

**Re-bordering Camp and City:  
'Race', space and citizenship in Dhaka**

The relationship between 'race', space and citizenship has been a central feature of urban sociology since the studies of African-American urban segregation at the end of the nineteenth century (Du Bois, 1899; Haynes, 1913). It is typically associated with the study of the 'ghetto' or 'ethnic enclave' and with immigrant communities rather than displaced people or refugees. With a few notable exceptions (Sanyal, 2012; 2014) interest in forced migration on the other hand has been more commonly associated with refugee studies and development studies, than urban studies or sociology. As such it has tended to consider citizenship through the lenses of ethnicity and nationalism rather than 'race' and class. In this chapter I bring some of these disparate literatures together to examine how the urban refugee camp, much like the ghetto or ethnic enclave, racializes residents and configures claims to citizenship in the city, but also how the everyday movement and mixing characteristic of urban space reconfigures those claims in complex and unexpected ways. I argue that when we look at the refugee camp through its relationship to the city, particular features of the camp that have been otherwise neglected are brought to the fore.

In recent years with growing scholarly interest in transnational phenomena, population movements from South Asia have attracted considerable attention. The emphasis in this field of research however has been on those who migrated to the West, overlooking far greater movements of displaced within the South itself. These 'other' south-south diasporas have been comparatively ignored by western academics. The Partition of the Indian Sub-Continent in 1947 generated what is now regarded as one of the largest involuntary migrations in modern history, much of which took the form of internal movement to

urban centres within the region. Considering the numbers displaced by Partition, and the sustained and voluminous *historical* interest in the period, markedly little attention has been paid to the individuals and communities it displaced (Ansari, 2005). This is particularly apparent in the region of East Bengal (formerly East Pakistan, present day Bangladesh) where many of Partition's refugees were displaced for a second time less than twenty-five years later. The War of Liberation in 1971, produced one of the greatest war-related migrations ever known (Kamuluddin, 1985). Over one third of East Pakistan's seventy-five million people are thought to have been displaced. Nearly ten million people took refuge in India and the UN estimate sixteen million people were displaced *within* East Pakistan's borders (Kamuluddin, 1985; Kosinski and Maudood, 1985). In 1972 some returned to their homes, although the precise number is unknown. Much like Partition, it was 'the migration of borders over people, and not simply...of people over borders' (Brubaker, 2005 p.3) that constituted this displacement. In the capital of the new state of Bangladesh, Dhaka City, the minorities produced by Partition and Liberation remain.

Dhaka City is now the eleventh fastest growing city in the world, with an urban agglomeration of almost seventeen million. It has an annual growth rate of 3.6% and is projected to exceed a population of 27,000 by 2030 (United Nations, 2014). According to Ananya Roy (2011), 'megacities', like Dhaka, have become shorthand for the human condition of the global South. They also represent the 'constitutive outside' of contemporary urban studies. Following Robinson's (2006) call to shed light on the cities rendered invisible and inconsequential by the global city analytic, I will draw upon the case of a linguistic minority made stateless after the Liberation War of 1971, who live today in the urban camps of Dhaka into which they were displaced. By examining the city that Partition and Liberation produced I hope to underscore how *historic* migration is connected

to *contemporary* processes of urban transformation (Pasquetti, 2015; Katz, 2015). I also hope to investigate the relationship between state and city in the dynamic (re)bordering practices I explore. In this example, the mixing and hybridity opened up through migration and made possible by the space of the city disturbs state structured borders of 'race' and citizenship, re-making identity and belonging in fundamental ways. It shows us that urban spaces of interconnection can indeed extend beyond encounter, towards the possibilities of social *and* political reconfiguration (Hall, 2015). However, in exploring how such urban transformations involve both the transformation of city spaces and the transformation of urban citizens, the chapter will question whether this reconfiguration challenges colonial racializations and the uneven crafting of citizenship. Or whether it re-inscribes the inequalities of 'race', class and rights that are a sedimented product of the region's colonial past. As AbdouMaliq Simone (2004) has shown, a resourcefulness sometimes exists at the level of the urban because of and in spite of structural barriers and enduring subordination. This dynamic plays out in urban camps of Dhaka which are characterised simultaneously by steady reconfiguration and persistent discrimination. In the final analysis, the case illustrates how the city unsettles state structures of insider and outsider *at the same time* as it replicates prescriptions of who belongs and who does not.

### **Social and historical context**

Amongst the approximately 18 million people who left their homes in the first two decades after the creation of Pakistan, almost one million were Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from North India to East Pakistan (Ghosh, 2004). They came from all over North India but as many fled violence in the state of Bihar, the label 'Bihari' has been used in reference to the community ever since. The involvement of some in Bangladesh's 1971

War of Liberation displaced many for a second time. Thought to have sided with the occupying Pakistani forces against the majority Bengali population, the 'Urdu-speaking Bihari community' were made stateless following the birth of Bangladesh. Thousands were arrested or executed, while others, having been dispossessed by the state,<sup>i</sup> were forced to flee. Some found shelter in the house of a friend. Others, with fewer connections to rely on, or connections with less to offer, made their way to the areas of the city considered the safest, due either to their proximity to army cantonments or to the numbers of 'Urdu-speakers' living there. In these parts of the city, throughout the nine months of fighting, temporary shelters grew in size. By the end of the war, 735,180 'Urdu-speaking Biharis' were recorded as housed in 66 temporary shelters around the country (Sen, 1999). Today the population is thought to be closer to 160,000, spread across 116 settlements nationwide. 38 of these 'temporary shelters' remain in Dhaka city, with a present day population of approximately 90,000 (Al Falah, 2006).

For 40 years the Urdu-speaking population was recognized as 'de facto stateless' by the international community. However in May 2008 the entire community was granted citizenship by the High Court of Bangladesh. This precedent-setting judgement can only be understood in the context of a growing pro-democracy movement in Bangladesh<sup>ii</sup>, alongside the installation of a Caretaker Government when the country descended into political turmoil in 2007. In the final instance, elections planned for December 2008, and the introduction of the National ID system, galvanized the Election Commission towards a clarification of their status. The decision was considered 'a major success in the campaign to end 'statelessness' around the world' (Refugees International, 2008). However, the political, civil, social and economic rights of 'Urdu-speakers' in Bangladesh remain highly contested (Redclift, 2013a; 2013b). After years of brutal repression at the hands of the

Pakistani authorities, and a war in which millions of Bengalis were killed, the country's wounds are deep. In Dhaka city alone, one third of the population are thought to have lost their lives during the fighting (Kamuluddin, 1985). As a result of this history, and the stigma towards camp residents that remains, the political and moral recognition necessary for citizenship to be exercised effectively simply has not been achieved. Importantly for our purposes here, however, citizenship has always been available to those 'Urdu-speakers' who do not live the camps. Consequently, while stigma may be rooted in history and ethnic or linguistic identity, it is today manifested crudely in space.

The research on which this chapter is based was conducted between 2008 and 2013. It involved a total of 90 interviews (64 in-depth semi-structured interviews, 11 case study narrative interviews, 15 semi-structured interviews with local community leaders and political representatives), one civil society focus group, and 16 months participant observation. Access was gained with the help of Al Falah Bangladesh and the Shamshul Huque Foundation and the interviews were conducted in Urdu, Bengali and English depending on the participants' preference. Two field sites were chosen in the capital Dhaka - Mohammadpur in the centre and Mirpur in the suburbs<sup>iii</sup>. These areas were chosen not only because they contain the largest concentrations of 'Urdu-speakers' in the capital, but because they represent very different socio-economic spaces. Mirpur is more deprived economically, further out of town, with less local employment. Mohammadpur on the other hand is in a prime central location, housing the country's most populous camp (Geneva Camp). The contrast highlights the impact of urban economies and urban labour markets on the re-bordering of 'race' and citizenship in the city.

In this chapter, my aim is to confront some of the disciplinary and geographical boundaries that impede our understanding of the way in which political exclusion is manifest in the social body and marked in the physical contours of city space. Setting Euro-Atlantic interest in immigrant settlement and segregation against a story of the urban experience of forced displacement and informal settlement, the following section explores how the 'ethnic enclave', 'the ghetto', 'the camp' and 'the slum' all contribute to our understanding of space and citizenship in the city

## **SPATIAL FORMATIONS OF URBAN EXCLUSION**

Hannah Arendt's analysis of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany (1951) defined literature on political exclusion for decades by demonstrating that shallow notions of human rights lack all reality when those humans do not belong to political community. Giorgio Agamben's (1998; 2005) work resumed this debate, arguing that rights are attributed to (wo)man solely to the extent that (wo)man is citizen. The refugee camp, then, names a space that is formally outside the juridical and political order, but because it is presided over by that which is inside, it is never a condition of pure externality. According to Agamben (2005), it occupies instead an ambiguous borderline 'limit zone' between life and death, inside and outside; an indeterminate space that materializes wherever there is a 'materialization of the state of exception' and the creation therefore of a space for 'naked life'. In this conceptualisation, the refugee, who is also 'stateless' and rightless, is divested of agency; emptied of subjectivity (Nyers and Rygiel, 2012). And the camp is constructed as a vacuum of social and political exchange.

The Schmittian concept of the 'political exception' has been employed by other scholars in different ways, but Agamben's notion of the camp as 'exception incarnated' (Diken and Lautsen, 2005) has been particularly influential and Agamben has been described as the pre-eminent theorist of the interstitial (Walters, 2008). As the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West, 'the camp' emerges in the demarcation or distinction between 'inside' and 'outside'. But, in examining movement between the camp and the city beyond, we see that city space and urban experience trouble such simple demarcations, and we are forced to question whether or not a paradigm which rests fundamentally on the dual order of in/exclusion can ever truly do justice to the indeterminacy of the 'in between'.

However the border is conceived, the camp relates sociality to space, a relationship that has been studied since the Chicago School and continues to be reflected in approaches to urban problems and policies today. In early urban sociology, the typical model community was based on the immigrant area, and the study of 'the ghetto' or 'ethnic enclave' was an important forerunner to the study of the camp. At the end of the nineteenth century W.E.B Du Bois's (1899) prophetic study of Philadelphia revealed the political nature of urban segregation in America. In the early twentieth century Louis Wirth's (1928) classic study took the term back to its original association with Jewish settlement. For Wirth, the Chicago ghetto was conceived as an enclosed space of community which functioned as a place of refuge, familiarity and belonging. It was, however, also a space of separation from others; a space formed through persecution, which highlighted the way in which access to public space is organised through forms of segregation, regulation and control. It configures, therefore, an important duality: as a source of social capital as well as a testament to institutionally racist exclusion (Keith, 2005a). Put another way, the interplay

between space and identity politics has the capacity to generate both sociality and social control. Although literature on 'the camp' tends to favour the latter.

Studies that have followed have been accused of reducing the ghetto to a container of the exoticised 'others' of social research; linking urban poverty and inequality to themes of social disorganisation and the cultural pathologies of ghetto residents (Keith, 2005b).

Perhaps the most famous example is William J. Wilson's (1987) controversial study of the ghetto 'underclass' which brought the African-American ghetto into the mainstream of academic research. In critique of much of this scholarship, Wacquant's (2000) depiction of the ghetto as 'a relation of ethnoracial control and closure' based on stigma and institutional encasement resonates with the camps of this study. However, his argument that the analytical ordering of the spaces of the city should be separated from the folk concepts of the powerful and the powerless fails to recognise the relationship between the representation of the ghetto and its invocation by both its residents and its oppressors (Keith, 2005b). The language and the lens through which the spatial is seen must be borne in mind.

Here we are drawn to the real and the figurative ghetto, the ghetto as fiction and fact, and as such the potential conflation of the abstract and analytical. Where the real ends and the imagined begins is not always clear, but in the imagination of 'the ghetto' processes of marking and holding space are clearly important, and the role of the symbolic is germane (Tonkiss, 2005). In similar ways, 'the camp', as the symbolic separation of social groups (as much as the material), is a moment of arbitrary closure. Social differentiation is played out across landscapes which are shifting and, as Mario Small's (2007) critiques of Wacquant remind us, we must therefore look beyond ideal types. When we talk of the ghetto, or the



camp, we cannot presume that experiences of segregation and social exclusion look the same and have the same consequences everywhere.

The ghetto may be the forerunner of the camp in modern sociology but it speaks to and of the West. In a developing world context, it is the ubiquitous ‘slum’ or ‘shanty town’ that has become the ‘recognizable frame’ through which cities of the global South are perceived and understood (Nutall and Mbembe, 2005 in Roy, 2011; Vasudevan, 2015). Many of these informal settlements have been in existence for years and can be likened to virtual cities in themselves in view of their demographic density. These so-called ‘squatter cities’ will house the majority of the world’s population within the next two to three decades (Amin, 2012). Writing against dystopian narratives of the slum, scholars have attempted to recast it as the terrain of livelihood and politics, interrogating the epistemological categories through which informal forms of living are narrated (Vasudevan, 2015; Roy, 2011). Without romanticizing urban informality, then, this chapter hopes to contribute to a renewed commitment to document subaltern political action by showing that it is not only through informal settlement that difference is mapped and located but it is through the practices of subaltern settlers that the city is (re-)made.

Distinctions between the camp and the slum have been challenged and, in the context of the ‘Urdu-speaking minority’ in Bangladesh, inter-ethnic marriage, poverty and the passage of time blur the line considerably. For both, informality, as an idiom of urbanization, is a logic through which differential spatial value is constructed and managed (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004). But, the camps of Dhaka are also very much a product of their origins, and the historical formation of space that situates *specific* racial meaning. Issues of rights, history and identity are contextualised by the camps at the same time as they invest the

camps with meaning. Social relations are, then, structured through the meaning with which the camps are invested; camp residents are stigmatised by the definitive physical and material demarcation of the camp itself. It is to this interface, where the social and spatial are overlaid, that I now turn.

## **THE SPATIALIZATION OF CITIZENSHIP IN DHAKA**

Only one camp in Dhaka, Geneva Camp, was formally built by the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). The majority developed on an ad hoc basis and names such as ‘Cinema Hall Camp’, ‘Market Camp’, ‘Football Ground Camp’ and ‘Muslim School Camp’ attest to their origins, as well as the desperate search for shelter in the aftermath of fighting. They are an example of so-called ‘self-settled camps’ which aren’t included in official statistics on ‘encampment’ but which have been occupied in times of war, conflict or famine across the globe. These precarious, informal, invisible and sometimes illegal spaces of provisional shelter have been described as ‘the most borderline of sites’ (Agier, 2011, p.39).

The lack of state or humanitarian intervention in ‘self-settled’ camps produces a particular kind of indeterminacy, which doesn’t wait for change or resolution. Instead of a transition *between* homes, the camps have come to represent re-imagined *liminal* homelands. They have become the spatial and symbolic site for re-constructed belonging. In physical terms too, as these temporary shelters have slowly developed into permanent settlements, the materials used in the camps have become more and more like the materials used outside. Built as simple bamboo structures on any land left vacant, they now take the form of concrete rooms with tin roofs, and each camp has developed into a situated local economy. In

Mirpur rooms are filled with handicraft looms where beautiful Benarasi (Varanasi) saris are made. In Mohammadpur camp properties have been turned into cafes, restaurants, barbers, and market stalls and camp residents offer every kind of service to the throngs of people that visit the area to shop.

Where the camps begin and end is not at all clear. In the camps of Mirpur and Mohammadpur there is no obvious border, no wall, no fence, no boundary between the world inside and out. However, a border does exist, and it carries great meaning to those who know of it. One informant from Geneva camp told me how vividly he remembered crossing the border playing football as a child. He would go back and forth over the line, almost as if he was testing it out. What happens when you exceed the boundary through which you have been defined? The line itself was of course invisible, or visible only to those who knew of its existence. As a result, in physical and material terms the camps blend into the maze of bodies and buildings that surround them. Without administrative buildings, or humanitarian and Government bodies in charge, they more closely resemble slums, shanty towns or favelas than the securitized refugee camps of the international imagination. As a legacy of the way in which they developed, they are still provided with free water and electricity, which means that in many ways they provide a better quality of life than the Bengali slums next door. Nonetheless, with severe overcrowding and poor sanitation, conditions are dismal. Enormous piles of garbage line the narrow alleyways and some say it is the smell of the garbage that signifies the boundary between inside and out.

If you look carefully you can see that some camps still display the original signboards erected when they were first built, reading 'Stranded Pakistanis General Rehabilitation Committee (SPGRC)'. The SPGRC was the organisation formed to facilitate the 'return' of

these refugees to Pakistan after the Liberation War (a country most had never seen)<sup>iv</sup>. These signs were, therefore, not only a form of publicity for the SPGRC's political agenda, they also functioned to stake a claim over the space and its inhabitants. In fact, the naming of these spaces has had such a reifying effect that the Urdu-speaking population of Bangladesh is often assumed to be entirely camp-based. However, alongside the 160,000 people still living in the camps nationwide, around 100,000 have been able to establish themselves outside the camps. Moreover, since 1972, citizenship rights of birth and blood, both of which have recognised legal value under the Citizenship Act of 1951 and Citizenship Order of 1972, have been undermined by a civil status effectively constituted on spatial grounds. Those individuals who were never forced into the camps, as a result of the wealth, status or connections they were able to claim at the time of war, were accepted into the nation in all substantive respects. They have even had passports and access to voter registration, the rights commonly understood as the most difficult to acquire (Brubaker in Delanty, 2000; Soysal, 1994).

Those inside the camps, however, had none of these advantages. They were not registered on voter lists and, in the words of the High Court of Bangladesh in 2008, 'are constantly denied the constitutional rights to job, education, accommodation, health and a decent life like other citizens of the country.'<sup>v</sup> Until 2008, state power criminalized the 'gray space' of the camp (Yiftachel, 2009) and, unsurprisingly, in the intervening period, social and economic divisions between camp and non-camp based 'Urdu-speakers' have grown. After all, the camp itself is something different when it contains only those who did not leave, and as the more socially mobile camp residents continue to move outside, the camps have become the source of increasing social stigma. Crucially here, social relations have been reinforced by spatial organisation. The stigma towards camp residents has become about

the camp itself. This does not mean that stigma is no longer about 'race' or identity as traditionally assumed. It simply means that whereas 'race' or identity was thought to have produced the camp, the reverse is also true. Racialization is here an outcome of the socio-spatial structure of the city. And, as such, it is both cause and effect of the camp residents' protracted disenfranchisement.

## **THE RACIALIZATION OF SPACE IN DHAKA**

Hall (2000) argued that the structure of identification is always constructed through ambivalence; through the difference between that which one is and that which is the other. In exploring the defining terms of 'community identity' among 'Urdu-speakers' in Dhaka, the difference between that which one is that which is the other was communicated profoundly through the mapping of bodily traits; articulations of biological and physical difference that serve to construct the group in racial terms (Brah, 1996). When 'Urdu-speakers' are discussed in relation to Bengalis, they are very often constructed as taller and fairer. But articulations of racial difference are in fact most striking when 'Urdu-speakers' are *internally* compared:

Those ('Urdu-speakers') from Bihar look like Bengalis physically too, but those from Punjab look different, taller, fairer, with a beard (Afsar, non-camp 'Urdu-speaker', 26, Mohammadpur).

The references to height and skin colour in the above quotation are part of the production of well-rehearsed ideal types that form powerful classificatory tools. Through this subtext of innate difference 'Urdu-speakers' are depicted as both particularly fair-skinned (if they

happen to be of Punjabi, north-west Indian, West Pakistani or Patan<sup>vi</sup> origin) and particularly dark-skinned (if they happen to be from Bihar). ‘Ethnic origin’ is mapped onto the body in the establishment of indissoluble categorical difference within a ‘community’ nationally and internationally portrayed as ethnically holistic.

Bihar as an imagined place plays an important role in this production of categorical difference. It is discursively produced in the Bangladeshi imagination as a symbol of communal conflict, famine and poverty and occupies a highly charged space in the rhetoric of identity and belonging (Chatterji, 2010). Consequently, certain ‘Urdu-speakers’ concealed their ‘Bihari’ origins in order to claim racially superior UP or Punjabi heritage; only to be given away by the colour of their skin:

I asked Mohammad Abbas why he wasn’t going to India with his friends and he said it was because Bihar was a dirty place and he didn’t really like it. He told me that he was from Uttar Pradesh anyway, not Bihar. I asked Ajit about this but he didn’t seem convinced. ‘Many other people just say they are, like Mr Abbas, I don’t think he is really. He doesn’t look Aryan at all, he looks just like me, he looks too Bihari!’ He laughed. He often refers to himself as short and dark and ‘very Bihari’ (Field note, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2008).

It is true that at the time of Partition migrants from Bihar made up the majority of Urdu-speaking incomers to the region. However, it was not merely on account of numbers that this seemingly innocuous regional reference became the choice nomenclature when tensions in East Pakistan grew. It was suitably pejorative then, as it is now and, with its derogatory ethno-racial connotations, it is increasingly used in reference *only* to those who

live in the camps. Another term increasingly associated with the camps is the term 'Maowra'. The term 'Maowra' originates from Chandragupta Maurya who conquered Bihar and founded the Maurya Dynasty between 321 and 297BC (Ilias, 2003). Like the term 'Bihari' it has become a term of abuse only used in reference to 'Urdu-speakers' living in the camps. Through these terms the embodied distance between 'Urdu-speakers' in the camps and 'Urdu-speakers' living outside the camps has widened:

V.R: Have you ever been to the camps?

Jalal (non-camp 'Urdu-speaker', 29, Mohammadpur): Of course not, why would I? [laughs] I don't have any time for those people. They're called Maowra you know. [pause] I'm sorry... I'm not a humanitarian. I look after myself, that's how we do things here.

V.R: Have you ever called any of them Maowra?

Jalal: I'm ashamed to admit it, but yeh, I have. One time I had some of them fixing my car and I knew it was the brake, but they kept saying no it was the exhaust, and I knew, I know a lot about these things, and I was getting annoyed so I shouted the same thing in Urdu. And then they listened, and decided it was the brake! They gave me a cheap deal and the job was done. So I said to them 'right, so you fucking Maowra you'll listen to another Maowra but no one else.'

V.R: So you'd call yourself a Maowra too?

Jalal: No, I'm not a Maowra; I mean no one would call me that.

V.R: Why?

Jalal: Because I have too much power (interview conducted in English).

As the quotation above reveals, ‘Urdu-speakers’ of a particular social status are not branded with the pejorative labels of those in the camps. Jalal has the power to either avoid or appropriate such terms. Space, socio-economic status, education and citizenship rights all have an impact on the symbolic capital that he describes.

As Goffman (1959) observes, a ‘sense of one’s place’ in society must always be a sense of the place of others. This ‘sense of place’ has been understood by Bourdieu (1989) as an *adjustment* that is made to the dispositions acquired as a result of positioning in social space; a process through which social distance is inscribed in bodies. As Shabana explains below, this is an embodied distance that firmly keeps those in the camps and those outside the camps apart:

I do not have friends in the camp, because we are wealthy and have ‘good society’ (‘bhalo obosthan’). I know some of them who are very poor...some of them cannot even speak Bangla (Shabana, non-camp ‘Urdu-speaker’, 26, Mohammadpur).

In comparison to the rest of the country, this gulf is especially stark in the capital because the gap between rich and poor is greatest here. Those who were able to avoid moving into the camps in Dhaka were a small, well-educated elite, and today, despite the legacy of conflict, many occupy positions of significant social status. Here, therefore, spatial segregation represents greater social stratification than in other parts of the country. The rich have become richer, educating their children in universities overseas, or migrating again themselves, and the camp residents, without access to education and discriminated against in terms of employment, have become poorer. Marked by ‘race’, then, ethnic identities are not only articulated through the perception of biological difference such as



skin colour and height, but the physical expression of poverty too (see Redclift, 2015).

Being a 'Bihari' is written on the body, as dirt is described in almost biological terms.

VR: Are there any visible differences between a camp-dweller and an outsider?

Md. Shahid: It is clean clothes that identify you as an 'outsider'...they think *Biharis* are dirty (Md. Shahid, 'insider', 37, Mirpur).

This is an example of those instances where the markers of *social* difference are immediately coded with understandings of *racial* difference, almost as if a caste difference was being inscribed upon the body (Malkki, 1995). Put another way, social relations have been structured by the signification of biological characteristics to the extent that they define and construct differentiated social collectivities (Miles, 1989). Goldberg (2002) has warned that the term 'racialization' is too often used without attempts to specify its meaning, but here the context in which it was used by Fanon (1967) is vividly pronounced. Fanon contrasted 'to racialize' with 'to humanize'. The dirt and disrespectability attributed to the camps is part of that de-humanizing process, and it has chrysalized racialized patterns of opportunity and expectation in spatial form. Informants reported children being beaten in schools and failed at exams because their ragged clothes identified them as 'Bihari'. Others explained that they were paid less for the same work, or denied jobs altogether when their appearance gave them away as camp residents. The paradox this created, in which the identity of the camp prevented people from leaving it, did not go unnoticed. As one informant told me, an association with the camp would make it very difficult to find rented accomodation outside: "“why would I give a flat to this Maowra”, landlords would say, “they are very dirty”" (Shabana Begum, 'insider', 70, Dhaka). The concept of racialization appears here as the *contingent* construction and deployment of ideologies of racial difference.

It is with purpose that a dividing line is drawn, and the poor 'robbed of all humanity' are constructed as 'a race wholly apart' (Engels, 1844 [1958], p.361).

The classification of spaces – here as Moawra or Bihari - is one of the key ways in which meaning is created, both about people and the spaces they inhabit (Anderson, 1987). Pulido (2002) has argued that racialization is, after all, fundamentally a spatial relation. This not only plays out in the division of space between the camp and the world outside, although this is by far the most powerful spatial distinction. Among camp residents, an internal hierarchy was spatialized through these same associations of wealth and poverty. Most of the properties consist of one simple eight foot by eight foot room, in which people eat, work and sleep. However, the more socially mobile camp residents have been able to improve upon these spaces by building rooms on top of each other, and some have grown to as many as four stories high. Residents commented that these physical enhancements were associated with personal or moral enhancement too. One noted that his religious observance had increased as he now had more clean space to pray. Dirt and hygiene played heavily into the processes of dis-identification through which non-camp 'Urdu-speakers' distanced themselves from the camp, but they also played into the processes through which camp residents set themselves apart from their neighbours.

In more affluent camps such as Staff Quarters Camp in Mohammadpur whole camps have garnered a higher social status. This is because the employment structure of each camp has been influenced not only by the local economy but in relation to the nature of the site on which the camp was built. Staff Quarters Camp was appropriated from the quarters of Urdu-speaking Government employees in 1971/2. It is traditionally associated with white collar work and greater levels of formal employment than other camps in the capital. While

formal employment is no longer common, it remains a wealthier camp than many others. An internal camp hierarchy is produced as a result of very specific historical experience:

Every camp is different. We are living in multi storied buildings in this (Staff Quarter) camp. There is also one toilet per house whereas in Geneva Camp there is one per row, which means there are four in total! So our status is higher. Many of the Geneva Camp dwellers come around to get a rented house in Staff Quarter Camp. They think we are rich here. A person from Staff Quarter thinks that they are superior to those from Geneva Camp or Market Camp. They tease each other; it's a kind of identity. Also people do different things in different camps: most people in Staff Quarter Camp are service workers (drivers, clerks etc.) whereas most people in Geneva camp are businessmen (market traders). This indicates the status of the camps. They were distributed randomly in 1972; it was just luck where you ended up (Sajid, 'insider', 28, Mohammadpur).

As this last quote makes clear, the salience of historicity, as well as spatiality, in making sense of processes of racialization is immediately apparent in the space of the camp. As Keith (2005a) observes, in the absence of context there is a danger that the term suggests a much greater sense of certainty than reality delivers. The stress on notions of *becoming* rather than *being* is therefore important. In the camps of Dhaka movements through social space are not impossible and, as camp residents revealed, racialized identities could be reconfigured. With economic capital (reflected in 'a good place to live' and clean clothes, for example), the mutability of racial subjects within the times and spaces in which identities are staged, is made very clear (Keith, 2005a). What this means is that while the camps function to divide the city into spaces of 'barbarism' and spaces of 'civility' that

identify some as the proper subjects of the political and others as not (Rygiel, 2012), in the everyday life of the city these borders are porous and shifting. The *crossing* of a boundary (between barbarism and civilisation, friend and enemy, political being and bare life) can represent a powerful political act that is insufficiently explored. In the final section I turn my attention to the impact of these active practices of border-crossing, mixing and exchange.

## **UNSETTLING BORDERS OF ‘RACE’ AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE CITY**

One of the ways in which elite ‘Urdu-speakers’ in Dhaka distinguished themselves from camp residents was by declaring a non-Bihari origin. As we saw, lighter-skinned Punjabi or Patan complexions carried associations of ethnic or racial ‘purity’. Despite this, the corresponding idea of a physical *similarity* between ‘Urdu-speakers’ from Bihar and Bengalis carried advantages of its own. My research assistant would joke that his dark skin and ‘Bihari looks’ concerned his mother and he was regularly told off for spending too much time in the sun. However, in enabling him to ‘pass as Bengali’ these same characteristics also made it easier for him to get a job, buy land, or rent a flat outside the camps.

### **Moving, hiding and passing**

Movement outside the camps and the ‘passing’ that could accompany such movement, was an important means through which camp residents could transcend or subvert racial *and* political identities, accessing rights and recognition. While living in the camp people were defined as an ethnic and linguistic minority and it wasn’t until they moved outside that they were accepted as Bangladeshi:

Before I moved outside the camp I had many names, Bihari, Stranded Pakistani, Maowra. Now to other people I'm just Bangladeshi (Emran, non-camp 'Urdu-speaker', 37, Mohammadpur).

Moving outside offered the opportunity of being treated with respect:

The people who are living in the camp are treating me differently now I have a good place to live. When I was in the camp, the Bengalis used to call us 'Bihari'. However here no one can say that...I think the label Bangladeshi is more comfortable for me (now) (Chanda, non-camp 'Urdu-speaker', 25, Mohammadpur).

Here it is a 'good place to live' that distinguishes a 'Bihari' from a 'Bangladeshi'. The 'good place' Chanda refers to is also a place of citizenship. As the quotation below suggests, movement outside the camps is about claiming citizenship and, as a result, achieving something more profound:

We moved from the camp four years ago...we get many advantages living outside, like voter ID, and an address that I can give freely to people...We got self-respect from others living outside (Tuni, non-camp 'Urdu-speaker', 27, Mohammadpur).

Once that physical boundary is crossed, a range of opportunities and relationships become available. However, this kind of physical mobility was a product of a level of social mobility that was more common in Mohammadpur than it was in Mirpur. Moving outside required money to rent privately, and the highly localised labour markets of Dhaka have an effect on

the degree to which this is possible. Geneva camp in Mohammadpur is situated on the edge of a busy marketplace in the centre of the city and many camp residents are employed as stall owners or assistants or work in the shops, barbers and eateries around. There are greater opportunities for employment here than almost anywhere in the city. Mirpur on the other hand, a northern suburb of the capital, has been the centre of local but rapidly declining Benarasi sari production since well before the Liberation War and many residents of camps in Mirpur continue to work in the trade. Here the local economy is much less buoyant and unemployment levels in the camps are significantly higher. Consequently, the social mobility that movement outside the camps required was more difficult to achieve.

If physical movement was not possible, camp residents hid their camp addresses to avoid the stigma associated. But where hiding an address became hiding an ethnic, racial or linguistic identity was sometimes difficult to unpick. For those in the camps, socio-spatial relations structure the signification of racialized ascriptions and the two are therefore inevitably intertwined:

Lots of Bengalis look down on us just because we're from the camps. I hide my identity as a result, I can't show I'm a camp-dweller, and I have to hide my language also...Only one or two of my Bengali friends know I'm a camp-dweller. I would feel shy if the others knew, they would start to tease me, look down on me, and I think I would lose their respect (Sajia, camp-based 'Urdu-speaker', 20, Mirpur).

As Sajia confirms, it is the combination of both the camp and language that identifies you as a 'Maowra', a 'Bihari', and therefore dis-identification is required with both. These attempts to pass were not a form of insubordination. They were not the instances of

rebellion or insurgency that we often look for in the tactics and struggles of the urban poor (Roy, 2009). Rather, as Skeggs (1997) observes, they are dissimulations, performances of a desire not to be shamed but to be legitimated. And they were facilitated by the anonymity of the city. In smaller towns around the country the boundaries between ‘Urdu-speakers’ and Bengalis were reinforced by a lack of anonymity (see Redclift, 2013a). But in a city like Dhaka – with a population of almost seventeen million - approximately 100,000 ‘Urdu-speakers’ are easy to miss. Here, adoptive Bengali identities functioned as cloaks of protective coloration that lent their bearers’ security in complex social arenas (Malkki, 1995):

I often pretend to be Bengali...If I said I was from Geneva camp people would look down on me. So I say I’m from a certain village...Some days ago we went to a party of freedom fighters<sup>vii</sup> and they asked me where I was from and I said Faridpur to get acceptance. They would have looked down on me otherwise...it depends on the society you mix with. It’s a need for me, that’s all (Khalid, non-camp ‘Urdu-speaker’, 28, Mohammadpur).

It is a ‘need’ for Khalid to ‘pass as Bengali’ because ‘passing’ is necessary in order to rent a flat (as we have seen), in order to access health facilities at a clinic, or in order to find a job:

Shabana (non-camp ‘Urdu-speaker’, 26, Mohammadpur): When I apply for jobs I still hide the fact that I’m Urdu-speaking. We have to hide our language in our workplace...Some of my colleagues are very eager to visit my home. With less enthusiasm I invite them to my place. However on those occasions we are very

careful about our language, we don't speak in Urdu in front of them...I worry that my family will speak Urdu...

The site of the 'everyday encounter' has been a productive arena for interrogating experiences of difference within urban space (Amin, 2002). Shabana's passing is an example of the below-the-radar 'small actions' which sustain life in precarious informal conditions (Pieterse, 2008, p. 113). In troubling bounded categories and fixed binaries perhaps it offers the potential for moving beyond the essentialisms imposed by language, ethnicity and pure points of origin? But this is a small action which occurs against a highly uneven urban landscape. While passing enables these individuals to avoid racialized stigmatisation and access opportunities otherwise denied them, it does nothing to challenge the exclusion on which that denial rests. It provides certain advantages at an individual level but exposes deeply embedded structures of inequality at the collective level. After all, while passing may be read as a site of association and possibility, it is only necessary in the context of moral judgments, ascribed statuses, and exclusionary social barriers (Bradshaw, 1992 in Barber, 2015). For some those exclusionary social barriers were so profound that a more fundamental mixing was required.

### **Marrying out, marrying in**

Places are not just culturally, ethnically and socially distinct, but 'sexed' and 'gendered' too. The gendering of movement, and the social relations which particular places construct, is particularly apparent in the context of marriage in and out of the camps. For many 'Urdu-speakers', 'inter-marriage' with Bengalis was a means by which it was thought that they might 'improve' upon their lives, especially in relation to experiences of citizenship. I asked



one informant whether he felt the High Court ruling of 2008 which conferred formal citizenship on camp residents would have an impact on his life. He laughed as he replied:

I have already married an Urdu-speaking girl...but if we had still not got rights of citizen ('nagorik odhikar') I may have married a Bengali one! (Shamim, camp resident, 28, Mohammadpur)

'Inter-marriage' could, he suggests, offer protection against the insecurity of 'statelessness'. And, as a result of these inter-marriages, it is thought that as many as 25 percent of camp residents in Dhaka are now in fact ethnically Bengali. In a society in which social structures are strongly influenced by vertical patron-client relations, it is marriage above one's *social status* that is more difficult to achieve:

Between those ('Urdu-speakers') outside the camps and inside...is like between poor and rich men. Poor and rich men don't mix much but rich and rich men do. For example a Bengali better off family don't want to mix with lower people whether they belong to the same community (Md. Shahid, camp-resident, 37, Mirpur).

As Mohammad Shahid observes 'inter-ethnic marriage' is not a problem, as long as it occurs within one's *social* status, a fact confirmed by the number of Bengalis now living in the camps. Residence is traditionally patrilocal, which is why it is Bengali *women* rather than Bengali *men* who tend to marry-into the camp (and 'Bihari' women rather 'Bihari' men may be able to marry-out). Unsurprisingly, for these Bengali women, living in the camps has had an impact on their identity:

When I was new (in the camp), I was a stranger - I didn't understand their language, I felt this place was not for me...However after spending a long time with this community...now I can give answer in Urdu...and they became my brothers and sisters. I think I am part of this society...If there's a problem in this community it's a problem for me, if there's happiness in this community it's good for me (Shabanaj, camp resident, 36-37, Mirpur).

Shabanaj's story highlights the identificational resonance of place, and the way in which it intersects with language and social community. Salima is another middle-aged Bengali woman who moved into the camps after marriage:

When I came here before my marriage I was totally Bengali. I couldn't speak a word of Urdu and since coming here I have completely switched! (laughs)...Now I'm more fluent in Urdu! (Laughs again). When I first came to the camp I was teased...The one word I understood was 'Bangali'. They were calling me 'Bangali, Bangali'...At that time I didn't feel like an 'Urdu-speaker' I felt like a Bengali but as I came here and was teased so much, I struggled so much to learn Urdu. And after two or three years hard work I got Urdu and the teasing stopped. And now I feel like a 'Bihari' (Salima, camp resident, 40, Mohammadpur).

Once Salima had gained acceptance in the camps, once she was considered a 'Bihari' in the terms of those around her, she began to understand herself as such. For both of these women, language and local environment are central to their narratives of identification, but so is the gaze of the world outside. Identified by others as 'Bihari', they are dependent for their happiness on the position of 'the community' in broader terms ('if there's a problem

for this community it's a problem for me'). The inscription of identity in the look of the world outside, the necessity of the 'other' to the self (Hall, 2000) is always apparent. For both of these women, before 2008, marrying into the camps meant the loss of citizenship. After 2008 some of their rights were restored; they are now able to cast their vote and their children are beginning to access education. But the camp address that they have acquired still prevents them from obtaining passports (Hussain, 2009) and informal discrimination severely limits opportunities for employment. In such a context it may be difficult to understand why someone would marry in, assuming a stigma that limits opportunities in this way.

Such a decision only underscores the precarity of urban livelihoods in the global south. For Bengali women of a low socio-economic status who marry into the camps the negotiation is between racialization and political exclusion on the one hand, and the free shelter which is so key to sustaining life in uncertain conditions on the other. Across cities of the global north and south class-stratified decision making intersects with racial categorization (Brahinsky, 2011). In fact, in Mohammadpur, where real estate is at a premium, some camp residents have even rented out or sold their camp properties to Bengali families. There are no titles to buy and sell and such transactions rest on informal agreements overseen by local community leaders. In addition, the emergency conditions under which camp sites were chosen in 1971 have meant that the ownership of such spaces remains very much in dispute. In parts of the city the original owners of the land on which camps were built continue to claim the land back<sup>viii</sup>. These unexpected border crossings depend on the practices and materialities that are themselves a product of the very uncertainties incumbent within cities (Simone, 2008).

As we see here state structures of insider and outsider are written in city space, at the same time as they are undermined by it. The camp is a space of urban exclusion and its subjects are excluded from the 'formal' political domain, but the city is also a site of claims-making in which borders of 'race' and citizenship are re-defined. Moving, mixing and marrying extend beyond encounter to result in a reconfiguration of citizenship statuses, ethnic labelling and stigmatisation. They underscore the agility and creativity expressed in countless everyday adaptations by diverse urban residents to the vast heterogeneities of urban life (Simone, 2008). But this reconfiguration is also the object of necessity, and it does nothing to challenge the urban status quo. It is a reconfiguration which requires agility and creativity of some but not all.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I hope to contribute to illuminating two 'urban shadows', or spaces at the edge of urban theory (McFarlane, 2008). One of those is Dhaka city itself; rendered invisible by the global city analytic. The other is an example of the many south-south diasporas that make up the majority of migrants to urban centres around the world, but which have, until recently, been rendered equally invisible by urban theory's parochial lens (Robinson, 2006).

Like all cities, Dhaka testifies to the past within its present form and the 'Bihari' camps of this study mark the urban landscape with a past that continues to shape the present. As we see here, they also map out the material inequalities that are a feature of cities across the global north and south. In the space of the camp, economic deprivation redoubles ethnic and linguistic discrimination. Stigma works through discourses of dirt, pollution and

poverty, to influence the way in which ethnicity, 'race', language and culture, are read and understood. The space of the camp, therefore, becomes a constitutive feature of the manner in which racial identities are defined (Keith, 2005a)

But, the everyday movement and mixing characteristic of urban space reconfigures racial stigmatisation and corresponding claims to citizenship in complex and unexpected ways. Identities have transformed under difficult circumstances and today the use of the labels 'Bihari' and 'Bengali' as antonyms in the study of Bangladeshi society have become an obstacle to understanding their experience (Rahman and Van Schendal, 2004). The reality is much more complex. The camp is not a static space of 'tradition' and 'immobility'. The acts of moving, mixing, passing and marrying explored here all challenge the practice of marking difference in the city. The camp becomes a space in which tradition is 'invented', languages fuse and "new ethnicities' emerge that are articulated through the spatialisation of culture within the city' (Keith, 2005a, p.266).

Places are dynamic contexts of social interaction and in this sense the camps are not essences but processes. An understanding of the camps as formulated through the spatial politics of history recognises not only that in some sense their evolution *is* their meaning, but more importantly perhaps that this meaning is constituted through power relations. Therefore, while the practice of passing might be seen to counter the practice of making racial/ethnic distinctions it also buys into that same oppressive social order, legitimating and perpetuating it (Kroeger, 2003 in Barber, 2015). The reconfiguration these 'small acts' produce does nothing to call into question the exclusion on which it rests. It speaks in fact to the virulent systems of social sorting by class, race, ethnicity and gender that limit participation in the city (Back and Sinha, 2012). Not to mention the uncertainties of urban

life on which strategies of everyday negotiation and subversion depend. In this way, the city both unsettles the state prescriptions of belonging through how people pursue their everyday connections and ambitions, but also replicates 'race'-class confluences which characterise urban life and which play out in access to real material goods and services. A simultaneity of steady reconfiguration and persistent discrimination is made possible by the city, as well as the uneven ground on which it sits.

**KEYWORDS: 'Race', urban space, citizenship, South Asia, Dhaka, 'the camp', political exclusion, refugees, borders, mobility**

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- <sup>i</sup> Pakistan's Vested Property Act (reinforced in the promulgation of Enemy Property Custody and Registration Order of 1965) was not withdrawn with the creation of Bangladesh, but given a new lease of life. Properties belonging to 'Biharis' were occupied by the state largely through the 'Bangladesh Abandoned Property Order' of 1972 (Paulsen, 2006).
- <sup>ii</sup> Spearheaded by groups such as Ain-o-Shalish Kendra (ASK) and supported by sections of the Academy (Chatterji, 2010).
- <sup>iii</sup> A third field site in the small town of Saidpur, in the northern Rajshahi district, was also studied, but it does not form the subject of this piece.
- <sup>iv</sup> For more information on the SPGRC, as well as the other community organisations established in the camps, and the modes of collective organisation that exist see Redclift (2013a)
- <sup>v</sup> 'Md. Sadaqat Khan (Fakku) and Others v. Chief Election Commissioner, Bangladesh Election Commission', Writ Petition No. 10129 of 2007, Bangladesh: Supreme Court, 18 May 2008.
- <sup>vi</sup> A large Eastern Iranian ethno-linguistic group primarily located in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- <sup>vii</sup> The Freedom Fighters (or Mukti Bahini) were the guerrilla resistance forces formed by Bengali military, paramilitary and civilians during the war of Liberation.
- <sup>viii</sup> For a more detailed explanation of land tenure and the threat of eviction see Redclift (2013a).