In the shadow of displaceability: refugee and migrants in suburban Calcutta

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Introduction

At the beginning of my field work with a group of rural migrants in Calcutta in 2017, a serendipitous street encounter took place. As I was moving along a tattered road by a sewerage canal in a December morning, hoping to talk to migrants who live by its sides, an elderly man beckoned me. When I approached, he asked me who I was. Anwar claimed to be a local leader. Even as I was trying to explain my research project, he (entirely unprompted) put his hand in his pocket and started drawing out identity cards one by one. He began telling me which card was issued to him in which year. The spectacle was drawing some attention. A young woman standing nearby interjected, uncle, please don't consume everything by yourself! Share with us too! She laughed. I came to know later that she is Anwar's niece. Some of the onlookers joined in the laughter. Anwar smiled too. Why not, he said, I certainly would. This first meeting remained etched in my mind for a long time, for what was said in jest and for all that remained implied in this mode of sociality. The importance of identification documents for a largely sans papier group of rural migrants cannot be overstated. They live through various forms of 'citizenship tests' in their everyday lives. For many of them documents and a legally recognised status of their persons and their dwellings have remained in deferral, and mediate their experience of dislocation and their claims to urban and national citizenship.

In this thesis I explore modalities of displacement, and how these fashion the experience of citizenship for migrants in informal urban contexts. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures, about 85% of the world's displaced population live in the developing countries. Nations emerging from erstwhile colonial empires in the global south are at the heart of contemporary dislocations. This study focuses on one such ex-colonial region, India. India's history of two centuries long British colonial domination and a protracted process of decolonisation from the mid twentieth century which has dovetailed into the current moment of neo-liberalisation, structurally condition experiences of dislocation in the region. India has been a locale of myriad displacements induced by partition of territories, political conflicts, development projects, climate change, poverty and recurring famines. My study focuses on the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, which was carved out of the erstwhile British colonial province of Bengal after its territorial partition in 1947.[1]

More specifically, the empirical data of this study comes from Calcutta[2] and its suburbs spanning the district of North 24 Parganas in West Bengal.[3] Calcutta, the erstwhile capital of the British Indian Empire (present capital of West Bengal) has received varied streams of migration since colonial times and through its post-colonial transition. North 24 Parganas is in the northern suburbs of Calcutta. The district shares a porous international border with Bangladesh, and it is (together with the Nadia district) home to the largest number of refugees coming from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Due to the presence of a large number of refugees and migrants, both Calcutta and North 24 Parganas are equally interesting locales for examining the nature of migrant citizenship. This study zooms in on the experience of two different migrants in Calcutta and North 24 Parganas, East Bengali dalit[4] partition refugees and a group of peripatetic impoverished rural migrants coming from the villages of East and West Bengal to the urban agglomeration around Calcutta. I take a broad time frame from 1939, with the beginning of the Second World War till the present.

Rather than displacements of *climactic* and exceptional magnitude, I am interested in the low key and everyday modalities of dislocations, techniques of its operationalisation through post-colonial governmentality and the way such dislocation shape the nature of citizenship for socially disadvantaged groups.[5] To understand such drawn out processes I have found useful Oren Yiftachel's concept of displaceability. It expands understanding of displacement from an *act* to a *systemic condition* through which power is exerted by means of policy and legal systems. In this formulation, contemporary power regimes not only allocate but also withdraw rights and capabilities. Within this allocation-erasure spectrum, a potent tool in the regime's arsenal of control is the threat of displacement which is always present (Yiftachel 2020). Such shadowy presence of displaceability particularly pervades informal urban contexts where neo-colonial relations of power are at work. In this thesis I attempt to explore the concept of displaceability by unpacking its nuances within informal urban contexts. This thesis advances one central question. How do endemic conditions of displaceability fashion the life and livelihood of socially disadvantaged migrants in the post colony? I try to answer the main query be moving three inter-related sub questions:

- How does displaceability operate as a specific tool of post-colonial governance within informal urban contexts and keep people unsettled?
- How is the endemic condition of displaceability negotiated by the displaced themselves?
- How does the experience of displaceability shape national and urban citizenship and belonging of the refugees and migrants?

I. Migration, classification and erasure: a background

The Bengal region and the metropolitan area around Calcutta have received varied streams of migration since its very inception. The forces of the dislocation of the two groups studied here, the dalit East Bengali refugees and the impoverished rural migrants can be located in the late colonial period. Migration in the region have taken place due to multifaceted and overlapping causes. The way migrants are seen and classified by the government reveal designs of governance and much less the reality on the ground. Built into these official classificatory schemes and 'relief' or 'rehabilitation' measures effected on the basis of such classificatory knowledge, are various erasures, fuzziness and informality. All of these come with the likelihood of further dislocations, the possibility of the condition of displaceability. We can trace elements of these processes in the late colonial period as migration increased to the Calcutta metropolitan area from the time of the Second World War.

As the Second World War expanded from Europe to South East and South Asia, the eastern parts of the subcontinent got directly implicated in British war efforts. This in turn set into motion various population movements. Different groups of displaced people started flocking to Calcutta and its suburbs, including 'evacuees' from the Far East like Burma, famine stricken rural poor from Bengal's countryside and those dislocated due to communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. Politics in the Bengal province during this time revolved around increasing communal polarisation between the Hindus and the Muslims. Beginning with the communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Dhaka in 1941, communal riots increasingly fed into polarisation of society in service of the two-nation theory.[6] There were communal riots in Calcutta in 1946, followed by the Noakhali riots later that year and all pervasive communal hostility around the partition of 1947. This continued for a long time after the partition. Communal conflicts pushed people out of their homes and refugees started moving across the international border in myriad directions. All of this marred the moment of arrival of national independence in the region in August 1947, the other side of which was the religious partitioning of the Bengal and Punjab provinces of British India.

As per official estimate, 18 million people belonging to religious minorities sought shelter across the newly created international boundaries between India and Pakistan immediately after the partition (Tan and Kudaisya 2008, 105). In the Punjab region, a population exchange was affected under the Military Evacuation Organisations (MEOs), which oversaw such exchange. Violence in this region largely proved to be a one-time affair. Compared to the west, migration became a much more protracted experience in the east. Here communal violence was relatively lower in intensity and no

population exchange was officially implemented. The initial position of the national leaders pertaining to Bengal was to encourage the dislocated Muslim and Hindu minorities to return back to their respective homes in West Bengal and East Bengal after communal tensions dissipated. One of the first instances of the official policy of encouraging the refugees to return to their left behind homes in the east was the Inter-Dominion Conference held between India and Pakistan in 1948. Such policies of encouraging religious minorities to return to their respective countries however, had very little effect on the ground. Here population flow was comparatively greater from East Bengal to eastern India, although a considerable number of people moved in the reverse direction, from different parts of eastern India to East Bengal.

A much greater number of Hindus left East Bengal in successive waves and settled in West Bengal and the neighbouring states of Assam and Tripura. A vast majority of the East Bengali Hindu refugees came to West Bengal for reasons of physical and cultural proximity. While migration started from the mid-1940s, the inflow of refugees accelerated during the Indian military intervention in the princely state of Hyderabad in September 1948.[7] By the end of 1949 it nearly petered out. Another round of migration started with communal riots, now between dalit Hindu peasants and their Muslim counterparts in areas like Khulna, Dhaka and Barishal in East Bengal from the early 1950s. This time the inflow of Hindu refugees was much greater in magnitude, and it consisted of lower class and caste dalit peasant communities coming to West Bengal. The migration continued even after the conclusion of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact of 1950, which was signed with a view to improve the communal situation in the two countries and provide securities to the religious minorities on both sides of the border. The pact temporarily checked the flow of migration, but could not stop it completely. The introduction of passports for travel from Pakistan to India on 15 October 1952 started a new exodus. Migration continued all through the 1950s. Another significant phase of migration began in the decade of the 1960s. There was widespread minority persecution in Khulna, Dhaka and other areas of East Bengal in 1964-65, over discontent due to the theft of a holy relic from a Muslim shrine, the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar in India. This set in a chain of migration (Chakrabarti 1999, 1-5).[8] Large scale migration came with the struggle for independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Migration has continued after that in the form of periodic trickles. The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first Prime Minister of independent Bangladesh in 1975 and declaration of Islam as state religion of Bangladesh in 1985 were major causes of outflow of Hindu population. There were a series of violence against the Bengali Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities in Bangladesh between 1989 till about 1993 in retaliation to the demolition of Babri Masjid and violence against Muslims in different parts of India. There has been anti-Hindu pogrom in

Bangladesh in 2010, 2013-2014. All these incidents have set off migration of Hindu minorities from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Other than religious persecution, more long-term factors like economic hardship and climate change have all pushed people out from Bangladesh to West Bengal. These factors are less emphasised in discussions of migration between India and Bangladesh. The later migratory flows have remained largely undocumented due to politics of non-recognition and covert nature of the migratory flows. For a large section of these incoming population, the urban agglomeration around Calcutta have been one of the prime destinations.

In India in the immediate aftermath of the partition of 1947, 'refugee' status was not granted to any of the displaced people migrating from Pakistan in the eastern and western parts. They were provided some protection under the official category of 'displaced persons'.[9] In this thesis, I have used to the terms refugee and migrants interchangeably for the two groups studied here, as the categorical differences between refugees and migrants are difficult to sustain. In my usage neither term implies a legally defined status.

All the East Bengali refugees coming to India till 1971 were officially categorised as 'displaced persons'. There were some sub categorisation within this broad legally defined status on the basis of their times of arrival. This categorical scheme reflects agendas of migration governance and erasures. Those refugees who came to West Bengal between October 1946 and March 1958 were termed 'Old Migrants'. They were promised some state assistance. Those who migrated between April 1958 and December 1963 were not recognised by the central or the state government and left out of any form of official rehabilitation. Those who migrated between January 1964 and March 1971 were termed 'New Migrants'. It was decided, only those of the 'New Migrants' who agreed to take shelter in government camps located outside West Bengal in other parts of India would receive official rehabilitation (Chakrabarti 1999, 234-235). From the late 1950s the main plank of government policy became dispersal of the East Bengali refugees from West Bengal to other neighbouring states. In the early 1960s this was achieved through erasure of migrants from official enumeration and entitlements. Afterwards, a new classificatory scheme of 'New Migrants' was devised which aimed to push the incoming refugees out of West Bengal. All those who have migrated to India after 1971 have again been erased from government records and faced exclusion from state assistance. An agreement was signed between India and Bangladesh after the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971, known as the Indira Mujib Pact. As per this pact all refugees who entered into India before March 25, 1971 were allowed to stay in India. Those migrating from Bangladesh to India after that date, do not have a legally recognised status. With an amendment to the Indian

Citizenship Act of 1955 brought about in 2003, the most recent migrants coming from Bangladesh were labelled as 'illegal migrants.'[10]

The other stream of migration studied here are of impoverished rural migrants coming to the Calcutta metropolitan agglomeration in the face of scarcity and lack of livelihood options in the rural areas of Bengal from the late 1930s. There are a good number of official records of migration of East Bengali displaced persons coming to West Bengal, at least till 1971 (after which migration has become legally ambiguous). There are also surveys and reports on labour migration to Calcutta's industrial suburbs. But there is hardly any comparable documentation of these other streams of rural-urban migration, often known as 'distress' migration. Long term structural factors like dislocation due to the Second World War, draught or famine like condition, dislocation in the coastal areas due to climate change and salinisation of soil from rising sea level have pushed people towards the urban areas. It is often people at the lowest rung of the rural landholding system who are dislocated and flock to urban margins to substitute their income. They are not officially recognised as refugees or migrants and have largely remained outside surveys and documentation. These are people of uncertain nomenclature. None of the labels used in the few existing official surveys on them, like 'sick destitutes', 'vagrants', 'encroachers' or a relatively less incriminating census category of 'homeless' adequately captures their condition. They have come under repeated eviction drives all through the post-independence era. The politics of (non)enumeration of these migrants is traced in greater detail in chapter three.

II. Anti-colonial nationalism and origins of ethnic and civic citizenship

The other concern of this thesis is how frequent dislocations mediate the nature of citizenship. Regulation of migration is one of the primary mechanisms for the production of the state, for defining membership in political communities and for consolidating the notion of state border. During the early phase of the evolution of the citizenship regime in colonial India, movement indentured labour and of non-indentured Indians to white settler colonies (like South Africa, Australia and Canada) were sites through which the colonial empire-state took a particular formation (Mongia 2018). In the British empire one important axis of controlling population movement remained race. The process of decolonisation would see supplanting race with ethnicity as a major determining factor for controlling migration and membership in the political community. We may briefly take note of how the two important conceptions of citizenship, universal civic citizenship and group differentiated forms of citizenship evolved in relation to British colonial rule, in

order to understand the increasing entanglement between ethnic citizenship and migration in post-colonial times.

Internal dynamics of the British colonial state, especially anti-colonial nationalism also shaped different ideas about the nature of political community and belonging. The growth of anti-colonial nationalism and citizenship as a form of membership to the nation took place in two related but distinct spheres, the material and the spiritual.[11] In the material domain, nationalist imagination followed western notions of 'modernity' and progress, and fought to erase the rule of colonial difference in areas of law, administration, economy and statecraft. Basic institutional arrangements created under British rule were retained and expanded by the post-colonial state in subsequent years. In the inner spiritual sphere, the indigenous elite attempted to carve out their own sovereign domain, with its own marks of distinct national culture, premised on an articulation of *difference* with colonial rule (P. Chatterjee 1993a; 1993b).[12]

In these two distinct spheres of the spiritual and the material, anti-colonial nationalism and associated ideas of citizenship found two different expressions. The first form of nationalism was closely tied to spiritual revivalist movements, split between its Hindu and Muslim counterparts. The revivalist trend will eventually lead to the two-nation theory and associated notions of group differentiated citizenship. The second avowedly 'modern' nationalism, propagated by the mainstream leadership of the Indian National Congress (INC) followed the western rational line of thinking. It prioritised a sense of western civic community of equal citizens. The *jus soli* criteria of citizenship followed from it. It may be noted here that these two traditions were never clearly separate and often overlapped.

Religious nationalism had its origin in Hindu and Muslim revivalist movements of the late nineteenth century, which grew in a competitive relation with each other. The revivalist movements were premised upon a recreation of their own distinct versions of history, drawing on romantic notions of Hindu or Muslim periods of golden rule in the past. In these romanticised histories, the Golden Age for the Muslim nation coincided with a time which would be considered the end of the Golden Age in Hindu collective memory. The way these were conceived in effect implied a clash of Hindu and Muslim cultures and civilisations.

Muslim revivalist tradition started with the Aligarh movement of social and cultural reform in north India, spearheaded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in the second half of the nineteenth century.[13]

Eventually taking the cue from this revivalist movement, Muslim separatist politics would draw its basic ideas of separate electorate and the demand of their own sovereign nation state, Pakistan. Initial beginnings of a Hindu nationalist reconstruction of their past could be found in the activities of the Hindu revivalist organisations like the Arya Samaj launched by Dayananda Saraswati in 1875,[14] the cow protection movement and revivalist movement initiated by Marathi leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak into the Indian National Congress (INC).

In the twentieth century Hindu religious nationalism became more overtly political under the ideology of Hindutva, as developed by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Savarkar was a brahmin revolutionary nationalist leader of the Hindu Mahasabha. Savarkar in a tract, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* among other writings made a distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism. In his formulation, Hinduism as a faith or religion was only a part of Hindutva. Hindutva more broadly encompassed a love for the land of the Hindus. Hindus, according to Savarkar, are those who consider India to be the land of their ancestors or *pitrabhumi*, as well as the land of their religion or *punyabhumi*. Only they can be its natural and national inhabitants.

Savarkar's writings in the *Hindutva* are full of poetic evocation of a land of the Hindus. This evocation of geography was meant to call attention to the land itself and to use tropes of cartography to assert the fundamental unity of Hindusthan. In *Hindutva*, Savarkar depicted the Muslims as foreign invaders. He portrayed the Indo Islamic millennium as one of invasion, which clashed with the Hindu nation and civilisation. Non-Hindus were consequently consigned to a second order of citizenship (Bakhle 2010, 177-178). Hindu and Muslim religious nationalism entered the arena of competitive politics from the early twentieth century. The All India Muslim League founded in 1906 and later the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) all drew on revivalist nationalist ideas and pursued communally charged politics.[15] The ideology of Hindutva has significantly contributed to an ethno-religious conception of citizenship.

Religious nationalism and ethnic group identities were also fostered by colonial ethnographic knowledge practices. It grew around the decennial census operations from the late nineteenth century. As part of census operations, studies on Indian religion and caste were carried out by members of the Indian Civil Service. Both religion and caste came to be understood through surveys, classification and codification. What resulted was a reified 'census-based view' of caste and religion. By counting, classifying and describing castes and religious communities as separate, reified, 'substantialised' or 'ethnicised' groups, the censuses and colonial anthropology significantly

encouraged the growth of politicised caste and religious communalism during the colonial period (Dirks 2001; Fuller 2016; Cohn 1987).

Mainstream nationalist leadership represented by the INC assumed a more western approach to nationalism and citizenship. They resorted to a more syncretic view of India's past. In this reconstruction, both ancient Hindu period as well as certain periods of Muslim domination, were viewed as periods of social and cultural efflorescence. But this brand of nationalism held that Indian society has decayed over the centuries through a divisive caste system and required reforms. They also presented a scathing economic critique of colonialism and pointed to the adverse economic impact of colonial rule. This economic critique became a significant component of Nehruvian nationalism. The economic goals and social objectives of this nationalism could not be fulfilled under colonial rule, as the economic interests of the colonial state prevented national reconstruction. Nationalist leaders like Nehru assumed that a solution to issues like the 'communal' problem required the elimination of the colonial state. The only problems which would then be real were economic problems.[16] The assumption was that nationalism based on sectarian identity is an anomaly caused by colonial policy of divide and rule and should disappear with the end of colonial rule. But this expectation of India's 'modernist' nationalist leaders was belied and different sectarian identities remained.

These contradictory elements in anti-colonial nationalism shaped the evolution of a subject-citizen regime in the colonial period and its transition to full national citizenship in India after independence.[17] During British colonial rule, the legal status of Indians was that of subjects in the empire. The colonial government experimented with providing limited franchise to a large subject population. The principle of partial representation was introduced, first in the municipal councils in 1882 and then in the provincial legislative councils at the turn of the century. Limited franchise was granted to a select section of the propertied classes and educated professionals such as civil servants and lawyers. By the Government of India Act of 1935, franchise was extended to about a fifth of the adult population in India (Jayal 2013, 44). While piecemeal concessions were granted, it was not the purpose of the colonial state to create conditions for the full growth of citizenship.

During this initial expansion of franchise, both the *jus sanguini* and the *jus soli* criteria of citizenship remained important. The *jus sanguini* principle prioritise primordial group attachments. Two such group identities, religion and caste became important and was fostered by the colonial state. Religious identities consolidated through the revivalist movements noted above. Caste based

movements for the social upliftment of the untouchable castes also grew from the late nineteenth century and became an important factor in staking citizenship claims. To give expression to such group differentiated demands of citizenship, the principle of separate representation in the legislatures and other elected bodies was introduced. The Morley-Minto reforms established separate Muslim electorates in 1909. Separate representation for the Muslim was extended in 1921 by the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms and again by the Government of India Act in 1935. This would culminate in their demand for a sovereign nation state, Pakistan in the 1940s. Parallelly, demands for providing protection to specific castes was raised and recognised in the Poona Pact of 1932, whereby the 'Depressed Classes' implying the dalit subjects secured special rights. Pressure from mainstream nationalist leaders forced them to abandon their claim for a separate electorate. By the Poona Pact, they secured reserved seats in a joint electorate. In addition, the Poona Pact assured a fair representation of the 'Depressed Classes' in the public services and earmarked a portion of educational grants for them.[18] In the Government of India Act, 1935 reserved seats were extended for the 'Depressed Classes', now re-named as the Scheduled Castes (SC). This brief recounting shows that group differentiated and ethnic forms of citizenship was woven into the citizenship regime of the colonial state.

The *jus soli* criteria of citizenship, the idea that national membership should be based on birth within the territory of the nation flowed from the western approach to nationalism. Rather than specific group attachments, they advocated a civic community of all equal citizens. For the moderate nationalists of the INC, there was little disagreement on the basic principle of *jus soli*, not least because of its precedence in British law as well as a range of proto-constitutional documents drafted by the nationalist leadership during the early twentieth century. Discussions on the question of citizenship for India's indentured labour migrants reveal this line of thinking. Indentured labour were taken from India to different parts of the British empire by the colonial authorities to work in plantations. The issue of their citizenship remained open. Nationalist leaders like Nehru encouraged overseas Indians to identify with the countries of their adoption. In 1947 there were four million Indians in the British Commonwealth countries. In the newly independent republic of India, dual citizenship was not offered. India embraced the *jus soli* criteria of citizenship (Jayal 2013, 54-57). But the jus soli criterion was already considerably mediated by ethno-religious ideas of citizenship in colonial times. This will become increasingly important in the context of post partition migration. Ceaseless migration after the partition will feed into ethno-religious identity politics and associated group differentiated ideas of citizenship.

III. Displaceability, bodily politics and citizenship: a conceptual itinerary

This dissertation contributes to three inter-related sets of literature, on the partition of India, on contemporary displacements and citizenship. I attempt to bring the partition studies literature in dialogue with other experiences of dislocation in Bengal. Research on migration in West Bengal has been pursued in two main arenas. There is a significant and rich corpus of study on the partition of Bengal in 1947, the politics around it, the inflow of refugees that ensued in its aftermath and its various ramifications (Chakrabarti 1999; Chatterji 1994; 2007a; N. Chatterjee 1992; Sen 2018). A considerable part of the existing literature on the partition focuses on the experiences of the middle-class refugees migrating from East Bengal to West Bengal. The migration of lower caste and class groups has remained relatively unexplored. Some new beginnings have been made in this area with accounts of fractures in dalit identity politics in Bengal after the partition (S. Bandyopadhyay and Basu Ray Chaudhury 2014), the experiences of the dalit camp refugees (Sen 2011) and the experience of the East Bengali dalit Matua religionists (Lorea 2020) among others. My study builds on this literature. It focuses on one dalit group, the *namasudras* in a camp area in a peri-urban locale over a long time frame. It traces their negotiation of mechanisms of dislocations, by foregrounding the role their caste and associated social and cultural capital in the process.

Apart from partition studies, the other important point of interest in migration research in West Bengal has been facets of labour migration, specially migration of labour to the industrial suburbs of the Calcutta metropolitan region from Bengal's rural hinterland and neighbouring states and the question of formation of an industrial proletariat (Haan 1994; Dasgupta 1976; Chaudhuri 1992; Chakrabarty 2000b). The life experience of the partition refugees and the labour migrants are treated separately under 'refugee' and 'migration' studies. There is a scholarly agreement, that unlike other parts of India, Bengal has not seen much of what is studied under the category of 'internal displacement' (Banerjee et al. 2005, 134). The present thesis attempts to destabilise the presumed categorical separation between the 'refugee' and the 'migrant' by the aforementioned two sets of literature. On the one hand it draws on the experience of dalit partition refugees and attempts to de-exceptionalise the partition of 1947 by highlighting its protracted nature. On the other hand, it attempts to bring the experience of the 'partition refugees', often treated as a class unto themselves in dialogue with other experiences of migration. It highlights how for lower class and caste groups everyday forms of displacements unfold within the domain of the informal, where the boundaries between 'refugees' and 'migrants' blur. Rather than reifying the governmental categories of 'refugee', 'migrant', 'distress migrant' or 'homeless' and the assumptions of agency

and victimhood underlying these categories, I am interested in the ways in which such categories come to be constructed and the purposes they serve. The emphasis on *how* suggests a study of processes rather than of origins and end results, of multiple and overlapping causes. The interest shifts to how governmental categories work to acknowledge the claims to entitlement of certain groups, erasing the rights-claims of several others.

The past decade has seen a number of insightful studies on different modalities of displacements in South Asia. A prime concern of these works is the initiation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the region from the 1990s and associated dislocations in urban areas. Several book length works and articles have come up in this vein that draw on Henri Lefebvre's notion of how space is not simply a geometrical location, but *produced* in service of the dominant power relations (Lefebvre 1992), and on David Harvey's idea of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2009). In this formulation, lately a form of primitive accumulation (which according to Marxist theory is an originary moment, somewhat prior to and outside of capitalism), which Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession, is operative in third world contexts through mechanisms of the SAPs. Through the SAPs, western surplus capital is invested in the global south by dispossession of already existing spaces of livelihood. Taking the cue from Lefebvre and Harvey's notion of space and dispossession, new studies point out that extraction of surplus value is a socio-spatial process. Hereby labouring and lived landscapes are usurped and reproduced into landscapes of accumulation. Focusing on a spate of recent eviction of squatters' settlements and slums in big metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmedabad from the late 1990s, these studies highlight a shift in India's planning goals that traditionally prioritised rural development. Now a new importance is placed on the development of the country's big urban centres as 'world-class' cities (Batra and Mehra 2008; Bhan 2009; Ramanathan 2006; Baviskar 2003; Dupont 2008; Padhi 2007; Ghertner 2011; Fernandes 2004; I. Chatterjee 2014). The subcontinent's major metro cities, the argument goes, are being remoulded in the image of 'global' or 'world-class' cities to attract the flow of global finance capital in order to progress on a path of a projected economic growth. The middle-classes are the prime beneficiary and driving factor of this neoliberal globalisation. They are increasingly recast in the image of ideal citizens in their capacity of *consumption*. This literature points out that the growing visibility of the middle-class *consumer* citizens comes with a concomitant political discursive process of forgetting of the poor. Increasing claims on public spaces by the middle-classes together with the state, judiciary and sections of the media have led to a corresponding movement to clean such spaces of the poor. These studies point out that dislocation of the poor are often justified through the discourses

of trespassing on public land, which renders the poor as 'encroacher', and as the prime source of pollution of urban land and resources.

Much of the aforementioned literature focuses on big metro cities, but Calcutta and the Bengal region more broadly do not significantly figure in these studies. I have attempted to contribute to this literature in two ways. First, I try to broaden the understanding of displacement by including within analysis actual displacements and potential threats of it, which constitutes a particular mode of governance. Taking the cue from Yiftachel (2020) I term this condition displaceability. I take displaceability to be a coercive expression of the informal as discussed shortly. Within displaceability people are sometimes displaced. More often, they are held in a relation of inclusive exclusion and participate in grossly unequal political exchanges. Their political subjectivity is eroded to varying degrees. Second, I highlight that in the condition of displaceability, when participation in conventional politics is constrained, it is useful to locate political agency at the level of the fleshly body. I try to show that in informal and displaceable contexts where the human body is exposed to extreme depravity, bodies in collective enact a form of bodily politics.

I find the analytical lens of the informal useful to understand modes of insidious displacements. Traditionally the informal has been understood as a sector of the economy, deficient in legal standards operational in the formal sector of the economy. But over time, the sense of the informal has been broadened from informal economy to include informal politics, and various other modes of life activity which go on in quasi legal ways. In policy circles and academia, attitude towards the informal vary. One line of thought which is critical of the unjust fallout of the neo-liberal economic policies, shared by researches focused on third world urbanism views the informal as sites (for example, informal slums) of future doom due to unjust neoliberal policies (Davis 2004). Alternately scholars have also located in the informal entrepreneurship and forms of initiative that contribute to the upliftment of these life-worlds in spite of the inequalities inherent in such arrangements. In a seminal work in this vein, Partha Chatterjee has espoused the idea of political society which falls outside western conception of civil society (Chatterjee 2004). The domain of political society is marked by illegality, but nevertheless contributes to a form of democratisation of politics. In these formulations, a dichotomy between the formal and informal is presupposed. Rather than looking at the informal simply as a sector of the economy or in a dichotomous relation to the formal, this study adopts a broader approach to the informal as a *mode*. This understanding indicates a wider organising logic that governs the process of urban transformation itself (Roy and AlSayyad 2004). In the domain of the informal, the logic of exception is at work.

Giorgio Agamben has highlighted the functioning of the state of exception as a general condition of politics of the modern bio political paradigm. In the state of exception human beings are held in a relation of abandonment with the sovereign power, in a zone of indistinction where politico juridical rules apply in withholding itself (Agamben 1998). In Agamben's original formulation, sovereign exception marks out the excludable subjects who are denied protection and reduced to 'bare life'. In post-colonial contexts exception does not manifest as a political singularity. Rather than taking an absolute view of sovereign exception, this thesis looks at exception more broadly which mutates and takes different formations as a graded and differentiated regime (Ong 2006; Roy 2009). Within the informal, the logic of exception is at work. In this view of informality as exception, informality is not an object of state regulation, but *produced* by it. These are politically liminal situations which nonetheless retain room for negotiation and different levels of resistance manifest.

Displaceability operates within informal contexts. Theorists of informal politics often highlight how conditions of the informal lead to the empowerment of socially disadvantaged groups. This happens when marginal groups are able to forge larger political alliances with different stakeholders including government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), even if such alliances hinge on a fine balance, in order to successfully claim rights. Socially disadvantaged groups are also empowered when they emerge as a consolidated vote bank (Agarwala 2013) and claim rights through exchanges in vote bank politics. NGO activism, forging larger alliances and vote bank politics strengthen marginal social groups in their negotiation of informality and leads to a 'deepening of democracy' (Chatterjee 2004; Appadurai 2001; Benjamin 2008; Agarwala 2013). In this study I have emphasised the violence and ruptures within the informal, on times when informal negotiations with myriad stakeholders do not lead to significant empowerment. Displaceability is a coercive expression of the informal. The lack of right to shelter and a perpetual threat of impending demolition of their dwellings erode their political subjectivity and coerce them to participate in unequal political exchanges. Within such conditions, a more basic level of alliance, that of the fleshly body in collective takes precedence. This thesis highlights that an understanding of negotiations in the informal domain should take seriously the role of the *enfleshed* and mobile body.

Discussions on politics have conventionally privileged a knowing and speaking subject as the legitimate actor in the political field. The powerful role of speech attributed in conventional political imaginary comes out from this observation made by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*- 'speech is what makes man a political being... whatever men do or know or experience can make

sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about… speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words' (Arendt 1958, 3-4, 178). This reflects a long standing conception of politics where a disembodied knowing and speaking subject is considered to be the bearer of rights and the prime actor in politics. The body is taken to be a mere facticity, awaiting signification by a disembodied consciousness. While the metaphor of the body has been present in juridico-political discourse for a long time, it is often invoked in an abstract sense to indicate an overarching political body. More recent discussions of bio power and bio politics take into account the wellbeing of the body as an important concern of politics (Foucault 1998; Agamben 1998). In this view, technologies of disciplining of the body and managing populations mark contemporary conditions of bio politics. These studies based on the experience of Europe, sees in power a positive function of preserving life. But in neo-colonial contexts, the positive functions of power in preserving life are often constrained. Dwellers of peripheral informal spaces live in harsh conditions. In situations where the human body is exposed to extreme depravity, politics through and for the body is faced with more oppressive power. Contemporary discussions of subaltern urbanism in the third world have variously discussed agency and entrepreneurship in different contexts of informal life-worlds. But these studies have largely ignored politics at the level of the body. I try to highlight how in informal contexts the fleshly body becomes a site for politics. Operationalisation of power in the domain of the informal render vulnerable groups as disposable bodies. I attempt to show that such reduced bodily existence in turn induces a form of politics whereby migrants use mobile and bodily strategies to negotiate dislocation.

Finally, this thesis is concerned with how such informal migrants experience citizenship. A recent focus of citizenship studies has been how forces of globalisation have mediated citizenship and belonging. Tied to these deliberations is a notion that with increasing globalisation and movement of goods, capital and labour, forms of ethnic nationalism and ethnic citizenship are losing relevance. Rather, emphasis is put on processes and mechanisms of de-nationalisation and associated transformations in citizenship, where membership presumably broaden in scope. Scholars have variously stressed post national forms of membership specially in the case of Europe (Soysal 1994; Bauböck 1994) or denationalised forms drawing on the experience of the United States (Sassen 2002). In both these formulations rights associated with citizenship derive from international human rights organisations and accrue to universal persons (Benhabib 2007) rather than to citizens bestowed by territorially bound nation states. A strand of this literature relocates emancipatory forms of citizenship at the level of the city, in place of the nation (Sassen 2002; Kron and Lebuhn

2018; Rabben 2011; Rotter 2010). These studies emphasise how citizenship transcends national loyalties in favour of larger global formations. They tend to suggest that one effect of this is de-ethnicisation of citizenship. It is suggested that migration works as an important catalyst in the process of de-ethnicisation of citizenship (Joppke 1999). In this recent burgeoning scholarly field, ethnic imagination of the nation state and ethnic forms of belonging are relegated to a past which is contradictory to the spread and functioning of global capital. However, the experience of migration and citizenship in many parts of the global south, including the Indian subcontinent is contrary to this formulation. In post-colonial contexts, globalisation often works in paradoxical ways. Here forces of globalisation have created new incentives of cultural purification and produced new forms of ethnos (Das 2019; Appadurai 2006). This is manifesting in renewed drives of ethnicisation of citizenship, where migration acts as a catalyst of re-asserting primordial group associations.

In India recent trends show attempts to ethnically homogenise, what was earlier a fluid and multicultural regime of citizenship. The existing literature on citizenship in the subcontinent variously explores the tensions in the citizenship regime in the immediate aftermath of the partition and ensuing migration (Zamindar 2007) and shifts in its *de jure* structure over the years (Roy 2010; Jayal 2013). I revisit these grounds in the light of the new situation arising out of two successive amendments brought to India's Citizenship Act, first in 2003, and then in 2019, and prospects of updating a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC), all of which move towards a prioritisation of descent over domicile. Furthermore, while these researches take migration to be central to the formation of Indian citizenship, they do not address the lived experiences of migrants themselves and their responses to these transformations. I have attempted to bring out the diverse responses such transformations generate by drawing on the lived experiences of migrants and their changing politics. A refreshing addition to this literature is Sinharay's study of dalit migrant citizenship in West Bengal (Sinharay 2019). My study is a comparison of two different groups of migrants with differing legal status and social and cultural capital. The attempt is to bring out the specificities of peripheral migrant experiences and facets of their negotiations with the state with regard to their legal status as well as social rights. In doing this, this thesis highlights the fractures of citizenship, its exclusions and the contestations it generates.

A word is needed about the ways in which post-colonial relations of power function. This thesis takes post-colonies to mean societies recently emerging from the experience of colonialism and colonial relations of violence, and itself constituting a distinctive regime of violence (Mbembe 1992). Focus on neo/post-colonial relations of exploitation are absent from a large part of critical urban

theory which often take the basic condition of formally equal citizenship and political membership as a point of departure for their analysis. But post-colonial contexts are often marked by prevalence of neo-colonial type of relations, where the very notions of membership and citizenship are deeply ruptured (Yiftachel 2009). Gramsci's concept of hegemony, with its fundamental assumption regarding the willingness and ability of the social elite to incorporate the peripheries, has notable limitations when dealing with post-colonial settings. Instead of consensual domination, here the working of power is premised on more coercive relations. The positive aspects of power as implied in the notion of hegemony, or in the Foucauldian notions of governmentality and bio politics concerned with preservation of life are often limited in a vast array of post-colonial countries, which are ruled by ethnocratic states. Here, subaltern groups are placed at the limits of societal hegemonic projects. Dominant powers often tend to impose coercive and violent forms of colonial control, rather than legitimising types of power.

IV. Rationale of case studies

Due to reasons of familiarity, my field site has remained the area around my home town, Calcutta and North 24 Parganas. A large part of the population movement in Bengal has occurred in relation to forces of structural inequality operating within the region, centred around an unequal city-country exchange. The city of Calcutta has been at the heart of colonial trade and commerce. In many ways, the vast countryside was made subservient to the commercial needs of the city. Direction of population flow in Bengal often reflects as well as reproduces this. Calcutta and its industrial suburbs have received migrants since its very inception, suffered severe disruptions during the process of decolonisation, and in its aftermath, became home to the largest number of refugees among all South Asian cities.[19] Calcutta's past experiences with migration and its deep entanglement in 'partition induced displacement,' makes it ideally suited to provide an understanding of the differential experience of displaced populations within the urban spaces of South Asia. North 24 Parganas is a border district and is home to ceaseless inflow of people from Bangladesh. It is an equally interesting locale for examining questions of dislocation. The experiences of migrants at the urban margins of Calcutta and North 24 Parganas also provide interesting insights on the recent transformations in citizenship.

More than the city itself, the present study is concerned with spaces of migrant livelihood in the suburbs and at the urban margins. The expanding conurbations, where the city fades into the countryside are liminal spaces and locales of ever changing modes of dislocation and dispossession.

These are zones of informality and locales where connection between people and places are frequently challenged and fierce contests over land are fought out. The two migrant groups and their dwelling and livelihood spaces discussed in this thesis are marginal in location and in their relation to the overall functional logic of the Calcutta metropolitan area.[20] These are the zones of exception where rules of metropolitan planning apply by withholding itself. While they are an inseparable part of Calcutta metropolitan area, here the symbolic meaning of middle-class *bhadralok*[21] Calcutta breaks down. They somehow constitute an outside if every present reality. Here a migrational or metaphorical city slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.

The first case study is of dalit partition refugees from East Bengal migrating to North 24 Parganas. Dalit East Bengali refugees have the highest concentration in two districts of West Bengal, Nadia and 24 Parganas. My field site is located in North 24 Parganas. My initial attempts were at interaction at two settlements close to the India-Bangladesh border where recent migrants from Bangladesh live. But I repeatedly encountered reluctance to discuss issues of recent migration due to their dubious legality. The nature of these informal settlements renders them precarious. Finally, I begun interaction at an area which is less precarious in legal terms, an officially recognised East Bengali dalit refugee camp site set up in early 1954, which eventually became a squatters' settlement. This camp area is officially known as the Bahirdoba group of 'ex-camp sites'.

The Bahirdoba ex-camp area provides an interesting site of research because of its peripheral but potentially important location within the Calcutta metropolitan agglomeration. The western most part of North 24 Parganas is bordered by the river Ganga. Most of the old settlements in the district line the river. As one moves away from the river towards the east, large areas have now become intermixed with middle-class East Bengali refugee squatters' colonies. The eastern most part of the district shares border with Bangladesh and is a locale of continuous trickle of low scale migration from across the border. Areas closer to North 24 Pargana's eastern border are home to relatively recent migrants from Bangladesh, an overwhelming majority of whom are dalits. The Bahirdoba camps are located in the middle of the district and are integrally connected to the eastern parts. The area resembles a desakota region, where urban and rural forms of land use and settlement coexist in uneasy entanglement and various disputes over land are fought. It is located north east of Calcutta and is only a few kilometres away from the city. The Bahirdoba camps have a majority of 'displaced persons' migrating around the early 1950s. But the area is also home to a considerable number of new incoming people from Bangladesh, usually relatives and friends of the old camp settlers. The camp locale was rural and part of local village *panchayats*[22] till the 1980s. In the 1990s parts of it came under a municipality, indicating a process of rapid and problematic urbanisation. The closeness

of this ex-camp site to Calcutta and rapid urbanisation has eventually made this area of interest to builders and a ground for fierce contestations over land.

The refugee inhabitants in the ex-camp site belong almost exclusively to the *namasudra* cultivating caste. The *namasudras* were a lower caste Bengali peasant community settled in the low lying swamp regions of East Bengal. They found themselves amidst Hindu Muslim communal violence in the early 1950s and started migrating to West Bengal. Many of them took shelter in government camps. A group of such government camp refugees were brought to the Bahirdoba camps to work in a canal renovation project, and became forceful squatters at the camp sites after high handed closure of the camps by the government in the late 1950s. I have drawn on semi structured interviews and repeated discussions with a total of 25 respondents including refugee households at the ex-camp sites and adjoining areas. The interviewees range from leaders of the settlement and day labourers who form the majority of the campers. I have held informal discussions with relatively new inhabitants from Bangladesh in the camps and adjoining area who migrated after 1971 and lack a recognised legal status as 'displaced persons'. I have also interacted with leaders of two dalit refugee organisations active in Bahirdoba: the Nikhil Bharat Bangali Udbastu Samannyay Samity (NIBBUSS) and the Matua Mahasangha (MM), in and outside of the camp areas. These organisations have played a role in the social and cultural life of the refugees and more recently consolidated their agitation around citizenship. I have participated in a few public meetings on citizenship held by these organisations. Public speeches made by the leaders at these meetings have been used.

The second case study consists of impoverished rural landless people migrating from the countryside of West and East Bengal[23] and as also from rural areas of the neighbouring state of Bihar to the urban margins of Calcutta. Poverty stricken rural migrants who flock to urban areas often live in shanties at marginal urban spaces along suburban railway tracks and canal banks, on the sidewalks and pavements of public thoroughfares and under foot bridges and flyovers etc. They are a curiously status-less group and are variously labelled as 'vagrants', 'homeless', 'pavement dwellers,' or 'encroachers'. I have drawn on field research conducted at specific pockets of such migrant dwellings along two of Calcutta's sewerage canals, the Round Canal and the Pali Nala and five pavement dwelling areas. The two canals run through some of the central parts of the city. For locational advantage and reasons of availability of work, the canal banks have been densely populated by rural migrants from the southern districts of West Bengal and other areas, have come under repeated eviction drives and been re-occupied by the same or new groups of migrants.[24] More specifically, my field data comes from two pockets of dwellings by the Round Canal at the

Ramhata area in central Calcutta and Ragbazar area in north Calcutta. My other field site is a stretch of dwellings by the Pali Nala near Haria in south Calcutta. The dwellers of informal squats usually don't *stay put* at one particular site willingly or otherwise. My following of peripatetic groups at the two canal sides led to the spread my field visits between several interconnected spaces at the promptings of my interlocutors. I eventually visited five pavement dwellings close to the two canals. They include three groups of dwellings near the Round Canal in central Calcutta i) families on a main north south artery, the Krafulla Chandra road, ii) a group of families living on a street in central Calcutta, Ambala street iii) a group of families close to Ambala street, living on a pavement next to a park called Manas Mitra Park. Apart from this, I have interacted with two groups of dwellings near the Pali Nala in south Calcutta iv) a few families living under a flyover near Kheyalipur, close to a Muslim religious shrine in south west and v) another cluster of families on a main road near Nadirpur also in south west Calcutta. My field visits also include an official rehabilitation site for a very small number of people displaced during the metro railway extension project at Pali Nala, at the south eastern suburb of Calcutta. This rehabilitation scheme has been an exception in the larger scenario of displacements without resettlement.

The canal side dwellings are known as *khalpar* in the local parlance which translates as canal bank. The pavement dwellings are known by the brief term *foot*, an abbreviation for footpath. All the spaces visited, function as dwelling spaces from time to time for rural migrants, face 'cleansing' by different sources of authorities and morph into other spaces depending on contextual power equations. My interactions at the field sites have been in the nature of semi structured interviews or informal discussions conducted with 25 households spread between the two *khalpar* and five *foot* sites. Apart from interaction with the dwellers, I have conducted 10 interviews of practitioners including councillors, political party workers, activists and NGO workers involved in anti-eviction struggle in these areas. Real place names and names of people for all interviews and discussions used in this thesis have been changed to protect the identity of the research participants.

V. Historical anthropology and the question of method

This research is epistemologically located at the intersection of history and anthropology. I have drawn on the method of historical anthropology. This method foregrounds a diachronic perspective. The spatial imaginary of naturally isolable and well bound areas/regions is problematised and both space and time are taken as produced (Cohn 1987; Axel 2002). My attempt has been to look at time as non-linear and heterogenous. The past is not treated simply as a historical background that precedes the present, but as continuously being folded within a heterogenous present, attuned

towards a future. The relation between the archive and ethnography is taken as mutually constitutive. The attempt is to treat the colonial archive as a product of colonial ethnography and view field notes as a mode of archiving, written over by the myriad power dynamics of class, caste and gender between myself and the research participants within the field.

Practices of archiving in colonial contexts have always been instruments of maintaining domination. The introductory chapter explores migration governance in relation to mechanisms of colonial archiving during an intense moment of decolonisation from 1939-1947 and the multiple erasures and silences of the archive. I have utilised colonial police files in Calcutta which provides glimpse into modes of categorising and containing a diverse array of migratory subjects. The Special Branch (SB) of the Calcutta Police (which after independence has come under the government of West Bengal) is a branch solely responsible for policing of the city of Calcutta. And the files of the SB, Political Miscellaneous Series contain day to day police records of activities of different groups of migrants, 'evacuees', and 'destitutes' on the streets of Calcutta, public meetings held by charitable organisations and politics parties catering to these groups. It contains records of contemporary unrests, strikes and communal conflicts in the 1940s. These were uncertain times and the police files reflect the uncertainty of the moment and bear traces of archival displacements. The practices of producing knowledge about migration during this period and traces of archival dislocations provide clue to the post-colonial mechanisms of migration governance.

Apart from the police files, I have utilised various published reports and surveys by different government departments. The Annual Administrative Reports of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) and the Annual Reports of the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) have been helpful in tracing planning priorities in the initial years before and after independence in relation to migration. Other than this, a few reports of the department of Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of West Bengal set up after independence to deal with the influx of East Bengali 'displaced persons' have been useful. Most of the above mentioned sources provide information relating to the East Bengali refugees and issues of migration governance in general. The only government sources pertaining to the itinerant 'homeless' people in Calcutta have been three reports on Calcutta's pavement dwellers by the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) published between 1970s and the 1980s. The Calcutta censuses of different years have also been utilised.

A large part of the rest of the study brings ethnography to bear on the archive. I have tried to constantly turn back on my own position within this research project, permeated as it is by a

persisting insider/outsider dilemma. My interest in migration stems from being part of an East Bengali Hindu refugee family based in Calcutta for three generations. As a third generation member of a family of refugees, I have grown up listening to stories of Bengal's territorial partition in 1947 and my family's dislocation from East Bengal. From early childhood, stories of my family's dislocation and their subsequent struggle for resettlement in Calcutta have become part of my everyday sensibility. After migrating to Calcutta in the 1940s, my grandparents built our extended family home in the southern suburbs of Calcutta, close to a middle-class East Bengali refugee colony area. The entire locality is inhabited by middle-class East Bengali refugees, now by their third generation descendants. This part of the city has acquired a symbolic value as a bastion of a valorous *udbastu sangram* (refugee struggle). Numerous memoirs produced by the refugees themselves, and popular histories emanating from the region recount the valorous struggle of the middle-class East Bengali refugees and their integration within the suburbs of Calcutta.[25] The success story of the middle-class refugees pervade the public sphere of West Bengal. What is intriguing about these stories are their silences and erasures. In this thesis I have attempted to address concerns beyond my own class and caste position and broaden the understanding of displacement, by drawing on the experiences of lower class and caste refugees. This thesis is permeated by the paradox of my own positionality of being part of a resourceful middle-class group of refugees in West Bengal, albeit with a past history of dislocation, and my attempts to be an 'insider' to other experiences of dislocations and weave a research agenda around it. Research is never innocent of politics. The fact that I come from a relatively privileged middle-class background and was located as such by my research participants is inscribed in this research in multiple ways.

The field areas studied here are transitional spaces located at the intersection of the rural and urban. Rather than trying to identify well defined places, the field sites have been treated as fluid with no specific boundaries, as part of a web of interconnected spaces. In conducting discussions, the attempt was never to push conversations into issues which the research participants were not comfortable reflecting on. I have tried to pay close attention to what my interlocutors thought crucial in their lifeworld. This led the field guide my enquiry and areas visited in an interactive manner. In the Bahirdoba camps and adjoining areas the interactions have been through repeated visits. Here I begun interaction through the contact of a well known middle-class left refugee leader in the area, Kartik. He spoke about camp culture in derogatory terms discussed later in chapter two. My familiarity with some of the middle-class refugee colonies in North 24 Parganas and subsequent interactions at the Bahirdoba area inhabited by dalit refugees, made me aware of a huge social disconnect between the middle-class refugees, their left political patrons and their dalit

counterparts still present in the state of West Bengal. Since then, the interactions have continued with repeated visits and participation in the social life of the Bahirboba area.

The interview questions were initially aimed at understanding their experience of the partition and the dislocation around it. Due to the growing importance of their struggle for citizenship, eventually my interest was channelled to citizenship. The nature of the interactions involved interviews, participation in their social functions, like religious ceremonies held in the camp areas and a series of recent political rallies and meetings on citizenship. During these interactions I was repeatedly asked about my last name, which is an indicator of caste position in the Hindu caste structure, in order to be located by the research participants in the caste hierarchy. Apart from personal and group interactions, a memoir collected during fieldwork, newsletters, pamphlets and publications of two refugee organisations active in the camp area, the NIBBUS and the MM have been utilised. Both these organisations are active on social media and their social media handles have provided a wealth of information about their recent demands regarding citizenship.

At the Round Canal and Pali Nala, my initial attempt was to understand the massive eviction drive that was carried out in 2002 in connection, first with the metro railway extension at Pali Nala and afterwards for canal renovation at the Round Canal. My repeated visits to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC)[26] in an attempt to secure an appointment with the engineer responsible for the metro railway extension project and reach project affected people failed. Nor were other officials at the CMC interested in providing contacts at these areas. There is no separate CMC department that deals with the urban 'homeless' and I approached the slum development department. There I was encouraged to visit slums that have been regularised by the Corporation over the years, as these areas are a relative success story of regularisation carried out by the municipal government. It was not possible to find contacts at either of the two *khalpar* through my middle-class circles. Finally, I started walking by the Round Canal, hoping to approach people and strike a conversation. During my third such attempt at interactions, I met Anwar, an inhabitant of the area and a local leader who eventually became my main interlocutor. When Anwar wanted to know who I was and what did I do professionally, I told him that I was doing a PhD and that I wanted to write about the lives of people by the canal side. In Anwar's world, doctoral research is not a familiar professional or life activity. I explained that after the completion of the research, the findings will be printed in the form of a book. I became known as the *survey didi*, the sister who conducts surveys, and thus came to be associated with that powerful apparatus for generating knowledge. My questions were guided by a broad concern to understand how the migrant families have come to occupy these precarious

dwellings, how they cope with evictions, and have staked repeated returns. The discussions usually took place over hospitality over a cup of tea and never simply abided by a set questionnaire. Here I have encountered people willing to share their experience. But I have also met many others who have been reluctant to engage. They have expressed a strong disdain about the utility of such interactions. I have encountered sharp questions about how, if at all, discussions with me, or my 'survey' will contribute to the betterment of their lives.

I have also interacted with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) who have been active at different stretches of the *khalpar* and *foot* at different times. These include three Calcutta based NGOs, the Hawker Sangram Committee (HSC), the Nagarik Mancha and The Calcutta Samaritan (TCS). Two of the NGOs, the Hawker Sangram Committee and the Nagarik Mancha were active here only around the time of the evictions in 2001-2002. They were part of an anti-eviction struggle that continued for a few years from 2001. A survey conducted by the HSC in 2004 in the aftermath of the evictions at Round canal have been useful. The TCS has worked with these groups for the longest period of time. A survey and a number of reports published by them on Calcutta's 'homeless' provide a wealth of information on relevant issues concerning these groups.

My study also extensively draws on contemporary newspapers. I have utilised news report from the English dailies, especially the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Times of India and the Statesman. Among the vernacular dailies I have utilised *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Jugantar* and *Swadhinata*. The affairs of the refugees and their rehabilitation within the state was a much discussed issue of the day. The newspapers contain news reports about the East Bengali refugees almost on a daily basis for about two decades during and after the partition of the subcontinent. My thesis also makes use of memoirs and autobiographies collected during field research with the dalit refugees.

VI. Organisation of the dissertation

This thesis has four chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. In this introductory discussion, I provide the context of the study, its theoretical framework in relation to the case studies and the key questions and methods I follow.

All four chapters of the thesis address different aspects of the central notion of displaceability. Chapter one focuses on the period beginning with the Second World War in 1939 till the moment of national independence in the subcontinent in 1947. Here I look at the general experience of

migration to Calcutta in the 1940s. By drawing on the colonial archive, especially the files of the Special Branch (SB) of the Calcutta Police, my attempt is to address how politics of colonial archiving and accompanying archival dislocations and erasures have been an integral part of colonial migration governance and can significantly fashion the condition of displaceability. The chapter is not intended as a background, but mobilises a central question regarding politics of archiving and enumeration, further developed in chapters two and three. In this chapter I have traced three streams of population movement directed towards or passing through Calcutta i) people displaced from the Far East and coming to Calcutta from the early 1942, ii) famished rural poor from Bengal's countryside who arrived all through the 1940s and iii) people fleeing communal violence between the Hindus and Muslims from the mid-1940s. The chapter identifies a few interconnected population categories brought to bear in wartime Calcutta, like the 'priority classes' who were provided some protection as people servicing the war, and its various migrant 'others', variously categorised as 'evacuees' and 'sick destitutes' whose rights ranged from those of quasi to non-citizen-subjects. This refugee protection regime provided controlled relief for a few and sought to confine and disperse several others.

Chapter two looks at the experience of dalit East Bengali refugees who were displaced due to communal violence in East Bengal and migrated to 24 Parganas in the early 1950s. These refugees were initially recognised as 'displaced persons' by the West Bengal government with some rights and entitlements. This chapter explores the mechanisms of displaceability by tracing a process of deliberate state initiated informalisation which has eroded the dalit refugees' legally recognised status. I analyse how over the years their lives have become entwined with new 'migrants' coming from Bangladesh. Their lives are informalised and a small but significant number of them live under the condition of displaceability. Here I foreground the role of caste in order to understand how socially disadvantaged groups experience and also *negotiate* dislocations differentially. This chapter further shows that the identities of dwellers of such peripheral grey zones retain certain ambiguities, where dissonance surface.

Chapter three addresses the experience of a status less and much more socially invisible group of rural migrants. They are an impoverished peripatetic rural people, dislocated due to multiple factors related to long term structural violence of poverty. They come to the urban margins of Calcutta from the villages of West Bengal, East Bengal and Bihar. I trace how displaceability operates for them through processes of archival erasure and how dislocation has become more frequent after the initiation of neo-liberal reforms in India from the 1990s. Their lived lives are conflated with the

images of 'encroacher', 'pollutant' 'criminal' and 'infiltrator', which negates their positive contribution to the city and renders them vulnerable to dislocations. I look at how in the shadowy presence of displaceability, they participate in unequal political exchanges. Such politics try to nullify their political subjectivity and reduce them to a mere bodily existence. This chapter shows that they in turn negotiate forces of dislocation through a mobile and bodily politics.

Chapter four is concerned with how the migrants experience citizenship. It looks at two aspects of their experience of citizenship, pertaining to legal status and social rights. I trace a gradual transformation in the legal instruments of citizenship in India from *jus soli* to *jus sanguinis* principles in relation to migration. I peruse how this brand of ethnic citizenship has in turn mediated the legal status of the dalit partition refugees and the peripatetic rural migrants. Finally, I look into how the displaced groups have claimed social rights associated with citizenship, all of which are tied to their right to inhabit the city. The chapter shows that the dalit refugees, through their long-drawn movement for rehabilitation, and struggle for protective discrimination, have managed to tap some social rights as Indian citizens. The statusless and peripatetic rural migrants however, carry on an everyday struggle for the most basic necessities of life like food, shelter and livelihood.

In the conclusion I ponder upon the broader implication of such peripheral migrant experiences in post-colonial urban contexts, through the conceptual lens of displaceability and its relation to citizenship.

Notes

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[1] The British colonial province of Bengal was territorially partitioned in two halves at the time of India's independence in 1947. The eastern half of the province became known as East Bengal and joined Pakistan. East Bengal was officially renamed as East Pakistan and was known by that name between 1955 and 1971. After a war of independence in that region in 1971, East Pakistan emerged as a new nation, Bangladesh. The western half of the erstwhile province of Bengal became known as the state of West Bengal within India. In this thesis I have used the nomenclature East Bengal for the territory of Bangladesh (before 1971) as this is used by most of my interlocutors, or by its Bengali translation, Purba Bangla.

[2] The city of Calcutta was renamed as Kolkata in 2001. In this thesis I have retained the old usage, as the old name was prevalent for a large part of the study period.

[3] 24 Parganas was one single district in southern West Bengal bordering Calcutta in both the north and the south. It was split in two districts in 1986. The northern part of the district became known as North 24 Parganas and the southern part came to be called South 24 Parganas. My study area is located in North 24 Parganas.

[4] The term dalit literary means the oppressed or the downtrodden. The term was used by B.R. Ambedkar, the most important proponent of lower caste movement in India in the early twentieth century, to identify and consolidate the struggle of the lower caste and class groups in India.

[5] This thesis presents a critique of the *climactic* approach to dislocations and by extension its implication for the rights of the displaced people. This emphasis on the *climactic* approach overlaps with a few biases in migration studies. For example, international migration has more visibility in migration studies and migration taking place within the nation states, or internal migration evoke relatively less academic interest. Temporary or seasonal migration is not of equal interest as long term migration (Lucassen, and Lucassen 2014). I draw on Ranabir Samaddar's critique of the distinction between climactic and endemic violence, which leads to the fashioning of the categories of 'refugee' and 'migrant' (Samaddar 1999, 64-69). The former implies exceptional conditions of violence and dislocation, stressing circumstances which are spectacular and much beyond the control of the displaced groups, thus entitling them to certain measures of protection under the category of 'refugee'. Other displaced groups labelled as 'migrants' go through similar oppressive circumstance in the face of long term structural violence which are drawn out, non-spectacular and equally beyond their control. But 'migrants' are not entitled to legal protection. In the lived experience of displaced groups, the distinction between climactic and endemic violence often blurs and 'refugees' and 'migrants' go through similar violence.

[6] The two-nation theory assumes that the Muslims and the Hindus are two separate nations. According to it the Hindus and the Muslims have their own custom, religion and way of life. Since the Hindus and the Muslims constitute two different nations, they should be able to have their own separate homelands.

[7] Hyderabad had been a princely state, one of 500 such princely states in British colonial India which enjoyed relative autonomy. After national independence, the Nizam (ruler) of Hyderabad refused to accede to the Indian Union. The Indian militia intervened to defeat the Nizam's forces and complete the territorial integration of India. This was followed by communal riots against the Muslims in Hyderabad, which sparked communal massacre of the Hindus in East Bengal.

[8] On 27 December 1963, a holy relic (said to be the hair of prophet Muhammad) went missing from the Hazratbal Shrine in Srinagar in India. There were mass protests in Jammu and Kashmir over the disappearance of the relic. In East Pakistan, communal riots against the Hindus occurred at places like Khulna, Dhaka, Narayanganj and Rajshahi and there was an exodus of population.

[9] According to 1951 UN Convention, 'a refugee is a person owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.' The Indian government not only refused to sign this convention, but also avoided using the term 'refugee' in designating displaced East Bengalis in order to avoid legal and administrative implications.

[10] The latest amendment to the Citizenship Act has come in 2019, which exempts Hindus along with some other religious minorities coming from India's neighbouring countries (including Bangladesh) from being treated as 'illegal migrants'. The amendment renders them eligible to apply for Indian citizenship. But the amendment comes with some caveats as discussed in chapter four.

[11] The question of nationalism and assertion of national identity in large parts of the non-European world has been fused with colonialism. According to a well known universal framework for understanding nationalism, large parts of the colonial world in Africa and Asia have derived their forms of nationalism from the historical experience of nationalism in the West. Western Europe, the Americas and Russia have supplied a set of modular forms which could be emulated by all subsequent nationalisms (Anderson 2006). Such an assumption of universal modular nationalism perhaps miss out on crucial creative and imaginative facets of anti-colonial nationalism.

[12] Anti-colonial nationalism, split between a material and spiritual domain of course retained unresolved contradictions. These contradictions are a part of a deeper set of conflicts implicit in bourgeoise rationalist conception of knowledge, established within the post enlightenment European intellectual tradition. The conception of enlightenment reason has in its universalist urge been parasitic upon the productive expansion of capital via colonial expansion. While western nationalism extolls reason, the relation between reason and colonial history of capitalism is an undiscussed underside of western rationalism and national consciousness flowing from this rationalism. Anti-colonial nationalism, which often emulates western reason at least in the material sphere, does not challenge this relation between universalist reason and capitalist exploitation (P. Chatterjee 1993a).

[13] During the initial stage of the Aligarh movement, Sir Syed spread the message of communal harmony, stressing that the Hindus and the Muslims were part of the same *qawm* or nation irrespective of their different religious beliefs. But competitive politics influenced by several factors eventually led to a hard-line Muslim position. By the late nineteenth century, Sir Syed had started voicing the opinion that religion constituted a basic ingredient of nationality. This idea drew from a de-territorial notion of *umma* or community of all Muslims (inside of the Indian subcontinent as well as outside) as preached by Prophet Muhammad. Sir Syed voiced the opinion that the Muslims in their education, economic backwardness and numerical inferiority, could not compete with the Hindus in elections and needed separate electorate to truly represent their interests (Mujahid 1999).

[14] The Arya Samaj movement started in Punjab and spread to other parts of the country. Its leader was Dayananda Swaraswati. He perceived the conversion of Hindus, including the Untouchables to

Christianity as a challenge to Hinduism. He introduced a ritual of *suddhi* as part of the Arya Samaj movement, a reconversion technique, by which Hindus who had been defiled could reintegrate with their caste.

[15] The All India Muslim League, a political party to champion the cause of the Muslims was established in 1906. As a response to this move, one of the first Hindu political organisations, the Hindu Mahasabha was formed. A similar organisation espousing the Hindu cause, the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), was founded in 1925 by Keshav B Hedgewar with the explicit aim of uniting the Hindus for independence. A large number of the initial RSS cadre came from high caste and middle-class Hindus in urban areas of the Hindi and Marathi speaking regions in north and central India. The RSS was overtly non-political for a long time. Amidst communal tensions in the immediate years after national independence, M K Gandhi, the architect of the Congress led nationalist movement, was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a man who had ties with the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha. This assassination greatly diminished the popularity of these organisations. The RSS was banned for a short time in 1948 and prominent leaders of both the RSS and the Mahasabha were jailed. While the RSS had been overtly non-political, for a long time, the hope of RSS leaders had been to influence politics through leaders sympathetic to the Hindu cause within the Congress party. But the Congress ban on RSS members joining the party in the aftermath of Gandhi's assassination forced the RSS to look for other channels of support (Andersen 1972; Copland 2002, 214). After the ban was lifted, the RSS attempted to extend their influence by creating and supporting allied institutions like the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS). From the 1970s, the RSS will eventually influence strands of Hindu nationalism and associated notions of ethno-religious citizenship through its collaboration with first the Jana Sangha and then with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

[16] This observation by Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister, in his book *Discovery of India*, is representative of this strand of liberal nationalist thinking: "Having assured the protection of religion and culture, etc, the major problems that were bound to come up were economic ones which had nothing to do with a person's religion. Class conflicts there might be, but not religious conflicts, except in so far as religion itself represented some vested interests." (Quoted from P. Chatterjee 1993a, 141).

[17] The transition from empire to nation states and from subjecthood to citizenship have followed different trajectories across the world. For example, in French West Africa, in the years immediately after the Second World War, a considerable number of activists and leaders did not claim a sovereign nation state. What they demanded was a form of federation with an imperial citizenship. Such a conception of citizenship both assumed the history of colonisation and transcended it. They saw the heritage of their French colonial rulers as valuable, specially the tradition of rights of man and of the citizen. Territories of French West Africa were too small and poor to survive as independent states and hence imagined themselves as part of an interdependent world. French West African leaders sought to

transform a colonial empire into another sort of assemblage of diverse territory and people: a federation of African states with each other and with France. The idea of a sovereign nation state and associated citizenship claims is a post 1960 idea in the context of the French West African states. In both its federal vision and in the later ideas of national citizenship, a central problematic was how to reconcile claims of equal citizenship while preserving local differences (Cooper 2014).

[18] The British government brought the Communal Award in August 1932, with a view to grant representation to minority interest in the state and central legislatures. The Award aimed to grant separate electorates for the Forward Caste, Lower Caste, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and Untouchables. Gandhi, who was opposed to the Communal Award, saw it as a British attempt to split Hindus, and began a fast unto death to have it repealed. A compromise was reached between mainstream national interest represented by Gandhi and the dalit interests represented by Ambedkar, in the Poona Pact of 1932. The Pact abandoned separate electorates for the depressed classes, and through it seats were to be reserved for them within a joint electorate. The provisions of the pact were later incorporated into the Government of India Act of 1935. (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 355).

[19] See (Kudaisya 2008).

[20] The Calcutta metropolitan area is an administrative area comprising the city of Calcutta and 37 other municipalities located in the north and the south of the city spanning the districts of North 24 Parganas, South 24 parganas, Nadia, Howrah and Hooghly. Here the term is used in a loose sense to imply the broader metropolitan area spanning Calcutta and its industrial suburbs.

[21] The Bengali term *bhadralok* literally means a well-mannered person or a gentleman. The term refers to a Bengali cultural elite who benefitted from western education and rose to prominence during British colonial rule in Bengal. After independence they have continued to hold a predominant position in West Bengal's political, social and cultural life.

[22] A gram panchayat is part of local government in India, consisting of a three tier system of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) spanning village, block and district levels. A gram panchayat consists of a village or several villages.

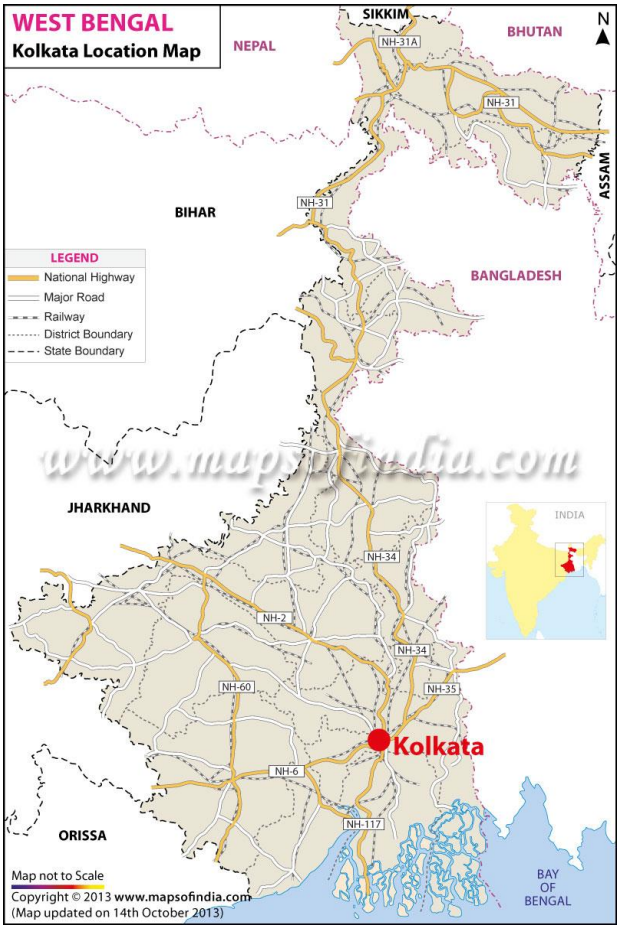
[23] Many people continue to migrate from East Bengal to the Sundarban areas of West Bengal where the international border is porous. They settle down there for some time. Some of them eventually make their way to the Calcutta metropolitan area.

[24] From the beginning of the new millennium the state government has conceived a fresh scheme for displacement and resettlement of the dwellers along five canal side locations in the south east and south western suburbs of Calcutta. These include Manikhali, Charial Khal, Begor Khal, Keorapukur Khal and Taligunge-Panchannagram khal (*Unnata Hocche Shaharer Man Bodle Jacche Jiboner Gaan*, KEIP, Calcutta Corporation).

[25] A few memoirs written by the middle-class refugee inhabitant of the Bijaygarh area in South Calcutta are: *Colonysmriti* by Indu Baran Ganguly, (Ganguly 1997); *Bijaygarh Ekti Udbastu Upanibesh* by Debabrata

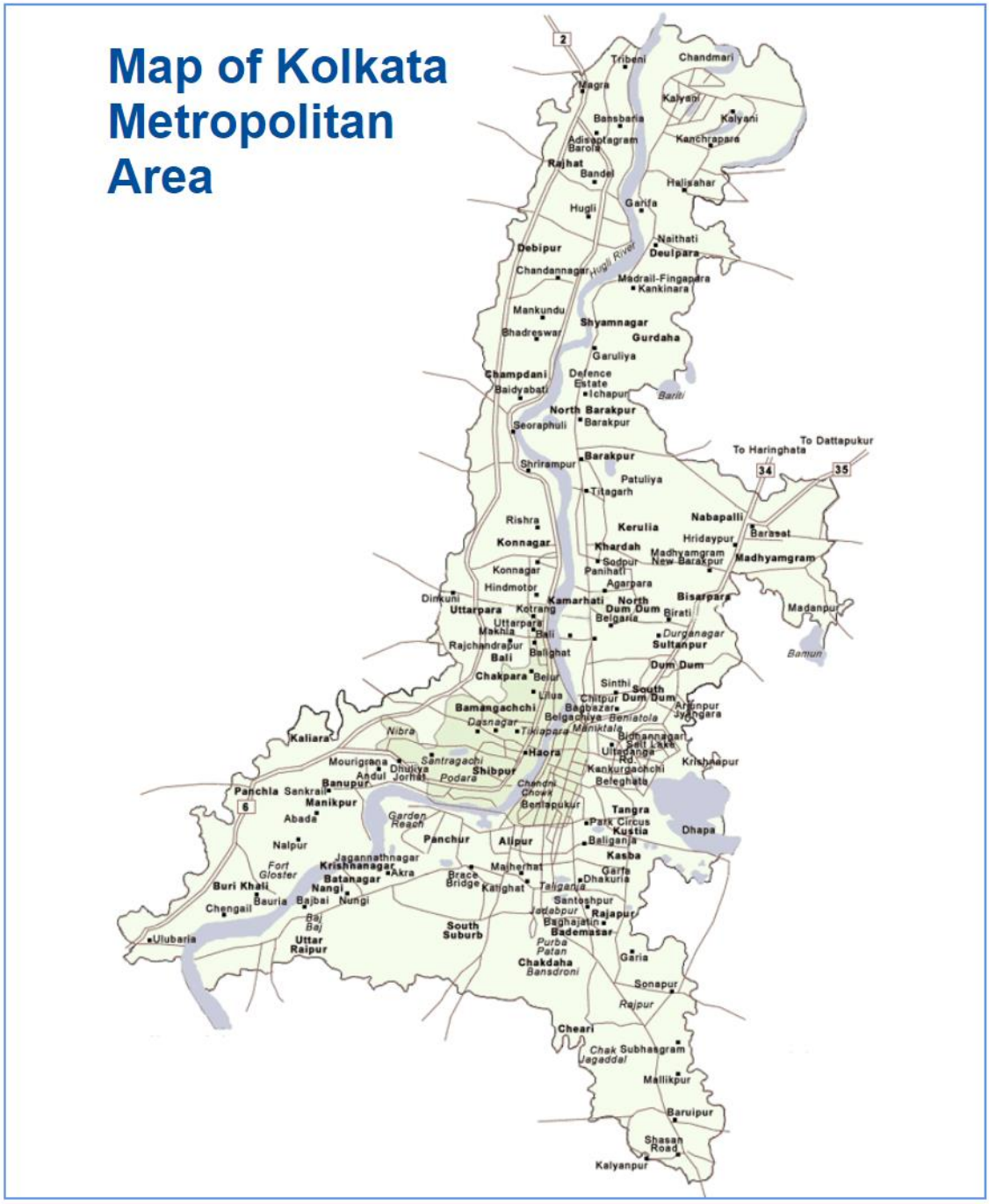
Dutta; (D. Dutta 2001); *Udbastu Andolaner Smritichitra* by Tejendralal Dutta (T. Dutta 2011), *Maranjayi Sangrame Bastuhara* by Tushar Singha (T. Sinha 1999); *Chittaranjan Colony-r Itihash* by Tamal Kanti Dey (T. K. Dey 1999). There are a host of other literature of this sort. For a detailed discussion of such *bhadralok* refugee narratives see, (Sen 2014).

[26] Now the Corporation is known as the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC).



Map 1.1: Location Map of West Bengal (top left) (Source: Maps of India, Location Map West Bengal, https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/westbengal/westbengallocation.htm) and Location Map of

Calcutta (bottom right) (Source: Maps of India, Kolkata Location Map, https://www.mapsofindia.com/india/where-is-kolkata.html)



Map 1.2: Calcutta Metropolitan Area (Source: Kolkata Municipal Corporation, Map of Kolkata Metropolitan Area, https://www.kmcgov.in/KMCPortal/jsp/KMCMap.jsp)