GHOSTS OF THE PAST OR RELICS OF THE FUTURE?

A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE

HAND-PULLED RICKSHAWS OF CALCUTTA

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GHOSTS OF THE PAST OR RELICS OF THE FUTURE?

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HAND-PULLED RICKSHAWS OF CALCUTTA

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PREFACE

This dissertation addresses the relationship between rickshaw pullers, local residents, and the city of Calcutta and how politics and culture intertwine with the use of space. I conducted preliminary fieldwork in December 2008-09 and in-depth fieldwork from May 2009-August 2009. I followed up with fieldwork once again in December 2009-10. This dissertation follows the prescribed three-article dissertation format of the Geography Department of Oklahoma State University. Chapters two, three, and four are distinct stand-alone articles with their own set of figures, tables, and references attached to each. The referencing style and format of each article reflects the style of the target journal.

The first article (Chapter 2) "Calcutta's Hand-Pulled Rickshaws: Cultural Politics and Place Making in a Globalizing City" is authored by me and co-authored by my advisor Dr. Alyson L Greiner. The target journal for this article is *The Geographical Review.*

I am the sole author for the second article (Chapter 3) "Calcutta's Image Change: The Construction of Ambiguity and Betweenness of the Hand-Pulled Rickshaws" The target journal for this article is the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* or *Contemporary South Asia.*

The third article (Chapter 4) "Banned but still in operation: An urban political ecology of the hand-pulled rickshaws in Calcutta" is authored by me and co-authored by Dr. Jacqueline Vadjunec and Dr. Alyson L. Greiner. The target journal for this article is *Environment and Planning A* or *Geographical Journal.*

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Born and raised in the city of Calcutta, I was all too familiar with the many problems in the city. As I commenced my Doctor of Philosophy degree at Oklahoma State University, a ban on the rickshaw profession was announced. The timing could not have been more perfect for me to select the profession to critically analyze and evaluate as to why this activity was suddenly seemingly at odds with the city. This was my opportunity to give back to the rickshaw *wallahs* who had taken care of me during my school years in the city.

This dissertation completes my purpose for coming to the United States of America and after these many years of hard work and effort, I have many people to thank. From Calcutta - First I would like to thank my family for providing me with the opportunity to reach this far in my academic career and for constantly encouraging me to set my goals and aspirations as high as possible. I would also like to thank the Armenian Church of Kolkata for their generous support of Armenian students from the city who aim to achieve higher degrees of excellence. I would also like to thank my friends and teachers from Loreto College who have supported and encouraged me through my PhD.

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ABSTRACT: This dissertation was an attempt to develop a better understanding of the use and value of hand-pulled rickshaws in the city of Calcutta and the lifeworlds of the rickshaw pullers because of a ban placed on the profession in 2006. Using an ethnographic approach, 83 semi-structured interviews were gathered with rickshaw pullers, owners, the public, and government officials. Content and discourse analysis were used to analyze the data and present the findings in a three-article dissertation format. Each article is a stand-alone piece of work modeled along different yet interrelated geographical conceptual frameworks. This study has shown that through long-standing relationships of trust, familiarity, and dependability, residents and rickshaw pullers fulfill critical daily needs in each other's lives which makes a place for rickshaw pullers in Calcutta. Through a consideration of the geographical imagination, the analysis has also provided insights about the relationship between local perceptions, planning, and city image change while simultaneously showing that popular discourses construct and represent the rickshaw pullers as people whose status is characterized by ambiguity and betweenness. This research has shown that the pullers have been able to negotiate and maintain their right and access to their livelihood by engaging in active and passive forms of resistance, and because of the role played by multiple actors involved with the rickshaw ban. Overall, this study concludes that urban development affords significant biases which must be evaluated to ensure social justice. Additionally, this evaluation is critical because urban development is embedded with power relations as dominant groups attempt to regulate who belongs where and what is appropriate and inappropriate in place, while traditionally weaker groups manipulate power for their own survival and existence. This investigation is valuable to planners and policy makers since it provides an understanding of the use and value of the profession to the city and the contributions of the rickshaw pullers to the lives of residents. On a broader scale, this research has used different lenses to provide insights about an informal profession and suggests a need to evaluate the contributions of similar professions in other parts of the world.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

While a significant literature exists about the livelihoods of marginalized groups

of people—particularly within the extremely large informal economy throughout the

developing world—the relationship between politics and the social and cultural

contributions of the professions and those engaged in it, remain understudied. Brought

into focus in the 1970s through the work of Keith Hart in Ghana, the informal economy

continues to remain a phenomena of urban areas (King 2001).[1] Studies on informal work

proliferated as scholars examined the phenomena in Africa (Amponsah et al. 1994;

Tambulasi and Kayuni 2008), Latin America (Bromley 1978; Moser 1980), and

Southeast Asia (Sethuraman 1985; Timothy and Wall 1997) to name a few. These studies

examine the role of the informal economy in terms of its diversity, size, and contribution

to the overall economy. However, what remains implicit in these studies is the value of

the social and cultural attributes of the informal economy and the role played by its

workers. By this I mean we know less about the relationship between informal trades,

their workers, local residents, and their geographical context. Informal workers contribute

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[1] Hart specifically introduced the term "informal sector," but scholarly consensus today is that the term
"informal economy" more effectively encompasses the diversity of informal activities and services.

in significant ways to society by performing several functions that extend beyond their immediately visible roles. However as cities attempt to modernize, informal work is viewed as external to society and to the overall economic system and considered to be at odds with visions of development in urban areas (Bromley 1998). This dissertation seeks to advance a critical look at one such informal economy profession, the hand-pulled rickshaws of Calcutta.[2] Specifically, I attempt to understand the relationship between the pullers and the city and the consequences of a ban on the profession by exploring the lifeworlds of the rickshaw puller. Through their own words and experiences, I explore how they live their lives in Calcutta and assess the different dimensions of their relationship with the city. I stress the need for further studies of a similar nature throughout the developing world, and more specifically in India, to ascertain how traditionally marginalized groups of people negotiate and maintain access to their material resources while simultaneously making a place for themselves.

The Research Context

The human-powered hand-pulled rickshaw of Calcutta, India is the only remaining transportation of this kind in existence in the world today. The rickshaw is "a light cart with large diameter wheels, drawn by a man running between two shafts" (Unnayan 1981, 2). Wood is used to construct the main body of the vehicle (Figure 1), including the wheels, shafts, and spokes (Figure 2) while metal is used for the springs, struts, and bearings (Unnayan 1981).

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[2] Calcutta was officially renamed Kolkata in 2001, but I prefer to use the former name because Kolkata denotes primarily the Bengali pronunciation and culture and does not adequately reflect the cosmopolitanism of the city in my view.

Officially, there are 5,945 rickshaws in operation in Calcutta with approximately 20,000 pullers engaged in the profession; the unofficial numbers of both pullers and rickshaws are believed to be higher (Unnayan 1981; Whitelegg and Williams 2000). Halder and Basu (1982) and Sen (1998) offer one explanation for the discrepancy in numbers, by noting that in 1939 an upper limit of 6,000 was placed on rickshaw licenses and in spite of the growth in Calcutta, the limit has not been revised. Subsequently, in 2009 (during the time fieldwork for this study was conducted) the limit of 6,000 licenses still stood and government officials explained that approximately 55 rickshaws had been confiscated or decommissioned over time.

Figure 2: Wood used to construct the wheels in a hand-pulled rickshaw.

Figure 1: A hand-pulled rickshaw.

The rickshaw profession is a part of Calcutta's considerably large informal economy which employs approximately 40-50% of the city's labor force (Hand Rickshaw Pullers of Kolkata n.d.). The rickshaw pullers hail almost exclusively from the neighboring states of Jharkhand and Bihar and seek employment in Calcutta as migrant workers. Entry into the rickshaw profession is relatively easy, as one puller typically recommends another for the job. Pullers do not own their vehicles, but rent them from owners at an average daily price of ₹20. Rickshaws owners may own a fleet of anywhere between five and 150 rickshaws (Figure 3). The entire profession is based on familiarity, kinship, and social networks. The element of familiarity is extremely important, because rickshaw owners do not rent their rickshaws to anyone without a credible reference from another puller. Significantly, the rickshaw profession is also inter-generationally sustained by family members who recommend one another for the job as well as owners who continue the profession of their forefathers.

Figure 3: A fleet of rickshaws owned by a single owner.

Calcutta is an organically arranged unplanned city with a population of over 15 million and a density which exceeds 23,000 people per square kilometer in Central Calcutta

(Whitelegg and Williams 2000). The city—which falls under the jurisdiction of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation—has 15 boroughs subdivided into 141 wards. Rickshaws operate only in 10 boroughs which include 100 wards (Figure 4) and thus, 70% of Calcutta's urban space is under rickshaw usage.

In these 10 boroughs, residential and commercial spaces are mixed with slums and high-class residential housing in which a cosmopolitan population resides. In these areas, rickshaws transport goods and passengers—young and old, rich and poor, men and women, able-bodied and disabled, office-goers and schoolchildren, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians; those in an emergency and those riding for leisure.

In 2006, the state government of West Bengal banned the rickshaws on grounds that they are a traffic menace, inhumane, and unsightly in a modernizing city such as Calcutta. Further, the government announced that no rehabilitation or remuneration would be provided to the owners and pullers. Therefore, my attempt in this work is to critically evaluate and assess the call for a removal of rickshaws in Calcutta. Through the three-article dissertation format, I examine the rickshaw issue from different, yet critical lenses and provide a conceptual contribution to the discipline of geography as well as policy recommendations to the city.

First, I turn to a discussion of the relevant literature drawn from cultural and urban geography and urban political ecology which have guided my analysis of the rickshaw profession and enabled a more critical understanding of the contributions of the rickshaws and their pullers as well as the politics surrounding their eradication. I begin the next section with a discussion of the interconnectedness of politics and culture.
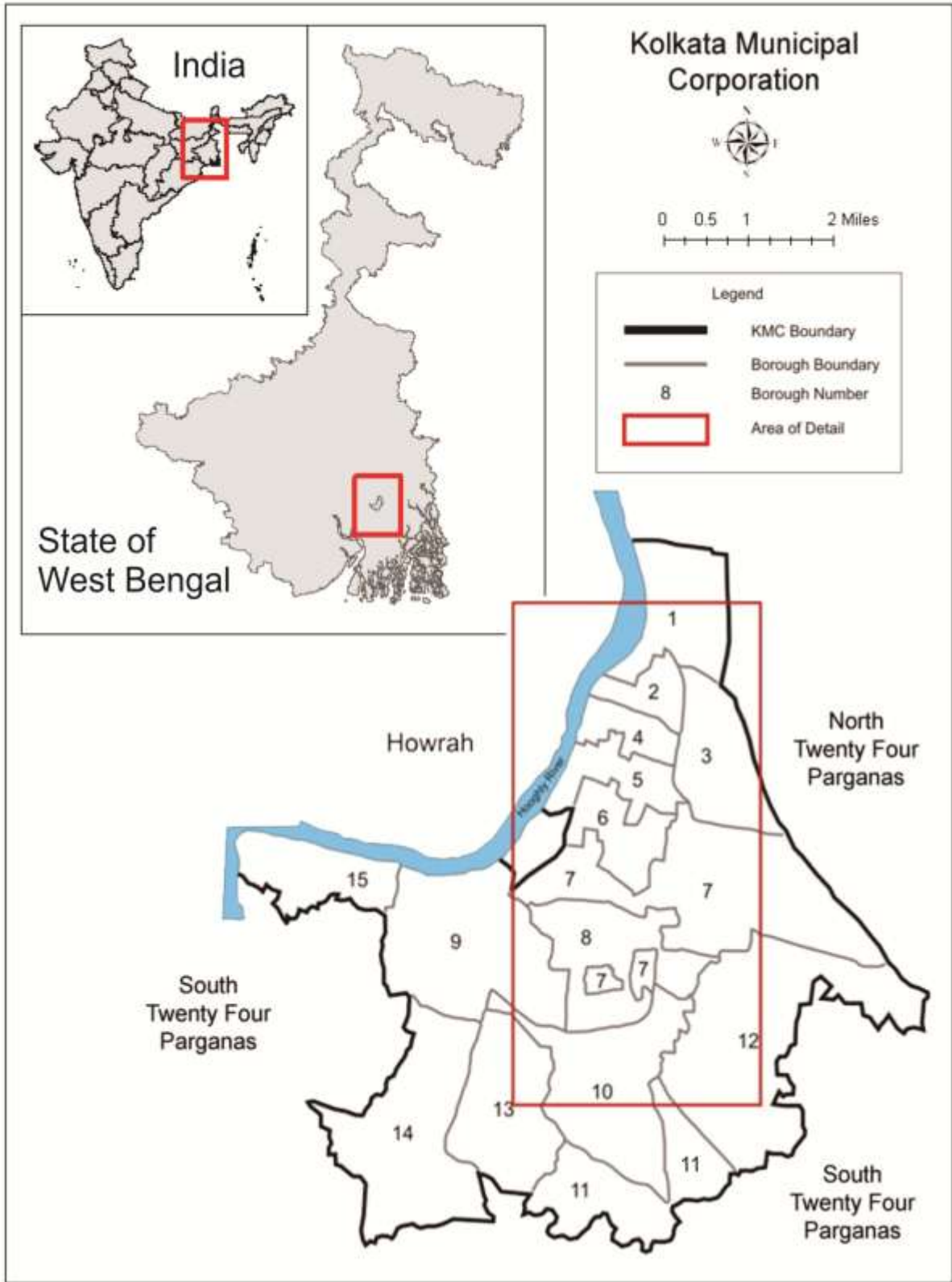
Figure 4: Boroughs in the city of Calcutta where rickshaws operate and the approximate location of the study area.

The Interconnectedness of Culture and Politics

Restricted by the intellectual tradition of landscape studies and faced with significant transformations at local, national, and global levels, "cultural geography as it entered the 1980s was ill-quipped to deal with the controversies stirred up by events…"(Mitchell 2000, 36). In short, according to Mitchell (2000, 35) cultural geography lacked a certain degree of "relevancy." Cultural geographers required the theoretical foundations to explain the expanding role of politics in cultural change evidenced through transformations of place and the corresponding impact on people in rural and urban environments. Duncan (1980) and Jackson (1989) advanced the idea that culture *is* politics as they sought to challenge traditional notions of culture as an organic, independent entity with agency. According to these geographers, in order to understand social relations, culture must be understood and examined as a form of politics (Mitchell 2000, 41). Jackson called for a shift of emphasis from material understandings of culture to a "domain of cultural politics", where "meanings are negotiated and relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested" (1989, 2). In other words, resistance translates into a way to contest meaning—a view emphasized by several scholars (Jackson 1989; Creswell 1996; Mitchell 2000). Moreover, while scholars emphasized the need to view culture in political terms, key to the new wave of thinking about culture was that it is multi-dimensional, inherently social and plays a role in the transformations of space and place (Jackson 1989, 3; Mitchell 2000, 42, 63). Wright (1998, 10) argues that "culture is a dynamic concept, always negotiable and in the process of endorsement, contestation, and transformation." Therefore, as people engage in everyday cultural struggle, they not only contest the meaning of culture, but they challenge policies which seek to determine who belongs where (Stallybrass and White 1986; Creswell 1996).

The idea of cultural politics, which involves contest over meaning and space, advanced our knowledge of class struggles, racism (hooks 1990), gender issues, and a host of local and global events from gay rights to environmental politics. An underlying theme is that everyday struggles involve the need to protect and defend one's cultural identity. As Wright (1998, 9) contends, "cultural identities are not inherent, bounded or static; they are dynamic, fluid and constructed situationally, in particular places and times." Accordingly, cultural identities are intimately bound with people's sense of belonging and place attachments. Typically, political elites and those in positions of authority use the power of discourse to provide their definitions of culture as the dominant ones and in turn attempt to control and dominate over marginalized and politically disempowered groups (Mitchell 2000). However, history has shown that traditionally marginalized and politically weaker groups also possess power and resist their domination in multiple ways from outright acts of defiance and protest to simple every day acts of resistance (Mitchell 2000).

Therefore by extending this scholarship, I draw on cultural geography's concepts of cultural politics and place making to understand how politics and culture co-mingle and attempt to influence who belongs where in Calcutta. Since spatial and social exclusion can also influence people's sense of belonging and place attachment, I use these concepts to assert that rickshaw pullers challenge hegemonic ideas by carving a niche for themselves in the lives of local residents. As a result, they engage in their own place making and stand as testimony to how people derive their identity and sense of belonging from place. These contests and negotiations which lie at the intersection between politics and cultural meaning and dominant and subordinate groups manifest themselves in an urban context through city image change to which I now turn.

City Image Change

Cities in the global north and south are witnessing significant changes as authorities refashion them in order to maintain a competitive edge locally, regionally, and globally. A key aspect of image change involves replacing negative images and associations with positive features, emblems, and images. Place promotion and marketing approaches employ several different techniques in order to sell the city to residents, tourists, and/or investors (Young and Lever 1997; Young and Kaczmarek 1999; Avraham 2004; Smith 2005). Strategies of image change in the developed world include an emphasis on hallmark events (Atkinson and Laurier 1998; Richards and Wilson 2004), the arts (Lee 2006), recreation (Schollmann, Perkins and Moore 2000) and revitalization of small scale businesses (Short et al. 1993; Addie 2008). On the other hand, in the developing world emphasis is placed more on making the city appear modern and urban in order to retain citizens and attract tourists and investors to the city (Siemiatycki 2006). Toward this end, cities in the developing world place greater importance on historical conservation (Bromley and Jones 1996; Bromley 1998) and/or on mega-infrastructural projects (Yeoh 2005; Siemiatycki 2006). However, a key element governing image change is the attempt to reconfigure or revalidate what a city is, who it represents, and its value—essentially attempts to alter or refashion the meaning of the city.

Incidentally, informal trades and professions and their associated workers bear the brunt of image change policies and directives (Bromley 1998; Dupont 2011). For local governments, the informal economy, which is expressly visible, is considered at odds with the modern, progressive, urban image sought for cities. For the most part, informal work is typically considered unsightly and/or offensive and thus unbecoming of modernizing cities.

Therefore, plans and policies to alter a city's image inadvertently impact people engaged in informal work because as city's images are changed more often than not, these groups are regarded as out of place (Creswell 1996). Much work in geography and urban studies has focused on social exclusion which results from city image change (see, for example, Jones and Varley 1994; Bromley 1998; Siemiatycki 2006). But the value of informal professions to the city and in the lives of local residents is still considerably underestimated. Along these lines, we need more insights about how local governments and residents perceive or imagine their cities and the place of informal work in them.

Since authorities are in a position of power to make plans for cities and greatly transform their internal configurations, they possess the power to also change the meaning of the city. Therefore, examining their imaginations and visions for the city become imperative. These imaginations and visions for a city appear in a variety of different forms such as planning documents, city maps, newspaper articles, city guidebooks, government websites and reflect how the authorities want the city to be perceived or imagined. As transformations of place attempt to redefine the meaning of cities and affect its culture, the imaginations of local residents can also shed light on what the city means to them. Because geographical imaginations according to Daniels (1992), consist of contrasting and opposing visions for cities, an analysis of these imaginations can assist with future planning initiatives. Geographical imaginations and visions of the city held by authorities and local residents can provide insights on the meaning of the city and the value of informal professions, which in turn can help explain how the city functions.

Oftentimes, city's images are refashioned based on the discourse of a minority of a city's population who present their ideas as a benefit-for-all (Atkinson and Laurier 1998).

However, geographical imaginations of what the city is, who it represents, and its value to local residents offer significant and surprisingly contradictory visions depending on whom you ask. Therefore, I use the concepts from urban geography related to city image change to expose the dualisms, contradictions, and paradoxes inherent in Calcutta's attempts to urbanize and modernize. Through the conceptual framework of city image change, I explore the geographical imaginations of Calcutta's residents through their words and discourse. I show how the pullers are dehumanized and rickshaws made to appear out of place with the vision for the city. Analysis of the interview data shows that Calcuttans use discourses that construct an ambiguous status or betweenness for the pullers. For example, while some people describe the sub-human treatment of the pullers, others believe that the pullers have been harmed by this treatment. In another example of betweenness, rickshaws are portrayed and represented as value-less, but through other medium such as art and film, they fetch significant value. These discursive constructions of betweenness of the profession and pullers is revealed through an analysis of Calcutta's image change.

Attempts to transform place are not only embedded with multiple meanings and imaginations of place, but are also political. I now turn to a discussion of the political ecology literature as it applies to the urban context to understand why the rickshaw profession provides a useful example to understand how power struggles involve the fundamental need to control access to livelihood.

Political Ecology – Origins and Trajectories

Believed to have first been used by anthropologist Eric R. Wolf in 1972, "Political ecology" (PE) emerged from the earlier tradition of cultural ecological thought and sought to

explain the relationship between humans and their environment through more political, economic and structural procedures rather than just cultural practices attributed solely to human agency (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Bassett 1988; Peet and Watts 1996; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Walker 2005). A widely accepted definition for PE is elusive, given the many emphases within the field, but PE scholars generally agree that environmental change and ecological conditions is the product of political processes (Robbins 2004; Walker 2005). The discipline evolved as scholars critiqued and challenged apolitical ecologies, particularly in the context of the role of the state in world development and sustainability initiatives (Robbins 2004). With the publication of the Brundtland Report, "Our Common Future" by the World Commission on Environment and Development which placed the blame for environmental degradation squarely on marginalized people in the developing world, political ecologists countered these claims. Influenced by Marxism, political ecologists attempted to explain environmental degradation not as a Third World phenomena as suggested by the Brundtland Report, but as a fundamental feature of capitalism and development in advanced countries of the North (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Robbins 2004). Additionally, Marxist approaches also enabled PE scholars to examine and explain the increasing social injustices and inequalities which resulted from capitalism's impact on the environment. However, political ecologists did note that capitalism was not the only factor that contributed to environmental degradation—the role of the state in advancing its own political interests was equally important. Thus, PE scholars sought to demonstrate a more complex understanding of how power relations influence human-environment interactions.

As a general rule of thumb, political ecologists recognize that environmental change alters social and economic inequalities because oftentimes some actors gain at the expense of

others. Political ecologists also realize that politics forms the basis for how power is exercised between actors (Robbins 2004, adapted from Bryant and Bailey 1997). Therefore, while power reflects the ability of one actor to control the environment of another, political ecology developed a concern with the resistance to that power (Bryant 1998). A central theme in PE which guides examinations and analyses of environmental change is that conflict emerges when people's rights and access over their livelihood are challenged. In other words, conflict is intimately associated with rights to and access over social and material resources.

As an extension of the above themes from PE, a recent trajectory has been in the urban context where rights and access are influenced by complex human-environment relations in a socially constructed environment (Gandy 2006; Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006). Historically, the urban context was ignored as a potential source of environmental problems, but due to the forces of globalization urban areas are recognized as a driving force behind environmental degradation and a site of power struggles. However, urban political ecology (UPE) received criticism on the basis of the term 'nature' in the urban context. Urban political ecologists defend their position by arguing that urban environments emerge out of natural resources and social processes (Heynen et al. 2006). Hence, an integral part of UPE is to critically examine the processes which produce urban environments. Since the urban arena is socially constructed, rights to and access over social and material resources produce urban environments and form the fundamental basis for UPE scholarship. Moreover, Heynen et al. (2006, 899) call for further studies on urban areas because, according to these authors, "…discussions about global environmental problems and the possibilities for a 'sustainable' future customarily ignore the urban origin of many of these problems" and

these are also sites for widespread social inequalities from uneven development initiatives (Escobar 2011). Therefore, urban political ecologists use themes from PE to examine and explore the urban context in order to gain a deeper understanding of how power, control, and resistance interact to produce urban natures.

Extending this research tradition, I use themes from political ecology, particularly the role of actors and acts of resistance and apply them to the urban context of Calcutta to analyze how power and control are negotiated in Calcutta. These multiple themes from political ecology provide a valuable foundation for understanding the complexities of the human-environment relationship in Calcutta. Further, these themes have proved useful to discerning how power and control are manipulated by even traditionally weaker actors in urban areas with the primary intention of maintaining access to their livelihood.

In summary, I use the conceptual frameworks of cultural politics and place making and urban image change ideas to illustrate how culture is a dynamic, continually contested process inherently bound to how space is conceptualized as groups negotiate their place in cities. Further, using a framework of urban political ecology, I elaborate on how politics plays a fundamental role as powerful and less powerful actors negotiate their vested interests by employing various acts of resistance to power and control. Overall, the frameworks applied in this study seek to provide a critical analysis of how politics intertwines with space to influence who belongs where, how groups challenge and manipulate powerful state policies over space, and the impact of these on the social and cultural composition of the city with specific reference to the rickshaw pullers of Calcutta.

Conceptual Frameworks

In the following sections, I provide an overview of the two conceptual frameworks used for article one and two which have helped expand on the notions of culture as a contested process of meaning-making and the use of space as a site of cultural struggle. In the third section, I provide a synopsis of the urban political ecology framework applied to article three which expounds the role of actors and the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the rickshaw ban.

Cultural Politics and Place making

Scholarship on the informal economy abounds across the world with emphases which span the birth, evolution, and dynamics of professions to politics, gender issues, and social relationships within them (Bartlett 1990; Ong 1991; Grieco, Turner and Kwakye 1995; Bromley 1998; Wright 1998; Kulshreshtha and Singh 2001; Pratt 2004; Tambulasi and Kayuni 2008). More recently, geographers and urban scholars have examined the impact on informal trades as a result of policy initiatives which seek to change the image of cities (Jones and Varley 1994; Siemiatycki 2006). Scholars argue that the expanse of informal work provides several functions such as sustaining a country's economy (Bartlett 1990), offering an employment opportunity (Bromley 1978), and providing an environmental benefit (Whitelegg and Williams 2000) and therefore must be given additional consideration. However, while we know much about how policies impact informal professions we are yet to engage significantly with the use and value of workers in the informal economy with local residents and place. In other words, we know little about how workers participate and negotiate in their own place making. Therefore, in this study I examine closely the relationship between politics and urban policy to understand how less powerful groups culturally embed themselves in the lives of residents through which they make a place for

themselves. Using the ideas of cultural politics and place making helps to gather insights about how some groups use power to dominate who belongs where and other groups challenge these hegemonic practices by assimilating themselves into the cultural and social lives of residents. These ideas have allowed me to engage with how informal economic activities, such as rickshaw pulling, are not necessarily at odds with globalizing cities, but in fact can be a resource if firmly and consciously integrated into future planning needs and requirements in cities of the global south. Only with a conscious consideration of these types of professions, may social injustices in the developing world be diminished.

Urban Image Change

Increasingly, cities throughout the developing world are undergoing massive restructuring and modernization initiatives in order to gain a competitive edge and attract more investment (Yeoh 2005; Siemiatycki 2006). Several scholars have investigated the social impacts of such changes and the resulting exclusion of marginalized and other less powerful groups as a result of modernization initiatives (Atkinson and Laurier 1998; Bromley 1998; Beazley 2000; Vicari 2001). Significantly also, Lee (2006) argues that city image change and investment do not share a direct relationship, but that city image is only one part of investment decisions. These studies indicate that image change and ideas about image-making share a relationship and impact residents. However, we know very little about how local residents perceive and imagine their cities and the value of informal professions to them. These perceptions can prove useful when undertaking plans for an image change. Therefore, using the urban image change discourse in Calcutta, I draw on Creswell's (1996) arguments about what is in place or out of place, to expand the understanding about how rickshaws seem to be at odds with the city. Additionally, I use ideas from Stallybrass and

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White (1986) to show how the dehumanization of the pullers lead to their undesirability and relegates them as out of place. I examine the contradictions, dualisms, and paradoxes prevalent in the image change discourse in Calcutta to assess the contrasting visions which authorities and local residents have for their city and the place of rickshaws in Calcutta. In all, I provide a critical analysis of how in spite of the attempt to promote a positive image for Calcutta, contradictions exist and instead of being out of place with imaginations and visions for the city, the rickshaw profession occupies a discursively constructedstatus of betweenness in Calcutta as the city's image is refashioned. From a policy point of view, these findings are important as planners ascertain the role played by informal work in cities and in the lives of residents.

Urban Political Ecology

I engage themes from political ecology with its specific emphasis on politics to analyze the human-environment milieu of Calcutta. The urban context is increasingly coming under scrutiny, as plans and policies affect already marginalized groups and impact their rights and access to material and social production (Heynen et al. 2006). A trend in political ecology is to assess the role of multiple competing and conflicting actors who constantly negotiate rights and access to social resources (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Peluso 1994; Robbins 2004). Further, scholars have shown that as a result of resistance (both active and passive), marginalized groups are able to maintain control over their social resources (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Schmink and Wood 1992; Campbell 1996). I use themes from political ecology such as the role of actors, acts of resistance, and power and control strategies and apply them to the urban context in Calcutta to gain insights about how human beings negotiate access to their livelihood. Through these negotiations, rickshaw pullers are able to

resist the ban, control access to their livelihood, and thereby, maintain the production of urban nature in Calcutta. This study bears relevance to scholars and policy makers who seek to assess the complexity of the human-environment context and understand how impacts on access and rights over one's livelihood have the potential for persistent conflict. Overall, authorities can benefit via an awareness of how traditionally marginalized groups regulate, control, and negotiate access to their social and material resources.

The Research Questions

This dissertation engages the theories of cultural politics and place making, urban image change discourses and their impacts, and the role of actors and social resistance to analyze how rickshaws and their pullers persist for over a century in Calcutta in spite of attempts to eradicate the profession. The central research questions which I address in this dissertation are as follows:

1. What functions and role do the rickshaws and their pullers play in the city of Calcutta and in the lives of residents?

2. Why are the rickshaws and their pullers considered an anachronism in Calcutta and how have they resisted their eradication from the city?

3. What implications does this have for the rickshaws pullers as Calcutta's image is refashioned?

4. What does this mean for the production of urban nature in the city of Calcutta?

Overview of Methods

I employed grounded theory methods of semi-structured, open-ended interviews and the collection and analysis of archival and secondary sources of data as described by

Charmaz (2004). I conducted preliminary fieldwork in the month of December 2008, followed by in-depth field work from May – August 2009 and follow-up fieldwork in December 2009. I collected a total of 83 semi-structured interviews which includes 51 interviews with rickshaw pullers (Appendix 1), 7 with rickshaw owners (Appendix 2), 6 with government officials (Appendix 3) and 19 with the general public (Appendix 4) who use the rickshaws. Interviews were conducted in Hindi with the rickshaw pullers and on average lasted for approximately 35-45 minutes. Government officials and the general public were interviewed in English with an average of one hour allotted to each interview. A mixture of English and Hindi was used to interview the rickshaw owners and interviews typically lasted approximately one hour. I used a semi-structured interview guide which permitted the cross comparison of interviewee responses and also provided the rich qualitative data for analysis. Questions of a semi-structured nature contained questions about one-word definitions of the rickshaw, its pullers, and the city. For example, I asked simple "yes" and "no" questions about whether rickshaws cause traffic congestion or taint the image of the city. Questions of an open-ended nature allowed the respondents to think and reflect and elicited the more nuanced responses. Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study (see Appendix 5 for IRB approval) with all associated survey instruments and confidentiality agreements (For IRB approved interview guides see Appendices 1-4).

I initially used snowball sampling to conduct interviews since I had identified informants through the literature or during preliminary fieldwork. But, I encountered a methodological difficulty with the snowball process. Interviewees typically referred me to another person in the same geographical area. Thus, to incorporate a greater degree of geographical variation, I introduced stratified purposive sampling. This procedure brought

spatial variation to my interviews as I could visit rickshaw stands at multiple locations in the city to interview the pullers.

As recommended by Cope (2008), I used the open-ended interview strategy to code the interviews. In this strategy, the data is examined in stages by first applying descriptive codes and then following with analytical codes. Descriptive codes reflect the respondents own words while analytical codes are the ones I derived by carefully examining the descriptive codes. The reason I chose this strategy was to remain as close to the respondent's own words and quotes as possible. Additionally, I used discourse analysis to examine texts and visuals in government documents, government websites, Calcutta guidebooks, and media reports and to deconstruct the open-ended interviews.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation uses the three article format as prescribed by the Department of Geography at Oklahoma State University. Each stand-alone article (Chapters 2-4), focuses on three distinct, yet related, conceptual frameworks from cultural geography, urban geography, and urban political ecology. Each article is an attempt to answer the research questions within the realm of cultural politics and place making, urban image change and planning, and the role of actors and resistance movements in the urban political ecology trajectory. Some of the research questions overlap and are addressed in more than one article within this dissertation, however each article makes a distinctly different contribution. Article one (Chapter 2) contributes to ideas about how politics and culture interrelate and influence one another and the procedures used by marginalized groups to contest their spatial and social exclusion while simultaneously negotiating a place for themselves. Article two (Chapter 3) elaborates on the contrasting geographical imaginations and local perceptions of image

change in cities while simultaneously showing how an informal profession assumes an ambiguous status of betweenness. Article three (Chapter 4) expands on the role of actors and the politics involved in how groups resist hegemonic state policies which seek to impose power and control over less powerful groups. Chapter overviews follow.

Chapter 2: Calcutta's Hand-Pulled Rickshaws: Cultural Politics and Place Making in a Globalizing City

This paper attempts to address questions 1, 2 and 3. Although the economic contributions of informal activities are widely known and are significant in developing economies, insufficient attention is given to their social and cultural contributions to society. The rickshaw profession in Calcutta is a part of the city's large informal economy, but very little is known about how and why the profession has persisted in the city for over a century and the role played by pullers in the lives of local residents. In this chapter, I analyze the rickshaw profession as a part of the informal economy in the city and reveal some of the overlooked aspects of the rickshaw profession. As an inter-generational profession, the pullers have firmly entrenched themselves in the urban fabric of the city and embedded themselves in the lives of the residents fulfilling vital personalized functions and services in addition to their significant role in transportation. For example, they act as transport guardians, they provide nighttime security, their earnings support their families in Calcutta's hinterland, and by virtue of access to red light districts they provide critical HIV/AIDS related information. As a result, the pullers have negotiated their place in the city by providing services which are currently not being fulfilled by anyone else. I also show how cultural politics is intertwined with hegemonic ideas about who belongs where in and how rickshaw pullers challenge these ideas by virtue of their embeddedness in Calcutta's society.

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Consequently, the pullers carve a niche for themselves in the lives of local people and the profession makes a place for itself within the city's fabric.

Chapter 3: Calcutta's Image Change: The Construction of Ambiguity and Betweenness of the Hand-Pulled Rickshaws

This paper attempts to answer research questions 2 and 3. As cities embrace the ideas of urbanization and modernization in an increasingly globalized world, the decision about what and who stays or goes is intimately linked to the imaginations of the economic and political elite. However, these geographical imaginations of Calcutta's urban space offer significant contradictions which vary between residents and the authorities. While several studies explore image change in the developed and developing worlds and the social exclusion which results, little attention has been placed on the changes to cities in India. Using the literature on urban image change debates, I show that Calcutta's rickshaws are imagined by some as an anachronism while others hold value in their services. Likewise, while the city is envisioned as an economic powerhouse by some, others believe the cultural and social facets of the city sets it apart from cities in India. Drawing on these paradoxes, I show that image making in Calcutta is a mix of ideas and geographical imaginations which along with a tendency to dehumanize the rickshaw pullers, makes them appear at odds with the image of the city. However, I show that rickshaws and their pullers are not really out of place in Calcutta, but through an analysis of local discourses they occupy an ambiguously constructed betweenness in the city and in the lives of residents. From a policy perspective, acknowledging and considering the betweenness of the rickshaws and their pullers provides a strong basis for future planning and services to residents.

Chapter 4: Banned but still in operation: an urban political ecology of the hand-pulled rickshaws in Calcutta

This paper is an attempt to answer questions 2 and 4. Political ecology's concern with how politics shapes the human-environment relationship offers tremendous significance in the urban context. Urban political ecology is an outcome of the attention being placed on cities as, arguably, cities are the centers of power and control and since they are socially constructed, they are in a constant state of production. Urban natures are produced as humans interact with their environment and access their means of social and material production. However, too often the ability of weaker groups to maintain control and negotiate access to their social and material resources is underestimated. In Calcutta, the government declared rickshaws illegal and banned the profession. In this paper, I show that through ongoing active and passive forms of resistance, rickshaw pullers have negotiated control and access to their means of livelihood. They have actively engaged in strikes, protests, and demonstrations and passively embedded themselves in the cultural and social milieu of the city to avoid their dismissal. Additionally, the role of multiple competing and complementary actors involved with the rickshaw ban has perpetuated the visibility of the issue and prevented an amicable solution. Through the role of multiple actors and conflicts surrounding resistance, pullers have negotiated control over their livelihood, provided services to residents, and perpetuated the profession in the city. Consequently, an urban political ecology approach used in this study has emphasized local strategies and political objectives which interplay in achieving urban social justice.

Dissertation Significance

This study helps to develop a better understanding of how marginalized groups such as the rickshaw pullers have resisted attempts at their eradication by firmly entrenching themselves in the socio-cultural lives of Calcutta's residents. As a result, the pullers have not only ensured their own social and material well-being, but have simultaneously contributed to place making in Calcutta. Also, through contrasting geographical imaginations and discourses of local residents, I have shown that rickshaws and their pullers occupy an ambiguous status of betweenness in Calcutta where they are neither in place nor out of place, legal or illegal, human or animal. They have also engaged in social resistance, both in active and passive ways by making use of the machinery at their disposal, such as strikes, lockouts, demonstrations, and bribes to defend their rights to access their means of social and material production. Using the political machinery and adapting to it, the rickshaw pullers and owners have negotiated their rights and access to their livelihoods. In doing so, the rickshaw pullers have successfully defended the demise of their profession. Moreover, multiple agencies and institutions working to either defend the pullers or eradicate them create a complex socio-political environment which defies easy explanation, but coincidentally helps to perpetuate the profession. Likewise, conflicting visions of the city held by several different stakeholders such as the government and the general public produce an environment of contestation with no readily discernible outcomes.

Through the rickshaw profession I have shown that weaker groups have the power and control to maintain access to their resources, and they will consistently negotiate their position. Moreover, informal professions are not on the brink or marginal to the socio-economic and cultural lives of residents in cities, but perform essential functions which

contribute to not only their own well-being, but give character to place and contribute to the well-being of residents as well. We need further studies on professions within informal economies throughout cities of the global south who face the fear of extinction on aesthetic grounds and visually unappealing discourses. In fact, these professions help sustain several millions around the world and must be viewed more critically in relation to the role they perform in place making and how their presence reduces social injustices.

CHAPTER II

The following chapter has been published in the *Geographical Review* and appears in this dissertation with the journal's permission.

Calcutta's Hand-Pulled Rickshaws: Cultural Politics and Place Making in a Globalizing City

Abstract

For more than a century, hand-pulled rickshaws have been a prominent part of Calcutta's cityscape. Under the veil of modernization, progress, and globalization, however, the state government of West Bengal has declared that rickshaws cause traffic congestion and constitute an exploitative use of human labor. Despite a government-imposed ban, rickshaws continue to ply the streets of central Calcutta. Based on interviews with rickshaw owners, operators, public officials, and local residents, this study examines the cultural politics surrounding rickshaw pulling in Calcutta. This article shows that rickshaw pullers, or rickshaw wallahs, who operate as part of the informal economy, provide an expansive range of services not limited to transportation. Indeed, the rickshaw wallahs form an integral part of Calcutta's social fabric, having made a place for themselves by facilitating social interaction and challenging hegemonic ideas and practices about who belongs where.

Keywords: Calcutta, cultural politics, informal economy, Kolkata, place making, rickshaws

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In the heart of Calcutta, shoppers, scooters, taxis, and cars simultaneously jostle for space.[1] Amid blaring horns, hawkers selling their wares, and throngs of pedestrians, the rickshaw *wallah* (rickshaw man) sits calmly in his vehicle. Soon an old man with a walking stick in hand approaches and asks for a ride. An unspoken language commences between the rickshaw wallah and his passenger. The rickshaw wallah takes the walking stick from the old man, and helps him alight the rickshaw—no bargaining for a fare, no need to specify a destination, just an understanding between the passenger and the puller.[2] It is an understanding based on a well-established relationship built on familiarity, trust, and dependability. The hand-pulled rickshaws of Calcutta constitute the last remaining pedestrian form of transport (in a sizeable fleet) in existence in the world today.

As an economic activity, rickshaw pulling operates within the informal economy. Across the developing world, the informal economy adds vigor to the economy and absorbs a significant portion of the labor force—perhaps as much as 30 percent in Latin America, 59 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 54 percent in Indonesia (Bartlett 1990). In addition, informal economy activities contribute to a significant proportion of a country's gross domestic product (GDP). For example, Cambodia's informal economy contributes to 62 percent of the country's GDP (Kawakami *et al*. 2011). In India, out of a total labor force of 399 million, in excess of 370 million (93 percent) people are likely engaged in the informal economy, which contributes to about 60 percent of India's net domestic product (Sakthivel and Joddar 2006; Kulshreshtha 2011). In Calcutta, estimates suggest that 40 to 50 percent of the city's labor force is engaged in the informal economy (Chakravorty 2000; Hand Rickshaw Pullers of Kolkata n.d.).

Research on the informal economy now spans developing and developed countries, as well as many social science disciplines. Numerous studies address the evolution, operation, regulation, and impacts of informal economy trades and professions in Latin America (Bromley 1978; Bartlett 1990; Portes and Schauffler 1993; Jones and Varley 1994; Bromley 1998), Africa (Amponsah *et al*. 1994; Grieco, Turner, and Kwakye 1995; King 2001; Tambulasi and Kayuni 2008), and East and South Asia (Breman 1983; Shaw 1985; Kulshreshtha and Singh 2001; Huang 2009). Significantly, Melissa Wright (1998), Geraldine Pratt (2004) and Aihwa Ong (1991) have extended this discussion to show how the construction of gendered spaces influences social relations, work, and feminist politics in the informal economy.

Geographers have also contributed to this scholarship in noteworthy ways. The research of Rosemary D. F. Bromley has yielded important insights into the expansion of the informal economy, especially in a Latin American context, and has drawn attention to "the neglected spatial dimension of informal commerce" (1998, 245). Her study of street traders in Quito, for example, demonstrates that their presence in the historic city center diverges from the image of the city held by municipal officials and others interested in promoting the city center as a tourist destination (Bromley 1998). Other geographers, including John Whitelegg and Nick Williams, have demonstrated the utility of rickshaws from a transportation and sustainability perspective (Whitelegg 1997; Whitelegg and Williams 2000).

Our study of rickshaw wallahs aims to extend this geographical scholarship. Like Bromley (1998), we focus on the informal economy as a site of cultural struggle but, in doing so, we position our study at the juncture of cultural politics and urban policy in the

context of a globalizing city. Cultural politics refers to the ways in which different groups

and individuals construct, alter, deploy, and contest cultural meanings and representations

in order to advance specific interests, often to gain power or alter the social constellations

of power. We share Susan Wright's view that "culture" might best be defined "as a

contested process of meaning-making" (1998, 9). We consider the cultural and economic

dimensions of urban politics to be interwoven, a position maintained and substantiated by

a number of other scholars (for example, Massey 1994; Mitchell 1995; Jacobs and

Fincher 1998).

In Calcutta, the rickshaw has become a contested vehicle and symbol. Over the

past several years some state government leaders have sought to abolish rickshaws on the

grounds that their use constitutes an exploitative form of labor, causes traffic congestion,

and reflects negatively on the city. In other words, to some the rickshaw serves as

anachronistic form of transportation and relic of the past that is unfit for a globalizing

city. Like Whitelegg and Williams (2000), we contend that rickshaw pullers provide a

necessary service in the city. We arrive at this position by direct engagement with the

rickshaw pullers and others who use or are familiar with their services. To this end,

Hyrapiet carried out initial fieldwork in Calcutta in 2008. She conducted interviews

during the summer of 2009 and follow-up interviews in late 2009 and early 2010 with

rickshaw wallahs, rickshaw owners, the general public, representatives of non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), and government officials. Hyrapiet interviewed a

total of 83 Calcuttans: fifty-one rickshaw wallahs, seven rickshaw owners, nineteen

members of the public and NGOs, and six government officials. A native of Calcutta,

Hyrapiet brought important firsthand knowledge of the city, which enhanced the

credibility of the project and greatly facilitated the research process. Using an ethnographically informed, dialogical approach, we sought to gain a fuller understanding of not only the livelihood of rickshaw pullers but also their lifeworld, including the social networks and interactions that give structure and meaning to their lives. This approach has enabled us to excavate the ways in which the rickshaw pullers have made a place for themselves and their livelihood in the daily functioning of Calcutta. More specifically, we show how cultural politics and place making in Calcutta involve struggles over the meanings of progress, work, and mobility.

This article proceeds in the following manner. First, we present an historical context of Calcutta that highlights the arrival and use of the rickshaw within the city. Next, we turn to an examination of the cultural politics that surround rickshaw pulling. In the process, we discuss who the rickshaw wallahs are, how they live, the services they provide, as well as the efforts to prohibit their operation. We then show how these services, and the rickshaw pulling livelihood itself, facilitate social interaction in the city and contribute to place making. We situate our findings about the rickshaw profession within the broader framework of the informal economy and similar professions in the developing world which are perceived as being out of place and at odds with conventional views of development. We conclude with a few policy recommendations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Calcutta, as we know it today, emerged from three villages: Govindpur, Sutanuti, and Kalikata. Job Charnock, an English trader, laid the foundations of the city in 1690, before which Calcutta consisted mainly of marshes with patches of jungle growth (Ghosh

1989; Chakravorty 2000; Sarkar 2006). The city is built on a levee on the left bank of the River Hooghly, which makes its western parts higher than its central and eastern regions. Therefore, during heavy rains, water tends to accumulate in central and eastern Calcutta and water-logging occurs frequently (Ghosh 1950; Ghosh 1989; Sarkar 2006). In the eighteenth century, the British negotiated with the Mughal emperor to acquire thirty-eight new villages to accommodate the expansion of British trade and to provide room for the city to grow.

The disorderly nature of Calcutta's urban growth has attracted derisive comments since as early as 1886, when Rudyard Kipling penned his famous poem, "A Tale of Two Cities." In this work Kipling likened Calcutta's chaotic and indiscriminate growth to that of a fungus. In a 1911 report, E. P. Richards, the Chief Engineer of the Calcutta Improvement Trust, highlighted the haphazard and irregular pattern of Calcutta's street network. He showed that the most densely settled areas were served by the fewest streets, and that main roads existed only as fragments in some parts of the city (Chatterjee 1990). In view of these circumstances, the rickshaw, which had been invented by the Japanese in the late nineteenth century, perhaps offered an unparalleled option for vehicular transport though we do not mean to suggest that Richards' report directly spurred their adoption (Hand Rickshaw Pullers of Kolkata n.d.). Although the British introduced rickshaws to India in the hill station of Shimla, the rickshaw likely arrived in Calcutta with the Chinese about 1914 (Unnayan 1981; Nair 1990). Indeed, the Chinese took advantage of the rickshaw, initially using it as a primary conveyance for goods. Subsequently they sought permission from municipal authorities to use rickshaws to transport passengers (Unnayan 1981; Nair 1990). Thus, the rickshaw has existed in Calcutta for over a century.

Independence in 1947 and the partition of India and Pakistan greatly affected the growth of Calcutta as refugees arrived by the millions. By this time and by virtue of their situation outside the caste system, a number of Chinese had taken up tanning, an occupation avoided by high caste Hindus (Thomas 1997). Meanwhile, shanties or slums emerged as people crowded into the city, set up make-shift homes, and provided low-wage labor and services, among them rickshaw pulling (Chakraborty 1990; Bhattacharya 1997; Thomas 1997). Calcutta's informal economy burgeoned as a result of the entry of immigrants into Calcutta, the partition of Bengal, and the influx of refugees into the city without a corresponding growth in employment opportunities. The push to modernize India that came in the aftermath of the country's independence resulted in the gradual removal of rickshaws from cities across the country except in Calcutta, where rickshaws increased in number (Breman 1983).

Historically, development plans in West Bengal in the post-colonial phase were based on Western planning models, funded primarily through the Ford Foundation, and were thought to be transferable to developing economies. The Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO) was created in 1961 "to receive the advice of Ford Foundation experts" and the organization was later entrusted with implementing the Basic Development Plan (BDP) (Pal 2008, 44. See also Munshi 1978; Chakravorty and Gupta 1996). The BDP provided a program for economic development and outlined target areas for growth, but the BDP ignored the ubiquitous urban informal economy and its role in the economic development of the city (Banerjee and Chakravorty 1994). As a result, the informal economy and the role of rickshaws in the economy were never clearly identified, and recent development initiatives have targeted the rickshaw for removal.

In an effort to end rickshaw operations, the state government in 2006 amended the Hackney Carriage Act of 1919 (the act which governs the operation of rickshaws in Calcutta), eliminating all terms related to rickshaws. Coincidentally, these actions against rickshaws followed the announcement of the proposed Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission for India—an initiative with an underlying focus on reworking the visual aesthetics of cities.[3] The state government also declared that the rickshaw wallahs would receive no rehabilitation or remuneration (Bhattacharjee 2006).

Removal efforts aside, there are officially 5,945 rickshaws in the city today with approximately 18,000 rickshaw wallahs and 2,500 owners engaged in the profession, but the actual numbers of rickshaws and pullers are probably significantly higher (Hand Rickshaw Pullers of Kolkata n.d.). During the monsoons or waterlogged conditions when cars and trucks stall in the deep waters, it is the rickshaw, more than any other vehicle, which is used to traverse the streets. Even government ministers resort to taking rickshaws when the streets flood. One rickshaw wallah recalled the following incident: "I took Jyoti Basu [former Chief Minister of West Bengal] on Amherst Street to the *thana* [police station]. Four cops stopped me and made me take Jyoti Basu across the street, his car had broken down…[in the floods]." In addition to people, rickshaw wallahs also transport mattresses, furniture, household supplies, and goods for small enterprises (Figure 1).

Fig. 1— Rickshaws transport schoolchildren and bulky goods. (Photograph by Hyrapiet, June 2009)

The Greater Calcutta Metropolitan Area covers approximately 1,851 km^2 and has a population of over 15 million (KMDA 2011). By contrast, the city of Calcutta, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), is 185 km^2—an area slightly larger than Washington, D.C. In central Calcutta, the population density exceeds 23,000 people per square kilometer (Whitelegg and Williams 2000; KMDA 2011). Calcutta is divided into fifteen boroughs and each borough is further subdivided into wards, roughly the equivalent of U.S. census tracts, with a total of 141 wards throughout the city (Sarkar 2006; KMC 2011). Rickshaw wallahs operate in ten of the city's fifteen boroughs and 100 wards, or approximately 70 percent of Calcutta's urban space (Figure 2). These ten boroughs correspond with the administrative and commercial core and residential area divisions, as described by Suprekas Ghosh (1950).
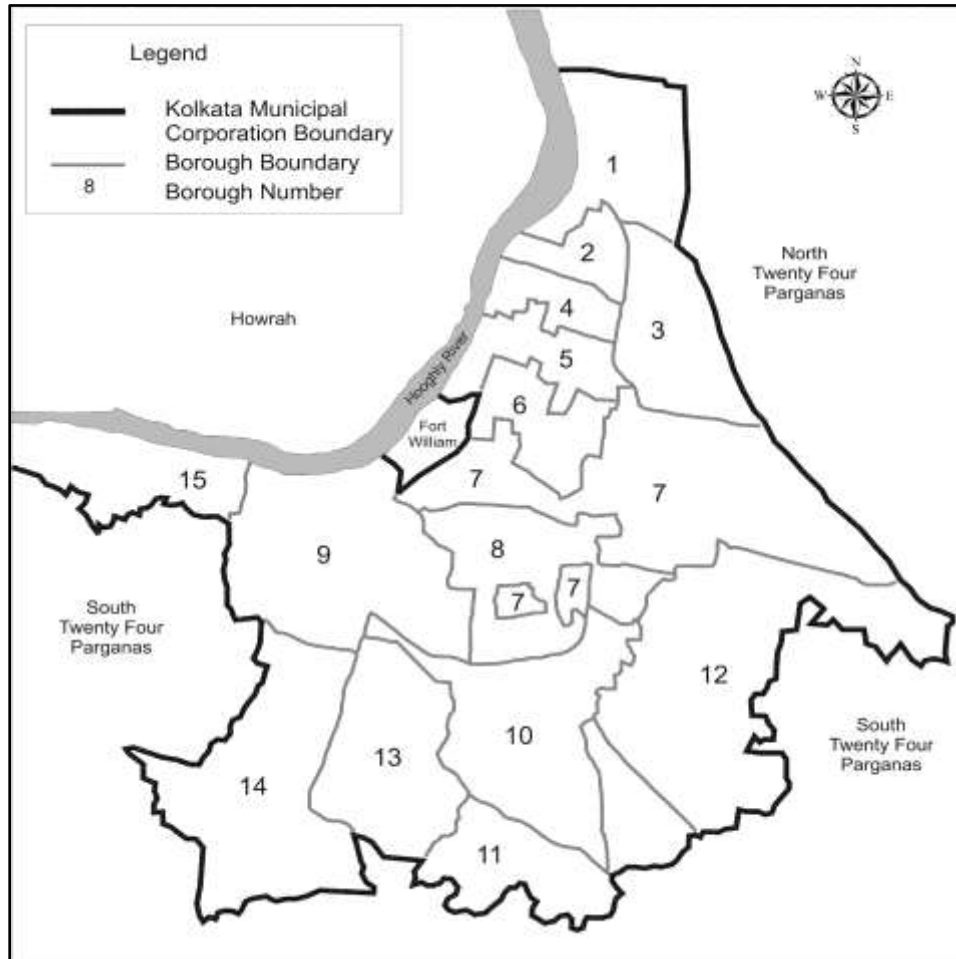
Fig. 2— The City of Calcutta, its boroughs, and bordering districts including Howrah and
24 Parganas. (Cartography by Hyrapiet)

Rickshaws are used more extensively in some parts of the commercial core for
transportation of goods as this area includes Calcutta's retail and wholesale markets
adjacent to the old residential district (Figure 3). The old residential district lies to the
north of the central city and is marked by densely congested housing, which includes
two- and three-story houses as well as palatial houses of the rich Bengalis. The newer
residential district occupies the east-central and southern parts of the city and, compared
to the old residential district, has a more planned configuration with broader roads and
more dispersed housing (Ghosh 1950; Halder and Basu 1982; Thomas 1997).
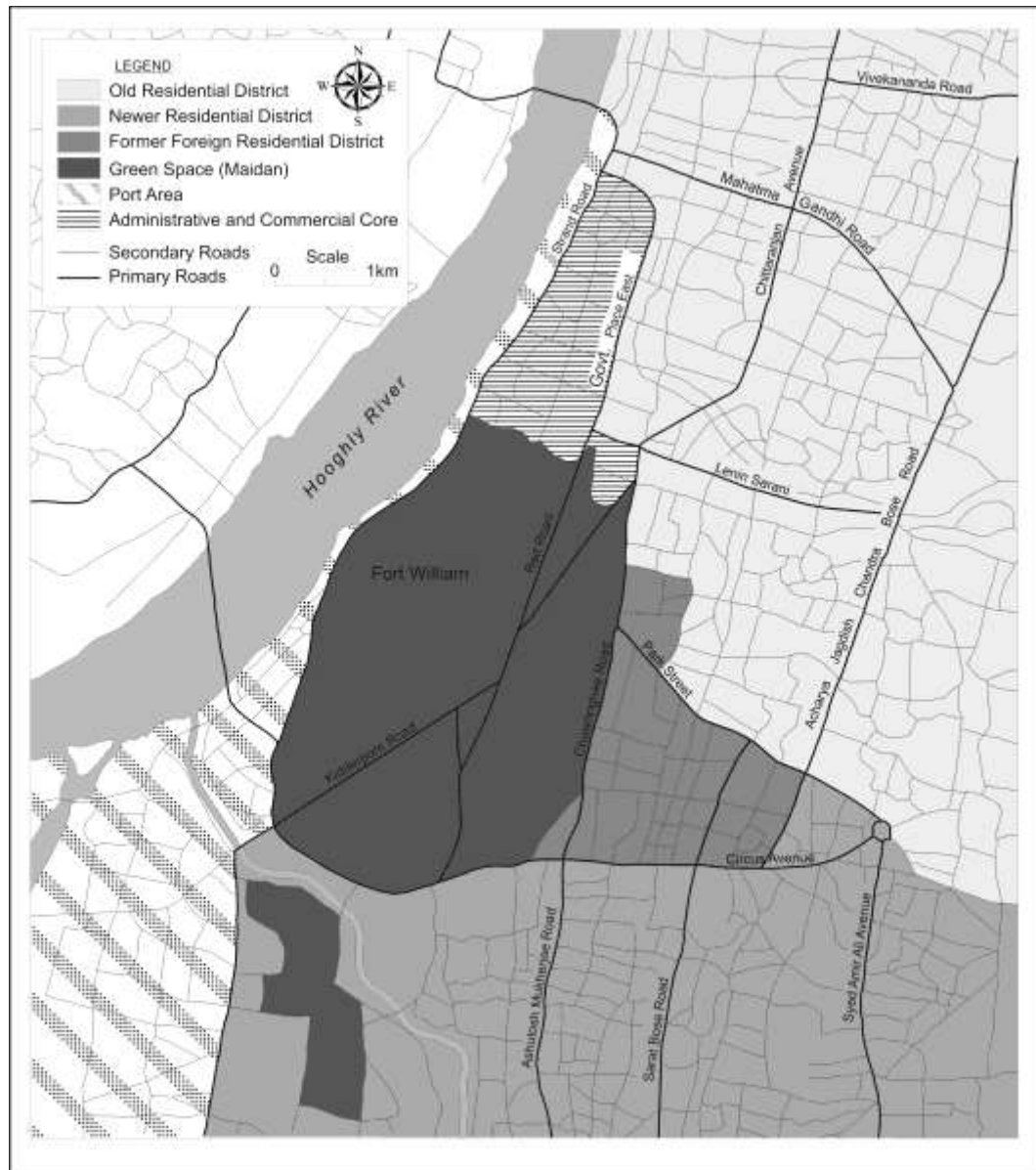
Fig. 3— Land use divisions in Calcutta. (Source: Ghosh, 1950, with updates)

In the old and newer residential districts rickshaw wallahs carry passengers on short distance trips to the local markets and will often also have monthly contracts for transporting children to and from school. Most of their trips take place along the *gali*, the narrow lanes and by-lanes that came into being as pedestrian pathways. Rarely, if at all, are other public or private transport operators found in the *gali* within these residential

areas or employed to perform these kinds of services. In fact, the authorities do not permit even cycle-rickshaws to enter central Calcutta because of accidents associated with pedestrians (Breman 1983; Bhattacharya 1997). Laws prevent rickshaws from operating in the remaining divisions of the city. This includes parts of the administrative and commercial core, Fort William and its surrounding area (the Maidan), some parts of the former foreign residential district, and the port area.

Hyrapiet interviewed rickshaw wallahs in the administrative and commercial core as well as the old and newer residential districts. Interview sites correspond with the locations of rickshaw stands, since these places afforded the best opportunities to meet and engage with rickshaw wallahs (Figure 4). Some rickshaw stands operate like the taxi ranks or stands found at airports, with each rickshaw wallah waiting his turn in line for the next passenger; however less systematic practices prevail at other rickshaw stands. None of the rickshaw stands is officially sanctioned or recognized today, though they were in the past. Thus, gaining access to and making use of rickshaw wallah services requires a certain degree of local knowledge.
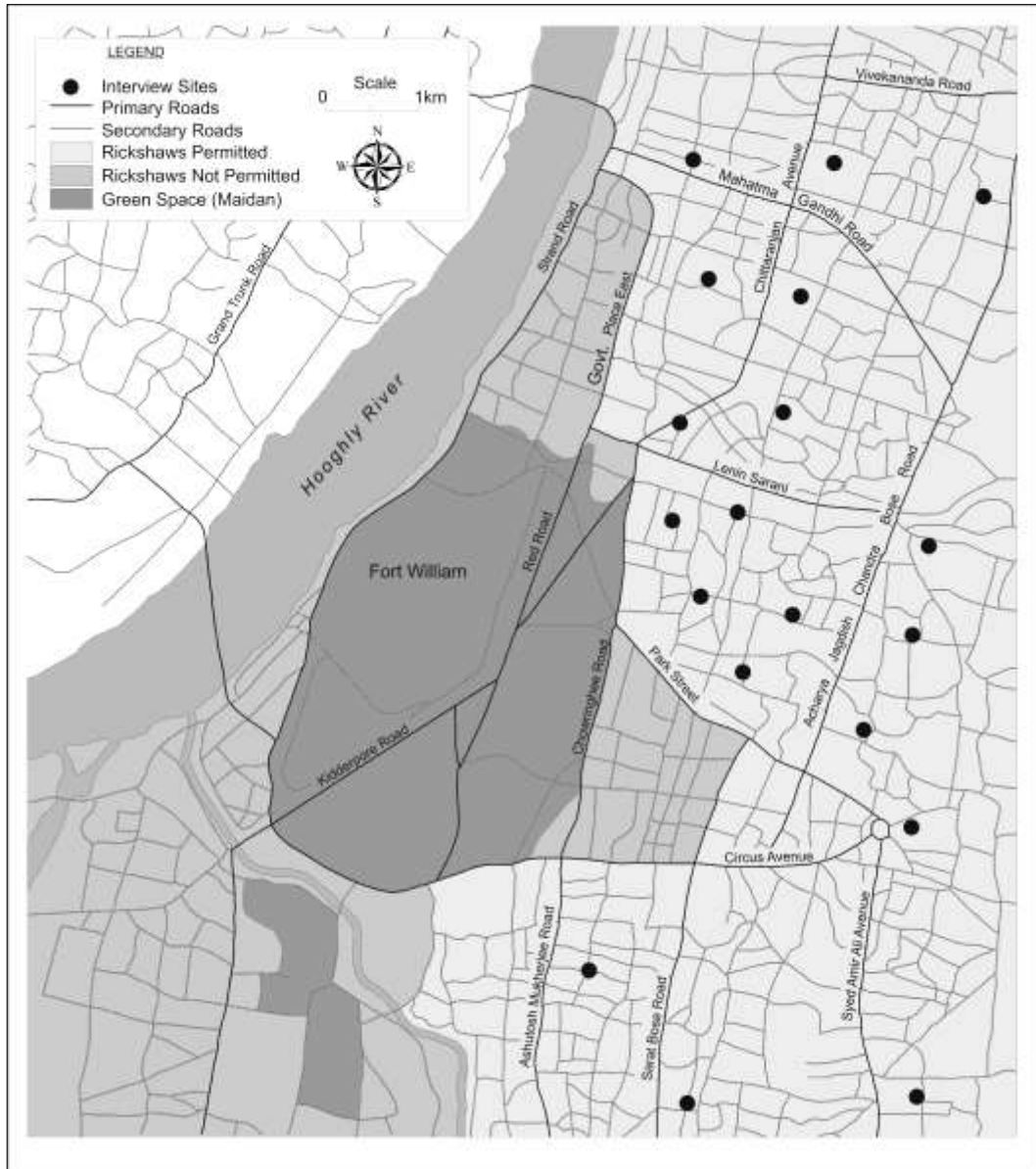
Fig. 4— The study area, including interview sites. (Cartography by Hyrapiet)

CULTURAL POLITICS AND WORK

Calcutta's rickshaw wallahs hail primarily from the states of Bihar and Jharkhand

(formerly also Bihar), and the majority are second or third generation pullers who have

worked in Calcutta for more than twenty-five years. Biharis have historically migrated to

Calcutta in search of employment, driven by push factors such as poverty and the dearth

of agricultural jobs in their home villages. None of the pullers interviewed owned land or

property before moving to the city. Likewise, very few are new entrants into the profession—perhaps a reflection of the impact of the proposed ban—and just a handful have been employed for forty-five to fifty years. Rickshaw wallahs earn anywhere between ₹1500 - ₹5000 (Approx. $30 - $98) per month.[4]

There exists a high degree of interdependence among rickshaw pullers and other forms of informal commerce (Chakravorty 2000; Hand Rickshaw Pullers of Kolkata n.d.). For example, rickshaw wallahs buy food from roadside vendors and in turn, roadside vendors use the rickshaws to transport their goods. Further, rickshaw wallahs remit their incomes to their families in the neighboring state of Bihar and thereby contribute to that state's earnings. As a result, the rickshaw profession not only fulfills household needs and supports other professions in the informal economy in the city, but on a larger scale, contributes to the income of Calcutta's hinterland area. By virtue of their social networks and the class and ethnic divisions within Calcutta, Biharis have maintained a strong association with the rickshaw-pulling profession.

Migrants from Bihar choose the rickshaw profession for several reasons. As previously suggested, migrants take advantage of their social connections. Once they arrive in the city they establish contact with a family member (typically a father or an uncle who is already a rickshaw wallah), friend, or other contact from their home village. The ease of learning how to pull a rickshaw also encourages the adoption of the profession. As explained by a rickshaw wallah, "my father used to pull a rickshaw; he taught me. It took me two days to learn, just left, right and directions." Additionally, rickshaw pulling requires no *punji* [capital/investment] on the part of the rickshaw wallah. Based on a referral from a friend or relative, a rickshaw wallah rents a rickshaw

from an owner. Contrary to popular misconceptions, rickshaw wallahs believe that their work is less physically demanding than other professions. As one rickshaw wallah affirmed, "I do not have the inclination to do other work…besides other work is physically challenging, there is less work in this, less physical strength." Another rickshaw wallah indicated that rickshaw pulling was even less strenuous than operating a cycle-rickshaw, "the work is light; light in comparison to a cycle-rickshaw in which one has to pull a lot."

The decision to pull a rickshaw also stems from the fact that this work offers more money and a good return on the labor invested in it. Many rickshaw wallahs noted that they had first sought employment in other trades and professions, particularly as masons, *coolies* (head-load porters), domestic servants, and waiters, before choosing to pull a rickshaw. As explained by another rickshaw wallah, "I used to do masonry work before rickshaw pulling, mixing sand and cement but it was only paying me ₹30 ($0.59) per month which was not enough, so I decided to pull a rickshaw." Or as stated by another rickshaw wallah, "I worked as a domestic servant for two to four years, but there was no profit in it. Rickshaw pulling was better, as a servant I would only get ₹1000 ($20) per month. What will that do?"

Rickshaw wallahs agree that they pull rickshaws out of *majboori* [the lack of options or helplessness] but that there is a degree of pride and independence which the profession affords. For example, pulling a rickshaw puts the reins of obligation in the hands of the puller himself and no one else. A rickshaw wallah elucidated this independence by comparing his previous work as a domestic servant. He explained "By working as a servant I am obligated to the owners; with a rickshaw I am not obligated to

anyone." More powerfully, another rickshaw wallah defined rickshaw pulling as a "Jai Hind" [Hail India] task because of its non-obligatory nature and the fact that he can choose to pull or not pull the rickshaw whenever he wants. With respect to the owners, the pullers are only obligated to pay the daily rent for the vehicle.[5] Also, because the rickshaw wallahs rent and do not own their vehicles, an added advantage is that they can take a leave of absence whenever they choose—another level of independence afforded by the rickshaw profession.

Like the pullers, rickshaw owners are second or third generation owners who run the business handed down to them by their fathers or grandfathers. The owners typically maintain a fleet consisting of five to 150 rickshaws, and rent them to the pullers at an average daily rate of approximately ₹20 ($0.39). Rickshaw owners tend to be either Biharis or native Bengalis. Owners and pullers share a common understanding and a bond of familiarity and trust with one another based on longstanding associations with each other which cut across generations. As a result, some owners permit the rickshaw wallahs to live in their garages for a nominal fee every month (Figure 5). Though their lives are far from glamorous, the rickshaw wallahs find in their livelihood a kind of escape from other economic and occupational oppressions as well as opportunities for self-empowerment.

Fig. 5—View of a *dera* (garage), one kind of living space for rickshaw wallahs. Rickshaw owners allow the rickshaw wallahs who rent rickshaws from them to live here. (Photograph by Hyrapiet, July 2009)

For rickshaw wallahs, their association with this profession and the work they perform provides a mechanism by which they can, materially and symbolically, achieve social and spatial mobility. These views stand in dramatic contrast to those of certain politicians who have sought to ban rickshaw pulling. One especially vocal opponent of rickshaw pulling has been Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal from 2000 to 2011. Though a member of the Communist party, his policies cultivated foreign investment even when it meant expropriating farmland to establish special economic zones. *The Economist* (2007) dubbed him "the capitalist communist."

Along with his neoliberalism and his push to turn Calcutta into a global city, Bhattacharjee also brought a modernist vision of Calcutta in which the rickshaw no longer belonged. As he expressed it, "[i]n the 21st century it is not right for a human being to pull another human being" (quoted in IGE 2006). His rationale draws on the

perception that rickshaw pulling is "inhuman" and inappropriate since rickshaws are "seen in no other city in the world" (quoted in *Hindu* 2006). In this view, Calcutta's rickshaws and rickshaw wallahs mark the city as an urban "other," and stand as unacceptable reminders of an anti-modern past. Rickshaw wallahs are not only perceived as being backward and inferior, they are also considered undisciplined. As explained by one respondent, "They [government officials] want to remove their caste, they want to remove the uneducated, the uncultured [rickshaw wallahs] because they lift their *lungis* [to relieve themselves] whenever they want." Lungis are the skirt-like garments worn by males. For an example, refer again to Figure 1.

In a similar vein, several middle- and upper-class Bengali respondents described rickshaw wallahs as "monkeys," and said they disliked the pullers "spitting on the streets." Thus, cultural and economic representations of the rickshaw wallahs become intertwined so that attacking the rickshaw profession comes across as an assault on ethnic Biharis. One Calcutta resident perceived the ethnic dimensions of the situation this way: "It's coming out of the Bengali *Bhadralok's* [a genteel class] vanity and their ethnic bigotry; they want to strike at the non-Bengali, Hindi proletariat in the city."

Two important ideas follow from this discussion. First, these cultural politics show how understandings of cultural difference, or to borrow from Jane M. Jacobs and Ruth Fincher, "regimes of difference" can simultaneously enable the marginalization of some groups and the empowerment of others (1998, 2). In the process, certain cultural practices become bound up with ideas about economic development. Second, these cultural politics reveal the divergent ways by which the social construction of place proceeds. We take up this issue in the next section.

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RICKSHAW WALLAHS AND PLACE MAKING

As a megacity, Calcutta confronts many challenges such as poverty, pollution, infrastructure problems, corruption, and traffic congestion, yet Calcuttans often express a strong sense of place and attachment to the city. According to one NGO representative, "Calcutta has become my home now and I would not live anywhere else really. I would have a choice to live maybe even abroad but I would never think of it, because I miss being here." Scholars have also attested to these sentiments. In the words of the anthropologist and social observer Frederic Thomas, "Calcuttans seem to accept conditions as they are. In a perverse way they also love the city" (1997, 7). Or as summed up by Jan Breman, many Calcuttans take great pride in the hospitality, culture, and heritage of the city despite the pollution, nightmarish transport, and crowds (1983).

This attachment to the city comes from more than just its built-up environment. The people, their interactions, and relationships also contribute to the development of a sense of belonging in and connection to the city. Much of the work the rickshaw wallahs perform constitutes a kind of place making that enmeshes them in the routines of daily life and from which they have generated considerable social capital. For example, without the rickshaw, public transport via the many lanes and by-lanes of Calcutta would be non-existent. Rickshaws, therefore, permit people to commute safely and facilitate their social interaction with friends. As explained by an older citizen, "the rickshaws are convenient and comfortable. If removed, it [sic] will affect my lifestyle to some extent; I will have to walk short distances." Or, as explained by another citizen, "I will have to stop going to the market. I cannot go alone and taxis won't come up here. I like going

marketing but will have to stop doing it." The use of rickshaws for daily marketing is invaluable for many because the rickshaw pullers are less likely to refuse to carry freshly cut meat or household pets.

The rickshaw wallahs also help sustain the *adda*, or the long conversations held among friends, colleagues, or neighbors. The adda remains a distinguishing feature of cultural life in Calcutta's *paras*, or neighborhoods. According to Pratap Kumar Ray, the adda "*...* is not simply conversation, or discussion, or debate, or gossip; and yet it is all these" (1990). Because rickshaws operate in the paras and are used frequently by middle-aged and older citizens, the rickshaw wallahs facilitate daily adda sessions in Calcutta's localities. This is especially the case at the local markets, where adda sessions sometimes spontaneously develop .The fact that rickshaw wallahs will wait as long as necessary for their passengers enhances the value of the service that the pullers provide. In the words of one respondent, "They [rickshaw wallahs] will go no matter where you want. [They are] very convenient; taxis won't wait, rickshaws will wait for you. I go to my friend's house and the rickshaw man waits two hours for me there." Likewise, rickshaw wallahs help maintain social interaction for Calcutta during seasonal disruptions to normal city life when the city floods. In these situations, although the cost of a rickshaw ride may double or triple, the rickshaw keeps Calcutta moving by transporting people to office and to school.

Rickshaw wallahs also provide personal door-to-door services including carrying bags of groceries, helping with children, and delivering water to households from local municipal tube wells. Thinking about the welfare of her children, one respondent said, "without the rickshaws I will be totally lost and my son will need a coolie to carry his

schoolbag of bricks." Because rickshaw wallahs act as transport guardians for schoolchildren, they provide a service to parents that is considered difficult to replace. The trust that has developed between the rickshaw wallah, the parents, and other *para* residents derives from decades of interaction and familiarity. Furthermore, young and old women extensively use rickshaws because they know the local pullers and feel very safe riding in their vehicles. Comparing them to taxi drivers, one woman explained that taxi drivers are much less invested in the safety of their passengers. She attributed this to the fact that taxi drivers do not give much thought to the places they take their passengers, the sites where they drop them off, or what might happen to them once they leave the taxi. In her view, "for single ladies who are traveling alone .... [r]ickshaws are dependable, good guys [who will] take you through the lanes but bring you home without a problem."

Because the rickshaw wallah sleeps near his vehicle (Figure 6), the rickshaw is

Fig. 6— A rickshaw wallah sleeps with his rickhaw on a pavement in central Calcutta. (Photograph by Hyrapiet, July 2009)

readily available around the clock as an ambulance service for anyone needing transport to the local hospital or clinic. Also by virtue of the rickshaw wallahs' presence in a local neighborhood or community they provide a measure of security. It is not uncommon to find families that allow rickshaw wallahs to sleep near their front doors, balconies, or garages. In exchange, the rickshaw wallahs perform odd jobs such as filling buckets of water, and carrying heavy goods. The presence of the rickshaw pullers in upper- and middle-class *paras* challenges hegemonic constructs about who belongs where. By transgressing these conventional social and spatial boundaries the rickshaw wallahs engage in their own place making.

Rickshaw wallahs have resisted their eradication by firmly integrating themselves into the lives of citizens and strengthening their indispensability. Their non-transport related functions in Calcutta's paras such as sleeping at doorsteps and balconies as a form of security, performing odd jobs for local residents, and building and sustaining trustworthy, dependable relationships with people, reflect their embeddedness in the local community. Rickshaw pullers also resist their eradication by quickly learning how to avoid police raids, fines, and confiscations. Proud of his ability to outwit the police, a rickshaw wallah who refused to take a passenger during an interview said, "At 7 pm the police will seize the rickshaws in *Nilmoni gali* [a local street] this is why I didn't take that passenger there. Because if I did and got caught my rickshaw would lie in the *thana* [police station] all night and tomorrow morning and then I would lose my morning business with the school kids." Contractual obligations plus the desire to avoid a fine and confiscation of their rickshaw mean that the pullers must make tactical decisions about the passengers they agree to transport and the places they serve. In this way, rickshaw

wallahs regularly reckon with the hegemonic mechanisms of spatial control which privilege certain people and livelihoods over others. More directly, however, many rickshaw wallahs challenge conventional "power geometries" (Massey 1994, 4) and actively participate in place making by establishing impromptu rickshaw stands outside the KMC office and beside police vans (Figure 7).

Fig. 7— Rickshaw wallahs wait for a fare beside police vehicles that are parked in front of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation building. (Photograph by Hyrapiet, June 2009)

LIVELIHOOD, PLACE, AND POLICY

As this study shows, people derive meaning and identity from the work they do as well as from the people with whom they interact. Moreover, job loss has long been recognized as a source of very real psychological and social trauma, and unemployment remains a much maligned and stigmatized condition. And yet, the livelihood of the rickshaw pullers faces a number of threats. As scholars it behooves us to recall the rural

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and urban examples of the consequences that may occur if the right to earn a living is terminated or significantly altered without providing suitable alternatives or support. The classic study on rubber tappers in the Amazon by Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn shows that the rubber tappers engaged in acts of resistance ranging from protests and demonstrations to sabotage and illegal activities in order to protect their livelihood (1990). In another rural example, Nancy Peluso documents the struggles that occurred in the forests in Java as the state implemented forest policies that had the effect of severing forest villagers from their livelihood (1994).

In an urban context, Richard Tambulasi and Happy Kayuni show the social distress that occurred in Malawi when the government made minibus calling illegal (2008). To get by, those unemployed by this action resorted to stealing, pick-pocketing, and drug use. Gareth Jones and Ann Varley illustrate how historic preservation efforts in the city center of Puebla, Mexico sought to preserve an idealized image of the city's past which was used to justify the exclusion of street traders (1994). They conclude that the "historic renovation of Puebla has meant the conservation of architecture and the *destruction of present ways of life*" (Jones and Varley 1994, 41, italics added).

Speaking from a policy perspective, however, development in cities need not eradicate livelihoods such as rickshaw pulling. From the standpoint of heritage, the rickshaw functions as a widely recognized emblem of the city of Calcutta. An integration of the rickshaw into the city's development plans could preserve an icon and potentially help market the city for tourism. Further, with an integration of the non-polluting rickshaw into Calcutta's sustainable transport options of the future, the city might place itself on the map in the developing world in terms of the battle against transportation-

related pollution. The environmental benefit of rickshaws cannot be contested and their social and cultural contributions to society can translate into a place-based resource that help advance the development objectives of the state and city in a more socially equitable way.

Our recommendation to maintain the rickshaw profession does not stem from nostalgia or a vision of the rickshaw wallahs as an exotic dimension of the city. Even though work configures and reinforces social hierarchies as well as class boundaries, the rickshaw wallahs find themselves in a position that enables them to challenge such naturalized categories. As we have shown, the rickshaw wallahs provide a host of beneficial services that transcend class lines. They provide a readily accessible means of transportation, and in a city where walking is dangerous because of narrow and congested lanes as well as the absence of (uncluttered) sidewalks for pedestrians, the rickshaws offer a practical advantage for mobility. In addition, a less familiar social function the pullers provide includes acting as pimps in many of Calcutta's red-light districts. As a result, rickshaw wallahs have access to some socially marginalized individuals and groups of people. The Calcutta Samaritans use rickshaw wallahs in these areas to serve as peer advisors, and the rickshaw wallahs have in turn provided the non-governmental organization with crucial information on HIV/AIDS. As one interviewee explained, "they [rickshaw wallahs] have provided some key information in the field of HIV and AIDS as they act as pimps and have access to people and information that an ordinary person won't be able to."

An added advantage of the rickshaw is its environmentally friendly nature. Whitelegg and Williams suggest that if rickshaws are eradicated their journeys would

most likely transfer to motorized transport and thereby increase Calcutta's pollution levels (2000). The city already has a Suspended Particulate Matter (SPM) level which is fifteen times more than the World Health Organization (WHO) prescribed standard, and noise pollution which surpasses tolerable levels (Whitelegg 1997; Whitelegg, Williams, and Basu 2003). The eco-friendliness of the hand-pulled rickshaw cannot be overstated.

At least one study has demonstrated the "ergonomic efficiency" of rickshaws (Datta, Chatterjee, and Roy 1978). Although more interested in how the physics of gravity, load, and degree of tilt affect energy expenditure, S. R. Datta and others showed that the rickshaw can be pulled with comparatively little energy. Rickshaw design also permits the puller to adjust the vehicle to suit his physical build and the load being carried in order to achieve the most comfortable positions for his arms, forearms and wrists. Datta and others did offer suggestions for improving the design, and rickshaws could certainly use some aesthetic modifications, but the vehicle offers a surprisingly versatile mode of transport.

Apart from the versatility of the vehicles, we want to be clear about the work conditions of the rickshaw wallahs. Many expect to be "on call" on a 24/7 basis, whether as home security guards or to transport people during late night emergencies. On the hottest days they struggle to keep properly hydrated and many are probably malnourished. Public health issues remain a serious concern. For example, rickshaw wallahs do not wear shoes—because they claim they get better traction barefooted—and a cut can lead to an acute illness or infection. Daily exposure to Calcutta's air pollution and lack of access to medical care are still critical issues.

One might argue that the cycle-rickshaw provides a more acceptable alternative that is equally eco-friendly, however there are three significant drawbacks. First, cycle-rickshaws lack the maneuverability of hand-pulled rickshaws because they are heavier and have three-wheels. A study of cycle-rickshaw pullers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, for example, found "that in adverse conditions (which are 'normal' for rickshaw pullers in Dhaka), rickshaw pullers have to work nearly as hard as Olympic athletes (Begum and Sen 2005, 16). Second, the cycle-rickshaw cannot be parked along the street overnight. Thus, they are not available for emergencies in the middle of the night. Third, they are not permitted into the city proper because of accidents associated with people.

PLACE EMBEDDEDNESS

Do rickshaws have a place in Calcutta? Our research indicates that they do, in part because rickshaw pullers provide a range of services that extends well beyond merely providing a transportation option for Calcutta's population. On a spatial scale, the rickshaw profession supports people in Calcutta's hinterland area through remittances to Bihar. From the rickshaw wallahs themselves, we learned that financial circumstances do influence their decision to choose this profession, but that they value the comparative freedom and self-empowerment of their work. Rickshaw pullers consistently attested to the fact that their work was much less strenuous than the work expected in other types of employment, and more profitable.

The recent attempt to ban rickshaws from the city reveals some of the workings of Calcutta's cultural politics. Although well-intentioned in theory, the urban reform agenda seeks to make Calcutta a global city in part by marginalizing, excluding, and, in effect,

displacing professions of the urban informal economy, specifically rickshaw pulling. In this vision, the rickshaws and rickshaw wallahs constitute undesirable relics of the past and are deemed inappropriate for a modern, progressive city.

Regardless of the rhetoric of these cultural politics, the rickshaw wallahs actively participate in their own place making. They challenge hegemonic views of who belongs where in Calcutta by fluidly crossing socio-economic and spatial divides within the city and strategically avoiding police arrests. Perhaps most important, however, are the ways in which the rickshaw wallahs have integrated themselves into the communities they serve, gaining much social capital in the process. Rickshaw wallahs have made a place for themselves in Calcutta and have taken a crucial step toward the maintenance of their livelihood by virtue of the fact that they are socially and spatially embedded within Calcutta's urban mosaic.

NOTES

1. Though Calcutta was officially renamed Kolkata in 2001, the authors prefer to use the name Calcutta to refer to the city and its people. Kolkata is essentially a Bengali term, yet the city is home to several communities including Bengalis, Chinese, Parsis, Jews, Armenians and others who give it a cosmopolitan identity.

2. Rickshaws come in different forms. Non-motorized types include bicycle or cycle-rickshaws and hand-pulled rickshaws. Unless otherwise noted, henceforth the term "rickshaw" denotes the hand-pulled variety.

3. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) is a multi-scale project aimed at urban renewal in cities across India, not solely Calcutta.

4. The Indian Rupee, formerly denoted by "Rs" is now symbolized with ₹. The conversion for all Rupee values are based on an exchange rate of $1 equivalent to ₹50.64—the rate on January 17, 2012.

5. If the police confiscate their rickshaw, the rickshaw wallah may also be responsible for paying the fine. Sometimes, however, the owners pay the fines to release the vehicles, and sometimes the pullers pay a bribe to the police to avoid the confiscation altogether.

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CHAPTER III

Calcutta's Image Change: The Construction of Ambiguity and Betweenness of the Hand-Pulled Rickshaws

Abstract

Efforts to refashion a city's image and to present a positive image to encourage people to live, visit, and invest offer challenges and opportunities particularly in cities of the global south. Often, structural changes are equated with enhanced images and neglect to consider the multiple dimensions of image change. As a result, planning perhaps oftentimes fails because planners place an emphasis on what they perceive as important without acknowledging local perceptions and imaginations of the city. These imaginations can offer insights about the character of the city and its value to residents which can enable a better understanding of the relationship between planning, image change, and ideas about image-making. Using open-ended and semi-structured interviews, content and discourse analysis, I examine local perceptions of Calcutta through an analysis of the banned hand-pulled rickshaws in the city. I show that Calcutta's residents and the authorities differ greatly in their perceptions and imaginations of Calcutta. I also show that the rickshaw *wallahs* (rickshaw men) are not really out of

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place, but occupy an ambiguous status of betweenness in Calcutta as the city's image is being refashioned.

Introduction

Home to more than one billion people, India's strength lies increasingly in its cities which stand as gateways to the country's booming economy and as bastions of India's growing power. By 2021, India's urban areas are expected to contain 40% of the country's population (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission: Overview, 2005). Moreover, Agarwal (2011) estimates that approximately 50 Indian cities will have populations over 1 million by 2015. With the pressure of population on urban centers, civic authorities are hard-pressed to provide services in cities. Scholars frequently attest to the difficult task of service provision and relate the problems to failures in comprehensive planning (Breese, 1963; Banerjee, 2005). Without a subsequent rise in employment and housing opportunities, massive population growth and shortcomings in planning result in increases in slums, squatters, and the informal economy in Indian cities. The seemingly intractable issues of unemployment, inadequate housing, and the growth of slums and pavement dwellers, lie at the forefront of efforts to change the image of Indian cities. Therefore, urban projects related to infrastructural improvements, heritage conservation, housing, and retail expansion are intimately associated with city image change.

City image change closely relates to the presentation of the positive aspects of cities. Often, a positive image plays a role in certain decisions as residents, investors, and visitors choose whether to live in, invest in, or visit a particular city (Avraham, 2004).

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Since the 1980s, urban marketing initiatives have incorporated strategies to cultivate and present a positive city image (Short et al., 1993; Schollmann et al., 2000; Lee, 2006). These strategies range from running advertising campaigns that promote a city to attracting and hosting conventions and other cultural or athletic events (Richards et al., 2004; Lee, 2006; Greene et al., 2007). City branding is a recognized strategy associated with image-making. Cities have moved far beyond the Sister Cities partnerships of the 1990s, which represented a concerted effort to cultivate economic and cultural ties between city administrators and residents of the paired cities. But today, in part because of globalization, city planners and managers recognize the importance of cities being able to successfully compete for jobs, investment dollars, and tourist revenue. Their planning strategies revolve around the need to succeed in a highly dynamic and competitive global marketplace. Therefore, the commodification of cities or specific sites within them is well underway as planners seek to re-package cities in order to sell them to tourists, residents, and investors (Ashworth et al., 1990; Kearns et al., 1993). An important aspect of commodifying or branding the city involves the creation of certain narratives about and images of the city (Kearns et al., 1993; Paddison, 1993; Avraham, 2000). Common narratives emphasize the character of the city and the value of the city—locally, regionally, and (increasingly today) globally. In short, city image change relates to the marketing of local geographies—places and sites—as attractive destinations.

In the context of Calcutta, the city's image, along with issues of congestion and poverty, have vexed planners and politicians who view city planning not only as a means to address these issues but also to construct a more positive image of the city. Thus, planning in Calcutta includes the need to increase the city's attractiveness as an

investment center and therefore 'clean-up campaigns' have occurred sporadically over the years in order to decongest the city and produce the much sought after 'world-class' look (Sen, 1998; Fernandes, 2004; Bose, 2007; Hill, 2010). A key aspect of the clean-up campaigns is their focus on informal trades and professions. For example, in late 1996 the state government evicted thousands of hawkers from Calcutta's sidewalks in a scheme infamously dubbed, 'Operation Sunshine' (Sen, 1998; McLean, 2001; Roy, 2011). Also as part of Operation Sunshine, the government removed political graffiti from street walls, removed illegal billboards, and seized and removed unlicensed rickshaws in early 1997 (Sen, 1998). Roy (2011: 95) argues that Operation Sunshine criminalized informal activities, in order to 'clear the city of informal vendors' and restore the city's sidewalks to hygienic and orderly conditions in preparation for 'transnational investment' opportunities. Chakraborty (2000: 77) notes that the evictions coincided with the then British Prime Minister, John Major's visit to the city and the need to portray an image to him that was worthy of British investment. According to Sen (1998: 39), the plans to clean up the city were 'aggressively presented to the public [the middle class] as— clearing of the streets, to help traffic move faster, to make the city more pleasant to live in.' However, these strategies of 'clean-up' have consistently failed because of activism, public outrage, and election-related politics (Sen, 1998; Roy, 2011). More recently adopting a different approach, in 2006 the state government of West Bengal announced the abolition of the hand-pulled rickshaws in Calcutta. In swift legislation, the government removed all terms related to rickshaws from the Calcutta Hackney Carriage Act of 1919, the act which governs rickshaw operations in the city.

As this discussion shows, a relationship exists between a city's image, ideas about image-making, and how people perceive or imagine place. Imaginations of place received scholarly attention through the work of Wright (1947) who, decades ago, introduced the term *terrae incognitae* to refer to a geographical understanding of unexplored or unchartered places through imaginative processes. More specifically, the geographical imagination comprises a way to discover the unexplored objective and subjective realms of geographical knowledge about the world. Daniels (2011: 183) suggests that the "…imagination is a way of encompassing the condition of both the known world and the horizons of possible worlds..." Accordingly, because planners play a key role in image-making in cities, they are in a position to turn imaginations of place into realities. This holds true in Calcutta where imaginations of place are materializing as planners implement Vision 2025—a 20-year perspective plan for the city aimed at urban reform and renewal. Calcutta's Vision 2025 is a city development plan proposed as part of a wider scheme of urban reform for Indian cites called the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

City administrators are well positioned to express their imaginations of the city through planning initiatives and transform their visions into realities on the ground. But, city images, place perceptions, and, more broadly, the geographical imagination, vary between and among authorities and local residents. While studies on Calcutta abound, most explore the relationships among economics, politics, society, and urban planning through readily accessible quantitative data (Banerjee et al., 1994; Chakravorty et al., 1996; Fernandes, 2004; Roy, 2011). Seldom do scholars examine Calcutta by performing ethnographic field research and including a range of different sources to understand the

relationship between planning and local needs and perceptions. The manner in which local residents perceive and imagine their cities could perhaps shed light on why well intentioned planning outcomes sometimes fail. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature on city image and image change by examining a series of dualisms in local perceptions and imaginations of Calcutta through which visions of the city are articulated. Dualisms emerge when residents and authorities discuss spaces within Calcutta—for some, the core of the city is the historical city center, while for others the periphery or fringe areas assume a more central focus. Dualisms also surround the rickshaw profession as some residents dehumanize the rickshaw wallahs by treating them with disgust and offense while other residents humanize them by highlighting their use and value to the local community. Through these contrasting visions I explore image-making in Calcutta. I examine the multiple images of Calcutta through the lenses of local residents, government documents and websites, guidebooks on the city, and the rickshaw wallahs and owners in order to understand how the image of Calcutta is being refashioned and local reactions to it.

In the next section, I provide a brief background of urban planning initiatives undertaken in India and elaborate on the JNNURM scheme in relation to Calcutta. I follow with a discussion of the dualistic nature of planning with examples from Indian cities and then turn to the conceptual ideas used in this study to examine these dualisms. I then proceed to discuss the methods used to collect the data and the procedures used to analyze it. As part of my findings, I present the contrasting views of the city of Calcutta and the rickshaw wallahs whom residents and city officials treat with ambivalence.

Urban planning in India

Following profound growth in India's urban areas, The National Commission on Urbanization prepared a report in 1988 which Chakravorty (1996: 2566) hails as unique as it was the 'first comprehensive national level urban policy statement' in India at that time. This report highlighted the importance of urban areas in the development process of India and also outlined policies to make the urban growth process 'manageable, sustainable, and equitable' (Chakravorty, 1996: 2566). Further, the report emphasized the need to declare Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, and Madras as 'national cities' based on their social and economic importance and to allocate ₹5 billion to each city. However in 1991, India commenced liberalization and the planning commission denounced the report on the premise that under the new economic policy, such large scale urban grants were unfeasible.

In the 1991 census, the term 'Mega City' was used for the first time to refer to the cities of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras which had populations over 5 million (Dutt et al., 1992). In 1994, the Ministry of Urban Affairs and Employment proposed the Mega City Program (MCP) to include the four census-defined megacities (Delhi was subsequently dropped), as well as Hyderabad and Bangalore because of their comparable populations and urban growth rates (MUAE, 1995; Chakravorty et al., 1996).

Following the MCP, the Government of India initiated the JNNURM in 2005 which encompassed some of the goals of the MCP, but was also much wider in scope as the share of central assistance toward state projects was increased. As a result, the JNNURM is hailed as the 'single largest central government initiative in the urban sector' (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission: Brochure, 2005: 11). A

fundamental part of the JNNURM is to encourage greater private participation in public undertakings and urban infrastructure, termed Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Overall, the MCP and the JNNURM place a specific emphasis on infrastructural projects with an underlying aim to transform Indian cities into world-class cities (Mehta et al., 2010).[3]

After the announcement of the JNNURM, The Department of Urban Development, Government of West Bengal submitted a City Development Plan (CDP)—entitled 'Vision 2025'—to procure central government funds to combat Calcutta's urban problems. Vision 2025 details a comprehensive urban vision for the city from infrastructural projects and civic amenities to urban governance and services for the urban poor. Vision 2025 notes that 'notwithstanding the problems and constraints, Kolkata envisions to become a world-class city and attend [attain] [a] competitive age [edge] in this era of globalization' (KMDA, 2003a: 1). The aim of the Vision is '…to provide [a] sustained and improved quality of life through basic urban services in an inclusive manner and create [an] enabling environment for attracting domestic and international investors to live, work, & [*sic*] invest in [the] Kolkata Metropolitan Area' (KMDA, 2003b). The goals and objectives of Calcutta's proposal seek to strengthen Calcutta's position as the industrial and intellectual hub of the country and increase the influence of the Calcutta metropolitan area in India. Toward these goals, the plan for Calcutta includes a focus on fast transportation corridors, better sewerage and drainage facilities, sustainable environmental conditions, heritage conservation, the provision of greater social amenities, and an enhanced aesthetic for the city (KMDA, 2003b).

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[3] Urban scholars typically use the terms 'global cities,' 'world cities,' and 'world-class cities' interchangeably to denote cities which act as a global or regional node for the flow of information, goods, and communication.

A key objective of the JNNURM (and also of the earlier MCP) is the focus on urban renewal of Indian cities which is identified in the planning documents as 'redevelopment of inner (old) city areas' (MUAE, 1995; Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission: Overview, 2005). In order to undertake urban renewal the planning document recommends structural changes within the historical parts of cities. Accordingly, the JNNRUM prioritizes widening streets, shifting industrial and commercial establishments to the fringe areas of cities to reduce congestion, replacement of old pipes, and renewal of sewage, drainage, and solid waste management. This emphasis suggests that a city's image is directly proportional to infrastructural change. Bringing attention to this idea, the Prime Minister in his 2006 address to the nation said,

> Our cities need to have a *new look* [emphasis added] for which they need massive investment and renewal... In order to ensure that our cities have better infrastructure and that they have better living conditions, we launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission. Work has begun on Metro systems in Bangalore and Mumbai. I see a glorious decade of city development ahead of us (Singh, 2006).

Image-making and Planning Dualisms

The association of infrastructural change with an enhanced aesthetic in cities forms the basis for much academic work in India as scholars frequently examine the outcomes of these changes. In doing so, they reveal the differences between intentions and outcomes of planning and attest to the dualistic nature of India's planning culture. As an example of how infrastructural change is equated with a change of image, Siemiatycki (2006) shows how the authorities in Delhi constructed a discourse about the city's image

and used the metro as a key symbol of the modernization and urbanization rhetoric. In order to achieve public support for the project, promotional campaigns in Delhi were geared toward creating an image that New Delhi was dynamic, modern, and competitive and that the metro was a symbol of hope; a new icon for the city. However, he concludes that '…to date even a positive image has not been able to attract the predicted number of riders to the system or avoid the creation of physical destruction and social disorientation[4] left in the project's wake' (Siemiatycki, 2006: 290). Also focusing on New Delhi, Dupont (2011) argues that the Delhi government viewed infrastructural changes as well as slum removal and clearance and removal of hawkers and beggars as necessary for Delhi to achieve the image of a global city in the wake of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Roy (2010) has also shown how Calcutta's peri-urban fringe, intended to be one of the hallmarks of Calcutta's development, has low occupancy rates and stands in disrepair with water shortages, power outages, and poor drainage.

As Calcutta is in the process of being greatly transformed and refashioned in line with the JNNURM, residents, local media, and the rickshaw wallahs can provide useful insights on the different visions of the city. These visions help explain what the city means to its residents and the value of the city to them. Moreover, planning documents and the media also reveal the visions that authorities and residents have for the city. Therefore, we are in a position to learn much from these multiple imaginations of Calcutta held by its many residents at different levels of the social hierarchical order.

In this study, I examine the contrasting perceptions of Calcutta. In the process I draw on Creswell's (1996) key arguments that transformations of space are presented by

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[4] Siemiatycki's discussion of 'social disorientation' refers to the displacement of low-income groups and marginalized populations.

the politically and economically powerful as improvements which will benefit all, while simultaneously characterizing activities, people, and groups as inappropriate or 'out of place'. By focusing on the rickshaw profession, I show that image change is not just about certain people or groups being in place or out of place, but that it creates ambiguities about belonging and can contribute to a kind of betweenness for marginalized groups. Entrikin (1991) develops the idea of betweenness as a way of understanding place that incorporates both objective and subjective approaches. I borrow Entrikin's concept of betweenness because it helps to illustrate that the rickshaw wallahs occupy an ambiguous position or status in people's geographical imaginations of Calcutta.

Similarly, Chakrabarty (1991: 22) notes, that in India the cultural composition of the 'bazaar' is considered as public space outside of the protective confines of one's home. For Bengalis, the bazaar metaphorically represents the unfamiliar 'outside' and should therefore, logically be considered a place where strangers meet and familiarity and trust are held suspect. However this is not the case, because in the bazaar, the notorious outside, the economic and social are intertwined in fact trust and familiarity are key features according to Chakrabarty, as regular customers do not need to bargain for goods. Interestingly, Chakrabarty's (1991) discussion alludes to Entrikin's (1991) idea of betweenness as these socially constructed spaces of difference expected to keep the Other out, are essentially ambiguous spaces constituted of and by the very Other. I now present the data-collection and analysis techniques employed in this study.

Methods

I conducted preliminary fieldwork in December 2008, followed by in-depth field work from May – August 2009 and additional follow-up fieldwork in December 2009-10. I interviewed a total of 83 respondents from four different groups: rickshaw wallahs, rickshaw owners, the general public, including representatives of NGOs, and government officials. All 51 rickshaw wallahs interviewed were male and from the state of Bihar, except 2 who were from the state of West Bengal. Bihari rickshaw wallahs have been employed in the profession for over 30 years, whereas the Bengali rickshaw wallahs have worked for approximately 5 years. This indicates that the rickshaw profession is predominantly operated by Biharis. The rickshaw wallahs interviewed varied in age from 22 to 75 years and were either Hindu or Muslim with little to no formal education. I interviewed 19 residents of Calcutta with diverse backgrounds. The respondents were between 24 to 70 years of age and varying from high-school to post-graduate degrees. Religious, ethnic, and occupational diversity of the respondents existed as Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians and Christians were interviewed with occupations such as teachers, housewives, business owners, business executives, and staff of the Calcutta Samaritans. The monthly incomes of residents ranged between ₹10,000 – ₹35,000 (approx. $210-$730) per month. Government officials refused to answer questions from my survey instrument, but the 6 of them who I attempted interviews with, offered to make general comments about the ban on rickshaws.

I used snowball sampling to access participants having established key informants through the literature or during preliminary fieldwork. These interviewees in turn led me to additional potential participants. Snowball sampling restricted the geographic variation

in my study because typically one interviewee would lead me to another one in the same geographical space. Thus, I incorporated purposive sampling which enabled me to interview pullers at rickshaw stands spread across the city. My interview guide consisted of questions of a semi-structured nature and included questions such as, 'How would you describe Calcutta in the past, present, and future,' The responses to this question offer insights to the various ways in which the city is perceived and imagined. Other questions included 'what is one word you would use to describe Calcutta', 'what is one word you would use to describe a rickshaw wallah', and 'what is one word you would use to describe the rickshaw profession'. The answers to this series of questions help to identify the associations people make with the city, the rickshaws, and its pullers which lead to an understanding of their perceptions and imaginations of people and places.

In addition to interview data, I analyzed texts and images from a variety of sources by using a combination of discourse analysis and content analysis techniques. Following Rose (2007), who explains that authoritative sources construct and produce knowledge about things through a wide variety of texts and images, I selected government and media sources which contain details about urban plans and policies as well as references to the city, the rickshaws, and the rickshaw wallahs. I included Vision 2025 (compiled by the Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Commission-KMPC) which is Calcutta's perspective plan for 20 years and outlines the JNNURM proposed urban structure and development strategies for the city and its periphery. Further, I selected websites of several departments of the West Bengal State Government, particularly ones that are related to urban and municipal affairs of the city, such as, the West Bengal Urban Development Ministry, The Kolkata Improvement Trust, The Kolkata Metropolitan

Development Agency, Department of Municipal Affairs, Development and Planning

Department, the West Bengal State Government, and the Kolkata Police. These sources

enabled me to develop an understanding of how the authorities imagine and present the

city.

Additionally, I gathered newspaper clippings about rickshaws stored thematically

in *The Telegraph* newspaper's library and their online database. I analyzed a total of 70

articles from 2005 onwards with 56 in electronic form and 14 in hard copy. I limited my

data collection to the year 2005 onwards since this was the year the JNNURM was

announced and the Government of West Bengal embarked on its mission to modernize

Calcutta. Therefore, I use the year 2005 as a benchmark year for the onset of rigorous

development plans in the city.

I also analyzed text and images from Calcutta guide books because according to

Avraham (2004), a variety of measures are used to enhance and market a new image for

cities. Since these guide books are geared specifically for tourists, they contain

representations of how the city is perceived and imagined and bear relevance to my

study.   For these guide books, I selected *Kolkata – A City Guide*, *Inside Kolkata*, and

Kolkata, Tourist Guide and Map. I selected these three guide books based on an

informally asked question of 12 booksellers on Park Street (locally referred to as 'The

Times Square of Calcutta') and Chowringhee.[5] I asked 'If a tourist asked you for a guide

book on the city, which would you give them?' The 12 booksellers referred me to either

one or all three guide books.

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[5] Park Street and Chowringhee are frequented by tourists both domestic and foreign and are also where most hotels and guest houses are found.

I conducted a textual analysis on the interview data, government documents, government websites, newspaper articles, guide books, as well as an analysis of images on government websites, in newspaper articles, and guide books. I used content analysis to identify key themes. I examined 50 images on government websites, 226 images in the guide books, and 62 images from newspaper articles and clippings, amounting to a total of 338 images.

Table 1 Sources of Data.

Source	Images	Text
Interviews	-	85
Government Document	-	1
Government Websites	50	7
Newspaper Articles	62	70
Guide Books	226	3
Total	338	166

The analysis of newspaper clippings was restricted to the ones offered by the library at *The Telegraph* office. Several online articles lacked the images that appeared in print, for example in the 56 online articles I reviewed 3 images, whereas in the 14 hard copy articles, I reviewed 59 images. Moreover, online searches for newspaper articles related to rickshaws are not thorough because of the very nature of online archives. For example, the *Times of India* newspaper requires one to search through the archives by date. Additionally, government document analysis was restricted to the documents available online and many links were either incomplete, broken, or data simply did not

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exist.[6] Therefore, since my data collection is certainly not exhaustive, I sought to acquire data that was representative relative to my research questions.

Data Coding and Analysis

Part of conducting a discourse analysis is to explore the rhetorical organization of the discourse (Van Dijk, 1993; Tonkiss, 1998; Lees, 2004; Rose, 2007). Tonkiss (1998: 250) suggests that besides the manner in which statements are put together, discourse analysts should be concerned with how some forms of knowledge are privileged over others, how some arguments stand out more than others, and how authority is identified within a greater rhetorical context. Therefore, as I reviewed government documents, I paid careful attention to words and phrases used to describe the city and the periphery (the terms fringe areas denote the periphery). I also made note of the terms used in connection with services to be provided to citizens which revealed information on the socio-economic classes that stood to benefit from urban renewal plans. While reviewing government websites, I took note of the imagery on the front page of the websites because the images reveal how the government would like the city to be perceived. With newspaper clippings of rickshaw-related articles, I documented the corresponding text and sometimes the lack thereof because a part of doing a discourse analysis also entails reading the invisible or unsaid (Tonkiss, 1998; Rose, 2007).

I used the coding strategy as suggested by Cope (2008) to derive themes from the data. I first applied descriptive codes and then analytical codes. While descriptive codes reflect the words of respondents analytical codes offer greater insights. I chose this

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[6] This link [http://www.kmdaonline.org/html/master_plan.html] represents an example of missing data on government websites.

strategy in order to closely reflect imaginations and perceptions of respondents as spoken in their own words.

I assessed Calcutta's Vision 2025 and government websites in the same manner and paid careful attention to words, phrases, and plans which focus on the historic parts of Calcutta as well as the fringe areas in order to evaluate the dualisms in the government's perception and imagination. I paid greater attention to details and descriptions on the emphasis of services to residents in terms of transport, retail, and housing. I made note of descriptions of the city's aesthetics, urban environment, infrastructural references (particularly roads and flyovers), and services as it relates to the rickshaws, the core, and the periphery of Calcutta. Since the newspaper articles collected during fieldwork were already about the rickshaw profession, I sought to extract references to the city from the articles. I also focused attention on the descriptions of the pullers and profession in order to understand how they are perceived and why they are seemingly at odds with the city. Guidebooks provided a greater amount of images than text, but introductions to the city in these also portray how the city is perceived. I assessed the images and text for their ability to emphasize certain icons and symbols of the city at the expense of others as these reflect cultural markers for how the city is imagined by those constructing the image.

Overall, the data showed that there are contrasting geographical imaginations of Calcutta which draw attention to and are commonly built on dualistic understandings of the city. These dualisms emerged through discussions about the value of Calcutta's core and peripheral areas, and their relationship to the city and its image. Another set of dualistic conceptualizations became apparent as I observed the tendency of some people

to humanize or dehumanize the rickshaw wallahs. Similarly, depictions of Calcutta in tourist guidebooks emphasize the city's contrasts, but present them more as contradictions or unresolvable paradoxes. In the following section, I analyze my findings and examine in-depth, these dualisms and paradoxes.

Contrasting Geographical Imaginations of Calcutta

One word descriptions reveal much about the associations people make with places and provide an understanding of the diverse perceptions of a place. I found that local residents differ significantly in their imaginations of Calcutta and their visions for the city. When asked to give one word to describe the city, respondents offered an array of terms. To help distinguish the importance of some words over others, I created a Wordle. A Wordle —typically described as a 'word cloud' —provides a visual representation of terms based on their frequency in a particular context. In this case, these are the words most commonly used by the public, rickshaw owners, and rickshaw wallahs I interviewed. Rickshaw wallahs' one word responses are included as an inset in the Wordle because they used either the terms 'very good' or 'good' to describe the city and their interviews greatly outnumbered those of the public and rickshaw owners. Figure 1 shows a 'Wordle' that I created using a web-based Wordle auto-generator.

Figure 1 Wordle depicting terms used by local residents when asked, 'What is the first word you would use to describe Kolkata?'

Of all the terms, 'helpful' was used the most followed by 'populated', 'warmth', 'love', 'cheap', and 'noisy'. The terms 'rich' and 'poor' were also used to identify the city, but usually always together, not independently of one another. For example, respondents typically said that Calcutta is a place for the rich and the poor. Follow-up questions elicited the differences inherent in their understandings of the city. For example, while one interviewee defined Calcutta as a city of 'warmth' because non-residents live in the city, another interviewee defined the city as a 'business center' because of the presence of non-residents. Interestingly, respondents used different terminology to mean the same thing in some responses. For instance, respondents used the terms 'warmth', 'belonging', and 'honesty' to explain that Calcutta welcomes and

easily assimilates outsiders into the culture. In their responses, interviewees alluded to the hospitality of Calcutta. Respondents also used the terms 'helpful' and 'warmth' to explain that Calcuttans take time to talk/chat or help one another compared to citizens of other cities in India. Interviewees' interpretations of the term 'cheap' to refer to Calcutta focused on the affordability of eating and drinking, living expenses, and public transport. Significantly, interviewees did not use terms such as slums, poverty, and congestion to identify Calcutta. While a few respondents described the city as congested in their more elaborate explanations of Calcutta, the term did not appear as the most prominent in their one-word definitions of the city. What is also striking is that the terms used had more to do with being comfortable in and indicating a strong sense of attachment to Calcutta rather than descriptions of Calcutta as a city in despair.[7]

The Wordle also helps us to see the dualisms in perceptions of the city in the contrasting terms such as peaceful and noisy, rich and poor, difficult and resilience. While a respondent remarked that the city was a place for survival another said it was a place of struggle. One respondent called the city 'beautiful' and another called it 'hopeless' because of bad roads and power outages. People with graduate and post-graduate degrees were more likely to describe the non-material aspects of Calcutta. However, respondents' socio-economic status, ethnicity, and location showed no pronounced differences in responses.

Rickshaw wallahs, in their more elaborate descriptions of the city, also described the city as a place for the rich and the poor and commended the ability of the city to welcome non-residents. In fact, the presence of tourists and visitors to the city appeared

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[7] Calcutta is referred to as a 'much maligned city' on page 351 in Brunn, S. D., Williams, J. F. & Zeigler, D. J. 2003. *Cities of the world: world regional urban development*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

to be an attractive quality of the city according to one rickshaw wallah who remarked, 'there was no *suchale* (recognition) before, now Calcutta is in the highest position, it has become a "*dekhne ka cheez*" (thing to see)'. Many pullers commended progress in Calcutta despite the hardships they face in their daily lives. Commenting on the new growth in the city, a rickshaw wallah said, 'It is good now, there is a lot of money. Earlier we had to walk for miles to get water, now there are taps all over the place, even in houses. It will get better, all these old buildings will come down and new ones will come up in its place'. As a point of contrast, another rickshaw wallah described the city as a *sone ka pinjra* (gold cage) referring to his economic bondage to the city. While a few rickshaw wallahs complained about how expensive the city had become and the relative increase in their living expenses, other rickshaw wallahs praised Calcutta in comparison to other cities in India. One puller said, 'No one goes hungry [here]. Even without money we eat at *Bhuthnath*, they feed the poor there. Also referring to the hospitality of Calcutta, another puller said, '…even one glass of water no one will give you [in other cities]. Here they will save you from dying'.

The Calcutta-based guidebooks reveal similar dualisms in their portrayal and presentation of the city. Images portray shopping malls, coffee shops, expensive eateries, and spas while the corresponding text refers to the city as world-class, dynamic, and modern. However, the negative aspects of the city such as slums, congestion, and water-logging are also depicted through images and text. Moreover, the guidebooks present the city as one of contradictions by using phrases such as, 'shocks and charms', 'neglect and regeneration', 'chaos and continuity', and a 'medley of moods'. By describing Calcutta through a set of paradoxical, almost opposing characteristics, the tourist books make the

city seem exotic which enables the city to be marketed and sold to tourists. The rickshaws are a symbol of this form of exoticism in Calcutta as tourists frequently visit to photograph them, as one rickshaw wallah said, 'people take our photos, they give us ₹100-200'. But another rickshaw wallah appeared annoyed at the presence of tourists and said, 'People from America and London [are] here - they take photos of us and go'.

These contrasting views about Calcutta play out in the dualisms relating to the core and the periphery of the city. The authorities view the peripheral areas as strongholds of development as evidenced in the maps which accompany Vision 2025 (see Figure 2) whereas urban residents equate the essence and soul of Calcutta with the historic central city.

Images on government websites showcase high-rise condominiums, flyovers, glitzy shopping malls, and shiny, glass buildings mostly in the historic core. Historical sites such as the Victoria Memorial, Howrah Bridge, Writers Building, Red Road, and the Ochterlony Monument (or Shahid Minar) feature in images in the guides and on government websites as well. The government websites emphasize the historic core only as it relates to symbols and icons which present the city as rich in history but with modern, urban facilities which packages the city well for sale and marketing to tourists. However, while Vision 2025 lists historic preservation as a planning objective, throughout the document development in the periphery of the city is emphasized to meet the needs of a new spending class. When a resident compared these new spaces of development in the periphery to the historic city he had this to say:
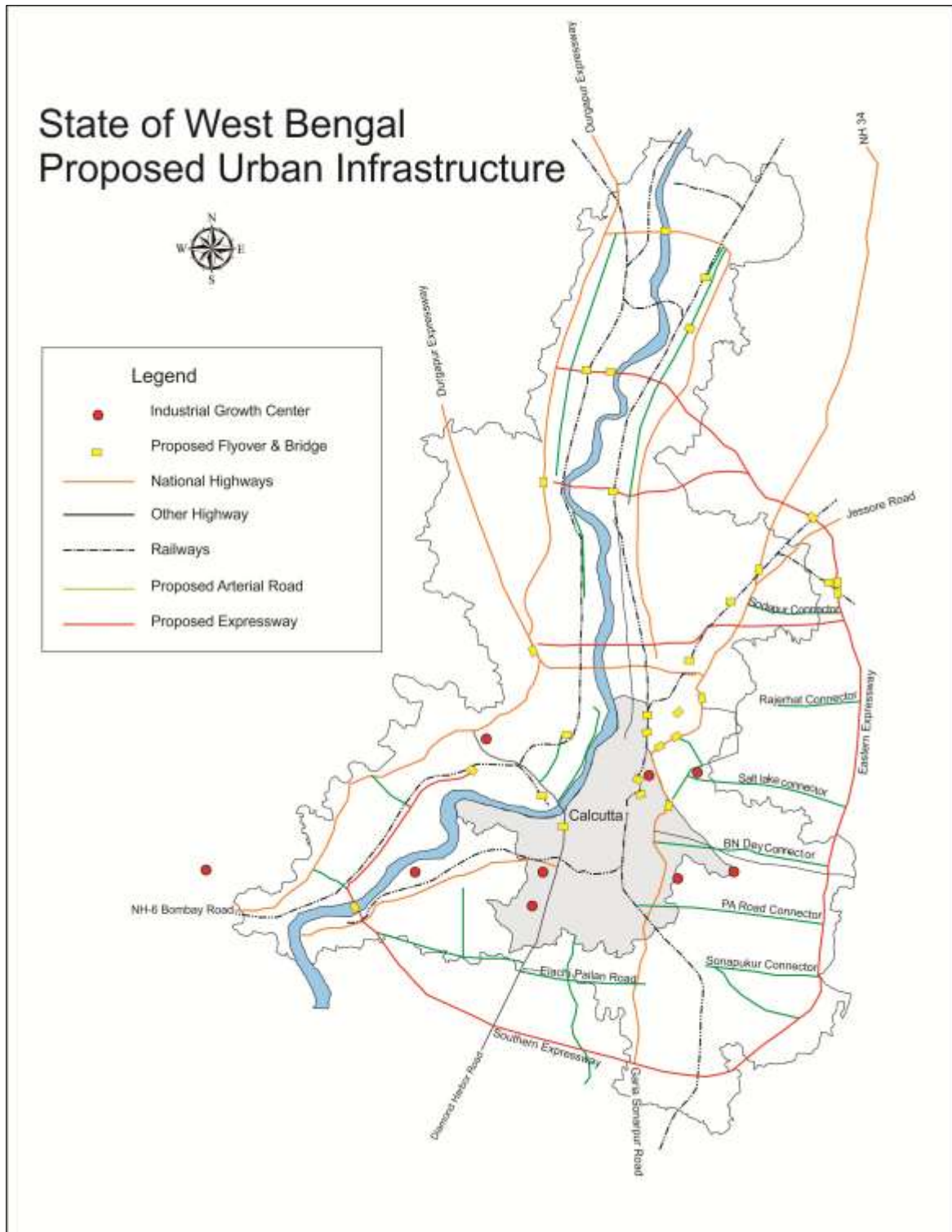
Figure 2 Proposed urban infrastructure for the State of West Bengal (adapted from Vision 2025).

This North-South corridor in the last 10 years or more, this is where the infrastructure is, other parts are systematically neglected. But this new corridor is not the city, it is an economic-highway; retail, residence - portrays a disparity, offers a modicum of change that is exploitative. Not a city with anything symbolic, diverse backgrounds interacting, memories, icons, an organic entity, this new corridor city is not that. Though this is the corridor of Calcutta, but I hate it and I find the old city much more interesting in every way. Rich and poor are going to be socialized in this difference, from being socialized in the old city. Like a person living without a knee cap or a hipbone but not realizing what he is missing in this corridor.

Besides the periphery, changes in the core of the city include an increased number of flyovers and multi-storied buildings. Reflecting on these changes another interviewee despondently stated:

[The] city has lost its character, it is a run-down place where people are just surviving. Calcutta's identity has merged; there is nothing distinctive. Cities must have symbols; features which allow you to adore a space, or a liking for a space, [but] everything exists in a shambles. [There is] not a single piece of architecture to admire in Calcutta. [It is] just put it up for functionality, nothing monumental, not for inspiration.

Also elaborating on the developments within the city, another respondent drew attention to social distancing that is occurring in Calcutta. She stated:

Calcutta was much better then, people used to have the time to say hi, hello. If something happened up the street, everyone would know what happened, to who [sic] it happened and what the story is. But now people have become like machines, they don't have the time to stand and say hi anymore. They have moved into multi-storied buildings, we don't see them anymore. At the most you will see them come downstairs to buy milk and then they disappear into the building again. Earlier there was a sense of satisfaction with whatever you did, with a little income people were happy. Now everyone is rushing around all the time, no matter how much they earn it is not enough, they want more. If you see the metro, you will see people rushing there also to get somewhere. There used to be peace of mind back then. Whatever little love, friendship we have will also go. No one will have time to talk with all these flats coming up. The day all of this area becomes multi-storied residences, we won't know who is who anymore.

Alluding to these same ideas, another respondent added 'What is felt by me is cognitive distancing, disparities in Calcutta, for a long time but people shared a similar psycho-social space despite income level, now there is almost no human intercourse between the rich and the poor. One is at the bottom and one is at the top, there is no psycho-social linkage'. Uncomfortable about the impact on people as a result of development, another respondent said:

I see signs of a lot progress in terms of urban facilities, technology and a lot of other things but life is not about these things really, it is about relationships. And I feel a large section of people will be displaced and ignored and their rights not met and I am very uncomfortable about them, very distressed in fact. Because ultimately history proves that when that carries on, the country is asking for trouble. How much will people bear and suffer without retaliation?

Paradoxically, a key word search in Vision 2025 reveals the term 'development' used 132 times, 'industry'- 95 times, 'growth'-75 times, 'infrastructure'- 49 times, and 'economy'- 38 times whereas, 'people' appeared 15 times and 'social' 11 times. The Wordle in Figure 3 displays the striking contrasts to local perceptions of the city in the Wordle in Figure 1.
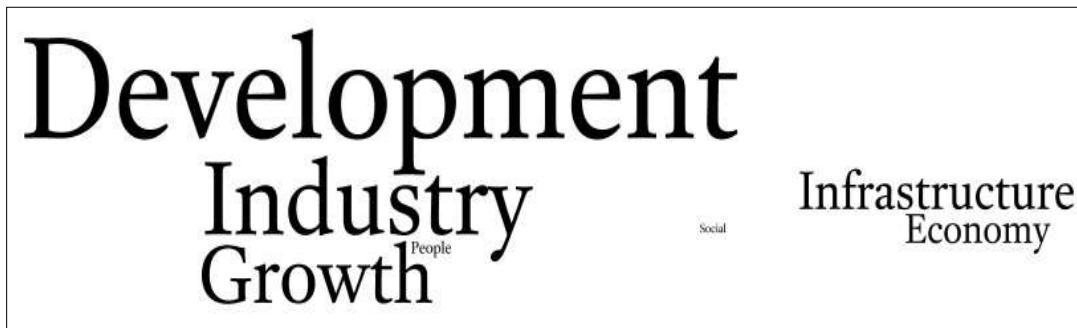
Figure 3 A Wordle displaying the contrasting emphasis of planning in Vision 2025.

Significant contrasts exist in the perceptions and imaginations between residents and the authorities. Social interaction and exchange have meaning for residents who derive their sense of belonging and attachment to the city through these, whereas the authorities perceive the built-up environment as significant. Contrastingly, while the authorities

seem to package and sell the historic core to tourists and visitors, they place a greater deal of emphasis on the periphery in their planning vision for the city. Vision 2025 and government websites consistently portray the construction of numerous high-rises and expensive real estate and retail which are geared primarily for the wealthier minority. According to Vision 2025, 'the obvious indicators for prosperity of a state or for that matter, a country, are the wealth of the nation' and 'rapid urbanization is a hallmark of overall economic development'. The twin concepts of 'wealth' and 'development' are narrowly envisaged in monetary and infrastructural terms respectively, whereas an emphasis on the 'social' is negligible.

According to the planning vision for the city, Calcutta's image has less to do with the historic core and more to do with the periphery. Besides historic preservation of icons within the core, Vision 2025 views the *periphery as the core* and many residents appear to sense this as evidenced through their comments. Through this inversion however, the image of Calcutta is being refashioned. What also surfaces through interviewee responses is that more than infrastructural changes, residents value the non-material aspects of the historic core such as, belonging, friendships, emotional attachments, familiarity, and depth of relationships.

Humanizing and Dehumanizing the Rickshaw Wallahs

Social divides and hierarchies form based on a cognitive logic of excluding disorder, disease, and filth and as Stallybrass et al. (1986) have argued, identity is constructed through these divisions. In India, social and economic divides form the basis

of one's identity and can play a role in the dehumanization of individuals. A respondent calls attention to this social problem in India by stating,

> In India if you ask somebody who are you, they will immediately say I am a doctor, or I am a milkman, because they identify themselves with what they do, we cannot, even if they have a name, to recall them by their name…so we have reduced the man where he has lost his identity and he is identified with his rickshaw, we have fallen short.

The quote above reflects my finding that rickshaw wallahs are rarely referenced without their vehicles in both images and text; they are almost always depicted at work in the act of rickshaw pulling, and their transport related tasks are emphasized. Not surprisingly, when asked to describe a rickshaw wallah, most respondents used the term 'hardworking'. However, the manner in which they are perceived and imagined present contradictions. Upon further questioning, an overwhelming majority of respondents stated that the rickshaw is extremely valuable during floods or water-logging conditions in the city and the rickshaw wallahs are helpful and honest men. Yet, in the newspapers, the work the rickshaw wallahs perform provides a justification for dehumanizing them by the use of terms and phrases such as as 'sweat-*ing* like pigs', wearing 'tattered *baniyans* (vests)', 'malnutritioned', 'bare-footed', and infected with 'tuberculosis'. In yet another contradiction, during midnight emergencies the rickshaw performs ambulatory services in neighborhoods where much public transport cannot and does not operate.

However, in media articles and even government registration forms, rickshaw wallahs are discussed in conjunction with animals (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Section of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation License Department. Receipt for Municipal Permission/License/Registration. Form no. 101AA/2.

Media articles oftentimes refer to the rickshaw wallahs as 'beasts of burden' or 'human horses', (see *The Statesman*, August 22, 2005 'Talk of the Town'). Several articles also draw attention to loss of human dignity through the act of rickshaw pulling. The act of photographing rickshaw wallahs also constitutes a form of dehumanization through the process of objectification. And a rickshaw wallah explained this act as such, 'photos are taken of us smoking *bidis* (an Indian cigarette—typically associated with people of lower social status)'.

Further, news articles highlight the living conditions of rickshaw wallahs' by emphasizing their *bustees* (slums) with lack of water and sanitation and *deras* (garage/workshop where the pullers live) where conditions are pitiable. Descriptions about their living conditions as unfit for human habitation tend to produce imaginations of filth and immorality and have a dehumanizing effect. Alternatively, rarely do the media report on rickshaw wallahs who sleep within the confines of people's homes such as balconies, verandahs, front door-steps, and other spaces where they offer residents a layer of added security (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Rickshaw pullers sleep at the doorway of a palatial home in North Calcutta.

However, the contradictions between rickshaw services and the manner in which they are represented is not just one portrayed by the media and government. The discourse of the people reveals contrasting perceptions. For example while one

respondent said, 'rickshaw wallahs are horrible, they use language [slang], and are unimportant' another respondent stated, 'I just feel that they are a part of the human race and we have done them a lot of harm by the way we think about them as being subhuman'.

Another respondent drew attention to the loss of human dignity in Calcutta and said,

There is subsistence existence in Calcutta. Of late this is not the sense the informal sector is looked at. [People in the informal sector are] very sad and [there is this] empathy evoking disempowered ingenuity and innovation to find forms of survival and existence. All [of this is] very sad and demeaning, consigning people to less and less dignity, people subsidize themselves by compromising their dignity, [the] body is just skin and bone [it] survives, but dignity takes a beating, [the] city is a theater of that.

Because these discursive constructions are so powerful and dehumanizing, even the pullers question their self-worth. A respondent mentioned that when she called a few rickshaw wallahs to talk to them and ask how she could help them, they collectively responded with, 'why would anybody want to meet with us? Who are we? We don't have anything to offer?' Incidentally, even I received this informal question several times when I approached rickshaw wallahs to speak with them. The dehumanizing effect on rickshaw wallahs appears so profound and demoralizing that many were disinterested in speculating about the future. As one rickshaw wallah said, 'I don't know what the future will be like, I may be dead by then'. Or as stated by another, 'I can die now how will I

know the future. I don't know what's going to happen two days from now, how can I say anything about the future'.

A respondent also talked about how rickshaw wallahs are treated by local goons and the police if an accident involving a rickshaw takes place. He said, 'the rickshaw wallah is slapped, the *para dadas* (local tough guys) slap him, they make jokes about his education and culture in a demeaning way, a kind of racism'. Referring to the Bihari culture of the rickshaw wallahs another respondent said, 'they [the government] want to remove their [rickshaw wallahs'] caste, they want to remove the uneducated, the uncultured…' This same respondent drew attention to the fact that he is also Bihari, but represents a higher class and caste and therefore, perhaps does not pose a threat to the dominant Bengali culture of the city. This respondent believes that a removal of the rickshaws is based on caste and a particular perception of what it means to be cultured. Such is the dehumanization of the rickshaw wallahs that a rickshaw owner stated, 'if a rickshaw wallah is slapped, he will take it'. A rickshaw wallah attested to this statement and said, 'If anyone shouts at us we move. Sometimes they get out of the car and give us a slap to move'.

As contrasts to the preceding quotes, the following responses highlighted the fondness for the pullers and their embeddedness in people's lives. Offering a way to humanize the pullers, a respondent suggested:

And actually if we treated them well and did not argue about the ₹0.50 and ₹1, but was thankful that someone was there to help us, in our attitude if we communicated that, that would be such a great help to them I think, they won't feel so useless and unwanted, and rejected and abused.

A respondent from Central Calcutta highlighted the close connection between her local rickshaw wallah in her daily life:

This rickshaw wallah sleeps here. He works here. I found him at the stand, he pulls very well. I know about 3-4 rickshaw wallahs. This one I have known for 10 years. He used to sleep in the park so I told him to sleep here and take me to the market in the morning. He takes my husband too. He is from Bihar has 4 sons and 2 daughters, house, land. With his income only he was able to buy the house and land. Goes to the village twice a year. For festivals or if someone falls sick. He brings my morning breakfast, I give him the money the night before and he brings it in the morning. Some rickshaw wallahs keep their money with me also. They don't have anywhere else to keep it, it will get robbed.

Yet another respondent commented on how entrenched rickshaw wallahs are in the lives of residents and drew attention to their helpfulness. She said, 'many years ago, there was a fire in the building, they saw the fire start in the electric box and alerted everyone. They are always there to help. When my aunt passed away they came to condole [offer condolences]'.

Laws and policies over the years have restricted rickshaw operation on thoroughfares, but permitted them entry in Calcutta's many lanes and by-lanes. In these spaces in the city, rickshaws perform their greatest social and cultural functions. While these spaces in the city are dominated by the rickshaws, this sort of legislation points to regulation and control over rickshaw wallahs and—following Creswell—a cultural coding of who belongs where in the city. But besides regulation of the vehicle a respondent argues that, 'rickshaw wallahs don't wear uniforms, [they are] shabbily

dressed. If rickshaws are upgraded and rickshaw wallahs given uniforms then they won't be bad for the image'. This imagination of rickshaw wallahs in uniform suggests that rickshaw wallahs need to be controlled and regulated and highlights the ambivalence people feel.

Symbols and icons reflect positively or negatively on place, and in Calcutta although oftentimes the rickshaws are used as a negative reflection of the city, they can sometimes be the source of ambivalence as well. Newspaper coverage on the rickshaws reflects this ambivalence. For example, in one instance rickshaws are referred to as a 'discomfiting symbol of the city's poverty and struggle for life' and in another instance their value is highlighted as expressed with the phrase, 'Every time the city stands paralyzed…the ubiquitous hand-pulled rickshaw comes to the rescue of a helpless citizenry'. In another example of their contrasting symbolism, an ad by Tamanna (an enterprise resource planning firm) in the *Times of India*, Education Section portrayed a gentleman in a business suit pulling a rickshaw with the caption 'Paradise Lost?' The symbol of the rickshaw in the ad is linked with low aspirations or downward mobility. To the contrary, a few rickshaw wallahs stated that they had attempted other jobs such as waiters, masons, and coolies, but opted for rickshaw pulling instead because the pay was better. This indicates that the rickshaw profession signifies upward mobility for some. These two contrasting scenarios highlight the betweenness of the profession. As some perceive the rickshaws as a positive symbol while others perceive it as a negative one.

Discussion

The imaginations of Calcutta's residents highlighted in this study reflect multiple and often dualistic visions for the city. While the authorities hold visions about who

belongs where in Calcutta and what stays and what must be removed, other residents have contradictory views and visions. These contradictions are perhaps key to understanding why planning or image change in Calcutta is so challenging. With respect to the rickshaw wallahs, however, a more critical appraisal, points to the construction of a status of ambiguity and betweenness for them.

In one set of discourses (the quasi-official discourses of planning documents and government web sites), the city is perceived and presented as fast, mobile, and modern. As an example, Vision 2025 includes images of large, multi-lane highways in conjunction with its discussion of traffic and transportation. At first glance, it might seem as though rickshaws are out of place and at odds with this vision of the city. But, this is not the case. The rickshaws are actually included in Vision 2025 and are mentioned in the document as a para-transit mode. What is most revealing, however, is that no data is provided for or about them, pointing to the ambiguity of their status. In another set of discourses (those of the rickshaw wallahs, owners, and local citizens), the rickshaw wallahs are perceived as valuable and helpful to the city and its residents, but are not immune from dehumanizing treatment and characterizations. Some interviewee responses perceptively called attention to the issue of social distancing and seemed to recognize the ambiguity and uncertainty attributed to the rickshaw wallahs.

The ambiguity of the rickshaws and rickshaw wallahs also emerges and is expressed in conjunction with the visual imaginations of the city. More specifically, the rickshaw wallahs occupy a status of betweenness at several levels. They are in between human and animal, legal and illegal, local and global forces, an emblem of the past and a relic of the future of the city. Humanized by some and dehumanized by others, permitted

into homes, yet still at the margin—rickshaw wallahs exemplify the ambiguity of their position in Calcutta's society. The profession is also juxtaposed between an official legal directive from the state and the illegal continued operation of rickshaws six years after their official ban. The betweenness of the rickshaws also manifests itself where local value for the rickshaw precedes the global face of the city—a point where the past also meets the future. Even on a micro-scale, rickshaw wallahs are in between the notorious 'outside' and the safe confines of one's home—being permitted inside homes of residents, but only so far as the doorway, balconies, or verandahs of homes. And by virtue of their entry into the home, they also lie at the ambiguous realm of being somewhere in between a friend/family member and a stranger. Instead of hard and fast rules about being in place or out of place, rickshaws and their rickshaw wallahs are attributed an ambiguous status that might best be described as betweenness.

Conclusion

The rickshaw is targeted for eradication in attempts to increase the importance of Calcutta, to attract investment, and to eradicate negative associations with the city. The 'common good' here acts as a surrogate to conceal hegemonic self-interests. Rickshaws are presented and imagined as symbols of inhumanity, downward mobility, and value-less while rickshaw wallahs are dehumanized and treated as sub-human. Yet, in June 2011 Tyeb Mehta's *Untitled (Figure on Rickshaw)* sold for $3.24 million at Christie's in London. Rickshaws are made to appear as out of place in Calcutta, but as the city is being refashioned, the ambiguity of the position of rickshaws and their rickshaw wallahs is exemplified in the visual imaginations of the city. At a subjective and objective level,

dualisms exist about the profession and reveal a betweenness of the place of rickshaws and their rickshaw wallahs in Calcutta.

I have shown that rickshaws and their pullers are not really out of place in Calcutta but occupy an ambiguous status as the city is undergoing image change. This study also assesses the place of informal work as city image change proceeds. I have shown that city image change involves far more than just a one-dimensional explanation for improvement. The findings of this study may be valuable to planners and urban policy makers as they provide insights about local perceptions of the city and can prove useful as authorities attempt image change in their cities. Nonetheless, the multiple acts to refashion Calcutta bring into sharp focus the already existing powerful meaning of place. Whether a new image is refashioned and emerges from these contradictions, or a hybrid image which blends the traditional and modern emerges in Calcutta, will be decided by the effectual power of place and its social composition.

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CHAPTER IV

Banned but still in operation: An urban political ecology of the hand-pulled rickshaws in Calcutta

Abstract

We use themes from political ecology to explore the role of politics in shaping the complex human-environment in Calcutta, India through an assessment of the hand-pulled rickshaws. A ban on the profession was placed in 2006 yet, six years later rickshaws still operate. We draw upon semi-structured interviews and triangulate our findings with secondary sources of data, to analyze the role of competing actors involved in the ban. We show that while multiple actors perpetuate conflict over the rickshaw ban, they also create opportunities for everyday resistance. We argue that through active (protests and demonstrations) and passive forms of resistance (functions outside the role of transportation and bribery), rickshaw pullers maintain control over their livelihood and thereby, construct urban nature. Subsequently, we argue that rickshaw pullers should be viewed as active agents in how they negotiate and maintain control over access to their livelihood. Our study emphasizes the role played by multiple actors in how urban environments are constructed and (re)produced. In conclusion, we argue for the adoption of an urban political ecology framework in order to better understand how seemingly

marginalized groups manipulate and transform urban socio-political environments in order to maintain control over access to their social and material resources.

Keywords: Calcutta; resistance; urban political ecology; rickshaw; access; rights; livelihood

Introduction

Hand-pulled rickshaws have existed in Calcutta, India for a century.[1] In 1981, the West Bengal State government amended the Hackney Carriage Act of 1919 (the law which governs rickshaw operations) and attempted to ban rickshaws from Calcutta. Due to media and public resistance, plans were withdrawn (Halder and Basu 1982). Again in 1996, in an attempt to "clean the city" the government embarked on 'Operation Sunshine,' to remove hawkers and slow-moving vehicles — the rickshaws (Gentleman 2005; Sen 1998, 39), but the attempt failed. Yet again in 2006, the government, without much opposition, amended the Hackney Carriage Act, removed the word "rickshaw", and officially banned the vehicle from the city. The government argues that rickshaws are antiquated, inhumane, a traffic inconvenience, and unsightly in a modernizing city like Calcutta (Bhattacharjee 2006; Burns 1995; Economist 2007; Gentleman 2005). Further, the new policy announced that pullers would receive no remuneration or rehabilitation (Bhattacharjee 2006). Approximately 500,000 people, which include the pullers and their families, the owners and others who use the rickshaws stand to be affected by the ban (Burns 1995; Whitelegg and Williams 2000). However, as a result of the policy opponents of the ban appealed to the high court which keeps enforcement of the ban at a minimal and rickshaws continue to operate in the city.

In this study, we engage key Political Ecology (PE) themes such as the role of actors, acts of resistance, and the development discourse and apply them to the urban context to assess power struggles which result from the ban on rickshaws in Calcutta. These power struggles provide insights on the relationship between politics and how less powerful groups maintain access to and control over their environment and livelihood. We use PE's actor analysis approach to examine the various roles and competing interests of actors working on the rickshaw issue to evaluate how and why rickshaws are still in operation in Calcutta. In this paper, we show that through everyday acts of resistance among multiple actors, the rickshaw profession persists in the city of Calcutta. The themes from PE applied to the urban context in Calcutta shed light on how power and control is constantly negotiated among multiple actors to produce a contested urban environment. Before presenting the literature on political ecology, we provide a brief overview of the history of rickshaws in Calcutta and their functions to help situate the context under study and analysis.

The Rickshaws of Calcutta

Although the British introduced rickshaws in other parts of India, the Chinese brought rickshaws to Calcutta around the 1900s, to carry goods and traverse flooded streets (Nair 1990; Unnayan 1981). In 1914, rickshaws were first used as a passenger vehicle (Nair 1990; Thomas 1997; Unnayan 1981). Officially, there are 5,945 licensed rickshaws in Calcutta (Hand rickshaw pullers of kolkata n.d.; Unnayan 1981), but unofficially it is believed that over 20,000 rickshaws exist (Unnayan 1981; Whitelegg and Williams 2000).

The rickshaw pullers are male migrants from neighboring states (Sen 1998; Trillin 2008; Unnayan 1981). They are mainly Muslims or Hindus who live together in *deras* (a rented room or a garage space) and share daily chores such as cooking and cleaning. Several pullers live and sleep on sidewalks or in slums.

The rickshaws provide several transportation options for Calcutta's citizens—services which many believe are indispensable given the unplanned design of the city. Public transportation is rarely, if ever, found in Calcutta's narrow lanes. Here, rickshaws are the only option when citizens require a quick, short-distance trip. Rickshaws transport men, women, and children; the aged and disabled; the middle class and the poor; those going to the local market and those in emergencies. They are particularly useful for women and schoolchildren. Moreover, rickshaws are the only mode of transport which, due to their non-motorized nature, continue to operate when the city's streets are water-logged (Bhattacharya 1997; Halder 1997; Halder and Basu 1982; Sen 1998; Whitelegg and Williams 2000). Having introduced the services provided by the rickshaws and their pullers, we next draw upon the urban political ecology literature in order to situate the rickshaw ban within Calcutta's urban mosaic.

From Political Ecology to Urban Political Ecology

PE scholars concern themselves with the relationships between humans, their livelihood, and their environment (Robbins 2004). PE focuses on social and environmental justice issues, historically emphasizing rural areas and third world development (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Peet and Watts 1996). With the historical blame for environmental degradation often placed on the marginalized poor in developing nations (WCED 1987), political ecologists attempted to counter that claim by

illustrating that environmental degradation is not only an outcome of capitalism (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Escobar 2011; Hecht and Cockburn 1990), but is often linked intimately to the state, through development policy (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Guha 2000; Peluso 1994, 72). Political ecologists accept that costs and benefits associated with development are not distributed equally; the unequal distribution reinforces or reduces existing social and economic inequalities, which in turn alters the power of actors in relation to other actors (Bryant and Bailey 1997, 28).

Influenced by Marxist ideas, many political ecologists view the human-environment relationship as a system of production in which material goods and social relations intertwine in order to materially and socially produce and reproduce the conditions necessary for survival (Lipietz 2000; Peet and Watts 1996). In this system, humans by virtue of their livelihood or labor, use material goods as a means to produce, consume, and survive. And social relations mediate the processes by which people have access to and rights over material resources (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). Traditionally, PE viewed these social relations as expressly political and controlled and manipulated by the economic, social, and cultural elite. However, scholars adopting neo-Marxist ideas also recognize the role of agency and the resistance to power and control (Bryant 1998). Therefore, PE emphasizes the study of unequal power relations in systems of production.

While initial PE studies focused on mainly rural smallholders in developing countries, a more recent focus has shifted to the urban arena (Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006; Keil 2003). A strong connection between the rural and urban was established as remittances changed the landscape in the 1990s and globalization brought

about new geographies of power and social change (Bebbington and Batterbury 2001; Zimmerer and Bassett 2003). Cities were viewed as actors in the production system with complex human-environment relations (Gandy 2006; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006). Urban Political Ecology (UPE), therefore, focuses on urban and urban to rural linkages and changing ecologies in both developed and developing countries (Keil 2003; Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003) Arguably, because of widespread development initiatives, due to the forces of globalization as well as consumption patterns, urban areas are the source of many global environmental problems and social inequalities (Escobar 2011; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006). Therefore, urban political ecologists seek to explore and investigate '…the political processes through which particular socio-environmental urban conditions are made and remade' (Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006, 2). A fundamental premise of PE which draws strong support in UPE debates is that politics forms the basis for power struggles and influences social relations.

Questions arise about urban 'nature', which urban political ecologists defend on the basis that 'produced environments are specific historical results of socio-environmental processes…cities are built out of natural resources, through socially mediated natural processes' (Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006, 5). Frequently, UPE scholars turn to David Harvey's (1996, 186) justification that there is nothing unnatural about New York City to make the point that the term 'nature' is intrinsic to the urban context. Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw (2006, 4) also point out that the process of urbanization is essentially viewed as the replacement of a 'natural' environment with a 'built' environment. Further, Keil (2003) views cities as sites where urban-nature relations are constantly negotiated through flows of people, goods, and capital and thus

sees urbanization as a process through which complex nature-society relationships are established. Therefore, urban political ecologists focus on the interconnection between social relations, power struggles, and the transformation of urban nature which they view as inherently bound. Subsequently, an individual or groups' pursuit of social and material reproduction through access to livelihood and means to eke out a living are also deeply connected to the transformations of urban natures. So, urban political ecologists attempt to critically respond to, examine, and explain the dialectic of the material production of urban nature.

Material conditions of people such as their rights to access, to a livelihood, and to social well-being are important for the production of the urban environment as cities are socially constructed entities. Extending this research vein, Moffat and Finnis (2005) call for UPE to include not only natural resources (which are sometimes less relevant in an urban setting), but to also focus on 'resources' that are social as well, such as access to health care, education, and livelihood. These social resources, according to Moffat and Finnis (2005, 455), '…also play critical roles in the material aspects of people's lives.' Moreover, scholars believe that those actors in power, control and manipulate the material conditions which comprise the urban environment at the expense of less powerful groups of people and, therefore must be examined in order to understand the nature of cities (Bebbington and Batterbury 2001; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006; Pellow 2006). By evaluating and examining power struggles, urban political ecologists attempt to understand how people materially produce their socio-environmental conditions. These evaluations provide answers to questions about who

controls rights to access and who resists the control and how, and gives us a better understanding of the complex human-environmental landscape of cities.

Drawing from PE, urban political ecologists argue that the political and economic processes that form, shape, and transform the urban environment are situated in a discourse (Escobar 2011; Peet and Watts 1996). However, while this discourse is created by those in power, and it can lead to uneven development and affect marginalized groups, it does not go uncontested (Bryant 1998; Escobar 2011; Gandy 2006; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006). Therefore, urban political ecologists examine and analyze competing discourses in order to better understand the urban context of conflict. Those who construct the discourse and those who resist it are responsible for creating, maintaining and transforming the urban human-environment. Arguably then, cities are produced through competing and contrasting discourses which constantly challenge and negotiate with the dominant discourse, producing a complex urban landscape.

Using PE's research tradition with discourse, power struggles, unequal relations, the role of actors and resistance to power and control, we apply it to an urban context in Calcutta to understand the contested urban environment in the city. We now turn our attention to the role of actors as they construct and negotiate the dominant narrative to justify their actions.

The Role of Actors

PE explores the competing, conflicting, and overlapping interests, and actions of different types of actors in understanding nature-society conflicts (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Peluso 1994; Robbins 2004). Bryant and Bailey (1997, 24-5) assert that an actor-oriented approach sheds light on the influence of politics between actors as more and less

powerful groups negotiate access to environmental resources. This approach also provides a deeper understanding of the intentions and motivations of actors.

An actor-oriented approach investigates the interaction of different actors who pursue distinctive aims and interests in resolving a particular conflict. For example, Bassett's (1988) study on peasant herder conflicts in the Northern Ivory Coast attests to how the state worked through political processes such as land use policy, whereas the herders used cultural practices to resolve conflict. Similarly, Peluso (1994) examines the competing interests in Javanese forests by assessing how the state struggles to control forest land, whereas the peasants struggle to control forest access in order to resolve conflict. An actor analysis reveals the measures used by weaker actors to maintain access and control over their livelihoods and reflects a key theme used in this study.

Forms of Resistance and Grassroots Actors

Political ecology emphasizes the actions of grassroots actors and their resistance to powerful discourses and state legislation (Escobar 2011; Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Peluso 1994). Patterns of resistance, which may be defined as the collective of measures, means, activities, and processes used by groups to gain access and to maintain control of resource(s) (such as livelihood in the rickshaw pullers' situation) are difficult to discern. Similarly, Scott (1987) observes that the weak rarely seek to draw public attention to their resistance. In other words, because certain groups of people may be marginalized in society and lack political bargaining power does not necessarily mean that they are not participants in how their fates are decided. Their patterns of resistance do exist and are often associated with illegal activities and every day forms of resistance. For example, Scott (1987) observes that arson and sabotage are some of the forms of everyday

resistance by grassroots actors (see also Kull 2002). Active forms of resistance such as strikes, lockouts, protests, and demonstrations are often accompanied by passive forms of resistance. These every day passive forms of resistance include, but are not limited to, working illegally, performing essential functions to society, and carrying out tasks which exemplify the independence of groups.

Hecht and Cockburn's (1990) analysis of the resistance of the rubber tappers in the Amazon and the actions of Chico Mendes provides an excellent example of active and passive forms of resistance to the removal of a means of livelihood. Under the leadership of Chico Mendes, the rubber tappers informed the world that their livelihood as extractivists in Amazonia was under threat as forest land was being appropriated by foreign firms for mining and ranching activities (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Schmink and Wood 1992; Vadjunec, Schmink, and Greiner 2011). The rubber tappers engaged in several acts of resistance from outright physical acts such as non-violent stand-offs, to sabotaging the rubber collected or selling it illegally, to more passive acts of resistance like growing their own food as an act of independence (Campbell 1996; Hecht and Cockburn 1990). Additionally, environmental groups, development agencies, and scholars working in the Amazon, made known to the outside world the rights and knowledge of the rubber tappers. Through these multiple acts of resistance and advocacy, the rubber tappers were able to successfully defend their livelihood (Vadjunec, Schmink, and Gomes 2011).

Peluso (1994) notes that if a loss of resource access means losing the capacity for basic subsistence, this loss threatens the peasants' survival and their resistance reflects a desire to maintain and control their means of social reproduction. For example, Peluso

(1994) shows that when and where state forest policies related to control and access of Javanese forests did not coincide with the interests of the forest villagers, conflict erupted and resistance was inevitable. As such, these examples show that when there are competing ideologies of resource access and control between marginalized groups and the state, threats and struggles ensue as actors fight to protect their interests and control their access to a particular resource.

The Discourse of Development

The predominantly Western development discourse contends that development will allow existing conditions to get better with time (WCED 1987). Escobar (2011) argues that development is viewed solely in terms of productivity, savings, and investments with no emphasis on the socio-economic, cultural and political factors of the developing world. As a result, PE views mainstream development efforts as 'uniquely efficient colonizers on behalf of central strategies of power' –or in other words, the impress of the powerful on the less powerful (Peet and Watts 1996, 16-7). Such power is achieved by normalizing the means to bring about change as Western progress is viewed as the measure of success (Escobar 2011). Escobar (2011) explicitly blames the situation in developing economies on the development discourse of the global north. He states that development discourses are socially constructed and serve to impose a dominant way of 'doing' development.

In contrast, PE explores alternatives to mainstream development. For instance, Schmink and Wood (1992) show that by 'greening the discourse' i.e., by adopting ideas and representations that portray conservation and preservation, marginalized groups such as the rubber tappers of Acre were able to garner support for their cause against foreign firms and elites who sought to destroy the forests for non-extractivist activities such as

cattle ranching. The greening of the discourse by conservationists and environmental activists in Acre worked in opposition to the dominant developmentalist discourse by adopting a new vocabulary and presenting the conflict in social and environmental justice terms (Schmink and Wood 1992).

Power and Control

Discursive control is control over what Scott (1990, 5) terms the 'public transcript' – the version of events which is popularly accepted and (re)produced in public documents, legal political ideologies, music, and theater. Bryant and Bailey (1997) note that the question of legitimacy is vital.

> Powerful actors try to appeal to the "common good" as part of their attempt to naturalize the situation. The state is very keen to seek legitimacy for their actions. Yet non-state actors seek to justify their actions on grounds other than self-interest. The weaker hidden transcripts of weaker actors always pose a danger for powerful actors precisely because they question "official history". When weaker actors openly challenge the claims of legitimacy of more powerful actors, the political and economic situation becomes explosive (Bryant 1997, 45).

Often, non-government organizations (NGOs) and/or social movements may make it hard for the state to control the public transcript by publicizing and supporting the struggles of marginal groups. By doing so, NGOs and other resistance groups are able to justify their actions while at the same time disguising their self-interests. Their discourse provides an opposition to the more powerful discourse of the government and in this manner, these groups maintain power and control over the public transcript. In

summary, we use an UPE framework, which draws on PE themes to explore the role of the actors involved in the rickshaw ban, their forms of resistance, and the development discourses embedded within issues of power and control in Calcutta.

Methods

Field work was conducted by Hyrapiet in Calcutta between May 2009-August 2009 and additional follow-up interviews were conducted between December 2009 and January 2010. Document collection (government documents, fliers, media reports) and face-to-face interviews were used to collect data. The survey instrument included questions of a semi-structured and open-ended nature and each interview lasted approximately one hour. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the ban on rickshaws. They were also questioned about their perception of rickshaws in relation to the city's overall image. In all, 83 respondents were interviewed in Calcutta, across four groups i.e. the rickshaw pullers, rickshaw owners, government officials, and the general public (local residents and non-government organization staff). Interviews with the pullers were conducted in Hindi, while all other interviews were conducted in English.

Rickshaw pullers and owners were asked to describe their profession in an open-ended nature with prompts used to guide the interview. Of the 51 rickshaw pullers interviewed, all were male and from the state of Bihar except for a few pullers who were from the state of West Bengal. On average, the pullers from West Bengal had worked for no more than 5 years, whereas the pullers from Bihar had worked for over 30 years in the profession; this indicates that rickshaw pulling is largely sustained by the ethnic Biharis in Calcutta. The average age of rickshaw pullers was 65 years and those interviewed ranged from 22-75 years of age. The rickshaw pullers who were interviewed were either

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Hindu or Muslim with most having little to no formal education. All of the seven rickshaw owners interviewed, except one, are continuing their family rickshaw business.

A total of 19 interviews were conducted with the general public which included people varying in education from high school to post-graduate degrees, 24 years of age to 70 years of age with an average age of 47 for respondents. Interviewees varied in income levels from ₹10,000–35,000 (~$181-$636 per month).[2] Hindus, Muslims, Chinese, Zoroastrians and Christians were interviewed with occupations spanning teachers and housewives, business owners, business executives, flight attendants, and staff of the Calcutta Samaritans (a local NGO). Additionally, six interviews were attempted with government officials who declined to answer questions from the survey instrument, but agreed to make general statements about the rickshaws and the ban within the limits of their positions and authority. This reveals the political sensitivity of the rickshaw ban.

Interviews were originally conducted using a snowball sampling method whereby a few key respondents were interviewed, such as leaders of the All Bengal Rickshaw Union (ABRU), who in turn then provided additional leads. However, since several of the leads did not adequately cover the geography of the city of Calcutta—one respondent typically led to another respondent in the same community—a stratified purposive sampling method was introduced into data collection. This method allowed greater geographical variation as rickshaw pullers could be interviewed at rickshaws stands across the city.

Memos, Notes, Maps and Photographs

Intensive memos and notes were maintained (see Rubin and Rubin (2004, 203-6)); Neuman (2007, 332-5). Notes about the respondents' reactions to questions, their overall

behavior, the environment of the interview and its potential impact on the interviewee, and other external factors which influenced the interview were recorded. Particularly, where government officials were concerned, memos of this nature assisted us during the data analysis phase in describing the government's indifference and secrecy toward questions pertaining to the rickshaws. Additionally, observations were recorded during attendance at a rickshaw convention and its corresponding press conference and these memos generated insights during data analysis about the politics of the rickshaw ban. Several photographs of rickshaws and rickshaw pullers were taken at work, at rest, and also of billboards and other advertising which depicted rickshaws, to support and triangulate our findings and analysis.

Coding and Discourse Analysis

We followed the open-ended interview coding strategy as suggested by Cope (2008, 452) in which we identified and evaluated the data in stages identifying descriptive codes first and then analytical codes. Descriptive codes in this strategy are codes which occur in the text and reflect the respondents own words. Analytical codes are those which arise after consideration and careful assessment of the descriptive codes (Cope 2008). For example, references to the safety of rickshaws for women and trustworthiness of the pullers qualified as descriptive codes while the analytical codes we applied included the embeddedness of the pullers in the social lives of residents. The reason we chose this strategy was to stay as close to the respondents own words and quotes as possible.

The coding categories or themes we applied were as follows; 1) the role of actors, 2) ambiguities, 3) acts of resistance, 4) power and control, and 5) services besides transport. These five broad codes helped us analyze what role each actor plays toward the

rickshaw ban, the uncertainties of the rickshaw issue and the resulting resistance, both in active and passive forms. Within these five broad categories, we listed interviewee responses which corresponded to the information that we were trying to gather. For example, references to the functions, aims, objectives or role played by different agencies were coded under the role of actors. Similarly, comments related to the confusion over rickshaw licenses, numbers etc, were coded under 'ambiguities'. References made to strikes, lockouts, protests and other demonstrations, were coded under the active resistance theme. Additionally, as we coded we found numerous statements made by respondents regarding the many functions of rickshaw pullers which are not transport related. We coded these under passive forms of resistance. In the power and control theme, we coded archival data and secondary sources of information which suggested that the administration controlled and dominated the public transcript by trying to naturalize the need to ban the rickshaws. For example, statements such as the inhumane nature of the profession or the traffic congestion argument of the administration, we coded under this theme.

Findings

Below we present the results of our thematic coding analysis based on our PE themes in order to explore the socio-political processes, which impact and influence the operation of the rickshaw profession.

The Role of Actors

Using an actor analysis based on secondary and archival sources of data and interviewee responses, we found that there are several groups of actors working with the rickshaws,

each with distinct aims. We classified them into two categories based on the functions

and the role these actors play toward either supporting or opposing the ban on rickshaws

(Table 1).

Power Scale	Role of Actors			
	Aim: Ban the Rickshaws		*Aim: Save the Rickshaws*	
	State Departments	**Role**	**Opposition**	**Role**
Most Power ↓ Least Power	West Bengal Department of Transportation	Make rules and laws pertaining to all transportation related issues in Kolkata	All Bengal Rickshaw Union (ABRU)	A Union which works closely with the Calcutta Samaritans and its own internal political affiliations to lobby the government for a rehabilitation package.
	Kolkata Municipal Corporation	Issue trade licenses, registrations, and perform other civic operations for the city	Calcutta Samaritans (NGO)	An NGO negotiating a rehabilitation package for rickshaw pullers and owners by lobbying the state government
	Hackney Carriage Department	Issues licenses and regulates all vehicles which fall under the Hackney Carriage Act of 1919	Rickshaw Owners	Work closely with the ABRU to lobby the government for rehabilitation
	Kolkata Police	Implementation agency for all laws of the State Government	Rickshaw Pullers	Continue to work despite the ban on the profession

Table 1: Groups of Actors involved with the Rickshaw Ban.

One group is the State Government of West Bengal and its associated departments

working to ban the rickshaws, and the other encompasses all other groups working

toward either retaining the rickshaws or negotiating some form of rehabilitation or

remuneration. It appears that each group (government or non-government) plays

distinctly different roles, but pursues one of two aims. Below, we dissect the aims of each

group of actors and show that on account of the differing objectives, a unified voice is

compromised and the goal is left unaccomplished, but the rickshaw profession persists in

the city.

Government departments include the West Bengal Department of Transport, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), the Hackney Carriage Department, and the Kolkata Police (KP). After several repeated attempts, officials at the West Bengal Transport Department declined interviews and directed us to the KMC. Officials at the KMC also refused to be interviewed, but one officer agreed to discuss the rickshaw profession. He said,

> Since the 1980s humanitarian associations have been questioning the issue of one man pulling another and saying that when we are going into the 21st century one man pulling another is not only inhumane, but does not depict a good picture of society. Secondly, the traffic department found it inconvenient to allow slow moving vehicles, especially hand-pulled rickshaws called *Jinrikisha* to ply in Calcutta because the state is trying to introduce high speed moving vehicles. In 2006, the honorable Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya of West Bengal, personally initiated to bring in the amendment because he is the official spokesperson to the Home Ministry.

Moreover, the officer added that the entire rickshaw operation resembles an outdated system as he elaborated with the following statement,

> These owners hire pullers to do their job and it is somewhat of a feudal state of affairs, because when night falls and the day is over, the owner gets the money from the pullers and the pullers are only given ₹20-30 [~$0.36-0.54]. This is a feudal system being run like a business and does not sit right with Calcutta. For all the effort

they have taken for the entire day, you give the money to the owners and keep only ₹20 [~$0.36], this is not right.

Of the 51 rickshaw pullers interviewed, all of them claimed that they pay the owner only the daily rickshaw rental rate of ₹20 (~$0.36)—the earnings for the day belong to the pullers. The statement from the KMC exhibits the disconnect between the actual operation of the rickshaw profession and that which the officials understand. Additionally, the administration is unaware of the actual number of rickshaw pullers or the number of licenses issued, as confirmed by the senior KMC official. He stated,

> The main constraint of the State, KMC & the Administration is that we do not know the actual number of pullers and in all probability all of them are from Bihar and they are pulling from their youth. If a survey is [conducted], [and some] have been done by some agencies, numbers and figures [of rickshaws, owners, and pullers] do not match. Some are saying 32,000 some are saying 24,000 because the owners are stating conflicting numbers.

These ambiguities raise questions about the call for a ban without an assessment of how many stand to be affected and the overall impact of the ban. Overall, the KMC is unaware of, the number of rickshaw pullers or owners, the number of licenses issued (legal or illegal), or the specifics of the rickshaw profession. But, their primary concern appears to be the rickshaw pullers and not the owners because the KMC believes that the owners have alternative sources of income. The senior KMC official attested to this by saying

> The owners are not to be rehabilitated because they have other sources of incomes, it is the pullers who we are seeking rehabilitation methods for. However,

as a license issuing agency, the KMC no longer issues licenses to the rickshaw owners because the State Government has ordered a ban and because the rickshaw issue is *sub judice*[3] at the High Court and is pending a decision.

The Hackney Carriage Branch of the Calcutta Police issues licenses and regulates the profession. This branch receives its orders directly from the District Commissioner of Police-Traffic. Officials at this department declined to answer questions on grounds that the matter is *sub judic*e at the high court. As one official stated, 'we cannot answer questions about this issue, but I can tell you that rickshaws are being banned because they cause traffic congestion and it is inhuman for one man to be pulling another.' However, officials requested to see the interview guide, which was shown to them. They appeared to be very concerned about the questions being asked and the responses being received from the pullers, the owners, and citizens. Additionally, although a retired Officer-in-Charge of this department agreed to be interviewed, he failed to arrive for the appointment. This degree of secrecy at the administrative level raises questions about the intentions of the administration and also highlights the political sensitivity of the issue.

The Calcutta Police's position on the state government's orders might be described as stoic. As an implementation agency, the police force complies if the state government issues an order for the seizure and confiscation of rickshaws. Police officials claim that after the ban in 2006, they had been notified that legally rickshaws no longer exist in the city. Therefore according to police officials, there is no difference between a legal rickshaw and an illegal one. A senior police officer made the following statement;

> Right now we are doing nothing. Everything related to this has stopped. There is no more law, it has been banned, so we have discontinued everything related to

this issue. The executive and the judicial branches are at loggerheads. As far as we know the high court has ordered the KMC to renew the licenses and they are not doing so. So right now there is no difference between legal and illegal rickshaws as that law does not exist anymore.

Figure 1: Rickshaws parked by police vans outside the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

Consequently, senior officials claim that there are no raids on rickshaws and no confiscations of vehicles, however rickshaw pullers denied this claim as we show later in our findings. Figure 1 depicts the ambivalence about the situation. In a rather straightforward interview, police officials stated, 'no impact assessment has been done and no rehabilitation package has been announced.' Moreover the police department anticipates that there will be no issues in Calcutta even if rickshaws are removed without any rehabilitation as affirmed by a senior police officer who stated, 'No, none [issues].

From the police point of view [there will] hardly [be] any problems even if no rehabilitation is given.'

After presenting the role of the multiple state agencies and their position toward the ban on the rickshaw profession, we now turn our attention to the opposition. We use the term 'opposition' to refer to all actors who are non-governmental and engaged in the struggle against the ban on rickshaws.

Aim: save the rickshaws

Working to negotiate a solution for the rickshaw issue is the Calcutta Samaritans, the ABRU, the rickshaw owners, and the rickshaw pullers. The Calcutta Samaritans have been involved with the rickshaw pullers for over 20 years since the founder, Pastor Vijayan Pavamani intimated contact with local pullers to learn about their lives and to help them in some way. Initially, the NGO provided pullers with medicines and counseled them during times of distress. When the government identified the pullers as a high-risk group for HIV/AIDS, the Calcutta Samaritans worked with the pullers to help them combat the infection. The NGO then recruited the pullers as peer educators and sent them to Calcutta's prostitution circuits to advise people about the threat of HIV/AIDS. The rickshaw pullers have an advantage because they have street credit and hence, access to other high-risk groups who operate in the back alleys of Calcutta. A representative of the NGO attests to the value of pullers by saying,

> I think they have provided some key information in the field of HIV and AIDS as a high risk group that's why we use them as peer educators in their own field, but, they also act sometimes as pimps, you know, so being migrants they are able to access people and information that an ordinary person won't be able to.

By providing critical information on HIV/AIDS and acting as peer educators, the pullers perform a service to the community, but this never surfaces in the dominant discourse. After the rickshaw ban in 2006, the Campaign and Advocacy Department of the Calcutta Samaritans worked to negotiate rehabilitation or remuneration for the rickshaw pullers. The organization, while not in favor of one man pulling another, is of the firm opinion that the government cannot ban a profession without arranging some compensation. Besides, the NGO contends that pullers are primarily concerned with earning a living so they do not relate to the argument about traffic congestion and the city's image. The leadership condemns the call for a ban without an assessment of the number of pullers and reiterates the same problem as expressed by the KMC—the number of pullers is not known. Explaining this problem, the respondent said,

> If they had decided to ban it they should have done proper homework which they didn't do. They just went by the licenses. They have stopped issuing licenses now, [actually] some years ago they decided that there was just 5,000 rickshaw pullers because that many licenses had been issued up until that time. [But] actually there are around 24,000 rickshaw pullers who are a lot of people to be without jobs and taking their families would be around a lakh [100,000], you see, which is why we have been pushing the government for a rehabilitation package, not just drop them, after passing a bill without much of an opposition because nobody did any homework they are just viewing it from a certain perspective.

The quote above draws attention to the legal and illegal nature of the profession and the quandary of the administration with regards to the number of rickshaw pullers.

Nonetheless, the aim of the organization is to seek rehabilitation or remuneration for the rickshaw pullers.

The Calcutta Samaritans works closely with the ABRU which is the union for the rickshaw profession. The ABRU works with rickshaw owners, the media, and other interest groups to pressure the government and lobby and negotiate remuneration or rehabilitation. The union leadership is affiliated with the Trinamool Congress.[4] The ABRU organizes and arranges rallies, protests, demonstrations and strikes and creates all the supporting propaganda material such as fliers, posters, and billboards. Social rights activist Medha Patkar is prominently displayed in a billboard advertising the rickshaw convention which was arranged by the ABRU on 25 July 2009, although she did not attend the convention (Figure 2). An NGO representative explained during an interview that she was never expected to attend—the use of her name was to generate publicity for the event.

Figure 2: Billboard advertising members of Parliament and Social Activists.

Prior to the rickshaw convention, a Press Conference was held on 22 July, 2009. Approximately 75-100 people attended the press conference which included officials of the ABRU, members of the Calcutta Samaritans, and other local councilors—rickshaw pullers and owners were absent. While the Press Conference lasted for only 10 minutes, several handouts were distributed advertising the upcoming rickshaw convention. An NGO representative claimed that 'nothing is ever changed on the documents distributed, they just change the date.' This suggests that there are broader politics intertwined with the current rickshaw issue.

The ABRU invited social activists and politicians from the Trinamool Congress to speak at the rickshaw convention. The media also attended but mostly focused their attention on the arrival and departure of the Minister of Tourism, Sultan Ahmed. Approximately 1,000 rickshaw pullers and 100 rickshaw owners attended the convention which was convened by a panel of approximately 15 political leaders and a lesser known activist Anuradha Talwar (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3: Rickshaw pullers and owners at the Rickshaw Convention on July 25, 2009.

Figure 4: Minister of Tourism, Sultan Ahmed and other political leaders at the Rickshaw Convention, July 25, 2009.

While the panelists highlighted some of the benefits of rickshaws most of the political speeches appeared to target the ruling Community Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] government and digressed from the issue of rickshaw puller rehabilitation.

The speakers targeted the CPI (M) at a political level and also questioned their ethnic allegiances. By this we mean that the opposition argued that the administration favored the Bengali language and culture in the state over other ethnic groups. By suggesting the ethnic dimension of the ban, the opposition appeals to the sensitivities of the Bihari population and strengthens their resistance. Additionally, the speakers at the convention had differences of opinion, while some demanded rehabilitation; others demanded that rickshaws be retained in the city. Overall, the convention appeared to be a political move by the Trinamool Congress to target the CPI (M) and to sustain the support of the rickshaw pullers. A win for the rickshaw profession signals a win for the

Trinamool Congress— an element implicit in the convention and resistance of the ABRU.

The rickshaw owners do not have a concerted effort to resist the ban on rickshaws, but their strategies do exist. While some cooperate with the ABRU and appeal to the justice system, others resort to illegal techniques of resistance There are some rickshaw owners who run their business within the premises of the rules and laws which have governed rickshaw operation in the city. These rickshaw owners maintain records of their pullers and have licenses for their vehicles with government issued registration numbers. However, there are rickshaw owners who operate illegally by using the same registration number on several different rickshaws and sending them to different parts of the city. As such, instead of 5,945 rickshaws, the city has approximately 20,000 rickshaws (some licensed and registered with the KMC while others are not) in operation. Now, because of the nature of the government ruling and the ban on the profession, all rickshaw owners are operating the profession illegally. Since the government has no formal count of rickshaw numbers they cannot deliberate an appropriate rehabilitation package for either the owners or the rickshaw pullers. What has resulted is bribery, corruption and ongoing resistance and conflict. An added layer to the complex urban environment, are the measures used by rickshaw pullers to maintain their right to their livelihood.

The rickshaw pullers continue to work, visibly, in the city's streets, transporting people and goods and providing other kinds of social services. Some of them attend strikes and demonstrations which portray their strength in numbers for the media's attention, but several are disinclined to attend, because they lose their daily earnings.

They bribe the police to prevent their vehicles from being confiscated. In this manner, they continue the life of their profession. However, their resistance movement originates from the role they play in the lives of Calcutta's population. By performing some critical functions they have actively and passively resisted their eradication over the last 63 years by carving out a niche for themselves in local neighborhoods and everyday lives of people. In this next section, we take a closer look at the rickshaw pullers' various acts of resistance.

Rickshaw Pullers' Acts of Resistance

In this section, we attempt to unearth the factors which have worked to keep the rickshaw profession in operation and discuss the significance of them. We have found that the pullers acts of resistance occur in two distinct ways, one active and vocal and the other passive and implicit.

Active resistance

Rickshaw pullers participate in strikes, *gheraos (*Hindi term for an active protest, which could include blocking a street or government building)*, and demonstrations at the behest of the ABRU. While rickshaw pullers arrive in large numbers to support the public displays of resistance, they are often confused about whether the expected solution is rehabilitation, compensation, or retention of the profession. Their confusion stems from the ambiguous nature of all those working to save the rickshaws. As noted earlier, while some groups call for rehabilitation of the rickshaws and owners, others want the rickshaw profession to be continued.

During the rickshaw convention not a single rickshaw owner or puller delivered any speech to his peers, and many rickshaw pullers fell asleep during the speeches.

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Perhaps they are tired of listening to the same discourse by political leaders, or have given up hope of an acceptable solution to their situation. Accordingly an old-timer had this to say, 'I have been listening to this [a ban on rickshaws] and 30 years have passed. Even the CPI (M) will be gone before the rickshaws are removed.' Or as stated by another puller when asked if he was aware that rickshaws have been banned, he said, 'Yes, but listening to it, my hair has gone grey' and in amusement another puller stated, 'listening to the officials I have gone deaf and others have left this world.'

The political speeches delivered at the convention were fiery and nationalistic, appealing to the patriotism of the rickshaw pullers by making references to India's freedom struggle and how it took ordinary people to rise up against the British. The panelists insinuated that the pullers must fight and oppose the ruling of the communists. Frequently, politicians reminded the rickshaw pullers that senior party leaders of the opposition were doing everything within their power to prevent the rickshaws from being removed from the city. Referring to former resistance by the pullers, a prominent women's rights activist stated that, 'I have been associated with the rickshaw issue since the days of Unnayan, and because of their protest from then to now, they are still around.' A Central Government official and a member of the Trinamool Congress made a similar statement saying,

> On 15 August 2006 there was a decision made that in three months, Calcutta should become like Hong Kong and Singapore and rickshaws will be removed, but because of protests and high court cases we are still around and will remain around.

While these acts of resistance such as organizing large conventions, featuring prominent public figures, and procuring media coverage appear to be working in favor of keeping the profession in operation, it seems that the political undertones are essentially what are effective. Because the Trinamool Congress uses the rickshaw situation in their fight against the ruling communist party, the issue is perceived as politically sensitive and high profile. However, while these high profile conventions and demonstrations receive the support of the illiterate masses of rickshaw pullers it appears that their right to a livelihood is subsumed with the greater political objectives of the opposition. Consequently, the issue remains unresolved and an acceptable outcome is left wanting. Besides these active and highly publicized acts of resistance, rickshaw pullers have also engaged in passive resistance techniques through their everyday activities which we now elaborate.

Passive resistance and everyday acts of resistance

The rickshaw pullers are aware that the government wants to ban the profession because it does not look right for one man to be pulling another in an advanced society. But they are also of the opinion that if rickshaw pulling is a means to earn a living, then it should not be considered a degrading task. As stated by a rickshaw puller, 'they [the government] may think one man pulling another is not good, but we fill our stomachs with this.' Added by another rickshaw puller, 'We don't steal, we work hard to educate our kids. They say one man pulling another is not good, but for me this is my Lakshmi (Goddess of Wealth).' For many, rickshaw pulling offers them upward mobility from jobs such as waiters, servants, and porters; many of whom have tried working at these jobs and have found rickshaw pulling to be more rewarding. On average, pullers said they

earned about ₹60-80 (~$1.07-1.43) per day working as servants, waiters, or coolies, whereas rickshaw pulling generated roughly ₹100-120 (~$1.79-2.15) per day. A rickshaw puller expressed his dissatisfaction with other jobs as such, 'I used to work as a coolie before, but there was no profit in it, so rickshaw pulling was the best option.' Yet another rickshaw puller expressed the same idea by stating, 'I worked in a hotel as a waiter serving water and picking up plates, but my family got bigger I had kids so there was not much profit from being a waiter, so I decided to pull a rickshaw'.

Additionally, the rickshaw pullers contend that if rickshaw pulling is morally incorrect then so is banishing a profession without rehabilitation or remuneration. A rickshaw puller stated, 'they think it is bad that one man is pulling another, but there is poverty behind this [the rickshaw profession]. We don't think like this, we don't think it is bad, our families survive with this.' Clearly, the notion of morality and rights differs between the rickshaw puller community and the state government. As a result, even though rickshaws legally, on paper, do not exist in Calcutta, the pullers continue to operate their vehicles and provide Calcuttans with all types of services. Consequently they engage in everyday acts of resistance to perpetuate their livelihood and existence.

Bribes. Bribery is a common feature in Calcutta that very few can avoid. Interviewee responses related to bribes emerged several times although the survey instrument did not contain a question on bribery. Bribery occurs at all levels, between the rickshaw puller and the police, the rickshaw owner and the police, the cycle-rickshaws and the police, but each with a differing objective. For example, police officers threaten to confiscate rickshaws unless they are given bribes as a token. Likewise, the pullers and owners bribe the police to avoid confiscations, fines, and police harassment. Even though senior police

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officials insisted that raids and confiscations of rickshaws were not taking place, Figure 5 attests to the contrary.
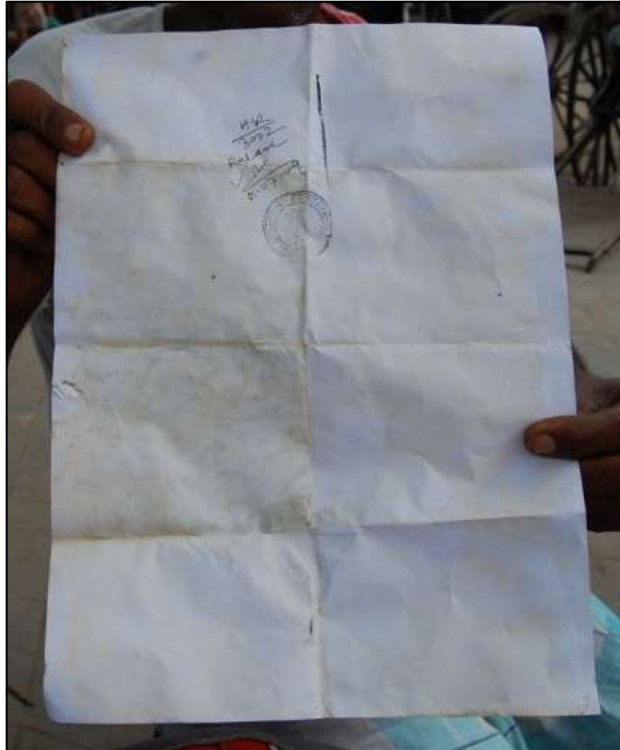
Figure 5: Blank sheet of paper signed and stamped by the local police station for the release of the rickshaw.

Here, a rickshaw puller holds a plain sheet of paper, stamped and signed by the police department for the release of his vehicle. By paying bribes as token, rickshaw owners and pullers are passively resisting the removal of the rickshaws. Moreover, the police are accepting bribes from cycle-rickshaw operators and permitting them entry to the inner city areas where, by law, they are not permitted. As one rickshaw puller stated,

> Those guys (cycle-rickshaws operators) have stamps on their vehicles so the cops know [who has paid] because the owners pay bribes to operate there [central city areas]…

Another official of the ABRU stated,

> Also the cycle-rickshaws are bribing the police and now coming into the city
> where they are legally not allowed to come. The zones of the rickshaw puller and
> cycle rickshaw do not overlap because if they do then one or the other will suffer.

A senior official of the police force also attested to the same arguments about cycle-rickshaws penetrating central city areas, he said,

> The police are keeping quiet on this. The cycle-rickshaws are infiltrating the
> KMC area. There is a general permissiveness against an order. Priorities change
> with every police commissioner. There is a police inertia because of political and
> internal inertias.

The city areas traditionally used by the non-Bengali migrant rickshaw pullers are now being usurped by cycle-rickshaw operators who are mostly Bengali. Because the government is not actively preventing cycle-rickshaws from entering the city, incidentally, concerns arise about their favoritism toward the Bengalis and target on the Biharis rickshaw pullers. However, pullers continue to operate in spaces in the city where they have historically done so, carrying out functions which display and reinforce their embeddedness in the local community.

Services besides transport. Rickshaws are popularly known for their transport services in Calcutta. What oftentimes go unnoticed are the functions provided by rickshaw pullers which extend beyond their vehicles, and for which mutual benefit is the only remuneration (for a detailed discussion of services see Hyrapiet and Greiner

forthcoming). These services constitute a passive form of resistance where, by virtue of these services, the rickshaw pullers maintain some degree of control over their indispensability and important role in society. Rickshaw pullers provide a local community with a layer of security by virtue of their presence in a neighborhood. It is common to find a rickshaw puller sleep on the sidewalk with his vehicle or even be given a place on a patio or verandah in a private home. Moreover, the entire rickshaw profession is one built on familiarity (colloquially termed *jaan pehchan*) between rickshaw pullers and owners, and rickshaw pullers and the local people. It is in this context that rickshaw pullers continue to perform security functions for the locality; offer personalized services, such as care for elders (Figure 6), schoolchildren, and even babies.

Figure 6: A rickshaw puller assists an elderly gentleman into his vehicle.

As one respondent stated, 'they are very caring, they take kids to school, they take care of them,' or as stated by another respondent, '[they are] dependable, like an angel…parents leave their little children in the pullers care to take and pick up from

school…he looks after them.' Women also feel safe and secure with their local rickshaw pullers compared to other transport operators. Local people and rickshaw pullers share a great deal of mutual respect and trust, a relationship unlike any other between public transportation operators and the general public, as quoted by one respondent, 'if you leave stuff behind he will bring it back, taxis won't.'

Moreover, rickshaw pullers work as peer educators with the Calcutta Samaritans, and assist the organization with reaching out to prostitutes and others in the sex industry as well as providing key information on HIV/AIDS. These services which extend beyond transportation are unpaid services based on mutual understanding and a high degree of familiarity. These acts of the rickshaw pullers are cultural and social in nature and serve to produce and maintain the urban nature of Calcutta.

The Government's Development Discourse

The state government wants to improve the city's image and therefore, banned the rickshaw because of its colonial symbolism and supposed inhumaneness. Mr. Bhattacharjee (West Bengal's former Chief Minister) was quoted in *The Statesman,* December 9, 2006 as saying, 'We must agree on one point: in the 21st century it is not right for a human being to pull another human being. Wherever I go, be it Delhi, Mumbai or abroad, people ask me how long Kolkata will have hand-pulled rickshaws? This is a shame for our city and state. We should have done this much earlier.'

Using archival and secondary sources of data we found that the city's image became an issue around the turn of the 21st century. Before this time, government planning documents from as early as India's independence in 1947, indicated a need to remove rickshaws to speed up the traffic and decongest the city. In *The Calcutta*

Municipal Gazette of 1947, Mazumdar (1947, 103) writes, 'rickshaws…should not be allowed on certain main streets when they are mainly used for the city's vehicular traffic.' Media reports from 1993 also indicate that attempts to remove rickshaws was to increase the average cruising speed in the city and to decongest the streets (Sarkar 1993). A shift takes place in media reports in late 1996, when the first mention of the city's image appeared. This shift in reporting coincides with the time that the West Bengal state government proposed plans to establish a 'New Calcutta' as part of the wider economic policies of liberalization and infrastructural change (Chakravorty and Gupta 1996; Ghosh 1996). At this same time, India sought a permanent seat with the Security Council and was also celebrating 50 years of Independence which prompted the nation's leadership to intervene. The leaders labeled the rickshaw profession antiquated and demeaning. Nonetheless, due to an extremely vocal resistance movement, all attempts to eradicate the rickshaws in the late 1990s were dismissed.

The rhetoric on rickshaws is strongly connected to a transportation perspective and rarely makes a reference to the pullers as human beings detached from their vehicles. As such, the rickshaw pullers, owners and the general public commonly discuss all the apparent transport- related services of the rickshaws. So powerful and pervasive is this common discourse that even the rickshaw pullers talk about these benefits as though it were second nature. Implicit cultural and social services such as night-time security and their role as peer educators or their role in people's lives due to their responsible, honest, and caring nature is left out of the dominant discourse. This does not mean that the pullers are not aware of the cultural and social functions which they perform or that their vehicles are environmentally friendly and sustainable, but the degree of importance given

to these aspects is downplayed in the wider fray of the discourse. The eco-friendly nature of the profession is mentioned, but hardly ever focused upon even by the ABRU leaders, politicians, the media, and NGOs fighting for the rickshaw cause. The absence of the cultural and social services and the environmental benefit in the opposition's discourse signifies the strength and power of the government discourse and as such more energy is devoted to refuting the dominant discourse rather than creating a new one.

Power and Control

In their attempt to legitimize and naturalize the ban on rickshaws, the state government made every effort to control the public transcript. In legal documents, official gazettes, in quotes given to the media, and in any reference to the rickshaw profession, the government claims that rickshaws cause congestion and are inhumane. The discourse excludes the "green" nature of the rickshaw profession as it would work contrary to naturalizing the ban. But, a senior government official did clarify his personal stance in response to if he agreed with the rickshaw ban, he said 'In a way yes, and in a way no, If you think of the carbon footprint and global warming, when other countries around the world are switching to non-motorized transportation, you have a case for the hand-pulled rickshaw.' This environmental benefit of rickshaws and its socio-cultural impacts are left out of the opposition's discourse. By focusing primarily on the inhumanity of the profession and the role rickshaws play in congestion, the government is trying to appeal to the 'common good' to ban the rickshaws. A senior officer of the police department uses the same discourse when asked why the government wants to ban rickshaws, he said 'one school of thought is that one man is pulling another and another is that they are impeding the flow of traffic.' Another officer said the same thing, 'The reason for the ban

is because one man is pulling another [and this] is inhuman. From our point of view, these are slow moving vehicles which obstruct the smooth flow of traffic.'

However, citizens' and rickshaw pullers' and even some government officials argue against the reasoning that the profession is inhumane which challenges the premises of the government discourse. When compared to jobs that are far more degrading and undignified, the rickshaw pales in comparison according to several respondents. As suggested by a police officer,

> We need to first make all the man-entry sewers into non-man entry sewers.[5] From a societal point of view it is much more inhumane than the hand-pulled rickshaw. One may say the same thing of the shoe-shine boys and men who enter the gutters and sewers to clean it, we should ban that first.

A senior member of the Calcutta Samaritans also questions the inhumane argument to ban the rickshaws and calls attention to other equally demeaning professions. She said, 'I mean it is easy to say it is against human rights without thinking of what else they can do, you know. What I would say is really against human rights is for people to carry excreta in baskets on their heads, this need not happen at all!' Another respondent downplayed the inhumane argument as well by saying, 'But railway track engineers are sitting on a cart and fourth grade (grade pay classification) employees pull them, this is also inhumane; coolies, sweepers, [these are all] more inhuman [and] unhygienic.'

Yet another respondent brought attention to professions (servants, porters etc) which are hidden from public view, but are equally demeaning, 'people doing hard work or worse work is everywhere…we exploit but we don't see it.' Another respondent stated 'the coolies and municipal sweepers work in inhumane conditions too,' yet another

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respondent talks about inhumane professions 'hundreds to thousands of women are suffering intestinal problems because they cannot relieve themselves when they want to…working as domestic servants.' A rickshaw puller defended his profession and argued about the inhumanity of the profession by saying,

> He [government officials] is saying one man pulling another [is inhumane], but in 24 Parganas [district adjacent to Calcutta] people are carrying latrines with human shit on their heads to throw it away. What about the shoe shine boys when you put your foot up to them to shine your shoes, is that not inhuman? People are cleaning drains here, in the US they are using machines and technology.

The state also puts forward the traffic congestion argument as grounds for rickshaw removal, but Calcutta's traffic situation is believed to extend well beyond just the banishment of rickshaws. Several respondents pointed out there are traffic bottlenecks for hours in areas where rickshaws do not operate, so how is a removal of rickshaws justified on these grounds? Other respondents noted that rickshaws use the lanes and are not permitted on arterial roads except to cross at intersections. While other respondents attributed the traffic congestion to other vehicles, 'jams are caused by autos, taxis, buses. Rickshaws use the gullies [lanes], they maneuver all over to get to the destination.' A rickshaw puller expressed a similar sentiment, 'Trams are not causing jams or what? Taxis, autos [auto-rickshaws], and Honda Citys are not causing jams? But Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee [former Chief Minister of West Bengal] can only see the rickshaws.' The public and rickshaw pullers believe that the inhumane and traffic congestion arguments conceal other government biases against the Biharis migrants in Calcutta. The rickshaw

profession operated mostly by Biharis, offers an opportunity to not only eradicate an outdated profession, but to target ethnic minorities in the city.

Discussion

The findings of our study indicate that because there are two broad groups of actors (government and non-government) working under different sets of rules, functions, and objectives, the possibility of a resolution is left pending. The West Bengal State Department of Transportation has banned the rickshaws, but due to several ambiguities in terms of rickshaw and rickshaw pullers' numbers and the political sensitivity of the issue, no definitive action has been taken by the administration. On the other hand, the groups of actors hoping to save the rickshaws appear to have competing interests. While some want the profession to continue, others seek rehabilitation or remuneration for the pullers while at the same time concealing hidden political agendas. As a result, a (passively) antagonistic situation has emerged in the city. The local police departments continue with the confiscation of vehicles from time to time without specific orders from higher officers and the opposition continues with various forms of resistance to these acts.

However, because of an extremely effective resistance movement, both active and passive, the rickshaw profession perpetuates in Calcutta. Even though the resistance, in part has their own, broader, political agenda, it has prevented the rickshaws from being banished from the city's streets. Moreover, as part of the strategies of resistance the rickshaw pullers and owners use the machinery of bribery and corruption to work in their favor by appealing to the interests of law enforcement. Besides the politics enmeshed in the struggle to control the means of social reproduction for the rickshaw pullers, are the inherent cultural factors (such as important services besides transport) that have

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consistently worked in the favor of the rickshaw puller community. By performing these functions, rickshaw pullers have negotiated a place for rickshaws in Calcutta. Moreover, while the government depicts the profession as inhumane, local residents perceive the rickshaws as very useful and the pullers as trustworthy and compassionate. The services provided by rickshaw pullers beyond their transportation role are built into the cultural fabric of the city and have proved to be a daunting challenge for the state government to disengage. By socially and culturally embedding themselves in the lives of people, rickshaw pullers have maintained control over access to their livelihoods—these are their everyday acts of resistance.

Additionally, the reasoning behind a ban on the rickshaws is based on misinformation, which leaves the administration open to challenge and criticism. The secrecy of decision-making in relation to the ban is perceived as a hidden agenda on the part of the administration that has frequently been criticized as being ethnically biased toward the Bihari population. However, while the government's discourse about rickshaws is impressive, to the extent that it brings to the forefront important issues of human rights and the need to address traffic flows in the city, the opposition also uses it to their advantage. By exercising power and control over the 'public transcript', the opposition conceals their individual aims while defending the rickshaw profession. The Trinamool Congress, through the ABRU projects its political agenda and exercises control over the CPI (M) by using the rickshaw profession. However, so powerful is the government's discourse that the opposition devotes significant attention to dismissing the claims rather than highlighting positives of the rickshaw profession. The positives such as its socio-cultural contributions and the environmental benefit of rickshaws rarely gain

any importance in the discourse of the opposition. It appears that the public transcript and the method to naturalize and legitimize the ban is in constant (re)negotiation as power and control is exercised between the politically powerful and those challenging that very power.

Subsequently, power and control is also exercised by the rickshaw pullers on the administration. By paying bribes to the police the rickshaw pullers are controlling their fate. By appealing to the cultural needs of Calcutta's population, they are bypassing their eradication. As weaker actors in the midst of an all-powerful discourse and political agenda, rickshaw pullers have survived their eradication. Consequently, any attempt to ban the rickshaws has met with opposition and both active and passive resistance.

For the state to be able to make any headway to resolve the situation it will have to include all interests groups in its planning processes and decision-making at a political level. At the same time, the state will have to consider the needs and requirements of Calcutta's population and the many rickshaw pullers who cohabitate in a web which defies an easy understanding of the human-urban-environment.

Conclusion

Our study grew out of the need to understand the ecological, social, and political facets of the rickshaw profession, the related ban, and its role in the construction of urban nature in Calcutta. However, we found that the ecological aspects of the profession were subsumed by the socio-political dimensions of the ban. Nonetheless, the multiple themes from political ecology used in this research have helped shed light on the complex nature-society relationships in Calcutta by showing how rickshaw pullers maintain access to their livelihood and how power struggles continually negotiate the production of urban

nature. The role of multiple actors, acts of resistance, and power and control over the dominant discourse has created an urban environment of conflict, contestation, and negotiation. However, together these power struggles are responsible for why the pullers have access to their livelihood, residents have access to their services, and the production of urban nature in Calcutta continues.

This case study has contributed to the expanding body of UPE literature by showing that social power relations impacts and controls the right to access material and social reproduction in cities. We have also shown that through socially-mediated processes, the urban nature of the city is maintained. Our study adds to the UPE toolkit by illustrating how urban natures are produced, negotiated, and maintained.

Since the fieldwork for this study was conducted, several things have changed which exemplify certain aspects of our findings. The Trinamool Congress won elections in West Bengal in 2011 and are currently in power upsetting the 34 year rule of the CPI(M). Consequently, the media reported that rickshaw pullers would be able to renew their licenses (*The Telegraph,* November 10, 2011) and would also be given identity cards to address the illegal nature of the profession (*The Statesman*, December 27, 2011). Also earlier this year, the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee announced that rickshaws will be painted blue and white in keeping with the colors of the city. Therefore, it is expected that rickshaws will persist in Calcutta as a win for the Trinamool Congress signals a victory for the rickshaw profession.

Despite the politics, evident from our study is that actors will be able to maintain access to their livelihood because their activities are embedded in the socio-cultural milieu of the urban nature of the city. Their activities become acts of resistance when

defiantly performed in the wake of official ruling by more powerful actors. What also remains clear is the ability of less powerful actors to negotiate their rights to access in the event that their livelihood is under threat. The urban political ecology framework applied in this study serves well to elaborate how politics intertwines with social and cultural factors to not only produce urban natures, but for marginalized groups to negotiate access to their social and material well-being.

Notes

1. In Calcutta, three types of rickshaws exist—the motorized auto-rickshaw, and non-motorized cycle-rickshaw (pedicab) and hand-pulled rickshaw. Unless otherwise noted, all references to rickshaw denote the hand-pulled variety.
2. The conversion rate as of June 4, 2012 is 1 USD = 55.66 Rupees.
3. Under judicial review
4. Trinamool Congress is the ruling political party in West Bengal as of 2011. During fieldwork they were the main opposition to the then ruling CPI (M).
5. Frequently, municipal workers enter clogged city drains in knee- to waist deep sewage to clean them.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This research attempted to address questions pertaining to the use and value of

rickshaws in the city of Calcutta. The articles incorporate several different yet related

themes of cultural politics and place making, contrasting geographical imaginations of

local residents related to urban image change, and the role of actors and acts of resistance

as they relate to the human-urban relationship. This study demonstrates the socio-

economic and cultural embeddedness of the profession within the urban fabric of the city

and in relation to the informal economy in Calcutta. Through multiple geographical

conceptual ideas, I show how rickshaw pullers have made a place for themselves and

rickshaws in Calcutta by embedding themselves in the lives of local residents. They

discursively occupy an ambiguous position in the city, and have also effectively

negotiated and resisted efforts of eradication.

The central questions in this dissertation are:

1. What functions and role do the rickshaws and their pullers play in the city of

   Calcutta and in the lives of residents?

2. Why are the rickshaws and their pullers considered an anachronism in

   Calcutta and how have they resisted their eradication from the city?

3. What implications does this have for the rickshaws pullers as Calcutta's image is refashioned?

4. What does this mean for the production of urban nature in the city of Calcutta?

Using the three article dissertation format, each stand-alone article in this dissertation is an attempt to answer one or more of these research questions. The first article, Chapter 2 uses an understanding of cultural politics and place making to describe the role played by rickshaw pullers in the lives of the city's residents and the use and value of the rickshaw profession to the city of Calcutta. Through 83 interviews triangulated with photographs and archival and secondary sources of data, the following findings were ascertained to answer questions 1, 2 and 3.

- The rickshaws perform functions that go beyond their simple role in transportation. Because of their bonds of friendship, familiarity, and trust with the local residents, they are deeply embedded in the lives of citizens.

- As a result of their embeddedness in the lives of people, they contribute to place making as the profession is ingrained in the urban economic functioning of the city

- The profession also supports several families in India's eastern region and Calcutta's hinterland through remittances to the neighboring state of Bihar.

- Significantly, rickshaw pullers also value the comparative freedom, independence, and empowerment which they receive through the rickshaw profession as they are not obligated to anyone.

- Pulling a rickshaw is also less stressful and more profitable for the rickshaw pullers in comparison to other professions within the informal economy in Calcutta.

- By avoiding police arrests and embedding themselves in the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the city, rickshaw pullers challenge hegemonic views of who belongs where in the city and thereby make a place for themselves in Calcutta.

- The rickshaw can be integrated into sustainable transport solutions for the city of Calcutta which is already battling immense pollution problems.

- The rickshaw can also be used to market the city for tourism as it reflects a part of the city's heritage.

- The rickshaw is one transportation option which cuts across class lines. In a city where the divisions between the haves and have-nots are stark, the rickshaw offers perhaps one option to lessen the divide.

While the first article explores the social and cultural embeddedness of the rickshaw profession in Calcutta, the next article (Chapter 3) explores the profession in relation to urban image change. The trend in cities of the global south is to make cities more marketable, investment friendly and attractive to tourists and thus, gain a competitive edge locally, regionally, and even globally. Calcutta is on the quest to change its image and therefore through planning, city administrators are attempting to displace negative stereotypes of Calcutta. A new suite of infrastructure such as shopping malls, coffee shops, flyovers, and expensive condominiums are expected to achieve the goal of making Calcutta appear more modern and increasing the city's influence in India. In view

of these changes and an expectation of what is appropriate and inappropriate in the city, the hand-pulled rickshaws appear at odds with the city's image. By investigating local perceptions of the city, I show that contrasting geographical imaginations of Calcutta exists and can shed light on the multiple dimensions of planning and city image change. Moreover, through the data the dualistic nature of Calcutta's planning emerges as the government views infrastructural development as key to transforming Calcutta, while local residents value the social aspects of the historic core of the city. Also, through processes of dehumanization, the rickshaw pullers are made to appear at odds with the city, but I show that they occupy a discursively constructed status of ambiguity in Calcutta. The portrayal of the rickshaws and their pullers somewhere along the lines of human and animal, legal and illegal, inside and outside, in place and out of place, stranger and family, positions them at an ambiguously constructed status of betweenness in Calcutta. Using the 83 interviews, triangulated with government documents, government websites, media reports, and Calcutta based guidebooks, I highlight the significant contrasts and show that rickshaws are positioned at an ambiguous place within these contrasting imaginations of Calcutta. I attempt to answer questions 2 and 3. The main findings are as follows:

- Based on Central strategies of planning facilitated through the JNNURM, dominant groups attempt to justify development in Calcutta's peripheral areas by presenting infrastructural change as a means to alter the city's image.

- Infrastructural change and development takes precedence in Calcutta's planning culture over an emphasis on the social aspects of the city.

- By reworking symbols and icons of the city which reflect negatively on the associations people make and keep with the city, the more powerful groups attempt to naturalize image change and replace the old symbols with new symbols of progress and modernity.

- Through the dehumanization of rickshaw pullers, dominant groups attempt to legitimize the demise of the profession and have also influenced the self-worth of the rickshaw pullers.

- Local perceptions of the city reveal contrasting views of the character of Calcutta as the geographical imaginations of residents and authorities greatly diverge.

- Calcutta's image affords significant contradictions and paradoxes for local residents and the authorities. While authorities perceive the periphery as the core and emphasize development in the periphery, local residents have a strong sense of belonging to the historic core.

- Rickshaws and their pullers appear to be out of place in modernizing Calcutta, but they essentially inhabit a discursively constructed ambiguous place of betweenness in the city and in the lives of residents.

- Image change throughout cities of the global south, must assess local perceptions of the character of a particular city and evaluate the place of informal work in them in order to better prepare planning objectives and outcomes.

The final article (Chapter 4) evaluates the role of multiple competing and conflicting actors who are working with either of two aims; one – to ban the rickshaws, two – to save the rickshaws. Additionally, I use political ecology's emphasis on acts of resistance to examine how the rickshaw puller community has adapted, in active and passive ways, to

avoid the eradication of their profession. Using open-ended interviews and documents and photographs collected as well as field memos and notes, I show that because of an extremely effective resistance, the rickshaw profession continues to exist in Calcutta in spite of the politics surrounding the issue. Additionally, because the multiple actors involved in the rickshaw profession have conflicting and contrasting objectives and aims, the issue remains unresolved. Overall, because of an effective resistance and the conflicting role of actors, rickshaw pullers have been able to maintain their rights to access their means of social production and in turn have negotiated and maintained the production of urban nature in Calcutta. This article attempts to answer research questions 2 and 4 and its findings follow:

- The rickshaw ban is contentious, politically charged and sensitive with the opposition political party (Trinamool Congress) using it as a means to attack the ruling party (CPI[M]).

- The rickshaw profession has persisted in the city because multiple actors with differing objectives, rules, and functions have prevented a resolution. The situation that has arisen is antagonistic with the police raiding and confiscating rickshaws and the pullers avoiding arrests by bribing the police.

- As a result of the politics associated with the rickshaw profession and the lack of a clear, definitive resolution, the rickshaw pullers have engaged in their own active and passive forms of resistance to maintain access to their means of livelihood.

- Consequently, the rickshaw pullers have not only negotiated and maintained their right to social production but have enabled the production of urban

nature as rickshaws are integral to the urban fabric of the city performing much-needed functions beyond the role of transportation.

- The planning and decision-making process is closed and not transparent. Stakeholders are left out of the planning process which leaves the government open to criticism and resistance.

- On account of the resistance and role played by multiple actors, challenges to the human-environment complex in the city abound.

These articles cover different yet related themes on the issue of the socio-cultural and economic roles played by rickshaw pullers and the place for rickshaws in present day Calcutta. Informal activities such as rickshaw pulling play an integral role and should not be considered as peripheral to the urban character or the human-environment complex in cities of the global south. Overall, this research shows that

- The rickshaw profession sustains several thousand people in Calcutta as well as its hinterland area.

- The profession sustains the socio-cultural fabric of Calcutta and in spite of the cultural politics surrounding the ban, the pullers contribute to place making in the city by challenging hegemonic views of where they belong.

- As a transportation option, rickshaws perform functions which are perhaps unparalleled given the dense nature of the city and its structure. The rickshaws facilitate spatial mobility for the old, disabled, aged, and physically challenged. The pullers offer a midnight ambulance service and perform functions of nighttime security—valuable in a city of the size and character of

Calcutta. The pullers act as guardians for schoolchildren and also assist in a health related capacity by playing critical functions in relation to HIV/AIDS.

- Contrary to popular belief rickshaw pulling is not the most inhumane profession in Calcutta and neither is it the most physically challenging.

- The arguments put forward by the government, i.e. traffic congestion and the inhumanity of the profession, appear to be ruses to divert attention from the underlying ethnic dimension of the rickshaw profession and the need to clean the city's image.

- Local perceptions in this study, reveal the dualisms in imaginations of the value of the city to residents and city administrators strikingly show that authorities value economic facets while residents find belonging in the social aspects of Calcutta.

- This research sheds light on the contrasting local geographical imaginations of place and provides an explanation for why intentions and outcomes of planning in Calcutta differ.

- The study also shows that rickshaws and their pullers occupy a discursively constructed ambiguous status of "betweenness" in Calcutta even though they are frequently envisioned by the government as being out of place in the city.

- The multi-dimensionality of city image change is also highlighted and emphasized in this study.

Scope and Limitations

My biggest strengths were also my weaknesses. The fact that I was born and raised in Calcutta provided me an edge with the local language and permitted me entrée to rickshaw pullers, rickshaw owners, and the general public. But the dialects such as Bhojpuri and Bihari made translations difficult and some English words do not have a vernacular equivalent. Since I was considered a member of the community, several answers to questions were brushed off with "you know what I mean, you are from here."

My social network gave me several leads to top government officials and police officers. But this same social network hindered the snowball process. In some instances because I used my social network, several officials refused to be interviewed. Additionally, it also appeared that the rickshaw issue, while openly discussed in the media, is not as explicitly deliberated in government ranks. I personally took several letters to the state government's transport department and requested an interview with any official who could give me some insight on the rickshaw ban issue. I was flatly refused interviews and told that "the State government has nothing to do with the rickshaw issue." I faced a similar situation at the Hackney Carriage Licensing Department where the office-in-charge made several phone calls to his superiors, read out my questionnaire to them over the phone and then refused to be interviewed.

Because I interviewed rickshaw pullers at the rickshaw stands, an audience spontaneously enveloped the interview site. Sometimes this worked to my advantage as it would give the rickshaw puller far more courage to speak up and in some instances this would worry the rickshaw puller as it would draw undue importance to him. Moreover, because I am a woman I was socially denied access to a predominantly male world and

because I represent the middle class, my access and understanding of those below the poverty line was presumed to be beyond comprehension.

Data collection could not be exhaustive due to the nature of storage of archival data and library regulations. Since library data is not cataloged based on subject, my searches were restricted to reference librarian suggestions and the books and articles which they retrieved. As suggested by Rose (2007) one of the problems with discourse analysis is knowing where to stop data collection. In this regard my choices were limited because of the inaccessibility of archival data and the dependence on others to procure it for me. In terms of when and where to stop interviews, I used the point of saturation as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined as the point at which one can predict the interviewee's next response. While I did conclude interviews at saturation point, the small sample size of the general public was a limiting factor during analysis. Rose (2007) recommends that it is impossible to read everything and therefore a researcher must strive for quality of data as opposed to quantity, which given my limitations, was precisely my aim.

Dissertation Significance

This study helps to develop a better understanding of how marginalized groups such as the rickshaw pullers have resisted attempts at their eradication by firmly entrenching themselves in the socio-cultural lives of Calcutta's residents. In doing so, the rickshaw pullers have successfully defended the demise of their profession and have contributed to place making in Calcutta. Additionally, through contrasting imaginations and visions for Calcutta, this study has also provided a better understanding of local perceptions of the city. These perceptions in turn perhaps explain why planning in Calcutta can be

challenging with outcomes falling short of well-intentioned expectations. Through planning related to image change in Calcutta, the place of rickshaws and their pullers is also highlighted and they are shown as occupying a condition of betweenness in the city.

This study has also shown that the pullers engage in social resistance, both in active and passive ways, by making use of the systems at their disposal, such as strikes, lockouts, demonstrations, and bribes to defend their rights to access their means of social and material production. As a result, the pullers have not only ensured their own social and material well-being, but have simultaneously contributed to place making in Calcutta. Using the political machinery and adapting to it, the rickshaw pullers and owners have negotiated their rights and access to their livelihoods. Moreover, multiple agencies and institutions working to either defend the pullers or eradicate them create a complex human-environment which defies easy explanation, but coincidentally is responsible for perpetuating the profession.

Results of this study will be shared with the Non-government organization working with the rickshaw, the All Bengal Rickshaw Union, and copies of published articles will be offered to members of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and officials of the West Bengal State Department of Transportation. Additionally, the results of this study will also be made available to the news media in Calcutta in order to highlight the alternative views of the rickshaw profession and the role of the pullers made prominent in this study.

Through the rickshaw profession I have shown that weaker groups have the power and control to maintain access to their resources, and they will consistently negotiate their position. Moreover, these professions are not on the brink or marginal to the socio-economic and cultural lives of residents in cities, but perform essential functions which

contribute to not only their own well-being, but give character to place and contribute to the well-being of residents as well. We need further studies on professions within the informal economy throughout cities of the global south who face the fear of extinction on aesthetic grounds and visually unappealing discourses. In fact, these professions help sustain several millions around the world and must be viewed more critically in relation to the role they perform in place making and how their presence reduces social injustices.

Future Directions

I would like to extend this research a step further to critically analyze the idea of "slow-moving" in Calcutta. It is my belief that non-motorized transport while not as fast as motorized transportation are yet a better option given Calcutta's dense street pattern and irregular lanes and by-lanes. The idea of removing transportation on the basis of speed alone needs to be re-evaluated. Also, this research will serve as a stepping stone to assess and analyze several other professions like rickshaw pulling which are a part of the informal economy in Calcutta, but not given any importance or critical reflection. Particularly, I would like to extend this study to domestic aides, mainly women maidservants and children workers who live and work under deplorable conditions in slums and on pavements and lack access to basic amenities.

A Final Reflection

Rickshaws are part of parcel of the socio-cultural life of Calcutta and its many residents. The pullers are ingrained into the fabric of the city and have developed friendships and networks of trust and dependability which are hard to come by in public transport operators in cities such as the nature of Calcutta. These professions afford

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migrant workers with an honest, wage-earning opportunity and should not be annihilated

without remuneration or rehabilitation. While I understand the frustrations of the

government in terms of handling traffic congestion by building bigger and better roads in

the city, it is imprudent to remove a century old profession without any socio-economic

assessment. Calcutta has prided itself on its cosmopolitanism and welcoming nature to

outsiders both domestic and foreign, it will take a re-evaluation on the part of the

government to see strengths in the city's greatest asset and resource – its people!

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Interview Guide – Rickshaw Puller

(Open-ended questions subject to change)

Demographics

Age: _____
Religion: _____
Caste: _____
Income (from rickshaw pulling): _____ Any other income:
_____
Any other family members working or are you the only one? _____
Education level: _____
Years in the profession: _____
Hometown: _____
No. of family members: _____
Neighborhood: _____

Expenses in Rupees

Rickshaw rental: _____
Rickshaw Repair and Maintenance: _____
Food: _____
Rent: _____
Income sent to family: Yes ☐ No ☐
        How much is sent to family? _____
        Where is the money sent? _____
        What is the money used for? _____
        Other costs: _____

1. Tell me about yourself and your profession as a rickshaw puller

   Probes:
   - Where you live
   - What you eat
   - Why you became a rickshaw puller
   - How easy was it to become a rickshaw puller
     - Any problems that you may have encountered entering the profession
   - What is your relationship with the rickshaw owner?
   - Do you have any health problems
   - Where do you operate and why
   - How many hours a day do you work
   - Who mostly uses your services and why
   - What do you think these people will do when you cannot pull a rickshaw anymore
   - What do you think about the rickshaw ban
     - Were you consulted when it was decided
     - Why do you think you were not consulted
   - What alternatives would you like the Government to provide?
   - What, if any, problems do you feel, could be encountered after rickshaws are removed?
   - What would you do if you could not pull a rickshaw?
   - Do you know of any rickshaw puller who has left the profession? What is he doing today?
   - How many trips per day, most common types, distance travelled?
   - What happens if you have an accident – how do you handle it?

2. Do you think the rickshaws provide a valuable service?
   - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
   - Explain your answer:

     _____
     _____
     _____
     _____

3. Are you aware that the government is trying to ban the rickshaws
   - Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Do you agree with the government's decision to ban the rickshaws, why or why not?
   - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
   - Explain your answer:

5. Why do you think the government wants to ban the rickshaws?
- o Traffic congestion ☐
- o Inhumane ☐
- o Not good for Kolkata's image ☐
- o Other:_____
- o Explain your answer:

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. What, if any, problems do you feel, could be encountered after rickshaws are removed?

_____
_____
_____

7. Do you think rickshaw pullers cause traffic congestion or other traffic problems?
- • Yes ☐ No ☐
- • Explain your answer:

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Do you think rickshaw pullers give the city a bad or negative image?
- • Yes ☐ No ☐
- • Explain your answer:

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. How would you describe Kolkata
- • Thinking about the Past
  Probes
  - o British times
  - o Before 1980
- • Thinking about the Present
  - o 1990s till the present
- • Thinking about the future
  - o After 2010

10. What is the first word you would use to describe Kolkata:_____
   - Any additional words that come to mind:
     _____
   - Why:
     _____
     _____

11. What is the first word you would use to describe a rickshaw puller: _____
   - Any additional words that come to mind:
     _____
   - Why:
     _____
     _____

12. What is the first word you would use to describe the rickshaw profession:
   _____
   - Any additional words that come to mind:
     _____
   - Why:_____
     _____

13. How do you think a government official would describe Kolkata?
   _____
   _____
   _____

14. How do you think a citizen would describe Kolkata?
   _____
   _____
   _____

Interview Guide – Rickshaw Owner

(Open-ended questions subject to change)

Demographics

Age: _____

Religion: _____

Income (from rickshaw pulling): _____

Any other income: _____

Years in the profession: _____

Hometown: _____

Education level: _____

Political affiliation: _____

Neighborhood: _____

Expenses in Rupees

Rickshaw rental: _____

Rickshaw Repair and Maintenance: _____

Other costs: _____

1. Tell me about your life as a Rickshaw Owner

   Probes:

   - What is your life like as a rickshaw owner on a daily basis?
   - What are some of the things you do as a rickshaw owner on an annual basis?
     - What are your responsibilities as a rickshaw owner
     - Repair/Maintenance
   - How long have you been an owner
   - How often do you buy rickshaws (per year)
     - Any ownership changes – why?
   - How many rickshaws do you own
   - What are the rental rates (per day)
     - Who decides the rates

- What is your relationship with the pullers
- How do you decide who to rent the rickshaws to
  - What is the process
- What are the problems of being an owner
- What are the benefits
- What do you think prevents rickshaw pullers from owning their own rickshaws
- What will you do when the rickshaw ban is legalized
- Any other problems that you may have as an owner
- How often do you interact with city officials (in a month)
  - In your opinion do you think city officials are receptive to your needs and concerns:
  - Yes ☐ No ☐
  - Which departments
  - Why?
- What are you currently doing about the ban on rickshaws
- What did you do when the first ban was imposed
- Do you think you have been responsible for the ban not being legalized
  - How? Why?
- Why do you think rickshaws are being banned?

2. How important do you think the income from rickshaw pulling is for a rickshaw puller
   a. Are you aware of what they do with their incomes

3. Do you think the rickshaws provide a valuable service?
   - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
     - Explain your answer:
       _____
       _____
       _____

4. Are you aware that the government is trying to ban the rickshaws
   - Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Do you agree with the government's decision to ban the rickshaws, why or why not?
   - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
   - Explain your answer:
     _____

_____
_____

6. Why do you think the government wants to ban the rickshaws?
   2. Traffic congestion ☐
   3. Inhumane ☐
   4. Not good for Kolkata's image ☐
   5. Other:_____
   6. Explain your answer:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

7. What, if any, problems do you feel, could be encountered after rickshaws are removed?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

8. Do you think rickshaw pullers cause traffic congestion or other traffic problems?
   o Yes ☐ No ☐
   o Explain your answer:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

9. Do you think rickshaw pullers give the city a bad or negative image?
   o Yes ☐ No ☐
   o Explain your answer:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

10. How would you describe Kolkata
    • Thinking about the Past
      Probes
      o British times
      o Before 1980

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- Thinking about the Present
  - 1990s till the present
- Thinking about the future
  - After 2010

11. What is the first word you would use to describe Kolkata:_____
    a. Any additional words that come to mind:

    _____

    b. Why:

    _____
    _____

12. What is the first word you would use to describe a rickshaw puller: _____
    a. Any additional words that come to mind:

    _____

    b. Why:

    _____
    _____

13. What is the first word you would use to describe the rickshaw profession: _____
    a. Any additional words that come to mind:

    _____

    b. Why:

    _____
    _____

14. How do you think a government official would describe Kolkata?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

15. How do you think a citizen would describe Kolkata?

    _____
    _____
    _____

Appendix 3

Interview Guide – Government Officials

(Open-ended questions subject to change)

Demographics
Age: _____
Religion: _____
Department: _____
Portfolio: _____
Political affiliation: _____
Education level: _____

1. How would you describe Kolkata
   a. Thinking about the Past
      Probes
      - British times
      - Before 1980
   b. Thinking about the Present
      - 1990s till the present
   c. Thinking about the future
      i. After 2010

2. What is the first word you would use to describe Kolkata:_____
   a. Any additional words that come to mind:
      _____
   b. Why:
      _____
      _____

3. What is the first word you would use to describe a rickshaw puller: _____
   a. Any additional words that come to mind:
      _____
   b. Why:
      _____
      _____

4. What is the first word you would use to describe the rickshaw profession: _____
   a. Any additional words that come to mind:
      _____
   b. Why:
      _____

_____

5. How do you think a citizen of Kolkata would describe the city?
_____
_____
_____

6. How do you think a rickshaw puller would describe Kolkata?
_____
_____
_____

7. Do you think the rickshaws provide a valuable service?
   - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
   - Explain
     _____
     _____
     _____

8. Do you think the rickshaws should be banned
   a. Yes ☐ No ☐
   b. Explain your answer:
_____
_____
_____

9. Do you agree with the government's decision to ban the rickshaws, why or why not?
   - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
   - Explain your answer:
     _____
     _____
     _____

10. Why do you think the rickshaws are being banned?
   - Traffic congestion ☐
   - Inhumane ☐
   - Not good for Kolkata's image ☐
   - Other:_____
   - Explain your answer:
     _____
     _____
     _____

11. Who do you think uses the rickshaw services and why?

- What do you think they will do when rickshaws are removed?
- Have they been consulted when a rickshaw ban was proposed?
  - Were the rickshaw pullers, NGOs etc consulted?
  - Why or why not?

12. Are you aware that rickshaws provide the following services

	Yes	No
Goods transport		
Transport schoolchildren		
Transport aged, disabled		
Transport during floods		
Environmentally friendly to Kolkata		
Keeps people employed		
Affordable transport		
Other:		

13. What, if any, problems do you feel, could be encountered after rickshaws are removed?

14. How important do you think the income from rickshaw pulling is for a rickshaw puller
- Are you aware of what they do with their incomes
- Are you aware that their incomes support people in neighboring states

15. Why have they been operating only in the center of the city and why are cycle-rickshaws not allowed in to central Kolkata?

16. What alternatives are you going to provide to the rickshaw pullers?

17. Why is there no ban on other inhumane professions/trades. E.g. coolies, handcarts, bus conductors?

18. Have you considered any other options for the rickshaws besides a complete ban?

19. Why were they not removed in the 60s when everywhere else in India they were removed?

Appendix 4

Interview Guide – General Public

(Open-ended questions subject to change)

Demographics
Age: _____
Religion: _____
Income: _____
Occupation: _____
No. of family members: _____
Education level: _____
   Neighborhood: _____

1. How would you describe Kolkata
   - Thinking about the Past
     - Probes
       - British times
       - Before 1980
   - Thinking about the Present
       - 1990s till the present
   - Thinking about the future
       - After 2010

2. What is the first word you would use to describe Kolkata: _____
   - Any additional words that come to mind:
     _____
   - Why:
     _____
     _____

3. What is the first word you would use to describe a rickshaw puller: _____
   - Any additional words that come to mind:
     _____
   - Why:
     _____
     _____

4. What is the first word you would use to describe the rickshaw profession: _____
   - Any additional words that come to mind:
     _____
   - Why:

_____
_____

5. How do you think a government official would describe Kolkata?
_____
_____
_____

6. How do you think a rickshaw puller would describe Kolkata?
_____
_____
_____

7. Do you think the rickshaws provide a valuable service?
    - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
    - Explain
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

8. Do you use the rickshaw services?
    o If not, why?
       ▪ Inhumane?
    o If yes,
       ▪ How and how frequently do you use their services?
       ▪ Why and what do you plan to do if they are removed from Kolkata?

9. Are you aware that rickshaws provide the following services

	Yes	No
Goods transport		
Transport schoolchildren		
Transport aged, disabled		
Transport during floods		
Environmentally friendly to Kolkata		
Keeps people employed		
Affordable transport		
Other:		

10. Are you aware that the government is trying to ban the rickshaws
    - Yes ☐ No ☐

11. Do you agree with the government's decision to ban the rickshaws, why or why not?
    - Definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Not at all ☐ No opinion ☐
    - Explain your answer:

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. Why do you think the government wants to ban the rickshaws?
    o   Traffic congestion ☐
    o   Inhumane ☐
    o   Not good for Kolkata's image ☐
    o   Other:_____
    o   Explain your answer:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

13. What, if any, problems do you feel, could be encountered after rickshaws are removed?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

14. Do you think rickshaw pullers cause traffic congestion or other traffic problems?
    o   Yes ☐ No ☐
    o   Explain your answer:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

15. Do you think rickshaw pullers give the city a bad or negative image?
    o   Yes ☐ No ☐
    o   Explain your answer:

    _____
    _____
    _____

16. How important do you think the income from rickshaw pulling is for a rickshaw puller
    o   Are you aware of what they do with their incomes
    o   Are you aware that their incomes support people in neighboring states

Appendix 5

IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, May 20, 2009

IRB Application No AS0945

Proposal Title: Ghosts of the past or relics of the future? A Geographical Analysis of the Hand-Pulled Rickshaws of Kolkata

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 5/19/2010

Principal Investigator(s):

Shireen Hyrapiet
410 S. Hester Apt. 2
Stillwater, OK 74074

Alyson Greiner
225 Scott Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Shireen Hyrapiet

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: Ghosts of the past or relics of the future? A geographical analysis of the hand-pulled rickshaws of Calcutta

Major Field: Geography

Biographical:

    Education:

    Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Geography at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2012.

    Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Fire and Emergency Management Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA in 2006.

    Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Geography at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, Millersville, Pennsylvania, USA in 2003.

    Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Geography Honors at Loreto College, Calcutta, India in 2000.

    Experience:

    Since March 2012, Instructor of Geography at Oregon State University
    August 2008 – December 2011 – Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of
            Geography, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA
    May 2007 – March 2012 – Graduate Assistant, International Students and
            Scholars, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA
    August 2006 – May 2008 – Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of
            Geography, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA

    Professional Memberships: Association of American Geographers, American
            Geographical Society, Phi Beta Delta, Gamma Theta Upsilon, National
            Geographic Society