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'We live like birds in a cage'

Negotiating forced inclusion in a resettlement
colony in Kolkata, India

Promotor : Prof. Dr. S. VAN WOLPUTTE
Second reader : Prof. Dr. F. DE BOECK

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'We Live Like Birds in a Cage'

Negotiating Forced Inclusion in a Resettlement
Colony in Kolkata, India

Nele Van Doninck

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1

Introduction

This thesis deals with a small piece of land on the South East side of Kolkata, formerly known as Calcutta, the capital of the state of West Bengal in India. On this patch, the government has built a number of apartment blocks. Next to these apartments, who make up the bulk of the area, there also are some plots of land that have been given to refugees who have come from Bangladesh, before 1971, the year of the country's war of independence with Pakistan. The apartments on the other hand are mostly inhabited by migrants from the rural part of the state, and of neighbouring states, who have, often after residing decades in the city, been removed from canal borders for environmental reasons.

This work wants to understand what happened after the resettlement process, how the area is developing and how the people are coping with and negotiating the new circumstances. One of the first complaints was on the size of the apartments, which they deemed to be too small, especially for big families. 'We live like birds in a cage', they told us, time and time again, indicating both their problems with the size of the apartment as well as a feeling of entrapment.

Through studying the narratives and practices people have developed, this thesis looks at how people are dealing with this and other problems of resettlement, and how these actions also influence the composition of the area, allowing other, non-resettled people to come in and claim their place. I argue that the resettlement of these apartment dwellers has been a 'forced inclusion' into the city by the state, and although they do not resist development as such, they do demand to be included properly.

Although this particular research project focuses on a small plot of land in Kolkata, and the currents it shows cannot and should not be simply extrapolated to other contexts, it does however fit in a global urge towards a more modern city, and a longing for a master-planned city. This research aims to give an insight on what happens below/inside this global trend, how it affects people on a grass-roots level, in this case a resettlement colony. In this view, this research offers a modest contribution to the growing body of work on urbanization and how contemporary cities deal with their poorer inhabitants.

The locality under scrutiny is a prime example of 'people management'. The poor on the canal borders and next to railway tracks have been removed from their squatter homes and have been put in this new neighbourhood, created especially to accommodate them. This is no new tendency an sich, but seems to have gained a new momentum the last decade in India and elsewhere (Baviskar 2003).

1. Ordering the disordered

Like many cities in the global South, Kolkata too is an inherently postcolonial city. It is one of the 'big five' in South Asia (together with Delhi, Mumbai, Karachi and Dhaka) (Rao 2006:227) and has a long history of colonial rule by the British. The city has a pre-colonial history too, but it was the British that made it into the metropolis it now is (Monidip Chatterjee 1990). It made Kolkata into a town with a dual structure: 'a white town' for the British, and a 'black town' for native Indians. Planning, like in many cities in the global South, consisted mainly in making the city liveable for the

British colonizer. People were therefore segregated on grounds of race (Baviskar 2003). There were influences that fall outside this dichotomy (Mukherjee n.d.)**,** but the white-native structure is one the colonial regime tried to impose on many colonial cities in Asia, but also in Africa (Watson 2009; Ghertner 2011).

In these cities the division was not simply color-based. There also was an underlying idea of the natives as dirty and unhygienic, and thus in need of separation (see also Mary Douglas 2001 [1966]). Moreover, the colonial citizens, the whites, were seen as proper citizens, and able to live in planned, organized, clean quarters while the natives and recent migrants were to live in the margins, in unplanned, disorderly spaces, often concentrated in 'slums, favelas, souks and bidonvilles' (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009:10). It is very important to take these specific historicities into account, and to rethink what it means to be urban, to be colonial and postcolonial (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009:10).

Limiting the spatialisation of racial and class relations in contemporary cities only to their colonial background and inheritance would be too easy though. As we see in the emergence of the locality in this thesis, but also in other similar cases throughout India (such as described by Tarlo 2003; Desai 2012; Rao 2010; Baviskar 2003) there is a contemporary urge towards a clean and orderly city, one where slum dwellers should be removed from its gaze.

As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002) notes, this urge is now also included in a 'language of modernity' (Chakrabarty 2002:66). The idea that streets and public space in India are crowded, dirty and unhygienic is no longer merely an Western, Orientalist idea, but one that recently became a hot topic for modern nationalist governments (Chakrabarty 2002). It channelled concerns about the welfare of 'concentrated human populations into the desire for a planned city, where they converged with the high nationalist fervour for modernization' (Baviskar 2003:90). In Kolkata, this urge was recently translated by contending politician Mamata Banerjee in an election slogan, stating that Kolkata should become 'a new London'.

Providing flats for people who used to live in squatter settlements can be read as such an urge to clean up the city, and as such also in a wider development narrative of the 'modern' city. In

such a modern India, there is no room for slums or squatter settlements. The country has even devised a 'slumfree cities'-policy[1]. But in resettling poor people, in order to include the people in the city, while erasing their earlier settlements, the state executes more than just a geographical move.

2. Modern Living?

As I will show in this thesis, in this resettling of people, the state shows her power over them. As for instance De Boeck (2011:273) notes on Kinshasa:

> 'The state's brutal destruction of citizens' material and social environments under the guise of an urban reform that once again seems to be inspired by the earlier moral models of colonialist modernity, therefore forms a violent attack on precisely that crucial creative capacity that is a sine qua non to belong, and to belong together, in the city. The official urban politics "orphans" many urban residents and in the end defines them as out of place in the contours of this newer, cleaner, "better" and more "modern" urban environment'.

In the case of the resettlement area, people are not only defined as out of place, but also attributed a new space, a well-defined area in the periphery of the urban environment. They are told where to live, and even how to live. Therefore, as Roy (2003) argues, housing can be a very important analytical arena for anthropological research on the state and its power over her citizens. 'It reveals the spatialisation of forms of regulation (Cooper 1983) and the ways in which such

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[1] Also in other parts of the world this tendency is seen and felt. In Africa for instance, UN Habitat is implementing a 'Cities without Slums'-program. Interestingly, however, this somehow clashes with a more general view on megacities, where slums, or squatter settlements seem to have become somewhat the measuring device of what constitutes a megacity (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008:5; Roy 2009:224).

spatialised techniques link home and community, work and identity, family and nation' (Roy 2003:107).

Moreover, in putting people in rigid, brick apartments, as opposed to their own constructed bamboo homes[2], could also be perceived as an attempt by the state to force people into a more 'modern' way of living. It stresses for instance the importance of the nuclear family instead of living in the context of a more extended family.

This idea of shaping peoples behaviour through housing is especially clear in modernist urban planning, as shows the example of Brasilia, where, notes Holston (1989), architecture was clearly used as an instrument for social change. By putting people in very similar apartments, the government wanted to erase class differences. Brasilia is an extreme case, but the idea of shaping peoples lives through housing has a long history in the West too, notes Holston further. Since Renaissance housing has been used to regulate 'not only such practical matters as how to avoid epidemics, traffic jams, and street riots, but equally (…) to stimulate family and civic virtue' (Holston 1989:12).

Modernism in a moderate form is very present in large parts of the world, and, as Holston (1989:5-6) further argues, it is not too

'great a generalization to say that the modernist vision of a new way of life has fundamentally altered the urban environment in which nearly half the world's people live (…) Postmodern critics tell us today that this modernism is now finished, its creativity exhausted. Yet, I would suggest another aspect of the problem: if modernism is dying, it nevertheless remains dominant, at the very least in the third world'.

The planned, rigid, built environment that forms the biggest part of the neighbourhood where the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted, is certainly reminiscent of Holston's ideas of modernism.

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[2] People believe these bamboo homes, although more prone to destruction by severe weather, to be much more flexible, for instance in the case of family expansion.

Living in an apartment (as were given to resettled people) rather than in a bamboo shack would than lead to an embodiment of new values, more suited to the modern idea of how inhabitants of the sanitized, orderly city should behave.

Yet, this attempt to control people through housing, has a reverse side too. People do recognize these strategies of the state, and are also capable of counteracts. In looking at what Bourdieu (1977:72) refers to as 'the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality' (or 'incorporation' and 'objectification'), and his idea of habitus, we can wonder what this material form/built environment may mean for the people living in it and embodying this message sent by the state, but also how they reproduce and alter these ideas. I will go further into this matter in chapters five, six and seven.

Although this thesis looks at one particular area of the city, it should be stressed that is not an island in the city, but people are connected with the larger city, and are an integral part of it. Although we can see this area as marginal; it is also a part of the city as a whole, we must not forget it plays an active role in the interaction between the different parts of it (Roy 2011).

3. General argument and outline of the thesis

The main interest of this thesis lies in the development of and movement in this area to which the poor were relocated. Only eight years after the first people were resettled to the apartments, the area is now a hodgepodge of different people and different interests.

Although the processes which have shaped, and are still shaping the locality, are certainly rooted in the broader framework described above, this thesis is not meant as a theoretical critique of global forces such as neoliberalism and their macro-effects on a city as a whole, but it wants to explore their effects on a grassroots-level. Many studies have looked into how these forces have influenced resettlement processes throughout India (Desai 2012; Coelho and Raman 2010; Roy 2011).

This thesis looks at what happens next: how do people experience the area where they have been resettled to, which

discourses and strategies do they develop to cope with the new reality, and how these influence the urban tissue of the area.

I will argue that the resettlement can be interpreted as a forced inclusion by the state. As such, people are continuously negotiating this forced inclusion, both in narratives and in practice. These practices at the one hand mimic state language as protection against this same state, and – often unchallenged - flaunt building regulations. These practices have been altering the set-up and architecture the state envisioned. Combined with the opportunities the empty land in and surrounding the resettlement provide for newcomers, trying to occupy and claim pieces of land, this has altered the planned environment to a large extent. As such, it will be shown that notwithstanding the clear starting-point of the resettlement area in modernist planning, after merely eight years, the city has gradually taken over planning. In not countering this, the state is negotiating its own position vis-à-vis the resettlement area and its inhabitants.

Of course, this is no unambiguous thesis. The area hosts many thousands of people, and people have different opinions. I often got outright contrary opinions, sometimes on very simple things. There can be a lot of explanations for it: political preference for instance, but also simple personal feelings. Different attitudes towards certain ideas or plans can also be influenced by different experiences and memories of the past, or fit in a wider personal or political agenda (see also Tarlo 2003:3). I will try as much as possible to voice the different opinions, as they too make the richness of an ethnography, but try and offer guidance in this multitude of opinions and attitudes. Names of informants have been changed, as to protect their privacy, as I promised them I would.

The everyday lives of the people in the locality provide a detailed look at how the power structures affect them, and how they try and make sense of them, create narratives, and act on them. Through looking at concrete narratives and behaviour, this approach reveals a nuanced and complex picture. Or as Schielke (2010:12) puts it: 'the ways people try to find a place in life are ambiguous and often tragic in their outcomes'.

In this case too, the continuous negotiations they are involved in to make sense of their circumstances is not always heroic

or even in the least part successful, but they provide a useful insight in how people deal with what has happened, and is still happening to them. As such, these negotiations are a recurring topic in this thesis and connect the different chapters.

Choosing this particular framework of negotiation obviously means that other possible angles, stories and discourse had to make room. I believe nonetheless that exactly this one offers the best opportunity to fully represent and understand the stories, anecdotes and complaints people have offered me.

After discussing methodology and ethics in chapter two, the thesis is roughly divided in two parts. In the first part, consisting of chapters three and four, I will provide an introduction to Kolkata and aim to provide a 'thick description' of what goes on in this locality.

In the third chapter I will give a functional overview of backgrounds and history that are relevant to understand the current dynamics in the area. In the fourth chapter I introduce an ethnographic description of the area itself. This focuses on the issues people most often talked about, but not limited to them.

In the second part, which consists of chapters five, six and seven, I aim towards a more analytical understanding and description of the locality. I look at discourses and practices and analyse them as a negotiation of power relations. It is important to remember that these people, although sometimes in precarious situations, financially and legally, are not just subjected to the powers that be. As will be shown, there is always, to a greater or smaller extent, a possibility to negotiate or resist those who you feel are oppressing or limiting you.

In chapter five I focus on debates of inclusion and exclusion. I will argue that people's experience of the neighbourhood is one of 'forced inclusion' by the state. The narratives they have developed can be understood as counterclaims to the developmental narratives of this state. They talk about marginalization and entrapment, and claim to be 'forgotten by the government'.

In chapters six and seven I focus on practices people have undertaken to secure their rights, and to appropriate their apartments and the area as a whole. Chapter six looks at two strategies people have developed to protect themselves from the state. At the one hand they refuse official documents for their apartments. These should allow them to feel more secure about the 99-year lease the

government has granted them. Yet people refuse to accept these documents on grounds that they do not state their financial contribution to the apartment and are thus not correct. On the other hand they create their own paper trail, when selling and renting out apartments and land, something the state has forbidden. In invoking a 'moral right' to these practices, and mimicking the state's 'master code' (Mbembe 2001:103) they try to protect their position vis-a-vis the state.

Chapter seven focuses on the appropriation of virtually all free space in the area, first and foremost as daily practices (Bayat 1997), but also in negotiating circumstances of daily life. Chapter seven shows how the state, in not intervening, is also negotiating its own position in the area. Moreover, the strategies and practices described in chapters six and seven have invoked a shift of residents in the area. This transforms it from a clearly designated space for resettlement, into one that becomes more and more similar to other neighbourhoods in the city, despite master-planning.

The appropriation of free space could thus be claimed to be an informal way of city building and claim-making by new residents. Especially by squatters, who have come to seek refuge in the area, to be incorporated in the city as well. They often face a double exclusion though: one by the state, and one by the apartment dwellers, who have internalized the inclusionary debate of the government maybe more than they realize themselves.

The thesis ends with a general conclusion, which connects the above outlined general framework on spatialisation and the 'modern' city, with the more applied one of the ongoing negotiations of forced inclusion, that are shown in chapters five, six and seven.

4. A note on terminology

A last important note in this general introduction is the terminology used to describe this area. On the basis of criteria given by international development agencies such as UN Habitat (2007), one could argue that in fact this area, albeit consisting mostly of brick apartments, is a slum. There is indeed an inadequate access to safe water, and drainage gets, especially during monsoon season, often

clogged and dirty, attracting mosquitoes prone to transfer diseases such as malaria or dengue. The overall quality of the apartment buildings is not good, especially in the older part of the area, and most have cracks and are mildewed. Overcrowding is an important issue, and residential status is, people tell me, still not secure. These last two issues will feature quite prominent in the thesis. Terming it a slum, while maybe controversial, would almost be obvious.

Except, for the people living in the area, it is not. They do not perceive it as such, and avoid the word 'bustee', the Bengali term for slum, rather ferociously. Slums are crowded, dirty and unhygienic, they say (fieldnotes, 3 September 2012). For that reason, I will too. For the inhabitants, it is a neighbourhood, which consists of various colonies.

Although this term may seem rather awkward in postcolonial ears, it is rather common in India. From the 1950's onwards, migrants all over the country have created new spaces for themselves, terming them colonies.

Colonies came into being through a variety of strategies. This could be buying some houses as a group, or exchanging it with Muslims going the opposite way, or squatting in barracks, empty villa's, to "the take-over of private, government and wastelands" (Chatterjee 1990) But as Chatterjee further shows, the term colony does not actually say something about the way of living, it simple means something like 'community of refugees' (Chatterjee 1990:73). Especially in Kolkata, that also saw an influx of fairly wealthy refugees from the neighbouring Bangladesh, the term comprises a very broad spectrum of practices.

As Sanyal (2012) further notes, many of these latter refugees were also fairly well-off and bought land and built houses after their arrival by themselves, with minimal, or no help from the state. These colonies were often fairly affluent, but kept the terminology. In Kolkata therefore, you find people denoting their settlements as colonies, ranging from rather middle class neighbourhoods to people living in not much more than four bamboo walls and a plastic ceiling. In my neighbourhood too, the various different parts of the area with apartments were labelled colonies, but also patches of encroachments put up by squatters.

The term 'slum' however, will feature in the thesis, as other authors sometimes choose to categorize squatter settlements they have studied as such. I however, have chosen not to use the term, for the reasons stated above.

2

Methodology and Ethics

This master thesis is based on three-month field research in the Indian city of Kolkata, conducted from July to September 2012. The research was done in a neighbourhood where planned development of the city is being intertwined with other more 'informal' modes of living. I encountered this area almost coincidental, as I was there to look at another possible topic for this thesis. But the rows and rows of identical apartment buildings triggered my interest more. I had no idea what they were, or who inhabited them, but this unawareness proved to have its benefits too.

Stepping into an area, a situation of which you have almost no knowledge has its advantages. Your view is not (yet) clouded by what others have written, which makes it easier to go in with a complete open mind.

But it also sometimes makes way for very stupid questions (and yes, they actually do exist). Especially during the first few weeks, I encountered many puzzled looks, a sometimes very confused assistant and often only weeks later I understood why it was that what I had asked had caused a blank all around me. Still, I believe asking stupid questions is an important part of the task of an

anthropologist, because I believe it is better to ask what is considered a stupid question, than simply to assume things.

Most of the information was obtained in informal talks and semi-structured interviews in tea stalls or other places where people gathered during the day, but also longer interviews in their homes. These often provided deeper, more detailed, and sometimes also more political viewpoints.

I am aware that after a three-month stay, only brushstrokes have emerged, and that a lot of nuance will have gone unnoticed. In this chapter I want to look into some of the issues that made this thesis into what it is. I have highlighted some of the methods, nuisances and ethics of this research project. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but sheds a light on some of the most important guidelines, experiences and annoyances that have shaped this research project and the thesis, which resulted from it.

1. On the politics of fieldwork, analysis and responsibility

I agree with Miller (2007:7) that 'experience is radically more challenging than imagination, research results are more interesting than our working hypotheses'. Working with real people, with real lives and real stories is extremely interesting, but it also poses a huge responsibility.

In the drafting of this thesis, I held on to one important guideline for myself. The field notes are the basis of everything. This thesis is built up from the stories my informants told me. They are the authorities of this thesis. I am the one listening, asking questions, noting down. Because of the intricacies of the science I am in, I am also the one analysing afterwards. I have tried to stick very close to what people have told me, and be true to what they wanted to convey, and, while being aware of my own position, also trying to minimize it. Much in line with a running joke amongst anthropologists, as quoted for instance by Marshall Sahlins and David Schneider**:** 'As the native said to the postmodern anthropologist, "that's enough about you, let's talk about me for a while"' (see e.g. Boyer n.d; Comaroff 2010; Newton 2000).

During the fieldwork numerous questions were answered, stories and jokes were told, during numerous times and places. Sometimes an interview was interrupted as suddenly we found ourselves all coughing, because one of the women threw a whole bunch of chillies in a pan of boiling oil, and one time an interview was briefly interrupted as two buffalos came galloping past. Another time two women made so much effort to put my chair in the shadow, that I felt I was about to be swallowed by the thick bush of banana leaves as I was desperately trying to get my questions across. I sometimes still dream of the 'Ai dada' and 'Ai didi's', which we often used to make contact with men and women in the street.

My assistant and I drank numerous teas, of all kinds of tastes, and sat hours and hours on benches of tea stalls. We heard all kinds of stories, some of which we used, and some of which will remain with me, but sadly did not made it into the thesis.

Analysis started from a number of paradoxes and tensions in people's stories that struck me as counterintuitive, as they convey certain frictions and sometimes dynamics that exist in the area. These are of course but a small part of what goes on in the area, but offer a fertile starting point for analysis, as it is often in the cracks of a seemingly 'logic' course of events that interesting stories are found. I have combined stories people told with the way they were told, with actions they undertook and observations I made, as to provide a 'thick' description, as much as possible after three months of fieldwork.

The main starting point from my writing exercise has always been my field data. Using the grounded theory approach, I have firstly tried to understand what is going on in my research area. I have identified some core issues, stories and observations I wanted to work with, and have than tested them with other research and theory (Glaser and Strauss 2008 [1967]).

The end result has emerged from a continuous picking my way 'through the morass of data by a process of constant error and revision' (Barley 1986:128). A continuous back-and-forth between fieldnotes and literature was my part for many months, until finally something understandable and fairly coherent came into being. I say fairly, because in the thesis, following my fieldnotes, I describe a number of opinions, practices and strategies that are not always on

one line. People have different opinions, different histories and different hopes for the future. Some are angry; some are rather subdued. Some want to leave; some accept the fact that this is their new home. Their ideas do not always comply with each other, and so sometimes the strategies I describe do not only sound contradictory, they simply are. But that is a part of the richness of anthropological research, that it does not always present smooth findings, but points at complexities under the radar.

I tried to stay close to my field notes and interviews, but there are no long excerpts of them in the thesis. Because of the often very informal manner of interviewing, I have chosen to work with quotes, rather than whole interview fragments.

Of course, in the process, my own person has crept in, with my own experiences and background. Writing an ethnography, small as it may be, is and remains a writing act. Yet, reducing it as Sangren refutes to 'a solipsistic literary practice, one so obsessively reflexive as to be of no interest to anybody outside of itself' (Comaroff 2010:525) is, I believe, of no use. I have tried and I believe this thesis to be true of what people have told me; and possible mistakes in understanding or analyzing them are only mine.

2. 'Dangers' and annoyances

Why should we speak to you?
Some of the difficulties and peculiarities of the site have shaped this thesis. At times I encountered some serious potholes in the road, so to speak, some even becoming rather steep ravines we could only work around. A first serious issue had to do with our mere presence in the area. I am a white woman; my assistant was a young Brahmin man. And although his grandparents had also fled Bangladesh many years ago, like many of the people in our locality, his and my social status still made us stand out as strangers, as out of place. Moreover, we were often met with a lot of suspicion, which had one the one hand to do with the tense political situation I will discuss in the next part, but also just with us being there. As Michel Foucault would maybe say, social inquiry itself has in many cases become 'a form of surveillance, the eye whose pitiless, secretive gaze the marginalized

seek instinctively to avoid' (Coplan 2001:83). I am not arguing here that my informants were simply marginalised, but they have been perceived as such often. Their suspicion was not without a reason, thus showed our research afterwards. In the first few days and even weeks, our main task seemed to answer the question 'why should we speak to you', even before asking the simplest questions.

'The baby will be born in five months – here it is'
Already early in the preparation of the field research, I decided to go on my own, not being enrolled in a volunteering program or linked to a welfare organisation of NGO. I wanted to try and do my research as independent as possible. But it also meant I needed an assistant/translator. Throughout the stay I tried to improve my very basic Bengali skills, but for interviewing, it was simply never good enough. As a former journalist though, I do want to stress the importance of the kind of questions posed and especially how they are conveyed. Working with an interlocutor, regardless of his qualities, often felt frustrating. Nuances I wanted to convey sometimes got lost, and people often kept talking while my assistant desperately tried to translate and listen at the same time, driving him stark mad. Bengali also has some peculiarities, as some translations made clear. Moreover, the language itself has its peculiarities too, when translated into English. One time a woman was talking about how her daughter-in-law was having a baby in five months, or so I thought, and the problems that would arise in accommodating this extra person in the already cramped apartment. Suddenly she got up, and moments later she returned… with a five month old baby. I believe I have filtered most of these kinds of mistakes out, but that is not certain. Most times you feel something is off, or like one my professor in a linguistics course used to say: 'If your translation sounds odd, it is probably wrong'.

Strategic silence
My choice of fieldwork site was also not the easiest choice I could have made. Violent evictions in the area only a few months before, and the alleged presence of 'Maoists' in the area made the government very suspicious. The area was very heavily policed (or at least until about six PM, when most of the police officers ended their

shifts and left the area). We had only been in the area for an hour and a half in our first visit (although I had visited the contested area once before with such an alleged 'Maoist', in fact a very dedicated young activist, but a member of a far left-wing political party distrusted by the state) before the police halted us and asked our names and university departments.

Working around these policemen was very quirky, and at the same time many of the inhabitants of the area did not wish to be associated with the people from the evicted area, or the activists. Their distrust to talk about politics was moreover not confined to questions on the area (which we very seldom asked), but also to other forms of politics.

One of my major frustrations therefore was the strategic silence people wielded when confronted with questions about the power of political parties in the area. Often very general explanations were given about the patronage of certain areas in the neighbourhood, but when – very cautiously and politely – we inquired about the nature of those things in the area, they fell silent. "I don't know anything about that", was the answer most often heard.

'But it is dangerous'

For me, it was very difficult to assess to what extent it was actually dangerous to do fieldwork or to ask certain questions. It became one of the great annoyances during the stay. My assistant was not a great help in these matters; he repeatedly pointed 'dangerous' things out to me, going from muddy patches on the road to certain people and certain places. Danger seemed to be lurking around every corner. It was very hard for me, as I often felt these things not to be as dangerous as he described them. Many people I met in the city, considered it even dangerous to enter such a neighbourhood at all.

But challenging his assessments was not without risk either; although I had a different view of what is dangerous or not for a woman especially, I did not want to endanger us. One wrong decision could have compromised the research, and I did not want to risk that. Some of the questions could have been bolder; some should have been more persistent.

But all in all, I am happy. With only a few telephone numbers and contact addresses in my pocket when arriving all alone in a strange city, with only a very limited understanding of where and what I was going to research in the next three months, I did not yet grasp the difficulties and stress I would encounter. But these are side effects. All in all, doing fieldwork is great. It offers the possibility to meet people you would otherwise never had met, to encounter areas and developments unknown to you, but a daily reality (and often struggle) to the people living there.

A last note is on the pictures used in the thesis. All pictures are either with consent of the people in it, or taken outside without hiding the act of it. Most of the people in the pictures do not feature directly in the thesis, as to further enhance anonymity.

3

Meeting the City of Joy

The area that is called Nonadanga by its inhabitants, cannot be found on a map. Although the name is very commonly used by the people living there, and very present on signs on walls around and in the neighbourhood, it does, for instance, not yet appear on Google maps. For an outsider, as I was when I first arrived there, the area seems tucked away very neatly in an area dominated by large fish ponds, away from the gaze of the average Kolkata inhabitant.

In fact, the first time I got there, I felt like I had arrived almost at the end of the world. From the Kalighat metro stop in the city centre, we took three autos - a shared tuktuk-like vehicle - up to the Ruby crossroads. From this very large, bustling crossroads, full of busses, auto's, cars and pedestrians, it takes another auto to reach Nonadanga. But where the previous route takes you through crowded lanes and busy traffic, two minutes in this ride you already feel like you have left the city, and have entered a rural area, cattle inclusive. It didn't take long before I felt I had lost all sense of direction.

The long, curvy, potholed road leads its visitors to the neighbourhood. It meanders through plots of damp land, often

occupied in the morning by bathing buffalos, deeply sunken in the muddy wetlands, seemingly cut in half for the unaware eye. It feels like a brusque change from the always busy, always congested roads of the inner city.

Auto-drivers ferry people to and fro, pushing up to seven passengers into the small vehicles. Avoiding the worst of bumps, they find customers all along the way, at small patches of new settlements, belonging to families who built huts somewhere halfway between the busy crossroads and the neighbourhood I researched, hoping to get an apartment as well; or people crossing the bridge that connects the road to better off neighbourhoods on the other side of the canal.

Well-dressed people would take these shared taxis too, but they would get off very quickly, at the glitzy car stores close to the Ruby crossroads. After that, suits become rare. Along the way we would cross people on bicycles, in busses, and on trucks going to the nearby factory, and, in the morning also some peculiar cycle vans that look rather like small cages, full of children being brought to a neighbouring school by a man cycling the whole lot there. The ride itself seemed to function as a transition from the city to something else, something different. Almost immediately, I liked this ride, which functioned for me too as a gateway to a new experience.

But, then, one day, roughly halfway through my daily drive, just as I too thought I knew every pothole and bend in the way, the road had become asphalted. Four days before, the workers had appeared. I had seen them squatting on their heels, with small brushes, like the ones we use with a dustpan, trying to wipe the dirt of the roads - a task that cannot but remind one of the work that the mythological king Sisyphus was forced to do - to facilitate the process of road making. The brute work of these people, dressed in rather old and ragged clothes, in contrast with the more 'modern' look the road got later was an eye opener. Was this area being developed, despite the resettlement people, in an attempt to make the connection between the area and the city more accessible?

As soon as the asphalt had dried, the auto's started racing over the newly paved track, and despite the grand detour, the residents of the area at least seemed much closer to the city. It was only later that some residents from the neighbourhood told me why

the road had been improved. No goodwill from the government towards the people in the quarter, but the (temporary) bridge factory, located at the entrance of the neighbourhood had asked for an asphalt road for its trucks, and had paid a substantial amount, if not everything, for it.

The ride became smoother and quicker, but the paradox remained. We still went in a big circle around the fish ponds, a trip which seemed roughly four of five times as long as the bird's eye distance, as if willingly making the space between the city and the neighbourhoods longer, bigger, more distant.

This paradox, between close and far, between the city and this newly developed area, was only one of the many paradoxes I encountered during my field research. It seemed so odd to me, choosing this place as a location to resettle (poor) canal border dwellers, as it is a very fast developing part of the city, where project developers pay big money to build compounds for the city's well-off. There is talk of the construction of a new metro line too, which would connect this part of the city in no time with the city center, and which would make the prices for land go through the roof.

Why put these people exactly here, in an area where the developers will soon battle intensely for plots of land, as the glitzy high-rises and compounds will continue expanding, and creeping up to the government purpose built bustee, full of people who once lived in a shack on the border of a canal?

1. A city without a founder, thus ruled the high court

To understand how this neighbourhood came to be, it is important to take a few historical developments of the city into account. I will give a rather short, but functional history of the city, followed by a small overview of the waves of migration the city encountered. This will help to explain why the people that were relocated had to leave their canal bank homes.

Usually, the emergence of the city is put in the late 18th century, when a battalion of the British East India Company defeated the then Nawab of Bengal, Siraj ud-Daulah. The British trader Job Charnock is usually seen as the 'founder' of the city (Thankappan

Nair 1977). But this has been contested on the grounds of a previous existence of three villages (Kolikata, Sutanuti and Govindapur) (Chakravorty 2000) that have emerged into the city of Kolkata. Furthermore, in 2003 the Calcutta High Court even ruled that the city does not have an official founder (Gupta 2003).

It may indeed seem a bit harsh to appoint a British citizen as the founder of Kolkata, but it is undeniable that the influence of the British has been very profoundly. Over the next three hundred years, the city expanded hugely, mostly in a narrow north-south axis, as its industry was mostly located at the banks of the river Hooghly, which crosses town from north to south.

The eastern parts of the city, where Nonadanga is located, have long been used as wetlands, wastelands. It is only in the last few years that the real run on land has begun. This is very visible. All over town, and in the metro line, there are billboards urging people to apply for newly developed luxurious apartments in the area; in compounds with swimming pools and fitness areas, to be part of 'the chosen few'. Many of these new projects will be built on these eastern fringes of the city. The newly elected government also plans shopping malls and water parks in this area, as part of what the Mamata Banerjee, the current chief minister of the West-Bengal state envisions as the future for the city: it should become a 'new London'.

A huge task at hand, as Kolkata, which is considered as India's cultural capital and the third biggest city in the country, is 'a sprawling metropolis'. The Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA) covers an area as big as 1851 square kilometre, and hosts (according to the 2001 census) no less than 14 720 000 people. In terms of population, the KMA belongs to the world's top ten megacities (Kolkata Municipal Corporation 2012:15). London, in comparison, the city it strives to be, hosted, according to their last census in 2011, 'merely' a population of 8 174 000 (UK Office for National Statistics 2011).

Not unexpectedly, a huge majority of people living in Kolkata, frequently nicknamed 'the city of joy', are migrants or have ancestors who were. They are often still among the cities poor and working class population, which has an impact on the cities layout. It is estimated that in the city alone, the Kolkata Municipal City

(KMC), 'registered bustees (slum or low- income communities) represent around thirty per cent of the population, with unregistered bustees and illegal squatters accounting for approximately an additional nine per cent' (Asian Development Bank 2006:1). According to these numbers, about forty per cent of the population lives in sub-standard housing. Many, if not most of the people in these settlements, recognized or not, and on the canal borders (which are probably to be measured amongst the illegal settlements) are (relatively recent) migrants, who have come to the city in search of jobs and refuge.

2. Migration explained

The city has indeed a very long history of migration and newcomers (Chakravorty 2000), and has always had to accommodate flows of people that arrived at the cities train stations and from its huge hinterland. It is no surprise many people wanted to find a new future in Kolkata. As the capital of West Bengal, and the only large city in the province, it attracts many rural migrants to her. Being the only major city in the area, it is attractive to a huge population surrounding it. In 2000, Chakravorty estimated the hinterland of Kolkata hosted some 220 million people, a mostly poor rural population (Chakravorty 2000:58). This huge hinterland, and Kolkata's rather particular historical position in the region, has led to a number of 'flows' of migrants into the city. I will outline some of the main influxes, as it will prove to be important later on, when discussing the allotment of apartments vis-à-vis plots of land in the new quarter I conducted my field research in.

The very first wave of immigrants came to try and find jobs as servants for the British traders and administrators. Because they needed to be within walking distance, Munchi states they settled in slums near the houses of the British, in the city centre (Chakravorty 2000:65). A second wave of immigrants came to work in the jute mills and factories, and settled in bustees near the Hooghly river (Chakravorty 2000:66). These people arrived a long time ago, and it is difficult to still see them as 'migrants', for they have a historical presence in the city, and there place in the city is not so much

contested. This is different for the migrants that came to the city from 1947 onwards. The date is an important one, as after almost three hundred years of British rule, India declared independence.

The independence of India not only denoted the end of British rule, but also a partition from Pakistan and what would become Bangladesh, a separation that was not only geographical, but also religious. It caused many Hindu people to flee from the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to Kolkata, because they feared religious prosecution. Muslim inhabitants of the city have also been reported to have made the opposite journey, but in much smaller numbers (Chakravorty 2000:61). This was again repeated during and after the independence war between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971. Many of the people that came between 1947 and 1971 were given plots of land in the city, creating 'colonies'. As mentioned, this word is still being used today, but where originally it meant a community of people from Bangladesh, it now also refers to a migrant community as such, regardless of where they come from.

Refugees that came after 1971 were less lucky. They did not receive land, and most of them settled in rail colonies, where poor people live next to the railway station, often awfully close to the tracks. Others settled on canal banks in the eastern part of town, not seldom after they had settled in one of the railway colonies first, but found the living costs there too high (fieldnotes, 14 August 2012). It is mostly these people that have been resettled into the apartments I studied. Some have come from Bangladesh, but many of them also came from the Kolkata hinterland in India itself, often from villages in the Sunderbans, a tidal mangrove forest in the South of West Bengal.

For the people in the squatter settlements who migrated from East Pakistan/Bangladesh, especially the date of their arrival is very important. Holders of an official document that proves an arrival before 1971, have the right to a piece of land, instead of an apartment, which proved to be a huge advantage.

3. City upgrading – people removal?

To cope with this enormous influx of people over the years, and the corresponding growth of informal settlements, the city decided something had to be done. As noted above, about forty per cent of the city population lives in settlements that could be categorized as slums[3]. This causes a huge strain on the city, according to the city corporation.

Already in the 1970's, India's cities began to implement programs to 'better' the city. In Kolkata the Bustee Improvement Program was implemented, which focused on sanitation. The city also profited from India's Megacity Scheme, a nation-wide program that promotes 'the establishment of revolving funds for sustained investment in urban infrastructure through the adoption of direct and indirect cost-recovery measures' (Asian Development Bank 2006:2). There was a somewhat strange intertwining between the notion of informal or squatter settlements and sanitation, a intertwining that never disappeared anymore. As Bandyopadhyay (1990:78) notes:

> 'In the 1980's, a middle-class revolution has silently seized Calcutta. There is a new trend towards sporadic beautification, preservation of old monuments, and a certain streamlining, sophistication and even luxury in middle-class homes. With this goes a new concern for the environment. All this is designed to foster one particular aspect of the myth of Calcutta. But another compelling – if equally mythicized – aspect remains. It is one thing to raise enlightened slogans of 'health and shelter for all' another to implement them in the teeth of reality or even to insulate the affluent classes from that reality'.

Talk was there, but implementation remained difficult, argues Bandyopadhyay. But not for long, it seemed. In the nineties the city started organizing a program to improve the cities sanitation, which

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[3] As explained in the introducting, people in the settlements often strongly disapprove of being categorized as slum dwellers, but in official documents and popular discourse, they are termed as such.

resulted in 2000 in the emergence of the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Program (KEIP).

It is a 'multi-agency' that aims to provide

> 'affordable access to basic urban services in slums, revamp and up grade the sewerage and drainage system, make solid waste management system efficient, restore the city's drainage canals, and improve outdoor recreation facilities in parks and water bodies. It also has a capacity building component to raise the standards of KMC's delivery of municipal services' (KEIP 2012).

Making the sewerage canals cleaner did imply however, that a solution needed to be found for the people living on the canal banks, who often had been staying there for twenty years or more (fieldnotes, 9 August 2012). The apartments and the quarter that is the focus of my research, has been developed as a result of exactly this program. It is hard to say if this sanitation problem was the real worry of the city council, or whether the underlying idea was to remove these canal border dwellers to the outskirts of the city. The program combines two entities of the city, namely the betterment of sanitation and of slums, and, somewhat oddly maybe, proposes that the one cannot be done without the other. Reading some of the reports is a very strange experience. Next to the description of the project, somewhere hidden in the belly of the report, there are also lists of how many people had to be resettled, and how much it would cost. But overall, these resettlement figures seem to be remarks in the margin, something on the same level as hiring workers or ordering material.

The policy documents of this program emphasize that the project will make the life of the slum dwellers better. They stress that only few now have a drainage system. Ironically enough, one of the key problems that the inhabitants of the Nonadanga resettlement area complain about, is exactly drainage and sanitation. Pipes and gutters seem to get clogged almost always during the monsoon season, causing danger for malaria and dengue. I will come back to this issue

later. In the next chapter, I will first look at the actual quarter where some of the people from the canal banks have been resettled.

4

Nonadanga, One Size Fits All

The entry by auto-taxi into the resettlement area during the monsoon season depends on the amount of rain that has fallen during the night and the previous days. The newly asphalted road stops at the entrance of the settlement, and most roads in the area itself are once again made out of dirt, sometimes with patches of old asphalt in it. When it has been dry, the roads are full of potholes. When it has been wet, there are no roads. Or so it seems. The autos then must try to make a way through the water, whilst skilfully avoiding to splotch the people they pass during the trip.

People are moving in and out of the area in great numbers, and if one starts counting the apartment blocks that house the resettled people, it becomes clear what an enormous amount of people is living here. Not very large in surface, the area houses well over a hundred and twenty apartment blocks, some houses build on scattered plots of land and an older colony of Bangladeshi refugees.

In this chapter, I will focus most on the flats and their inhabitants. The other parts of the settlement will be dealt with in later chapters. This chapter gives a description of what they look like, and how people perceive them, going into some of the basic

problems people have with the flats, and is derived from my fieldnotes. The next chapters will provide a more in-depth theoretical and analytical engagement with the developments taking place in the area, which are described here.

1. 'They said: you have to go now'

At first sight, a new visitor to the area would count about eight flats per apartment block, a number of families, which constitutes, when multiplied by about 120 apartment blocks, already a huge crowd living on this small patch of land. The buildings, mostly painted in a pale yellow, turning to a vague grey during heavy rains, make a strangely regular skyline in a city where no two buildings ever look the same. Here they come end on end, the one next to the other. And although they all seem to look the same to the casual eye, they are not.

There is, for one, a difference in organization. In one area, the flats were built by the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), the program already mentioned in chapter three. I will refer to this area as sector A. The others have been built by the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA). To those I will further refer to as sector B. For this thesis, I have focused my research mainly on the A sector, where people had been living the longest. I also occasionally visited the other sector, and spoke to people there, as the sectors are not completely separate entities, and people do mix, for instance at certain teashops, and at the market stalls. When not explicitly mentioned, all the data and informants are derived from the A-sector.

In the A-sector, the building of new apartment blocks has finished some years ago. In the other sector there are still new blocks being added. Although these two sectors are built by two different city authorities, the apartments look roughly the same, although in the new sector, they are not only painted in the pale yellow that is so typical for the older buildings, but also in blue and orange.

One very important thing remains the same though. Where I had first estimated about eight apartments in one building, it turned out to host no less than 32 flats per block, each measuring about

fifteen square meters, a surface that is sometimes inhabited by no less than thirteen people.

In the A-sector, there are three distinct neighbourhoods, consisting of apartments blocks. They are referred to by the inhabitants as separate colonies, and consist each of two rows of fifteen to twenty apartment blocks in total, facing each other. They are spatially distinctly separated from each other. The A-block was built first, followed by the B- and C-block, where small changes to the apartments have been made.

Most people living in the A-sector reported moving into the apartments about seven to eight years ago. Most of them used to live in squatter settlements on canal borders not too far from the area, and were forced to come here by the government. Officials came to their settlements, and told them the canal borders would be restored, for environmental purposes. Although living conditions were far from good at the canal borders, people were reluctant to resettle to the apartments. But the government did not leave a lot of choices. As one of my informants told me:

'They said: "you have to go now. If you don't go, that's your choice, but we will come back in a few days to demolish your hut". So we had to find buyers for all the furniture we had, and our animals in only a few days' time. We had to sell everything very cheaply' (interview, 10 August 2012).

But packing up and moving family and belongings to an apartment came with another condition, we heard from another man, a clerk, with his mouth red of the constantly chewing of *paan* (areca 'betel' nut wrapped in a betel leaf, often with tobacco added).

'We paid around 5000 rupees, in the bank. We don't really know to whom this money went. But we have a bank slip stating the amount of money we paid. Together with the allotment paper and the document with the photo that was snatched of us. But a real legal document, saying we are owners of these apartments, we did not get' (interview, 7 August 2012).

Later on, however, someone told me that the actual discussion over the legal papers was a bit more complicated. I will talk about the legal arguments and on the role of the state in the lives of the people of Nonadanga in chapter six.

2. One size fits all?

The build-up of the apartment blocks is fairly similar. Each block consists of a dual structure, with sixteen flats on each end, connected by a stairwell, which is used by all the residents. The blocks consist of four stories, so on every story, on each side of the central stairwell, there are four rooms/apartments. There are some small differences as to where the door is, for instance, because of the location of the particular apartment in the building, but in essence, they all look like the same rectangular empty box.

After the construction of the A-block, there were some small changes made to the apartment layout. The bathroom was moved to a small space, accessible through the balcony, as opposed to the first blocks, where the bathroom was inside the room. As people voiced the horror they felt when they had to eat so close to the place where they defecate and wash, the apartment design was adjusted later on, and the bathroom was moved to a part of the balcony[4]. It was also often said that the new apartments, that are still being built, are even smaller than the fifteen square meters rooms most of my informants live in.

The flat itself, as said, is like a rectangular box. There are two windows, and there is a balcony. When received, the apartments are completely empty. There is no furniture provided. The box-like structure, however, allows for adjustments to be made, which is done by many people. Inhabitants of almost all the apartments somehow tried to make the brick, rigid structure of their new home a little more suited to their family needs.

Through constructions such as making the balcony into a room, by closing it up with a window, or simply walling up the open

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[4] Ironically, as people extend the balcony, and make it into a kitchen, the same problem arises again.

space, balconies became kitchens, or, if located on the ground floor, shops. Also on the ground floor of certain buildings, people started to make shed-like extensions to their apartments. On the inside, people try to make extra space available by lowering the ceiling and creating an extra (duplex) space where sons or daughters can sleep. This gives the people in the main, downstairs bed some privacy. So oddly enough, the apartments themselves seem to have become to represent what is happening in the neighbourhood as a whole. The resentment against the *one size fits all*-approach that the government seems to have taken in the construction of the apartments is visualized by numerous adjustments and extensions that have been made by the inhabitants of the flats. I wrote in my fieldnotes:

> 'The adjustments and especially the extensions that have been made to a large number of the apartments seem to visualize what people have been telling us time and time again: the rooms are too small, they cannot properly live in it. The bulging self-made constructions, some very small and basic, some very large and professional, make the apartments look as if they will burst out of their seams any moment now' (fieldnotes, 20 September 2012).

People reported living in the apartments with up to thirteen people. They often feel betrayed, and the 'big families' all tell the same story: their name was noted as a big family, and they were promised an apartment with two rooms. It was only when they got to the site, they saw how small the rooms actually were.

3. (No) Family space

Especially the inhabitants of the A-block reported how the move to these apartments was not only a physical move from the hutment to a brick structure, but also a change in their way of life. Particularly the women felt deprived of their way of life, they told me.

I had just left an apartment on the ground floor where I had been invited by a woman to come see the problems with it for myself. Afterwards, I got into a conversation with another woman in

the hallway of the building. I was happy meeting these women inside, because in the street, women often shied away from us, and so outside, we mostly spoke to men. Once we moved into a building, however, the women often tended to open up very quickly and very enthusiastically.

Next, I found myself quite suddenly surrounded by a group of women, about six or seven of them, all wanting very badly to express their feelings about their buildings. 'We used to be more secure', they explained, 'we could also keep some cattle and some hens, which brought us some money too. But where should we do that here?' The women told us about how they lost their income, not being able to tend the animals any longer. It forced them into becoming housewives, often confining them large parts of the day in this small room with their in-laws, something that not seldom led to quarrels and problems within the family. Men tended to 'escape' either to go out to do a job, or hang out at teashops, or engage in drinking sprees with friends.

They told us the buildings were old (although they had only been build up to ten years ago), and not well built. The small rooms also caused their family ties to break. Because of the small size of the apartment, families that are able to, try and rent another apartment in the area. But these families are confronted with another problem. For the new flat, they of course have to pay extra rent, and again money for electricity and gas. All money that is wasted, in their view, and, more importantly, it decreases the amount of money paid by children to their (elderly) parents.

Several scholars (Gore 1968; Karve 1965; Pollock 1972; in Van Wessel 2001:129) point out that the ideal of the 'joint family', is 'primarily understood to be consisting of lineally or collaterally united men, their wives and unmarried daughters'. People in the resettlement area kept coming back to it and how the size of the flats affected their ability to live together as one family. In her study on middle class Indians, Van Wessel sees this traditional idea of the joint family as a 'model' (Van Wessel 2001:130), something on which reality is held up against. It is very possible that this also holds true for the people in the resettlement flats, who also see their families split by the size of the apartment, and family members going out to other places in India to earn money there.

4. Water buckets and clogged pipes

Another reason people frequently complained about the build-up of the area, was the lack of facilities. Whereas the new flats might look as if the government wanted to build some kind of (modernist) 'model district', resembling some middle-class flats and neighbourhoods in town, they built exactly one primary school, and no health centres in this area. For an area where some tens of thousands of people live, it seems rather limited. Water is a problem too. There are pumps, but they are not strong enough to reach all the buildings, and the water is said to be heavily polluted, and cannot be used for consumption. So drinking water is brought in daily by tankers, which almost always leave some families dry. The inhabitants of the blocks have made arrangements amongst themselves, and they take water from the tanker per three or four buildings. But this also means, that if you are at the back of the line, and water runs out before you can fill your bucket, you have to wait for four days or so before your block gets access again to a water tanker. One delivery that I witnessed on September 4 left six families without water. They face once again extra costs. They have to buy water from people who make a living out of bringing drinking water they have collected from pumps in nearby areas to the site. If they try to go to neighbouring area's themselves, they often wind up in heavy quarrelling with the inhabitants of that area, who believe that the Nonadanga inhabitants have no right to their water.

As mentioned, drainage is another problem. During monsoon season, pipes break, and drains get clogged, which causes water to stand still, which is regarded as very dangerous, especially augmenting the risk for malaria and dengue. In an attempt to control some of this danger, we sometimes saw government employees cycling around the area, with big containers full of a bug repellent, probably DDT, to spray it in pools and drains.

Overall, the condition of the flats deteriorates very quickly. There are cracks and there is mildew on almost every building in the A-sector. One building even seems on the verge of collapse. 'If a crow sits on the window sill, it will collapse,' people jokingly told us

over yet another tea. But the story behind it is rather appalling. The building right opposite to the crumbling building is actually one of the best in the area. They were 'test'-buildings. The contractor who built the good block did not receive any more contracts for building extra blocks. The contractor that built the much cheaper, but much more rickety building, however, was approved by the government to make some more buildings.

5. Rotting vegetables and luxurious fish tanks

There is also no official food market in the area. All shops are 'unofficial'. There are two main roads into the area, both of which are lined with shops. They constitute the two main markets of the area. The shops are mostly made out of bamboo, and the diversity of the goods offered is great. But most of them sell food items. Some sell vegetables, some sell meat, some sell fish.

In the centre of the bigger road of the two, there is a square with a vegetable shop that is immensely popular. After a few weeks, I asked one of owners of a teashop what the difference was with the numerous other shops that lined the road. It turned out that the owner of the popular shop went to the wholesale market very late, and got the vegetables that the other sellers didn't think were good enough, because the quality was poor, or because they were almost off. He bought them for next to nothing, and also sold them cheaper then the other sellers in the market. The fact that this almost-off vegetable shop was so popular, and people sometimes returned extremely disappointed when it would not open that day, is a glimpse of the extent of the sometimes very well hidden poverty of the people in the neighbourhood.

In contrast, another time a man called us into a shop, and he offered us a drink. The shop owner started preparing the drink, a strange mix of a white powder from a plastic bag, with pieces of chopped onion and chilli in it, apparently a prime breakfast beverage, and joined our conversation. We had been sitting on a bench in front of his shop, but he invited us in to see the rest of his merchandise. It was a big surprise to see he did not only sell these drinks, but also fish tanks, and fish. He showed us a water pump for an aquarium,

costing 200 rupees. The difference between shops – one selling throw-away vegetables, another luxury fish tanks - is already an indicator of the diversity of people living in the area, even before entering their homes. While some have to rely on almost rotting vegetables, others have the funds to buy fish tanks.

It is a paradox that will run through this whole thesis. This area that has been developed to host mostly people coming from houses at the canal borders in the city, but has attracted already a lot of new people, seeking opportunities in this neighbourhood. In the next chapters we will also look at how people some see this area as an arena of problems, while others consider it to be an arena of opportunity.

General view of one of the 'squares' of Nonadanga resettlement colony.

Children playing in one of the roads of the neighbourhood.

Unclogging the drainage system.

Inside view of one of a ground floor apartment with duplex.

Inside view of a top floor apartment.

Another example of duplex made inside the flat.

5

Talking about a Forced Inclusion

Throughout the fieldwork, people often voiced similar complaints. The flats were too small. The amount of water the government brought was not enough. The area was unpleasant. The drains got clogged. They did not get anything done from the government. These were all fairly straightforward grievances, rather visible and immediately understandable for a new visitor to the area. But one annoyance I did not understand.

People kept emphasizing how much more expensive it had become to go to work. They were further away, they argued, and there was not so much public transport available that went all the way from their homes to their working places. This they told me time and time again. But to me it sounded rather strange. I did not understand at the time. It was true that the area was in the periphery of the city, but it was not, as for instance Rao (2010) shows in her study of a resettlement colony in Delhi, almost fifty kilometres away from the city centre. Moreover, most people were relocated within roughly one and a half kilometre from their previous homes. And yes, there were not many busses coming to the area where they were relocated, but there was one that passed at least once an hour. And

the distance to the busy Ruby crossroads, one of the hubs for transport in the city, was three kilometres at most. It takes time to walk there, of course, but walking could save them a lot of money too, it seemed. I struggled with this problem throughout my stay.

I did not understand why they kept stressing this distance. But looking back, it probably was not only the distance as such that mattered. Rather, it reflected what they felt about being put in the resettlement apartment area: away from what they knew, less connected with their (life-)world. An attempt to create an 'island of formalisation' (Ferguson 2007:72) as it were, where they were put by the government, away from their homes on the canal borders. An attempt too, to voice their anger at being pushed away from the homes they had been living in the last decades. To push back, as it were.

In this chapter I look through people's narratives at debates about inclusion and exclusion in the city; how they perceive the power of the state, and how these narratives are instances of negotiating their position in the neighbourhood and the city as a whole.

I argue that we could speak of a 'forced inclusion' of these people in the city. I further argue that people who have been resettled do not resist development as such, but they rather aim to negotiate this 'forced inclusion', and as such a right to the city as defined by the state in the place that the state chooses. Their right to the city as defined by the state (e.g. their role in development of certain areas) can be contrasted to a right to the city as in the slum (see also Bayat 1997:60). Through their narratives, they further voice the inability to contest this forced inclusion.

It is important to note, however, that narratives here are understood as more than just stories or comments, but rather as embodied with a deeper meaning. As Gardner (2002) notes, 'even the most apparently innocuous story is loaded with political meaning; for stories do not simply entertain or convey experience, they also comment upon it, and hence help to change it' (Gardner 2002:2). Moreover, through storytelling, agency is 'redistributed through accounts of resettlement as actions are explained as impelled by the threat of violence, new opportunities, or the need for food and shelter' (Read 2012:89). They further offer an insight in the

'profoundly ambivalent relationship that residents have with their neighbourhood; their reflections on their sense of place in the city today and in the future' (Read 2012:88).

While in this chapter I focus on narratives, in the next two chapters, I will zoom in on practices. In the three chapters as a whole however, I treat this part of the city, as Ferguson (1999) considers it, as a performative space, readable and changeable for people that have acquired some measures of performative competence (Ferguson 1999). It is exactly this performative competence that in the three chapters makes negotiation possible, as people in the resettlement area know which arguments and practices to use to alter/adjust, however smallish they sometimes may be, their living conditions.

1. A relation out of balance

'It is almost mid day, and the old man that has been sitting and listening to us and our questions at the tea stall, but declined answering them, has just fallen asleep. The five drunken men are still making a fuss a little down the road. Stray dogs have snuck under the cover of some parked auto-rickshaws, and are taking an invisible nap on the back seat. Three little boys have just stolen a broken tricycle from the scrap monger. And a woman scolds a little boy for playing outside naked, threatening to tell his mother' (fieldnotes, 18 September 2012).

'If I had money, I wouldn't be here', Ruma (40) tells me. It is an almost innocent remark in an informal conversation about her sari shop. A passing remark, but it echoed what many people had been telling us during our visits. Coming here was not a free choice at all, they recall, but the state entered into their lives, and forced them to move here.

Resettlement areas such as this one in Kolkata are relatively understudied in terms of their social importance in India. Many academic studies focus on the resettlement process itself, or health

and health care in poorer neighbourhoods, but only very seldom the question is being asked what kind of effect the actions of the state[5] (in this case the city municipality with support of a nationwide program) have on the people after they have been resettled.

Of course, as Fuller and Bénéï (2001:2) have very usefully pointed out, 'the state', not unlike 'the economy' are not universal categories. The 'state' is a often an idea 'hides' the actual practices of her functionaries. But the state, as impersonal as people may perceive it, is always derivative of political practices (Abrams 1988). The state, after it had been reified, may than become a mask for these political practices, but that doesn't means these practices do not exist anymore (Abrams 1988:82). With this in mind, when I refer to 'the state' in this thesis, I refer to the state not as in opposition with society, but, with James Ferguson, as themselves made up of bundles of social practices, 'every bit as "local" in their social situatedness and materiality as any other' (Osella and Osella 2001:156), and the way they are attributed to the state and experienced by the local people, what Timothy Mitchell (1991:96, see also 1999) has named the 'state effect'.

Looking at people's role in negotiating their dealings with the those state practices and the influence they have on their lives is possibly very enlightening. Following 'human beings who, in their everyday production of goods and meanings, acquiesce yet protest, reproduce yet seek to transform their predicament' (Comaroff 1985:1) can tell us more on resettlement colonies and their place in the urban environment. As Jean Comaroff shows, there is not a straightforward answer to this problem. In this locality too, sometimes people contest certain decisions of the state; sometimes they comply. This is not surprising though. As Julia Eckert (2006) very convincingly shows, even resistance is never to be understood as one side in a dichotomy between resistance and reproduction of hegemonic ideas. It will always be some of the one, and some of the other, depending on different factors, varying from pure personal motifs to specific circumstances, cases and contexts (see also Moore 1998). Moreover, resisting certain decisions does not necessarily mean these attempts are successful. They are counter-hegemonic,

yes, but may not succeed in bringing about change (Seymour 2006:305). Most times they are even not meant to overthrow certain decisions, but rather to negotiate a 'middle way' between what they want, and what the state proscribes, and people are very much aware of the limitations and local context in which they are negotiating (Peters 2002).

One could wonder what this resettlement colony the state created for its inhabitants is, and what the intentions of the state were in creating it. On the one hand, it could be argued that what happened to the inhabitants of the resettlement colony is in fact an example of exclusion by the state, wanting to put poor people - inhabiting self-made refugee colonies at canal borders in slum-like dwellings such as bamboo huts - out of the way, pushing them to a confined area in the fringes of the city. Putting them in a confined area, in 'peripheries seen as containers for people considered insufficiently socialized into the law', as Das and Poole (2004:9) claim in their study of margins; In areas that 'escape the gaze of middle and upper class citizens' as has been argued by Rao (2010:420). Or was it, looking from the viewpoint of state rather an attempt to include these canal dwellers, in a more formal system of ownership; of legal certainty?[6] Of inclusion, albeit a forced one? While the narratives people in the resettlement colony voiced to us indicate they consider it very strongly as exclusion, yet the idea of ownership through a 99-year lease, the state wants to impose on the people could very well be understood as a claim of inclusion, of trying to give these people a proper place in the city, instead of letting them dwell on canal borders. I argue that in fact the concept of 'forced inclusion' provides a useful analytical tool to understand what is going on: it combines both the intention of inclusion (of the state) and the feeling of exclusion (of the inhabitants), at the same time emphasizing the virtual absence of free choice for the inhabitants.

Ursula Rao (2010) has described a similar apparent paradox in her study on a resettlement colony in Delhi. Although in this colony, people received land, not apartments, she too describes how

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[6] I will adress the issues of ownership, albeit in the form of a 99-year lease, put forward by the state but contested by the people in more detail in chapter 6.

the resettled complain that they have not been provided with proper infrastructure, whereas administrators and social workers counterclaim that although the people have been giving land, they still do not know how to keep their area clean.

She explains the underlying idea. For the state, the generosity of giving people land, calls for a proper behaviour and conduct. For the resettled though, the sacrifice of having had to move to the outskirts of the city, often losing jobs and social relations, is perceived as not being properly compensated by the government. She argues: 'the two opinions express conflicting value hierarchies. The poor make claims to a right of survival and offer their labour as an important contribution to national wealth. State agencies in turn demand proper conduct ad meaningful participation as preconditions for full membership' (Rao 2010:416). In the last chapter I show that the inhabitants of Nonadanga too feel a certain expectancy from the government, but appropriate the apartments and land they received as compensation, and commodify them, on grounds of moral rights, as a negotiation of the restrictions the state expects the people to obey as a 'thank you' for the apartments or land given as compensation.

It is their way to contest the 'forced' nature of the resettlement, the conditions sine qua non, to which they could not say no (see also Desai 2012). At the same time, they also desire to be a fair part of the city, although they had imagined the flats differently, as everyone would, being promised a 'flat with a kitchen and a bathroom'.

2. A right to the city (centre)?

One way of negotiating in the area was the making of claims through stories. What begins as a story sometimes rapidly evolves into a claim, in this case a claim to a right to (be properly included) in the city. In this way the storytelling is also a performance, the frontier stories (Roy 2004:149) that are told are a way of demanding compensation for the development they have done in the area, by themselves.

Especially the first-comers in the area told us how dangerous the area was at that time. Before the development, the

land had been used to dispose of dead bodies, animals as well as people, they told us. Gopa, a 45-year old woman explains: 'Before we got here, this was a land of vultures and foxes. There were a lot of bad people here, it was very dangerous. Nearby farmers came to dump their dead animals here, and sometimes also human bodies were left here. But only unclaimed ones' (interview, 21 September 2012). It was only after they moved there, that things slowly got better, although many still describe it as 'not a good place for children' and 'very dangerous at night'.

These are actually remarkable utterances, for this exact development argument is often used by people living in slum(-like) settlements claiming a right to the city. Roy (2003:155) notes similar discourses in her study of slum dwellers who fear eviction:

'We will be given a place to stay, but it will be more remote than this place, further from our livelihoods, isolated from our services. You see, there is an unwritten law here – that the poor like us develop areas, fill in marches, build homes, struggle to get infrastructure, and then evicted to make way for the rich who move into a now desirable area'.

The above quote in Roy's book shows not only that slum dwellers do very well understand what their expiration date is – the moment the land has become interesting enough for the owners (often the state) to sell it, often to contractors who want to develop the area. But in telling these tales, as Zimmerman puts it, of 'uncultivated, uninhabited and wild land' (Read 2012:94) and describe them as some kind of jungle (Tarlo 2003:131), they also show they know that the government is sometimes not averse of 'rewarding' these developmental 'investments' by slum dwellers. Baviskar (2003) notes how squatters in Delhi were very well aware that if they would persist long enough in their deplorable circumstances, and try to improve them enough, their chances on compensation in a resettlement case would go up (Baviskar 2003:96). Using these kinds of stories has, albeit in different situations, already proved to be a rather successful way of negotiating a possible compensation from the government.

In the case of the resettlement of the people living in Nonadanga however, previous attempts to secure a 'proper' place in the city were not as successful as they had hoped, showing the sometimes-fickle nature of these negotiations. Similar development of the land where they used to live, had not been compensated properly, they felt. They voiced similar stories:

> 'Initially living at the canal borders was very hard. But it gradually improved. But as it got better, the government came and dumped us here.'

This complaint is not only a recounting of what happened in the past, it is also directed towards the future. This last story almost echoes the fear of a repeated defeat against the state. 'We didn't have ownership there, and we don't have ownership here. We fear that we will be removed from here too, if the government wants it' (interview, 21 September 2012).

It shows some of the power relations these people are experiencing. The arranging of people on het territory is indeed a very state-like thing to do (Scott 1998). But at the same time the state sometimes rewards development of wastelands by the poor, in compensating them in resettlement agreements, and hence granting them a place in the master-planned city. The story of the people here however, shows clearly that the way the state envisions this compensation, is not as the people wish. To the people, the state is forcing them into its own, planned, view of how the city should be.

As Bayat (1997:60) notes, people are not as such against a 'modern way of living', but against the constraining facet of it. It is in this way too we can look at the right to the city debate. Poor migrants have often settled in the city informally, outside the scope of organized society, enjoying some of the advantages (such as cheap living) but also some of the dangers (such as not being entitled or secure). As Benjamin and Raman (2011:67) note: 'Slums don't always carry the same name or developing history, but one thing they have in common: these developments happened outside "the master-planning process"'. These settlements, be it older, historical slums in the centre of the city, or canal areas such as the ones where most of

my informants used to live, are often not officially 'mapped' and in those cases rather illegible to the state.

The state, on the other hand, tries to control the people living on het territory, and in this view, the spatial reorganization of people in resettlement areas can also be read as a means of controlling these 'unorganized peoples'. As James Scott (1998:2) notes, modern administrative technologies attempt to 'make a society legible' to the government (Hull 2008:503), to create a Foucaultian panopticon to control the city. One of the prime tools is mapping the area. 'Maps', as Harvey argues, 'however comprehensive they may be, are forms of closure' (Chatterji 2005:214) and Scott (1998:55) noted how 'state authorities endeavored to map complex old cities in a way that would facilitate policing and control'. My locality is not an old city, but in contrast a very new area in the city, but one can very clearly see the similarity in approach. The boundary between including people and controlling them becomes very much troublesome in this view.

Moreover, people do not contest being more 'legible' for the state, but when this unmapped nature changes, people want to renegotiate the other factors too, people tell me. If they will be more visible to the state, they want to be properly entitled for instance, to be better insured against state action. Or as one man in the newer part of the area voiced his frustration with the way the government acted[7]: 'When they did this, the government was playing with dolls' (interview, 28 September 2012).

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[7] Although outside the scope of the current project, it would be interesting to look into the actions of the state, so much contested by the inhabitants, through the eyes of the state. As such, it would be very interesting to do additional fieldwork to also include the view of the state, for example the city's slum department. It could clarify the workings of the departments and her employees. As Gupta (2012) shows these people often try their very best to follow instructions of higher authorities, but often end up rather frustrated because programs come and go and are cut off before they actually could benefit the people they have been designed for. The scope of the thesis did not allow for such field research, but it could shed a light on the underlying rationale of some of the strategies of the government that seemed to puzzle my informants. One of them were the criteria the officials followed in making people eligible for an apartment or a plot of land. I will discuss them in the next part.

3. Being moved and being trapped

The question then pops up how to understand the 'forced inclusion', as people had very few choices to resist this (specific type of) inclusion the state had come up with. In this part I will look at certain practices of the state my informants found very rigid and puzzling, and how they look at them. The first part discusses the resettlement process itself, the second the feeling of being trapped. Both support the thesis of a forced inclusion, as they emphasize the inability of the people involved to resist the process of inclusion.

> 'Government officials came to our previous settlement. They asked who the head of the family was, and they took a picture of this man. But some people weren't there, because they were working, and others, they knew what was happening, because they had friends in the party. So they started ringing people up, all their family members that were living elsewhere, and had their pictures taken too' (interview, 3 August 2012)

People often had the feeling this had not happened very honestly. But surprisingly enough, this did not concern the political fumbling. There was political party involvement, yes, but that sounded like something that was very normal to them. What they truly resented was that people who were only renting plots of lands in the settlements, had received apartments too! And if the 'owner' (between parenthesis, as ever) was at work or in his other house, he had received nothing!

From the point of view of the government, this seems not very surprising. If a family can rent out some land and live somewhere else, it seems more logical that the person renting the plot of land, who is probably not financially strong enough to buy something, and hence in a much more vulnerable place, should get an apartment. But the people telling me this story, were very angry with this approach, as they felt that those who had done well, had now lost their chances of compensation from the government.

Besides these complaints, they also often told me about how the government had not taken the growth of the family in consideration. One informant told us how between the moment the pictures had been taken (in 2000) and the moment the apartments had been allotted, his family had changed. His sons, who were little in 2000 had grown, and were almost ready to marry. This would cause a huge problem, as their wives are supposed to live with them[8].

The definitive allotment of the flats was done by a lottery. People who owned shops in the original settlement could apply for a ground floor flat, as could old or ill people. But aside from these, the lottery mixed and broke up old neighbourhoods, making people neighbours to people they had never seen or met before. As was argued by Emma Tarlo (2003:13) the state thus lumps 'together people who may share little more in common than their poverty and displacement'.

One could suspect that in the mixing up of people another strategy of control is being exercised. Cutting existing neighbourhood ties lessens the likelihood of organized resistance, where whole old neighbourhoods could unite block per block.

People also complained about how the government did not seem to care for them. 'They put us here, and than they forgot about us,' Ajit (47) complained. He meant that it was difficult for them to get things done, and that they did not often see representatives of the state in their neighbourhood.

But from my own observations during the fieldwork, this did not seem entirely true. Almost every week three nurses cycled to the area, and made sure all the babies got the vaccinations they needed. Furthermore, I saw several times how men with pesticides came to spray the neighbourhood, in an attempt to control the outbreak of dengue in the city. But also the water tanks that came to the flats every day were sent and paid by the government. I have already mentioned how this arrangement was far from perfect, but it was undeniable that it was there. The narratives of abandonment

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[8] Indian planners consistently underestimate infrastructure and service needs, that they fail to 'future-proof' by planning for 'unforeseen growth' (Roy 2009:77).

expressed a fundamental feeling of being left out, rather than a true absence of government presence in the area.

4. The challenges of escaping 'forced inclusion'

Moreover, apart from the knowledge that your home as a poor men or woman is very much dependent on what the government decides, they also complained about the fact that not only had they been brought into the area, it was for some of them very difficult to get out again[10].

On a rainy day we meet Nihar, a plumber of about 45 years old. He has been living in Kolkata for almost 25 years now. He is not working, because of the heavy monsoon rain this week. He tells us that his family received an apartment, but that they have to rent another one, 'because you can't live with seven in such a room' (fieldnotes, 6 September 2012). But renting a second apartment implies a new set of problems. People have to pay the rent, and then, in both apartments, the cost for gas and electricity. In this way, receiving such tiny apartments, especially for large families, did not only bring a problem of (the lack of) privacy, but also proves to be a lot more expensive if people tried to rent a second flat.

And the nature of the costs was often different from their previous homes. Whereas earlier, they often tapped electricity illegally from the network, and cooked on wood fire, they are now forced to take an electrical connection to a private supplier, and cooking on wood fire is almost not possible in the apartments due to the heavy smoke it produces. The numbers people noted differed a bit, but were always between five hundred and a thousand rupees (between 6,9 and 13,8 euro) per month for electricity, and about four hundred rupees (about 5,5 euro) per month for firewood. Knowing that the average daily wager is paid around 2000-3000 rupees (28-42 euro) per month, these costs take away a very substantial part of the families income.

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[10] Strategies developed by some to try and escape it will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Moreover, going back to his family in the villages is not an option, he explains. 'I am a plumber; I have my contacts here. It would take six months to a year before I could make a living some place else. What money would we live from in that time?' (fieldnotes, 6 September 2012). Buying a plot of land elsewhere in the city proves equally problematic, because of the price of the land. The possible money from selling the apartment, a practice we will discuss further in this thesis, would not be sufficient.

A similar complaint was filed by Muhamed, one of the not so many Muslims in the neighbourhood. He shared a room with his wife, three sons and two daughters-in-law:

'In the area where our land is, the government gives some money to people below the poverty line to help them build a house. But as we are not staying there now, we cannot get that help. But selling this property [the apartment] is no option. We will lose our income, we are old, and if someone buys this apartment, we will have to get out immediately. Where will we stay while the new house is built? It will cost only more money. But it would help us if even only a few of us could move there' (interview, 10 September 2012).

Others expressed the impossibility to go back to their home villages (which most of them left between twenty and thirty years ago): 'We feel like refugees, we have nothing left back there (in their home villages). But the government doesn't recognize us as such' (interview, 21 September 2012).

Different as these stories may be, coming from people with different ideas and backgrounds, they all show one thing: this forced move is not felt as an inclusion as a full member of the city, it is felt as an entrapment. An exclusion too, from the possibility to settle freely in the city, and an exclusion from basic facilities like schools and health care centres, which are (with the exception of one primary school) absent in the neighbourhood. If anything, it is a forced inclusion.

The complaints and narratives of the resettled can be read as a contestation against the 'almight' of the state. Although the state

might argue to have included these people in a more formal system, has given them a place in the city – indeed let them enjoy their 'right to the city' -, the people themselves feel excluded, and try to counterbalance the hegemonic discourse of the state. They want their place in the system, not just a brick room to live in. People do not resist development as such, they simply resist being left out. In voicing their ideas, they try to negotiate a better position, a bit more attention from the state, a better life.

In the next chapters we will look into strategies of negotiation and resistance through practices, and what it means to the area and its composition.

6

Legal Claims and Paper Trails

On a damp Sunday morning, as we were sipping yet another cup of tea at one of our 'regular' tea stalls, which I had nicknamed 'the old men's tea stall', we saw three very well-dressed women in expensive saris walking hurriedly towards a small blue car that was parked in front of the tea stall. We assumed they were from an NGO of some sort, but when the car had left, in its rush almost crushing some puppies sleeping underneath, and we asked the tea lady if she knew who these women were, she made a long face, as if she had tasted something very bitter, and whispered: 'Marwari. They've come to buy apartments' (fieldnotes, 23 september 2012).

Although it is not absolutely certain that the women we saw were actually Marwari, they were perceived as such by the tea lady. Marwari, 'a wealthy business community' (Hardgrove 1999), are not very liked throughout India, as they are often perceived as some kind of thugs, making money through illicit business such as money lending. Capturing the popular mood vis-à-vis this community, Jonathan Parry (1989:78) records: 'If you meet a snake and a Marwari (trader), says the proverb, kill the Marwari'. But the very fact that these clearly upper-class women were in the neighbourhood

meant that this neighbourhood seemed to promise profit for investors.

Although selling (or renting out) your apartment or land officially is not allowed, it is a frequent practice in the neighbourhood. Often it is a very pragmatic decision, as people claim apartments are just not suited to their needs. But although the decision itself may be commonsensical, when asked about possible consequences, they often refer to the government, and invoke a moral right to sell, rent or modify, although illegal, because the government should have provided them with proper housing.

As such, next to the narratives discussed in the previous chapter, people also are involved in everyday practices that make use of the ambiguity of their position and that of the state. In this chapter I look at an interesting ambiguity in practices the inhabitants use to negotiate the forced inclusion introduced in the previous chapter. They refuse official documents, which would replace their temporary allotment paper and bank slip, because the state does not mention the amount of money they contributed to its construction costs. Also, they create a paper trail that mimics the states whilst illegally trading the apartments or land received as compensation. Following these two sets of practices, people try to ensure themselves against future actions of the state. By putting up defences, they negotiate their own position vis-à-vis the state.

I argue that, contrary to popular belief, people know rather well what their rights are. In the gist of Julia Eckert's (2006) article 'From Subjects to citizens: legalism from below and the homogenization of the legal sphere' I show how people demand 'proper documents' to assert their ownership, but at the same moment use the absence of those papers to rent and sell out flats and land, based on a 'moral right', as they call it. Moreover, they even mimic state practices, in using official papers in documenting these practices, albeit without registering them, which makes them legally invalid, but are nonetheless added to the paper trail, albeit unofficial. I argue that this ambiguous nature of the documents produced by the inhabitants of the area is itself a sign of the ambiguity they feel towards the state. Also, in not actively contesting these practices, the state itself negotiates her position within the area, a practice we will also encounter in the next chapter.

1. Protection as negotiation

Land and property titles have traditionally been considered as the way to go in including poor people into the city (see e.g. the ideas on land and property privatization of De Soto (1989) as a means of inserting oneself into society), but this has been heavily problematised in the last couple of years, for being too ready-made, offering a one-solution-fits-all-approach for contexts that are very different and particular (Hansen and Vaa 2004; Bromley 2009; Sjaastad and Cousins 2009).

Doing away with the importance of titles in general would not serve us well though. Often property titles are indeed very much wanted by people in precarious situations, hoping that they would give them some certainty about their future (see e.g. Holston 2010). They often have lived in precarious situations for a long time, legally very insecure, and hope titles will end their uncertainty. Even small steps towards a more secure future, such as being included in a resettlement program, may at least partly be felt as recognition. As such this might make them stay, although in difficult circumstances. In some resettlement areas, not unlike in Nonadanga, the resettled consider that even if the land they have been given is not appropriate for their family, it still makes them feel as if they have been 'given leave to stay in the city' (Read 2012:95).

This acceptance does not mean they do agree with the way the state sees this recognition and inclusion in the city, and it certainly does not mean they do not wish to negotiate the inclusion any further. But it might explain, at least partly, why many of them stay, even in very unsuited circumstances. They do, however, continue to stress the importance of decent legal property titles, to secure themselves against possible future state action.

And yet, notwithstanding the deeply felt need for proper titles, when the government had come round to replace the temporary documents every family holds to prove their legal residence in the area, they had, with the exception of a few, refused to accept them. Instead of the new official documents, they each held on very firmly to an allotment paper, stating their names and family composition,

and the identification number of the apartment received, and a bank slip. Especially this last item seemed extremely important to them. On it was stated the amount of money that they had paid to the government to be eligible for receiving an apartment, in most cases around 5000 rupees[11].

This move, refusing to change temporary documents for new official ones, may sound very counterintuitive at first, but they had good reasons, they explained. As said, especially the bank slip was important to them, as it proved that they had paid (at least a small amount) for the flat. They were very well aware of the importance of this act:

> '"The government came and wanted to give us more official papers," Kumar (48) told us, as we have sought shelter inside a shop against the harsh monsoon rains, "but we refused. We would have had to hand in our old documents. On the new documents, however, the government stated that we had received the apartment as a gift. But we paid for it! It makes a huge difference!"' (fieldnotes, 21 August 2012).

It is in not accepting these documents[12], people claimed their rights to be there. Many of them felt that by accepting the apartment lease as a 'gift', as they called it, from the government, they were also accepting the possibility of the government resettling them again, on any given moment. They felt that accepting (the gift) would mean granting the government a right to do as they wish, giving away the possibility to negotiate their forced inclusion further. In refusing the documents and holding on to the bank slip, hard evidence of their payment, they tried to protect themselves from possible future actions of the state, such as new evictions or a resettlement. Just like the slum residents in Julia Eckert's (2006:68) locality, these 'people

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[11] The amounts people named varied, because it was said to be 5 percent of the total cost of the flat received. And apparently, different contractors amounted for different prices, a difference well distinguishable in the quality of the flats.

[12] It can be assumed, from the work of Roy (2004) for instance, that this strategy was given to them by local party members, but once again they remained very silent when asked about this.

(…) assume an active role and use the law available to them'. Whereas before people relied more on 'traditional' norms, they now also use state law against government officials, and in the case of Eckert, even go to court against harassment and corrupt police officers.

Although in the case of the legal papers no court case was filed, and it probably also will not be filed in the future, here too the residents of the flats know very well what the difference can be between a gift and something they contributed (partly) to themselves. By not accepting more (or different) official papers than the ones they have now, they show that in return for the money they paid, they want more security, a greater say in their residence, a proof of written (co-)ownership.

Here we see a paradoxical situation, where people feel more secure holding on to temporary documents, and their bank slip denoting the amount of their own money they have spent, than excepting official documents allowing for their residence. This move could be seen in the same light as the resistance against their resettlement, in which they do not contest development as such, but they way the government sees their place in it. In the same gist they do not refuse official documents as such, but by refusing documents they perceive as negative, they try to negotiate with the state, and get a possible better outcome for themselves.

The negotiation on the documents seems to have come to a standstill at the moment, but as the government does not seem to take punitive measures, this could also be interpreted as a (at least temporary) success. Although their legal status remains unclear, the government has to acknowledge their position and their wishes. It echoes what Partha Chatterjee (2004:38) has famously named political society, namely the huge collection of people living in India who are 'only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and textually rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution'. These (often poor) people do not belong to the classic civil society, but do however, have a certain political relationship with the (democratically elected) state, just because of their presence and numbers. And moreover, political society has found a place in the general political culture, claims Chatterjee. 'Here, people are not

unaware of their possible entitlements or ignorant of the means of making themselves heard' (Chatterjee 2004:73).

This approach seems also to provide a possible answer to bridge the gap that in this case seems to have emerged between the conscious, law-aware citizen that Eckert describes, and the idea of the state becoming more and more illegible to the majority of her citizens as Das (2004) describes it. In the next part of this chapter I will further show how people do not solely rely on the law, but also use the ambiguities left by the absence of official documents. This allows them to further negotiate their forced inclusion into the city by the state. They try to pull some strings here and there, to 'fix things' (Hansen 2005:169), relying on the one hand on the absence of these official documents, and on the other hand in creating their own paper trail, mimicking state practices (as will become clear in the next part).

2. The commodification of the 'gift'

Not having an official document creates the opportunity to deal somewhat more 'flexibly' with the apartment people received. As stated before, on arriving in the locality, many of them were not happy to find an apartment that did not at all resemble what they had expected or had been promised. Although most of them saw no other option than to come and stay anyway, and try and get the best titles they could, others had a different viewpoint. They decided not to stay, and appropriated the right to rent and sell their land or apartment, even though they had only been given leases to the properties.

'The absence of official papers makes it easier too to rent and sell these things,' explains Shyamal (37), putting down the local newspaper, while sipping his tea. Although the practice is not uncommon in the older part of the settlement, in the newer part, as seen by the appearance of the 'Marwari' women, it happens more often, we were told. Many people who were entitled to an apartment, never even inhabited it, but sold it right away. These people have been resettled from railway tracks, and prefer a home closer to a transport hub, such as the rail station where they had been living.

A similar strategy has been described by Kalyani Menon-Sen and Gautam Bhan (2008), in their study on a resettlement colony in Delhi. There too, people sell and rent out the land they have been given. This even caused the local state authorities to limit the lease to a mere five years, in order to counter these strategies. A similar limitation has not (yet) come up in my area though.

What we see in both cases is a commodification of a donation by the state as a compensation for resettlement. But in the same line as described in Marcel Mauss' (1990 [1925]) classic work 'the gift', people in the apartments feel that in this 'gift' from the state, a certain reciprocity is implied: one of control and obedience, of complying with the development logic of the government.

But as they consider, as we have seen, the apartments too small to live in, or the lands that have been given too far away from their social and professional network, in a counterclaim to the government's purposes, they make these 'gifts' their own. They appropriate the gift. They create monetary value as a counter move, as if playing a game of chess with the government. Although formally forbidden, they thus appropriate the right to sell and rent out their newly gained assets.

Especially the - about 150 - plots of land that were given to migrants who could document their arrival before 1971, are very desirable. Although but a small part in the neighbourhood, this colony is rather different from the rest of it. On the plots are houses is all sorts and kinds, ranging from bamboo huts to brick buildings, up to two and a half stories high. They are very wanted by people from outside the area, as their prices are a lot less than in other parts of the city. One of the men who brokers[13] between sellers and buyers estimates that of the 148 plots, some one hundred have been sold, of

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[13] In India, the figure of the 'broker' is very omnipresent. They often do not only broker between people and the market, but also between people and the state, being an interlocutor. They are often attached to political parties, trying to make money from the transactions, and in turn for a fair share of the money, protected by them (Reddy 1985; Mitra 1991; Manor 2000: Berenschot 2011; Witsoe 2012).

which he himself brokered 45. Only around 16-17 of the original families were still there he estimated[14].

Here too however, it must be noted that these negotiations were and are not without risks. The practice is still illegal, and as we roamed the area where land had been sold, people – often the recent buyers of these plots - were much more reluctant to speak to us. Many of them did not possess any ownership papers, except from a paper given by the previous owner, stating that he had 'donated' the plot, in a way themselves mimicking the 'gift' from the state. This was a common practice, we were told, but of course money changed hands too. Donating was perceived as less illegal though, and by naming the transaction as such, they were once again putting up a defence against future state intervention. This was not so unimaginable, the broker told us. Government officials had actually showed up to verify who actually lived on the plots. And as most of them have no legal (or even semi-legal) documents, they could be thrown off.

Still, apart from this absence of official ownership documents, people were quite confident they could remain on the plots, seeing the rather big brick buildings they put up. Reminiscent of the work of Ananya Roy (2003), one could suspect that there is a large political involvement in the renting and selling of these plots of land, and in the protection of those who purchased it without legal documents, but people in the area were very reluctant to speak about this type of political patronage.

For instance, in one of the newer blocks in the other part of the area, we stumbled upon a man carrying a notebook in which he noted all kinds of numbers. On top of one of the column was the word 'rent'. This man was a broker too, and after some small talk we asked what the going rate is here to buy an apartment. 1 lakh 50 000 (150 000) rupees he answered reluctantly. But why pay so much if you don't get papers, we asked. 'The government won't evict you, I

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[14] From a phonecall we overheard between him and one of his assistants, the suspicion arises that not all people who received land are very willing to sell, and the broker was not very cautious about hiding his desire to make their life quite difficult as long as they did not want to sell. The broker was also connected to the local political party, we were told.

guarantee,' the broker replied. But before we could ask any more, people around us started to say to him that 'he should not tell us more', because we would be the only ones making profit of his words (interview, 22 September 2012).

Often these kind of hints and partial info were issued, but we never got the whole picture[15]. The true extent of the political patronage remains unclear. It did not seem as bad as the control described by Roy (2003) in the resettlement colony in Kolkata she conducted her field research in. There, people reported local party goons to control virtually everything, 'from clogged toilets to religious rituals' (Roy 2003:150). In the resettlement area there is political involvement, as the examples above show. People do have a certain confidence in the fact that despite their illegal way of purchasing land or apartments, they will not be thrown out. On the other hand, on other matters, such as applying for pensions for widows or elderly people, people in the apartments knew very well they were entitled to them, but reported not receiving them. They filled out the papers, but without any result. When asked whether there was no one who could help them in this matters, we often met blank stares.

One man provided us a possible answer for this ambiguity when he noted how the new flats were not so interesting for the local party members, as they were much more official than for instance slums, where people needed them much more (as we see in the example by Roy 2003). When big money can be obtained – for instance in the buying and selling of property -, party involvement is still very present, it seems, but for simpler matters people do not rely on them (with the loss of money they are entitled to as a result). But this is but a tentative observation, and the precarious nature of this information would require extra fieldwork to get to know the exact magnitude of the involvement of political players in the area.

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[15] This reluctancy to speak about the political patronage could be due to our short period of fieldwork, but also to the fact that the government had, a few months before, evicted some of the illegal hutments on an open spot in the area. Since then, police men guarded the area, and people were not eager to be associated with the activists who had supported the people of the hutment. I have elaborated on these methodological issues and their consequences further in the chapter: 'methods and ethics'.

3. Stamped paper and state mimicry

Selling an apartment involved some rather peculiar features. As mentioned, as selling was illegal, it was often done in the form of a 'donation'. The seller issued a paper to the new owner, stating, ironically enough, that it was a gift. Often it was reported that this was sometimes done on 'stamped paper', as to give it some legitimacy. Stamped paper, used for all types of legally binding contracts, can be freely purchased in India, but deeds issued on them should be registered in order to become legally valid. This probably did not happen very often, as the very act of donating was on the verge of illegality. Other times, as a local party worker noted: 'they just write it on a plain white piece of paper, that it is a gift. The name is not transferred, so officially, the flat still belongs to the first owner' (interview 11 September). From a legal point of view, the flimsiness of these papers is obvious, but the symbolical value is more than clear. Paperwork and bureaucracy in many instances, in more material terms, have come to represent and reproduce the state (see e.g. Das 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Poole 2004; Sharma and Gupta 2006).

Emma Tarlo (2003:10) notes:

> 'If documents are the lingua franca of the state, then citizens wishing to negotiate with the state not only learn that language but also learn to reproduce it in the form of official documents 'proving' housing (…). The state's demand for paper proofs generates the popular production of paper truths as people mimic the very writing technologies that ensnare them. Such acts of mimesis bear witness to the reach of the state in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens but they also point to the limitations of that reach, for ultimately, the state risks drowning in the artifice of its own creation'.

In reproducing and mimicking state practices, people show their ability to negotiate with the very same techniques the state uses to 'ensnare' them, as Tarlo points out. In building their very own, albeit

unofficial 'paper trail', mimicking the state's 'master code' (Mbembe 2001:103) they try to protect their position vis-a-vis the state. They hope, later on, should problems with the state ever arise, that this accumulation of documents will help them in their claims (see on similar practices in Africa: Lavigne Delville 2003). Ironically enough, in the literature it is sometimes argued that a large paper trail produced by government officials is in fact a countermeasure against corruption, and thus an example of a transparent bureaucracy (Sharma and Gupta 2006:14; Haller and Shore 2005:76). In mimicking this transparent state, people once again negotiate their own position by trying to ensure them against future state actions/sanctions.

These negotiations with the state not only influence the existing and original inhabitants, but also change the composition of the area. Whereas people considering leaving the area describe it as bad, and others speak of entrapment, the buying and renting market attracts people who look differently at the area. One man, who was renting an apartment told us that he was also living in the area before, but had needed to move out of the family house for a while, due to tensions between him and his father; renting an apartment in the area was perfect, because it was affordable, and he could still be close to his family (as the quarrel with his father was about money, he wanted to keep an eye on what happened there, rather than just staying for family love).

People who have come into the area through buying or renting generally have seen the apartment before agreeing to a contract, and know what they will get. One man told us he had bought an apartment four years ago, for 1 lakh 20 000 (120 000) rupees. He was quite happy with his purchase. He found the transport connection fairly well, and noted that he now had a *pucca* apartment, something he would not have been able to buy in another part of the city. So whereas most resettled people described the area as unsuited to their needs, to newcomers, it offered a lot of possibilities. It indicates the changing composition of the area, and how people view it.

In the next chapter I will look further into practices by the locals to negotiate their forced inclusion by looking at the built environment, and what the consequences are for the composition and build-up of the area.

General view of recently built colony.

General view of older colony.

House in a squatter settlement in the neighbourhood.

Ground floor extension.

7

The City Takes over Planning

Walking through the newer part of the area is fundamentally different from a walk through the older part. In the newer area build-up is still on its way. It provides an interesting insight into how the older colonies started out. In this area there are no brick roads, just a few shops and it feels much more like an area still under construction. Moreover, the apartments still bear bright colours, and the symmetry in their design and position is much more obvious. Looking at them, the resemblance between these newly-constructed apartment blocks and certain newer middle-class areas in the cities becomes clearly apparent.

    The planners used a modernist design, similar to certain 'cités modernes' (see e.g. Loeckx 1998) that sprung up in the fifties and sixties throughout the world. Here too, the government clearly wanted to design a 'model district', clean, orderly and straight, as to mimic the very rigidity of her rule.

    But as clear as the build-up originally may have been, after a mere eight years or so, in the older part of the neighbourhood, the rigidness of the planned environment has been interlaced by numerous unplanned extensions and constructions. These range from

a very large, brick, but illegal corner house in the older part, to hutments of all kinds, behind shops or at the end of roads, but, almost ironically, also on the areas own canal borders. While in the newer part of the resettlement area, the clean and orderly design of planned space is still very clear, in the older parts practically every possible scratch of land has been extended on and occupied.

Especially the ground floor flats often gained up to a quarter or more of surface because of cleverly built extensions. This too is not allowed according to government regulations, but here too people invoked a 'moral right' to do so. From very early in the fieldwork, people noted that they 'live like birds in a cage', 'sleep like pigs and dogs', 'live in a deep freezer', that we only had to 'look at these pigeonholes' and that 'even cowsheds are bigger than these apartments'. Extending them where possible was seen as a way of surviving. This moral right made, they seemed to argue, that the government would not protest these extensions.

This chapter zooms in on these appropriation strategies used by the people in the area. I argue that the appropriation of empty land and also the extensions to the apartments could be seen as another strategy of negotiating conditions in the master-planned city. I argue, in the line of Bayat (1997), that most practices are rather pragmatic in their intent, rather than a clear-cut resistance. People try to make their lives as comfortable as possible, within the rigidity of the built environment.

In the second part of this chapter I argue that inclusion and exclusion is not only felt and negotiated by people who have received an apartment or a plot of land by the government, but also by those who have come in later, and have set up shop (and house) without legal titles.

As such, in the second part of this chapter, I direct my focus to yet another population in this area, namely those who have sought refuge in hutments in and around the area. They face a double exclusion. Whilst the government granted people on the canal borders apartments, these newcomers who set up a hut or shanty are not eligible for resettlement. They are not included in the project and thus the city. Moreover, many people that have received apartments are not happy with these newcomers either, stating that 'they are new

refugees, they have not been in the city for long, and should not get an apartment'.

I finish the chapter and the thesis with looking at how these encroachments (of original inhabitants and newcomers) influence planning, and how planning is taken over by people's actions, and the neighbourhood starts to 'exist beyond architecture' (De Boeck 2012:271). In this way, the resettlement colony, clearly meant for a very specific public, resembles and becomes more and more like other neighbourhoods in the rest of the city, hosting different kinds of people, undoing the specific plan the state envisioned. As such, the city takes over the planned environment. Moreover, in virtually not sanctioning violations to its own rules, the state itself makes this change and take-over possible.

1. Occupy everything

In the area, roughly three different, but interrelated elements of occupation can be distinguished. Firstly people in the apartments try and extend these apartments as much as possible. Secondly some of the people who received an apartment leave that to a part of the family, and set up a new hut in or close to the resettlement area. And lastly, the possibility of empty land also draws in people from outside, trying to set up a shop or a new squatter settlement.

Extending the birdcages
In looking at the built environment, it is difficult not to see the adjustments people have made to accommodate their living conditions. The extensions and new constructions that have come up also provide visible signs (as noted in chapter four) in this rigid built environment of the issues and struggles the inhabitants are dealing with and the resistance they put up. The balconies-turned-kitchens, kitchens-turned-storage-rooms or shacks-turned-bedrooms-aka-chicken-shed that determine the view in the older colonies seem to be very clear violations of state policy, of the planned environment. One could imagine these as hallmarks of the resistance against the forced inclusion in the area.

Yet, the extensions' role is not unambiguous. At first they look like a blatant offense of regulations put up by the government, and hence as a visible resistance against these very limitations. But on the other hand, one of the owners told us that extensions should not only be seen as resistance, but also as a sign of submission to their fate, in investing in the apartments. 'The ones extending the apartments are the ones that are staying', he told us.

In investing and adapting the apartment itself (also inside the rooms adjustments are made, such as making them into duplexes), people try and adjust the cramped living conditions of the apartments they were given. They spent money in adjusting them to their needs, accepting the risk to lose this money spent on renovations, if/when sold. A broker told us that extended or modified apartments were very hard to sell - he had tried it once, but the owner wanted too much money (to compensate for his expenses) - as possible buyers rather wanted an untouched apartment, to be modified according to their own needs and taste.

'It has become a business'

Others, who cannot extend the flat, or not enough, because they are on a top floor for instance, are applying a similar appropriation and negotiation strategy. Whereas some people pack up and leave after they have sold or rented out their apartment, others decide to leave only a part of the family in the apartment. Other members of the family move out and shift to another place to stay. This happens for instance when the oldest son marries, and his new wife comes to live with him (and his family). The parents then may decide to move out and set up a new home, often again a bamboo house or a shanty, in the area itself, or close by, in a similar area where they hope the government will come to evict/issue new apartments.

Many people in the area see this move as the only option they have left. One of my informants, a man who lost his former job because of the resettlement, but now made a living carrying water in plastic barrels into the area, explained his motivations as such:

'I have to be honest, I too have made a new settlement in the contested area to get an extra apartment. It is not ok, I should

not be getting it. I know, the apartments should go to those who have not gotten any yet. But I have a large family, and this apartment just is not big enough' (Interview, 6 August 2012).

It once again shows the ambiguous way people are feeling. People do not contest the development, or even the apartments an sich, but the unfit nature, being unsuitable to live in with a big family. They want an extra apartment if possible, instead of rejecting it altogether. Others, including a young boy from the neighbouring state Bihar, himself a migrant in the area, spoke very fiercely against these strategies, naming it 'business':

'It has to stop, that people are giving the apartment to one or more of their sons, and then leave and build a new hut in the slums, or in damp land. And then they say to the government, we have developed this land, we have invested money here, so we want compensation (if you want to evict us), we want a new flat. But it has to stop, it has become a business!' (Interview, 3 September 2012).

These two quotes show that the appreciation of these practices is not unambiguous, and often a personal one; a choice sometimes very much contested by other inhabitants of the area, creating tensions between people with different opinions.

Setting up shop
Most of these changes to the built environment described above, are done by people who did in fact get resettled to an apartment. But the availability of empty land and the possibility to appropriate this land provides opportunities for people living close by. They enter the resettlement area in the hope of being able to claim some land someday.

The entrance roads I described in the fourth chapter are a prime example of this type of occupation: none of the shops have titles for the land they are on. Some of the owners are people from the flats who have occupied a piece of land and constructed a shop, some have come from outside. A man, who frequently had tea in his

fancy sari shop with some of the police men stationed in the area, was whispered to have claimed as much land as to put up three shops. One of them was often closed, but his brother ran a music shop, blurting loud music whenever open.

It would be wrong to read these actions as contestation of the state from the beginning on. They are rather very pragmatic actions to better their living conditions, more to be understood as daily practices then political acts as such. As Asef Bayat (1997:58), in his discussion of similar practices in Tehran, notes: 'rather they are driven by the force of necessity - the necessity to survive and live a dignified life'. Only when challenged or opposed by another party, in this case the state, these daily, pragmatical practices can become political, and people with similar interests can unite in a (political) movement (Bayat 1997).

Again, as noted in the last chapter, one could wonder to what extent such appropriations are possible at an individual level. Again, it was hinted to us that without support from local parties (who seemed to function through local 'clubs' on the grounds – although they denied to have anything to do with politics), occupation was not possible.

We saw another example at the end of a cul-de-sac, well hidden from the eye. I noted in my fieldnotes:

'At the back of one of the colonies, on a small patch of land, I see again some houses in bamboo. I ask a man what they are. He is not very enthusiast to talk about it, but he answers anyway: "It's all a business, wherever people see land they occupy it. But they have to pay to the party." This small patch of ten houses, close together, is being patronaged by the ruling party, he says' (fieldnotes, 11 September 2012).

These hutments would probably remain intact for a while to come, as they were clearly patronaged. Another two stable colonies, out of view because of the wall the government build around them, are located at the entrance of the neighbourhood. For instance, there is a rather large patch of huts that has been there from around the time the first resettled people moved into their apartments. Some of the inhabitants had in fact believed to come and live in an apartment as

well, but retreated to this area after they found out the apartment would never fit their family. Others had come later, in the hope that when they were living in a resettlement colony, they would not be thrown out.

But encroachments proved to be of different levels of certainty. From the stories we were told, it appeared some of these illegal constructions were more under attack than others. It was behind shops or trees, out of the immediate sight of a casual passer-by, that the true extent of the changes in the urban tissue became even clearer. Not only people who could afford to buy or rent a flat, or set up shop came in, but also new poor people, living in the same circumstances as the resettled had before.

2.   Negotiating inclusion/exclusion amongst each other

Behind what I always had seen as shops yet to be opened, there were more huts. Almost literally in the shadow of the brick apartments, and squeezed in between them and the older colony of Bangladeshi refugees, about fifteen families have made a home. They have been living there for eight years now, they told us. To emphasize their precarious situation, they showed us what they were actually living on: the end of the sewerage pipe that releases its contents from the whole area in the river there. Despite almost a decade on the site, these people are not eligible for an apartment.

It is not uncommon for new squatters to settle close to, or in resettlement colonies. Ali (2005:102) even reports that in Delhi, in all 46 resettlement colonies, numbers of squatters seeking refuge there are increasing. Whereas in his research site people mainly chose to settle there because it is a cheap place to stay or they have friends who have been allotted land, in my locality most squatters voice the hope of getting an apartment too. They have asked for one, they tell, but have not gotten one. They gave no clear reason for this, but they too voice a great feeling of discrimination. Leaving the area again is not an option, a man tells us. 'Leaving? Where would we go? We have nowhere to go!'

Although they had been removed once for construction works, they are now back in place. They know that a road has been

designed on their stretch of land, and if the government will start the construction, they will be thrown of again. But all in all, these people were living in not-so-immediate threat.

This was obviously not the case for the people on a large plot of empty land in the neighbourhood, mostly used to store huge iron pipes and other building materials. Now largely out of view for first-time visitors because of a large, blue wall the government erected at the edges of the plot, there are two small colonies, of about 400 huts which have been very harshly evicted (The Times of India 2012). On March 30th 2012, the government showed up with bulldozers to clear the land. Most of the houses were in fact destroyed, but very rapidly build up again by the inhabitants, helped by activists of the small extreme leftwing opposition party CPI-ML (Communist Party of India – Marxist Leninist), often called Maoists by the government. These evicted-but-rebuilt colonies were newer, and the activists claimed most inhabitants were victims of the hurricane Aila, which fiercely struck the Sunderbans mangrove forest in 2008. Many of my informants however claimed that also people with apartments had build up a hut there, in the hope of getting another apartment. But the government seems not to be inclined to give the new settlers an apartment, much to the anger of these people.

One of the young women in the small colony on the sewer voiced her anger: 'The government is always claiming they are pro-poor, but we are still waiting. We have not seen it yet' (interview, 27 September 2012). But it is not only the government who resists their presence in the area. The inhabitants of this small colony have been trying to become a part of an older, Bangladeshi refugee settlement, but they too refuse to recognize them. 'We do contribute for the *puja* (religious feast), but still we are not seen by the locality as a part of it' (interview, 27 September 2012).

Moreover, it was not only the inhabitants of the old Bangladeshi refugee colony who were rather hostile towards the encroachers. Many of the residents in the apartments were not very sympathetic towards the newly arrived refugees, those claiming land and refuge in the area, and certainly not towards the activists who were helping them. Many of them voiced the difference between themselves, for decades inhabitants of the city, and these newcomers,

denying them the right to get an apartment, and hence also, ironically enough, a right to the city.

We cannot but wonder, why the very people negotiating their dealings with the forced inclusion they encounter, deny others this same right of inclusion (albeit forced). Whereas they feel they have been forcefully included in the development of the city, in a way they do not like at all, they often look at the newcomers, rich or poor, as scammers. These people, some of them almost desperately seeking refuge thus face a double exclusion: one by the government, who does not consider them eligible for an apartment, and one by the original inhabitants, considering them as cheaters who want to get an apartment, or titles to empty land without being entitled to it.

The negotiation between inclusion and exclusion is thus being played out not only inhabitants against government, but also between inhabitants, old and new. The state has forcefully included some of them by resettling them here, but others are excluded. In not granting the new ones a place in the area, the original inhabitants are, may it be pragmatically or not, reproducing partly the discourse of the government (see also Ghertner 2011), in for instance deeming the inhabitants of the contested and recently evicted area 'anti-social', meaning, against the Indian state, or denying the new encroachers the right to an apartment.

3. Planned environment versus living urban tissue

The above examples show, together with the practices described in the previous chapter, how people's actions have changed the composition of the area; How the planned environment, with her wish to convey a more modern way of living, is becoming modified, intertwined, and given a new meaning.

The resettlement site as a planned environment, and with it the plans the government had with it, is slowly but steadily being intersected by people's action. It is changing, and because of the changes and the new people it brings to the area, it gradually becomes more like an ordinary neighbourhood in the city. It already houses people with different reasons, interests and motivations to be there, with a mixed type of building patterns. Planning an area such

as this may work on paper, but the actual evolution reminds us on how the city itself

> 'is not the passive object of our desires, obeying the fantasies of the modernist imagination that inscribe city space with unequivocal meanings and functions, its citizens with clear directives: 'commit no nuisance'. Instead the city is a continually morphing entity, marked by flux and change, whether in its growth or in entropy' (Ghandi and Hoek 2012:5).

The state oddly enough makes way for this almost organic growth of the neighbourhood, in her negotiations with the people living in it. If the government of Kolkata would systematically punish those violating her rules by demolishing illegal huts, shops, sheds and extensions, she would be able to keep the area more as it was planned. But through her (in)actions, or in taking action only in some cases when offences become to blatant (Bayat (1997) would argue: until a critical mass is reached) the state allows this organic growth, this change in the neighbourhood to happen. 'They (government officials) have come and said that we cannot do these things', one lady commented, 'but then they left and nothing happened' (interview 22 August 2012).

As Roy (2009) shows, the state itself is not only the formal entity it is often believed to be. In line, but even going beyond Ferguson (1999), who claimed the state is but a bundle of social practices and should hence not be seen as in a strict opposition with society, Roy argues that the state itself enhances ambiguity, and even is informal. In changing rules and adapting policies to her needs, the state itself is informalised (Roy 2009:81). But that does not simply mean the power of the state diminishes. As Ong shows, the nation-state remains a key institution in 'structuring spatial order'. She argues that the state creates systems of graduated zones, with a 'differential deployment of state power': that 'populations in different zones are variously subjected to political control and to social regulation by state and non-state agencies' (Roy 2011:234).

In this locality it can be argued that the state itself decides to deploy different gradations of power. At times she is virtually absent,

only to be felt by the mere fact that people are in the apartments. At the other end of the spectrum, when challenged, when the 'critical mass' has been reached, she comes in the form of government officials with bulldozers, demolishing homes of squatters. At other times she builds walls around settlements that are too visible, but leaves the settlements otherwise as they are. In all these different decisions, the state negotiates as well.

8

Conclusion

'We live like birds in a cage'. Throughout the field research, almost all people we talked to voiced this remark, or a variation on it. It was the starting point, and it proved a useful one, for it shows not only the unsuited nature of the small brick apartments people were living in, but also the feeling of entrapment many people experience in the locality of this thesis, a resettlement colony in Kolkata, India.

This urban neighbourhood is but one of many in the world affected by forces on a global level. The idea of and the urge towards a sanitized city, felt in many cities today, directly affects these people, forcefully including them in it, demanding a certain reciprocity in the form of a more 'modern' way of living.

In this thesis I have shown on a grass-roots level how people deal with the consequences of this global urge for orderly, sanitized cities on their lives, and how they negotiate those forces.

Through their narratives (chapter five) and practices (chapters six and seven) they try to negotiate their dealings with the new circumstances, this forced inclusion. They speak of 'being forgotten by the government' and of entrapment. I use this terminology of a forceful inclusion into the city to indicate the

paradox people feel in being resettled. Their accusations are not directed towards development as such, but rather to the way the state sees this development and the role of the people in it.

The narratives and practices show not only personal feelings, but also show glimpses of past traumas and demands to the government, sometimes well hidden in stories, sometimes in blunt and direct accusations.

They try to protect themselves against new meddling from the state, in demanding proper ownership documents and creating their own paper trails, albeit mostly unofficial. They appropriate empty land, to build extra living space or shops, to make a living.

It is also important to note that apparent dichotomies such as the planned versus the unplanned city or the people versus the state are mere analytical tools, which proofs on the ground to be more fluid, and flexible. It is through measures taken by the state that people in the locality experience the planned city. The fact that they live in apartments shows their dealings with both the state and the planned city.

The fact that the state itself does not contest some of the daily practices people use to make their lives more liveable, such as selling or renting out the apartment, or occupying empty bits and pieces of land, shows how the state itself is negotiating. In not enforcing her rules and decisions, we see indeed that the state itself is a bundle of social practices (Ferguson), and adjusts these practices such as to keep her power without creating an uproar.

On the other hand, as Bayat (1997) very usefully notes, on the side of the residents of the neighbourhood, resistance or negotiation often only exists when asked for motives or when the states makes a countermove. In the minds of the people, when doing it, most practices are mainly practical. Negotiations are not unlimited either, are always embedded in local context, and power structures (Peters 2002).

In this case, it seems people and the state have found a working compromise. Conditions for the people are sometimes still very harsh, and unsuitable. But so were at times their dwellings at the canal borders. In allowing certain practices to happen, the state is looking for a compromise too. Continuous negotiation is a way of finding a situation that is liveable for both groups, the people and the

state. People voice their anger, but do not march in the streets or demolish the apartments. The state imposes restrictions to the habitation, but does not (or mostly not) enforce them. As such they allow this planned neighbourhood to become more like the city; to let the city take over the planned environment.

Although three months is a short period of time in anthropological terms, and I am very much aware of the shortcomings, I believe to have shown some interesting dimensions of the locality. Not all went well though, and a few frustrations were my part, and have also influenced the outcome of thesis.

One of these frustrations has been the lack of information on certain topics, because of the sometimes tense situation in the field and the short duration of the fieldwork. In reading authors on similar neighbourhoods in Kolkata and elsewhere in India, one can assume that political patronage is rather prominently present in my neighbourhood, but when asked, even very cautiously, people remained silent. Through passing remarks and conversations my assistant and I overheard, we can assume the presence of local strongmen, but I have not much evidence on it. Their role however, could have enriched this thesis, and the analysis of the actions of the people in their negotiations with the very local state, namely the people embodying them in the locality.

Another frustration is the difficulty to study people's motivations for staying or leaving, protesting or accepting the situation they are in. But the sheer magnitude of the project, and the many thousands of people living there, make it difficult to assess all the reasons to leave or stay, also because they often are highly personal, and connected to practical reasons, such as job contacts, or children in a local school.

I have tried however, to show some of the brushstrokes that have emerged from my fieldwork. More elaborate fieldwork would certainly help to further understand and nuance this findings, and could also go into expectations and experiences of the people who have just arrived in the new blocks in the newer parts of the neighbourhood. It would provide an even more complex image of people's dealings with the state, and each other.

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