

**Unmapping the Metropolis: urban restructuring,
governmental logics, and adivasi rights in liberalizing
Ahmedabad**

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the struggles and conditions of Baoris and Chharas, two adivasi (indigenous) communities living in Ahmedabad, India. It engages with the histories through which these communities were transformed into criminalized populations under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. As mapped Criminal Tribes, Baoris and Chharas were brought into a repressive policy apparatus designed to discipline and regulate, control and reform subaltern adivasi populations. This work documents the effects of this history in the post-colonial present. I assess Baoris and Chharas' differentiated inclusion and exclusion within the long and troubled trajectory of India's governmental power. Their struggles are situated within the dramatic recalibration of governmental logics and urban restructuring within the liberalizing metropolis. I consider the negotiation of rights and entitlements in a time and place wherein the Indian state is jettisoning its constitutional responsibilities to provide social welfare and democratic justice. This work argues that liberalization produces the informal to push the poor beyond the pale of legality, and suspend the possibility of accessing the technologies and categories of formal governance. I examine how the un-mapping of responsibilities, rights, and visibilities represents a central mechanism driving an emergent urban developmentalism that is reordering the city's moral, legal and physical landscapes. Just as Baoris and Chharas' experiences figure the greater erosion of rights and entitlements, their organizing also demonstrates how the developmental and rights-protecting apparatus of the Indian state remains a critical site of oppositional politics. I document their attempts to access and exercise technologies of governing in order to position themselves as legible populations within the classifications and categories of state power.

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Chapter 1: Ahmedabad, an Introduction

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. ~ Dickens 1859



Figure 1. Poster of Tata and Modi in Shahibag. Photograph by author.

The day after arriving back in Ahmedabad in October 2008, a banner appeared on billboards throughout the city. At the time, I was briefly staying at the Dadi Maa Ka Mandir, a temple complex in Shahibag. Across the road was the Calico Museum, widely considered among the foremost textile museums in the world, once the estate of the Sarabhai Family—one of the familial empires that accumulated vast fortunes in Ahmedabad's rise as a hub of industrial textile production in the late 19th century. The banner had been raised following the decision of the Tata Corporation to relocate their Nano car factory to the outskirts of Ahmedabad following protracted protests over their

proposed industrial estate in West Bengal. The decision was prompted by Ratan Tata's sense that the Government of Gujarat knows best how to treat big business. Tata's welcome was extended personally by Gujarat's Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, the financial wizard at the helm of the state's aggressive campaign of financial restructuring. As the brains behind Gujarat's long ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Modi has also played a central hand in the consolidation of a muscular ethnonationalism for which Gujarat is infamous. I use the poster as an entry point into Ahmedabad because it stands as a powerful emblem of the forces radically reshaping the city in its relentless "drive towards... Prosperity".

Ahmedabad is Gujarat's principal metropolitan centre, and India's seventh largest city. To invoke an old cliché, Ahmedabad presents a tale of two cities. With the Sabarmati River cleaving it into two halves, Ahmedabad's western districts are undergoing a rapid transformation. In particular areas, such as along S.G. Highway that rims Ahmedabad's western fringe, an entirely new landscape rises up. This is India Shining. Vibrant Gujarat. Sleek. Smooth. Connected. Lavish shopping complexes—the new temples of conspicuous consumption—mix with residential towers and private gated bungalows to personify a new horizon of exclusive urban territory and lifestyle catering to emergent middle classes in 21st century India. Here the new is built on the wreckage of the old, an urban restructuring driven by the state and private capital under the rhetorical cover of beautification, progress and renewal. It is a landscape that stands as a testament to Gujarat's surging economy and India's bold entrance onto the world stage.



Figure 2. Advertising real estate. Photograph by author.

This transformation is accompanied with a tremendous human cost. In many respects, Ahmedabad is a city in crisis, where the twin forces of economic liberalization and muscular Hindu nationalism are radically reconfiguring the capacity to live, work and act politically. Since the late 1980s, well over a hundred thousand workers have been ejected from formal employment in industrial textile production (Breman 2004), which traces the trajectory of liberalization over the past thirty years. These are the workers whose union, The Textile Labour Association (TLA), has collapsed; the union is now a shell of its former self. Gone are the days when the TLA commanded tremendous political weight in the city and state. Over the past decades the TLA has done very little to assert the rights of its diminished industrial membership, or to resist the greater casualization of industrial processes, and the relocation of textile production to concentrated sites of power loom and dying factories where there is little enforcement of existing industrial labour and environmental legislation. Ahmedabad is a city wherein adivasis, dalits, and Muslims continue to toil in disproportionate numbers within the lowest rungs of the urban hierarchy, alongside and in relation to an increasingly elite, Hinduized metropolis. The demolition of unauthorized settlements has become an all too familiar occurrence in the city, as the poor are systematically displaced to the urban-

rural periphery—repositioned as a mobile labour force servicing the metropolis but deposited in sites of concentrated poverty and social segregation. Ahmedabad and Gujarat remain strongholds of political hegemony of the BJP, and the setting for communal clashes and politicized violence, as witnessed in the city's most recent serial bombings in July 2008 (which preceded those in New Delhi in September 2008, and foreshadowed the attacks in Mumbai in November 2008).

Ahmedabad is increasingly a polarized site of burgeoning informality where the working poor are fixed within an insecure landscape of tenuous rights and entitlements. The specter of informality hovers over Gujri Market, for instance, a bazaar that unfolds each Sunday on the eastern banks of the Sabarmati River. Fanning out next to and underneath Ellis Bridge, Gujri Market is where men and women congregate to hawk a seemingly endless variety of commodities: t-shirts, Santa hats, Bollywood posters, pirated DVDs, pots and cell phones. They fix watches. They come to barter livestock, shoes, belts and tools. They peddle mountains of used electronics: circuit boards, remote controls, VCRs and batteries.



Figure 3. Gujri Market. Photograph by author.

Elsewhere, informality embodies the growing gendered dimensions of labour; in the efforts of women who work as domestics in the homes of middle classes; or those who sweep the streets each morning, the sounds of bundled brooms scraping concrete in the early hours. Or the ‘rag pickers’ (typically women and children) who comb through trash, weighing waste for rupees. Or in the choreography of men who shave faces in improvised barber chairs or brew chai in city streets. These are the women, men and children who cook, clean, wash, cycle, push, carry and sweat for little pay without any form of labour protection (social security, pensions, work contracts, minimum wages). They often labour in direct violation of the rules and regulations that govern the use and access of public territory. In this setting, Ananya Roy and Nazar AlSayaad (2004: 27) argue that informality must be understood “not only as political economy but also a way of life”.

It is a way of life for those who live within the various forms of insecure housing and shelter in Ahmedabad. To say that there is a housing problem in the city is a colossal understatement. It is a full-blown crisis. Twenty-five percent of the city is settled in its many *bastis*, or unauthorized settlements on public and private lands. An additional one million residents reside in the dilapidated *chawls* of the eastern city—tenements originally built to house industrial workers at the turn of the 20th century. Of course, insecure housing is nothing particularly new in Ahmedabad. It long preceded the era of liberalization, reaching back to the first *wadas* (settlements) that emerged and remained along the banks of the Sabarmati as labour was brought into the city during the late 19th century. Increasingly, however, what Arjun Appadurai (2000) describes as ‘spectral housing’ is viewed not as a problem but as the answer to the city’s housing crisis. The more fortunate among the urban poor are sometimes the targets of in situ upgrading schemes, but more often than not they are summarily displaced with little or no compensation from the state and private capital.

Though labour unions may have weakened, Ahmedabad remains a city of oppositional politics. No ethnographer is a tabula rasa, and I went to Ahmedabad looking for sites of insurgent citizenship. What I encountered was an uneasy waiting. In a time and place of eroding rights and entitlements, many of the urban poor continue to wait. They wait for meaningful inclusion and accommodation. They wait for social justice. They wait for promises made but seldom kept. This is not a version of Oscar Lewis’ (1959) passive poor trapped in a culture of poverty. Theirs is not an idle, passive waiting, but rather an uneasy, unstable unrest. While this research is concerned with class and caste struggle, it does not narrate the successes of a particular movement rising up to challenge the forces of state power and private capital. This is not the story of the Narmada Bachao

Andolen and its struggles to resist the damming of the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh and its efforts to assert the rights of the displaced. Nor does it chronicle the likes of the Chipko movement in the state of Uttarkhand, where the incredible organizing of adivasis has led to the reclamation of customary land and furthered the possibilities of sustainable forestry in the foothills of the Himalayas. I went to Ahmedabad looking for revolution but encountered what Asef Bayat (1997: 57) describes as the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” characterized by a “patient, protracted, and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive hardships and better their lives.”

Like all research, this thesis emerged through an indirect path, residing somewhere between the personal and political. Did it begin in the early 1990s, when I spent a year and a half living in India? This was a tremendous moment in the country’s history, the beginning of the structural adjustments prescribed by the International Monetary Fund that pried open the Indian economy and led to the last two decades of economic liberalization. At that time, India also witnessed the rising tide of *Hindutva*, or militant Hindu nationalism that engulfed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and led to the surging political power wielded by the Sangh Parivar and related BJP. Did this research start then and there? Did it germinate in 2002 when I collaborated with members of Vancouver’s Ismaili community (whose family roots trace back to Gujarat) in creating an award-winning theatre project following the bombing of the trade towers in New York City? Designed to disseminate Muslim culture in Canada, it was performed in conjunction with a visiting textile exhibition from Gujarat, and was re-adapted for the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, the country’s national public radio.

More clearly, this text draws on several periods of ethnographic immersion in the city of Ahmedabad dating back to fall of 2004. Two years earlier, Hindus and Muslims clashed violently when the Sabarmati Express train caught fire, killing 59 people, mostly *kar savaks* returning from a politico-religious rally organized by the Vishwa Hindu Prashad at the highly contentious site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The event triggered the bloodiest communal violence witnessed in Gujarat's recent memory. In 2004, I was living in Kalupur, a district in eastern Ahmedabad that was once the city's industrial heartland formed around the mighty composite mills and vibrant working class neighbourhoods arcing around the walled city. The mills have long been abandoned and working class areas decimated by the liquidation of formal sector manufacturing and severe weakening of unionized labour in the city. In such conditions, and as one of three concentrated Muslim areas in Ahmedabad, it was no coincidence that Kalupur was a focal point where Hindu mobs pillaged and burned in the violence unleashed by Godhra.

In the aftermath of the riots, I documented the adaptation of Augusto Boal's model of Forum Theatre by Vidya, a street theatre company based in the city. I had previously met Manisha Mehta, Vidya's artistic director, in Vancouver where we discovered a mutual interest in Boal's work. I was invited to Ahmedabad and accepted the invitation. This initial fieldwork led to a much longer period of research conducted between 2008 and 2010, in which I spent eleven months in the city engaged with several community struggles focused on asserting those elusive goals of social justice and equitable development. This research never set out to study *the* urban poor, if indeed such a rough conceptualization can be made without absencing the incredibly complex geographies that constitute urban poverty in Ahmedabad. This work grounds itself in a

close engagement with the struggles of Baoris and Chharas, two adivasi (indigenous) communities living in the metropolis. If I never planned on studying the urban poor as a whole, I certainly never imagined working with indigenous communities. It was only after a series of events and ‘chance’ encounters that I ended up spending considerable time with Baoris and Chharas.

It is their struggles that inform this thesis, which narrates their respective efforts to assert rights and entitlements in a time and place wherein their access is significantly compromised as the Gujarat state retracts from its (constitutional) responsibilities to provide social welfare and democratic protections. I argue that adivasi rights¹ cannot be solely considered within universal or equal treatment of citizens. I suggest that the history of liberal democracy in India resides within the machinations of governmentality and the politics of development—in all its varied, contested ideological guises. I begin by providing a broad context for understanding the conditions of India’s adivasis, whose histories are located within the trajectory of India’s developmental governmentality. I then establish the central focus of this work by situating Baoris and Chharas’ attempts to assert their rights and entitlements within the liberalizing metropolis and its recalibration of governmental logics.

Adivasis and Developmental Governmentality

I will not venture many generalizations of India’s adivasis, who collectively represent a vast, heterogeneous social field spread out across languages, cultures and

¹ Rights are considered in two registers: first, formal constitutional rights enforceable under the rule of law; and, secondly, moral rights, or the expression of what is socially just.

geographies. Their respective struggles must be considered within the contingencies of individual histories and specificities of place. Nevertheless, I can provide a rough backdrop. According to the 2001 census, adivasis (as Scheduled Tribes) represent approximately 8.2 percent (or 84.3 million) of India's population. More than fifty percent of recognized adivasis are concentrated in the states of Gujarat, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. In the northeastern states of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland², indigenous peoples make up well over 80 percent of the population (Devy 2006a). The definition of who and who does not constitute an adivasi population remains highly contested in India. Their sheer diversity, along with the flexible boundaries that demark indigenous and caste identities, makes their classification difficult and politically charged. I will not offer any definition as to what constitutes adivasi identities. More relevant is how these social categories are operationalized, and the manner with which identification often determines who and who is not administrated by modern state power in India.

By no means an easy classification, the term adivasi emerged in the 20th century (replacing tribal) as a population category through which to identify those social groups believed to be the autochthonous or original inhabitants of specific geographic areas in India. Although long described through the language and imagery of primitivism, adivasis (unlike dalits) have historically exercised some autonomy from the social

² I am aware that the designation of adivasi is problematic in certain areas. It is perhaps most tenuous to use the category within the geographic context of the northeastern states, where other indigenous groups often consider adivasis outsiders. In this setting, the terminology of adivasi is often invoked to describe the descendents of the indentured workers brought in by the British Raj to labour in commercial tea plantations. Further, while in common circulation within India, I avoid the terminology of 'tribal' simply because of the incredible pejorative and derogatory connotations this carries within popular discourse. The terms adivasi and indigenous are used interchangeably throughout this research, drawing on the efforts of those who utilize the categories to construct a national politics forged in common but differentiated identities.

systems that govern caste practices and hierarchies. In some regions (especially in central India), adivasis once commanded large territories, governing 'non-tribals', while elsewhere their military support was vital in preserving the sovereign power of Rajput and other princely states. Whatever political or social independence adivasi groups may or may not have possessed, their autonomy was critically disrupted through time. First by the consolidation of the Mughal Empire in the early 16th century, and then with the dramatic expansion of the British during the 18th century, wherein the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 began the process of appropriating adivasis' customary lands. The Act systematized adivasi lands within repressive land revenue policies and regimes of private property, which were placed under the management of British-appointed zamindars (landlords). A great deal more detail will be put on these colonial bones, but central to this thesis is the recognition that adivasis have long been the explicit targets of developmental governmentality. I turn now to unpacking what I mean by developmental governmentality.

In Foucauldian terms, governmentality invokes the many technological and discursive practices and processes through which subjects are rendered governable within modern state power. Governmentality is thus broadly concerned with the 'conduct of conduct', and denotes the various strategies, techniques and knowledges deployed to ensure the control and prosperity of populations (see Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991; Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996; Dean 1999; Legg 2007; or directly Foucault 1978; 1991; 2007). It draws on what Michel Foucault (1991: 102) describes as:

The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security. The tendency which, over a long period and throughout the West, has

steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of *savoirs*.

Foucault, however, was never particularly interested in the colonies (in his writings at any rate), and by extension the transformation of liberalism within the practices and politics of Empire. He was infinitely more concerned with the emergence of modern state power in the European metropolis. In traveling with Foucault to the colonized world, the substantial work of Ann Stoler (1995; 2002; 2006) is instructive because of the critical attention she brings to the ways that 19th century liberalism was shaped by and within the intimacies of colonialism. Stoler takes Foucault to the Dutch East Indies to demonstrate how European bourgeois identities were not only wrought but contingent upon the encounters with Others. In (re)reading the production of European sexuality through Empire, Stoler (2002: 159) traces the interconnections between biopower and the racisms that attempted to police systems of colonial governance, or alternatively, how racism figured as “biopower’s operating mechanism”. She highlights how the regulation of the intimate—through the microphysics of state power—was critical in the formation of colonial government. She thus situates questions of race within the centre of imperial politics, arguing that racism was “not subsequent to the bourgeois order but constitutive of it... racism was not a reflex, fashioned to deal with the distant Other, but part and parcel of the very making of Europeans themselves” (44). My consideration of the intersections between adivasis and colonial governmentalities begins with the awareness that modernity, in which self and society were shaped by 19th century liberalism, was forged within the anxieties and desires of Empire.

What bearing does this have on the lives of Baoris and Chharas in Ahmedabad? These concerns are taken up at length in chapter five, but it is critical to note from the onset that Baoris and Chharas were fixed within the taxonomies of race and caste that embodied a complex matrix knitting together race and biopolitics within the birth of government in colonial India. In other words, Baoris and Chharas were among the 198-*adivasi* populations who were subject to the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (CTA). The CTA instituted a repressive policy apparatus that produced criminalized *adivasi* populations—as social aggregates—fixing them within a fundamentally racist order of things. As identified ‘criminal’ populations, Baoris and Chharas were classified within the topology of the Criminal Tribe—a powerful racial imaginary through which *adivasis* were wired into geometries of power: the population categories, knowledges and cultures of empire designed to order, control, regulate and reform Indian society. The CTA fused race and biopower in British efforts to apply economy to the maintenance of controlled and productive populations. It instituted specific technologies of governing that were meant to ensure that *adivasis* were to be improved and remodeled into modern, productive citizens situated within a capitalist space economy, which, in Ahmedabad, meant wage labourers engaged in the industrial production of textiles.

This figures the manner with which India—as a colonial territory—became governed by a specific developmental rationale, or rather, a set of discursive practices that emerged within the framework of 19th century liberalism. India was never simply a site for imperial exploitation, but also a laboratory of modernity—a testing ground for British notions of liberty, nationalism, citizenship, modernization and development. There is little doubt that the term ‘development’ is slippery, one escaping any easy identification. It is what Michael Cowen and Richard Shenton (1996: 1) argue defies “definition, although not for

want of definitions on offer.” Simply put, development, as argues Michael Watts (2000: 166), represents “one of the most complex words in the English language.” I am less concerned with venturing a definitive meaning of development (if one were possible) as understanding how it was put to work within the context of British India and interlinked with liberal ideals. I am interested in the emergence of the idea of development—as a historically produced discourse—in a time when the British assumed the authority to determine the processes and trajectories of improving the lives of colonized others; those subaltern subjects framed as ill equipped to develop themselves. This draws on the significant attention that Tanya Li (2007) pays to the long and troubled history of developmental governmentality, at whose nerve centre resides the ‘will to improve’.

The will to improve is intimately bound up with capitalist modernity, state power and the genealogy of development. “The spirit of modernity”, argues David Goldberg (1993: 4), “is to be found most centrally in its commitment to continuous progress, to material, moral, physical, and political improvement and to the promotion and development of civilization, the general standards for which the West took to be its own values universalized.” Cowen and Shenton (1996) trace the epistemological origins of development back to the imperial metropolis at the turn of the 19th century, arguing that it materialized in the formation of modern state power to deal with the great social and political anxieties generated by Europe’s transition to industrial capitalism. “It was the turmoil and fear of revolution”, they argue, “that gave birth to the idea of development” (2). The will to improve was thus necessitated by the need to ensure stability, and development provided a discursive means through which modern state power could impose order upon disorderly, unruly landscapes, if only to mitigate dangers posed by

social and political revolution. The spirit of the age was well articulated by liberal reformer John Stuart Mill (1942: 6-7):

Much might be said... of the mode in which the old order of things had become unsuited to the state of Society and of the human mind. But when almost every nation on the continent has achieved, or is in the course of rapidly achieving, a change in its form of government; when our own country, at all times the most attached in Europe to old institutions, proclaims almost with one voice that they are vicious in the outlines and the details, and shall be renovated, and purified and made fit for civilized man, we may assume that a part of the effects of the cause just now pointed out, speak sufficiently loudly for themselves... Society demands, and anticipates, not merely a new *machine*, but a machine constructed in another manner (emphasis added).

The machinic quality of development is evident in Mill's words. In the context of colonial India, its engine was driven by the underlining assumption that improvement was only possible through the transplantation of the socio-political, moral, cultural and economic institutions, values and norms that defined British modernity. Developmental logics were thus mobilized under the auspices of 19th century liberalism to justify the rapid expansion of British power and its vast appropriation of territory and subjugation of people.

Modernity, however, was never solely contained to the territorial boundaries of Europe, but intimately shaped by colonial encounters. India had long figured prominently in the calculations of Britain's own development, but it was not until the early 19th century that liberal reformers called for a reorientation in the rationale governing imperial ambitions (see Legg 2007). India was the crown jewel in the proverbial colonial crown, and many of the foremost thinkers of the time were situated within the rank and file of the British East India Company: Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill, David Ricardo, and later, John Maynard Keynes. The composition and character of Indian society was a central concern for many of these political economists. Among the influential was James Mill,

whose *The History of British India* (first published in 1818) offered a scathing critique of Indian society and civilization (or lack thereof). Mill was explicit in his racialized contempt for Hindu and Muslim cultures, and expressed deep concern over the degenerative contagions poised by Indian society. Liberal reformers gave little credence to India's trace civilizations, and rallied against Orientalists (such as Warren Hastings and William Jones), who argued that as India's institutions had fallen into decay under the paralysis of oriental despotism, the British bore the responsibility to not only ensure their preservation but the resurrection of an 'authentic' India. Many liberal reformers were also contemptuous of previous Company bureaucrats, who James Mill (1975: 408) described as "petty tyrants" who "plundered all below them". India's pervasive poverty—seen as the product of its feudal agrarian aristocracy—was believed to be the root cause of much malaise and social stagnation (or underdevelopment) characterized by an alleged total disregard for law and order, and a territory void of the institutions and norms critical in the formation of modernity. A point of departure in such considerations occurred in the events leading up to and in the aftermath of India's First War of Independence in 1857, after which the territorial acquisitions of the British East India Company were transformed into a Crown colony governed directly by the British Parliament. This was a historical rupture that demanded a dramatic reordering in the ethos guiding the consolidation of British power overseas. The discourse of development or the will to improve was utilized to justify *colonial* occupation.

Development would bring order, and by doing so, create the conditions under which India's progress would be possible. Liberal reformers argued that India's improvement lay in the necessity to radically reconfigure virtually every sphere of life and governance in the colony: from recalibrating land revenue collection (thus the transition from a

zamindari to ryotwari system); the dissemination of Western pedagogy and education; building public works projects (trains, roads and irrigation); as well as the imposition of an Anglocentric code of laws. Reformers went to great lengths to articulate the steps and conditions necessary to ignite India's social and economic 'take off'—a process only possible under the trusteeship of a liberal doctrine of progress through which India would ascend the hierarchical ladder of civilizations. India's despotic (dis)order was salvable but only through the thorough application of British Reason, believed to be uniquely positioned with the knowledge and know-how to transform subaltern landscapes. As William Wiberforce, a utilitarian reformer, noted, Britain's colonial mission should "endeavor to strike our roots into their [Hindu and Muslim] souls... by the gradual introduction and establishment of our own principals and opinions; of our laws, institutions and manners" (Qtd in Driver 1992: 27). For James Mills (1975: 493), the enterprise "ranked among the noblest that ever were taken for the improvement of any country" helping to "compensate the people of India, for the miseries of that misgovernment which they have so long endured."

There were, however, violent contradictions that lay at the heart of 19th century liberalism, as one of its core tenants was the unequivocal commitment to equality and the ideal that difference should have no bearing on political and legal freedoms. But as Baoris and Chharas' history in Ahmedabad demonstrates, racial imaginaries were woven into the fabric of liberalism, whose institutions, cultures and knowledges rested upon racialized exclusions. For David Goldberg (1993), it was precisely through the production of racial difference that many liberals (of various political persuasions) sought to rationalize exclusion and thus justify colonial regimes. "The liberal paradox comes down to this", argues Goldberg, "As modernity commits itself progressively to

idealized notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity... there is a multiplication of racial identities and the sets of exclusions they prompt and rationalize, enable and sustain” (6). According to Uday Mehta (1990), liberalism’s politics of exclusion had their founding origins in many of the writings of the Enlightenment wherein European supremacy was rationalized in explicitly racialized terms. In other words, universalized ideals of individual liberty were entirely dependent upon exclusionary practices that allowed for the exercise of European liberty over that of racially inferior others in the colonized world. Working within the colonial executive, John Stuart Mill (1990: 45) oversaw massive reforms to British rule in India, and maintained that Indian subjects had not “attained such a degree of civilization and improvement to be ripe for anything like representative government.” While this was by no means a smooth discourse, without fractures and variants, there lay the perception that because Indian subjects were uncivilized and racially inferior, they were, at best, not yet ready for citizenship, and at worst, would never be capable of self-rule.

For Vinay Gidwani (2008), the discourse of improvement was put to work in a bid to resolve the inherent paradox of 19th century liberalism and legitimized the denial of civil and political rights of the colonized. Development, then, functioned as a central mechanism through which the British executive attempted to regulate and reform the non-European world. According to Arturo Escobar (1995: 56) development has been utilized to set “up the world as a picture, so that the whole system can be grasped in some orderly fashion as forming a structure or system”. While Escobar is interested in developmental discourse in the post-World War II era, this notion was certainly mobilized in British India to further the expansion of British reason embodied in a welter of institutions designed to transform India into the liberal image of the West. Intimately

shaped by Eurocentric ideals of liberty, progress and order, the will to improve emerged as what Gidwani (2008: 12) argues to be the “reigning watchword” that legitimized “the birth of a new modality of power in the colonies, ‘government’.”

Enter the Nehruvian State

The structures of governance instituted under British occupation provided a central framework around which the Nehruvian state emerged in the post-colonial period. Significant to this discussion are how the racialized classification grids produced by the British were adapted in the transition from colonial developmentalism to the governmental logics of India’s independent nation state. The promises of development were mobilized as the organizing logic of the Nehruvian state, and an immense, centralized apparatus was instituted to guide industrialization and the social improvement of populations. There were important continuities and divergences in this (contested) transition, but significantly, many of the population categories, policies and *savoirs* produced under colonial modernity were inherited and reworked by the formation of India’s independent government. Under the centralized planning of the Nehruvian state, the pledges of development were to be delivered to one and all, repositioned to act as what Gidwani (2008: xv) describes as the “suture” that would heal “India’s myriad of wounds”. The state would knit together the nation, uplift impoverished masses, and redress the injustices perpetuated under British colonialism. The Indian state would deliver equal citizenship rights, dismantle caste and class oppressions, redistribute wealth and enact rapid industrialization. And well into the 1980s, this remained a constant narrative in India, wherein the discourse of development remained the central rationale structuring the expression of governmental power.

In one sphere, the Nehruvian state established a model structured around import-substitution industrialization, in which the capitalist state took concerted legislative steps to protect India's domestic markets. The state's commitments were to provide a sheltered environment for Indian capitalists within a national economy. There were few measures taken to demand technological and productivity improvements from the captains of industry. The fate of Ahmedabad's mill districts provides a compelling testament of this history. They reflect Vivek Chibber's (2003) sense that in the formative years of charting its independent economy (1947-1952), state actors failed egregiously to discipline capital (as far as this is possible), and were thus unwilling to advance the interests of the country's substantial labour movements. Instead, the state opted for a system in which familial oligarchies (such as the Tata or Birla empires) quickly monopolized domestic markets vacated by British companies. India's path of industrial development has a bearing on this thesis insofar as it may partially explain the scale of urban poverty and proliferation of insecure housing that one readily encounters throughout urban India.

More pertinent is the realization that adivasis have greatly suffered within India's modernist development. This is a history that stretches directly back to colonial modernity. It was the economic policies of the British Raj that decimated the local economies of many adivasis, as the British expanded territorial hegemony beyond their coastal command and control centers of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. Indeed, the violent dispossession of adivasis remains a critical narrative within the trajectory of India's modernist development. This is a history that flows into the immediate post-colonial present (see Baviskar 1995; Radhakrishna 2001; Devy 2006; Devi 2007; Roy 2010).

Despite 63 years of liberal democracy, many adivasis continue to be among the most vulnerable people in the world. “It is indeed a matter of great concern for every sensitive citizen of India”, argues Ganesh Devy (2004: 3), a prominent adivasi activist based in Gujarat, “that the social and economic situation of the adivasis should remain plagued with underdevelopment, starvation and lack of opportunities.” These conditions can be gleaned in any number of socio-economic indicators: adivasis’ dismal literacy rates; high maternal and child mortality; limited access to clean water and electricity; disproportionate numbers within the ranks of landless agricultural workers; high vulnerability to gendered violence, regimes of debt bondage, disease and explicit state violence (Devi 1981a; 1981b; 1983a; 1983b; 1983c; 1984a; 1985a; 1988; 1992; Devy 2006; Food Agriculture Organization 2006; FoodFirst 2008; Asian Indigenous & Tribal People Network 2009). Given that most adivasis continue to live in rural India, they are situated within regimes of inequity that characterize the country’s acute agrarian crisis. Seventy percent of rural Scheduled Tribes possess less than 5 acres of land or are landless (Das 2009). Human Rights Watch (1999) notes that there continues to be 40 million bonded (mostly agricultural) labourers in India, 90 percent of which are either dalits or adivasis. According to the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP), 80 percent of adivasis live below the poverty line—aptly reframed as India’s ‘line of hunger’ (www.icitp-nez.org; see also Patnaik 2004; Ziegler 2006; United Nations 2009b). Many adivasis remained fixed in the debris of colonial modernity and state policies, such as the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which usurped adivasi lands in establishing 85 national parks and 450 wildlife sanctuaries. Despite laws prohibiting the transfer or sale of indigenous lands to non-indigenous people, the practice continues to run rampant. Most contentious is the state’s own vast appropriation of adivasi lands. By some estimates, over the past several decades, 25 percent of

indigenous land has been usurped in the name of 'public' interest. Agencies such as the ICITP continue to document the displacement of tens of thousands of adivasis who are driven off their customary lands in the name of public parks, military sites, irrigation channels, hydroelectric dams, roads, Special Economic Zones, mines and urban expansion. As I will detail at the end of this thesis, in such conditions, particular areas of the country are witnessing the escalation of a violent confrontation between adivasis, the state's security forces and the various armed and unarmed groups typically described as Naxalites, or those who subscribe to varying interpretations of Marxist, Leninist, or Maoist ideologies.

At the same time, the Nehruvian state did institute a substantial developmental and rights-protecting apparatus through which to improve the country's disenfranchised. The Indian constitution makes special demands that the state has a direct responsibility to provide for three general population categories: Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). These categories are defined in the constitution and administrated by various state agencies. Working with colonial classification grids, the central Indian state mapped and notified 645 indigenous populations at the time of independence under Schedules 5 and 6 of the constitution. This enshrined the state's obligations to those recognized as Scheduled Tribes. The constitution also established a permanent National Commission to oversee the delivery of constitutional and developmental measures for STs. It identified specific Scheduled Areas where the state is supposed to extend forms of self-management to indigenous groups. This has been put into practice, predominantly in the troubled northeastern states, where indigenous communities form Autonomous District Councils with legislative and judicial powers within the administrative structures of state governments.

The constitution demands that state authorities make special provision for ST populations in the realms of education and livelihood, and reserves positions in elected political bodies, public labour markets, and public education institutions. Often coordinated by Tribal Welfare Departments under the centralized Ministry of Tribal Affairs, a plethora of social welfare programs have existed to improve India's recognized Scheduled Tribes.³ The effectiveness of this developmental and subject forming apparatus shall be interrogated. Its fate or condition within the context of liberalizing India is of critical importance to this thesis. For Baoris and Chharas—as Criminal Tribes—independence led to their official decriminalization and reclassification as *vimukta jatis*, 'liberated castes', or the subject category known as India's Denotified Tribes (DNT). The precarious visibility of this population category will be explained at length. For the moment, however, it is vital to realize that such racialized classifications continue to play a central role in Baoris and Chharas' everyday lives, often informing their respective struggles to gain visibility and position themselves within usable structures of formal governance.

Negotiating the Liberalizing Metropolis

It is in the liberalizing moment that the vast majority of this research resides, and my work is firmly grounded in the material struggles of Baoris and Chharas within the

³ Many of these commitments were reaffirmed in 2004 by the current Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government and its Common Minimum Programme. The union government stated that: "The UPA administration will take all measures to reconcile the objectives of economic growth and environmental conservation, particularly as far as tribal communities dependent on forests are concerned... The UPA government will immediately review the overall strategy and programmes for the development of tribal areas to plug loopholes and to work out more viable livelihood strategies... Eviction of tribal communities and other forest-dwelling communities from forest areas will be discontinued. Cooperation of these communities will be sought for protecting forests and for undertaking social afforestation."

contemporary setting of Ahmedabad. I have spent considerable time with these two communities, and this thesis draws on firsthand engagement with their respective efforts to assert and maintain rights and entitlements in the metropolis. While there is a substantial literature documenting the conditions of rural adivasis, those living in India's cities are seriously understudied. Many adivasis live and work in cities, often as migrant and seasonal labourers, but as Chharas and Baoris demonstrate, adivasis have long settled or been settled in the urban landscape, where they are often sequestered to urban ghettos and within the most insecure informal economies (particularly in construction, domestic work and petty trading). The current situation facing many adivasis across India represents a grave state of affairs, one that is rendered more precarious within the country's dramatic reorientation of state power. Since the late 1980s, much has shifted within India's social, political and economic landscapes, and we have witnessed the Indian state moving away from its obligations to provide social welfare and constitutional justice. In this respect, Gujarat figures prominently as it possesses arguably the most aggressive state government in India pursuing the deregulation and privatization of governance and industry. Gujarat, and Ahmedabad specially, deserve consideration because here the forces of economic liberalization intersect with an agenda of state-sponsored ethnonationalism (or Hindutva) that virulently targets minority rights (Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Gidwani 2008).

The dramatic restructuring of state power in Gujarat continues under the force of liberalization. I argue throughout this work that a key characteristic of which is the greater erosion of the structures and categories of governance. This is a transformation characterized by a rapid reordering in the state's commitments to the poor. I begin this thesis by narrating the experiences of Baoris in examining the processes through which

the city government attempts an urban cleansing by displacing the community from the inner city and relocating them to the urban-rural frontier. At issue is how the informalization of rights and entitlements figures as a primary mechanism driving the violent restructuring of Ahmedabad's moral, legal and physical landscapes. I argue that liberalization accelerates the production of the informal to push the poor beyond the pale of legality, and erodes the possibility of accessing legislative protections and the structures of formal governance. Informalization is considered as a tactic of power to reposition both constitutional and moral rights in a suspended space, wherein they are subject to a seemingly endless renegotiation. Informal processes are not considered beyond state control, nor are they the sole domain of the poor. Rather, they are bound up in what Ananya Roy (2003) describes as new regimes of (un)regulation that are reconfiguring the systems of urban governance. Further, the informal does not preclude political negotiation. Baoris' displacement suggests that along with the greater suspension of basic fundamental rights and visibilities, the poor in Ahmedabad are forced into extra-legal parleys with the state and (increasingly) private capital. A central argument of this thesis is that the recalibration of state power involves the systematic un-mapping of the technologies and administrative categories designed for the governance and regulation of adivasi populations. The issue of eroding visibility within state categories and classifications is elaborated in traveling to Chharanagar, where the legacies handed down by the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 are considered.

The struggles of Baoris and Chharas are situated within the recalibration of governmental logics in Ahmedabad. Their lives are increasingly fixed within new regimes of deregulation, informality and flexibilization that are reorienting the structures

of formal governance and instituting new forms of social regulation. In this climate,

Nancy Fraser (2009: 116) reminisces how Foucault:

taught us to see the dark underside of even its [a fordist mode of social regulation] most vaunted achievements. Viewed through his eyes, social services became disciplinary apparatuses, humanist reforms became panoptical surveillance regimes, public health measures became deployments of biopower, and therapeutic practices became vehicles of subjection. From his perspective, the components of the postwar social state constituted a carceral archipelago of disciplinary domination, all the more insidious because self-imposed.

In historicizing the historian, Fraser's own interest lies in mapping a post-disciplinary governmentality within the topologies of a neoliberal (read post-fordist) world order.

"What is emerging", argues Fraser, "is a new type of regulatory structure, a multi-layered system of globalized governmentality, whose full contours have yet to be determined" (124). She argues that the regulatory practices and structures of social life are "undergoing a process of *de*-socialization" in which, "The resulting 'race to the bottom' fuels myriad projects of *deregulation*, as well as efforts to privatize social services, whether by shifting onto the market or devolving them onto the family" (124).

In interrogating the differentiated trajectories and contemporary struggles of Baoris and Chharas, I seek to contextualize the unfolding of liberalization's complex processes in a specific time (history) and place (geography)—within the intimacies of Baoris and Chharas' everyday lives. Their lives are increasingly shaped by processes under which the market and civil society are positioned as privileged agents of development, and on whose shoulders the Gujarat state jettisons its constitutional responsibilities to provide social welfare (such as subsidized foods, housing, water, sanitation, education, health care, and land tenure). For Fraser, this is the terrain of "de-statized governmentality" in which welfare and developmental policies are giving way to "formal technologies of economic accountability... vouchers replace public services, and privatized 'risk

management' replaces social insurance, individuals are made to assume new levels of 'responsibility' for their lives" (127).

This thesis revolves around a comparative study between two adivasi communities who possess shared histories, conditions and issues. As *ghumantus*, or nomads, with long histories of itinerant activity in northwestern India, Chharas and Baoris have long been situated within an elaborate legal and social matrix produced under colonial modernity. Both settled in Ahmedabad during the late 19th and 20th century, as the city emerged as a hub of industrial textile production. Both are located among the urban poor. They are locked within the lower echelons of the city's social hierarchy, subject to various forms of overt discrimination. They have long been relegated to informal economies, where they labour as petty traders, domestic workers and artisans with little or no access to capital. Baoris and Chharas belong to the indigenous groups who have become known as the Denotified Tribes of India. While such aggregates were and remain constructed upon unstable, spatially bound imaginaries, they nonetheless produce effects that have proven remarkably durable. With important differences, Baoris and Chharas' inability to access and occupy substantive inclusion and citizenship continues to be structured around racialized exclusions. At the same time, Chharas and Baoris are situated differently within the structures and (re)orderings of governmental logics in Ahmedabad. There are important differences to be considered in the ways they were brought into the machinations of modern state power. Their settling in the metropolis took place under remarkably varied circumstances and amidst conditions that produced differed effects in the post-independence period. As a consequence, they are positioned differently vis-à-vis the state, a positioning that informs their respective tactics to access state resources, inclusion and civic entitlements.

The experiences and conditions of Baoris and Chharas, however, intersect insofar that neither organizes to contest state power so much as to position themselves within the gaze of the state's (now transforming) developmental apparatus. In other words, they are working very hard to establish themselves within usable categories of governmentality, namely, as legible populations. Just as we stand on the precipice of a 'post-development', it is precisely the classifications produced by colonial modernity and adapted by the Nehruvian state that represent the principal means through which these two adivasi communities attempt to gain access to critical state resources and constitutional protections. Their (in)abilities to do so often depends directly upon their capacity to exercise, or at the very least access, the instruments of state power: from ration cards to caste certificates, voting records to electricity bills, social categories to census data, schools to resettlement programs (among the technologies of governing that Foucault is so critical of). As discussed in the closing chapter, this kind of politics reaffirms the territoriality of the Indian state as the dominant frame within which to confront injustices and contest the very meaning of development in contemporary India. Just as the Indian state continues to create the conditions conducive to transnational capital and privatize social welfare, the actions of Baoris and Chharas suggest that it nonetheless remains the principal engine driving the project of nation building.

I do not narrate the struggles of Baoris and Chharas from a distance. Rather, I travel through a series of ethnographic encounters. I emerge from these to stage a number of critical interventions. The stage is set. The players have taken their places. It is time for an arrival scene.

Chapter 2: Purifying the Public Sphere

Arrival Scene

Traveling in an auto-rickshaw on University Street in Ahmedabad, Baori Samaj is partially obscured by a 'park', where, most days, young men congregate to bat a weathered cricket ball along an improvised pitch, or sit huddled in tight groups betting at cards. Driving along in jostling traffic, you may hardly notice a few makeshift vending stalls set up, where a couple of women sit presiding over their wares: neatly stacked rocks, dyed blue and green, and various plaster statues, one holding a red rose. You have to turn off University Street to see Baori Samaj fan out in a dense concentration of single story homes. The more solid are built of brick and mortar, others little more than tented plastics with earthen floors. Large stones and bricks weigh down roofs of corrugated tin or plastic, positioned to resist the seasonal winds that sweep through the city during the winter months, or to resist the torrential monsoon rains. A network of narrow lanes radiate out from the street, leading back into a dense web of houses that constitute the *basti* (unauthorized settlement). A great cacophony of sound and movement greets one in Baori Samaj as people congregate on the road; women squat over cooking fires, dry twigs combusting into flame, while nimble fingers roll out thin chapattis. Goats are tethered here and there, sporting a line of colour along their backside, neon pinks and purples: the markings of ownership. The elderly rest on woven mats in the shade to escape the searing noonday sun as children roam about under watchful eyes. Home to some 10,000 people, Baori Samaj is one of the 'slums' situated in central Ahmedabad, located as it is between the city's commercial centre and expansive university district. It may not be the city's largest *basti* but it is certainly

one of its oldest. Originally from the neighbouring state of Rajasthan, its residents—the Baori—migrated to Ahmedabad back in the 19th century after abandoning ancestral lands around the city of Jodpur due to what is remembered in the community as a prolonged and devastating famine in 1857.⁴

In this opening chapter, I narrate Baoris' history of migration and settlement in Ahmedabad, thus sketching their precarious existence on the periphery of formal governance. This leads to an examination of the violent steps taken by Ahmedabad's city government to evict Baori families. At issue is the informalization of Baoris' tenure rights. I argue that informal processes are a key component within the liberalizing metropolis. Such processes, however, are not considered outside the workings of state power, but rather intimately wired into the recalibration of governmental logics. These conditions are set amidst a broader examination of the geographies of informal housing, the scale of Ahmedabad's housing crisis, and the reorientation of the state's 'rehabilitation' policy. I document Baoris' displacement from the inner city to examine the various strategies deployed by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) to legitimize the erasure of the urban poor within the transformation of the city's moral, legal and administrative landscapes.

⁴ Although the famine Baoris' described occurred earlier, it is salient to situate this narrative within the significant attention that Mike Davis (2001) brings to the intimate interconnections between starvation, environmental conditions and governmental policy in colonial India. For Davis, an accurate measure of Britain's tyranny can be gleaned in the "secret history of the nineteenth century" (6), where, between 1876-79 and 1892-1902, an estimated 12.2 to 29.3 million people in India died as a result of famine. The failing monsoon rains in conjunction with specific economic policies produced 'holocaust' famines, thus resulting in tens of millions succumbing to a range of related illnesses: starvation, dysentery, bubonic plague, malaria, and cholera. Amidst such conditions, Davis urges a radical reconsideration of the achievements of empire at the height of liberal capitalism. Indeed, he asks: "how do we weigh smug claims about the life-saving benefits of steam transportation and modern grain elevators when so many millions, especially in British India, died alongside railroad tracks or on the steps of grain depots" (9). Relevant to our discussions in Ahmedabad is that such famine conditions were extreme for many of India's adivasis, who were devastated by the land revenue policies and forest laws enacted by the British during the early 19th century, which, in short, stripped adivasis of their customary use and access to land throughout British India. The debris of this policy history will be examined in chapter 5.

Settling in the City

The history of Baoris' migration lives on, passed down through generations in Gulbai Tekra. The persistent droughts of the mid-19th century forced Baoris to the open road, a great exodus with some families settling in Sindh (now a province in Pakistan) and others in Ahmedabad. Baoris have since spread throughout Saurashtra in Gujarat, from Ahmedabad to Surat, forming a familial network that spans both state and national borders. The Baori initially settled in Ahmedabad on the western banks of the mighty Sabarmati River—its close proximity provided easy access to water and positioned the community within walking distance to the walled city on the river's eastern shores. The Sabarmati's annual flooding during the monsoon, however, forced Baoris to relocate further inland, settling in the area they named Gulbai Tekra; 'Gulbai' after their Parsi landlord, and 'Tekra' or 'hilly region' and thus the best refuge during seasonal rains.



Figure 4. Main road in Baori Samaj. Photograph by author.



Figure 5. A home in Baori Samaj. Photograph by author.

Given their long tenure, Baoris' collective memory runs deep in the city. They remember the British. They remember the textile mills, those bastions of industry that built the modern city. They remember labouring as masons (their traditional skill) on Ellis Bridge, the great feat of engineering commanded by the British to straddle the Sabarmati and thus open what emerged as Ahmedabad's commercial heartland. Baoris have watched the city grow like a hungry ghost, gobbling up surrounding farmlands and forest as it surged westwards. Settled in the city for well over a hundred years, Baoris' adivasi (indigenous) identity remains enshrined in song, custom, dance, dress and language. They speak a hybrid of Marwari and Gujarati. They sing the songs carried with them from Rajasthan. They have adapted and reworked themselves into the social geographies of the city. Unlike other labourers who migrated to Ahmedabad during the late 19th and early 20th century, Baoris never managed to access formal employment in industrial textile manufacturing. Employment in textile production was determined along the fault lines of caste and religion, with specific caste Hindus and Muslims occupying

particular jobs in manufacturing processes. It would have been extremely difficult for Baoris (as adivasis) to access these labour markets and related legislative protections (social security, minimum wages, pensions, housing). Excluded from formal employment and the powerful trade unions that organized to represent the collective interests of industrial workers, the Baori worked themselves into Ahmedabad's informal economy as casual labourers, along with the selling of oxen to farmers before the widespread introduction of mechanized agriculture. During the city's boom years of textile production, the community made rope out of rejected yarn from cotton mills, weaving together strands for sale in local bazaars and surrounding villages. More recently, Baoris have used their expertise as artisans to produce plaster statues. Statue making is—by and large—men's work, and it spills out into every nook and cranny of public space: the mixing of Plaster of Paris with straw, the careful pouring into flexible, plastic moulds, along with the sawing, sanding and painting that give shape to intricate figures, some towering, ten feet high, of Ganesh, Shiva, Kalimata, or the small armies of Sai Babas decorated in bright, transcendent orange.



Figure 6. Sai Babas. Photograph by author.



Figure 7. Ganesh. Photograph by author.

Many women in Baori Samaj find work as domestics in the homes of surrounding middle classes; their labour embodies the growing gendered dimensions of particular informal labour markets, where women are typically confined to the most vulnerable and lowest paying of jobs. The early evenings find the young men of the community roaming busy intersections along C.G. Road or the Law Gardens hawking belts and watches.

The employment of the young makes an important contribution to family incomes. In Baori Samaj, the opportunity for higher levels of education and training simply do not exist. The young are expected to shoulder the burden of poverty. While the community may not occupy the lowest rungs of the urban economy, families struggle under the weight of persistent poverty. Their shared labour demonstrates the great ingenuity required to survive near the bottom of the city's labour hierarchy as craftsmen, domestics and hawkers. Given their long history in the city, Baoris live in a well-established *basti* that exists in a state of semi or extra-legality. They are settled on both public and private lands. Recently regularized by the newly privatized Torrent Power, for decades, the community pirated electricity off the main grid. And a few years ago, while a new water line was being dug through the area, residents managed to bribe city workers to build a junction pipe that brought communal water taps. Their long history of paying rents and more recent fees for electricity, their limited water supply and scant sewer infrastructure all indicate Baoris' position on the fringe of the city.

Informalizing Tenure Rights

In 2008, I returned to Baori Samaj after an absence of several years. At the time, I was working with two of its residents. Together we were making a short documentary video focused on Baoris' ongoing struggles with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, the city government, or simply the AMC for short. I first met Suresh and Kalu while conducting research in Ahmedabad in 2004 on the adaptation of Augusto Boal's model of Forum Theatre by Vidya Educational and Charitable Trust, a street theatre company based in the city. Suresh and Kalu are founding members of Vidya and seasoned street theatre practitioners. They are also prominent community musicians in Baori Samaj,

which means they play significant roles as oral historians. Part of my research in 2008-09 involved working with Vidya in a video-mentoring program, wherein I donated a laptop computer and digital video camera to the company, and spent considerable time training them in the techniques of video production. As part of this workshop, Suresh and Kalu expressed a desired to use video to document their community's most pressing issue, namely, the sustained efforts of the city government to displace them from Gulbai Tekra.

In November 2008, we organized a series of interviews with community leaders in an effort to collect testimonies and video footage that documented this struggle. Many meetings were held in a large open clearing just off the roadway cutting through the middle of the community. On one occasion, Maghabhai, an important community leader, a burly, serious man in his early fifties, began his interview by explaining that we were sitting amongst the ruins of what used to be his family home. It was a highly charged landscape that bore the skeletons of many former homes: cement foundations overgrown with vegetation, darkened fire pits and crumbling brick walls—the eerie remnants of the past.



Figure 8. Land cleared out by the AMC. Photograph by author.



Figure 9. Remains of a home. Photograph by author.

“The Corporation brought a sudden attack on us”, explained Maghabhai, recalling the day in 2002 when the AMC showed up to evict families from the area. He produced a

stack of photographs carefully wrapped in plastic that provided the evidence of police yielding *lathi* sticks. “Our women and children resisted by wrapping themselves in the national flag of India. They lay down in the streets.” More photographs were procured at the time, these of former homes with families posed in domestic scenes. “When we see these photographs”, Maghabhai began to explain but was unable to finish the thought, his words trailed off in the pain of memory (Interview, November 2008).



Figure 10. Evidence of police evicting families. Photograph by author.

This was difficult testimony to witness. The eviction had not come as a surprise to residents, given their long struggle (dating as far back as the 1970s) with the AMC and its efforts to clear Baoris out of Gulbai Tekra, which, in recent decades, has become prime real estate in the central city. The community has long been considered a blight on the urban landscape—clearly a convenient source of cheap domestic labour but equally an eye sore for the middle class neighbourhoods that have come to encircle Baori Samaj. The eviction in 2002 may not have come as a surprise but residents

received no prior warning when city authorities descended on the community, armed with what the AMC alleged was an eviction notice sanctified by the Supreme Court of India. It was a document that residents claim was never procured. City authorities were not only fortified by a court order. They had also brought significant muscle, arriving with bulldozers to raze homes and several hundred police officers to be deployed in the event of any resistance. The AMC had tried to evict families earlier in 2002, but at that time, residents were successful in getting a three-month stay order from the High Court of Gujarat that temporarily blocked the city from carrying out any demolitions in the community. The AMC had proceeded to take the matter to the Supreme Court of India, where the Baori were unable to attend due to a lack of financial resources required to travel to New Delhi (not to mention to hire an attorney). The AMC won the case, in which the state claimed Baoris were encroaching on public land that the city had designated to its Town Planning Scheme. The city legitimized evictions on the basis that Baoris were illegally occupying an 80-foot roadway outlined on city maps. This is a familiar strategy deployed by the planning apparatus, which—in Haussmannian fashion—mobilizes town planning as a central mechanism for evicting the poor who are enframed as encroaching on public lands and threatening existing planning (see Roy 2003; Ramanathan 2005; 2006; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008; Bhan 2009).⁵

Given the courts increasing role in the process of urban dispossession (to be elaborated in chapter 4), it is likely that the AMC did possess an order from the Supreme Court,

⁵ Modern planning in Ahmedabad is guided by two interrelated documents: the city's Development or Master Plan and related Town Planning Schemes (TPS); both of which are administrated by either the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation or the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA). While the AMC typically implements TPS within city limits, AUDA targets infrastructure along the shifting urban-rural frontier in advance of urban expansion. The city's Master Plan articulates the broad horizon of urban development in Ahmedabad by establishing projected growth patterns, transportation systems, road networks, water supply, etc, while Town Planning Schemes are the mechanisms through which the Master Plan is enacted by various state agencies. If the city's Master Plan is the blunt instrument of urban development, then TPS are the scalpels carving up the anatomy of the city. There is, of course, a great deal of violence wrapped up in such instruments of urban governmentality. In the case of Baoris, we glean how TPS are routinely used to flatten complex social worlds and forcibly remove the urban poor.

one that provided the legal justification for the demolition of those homes in Baori Samaj constructed along the city's proposed roadway. Baori families were willing to concede such land but vehemently opposed the AMC's efforts to clear out additional houses situated on one side of the planned thoroughfare. Residents claim that city authorities used its court order and Town Planning Scheme as pretenses for clearing out a much larger area in the community. They insist that this constituted an illegal action, claiming that the land in question remains under private ownership.

There is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the issue of land ownership in Baori Samaj. Originally the entire area was under the private ownership of the Parsi landlord who permitted the Baori to settle in the area in exchange for rents. The city was then concentrated many kilometers away, across the Sabarmati River, arching around the textile mills and working class neighbourhoods of the walled city. Gulbai Tekra, then, was little more than farms and forest. During the 1960s, the ownership of land passed on to two new landlords, one of whom subsequently ran for election in municipal office. He was elected a city councilor, in part from the political support elicited from the Baori. They had lent their collective vote bank on the promise that once in office, he would regularized their tenure in Gulbai Tekra. Having assumed political office, he did the opposite, selling his land in the area to the AMC. It is remembered by Baoris as an act of betrayal. They were unable to hold their landlord to the guarantee of regularized tenure, incapable of realizing a common tactic in India wherein the poor (squatters and renters) are (sometimes) able to leverage political support in exchange for formal ownership of occupied land (or at the very least protection from eviction).

The sale to the AMC converted much of the area into 'public' land. It is important to note that Baoris' settlement in Ahmedabad was not the kind of 'pirate' urbanization where the poor occupy vacant or unused land in an effort to claim territory in the city. Rather, the sale of land transformed the community from renters with a semi-formal (albeit tenuous) tenure to the extra-legal occupiers of public land.⁶ This was a conscious effort to informalize urban territory and tenure rights by a city authority eager to develop the area, first by punching a road through the community, and more recently, by handing over land to private developers for the construction of middle class residential apartments. No one in Baori Samaj knows what happened to their second landlord, who, after collecting rents for some years, disappeared, never to be heard from again. Residents maintain that the area running parallel to the city's roadway, the land cleared out by the AMC in 2002, remains under the private ownership of this absent landlord, who has not emerged to collect rents and pay municipal land taxes. Requests made by community leaders under the Right to Information Act seem to confirm such assertions. Multiple requests to the AMC have revealed no owner listed on existing municipal property records, and city authorities claim they are still in the process of tracing the land's legal ownership. This is a remarkable state of affairs, given that a Town Planning Scheme was carried out for Gulbai Tekra, a process that should have established legal ownership. The families who lost their homes are understandably incensed. If title remains unclear, then the city has no right to carry out evictions where it has no jurisdiction. City authorities maintain that the entire area is now under the domain of the AMC and that Baoris are nothing more than illegal occupiers on public territory. These competing claims over ownership are irresolvable. I will return to the significance of this

⁶ It is unclear to me to what extent Baoris' tenure may have represented a customary agreement with landlords, which was unrecognized in the expansion of private property and the state's mapping of urban territory in the colonial and post-colonial period.

ambiguity, but first I consider the geographies of informal housing in Ahmedabad in order to contextualize the issue of urban poverty.

Geographies of Informal Housing

'Slums' have always existed in modern Ahmedabad, ever since the first mill workers flocked to the city in the late 19th century to form the *wadas* (settlements) concentrated in the industrial districts along the banks of the Sabarmati River. Painting in broad strokes, then, there are two basic types of insecure housing in Ahmedabad: *chawls* and *bastis*. The former represent some of the earliest low-income housing in the city. Many *chawls* were built in the early 20th century, when mill owners began constructing housing for workers labouring in industrial textile production. They were situated in narrow dead-end alleyways with one or two rooms that workers could rent from factory bosses, who became the landlords of vast armies of indentured workers. At that time, Ahmedabad was governed under the Bombay Town Planning Act of 1915, which established a series of laws designed to control land ownership and direct urban development. Adherence to the Act, though, was voluntary, and its implementation depended entirely on the political will of local colonial officials in Ahmedabad, where a disregard for the welfare of industrial workers, coupled with the apathy of the Textile Labour Association, resulted in very little provision for urban infrastructure or services in working class neighbourhoods. Jan Breman (2004) observes that it was not until the middle of the 20th century that sewer infrastructure, streetlights, running water, schools and health care clinics began to reach the *chawls* of central and eastern Ahmedabad.

Rent controls have existed in a bid to protect industrial workers and their families living in *chawls* but much of this legislation has been eroded in the current climate of rapid deregulation in Gujarat. With the liquidation of formal sector industry since the late 1970s, and with little civic investment, the mill districts such as Kalupur, Bapunagar, Behrampura, or Naroda (to mention only a few), once the industrial nerve center of the city, have now become sites of concentrated, enduring poverty. Over time, some *chawls* were sold to residents, while in other cases, landlords simply stopped charging rents all together, meaning that a high percentage of *chawl* residents were able to acquire formal or de facto ownership of homes. And despite the massive relocation of industry (elsewhere in Ahmedabad), *chawl* residents have not been left homeless, even if the greater economic vulnerability of industrial workers has resulted in the extraordinary deterioration of neighbourhoods. That said the extreme shortage of low-income housing in central and eastern Ahmedabad has resulted in the massive over-crowding of *chawl* areas, which simultaneously have the greatest concentrations of Muslims, and it is no mere coincidence that so much of the city's worst communal carnage since the 1960s has erupted in these former industrial locales.

The second broad category of insecure housing in Ahmedabad are *bastis*—the many unauthorized settlements scattered throughout the city. *Bastis* take various forms of informal tenure. Some are unauthorized but have a degree of legitimacy in the sense that they have been notified by the state under the Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearances) Act of 1956, and are thus, in theory, eligible for upgrading schemes, available social services, and relocation in the event of displacement. These particular *bastis* constitute a miniscule portion of Ahmedabad's unauthorized settlements, the vast majority of which are characterized by their 'illegal' occupation of private and public

lands. Such settlements have an incredibly disproportionate number (over 90 percent) of Muslims, dalits, adivasi and other vulnerable caste Hindus—those groups who occupy the lowest rungs of the city’s informal economies and social order. As Rajendra Joshi, the managing director of Saath notes, the vast majority of bastis in Ahmedabad (by his estimate between 70 to 80 percent) are situated on private land, which, in some cases, may provide more protection from eviction, but where it is extremely difficult to implement tenure regularization and extend upgrading schemes, even when the political will exists to do so (Interview, December 2009; see also Kundu and Mahadevia 2002).

There is a full-blown housing crisis in Ahmedabad.⁷ While the AMC claims that there has been a decrease in the total number of unauthorized settlements since 1991, it admits that the city’s slum population has doubled, now comprising between 10 to 15 percent of Ahmedabad’s total population. According to the latest City Development Plan (2006), the state identifies 710 individual unauthorized settlements in Ahmedabad that include 439,843 people, a figure calculated on an average family size of 5. It is wise to treat these official statistics with uncertainty, and they do seem rather conservative. But it is critical to note that they were collected for the city through surveys conducted by the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and Saath, two prominent NGOs based in Ahmedabad with extensive histories of development work with the urban poor. The survey of urban slums was carried out as a necessary component of the AMC’s application to the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), which represents the central government’s principal funding stream for urban renewal projects

⁷ This despite the 3.34 square kilometers of land (concentrated in the central and eastern districts) occupied by abandoned textile mills, and the 12.5 percent of housing in Ahmedabad that remains vacant due to rent control legislation, which continues to constrain housing even though changes have been made to rent control and urban land ceiling laws in Gujarat (see Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation 2006).

in India's primary metropolitan centers (see <http://jnnurm.nic.in>). A condition of funding through the JNNURM is providing a long-term plan guiding urban expansion and civic investment. The AMC promises a 'city without slums', and outlines an ambitious program of civic projects to which 995 crore rupees (or approximately 226 million CDN) are to be dedicated over the next decade. These funds are being sought primarily to support the city's Slum Networking Program (to be discussed below), chawl reconstruction, social housing, and the delivery of civic amenities (water, transportation, sewage, etc). This is not the place to debate the pledges made by the AMC's latest Development Plan. I want to point out, however, that the city's dependence on Saath and SEWA to carry out the enumeration of the poor demonstrates its acute dearth of knowledge vis-à-vis the city's most vulnerable populations. Further, it is relevant that the statistics generated by these two agencies only pertain to unauthorized settlements, those identified by NGOs as city slums. They do not account for Ahmedabad's pavement dwellers (of which there are many), nor do they calculate the city's sizable *chawls*, which house over one million people. If one combines *bastis* and *chawls* (as does UN-Habitat), then the percentage of the city living in 'slum' conditions breaches the outrageous threshold of 40 percent.

Intimidation, Coercion and Politics of Waste

In 2002, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation managed to evict hundreds of Baori families in Gulbai Tekra, and quickly moved in to demolish 448 homes (roughly one third of the community). This cleansing was carried out through a mix of covert bribes, outright intimidation and body politics.

Modevbhai: Corporation officers bribed me by saying that they would give me six houses for my children... if I agreed to join hands with them. They also threatened me that if I refused, I would get nothing. I would be thrown out of here, losing everything (Interview, November 2008).

A second resident, Chamanbhai, described how rumours began to surface in the events leading up to the demolitions, whisperings that accused him of personally accepting a bribe from local developers. It is an unlikely charge given that this individual was briefly taken into police custody for refusing to cooperate with city authorities. The episode demonstrates how bribes were extended to particular figures in the community who the AMC determined could play a decisive role in convincing residents to vacate the area 'voluntarily'. At the same time, agents of the state deployed various intimidation tactics on the day of evictions. The looming presence of several hundred police officers, armed with *lathi* sticks, clearly illustrate the state's willingness to use brute violence to remove people from their homes. Further, under police surveillance, and while the bulldozers hummed, families were pressured to sign legal documents wherein they agreed to the conditions of their eviction. Most opted to sign, but did so without any legal consultation and under threats of public beatings. Failure to comply, the city warned, would result in no compensation from the AMC, and that signing such documents meant that residents relinquished whatever legal or moral leverage they may or may not have had before evictions were carried out.

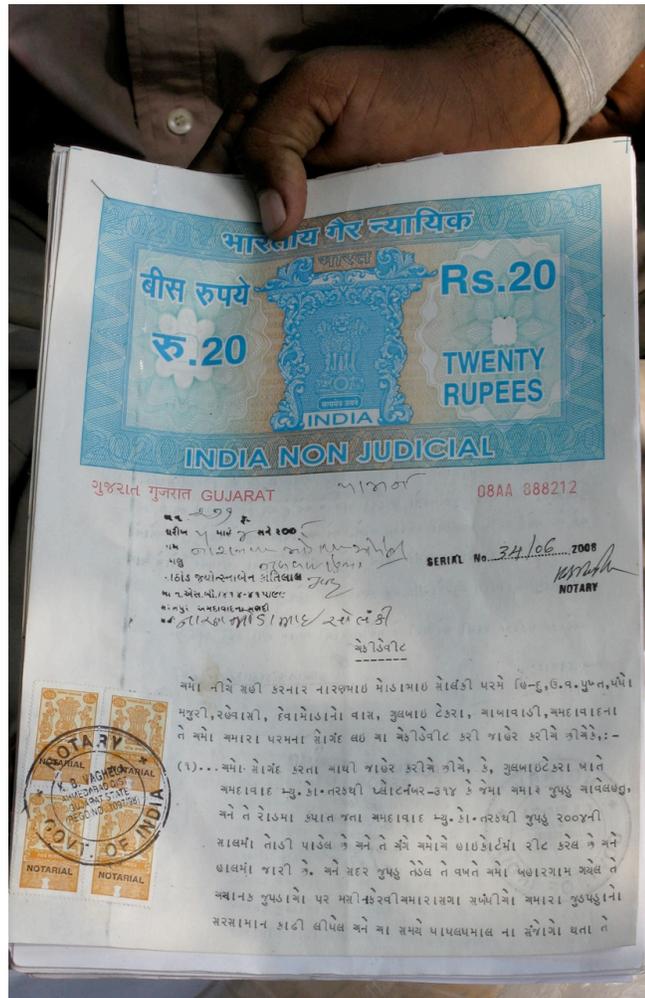


Figure 11. Signed legal documents. Photograph by author.

Residents were not successful in stopping the demolitions of homes, and while the willful destruction of property demonstrates the naked use of force, it is equally important to realize how the AMC has deployed other, more insidious strategies to undermine Baoris' claims to territory. After the initial evictions in 2002, the city deposited several large dumpsters in various locations in the community where surrounding businesses now dump their trash. The AMC also constructed a large public urinal, little more than a filthy, open sewer, located inches away from the front door of residents' homes. Modevbhai suggested that garbage in the community is

created by the various societies nearby and hotels around here. You can visit this area between 12 am and 6 pm, you will find that all the garbage from these

places is dumped in this area. This spills everywhere, but said to be created by us, the people living in Gulbai Tekra. And we are blamed for this (Interview, November 2008).

Chamanbhai was more candid:

They want to remove us. For that they arranged to declare our area as [a] filthy slum. For that they have kept garbage bins in our area. Now the garbage from all the hotels and surrounding area is dumped in these bins, which are in front of Kalu's house. This is all being done to declare our community as a ubiquitous, filthy slum area. Then they constructed a public lavatory... in spite of us having our independent drainage in our houses... They're not maintaining these public lavatories, nor cleaning them, in spite of our requests (Interview, November 2008).

The construction of a public urinal (literally outside the front door of homes), along with the depositing of trash containers, are not considered as instances where the city is providing much-needed civic infrastructure, but rather as conscious strategies to further stigmatize the community as a 'filthy slum'.⁸ The management of waste (through its purification), argues Dominique Laporte (2000) stands as one of the great markers of modern civilization and a primary site in the exercise of state power. "Hold onto your shit, declares the monarch", suggests Laporte, "Dispose of it only in the dark of night. Remove your pigs from sight beyond the city's walls, or I will seize your person and your goods, engulf your home in my capacious purse, and lock your body in my jail" (11). There is little doubt that constant intimacy with others' waste amounts to the most striking of social divides. The politics of shit are tremendous in India—a country where an estimated 700 million people are forced to defecate in the open each and every day. The situation in the country's largest metropolitan centres is extreme. In Mumbai, it is believed that close to half the city's population does not have access to a functioning toilet. Shitting outside is clearly a humiliation for all, and a matter of safety for many.

⁸ Lost is the fact that the depositing of waste represents an atrocity as defined in the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989.

Arundhati Roy (2000) observes how, in 1998, three Delhi 'slum' dwellers were shot by the police for shitting in public. The irony for Baoris in Gulbai Tekra, however, is that many homes do have marginal sewage facilities. While not connected to the city's main sewer grid, homes have drainage into an adjacent park and back lanes.

Baoris' experiences demonstrate how the language and imagery of filth and excrement loom to justify the erasure of the urban poor and the executive's efforts to purify the public sphere. "To cleanse, to order, to beautify", argues Laporte, "the fact that this discursive triad manifests itself so openly in the policing of both city and speech should give us pause" (11). The central role that the discourse of waste plays in the politics of citizenship will be taken up in greater detail in chapter four, in an examination of the dramatic reorientation of India's judiciary and its narrowing definition of fundamental rights. At present, I draw attention to the direct links that are made between urban degeneracy and the criminalization of the poor. The imagery of waste has a tremendous performative force within discussions of urban renewal wherein the poor are increasingly seen as responsible for environmental degradation and threats to both order and public health. Waste, then, represents a primary means through which to encode Baoris' illegal status, inferior social status, and to justify violent actions taken by the planning apparatus. In such settings, the tactics of the AMC mask the failures of the state to provide basic infrastructure, and enable an urban cleansing that—in Ahmedabad—assumes specific racialized and casteized characteristics.

The politics of excrement are coupled with the fact that as a distinct adivasi community in the city, Baoris eat meat and occasionally drink alcohol. These may seem of little consequence but in a conservative Hindu city, particularly in an area surrounded by

middle class, 'higher' caste Hindus, meat eating and alcohol consumption are widely considered polluting to the public body. "They're now playing these dirty games", Chamanbhai declared, "Secondly, is that [when] we are celebrating our festivals, marriages, other social, death ceremonies here, and during that time, as we are non-vegetarians, we prepare meat and consume liquor, which people residing in nearby societies do not like" (Interview, November 2008). Not only are such activities heavily stigmatized, but in a 'dry' state, alcohol consumption (although widespread) is illegal without special license from the state. Here we enter into a complicated web of body politics that situates Gujarat as one of the primary staging grounds for conservative Hindu revivalism. It is these kinds of strategies that get deployed to circulate a particular public discourse. Deployed to construct a distinctive imaginative geography that frames Baori Samaj—the slum—as a place of filth and social degradation, providing the discursive means to legitimize displacement in the transformation of Ahmedabad into an elite, Hinduized metropolis.

In the popular imagination, slums have always been synonymous with decay and social immorality—landscapes of titillating fascination to be sure but equally spaces of danger. Slums are typically scripted as the nightmare product of modernist urbanism gone horribly awry. They cast the dark shadows of industrial capitalism, exposing its stark underbelly, whose squalor gets circulated in popular discourse through the language and imagery of disease and death. There is little doubt that the word 'slum' carries incredible bias, which cultural productions from *Slumdog Millionaire* to Mike Davis' *Planet of Slums* (2006) do little to disrupt. Of course, such productions are used to produce different effects. On the one hand, they are exercised to galvanize activist politics and NGO work to focus collective outrage over the conditions in which the urban

poor in India are forced to live and work. Increasingly, however, within Ahmedabad, this kind of popular discourse is deployed to remove slums under the rhetorical cover of beautification, renewal and security—the various place-making strategies that seek to reimagine the city by purifying a public sphere through the erasure of the urban poor.

Similar processes are at work elsewhere in Ahmedabad. We glean the utilization of beautification in the recent redevelopment of Kankaria Lake, an artificial lake originally built by the Sultan Qutub-ud-Din in the mid-15th century. Situated in eastern Ahmedabad, for hundreds of years, Kankaria functioned as an important hub of worship and work in the city. It is now fenced and gated. Its miniature train and tollbooths, amusement park and plastic elephants, water park and paddleboats, the telltale signs of a Disneyfied and carnival landscape designed for elite leisure.



Figure 12. Kankaria Lake. Photograph by author.

Or we can turn to the actions taken by the AMC in November 2009, when local police forces demolished unauthorized shelters in Chandola Taleb. This was one of the 'relief' camps established to shelter the 250,000 (overwhelmingly Muslim) individuals displaced during the 2002 communal riots. Eight years later, tens of thousands of Muslims wait for compensation, as well as the restoration of their fundamental rights and reparation for lost properties. The state BJP government has never acknowledged the existence of such camps, nor provided critical resources to meet basic humanitarian needs. The relief camp in Chandola Taleb was razed to the ground in 2009 on the state's suspicion that not only were its residents illegal squatters, but significantly, accused of harboring Bangladeshi immigrants, a fictitious population feared as Islamic terrorists. The demolitions left 1800 Muslim families homeless.

Most dramatically, we see the circulation of renewal being used to legitimize the current redevelopment taking shape along the Sabarmati River. Stretching 20 kilometers on both sides of the river, the Sabarmati River Front Development Project (SRFDP) is by far Ahmedabad's most ambitious renewal project that stands to transform vast tracts of territory in the central city (see www.sabarmatiriverfront.com). The high-resolution photographs and press releases put into circulation depict a utopic reclamation of the riverfront, a discourse delivering what Renu Desai (2006: 5) describes as "giving the river back to the city and its citizens." The SRFDP promises a landscape of pristine nature, promenades, parks and gardens, licensed markets and well-planned roads. While the project embodies Ahmedabad's version of the garden city, it is busy displacing thousands who live in slums along the riverfront. As there are vast discrepancies between the figures put forward by city authorities and community associations, it is impossible to pin down an accurate number of the displaced (which

range from 50,000 to 150,000; see Desai 2006). Residents and concerned NGOs wait to see if resettlement programs will be delivered to dislocated families as promised by city authorities and the private corporation orchestrating the project.



Figure 13. Developing the riverfront. Photograph by author.

Each of these sites mirrors a process evident in Gulbai Tekra, where the urban landscape is being re-imagined and reconfigured within the liberalizing metropolis. This is a process marked by both violence and desire (Baviskar 2003), wherein the discourse of waste gets constructed and circulated to legitimize urban cleansings. It is a language mobilized to strip the poor of their individual identities and reduce the complex geographies that constitute poverty in Ahmedabad. It is a discourse that renders the poor invisible within the dramatic restructuring of the city's moral, administrative and physical landscapes. This enables an enfolding of the urban poor into the great mass of humanity that struggles to survive at the bottom of the city's socio-economic order. It is

a dehumanizing process. It is a process wherein the slum is “consumed”, as argues Gautam Bhan (2009: 140), “as an image: flat, without history, without structure and emptied of those who live within it.” The ontological flattening of the urban poor facilitate their erasure, effectively masking the failure of the state to provide basic ‘rights’ and existing disparities of wealth and privilege.

Shifting State Policy

Similar to virtually every Indian city, the pressing issue of urban poverty continues to vex Ahmedabad, and over the past 63 years a plethora of programs and promises have existed to tackle the problem. There have been numerous slum development projects initiated by various state agencies all charged with strategizing on the questions of housing and basic civic services. There is a long list of programs, legislative acts, state departments and political rhetoric that could be invoked to detail this genealogy, but my basic point is that very little has been done to quell the urban poverty that continues to mushroom in Ahmedabad. This despite the 73rd constitutional amendment stipulating that social and economic planning and poverty alleviation are the responsibilities of municipal governments, or the amendments made to the Bombay Municipal Corporation Act in the 1970s that directed the AMC to spend 10 percent of its annual revenues on improving basic services and infrastructure in Ahmedabad’s *chawls* and *bastis*. Most recently, however, there has been a fundamental rethinking on the part of the state in how to deal with the issues of insecure housing and service provision for the urban poor. There continues to be significant efforts staged by the Gujarati state to off load social welfare measures onto the backs of local NGOs and, increasingly, private commercial developers.

Such trends are situated within well-established critiques of the NGOization of development, but there have been some innovative programming in Ahmedabad worth mentioning. The most significant is the much-touted Slum Networking Program (SNP), first launched as a pilot project in 1996 before being expanded to include 41 unauthorized settlements situated throughout the city, but primarily concentrated in its eastern zone. The SNP brought together a partnership between the AMC, Saath and SEWA. In one sense, it offered momentary relief from the whole-scale demolition of city slums by proposing in-situ upgrading as a potential solution to insecure housing, even if this was guided by economic calculations: upgrading is far cheaper than relocation. The SNP clearly embodies the efforts of the AMC to get private capital and NGOs into social welfare provision, and to this end, the results were mixed.

On the one hand, Saath and SEWA worked very closely with resident associations in targeted slum areas (identified by these two NGOs) in the design and implementation of the project. By all accounts the SNP, running from 2001-06, did produce results. It carried out in-site upgrading of infrastructure that included water supply, sewage, toilets, paving of inner lanes, storm drains, street lighting, solid waste management, landscaping, as well as the delivery of various social services: community saving accounts, education, childcare and healthcare centres, cheap medicines, and immunization shots. There are serious critiques that can be leveled at the discourse of upgrading, given that it tends to address the aesthetics of the urban landscape rather than the underlining issues of equitable wages, wealth (re)distribution and political agency. Nevertheless, the SNP did carry out an impressive list of initiatives. Eighty percent of its costs were paid by the AMC, while the additional twenty percent was collected from individual households participating in the program. One can be cynical in

that the poor were expected to pay for basic services that any middle class resident takes for granted, but perhaps an acceptable situation given that the realistic alternative is no services whatsoever. Further, from interviews conducted with organizers at Saath, there appears to have been a high degree of inclusion of community members in both the planning and implementation of the SNP.

The SNP, however, was not without its problems. At no time since its initiation in 1996 did the private sector show any sustained interest in supporting the project (as envisioned by the AMC). Further, despite the best efforts made by organizers, the World Bank has not indicated any interest in funding the program. Lastly, but most importantly, the SNP was deeply flawed in that the state refused to extend the tenure rights of participating slums beyond a period of ten years. This situation raises serious questions regarding the long-term security and tenure of targeted populations. By doing so, the state left the threat of future eviction wide open. More recently, the SNP has withered despite the AMC's initial promise (articulated in its City Development Plan 2006) to radically expand the project to include an additional 120 unauthorized settlements. With the AMC no longer funding the project, both SAATH and SEWA have redirected time and energy to other programming. Moreover, the SNP reflects the current climate of liberalization in Gujarat, where the state itself is keen on getting out of being the provider of social welfare, and redirecting its (constitutional) responsibilities to NGOs and private capital, who are increasingly seen as the pallbearers of social welfare in the city. In other spheres, Gujarat is among the most aggressive states in India pursuing the privatization of key areas of industry and governance. Since the mid-1990s, there has been a rapid escalation of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the state, primarily orchestrated by the Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board (GIDB)—established in

1995 and chaired by Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The GIDB was instituted to oversee the overall design and implementation of PPPs and to articulate Vision 2020, Gujarat's Master Plan. Over the past 18 years, PPPs have flourished in Gujarat, initially targeting port facilities, power generation and distribution, gas reserves and oil refining, the expansion of transportation networks, as well as Special Economic Zones and Special Investment Regions.

Relevant to our discussion is the new round of PPPs currently in the planning stages that focus on the private delivery of both civic amenities and housing. The Gujarat government is now pushing a market-based solution to the conundrums of services and slum rehabilitation. In this, it appears set to follow the model already in practice in Mumbai, where PPPs are widely utilized by the city's Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA). Founded in 1995, the model deployed by Mumbai's SRA is relatively straightforward. In dealing with the issue of urban slums, the municipal government either carries out in situ upgrading or hands over 'public' land to private developers, who are encouraged to construct commercial developments on the condition that they provide social housing to displaced persons. To sweeten the deal, city authorities have pushed a number of reforms, including relaxing building regulations to permit greater square footage (the Floor Space Index) and building density; as well as rent control legislation that many argue is the very reason why particular forms of housing (i.e. *chawls*) have deteriorated. Without providing substantial detail, these initiatives have been sharply criticized by poverty activists and targeted communities in Mumbai. While PPPs have resulted in a number of large-scale, modernist residential housing complexes and resettlement colonies in the city, these have not been deemed a suitable solution (see Patel et al., 2002; Burra 2003). Firstly, only a fraction of proposed

low-income housing has been provided to those displaced by commercial development. Secondly, inappropriate design, along with a higher cost of living has resulted in relocated persons simply abandoning such housing schemes to reestablish unauthorized settlements elsewhere in the city. While there is nothing particularly new about PPPs in Gujarat, in regards to housing and civic amenities, such developments are only now unfolding and remain seriously understudied. As of this writing, the state government is currently reviewing its slum rehabilitation policy, intimating (in the press; see Kapil 2009) that it will shortly establish (yet) another rehabilitation agency, this to be modeled on Mumbai's SRA and specifically its plans for the transformation of Dharavi, widely described as Asia's 'largest slum'. This means that the privatization of slum rehabilitation is shortly to be the centerpiece of state policy in Gujarat.

Ambiguous Fortunes

I end this chapter by returning to the fate of those 448 Baori families evicted from Gulbai Tekra in 2002. Ironically, they were among the more fortunate of Ahmedabad's many displaced peoples because they were able to access a state sponsored resettlement program. In Gujarat, the state has a legal obligation to resettle residents of unauthorized settlements, displaced by urban renewal, who can *prove* their tenure on *public* lands back to 1976. The law stretches back to the 1970s, specifically to the Emergency Years (1975-77) and Indira Gandhi's national government, who, in response to gathering unrest from below, directed all state and city governments to survey existing slum populations. The subsequent Slum Census of 1976 catalogued and photographed 'illegal' squatter communities by recording their names, addresses, and measuring the square footage of homes. In Ahmedabad, city authorities issued the infamous 'Yellow

Card', the possession of which was meant to ensure that displaced populations would be resettled by the state. While this may have signaled recognition that some form of resettlement was needed when slum demolitions were carried out, unauthorized settlements on privately owned land or that under the administration of the central government were excluded from resettlement policy (precisely where the vast majority of slums are situated in Ahmedabad).

During the late 1970s approximately 400 Baori families were persuaded by the city government to relocate further west to the ward of Ramdevnagar. The area was then situated beyond the western edge of the city, but by all accounts, basic services and infrastructure were provided. Most significantly, residents were able to secure the legal title of land, which means that as Ramdevnagar has emerged as a focal point of middle class development, Baoris can either chose to remain in the locale or sell their homes at market prices. I am not suggesting that the formalization of tenure is unproblematic, nor arguing that it represents the answer to urban poverty. Not only is there already a long history of attempting to formalize the informal in India, but extending the right to participate in private property markets is clearly not enough. It is riddled with questions of gendered and class inequities within local communities. Nor does this respond to the vast disparities of wealth, opportunity and agency in urban India, and overlooks the ways in which informal property markets in Ahmedabad are already used as collateral and equity. Nevertheless, I would argue that Baoris in Ramdevnagar are far better off than their relatives elsewhere in the city. The formalization of their tenure rights has had some positive effects, and positioned them very differently than their kin in Gulbai Tekra, where the prospect of legalization is a distant reality.

The formalization (or marketization) of tenure, however, is not widely practiced in Ahmedabad. It is often promised but rarely delivered. This is particularly apparent in the politics of resettlement in the city, and there are serious concerns to be considered vis-à-vis the resettlement schemes institutionalized during the 1970s in Gujarat. The criteria for accessing resettlement is particularly draconian and antiquated in Gujarat, a state that has stubbornly refused to revise the qualifying date of 1976 despite decades of protest staged by housing activists and civil rights lawyers in the city.⁹ Other states have taken far more progressive steps in this regard. In Delhi, city authorities are supposed to provide relocation to those who can prove tenure back to 1998, while in Mumbai the date of eligibility is 1995. Of course, this does not ensure access to resettlement programs. In documenting the mass evictions in Delhi along the Yamuna River in 2004-05, Kalyani Menon-Sen and Gautam Bhan (2008) observe that only 50 percent of the 135,000 people displaced by development on the riverfront were deemed eligible for relocation schemes.

The burden of proving one's physical existence always falls to the urban poor. A difficulty made apparent in a UN-Habitat study (2003) that observed that 28 percent of 'slum' dwellers in Ahmedabad do not possess valid identification, meaning the possession of a ration card, AMC photo pass, or Yellow Card. The absence of such documentation makes accessing social welfare programs and relocation schemes

⁹ In 2004-05, there was a concerted attempt to revise the 1976 date of eligibility. It was during a brief period when the Congress Party managed to capture municipal offices in Ahmedabad. The Congress election campaign had promised the regularization of unauthorized settlements in the city—a familiar refrain. At the time, city council did pass a resolution committed to making relocation programs accessible to displaced individuals whose tenure dated to 1995, and even promised a new survey through which to revise this further to 2001. Ultimately, the motion was opposed by the Municipal Commissioner of the AMC, who enlisted the support of the BJP state government to veto the proposal. Opposition was based on the grounds that the city could not absorb the financial costs of expanding resettlement programs; that more land would need to be appropriated by the AMC; that the measure would only encourage further 'encroachment' on public lands; and finally, that such a resolution would hamstring the ability of the city to allot land to private developers. The resolution was never brought into law.

extremely difficult. Given these conditions, Baoris have been fortunate in managing to access resettlement, only possible because displaced families possess the necessary documentation (in this case rent receipts dating back to the 1960s) that proves their tenure in Gulbai Tekra. Baoris have been displaced under the guise of urban planning, a process of cleansing the public sphere through the language and imagery of waste. At the same time, Baoris have managed to position themselves as marginal targets of governmentality. But theirs is a deeply ambiguous fortune—one that traces a disturbing geography. It is time to travel to the urban-rural fringe.

Chapter 3: From Slum to Ghetto: resettlement along the urban-rural frontier

Introduction

Clearing Baoris out of Gulbai Tekra in 2002 required an act of (un)mapping. Suresh recalled,

The Corporation's tow-away vehicles came. The corporators [city officials] kept boxes there and when the houses were demolished, they wrote the family's ration card number and kept their personal belongings in those boxes to be carried away to their new allotted area (Interview, December 2008).

During the demolitions, the AMC not only (re)classified residents but also collected existing documentation, namely, rent receipts and ration cards. They did so to mitigate the ability of residents to reestablish any claim to territory in the area. Baoris were then asked to, "stand in front of our homes and they photographed us and gave us a receipt... After, two, three families were transported in one truck with the belongings" (Kalu, Interview, December 2008). The 448 families were first relocated to a resettlement colony in Odhav situated on the extreme eastern fringe of Ahmedabad, roughly 20 kilometers from the inner city. Odhav is an area of concentrated industrial activity where various industrial estates were first established in the early 1980s. Areas like Odhav, along Ahmedabad's eastern rim, emerged as the relocation sites for various industrial processes following the dismantling of the city's primary textile industry, as well as the growth of metallurgy, chemical and petrochemical industries. Odhav has a high concentration of informal workers and insecure housing, an area of the city that was only brought under the jurisdiction of the AMC in 1986, and thus suffers from an acute lack of basic infrastructure. Baoris' resettlement colony in the area was built in 2000 and established 1500 housing units in a series of multi-story tenements. Having

been deposited in Odhav, the AMC offered families a small cash payment of a 1000 rupees; a meager stipend meant to off set the costs of displacement. Baoris were told that their relocation to the locale was temporary, and that they would be shifted again within six months to more 'permanent' residencies. It took the AMC four years to move Baoris to a second resettlement colony in Vishala. It was here that I encountered Baoris' experience of displacement during fieldwork in Ahmedabad in the fall of 2008.

In this chapter, I narrate the experiences of Baoris to document the effects of their displacement to the urban-rural frontier. I continue the argument that the informalization of Baoris' rights and entitlements figures as key strategy of state power in the liberalizing metropolis. In Ahmedabad, it is on the urban edge where the multiple processes of renewal, resettlement and migration intersect, where, in the words of Ananya Roy (2003: 145), "liberalization gnaws at the boundaries of the urban". Informality is not considered as the sole domain of the urban poor. Just as Ahmedabad's southwestern and eastern fringes are the relocation sites for displaced populations, territory along the city's western rim, running parallel to S.G. Highway, is being rapidly transformed into a spectacle of shopping complexes and guarded residential towers. This middle class development is equally dependent upon informal processes, which implicate various actors situated across the city's socio-economic spectrum. I argue that such processes are not independent of the state as the planning apparatus and elected authorities retain what Roy (2005: 149) describes as the power to "determine what is informal and what is not, to determine what forms of informality will thrive and what will not." In addition, I examine the detrimental effects of Baoris' resettlement to the urban periphery and argue that this has led to a dramatic expansion in the spheres of their social and economic reproduction. These conditions are situated

in relation to the kinds of (in)mobilities promised but delivered to few within the efforts to transform Ahmedabad into a dominant command and control centre in northwestern India. I begin with a rickshaw ride.

Traveling to the Urban Fringe

December 2008. Modevbhai picked me up at Swastik Crossroads in downtown Ahmedabad, and we sped away toward Vishala. We followed the Sabarmati River southward as the business district faded and residential neighbourhoods gave way to surrounding farmlands. En route to the resettlement colony, large shantytowns emerged along the highway leading out of the city. Here, tens of thousands are marooned in Ahmedabad, forced into insecure shelters. They live in the kind of makeshift shacks that one becomes (too easily) accustomed to witnessing along the edge of urban Indian—tent cities on the side of roads. The landscape was evocative of a sprawling refugee camp. It stretched for miles. The urban-rural frontier is where rural migrants and urban poor jostle, occupying land and forming the great reservoir of mobile labour servicing the metropolis and surrounding industrial estates. The living conditions and lack of infrastructure make life along the urban edge in Ahmedabad hard. The absence of water, electricity and sewage are devastating, especially given the extreme environmental pressures in Gujarat, where, during the summer months, it is not unusual for daily temperatures to soar above 45 degrees Celsius to create an urban inferno. It is difficult to imagine the hardship that the absence of basic services bears down on everyday lives.

The settlement along the urban periphery reflects the manner with which the poor in India are always sequestered to the least desirable tracts of urban territory; often exposed to various environmental dangers. In Ahmedabad, the poor have long been confined to the eastern shores of the Sabarmati, along railway tracks, under bridges, clustered along the riverbank or around sites of heavy industry. The close proximity to toxic industry can have devastating consequences. In India, its most devastating form was seen in the nightmare that unfolded in Bhopal (the capital of Madhya Pradesh) in 1984 when the city's Union Carbide plant exploded. In what is often referred to as the world's worst industrial accident, the explosion released 42 tons of lethal methyl isocyanate gas, exposing half a million people to toxic fumes. It has been estimated that between 8,000 to 10,000 people died within the first 72 hours of exposure. A further study released by Amnesty International (2004) suggests that an additional 15,000 people have perished in subsequent years due to a range of related illnesses. Not surprisingly it was the poor who suffered the greatest casualties as urban squatters surrounded the pesticide packaging plant. This is an extreme case but does demonstrate the incredible environmental vulnerability of the poor in urban India.



Figure 14. Resettlement colony in Vishala. Photograph by author.



Figure 15. Road leading out of housing colony. Photograph by author.

Passing through farmers' fields with Modevbhai, and turning onto narrow, dusty dirt roads, Baoris' resettlement colony in Vishala emerged quite unexpectedly—a giant housing complex consisting of a dozen whitewashed towers rising up out of surrounding grazing land. With no streetlights, no paved roads, far removed from the synergy of the city, no shops or businesses, an isolation permeated the area. The interior of the housing complex opened up into a large common courtyard encircled by several multi-storied apartment towers. The challenges of resettlement for the Baori are many. Because there is no public transportation to the area, families can no longer afford to send their children to school. The conditions of resettlement are such that residents are not permitted to establish any businesses, nor are they allowed to keep any livestock (an important source of food). Torrent Power is providing electricity but it is expensive. And more importantly, authorities are refusing to issue electricity bills in individuals' names, only by unit number. This means that residents have no way of proving their tenure in the housing colony. The issue of documentation here is critical, and its absence is a

tactic clearly designed to make it easier to move the Baori at a later date. The resettlement colony in Vishala is situated in a bizarre no-man's land in south Ahmedabad, a large tract of territory running parallel with the Sabarmati River. The city has extended itself further southward, and presumably the area has been left undeveloped precisely because it is valuable agricultural land, for which an irrigation channel was built some time ago, moving water from the Sabarmati before being choked off by a second hydroelectric dam that frames the south end of the city. Considering the sustained growth of the city in recent years and the soaring value of real estate, the entire area will shortly undergo rapid transformation.



Figure 16. Modev's one-room apartment. Photograph by author.

Modevbhai led me up several flights of stairs to show his apartment. Resettlement entitled his family of ten to a 12x12 single room. There is no drainage or sewer infrastructure in the complex, the absence of which forces residents into adjacent fields to defecate. Given the extremely tight living quarters, it was not surprising to find the

hallways filled with women cooking over open fires, and others sleeping here and there on bits of cardboard. Most significantly, despite its promises, the AMC has not provided residents with legal title that would formalize their ownership rights in the resettlement colony. The city is asking each family to pay 40,000 rupees for legal title—the cost of subsidized construction. It is a sum that no one here can seemingly afford. Further, given fears that this would do little to secure their ownership rights and deep mistrust of city authorities, it is doubtful that residents would pay even if they could.

The housing colony lies close to the Sabarmati, the proximity of which poses serious health risks. During the annual monsoon, it is not unusual for the river to flood. Flooding brings disease. The storm drains—long ditches dug alongside the approaching roadway—designed to channel rainwater—are choked full with large bodies of standing, green, filthy water. They are the breeding ground for cholera, dysentery and dengue fever. Last year, two children died of malaria. With no organized garbage disposal or sewage, waste is simply thrown or directed into adjacent fields. It is unclear who is responsible for the provision and maintenance of services in the resettlement colony. According to residents in Vishala, no municipal workers have ever visited the area. No sewer infrastructure, public transportation, garbage or paved roads have been provided to the settlement; and while water connections do exist, the cost and responsibility of maintenance is left to Baoris. The provision of some services, while the absence of others, the not knowing who is ultimately responsible demonstrates Nikolas Rose's (1999: 19) sense that "self-responsibilization" is the order of the day, where the poor are left to negotiate services as best they can.

Up on the rooftop of the resettlement colony, a young Baori man directed my attention to a wall where exterior plaster had worn away to reveal bright red brick underneath. He jokingly rubbed his finger along the exposure. The wall crumbled. The resettlement colony was only two years old, and yet plaster walls were deteriorating, electrical circuits failing, doors and windows busting apart. Just as this demonstrates the conditions of informal housing, it would be a mistake to suggest that such conditions simply characterize the lives of the urban poor.



Figure 17. Commercial development on S.G. Highway. Photograph by author.



Figure 18. The Acropolis on S.G. Highway. Photograph by author.

I now turn to Ahmedabad's western frontier—a territory of shady land deals, where farmers' fields are bought and sold, a zone of squatters, illegal and legal subdivisions, farms and resettlement colonies. It is also the setting of upper middle class space, often built in direct violation of zoning policies, only to be formalized and brought into existing town planning. The informal construction industry sketches a geography that connects Ahmedabad's richest to the highest levels of political power and the machinery of urban planning. As early as the 1980s, the city witnessed the emergence of "a new class of quasi-criminal entrepreneurs", as argues Achuyat Yagnik (1983: 112-113), a Gujarati historian, "capable of illegally occupying open land through their powerful political connections. Today (1983) it is not unusual to meet at Ahmedabad a slumlord-turned-builder who at the same time is a municipal councilor or office-bearer of a national political party". The private development of property in advance of urban expansion may constitute the single largest industry capitalizing on informal processes. The building of unregulated housing runs rampant in Ahmedabad, construction that is pursued in direct

violation of various codes, bylaws and town planning schemes designed to govern the use and ownership of land.

We clearly see this within the proliferation of unauthorized settlements that house the urban poor, the vast majority of which are situated on the lands of private landlords who command tremendous political clout. But informal construction has also long been the norm in the planning of middle class residential and commercial space, a process accelerated within the current climate of deregulation and liberalization. Such developments, while built illegally, are routinely regularized by municipal authorities, who levy a nominal 'impact fee' in return for formalization. The production of commercial space through informal processes dominates Ahmedabad's physical landscape. In a survey conducted for the World Institute for Disaster Risk Management, Krishna Vatsa (2001) argues that within the jurisdiction of the AMC, 200 of 450 multi-story buildings were constructed without a building permit. In areas under the administration of the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA), less than 25 of 200 multi-story complexes ever bothered to secure permission from local planning authorities. The report was produced amidst a flurry of news stories that emerged in the aftermath of Gujarat's 2001 earthquake—a catastrophic event exposing the ramifications of informal building practices. In Ahmedabad alone, the earthquake resulted in the collapse of 150 buildings which included dozens of high-rise residential complexes all built within the previous five years. The fallout led to a number of lawsuits that revealed builders' inadequate use of steel, sand-diluted cement, construction on soft soil, and short cuts in the curing of cement.

Informal construction is concentrated along Ahmedabad's urban-rural frontier. Here, land is cheap and yields the greatest profits in advance of the expanding metropolis. Along its periphery, the city's construction mafia has enjoyed decades of collusion and the acquiescence of AUDA, the municipal body responsible for planning and guiding urban growth. AUDA has done little to enforce existing codes, or condemn fraudulent practices. The urban-rural frontier is the unfortunate setting where construction barons routinely deploy a range of tactics (coercion, intimidation and extortion) to forcibly acquire land for commercial development. Bimal Patel (1995: 144), one of Ahmedabad's premiere architects, argues that the "use of force is fairly common when developers are dealing with farmers in the periphery of the city. Though not conclusively proved, it is widely believed that developers make use of communal and political riots to get rid of troublesome tenants or squatters." Simply put, informality figures an entanglement of political and violent processes that enable private developers to utilize informal conditions and networks to their advantage.



Figure 19. Construction of a mega slum. Photograph by author.

From a bird's eye view from atop Baoris' resettlement colony in Vishala, one can see the central city fan out in the distant northeast, to the west, the eastern side of the Sabarmati, and farmers' fields rolled out immediately to the south. Directly behind

resettlement towers, a long line of cement foundations had been recently poured—a sea of rusty steel rebar running parallel to the river. It is an ominous signal that the construction of a giant ghetto is well under way. We climbed down from the rooftop and walked back through the inner courtyard, where two young men sculpted clay into an ornate image of Krishna. As we prepared to leave, a woman yelled out to our group, “The government has thrown us away like garbage.” She echoed Arjun Appadurai’s (2000: 637) sense of the great irony that as in all societies based on financial (and to this I add racialized) apartheid, “one wants the poor close at hand as servants but far away as humans.”

Expanding Geographies in the ‘Global’ City

One of the greatest impacts of resettlement for Baoris has been that they now find themselves dislocated from the markets and middle class households critical for their economic survival. Resettlement to the urban-rural fringe has taken no account for the fact that residents depend on their homes in Gulbai Tekra as workshops in the small-scale production of plaster statues. Nor has the acute necessity of accessing middle class consumers in the inner city figured into the calculations of the state. Baoris’ displacement means that relocated families are significantly distanced from the very means of economic reproduction. It has disrupted their ability to eek out a subsistence living near the bottom of the city’s informal economy. Residents in Vishala now have to strategize ways of commuting to the inner city each day—a difficult task given that there is no available public transportation (bus or train). Commuting is necessary because there are simply no employment opportunities in or anywhere around the resettlement colony: no industrial estates, no middle class homes, no businesses, no shops or

markets. This is especially problematic for women in the community, and those who can afford the cost, travel back to Gulbai Tekra to maintain their employment as domestics. Commuting by auto-rickshaw is the only option, but unaffordable for many families, and those I interviewed in Vishala testified to a sharp financial crisis and dramatic reduction of income as a result of resettlement. Many said they have been forced to use up meager savings, mortgage wedding jewelry, or take loans from predatory moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates in order to cover day-to-day living expenses. Relocation has wiped out family savings, and the unauthorized shelters in Gulbai Tekra, which previously could be sold in the city's informal housing market, are no longer potential assets. An absurd irony being that despite having their homes demolished in Gulbai Tekra, many residents are still receiving tax bills from the AMC. It appears that city authorities, who have long collected fees from 'illegal' settlements, are unaware that homes have been razed to the ground.

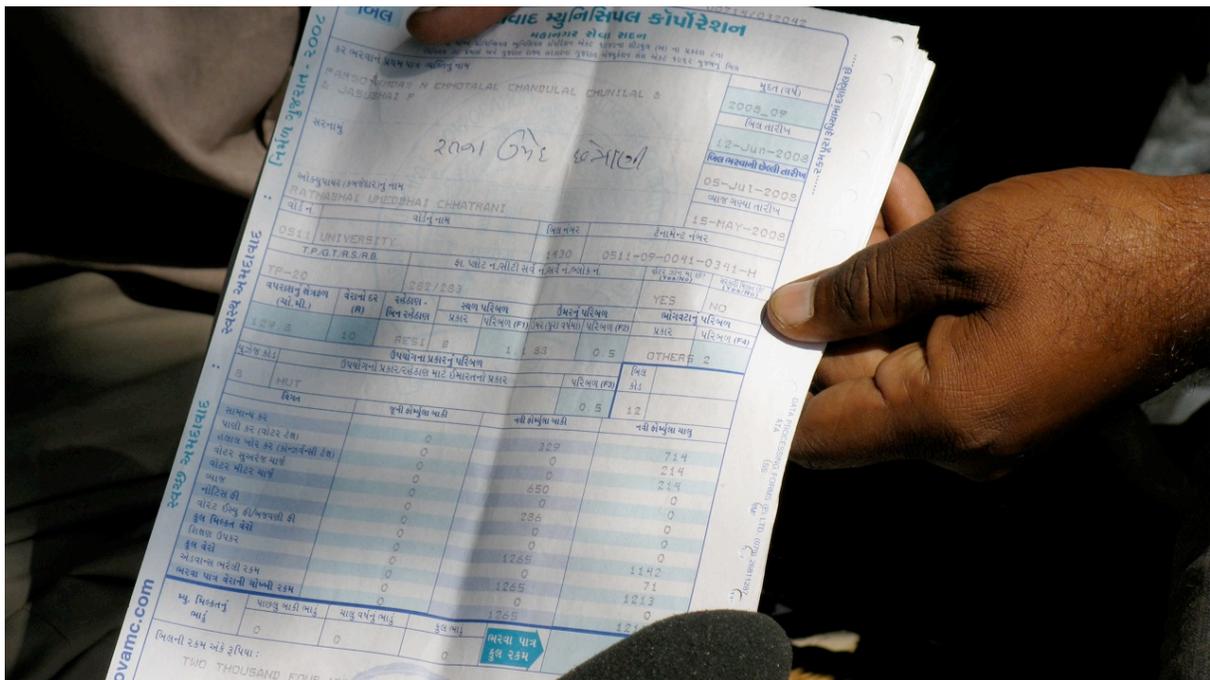


Figure 20. Magha's 2008 tax bill for his house demolished in 2002. Photograph by author.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the ration cards¹⁰ re-issued to residents during the 2002 evictions stipulate they must be used in Odhav, the site of the Baori's first resettlement. Having been relocated to Vishala in 2006, residents now have to travel across the city to Odhav to access subsidized supplies. If Baoris fail to utilize their ration cards, they can be revoked by the state. To contextualize this, the cost of a rickshaw ride to Odhav and back to Gulbai Tekra would cost approximately 300-400 rupees, a prohibitive cost to families. Baoris are fortunate in that most families do possess a ration card, although this does not guarantee access to subsidized foods (rice, wheat, sugar) and cooking fuel (kerosene). It is not uncommon for ration shops to be open erratically, and long lines can exhaust supplies. The corruption of ration shopkeepers is notorious, and successive efforts to redesign the Public Distribution System in India have severely compromised its ability to deliver social welfare. The last decade has witnessed the reduction of benefits and decreasing quantities—all of which is taking place in a time of soaring food prices across the country.

All of these conditions raise serious questions regarding the immobility of the poor in Ahmedabad's attempts to transform itself into a global metropolis. I briefly consider this emergent geography of urban connectivity and situate it in relief to dramatic expansion in Baoris' social and economic reproduction. It is almost cliché now to script the world hurtling toward the formation of some sort of end state. We are well acquainted with the pronouncements announcing the arrival of a borderless world, where information, bodies and commodities crisscross the world at dizzying speeds (see Harvey 1989; 1990). This is a space which Fredric Jameson (1991: 412-13) laments the "suppression

¹⁰ India's Public Distribution System (PDS) is designed to provide subsidized rations to low-income families, which can be accessed by the possession of a ration card.

of distance” and the “perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed.” This is a liquid urban modernity shaped by seamless connectivity, where the motifs of flow, unbounded space, and unfettered mobility emerge to capture the crowing achievements of industrial capitalism. The efforts to transform Ahmedabad into a global metropolis have certainly embraced this vision of a brave new world. While not of the equal stature of Mumbai or Delhi, there are, nonetheless, concerted attempts to launch the city’s entrance onto the world stage.

This is precisely the motivation underscoring the BJP state government’s campaign of Vibrant Gujarat, a biannual corporate summit orchestrated to attract the investment of global capital, described as the “ideal platform to discuss and debate business opportunities in the new age world” (GOG 2009; see www.vibrantgujarat.com). Having garnered US \$385 billion over three summits since 2003, Vibrant Gujarat embodies an aggressive development agenda that draws on the claim that “since time immemorial” Gujarat has “been renowned for its entrepreneurial spirit... It is this inherent trait that has made Gujarat spearhead the Indian march for global economic superpower status... Gujarat is surging ahead with such force and speed that its burgeoning economy has left all other Indian states awe-struck” (*ibid*). In marketing Gujarat as the ‘Land of Entrepreneurs’, there is no doubt that the state has taken determined steps to create conditions conducive to global capital. Ahmedabad and its immediate surrounding area alone have 11 Special Economic Zones, 10 Industrial Parks, and 12 Industrial Estates. The state government enacted the Gujarat Infrastructure Development Act in 1999, a key legislation opening up the rapid privatization of infrastructure (water, ports, power, transportation and telecommunications). The state

has capitalized on strategic amendments to the Industrial Dispute Act of 1947 to, in its own words, “provide flexible labour employment in SEZs” (*ibid*).

Special Economic Zones continue to proliferate under stewardship of Chief Minister Narendra Modi, and Gujarat now has 60 such sites scattered throughout the state, occupying 29,242 hectares of land, where 10 years of tax breaks have been extended to some of the biggest players in corporate capital: GM, Pfizer, Tata Industries, British Gas, Bombardier, GE Plastics, among others. The state government has also mapped and established vast Special Economic Regions, such as the Petroleum, Chemicals and Petrochemical Investment Region; those along the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor, and the Ahmedabad Dholera Investment Region. Within this staggering landscape of deregulation and liberalization, Ahmedabad is being positioned to be a command and control centre in northwestern India. It is a city wired into the information pipeline and a hub directing Gujarat’s mighty business diaspora. It is poised to dominate India’s ‘Golden Corridor’, a zone of concentrated economic activity linking industrial estates and SEZs from Ahmedabad to Surat, from India’s largest private port in Mundra down along the Indian Ocean to the juggernaut of Mumbai. Nowhere are Gujarat’s global, urban aspirations more conspicuous than in the current plans to construct the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City, whose acronym ironically reads GIFT—one of the investment opportunities showcased in Vibrant Gujarat.

December 2009. The offices of the corporation leading GIFT’s construction turned out to be only a short distance from where I was living at the time in Ahmedabad. Situated in a giant tower sculpted out of pink granite, GIFT’s offices command an impressive view of the surrounding exhibition ground in Vastrapur. En route, my taxi driver joked that the

building's construction was typical of India's poor planning. Apparently, the offices were built with no connecting road to city streets, making access particularly problematic. I was warmly ushered into executive offices, and shortly met by several young, slick marketers in charge of GIFT. They gave every assurance that phase one of the city was well under way, and I left with a glossy package complete with high-resolution architectural drawings and promotional DVD video. As a Public-Private Partnership, the Gujarat government has pledged to match the investment of corporate capital in GIFT's construction. The land for the city has already been appropriated by the state, and developers' SEZ application approved. The ground has been consecrated. GIFT is open for global investment.



Figure 21. The future site of GIFT. Photograph by author.

After the meeting, I traveled to the site of the future city. The journey took me north of Ahmedabad, along S.G. Highway, passing Info City, and over a large irrigation canal,

the primary artery diverting water from the Narmada River northwestward to the parched agricultural lands that stretch out to the Rann of Kutch. After many twisting directions, the gate to GIFT was open, leading into an expansive fenced area. Construction was not apparent with the exception of several dirt roads snaking through scrubby brush and a convoy of lorry trucks carrying sand up from the dry riverbed of the Sabarmati. Back in the cool, corporate offices in Ahmedabad, the 550 acres appropriated for GIFT was described as 'barren land', but not surprisingly there are several villages situated within the enclosed area. These are relatively small settlements, such as Phirozpur, a village clustered around 100 homes whose residents raise buffalo and use the surrounding land for grazing. I stopped to talk with some local villagers, who were uncertain of their future. Those I spoke with (albeit briefly) were unaware if and what compensation had been offered for land usurped for the coming city, where they hoped to find employment.

Located between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar, in a zone outlined on maps as Ecopolis, Parcel 2, GIFT promises to be the centerpiece of hyper modernity in Gujarat. Described as 'A City for the Next Generation India', GIFT's promotional materials outline an avatar city, whose spiral towers of glass and steel represent the new temples of India's financial power. With rainwater harvesting, zero discharge, automated collection where waste gets sucked through underground pipes at 90 km/hr and treated through plasma technology, fiber optics and wireless networks, river tunnels and automatic driver-less pods available 24 hours a day, GIFT guarantees a landscape of luxurious mobility, of power and prestige. GIFT is a colossal undertaking, an audacious high-tech financial hub directing the flows of global capital in western India, an information pipeline linking Gujarat to India's multiple global cities and beyond. It is a cybernetic

landscape that marketers place on par with London's Dockyards, Shanghai's Pudong Park, and Tokyo's Shinjuku district. Lofty ambitions to be sure, but it articulates a compelling testament to Gujarat's rising economic might and India's ascent as a legitimate global superpower. GIFT's crowning jewel is Fortune Island, to be dominated by the twisting apparition of Diamond Tower, destined to be India's tallest building, standing over 80 stories at 400 meters with 4.29 million square feet of office space. Diamond Tower rules a radiant, planned skyline. Sculpted to mimic the cut sides of a diamond, the tower's symbolism is potent, given that Gujarat produces 72 percent of all processed diamonds worldwide. Lost is the fact that not only is Gujarat's diamond industry notoriously unregulated, but also in major crisis due to the freefall of the U.S. consumer market in 2009, the collapse of which was quickly followed by massive layoffs in Gujarat and over 70 reported suicides by indebted diamond workers in Ahmedabad and Surat. In Ahmedabad, the geography of connectivity has exploded in recent years with the proliferation of cyber cafes and cell phones, with advertisements for broadband connection, Vodaphones, Airtel and Reliance Communications lining city streets and cascading down the sides of residential apartments.¹¹ The propagation of gated

¹¹ As a whole, India represents the fastest growing telecommunication market in the world. According to the Department of Telecommunications of the Government of India, the Indian telecom sector now represents the third largest in the world, with more than a thousand cities in India having been provided with broadband connection (Kaushal 2007). India now has a mobile phone subscriber base of over 375 million, with somewhere around 7 million new users added each month, or an average growth rate of 40 percent (see www.wirelessfederation.com). The Indian Cellular Association claims that the number of mobile phones has skyrocketed by 300 percent in recent years, from 35 million in 2005 to 130 million in 2009 (www.ica-ind.org). The point being that business is booming. In 2010, Tata Communications, in collaboration with China Telecom, announced plans for a fiber-optic cable connecting the two countries. This 500-kilometer cable will provide high-speed connectivity between two of the world's fastest growing economies. This builds on a similar line established in 2009 by India's Reliance Communications and China Telecom that snaked its way over the Himalaya Mountains to connect the city of Yadong to the northeastern town of Siliguri in India (see www.telegeography.com). I am not going to debate the merits and limitations of India's 'digital revolution', although it is salient to note that its geography of connectivity is highly varied and uneven. It remains concentrated in urban settings with little expansion into rural India (where 70 percent of the country live). Given that the country only has 18.4 mobile phone, 0.8 Internet, and 3.5 fixed telephone line subscribers per 100 inhabitants (Kaushal 2007), I think we need to be hesitant in overtly celebrating the reach of information technologies. Further, Steve Hill (2000) argues that while South Asia has 23 percent of the world's population, it has less than one percent of its Internet

bungalows and private member clubs along the city's western rim are like islands of cyber-modernity, the promised land of fortified, exclusive urban territory. Billions of rupees continue to pour into the city's transportation network, like its Rapid Transit System or arching freeways and flyovers that connect the inner city with reclusive suburbs. This is a geography that extends the promise of universal connectivity and mobile citizenship in 21st century Gujarat.

But this is a promise made only to the few. And for those living in resettlement colonies like Odhav or Vishala (to name only two), the tens of thousands living along the tenuous urban-rural frontier, or the vast majority in Ahmedabad, such promises are a mirage, the world of unfettered mobility a pipe dream. Time-space expansion, then, is as much or more a dominant feature of the 'global' city. For the Baori, this extension is not simply a matter of economics but equally that of social reproduction. Theirs is a condition that Anthony Giddens (1981) might describe as 'time-space distancing', a somewhat clinical term to illustrate the stretching of social relations as Baoris now live in multiple locations in the city, split between Vishala, Gulbai Tekra and Ramdevnagar. In a place where the family is one's social safety net, such expansion has very serious ramifications. The disruption of social networks can be, quite literally, a matter of life and death. It is such networks that allow for various forms of collective organizing, such as the buying of supplies, identifying common spaces for economic activities, as well as offering physical safety and the sharing of information and resources.

users. Lastly, it is difficult to consider the possible progressive potential of information technologies in India where hundreds of millions lack basic services such as clean water, secure shelter, and access to education.



Figure 22. The abandoned Gujarat Ginning Mill in Kalupur. Photograph by author.

This kind of time-space expansion can be traced elsewhere in Ahmedabad, extending well beyond the experience of resettlement to the urban periphery. Indeed, it can be argued that it has become one of the defining features of daily life for the urban poor toiling in informal economies. Jan Breman (2004) estimates that the ejection of formal

sector workers from the Ahmedabad textile mills over the past thirty years has meant workers labouring over longer hours in multiple jobs for less money. Additionally, the ratcheting up of evictions in the city has been accompanied with the state's greater efforts to restrict various informal activities in specific areas. This has meant attempting to curtail the movement of hawkers and street vendors, narrowing their access and mobility in the city through the enforcement of anti-begging and loitering legislation. I do not want to belabour this point, but simply argue that just as capital tears down particular barriers in Ahmedabad, it is busy (re)constructing new partitions and systems of enclosure. As Cindi Katz (2001) astutely notes, while from the vantage point of capital, the world may have shrunk, for those experiencing various forms of dislocation, the spheres of social and economic reproduction have dramatically expanded.



Figure 23. Young man working alongside the Gujarat Ginning Mill. Photograph by author.

“They’re Turning Us Into Nomads Again”

The displacement of Baoris to the urban-rural frontier traces a distressing geography. Speaking of Gulbai Tekra, Suresh observed that, “The fact is that this place is situated in an area where we can earn. Here... there are more wealthy people living... There are a lot of people in areas like C.G. Road, Law Gardens, Nehrunagar, which are nearby here, where people crowd in the evenings. And at these places we can do business by selling our statues, and earn some money” (Interview, November 2008). Given the necessity of being within striking distance of municipal market areas, and their need to access domestic work in the locale immediately surrounding Gulbai Tekra, the Baori have little option but to live with the threat of pending eviction as part of their daily lives. They maintain a tenuous claim in the inner city. Despite the 2002 evictions, many families continue to live in Gulbai Tekra. Those relocated to Vishala uphold close ties with their ‘core’ community through familial relations, and there is a great deal of commuting back and forth between the two settlements. Their need to remain in the inner city is equally prompted by an emotional attachment. “We can’t leave this place, even if we’re pushed out”, Modevbhai explained, “We cannot leave here because we have a *feeling* for this place” (Interview, November 2008). The ‘feeling’ for Gulbai Tekra illustrates the powerful entwined forces of economic survival and community identity that give meaning to Baoris’ attachment to territory—their home in Ahmedabad for generations.

To this end, it is significant to note that the community has reterritorialized much of the land lost during the demolitions carried out in 2002. The making of plaster statues spills out onto the roadway punched through by the AMC, and various stages of production

slows passing traffic. Strangely, city authorities and private developers have done nothing to develop the land emptied next to the roadway. “After the demolitions, the land is just lying empty”, and exacerbated Maghabhai complained, “They should not object to poor people staying here” (Interview, November 2008). While no one has ventured to reconstruct homes, the area is now used to support various aspects of domestic life: the keeping of livestock, cooking, socializing, washing, etc.



Figure 24. Reclaiming land in Gulbai Tekra. Photograph by author.

Laxmiben, a community educator who provides daily lunches and instruction for 50 children in a 14x14 room in Gulbai Tekra, described the standoff with the AMC: “They want to wipe us out... it has been many times they come and demolish our houses. So we have to rebuild” (Interview, November 2008). This kind of tug-of-war between the state and poor is common throughout Ahmedabad. The city demolishes homes. When they can, residents often return to pick up the pieces. Vendors are ejected from city

streets. They return carting their wares. On the one hand, this demonstrates what Mike Davis (2006: 98) argues to be a “ceaseless social war” wherein the state activates its planning apparatus to wage a low-intensity war on the poor. But the Baori’s reterritorialization is an important site of resistance in its own right, refocusing what Nicholas Blomley (2004: xiv-xix) illustrates as struggles where the “right to the city” collides with the “right not to be excluded”. The Baori are thus a community who refuses to concede their rightful place in the city. These, then, are the strategies that Asef Bayat (1997) would argue demonstrate that the responses of the poor are never simply defensive but rather “serendipitously offensive”.

Questions of Baoris’ agency will be more fully elaborated in due course. Their eviction and resettlement, however, presents a somber and rather disheartening reminder of how the politics of citizenship in contemporary Ahmedabad are deeply imbued in the struggle over territory. This elaborates Henri Lefebvre’s (1974) insight that the right to the city is perpetually at odds with the right to property. In so many respects, economic liberalization in Ahmedabad has involved undermining constitutional rights and legislative acts in virtually every sphere of life and governance; whether we look to the spectacular rise of special economic zones; the erosion of and circumvention of labour legislation; or the retrenchment of the state on responsibilities to provide social welfare to adivasis (and others). In such conditions, Baoris are indeed stuck between a rock and a hard place. The objectives of the last two chapters have been to document how Baoris’ collective predicament and how the informalization of territory and tenure rights functions as a primary mechanism driving the violent remaking of the liberalizing metropolis. It is such processes that are put to work to generate what Ananya Roy (2005: 147) describes as the best efforts of “planning modalities” to produce the

“unplanned city”. But it is not the absence of planning or policy that defines this ‘unmapping’, but rather an apparatus that requires the active engagement of state actors to design a “system of norms that governs the process of urbanization itself” (Roy and AlSayyad 2004). Ahmedabad is increasingly a city of recalibrated urban governmentality, where the state and private capital utilize regimes of informality to reconfigure the urban landscape along the fault lines of class, caste, and (more ominously) religion. In Gulbai Tekra, we have seen the sovereign power of the planning apparatus utilized to appropriate land in the name of public interest, a process mirrored by stripping residents of the documentation that support their claims to land and existing government social welfare schemes. On the one hand, then, informality is produced to ensure subordination and affords planning authorities a great deal of spatial control. At the same time, informal processes are capitalized upon by private developers, who negotiate formalization through nefarious connections and networks with politicians and planning agencies.

For those fortunate enough (like Baoris in Gulbai Tekra) to establish themselves as eligible targets of state intervention, resettlement schemes seemingly represent ambitious plans that include state-sponsored infrastructure and promises of land tenure and civic amenities. But if Baoris’ experiences are any indication, these are promises made but seldom kept. In practice, resettlement to the urban-rural frontier is an institutional mode of land (re)distribution wherein the state deliberately keeps entitlements in a state of ambiguity—a miasma that makes it effectively impossible to establish rights. The vagueness of land ownership and tenure rights in both Gulbai Tekra and Vishala are revealing. I have already traced the contestation of land ownership in Gulbai Tekra in the previous chapter, but to reiterate, Baoris who remain in

the area insist they reside on land that is under the private ownership of an absent landlord. The AMC maintains that the entire area is under its domain, and the Baori are nothing more than illegal encroachers on public territory. The dichotomy between these competing claims is irresolvable. The urban planners at the AMC I finally managed to track down during the course of this fieldwork did nothing to ease this ambiguity. In fact, they were completely unwilling to speak about resettlement colonies in the city (even 'off the record'). They opted instead to draw my attention to the AMC being awarded the Dubai International Award for Best Practices in 2006 for the city's participation in the (now abandoned) Slum Networking Programme. If the development of the resettlement colony in Vishala follows examples elsewhere in the city, it is likely that land is owned by the AMC, while its physical infrastructure is being developed by AUDA. Details in this regard were not forthcoming from city planners. It is perhaps most telling that in the resettlement colony itself, Baoris have no idea who owns the land. They have been unable to secure formal tenure (as promised) from the AMC, as well as the documentation (electricity bills and ration cards) through which they can prove they are legitimate residents in the area. Such actions are indicative of how Baoris' entitlements have been suspended by the state, and residents in Vishala now live with the tenuous guarantee that they will not be further displaced until the end of 2010. There is little doubt that when it becomes attractive to develop the area, the entire community will again be displaced. In the meantime, the state can discipline by leaving open the threat of eviction.

It is clear that capitalizing on such ambiguity has emerged as a central component within the restructuring of Ahmedabad. This is by no means unique to the city, as the vagueness of metropolitan land, writes Gopal Bhargava (1983: 18) is common

throughout India, with most cities lacking proper documentation regarding urban land holdings. The lack of centralized or inaccessible maps means that it is often very difficult to establish the legal ownership of land. With an increasingly hostile judiciary and its narrowing interpretation of the Indian constitution (Ramanathan 2002; 2005; 2006; Shukla 2006), it is precisely such regulatory ambiguity that facilitates the unchecked power of the AMC to reclaim 'public' land for private commercial development. For Ananya Roy (2003: 138-39), this is an enforced ambiguity that drives a developmentalism deploying a "specific logic" that operates through the "absence of knowable maps and records". For Baoris this means being violently pushed out of the inner city to the urban periphery and to a future of perpetual (im)mobility—a forced march in advance of middle class or industrial encroachment. As one acquaintance in Vishala put it, "The government? They're turning us into nomads again." Given the seemingly inexhaustible appetite of developers for land for commercial development in Ahmedabad, this process of dispossession seems poised to extend well into the foreseeable future. What today is a farmer's field or dilapidated housing colony will be engulfed by the metropolis, to be transformed into a shopping complex, a gated community, industrial estate, or avatar city. As urban nomads in 21st century India, for the Baori, this may very well mean a future of continual displacement along the ever-shifting urban-rural frontier. "In the mega city", Suresh observed, "there is no place for slums. We will have to go to the outskirts... to areas such as Sanand, near Chagodar Highway. We will have to shift someday, that is sure" (Interview, December 2008). Identifying 'Sanand, near Chagodar Highway' is no mere coincidence. It tracks the Baoris' march further southward from Vishala, moving alongside the recent relocation of the Tata Nano Industrial Zone—a massive industrial estate owned by one of India's

richest oligarchies and whose assembly line is soon to roll out the Nano, the world's cheapest car.

Baoris' precarious place in Ahmedabad raises deeper questions that require consideration. To what extent have they ever been rights bearing citizens? Or to what degree have Baoris ever had meaningful inclusion and access to formal constitutional protections and governmental structures within the framework of India's (neo)liberal democracy? While it is true that liberalization and urban renewal have propelled the greater erosion and suspension of Baoris' rights and entitlements, it is equally relevant to serious question the extent to which they (like so many adivasis) have long lived beyond the pale of democratic protections. This exclusion does not preclude the possibilities of accommodation as Baoris attempt to secure their claim in the city and within the mechanisms of state power through precarious negotiations with city officials and private developers. This, however, figures a different terrain of politics wherein Baoris contest inclusion beyond the rules of law and order. It is such negotiations and their limits that inform what follows.

Chapter 4: Labouring In and Beyond Political Society

Opening Moves

The conditions of Baoris clearly demonstrate that the question of (in)visibility continues and is increasingly problematic for many of India's poor, whose lack of physical documentation is a primary ground for exclusion. As expressions of state power—among its technologies of governing—such documents represent, as argues Gaston Gardillo (2006: 162), the “crucible of citizenship”, which are often perceived to possess a “force of their own” and the authority to “deflect state violence and shape major aspects of a group's collective identity”. In Ahmedabad, ID papers are the primary means of gaining visibility in the classification schematics of the state, and thus to access its resources and to legitimize group identities. We have already seen their critical necessity in the experiences of Baoris, whose tattered rent receipts and electricity bills are (quite literally) their only means of proving their existence in the city. In this chapter, I consider Baoris' negotiation of inclusion and exclusion within the mechanisms of state power in Ahmedabad. I begin by reiterating their tenuous visibility within the urban landscape and structures of formal governance. Baoris' struggles are situated in relief to the recent efforts of the Indian judiciary to radically reconfigure who and who does not constitute legitimate citizens within an emergent legal discourse legitimizing the recalibration of state functions and the erasure of the poor in the liberalizing metropolis. Such considerations are critical as a key dynamic of economic restructuring in Gujarat (and beyond) continues to be the systematic un-mapping in the

systems and categories of governance.¹² Baoris struggle not as rights bearing citizens, who have a legitimate claim on state resources and legislated protections, so much as a community attempting to establish themselves as an eligible, visible population. The growing suspension of formal rights and constitutional protections does not, however, preclude political negotiation. I describe how Baoris attempt to secure their place in the city through precarious parleys with state agents and private developers. Their recent inability to meaningfully navigate this terrain emphasizes important limits to what Partha Chatterjee (2004) describes as “political society”—a nebulous political sphere wherein ‘rights’ and entitlements are thwarted and negotiated outside the realms of formal citizenship, and beyond the rules that govern elite, civil society.

¹² An important counter-argument to this claim is found in the 2008 announcement of the Government of India to issue each and every citizen with a Unique Identification Number (UID). The UID will quantify personal information on an almost unimaginable scale, with the state collecting the date of birth, name, address, marital status, as well as the biometric identification (fingerprints and photographs) of India’s 1.2 billion people. This will be the largest cataloguing of people ever carried out anywhere in the world, and this personal identification will be accessible through a centralized computer database. The Unique Identification Authority (UIA) assures that over the next four years, it will issue six hundred million 16-digit identity numbers, thus mapping half the Indian population. The UID is being touted by the United Progressive Alliance government as a cost-effective strategy for delivering social welfare. This is meant as a pro-poor initiative designed to answer the fact that there are vast numbers in India who do not possess any form of (state authorized) identification. The UID means to fix this. In the words of Nandan Nilekani, one of the India’s premiere software gurus and head of the government’s UIA: “We are going to build something on the scale of Google but it will change the country... every person for the first time [will] be able to prove who he or she [is]... This will mean maids and labourers... a hundred or two hundred million people will be able to access welfare benefits for the first time without any question of who they are” (Qtd. in *Guardian* 25.09.09 page 4). Ominously, the UID will be accessible to various agencies that comprise India’s security apparatus, many of which are to be incorporated into the National Intelligence Grid (NIG) in 2011. The NIG will centralize access to various data sets, including the records of air and rail travel, phone calls, bank accounts and credit card transactions, as well as visa, immigration and property records. It means to enable ‘real-time’ tracking of citizens. The UID is clearly driven by heightened fears over national security in the escalating activities of armed Maoist groups, as well as in the aftermath of the latest serial bombings in Ahmedabad (July 2008), New Delhi (September 2008), and the brazen attacks in Mumbai (December 2008). The effort to map the entire citizen body is meant to further the state’s field of vision, a centralized optic enabling it to track citizens within India’s anti-terror apparatus. At a public talk given at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad in December 2009, Nilekani gave no indication of how the state plans to protect against the misuse of citizens’ identification. Further, without recording length of residence and caste identities, it is unclear the extent to which the UID will assure access to social welfare schemes and developmental programs.

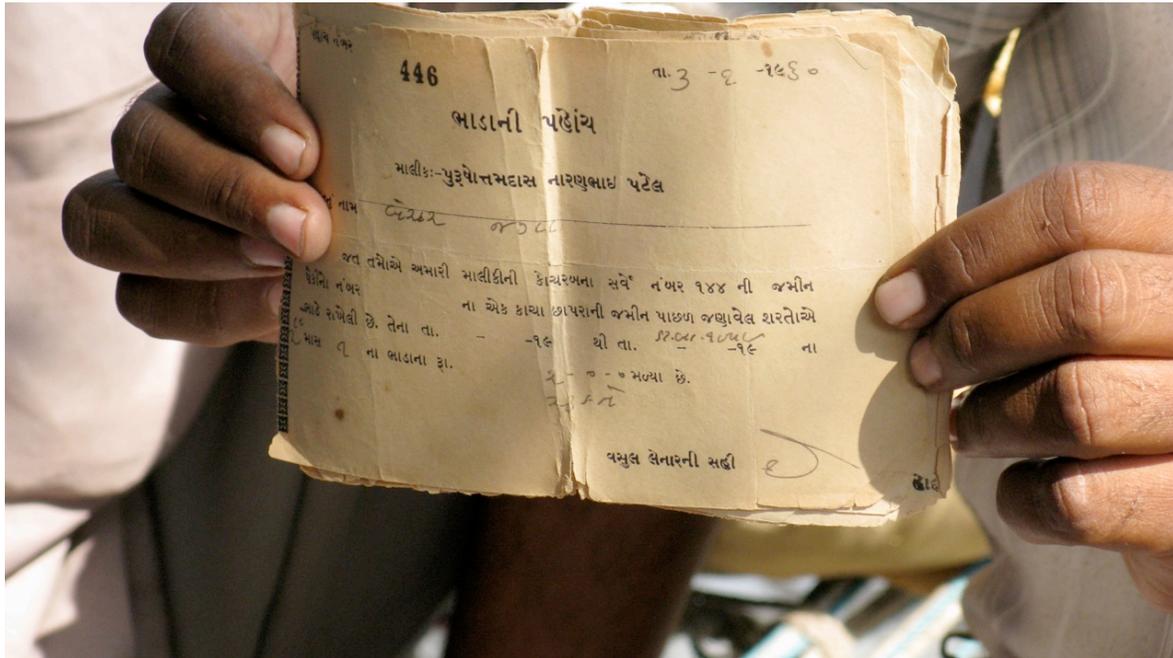


Figure 25. Rent receipt from the 1960s. Photograph by author.

Baori claims in Ahmedabad have always been precarious. They have never had meaningful access to formal rights as lawful citizens and have long been excluded from the protections offered by formal sector employment. As detailed in chapters two and three, although settled in Ahmedabad for well over a hundred years, Baoris have never managed access to (unionized) employment. Most recently, they have worked themselves into the city's informal economies as casual labourers, domestic workers, and used their expertise as artisans to produce plaster statues sold in local street markets. In Baori Samaj, the opportunity for higher levels of education and training do not exist. Baoris' inability to access various state welfare programs and administrative categories established for adivasis has resulted in their exclusion from public sector labour markets and access to public education institutions. While the community may not occupy the lowest rungs of the urban economy, families struggle with the weight of

persistent poverty. Their collective labour demonstrates the great ingenuity required to survive near the bottom of the city's socio-economic hierarchy. Similar to many other communities that constitute the urban poor in Ahmedabad, Baoris in Gulbai Tekra live much of their lives on the fringe of legality. They are settled in a well-established *basti* that exists in a state of illegality. They are considered illegal squatters on public land with no rights of tenure. It is important to reiterate, however, that Baoris' settlement in the city was not an instance of 'pirate' urbanization wherein the poor occupy vacant or unused land. Rather, recent actions taken by the AMC have transformed the community from renters with a semi-formal or de facto tenure to the extra-legal occupiers of public land. This has been a conscious strategy to informalize urban territory by a planning apparatus eager to 'develop' the area.

All of these conditions do not figure the absence of political negotiations, nor even state regulation. A key feature of political society is the recognition that because any dealings with such populations implies a tacit acknowledgement of various extra-legal practices, agents of the state often administrate the poor as exceptions to the rule of law. In attempting to negotiate their inclusion in the city, Baoris have had to enter into an alternative sphere of politics. We have already seen political society at work in Baori Samaj, namely, in the way they have accessed civic amenities. These 'rights' were never secured as lawful citizens. For decades, Baoris drew electricity from the main city grid; while communal water taps were obtained by bribing municipal workers as a water main was dug through the area. Their ability to work as hawkers and artisans takes place in direct violation and circumvention of existing bylaws that govern the access and use of public territory. The irony, if not downright hypocrisy, being that despite their

illegal tenancy on public lands, Baoris pay municipal taxes for unauthorized homes and yet receive no basic entitlements. This is a familiar contradiction throughout the city.

Baoris' position in Ahmedabad is precarious but it was not so long ago that they did manage to garner some measure of support from local state actors and concerned middle classes.

Laxmiben: Earlier we had this health minister, Mr. Babubhai Vasanwala, who was elected from our constituency, who worked for us and provided us with one big pipeline... [He] installed sewage facility in every house here. Later there was a lady named Vijayaben Desai, she also used to take care of us, hear our difficulties and help us. At present there is Prafulbhai who is very little help. If, for instance, we have a blocked sewage line, and nobody comes, [when] we make an application [to the city], a phone call might give us help. Otherwise, nobody is here to take care of us (Interview, November 2008).

While Baoris may have once garnered support from a handful of elected officials and sympathetic elites, this is no longer the case. This figures a much broader trend that Chatterjee (2004) describes as the dramatic reorientation of Indian civil society, where, since the early 1990s, the willingness of urban middle classes to pressure the state to provide social welfare for the poor has significantly withered. This transformation is furthered in the manner that the Indian state is increasingly seen as corrupt, inefficient, and a hindrance to effective governance and economic growth. This is precisely the kind of public discourse that gets circulated to legitimize state restructuring the world over, and in India, according to Chatterjee, a consensus amongst Indian elites has emerged that places a priority on rapid economic growth and urban renewal regardless of the human cost (see also Baviskar 2001; 2003; Roy 2003; 2005; Breman 2004). The effects of this reordering of state power in the lives of Baoris will be taken up in greater detail in ensuing pages. The reorientation of the institutions that govern Indian civil society, however, are perhaps no where clearer than in the steps taken by the Indian

judiciary to dramatically tack away from extending constitutional protections to the urban poor.

An Activist Judiciary?

The Indian constitution is without question a remarkable document, certainly one of the world's most democratic (if not its longest) and enshrines the state's obligation to protect the lives of all citizens regardless of class, caste, gender or religion. It lays the foundation of the modern, independent Indian nation state, founded on the pillars of federalism, secularism and socialism. It was only ten years ago that the Indian courts were widely seen as a place where activists and citizen movements could turn to assert the rights of India's most vulnerable—the many left behind in the wake of modernist development and long kept outside meaningful political inclusion. While the judiciary is always pivotal in the execution of state power, in India, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there were a number of progressive rulings issued by the Supreme Court that did much to affirm the constitutional rights of the disenfranchised. The courts did so by routinely challenging the state to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities. I do not want to trace this genealogy in detail, but perhaps a few examples will suffice. Significant to our discussion is *Olga Tellis vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985), where a petition was filed on behalf of city pavement dwellers living in more than 10,000 improvised shelters on city streets. Petitioners argued that city authorities had no right to evict them without notice and alternative accommodation because their occupation of land was necessitated by the need to be in close proximity to places of work. They demanded that the courts must make a decision on the function of public territory, and challenged that provisions of the Bombay Municipal Corporation Act were in direct violation of the

Indian constitution. Pavement dwellers drew critical attention to the unchecked power of the Municipal Commissioner to evict anyone occupying public space without license from the state. They argued that evictions would amount to depriving them of their livelihood, thus stripping them of their 'right to life' as guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution. The ruling of the Supreme Court was widely hailed as a landmark decision because it expanded the interpretation of the 'right to life' clause as inclusive of livelihood. It concluded that:

The eviction of the pavement or slum-dweller not only means his removal from the house but the destruction of the house itself. And the destruction of a dwelling house is the end of all that one holds dear in life. Humbler the dwelling, greater the suffering and more intense the sense of loss (Olga Tellis 1985).

The courts directed the municipal corporation to provide alternative accommodations to displaced pavement dwellers, which were to be a reasonable distance from places of work. At the same time, the courts maintained the sovereign authority of the planning apparatus to remove 'illegal' settlements, albeit under a number of new criteria and conditions.

In a similar case, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation vs. Nawab Khan Gulab Khan (1997), a parallel argument was presented when the city government attempted to evict pavement dwellers who had established a number of semi-permanent structures and businesses on city streets. Again, the Supreme Court upheld the argument that these communities did pose a public nuisance (whose definition derived from British law) by obstructing public life, but reaffirmed that adequate notice (21 days) had to be issued in advance of eviction. The court also pressured the AMC to resettle qualifying residents. The case reinstated that the right to alternative accommodation (when disrupting livelihood) fell within the constitutional obligations of the state. It was a pronouncement

that echoed the *Bombay Hawkers' Union vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985), where street vendors challenged the unrestrained authority of municipal officials to remove them without first providing a public hearing. The court supported the argument that informal vendors had a constitutional right to 'hawk' on city streets, but again upheld the power of the city to remove such activities when they were deemed to infringe on the access of public land. The courts directed the Bombay Municipal Corporation to devise a planning strategy that was meant to create and regulate 'hawking' zones in each ward of the city. The case led to the relaxing of certain bylaws, such as lifting the ban on the sale of cooked food and fruit.¹³

This is obviously a rough sampling of an extensive judicial history. And while the decisions of the Supreme Court during the time were hardly radical, they nevertheless signaled their empathy to the plight of the urban poor, while extending the interpretation of the Indian constitution. Until the end of the 1990s, the Supreme Court of India did maintain that the right to livelihood and shelter constituted fundamental rights, which were in step with the executive government's commitments to various international treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nation's Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Successive rulings, then, attempted to bridge two contradictions; of bringing the disenfranchised more fully within constitutional protections, and—at the same time—preserving the sovereign power of the state to violate those rights in the name of urban development and public interest. To some extent, the court's interpretation of the constitution solidified it as a space for furthering the elusive goals of social justice. As many civil rights lawyers in Ahmedabad

¹³ Other cases along a similar vein would include: *Sodan Singh vs. NDMC* (1989); *Shantistar Builders vs. Narayan Khimalal Totame* (1990); *Chameli Singh vs. State of U.P.* (1996).

are quick to point out, the court's progressive leaning was reflected in their willingness to expand what constituted the 'right to life' clause in Article 21 of the constitution, which enshrines the ideal that no Indian citizen shall be denied their right to life and liberty (except by law).

This 'judicial activism' in India was facilitated in large measure by the introduction of Public Interest Litigation (PIL) during the early 1980s.¹⁴ This represented a significant effort to democratize the access of the disenfranchised to the highest levels of judicial authority in the country. What followed was an explosion of PIL issued by civil rights organizations across India, often leading the courts to direct state authorities to improve the living conditions of the poor. The courts used PIL to confront state violence¹⁵; improve the lives of inmates of prisons and asylums; and to stop the practice of bonded and child labour. The courts also capitalized on PIL to pressure the state to initiate minimum wages, police reforms, environmental legislation, while chastising planning departments for their failure to carry out social housing schemes outlined in cities' master plans. PIL instigated a number of progressive reforms, and a reinterpretation of fundamental rights in India, particularly those pertaining to the right to life and liberty. Through time, the courts expanded their constitutional interpretation to include not only one's physical existence, but also what was identified as fundamental to life: e.g., food, shelter, education, healthcare, water. PIL continued to extend the reach of the courts

¹⁴ In a remarkable case, *SP Gupta vs. Union of India* (1981), the Supreme Court significantly relaxed the rules governing who could appear before the courts. The rules of *loci standi* were eased to such an extent that a letter or postcard addressed to a judge could be converted into a writ petition. In the words of the presiding judge, Justice Iyer, PIL was designed to open access to the judiciary to any "person or determinate class of persons (who) by reason of poverty, helplessness or disability or socially or economically disadvantaged position (is) unable to reach the courts for relief" (*SP Gupta* 1981).

¹⁵ As seen in the case of *Anil Yadvu vs. State of Bihar*, where, in 1982, state torture was brought to the attention of the Supreme Court. The case revealed how the police in Bihar had blinded thirty-three suspected criminals by pouring acid into their eyes. The Supreme Court initiated the immediate criminal prosecution of those involved, and directed state authorities to bring those injured to Delhi to receive proper medical care.

through the 1990s, particularly in targeting state corruption and the accountability of civil servants, and thus formed a primary mechanism through which activists, journalists, civil rights lawyers, academics, and citizen movements attempted to further an agenda of social justice within a constitutional framework. In many respects, PIL emerged in direct response to the excesses of the Emergency years (1975-77), and what it did accomplish was the dramatic expansion of the judiciary's power and scope. It extended the ability of the courts to intervene in state policy, which, according to Rakesh Shukla (2006: 3757), quickly reached into "almost each and every sphere of life and governance." Usha Ramanathan (2002), a law researcher based in Delhi, argues that PIL resulted in a dramatic reinvention of the constitution "as something relevant to thus-far marginalized masses" and thus provided the courts with a "keen sense of [popular] appeal and legitimacy." While this may have signaled the courts assuming extra-constitutional powers, it was widely endorsed because it opened the possibility of a more inclusive democracy and use of law to assert the rights of those long kept beyond the pale.

Redefining Citizenship

Over the last decade, the willingness of the Indian courts to further the rights of the poor have all but disappeared. There has been a rapid shift in orientation vis-à-vis whose rights will prevail and take precedence under the rule of law in liberalizing India. Recent years have witnessed a dramatic swing in the tone and tenor of the courts, which now seem intent on a program where the individual and collective rights of the poor are to be sacrificed in the name of urban renewal and liberalization (this is to say nothing of national security). "Increasingly", argues Usha Ramanathan, "the constituency on

whose behalf the enhancement of judicial power had been strengthened” has begun “to emerge as the casualty of the exercise of that power... the slum-dweller, the working classes and the dam-displaced were exiled to the margins of the court’s concern, or outlawed altogether”(ibid). The Supreme Court’s backtracking on PIL as an instrument of social justice is instructive here, and nowhere has this trend been sharper than in the court’s total dismissal of litigation challenging the state’s efforts to liberalize the economy and hammer through successive rounds of privatization, even when and where challenges are based on a perceived violation of fundamental rights.¹⁶ What we have seen is a dramatic reframing of what constitutes the public’s interest. Relevant to our discussion is the chilling turn of the judiciary in its growing aggression toward the urban poor. The courts continue to berate the state for allowing so-called ‘illegal’ settlements to develop in the first place, but now insist on their removal under the rubric that the poor pose a public nuisance or encroach on public and private properties. Various legal precedents could be described to further this point but I will limit myself to one.

Almitra Patel vs. Union of India (2000) is particularly instructive because it signaled the Supreme Court’s dramatic reorientation. The case revolved around the Municipal Corporation of Delhi’s (MCD) (mis)management of solid waste in the metropolis. The Supreme Court argued that the practices of the MCD had long pursued a “politics of appeasement” that had led to a “systemic failure of planning in the city”. The case was presided over by (the now infamous) Justice BN Kirpal, who declared that while Delhi should be the “showpiece of the country... no effective indication of any kind has been

¹⁶ There is a long list of recent case law to support this claim, such as: *CITU vs. State of Maharashtra* (2004); *State of Karnataka vs. Arun Kumar Agrawal* (2000); *Narmada Bachao Andolan vs. Union of India* (2000).

taken for cleaning up the city". The courts directed the MCD to identify and prepare landfill sites sufficient to deal with the disposal of waste, but the MCD argued it was unable to do so because other state agencies were demanding market value for land. Incensed by the situation, Justice Kirpal argued that could the city provide free land to slum dwellers and not be able to procure territory to manage Delhi's waste. The Justice, however, went a great deal further and identified the poor as the root cause of urban degeneracy in Delhi. In doing so, he drew a direct correlation between waste and the issue of slums. The Supreme Court declared that the number of slums in the capital had proliferated in "geometric proportion" and suggested that the "promise of free land, at taxpayers cost... is a proposal which attracts more land-grabbing." The ruling went on to define "slums" as "large areas of public land usurped for private use free of cost". In the often-cited judgment, the case effectively criminalized everyone living in slum conditions. It established the precedent, as argues Usha Ramanathan (2006: 3195), in which "illegality was signaled out as the trait of the slum dweller... where 'cleaning up' the city was declared to be the primary task in which government agencies needed to be engaged."

The Almitra Patel case thus represents a dramatic reversal in the hard-fought successes in the realms of housing and civic entitlements established since the early 1980s. Further legislation, drawing on the Almitra decision, has challenged the right of the poor to occupy 'public' territory and dismantled municipal laws that protect against summary evictions and the provision of resettlement programs. The Baoris' experience in Ahmedabad has already demonstrated how the imagery and language of waste (intimately linked to criminality) gets mobilized as a discursive means to undermine citizenship rights and to legitimize erasures from the urban landscape. In legal

discourse, slum dwellers (across India) have been increasingly encoded as 'encroachers', whose displacement has been recast in a new light. Actions of Justice Kirpal turned on the sensibility that "rewarding an encroacher on public land with an alternative free site is like giving a *reward to a pickpocket for stealing*" (emphasis added, *Almitra Patel vs Union of India*).¹⁷ This is a remarkable turn of events, given that only ten years ago, the courts often utilized PIL to exert pressure on state agencies to assert social justice, and to reprimand planning authorities and elected officials for their failure to carry out state functions. Over the past decade, we have seen a dramatic reframing of what constitutes state functions, and the court's insistence that the state be accountable to its constitutional responsibilities have all but disappeared. This is a conservative turn signaling the courts falling in step with the executive's agenda of aggressive liberalization and a new urban regime wherein the poor no longer have a place in the democratic politics of the city.

This shift has implications not only in the material struggle over territory, but equally in the contestation of the very meaning of citizenship in India. The emergence of a new legal discourse that effectively criminalizes urban slums has required a dramatic reframing of the public body, where the very validity of the poor's claim to citizenship has been called into question. I will again defer to Usha Ramanathan's (2002) sense of how the language of 'encroachment' has stealthily crept into legal discourse, a language, she argues, loaded with overtones of illegality and criminality. There has been a proliferation of 'encroachment' judgments across India, thus laying a powerful framework that situates the urban poor as periphery 'citizens', stripped of their moral

¹⁷ Numerous cases could be invoked to further unpack this shifting legal discourse; such as: *Lawyers' Cooperative Housing Society vs. Union of India* (1993); *Hem Raj vs. Commissioner of Police* (1999); *Dhar vs. Government of India* (2002); *Azaadi Bachao vs. Union of India* (2003).

and legal legitimacy. As ‘encroachers’ on the public, the poor are routinely likened to trespassers who siphon valuable state resources, while usurping the rights of ‘honest’ middle classes. In this, the law is exercised as an instrument of exclusion, seeking to create what Nicholas Blomley (2004: 796) describes as “seemingly clear boundaries of legal distinctions and the markings of inside and outside” the body politic. This involves a systematic division of what and who constitute a legitimate public—its separation into two very different kinds of citizens: honest vs. unscrupulous, legal vs. illegal, resident vs. trespasser. These are roughly hewed distinctions made between lawful citizens, whose rights are to be upheld by the institutions of civil society (enforced by the rule of law) and ‘pariah’ citizens who have no rightful claim to the city—those whose lives are lived beyond constitutional or legislative protections.

The law itself is a site of resistance and struggle, both in terms of what it does and says, and the boundaries drawn around the inside and outside of citizenship in India are always in the process of being re-mapped. In this sense, the constitution itself is subject to a constant, contested re-imagining. The civil rights lawyers I interviewed during the course of this fieldwork are keenly aware of this fact. Many continue to construct constitutional arguments in the hopes of holding the state and judiciary accountable to the promises of India’s liberal democracy. It is difficult to measure the immediate success of such maneuvers, but many are successful in getting temporary stay orders from the High Court of Gujarat and Supreme Court of India that *temporarily* block the demolition of unauthorized settlements. This hardly exemplifies the courts’ willingness to assert the constitutional rights of the disenfranchised. Nevertheless, given the extraordinary time that legal proceedings can take in India such strategies can be read as an important stalling tactic that buys the poor precious time in advance of slum

demolitions. The chilling turn of India's judiciary is symptomatic of civil society's dramatic reorientation toward the urban poor. In a legal sphere, these developments are often pursued through what Amita Baviskar (2003: 89) describes as an emergent "bourgeois environmentalism" wherein the Indian courts affirm the interests of middle-classes who demand the state 'clean up' cities by erasing the poor from the urban landscape. As witnessed in previous chapters, this public and legal discourse criminalizes the poor by forging a direct correlation between urban degeneracy and poverty, thus providing a central mechanism deployed to justify the denial of fundamental rights and violent expulsion from the city.¹⁸ But a deeper crisis exists here; the fact remains that the vast majority of Indians have never been rights bearing citizens as imagined in the constitution. Given the highly exclusionary nature of civil society and the conservative tenor of the judiciary, it may never have been tenable to solely situate the question of adivasi rights within the framework of liberal democracy. I return to Baoris' struggles in Gulbai Tekra to examine their attempts to negotiate inclusion within existing governmental categories. Their inability to do so necessitates their turn elsewhere, namely, within the terrain of political society.

Invisible Population

The Baori have been excluded from the promises of liberal democracy and equitable development because they struggle to be seen as a legitimate population. The fact that populations are the only usable categories of governmentality means that being identified by the state is critical. It is often the only means through which the poor can

¹⁸ For a consideration of the role that middle-class Resident Welfare Associations play in this process, see Coelho and Venkat 2009.

access valuable state resources. Given their long tenure in Ahmedabad, one would expect that the Baori would command a strong legal and moral legitimacy. One of the unique characteristics of Baoris is that, unlike many other unauthorized settlements in the city where a common identity is forged out of the shared occupation of land, the community does constitute a distinct population. “Our community”, Suresh observed, “is one that has a unique language and ways of living, and is of a completely different kind” (Interview, December 2008). This strong sense of identity, however, can be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it is a source of strength, integrity and survival. The ability to establish a claim in the city and access the resources of the state often depend directly upon the poor’s capacity to establish and circulate a collective identity recognized by the state and supported by civil society. On the other, identity also places boundaries around Baori Samaj, a marked social difference that limits their willingness to connect with other vulnerable groups to stage a broader oppositional politics. “We are from [the] Baori community”, argued Chamanbhai, “We will not prefer to stay with, for example, the Thakor community, which is just in front of us. We will not permit them to live with us. We will not permit them to stay with us. This is because our customs, rules and regulations are different” (Interview, November 2008). This does not preclude the possibility for solidarity across identity formations and organizing around common goals, but it is salient that this has yet to happen in Baori Samaj.

More central is that Baoris’ strong collective identity remains unrecognized by the Gujarati state. The community is not completely invisible. They do exist within the administrative categories of the state’s Social Welfare Department, but not as Baori. This is deeply problematic because the community does constitute a distinct adivasi group with a long history of nomadic activity in northwestern India. Baoris are among

the adivasi populations criminalized by the British Raj under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, and thus represent one of the 198 ethnic aggregates who have become known as the Denotified Tribes of India (DNT). This is a deeply buried history that only became apparent to me in December 2009. At no time over the four years that I had been interacting with Baoris in Gulbai Tekra had anyone in the community articulated this history, with the exception of vague descriptions of other Baori communities in the state of Uttar Pradesh, who Baoris in Ahmedabad described as being engaged in various criminal activities. The Criminal Tribes Act will be interrogated in the following chapter, but suffice to say that the absence of this history in Gulbai Tekra remains extremely puzzling. I only became aware of Baoris' place in this history after working with DNT activists in Ahmedabad and doing extensive archival research on those adivasi groups interned by the British during the late 19th and early 20th century. DNT activists argued that it is not uncommon for such populations to have forgotten this distressing past. Was Baoris' initial classification as Marwari migrants from Rajasthan, then, a tactic they deployed to evade detection by colonial authorities when they first settled in Ahmedabad? Is this a history that has simply slipped into the recesses of time and amnesia of memory. It is impossible for me to say.¹⁹

What is relevant is that Baoris consider themselves a distinct adivasi group based on shared language, custom and religion. As adivasis, they speak their own language. Baori women wear a distinct dress, bought in local Rajasthani markets, and sport unique jewelry. They have adapted songs, dances and rituals in working themselves into the social geographies of the city. "I was born here", Kalu suggested, "as far as I

¹⁹ As it became clear that the subjectivity of DNT had no meaning for Baoris in Gulbai Tekra, I was reluctant to press this issue with community residents. The positionality of the Criminal Tribe continues to carry derogatory connotations in Ahmedabad.

know we came from Rajasthan, from Jodpur... We came here and then spread out to various places like Jamnagar, Rajkot, Probandar, Veraval, Junagadh, and many other places all over Saurashtra... Initially... we were known as Marwaris. So we got together and we named our community as Baori Samaj, as this was very essential” (Interview, November 2008). Kalu traces the history of Baoris’ migration throughout Gujarat, while suggesting the importance of being recognized as a legitimate adivasi population.

Baoris, however, do not appear in the population categories of the Gujarati state.

Laxmiben: The government does not consider us in any type of caste or tribe. They say we don’t have any caste as such... So we don’t get benefits. On the other side, they tell us we are from an upper caste, Marwari community, “You are rich enough. You’re good.” [But] in reality, we are from Baori Samaj, so there is no special quota for the education of our kids, no special quota for government jobs... To prove yourself as backward, you need to have a certificate. And that certificate shows you as a Backward Caste, OBC, SC, ST, whatever the section is... We have submitted and applied to the Samaj Kalyan Kendra, social welfare centre. They have the whole list of Brahmins, Kashatriyas, and Patels. [But] they don’t have our names inside that list, and our existence is now a question. We are considered to be Marwari people, which fall into a higher caste. And that’s the problem. We are from Baori Samaj, and we don’t have any existence in government records (Interview, November 2008).

Laxmiben draws to the heart of the matter: Baoris’ invisibility within the population aggregates of the state—the administrative lists of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, which are defined in the Indian constitution and meant to ensure access to state resources and democratic protections.

The inability of Baoris to secure the necessary identification that would legitimize their adivasi identity has serious implications. It means that they cannot access the state’s reservation system to pursue higher levels of education and training, make use of available social welfare programs, nor gain admission to public labour markets. As a result, residents remain fixed in low-paying, insecure jobs in Ahmedabad’s informal economies. “We’ve tried to expand our community and spread out”, Suresh argued, “for

example, like [the] Patel community, or the Thakor community... We have very few people who are educated... Other communities, they have at least a few people in the government. As for our community, we have no representation in the Corporation or government in Gandhinagar... There is no such leader here” (Interview, December 2008). Baoris have been unable to gain recognition as a legible adivasi population within the governmental logics and categories of the Gujarati state. Further, as Suresh points out, despite their best efforts to ‘expand the community’, Baoris have not had the opportunity to establish anyone in positions of authority and command influence in the corridors of power. This incapacity is precisely what motivates their desperate turn to ‘extra-legal’ negotiations with state agents and private developers. To these tactics I now turn.

Contesting State-Tistics and Precarious Negotiations

In the events leading up to the 2002 evictions, community leaders in Gulbai Tekra attempted to bring their struggle to the attention of elected officials by working through political channels. They first initiated contact with their local MLA, before trying to climb up the political food chain to their area’s MP. They staged a final plea in attempting to solicit the support of the mighty Shri LK Advani, the leader of the BJP party, whose constituency is in Gandhinagar, Gujarat’s capital city. Baoris’ appeals to government authorities fell on deaf ears.

Modevbhai:

No educated person or court judge has come to our rescue. We approached the MLA of our area, Shri Bhavin Seth, but he did not help us. Even the Municipal Corporator [local city councilor] of our area, Shri Prafulbhai Rawal, he is also no help to us... We visited our MP in Delhi, but his secretary phoned Shri Bhavin Seth in Ahmedabad, and narrated a story that we have created a nuisance in this

locality, “Don’t allow these people to get in touch with Shri Advani”... We are poor people, how can we meet such leaders? (Interview, November 2008).

Or Laxmiben:

Here, where we are living, they demolish our huts. When we go on the streets to sell our products, they don’t allow us to sit there. There is no question about any help from them. The government has not even come here to see our plight or [the] condition we live in. Or even to know that a community exists in Gulbai Tekra... They treat us like goats and sheep, like animals. Neither Congress nor the BJP help us in any way (Interview, November 2008).

The Baori have staged other attempts to work within the realms of political society to resist their displacement from the inner city. Shortly following the clearances carried out in 2002, community leaders formed the Akhil Baori Samaj, a local resident association established to represent the collective interests of the community, and a mechanism through which they hoped to negotiate with AMC officials and private developers. One of the first strategies the association deployed was to map Baori Samaj. This was not done with any sophisticated technology, nor in collaboration with any NGO or academic. It was a kind of counter-governmentality—an effort to survey the community by doing a population count and a listing of individual households in which the square footage of homes was recorded. The effort to self-enumerate represents a kind of self-defensive mechanism, a counter-mapping meant to ensure that residents would be properly compensated in future evictions. The Baori’s mapping of their own community space was carried out by co-opting the state’s technologies of governing.

Chamanbhai: The list made by the government during a population survey is with them only. Another list was prepared by our people, it is with us... Our families and children, etc, are all listed... The government has not given [us their] list. If the government gives [us] their list, we can compare... When they come to do a survey, our representative should be present with them to get the exact list. This is because our houses are in narrow lanes spread over the area. Nobody can survey correctly unless our local representative is present. They miss houses in their survey. That’s why, even in our electoral list, half of our people’s names are missing. The survey people... never take an interest in making a correct list... They go into two houses, leave one or two out. They’re scared to go inside [the

community]. They don't like going inside. They don't go deep inside... So the survey is improper. They make it to fool us (Interview, November 2008).

Chamanbhai raises a familiar concern, one where vulnerable populations get excluded in the collection of state-tistics. We see this most readily in the fifty percent of the Baori residing in Gulbai Tekra who do not appear in the state's electoral register. The fact that the state has been completely unwilling to share its numbers demonstrates an acute lack of transparency typical in Ahmedabad. Further, even when 'survey people' have shown up, there appears to have been little effort made to produce a reliable numerical representation of the community. Residents fear that those families not appearing in the statistics of the city will be excluded from resettlement schemes and compensation. This is one example of a much broader trend in Ahmedabad, where there is—more often than not—troubling contradictions and vast disparities between the statistics produced by the state and those procured on the ground by community associations and NGOs. To reiterate, this raises critical questions regarding the state's vague understanding of the urban poor in the city. Over the course of my research, this narrative was repeated so often that one must consider that this was not simply unintentional ignorance, but rather a blatant strategy to undermine rights and entitlements. Baori Samaj is no exception. It is the norm.

Baoris' efforts to counter-map their community also sketches a different politics.

Suresh: We have made a list of each family's details, showing the number of children, married and otherwise. We have been told that those children who are married will each get a house. The unmarried children will not be allotted houses. We have made detailed files about each family. Our united efforts are to get two rooms with a kitchen per family, along with other amenities and facilities... We will give the rest of the land to the government if they agree (Interview, December 2008).

'We will give the rest of the land to the government if they agree' is striking, figuring that the community's self-enumeration represents a mechanism to strengthen their bargaining position and abilities to negotiation. While Baoris naturally have a strong desire to remain in Gulbai Tekra, many express a willingness to concede their claim to territory if properly compensated. "The fact is", Suresh continued, "if we get a good place and a reasonable amount of money, we may consider moving" (Interview, December 2008). This is political society at work, where the Baori—with no legal claim to land—are ready to negotiate a mutually beneficial settlement with the AMC and Anil Bakeri, the private developers eager to transform the area into luxury apartments.

Chamanbhai: It's understood that the builder, Anil Bakeri, is having a presale deed for this area. He has sent message that, "If you want to leave this place, I will give you land and money". We are not refusing the offer, but this is difficult as there is mistrust among our people. So we have to think twice before going to the builder (Interview, November 2008).

Chamanbhai draws our attention to the fact that populations working within political society are often not particularly interested in contesting state power so much as positioning themselves to parlay settlements with state and private capital. "Those in political society", writes Partha Chatterjee (2008: 12), "make their claims on government, and are in turn governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations". Baoris' predicament highlights the uneasy ground that such negotiations rest on within political society. Just as it has become attractive to develop land in Gulbai Tekra, the state has withdrawn its consent that has allowed Baoris to live as an exception to law. The state's accommodation or tacit agreement can thus be revoked at any time for the 15 percent of Ahmedabad's population who live as 'illegal' squatters on public and private lands,

the many others who reside in dilapidated *chawls* in violation of building codes, or the great army of hawkers who work city streets in direct contravention of existing bylaws.

Regrettably, the AMC has expressed no interest in any form of dialogue with Baoris. Further, the violent manner with which the 2002 evictions were carried out, the AMC's sleight of hand, and the negative ramifications of resettlement have all seemingly poisoned any opportunity for meaningful dialogue. There is no doubt that the AMC desires to develop land in Gulbai Tekra, and has partnered with Anil Bakeri to do so, but because Baori Samaj is a relatively small community, their ability to leverage the situation is marginal. The Baori are understandably very suspicious of any future dealings with city officials and private real estate developers. Because of this several families are now contemplating leaving Baori Samaj on their own accord. Fearing displacement without compensation, some are now exploring the possibility of selling unauthorized homes to a neighbouring community of Rabaris, themselves poor adivasi migrants. The sale of houses in the informal real estate market represents an important potential source of equity.

Suresh: Recently, there was an inquiry from a few Rabaris of the Parimal area. They wanted to purchase our houses. So some of us, about 10 to 12, went to Parimal Garden and met the Rabaris there. They asked us the price we want... They further asked us for the measurements of each house. In the meantime, our people constructed an additional wall in the same house so that it can be considered as two homes (Interview, December 2008).

The state's threat of eviction has produced a fracturing of unity and consensus amongst Baoris—a splintering that makes the possibility of organizing in the city's informal sphere all the more challenging. "There are now two groups in the community", observed Modevbhai, "People fell for their false promises. They broke our unity... Now they're forcing us to vacate and saying that if we refuse, we will be beaten and thrown

out of this place. So the people are nervous, and started to think, if such things happen, where will we go?" (Interview, November 2008).

The Limits of Political Society

Partha Chatterjee (2004) proposes political society in an effort to map a space wherein India's poor negotiate 'rights' and inclusion beyond the structures of formal governance and democratic protections. His interest lies in a realm of existing political negotiations taking place outside the framework of liberal democracy, and draws attention to the ways that the poor are governed as exceptions to the rule of law. Accordingly, political society thus functions as a site for democratic politics, in which the poor can deploy various tactics to leverage pressure and wrestle concessions from state actors and private capital. Having been long excluded from the mechanisms and categories of lawful governance, Baoris have had to mobilize other strategies in their bid to secure claims to territory and access civic entitlements. They organize to negotiate accommodation with those intent on transforming Baori Samaj into middle-class apartments. They siphoned electricity. They paid bribes to municipal workers to bring running water to the community. They work as hawkers, roadside merchants and artisans in direct violation of regulations that govern the use of public space. Such tactics have become all the more pertinent in the fallout of rapid economic restructuring and the reframing of state functions in Gujarat—a process shadowed by the judiciary's dramatic steps to undermine progressive interpretations of the constitution. Indeed, Chatterjee (2008) argues that it is precisely such events that necessitate the poor's turn to political society. He insists that it will continue to function as a space for democratization, largely because, just as economic reforms produce the informal, it

remains necessary for the state and capital to administrate the poor. “It is in political society”, he suggests, “that they have to be fed and clothed and given work, if only to secure the long-term and relatively peaceful well-being of civil society”.

This notion of political society is problematic. Chatterjee cuts too broad a distinction, or fails to recognize the messy spatiality or slippage between the formal and informal, the political and the civil, and the legal and extra-legal. There is little room in political society for an understanding how the contestation over the definition of what constitutes formal citizenship rights (defined and enforced under the rule of law) exists in a constant state of flux and site of considerable contestation. Moreover, there is nothing to suggest that political society is the sole domain of the poor. Elites are arguably as or better positioned to work this realm of politics to their advantage. Lastly, this hewed dichotomy does not provide for considering that while Baoris turn to extra-legal negotiations out of desperation, they are simultaneously working very hard for inclusion within the (formal) administrative structures, technologies and categories of state power. Nevertheless, Chatterjee draws attention to an arena of existing political negotiation and the conditions under which extra-legal parleys can be successful. I do not want to suggest a model that determines success or failure in political society, but there may be a number of conditions under which the poor in Ahmedabad are far better situated to negotiate marginal inclusion. As Chatterjee (2004) argues, and my own research in Ahmedabad bears out, ‘success’ in political society is more likely if a community has well-organized resident associations, leadership, sympathetic middle classes, political connections, a moral legitimacy, and possibly sites of high profile development or urban renewal

around which media, academics, activists and community residents converge.²⁰ The absence of many of these conditions in Baori Samaj raises important questions regarding the issue of agency within the space and politics described by political society. Baoris' recent inability to work through this terrain is instructive. It is hampered by their particularly weak bargaining position. Their collective numbers are small in Gulbai Tekra and access to public authorities nonexistent. What past success Baoris had within political society has been stripped away. They are now unable to secure lasting negotiation and dialogue with state and private developers. As it has become attractive to develop land in the community, Baoris' tacit agreement with the state has been repealed, and as such, their capacity to be administrated as an exception eroded. Baoris are thus increasingly pushed beyond the boundaries of political society—a population unable to access the mechanisms of state power.

²⁰ Although by no means a clear-cut case, the Sabarmati River Front Development Project provides a useful counterpoint. The negotiations taking place around the resettlement of families being displaced in the wake of this colossal development along the banks of the Sabarmati River are telling. Here, a well-orchestrated community association has coalesced to represent the demands of project-affected families living in unauthorized settlements along the river. The site has generated substantial attention from Ahmedabad's activist, NGO and academic communities. In a meeting at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad in November 2009, a representative of the Sabarmati River Front Development Corporation and the project's chief architect, Bimal Patel, were frank in revealing the logic motivating the provision of generous (at face value) resettlement programs. They divulged these were largely motivated by both community mobilization and fears amongst planners and government officials that slum demolitions would ignite the same kind of public protest as that which erupted around the construction of the contentious Mahashwar Dam along the Narmada River. If not somewhat contradictory, Bimal Patel went on to argue that if academics and activists were serious about getting state actors to take action on the Sabarmati issue, they would be well advised to appease the authorities. He suggested that the best strategy to advance the rights of project-affected people was not through direct confrontation but appeasement—the only true means of opening doors to the corridors of power. “[This is] a certain way of doing politics”, he argued, “Say a few good things. Say you're doing a good job. Get them a Best Practice Award... This is how power works. This is my way... When it comes to oppositional politics, I can't do that” (Personal Correspondence, November 2009). I do not want to dismiss the kind of accommodation politics that this suggests, and these will be taken up in greater detail elsewhere. I raise the issue merely to suggest that there are various factors around the development of the Sabarmati riverfront that strengthens the bargaining position of local residents living in 'illegal' settlements. These conditions simply do not exist for the Baori in Gulbai Tekra, and thus, they are far less able to work through political society to negotiate with state actors.

At the same time, Baoris have had little success in negotiating recognition and rights within the institutions and structures that govern the realms of civil society. Baoris have had no success in lobbying the state to be recognized as a distinct adivasi population, which would presumably strengthen their ability to access state resources and democratic protections. Their situation is made all the more egregious because Baoris are not simply an adivasi community struggling on the periphery. Significantly, they belong to India's Denotified Tribes, who, as we shall see in the following chapter, were subject to the most severe workings of colonial state power. These were adivasi populations brought into a repressive legislative and policy apparatus that, while originating during the British occupation, continues to produce effects in the post-colonial present. I examine how the contestation of adivasi inclusion and visibility continues to be structured around specific racial imaginaries constructed and circulated under the authority of the colonial state. The fact that this remains a deeply buried history for Baoris in Gulbai Tekra has resulted in somewhat contradictory effects. On the one hand, the invisibility of Baoris in Ahmedabad enabled them to evade detention by the British but, more recently, has undermined their ability to access state resources and connect with a national activist community working very hard to assert the collective rights of DNT populations across the country. For others in the city, the subjectivity of DNT has become a rallying point for collective and political organizing. It is time to travel to Chharanagar.

Chapter 5: The Camp, an Epitaph

It need scarcely be said that the long descent of the thievish castes give them no claim on the sympathy of the rest of the community, who look on them as equally obnoxious to punishment both in this world and the next. One hundred years ago, predatory tribes were literally the terror of the country side.
~ Mountstuart Elphinstone 1843

Meeting Chharas



Figure 26. The remnants of the Naroda Settlement. Photograph by author.

While spending several months in New Delhi during the late days of summer in 2008, I was in contact with Rakesh Sharma, a noted documentary filmmaker based in Mumbai, whose *Final Solution* offers a damning investigation of the role state actors in Gujarat played during the 2002 post-Godhra riots. At the time, I was en route back to Ahmedabad, and busy working through a network of activists focused on the issue of minority rights in the city. Rakesh advised that there was no one better to talk with than

Dakxin Bajrange, and soon after returning to Ahmedabad, a meeting was set up. The journey to meet Dakxin took me to the far northeastern edge of the city, past its expansive cantonment area devoted to the Indian armed forces—a landscape marked by fortified bunkers and outdoor training facilities: rubber tires and roped obstacles. Tucked in behind Ahmedabad’s international airport, there is little to distinguish Chharanagar from the surrounding area, a rundown neighbourhood not uncommon to the eastern side of the Sabarmati. But as one passes the Sardargram platform, where passengers await trains heading in and out of the city, one seemingly crosses an invisible spatial demarcation. Meeting Dakxin was the kind of serendipitous encounter that any ethnographer waits for, and over the next year and a half, I spent a great deal of time with him in Chharanagar. Dakxin, one of four brothers named after the cardinal directions, is himself a documentary filmmaker whose work has gone to great lengths to record the struggles and lives of adivasis in Gujarat. He is also a Chhara (or Sansi), among the many *ghumantu* (itinerant adivasi) populations identified and detained by the British under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (CTA). Chharas are a community with a long, troubled history, and are one of many groups who make up the Denotified Tribes of India (DNT).²¹ During one of many days spent in Chharanagar, Dakxin and I went to see the internment camp. It is only a short walk from the area where Chharas live in Ahmedabad. The camp is now largely abandoned, a dusty field surrounded by a ten-foot high cement wall, accessible only through a commanding wrought-iron gate. It is a landscape haunted by the past. Here is where Chharas, along with other Criminal Tribes, were rounded up and incarcerated by the British in an industrial labour colony in

²¹ Activists typically include DNTs with nomadic communities, which together represent somewhere around 60 million of the total Indian population.

1932. It was then known as the Naroda Settlement, Gujarat's largest detention camp designed for the rehabilitation of itinerant adivasi populations.

This chapter unpacks this carceral landscape in an effort to document the conditions under which Chharas were forcibly settled in Ahmedabad. In doing so, I examine the colonial systems of racial/caste apartheid instituted by the British that enframed the lives of many adivasis. I begin by tracing the emergence of one type of colonial subject; the Criminal Tribe, a category situated within the racial taxonomies produced under the rigors of a fundamentally racist Victorian science and circulated in popular metropolitan discourse. As larger population aggregates produced by the British, Baoris and Chharas were subject to the Criminal Tribes Act; although their experiences in Ahmedabad differ dramatically. As previously detailed, Baoris in Gulbai Tekra managed to evade detection and detention through an invisibility that has, in the independence period, excluded them from redistributive programs targeting DNTs. This chapter, then, provides a telling backdrop that details the historic injustices that shape contemporary exclusion in the city.

Chharas' relationship to the CTA is more explicit as their incarceration in the Naroda Settlement exposed them to severe regimes of social engineering and labour exploitation. They were thus brought into the machinations of modern state power as an identified criminalized population subject to state management. I focus on how the racial classification of the Criminal Tribe represented a primary mechanism in the regulation and subjugation of subaltern subjects. The slippery designation of the Criminal Tribe—as a colonial topology—was pivotal in the preservation of imperial rule and reveals the political and territorial anxieties of the colonial state. In tracking this geography, we cast

ourselves back to prod the recesses of a not-so-distant past. What follows is a historical epitaph, a journey to a time and place where so much of Chharas and Baoris' present was forged. It is a chilling story, the kind of which we have become all too familiar with in probing the excesses of Empire at the height of British power. It deserves a retelling, if only because it is a legacy that continues to shape the struggles of these adivasis in the immediate post-colonial present.

Identifying Criminal Tribes

If the Local Government has reason to believe that any tribe, gang or class of persons, or any part of a tribe, gang or class, is addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offenses, it may, by notification in the local official Gazette, declare that such tribe, gang or class or, as the case may be, that such part of the tribe, gang or class is a criminal tribe for the purpose of the Act
~ Criminal Tribes Act 1871

Implemented in the 1871, the CTA represents a highly visible manifestation of colonial governmentality enacted under the British Raj. It formed the legal mechanism through which the British criminalized entire populations by literally creating and transforming itinerant adivasi communities (among others) into so-called Criminal Tribes (CTs). First instituted in the Northwest Provinces, Oudh, Sind and Punjab, the CTA culminated out of the effort to identify and suppress what authorities perceived to be an inherent criminality operating throughout its occupied territories.²² The legislation specifically targeted mobile subjects like Chharas, one of India's many nomadic or semi-nomadic groups situated in northwestern and central India. The genealogy of the CTA is one intimately bound up in Britain's efforts to order and control unwieldy populations, the

²² The CTA was extended to the Bombay and Madras Presidencies in 1911, and further amended in 1924 and applied throughout British India.

identification of which was informed by the intersecting discourses of race, class and caste.

The effort to identify India's Criminal Tribes was driven by Britain's fixation with producing taxonomies of race in colonial India during the 19th century, where environmental determinism was put to work to map the biological determinants of crime among India's lower castes and tribes. For Ann Stoler (1991: 51) racial taxonomies were themselves generated within the colonies, revealing an entangled geography in which "Europeans imagined themselves and constructed communities built on asymmetries of race, class, and gender." Accordingly, racial classification was intimately bound up in the attempts to discipline the unstable boundaries meant to ensure the spatial segregation between colonizer and colonized. Increasingly obsessed with notions of racial purity and degeneracy, adivasis were the explicit targets of European eugenics and social Darwinism. It was through the discourse of eugenics that the British "derived notions that acquired characteristics were inherited", as argues Stoler, "and thus poverty, vagrancy, and promiscuity were class-linked biological traits, tied to genetic material as directly as nightblindness and blonde hair" (72). She argues further that eugenics linked "racial degeneration to the sexual transmission of cultural contagions and to the political instability of imperial rule... Eugenics provided not so much a new vocabulary as a new biological idiom in which to ground the medical and moral basis for anxiety over the security of European hegemony and white prestige" (72-73). It was in such a climate of anxiety that the authority of Victorian science was deployed to (re)order thereto ambiguous racial typologies in India—a practice that involved the distressing utility of comparative anatomy, anthropometric measurement, and the analysis of 'tribal' blood groups. Science therefore asserted a "distinct colonial

morality” that was “explicit in its reorientation toward the racial and class markers of ‘Europeaness’, emphasizing transnational racial commonalities despite national differences—distilling a *homo europeaus* for whom superior health, wealth, and education were tied to racial endowments and a White Man’s norm” (Stoler, 74).

At the same time, the practice of eugenics was supported by the collection of vast quantities of anthropological knowledge, which was being produced to bring order to India’s great social heterogeneity; its many peoples, customs, languages, and social codes. This process drew on at least a hundred years of orientalist scholarship carried out by the likes of William Jones, those scholars working hard for the preservation and stewardship of India’s ancient cultural artifacts, languages and monuments perceived to have fallen into ruin under the paralysis of oriental despotism. By the turn of the 19th century, biology and social science combined to produce an elaborate grid of legal classifications intimately shaped by racial and cultural distinctions. Populations were studied. Anatomical features were mapped. Plaster casts of nasal indexes and cranial structures were reproduced. Rituals and customs were observed and recorded. There existed an immense apparatus through which the British sought to identify and catalogue subject populations, and under the voracious appetite of Victorian empiricism, incredible efforts were staged to produce detailed ethnological surveys (like those carried out in 1841, 1865, 1872, 1891). Of course, the systematization of land and people was concerned with much more than unearthing the roots of criminality in India; it was central to the production of colonial knowledge critical to the rapid expansion of British power. As Timothy Mitchell (2002) reminds us, the abstraction of knowledge during the time facilitated elaborate systems of technological control and centralized bureaucratic power that enabled the administration of vast colonial territories from afar. This power-

knowledge nexus is a familiar geography and requires no substantial retelling (see also Said 1979; Foucault 1980; Guha, 1997; Crampton and Elden 2007).

Relevant to our discussion is the priority the British placed on understanding India's internal social system. This was primarily realized in terms of caste, which colonial authorities codified with what Rachel Tolen (1991: 108) describes as "taxonomic precision". Caste was the principal means through which the British ordered and classified India's social structure. Effective governance was only possible through the identification and administration of knowable caste populations. Caste was produced through an infinite number of demographic surveys, wherein occupation and endogamy were the primary signifiers of both social position and ethnic difference.²³ While the root of crime was certainly sought by mapping and branding the physical bodies of lower castes and tribes, it was not widely seen as the product of biological determinism so much as reproduced within India's elaborate caste system. Caste and class were virtually synonymous in colonial discourse, but significantly, because crime was seen to be reproduced within a social field, passed down from one generation to the next as labour, it could be reformed given the appropriate discipline and punishment. Such sensibilities coincided with a period of rapid social reform sweeping across the British Empire. In many ways, the reform spirit of the 19th century represented a significant rupture in the rationale governing imperial ambitions in India. Up until that time, the British East India Company maintained that it could only consolidate its control through

²³ The word caste originated from the Portuguese 'casta', and traces its etymological roots to terminology first used by the missionaries and traders who ventured to India as far back as the early 16th century. Caste conflated two Indian concepts; *jati*, the social group one is born into, and *varna*, the place that this group is situated (hierarchically) according to Hindu scripture. There are four (five if one considers dalits to be a caste) *varnas*: Brahmins (teachers, priests, scholars), Kshatriyas kings, warriors), Vaishyas (traders) Sudras (agriculturalists, artisans) and Untouchables. Within these there are literally thousands of *jatīs*, each varying according to specific geographic areas. In other words, there is a seemingly endless series of divisions and sub-divisions within India's caste system.

the assimilation and appropriation of Hindu and Muslim ways of life. The Company's primary objective was always the growth of trade and acquisition of territory, to be accomplished with as little direct intervention into the laws and customs of Indians as possible (unless its commercial interests were threatened, at which point, military retribution was swift and bloody). By the early 19th century, the rationale sought to legitimize *colonial* expansion was increasingly superseded by a new generation of liberal reformers and bureaucrats; many of whom had risen up through the rank and file of the Company but possessed radically different notions of labour, discipline, and morality.

It was a historical rupture or transition from what Vinay Gidwani (2008: 7) describes as a “regime of sovereign power to a regime of governmental power”, wherein the inherent problematics of liberalism were increasingly sought through the discourse of improvement (and its intimate notions of progress). The new ethos called for the reorientation of Empire, a movement galvanized around the audacious belief that the British—having assumed supremacy of a globalizing economy and riding high upon the pinnacles of progress and civilization—had a pressing responsibility to disseminate the values of capitalist modernity. It was, after all, the white man's burden to raise the moral and intellectual character of Indian society and to remake India into the liberal image of the west²⁴ (see Bauer 1976; Asher and Metcalf, 1994; Frederick and Stoler 1997; Driver 2001; Hall 2002). Empire, then, was circulated as a force necessary to advance the economic modernization and social improvement of others through the transplantation of Eurocentric notions of law and order, private property, sexuality, industry, and

²⁴ Of note here is James Mills', *The History of British India* (1818), which offered a particularly savage critique of Indian civilization and called for its wholesale modernization through the stewardship of British authority.

politico-legal institutions. As such, an immense ideological and material apparatus was put into motion within British India through which colonized subjects and territory were to be guided in their ascent of the hierarchical ladder of civilization.

This is clearly not a nuanced anthropology of empire, and is meant as a rough backdrop to the introduction of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871. I am less concerned with the gradations of imperial rule, as I am with the consensus that emerged amongst the colonial executive that Criminal Tribes did in fact constitute a measurable population, which posed a serious security risk to the maintenance of colonial authority.

Significantly, the CTA came into effect in the aftermath of the India's First War of Independence in 1857. While this period witnessed a radical reordering in the ethos of empire, it was equally a time of tremendous uncertainty for the British, who feared its reverberations would resonate throughout the empire. The events of 1857 led to the territorial acquisitions of the British East India Company being converted into a crown colony administrated by the British government. Specific provisions of the CTA were designed to not only target suspect criminal populations, but also repress subversive political organizing—a concern that would only grow with the rising tide of India's freedom movement at the turn of the 20th century. Within the practice of Empire, liberalism thus “sanctioned the curtailment of political liberty”, as argues Gidwani (2008: xxi), “but commended itself for civilizing the habits and the economic liberty of the colonized”. Moreover, it was within the aftermath of 1857 that calls for racialized divisions would intensify dramatically, and it is possible to read the CTA as one of many instruments attempting to spatially segregate white and non-white. Segregation can be gleaned throughout the colonization of British India, such as in any number of legislative maneuvers, the rapid construction of hill sanatoriums, or the general policy of

establishing separate European quarters (civil lines and military cantonments) on the edge of 'native' towns.

At the same time, the CTA was informed by Britain's fears over its own 'dangerous classes' (read the urban poor) situated in the imperial metropolis itself. These were the objects of modern policing and surveillance, and around which the apparatus of the modern nation-state emerged to facilitate the control and rehabilitation of threatening populations. Criminality was never the sole trait of the colonized but equally that of Britain's swelling underclass whose lives were fixed in the desperation spawned by industrial capitalism. And yet, while the dangers posed by Britain's own underclass were significant, unruly colonial subjects represented far more dramatic perils. The category of the Criminal Tribe was thus intimately embedded in the imperial imperative to mitigate both political and physical vulnerabilities in the colonies. The CTA draws a close collusion between racial/caste classification and the executive's fear of insurgency. It was thus part of what Ann Stoler (2002: 69) describes as the larger "prescription for securing white control" through the "increased surveillance of native men" (although the CTA targeted the surveillance of entire communities). In many respects, it represented the adoption of Britain's Vagrancy Act of 1824 (followed by the Habitual Criminals Act 1869), which, Meena Radhakrishna (2001) argues identified three general categories of social deviants: the gypsy, the vagrant, and the migrant. As mobile subjects, vagrants in Britain and nomads in India posed a serious threat to the established order of things, and accordingly to the British state, shared a number of fundamental characteristics: a natural propensity for crime and a lifestyle that defiled the work ethic and sanctity of private property that defined modernity in 19th century Britain.

In India, however, the fact remained that no one really knew who Criminal Tribes were, their itinerant past shrouded in mystery. They were imagined as the marauding warriors of disbanded Marathi armies; the remnants of Rajput kingdoms long scattered following the consolidation of the Mughal Empire; and even the descendents of the notorious bands of roving nomads that savaged the plateaus of Central Asia. Anthropologists went so far as to suggest that the genealogy of so-called deviant gypsies in Europe traced a direct lineage to the 'lawless tribes' of northwestern India. Criminal Tribes, the world over, it was argued shared common ancestry rooted in language, blood, and ritualized custom. It was within the CTA that the category of the Criminal Tribe first appeared in official colonial policy, and it was deployed as a mechanism of control in British India. It was initially applied to what Ganesh Devy (2006a: 21), a celebrated adivasi activist, describes as the many "wandering minstrels, fakirs, petty traders, [and] rustic transporters" found throughout the occupied territories. The Criminal Tribe became a convenient category of colonial classification, broadly deployed to define mobile subjects who did not fit the model of settled agriculturalists and wage labourers, or to brand the fiercest resisters of empire and punish any number of petty thieves. As we shall see, this category was systematically expanded throughout the 19th century, and the colonial executive went to great pains to compile lists of caste and adivasi populations who were singled out for their habitual criminality.²⁵ Over night, it seemed, Bhils and Sansis, Bajanias and Pardis, Bhats and Hurs, among many adivasis, were brought under the repressive heel of the Criminal Tribes Act.

²⁵ The category of Criminal Tribe has persisted. As Sandria Freitag (1991) notes, the 1941 census identified 19 tribes and castes as *dhoomkku jatiya*, alternatively, those who do not lead a settled life. In the 1950s, these groups became known as *aprudhi*, or those whose occupation is crime.

Circulating Criminal Tribes in Popular Discourse

The tale of crime which forms the subject of the following pages is, alas! almost all true; what there is of fiction has been supplied only to connect the events, and makes the adventures of Ameer Ali as interesting as the nature of his horrible profession would permit me... I have listened to them with fearful interest, such as I can scarcely hope to excite in the minds of my readers; and I can only add, in corroboration of the ensuing story, that, by his own confessions, which were in every particular confirmed by those of his brother informers, and are upon official record, he had been directly concerned in the murder of seven hundred and nineteen persons. He once said to me, 'Ah! Sir, if I had not been in prison twelve years, the number would have been a thousand!'

*Murderers there have been in every country under heaven, from the time of Cain to the present... but these Thugs are unlike any others. No remorse seems to possess their souls. In the weariness of perpetual imprisonment one would think their imaginations and recollections of the past would be insupportable to them; but no—they eat, drink, and sleep like others, are solicitous about their dress, even ready to talk over the past, and would, if released tomorrow, again follow their dreadful profession with a fresh zest. ~ Philip Meadows Taylor, *Confessions of a Thug* 1839: 5, 263*

Within colonial classification schematics, tribals always occupied the lowliest of social rungs, their lives enframed by the language of savagery and primitivism typical of Victorian thought. Tribe and caste were used interchangeably to describe the lower echelons of the Indian social hierarchy, with the former reserved for the most debased and backward of social groups. “Tribals”, argues Ganesh Devy (2006a: 11), “have remained trapped in the debris of colonial history which first marked them out as the most rebellious and then labeled them as the most primitive communities.” Despite the vast amount of ethnographic knowledge produced by the British, they knew remarkably little about nomads in India. Their imaginings were primarily formed around the ethnographic writings of colonial officers and missionaries stationed across the occupied territories. Such narratives were often fearful accounts of people both strange and exotic. Bizarre tales proliferated. Itinerant tribals were said to eat human flesh. They wore no cloths. They sacrificed their victims at the alters of savage gods. They practiced

polygamy. They roamed the country aimlessly with no regard to private property (see the ethnologies and travel writings of various colonial figures: Thornton 1837; Sleeman 1836; Elphinstone 1843; Hervey 1892; Crooke 1896). Such orientalist anxieties stoked the popular imagination, and nowhere did this manifest more readily than in the British fixation with the phenomenon of Thugs in the early 19th century. Thugs were alleged to be a secret society of roving bandits operating throughout British India, a criminal conspiracy whose presence had been unearthed by William Sleeman, a British officer stationed in the Narmada Valley Territories during the 1820s. For some, Thugs were a murderous cult of fanatics who offered sacrifices in their frenzied worship of Kali; while for others, they represented a network of organized crime. No one really knew for sure. They could be Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or Tribal. Their suspected modus operandi was the infiltration of traveling caravans, and the mass strangulation of unsuspecting victims with their headscarves. The grisly exploits of Thugs grew to epic proportions.²⁶

Particular narratives were themselves transformed into bestsellers in the imperial metropolis. Philip Meadows Taylor's (1939) classic, *Confessions of a Thug*, is the most convincing example. Taylor went to India in the ranks of the Company during the early 19th century and ended up securing a position as the Assistant Superintendent of Police in the southwestern districts of the Nizam of Hyderabad (one of many 'princely states' in British India). It was during his tenure that Taylor claimed to have unearthed evidence of mass murders committed by marauding criminal bands. This experience formed the basis of *Confessions of a Thug*, which became one of the most popular crime novels of

²⁶ The mythology of India's criminal tribals has proven remarkably resilient. A sampling of cultural productions would include: Mark Twain's (1897) *Following the Equator*; George Bruce's (1968) *The Stranglers*; Dan Simmons' (1985) *Song of Kali*, which aptly won the World Fantasy Award; George Fraser's (1977) *Flashman in the Great Game*; or the cinematic productions of *Gunga Din* (1939); *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956); *The Stranglers of Bombay* (1960); *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984); or the unforgettable Pierce Brosnan in *The Deceivers* (1988).

the century, apparently among the favorites of a young Queen Victoria. Taylor (1939) alleged it had been written exclusively from documentary evidence extracted during his police work. In fact, he claimed the novel involved nothing more than the retelling of the oral confession of Ameer Ali, a captured Thug (Taylor's word), who the author argued had confessed to some 719 murders (and who would have certainly killed another thousand if released from custody). It is a sensational work of ethnographic realism, which literary critic, Patrick Brantlinger (1998: ix) describes as having the "simultaneous appearance of wild romance and hard-edged, objective realism." No wonder it appealed to the Victorian imagination. According to Brantlinger, Taylor inspired some of the very first detective novels in Britain, such as Charles Dickens' *Mystery of Edwin Brood* (1870) and Wilkie Collin's *The Moonstone* (1868). It was certainly central in the popular cultural productions of the time that constructed and circulated Thugs, thus laying a powerful discursive framework from which public figures would draw upon to demonstrate the savagery of criminal tribes.

While armed banditry and petty crime were certainly not uncommon in colonial India, there is nothing to suggest that Thugs ever existed, given that proof of their operations often depended upon confessions extracted under torture. This criminal conspiracy was just as likely the product of an excitable colonial imagination rather than any underground network of tribal killers. Thugs, nevertheless, confirmed colonialists' worst fear; that something dark and menacing awaited them in the heart of India. In this respect, this mythology clearly echoes Edward Said's (1979) famous remark that Empire was never just a matter of soldiers and cannons but equally dependent upon the production and circulation of ideas, images and imaginings. Such imaginings or imaginative geographies, however, had very real, material effects for itinerant adivasis

in India. They provided evidence that there existed a criminal underclass or caste operating with impunity in colonial territories, whose murderous occupation was both hereditary and reproduced through familial networks. The executive's concern led directly to the formation of the Thuggee and Dacoity Department in 1835, an agency placed under the command of William Sleeman armed with powers of detention and the instruments of modern policing. While not refuting the existence of Thugs, Sandria Freitag (1991: 233) nonetheless argues that they became a category widely utilized to apprehend many offenders, with the "special police formed to wipe out... robber bands... whose crime-related rituals and belief systems were rooted in popular Hinduism."

The fact that nomadic and semi-nomadic adivasis traveled throughout British India at the time made them particularly vulnerable targets of the Department. Further, given that many adivasi groups continued to offer the greatest resistance to the expansion of British power (especially into the interior of the country) only seemed to confirm the worst of suspicions. Much of Sleeman's work revolved around the necessity of proving that Thugs did in fact constitute a distinct (and measurable) population, and any distinction between Thugs and 'lawless tribes' was quickly blurred and rendered meaningless. Dating back to the 1840s, many itinerant communities were rigorously profiled in an effort to procure reliable intelligence. Police ethnographies were deployed to infiltrate the lives of nomads to detail customs, physiologies, attires and modus operandi, and a plethora of publications put into circulation through which to identify

Criminal Tribes.²⁷ William Sleeman's (1836: 32-33) personal powers of detection were purportedly so great that,

no ordinary robbery or theft could be committed without me becoming acquainted with it; nor was there a robber or a thief of the ordinary kind in the district, with whose character I had not become acquainted in the discharge of my duty as magistrate; and if any had then told me, that a gang of assassins by profession resided in the village of Kandlee, not four hundred yards from my court, and that [in the] extensive groves of the village of Mandesur, only one state from me ... was one of the largest ... places of murder in all India; and that large gangs from Hindustan and the Deccan used to rendezvous in these groves, remain in them for many days together every year, and carry their dreadful trade along all the lines of road that pass by and branch off them, with the knowledge and connivance of the two landholders by whose ancestors those groves had been planted, I should have thought him a fool or a mad man; and yet nothing could have been more true.

Sleeman had unearthed a murderous conspiracy that implicated not only 'lawless tribes' but the acquiescence of local agrarian elites. The Thuggee and Dacoity Department established a centralized police force, as well as produced a vast body of knowledge that supposedly detailed the ritualized geographies of suspect Criminal Tribes. Sleeman's (1836) own *Ramaseena* was remarkable in this respect, this, a dictionary that alleged to have identified Thugs' secret language and vocabulary, the signs and signals deployed within this hidden, underground network of tribes. A large body of colonial knowledge was thus put into circulation and passed amongst British administrators to form a powerful schematic that defined and catalogued adivasi criminality.

²⁷ These would include: Gunthrope's (1882) *Notes on Criminal Tribes Residing in, or Frequenting the Bombay Presidency, Berar and the Central Provinces*; Rai Pauparao's (1915) *The History of Railway Thieves with Illustrations & Hints on Detection*; Alfred Lemarchand's (1915) *A Guide to Criminal Tribes*; or General George MacMunn's (1933) *The Underworld of India*.

Entwined Geographies of Descent

Baoris and Chharas (also known as Sansis) were both the subject of intense profiling by the colonial state. In a lecture series, *Some Criminal Tribes of India and Religious Mendicants*, used in the instruction of colonial cadets, George Gayer²⁸ (1909) drew particular attention to each ethnic population, drawing liberally on the Thagi and Dakati Manual which was itself a synthesis of work generated by the previous generation of colonial officers stationed in British India. Gayer drew specifically on the police ethnographies of William Sleeman produced in the 1830s and 1840s during his tenure in the Thuggee and Dacoity Department. Gayer's lecture series divided Criminal Tribes into several subcategories: Dakaits and House-Breakers (inclusive of Baoris), Poisoners, Theives and Swindlers, Gypsies (inclusive of Sansis), as well as Outcasts and Religious Mendicants. He opened the work with a warning to young officers of the hidden dangers posed by India's 'habitual lawless tribes':

Criminals when on the warpath naturally do all they can to hide their identity and evade observation... Each band has its own ways and keeps them as secret as possible... Customs, however, die hard in this land of caste, where the help of tribal gods is invoked by their votaries in their criminal expeditions... Wherever there is a run of serious offences against property, that 'habituals' are at work, and there are no habituals so bold or successful as those belonging to a tribe which has made that particular form of crime its chief study for generations: they are people whose blood tingles with pleasure at each fresh *coup* and urges them on to fresh triumphs... whose chief deity is best pleased when they are employed in enriching themselves under his or her auspices (i-iii).

The discursive framing of the Baori is revealing, and Gayer goes on to explain that Sleeman had:

established the fact that [the Baori were] a class of criminals [who] had spread themselves, and formed colonies, all over India, that these colonies sometimes changed their places of abode, and... had come to be known by various names

²⁸ George Whitty Gayer was the district Superintendent of Police in the Central Provinces during the early 20th century. He was also the Principal of the Police Officers' Training School in Saugor (now in Madhya Pradesh).

which had been given by the inhabitants of the territories they settled in... but that they one and all had a common origin, belonged to the same tribe, spoke the same language—a corrupt form of Gujarati—inter-married and on occasion associated for criminal purposes (4).

Intrinsic to our narrative is the specific reference to the Baori residing around the cities of Jodhpur (Rajasthan) and Baroda (Gujarat) who were profiled as the ‘expert counterfeiters of coins’.

Gayer: The Baori coiners travel with their families, and though they may call themselves mendicants on pilgrimage or more often Wagris, Kunbis or even Rajputs famine stricken and in search of work, they do not adopt any disguise. When searching them you may not be able to find complete moulds with them, but the blocks with the circular holes will probably be found. These are kept by the women who accompany them. When passing false coin they are said to hold something, a leaf or some other article in the hand to help them to palm successfully... All Baoris are branded soon after birth with a hot iron in three places, but not always near the navel. The scars are large and unmistakable. In addition to these marks the women are all tattooed in five places, on the outer corner of each eye, on the inner corner of the left eye, on the left cheek and on the chin. They also counterfeit gold mohurs and carry numerous iron spoons with them, and these usually have traces of baked mud on them. The members of the gang leave a track behind them which their comrades can easily follow. The women trail a stick in the dust as they walk along and thus leave a mark like that made by a snake. The men place a newly picked leaf by the side of the road with a stone on it at intervals to show the route they have taken (8).

Not only were Baoris’ secret, serpentine modus operandi made visible, but their origins were traced back into myth. Their ancestors were alleged to be the soldiers enlisted within the armies of a Rajput Chief of Gujarat, who, during the 16th century, had entrusted the Baori with the delivery of his daughter to the harem of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. En route to the imperial palace in Shahjahanabad (Delhi), the princess threw herself into a water-well and drowned. Having failed in their appointed task, the Baori, had little option than to establish themselves as a roving band of warring mercenaries, who took the women of the princess’ entourage as wives. Through time, they migrated to different parts of the country, assumed different aliases and formed

disparate ethnic enclaves: Marwara, Malwit, Godwara, etc; such as in Delhi, where they became known as Baduk, or executioner—a name derived from the Sanskrit Budh and Wudh, or alternatively, to kill and murderer. The mythology of Rajput descent has also percolated down in Chharanagar in Ahmedabad, where narratives circulate wherein community members trace their lineage back to the armies of Maharana Pratap Singh of Mewar—a 16th century Hindu ruler in northwestern India perpetually at war with Mughal Emperor Akbar. “I have heard”, Jachand Rathod, a lawyer in Chharanagar, remembers, “that when Maharana Pratep was in difficulty, he took shelter in the forest that our people, along with [the] Bhil tribes, [we] helped him by fighting bravely and courageously (Interview, December 2009).²⁹

Chharas (Sansis) also figured prominently for George Gayer, a police superintendent in the Central Provinces, who argues that Sleeman had taken a particularly interest in them; his efforts “broke up all the great Sansi bands of robbers, and the descendents of those that escaped his vigilance have evidently from the later accounts departed from their former customs”. At the same time, he cautioned that, “It is still possible however that some have kept their blood more or less pure and still cherish some of their old traditions” (59). Similar to his description of Baoris, Gayer, revealed Chharas’ ritualized customs, superstitions; the omens that determined the timing and location of crime; their vocabulary and criminal methods; the different names of related tribes, and the conventions that governed their social and biological reproduction. Gayer was particularly violent in his description of Chharas (Sansis):

²⁹ This history is best preserved in Colonel James Tod’s (1829) *Annals of Antiquities of Rajast’han or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*. It is a source that Chharas often cite in tracing their genealogy back to the itinerant groups in what is today the state of Rajasthan.

They are a dissolute and disorderly people found scattered all over Northern India and in the Central Provinces. They are notorious for their orgies. When in liquor in the camp they generally end their revels with a free fight and beat their women and each other, not infrequently killing one another... Beria [another name used for Sansis] women are generally prostitutes, and the kidnapping of girls is common among this people. A well-to-do Beria has often five or six girls whom he has brought up or stolen as children, and keeps them for the income he derives from their prostitution... The Sansis show good breeding, and their hands and feet, both in men and women, are usually small and well made. In ferocity and daring both are equally dangerous... when arrested they ought to be kept apart—a procedure which they greatly dread, as they fear that discrepancies in their statements will betray them. Their secret code of signs is very large and they can easily communicate with each other (64-65).

According to Gayer, there were intimate connections between Baoris and Chharas:

“The real origin of all branches of the Baori tribes would appear identical to that of the Sansi or Sansya, who also claim Rajput descent”. Their respective histories were so entwined that he suggested further that “the majority of tribes now known as Criminal Tribes in the northern half of India have probably arisen from a common stock, a proof of this history being the great similarity of the ‘slang’ or thieves talk” (10).

Chharas (Sansis) were long considered among the most dangerous offenders in British India. Such sentiments had been previously articulated by John Woodburn³⁰ (1889: 2) in a letter to the Home Department of the central colonial state, wherein he argued that:

The Sansiahs of these Provinces are the hereditary robbers of Upper India. They are a wandering tribe, moving in gangs from one part of the country to another, and detaching parties from their camps, whose method is usually a rapid series of daring robberies at a distance from their head-quarters. Under the orders of the Lieutenant-Governor a careful census of the Sansiahs has been made... Their camps are nomadic, and the census was followed by general movements, which have materially altered their distribution in the districts they ordinarily frequent... The reports... leave no doubt that the Sansiahs as a tribe are addicted to the systematic commission of crime against property of the non-bailable class, frequently attended by violence and even murder.

³⁰ John Woodburn was then the Chief Secretary to the Government of the Northwest Provinces and Oudh.

The very same rhetoric was echoed by Colonel Alfred Ollivant³¹ (1887: 1,6), who claimed that Sansis:

are by far the most dangerous of the criminal tribes. They are absolute nomads, men, women, and children wandering at will; but certain families commonly frequent particular districts ... The mass of the Sansiahs infinitely prefer their roaming life, and they will not relinquish it unless driven to do so by hard necessity. They... make no pretence of following any trade or industry whatever, and live solely by the proceeds of their crimes... They all intermarry and join in the commission of crime [even though] the names they go by differ... in different localities... [I]t is not uncommon for members of a gang who have got into trouble to leave their usual associates and to join another Girdh at a distance; and at least four large camps of refuge are kept up... Here Sansiahs flock in great numbers; their marriages are arranged, and persons guilty of crime are enabled to sink their identity for a time. This sufficiently proves that the measures adopted should be universal (Qtd. in Frietag 1991).

More explicit language was again used in a letter (1891) from the Inspector General of Police to the then Chief Secretary of the Northwest Provinces and Oudh, in which Sansis were alleged to display an “absolute repugnance to honest labour of any kind”, while “ruthless in the destruction of human life”, and committing “violence and even murder wantonly, when they can do so with impunity” (*ibid*).

Chharas and Baoris were long considered among the very worst and most notorious of India’s ‘predatory tribes’. As such, guided by the adaptation of racial theory and deployment of crude policing tactics, the Thuggee and Dacoity Department³² perpetuated a long list of human rights abuses. The skulls of convicted and executed ‘Thugs’ were shipped back to Britain, where scientists busied themselves with determining the physical characteristics responsible for tribals’ propensity for violence and ‘unnatural’ acts. Primitive biometrics branded the bodies of nomads. Torture, incarceration and capital punishment were widely deployed. Many of these ‘corrective’

³¹ Colonel Alfred Ollivant was the Senior Deputy Inspector-General of Police in the Northwest Provinces and Oudh.

³² The Thuggee and Dacoity Department remained in operation until 1904, at which point it was replaced with the Central Criminal Intelligence Department.

measures extended well beyond the judicial powers enacted in the late 18th century that authorized the sentencing and imprisonment of *convicted* criminals in colonial India. What developed under the auspices of the Department was a method of preemptive security, a draconian system of surveillance, identification and punishment. These atrocities did garner objections from the colonial judiciary (especially in the Punjab), who argued that personal liberty and due process were completely at odds with the extra-legal powers utilized to subdue 'lawless tribes'.

The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was the executive's response, legislation that formalized a set of extra-legal practices already widely used in British India. While the Baori and Sansis were among the very first itinerant adivasi populations targeted by the CTA, previous attempts had been made to bring them under the rule of colonial order, with various regulations enforced within British India and by the Political Officers stationed within the princely states of central and western India.³³ Further, prior legislation existed, such as the Indian Penal Code and Regulation III of the Bombay Presidency³⁴, which attempted to control 'suspicious characters' by restricting movements by night and charging local police officers with enforcing the surveillance of particular populations. Indeed, as the CTA Enquiry Committee of 1939 noted, by the

³³ Baoris were initially registered as Criminal Tribe in 1871 in the Punjab, the Central India Agency, and various districts in the 'native' state of Rajputana. Sansis were similarly notified in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Punjab and princely states.

³⁴ Under Governor Mountstuart Elphinstone, the legal system of the Bombay Presidency was formalized into a code of laws in 1827. What became known as the 'Elphinstone Code' consisted of 27 regulations that governed the Presidency's judicial system, dictating that the laws of the British Parliament would reign supreme, followed by the rules established by the Governor, and finally the customary law of subjects. Interestingly, the Elphinstone Code departed from the legal system utilized elsewhere in British India. By the late 18th century, orientalist Warren Hastings and William Jones had established a set of indigenous laws in West Bengal for Hindus based on Sanskrit religious texts and for Muslims premised on Persian-Arabic teachings. Mountstuart Elphinstone was less convinced of formulating a standardized customary law as such, arguing instead that each caste group possessed their own distinct rules and regulations. In the Bombay Presidency, an effort was thus made to compile lists of the customary laws of specific caste groups. This, however, had a short life space, as after India's First War of Independence in 1857, the Bengal model was put into practice throughout British India.

latter half of the 19th century, one third of the prison population in the Bombay Presidency hailed from so-called 'predatory tribes' (CTA Enquiry 1939). But the notion persisted that existing legislation was having little effect in combating the activities of such groups. And it was the CTA that specifically extended the state's authority to capture and detain those who seemingly could not be controlled through existing laws. It was legislation, then, deployed to control and rehabilitate what Andrew Major (1999: 659) describes as the most "defiant and despised subaltern classes."

Arbitrary Classification

Arguably the most distressing aspect of the CTA was that notification under the legislation was incredibly arbitrary. The blood relations linking members of Criminal Tribes did not have to be proven, only intimated by the authorities. Nor did the conviction of an individual require any physical evidence presented in a court of law. Any 'reasonable' suspicion of criminal activities or relation to a criminal was enough to prompt notification under the CTA, for which no appeal was possible. Criminalization often resulted from a hostile misunderstanding of adivasi custom; the alleged licentiousness of women was interpreted as prostitution; the practice of polygamy condemned; and the 'wandering' nature of nomads was itself considered ample proof of a propensity for crime, given that it demonstrated the absence of regular wage labour. The colonial state always had a great deal of difficulty identifying CTs on their own accord, and notification was typically carried out in close collaboration with local elites and the police. The CTA, then, was often used as an instrument of caste dominance. The CTA Enquiry Committee of 1939 observed that the registration of Dharalas, a large heterogeneous adivasi group (also known as Kolis) in the Bombay Presidency, had

been carried out by local Patel elites who utilized the legislation to ensure the former's subordination. In the Committee's (1939: 47) own words:

Very few Patels, it is to be feared, attempt to carry out their duties solely in the public interest; the Act is regarded more as a means of getting the Dharalas under their control, and it leads to many abuses. The officers enquiring about bad characters have naturally to depend largely on the information they receive from Patels and their friends, and in many cases the latter simply scheme to put a man on the *hazari* in order to satisfy some private grudge. So low is the level of public morality in the district that it is quite impossible to sift the false from the true and to decide whether the man against whom information is given is really a bad character or not, and in many cases the threat of the Act is employed in order to put pressure on the Dharala so as to get the better of him in some dispute, or even to make him perform petty tasks for the benefit of the Patel or his friends.

The process of notification was relatively straightforward. Police officials and local landlords would identify members of a Criminal Tribe. Once notified, entire communities were compelled to present themselves to colonial authorities, who collected and circulated names, addresses and issued crude biometric identification. Claire Anderson (2004) details the various methods utilized by the police to mark the bodies of suspect communities, which included fingerprints, tattooing and photography (methods incidentally, she argues were deployed first in India before their adoption by Scotland Yard in Britain).

The criminalization of adivasi communities took place despite the fact that these were themselves incredibly diverse populations. Chharas in Ahmedabad were classified within the larger population of Bantu-speaking Sansis spread out across political borders in northern and western India. "We are known by different names in different regions", observed Dakxin, "like Chharas in Ahmedabad, Sansi in Rajasthan and Delhi, Kanjar and Kanjarbhati in Maharashtra... It's a Bantu community but the names are different" (Interview, 26 October 2008). Similar to other adivasis, Sansis were declared

a Criminal Tribe regardless that this 'community' was (and remains) comprised of hundreds of individual social groups. This involved reducing a complex heterogeneous social field into single racialized categories of classification—a process fundamental to colonial administration. The idea being that once a Criminal Tribe was mapped, many other populations, connected through shared kinship, geography and language were brought under the legislation. There was thus a great deal of slippage in such categorization, and the racial classification of Criminal Tribes is perhaps best understood not as a rigid grid, so much as held together with the “viscosity” that Arun Salhanda (2006: 10) describes as “bodies gradually becoming sticky and clustering into aggregates.” Of course, it was the British who retained the authority to determine who and what constituted or stuck together as an aggregate population.

The CTA initiated a punitive system that articulated four distinct steps: notification, registration, restriction and internment. It dictated that anyone (woman, man or child) with blood relations to either a convicted felon, or to anyone already registered, could be notified. Police officials were directed to compile and circulate lists of those criminal groups present within their respective territories. Lastly, different forms of spatial restrictions were introduced. In the Bombay Presidency, the *hazari* system was inducted, where registered CTs were compelled to notify authorities if changing residencies, present themselves to officials at fixed intervals, and adhere to a pass system wherein individuals required the consent of officials if they wished to leave their designated areas. The CTA permitted the separation of children (ages 4 to 18) from their parents. The legislation also provided for the relocation of entire communities to reformatory or internment settlements. These took either one of two forms: agricultural

settlements or industrial labour camps. In tracing the history of Chharas in Ahmedabad, we turn to the latter.

Rehabilitating Chharas in the Ahmedabad Camp

While Sansis had been previously notified elsewhere in British India, Chharas were registered in the Bombay Presidency in 1912 following the amendments made to the CTA in the previous year. Chharas were rounded up and transferred to Ahmedabad in 1932, and confined to an industrial labour colony in Naroda on the eastern fringe of the city. Chharas were not the only Criminal Tribe detained in Ahmedabad. They found themselves incarcerated along with Bhils, Hurs, Dharalas, Bhats, and Kaikadis (several of the twelve CTs identified in Gujarat). The CTA Enquiry Committee estimated that by the late 1930s, the Ahmedabad camp had an approximate registered population of 900, much smaller than other camps such as in Sholapur, with an estimated population of 3,627).³⁵ Dakxin's grandmother still remembers her childhood spent in the Sholapur settlement, in what is now the state of Maharashtra. It was the largest of its kind in British India, from which she was relocated to Ahmedabad. A few years ago, while digging around colonial archives, Kerim Friedman, an anthropologist who has spent time in Chharanagar, came across a photograph of the Sholapur Camp. It had a dramatic impact on Dakxin, who observed:

In Sholapur, in Maharashtra, *lakhs* of people were deported there. And, you know, my grandfather [and grandmother] were in that [camp]. So that photograph is so, in that photograph, the child is standing behind the fencing wire. And he's just watching the world outside that wire. I can see the desire to see another world [than] where he is living... This one photograph remembers all kinds of

³⁵ Again, it is wise to treat these as guiding figures, as by the Committee's own admission, the calculation of those registered and interned under the CTA was incredibly difficult to quantify.

history. This sole photograph remembers the life that our forefathers led in the settlements (Interview, 28 February 2009).

While a single Settlement Officer, accountable only to the executive of the Bombay Presidency, was charged with the administration of Chharas in Ahmedabad, it was the Salvation Army (SA) which was responsible for their transformation into modern, productive citizens. The SA emerged as a powerful missionary organization with a global presence and intimately implicated in the dissemination of Empire. The militant overtones of the SA were striking. The Salvation Army, so evocative of an imperial body responsible for the civilizing mission of Empire at the height of British power. Founded in London's east end in the 1870s, the SA was structured more along the lines of the military than expected from a social welfare agency; its CEO, a General; its officers signed Articles of War; its newspaper was aptly named *The War Cry*. Its ideological position was articulated by its founder, none other than British social reformer, William Booth, whose *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890) laid an ambitious plan for combating the poverty that proliferated in industrial Britain. India was the first staging ground for the agency's activities beyond Britain, and the SA emerged instrumental in shaping criminal legislation in the colonies. William Booth himself pressed hard for the inclusion of forced settlement of itinerant populations in the amendments ratified to the CTA in 1911, and specifically argued the utility of labour camps in the rehabilitation of Criminal Tribes. "By means of the firm yet kindly discipline of Christlike love", one of its newsletters noted, India's underclass will be trained in "industry, cleanliness, honesty, and obedience... trained to become worthy citizens of India" (Salvation Army 1923: 60; Qtd in Tolen 1991: 117). The SA, then, was precisely the kind of institution through which disciplinary power radiated within a colonial setting. To do so, it established a range of institutional spaces designed to transform the very nature of Chharas in

Ahmedabad. They were not merely the objects of legislative intervention but on whose bodies British power was to be inscribed. Within the Ahmedabad camp, the lines of control and social reform blurred, and it was here that Criminal Tribes were to be corrected through the application of moral instruction and hard physical labour.

The SA (1923:27) was clearly a missionary organization, whose agenda in India was driven by the “spirit of holy aggression”, although this pitted the organization against the colonial executive, who discouraged mass conversions in order to safeguard political stability. While there are few memories of explicit missionary activity in Chharanagar, the ‘soft conversion’ and evangelical work of the SA was often tolerated, especially in the instruction of juveniles. Religious instruction was part of the compulsory education that Chharas received in a local reformatory school where youth were instructed in western values, language and pedagogy.



Figure 27. The school established by the Salvation Army. Photograph by author.

While entire families were kept inside the camp, it was a partitioned space, wherein special attention was given to children in order to wean them away from the corrupting influence of parents.

Dakxin: There was this school... [And] there was a hostel for kids who were sent to school by the British. As I heard from my forefathers... the children were separated from parents immediately when they were born. So they were brought up separately from their parents. The British thought that they should not be exposed to the infection of their parents, their criminality or criminal thoughts (Interview, October 2008).

Receiving grants from the colonial executive to administrate social welfare in the internment camp (calculated on a per-head basis), the SA also provided instruction specifically designed for adivasi women, who were schooled in the appropriate demeanor and attire expected from idealized notions of wife and mother. There were significant efforts to control the biological reproduction of those confined within the Ahmedabad camp. Marriages were only permissible with the consent of camp authorities, who attempted to eradicate what were perceived to be primitive tribal customs: polygamy, 'child' marriages, and specific dowry practices. As Meena Radhakrishna (2001) notes, in writing about similar camps established in the Madras Presidency, Criminal Tribes were to be transformed into model, urban citizens through the introduction to Brahmanical and Victorian sensibilities regarding respectability, morality, education and social organization.

Harnessing Adivasi Labour Power

The effort to reform the social reproduction of Chharas was shadowed by the will to harness their collective labour power. The CTA was introduced in a time when colonial economic policies had absolutely devastated the traditional economies of many

nomadic and semi-nomadic groups. The British government's monopoly on the production, transportation and sale of salt; the rapid expansion of rail systems; and the enclosure of common properties crippled their means of economic survival. The enactment of a series of forest laws in the later 19th century was particularly devastating to many adivasis. It was policy that effectively stripped millions of their collective rights and access to forested land that was absolutely critical to identity, cosmology and local economies. The introduction of forest laws led to multiple armed uprisings against British rule, struggles that have not been preserved in the texts of history, nor, as Ganesh Devy (2006a: 10) points out, ever "been treated as part of the 'national' struggle for freedom." Or according to Mahasweta Devi (1995: xi):

They [adivasis] are suffering spectators of the India that is traveling toward the twenty-first century... Although they fought bravely against the British, they have not been treated as part of India's freedom struggle. A tribal girl asked me modestly, "When we go to school, we read about Mahatma Gandhi. Did we have no heroes? Did we always suffer like this?" That is why I started writing about the tribal movements and the tribal heroes... it had to be written. I repay them their honor.

Adivasi resistance was further spurred by the particularly draconian land revenue system enforced in the Bombay Presidency. Originating under the auspices of the British East India Company, the *ryotwari* system³⁶ instituted regimes of capital extraction that perpetuated severe debt bondage and poverty in rural Gujarat. Adivasis were among those who waged sustained guerilla warfare against the rule of Company and Crown. As Devy notes, much of this history has receded into the recesses of time, rarely the subject of India's official history, now often only preserved in local folklore. There were the Bhils in the forested areas of eastern Gujarat who took up arms in

³⁶ While its management was by no means a tidy affair, the *ryotwari* system represented the British attempt to bypass local intermediaries, thus linking government officials and individual producers. For a detailed description of the system in Gujarat, see Gidwani 2008.

advance and beyond the 1857 Uprising. Or there was the organized resistance staged by Vaghers of coastal Saurashtra around the city of Dwarka, who, after the area was recaptured by the British, continued their armed rebellion from the inland Gir forests until the end of the 1860s (Yagnik and Sheth 2005). Or as Jaychand Rathod, a Chhara, argues:

During the time of British rule there was the fight for *kranti* [freedom] by us and other freedom fighters. At that time, our Sansi community gave their full support to the freedom fighters... The British came to know this and they started arresting us on the charges of being criminals, and, as per the Criminal Tribes Act, kept us in settlements as captives (Interview, December 2009).

These communities would pay a heavy price for their insurgency against the expansion of British power. Not only were there concerted efforts to forcibly disarm adivasis in the post-1857 era, but it was no coincidence that these same itinerant populations (who resisted the appropriation of their lands and resources) were subject to the repressive measures initiated by the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871. This is a history that continues to be sharply felt in the present, as adivasis continue to suffer from the fallout of modernist development caused by dam construction³⁷, corporate mining and forestry, as well as various state policies that trace a direct lineage to colonial strategies of violent dispossession. The central government's own Planning Commission estimates that approximately 21.3 million people in India were displaced by modernist development between 1951 and 1990 alone. This figure is very conservative, and includes a high percentage of indigenous.

³⁷ The most thoroughly documented site of adivasi displacement and resistance continues to be in the Narmada Valley, see Kothari and Parajuli 1993; Baviskar 1995; Narmada Bachao Andolan 1999; Routledge 2003.

As a mobile community, for many years, Chhara had moved along established trading networks between the inland forests and coastlines of western India, playing a vital role in the circulation of commodities like salt, honey, forest products, and livestock. The 'wanderings' of Chharas, as with all nomadic communities, were far from aimless, revolving as they did around trading fairs and festivals, or in accordance with the seasons and availability of food. The logic of labour camps established under the CTA was governed by much more than a desire to socially reform Criminal Tribes. The confinement of Chharas illustrates the widely held view that a key to rehabilitation was their introduction to 'honest' wage labour within a capitalist space economy. How could anyone become a productive, modern citizen without either tilling the land or labouring in industrial production? Such concerns echo the interests of the British in India, namely, the raising of revenue through the taxation of land or the development of private industry. It was effectively impossible to tax itinerant communities like Chharas, whose lives defied political boundaries, sedentary existence and state control.

Labour camps were organized through an intimate coalition between social welfare agencies, settlement officers, and industrialists. While the Salvation Army managed the social reform of Chharas, their Settlement Officer contracted them out to private enterprise in the city. Roxy, a Chhara, remembers:

So at that time, my great grandfather was living in that settlement, and they were actually taken into the main city. The main city means, at that time, it was Kalupur and all that area... They were used as cheap labour for textile mills, and all that. They were paid some 25 paise or 50 paise per day. They were actually taken in a convoy. They were taken by the police of the settlement and returned in the evening. By that time, the women of the family, they remain at home and cook the food... The kids, who are also in the open jail, were taken to school. (Interview, 20 December 2008).

Throughout British India, labour camps were typically situated in close proximity to textile mills, sugar refineries, plantations and distilleries—any place where CT labour could be exploited by private capital. The All India Jails Commission of 1919 had observed as much, noting that the most successful rehabilitation camps were those “where labour is found in some large and neighbouring commercial undertaking”. In some cases, internment camps themselves were established as sites of production, where CTs were put to work in weaving, tailoring, or *chappal* (shoe) making. It was not by chance that Chharas were sequestered in eastern Ahmedabad just as the city emerged as a bustling hub of industrial textile production. The camp itself was located close to the city’s many textile mills, concentrated in Kalupur, and yet far enough away to ensure segregation from the working class neighbourhoods located around the walled city. While not typical practice, it was not uncommon for private companies to be charged with the management and surveillance of Criminal Tribes. In such cases, the factory and camp fused together as one spatial entity, where the powers of the CTA were extended to the owners of industry, who assumed the absolute authority of factory boss and prison warden. Labour camps were an invaluable source of procuring docile workers in a variety of emergent industries in British India. Criminal Tribes mined raw ore. They toiled in the tea plantations of Darjeeling. They laboured to pick cotton in the sprawling estates of the Bombay Presidency. They sweated in the infernal processing of tobacco in the south and in the smoldering textile mills of Bombay and Ahmedabad. Criminal Tribes were even exported to the far reaches of Empire as indentured, slave workers, sometimes enlisted into the fighting ranks of the imperial army.

Chharas were shipped to Ahmedabad in the early 1930s to man the textile mills and were deployed to build various public work projects. As the CTA Enquiry Committee (1939: 23) suggested:

A recent experiment was made in interning large numbers of Chharas (who are themselves a sub-section of the Sansia tribe) in the Naroda settlement. Although a few years previously they had been a scourge to civilized life in Ahmedabad. Settlement life has already produced self-supporting habits and many members of this tribe are now engaged in textile mills and are earning good wages.

Paternal overtones mask the horrors of such arrangements. Work in the Ahmedabad mills was brutal and wages extremely poor (for the full horror of labouring in textile production see Breman 2004). This system of contract labour also represented a means of providing workers in times of labour unrest in the city, and to undermine the actions of unions such as the Textile Labour Association, which was particularly active in the 1930s and 1940s. CT workers could be deployed to break strike action and undercut potential working class solidarity. There was also a cold economic calculation in keeping families in labour colonies as factory bosses paid less for the employment of entire families than they did for individual workers (although by all accounts Chhara women and children were not used as such in Ahmedabad). Of course, a permanent workforce was only possible through the (controlled) biological reproduction of Criminal Tribes.



Figure 28. The derelict Teliya composite mill in Kalapur. Photograph by author.

There are, however, recorded instances of unions attempting to organize CT workers kept in the internment camps. Again, we can turn to the valuable chronicles of the CTA Enquiry Committee of 1939:

In the earlier days of the settlements matters went on smoothly but the constant opportunities for mixing with labour in the industrial towns and coming into the influence of labour agitation having for its object the creation of class consciousness, brought in disturbing influences. The settlers were subjected to class conscious outside propaganda. Such influences and propaganda are not conducive to the main purpose of settlement life, as its discipline becomes irksome at a stage when the settlers have not yet been "nursed " to a non-criminal life. The criminal tribes by heredity and temperament fall an easy prey to any irresponsible agitation which does not impose self-control. The restless and criminal tendencies of these tribes easily lead to violent activities and are likely as they did in Sholapur, to create a formidable problem in the life of industrial town (58).

The Committee was referring specifically to the agitations orchestrated by the Red Flag Union within the Sholapur camp in the late 1930s. The Union had fiercely agitated for the rights of incarcerated CT workers, and campaigned for the repeal of the CTA in its entirety. In response to escalating action, the District Magistrate for the town of

Sholapur banned any union meetings and public demonstrations anywhere within the vicinity of the internment camp. The city's Settlement Officer made plans to transfer agitators within the camp and banned any access to the settlement. In considering the 'interests of peace', the CTA Enquiry Committee's recommendation was to either move the Sholapur camp altogether, or alternatively, significantly reduce the numbers of CT inmates. The 4000 individuals that resided within the camp (working in solidarity with unionized workers) were seen as a serious risk to the stability of political order and industrial production in the city.

In many respects, the CTA provided an ideal mode of labour recruitment. Captive workers could be driven to work longer hours for less pay. The ability to apply corporal punishment inside the camp ensured that CT workers would be less inclined to challenge the authority of mill owners and the conditions of incarceration. For the colonial government, labour colonies were a model form of discipline, given that they required very little investment from the state. It was expected that camps would be economically self-sufficient, and those in charge of the Ahmedabad settlement collected wages to cover the cost of day-to-day operations. Further, because the SA administrated various reformatory activities, incarceration could be legitimized on the basis that the physical and spiritual wellbeing of Chharas was being provided by a social welfare agency. After all, Criminal Tribes were being rehabilitated, and there was always the promise that, at some vague point in the future, they would be released from bondage.

The objective of this chapter has been to demonstrate the violence embedded in the colonial administration of Chharas, and to illustrate how the category of the Criminal

Tribe was put to work to identify and discipline adivasi populations. Produced out of colonial anxieties, the racial/caste taxonomies constructed by the British have proven remarkably durable—the lasting effects of which will be the subject of the following chapters. The incarceration of Chharas traces a geography that contrasts remarkably with the settlement of Baoris in Gulbai Tekra. The critical difference being that the former were brought into modern governmentality as an identified population subject to state regulation. On the one hand, Chharas' criminalization rendered them critically vulnerable to regimes of labour exploitation and social 'improvement', creating conditions that continue to produce effects in nefarious ways in the post-colonial present. At the same time, the unjust structures and categories established under the British Raj laid a powerful framework inherited by the Nehruvian state, and laid the foundation of its developmental apparatus. As we shall see, the population categories produced by colonial modernity and constitutional provisions continue to be sites in which subaltern adivasis contest citizenship rights and inclusion within the (transforming) developmental logics of the Indian state. In this next chapter, I continue narrating the experiences of Chharas in Ahmedabad, detailing their release from the Naroda Settlement, which sets up a consideration of the ways that being an identified DNT population inform their struggles in the city.

Chapter 6: Camp Effects and Traces of Criminality

Introduction

There is no more brutal incarnation of modern governmentality than that conjured by the image of the camp. In Ahmedabad, Chharas and other Criminal Tribes were confined in a highly regulated and controlled landscape of barbed wire and fortified enclosure.

Dakxin, understandably, describes this period as a “black history” for his community:

[The] settlement was like a concentration camp, like the Nazis... when they arrested us, they have not arrested a single man. They have arrested an entire community... We were treated as born killers. Atrocities, many kinds of atrocities, these were a regular practice in the settlement (Interview, 26 October 2008).

One can still see the traces of this landscape—what was once a policed compound where movements were restricted and surveillance constant. Searches and roll calls occurred both day and night in the Naroda Settlement, while corporal punished was a possibility for those who challenged the authority of its officers. The image that Dakxin summons does not require an outrageous stretch of the imagination, as this labour ghetto amounted to little more than organized, systemic slavery. Within the camp, Chharas were fixed in a suspended space for an indefinite period of time. To reiterate, the CTA granted arbitrary powers whereby the colonial state criminalized ethnic populations suspected of subversive activities. Notification could take place at any point in time with or without the burden of providing physical evidence in a court of law. Once brought under the legislation, ‘normal’ rights and due process were suspended as the courts had no jurisdiction to challenge the decision of state actors, nor the conditions of incarceration. The law itself allowed for the suspension of laws. This was colonial ‘justice’ in its most unfettered form, where the powers over the governed were virtually

limitless. That said there were reported instances of organized resistance made by Criminal Tribes, and protest took the form of public demonstrations and written petitions (see Radhakrishna 2001). Further, the freedom movement, led by Gandhi (living at the time in Ahmedabad), did target the CTA, but limited action to demanding that the names of women, children and the elderly be exempt from its master registrar. Sporadic protests, however, did nothing to dislodge the application of the CTA in British India, and some 200 adivasi populations languished in labour camps and agricultural settlements until their final decommission in 1952. Incredibly, the release of Chharas in Ahmedabad took place five years after formal independence had been ultimately wrestled from the British. As Roxy tells it:

At that time, Denotified Tribes were not in any area of the Constitution, because entire tribes were forgotten when the Constitution was passed. So in 1952, someone from Maharashtra, Solapur, wrote to the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, that there are tribes, there are people who are still in jail, and you have forgotten about them... So Nehru, in 1952, on 31st August, he came to Solapur to open the settlement, and he broke and cut the strings of the jail (Interview, 20 December 2008).

The significance of 'entire tribes' being 'forgotten when the constitution was passed' will be taken up in more detail in the following chapter.

Prior to 1952, freedom had been a possibility for those Chharas who could bribe prison guards or were willing to risk a daring escape. Discharge from the camp was rare but not altogether unheard of as a small group of Chharas was liberated sometime in the early 1940s. The photograph below provides a glimpse of what those families were provided with. This, one of the 40 homes that comprised Free Colony, was the setting for released Chharas. These were extremely small quarters, their roofs less than six feet off of earthen floors, and situated a short walking distance from the labour camp itself. Today, the same discharged families continue to live in these dilapidated

structures, around which the community of Chharanagar has grown over the past 57 years.



Figure 29. Tenement built by the British for rehabilitated Chharas. Photograph by author.

Within the Bombay Presidency, it was typical practice to establish 'free colonies' in close proximity to internment camps. It was policy guided by the rationale that they were integral to plans for the permanent settlement of CTs in the event of their final discharge. Free Colonies were thus meant to provide incentive for CTs to cooperate with camp authorities, while ensuring continued surveillance after release. 'Freed' Chharas were still subject to various measures of control. Roll calls continued, and Criminal Tribes had to adhere to a strict 'standard of conduct' expected of law-abiding citizens. Officially, discharge from detention was possible 8 years after one's last conviction; with the approval of the local Settlement Officer; and individuals had to have the means of supporting their families by 'honest' wage labour. In practice, the

Settlement Officer of the Ahmedabad camp commanded absolute power to determine the conditions of release. Chharas had to reside where directed, maintain lawful conduct, send their children to school, and abide by the conditions of probation. While the period of probation was only supposed to last six years, provisions existed for this to be extended indefinitely. Settlement Officers retained the authority to administrate additional 'disciplinary punishment' for even the smallest breach of probation. The Chhara families released from the camp are remembered with a great deal of ambiguity. "The British had started to release families", argues Roxy, "who were not actively into crime. Or, in other words, who were their informers" (Interview, December 2008). Or according to Dakxin:

When they were considered for good behaviour, by the police in the settlement, they [were] given a permit to stay outside [the camp]... It was called Free Colony... These were people who delivered information to the police, where were they going? And why were they going? If some people came for a marriage; who are they? Which region are they from? (Interview, 30 October 2008).

Spies or rehabilitated citizens? It is impossible to say. In the chapters that follow, I will have much more to say about how Chharas are actively working with this history, but for the moment, I want to briefly think through some of the lasting effects of the Ahmedabad camp.

Foucault (1978) reminds us that disciplinary power enters into the everyday order of things. It is not something merely done to us but something we do to ourselves and to one another. It operates to the degree that we all become its conscious or unconscious agents. It is difficult to say to what extent Chharas in Ahmedabad internalized the disciplinary power of the camp. I am uncertain that it is ever possible to fully absorb its logic. Nevertheless, being branded by the Criminal Tribes Act continues to have serious effects for the community, among which is the circulation of Chharas' criminality within

the popular discourse of the city. The reputation of Chharanagar as a criminal ghetto is infamous throughout Ahmedabad. During my fieldwork, rickshaw drivers were often extremely hesitant to enter the community, and on more than one occasion, my (liberal) middle-class acquaintances scoffed at my work there, barely making an effort to conceal their distain that it was no place for any self-respecting citizen (never mind a visiting academic). Other incidents come to mind, such as when Dakxin gave a tour of Chharanagar to a group of graduate students from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM). “Almost 25 students came here”, Dakxin explained, “[They were] all afraid, actually, you could see it in the way they were walking. But how to tell them to feel free? It’s Chharanagar. It is not a *nagar* of thieves” (Interview, 20 November 2008). Navdeep Mathur, a professor at IIM, had organized the guided tour with Dakxin, which was part of a course designed to connect public policy students with various community struggles in the city.

Navdeep: I had never heard of them [Chharas]... When I started making inquiries around here, nobody had heard of Chharanagar... But I also encountered some nastiness when I mentioned this. I asked somebody, “Well, do you know where Chharanagar is?” “Yeah. That’s a horrible place and [a] filthy dirty place.” I said, “I’m planning to take my students there.” They were shocked... So I got interested in this... So I organized about 15 field visits, which [included] about 20 to 25 students. And the first visit was to Chharanagar.

Caleb: What was that like for students?

Naveep: It was mixed. Some were very scared. One of them, later, let me know that one local told him that, “If you go to Chharanagar, you [will] get knifed. So carry a knife.” And he did... This is the kind of thing that you hear. Some people were, of course, very moved... For some students it was very moving, and one of them got inspired by Dakxin. He said that he wanted to work with Dakxin, under his guidance (Interview, February 2009).

On the one hand, there is nothing particularly unique about this kind of discrimination, which is typical of urban slums in Ahmedabad—those spaces that get narrated through the language of filth and danger. “Whenever people pass through here”, observes

Dakxin, “they put, you know, their handkerchiefs here [over their noses and mouths]” (Interview, 26 October 2008). But the meeting with Dakxin had other effects, the tour was ‘very moving’ to some students, disrupting preconceived stereotypes of the community and opened up the possibility for future solidarity. Nevertheless, there is a deeper, more persistent stigma that continues to haunt the popular imaginings of Chharanagar, a community that continues to be seen as a loci of dangerous criminality.

Dakxin: Due to the Criminal Tribes Act, and due to stigma, we are branded as criminals. We were and we are a scapegoat for the police... The police have certain prejudices for certain tribes. And this Criminal Tribes Act is taught in the police academies. Since 1984, officially, in the, they teach [this] to the IPS Officers [Indian Police Services], top officials of India. So if they teach this in the official syllabus, you can understand why the prejudice remains so strong (Interview, 26 October 2008).

Dakxin’s allegations that the CTA is part of the instruction that ‘top police officials’ receive proved difficult to substantiate more fully. The training manuals used by the Indian Police Services are not widely available. That said, it is significant to note that in a meeting with India’s National Human Rights Commission in 2000, DNT activists reinstated their demand that each state appoint a retired senior police official to report atrocity cases to the Commission, and pressed for the revision of the syllabi used by the country’s National Police Academy and other institutions providing training to state security forces. The Commission concluded that, “The entire State machinery, especially the police officers, are to be sensitized”, and pledged to take up the matter with the National Police Academy (see www.nhrc.nic.in/dispatchive.asp?fno=424).³⁸ In this we can also draw on the case of Motiraj Bhajru Rathod vs State of Maharashtra in 1998. It was a case wherein the Maharashtra High Court issued a directive that no

³⁸ The 2000 meeting with the National Human Rights Commission was attended by the Chief Secretaries of Karnataka, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra; as well as the Principal Secretaries of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Punjab, along with the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

arrest of any adivasi should take place based on their membership to a nomadic community or caste; existing area restrictions were considered to be in gross violation of the Indian constitution; and the courts directed the police to stop the practice of collecting biometric identification of DNTs. Significant to our discussion, the court ruling stated that: “the extract from chapter 13 of the text book for the police sub-inspector, as annexed at Exhibit ‘E’ be removed from the said text” and the “indiscriminate reference to ex-criminal tribes contained in the police guide book for Maharashtra as annexed at Exhibit ‘F’ be removed from the said guide book, and that notice be served on every police station... directing that such references have been abolished, and no longer constitute police policy” (Bhasha 2000a: 29).

Discrimination is also reproduced within the local school system around Chharanagar.

Hardika Kodekar, a young Chhara woman described her difficulties:

There are five thousand students studying in our school, and I am the only one who is a Chhara. In the beginning, all the girls were interacting very nicely with me. But when they wanted to know my surname, I told them that I was a Chhara and belonged to Chharanagar. On knowing my real identity, they started behaving differently. Nobody would sit next to me... I have one classmate... She is Sinhdi... I asked her why she didn't accompany me. But she never answered me. Both of us live nearby [each other]. I told her to accompany me in a rickshaw, but she always refuses... Since I joined the school, the teachers don't know that I am a Chhara. I don't know when they will come to know... and how they will react. But the other children belonging to Chharanagar, who attend other schools, their teachers treat them very badly (Interview, December 2009).

A similar experience was narrated by Tushar Kodekar:

I entered into another school for the eighth standard... It was a mixed population in that school. There were Patels, Brahmins, Solankis, Baniyas, these kind of people. What happened, once there was some stealing in the classroom, and all the Chhara students were interrogated by the school authorities, saying that, “You have stolen these things”. That was the first time that I came to know that we are isolated. We are isolated. We are thieves in the eyes of the people (Interview, January 2009).

Chharas remain not only the target of extreme forms of social discrimination, but equally of state violence. We see this explicitly in Chharanagar with the death of Roxy's father who was arrested by the Ahmedabad police in 2001 under the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act (PASA). He was jailed for nine months, over which time he was denied treatment for his diabetes and subjected to several rigorous beatings. After his release, his leg was badly maimed and his condition so deteriorated that he died after failed dialysis. This is but one example of the level of violence experienced by DNT communities across the country. The well-documented murders of Budhan Sabar in 1998, while in police custody in West Bengal, and that of Pinya Hari Kale in Maharashtra illustrate that DNTs continue to suffer the worst forms of state excess: rape, torture, public beatings, extortion, false charges, displacement and long periods of incarceration. Stories abound of DNTs being lynched by mobs who suspect them of crimes committed in local communities. They are convenient targets. There are reports of DNT children being coerced into slave labour in the carpet factories of Mirzapur and Beneras in Uttar Pradesh, where they are subject to sub-human conditions. DNTs are often found among the landless agricultural workers suffering under persistent regimes of debt-bondage (despite the abolition of bonded labour in 1976). They are found in the brick kilns of West Bengal, or among the young adivasi women who are sold into sexual slavery as trophies to the masters of industry in Bihar, Bengal, Haryana, and elsewhere. They fill the ranks of those in India kept well beyond the reach of labour laws and democratic rights.³⁹ They are disproportionately exposed to hunger, malnutrition, infant, child and maternal mortality, sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, diarrhea, anemia, and malaria (Devy 2006a; UN 2007a; 2007b FIAN 2008). "The DNTs of India",

³⁹ These claims are based on a close reading of the ongoing efforts of Bengali writer and activist, Mahasweta Devi, to chronicle the plight of adivasis, particularly in eastern India (see Devi 1981a; 1981b; 1983a; 1983b; 1983c; 1983d; 1983e; 1983f; 1984a; 1984b; 1985a; 1985b; 1987; 1988; 1992; 1995; 2007).

admonishes Ganesh Devy (2006a: 23), “are on the run. Freedom has still not reached them.”

The proceedings of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, or CERD (UN 2007a; 2007b), are instructive in these regards, especially since the Government of India is a signatory nation to the UN convention.⁴⁰ In its 2007 session, CERD drew critical attention to the persistent and systematic violation of adivasi rights and called for “urgent action in response to the escalation of hatred and violence against indigenous peoples [in India]” (2007a: 6). It raised concerns over reports that each year some 23,000 children die from starvation in the ‘tribal’ areas of Maharashtra alone. The Committee (2007b: 3) was particularly distressed by instances of “arbitrary arrest, torture and extrajudicial killings of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes by the police, and about the frequent failure to protect these groups against acts of communal violence.” It equally expressed anxiety over the large number of “allegations of acts of sexual violence... and about the sexual exploitation of Dalit and tribal women who are being trafficked and forced into prostitution” (4). CERD urged the greater enforcement of and mandatory training of state actors in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, necessitated by the alarming backlog of atrocity cases pending in the Indian courts, as well as the low rate of conviction and high percentage of acquittals in those cases brought forward under the Act.⁴¹ The Committee pressed the Government of India to formally recognize its

⁴⁰ While the Government of India signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1968, it continues to resist the recommendations of the CERD based on its argument that discrimination in India is based in caste and not race; hence the UN agency and convention are not applicable.

⁴¹ The Act was instituted in 1989 to prevent atrocities against India’s Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, or alternatively, 24 percent of the population (according to the 2001 census). The legislation provides special courts for the trial of atrocity cases, as well as state sponsored relief and rehabilitation. It

indigenous peoples as a distinct group “entitled to special protection under national and international law... and [to] provide information on the criteria used for determining the membership of scheduled and other tribes” (3).

The Criminal Tribes Act also continues to be reproduced through official state policy. It was disbanded only to be replaced with the Habitual Offenders Act (HOA) in 1952, which preserves the powers of the police to perpetuate similar abuses established under the CTA. The principal difference is that individuals are now profiled rather than entire ethnic populations. The HOA allows the state to compile a master registrar of criminals through the circulation of photographs, foot and fingerprints. It compels registered offenders to notify the state of any change in residence, and preserves the authority to restrict movement and to establish rehabilitation settlements. The HOA also permits the administration of ‘corrective’ training, while allowing for the ‘enhanced punishment’ of previously convicted persons (see Bombay Habitual Offenders Act 1952). CERD drew specific attention to the plight of DNT and nomadic communities in India, and it is significant to note that the HOA has not been repealed despite its recommendations, along with decades of protest staged by adivasi activists working across the country.

CERD (2007a: 6) also expressed grave concern over the “impunity afforded to security forces” under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, which is “applicable to internal conflict situations in areas inhabited by indigenous and tribal peoples.” Again, despite a long history of protest and the pressure exerted by the likes of the United

is applicable to the whole of India, with the exception of Jammu and Kashmir. In 2003, 22,603 cases were filed under the Act, with a dismal conviction rate of 2.31 percent (FAO 2006).

Nations' CERD, the Government of India had done nothing to review or revoke the much-maligned Armed Forces Act, under which members of the armed forces cannot be prosecuted without the direct sanction of the central government. The Act extends extraordinary powers to the state's security forces to search, arrest and detain without a warrant. This, in a country where custodial torture and extrajudicial killings are not uncommon. The Act has led to severe human rights abuses (which are well documented) against adivasi people (see Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network 2009), and is widely utilized throughout the northeastern states, which have the highest concentrations of indigenous groups. The region is also the setting of multiple, violent conflicts between the state's security forces and local communities, as well as the site of 168 mega dam projects currently being built on indigenous land. The connections between indigenous territory, armed conflict and accelerated capitalist development will be the subject of chapter eight.

For Chharas in Ahmedabad, in addition to the HOA, the CTA has been reincarnated in a host of anti-begging and anti-loitering policies that continue to draw nefarious connections between transient activities and criminality. Every state government in India has legislation designed to prohibit various informal activities within the public sphere. These are policies wherein the definitions of vagrancy and begging remain remarkably broad, inclusive of dancing, performing, fortune telling, demonstrating and hawking—the very activities that remain critical in the economies of many adivasi communities (Radhakrishna 2001). The Naroda Settlement is itself now under the control of the Social Welfare Department. The school once run by the Salvation Army has partially collapsed but still used as a local police station, and an inner fenced compound has been established in which city beggars are rounded up to be rehabilitated by the state. It

thus remains a powerful testament to the legacy of the CTA, its traces still visible on the landscape.



Figure 30. Contemporary rehabilitation centre run by the Social Welfare Department. Photograph by author.

Persistent Criminality?

In considering the popular stigma of Chharanagar, it bears considering that there are various illicit activities which take place within the community. Its primary industry is the production and sale of alcohol, which by some estimates (calculated by Chharas) generates nearly 70 percent of all income in the community. On any given day, one can readily see elderly women huddled over kerosene burners, engaged in the various stages involved in distilling a powerful liquor. Or one can watch the daily caravan of rickshaws, parked on the roadway cutting through Chharanagar, many of whose drivers

and passengers frequent roadside canteens. There are others in the community who engage in a range of illicit activities, such as petty theft and gambling. As a result, police raids and arrests are a regular occurrence in Chharanagar, although these are often prompted by rounding up suspects for any crime committed in the surrounding area. Arrests on trumped up charges are alarmingly frequent. As Kerim Friedman (unpublished article) noted during the making of a video documentary in Chharanagar:

When we were filming in January 2007 we had been slowly making progress in gaining the trust... of the community which still engages in thieving; however, just when the “merchants associations” representing the thieves had agreed to meet with us to discuss their participation in the documentary, our activities were interrupted by a series of police raids. The police were rounding up everyone suspected of thieving and photographing them and videotaping them at the police station... Young people with no criminal record fled the neighbourhood and went into hiding to avoid being listed.

There is also the testimony of Pravin Garange, a Chhara man who the Ahmedabad police arrested in 2008 on suspicion of a robbery that had taken place in the city of Surat.

Pravin Garange: An Ahmedabad policeman, named Subhashbhai, called me to the police station saying that I have to answer his inquiries. After reporting to him, he sent me to the Surat Crime Police... They handed me over to the Surat police... I was beaten by the Surat police for one day, and they made me sit, only, for two days. On the third day, they charged me with false allegations of theft of three and a half lakh rupees (Interview, December 2009).

In order to secure bail, Pravin took a loan of 40,000 rupees (\$900 CDN) from a local moneylender. The case against him is pending in the Surat courts.

Given their tenuous relationship with the authorities, it is hardly surprising that Chharas are often extremely reluctant to bring any grievances to the attention of the local police, preferring instead to have conflict arbitrated by its own *jat panchayat*—a council of elected elders (which includes women) who govern and administrate justice within

Chharanagar.⁴² But there exists a more problematic relationship between the police and Chharas. Criminal profiling within the community is common and virtually everyone testified to having experienced some form of police harassment and/or violence. Further, various criminal activities, namely the distillation of alcohol, continues at the behest of the police as bribes constitute an important source of *baksheesh*, revenue for local officers. I do not want to press the presence of illegality in Chharanagar. Writing about this raises the danger of reproducing the very narratives that continue to reinscribe Chharas' natural, pre-ordained propensity for crime. I would simply ask whose crime is greater? Those who imprisoned nomads in labour camps? The state authorities who continue to perpetuate the legacy of the CTA? The Ahmedabad police who demand tribute from impoverished community residents? Or those in Chharanagar engaged in illegal activities out of economic desperation, whose crimes are obviously the product of a long history of exclusion? Given the opportunity, there is no doubt that Chharas would (and do) excel in meaningful, paid employment.

At the same time, Chharas often insist on the presence of a dangerous criminality at work within the community. As Roxy and his wife Kalpana explained:

You can say that our ancestors, or our fathers, they were criminals. They were thieves. Their work was to go to some place, if there was a goat, they'll steal the goat. If there's some vessel kept, they'll take away the vessel and all that. They'll steal that and they'll sell it for an aana, two aanas, rupee, two rupees, something. And they'll earn the money like this. They were acting to thieve. Say, for example, what's the aim of a Chhara? Two or three members of the same community, same group, they will enter a shop, they will act as they don't know each other. They'll try and confuse the shopkeeper. "Show me this. Show me this. (Interview, 1 December 2008).

⁴² This council continues to meet in the Chharas' original internment camp to make decisions on community issues.

And now Dakxin:

Our forefathers were thieves, and you know, thieving is an art. You cannot thief. I can. We can. Thieving is an art. In fact, we have a different kind of *modus operandi*. I am sorry, I cannot explain. Because if I explain to you, I would be guilty in my community. I cannot explain the *modus operandi* of my community with you, because it's still the livelihood of these, of many people... [But] our *modus operandi* is [that] we never touch people when we thief. See, to thief and to do a robbery, these are both different things. To do a robbery that means, yeah, it's violence. But to thief, that means I distract your mind. I distract your eyes and I pickup your belongings... So we are specialized in thieving but not in robberies... It's inherent. It is in [our] *genes*. It's an inherent talent.... Because, you know, people can wake up in the morning with an empty space, the empty stomach, but they cannot sleep with an empty stomach... So they started thieving and they used their artistic talent, inherent and genetic talent in the thieving" (Interview, 26 October 2008).

Is this the reproduction of camp mentality? Of a community indoctrinated in its inherent (biological) criminality? It is hard to say. But I found the repetition of this narrative—again and again—distressing. It points to an unknowable relationship between thieving and exclusion. It is clear that Chharas' history of exclusion and the skills necessary for survival are prominent and entangled. Whatever criminal activities may exist in the community, however, does not justify the erasure of rights. The mythology of crime in Chharanagar has persisted, passed down through generations, and it is unclear where the real and myth, fact and fiction, converge and separate. I end up pointing out that there is now an emergent generation of politicized leaders within the community (such as Dakxin, Kalpana and Roxy) who are leading the reclamation of this history, and are engaged in a substantial reworking of Chharas' collective identity. In this reimagining, the shared history of being a branded population, now a *vimukta jati* (liberated community), is increasingly a mark of distinction and basis for solidarity with others in Ahmedabad and beyond. To that present we now turn.

Chapter 7: The Importance of Being Counted

Introduction

There continues to be much ground for interrogating the limited impact and reach of liberal democracy and the vestige of India's developmental apparatus. For many, institutional democracy and developmental governmentality have simply failed, their resonance lost in the fact that more people in India live in absolute poverty than in all Sub-Saharan Africa combined. The United Nations ranked India 134th in its most recent Human Development Index (2009), India has slid down 14 positions since 1992. The UN World Food Programme (2009) has suggested that the country possess 50 percent of the "world's hungry", or alternatively 350 million people in India are "food insecure". The UN Food Agricultural Organization (FAO 2006) identifies 212 million malnourished people in India, which represents by far the largest of any single country in the world. The FAO calculates that while 28.6 percent of the Indian population lives below the official poverty line,⁴³ over 80 percent exist on less than 2 US dollars per day, meaning that the vast majority are critically exposed to hunger and lack basic services (see also Patnaik 2004). This is an incredible state of affairs in which, according to a UN rapporteur, hunger and food insecurity are actually increasing despite the last decade of sustained economic growth (Ziegler 2006). Or we can turn to the work of Mohan Guruswamy and Ronald Abraham (2010) who argue that 37.7 percent of Indian households do not have access to a nearby water source; 49 percent do not have secure shelter; 69.5 percent do not have suitable toilets; and 85.2 percent of Indian

⁴³ The official poverty line in India is 368 rupees (\$8.2 CDN) per month rurally, and 559 rupees (\$12.5 CDN) in urban areas.

villages do not have a secondary school. Using what they describe as a 'holistic poverty line', the authors estimate that 84.6 percent of rural people along with 42.4 percent of urban populations live in poverty. Many figures can be invoked to paint a dreary picture of the majority that continue to toil at the bottom of India's socio-economic order. At the same time, others argue that the very survival of democratic institutions in India, against all odds and amidst difficult conditions, are a shining beacon of hope in a region marred by war (Afghanistan), military coups and Islamic fundamentalism (Bangladesh, Pakistan), repressive juntas (Myanmar), and communist insurrection (Nepal). For some, it is as if holding regular elections, the presence of a robust judiciary, and freedom of the press are enough to hold aloft the pillars of Indian democracy rallied under the banner of freedom, justice and development for one and all.

If the last 62 years has proven anything in India, it has demonstrated how the entangled geographies of democracy, citizenship and development are incredibly varied and uneven across time and space. Why is it that certain populations thrive in India just as many others remain fixed in place? Or become increasingly impoverished? While it is true that hundreds of millions continue to grapple with extreme poverty and exclusion, India has also witnessed the unprecedented emergence of dalit, adivasi, environmental, farmer, women and citizen movements. Many have risen up to demand higher wages, a share of state power, gender equality, land redistribution, and social equity. Social and political movements have challenged the authority of patriarchy, tenacious caste politics, abuses of state power, and the violence of modernist development. The success of particular actors is striking. The rising political fortune of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is but one example, this, a political party under the command of a dalit woman, the controversial figure of Mayawati Kumari who is currently the Chief Minister

of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populated state. This reflects a much broader trend where most ministers of state governments are non-Brahmin, as are many figures in all walks of public life (Weiner 2001). Of course, political representation and social movement activism by no means ensure the redistribution of wealth, but do raise the consideration that the workings of governmentality are central in understanding this varied topography of uneven development. In this context, what I mean by governmentality is the immense apparatus (strategies, categories and structures) that was instituted by the Nehruvian state at the time of independence, the technologies of governing deployed to identify and administrate the country's most vulnerable populations (principally Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes). Such considerations focus that while liberal democracy in India has never delivered on the promises of equal citizenship, equitable development, nor provided meaningful inclusion for the majority in the structures of civil life, particular populations have managed to access state resources and political influence far better than others.

In this chapter and to situate these politics more fully, I return to the struggles of Chharas in Ahmedabad. There is little doubt that having been branded as a Criminal Tribe has left lasting effects in the immediacy of Chharas' everyday lives. They embody the living history of a colonial strategy that continues to be reproduced through the machinery of the state and circulated in the popular imagination of the city. At the same time, this is a history that violently brought Chharas into the folds of modern state power as an identified population. Unlike the Baori, or indeed other DNTs elsewhere in the city (and beyond), Chharas thus became eligible targets of India's centralized developmental apparatus in the post-independence period. Being a visible DNT community has situated Chharas' quite differently vis-à-vis the state. To some extent,

the experiences of Chharas illustrate the critical importance of being counted—of being seen by the state. This elaborates how accessing the ‘rights’ and entitlements of the subaltern often depend directly upon their ability to position themselves within usable categories of governmentality, namely, as visible populations. I think through what effects being a recognized DNT community has had in Chharanagar. I then consider how their tenuous visibility is positioned within the efforts to liberalize the structures of governance in the city and state, and as such, is bound up in the accelerated erosion of the poor’s constitutional rights and moral legitimacy.

Vimukta (Especially Free)

There is no question that Chharas’ history in Ahmedabad exposes the underbelly of a hostile colonial authority that resonates in their everyday lives. At the same time, it is only with tragic irony that this history—of being identified as a Criminal Tribe subject to state management—has been utilized by Chharas to access state resources. Under the Criminal Tribes Act, approximately 200 adivasi populations were detained in agricultural settlements and industrial labour colonies until 1952. Freedom is clearly remembered as a cause for much celebration in the collective memory of Chharas in Ahmedabad.

Dakxin: After five years [of independence], we were free. So we were denotified by the Government of India, by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. And he gave us a new name, to all those tribes who [were] kept in the settlements, ‘That you people are *vimukta*’, which means ‘especially free’. *Vi* means ‘especially’, *mukta*, means ‘free’ (Interview, 26 October 2008).

For Criminal Tribes, denotification meant decriminalization, and their reclassification as *vimukta jatis*, ‘liberated castes’, or the category known as Denotified Tribes (DNT). This process had important effects for Chharas. It enabled them (those living in the Ahmedabad camp) to secure a 99-year land lease from the state and the right to settle

a short distance from their original labour colony situated along the northeastern fringe of the city.



Figure 31. Chharanagar. Photograph by author.

This was hardly prime real estate—the site of a former cremation ground that remains alongside passing rail tracks. But a community arose out of the ashes, settling around Free Colony, the forty huts built for ‘rehabilitated’ Chhara families in the early 1940s. It is difficult to overstate the significance of obtaining secure tenure rights in the early independence period. While land in Chharanagar ultimately remains under the stewardship of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, this lease has insulated Chharas from the slum clearances that have become a regular occurrence in the city. While Chharas remain ghettoized within the broader socio-economic landscape, tenure offers some measure of protection, and not just for Chharas. It also provides safe refuge for others during periods of communal strife in Ahmedabad.

Dakxin: When [the] riots occurred in 2002, ... Chharanagar became a shelter for Muslims. So we saved more than four hundred people in Chharanagar. We fed them, at least for two months. We sent them to a safe place... So Chharanagar is always a shelter for the minority people.

Chharas offered sanctuary to Muslims from the immediate vicinity during the violence unleashed by Hindu mobs in the aftermath of Godhra in 2002. Like refugees on the run in their own city, Muslims were stowed away in Chharanagar. Further, the size and organization of Chharas means they have taken steps to stop Hindutva activists from penetrating the community.

Caleb: Have saffron activists tried to recruit in Chharanagar?

Dakxin: They tried but they did not succeed. [The] RSS tried but they did not succeed... They closed their branch (Interview, 19 November 2009).

Secure land tenure also means that families have made greater investments in the physical infrastructure of the community. While this varies according to the differing financial resources of families, many homes are far more secure than one encounters elsewhere in Ahmedabad's many 'illegal' *bastis*.



Figure 32. Secure housing in Chharanagar. Photograph by author.

There is a complicated housing geography in Chharanagar, and just as some families have profited from the illicit economy and better jobs, others have not. Multi-storied homes, built of brick and mortar, exist side-by-side with ramshackle tenements.



Figure 33. Insecure housing in Chharanagar. Photograph by author.

Tenure rights have further enabled Chharas to obtain the regularized provision of some basic civic amenities: water, electricity, and (to some extent) sewer and drainage. “We pay municipal taxes”, observed Roxy, “We are given electricity connections. We pay all the taxes, and we have drainage facilities over there, right now (Interview, 20 December 2008). It should be noted, however, that the regularized provision of electricity is a relatively recent phenomenon in Chharanagar. It dates back to 1997 and the privatization of power generation and distribution in the city. Since acquiring ownership of the Ahmedabad Electricity Company (a state industry), Torrent Power has orchestrated an aggressive campaign to expand provision regardless of communities’ legal status. For Chharas this resulted in the company providing formal meters and connections for individual homes in 2006. Further, while some houses in Chharanagar are connected to the main sewer grid, many are not and these simply direct waste in dug channels into back lanes. The result is large, concentrated bodies of filthy, stagnant

water, clearly a serious health concern. Like most of the city, there is no system in place for the organized collection of solid waste. Nevertheless, the provision of electricity, some sewer infrastructure, the fact that Chharas have recognized residential addresses and pay municipal taxes are important signifiers that they exist more fully within the parameters of formalized governance. As a result, they cannot be dismissed as a pirate community skirting the edge of legality to secure their right to the city. While still viewed as a criminal population, Chharanagar is not an unauthorized settlement. Chharas cannot be seen as illegal encroachers on public territory, and if not substantive rights bearing citizens—at the very least—they have managed to wrestle some rudimentary entitlements.

While tenure rights exist, they do so in a temporary arrangement with the state that is scheduled to expire sometime around 2041. No one in Chharanagar that I interviewed or spoke with possessed any clear indication when exactly this lease will end. Most tended to calculate the date from when the first Chhara families were relocated to Free Colony. It could thus be the vestige of colonial policy designed to settle Criminal Tribes within the immediate vicinity of internment camps. This not knowing is again instructive of the kind of ambiguity endemic of tenure rights in Ahmedabad. It is a pending future that troubles Dakxin:

After our 99 years... the government can vacate this place for their own purposes. Or to build good buildings to beautify the city... So we will have to prove that we are living here since 100 years. We have documents, and on the basis of that, the High Court or Supreme Court [may] be helping us. Or we will be allotted another land outside of Ahmedabad city. Because these communities [slums] are notorious for the city... We are treated as a menace... So it might be that we will be thrown out by the government (Interview, 30 October 2008).

As Dakxin observes, his community's long-term tenure is questionable, and he rightly suggests that if current trends prevail in the growing metropolis, Chharas will likely face the same brand of displacement peddled elsewhere in the city. He also suggests that their long tenure in Chharanagar may prove critical in soliciting support from the judiciary. Further, their specific history as a DNT population may prove significant in establishing a moral legitimacy that can be used to garner compensation in the event of eviction.

Partial Visibility

Being identified as a DNT population has enabled Chharas limited access to one other significant state resource: India's reservation system. The reservation system is India's version of affirmative action. At the time of independence, it was designed to support the development of three general population categories: Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).⁴⁴ Enshrined in the constitution, the reservation system articulated one of the great commitments of India's developmental apparatus.⁴⁵ It reserves seats in elected bodies for marginalized caste

⁴⁴ There are 645 Scheduled Tribes (reframed as adivasi) that are notified in the Indian Constitution. Scheduled Castes have been known by various names: untouchables, harijians, and more recently, dalits (translates as oppressed). These groups are spread out across India, long exposed to the worst forms of class and caste exploitation.

⁴⁵ The conflict over the design of the reservation system in the early independence period is instructive. It brought into focus sharp debates over what constituted the root of inequity, along with the best course of action to 'uplift' the dispossessed. Marxists rallied that the reservation system would only serve to reinforce caste divisions and social difference. Here, caste was seen as the product of ruling classes, an instrument of social control, where caste identities are instrumental in preserving class privileges by preventing the consolidation of effective working class consciousness. Other figures, such as Dr. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian constitution and champion of dalit rights, saw inequity rooted in caste dynamics and was extremely doubtful that the emancipation of dalits would ever be possible within the country's ingrained social hierarchy. At the same time, the Congress executive (Nehru and Gandhi), while agreeing that caste was the source of great suffering, argued that it was only reformable from within the Hindu 'community'; hence their unwillingness to establish separate electorates for dalits (unlike their eventual position taken vis-à-vis the demands of Muslims). Reservations were thus seen as a means of ensuring equality between caste Hindus and adivasis.

and adivasi groups, and establishes quotas in both public sector labour markets and education institutions, where it relaxes certain requirements (fees and marks). Based on positive discrimination, the reservation system recognizes that certain populations face acute socio-economic barriers rooted in India's tenacious caste hierarchy. The general idea being that providing opportunity leads to the gradual assimilation of vulnerable groups, eventually eliminating the need for reservations altogether. In doing so, however, the system illustrates fundamental contradictions that lay at the heart of liberal democracy in India. Scheduled reservations disrupt any notion of universal (or national) equality by making special provision for particular communities identified by the state. How can India's democracy, founded on the principal of equal rights, endorse a system that privileges specific social groups? This contradiction is precisely what prompts Partha Chatterjee (2004) to argue that it is never the universality of rights and freedoms that define democracy. Rather, it is the machinations of governmentality that inform the workings of democratic politics, which depend upon the technological and discursive practices and categories through which subjects are rendered governable. Modern state power thus hinges on producing knowable populations through various strategies and techniques that ensure the control, supervision and prosperity of citizens.

Central to our narrative is the mixed success that Chharas have had in accessing the reservation system. In describing the closure of the Ahmedabad camp in 1952, Roxy made the important observation that:

At that time, denotified tribes were not in any area of the constitution, because entire tribes were forgotten when the constitution was passed. So in 1952, someone from Maharashtra, [in the] Sholapur camp, wrote to the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, that, 'There are tribes, there are people who are still in jail. And you have forgotten about them'... So Nehru, in 1952, on 31st August, he came to Sholapur to open the settlement, and he broke and cut the strings of the jail (Interview, 20 December 2008).

The fact that DNTs were not officially recognized in the writing of the constitution, nor in the design of scheduled reservations has had consequences. The closure of CT camps may have been accompanied with much pomp and ceremony but the state did little to ensure the provision of social welfare and justice for CTs (reframed as DNT). DNT populations have had an opaque visibility within the classification grids of the state. The first comprehensive effort to locate DNTs in the Bombay Presidency was staged in 1939 under the auspices of the CTA Enquiry Committee, a body established to not only survey CT populations but put forward a number of recommendations designed for their rehabilitation. Efforts to map DNT populations were again taken up in the early independence period by the Antrolikar Commission of 1949, which spent a great deal of time surveying DNTs situated in the state of Bombay (which then included Gujarat and territories of Karnataka). The Commission's subsequent report not only listed a number of DNT communities but also made a number of specific recommendations it deemed critical in their successful assimilation in the post-independence period. In theory, this should have provided the incentive and statistics for state authorities to provide social welfare to DNT groups.

But the Commission's classification schemes and policy recommendations were never formally ratified by the national and state governments. As Roxy intimates, no schedules were designed specifically for DNTs, and little provision ever made for their socio-economic welfare. Never governed as a uniform, distinct category, DNTs have thus largely remained invisible. In Gujarat, the state government did produce an additional survey in the late 1960s, which identified some thirty-odd DNT and Nomadic Tribes. This classification grid was later revised in the 1980s, although it was never

made public and is now stored in the inaccessible recesses of government archives.⁴⁶ Regrettably, as with virtually all other state governments in India, Gujarat now denies the very existence of DNT populations. “The state and the country both”, argues Ganesh Devy, “are trying to forget that there is a category called DNT... DNT is a category that in the official practice, the government is trying to brush aside or forget” (Interview, 18 November 2009). The actions taken by DNT activists to disrupt this lacuna will be the subject of further investigation in the following chapter.

It is not that DNT populations have not been administered by the state. Rather, what has emerged across India is an incredibly complex and convoluted matrix where the governance of DNTs varies dramatically from one state to the next. In certain states, DNTs are administered within ST categories, in others as SCs or OBCs, and elsewhere excluded from the reservation system and social welfare programs altogether. In Gujarat, Chharas are classified within the state’s *Bakshi Panch*, or among what is known as the Other Backward Classes. But if somewhat contradictorily, Chharas have also been eligible for a specific DNT certificate that—in theory—entitles them to various state programs. These are programs that were inherited by Gujarat following its break from the state of Bombay and its formation as an independent, linguistic state in 1960.

Dakxin: There are [loans for] sewing machines for the girls. There are loans for leather machines. If he or she is an engineering student, they provide some additional help to purchase some instruments.

Caleb: Have people in Chharanagar benefited from those welfare schemes?

Dakxin: Only scholarships. Because the government never approached Chharanagar, first. Second, [our] community never, we never knew, at all, about

⁴⁶ This assertion is based on the fact that DNT activists have been trying very hard to access these records through the newly introduced Right to Information Act 2005. The Government of Gujarat denies any prior knowledge of these surveys.

these schemes that the government is giving. So there is a gap in accessing information (Interview, 19 November 2009).

Dakxin suggests that while Chharas have been eligible for various social welfare schemes, there exists a 'gap of information', and it is certainly not uncommon for the poor to be unaware or uninformed of the very programs designed for their benefit. He also observes that scholarship programs have had the greatest impact for the community. While Chharas are classified within the state's OBC schedule, because they possess a DNT certificate, they are sometimes able to access unfilled quotas in the reservation system's ST and SC categories. This is a small but very important caveat.

For Dakxin, this enabled him to secure entrance and a scholarship to college where he obtained a degree in the arts, which led him to filmmaking and an opportunity to work with Rakesh Sharma in Mumbai. Since then, he has emerged as a prominent community organizer in Chharanagar and politically engaged artist. In 2009, he registered his film company, Nomad Productions, which culminated out of many years documenting the struggles of DNTs and adivasis in Gujarat. Roxy had a similar experience. After completing a degree in journalism in Ahmedabad, he landed well-paid, secure employment as a criminal investigative reporter at DNA, a national English daily newspaper. Ironically, for Roxy at least, it seems the stigma associated with belonging to a Criminal Tribe may have been strategically utilized to some advantage. His employment as a journalist reporting on crime in the city is an example in point. But so is the experience of Tushar, a young Chhara in his late 20s, who now works as a producer for TV9, a popular news station in Gujarat. Part of Tushar's job is to produce and film the mock reenactments of violent crime scenes for the daily news.

Chharanagar has provided both the actors and physical landscape for much of this

work. The fear is that this simply reinforces an imaginative geography that continues to stigmatize Chharanagar. Alternatively, one can argue that this demonstrates a calculated deployment of (de)criminalized subjectivity.



Figure 34. Tushar filming crime in Chharanagar for TV9. Photograph by author.

Additionally, there is a remarkable number of lawyers in Chharanagar, by some estimates there are close to 200 attorneys in a community less than 15,000. This may or may not be surprising. Given Chharas' violent history with the police, it is little wonder that so many are keenly interested in knowing the laws of the land.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The average salary for attorneys in Chharanagar is between 6,000 to 10,000 rupees (\$138 – \$230 USD).

The impact of scheduled quotas, however, has been limited to Chharas accessing public education, and, significantly, not government jobs. Those who exercise political power in India belong to a highly exclusive class. The importance of gaining entry to government positions and public office can mean access to quality medical insurance, pensions, rent-free housing, low-interest loans, political influence, use of state resources, special government schools for children, among other benefits. Networks of political patronage are notorious in India. They often determine who gets state resources and who does not. They are the veins through which political society flows, where entitlements of the many are (re)negotiated through back-door deals, vote bank politics and personal caste/class connections. As Jaychand Rathod, a Chhara lawyer, argued:

Because our population is very small, the politics of the nation does not let us have facilities. We don't get justice. In the present politics, those who have a good vote bank get the facilities, but we have fewer votes, so the local politicians, like the Corporation, do not provide us with anything (Interview, December 2009).

Sadly, there is no great success story to be told of Chharas struggling up to command positions of public authority or political influence. Nevertheless, the experiences of Roxy and Dakxin (among others) certainly demonstrate that accessing the reservation system has had positive effects, and is intrinsic to securing better economic opportunities. As we have seen in the experience of the Baori in Gulbai Tekra, many others in Ahmedabad are not as fortunate.

Eroded Visibility

Chharas now find it difficult to access the reservation system.

Dakxin: When I was studying in college, I was provided with a Denotified Tribe or NT/DNT certificate, caste certificate. So, on that basis... when the seats are not filled up, DNT people were considered as students, and then general [candidates]. But now the Government of Gujarat, they stopped issuing the tribal certificates, and now, you know, [when] Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe seats are not filled up entirely, [they] remain vacant and no one can do anything (Interview, 20 November 2008).

This is a particularly distressing development in Gujarat, where the current BJP government is taking concerted steps to undermine scheduled reservations. By no longer issuing 'tribal' certificates, it is closing the mechanism through which Chharas (and other recognized DNT populations) have had some access to reservations and other social welfare schemes. This state of affairs is of great personal concern to Roxy:

We were categorized [by] that NT/DNT certificate. We used to get a NT/DNT certificate, which means Nomadic Tribes or Denotified Tribe Certificate. I still have that certificate with me, but it [has] no importance now because this entire category has been eradicated by the state government. They have now changed [the criteria] for DNTs. When I was a student, before seven years, I got admission into the ST quota, even though I am a Denotified Tribal. I am not a Scheduled Tribal... But now the scenario has changed. Now what happens is that if the ST quota has not been fulfilled, it will be filled by the general candidates and the DNT candidate will not be preferred (Interview, 20 December 2008).

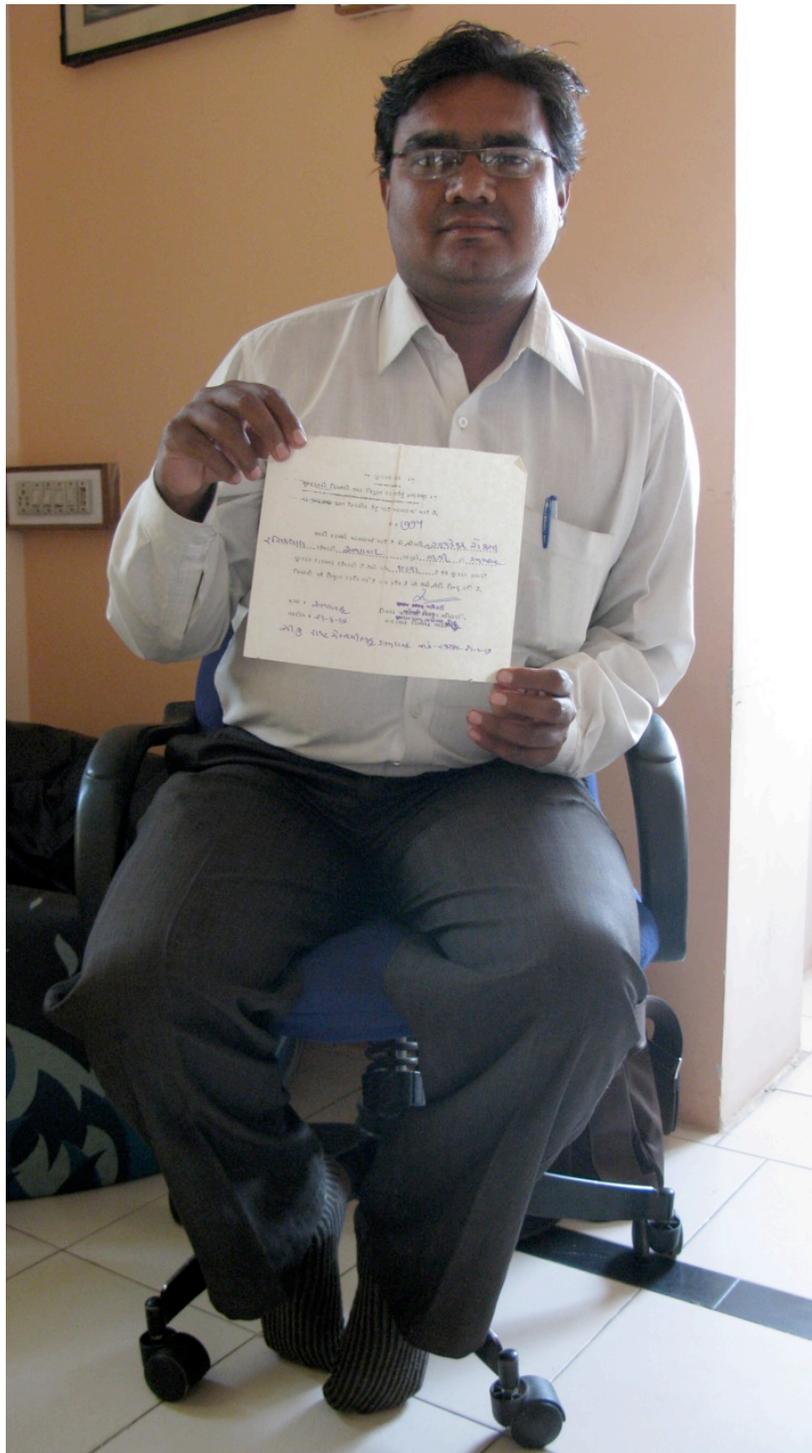


Figure 35. Roxy's DNT certificate. Photograph by author.

These are recent developments in Gujarat, and it is unclear to what extent the BJP state government will or can go in 'reforming' the reservation system. It certainly cannot dismantle it in its entirety, as this would require a constitutional amendment by the

central government. Yet, state governments do possess considerable authority in the structure and delivery of scheduled reservations. With a seemingly impenetrable political hegemony in both Gujarat and Ahmedabad, the BJP is taking aggressive steps to undercut the constitutional entitlements of particular vulnerable populations. By ‘eradicating’ their DNT certificate, the Government in Gujarat is making it effectively impossible for Chharas to access social welfare programs and has severely hampered their ability to utilize scheduled reservations.⁴⁸ As it now stands, Chharas are forced to compete exclusively within the Other Backward Classes category. The simple reality is that DNT communities cannot vie with other OBCs, many of who are: “fluent [in English], many of them are very rich, many of them don’t even need proper reservation categories” (Roxy, Interview, 20 December 2008). The fact that the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, himself hails from an OBC is a striking example of the levels of power and influence to which certain groups have ascended.

This reflects a much deeper politics concerned with India’s reservation system. Initially, it was governed by the logic that making special provision for marginalized populations would naturally lead to equality between caste groups.⁴⁹ But a convoluted topography has emerged, where particular social groups tend to dominate and thrive, while others continue to be fixed in place, where reservations have little or no effect. We see these dynamics in the dominance of Vankars and Charmars in the Schedule Caste reservations in Gujarat at the expense of other marginalized dalit groups. Or in the case

⁴⁸ The issue of revoking caste identification is not limited to DNT populations, as several local news stories have surfaced over the last year suggesting that the Gujarati government is also no longer prepared to issue certificates to members of Scheduled Tribes who cannot prove their residency in the state prior to 1961—the year that Gujarat was established as an independent state.

⁴⁹ This is to say nothing of the fact that the reservation system has never made any provision for minority Muslims or Christians in India, nor the fact that dalits or Scheduled Tribes who convert to Islam or Christianity relinquish their reservation rights, unlike those who convert to Buddhism (UN 2007a).

of Meenas, a ST population who command dominion in the reservation of government jobs in Rajasthan. Given the stakes involved, it is not surprising that we see tremendous lobbying on the part of caste groups to be included within reservation categories, like the sustained demands staged by Malas and Madigas for quotas in Andhra Pradesh, or the case submitted by Banjaras to the Rajasthan High Court demanding recognition as an ST group (as they are in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra). As one acquaintance, at the Indian Institute of Management (himself a high ranking civil servant in Andhra Pradesh), put it, “India must be the only country in the world where people try to prove their backwardness.” They do so, however, because it is often the only means of accessing constitutional entitlements and the resources of the state. Many now argue that the entire reservation system does little more than reproduce competition between rival populations at the expense of facilitating unity across social difference. Others suggest the need for sweeping reforms, categories within categories, in order to refocus the ability to target those in need (as has happened recently in Tamil Nadu and Kerala). Supporters of scheduled reservations maintain that they are important mechanisms for furthering the agenda of social justice; the struggle against India’s persistent hierarchy rooted in caste politics; and what Rajni Kothari (1997: 443) describes as the effort to shift the country toward a “politics of plurality”. Part of the problem here is that reservations have never been structured around class (despite guidelines laid out in the constitution) but by caste, which is determined by birth. In the eyes of the state, one’s caste is immutable and permanent. It cannot be changed, unlike religion or economic status.

Having been classified as an OBC, Chharas face an extremely difficult situation, made especially problematic given that defining this population category remains highly

contentious in India. While the Indian constitution originally made provision for OBCs, these categories were not widely operationalized by state governments in the early independence period (with the important exceptions of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka). Similar to most states, however, Gujarat acted much earlier than the central government in identifying OBCs, carrying out surveys in the early 1980s that classified 100 caste groups considered both socially and economically disadvantaged.⁵⁰

Quantifying OBCs in India has remained an extremely fraught process, the result being that there continues to be a great deal of contestation over who and what constitutes an OBC, and the National Sample Survey and National Family Health Survey have presented radically different figures than those put forward by the Mandal Commission in 1989. This has resulted in different caste groups exerting pressure on state actors, and accusations of partisan politics in the collection and analysis of survey/census data.

What is important to our considerations in Ahmedabad is the incredible heterogeneity of OBCs in terms of occupation, income, social status, education and political clout. Given their limited resources, Chharas stand little chance of competing with other more influential OBC populations. Moreover, it was in the defining of OBCs in Gujarat that DNTs were quietly forgotten as a population category. Lastly, the process of excluding

⁵⁰ It was not until the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations in 1989 that reservation schedules were extended to OBCs in those services and institutions administrated by the central government. The Mandal Commission had been established to study the feasibility of expanding reservations to OBCs, and it compiled a master registrar by largely adopting the classification schemes prepared by state governments. It thus instituted a grid that included 1,257 recognized OBC populations, claiming that these represented 52 percent of the national population. Acting on the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, the central state carried out massive expansions to the reservation system. OBC quotas were set at 27 percent, which, combined with the 7.5 percent for STs and the 15 percent for SCs, amounts to 49.5 percent; the maximum dictated by the Supreme Court of India under the guidelines laid out by the constitution to ensure 'equal' access to public sector jobs and education institutions. The efforts made by the central government and judiciary to exclude privileged members of OBC groups should be noted. These include those whose family income is greater than 250,000 rupees per year, the children of doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, actors, consultants, defense officers with the rank of colonel or higher, both High Court and Supreme Court judges, and all central and state government Class A and B officials.

Chharas from the reservation system is particularly detrimental considering the persistence of bigotry and entrenched social discrimination that the community continues to experience in the city. The ability that some Chharas have had in accessing scheduled reservations does not guarantee employment opportunities. Employers in the private sector in Ahmedabad are extremely resistant to hiring minorities in secure, well-paying jobs—those communities who continue to dominate the lowest and most insecure rungs of urban informal economies. Added to this situation is the failure of the reservation system to extend to privately funded educational facilities, and to private labour markets, a situation that partially explains the under representation of minorities in higher levels of education and employment.

Cold Comfort

Chharas (in)ability to access constitutional rights certainly presents a convoluted and opaque landscape. Cold comfort is the fact that many other adivasi communities in Ahmedabad are experiencing far worse conditions. We have already traced these politics in the case of the Baori in Gulbai Tekra, but we can also briefly turn to the ongoing struggles of Dabgars in Maninagar. As a former nomadic population from northwestern India that speaks Bhanu, Dabgars share a close affinity with Chharas—the pivotal difference being that this particular group was never interned by the British in the city's labour camp. Dabgars now work in the city's informal economy as casual labourers and by selling maps along S.G. Road. They also hawk *bairagi* (children's toys) and are widely known for their skill in making *dhol* drums out of goatskins. The community migrated to Ahmedabad in the early 1960s, settling around the city's Kalapur railway station, an important transportation hub that happens to be the political

constituency of Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. They live alongside other DNT residents in a large, mixed unauthorized *basti* that has been fighting displacement over the past ten years. Homes in the community have been razed to the ground on several occasions but residents have returned to reestablish their stubborn claim to the city.

Similar to Chharas, Dabgars are administrated as an OBC in Gujarat, but with no tenure rights, and critically, the absence of any physical identification whatsoever has made it all the easier for the AMC to violate constitutional rights. They are firmly fixed among the city's invisible 'citizens'. Chhara activists (namely Dakxin and Roxy) have been working with the community to resist their displacement, but with few tangible results.

Roxy: We even went and met the Municipal Commissioner. We met the Mayor. We met the local government, local counselor, municipal councilors, but nothing happened. We even protested for a day, [a] one-day symbolic hunger strike was also done in the city. And we made a protest rally for that. Many things were done (Interview, 20 December 2008).

They eventually were successful in enlisting the services of Megha Jani, an attorney working the High Court of Gujarat, and when their case failed there, she took the matter to the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi. There is little hope that the courts will rule in the community's favour but (at the very least) the long delay in the court's ruling is buying Dabgars precious time to find alternative accommodation in the city. I draw attention to the struggles of Dabgars to illustrate the importance of being counted, even in the case of being violently brought into the machinations of governmentality as a branded Criminal Tribe.

Roxy: This group was never taken into the settlement. They were just roaming, and they were escaping from being arrested by the British police. And they refused to go into the settlement. So they were never taken into the settlement... They never got into the hands of the British police at that time.... And that was the reason why they don't get land after 1952. If they would have been in some settlement, they would have been on the papers. They would have existed on some government papers, and they would have been given some sort of land to

live on. But, because they did not exist on government records, they were like invisible, because they don't have any record. They don't have any proof of being a citizen or anything. I mean it's unfortunate that we need to have some documents if you want to prove that you are a citizen of the country (Interview, 20 December 2008).

Roxy was narrating the summary eviction of a DNT community living in an unauthorized settlement alongside Ahmedabad's Kalupur railway station. It is a situation that mirrors the predicament of Baoris (except that the former has been displaced with no state compensation). Roxy's insight captures the tragic irony that not having been detained under the Criminal Tribes Act, has left other DNT populations in the city exposed to then greater vulnerability.

In some respects, there have been important effects for Chharas that stem from the fact that they appeared as an identified population subject to state regulation. Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the critical significance of their tenure rights and (albeit) limited access to India's reservation system. These, however, are increasingly fragile claims, whose erosion must be situated within the landscape of a rapidly liberalizing metropolis. The ongoing efforts of the Gujarati state to undermine the ability of Chharas to legitimize themselves as a DNT population are part of a sustained campaign to reconfigure the structures of governance. Here, state actors seem increasingly determined to un-map their constitutional obligations and liquidate the structures and categories of its developmental apparatus. While Chharas have managed to wrangle some basic entitlements in previous decades, the Gujarat government now appears intent on not only circumscribing access to resources but, more dramatically, deny the very existence of DNT populations altogether. Nevertheless, Chharas' self-identification as a *vimukta jati* remains critical. It is a subjectivity that provides them with a strong moral legitimacy, and many Chharas are leading the reclamation of this (de)criminalized identity.

Moreover, the subject category of the DNT has become a rallying point for political mobilization. I end by setting up what follows. Just as Chharas demonstrate the shifting nature of urban governance, they are positioned within the emergence of the Denotified Rights Action Group, a national social movement focused on asserting an agenda of social justice for India's DNTs.

Chapter 8: Constructing a Politics of Accommodation: the case of the DNT-RAG

Introduction: The Murder of Budhan Sabar

In February 1998, Budhan, a member of the Sabar community in West Bengal, died while in police custody. The young adivasi man had left home one morning on his bicycle to commute to the market. En route he was arrested by Ashok Roy, the officer in charge of the local Barabazar police station. Budhan was detained on the allegation that he was a suspect in a theft that had taken place in the surrounding area. Incarcerated in the Purulia jail, Budhan was denied food, water and subjected to repeated torture (Devi 2001); six days later, he was found dead in his cell. The police claimed he had committed suicide by hanging himself with his *gamchha* (towel). The matter may have been forgotten there, slipping into the recesses of time as simply another instance of state violence targeting those widely known as the Denotified Tribes of India (DNT). But the event was not overlooked. Having worked closely with the Kheria Sabar and other DNT groups since the 1970s, the death of Budhan was of great concern to acclaimed Bengali writer and activist Mahasweta Devi. The Kheria Sabar Kalian Samiti, an adivasi advocacy organization or people's alliance under the stewardship of Devi, was quick to demand an official inquiry into the death. Working through her personal networks, Devi enlisted the support of retired judge, Dilip Basu, and together they pressed for justice in the Calcutta High Court. Activists were successful in prompting the courts to order a second postmortem of Budhan's body, which revealed he had suffered a series of severe beatings while in custody. It lent credence to what many already knew: Budhan had been murdered. In the aftermath of Budhan's death, Mahasweta Devi traveled to Gujarat to deliver a guest lecture at the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, a

NGO based in Baroda founded in 1996 to advance adivasi culture and rights. There, Devi gave a passionate address that spoke not only of the recent events in West Bengal but also the abysmal conditions and historic injustices suffered by India's DNT communities. She called for united action. It was a serendipitous moment that proved to be the beginning of a movement. In Baroda, she reencountered Ganesh Devy, the founder of Bhasha, as well as Laxman Gaikwad, a DNT writer and activist based in Maharashtra. Budhan's murder ignited the formation of the Denotified Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG) in March 1998. With many others subsequently joining the movement, and drawing on a long history of political agitation staged by adivasi communities, the DNT-RAG has emerged as a national social movement focused on asserting an agenda of social justice.

In this chapter, I situated the contestation of adivasi rights within the politics of development and anti-development in contemporary India. I begin by narrating the DNT-RAG's strategic use of scale(s) which raises questions regarding what is the most appropriate frame within which to contest the meaning of development and address (in)justice. I document the substantial efforts of the movement to engage the highest levels of India's political executive in dialogue to further the collective citizenship rights of historically marginalized adivasis. By examining the activities of this undocumented national movement, I suggest that it mobilizes adivasis' subalternity in order to situate excluded populations within the gaze of the state's developmental apparatus. I argue that the movement concentrates on the central government precisely because it is seen as the best bet for realizing the equitable redistribution of resources, as well as securing adivasis' equal right to participate in the political community of the nation. The DNT-RAG reasserts the primacy of the Indian nation state as the dominant frame within

which to contest the meaning of development and confront injustice. The various technologies, knowledges and categories that comprise India's developmental apparatus thus remain a focal point of oppositional politics. The territoriality of the nation state is critical because, despite the past two decades of rapid liberalization, it remains the principal engine driving the project of nation building. In seeking to negotiate adivasi rights and inclusion, I argue that the DNT-RAG traces a politics of accommodation, a mode of organizing increasingly common in India, wherein NGOs, cultural figures and social movement actors can bridge relations between the disenfranchised and the state.

I end by drawing out the deep-seated contradictions that lie at the heart of India's developmental governmentality. The discourse of development is never static, adapting and reappearing in various ideological guises to produce remarkably different effects in specific places. Just as the DNT-RAG figures the possibility of accommodation, their efforts are situated in relation to the deployment of the state's war machine in east-central India to secure corporate control over adivasi lands and resources. Here, notions of development based on social justice and citizenship rights morph into anti-development—the pursuit of accelerated capitalist growth regardless of the human cost. The organizing of the DNT-RAG stands in sharp contrast to the escalating civil war presently unfolding in the violent confrontation between adivasis, the state's security forces, and the various armed and unarmed oppositional groups typically described as Naxalites—those who subscribe to varying interpretations of Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist ideologies. What follows is based on first hand experience of the DNT-RAG's work in Gujarat, which is supported by a series of interviews with some of its primary organizers.

Scaling Up Political Action

The DNT-RAG began its organizing by taking several actions. It immediately pressed for justice in the murder of Budhan Sabar by submitting public interest litigation to the Calcutta High Court.⁵¹ In February 2001, the initial verdict of Justice Ruma Pal was delivered, which sharply condemned Budhan's death by drawing critical attention to inconsistencies in the state's police report. The courts affirmed that Budhan's death had not been a suicide and directed the Government of West Bengal to pay monetary compensation (one lakh rupees) to Budhan's widow. The courts directed the police to immediately investigate the circumstances surrounding his custodial death, while initiating departmental proceedings against Ashok Roy, as well as the warden and superintendent of the Purulia prison. The wheels of justice, however, turn woefully slow, and twelve years later criminal proceedings continues to grind along in the courts.

The DNT-RAG also launched *Budhan*, a printed newsletter designed to disseminate and publicize issues relevant to DNT communities. It inaugurated the newsletter by circulating the ruling issued by the Calcutta High Court, widely hailed as a victory for adivasis in holding state actors accountable. At the same time, the DNT-RAG expanded its existing network by seeking out and establishing contact with various DNT groups, such as Chharas in Ahmedabad, whose former internment camp provided the setting for the first national DNT conference held on 31 August 1998 (the anniversary commemorating the official closure of the detention camps established under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871). This event brought together representatives from adivasi

⁵¹ This was followed by a similar petition filed by the DNT-RAG's co-founder, Laxman Gaikwad, in 1998 in the Bombay High Court following the custodial death of Pinya Hari Kale, a landless agricultural worker and DNT belonging to the Pardi community in Maharashtra.

communities, activists and scholars from across the country with the objective of formulating a national social movement.

Orchestrating such a national movement in India is no easy task. Consider that the DNT-RAG identifies 313 nomadic and 198 DNT groups, which are situated in relation to the 645 Scheduled Tribes recognized in the Indian constitution. Given the staggering social heterogeneity of adivasis in terms of language, custom and geography, the organizing efforts of the DNT-RAG to scale up its political activism has necessitated nothing short of a transcultural politics. This is a movement balancing the autonomy and plurality of adivasi communities, while energized by their shared history of being systematically denied meaningful inclusion in the structures of democratic governance and particularly marginalized within India's modernist development. The DNT-RAG, then, has functioned as a mechanism for solidarity that extends beyond what David Featherstone (2005: 405) argues as the tendency to see struggles rooted exclusively in the local and "within the limits circumscribed by capitalist formations." The movement has had to strategize around what Featherstone identifies as the "prison-house of particularism" (263) that often curtails the ability to imagine and enact solidarity across difference.

The DNT-RAG forms a network whose actions, rather than being bounded in fixed origins, attempts to assert a mobile politics that is flexible but geographically and historically specific. This resonates with Vinay Gidwani's (2006: 18) interest in tracing the connections that are possible "between different disenfranchised without absencing geography and summoning a 'democracy for the multitude'." For Gidwani, meaningful solidarity politics are only possible to the extent that heterogenic struggles are united in

asserting their ‘subalternity’ and by transmitting their “imprint and stain on other places through links and flow that crisscross regions, countries and continents” (18). The DNT-RAG has been able work across substantial difference *within* India precisely because its members are uniquely positioned to coordinate activism on a national scale but whose local political commitments are squarely informed by the contingencies of place. Over the past twelve years, the DNT-RAG has successfully established a national network that stretches from Gujarat to West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh to Tamil Nadu—one bringing together various institutions and individuals dedicated to the common goal of asserting the collective rights of DNT populations.

The formation of the DNT-RAG, however, traces a particular geography of solidarity. In describing the origins of the group, Ganesh Devy observed:

I had met Laxman Gaikwad, the DNT writer who writes in Marathi, my mother tongue. In 1994, the two of us traveled to China in a literary delegation. I met Mahasweta Devi for the first time in February 1998, though I had corresponded with her in 1984, when I used to edit the magazine *Setu*, to which she had contributed two long stories. Thus, in our March 1998 meeting in Baroda, the three of us met entirely as writers. I had no idea of Mahasweta Devi's activist life, not about Laxman's life as an activist (though I knew that he belonged to some workers' union)... Our sympathy for DNTs had the backdrop of the generally speaking humanistic literary sense of what is socially right. We did not know that there was a National Human Rights Commission in India. I knew about the black literary movement in the US, but did not know that a lot of international human rights activity was taking place at that time. My knowledge of Nelson Mandela's movement in South Africa was limited to what I read in newspapers... It was a result of [our] discussions ... and the public meetings we organized in various states that we ourselves became aware that the struggle of the DNTs belongs to what can be described as a Human Rights movement. Gradually, I became aware that similar movements have been taking place in other countries, and across national frontiers, on various other issues. Later, when I participated in the [World] Social Forum in Bombay, I became fully aware that the DNT movement in India can be seen as a part of a common cause of international human rights movements (Email correspondence 5 March 2010).

Devy maps a spatiality wherein members came together by a 'chance' encounter—lives colliding in space—and emerging out of specific life histories and relationships of trust. Moreover, Devy suggests that it took time to realize how their work was connected and situated within the broader discourse of human rights.

This realization is instructive, particularly given the enthusiasm that the global has garnered of late. For Nancy Fraser (2009: 1) we are now living in a time when various transnational actors “contest the national frame within which justice conflicts have historically been situated and seek to re-map the bounds of justice on a broader scale.” Fraser’s interest lies in remapping the frame of injustices in a post-Westphalian world, and thus situating questions of rights within the new (global) imaginary. “Today”, she argues, “the Westphalian mapping of political space is losing its hold. Certainly, its posit of exclusive, undivided state sovereignty is no longer plausible, given a ramifying human-rights regime, on the one hand, and spiraling networks of global governance, on the other” (4-5). Any easy distinction, so the argument goes, between national and transnational space has collapsed under the authority of powerful global forces: from NGOs to international human rights treaties, supranational institutions of global governance to transnational corporations, mass media to social movements.

For Fraser, within the 'Keynesian-Westphalian' frame, the contestation over justice typically took place within the territoriality of nation states, which retained the authority over national policy, development, and as the arbiters between claims and counter claims over redistribution, recognition and inclusion in body politic. In this sense, the DNT-RAG falls into what Fraser describes as the “affirmative politics” that “still assumes the territorial state is the appropriate unit within which to pose and resolve disputes

about justice” (22). But this is a politics of framing that is being rapidly eroded or transformed in a globalizing world, redrawn by global capital, as well as social justice movements who are building “new cosmopolitan institutions, such as the International Criminal Court, which can punish state violations of human dignity” (14). Increasing, then, the frame for justice is superseded by a “transformative approach” wherein the forces “that perpetuate injustice belong not to ‘the space of places,’ but to ‘the space of flows’. Not locatable within the jurisdiction of any actual or conceivable territorial state, they cannot be made answerable to claims of justice that are framed in terms of the state-territorial principal” (23). Fraser argues that those concerned with (re)constituting a politics equipped to resist and disrupt the excesses of global capitalism have equally appropriated the global. Just as the achievements of industrial capitalism facilitate the greater mobility of capital, they simultaneously open up the possibility for solidarity politics beyond the territorial frame of nation states.

The DNT-RAG has made use of global institutions, initially in 1998 in a letter drafted by Mahasweta Devi and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Bhasha 2000b). In the petition, Devi and Spivak drew attention to the systemic violation of the basic human rights of India’s 60 million DNTs, and requested the Commission’s “immediate intervention in the matter in accordance with Clause XXII of the UN Charter of Rights” (2).⁵² But even as they appealed to the UN, Spivak observed that, “the UN should not be called upon to manage our business. I think that the petition stands as a kind of monument in the history of the DNT-RAG” (7). The DNT-RAG again drew on the global in Ganesh Devy’s participation in the World Social Forum

⁵² Spivak’s involvement with the DNT-RAG grew out of her work with Mahasweta Devi and training of educators with Kheriya Sabars in West Bengal.

in Mumbai in 2004, and then again in the invitation that he and Dakxin (a Chhara activist living in Ahmedabad) received in February 2007 to present at the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in New York. Their presentation at UNESCO was followed by a two-day symposium at Georgetown University, organized under the theme of Liberation Movements and the Neo-Liberal World Order (www8.georgetown.edu/departments/english/lannan/symposiumfestival_wmm.htm). Here they joined writers and activists from the U.S., South Africa and Ethiopia to engage the legacies of colonialism and explore the possibilities of transnational dialogue. These moments represented the opportunity to not only speak on a global stage, but also connect and learn from the struggles of others. Solidarity, after all, travels in unpredictable ways. In this respect, David Harvey (2008) is right to suggest that the recent global circulation of human rights discourse often gets reworked to strengthen local social justice movements.

And yet, it remains critical to emphasize the priority that the DNT-RAG places on the national scale. Their organizing does not exemplify a 'globalization from below', nor their subscription to a transnationalizing public sphere. Rather, the movement has made a very deliberate use of scale, focusing as it does on the lobbying the central Indian government to further the rights of DNT populations. Ganesh Devy argues that concentrating on the central state is important because:

The remoter the sight of injustice, the greater the scales of justice. Now, the state government has Members of the Legislature (MLAs) who know these communities as their day-to-day reality. And so to change their minds, it is more difficult. But when the central government decides, it becomes law, [and] things become easier. You have to have a legal instrument to fight the injustice. Then the fight can be done at the state level... Because the state government is more insensitive when it comes to social justice... When it comes to justice, ethics, and, you know, the states have a very low caliber. The central government is slightly better there" (Interview, 18 November 2009).

Here the primacy of the Indian nation state is reaffirmed. This is an oppositional politics that takes up Jim Glassman's (2002) sense that the nation state remains the central mechanism regulating global markets and policing national populations. Nancy Fraser (2009: 8) asks: "Can the ideal of inclusive, unrestricted political communication still play a critical, emancipatory role in the present era, when publics no longer coincide with territorial citizenries, economies are no longer national, and states no longer possess the necessary and sufficient capacity to solve many problems?" The DNT-RAG would certainly hope that they can. It presents one site where justice is being asserted territorially and, significantly, not within the unbounded space of an abstract civil society. The DNT-RAG has made limited use of various international treaties, such as the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1996), or the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1996)—to which the Government of India is a signatory nation.

Given Hannah Arendt's (1958) argument that human rights represent the weakest form of rights, it is perhaps not surprising that the DNT-RAG has staged limited appeals to the global. For Arendt, human rights are always dependent upon national rights enframed within the territoriality of nation states. This prefigures a wider critique of human rights discourse. Talal Asad (2000) takes issue with the way human rights are defined and put to work, whose language assumes a global formula that veils the "universalizing moral project of America" and its "project of redeeming the world". Accordingly, human rights are intimately shaped by Western norms, implicated in the civilizing impulses of European colonialism, and now a primary artery through which to sustain the hegemony of American empire. The author's sharp critique, however, is not

a rejection of the need for a universal ethic, so much as a call to interrogate who and who does not get to define what constitutes the universal. Central to my narrative is Asad's sense that universalist ideals are not the most appropriate means for fighting injustices. Rather, we must (re)turn to national rights informed by the cultural and historical contingencies of sovereign nation states.

The DNT-RAG is not working toward the realization of universalist human rights so much as accessing those already defined in the Indian constitution. As Spivak noted in an interview around her work with Mahasweta Devi:

It is not a question of resituating anything. Those laws have been in existence in the 1947-49 Constitution and then the denotification of 1952. It is not really anything of subject-forming importance, it's an agency question, a validation that already exists. We have to be able to distinguish between law and justice although there isn't a strict distinction but it's a relationship without relationship, if you like, between ethics and politics. What we are talking about is the calculus of politics (Bhasha 2000b: 10).

While realizing the connections to subaltern struggles elsewhere, the movement is not asserting adivasi humanity independent of the nation state. The DNT-RAG has made strategic use of the global. But it focuses on the central Indian state precisely because it recognizes that it is both the greatest violator of adivasi rights as well as retains the sovereign power to enact national rights defined in the constitution and enforceable under the rule of law. The nation state is thus the most appropriate scale for confronting (in)justice and the space in which to press for the full membership of adivasis within the political community of the nation. The DNT-RAG works from the position that DNTs are not yet the bearers of national rights, realizing what Asad describes as the "divergence between the moral authority of [universal] norms and the political force of state laws". This recognizes that despite the growing influence of global financial institutions and their demands for accelerated liberalization, the Indian state continues the project of

nation building. The DNT-RAG refocuses the constitutive power of the political, by this I mean the ability of the state to function as the central force in the redistribution of resources and the guarantor of social welfare. It is the stage upon which contestations over justice and development are best waged because state actors retain the authority to determine whose rights are to be protected, and who and who is not to be the subjects of improvement. The DNT-RAG is keenly aware not only of the importance of new legislation, but also of existing mechanisms built into the Indian constitution, such as Articles 342 and 366, which, at the time of independence identified the country's Scheduled Tribes and enshrined the state's obligations to further their socio-economic improvement and political inclusion. This, then, is part of an elaborate developmental apparatus meant to make special provision for India's adivasis in the realms of education, livelihood, representation, protection from exploitation, along with a plethora of social welfare schemes coordinated by Tribal Development Authorities and planning agencies. It is the centrality of the nation state that has prompted over a decade of activism staged by the DNT-RAG focused on engaging state actors in meaningful dialogue to (re)assert their (constitutional) responsibilities. To that dialogue I now turn.

Dialoging the Central State

The DNT-RAG extended its engagement with the state by submitting a petition to India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in 2000. "It was only accidentally that I read about the NHRC in India", observed Ganesh Devy, "which was, at that time, fairly new. After reading that an agency like [the] NHRC exists in India, I decided to write to them. Mahasweta Devi's reputation as a writer helped us in getting an appointment." Ganesh Devy wrote in the hopes of drawing attention to the plight of DNT groups in the

country, and urged for action to be taken to not only address instances of extreme state violence, as in the custodial deaths of Budhan Sabar and Pinya Hari Kale in 1998, but also the widespread denial of these communities' citizenship rights. After a meeting with the director of the NHRC in New Delhi, the DNT-RAG was invited to form an ancillary body to draft a petition on behalf of DNTs. This report was subsequently forwarded by the Commission to the Indian Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The NHRC was moved by the appeals of the DNT-RAG, concluding that:

The continued plight of these groups of communities... is an eloquent illustration of the failure of the machinery for planning, financial resources allocation and budgeting and administration in the country to seriously follow the mandate of the Constitution (Bhasha 2006: 132-133).

The DNT-RAG secured further support from the National Commission for Review the Working of the Constitution, a governmental body established to study the effectiveness of the Indian constitution. Released in 2002, the Commission's report made specific reference to the dismal living conditions of DNTs, and drew attention to the fact that while a number of programs have existed to 'rehabilitate' these populations, state agencies have done very little to implement any concrete planning. It urged the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to work in partnership with adivasi advocacy organizations such as the DNT-RAG to formulate constitutional protections and social welfare programs.

The pressure exerted in both instances prompted the formation of yet another state agency in 2004, the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NCDNSNT). Charged with producing specific policy recommendations for the central government, the mandate of the NCDNSNT seemed promising. In six short years, the DNT-RAG had succeeded in getting the state to launch an official

investigation into the struggles of India's many DNT populations. Regrettably, the Commission was constrained in several important respects. It took over a year for a chairperson to be appointed, a state of affairs exacerbated by the fact that no technical staff was provided, and there were many further delays in securing basic administrative facilities: office space, electricity, telephones, etc. Very little effort was made to establish a functioning body with the personnel and resources necessary to carry out the objectives laid out for the Commission. "For one year", lamented Ganesh Devy, "the Commission remained non-functional because they created a commission but they did not appoint anybody. So in 2006, I met with the Prime Minister, with Mahasweta Devi, and then ten days later they appointed a person to chair the Commission" (Interview, 18 November 2009).

The ability of Mahasweta Devi and Ganesh Devy to secure an audience with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is unusual, a meeting to which they went "praying to have something concrete done for the Denotified tribals of India" (Devi 2007). The encounter speaks directly to the influence of those leading the movement, along with the kinds of expertise necessary to access the innermost corridors of political power in the country. The issue of leadership and the role that prominent cultural figures play in social movement activism in India is fraught with politics. On the one hand, social movements often galvanize around the critical need for equitable development and the political inclusion of the disenfranchised. And there are certainly well founded anxieties that particular actors occupy positions of authority only to reinscribe inequity. While class politics, poverty alleviation, empowerment and democratic processes remain the buzz words guiding movement organizing, institutions often do little to disrupt ensconced hierarchies shaped by class, caste and gender politics. As Richa Nagar and

Saraswati Raju (2003) argue, these dynamics can sometimes be ascribed to the fact that the greater agency afforded to developmental agencies and movement organizers typically leads to their professionalization. This can have serious ramifications within organizations themselves, who reproduce exclusionary practices that obscure the possibilities for genuine empowerment and equitable development (see Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar 2006). This raises deeper questions regarding the kinds of silence and erasures implicit in the organizing staged by the DNT-RAG. One reviewer of this article urged the need to consider the selective mobilities that enable figures such as Devy and Devi to occupy positions of authority within the movement. There are indeed various exclusions and (in)visibilities bound up in all geographies of solidarity, drawing attention to who and who does not possess the agency to represent the hopes, aspirations and objectives of movements. Activist organizing must strategize carefully least risk reproducing existing power structures, and undoubtedly the movement revolves around a number of enabling and constraining dynamics. Regrettably, my ability to analyze the DNT-RAG in this regard is limited. Simply put, a fuller engagement with its internal institutional workings would require further empirical research.

That said the words and writings of Devy and Devi figure prominently in my narration, reflecting the fact that they are among a small group of elites orchestrating and representing the movement. The DNT-RAG's activities, however, are not simply directed through the desires of an elite leadership, but rather coordinated through a capillary network of research institutions, local people's associations, and non-governmental organizations, such as Muktdhara in Ajmer, Sarthak in New Delhi, and Bhasha in Baroda (to name only three). "There are large numbers of people involved here", Ganesh Devy argued, "in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune, Chandigarh, Uttar

Pradesh, Delhi, there are many organizations active. If one were to make a list of these organizations, it can easily run up to 150 to 200” (Interview, 18 November 2009). In orchestrating a national movement, members of the DNT-RAG bring their own individual histories of solidarity work that are grounded in local politics. At the same time, it is salient that this leadership also possesses the kind of technical *savoir-faire* that enables them to legitimize and circulate adivasi struggles within the knowledges of the state and literary cultures. As Mahasweta Devi (1995: xvi) notes:

I've been doing this for many years. I write these days for *Frontier*, and even for *Economic and Political Weekly*, and I have been doing a regular column contribution to Bengali dailies since 1982. Wherever there is exploitation, I report it immediately. I write directly to the pertinent ministerial department. I send a copy to the area, they make a mass-signature effort and go to the local authority. Each minister has one to two hundred of my letters. I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty toward society. Yet I don't know why I do these things. This sense of duty is an obsession... And this journalistic exposure is very necessary. The government officials admit that they are afraid of me. What will I write next?

Devi reveals how powerful public figures can be put to work to exert pressure on state actors. Beyond showering ministers with petitions, it was only the personal reputations of Devi and Devy that enabled a meeting with Prime Minister Singh, and thus opened up an important opportunity to discuss the conditions of India's DNT communities. Lastly, I suggest that members of the DNT-RAG have been 'given the right' (and responsibility) to represent precisely because they are positioned and trusted to critically engage with the machinery of the state. As Spivak narrates in her work with the movement:

It is true that they [adivasis] were calling Mahasweta Devi 'Mother', and comparing her relationship to them to Bapuji's ['respected father', the name used to describe Gandhi] relationship to the Indian Harijans. Now you and I know how to read this narrative partially... but at the same time this is a kind of giving the right to represent, in *loco parentis*, as much as parliamentary elections are, as, technically, *primus inter pares*, though that is, of course, never ever true. I,

myself, find it exceedingly strange that so-called activists always talk about this speaking for business as if parliamentary democracy is the best model of identification. They have forgotten the noble and careful act of speaking about, informing, knowledge as descriptive information. Although the petition [to the UN] begins that way, I have no hesitation signing it because we have been chosen to agitate for those whose agitation was foiled by our kind (Bhasha 2000b: 8-9).

This leadership represents one potent mechanism or channel through which action is coordinated on a national scale. It was the collective expertise and resources of Devy and Devi (among others) that made possible the movement's persistent correspondence with state actors just as the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes languished. In response to the Commission's lethargy, Ganesh Devy and Mahasweta Devi were successful in not only prompting the appointment of a chairperson, but more significantly, the DNT-RAG's membership as a special advisory council, which resulted in the formation of the Technical Action Group (TAG) in 2006.⁵³ The TAG was authorized by the central government to obtain any information from state agencies it deemed necessary to support the work of the NCDNSNT, and it seized the opportunity to press forward in preparing its own report for the union government.

Counter-Counting

Members of the TAG were intimately familiar with the issues affecting DNT communities, and they certainly possessed the legal and scholarly know-how to report on these conditions. But in preparing its findings for the government, it faced a daunting

⁵³ In addition to Ganesh Devy, who was appointed the chairperson of the TAG, the body included: Dr. Rudolf Heredia, former director of the St. Xavier's Social Science Research Centre in Bombay; Professor Ajay Dandekar, an activist and co-founder of Lokdhara; Dr. Meena Radhakrishna, a sociologist at the University of Delhi; Dr. Anil Kumar Pandey; Shri Mohd. Aslam, a retired I.A.S. officer; Professor Kanji Patel, a Gujarati writer and activist; and Dr. Metry, a professor in the Department of Tribal Studies in Hampi's Kannada University.

challenge, as there is virtually no existing enumeration of these groups in India. This absence is particularly pertinent given that these are not population categories tracked in the nation census, and especially problematic in the case of nomadic communities (NT) who are typically excluded from sample surveys, residing and moving across political boundaries in some of the most isolated areas of the country. This lacuna poses serious difficulties for activists in producing the kind of technical knowledge recognized by state institutions. The DNT-RAG had previously been successful in prompting the National Human Rights Commission of 2000 to extend an invitation to state secretaries to New Delhi in the hopes of bringing an awareness of the conditions of India's DNT and NT populations. The Commission went as far as issuing a judicial order directing all state governments to submit lists of the DNT and NT populations present within their respective territories. The subsequent response was disheartening. "Except for three states", lamented Ganesh Devy, "all other states denied having any DNT populations at all" (Interview, 18 November 2009). Gujarat was not among the exceptions. This reflects the state amnesia that denies the very existence of such populations, a tactic to circumvent the necessity of having to provide social welfare to specifically vulnerable communities. By and large DNT and NTs are populations that are simply unrecognized and uncounted by the state.⁵⁴

The DNT-RAG then proceeded to take the matter to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the agency responsible for conducting India's national decennial census. It argued for a mechanism to be included in the upcoming 2011 census that would enable the identification of DNT and NT groups. Their request was denied. In 2006, now working

⁵⁴ An important exception appears in Madhya Pradesh, a state in which DNT and NT groups certainly have a troubled history, but one that has also recently established a Denotified Tribal Development Authority, which may prove to be a promising development.

within the parameters established by the NCDNSNT, the TAG suggested that these populations could be located by appropriating existing state-tistics. It argued that nomadic and semi-nomadic groups could be identified by using data collected in the 1931 census, while tracking DNTs by utilizing the classification schemes prepared (but never ratified) by the Antrolikar Commission of 1952—the first comprehensive attempt to survey those registered and interned under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. This embodies the calculated appropriation of statistics generated by colonial authorities, the very classification grids that facilitated the administration of subject ‘criminal’ populations during the British Raj.

In many respects, the TAG has attempted to redeploy the instruments of state power to assert the collective rights and constitutional entitlements of thus far marginalized adivasis. The TAG argues that the numbers of DNTs and NTs can be established by estimating projected growth rates, which allow for ascertaining their proportionate percentage of the overall national population. This draws on the exact methodology used by the Mandal Commission to institute reservation quotas for Other Backward Classes in the late 1970s, which instituted administrated categories within which many DNT groups are situated but unable to compete with other populations. The TAG estimates a combined DNT and NT population of 60 million spread out across the country, and in the absence of more accurate figures, it is not surprising that the TAG has repeatedly reinstated the critical need for a national survey to construct a clearer demographic profile of these diverse social groups.⁵⁵ The DNT-RAG is thus producing

⁵⁵ Census data enumerating India’s adivasis has fluctuated dramatically through time. While the 1931 census identified a ‘tribal’ population of 22 million, this figure fell remarkably to 10 million in 1941. The 1961 census classified a Schedule Tribe population of 30 million, which rose to 68 million in the 1991 census. Such fluctuations in those recognized as Schedule Tribes is clearly wrapped up in the contested

the kind of technical knowledge through which to apply pressure on state agencies, which possess an unrealized and (what some would argue) purposeful misunderstanding of particular populations. Writing within the context of SPARC's work in Mumbai, Arjun Appadurai (2002:35) argues that because many of India's poor are socially, legally and spatially marginal, "they are by definition uncounted and uncountable". The efforts of the DNT-RAG, then, can be read as a kind of counter-counting.

The TAG's efforts culminated in submitting a report to the central government's Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment following the failure of the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes to produce its own report at the end of its tenure in 2006 (see Bhasha 2006). The TAG's objectives were to outline a 'road-map' for the long-term socio-economic security of DNT and NT communities in India. Initially, the TAG had pressed for the Commission's recommendations to be included in India's 11th Five Year Plan. Since independence, the broad structure of the Indian economy has been shaped by successive plans prepared by the government's Planning Commission and ratified by the Indian parliament. Implemented in 2007, the TAG was unable to get its recommendations absorbed into the country's latest macro-economic planning strategy.

That said the report produced by the TAG is a remarkable document.⁵⁶ At a staggering 446 pages, it is an archive chronicling an extensive activist history. It interrogates the legacy through which adivasi communities were transformed into criminal populations;

definition of social classification categories, indicative the flexible boundaries that govern the distinctions between caste and 'tribal' identities.

⁵⁶ This report is available at: www.bhasharesearch.org.in/Site.html#id=DNT%20RAG

the colonial strategies that devastated their local economies during the 19th century; and it traces the reincarnation of repressive policy in the post-colonial era. It summons the various committees formed since the early independence period to study the state's governance of DNTs and NTs, and attempts to untangle the incredibly convoluted manner with which these groups are and are not administrated across state boundaries and population categories. The TAG report is the latest installment in a history, "which has sought to restore dignity and human rights to these communities" (TAG 2006: 12). Of course, it is an impossible task to fully translate the struggles of DNTs and NTs into a policy document. Nevertheless, the TAG attempted to do so by articulating 353 policy recommendations it deems critical in furthering the elusive goals of social justice and equitable development. In summary, they argued for bringing DNTs and NTs under the protections of the Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989; establishing constitutional quotas in existing ST and SC reservation categories; the abolition of bonded and child labour; numerous social welfare programs in the realms of housing, education and employment; along with the immediate repeal of the Bombay Habitual Offenders Act, and all related area restrictions that continue to constrain the mobility of individuals. The TAG also argued for a series of new laws to secure the rights and access of adivasis to forest and grazing lands; a mechanism to ensure the local delivery of social welfare programs; the provision of recognized identification in the form of ration and voting cards, birth and caste certificates; as well as the revision of police training, and a public awareness campaign to disrupt entrenched discrimination. The TAG urged the central government to make an official public apology to address the historic injustice that DNTs have been subjected to, and to guarantee the provision of welfare programs over the next 50 years.

The movement has thus lobbied the state in an effort to dismantle the social, institutional and economic barriers that reproduce inequity, injustice and discrimination—the class and caste systems that hamstring the ability of adivasis to participate as equal (but differentiated) members of Indian society. The DNT-RAG has concentrated its activities on the central government precisely because it is seen as the most appropriate site for democratizing the redistribution of wealth as well as recognizing the social and cultural rights of (or righting the wrongs perpetuated against) adivasi populations. In this setting, the struggle for justice can be read as the struggle over development, or alternatively, the efforts of the DNT-RAG are focused on situating thus-far marginalized adivasis squarely within the gaze of the state's developmental apparatus.

Accommodation Politics

The DNT-RAG (working under the TAG) submitted its findings to the central government in 2006, and there they have marooned. The state has not acted on any of its recommendations. As the term of the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes expired in 2006, the TAG disbanded as an official advisory body. Despite this, members of the DNT-RAG remain remarkably confident, and are now calling for a grassroots mobilization to force the state machinery into action.

Ganesh Devy: There was nobody there in 1998 when we started the Rights Action Group. Nobody had thought of the DNTs, but in ten years time to get so many organizations interested in it, to get a national commission setup, to prepare a report, to get the Prime Minister interested in the issue. I have spoken to Manmohan Singh twice on this issue, and he knows that such an issue exists. I think it's a long way we have come... So now that the [2009 general] elections are over, it is time for people to mobilize once again to ask for the implementation of the TAG report... Somebody will have to do it, and that's where, if there is a good rapport with the government, the government is willing to act but a little

push is needed... This report will go to the parliament, and when the parliament accepts the report for implementation, it then becomes obligatory for all state governments to adhere to those guidelines (Interview, 18 November 2009).

The DNT-RAG has indeed accomplished much in a relatively short period of time, and its activists remain committed to a methodical dialogue with agents of the state. In one sense, the introduction of TAG report to the central government is in itself a performative act that opens up the possibility to influence and prompt significant change. It has furthered the conversation within a formal political arena, and has the potential to get policy makers and senior politicians thinking and acting on the issues. “Not all of these promises may be kept (or even meant)”, reminds Arjun Appadurai (2004: 78), “but they change the climate of negotiation, place certain commitments on public record and produce a common terrain of aspiration.” That may be the case but it does remain unclear to what extent the central government is prepared to translate their recommendations into concrete legislation. The end game of the DNT-RAG is pressing for new policy in the Indian parliament that lays the foundation for social welfare programs and constitutional protections that can be enacted and enforced at the local state levels. It may be too early to measure the effects of the DNT-RAG’s dialogue with state actors, but they draw on Ganesh Devy’s sense that, “What was created over [a] hundred and forty years will take at least forty years to set right. But I am very sure that a new Act will come for the DNTs in this country. Their numbers are in their favour” (Interview, 18 November 2009).

In this respect, it is important to note that these efforts are furthered by the extensive work of related NGOs that are situated and connected to the movement organizing of the DNT-RAG. Most notably is the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre based in

Baroda, Gujarat, of which Ganesh Devy and his wife are founding members. While the politics of NGO work in India are not the explicit focus of this chapter, it is necessary to briefly trace the interrelations between the organization and movement, blurring as they do the flexible boundaries between developmental politics and social movement activism in India. Bhasha (or Voice) is a NGO that has initiated a wide array of programs and projects dedicated to promoting both adivasi identities and socio-economic improvement in Gujarat (and beyond). Over its 14-year history, Bhasha has established the Museum of Tribal Voice, the National Consortium of Indian Arts, the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh, Gujarat, along with Himlok in Himachal Pradesh, the latter two institutions offering training in adivasi languages, sustainable farming and rural health management. Bhasha organizes an ongoing series of seminars, conferences, workshops, and annual *melas* where adivasi artists and activists come together to present and perform theatre, dance, song and music.

In February 2009, I was invited to attend one such *mela* or gathering in Kaleshwari, Gujarat. I traveled there in a large caravan of Chharas from Ahmedabad. Held on Shivratri (Shiva's birth date), and 160 kilometers north of Ahmedabad, the *mela* took place amongst the ruins of an elaborate temple complex dating back to the 10th century. Originally dedicated to Shiva, the area is now the setting for the worship of the local manifestation of Kaleshwari Mataji. The complex also included several artificial lakes and an extensive *vav* or step well accessible by a steep staircase that led down into reddish earth. The gathering brought together well over 10,000 adivasis and DNTs from across Gujarat and Rajasthan: Chamtas, Visparas, Chharas, Madaries, Waghris, and others. The *mela* was a raucous festival. Adivasi men and women formed large, spontaneous circle dances, moving to the music of parading orchestras that marched

through the crowds. Men beat large *dhol* drums, five feet across, each with one mallet and turning clockwise in choreographed movements in step with the rhythmic clicking of *dandia* (sticks). In all sorts of ways, the *mela* served much more than the strident celebration of identity. It was equally a meeting place in which to forge solidarity in a shared material politics. Chharas performed a street theatre play retelling the custodial deaths of Budhan Sabar and Pinya Hari Kale to hundreds who encircled the troupe. After their performance, Dakxin Bajrange was asked to come to the city of Rajkot to help form a local theatre company in a DNT community who continues to be the target of police violence. Solidarity was also the subject of much debate in the gathering of several hundred adivasi writers who congregated at the end of the day under the protective shade cast by a giant *neem* tree. Bhasha paid an honorarium to DNT artists to travel and perform at Kaleshwari, one moment in their ongoing support of cultural forms designed to assert the collective rights of adivasis.

The DNT-RAG has thus placed an emphasis on culture as a site of politics and resistance, and its ongoing dialogue with the state builds directly upon its recent success in getting adivasi languages officially recognized by the central government.

Ganesh Devy: I was fighting the battle for the conservation of tribal languages and finally, it is a long story, but finally we got the central government to recognize the existence of these languages, and put up a proposal in the Planning Commission to set aside some funds for the promotion of these languages. It has happened. And the government has actually created a new scheme [for] promoting all the, including the language of Chharas, Sansis... And if they want to put up a play or write or produce a book, the government is bound to help... Yeah, so once the language gets recognized. Identity is not a single unit, it is language, history, social custom. So one will have to push each of these through, steadily and patiently (Interview, 18 November 2009).

As a scholar of post-colonial literature, Ganesh Devy is keenly sensitive to how the support of (rapidly disappearing) adivasi languages and dialects represents an integral

part of strengthening local cultural systems. Bhasha has established two colleges that offer degree programs in adivasi cultural studies. It also organizes Purva Prakesh, a publication house that publishes newsletters and books in a variety of adivasi languages, while supporting hundreds of writers, cultural producers and productions. But Bhasha's work extends well beyond cultural organizing. It has also initiated a range of alternative or counter-development programs. Over the past decade, it has built community centers and irrigation works in hundreds of adivasi villages in Gujarat, while providing long-distance and non-formal education for migratory labourers and communities. It has established numerous food grain banks and micro-credit federations, such as on the one in Tejgadh to help local DNTs escape vicious cycles of debt bondage to predatory moneylenders. Most recently, Bhasha has established Green Economic Zones (GEZ) based on organic farming practices, herbal and medicinal gardens, as well as local manufacturing processes. As of June 2009, 128 adivasi villages in Gujarat have enrolled in the GEZ campaign. Bhasha is funded through various departments of the state and central government, along with some of the big names in international development: Oxfam, Ford Foundation, Global Human Rights Fund, Reach to Teach U.K., among other agencies (see <http://www.bhasharesearch.org.in/Site.html>).

Given the important awareness that many such organizations do little more than reproduce caste and class inequities, there is much ground to be critical of NGO work in India. This is situated in the well-established critique that the NGOization of development is taking place within rapid structural adjustments to the Indian economy, wherein the state is increasingly offloading its constitutional responsibilities to provide social welfare onto the backs of civil society and private capital. John Harriss (2001: 2)

offers one scathing account of NGOs, suggesting that they have become the “new weapons in the armory of the ‘anti-politics machine’ that is constituted by the practices of ‘international development’.” Intimately bound up in depoliticizing development, NGOs have become sub-contractors of the state, governed by the ideological agenda of powerful financial institutions (such as the World Bank) which possess tremendous influence determining the parameters of improvement. This is what leads Alan Fowler (1994) to assert that in the new world order NGOs are to function as its “global soup kitchens”. While less explicit in their criticism, David Hulme and Michael Edwards (1997) nevertheless argue that the politics of funding, the regulatory policing of NGOs, and universalized models have all severely compromised more radical ways of confronting the underlying structures of poverty (see also Ray and Katzenstein 2005). At the same time, given that there are between 20 to 30 thousand NGOs operating in India (Kudva 2005), it is difficult to make easy generalizations. There are institutions, such as Bhasha, that are the setting for new forms of organizing and are redrawing the possibilities for progressive political engagement.

More central to this chapter, are the close interconnections between Bhasha, the NGO, and the DNT-RAG, the movement. The former focused on directing resources and charting alternative development models, and the latter squarely focused on exerting pressure on state actors to assert the constitutional rights of adivasis. In these respects, it is instructive to briefly situate the activism of the DNT-RAG in relation to other legislation recently inducted by the current UPA coalition government. The first is the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act. Instituted in 2006, the Act is key legislation that (in theory) secures the rights of adivasis and others who reside in forested areas of the

country. The legislation is meant to redress long and oppressive histories of colonial and post-colonial policy through which the control over forested lands and resources have been consolidated by the state (such as the Indian Forest Act of 1927, the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, or the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980). This is a history that has been particularly devastating to many adivasis, whose lands have been usurped by the state who has failed enormously in the resettlement of displaced populations. Or as Arundhati Roy (2010) puts it, this is a policy history that “made the State the custodian of tribal homelands. Overnight, it turned the entire tribal population into squatters on their own land.”

In short, the Forest Rights Act is meant to affirm the customary rights—the use and access—over forested areas by promising four types of rights: ownership, use, managerial and compensation. It means to protect the rights of Schedule Castes and Tribes, and, more contentiously, ‘other forest dwellers’ who can prove their tenancy back 75 years. The Act also lays out specific guidelines for compensation and resettlement in the event that land is appropriated for industrial development and/or in the protection of wildlife and biodiversity. This, in addition, to the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996, which means to give adivasis greater control over resources. Further legislation is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of 2005, which represents a flagship program of the central state. The NREGA is a job guarantee program wherein adult members of rural households are ensured 100 days of paid employment (at 100 rupees per day) in a range of public works projects: roads, irrigation, water conservation, flood control, tree plantations, etc. In providing subsidized employment, the program seeks the twin objectives of rural employment through the development of infrastructure. Lastly, is the

Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989. The Act instituted a number of affirmative measures for dalits and adivasis. It defines those acts that constitute atrocities, including: dispossession of land; acts of public humiliation; depositing of waste (excrement, animal carcasses); voting intimidation; malicious prosecution; acts of physical (especially gendered) violence; denial of customary rights; or the discrimination of public officials. The Act mandates the provision of Special Courts and Special Public Prosecutors charged with the delivery of timely trials in related atrocity cases. My intention is not to work through each of these legislative measures in detail, and certainly their implementation continues to be highly problematic. Legislation in and of itself is never enough, dependent as it is on the state's administrative will to enact, inform and ensure access to existing laws, resources, and protections. In theory—at the very least—each of these acts represents the state's commitments to extend rights and resources to India's most vulnerable. The point being that the efforts of the DNT-RAG are situated within an existing developmental apparatus and rights-protecting mechanisms already defined in India, and which are constitutionally charged with not only the protection of minorities but their targeted improvement.

In attempting to access and extend the state's developmental apparatus, the DNT-RAG represents an oppositional politics increasingly common in India. Rather than confront state power, it has opted instead for what Arjun Appadurai (2002: 22) describes as a "politics of partnership" by establishing working relations with various levels of government. The movement contributes to a distinct form of politics, which is guided by actors who, according to Ananya Roy (2009: 163), function as "mediating institutions" bridging the state and the poor. According to Roy, by appropriating the "technologies of

governing” such institutions can work the disenfranchised into the state’s decision-making processes.

Caleb: Do you see your work as mediating between DNT communities, adivasis and the state?

Ganesh: I see myself as belonging to the adivasis and DNTs. Belonging to the tribals and DNTs, and talking with them [and] to the government. But I’m not a trade unionist, because if you are a trade union person, then you have some compulsions to keep the unity, and so on. I am not terribly worried about the unity among the DNTs. I am more worried about justice. And I still have some faith in the structural means of delivering justice. I have not lost all faith. I have lost a lot in it, but not entirely. I am not an anarchist and I am not a Maoist. But I am pro-poor, pro-STs and DNTs, talking with them to the government, raising their voice, mobilizing them, but not unifying them into a party because I have no will to power... But I know that DNTs require justice. They need justice and in the process of giving justice, they should not be created as another destructive force, violent force. So, the work has to be done non-violently. Not in a submissive manner, one has to be outspoken, go to the government, bring people together, shout for this and all that. But violence should not be the basis of one’s politics (Interview, 18 November 2009).

Devy reveals many of the characteristics central to constructing a politics of accommodation, namely, the non-alignment with established political parties; a distancing from working class ideology; and an emphasis on identity politics as the guiding rationale for organizing. What is striking about Devy’s testimony is a continued (albeit tenuous) belief in the institutions of liberal governance and the structural means of delivering constitutional justice. This is not a violent confrontational politics, nor the desire to unify DNT communities into a movement with the objective of capturing state power. Significantly, while the DNT-RAG positions itself as a mediator between adivasis and the state, it is critical of the state and stages specific demands for adivasi inclusion within the folds of legal and administrative structures. This is a politics asserting the citizenship rights of adivasis by attempting to recalibrate the mechanisms of state power, or alternatively, pressure the state to establish and recognize existing categories

through which these populations can gain much needed access to state resources and lawful protections.

There are important limits to these accommodation politics that require substantial consideration. India's developmental apparatus is far from innocent, implicated as it is in regimes of tremendous violence. It is not just that the access and delivery of developmental measures are severely compromised in the liberalizing moment (and indeed they are) but further, must be understood in relation to the politics of anti-development. I thus end by situating the efforts of the DNT-RAG in counterpoint to the violent actions taken by the state in east-central India to create the conditions conducive to the greater penetration of transnational capital.

Counterpoint, or Development as Anti-Development

The efforts of the DNT-RAG sketch a non-violent geography of adivasi resistance and developmental politics of a very different tone and tenor than what we presently see elsewhere in the country. I end this chapter by situating this organizing in relation to the tragic events unfolding in the Dandakaranya, the forested heartland of India that stretches through the eastern and central states of West Bengal, Chhatisgarh, Orissa, Madhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and down to northern Andhra Pradesh. This so-called 'tribal belt' continues to be the setting of an escalating violent confrontation between adivasis, the state and armed Maoist groups. The region is home to tens of millions of adivasis, many of who continue to suffer the worst forms of state neglect: poverty, famine and landlessness. They are quite literally among the most vulnerable people in the world, whose struggles are fixed within enduring caste inequities and repressive

state policy.⁵⁷ The activities of Maoists have long garnered a violent response from the state's security forces. In the recent past, these have been coordinated through the Salwa Judum (the purification hunt), this, a paramilitary organization led by Mahendra Karma—the Congress MLA for Dantewada—which has operated with impunity in the state of Chhatisgarh. The Salwa Judum itself represents the latest chapter in a distressing history of paramilitary units organized to confront and counteract the expanding influence of Maoists and to defend the class interests of landlords, politicians and industrialists.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Adivasis living in the Dandakaranya region have long staged resistance movements that predate formal independence in 1947. But the current conflict is typically traced back to the various incarnations of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist groups that emerged out of the Naxalbari Uprising in West Bengal in 1967. The genealogy of Maoists in India is complex, suffice to say that the Communist Party of India (Maoist) emerged out of deep ideological divisions within the country's substantial communist movement that materialized in the 1950s and 1960s. It was the Naxalbari Uprising that led to the formation of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist). In 2004, the CPI (Maoist) was established out of a merger between the CPI (M-L), the People's War Group, and the Maoist Communist Centre of India. These groups came together under the belief that genuine revolution is only possible through the overthrow of state power in India. The CPI (Maoist) has been banned as a terrorist organization by the current UPA government under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967. Operating throughout the Dandakaranya, Maoist groups seek to establish a Compact Revolutionary Zone from which to launch other offensives elsewhere in the country (for the roots of Maoism in India see Banerjee 1984; Gupa 2006). What is important to this narrative is how the Communist Party of India (Maoist) has been—for decades—the most active in organizing adivasis throughout the region of east-central India. The Party has aggressively confronted state neglect and corporate excess, mobilized armed resistance to liberate territorial zones with the end goal of unsettling state power through armed insurrection or 'protracted war'. The CPI (Maoist) maintains that it is conducting a 'people's war' to rally against the instruments of adivasi oppression, namely, the forces of economic liberalization and India's entrenched caste hierarchy. In particular areas where Maoists have consolidated territorial control, they have instituted radically alternative systems and structures of governance, development and justice. Its territories, such as those in the states of Chhatisgarh and West Bengal, are administrated by Janatana Sarkars (people's governments), wherein community justice is delivered by summary courts or jan adalats (people's courts) (for a more detailed description of Maoist administration see Banerjee 1984; Roy 2010). Maoists have utilized politicized violence (i.e. assassinations) to target agents of the state, focusing specifically on the police, politicians and forestry officials. On the other hand, within its sphere of influence, they have been active in ensuring the payment of minimum wages for agricultural workers; ending extreme forms of exploitation; as well as reclaiming land from adivasis' largest landlord, the central government's Forest Department. Maoists have raised the price for various forest commodities, such as Tendu leaves, which are used in making beedis, while levying 'fees' on traders and contractors to generate Party funds (for a consideration of Maoists' alternative development strategies see Bhattacharyya 2010). The irony being that in specific areas, it has seemingly fallen on an armed political party dedicated to terminating the Indian constitution to ensure the delivery of basic rights and protections to marginalized adivasi communities.

⁵⁸ As Arundhati Roy (2009; 2010) chronicles, throughout 2005, the Salwa Judum burned and pillaged forest communities in Chhatisgarh, specifically targeting the planned site of the Essar steel plant (which was secured through a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the BJP state government). Operating throughout the region, the Salwa Judum has unleashed a campaign of terror against adivasis,

More recently, however, the conflict in the region has been escalated dramatically by the union government. There is now a war being waged by the state under the rhetorical cover of hunting down and eradicating Maoist insurgents, who Indian Prime Minister Singh, in his address to the Second Standing Committee of Chief Ministers in April 2006, described as posing the “single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country.” The words of PM Singh had effects, foreshadowing the formation of the central government’s Operation Green Hunt—a massive counterinsurgency campaign coordinated through the deployment of 50,000 paramilitary personnel to ‘recover’ territory lost to Maoists. Launched in November 2009, Operation Green Hunt is well under way as of this writing, with various Special Forces, from the Greyhounds and Cobras to the feared Naga Battalion, deployed along the ‘red corridor’ in east-central India. The Operation has led to the rapid militarization of the region, representing nothing short of a civil war—a violent confrontation between the Central Reserve Police Forces and the adivasi recruits that form the rank and file of the People’s Liberation Guerilla Army of the CPI (Maoist). Entire districts, such as Lalgah and Midnapore in West Bengal or Dantewada in Chhatisgarh, have become the epicenters of war, where access to the press and human rights observers strictly curtailed. Like any theatre of war, this is a landscape marred by the extreme violation of rights, a space wherein civil liberties have been suspended in the name of securing the public interest. Various human rights organizations and independent journalists continue to document the situation as best they can, and the stories smuggled out by fact-finding missions depict a dire situation: regular ‘encounter’ and extra-judicial killings; detentions without trials; the massive displacement of adivasi communities; arbitrary arrests; gendered violence;

sanctioned by state governments (and the silent approval of the central government) to restore ‘democratic order’ to areas under Maoist control (see also Balagopal 2006).

arson, torture; and custodial deaths (see Asian Centre for Human Rights 2006; Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network 2009). The AITPN (2009) estimates that over 400,000 indigenous peoples have been displaced due to armed conflicts over the last decade, many who are sequestered into 'relief' camps where there is a severe lack of basic infrastructure and where adivasis remain critically vulnerable to violence and persecution by the state's security forces.⁵⁹

Operation Green Hunt is being legitimized by the discourse of terminating 'red terrorism' in 'Naxal-infested' districts, but the state's actions are clearly motivated by a cold economic calculation that extends well beyond routing out impoverished rebels.⁶⁰ In this sense, Maoists pose less of a risk to the security of the nation, as they threaten to destabilize the climate of investment deemed critical in India's current accelerated economic growth. At the very heart of this escalating civil war is the contestation over territory, or more precisely, the efforts of Maoists to resist the state's compulsory appropriation of adivasi lands to be handed over to a consortium of powerful transnational corporate interests. It is no coincidence that support for Maoists and the state's counterinsurgency tactics have focused in areas that are among the richest in natural resources.

Over the past decade, and under the guidance of Union Home Minister, P Chidambaram (a former corporate lawyer), the central government has signed dozens

⁵⁹ Following the bombing of a civilian bus carrying state security forces by Maoists in May 2010 in Chhatisgarh, the central government is now considering escalating the conflict further. "I was given a limited mandate", Home Minister Chidambaram noted after the attack, "we will have to go back to the cabinet to revisit that mandate" (BBC News 2010). The Home Minister continues to stage the rather frightful promise to deploy wider powers and 'study all options', which at this point hinge on the decision whether or not to mobilize the Indian Air Force in the state's eradication campaign.

⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion of the collusion between modernist development and global capital in India see Shiva 1991.

of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)—all kept secret—with various corporate actors and worth several billions of dollars (Roy 2009). Such MoUs have opened up the door for the consolidation of various large-scale (private) development projects: dams, mines, steel plants, aluminum refineries, etc. In many sites, the state's war machine is being deployed to strip adivasis (and others) of their ancestral lands (which is a violation of the constitution), such as in the Niyamgiri Hills in southern Orissa, the home of the Dongria Kondh. Having signed a MoU with the state, the Hills have been licensed to Vedanta Resources, a transnational mining corporation based in London and owned by Indian billionaire Anil Agrawal.⁶¹ This is but one example of the widespread appropriation of land in a region with an abundance of natural resources: iron, uranium, coal, marble, copper, gold, etc. It is the retelling of an old story, the violent dislocation of the poor in advance of modernist development.⁶² This, we are told, is progress. In such conditions, is it any wonder that many of the poor take up arms to defend their lands? This is a geography that speaks directly to the growing and long-existing gap between those who have thrived within India's economic development and the many who remain disenfranchised and/or are in the process of being dispossessed within the country's relentless drive for 10 percent GDP growth. This is a geography of anger fueled by the desperation of many. It is an armed revolution, not driven by an urban proletariat, but rather by the deep crises fixed in rural India.⁶³

⁶¹ Having won a case in the Indian Supreme Court, Vedanta is currently expanding its mining operations in the area to exploit high concentrations of bauxite, whose deposits are alleged to be valued in the trillions of dollars (see Roy 2009; Amnesty International 2010).

⁶² We can also look to the state of Jharkhand, where the world's largest steel manufacturer, Arcelor Mittal, is moving ahead with consolidating a 12 million ton steel plan on 11,000 acres of indigenous land. Or the construction of a mega-steel plant by POSCO India, a subsidiary of Korean-based POSCO in Orissa, which is posed to displace 4000 adivasi families (The Hindu 2008).

⁶³ The sense of desperation and the futility of turning to electoral democracy in India is summed up by Arundhati Roy (2010) during her time spent with Maoists in Chhatisgarh:

I feel I ought to say something at this point. About the futility of violence, about the unacceptability of summary executions. But what should I suggest they [Maoists] do? Go to court? Do a dharna at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi? A rally? A relay hunger strike? It sounds ridiculous. The promoters

At the same time, it is important to note how the rubric of 'red terrorism' is being mobilized to repress other (unarmed) adivasi movements. We see this in the recent steps taken by the state to disband the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA), an advocacy organization based in Lalgarh, West Bengal. The PCAPA was formed in 1998 to resist the escalation of police violence unleashed in Lalgarh after Maoists failed to assassinate the state's Chief Minister following his inauguration of a Special Economic Zone. The movement began as an attempt to block the access of security forces to adivasi villages by felling trees and digging trenches to obstruct roadways. It quickly grew in a bid to establish a *muktanchal*, or liberated zone, and many related committees were established in the Jangal Manhal, the forested region surrounding Lalgarh. The PCAPA has not only organized a rural campaign of non-cooperation with the nation state, but also initiated an array of counter-development programs. In many respects, the PCAPA has organized beyond a program of alternative development in dedicating itself to delivering the very infrastructure and equitable development long promised but never delivered by liberal democracy, and in this setting, 34 years of uninterrupted Marxist rule in West Bengal. Out of desperate necessity, adivasis, then, have taken their own improvement or development, if you like, into their own hands.⁶⁴

of the New Economic Policy—who find it so easy to say “There is No Alternative”—should be asked to suggest an alternative Resistance Policy. A specific one, to these specific people, in this specific forest. Here. Now. Which party should they vote for? Which democratic institution in this country should they approach? Which door did the Narmada Bachao Andolan not knock on during the years and years it fought against Big Dams on the Narmada?

⁶⁴ The PCAPA has coordinated volunteer labour programs to construct a number of irrigation works, including check dams to gather rainwater during the monsoon; to expand road systems; and build health care clinics that provide free medical treatment. The movement has established seed banks and organic fertilizer cooperatives to lessen the dependence on chemical fertilizers and disrupt the introduction of genetically modified crops. The PCAPA has called for meaningful land reforms and the redistribution of resources. It has resisted the expansion of eucalyptus plantations that drain precious ground water reserves, while demanding the rights of adivasis to access protected forested land.

The activities of the PCAPA have elicited a strong reaction from the state's security apparatus, due in part from the fact that Lalgurh is a hub of armed Maoist resistance. In September 2009, the PCAPA's leader, Chhatradhar Mahato, was arrested (along with eight of his colleagues), who are being detained under the suspicion that the organization forms a wing of the CPI (Maoist) and has explicit ties to the People's Liberation Guerilla Army.⁶⁵ Reaching back to the 1960s, the interconnections between Maoist groups and the multiple struggles of the poor represent a complex, entangled geography, and it is doubtful that anyone properly understands these interrelations beyond a local setting. As it stands, however, it seems that anyone who organizes against the state in the region can now be branded a Naxalite, certainly a convenient discursive category through which to target multiple forms of resistance. Having worked with adivasis in West Bengal over the past 30 years, Mahasweta Devi, of the DNT-RAG, was among those who staged a public outcry over the arrests of the PCAPA, arguing that it is an autonomous citizen movement orchestrated to protect the rights of adivasis amidst mounting violence.

I leave a deeper description of the conflicts in the Dandakaranya to other voices (Balagopal 2006; Guha 2007; AITPN 2009; Das 2009; Roy 2009; 2010; Datta 2010). My primary concern here is the deployment of the state's war machine in the name of development, aptly reframed as the pursuit of economic progress regardless of the human cost. Of course, there is nothing particularly new in the state's use of brute military force to further the interests (of now a transnational) corporate capital in India.

⁶⁵ Similar actions and arrests have been taken against other civil rights organizations in the region who are documenting state atrocities against adivasi communities. We see this in the arrest of Binayak Sen, the general secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties in Chhatisgarh in 2007 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 2004 and the Special Public Security Act of 2006. Similar steps have been taken against the Andhra Pradesh Liberties Committee.

But in the Dandakaranya, the promises of national rights and equitable development are washed away in blood, where notions of development based on social welfare, justice and the redistribution of wealth transform into an entirely different entity: anti-development. I thus draw critical attention to these events to illustrate the deep-seated contradictions inherent to India's developmental governmentality. On the one hand, the situation reveals its sheer brutality, where the discourse of development is mobilized to safeguard the interests and security of the nation. It is a popular discourse that "legitimizes the suppression, expulsions or even extermination of subpopulations", as argues Vinay Gidwani (2009: 8), "that ostensibly threaten or thwart the security and well-being of the majority." The militant aggression staged by the Indian state in the Dandakaranya thus demonstrates how development can "morph into anti-development: a war machine that is willing to exclude, even abolish certain lives, in the name of fostering others" (6).

At the same time, the eradication of Maoists and the targeting of (peaceful) non-cooperation movements stands in remarkable contrast to the central government's apparent willingness to negotiate and even possibly to accommodate the demands put forward by the DNT-RAG. In this sense, the readiness of the state machinery to accommodate is situational. Developmental governmentality is always janus faced, existing in a duality that stands in an uneasy tension or opposition that represents what Gidwani (2009: 1-2) argues to be a "particular machine, unusually adaptive... whose appeal undoubtedly lies in its distinctive modality: *improvement*." These contradictions are summed up in the words of Indian Prime Minister Singh, who, just as he unleashed the state's security forces to quell unrest from below, also, paradoxically, called for the greater inclusion and improvement of adivasis in the Dandakaranya (and beyond). In a

conference held in November 2009 (as Operating Green Hunt gathered momentum) with India's state Chief Ministers, PM Singh admitted on public record that there has been a "systematic failure" to include adivasis in the country's rapid economic growth. He revealed further that, "The alienation built over decades is now taking a dangerous turn. We must change our ways of dealing with tribals. We have to win the battle for their hearts" (Qtd in The Times of India 2009). Is it now possible, then, for the DNT-RAG, and other adivasi organizations, to utilize the state's fear of Maoist insurgents (of red revolution) to their advantage? Namely, to press the political executive for concessions, provided if only to ensure the political stability necessary to secure corporate investment and the class interests of an elite civil society.

There is certainly much ground to be cynical here, or at the very least seriously question the sincerity of the Prime Minister's words, and it remains unclear how the central government plans on 'winning the hearts of tribals', or rather, the refugees of India's progress. The signs are not particularly hopeful. The central government has yet to make meaningful use of the recommendations produced by the DNT-RAG and submitted to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 2006. Further, the Provisions of the Panchayats Act of 1996, that made important amendments to Scheduled Areas, has yet to be ratified by state governments. While promising in certain areas of the country, the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 has been extremely uneven. The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has never asserted its independence from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and thus failed to work with the enormous powers mandated by the Indian constitution to investigate the violations of rights and ensure the implementation of constitutional provisions for adivasis. Lastly, the effects of the Prevention of Atrocities

Act of 1989 have been extremely limited, characterized by an abysmally low conviction rate, a long backlog of pending cases, and a high rate of acquittal. Moreover, the Habitual Offenders Act of 1952 has not been repealed, nor have amendments been made to the much-maligned Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958. This despite the express concerns of civil rights activists and that of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), whose convention the Government of India continues to argue has no jurisdiction in India as discrimination in the country is based on caste and not race (see UN 2007a; 2007b). These shortcomings all signify an extreme lack of political will to enforce and extend existing developmental and rights-protecting measures to adivasis.

And yet, just as such developmental mechanisms remain unrealized, the efforts of the DNT-RAG (among many other movements) demonstrate how the nation state and the discourse of development remain active sites of oppositional politics. One can only hope that the state will engage the likes of the DNT-RAG in meaningful dialogue, and take seriously their appeals for equitable development and justice for India's 60 million DNTs. The failure to do so will only fan the flames of escalating conflict in India, furthering the militancy of those who continue to suffer the violent fallout of liberalized development and long excluded from the democratic politics of the nation.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Baoris and Chharas share a number of conditions and intertwined geographies. Both were once *ghumantus*, nomads, with long histories of itinerant activity in northwestern India. Both settled or were settled in Ahmedabad as it emerged as an important node of industrial textile manufacturing. To a lesser or greater extent, they have remained situated among the city's poor. They are locked in the lower echelons of Ahmedabad's social and labour hierarchies. In many respects, Baoris and Chharas trace the long and troubled history of India's developmental governmentality. Their experiences reflect the manner which the discourse of development, or the will to improve, has long been mobilized as the central operating logic legitimizing expressions of state power. I have argued that this is a history that arcs from the consolidation of colonial government into the formation of the independent nation state. Baoris and Chharas were subject to the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, which instituted a toxic colonial apparatus designed to discipline and regulate, order and reform subaltern adivasi populations produced by colonial modernity. Classified within the topology of the Criminal Tribe, they were fixed within taxonomies that knit together race and biopower at the birth of colonial government. This history reveals an inherent paradox of 19th century liberalism, namely, that it was always contingent upon a set of racialized exclusions put to work to justify British supremacy. Such racial imaginaries continue to structure Chharas and Baoris' attempts to occupy meaningful inclusion in the democratic politics of the nation.

At the same time, these two adivasi populations trace important differences in their respective inclusion and exclusion within the trajectories of India's governmental power. While both were excluded from constitutional reservations for Scheduled Tribes, their

differentiated relationship to the classification of the Criminal Tribe is instructive. Unlike Chharas whose DNT certificates have granted them access to unused ST reservations, Baoris' history as a CT remains deeply buried. Its subjectivity (now reframed as DNT) has yet to have any meaning for Baoris in Gulbai Tekra. This lacuna enabled them to evade severe regimes of labour exploitation and social improvement instituted under the CTA. In the post-independence period, however, this has undermined their ability to establish themselves as a legible population within the categories and classifications inherited and adapted by the Nehruvian state for the targeted improvement of identified Scheduled Tribes. As a consequence, Baoris have never gained access to the state's reservation system, and by proxy higher levels of education and training, public labour markets, social welfare schemes, and democratic protections (designed for Scheduled Tribes). They remain situated in low-paying, insecure jobs as petty traders, artisans and domestic workers in Ahmedabad's informal economies.

Having been largely excluded from India's developmental and rights-protecting apparatus, Baoris are now particularly vulnerable within the dramatic recalibration of state power in the liberalizing metropolis. Their exclusion has made it all the easier for the state to informalize their tenuous tenure rights and displace them to the urban-rural frontier. I have argued that this is a process wherein the planning executive is carrying out an urban cleansing legitimized through the language and imagery of waste—a discourse operating under the rhetorical cover of beautification and renewal. The desires to purify the public sphere are not only supported but increasingly prompted by the highest levels of the Indian judiciary, which has narrowed its interpretation of fundamental constitutional rights and forged a direct correlation between 'slums', waste and criminality. Baoris are now considered little more than illegal occupiers of public

territory and as hawkers working in violation of existing bylaws and regulations that govern the use and access of public space.

I have suggested that the informalization of responsibilities, rights and visibilities function as a central mechanism driving a reconstituted urban developmentalism that is restructuring Ahmedabad's moral, physical and legal landscapes. Liberalization thus deploys informality to push the poor beyond the pale of legality, and suspend the very possibilities of accessing legislative protections and structures of lawful governance. Informal processes are considered beyond state control, but rather a tactic of power. Moreover, informality is not the sole domain of the poor, nor a space void of political negotiation. Baoris are increasingly left to negotiate 'rights', services and accommodation as best they can outside the rules and regulations that structure civil society. Regrettably, Baoris occupy an extremely weak bargaining position, and have had no success in negotiating a settlement with the state and private developers. Nor have they gained formal recognition as an adivasi population within existing governmental classifications. Their displacement from Gulbai Tekra raises critical questions regarding the limits of the space and politics wherein the poor attempt extra-legal parleys to access rights and entitlements. Baoris' tacit agreement with Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has been repealed, and as such, their administration as an exception to the rule of law suspended.

Chharas' history as a Criminal Tribe is both more explicit and contradictory. It certainly exposed them to the excesses of colonial governmental power exerted to transform them into modern, urbane, and productive citizens within a capitalist economy. I have traced some of this legacy that has left them a heavily stigmatized population vulnerable

to state violence. But it was precisely because Chharas were interned in the Naroda Settlement in 1932—a population subject to state management—that they managed to wrestle some concessions within the developmental framework of the Nehruvian state. In other words, Chharas were brought into the machinations of modern state power as an identified population, which meant that they were able to establish secure land tenure and limited access to constitutional quotas in the state's reservation system. This marginal accommodation has been severely compromised as the Government of Gujarat retracts from its constitutional responsibilities to provide social welfare. This un-mapping is evident in the state's decision to stop issuing caste certificates to Chharas that identify them as DNTs, and the broader history wherein the category has remained largely unrecognized within the state's population schematics. Nevertheless, Chharas' self-identification as a DNT community remains critical. It is a subjectivity that carries tremendous importance. It provides Chharas with a strong moral legitimacy, and there is now an emergent generation of highly politicized leaders (such as Dakxin and Roxy) who are leading the reclamation and redeployment of this (de)criminalized identity.

Furthermore, the subject category of DNT has become a rallying point for political mobilization. We have witnessed these developments within the organizing of the Denotified Rights Action Group, a national social movement exerting pressure on the central Indian government to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities by instituting a uniform system of governance through which DNTs can access state resources and democratic protections. In mobilizing an accommodation politics, I have argued that the movement reaffirms the territoriality of the Indian state as the dominant frame within which to redress injustices and to contest the very meaning of development. Chharas' relationship to the leadership of the DNT-RAG highlights the selective (in)mobilities

bound up in social movement organizing. This also connects them to influential cultural figures, and by extension to the innermost corridors of political power in the country (right up to the Prime Minister's office). Chharas' visibility as a DNT population means that they stand poised to benefit if and when meaningful inclusion is extended to India's adivasis. The DNT-RAG reminds us that despite the past decades of rapid liberalization, the Indian state continues to drive the project of nation building. It thus figures as the central target in efforts to assert an agenda of social justice and the citizenship rights of thus-far marginalized adivasis.

Chharas and Baoris deploy these politics as they attempt to negotiate inclusion within the violent reordering of state power and governmental logics in the liberalizing metropolis. Their lives are increasingly framed by new regimes of deregulation and informality that are reconfiguring the structures of governance, development, while instituting new forms of social regulation. Just as we teeter on the edge of 'post-development', Baoris and Chharas' refocus how India's (now transforming) developmental apparatus and constitution remain sites of significant oppositional politics. Their attempts to access rights and resources increasingly depend upon their capacity to exercise the very instruments and techniques of governing. They do so in order to establish themselves as visible, legitimate populations within recognized categories of state power. To this end, their struggles live on.

Afterword: Performing Ethnography

Performing ethnographic research in Baori Samaj and Chharanagar is a political enterprise. I distinctly recall becoming unnerved by this undertaking following my fieldwork in Gujarat. I had returned to read through the representations of adivasis produced during the 19th century and was chilled by the narratives of colonial authorities, missionaries and travelers that circulated wild descriptions of Criminal Tribes—the stories that legitimized the criminalization of adivasi populations. Edward Said's (1979) famous remark loomed suggesting that Empire was never just a matter of 'soldiers and cannons' but equally involved the production and circulation of ideas, images and imaginings. I knew I was treading on thin ice. The representations we produce, after all, are never innocent. They have effects. They are situated in systems and histories of knowledge and power that subjugate and exclude. Given its long sordid history in the colonies, ethnography has been the focus of intense scrutiny, which figures within a wider crisis across the social sciences, namely, the politics of representation. I am not going to rehash familiar debates, but ethnography—as a representational strategy—stands accused of an inherent voyeurism, and at worst, is implicated in circulating a pornography of violence.

What ethnographers do and say, however, has changed significantly over time. It is not a static method and its practice can be a deeply political act in and of itself. In many respects it is extremely difficult to escape the conundrum that what we do is represent the lives of others. This is largely what is expected of academics. We translate experiences. We circulate life histories with the aim of establishing knowledge claims that (hopefully) advance a progressive material politics. In thinking about the political

work of representation, I return to Cindi Katz's (1994) proposal that we (ethnographers) occupy a 'space of in-betweenness'. Such a space implies that ethnographers are particularly well positioned to move between critical theory and practice to communicate how historically produced structures manifest in the micrological geographies of the everyday. In addition we are situated to carry our translations to multiple publics, sometimes over great distances. A 'space of inbetweenness' thus denotes a tremendous responsibility wherein we take responsibility (as best we can) for the representations we produce. As Dakxinbhai admitted very early during my research in Chharanagar, he was only interested in speaking with academics and facilitating access to his community because he believed this to be an important avenue through which his words and community's experiences could travel to other places to affect different publics.

I am not trying to sidestep the politics of representation. There are two recent experiences that give me reason to pause. The first was during an expedition to the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, where four sessions were organized under the theme of 'Democracy and Ethnography'. I was excited. Here, the 'experts' would not only deliberate on the problematics of fieldwork but also propose some concrete options for navigating the murky waters of representation. I was disappointed. Despite presenting some fascinating ethnographic research (mostly in the global south), not a single speaker ventured into such terrain. No one seemed willing to (re)open Pandora's Box. The second moment took place in my own department at the University of British Columbia during a series of method seminars organized for graduate students. During one session, a small group congregated to discuss ethnographic research, which led to a heated and constructive discussion around what a democratized social science might look like. I rallied around the need to work

collaboratively to produce new kinds of knowledge effects. One colleague, somewhat exacerbated, blurted, “Caleb, can’t we just get on with the business of actually doing research?” I countered, insisting (rather dogmatically) that we must continue to grapple with such politics lest the past thirty years of deconstruction go to waste. Nevertheless, the episode left an impression, and suggested that while the protracted debate around producing expert knowledge continues to be extremely productive, it has for some had no or a debilitating effect. Richa Nagar and Susan Geiger (2007) argue as much, suggesting that the current ‘impasse’ in the social sciences has left many feeling despondent about the prospects of fieldwork, while propelling many to retreat from the field altogether. For the most part, my ethnographic work in Ahmedabad was carried out along somewhat conventional lines. I worked through the social networks that opened up in the city. I observed and scripted a field journal. I took photographs and conducted interviews. Like a magpie I gleaned compelling narratives and life experiences. My turn to ethnography, however, was motivated by the belief that it is no more problematic or political than any other method. Indeed, one of its great strengths derives from the fact that it forces one into the field to work with the politics of knowledge production within the (sometimes uncomfortable) geographies of intimate encounter. Further, if producing representations of marginalized adivasis is problematic (and indeed they are) I work from the position that not speaking about inequity is a far more dangerous enterprise.

I am under no illusion that this dissertation has much to offer Baoris and Chharas. It will eventually enter into circulation within the political economy of academic knowledge production. Nevertheless, tangible collaborative efforts developed during my fieldwork in Ahmedabad. Most significantly, I spent four months in Baori Samaj and Chharanagar mentoring residents in the techniques of digital video production. These teaching

programs emerged directly out of the desires of community members, and fortunately, I possessed the skills and pedagogy to make a substantial contribution to community organizing. A series of short documentary videos were produced out of these engagements, which animated issues identified, filmed and edited by community residents. These videos were seen by well over 4,000 people in a series of public screenings in Baori Samaj, Vishala, and Chharanagar. This number multiplied substantially as we compressed videos so that they could be circulated and viewed on cell phones. I remember Sureshbhai's claim that his video, chronicling the demolition of homes in Baori Samaj, would be passed among Baori communities throughout Saurashtra. A more thorough consideration of these documenting engagements is a project for the future.

I draw attention to this work here because in many respects this thesis represents as much as a new beginning as it does an ending. It has laid the foundation for future collaboration in Ahmedabad. Plans to this effect are already taking shape. Dakxin and I are plotting a collaborative research and writing project. Together, we are planning a site-specific documentary play modeled on the motif of the 'guided tour'. Audience members will be guided along a walking tour of Chharanagar where they encounter various staged testimonies. The materials and text for the project will be based entirely on verbatim testimony collected from interviews conducted in the community. The project will also form the basis of Dakxin's master thesis at the University of Leeds, for which he has received a scholarship from the Ford Foundation. Our collaboration is being developed to appropriate and restage Chharas' (de)criminalized subjectivities and to facilitate a 'safe' encounter with this history.

Our collaboration presents one site for more fully exploring the possibilities and tensions of transnational solidarity across the multiple divides of difference and distance. We may never be in a position to produce fully democratic knowledge production. The operations of power are inherently bound up in establishing truth claims. But it is the very impossibility of fully ethical engagements that necessitates our need to devise and revise political strategies. I defer to the insight provided by Chakravorty Spivak (1995: xxv), who argues that:

ethics is the experience of the impossible. Please note that I am not saying that ethics are impossible, but rather that ethics is the experience of the impossible. This understanding only sharpens the sense of the critical and continuing need for collective political struggle. For a collective struggle *supplemented* by the impossibility of the full ethical engagement—not in the rationalist sense of ‘doing the right thing,’ but in this more familiar sense of the impossibility of ‘love’ in the one-on-one way for each human being—the future is always around the corner, there is no victory, but only victories that are also warnings.

Given the disparate nature of global capitalism, along with the disparities of access to resources, information and technologies, it is not surprising that transnational encounters remain politically charged. They always take place within the enduring asymmetries of power and debris of colonial legacies. They often re-inscribe unequal power relations and divisive subjectivities. But the conditions of the world demand our involvement in the struggles of one another, motivated, if only, to strategize transgressive border crossings to destabilize fixed notions of place and identity. Despite important reservations, David Faust and Richa Nagar (2002) argue that transnational collaborations remain a persuasive means of furthering the exchange of progressive politics, values and methodologies. There are political opportunities in such encounters that unsettle dichotomous divisions. Geraldine Pratt (2008: 757) suggests that transnational meetings involve a “geographical entanglement” that is not “adequately captured by the ethical framing of ‘normative interventions.’” In order to capture this

complexity, Pratt argues the need to approach transnational solidarities from “lived experience, and not just abstracted ethical principals... devised in relation to static, stable geographies of north/south, west/east, first world/third world”. It is precisely through the practice of a transnational ethnography that we are confronted with the politics of research and wherein strategies can emerge to negotiate difference. David Featherstone (2003: 405) echoes similar sentiments, arguing that solidarity networks “need to be seen as generative” rather than situated within fixed notions of place. Solidarity travels along unpredictable pathways that are not produced out of thin air. It is often the product of life histories and spatial connections that intersect at a specific time for particular reasons.

I will end by arguing that the practice of solidarity, which for me is born out of a critical and collaborative ethnographic practice, is a deeply performative act. I invoke the performative because it opens up the possibility for a more embodied geographic thought and practice. A performative ethnography asks for different modes of address and narration. It asks us to perform in our texts, not as all-knowing agents operating under a cloak of dispassionate objectivity, or alternatively, transparent reflexivity, but rather as situated actors engaged in the political work of (re)presentation. A performing ethnographer recognizes that knowledge production is built upon a number of improvisations that we are never fully in control of: an unruly landscape, chance encounters, an uncooperative official, what our informants do and do not reveal, etc. It is within these unstable moments that resides what Nigel Thrift (2000: 237) describes as the “art of producing the now” in which each moment is open to political possibility. It is the ‘art of the now’ that extends the opportunity for meaningful dialogue and solidarity politics by unsettling fixed notions of here and there, of self and other, and the rigid

boundaries that police our research encounters. A performative ethnography, then, proposes that maybe, just maybe, we are not so different after all, and that Said (1987) was also right to suggest a “smuggling of ideas across lines”, smuggling that is between the borders that separate us from them.

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Interviews

(requests for anonymity have been honoured)

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Appendix: UBC Research Ethics Board's Certificate of Approval



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Geraldine Pratt	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Arts/Geography	UBC BREB NUMBER: H08-01209
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution UBC		Site Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)
Other locations where the research will be conducted: This research will be conducted in four cities in India: Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Trivandrum. Research will be conducted in community centers, NGO offices and subject's homes.		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Caleb Johnston		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: International Development Research Centre Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)		
PROJECT TITLE: The Prospects of Deep Democracy in India: citizenship, civil society, social movements		
REB MEETING DATE: July 10, 2008	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: July 10, 2009	
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: July 23, 2008
Document Name	Version	Date
Consent Forms:		
Translator Confidentiality Agreement	N/A	June 15, 2008
Consent Form for Ethnographic Observation	N/A	July 18, 2008
Consent Form for Interviews	N/A	July 11, 2008
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
Sample Interview Questions	N/A	May 22, 2008
Other Documents:		
Letter of Support from Vidya Education and Charitable Trust	N/A	July 12, 2008
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<p>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</p> <p>Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair Dr. Ken Craig, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair</p>		