HYBRID BAZAAR SPACE: COLONIALIZATION, GLOBALIZATION, AND TRADITIONAL SPACE IN BARABAZAAR, CALCUTTA, INDIA

Abstract

This article uses Mikhail Bakhtin and Homi K. Bhabha’s notions of hybridity as an interpretive tool in a traditional market area situated to the north of the centre of Calcutta, called Barabazaar or the Great Bazaar. More specifically, I study the changing effects of colonialization and globalization on a small group of Marwari paper traders in an area at the southern end of Barabazaar, called China Bazaar. Acknowledging the overlapping geographies, both indigenous and foreign, that was and is constantly negotiated in places such as Barabazaar; I define a concept of hybrid space.¹

Introduction: Hybridity Theory and the Bazaar

A market place or bazaar demonstrates local identity, and often defines one particular place as more significant from its surrounding communities. However, the trade and traffic of goods from outside the bazaar unsettles that identity. In India, Dipesh Chakrabarty interprets the marketplace as the meeting point of several communities:

In contrast to the ritually enclosed inside, the outside, for which we have used the bazaar as a paradigm, has a deeply ambiguous character. It is exposed and therefore malevolent. It is not subject to a single set of (enclosing) rules and rituals defining a community. It is where miscegenation occurs. All that do not belong to the ‘inside’ (family/kinship/community) lie there, cheek by jowl, in unassorted collection, violating rules of mixing: from faeces to prostitutes.²
Chakrabarty argues that the bazaar is a paradigm of hybrid outside space, echoing Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas on hybridity and the marketplace. Bakhtin critiques François Rabelais’ novel *Pantagruel*, believing that there is no other work that reflects so deeply all aspects of the marketplace. For Bakhtin, “the marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of unofficial order and official ideology, it always remained ‘with the people’.”

Bakhtin’s ideas of hybridity develop from Rabelais’ language of the marketplace. Bakhtin’s work on language uses the term hybridity to discriminate texts that are monological or with a single voice, from those that are dialogical. For Bakhtin, monologism denies the existence and validity of the other. Purity and clarity of speech with clear levels of discourse suggest to Bakhtin a closed and stratified society devoted to, “terror, dogmatism, reverence and piety.” Dialogism appears for Bakhtin where the speaker’s language bears the imprint of the other. In *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin argues that the Russian writer’s fiction has a dialogic or polyphonic structure in that it includes the voice of the other within itself.

Within Bakhtin’s notion of hybridity, he makes a fundamental distinction between organic, and intentional hybridity. Organic hybridity is a feature of the evolution of all languages that intermingle and change historically. Applying it to cultures, organic hybridity shows that they evolve historically through unreflective borrowings, appropriations, and exchanges. However, Bakhtin is more concerned with an intentional hybridity that has been politicized and contested, the moment wherein a single discourse one voice can unmask the other. Intentional hybridity sets different points of view against each other in a structure of conflict that retains a sense of openness.

In the context of India, Homi K. Bhabha’s seminal book *The Location of Culture* uses Bakhtin’s notion of the intentional hybrid to investigate the situation of colonialism. Bhabha defines hybridity as an inherent part of colonial representation that can reverse the effects of colonial power.
Hybridity is not just a mixing together, it is a dialogical dynamic in that certain elements of dominant cultures are appropriated by minorities and re-articulated in subversive ways. At this point, hybridity marks the jarring of a differentiated culture, whose opposing powers challenge the dominant norms.

One criticism of many studies in hybridity theory is their failure to ground themselves in the context of everyday practices. Smith and Godlewska suggest that many of the literary based re-evaluations of colonialism are ambivalent about geographies, “more physical than imagined.”⁸ Aijaz Ahmad argues that hybridity fails to move beyond the ephemeral and the contingent, masking long-term social and political continuities and transformations.⁹ Hybridity theory has only appeared recently in architectural discourse.¹⁰ This article furthers this debate, bringing together notions of hybridity with particular places in China Bazaar (fig. 1). In particular I ask how Bakhtin’s view of the marketplace, and Bhabha’s notion of intentional and organic hybridity, may be useful to better understand a contemporary marketplace setting such as China Bazaar.

**Nineteenth Century Marwari Culture in Barabazaar**

Over the last three hundred years merchant traders traveled from Rajasthan villages to towns and cities across northern and eastern India, becoming known as Marwaris. Despite what their name suggests however, Marwaris do not literally come from Marwar, the former princely state of Marwar that is now the district of Jodhpur in central Rajasthan. The most prominent groups of Marwaris in Calcutta were the Maheshwari and Aggrawal trading castes from the Shekhawati region, north of Jaipur in Rajasthan (fig. 2).

Marwari inhabitants of Calcutta numbered only a handful in the late eighteenth century. According to Thomas Timberg, “an early report tells of 80 Marwaris in Calcutta in 1813, another of 600 in 1833.”¹¹ Bengalis dominated Calcutta’s economy until the mid-nineteenth century, when their decline in fortunes was matched by the arrival of the Marwari. From the mid-nineteenth century,
Barabazaar began to grow as a stronghold of Marwari businessmen. After the construction of the Delhi-Calcutta railway in 1858-60, Marwaris began arriving in ever larger numbers.

As colonial Calcutta’s centre of indigenous banking and commerce, Barabazaar housed thousands of small gaddis, or small shop/office units (fig. 3). The floor of the gaddi was raised, keeping it clear of dirt from the street and monsoon rain, and covered with a mattress and white cotton sheet. As well as providing business accommodation during the day, the gaddi was often used as accommodation for an extended family at night. Mr. R.C. Gupta described how when his predecessors first came to Barabazaar they were content living in their gaddi, saving money to send back to relatives. Later people expected more and rented a room to live in, rather than a flat or house. Arun Sundariyat’s family business is still being run from a gaddi by three brothers in a very traditional manner, although the family lives across the river in Howrah.

Between the consolidation of British power in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the Indian Sepoy Mutiny/ Revolt of 1857, the British rapidly extended their commercial network all over India. Indigo, opium, cotton, and tea were developed as export crops, and British exports to India, mainly cotton, expanded dramatically. Marwaris emerged as important dealers, brokers, and financiers in these new markets. In Calcutta, the role of the Marwari banyan, or broker, to British firms importing cotton cloth was established in the late nineteenth century. The Calcutta jute industry was predominantly Marwari by the beginning of the twentieth century.

As Marwari banyans began to dominate trade, simultaneously Marwari shroffs or indigenous bankers strengthened their hold in Calcutta. According to Timberg, “a list of ‘Native Bankers’ in a commercial directory in 1864 is probably at least half Marwari.” This financial network was integrated by hundis or bills of exchange, and by arhatiyas or commission agents who acted for each other at different centers of trade across Eastern India. The shroffs who discounted the hundis, and the arhatiyas who ensured the movement of goods, tended to come from specialized
communities with strong migrant tendencies, such as Marwaris who dominated these trans-regional networks of trade.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries therefore, the business opportunities offered by colonial expansion arguably led to the development of hybrid trading arrangements. The impact of new forms of colonial transport, particularly rail, and the expansion of colonial cities such as Calcutta had a significant influence on new patterns of commerce. Traditional rural indigenous systems operated with more modern regional and national networks, managed simultaneously by Marwari, Bengali, and colonial communities. There were many differing and changing mappings of the bazaar framed by the differing groups of people that engaged with it. The different places of worship in China Bazaar, including the Armenian Church (1728), the Portuguese Roman Catholic Cathedral (1799), and the Synagogue, give an indication of the various communities that once lived there.

Colonialization and Traditional Space in the Bazaar

Rory Fonseca traces the characteristic spatial structure of, “the indigenous urban scene,” back to, “rural communities, and their basis on caste division.” Indian society was divided into five castes: Brahmins or priests; Ksatriya or warriors; Vaisya or merchants; Sudra or artisans; and untouchables or Scheduled Castes. Underlying the caste system were concepts of ritual purity and pollution. The Brahmin who had the highest status could not pollute others, but was prone to pollution by social contact with others. In the rural community, occupations related to caste position and were often hereditary. Unclean occupations clustered on the periphery of the bazaar while clean or dominant groups occupied prime locations.

In the urban setting these enclaves became identified as mohallas or neighborhoods, and gave the Indian urban market its character of clustered trades. Typically, a mohalla was a mixed-use area of residential and commercial activity that also contained its own mosque, temple, and
school. In Calcutta, several mohallas were contained in a Para defined as, “an area approximately 1/4 by 1/2 mile,” deriving it’s, “sense of identity from a physical feature . . . a bagan, or garden, pukur or pond, or a bazaar.”

China Bazaar received its name from a market selling Chinese goods that were traded between Calcutta and Canton. Originally the bazaar was closer to the river, parts of which were subsequently reclaimed and built on. China Bazaar appeared to come into existence after Calcutta’s re-capture from Siraj ud-Daula by Clive in 1757. Old China Bazaar Street, Synagogue Street, and Jackson Lane, and Bonfield Lane appeared on the earliest known plan of Calcutta, Theodore Forresti and John Ollifres, Plan of Calcutta. The typology of the Gaddi gave China Bazaar its characteristic urban grain in part - although now the raised floors have largely been removed (figs. 4 and 5).

While Fonseca’s analysis acknowledges, “the power structure within rural communities,” he gives no thought to the effects of colonialism. Reading markets of the colonial era as material evidence of the local way of life, requires journeying through the oriental market that exoticized other place of Western imagination. Anand A. Yang, in, Bazaar India Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar, contextualizes the space of the bazaar in comparison to the related and interlinked sites of village and caste. For Yang, “like caste, the village, was isolated by the colonial discourse as one of the major sites at which the ‘real India’ was knowable.” Like caste, the village was a paradigm of rural society, a template of the structure and organization of indigenous society and economy. Colonial representations of the oriental market reflect the biases of the colonial record, and follow the familiar tropes of an unchanging world that embodies tradition, inhabited by largely backward people.

Many of the new roads built by the colonial administration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries opened up new building opportunities for Marwari property speculators, who constructed multi-occupancy housing. Like their Bengali neighbors, this housing showed a
marked European influence, incorporating mass-produced elements such as cast-iron columns and balustrades that were often made in England (fig. 6).21

Many Bengalis identified Marwaris with the colonial establishment, and saw them as having taken over from it both in business and political arenas. The identification of Marwaris with the ruling elite was hardly surprising, given their former role as banyans, a position that was dependant on maintaining good relations with the British in Calcutta. In light of the relatively uneven fortunes between Bengali and Marwari trading groups during the late nineteenth century, economic critiques that were applied against the British were equally applied to Marwaris. Rhetoric similar to that used by Dadabhai Naoroji in his argument that the British drained India of her wealth was used against Marwari traders in Bengal, as people interested in making money but who sent it outside to Rajasthan.

Naoroji’s argument is mostly economic, claiming that money raised by taxes in India was being taken out of the country to Britain, and India was being drained or bled. At the beginning of the twentieth century Naoroji claimed that “the evil of the ‘bleeding’ and impoverishing drain by the foreign dominion,” amounted to, “nearly or above £30,000,000 a year.”22 The Bengali nationalist Paula Chandra Ray’s autobiography Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist, similarly documents a modern Bengali ambivalence towards Marwaris. Ray argued that Marwaris earned a thousand times more than they actually spent, “mere parasites,” who, “do not add a single farthing to the country’s wealth, but have become the chosen instruments for the draining away of the country’s wealth - the life-blood of the peasants - to foreign lands.”23

Though it would be an exaggeration to say that Marwaris and Bengalis live in two separate worlds with no social interaction, even today the two communities remain socially distant despite their close physical proximity in China Bazaar. This seems to indicate limits to diversity in the bazaar and perhaps limits to hybridity theory itself, highlighting the multiple or competing representations under which the idea of the bazaar is configured in the past or present. In reality, the bazaar never
was a place of fixed ideas and locations emblematic of a way of life. This changing social reality continues to this day.

**China Bazaar Everyday Life**

Ákos Östör in his study of a Bengali bazaar states, “the bazaar person sees the town, the people, and indeed life itself reflected in the rhythm of bazaar activities.”²⁴ He continues to describe the changing daily patterns of everyday life in the traditional bazaar:

Trade is brisk in the morning . . . Throughout the late morning supplies are brought in from neighbouring villages. By noon the pace becomes calmer. Bazaar people go home in the early afternoon for the main meal . . . Bathing, eating and rest take up the afternoon and some trading takes place in the late afternoon and evening. But the evening is the time for serious or light discussions among bazaar men, friends, relatives, or just passers-by . . .²⁵

Amongst the China Bazaar paper traders, Indra Kumar Kathotia’s work is most closely integrated to daily life in the bazaar and resonates with Östör’s analysis of the marketplace. Kathotia lives with his wife, daughter, and son in a house over the shop that he opens at around 9 a.m., and manages on his own until his son and manager arrive later in the morning. He has his lunch and some rest in the early afternoon. Unusually, Kathotia is a keen philatelist and numismatic, and in the late afternoon, he deals in stamps and coins. He described his evening routine:

I go to the market now from six onwards. I take one hour for the market where I interact with the people who are purchasing the material from me and who are selling the material to me for my paper shop . . . Then I just come to my home at around seven thirty or eight sometimes. Then I just take my bath and . . . I watch the television up to eleven p.m.²⁶
Symbolic of Kathotia’s close relationship with the bazaar combining public and private life is his house that is located in the middle of China Bazaar on the main chowk. Today this relationship with the bazaar is an exception, and the norm is much more geographically separate public and private lives.

Bazaar Private Relations

Conceptually, the bazaar supports multiple interpretations, a place of ambiguity and uncertainty for some. In a space where transactions are contingent on trust, interactions within the bazaar are based on overcoming the mistrust of the outsider. For Östör, “the bazaar represents relationships among men,” that are overlapping, multidimensional and reciprocal.27 Makers of goods in one direction are suppliers in another, and dealers or agents in yet another. He describes these mutual relations as follows:

“The concept of knowing the bazaar expresses the configuration and meaning of bazaar categories and relationships at a given moment. These configurations and indications of events are the hardest thing to learn. A trader must know how prices behave, what is produced where, who does what and how people are related to each other. A trader must know the way bazaars relate to each other, how bazaars are supplied and what to send to whom. Above all a trader must know people and be related to people.”28

Most of the paper businesses I studied in China Bazaar were started in the 1950s, and were taken over by the present generation twenty years ago.29 In the bazaar, close business and personal relationships can be seen in the often long standing associations with customers and suppliers that are often inherited with the family business. Kathotia’s business caters for wholesale and retail customers, who come from both the local area and further away. He explained the range of
his customers and why they choose his shop in particular, in his usual positive and up-beat manner:

this paper is being used by everybody, even by the poor and even by the rich . . . whenever a customer visits our shop he knows that the paper will be available here all the time so he don’t bargain, he just gives the exact money . . . We don’t say no to anybody and we know our customers what they require. . . And that is the thing that they never return dissatisfied from us.30

Mr. R. C. Gupta’s customers come from all over Calcutta and he described his strong relationship and deep commitment to them:

Here the business has been developed . . . over a period of years. So they know what to expect from me and I know what to expect from them . . . they know me, they know me by my face, they know me by my name, they know my house. Even in odd times when they are disturbed, somebody dies, I don’t go and trouble them . . . The entire thing is based on personal relationship.31

Sanjeev Kejriwal, who was in his thirties, obtains his paper from one mill in Orissa, and another in Madhya Pradesh. When I asked him why this was the case he answered as if it was obvious: “because my forefathers have been working with them, we have set a relation with them.”32 His customers have mostly been passed down to him by his grandfather, and his father, and as he admitted, “I have developed a few [customers], but major chunk of my customers are very old.”33 Mr. M. L. Bansal, who was seventy five years old, is a distributor for a paper mill from Puna with that he has had an association since 1970, and another paper mill from Kerala. Arun Sundariyat is an agent for Andra Pradesh Mills in Gujarat. He sells mostly to Calcutta newspapers such as, The Statesman, and Telegraph. Sheetal Prasad Jain, who was in his forties, took over the business
from his recently deceased father, importing paper from Commercial Paper Mills situated near Bangalore for the last 12 years.

These long-standing relationships point to the limits of mixing in China Bazaar, a pre-requisite for the phenomena of hybridity. In addition, Sheetal Prasad Jain indicated that while the nature of what businesses traded had changed, there was little scope for new families in the area as businesses were generally passed down from father to son, rather than being sold to new families. Such evidence seems to question both Bakhtin and Chakrabarty’s notion of the bazaar as a paradigmatic example of hybrid outside space. An outsider or migrant in a new place, such as the Marwaris of Barabazaar had to socialize to get to know people. Often driven by economic necessity, such a process was limited by family connections that mirrored business associations, relationships that continue to this day.

**Bazaar Social or Public Life**

Traditional social life in the indigenous urban setting was often centered on a *chowk* or external space that served the inhabitants of two or more *mohallas*. A change in land use from residential to commercial activities often happened around *chowks*, where a shop was located. Equally, the *chowk* was often just a widening of the street around a significant tree, shrine, or at the junction of two or more streets.

The *chowks* in Barabazaar have become more commercial with paper traders occupying one side of the shrine in China Bazaar *chowk* (fig. 7). The traditional mixed-use structure of China Bazaar has all but disappeared. Starting from the first world war, and especially from the 1940s, wealthier Marwaris began to leave Barabazaar. Some of them kept their shops in Barabazaar, while others relocated businesses to offices elsewhere. Family houses were converted to shops and offices and others demolished as new buildings commanding higher rents were built. In an area that once
had many traders who owned their houses and lived in the area, cheap rented accommodation now predominates.

A temple to Shiva is situated in China Bazaar chowk (fig. 8). Kathotia with his usual optimism described the “cosmopolitan” social life in China Bazaar chowk:

the people just gather there . . . the people from Bihar are celebrating their own festival, and the people from Rajasthan are celebrating theirs . . . so this is China Bazaar chowk, the only place where people can interact with each other. And you see, the thing, the good thing is this it is a cosmopolitan Barabazaar . . . there is no bar at all.34

Many Marwari families moved to South Calcutta to avoid the noise, pollution, and congestion of Barabazaar. The only one of the surveyed paper traders in China Bazaar who still lives there is Kathotia. Gupta’s family moved out of China Bazaar in 1964 and now lives in Park Circus, South Calcutta, with one of his two sons, and his parents. Kejriwal has never lived in China Bazaar, and lives in Balyganj, South Calcutta, with his wife, a daughter, a son, a brother, and his parents. Bansal previously lived in Old China Bazaar Street very near to his shop, but now lives in Balyganj. Jain used to live in China Bazaar but also moved to Balyganj in 1988.

Naturally, moving out of China Bazaar affected the traders’ public and private lives. Gupta, chose his words with care, and broadly summarized the changes:

basically [China Bazaar] was like . . . an extended part of the extended family. People were very close knitted, bad times good times, they used to share with you . . . Those days the business was open for twenty four hours, we had no other activity but to be there and be shop assistants . . . but now as people are
leaving, because of the lifestyle changes that is taking place, so they want the house, the family, and the businesses are getting separated.\(^35\)

Social or public life in the bazaar often aided interaction and with it the phenomena of hybridity. Some traders believe there is less communication amongst individuals and different communities in China Bazaar today. Bansal stated, “nowadays the people have become very narrow minded, previously they were very broad minded.” When I asked what he meant by this, he replied, “Narrow minded . . . means mixing is less.”\(^36\) Whether this sentiment is entirely true is difficult to judge.\(^37\)

**Globalization and Traditional Space in the Bazaar**

It is important to remember that space and place are not and never were, especially in China Bazaar, entirely local phenomena. Once affected by the modernizing colonial network of trade, China Bazaar now needs to be reconsidered in the context of contemporary globalization. Globalization marks an acceleration of the flows of people, goods and information established in modernity.

The everyday specifics of such globalization are illustrated in the sometimes contradictory views expressed by the China Bazaar paper traders, further questioning the idea of the marketplace as the paradigm of everything that is traditional in India. Gupta was concerned that when import duties were relaxed, Indian paper traders would not be able to compete with imports from Europe and America. He did not see his sons following him into the family business, one of whom was a software consultant; the other was studying in Calcutta. For Kejriwal, the future of his paper business was bleak, and he was thinking of opening a travel agency. As with most things he was ambivalent about his only son taking over the paper business saying, “sons do not want to follow into the footsteps of the fathers, with growing education . . . if he wants to change his line, wants to become a professional, I won’t mind.”\(^38\)
Even the ever-cheerful Kathotia was pessimistic about the future of the paper trade in China saying it was “drifting” away from the area. Some of the shops at the bottom of China Bazaar Street, that were previously solely paper businesses, were now selling kitchenware (fig. 9). A lot of the shops on Jackson Lane were also selling cards and festival decorations. Historically paper traders were located in this area because of their proximity to offices, newspapers, and other wholesale paper markets that was now no longer the case.

It would be easy to assume from such conversations, that due to globalization, any idea of China Bazaar as the traditional marketplace is at an end. This assumption does not recognize that new ideas of tradition are being invented continually. As Jane M. Jacobs asserts, “rather than doing away with tradition, globalisation has delivered new conditions for its emergence; installed new mechanisms for its transference; and brought into being new political imperatives for its performance.”

In Calcutta, the politics of globalization and their effects on traditional space are illustrated in contemporary debates surrounding local identities in urban conservation. The urban heritage of Calcutta (albeit a largely colonial, and Bengali version, rather than Marwari one) is seen as one way of attracting national and international tourist revenue to the city. While many are aware of globalization’s potential for exploitation, domination, and appropriation of local identities, in a relatively poor city, many are pragmatic about mediating with what might be thought of as a new type of colonialism.

While the material reality of tradition as an authentic expression of an isolated and culturally homogeneous group is no longer tenable, it may still be useful in identifying instances of difference and resistance, and the development of competing subject positions respectively. Arguably what is needed is a more mobile approach to the nature of identity in considering its relationship to place. It would attend to the constant interplay between positional and variable
histories, highlighting competing images, as well as the complex intermeshing of the global and the local. Such an account would note what Edward Said refers to as the, “overlapping territories,” and, “intertwined histories,” which produce the unstable conditions of dwelling in place. Together this urbanism marks a geography in which centre and margin, self and other, here and there are in negotiation - where there is displacement, interaction and contest.

**Conclusion: Towards a Definition of Hybrid Space**

What then do Bakhtin and Bhabha’s notions of hybridity mean for spatial identities in the city? Just as Bakhtin highlights two aspects of hybridity, namely organic and intentional, similarly hybridity theory points towards two facets in the notion of identity. First a fusing or merging in which new identities form by accretion, but more importantly intentional hybridity emphasizes a process of interaction that highlights how hybrid spaces may hold different identities together.

Such a notion of hybrid space might reflect Bhabha’s model for a hybrid community that derives in part from Bakhtin’s notion of the intentional hybrid. Bhabha claims that a hybrid community is created through incommensurable, not simply multiple positions, remaining contested, challenged, and divided:

> Hybrid [communities] find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the *partial culture* [italics mine] from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside: the part in the whole.\(^{42}\)

Bhabha borrows the notion of partial cultures from T. S. Elliot’s *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.\(^{43}\) Elliot referring to migrant societies, such as the Marwaris of Barabazaar, explains how they take only a part of their parent culture with them. The culture that develops on new soil has a highly sensitized and overly traditional view of the parent culture, often bearing little resemblance
to reality. Kathotia said that he thought the Barabazaar Marwaris were, “more traditional” than their own relatives in Rajasthan.  

Bhabha defines this partial culture as, “the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures” that “emphasises the internal differentiations, the ‘foreign bodies,’ in the midst of the nation.”

One obvious material example in Barabazaar of such foreign bodies are the reproductions of Rajasthan architecture one comes across in the midst of the bazaar (fig. 10). The resemblance of these Marwari structures to the havelis, or palatial mansions, of Rajasthan is striking.

For some Bhabha’s view of a hybrid community of incommensurable positions is paradoxical and utopian. David Bennet believes that, “if this concept is to have an affective value greater than that simply of ‘force-field’ say, then it would seem to imply . . . a level at which the ‘incommensurable’ resolves into commonality.” Bhabha disagrees arguing that, “‘conflicting interests forming temporary strategic alliances’ - is a good popular front tactic that has been part of many movements for revolutionary social transformation.” According to Bhabha, “the difficult non-utopian thought that one has to think: what structures and strategies of praxis, organisation, interpellation, coalition can be held, painfully and paradoxically, ‘in common’ between antagonistic political philosophies in the performative and practice-bound realm.”

It is difficult to see how particular groups of people in Barabazaar might accommodate such a model. Aspects of the politic, oppression and corruption that is part of present day Barabazaar, were presented by two young Calcutta architects Indranil Majomder and Raj Agrawal. Majomder described the murky nature of the neighborhood bosses who represent political parties in Barabazaar:

over the period of time, due to their proximity to the corridors of power, due to their proximity to the influential people, the political leaders, they have gained
some sort of - you can say they influence people. And secondly, lots of their activities are supposed to be not so legal, not so civilized activities.\textsuperscript{50}

As well as casting doubt on Bakhtin and Chakrabarty's view of the marketplace as an ideal hybrid outside space, such stories lead one to question whether it is possible to form societies based on hybridity theory, that avoid such obvious social and political failings. Such insights are a reminder that Bhabha's notion of hybridity is at best problematic. Gillian Rose has argued that, "the proliferation of disruptions, subversions, instabilities, undecidabilities," in Bhabha's work, insisting on the failure of the powerful from within, is worryingly optimistic.\textsuperscript{51} For Rose, discourses of the powerful, "have not so far subverted themselves away."\textsuperscript{52} Perhaps, as Doreen Massey intimates in what she refers to as a, "progressive sense of place," such a vision of hybridity would only flourish within a more evenly democratic terrain of power than that characterizes China Bazaar at present.\textsuperscript{53}

For some Bhabha's emphasis on foreign bodies in hybrid communities exaggerates cultural difference, valorizing fundamentalist cultural self-definitions among minorities. Nira Yuval-Davis argues that the creation of oppositional alliances aiming to transcend difference often compete with activists resisting the hybridization and fusing of their identities.\textsuperscript{54} There is no doubt that the fixing and hardening of identification around place has led to certain kinds of racism and xenophobia. I and others have described elsewhere the racial distinction of black and white towns, in eighteenth and nineteenth century Calcutta.\textsuperscript{55} One must acknowledge however, the difference between the objectives of ethnicity that foreground a shifting hybridizing politics of cultural multiplicity, and racism as a violating exclusionary process of essentialism, that ultimately seeks to negate ambivalence.

Ananya Roy gives a tentative working definition of hybrid space as, "fluid spaces with nodes of articulation, the spatio-temporal points at which the pure and authentic are distilled from amidst cultural corruptions."\textsuperscript{56} The material reality of Roy's pure and authentic, for the Marwaris of China
Bazaar, are their Gaddis, and Rajasthan *haveli* architecture. The cultural corruptions are the modernizing effects of colonialization and globalization on traditional Marwari spatial identities that I describe earlier. Such a hybrid urbanism echoes Bhabha’s notion of hybrid communities, emphasizing the foreign bodies that make up partial cultures. This concept of hybrid urbanism must also take the social and political arena seriously, engaging with narratives of the powerful and the oppressed.
Glossary

Arhatiyas – Commission agent
Banyan – Broker or intermediary
Brahmin – Hindu priest
Chowk – External public space
Gaddi – Shop/unit
Haveli – Palatial mansion
Hundi – Bill of exchange
Ksatriya – Warrior caste
Mohalla – Neighborhood
Para – An area containing several mohallas
Schroff – Indigenous banker
Sudra – Artisan caste
Vaisya – Merchant caste
Figure 1. Map of Calcutta.
Figure 2. Map of India.
Figure 3. Paper Traders on Old China Bazaar Street showing urban grain of *gaddis*.
Photographed Easter 2003
Figure 4. Plan of Old China Bazaar. Surveyed Easter 2003.
Figure. 5 Section A – A. North-South through gaddi and Rohatgi house. Surveyed August 2000.
Figure 6. Early twentieth century Marwari multi-occupancy housing, Barabazaar. Photographed August 2000
Figure 7. Paper traders at the shrine, China Bazaar Chowk, with Kathotia house in background. Photographed Easter 2003
Figure 8. Old China Bazaar Street with China Bazaar chowk on right hand side, and temple to Shiva. The Armenian Church is at the end of the street. Photographed August 2000
Figure 9. Hawkers on Jackson Lane selling kitchenware. Photographed Easter 2003
Figure 10. (White) Rajasthan *haveli* style architecture on Mahatma Gandhi Road, Barabazaar.

Photographed Easter 1999
In August 2001, the colonial anglicized name of the city of Calcutta was changed by Statute to its Bengali version, Kolkata. Today in the city both versions of the city’s name are in circulation, and no doubt will be for the foreseeable future. I have used the old version throughout this article simply because it is still the version familiar to most, except where the name Kolkata was spoken to me explicitly in interviews or where I have quoted from existing literature. I appreciate that the naming of this city has been and still is a contested issue. Equally, Barabazaar has had several names over the centuries reflecting the Bengali origins of this term. Other spellings have included, Burabazar, Burobazar, and Barra Bazaar. I have followed the lead of P. T. Nair, the contemporary Calcutta historian, and used Barabazaar. For an overview of the origin of the name of Calcutta, see P. T. Nair, *Calcutta: Origin of the Name* (Calcutta: Subaranekha, 1985).


7 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).


15 Swati Chattopadhyay, “Depicting Calcutta” (PhD in Architecture, University of California, 1997), 140, 141.


19 Ibid., 2.

20 I have explored the impact of colonialism on the urban spaces of Barabazaar in “Colonial Space: Health and Modernity in Barabazaar, Kolkata,” Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review 14, no. 2 (June 2003): 7-19.


25 Ibid.
27 Östör, *Culture and Power*, 102.
28 Ibid., 126.
29 Four fieldwork trips were made to Calcutta between 1999 and 2003 as part of research for a PhD, of which this article is a part. Much of my time in Calcutta was spent developing networks of contacts with many intermediaries. I came across these people through four organizations: the Rotary Club of Calcutta; Calcutta Numismatics Society; Society for the Preservation of Calcutta; and, the Foundation for the Conservation of Rural and Urban Traditional Architecture. The bulk of the research for this article involved completing six taped semi-structured interviews with market traders who deal in paper and stationary, on two adjacent streets in China Bazaar. This reflects what I admit is a very modest and partial view of China Bazaar. See the author, “The Marketplace as Hybrid Space: Re-reading Barabazaar and the City” (PhD in Architecture, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005).
30 Kathotia interview.
31 Gupta interview.
33 Ibid.
34 Kathotia interview.
35 Gupta interview.
36 Mr. M. L. Bansal, interview with the author, 10 April 2003.
37 Bansal was not forthcoming with me – whether he was naturally like this, or it was a result of language difficulties, or the busy nature of the shop at the time of the interview, I do not know.
38 Kejriwal interview.
39 Kathotia, conversation with the author, 10 April 2003.
42 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 34.


44 Kathotia interview.

45 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 30, and 33.

46 Havelis were built by rich émigré Marwaris as symbols of their wealth from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries in their ancestral villages of Rajasthan.


48 Ibid., 40.

49 Ibid.

50 Indranil Majomder and Raj Agrawal, interview with the author, 22 August 2000.


52 Ibid.

