THE INFORMAL SYNDICATE RAJ: EMERGING URBAN GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES IN NEWLY INCORPORATED VILLAGES

Track 2: Besides the megacity and other cities

Dr. Ratoola Kundu
Centre for Urban Policy and Governance
TISS, Mumbai
Key questions: (Track level)

• What is the nature of the challenges in contemporary urbanisation context under which megacities and their regional linkages are embedded?
• What are the socio-spatial alternatives?
PERI-URBANISATION TRAJECTORIES IN WEST BENGAL (AROUND KOLKATA)

- INFORMAL SPATIAL OUTGROWTH OF CITY AND CONVERSION OF AGRI TO URBAN LAND USES AND BUILT FORM
- FORMAL INCORPORATION OF PERIPHERAL VILLAGES INTO URBAN AREA
- LARGE SCALE LAND ACQUISITION FOR NEW TOWN FORMATION, DECONGESTING OLDER MEGACITIES
- TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL AREAS – SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC – TO URBAN OCCUPATIONS
- CENSUS TOWNS VERSUS ADMINISTRATIVE URBAN AREAS
VOLATILE AND UNSETTLED URBAN PERIPHERIES

• Violence, erasure, displacement, dispossession of livelihoods, settling and unsettling of populations: volatile, unstable, making and unmaking of place

• Expropriation, commodification of land, ACCUMULATION THROUGH DISPOSSESSION

• Fragmented landscape – uneven development – splintered geographies of urban infrastructure provision

• Fractured, contesting, overlapping and sometimes absent governance arrangements – multiple authorities and jurisdiction

• Conflicts between traditional inhabitants and the new inhabitants – identity, way of life, inequalities, natural resources
Splintered geographies of exclusion
Key questions:

• What kinds of politics and governance configurations emerge in the peri-urban areas of mega-cities?

• What kind of relationships, strategic yet unstable alliances are forged between these new and old actors – particularly between erstwhile (internally displaced) farmers and the new migrants?

• How is the relationship between land and labour reconstituted through new circuits of capital accumulation and regimes of governance?

• How are inhabitants making sense and attaching meaning to these spaces and in turn being influenced by the dynamic shifts in the landscape?

• What kind of power structures and locally contingent assemblages have been carved out to influence and control these processes of large scale transformations and the limits of such influence?

• And finally, what can the study of these relationships, everyday practices, contestation and negotiations reveal about the future of urban peripheries as viable and livable places?

• Moving beyond the binaries of planned versus unplanned, village versus city, local versus migrant – these are produced and mediated in specific ways
STRATEGIES OF PLACE-MAKING IN THE PERIPHERIES:

• Villages in the city – reconstituting the social and economic relationships around land

• People as infrastructure – building networks and filling gaps

• The politics of doing business and the business of doing politics – musclemen, intermediaries and the Syndicate Raj
Making of the eastern periphery of Kolkata
Villages in the City: How the “Urban” is being reconstituted by the “Rural”

- Villages and villagers made invisible
- Politics of planned exclusion (and inclusion) – differential treatment, “eye sore” to “service villages”
- Production of geography of uneven spatial value
- Secondary cycles of rent extraction, settling and unsettling, ré-regulation of land
- Villages transforming, commons disappearing, economies changing, new social relations and dynamics
- Persistence of socio-spatial inequalities in agrarian holdings and relations translating onto new geographies
- Large landholders > small land holders > sharecroppers > landless labourers and fishery workers
People as Infrastructure: Filling in the gaps

• Uneven, splintered geography, fragmentations and disconnections

• Building bridges

• Filling in for networked urban infrastructure – water, transport, waste collection

• Filling in for missing urban services – markets, canteens, driving, cooking, cleaning, landscaping, security,

• Villagers: Entrepreneurial, risk taking initiatives, speculating, trust as basis

• Contingent combinations of actors, expanding their opportunities – e.g. Atharotala market and the coalition between residents, shop keepers, villagers
Strongmen and the Syndicate Raj: The politics of Doing Business and the Business of doing Politics

• How to manage and control the violence accompanying land acquisition by the State?

• Land Procurement Committees - generating consent, depoliticisation, stopping resistance and its mobilisation, spoils across party lines

• Birth of strongmen/ Mastaans – informal sovereigns, territorial controls, Benevolent but also capacity for violence, keeping the populace in control

• Rise of syndicates – youth and employment, dictating development, extraction of money, feeding electoral campaigns, disrupting electoral campaigns, territorial infighting

• Local leaders – No violence, negotiation and mediation, good governance? Control over inhabitants, migrants, new inhabitants
Powers of the Syndicate – Informal, muscle, money, connect with people

- These Syndicates are shown to have significant decision making powers in the governance of the highly uneven fringe areas of the Corporation:
  - (i) control over labour and material requirements of the periurban economy
  - (ii) ability to mobilise large numbers of people and votes
  - (iii) influence decision making with respect to the development of urban infrastructure networks in and through villages where real estate developers are flocking to.
CONCLUSIONS

• Villagers – differentiated access to the new economy, new claims, making oneself visible through new enterprises and coalitions, new mobilisations and collective action, new urban aspirations, reconstruction of the idyllic village, invisibilising migrants, resistance and mobilisation

• New, secondary circuits of capital – extraction of various types of rent

• Syndicates and strongmen, local political leaders – contested territories, trade off between political allegiance and economic gains, consolidation of personal wealth and political power, negotiated development rather than violence, simmering tensions

• The Future of Rajarhat New Town as a viable and liveable place? Not contained but spilling over.