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SPECULATION AND HOMELESSNESS IN INDIAN CITIES

DEBJANI BHATTACHARYYA*

Abstract

This article links speculative urbanism to the rapid rise of homelessness to argue that the late 20th and early 21st century building boom in one part of the globe is connected to the massive foreclosures in the other part through globalised instruments of finance, new forms of real estate and, more importantly, the proliferation of speculative vacant homes. According to the last global survey of homelessness conducted by the United Nations, 100 million people are homeless worldwide, while 1.6 billion people lack adequate housing. Of these, an estimated 20 to 40 million are in urban centres. This scenario is exacerbated in the Global South where urbanisation, homelessness and squatting are on the rise. In India, the number of available houses has increased, but so has the homeless and the squatter population. In an attempt to link the rise of speculative urbanism and homeless, this article turns to the history of housing and homelessness in 20th century Kolkata. Through three specific case studies—archival and ethnographic—the article explores the contradiction between the right to property and the right to affordable housing in the past century. However, moving away from strictly legalistic analysis, it turns to those spatial ideas and practices where the contradiction between private ownership and the right to affordable housing becomes manifest in various kinds of ideas around home and dwelling within the city. By using the analytic of ‘politics of dwelling’, the article recovers how dwelling occurs and what ideas are embedded therein beyond the overarching rubrics of law, resistance and rights.

Key words: homelessness, speculative urbanism, right to housing, accumulation, dispossession

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Introduction

Speculative urbanisation is neither new, nor is it like a bubble. Yet, after 2008, it increasingly captured our imagination as if it were a novelty. What was striking perhaps was the simultaneity with which empty skyscrapers were shooting up in the cities of India, unoccupied towns sprawling in China, and ghost estates proliferating in Ireland, while houses were foreclosed and vacated across the United States. This sudden building boom in one part of the globe is connected to the massive foreclosures in the other part through globalised instruments of finance, new forms of real estate and, more importantly, the proliferation of speculative vacant homes. What made 2008 dramatic was precisely the intimate connections that yoked together the cement, concrete and empty housing enclaves of accumulation in Asian megalopolis with the other forcefully vacated landscapes of, for instance, Los Angeles, and heightened homelessness in Delhi and Mumbai.¹ These empty landscapes of accumulation driven by derivative futures in the Global South and a regime of debt in the Global North were both spectacular and physically different manifestations of financial speculation. This article focuses on the long 20th century leading up to 2008 to show how the period was also marked by a simultaneous rise of homelessness and squatting as resurgent forms of dwelling practices and claim-making against the state.

While financial speculations from earlier centuries were linked to urban land markets, until a decade or so ago it was not the transnational phenomenon of 'residential capitalism' that it has become (Schwartz and Seabrooke 2009: 2). In the past 30 years, with the liberalisation of credit structures and inventive forms of real estate securitisation, building speculation has accelerated, resulting in massive displacements of population, through gentrification, land grabs and foreclosures. According to the last global survey of homelessness conducted by the United Nations, 100 million people are homeless worldwide, while 1.6 billion people lack adequate housing. Of these an estimated 20 to 40 million are in urban centres (United Nations 2005). This scenario is exacerbated in the Global South where urbanisation, homelessness and squatting are on the rise. In India, the number of available houses has increased, but so have the homeless and the squatter population.

In this article, I examine the case of the Indian city of Kolkata (historical name Calcutta).² Beginning as a tiny colonial emporium in the marshes of eastern India at the turn of the 17th century, Calcutta became an iconic image of poverty in the 20th century.³ Interwar housing crisis and rent wars between 1915 and the 1920s, followed by the 1943 Bengal famine and the influx of partition refugees in 1947, made Calcutta poster-child of a third-world city. Poverty tourism and sensationalist cinematic representations of human habitation spilling out into the streets have compounded the Malthusian image of a city bursting at its seams. Thus, Kolkata offers a case to think about the crisis of housing and urban development. The spectacular rise of unaffordable housing through the 19th and 20th century has resulted in the creation of various forms of dwelling conditions, from *bastis* in Calcutta, *chawls* in Mumbai, *barrios* in Brasilia, to tent-cities in Los Angeles and squats in Amsterdam.⁴ This current moment is unique in the geographic scope of real estate speculation and the expulsion of people from their homes. As Herman Schwartz and Leonard Seabrooke put it, ‘both financially repressed and financially liberal systems are globally interdependent and the deregulation of the national housing system has largely been a transnational phenomenon’ (2009: 2).

Therefore, I ask, how does one dwell in these landscapes of accumulation and dispossession. My material comes from archival and ethnographic projects documenting various forms of dwelling practices that resisted and continue to resist the state and the market, both historically and in the contemporary moment. These forms of dwelling emerge within the historical archive as legal recalcitrance and, in our contemporary bureaucratic parlance, as deviance. Through a close analysis of three moments in the story of Calcutta’s urbanisation, I seek to learn from the ground the legal meaning and bureaucratic significance of these forms of recalcitrance.

The right to property and the right to affordable housing are always in conflict with one another, and moments of economic crisis deepen and reveal the contradiction between these two rights in a spectacular manner. Moving away from strictly legalistic analysis, I turn to those spatial ideas and practices where the contradiction between private ownership and the right to affordable housing becomes manifest in various kinds of ideas around home and dwelling within the city. I am deliberately using the phrase ‘politics of dwelling’ as I want to recover how dwelling occurs and what ideas are embedded therein beyond the overarching rubrics of law, resistance and

rights. In order to situate these practices within the idea of deregulation of the housing system, I trace instances of a ‘politics of dwelling’ in Calcutta.

My paper rests on the premise that the act of dwelling outside the formal housing framework in postcolonial cities in the Global South—but this might also be extended to the Global North—is a political act. This then raises the question: What is dwelling and how is it political? According to a recent study by the UN, about one billion people worldwide are living outside the frameworks of capitalist housing markets, welfare systems, or state housing (Neuwirth 2005). This astounding figure shows that one person out of seven is either homeless or is providing for a home in what the state would mark out as beyond the pale of the law. The 20th century has seen a striking rise in this figure as a result of the privatisation of public services and spaces, the commodification of many aspects of our lives and livelihoods, the dwindling of social housing, and the emergence of residential capitalism. This necessitates that we return to the conversations around the ‘right to the city’ from a different vantage point—from the act of dwelling (Fainstein 2010; Harvey 1998 [1973]; Lefebvre et al. 1996).

Therefore, instead of asking why some acts of dwelling became recalcitrance or deviance, I ask: Against what larger structures and statecraft do the working poor provide for their own housing in the absence of protection, housing and welfare systems? What ideas around home and rights might one discern in these acts of political dwelling in the interstices of what the state sees as formal and informal? That is, how do the poor in our cities *dwell*? What new ideas of housing and urbanisation are generated when we explore three kinds of dwelling practices in Calcutta— *basti*, encroaching, and squatting? Housing markets are unique, and especially so in Calcutta, given its speculative character. Indeed, if we begin from the premise that the right to shelter is a fundamental right as stipulated by the Indian Constitution,⁵ these practices reveal real estate ‘speculation using housing stock as one of the worst legal behaviors within a capitalist society, since it is the origin of housing exclusion and other social inequalities’ (Cattaneo and Martinez 2014: 14).⁶ In the case of Calcutta, these three moments in the history of its urbanisation also reveal the collusion of state and market, where the distinction between private capital and public funds are always obfuscated.⁷ At the same time a deviant spatiality of dwelling in the city blurs the distinction between public and private spaces.

Precisely because of the obfuscation of state-market on the one hand and private-public on the other hand, displacement of the working poor has been one of the central mechanisms of urban development, even when the development is pledged as an answer to the question of housing rights, as was the case in the early twentieth century.⁸ Thus, it is not surprising that the urban improvements trusts that began sprouting up under the aegis of representative municipal bodies in England and its colonies at the turn of the 19th century were nothing but an embodiment of ‘strong executive action unencumbered by accountability to representatives of local self-governing institutions’ (Kidambi 2007: 71–72). What these colonial urban improvement trusts embodied was not merely the principles of a developmental agenda that was urban and spatial in particular ways; they also manifested the centralisation of particular legal instruments within a quasi-municipal body that facilitated unrestricted private investment in housing in the name of worker’s housing rights (Bhattacharyya 2016: 479–80). The three stories of deviant dwelling that I narrate in the following sections are located within this complex inheritance of state–market collusion over housing.

I. How to House the Human?

If displacement is the other side of ‘residential capitalism’ (Schwartz and Seabrooke 2009: 2) that marks urban growth in the Global South, then its direct fallout in the form of homelessness is the other side of legal propertyhood. This then raises questions about what a home is within the larger urban property market in Calcutta, defined as it is by the simultaneity of homelessness and speculative urbanism.

Deploying the concept of ‘politics of dwelling’ illuminates how the idea of illegitimate occupancy and the erasure of the human in the idea of the space of dwelling was constitutive of the classificatory regime of formal and informal housing used in the urban zoning nomenclatures starting from the colonial period. The informal spaces we call *basti* (slum) in India, straddles both the official and the non-official spaces of the city. Let me share a vignette from late-1980s India, a period which was beginning to see the opening up of the Indian economy to neoliberal market policies.

On 5 February 1989, The Salt Lake Development Trust of Calcutta evicted the inhabitants of a *basti* along a major highway on the outskirts of the city. This *basti* consisted of dwellings built in

1985 that were intended as housing for the urban poor. After completion, these households remained vacant, for the government took no initiative to allocate the housing. Around 1987, a group of people whom official discourses labelled ‘squatters’ were evicted from the areas surrounding the housing complex. Subsequently, they moved into these vacant dwellings, by then covered in grass and weed. For two years, the people lived there, cleaned up the area, began gardening and growing vegetables, and made the homes habitable. In 1989, armed police raided the area and evicted the people from these dwellings. For days on end, the evicted people sat out in the streets during the winter month of February.

Having entered the official discourse as ‘squatters’, their practices of dwelling were deemed illegal according to the developmentalist logic of the state. How does one understand this state-sanctioned action of evicting these dwellers from housing for the urban poor and relegating them back to homelessness? And then calling these very ‘homeless’ people encroachers? In trying to understand how slum dwellers in Kolkata continue to live and make claims for basic necessities like water and electricity, political theorist Partha Chatterjee distinguishes between the idea of rights-bearing citizens who comprise civil society on the one hand, and on the other hand the popular politics of slum dwellers, who, in contrast to civil society, comprise ‘political society’. He adds that their ‘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’ (2006: 60).

Yet not all homeless are able to form a political society. Their deviant practices of dwelling on the margins of the state and market foreclose many of the political possibilities theorised by Chatterjee, especially for the homeless in ways that is not foreclosed for the slum dwellers. Thus, another way to approach this would be to return to the idea of spatial deviance and ask what produced them as deviant in this scenario in the first place, so that it was possible to evict them from the very homes which were built to supply the working poor. If their only possibility of becoming legible to the state was as the statistical entity of the working poor of the city, why was that possibility not available to them? In order to do that we must begin to historicise the space

that was marked as *basti* in the statist narratives in order to answer why the ideas that congeal around this term produce it as the deviant within urban society.

In the colonial archives, the *basti* first enters as an uncanny ‘rural space’ within the urban, as a consequence of the medico–moral topographies of colonial cities. In 1836, the *Medical Topography of Calcutta* singled out the ‘native tenement huts’ as the cause of effluvia in the city, creating a so-called scientific spatial category.⁹ With the repeated outbreaks of cholera in the 19th century and the development of germ theory in place of the miasma theory of fever, the medicalised landscape of Calcutta produced the space of *basti* (already marked as the uncanny other of urban) as the site of decay and death.¹⁰ Through the 20th century, as the language of science organised this division in neater, tighter lines, extending the conceptual distance between what is urban and non-urban, the *basti* and encroachments became the economically wasted spaces of the developmental city. Underlying this classification and designation is a certain relation between the official municipal, juridical and medical discourses, and the economisation of the spaces under its jurisdiction. In these discourses, the *basti* signified both the failure of scientific modernity of medicine and developmental practices of the market.

Reading the colonial archive against the grain reveals the juridically deviant space of the *basti* as a quintessentially urban space—a product of both urbanisation and colonialism, coeval with modernity. Therefore, it became a site rife for social engineering throughout the 20th century, and a site to be overcome in the 21st century. For instance, in 1970, the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO) estimated that in Calcutta and its neighbouring hinterland town of Howrah, about 2,000 acres of land were ‘locked up in *bastis*’ which needed to be ‘recovered’ and brought within the market economy. For the state, the *basti* was outside the profit generating uses of an organised market, controlled by slum lords rather than the increasingly influential official land developers or land lobbies. It is especially interesting how the space of the *basti*, rather than its residents, became a central focus. Moreover, by deploying a notion of land being ‘locked up’, the state made clear that the living practices of the urban poor and the labouring migrant communities were neither useful nor necessary. Accordingly, such land had to be developed and made into a resource. Procuring that land from the urban poor would unlock the land and release it in the capitalist land market.

Slum clearance schemes—hallmarks of 19th century colonialism that continue to galvanise municipal politics in the Global South and which legitimise state-led evictions of the working poor from their dwellings—reveal that, ever since the entry of the *basti* into the official archive as the ‘native village’ with a ‘putrefying, toxic smell’ in the heart of the city, the slums have not ceased being a threat (Martin 1837). The pathologised space of the *basti* then manifests itself today as nothing more than a site smeared by the violence of accumulation through dispossession.¹¹ The space of the *basti*, required for the supply of cheap labour yet derided for its threat to urbanity, challenges the easy power relationship between government institutions and the space of the inhabitants those institutions try to discipline. Precisely because profit-oriented development is embedded in the very notion of the city itself, there is no grammar for dealing with the space of the *basti* as anything other than ‘obsolete’, ‘rural’, a ‘temporal lag’ and ‘not yet urban’. In independent India, municipal bodies repeatedly attempt to rationalise these spaces through evictions, and by bulldozing squatter settlements and removing encroachers. At the far end of this spectrum of informal housing are the homeless in the city. If the space of the *basti* emerges as one mired in a shadow land economy, the homeless complicate the relation between state and market even further, as I show in the next section.

II. Lone Encroacher in a Crowded City

Kali Ray, a homeless woman in her mid-40s, had made her home—a blue tarpaulin, two pots, a brick hearth and a bundle of clothing—in the Maidan for the past 30 years. Maidan is a vast open green space, measuring 333 acres in the heart of Kolkata, comparable to Central Park in New York or Hyde Park in London. Ray’s life in the Maidan became precarious following a 2007 ruling by the High Court which brought an abrupt halt to any kind of temporary or makeshift buildings in the Maidan, and ordered the relocation of the city’s annual fairs that had been held there through much of the 20th century.¹² This ruling came out of a decade-long citizens’ environmental movement to save what they called Kolkata’s ‘only green space’. A rag-picker by profession, Ray was now known for being the ‘lone encroacher on the army-owned territory’ where one was no longer permitted to cook or build permanent structures.¹³

The Maidan was created by land drainage and originally intended as a fortification and buffer between the colonial Fort William, built in 1781, and the city (Chattopadhyay, 2006). Given its

military origins, the jurisdiction of this open green space falls under the military, city police and municipal department. The violence of eviction is aggravated by the triple authority of the municipality, police and military. Despite the mounting pressure from the army, police and the municipality, Ray continued to live in her ten-by-five-foot shack by 'def[ying] the army, dodg[ing] the police, evad[ing] civic eviction and ignor[ing] rules that prohibit encroachment of the *Maidan*'.¹⁴ In 2009, the Kolkata municipality, the police and the army accused her of flouting the High Court's directive. Ray's only response was the following: 'I have nowhere to go, and I wish to die on the Maidan. This is my home.'¹⁵ 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; her '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 dwelling in the city (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2004: 4–6).

Like Ray, many live messily and fractiously in the city. That is their home and they have nowhere to go. They keep it clean, maintain it, and, if the need arises, pay their dues. They are very similar to the fruit sellers, the vibrant hawker markets on the footpaths, the typewriter shops outside the courts and offices of the city, the tea stalls that spill onto the footpaths, or the packaging guy who runs a quick business outside post offices (Bandyopadhyay 2016). The state is 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. How do we understand Ray's definitions of home, who just wants to live and die in the Maidan? Her life is not lived as an open expression of defiance, or resistance to the state and law. She does not wish to become a political message. Yet she vociferously claims her right to die in her home, the Maidan, like everyone else who wishes to die in their homes too. The only difference is her home has neither walls nor a roof.

Kali Ray is not exactly a member of Partha Chatterjee's 'political society'; she does not have the leverage to occupy a different politico–social terrain. She is one of the many dispersed homeless people of the city. In contrast to the strategy suggested by Chatterjee, the politics of space that the homeless exercise operates on a different register, which instead of engaging policies strategically, subverts them to make the state confront its own limits. I am not claiming that this

deviant spatiality is some form of a romantic politics of the poor; rather, I want to expose this as a site where both state violence and the limits of urban planning coalesce. Before I conclude this paper, let me briefly turn to another reading of the homeless to illuminate another aspect of this politics of dwelling that exists within the city, revealing the limits of urban political development.

III. Home as a Condition of Homelessness

This final ethnographic encounter brings to light a different register of ownership practice that challenges the ideas of property, land markets, and urban housing. 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 relations that remain the unspoken background to the creation of a strict codification of the urban property and housing market.

In 2010, a directive from the Supreme Court of India mandated that state governments build 24-hour shelters for the urban homeless in 62 cities, including Calcutta. In the wake of this ruling I was invited by 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 present a draft report to the Government of West Bengal, detailing how the homeless population imagined shelters (Bhattacharyya and Chakraborty 2011). This was also a period when I was undertaking research on the colonial housing market in the city. When the archive shut down at 5 pm and the entire city rushed home, along with two other researchers, we would head to various stretches of footpath dwellings, to sites under bridges or along railway tracks, where the homeless of Kolkata had constructed makeshift tenements. Sometimes the homeless marked their homes with little more than a poster on a bare wall and a stack of small cartons of valuables. Visual markers of space need not always be tangible borders, but consist of spoken and unspoken negotiations (Rose 1994). These cardboard tenements are found all over the world from refugee shelters to tent cities, a phenomenon which makes us confront the question of how to imagine dwelling and home when you can carry your 'weightless homes' on your back.

During one of the meetings my colleague told me Lalita's story,¹⁶ an intriguing example of weightless housing. Lalita was a woman in her mid-50s who worked as a domestic servant and

lived with her three children on a footpath in the northern part of Calcutta. Nine other homeless families lived under the awning of the subway entrance that 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. Most of the time they managed to escape the eviction drives, ‘lie low for a while’, and return to their homes under the awning. Life would continue and the police would turn a blind eye, sometimes in return for sexual services, money or upon satisfying other methods of extortion. However, one particularly brutal eviction drive took place. The police came one afternoon, rounded up Lalita and some of her neighbours, destroyed their belongings, and carted the group of people away to the Bangladesh border, over 300 miles away. 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 took months to complete, Lalita’s husband was not to be found. To date she has still not found her husband. As we learned during our research, this 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, right next to hers, as dowry to her son-in-law. She went to great lengths to secure her daughter and son-in-law’s rights to that space—a small stretch of the footpath—and no one dared touch them.

How was her ownership to that stretch of footpath marked? Not through cardboard. She owned the place because she 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 of postcolonial urbanism. A whole host of questions remained unanswered, including how her rights were recognised and how Lalita or her daughter would secure their rights back on that land following eviction drives. What I realised was perhaps not that my questions were unanswered, but that they were modelled on a conviction in rights, documents, and a particular reality that law creates around housing. The basic premise of my questions suddenly felt misguided. In a city of overwhelming homelessness, even eviction drives meet their limit. It is at this limit that new political possibilities of home and a counter-imaginary of radical spatiality emerge.

Lalita's story is not an unusual one. During this period, we encountered countless forms of claims to the city's spaces and differing registers of ownership that overlap with formal, 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. If we were to step back from the legal reality of our spatial practices, perhaps the borders between legitimate and illegitimate forms of property relations start to look messy. We may then take pause to ask: What legitimises speculative urbanisms that appear as gated communities without any dwellers in Kolkata, when thousands have no roof over their heads? We must also ask where we locate home and dwelling in this context.

IV. Economising Space

As encroachers, Lalita and Kali Ray disrupt the idea of the urban marked by planning and zoning that clearly demarcates spaces and property rights. They consider the public spaces in the city their home, and nothing more. They are not bending rules of the state to make political claims for the recognition of 'illegal' forms of ownership. They work and make the city and they dwell there. So, how do we read these practices not as strategic resistance to the state, but one that opens up other possibilities. One way would be to view such ownership patterns as constitutive of the absent presence that haunts the margins of modern contractual property relations. Perhaps this absent presence of the encroachable, squattable space created the paper deed attesting to property and the contract in the first place. These practices are neither recalcitrance within the modernising geography of the city, which shoots up glitzy skyscrapers, nor a temporal lag on the onward march of global urban progress. Rather, they are part of the landscapes of accumulation that produce both the shiny empires of Asian cities and its dispossessed. They are the invisible background to the visible (legal, contractual) text of property.

Legal principles and economics filter our knowledge about spaces and the people who live in, work in, and own, those spaces. If an understanding of ownership and property marks human relations to urban 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—a geography that has been equally punctured by the vacant buildings of speculative urbanism. As I have 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 of our urbanising landscapes are everywhere, and all the time muddied by various forms of occupancy and dwelling. 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.

Notes

- 1 For a robust reading of the speculative urbanism in recent times see Marcinkoski (2016).
- 2 In January 2001, Calcutta's name was changed to Kolkata. I use Calcutta to refer to the pre-2001 city, and Kolkata to refer to the contemporary city.
- 3 For a history of Calcutta's land market see Bhattacharyya (2018).
- 4 Bastis, chawls, barrios are various ways the working poor have provided for their own housing in the face of governmental indifference in both capitalistic and socialist regimes.
- 5 Olga Tellis & Ors vs Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985) 1986 AIR 180, 1985 SCR Supl. (2) 51.
- 6 Claudio editor Cattaneo, and Miguel A. editor Martinez, *The Squatters' Movement in Europe : Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 7.
- 7 On the speculative nature of urban housing market in Calcutta see Bhattacharyya (2016).
- 8 Ibid.; doi: 10.1215/1089201x-3699007. 467–79.
- 9 Martin (1837). Partha Datta (2012) shows how important the medical topography was to planning histories, and David Arnold (1993) argues that medical ideology was central to the molding of an idea of occidental cures versus oriental therapeutics.
- 10 Before the germ theory of disease became predominant, it was the fever theory that guided medical practitioners and public health workers and urban sanitation reformers. Fever theory was based on the circulation of blood that was considered contagious. However, even though germ theory was gaining ground, fever theory did not disappear overnight, but both the discourses operated together for a long time in the consciousness of urban planners. In India, climatic and miasmatic theory of disease causation persisted much longer than in Europe (Arnold 1987: 60).
- 11 For a powerful reading of accumulation by dispossession within the Indian context see Sanyal (2007).
- 12 The environmentalist Subhash Dutta and his organisation, 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 Dembowski (1999).
- 13 'Lone Intruder on the Maidan', *Times of India*, 16 November 2009.
- 14 'Lone Intruder on the Maidan', *Times of India*, 16 November 2009.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Name changed.

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