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WITHIN THE LIMITS OF SCARCITY

RETHINKING SPACE, CITY AND PRACTICES

Edited by
Barbara Ascher
Isis Nunez Ferrera
Michael Klein

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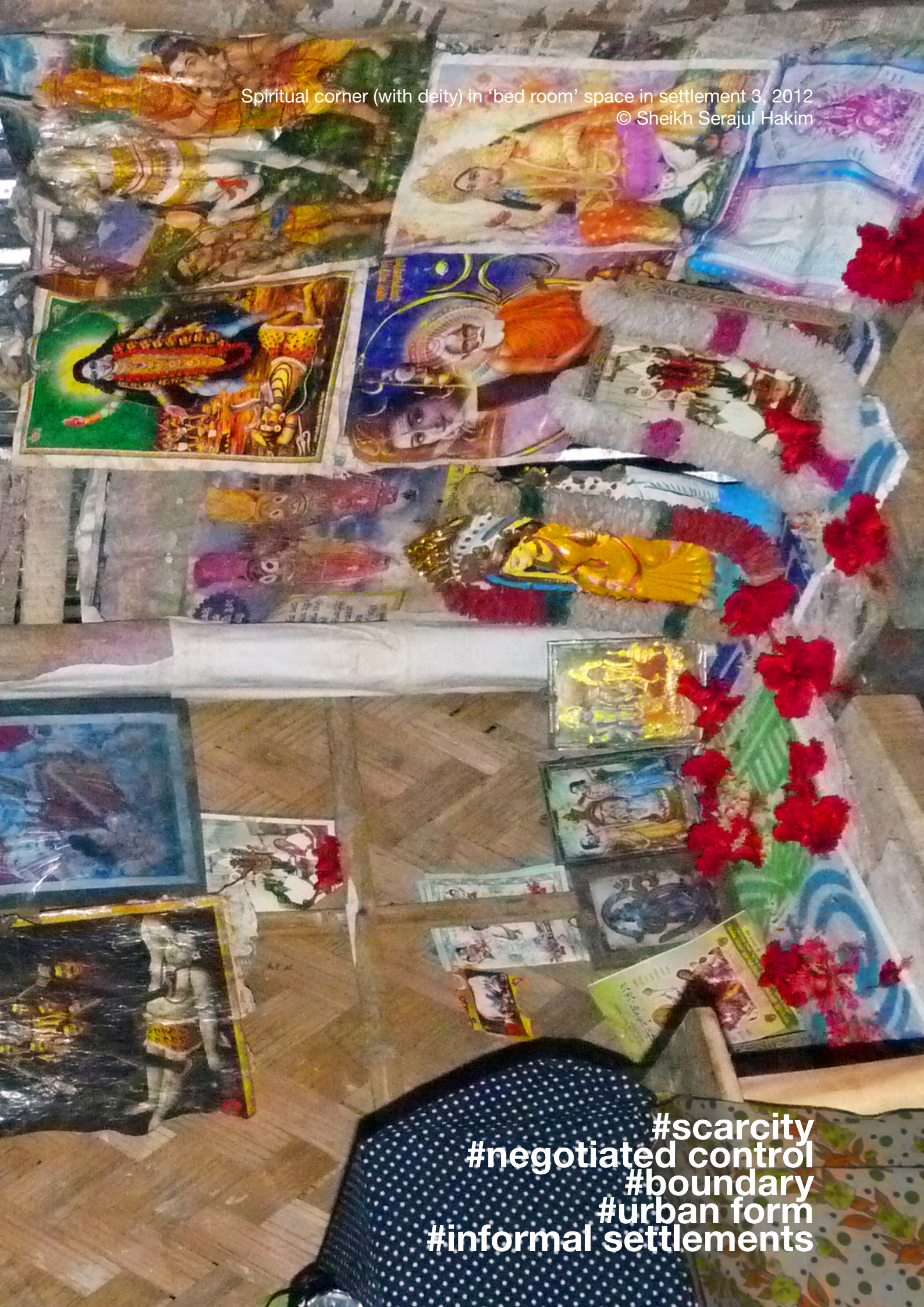
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Spiritual corner (with deity) in 'bed room' space in settlement 3, 2012
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#scarcity
#negotiated control
#boundary
#urban form
#informal settlements

Scarcity, control and negotiations: an interpretation of form in urban informal settlements

1. Introduction

Once peasants and employed in rural agriculture, the rural-to-urban migrants constitute a third of the entire urban population of any typical city in the global south; migration-driven urbanization has since the 1950s infused a new order to their spatio-physical form (UN 2008). During these post-WWII decades of unprecedented urbanization, governments and other formal-sector actors failed to provide these ex-peasants any affordable housing in the city. Amid this failure, it is the illegal and informal settlements that have proliferated in these cities¹, and have since remained the most predominant form of affordable accommodation for the ordinary migrant (Neuwirth 2005; UN 2008). Moreover, the spatial implications of informality remain under-researched; there is a lack of well-developed theories of how such urbanism works (Dovey 2012: 351). Therefore, to understand migrants' many informal, illegal and nonstandard spatial practices for urban home making, one way could be to see them in relation with their binary oppositions (e.g. formal, legal, standard). Viewing informal settlements as the physical manifestation of the working of these binaries, it might be useful to explore the: (1) socio-spatial mechanisms deployed by migrant dwellers to remain engaged with the formal; (2) socio-spatial outcomes of this engagement.

In terms of engagement between informal and formal, a review of land-related administrative policies (in Bangladesh) reveals how the latter's authoritarian manipulation has left grave consequences for Bangladeshi agrarian socio-spatial structure – displacing people and resulting in socio-spatial inequalities and major urban spatio-physical transformation². And while the authorities remain in control of the allocation of scarce resources (e.g. land), the migrants tend to exploit this condition of scarcity to negotiate with authorities for space and infrastructure while legitimizing the role of the latter. In terms of spatio-physical consequence, the acute dearth of space and resources are compensated by a range of socio-spatial practices. Space-making by various negotiation of socio-spatial boundaries (e.g. obscuring public-private delineation or adapting to domestic practices for economic gain) have become customary in Khulna's³ informal settlements. These practices, as found, are all based on flexibility, adjustment and manipulation of the available and affordable, and in no way consistent with the 'standard' or 'formal'.

1 UN-HABITAT (2007) suggests that by 2030, global slum-dwelling population will double (reach 2 billion).

2 A portion of this we have discussed elsewhere in Hakim and Lim (2013).

3 The city under investigation is Khulna, Bangladesh; details are provided later.

2. Methodology

This paper begins with an introduction to the context of Khulna, followed by a brief on tools, techniques and methods used in this research. The concept of Scarcity is discussed as a product of modern conditions, where scarce conditions such as informal or illegal are depicted as being deliberate and strategic constructions by authoritative (formal sector) regimes. Further discussions reveal how in the agrarian context of Bangladesh the 'politically charged' market-driven land/housing policies have created numerous moments of crisis in the lives of peasant-turned-migrants. Alternatively, study on a typology of Khulna's informal settlements and their morphological transformation demonstrates a correlation between the home-making efforts by successful permanent migrants⁴ and their various socio-spatial negotiations – all taking advantage of the same scarce conditions across the various levels of settlements. Finally a framework is suggested where Scarcity is viewed as an opportunity for the migrant dweller, while negotiated control of socio-spatial boundaries remaining as a means to deal with scarce conditions.

In terms of research setting, Khulna (figure 1)'s selection is significant for it being a medium-sized city⁵. Khulna is the third largest city in Bangladesh with a population of around 2 million and with a density of 67,944 persons/km² within 45.65km² of its core municipal area (KCC 2012). With its 37th ranking amongst the world's fastest growing cities (Citymayors 2007), it also has the highest concentration of urban poor amongst all the coastal towns and cities in Bangladesh (Ahmad 2005: 16). Khulna has one of the largest concentrations of "poor settlements" in the country as well (5080 of varying size and tenure types), with more than a million (58.9%) people living there presently (CUS-UNDP-KCC 2011: ii; figure 1 - right). Most of these 'poor' however are recognized as ex-migrants (KCC-LGED-UNDP 2009), where amongst them, 27% own a house of some sort while 66% remain as tenants (Ahmed 2005: 10). Less than 30% of these poor people actually own some kind of land (WB 2007: 36).

The research is both inductive and deductive; but an initial discussion on Scarcity helps formulate hypotheses for further exploration. The research methods used are chiefly qualitative; quantitative data from secondary sources are only used to supplement the findings from fieldworks. The fieldwork-based research is conducted considering 'types and levels' of settlements. In that, ten (10) informal settlements⁶ based on tenure were chosen (figure 2). Their morphological reading shows how, despite having dubious tenure status, each settlement succeeded to attain some form of 'secured tenure' through various socio-spatial negotiations during the post-WWII years of modernization and industrialization in Khulna. To comprehend migrants' everyday building activities and spatial practices, 34 dwelling units and corresponding neighbourhood tissues are also studied over a period of two years (2011-12).

4 The term 'successful' refer particularly to those permanent migrants (living in Khulna for at least two generations) who despite their dubious tenure status (illegal, and lease-holding or renting without documents) are now in possession of a piece of land, or a dwelling unit or both.

5 Cohen (2004: 25) argues that "most urban growth over the next 25 years will not take place in megacities but in smaller towns". UN (2008: 15) also asserts that *medium-sized cities* (>5million but <1million) would house 23% of entire global population (second highest) by 2025.

6 In the studied settlements, settlement size varies from 0.03acre to 15acre, population size from 5 households to 2,500 households, while population density ranging from 520p/ha to 3,200p/ha. Generally, migrants living here originate from three particular rural regions.



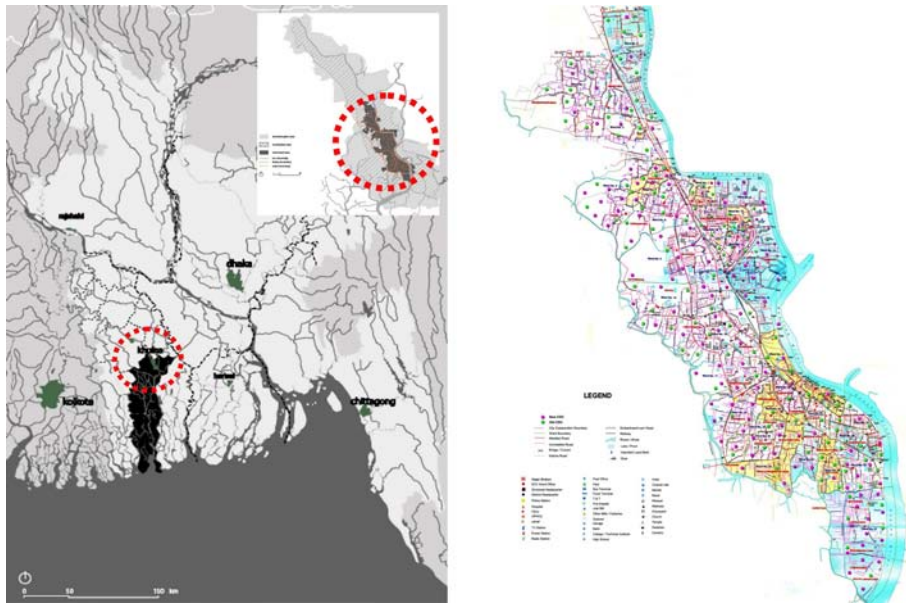
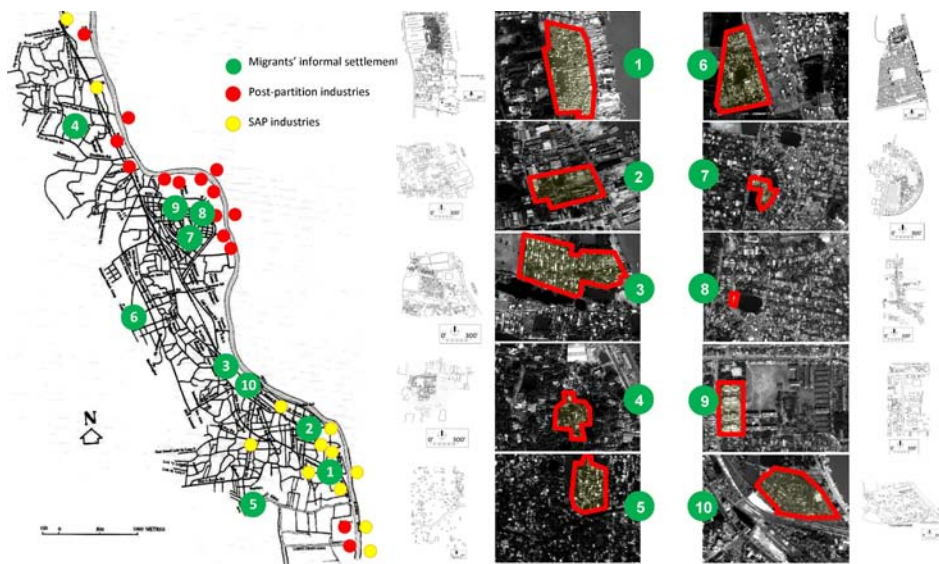


Figure 1. (Left) Khulna in relation to Bangladesh; (inset) administrative boundaries of Khulna – dark portion being the present municipal boundary; (right): mosaic-like (dots) distribution of ‘poor settlements’ within Khulna’s present municipal boundary. Source: (Left) Dudek and Van Houtte (2008); (right) KCC-LGED-UNDP (2009).



Tenure-based typology of 10 high-density low-income informal settlements in Khulna: (1) Government land is developed by migrants – no agreement between government and tenants; only active support from political leaders; (2) Private land is only rented to people from own regional origin; tenants build (and un-build) their own houses and pay rent accordingly; (3) Bangladesh Railway’s land squatted by migrants where tenants are not landowners; an informal arrangement was made earlier with the influence of a *Mastan* (mafia boss); after he perished local politicians bargain with government offices in support of migrant tenants; (4) Government land leased (long-term) to landless migrants from a particular regional location following decades-long political and bureaucratic lobbying by inhabitant labour leaders; (5) Privately developed small informal settlement cluster on city periphery where land is cheap and so is rent; tenants pay monthly/weekly rent; the owner of these plots are also ex-migrants who became the landlord him/herself; (6) Government initiated *site and services* project for the once-landless; inhabitants enjoy ownership of land, but without a formal title; (7) *Bihari Refugee Camp* within the planned township of *Khalishpur*; some Bangladeshi migrants also live alongside non-Bangali *Biharis*; (8) Squatter settlement within the planned township of *Khalishpur*, established and maintained by ex labour leader; (9) Government-built mid-rise apartments for lower-level government employees squatted by current & former jute mill workers; and (10) *Bangladesh Railway* staffs’ residential quarters & adjacent land modified by Railway’s staff themselves.

Figure 2. (Left) KCC jurisdiction map. Green dots showing spatial distribution of 10 informal settlements; red and yellow dots showing locations of export-oriented industries of post-partition and post-SAP phases respectively; (right) satellite view and maps of informal settlements. Source: KCC (2012); image courtesy Google Earth (2012).

Findings from an earlier 57 household survey, 10 group discussions, 6 key informant interviews (2009-10) supplement this. In both occasions, targeted sampling and snowballing are used for selecting and locating particular migrant households. Households are selected ensuring variety according to religion, ethnicity, rural origin, headship and in-house income generation. For data collection, literature review, life history, architectural mapping and drawings, semi-structured interviews and FGDs are used. Content analysis, descriptive morphology, behavioural regularities in everyday life and social world analysis are used for analysis.

3. Scarcity and the two hypotheses

Scarcity is a condition contrary to abundance and a synonym for ‘insufficiency’ (Bronfenbrenner 1962: 265). Yet under modernity, scarcity is a more constructed condition rather than a mere period of dearth (Xenos 1989: Introduction). Scarce conditions are created through the uneven distribution of resources or denying specific groups of people or settlements from accessing certain resources to serve eventually the interest of the market (Till 2011: 4). In the context of the developing city, scarcity then can be viewed as a means to fulfilling political objectives (read ‘control’) especially by the formal sector authorities where resource allocation and resource accessibility are enabled through the systematic creation and maintenance of binary opposites. So when poor migrants choose informal housing for themselves, it is not because of government’s resource scarcity alone. We have discussed elsewhere that even under affluence, ordinary people might be deprived of housing on political grounds (Hakim and Lim 2013: 6). “A famine can occur even if food supplies are adequate and markets are functioning well” said Amartya Sen. It is not the scarcity of food that creates famine only; rather its inequitable distribution between rural and urban West Bengal made it inaccessible to a certain section of society (Devereux 2001: 246). So it is not unusual that ‘the formal’ (e.g. governments) often tolerate or even stimulate informal activities to promote political patronage (Castells and Portes 1989: 26); this is also seen in Chatterjee (2004)’s idea of ‘political society’.

In the agrarian context of Bangladesh, it is only natural that scarcity of land would be used as a political tool to control the agrarian masses, and thus retain power at elite’s disposal (Harris 1989). In addition to its value as a scarce resource, land is also the essential component of economic production and home-making, and also an ever-shifting physical entity shaped by the deltaic river-systems. Land therefore has always remained an elusive cultural component in rural Bangladeshi society; it, however, has continued to do so even in the urban context. Therefore, for the ordinary migrant in Khulna, access to land (hence housing) remained a subject of constant negotiation with influential middle-men (Hakim 2012). And when land/housing was meant to be delivered by government agencies, it mostly required the bargaining with and mediation of ‘powerful’ actors – a political figure, a rich businessman, a government official, a religious institution or in recent time, a number of NGOs and UNDP-led projects. Roy (2004)’s discussion on Kolkata tells of similar processes of “choreographed” creation of urban informality by political elites.

On the other hand, informal is often inseparable from formal; a series of complex interactions between formal and informal operates in between. Informality operates on the “margins of rules and organizational arrangements that no longer fit people’s real condition and experience” (Castells and Portes 1989: 29). In planning terms, what are officially classified as informal settlements, are not something that ordinary people recognize or apply to their reality. In the former colonies of the Global south, formal standardization such as urban planning was primarily intended to ser-



ve colonial interests. Yet in present condition, urban planning benefits mainly the new elites. In all formal situations, some form of informality then should be present (Jenkins and Andersen 2011: 1-3). In many cases, such activities – in both overt and covert forms run parallel to formal developments. They take advantage of ‘loose’ official systems and use its spatio-political cracks and niches (Kudva 2009; Perara 2009). People with insufficient means derive maximum outcomes from a minimum of elements; rules are formed from processes of endless convertibility, turning commodities, found objects and resources into uses previously unimaginable (Simone 2004). Such fluidity of forms, practices and meanings suggest of “slippages” (Dovey 2012: 358), which in Heynen and Loeckx (1994)’s terms, may be described as ambivalent, hybrid or even creative.

In light of the discussions so far, two hypotheses could be formulated. One, scarcity can be used as a ‘strategic tool’ by both ordinary migrants and formal sector authorities, where each of them deploy specific socio-spatial control mechanisms to validate respective prowess and position in the particular context of Khulna. Informal settlements hence can be viewed as physical sites for the socio-political interplay between the migrant and those actors – both seeking legitimacy in the context of scarcity. Two, scarcity of space and resources produce alternative socio-spatial practices; often unorthodox yet they compensate migrants’ present deficits of spaces and resources. Discussions on and around these two hypotheses are made on the following two sections.

4. Scarcity as a ‘tool’

4.1 The politics of in-between-ness

Land transaction in Bangladesh has been embroiled with corruption and conflict⁷. Land scarcity has been the result of it being curtailed and hoarded by the public agencies⁸ and the gentry to manipulate land price for profit⁹. Neither from government banks nor from NGOs, any loan was ever made available for the urban poor for land purchasing or house building. Although more than 16,000 NGOs are operating in Bangladesh in sectors allied to housing¹⁰, the immediate return from the involvement with socio economic issues of the slums prompt these NGOs to set a low priority on housing issues. NGOs also look for a safer return from their investments, which the landless migrant does not guarantee. So, as early as in 1997, 97% of the Bangladeshi urban poor did not own any land, as private developers were serving exclusively the upper and middle classes (WB 2007: 35). Government

7 Bangladesh land record management system is antiquated; it keeps adding to the already existing conflicts. Nearly 2 million legal cases are pending in the judicial system, of which more than two-thirds are about land disputes (Islam 2010). Land administration accounts for almost 40% of total corruption cost in urban and rural areas (Siddique 2001).

8 Public agencies continue to occupy large quantities of underutilized land (approximately 10% in Khulna); *Bangladesh Railways* alone, for example, owns 2.5 km² of unutilized land in Khulna. Similar is seen in Dhaka, where “the real scarcity (of land) is compounded by an artificial scarcity stemming primarily from the lack of utilization of public land” (WB 2007: 38).

9 Bangladesh is amongst the most densely populated nations in the world (1125 person/km²) (CIA 2012). Yet ‘land-grabber’ elites illegally hold 1.3 million hectares of government-owned *Khas* land, ignoring the official maximum allowable slab (Islam 2010).

10 Rahman (2002: 435) informs of the NGOs working in Dhaka slums that apart from their involvement in poverty reduction, education, health, family planning and gender issues, their works in housing has remained limited to infrastructure and utility provisioning. Recently, BRAC is putting in efforts to create a housing fund for assisting Dhaka’s female industrial workers by building dormitories, and acting as intermediaries between female tenants and private slum landlords (WB 2007: 46).

agencies like KDA¹¹ behave as private developers, developing fringe lands for profit and selling them to middle and higher income buyers. A review of nine 'completed housing projects' (KDA 2007) shows that at least six of these have become the most expensive land plots in Khulna. The remaining three identified as "low income residential area" (KDA 2012) are in fact 150 m² land plots for the lower-middle income groups in Khulna – not the lowest. Land-plot distribution and the dissemination of current structural plan still privilege the rich who indulge in speculative markets¹².

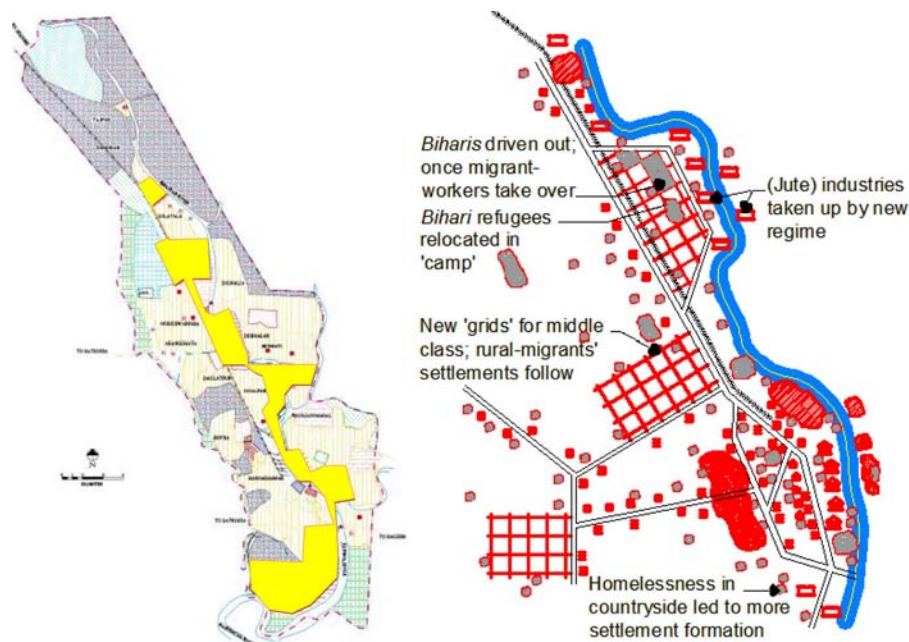


Figure 3. (Left) Khulna Master Plan 1961 (industrial area in yellow); (right) Diagrammatic expression of Khulna's urban form (1990-present). Source: (Left) KDA (2002: 11); (right) Author in accordance with Miah 2002

The near-absence of formal agencies in public infrastructure provisioning is also glaring; a failure to realize local socio-political-economic realities becomes evident in Khulna's 1961 Master Plan. Whilst large portions of land were zoned for industry and housing (figure 3; left), the British planner ignored cultural tradition, affordability and the nature of housing required for industrial workers. This left little choice for migrants except to settle in areas between these industries, disregarding the Master Plan intention (Chaudhury undated: 5; figure 3). None of the nationalized jute industries in Khulna were designed to provide adequate accommodation for its migrant workers either; not even during their thriving years¹³. Studies on three oldest and largest nationalized jute mills in Khulna (figure 2 left: red dots) show that housing was only available to less than 10% of total jute mills workers (Shahed 2006: 31, 33, 35); of these 10% however, most relied on their 'desi manush' (kinship networks, e.g. family members, friends or known persons from same regional origin) or political connections (with labour leaders or junior political leaders) to gain access to housing

11 KDA stands for *Khulna Development Authority* – responsible for all sorts of physical planning and its control in Khulna; it is a central government authority headed by government bureaucrats.

12 Ghafur (2010) similarly shows how Dhaka's planning and development agency (RAJUK) has formed a syndicate with land developers, politicians and the affluent higher middle class.

13 Between early- to mid-1970s, Jute export contributed around 80% to national export revenue (Rahman and Khaled 2011: 2).

(Hakim 2012). In the later industrial developments like the private-sector shrimp industries that have fuelled Khulna's economy since 1990s (figure 2 left: yellow dots), no accommodation or housing subsidy was provided for the workers either.

Squatting on Khas land¹⁴ has thus produced a form of rhizomic growth within the formal 'grid'; tenanted shelters of varying size and configurations adjacent to these industries (settlements 1, 2) has become the only choice for (re)making home. When government officio were to be involved in the settlement process, bribing to retain tenure security was frequent (settlements 4, 8, 10). Even for those with formal recognition (settlements 3, 5, 6), political patronage is still required. Local-level politicians, from both ruling and opposition parties, are persistently lobbied by migrant-tenants. These politicians assure the migrants by visiting settlements regularly and taking care of their immediate needs (e.g. repair roads and construct public baths). In cases where disputes on land ownership appear resolvable, the process is often delayed beyond accepted limits. As in settlement 6 (called Vastuhara locally) – the government-provided low income site and services project originally allotted to the homeless migrants of Khulna in mid 1970s, formalization of title has still been deliberately kept unresolved. It was only a 'Land Allotment Slip' (figure 4 left) that was issued for a 42 m² parcel in 1977 instead of a formal title deed ('Dalil' in Bangla). Although entitled for such a Dalil through years of possession, the holders of these slips are still kept in a state of dilemma with a tenure which is neither formal nor informal. This situation is further compounded by the contradictory 'acts of recognition' by various public sector organizations. While migrants without a Dalil continue to remain outside the central government's land-tax roll, Mayor's office¹⁵ continue to put holding numbers on each of these 'illegal' dwelling units and collect Holding Tax from their owners. Lobbying and political pressure from reigning Mayor¹⁶, Ward Councillors and party cadres on other central government offices (e.g. postal, electricity and water supply) also ensures that these essential services are extended to these settlements, which would otherwise have not been possible¹⁷.

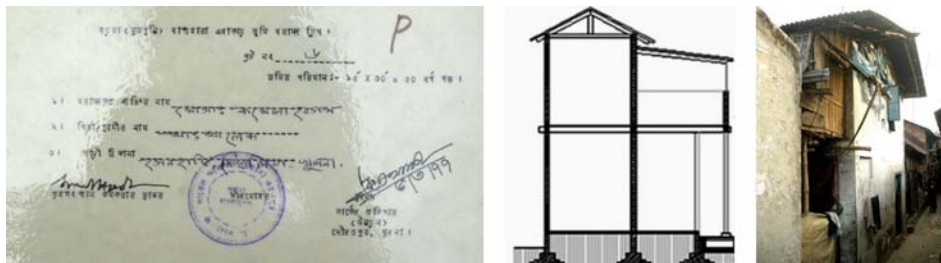


Figure 4. (Left) typical 'Land Allotment Slip' for Vastuhara; (middle and right) brick-built house with wooden floor and CI sheet roof., Source: Author.

The creation of uncertainty though such 'quasi recognition', however, gives Mayor

¹⁴ Khas land is central government-owned land, intended to be leased for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. The most eligible for Khas land is the landless poor (both urban and rural), significant contributors to society/economy and persons/groups/institutes who wish to use it for public purpose (Hossain 2010: 77).

¹⁵ Khulna City Corporation (KCC) is the local government office headed by the Mayor; it is divided into 32 administrative Wards each represented by a Ward Councillor.

¹⁶ KCC's history suggests that each of its Mayors typically got elected from the same party that formed the central government; thus central government organizations had to respond to the Mayor's and his party workers' (including the Ward Councillors) political persuasions even if they were illegitimate or extra-legal.

¹⁷ This is coined as "the coupling of party and state, the combining of informal party tactics of mobilization with the formal state apparatus of infrastructure provision" (Roy 2004: 149).

and Ward Councillors crucial political imperatives. For them, partial legalization of Khulna's 1 million population living in these settlements would improve the latter's confidence in them and ensure political compliance. Provisioning of land, although unsecured, therefore provides a sense of 'anchorage' for home-making and augments migrant's reliance on the political machinery as the provider. Thus, as we have come to recognize, the initial formation of 9 out of 10 settlements have been through the direct patronization of political actors and their associates (e.g. businessmen or labour leaders). Migrant population in these settlements residing even for 4 to 5 decades still rely heavily on these patrons for all infrastructure/utility provisioning, and for potential formalization of land title (Hakim 2012). A systematically slow disbursement of infrastructure through strategically prolonged promises also helps sustain these interests and ensure political compliance. Such "choreographed unevenness" (Roy 2004: 154), deliberately devised and maintained by the powerful actors lead to the curious construction of 'in-between-ness' in these settlements manifest in a number of 'neither-nor' scenarios of uncertainty. Both social and physical boundaries between legal and illegal, and differentiations between formal and informal hence appear blurred and ambiguous. These benefit political actors to control this large demography yearning for legitimization of their present tenure.

The 'Allotment Slip' thus embodies a political instrument in land scarce Bangladesh. The unresolved cases of ownership therefore sustain conditions that impart a sense of rootless-ness¹⁸ amongst the tenant migrants. Ananya Roy's seminal work on Kolkata in relation to its Communist government's manipulation of informality similarly suggests that party politics has been an "everyday business" that ran parallel with government policy. Panchayet in the villages and party cadres in the urban informal settlements have continued to play an active brokerage role between the central power and grassroots migrants in order to maintain a systematic control over the latter's spaces. To further strengthen this control over "every detail of daily life from clogged toilets to domestic disputes" and infrastructure provisioning was taken care of by such brokers. Threatened by similar moves by opposition parties, there was also a persistent "search" for new territories of support (hence voters) through "constant recharging of patronage". In the absence of a Master Plan and without an active registry of sites and deeds, territorial flexibility¹⁹ was practiced by the Communist Government of Kolkata. The planners in the land department were also barred from preparing any such plan or land record by the government itself. In addition, a legal provision called 'vested property law' was put in place that facilitated the government to acquire and expropriate any private land (at its will) in the name of public interest (Roy 2004: 149-158).

Such in-between-ness can also be found in physical manifestations referred to as 'politics with plinths and roofs'. 'Plinths and roofs', as an axiom, here portrays a symbolic category that has crucial spatio-physical implications for informal settlements and their rather 'slippery' tenure status (e.g. settlements 1 and 7). Although not designated in the KDA plan as a residential zone, these settlements during the last five decades have physically proliferated in a manner that many 'formal' townships and settlements of Khulna have not. Many buildings in these settlements

¹⁸ In Bangladeshi context, 'Rootless-ness' is defined by Ghafur (2006: 45) as "loss of identity, privacy, comfort and protection enjoyed at home by default".

¹⁹ Formation of numerous informal settlements on the city fringes, their eviction and relocation, illegal subdivision of peripheral agricultural land, their development using the relocated informal population and their eventual selling off to large-scale private sector projects (*Op. cit.*).



(some two-storied) are constructed using brick and other permanent materials, while gentrification and property transfer remains part of everyday life. Both settlements have a long history of negotiation with elites. Settlement 1 with fish merchants and shrimp factory owners, Christian Service Society (CSS) and KCC Mayors and Ward Councillors from successive political regimes; settlement 7 initially with International Red Cross, and later with Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee and right wing Ward Councillors and local MPs. Here, migrants are allowed to do most things that a typical owner is able to do: buy and sell property, construct permanent building etc. Most urban infrastructure and utility services are also available in both. Yet what makes their case interesting is the ambiguity between permanent and temporary where migrants are not allowed to construct permanent (concrete) roofs (Figure 4: middle and right). Permanent roofs, as locally perceived, are culturally approved symbols of permanence. The politics of 'in-between-ness' thus results in a landscape of 'roofless-ness', which also epitomizes the conditions of 'rootless-ness'.

4.2 The politics of control

In many cases, the migrant dweller may compromise or give up portions of spatio-territorial claim, for example, of his dwelling unit in order to strengthen privacy for the household and social control at a higher level. In the context of a severe deficiency of space as in the (28'x11') house in figure 5 (left), a (6'x6') verandah space has been given up for constructing a community bathroom cum water collection point (circled). Although none of the inhabitants of settlement 7 are 'owners' in usual sense, yet giving up of a tenth of what is already scarce according to most definitions of 'standard', is certainly indicative of a different set of life priorities for this owner. In short, this addition ensured the owner's family and her adolescent daughter in particular a better sense of privacy – who can now take her bath in the house without having to go to the community bathroom. It also has saved the landlord time that was normally lost waiting in a water collection queue. However, there were vested interests too. The female owner of this house, who is also a cluster-leader for UNDP-run community improvement project (UPPR) that operates in settlement 7, was ready to make this apparently costly sacrifice on the ground that this would eventually reinforce her social position. Although not willing to give in initially, her ultimate compliance with the communal decision for constructing this service area within her home had placed her in high esteem amongst community elders, neighbours (potential users of the new bathing/water collection space) and other UPPR personnel. This sacrifice of valuable space, culminating in the construction of a very small physical structure, therefore has had a much broader social implication. The landlord's magnanimity thus legitimizes her position in the society for now her premise is serving the larger community. For the community, this construction legitimizes the community's position as the key decision-making body and re-affirms its authority over the control of all socio-spatial activities within settlement. It also exhibits the community's strength to the external actors (UPPRP officials, NGOs and local Ward Councillor) by showing its solidarity and willingness toward the betterment of the community. Simultaneously, the external actors understand that any intervention on their part must first satisfy a complex and hierarchical decision-making process.

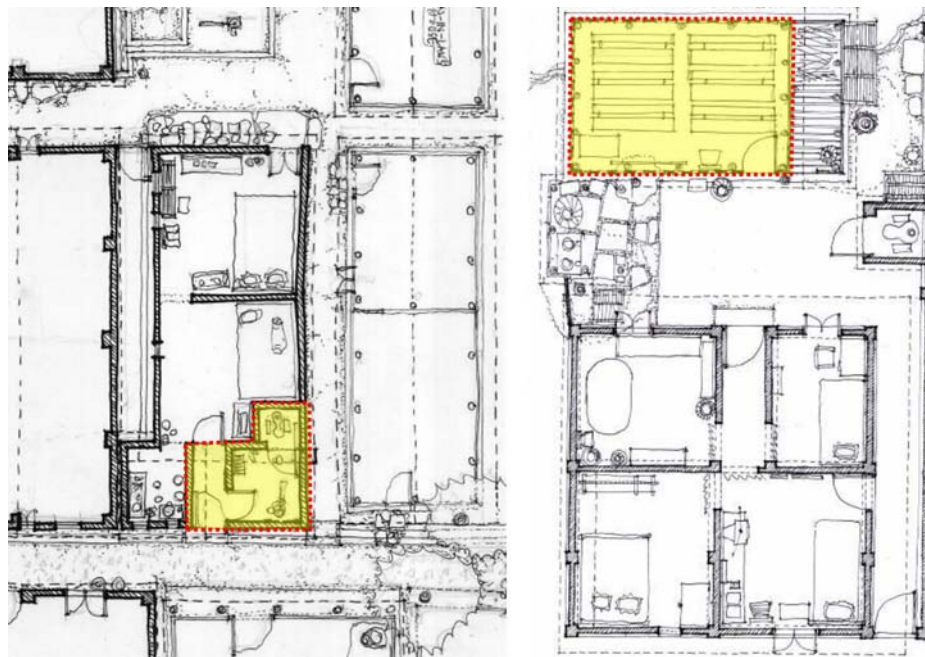


Figure 5. Compromised control: (left) part of house premise given up to community bath in settlement 7; (right) previously vacant in-house space transformed into NGO-run pre-school in settlement 1. Source: Hakim 2012

Similar ‘negotiated control’ may be noticed in another dwelling-level example, where the Christian owner permits the Christian Missionary-led NGO (CSS) to construct a pre-school in her house compound. Whilst the function of a school should upset the privacy of a home within the same compound of (50’x22’), the owner benefits from the goodwill forged in the relationship with the NGO, and spiritual fulfilment through a religious and educational cause, not to mention the modest rent received as compensation.

4.3 The politics of infrastructure

With the aim to validate their present status and hence become ‘visible’, migrants engage in a ‘politics of infrastructure’ too. These can be identified particularly at the settlement level – in the realm of public. Irrespective of the hidden nature of all these settlements, migrants put in efforts to legitimize their ‘illegality’ by trying and getting recognized by as many formal public- (such as utilities boards, postal service etc.) and private-sector institutions (e.g. NGOs) as they can. The construction of physical infrastructure has been the most widely used form of laying claim to land occupied. Infrastructures, which are at once visible and permanent investments from the part of official bodies, are believed to leave a ‘formal stamping’ on these otherwise informal and illegal spaces. All forms of exogenous interventions, including NGO or Donor-led infrastructure projects hence are welcomed and enthusiastically pursued. NGOs having their own objectives (such as donor-defined Slum Upgrading Projects), also make use of this opportunity and continue funding for schools and community buildings, communal and individual baths and toilets, water distribution points, sewer drains and internal roads. Through these interventions, vested interests converge into projects of mutual interest and mutual claim.



Figure 6. Infrastructure politics (clockwise, from top left corner): electricity meter at settlement 1; school, Madrasah and orphanage at settlement 6; less used toilet structure at settlement 3; community building at settlement 4; Hindu Mandir at settlement 3.

Source: Hakim 2012

Infrastructures enabling political advantage may also be self-financed. In large settlements as in settlement 6, secondary schools, Madrasah and Yatimkhana²⁰ are built, managed and promoted by the community itself where outsiders can also send their children to (figure 6). Likewise, in the Harijanpara Kali Mandir at settlement 3 – self-financed by the Harijan community²¹, a Muslim woman is seen sitting before the Hindu temple waiting for a spiritual healing session to begin (circled, figure 6). Although the Mandir primarily serves the ritual purposes of the Harijan, outsiders even from other faiths are also encouraged to join. The spiritual healing session that takes place every Tuesday afternoon on the temple premise, is actually a more secular event that draws in people from different faiths and from diverse localities. The non-monetary transactions and information flows between migrant communities and outside societies by making use of the sites of both modern and traditional (religiously significant) institutions and edifices again help earn a good name for the community. Still unable to make any permanent claim on the land, the Harijan community's establishment of these apparently 'neutral' public infrastructures hence start making sense. One realizes how their many socio-financial investments in these infrastructures are aimed to elevate their status to the level of any 'mainstream citizen' and hence reinforce their claim on land. In both cases, these interventions may be viewed as acts of 'territorial compromise', which allow outsiders to penetrate

²⁰ Arabic terms referring to a Muslim religious school and an orphanage respectively. These are both religiously significant institutions and are very common in Bangladeshi villages and towns. Commonly a *Yatimkhana* stands for a boarding school for orphan boys. It is a sensitive institution in any Muslim society as Prophet Muhammad (SM) was himself an orphan and he repeatedly stressed the need for taking good care of orphans. Different forms (and sums) of donation from both wealthy and poor are used to run these institutions. Any acts benefiting the erection, management and continuity of these institutions are considered as acts of divinity.

²¹ The *Harijan* is a tribal community working as sweepers and cleaners in Khulna were brought along by the British Planters during Colonia.

and participate in their spatio-physical environment. In the naive eye, these are mere donations and contributions made by outsiders. Yet a critical reading into this reveals of a strategic loosening of territorial control – a means to sanitize their present negative image as ‘Bastee’ or ‘Colony’.

Scarcity, or alternative materiality?

5.1 The obscured boundaries

The perception of density and its qualitative evaluation depends on both desired and actual levels of interaction between people and their socio-spatial environment and hence also by the way socio-spatial boundaries are defined and upheld by the inhabitants of the settlements concerned (Rapoport 1975: 142). Typically, informal settlements are high-density agglomerations where conditions are often exacerbated by ‘intricate’ physical conditions such as minimum greenery and maximum man-made features, lack of public space and shortage of land for non-residential use etc. Individually and collectively, these all add up to the negative construction of density (Opcit: 138-140). Yet here, an underlying mechanism of synthesis has been devised and gradually converted into practice. To overcome the norms of fixed private-public and communal boundaries, the definition and implications of density statistics became meaningless as social and spatial boundaries are made to work flexibly, permeably, sometimes ambiguously and serving even dual purposes. Through these means – built-forms, spaces and associated social exchanges find alternative usage and meaning.



Figure 7. (Left) shared functional space leading to social exchange between landlord and her tenants in settlement 5; (middle) territorial encroachment of public street during dry seasons; (right) spiritual corner (with deity) in ‘bed room’ space in settlement 3.

Source: Hakim 2012

In settlement 3, a public street temporarily becomes a living, child-rearing, or a cooking space; a room for rest and retreat performs also as a place for spiritual fulfilment (figure 7: middle and right). The Church or Mosque premises continue to serve as children’s play area or other domestic purposes in settlement 3 and 5 respectively, while within the privately owned migrant-house in settlement 5, the conventional landlord-tenant division becomes blurred, and a common space for social exchange and domestic cohort is created and negotiated between the landlord and her tenants (figure 7: left). This justifies the hypothesis that in small-scale housing markets, resident owners’ relationship with tenants remains personal and is enforced by social exchange; this enables small owners to achieve greater social efficiency at a lower cost and benefit socially and economically (Peattie 1994: 140-141).

5.2 Spatial compromises

The urban dwelling unit of the migrant is used also as a space for retail and production. Indeed, practices of using the entire household premise as a space for economic production²² was (and still is) only natural in the context of agrarian rural Bangladeshi society (Hakim 2010). In the context of the urban house, however, similar practices cannot be expected because of the non-agrarian nature of livelihoods in the city, and also considering its insufficiency of space compared to rural households. Yet driven by the need to make a livelihood, these unregulated dwelling environments in Khulna are often used for income generation (as in Peattie 1994: 136). In this context, the notion of a dual usage of tenanted space has been a means to overcome the need for renting, commercial or production space, and the further demand on land area for differentiating domestic activities from income generation. Yet these practices make the domestic realm – the only (spatial) resource available at the individual level – to be compromised to supplement economic return and to establish and maintain alliance with important actors.

In settlement 1 for example, works, particularly related to backward linkages of nearby export-oriented industries (e.g. fish scaling, carton making) are carried out within dwelling unit (figure 8). These works benefit both; the industrialist elite benefits from saving factory space, supply and utility cost, and most of all crucial ‘formal labor hours’, while the migrant worker benefits from a flexible time schedule (particularly for female), lesser travel cost and easier marketability. Through these ‘primarily economic transactions’, a symbiotic social relation with industrial-elite is also established. These arrangements provide the migrants considerable leverage in retaining their occupancy of settlement territories and leading to a more intense and vibrant mix of activities. The elite support thus becomes crucial especially to neutralize eviction threats or during contingencies when financial support is required (e.g. marriage).



Figure 8. (left to right) NGO signboard describing the nature of their involvement at settlement 5; house interior transformed to workspace for producing export-oriented products (Saree embroidery at settlement 6, and shrimp at settlement 1). Source: Hakim 2012

Additionally, NGO intervention in the built environment is also noteworthy. NGOs prompt for trading off domestic privacy for migrants’ economic (and also their own) gains. This can also be observed at the settlement level. Space, although scarce, is sacrificed for accommodating interventions by NGOs (e.g. Saree embroidery financed by NGO loan in settlement 6). This is an opportunity that both would embrace with relative ease; a sense of synergy again underlies such transactions in anticipation of continuing social gains. For the migrant, NGOs remain the only government they have ever known. NGOs, though not loved always, are still considered as ‘the sole providers’ of instant credit and caretakers of livelihood issues including education,

²² Although a typology exists (Ali 2005: 253), this typically includes open land, multiple dwelling units shared amongst members of the extended family, orchards and vegetable gardens, cowsheds and poultry house, and at least a pond (Ahmed 2006: 10-11).

healthcare, sanitation and infrastructure. So those understood as the negative components of density – enhanced activities, movements and ‘information flows’, and also the domestic encroachments, are not in fact crowding per se. The same conditions of round-the-clock activities (as in settlements 1 and 10), which are feared to worsen the perception of density (Rapoport 1975: 139) instead becomes key factors for household’s financial gain, women’s empowerment and economic security, settlement reputation and hence a bargaining tool for its safeguarding, and also a key driver for Khulna’s economic growth.

Scarcity or the urbanism of negotiations?

In the hunter-gatherer society of the “uneconomic man”, human wants are limited and few; people enjoy material abundance with lower standard of living by being free from the market-creation of scarcity (Bronfenbrenner 1962: 266). Likewise, Australian Aborigine’s access to material, edible and instrumental resources is limited; yet “it allows them to open up to an astonishingly abundant set of mythical and human horizons. Scarcity only makes sense in relation to the context (physical, material or conceptual) which it is part of” (Till 2011: 1). Taking account of this context-dependent view of scarcity and basing on the premise that migrants’ wants are limited by manufactured scarcities, migrant spaces then can be viewed as “alternative ideal environments” (Ghafur 2010: 12). Characterized by “mobility, resilience and adaptiveness”, these spaces suggests of underlying ‘synthetic processes’ where “social and spatial boundaries are inscribed, erased (and) identities are formed, expressed and transformed” (Dovey 2012: 353). It is therefore, the formal and informal binary should be viewed as something that is grounded in particular cultural, social, institutional, economic and political realities of informal settlements (Jenkins and Andersen 2011) as those in Khulna.

So if scarcity is a product, then we must consider ourselves part of it and do something about it (Till 2011: 10); there indeed is social, cultural and spatial room for manoeuvre. The perceived lack of space and resources in Khulna settlements, at least what is presumed from outside, hence turns out to be something not in need of external fix. Migrants have time-tested socio-spatial mechanisms to address those. For a sustained stay, strategic making of social-networks with elites thus seems ingenious where settlement configurations are allowed to be controlled by individual elites or by a combination of them. This substantiates that in a traditional society, people tend to satisfy their wants using alternative logics of reciprocity, redistribution and exchange (Bronfenbrenner 1962: 265); people cooperate with each other in adversity to avoid high transaction costs associated with their failure to comply (Southerton 2011: 1247). Informalities hence remain “flexible, ad-hoc form of economic activity that, while reviving old methods of primitive exploitation, also provides room for personal interaction” (Castells and Portes 1989: 26). The personal interactions with the elite thus can be viewed as a revival of the traditional social structure. These have been seen in the accepted compliance to pre-colonial hierarchical land-ruling class such as Zamindar, Jotedar and Mathbar²³, and to the late-colonial English-educated higher-middle class ‘Bhadrolok’ (Nahiduzzaman 2003: 50). In the presence of a highly stratified social structure, compliance to the elite seems to be a proven tactic for compensating material inadequacies. Even under present democratic conditions, similar is found in rural Bangladesh. Elites there still play an “active brokerage role between villagers and wider institutions” (Lewis and Hossain 2008:

²³ *Zamindars* were tax collectors for Mughal (later Colonial) rulers; *Jotedars* were intermediaries between *Zamindars* and peasants and *Mathbars* were community leaders (Ray and Ray 1975: 84).



48-49). At the household level, rural landless population continue to “make innovative use of kinship and other ideologies legitimating reciprocity and mutual aid to re-establish themselves rent-free on the land of others” (Indra and Norman 1997: 26). With cultural approval, these all remain rooted in the vernacular customs²⁴.

In this predominantly Muslim society, the notion of privacy is clearly defined with implications for a gendered distinction of space²⁵. This was stressed by both male and female members of Muslim migrant households. Hindu (settlement 3) and Christian (settlement 1) migrants have equally expressed similar need for privacy – revealing that privacy is more a culturally desired category rather by religion alone. Yet the situated practices of privacy in Khulna settlements are of socio-spatial compromise and negotiations. So when slippages as such occur, scarcity of space is naturally held responsible. But a closer scrutiny reveals that once such socio-spatial compromises become customary through decades of residence within a familiar context²⁶, they could not be viewed as consequences of scarcity alone. Instead, they are to be seen as conscious acts of socio-spatial negotiations to establish territorial claims over public spaces. Usage of such means hence helps retain a desired level of privacy for individuals. Familiarity with patterns (rules) of spatial encounters (e.g. male and female time-slots for using community baths), and hence respecting each other’s boundaries actually allow these people to maintain privacy within the realm of the public. An unwritten code of behavior exists that facilitate co-existence and sharing to retain privacy.

Conclusion

The idea of scarcity offers an alternative way to comprehend urban form-making while substantiating to the two hypotheses. First, opportunistic tactics from all actors in response to waves of constructed scarcities hence influence urban form-making. Both migrants and authoritative actors use scarcity as politics of in-between-ness is pacified by politics of control and politics of infrastructure. Second, the negotiated spatial structure through behavioural and territorial compromises also demonstrates migrant dweller’s alternative practices in response to ‘real’ scarcities of space and resources. One might see creativity ‘amongst nothingness’ evident in migrants’ ingenious use of ‘social’ in combination and interchangeably with ‘spatial’ to compensate for economic lacks, and in their play with control-mechanisms through many acts of compromise and negotiations during hardships. For migrants in Khulna’s informal settlements, ‘need’ remains perpetual; under modern conditions this should persist as a sense of ‘not having enough’. But as long as such periods would occur, it would most likely be dealt with by creativity of some sort, using elements of the built environment as one of its key instruments.

24 “Extended entitlements” (Dreze and Sen 1989: 11) theorizes how a poor family uses the socially sanctioned rights through a range of informal social relations (instead of legal rights to ownership), which becomes the primary means of accessing food, health care and other necessary household commodities (Southerton 2011: 1248).

25 Considering migrant’s rural origin, a review of rural house forms and spaces substantiate that a variety of spatio-physical mechanisms, including zoning and sequencing of open, semi-open and enclosed spaces, use of barriers (vegetation and screen), time-zoning etc. are traditionally used for achieving a desired level of privacy (Ahmed 2006: 12; Muktadir and Hasan 1985: 82, 84).

26 Positive outcome of a desired level of density is related to familiar patterns of interaction between migrant dwellers and other actors who use that public space equally. *Privacy* is seen as the ability to control unwanted interactions (Rapoport 1975: 140).

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