

The Highway Revolution. Enclosure and State Space in India

On 16 November 2021, a heavy-body Air Force aircraft carrying Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a spectacular landing on a newly constructed six-lane motorway in a nondescript and remote agrarian hinterland in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Following the landing, Modi delivered a speech to a large congregation of farmers and agriculture workers from the region, laying out the centrality of motorways and their world-class urbanisation in his vision for a “New India.” In the backdrop to his speech, promotional videos of the motorway featured a series of free-floating architectural renderings that helped to conjure the abstract reality of the express urbanism yet to come¹—what seems like a contradictory and distant everyday reality for this region of subsistence agriculture. The expressway is projected as a techno-fix that will bring prosperity and development to this “backward” agricultural region by unlocking agrarian land for more “productive” uses such as world-class investment parks, logistical centres, and industries.

In addition to offering express connectivity to metropolitan centres, such as Uttar Pradesh’s capital, Lucknow, and the national capital, Delhi, the government narrative around the expressway claims that it would benefit farmers in the region through increased land prices and access to new employment opportunities.² Contrary to this narrative, the land for the expressway corridor was expropriated from the farmers at below-market rates using colonial-era eminent domain³ laws for land acquisition. The involvement of the parastatal institution, the Uttar Pradesh Expressway Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA), in this otherwise private project helped attach a public purpose (bringing development to the region) and thus allowed the project to unfold at a rapid pace, at minimum costs. Furthermore, this direct land-acquisition model has helped avoid unified farmer protests such as those that emerged during the heyday of India’s land-acquisition projects in 2008.⁴ In fact, no large-scale resistance emerged against land acquisition for highways, even at a time when one of the

largest organised protests in India's history was unfolding against the agriculture privatisation laws in 2021, when the rate of highway construction in India stood at its highest, with 34 kilometres of lanes per day.⁵ Despite the obvious accumulation by dispossession⁶ that the construction of expressways facilitates, it has become an important political promise across India.

In his speech, Modi claimed that in the year 2021 alone, his government constructed over 12,000 kilometres of new highways to attract transnational capital investments to the most underdeveloped parts of the country.⁷ His speech culminated in thundering applause, followed by a nationalistic chanting of *Bharat Mata ki Jai* (Hail Mother India) led by Modi. The plane soon took off, perhaps for another political congregation, on one of the 22 landing airstrips developed along newly constructed highways all over India. The rapid construction of highways and the express urbanism it catalyses are a kind of new opium for the masses, offering a state-created condition where rapid urbanisation, religious nationalism, and bellicose militarism undergo a toxic amalgamation.

INDIA'S HIGHWAY REVOLUTION

A profound transformation is underway in the Indian countryside that assumes nothing short of the complete urbanisation of India as its horizon. This is the transformation that is producing Modi's New India,⁸ an India that is new not only in terms of its economic and religious nationalism and the erosion of social justice but also in its production of what Neil Brenner calls "new state spaces."⁹ A new India is being produced through the extensive material extension of state infrastructure and urbanisation in territories previously bypassed by capitalism through the explosion and re-territorialisation of the "colonial state space." To put this process into perspective, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic

in 2021, even as the country was reeling from a desperate lack of ventilators and hospital beds, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) constructed 34 kilometres of new highway lanes per day.¹⁰ This translates to about 5.5 kilometres of standard six-lane highway built daily. This pace is unparalleled in history, even at the height of the US Interstate Highway System in the post-war period. The current government's stated ambition is for the construction pace to reach 100 kilometres of highway lanes per day by 2025, which will, in turn, catapult India into an elusive USD 5 trillion economy.¹¹

The production of space through highway corridors has been a central feature of India's fast-paced growth trajectory under neoliberalism. It has emerged as the dominant mode through which "accumulation by dispossession"¹² functions in India, whereby the "land broker state" attempts to remove barriers for transnational capital to invest in rural land markets.¹³ [Fig. 1] The construction of these corridors is not only rapid but also extensive. Under the ongoing highway development programme, curiously entitled *Bharatmala* (garland of roads around Mother India), 100 new highway corridors spanning 34,600 kilometres have been planned across the length and breadth of India at the cost of USD 74 billion.¹⁴ The title of the highway programme builds upon the nationalist imaginary and contemporary mythology of *Bharat Mata*, or the nation as the mother goddess, where the highway corridors are presented as a garland on its mythical body.¹⁵ The 100 new highway corridors include 44 primary economic and 56 inter-economic corridors. [Fig. 2–3] They are often implanted parallel to corridors that have only recently been constructed, some of which have not yet become fully operational. Together with other contemporary mega-infrastructure programmes, such as China's One Belt One Road initiative, India's highway revolution can be understood as a counter-revolution similar to the Green Revolution.¹⁶ Raj Patel's analysis of the "Long Green Revolution" in India and the broader global South finds how direct links between

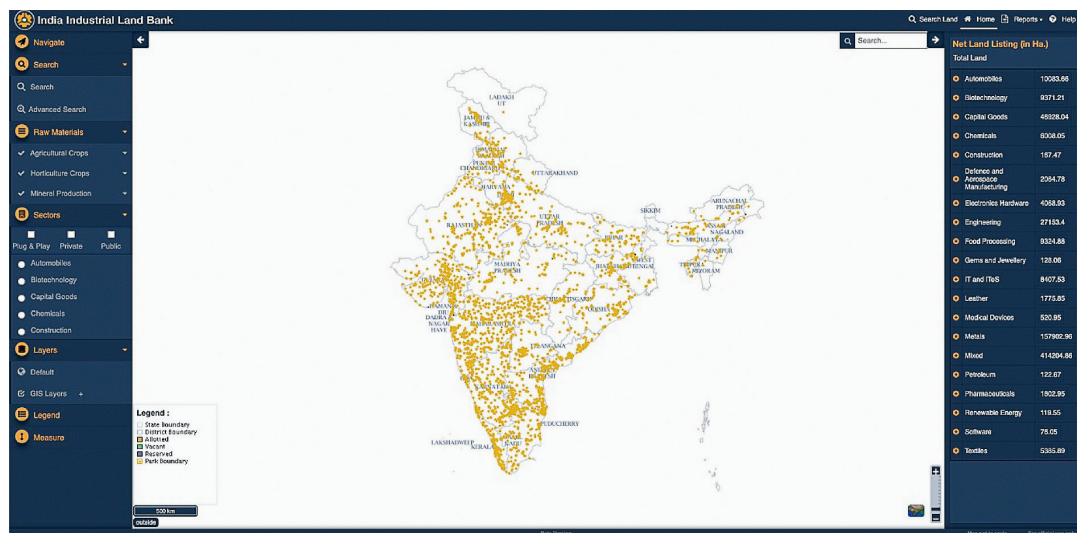


Fig. 1

governments and philanthropic institutions—such as the Rockefeller Foundation—ushered in the Green Revolution as a capitalist counter-movement to suppress the peasant rebellions in the countryside.

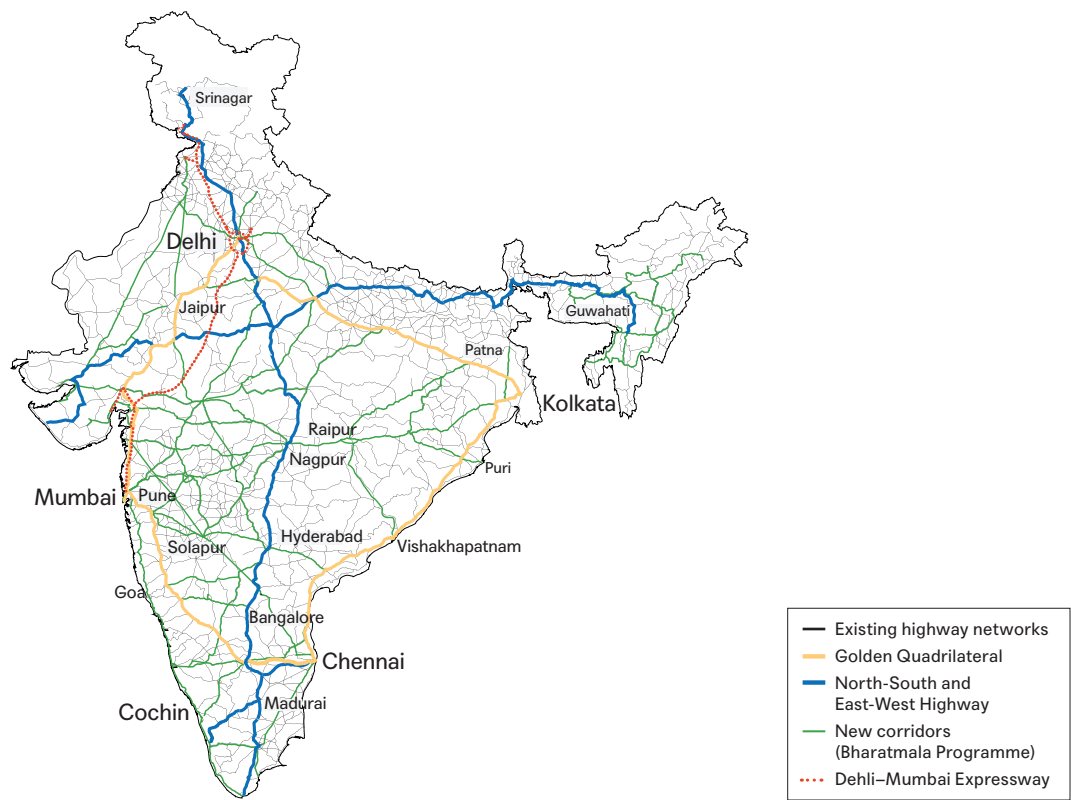
Similarly, the highway revolution is catalysing a very specific kind of large-scale extended urbanisation, which is distinct from what we encounter in the other chapters of this book. This form of state-driven extended urbanisation serves as a vehicle for the enclosure and commodification of rural land and its transformation into urban space rather than for the extraction of natural resources.¹⁷ It often reaches beyond the nation-state borders, for example, with the construction of the Chabahar Port in Iran and the International North-South Transport Corridor in Central Asia by the Indian state.¹⁸

The “new state spaces” produced by the highway revolution are multi-scalar, reaching across local, metropolitan, regional, and inter-regional scales. Three examples are the six-lane, 150-kilometre Ring Road project around the city of Jaipur (USD 150 million), the double-storeyed, eight-lane, 29-kilometre-long Dwarka Expressway, which is an urban corridor between the cities of Delhi and Gurgaon (USD 1.3

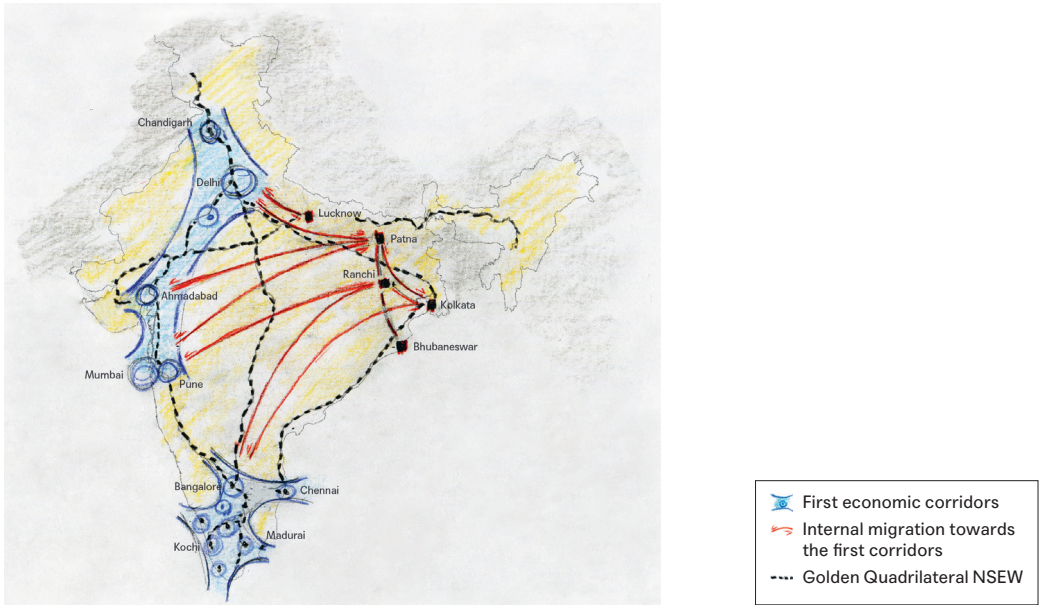
billion), and the 1,320-kilometre-long Delhi-Mumbai Expressway (USD 12.4 billion). These new highway corridors often promise alternative faster and greener mobility to existing highways. Thus, the rapid construction of highway corridors across space and scales is no longer merely enabling a time-space compression,¹⁹ but it is also turning Henri Lefebvre’s thesis on a “complete urbanisation of society” from an abstraction into a concrete reality.²⁰

However, as Brenner aptly points out, these new state spaces are ripe with “conflict, crisis, and contradiction as they exacerbate rather than alleviate the economic dislocations of post-Keynesian urbanisation. Therefore, they are also spaces of incessant regulatory experimentation and dynamic institutional searching.”²¹ The highway programme does not even try to avoid conflicts in the aggregation of agrarian land.

F. 1 The land broker state: a screenshot of the GIS-enabled India Industrial Land Bank Portal maintained by the Indian government, which allows transnational investors an overview of aggregated land banks available for investment.



THE HIGHWAY REVOLUTION AS EXTENDED URBANISATION
Fig. 2



FORMATION OF ECONOMIC CORRIDORS &
MAIN MIGRATION MOVEMENTS
Fig. 3

The planning of new highway corridors into previously economically bypassed regions operates on a terra nullius assumption, ignoring the complexity of land ownership, cadastral negotiations, and practices of dwelling and occupancies on the ground. The abstract agrarian revenue cadastres substitute ground surveys for land acquisition, resulting in long-fraught legal conflicts that turn judicial courts into sites of struggle and negotiation.

On the one hand, marginalised groups exercise resistance by filing public interest litigations against highway development, citing a “Right to Life”²² to expose the contradictions and arbitrariness in the planning and land acquisition process through the Right to Information Act.²³ On the other hand, the state invents new rationalities and narratives to legitimise highway projects.²⁴ The uncertainty imposed by such conflicts propels highway corridors into long phases of incompleteness, which, as discussed later in this chapter, becomes productive not only for the state and property-owning classes but also for the subaltern communities whose lives are disrupted by these highway corridors.

This chapter explores the production of new state spaces under India’s ongoing highway revolution along four coinciding arguments. The first section presents a periodisation of highway development as a state works project in India since the late 1990s. The second section explores the dominant spatial strategies and the production of new state spaces. The third section highlights India’s essential urban dilemma of continued low urbanisation rates despite these profound infrastructure transformations. This section also engages with the rich and varied scholarship on subaltern urbanisation in India, which tackles this question from a post-colonial perspective. The final section of the chapter brings us right into the everyday life of the new state spaces, full of conflicts and uncertainties, through the analysis of the production of a regional highway corridor on the periphery of Delhi.

This chapter draws upon extensive mobile and multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted

in the extended urban region of Delhi between 2017 and 2020.²⁵ In attempting to piece together India’s political economy of highway corridors, I focus on the frictions and conflicts these projects generate on the ground. In particular, I employ the procedure of “dialectical transduction,” which allows for a mutual interaction between concepts and empirical research,²⁶ combining an intimate observation of everyday life through critical ethnography with the analysis of state strategies driving large-scale processes of urban change.²⁷ The discussion draws upon interviews with experts and with communities displaced by highway construction, participant observation conducted at highway launches and state planning offices, as well as analysis of geospatial data, grey literature, and court archives. Additionally, this research used ethnographic film to draw upon the “urban sensorium” of the 2020 ethnographic documentary film *Not Just Roads*.²⁸

A PERIODISATION OF INDIA’S HIGHWAY PROGRAMMES

In this section, I identify three distinct phases in India’s neo-liberal highway revolution which marked important shifts in the political economy, public narratives, and governance of highway programmes in the country. The first of these phases, which I describe as the “foundational phase,” emerged with the planning of the first nation-spanning greenfield highways under the National Highway Development Programme (NHDP), coinciding with the Asian financial crisis between 1997–1999. The second,

- F. 2 The 34,800 kilometres of new highway routes proposed under the 44 economic and 56 inter-economic corridors as part of the Bharatmala Highway Program.
- F. 3 Periodisation of the emergence of highway corridors across India and the migration patterns that resulted from the uneven development of these corridors.

the “expansion phase,” saw the emergence of the first nationwide industrial corridors along the pathways laid out during the first phase. This coincided with the 2007–2008 global financial crisis and was marked by the emergence of parastatal corporations managing urban corridors. The third phase, which I describe as the “intensification phase,” emerged in conjunction with the rightward, market-oriented shift in India’s national politics since 2014. This ongoing phase is marked by a sharp acceleration in the pace of highway construction. The new highway corridors bypass the industrial corridors laid out in the earlier phases. I will elaborate on these three phases briefly in the following subsections.

THE FOUNDATIONAL PHASE

(1999 UNTIL THE MID-2000s)

Although the institutional foundations for the first phase of India’s highway development were laid down at the beginning of the 1990s, the programme officially began under the first National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in 1999, led by the right-wing Bhartiya Janta Party. In the narrative around the programme, highway development has been presented as an attempt to mitigate contagion from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.²⁹ The programme provided an avenue for international financial capital that was leaving East and South East Asian economies due to falling rates of profit.³⁰ It promised to catch up with its fast-growing neighbour, China, whose economy was built on a fast and efficient highway network.³¹ Importantly, as Rupal Oza shows, the NDA used the promise of the reinvention of India through world-class infrastructures as a key argument of its India Shining election campaign.³² This phase can thus be seen as the birth period of what Seth Schindler called the “infrastructure state”: governments attempt to attract transnational investments for the transformation of the territory rather than for the production of urban space for the reproduction of an industrial proletariat.³³

This phase cumulatively added over 49,260 kilometres of new roads and highways

to the existing network across the country with two distinct projects. The first, the Golden Quadrilateral Project, connected the four largest metropolitan regions of India—Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata—whereas the second, the North-South, East-West Project, projected two central axes across India. While these highways were truly nation-spanning in their reach, their pathways followed the arc of fertile regions, which had experienced agricultural modernisation under the Green Revolution, producing an agricultural surplus.³⁴ The dominant agrarian castes in these regions were able to capture political power and thus guide decisions regarding the alignment of the highway corridors.³⁵ Therefore, according to Sai Balakrishnan, infrastructural choices in the neo-liberal era produced new uneven geographies, “like how irrigation canal projects socio-technically produced a geography of uneven agrarian capitalism.”³⁶ This led to the production of uneven land markets whereby the regions through which these early highways passed were able to benefit from an above-average increase in ground rents. Therefore, “the distributive politics of who captures the surpluses from agrarian-to-urban land-use change depends on prior agrarian geographies.”³⁷

Another essential feature of this phase is the foundation of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), a parastatal institution whose main goal was, according to Liz Light, to cut the “red tape of bureaucratic accountability” and “bring a military-like urgency and command into the construction of highway infrastructure.”³⁸ Founding members of the NHAI—such as Major General B.C. Khanduri—were taken from the Indian Army’s engineering corps, and its decision-making was controlled by a narrow group of executives appointed by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.³⁹ Therefore, NHAI not only privileged the private sector with infrastructure development but also facilitated highway development as a “scalar fix.”⁴⁰ The construction of these industrial corridors pushed inter-regional extended urbanisation, which predominated urbanisation processes at local and regional scales.

This phase resulted in proto-urban corridors, such as the Mumbai-Pune and the Bangalore-Mysore. They catalysed land markets and enclosures in territories of extended urbanisation but lacked regulatory bodies beyond the regional scale. They were largely regional-level experiments conducted by local governments acting in consort with the central state. In his excellent analysis of this period, Michael Goldman notes that there was an increasing intersection between neoliberal and world-city urbanisation through highway construction. Goldman finds that the “speculative urbanism” catalysed during this period shaped state-citizen relationships around a culture of real estate and land speculation.⁴¹ As a consequence, a number of private townships emerged along toll highways in the agrarian peripheries around large Indian cities, such as DLF City (Delhi Land & Finance), which emerged on the periphery of Delhi in the early 2000s, and the private townships of the NICE Corridor (Nandi Infrastructure Corridor Enterprise Ltd) outside Bangalore.⁴²

THE EXPANSION PHASE

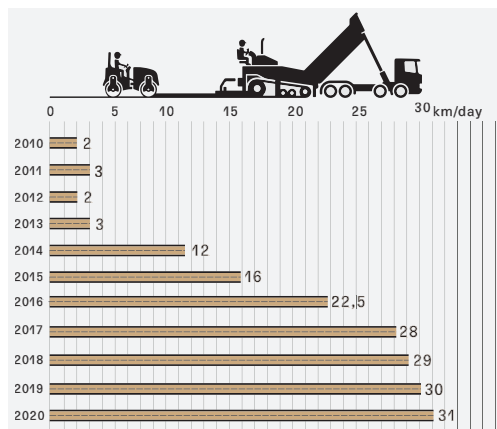
(THE MID-2000s TO 2014)

While the foundational phase of India's highway development programme was forging initial pathways of extended urbanisation through agrarian hinterlands, the second phase was marked by efforts to enclose and commodify the land in these territories. By 2007–2008, planning the first genuinely inter-regional and nation-spanning urban corridors coincided with the global financial crisis. As Llerena Searle notes, there was a significant upheaval in the Indian real estate markets during this period as foreign investment funds, having invested millions into speculative urbanism, were exiting Indian markets.⁴³ The planning of these corridors can thus be understood as a state strategy to expand territories suited for speculative urbanism while also attracting further transnational investments into the country.

The first of these corridors, the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), was established through significant direct investment

by the Japanese government, and it was modelled after the Japanese Tokyo-Osaka Taiheiyo Belt,⁴⁴ a 1200-kilometre-long urban corridor between the cities of Tokyo and Osaka along which a majority of Japan's manufacturing industries and urban centres are concentrated. For the management of the DMIC that cut across the jurisdiction of several regional governments, a state development corporation, DMICDC (Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation), was established. As a parastatal corporation, it could simplify the palimpsest of jurisdictional boundaries and complexities in an extremely large territory stretching 150 to 200 kilometres on either side of an approximately 1,300-kilometre-long freight corridor. During this period, corridor urbanisation became an official state strategy to generate economic growth by directing large transnational investments into the conversion of land. Such urban corridors are often made up of several large-scale projects that emerge fluidly with the ebbs and flows of capital investment, which are often designed through the involvement of transnational consultants like the Jurong Corporation from Singapore.⁴⁵ There is, thus, a “worlding” of the experiences in East and South East Asian cities with such large-scale projects.⁴⁶

Following the initial experimentation with the Delhi-Mumbai urban corridor, the DMICDC eventually planned and developed several other inter-regional urban corridors and was renamed the National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC).⁴⁷ Thus, this second phase of India's highway revolution deployed extended urbanisation as a state strategy to capitalise on the ground rents generated in the first phase of highway programmes. While significant farmer resistance emerged during this period against land acquisition for smaller initiatives, such as special economic zones in Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal,⁴⁸ the territories of extended urbanisation opened through urban corridors were so vast and fluid that they faced little organised resistance. Furthermore, what becomes evident here is that contrary to the free-market myth often



THE UNPRECEDENTED PACE OF HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION IN INDIA

Fig. 4

attributed to speculative urbanism, state corporations played a significant role in facilitating these endeavours.⁴⁹

THE INTENSIFICATION PHASE (2014–ONGOING)

The transition into the third and ongoing phase of India's highway revolution coincides with the political transition of central state power from the centre-left coalition United Progressive Alliance to the Hindu nationalist National Democratic Alliance-II coalition in 2014. In the first year following the political transition, the daily rate of highway construction jumped from 3 to 12 kilometres, finally reaching 34 kilometres in 2020–2021. [Fig. 4]

However, the increase in the pace of highway construction is not merely due to the mechanisation of construction (for example, through the introduction of very efficient asphalt paver machines), but it hints at the unfolding of a new political economy of land in India. Thus, a large number of highways were constructed in parallel to already existing highways in order to open up additional land for enclosure in previously bypassed regions. Their construction is often justified by the narrative of providing faster connectivity and bringing development to the “backward” and “tribal” regions of the country.

F. 4 The daily pace of highway construction in India over the last two decades.

In 2017, the NHDP was officially transitioned into the *Bharatmala* Programme, which envisioned 100 *ex novo* urban/economic corridors (44 main corridors plus 56 inter-economic corridors). This programme literally strives for a complete urbanisation of the country. The territories of extended urbanisation that these corridors intend to open pass through some of the poorest subsistence agriculture and tribal regions of the country. While their construction is often premised on bringing development to regions that were previously bypassed by both agricultural modernisation and urban development, what they actually are facilitating is access to cheap land. The new Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, planned to bypass the existing DMIC, serves as a good illustration of this contradictory logic. [Fig. 5] It is promoted as a techno-fix, addressing previous uneven development in the regions passed through while simultaneously advertised as an opportunity for transnational investors to buy land that is far cheaper than in the DMIC. Under the promise of bringing development to disadvantaged regions, it expands territories of extended urbanisation in order to catalyse the formation of fully commodified land markets.

The phenomenal pace of highway construction has many additional consequences. It means

that ground surveys are often not conducted, leading to highway corridors coming into conflict with existing practices of dwelling and resulting in extended periods of uncertainty. However, such uncertainty does not necessarily paralyse technopolitical action because state power increasingly acts through “governing through uncertainty,” as Zeiderman et al. note. “Just as investment instruments like derivatives make it possible to capitalise on contingency, fluidity, and unpredictability in financial markets, other techniques for managing uncertainty in an urban context convert these conditions into forms of value that can be commodified and exchanged.”⁵⁰ For example, instead of halting the construction of highway corridors until legal conflicts are resolved, parastatal companies continue land acquisition and construction in parts where they face little resistance. The real estate developers, on their side, hedge on the best time to complete their projects, maintaining enclosed agricultural land in a prolonged state of fallowness or leaving buildings and projects half-finished, speculating on future profitability.⁵¹ Middle-class investors may hedge on differential property values, using uncertainty to buy into the future. In contrast, poor and less affluent communities can attempt to evade the foreclosing effects of the land enclosure by embracing practices of uncertainty and laying claim to urban space by squatting or intentionally investing in land or housing with unclear or illegal titles.⁵² Uncertainty, thus, becomes something that is both produced and productive in very different ways and becomes a central constitutive feature of everyday life.⁵³ I will engage the generative potentials of uncertainty later in this chapter when discussing the regional urban corridor—the Dwarka Expressway, close to Delhi.

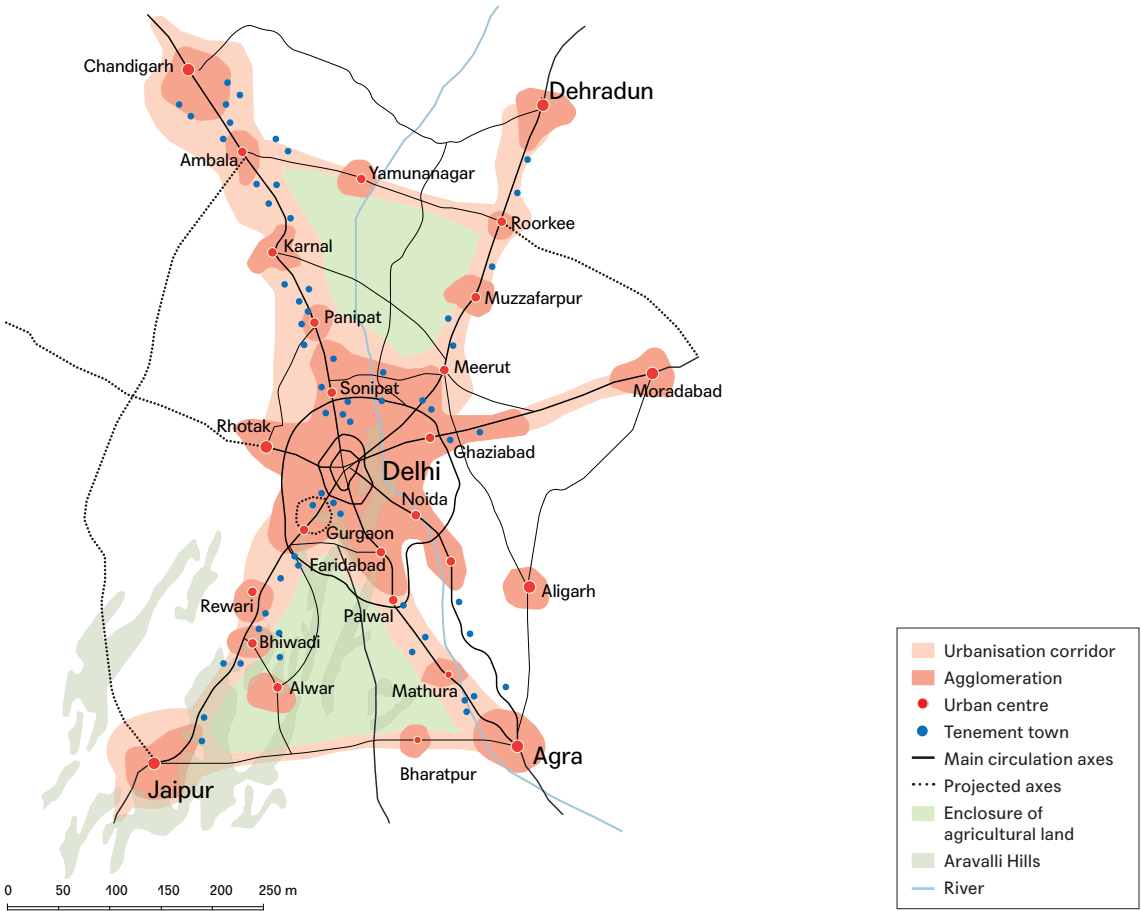
HIGHWAY REVOLUTION AND NEW STATE SPACES

In the previous section, we saw how the Indian state significantly reshaped and redefined the highway programme at vital political-economic

conjunctures, with one example being the global financial crisis bringing previously bypassed territories into its fold. This highlights the crucial role of the state in the production of space and in steering urbanisation, which can be critically analysed through Henri Lefebvre’s concept of state space (*espace étatique*). Lefebvre introduced the term in his 1976 book *De l’État* to illustrate how the state binds itself to space through a complex and shifting relationship.⁵⁴ In other words, as Christian Schmid aptly points out, “The ever-increasing extension of urbanisation is only possible with an enormous expansion of state control and surveillance over the entire planet. The earth eventually becomes the new horizon of the production of space.”⁵⁵ Therefore, as Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden highlight in their analysis of Lefebvre’s writings, the state becomes the key actor of the production of space because: “only the state is capable of taking charge of space on a grand scale—highways, air traffic routes—because only the state has at its disposal the appropriate resources, techniques, and conceptual capacity.”⁵⁶

However, it is essential to recognise that for Lefebvre, the state stood not only for the nation-state but also for a multi-scalar state structure, spanning the planetary to neighbourhood scales. “It is the result of a long historical development in which the nation-state increasingly becomes dominant and finally becomes the principal actor in the production of space.”⁵⁷ State space for Lefebvre encompasses the production of the territory of the nation-state in which capitalist social relations may unfold. It includes the symbolic representations of state power within such territories and develops state strategies to shape patterns of land use and circulation.⁵⁸ In this way, the state maps manage and manipulate the production of space, especially through attempts to extend capitalist social relations onto previously marginalised zones.

In her landmark 2010 book *Producing India*, Manu Goswami analyses the crucial importance of state works in distilling and communicating the ideology of state space in colonial India. Goswami finds that railways came the closest of any state infrastructure



MULTISCALAR CORRIDOR
URBANISATION AROUND DELHI
Fig. 5

works in the production of colonial state space. She claims that the railways not only enabled the circulation of peoples and commodities within the boundaries of a state space but that the railways also emerged as a site of collective self-understanding and identity as Indian people, where new socio-economic differences were produced.⁵⁹ The Bharatmala highway programme as a state work similarly aims at producing a new state space, where “new” does not merely refer to the reimagination of India as *Bharat Mata* (nation-as-mother) but rather as a neoliberal state space that emerges through an explosion of colonial state space, no longer bound by the borders of the nation-state.

In his analysis of new state spaces, Neil Brenner finds that under neoliberalism, it is no longer capital that is moulded into the (territorially integrated) geography of state space, but it is state space that is moulded into the territorially differentiated geography of capital.⁶⁰

However, as Lefebvre highlights, state space does not merely eliminate differences but also manages them. The modern state organises space to control the entire system, breaks up opposition

F. 4 The expanding network of highway axes leading to urban development and the enclosure of agricultural land.

by redistributing groups of people, and hierarchises places based on power relations.⁶¹ We see these processes in the experience of extended urbanisation with highway corridors in India. While the state attempts to produce a homogeneous commodifiable space by enacting eminent domain on agrarian land, its extensive urban fabric is highly differentiated and hierarchical. As I will discuss in the subsequent sections, this results in the production of “planned illegalities”⁶² such as tenement towns and “unauthorised colonies,” which concentrate masses of working-class people and urban poor in a socio-spatial difference to the legal spaces for the elite.

In this section, I discuss the narrative imaginaries and strategies that the Indian state employs to produce the national territory and manage socio-spatial differentiation, and I also look at their environmental consequences.

EXTENDED URBANISATION AND THE NATIONALIST STATE

“Not Just Roads, Building a Nation,” the tagline of the ongoing Bharatmala highways programme, boldly suggests highway construction as a nation-building project. [Fig. 6] The programme imagines India’s territory as the *Bharat Mata*, or Goddess India, her body (the nation-state) festooned with necklaces of roads and urban corridors.⁶³ This is similar to how road construction helps deploy and consolidate an image of a singular, abstract national territory or state space in Latin America, as Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox aptly highlight for Peru.⁶⁴ The Plan Puebla Panama in Central America and the Trans-Amazonian Highway in the Brazilian state of Amazonas have similarly allowed for the extension of state space.⁶⁵ Regular public spectacles like the landing and take-off of military aircraft on highways not only attempt to reinforce this imaginary and stimulate public thinking in favour of highway construction but also highlight how highways double as tactical military infrastructure.⁶⁶ In total, 22 landing airstrips have been planned along newly constructed highways in places that are both proximate and distant to India’s political borders.⁶⁷

Furthermore, a constant comparison of the Bharatmala Programme with the US Interstate Highway System is mobilised to locate its centrality in nation-building. John F. Kennedy’s famous quote, “American roads are not good because America is rich, but America is rich because American roads are good,”⁶⁸ is often utilised in India’s political discourse to make this point.⁶⁹ This imaginary of highways as a state space also serves the purpose of justifying the violence that the highway programme inflicts upon historically colonised and marginalised communities. In the case of the planning of the US Interstate, “officials routinely routed expressways through black neighbourhoods,” as Rose and Mohl explain.⁷⁰ In contemporary India, this violence is exerted through the expropriation of land because it marginalises people inhabiting subaltern urbanisation.

STATE SPACE AND FOSSIL URBANISM

In his 2016 book, Andreas Malm notes how fossil capitalism allows the state to produce abstract space that is removed from the concrete qualities of space and time.⁷¹ The consequent spatio-temporal fossil capitalism, which I term “fossil urbanism,” finds its full expression in the abstract space produced historically through the US Interstate Highway System and India’s ongoing highway programme. The state strategy to produce abstract space uses the image of a “car country”⁷² with an upwardly mobile, aspirational, consumptive middle class that owns suburban property, commutes large distances using personal automobiles, and shops at highway malls.

Property relations in this abstract space are held together by fossil capitalism financially, materially, and socially. Just like the US Interstate, India’s highway programme is primarily financed through taxes on fossil fuels.⁷³ The revenue collected through this tax in 2021 alone stood at \$107 billion.⁷⁴ Materially, the rapid highway construction also offers an outlet for the en masse consumption of asphalt, a by-product of crude-oil refining.⁷⁵ However, the biggest promise of India’s highway revolution has been “the invention



Fig. 6

of India as the world's fastest-growing car market."⁷⁶ A recent government report similarly notes that in addition to the highways adding to the gross domestic product through logistics, transport, and increasing capital expenditure, their "real promise" lies in the growth of commercial vehicle sales.⁷⁷ Under slow industrial growth, India's fossil urbanism not only fires the engines of economic growth but also helps uphold the property relations of the abstract space it produces.⁷⁸

GREEN GROWTH AS A STATE STRATEGY

Similar to the colonial view of land as state property that Goswami describes in the production of state space in India,⁷⁹ the ongoing highway programme attempts to settle and valorise primal forests and agrarian commons as "cheap green land," or wastelands, available for urbanisation.⁸⁰ The construction of highway corridors is thus leading to extensive socio-ecological damage and biodiversity loss on the one hand and an increase in carbon emissions

and accelerated climate change on the other. The state has invented narratives of sustainability and green growth in an attempt to soften these devastating environmental consequences. However, on the contrary, they present the construction of highway corridors as being beneficial to the environment. Existing corridors between urban centres are, therefore, reviled as a source of inefficient traffic circulation and congestion that produces excessive greenhouse emissions and air pollution. Against this backdrop, new highway corridors are presented as an alternative, offering possibilities for green growth in the form of savings in carbon emissions that are often quantified using international policy metrics and traded in international credit markets.⁸¹

F. 6 The political assemblage at the Bharatmala launch event. Seated from the centre to the right: the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Road Transport and Highways, and the Foreign Affairs Minister.

The Delhi-Mumbai Expressway offers an excellent example of these tactics; despite its disastrous environmental consequences,⁸² the National Highways Authority of India claims that it will save an equivalent of 20 million trees worth of greenhouse emissions by opening an alternative, faster route between the cities.⁸³ An additional two million trees of strip forest will be planted along the expressway as compensatory forestation. Such strip forests are monocultural plantations of fast-growing trees along what is officially classified as government wastelands, such as on the sides of roads, canals, and railway tracks. Strip forests are quickly becoming a dominant category of forest cover in India and can be used by the state as cheap land when needed. Thus, the fossil urbanism of the highway corridors produces its own abstract space—a wasteland that can be called into the service of capital.

TERRITORIES OF EXTENDED URBANISATION FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

The massive urban and agrarian change in India over the last two decades has provided a rich and generative terrain for postcolonial urban theory. A diversity of ideas and analytical frameworks have been developed and applied to analyse the transformations of the postcolonial state during the neo-liberal period and how it shapes urban space in Indian urban centres and beyond. The transformation of large metropolitan regions such as Delhi and Mumbai followed the lead of other global cities, which have been abundantly analysed in relation to the concomitant evictions of the marginalised, subaltern, and urban poor.⁸⁴ At the same time, the call to push urban and regional analysis beyond “metrocentricity”⁸⁵ has also inspired a rich body of scholarship. This research includes the analysis of the speculative transformations of agricultural land into real estate, its entanglements with the pre-existing structures of agrarian class and caste in the periphery of Indian cities,

and the formation of special economic zones and early urban corridors.⁸⁶ The broad scholarship also analysed the in-situ transformations of settlements across the Indian countryside (see also Elisa Bertuzzo in this volume) and attempted to reckon the urban and rural as categories of spatial classification.⁸⁷ The latter stream of scholarship is particularly interesting in the context of the territories of extended urbanisation discussed in the upcoming section.

THE POLITICS OF URBAN CLASSIFICATION

The governmental spatial classifications of “rural” and “urban” concretely determine the nature of governance and land use in India. Urban is usually defined by the Census of India using the tri-fold criteria of the total population, population density, and percentage of employment. If a settlement crosses the threshold of 5,000 inhabitants, a density of 400 people per square kilometre, and at least 75% of the male workforce is in the non-agrarian sector, then the settlement is considered urban. Failing to meet any one of these criteria results in the settlement remaining rural. Moreover, settlements are often not classified as “urban” despite crossing the tri-fold threshold. In fact, following political pressure, they are often classified back as rural, a phenomenon described as “census activism.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, as I have written elsewhere, such static models of spatial classification fail to account for the seasonal mobility of labour migrants between spaces classified as rural and urban.⁸⁹

Using the Census of India criteria, the level of urbanisation in 2011 stood at only about 31%. While similar statistics have not been released since then, according to a World Bank report the level stood at 35% in 2021.⁹⁰ Such a normative and narrow demography and male-workforce-focused methodology for urban classification helped portray India as a rural nation in need of urgent policy interventions that produce “fast cities of the urban age.”⁹¹ It also fails to register the evident urban transformations on the ground.⁹² In their geospatial

analysis of urban agglomerations across India published in a 2011 paper, Eric Denis and Kamala Marius-Gnanou disputed the low levels of urbanisation in India, finding the actual extent of urbanisation to be much higher. They registered these agglomerations as unacknowledged urban transformations (beyond urban regions) and called them “extended urbanisation in the Indian countryside” with rural-urban or *desakota*-like characteristics.⁹³ They called for a better appraisal of urbanisation in India and reported the existence of numerous census towns, which I will discuss in the following section.

CENSUS TOWNS—THE SETTLEMENTS THAT ARE NOT QUITE URBAN

Since the 1990s, Indian urbanisation has witnessed the peculiar trend of a remarkable rise in the number of so-called census towns. These are settlements that become urban according to the Census’s tri-fold criteria yet remain rural in terms of their administration and service provision. This means that despite a large population that can often cross 50,000 inhabitants, census towns continue to be governed directly by an elected council of representatives with budgets analogous to small villages that cannot cater to municipal service provision. This trend of urbanisation through settlement reclassification, which also has been described as “in-situ urbanisation,” accounted for as much as one-third of the total recorded urban growth between 2001 and 2011.⁹⁴ In absolute figures, the number of census towns has more than doubled every decade since 1991. Their number grew from 1,702 in 1991 to 5,315 in 2011. Moreover, it is predicted that this trend will continue to remain the predominant factor driving urban growth in India well into the next decades.⁹⁵

The spectacular jump in the number of census towns has taken place concomitant to the shifts in the political economy of state space and large-scale urbanisation, as discussed in the previous sections. Furthermore, the terrains in which they emerge overlap with what I analysed as territories of extended

urbanisation. Recent research has pointed to correlations between the hotspots of census town development and extended urbanisation of highway corridors, such as the DMIC.⁹⁶ As a settlement type, census towns emerge all over India but are highly varied in their character. Partha Mukhopadhyay proposes to distinguish them under the categories of proximate and non-proximate census towns, with the former being proximate to large urban centres and the latter being remote.⁹⁷ Similarly, Duijne and Nijman classify in-situ formations of census towns as emergent peri-urban formations, emergent highway formations, and emergent remote urbanisation, referring to their proximity to large cities, highway corridors, and remote locations, respectively.⁹⁸ Elsewhere, I have proposed differentiating census towns emerging in highway corridors as “tenement towns,” as their transformation is often related to private landlords for housing workers.⁹⁹ As I elaborate in the following section, a rich body of scholarship is emerging under the umbrella of subaltern urbanisation that has attempted to explore the dynamics of census towns further.

SUBALTERN URBANISATION

Drawing upon and extending the work of Ananya Roy on subaltern urbanism beyond the city,¹⁰⁰ burgeoning scholarship focuses on the experience of small towns and urbanising villages as the Indian countryside undergoes large-scale territorial change. The research attempts to draw attention to subaltern processes that are not dominant or fully capitalist in nature and are shaping poorer settlements at the urban-rural frontier.¹⁰¹ Rather than the state, these settlements are shaped by the urban majority,¹⁰² which operates through ambiguity and uncertainties in the agrarian land cadastre and ownership. The growth of these settlements is often in response to the lack of affordable housing, small commerce, small logistical operations, or rental tenements that are missed in the state’s planning and provisioning. In response to such absences, local developers or land owners plot agricultural land without seeking requisite permissions and clearances.

Such settlements of improvised urbanism,¹⁰³ which are colloquially referred to as “unauthorised colonies,”¹⁰⁴ emerge not only around large cities like Delhi but also around distant small towns.¹⁰⁵

Because the accumulation of capital through the production of space in these settlements is conditioned by existing landownership hierarchies, it reproduces existing relations of agrarian class and caste.¹⁰⁶ As Michael Levien has shown in his analysis of the transformation of rural settlements around special economic zones in the state of Rajasthan, the production of such subaltern urbanisation does not exclude capitalist urbanisation but is intersectional with it. He notes that the agrarian-to-urban transition, rather than serving as a pre-condition for the modernisation of the countryside, is reinvigorating pre-capitalist forms of brokerage and rentiership and turning farmers into entrepreneurs and land speculators.¹⁰⁷ It is not merely that the highway corridors are producing subaltern urbanisation as “agglomeration effects.”¹⁰⁸ As I will discuss subsequently, the ongoing attempts to extend urban corridors and state space in previously bypassed regions have increasingly come into conflict with pre-existing subaltern urbanisation in often violent ways. Thus, the transformations in the socio-spatial structure and everyday life of subaltern urbanisation become particularly interesting in conjunction with the analysis of territories of extended urbanisation.

HEDGING THE DREAM HIGHWAY

As I drove along the narrow peripheral roads at the edges of Delhi on a foggy winter morning in early 2018, agricultural fields gave way to towering apartment blocks and narrow pathways abruptly transformed into an eight-lane expressway. Despite the fog, signs promoting rentiership and brokerage were everywhere to be seen. [Fig. 7] Real-estate salespeople were pitching brochures for new housing estates to passing cars. The flyers promoted more

affordable but illegally plotted land in unauthorised colonies, and ads for the sale of agricultural farmland. I stopped beside one of the several salespeople, and as I wound down the window, he popped a brochure into the car and said, “Today is your lucky day, sir. Hero Homes is offering an inaugural 20% discount to the first 100 customers. What do you say—shall we go and visit the show flat at the sales office? Maybe that will change your mind.” Although I was in no position to afford an apartment, I took the salesman up on his offer.

On the way, the salesman explained about the highway corridor, which was constructed to bypass the existing highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. [Fig. 8] Although it is only 29 kilometres in length, it is representative of the complexity in which the multi-scalar highway-corridors project is being executed across India. As we drove along the expressway’s unfinished ruderal landscape, he painted the three-dimensional world of the “city yet to come” on the car’s windscreen. He attempted to fill in the absences and gaps formed by large empty plots, unfinished facades, and patchy infrastructures with stories about the future of the highway. “The expressway will be two-storied with a metro train eventually running on the very top of it. There would be a convention centre and diplomatic enclave nearby, a commercial strip with shopping close by.” There seemed to be no finality to the location or timeline of these urban dreams. However, the promise of proximity to this sizeable urban infrastructure, even though uncertain, started to look like a bet worth taking.

Only a few kilometres into our trip, the dreamscape came to a shattering end, and our journey was interrupted by what appeared to be an “unauthorised colony” at the end of the motorable road. A housing settlement emerged from the illegal plotting of rural land. The salesman asked me to go off-road, and we took an improvised dirt path around the colony for about two kilometres, after which the motorable sections of the expressway resumed. The salesman explained the roadblocks were temporary, and the legal litigation regarding houses



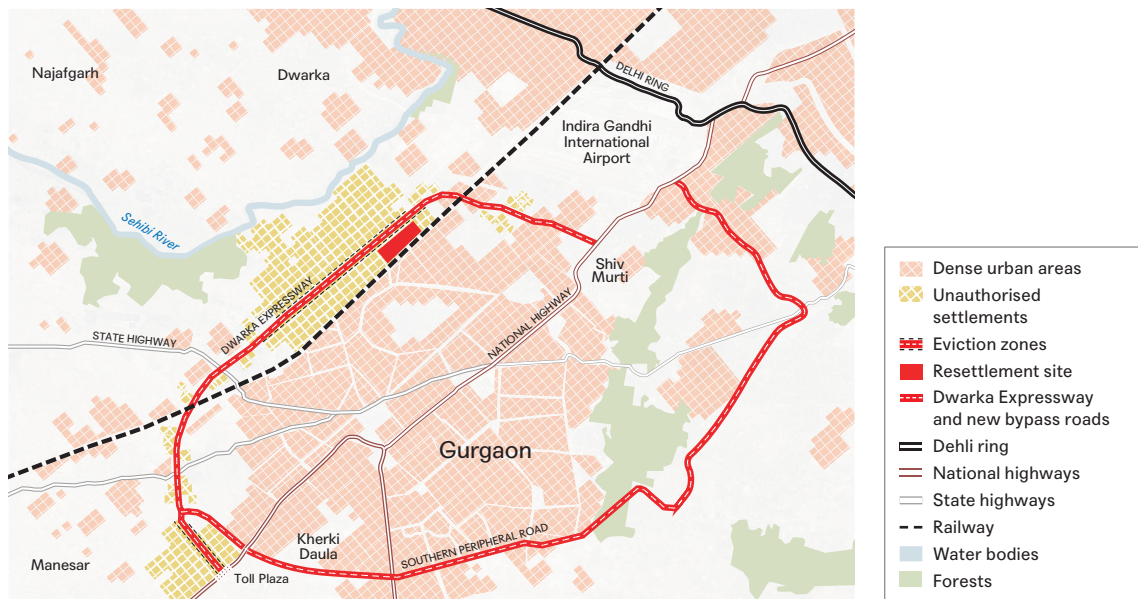
Fig. 7

falling onto the path of the expressway was nearing a resolution. He asserted that it would be wiser to buy the house now, claiming that the houses would be ready by the time the litigation was resolved. His point was that if I bet on the project's uncertainty, the profits that I stood to gain would be much larger.

In this way, the completion of the expressway was not only presented as a near-future prospect but also as a means to hedge uncertainty to potentially yield a greater return on investment. Thus, it is not just the land and the house that become speculative commodities but also the future completion of the expressway itself as a form of commodified value. In fact, none of the homes that were being sold through the sales office were actually built. They were fictional commodities against which middle-class investors could hedge. This lack of actual buildings is patched up with architectural renderings, master plans, and show flats, which attempt to recreate the distant but inevitable future.

SPATIAL DIFFERENCE

The Dwarka Expressway, initially planned in 2008 with the Delhi Commonwealth Games of 2010, was 14 years into the making at the time of writing this chapter. Millions of homebuyer investors have put bets on the uncertainty around its completion and have become entangled in its incompleteness and long-winded temporality. Although the house occupancy along the expressway remains low, at only about 20% according to the data collected by local real estate firms, about 300,000 families have lived daily improvised lives there for almost a decade now.¹⁰⁹ [Fig. 9–11] Then there are the lower-middle-class families that bought illegal plots in the unauthorised colony and now face the prospect of eviction when the expressway is completed. Then there are the former farmers from the region who were alienated from farming and could not find industrial work and now work as land brokers and tenement entrepreneurs in businesses, providing security and drinking water to the gated communities. Instead of successfully dislodging the pre-existing urban



LOCATION OF THE DWARKA EXPRESSWAY CORRIDOR

Fig. 8

fabric and supplanting it with a new one, the state space of highway corridor seems to generate a spiralling conflict in which different social groups have become entangled in new hierarchical dependencies.

BUYING INTO THE FUTURE

It was a similar real estate pitch to the one presented above that hooked Mukesh and Sarita Khamboj into booking a house at the Ramaprastha (RP) City, one of the most significant gated projects along the Dwarka Expressway.¹¹⁰

F. 7 Billboards outside the sales office of an upcoming real estate project along the Dwarka Expressway.

F. 8 The Dwarka Expressway Corridor was proposed as a bypass to the corridor urbanisation along the National Highway 48. The lack of surveys meant that the corridor soon came into conflict with informally built unauthorised settlements. The families affected by the expressway construction were resettled after a decade-long legal battle.

Mukesh works as a travelling salesman for a farm products manufacturer. The family saw home ownership as an opportunity for investing in their retirement, thinking that they could invest in a house in a new urban extension and then, in a few years, trade it with something cheaper, making some savings in the process.

Mukesh narrates that the period before the Commonwealth Games (between 2008–2010) was a period of mass public investments. “There was suddenly a lot of construction activity, and everyone was looking to take loans and make investments. Pages upon pages of newspapers carried advertisements featuring new real-estate projects that were promising the so-called subvention scheme.”

This scheme meant that after booking a house, one was exempt from paying equated monthly instalments (EMIs) for two to three years when the Dwarka Expressway and the housing projects were projected to be ready. As the entire landscape was merely agricultural fields back then, and the expressway was a mere fictional line, the subvention scheme



Fig. 9

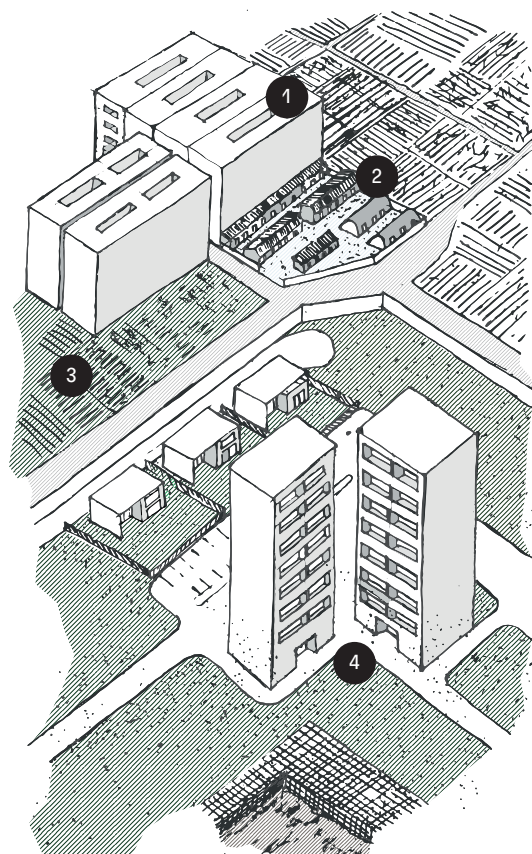


Fig. 10

made the investment seem like a safe bet for the Khambojs and millions like them. It seemed like a safe buy into the future, especially for the millions of middle-class families who had missed out on the previous real estate boom in the early 2000s.

However, over a decade later, the Khambojs are still waiting for the promise of the expressway and its spectacular urban dreams to materialise. [Fig. 10] Despite the clear uncertainty around the project, new-homebuyer investors have kept investing. For example, a 2015 report on the Dwarka Expressway, prepared by the Bangalore-based realty firm Common Floor, presents this uncertainty as an investment opportunity for early investors.¹¹¹ Still, the pervasive uncertainty is not merely to do with the completion of the expressway but also with the patchy state of infrastructure in general. Instead of offering a networked municipal supply, the gated communities purchase drinking water from private water contractors, who, in turn, pump water illegally from canals and groundwater aquifers. The supply of drinking water is contingent on the continuation of the semi-legal/illegal sourcing of water by the water-tanker suppliers and is thus often uncertain. Moreover, the sharp socio-spatial polarisation between the affluent residents of the gated communities and the poorer residents, especially former farmers who lost their source of livelihood due to the project, often results in conflicts that manifest in the form of robberies and carjackings. The gated communities hire security companies to secure their compounds against the outside; however, the expressway itself, especially in its current incomplete state, becomes a flashpoint where these conflicts often break out. Thus, managing these forms of everyday uncertainty also becomes a commodity in which the consumptive residents of gated communities make significant investments. Moreover, local politicians also articulate their politics around managing this uncertainty.

- F. 9 From the belly of the infrastructure: a view of the city from under the Dwarka Expressway.
- F. 10 A view from the house of Mr. and Mrs. Khamboj, in silhouette.
- F. 11 Disparate settlement types coming together in the emerging urban fabric of corridor urbanisation in the Delhi region.



DISPARATE SETTLEMENT TYPES OF
CORRIDOR URBANISATION

Fig. 11

- 1 **TENEMENT BLOCKS**
(to house labour migrants)
Constructed and provisioned by tenement landlords. Insecure tenureship, high rental rates and covert local-corporate partnerships which hold migrants as a permanently temporary surplus labour.
- 2 **TEMPORARY TENEMENTS**
(for entry-level migrant tenants)
Help in solidifying claims over plotted colonies through occupancy.
- 3 **ENCLOSED BUT CULTIVATED**
(invisible enclosures)
Land is enclosed as real estate but still continues to be cultivated.
- 4 **GATED UTOPIAS**
(housing, shopping malls, entertainment, recreation)
Low occupancy rates, cater to the middle-classes and the bourgeois, amenities are provided and managed privately through resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). Based on an extensive resource consumption and cheap labour.

BOURGEOIS ACTIVISM AGAINST UNCERTAINTY

Mukesh claims that a major problem behind the conflict was that the requisite ground surveys were not conducted before the planning of the expressway. The source of his knowledge is his investigative work conducted with the¹¹² Dwarka Expressway Welfare Association (DXPWA).¹¹³ This is an association of over 130,000 families living across 89 gated communities along the expressway. It works as a collective front of middle-class homeowners that exert collective political pressure to complete the Dwarka Expressway.

Since its formation in 2015, the DXPWA has been organising direct and collective action to manage the different forms of uncertainty

surrounding the completion of the expressway. I followed their political mobilisations between 2018 and 2020 and had the opportunity to conduct key interviews with the group's core members. Pradip Rahi, the founder of the group, described that there was no incentive on the part of the state to seek a resolution with the plotted colony residents that lay in the path of the expressway. "It was as if they were letting the land prices rise sufficiently high before seeking a resolution, and it was us, who invested early into the project, who are paying the price for it in living through such prolonged uncertainty and everyday infrastructure disruptions."

To build public pressure for the expressway's completion, the individual RWAs along the expressway came together and formed DXPWA

as an umbrella organisation. It organises symbolic protests to draw media attention and ridicule the protracted delays surrounding the expressway. Their protests often take the form of sit-in hunger strikes to facilitate the removal of barriers and roadblocks¹¹⁴ and direct civic action, which can include laying off-road trails and even asphalt roads to close the gaps along the fragmented expressway.¹¹⁵ The novelty of these protests and the bourgeois participation in them attracts significant media attention, leading to direct political interventions by powerful politicians. In one such hunger strike organised by DXPWA, the chief minister of the federal state of Haryana showed up with demolition teams and ordered direct action to remove a roadblock on live television.

One of the first public protests the DXPWA organised was at the prominent Jantar Mantar protest site in Central Delhi.¹¹⁶ In the following, they launched a public interest litigation (PIL) in the High Court of Haryana.¹¹⁷ In their PIL, the DXPWA argued that the prolonged uncertainty over the construction of the expressway violated their “Right to Life.”¹¹⁸ The incomplete nature of the project subjected them to a sub-standard quality of urban life compared to what had been promised at the time of booking their homes. The PIL facilitated the reopening of the court case between the plotted colony residents and the state, which had been under a stalemate for several years. I will elaborate upon the details of this court case in a successive section.

While the reopening of the court case led to the eventual settlement between the state and the residents of the plotted colony, it also led to a complete reshaping of the expressway itself. The expressway transformed from a regional road to a national highway, and the entire project was completely redesigned. The expressway was privatised and planned as an access-controlled toll road raised on stilts above the original road, thus closing off the urban poor who could no longer access it due to the physical barrier and exorbitant toll charges. The bourgeois activism¹¹⁹ of DXPWA largely facilitated the expressway’s final form, which

built upon their fears about urban insecurity.

Following the privatisation of the expressway and the settlement of the conflict with the plotted colony, several big-ticket projects were launched. One such project is the India International Convention Centre (IICC), planned as the largest convention facility in Asia at the cost of USD 4 billion.¹²⁰ Once the dust on the project had settled, several bigger companies started to enter the real estate market with high-value projects. Many of these are blue-chip companies such as Tata, Godrej, and the Hero Group. These brands have traditionally been associated with industrial manufacturing¹²¹ and transnational conglomerates such as The Trump Organization and Emaar Properties, who acquired land aggregated by smaller local developers. [Fig. 12] These companies market their real estate ventures as premium and luxury projects, qualifiers that are not only employed as an assertion of the brand value, world-class materiality, and aesthetics of these projects but also to indicate their relative late entry into the market. The value of these projects is often several times higher than comparable projects, indicating how managing uncertainty also becomes financialised.

PLOTTING COUNTER-POLITICS

Caught at the other end of uncertainty around the Dwarka Expressway is the Kumar family, who reside in New Palam Vihar, the largest unauthorised colony in conflict with the expressway. It is, in fact, one of the unauthorised colonies in the entire Badshahpur section of the Gurgaon district of Haryana, which was largely agrarian before 2008. Such colonies usually emerge on agrarian land outside the purview of the official master plans when an “aggregator” (colloquially referred to as a coloniser) buys rural land from individual farmers and divides it into plots that are then sold to individual homeowners.¹²² The process through which such colonies are developed is colloquially referred to as “plotting” and shares close similarities with what Karaman et al. describe as “plotting urbanism.”¹²³ What makes these housing colonies unauthorised or illegal is that while

the purchase of land may be formal, it may not be legal due to the complexities in changing land use from agrarian to residential.¹²⁴ Thus, the land titles in these plotted colonies are usually not officially registered as residential, and their presence remains “off the map.” This ambiguity in terms of ownership and land titles became a source of conflict between the residents of the New Palam Vihar and the expressway.

Construction of New Palam Vihar started in the mid-1990s in the rural outskirts of both Delhi and Gurgaon. [Fig. 5] A local politician belonging to the agrarian elite purchased several acres of farmland in Bhajghera village and began plotting it into plots of roughly 110 square metres in size. [Fig. 13] Nearly 10,000 plots were sold until the late-2000s; they were mainly purchased by lower-middle-class families like the Kumars. The Kumars migrated to Delhi in the mid-1980s when Mukesh Kumar took up a job in a car-driving company. After having rented houses across Delhi for over a decade, the Kumars decided to buy a plot in the colony in the mid-1990s as an investment into the future. Although the Kumars were crucially aware that their land purchase was illegal, the unauthorised colony was the only affordable housing option available to them. Furthermore, as the area was a *babari elaka* (remote area) back then, they could not imagine a future possibility in which the state might need this land. However, in 2007, when the first chatter around the expressway emerged in the newspapers, their assumptions came crashing down. Even though the exact alignment of the expressway was still uncertain, many residents felt the state might exploit this opportunity to force evictions on their community. In 2008, when they really received eviction notices and the detailed plans of the expressway were made public, their worst fears were confirmed. Following the eviction orders, the roughly 450 affected families from New Palam Vihar formed a RWA and filed a PIL in the high court against the construction of the expressway, asserting their “Right to Life.”

Similar to the investigative work by the DXPWA discussed earlier in this chapter, the litigant, RWA from NPR, began filing Right



Fig. 12

F. 12 Screen captures from an interview with Donald Trump Jr. about the launch of Trump Towers in Delhi NCR.



CONTESTATIONS
AND UNCERTAINTY UNDER
CORRIDOR URBANISATION

Fig. 13

F. 13 From top to bottom: the evolution of 'plotting urbanism' in the unauthorised colony of New Palam Vihar (NPV), from agricultural land in 2004 to the evictions enforced by the Dwarka Expressway between 2008 and 2019.

F.14 A view of demolished homes at the unauthorised colony of New Palam Vihar. The demolitions made and evictions made way for the Dwarka Expressway.

to Information (RTI)¹²⁵ requests to uncover the contradictions in the planning of the expressway. They addressed these requests to various government departments, such as the Delhi NCR Planning Board, the pollution department, and the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA). These RTIs revealed the hidden but uncertain ways in which the state planned the Dwarka Expressway corridor. For example, no ground surveys were conducted before its planning, and environmental clearances were not sought at the regional level. Moreover, the litigants also found out that a crucially important step during the land acquisition process for the expressway was missed.¹²⁶ The litigants attempted to employ these contradictions to counter the tag of illegality that was thrust upon them by the state to justify the evictions by exposing the irregular ways the state conducted the planning of the expressway.

The state prosecution justified these irregularities and uncertainties in the planning of the expressway by falsely attaching the project to the preparation for the Commonwealth Games 2010 and claiming that this created a state of urgency, allowing for a suspension of "normal procedures."¹²⁷ Therefore, the state was unwilling to budge from its stance and wanted to undertake the evictions despite the apparent contradictions and irregularities on its part in the planning process. This led to a stalemate in the case, and the jury ordered a stay on the evictions. Nevertheless, the state continued to construct fragments of the expressway in stretches that were not under dispute. [Fig. 14] It was extended up to the edge of the colony, and a fragment of it was even constructed in a former village commons in the middle of the colony. It seems the continued construction served two intersectional purposes. Firstly, it kept drawing buy-ins from middle-class home-buyers betting on a future resolution to the conflict regardless of the uncertainty surrounding the project. Secondly, it signalled to the residents that evictions were an impending possibility.

The New Palam Vihar residents thus lived under a pervasive uncertainty and fear that the state may attempt to invent new rationalities to



Fig. 14

justify their eviction or be threatened with police violence. In my conversations with the Kumars and other members of the New Palam Vihar, it emerged that there were indeed moments when the state tried to employ police violence to enforce the evictions and that the uncertainty surrounding the evictions became an embodied and affective experience. Sushil Kumar, for example, mentioned that he suffered a major heart attack in 2012 due to prolonged uncertainty, and several others from the community complained of chronic depression. With the remaining stretches of the expressway constructed and evictions becoming an eventuality, the Kumars' struggle slowly shifted towards negotiating adequate compensation rather than seeking alternative alignments for the expressway to avoid the evictions.

IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

The stalemate on the court case was broken only six years later, after the previously discussed PIL filed by the DXPWA. The actions undertaken by the state in the years following

the stalemate allowed it to fabricate a new rationality of acting in the public interest. The state prosecutor argued that a change in the course of the project was no longer possible, as most of the stretches had been constructed and curving the road to avoid evictions would be against the "public interest." A curvy road, it was argued, citing expert opinion, would lead to a loss of fuel efficiency and a slowdown in traffic speeds.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the state argued, changing the course of the road would impede the right to property of investors who had aggregated land based on the promise of direct access to the expressway, thus leading to even more litigation from real estate developers who were hedging on the future of the project.¹²⁹

After years of negotiations, almost 650 families from the unauthorised colonies were offered resettlement plots and compensation in accordance with the Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Policy of 2010. The resettlement plots were offered in a legally planned colony only a few kilometres from the original location. The Kumars were quite satisfied



Fig. 15

with this final outcome, and by the end of 2019, they had already constructed their new house on a plot awarded to them as part of the resettlement deal. Their emotion was echoed by several of the resettled residents because, with the resettlement, they could finally overcome the lifelong uncertainty of inhabiting the margins on land with unclear tenure. Several residents expressed that their children would not have to navigate the same kind of uncertainty of urban life as they did. Consequently, their investment in inhabiting the everyday uncertainty in the unauthorised colony had finally paid off. Furthermore, following the resettlement, several local politicians attempted to attach themselves to the success of the court case,

basing their election manifestos on the promise of managing the uncertainty related to the legal status of the colonies. A local politician, Rakesh Daulatabad, belonging to the local agrarian elite, was elected as Minister of the Legislative Assembly on the promise of legalising the colony through a process that is colloquially referred to as “regularisation.”¹³⁰

In the following years, New Palam Vihar experienced rapid upgradation. A high-shopping street evolved along the edges of the expressway, which is now used mostly by the residents of gated communities, as amenities such as small-scale shopping were not foreseen in the planning process. Moreover, local real estate agents, specialising in the sale of illegal plots, faithfully integrated the expressway in their sales pitch, with the plots closer to the expressway gaining property value. It was as if the resolution of uncertainty around the expressway and the consequent suturing of the urban fabric had opened new political and social possibilities. An interview that I conducted with a New Palam Vihar resident in the spring of 2019 best

F. 15 A traditional wrestling event (Dangal) in the former agrarian commons of Daulatabad village along the Dwarka Expressway. The urbanisation of the unauthorised colony, village, and highway corridor come into a spiralling conflict around such sites.

captures the double-edged nature of uncertainty imposed by the expressway. The resident, a former farmer from Bhajghera, claimed “the expressway brought both *sheher* – *keher* [urbanisation and destruction] and *aafat* – *paisa* [anxiety and wealth]. Although we know that we will never be able to afford to live in these towers [gated communities], and they are not even designed keeping us in mind, in the overall scheme of things, we have benefited from the coming of the expressway. Thus, altogether things are OK.” [Fig. 16]

In the surveys that I conducted in New Palam Vihar, it emerged that the average monthly income of the residents was only between 10,000 and 12,000 Rupees (USD 120–170), while average property prices in the gated communities along the expressway were anywhere between 45,000–75,000 Rupees (USD 620–1,030) per square metre. Such strong difference puts formal housing and property in urban extension projects like highway corridors out of reach for the urban majority. That “things are OK” overall, despite the possibility that forces driving extended urbanisation might disrupt the lives of marginal communities, exposes what Goswami points to as the inherent contradiction in the production of state space, “the very practices that homogenised social relations also engendered new forms of differentiation and deepened socio-economic and cultural unevenness.”¹³¹ Thus, uncertainty and embracing practices of ambiguity in land titling and construction become a productive element for marginal communities in negotiating claims to urban space under extended urbanisation.

While the project described in this chapter is a regional-scale intervention, similar uncertainties operate in the extended urbanisation of urban corridors emerging at even larger scales. My research on the upcoming Delhi-Mumbai Expressway corridor that was conducted during the same period revealed similar patterns of patchiness and uncertainty over form and timeline.¹³² As the ongoing attempts at corridor urbanisation continue to remain a defining feature of urbanisation in India and across the so-called global South,¹³³ it is perhaps necessary

to pay attention to the immanent contradictions of the state space being produced through it.

NEW STATE SPACES AND THE URBANISATION YET TO COME

In concluding this chapter that journeyed through the political-economic transformations of India’s ongoing highway revolution, it is perhaps pertinent to circle back to the nature of new state spaces under production. Throughout the chapter, we witnessed how the state employs highway corridors to facilitate extended urbanisation into previously bypassed agrarian regions, enabling the enclosure and commodification of land considered cheap compared to the regions that have experienced urbanisation previously. Moreover, we explored how the abstract space produced by the highway corridors is upheld through the state strategy of fossil capitalism, with the adverse environmental consequences masked under the narratives of green growth. However, as Neil Brenner aptly points out, these new state spaces are also spaces of conflict, crisis, and contradiction. We saw, for instance, how the attempts to open pathways for new highway corridors often come into conflict with a palimpsest of pre-existing claims, occupancies, and forms of dwelling, making uncertainty a constitutive feature of extended urbanisation. However, uncertainty does not necessarily paralyse technopolitical action. Instead, state power increasingly acts and governs through uncertainty. The state engages in incessant regulatory experimentation and dynamic institutional searching, inventing new rationalities for acting in the public interest to enforce such projects. Despite these attempts, the very ambiguities that produce uncertainty as a structure, such as uncertain land titles, non-formally constructed housing, and infrastructure precarity, offer possible hooks for contestation, becoming the grounds through which the “urban majority” make claims to urban space. There is thus a need to embrace the politics and practices of uncertainty in the continued efforts to push the

understanding of extended urbanisation beyond its narrow focus on state processes and commodification and resist its closing-down effects through diverse and imagined alternatives. This chapter did this by engaging with the burgeoning postcolonial scholarship on subaltern urbanisation focused on settlement transformations in the Indian countryside.

As I have written elsewhere,¹³⁴ in the scenario that the extensive entanglement of transport infrastructure, urbanisation, and production of state space at scales that defy commensurability is projected to continue, the question worth exploring is where these roads are heading and what kind of people and urbanisation is yet to come. Recent political events have shown how highways are not only the harbingers of urbanisation, but also flashpoints of protests and political struggles. In August 2020, farmers' unions representing millions of farmers from the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh (adjoining Delhi) occupied six major highways leading up to the city as part of the *Dilli Chalo* (March to Delhi) protests. These protests, reported to be one of the largest in global history, were organised in opposition to the introduction of new farm laws that attempted to privatise agriculture procurement in the country. The farmers built large encampments along highways, holding their ground for over a year, blocking crucial access to the city for commuters, visitors, and commodities, and ensuring the repeal of the privatisation laws. While the new state spaces under production through the highway revolution are currently characterised by militant nationalism, exclusion, and spectacles, they can also become plural, democratic, and inclusive by increasing cognisance about the extended political terrain they are producing.

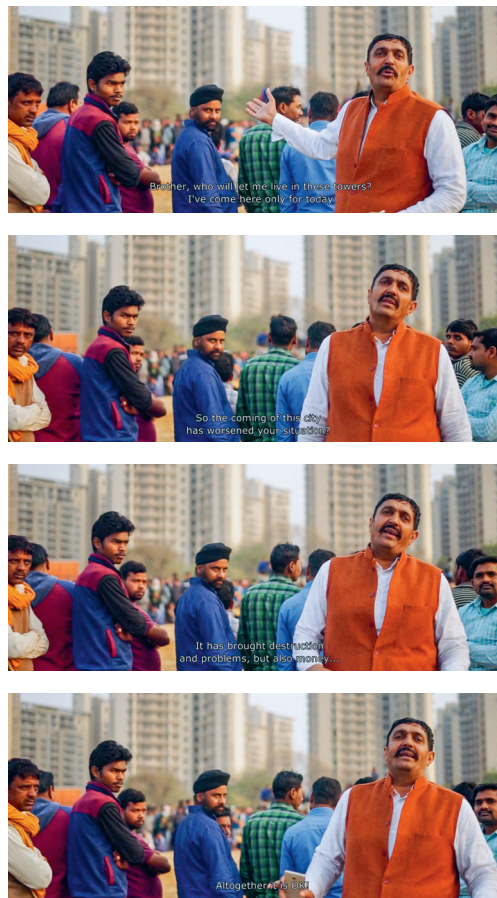


Fig. 16

- F.16 Stills from the film "Not Just Roads" from an interview with a resident from the unauthorised colony of New Palam Vihar. The resident speaks of the double-edged nature of urbanisation of the highway corridor, "how it has been destructive but has also brought money, so on the overall things are OK," he claims (the interview takes place between 17.30' and 18.30').

ENDNOTES

- 1 Simone, *For the City Yet to Come*.
- 2 ANI, "Purvanchal Expressway Will Become Lifeline of Development in Eastern UP: Yogi."
- 3 Eminent domain refers to the power of the government to take private property and convert it into public use. The law emerged during colonial India to further colonial interests, through the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) 1894. It was later enshrined into the postcolonial constitution in order to distribute land amongst the masses but ultimately became a tool to accomplish the opposite. For further discussion, see Balakrishnan, *Shareholder Cities: Land Transformations Along Urban Corridors in India*, 127–134.
- 4 Seth, "Explained: Politics of Uttar Pradesh Expressways."
- 5 FE Bureau, "Big Achievement."
- 6 Harvey, "Accumulation by Dispossession"; Levien, "The Land Question."
- 7 Transcript from PM Modi's speech at the political rally (16 November 2021). "PM Inaugurates Purvanchal Expressway, Says Earlier Govts Didn't Do Justice to UP."
- 8 Goswami, *Producing India*.
- 9 Brenner, *New State Spaces*.
- 10 FE Bureau, "Big Achievement."
- 11 PTI, "Highways Sector Can Help Nation Achieve \$5 Trillion Economy: Nitin Gadkari"; Bathla, "India's Highway Revolution."
- 12 Harvey, "Accumulation by Dispossession," 149.
- 13 Levien, "The Land Question," 457; Balakrishnan, "Highway Urbanization and Land Conflicts."
- 14 Dubey, "Highway Construction Rate in India on the Right Track, More than Doubles in Five Years."
- 15 Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*.
- 16 Patel, "The Long Green Revolution."
- 17 "The Land Question," 458.
- 18 PTI, "Chabahar Port's INSTC Link to Enhance Central Asia Reach: Sonowal."
- 19 Harvey, "Time—Space Compression and the Postmodern."
- 20 Complete urbanisation refers to the opening hypothesis of Henri Lefebvre in *The Urban Revolution* (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 1 [1970]) where he states, "Society has been completely urbanised. An Urban Society is a society that results from a complete urbanisation. The urbanisation is virtual today but will become real in the future."
- 21 Brenner, *New State Spaces*, 304.
- 22 Although the "Right to Life" has also been misused by urban elites to force evictions of marginalised communities in Indian cities.
- 23 Bhan, *In the Public's Interest*."
- 24 Bathla, "Extended Urbanisation and the Politics of Uncertainty"; Bhan, *In the Public's Interest*.
- 25 Streule, "Doing Mobile Ethnography."
- 26 Schmid, "The Trouble with Henri," 38.
- 27 Schmid, 38; Hart, "Denaturalizing Dispossession."
- 28 Bathla and Papanicolaou, "Reframing the Contested City through Ethnographic Film"; El-Husseiny et al., "Not Just Roads."
- 29 A 1998 report by the IMF, "The Asian Crisis: Causes and Cures" lists falling rates of financial yields (rate of profits) for international investors as one of the major causes of the crisis.
- 30 This was highlighted during the speech of former Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at the launch of Bharatmala Programme (08.03.2019) and in several public speeches by Road and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari.
- 31 Light, "The Golden Quadrilateral."
- 32 Oza, *Indian Elections: Mandate against Religious Nationalism and Neoliberal Reform*.
- 33 "Towards a Paradigm of Southern Urbanism," 54.
- 34 *Shareholder Cities: Land Transformations Along Urban Corridors in India*, 1–2.
- 35 Balakrishnan, 12.
- 36 Balakrishnan, 625.
- 37 Balakrishnan, "Recombinant Urbanization," 620.
- 38 Light, "The Golden Quadrilateral: Connecting India."
- 39 Nautiyal, "The Roads Ahead: Saga of Highway Development in India," 152.
- 40 Brenner, "The Limits to Scale?," 606.
- 41 Goldman, "Speculative Urbanism and the Making of the Next World City," 564, 567.
- 42 Levien, "The Land Question," 467.
- 43 *Landscapes of Accumulation*, 232.
- 44 Anand and Sami, "Urban Corridors: Strategies for Economic and Urban Development," 1.
- 45 DMIDC, "Metamorphosis."
- 46 Roy and Ong, *Worlding Cities*.
- 47 The official website of the NICDC provides the history of its transformation from DMIDC under the heading "Corporate Overview," <https://www.nicdc.in/about-DMIDC>.
- 48 Guha, "Peasant Resistance in West Bengal a Decade before Singur and Nandigram"; For further discussion, see Bertuzzo in this volume.
- 49 Shatkin, "The City and the Bottom Line"; Sawyer et al., "Bypass Urbanism."
- 50 Zeiderman et al., "Uncertainty and Urban Life," 299–300.
- 51 Seveilla-Buitrago, "Antinomies of Space-Time Value: Fallowness, Planning, Speculation."
- 52 Thieme, "The Hustle Economy," 542.
- 53 Zeiderman et al., "Uncertainty and Urban Life," 285; Simone, "Cities of Uncertainty."
- 54 Lefebvre, *De l'État*; Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, 464.
- 55 Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, 402–403.
- 56 Lefebvre, Brenner, and Elden, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, 238.
- 57 Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, 464.
- 58 Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, 20–21.
- 59 Goswami, *Producing India*, 103–104.
- 60 Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*, 16.
- 61 Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, 24.
- 62 Bhan, "Planned Illegality"; Bathla, "Planned Illegality, Permanent Temporiness, and Strategic Philanthropy."
- 63 Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*.
- 64 *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise*, 187.
- 65 Wilson, "Plan Puebla Panama: The Violence of Abstract Space"; Monte-Mor, *Modernities in the Jungle*.

- 66 Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*, 98.
- 67 PTI, "22 Highway Stretches In India May Double Up As Airstrips: Nitin Gadkari."
- 68 PTI, "Delhi-Mumbai Expressway Set to Script New Age of Development for Tribal Areas: Gadkari."
- 69 Also highlighted during the speech of former Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at the launch of Bharatmala Programme (08.03.2019).
- 70 Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*, 96.
- 71 Malm, "The Origins of Fossil Capital," 308; Mitchell, "Carbon Democracy."
- 72 Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History*.
- 73 Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*, 4.
- 74 PTI, "Govt Earned over Rs 8 Lakh Cr from Taxes on Petrol, Diesel in Last 3 Fiscals: FM Sitharaman."
- 75 Hein, "Oil Spaces."
- 76 "Mile by Mile, India Paves a Smoother Road to Its Future." <https://www.ibef.org/industry/roads-india.aspx>.
- 77 Saluja, "Modi Govt Sets out on the Road to \$5 Trillion with a Rs 8 Lakh-Crore First List."
- 78 Goswami, *Producing India*, 56.
- 80 Guha, "Forestry in British and Post-British India"; Sud, *The Making of Land and the Making of India*.
- 81 "Methodology for Estimating Carbon Footprint of Road Projects: Case Study: India."
- 82 Bathla and Singh, "The Delhi-Mumbai Expressway Is a Short-Cut to Socio-Ecological Disaster."
- 83 PTI, "Delhi-Mumbai Expressway Set to Script New Age of Development for Tribal Areas: Gadkari."
- 84 Dupont, "The Dream of Delhi as a Global City"; Ghertner, *Rule By Aesthetics*; Bhan, *In the Public's Interest*.
- 85 Bunnell and Maringanti, "Practising Urban and Regional Research beyond Metrocentricity."
- 86 Goldman, "Speculative Urbanism and the Making of the Next World City"; Searle, *Landscapes of Accumulation*; Gururani, "When Land Becomes Gold"; Levien, "The Land Question"; Balakrishnan, *Shareholder Cities: Land Transformations Along Urban Corridors in India*.
- 87 Denis, Mukhopadhyay, and Zerah, "Subaltern Urbanisation in India"; Pradhan, "Unacknowledged Urbanisation"; Samanta, "The Politics of Classification and the Complexity of Governance in Census Towns, Making a Show."
- 88 Samanta, "The Politics of Classification and the Complexity of Governance in Census Towns, Making a Show"; Guin and Das, "Spatial Perspectives of the New Census Towns, 2011"; Mukhopadhyay et al., "Understanding India's Urban Frontier."
- 89 Bathla and Duyne Barenstein, *THE [SEASONAL] ARRIVAL CITY*.
- 90 World Bank Group, *Demographic Trends and Urbanization*.
- 91 Datta, "Introduction: Fast Cities in an Urban Age."
- 92 Kundu, "Method in Madness"; Brenner and Schmid, "The 'Urban Age' in Question."
- 93 Denis and Marius-Gnanou, "Toward a Better Appraisal of Urbanization in India. A Fresh Look at the Landscape of Morphological Agglomerates," 68.
- 94 Pradhan, "Unacknowledged Urbanisation," 45.
- 95 Roy and Pradhan, "Census Towns in India," 7.
- 96 Duijine and Nijman, "India's Emergent Urban Formations," 14.
- 97 Mukhopadhyay, "Does Administrative Status Matter for Small Towns in India?"
- 98 Duijine and Nijman, "India's Emergent Urban Formations."
- 99 Bathla, "Planned Illegality, Permanent Temporariness, and Strategic Philanthropy."
- 100 "Slumdog Cities."
- 101 Mukhopadhyay, Zerah, and Denis, "Subaltern Urbanization: Indian Insights for Urban Theory," 14.
- 102 Simone, "Cities of Uncertainty."
- 103 Ghertner, "Improvised Urbanism in the Design of India's Unauthorized Colonies."
- 104 Karaman et al., "Plot by Plot."
- 105 Dubey, "Accumulation at Margins: The Case of Khora Colony."
- 106 Zerah, "Shedding Light on Social and Economic Changes in Small Towns Through the Prism of Local Governance."
- 107 Levien, "The Land Question," 480; Bathla, "Planned Illegality, Permanent Temporariness, and Strategic Philanthropy."
- 108 Punia et al., "Comparison of Peripheral Metropolitanisation in Haryana and Rajasthan, India"; Duijine and Nijman, "India's Emergent Urban Formations," 14.
- 109 Simone, *Improvised Lives: Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South*.
- 110 RP City is spread over half a square kilometre (110 acres) of area with over 2,500 housing units. See <http://www.ramprastha.com/>.
- 111 Nagula, Gupta, and Singla, "Real Insights: Locality Snapshot—Dwarka Expressway."
- 112 Srivastava, *Entangled Urbanism*, xxi.
- 113 The DXPWA used to maintain a website (<http://dexpwa.com>) for collecting data around the delays on the expressway. However, the website is currently dysfunctional, and the group largely organises through social media channels such as Facebook—Dwarka Expressway & New Gurugram, and Twitter—DXPAssociation.
- 114 The Hindu, "Dwarka E-Way Homebuyers on Hunger Strike."
- 115 Tiwari, "Residents Build Road to Avoid Toll at Kherki Daula, Operator."
- 116 Singh, "Protest against Incomplete Dwarka E-Way Reaches Jantar Mantar."
- 117 Jha, "E-Way Delayed for 8 Years, Buyers Move High Court."
- 118 PILs were introduced in India in the 1970s to protect the fundamental rights of the marginalised. Communities and individuals fearing marginalisation due to state-led development projects or policies can file a PIL in the Indian court to claim their "Right to Life." Bhan, *In the Public's Interest*, 30, 111.
- 119 Baviskar, "Cows, Cars and Cycle-Rickshaws."
- 120 Sikarwar, "India Plans World-Class Convention Centre."
- 121 Levien, "The Land Question," 560.
- 122 Bhan, "Planned Illegality," 59; Zimmer, "Enumerating the Semi-Visible"; Bathla, "Planned Illegality, Permanent Temporariness, and Strategic Philanthropy."
- 123 "Plot by Plot."
- 124 Bhan, "Planned Illegality," 61.
- 125 The Right to Information Act 2005 allows citizens to request the government for information in a time-bound manner. Its objective is to promote transparency and accountability in the working of the government. See <https://rti.gov.in/>.

- 126 Precisely, public objections regarding the land acquisition mandated under the Section 5A Land Acquisition Act (LAA) of 1870 were not followed.
- 127 Mittal and Sidhu, CWP-8055-2008 and connected matters (O&M), Hon'ble Mr. Justice Harinder Singh Sidhu at 23.
- 128 Mittal and Sidhu, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Harinder Singh Sidhu at 13, 18, 21.
- 129 Mittal and Sidhu, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Harinder Singh Sidhu at 12.
- 130 Periodically, the unauthorised colonies can be legalised through a "regularisation" process. Joseph, "Disquiet to Blame for Loss in Badshapur? BJP to Probe."
- 131 Goswami, *Producing India*, 9.
- 132 Bathla and Singh, "The Delhi-Mumbai Expressway is a Short-Cut to Socio-Ecological Disaster."
- 133 Balakrishnan, "Highway Urbanization and Land Conflicts," 786.
- 134 Bathla, "India's Highway Revolution."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ADB. "Methodology for Estimating Carbon Footprint of Road Projects—Case Study: India." Manila: Asian Development Bank, December 2010.
- Anand, Shriya, and Neha Sami. "Urban Corridors: Strategies for Economic and Urban Development." *International Growth Centre* (2015).
- Angelo, Hillary. *How Green Became Good: Urbanized Nature and the Making of Cities and Citizens*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.
- ANI. "Purvanchal Expressway Will Become Lifeline of Development in Eastern UP: Yogi." *Times of India*, 16 November 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/purvanchal-expressway-will-become-lifeline-of-development-in-eastern-up-yogi/articleshow/87736101.cms>.
- Balakrishnan, Sai. "Highway Urbanization and Land Conflicts: The Challenges to Decentralization in India." *Pacific Affairs* 86, no. 4 (2013): 785–811.
- . "Recombinant Urbanization: Agrarian–Urban Landed Property and Uneven Development in India." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 43, no. 4 (2019): 617–632.
- . *Shareholder Cities: Land Transformations along Urban Corridors in India*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.
- Bathla, Nitin. "Extended Urbanisation and the Politics of Uncertainty: The Contested Pathways of Highway Corridors in India." *The Geographical Journal* (2022): 1–15.
- . "India's Highway Revolution." Special issue, *Architectural Review*, no. 1491 (2022): 88–91.
- . "Planned Illegality, Permanent Temporariness, and Strategic Philanthropy: Tenement Towns Under Extended Urbanisation of Postmetropolitan Delhi." *Housing Studies* (2021): 1–21.
- Bathla, Nitin, and Jennifer Duyn Barenstein. "THE [SEASONAL] ARRIVAL CITY: Designing for Migrants' 'Transient Right to the City.'" *ETH MAS Housing* (2022). <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/handle/20.500.11850/543590.2>.
- Bathla, Nitin, and Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou. "Reframing the Contested City through Ethnographic Film: Beyond the Expository on Housing and the Urban." *International Journal of Housing Policy* (10 March 2021): 1–16.
- Bathla, Nitin, and Aman Singh. "The Delhi-Mumbai Expressway Is a Short-Cut to Socio-Ecological Disaster." *The Wire Science*, 6 June 2019, sec. Environment. <https://science.thewire.in/environment/delhi-mumbai-expressway-nitin-gadkari-bharatmala-nhai/>.
- Baviskar, Amita. "Cows, Cars and Cycle-Rickshaws: Bourgeois Environmentalists and the Battle for Delhi's Streets." *Elite and Everyman: The Cultural Politics of the Indian Middle Classes*, 2011, 391–418.
- Bhan, Gautam. *In the Public's Interest: Evictions, Citizenship, and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi*. Vol. 30. Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2016.
- . "Planned Illegality: Housing and the 'Failure' of Planning in Delhi: 1947–2010." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 24 (2013): 58–70.
- Brenner, Neil. *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- . "The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration." *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 4 (1 December 2001): 591–614.
- Brenner, Neil, and Christian Schmid. "The 'Urban Age' in Question." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (1 May 2014): 731–755.
- Bunnell, Tim, and Anant Maringanti. "Practising Urban and Regional Research Beyond Metrocentricity." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 2 (2010): 415–420.
- Datta, Ayona. "Introduction: Fast Cities in an Urban Age." In *Mega-Urbanization in the Global South*, edited by Ayona Datta and Abdul Shaban, 13–40. London: Routledge, 2016.

- Denis, Eric, and Kamala Marius-Gnanou. "Toward a Better Appraisal of Urbanization in India. A Fresh Look at the Landscape of Morphological Agglomerates." *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography* (28 November 2010).
- Denis, Eric, Partha Mukhopadhyay, and Marie Helene Zerach. "Subaltern Urbanisation in India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 30 (28 July 2012): 52–62.
- DMIDC. "Metamorphosis." New Delhi: DMIDC, unknown. www.dmidc.com.
- Dubey, Jyotindra. "Highway Construction Rate in India on the Right Track, More than Doubles in Five Years." *India Today*, 4 July 2019. <https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/highway-construction-rate-in-india-on-the-right-track-more-than-doubles-in-five-years-1562333-2019-07-04>.
- Dubey, Shruti. "Accumulation at Margins: The Case of Khora Colony." In *Accumulation in Post-Colonial Capitalism*, edited by Iman Kumar Mitra, Ranabir Samaddar, and Samita Sens, 109–123. Singapore: Springer, 2017.
- Duijine, Robbin Jan van, and Jan Nijman. "India's Emergent Urban Formations." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 109, no. 6 (2 November 2019): 1978–1998.
- Dupont, Véronique D. N. "The Dream of Delhi as a Global City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 3 (2011): 533–554.
- El-Husseiny, Momen, Abdou Maliq Simone, Llerena Guiu Searle, D. Asher Ghertner, and Sandra Jasper. "Not Just Roads." *The AAG Review of Books* 9, no. 4 (2 October 2021): 39–52.
- FE Bureau. "Big Achievement: Highway Construction in India to Hit Record Pace! To Touch 40 Km/Day in FY21." *The Financial Express*, 25 March 2021. <https://www.financialexpress.com/infrastructure/roadways/big-achievement-highway-construction-in-india-to-hit-record-pace-to-touch-40-km-day-in-fy21/2219525/>.
- Ghertner, D. Asher. "Improvvised Urbanism in the Design of India's Unauthorized Colonies." In *The New Companion to Urban Design*, edited by Tridib Banerjee and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, 355–367. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- . *Rule By Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi*. 1st edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Goldman, Michael. "Speculative Urbanism and the Making of the Next World City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 3 (2011): 555–581.
- Goswami, Manu. *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Guha, Abhijit. "Peasant Resistance in West Bengal a Decade before Singur and Nandigram." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2007): 3706–3711.
- Guha, Ramachandra. "Forestry in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis." *Economic and Political Weekly* 18, no. 44 (1983): 1882–1896.
- Guin, Debarshi, and Dipendra Nath Das. "Spatial Perspectives of the New Census Towns, 2011: A Case Study of West Bengal." *Environment and Urbanization ASIA* 6, no. 2 (1 September 2015): 109–124.
- Gururani, Shubhra. "When Land Becomes Gold." In *Land Rights, Biodiversity Conservation and Justice Rethinking Parks and People*, 1st edition, edited by Sharlene Mollett and Thembele Kepe, 107–125. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Hart, Gillian. "Denaturalizing Dispossession: Critical Ethnography in the Age of Resurgent Imperialism." *Antipode* 38, no. 5 (2006): 977–1004.
- Harvey, David. "Accumulation by Dispossession." In *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- . "Time—Space Compression and the Postmodern." In *Modernity: After Modernity*, edited by Malcolm Waters, 98–118. London: Taylor & Francis, 1999.
- Harvey, Penny, and Hannah Knox. *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Hein, Carola. "Oil Spaces: The Global Petroleumscape in the Rotterdam/The Hague Area." *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 5 (2018): 887–929.
- IMF. "The Asian Crisis: Causes and Cures." *Finance and Development. International Monetary Fund*, June 1998. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1998/06/imfstaff.htm>.
- Jha, Bagish. "E-Way Delayed for 8 Years, Buyers Move High Court." *The Times of India*, 22 February 2017, sec. Gurgaon. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/e-way-delayed-for-8-yrs-buyers-move-hc/articleshow/57281208.cms>.
- Joseph, Joel. "Disquiet to Blame for Loss in Badshapur? BJP to Probe." *Times of India*, 27 October 2019, sec. Gurgaon. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/disquiet-to-blame-for-loss-in-badshapur-bjp-to-probe/articleshow/71780769.cms>.
- Karaman, Ozan, Lindsay Sawyer, Christian Schmid, and Kit Ping Wong. "Plot by Plot: Plotting Urbanism as an Ordinary Process of Urbanisation." *Antipode* 52, no. 4 (2020): 1122–1151.
- Kundu, Amitabh. "Method in Madness: Urban Data from 2011 Census." *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 40 (2011): 7.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *De l'État*. Vol. 1049. Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1976.
- . *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*. Edited by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- . *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Lefebvre, Henri, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden. *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Levien, Michael. "The Land Question: Special Economic Zones and the Political Economy of Dispossession in India." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (1 July 2012): 933–69.
- Light, Liz. "The Golden Quadrilateral: Connecting India." *E. Nz Magazine: The Magazine of Technical Enterprise* 4, no. 4 (2004).
- Malm, Andreas. "The Origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry." *Historical Materialism* 21, no. 1 (2013): 15–68.
- Mitchell, Timothy. "Carbon Democracy." *Economy and Society* 38, no. 3 (2009): 399–432.
- Mittal, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Satish Kuman, and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Harinder Singh Sidhu. CWP-8055-2008 & connected matters (O&M), Hon'ble Mr. Justice Harinder Singh Sidhu (High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh 2015).

- Monte-Mor, Roberto Luiz de Melo. "Modernities in the Jungle: Extended Urbanization in the Brazilian Amazonia." PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2004.
- Mukhopadhyay, Partha. "Does Administrative Status Matter for Small Towns in India?" In *Subaltern Urbanisation in India—An Introduction to the Dynamics of Ordinary Towns*, edited by Eric Denis and Marie-Helene Zerah, 443–69. New Delhi: Springer, 2017.
- Mukhopadhyay, Partha, Marie-Helene Zerah, and Eric Denis. "Subaltern Urbanization: Indian Insights for Urban Theory." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 44, no. 4 (July 2020): 582–98.
- Mukhopadhyay, Partha, Marie-Helene Zerah, Gopa Samanta, and Augustin Maria. "Understanding India's Urban Frontier: What Is Behind the Emergence of Census Towns in India?" *The World Bank*, 19 December 2016. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/378351482172055283/Understanding-Indias-urban-frontier-what-is-behind-the-emergence-of-census-towns-in-India>.
- Nagula, Vishal, Gaurav Gupta, and Meha Singla. "Real Insights: Locality Snapshot—Dwarka Expressway." *Bangalore: CommonFloor.com*, 2015. https://www.commonfloor.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Real-Insights-%E2%80%93-Dwarka-Expressway-Gurgaon-A-CommonFloor-Report-2015.pdf?utm_source=guide%2520commonfloor%2520survey&utm_medium=pdf%2520response&utm_content=1&utm_campaign=locality%2520report%2520-%2520guide.
- Nautiyal, Santosh. "The Roads Ahead: Saga of Highway Development in India." *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 50, no. 1 (2004): 151–157.
- Not Just Roads*. DCP, Documentary. ETH Zurich, 2020.
- Oza, Rupal. "Indian Elections: Mandate against Religious Nationalism and Neoliberal Reform." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22, no. 5 (2004): 633–638.
- Patel, Raj. "The Long Green Revolution." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 40, no. 1 (2013): 1–63.
- Pradhan, Kanhu. "Unacknowledged Urbanisation: New Census Towns of India." SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 7 September 2013. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2402116>.
- PTI. "22 Highway Stretches In India May Double Up As Airstrips: Nitin Gadkari." *NDTV*, 16 October 2016, sec. All India. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/governments-latest-plan-planes-to-land-on-22-highways-across-india-1474802>.
- . "Chababar Port's INSTC Link to Enhance Central Asia Reach: Sonowal." *Times of India*, 1 August 2022, sec. India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/chababar-ports-instc-link-to-enhance-central-asia-reach-sonowal/articleshow/93260369.cms>.
- . "Delhi-Mumbai Expressway Set to Script New Age of Development for Tribal Areas: Gadkari." *Outlook*, 16 September 2021. <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/delhimumbai-expressway-set-to-script-new-age-of-development-for-tribal-areas-gadkari/2161437>.
- . "Govt Earned over Rs 8 Lakh Cr from Taxes on Petrol, Diesel in Last 3 Fiscals: FM Sitharaman." *The Economic Times*, 14 December 2021, sec. Economy. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/govt-earned-over-rs-8-lakh-cr-from-taxes-on-petrol-diesel-in-last-3-fiscals-fm-sitharaman/articleshow/88281455.cms>.
- . "Highways Sector Can Help Nation Achieve \$5 Trillion Economy: Nitin Gadkari." *Business Standard India*, 8 July 2019, sec. Economy. https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/highways-sector-can-help-nation-achieve-5-trillion-economy-nitin-gadkari-119070801260_1.html.
- Punia, Milap, Rajnish Kumar, Laxman Singh, and Sandeep Kaushik. "Comparison of Peripheral Metropolitanisation in Haryana and Rajasthan, India." In *Subaltern Urbanisation in India—An Introduction to the Dynamics of Ordinary Towns*, edited by Eric Denis and Marie-Helene Zerah, 141–167. New Delhi: Springer, 2017.
- Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India*. E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Rose, Mark H., and Raymond A. Mohl. *Interstate: Highway Politics and Policy Since 1939*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2012.
- Roy, Ananya. "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 2 (1 March 2011): 223–238.
- Roy, Ananya, and Aihwa Ong. *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011.
- Roy, Shamindra Nath, and Kanhu Charan Pradhan. *Census Towns in India: Current Patterns and Future Discourses*. Delhi: Centre for Policy Research, 1 May 2018.
- Saluja, Nishtha. "Modi Govt Sets out on the Road to \$5 Trillion with a Rs 8 Lakh-Crore First List." *The Economic Times*, 24 October 2019, sec. News. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/nhai-likely-to-award-rs-8-lakh-crore-projects-over-3-years/articleshow/71711823.cms?from=mdr>.
- Samanta, Gopa. "The Politics of Classification and the Complexity of Governance in Census Towns." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 22 (May 2014): 55–62.
- Sawyer, Lindsay, Christian Schmid, Monika Streule, and Pascal Kallenberger. "Bypass Urbanism: Re-Ordering Center-Periphery Relations in Kolkata, Lagos and Mexico City." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 53, no. 4 (2021): 675–703.
- Schindler, Seth. "Towards a Paradigm of Southern Urbanism." *City* 21, no. 1 (2017): 47–64.
- Schmid, Christian. *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*. London: Verso Books, 2022.
- . "The Trouble with Henri: Urban Research and the Theory of the Production of Space." In *Urban Revolution Now*, 43–64. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Searle, Llerena Guiu. *Landscapes of Accumulation: Real Estate and the Neoliberal Imagination in Contemporary India*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

- Seth, Maulshree. "Explained: Politics of Uttar Pradesh Expressways." *The Indian Express*, 23 November 2021, sec. Explained. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/politics-up-expressways-7634560/>.
- Sevilla-Buitrago, Álvaro. "Antinomies of Space-Time Value: Fallowness, Planning, Speculation." *New Geographies* 10 (2019): 18–23.
- Shatkin, Gavin. "The City and the Bottom Line: Urban Megaprojects and the Privatisation of Planning in Southeast Asia." *Environment and Planning A* 40, no. 2 (2008): 383–401.
- Sikarwar, Deepshikha. "India Plans World-Class Convention Centre." *The Economic Times*, 20 September 2018, sec. Industry. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/property/-construction/india-plans-world-class-convention-centre/article-show/65879866.cms?from=mdr>.
- Simone, AbdouMalik. "Cities of Uncertainty: Jakarta, the Urban Majority, and Inventive Political Technologies." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 7–8 (2013): 243–263.
- . *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.
- . *Improvised Lives: Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018.
- Singh, Rashpal. "Protest against Incomplete Dwarka E-Way Reaches Jantar Mantar." *The Hindustan Times*, 25 April 2016, sec. Gurugram News. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/gurgaon/protest-against-incomplete-dwarka-e-way-reaches-jantar-mantar/story-Odw7wHmRBgNLYk-7fIPsN2N.html>.
- Srivastava, Sanjay. *Entangled Urbanism: Slum, Gated Community and Shopping Mall in Delhi and Gurgaon*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Streule, Monika. "Doing Mobile Ethnography: Grounded, Situated and Comparative." *Urban Studies* 57, no. 2 (2020): 421–438.
- Sud, Nikita. *The Making of Land and the Making of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- The Hindu. "Dwarka E-Way Homebuyers on Hunger Strike." *The Hindu*, 11 January 2019, sec. Delhi. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/dwarka-e-way-home-buyers-on-hunger-strike/article25964133.ece>.
- The Quint. "PM Inaugurates Purvanchal Expressway, Says Earlier Govts Didn't Do Justice to UP." *The Quint*, 17 November 2021, sec. Development and Environment. <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/pm-modi-inauguration-purvanchal-expressway-up#read-more>.
- Thieme, Tatiana Adeline. "The Hustle Economy: Informality, Uncertainty and the Geographies of Getting By." *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 4 (2018): 529–548.
- Tiwari, Siddharth. "Residents Build Road to Avoid Toll at Kherki Daula, Operator." *Times of India*, 1 October 2019. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/residents-build-road-to-avoid-toll-at-kherki-daula-operator-cries-foul/articleshow/71383016.cms>.
- Waldman, Amy. "Mile by Mile, India Paves a Smoother Road to Its Future." *The New York Times*, 4 December 2005, sec. World. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/04/world/asia/mile-by-mile-india-paves-a-smoother-road-to-its-future.html>.
- Wells, Christopher W. *Car Country: An Environmental History*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013.
- Wilson, Japhy. "Plan Puebla Panama: The Violence of Abstract Space." In *Urban Revolution Now*, 129–148. Routledge, 2016.
- World Bank Group. *Demographic Trends and Urbanization*. Washington DC: World Bank, 2021. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/260581617988607640/demographic-trends-and-urbanization>.
- Zeiderman, Austin, Sobia Ahmad Kaker, Jonathan Silver, and Astrid Wood. "Uncertainty and Urban Life." *Public Culture* 27, no. 2 (1 May 2015): 281–304.
- Zerah, Marie Helene. "Shedding Light on Social and Economic Changes in Small Towns Through the Prism of Local Governance: A Case Study of Haryana." In *Subaltern Urbanisation in India—An Introduction to the Dynamics of Ordinary Towns*, edited by Eric Denis and Marie-Helene Zerah, 371–395. New Delhi: Springer, 2017.
- Zimmer, Anna. "Enumerating the Semi-Visible: The Politics of Regularising Delhi's Unauthorised Colonies." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 30 (2012): 89–97.

IMAGE CREDITS

All photography from author unless otherwise stated.

All maps from author with Philippe Rekacewicz. Cartographic assistance Ecce Emanetoglu and Aikaterini Katsouli.

- F. 1 <https://iis.ncog.gov.in/parks/exploreParks>
- F. 2 National Highways Authority of India
- F. 4 The Delhi Decongestion Plan – Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
- F. 11 Field sketch, Nitin Bathla
- F. 12 The Property Show – CNBC TV 18 (2018)
- F. 13 Google Earth
- F. 16 Film stills from "Not Just Roads" (2020), directed by Nitin Bathla and Klearjos Papanicolaou, www.notjustroadsfilm.com