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Kanika Batra

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## City Botany: Reading Urban Ecologies in China through Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke*

Amitav Ghosh's second novel in the *Ibis* trilogy about the opium trade to China in the early nineteenth century is also a sustained meditation on the economics of botany. The cultivation of poppy flowers and the processing of seeds into opium in India and its sale in China by British, American, and Indian traders is the most obvious aspect of economic botany. The secondary narrative of the search for an elusive flower from China, the golden camellia, is another goal of the mercantile explorations undertaken by the British in the nineteenth century. My interest is in examining these botanical endeavors through the lens of urban studies. Ghosh's representation of Chinese flora and fauna is emblematic of what I call "city botany," the cultivation and trade of plants within cities, specifically Canton, center of the illicit opium trade and the site of British defeat of the Chinese in the first Opium Wars (1839–1842).

In detailing colonial expeditions in search of exotic plants that somehow wend their way from, towards, and around the city, Ghosh suggests a move away from Orientalist notions of "pure" uncultivated nature. Cultivated nature, its bounty, and the transportation of this bounty across the seas is the governing trope in the first two novels of the trilogy: *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011). Examining contemporary implications of such tropology, this article places environmental and

**Kanika Batra** is Associate Professor of English at Texas Tech University, where she teaches courses in post-colonial literature and theory, transnational feminist studies, and queer studies. She is the author of two books: *Caribbean Poetry: Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite* (Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2001) and *Feminist Visions and Queer Futures in Postcolonial Drama: Community, Kinship, and Citizenship* (Routledge, 2011). Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Callaloo*, *Feminist Review*, *Interventions*, *Small Axe*, *South Asian Review*, and *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*. Currently she is working on a book manuscript tentatively titled *Postcolonial Counterpublics: Genders and Sexualities in Print*.

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urban studies in dialogue with postcolonial studies to argue that Ghosh's historical perspective illuminates contemporary global concerns about urban spatial economy, built versus natural environments, and the profitability of the trade in plants, which often take China as the epicenter of these concerns. The novel, like the cities depicted in it, advances a postmodern historiography that gestures toward the present even while it describes the past. It allows for an analysis of a strand in postmodernist discussions of urban ecologies, embodied in particular by David Harvey's recent writings, where some cities are understood as epitomes of unequal development and governmental apathy toward its citizens. Such an approach inadvertently contributes to the discourse emerging from Western policy studies that takes developing nations to task for not preserving environmental standards or biological resources in the rapid drive towards urbanization.<sup>1</sup>

My claims resonate with those made by Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughery in their essay "Against Authenticity" that "a vital aspect of postcolonial ecocriticism refuses the nostalgia of pure landscape even while it grapples with the best ways of addressing the representation of the nonhuman environment" (79). I understand Cilano and DeLoughery's reference to "nonhuman environment" as indicating natural and built environments. The city and the garden are two obvious examples of such built environments.<sup>2</sup> The following questions addressed in this article derive from my reading of Ghosh's novel: If botany has always been pressed in the service of economic interests, and cities have served as the loci of these interests, then should developing nations be held especially culpable for not keeping in mind sustainable development in imagining and creating cities for the new millennium? Further, are developing nations any more culpable than developed ones for not preserving their biological resources in natural habitats? There are no easy answers, particularly since China (like many other Asian countries) is witnessing unprecedented migration from rural to urban locations, which puts pressure on existing natural and built environments.

Ghosh has pointed to the connections between the historical setting of the novel and contemporary relations between China and Western nations in an interview with Tom Ashbrook. The parallels between nineteenth-century Euro-American advocates of Free Trade in the novel and neoliberal policies in the present as well as the inverse balance of payments crisis are too obvious to be missed. The opium trade was directly responsible for draining the Chinese economy much as the current situation is leading to a US balance of payments deficit. In both cases state protectionism to curb the excesses of the trade imbalance is seen as a way out of the current crisis. In Ghosh's novel when Governor Lin confiscates the opium cargo brought by American, British, and Indian traders, he does so by following both the letter and the spirit of Chinese law, which encouraged legitimate trade in commodities but had always banned opium imports, which continued illegally for about half a century. In demonstrating how Ghosh's evocation of history enables us to read contemporary concerns, I will adopt a contrapuntal methodology involving the following steps: a palimpsestic view of the urban ecology of Canton/Guangzhou; the emergence of profitable greening embodied in the historic Lingnan garden style adopted in Chinese cities at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century; and finally, whether Western interventions in botanical ownership and diversity constitute an ecological imperial-

ism that continues in postcolonial times.<sup>3</sup> I begin with an examination of Guangzhou (and its historical antecedent Canton) as a palimpsestic postmodern city space that fulfills the labor, leisure, and developmental needs of an emerging global power.

### Guangzhou Was Canton

Canton, the setting of Ghosh's novel, was one of the most developed and populous cities in China in the early nineteenth century. The arrival of Europeans in the eighteenth century for trade in tea, silk, and other curiosities led to a spate of construction along the Pearl River on the edges of Canton. Since foreigners were not permitted in the city, once off the ships they were based in the factories constructed to provide them with offices and accommodation. A fascinating account of life in the factories from an American rather than British perspective, and of the development of print as a medium of communication among Euro-Americans in the region, is provided in Timothy Mo's magnum opus *An Insular Possession* (1987). Other non-fictional accounts of the city include Jacques Downs's study of the American commercial community in Canton titled *The Golden Ghetto*, which not only provides an overview of life in factories but also of the city of Canton surrounding the factories.

What is common in these accounts of the city is the diversity of cultural influences inspired by trading connections between China and other parts of the world, centuries before the Opium Wars. Downs observes that Swedes, Danes, Austrians, Prussians, Spaniards, Portuguese, and Italians had all done business in the city with the British and American traders. In addition there were Armenians, Jews, Arabs, and Parsees, who resided in the "Chow Chow Hong" or the "mixed" factory (33–45). Ghosh indicates a similar *mélange* of cultural influences in Canton by providing various personal and city stories. Among these are the romantic relationships between the boat-woman Chi-mei and the Parsee opium trader Bahram Moddie; between the Bengali Asha-didi and her Chinese husband, Ah Bao (nicknamed Baburao); and between the Anglo-Indian painter Robin Chinnery and his Chinese counterpart Jacqua.

Most of the impressions of the city in Ghosh's novel are conveyed through the painter Robin Chinnery and Bahram's scribe Neel on their tours out of the factory premises into Canton and its surrounding areas. Unsurprisingly, the teeming nineteenth-century Indian city of Calcutta is often a point of comparison in Robin's descriptions of Canton in the letters he sends his childhood friend Paulette: "The north bank, where Canton lies, is as crowded a stretch of land as you will ever see, with houses, walls, bustees and galis, extending for miles into the distance; Honam, by contrast, is like a vast park, green and wooded: several small creeks and streams cut through it and their shores are dotted with monasteries, nurseries, orchards, pagodas, and picturesque little villages" (Ghosh, *River* 260). In using the Indian words "bustees" and "galis" (neighborhoods and lanes) to describe Canton, Robin provides a pan-Asian perspective on the cityscape he unfolds for Paulette. He also sets up a contrast between the urban vistas of Canton and the semi-urban one of Honam with its idyllic placement of natural and built environments.

Present day development on the Pearl River Delta including the city formerly known as Canton and now Guangzhou has been as sudden and as unprecedented as the trajectory of trade in the nineteenth century. One opinion has it that this region in China “provides a distinct natural and built environment in which to analyse some of the unresolved issues relating to the development of extended metropolitan regions in the context of an Asian developing economy” (Lin, “Metropolitan” 387). Much like Robin Chinnery’s comparative perspective on Canton, the rapid development of Guangzhou has also been analyzed using paradigms borrowed from other Asian cities. Yanliu Lin, Bruno de Meulder, and Shifu Wang examine Guangzhou’s rapid, unplanned growth through the concept “village in the city.” Their argument is that because agricultural land is priced much higher than residential spaces, the state is reluctant to expropriate the former, leading to a mixed pattern of land usage in which agricultural land soon becomes transformed for residential purposes to meet the growing housing demands of cities like Guangzhou. In the same way, another descriptor that has been used for the unprecedented growth of urban centers in the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas is the Bahasa Indonesian term “desakota,” which combines the words for village (*desa*) and town (*kota*) to describe the interlocking of rural and urban patterns (Xie, Yu, Bai, and Xing). These concepts and terms imply a move away from using Western patterns of urbanization as the norm for analyzing newly emerging Asian cities.

Given this pattern, which often dictates mixed land usage in cities, it is surprising that a consistently nuanced postmodernist Marxist thinker such as David Harvey mentions state appropriation of land as the most important feature of urbanization in China when discussing ownership of city spaces. Harvey states that “China is only the epicentre of an urbanization process that has now become genuinely global, partly through the astonishing integration of financial markets that have used their flexibility to debt-finance urban development around the world” (“Right”). For Harvey, perhaps with the Olympics-fueled urban reconstruction as an implicit reference, China (and Beijing in particular) serves as a case in point to illustrate how “millions are being dispossessed of the spaces they have long occupied.” My aim is not to condone the state possession of land by force in the face of popular resistance, but to point to the rhetoric of state repression employed to explain the process of rapid urbanization in China. Harvey adds that where there is “widespread resistance” to enforced relocation, “the usual response . . . is brutal repression by the Communist party” (“Right”). Encompassing examples of land dispossession from all parts of the world at different historical periods—India, China, England, and the USA—Harvey’s argument is, as always, commendable in its commitment to the class analysis. He concludes by claiming that while urbanization “has played a crucial role in the absorption of capital surpluses, at ever increasing geographical scales,” this has been accomplished “at the price of burgeoning processes of creative destruction that have dispossessed the masses of any right to the city whatsoever” (“Right”).

These opinions inadvertently echo those expressed by the World Economic Forum and the Stockholm Environmental Institute’s agenda about the culpability of the Chinese state in rapid, unplanned, and environmentally hazardous urbanization. Additionally, Harvey’s views on the role played by the Chinese state in urbanization ap-

pear somewhat contradictory to his statements on its handling of the crisis situation fueled by the global recession. Here Harvey applauds the Chinese state for adopting what he calls “other aspects of a Keynesian program” that include “the stimulation of the internal market by increasing the empowerment of labor and addressing social inequality.” In fact, the Chinese government, according to Harvey, “increased investments in health care and social services and pushed hard on the *development of environmental technologies* to the point where China is now a global leader” (“Crises” 16; emphasis mine). My suggestion is that while we can view the Asian city in the terms suggested by Harvey when he mentions that the poor have been deprived of the right to the city, another way to see it could be as a locus for the emergence of a consciousness involving the close interaction of the human and the non-human, the natural and the built, or the village and the town: a “desakota” awareness that existed in historic Canton but also continues in modern day Guangzhou. In order to think of urban ecologies in China, it is crucial to wrest the idea of the city as necessarily separate from the village and to reclaim it as a space for all classes. This helps avoid dichotomizing the rural and the urban and facilitates the development of new literary and social concepts to analyze the booming urbanization that has made Asian cities such as Calcutta and Guangzhou epicenters of political, social, and *environmental* concerns.<sup>4</sup>

### City Botany versus “Botanizing in the Wild”

Ghosh has always been concerned about the effect of human excesses on the environment. *Countdown*, a short tract he wrote in the aftermath of India’s nuclear test at Pokhran in 1998, set up a dystopian scenario of the human and environmental costs of a possible nuclear explosion. In the novel *The Hungry Tide* (2005), set in the rainforests of the Bangladesh-India border, he explores the fraught relations between people and the harsh, dangerous environment surrounding them, including the efforts of the state to “protect” the non-human at the cost of the human. While *River of Smoke* does not directly espouse environmental concerns in the way some of Ghosh’s other writings do, the juxtaposition of the economic and environmental is clear enough in the opium trade and in the horticulturalist Fitcher Penrose’s mercantile explorations to secure Chinese botanical curiosities for European consumption. His assistant in these endeavors, Paulette, suffers a twofold disappointment of her naturalist ambitions. First, she is surprised to discover that Fitcher has not found his exotic plants in distant corners of China but that all that he has exported to England to make his fortune was secured in nurseries in Canton and Macau: “most anything that any plant collector had obtained in China—all the begonias, azaleas, moutons, lilies, chrysanthemums and roses that had already transformed the world’s gardens—all these floral riches had come from just one place: not a jungle, nor a mountain, nor a swamp, but a set of nurseries, run by professional gardeners” (194). Next, Paulette is also deeply disappointed to learn that as a European woman, she is not allowed into Canton. She is consoled by Penrose’s recommendation that she can explore Hong Kong, an island

on the eastern end of the river where she would be able to “botanize in the wild” just as she had always hoped (99).

These fictional descriptions of botanical explorations within the city and those outside it can be juxtaposed with contemporary accounts of Guangzhou’s mixed-land usage deriving from its history as Canton. In 2001 George Lin wrote that “a distinct zone with a relatively advanced level of industrial and agricultural production is taking shape in the triangular area bordered by Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macao” (391).<sup>5</sup> A 2007 study on sustainable residential landscapes in Guangzhou revealed that most residents desire “green homes” in suburban areas but land availability and environmental capacity make this an impossible dream for many (He and Jia). Fitcher’s description of Canton, though couched in mercenary terms, indicates these historic interconnections between nature and culture:

[Canton is] the busiest, most crowded city I ever saw. The biggest too, bigger even than London. It’s a sea of houses and boats and the plants are in places eēd never expect. On the roof of a sampan, pouring over the top of a kewny old wall, hanging down from some sheltered balcony. There are carts that roam the streets, loaded with flower pots; there are sampans playing the river, selling nothing but plants. On feast and festival days the whole city bursts into bloom and flower-sellers hawk their wares at prices fit to make an English nurseryman turn chibbol-coloured with envy. Why, I m’self once saw a boatload of orchids sell out in an hour and that too, with each blowth valued at a hundred silver dollars” (98).

These connections continue in present day Guangzhou, particularly in view of the National Construction Department issuing a standard of thirty percent “greenery-coverage-ratio” in 1993 for all new housing projects in order to maintain “minimum environmental standards” (He and Jia 241). He and Jia studied a residential community in Guangzhou, Riverside Garden, which they chose specifically because of “its mixed housing types, variety of landscape styles, and the numerous national and provincial awards and accolades” (245). The authors discovered that while there is overwhelming unity among the residents’ desire to maintain green coverage, these efforts are hampered by other concerns such as availability of water resources to sustain the coverage, high labor costs required to maintain it, and some loss of biological diversity. All of these are studied under the economic, environmental, and cultural determinants of “sustainable development” closely applied to developing urban centers. It may be argued that the desire for green homes is a class-mediated privilege that goes against the idea of the urban commons since these are not areas of public access and usage. In “The Future of the Commons” Harvey asserts, “Not all forms of the commons are open access. Some, like the air we breathe, are open, while others, like the streets of our cities, are open in principle but regulated, policed, and even privately managed in the form of business-improvement districts” (103). The same is true of residential complexes with green coverage that limit access to its residents, management, and workers.

Examining the cultural determinants of ecological sustainability, He and Jia mention that in Guangzhou, “the design of the traditional Lingnan Garden beautifully demonstrates the relationship between a place and its culture” (249). The garden culture of this region of China, favored by a climate that encourages a wide variety of flowering plants and other kinds of vegetation, is known as the Lingnan style. One of the characteristics of this style is the artful, painterly arrangement of built structures such as halls, pavilions, corridors, walls, bridges, flower ponds, artificial hills, and ancestral statue figures, along with flowering bushes and verdant trees. This style of landscaping fits particularly well with residential buildings by not only increasing the value of the homes on sale but also satisfying the peculiarly nostalgic urban urge for tradition. He and Jia refer to the Kang-Cheng-Ju neighborhood in Guangzhou, developed as “Kang Garden,” which imitates the classic Lingnan Garden style. About two hundred residential units were sold in the neighborhood within a single day. According to the authors, this record sale “justifies the assumption that the traditional garden culture style still retains its charm and has some feasibility in contemporary applications” (249–50). Given the garden style’s profitability, it is unsurprising that real estate developers have been quick to implement the National Construction Department’s directive of thirty percent green coverage. Additionally, this garden style is applied to other city structures including several Lingnan Garden Inns advertising affordable, aesthetic, and accessible accommodation in cities like Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

The aesthetic elements of Lingnan landscaping catch Robin Chinnery’s attention in Ghosh’s novel. Robin is on a quest to discover the painter of an image of the golden camellia provided by Fitcher Penrose and Paulette. He first visits the Co-Hong magnate Punhygqua’s “southern style” garden. This garden represents the leisure cultivation so popular among Chinese elite. To Robin it is “a place of most *extravagant* fantasy: there are winding streams, spanned by hump-backed bridges; lakes with islands on which dainty little follies sat precariously perched; there were halls and pavilions of many sizes, some large enough to accommodate a hundred people and some in which no more than one person could sit” (261; *emphasis original*). Punhygqua’s garden inspires Robin’s painterly sensibilities, but more importantly he takes the garden to be representative of its owner: “he is said to be a great sensualist, with a vast harem of wives and concubines, and an epicure too, famous for his banquets” (262). Co-Hong magnates were responsible for the smooth functioning of trade between the foreign merchants and the Chinese, though they were increasingly discredited when the opium trade reached inordinate proportions. Ah Fey, another rich merchant, who assures Robin that he will find the original painter of the golden camellia, owns an estate similar in scale and magnitude to the one previously described. On his first visit there Robin immediately notes the similarities in the landscaping: “Ahead lay a garden, not unlike Punhygqua’s, an artfully made landscape of streams and bridges, lakes and hills, rocks and forests, with winding pathways and wave-like walls” (413). The leisured classes’ tastes in a combination of built and natural environments in nineteenth-century Canton are replicated in modern-day Guangzhou, if not by the same class, then at least by those who can lay claim to a permanent space in the city through property ownership.



### Gardens, Untended Wilderness, and Profitable Plants

The question of ownership assumes critical dimensions in a discussion of ecological imperialism of the kind undertaken by Western nations in the nineteenth century; it resonates today in anti-globalization discourse as biopiracy. Discussing his explorations for William Kerr, representative of the famous Kew Gardens in England, whose voyages to Asia had been financed by Kew, Ah Fey tells Robin, "I arrive at Kew bringing with me more Chinese plants than anyone has succeeded in transporting before. These are plants that I myself have obtained for Mr. Kerr in Canton: he has no more idea of where to find them than he has of buying opium—in all things I am his pander and procurer. But the successful delivery of the plants is attributed not to me but to Mr. Kerr; I am but the monkey who travelled with them" (416). Scholars have analyzed the role played by biologists affiliated with the Kew gardens as "plant imperialism" or "nature's government" (Brockway, "Plant"; "Science"; Drayton). Though this is not the story told in Ghosh's novel, the work does set up a contrast between the thieving, plundering, and profiteering of the Kew gardens as an enterprise and the thorough professionalism of the Canton nurseries which thrive on local as well as foreign trade. Ah Fey delivers a damning judgment on Kew when he tells Robin, "In my eyes, Kew is not a garden but an untended wilderness." And indeed it might very well be considered so in contrast to the Lingnan gardens or the "Pearl River Nurseries" on Honam Island near Canton described by Robin to Paulette: "pots, pots, pots—that is all you see at the outset. But then, as your eye grows more accustomed to the surroundings, you notice that the containers have been skillfully grouped to create an impression of a landscape, complete with winding paths, grassy meadows, wooded hills and dense forests" (287).

In his landmark account of the Kew gardens, Richard Drayton writes of the mutual imbrication of nature and imperial power by observing, "The future of Kew in the age of Sir Joseph Banks rested on this faith that kings or empires might purchase their right to rule with plants and gardens" (44). This proved true in the case of British trade with China, where opium became the prized commodity to reverse the flow of bullion lost by Britain in the purchase of tea. Drayton also notes Joseph Banks had tried his best to encourage stealing tea plants from China. The opportunity came after the defeat of the Chinese in the Opium Wars when five treaty-ports were opened. In the period 1848 to 1851 there was a plant transfer facilitated by the British East India Company. A plant collector named Robert Fortune brought 2,000 tea plants and 17,000 tea seeds out of China along with Chinese experts to encourage tea cultivation in India (Brockway, "Science" 455).

The search for the golden camellia in the novel connects directly to the search for tea plants later in the century. Tea, or *Camellia sinensis*, is part of the camellia family but that is not what Fitcher is looking for in the novel. His trade is in flowers as objects of beauty, though he does mention that, following in William Kerr's footsteps, the golden camellia he is hoping to find has medicinal properties that could "reverse the effects of ageing" and be useful in battling "consumption" (118). The somewhat surprising discovery conveyed at the end of the novel is that this flower was a figment

of Kerr's imagination and there is no botanical equivalent of it in nature. That in fact there is such a plant and that it has immense medicinal value is not revealed to the foreigners, thereby containing it in its natural habitat in southern China.

In the 1990s the golden camellia was put on the list of endangered plant species, and since then the Chinese government has taken several measures to preserve it from extinction. One of these includes a golden camellia park and gene bank in the city of Nanning in Guangxi where it is showcased as a major tourist attraction. In searching for this elusive plant in and around Canton, the hotbed of horticultural exchanges with the rest of the world, Fitcher and Paulette pursue city botany as the only kind of botany available to them. The neat dismissal of the existence of the plant by the Chinese temporarily stops the search for it. Perhaps then it is strangely ironic that the preservation of the elusive flower is in a major city with a population of over six million people and one that is also dubbed a "green city."

## Conclusion

Ghosh's novel foregrounds city botany in the transportation of plants, their commercial use, and of Canton as its hub in the nineteenth century. I argue that this historical exploration allows us to examine Canton's legacy in contemporary Guangzhou where city botany is being used for commercial interests in real estate development. The class-mediated nature of these interests is evident in Harvey's recent writings on cities and on the future of urbanization following the global economic crisis. A model of postcolonial analysis of the urban condition that does not minimize the right of the underclass to the city would recognize that factors of development leading to rapid urbanization (and sometimes reprehensible forced land expropriation) are likely to be a permanent feature of the world we inhabit. While such rapid urbanization raises serious concerns about social justice, environment, and development, not all of these are or can be addressed at the state level. The crucial factor in addressing these concerns is, in my view, a country-city awareness that foregrounds the interrelations between the natural and the built in urban ecologies. Such awareness also works to minimize the human and environmental costs of urban development. The search for the golden camellia in Ghosh's novel and the golden camellia gene bank in the green forest in Liang Fengjiang Park, Nanning, points to the interrelations between the past and the present, the natural and the built, the human and the environmental. Not all botany is city botany, though much of it is likely to be in keeping with the urban ecologies of the twenty-first century.

## Endnotes

1. One obvious and rather notorious example of such a think tank is the World Economic Forum, which defines itself as "an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas." See the Forum's report "China and the World: Scenarios

to 2025,” where Section 4 on “Unfulfilled Promises” hypothesizes that by 2025 “land resources were under increasing pressure as development zones and urban infrastructure encroached on farmland. Land expropriation generated flows of rural migrants towards already overcrowded cities. Urbanization is, of course, a natural component of the development process, but the speed at which this was happening in China was extraordinary. Many municipal governments simply found it overwhelming: cities could not develop the infrastructure to sustain their growing populations” (38).

Another example of such thinking is reflected in The Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI), which describes itself as an “independent international research institute . . . engaged in environment and development issues at local, national, regional and global policy levels for more than 20 years.” The SEI has set up a “China Cluster” that warns: “Poorly constructed cities risk locking China on a carbon and resource intensive path of development for decades to come. The SEI China Cluster explores the challenges and opportunities of urbanization in the transition towards sustainability.”

2. Teju Cole’s 2011 novel *Open City* and Zadie Smith’s 2012 novel *NW* foreground the importance of cultivated nature for city dwellers in New York and London respectively. Presented as centers of leisure, relaxation, and community interaction, the function of parks and green areas in these novels is somewhat different than that of the gardens described in Ghosh’s novel. “City geography” would be a way of exploring the implications of Cole’s and Smith’s works, just as city botany is explored in relation to Ghosh’s novel.
3. I wish to clarify that while my argument involves environmental concerns, it also goes beyond them. For a succinct account of this methodology see Elizabeth DeLoughery and George B. Handley’s introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, where the authors state that their “definition of postcolonial ecology reflects a complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both history *and* nature, without reducing either to the other” (4; emphasis original).
4. The Nandigram incident of 2008 near the Indian city of Calcutta in West Bengal reveals the fraught situation of “development” of cities. Located about 70 kilometers from Calcutta, on the banks of the river Hooghly and opposite the industrial township of Haldia, Nandigram was proposed as a site for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) that would have included a chemical factory. The West Bengal government ordered forcible eviction of people from their farmlands using the logic that the proposed industrialization would create jobs for unemployed youth around the area. This led to widespread protests by a coalition of citizens, politicians, and public intellectuals that invited police firing leading to deaths of 17 people and injuries to many. It was proposed later that the SEZ site would be at Nayachar, a nearby island home to a few fishing families, which would not require massive possession of land by the state. However, the project was scrapped in 2011 citing environmental reasons. The incident reveals the inextricability of urban, developmental, and environmental concerns in economies in the global South.
5. In a similar vein AbdouMaliq Simone refers to such areas as “the peri-urban interface” or an “interstitial zone between the urban and the rural,” which usually but not always refers to emerging urban centers in the global South. Simone identifies several ways in which these areas function, but for the purposes of my argument, the most important one is that “these are territories of agricultural production that enter into varied circuits of consumption” to fulfill urban market needs (51).

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