fiction* of law, deploying novel technologies of legitimation, was generated to render previous authority and claims to the land along the riverbank *fictitious.* The legal battles precipitated by land acquisition were a clash of two narrative genres attesting to two forms of authority. An analysis of some of these long overlooked property disputes over the newly formed land reveals that a new language and textuality of possession was forged and offers a unique perspective to understand the longer history of urban land acquisition.

Urban land in colonial India, unlike revenue-generating forest and agricultural

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[257] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog. 15, WBSA, Kolkata.

[258] Strand Bank Funds, Judicial [Judicial], 10 October 1963, Prog. 123-131, WBSA, Kolkata.

[259] The British spelling until the mid-nineteenth century was either Ghât or Ghaut. I use the term riverbank when I am referring to the colonial conceptualization of the space and their attempts to produce for Calcutta a riverbank within the familiar European parameters. Otherwise I use the term ghat.

landholding, did not become part of the systematized balance sheet of revenue generation until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although municipal bodies made many unsuccessful proposals to tax urban properties from 1753 onwards, it was only three years after the Crown took over British India that urban land became a taxable entity through an act passed in 1860.[260] Around the end of the eighteenth century the Company's coffers were considerably depleted by the many small wars they were waging with the Indian polities and European settlers. [261] Thus, the geological changes in the lower-Ganga Delta basin in 1804 -05 became an opportune moment for establishing a reevaluation of properties in the city and eking out new ways to expand their revenue base.

Early nineteenth-century Bengal was filled with deep economic uncertainties and volatility, for precision and standardization did not underpin the world of money or measures.[262] The micro-level of everyday transactions among the Company servants was

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[260] "Act for imposing Duties on Profits arising from Property, Profession, Trades, Office, Act XXXII of 1860," 19th-Century House of Commons Sessional Papers, Vol. XLIII.201, March 7, 1861.

[261] In 1781-82 alone, the disbursements to the military operations far exceeded the revenue collected by the Fort William of Bengal, see Letter to the Court of Directors, § 102, March 25, 1785, B. A. Saletore ed., *Fort William House India Correspondence: 1782-1785*, Vol. 9 (Delhi: National Archives of India, 1959).

[262] Peter Robb, "Mr Upjohn's Debt: Money and Friendship in early colonial Calcutta," *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (2013): 1185-1271. For standard works on East Indian Company's early trade and caprices of silver supply and struggles with the right type of money see, K. N. Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company: The Study of an Early Joint-Stock Company 1600-1640* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965); Amalesh Tripathi, *Trade and Finance in Bengal Presidency 1793 -1833* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1979); Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 2, c. 1751-c.1970 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Om Prakash, "The European Trading Companies and the Merchants of Bengal, 1650-1725," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 1, no. 3 (Jan-Mar 1964): 37-63 and *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. Chapter 8; for the unstable nature of metal and its effect on commerce see Prakash, *Precious Metals and Commerce, The Dutch East India Company and Indian Ocean Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); for more on the negotiations of credit and trust among the Indian and European merchants during that period see also Anthony Webster, *The Richest East India Merchant: The Life and Business of John Palmer of Calcutta, 1767-1836*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003); H. V. Boven, *Business of Empire: The East India Company and*

not entirely monetized. It included a complex mixture of credit, bank cheques, Company Paper, IOUs, lotteries and even theatre tickets. Not surprisingly, disputes raged over the exact valuation of the currencies and its authenticity.[263] The same held true for ownership since the process of evaluating and producing urban property in numerical rhetoric was still not systematized.[264] The paper regime of leases, maps and land acquisition laws ritualistically produced cognizable scripts of possession.[265]

If the property deeds and surveys attempted to stabilize property the legal battles involving gods and factitive authority revealed "property [to be] a process (of making and

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Imperial Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); on the interactions between colonial traders and their vernacular capitalists that debunks the idea of a oriental 'bazaar' and shows the vibrant operation of both credit and metallic currency see, Rajat Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1880-1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 3 (1995): 449-554; Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Anand Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets Society and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[263] Robb, "Mr. Upjohn's Debt," (2013), 1186-1188. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison argue that moralization of objectivity in the sciences did not take place till the mid-nineteenth century. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "The Image of Objectivity," *Representations*, no. 40, Special Issue: Seeing Sciences (Autumn, 1992): 81-128.

[264] Before the British, the Mughal Empire had developed a complex system of agrarian property through the right to collect revenue from agricultural land. Scholars have argued that while the British adapted much of the existing Mughal land tenurial system, nonetheless by rendering land an object of private property the British had facilitated the transformation of existing concepts of property, sovereignty and value. For a discussion on the question of transformation of concepts, nature of power and value see Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Robert Travers, " 'The Real Value of Lands': The Nawabs, the British and Land Tax in Eighteenth-Century Bengal," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 517-558 and *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); for a discussion on how the economic scholarship on 'real markets' and 'market imperfection' affects the histories of commercialization in South Asia see Jairus Banaji and Tirthankar Roy, "Markets in History: Concepts and Outcomes of Commercialisation in South Asia," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36, no. 3 (Special Issues on Markets in History) (1999): 271-73; for an overview on the nature and effects of colonial property regime see Sturman, *Government of Social Life in Colonial India*, 35-70.

[265] On the origins of various ceremonial symbols and shared language of possession among European colonizers in the New World see Particia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possessions in Europe's Conquest of the New World 1492 – 1640 (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). The English used turf and twig ceremony which came from gardening, land ownership practices and agricultural fertility rites. 4-5.

unmaking certain kinds of relationships); [whose] endpoint is not known."[266] The new idiom of possession was integral to the process of regularizing property as a modern juridico-economic entity, and consequently new legitimacies were formed rendering older forms of land use in this marshy delta illegitimate. In order to understand how various forms of authority constituting legitimate ownership changed over the course of the fifty years between 1820 to roughly 1870, we will turn to a history of prior structures of human-land relationship. Through what historical contingencies did a Hindu deity became embroiled in the colonial courts? How does this case relate to the issue of translating the riverbank into property? The processual nature of property is illuminated in studying a longer genealogy of the human-land-water relations in early modern Bengal.

My analysis of this process of translation in nineteenth-century Calcutta proceeds in three sections. First, I analyze Bengal's riverine songs and early-modern literary texts to bring out the particular vernacular spatial currency of the riverbank. I delineate the ways in which various modes of space use and exchange practices were underwritten simultaneously by mercantile and sacred logics. Next I show how the sacred logic was obscured by the colonial regime of surveys and the creation of "public" space, by analyzing the 1820's riverbank survey carried out by the Territories Department. My analysis reveals how the emergence of the new tract of land along the river gave the British an opportune moment to generate novel legal narratives of possession and fabricate a paper-based regime that authorized property relations through property or title deeds. However, the paper-based authority of titles and deeds did not always back the

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[266] Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*, 13.

property market in the newly created city. Instead, it existed in a world of credit and non-monetized tenancy relations, where the nature of property evaluation was in constant flux. The colonial state systematized this fluctuating property evaluation through a form of market governance from the 1830s onwards. The final section focuses on the legal battles that ensued following the implementation of these land acquisitions laws and recommendations coming out of the 1820s Territories Department survey to highlight how one fiction legitimized by the law papered over other forms of authority, claims, and relations to land, rendering them *fictitious* in the process. I conclude by arguing that the fluid and sacred geography of the lower Ganga Delta region where Calcutta is situated problematizes the universalist and inevitable history of financialization by revealing the contingencies of economic and legal knowledge formation.

II. Writing History with the Knots and Folds of the River

The European geographical lexicon, containing a rich repertoire of tropes in travelogue writing along with cartography and landscape paintings, produced the riverine region in the metropole and colony as both a natural setting and cultural space.[267] Rivers in important trading cities across the world have functioned variously not only as natural highways and sewers, but also as sources of power and sites of aspirations. Existing within a variegated urban history of connections and uses, these rivers weave a trail of stories of loss and dreams.[268] Riverfronts are the point through which the river can be

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[267] See for instance how Joseph Conrad discusses equates his upstream river journey as a descent into madness as the topography becomes unfamiliar. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Penguin, 2007 [1899]).

[268] For works that deal with the riverine landscape of Bengal see for instance Himanshu Prabha Ray, "The Archaeology of Bengal: Trading Networks, Cultural Identities," *Journal of Economic and Social History of*

read and written into the city as both a "natural artifact and [a] cultural form."[269] Writing about the British arrival on the banks of the river Hooghly in his *Early Annals* (1895), C. R. Wilson describes the river Hooghly in the following words:

> It [An Indian river] approaches its end rich with spoils gathered during a long and prosperous life, but uncertain where to leave them. Torn in a hundred different directions, it reaches the sea through an ever-varying distributaries. Now the *stream eats away its right bank, now its left*. It oscillates in wide sweeping circles, depositing silt on either side, and again breaks though the curves thus formed and takes a more direct course.[270]

The hungry tides of the Hooghly fed upon the banks, threw up new lands and simultaneously obfuscated attempts by colonial topographers to lexicalize their vagaries. Maps and historical geographies of this region produced by the Italian cartographer Giacomo Gastaldi, *India Tercera Nova Tabula* (1548), the Portuguese historian João de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia* (1552), navigational maps by the Dutch merchant Pieter van den Broecke from 1666 and the English geographer James Rennell's *A Map of Bengal, Bahar, Oude and Allahabad* (1786) testify to this continuous process of land formation.[271] The European symbolic repertoire built

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the Orient 49, no.1 (2006) 68-95; for works that deal with rivers as a cultural form in histories of major cities of world see Peter Ackroyd, *Thames: The Sacred River* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007); Morris, *Big Muddy*; Kelman, *The River and its City*; Douglas H. Johnson, "Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 25, no. 3 (1992): 607-649; el-Sayed el-Aswad, "Spiritual Genealogy: Sufism and Saintly Places in the Nile Delta," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 4 (2006): 501-518.

[269] Kelman, *A River and Its City*, 7.

[270] Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, 103. [emphasis mine].

[271] Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta*, 3.

upon European rivers and enriched by their own religious, biblical, and literary writing found no precedence to frame this space. As Wilson further narrates:

> A tidal river, the Hughli has not during the last three or four hundred years so much changed its course, but the alterations which have taken place in its confluents and in its banks have been so many and so considerable that an enquirer into its topography in the days of Job Charnock [considered the founder of Calcutta] will often find the greatest difficulty in tracing out the many localities which were at that time well known and conspicuous.[272]

The natural anomaly of the temperamental Indian rivers produced wonder and signaled natural diversity.[273] In spite of the geographical richness, the shifting banks of the river proved intractable to revenue calculation and the legal jurisdiction of spaces. The modern language of property posits land-human-water as separate, yet in many parts of the world they are not always separated so neatly.[274] According to contemporary accounts, the newly formed land along Calcutta looked like a muddy lake thriving in weeds along the banks.[275] Riverine Bengal, as well as the larger Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna plains in eastern India, is home to a particular geographical feature known in Bengal as *char* land,

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[272] Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, 103.

[273] Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

[274] In the Canadian context Paul Nadasdy writes about the complex land-animal-human relations which could not be easily translated into a language of property and hunting rights, "'Property' and Aboriginal Land Claims in the Canadian Subarctic: Some Theoretical Considerations" *American Anthropologist* 104, no.1 (2002) 247-261. In the context of aboriginal Australians, Povinelli has shown how sweat, land, ancestral spirit and people constitute one another mutually, *The Cunning of Recognition*, see esp. chaps. 5-6.

[275] Extract of the Territories Department, Judicial [Criminal], 1 April 1820, Prog. 15, § 1WBSA, Kolkata.

which is a fluid environment where the demarcation between land and water is constantly in flux. *Char* lands are formed as the roaring river Ganga descending from the Himalayan range carries an enormous body of sedimentation which is deposited as the river reaches the Gangetic Plains. As a result of this rich sedimentation, pockets of muddy and extremely fertile land form in and along the river. These transient lands appear, disappear and reappear. Recent scholarship on *char* has termed these spaces as hybrid environments, thus challenging one of the foundational distinctions of environmental studies: the land/water dichotomy.[276] The meandering river formed *char* lands along the western banks of Calcutta as the river shifted course in the early nineteenth century. Colonial surveyors such as James Rennell (1786), Francis Hamilton Buchanan (1828) and W. W. Hunter (1875) were all baffled by what they variously called a half-drowned alluvial plain, overgrown grassland or silt-bed.[277]

Bengal's regional identity weaves the river-centric landscape into its understanding of land, river, tree, and human life.[278] The *char* lands that are thrown up by the river one day and eaten away the next day are a familiar lived environment in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Megha river region.[279] Muddy lands hold together animals, fish, vegetation and humans in inseparable and interdependent ways.[280] Boatmen in Bengal

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[276] Lahiri-Dutt and Samanta, *Dancing with the River,* 4.

[277] Lahiri-Dutt and Samanta, *Dancing with the River*, 6-12.

[278] Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal: A Study in Riverine Economy* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1938).

[279] For a contemporary literary representation of this space see Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2004).

[280] For a study that breathes life into mud and soil as an agent of history see Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

live both on and off these half-soil, half-water areas. The English geographical terms "erosion" and "deposition" do not capture the range of intimate river-human experiences that are used in Bengali.[281]

In Bengali, for example, there are multiple ways of understanding erosion, signaling the diverse experience of living with the river. *Chapa bhanga* is used when the river breaks away chunks of lands up to two meters wide as it flows during rainy seasons; *Bhanga* on the other hand refers to erosion that wipes away a couple of acres of lands in a matter of minutes and is experienced as a devastation that monsoon brings regularly to this region. *Hanria bhanga* signals the strong undercurrents that sweep the soft, sandy bottom layer, causing the bank to hang precariously. Besides these three major terms, people of the lower-Ganga basin employ other terms to understand the river's behavior: *chechra bhanga* occurs mainly when floodwaters recede, revealing a newly emerged *char*; *bhurbhuri bhanga* captures the bubbling of the river eating away sandy lands; *nishi bhanga* describes nocturnal erosion and *probol bhanga*, a superlative of *bhanga,* refers to devastating bank erosion.[282]

These multiple ways of understanding the river's relation to its banks were inconsequential to the European settlers. For the merchants of the Company and their trading interests, water and mud had to be separated and transformed into a recognizable geographical feature.[283] Separation of water and fortification of that land would bestow

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[281] Raffles points to the same impossibility of translating the rich riverine language and the difficulties of communicating in writing a language seeped in this watery vocabulary, *In Amazonia*, 27.

[282] For more see C.R. Abrar and S. Nurrullah Azad, *Coping with Displacement: Riverbank Erosion in Northwest Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Serive and North Bengal Institute, 2003), 17-18; Lahiri-Dutt and Samanta, *Dancing with the River*, 40-41.

[283] A similar battle with mud and land took place over centuries in the Mississippi valley, where the

on Calcutta a strand instead of the knee-deep swamp that linked the land to the river. Moreover, throughout the early modern and colonial periods the banks of the river occupied a very integral space in Calcutta as a port and a site of trade. The early English, Dutch and Portuguese factories around Calcutta were located along the river. The swampy and marshy riverbanks also figured significantly in the debates about sanitation, epidemiology and cholera, especially throughout the nineteenth century.[284]

Riverbanks have always been important sites for the temple as an economy, precisely for its proximity to trade networks. However, prior to the fortification and financialization of the space, a different set of claims inhered in this essentially holy site. As a sacred space it was situated within the network of temple economies and was simultaneously a religious and secular market site. The logic of the market was deeply embedded in the sacred exchange of gifts, rituals and rites. Early modern accounts of pilgrimage narratives reveal riverbanks to be a sacred space, which also acted as arbiters of political power and gateways to important towns.[285] Riverbanks are characterized by a landing area with concrete steps that lead to the river from the land, and are used as a place for bathing, taking ablutions, a regular market, as well as Hindu cremation site. This sacred currency, spatialized in the temples and crematoriums, predated its importance as a colonial port area. The ensuing discussion of the literary and folk material that follows will illuminate how the spaces of the *ghat* existed as a material,

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technological separation of land and water forms a critical moment in its history. See Morris, *The Big Muddy.* Morris' history locates Hurricane Katrina as one of the consequences of what he refers throughout the books as the repression of the wetlands.

[284] Smith, *Report on the Drainage and Conservancy of Calcutta*.

[285] Bijayram Sen, *Tirthamangal*, (repr. 1790, Kolkata: Parashpathar Prakashan, 2009).

sacred and cultural form.[286] The literary material illuminate a political economy of circulation of this volatile geography, rather than a codified and fixed possession backed by a bureaucratic machine of the modern state.

The riverine landscape of Bengal is woven into its cultural sphere, be they folk songs, ritual performances, literature or artistic and artisanal representations. In these myriad representations, journeys through the river often became a metaphor for life. In order to understand the cultural meanings of the river and its banks, it is perhaps best to turn to the unique genre of pre-colonial didactic maritime narrative poems called the *Mangalkavya,* which is about the riverine culture and economy of Bengal. These poems were in oral circulation in various parts of rural Bengal from the fifteenth century onwards, and were textualized from the latter half of the eighteenth century. While historians of Bengal often ignore this rich textual source, literary scholars frequently argue that the *Mangalkavya* poems attest to the birth of a mercantile culture in Bengal from the fifteenth century.[287] As a pre-colonial archival source, the poems of the *Mangalkavya* genre provide an understanding of the complexity of the space of the *ghat*, where the river and its banks are depicted as both sites of worship and trade.

Mangalkavyas' central theme eulogizes Hindu sub-cult deities like *Sitala*, the goddess of smallpox, *Candi*, the slayer of demons, and *Manasa*, the goddess of snakes.

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[286] While folk songs, poetry and narratives are rich with imagery of the ghat, there is only one disciplinary history of Calcutta Port. See Nilmani Mukherjee, *The Port of Calcutta: A Short History* (Calcutta: Commissioners of Port of Calcutta, 1968).

[287] For a discussion of the historians approach to the literary world of mangal-kavyas, see David Curley, "A historian's Introduction to Reading Mangal-Kabya" in *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-Kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal* (Chronicle Books: Delhi, 2008), 1-36. For an exception see Kumkum Chatterjee, "Goddess encounters: Mughals, Monsters and the Goddess in Bengal," *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2013): 1435-1487.

Market scenes along the riverbank form an important trope within the *kavya* texts, albeit frequently of a nature that challenges our realistic-representative index, often hinting at a folk conceptualization of the space. A very common narrative thread running through the *Candimangal* texts is a scene that opens on a Hindu burning *ghat* as market. It is a market of dismembered human bodies [*pret-bajar*], where the entourage of the goddess Chandi engages in a trade in human body parts.[288]

Following Henri Lefebvre's formulation of representational spaces, let me hint at the cosmological space that is woven into the geographical locale.[289] Lefebvre's triad of "spatial practices," "representations of space" and "representational space" (perceived, conceived and lived spaces respectively) gesture towards the multi-dimensionality of spaces. Discussing European medieval representation of spaces, he analyses their non-realistic illustration as an "interpretation, sometimes marvelously successful ones, of cosmological representations." He therefore makes symbolism, both verbal and non-verbal, critical to the understanding of how spaces are lived and thereby produced. Read symbolically, the market scene of dismembered bodies significantly captures the overlapping worlds of exchange, both sacred and mercantile, that the space signified. Artisans of Bengal continue to paint these richly imagined spaces as narrative scrolls that accompany the oral performance of the *Mangalkavya* poems.

Artisanal production, unlike artistic production, occupies a very distinctive time and space in the category of historical evidence. While it is not a traditional piece of

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[288] Sukumar Sen ed., *Chandimangal* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1975), 265-68. The text is ascribed to Mukunaram and dated 1589.

[289] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 45 and also 31-53.

evidence, to nonetheless ignore the rich repertoire of representative practices that linger on as artisanal representations of the *ghat* would be a serious limitation. The *Mangalkavya* poems were always performed to the accompaniment of scroll paintings [fig. 4] depicting the scenes of narration. These paintings, which are still available as artisanal productions, cultural artefacts and not as state-historical archival remains, are always represented in a non-realist representative index. These paintings are elements of the narratives which were sung and were part of the ritual singing of these poems. As a performance genre, without the fixed temporality of a painting, the scrolls occupy a different aesthetic system, which is not based on authorship or representational facticity, and their power lies in a metaphorical invocation of the spaces, rather than a Cartesian grasping of it.[290]

[290] Discussing native-American masks as a ritual performances rather than as museum pieces, Gloria Anzaldua evokes the same argument about how to approach these object outside a Cartesian understanding of them. Gloria Anzaldua, *Boderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), see esp. 90-108; for recent scholarship on narrative scrolls and their social role see Pika Ghosh, "Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Bengal," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 3 (2003): 835-871; on using material objects such as stones as an animate communicative object see Carolyn Dean, "Rock Sites/Rock's Sight: Reflections on Site Documentation," *Public Art Dialogue* 1, no. 2 (2011): 151-61.

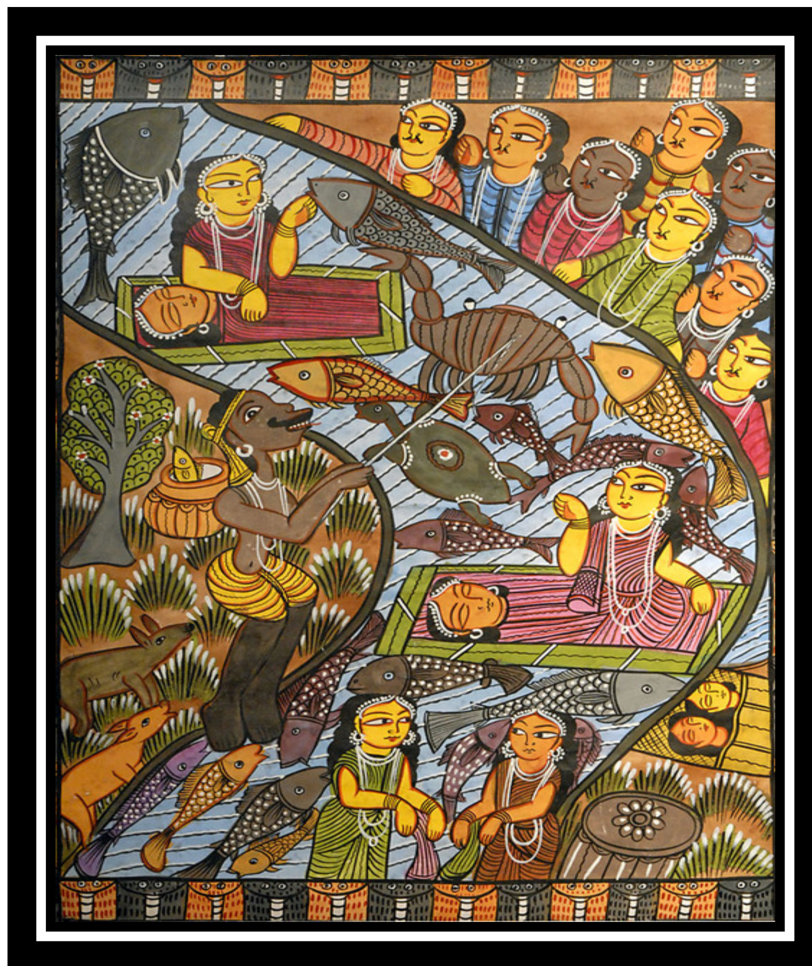

Figure 4: A present-day pictorial scroll from *Manasamangal* used as accompaniment while reciting the poem n.d. from district Medinipur, in West Bengal. [Acquired by the author in 2011]

In the above painting [fig. 4] depicting a scene from *Manasamangal*, we can see how it has nothing of the controlled horizon of European landscape paintings or the calm of the picturesque [fig.5].[291]

[291] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The Compulsions of Visual Representation in Colonial India," *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850-1950* ed. Maria Antonella Pelizzari, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 14 and *passim*.

Figure 5: Water-colour drawing of the view of Calcutta from Garden Reach after Thomas and William Daniell dated c.1810. This picture is a copy of plate 49 from “A Picturesque voyage to India by the way of China.” Inscribed on the front in pencil: “Calcutta from the Garden Reach;” on the back in pencil: “Calcutta. William Daniell R.A. Plate 49. View of Calcutta from the Garden Reach.” [British Library Collection, London]

Instead, figure 4 depicts the world of the vibrant human, animal, and water-land relations that this space embodied. The sacred geography of the *ghat* in the painting seems in no way dislodged by an economic world order, but instead the sacred and economic are coterminous. Trade, worship and death existed along with human, fish, plants and animals. The devotees of the sub-cult deities, *Candi, Manasa* and *Sitala* primarily came from the lower caste orders. The *ghat* depicted in the *Mangalkavya* texts was a site where goddesses appeared in human guises to trade and engage in material exchange. These scenes [figs. 4 and later 6] bring forth an understanding of the space of the *ghat*, which intimates other spatial relations, as well as heterogeneous ways of relating to the water, land and the space where they mix.

Geographically, the banks and the *char* lands were understood to be spaces between land and water and metaphorically they signaled a unique spatial understanding. Given Bengal's riverine culture, symbolically water never meant a clean break in land, but often a continuation of spaces of habitation. Whenever water appears as split from the landmass, especially in the Bengali folksongs, it signals a disjuncture that marks the end of earthly life and crossing the river to the other life. Bengali folksongs are primarily riverine. It is no surprise that the boat is often a literary metaphor for life, and the boatman is a divine being. There are four major groups of riverine folksongs: *bhatiyali-bhawaiya, majhigaan, sarigaan and baulgaan.* Among them, *baulgaan* is sung by members of a distinct community known as *baul* and they use the river in their ballads as a metaphor for life and death.[292] Witness, for example, this metaphorically rich *baul* song about crossing the river, redolent with musings on death and crossing to the other life:[293]

> I sit and weep on Bhaba River bank
>
> I do not know your name boatman
>
> Who should I call?
>
> Who will help me cross? [294]

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[292] The four major folk songs are: *Bhatiyali* which comes from the term *bhati* or low-lying area which is mostly inundated during the monsoon flood. The rhythm and meter of the songs are said to have derived from the sounds of the river. *Majhigaan*, refers to boatman and are often sung by the women when their husbands are away in the river. Boatmen sing *Sarigaan* during boat races. Sukumar Ray, *Folk-music of Eastern India with Special Reference to Bengal* (Kolkata: Naya Prokash, 1998).

[293] For a discussion on the rich philosophy behind baul thought and *deha-tattva* theology see Sanat Kumar Bose, "Baul Songs of Bengal," *Folkmusic and Folklore: An Anthology*, vol. 1, ed. Hemango Biswas et al. (Calcutta: Folkmusic and Folklore Research Institute, 1967), 45-56; Edward Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaisnava-Sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[294] This baul song from rural Bengal was popularized in the late 20th century by Ranen Chaudhury. [translation mine].

Kaandiya akul hoilam

Bhabanadir pare

Majhi tor naam janina

Ami daak deemu kare?

Mon tore ke ba paar kore?

The body, the space the body occupies and the immaterialization of that space is an integral part of what is understood as a folk-theological and phenomenological understanding of life and river within these folk songs.

The metaphor of the journey laces the Bengali understandings of the riverfront. These include stories of trade and pilgrimage found in the early modern texts of the *Mangalkavya,* or in the folksongs of the boatmen for whom the river and the *ghat* are spaces of dwelling and livelihood. Stories of colonial encounter and river surveys are rich with tropes from travelogue writings too. In fact, the colonial journey is one of re-territorialization that involves mapping, measuring and fixing.[295] The folk songs, poetry and paintings, on the other hand, signal a journey away from the earthly life, thereby rendering the land immaterial and de-territorialized.

The painting [fig. 6] by an anonymous Indian artist in the early nineteenth century illustrates the folding in of the vibrant market space and the sacred life of the *ghat* area.

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[295] For the theorization of the erasure of movements in mapping practices see Carter, *Dark Writing*, 5-8.

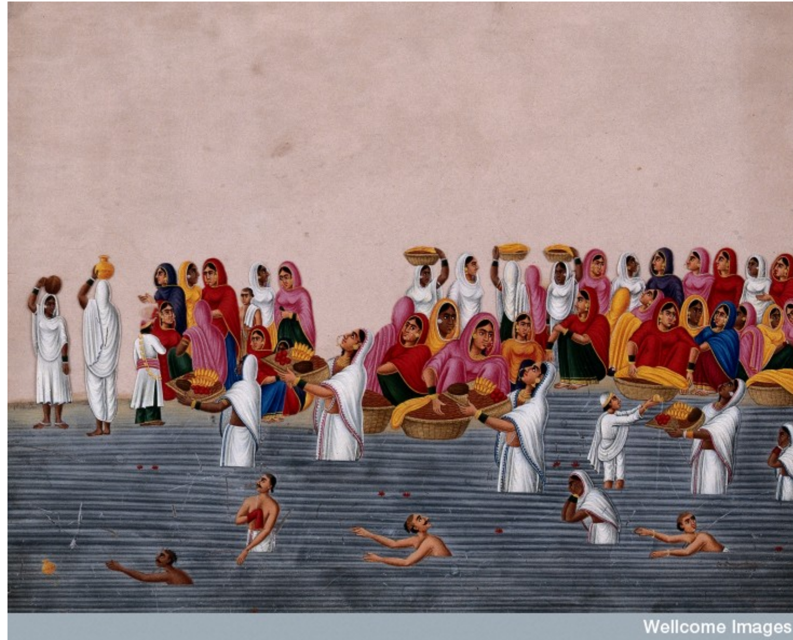

Figure 6: People Bathing and Praying in the Holy River Ganga, Gouache painting on mica by an unnamed Indian artist. Date unknown Image 15.8 X 19.8 cm. Courtesy of Wellcome Library, London, © Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only license CC BY 4.0 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

The absence of the clear demarcation of where the river ends and land begins is significant in this painting. The painter does not differentiate between the land and water; and both water and land are spaces of dwelling and selling, hence a space of holy ablutions and market at the same time. The folk imaginations of the space are in direct contrast to the representations of continuous and controlled space of landscape vistas in colonial paintings and cartography [fig. 5], where the coastlines orchestrate the coherence of the representative index. In the folk representations discussed above the mercantile and the sacred are both inscribed in a world of material exchange; two forms of ideological and living practices cohere, each bolstering the other, marking the space of the *ghat* as both profane and sacred. The ebbs and flows of the river make and unmake the city, both giving the city its natural boundary and cultural form. Yet, few histories pay adequate

attention to the life-world of that space: A life-world defined not simply by a network of relations (be they economic, political or social), but rather as thick routes of differentiation where both actual and potential inhabitation takes place.[296] Attention to this life-world reveals a place where the economic and sacred are not overlapping, but any demarcation between them appears rather contingent and accidental.

Understanding the river and the land as a continuous space of habitation is not simply a question of rethinking ownership. It also raises intrinsic questions about the foundation of one's place in the world. Though in a much different context, this can be seen in the work of Dinah Norman Marrngawi, from the Yanyuwa tribe of Northern Australia, who lives at Borroloola in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria. Marrngawi has been actively engaged in producing an atlas of the region where she mapped the sacred knowledge of the community and how they managed life in that region, which includes both the land and the sea. She argues that through her project of mapping she raises questions about the gap between forms of knowledge and expressions and the cognitive field in which the various knowledges exist and interact.[297] Contingency and indeterminacy are not only encapsulated at the rim where land and water mix, but also between knowledge and our sensitivity to the fate of place in the larger discourses of space.[298]

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[296] I use Bruno Latour's definition of life-world here. Bruno Latour, "Some Experiments in Art and Politics" e-flux Journal 23, 03/2011, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/some-experiments-in-art-and-politics/ accessed on July 27, 2013.

[297] Amanda Kearney and John J. Bradley, "Landscapes with Shadows of Once-Living People: The Kundawira Challenge," in *The Social Archeology of Australian Indigenous Societies*, ed. B. David, B. Baker and I. J. McNiven (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 182-203.

[298] Edward Casey, *Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 77-107.

Paul Carter identifies a similar set of concerns and points to what he calls "the madness" inherent in the cartographic representation of the coasts in his work on indigenous land claims in Australia.[299] Scholars such as Carter and Greg Denning who work on indigenous spatial understanding have argued that mapping and map-making were central and violent practices of the Enlightenment *episteme* for understanding space. These practices rendered a varied range of spatial economies illegible.[300] Mapping and representational practices played a pivotal role in bolstering the colonial "fact" of "vacant," "unused," and "empty" land and producing a particular Eurocentric notion of topography.[301]

Coastlines and banks have been the sites of colonial encounter in many parts of the world. The "marvelous" world of the colonies was first sighted as coastlines by European travelers,[302] as the following Topographical Survey of the Riverbank by Charles Joseph demonstrates:

> And it was at this Chandpal Ghat that the first Judges of the Supreme Court, who came out to redress the wrongs of India, but created infinitely more mischief than they remedied, first set foot in India. It was here, at this *Ghat*, that the Chief Justice, as he contemplated the bare legs and feet of the multitude who crowded to witness their advent, exclaimed to his colleague, see Brother, the wretched victims of

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[299] Carter, *Dark Writing,* 54; see also Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

[300] Denning, *Islands and Beaches*.

[301] See Clifton Crais on how certain "facts" about vacant land legitimizing colonialism circulate through both visual and literal representational practices in "The Vacant Land: The Mythology of British Expansion in the Eastern Cape, South Africa," *Journal of Social History* 25, no.2 (Winter, 1991): 255-275.

[302] Here and throughout the chapter my ability to read the mimetic capital of representation and the nature of representational practices is born through an engagement with Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

> tyranny. The Crown Court was not surely established before it was needed. I trust it will not have been in operation six months before we shall see these poor creatures comfortably clothed in shoes and stockings.[303]

Although a bureaucratic document, the language of the survey borrows a particular trope of colonial travel writing, where the sighting of the land after days of weary journey was an event in the ship as well as a moment of reportage and encounter with the "other" of the colony.[304] And, as Carter points out, this colonial travel trope participates in Enlightenment abstraction: "the coastline is an artifact of linear thinking, a binary abstraction that corresponds to nothing in nature."[305] In colonial Calcutta, the British preoccupation with land evaluation of the riverbank gradually eclipsed certain non-propertized relations to land, although the latter did not disappear altogether. Rather, the sacred and profane culture of the riverbank persisted in residual forms as illegality, squatting and fictitious claims, as "recalcitrant" forms of land-usage, which ultimately brought the Hindu deity to the court.[306]

Traditionally, the spaces of the *ghat* were always open to access by the residents

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[303] Charles Joseph, "Topographical Survey of the River Hooghly from Bandel to Garden Reach, exhibiting the Principal Buildings, Ghats and Temples on both Banks, executed in the year 1841," *Calcutta Review* 6, no. 3 (Jan – June 1845): 428-462, 433.

[304] Maria Graham, *Journal of Residence in India* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1812); Mary (Martha) Sherwood, *Life of Mrs. Sherwood with Extracts from Mr. Sherwood's Journal During his Imprisonment in France and Residence in India* (London: Darton 1857), 246-47. Lauren Benton's study of the ocean as a vast expanse of emptiness also points out, "Voyage chronicles typically offer only brief descriptions of the sea, and land sightings and interactions with locals figure as the dramatic turning points of these narratives, and as contrast to the monotony of ocean travel." *Search for Sovereignty*: *Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 105.

[305] Carter, *Dark Writing*, 9.

[306] I employ the term "recalcitrant" in the sense used by Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, History: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) to mean events [or claims] that do not fit the given terms of a particular narrative or political articulation.

around that *ghat*, although use of the space did not confer any kind of proprietorial rights upon the users. Wealthy Indian property owners with riverfront property would build *ghat* and steps leading to the water for the use of public, not in lieu of money, but in order to gain prominence within the local community. It was common practice for landed proprietors, who occupied the second tier of power after the Mughal Governors in Bengal, to maintain law and order and undertake public works often in forms of ritual gifting (*dana*), alms, and sacrifice.[307] This explains why most *ghat* are named after wealthy merchants and land-proprietors in Calcutta.[308] As Swati Chattopadhyay argues, "[t]he ability to, pay, however, was not the only determinant of spatial use or social power."[309] Through mutual recognition, the spaces of the *ghat* were always considered shared spaces with their own distinct caste-class hierarchies and politics of ownership. Due to its sacred nature, as well as putative usage for water and trade, the *ghat* also served the purposes of public utility as a trading place, a bathing place, as well as a small fruit and flower market that formed part of the temple economy around the *ghat*.[310] The

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[307] Numerous studies on the landed gentry of Bengal attest to this. See Shirin Akhtar, *The Role of Zamindars in Bengal, 1707-1772* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1982); Ratnalekha Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society 1760-1850* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1979); John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth Century Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Rajat Dutta, *Society, Economy and the Market: Commercialization in Rural Bengal, c. 1760-1800* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000).

[308] Chronicler Radharaman Mitra, *Kalikata Darpan*, 253-315 documents the history of each of the *ghat* along Calcutta attesting how wealthy families often performed charitable work by constructing the *ghats* and making it available for use to their tenants and neighbors living in that particular area.

[309] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 80.

[310] Wealthy merchants held markets on the *ghats* twice a week for a couple of hours. These small markets known as *haats* became a site of contention for the colonial officials. In 1855, after Strand Bank was declared a public space, the Chief Magistrate of Calcutta complained to the Secretary of the Judicial department about the rights to hold market by the wealthy Indians, since "In no other part of the city, that I am aware of does such a right exist, & by the provisions of Act XII of 1852, the sale or exposure for sale articles on the public street is prohibited and is punishable by offence." Compensation claimed by the Rajas of Shobha Bazar for their land on Strand Bank, Judicial [Judicial] 18th October 1855, Prog. 22-24. WBSA.

riverbanks encapsulated a sacred geography, personal memories, and ancestral spirits that made the land invaluable and multiple social and cultural worlds possible.[311]

III. The Curious Case of the Land that Grew: The Company as General *Zamindar*

Despite the vibrancy of these manifold sacral and mercantile relations inhering in the *ghat*, throughout the nineteenth century these complex human-land relations were translated into a recognizable language of property. "The city was in fact little better than an undrained swamp, surrounded by malarious jungle and pervaded by a pestilential miasma," claimed an early twentieth-century colonial history of Calcutta municipality.[312] This quote effectively encapsulates the common assumptions upon and against which countless epidemiological histories of colonial cities have been conceived.[313] Pestilence and marshes served as tropes that summed up the colonial space of Calcutta, one that is often read to be at the heart of the birth of municipal ventures in the city – namely ridding it of pestilence. However, as I argued in my Introduction, urban histories of segregation, racial difference, epidemiology, and disciplining have not adequately linked the issues of medical, moral, and municipal governance to the political economy of possession (and

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[311] I am hinting at Denning's metaphor of "islands and beaches" as a form of cultural untranslatability across the coast and in order to signal the process of flux in-built in the system of meanings in different geographies that often defy translatability. Denning, *Islands and Beaches*, 86-94.

[312] Goode, *Municipal Calcutta,* 9.

[313] For work on town planning and disease see David S. Barnes, *The Great Stink of Paris and the nineteenth-century Struggle against Filth and Germs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Joseph Childers, "Foreign Matter, Imperial Filth" in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, eds. William Cohen and Ryan Johnson, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Mark Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British imperialism in India, 1600-1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*.

dispossession).[314] The legal tussle between the Sanitary and Territories departments about managing this piece of marshy land reveals how the epidemiological order folded in the economic and commercial concerns about town planning.

In 1869 the Conservancy Department criticized the work on the Strand Bank area in reclaiming the "silt-bed" for town expansion purposes. The Conservancy Department called the "reclamation" of the Strand Bank "loathsome," since the waste of the town was used to fill and fortify the space. They conceded that a valuable portion of new land was reclaimed, at very little cost, thus adding to the Company coffers. At the same time, they pointed out that the best way to breed malaria was through the reclamation of the marshes by filling them with the town's waste and offal:

> The sweepings of the town have been turned to good account for the reclamation of the Strand Bank, and the River Trust ought to consider themselves very fortunate in having an immense area of valuable land between Armenian Ghât and Aheritolah reclaimed with expenditure by the sole agency of the Conservancy Department. […]. Probably, no more certain method of generating and perpetuating cholera could be devised than this said filling-up…with decaying organic matter. This mode reclaiming (!) the Strand Bank is repugnant to all ideas of cleanliness and propriety. I have frequently gone to observe the effects of this practice, and I need hardly say that, where tons of sweepings and offal, i.e., animal refuse, are deposited on the already foul bank of a tidal river the result is obnoxious to the last degree.[315]

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[314] Exceptions include Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Techno-Politics of Modernity* (Stanford: University of California Press, 2002); Harriet Deacon, "Racial Segregation and Medical Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Cape Town" in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 287-308; Frederick Cooper, *Struggles for the City: Migrant Labour, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa* (London: Sage, 1983).

[315] Smith, *Report on the Drainage and Conservancy of Calcutta*, 11-12.

The town's waste – the sweepings – was rendered valuable in the service of fortifying the city's banks. Yet the absence of foresight in the disease it could potentially breed threatened to devalue the entire project of fortification. The Conservancy and Revenue departments apparently worked independently in their attempts to generate value through disciplining, be it the space, its waste or citizen's health. Sometimes, they also worked at loggerheads! The epidemiological and the economic were deeply tied together in the ventures of maximizing wealth – through accrual of revenue and through keeping its citizen alive and healthy, even when they were working against each other.

Prescient revenue calculation was a significant criterion in settling swampy Calcutta. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, in the early days of European expansion and trading in the Bay of Bengal, colonial port activities were carried out on the western side of the river Hooghly, i.e. the area flanking the opposite bank of Calcutta, namely in towns such as Betor, Hidgelee, Chinsura, Chandannagore and Shalkia. The water was deeper there and the European ships were primarily docked on the western side.[316] The European merchants set up their factories there from the middle of the seventeenth century.[317] However, the changing political climate of the time, coupled with the changing course of the river, meant that the English trade moved to the other side of the river. The dominant explanation for this move argues that the thriving market infrastructure of small-scale *hats* and *bazaars*, as well as roads leading from the river to the interior on the eastern side

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[316] For an account of European settlement before the British see Harishadhan Mukhyopadhyay, *Kalikata shekale'r o ekale'r* (Kolkata: P. M. Bagchi, 1985), 153-179 and Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 30.

[317] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 32-34.

(where present Calcutta is situated), made it profitable to establish trade there.[318] Moreover, the absence of competition from other European traders proved conducive to the move from the western banks of the Hooghly.

The "unhealthy" marshes were critical to the calculation of cheaper settlement costs on the Calcutta side of the river.[319] In 1690 Job Charnock proclaimed that:

> persons desirous of living in Chuttanutee [could] erect houses at their pleasure, on any site they chose, in any portion of the *waste lands* belonging to the Company….it is necessary to remember that except for a small portion on the river-bank, the whole area around the settlement *was waste and jungle*, and that an inducement of the kind was a *sine qua non* for attracting a population.[320]

The Company agents also began surveying the land around Calcutta from 1797 and made attempts to register those lands. While it was not a consolidated project some of the European residents with landed property began to register their properties at the local *pattah* offices from the late eighteenth century.[321] A *pattah* is defined as "the conditions on which lands are held; a lease or other document securing rights in land or house property."[322] Although it was not uncommon for some of the wealthy residents of

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[318] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 36.

[319] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 37-38.

[320] Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, 146 (barring Latin words, the italics are mine).

[321] See report appended to Extract from the Territories Department, 24th March, 1820, Judicial [Criminal], 1 April 1820, Prog. 15, WBSA, Kolkata; see Appendix I of this dissertation; for more on renting and tenancy practices and a selection of wills by wealthy Indian families see also Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, 1-32 and 140-159.

[322] Hobson-Jobson http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgibin/philologic/search3advanced?dbname=hobson&query=*pattah*&matchtype=exact&display=utf8. Accessed July 27, 13.

Calcutta to have wills, the documentary regime backing the property market had not yet been standardized. For instance, in the 1790s when surveyor and adventurer Major Aaron Upjohn tried to pay off his creditor by mortgaging his house, he was unable to either produce a property deed or measurements of the house.[323] The records of the *pattah* office were held with the local police and often appended to the town surveys. Attempts at regularizing the settlement patterns in what Charnock called the "wastelands" and documenting the same in *pattah* registries was also a method to curb and diminish the powers of the *amil*, who kept a memorialized record of land-holding and was the local contact for the Company agents. These *amils* capitalized on their knowledge of the language as well as their knowledge concerning the land revenue in Calcutta and larger parts of Bengal.[324]

Despite Charnock's 1690 proclamation, work along the *ghat* did not begin until over a century later.[325] One of the early municipal tasks in the nineteenth century was an extensive survey of the riverbank. The survey became critical, as the unruly river had begun changing its course around 1804-1805, resulting in the addition of a strip of land along the western periphery of Calcutta.[326] A long drawn-out process of land acquisition

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[323] Robb, "Mr. Upjohn's Debt," *Modern Asian Studies*, (2013), 1214.

[324] Ranajit Guha writes that the knowledge of the amils "were a precious monopoly which the amils were not keen to share with others." Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, 5 and *passim*.

[325] Although colonial municipal histories begin from the premise that there was little by way of municipal measures before their advent, Mughal historians have shown otherwise. While it is true that the nature of settlement in Calcutta was not robust until the arrival of the merchants of the Company-State, in other parts of Bengal town improvement works had already begun. During the days of the Nizamat, Muhammad Azam Shah, the Mughal governor of Bengal from 1697-1703, laid down brick roads in Dhaka to make movement of men, horses, and elephants easier during the monsoon months. See Tillotama Mukherjee, "The Co-ordinating State and the Economy: The Nizamat in Eighteenth-Century Bengal" *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009), 389-436, 397.

[326] Radharaman Mitra dates it to 1808, Mitra, *Kalikata Darpan*, 253. However, the first Strand Bank

commenced. The larger consequence of these acquisitions was a considerable change in the property market and jurisdiction in the city, and the creation of a regulated "public" space.

In their preoccupation with the riverbank, the British unambiguously saw it as a site of trade and revenue generation. From 1805 onwards there was a concerted effort to remove "nuisances" along the riverbank of Calcutta, which included huts and shops between Chandpal Ghat and Chitpore (an area comprised mainly of native inhabitants) in order that they might not impede free movement and trade.[327] Nuisances also included all forms of obstructions strewn about, such as garbage, old guns, brick rubbish, and timbers.[328] The regulation of public annoyances was premised on the political modernity of private property. Disciplining techniques vis-à-vis what was considered nuisance by the British officials, and in some cases the new middle-class hegemonies in the major presidencies in British India, provided the conceptual architecture for the ordering of public spaces.[329] In this particular case, the slippages in the conceptualization and reconstitution of the *ghat* as public property in the municipal records point to the uneasy relation and impossibility of a conceptual conflation of the two, namely of *property* and

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Survey was conducted in 1807, showing that the river had well receded. Magistrate to Direct their Surveyors to Survey and Report on the Bank of the River mentioned by the Mint Master, Judicial [Criminal], 25 June 1807, Prog. 1, WBSA, Kolkata.

[327] First Report of the Special Committee for considering the Nuisances which exist throughout the Town of Calcutta and Proposing the Best means of Removing them, Judicial [Criminal], 25 July 1805, Prog. 22-25, WBSA, Kolkata.

[328] First Report of the Special Committee for considering the Nuisances, 25 July 1805, Prog. 23, WBSA, Kolkata.

[329] Michael Anderson, "Public Nuisance and Private Purpose: Policed Environments in British India, 1860-1947," *SOAS School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper Series*, Research Paper No. 5 (2011) [repr. from SOAS Law Department, Working Paper No. 1 (July 1992)].

of *space*.

From our present understandings of urban spaces as propertied geography, it is difficult to imagine that space did not always mean property. Consider the legal fate of the newly formed island off the coast of Pakistan on September 24, 2013.[330] Who owns that landmass? Through what historical processes do states gain natural right over newly formed lands along coastal regions? Over two centuries ago, faced with similar kinds of new land formations, the British in India had no written legal precedence that could settle the question of ownership of land formed by natural occurrence.

In 1820 Esq. Holt Mackenzie, Secretary to the Territorial Department conducted the first survey of the riverbank and the newly formed land in order to assess the extent and potential appropriation of this newly formed ground which the government could then claim as its property.[331] Buried under countless land-acquisition laws of Bengal, this unpublished Report has not been previously investigated by historians. Yet, as a governing document or a "graphic-artifact,"[332] this Territories Department Report mediated and transformed many social relations into political and economic contracts, and became a significant part of the nineteenth-century social life of the city in comparison to the later town-planning records and master plans. The epistemological

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[330] On September 24, 2013 the earthquake that hit Pakistan resulted in the formation of a new island off the coast of Gwadar. Named Zalzala Koh or the quake hill, it is being read as a magical trick played by the sea. "A Quake Shakes Loose An Island," *New York Times*, October 1, 2013.

[331] Extract form the Proceedings of the Territories Department, Judicial [Criminal], 1 April 1820, Prog. 15, WBSA, Kolkata.

[332] I am borrowing from Mathew Hull's formulation to explain how paper (both as a linguistic text and as a non- and para-linguistic entity) mediates the act of governing with citizen's acquiescence, contestation and use of governance. Mathew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012), see especially "Introduction" and chapters 1 and 4.

space of this Report as a bureaucratic document is vastly different from the town-planning maps, sanitary reports and land-acquisition laws, all of which were enacted in the aftermath of the river changing its course. The provision of the Report embedded itself in the social and political lives of the city's residents through techniques of negotiation, contestation and creation of a new paper regime of deeds and titles, unlike those of a legal act or master-plan which only offers an ideological framing to urban planning.[333] The materiality of the paper became a legitimizing object of modern property.

The Report stressed that, in Calcutta, the Company had the *double right* of both the Sovereign and the Zamindar, and therefore it harnessed the laws of the sovereign alongside the established custom. The availability of the newly formed alluvium land along the river opened up a variety of claims. Mackenzie stressed throughout the Report that "[t]he company is the general Zamindar [landlord] and as such any new lands must, we conceive, be considered at its disposal."[334] This Report illuminates how a corporate body of the joint-stock Company produced itself as the sovereign body in a foreign land. Philip Stern used the term Company-State to capture this form of corporate sovereignty. Stern breaks from earlier works, which, while recognizing East India Company's sovereign powers, have only seen it as state-like, semi-sovereign, or quasi-governmental. He turns this conception around to show how forms of corporation constituted the bedrock of the political form of the early modern state, or what he calls *corpus politicum*

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[333] The master plans never become part of the lived city, in ways smaller rulings, acts, reports and surveys do. Reports of this nature become important governing mechanism, as well as petitioning mechanism in ways that comprehensive town plans never achieve. Yet, as Hull shows scholars of South Asia turn to these larger plans, and often ignore the smaller reports which formed the everyday of governmentality.

[334] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog. 15 § 48, WBSA, Kolkata.

et corporatum or *communitas perpetua*. This Report is a perfect example of the fine negotiations between customary practices and the aspiration to sovereign power that maintained the Company rule for over a century.[335]

The Report emphasized "that even in the case of persons who have long had possession it is the practice for them when the excess is discovered to apply for and obtain a *pattah* from the Collector for such excess and pay corresponding Revenue."[336] I read the materiality of the Report as a powerful tool of governance. At the same time, I read the narrative within the Report to undercut its power by showing how the company agents were daunted by the task at hand. The text is shot through with doubts of ownership, or—more precisely—with an attempt to forge, in the dual senses of creating and fabricating, a language of ownership. What becomes clear is that the authority of the material paper as a symbol or a "graphic artifact" attesting possession had the power to supersede the written text within the paper.[337]

The Report recommended that the Strand Bank authorities lay "immediate claims" to the newly acquired land exposed "by the spontaneous desertion of the stream, [the Company] acquired lands [which] were to be converted to a public wharf from

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[335] Philips Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); for an engagement with the company as a military power see Chris A. Bayly, "The British Military-Fiscal State and Indigenous Resistance: India 1720-1820," in Lawrence Stone, ed. A*n Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London: Routledge, 1994); Ian Bruce Watson, "Fortification and the 'Idea' of Force in Early English East India Company Relations with India," *Past and Present* 88 (1980): 70-87; as a trading empire see Nigel Rigby, ed. *The Worlds of East India Company* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002).

[336] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog. 15, § 30, WBSA, Kolkata.

[337] Hull, *Government of Paper,* 13-24.

Customs House to Cuchagoody Ghat."[338] The Territories Department hastened to create what it considered would be a "public wharf," but for that the Department needed to demarcate spaces already in use by the public. The Report rendered the rich life-world of the space invisible and attempted to diminish the gap between their plans and geographical and social vagaries of the space.

Having planted Fort William in the riverfront area, it was deemed that the *ghats* around it were chiefly used for military purposes, housing yards and buildings for the reception of Garrison Stores. According to the Report, Babughat, one of the *ghat* adjoining the Fort and an important point of transport between Calcutta and its adjoining areas, was particularly convenient for the embankment of troops and the loading and unloading of the military garrison. Devoid of any form of circumspection about town planning, the area from the north of the Fort to that of Chandpal Ghat was demarcated to be kept clear, and a public promenade was planned. However, the British soon realized the fallacy of creating a public space out of a public space, and they covered up their fatuousness through a plan that forbade "private individuals" to enter or use that area until the promenade was ready.[339] Judiciously, the term "private individuals" was left undefined.

The British transfigured these heterogeneous communal spaces into clearly demarcated public space and simultaneously codified customs into a legal system.[340] The codification was coterminous with the production of a market in land, and the market

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[338] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog. 15, § 8, WBSA, Kolkata.

[339] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog. 15, § 5, WBSA, Kolkata.

[340] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

masqueraded as the colonial idea of the "public," one that can be regulated, measured and disciplined.[341] The Report further mentioned that, although the government stood to accrue a considerable amount of revenue from this, "the immediate pecuniary gain" was hardly the driving force behind the Strand Bank project.[342] In the next section it will become clear that impulses much larger than mere pecuniary gains were at work here. Indeed, the economic basis of colonial legal production of spaces becomes apparent through an analysis of this process.

The Territories Department Report provides compelling evidence for the frustration encountered in attempts at mapping in the face of the moving river. The primary problem with the *ghat*, as far as the Territories Department officials were concerned, was the changing course of the river. Moreover, the alluvial deposit meant that the earlier *pattah* measurements from 1797 had been nullified.[343] The major thrust of the Report was to acquire lands which the Territories Department found to be in excess of any previous documentation with the *pattah* office, or spaces where inhabitants could not produce any *pattah*, or "recognizable" land-titles. Whenever residents, mostly native, but sometimes also Europeans, failed to supply the surveyors with paper documentation, the officials declared:

> We are of the opinion that it is indisputably the property of the State and it would be

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[341] Birla, "Introduction," *Stages of Capital,* 8-10.

[342] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog. 15, § 65, WBSA.

[343] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog.15, §§ 11, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 21, WBSA, Kolkata. This report refers to several older reports, one made by Mr. [Francis?] Gladwin in 1797 which prepared a ground measurement of the properties along the river frontage. It also mentions two other reports dated in the Bengali Calendar but the names of the surveyors are not mentioned. I could not locate these reports.

> advisable to adopt measures for raising it with a view to the appropriation of it to public purposes. We are not aware that any claim is likely to be seriously maintained to this spot, though it has been occasionally used for the deposit of old guns and anchor, and thus a *dubious sort of occupancy* has been exercised over a part of it by Messer's Clarke and Co. on behalf of Mr. Johnson. It may nevertheless be proper to state the grounds on which we consider the title of Government to it to rest.[344]

At this point in time in 1820, paper became central in illuminating how the operations of colonial law and economy merged in a moment of "regularization."[345] This Report became the conduit which crystallized the moment of struggle in translating *squatting* or occupation by early British merchants into ownership, or—more precisely stated—colonial conquest. Early British writings about life in Calcutta often use the term squatting to express British presence in Calcutta, and the Report clearly states that this survey must seal the translation from squatting to conquest through the redefinition of the idea of legality. The Report prescribed an arbitrary provision for applying to have the extra land counted as part of existing ownership. However, by a sleight of hand it stipulated that papers legitimizing ownership must be produced to justify claims upon the newly emergent land. Finally, it foreclosed even that ludicrous provision in the next sentence by saying that in spite of any legitimate claim one may produce, the "state" may

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[344] Extract of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal], Prog. 15, §§ 27-28, WBSA, Kolkata. [emphasis mine].

[345] Kapil Raj, "The Maps and their uses in Southeast Asia and Britain, 18th-19th Centuries," in *Thinking Tools: A Comparative Study of "Texts" and their Social Functions*, ed. Akira Saito and Yusuke Nakamura (Tokyo: National Museum of Ethnology, 2009), 175-190; Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*; Raymond Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixation and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

decide to take over the land or refuse granting rights to it.[346] Through these bureaucratic maneuvers, merchants of a joint stock company turned themselves into landlords and laid the "legal" groundwork for land acquisition in the colony.

Two decisive aspects of colonial law and economy converge here: On the one hand, there was the attempt by the Company agents to initiate a process whereby a heterogeneous body of ownership practices was condensed into contractual paper-based exchange and establishment of rights. On the other hand, the slippage between the terms interchangeably used in the Report point to the operation of colonial power as corporate sovereignty — as the Company, in the course of the report becomes the *Zamindar*, then the Government and finally the State. This deliberate slippage throws light upon the unique political power of the Company-State and how it calibrated its status "between positions of deference and defiance, between claims to be a "mere merchant" and an independent "sovereign."[347] This unique position afforded the Company the opportunity to produce itself as a precarious, yet potent, form of corporate sovereignty which forged its own authority and delegitimized that of others with impunity. The authority of the *pattah* was in the process of being refurbished in the form of property deeds, and, concomitantly, the claims of the *squatters* were also being legitimized in the process, thus providing new definitions of squatting.

Following the publication of the Territories Department Report, a Strand Bank Fund was set up to improve the *ghat*s along the city's predominantly European quarters,

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[346] Extract from the Proceedings of the Territories Department, 1 April 1820, Prog. 15 § 31, WBSA, Kolkata.

[347] Stern, *The Company State*, 13.

but by the middle of the nineteenth century the Strand Bank Fund began stretching its tentacles both north and south to the native parts of the city. The present Strand Road that runs through the city was constructed between 1852-53 "by using the accreted land permanently, and exclusively, for purposes of public utility connected with the trade, the traffic, the health and the convenience of the community."[348] The process of producing the land along the *ghat* as public property with stipulated land-use regulation was anything but easy. The final section of this chapter documents how existing land-use patterns became expressions of *fictional* claims to property and were rendered "recalcitrant" in the domain of law.

IV. The Many Biographies of One Plot of Land

The logical-bureaucratic state machine mustered several inventive legal referencing methods to deal in the most rational manner possible with ancestral spirits and Hindu deities in order to get every inch of land for a riverbank. The construction of the Strand Bank as a public wharf did not begin until 1852. The period following the publication of the report in 1820 was marked by small moves of acquisition that significantly changed the power structure of the urban land-market. Before we turn to the case with which we opened the chapter, I want to highlight one representative case of land acquisition.

In 1838 Rajah Radhakanta Deb Bahadur, a wealthy Indian merchant, forfeited his claim to what is referred to as his "river frontage" property, which he chose to give up after repeated appeals and in exchange for compensation. In the process, Bahadur pointed

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[348] *Select Documents on Calcutta 1800-1900* (Kolkata: Directorate of State Archives, 2012), 95.

out that the land he referred to as “newly formed alluvion” which the Lottery Committee wanted to claim for the public wharf was already in use by his tenants and the people living around his house. In spite of the compensation that was paid to him, he pointed out the great inconvenience it would cause to these people if their daily itineraries to the river were to be discontinued due to the construction of a public wharf. “River Frontage Property” with temples or tanks was often *devuttur sampatti*, or a Hindu form of religious endowment.[349] According to Hindu law, property can be relinquished as a gift or a sacrifice for the public and property can be held in absolute and partial terms by the *donee*.[350] However, before the Hindu deity was reified as a legal entity through the Charitable Endowment Act of 1890,[351] properties of this nature posed a legal conundrum. Not surprisingly, Bahadur’s appeal went unheeded by the members of the Lottery Committee.[352] But the Committee was up for an even greater challenge.

A small parcel of land acquired by the colonial officials took on a life of its own leading to a legal case without a human plaintiff, a first in India. While Bahadur’s appeal was based upon the contention that the people living in that area and his tenants were already using his land, in the following case that I discuss, the colonial power had to confront the sacred authority of the Hindu deity when Moti Lal Seal’s case [hereafter

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[349] B. K. Mukherjea, *The Hindu Law of Religious and Charitable Trust* (Calcutta: Eastern Law House, 1970), see esp. chap. 7.

[350] Anon. “Sattva Vicara,” Derrett, *Essays in Classical and Modern Hindu Law*, 478-79. Some studies attribute authorship of this text to Raghunath Siromani, however Derrett elaborates on the existing debates that deny sole authorship to Siromani.

[351] See Birla’s analysis on the reification of the Hindu deity, *Stages of Capital*. 87.

[352] Radhakanta Deb versus Company Government, Judicial [Criminal], Letter to George Earl of Auckland, Governor of Bengal, dated Nov. 10th 1840, Prog. 54, WBSA, Kolkata.

Seal case] came to the Privy Council. In 1851, about a year before the construction of the Strand Bank, the government began the process of acquiring a parcel of the newly formed alluvial land in front of the wealthy shipping merchant Babu Moti Lal Seal's property.[353] Being thoroughly enmeshed in the mercantile machinery fueled by British capital, Seal handed over the land to the Company agents. However, he kept a special provision that if, for the purposes of improving the land the Government felt the need to pull down the landing and bathing *ghat* that existed there, it would have to construct a new one.[354] By handing over his rights, Seal became a tenant in his own property by continuing to pay a monthly amount to the Government until it was to be finally taken over for "public purposes." When in 1857 the Lottery Committee finally tried to bring the land into its infrastructural grip, Seal's eldest son and inheritor protested, and subsequently a legal battle ensued. This battle was characterized by its intensity rather than longevity, since it was settled the same year by an appeal of the small jurisdiction court of the Privy Council. The Privy Council was a judicial body where Indian petitioners made use of the law to litigate against the oppression of the East India Company.[355] One important development took place between 1851, the year when Moti Lal Seal was forced to relinquish his rights to that land and his son's petition in 1857, a change which

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[353] For more on Moti Lal Seal see Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "Traders and Trades in Old Calcutta," in *Calcutta, the Living City*, Vol. I, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1991), 209; Kissory Chand Mitra, Mutty Lall Seal (Calcutta: D'Rozario Printer, 1869); Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Colonial context Of The Bengal Renaissance: A Note On Early Railway Thinking In Bengal," Indian Economic and Social History Review 11, no. 1 (1974): 92-106.

[354] Legal Tussle with Strand Bank, Judicial [Judicial], 1 June 1870. Prog. 161, WBSA, Kolkata.

[355] J.D.M. Derrett, 'The administration of Hindu law by the British', Comparative Studies in Society and History, 4: 1 (Nov. 1961), pp. 10-52; Brimnes, "Beyond Colonial Law: Indigenous Litigation and the Contestation of Property in the Mayor's Court in Late Eighteenth-Century Madras"; Mariam Dossal, *Theatre of Conflict, City of Hope*.

represented the altered status of the Strand Bank in official nomenclature. In October 1854 the Chief Magistrate of Calcutta declared the riverbank to be a public space, removing communal activities apart from commercial ones from the site.[356]

When the Territories Department Report put forward recommendations for regularizing claims along the riverbank, the Company had no idea they would be confronted with the claims by a Hindu god. Faced with challenges of this nature, the colonial government was forced to transform the Hindu deities into a legal entity with rights and obligations, and simultaneously into a taxable commodity. Harnessing the recalcitrant Hindu idols proved difficult. Being pantheistic in nature, these idols appeared "surreptitiously" in various kinds of spaces, and sometimes to the great consternation of colonial officials, precisely in spaces of public works projects. Events like the Seal case necessitated the reinvention of Hindu deities as idols within the legal discourse. Discussing the re-birth of the Hindu deity as "religious fetish" through the Charitable Endowment Act of 1890 Birla argues that by this legal maneuver colonial law separated religious activities as a domain of the private from economic activities as the domain of the public. In this manner, market exchange, commercial practices, and economic activities for profit became separate entities, quite distinct from religious occupations. Religious occupations would enter the public domain as non-profit-making legal entities only in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The material exchange so integral to the sacred world of the Hindu cosmology manifested itself in the "dynamism between gifted material compensation and the ritual labor of the priest was often read by

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[356] Declaration of Strand Bank as Public Space, Judicial [Judicial]. 19 April 1855, Prog. 69-73, WBSA, Kolkata.

British administrators as an immoral traffic in the sacred."[357]

The 1854 decree defined "public" as a space of commercial use. This decree converted an already existing sacred-economic space of temples and markets into a public space for commercial use heralding the beginning of a new definition of "public," and an attempt to take temple and holy spaces out of the financial networks. The spaces of the *ghat* which had been in continuous use as a weekly market place, cremation ground, a site of transportation and ablutions, were suddenly being declared "public" through colonial regulations. In one stroke, vernacular markets and religious practices were all relegated to the realm outside the domain of "public," and economic exchange within the religious sphere became delegitimized. The legal tussle with Seal became one of the earliest moments in these legal transformations, where some of the smaller temples and sub-cults that are traditionally found along the *ghat* were removed because their claims were on the "ground of a fictitious occupancy."[358]

In 1857, following the decree of the Privy Council, the government took possession of Seal's land, nullifying his son's petition and removing everything, including places of worship, or, as the memorandum states, "various idols and objects of Hindu worship." Despite these efforts, the Judicial Proceedings of 1870 reports the following incident on Seal's land: in April 1864 "a small idol was surreptitiously set up under a tree standing in the centre of the Government Land, and a rude mat hut erected over it, in which sat daily a Brahmin priest, whose ostensible function it was to mark the

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[357] Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 87.

[358] Legal Tussle with Strand Bank, Judicial [Judicial], June 1870. Prog. 161, WBSA.

foreheads of the bathers."[359] This "surreptitious occupation of land" continued for six years until 1870 when the Government sought to remove the idol, and "a claim was set up to the possession of the land on which the idol stood, on the *ground of a fictitious occupancy*."[360] After a protracted legal battle with this Hindu deity, the Government was forced to pay compensation for the relocation of the temple and its *shebaits* (priests) before the land could be made available for Strand Bank purposes. The Bahadur and Seal cases are just two instances of many such petitions from the Indian property owners along the river, as well as in other parts of northern Calcutta which fell under the intense spatial expansion of the mid-nineteenth century.[361]

V. Concluding Remarks: Muddying Property

The legal battle between a deity plaintiff and the bureaucratic court reveal the collapsed temporality of the pre-modern forms of ownership that persisted within the rational practices of the modern state. The regulations pertaining to the *ghat* following the 1820s survey became critical to marking out public and private property within the city. These regulations significantly spelled out the beginnings of the transition wherein space was translated into property and thereafter into speculative capital by the beginning of the twentieth century, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Religious symbolism often became the rallying cry of contestation over claims and counter-claims to land, as well as forms of

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[359] Legal Tussle with Strand Bank, Judicial [Judicial], June 1870. Prog. 161, § 2, WBSA, Kolkata.

[360] Legal Tussle with Strand Bank, Judicial [Judicial], June 1870. Prog. 161, WBSA, Kolkata. [emphasis mine].

[361] Mallicks versus Company Government, Judicial [Criminal], September 4th 1818, Prog. 6-10, WBSA, Kolkata; Petition to save the sanctity of religious spaces, Judicial [Criminal], 22 August 1822, Prog. 35-41, WBSA, Kolkata.

resistance to thwart infrastructural violence of colonial urban spatial expansion. Recent studies on urban planning, public works and legal disputes regarding community tanks, temples, or other spaces of communal use tend to interpret such disputes as instances of native resistance to infrastructural and logistical forms of urban governance.[362] These moments of riverbank property disputes mark an unfolding of the differing and often incongruous spatial genealogies and material exchanges inscribed in sacred and legal understandings. The judicial systems of producing and legitimizing property masked the violence of dispossession they caused.[363] It is worth pointing out that this is no less true of postcolonial India.[364]

What does it mean if the claim of occupancy can be so easily fictionalized? The absence of the *pattah* did not easily translate into a fiction of occupation, as my analysis of the 1820 Report revealed. Indeed, I argue that a new fiction had to be generated to render other authorities fictitious – namely the fiction of the paper as a document that guarantees rights. The relation of the Company and the market must be understood not as

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[362] In the last decade, scholars have put forward more focused attention to histories of public works and resistance and vernacular afterlives of infrastructure. See for instance Ravi Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire: Circulation, Public Works and Social Space in Colonial Orissa, c. 1780 – 1914* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009); Arjun Appadurai, "Deep democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 21-47; Swati Chattopadhyay, *Unlearning the City: Urban Infrastructure in a New Optical Field* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Mathew Gandy, "Rethinking Urban Metabolism: Water, Space and the Modern City," *City* 8, no. 3 (2004): 363-379.

[363] The scholarship on law, violence and private property has been discussed in my introduction. Here I am specifically referring to Nicholas Blomley, "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 1 (2003): 121-141.

[364] In a more recent study Nicolas Jaoul shows how Ambedkar or Buddha's images, statues, photos are mobilized by dalit slum-dwellers in order to thwart eviction. Nicolas Jaoul, "Learning the Use of Symbolic Means: Dalits, Ambedkar Statues and the State in Uttar Pradesh," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 175-207.

law and economy, but rather in terms of what Birla refers to as "law as economy."[365] This formulation is critical to understanding the generation of one fiction as law that had the power to eclipse other forms of authority, customs, and uses in the name of the public good. Yet, as we have seen the very creation of the public was driven by "pecuniary gains." Birla points out that studying law and economy as two distinct areas means treating the logic of each system as an isolated, discrete entity that only incidentally crosses paths with the other. However she contends that their mutual embeddedness manifests itself in the act of governing. The land acquisition battles slowly created a thriving market in urban property in colonial Calcutta. Regulating this market served economic purposes of revenue generation and administrative purposes of governance and spatial control of the native population. The next chapters will explore how the colonial officials controlled the market in their attempt to regulate the circulation of land as a monetized unit. The market, in other words, is a site of modernity and a space distinguished from the private realm of ancient and anachronistic "native culture."[366] Thus studying the technologies of market governance reveals how "colonial liberalism, masquerading as improvement missions, hides acts of governing as market rationalities," and, the market is "the stand in for 'the public.'" Therefore the public space of commercial use had to exorcise the gods and their chaotic bazaar.

The area along the river, which was a market and a sacred space, a space rich in folkloric and mythic investment, was slowly transformed into property. Chapter 4 will

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[365] Ritu Birla, "Law as Economy: Convention, Corporation, Currency," University of California, *Irvine Law Review* 1, no. 3 (2012): 1015-1037.

[366] Birla, "Law as Economy," 1018.

elaborate how by the turn of the twentieth century land assets enter capitalist modernity by becoming *purely* financialized and thus becoming "fictitious capital."[367] Consequently the surveys, *pattahs*, maps, property deeds, leases, and reports detailed in this chapter are not disparate acts of documentation performed by the bureaucratic state, but instead existed along a continuum that created a represented space, with one history and one narrative, a space uniform and flat. This was a space whose possibility of existence was *only* as property, property that could be speculated upon and exchanged in a regulated market paternalized by the state. Each of these paper signifiers bolstered the other in a continual chain of signification producing a believable fiction, a juridico-economic form of private property along the *ghat* that did not exist prior to the coming-to-be of these paper signifiers.[368]

The materialization of these paper signifiers as title deeds, surveys and maps and the emergence of "property" signaled a process of translation, a translation of spaces and the manifold claims that inhere in those spaces. The marshy sediments, "shoals or mud-flats" entered into a history of political modernity as an economic entity. The sedimentation of this history is also a history of the separation of river and cities, and a history of that space between the river and the city, between water and land and how that in-between space was converted into urban property with far-reaching consequences. This process of translation, where a sacred and multi-layered geography of the land along

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[367] According to Harvey: "Not only is the appropriation of rent socially necessary under capitalism by virtue of the key coordinating functions it performs, but landowners must also treat the land as a pure financial asset, a form of fictitious capital, and seek thereby an active role in coordinating the flow of capital onto and through the land," in *The Urban Experience*, 97.

[368] I am, of course, not denying that property did not exist. What I am hinting at here is that the modern form of property, increasingly understood as real estate, (or real-estate in waiting) did not exist.

the River Hooghly becomes an asset in the financialized market emerges within the new discursive formations of colonial law and economy.[369] Urban property becomes a central question of urban modernity as land distribution increasingly codifies urban spaces and residents as legal entities who are owners, renters, tenants, landlords and pavement dwellers or illegal occupiers. In the following chapter we shall note the gradual disappearance of the marshes and wetlands from history and popular discourses, by turning to a public space at the heart of the city.

[369] Especially noteworthy among studies that discuss the various ancient riverbank towns in India as sacred geographies are Diana Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Three Rivers Space, 2012). According to Eck, the sacred geography of India "is part of a living, storied, and intricately connected landscape," 2.

Chapter 3 / Value’s Other: *Maidan* as a Hollow Core of Calcutta

Of my land only a little remained, the rest having been mortgaged away.
The *zamindar* said one day, “Know what Upen? This too should come my way”.
I said, “O Lord, countless are the plots of land you already own,
But consider - I only have land enough to [lay my head and die]!'

-- Rabindranath Tagore [trans. Fakrul Alam],
Dui Bigha Jomi (Two Acres of Land: A Poem)

I. Possessing the *Maidan*

In the heart of present Kolkata is the *Maidan*. A public space under army jurisdiction from the colonial period to the present moment, the *Maidan* comprises one-hundred and ninety-three acres of lush green in winter and a canopy of shade in summer. Known also as the Brigade Parade Ground or *Gader Math* (field around the fort), the space marks the edge of Fort William, a symbol of British dominance in Bengal, situated on the banks of the River Hughli. As this chapter will show, the open expanse of the *Maidan* represents an acute concentration of both colonial and military power, constantly undermined by the inhabitants of the city: producing a fabulous space at the core of the urban. The *Maidan* is a uniquely duplicitous space: On the one hand, the British Raj transformed it into the testing grounds for its constructive imperial zeal. On the other hand, it has also served as a site of myriad contestations. This center often became the limit of the city as an extramural and ungovernable space.

A recent instance of ungovernability offers a unique entry point into the complex history of this public space. For over a century from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century, the *Maidan* served as a carnivalesque space of fairs and political

rallies. A decade-long citizens' environmental movement to save what they called Kolkata's "only green space" culminated in a significant High Court ruling in 2007 which brought an abrupt halt to this tradition by ordering the relocation of the annual fairs of the city from the *Maidan*.[370] The Kolkata citizenry was split about this ruling. While environmentalists marked it as a victory, one of the dominant opposition accounts was a narrative of the middle-class intelligentsia's nostalgia for the Annual Book Fair that used to be held there every winter.[371]

There is, however, another far more urgent and poignant story to be told about marginalization and displacement. Kali Ray, a homeless woman in her mid-forties, has made the *Maidan* her home for the past thirty years. Ray's life in the *Maidan* became even more precarious following the 2007 ruling by the High Court. A rag picker by profession, Ray is now known for being the "lone encroacher on the army-owned territory" where one is neither permitted to cook, nor to build permanent structures.[372] Despite the mounting pressure from the army, police and the municipality, Ray continues to live in her ten-by-five foot shack on the western edge of the *Maidan* by "def[ying] the army, dodg[ing] the police, evad[ing] civic eviction and ignor[ing] rules that prohibit encroachment of the *Maidan*."[373] In 2009 the Kolkata Municipality, the Police and the

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[370] The environmentalist Subhash Dutta and his organization Howrah Ganatantrik Nagarik Samiti (HGNS) spearheaded this citizens' movement. HGNS was founded right after the declaration of Emergency in 1975 and its members are mostly middle-class Bengalis. Ideologically, HGNS is rooted in a socialist tradition and has campaigned for better civic amenities as well as against police atrocities. For more on the activities of HGNS see, Hans Dembowski, "Courts, Civil Society and Public Sphere: Environmental Litigation in Calcutta" *Economic Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, no. 1/2 (Jan. 2-15, 1999): 49-56.

[371] "HC Moves Kolkata Book Fair out of *Maidan,*" January 20, 2007 *Indian Express*.

[372] "Lone Intruder on the *Maidan,*" *Times of India*, November 16, 2009.

[373] "Lone Intruder on the *Maidan.*"

Army accused her of flouting the High Court's directive. Ray's only response, like Upen's in the opening epigraph, was the following: "I have nowhere to go, and I wish to die on the *Maidan*. This is my home."[374] Ray is among one of the many people who survive in or on the edges of the *Maidan* and make a living by cleaning and foraging in this public space.

Ray's "frictions" with the law and police are a microcosm of the diverse and conflicting social interactions that make up this "messy and awkward" history of the *Maidan* as a *public possession*.[375] Since its conception in 1757 the *Maidan* has been the site of imperial splendor, has been deemed Calcutta's "finest possession,"[376] and has served as an anticolonial sporting arena.[377] Moreover, it has a powerful symbolic resonance as the postcolonial site of radical labor movements and the dream world of a young nation-state revealed in a kaleidoscope of annual winter exhibitions.[378] Much like Manhattan's Central Park, the late-twentieth-century history of the *Maidan* has been that of "a taxidermic preservation of nature that exhibit[ed] forever the drama of culture outdistancing nature."[379]

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[374] "Lone Intruder on the *Maidan.*"

[375] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4-6.

[376] Control of the Government of India over the Calcutta Maidan, Police A, January 1903, Prog. 73-74, National Archives of India: New Delhi. [hereafter NAI].

[377] Chatterjee, "Bombs, Sovereignty, and Football," in *Black Hole,* 264-310.

[378] Timnothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), see especially 1-62.

[379] Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 21

A certain section of a civic-minded middle-class population is currently developing a violent environmental movement in contemporary Kolkata by romanticizing the *Maidan*. Today, the *Maidan*'s value is contained as a repository of green. It was not always so, and the present-day discussion of the *Maidan* as a pristine green space masks a violent history. In the last decade, operations to rescue the *Maidan* from becoming a wasted common were premised on a particular logic of the space as nature. The *Maidan* thus emerged as a green space paralleling an earlier trajectory of the English enclosures "dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt."[380] Nature was produced in the heart of the city by dispossessing sections of the population, by criminalizing circulation of certain bodies like Ray's through the green space. Moreover, as I will show in the next section, the preservation of the *Maidan* as "nature" is directly linked to the disappearance of the the environmentally critical wetlands of the city.

The oft-told history of planning and contestation is not the only narrative about the *Maidan*. In 1918, European women, draped in "fleshings," were posing as sexualized living statues on the *Maidan*, which was open to both the white and the native population.[381] The newly established Intelligence Bureau of the colonial government swiftly clamped it down.[382] In a curious mirroring of the early twentieth century displays of brown bodies in the metropole of London, Paris or Brussels, here was a quick

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[380] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vo. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 925-926.

[381] "Representation of Living Statues in Calcutta," Home Political (Confidential), 981/3 of 1907, WBSA, Kolkata.

[382] Andrew Erdman, *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004), 83-126.

performative and economic venture which provoked the white male gaze and simultaneously teased the native men who frequented the *Maidan*.[383]

Also known as *tableaux vivants,* living statues were a well established genre*,* where performers dressed up in classical poses and held them as long as possible. During the early twentieth-century, La Milo was famous throughout Europe for her poses, often as classical nudes.[384] But disgraced white women serving as a spectacle of flesh were not among the priorities of the Raj during the early twentieth century, when a growing anti-colonial nationalist movement threatened the colony's permanence.[385] The issue of public disorder soon became an Intelligence Bureau preoccupation. In a secret-coded letter from Shimla, the twentieth-century winter capital of British India, officer Wauchuope asked why such a matter was not reported. The confounded Calcutta police responded that since the event was being publicized through newspapers and pamphlets, they saw no urgency in reporting it. Soon thereafter the scandal of living statues in the *Maidan* died out. This sudden erotic burst, one I found in a rather mundane military archive of planning and control, gave way to the minutiae of letters exchanged between various garrisons' departments about keeping the *Maidan* clean, the grasses trimmed and regulating the diurnal business of army practice. However, I gradually discovered that living statues, for instance, thieves, drunk and "mischievous" soldiers, and homeless ragpickers, who

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[383] See for instance the documentation of Sara Baartman's life and travails through the various exhibits and scientific examinations in Europe in Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[384] Edman, *Blue Vaudeville*.

[385] Harald Fischer-Tiné, '"White Women Degrading themselves to the Lowest Depths': European Networks of Prostitution and Colonial Anxieties in British India and Ceylon," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 40, no. 2 (2003):163-90.

haunted this closely planned space of the imperial city, were not all that uncommon. They offer an opening where another history of planning *dis*closed itself.[386]

It is impossible to tell just one history of the *Maidan*. I began this chapter at the "historical future" of the *Maidan* as the green lungs of the postcolonial city, which enables me to narrate a linear history of planning and contestation that goes into the production of urban parks as public property. Such a history will foreclose the many arrested possibilities unfurled by an archive of sexual, economic and civic threat that remain implicit in the above-mentioned vignettes.[387] While there might not be one history of the *Maidan*, one narrative remains constant in the official archive and public discourse: the threat of the *Maidan* lapsing into *waste*.

As a potential wasted space, unstable definitions of the *Maidan* continuously emerged in police, army and municipal documentation, which portrayed it as a threat to the city's value and land valuation. In my reading of the archive of planning the *Maidan*, I unearth a longer genealogy of governmental fear with this space – fears of both waste and sexual threat. An archive of secrecy and euphemism organized the space of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century *Maidan*. The *Maidan*, therefore, invariably became the other of value. The history of the *Maidan* as a public park illuminates how a necessary intertwining of *waste* and *potential* frames any production of spaces as "green," as "nature" and as "urban lungs."

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[386] See Chapter 1 for a discussion historical disclosure.

[387] Historical future comes from Michel Foucault *History of Madness,* (New York: Routledge, 2006). See Lynne Huffer's exposition of the historical future and the scholarly practice of writing which remains aware of the impossible yet political necessity of making this fraught negotiation between the past and the future, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 19.

To complicate this picture further, the *Maidan* also figures centrally as a site of ghostly possession: where environmentalists and health officers saw green and health, literature saw the narrative potential for haunting. Since the late nineteenth century, Bengali literature has been fascinated with the space of the *Maidan* as a site of the abnormal. The popular press, British chronicles, and colonial travel writing from the early nineteenth century also documented stories of strange events taking place in the *Maidan*. The confluence of these disparate narratives surrounding the *Maidan* forms the tension at the heart of this chapter. How does one reconcile the various *Maidan*s, as nature, as the imperial landscape, as the lungs of the city with the space as a site of haunting and a locus of sexual threat? Attempting to write the history of the possessed *Maidan* only becomes possible by turning to a parallel history of dispossession. Draining the marshes around the Fort through the nineteenth century formed the *Maidan*, ridding the area of what the British called the "unhealthy swamps."[388] The repercussions of protecting the present *Maidan* today are felt on the fringes of the city, in the disappearing wetlands. These wetlands continue to haunt the very core of the city. Sexual threats lurk in the margins. In a simultaneous discourse, the idea of waste continues to haunt the value of this piece of land where the fantastic sublimates the material.[389]

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[388] Even in 1865, the *Maidan* was still not sufficiently drained and Garrison engineers were erecting culverts to manage this space that was full of "deep holes and […] a series of irregular pools." "Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel J. P. Beadle to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal in the Public Works Department," Report to Accompany and Explain a Project for the Drainage of the Calcutta *Maidan*, Judicial [Judicial] March 1865, Prog. 85. WBSA, Kolkata.

[389] For an understanding of the relation between the fantastic and the material see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises," *The German Ideology* (International Publisher, 1947), 47.

II. *Terra Economica*: Neoliberalism and Environment

In 2007, the Calcutta High Court ordered the Publishers and Book Sellers Guild to stop the proceedings of the 32nd Annual Book Fair of Kolkata, an iconic social and cultural event in the city. The annual Book Fair, attracting over a million visitors each year, had been held for thirty-one years in the *Maidan*. The ruling claimed that the fair was being held at the *Maidan* in violation of the "environmental laws." The division bench of Acting Chief Justice, Justice Bhaskar Bhattacharyya and Justice K. K. Prasad directed the Guild to restore the *Maidan* to the Army after bringing it back to "its original green state." The ruling also pointed out how the then Kolkata Police, Kolkata Municipal Corporation, West Bengal Pollution Control Board and Fire Brigade had flouted both environmental and local laws in going ahead with the preparation of the Book Fair.[390] Every winter publishers international and domestic, big and small, gathered alongside alternative publishing houses, turning the *Maidan* into a spectacular place, disrupting traffic for two weeks while drawing a voluminous crowd to the fairground from the city and surrounding towns.[391]

Winter festivities apart, following the court order in 2007 all kinds of fairs, fairground activities and political events were banned from the *Maidan* save the sporting clubs and sporting activities. As the Supreme Court order came into effect, the "wasted common" space of the *Maidan* was fenced in to produce gated gardens for middle-class consumption (sometimes for a fee). These gated parks not only became potent symbols of

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[390] "HC Moves Kolkata Book Fair out of *Maidan,*" January 20, 2007 *Indian Express*.

[391] For a description of book fair in both its importance and its postmodern kitsch see Ananya Roy, *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 1-6.

possession, but also serve the purpose of managing the circulation of people like Ray for whom the *Maidan* is a common waste ground.[392]

While the middle-class environmentalist movement won their *Maidan*, something more significant was taking place in the city. The state-hosted fairs were subsequently shifted to a site on a newly constructed fair pavilion on the eastern fringes of the city – an area which is comprised of rapidly disappearing wetlands. The wetlands had been declared a protected Ramsar site no. 1208 in 2002.[393] The wetlands, comprising 31,483 acres of land, support the livelihood of approximately 150,000 inhabitants.[394]

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[392] Nicholas Blomley "Making of Private Property: Enclosure, common right and the work of hedges," Rural History 18, no. 1 (2007): 1-21; Patricia Seed, Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). They explore how fences, borders, and hedges besieged the landscape of enclosure and colonialism. Although these spaces are understood as common waste, for a study on the economic importance of these geographic margins see Jesse Goldstein, "Terra Economica: Waste and the Production of Enclosed Nature," *Antipode* 45, no. 2 (2013): 357-375.

[393] Following the Ramsar Convention in Iran 1971, a global environmental treaty came into force in 1975 to protect wetlands and ecosystems across the world. Its mission is " the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world" http://www.ramsar.org.

[394] Anindita Bhatacharyya, Subro Sen, Pankaj Kumar Roy and Asis Mazumdar, "A Critical Study on Status of East Kolkata Wetlands with Special Emphasis on Water Birds as Bio-Indicator" in M. Sengupta and R. Dalwani, (eds.) *Proceedings of Taal 2007: The 12th World Lake Conference*, 2008 p 1561-1570. Accessed at World Lake database http://wldb.ilec.or.jp/data/ilec/wlc/P%20-%World%20Case%20Studies/p-31.pdf.

Figure 7: Arial Image of wetlands of Kolkata on the eastern fringes 2009. © Pradipta Ray

The three major forms of livelihood that are supported by these wetlands are sewage-fed fisheries, agriculture and productive farming from garbage dumping. This is one of the sites in the city where the waste is turned into value. Most of the people presently living there are erstwhile-displaced peri-urban populations from Howrah who relocated in the early twentieth-century.[395] They started living in the swamps and practicing fishing and horticulture. In 1957-58 the Calcutta Port Trust granted them fishing rights over the 133 acres of wetlands.[396] The expansion of the city over the last two decades has resulted in a substantial shrinking of these wetlands, resulting in further marginalization of those who rely on the wetlands as a source of sustenance and leading an already precarious

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[395] Howrah is the industrial hinterland to the colonial capital and postcolonial metropolitan city of Calcutta.

[396] East Kolkata Wetlands had been declared a Ramsar site in 2002, following a decade of mobilization by and lobbying with governmental organization. A choked and hungry city like Kolkata, expanding at magnifying speed is ready to gulp up the wetlands and make it ready for the real-estate market. For more see Dhrubajyoti Ghosh and Susmita Sen "Developing Waterlogged Areas for Urban Fishery and a Waterfront Recreation Project" in *Ambio* 21, no. 2 (April 1992), 185-186; *Workshop Proceedings: East Kolkata Wetlands and Livelihoods*, Working Paper 2, West Bengal, July 2001; Christine Furedy, "From Waste Land to Waste-Not Land: The Role of the Salt Lakes, East Calcutta in Waste Treatment and Recycling 1845-1930" in Sinha ed. *The Urban Experience Calcutta*, 145-53.

existence on the eastern fringes of the city. The wetlands are part of the south-Bengal ecotone and the mature delta of the River Ganga. Being sites of great floral and faunal diversity these wetlands are critical to the ecology of Kolkata. Moreover, they serve as a flood-control plain, waste-recycling area, and a highly productive area for agriculture and fishing, delivering environmental benefits estimated to be worth $38.54 million annually.[397]

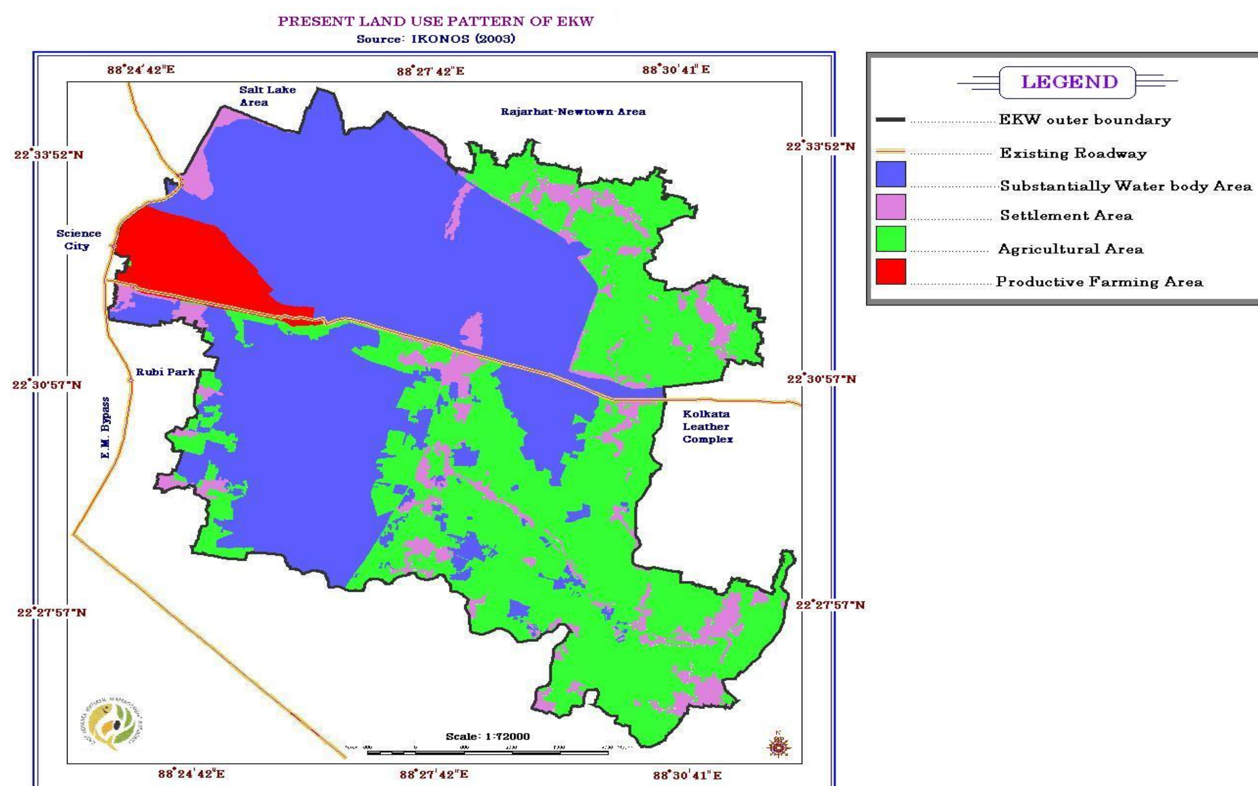

Figure 8: Land use Pattern of Wetlands of Kolkata (2003), courtesy http://www.keip.in/bl3/wetlands.php

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397 For a detailed analysis of the importance of the wetlands see Anindita Bhatacharyya et. al., "A Critical Study on Status of East Kolkata Wetlands." Their study has revealed that the present land-use pattern has resulted in a highly fragmented wetlands in the core zone, resulting in a complete local extinction of certain species of water-birds, and presence of chemicals in the water has resulted in the loss of fish diversity and irreversible changes in habitat pattern.

Yet, within the dominant discourses, the *Maidan*, a zone created originally for defense purposes, emerged as the site for mainstream environmentalist movement in the last decades, instead of the wetlands. Why, we might ask, does the *Maidan* become the focal point for such attention?

The trope of Calcutta as an urban disaster is well known, and in this terrain of disaster the *Maidan* has increasingly come to stand for the city's fading glory, its finest possession – imperial or otherwise. The *Maidan* has been the site for the reproduction of the social and symbolic power of the state, as well as the site for the enactment of techniques of rules. As a wasted potential throughout the city's history, its "resources" were never harnessed into capital's productive potential. As the *Maidan* became the site of nature, the wetlands became nature's underbelly, serving as the site of neo-liberal primitive accumulation. [398]

The *Maidan* emerged as the sacrosanct space holding up the critical environmental discourse of the late-twentieth century, precisely because the forgotten (or ignored) wetlands are rapidly being turned into the site for capitalist accumulation of shopping malls and world-class pavilions and dispossession of the "obsolete" forms of livelihoods. Massimo de Angelis has argued that primitive accumulation is not merely temporal, but also a "constitutive primitive of capitalism," and the process of primitive accumulation is continuous with capitalism in its more mature forms.[399] The recent

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[398] For a discussion of the postcolonial forms of primitive accumulation see Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development,* 105-168.

[399] Massimo De Angelis, "Marx and Primitive Accumulation: The Continuous Character of Capital's "Enclosures," *The Commoner No 2* (September, 2001). David Harvey has termed this process "accumulation by dispossession" whereby market and state-actors co-operate to oversee the process of dispossession and privatization in "The New Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession," *The Socialist Register* (London: Merlin Press, 2003), 63-87.

expansion of the city facilitated the dispossession of a vast number of people from these areas, creating a circulation of displaced low-wage laborers. Ironically, this disenfranchised population is critical to the success of neo-liberal cities of the Global South. While Kali Ray's labor is necessary to keep the city clean, precisely because the city is clean she has no place in it. Ray's battle with eviction must be read in the longer trajectory of creation of what Jesse Goldstein recently called *terra economica* in central Kolkata.[400]

III. The Time of the Park: The Unconsumable Open Space in Calcutta:

To offer a thicker historical background to this story, let us now turn to the *Maidan*'s early history and understand the competing discourses of waste and fear that frame this place. The word *Maidan* derives from the Persian word *meidān* which means an open space or clearing. The other two names, Brigade Parade Ground and *Gader Maath,* signify its particular militaristic genealogy. At its inception, the area covered by the Fort William, Eden Gardens and the grassy plain, or marshes known as the *Maidan* is comprised of an area of eleven hundred seventy-eight *bigha* (approximately 393 acres), of which only fifty-seven *bigha* (approximately 19 acres) had human habitation.[401] Following the destruction of the Old Fort during the Battle of Plassey (1757), reclamation of land was carried out and the foundations for the new Fort William and the *Maidan*

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[400] Goldstein, "Terra Economica: Waste and the Production of Enclosed Nature."

[401] See Orme to Mitchell, 29 October 1764, *Private Papers of Orme*, vol. XV, 4134. India Office Library, London.

were laid.[402] The new Fort William had ninety-nine canons facing the city to ward off any other possible attacks. The wide expanse of the *Maidan* became critical to the fort and its defense. The spatial shift from the wall that surrounded the Old Fort to the "open space" as a zone of fortification reflected the changed stature of the East India Company, and thus also began the *Maidan's* militaristic genealogy.

The military importance of the *Maidan* in the early days of the Company was replicated in its cartographic production of the city. The cartographic ventures always produced the Fort and the *Maidan* as the center around which the city was visually laid out. In the following two maps, before and after the construction of the Fort, one can mark the cartographic trope of representing Calcutta. Contrary to conventional cartographic emplotment, the map below is tilted with the north facing left, the east top and south right and west downward. Such a mapping practice was common in colonial cartography of Calcutta in order to center the Fort and the *Maidan*.

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[402] H. James Rainey, *A Historical and Topographical Sketch of Calcutta in Four Parts* (Calcutta: Englishman Press, 1876), 20-21.

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Figure 9: Plan for the intelligence of the military operations at Calcutta, when Attacked and Taken by Seerajah Dowlet, 1756, a map by John Call and J. Cheevers, London, 1756 [Columbia University Map Collection, New York]

During the early days the *Maidan* area held regular markets and had a well-built road network as the map in fig. 9 shows. Before 1757 the servants of the East India Company lived inside the Old Fort and "met for dinner and supper at a common table, taking their seats according to their rank [...] and at night the gates of the Fort shut upon them. Their life thus bore a strong resemblance to that of an Oxford or Cambridge college."[403] During

[403] Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal*, 95.

the pre-Plassey days there were only seventy British households outside the old Fort and the *Maidan* and some were freeholds and some rented from Indian owners.[404]

With the building of the new Fort William the British settlement patterns changed considerably. The *Maidan* increasingly became a green expanse and cartographically was marked as such to stress its separation from the rest of the marshy or unsettled area within the Fort's jurisdiction. In the second extant pictorial maps from 1842, one notes the cartographic and visual emplacement of the *Maidan* as a green space and the Fort as the most prominent section in the city, and the colonial buildings tropicalized with "native" workers and birds. These two maps offer us a comparative cartographic trope of representing Calcutta.

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[404] Blochman, *Calcutta during the Last Century*, 12.

Figure 10: Engraved map with pictorial inserts of Calcutta by an unknown engraver published in 1842 under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. [British Library, London]

The *Maidan* remained an extension of the colonial tropics for the Company servants, and there were many legends about the possible threats that abound in the *Maidan*. Early colonial travel writing and memoirs describe the eighteenth-century *Maidan* as a dense jungle, portrayed as pools of stagnant water and happy hunting grounds for Bengal tigers.[405] Tigers or not, travelling through the *Maidan* posed various kinds of threats during the eighteenth century. While the tiger-infested jungle "which cut off the village of Chowringee [adjacent to the *Maidan*] from the river was cleared to give

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[405] Cotton, *Calcutta Old and New*, 24.

way to the wide grassy stretch of *Maidan* of which Calcutta is so proud," nonetheless when evening descended caution reigned supreme "for fear of the rascally characters who infested the *Maidan*."[406] In his travelogue *Good Old Days of Honourable John Company*, W. H. Carey (1761-1834), a Baptist missionary in India, describes the *Maidan* as a dangerous place by night as Europeans in various disguises committed robberies there.[407] He narrates incidents of robberies and assaults in the *Maidan*, some extremely curious in nature:

> It would appear that it was anything but safe to be out late at night on the *Maidan*. We read in a paper of the 1st September 1791 – "Last night about 10 o'clock a very daring robbery was committed near the new Fort on Mr Masseyk who was in his palanqueen [*sic*], by eight Europeans, supposed to be soldiers; after wounding him severely, they took from him his shoe-buckles, and every valuable he had about him."[408]

The *Maidan* remained somewhat of a wilderness within the city during this early period. This unknowable and uncertain space of the "wilderness" within the city was harnessed into the official discourses of planning through two operative principles: the first through the medicalization of the space, which was part of a larger process of pathologizing colonial cities and, second, through the process of grafting an English picturesque landscape onto the tropical world.

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[406] Cotton, *Calcutta Old and New*, 90-91.

[407] W. H. Carey, *Good Old Days of Honourable John Company: Being Curious Reminiscences during the Rule of the East India Company from 1600 to 1858* (Calcutta: Quins Book Company,1882).

[408] Carey, *Good Old Days of Honourable John Company*, 265-66.

Attention to the genealogy of public spaces and gardens in both the colonial space and the metropole underscores the singularity of the space of the *Maidan*. From the eighteenth-century onwards, the English idea of urban parks drew upon the classical notion of *locus amoenus*: a space whose three basic elements would be grass, trees, and water. Such a space embodied a complex meaning system which organized the semiotics of post-industrial urban life in England. The political backdrop of the eighteenth-century production of nature in the form of landscape paintings simultaneously mirrored in the manicured reproductions of urban gardens and parks served an important purpose of producing and controlling the body politic.[409] With the dramatic growth of the industrialized city, parks performed a social and hygienic role too.

Taking walks in the park also served a key social function in marking social hierarchy and leisure. Thus, apart from the medical purpose, the consumption of the regulated green space within the city was tied very deeply with the highly structured social hierarchies of English society.[410] It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that the landscape designs of Humphrey Repton attempted to introduce a kind of informality to English Gardens, very unlike the controlled geometry of French gardens. This informality was an attempt to offer "nature" through urban parks, as the countryside was

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[409] Kenneth Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic: From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 16-23. Olwig explores the link between ideas of customary laws, the institutions that embody that law, and the people enfranchised to engage in the making and administration of the legal system and how that participates in the production of landscape or *landschaft* in post Renaissance Europe.

[410] For studies comparing commons and regulated parks in eighteenth-century England see Raphael Samuel, "Quarry Roughs," *Village Life and Labour* (London: Routledge, 1975) esp. 207-227; and Neil MacMaster, "The Battle for Mousehold Heath," *Past and Present*, no. 127 (May 1990): 117-154.

being overtaken by agro-capitalism.[411] Kennth Olwig points out that landscape as pictorial scenery resurfaced in the English language during the Renaissance at a time when "the notion of land, in the sense of country, lay at the heart of a Europe-wide struggle concerning the legitimate representation of polity."[412]

The politics of domesticating the *Maidan* were intricately bound up with issues of health and landscape aesthetics. Captain Hamilton, a physician of the East India Company who toured various parts of India between the years of 1688 and 1733, commented about Calcutta that "a more unhealthful place could not be chosen on all the river."[413] The marshes threatened the health of the Company servants and soldiers, and tropical "nature" had to be "vanquished."[414] If vernacular folk songs thematized living with land, water and shifting landscape, witness the markedly different rhetoric of the colonial writing of G. F. Atkinson's poem (1781) about dying in the marshes:

> Calcutta, what was thy condition then?
>
> An anxious, forced existence, and thy site
>
> Embowering jungle and noxious fen,
>
> Fatal to many a bold aspiring wight:
>
> On every side tall trees shut out the sight
>
> And like the Upas, noisome vapours shed;

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[411] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 30-31. For more on English gardens see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); George F. Chadwick, *The Park and the Town; Public Landscape in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1966); Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England : Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Methuen, 1987).

[412] Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic,* xxvi.

[413] Quoted in Martin, *Notes on the Medical Topography,* 1.

[414] Johnson, *Tropical Disease*, 22-23.

> Day blazed with heat intense, and murky night
>
> Brought damps excessive, and a feverish bed;
>
> The revellers at eve were in the morning dead.[415]

This bleak imagery of revelry, noxious fumes arising from the damp earth bringing death to the young company servants parallels the medical writings from half a century later when Fever Hospital started to document and redress the early mortality in the colonies. James Ranald Martin who drafted the first *Medical Topography of Calcutta* for the Fever Hospital Committee commented on the jungles and marshes where "trade flourished" and "was well established."[416] From 1710 onward, the Company passed regular directives to clear the trees and prepare plans for draining the area around the Old Fort in order to mitigate the effects of damp air, which was claiming the lives of the people of the Company, as well as acting as a deterrent against settling people in the area.[417] Martin's *Medical Topography* pointed out the importance of the *Maidan* as the lungs of the city, without which "one would breathe thickly through the heat and miasma."[418] Most town-planners, municipal historians and scholars forget the *Maidan*'s military origins and attribute the birth of the *Maidan* to reasons of health and a desire for an open space for

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[415]Atkins, "City of Palaces", in *Calcutta Review*, Vol. XXXV (1860): 16; Sarmistha De and Bidisha Chakraborty, "*Maidan*: The Open Space in History," *Social Scientist* 38, nos. 1-2 (Jan-Feb 2010): 3-22 also mention the threat of the swamps and the health concerns surrounding the undrained *Maidan*.

[416] Martin, *Notes on the Medical Topography*, 7-9; Roy, *Calcutta 1481 to 1981:*; Anil Ranjan Biswas, *Calcutta and Calcuttans: From Dihi to Megalopolis* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1992).

[417] Ajitkumar Bose, *Kalikatar Raajpath: Samaje o Sanskritite* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers 1996), 18.

[418] Martin, *Notes on the Medical Topography*.

walks and horse rides.[419] However, mixed intricately with medical discourses were the discourses of the ocular.

Visual representation became one of the key techniques for translating these marshes into a continuous imperial landscape framed by the fort and the port. Thus the *Maidan* was not just the lungs of the city, but also the proscenium for the display of imperial splendor as well as a site that framed it. The rhetoric of "health" was deployed to discipline the access, participation and use of the space of the *Maidan*. In India, climatic and miasmatic theory of disease causation persisted much longer than in Europe, and sometimes both these theories operated together in disciplining urban spaces.[420] The potential of the *Maidan* to become marshy wasteland was controlled by producing it as urban green. Harnessing the marshes into a consumable public park required not just draining the space, but also producing a discourse around it.

Colonial paintings about the *Maidan* illuminate the power of paintings as a tool of governance. The colonial painters deployed visual semantics of an imperial landscape by painting the *Maidan* as a central pictorial backdrop. Displaying the colonial splendor was just one of the modalities of translating the "uncertain" space of the wilderness into a colonial script of comprehensibility before it could be fully instrumentalized as a tool of planning. I purposely use the term 'uncertain' to point to the burden of empirical

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[419] De and Chakraborty, "Maidan: The Open Space in History," 5-6.

[420] The literature on colonial epidemiology and urban planning is wide For relevant studies on Calcutta see, Michael Anderson, "The Conquest of Smoke: Legislation and Pollution in Colonial Calcutta," in *Nature, Culture and Imperials: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia,* ed. David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995), 328-335; David Arnold, "Perspectives of Indian Plague, 1896-1900" in *Subaltern Studies V*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Mark Harrison, *Climates and Constitution: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600-1850* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999).

depiction in the early lithographs, paintings and early writings of colonial officials. Visual representations of the *Maidan* must be placed within this account. Discussing the pre-camera period, Christopher Pinney wrote, "Indian encounter was full of 'symbolic vagaries', and colonial officials could not trust, since they could not make meaning of what they saw. There was frustration that emerged out of an existence in this uncertain world of signs."[421] He demonstrated how the colonial authorities operationalized the visual world of painting, lithographs and later photography towards documenting practices, where factuality, transparency, and documentability were privileged over the semiotic properties of the represented.[422] The *Maidan* became a central backdrop in the early colonial paintings of Calcutta by William Daniells and Timothy Daniells, two painters who came to India at the end of the eighteenth century.[423] The Daniells drew twelve scenes of Calcutta, two of them being of the native town and the rest of the white town; more than half of them used the *Maidan* as the site from which to view the imperial grandeur and whatever was considered worth viewing in the city.[424] In these depictions, the *Maidan* was either the backdrop for the theatre of colonial splendor or the magnificent horizon into which the view fades out.

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[421] Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 20-21.

[422] Pinney, *Camera Indica,* 21-23.

[423] Timothy Daniells obtained permission to arrive in Calcutta in 1784, and soon after his nephew William Daniells was also given permission to travel with him, and they both arrived and spent the years from 1785 to 1794 travelling and painting in India. For reasons of space, my discussions have focused mainly on the Daniells, while the images used will show they were among a many who were working in the Empire as artists and producing pictures of Calcutta, with the *Maidan* as a very central backdrop.

[424] These images are also reproduced in Jeremy P. Losty, *Calcutta: A City of Palaces* (London: British Library, 1990).

These early colonial paintings of the city translated the inscrutable and heterogeneous landscape of the *Maidan* for European eyes. See, for example, the painting below showing a brick-built colonial edifice in the background, ships on the river and natives relaxing on the *Maidan*. The painting below was produced between 1785 and 1794.

Figure 11: Plate 1 from the second set of Thomas and William Daniell's 'Oriental Scenery,' Victoria Memorial. [Victoria Memorial Archive, Kolkata]

Colonial memoirs from this time produce this very same space as a perilous zone where tigers and dacoits abound. Carey tells us:

> Several robberies were committed within the months of March and April 1795, on the Calcutta Esplanade [the northern edge of the *Maidan*], and the roads leading to

> and from the Fort William [through the *Maidan*], by Europeans disguised in various dresses, who proved to be private soldiers from the garrison.[425]

There seems to be little in common between Carey's and Daniells' representation of this space. The Daniells deployed specific semantic tools to translate the "open space" of the *Maidan* into what was understood as "landscape" in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century metropolitan discourse. The *Maidan* frames the city and this framing becomes the site where indigenous meanings and foreign semiotics are seen to be competing with one another, as the painter is trying to "accurately" depict the landscape, while at the same time making it accessible for metropolitan consumption. These paintings defamiliarize the tropics and render the space familiar. In the following painting, for instance, the *Maidan* is presented as a horizon, a vista, and a landscape to frame the city. Through these depictions confusion was turned into comprehension.[426]

Figure 12: Watercolour of a view of Calcutta from the *Maidan* by Stanley Leighton (1837-1901) dated 24th October 1868. Inscribed on the mount in pencil: "Calcutta from the *Maidan*." Fri. 24 Oct. 1868. Government House, Law Courts. Ochterlony Monument. [British Library, London].

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[425] Carey, *The Good old days of Honorable John Company*, 266.

[426] Stephen Greenblatt calls this project of rendering familiar the space of the 'discovered' colony: "Still, the form of the journal entry characteristically registers first the material sighting and then its significance; the space between the two what I have called the caesura-is the place of discovery where the explanatory power of writing repeatedly tames the opacity of the eye's objects by rendering them transparent signs," where opacity stand as an obstacle standing in the way of desired access to the known. *Marvelous Possessions*, 88 and *passim*.

The *Maidan* emerged as a site of "nature" within the urban: nature tamed for enjoyment. Tapati Guha-Thakurta notes that the use of the picturesque in colonial paintings of the Indian landscape enabled two different things: a "re-enchantment of [English] domestic rural landscape" and, at the same time, a "free rein to alternative fantasies of ruggedness, turbulence, and the primeval powers of nature […] offering themselves as rich contrasts to the tameness and order of the English landscape."[427] Through a kind of nostalgia, the colonial spaces were rendered into a copy of the English landscape. English cultural sensibilities mediated the representation and through it breathed value into the marshy undrained swamps. W.J.T. Mitchell calls this a method through which landscape is "both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package."[428]

In the Daniells' paintings the *Maidan* became a "formal device to generate a series of panoramic views that defined all that was important to these painters and their audience."[429] The power of representation was premised on developing a visual language of seeing the imperial spaces and developing an idea of a "picturesque" that was at once British but tropical in the colony.[430] This representational method sought to reduce the

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[427] Guha-Thakurta, "The Compulsions of Visual Representation in Colonial India," 14.

[428] Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 5.

[429] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 46.

[430] For a more in-depth discussion of the colonial landscape and its representation see, John Zarobell, *Empire of Landscape: Space and Ideology in French Colonial Algeria* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*; Alan R. H. Baker, *Home and Colonial:*

space to a stage, emptying the space of its historicity and making it available through instrumental frames as a tool of urban planning and aesthetics.

V. "This Wicked and Foule Fayre"[431]: Spectacles in the Green

As the *Maidan* began to emerge as a tropical background to the Company's adventures in the East access to the material space was closely monitored. The city of Calcutta had begun to grow in settlement and population.[432] In 1821, a notice from the Governor of Fort William prohibited Indians from using the Walk or the Race Course in the *Maidan* area from the hours of 5-8 in the morning and evening:

> It having been represented to the Most Noble the Governor of Fort William that considerable inconvenience is experienced by the European part of the community who resort to the Respondentia, from the Crowds of Native Workmen and Coolies who make a thoroughfare of the Walk.[433]

Essays on Landscape, Ireland, Environment and Empire in Celebration of Robin Butlin's Contribution to Historical Geography (London: Historical Geography Research Group, 2004); Barbara Chapman, *The Colonial Eye: A Topographical and Artistic Record of the Life and Landscape of Western Australia, 1798-1914* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1979); Amar Wahab, *Colonial Inventions: Landscape, Power and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

[431] Ben Johnson, *The Bartholomew Fayre: A Comedy*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (1631 repr., London: A.C. Black, 1977).

[432] While there were only 8 *pucca* (mud huts) houses and 8000 mud huts in 1706, following 1756 it had increased to 498 *pucca* houses and about 14450 mud houses, and thereafter there was a rapid increase in the population of the city. Bose, *Kalikatar Raajpath*, 25-26.

[433] W.S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from the Calcutta Gazette Showing the Political and Social Conditions of the Enlgish in India Sixty Years Ago* Vol. 5, (Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government Printing, 1868), 76.

Walking for leisure and walking for work became separated both racially and spatially simultaneously paralleling the cartographic greening of the space. The *Maidan* became a site of leisurely walks and only available for British consumption. For the following half century, access to the *Maidan* became an exclusive privilege of the European population, who entered the open space for air, walks and enjoyment of the river view.[434] Carey's memoir documents that beginning in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the *Maidan* gradually became a site for the "great show of the fashionables out for the purposes of enjoying a drive 'eating the air' [*hawa-khawa*] as the Indians express it."[435] Fashionables aside, the *Maidan* was nonetheless still used by only a very small segment of the European population, and even into the middle of the nineteenth century, it was a site where soldiers escaped the rigors of Fort William.[436]

The mid-nineteenth century saw heightened police reporting of drunken soldiers in the *Maidan*. In March 1865 the Police Department complained to the Army Major General about the paucity of lock-up space and the increased number of drunken soldiers they were picking up each month from the *Maidan*. On not receiving any response from the Army General V. H. Schlach, the then Commissioner of Police complained to the Under Secretary of the Government of Bengal saying, "the constant appearance of these men at the Police Court is anything but credible. Within the last month there have been

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[434] In 1820 the Lottery Committee conducted a survey of the river bank, and the survey report recommended a promenade along the river bank and the *Maidan*, and there were even suggestions to transform a section of this river bank into an artificial beach. Extract from the Proceedings of the Territories Department. 1 April 1820, Judicial [Criminal] 24 March 1820, Judicial [Criminal] Prog. 15, April 1820, WBSA, Kolkata.

[435] Carey, *Good Old Days of Honorable John Company*, 67.

[436] In March 1864, over 20 soldiers were imprisoned on being found drunk and passed out on the *Maidan*. Judicial [Judicial] March 1864, WBSA, Kolkata.

twenty-four soldiers confined in the lock-up for being drunk and riotous in the Mydaun [*Maidan*]."[437] Soon thereafter an European woman who kept a Boarding house in Park Street of central Calcutta was assaulted "by an European soldier on the Mydaun about 7.10 pm while in her carriage."[438] Two constables, who heard the cry and went in search of this soldier, who ultimately escaped arrest, instead found "two other soldiers… lying 'dead Drunk' on the Mydaun. They were sent to the Fort."[439]

Sexuality is the recursive form that frames this archive of the open space. Governmental planning and production of a regulated urban park gives way to unruly drunken soldiers who assault women in the *Maidan*. The archive of colonial sexuality is an archive of secrecy.[440] Is there a different story to be heard in the muted missives between the Police and the Army? How does one read between the lines when the Lieutenant Governor responding to the situation points out the problem is much more than that of restoring order, "even setting aside the question of preservation of order, such a state of things as that which Mr. Schlach describes must have a most mischievous effect on the natives of the country?"[441] What is the "most mischievous effect" he is referring to here?

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[437] Letter from V. H. Schalch, Esq. Commissioner of Police, Calcutta to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, [no. 307, dated Feb 24th 1865] Judicial [Judicial] March 1865. Prog. § 43-44, Kolkata.

[438] Letter from V. H. Schalch, Esq. Commissioner of Police, Judicial [Judicial] March 1865, § 43, WBSA, Kolkata.

[439] Letter from V. H. Schalch, Esq. Commissioner of Police, Judicial [Judicial] March 1865, § 43, WBSA, Kolkata.

[440] About the operation of secrecy and euphemism in the colonial archive see Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2009).

[441] Letter from V. H. Schalch, Esq. Commissioner of Police, Judicial [Judicial] March 1865, § 44, WBSA, Kolkata.

Thinking spatially raises another question: is it of any consequence that the Lock Hospitals that were established to control the shyphillitic spread in the Fort and the ports of Calcutta happened to border the southern edge of the *Maidan*? In March 1865 while the Police were complaining to the Army to restrain their soldiers, the municipal body known as the Justices of Peace disbursed funds to the Government of Bengal stating, "Given the large number of troops garrisoned at the Fort William and the seamen in the port of Calcutta, Lock Hospital is extremely necessary."[442] At a period where there was a paucity of horse-drawn carriages, the army general physician demanded a Lock Hospital close to the prostitution quarters, and yet it was founded on the southern edge of the Maidan, and not in the so-called "red light zones" of Northern Calcutta.

IV. The Politics of Open Space

Two of the most potent, and yet divergent ways of understanding open spaces are as a tool of urban planning and disciplining, on the one hand, and as a political and social practice on the other. Post-industrial eighteenth-century western cities have treated open spaces and urban parks as spaces promoting the health of the population as well as a disciplinary tool. As a social and political practice, the idea of open space was operative in two modalities in the metropole by the mid-nineteenth century. While, on the one hand, it animated discussions about the public sphere and democracy that inhere in the possibilities of the idea of an "open space,"[443] it also fractured architectural theory and

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[442] Letter from R. Turnbull Esq. Secretary to the Justices of the Peace for the town of Calcutta to S. C. Bayley, Esq. Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial March 1865, Prog. § 75-78, WBSA, Kolkata.

[443] Very recently Jai Sen has theorized open space in the twenty-first century following the formation of the World Social Forum in 2001. He argues that there are three central concepts of social and political practice

ideas of urbanism by the void that it signaled – a void which was thematized as the agoraphobia of modern urban life.[444] On the other hand technologies of governance of public parks within colonial cities through nineteenth and early twentieth century operated through prohibitive or calibrated regulations.[445]

The archive of planning obscures the inchoate history of chaos that is constitutive of the process of planning. While histories of colonial cities have looked at the *bazaar*, *medina*, and native quarters to narrate the history of planning's other,[446] it is also important to inverse this proposition and examine the chaos that orders and organizes the highly planned, ordered and manicured spaces of the colonial cities by revealing the failure of planning that those spaces signal. There is often an irreducible heterogeneity at the heart of a planned open space.

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of open space. They are self organization, autonomy and emergence. Jai Sen, "On Open Space: Exploration Towards a Vocabulary of a More Open Politics," *Antipode* 42, no. 4, (September 2010): 994-1018.

[444] Carl Otto Westphal in 1871 famously deployed agoraphobia to talk about the fear and experience of panic brought on by "the sight of a large room, a long street, or a wide square." In the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century new forms of urban anomie appeared within the European and Anglo-American psychiatric discourses that dealt with apathy, blasé and all those affects that characterized industrial capitalism. One of the experiences of urban industrial modernity was the experience of speed and velocity, and its more mundane manifestation in the changed urban experience with the appearance of streetcars and motor-cars. It is within these discussions that architectural theories and urban planning takes on a formidable form, and new branches of architecture are born that attempt to address agoraphobia through architectural and town-planning. Camillo Sitte, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künsterlichen Grundsätzen,* (1909; repr., Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2002).

[445] An Act for the Regulation of Public Parks in Bengal, Bengal Act No. II of 1904, Published in *Calcutta Gazette* 9th March 1904, WBSA, Kolkata. In 1898 Public Parks Act was passed in British India which laid down stringent rules about proper ways of using Public Parks, which initially included Zoological Gardens, Botanical Gardens and was later extended to include the Eden Gardens through the Bengal Public Parks Act of 1904. From 1905 onwards continuing through the *swadeshi* movement, parks and squares like the Dalhousie Town Square, College Square were brought under stringent surveillance through curfews.

[446] Abdoumaliq Simone, *For the City yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2004); Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*; Janet Abu-Lughold, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981); Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities*.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the colonial discourse about the *Maidan* became a paranoid history of encroachment. One of the dominant rhetorics about the *Maidan* was how to rescue the patch of open greenery. The urban expansion of the town was encroaching upon this *unhealthy* swamp turned *prized* urban park.[447] During the rule of Lord Auckland (1836-42), trees were planted on the *Maidan*, making it more amenable for walks. From a space of defense the *Maidan* was gradually transformed into an imperial urban park. Other critical changes to the *Maidan* included carving out the racecourse on its southern side, the installation of a graveled walk called the Respondentia walk, and the construction of tanks, the Ochterlony Monument (renamed Shahid Minar after India's Independence in 1947) and Victoria Memorial during the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1854, in recognition of its increased civil use, the responsibilities for maintaining the *Maidan* were split between the military and the civil authorities. Lord Dalhousie handed over the "entire conservancy and control of the Esplanade [northern section of the *Maidan*] on every side of the Fort, up to the crest of the glacis, except the roadways leading into the Fort […], in the hands of Chief Magistrate."[448] In this letter, Dalhousie vested most of the authority pertaining to the *Maidan* in the hands of the Town Major. However, he added that, "[i]n all cases of difference between the Chief Magistrate and the Town Major, His Lordship [Dalhousie] considers that the decision must rest with

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[447] Major Schlach's map of Calcutta prepared from 1825-32, when contrasted with Upjohn's map prepared during 1792-93, shows that the new Town Hall occupied the land which was earlier part of the *Maidan,* and through the latter half of the nineteenth century, the *Maidan* would accede its territory to road extension and various civic projects. Both maps reproduced in *Atlas of Calcutta and its Environs* (Kolkata: NATMO, 1996).

[448] Letter no. 1020 dated 28th April 1854, Judicial [Judicial] 29th April 1854, Prog. 106-113, WBSA, Kolkata.

the Governor of Fort William."[449] In 1863, Fort William proposed that the *Maidan* be brought under military control. However, the Home Department rejected the proposal since civil authorities had a vested interest in the Esplanade which had:

> become the park or recreation ground of the city; and this being its chief use to which it is put, and there being no other place in which the inhabitants of Calcutta can resort for air or exercise, it seems very inexpedient that it should be placed under military authority, especially as no practical advantage could arise from it.[450]

The military activities of parading or encampment of troops continued unhindered even after 1854.[451] Thus, while the military argued that the chief purpose of the *Maidan* for the city was defense, the civil authorities viewed it as a public space and increasingly as a site of festivity. When the British Crown took over after the uprising of 1857 north-Indian towns were militarized.[452] In an interesting twist, during the same period the civil use of the *Maidan* was given an upper hand over the militaristic use, and this did not change until onset of the First World War.

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[449] Judicial [Judicial] 29th April 1854, Prog. 106-113, WBSA, Kolkata.

[450] Control of the *Maidan,* October 1863, NAI, Delhi.

[451] Control of the *Maidan*, October 1863, NAI, Delhi.

[452] For a study of the colonial heritage of postcolonial urban governance in Lucknow see, Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow*.

Figure 13: Uncoloured lithograph of a panorama of Calcutta drawn after nature by Frederick Fiebig and prepared, printed and published by T. Black of the Asiatic Lithographic Press in Calcutta in 1847. The sixth section of the panorama shows Chowringhee Road. In this view, we can see three of the water tanks placed along the *Maidan* to supply water to the city. [British Library, London]

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards the civil authorities maintained the *Maidan.* However, no construction, temporary or otherwise, even that of planting trees, could be executed without the consent of the military. This 1854 ruling continues to be in place in contemporary Kolkata and was affirmed in the High Court ruling from 2007 and used to evict Kali Ray on the grounds of her being “the lone encroacher on the Army owned space.” However, by 1880 the Judicial Department felt the need to regulate the use of the *Maidan*, as it was increasingly turning into an entertainment ground for the population. Apart from football games and sporting clubs, there were operas, circuses, fairs, balloons as well as performances by magicians, jugglers, and travelling troupes. Along with these performers, there was a bustling business of vendors, tea-stalls,

paanwalis, and fortune-tellers.[453] In 1880, the Judicial Department sanctioned rules for the erection of tents and temporary buildings on the *Maidan* for entertainment or other public purposes – marking the beginning of a phase which would change the space of the *Maidan* from being merely an urban park to that of a public space of entertainment and gathering.[454] By the end of nineteenth century, the *Maidan* was turned into a fairground every winter, where a large section of the European population gathered for festivities, and the working-class Indian population gathered for football matches.

As a space of entertainment the military increasingly came to view it not as the open expanse where soldiers escaped but rather as a buffer from the evils of a growing town. At the turn of the century the *Maidan* had turned into such a carnivalesque site within the city, and the civil and military locked horns over aesthetically protecting the *Maidan*. Lord Curzon, the then Governor General of India (1899 – 1905) was instrumental in laying down rules about what he called the "external face" of the *Maidan*. For the European inhabitants, the *Maidan* was their proudest possession, "for they have appraised its value and are ready to snarl at every official nibble."[455] Thus, Lord Curzon admitted that without his intervention, the *Maidan* would completely disappear, making Calcutta a "second rate Provincial Town."[456] This "free hand" that the civil authorities, viz. the Bengal Government, had been bequeathed resulted in "defacing the external

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[453] For a sports history of the *Maidan* see Chatterjee, "Bombs, Sovereignty, and Football," in *Black Hole,* 264-310.

[454] Grant of Temporary Concession on the *Maidan*, JudicialA, March 1880, Prog. 14-15, NAI, Delhi.

[455] R. J. Minney, *Round About Calcutta* (London: Thacker and Spink, 1922), 21.

[456] Control of the Government of India over the Calcutta *Maidan*, Police A, January 1903, Prog. 73-74, NAI, Delhi. At this time the Bengal Government was in negotiation with two Calcutta Clubs about erecting permanent structures with residential quarters at the site of the Jail in the *Maidan*.

face" of the *Maidan*, with little regard for its aesthetics.[457] Never before had the question of "aesthetics" in relation to the *Maidan* and the city been posed in such a significant manner. In 1903 Lord Curzon issued orders to the Bengal Government directing that all proposals involving permanent and quasi-permanent structural changes be submitted to the Military Department.[458]

Lord Curzon's 1903 ruling about the erection of structures stressed that the "external face" of the *Maidan* was sacrosanct, and consent as well as intervention of the governing bodies were necessary when the *Maidan* was materially changed. In this debate, the questions of the *Maidan*'s aesthetics were pitted against the concern for defense of the city. Not only was permission required to erect structures on the *Maidan*, but from now all structures had to be semi-permanent, erected in winter and removed in summer. However, one building escaped the seasonal fate. This was the Ronaldsay Hut, a recreational club managed by the Young Men's Christian Association. The reason for keeping the structure in place is very illuminating about the *Maidan*'s transformed spatial status within the city:

> The hut is on the *Maidan* and is of the greatest value to non-commissioned officers and men of the British units stationed in Calcutta; and it supplies a well-equipped place for recreation. It is extensively used by the troops and owning to its excellent

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[457] Control of the Government of India over the Calcutta *Maidan*, January 1903, NAI, Delhi.

[458] Letter no. 39, dated 29th January 1903, Control of the Government of India over the Calcutta *Maidan*, January 1903, NAI, Delhi.

> situation on the main road from the fort to the town it keeps a good many men from going to the town and participating in a more doubtful form of entertainment.[459]

From a zone of threat the *Maidan* had emerged as a zone of containment. As a tool of colonial urban planning, the *Maidan* was central to the various discourses of fortification, urban planning, safety, beautification, and health. By the middle of the twentieth-century, the *Maidan* became a tamed part of the city – through the romance of controlled nature, through the state-sponsored fairs, and through political rallies. British memoirs and travelogues from the early twentieth century document the romance of the *Maidan* in ways that were not evident in earlier writings. If a century earlier the failure to enjoy the *Maidan* lay with the heterogeneous colonial space, then by the early twentieth century the failure to participate in this romance was a failure not of the landscape, or the terrain, but instead of the beholder.

Describing the *Maidan*, journalist and travel writer R. J. Minney writes: "Many fail to see beauty in a sea of green upon which clusters of trees seem like islands, and where to keep up the illusion the Monument is to all seeming a light-house."[460] In his account, the *Maidan* emerges as a site almost outside of the city – a site unbounded by the city. "The *Maidan* spreads its face to the sky in the evening, unruffled by playing children, wandering cows or lounging idlers."[461] It is a site where the city is forgotten, a place where one comes to forget oneself as a city-dweller, an essentially modern form of

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[459] "Removal of the Ronaldshay hut from the Calcutta *Maidan*" File 1M-7, Serial No. 1-3, 6-7 & 12-13, Proceedings nos. 16-22, October 1920, WBSA, Kolkata.

[460] Minney, *Round About Calcutta*, 24.

[461] Minney, *Round About Calcutta*, 29.

relating to cities. In spite of romancing the green, the first comprehensive town-planning report produced under the aegis of the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) in 1914 ventriloquized the administrative paranoia when it labeled the *Maidan* as a "wasted space."[462]

In the first comprehensive report of Calcutta's town-planning published by E. P. Richards, the aesthetic tenor took precedence over the defense aspect, as exemplified when Richards called for "the creation of order and dignity in the chaotic and so artistically wasted *Maidan*."[463] Echoing Curzon's concern with the *Maidan*, and treating it primarily as an urban park, Richards pointed out in his town-planning report:

> The *Maidan*, forming a great park of 300 acres, occupied a south-west-central position in relation to the city as a whole. It is a little larger than Hyde Park, London, and is perhaps the finest possession of Calcutta, and is so placed as to be fairly close and accessible to about one quarter of the inhabitants of the city. It is unhappily too far south to be of any daily use to the dense population of North Calcutta – nevertheless, it is a most valuable large city reservoir of open space and decently fresh air, and without the *Maidan* and the zone of modern buildings that bound it on north and east, *Calcutta would be something of a hell*.[464]

The *Maidan* was a wasted space, not because neither the municipal commissioners nor the city-dwellers had failed to appraise its value as a reservoir of green space. Rather,

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[462] E. P. Richards, *Report, by Request of the Trust, on the Condition, Improvement and Town Planning of the City of Calcutta and Contiguous Areas* (Ware: Printed by Jennings & Bewley, 1914).

[463] Richards, *Improvement and Town Planning of the City of Calcutta*, 388.

[464] Richards, *Improvement and Town Planning of the City of Calcutta,* 22, emphasis mine.

even after understanding its value, they failed to utilize it accordingly. The *Maidan* had been drained and tamed and no longer posed much threat to the health of the company officials, yet it did not quite transform in a valuable spot in the city. In a recent essay, Vinay Gidwani and Rajashree Reddy have read waste as the political other of capitalist "value," and in tracing the trajectory of wasted spaces, they argue that one can construct a minor history of those who are cast outside the pale of "value" as superfluity, remnant, excess or detritus.[465] In their reading waste signals a kind of ethical horizon of civil society. Gidwani and Reddy map out Lockean discourses to argue that the transformation of waste into something useful is the moment of entry into political modernity.[466] The marshes of Calcutta entered political modernity as property, and the wetlands as potential real estate. But the Maidan became an extra-mural space, a purloined city.

Viceroy Lord Curzon, town-planner E.P. Richard, writer R. J. Minney are all writing in very different genres: official letters, planning documents, memoirs. Yet, rhetorically their work aligns in producing an immaterial and transcendental value of the *Maidan*. It is also from this point onwards that an officially scripted municipal romance with the *Maidan* begins. Thus, waste becomes a specter that haunts the modern notion of value, both in economic and moral registers.

The irreducible heterogeneity that marks the space of the *Maidan* is best captured in the vernacular literature about the *Maidan,* which produces the space like a hollowed-out core of the city, a spectral shadow of the city itself. It was the "nowhere" in the city,

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[465] Vinay Gidwani and Rajyashree Reddy, "The Afterlives of "Waste": Notes from India for a Minor History of Capitalist Surplus", *Antipode*, 43, no. 5, (2011): 1625-1658.

[466] Gidwani and Reddy, "Afterlives," 1626.

without directions and destinations. If official debates frame the *Maidan* through technologies of governance as a highly ordered, contained, and planned space, I ask, by contrast, why do literary narratives produce it as a spectral, unpredictable and uncontainable site? The haunted and wasted *Maidan* trouble the planned *Maidan*. The meaning and status of the *Maidan* in the vernacular literary material perhaps occupies a different epistemic register than that of the colonial order of space. I look at examples of two literary genres in Bengali, both of which have engaged very differently with the space of the *Maidan*: a collection of *prahasan* (satirical writings, like a burlesque or farce) and short stories. In my reading, I show how the idea of "waste" that Richards highlights can be grasped through the image of the fantastic unreal geography that is used to depict the *Maidan* in these narratives.

VI. The Haunted *Maidan*

No history of the *Maidan* can be complete without engaging the vernacular literary production of this space as a fantastic geography. Feminist-Marxist geographers have linked the disciplining impetus of primitive accumulation to the misogyny of Enlightenment thought which produced land/nature and women in need of rational and scientific control.[467] Nature and women were not actively productive of value, but had to be scientifically improved. Marxists have argued that this was a certain production of "nature" itself.[468] The engineering of land and society is at the heart of this production.

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[467] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004) and Carolyn Merchant, *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

[468] Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (New York: Verso,

The sexualized threat that erupted in the military and municipal archive of planning and controlling the *Maidan*, begins to make sense by turning to the literary, which treats the *Maidan* as a zone of excess within the city.

As historians Sharmistha De and Bidisha Chakraborty have pointed out, the *Maidan* was perceived by the colonized population of the northern parts of Calcutta, namely the elite Bengalis, as a symbol of colonialism.[469] Thus, the Hindu public groups opposing social reform often found the threats posed by English education and women's empowerment to be contiguous with women venturing out into the *Maidan* on their own. This space soon evolved as the proverbial site of defiled female "propriety." Taking a leisurely walk in the *Maidan* became a practice of colonial decadence – a threat to the bourgeois domesticity of Bengali homes. Ishwar Chandra Gupta, renowned satirist and poet wrote in the late nineteenth century:

> These sassy maids snap their fingers and pick up books
>
> Learning *A B*, feigning to be Memshahibs and spewing English
>
> Dear Brother! Stay awhile and you will surely see
>
> How they draw the reins and ride off to the *Maidan* for fresh air ["to eat air"]
>
> *jato chhunrigulo turi mere ketab hatey nichhey jabey,*
>
> *A B sikhey, bibi sejey, bilati bol kabei kabey;*
>
> *aar kichhu din thakrey bhai! pabei pabe dekhte pabe,*
>
> *apon hatey hankiye bogey, garer maatthey haoa khabey*. [470]

2007).

[469] De and Chakraborty, "*Maidan*: The Open Space in History," 5.

[470] Shivnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*, (repr., 1897, Kolkata: New Age Publishers,

In Gupta's couplet *Maidan* becomes a metonymy of the disorder of the city. Conservative Hindus and members of the radical Young Bengal Movement both shared an anxiety about the *Maidan*.[471] Harachandra Ghosh a member of the Young Bengal Movement who espoused women's reform, lamented the state of the "deplorable condition of Indian society:"

> Female emancipation in its proper and correct sense means nothing more or less than to emancipate women from errors and prejudices, from ignorance and superstition which are so many stumbling blocks in the way of the advancement in society. To walk with our wives and daughters in the evening on the *Maidan* under the beautiful graves [*sic*] of the Eden Gardens, arm in arm, and exposed to the gaze of public or to give them unrestrained license to ramble by themselves does hardly come within the true meaning of emancipation and is wholly inconsistent with the propriety considering the present deplorable state of Indian society.[472]

In these couplets and the literary material there is hardly any attempt to produce the space mimetically, but rather an invitation to explore the *Maidan* as a space of possibility, and all that remains uncontainable in the city. What is interesting here is to note the fact that the fear was not generated out of any particular occurrences, as much as the idea of the

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2003), 113-114.

[471] For a study of the radical student movement in the mid-nineteenth century see Nemai Shadan Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M, 1960).

[472] Harachandra Ghosh, "Female Emancipation" *Oriental Miscellany*, December 1880, quoted in Jayanta Goswami, *Samajacitre Unabingsha Satabdir Bangla Prahasan* (Picture of Society as revealed in the 19th century Bengali Farce), (Kolkata: Sahityasree, 1975), 900. Harachandra Ghosh was a student of Derozio and was a member of the youthful radical group known as the Young Bengal of Calcutta.

Maidan as an open space in the city. The trope of the *Maidan* became a classic early-twentieth century rhetorical device to voice working-class discontent. Witness, for example, the following lines of a vendor's work-song, which ridicules the new arriviste-class of clerks who pose as *babu* (a term of respect, but also used as a form of ridicule to indicate the petty bourgeoisie) in the city during the early-twentieth century:

> Aye, the fancy shoes they wear, they dine out, and take car-rides
> glasses on their nose,
> wearing watches they go for walks in the park, and [alas] live in shacks
>
> *Ogo aajkal jutor bahar, hotele ahar, gadite bihar*
> *Era chosma dey naake*
> *Ghodi haathe jaaye parkete, kothho ghodete thake* [473]
>
> Or
> the irony of kaliyuga [the last era in the Hindu time cycle] in Kolkata
> the harlots are riding cars and carriages
> canes in their hands, and hats in their heads
> rituals they have dumped
> they don't care about mirrors
> they want to be photographed
> gowns they wear, horses they ride
> dipping in the Ganga, they have long given up
> in their kitchens they get their *khanshamas*

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[473] Anon. "Naakchhabiwalar Chhoda" in Dnere, *Jeleparar Shong*, 334. According to the author, who collected these songs, they were composed in the period between 1913-1930.

to wipe them with towels.

Haddamaja kalikale koll'e kolkatay
Magite chalaye gadi fetonjudi
Haathe chodi hat mathay
Sashti makal ar mane na
Arshite mukh ar dekhena
Ekhon kebal photograph chai
Ekhon gown pore, ghoday chode
Ganga-snan to deche chere
Goshal khanay khanshamate
Towel diye ga mochay[474]

The openness of the *Maidan* not only subverted the closed quarters of the domestic *andarmahal* [inner-quarters] of the bourgeois household, but it also contaminated the very idea of the *andarmahal*. The enclosed (captive) space of bourgeois domesticity and the openness and mixing possible in the *Maidan* became a metonymic representation of the distinction between the good and fallen woman. The threat of women's education and emancipation was not articulated as that of women being allowed out of the *andarmahal* into the *baithak-khana* [living rooms, where middle and upper class women were traditionally denied entry], the masculine space of the house, as well as the emergent public sphere. For instance it was not uncommon for upper-class women to take walks in the *Maidan*.

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[474] Perhaps collected by Baishnab Charan Basak in 1893, cited in Goswami, *Samajacitre Unabingsha Satabdir Bangla Prahasan*, 457-58.

Photograph redacted for copyright purposes

Figure 14: (81) Morning ride of a lady of Calcutta in her palanquin, India. *From Notes of Travel* 1904, Underwood & Underwood. India, Vol. I and II, Stereoscopic images mounted on gray. Albumen prints. [Alkhazi Foundation, Delhi]

In 1927 Upendra Bandhyopadhyay, the chair of the North Calcutta Youth Association (*Uttar Kalikata Juba-Sammilani*), satirized and ridiculed the women's movement and empowerment schemes while giving a speech at the club Shimla Byam Samiti Prangan in the northern part of Calcutta. Bandhyopadhyay summed up the essence of the movement by linking it significantly to the *Maidan*:

> If the women of Bengal want to finally climb down from the backs of their men, on whom, for centuries they have depended and desire to walk off independently to the *Maidan* for fresh air, let it be known that there are no men in Bengal who would be stupid enough to obfuscate this desire.

> Purusher kaandh hoite namiya god'er maath'e swadhin hawa khaiba'r iccha jodi satya satyai e desher meyder hoia thake, taha hoile sthir janiben je, bangladesh'e emon boka purush nai, jini she shubho sonkolpe bandha deben.[475]

The threat conjured up through this juxtaposition is the wilderness of the *Maidan* into which the educated women venture. Women's desire for leisure and mobility threatened even the progressive population of Calcutta. The *Maidan* therefore was not simply an extension of the open space to the knowable and containable city, but a metonymy for the bourgeois anxiety of the city that militated against the planned and visible city.

In these countless rhymes that were popular among the theatre and folk performances in Calcutta in the mid-nineteenth century, the *Maidan* emerges as the site that offers the possibility of breaking the codes of the normative urban order. One way to read this trope of the *Maidan* as a space of colonial corruption of a certain known order of things is to read it through the depictions of the wilderness or forest in classical Sanskrit literature. In the tradition of Sanskrit texts, the forest was seen as the limit to the courtly world of the *nagar* or polis, and thus as a place that subverts the rule-bound urban world and limits that world.[476]

Before I close my reading of the literary representation of the *Maidan*, let me turn to the descriptions of the *Maidan* as a site of haunting two well-known stories about the *Maidan*, one Rabindranath Tagore's (1861-1941) short story *Mastermashai* (1916) and

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[475] The speech was given at the Uttar Kalikata Juba Sammilani at the Shimla Byam Samiti Compound in Calcutta on November 7, 1927.The speech excerpt and the discussion following were used as part of the training for short-hand and typing for reporters by the Intelligence Bureau of colonial government of Bengal. Intelligence Bureau Files IB 591/27, serial no. 22/1927, 5, WBSA, Kolkata. [my translation]

[476] For a reading of how the space of the forest frames the strict order of courtly life see Romila Thapar, *Shakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories* (Delhi: Anthem Press, 2002).

the other by Rajshekhar Bose's (1880-1960) *Parash Pathar* (1921). In the few early-twentieth-century Bengali short stories where the *Maidan* appears, it does not emerge as a site of nature, but rather as the site of the supernatural, away from the harsh reality of urban life. The trope of the fantastic signaled not only a space outside the city limits, but also an otherworldly space, where one lost oneself, encountered ghosts, or made fortune. The supernatural appears in these stories not as demonic but rather through a problematization of language, the world, and desire in an increasingly urban world order. As Rosemary Jackson's seminal work on fantasy points out: "[Fantasy] is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss."[477]

Rabindranath Tagore's short story *Maaster-Mashai* (Teacher) is set in early-20th-century Calcutta. The main character Haralal is a private-tutor turned clerk who is wrongfully accused of stealing money. Unable to deal with the gravity of the situation, he walks around the city and when it "became impossible for him to bear the weight of his own body," he hails a carriage. When the driver asks him where he wants to go, he replies: "Nowhere, I want to drive across the *Maidan* to get fresh air."[478] The story comes to an end at the moment when the clock strikes one and they have been riding for seven hours. When the driver asks again where Haralal wants to go, he discovers an empty carriage. Haralal wants to go nowhere, and the *Maidan* becomes a site for the nowhere in the city. In a setting of lyrical spectrality, Tagore lays out Haralal's deliverance from the oppression of his world, and his body whose burden he could carry no longer: "A deep intense peace filled his heart…. He knew now that it was only an empty fear of the

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[477] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1981), 3.

[478] Rabindranath Tagore, *Mastermashai*, (New York: Macmillian, 1918), 95.

mind…And now there was neither darkness nor light, but only one tense fullness."[479] *Master-mashai*'s irresolvability is worked out through a spectral representation of the *Maidan*.[480]

Literary fantasy participates in the socio-cultural world of its production. Jackson points out that by briefly opening up the space to reveal a disorder or an impossibility, fantasy makes order possible. "The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent."[481] In Rajshekhar Bose's story *Parash Pathar*, a tired office worker falls asleep in the afternoon under a tree in the *Maidan* and wakes up to find a philosopher's stone which turns everything to gold. Surprisingly, this miraculous quality of the stone brings him much misery and he finally comes to the *Maidan* and throws it into the wilderness so that order might be restored in his life. The fantastic geography of the *Maidan* in these literary narratives does not suggest a desire for another world, rather it subverts the existing world by producing it anew, and by bringing to language that which remains unsaid.

The various appearances and disappearances in the *Maidan* in the short story can be read as emblematic of possible disappearances -- of order, of women, and their sense of propriety, and value. No amount of domesticating through a regulated planting of trees, construction of water-tanks, creation of a promenade or police patrolling could render the space familiar to the British or the native population of the city, and this space continued to signal something irreducible and uncanny about late-nineteenth and early-

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[479] Tagore, *Mastermashai,* 96

[480] There are a few other contemporary short stories where the space is produced as the other of the city and where the fantastic take place. For the sake of brevity I just stick to these two well-known texts.

[481] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 4.

twentieth century urban life in Calcutta. The afterlife of this logistical ordering of space through producing it as an open space for defense, health, and moral education took on a trajectory of its own. It remained the wasted or underutilized space within the city, signaling that something was not in order. The "nowhere" in the middle of city became the site around which various competing narratives emplotted themselves. Is it merely a site of imaginative respite from the pressures of urban life? Is it perhaps a paradigmatic example of the Foucauldian heterotopic sites that "destroy the syntax which causes words and things to hold together?"[482] I conclude by returning to the idea of 'waste' as a specter that haunts the notion of value in land, which defined colonial land policies. Such a specter is useful in order to return to the environmental movements in contemporary Kolkata.

VII. Conclusion

The *Maidan* forms both the centre and the margin of the city. As an open space it traffics in notions of value and waste.[483] While the official archive surrounding the *Maidan* may function in a particular register of ordered space, the stories, myths and anecdotes about the *Maidan*, on the other hand, function in a different linguistic register and desynchronize the space represented in the official archive. The *Maidan* occupied a strategic military position during the early days of the East India Company due to its location adjacent to the Fort. Through most of the nineteenth century the *Maidan* remained a site of danger. By the turn of the twentieth century it became the European

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[482] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii

[483] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

pleasure garden, the city's fairgrounds and a political arena. A literary ecology of fear gave way to environmental ecological concerns about the *Maidan* through the twentieth century.

The present environmental concern for the *Maidan* draws upon early colonial aesthetic frames as much as environmental issues. The aesthetic and environmental concerns produce the contemporary *Maidan* in the humanist terms of a *hortus conclusus* (classical gardens, literally meaning an enclosed garden, or a private style of garden)[484] wherein conservation increasingly signifies creating enclave gardens – or the privatization of public spaces. Privatization transformed the politics of open space into an economic offence based on the principle of waste, i.e. underutilization of maximum potential.[485] The contradictions in such maneuvers are clearly indicated in the attempt to generate a certain kind of spatial citizenship through the orderly use of the *Maidan,* i.e. the ability and leisure to enjoy the green space. The homeless rag picker Kali Ray, and other foragers who work on the *Maidan* threaten the semiotics of contemporary green space. In these enclave gardens cropping up on the Maidan we can trace a shift from "common wastes to wasted commons, [which] is central to the production of *terra economica*."[486]

Following the environmentalist logic that governs contemporary discourses on the *Maidan*, the fear of open spaces has not left bourgeois consciousness. In March 2011,

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[484] The biblical allusion, as mentioned in the *Vulgate Bible* is to the perpetual virginity of Mary and has a different tradition. In this section I am referring to the increasing privatization of the *Maidan*, and also the trope of the pristine nature of the garden – whereby a space is offered up for the consumption of a certain class, at the cost of ousting forms of livelihood and sustenance of another class of people.

[485] Goldstein, "Terra Economica: Waste and the Production of Enclosed Nature," 368.

[486] Goldstein, "Terra Economica: Waste and the Production of Enclosed Nature," 363.

following a lapse of almost four years since all the fairs, open fires, and littering were banned in the *Maidan*, green activists began complaining that "wild bushes and shrubs have overtaken large swathes of the *Maidan*, making them inaccessible for citizens. These areas now provide shelter to criminals."[487] This echoes the early-nineteenth-century sentiments of a British statistician and writer on economic issues. Arthur Young wrote that enclosing open spaces would produce a new concept of nature "pregnant with advantage" and, if left unutilized, these wastelands would become "the best nursery for idleness and thieves in this kingdom."[488]

As an open space, the *Maidan* operated in a twofold manner. First, as a space of defense and health it became a site for regulating and disciplining the urban population. Second, it functioned as a receptacle, as a void which carried the stories of the city. From its inception, the *Maidan* (or for that matter the idea of the *Maidan*) was constantly inserted into various discourses and texts. The *Maidan* existed in order for the other spaces within the city to exist – as a site to develop and bestow the tropics with an English landscape, to memorialize imperial power, to sanitize the city and its air, or to stage the endeavors of the emergent nation-state. It operated, to quote Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, "as the text of a delexicalized cultural inscription."[489] The *Maidan* is

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[487] "*Maidan* no Longer Green and Pretty," *Times of India*, March 4, 2011.

[488] Arthur Young, *General Report on Enclosures* (London: B McMillan, 1808), 121.

[489] I am drawing directly from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's definition, in which she states: "To lexicalize is to separate a linguistic item from its appropriate grammatical system into the convention of another grammar." In her study of Harlem from the early 2000s when it was being transformed into a site that essentialises black culturalism and memorialized a certain nostalgic relation to the past, she shows how this new economic and cultural lexicalization demanded a delexicalization. And, I may add here, this is not a positing of a binaristic concept of space but positing the impossibility of a certain decoupling of these two processes. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Harlem," *Social Text 81*, no. 22 (Winter 2004):113-139.

constituted through a forgetting of the wetlands, a forgetting that itself has been forgotten. The rhetoric of waste is operationalized not only to evict people like Kali Ray, but also to weave speculative real-estate futures in the forgotten wetlands. If the *Maidan* problematizes the notion of capitalist value by revealing the uneven economization of spaces within the city, in the following chapter we will turn to economically disobedient figures that threatened the increasingly financialized market in urban land in the early quarter of the twentieth century.

Chapter 4/ Speculation and Land-Profiteering: Fixing the Fiscal Geography of Calcutta

> Bassanio to Antonio:
> In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft,
> I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
> The self-same way with more advised watch,
> To find the other forth, and by adventuring both
> I oft found both: I urge this childhood proof,
> Because what follows is pure innocence.
> I owe you much, and, like a wilful youth,
> That which I owe is lost; but if you please
> To shoot another arrow that self way
> Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
> As I will watch the aim, or to find both
> Or bring your latter *hazard* back again
> And thankfully rest debtor for the first.
>
> William Shakespeare,
> *Merchant of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 1[emphasis mine]

I. Introduction: A Financial Activity in Search of a Lexicon

The shifting lexicon of finance has a long history. We witness one such lexical dissonance in the above quoted epigraph in William Shakespeare's famous *Merchant of Venice* (1598), where the aristocrat Bassanio pleads for nothing less than another round of speculative investment from his merchant friend Antonio. Antonio, who does not trust his fortunes to one route, has his argosies flung to the Seven Seas. Bassanio, whose fortunes are dwindling, is portrayed by Shakespeare as a rather quixotic trader whose loss is but the result of willful youth, mere cupidity, and a man whose financial machinations can muster no better argument than "childhood proof." Much can be made of the mercantile spirit of Shakespeare's age and the energetic speculative bubbles that were

being charged by a credit economy that was spread across the Seven Seas. Yet, I ask, was there a language for understanding Bassanio's financial proposal to *hazard* another chance for a possible profit?[490] It would seem little has changed as far as the indeterminacy of financial idiom is concerned even half a millennium later.

This inability to find a specific lexical coordinate again came to the fore during the housing crisis and financial meltdown of 2008. One consequence was the coining of a new popular vocabulary about the economy deemed "crisis-slang" by *The New York Times*. The *Times* remarked how new words had almost imperceptibly crept into popular consciousness in various European languages.[491] For instance, the debt ceiling in Germany was known as the *Schuldenbremse* – literally meaning "debt-brakes," playing on the well-known German word *Spaßbremse* – literally people who ruin your enjoyment. In Spain and Greece the new language centers on austerity measures.

A somewhat similar example of financial activity in search of a lexicon can be drawn from an earlier period in the English language. The Atlantic world witnessed the "South Sea Bubble" in 1720 where finance, deceit and fiction came together in a massive speculative misadventure.[492] Yet, there was no entry for the word "speculation" in Dr. Samuel Johnson's famous 1755 *The Dictionary of the English Language*.[493] There is one

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[490] Hazard was the name of a popular dice game in sixteenth century England and the word was associated with financial risk or loss, *Oxford English Dictionary*. It finds mention as early as the fourteenth century in Geoffrey Chaucer (1342-1400) *The Canterbury Tales*.

[491] "A Continent Mired in Crisis Coins a Language of Economic Pain," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2013.

[492] Vera Lee Brown, "The South Sea Company and Contraband Trade," *The American Historical Review* 31, no. 4 (1926): 662-678; John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (London: Cresset Press, 1960); Virginia Cowles, *The Great Swindle: The Story of the South Sea Bubble* (New York: Harper, 1960).

[493] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language in which the Words are Deduced from their Originals, Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers to which are Prefixed a History of the Language and an English Grammar*, (London: Strathern, 1755).

entry under the term "stock-jobber," which Johnson defines as a "low wretch who gets money by buying and selling shares in funds."[494] This is doubtless a character which Johnson, a foremost Shakespeare scholar of his age, would loathe associate either with the gentile merchant Antonio or with a Venetian aristocrat like Bassanio.[495] It took another hundred years after the publication of *The Dictionary of the English Language* (1886) before a British lexicographer, Samuel Maunder, a man who shared none of his namesake's posterity, would recognize speculation as a financial activity:

> the principle of monopolizing; or that kind of speculation which consists in the purchase and sale of shares in public companies, as well as "dabbling" in stocks; and a variety of *hazardous* transaction which might be named; are a different species of gambling and are often no less ruinous.[496]

Although speculation as deception and fiction emerged as early as the eighteenth-century economic writings of Daniel Defoe,[497] the history of the slow transformation of the

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[494] In an October 1753 entry in the bi-weekly magazine *The Adventurer*, no. 95, Samuel Johnson compared stock-jobbers to the usurers of Rome and the act of stock-jobbing being driven by avarice: "Avarice has worn a different form, as she actuated the usurer of Rome, and the stock-jobber of England; and idleness itself, how little soever inclined to the trouble of invention, has been forced from time to time to change its amusements, and contrive different methods of wearing out the day."

[495] Jean Christophe-Agnew's work shows how the worlds of the market, exchange and literature were deeply linked at this period (1550-1750), even though Samuel Johnson made no explicit reference to these links. *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[496] Samuel Maunder, *The Scientific and Literary Treasury* (London: Spottiswood & Co. 1866) 701. [emphasis mine].

[497] W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank eds., *The Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, Vol. VI (Finance), (Pickering and Chatto Ppublishers: London, 2000). These essays touch upon the following themes: *The Villainy of Stock-Jobbers Detected* (1701); *An Essay upon Publick Credit* (1710); *An Essay upon Loans* (1710); *The True State of the Case between the Government and the Creditors of the Navy* (1711); *Fair Payment No Spunge* (1717); *The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley* (1719); *The Chimera* (1720); *The Case of Mr. Law* (1721); *The Director* (1720-21).

motley variety of financial transactions into a lexical concept worthy of a place in the dictionary was being scripted on the far shores of the colonies and in the various trading circuits of the high seas, as much as it was being enacted in the stock-markets of London.

Gambling began to thrive in England from the seventeenth century with the spread of paper money.[498] By the latter half of the nineteenth century speculation and gambling both gained in popularity in an unprecedented manner. This popularity had been coterminous with new discourses within the discipline of economics, which was moving away from a production-centered paradigm to one of neo-classical financialization. Simultaneously, at the turn of the century, trading in securities overlapped with gambling as entertainment all across England.[499] Since the nineteenth century, Victorian literature heaped ridicule upon and weaved stories of horror and fascination around gamblers and speculators.[500] Prosaic manuals taught the tricks of futures trading and warned about the satanic operations of making money out of fictions. There were hair-splitting debates about what constituted speculation, investment, stock jobbing, fraudulent transactions, and gambling.[501]

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[498] Gerda Reith, *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999) esp. 44-87; Marc Shell, "The Issue of Representation," in *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 1999), 53-74.

[499] Urs Stäheli, *Spectacular Speculation: Thrills, the Economy and Popular Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 2 -3.

[500] Jane Austen's fragment novel *Sandition* (1817) bears mention here. Apart from that Thomas Surr, *Magic of Wealth* (1815); Catherine Gore, *Banker's Wife* (1843); Catherine Sinclair, *Sir Edward Graham; or, Railways Speculators* (1849). Novels that reflect on the colony's role in speculative financial growth are William Makepeace Thackerey, *The Newcomers* (1853-55); Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) and finally Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (1868).

[501] Anon., "Gamesters and Gaming Houses," *Westminster Review* in *The Living Age* 78, no. 1002 (1863): 305-316; Anon., "Business Gambling," *The Century: A Popular Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1884): 627-29; Anon., "A Dangerous Time," *The Outlook* 68, no. 2 (1901): 105-6; Anon., "The Investment Tortoise and the

At the turn of the twentieth century, the British colonial economy underwent a particular process of self-definition where the laws of supply and demand began to set limits on the normative legal authority of the state. This final chapter will broadly highlight this process of economic self-definition by focusing on the critical role played by urban property speculation in the early decades of the twentieth century in Calcutta. This was not peculiar to Calcutta; somewhat similar debates were raging in two other major towns of British India, namely Bombay and Rangoon.[502] During this period a variety of vernacular economic activities such as gambling, hedging, betting, speculating, and stockjobbing were spread along a fluid continuum of legality and illegality, as well as a spectrum of terminological diffuseness. This chapter argues that through the regulation of the early twentieth century crisis of urban property in colonial Calcutta speculation became an operational tool in the hands of the colonial officials to enact a legal domain of legitimate economic activity of speculation, separated from an illegitimate domain of profiteering and gambling. Studying the early-twentieth century transformation of property into "fictitious capital" provides the background for marking how the quintessential vernacular economic agent went from being a landowner to a financier.[503]

Land as a socio-cultural and economic entity underwent a great transformation during the colonial period, through land settlement in the agrarian world from 1793, resource

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Speculative Hare: Distinction between Legitimate Speculation and Stock Gambling," *World's Work* 39, no. 3 (January) 230-31.

[502] A copy of The Rangoon Rent Act of 1920 was attached to the file on Resolution Regarding the Appointment of a Committee to Enquire into the Causes of Increase in Land Value and House Rents, Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, Municipal [Municipal] Department, April 1920, Prog. 34-45, WBSA, Kolkata.

[503] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, chapter 29, 594-606 offers the concept of fictitious capital, and David Harvey applies it to property in *The Urban Experience*, 90-108.

production in the forests from 1840s, and cadastral production of propertied geography in urban space from the last decade of the nineteenth century. This chapter charts the process wherein materiality of value *in* land was slowly supplanted by the deferral of value to come *through* investments in land at the turn of the twentieth century. Land, as a valuable commodity, charted myriad paths through different regimes of values and networks of circulation morphing into new social, cultural and economic valences and financializing existing forms of sociality. While previous chapters of this dissertation focused on the process through which colonial law translated various spatial assemblages into property and how this newly created property regulated social life, this chapter focuses on the economic circuits of land as property. Accordingly, the crisis of the twentieth century also highlights how urban housing entered a new politics of exchange and valuation, thereby generating novel regimes of values and modes of "market governance."[504]

The colonial and indigenous reaction to the local housing crisis of Calcutta sheds light on the techniques of "market governance" that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century. These techniques of governance operated through regulating the fictive and imaginative staging of capital. Land profiteering in the 1920s crystallized the moment when urban property emerged quite significantly as an entity for investment and profit. As urban land increasingly became a marker of a stable asset of investment, a particular fiction of value accrued to land. Or, stated differently, land finally emerged as "fictitious capital" through the extraction of rent, through investment and through the imposition of housing and property taxes in the cities. My analysis reveals that the birth

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[504] I borrow the term market governance from Birla, *Stages of Capital*.

of property as an entity for speculation was intricately intertwined with comprehensive town-planning projects of the early twentieth century and developments in econometrics, especially those relating to quantification of the idea of "crisis," probabilistic statistics, and the mathematization of economy.[505]

The events of this chapter are located during a critical transition of the colonial economy in British India as well as a larger world of economic thought. From roughly 1870 until 1925 the discipline of economics underwent a slow transformation from political economy to neo-classical economics. The gradual late-nineteenth century diffusion of calculus and probabilistic thought, invented in the seventeenth century, especially in the works of economists like William Stanley Jevons, Léon Walrus, Francis Ysidro Edgeworth, Irving Fisher and others played a significant role in the birthing of neo-classical economics.[506] A pronounced mathematization of economics did not occur until after the Great Depression of the 1930s, although Thorstein Veblen had coined neoclassical economics as a term in 1900.[507] In this interim period between the diffusion of probabilistic calculus from 1870s onwards and the birth of neo-classical economics in the 1930s, scholars created a range of idiosyncratic algebraic structures for understanding the market and the mathematical representations of laws of supply and demand.

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[505] For a short article documenting these changes, see Philip Mirowski, "The When, the How and the Why of Mathematical Expression in the History of Economic Analysis," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 145-157; for a more detailed analysis see Benoit B. Mandelbrot, *Fractals and Scaling in Finance: Discontinuity, Concentration, Risk*, Selecta Volume E (New York: Springer, 1997).

[506] Mirowski, "The When, the How and the Why of Mathematical Expression in the History of Economic Analysis," 147-9.

[507] Tony Aspromourgos, "On the origins of the term 'neoclassical'," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 10, no. 3 (1986): 265-270.

Economists also borrowed heavily from the metaphors of equilibrium and utility, quantum physics and physical mechanics.[508]

Major players during this peculiar moment of experimentation in economics could be found at Cambridge and Oxford Universities as well as India House in London.[509] Thus the colonial economy underwent massive transformation as it provided the raw material for intellectual endeavors and experimentation. Indian economists also began to develop their own theories about the economy both in English and vernacular languages.[510] For instance, the metaphors of physics are directly imported into the bureaucratic writing on the situation of the Indian economy in 1880. Discussing the depreciation of the rupee, Scotsman Douglas Williams argued:

> For the only way to determine whether the rupee has or has not depreciated intrinsically is to take into account *all the conditions*, of which exchange is the only one, affecting the comparison of prices. The law of Galileo with reference to force,

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[508] Mirowski, "The When, the How and the Why of Mathematical Expression in the History of Economic Analysis," 155.

[509] William J. Barber, *British Economic Thought and India: 1600 -1858*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[510] Although the list is not meant to be exhaustive, a brief survey reveals how economic writing in academic and non-academic journals began to flourish in the period specifically from 1898 onwards. Apart from Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadeo Govind Ranade and Romesh Chunder Dutt who are considered pioneers of Indian economic thinking at the turn of the century, there was also a great deal of writing in both English and vernacular dailies, weeklies and monthlies which had a much wider readership. In the English language journals like the *East and West* (Bombay), *The Modern Review* (Calcutta), the *Indian Review* (Madras) and the *Hindustan Review* (Allahabad) were key journals where Indian economists regularly wrote about colonialism and its effects on the economy. Specialized economic journals were also published in Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali and Hindi. In Hindi the monthly journal *Swartha* (Economic Interest) published from Benaras, in Bengali *Byabasa O Banijya* (Trade and Industry), *Bangiya Bank-Sangha Patrika* (Journal of Bengal Bankers' Federation), *Jivan-Bima* (Life Insurance) and *Krishak* (the Peasant) were some of the journals with a wide circulation. There were also many journals publishing articles on labor issues, as well as publications by the various Chambers of Commerce. For a bibliographical account of the development of Indian economic thought in both academic and public spheres see Shib Chandra Dutt, "The Two Poles of Indian Economic Thought," *Conflicting Tendencies in Indian Economic Thought* (Calcutta: N. M. Chowdhury and Co., 1928), 5-31.

> "that the resulting movement is the equivalent of the moments concerned in it," applied equally to price, which is the result of certain conditions, and the same conditions invariably produce the same result.[511]

The bureaucratic writings about speculation on urban property in colonial Calcutta capture this moment of transformation of both the colonial economy and economic thought. Through the idiosyncratic maneuvers of statistical forms of representation, definitions of financial risk and economic crisis changed and were represented more in terms of calculable mathematical metaphors. Analyzing the contours of the debate around harnessing speculation in land will also lay the groundwork for understanding the changing premise of colonial liberalism. By the turn of the twentieth century a developmental discourse gradually overrode the civilization rhetoric of colonial liberalism.[512]

The early twentieth-century debate about land profiteering by wealthy Indians took place within the larger landscape of managing economic criminality. The colonial administration managed economic criminality by regulating practices such as gambling, speculating and hedging bets in order to discipline the colonial economic subject. Thus I challenge the notion that the land-based power of the physiocratic economic setting was transformed into a finance-based power by showing how land and urban property continued to remain an important part of the equation, although land operated differently in this financialized economic sphere.

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[511] William Douglas, "The Currency of India, With a Letter on Bi-Metalism," *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (Glasgow: James Maclehouse, 1881), 5. [emphasis in the original]

[512] Ludden, "India's Development Regime," 51-53.

Municipal and judicial documents at the turn of the century discussed the following three aspects of urban land: working-class housing, profiteering in the rent market and the potential for this activity to spark housing riots.[513] Most debates focus on the potential value of land, and how to control the scripts of that value. As a financialized entity, speculatable land in these debates is abstracted and presented as a site of legal and economic contradiction. New urban rent ceiling laws were initiated in Calcutta, Bombay and Rangoon. By analyzing the *Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the land value and rents in Calcutta 1919*, and the *Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923,* I propose that two interrelated aspects emerge in the urban rule of property. First, the document reveals that the development of probabilistic statistics gave birth to the rhetoric of the calculatability of risk which diffused into the bureaucratic space, and, second, how mathematical reasoning provided a basis for governance by calculating the future and controlling the scripts of the future. I conclude by arguing that the speculative property market in turn gave birth to an entirely new set of networks, policies and urban power-circuits. The following sections will chart how the regularization of the market economy, contract law and the rule of property all worked in tandem to produce an "unlivable Calcutta."

II. Between Native Mendacity and Colonial Economicity

While the nineteenth-century debates surrounding speculation in England charted a moral and ethical terrain, in the colony this ethical conundrum was folded into

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[513] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Increase in Land Value and House Rents, WBSA, Kolkata; *Annual Report of the Calcutta Improvement Trust, 1920*; Richards, *Improvement and Town Planning of the City of Calcutta*, 20-25 and *passim*.

questions about race. The racialization of economic discourses around speculation took place upon a shifting ground where arguments about the ethics and morality of speculation were being supplemented or replaced by questions of economicity.[514] In Calcutta's early twentieth century housing crisis, colonial officials, European merchants, as well as elite Bengali publicists, and the popular press especially targeted the north Indian Marwari population as precipitating the disaster. Marwaris were originally merchants and traders from Marwar and the various princely states of Rajputana in western India. Even though this ethnic group traces their origins back to Marwar in western India, they migrated across India from the beginning of the East India Company's rule, operating as traders, merchants, bankers, brokers and commission agents. From 1880 to 1910, they migrated in large numbers to the markets of the two major Presidency towns of Calcutta and Bombay. They often entered the market as clerks and traders and gradually succeeded in becoming financiers. In spite of the specific regional origin of the term, Marwaris in Calcutta during the early 1920s came to encompass a large group of northern and northwestern trading communities. In Calcutta they settled down in the Barrabazar (Great Market) area, which is the largest indigenous retail market in Calcutta. Describing the early Marwari settlement, translator and missionary Rev. James Long, who spent thirty-two years in Calcutta from 1840 to 1872, said: "The Burra Bazar [Barrabazar] and the Mughal part of Calcutta are quite a terra incognita to the other part, and I hope your society will pursue its inquiries into the curious social life of the Marwaris, Jews and Mughals that inhabit the far-famed Burra

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[514] Jean-Joseph Goux, "Values and Speculations: The Stock-Exchange Paradigm," *Cultural Values: Journal of the Institute of Cultural Research*, 1, no. 2 (1997): 159-77.

Bazar."[515] By the 1920s Marwaris increasingly became visible in various public debates as the spokespersons for "native commerce."[516]

Speculation, hedging and various forms of commercial practices sustained the indigenous trade networks or "native commerce" in British colonial India.[517] By the end of the nineteenth century, law and the economy had codified these practices as native commercial ethics gone awry, producing as a result unprofitable ventures. Recent scholarship on vernacular market ethics has explored a wide variety of gambling practices at the turn of the century involving critical goods of colonial trade, ranging from grains, jute, cotton and opium, and even recreational gambling on the monsoon rains.[518] The debate over indigenous speculation practices often reanimated the questions of commercial ethics of the earlier decades of the Company's trade. From the 1870s onwards, colonial officials struggled to extract the supposedly irrational cultural financial practices of the indigenous commercial classes and insert them into a rational system of exchange.[519] An economic anthropology of the native commercial communities, Birla

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[515] James Long was giving a speech to the Family Literary Club in Barrabazar in 1872. Quoted in N. N. Laha, *Subarnabanik Katha o Kriti*, vol. 3 (Kolkata: Dey's Publication, 1942), 29.

[516] Thomas Timberg, *The Marwaris: From Traders to Industrialists* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978). He points out how there were almost 15,000 Marwari traders in Calcutta at the turn of the century and approximately 525,000 Marwari traders throughout the country, see 88-89 and 114; for a study of the Marwari community of Calcutta and how they were pathologized and simultaneously admired (though to a lesser degree) for their ability to navigate the market see Anne Hardgrove, *Community and Public Culture: The Marwaris in Calcutta, c. 1897-1997* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[517] I am using the term indigenous to broadly speak about the various North Indian trading communities. Yet it must be remembered that the Marwari community was the predominant community and government documents and newspaper articles would use the term native traders and Marwaris, often interchangeably.

[518] Hardgrove, "Marwaris and Moral Economies: From Rain to Ghee," *Community and Public Culture*, 126-180.

[519] Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 197-234.

argues, organized the debate around speculation along the following lines: how trade in fictitious assets threatened the supply and demand market; how such habits encouraged an idea of the market as a dice game rather than a rational system of exchange; and, finally, risk-taking became regarded as a native disposition operating through unbridled accumulation rather than through investment and development.[520]

Indigenous trade, situated as it was within the narrow lanes of the bazaar operating along "secretive" information networks, continued to haunt the rational bureaucratic practices of the colonial administration and its municipal markets.[521] During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, colonial economic policies and financial laws criminalized various forms of native commercial practices in the Presidency towns.[522] For instance, grain trading, carried out primarily by the Marwari traders in eastern India, involved dealing in spot price and securities. Official and popular consensus progressively deemed these practices as illicit and irrational forms of commercial practice, and British financial laws criminalized them through acts to restrain what they considered "gambling." In July 1889 the Government of Bombay introduced a bill to amend the newly passed law through the *Bombay Prevention of Gambling Act of 1887*, an ordinance that primarily targeted monsoon gambling. Gambling in Calcutta soon came under the radar when Surendranath Banerjee, a prominent Swarajist [leader of Congress], demanded the curbing of rain gambling in the Marwari sections of the city

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[520] Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 144-167.

[521] Christopher Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870* (repr. 1983, New Delhi: Oxford, 1992).

[522] "Judgment of the Chief Magistrate of Bombay," Home Department, Judicial Branch, Oct 1889, Par A, no. 170—78, Prog. No. 172. NAI, Delhi.

from the Bengal Legislative Council in July 6, 1895.[523] In the following years, gambling in Calcutta became a crucial public debate and the police unearthed networks of gambling that spread to north India, especially Punjab and Agra, and swiftly went about amending laws and curbing the spread of gambling.[524]

At this historical juncture, financial risk was increasingly represented in mathematical and statistical metaphors and translated into a scientific domain of economic knowledge. The production of economy as a scientific domain of knowledge also involved a purging of a variety of commercial practices out of the domain of the economic as excess. The colonial state criminalized these practices to prevent the revenue departments from being cheated of their due shares of revenues. In the end, the colonial state also hoped to turn these reforms into a concerted effort to rid commercial practices of conniving native traders. However, as Chris Bayly has shown, "[m]any of the patterns of behaviour which seem to characterize the family firm of nineteenth-century North India can be understood as tactics to avoid risks of operating in a peculiarly hostile business climate."[525] The various practices outlined above ultimately shielded the merchants against financial failures which the colonial officials were targeting, especially by the deployment of new economic laws from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Discussing the indigenous origins of the "colonial economy," Bayly notes that, "[r]egardless of the steamboat, the agency house and the joint-stock bank, Indian

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[523] "Letter from C. W. Bolton, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Secretary of the Government of India," Home Department, Judicial Branch, March 1897, part A, nos. 31-42, NAI: New Delhi.

[524] "Rain-gambling in Calcutta, A Visit to the Gamblers," *Statesman*, October 2, 1896; *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, September 15, 1896; *Hindu Patriot*, September 22, 1896.

[525] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 394

commercial society proved almost as impenetrable to the Westerners as its Chinese counterpart, and was much more costly to come to grips with."[526] While in the early mercantile years the colonial administration coded this impenetrability as economic pilfering and commercial mendacity, by the turn of the century it developed an intricate legal system to render indigenous trade "transparent." Part of developing this transparency was drawing neat division between speculation and profiteering in urban housing – a phenomenon that remained intractable. The following investigations explore this intractability.

III. A Twentieth-Century History of Necessities

In mid 1919 W. H. Phelps, a member of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation expressed his dissatisfaction about the way the municipality was redressing the issue of housing and property speculation in colonial Calcutta. He presented his motion to the members of the Bengal Legislative Council wherein he stated in dismay and frustration that "[t]he commissioners [of the municipality] professed their inability to see the difference in principle between the purchase of a pair of boots and the renting of a house."[527] The debate traversed a contested terrain of defining legitimate need. In the Calcutta of the 1790s, shoes were precious items which might be stolen for the valuable metals (mainly silver) used for the buckles.[528] Within half a century the civilizational aspect of being booted over being barefoot slowly begun to superimpose its value over what had been

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[526] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 229

[527] Resolution Regarding the Appointment of a Committee to Enquire into the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, Municipal Miscellaneous Progs.§§ 34-45, April 1920, Kolkata: WBSA.

[528] See Chapter 3. (Maidan).

previously merely an economically precious item. Shoes entered new circuits of value, both social and cultural. For instance, as chapter 2 has already shown, in 1841 topographer Charles Joseph described the riverbanks where the East India Company merchants sighted the indigenous population and commented on the wretched "bare legs of the natives." He commented rhetorically that, if English rule is "in operation six months […] we shall see these poor creatures comfortably clothed in shoes and stockings."[529]

Through what historical contingency did the question of a pair of boots became significant in 1920 for the Bengal Legislative Council to devote a session to debating and equating it with another important municipal concern, namely that of housing? Although Phelps was unaware that he was standing at the edge of the Great Depression, his demand to discuss "common necessities of life" was perhaps not as ludicrous as it appeared at first glance. While for the Englishman a pair of shoes was considered an item of "common necessity," Phelps attempted to initiate a discussion about another key item of necessity. This item was housing for the working class population of Calcutta.

Phelps was concerned that since the First World War, house rents initially increased by 25%, followed by another 50%, followed by a 100% increase in rent in a mere *five* years. He pointed out that the value of property had increased continuously. Some members of the Legislative Council argued that the reasons for rent esclation were the increased costs of building materials and labor. However, Phelps raised doubts that the increased cost of building materials could be a significant factor, since they did not justify the "doubling of rent of houses which were erected before the war disturbed

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[529] See Chapter 2. (Ghat).

current prices."[530] Although not entirely successful in his endeavors, he wanted to introduce regulation to control the rampant housing and urban property speculation in early twentieth-century Calcutta. The Rent Act, "a purely war measure passed for the duration of the war and six months after," was introduced in England in 1915 and subsequently in India. The English Rent Act of 1915 was extended to the year 1921, even though it was supposed to be implemented only during the war years. Moreover, any dwelling houses, which the English municipal commissioners considered to be of a higher rental value, were brought under the legislative control of the English Rent Act.

Such was not the case in India. The 1919 Rent Act of Bombay charted a similar course to the British one and was extended for another two years. Phelps wanted that to be replicated in Calcutta.[531] The war slowed down building activity in Calcutta, while its population increased considerably and the armistice commercial boom, while augmenting accumulation of wealth among a certain section of the population, nonetheless made matters worse as far as housing and the rental market was concerned. The report details that, from 1909-10 to 1913-14 the Calcutta Corporation sanctioned 1,702 masonry buildings, slightly higher than those sanctioned during the war years, 1914-15 to 1918-19, which was 1,628.[532] In order to substantiate the "theory of 5 percent rise" in housing, the report furnished statistical documentation of the rise in cost of living in various

[530] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920.

[531] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 1.

[532] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 6.

Presidencies in India.[533] Let me cite a long quote to lay bare the narratological operation of the report:

> We are of the opinion that the increase in the price of all articles of ordinary consumption, or, to express it in another manner, the depreciation in the purchasing power of money, has contributed to the rise in land values and rents. The index numbers of retail food prices as given by the Director of Statistics show that there has been a marked increase in the cost of living as compared with the period before the war, and further that the termination of hostilities instead of producing a fall in the prices of articles of food was followed by a considerable further increase. The index numbers of retail food prices are quoted below:--

Port	At the end of					
	July 1914 (pre-war level)	August 1917	August 1918	September 1918	August 1919	September 1919
Bombay	100	119	148	164	197	193
Madras	100	111	128	145	174	179
Karachi	100	121	143	143	181	173
Calcutta	*100*	*119*	*124*	*131*	*151*	*154*
Rangoon	100	102	124	132	149	142*
Average (unweighted)	100	114	133	143	170	168

*Relates to December 1918

> It would be easy to advance theories of doubtful soundness in regard to this point, but when the prices of the necessaries of life are found to have increased 54 per cent in the last five years, and it is seen that people generally have to pay more for

[533] The report remains ambiguous about what it means by "theory of five percent rise." However, the report is strewn with this rent theory and acrobatic evidentiary logic is mustered to substantiate it.

> everything than formerly, the temptation to the land-owner to adjust his income to his increased cost of living is no doubt a factor in his mind when fixing rents.[534]

Phelps' perspicacious contention was that like boots, housing and urban property were rapidly becoming "fetishized" as a commodity governed by economic rules of supply and demand. Increasingly, statistical indices were producing knowledge about "living costs standards" for the first time, and it was the duty of people in administration to legislate upon those facts. Although rent was under the municipal domain, Phelps wanted more intricate economic-legal measures in place to control rent. He wanted to set up a Court of Appeals to look primarily into housing matters and an Enquiry Committee.[535] The commissioners' failure to understand that although the "economy" operated through its own set of laws, it could, nonetheless, be subjugated to the domain of judicial law, prevented Phelps from carrying out his wishes to reorder the colonial housing economy through law. According to Phelps, the market could and must be controlled by the judiciary. Thus, Phelps added in dismay:

> But the most astonishing objection was, in my opinion, that the matter of rents was entirely and very properly subject to the laws of supply and demand. The commissioners professed their inability to see the difference between the purchase of a pair of boots and the renting of a house.[536]

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[534] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 10. [emphasis mine].

[535] Although, he was not successful in 1923 the Court of Appeals to adjudicate housing issues was again brought to the table of the Legislative Council and Town hall meetings. Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, § 16.

[536] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920.

According to Phelps, such a fetishization of housing was an evil which could only be curbed through the application of regulation. Phelps demanded a refined understanding of the laws of economics, which remained, for the rest of the members, in excess and beyond the domain of the rule of law. Phelps was enterprising enough to understand that an active translation between the economic order had to be folded into the legal order, if the colonial coffers were to remain full and funded:

> The law of supply and demand became a fetish, a law which might sometimes act cruelly but must nevertheless be grovelled to with hopeless adoration. But the same people [municipal commissioners] voted for the control of the 'common necessities of life' such as coal, oil, *ghee* [clarified butter], rice and cotton-piece goods. […] I ask, my Lord, is not a house, a flat, a dwelling place of some sort a common necessity of life?"[537]

Urban property speculation was an epidemic which was spreading through the city due to the "unreasonableness developed by a few landlords."[538] Phelps was not the lone voice, although some of the members of the Bengal Legislative Committee saw larger issues at play here rather than merely unscrupulous landlords. However, Phelps was a dominant and significant voice in this debate.

Another voice of support came from the Anglo Indian merchants and tradesmen in the city. The Anglo-Indian merchants (as opposed to colonial officials) in Calcutta operated within late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century municipal affairs primarily

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[537] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920.

[538] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920.

through four interest groups: the first two being commercial organizations with interest in influencing the municipal affairs of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the Calcutta Trades Association. The other two were the Anglo-Indian Defence and the Public Health Society.[539] In its early days members of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1853, tried to separate their economic enterprise from the politics of ruling. However, these efforts soon proved futile and they became involved in local politics to protect their economic interests.[540] By the early twentieth century the non-official British community in Calcutta numbered almost twenty-three thousand.[541] With the flourishing of the jute and tea industry in the early twentieth century, these two commercial organizations became important intermediaries which the British governing bodies had to contend with.[542]

In 1920 the Anglo Indian merchant community, which controlled a significant portion of the land and housing market in central Calcutta, had decided to set up a Housing Trust which would act as a recommending agency to the government on the housing crisis in Calcutta. A tea merchant and a member of the Indian legislative council, Sir A. D. Pickford served as secretary of the Calcutta Domiciled Community Enquiry Committee and wrote to the secretary of the Government of Bengal requesting land to set

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[539] Chris Furedy, "Interest Groups and Municipal Management in Calcutta 1875-1890," *inter73.doc, York Historical Papers* (1973): 192-211, 194.

[540] Geoffrey Tyson, *The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry: 1853-1953, A Centenary Survey* (Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry & D. A. Lakin: Calcutta, 1953), 8-10.

[541] J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 43.

[542] Rudyard Kipling pointed out how the British population of India around the turn of the century were not a homogenous group but a rather stratified collection of people divided according to trade and affiliation to the Raj, "Bengal Civilians," "Government of India Men," "Men of the Firms," and the "Tradesmen." *City of Dreadful Night* (New York: 1890), 13.

up a Trust following up "a strongly worded report on the conditions of housing in Calcutta so far as this particular community [Anglo-Indian Community] [wa]s concerned."[543] He stated that he had to approach the government to acquire lands for the purposes of the Trust building since the wild speculation in land made it difficult for them to acquire land at a reasonable price. Speculation coupled with the manner in which land was owned in Calcutta in small parcels necessitated governmental intervention. In their logic, controlling speculation would be materialized on the ground (literally) as rationalization of landholding.

This request went unheeded by the government. The Secretary to the Government of Bengal pointed out the absence of any provision in the Land Acquisition Act of 1911 to acquire lands for private purposes or for the private interests of any merchants. However, perhaps in an ironic twist, he pointed out that, if the merchant community could prove its penury, then sections 394-97 of the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1917 authorized the Corporation to acquire lands and buildings for the construction of dwellings for poorer classes.[544] Before delving into the colonial debate parsing out legitimate speculation from native hoarding and profiteering, let us turn to the longer genealogy of indigenous commercial practices and how it was impacted through the critical years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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[543] Proposal for the Acquisition of Land under the Land Acquisition Act on Behalf of a Building Trust for Housing the Anglo Indian Community in Calcutta, Government of Bengal Proceedings, Municipal [Miscellaneous] Department Prog. 13-15, March 1920, WBSA, Kolkata.

[544] Reply by Mr. O'Malley, Secretary to the Government of Bengal to A. D Pickford. Proposal for the Acquisition of Land for Housing the Anglo Indian Community in Calcutta, March 1920, WBSA, Kolkata.

IV. A Long History of "Hoarding"

What we today view skeptically as an irrational act of "hoarding" has a long history of acting as a form of insurance or security against the vagaries of profit and loss in both trade and agriculture in colonial India.[545] In 1866 the British Government in India formed a Currency Committee to probe into the necessity for gold coinage in India, and found that the "demand for a gold currency [wa]s unanimous [among the natives] throughout the country."[546] The Currency Committee was not responding to the "native" demands, but rather using the introduction of the gold standard as a means of civilizing natives into proper economic subjects. Their rationale followed the particular logic illustrated in the quote below:

> If the country has hoards of gold bullion without a parallel, and is increasing them at a rate which is without a parallel, then the question of a gold coinage is not a merely theoretical one regarding the best standard of value, or a consideration of which is the most convenient kind of coin, but has also a direct practical bearing on the existing and *future* wealth and well-being of the country.[547]

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[545] Hoarding as used in nineteenth century British English and colonial writings meaning amassing wealth and storing or hiding it away from money circulation is very different from the contemporary definition of a psychological disorder as sensationalized by American reality television. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "An accumulation or collection of anything valuable hidden away or laid for preservation or future use; a stock, store, esp. of money; a treasure."

[546] Col. R. E. Ballard, "Remarks on a Gold Currency for India," *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (Bombay: Thacker, Vinning & Co. 1868), 3.

[547] Ballard, "Remarks on a Gold Currency for India," 4. [emphasis mine].

Not only do we see an argument for economicity being overridden by cultivating a particular developmental relation to the future through the economy, but as the report adds:

> We may be perfectly satisfied with silver as a good standard of value, and with the rupee as a convenient circulating medium, but we are also bound to consider whether our mint regulations are not partly to blame for the *Native habit of accumulating hoards of useless gold bullion*, and whether some means ought not to be afforded for turning portions of this reserve of wealth into money on occasions of a monetary crisis.[548]

This currency report highlights what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defined as the premise of colonial domination, which was made possible through a "successful cognitive failure." A form of "sanctioned ignorance" was employed by the British to decipher the economic practices of the Indian population.[549] This cognitive failure was undergirded by a desire to bring British utilitarian and liberal values of usefulness, wealth generation and a developmental relation to the market and to the future.

Various forms of native saving and investing practices came to be considered hoarding by the colonial officials, especially from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards. For the most part, the early European merchants understood and even adapted certain facets of vernacular commercial practices. One of them was the habit of double-

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[548] Ballard, "Remarks on a Gold Currency for India," 4. [emphasis mine]

[549] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3-32.

entry bookkeeping.[550] From 1700 onwards the vernacular mercantile community used forms of double-entry bookkeeping, made use of instruments of credits and had mechanisms for witnessing agreements. Europeans adapted many of these abovementioned forms of commercial practices to make inroads into the regional trading networks beyond the port towns of Calcutta, especially Patna, Agra, Banaras, and even further north.[551] Disputes between the indigenous and European communities arose primarily when the Company servants intervened in the patterns of exchange that were integral to religious and mercantile behavior of the native merchants.[552] By the turn of the twentieth century, the colonial government began criminalizing another form of behavior: hoarding.

As econometric calculations, statistical knowledge and the use of the "mean" or "average" seeped into bureaucratic workings of the colonial government, certain acts became the territory upon which the legitimizing process of speculation produced new economic self-definitions.[553] For instance, colonial officials increasingly began to regard

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[550] On the European history of double-entry bookkeeping which traversed a zone of household trade to forms of public knowledge production in the seventeenth century see, Mary Poovey, "Accommodating Merchants: Double-Entry Bookkeeping, Mercantile Expertise and the Effect of Accuracy," *History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 29-91.

[551] Ashin Dasgupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat c. 1700-1750* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979); Rajat Kanta Ray, "The Bazaar: Changing Structural Characteristics of the Indigenous Section of the Indian Economy before and after the Great Depression," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 25, no. 3 (1988): 263-318; Lakshmi Subramanian, "Banias and the British: Role of Indigenous Credit in the Process of Imperial Expansion in Western India in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies*, 21, no. 3 (1987): 473-510.

[552] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 239.

[553] For a conceptual history of how average became the norm see François Ewald, "Norms, Discipline and the Law" in *Representation*, 30 (Spring 1990), 138 -161; for a historical study of the bureaucratization of statistics see Ian Hacking, "Regimental Chests," *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990) esp. 106-111.

hoarding as an irrational and non-market practice rather than security and risk-insurance against future financial disasters.[554] Although European-style businesses began flourishing with the opening of the Suez Canal and were increasingly dependent on a colonial monetary credit structure, agency houses and exchange banks, they still occupied a narrow segment of the economy, even in the 1920s.[555] Thus, through the long nineteenth century trade banking for the most part depended on the success and failure of the autumn (*kharif*) crop, since repayment of loans after harvest financed agricultural trade through the busy winter months.[556] At the same time, retail and small commodity trade depended critically on the spring harvest, since a bad harvest meant declining demand for sugar, salt, drugs, cloth and liquor. The monsoon economy and ritual cycle of marriage and festivity significantly impacted trade, which was brisk during a stipulated few weeks of spring and winter.[557] According to Bayly, the probability of failure was so high that "[i]nvestments in jewellery, bullion and grain hoards provided some security against expected shortfalls."[558] He offers a north Indian anecdotal saying to elucidate the point:

> One *mahajani* [mercantile] formulae was built around the letters of the Hindi alphabet: K= *kam*, work; KH = *khana*, food; G = *garna*, to hoard (jewellery, etc); GH = *ghar*, house and so on. This was taken to mean that work produced food; then

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[554] G. Chapman, "Perception and regulation: A case study of farmers in Bihar," *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers* (July 1974): 71-93.

[555] Ray, "The Bazaar: Changing Structural Characteristics of the Indigenous Section of the Indian Economy before and after the Great Depression," 267.

[556] Whenever I am using the term long nineteenth century I am mostly speaking of a period stretching roughly from 1770 to 1870.

[557] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 394-395.

[558] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars,* 394.

> a merchant should purchase jewellery which could stand as security in time of need and a dowry for daughters, followed by a house in which to carry on a business.[559]

Countless numbers of mercantile rhymes attest to the financial activity of "hoarding" a portion of the money in jewelry as a source of investment, a common practice which would repeatedly come under the colonial scanner as irrational hoarding. However, not until the early twentieth century would a new form of hoarding make its entry into the so-called vernacular securities market, i.e. land and urban property. Expansion of modes of hoarding was just another way of diversification in an extremely unstable economic climate. What was considered "superstition," "irrational," or "ignorance" on the part of the Company agents was just another way of managing financial risk and forecasting healthy finances for the large indigenous family firms.[560] It is impossible to assess what percentage of capital was kept as reserve or "hoarded" before the 1870s. It was only from the late nineteenth century that large numbers of banker's books have been archived and retained in greater number.[561]

Birla's recent study of mercantile ethics points out that "[i]n the period from 1895 to 1914, when brute imperialism and sophisticated finance heralded a new staging of capital, criminal law directed itself at vernacular forms of hedging, [hoarding], and

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[559] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 396.

[560] For an illuminating taxonomy of six kinds of hoarding, distress hoarding; hoarding (jewelry) that performed ritual and social function; hoarding (gold and jewelry) as a form of liquid and moveable asset; hoarding to serve to collateral; hoarding (silver) as the basic reserve as part of the family's regular business; and finally hoarding (jewelry and bullion) which would reach the minting marking during the dire seasons; see Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 402-403.

[561] L. C. Jain, *Indigenous Banking in India*, (Bombay: Macmillan & Co., 1929) 99; Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 402.

speculation."[562] Predicated on distinguishing the market from the bazaar, the new laws pertaining to economic crimes sought to attack what British Parliamentarians considered "unhealthy accumulation," as well as a "broadened horizon for popular investment," which facilitated the easy and quick availability of "public commercial information" due to the development of railways and telegraphic systems.[563]

Academics and practitioners alike were engaged in assessing what was exactly "economic" about speculation. The localized housing crisis of the 1920s highlights this larger crisis of legitimation and definition within the discipline. As economists in England and France were churning out new econometric theories about the "perfect market" through the late nineteenth century they were also producing new borders among a motley variety of commercial activities. The property and housing crisis in Calcutta highlights just that: the separation of rational speculation from irrational gambling. Around this time, both the French economist Leon Walrus (1834-1910) and the governor of New York Stock Exchange William C. Van Antwerp (1867 – 1938) were writing about speculation's ability to produce the perfect market. As Urs Stäheli's work on the Anglo-American culture of speculation argues: "The stock exchange produced a fair price under 'ideal conditions' by temporally and spatially condensing communication of prices."[564] Communication of price became increasingly defined through a set of numerical values and a contractual time. Economic activities were increasingly becoming

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[562] Birla *Stages of Capital,* 144.

[563] Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 145-149.

[564] Stäheli, *Spectacular Speculation*, 20.

an objectified reality,[565] which had no space for the "extensive negotiability" of kinship practices that defined native commerce.[566] Payments of price, rent, debt etc., became time-bound. The time-boundedness of economic exchange simultaneously became legally enforced.

In this temporally regulated and legally bounded space at the turn of the twentieth century a new figure emerged, "the central figure of economic rationality – embodied in the speculators who found scope to pursue their calculated self-interest in its institutionalized economic freedom."[567] As a self-referential system without actual exchange taking place, speculation, operating contra gambling or hoarding, was supposed to not only represent the market through prices but also performatively generate it. This performative generation of the market became the turf for contesting the modes of behavior and characteristics of the economic man who was the speculator.

The property profiteering of the 1920s crystalized many disparate historical moments illuminating a convergence of various temporalities within the colonial economy. The regulated temporality of rent-deeds, leases and mortgages were ensconced within the indigenous temporalities of kinship finances within which land transected. Vernacular merchants in colonial India measured contracts in kinds and service. The vast literature on the anthropology of economic exchanges reveals that the time of the juridico-legal contract telescopes time into an instant of exchange which kinship

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[565] See Charles Taylor on the development of economy as independent from the polity and an objectified reality in western thought, "The Great Disembedding," and "The Economy as Objectified Reality," *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Raliegh: Duke University Press, 2003).

[566] Birla, *Stages of Capital*,

[567] Stäheli, *Spectacular Speculation*, 20

transaction stretches over a longer period of exchange and reciprocity.[568] Therefore the housing crisis can be read as a coming together of multiple temporalities which inserted moments of risk and ruptures in the progressive movement of colonial capital. Risk and crisis, especially economic crisis, became two productive discourses which enabled a market rationalization of governance and the production of a racial pathology of the Marwari landowners.[569]

V. Land as Fictitious Capital: "Squeezing and Profiteering"

Poet, writer and film director Premendra Mitra (1904-1988), one of the members of the *Kallol*, a writer's group affiliated with Marxist ideologies, wrote about the fickle movement of the capitalist development of the property market in early twentieth-century Calcutta. His novel *Aagamikal* (Tomorrow) captures the crisis of rising rents and urban development through a language wherein the city is emptied out of life and dissected into plots to map out the vision of the urban developers:

> The day is measured by the tapes of the engineer, the road roller, the contractor's accounts, and songs of the coolies, and under the omniscient moon, the mortified soul of the city wails.
>
> Perhaps both sides are true.

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[568] I am drawing particularly from Pierre Bourdieu observations about different natures of time when he distinguishes the dynamics of gifting from commodity exchange, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1977), 172.

[569]Janet Roitman and Achille Mbembe, "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis," *Public Culture*, 7, no. 2 winter, (1995): 323-52; see Reinhart Koselleck to explore the relation between productive nature of crisis and its relation to history, "Krise," *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Konze, and Reinhart Koselleck. Vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-97), 617-50.

> The city is becoming independent. [And], someone is counting the loss of his fruit garden, someone's farmland – the tanks and ponds filled, palm, coconut and date trees felled – the city is progressing. […]. The big businesses look bloated. Two hundred new chimneys are reaching up to the sky to blacken it.[570]

> *Diner alloy ingineerer gauj fite, roller, contractorer hishaab aar coolier gnaaiti, aar raater choturdorshi chaander alloy tar pangu atmar ei kakuti.*
> *Hoyeto dui satya.*
> *Sahar shabalak hocche. Kaar gelo faler bagaan, kaar gelo fashaler kshet, gol patar gna uthlo – pukur dighi bharat holo, taal, narkel, khejur'er matha niulo – sahar egiye choleche. [….]. saharer boro boro byaboshaiguli bujhi fnepe utheche. Dusho notun chimney uteche akasher mukhe kali makhate.*

Mitra experienced the commercial boom in the city's development as well as the burgeoning factories as a financial crisis. The developing city in his text is measured in the loss of gardens, ponds and the loss of the farmlands that surround Calcutta. In his depiction it is a technocratic space ruled over by engineers, town-planners and contractors who were "improving" the city under the aegis of the Calcutta Improvement Trust founded in 1911. This moment of loss and crisis, generated by the volatile property market, regulated certain narrative constructions around the idea of property, while at the same time obfuscating other narratives and historical possibilities. What does naming this

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[570] Premdendra Mitra, *Agamikal* from *Premendramitra Rachanabali*, Vol. 1 (Kolkata: Granthalay Pvt. Ltd, 1976), 225. [translation mine].

moment in Calcutta as an impending economic "crisis" signify?[571] Did calling the volatile land market a "crisis" mark the limits of intelligibility, or could it be a moment of transition? Was this an interruption in the economic flow or dynamism? Or is it just a failure of vocabulary, or a convergence of all these aspects?

In order to answer these questions let us turn to the 1857 Crown takeover of East India Company rule in India, which was lacerated with economic crisis. The British Parliament debated the "financial embarrassment" of the Raj; to control the financial crisis they unleashed a whole host of economic laws upon the new empire. The Indian Income Tax Act of 1886 for the first time consolidated the non-agricultural sector within a new fiscal arrangement. The towns, cities and their resources, businesses and properties had to generate revenue for the colonial state. The bloated military expenses due to the 1885 frontier policies of the Indian government [the Afghan Wars], the ill-executed public-works ventures throughout India, the famines through the 1870s and the depreciation of silver beginning in the early 1870s provided the immediate background for the Indian Income Tax laws.[572] However, it was primarily the depreciation of silver that riddled the finances of the government. Nevertheless, scholars have elaborated that initially the decline in the exchange rate had helped the agricultural revenues in the world market around the 1870s when famines began to gradually decimate the Indian

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[571] For a stimulating reading of the narrative of crisis within the economic context see, Janet Roitman, "Crisis" in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, http://www.politicalconcepts.org/issue1/crisis/

[572] John Dacosta, *The financial situation in India, as exposed in the budget statement for 1886-87*. London: P.S. King and Son, Parliamentary Agency, 1887, India Office Records, British Library, London. This pamphlet critiques the frontier policy in the climate of depreciation of silver beginning in the period of 1870s.

Territory.[573] John D'Acosta lamented to the British Parliament about the financial situation of India in 1887:

> The fact that India, whose currency and revenue are in silver, has incurred heavy obligations in gold, has introduced in our financial situation, since the fall of silver commenced, an element which experience shows to be one of the most serious dangers with which Indian administration has been hitherto menaced. This difficulty has lately reached a point beyond all previous experience, and it is more felt in proportion as we pursue a more active policy in regard to public works such as military and other considerations have lately led us to adopt. Owing to the oscillation in the silver market, there is now little practical control over surplus, equilibrium or deficit in the Indian Budget. This uncertainty throws doubt and discredit on our financial position and on the sufficiency of our resources, and must tend, therefore, to depreciate our credit in the money market. Neither we nor anyone else can feel any assurance of any kind whatever that the rupee will remain at one shilling; and sixpence, the rate at which the estimates are framed for the ensuing year. Some of the causes which maintain silver at its present price may be removed; should any of these causes cease to act, the downward progress of silver prices will probably, for a time at least, be more considerable than hitherto. Hence, there is too much ground for believing that the more hopeful views which may have been entertained from the seeming recoveries of 1880 and 1882, and which still linger in many minds, have now no reasonable basis.[574]

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[573] Radhabinod Pal and Balai Lal Pal, *The Law of Income Tax in British India: Being Act XI of 1922 as Amended by Act VII of 1939. With Explanatory Notes and Commentaries* (Calcutta: Eastern Law House, 1940).

[574] "Financial Statement of the India Government 1885" quoted in Dacosta, *The Financial Situation in*

For the first time the colonial government faced the crisis of the financialization of capital and the intricate network and workings of the "virtual and embodied states" of capital.[575] The late-nineteenth century saw a major reconstitution of the fiscal aspect of colonial rule. Since 1857, the gradual process of the legal codification of the British colony of India was well underway, as numerous scholars noted.[576] An *Act for imposing Duties on Profits arising from Property, Profession, Trades, Office*, Act XXXII of 1860 transformed urban property into a taxable entity.[577] Birla argues that "the foundational statutes of the 1880s […] confirmed a century-long shift from a physiocratic model of political economy focused on land as a source of revenue and wealth, to the taxation of income and investments."[578] Land does not disappear from the equation, but instead enters the debate differently.

The British Empire followed a two-pronged fiscal policy: lowering or abolishing of customs duties to maximize free trade that characterized colonial liberalism in this period and the expansion of the fiscal system beyond agricultural or productive land. In 1893, the free minting of rupees stopped, and instead the currency in India became a gold-standard exchange instead of silver. The Revenue Department hoped that this would

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India, 1886-87, p. 21-22.

[575] Mary Poovey, *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 2

[576] Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Criminal Justice in Colonial India* (Oxford University Press: Delhi, 2000); David Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India."

[577] "Act for imposing Duties on Profits arising from Property, Profession, Trades, Office, Act XXXII of 1860," 19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers, Vol. XLIII.201, March 7, 1861 (British Library: London).

[578] Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 36.

standardize the Indian economy with the world as well as bring "hoarded gold" into capitalist circuits of *productive* exchange. The following phrase beautifully captures the reason for this change: "To gather up the silver reserve of bullion is like gleaning ears of wheat in a field, but a large portion of the gold reserve is stacked ready for the threshing-floor."[579] This had significant repercussions on the British economy and its colonies, especially the trading ports as the rupee was devalued against the sterling pound during the war years.[580] This further aggravated an already over-taxed urban population especially in the port and trading cities in British India.

The economic restructuring affected a gradual financialization of the urban geography and land market. There was a boom in town-planning projects during the period preceding the formation of the 1919 Rent Committee in colonial Calcutta. C. H. Bompas, the then municipal commissioner, fought to establish the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) in 1911. He assumed the presidency of the CIT and invited Scottish town-planner E. P. Richards to prepare the first comprehensive town planning report of Calcutta, which he submitted in 1914.[581] With Richards, who was trained as a town engineer, town planning had moved from being an epidemiological affair with its roots in moral Christianity and sanitation to a technocratic affair. The spatial changes that took place in Calcutta following the foundation of the CIT and its accelerated public works

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[579] Ballard, "Remarks on a Gold Currency for India," 8.

[580] A. R. Burns, "The Indian Currency Report of December, 1919-and after," *Economica*, No. 3 (Oct., 1921): 269-282, 270-71; for a detailed discussion about how rising price in silver, and controlling of the exchange rate affected the devaluation of rupee and impacted global capital flows at the turn of the century see Gopalan Balachandran, "Britain's Liquidity Crisis and India, 1919-20," *Economic History Review* 46, no. 3, (August 1993): 575-591 and "Power and Markets in Global Finance: The Gold Standard, 1890-1926," *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 3 (2008): 313-335.

[581] Richards*, Report on the Improvement and Town Planning of the City of Calcutta*.

funded through violent processes of land acquisition is captured in the quote above by Mitra. As urban historian Partho Datta writes, "The bureaucrats, engineers, town planners, architects and itinerant intellectuals who advised the Trust were entirely British; expertise and ignorance, both formed part of their intellectual baggage."[582] The two schemes that the CIT undertook were the "General Improvement Scheme" and the "Street Scheme."[583] The Street Scheme fostered major land acquisition. To enable these land acquisitions the CIT passed the Calcutta Improvement Act 1911 to establish a special Land Acquisition Collector (Valuer).[584] From the perspective of the municipal officials, traders, administrators and town planners, the congestion of Calcutta was a problem that that they could only bring under control through effective road and transport planning. According to the planners and municipal officers, a proper and affordable communication system would enable the working-class population to move out of the city and thereby clear the city of slums.

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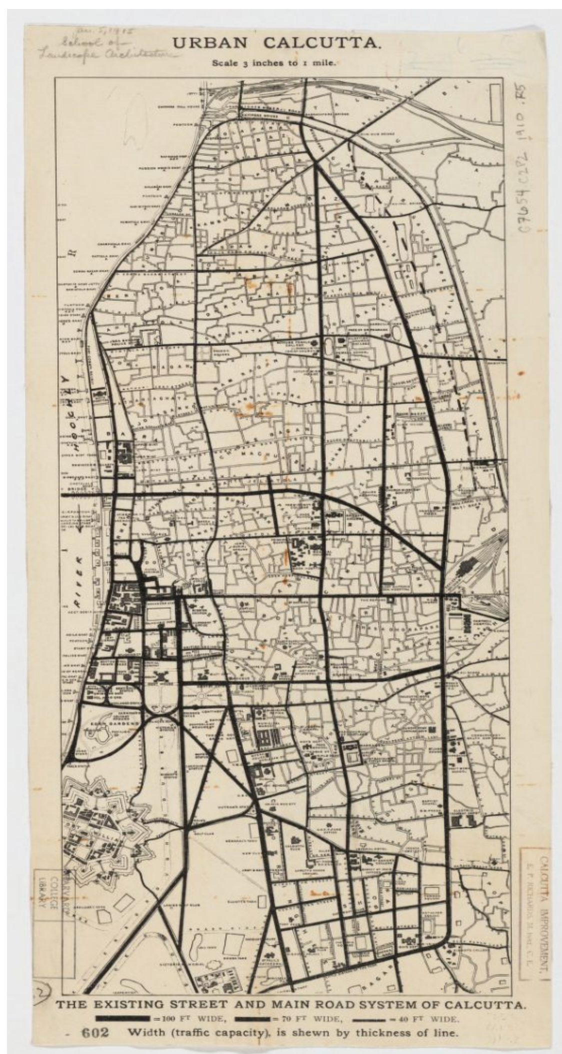
[582] Datta, *Planning the City*, 201-2

[583] C. H. Bompas, "The Work of the Calcutta Improvement Trust," *Journal of Royal Society of Arts*, 75, no. 7 (1927): 199-219, 201

[584] *The Calcutta Improvement Act, 1911 of Bengal Act V 1911*, (Kolkata: Town Hall Archive).The board of trustees of the CIT were granted executive powers to acquire land though the 1894 Land Acquisition Act *Calcutta Improvement Act, 1911*, Chap IV, Sections 68-81, 346-60.



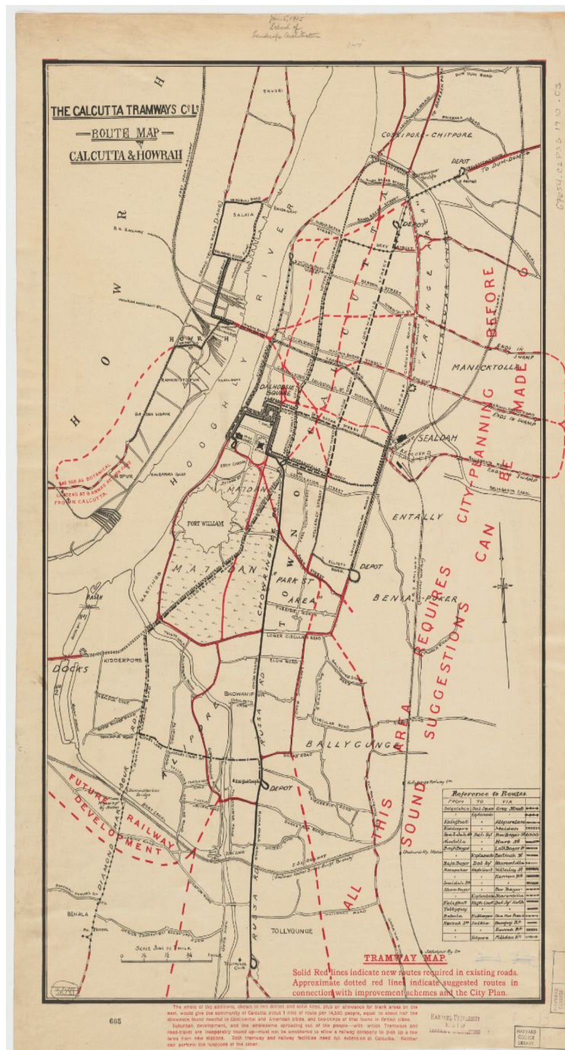


Figure 15: E. P. Richards*, The Existing Street and Main Road System of Calcutta,* (Calcutta: Calcutta Improvement Trust 1910) [British Library, London].

Figure 16: Route Map: Calcutta and Howrah (Calcutta Tramways and Company Co., 1910) Courtesy of Harvard Map Collection, Cambridge MA

The extensive town planning and land acquisition projects undertaken by the CIT can be witnessed in the two maps above. The black line on fig. 15 and the red lines on fig. 16 shows the extent of street development and broadening schemes undertaken by the CIT.

Soon thereafter, the Calcutta Corporation established the 1919 Rent and Land Commission "with the sole purpose of investigating the sudden abnormal rise in property rent."[585] Rents in Calcutta experienced a mercurial rise, as heightened public works and infrastructural expansion of the city meant extensive land acquisition. This was further compounded by the imposition of taxes on urban property. Focusing on the twentieth century does not mean that the problem of the exorbitant cost of housing was not an issue in the earlier centuries. Throughout the nineteenth century, the lower orders of servicemen of the East India Company found Calcutta's property market forbidding.[586] However, such a crisis did not precipitate a Rent Control Commission until 1919.

The Rent Control Committee was confounded by a "curious tendency," as they noted: "[t]he desire to invest in landed property has also an accumulative effect; the contagion spreads, and instead of the high prices being limited to property [*sic*], which is capable of increasing very greatly in value in the near future, speculative prices are being paid for *any property* coming on the market irrespective of its possibilities."[587] The case of Calcutta was not singular in this regard. Rangoon's Land Ceiling Act enacted around the same time became the template for understanding urban property issues in Calcutta.

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[585] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 1.

[586] Chattopadhyay, "The Limits of the "White" Town," *Representing Calcutta*.

[587] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 4.

Moreover, the riots in the working-class neighborhoods in Bombay a year earlier were only a reminder of the mismanagement of the property regime by the colonial government.[588]

The Rent committee argued that the rise in rent was so steady that it warranted "the theory [*sic*] of a five-percent annual increase." Although the Report does not reveal how it arrived at the specific equation, or what it called "theory," it explained that a five percent steady rise in rent signaled a city growing in "wealth and in health" in terms of econometric calculations.[589] Although, there is no clue as to where and how they arrive at this definition, elsewhere in the report they show that rents in Calcutta quadrupled in the previous four years, from 1915 to 1919. The municipal commissioners, Phelps and his team used statistical data gathered from Rangoon, Madras and Bombay as well as cities in England to mathematically represent growing rent, thereby establishing the rhetoric of a "quantum" of panic. From its inception in the late eighteenth century, statistics, however flawed the discipline may have been, was put to the service of measuring ethical values and emotional indices. For instance one of the earliest works on statistics and governance entitled *Statistical Account of Scotland* (composed between 1791-99) illuminates how beyond the services of governance and revenue generation, John Sinclair wished to map the "quantum of happiness" in the various parishes he surveyed.[590] In spite

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[588] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920; Speech by the Hon'ble Surendra Nath Banerjea introducing the Bill to amend the Calcutta Municipal Act, 1925 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1926).

[589] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 3. As I pointed out earlier they never defined this theory.

[590] Sir John Sinclair, "Address to the Reader," in *Statistical Account of Scotland*, Vol. 1, ed. Donald J. Withrington and Ian R. Grant, (Edinburgh: EP Publishing, 1983),15.

of the controversies that raged in England about the epistemological status of statistics,[591] statistics as a mode of governance had gained ground by the end of the nineteenth century. The colonial Government for its part had gradually moved from ethnographic reports to a statistical representation of the colony.[592]

The 1919 Report applied statistical knowledge to arrive at the *fact* of "profiteering" and financial "risk." The report displays a symptom of the larger tendency to view numerical representations as incontrovertible facts that would manage risk. Colonial market governance was increasingly using this management of risk as *the* template of governance. The 1919 Report adapted the earlier epidemiological tropes of urban governance as crisis management to the new fascination with the number-crunching rationality of econometrics. After citing the malarious hinterland and the absence of arterial roads connecting the city to the cheaper lands of the suburbs as reasons for the rising rent, the 1919 Report stated the following:

> The innate unwillingness of certain classes of the population to leave the area, in which their ancestors have lived for generations, and the immobility of certain classes of the population, while perhaps not major factors affecting the whole city, have undoubtedly contributed to high prices for landed property and high rents in the northern sections.[593]

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[591] Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, 308-325.

[592] For examples look at the decennial compilation from 1863, "Statistical Abstract Relating to British India, 1863-1872," 19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers, LXIX.219, 1873; An interesting example is "Statistical Memoir of the Neilgherry Mountain to Select Committee on Colonization and Settlement in India 1858," 19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers, XLIII.403, 1861.

[593] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 3.

The ideological premise of the Report partook in both cultures of epidemiology and a language of colonial difference, bolstered through deductive reasoning: econometrics in the service of colonial racism! The 1919 Report stated that "certain North India commercial groups [Marwaris] were directly responsible for controlling and abetting the rise of rent, since this section amassed a large amount of wealth from the war years leading up to the later half of 1919. The Anglo-Indian community, "the investors and developers of land," who controlled much of the supply and demand of the rent market of central Calcutta was losing its grip upon this market for the first time to the "Marwari commercial classes of Burrabazar [increasingly controlled by the Marwari population]."[594] The housing crisis thus illuminates how novel economic theories about speculation and risk trickled down to produce racialized bureaucratic knowledge about indigenous economic actors and their activities in the colony.

There was a noticeable commercial boom in the city during 1917-1919 due to the relocation of some major European businesses to the east. As a result, the market price of land went up for the period when Anglo-Indian landowners were indulging in speculative buying and selling of urban land. The municipal officials, following the symptoms of the market in urban land, pointed out that the lessons learned through calculated speculation could dovetail into market rationalization, and the so-called speculative buyer could enter the market as a seller:

> Past history has proved that prices paid for land in Calcutta, which at the time were considered to be of a speculative character, have soon been overtaken by the market,

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[594] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, §11.

> and the so-called speculative buyer within a comparatively short period of years has been able to sell at a profit. This historical fact is well known to the persons who are now paying what appear to be high speculative prices; and this, combined with the large amount of free money and the indications of a commercial boom in Calcutta, has no doubt led to the payment of very high prices.[595]

Acts of speculation routinized contingency and therefore anticipated market fluctuation. Many economists argued for the legitimization of speculation on the premise that it produced the market through what they called a "fair price." Acts of hoarding, profiteering or even gambling, on the other hand, dispensed with the sale or negotiation of any form of goods or services. As Max Weber argued, the speculator wanted to produce a difference in value and exploit it.[596] At the turn of the century it became clear, as Stäheli shows, that "*natural* prices did not exist; they had to be produced. The determination of prices on the exchange improved not through lengthy negotiations or struggle over the correct price, but instead because price became a reliable economic information."[597] Speculation therefore made the vicissitudes of the market a knowable entity. So a rational speculator was supposed to build upon prior lessons to enter the market with reliable economic information, and not flow with the vagaries of chance.

As the quote above suggests, according to the Rent Report of 1919, the "particular lesson of the past history" unfortunately proved disastrous for the urban market, as

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[595] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 3.

[596] Max Weber, "Stock and Commodity Exchanges," translated by Steven Lestition, *Theory and Society* 29, no. 3 (2000 [1894]): 305-338

[597] Stäheli, *Spectacular Speculation,* 46.

"certain commercial classes" were now holding onto the land bought at higher prices and refusing to sell it even when profit would accrue.[598] The colonial officials failed to understand the indigenous commercial classes as future speculators turned market agents. Rather, colonial officials like Phelps regarded their economically irrational and fatalistic attitude to the market as a symptom of a larger incapability on the part of the native inhabitants to see the future in terms of economic development. For the British officials contingency, unlike rational exchange, played a dominant role in commercial transactions undertaken by the indigenous population.

As the later Land Development Report from 1923 accused, often the landowner refused to sell the land not because they could not get higher prices, but because of their purported inability to make *sound* decisions, which stemmed from "absence of sound ideas of land finance."[599] The Land Development Report of 1923 pointed out that the moot problem was the disproportionately exorbitant cost of land vs. building material in Calcutta compared to London or other cities of England. The cost of land in housing schemes in England between the years 1919 and 1922 averaged out to Rs. 50 per kottha (approx. 720 sq. ft.), "*that is less than a tenth of Calcutta land values in the outer residential areas.*"[600] The report translated this statistically tabulated deduction into a racial pathology for holding onto land. This pathology was presented through the following analysis offered by the report:

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[598] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 3.

[599] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, §15.

[600] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, §6. [emphasis original]

> The Committee have examined the reasons for the high cost of land and analyse them as follows:-
>
> a) The great demand for land ownership.
>
> b) Unwillingness to sell at less than a rate in the owner's mind. He prefers to wait until he "gets his price."
>
> c) Complete absence of any conception of loss of economic interest on capital invested in land.
>
> d) Satisfaction for the great body of landholders with a low rate of interest (on their idea of capital value) in the form of rent.
>
> e) The attractiveness of landholding as a form of investment for safety.
>
> f) The opportunity that landholding gives for gradual investment by way of building development. *Building is almost a national recreation in Bengal*.
>
> g) The desire to provide housing for descendants.
>
> h) The tendency of the Indian family system to keep relatives in one locality and so produce inter-acting pressure.[601]

Economic maneuvering conducted in a rational manner produced a "fair price," but the economic ethnography conducted by the colonial officials produced native relations to investing in land within a cultural space of ignorance. As far as the colonial officials were

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[601] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, § 6.

concerned, this was not efficient maneuvering of the market based upon deliberate price calculation. Rather, echoing the earlier set of concerns about gambling, colonial officials saw it simply as a desire for "fast and furious accumulation" by an ill-educated native population.[602]

It was the eruption of the "popular" into the economic that created an anxiety around property speculation. The question of economicity was debated in terms of efficient and inefficient financial behaviors as well as proper knowledge versus popular thirst for easy money. This was not specific to Calcutta, but rather, whenever democratic participation within the economy became a reality, through ticker machines, or easy availability to stocks and bonds, a similar crisis followed: be it in Germany, France, England or the United States of America. For instance at the turn of the century, when stock speculation was on the rise, through the easy access to ticker machines, the dominant fear was that anyone with enough money could speculate. The fear stemmed from the fact that people without any training in finance and economy were slowing down the market through their inefficiency. Weber, in his famous study on economy and society, laments the same when he says:

> The widening of the market through bringing in the public, as it is made easier by futures trading, is drawing persons into commerce on the exchange – and this is beyond all doubt – who in fact must dispense with any professional knowledge of the exchange, as well as with any impulse to feel themselves *responsible* for financial

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[602] Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 144.

> gains and losses – whereby they would *independently* verify the proceedings that take place on the exchange.[603]

An intimate knowledge of the economy and training in such matters would produce a market and fair price. Speculation was a professional activity while gambling was illogical mimicry without professional knowledge or understanding of exchange. Weber adds that, "[the] whole horde of small speculators are armed with practically nothing beyond good lungs, a little notebook, and a pencil."[604] To qualify as a speculator, one's financial activity has to be based on sound economic knowledge, which the indigenous landowners of Calcutta were purported to lack. Without necessary knowledge, one would just be chasing "small differences in prices," in order to acquire the "kind of wealth he does not possess. […] Whatever might fall to him as earnings, the national economy also pays, in wholly unnecessary fashion, to a superfluous parasite."[605]

The 1923 Report suggested a remedy and that was "to educate the Calcutta [indigenous] public in the elements of land finance."[606] Thus speculation could only be condoned when it served the national economy, and the threat of speculation lay in its potential to be popular and inclusive, as well as have an element of play and entertainment built into it.[607] The language of epidemiology had a particular currency

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[603] Max Weber, "Commerce on the Stock and Commodity Exchanges," translated by Steven Lestition, *Theory and Society*, 29, no. 3 (2000 [1894]): 339-371, 363.

[604] Weber, "Commerce on the Stock and Commodity Exchanges," 367.

[605] Weber, "Commerce Stock and Commodity Exchanges," 333.

[606] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, § 24.

[607] Stäheli, *Spectacular Speculation*, 33-48.

within the financial market to speak about small and unqualified speculators at the turn of the century, especially when financial markets were trying to produce their boundaries within the larger backdrop of market deregulation.[608] In order to keep the legal tentacles at bay, the market had to develop the rhetoric of its own economic efficiency and rationality by purging the market of its excess.[609] In the colony, the bazaar and the native commercial classes were the excess.

By the early twentieth century the vernacular capitalists, the Marwaris, had become so vilified as agents of economic maneuvering through extra-economic means that when riots broke out during the later half of the 1920s, the rioters, comprised primarily of the angry working-class population, attacked the residences and businesses of the commercial classes of Barrabazar. According to colonial officials indigenous commercial classes failed as proper economic agents since they did not propel their land in the path of commoditization, but instead profit from land was accrued through the various non-commoditized diversions their land and housing market took. However, it was the crisscrossing of the paths and diversion that created an unprecedented value in land, which the Anlgo-Indian merchants equally exploited.[610]

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[608] Weber talks about "gambling epidemic" in his study of the essence of Stock speculation in "Börsenwesen: Die Vorschläge der Börsenenquetekommission," *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, 1 Vol. 5.2 eds. Horst Baier, M. Rainer Lepius, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Wolfgang Schluchter, and Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: Mohr), 558-90.

[609] Governor of New York Stock Exchange, William C. Van Antwerp, shows how the criteria for speculation was to be regulated not by laws or exclusive club-like organizations, rather "access to exchange should be purely regulated by money and creditworthiness, that is, by purely economic criteria." Van Antwerp, *The Stock Exchange from Within* (New York: Doubleday Page & Co., 1914), 60; see also Richard Lewinsohn and Franz Pick who speak about money being the sole regulator, *Der Sinn und Unsinn der Börse* (Berling: Fisher, 1933), 27.

[610] The relation between path and diversion in the politics of creating value in commodity flows has been theorized by N. D. Munn, "Gawan Kula: Spatiotemporal Control and the Symbolism of Influence," *The*

Before closing the discussion on the printed Report from 1919, let us turn to its marginalia, a small voice that disrupts the confident narrative of the Report. The marginalia attached as addendum at the end points out that one of the major hurdles the committee faced in preparing the report was their inability to arrive at a satisfactory definition of the word "profiteering." Therefore, they stopped short of accusing landowners of profiteering by stating that:

> We may point out that under the provision of the existing law in India, increment in land value is the property of the land-owners. At the same time we would add that while unable to express an opinion on this question, many instances have been brought to our notice in which the existing dearth of accommodation has been used as a means of "squeezing" tenants unduly.[611]

The 1919 Report fails to either coin a concept or develop a full-fledged definition of profiteering to bolster their numerical representation of the phenomenon. Indeed, they deduced their definition about "profiteering" or "squeezing" from an extremely narrow sample size; out of the 367 surveys they distributed, they only received 46 written (13 public bodies and 33 private persons) and 10 oral responses. Calcutta's population at that time was over 1.5 million. The members of the rent committee were unable to develop a lexical understanding of the rise in property prices and instead generated a narrative of "squeezing."

Kula: New Perspectives on Massim Exchange, eds. J.W. Leach and E. Leach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 277- 308; Arjun Appadurai, *Future as a cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*, (New York: Verso, 2013), see esp. chapter 1.

[611] Resolution Regarding the Causes of Excessive Land Values and High Rents in Calcutta, April 1920, § 7.

However, it seems the narrative of "squeezing" had another facet. Although, tucked away at the end of the report, this other facet reveals something else about the operations of the colonial government in Calcutta. In a memo submitted with the file, Phelps, one of the leading members of the Committee, complained that the issues he raised and the reason for which he facilitated the establishment of the committee went completely unheeded. What were these unheeded issues? Phelps introduces them subtly: the first was the issue of how rising rents and illegal extortion of rent were cornering the working-class population of the city. In a final sentence, as if to have the last word on the matter, Phelps pulled out a trump card that he knew would convince the committee of the urgency of the matter. He added that the [successful] entry of indigenous commercial classes into this rent market was *cheating* the municipality of its share of dues. The desire for controlling the rent market and the municipality receiving its daily bread was masqueraded by Phelps as a desire to protect tenants from being—in their words—"squeezed."

VI. Conclusion: Fatalistic Future Vs. Developmental Futures

The dominant meanings of terms like speculation and the neat distinctions between acts of speculation, gambling and investing tell us far less about what these acts constitute than the fissures where the governing distinctions between these terms appear contingent. In the opening epigraph, Bassanio in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* tampers with the temporality of value in his request to Antonio. Bassanio's request follows the logic of the futures trade, where the promise of the delivery of goods does not

have to be sealed with the materiality of the actual delivery.[612] In the case of land speculation, a similar virtual futurity was being written into property-based speculative transactions. At the same time, property speculation troubled the dividing line between those who, in the eyes of the colonial power, were considered to be investor/developers and those who were considered to be gamblers, or in this case profiteers.

As an instance of land speculation, the 1920s housing crisis disrupted the neat division between legitimate speculation and illegitimate profiteering and hoarding. The so-called "pre-modern" desire to hold onto ancestral property was coterminous with the hyper-modern moment when urban property emerged, in Harvey's words, as "fictitious capital," signaling the collapsed temporality in land which did not translate into a developmental teleology of a progressive space. Indigenous commerce in land was easily delegitimized as the pathological intractability of the native and either relegated to the sphere of the private and taken out of commercial circuits or criminalized. Speculation, on the other hand, was to operate with risks in order—paradoxically enough—to reduce instability and serve a larger economic function. Therefore the work of speculation was to undo itself and act as a supplement to the market.[613] Weber describes the act of exchange and speculation in the following words:

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[612] Futures trade, especially in Jute was rampant in the early 1900s and was referred to as the *fatka* or *satta* market. By 1912 it was thoroughly grouped together with gambling and increasingly criminalized. Omkar Goswami, *Industry, Trade and Peasant Society: The Jute Economy of Eastern India, 1900-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 85-6.

[613] Stäheli, *Spectacular Speculation*, 51-54.

> [O]n the exchanges, a deal is struck over a set of goods that are not present and often "in transit" somewhere, or often yet-to-be produced; and it takes place between a buyer who usually does not himself wish to "own" those goods (in any regular fashion) but who wishes – if possible before he received them and pays for them – to pass them along for a profit, and a seller, who usually does not yet have those goods, usually has not produced them, but wishes to furnish them for some earnings of his own.[614]

Land enters the equation of speculation with its own peculiarities. Land as fictitious capital continues to pose a contradiction since, even as a financial abstraction, it does not unfetter itself from its earlier social power nodes. This is because, even apparently, land speculation cannot be based on pure mathematics and probabilistic calculations.

Risk and indeterminacy in value continue to haunt landed urban property. The debates around profiteering express an anxiety about the ability to calculate risk, which in turn was further problematized by the municipal officials' inability to control the indeterminacy of fluctuating value. Through the land profiteering debate financial risk in the colony became one of the dominant lenses through which to understand the market, and gradually laid the groundwork for particular kind of market governance through town planning. The Rent Control Commissions performed two tasks: they attempted to manage future contingencies in land and, through that management, they also attempted to channel the surplus value generated in land back into the colonial coffers.

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[614] Weber, "Stock and Commodity Exchanges," 309-10.

Controlling the manner in which the future was scripted became a central concern for the developmental colonial state of the early 20th century.[615] The indigenous speculative future encouraged a fatalistic relation to the market. For instance, the Governor of the New York Stock Exchange, Van Antwerp, writing in 1914, argued that market prices represented a democracy of shared knowledge that contributed to the larger economy by generating the price and value not for the present, but for the future: "[F]inanciers everywhere have in mind prospective values rather than present value, and so he acquires a double advantage in regulating his own action by the light of the superior knowledge thus freely given him."[616] In this manner, speculation folded in the probable future by adjusting the present price, and this development was coterminous with probabilistic statistics.[617] The Rent Control Commission worked precisely by controlling the text of the future and produced the script for that text as economic development.

Before a lexical understanding of speculation emerged, the aristocrat Bassanio could afford to thrive on his fatalism. But the predictability of the financial future by the early 20th century demanded that any equation of value be managed in a rational order. The economic subject in the colony shifted from the landowner to the speculator or financier. The housing crisis illuminates how proper speculation emerged as a supplement to the economy and perfected the market, by disciplining and if possible

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[615] David Ludden, "Development Regimes in South Asia: History and the Development Conundrum," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 no. 37 (10 Sept., 2006): 4042-51.

[616] Antwerp, *The Stock Exchange from Within*, 23.

[617] Hacking, "The Autonomy of Statistical Law," *The Taming of Chance,* 180-88; Stäheli, *Spectacular Speculation*, 49-50.

banishing land profiteers and land owners who refused to sell their land "even though profit would accrue."

Conclusion: "Fictitious" Possessions

This dissertation has studied the creation of a market in urban land as a central project of colonial urbanism in Calcutta through the long nineteenth century. By studying this particular history, I have charted the birth of a specific legal notion of property bolstered by an economic narrative of use and utility. In mapping this history, I have addressed the gap between the *necessary* and *possible* juridico-economic definitions of property. I have highlighted how the highly volatile and fluid landscape of the lower-Ganga-Delta basin was materially and ideologically fortified and reproduced as propertied geography through maps and notarial paper during this period. In and through the creation of a propertied geography, a water-land conglomerate, often understood by colonial officials and Bengali elites alike as non-revenue generating wasteland, metamorphosed into capital that circulated in and out of a vibrant market in urban property.

Unstable ecological spaces, sometimes without legal denomination (often known as *benami* land, i.e. without name), fissured the archive of land records by challenging the categorical and organizational definitions of land, landlord and property. Moreover, supposedly inscrutable indigenous land titles complicated any uniform understanding of urban property since the authority of government papers did not always back urban land holding in the early nineteenth century. However, as the era progressed and mapping practices became entrenched as a result of epidemiological concerns, fire hazards and the establishment of colonial order, the East India Company's seal and paper became the regulative marker in consolidating urban property relations. By the mid-nineteenth century any plot of land without the backing of paper authority was rendered into a

fictitious—and hence illegitimate—form of occupancy. The chapters have not simply described how a fluid landscape entered market circulation as property, but rather focused on moments when the translation from *waste* to *value* failed or was reversed. Any unitary narrative of the modernity of urban property relations is clearly bizzare.

By analyzing the contradictory impetuses governing early twentieth-century property speculation, this dissertation has demonstrated the impossibility of disembedding the extra-legal, extra-economic and non-modern aspects of what we commonly understand as modern property relations. Historiographical literature has debated and documented how the metaphorics of value in land-as-property underwent a massive change during the colonial encounter. The late eighteenth-century agricultural land settlement borrowed from Mughal land tenure, British common law and French physiocrats, attesting to the fact that questions of property rights became inseparable from the idea of sovereignty. However, these studies have taken the concept of property – landed or personal – as a given. In contrast, this dissertation has attempted to also dwell on the question of what we understand by the term property and specifically urban property in colonial Calcutta. It has asked when and through what processes did discrete natural elements like swamps, bogs, mud and shoals become property? Or, what forms of ownership practices were considered modern property relations, and what was considered arcane superstition or culturally backward economic behaviors?

This dissertation has disaggregated any unitary notion of urban property to reveal the multiple relational possibilities that remain hidden and bracketed out beyond the paper, the map or the fence that defines what we commonly understand as property. However, these excluded aspects linger on often as either illegality or fictionalized forms

of occupancy. By exploring the multiple ways of dwelling and possessing spaces I have chipped away at the hard edges and certitudes about the notion of property by offering a brief glimpse into the variety of rich life-worlds of human relations to spaces within the city. In the process, I have focused on spaces that either lie beyond the purview of law, or are present within the legal domain as forms of recalcitrance.

In the process of narrating this history, fiction emerged as an important concept and has operated in multiple ways.[618] Within the legal domain, fiction operated contrary to fact, and a fact/fiction continuum established legitimate authority. At the same time, legal fictions sustained colonial rule of law in urban property and forged land acquisition policies. Within the economic domain fiction operated, in Poovey's words, through the "creation of a stable, self-evident distinction between the categories we call *fact* and *fiction*."[619] The marshy lands of Calcutta entered into a capitalist network of modern property relations circuitously via various *fictions* of deferred "value." A purely economistic value accrued in land as it became a financial asset and an entity for investment through the late nineteenth century. Through a gradual process of financialization, property became speculative capital backed by the authority of a bureaucratic paper regime of surveys, maps and title deeds. Speculation was and continues to be made possible through a believable fictional value in the future.

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[618] For a general understanding of the term please see, Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 111-113.

[619] See Mary Poovey, *Genres of Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 77.

A whole range of historical moments coalesced and splintered apart between the moment when the occupancy of a particular plot of land was rendered *fictitious* (used as contrary to fact) and the moment when the value of that land around the early twentieth century became completely monetized and therefore a believable fiction to speculate upon (fact/fiction continuum). By rendering the two fictions disparate, the modern idea of property could emerge in strictly juridico-economic terms. These terms were written, endorsed, and made valuable by two kinds of paper: the property deed and paper currency. These both represent genres of writing that managed the representative gap through the deferral of value.[620]

The postcolonial context has, if anything, intensified the land and property debates in multiple ways. Today a new kind of speculation (or shall we ventriloquize colonial officials and call it "hoarding?") is taking place. West Bengal Government's Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCO) has facilitated a massive transfer of public lands into the hands of private and corporate land-developers.[621] Of the 6,000-7,000 hectare area that comprises the satellite information technology town of Rajarhat in Kolkata some former wetlands and farm lands are now becoming a built environment. The landscapes of agriculture and pisciculture have all but disappeared to make way for high-rise apartment buildings built quite literally in the middle of nowhere, outside of and often unconnected to the city. See for instance a 2008 aerial view of Rajarhat – vertical buildings arising out of farmlands and wetlands.

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[620] See Georg Simmel, "Value and Money" in *Philosophy of Money* (Routledge: London, 1978), 56-75.

[621] http://www.wbhidcoltd.com/org_desc.php?pg=invcommon&typ=common&tag=aboutus_com

Figure 17: Rajarthat, Kolkata © Pradipta Ray, 2008

Rich absentee landlords, who are sometimes buying up air and hoarding apartment blocks in the hope of a future profit, own these buildings, which are still awaiting public-works infrastructure on the outer fringes of New Town and Rajarhat. Building, it seems, continues to be "the national recreation" in this landscape.[622] The collateral damage of this recreation is the dispossession of those populations whose life with the wetlands did not fit either an economic teleology of development or a legal framing of legitimacy.[623]

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[622] Report of the Calcutta Housing and Communication Committee, 1923, § 6.

[623] Kalyan Sanyal and Rajesh Bhattacharyya called this the by-pass urbanization model of postcolonial cities of India, "Bypassing the Squalor: New Towns, Immaterial Labour and Exclusion in Post-colonial Urbanisation," 41-48.

In his study of postcolonial spaces under the regime of developmental governance, economist Kalyan Sanyal demonstrates how the narrative of capital was re-inscribed in the third-world landscape as a politically neutral project whose two goals were capitalist accumulation and growth. These projects, according to Sanyal, were executed through a techno-bureaucratic planning exercise. Such an exercise meant the conflation of development with accumulation, and the state, with its juridical power and fiscal policies, became critical in facilitating the process of accumulation.[624] Through an analysis of the ideological underpinnings of creating land and thereby a market in urban property in colonial Calcutta, this dissertation offers a longer genealogy to the contemporary history of land grabs and capital flows into areas that are increasingly being carved out as "special economic zones" in the global South.[625]

If speculation and profiteering in land tampered with the relation between fact and fiction and produced the borders between legitimate and illegitimate forms of property relations, then I will turn to a recent encounter that reveals a vast array of ownership practices that continue to lie beyond the purview of both the law and the archive, but nonetheless operate almost ubiquitously. This story was narrated to me by a member of the team with whom I was conducting ethnographic research for a project on urban homelessness in Calcutta in 2011. It highlights the multitude of property and spatial

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[624] Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development,* 105-168.

[625] In order to be globally competitive, special zones are carved out where labor laws, or federal laws do not apply – a state of exception normalized. Historian Sumit Sarkar termed the creation of Special Economic Zones as just another model for massive displacement and distress. See "A Question Marked In Red," *Outlook*, January 9, 2007.

relations that remain the unspoken background to the creation of a strict codification of property.

In 2010 a directive from the Supreme Court of India mandated that state governments build 24-hour shelters for the urban homeless in sixty-two cities in India, including Calcutta. In the wake of this ruling I was invited by an organization called The Calcutta Samaritans and the School for Women's Studies at Jadavpur University to join a team of researchers to conduct interviews with the homeless population and specifically present a draft report to the Government of West Bengal detailing how the homeless population imagined shelters.[626] My ethnographic encounter contrasted my archival engagement with the minutiae of legal tussles between the colonial administrators, Indian landowners and squatters with their "inscrutable ownership practices" featuring Hindu deities, stones and trees as sacred sites. When the archive shut down at 5 pm and the entire city rushed home, I would head to various stretches of footpath dwellings accompanied by two other researchers, to sites under bridges or along railway tracks where the homeless of Kolkata had constructed makeshift tenements. Sometimes they would do little more than hang a poster on a bare wall and stack up a small carton of valuables to mark their homes under the bridges, or along the boundary walls of offices and metro stations.

During one of the meetings my colleagues told me Lalita's story.[627] Lalita was a woman in her mid-fifties who worked as a domestic servant and lived with her three

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[626] Debjani Bhattacharyya and Madhura Chakraborty, *Imagined Homes: Homeless People Envision Shelters* (Kolkata: The Calcutta Samaritans in Association with Action Aid, 2011).

[627] Name changed.

children on the footpath in the northern part of Calcutta. Nine other homeless families lived under the awning of the subway entrance, which Lalita had made her home. Not far from where they lived was the local police station. Every couple of years they would be evicted from this area. At most times they managed to escape the eviction drives, "lie low for a while," and return back to their homes under the awning. Life would continue and the police would turn a blind eye, sometimes in return for services, money and other methods of extortion. However, one particularly brutal eviction drive took place. The police came one afternoon, rounded up Lalita and some of her neighbors, destroyed their things and carted them away to the Bangladesh border. Most of the men who lived there, including Lalita's husband were away working at the local loading and unloading station along the riverbank when this happened. By the time the group of women had walked back to Kolkata, a journey which had taken months to complete, Lalita's husband was not to be found in this particular area. To date she has still not found her husband – and this as we learned during our research is a particularly common phenomenon for a mobile population like the homeless in Kolkata.

When the time came for the marriage of her elder daughter, Lalita was deeply troubled by the possibility of eviction breaking up her daughter's family. If such a thing were to happen then she wanted her daughter to be close to her. Lalita went about searching for a place in the same stretch under the subway awning and decided to give a small patch of the footpath land as dowry to her son-in-law, right next to her. She went to great lengths to secure her daughter and son-in-law's rights to that space: and no one dared touch them. She owned the place because knew the exact measurements of this patch of pedestrian land. Did the police know? That seemed like a puzzling question to

ask about something so ubiquitous and everyday. A whole host of questions remained unanswered, including how her rights were recognized, what would happen if they were evicted, and how Lalita or her daughter would secure their rights back on that land following eviction drives. Perhaps the premises of my question suddenly felt misguided. In a city of overwhelming homelessness, even eviction drives meet their limit.

Lalita's story is not an usual one, and during this period we encountered countless forms of claims to the city's spaces and differing registers of ownership that overlap with the formalized, registered property deeds. Like Lalita, the many homeless people we spoke to did not consider buying, selling, or gifting the footpath as forms of trespassing or encroachment on public property. That is their home and they have nowhere to go: they keep it clean, maintain it and, if the need arises, they pay their dues. They are in no way different from the fruit-sellers, the vibrant hawker markets or tea-stalls on the footpath. The state is also aware of these thickets of ownership practices that make up the city. Not just footpath dwellers, but also middle-class homeowners in Calcutta wage their own battles with the municipal bodies by encroaching on public roads through small gardens and balconies, which they expect to be demolished once every few years. This is not exactly Partha Chatterjee's political society, where slum settlements can galvanize powerful electoral vote banks and occupy a different politico-social terrain than the dispersed homeless population of the city. Analyzing the slum-dwellers claims for basic necessities he says:

> These claims are irreducibly political. They could only be made on a political terrain, where rules may be bent or stretched, and not on the terrain of established law or administrative procedure. The success of these claims depends entirely on the ability

> of particular population groups to mobilize support to influence the implementation of governmental policy in their favor.[628]

People like Lalita or Kali Ray in Chapter 4, the ragpicker who considers the *Maidan* her home, are not bending rules of the state to make political claims for recognition of "illegal" forms of ownership. Rather, such ownership patterns constitute the absent presence that haunts the margins of modern contractual property relations, and in many ways perhaps created the paper deed attesting to property and the contract in the first place. They are the invisible background to the visible (legal / contractual) text of property. In the early twentieth century the colonial government attempted and failed to regularize ownership through transparency. The postcolonial government, on the other hand, controls it through eviction and extortion.

If people like Lalita and Kali Ray occupy one side of the postcolonial narrative of urban property relations, on the other side is the story of the expanding city made possible through violent land grabs. For instance, a special *West Bengal Act XXX of 2007* was passed, also known as *The New Town, Kolkata Development Authority Act, 2007,* modeled on, colonial law to facilitate land acquisition.[629] The creation of the colonial land acquisition laws at the turn of the nineteenth century was born out of the twin impulses to discipline ownership patterns and thereby delegitimize various forms of ownership, all in order to add more land to the state domain. Recent studies of postcolonial development,

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[628] Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 60.

[629] http://www.wbhidcoltd.com/uploads/othdoc/The%20NKDA%20Act%202007.pdf

urban expansion and land grabs turn to the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894.[630] In doing so, these studies reiterate the continuity between the colonial and postcolonial state. The preceding chapters of this dissertation have deepened this research by focusing not on the watershed moment of 1894, but rather on the smaller, yet more potent forms of land acquisition instituted through disparate municipal by-laws for public works that came prior to 1894 and made the ruling possible.

I have argued that law and economy filtered knowledge about spaces and the people who lived with, worked in, and owned those spaces. If an understanding of ownership and property marks human relation to spaces, then I have demonstrated those multiple registers in which spaces exist and are lived by people who toil in and inhabit those spaces. These various assemblages of dwelling cannot always be subsumed into a propertied geography. As this dissertation has argued, the answer to understanding a multiplicity of valences of ownership is not certitude and a higher level of transparency, but an expansive notion of what it means to dwell in, claim and occupy spaces. Finally, once we admit the insufficiency of the juridico-economic definition of property, we will see that firmly held property lines are daily muddied by various forms of occupancies in our cities everywhere. Then the proposition for an openness to understanding what it means to dwell might not sound triumphalist or utopian, but instead might mark an opening where another history begins.

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[630] Ramanauj Ganguly and Swapan Kumar Pramanick, *Globalization in India: New Frontiers and Emerging Challenges* (New Delhi: PHI Learning, 2010); Sanjoy Chakravorty, *The Price of Land: Acquistion, Conflict, Consequence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Glossary

andarmahal	Inner rooms of a elite Hindu household
babu	Native clerks
bainama	Mughal transfer deed
basti	Slums
bhadralok	Elite society in Calcutta, predominantly upper-caste, Bengali Hindu male population
Bhaithak-khana	Living room; salon
Bhetki	A locally available sea fish
Bigha	Unit of measurement, about one-third of an acre
Burdwan, also spelt Bardhaman	An important pre-colonial town in Bengal which rose to prominence in the 18th century
Char	Alluvial accretion; land formation of fluvial action in deltaic rivers found in the lower ganga delta area of Bengal

Chitta	Land measurement
Debuttar	According to Hindu scriptures property donated in the name of god for public good
Diara	Alluvial accretion or Formation
Factory Town	Early British Settlement in India was in the form of a mud factory with ballast, containing trading related warehouse and offices
Ghat or Ghaut	Riverbank
Gonda	Monetary measurement in colonial Bengal
Itimandar	Revenue collector
Izardar	Lease holder
Jagirdar	Mughal title for Landlord
Kottah	Unit of measurement, smaller than bigha
Khal	Man-made canals
Khamar	Waste (land)

Pattah/Pottah	Land record, originated in Mughal period and is incorporated into British administration
Presidency Town	When the Factory towns grew they became Presidency town through special directives of the London East India Company Office
Pucka/ pucca	House or construction with solid foundation
Rajah, also spelt Raja:	King or Landlords
Ryot/Raiyat	Persian word for peasant or cultivator
Subhedar	Mughal title for the governor of a province
Wakf or Waqf	Muslim charitable trust, often used to denote property
Zamindar	Persian for landlord
Zamindari	Authority and jurisdiction of a zamindar

Appendix

Fort William, Judicial Criminal, 1820, April 1st, No. 15
Extract form the Proceedings of his Excellency the Most Noble the Governor General in Council in the Territories Department, under date, the 24th march, 1820

To: Holt Mackenzie Esq.
Secretary to Government, Territorial Department

Sir,

1. We have now the honor to submit for the consideration of His Excellency, the most Noble the Governor General in Council, a report on the extent and appropriation of the Ground the property of Government, lying on the Bank of the River within the City of Calcutta.

2. The boundaries of the on the Banks of the River Hooghly extend from Marhatta Ditch, or Chitpore Bridge on the North to the Junction of Tolly Nullah with the River on the South. Our attention having been hitherto directed more particularly to that part of the town inhabited by Europeans we shall confine the report to the Bank of the river lying between Tolly's Nullah and Jackson's Ghaut. In elucidation of which we annex the following documents

1st. An accurate survey of the Bank of the River
2nd Statement of lands on the East side of the River Hooghly from Chandpaul Ghat to Jackson's Ghat, obtained from the office of the collector of Calcutta
3rd a List of ghats not included in *pottahs*, furnished by the collector of Calcutta to the police office in the year 1797 with a report made in the following year on the measurement and state of each ghaut by the surveyor of Calcutta

3. We shall proceed to detail the extent and appropriation of the Ground, the property of the government lying within the limits above mentioned and conclude with such remarks as a general consideration of the subject may suggest.

1. This space is occupied chiefly by yards and Building for the reception of Garrison stores, which it would be inconvenient to keep in the Fort William. The Ghaut at Baboo Ghaut is particularly convenient for the embankment of troops, the landing and unloading of military stores etc. We have already suggested that the new mint be erected at the junction of the Nullah, and in other respects this space cannot be more usefully appropriated than it is at present. [margin writing: From the

junction of Tolly's Nullah with the Hooghly River to the Fort- a distance of nearly 3/4th of the mile]

2. Within this space private individuals are not allowed to have communication with the river. The Banks is kept clear, and appropriated to a public promenade. [From the North Glacis of the Fort to Chandpaul Ghaut a distance of nearly ½ a mile].
3. On the South side of the Ghaut is the reservoir and the water works for supplying the aqueducts from Tolly's Nullah to this ghaut on the ground is the property of the Government, forming the Western Boundary of the Esplanade of Fort William.
4. From the Report furnished by Mr. Gladwin in 1797 it appears that Chaundpaul ghat is not included in *pottahs* granted to individuals. [margin writing: From Chandpaul ghat to Cutchagoody Ghat measuring 5 ft]
5. The several parcels of land which we have marked on the statements are included in this space and it would be desirable that this ground should be purchased either by the Lottery committee or by the Government in order that the whole might be thrown open as a public wharf in continuation of that intended to be constructed from custom house to Cuchagoody Ghaut.
6. How far this subject can be effected at such an expense as, with reference to other projected improvement would justify the purchase, the committee of Improvement will be better able to form a judgment.
7. From the examination of papers in the office of the collector, from which the statement of lands has been made out, the premises occupied by Mr. Tyler, appear from the survey to contain a much larger quantity of ground, than is specified in the *chittas* of 1197 B.S as mentioned.
8. A *pottah* was granted from the parcel of ground in the year 1186 B.S. [AD 1779] to Mr. Thomas Lyon for 1.2 B[illegible] *Gonda* [monetary denomination] on condition that if he erected any buildings or walls upon it he would forfeit the ground.
9. Sir. Robert Chambers obtained a fresh *pottah* for this ground, then measuring then 1.1 BG] on the 23rd August 1784 in which the former condition on which the ground was granted to Mr. Lyon, are cancelled and taken off.
10. Cuchagoody Ghaut is also in included in the po9ttas it was considerably enlarged in 1818 by the Lottery Committee and now measured 20 ft. in width. [margin writing: From Cuchagoody Ghaut to measuring 700 ft.]
11. The space between the Ghaut is occupied by a House the property of Mr. Urignon, The Mint and a House belonging to Messer's Palmer and Company now occupied as the Marine Register Office
12. Mr. Urignon's premises would appear by the Survey to correspond with the *pottah* granted to the person of his name in the year 1206 BS
13. The Mint premises have been rather increased probably in the quantity projecting

towards the River beyond the line of Mr. Urignon's wall.

14. There are copies of two *pottahs* for the premises of Messer's Palmer and Co. granted to Colonel Hampton in the year AD 1801 making in the aggregate 1 *Bigha* 3 *Chitta* at present they would appear to exceed that quantity
15. Davidson's Ghaut is in like manner with the foregoing public property. It is mentioned in the measure of AD 1798 to have been 18 feet in width which it still remains. [margin writing: From Davidson's Ghat to Coila or Bankshall Ghat 700 feet]
16. This space comprises the present police office. Bankshall premises and part of the Marin Store yard, and the grounds of the Marine Paymasters office. As the Lottery Committee have purchased the House occupied by the Police Office for the purposes of opening a Ghaut and Street to Bankshall Street the whole of this space may be considered to belong to Government and we are not aware that it can be better appropriated than it is.
17. The River at its height flows over the ground at the west end of the store yard which required to be raised 3 or 4 feet to render it fit for building.
18. The whole of this space has been very considerably increased since the measurement in 1196 BS
19. This space contains export warehouses and customs house offices. The Ghaut is public and is stated in 1798 to have been only 18 feet wise, whereas it is now 125. On the north side a large spot is used for the landing of materials for the repairs of the Roads in the town. [margin writing: From Coila Ghat called in Mr. Colvin's list Bankshall Ghat to the Old Fort Ghaut, 650 ft.]
20. We have already recommended that a sport above the Ghaut may be appropriated to the building of offices for the servants of the Export Warehouse.
21. This space has received some additions by the formation of the new Custom House Wharf
22. The report on this Ghaut by the Superintendent in 1798 mentioned the steps, part of which appear on the survey and states the Ghaut to have measured as it does now 72 ft. in width
23. The spot on the North lying between the steps and the Street and measuring 8 *Bigha* and 15 *Chittah* is entered in the *Chittah* of 1196 BS as *khamar* land, in the possession of the Reverend Mr. Johnson with a godown and tiled house on it. It is stated to be "on the opposite side of the road on the West of Mr. Cockerell's House"
24. There is no copy of as *Pottah* to be found for this spot of the piece of Ground immediately to the west of it [below high water] no mention is made in the documents obtained from the *Pottah* office. We are of the opinion that it is indisputably the property of the State and that it would be advisable to adopt measures for raising it with a view to the appropriation of it to public purposes

25. We are not ware that any claim is likely to be seriously maintained to this spot, though it has been occasionally used for the deposit of Old guns and anchor, and thus a dubious sort of occupancy has been exercised over a part of it by Messer's Clarke and Co. on behalf of Mr. Johnson. It may nevertheless be proper to state the grounds on which we consider the title of Government to it to rest.
26. In the first place, as already intimated, this piece of ground has never been granted by *Pottah* to any one: the general propriety right of Government to all land not granted to Individuals nor occupied for such a period as to lead a Court of Justice to presume grant, is we believe in disputed
27. In Calcutta indeed Government has the double right of Sovereign and Zamindar, and by established Custom even in the case of persons who have long had possession it is the practice for them when the excess is discovered to apply for and obtain a *Pottah* from the Collector for such excess and pay a corresponding Revenue.
28. Though such applications are commonly if not invariably complied with, yet the forms appears to imply the option of granting or refusing a *Pottah* of letting the ground to any individual, or of appropriating it to the use of the state.
29. We have already observed that the ground to the eastwards of it is not held by pottah, it was in fact granted under special condition by Mr. Hastings' government to Mr. Johnson and with regard therefore to the origin and extent of his tenure there seems no ground of difficulty or doubt.
30. We find that the Reverend Mr. Johnson on the 11 of March 1777 applied by letter to hold the ground to the east of the spot in question, "Wasteland lying between his House and the Old Fort, with permission to erect on that side next [to] the River a range of Godowns and to rail in the whole, being about 120 yards in length, and 108 yards in breadth with posts and chains leaving a road to the Old Fort, forty feet in breadth and another road of fifty feet opposite [sic] the Ghaut, which application was on the 4th of April 1777 complied with, with this additional condition that the ground be kept vacant, viz. The space bounded by the high road on the east by the wall of Mr. Johnson's Garden on the north by the new range of godowns on the west and by the old fort on the South, shall not be employed for any kind, but that it shall be kept entirely free and open at the sole charge and risk of the grantee, his heirs, executors and assigns, and that on failure of this condition the Governor and Council shall be at liberty to stop up the passage to the river and resume profession of the whole ground.
31. Mr. Johnson in consideration for the above grant engaged to make a *Pucka* Ghaut to the River 50 ft. wide for the accommodation of Public
32. In December 1777 a further application was made by Mr. Johnson for making the Ghaut and road to it 80 ft instead of 50 feet, which was acceded to.
33. It appears that on the 28th of November 1787 Mr. Johnson proposed to sell the *ghaut* and building to Government which offer was rejected, as well as his request to obtain a fresh *pottah* for the ground unshackled with the condition of the

original grant.

34. We have deemed it necessary to enter this much into detail on the tenure of the ground held by Mr. Johnson to the East of the Spot, which we are of opinion is the exclusive property of the Government, in order to shew that even should a claim be set up, to the spot in question on the ground of its contiguity to the land granted conditionally to Mr. Johnson such a claim can be met by a reference to the peculiar terms of the grant which the land granted is specifically stated to be bounded on the West [i.e. on the side next the river] by a range of Godowns beyond which therefore neither Mr. Johnson his Heir's Executors or assigns , can possibly assert any just claim

35. The origin of the alluvion [which is indeed still for the most part covered at high water] is we believe of no very ancient date, and independently of the peculiarity of the grant above noticed may we think be claimed by Government with every prospect of success on the more general principle to which we shall presently advert

36. We shall only add in this place, that the spot of ground which requires raising is about 400 feet square, there are some anchors and dismounted guns lying at the corner of it, near the remains of the old Ghaut, and in the North east quarter is a mound on which there are two three *hauts*, occupied by boatmen form the Police Guard's Boat.

37. The parcels of Ground No. 11 containing 3.B-13C-8C and 1B 3c-8c were held on separate *Pottahs* and granted to the Trustees of Mr. Johnson on the 13th of May 1793. The Parcel for 1b, 13c. 2c was granted to Mr. Johnson by a Pottah bearing date the 26th of December 1794 on the Bank of the River West of her house, on condition that the Pottah shall be reckoned at the pleasure of Government should any public convenience be hereafter found to result from the grant.

38. These several parcels now form the premises of the Import Warehouse purchased from Gopee Mohun Thakoor

39. The several Parcels marked [illegible] are now the ship building yard of Messer’s Smith and Co. in possession of Messer’s Alexander and Co and Mr. Breen's Ship yard without a new measurement and local inquiry, it would be difficult to state the exact quantity of ground in the possession of each of these occupants

40. In the measurement of 1196 BS the whole of these parcels amounted only to 4 B. 9c 8c. By encroachment on the River they would now measure 10 or 20 Beegahs [illegible] is Jackson's Ghaut, measuring, as it did in 1798 about 24 ft in Breadth

41. From the foregoing remarks it would be collected that we are not of opinion that the ground on the Bank of the River actually in the possession of Government within the space to which our enquiries have been hitherto directed, can be better appropriated than it is at present and that we are of opinion. Government should take possession of and raise the low ground to the North of the Old Fort Ghuat and west of the ground granted conditionally to the reverend Mr. Johnson

42. With reference to the extension and valuable acquisition made to the premises of No [illegible] either be the receding of the River or by additions made to the main land, a very important question presents itself, to which we bed leave respectfully to solicit the particular attention of Government
43. We allude 1st to the immediate claims of the Government, to alluvial land not included in the Pottahs of the occupants whether the same has been formed by the spontaneous desertion of the stream, or by artificial means, and secondly its right as trustee for the public so to dispose and control the appropriation of the bank of the river and especially the space lying between high and low watermark, as to secure for public in open road and quay thoroughfare the whole or a large portion of the extent of the city
44. Considering the nature of the tenures under the land within Calcutta is held [with the exception of that of which the property in chief was transferred to Rajah Nabkissen] we apprehend the tenants or Pottah holders have no right to a single yard of ground beyond that specified in their pottahs, and that persons holding under tenures thus limited cannot claim any accretions arising from the retiring of the River
45. The company is the general Zamindar and as such any new lands muse, we conceive, be considered to be at its disposal
46. In cases indeed. Where Individuals have long been in undisturbed occupancy a little may perhaps be founded, to be shaken only by proceedings to which Government would not probably wish to resort/ But when the occupancy is of no very long standing or has [as in many cases we believe it has] been contested by the Magistrates the assertion by Government of its right to such land would if successful enable it to complete at a comparatively small expense the great work of obtaining a Public wharf along the banks of the city
47. Besides the argument arising from the nature of the Pottah under which the land is held we doubt whether the persons in question, if full proprietors or even the Government itself as Zamindars can legally shut out the public from the benefit of free access to the bank of the river, when it has been long enjoyed them and with trifling exceptions [which will be seen by reference to the Plan] no individual has yet asserted right to the low land in question by enclosing it and excluding the public
48. Even in front of the ship-builders yard the boatsmen and other have never, we believe, been prevented from coming to the shore
49. We understand indeed that in some cases, the proprietors of ground on the banks of the River are in the habit of levying a trifling wharfage on boat's loading or unloading in front of their property
50. The nature of this cess appears however very uncertain and as in the present state of the River bank the privilege of landing on it is of little value without the right of praising through the adjoining property, the exaction rests probably, rather o, the undisputed title to close such a passage than on any right tor prevent access to

the bank

51. Still less can it be taken to indicate any title to the land lying between high water and low water mark to which we apprehend the right of the public even where the bank may be possessed in full propriety right, is indisputable

52. But on the supposition that individuals are not entitled to shut out the public from access to the River bank where it has long been open we should imagine that the right of government tom raise the land lying between high and low water mark, for the accommodation of the public could [independently of any peculiar rights belonging to the Company as Zemindar be successfully resisted only by shewing that the operation would deprive the party of some rightful privilege being enjoyed by them

53. Thus in the case of the ship-builder's yards, government could not probably construct any work in front of them calculate to render those yards inapplicable to that purpose though even this case, the yard being routinely open to the River, not enlisted like the regular Dockyards on the western Bank, and the ground held by Pottahs limited in extent and containing no stipulation for more than the mere enjoyment of the land conveyed by them, the subject is open to question

54. In such cases, however, Government would naturally be very reluctant to enforce a right destruction of a long enjoyed privilege, and the claims of the parties who are we understand forwards to meet any arrangement consented with objects of public improvement could well believe be satisfactorily adjusted

55. In other cases all we apprehended that could be claimed would be the right of access to the River with this a public road and quay would in no degree interfere and even where the space raised was of such extent as to render it available to dispose of a portion of it for the erection of godowns the buildings might be so arranged as to leave the right substantially unimpaired

56. We have already intimated our doubts how far any one could maintain a right to levy any cess on boats brought to, on the bank adjoining their property and it must be almost unnecessary to remark how much that property would fain in value by having an open high way and quay in front of it

57. Such a work may we think be executed without any serious expense even supposition if necessary to construct at the places where Dockyards have been constructed draw bridges such as to allow a free passage for vessels built or repaired in them

58. We have already intended that in some cases, the ground to which if preferred in due time, government could have maintained an indisputable right has been so long occupied by individuals that no claim on the part of the public could perhaps now with propriety be asserted.

59. In other cases, Capital has been already expended probably to a considerable amount, on ground of this description. In such cases as well as where a bonafide purchase could be shewn, more especially if sanctioned by the collector,

government would no doubt consider itself bound on a liberal view of the subject to indemnity the parties

60. We believe, however, that by taking measures for gradually raising the Ground between high and low watermark, sufficient ground for a road along the bank of the river could be obtained with little or no interference with private rights

61. The convenience and advantage of having such a road would probably more than compensate to the parties the loss of those irregular exactions which from commanding the access to the city they now levy, and in many cases threw would remain within the proposed road a considerable extent of land which when raised so as to admit of the construction of ware houses, would possess a value sufficient to cover the whole or a great part of the expense of forming the Road while at the same time the existence of such a quay along the river would be eminently useful as affecting the security of the customs and the rover police of the town

62. We have thus stated the matter, not with the view of recommending the immediate commencement of the undertaking in its full extent but merely that the eventual completion of it may be kept steadily in sight, and to shew that the assertion of the right of Government to the alluvial land is connected with objects more important than any immediate pecuniary gain. The considerable extent of the land in question and its present condition will appear from the accompanying Survey plan though on the last point a personal inspection can alone of course convey an adequate conception

63. The following appears to us to be the most convenient mode of bringing the question to issue and of determining how far the work we have proposed is practicable and at what charge

64. We have above stated our reasons for thinking the low ground North of the old fort ghaut as easy of recovery for public purposes

65. Its situation and extent renders it peculiarly valuable, and though it may perhaps be recovered without necessarily involving the general questions of the government right to alluvion land, or those of the public to the space lying between high and low water mark, yet should those questions arise the circumstances that the conditions of the Grant are distinctly recorded by Government and admitted we believe by the parties will greatly facilitate the decision. It will at the same time we hope enable Government to shew to the community that in asserting its right to land of this description it is influenced solely by considerations of public utility, not by any narrow views of immediate profit

66. We should propose therefore that the Collector of Calcutta be directed to take possession of the Ground and that in concert with the Magistrate and with the Committee of Improvement, he should commence immediate measures for raising it

67. When raised, such part as appears necessary for an open road along the River sufficiently spacious to admit of the convenient landing and shipment of goods

should be set apart the rest to be disposed of to the best advantage the price obtained for this last portion to be reserved as a fund for the further prosecution of the work, or other similar purposes, connected with the improvement of the city, and we are satisfied that the liberally of government will anticipate our recommendation that this principle should be formally laid down and strictly acted upon

68. When such a resolution is generally known, any unpopularity which might otherwise attach to the assertion of the right of Government will be obviated the public will be listed on the side of the Government and the danger of litigious opposition will be much reduced
69. If on trying the scheme to the extent above recommended, it should be found that no obstacles oppose the recovery of the ground and that the appropriation of it will afford as we anticipate, a fund for further improvement, the same course may be followed in regard to other portions of the banks of the River and so on progressively
70. If on the other hand, it be found that the legal difficulties are insuperable little harm will be done by the limitedly agitating the question. By the gradual operation of the plan, there will be no risk of incurring fruitlessly any serious expense, and though it should not be practicable to accomplish the great and valuable work of constructing a road or beach along the whole extent of the city, yet the benefit would be great in opening even one additional means of free and convenient access

H. Shakespeare
John Hayes
H Mackenzie
G. I. Gordon
Calcutta, March 1st 1820

List of the Ghauts on in the Town of Calcutta which are not included in the Pottahs

Situation	Names	Breadth in cubits	Breadth in Feet	Report
Bazar Calcutta	Chandpaul	36	54	This Ghat is Puckah is in good condition, excepting the lower part toward the River, which wants some repairs

Ditto	Cutchiagoody	32	48	This ghat is only in earth, wants some reparis and well deserves it being of the most useful in that quarter of the town for the public convenience
Ditto	Davidson	12	18	This is also of earth and requires to be properly dressed
Ditto	Sloop/ Bankshaul	24	36	This is in earth and wants to be filled up in the centre with good rubbish and properly filled
Ditto	Tanksaul	12	18	This is one of the principal ghauts of the town
Ditto	Old Fort Ghat/ Purana Cootee	48	72	This ghat is all pucka in very good order. The centre part is sloping and has steps on the upper side
Ditto	Jackson's	16	24	The entrance of this Ghaut is reduced to 11 feet, by small straw huts built on both sides some of which are for the use of the customs house peons, this ghaut also

				is of earth in very bad condition for the public convinience being one of the principal ghauts of the town.

Signed
H. Shakespeare
John Hayes

Situation	Names of former proprietors	Quantity of lands	Remakrs
Dhee Calcutta	Luis De Costa, Agreeably to Chittah of 1197 BS	12 C	Northside of Chaundpal Ghat, occupied by Mr. Tyler
Bazaar Calcutta	Sir Robert Chambers, Agreeably to Chittah of 1197 BS	1b 3c	Possession of Ramrutton Mullick
Ditto	G. Urignon, agreebly to Pottah of 1206 BS no. 1594 no. 1595	Total -6.6 2b.10c 3b 16c	Mr. Urignon
Ditto	Khamar Buxee Khanna of Chittah of 1196 BS measurement No. 35 Mr. Gillet No. 34 Mr. LeBong no. 36	Total 6.15 3.5 3	Mint Office
Ditto	Colonel Hamption, agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS Measurement no. 33	1.3	Possession of Messers Palmer and Ramdoolal Sircar
Ditto	A. Hunter agreeably to Pottah of 1201 BS no. 387	2.14.15	Calcutta Police Office

Ditto	Khammar Banksaul agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS measurement no. 29	12/09/08	Bankshall
Ditto	Mr. Lubjak No. 24	16 c	Marine Payment office
Ditto	Khammer Fort of Homorable Company, Agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS Measurement no. 23 Khammer Possession of the Reverend Mr. Johsnon, no. 22 Khammer possession of the Reverend Mr. Johnson, Agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS Measurement no. 20 W. Hasting's Esq. G. Vanistratt Trustees of Beebee Johnson agreeably to Pottah of 1200 BS No. 6 No. 7	Total 35. 1 34c 14c 7c.0c 8c.15c 3.13.8 1.3.8	Export warehouse and custom house
Bazaar Calcutta	Beebee Francis Johnson agreeably to Pottah of 1201 BS No. 508	15b.52 c 1.13.2	Import Warehouse
Ditto	Khamar North side of Sorah Khannah House agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS Measurement no. 5 I Perrean no. 4	Total 3.14.12 2c4c 2.8.12 10c8c	Possession of Mr. Alexander and Company

	Captain Blye No. 8 Forman Q Bacon No. 6	13c4c	
	I. Frankin Agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS Measurement no. 3	4c8c	Do. Do and Palmers and Co
		10c4c	
	James Price Agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS No. 7	3c8c	Possession of Rammohan Dutt
	Khammer Northside of Mr. Price's house, Agreeably to Chittah of 1196 BS Measurement no. 2		Jackson's Ghaut

Signed
H. Shakespeare
Hotts Mackenzie
John Hayes

To the Committee for Repoprting upon the best mmode of appropriating the Government lands on the Banks of the River

Gentlemen,

I am directed by His Excellency the most Noble of the GG acknowledge receipt

1. Appreciates the report, and will be an useful records, but with one important exception does not generally suggest the necessity of any immediately orders of remarks from the Government
2. The Collector of Calcutta will be instructed to take possession of the piece of low ground described in the 27th para of your report and to transfer it to the Committee of Improvement
3. the measures necessary for raising it will most conveniently be conducted under the direction of that committee in communication with the Magistrates, and under the principle stated in the 70th paragraph of your report [which His Lordship in Council entirely concurs] it will naturally belong to them to consider and suggest the most advantageous mode of disposing of the ground in question with a view of the improvement of the city.

4. The committee of improvement to whom a copy of your report will be transmitted will likewise of course consider in what manner the general scheme suggested by you may best be prosecuted, and to what extent it may be practicable to carry it/
5. As stated in your report various difficulties may possibly oppose the prosecution of the plan. But the object appears to be one of very great importance to the Community and his lordship in council highly approved of having bought the matter forward
6. You will of course extend your enquiries to the ground lying to the Northward of Jackson's ghat and report the result to Government
7. The maps submitted by you is herewith returned. You will of course transmit it for inspection to the collector of Calcutta and to the Committee of Improvement. Should they apply for it.

Hotts Mackenzie
March 24th 1820

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