Article

Refugee Appropriation of Inhospitable Urban Terrains: Learning from Jabar-Dakhal Colonies of Kolkata

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ABSTRACT: Refugee subject position is an evolving topic of contention in the world today with increased migrant and refugee mobilities. Urban refugee spaces are often segregated in the form of colonies, ethnic villages, even ghettos, embodying institutionalised discourses of apathy and violence. These spaces only occupy the cracks and margins of the normative, formal city, as appropriations of inhospitable natural terrains and urban systems. The paper discusses how refugees compete for resources for survival as *"bio-political"* subjects and are often held summarily responsible for causing ecological stress in host environments.

After the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent, millions of Hindu Bengali refugees from East Pakistan flooded the Eastern Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Kolkata particularly drew millions for better livelihood prospects. Facing government apathy and local violence, East-Bengali refugees appropriated the urban fringes of Kolkata and claimed their right to urban space through the political act of squatting or *Jabar-Dakhal*. The intent of this paper is to investigate and map the spatial distribution of East-Bengali refugee squatters and elaborate on how they transformed the terrain and distributed resources through self-management tactics. This spatial history case-study attempts to uncover locational data from archival government records, existing academic literature and fieldwork to visualise where the 145 pre-1950 and the 123 post-1950 Jabar-Dakhal colonies were located in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area. This case of successful refugee self-settlement is qualitatively read in relation to the major areas of ecological stress in Kolkata. One of the UN sustainable development goals is to make cities and human settlements 'inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. This paper hopes to encourage further studies of urban refugee self-settlement and local integration as a viable but complex socio-political-environmental process.

Keywords: Refugee Self-Settlement; Vulnerability; Post-Partition Kolkata; Jabar-Dakhal colony; Global South; Urban Ecology

REFUGEE 'RIGHT TO THE CITY' AS BIO-POLITICAL SUBJECTS

Refugee subject position is an evolving topic of contention in the world today with increased migrant and refugee mobilities and changing political conditions of refuge itself. Approximately 60% of all refugees and 80% of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world today are located in urban

areas, according to estimates by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2009). In recognition of this global urban refugee crisis, UNHCR adopted the 'Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas' in 2009 recognising cities as 'legitimate places for refugees to reside and exercise the rights to which they are entitled'. "Right to the City", originally conceived by French neo-Marxist Lefebvre and developed by Harvey, is a radical concept which advocates for the right to access and appropriate urban spaces for any city inhabitant, regardless of legal status (Harvey, 2020).

As sites of opportunities and hope, urban areas promise easy access to health and educational services, basic infrastructure and improved livelihood prospects. The proximity tendency of urban centres and refugee settlements is well established (Jacobsen, 1997; Crisp et al., 2012). In contemporary times, cities have to absorb millions of immigrants and refugees, often in a short notice, following conflict situations. Any city, when encountering and accommodating these 'others', generates socio-geo-political spaces which embody institutionalised discourses of apathy or even violence. Very rarely do cities welcome refugees and provide sanctuary. The idea of 'others' is constructed based on cultural assumptions, stereotypes and differences in class, race, gender, religion, ancestry, language, caste, nationality etc. This 'ecology of fear', suspicion and tension often spatially segregates these refugee communities into homogenous neighbourhoods, colonies, ethnic villages, ethnoburbs and in extreme cases, ghettos. Urban refugees have to compete with the other urban poor to stake their right to the city. This is particularly true in the Global South, where bustling megalopolises are anyway stretched to their limits. Yet millions of the urban poor sustain themselves here, through unconventional distribution of limited resources and socio-political negotiations with various State and Non-State actors. The marginalised position of Global South urban refugees stems from institutionalised and communal discrimination, lack of citizenship, legal exclusion, housing and land insecurity, health hazards, inadequate access to work, constant threat of eviction, violence and petty harassments from both the State and the host community. Agamben has famously analysed that the sovereign can reduce a refugee to "bare life" and the ultimate "biopolitical" subject, regulated and governed in a permanent 'state of exception'(Agamben, 1998). Sanyal (2011) has described refugee spaces as existing at the 'intersections of multiple layers of governance and legality'. Refugees behave like Chatterjee's 'political society' (Chatterjee, 2004) and claim rights and services through popular politics and informal institutions. Refugees produce informal spaces which do not and cannot conform with formal laws and norms. Refugees are characterised as victims and their agency is often not validated. In this paper however, we acknowledge the agency of urban refugees in shaping their built environments. We discuss, employing a historical case study, how the East-Bengali refugees claimed their 'right to the city' through grass-root social consolidation, and community-led equitable distribution of resources.

IMPACT OF REFUGEE INFLUX ON URBAN ECOLOGY

It is established that rapid population influx causes overexploitation of resources (Berry, 2008). A majority of the millions of refugees and IDPs in the world today are located in developing countries (Jacobsen, 1997) where their

presence is associated with heavy ecological stress. Refugees are considered "exceptional resource degraders", often leading to deforestation, denuding of grazing pastures, depletion and contamination of water resources, waste accumulation (Black & Sessay, 1997). Refugee presence may create increased competition among the farmers, herders and other local communities leading to over-farming, overgrazing, deforestation, landuse change and subsequent land and soil degradation. Both surface and groundwater may get affected due to rapid and unplanned water extraction and poor sanitary infrastructure. Atmospheric pollution may increase due to use of fuelwood and waste accumulation. Biodiversity may be reduced due to habitat loss of native fauna, irreversibly damaging unique ecosystems. There is also often an increased risk of infectious diseases, endangering the refugees themselves, the host community and even local wildlife (Jacobsen, 1997). UNHCR Environmental Guidelines (1996) enlists specific concerns like "Natural Resources Deterioration" (degradation of forests, soils and water resources, biological impoverishment, contamination of surface and groundwater), "Irreversible Impacts on Natural Resources'' (impact on biodiversity, endangered species etc), Impacts on 'Health", "Social Conditions", "Local Populations'' and "Economic Impacts".

It is imperative that our sustainable urban development goals are sensitive and inclusive enough to acknowledge the complexities of urban refugee experiences and recognise the trade-offs between human costs and ecological costs, particularly in the contingent urban contexts of the Global South. UNHCR's (1996) Environmental Guidelines mention some refugee environmental impact indicators like deforestation, loss of biodiversity, competition for agricultural land, but they also enlist positive socio-economic indicators like increased agricultural production, increased local income, installation of educational, health, and other social services infrastructure as well as water supplies, among others. Oucho (2007) acknowledges that "little research has been undertaken on long-term negative impact" of displaced people. Elaborating on the concept of environmental impact, he emphasises the reciprocal nature of the relationship between man and nature- as man shapes his environment, both the natural world and the man-made world become essential to his well-being. Previous studies of environmental impact of refugees mostly conclude that "flora and fauna, energy and heating sources, water bodies, soil quality, environmental sanitation and a variety of infrastructure" are affected (Oucho, 2007). He opines that these studies conceptualise environmental impact only as "the process of change that occurs with respect to forests, soil and water" (Jacobsen, 1997). Such studies often unduly underscore the negative impact (Black & Sessay, 1997) and conveniently attribute to the refugees some of the negative ecological effects which pre-date their presence in the area. This is directly an effect of the disenfranchised status of refugees. Discussing 'desubjectivation', Judith Butler (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) has said that the ontological status as subjects is suspended when a space is understood to have invoked 'states of emergency'. In a similar strand,

Agamben describes the refugee 'state of exception' as a 'state of emergency produced through the sovereign's suspension of the juridical order" (Agamben, 1998). Such subaltern informalities tend to be criminalised and rendered vulnerable to eviction or demolition. Thus refugees are easy targets to blame for environmental degradations, not of their making (Allan, 1987), with researchers often interpreting correlation as causation.It is in this context that we have read Jacobsen's (1997) observation

"...we should bear in mind that environmental degradation is partly in the eye of the beholder. What local people and refugees perceive as necessary and even sustainable use of natural resources may be seen by national governments and international agencies as threats to the conservation of particular ecosystems."

Refugees suffer from public image issues (Zetter, 1991) as they are often not recognised as vulnerable victims but as 'problems' themselves, rather than "persons with problems".   The degree of environmental degradation depends on the form of refugee settlement, the duration of their presence in an area and social dynamics with local, host community, State assistance and refugee access to and control of land (Black & Sessay, 1997; McGregor, 1994). There is limited study on the environmental impact of 'self-settled' urban refugees. Jacobsen (1997) makes a clear distinction between authority-mediated settlements and self-settled refugee areas, highlighting differences in perceived stake and hence attitude towards local natural resources. In refugee camps, it is argued that damage can be contained due to control of resources by relief agencies. Due to perceived long-term stake in the area, self-settled refugee settlements cause less concentrated resource extraction and have a higher recovery tendency as against camps. The lack of local knowledge, environmental or otherwise, might lead to insensitive resource consumption in some cases. Constant interactions with host society may induce the refugees to adapt to local ways of life which are usually sensitive to local ecological patterns, and improve chances of refugee access to land and local knowledge (Hansen, 1990; Zetter, 1991). Self-settled refugees may bring positive environmental, social and economic benefits to an area as they learn to coexist with the host community, invest in the area and apply local knowledge.

Refugee relief agencies, according to UNHCR, try to minimise environmental degradation associated with refugee influx through environmental management practices. Outlined in the UNHCR sourcebook 'Refugee Operations and Environmental Management' are technical themes. Among others, they include Community-Based Strategies for Natural Resource Management, Domestic Energy, Environmental Education, Refugee Diet and Livestock. Leach laments that refugees are not approached to be involved in ecological resource management decisions by local authorities and often have no incentive or stake in conserving the environment. It is not the measurement of the degradation but the socio-political-economical context specific resource management practices of the refugees that deserve research attention. It is an extension of the observation made by Jacobsen that perception of environmental change as a 'problem' is context and subject specific. Our paper thus focuses on a specific case of

refugee self-management and the socio-political-economical context which enabled refugee agency in Jabar-Dakhal colonies.

SPATIAL HISTORY CASE-STUDY TO INVESTIGATE GLOBAL SOUTH URBANISM

In areas of study where measurable indicators are not agreed upon, and, where nuanced and subjective insights are required, a case-study approach is called for. In the oft-cited publication "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research", Flyvbjerg (2016) systematically argues that both natural sciences and social sciences are strengthened by case studies. Context-dependent knowledge adds value to human affairs as critical cases have strategic significance in relation to general problems and paradigmatic cases establish a metaphor or a school of thought for the domain. Case Studies are also valid epistemological strategies to decentre urban theories from Eurocentric roots. This is particularly true for the Global South context where the complexities of lived, empirical experience can only be captured through a discursive analysis and qualitative methods. It is part of the significant counter paradigm which emerged in urban studies, following Roy's call for provincializing urban theories from 'new geographies of theory' (Roy, 2009). Ideas of "ordinary cities", "comparative urbanism", "subaltern urbanism" (Roy, 2009) and "southern urbanism" (Schindler, 2017) argue for generating urban theories from specific and complex postcolonial urban situations in the Global South. Barnett (2020) has also debated for the status of case-studies in urban studies, involving casuistry as reasoning, rather than aiming for explanatory theory.

Spatial history cases engage with digital humanities and critical spatial inquiries, using visualisation and mapping tools to illustrate the 'contours of power'. Spatial history borrows tools from other disciplines to map archival geographical data (often textual and/or tabular) to reconstruct past landscapes to understand how they were produced. Partition refugees suffer from a negative image as they were perceived to be a strain on Kolkata's resources. Here, we map Partition refugee squatters or Jabar-Dakhal colonies which were not reflected in the official maps of 1960-s, partly because of their illegal, unsanctioned nature and partly, because of the political nature of the 'refugee problem'. Their details are available as tabular data in the 1976 Report of the Working Group on the Residual Problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal. produced by the Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation, Government of India. The same have been geo-coded using ArcGIS to produce the attached maps, in conjunction with the growing boundaries of Kolkata Municipal Area and Kolkata Metropolitan District and the major water resources of the city. This superimposition enables a reading of the refugee influx with respect to the encroachments on the most ecologically vulnerable area of Kolkata.

JABAR-DAKHAL COLONIES OF KOLKATA

UNHCR estimates that 15 million people were involuntarily displaced during the Partition of India in 1947 making it one of the largest mass migrations of human history. After the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, millions of Hindu Bengali refugees from East Pakistan flooded the Eastern states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The city of Kolkata particularly

drew millions for better livelihood prospects. Comparatively better off *bhadralok* refugees either 'opted' for migration to West Bengal before Partition or did so in the immediate wake of Partition. The government arranged for both relief and rehabilitation measures, in a limited capacity, for these so-called 'OLD' refugees. A majority of these refugees, however, used their kinship ties and political awareness to negotiate with the State and self-settle in squatter (Jabar-Dakhal) colonies, in and around the city of Kolkata.

Large-Scale Refugee Assimilation in Kolkata

Between 1946-1958 about 31.32 million refugees came to West Bengal. 24 Parganas and Kolkata accommodated about 70.48 percent of the total refugees coming into West Bengal. Between 1958 to 1971 about 6 and half lakhs refugees are estimated to have further arrived in Kolkata (Mandal et al., 2019). According to CMDA estimates, in 1961, refugee migrants to the city comprised 18% of total city population as these early refugees were mostly non-agriculturalist, middle class groups. Increasing tensions across the border prompted millions more of socio-economically weaker, lower caste refugees to trickle in over the years. The government woke up to the refugee crisis late. Taking a stern stand, all incoming, so-called "NEW" refugees, arriving after 1954, were to be provided rehabilitation aid, only if they settled outside West Bengal. All camps closed down in West Bengal by 1959. "NEW" refugees were compulsorily dispersed to distant inhospitable sites. Many would later return as deserters, often back to Kolkata.

Table 1. Types of Refugee Colonies.

Source: Report of the Working Group on the Residual Problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal. produced by the Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation, Government of India

Types of Partition Refugee Colonies in WB		Partition Refugee colonies in Kolkata Metropolitan District (424+77) 304 urban (46 in KMC) 120 rural			
GOVERNMENT sponsored colonies	Urban Colonies for Middle Class Refugees				
	Rural colonies for Non-agriculturists	JABARDAKHAL Squatter colonies in KMD (268)			
	Colonies for Agriculturists		urban	rural	total
	Barujibi colonies		221 (43 in KMC)	47	268
	Fishermen's colonies				
SQUATTER colonies	Pre-1950 (Before Eviction Bill; OLD refugee settlements)	Pre- 1950	84 (26 in KMC)	75	145
		Post- 1950	100 (17 in KMC)	13	123
	Post-1950 (After Eviction Bill; NEW refugee settlements)	Government sponsored colonies in KMD (156)			
			urban	rural	total
		1950-1973	81 urban (03 in KMC)	72	156
PRIVATE colonies	Built by refugees using legal means; limited records	Private colonies in KMD (77)			
		(Including all)			77

'Government-Sponsored Colonies' and 'Approved Squatters' Colonies' (set up before Dec, 1950) received conferment of Right and Title to land by 1976. The government moved slowly to regularise and formalise the Jabar-Dakhal colonies, many of which received 99-year leases only in the mid-1990s and finally title deeds over the next 20 years. Left politics became central to the refugee movement. Refugee protests and demands were mainly for access

to land and rehabilitation and against the 'Dispersal' Policy of the Government. Kolkata of the '50 s and '60 s was a politically volatile city, with many grassroots movements for land, housing, food, transport, jobs- all linked to the broader refugee movement. The act of squatting was in itself a political act. East Bengali refugees negotiated with their change in social status, citizenship and nationality, gender, caste dynamics and community ties as they spatially organised themselves as consolidated, socio-politically homogenous communities (Basu & Chaudhury, 2009).

Terrain Transformation and Resource Management in Jabar-Dakhal colonies

Refugee tactics of shaping their environment are complex, interconnected socio-spatial productions. The existing urban landscape of Post-partition Kolkata was already heavily contested. It afforded little scope for large-scale spatial appropriation by refugees. Urban citizenship and access to opportunities were contingent on their proximity to formal systems of the city. There were inhospitable and uninhabited wastelands and marshes in the Southern and Eastern fringes of the city limits. Strategic planning and awareness, community networking and political consolidation were the keys to finding these pockets. Once these areas were identified, the refugees engaged in Jabar-Dakhal (or forcible acquisition) and squatted on the land, collectively resisting local resistance. Besides these colonies, refugees also occupied all available urban public spaces of Kolkata like footpaths, stretches of land along railway tracks, open grounds etc.

Responses collected during primary fieldwork suggest that overnight filling up of marshes, grading and site development, through sweat equity was a common spatial fix. Families would quickly construct their own homes by collecting locally available hogla leaves for shade and tying together woven bamboo sheets as walls. Community-monitored equitable distribution of resources, coordinated by colony committees, was the bedrock of their self-management practices and was a critical factor for their subsequent social integration. Some of the educated 'elders' of the community formed the colony committee which did the initial survey of the land, allocated open spaces for public use, demarcated relatively habitable pockets, plotted the layout into wards and distributed the parcels on a first-come-first-serve basis. Urgent need of community consolidation prompted the refugees to consciously disregard long-practised caste identities and caste dynamics. Specific areas were *not* demarcated for specific castes, unlike the normative caste-based divisions of their native villages. There were however natural clusters of people from the same village or from the same extended families, which was important to foster kinship ties. The colony committee was responsible for funds collection for shared infrastructure. These committees were entrusted with making long-term visions for the settlements, and hence they did not allow for hasty measures. As and when they could afford, they would commission, plan and coordinate the construction of brick lined roads, makeshift bamboo bridges over water bodies, pit latrines, shared tube-wells for water supply. Gradually they also set up markets, schools, clinics and then temples, libraries and youth centres. These were set up initially as shacks or temporary structures and later upgraded. They proactively marked the colony territory with curated socio-cultural institutions to create a public image of a socio-culturally progressive

urbane community. The process of decision-making was democratic in spirit. Socio-spatial practices of Jabar-Dakhal colonies indicate tendencies of Lefebvrean *autogestion*. Their community-led self-management produced robust systems of urban space appropriation with a keen eye for long-term resource management.

Mapping Jabar-Dakhal Colonies

Our scope of refugee self-settlement mapping includes only the pre-1950 and post-1950 Jabar-Dakhal colonies (i.e. it excludes Government sponsored colonies, private colonies), located in Kolkata Metropolitan District (i.e. it excludes colonies in other pockets of West Bengal), set up by 1947-Partition refugees in 1950-s and 1960-s (i.e. it excludes later colonies set up by Bangladeshi migrants after Bangladesh Liberation War). According to archival data, there were 145 pre-1950 and 123 post-1950 Jabar-Dakhal colonies in Kolkata Metropolitan District. The refugee colonies' distribution was mainly to the south and the North East, showing minor overlap with the East Kolkata Wetlands which is the most vulnerable, eco-sensitive zone of the city. EKW started getting engulfed by the growing city in the 1960-s and 1970-s. Primary interviews reveal that filling up of minor water bodies, deforestation and landuse change, invariably took place in every Jabar-Dakhal colony. However, the convenient correlation between refugee influx and Kolkata's ecological stress is questionable, given that the refugee tactics never included drastic terrain transformations like large-scale wetlands reclamation.

URBAN ECOLOGY OF KOLKATA

Kolkata has been extending towards the east and the south. Kolkata's green and blue networks are disappearing at an alarming rate. Previous studies have established that urbanisation rate has correlation with reduction of waterbody and vegetation coverage in Kolkata. It is predicted that the city would have "67% built-up, while there will be only 3% water body, 14% vegetation and 16% fallow land" by 2051 (Mandal et al., 2019). Particularly of concern is the vulnerability of the East Kolkata Wetlands. Though designated a Ramsar site, it continues to be threatened by unscrupulous developers.
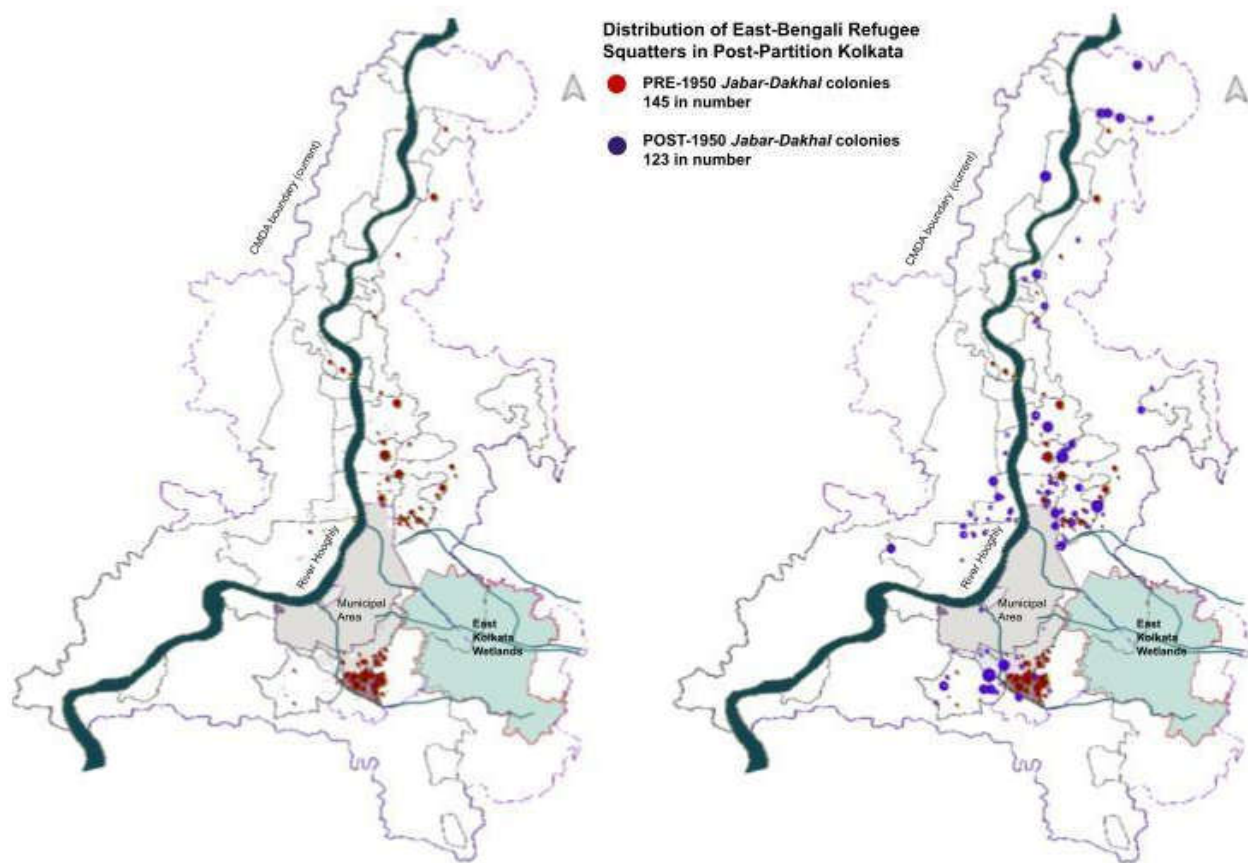
Figure 1. Distribution of East-Bengali Refugee Squatters in Post-Partition Kolkata.

The southern fringes once had an extensive rich habitat of native flora-fauna which gradually extended to the south as denser forested areas, gradually merging into the Sundarbans. Much of that had already undergone deforestation and was converted into agricultural land by the 1950-s which is the time-period of our study. The eastern fringes had saltwater marshlands or the East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW), a resource recycling ecosystem. EKW acts as a natural sink and recycles much of Kolkata's daily wastewater. It operates through a system of canals artificially excavated during colonial times and also connects to extensive stretches of pisciculture ponds- a source of food supply and livelihood for the urban poor. When the British founded Kolkata on the banks of Hooghly River, it was an unhealthy, swampy site but they took advantage of the Ganges for navigation and these swamps on the East as defence. The colonisers excavated canals to reclaim marshes, converted the saline marshes to sewage-fed, freshwater wetlands.

The period during 1941–1951 saw the highest decadal population growth at 69.34% which has hence declined. Mukherjee (2015) has claimed that it is this post-independence refugee influx which has posed the most threat to the wetlands. While sudden influx of refugees must have caused increased resource depletion, our mapping of the refugee squatter colonies

does not indicate significant overlaps. Rather in 1960, 3.75 square miles of North Salt Lake was reclaimed to set up the planned Salt Lake Township. Between 1962 to 1972 about 3800 acres of wetlands were converted to habitable lands. Further encroachments on the wetlands happened for the development of East Kolkata Township, Patuli Township, Eastern Metropolitan Bypass and the Municipal Solid Waste disposal ground. McDonnell et. al. (2009) have discussed that urban ecology is better understood as ecology 'of' cities than ecology 'in' cities, incorporating "both ecological and human dimensions" and integrating both natural and the social sciences. Peri-urban interfaces particularly are vulnerable where urbanisation drastically transforms ecosystems to urban settlements affecting ecological sustainability. Kolkata as a case-study amply demonstrates this scenario. In this paper we have superimposed the refugee colonies of 1950-s - 60-s with the eco-sensitive zones to contribute to the discussion about the same. We reinforce Mukherjee's (2015) claim that there is a "need for integrating political ecology and historical frameworks for studying urban ecology moving towards the more inclusive ecology 'of' cities approach."

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The concept of sustainable cities evolved from the concept of 'sustainable development', popularised in the Brundtland Report (1987) of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) with the post-2015 UN development agenda focussing on 'sustainable urbanisation'. In the 2030 Agenda, Sustainable Development Goal 11 is to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". The New Urban Agenda (2016), adopted at the United Nations Conference on 20 October 2016, specifically mentions

"We commit ourselves to ensuring full respect for the human rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, regardless of their migration status, and support their host cities in the spirit of international cooperation, taking into account national circumstances and recognizing that, although the movement of large populations into towns and cities poses a variety of challenges, it can also bring significant social, economic and cultural contributions to urban life. We further commit ourselves to strengthening synergies between international migration and development at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels by ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration through planned and well-managed migration policies, and to supporting local authorities in establishing frameworks that enable the positive contribution of migrants to cities and strengthened urban-rural linkages."

"Bare Life" vs Environmental Vulnerabilities: A Discussion

Karen Jacobsen calls the strategy of "local integration for refugees in developing countries' a "forgotten solution". Urban Ecology promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding urban social-ecological systems and decentres Global North perspectives. Lehmann (2011), argues that the Global South cannot have the "same strategies and debates" on sustainability as those in the North because of the peculiarity of their inherent potential, endowments, and limitations. The bio-physical attributes of Global South cities include decreased air quality, water and noise pollution, flooding, high

waste loads and minimal contact with nature, climatic severity, high biodiversity, invasive species as a colonial legacy, urban livestock, ecosystem disservices and geophysical hazards (Shackleton et al., 2021). But it is the socio-economic differences which call for a different approach to urban sustainability (Hansen et al., 2018) in the Global South context. Sustainability measures have to take into account urban sprawl, informal housing and livelihoods, poverty and lack of access to basic services, vulnerability to economic, social and environmental stresses, technological limitations etc. . Economic inequality, institutional dysfunction and rampant poverty makes sustainability a secondary goal for the marginalised.

Nagendra et al (2018) argue that Global South cities often offer "unique but often overlooked capacity to innovate and experiment for sustainability" with bottom-up, decentralised systems "harnessing collective action around environmental remediation, urban food production and alternative green infrastructure". Kolorob in Bangladesh and the Mapping Kibera project in Nairobi are contemporary examples of grass-roots, participatory approaches common with postcolonial subjects. Trade-offs inherent in integrated "pro-poor ecosystem management" need to be carefully evaluated in such contexts. The importance of political economy of negotiations over natural resource use is highlighted by the success of the self-settled Jabar-Dakhal colonies of Kolkata. 'Ecosystem services', developed in the early 1980s, is a promising framework for analysing biophysical ecosystem processes from the perspective of human well-being (Mooney & Ehrlich, 2012). But on-field applications of the same have limitations. Defries and Nagendra (2017) have presented ecosystem management as a 'wicked problem' with no simple solution and have recommended an incremental approach to addressing these problems. Reconciling competing objectives of human well-being and ecological gains remains a difficult proposition, with multiple vested interests competing and contributing to the local political economy.

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