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REVIEW ARTICLE

*The Indian City and its 'Restive Publics'**

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Abstract

How do we write about cities in a world of deepening inequality, real-estate geopolitics, and the planetary water crisis that is unfolding in parts of Asia and elsewhere? Indian urban studies, which began to gain ground as a legitimate subject of scholarly enquiry two decades ago, has now emerged as a site to study political society, state-making, and citizenship, and to offer rich accounts of how post-colonial urban governance and law-making work. In this review, I explore the powerful analytics developed in three recent books in urban studies: Anindita Ghosh's historical work on colonial Calcutta, *Claiming the City: Protest, Crime and Scandals in Colonial Calcutta, c. 1860–1920* (2016); Asher Ghertner's geographical analysis of neoliberal Delhi, *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi* (2015); and Nikhil Anand's ethnographic account of restive publics and citizenship in Mumbai, *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai* (2017). This recent scholarship on urbanization has moved away from earlier rubrics of segregation, biopolitical disciplining, and resistance to offer rich accounts of the frictions that make and unmake political societies, critical tools to study the life of law in post-colonial cities, infrastructures as sites for the production of citizenship, and new financial and legal assemblages of risk-management, building lobbies, and syndicates around which urban politics is swirling. These accounts also deepen our understanding of the long genealogy of the contemporary moment, including populism, electoral politics, and post-colonial state-making. Indeed, the future of urban studies in a rapidly urbanizing world should be one that helps us to understand the nature of politics, contestations around legalities, environmental crises, and new financial geographies of power and dispossession.

* 'Restive publics' is a term I draw from Nikhil Anand, *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

Introduction

Indian cities, like many cities in the global South, are products of restive frictions, protests, and politics of the people. The restive publics of urban India often experience their daily lives in the city, as well as its services and infrastructure—the basic conditions of living—as sites of contestation. Consequently, public goods, public property, and their keepers and maintainers increasingly emerge as pressure points around which the urban political regimes revolve.[1] In the past two decades, studies on Indian cities have offered us insights into the specific historical, sociological, and geographical conditions that produce the city as a site of passionate contestations, bruising negotiations, and vociferous demonstrations.[2] With the unleashing of a new kind of capital accumulation based on the 'residential capitalism' of the past decade,[3] the politics of the urban have transformed significantly. The evolving scripts of resistance to urbanization fluctuate between mundane and spectacular agitational tactics, producing the urban body politic as 'restive publics', to use Nikhil Anand's recent conceptualization.[4]

[1] Karen Coelho's work on urban public utilities as 'anthropomorphic grids' through which citizenship and sovereignty are constantly negotiated and held together by a patchy network of bureaucrats, engineers, and maintainers remain seminal in this regard. See Karen Coelho, 'Unstating "the Public": An Ethnography of Reform in an Urban Public Sector Utility in South India', in David Mosse and David Lewis (eds), *Anthropology Upstream: The Ethnography of Aid Donors and Neoliberal Reform* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), pp. 171–195; and K. Coelho, 'Tapping in: Leaky Sovereignties and Engineered (Dis)Order in an Urban Water System', in Monica Narula et al., *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (Delhi: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2006), pp. 497–509.

[2] While not an attempt at providing an exhaustive list on violence and cities in India, see works by Thomas Blom-Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Amita Baviskar, 'Between Violence and Desire: Space, Power, and Identity in the Making of Metropolitan Delhi', *International Social Science Journal* 55, no. 175 (2003), pp. 89–98; Swapna Banerjee-Guha, 'Neoliberalising the "Urban": New Geographies of Power and Injustice in Indian Cities', *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 22 (2009), pp. 95–107; Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables: History of an Enchanted City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[3] Herman M. Schwartz and Leonard Seabrooke, 'Varieties of Residential Capitalism in the International Political Economy: Old Welfare States and the New Politics of Housing', in Leonard Seabrooke and Herman Schwartz (eds), *The Politics of Housing Booms and Busts* (London: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 1–27.

[4] For an exploration of how this new residential capitalism operates in Delhi, see Rana Dasgupta, *Capital: The Eruption of Delhi* (New Delhi: Penguin Press, 2014); for Kolkata, see Debjani Bhattacharyya, 'Politics of Dwelling: Divergent Spaces in Calcutta', in Richardson

This article seeks to understand the long history of the making of restive publics by focusing on a few recent studies of Indian cities. It is divided into two sections. The first offers a broad overview of South Asian urban studies by tracing its beginnings in the 1970s in early explorations of port cities and transformations of the built environment up to the 1990s. In the period following the 1990s, conventionally theorized as the 'spatial turn' in South Asian studies, the focus of urban studies shifted decidedly from the built environment to a study of its citizens. In the second section, the article turns to three recent works in urban studies: Anindita Ghosh's *Claiming the City: Protest, Crime and Scandals in Colonial Calcutta, c. 1860–1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016); Asher Ghertner's *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Nikhil Anand's *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai*. These works explore the city as a site to understand how the urban body politic has resisted and accommodated, and was sometimes defeated by, the changing political economy of the urban throughout the twentieth century. These three books extend some of the existing concerns within the field, while opening up new and hitherto unexplored questions about the urban publics. The article concludes by reflecting on other ways in which scholars can engage with urbanization, and how various disciplinary questions can productively cross-pollinate.

Historian Anindita Ghosh's *Claiming the City* expands upon the scope of Subaltern studies to recover the marginal, subversive, and literate urban subjects of colonial Calcutta. She documents both their resistance to colonial urban modernity as well as their insurgent celebration of change. The subtle celebratory aspects of subaltern resistance offer us a different set of tools with which to understand everyday urban politics and a longer genealogy for political society. Geographer Asher Ghertner's *Rule by Aesthetics* brings us to twenty-first century urban India to document the failures of earlier modes of political resistance and mobilization in millennial Delhi in order to probe how neoliberal aesthetics is spatialized. He returns us to the ephemeral aspects of the built environment by focusing on subaltern aspirations in an expanding city to show how a new urban aesthetic emerges as a governing tool, and to what effects. Anthropologist Nikhil Anand's *Hydraulic City*

Dilworth and Timothy Weaver (eds), *Role of Ideas in Urban Political Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), pp. 202–14; and for Bombay, see Sheetal Chhabria, *Making the Modern Slum: The Power of Capital in Colonial Bombay* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

expands upon Karen Coelho's seminal work on the fractious interaction between the city and the bureaucracy over public utilities to show how the study of Mumbai's water distribution can help us to understand the incremental, reversible, and fractured nature of citizenship in urban India. Anand's meditation on Mumbai's water offers us a new theorization of urban citizenship and state-making in an age of aggressive privatization of basic utilities.

These books show us that the restiveness that marks the streets is a productive analytic for understanding the changing socio-economic and legal geographies of a rapidly urbanizing India. The everyday violence of urban development naturalized certain ideas, aesthetics, and visual rhetoric which displace, disrupt, and make the city unliveable for the working poor. They responded to these developments with caustic humour, strikes, resistance, riots, aspirations, and incremental negotiations with various levels of state bureaucracy. Taken together, these books document how changing modes of 'restiveness' increasingly became entangled with urban development in different periods of colonialism and post-colonial modernity. The story of urban development that emerges in these works document how large-scale dispossession and displacement, and the withholding of and demands for public services, increasingly produce a city of aspiration and exclusion. These three books direct our attention to the all-too-palpable frictions that make up the fabric of the urban as a site to study colonial urbanization and post-colonial state-formation.[5]

Scholarship on Indian cities has generated a wealth of material, ranging from historical treatments of the urban form, modes of being urban, to sophisticated understandings of the cultures of the city. Much of this historical investigation has remained firmly located in the nineteenth century, while anthropological and sociological scholarship on urban cities has primarily dissected the post-neo-liberal urban form in India and elsewhere in South Asia.[6] Recent developments in South Asian urban

[5] In his recent work on the interventions in the zoned areas of the brothel, Steve Legg studied urban spatial politics during the interwar period on a scalar level to understand governance at various levels, from local to state to international. S. Legg, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentality and Interwar India* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2014).

[6] For some excellent review essays on historical scholarship on South Asian cities, see Eric Beverley, 'Colonial Urbanism and South Asian Cities: A Review Essay', *Social History* 36, no. 4 (2011), pp. 482–497; Douglas Haynes and Nikhil Rao, 'Beyond the Colonial City: Re-Evaluating the Urban History of India, ca. 1920–1970', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013), pp. 317–335; Janaki Nair, 'Beyond Nationalism: Modernity, Governance and a New Urban History for India', *Urban*

studies urge us towards more granular analytics of the urban. By turning to the frictions and restiveness of urban life, these three books open up new ways to study the worlding of the legal, formal, informal, and the extra-legal within the urban. Each of these books emerges from three different disciplines and three metropolitan centres: historical scholarship focusing on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Calcutta, an anthropological examination of Mumbai's rapidly privatizing public infrastructures, and a geographical analysis of neoliberal accumulation in the transformation of New Delhi to the National Capital Region (NCR hereafter).

These three books offer us new ways to understand the various negotiations, contradictions, and confrontations that shaped Indian cities and the life of politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. First, each one of them significantly takes on the challenge of offering a longer genealogy to the question of political society. Ghosh's work helps us to excavate the roots of political society on the margins of colonial Calcutta. Anand's book expands our understanding of political society by moving the analytic from the people to their interactions with urban services, while also helping us to understand how of structures of post-colonial urban citizenship are 'incremental, intermittent, and reversible'.[7] Second, these books offer a robust engagement with questions of informality, electoral politics, and populism through various urban sites: from colonial infrastructures, post-colonial slum demolition, to the micropolitics of water distribution. Ghertner's work innovatively deploys informality as a lens through which to analyse post-colonial modes of governing the city of Delhi. Finally, taken together, these books help us to recover the long twentieth century of Indian cities, which has been marked by rapid urbanization, rural-urban migration, intense densification, and environmental degradation.[8] Most importantly, Ghosh's historical

History 36, no. 2 (2009), pp. 327–341; and Raj Chandavarkar, *History, Culture and the Indian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[7] Anand, *Hydraulic City*, p. 7.

[8] When I refer to the 'long' twentieth century here, I depart from Eric Hobsbawn's theorization of the twentieth century as a short one, with the Second World War and the fall of communism as two critical moments that bookend the century. While these experiences were not at all marginal to South Asia (or the post-colonial world), I regard decolonization as a more useful temporality for understanding the twentieth century for the formerly colonized world. The global economic changes that began at the end of the nineteenth century remade the twentieth century as a period marked by decolonization, economic neo-liberalization, rapid urbanization, and environmental crisis. In recasting the twentieth century in this manner, I have also found it productive

narrative successfully addresses one critical concern laid out in Douglas Haynes' field review article on Mumbai in this same journal, in which he pointed out that it is the imperative of the urban historian to try to break through the chronological barriers that have held historians back from exploring the time after the 1930s from a historical perspective.[9] Ghosh's book engages the street culture of the early twentieth-century interwar Calcutta to foreshadow the spaces of negotiations and protest that animate Anand's post-colonial Mumbai and Ghertner's neoliberal Delhi.

The urban turn in South Asian history

The trajectory of urban studies in South Asia can be divided into three large groups. The early scholarship on colonial cities, especially from the 1970s, focused mostly on the architectural history of ancient cities, touching upon themes of urban settlement patterns, demographics, and the growth of colonial port towns. This was followed by a second group of works, which borrowed from the analytic tools developed in sociological village studies to attempt to dissect the post-independence urban form in India. The imagination of the village continued to endure in these works and in others that attempted to understand working-class politics and urban violence. Finally, more recent scholarship on South Asian cities explored the spatialization of power in the built environment of colonial and post-colonial cities. Since epidemiological writings and epidemic crises throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries left a rich archival trail of medico-municipal documents, existing urban historiography in particular and urban studies in general have turned primarily to this archive to produce a history of sanitization, pathologization, and militarization of colonial cities.[10] Contestations over the production of the sanitary city have

to think through Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origin of our Time* (New York: Verso, [1994] 2009); and Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[9] Douglas E. Haynes, 'Rethinking the Twentieth-Century History of Mumbai', *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 5 (2014), pp. 1435–1449, p. 1438.

[10] Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856–1877* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Like Oldenburg's, Narayani Gupta's work on Delhi deals with the militarization of the city following the 1857 Uprising: N. Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires 1803–1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Sandip Hazareesingh, *The Colonial City and the Challenge of Modernity: Urban Hegemonies and Civic Contestations in Bombay City 1900–1925* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan 2007); Janaki Nair, *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore's Twentieth*

therefore emerged as a dominant rubric of urban studies in South Asia. However, the planning and medico-municipal archive offers us clues to the bureaucratic imagination of the city, rather than its lived reality.

Despite their remarkable contributions to the field of colonial urban history, some of the central questions within urban studies have largely remained focused on epidemiological and disciplinary town-planning practices.[11] From this medico-municipal archive, another strand of literature on the urban emerged which built upon Michel Foucault's theorization of space and its relation to power. These studies theorized colonial urban negotiations over space, in terms of rights to the city as multiple or hybrid modernities in post-colonial urban slums, *chawls*, and informal settlements.[12] These approaches mapped urban spaces in South Asia as sites of power and resistance.[13] While this rich scholarship points to the contested urban arena and lays the groundwork to analyse urban political movements of the twentieth century, perhaps the moment has arrived to push the conversation further.

South Asian urban history has been understood as a relatively new field in comparison to agrarian, economic, political, and social histories. For instance, in the Center for Studies of Developing Societies' (CSDS)[14] 2002 edition of the *Sarai Reader* on 'The Cities of Everyday Life', the editors state that the *Reader* 'carries within it an argument to take the urban seriously. In the context of India … this is significant, given the frugality of writing on city life in this part of the world.'[15] Urban studies in India have seen a renaissance since 2000, much of it in response to how global capital was reshaping urban space and politics. As the editors of the *Sarai Reader*

Century (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[11] Epidemiological cities continue to produce scholarly and artistic engagement with the urban. See the 2017 exhibition at the Wellcome Trust Library on 'Drawing the Bombay Plague', https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/Wju6LCQAACYA5fY7, [accessed 21 April 2020].

[12] See Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), especially Chapter 7 'Are Indian Cities becoming Bourgeois at Last?'. See also Véronique Dupont, Stéphanie Tawa Lama-Rewal and Marie-Hélène Zérah, *Urban Policies and the Right to the City* (Delhi: UNESCO, 2011).

[13] Steve Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2007).

[14] The CSDS is an institution that remains one of the central mouthpieces on urbanism in India.

[15] Sarai Collective, *Sarai Reader 02: Cities of Everyday Life* (New Delhi: Center for Studies of Developing Societies, 2002), p. iv.

correctly mapped, 'globalisation, with its mixture of enforced commodification, spatial transformations and urban ruin, excavated the city from margins of academic and literary writing to a new public discourse that suddenly assumed the given-ness of urban spaces'.[16] However, within the so-called margins of academic writing there were already significant forays into understanding the urban, especially in studies on port cities, temple cities, ancient cities, and urban morphology from as early as the 1970s.

Two important conferences and publications marked the nascent emergence of urban studies. The first of these was a conference held in Santa Cruz in the United States in June 1976 themed the 'Origin and Development of Colonial Port Cities of Asia'. The second was the founding of the Urban History Association of India in 1978, followed by the subsequent publication of two edited volumes of their first conference proceedings.[17] Hedged between the first conference and the publications, there was an emergence of what can be called a 'field' comprising the history of cities and towns in India, with a focus on the port towns of India,[18] the temple-cities of southern India,[19] the ancient and Mughal cities of North India,[20] sacred Hindu cities,[21] and colonial Presidency towns.[22]

[16] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

[22] Nirmal Kumar Bose, 'Calcutta: A Premature Metropolis', *Scientific American* 213, no. 3 (1965), pp. 91–103; S. N. Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Myths and History* (Calcutta: Firma KLM,

The transition from a rural aggregate into what was imagined to be 'urban' dominated as objects of historical enquiry for studies of ancient and Mughal cities. In the case of colonial cities, the prism of interconnected world economic systems and the dependency relationship that bound the West or the metropole as the 'core' to the less developed 'eastern/southern nations' of the periphery produced the dominant category for understanding colonial urbanization. The major concerns animating this body of scholarship included the nature of the relationship between the city and its hinterland, the role and character of mercantile elites, and urban political forms.[23] This focus has left us with rich material on the evolution of cities through continuous settlement patterns from an archive of archaeological excavations and artefacts which include 'extensive public works in palaces and granaries; careful and exact systems of town design set in grid patterns; extensive plumbing and drainage facilities; *stupa* mounds apparently for worship'.[24] These studies also drew centrally upon the frameworks developed by the twentieth-century urban planner and visionary Patrick Geddes who popularized the study of town morphology during his two visits in India in the early twentieth century.[25]

Sociological studies of Indian cities, on the other hand, were concerned with assessing the impact of the urban on the rural with analytics

1977); Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1978); Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Calcutta a Living City* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Surajit Sinha, *Cultural Profile of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Indian Anthropological Society, 1972).

[23] G. W. Skinner's adaptation of Walter Christaller's 'central place theory' in G. W. Skinner (ed.), *The Chinese City between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974) was particularly influential on scholars studying the city as regionally connected to its hinterland. See Ellen McDonald Gumprez, 'City-Hinterland Relations and the Development of a Regional Elite in Nineteenth Century Bombay', *Journal of Asian Studies* no. 33 (1974), pp. 581–601; and Howard Spodek, *Urban-Rural Integration in Regional Development: A Case Study of Saurashtra, India 1800–1960* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976). Other works that deal with urban morphology are: John E. Brush, 'The Morphology of Indian Cities', in Roy Turner (ed.), *India's Urban Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 57–70; and Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge, 1976).

[24] Howard Spodek, 'Studying the History of Urbanization in India', *Journal of Urban History* 6, no. 3 (1980), pp. 251–294, p. 254.

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

developed about the rural from village studies.[26] The idea of the village has haunted studies of Indian cities.[27] In post-independence Nehruvian India, the village became the site of social engineering, and scholars and urbanists likewise approached the city through the lens of planning, with its long colonial legacy. The demographic concerns that underlay India's planning regime found a reflection in the emerging urban studies literature of that period.[28] This turn to a demographic concern is not hard to understand, given the massive movement of populations following India's independence. Focusing especially on the migration of refugees, some of these studies view cities as sites of crisis and planning as its remedial measure.[29]

The idea of urban space as a site of crisis has a long and complex history. The nineteenth-century epidemiological crisis morphed into economic, housing, labour, and population crises from the early years of the twentieth century on. The lens of crisis changed in relation to larger transformations in colonial power and global economic upheavals. In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of scholarship that explores urban space as a site for analysing colonial power. The late twentieth-century restructuring of urban spaces worldwide, transnational movements of informal labour, and the birth of what has been called a 'global city' have generated fresh approaches to the idea of the urban in recent decades.[30] The turn of the twentieth century also witnessed the birth of a neo-liberal city marked by

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

[27] Both Howard Spodek and Doris Meth Srinivasan (eds), *Urban Form and Meaning in South Asia: The Shaping of Cities from Prehistoric to Precolonial Times* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1993); and Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge, 1976) explain the urban phenomenon through the lens of the village.

[28] See, for example, Satish Saberwal (ed.), *Process and Institution in Urban India: Sociological Studies* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978); and Bert F. Hoselitz, 'A Survey of the Literature on Urbanism in India', in Roy Turner (ed.), *India's Urban Future* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 425–443.

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

[30] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996); and Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006) explore how these frames have produced a distinct theory of South Asian urban modernity. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essay in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Gyan Prakash and Kevin Michael Kruse, *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life* (Princeton:

inequality and religious violence. For instance, scholars have explored the destruction of the vision of the 'red city' of Bombay, marked by a restive working class politics, and the birth of the ethno-nationalist Hindu 'saffron city' of Mumbai, as the Indian economy increasingly took a neoliberal turn.[31] Broadly, these studies view the urban space in terms of a history of militarization,[32] nationalism,[33] modernity/governmentality,[34] or what Gyan Prakash has termed the 'neo-liberal noir urbanisms'.[35]

Another major theme in colonial urban histories is the focus on the emergence of novel infrastructures like broad roadways, electricity, transport, and the sanitation networks and technologies of governance that follow them. Prashant Kidambi has termed these modes of transformation and governance as 'imperial globalization', wherein the 'fabric of urban life in many colonial cities was transformed by the rise of a global economic system based on industrial capitalism and its attendant technologies of power'.[36] Kidambi's work on Bombay and Steve Legg's work on Delhi foregrounded a crisis response as a mode of urban governance in colonial and post-colonial India. Viewing the city from the perspective of an increasingly embattled colonial state illuminated how urban governance inscribed powerful notions of hierarchy upon urban space.[37]

Princeton University Press, 2008); and Eric Lewis Beverley, 'Colonial Urbanism and South Asian Cities', *Social History* 36, no. 4 (November 2011), pp. 482–497.

[31] Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables: History of an Enchanted City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

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

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

[34] William J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Hazareesingh, *The Colonial City*; Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2007); Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*; Nair, *The Promise of the Metropolis*; and Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities*.

[35] Gyan Prakash 'The Urban Turn', in *Sarai Reader 02: Cities of Everyday Life*, pp. 2–7.

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

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

These works on colonial urbanism shed light on the historical processes that trace the emergence of modern state power, the growth of civil society, the networks of knowledge production, and circuits of governmental technologies.[38] While early histories examined architectural changes in the colonial bungalow,[39] Lutyen's Delhi (named after the twentieth-century architect Edwin Lutyen),[40] the native bourgeois houses of Calcutta,[41] or the technocratically planned smaller towns of post-independence India, more recent scholarship, including the three books under review, has brought forth a fresh set of areas from which to study the urban.[42]

William Glover's work on Lahore, for instance, builds upon the idea of 'cultural difference' to study how the project of colonial urbanism in Lahore centred on bringing modernity and difference into a common frame.[43] This, he argues, was constituted by both professional town planners and lay people, both Indians and British. These two groups worked from the shared assumptions that the 'material world embodied immaterial qualities that were both tangible and agentive'.[44] Through a meticulous reading of the architectural world, the town-planning materials, the built environment, as well as works of architectural pedagogy, housekeeping manuals, and local urban histories, Glover foregrounds the materialist outlook of liberalism which connected the natural environment with pedagogy, and character-building as central to town-planning debates.[45] Preeti Chopra's work, on the other hand,

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

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

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

[41] Chattopadhyay's fascinating exploration of Calcutta's culture and indigenous modernity turns away from the British administrative spaces to the wealthy native houses and their architectural ideology: S. Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta. Modernism, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (Abingdon; Routledge, 2006), pp. 136–224.

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

[43] Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*, p. xviii.

[44] Ibid., p. xx.

[45] Glover shows how Swiss educationist and social reformer Johann Pestalozzi's curriculum of 'object-lessons' were imported into the colonial classrooms and gradually adopted into the everyday parlance of colonial life. Ibid., p. xxv.

argues that a whole host of Indian actors, from philanthropists to engineers and architects, were involved in negotiating with colonial officials to shape Bombay's built environment. She calls this the 'joint-enterprise' of the making of the city.[46]

Instead of arguing for a negotiated or contested practice of urban modernity, Swati Chattopadhyay's work on Calcutta focuses on the (mis) translation of European 'modernity' in colonial Calcutta and the consequences resulting from the impossibility of such a translation. According to her, the failure to transpose colonial modernity onto Calcutta soon turned it into a 'disastrous city', an 'urban-planner's nightmare', and a place where 'modernity went awry'.[47] Within this failed modernity, she locates the urban uncanny in the colonialist as well as the nationalist conception of space. In her analysis of the ambivalence of being both colonized and modern, she turns her attention to the nationalist imagination of the city.[48] Urban space became a generative site for studying mutations in colonial power and its imprint on the city through the lens of multiple modernities, sometimes hybrid and at other times vernacular.[49] Partho Datta's recent work on Calcutta significantly challenges Chattopadhyay's argument about the failure of modernity, showing how a history of interventionist planning in colonial Calcutta in order to make it 'modern' worked by displacing the working poor. Thereby, his work unearthed a longer history of developmental displacement in Indian cities.[50]

Leaving behind the rubrics of modernity, epidemiology, or crisis, the three books excavate the urban as a locus for analysing colonial state-making and formations of political society, and demonstrate how post-colonial democratic processes operate (or fail to materialize) in India cities. Each of these studies turns to new sociological categories to unpack the urban. In Ghosh, for instance, the marginal and the subaltern are not enumerative categories, rather new configurations of an urban collective that emerge out of the turmoil engendered by the expanding colonial city and marked by 'insecurities of a highly competitive

[46] See Chopra, *A Joint Enterprise*, especially Chapter 1.

[47] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, pp. 1–3.

[48] Ibid.

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

[50] Datta, *Planning the City*.

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labour-market, rising prices and racial marginalization' in Calcutta at the turn of the twentieth century.[51] Ghertner's actors range from evicted slum dwellers, or those who live under the shadow of mass demolition, to the planners and lawyers who carry out the acts of eviction in millennial New Delhi. Anand's Mumbai is animated by a whole cluster of individuals who have arranged their lives around the infrastructures of water, be they the working poor, the water-engineers, or the municipal workers in the water department. Ultimately, these books open up new vistas from which to study the relation between urbanism and legality in their many aspects. However, the focus of these studies is not the cut-and-dried world of paper or the bureaucratic imagination of planning. Instead, they focus on a world where law is negotiated, challenged, and made productive in ways beyond the world of the written record—beyond what Mathew Hull's seminal anthropological work on Karachi taught us to understand as the 'government of paper'.[52]

A city seen from below

Anindita Ghosh's *Claiming the City* opens up the argument that, in their myriad complexities, colonial cities were sites of disciplining and governance.[53] She explores how urban sensibilities were shaped in the streets, markets, and open grounds, as well as the informal spaces beyond those of the public institutions such as town halls, municipal houses, and those in the public domain (like the press). Her rich archive and sophisticated theorization of the public sphere in the colony, by engaging the 'rarely visible' 'informal engagements of the city-dweller' reveals a Calcutta 'seen from below'.[54] Her book spans the period from 1860 to 1920, a time when new infrastructures, changes in urban governance structures, and the rapidly evolving colonial economy transformed Calcutta's material and built environments. However, unlike previous histories, she moves away from the municipal or planning archive. Turning to the ephemeral, she documents the changing history of the city by analysing the effects of urbanization on

[51] Anindita Ghosh, *Claiming the City: Protest, Crime and Scandal in Colonial Calcutta c. 1860–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 22.

[52] Mathew Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[53] Ghosh, *Claiming the City*, p. 20, see note 52.

[54] Ibid., p. 21.

the sensory and cultural life of the city. The story of this material transformation emerges through an engagement with the subaltern poems, songs, and doggerels about how the infrastructural changes animated the moral economy of the city. Her historical actors who shape the urban sensibilities of Calcutta are not the well-known figures of planners and petitioners; rather, they are the migrants, artisans, servants, boatmen, labourers, and petty shopkeepers, who have left an ephemeral archive of songs and poems. These cultural productions, she argues, are a celebration of and a testament to the harsh realities of living in Calcutta. They also offer a scathing description of colonial urbanization.

Moreover, contrary to the well-documented middle-class laments about the effects of colonial urbanization, Ghosh's unique archive shows how the subaltern street songs celebrated the city's modernity: 'As bridges spanned mighty rivers, and electricity dispelled evening darkness, people were awestruck by these events and wrote and sang prolifically about them.'[55] Yet, she is quick to point out that it was not all received with awe. Ghosh's recovery of the 'vociferous street culture' of early nineteenth-century Calcutta also reveals a vibrant critique of the material cultures of modernity: the wealth, corruption, and elitism of the rentier class of Calcutta. What is unique about her analysis is that she documents the subversive potential of celebration as a mode of resistance and places them next to riots and strikes to draw out the messiness of everyday negotiations by a range of the working poor, from sex workers to bullock-cart pullers. If the elite lamented the passing of a certain way of life, in the rich archive that Ghosh has unearthed for us, we get a bruising critique of colonial law and caste hierarchies of the city. Building upon Sumanta Banerjee's seminal work on subaltern and bourgeois Calcutta,[56] Ghosh points out that the streets of Calcutta were imprinted with the life stories of people 'caught up in the social and geographical upheavals of agrarian disorder and urban migration'. Her ephemeral archive emerges from the street performances, which created a knowing intimacy and immediacy between the performer and the lives of the audience.[57]

[55] Ibid., p. 89.

[56] Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Street: The Elite and Popular Culture of Nineteenth-Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989).

[57] Ghosh, *Claiming the City*, p. 104.

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These motifs, tropes, nicknames, coded languages, and the intertextual presence of myths and scandals animate this intimate world of immediacy. Plumbing the archive of ephemera and everyday politics, where the rules and modes of being urban were being significantly negotiated and challenged, Ghosh argues that subaltern negotiations of the changing urban space should be read as laying the groundwork to imagine new and radical futures. Ghosh's account urges us to go beyond the conventional narratives of colonial public space, as explored in vernacular newspapers, and instead recover the streets, markets, and open grounds where the seeds of political society were being sown—from the written to the oral, from the world of ideas to that of action. This world of action is produced through a particular kind of publicness based on a fleeting coming together, exchange of information, and a dispersal. Its transience records both the vibrancy of urban change and the new technologies that come with it. These informational networks were simultaneously mindful of the harsh reality of surviving in a rapidly changing city. The ephemera that constituted this public space both mocked the educated middle classes, while also translating the angst of the city's working poor and migrant population. The fleeting news, channels of information, and rumours afforded them 'comfortable familiarity, provided vital maps of the urban terrain, and helped in navigation of a rapidly changing world'.[58] Asher Ghertner's account of millennial Delhi, as we will see in the next section, also turns to these linguistic ephemera—an ephemera he calls 'nuisance talk'.

Ghosh's analysis of urban publics sets forth a fresh agenda for histories of urban politics and space in South Asia. Her robust analysis of fleeting publicness, nurtured through songs, doggerels, and poems, offers us new historical insights and methodological directions. Refreshingly, the publicness she recovers is decidedly gendered. Methodologically, Ghosh posits that, no matter how transient this world of coming together on the streets might have been, the historian cannot lose sight of how such moments sustained multiple networks of information exchange and dissemination. The unique tension that marks this kind of public sphere in the colony signals a departure from the traditional literature on the public sphere to reveal a long genealogy of everyday politics in Calcutta, which is marked by a restive urbanity and by crowds that spilled, and continue to spill, onto the streets, giving heft to its political society.

[58] Ibid., p. 121.

The robust accounts of restive urbanity are brought alive not just by events and scandals in the markets, open spaces, and streets, but by the discussions, debates, lampoons, and celebrations that followed thereafter. She critically scrutinizes what became the focus of intense discussion (and what was left out) during this period. By focusing on the presence and absence of themes that fed gossip, Ghosh uncovers the throbbing pulse of Calcutta's public sphere. For instance, discussions about women's transgressive and conjugal sexuality moved from street ridicule, through the public press, to the lawyer's desk. Firmly located within the scholarship on sexuality, the city, and prostitution, she shows how transgressive and conjugal sexuality became co-constituted at the turn of the twentieth century.[59] Religion, ritual, and community remained overwhelmingly discussed on the streets and in the law courts. 'The new law courts and trial procedures together with the press helped turn private affairs into public spectacles, and opened them up for discussion and litigation.'[60] Thus the streets, the press, and the courtroom produced sexual scandals 'with both the moral and legal communities scrutinizing and passing judgements on the lapses involved'.[61] She shows how the figure of the prostitute emerges in chap literature and paintings as an empathic figure—a 'vital cog in the urban economy and society'.[62]

Her analysis places sexuality and gender at the heart of urban politics, and documents how urban women became a fulcrum for the many public debates from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The city, she reminds us, was 'coming to terms with its women in the midst of fundamental changes in urban lifestyles and governance—including the role of litigation in establishing conjugal norms, criminalization resulting from medical regulation of prostitutes, and the brutalization of those at the margins of urban economy'.[63] Thus the presence, as well as the absence, of women on the streets opened up possibilities for crystalizing ideas around conjugality, sexuality, love, sin, and, encompassing all of these, politics in Calcutta.

[59] Sumanta Banerjee, *Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998); Stephen Legg, 'Anti-Vice Lives: Peopling the Archives of Prostitution in Interwar India', in Jessica R. Pliley, Robert Kramm-Masaoka and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds), *Global Anti-Vice Activism, 1890–1950: Fighting Drinks, Drugs, and 'Immorality'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[60] Ghosh, *Claiming the City*, p. 124.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., p. 125.

[63] Ibid., p. 162.

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Ghosh recovers a Calcutta that was shaped by the non-elite and non-*bhadralok* classes, who, although less powerful, were 'robustly articulate groups', to rewrite the history of the urban political world from the popular margins.[64] By reformulating the relationship between urban space and its material culture, she offers us a longer and gendered genealogy to Partha Chatterjee's 'political society' and provides tools for tracing the long history of how popular politics and ethical lives shaped the city's cultural and social history.[65] Ghosh also opens fresh grounds for studying the explosive twentieth-century public action on the city's streets within a broader historical framework, as Indian cities become increasingly unsafe for women and sexual minorities. She shows that the anti-colonial strikes, movements for rights to the city, and processions that destabilized Calcutta from the second decades of the twentieth century were built upon an earlier rhetoric of political protest by the city's unorganized labouring sector, which included a wide spectrum of the populace, from petty clerks to manual scavengers. The rich and new archive of Ghosh's work will challenge our over-reliance on jute-mill and cotton-mill workers as a central source for labour histories and twentieth-century urban politics.[66]

Finally, what Ghosh's study gives us is not another account of negotiated, hybrid colonial modernity, but rather different analytic tools which document urban experience. She shows how urban space and the social identities that she recovers are not enumerative categories that can be mapped upon census data, but rather are the sociological products of urban politics and its times. We see a similar move in Ghertner's study of post-colonial urban governance. Departing from using enumerative and statistical analytics to read post-colonial urban governance, or the absence thereof, 'millennial' Delhi furnishes Ghertner with new tools to explore urban aesthetics, where informality brushes up against the technologies of statist design.[67]

[64] Ibid., p. 293.

[65] Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[66] For an exception, see Tanika Sarkar, '"Dirty Work, Filthy Caste": Calcutta Scavengers in the 1920s', in Ravi Ahuja (ed.), *Working Lives, Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India* (Delhi: Tulika Books, 2013); and a more recent version: T. Sarkar, 'Calcutta Municipal Methars and their Strikes in 1928', *Refugee Watch: South Asia Journal on Forced Migration* 50 (2017), pp. 30–43.

[67] 'Millennial' is a transitive descriptor for Ghertner, as it marks the period of transition in Delhi as it moved from a city designed and governed through socialist planning vision to world-class status in 2010.

Aesthetic governmentality

Ghosh charted out the historical conditions that laid the seeds of urban politics in the post-colonial cities to come. Ghertner's work extends those themes through an engagement with geographical theories of the urban. While decidedly Foucaultian, he moves away from early Foucault and a focus on discourse and disciplinary regimes to the Foucault of governmentality and aesthetics.[68] He focuses on a particular urban assemblage, which emerges out of the politics of slum clearance in Delhi in 2010. Yet, in describing the process of slum demolition in the global South, his book is not the familiar narrative of agency and victimhood. The originality of Ghertner's argument lies in his re-reading of aesthetics as a site of governance, and moving the lens of informality away from the slum to the state. Thus, informality in his book is not how the state views its citizens on the margins. Rather, informality emerges as an analytic that reveals how the post-colonial state operates in a rapidly transforming economy, and how the state seeks legal impunity from acts it carries out without sanction. In this manner, his study of Delhi's decade-long transformation into what we today regard as the NCR lays the groundwork for examining urban politics in India as an exercise in bureaucratic flexibility.

Rule by Aesthetics documents the transformation in India's land market following India's economic liberalization in the 1990s, focusing on slum clearance and demolition. Ghertner's work must be located within that history of independent India's ambivalent vision of the urban in the period following 1947, when it turned its attention away from the cities to the villages in order to modernize them. As India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru announced: 'we want to urbanize the village, not take away the people from the villages to towns'.[69] Thus, as Stephen Legg has shown, the multiple urban regulations, beginning with the Slum Clearance Act of 1957 and followed by the Delhi Master Plan of 1960, only solidified the colonial treatment of slums as spaces of exception.[70] During the Emergency of 1975 to 1977, it was precisely this 'exceptional category' that was put to work to transform the legal

[68] Late Foucault is becoming increasingly influential in South Asian studies, where we see a shift from discourse and discipline to ethics and governmentality. See Deana Heath and Stephen Legg, *South Asian Governmentalities; Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[69] Prakash, 'The Urban Turn', p. 3.

[70] Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*, pp. 149–209.

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geography of Delhi. As Emma Tarlo's work reveals, the then ruling party's slogan *garibi hathao* (remove poverty) was violently translated into state-sponsored forced sterilization of Delhi's poor and the destruction of slums.[71]

What unfolded as exceptional during the Emergency was gradually normalized by the 1990s as India's economic liberalization transformed life in Delhi and across India's cities. Ravi Sundaram sums it up: 'the decade saw a series of concentrated shock experiences for Indian city dwellers, relentless expansion and spatial transformation, along with assaults on industrials areas seen as out of place by courts and liberal environmental activists'.[72] A new political economy of urban development emerged in which the 'informal city' became synonymous with 'illegal city'. Ayona Datta's work on Delhi shows how illegality and informality intersect in the slums to unpack the different conceptual, legal, cultural, gendered, and judicial work they do in Delhi's urban context.[73] Building upon this rich literature on how local politics, state-power, and market forces intersected in the living quarters of Delhi's working poor, Ghertner documents how informal housing interacts with the emerging neoliberal aesthetic register. The provocation of Ghertner's argument lies in relocating this informality and illegality away from the housing of the working poor to that of millennial Delhi's planning bodies. The twenty-first century modes of urban governance through aesthetics embody this informality.

Ghertner begins his book with a representative scene, which unpacks his conceptual contribution to reading the operations of state power and political resistance. According to him, calculative surveying was the bedrock of post-Independence socialist Delhi, which was replaced by an aesthetic vision, as millennial Delhi was poised to fashion itself into a world-class city. Aesthetic governance is an antidote to the politics of numbers. A city surveyor interviewed by Ghertner tells him that his team of engineers did a 'windshield survey' from the distance and comforts of their cars, rather than an in-depth field survey, of an area he calls Shiv Camp in Delhi, which was slated to be demolished. This is because conducting a traditional survey, which would require

[71] Emma Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in New Delhi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[72] Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 5.

[73] Ayona Dutta explores this in detail in A. Dutta, *The Illegal City: Space, Law and Gender in a Delhi Squatter Settlement* (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2012).

government officials to enter and measure the spaces in the slum, could 'get too political'.[74] A long history of vandalizing the symbols of colonial and statist rule had put a veritable limit to the use of the tools through which the state could see. In situations of this type, Delhi officials developed a bureaucratic flexibility to conduct a 'windshield survey'. This was enough to decide the legality of the space and its future existence. Shiv Camp did not pass the test of legality and was eventually demolished.

Ghertner's study alerts us to an in-between space where the rules of governance are being refashioned in the absence of an 'avalanche of printed numbers and calculative techniques' through codes of appearance.[75] In this in-between space, the 'rule by aesthetics' generates codes of what Ghertner terms 'aesthetic governmentality'. These codes emerge in his narrative as intense political frictions, which are meant to both contain and enact new forms of violence. Ghertner charts Delhi's transition from a socialist planned city of 'perceived inefficiency and encumbrances' to a millennial world-class city defined by its ability to host international events, attract as many Fortune 500 companies as possible, and offer a global consumerist lifestyle.[76] In order for this rapid transformation to take place, Delhi authorities produced both aesthetic and speculative conditions, by galvanizing a persuasive account of an unhindered 'growth story' in which everyone across class and caste lines was invited to partake.[77] This was a story so compelling that many of the slum dwellers Ghertner interviewed began to believe in the necessity of projects of urban expansion and improvement, even though these would ultimately render them homeless.[78] Avoiding the rubrics of agency and victimhood, Ghertner seeks to uncover this puzzle of how people differentially inhabited the aspirational dreams of a world-class city, even though that city had no place for them.

Ghertner's book makes three important interventions in the field of urban studies by reorienting how we may deploy some of our conceptual apparatus. First, he turns our focus to the valence of the story as a critical analytic of 'speculative urbanism' in the making of

[74] D. Asher Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 3.

[75] Ibid., p. 6.

[76] Ibid., p. 8. Recent work by Llerna Guiu Searle extends this conversation: see L. G. Searle, *Landscapes of Accumulation: Real Estate and the Neoliberal Imagination in Contemporary India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[77] Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics*, pp. 34–35.

[78] Ibid., pp. 42–44.

world-class cities of India.[79] While scholars have looked at the role of parastatal organizations, suspension of civil liberties and human rights, state-led dispossession, and rampant land speculation as facets of speculative urbanism, Ghertner argues that believable stories of 'speculative growth' which create faith in rising land values must be also studied as important political tools of urbanization. Bringing novel sites of investigation to bear upon his study of Delhi, Ghertner shows how the idea of an emerging Indian middle class and their anticipated incomes—a statistical projection generated by think-tanks, consulting firms, and parastatal organizations—was central to making Delhi's land market speculative. He argues that such future value projections undertaken by the building lobby in Delhi (and other Indian cities) have generated more questions than answers.[80] Ghertner charts how such numerical accounts of growth operated spatially and helped to imagine a future city. In this future city, land banks control the land market and its skyrocketing prices.[81]

Second, Ghertner locates 'informality' away from the streets, markets, and open spaces of the city, which dominate the urban historians' analytic apparatus, to the very niches of governmental functioning. He urges us to pay heed to the various modalities deployed in the making of a world-class city, one that is aspirational and without a blueprint. Overturning standard accounts of urban modernity as a cartographic-minded project, Ghertner argues that '[w]orld-class city making hence needs to be seen as an inherently speculative project, premised on an almost prophetic temporality in which the present is wagered on the future'.[82] This speculative disposition, he argues, first required an aesthetic visual literacy (which was not cadaster-based), but eventually became a spatial practice. In a city where the bureaucracy is slow-moving and is accompanied by a vociferous political society, the removal of slums and so-called 'unauthorized' buildings was virtually impossible to realize on the ground. To make matters worse, 70 per cent of Delhi, including malls and slums, was built on unauthorized land, making the legal landscape messy and embroiling the court,

[79] Michael Goldman, 'Speculative Urbanism and the Making of the Next World City', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 3 (2011), pp. 555–581.

[80] A recent book on Gurgaon explores the ramifications of this landbank-based urbanization in the region. See Veena Oldenburg, *Gurgaon: From Mythic Village to Millennium City* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2018).

[81] Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics*, pp. 24–26.

[82] Ibid., p. 10.

municipality, Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and the citizens in a deadlock. He urges his readers to ask: if legality and illegality are not the conditions for demolition, then what is? Why do the illegal malls continue to thrive, while slums like Shiv Camp are demolished?

Calculative forms of municipal governance instituted by the newly independent government with dreams of making Delhi a socialist city had been rendered useless by the 1980s. Both the slum dwellers of Delhi who occupied unauthorized land and housing, as well as unauthorized mall owners, inserted themselves, through various manipulations, into the bureaucracy of rule by records, surveys, papers, and leases. These paper documents therefore revealed little about the realities on the ground. Slum removal required extensive surveying and resettlement. Ghertner's detailed ethnographic work shows, however, that 'surveys were tampered with, false names were appended, and between the time when the survey was completed and when the agency obtained the necessary clearance and land appropriations (usually years), the number of people residing in the settlement had changed'.[83] These technologies of governance also had to incorporate the unwritten world of patronage politics which, as Anand's work on Mumbai shows, was essential to the functioning of the city.[84] In this chimeral world, Ghertner concludes that the DDA resorted to drastic measures, which were both violent and selective. Slum dwellers were evicted, while unauthorized malls continued to operate. Aesthetics offered both political and bureaucratic logic in defining the governance of demolition.

Finally, his ethnography of the eventual demolition of Shiv Camp and the failure of earlier modes of resistance lay the groundwork for retheorizing the politics of the governed in millennial India. If the removal of slums was going to be the lynchpin of Delhi's entry into the status of a world-class city in the previous decade, it was precisely the politics of removal that threatened to undo those aspirations. This is where aesthetic governmentality entered the urban political scene in Delhi, which, according to Ghertner, rendered the politics of the governed nothing but 'mere noise'.[85] Apart from the institutional structures and rhetoric used to conjure speculative growth and land values, the municipal governance resorted to weakening political society by tactically reformulating the Bhagidari, a mediating body between the

[83] Ibid.
[84] Anand, *Hydraulic City*.
[85] Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics*, p. 17.

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residents, planners, and elected representatives who would work towards what he terms 'gentrifying participation'.[86] Through a deep ethnography of the *bhagidari* system, Ghertner shows that, while it was instituted for good governance and making Delhi liveable for all, it ended up strengthening middle-class sensibilities about urban aesthetics, which embraced slum removal.

The *bhagidari* system deepened the regulatory and disciplinary regime instituted by colonial middle-class anxiety around nuisance at various sites. These included both physical and mental spaces, including neighbourhood talk among laypeople, the media, the state, and the judiciary. Much like the characters that people Ghosh's Calcutta and create an informal community of 'knowingness' that is both potent and political, Ghertner's analytic shows that the shifting vectors of this 'knowingness' created a shared language of civility and exclusion in post-colonial cities. Like many recent studies of New Delhi, nuisance is again re-emerging as an important analytical frame for understanding how the state saw the population it ruled over. For instance, Awadhendra Saran's work on colonial and post-colonial Delhi compares the colonial category of 'nuisance' to the Victorian municipal category of 'improvement'. Nuisance, unlike improvement, Saran argues, was not simply a spatial category, but could also be applied to trades, urban waters, sewers, or the lack thereof. As Saran argues, the imprecision within this particular bureaucratic category was productive of certain forms of colonial and post-colonial governmentality.[87]

Through a multi-sited ethnographic analysis, Ghertner also explores how talking about nuisance in neighbourhoods, streets, and tea stalls moves into state discourse and gains official legitimacy as urban policy. He documents how the embodied aversions rooted in caste-based notions of purity were translated into forms of urban abjection—'a politics of expulsion that draws legitimacy from notions of public welfare and environmental health but that remains rooted in necessarily localized experience of nuisance'.[88] In tracking these discourses from the tea stalls to urban legislation, he tries to unpack for us how the residents of Shiv Camp, being completely aware of their inevitable expulsion from the city, continued to engage in these discourses of

[86] Ibid., pp. 57–66.

[87] Awadhendra Saran, *In a City out of Place: Nuisance, Pollution and Dwelling in Delhi c. 1850–2000* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[88] Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics*, p. 86.

abjection and beautification. Thus, instead of a mobilized political society, we get a rather different account of millennial Delhi. When Shiv Camp was slated to be demolished in 2007, massive protests broke out. These stretched from the streets to the courts and offices. Sometimes they were mundane and bureaucratic, and at other times, spectral. The outcome of this resistance neither galvanized a 'political society' nor did it stop the demolition of Shiv Camp. The protest, which a decade earlier had the power to influence the course of political action by the city government, failed to stop the violence of infrastructural development in Delhi. All the known political acts of resistance, including the use of patronage networks, court cases, sit-ins, marches, and lying down in front of bulldozers failed to stop the demolition.

Traversing a zone of legality/illegality, spaces like Shiv Camp are marked by an aspiration to be placed within a trajectory that ends with state recognition, which the residents hoped would offer possibilities of receiving public services and being part of the world-class city.[89] Yet this very desire to belong to the world-class city meant spaces like Shiv Camp had to disappear. Within this contradiction, the aesthetic codes of an imagined world-class city collided with the city's messy realities. Ghertner analyses this contradiction through Jacques Rancière's 'community of sense', in order to understand how nuisance talk and aspirations for a world-class city created 'infrastructures of hope' for the residents of Shiv Camp and 'an expressive foundation from which the possibility of reimagining the city might emerge'.[90] Propertied citizenship remains an aspiration for the urban poor, but one that is only speculatively achievable through displacement from their own spaces of habitation. A world-class city, he reminds us, is built by producing 'aesthetic and not ideological consensus'.[91] However, one may argue that aesthetics is but an ideological tool, one refracted through glistening malls and operationalized through nuisance talk, slum clearance, and displacement in the name of development.

Perhaps due to the variegated work that aesthetic governmentality does, one particular visual rhetoric, namely that of a speculative and imagined future of the city, successfully renders resistance invisible and 'mere noise'. Through his rich ethnographic material and sophisticated analysis of slum

[89] Lisa Björkman, 'Becoming a Slum: From Municipal Colony to Illegal Settlement in Liberalization-Era Mumbai', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 1 (2014), pp. 36–59.

[90] Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics*, p. 157.

[91] Ibid., p. 22 and *passim*.

demolition, Ghertner gives us a nuanced account of the violence of everyday life in Delhi—a violence that is imprinted in the material and imagined landscape of the city. Politics, aesthetics, and aspiration intersected in Shiv Camp as it was demolished to make way for speculative urbanization. The material that Ghertner offers in his book is brimming with possibilities for retheorizing political society in the 'millennial mode', to borrow his turn of phrase.

Incremental citizenship

Nikhil Anand's *Hydraulic City* explores the politics of citizenship in post-colonial Mumbai through a social history of water and urban water-management in a period of dramatic environmental change and urbanization. Apart from broadening conversations around urban infrastructure, his book contributes to theories of post-colonial state-making and the field of urban biopolitics. Urban public utilities are emerging as a critical and exciting site from which to analyse post-colonial urbanism in India.[92] Overturning arguments that link colonial liberalism with the birth of sanitary cities in the nineteenth century, Anand follows a different line of inquiry. If infrastructures comprising water, roads, and marketplaces were central to the creation and governance of a liberal city, one that sought to organize and free 'political subjects and objects from the "primitive" entanglements of social and political life', then, Anand argues, these very same infrastructures can also emerge as disruptive as they break down, leak, and render political citizenship reversible.[93] His site of inquiry is neither a particular space in Mumbai, nor an urban collective. Rather, he turns his ethnographic gaze to the uncertainty that orchestrates access to water for those on the 'margins of state and the market in Mumbai'.[94] Water is not just an accidental object of inquiry to study the making and unmaking of urban

[92] See especially Karen Coelho, 'Of Engineers, Rationalities, and Rule: An Ethnography of Neoliberal Reform in an Urban Water Utility in South India', PhD thesis, University of Arizona, 2004; Matthew Gandy, 'Landscapes of Disaster: Water, Modernity, and Urban Fragmentation in Mumbai', *Environment and Planning A* 40, no. 1 (2008), pp. 108–130; Lisa Björkman, *Pipe Politics, Contested Waters: Embedded Infrastructures of Millenial Mumbai* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[93] Anand, *Hydraulic City*, p. 7. Coelho makes a similar argument about water's leakiness. See Coelho, 'Tapping in'.

[94] Anand, *Hydraulic* City, p. vii.

politics. Access to water (or the withdrawal and breakdown of access), as his narrative reminds us, acts as both a mode for the state to see its citizens and as a way that citizens see the state.[95] Water is the axis around which the narrative of post-colonial citizenship pivots: in his words, 'why water continues to be demanded as a public good, *particularly* by settlers (also called slum dwellers) who are marginalized by public institutions'.[96] Anand follows a whole range of characters: the engineers of water departments as they move water through the city; the residents of Jogeswari and Premnagar settlement, who mobilized the water pipes, guerrilla plumbers, and politicians to access the water; and NGO workers (like those in Asha) as an ethnographic 'site for the circulation and cultivation of new (and often liberal) political subjectivities'.[97] While infrastructures of water (much like electricity and media) produce particular subjectivities through connections and claims-making, Anand argues that these subjectivities are 'reducible neither to the political rationalities of administrators or politicians nor to the material technologies that engineers mobilize in the city'.[98]

Ghertner's state is unable to see, measure, and assess the realities on the ground through the available bureaucratic instruments. Anand's ethnography pushes this institutional opacity in Mumbai, to show how the state actively works *not to count* and *not to know* certain populations as liberal citizens.[99] These populations go to great lengths to be counted as citizens with rights and access to public goods. Anand's ethnography of the political and infrastructural mediations undertaken by water engineers, plumbers, and residents in the settlements reveals that municipal governance works in the city not by making 'laws more inclusive but by *not implementing* exclusive laws'.[100]

At the same time, Anand's canvas is much broader than the water that rushes through the pipes of Mumbai, and he is mindful of the sea, river sewers, and monsoons that interact with and interrupt the piped water. Like Ghosh, Anand harnesses the stories of the city and its water narratives to uncover the rich and complex socio-political world of Mumbai. Storytelling is not just another ethnographic site for Anand, as his deployment of the craft of language reveals him to be a master

[95] Ibid., p. 10.
[96] Ibid., p. vii.
[97] Ibid., p. 132.
[98] Ibid., p. 11.
[99] Ibid., pp. 89–92.
[100] Ibid., p. 91.

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storyteller too. These water stories are not just written narratives. Anand interweaves his written ethnography with short films he made with his interlocutors in Mumbai.[101] The memories of water, he tells us, 'sit with and sometimes interrupt the life that I describe in these pages. Water, like many other things we pretend to know and control, leaks from and undermines the stories we tell. It saturates, soaks, and erodes the stability of the world we know.'[102]

Anand recovers this leaking world, which is unstable and simultaneously opaque. For the urban poor of Mumbai, access to water is located at many points, from the taps, pipes, valves, to engineers' desks, encompassing a vast array of municipal workers, local plumbers, politicians, migrants, slum dwellers, and city engineers. In following the presence and absence of water connections in the city, Anand deftly navigates the rich and vociferous world of urban agitation, demands, claims-making, and the production of citizenship through infrastructure in the city. The stories of how multiple actors narrate their needs and thirst, and how they receive their water are critical in this operation.

Like Ghosh and Ghertner, both of whom depict the life of the working poor in the city as restive, multilayered, and complex, Anand's narrative also navigates the restiveness and ordinariness of the lives of the working poor: the ways in which they imagine, claim, and produce themselves as rights-bearing citizens; and the multi-sited contestations through which they claim their rights to be in and occupy a certain geography. In a rapidly urbanizing India, public utilities are critical sites for understanding the mediations between the city, its citizens, and the political authority that infuse, animate, and disrupt their lives.

Precisely because access to public services is an ongoing affair, it does not end with a legal water connection, as that may be reversed at any time. Getting water in Mumbai is 'not a singular, historical event in the linear time of liberal politics. Instead it is an incremental, intermittent, and reversible process that is composed of multiple temporalities.'[103] This he calls the 'infrapolitics' of Mumbai's water, which devolves around the question of a legal connection to water, in the form of piped municipal water. At the same time, water is not simply just water in the larger political

[101] Aakansha Sewa Sangh, Agaaz, Arts Collective CAMP and Nikhil Anand, *Ek Dozen Pani* (One Dozen Water), 2008, http://www.indiawaterportal.org/articles/ek-dozen-pani-twelve-stories-passage-water-mumbai-and-its-relation-everyday-lives-films, [accessed 27 March 2020].

[102] Anand, *Hydraulic City*, p. ix.

[103] Ibid., p. 7.

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equation. In his ethnographic site, piped water can also be regarded as equivalent to state recognition in the absence of formal citizenship, especially in instances when the settlers' housing might be on unauthorized land. Thus, for them, water connections create opportunities to be counted and recognized as legitimate citizens with access to elections, public consultations, human rights, training programmes, and so on.

Such is the politics of 'hydraulic citizenship' which, according to Anand, muddies the strict division between civil and political society—a distinction that can be 'rather static and dualistic'.[104] Using Colin MacFarlane's notions of 'learning', Anand argues that there is a world beyond political brokerage, where mediations with the state happen as settlers learn and try out new languages of entitlements and urban belonging.[105] Moreover, by focusing on the ongoing nature of water connections, Anand shows that the material politics of how water is pumped, delivered, negotiated, and disconnected are critical to the theorization of post-colonial governance and the post-colonial state. While political theorists have stressed the iterative and unequal nature of citizenship, what Anand's work reveals for us is how this tenuous citizenship is dependent on 'social histories, political technologies, *and* the material-semiotic infrastructures of water distribution in the city'.[106]

For instance, one of his informants, Alka Tai, who lived in unauthorized housing, had worked with local plumbers to circumvent the paperwork to receive water from the government. This had afforded her the opportunity to establish herself more thoroughly in her settlement. However, a water connection, once achieved, is not a closed affair. The taps can run dry and connections disappear. In the course of his ethnographic encounter, Anand notes that Tai had all the essential necessities for her upwardly mobile life, but the presence and absence of her water supply threatened to undo it all. This threat came in many forms.

Karen Coelho's work on Chennai has revealed how urban citizenship is negotiated at the site of the 'leaks' (of pipes and political authority).[107]

[104] Ibid., p. 156. For a similar critique of the static division of civil and political society in the case of Mumbai, see Michael McQuarrie, Naresh Fernandes and Cassim Shepard, 'The Field of Struggle, the Office, and the Flat: Protest and Aspiration in a Mumbai Slum', *Public Culture* 25, no. 2, 70 (2013), pp. 315–348, doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2020629.

[105] Colin MacFarlane, *Learning the City: Knowledge and Translocal Assemblage* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[106] Anand, *Hydraulic City*, p. 9.

[107] Coelho, 'Tapping in'.

Through a rich ethnography of Mumbai, Anand deploys the idea of the 'leak' as the site of a threat for both the citizens and municipal authorities. He shows how the sites of leaks are where the urban poor, or those whom Anand calls 'settlers', can make their tenuous or incremental claims to urban citizenship. His ethnography of leaks invites readers into the world of water engineers and the calculations that are critical to making water flow through Mumbai's pipes. He tells us how calculations involved in moving water through the city 'concealed both the city's prolific water leaks and the beneficiaries of these leaks (residents, state officials and its different wells)'.[108] The leaks in the pipes coursing through Mumbai's underground were not the only site into which citizens tapped for water. There were leakages in political authority too, which manifested themselves through various systems of negotiations, patronage politics, and plumbers acting as mediating agents, which the restive publics of Mumbai manoeuvred to satisfy their basic needs. Yet, while patronage and electoral politics become critical to the negotiation of and access to public services, Anand shows that access to water is not simply just about water and political brokerage. In-between water, urban governance, and water engineers lies the vast world of incalculable leakages.[109] Technical difficulties, geographical and socio-technical uncertainty, political ignorance, and improvisation make up this world of water leakage. These leaky pipes shape the political power of the state, making it 'porous' and amenable to negotiations.[110]

Thus, the absence of a water supply is not simply state, or human, dependent. Anand shows that, in a city like Mumbai, while access to water as a public service can be a pressure point for leveraging power politically, addressing the absence of water was not the work of the engineer, municipal councillor, or state authority. Beyond the techno-political state and its legal regimes lies what Anand calls the 'flaky infrastructures', which are produced through its interactions with 'human bodies, discourses and other things (sewage, soil, water, filtration plants)'.[111] And, more importantly, infrastructure is never simply there, it is always a process of becoming and coming apart. Anand's work offers a path-breaking ethnography of urban water and its uncertainty, which not only opens new directions for urban studies, but takes these issues

[108] Anand, *Hydraulic City*, p. 162.
[109] Ibid., pp. 165–168.
[110] Ibid., p. 189.
[111] Ibid., p. 13.

beyond the study of cities and situates them in urgent conversations about urban politics and precarity in a 'climate-altered planet'.[112]

New directions in urban studies

Urban studies, which began to gain ground as a legitimate site of historical enquiry two decades ago, has now emerged as a field for in-depth theorization of political society, state-making, and citizenship. It offers rich accounts of how post-colonial governance and the legal geography of Indian cities work. The assemblages of knowingness, story-telling, aesthetics, nuisance talks, leakages, and hydraulic citizenship are sure to elicit new works retheorizing the urban and its restive publics. No longer banished to the margins of academic study in a rapidly urbanizing world, cities are emerging as important sites from which to understand the long genealogies of political and state violence, mutations in global finance, and state-making in unstable environmental conditions. These three books mark new departures in urban studies, providing us with the critical tools to study the life of the law in post-colonial cities, infrastructures as sites for the production of citizenship, frictions that make and unmake political societies, and new financial and legal assemblages of risk-management, building lobbies, and syndicates around which urban politics swirls. These books offer us granular narratives about the specific configurations of political power, contestations, and crises produced by the recent spatial transformations in neoliberal Indian cities. Taken together, the recent works on urban space and conditions have also deepened our understanding of the long genealogy of the contemporary moment, including populism, electoral politics, and post-colonial state-making. While the new scholarship on cities illuminates aspects about the urban, it has also laid the groundwork to understand global political crises—be they late-colonial urbanization, real-estate geopolitics in the global South, or the planetary water crisis that is unfolding in parts of Asia and elsewhere. Indeed, the future of urban studies will not simply be about understanding the various kinds of urban existence and experience. Rather, in a rapidly urbanizing world any study of the city should be one that helps us to understand the nature of politics, contestations around legalities, the environmental crisis, and new financial geographies of power and dispossession.

[112] Ibid., p. 237.