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Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi

By

David Asher Ghertner

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Energy and Resources

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Michael J. Watts, Chair

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Abstract

Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi

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Professor Michael J. Watts, Chair

This project addresses the cultural and environmental politics of slum demolitions in the making of a “world-class city.” If “modern” cities are supposed to be built through techno-scientific procedures of urban planning and government—such as maps, censuses, and surveys—the conspicuous absence of such techniques in the world-class redevelopment of Delhi raises the question of how rule there is achieved. Based on an ethnography of the judiciary, state, and property owners’ associations, I find that what I call a *world-class aesthetic*—an idealized vision of a privatized, “green,” and slum-free city assembled from transnationally circulating images of “global cities”—has replaced these techniques as the key instrumentality of rule in contemporary Delhi.

To explore how this aesthetic regime of planning operates, I begin by demonstrating how the city’s new “good governance” initiative, called Bhagidari, has reconfigured state space, providing property owners’ with privileged channels of access to the judiciary and bureaucracy. By tracing the circulation of key representations of the slum through and beyond these channels, I show how discourse depicting slums as “nuisances”—i.e., as illegal environments—constructs an aesthetic grid that demarcates the “world-class” on the one hand, and the “polluting” on the other. I further reveal how the judiciary has codified this world-class aesthetic through a reinterpretation of nuisance law, recalibrating the axes of legality and planning such that those spaces *appearing* polluting and dirty (e.g., slums) are deemed unplanned and illegal, regardless of their statutory basis in planning law or actual environmental impact. Conversely, spaces that have a world-class “look” (e.g., shopping malls, sports stadia), despite violating land-use codes and environmental standards, are deemed planned and legal.

More than just reconfiguring state power, this aesthetic regime of planning alters how citizens see and engage the state, as well as how they envision their place in the city. Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork in a Delhi slum, I show how residents have begun to shift the basis on which they advance citizenship claims away from an earlier idiom of historical entitlement to public land and toward one of potential self-improvement via home ownership. This shift, however, cannot be reduced to an overarching neoliberal rationality, but must rather be located in residents’ changing affective ties to place and city. Specifically, I trace how a series of political

technologies—including government-run slum surveys, media campaigns, and a broad set of changes in the meaning of landscape—train slum residents to see the city through the lens of world-class aesthetics. In arguing that projects of rule are secured as much through embodied practices and aesthetic dispositions as through reason or ideology, the dissertation asserts the importance of everyday aesthetic practices as a key terrain on which political possibilities and urban visions are produced.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Planning without plans

Scene 1- From 2003 to 2007, news headlines in Delhi closely followed a story pitting a local environmental group against seven of India’s top land developers. In 2003, the Ridge Bachao Andolan (Save the Ridge Movement) submitted a petition to the Supreme Court of India challenging the construction of India’s largest shopping mall complex for being built on Delhi’s southern ridge, a protected green space, in the up-and-coming South Delhi colony of Vasant Kunj. This constituted a land use violation of the statutorily binding Delhi Master Plan. Expert testimony by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA)—the agency that drafts and is legally bound to implement the Master Plan—defended the project in the Court for being “planned” and thus legal because of the involvement of professional builders, its high-quality construction, and its strategic function in boosting Delhi’s architectural profile. Showing graphic models and architectural blueprints of the proposed development (see Figure 1), emphasizing the project’s more than 300 million dollar price tag, and describing the mall as a “world-class” commercial complex, the DDA suggested that the visual appearance of the future mall was in itself enough to confirm the project’s planned-ness. How could a project of such strategic importance in Delhi’s effort to become a world-class consumer destination *not* be planned, the DDA’s lawyer argued.



Figure 1. Graphic rendering of the DLF Emporio, the most expensive mall in India as of 2009 and one of the seven malls whose construction was challenged for being built on Delhi’s protected southern ridge.

Through reference to the developers’ use of the finest Italian marble (more marble than even the Taj Mahal, so the rumor went) and contracts with the most exclusive international retailers (e.g., Cartier, Gucci, Louis Vuitton), local politicians speaking to the media similarly questioned the possibility that India’s most expensive mall¹ could be “unplanned,” despite the failure of all seven of the developers to submit the mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment before

¹ The DLF Emporio, one of the seven projects involved, is the most expensive mall in India. “Check out the most expensive malls in the country”, *The Economic Times*, New Delhi, December 2, 2007.

beginning construction.² In early 2007, after its own “Expert Committee” found the complex in “flagrant violation” of planning law,³ the court stated, “The stand that wherever constructions have been made unauthorisedly[,] demolition is the only option cannot apply to the present cases” where the parties “have invested such huge sums of money.”⁴ Based on the mall’s capital-intensiveness and associated “world-class” appearance, the court allowed construction to go forward.

During the course of the mall proceedings in the Supreme Court, an adjacent multi-generational slum settlement in conformance with the land use designation listed in the Master Plan was declared “unplanned” and illegal by the DDA for being a “nuisance” to the neighboring middle class residential colonies. Based on a set of photographs showing the “unsightly” conditions in the slum and despite the absence of a survey or scientific evaluation of its so-called “nuisance-causing activities,” the DDA demolished the settlement without compensation, an action upheld by the court.⁵

In these two examples, “planned-ness,” an attribute of urban space key to the determination of legality, was defined as that which *looks* planned, regardless of its formal standing in planning law or any correspondence between actually existing urban development and expert paper representations of the city (e.g., the Master Plan). Here, it was a land use’s relationship to a particular “world-class” aesthetic sensibility (conformance in the case of the mall, divergence in the case of the slum) that determined the appropriate governance response. How has this *world-class aesthetic*—a distinct observational grid used for making normative assessments of urban space—come to stand in for maps and statutes?

Scene 2- The Delhi Master Plan was first implemented in 1962 and is a statutory document that provides comprehensive urban planning guidelines for prospective twenty-year periods. It designates land use categories, supplies infrastructure and development guidelines, specifies population and building densities, and is a standard instrument of modernist planning, the first draft of which was written at the peak of the Nehruvian developmental state.⁶ The Master Plan had been updated in 1980 and 1990 according to new population projections, but in the early 2000s a third revision began, approved in 2007 as the *Delhi Master Plan 2021* (DDA, 2007), that was intended to accommodate the liberalization of the city’s land market in the wake of a series of economic reforms launched in the city in the late 1990s.

My research in Delhi began in 2005 in the midst of both the preparation of the new Master Plan and a wave of large-scale, state-driven slum demolitions. This demolition drive, which began

² “Construction in Vasant Kunj ridge is environmentally unsound”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 9, 2006.

³ “SC stays construction in Ridge area in Vasant Kunj”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 1, 2006. See Verma (2002) for a description of the relationship between the Delhi Master Plan, the DDA, and planning law.

⁴ See T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad vs. Union of India and Ors. ((2006)10 SCC 490), paragraph 8.

⁵ Jagdish & Ors. vs. DDA, CWP 5007/2002 (Delhi High Court).

⁶ For a history of modernist development planning in India, as implemented by Nehru and his Minister of Planning, Mahalanobis, see Chakravarty (1987).

roughly at the turn of the 21st century and continues at the time of writing, has led to the displacement of more than one million people,⁷ surpassing vastly the scale and pace of demolitions during what is known as India's Emergency—a 21-month period (1975-1977) during which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended elections, curtailed civil liberties, and initiated a massive “clean-up” drive through forced slum removals (and sterilizations) in India's largest cities.⁸ Having begun preliminary field research in the immediate aftermath of the demolition of Delhi's largest slum settlement—known as Yamuna Pushta, which housed approximately 150,000 people (see Figure 2)—I spent most of my four months in 2005 meeting with planners, NGOs, lawyers, and bureaucrats in an effort to understand the relationship between economic liberalization and mass displacement. In particular, I wondered how the state justified slum demolitions when the poorest twenty-five percent of the population occupied less than two percent of the city's residential land area, despite a Master Plan mandate that twenty-five percent of all residential units in the city be reserved for this income group.⁹

I was therefore thrilled when I secured an interview with the Commissioner of Planning in the DDA, Mr. A.K. Jain, the officer in charge of overseeing the process of drafting the new Master Plan. Armed with a list of questions regarding the Plan's preparation, I was a graduate student ready to trace the techno-politics of the planning enterprise. After exchanging courtesies, I asked Jain the first of my questions: “How did you survey the city?” Having familiarized myself with the Delhi Development Act, which establishes the rules according to which the Delhi Development Authority is to prepare the Master Plan, I thought myself a good ethnographer, having begun where most planners would: asking about the survey and prospecting techniques used to gather data and assemble a baseline picture of the physical space to be administered. The Act specifies that before any Master Plan revision can begin, a comprehensive “civic survey” is to be conducted, yet Jain's answer that day fundamentally transformed my understanding of urban planning in contemporary India: “We didn't do a survey. Well, we did a ‘windshield survey’: I sent some engineers out in cars and had them look and see how things were... If people knew we were measuring them, things would get too political. We know what needs to be done without having to survey. We know what a world-class city should look like.”¹⁰

How can a planning authority design a plan without first physically assessing the territory and population it presumes to govern? How can it direct interventions without a sound calculative knowledge of its object?

⁷ Combined demolitions (notoriously under-) reported by the DDA and Slum and Jhuggi Jhompdi Wing of the Municipal Corporation from 1997-2007 lead to the conservative estimate of 710,000 displaced residents. *The City Development Plan of Delhi*, prepared by private consultants, on the other hand, estimates that 1.8 million residents were displaced in 1997-2001 alone. Conservative estimates suggest at least a tripling in the pre-2000 demolition pace (Dupont, 2008), whereas the three year demolition pace went up over tenfold in the periods immediately before and after 2000 (Ghertner, 2005).

⁸ See Tarlo (2003) for a discussion of the linkage between sterilization and resettlement eligibility in Delhi.

⁹ Batra (2007) and Verma (2002).

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. A.K. Jain, May 26, 2005.

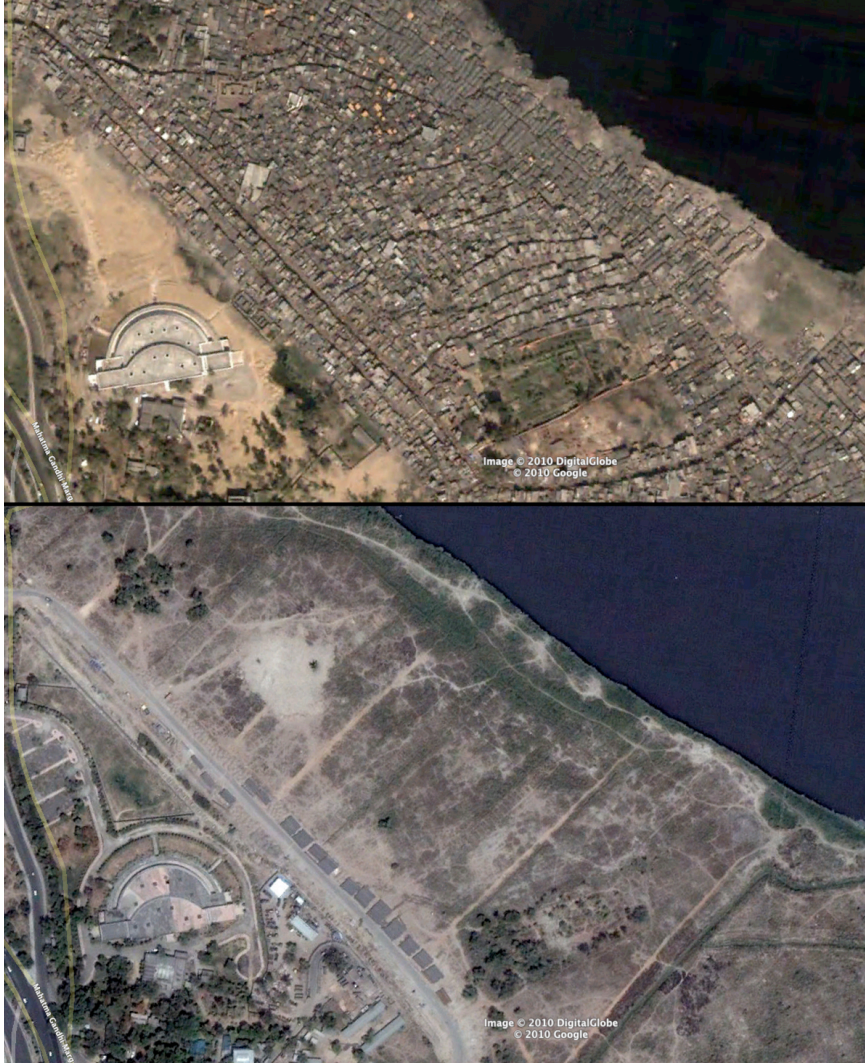


Figure 2. Site of Yamuna Pushta, before (top) and after (bottom) its demolition in April 2004. © 2010 DigitalGlobe, © 2010 Google.

Scene 3- Gopal is a resident of Shiv Camp, a slum settlement nestled in the midst of a burgeoning middle class colony in Delhi’s most rapidly growing Western District. I spent twelve months visiting Shiv Camp in 2007-2008, engaging with men and women, like Gopal, threatened by demolition. Almost a third of Shiv Camp households had been bulldozed a few days before I spoke with Gopal in January 2007, a moment when the violence of displacement could not have been more visible. Yet, despite the fact that the Municipal Corporation’s bulldozers had arrived unannounced, without a court order or legal notice, the demolition made sense to Gopal; it seemed part of a plan: “The government has made a new map that shows how the new city will look. There will be nice clean roads, big buildings; it will be beautiful; it will be clean and maintained. There will be less [traffic] *jam* and not so much filth... They are making Delhi look like Paris, clearing all these *jhuggis* [slum huts].” When I asked Gopal how he knew what the map looked like, he said, “Well, we have not seen the map. That is only for government officials to see, but they tell everyone about it. They say that the city will look beautiful and have all these

nice things. The newspapers tell us about it, and we read those and learn about the map slowly.” While Gopal made implicit reference to the Master Plan, this hypothetical “map” clearly laid out more than just land-use codes and infrastructure norms. In Gopal’s mind at least, it also established a complete vision of urban space against which normative assessments of individuals, neighborhoods and whole urban districts could be rendered. If “the map signifies the massive production of knowledge, the accuracy of calculation, and the entire politics based upon a [comprehensive] knowledge of population and territory” (Mitchell, 2002: 9), then Gopal’s seemed a very different sort of map.

More than a billion people live in squatter settlements today, a population the UN estimates will double by 2030. India alone is expected to add 200 million slum dwellers to its cities in the next twenty years.¹¹ Scholars have interpreted this future “planet of slums” (Davis, 2006)—whether through the more dystopian narrative of Third World planning failure or via the optimistic search for a democratic politics from below¹²—as “the growth of a population outside state control” (Zizek, 2006: 268). Using the case of Delhi, I ask not how the Third World megacity *lacks* spatial discipline and state control, but rather how the management of slums there forces us to rethink the epistemological foundation of government—that is, to rethink how it is that a state knows and directs its object—both in postcolonial contexts and in the West.

Slums are often called “informal” for the fact that they lie beyond the realm of state authorized maps, plans, and statutes. Their presumed “ungovernability” or unruliness, scholars suggest, stems from the absence of cartographic and statistical simplifications of their territory.¹³ *Rule by Aesthetics* traces how the production of an aesthetic normativity has replaced maps and statistics as the key instrumentality of rule in contemporary Delhi. Specifically, it shows that Delhi’s transformation into a “world-class city”—represented most vividly by the construction of sixty new shopping malls, the fivefold increase in land prices, and the displacement of a million slum dwellers since 2000¹⁴—is occurring not solely through a juridical redefinition of property or an economic calculus of cost-benefit.¹⁵ Rather, it also requires the dissemination of a compelling vision of the future—what I call a *world-class aesthetic*—and the cultivation of a popular desire for such a future—the making of world-class subjects.

The three scenes with which I begin thus introduce key components of what I will call “rule by aesthetics,” a form of government that operates less through a techno-scientific rationality of

¹¹ Planning Commission of India.

¹² For the former, see Neuwirth (2004) and Davis (2006); for the latter, see Appadurai (2002) and Chatterjee (2004).

¹³ For example, see Smart (2001) and Legg (2007).

¹⁴ Taneja, Amitabh (ed.). (2007). *Malls in India: Shopping Centre Developers and Developments*. New Delhi: Images Multimedia.

¹⁵ Existing explanations of city “worlding” strategies, like that of the “entrepreneurial” (T. Hall & Hubbard, 1998; Harvey, 1989) or “global” (Sassen, 2001) city, emphasize these primarily economic explanations, focusing on the role of finance capital, the culture industries and information technology as functional means to recruit capital investment and achieve global city standing. For an alternative approach, see the essays in Roy and Ong (forthcoming).

numbers, probabilities, and maps and more through a broadly defined urban aesthetic. While scenes 1 and 2 suggest that the judiciary, members of the state, and the media share a common vision of Delhi's impending "world-class" transformation, even without a rigorous, techno-scientific basis for defining and charting this shift, scene 3 shows that slum residents—who are typically depicted as obstacles to this world-class future—also participate in this urban imaginary. This term, "urban imaginary," is largely self-explanatory, but to foreshadow the combination of material, discursive, and embodied practices through which a world-class aesthetic is being forged in contemporary Delhi, I offer Huysen's (2008: 3) concise formulation: "An urban imaginary is the cognitive and somatic image which we carry with us of the places we live, work, and play. It is an embodied material artifact. Urban imaginaries are thus a part of any city's reality, rather than being only figments of the imagination. What we think about a city and how we perceive it shapes the way we act in it." Before laying out how I use this concept concretely, and before making my argument for a concept of aesthetic rule, let us first consider how urban government has been understood in the literature.

1.2. Aestheticizing government

Governmentality concerns the "conduct of conduct" (Gordon, 1991: 5), "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behavior" (Foucault, 1997: 82). Governmentality's primary point of intervention is individual desire, the "one and only one mainspring of action" (Foucault, 2007: 73). Individual desire, according to Foucault, adds up to and produces "the general interest of the population," which government seeks to act upon and guide at a distance in order to reach "suitable ends" without recourse to direct intervention. Therefore, "by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs" (Li, 2007: 5), government attempts to cultivate a normative disposition within individuals that will lead them toward ends desirable to government.

Government thus functions by "arranging things so that people, following only their own self-interest, will do as they ought" (D. Scott, 1995: 202-3). It does so by constructing and making intelligible categories of knowledge that were previously unintelligible and authorizing those categories through expert "truths." By investing these intelligible categories (e.g., the rate of economic growth, the occurrence of a disease) with significance and problematizing them such that they appear to require improvement via technical intervention, governmental programs recruit the diverse desires of individuals into a shared normative framework. Such programs are effective to the extent that they produce governable subjects—individuals who evaluate and act upon the social world through lenses provided by government. An essential component of guiding the interests of target population groups is thus the joint exercise of crafting intelligible fields for governmental intervention and problematizing such fields so as to make certain "deficiencies" emerge as improvable.

The question of how a governing intelligibility, or legibility, is secured is fundamentally a question of epistemology: How are objects seen and known from a distance; how are truths verified? According to James Scott (1998: 11)—who defines legibility as an "an overall, aggregate, synoptic view of a selective reality" that enables state intervention into an otherwise ungovernable terrain—legibility is the product of "careful measurement" and "calculation."

Geographer Denis Cosgrove similarly says, “Urban legibility becomes the overarching goal of city mapping, to be achieved through precisely measured survey using carefully calibrated instruments” (2004: 54). Both Scott and Cosgrove, like urban and political theorists more generally, thus argue that paring down entangled socio-natural environments into a governing legibility requires what Porter (1995) calls “mechanical objectivity”: the repetition of standardized procedures of measurement, demarcation, quantification, and reportage.¹⁶ In Scott’s words: “Whatever the units being manipulated, they must be organized in a manner that permits them to be identified, observed, recorded, counted, aggregated, and monitored” (Scott, 1998: 124).¹⁷ It is on the basis of this rigorous techno-science—its inscriptive techniques and routines of monitoring, measuring and quantifying—that statistical tables, maps and the like operate as “little machines[s] for producing conviction in others” (Rose, 1999: 39).

Foucault too found “scientifically rational” statistics to be “the main technical factor” (2007, 104) undergirding governmental knowledge. This observation has led literature on governmentality to the epistemological presumption that “To govern a problem requires that it be counted” (Rose, 1999: 221). Be it the census, mapping, accounting practices, or any of a host of statistical aggregations, empirical studies making use of the governmentality framework often take the identification of numbers or other “scientific” depictions of targets of rule as the starting point for their analysis.¹⁸ But, few studies have explicitly considered how government operates in the absence of such numerical accuracy and “scientificity”¹⁹ (Foucault, 2007: 350)—that is, how might government operate when there is no “avalanche of printed numbers,” to borrow Ian Hacking’s phrase? when there is no “statistical stability” that allows government to conduct human conduct through “the picture of lots of minute and varying causes” (Hacking, 1990: 112)? What is to say that numbers necessarily play a determining role in producing subjectivity and conducting conduct? What is to say that other forms of knowledge do not have greater affective power in producing governmental effects? This concern is especially relevant in postcolonial contexts given that the technical means to secure accurate statistical knowledge are often

¹⁶ Mitchell too describes how it is through a well-defined set of mechanical procedures that objectivity is established: “The performance of the law will gain its authority from following this particular sequence of acts [granting land, survey of boundaries, placing of boundary stones, recording of measurements...]” (2002: 58).

¹⁷ As Joyce (2002: 37) says, “[I]t was the conquerors’ belief that they were creating the perfect map that enabled them to rule India... Rule in India was dependent on the creation of a space within which a systematic archive of knowledge of this space might be created.”

¹⁸ On the census, see (e.g. Brown & Boyle, 2000; Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava, & Veron, 2005; Dirks, 2001; Murdoch & Ward, 1997). On mapping, see (e.g. Hannah, 2000; Joyce, 2003; Legg, 2006). On accounting, see (e.g. Miller & O’Leary, 1987; Miller & Rose, 1990). On natural resource statistics, see (e.g. Agrawal, 2005; Demeritt, 2001). On disease statistics and the science of public health, see Prakash (1999), Osborne (1996), and Joyce (2002).

¹⁹ For further discussions of the history of rigorous calculative procedures and geodetic accuracy in modern territorial sovereignty, see Hannah (2000) and Kirsch (2009). My aim here is not to deny the power of numbers (or maps) to simplify and centralize knowledge (see Asad, 1994; Hacking, 1992; Harley, 2001) or the historical significance of statistics/maps in extending new forms of rule (see Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1993), especially in colonial contexts (see Appadurai, 1993; Dirks, 2001; Edney, 1997; Prakash, 1999). Rather, it is to consider how other modes of governing might operate in different, and sometimes more effective, ways.

incomplete in the post-colonial state;²⁰ or, when such knowledge is gathered, it often goes missing, or is deliberately concealed, forged, or unused.²¹

In Foucault's final lecture of *Security, Territory, Population*, where he lays out his concluding treatment of "modern and contemporary governmentality" (2007: 348), he states, "The knowledge involved [in this governmentality] must be scientific in its procedures. Second, this scientific knowledge is absolutely indispensable for good government. A government that did not take into account this kind of analysis... would be bound to fail." He continues by saying that "government cannot do without the consequences, the results, of this science" (2007: 350-1). Recent empirical studies making use of the governmentality framework that find an absence or shortage of numerical accuracy or scientific survey techniques similarly conclude that such a lack of scientific knowledge leads to general unruliness.²² While it may often be the case that the absence of, or inability to create, an intelligible summary of governmental targets (e.g., territory, populations, illegal "elements") through numerical survey leads to a failure to "govern from a distance" (Rose, 1999), might a shortage of numbers, or geometric/"planimetric" accuracy, give rise to other techniques that provide "a 'calculative' sense of the identity of land" and population (Pottage, 1994: 371)? Thus, while Smart (2001: 31) suggests that "we need to pay more attention to spaces in which control seems to be conspicuously absent, where neglect is more apparent than surveillance," I suggest that we also need to pay more attention to spaces in which surveillance and monitoring are conspicuously absent, but where control is nonetheless achieved. In a global context in which, as the UN says, there is "an almost complete lack of planning or preparation for urban growth in most parts of the world" (UN Human Settlements Programme, 2003: 5), where there is no "statistical stability," then an absence of numerical accuracy or "the rule of evidence" (Foucault, 2007: 350) should, perhaps, be the presumed epistemological condition of governmental knowledge.²³

When I met A.K. Jain (scene 2), I was looking for maps and the "avalanche of printed numbers" according to which urban government operated in Delhi. His response that day made me realize I needed to pay more attention to absences than presences. Indeed, when I looked closer, I found a conspicuous absence of accurate and up-to-date maps and statistics on either the population or the territory. For example, a comprehensive statistical summary of the size and distribution of Delhi's slum population has not been reported since 1998. The government itself is unaware of the total number of slums in Delhi and therefore continues to report 1998 numbers as if they were valid today. Similarly, the previous version of the Delhi Master Plan, which was enacted in 1990, had approved zonal plans for only six of the fifteen zones in the city. The criteria according to which city-level planning guidelines are meant to be applied at the zonal level—for

²⁰ See Corbridge et al. (2005: 18), Hansen and Stepputat (2001), and Watts (2005).

²¹ For example, see Hull (2008) and Roy (2004).

²² For example, see Legg (2007: Ch. 4) and Smart (2001). By failure I do not imply the dissolution of governmental power, but rather an inability to conduct the conduct of the population as intended, and thus a need for a reformulation of governmental reason. Governmental failure, of course, can be highly productive, as Ferguson (1990) and Li (2007) remind us.

²³ According to Edney, it was the introduction of triangulation into cartographic science, which "defined an exact equivalence between the geographical archive and the world" (Edney, 1997: 21), that was seen to best secure the accuracy of the correspondence between representation and reality and the ability to govern through the representational artifact.

example, where land is to be reserved for roads and where townships are to be located—were thus never approved at the field-level. For the most recent revision, the Delhi Master Plan 2021, only eleven zones have approved zonal plans.²⁴

Delhi was one of the first states to implement a version of the Right to Information Act. In 2000, a year before the national Right to Information (RTI) Act was enacted, Delhi's Act launched a wave of activity among civil society organizations to track, for example, how tax money was spent, where municipal waste was dumped, and how government housing was allotted. While the RTI Act has made existing government data more accessible to the public, it has done nothing to increase the accuracy or scope of monitoring technologies. During the course of my fieldwork in 2006-2008, I submitted a number of RTI requests to the DDA asking for summary statistics on the number of *jhuggis* (slum huts) demolished both in Delhi as a whole and at the district level since 1990. Although I received a hand-written reply for the years 2000-2006 from one of fifteen zones, including the responding officer's own provisional arithmetic and back-of-the-envelope calculation, the final reply to my request said, "there is no such compiled record/information."

If "modern" cities are supposed to be built through techno-scientific procedures of urban planning and government—such as maps, censuses, and zoning—the conspicuous absence of such techniques in the world-class redevelopment of Delhi raises the question of how rule there is achieved. If we apply familiar models of government and planning (often derived from the western experience) to the postcolonial context, this absence of maps and numbers might look like a type of failure.²⁵ But, as I will now argue, the Delhi case shows that this is not about failed government, but a different mode of governing space. Furthermore, if we are seeing the proliferation of informal spaces not only in the burgeoning slums of the global South, but also in the spaces of the elite (e.g., the Vasant Kunj mall complex introduced in scene 1 above) and in the western "core" (e.g., the more than 100,000 unidentifiable yet "illegal properties" in New York City²⁶), then much of the world will soon be governed by these alternative logics. To understand new forms of globalized urbanization, we must therefore develop research agendas attentive to these multiple modes of governing space. *Rule by Aesthetics* advances the argument that a form of aesthetic rule represents one of these modes, not only for directing official policy and practice, but also the will and aspirations of the people.

To examine the operation of what I am calling a world-class aesthetic—a normative grid that allows observers to assess urban space by comparing its appearance with an imagined "world-class" look—this dissertation will consider how the norms and aspirations of a particular class of property owners have been elevated as model dispositions of world-class citizens, i.e., as

²⁴ Most Plan interventions are carried out at the sub-zonal level according to what are called sub-zonal plans, which are almost never complete, even in zones with approved zonal plans. For example, in Zone G, the zone in which most of the slums I will discuss in this dissertation lie, only two of eighteen sub-zones have completed plans for the current Master Plan (DDA, n.d.).

²⁵ Cf. Roy (2009), who argues that what is typically considered the failure of planning in India is actually part of the informalization of the state itself, a regime of deregulation that maintains ambiguities and empowers "the state to arbitrarily allocate land to new land uses and owners" (81): that is, deregulation as "a mode of regulation" (83).

²⁶ Barnard, Anne. "After fatal fire, many in Queens denounce illegal apartment conversions," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2009.

universal standards. Doing so means traveling into the homes and offices of that portion of Delhi's elite that depicts slum removal as a necessary step to a clean, green, and world-class city and examining what it is about their urban visions that gain potency in public life. The state and the law play important roles here too, which will lead us inside local government offices and the courtroom to consider how state workers and judges adopt these same visions, why, and with what effects. These considerations are motivated by the question: How has a world-class aesthetic been conjured into existence, consolidated as a distinct regime of planning, and deployed as an organizing lens for guiding citizen conduct? My research in Delhi, however, began in the city's slums, and although we will not meet the residents of these settlements until the second half of the dissertation, I pose this first question with an eye toward a second: How is this world-class aesthetic received, re-worked, and in some instances contested by slum residents? That is, how do those depicted as obstacles to Delhi's world-class ascent engage the discourse of the world-class city? In the case of Gopal (scene 3), what is so compelling about the imagined map he describes? What is it about this vision of the city that allows him to consider his displacement a necessary step toward urban progress? Before entering into the details of these questions, allow me to step back and consider how the vision of the world-class city operates as both a political-economic and aspirational object, thereby tying the three opening scenes into the larger context of what I call world-class city making.

1.3. World-class city making

“The major contradiction of space arises from *the pulverization of space* by private property, the demand for interchangeable fragments...”
– Henri Lefebvre (2009: 189).

Everyone in Delhi talks about “world-class cities.” The Delhi Master Plan states that its goal is to transform Delhi into a “world-class city” (DDA, 2007), the Chief Minister of Delhi inaugurates every state ceremony with reference to this imagined future, and urban residents are constantly reminded of this impending transformation of self and city through the media's ongoing campaign to prepare them for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, hosted by Delhi. But, what does it mean to make a world-class city? According to A.K. Jain, “Making Delhi a world class city means building high quality sports facilities, creating a clean environment, and beautification of the city.”²⁷ As the Chief Secretary of Delhi said, “A world-class city means a slum-free city.”²⁸ The Minister of State for Finance and Planning proclaimed: “The urban planning of Delhi entails providing the city with adequate and quality urban and civic infrastructure to bring it on par with most developed metropolises of the world.”²⁹ As Baviskar (2010) writes, “We may not have been to Singapore or London, but we know when we are in the presence of something ‘world-class’. Like obscenity or divinity, ‘world-classness’ provokes a response from within, an instant shock of recognition.” Broadly construed, a world-class city is an idealized vision of a modern, privatized, and slum-free city assembled from transnationally circulating images of other “global

²⁷ Presentation by Mr. A.K. Jain at the “East Delhi Workshop on Development and the Delhi Master Plan 2021,” April 12, 2005.

²⁸ *New Delhi Pvt. Ltd.*, 2006, Hazards Centre Productions, 64 minutes.

²⁹ Quotation by Mr. A.K. Walia from “We want to make Delhi a world-class city,” Project Monitor, New Delhi, March 14, 2005, <http://www.projectsmonitor.com/detailnews.asp?newsid=8876>, accessed February 25, 2010.

cities.” It is thus extremely common to hear Delhi residents across the class spectrum say “Delhi will look like Paris,” where any other iconic city might just as easily stand in for Paris. It is in this sense that Chatterjee (2004: 143) writes that it is through “the intensified circulation of images of global cities through cinema, television, and the internet as well as through the Indian middle classes’ far greater access to international travel” that “[t]his idea of the new post-industrial globalized metropolis began to circulate.”

But, the “world-class city” is more than a mental image. It is also a set of material processes, part of a speculative project of attracting capital investment and fixing it in (and in turn fixing) the city. In India, this is a project largely executed through the valorization of the land market and by constructing urban real estate as an undervalued asset, ready to be tapped as a frontier of capitalist growth. It is thus no coincidence that state officials and politicians began articulating the goal of turning Delhi into a “slum-free city” and giving it a “world-class” look at the precise moment when the government sought to liberalize the land market by converting the “under-utilized” public land (including that occupied by slum dwellers) into commercially exploitable private property (DDA, 1997; also see A.K. Jain, 2003a).

Until the late 1990s, Delhi’s land was managed by a policy of socialized land. As codified in the Delhi Master Plan, this policy had three main components. First, according to the Delhi Development Act, the DDA was granted monopoly control over the acquisition, development and disposal of all urban land. This defined land in Delhi as *public* and was specifically initiated to prevent forms of land speculation that would impede new emigrants from accessing affordable housing. Second, Delhi land was administered through a leasehold-based tenure regime. Specifically defined against a private property regime, all land transactions in Delhi were thus monitored by the state, with the idea that land sales had to pass a minimum bar of being in “the public interest” in order to receive approval. Third, the Master Plan entitled the poor, as mentioned above, to twenty-five percent of residential units in the city.

In 1991, India began a gradual process of economic liberalization, devaluing the rupee, lifting import restrictions, privatizing state-run enterprises, and more generally dismantling the instruments of the command economy. In the late 1990s, once the goal of spurring economic growth and competing for foreign investment with other “emerging markets” had been solidified as both national and city-level policy priorities, land market liberalization began in Delhi.³⁰ The first step took place in 1998, when the Central Government repealed the Urban Land Ceiling Act, which had prevented investors from amassing large banks of unused land, lest they risk that land being seized by the state and re-allocated to the landless. Once the Urban Land Ceiling Act was repealed, landholders were able to assemble unlimited quantities of land, which would soon be made available for speculative transactions. Also in 1998, the Land Acquisition Act was modified, which drastically reduced the requirements for proof of “public good” in the exercise of eminent domain, opening the door for the state to acquire land that could be flipped and sold for commercial use. In 1999, the DDA launched its first commercial auctions, selling un- or under-used land (e.g., parks, vacant land, wedding grounds) that it had acquired for public purposes in order to generate revenue and to encourage capital investment in the city. In 2000, the DDA initiated its Freehold Conversion Program, which allowed leaseholders to obtain legal title to their land, thereby setting in place a system of private property relations—i.e., land could

³⁰ See Batra (2007) and Ghertner (2005) for further discussion of the conditions leading to this shift.

be bought and sold in an unregulated market—for the first time in the history of postcolonial Delhi. In 2001, the DDA passed a new Cooperative Housing Society Policy, which created a direct avenue by which land that the government had allocated to associations of private users at below-market rates could be sold on the market. In 2002, the DDA began drafting the Delhi Master Plan 2021 and advocated public-private partnerships in not just land development, but also in land acquisition.³¹ In 2003, the Chief Minister of Delhi proclaimed that the World Bank’s “vision document” would become the guideline for urban governance in Delhi, which defined cities as “the locus and engine of economic growth” and called for a rapid increase in foreign direct investment into the real estate sector. Finally, in April 2005 the central government opened the real estate and construction sectors to 100% foreign direct investment, which previously was capped at 40% and required Indian partners. When the Delhi Master Plan 2021 was finally approved in 2007, it cleared the books of the last remnants of the policy of socialized land by deleting the central passages mandating land reservations for the urban poor.

Since the mid-1990s, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the US Agency for International Development, and a host of private consultancies have been publishing studies and reports highlighting the central role of the land market in putting India on track to a high-growth future. By deregulating this market and inserting once public land into the marketplace, the Indian economy, so these institutions argued, would not only be able to mobilize a huge reserve of untapped capital, but also attract foreign investment—a necessary step to finance cities’ world-class infrastructure needs.³² The World Bank’s (2007: 11) India Urban Strategy Paper thus states that the pre-liberalized system of land administration “effectively ‘froze’ large blocks of the urban capital stock” and “a shortage of basic infrastructure capital.” It did not, however, acknowledge that this “frozen” land, outside of a formal system of property and therefore inaccessible to property developers, housed more than fifty percent of Delhi’s population in squatter and “unauthorized” settlements (GNCTD, 2004b). But, making Indian cities more “bankable” (World Bank, 2007: 3)—i.e., transforming urban land into capital—required aggressive urban land reform, the only means by which India would be able to meet and sustain high rates of GDP growth: the stated goal of the central government since the mid-1990s was maintaining an annual growth rate of at least eight percent. As the World Bank (2005: 3) writes, “[I]dle GOI [Government of India] land holdings or constraints on land usage in many cities – such as public land holdings or encroached infrastructure – often represent an enormous ‘implicit tax.’ This tax corresponds to the foregone imputed rent that could have accrued to residents of city.” Public land, so the story went, was undervalued and underutilized; this “forgone imputed rent” represented a new investment frontier, a new source of potential profit that could be

³¹ While such partnerships had been taking place in the realm of infrastructure development since the mid-1990s, once codified in the Master Plan, they would become the norm for urban development as such.

³² See Kamath and Baindur (2009) and Mahadevia (2003) for discussions of the widespread belief among Indian administrators in the importance of private investment in financing infrastructure development in India. Also see the World Bank’s (2005) argument in favor of private sector financing. A major aim in land market reform has to do with the World Bank and other International Financial Institutions’ aim of making Indian cities more creditworthy (“bankable”) so as to increase the flow of private sector debt into municipal government (Kamath & Baindur, 2009). Property formalization/rationalization also offers to increase the tax base of municipal governments (Lall, 2003), in some cases by more than 50% (Bank, 2005: 43), allowing them to better leverage private sector money.

capitalized (cf. N. Smith, 1996). Generating capital in the city, and thus national economic growth since urban centers contribute more than 60 percent of India's GDP (World Bank, 2005: 61), required privatizing urban land.

The McKinsey Global Institute, the economic research arm of McKinsey and Company, a management consulting firm that is one of the major players in economic reform debates in India, took this argument a step further when it published a more than 700-page, "bottom-up" study of "the barriers to productivity and output growth" in India (MGI, 2001: 1). Noting, in 2001, that India's GDP "is growing at a mere six per cent a year, compared to China's ten per cent," McKinsey argued that "with the right new policies, GDP growth of 10 per cent per year is within India's reach." Shunning common economic arguments about the causes of restricted growth rates, McKinsey's report, titled *India: The Growth Imperative*, claimed that product and land market barriers were the greatest hindrance to India's growth (ibid., 44), not the country's fiscal deficit, capital market distortions, restrictive labor laws, or poor infrastructure, as economists commonly argue. Emphasizing the need for land market deregulation, the report, whose advisory committee included high ranking members of India's Ministry of Finance, claimed that across all industries, "We found that product and land market barriers are four to five times more likely than government ownership to constrain output growth" (82). That is, the privatization of land was far more important than even the privatization of state-run industries. Overall, McKinsey calculated that "land market distortions account for close to 1.3 per cent of lost [GDP] growth a year" (7). These distortions included unclear ownership, counterproductive taxation, and inflexible zoning, rent and tenancy laws. Boosting its overall argument, the report gave the example of the retail sector, asserting that "allowing FDI [foreign direct investment] and removing land market barriers will allow retail supermarkets to increase productivity more than four-fold from the current 20 per cent to almost 90 per cent of US levels in 10 years" (69). It further showed that 75 percent of the barrier to labor productivity in the construction sector was caused by land market distortions (111).

One of McKinsey's major recommendations logically extended from this analysis: to make land procurement easier for private firms, which would increase investment and competition in *all* economic sectors. It further called for "a systematic onslaught against product and labor market regulations, coupled with complete privatization," which together, it said, "will allow India to achieve a growth rate of 10 per cent a year" (182). The sentiment that land use laws stifled urban development was (and still is) widely shared by the real estate industry, which reads the state's policies to protect the poor from displacement from public land as a misplaced subsidy that deters the true driver of poverty reduction: growth. As Rajiv Singh, the Vice Chairman of DLF—India's largest developer, which also built the DLF Emporio mall shown in Figure 1—announced:

The whole system was not and still is not geared to rapid provisioning of infrastructure. There's too much political freedom, too many legal rights, too much media. By contrast, I was in Shanghai recently and one day passed a bunch of huts beside the road. The next day they were all gone. The third day there were

a bunch of guys rolling out sod and planting trees. And on the fourth day they inaugurated a park. In India they first debate everything.³³

DLF, originally named Delhi Lease and Finance, had purchased large tracts of land in Delhi in the wake of Indian independence, turning some into elite residential colonies to meet growing housing demand and holding others for future use. The principles of socialized land introduced into the first Master Plan, some argue, were motivated by the speculative practices and growing power of DLF in land development in Delhi,³⁴ and DLF's return as the largest developer in Delhi today marks nothing less than the reversal of early efforts to curb speculative land practices.

In a more technocratic register than Singh's flippant call to replace slum hutments with parks, McKinsey justified the need for capital generation via land privatization through a diagram entitled "international benchmarks for investment rates," which it used to imply that India's relatively low rate of GDP growth (5.8 percent) through the 1990s was related to its low level of investment as a percentage of overall GDP (24.5 percent). China (32.9 percent), Indonesia (27.5 percent), and other "emerging markets" on a higher growth trajectory, it showed, had much higher rates of investment. Increasing investment, and foreign direct investment in particular, was the strategy to increase GDP, and privatization of the land market was one of the most important strategies to bring this about. A.K. Jain echoed this sentiment when he said, "Until land is used as a resource, we won't achieve the goal of planned development, meaning a city free of slums."³⁵ The World Bank's *India 2025* report elaborates (World Bank, 2007: 2): "A rapid rise in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) will be needed to finance the domestic saving-investment gap. The target is to increase this three times from the current level." It is in this light that the abovementioned land market reforms should be seen as efforts to transform land into a new financial instrument: real estate.

But, in addition to creating the conditions through which investors could access the land market (i.e., its financialization), constructing this market as one ripe for high growth required the mobilization of new speculative discourses. Markets run on hype and fear as much as "fundamentals" and, as in all speculative enterprises, "profit must be imagined before it can be extracted; the possibility of economic performance must be conjured like a spirit to draw an audience of potential investors" (Tsing, 2005: 57). How was a high growth future conjured for the land market and the Indian economy more generally? What object was inserted into the narrative of growth that would draw in an audience of investors?

1.4. Conjuring the world-class future

Conjuring a world-class future requires putting in place a compelling urban imaginary that will attract foreign capital, encourage rising valuations of existing capital stock, *and* produce a

³³ "Putting a roof over India: An interview with the country's biggest developer," *The McKinsey Quarterly*, November 2007.

³⁴ Personal communication with Dr. Sanjay Srivastava, who is doing historical research on the transition from the Delhi Improvement Trust, a colonial institution, through the first decades of the Delhi Development Authority.

³⁵ See note 27.

citizenry desirous of cities in which they can enjoy the benefits of world-class consumption and lifestyle. As economists George Akerlof and Robert Shiller (2009: 55) write, “high confidence tends to be associated with inspirational stories, stories about new business initiatives, tales of how others are getting rich.” Indian GDP is overwhelmingly driven by private consumption; it made up approximately sixty percent of GDP in the mid-2000s, a much higher number than in other developing countries, like China (~ forty percent).³⁶ The most logical means to construct compelling growth stories that are favorable to long-term capital appreciation thus lies in depicting long run increases in domestic consumption. Herein enters the role of the middle class and a now dominant narrative of socio-economic transformation in India. The story—told consistently in newspaper accounts, by politicians, and by economists banking on the Indian boom—goes something like this: India has historically been a poor country, with crippling high rates of poverty leaving most of the population living hand-to-mouth. In 1991, India began a gradual process of economic reforms, leading to a jump in economic growth for much of the 1990s and an additional boost in growth by the mid-2000s (exceeding ten percent in 2007-2008), which led it to surpass all other nations except China. With growth, so too has come a decline in poverty, and the poor are gradually morphing into a new middle class that is poised to catapult India into the ranks of the world’s economic leaders. As one report proclaims, “The Indian economy is growing from strength to strength. The fast-paced economic growth is bringing about a change in India’s socio-economic fabric. It is creating more jobs, fuelling aspirations and leading consumers to spend more” (Shukla, 2007: 5). Rising middle class consumption in such accounts both symbolizes the positive effects of economic liberalization and serves as the anticipated driver of future growth. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh invoked the booming middle class in an effort to woo Saudi investors in 2007 when he said: “Today, India’s economy is on the move. For three years, we have witnessed growth rates of between 7.0% and 8.5%. A growing market, with a large middle class, abundant raw materials, highly trained and skilled manpower, especially in the field of science and technology, is thirsting for new investment” (cited in Fernandes, 2009: 224).

Leading the charge in narrating an impending explosion in the growth of the middle class are a series of proprietary datasets that construct scenarios relating India’s class composition to GDP growth. Most prominent among these is the National Council of Applied Economic Research’s (NCAER) report called “The Great Indian Middle Class,” which is based on a marketing survey of 300,000 households that divides the Indian population into eight income groups called “the Deprived, Aspirers, Seekers, Strivers, Near Rich, Clear Rich, Sheer Rich, and Super Rich” (Searle, 2008: 54). The NCAER’s rhetorical slight of hand should already be evident, as four of the eight group names include the word “rich,” three signify upward mobility, and only one (“the deprived”) suggests poverty. While the data backing this report are proprietary, I found summary results on the NCAER webpage, which I have reproduced as Figure 3. In 2005, the four categories of the “rich” added up to only 0.8 percent of total households, making clear the irony of the NCAER’s imagined class hierarchy. Despite the almost complete absence of “rich” people in India today, the NCAER’s decision to switch away from standard income quintiles or deciles (i.e., evenly distributed categories) and to depict most class categories as yet-to-be-filled and “rich” represents the first of what would be a series of rhetorical steps to imagine an upwardly mobile future. One of the NCAER report’s main findings thus reads: “The rapid rise in incomes will lead to an even faster increase in demand for consumer durables... What will power this is

³⁶ Economic Survey of India, 2008-2009, Ministry of Finance, Government of India.

the increased usage in different income classes coupled with the rise in the size of the Great Indian Middle Class” (NCAER, 2005). Yet, the middle class—which the NCAER defines as the “seekers” and “strivers,” or households that earn between 200,000 and 1,000,000 rupees per year (~4,400-22,000 real US dollars in 2000)—made up just over eight percent of the population in 2005. If the growth potential of the Indian economy is largely gauged by future middle class demand, and if the middle class is but a small minority of the overall Indian population, as these data suggest, then how can the Indian growth story sustain itself?

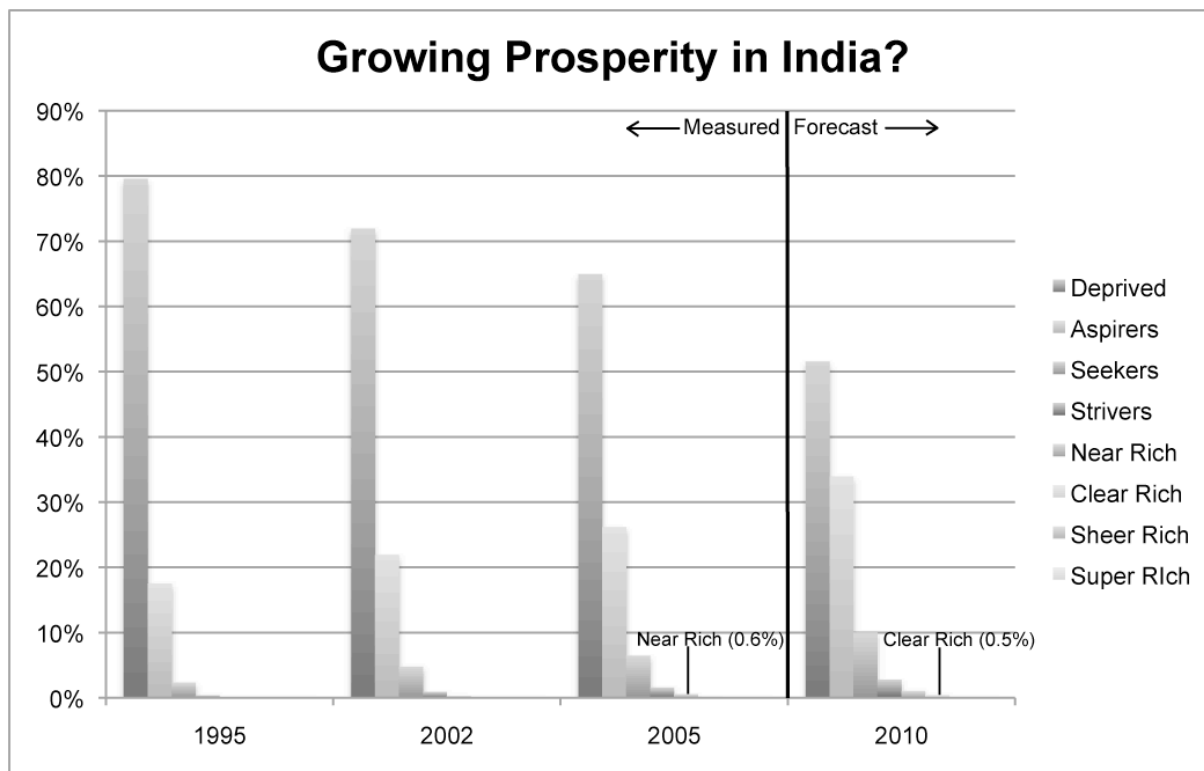


Figure 3. The NCAER’s representation of “The Great Indian Middle Class.” Annual household income: Deprived < 90,000 rupees; Aspirers = 90,000–199,000; Seekers = 200,000–499,999; Strivers = 500,000–999,999; Near Rich = 1–2 million; Clear Rich = 2–5 million; Sheer Rich = 5–10 million; Super Rich >10 million. The four categories of the “rich” make up less than 1% of the Indian population in 2005, but nonetheless garner half of the income categories. Data reproduced from NCAER (2005).

In 2007, McKinsey and Co. fed the NCAER’s and other demographic data through an econometric model to predict India’s class distribution in 2025. Its report, called “Tracking the growth of India’s middle class,” claimed that “over the next two decades, the country’s middle class will grow from about 5 percent of the population to more than 40 percent and create the world’s fifth-largest consumer market” (MGI, 2007b: 51).³⁷ It went on to say: “The same furious energy that made India a world-class provider of software and business services is creating a huge urban middle class” (ibid.). McKinsey simplified the NCAER income categories by renaming the four categories of “rich” into a single group that it termed “Globals,” but did so in a way that generated results even more favorable to a rising middle class. Whereas the NCAER had found that the “deprived” were 65 percent of the population in 2005, McKinsey claimed that

³⁷ This report is a summary of a larger McKinsey study (MGI, 2007a) called *‘Bird of Gold’: The Rise of India’s Consumer Class*.

“In 1985 93 percent of the population lived on a household income of less than 90,000 rupees per year [the “deprived”], or about a dollar per person per day; by 2005 that proportion had been cut nearly in half, to 54 percent. We project that if India can achieve 7.3 percent annual growth over the next 20 years, 465 million more people will be spared a life of extreme deprivation” (54).

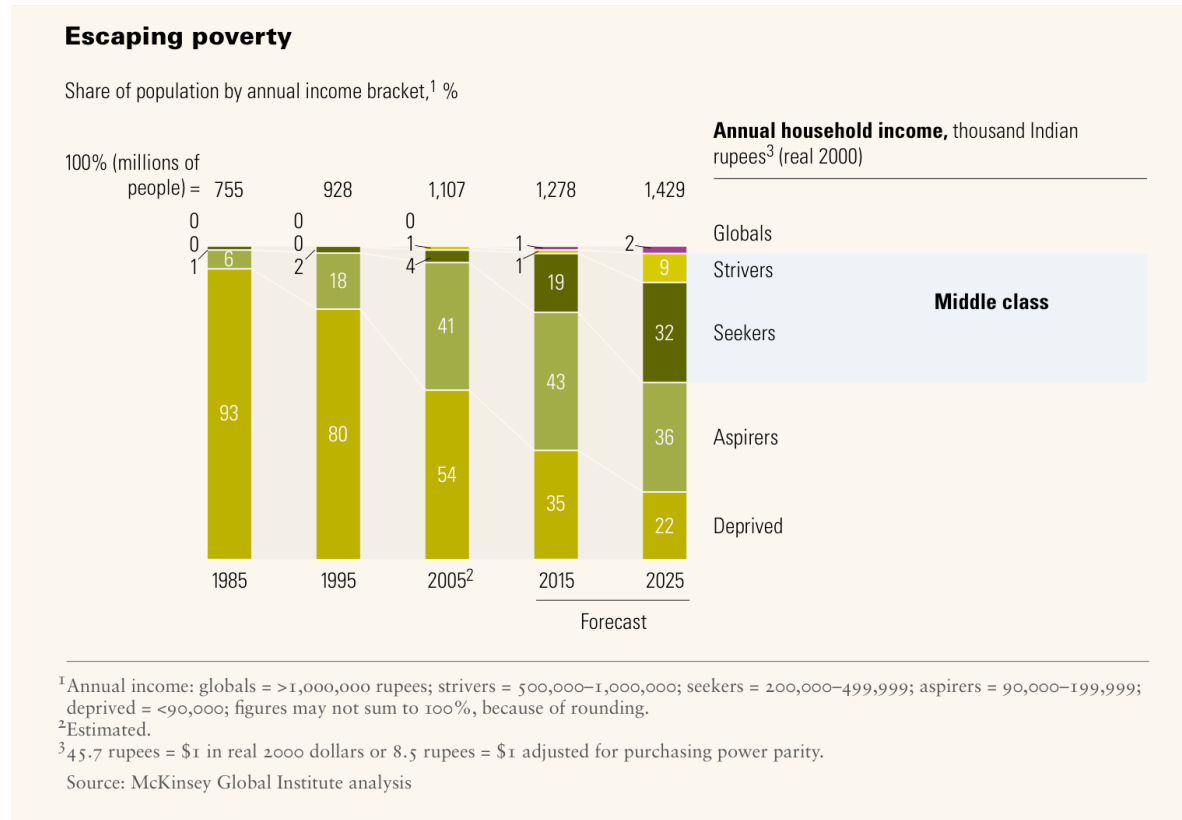


Figure 4. Conjuring away the poor. Source: McKinsey Global Institute (2007b: 55).

As Figure 4 shows, McKinsey predicts that this 465 million people will move up the imagined income ladder, swelling the ranks of the middle class and leaving only 22 percent of the population “deprived” by 2025. According to this model, then, the vast pool of low-income people in India represents a future investment opportunity: poor people are portrayed as future rich people. As McKinsey writes, investment “opportunities will blossom as millions of first-time buyers step up to cash registers” causing aggregate consumer demand to quadruple by 2025 (52). Incorporating the NCAER’s definition of the middle class (i.e., the “seekers” and “strivers”), McKinsey’s model finds:

By 2025 a continuing rise in personal incomes will spur a tenfold increase [in the middle class] enlarging the middle class to about 583 million people, or 41 percent of the population... About 400 million Indian city dwellers—a group nearly 100 million people larger than the current population of the United States—will belong to households with a comfortable standard of living (MGI, 2007b: 56-7).

According to McKinsey, the ranks of the “Aspirers” and “Seekers,” those households earning between 90,000 and 500,000 rupees per year, had swelled to 45 percent of the population by 2005, whereas the NCAER had found only 32 percent. Despite the fact that the NCAER data includes estimates for 2005, McKinsey chose to ignore this most recent time point and instead deployed its own 2005 numbers. The rapid fall in the size of the “deprived” from 1995-2005 allows McKinsey to project future trends, which indicate that India’s poor masses are on the verge of transforming into a new consuming class. As Searle (2008) notes, the NCAER and McKinsey data has been widely reproduced in the media and in real estate prospectuses through the mid-2000s, spinning this imagined demographic transformation as one of India’s growth “fundamentals,” what *BusinessWeek* calls a “seismic wave of income growth.”³⁸ And, according to investment numbers, the conjuring of a future middle class has worked.

By 2007, what economists Ila Patnaik and Ajay Shah (borrowing from Keynes) call the “animal spirits of private corporations” had bitten, sending the share of investment in overall GDP growth up to forty percent (from twenty-five percent in 2001), with the influx of foreign direct investment making up a staggering sixteen percent of GDP growth.³⁹ The real estate sector has been on the forefront of this trend, accounting for twenty-six percent of FDI in 2007,⁴⁰ with economists even describing the possibility of “mak[ing] India a property-driven stock market.”⁴¹ In the wake of DLF launching the largest initial public offering (IPO) in the history of India in 2007, the company’s chairman said:

I would go so far as to say that the institutional investment from overseas has been of such high quality that it is clear that global investors, knowing fully well that the growth of India is closely linked to real estate and infrastructure development in the country, have chosen your Company to express their faith in the future of the Indian economy...[and this] reflects investor confidence in the DLF growth story.⁴²

According to Jones Lang LaSalle, one of the world’s largest real estate firms, India is the cutting edge in global real estate investment: “total retail mall stock has been doubling every year, from a meagre one million sq ft in 2002 to a staggering 40 million sq ft in 2007 and an estimated 60 million sq ft by the end of 2008,” “office rental rates went up almost 73% from 07-8, and capital

³⁸ Referring to the McKinsey study, the article reports: “As the seismic wave of income growth rolls across Indian society, the character of consumption will change dramatically over the next 20 years,” Farrel, D. and E. Beinhocker, “Next big spenders: India’s middle class,” *BusinessWeek*, May 19, 2007.

³⁹ Patnaik, Ila and Ajay Shah, “India in the great recession,” *The Financial Express*, New Delhi, April 15, 2009.

⁴⁰ Jones Lang and LaSalle, “Strengthening India’s Capital Market- Rising Foreign Direct Investment in Real Estate,” *Economic Insight*, May 2007.

⁴¹ Abraham, Rajesh, “DLF IPO to make India a property-driven stock market,” *The Hindu Businessline*, New Delhi, April 26, 2006. The real estate index of the Bombay Stock Exchange, for example, doubled in just ten months after the government liberalized FDI norms in 2005. Jones Lang LaSalle, “The New Investment Mantra – Understanding Risk and Returns in the Indian Real Estate Sector,” April 2006, pg. 6.

⁴² “DLF Limited, Speech by the Chairman Mr. K.P. Singh at the 42nd General Meeting,” printed in *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, October 1, 2007.

values went up 72.4%.”⁴³ Anuj Puri, Chairman of Jones Lang LaSalle’s Indian subsidiary, said: “On an average, we’ve been growing over the last three years by 60% to 70%... Even as of today, there is [a] 20 million dwelling units shortfall on the residential, so the pent-up demand is huge. That needs to be caught up.”⁴⁴ Where does this estimation of “pent-up demand” come from? Again, it is based on anticipated future demand, “an ever burgeoning middle class” and what are called “favourable demographics,” described as an “emerging youthful, urban and relatively affluent Vanguard Class that is the driving force behind consumer spending... This group includes circa 120 million people and continues to expand.”⁴⁵

1.5. Statistical conjuring, mythic trend lines

“A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality: it is... a perceptible absence.” –Barthes (1972: 142-3)

DLF, in the above quotation, notes investor confidence in what it calls its “growth story,” while I have been using the word “conjure” to describe the fabulous reinvention of the poor as a future elite. To conjure: “To invoke by supernatural power, to effect by magic or jugglery;” “To bring, get, move, convey, as by magic.”⁴⁶ What is the conjurer’s trick in these speculative stories? The premise of the NCAER and McKinsey reports is a downward sloping poverty curve, for it is the transformation of the poor into the rich that pads the promise of a sustained profit margin and ever-rising land prices. India’s official poverty estimates, published by the Planning Commission, also read a gradual increase in income levels across India, with the percentage of Indians living below the poverty line falling from 44.7 percent in 1985 to 36.2 percent in 1995 and all the way down to 27.5 percent in 2005.⁴⁷ But, as the agricultural economist Utsa Patnaik (2008) argues, this is an act of “statistical trickery”: “No amount of full-page advertisements by the government in newspapers... can alter the fact that in reality... [t]his country remains a Republic of Hunger.” Patnaik has been arguing in recent years that the Planning Commission has abandoned its own standards of poverty estimation to conceal what is in fact an increase in the incidence of poverty throughout India during the years of economic reform. To understand the

⁴³ Jones, Lang and LaSalle Press release, Mumbai, April 22, 2008, <http://www.jllm.co.in/India/en-gb/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?ItemID=7307> accessed on September 10, 2008.

⁴⁴ “Interview with Anuj Puri,” Bloomberg UK, air date: November 6, 2008, 4 minutes. Accessed on September 10, 2008 from <http://www.jllm.co.in/India/EN-GB/Pages/BloombergInterview.aspx>. Also see the report by Merrill Lynch, which in 2006 estimated that “the Indian realty sector will grow from \$12 billion in 2005 to \$90 billion by 2015,” accessed from <http://www.terrapinn.com/2007/reiwin/> on March 3, 2009.

⁴⁵ Jones Lang LaSalle Meghraj. (2007). “The Geography of Opportunity: The ‘India 50’,” World Winning Cities Series. Such depictions suggest that it is the imagined middle class that sustains “the regulating fiction” (Robinson, 2002: 546) of the world-class future.

⁴⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, 1989.

⁴⁷ National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Fourth Report 1996-97 & 1997-98, Volume 1, <http://www.indiastat.com/economy/8/incidenceofpoverty/221/stats.aspx> accessed on March 2, and 2010 and Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2090, dated March 16, 2005.

basis of her claim, we must briefly foray into the methods of poverty estimation in India, for it is only with a basic understanding of nutritional norms that we can begin to see the trick by which India's hundreds of millions of poor people are read as an opportunity for investment.

Since the early 1970s, poverty estimates in India have been based on establishing a poverty line defined as the level of expenditure per capita per month spent on all goods and services whose food expenditure component provided an energy intake of 2,100 and 2,400 calories per person per day in urban and rural areas, respectively (Patnaik, 2007: 173). Those spending below the poverty line are considered poor. While this is obviously a minimalist definition of poverty, including no norms for non-food expenditure (e.g., shelter, clothing, education), it is the standard the Government of India has used to define poverty for forty years, and in this line—in its shape, in who lives below and above it, and in its future trajectory—lies the image of a foretold future. Every five years or so, the National Sample Survey Organization surveys hundreds of thousands of households across India, measuring total household expenditure and total food consumption, with smaller-scale surveys conducted annually. These surveys present a population distribution according to per capita monthly expenditure groups, and because they also present the calorie equivalents of the food consumed, they record the calorie intake of each expenditure group per person per day. Such data are compiled for India's major cities and at the state and national level. They allow for a simple observation of the percentage of households whose monthly per capita consumption expenditure is not enough to meet the 2,400 and 2,100 calorie norms.

In 1974, the Planning Commission used this very approach to establish rural and urban poverty lines of 49 and 57 rupees per person per month, respectively. This established the incidence of poverty, which was 56 percent across India. The National Sample Survey has been completed annually since 1974, with the most recent large-sample survey completed in 2005. However, rather than following this method of “direct observation,” the Planning Commission simply applies a consumer price index adjustment to the 1974 poverty line, assuming that the quantities people consumed then, and thus the pattern of consumer expenditure, has remained unchanged with time. This method of “indirect estimation,” as Patnaik calls it, leads to widely divergent poverty numbers from those derived from the method of direct observation, as it fails to consider changes in consumption patterns caused by such things as a decline in common property resources and payment in kind, both of which supplement household consumption (Patnaik, 2007: 139). This has resulted in a delinking of official poverty estimates from the Planning Commission's own nutrition norm, meaning the official poverty line is no longer established in relation to the state's own consumption standard. Official poverty trends, as a result, now reflect only the changing price of food, not households' ability to access it. Patnaik, using the direct observation method drawn from the National Sample Survey, finds that the official 2005 poverty line provides enough money to consume only 1,820 and 1,835 calories per person per day in rural and urban areas, respectively, which is far below the 2,400 and 2,100 calorie norms (Patnaik, 2008). It is in this context that she calls official poverty numbers a “statistical poverty reduction via clandestine reduction of the calorie norm” (Patnaik, 2007: 142). That is, in India today, there is a large and growing percentage of the population that is malnourished and *not* considered poor.

After acquiring the National Sample Survey data between 1983 and 2006, I calculated the poverty rate in India using the direct observation method, which I compared with the official

estimates of the Planning Commission. I did my own calculation instead of reproducing Patnaik's (2007, 2008) data because she provides poverty estimates only for the large-sample years (1994, 2000, 2005), whereas I wanted to present annual results on the same terms as McKinsey, whose charts I will return to in a moment. The results of my calculation, presented in Figure 5, show that poverty in India, according to official nutritional norms, has been steadily increasing over the past twenty years. Whereas official estimates show that poverty numbers have fallen from more than forty percent in the early 1980s to just over twenty percent by 2005, direct observation shows that the percentage of Indians with too little food has jumped from just over fifty percent to eighty percent over the same period. Whereas the Planning Commission finds that only thirty-six percent of India lived below the poverty line in 1994, the direct observation method shows that sixty-seven percent were in poverty. For 2005, the official poverty line in real 2000 rupees was 320 for rural areas and 453 for urban areas, whereas meeting minimum nutritional norms actually required 800 rupees for rural areas and 782 rupees for urban areas.⁴⁸ The official estimate thus shows that only 27.5 percent of Indians live below the poverty line, whereas direct observation shows that eighty-one percent of Indians do not meet minimum nutritional norms.⁴⁹ In 2005, based on my calculation, the indirect estimation employed by the Planning Commission invisibilized approximately *590 million people* who did not eat enough food every day. While economists have begun to hypothesize that declining calorie intake does not imply a decline in overall nutrition (Deaton & Dreze, 2009), the fact remains that the Planning Commission defines poverty in terms of the same minimum calorie norms it set in 1973, and, according to its own definition of poverty, it has conjured away a large and growing population living with too little food intake.

The political implications of this “statistical trickery” are massive, including its use in justifying a reduction in food subsidies to the poor, but let us now turn back to the conjuring of the middle class, a project in which the Planning Commission took deliberate part when it wrote in its *India Vision 2020* report:

The compounded effect of achieving the targeted annual GDP growth rate of 8.5 to 9 per cent over the next 20 years would result in a quadrupling of the real per capita income and almost eliminating the percentage of Indians living below the poverty line. This will raise India's rank from around 11th today to 4th from the

⁴⁸ It is difficult to determine why rural monthly per capita expenditure is greater than it is for urban areas, but part of the reason is that the consumer price index for rural areas rose more steeply through the 2000s than in urban areas, making 100 urban rupees relatively stronger than 100 rural rupees when adjusted to 2000 numbers. The higher 2,400-calorie norm in rural areas should also be considered in this regard. Nominal 2005 expenditure numbers in urban India (930) remain higher than in rural areas (890). Also, the expenditure group just below the 2,400-calorie rural norm in the NSS tables consumes 2,380 calories, or almost enough food, whereas the expenditure group just below the 2,100-calorie urban norm consumes 2,024 and the next expenditure group, which spends 925 real 2000 rupees per person per month consumes only 2,110 calories per person per day (barely over the norm), meaning the actual poverty line in urban areas should be somewhere closer to 925 than 800. Patnaik (2008) finds the rural and urban poverty line to be 710 and 840 real 2000 rupees, respectively. I did not receive a reply from her after requesting information on how she derived these numbers.

⁴⁹ See Meenakshi and Visvanathan (2003) as well as Patnaik (2007: 148) for a discussion of why the National Institute of Nutrition considers calorie intake an accurate proxy of overall nutritional status in India.

top in 2020 among 207 countries given in the World Development Report in terms of GDP. Further, in terms of per capita GDP measured in ppp [purchasing power parity] India's rank will rise by a minimum of 53 ranks from the present 153 to 100. This will mean India will move from a low income country to an upper middle income country. This is a very real possibility for us to seize upon and realise (GOI, 2002: 2).⁵⁰

While the report briefly acknowledges that, “in spite of enormous progress in food production, nearly half the country’s population still suffers from chronic under-nutrition and malnutrition,” it proceeds to divorce hunger from poverty in presenting a glorious Indian future in which poverty is no longer an economic problem.

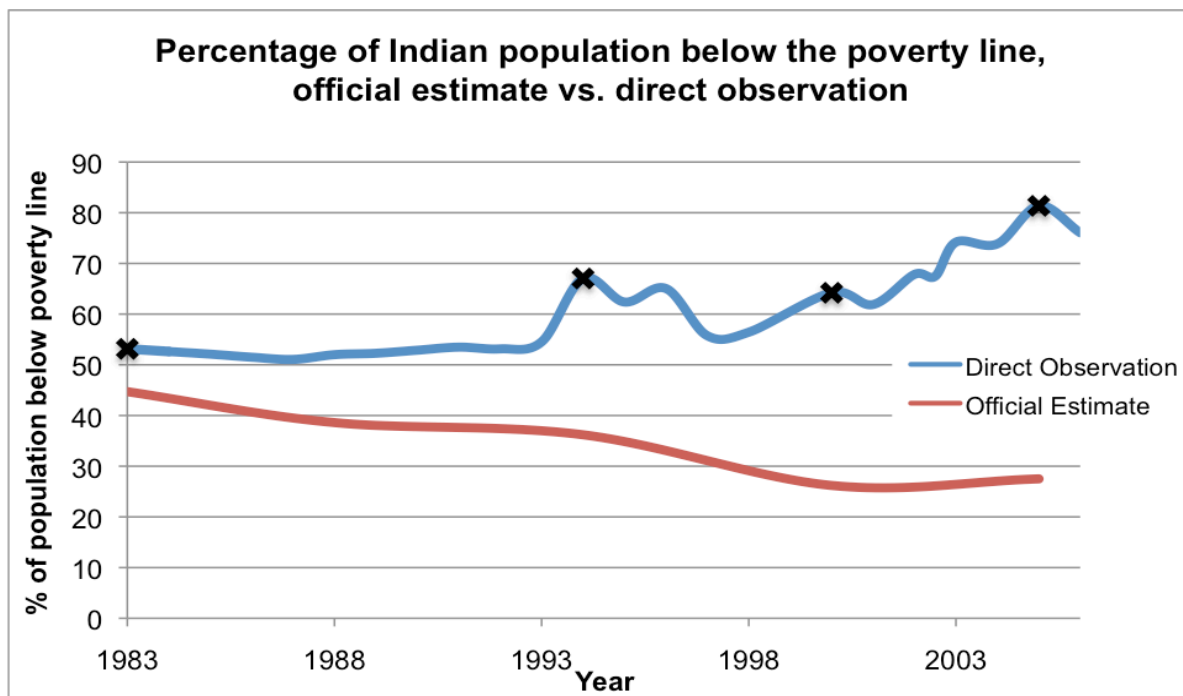


Figure 5. Has poverty been increasing or decreasing through India’s reform years? The data points labeled with an “X” are the large-sample survey years, corresponding to National Sample Survey (NSS) rounds 38, 50, 55 and 61, and are thus more reliable than the other data. The official estimate line is based on data from 1983, 1988, 1994, 2000 and 2005.⁵¹

McKinsey, banking on the Government of India’s official stance that poverty is on the decline, advances this argument even more aggressively, constructing what it calls the “deprived” as a

⁵⁰ This message has been repeated regularly by the Planning Commission, as when Virmani (2006: 8) extrapolates the presumed fall in the rate of poverty (1.08% decline per annum) forward to claim: “poverty in India would be eliminated by 2020, when India would be a Middle Income Country.”

⁵¹ A note to explain the large upswing in the poverty rate from 1993 to 1994: While it may be true that poverty increased drastically at this moment, which is when the agrarian sector started to be liberalized in India, it is more likely that this pattern is a product of the income categories used by the NSSO: using broad expenditure groups with a fixed poverty line means that year-to-year rates can jump drastically if one expenditure group sees even a small drop in caloric intake from, for example, just above to just below the poverty line.

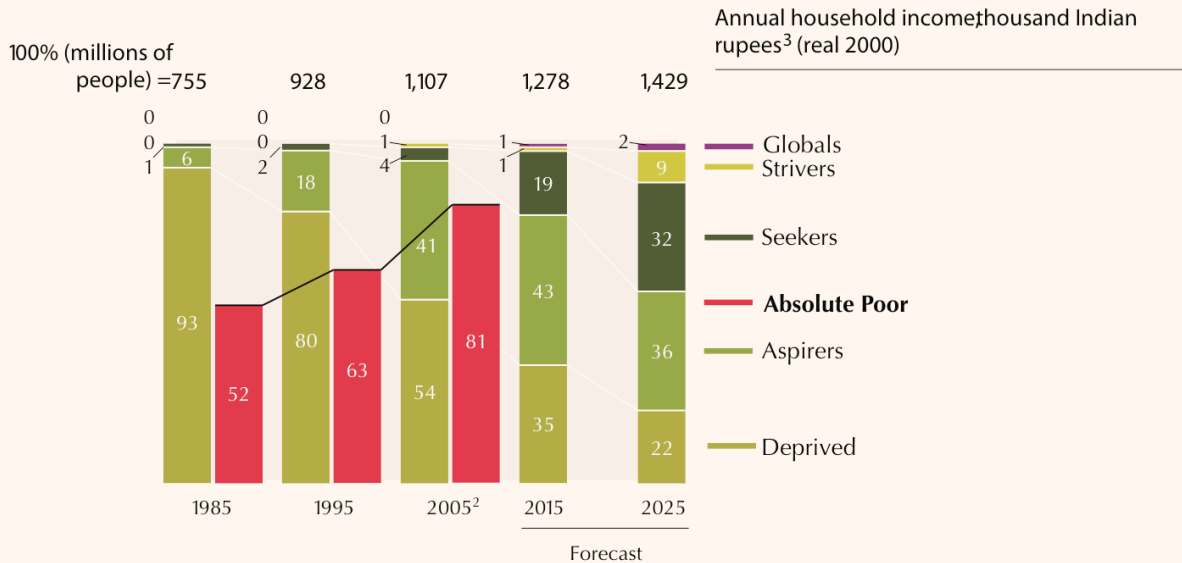
holdover from an earlier era—a remnant of an inefficient, planned economy. The National Sample Survey, the largest survey of households across India, shows that the era of economic reforms has, in contrast, led to a massive increase in poverty in the country. The rise in farmer suicides, the burgeoning population of urban slum dwellers, the decline in per capita food grain absorption (Patnaik, 2007: 124-5), and the persistence of high rates of stunted growth in children in India all confirm this startling trend, yet this is not the story of 21st century India recited in government reports, media stories, or emerging market mutual fund prospectuses. What are the real prospects of such a middle class future?

To visualize the mythic nature of McKinsey’s celebration of India’s middle class future, I plotted the percentage of Indians who do not meet minimum nutritional norms on top of the McKinsey chart depicting India’s “escape from poverty” (see Figure 4).⁵² As Figure 6 shows, the percentage of what I have labeled the “absolute poor,” i.e., the under- or malnourished, in India makes clear the image work that goes into the narrative of middle class India. The promise of a middle class future, presented by McKinsey as a natural demographic trajectory driven by steady economic growth, appears nothing but a myth when we consider rising poverty in India today.

⁵² While not directly comparable, one can presume that those living in extreme poverty (i.e., those unable to meet daily calorie intake norms) spend most of their earned income within the sample period of thirty days on which the National Sample Survey is based: why would someone save money if they are hungry? The “deprived” represent households that earn 90,000 rupees per year, which comes out to a per capita monthly income of approximately 1,500 rupees. This is more than twice the expenditure-based poverty line in rural and urban areas in 2005. This suggests that even a doubling in earnings would leave most Indians locked in McKinsey’s “deprived” income group, with nowhere near the consumptive power of the middle class.

Escaping poverty

Share of population by annual income bracket,¹ %



¹ Annual income: globals = > 1,000,000 rupees; strivers = 500,000–1,000,000; seekers = 200,000–499,999; aspirers = 90,000–199,999; deprived = <90,000; figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.

² Estimated.

³ 45.7 rupees = \$1 in real 2000 dollars or 8.5 rupees = \$1 adjusted for purchasing power parity.

Source: McKinsey Global Institute analysis

Figure 6. Deconstructing growth. Estimation of the percentage of absolute poor in India overlaid upon McKinsey's (MGI, 2007) mythic presentation of a future without poverty.

While McKinsey's data (provided largely by the NCAER) are proprietary and based on a marketing survey soliciting verbal responses from those interviewed, the National Sample Survey is based on a massive field-level assessment that directly observes hundreds of thousands of households' actual consumption and expenditure patterns. Yet, the measure of malnourishment or the observation of real purchasing power do not figure in the magical incantations of middle class growth found throughout state and public discourse, for this is an image not divorced from reality, but productive of its own reality. Another McKinsey chart, labeled "winds of change," represents an even more dramatic effort to paint poverty as an anachronism. Focusing only on urban households, McKinsey suggests that the poor are already (as of 2005) a small minority of the urban population and that sometime around 2013 the largest income group in Indian cities will be the middle class (the "seekers"), when barely six percent of city dwellers will be "deprived." Using the direct observation method, I have included atop McKinsey's graphic the number of absolute poor in Indian cities between 1985 and 2006. The trend here yet again reveals the means by which the urban poor are falsely identified as an already emergent middle-income group in McKinsey's presentation. Whereas McKinsey claims that only thirteen percent of the urban population of India is "deprived" as of 2005, the method of "direct observation" indicates that more than forty percent live below the poverty line, a number that has steadily increased over the past twenty years.

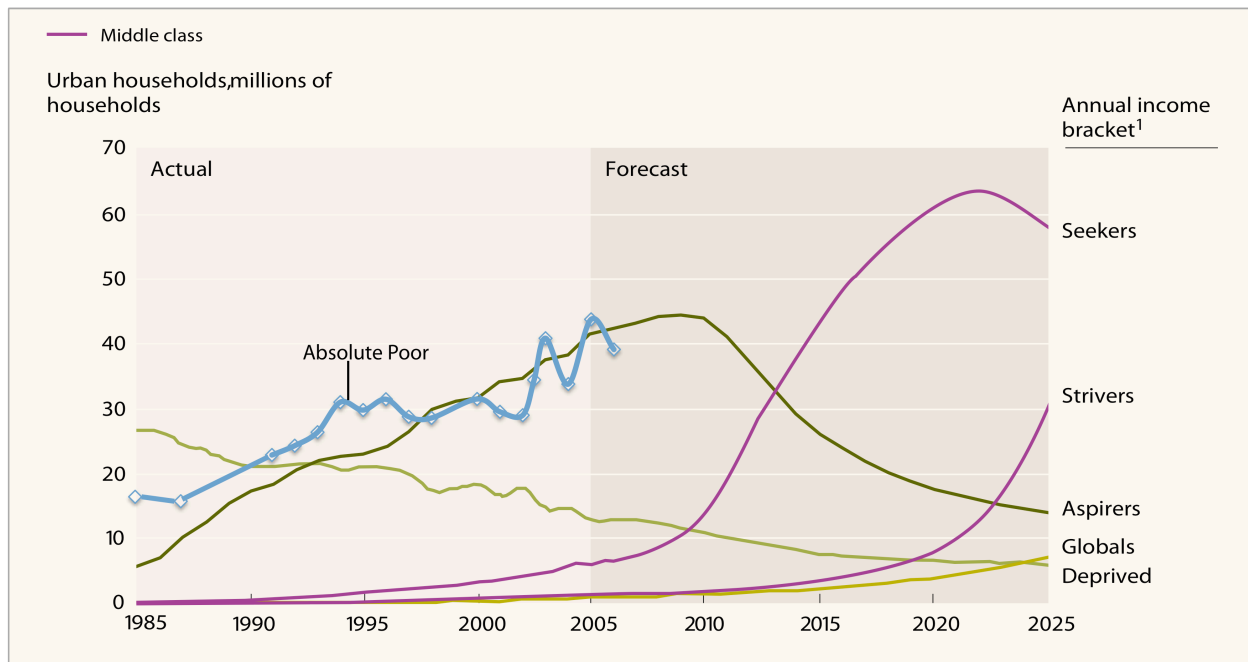


Figure 7. Waves of change, or more of the same? Calculation of number of “absolute poor” urban households plotted on top of McKinsey’s (MGI, 2007) depiction of the future income distribution of urban households.

While the central government claims that India “needs to reach an economic growth rate of at least 8% in order to significantly reduce the incidence of poverty” (Buckley, Singh, & Kalarickal, 2007: 2), these graphics and the rhetorical strategy of narrating an impending middle class future show that the physical and symbolic displacement of the poor—through the denial of their very existence and through the large-scale displacement of urban squatters to attract capital investment into “vacant land”—might better be read as a condition necessary to attain these rates of economic growth in the first place. The question of removing the poor would be one thing—a form of “silent violence” (Watts, 1983) driven by the goal of maximizing economic growth, regardless of the human cost. But, the narrative of world-class India, and especially of its world-class cities, is premised on an even more insidious equation: the poor not as obstacle, but asset; not the disappeared poor, but the consuming and entrepreneurial poor transforming themselves through the magic of economic growth. An article in *Newsweek* that appeared in February 2009, at the height of the global financial meltdown, for example, praised India’s potential to lead a global recovery on the backs of the consuming poor: “India boasts an unlikely growth driver all its own: legions of poor whose incomes have risen just enough in recent years to create powerful demands for basic goods and services... The idea that Indian backwardness is a plus may sound absurd... [But, s]uch a large population subsisting at so low an economic base is a powerful economic driver.”⁵³ As Searle (2008: 55) writes, this vision, common in real estate prospectuses and market projections, “manages to transform even the absence of development into a sign of possible growth. With this logic, any gap between India and other countries can be transformed into an opportunity for growth and an advertisement for investment.”

⁵³ Overdorf, Jason, “The boom from the bottom,” *Newsweek*, February 23, 2009.

Maintaining an influx of hundreds of billions of dollars of foreign direct investment, sustaining the speculative rise in land prices, and constructing economic reform and land market liberalization as a project in nation building all rely on the myth of economic mobility—the alienation of poverty measures from their original meaning and their re-deployment as a mythic image: the poor as the future rich, the signification of a positive trajectory without a causal or historical basis. This is what Barthes (1972: 125) means when he says myth is “speech stolen and restored,” for here the poverty line is detached from the content from which it arose, and its form (the relationship between time and well-being) is motivated for a different end, an end depicted as natural: growth. In myth, “meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment” (ibid.: 118); mythic speech and mythic graphics aim to transform meaning into naturalized form, to record “facts” but refuse explanations. This is the difference between *representing* reality and *signifying* it, for while one can unveil a false representation, there is no false signification, since it is not wedded to an original concept, but motivated as an essential fact in and of itself. The image of a world-class, middle-class dominated future is one such mythic signification. In India’s aspiring “world-class” cities, the suggestion that the middle class is *not* the most rapidly growing class would strike almost anyone as absurd: the urban form in these cities has already been constructed as a playground for consumption and tourism, and the media has already declared the English-speaking, air-conditioned car-driver the harbinger of “India rising.” As I will describe in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, how the poor appropriate this myth—and the diverse political technologies through which they are incorporated into discourses of the world-class future—is central to the project of world-class city making. Myth, as we shall see, works through a “ceaseless, untiring solicitation,” an “insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image” (Barthes, 1972: 155). This is a story, then, not just of displacement, but of aspirations and desires: how habits are directed, norms inhabited, and self-transformation anticipated.

But before elaborating, let us return to the case of Delhi, which is widely celebrated as India’s wealthiest city and leader in real estate development, to briefly give greater material specificity to the speculative practices motivating the myth of the world-class city. According to Searle (2008: 51), the cost of an apartment in Gurgaon—Delhi’s satellite city where DLF moved in the 1960s and which has been on the forefront of India’s real estate boom—is “100 times more than what the average [mean, not median] Delhiite makes in a year.” While the Planning Commission pegs the 2005 poverty rate at just under fifteen percent in Delhi, fifty-four percent of Delhi is actually poor, according to the direct observation method.⁵⁴ If in Delhi, as in the rest of India, the middle class remains but a small minority (if the mythic image of a world-class city does not yet have a corresponding content), then who is buying the thousands of new offices, condos, and shop floors being constructed every year? Searle’s extensive research on the real estate sector in the National Capital Region (which includes Delhi as well as Gurgaon and Delhi’s other satellite cities) shows that “some of the apartments in completed towers have been purchased by wealthy Indians, but a good number lie empty, bought by speculators, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) living in Dubai or London, or by the developer himself” (Searle, 2008: 51).

⁵⁴ Calculation by author, using the method described in the Methodological Appendix and table 3u of NSS report number 513. The New York Times also reports that “42.2 percent of children under 5 are stunted, or too short for their age, and 26 percent are underweight” in Delhi. See Sengupta, Somini, “As India grows, child hunger persists,” March 13, 2009.

The promise of a world-class future is what sustains the material transformation of the present, and the radical restructuring of Delhi's cityscape sustains the aspirational promise that the world-class city will produce a world-class population ready and able to benefit from world-class property development. Empty income projections are producing empty apartment buildings; invisibilized poverty trends contribute to the invisibilization of the replacement of low-income land uses (e.g., slums) by properties few can afford. Even in the wake of the ongoing global economic meltdown, real estate investors remain hot on India, for as long as the future Indian middle class can be conjured into economic prospectuses and shareholder reports, the upswing in the income curve (and the downswing in the poverty line) will secure speculative investment money. As one annual report for a real estate fund read in late 2009: "the current velocity of growth in the world's emerging markets should provide significant opportunities in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and other countries, where 6% to 8% plus GDP growth should enable middle-class expansion and underpin demand for real estate."⁵⁵ While Delhi saw a mild drop in real estate prices at the peak of the global recession (seven percent across all zones from 2008 to 2009), prices are still more than twenty percent above their 2007 levels, and all signs indicate that the real estate sector will continue to heat up as investors bank on the story of the great Indian middle class.⁵⁶

This dissertation is about the aesthetic politics of a world-class future, the way in which such a future it is conjured into existence, codified as a distinct regime of planning, deployed and circulated through diverse technologies of government, received and practiced as a normative framework for self-government, and lived and contested in everyday life. In scene 3, Gopal described his faith in the integrity of an imagined map, a faith that his potential displacement was part of a broader project of urban improvement—that his eviction would somehow make the city a better place and maybe, just maybe, a better place *for him*. Investor confidence in India's growth story too is based on a faith, a faith that land values will steadily climb along with the rise of India's consumer class. Each of these faiths is sustained by what I am calling aesthetic rule, a means of eliciting, fostering and promoting a particular set of convictions and dispositions in a population through a compelling image, one that encourages the anticipation of a certain future and the evaluation of existing conditions on the basis of that future. While the conjuring of India's "great middle class" constitutes a quite distinct set of speculative practices, it thus shares with the three scenes with which I began a powerful form of image work: a discursive and material mobilization of an image of the future intent on transforming the desires and dispositions, habits and habitus, affects and aversions of its consumer. The numerical conjuring I have explored in this section represents a form of mythic speech that divorces its form and signification from the "reality" it presumes to represent. Just as poverty estimates are now divorced from field measures and "objective" assessments, so too, I will show, have the state's efforts to direct urban interventions in contemporary Delhi been divorced from base maps and field surveys. In addition to problematizing the image of India rising, I thus provide this extended discussion of poverty estimates to show that what I am calling rule by aesthetics is not applied uniquely to the government of the poor, which is the focus of much of this dissertation,

⁵⁵ 2009 Annual Report, Alpine Real Estate Funds, page 10, <http://www.alpinefunds.com/default.asp?P=442562> accessed March 3, 2010.

⁵⁶ National Housing Bank Residex, Delhi, <http://nhb.org.in/Residex/delhires.php> accessed March 1, 2010.

but also to the governmental effort to recruit the desires of distant investors, state politicians and the elite. Such an aesthetic governmentality, I thus suggest, represents a mode of governing that shapes desires traversing the class spectrum. How enduring aesthetic lenses are assembled and mobilized—often in ways more effective than those techno-scientific modes of representation widely discussed in the literature—thus becomes key to understanding “the political” in the contemporary moment. Before providing a more complete outline of my argument, however, let me first elaborate what I mean by aesthetic politics and why the concept of the aesthetic is central for understanding the contours of urban politics in India today.

1.6. Aesthetics, technics, politics

Urban government, as implemented through the technologies of planning, engineering, police, architecture, and public health, among others, is a practice of coercing, conducting, and cajoling the use and organization of urban space into alignment with a more abstract urban imaginary; this is what Lefebvre (1991) might call aligning “spatial practices”—the everyday ways in which space is inhabited—with “representational space”—the space of maps and plans. According to Lefebvre, representational space is not purely an abstract formulation, though, but “is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre... it embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations” (ibid.: 42). Maps and plans are thus but a small piece of the larger production of a spatial imaginary, and as my analysis of poverty curves in the previous section shows, the image work of maps/plans often goes beyond merely representing an existing reality; it can also produce its own reality. As Barthes (1972: 117) says, “myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.” To study the means by which a compelling vision of the urban future—a myth of the world-class city—is projected across existing urban form, as well as into the minds, hearts and sensibilities of the population, I use ideas of intelligibility, visibility and technics inspired by the work of Foucault, along with a broad notion of aesthetic hegemony drawn from Gramsci and the writing of Jacques Ranciere. While these concepts will necessarily remain abstract in this initial formulation, my hope is that readers will bear with me as they are refined and honed as I apply them in the chapters to come.

Inspired by Foucault, Bernard Cohn’s (1996) now classic study of colonial knowledge in British India focused on what he called the “investigative modalities” used to assemble knowledge and build the imperial capacity to govern. In addition to his discussion of a “survey modality” and “enumerative modality,” Cohn found another set of modalities that operated more through the cultural domain of habits, tastes and expression than facts and figures. One of these, the “observational/travel modality,” provides direct insight into how world-class aesthetic discourse is producing distinct governmental effects in Delhi today. As Cohn says, “The questions that arise in examining this modality are related to the creation of a repertoire of images and typifications that determined what was significant to the European eye” (6). This modality works by providing a narrative for the experience of, or movement through, a given space. It creates expectations for how space looks and how it should look. Cohn discussed this primarily in terms of establishing set itineraries or patterns of movement for newcomers to India so that they could easily comprehend “India” through an already narrated experience—that is, this modality helped make strange sites/sights familiar by allowing viewers to see them in predictable ways: Calcutta

as a city of slums, Mumbai as a city of traders, Banaras as a Hindu city. But, this modality could also be thought of more broadly as a way of training a particular way of seeing. By providing routine, shared experiences of moving in a given space a consistent narrative or set of clear aesthetic markers, this technique makes *the experience of space itself* the inter-subjective epistemological basis for knowing that space and its features. For example, by guiding the eye to identify the slum as illegal or to associate shopping malls with progress, this modality can put in place a particular “community of sense” (Hinderliter, Kaizen, Maimon, Mansoor, & McCormick, 2009), or a shared mode of aesthetic engagement. When a strong narrative of moving through and seeing space becomes dominant within a population—i.e., when it prompts the viewing public to identify with the state’s vision—then *how one sees* that space becomes the basis for assessing what that space is, positively, and what it should be, normatively. “What is observed and reported” in this process “is mediated by particular socio-political contexts as well as historically specific aesthetic principles” (Cohn, 1996: 7; also see Crary, 1992).

Cohn thus shows that the ability to disseminate standardized modes of viewership can play a central role in the production of governable subjects: the power to “propound canons of taste” is “among the most significant instrumentalities of rulership” (10). This aligns with a concept of the aesthetic that Ranciere (2004) calls the “distribution of the sensible,” or “a frame of visibility and intelligibility that puts things or practices together under the same meaning,” thereby forming a “community of sense” (Ranciere, 2009: 31). For Ranciere, aesthetics is “a system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience” (13), although the *a priori* here is not founded on a transcendental knowledge, as in Kantian aesthetics, but in social structures that appear, or are handed down, *as though* they are fixed and natural. Aesthetics concerns the production of a *sensible* mode of being, thus constituting nothing less than the terrain on which ethical life is defined and contested as well as the practices through which human sensory experience is shaped and conducted.

The “sensible” has a dual meaning to Ranciere. First, it is that which “makes sense,” which aligns with the Gramscian concept of “common sense” and corresponds with what is the correct (as in ethical and practical) choice among existing options. Second, the sensible indicates what can be perceived or sensed (what is visible). As Ranciere says, “I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (12). Or, “It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise” (13). What makes sense, as in ethical action, is contingent upon what is visible, how the boundary between speech/noise, legal/illegal, beautiful/ugly is defined, and how elements that are “in common” lend themselves to action. That is, social life within any “distribution of the sensible” implies a particular form of sensory training. This is the non-ideational part of hegemony, what Eagleton (1990: 16) sees as the practice of “ruling and informing the senses from within while allowing them to thrive in all of their relative autonomy.”

By combining these different meanings of the sensible within his theory of aesthetics, Ranciere takes us beyond what Bourdieu (1998: 8) describes as the “social categories of perception” in that he treats the aesthetic not as a subjective domain that reflects “the objective structure of difference” (ibid.). Rather, for Ranciere, the distribution of the sensible constitutes the stage upon which politics are conducted—not something pre-formed or derivative, but actively

produced, maintained and elicited in everyday life. In this sense, studies of aesthetic politics take us to the heart of what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling” (Williams, 1977). The aesthetic, as a framework for conveying both the thinkable and the visible, always structures a particular form of community in that it defines who is inside and outside, who can see what and who is to be seen, and who is a part of what is common to the community. This combination of the thinkable and the visible, which brings in the more-than-rational and the-more-than-discursive, is what I find particularly productive in Ranciere, for while Foucault discusses the multiple domains through which governable subjects are produced, the particular mixing of reason and non-reason, discourse and affect, that emerge through any particular “distribution of the sensible” is most often subsumed under the discursive in Foucauldian accounts, which on my reading tend to efface the complex, non-discursive and non-ideational ways in which human desires are shaped. Understanding the operation of what I am calling “rule by aesthetics”—the complex ways in which standardized sensibilities and aesthetic dispositions are established among a “community of sense”—requires a more explicit conceptualization of how the embodied and the affective operate. It is for this reason that I turn to Ranciere.

While I will revisit Ranciere’s conceptualization of politics in later chapters, my primary interest is in exploring ethnographically the manner in which subjects are produced as inside or outside “the common” and how they are inserted into a particular community of sense, or frame of intelligibility. Specifically, I ask how world-class aesthetics, as a particular distribution of the sensible, defines who is inside and who is outside of the world-class community, how certain forms of visibility and observational dispositions are normalized among these differently positioned groups, and what forms of political practice might work to bring about a redistribution of the sensible and a reformulation of the sensible city in contemporary Delhi. What I want to suggest, in particular, is that even while being excluded from what is “common” to the world-class community—i.e., through being “outside” the boundaries of civility—residents on this outside can partake in the world-class “community of sense.” In other words, despite being denied the privileges of property and the rights extended to the city’s recognized citizens, the unpropertied poor living in informal settlements can and often do identify with this community of sense, seeing changes in the city on the terms of a broader world-class aesthetic sensibility and vision of the sensible, beautiful city. Gopal, I want to suggest, represents one such example. As I will argue, the question of property and the various privileges and powers it entails defines the boundary marking the inside/outside of the world-class community. At the same time, it operates as an aspirational object capable of calling forth the desires of even those threatened by world-class urban development (e.g., slum residents) into alignment with the world-class aesthetic. Questions of citizenship and belonging (what is “common” to the community in Ranciere’s terms), property and class, and visibility and sense (aesthetics) thus form elements that I examine dialectically in considering how the *middle class* is elevated as the norm and target of modern urban life, *property ownership* is defined as the status necessary to participate in the world-class city, and *slum removal* has emerged as the necessary means to reaching this imagined future.

1.7. A note on method

Through a multi-sited ethnography, combining legal and archival research, interviews, and encounters with the everyday, this dissertation looks at how “a cognitive and somatic image” of

the city—an urban imaginary—is formed, and how it shapes individual wills and aspirations. The research on which this dissertation is based was conducted over 25 months in the spring of 2005, and the academic years of 2006-7 and 2007-8. My entry point into the complex and charged field of land politics and slum demolitions was via the NGO the Hazards Centre. It is with workers in the Hazards Centre that I spent much of my four months in Delhi in 2005 and through whom I became affiliated with *Sajha Manch*, a network of slum-based organizations and unions for which the Hazards Centre served a research and support role. During this period, I was directly involved in legal analysis and documentation of slum demolitions, and my interests quickly crystallized into trying to understand how slum residents struggled to retain access to land and livelihood in the face of the threat of demolition. How do the informal poor prepare for demolition? How do they contest it? How do their modes of daily habitation and expectations for self and city change in anticipation of such violence? These are the questions with which I began.

My first months grappling with these questions led me to quickly realize that studying the politics of land access in Delhi's slums would require moving well beyond the city's squatter settlements, and I soon found myself meeting lawyers, waiting in government offices, and contacting middle class residents welfare associations (RWAs) that were demanding the removal of neighboring slums. Understanding Delhi's redevelopment required examining the strategies and tactics not only of the poor and the state, but also of the law and the elite, and entering into a variety of spaces in which the boundaries between these domains were blurred. My research method, then, while concerned with the multiple arenas of world-class city making, was one that began with slum demolition as a political problem and worked backwards, following the circuits of power to identify the forces and discourses driving slum clearance. What conditions were necessary for a particular slum to be cleared? Who demanded this clearance? On what legal basis were slum settlements, sanctioned by the state for decades, being demolished all of a sudden? And, what political strategies succeeded or did not in postponing a slum's removal?

This is also a distinctly activist method in that I learned who to contact (and how) largely under the tutelage of a group of remarkable and committed activists dedicated to organizing slum residents, blocking court orders, warding off police visits, and advocating pro-poor alternatives to the liberalization of land and labor in Delhi. I therefore have no qualms in saying that this is a situated, and hence partial, ethnographic portrayal of land struggles in contemporary Delhi: I entered into this arena hearing High Court judges equate squatters with pickpockets, seeing middle class residents demand the demolition of their nannies' and maids' homes, and watching bulldozers crush dreams and destroy lives. If this is a study of embodied experience and desire, then my own experiences and desires should be made clear up front. Through my research, I opposed slum removal, meaning I both did not want slums to be demolished and I actively sought, during my research, to prevent demolition. This is not a bold statement, but it explains the formation of a researcher studying land politics in the context of large-scale state violence in mid-2000s Delhi.

As the reader will notice, my narrative voice is quite distinct from chapter to chapter, and there is a marked shift in the form of ethnographic encounter presented in the chapters on the middle class (2 and 3) and those on slum residents (5 and 6). This is a function of my research design, as my engagements with the middle class were not intended primarily to understand their

perceptions of self, as was the case in my slum ethnography, but rather their perceptions of their less fortunate neighbors living in slums—their “other.” While this necessarily required attention to RWA members’ broader political and social lives, my method was to interview and visit diverse RWAs across Delhi that were mobilized against slums to try to elucidate the common discursive devices and political strategies they used to demand slum removal. I therefore devote little attention to understanding the middle class perspective and why a quite vocal group of property owners in Delhi describe slums with such vitriol. Instead, my aim was to understand how this class’s discourses and demands operated beyond the neighborhood, shaping the terms on which urban space, and slums in particular, could be evaluated.

I am not sure if this method of “uncovering” middle class bias was the most effective one. As a researcher from the US, my RWA interlocutors often assumed that I shared their sense of the inherent greatness of Western models of urbanism and the inherent undesirability of the urban poor. There were numerous instances in which I chose not to clarify my own politics in these conversations, which was a decision I made in order to facilitate further conversation and ensure future meetings. But, I often regretted this decision afterwards. After a particularly long day meeting RWA members, one of whom had described a neighboring slum as a compound of dogs, terrorists and beggars, I confessed to a friend working with slum residents that I could not continue doing my research on RWAs. I worried that I was operating more as a sounding board for xenophobic anxieties than a voice of critical intervention. I remember my friend’s response vividly. He said, “what you are doing *is* critical. None of us here could have such a conversation. We all know what is being said, but we can’t hear them say it, and we don’t know how they organize around it. Without that, how can our struggle move forward?” Although this was an enduring tension during my fieldwork with the middle class, my status as a white American gave me privileged access to an elite political space closed to others struggling to defend slum residents in Delhi. Studying how everyday neighborhood talk became incorporated into political discourse, I felt, required embracing my privilege. My hope was that in doing so, I would be able to provide information and insight into those without the same access.

My slum ethnography, on the other hand, was a sustained engagement with a single place deemed “other,” a place of relegation. Here, I set out to study how people forged a life in a place with an unknown but foretold expiration date. An aim of my research here was to consider how middle class discourses of the slum, once governmentalized through their widespread circulation in media, state, and judicial representations, were experienced by residents of a single slum settlement. Thus, while Chapters 2-4 focus on middle class and state constructions of the slum, they do so with the purpose of establishing a political context—a constellation of discourses, meanings, and political technologies—in which contemporary slum life can be situated.

The activists who introduced me to the legal, governance and political dimensions of land in Delhi were engaged in a political project to organize slum residents in opposition to displacement and in defense of tenure and job security. Failures to forge oppositional platforms capable of delaying or blocking demolitions were considered just that: failures. This perspective no doubt tinges the analysis I present. In sometimes heated conversations, these friends and colleagues asked pointed questions of my efforts to provide “nuance” to the land politics we studied: how is such “nuance” helpful in protecting the poor and dispossessed? This alignment of actors provided invaluable insights into the history and politics of the territories I studied,

shaping my commitments and obligations along the way. This does not mean, however, that we presumed a particular political end goal for slum residents. Instead, my research sought to understand the basis of the “failure” to resist by situating residents’ efforts to make history and find a sense of belonging in “conditions not of their own choosing.” In the face of extreme vulnerability and powerlessness, what does a radical politics look like? How can the activist/ethnographer read residents’ efforts to find dignity and forge identity as less-than-radical? How do we define radical politics when the conditions of enacting agency only allow other possibilities? These are questions implicit in Chapters 5 and 6, where I describe how I engaged in the place I call Shiv Camp. For further details of my ethnography, and my method more generally, I refer the reader to my methodological appendix.

1.8. Dissertation outline

A number of studies have emerged in recent years that locate the new middle class as the political driver of liberalized land development and planning in Indian cities.⁵⁷ A common narrative in this literature is that this class now feels “fed up,” tired of being held back by the socialistic policies and patronage politics that have historically supported the working masses. According to this literature, the newly global ambitions of this class are leading to the reconstitution of the Indian urban, what Partha Chatterjee (2004) calls a process of making “Indian cities bourgeois at last.” Yet, these works have a tendency to presume that the constitution of a new elite—the “new Indian middle class”—in and of itself explains the consolidation of the “world-class” city building project at hand. The mushrooming of malls, commercial complexes, flyovers, gated communities, and designated infrastructure—and the concomitant demolition of slums, expulsion of hawkers and vendors, and banishment of industry—is simply the supply to the “new middle class’s” rising demand. “World-class” discourse here is described as powerful, without showing how it derives and consolidates its power.

On the other hand, there is a growing body of literature on the informal means by which the urban poor have historically prevented official plans and policies that deny their claims to land and services from being carried out. Whether described in terms of “political society” (Chatterjee 2004), the “porous bureaucracy” (S. Benjamin, 2004), or the “vernacular” state (Kaviraj, 1991), scholars are in wide agreement that an array of state spaces have arisen in postcolonial India that lie below the radar of formal planning and politics and that are attuned directly to electoral pressure and the needs of vast sections of the urban population denied the formal privileges of civil society. It is these dense webs of political association binding the local state to the urban poor that must be overcome in order to enact a new bourgeois urbanism, yet the literature has yet to explain how new forms of urban governance have facilitated this process, and how new visions of urban space are practically imposed on those lower levels of the state that have for so long reinterpreted state plans to meet the demands of the poor. In **Chapter 2**, I begin by addressing this shortcoming, examining an urban governance experiment launched by the Delhi Government in the early 2000s that has effectively reconfigured state space to facilitate this

⁵⁷ See, for example, Anjaria (2006), Baviskar (2003), Chatterjee (2004), Fernandes (2006), Gandy (2008), and Mawdsley (2004).

process. By turning to the role of the local state in producing middle class power, I argue that political participation has itself been gentrified, a process that has facilitated the broader embourgeoisment of the Indian urban widely discussed by scholars. By bringing the state back in, I show how discourses of good governance actively produce socio-spatial inequality and how much of the literature on the middle classes indirectly reinforces the neoliberal rhetoric of state roll-back, deflecting analytical attention from the political stakes of the ongoing re-spatialization of the state. Specifically, I show that property ownership has been elevated as a condition for accessing the state, setting in motion a politics of property that I trace through the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter 3 follows by examining the everyday narratives through which neighborhood-based organizations of property owners called Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) describe slums in Delhi, as well as the larger spatial politics of which these narratives are a part. It does so by tracing how key tropes of the slum are transformed from everyday neighborhood talk into an organizing lens for remaking the city. I specifically consider how RWAs discursively position slums on the “outside”—both symbolically vis-à-vis idealizations of the bourgeois public sphere and private self, as well as materially in terms of property value and urban form. I find that “nuisance” has become the key principle according to which discourses of the slum are organized in everyday speech and translated from the neighborhood into official policy and practice. As a lay term, nuisance is widely used to identify forms of aesthetic impropriety or annoyance. But, because it is a primary element of environmental law, it operates discursively as a catchall category allowing a diverse array of private grievances, often pertaining to property value, to be expressed in terms of environmental welfare and the public interest. As such, the widening depiction of slums as nuisances—i.e., as illegal environments—reworks the public/private divide, inserting codes of civility once restricted to the home and neighborhood into the core of public life. By examining how this “nuisance talk” circulates between RWAs, the mass media, and the government, I show how it establishes aesthetic codes for determining what is considered pleasant and abhorrent in public life, thereby constructing slum demolitions as a form of environmental improvement, a necessary step to clean and green Delhi.

In **Chapter 4** I turn to the law, considering how nuisance talk travels into the judicial process, codifying the aesthetic sensibilities and bourgeois codes of civility discussed in the previous two chapters into a distinctly propertied form of citizenship. Specifically, I identify the legal and technical mechanisms by which the current round of court-ordered slum demolitions is being carried out in Delhi by engaging in a discourse analysis of court documents in slum-related cases from the past twenty-five years. I argue that the rise of court orders to demolish slums is occurring not simply because the judiciary is all of a sudden “anti-poor,” nor via a broad trend of “neoliberalization,” as previous authors have suggested, but rather because of a reinterpretation of nuisance law. As a legal concept, nuisance, I show, is an inherently aesthetic category used to specify codes of acceptable appearance and civic conduct. Through a blurring of a former distinction between private and public nuisance prosecution, the judiciary has imposed a new aesthetic ordering on urban space—one that conforms to the vision of a “world-class” city. Specifically, by tying a settlement’s legal standing to its visual appearance, the judiciary has ordered the massive demolition of slums based on their aesthetic affront to “world-class” aesthetic sensibilities. Following what I call the “new nuisance discourse,” I argue that the

ability to criminalize populations on the basis of their visual appearance—via nuisance law—has elevated a form of aesthetic rule in Delhi.

While I have already introduced how the myth of the middle class sustains land privatization and property investment in Indian cities, a broader aim of this dissertation is to consider how the middle class is deployed as an aspirational category. Mazzarella (2003) argues that the 1990s saw a gradual rise in the circulation of affect-intensive images in popular culture, in particular in advertising, film, and the news media. By “configuring an entire imaginary vernacular around the idea of the ‘middle class’” (91), Mazzarella suggests, this “consumerist dispensation” constructed “a new notion of collectivity, which was expressed as ‘the middle class’ and was based on the idea of the democratization of aspiration” (98). For Mazzarella, this process was aimed at generating new aspirations for self-transformation via commodity/image consumption among a wider consumer base. As described above, both the state and the private sector (especially real estate firms, the advertising industry, and retailers) have been aggressively positing the middle class consumer-subject as the ideal Indian citizen and proper denizen of the world-class future.

A necessarily “chaotic concept,” the middle class represents a social group whose ambiguous boundaries sustain the possibility that anyone might gain entrance. As Fernandes (2006: xix) notes, “the identity of the new Indian middle class provides a kind of normative standard to which this larger group [the lower classes] can aspire. The boundaries of this emerging group are fluid precisely because they hold the promise of entry for other social segments.” As both an economic class, aesthetic disposition, and citizen ideal, then, “middle classness” operates as an aesthetic field, gaining membership into which requires a particular combination of performative attributes and outward dispositions (cultural capital), social capacities, and economic powers.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine how residents of Shiv Camp, a slum settlement in West Delhi, consume and partake in the world-class aesthetic and model of middle class, propertied citizenship I frame in the previous chapters. Here, I examine the everyday forms of habitation, spatial practices, and political vocabularies through which residents made sense of the threat of displacement. During the course of my research, a court case was being heard in the Delhi High Court over the status of Shiv Camp, and on two separate occasions, once in January and once in April 2007, state bulldozers descended upon the settlement, razing almost a third of the huts there. This provided an occasion to examine the specific political and aesthetic techniques (as propagated by the state, judiciary and media in particular) through which slum demolition is constructed as an inevitable future, a positive form of violence necessary to produce a modern, orderly, “clean and green,” and thus “world-class” city.

In **Chapter 5**, more specifically, I examine the experiences and political technologies through which large-scale state violence was greeted with non-confrontational responses. I do so in order to ask what such responses might tell us about the relationship between citizenship, aesthetics, and hegemony. Overall, I argue that despite Shiv Camp residents’ profound ideational critiques of Delhi’s world-class redevelopment, their will and aspirations were shaped as much by embodied experiences of urban change, patterns of daily habitation, and everyday aesthetic practice as by ideology or a governing rationality. That is, I consider how a type of aesthetic hegemony is being forged in contemporary Delhi that captures not necessarily the rational

“interests” of the people, but their emotions. It is this realm of aesthetics—the question of whether patterns of change are subjectively registered as contributing to a well-ordered urban environment, even if such changes are against the “interest” of the viewer—that I will show to be the key terrain on which the urban question must be framed in contemporary India. I do so through a consideration of shock, tracing the operation of political technologies (namely, government-run slum survey exercises, media campaigns, and broad projects of landscape improvement) that aim to normalize people’s affective responses to violence and disorder, and by analyzing how slum residents’ embodied experiences of a changing urban landscape shape their expectations of self and city. It is to questions of the experience and conception of belonging, tenure, law, and land that this first chapter of my slum ethnography turns.

Chapter 6 addresses the question of what I call the myth of private property, charting how world-class aesthetic discourse and the re-structuring of Delhi’s economy created the structural and symbolic conditions out of which private property emerged as an exalted target and fetishized object for Shiv Camp residents. Focusing on residents’ experience of being alienated from both the labor process and the more broadly defined production of the urban, I examine how land, and private property in particular, took on fantastical qualities in Shiv Camp residents’ narratives, mobilizing new urban imaginaries and inhering the power to magically transform both self and city. Efforts to conjure a mental image of a better future through the lens of property ownership, I will show, were simultaneously efforts to align oneself with the speculative promises of world-class development—that is, to index propriety to property. The world-class city, I thus find, is not a structural inevitability to which the urban poor are resigned, but an active imaginary in which they participate and that relies on their ongoing participation.

Chapters 5 and 6 aim to more generally challenge a wave of recent scholarship on the Third World megacity, informal settlements, and urban marginality that posits, in the words of Mike Davis, a process of “urban involution.” In the context of both (i) declining rural economies and (ii) rising rates of urban migration, labor casualization and state retrenchment, Davis suggests that slums operate as mere containers for “warehousing this century’s surplus humanity” (Davis, 2006: 201)—the detritus, if you will, of neoliberalized economies. Like Davis’s account of slum residents’ “terminal marginality within global capitalism” (202), Loic Wacquant’s comparative study of what he calls “advanced urban marginality” in Chicago and Paris similarly suggests that certain highly stigmatized urban spaces operate as “mere warehouses for supernumerary populations that no longer have *any* identifiable political or economic utility” (2008b: 18, emphasis added). Besides startling resonances with earlier dual sector models of the urban economy that reify sharp binaries between processually linked domains (e.g., state and market, formal and informal, advanced and backward sectors),⁵⁸ this analysis, more worryingly, articulates with elite discourse depicting the urban poor as “outsiders”—that is, as a non-integral, surplus, “redundant” and therefore expendable population.⁵⁹ As I discuss in Chapter 3, it is precisely such analyses of urban decay, which characterize structurally isolated peripheries

⁵⁸ For critiques of dual sector economic analyses that consider “the informal” functionally isolated from “the formal,” see Rankowski (1994) and Perlman (1976). For a more recent critique, aimed at Wacquant, see Caldeira (2009).

⁵⁹ Wacquant uses this very language, describing the “urban outcasts” as “an absolute surplus population” (66) and as “redundant” (266). Although his arguments are specific to the US and France, in his postscript he suggests that the conditions of advanced marginality are emerging “everywhere” (286).

“other” to the urban core, that allow what I call “nuisance talk” to distil complex political and legal histories of urban space into a question of mere appearances: slums, we are told, exist outside of plans, “the economy” and even politics.

These studies conclude that because there is no upsurge in radical urban social movements (at least not one proportional to the forms of economic retrenchment at hand), the urban poor lack politics, at least one with transformative potential.⁶⁰ My research shows this conclusion to be both empirically and politically problematic. In these two chapters, I show slum residents to be integral vectors in Delhi’s worlding efforts, their aspirations central to both the material and symbolic transformation of the cityscape. I specifically find that the government cares a great deal about how this population imagines and conceptualizes its place in the city, and that this population’s aspirations directly sculpt new urban geographies of consumption and habitation: that is, the urban poor are active city makers, not mere passive recipients of urban space. By showing how slum residents receive, adopt, and contest “nuisance talk” and the world-class aesthetic it represents, I aim to reveal both (i) the mechanisms through which the poor participate in the imagination and realization of new urban futures—even if those futures are premised on their own marginalization as workers and occupants of public land—as well as (ii) the stakes in how these geographical imaginaries are formed.

This dissertation more generally sets out to show how economic transformation, in this case the privatization of land, is instantiated not through an abstract calculus of cost-benefit or through disembodied economic rationalities, but rather through everyday, situated aesthetic practices. That is, economic relations do not descend from above, providing a base context against which political actions and subjective reactions arise. Rather, economic change itself takes place through the everyday desires and will of urban residents.

Building on this insight, **Chapter 7** concludes the dissertation by showing that just as the world-class city making project is premised on conducting the will and aspirations of the urban poor in the direction of an imagined world-class future, so too is this project politically prone to this group’s reimagining of the urban. Focusing on the forms of aesthetic counter-conduct enacted by a network of slum residents in Delhi called the *Dilli Shramik Sangathan* (DSS), I show how their political sloganeering, poster hangs, performative protest, and street theater attempt to redistribute the sensible, posing an alternative vision of the urban in opposition to a privatized city. Whereas the appearance of slums and poverty in and of itself is being criminalized in contemporary Delhi, DSS’s “cultural programs,” as it calls them, aim to re-center and render visible the worker—“Delhi’s public,” as DSS members say. Through its campaign to defend the public’s right to public land, DSS is attempting to shatter the image of the world-class city by revealing the exclusionary basis of private property. These incipient political strategies show that the greatest potential to reconfigure the Indian urban lies in the everyday, situated aesthetic

⁶⁰ Davis and Wacquant both read this depoliticization as a product of the deproletarianization of the urban poor. While this leads Davis to call for a turn to alternative political arenas (e.g., religion) beyond the classical bastion of Marxian class consciousness—the factory floor—he does not himself suggest what these new political activities might consist of or look like. Wacquant, instead, argues that these “neighborhoods of relegation of the postindustrial metropolis” (247) are symptom of structural conditions, and he offers no suggestion for how politics in these stigmatized spaces might be recovered.

practices of slum residents, and not in an abstract “civil society,” workplace-centered organizing, or an entrepreneurial spirit.

Chapter 2. Gentrified Participation: The rise of middle class power in Delhi's urban governance

“The first man who, after fencing off a piece of land, took it upon himself to say ‘this belongs to me’ and found people simple-minded enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.” -Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

2.1. “R-W-what?”

Before 2000, the acronym “RWA” would have left almost any Delhi resident guessing. A middle-class man in his mid-30s who I interviewed in 2006—quite out of touch with current events in his city—may well represent what was the common view just five years earlier: “‘R’ ‘W’ what? I don’t know what that is.”¹ When I said it was a neighborhood association—standing for “Resident Welfare Association”—that existed in residential colonies like his, his response was “Yeah. My dad’s in one of those. It’s, like, for senior citizens, right?”

A senior citizen club, a retiree’s group, a social committee for the elderly: combine that with a bit of neighborhood volunteer work and you have the picture of how RWAs functioned in Delhi until the early 2000s. Primarily made up of retired men, many with military or bureaucratic backgrounds, RWAs had little if any influence beyond their immediate colonies and typically had minimal say in the workings of even their own residential blocks. As one RWA old-timer recalled, thinking back to his earlier days as his RWA’s Secretary: “It was a type of time-pass, a way to socialize with neighbors in a meaningful way.” Typical RWA activities included hiring and managing the *chowkidar* (security guard) and trash collectors, maintaining the community garden, coordinating tree planting campaigns, and posting street signs.

RWAs play a radically different role in Delhi today. Often considered by the media, state government and judiciary the de facto voice of citizens, or as the *Hindustan Times* says, “the residents’ voice,” RWAs now have veto power over development projects in their areas, hold sway over local budgetary decisions, and directly influence land use and development policy across metro Delhi. As I will discuss in the following two chapters, RWAs have been vociferously lobbying for slum removal, effectively using the mass media and courts to impose their aesthetic sensibilities on Delhi’s existing urban form. Visions of Delhi’s “world-class” future are increasingly interpreted through RWA desires and demands, combining with the general celebration of middle class consumptive habits discussed in the Introduction to sculpt a shared aesthetic sense of what a world-class city looks like. Before discussing how this aesthetic is consolidated and deployed though, this chapter examines how RWAs—emblems of the property owning middle class—took the political leap from bystander to political juggernaut. In doing so, I have two goals.

¹ In an interview with Mr. Surendra Kumar, Superintendent of the Chief Minister’s Office who oversees the daily operations of the Bhagidari Cell, he said, “before Bhagidari [which began in 2000], less than 5% of the population knew what ‘RWA’ stood for.” Interview date: October 9, 2006.

First, I set out to examine the political and institutional mechanisms by which RWAs, and the middle class more generally, has gained unheralded political power outside of electoral channels in urban India. My argument here is simple: Urban middle class power did not leap from a political awakening within this class itself, as most commentators have argued (e.g., Chatterjee, 2004; Fernandes, 2004), but was rather produced by the machinations of the local state. In particular, the state has re-engineered channels of urban governance, sometimes intentionally, to facilitate the embourgeoisement of local politics. This, I will demonstrate in the following chapter, has created the conditions in which a “world-class aesthetic”—an observational grid used to define spaces as “desirable” or “dirty” based on their contribution to Delhi’s world-class aspirations—has gained state authorization and public legitimacy.

My discussion of RWAs here pertains not simply to Delhi’s unique administrative context, but also to larger debates around urban governance and the formation, politics, and structure of the “new middle class.” My second goal in this chapter, then, is to specify the basis on which the Indian middle class can be assessed and studied most accurately. While recent studies (e.g., Srivastava, 2009) have sought to move beyond characterizations of the middle class based on single sociological or economic categories, such as income (Satish Deshpande, 2006), consumption/lifestyle (Varma, 1998), political affiliation/social location (Bardhan, 1993), or ideological stance vis-à-vis economic liberalization (Fernandes, 2006), I show that state-recognized private property ownership, especially as it pertains to the politics of urban space, confers, above all else, the status and privilege we typically associate with the “middle class” in Indian cities today. The propertied classes have both been elevated as model citizens or “world-class” India and simultaneously derive their political authority to define norms of civic conduct not because of numerical significance, nor simply because of their self-assertiveness and over-representation in the media, but rather because, as property owners, its members are formal owners of the city.

I will make these arguments by way of an engagement with recent debates over state form and the character of politics among both the elite and “subaltern” classes in Indian cities. I therefore begin in Section 2.2 by contrasting the political activity of the unpropertied poor and propertied classes of urban India, as discussed in the literature on the Indian state. Based on this review, I describe bureaucratic and political channels by which each of these groups have historically accessed the state, with particular attention to the extensive spaces of political negotiability in the lower reaches of the Indian bureaucracy that have allowed slum residents to enjoy relatively secure tenure despite their extra-legal status. These dense threads of political connection, until quite recently, cloaked slum residents from the reprimand of planners: ties to low-level bureaucrats formed the warp and patron-client relations with elected officials the weft in this political patchwork. In Section 2.3, I locate these channels of state access within the particular administrative structure of Delhi, showing how the poor have been able to secure political benefits historically despite the best efforts of middle class residents and planners. In Section 2.4, I review prevalent explanations for the rise of middle class power, which has led to an onslaught of slum clearance drives from the late 1990s onwards that have quickly taken away the poor’s political gains. Section 2.5 returns to the local state in Delhi by describing the Delhi Government’s Bhagidari scheme, a program launched in 2000 to increase citizen-government “participation” through RWAs. In contradistinction to existing explanations of the rise of middle class power, I here demonstrate how the Delhi Government cut the chord linking slum dwellers

to the local state by re-engineering state space and sidelining elected representatives. While Bhagidari has earned wide praise for its efforts to foster “good governance,” enhance transparency, and deepen popular participation in government, it has effectively disenfranchised the non-propertied classes of the city. Stepping inside the new state spaces it creates, I examine ethnographically how Bhagidari elevated and formalized the political status of RWAs and reduced the role and influence of local electoral politics in the administration of urban space. In Section 2.6, I detail how RWA power has been extended through its close ties with the media and judiciary. Section 2.7 finally offers concluding remarks on how middle class power took on its current shape and the implications of this analysis for larger debates on the middle class in India.

2.2. Passive politics

The starting point for most studies of politics in India is the observation that the modalities through which one can exercise political agency are highly determined by socio-economic status. Therefore, the manner in which a wealthy, English-speaking homeowner “problem solves” starkly differs from how a Hindi-speaking slum dweller “fixes.” The purpose of this section is to review existing scholarly explanations for why this is the case and locate the different state spaces in which the propertied and non-propertied classes of urban India engage in politics.

In his “Notes on Italian History,” Gramsci contrasts the French revolution with the more gradual, “reformist” path Italy took during the period of Risorgimento. Whereas in the former the bourgeoisie was powerful enough to directly overthrow the “old regimes” of feudalism, in Italy this class had not yet consolidated its power sufficiently for this end. Thus, the new Italian bourgeoisie followed a path by which the demands of the new society, which in France had found a revolutionary expression, could be “satisfied by small doses, legally, in a reformist manner—in such a way that it was possible to preserve the political and economic position of the old feudal classes, to avoid agrarian reform, and, especially, to avoid the popular masses going through a period of political experience such as occurred in France” (Gramsci, 1971, 119). Partha Chatterjee finds Gramsci’s discussion of this “passive revolution” highly instructive for the Indian, and more broadly postcolonial, context wherein the “intellectual-moral leadership of the dominant classes over the new nation remains fragmented” (Chatterjee, 1986, 29). In formulating what has become one of the most influential explanations of post-Independence state form in India, Chatterjee argues:

[I]n situations where an emergent bourgeoisie lacks the social conditions for establishing complete hegemony over the new nation, it resorts to a ‘passive revolution’, by attempting a ‘molecular transformation’ of the old dominant classes into partners in a new historical bloc and only a partial appropriation of the popular masses, in order to create a state as a necessary precondition for the establishment of capitalism (Chatterjee, 1986, 30).

Most important for our purposes here, the passive revolution did not attempt to break up either the institutional structures of colonial rule or attack pre-capitalist dominant classes. Rather, the bureaucratic power previously concentrated in the hands of the British was passed to a planning

elite—a “body of experts” whose task was to manage the competing interests and tenuous coalition between the capitalist and other dominant classes (Chatterjee, 1994, 57; also see Rudra, 1989). Whereas Prime Minister Nehru’s vision of this planning elite was that it would maintain a degree of “relative autonomy” from any single economic class or political party and gradually transform India into a socialistic, secular society, its capacity to pursue consistent development goals was undercut by its need to constantly legitimate itself by meeting the non-complementary demands of these competing (capitalist and feudal) dominant classes (Frankel, 1978). Bardhan (1990) argues that the political economy of India can be explained as the outcome of competition between India’s three dominant proprietary classes—industrial capitalists (the bourgeoisie), rich farmers (kulaks), and white-collar professionals (bureaucrats)—who we might see as together forming the ruling alliance in the passive revolution. The prevalent view among political scientists, based on or in support of Bardhan’s model, is that this competitive scramble for state largesse leads to systems of elaborate patronage and what Corbridge et al. (2005, 33) call the “relative scarcity of the state.”

Building on the arguments of Weiner (1962), Corbridge et al. suggest that the combination of a relatively underdeveloped private sector and what Weiner calls an “overdeveloped polity”—over-equipped in the capacity to extract benefits from the state—created the conditions for powerful demand groups to effectively capture limited state resources (cf. Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987). According to this model, the poor and weak are left to fight for the spoils that remain after the dominant groups have taken their share. As Corbridge et al. (2005, 34) say, “the state in India comes to be defined by those far-reaching mammaries of welfarism.... The state confers the blessings of consumption upon those who are able to access and milk it.” Political scientists have built on the state scarcity argument to explain the prevalence of competitive populism that forces citizens to turn to political fixers and parties instead of to a bureaucracy incapable of impartially distributing benefits across civil society (see Chandra, 2004; Weiner, 1962).

Here, we see a broad outline of the division in how different categories of society access the state. On the one hand, a domain of civil society has been carved out through which the elite retain privileged access to the state apparatus. On the other hand, those outside of this privileged domain are left to negotiate political outcomes through more makeshift mechanisms of political patronage, bribery, and sometimes coercion. Whereas in the political scientists’ “competition-based” model this divide between the elite and the subaltern is expressed through a competitive struggle over a fixed resource—a battle over the means of domination—the Gramscian conceptualization of the “integral state” allows us to turn our attention to how diverse state spaces are produced through cultural and ideological programs: that is, to examine what he calls “the ethical content of the state.” This means treating the state as “not a *thing* to be seized”—as if a resource that can be captured and that is governed by the rules of scarcity—but rather as “a complex *formation* in modern societies which must become the focus of a number of different strategies and struggles because it is an arena of different social contestations” (S. Hall, 1986: 19)—in other words, as a social space (Lefebvre, 2003).

Following this approach, Kaviraj (1991) notes the inability of the modernizing bourgeoisie at the time of Independence to exercise cultural leadership. Kaviraj agrees with Chatterjee’s claim that the passive revolution placed the burden of transforming “traditional” Indian society on “state-bureaucratic agency.” But, he argues that because this agency was built upon the institutions of

colonial rule, which had never won popular legitimacy, the postcolonial development project entered a context marked by a great divide between vernacular, popular understandings of nation, politics and democracy and the planners' newly defined goals of social reform, economic redistribution, and socialist planning. While the passive revolution failed to put in place the cultural instruments necessary to translate the new development priorities of the Indian state into the nation's vernacular spaces, the (federalist) state, ironically, depended precisely on these spaces for policy implementation. As the planning apparatus sought to extend control over "larger areas of social life, it had to find its personnel, especially at lower levels, from groups who did not inhabit the modernist discourse" (Kaviraj, 1991, 91). Thus, with the extension of the state into more vernacular spaces—and the incorporation of bureaucrats of different class backgrounds into the state apparatus—we see the concomitant expansion in the gap between, on the one hand, elite bureaucrats who inhabit the "modernist discourse" of bureaucratic rationality and, on the other hand, lower level personnel "whose 'everyday vernacular discourses' were not structured around principles of formal rationality at all" (Fuller & Harriss, 2000, 8). Because the state "had feet of vernacular clay" (Kaviraj, 1984, quoted in Fuller & Harriss, 2000, 8), elite bureaucrats found their mandates "reinterpreted beyond recognition" by the time they reached the implementation stage "very low down in the bureaucracy" (Kaviraj, 1991, 91).²

Thus, Kaviraj finds a diversity of political strategies operating both upon and through state institutions. Differently situated state bureaucrats not only interpret the meaning of policies differently, but are also embedded in contrasting ethico-political contexts. Thus, the ties that link India's elite to upper level bureaucrats and policy-makers are not just ones of economic stature and influence; they are also based on shared cultural formation and positionality.³ Similarly, the subaltern classes' ability to extract benefits or exercise influence over lower level bureaucrats is not then a secondary game of spoils, but rather a different cultural space in which the poor are more equipped to establish shared meanings and obligations with the formal (and sometimes informal) institutions of the state.

Chatterjee (2004) too premises his more recent discussion of postcolonial politics on a disjuncture between a more formalized elite domain reserved for culturally equipped citizens and a sphere marked by a more "paralegal," fluid, and vernacular mobilization of demands.⁴ He refers to the former as "civil society," which is premised on the ideals of democratic liberalism under which all citizens are considered equal before the law. The latter is called "political

² Frankel (1978, 111) makes a similar point in describing the lack of shared goals and willingness to cooperate between the central and state governments and the upper and lower level bureaucrats in the early decades of state planning: "But in the last analysis, the local development officers were themselves drawn mainly from the village population, and responsible to superiors in the administrative services and the ministries of state governments, many of whom had very little genuine enthusiasm for the tasks of social education [and reform]."

³ This notion is endorsed by research showing how the elite and educated classes not only took on important administrative and ideological roles, but also a symbolic importance as "a 'proxy' for the nation" (Satish Deshpande, 2003, 150).

⁴ For an earlier articulation of a similar point in the context of the Middle East, see Bayat (1997).

society,” and is the residual realm in which all those denied access (either legally or culturally) to the formal protections of civil society must tread.⁵

With a heavy infusion of Foucauldianism, especially Foucault’s (1991) differentiation between sovereign power and governmentality, Chatterjee interprets “civil society” as the ethico-political domain extending from the formal arrangements of sovereign power and “political society” as the domain produced out of the calculative techniques of governmentality. Thus, Chatterjee suggests that those within civil society are treated as citizens under sovereign law (with natural rights that automatically accrue to them), whereas those in political society are managed as “populations”—targets of various technical programs aimed at strategically guiding individuals toward “convenient ends” (Foucault, 2007). Not concerned with the delivery of equal rights or individual freedom, as in “civil society,” governmental programs operate upon political society to produce desired effects within the population as a whole: hygiene, public decency, low crime rates, or “civic sense.”

Whereas Foucault highlights new technologies of power that manage and control “the population’s” interests from a distance, Chatterjee suggests that the categories that governmental programs construct (e.g., “below poverty line” or “Scheduled Caste” in India) can also be invested with ethical value and used to make claims upon government. He thus suggests, in a way more forcefully elaborated by Li (2007), that governmental programs can also politicize population groups, allowing them to mobilize new demands and claims outside of the formal domain of law. This “politics of the governed”—practiced by those denied the formal privileges of civil society—then, is an attempt “to give the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community” (57); that is, it is an effort to operate through the cultural and political affinities that bind low level bureaucrats and political representatives to those groups denied rights and protections under the law.

Chatterjee’s primary examples of this “politics of the governed” come from Calcutta’s squatter settlements. He describes how various governmental programs in the 1980s aimed to improve the welfare of the city’s poor and working classes. These programs operated by defining “improvable” populations and then delivering services and resources based on membership criteria. “The politics of the governed” are attempts by those in political society to either depict categories of people—i.e., population groups—as numerically powerful or endow those categories with cultural meaning so as to win political benefits by strategically deploying the terms of improvement supplied by government.⁶

⁵ Also see Chatterjee (1993, 12-3) for a framing of “elite” and “subaltern” politics in terms of “the nation” and “its fragments.” Chatterjee (2004) develops this distinction based on an earlier formulation from the Subaltern Studies project that theorized a split during the Indian nationalist movement between a more organized, vertically-mobilized, and “controlled” elite domain and an unorganized, or more horizontally-mobilized, subaltern domain of “spontaneous” politics (Guha, 1982).

⁶ Although Chatterjee insists that these “new” types of political mobilization differ from previous party-based patron-client relations, recent comparative studies of urban politics in India indicate that slum dweller political mobilization continues to be largely patronage-based (see Harriss, 2005; Jha, Rao, & Woolcock, 2007). These survey-based studies argue that the recent emphasis on new associational practices among the poor is overstated, but nonetheless confirm the stark differences in the politics of the poor and elite.

Recent ethnographic work by Benjamin (2004, 2008) perhaps most clearly elucidates the complex workings of “political society.” Benjamin argues that behind what is commonly simplified by academics as “patron clientelism” and derided by the elite and high-level bureaucrats as “vote bank politics” lies a set of constructive interactions producing democratic outcomes for slum dwellers. Due to the highly centralized planning process in Indian cities, elected representatives and bureaucrats in city government have little formal input into land use and development decisions: master plans are created by planners in the provincial government (and the central government in the case of Delhi), who then pass their plans to municipalities for implementation. This leaves little if any room for the modification of plans based on the inputs of local representatives or residents, creating a clear gap in the democratic process by occluding municipal intervention, the lowest level of elected government in Indian cities (discussed below).

In contrast to the picture of disinterested planners removed from place-specific needs and demands, municipal bodies face constant pressure from constituents—especially from those in slums, which are not recognized by the plans—to extend infrastructure, ensure tenure security, prevent evictions, and sometimes permit business or industrial activities in “non-conforming areas.” Slum dwellers typically exert this pressure upon and through elected representatives and low level bureaucrats—the former acceding to demands in exchange for votes, the latter to avoid scorn from elected officials, to earn extra income through petty bribes, or based on camaraderie arising from their own semi-legal residential arrangements. As Benjamin (2004, 183) says, “Politicians and associations push local bureaucrats to act on these demands by using loopholes and a flexible interpretation of bureaucratic procedures.” The multiplicity of access points and means to such political “fixing” has led Benjamin to call these arrangements “porous bureaucracy” and the strategies by which the poor negotiate them “politics by stealth.” Although such stealth procedures are not the only way to interact with the local state, Benjamin (2004, 183) estimates that 50-75% of India’s urban population—mostly those without formal property rights—uses these channels for protecting or accessing land and employment. These channels are available to these otherwise politically marginal classes because the poor in Indian cities vote en masse, outnumbering vastly voter turnout by wealthier residents (Lama-Rewal, 2007; Yadav, 2000). Local elected representatives therefore have to at least entertain the demands of the urban poor, which is untrue of higher-level bureaucrats who see slums as “illegal,” falling outside the formal domain of planning, and the product of parochial, inefficient and corrupt politicians who rely on “vote bank politics,” the dirtiest words in “good governance” circles today.

My fieldwork in Delhi’s slums, described in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, confirms that in moments of difficulty, slum residents are remarkably effective in negotiating favorable outcomes when they mobilize through established political networks. Whether it was in threatening local workers to re-establish electricity connections after the power provider cut its free and unmonitored service, or in securing “stay orders” for demolitions from the courts by convincing the police, through the municipal councilor, to withhold timely support for a demolition drive, slum residents utilize established patronage systems in times of need to protect tenuously won tenure security and service provision. This suggests, following Benjamin, that the presence of elaborate patronage networks does not necessarily mean that slum dwellers are mere passive supplicants. It also signals an awareness of how to access and manipulate the state.

Whereas the informal channels of accessing the state apparatus are structured by seniority, kin, gender, and party affiliation (A. Roy, 2004); whereas unelected *pradhans* (slum headmen) usually control or at least heavily influence the collective demands of slum settlements (Harriss, 2005; Jha, Rao, & Woolcock, 2007); and whereas elected officials and leaders do structurally benefit by preserving relations of political dependency and patronage; we nonetheless see that a set of vernacular state spaces have arisen below the radar of formal planning and politics that are directly attuned to electoral pressure and the needs of vast sections of the urban population. This, of course, does not mean that these spaces should be celebrated as emblematic of the democratic (or entrepreneurial) spirit of the poor, a la de Soto (2000). Nor should it cause us to rethink Castells' (1983: 212) declaration that such urban populism occurs only in "cities without citizens," for Chatterjee is right to point out that vast swaths of India's urban population today are denied the substantive benefits of citizenship. As Castells writes of squatting and "the dependent city," squatters' "dependency upon the political system is at the very core of their social condition" (ibid.). Indeed, these vernacular spaces arose as makeshift attempts to secure temporary material security in the face of exclusionary citizenship. But, just as we should not romanticize these spaces as beacons of hope or political models of insurgent or innovative citizenship (cf. Holston, 2008), nor should we simply deride them as inherently exploitative. Until democratic representation is expanded, these zones of negotiability are all the poor have. What do these spaces look like in Delhi, and how have middle class associations and activism been able to subvert them? I now turn to the first question, before considering prominent scholarly explanations for the second in section 2.4.

2.3. "Political society" and slum prevalence in Delhi

Figure 8 below shows a simplified version of Delhi's administrative structure, including an illustration of the zone of negotiability (labeled "political society") in which slum dwellers have historically been able to exercise political claims to the city.

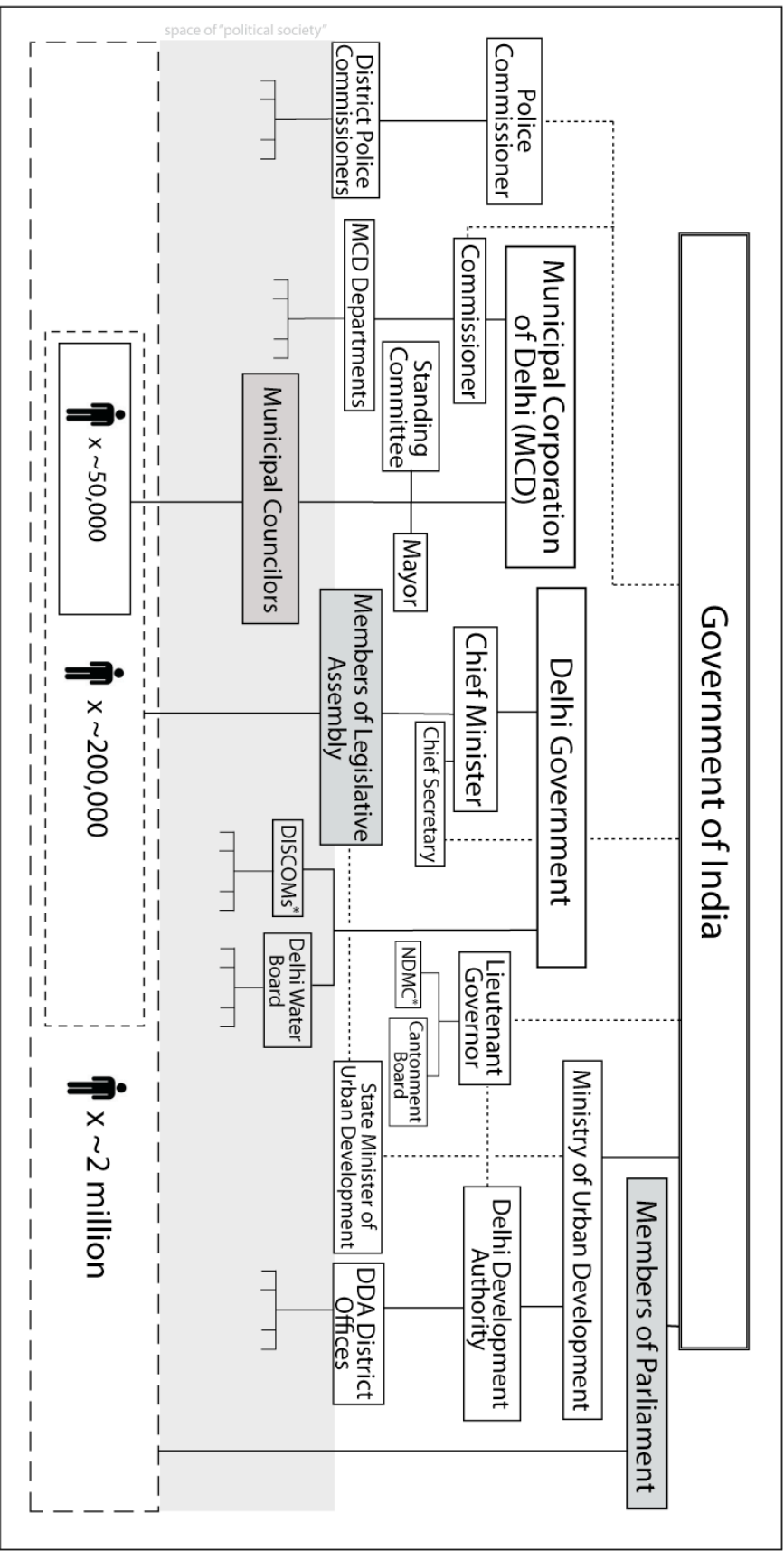


Figure 8. Simplified administrative structure for the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

Solid lines within the figure indicate direct bureaucratic hierarchy; lower boxes are subordinate to those higher on the figure. Dashed lines indicate that a given administrative position is directly appointed by a superordinate body (usually the Government of India [GoI]). For example, Delhi's State Minister of Urban Development is appointed by the Ministry of Urban Development from among the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs); Delhi's Lieutenant Governor, directly appointed by the GoI also serves as Chairman of the DDA; and, although the Chief Minister is chosen by the ruling party of the Legislative Assembly made up of the cities' 70 MLAs, her Chief Secretary is a senior bureaucrat (officer in the Indian Administrative Services) appointed by the GoI. The shaded boxes represent directly elected positions; the population boxes at the bottom show the approximate number of citizens represented by each elected official. Branches of the diagram hanging below the lowest designated position in any given hierarchy that lack titles indicate the domains in which lower level bureaucrats operate. There are more than 120 public bodies operational in Delhi (A.K. Jain, 2003b); only a handful are shown here. The large shaded area indicates the state space in which Chatterjee's (2004) "political society" is strongest. The degree to which a branch or box falls in this space represents how prone it is to the pressures of "political society."

*“NDMC” stands for the New Delhi Municipal Council, which serves the same function as the MCD, only in the more geographically confined administrative areas of New Delhi; the Cantonment Board is the municipal body that oversees Delhi’s Cantonment area; “DISCOMs” stand for the electricity distribution companies, which are regulated by the Delhi Government.

Because Delhi is India's Capital and only city-state, it has a unique administrative structure, with municipal, state and federal bodies overseeing different, although sometimes overlapping, administrative functions. Delhi does not yet have full statehood, which means that the Government of India (GoI) (the central government) retains direct oversight over state and municipal government. For example, the Legislative Assembly, the legislative arm of the Delhi (state) Government, is constrained by the fact that any act it tables must first be approved by the Lieutenant Governor, who is appointed by the GoI. There is thus a dual executive wing in the Delhi Government: the unelected Lieutenant Governor, who is a senior officer in the Indian Administrative Service, and the Chief Minister, chosen from the elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Within the municipal government, the elected Councilors, who choose a Mayor, constitute the "deliberative wing" of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)—a primarily consultative role that frames thematic committees and has limited financial control—whereas the GoI-appointed MCD Commissioner heads the executive wing, which actually frames policies and drafts the budget.¹ Each Municipal Councilor has an annual budget of approximately 7.5 million rupees (~ USD 150,000) and each MLA about 20 million rupees (~ USD 400,000) to spend directly on development-related projects in their area. However, because these projects must be approved and carried out by the executive wings of the Municipal Corporation and Government of Delhi, respectively, they are usually not fully utilized come the end of the fiscal year.

Local electoral politics are further removed from executive and planning decisions by the fact that the central government retains control over the domains of police, "social order," and land management and planning in Delhi. Thus, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), which is responsible for the acquisition, development, management, and disposal of land, operates under the GoI's Ministry of Urban Development. This means that the elected MLAs (the state government) and the Councilors elected into municipal government do not have any direct input into urban planning in Delhi. All this creates an administrative context in which the "split" between planners and low level bureaucrats discussed in the literature on the Indian state (described in the previous section) is even further enhanced by a divide between the decrees, plans, policies and imperatives placed on Delhi by the central government and the practical realities and political compulsions of bureaucrats and elected officials face in the municipal and state governments. That is, the bureaucratic chains linking planners and implementers are indirect or discontinuous in many sectors in Delhi, which leads to more negotiability in how policies and plans are implemented and, concomitantly, far more finger pointing and cross-departmental accusations than typical in other Indian cities. I now turn to some of these zones of negotiability in describing the primary functions of the state branches shown in Figure 8 and how they bear on the lives of slum dwellers.

The presence of slums is itself the outcome of the negotiable boundaries between central government plans and state- and municipal-level implementation. Since 1957, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has been assigned the task of preparing and implementing a Master Plan for the development of Delhi land. Once approved by the Ministry of Urban Development, the Master Plan becomes a statutory document that establishes planning law by determining land use codes, building bye-laws, development norms, and infrastructure and

¹ This commissioner system is in place in most Indian cities, Kolkata being a major exception (Lama-Rewal, 2007, 59, note 6).

planning standards. Framed as part of the policy of socialized land discussed in the Introduction, a key component of the Delhi Master Plan was that 25% of all residential land in the city was to be reserved for what is known as the “Economically Weaker Sections” (EWS) and the “Low Income Groups” (LIG). These are economic classes that represent the poorest approximately 40% of the population. While the DDA has effectively acquired the bulk of land notified through the Master Plan, land disposal has proceeded at a much slower pace. This is especially true for EWS and LIG housing: the DDA has been far more effective (but still behind schedule) in allocating land for private cooperative group housing societies for middle and higher income groups, but has completed less than 10% of its EWS and LIG housing projects (DDA, 2006).² As a result, slum dwellers, who constitute approximately one third of the city’s population and mostly fall in the EWS category, occupy less than three percent of city land today (Batra 2007).³

The DDA’s failure to provide adequate shelter for the city’s poor has not, however, dissuaded new migrants from coming to Delhi. In 1981, according to the Census of India’s notoriously inaccurate slum enumeration, 1.8 million of Delhi’s total population of over 5.7 million were slum dwellers. The number of slum dwellers had risen to 2.25 million (of 8.4 million total) by 1991 and 3.25 by 2001 (of 12.25 million total).⁴ According to the Slum Wing of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, which occasionally completes its own estimation of the slum population, the number of households living in slums increased from 260,000 in 1990 to 480,000 by 1995, with the number of slum clusters rising from 929 to 1,080 over the same period. What are the political and bureaucratic processes by which these slum settlements are established?

While each slum has a unique residential history, in the interest of relating slum formation to the previous discussion of state space, I will outline only the broadest contours of slum tenure and politics. In common parlance, slums are areas with sub-standard housing whose residents do not formally own or lease the land on which they reside.⁵ This land can be private or, more

² EWS, LIG, MIG and HIG are government-set, income-based class categories periodically updated based on purchasing power and census data. These terms are also used to classify the size of housing units: EWS is typically a 1-room flat, LIG 2-room, MIG 3-room, etc.

³ The Report of the Committee on Problems of Slums in Delhi, constituted by the Planning Commission confirms the gross under provision of land for the poorest segments of the population: “DDA claims that 20% of the residential area [of Delhi] is earmarked for Economically Weaker Sections/squatter population under the integrated development project. DDA has not allotted any land to Slum & JJ Department [responsible for slum housing] during 1992-97.... Prima facie, the allocation of land for the housing of the urban poor has been insufficient to meet the requirements, and below the proportion of their share [provided through the Master Plan]” (29-30).

⁴ Ministry of Urban Affairs. 1996. *A Compendium on Indian Slums*. Government of India and Census of India, 2001.

⁵ See Ramanathan (2005) for an elaboration of how slums are defined in law. The central act on slums, namely, the Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act, 1956 defines slums as “any area (where) buildings... (a) are in any respect unfit for human habitation, or (b) are by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement and design of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of streets, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation, or any combination of these factors, are detrimental, to safety, health or morals”. The Census of India 2001 defines a “slum” as “(i) All areas notified as 'Slum' by State/Local Government and UT [urban territory] Administration under any Act; (ii) All areas recognised as 'Slum' by State/Local Government and UT Administration, which have not been formally notified as slum under any Act; (iii) A compact area of at least 300 population or about 60-70

often, public. Because the Delhi Development Authority is by far the largest land-owning agency in Delhi, the majority of slums (700 out of 1,080 as of 2002)⁶ are located on land that it manages. Although, according to the Delhi Master Plan, residents of these slums are entitled to far more land in Delhi than they actually occupy, the DDA deems them unplanned “encroachers” because they have not been formally allocated the land they occupy. However, due to the vast under provision of low-income housing and the wide availability of vacant, public land, Delhi’s working classes have historically settled on vacant land with little difficulty. It is important to emphasize here that this does not constitute an unsolicited act of “squatting,” as is commonly understood and depicted today. Rather, most existing slum settlements were deliberately settled by governmental or private labor contractors in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. These contractors recruited and hired laborers from neighboring states to build the new DDA-planned areas of the city for middle and higher income groups, while the DDA consistently failed to meet the Master Plan’s provisions for low income housing. Instead, contractors created labor camps on government or private land beside their worksites.

This type of “squatting,” then, took place with government approval in the majority of cases: i.e., slums arose as planned violations of the Master Plan. As many construction projects at the time consisted of building up entire residential colonies (municipal infrastructure, roads, buildings, etc.), the labor camps became semi-permanent. As these camps grew, local politicians (councilors and MLAs) recognized the possibility of mobilizing the laboring population for their own electoral advantage. Thus, bureaucrats in the Delhi Government and local politicians (usually in the Congress Party, which has historically supported lower income groups in Delhi) seeking to solidify or expand their electoral base offered ration cards to slum residents, usually within the first few years of the establishment of a slum. Until the late 1980s, these ration cards were the sole requirement for exercising the vote. Slum dwellers, elected officials, and local bureaucrats up through the 1990s also treated these ration cards as legal residence proof, with slum dwellers believing (and being told) that such proof provided tenure security and the right to public services.

In Shiv Camp, the slum settlement I discuss in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, a private land developer purchased land from the Delhi Development Authority in the mid-1960s to build the plan-approved residential colony in which Shiv Camp is located. The developer hired laborers, mostly from the neighboring state of Rajasthan, and settled them on a small portion of the land he purchased. In 1980, after having sold a number of individual plots to private buyers, he turned the land over to the Municipal Corporation, which provides municipal services (e.g., lighting, waste disposal, and water connections) to the residents and businesses of such colonies and maintains the area’s public infrastructure (e.g., parks, roads, sewers, and parking). Because local politicians in both the state and municipal government depended on Shiv Camp residents for their vote and because the land was on the periphery of the city at the time and of little value to the Municipal Corporation, when the land developer handed the colony over to the Municipal

households of poorly built congested tenements, in unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities.”

⁶ Okhla Factor Owner’s Association vs. GNCTD (Delhi High Court, 2002), Civil Writ Petition No. 4441 of 1994, final judgment, paragraph 18. This estimate is based on the ground situation in 1998, but because up to date citywide estimates of Delhi’s slum population have not been completed in more than a decade (Dupont, 2008), the MCD and DDA are in the habit of quoting 1998 numbers for all later dates.

Corporation, there was no question of whether the slum would remain or go. Therefore, at the time when the Municipal Corporation took over the settlement, the residents of Shiv Camp were never confronted or threatened with demolition and were in fact never officially told that the land had been transferred. In a survey of fifty residents of Shiv Camp I conducted in 2007, which I describe in detail in Chapter 5, 48 residents stated that either upon arrival or after receiving their first ration card, they considered themselves legal occupants of their land, while 45 of 50 stated that they considered the land their own—43 of whom said the basis of their land claim was “government approval” or their ration card.

Despite the fact that Shiv Camp violated the Master Plan, its residents had negotiated secure tenure with the support of elected representatives, the local police, and bureaucrats in the Department of Food and Supplies (state government), which issues ration cards. While upper level bureaucrats in the state government and central government planners and bureaucrats deride this divide between the plan and the city’s actually existing residential geography as the outcome of political corruption and failed plan implementation, this system mutually benefited the local state, slum residents, and, it must be added, the city as a whole through the availability of cheap labor subsidized by low-cost housing. Thus, a highly favorable reading of this arrangement would suggest that in the absence of the resources to develop formal low income housing, India’s developmental state extended the right to occupy public land to the working poor as a type of social welfare. These arrangements, however, did not solely benefit the poor, for, according to the Municipal Corporation, 70% of all land development in Delhi—by slum dwellers and wealthy property owners alike—violates the Master Plan.⁷ Indeed, most of the privileged few in Delhi who own private land received it at highly concessional rates from the government. Furthermore, the vast majority of land used outside of the formal oversight of the state is occupied and used by the wealthy (Verma, 2002).

The point then is not to romanticize the bureaucratic negotiability that occurs in the local state, but to recognize that only through these arrangements were India’s urban poor able to secure the tenuous access to the city they enjoy today. The porosity of the lower bureaucracy and the multiple, fluid channels of accessing the local state have prevented the complete embourgeoisement of the state and thus the city. To return to the Gramscian terms discussed in the previous section, the passive revolution of capital has been inhibited by the spatiality of the state itself: the deep bonds in “political society” between slum residents and low-level bureaucrats have prevented those in “civil society” from completely reconfiguring urban space in their own image. Efforts by planning officials in the DDA and Delhi Government to bring Delhi’s land use scenario into accordance with the Master Plan, which increased in the 1990s as land prices rose and more profitable opportunities for urban land development arose, were thus consistently thwarted. These arrangements, however, are rapidly deteriorating today. As of the early 2000s, the pace and scale of slum demolitions has increased starkly, with conservative estimates suggesting at least a tripling of the pre-2000 pace (Dupont, 2008). According to most scholars, the increasingly anti-poor orientation of Indian cities arose because of an emboldened “new middle class.” This class has indeed played a key role in this new drive to transform Delhi into a bourgeois, “world-class” city, but not for the reasons widely affirmed in the literature.

⁷ Writ Petition No. 4582 of 2003 and CM No. 587 of 2006 filed in the Delhi High Court, order dated January 18, 2006.

2.4. Bourgeois cities: The rise of the new middle classes

If the ethico-political bonds between the lower classes and the lower bureaucracy militate against the urban elite's best efforts to impose rational order onto Indian cities, as we have seen was the case in Delhi (and all Indian cities) through the first 50 years of post-colonial government, what explains the recent upswing in slum demolitions and city beautification projects in the past five to ten years? How have bourgeois visions of the urban future gained enough political traction to reshape these cities' physical landscapes, despite their prolonged stubbornness for change, or "feet of vernacular clay"? These are the underlying questions motivating Partha Chatterjee's recent and highly influential essay "Are Indian Cities Becoming Bourgeois At Last?" and a spate of recent scholarship on the "new middle class" in India. Let us begin by looking at how Chatterjee responds to the research question he sets before himself.

Chatterjee starts by charting the gradual thickening of "political society" that put in place new paralegal arrangements directly benefiting the burgeoning ranks of the urban poor, as discussed in the two previous sections. While the poor were gaining political ground through the 1980s, Chatterjee argues, the middle class retreated and disengaged from the messy politics of the city. In the 1990s, however, "the tide turned" (61) and those cordoned off in "civil society" fought back:

... there has been without doubt a surge in the activities and visibility of civil society. In metropolis after Indian metropolis, *organized civic groups* have come forward to demand from the administration and the judiciary that laws and regulations for the proper use of land, public spaces, and thoroughfares be formulated and strictly adhered to in order to improve the quality of life of citizens. Everywhere the dominant cry seems to be to rid the city of encroachers and polluters and, as it were, to give the city back to its proper citizens (140, emphasis added).

From where did this shift in "civil society" arise? What precipitated this response? What is the origin of this newfound middle class power? The triggering event, for Chatterjee, occurred when "a new idea of the post-industrial city became globally available for emulation" (142). After rehearsing the common definition of "the global city" (a service-based, culturally branded city operating as a node in the global network of finance capital and information) (cf. Sassen, 2001), he notes that this global image arose through new media representations and the middle classes' increased access to international travel. Somehow, according to Chatterjee, the sudden exposure to the image of a post-industrial city not only spurred a political awakening among the elite, but also endowed those in civil society with the capacity to put pressure on the local state—the traditional bastion of "political society" and the poor—to stop "helping the poor subsist within the city" (144) and instead move Indian cities in the direction of this new image.

For Chatterjee, who earlier critiqued Benedict Anderson's (1983) argument that "the historical experience of nationalism in Western Europe, in the Americas, and in Russia had supplied... a set of modular forms from which nationalist elites in Asia and Africa had chosen the ones they liked" (Chatterjee, 1993, 5), it is surprising to find his explanation of the new Indian city stemming from a simple borrowing of Western modular forms ("the post-industrial global

image”). Regardless of the origins of world-class aesthetic discourse in India, which I analyze in detail in the following chapter, the middle class’s mere adoption of a particular aesthetic sensibility does not tell us if and how such an aesthetic became hegemonic.

In describing the role of the Calcutta middle class in establishing a hegemonic nationalist project in the early 20th century, Chatterjee early wrote:

It was this class that constructed through a modern vernacular the new forms of public discourse, laid down new criteria of social respectability, set new aesthetic and moral standards of judgment, and, suffused with its spirit of nationalism, fashioned the new forms of political mobilization that were to have such a decisive impact on the political history of the province [West Bengal] in the 20th century (Chatterjee, 1993, 36).

In making this observation, however, he detailed the specific institutional channels and positions by which the middle class achieved such political power: its position within the colonial bureaucracy and educational system (a “mediating” role, as Chatterjee calls it), its command of English as a leadership attribute necessary to confront British colonial policy, the importance of a highly visible and “civilized” class to counter British claims of Indian savagery, among others. His comments about the contemporary urban middle class, however, leave the political channels by which it is able to disseminate hegemonic aesthetic standards unspecified. While descriptions of the desires, aspirations and political goals of the middle class are useful, we should not confuse a class’s political goals with its strategy, nor the ideology of a class with the institutional mechanisms by which its ideological position is consolidated. In other words, in asking what the forces remaking Indian cities today are, our conclusion should not be the political aspirations or urban visions of the elite. This tells us very little about how change occurs. Instead, we have to show concretely through what political mechanisms, pathways and strategies these goals get translated into real outcomes. As Polanyi argued in a different context,

The problem here was not so much why agrarians, manufacturers, or trade unionists wished to increase their incomes through protectionist action, but why [or how] they succeeded in doing so; not why businessmen and workers wished to establish monopolies for their wares, but why they attained their end...; not why those who grew corn attempted to sell it dear, but why they regularly succeeded in persuading those who bought the corn to help to raise its price (Polanyi, 1944, 153).

If Chatterjee’s brief consideration of the making of bourgeois cities was but an appeal to turn greater research attention to how middle class power is consolidated, then more elaborate studies of this class have done little to further elucidate the concrete practices by which the gains of the urban poor have so quickly been slashed. Some have argued that the expansion of “political society” and what Hansen (1999) calls the “plebianization of the political field” led to a set of “elite revolts” against the loss of political and cultural control (Corbridge & Harriss, 2000). But, these arguments have been made primarily in terms of large scale electoral equations and economic policies that are not directly transferable to the context of municipal

politics. Further, they deal primarily with the upper echelons of state contestation, not the lower level bureaucracy upon which political society depends.

For Leela Fernandes (2004, 2006), who has engaged in by far the most in depth study of India's "new middle class" to date, slum demolitions and the remaking of Indian cities are driven by "new suburban aesthetic identities and lifestyles that seek to displace visual signs of poverty from public space" (2006, xxii). Like Chatterjee, Fernandes sees middle class power arising from new urban visions and demands—what I call world-class aesthetics—within this class itself. But, if as Fernandes says, "this social group has in fact historically been concerned with the assertion of civic order, a quest that has tended to rest on the exclusion of marginalized social groups that have threatened to disrupt this order" (Ibid., 26)—that is, if middle class urban visions and aesthetics are not new—then what is new about the rise of middle class power?

Just as Chatterjee argues (quoted above) that "organized civic groups have come forward to demand" a new type of city, Fernandes (2006, xxiii) suggests that "the rise of a new middle class identity begins to take the form of organized associational activity as segments of this social group form civic and neighborhood organizations in order to reclaim public space and consolidate a style of living that can adequately embody its self-image as the primary agent of the globalizing city and nation." Therefore, for them, it is not just an emboldened middle class aesthetic that is remaking the Indian city, but also the organization of that aesthetic into new associational practices. But, once again, the spur to the remaking of Indian cities is seen to emanate from internal changes within the middle class, without accounting for how these new visions are practically imposed on the lower levels of the bureaucracy. State power in this analysis figures in only once middle class aesthetics are secured and given official sanction, but these authors provide no sense of how this class and the local state intersect to transfigure the linkages between the lower level state and the lower classes. For example, Fernandes and Heller (2006, 516) argue that "The growth of civic organizations represents an emerging trend in which the NMC [new middle class] has begun to assert an autonomous form of agency as it has sought to defend its interests against groups such as hawkers and slumdweller." They go on to call this a "de-representation of politics, as the middle class has shifted its political practices from representative structures to making representations through civil society structures" (Ibid., 517). Their argument, then, is that the elite have asserted authority over the city by *disengaging* from the state, an act of separating civil society from the state. Both Chatterjee and Fernandes, then, seem to endorse the view of middle class activism held by the middle class itself: as a Delhi-based monthly magazine covering non-governmental organizations and civic associations suggests, "... middle class anger pays. The louder you scream the better."⁸ The problem with this view, however, is that the middle class has been screaming for years, but nobody had to listen. Current analyses provide little insight into what brought the megaphone to their lips, to continue the metaphor.

In contrast to Fernandes and Chatterjee, Roy (2004) shows that the new forms of liberalized urban development in contemporary Calcutta are the outcome of emergent strategies of state spatial regulation. She specifically argues that the state has begun to employ new strategies of accumulation, in line with the broader trend of economic liberalization in India, that seek to

⁸ Quoted from Delhi-based magazine called *Civil Society*, September-October 2005.

privatize state assets and valorize undercapitalized spaces. The state secures legitimacy in this process, she claims, by destabilizing existing patronage politics through the selective application of the law and the randomization of political support—the “indeterminacies of exclusion and inclusion,” she says. That is, large scale slum demolitions have not obliterated the previous negotiability and patronage politics of the local state, but flexibilized the deployment of informal party mechanisms to strategically appropriate the public space previously occupied by the poor, but do so in a piecemeal fashion and in such a way that the poor continue to rely on these same party mechanisms in hopes of retaining tenure security or securing resettlement rights (2004, 158). Her analysis thus suggests that beyond the secular rise of an emboldened middle class—which she does not herself address—we have to look at new spatial strategies and configurations of the local state to understand the redevelopment of Indian cities, a “hegemony through volatility” as she calls it (Roy, 2002: 212). Nair echoes this when she says of middle class efforts to reclaim Cubbon Park in Bangalore, “If anything, the success and visibility of the middle-class in re-establishing its claims to the park... comes at a time when the city government itself increasingly seeks the latter’s partnership in running the city” (2005, 216). I now turn to the spatial reorientation of the local state in Delhi and how it contributed to the rise of middle class power. My argument, then, in contrast to prevalent views on middle class power, is that only through a reconfiguration of urban governance structures—that is, a respatialization of the state—was the middle class vision or urban space able to gain traction and become hegemonic.

2.5. From popular to gentrified participation

Recognizing the inefficiencies of a centralized planning apparatus and a localized implementation mechanism, in 1989, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi stated before the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian Parliament) that “the irregular and uncertain elections, the wide gap between the people and the implementing authority were the main reasons that had ignited the need for decentralization in governance” (Gandhi, 1989, 28). In doing so, Gandhi set in motion a series of Parliamentary debates ultimately culminating, three years later, in the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act aimed at decentralizing urban governance functions to ward committees. This Act was intended to resolve the problems of the multiplicity of urban authorities discussed in Section 2.3 by devolving many of the planning and administrative tasks previously spread across the central, state and municipal government into more compact and localized administrative units. Ward committees were meant to represent populations of around 300,000 and be made up of the elected Councilors for each ward represented therein⁹, along with a nominated Chairman, as well as common citizens elected by their peers. In the case of Delhi, such committees would have taken over substantial portions of the DDA, Municipal Corporation and Delhi Government’s planning and administrative functions. Figure 9 shows how ward committees, if constituted as the Act intended, would have reconfigured Delhi state space.

⁹ In Delhi, this would have meant around three Councilors per committee until the 2007 municipal elections, when the MCD re-delimited wards, more than doubling the total number of wards. Wards now have an average of 50,000 people, down from 100,000 (Shah & Bakore, 2006).

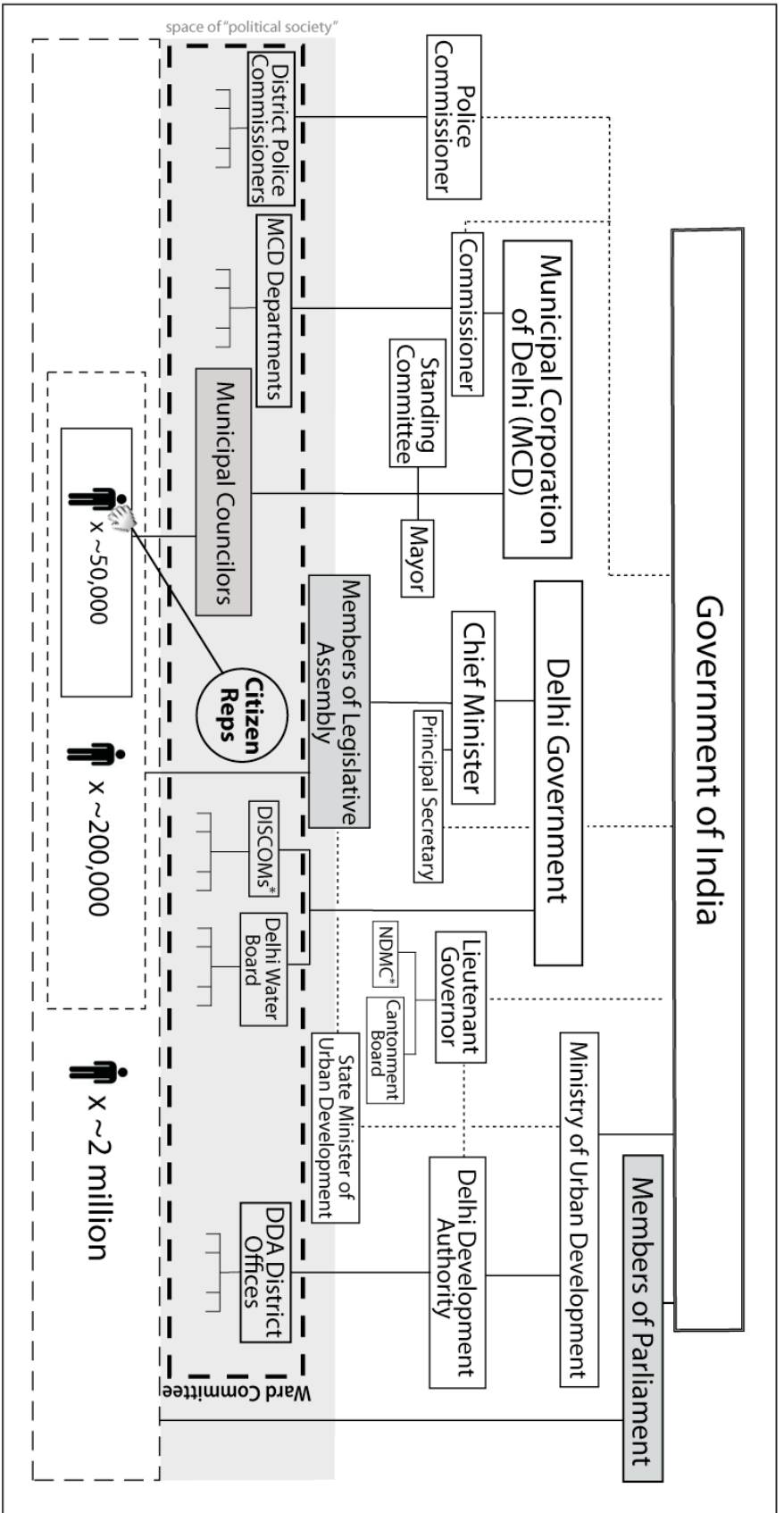


Figure 9. Intended configuration of Delhi's administrative arrangement after implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. The key change the 74th Amendment is supposed to bring about is the formation of ward committees (indicated by the bold, dashed box) in cities. The ward committees were intended to take over responsibilities from higher branches of government regarding land use planning and land management (currently under the DDA), service provision, infrastructure management and maintenance, tax collection, and local crime prevention. This would have expanded vastly the realm of "political society," giving all residents of a ward closer contact with departments previously beyond their reach. Ward committees, in Delhi like in most cities, have either not been formed, or have not been delegated enough authority to function.

This would have represented a significant deepening (i.e., residents can reach higher up into the state) and broadening (i.e., residents can access a wider range of state departments) of “political society,” or, perhaps, a greater overlap between political and civil society by extending the influence of local elected representatives into higher reaches of the state. The intention of the Act was to provide a forum in which problems in a particular ward—the smallest electoral constituency in the Indian political architecture—could be discussed by the Councilor, bureaucrats in the municipal government (MCD), and local residents through the citizen representatives. Budgetary decisions too would have been debated and settled in this space, bringing decisions regarding local development projects down from the MCD’s Standing Committee, which is an unelected body inaccessible to most residents, into a more local and accountable body.

In reality, the implementation of the Act was left to the state governments, and in Delhi’s case, ward committees have been constituted only at the level of the district, which includes well over 1 million people. Because of their size, the committees “do not provide a forum where ordinary people can deliberate on the needs of the community” and therefore defy the goal of increasing proximity between elected representatives and administrative decisions (Leena & Sharma, 2007, 26). Furthermore, the Deputy Commissioners of the Delhi Government’s Revenue Department for each district, who are appointed bureaucrats, chair the district committees (sometimes referred to as “District Development Committees”) hence obstructing the elected representatives’ (councilors and citizen representatives) ability to directly influence decisions even at this larger administrative scale. In addition, the DDA does not participate in these meetings, leaving the questions of land management and planning entirely off the table of local decision making. Thus whereas the Act was intended to decentralize governance mechanisms by strengthening the linkages between common residents, elected Municipal Councilors (who are typically most representative of slum interests), and the day-to-day operations of the state, the municipal structure continues to constrain these more representative forms of governance.

Delhi’s administrative context throughout the 1990s continued to be defined by a wide gap between residents and their elected representatives on the one hand, and the planning and implementation mechanisms of the state on the other. The arrangement shown in Figure 8, hence, remained the status quo. In 2000, however, Delhi’s system of urban governance took a radical turn. Sheila Dikshit, the Chief Minister of Delhi and a member of the ruling Congress Party, launched an ambitious program called Bhagidari, which means “participation” or “partnership” in Hindi. Bhagidari was conceived, according to the Chief Minister’s Office, to respond to

[t]he deteriorating condition of environment, traffic, and public utilities....
‘Delhi’ was synonymous with overflowing sewers, littering on public places
[sic], poor roads, long traffic jam coupled with vehicular and industrial pollution.
To make matters worse, the administration was overburdened, and the
conventional methods of problem solving were not yielding the desired results
(Government, 2007).

These “conventional methods” were the existing system of fragmented governance—that is, the space of “political society” and the “porous bureaucracy” that had allowed the poor to assert their claim to the city, as we saw in the previous section. Dikshit’s vision since taking office in

1998, a mantle shared by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, has been to transform Delhi into a “world-class city.”¹ Delhi’s hosting of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the highest profile international event ever scheduled to be held in India, is the key symbol in this transformation. As a result, Dikshit has on multiple occasions declared the preparation for the Games Delhi’s “top priority”²: “the games will result in an urban transformation of Delhi, and shall give us the opportunity to upgrade Delhi’s infrastructure and make it a world-class city.”³ The Delhi Budget 2006-7 also makes frequent reference to Delhi becoming a “world-class city” in justifying its financial allocations, as does the newest update to the Delhi Master Plan (DDA, 2007). Constructing a world-class city means, among other things, making the city presentable to foreign dignitaries, tourists, and investors—thus the concern with Delhi’s appearance in the above quotation.

As part of this effort, the Government gradually shifted public finances in the early 2000s away from education, public housing, healthcare, and food subsidies toward large, highly visible and “modern” infrastructure projects like the Delhi Metro Rail; more than 50 new flyovers; two new toll roads to Delhi’s posh, satellite cities; and the Commonwealth Games Village—prestige projects built “to dispel most visitors’ first impression that India is a country soaked in poverty” (Ramesh, 2008). Similarly, the Delhi Government approved a large sum of money (more than USD 100 million, which it later retracted after cost estimates almost doubled) for building a “signature bridge” modeled after London’s Millennium Bridge and the MCD liberalized building bye-laws and development norms to allow for denser and taller commercial development across the city. Along the same lines, the Delhi international airport and its 250 acres of land was privatized and new star-rated hotels were given a five-year tax holiday across the city—what Harvey (1989) calls a “geobribe.” The Delhi Government, the DDA, politicians, and the media continually reinforce the city’s collective interest in this world-class transformation by gauging changes in the city according to their contribution to an imagined world-class future. As one commentator in the *Times of India* asked, “In 2010, when a million foreign visitors come to Delhi to celebrate the Games, will they see world-class Delhi, or the same congested, slummy city?”⁴

Making a world-class city entails the thorough physical upgradation or redevelopment of dilapidated and undercapitalized areas of the city, and it is hence no secret that a “world-class city” means a slum-free city.” Garnering legitimacy and popular support for this project and ensuring full buy-in from the lower branches of the state—a weakening of the political ties in “political society”—though, required a re-structuring of the state itself. This is the context out of which Bhagidari emerged, the goal of which, according to the Chief Minister, is “to build a ‘clean, green, hassle-free quality of life’ in Delhi, and transform Delhi into a ‘world-class capital city’” (GNCTD, 2004a, XIII).

¹ See, for example, “Sheila urges citizens to strengthen Bhagidari”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 4, 2007.

² *The Hindu*, “Commonwealth Games top priority of government,” February 6, 2008.

³ *Frontline*, 23 (6). The aspiration to achieve world-class or global city status has been discussed widely. As Krupar (2007: 5) writes, “The global city has become a primary vehicle used by the nation to indicate arrival on the world stage and transform urban space through spectacular regeneration.”

⁴ “Editorial”, *The Times of India*, New Delhi Online Edition, March 8, 2007.

In 2000, the Chief Secretary of Delhi developed the concept of Bhagidari. Reflecting back on the Chief Minister's enthusiasm for the project, he told me in an interview in 2006 that

Citizens were unhappy with the state of the city, but all they did was complain to the government. What could we do? Colonial rule and rule by kings before that created a psyche that government had to do everything.... Bhagidari was created to tell people "you are a part of government and have equal duties and responsibilities." It is a change management process... Bhagidari tries to establish a structural and formal relationship with the government and people. The CM [Chief Minister] saw Bhagidari as an opportunity to change the mindset of the people; to get them involved.⁵

After Reigunathan's initial idea to create a new institutional mechanism to bring citizens directly into the governance process through workshops and consultations, the Chief Minister hired the Asian Centre for Organisation Research and Development (ACORD), a for-profit consulting organization specializing in "change management, strategic planning, and human development"⁶ that has worked primarily for industrial organizations and corporations, local governments, and NGOs in building more efficient organizational structures. After initial consultations with ACORD, a Bhagidari Cell was created inside the Chief Minister's Office that was envisaged as the center for recruiting participants, called "Bhagidars," and coordinating Bhagidari programs. The Bhagidari Cell and ACORD quickly defined three primary "stakeholders" considered worthy Bhagidars: market/trader and industrial associations, bureaucrats across the municipal, state and central government departments operating in Delhi, and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) based in DDA-approved residential colonies, membership in which is open only to property owners. This meant that residents of slum settlements and unauthorized colonies⁷ (as well as renters across the city) were excluded from the "citizen-government partnership," the voices of whom, the Delhi Government claimed, were represented by RWAs, the so-called "grass-roots citizens associations" (GNCTD, 2006b: 3). From the beginning, then, Bhagidari was designed as an instrument to incorporate the voices of private property owners into urban governance and exclude non-private property owners, making it a type of elite "invited space" (Cornwall, 2004). As Reigunathan said, "Its [Bhagidari's] goal is to make RWAs more powerful and responsive." Despite declarations that Bhagidari had become "elitist" by politicians in both the opposition and ruling parties, its exclusion of the 69 percent of the population living in slums and unauthorized colonies has not waived.⁸ When I asked the Secretary (one rank below the Chief Secretary) to the Chief Minister who oversees the Bhagidari Cell, why Bhagidari was not open to slum residents, she

⁵ Interview with Mr. S. Reigunathan, November 24, 2006.

⁶ Asian Centre for Organization Research and Development, Silver Jubilee Year 2006 brochure.

⁷ Unauthorized colonies are plots of land purchased via "power of attorney" sales that are typically registered with the Revenue Department, but are not formally recognized by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) because they do not conform to or exist within the district or area plans. They are primarily sub-divided agricultural tracts of land, often developed and sold by property dealers, without DDA approval of land-use conversion or development plans.

⁸ "Maken lashes out at *Bhagidari*", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 10, 2006.

began by describing the legal and administrative challenges of working in such areas, but concluded by saying, “In the end, the city shouldn’t look like a slum.”⁹

Despite its overtly exclusionary basis, Bhagidari bureaucrats and documents depict Bhagidari as an inclusive program aimed at fostering “good governance.” The Bhagidari symbol (see Figure 10)—two interlocking hands, indicating the partnership of citizens and government—is intended to reflect a sense of partnership and is stamped on all Delhi Government documents, public announcements, and advertisements. The Government also launched its “Clean Delhi, Green Delhi” campaign under Bhagidari, the purpose of which is to impart a sense of civic pride and environmental sensibility to the public through tree planting campaigns, anti-litter notices, and a general celebration of more eco-friendly and world-class public works ranging from park development to the Delhi Metro Rail (Delhi, 2006). Beyond these and similar measures to brand the city and create various catchy and widely disseminated phrases (e.g. “My Delhi, I Care”), Bhagidari self-describes as a citizen’s movement to transform government and the city through transparency building efforts, public participation, and improved government efficiency. As a Bhagidari brochure states:

A change process was required to bring the citizens into the centre of governance. Thus the scheme of ‘Citizen-Government Partnership: Bhagidari’ was formulated to develop a democratic framework wherein citizen groups can interact and partner with government functionaries for resolution of simple, day-to-day civic issues. It encourages citizen volunteerism and sharing of responsibilities between the government and its people. It facilitates public scrutiny of government functioning and works towards policy interventions in support of popular empowerment and betterment of civil society.



Figure 10. The Bhagidari Symbol

We thus see that the first goal of Bhagidari, stated explicitly in documents and Bhagidari workshops and conveyed to me in interviews, is to incorporate citizen concerns and activism into the practice of government—that is, to “governmentalize the state” (Foucault, 1991) by training RWA members through workshops (described below), and the public more broadly through publicity campaigns, to see themselves and act as if they are government. In addition to this effort to produce participation, Bhagidari arose out of a second, and perhaps deeper felt,

⁹ Interview in Chief Minister’s Office, April 26, 2006.

need to change the organization and operation of the state bureaucracy itself. As the Secretary to the Chief Minister said of the inefficiencies of the bureaucratic process,

Government workers don't respond to the demands of citizens. They don't follow directives outside of their immediate command either, and they sometimes don't even follow those.... We saw the need for Bhagidari to coordinate the demands of citizens [read: RWAs], so citizens wouldn't have to negotiate the maze of different departments and so those departments would become more responsive.... This was difficult early on because it was difficult to get government bureaucrats to move. Over five years now, there's been a change of mindset so that initial barriers are overcome.

Bhagidari seeks to not only transform citizens into the “eyes and ears of government,” as Bhagidari bureaucrats like to say, but also insert a new set of incentives and bureaucratic arrangements into state space itself so that government workers are more directly tied into and responsive to the demands of RWAs.¹⁰ As Ferguson and Gupta (2002) remind us, state spatial order as well as scalar and bureaucratic hierarchy have to be continually reproduced. In Delhi today, Bhagidari represents an active strategy to re-affirm the chain of command and re-tune bureaucratic responsiveness, and thus the class configuration, of the state. Let us now turn to Bhagidari's three primary activities through which RWAs interact with and shape state practice and policy.

Bhagidari Activity Number 1: The Membership Workshop

The first activity of Bhagidari is a three-day workshop held approximately three times a year in which new Bhagidars are inducted into the program and undergo training on how to “participate.” These workshops are held in large, air-conditioned, decorated conference halls with dozens of round tables seating a mixture of bureaucrats and RWA representatives. The workshops are inaugurated by the Chief Minister herself and followed by comments by the Chief Secretary of Delhi and the Director of the Bhagidari Cell, who proclaim the importance of the new Bhagidars in the efficient administration of the city. The Chief Minister begins the proceedings by describing the growth of the “Bhagidari movement” from a mere 30 RWAs in 2000 to more than 1600 today [2007]. She praises the decisions her administration has made by noting that Delhi implemented a Right to Information (RTI) Act before the national RTI Act was put in place in 2001 and stating that Bhagidari won the United Nations Public Service Award in 2005 for good governance and government transparency. She describes how citizens have begun to take part in government itself and makes reference to the slogan “My Delhi, I Care” as an example of the “mindset” Bhagidari seeks to foster. Through Bhagidari, she says, city problems can be jointly solved. In a workshop I attended in October 2006, the Director followed the Chief Minister by saying,

It is time to showcase the city, to showcase the country in the city. The Beijing Games are coming before the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, and you can count on China showcasing its economic and military power. This is what

¹⁰ Might this be read as a productive reversal of Agrawal's (2001) question “state formation in community spaces?”: the formation of community in a new state space?

countries do. The 1986 Asiad Games [hosted in Delhi, in 1982 not 1986] did this for Delhi. The city's first two flyovers came then. Color TV first came to India then. Now, we will construct 24 new flyovers before the Commonwealth Games.... Sports offer a stimulus to get any upgradation done: wider roads, the Metro, new stadiums—improving the city. We are here today to make sure this happens, to help make Delhi the best city, a world-class city.

He thus began by establishing the vision of a world-class city as the national goal of citizen and government alike. After further discussion of the significance of Bhagidari, the Director proceeded to describe how the relationship between Bhagidars and government is formalized by laying out the structure and organization of the Bhagidari process. Bhagidars, he explained, have four primary points of contact with the state, which are described in detail over the course of the workshop.

First, monthly Bhagidari meetings are held in each of Delhi's nine revenue districts, in which member RWAs and lower level bureaucrats as well as a "District Nodal Officer"—a top ranking bureaucrat—from all relevant government departments, including the MCD and DDA, meet under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner, who is the officer in charge of running the District Office as well as the chair of the Municipal Corporation's District Development Committee (the closest thing to a ward committee in Delhi, discussed above). I will describe the details of these meetings below, but in the Bhagidari Membership Workshops, these monthly meetings are described as the first line of contact between RWAs and the state. In addition to these monthly meetings, RWAs can directly contact the Bhagidari Cell, which then forwards the aggrieved RWA's request to the relevant department. The third line of contact between RWAs and the state is in Bhagidari Thematic Workshops, which address a single issue (e.g., water delivery) over the course of a 3-day workshop, discussed further below. The fourth line of contact between RWAs and the state is through direct communication, usually via telephone or office visits.

The Bhagidari Cell, as well as ACORD, which facilitates the Membership Workshops, insist that a major goal of Bhagidari is to make RWA members and bureaucrats not only partners in urban governance, but also friends. Their goal is to open lines of communication by which residents can call the relevant department workers when there is a leaking pipe, a downed power line, or a truant waste collector. As the Chairman of ACORD told me during a workshop, "a lot of bonding takes place [in Bhagidari]. New friendships are made. People exchange phone numbers. Then, when RWAs have problems, they can just call up officials and get things fixed up."¹¹ Indeed, extended lunch and tea breaks in both the membership and thematic workshops are opportunities for RWA-bureaucrat socialization. While attending these workshops and talking with participants, I often had a hard time differentiating between bureaucrats and RWA members. Both groups praised the food, laughed at funny or awkward statements the Bhagidari staff had made, criticized or endorsed certain outcomes reached in the workshop, and engaged in casual chit chat about family, film and cricket. Workshops successfully create a shared middle class cultural space in which the casual style of interaction, the attire of participants, and the mixed English-Hindi conversations helped reduce the divide between citizen and government worker. Lunch activities almost resembled middle class wedding receptions:

¹¹ Bhagidari thematic workshop, October 22, 2006.

participants wove through lavish buffet lines, listened to classic Hindi movie songs, and engaged in jovial conversation in between sipping tea and eating *jalebi*.

After the Director and Bhagidari staff describe the four primary channels of Bhagidari interaction at the beginning of the membership workshop, individual sessions are run wherein Bhagidars are taught the administrative structure in their district, who works for whom, and the procedures by which they can access and communicate with various branches of the state.

In addition to participating in small group sessions where new RWA Bhagidars interact with bureaucrats to understand the nature of their future interaction, Membership Workshops have two other primary functions. The first is to instill in Bhagidars a set of norms and expectations as to how the city should appear and function. While many RWAs join Bhagidari with a pre-formulated set of civic concerns and actually existing neighborhood problems, these workshops sketch out broader urban problematics that are presumed to be shared by all legitimate urban residents: residents should pay taxes, discourage littering and public urination, actively prevent electricity and water theft, ensure that all residents in an area are registered with the police, report suspicious behavior or individuals to the relevant authorities, help Delhi become world-class, support the project of “greening” Delhi under the city’s “Clean Delhi, Green Delhi” tree planting and litter removal campaigns, support the “planned” development of the city, discourage public encroachments on streets and public land, among others. While the workshop organizers repeatedly raise these challenges over the course of the workshop, a key way in which a normative picture of Delhi emerges is through a small group exercise in which Bhagidars are asked to identify “positive things in Delhi” and “negative things in Delhi.”

In these exercises, Bhagidars from diverse locales across the city are placed in groups of 8-10 and instructed to debate the “best” and “worst” aspects of Delhi and which citywide civic problems should be tackled on a priority basis. At the end of the session, the Bhagidari staff collects written recommendations and priority problems from the small groups so they can be summarized and discussed in the large group by day’s end. This summary sheet shows Bhagidars what the consensus “positives” and “negatives” are in Delhi. During one workshop, the top “positives” included the Delhi Metro, new flyovers and highway construction, “Green Delhi,” and the Commonwealth Games. Top “negatives” included “uncontrolled population growth,” “unauthorized occupation of parks, roads and public places,” “water and electricity supply,” and “lack of cleanliness.”

Over the course of the workshop days, a handful of these problem areas are selected, and individual training sessions are run to show Bhagidars how past problems have been resolved within individual neighborhoods and districts. For these sessions, Bhagidars are again broken into groups of 8-10 and asked to brainstorm possible solutions to a stated civic problem. The workshop coordinators begin by suggesting that the best way to fix a problem is to remedy it oneself. Only if the problem is truly beyond the capacity of the RWA should it turn to the state departments. Improving Delhi, RWAs are told, requires more responsibility and initiative on the part of both citizens and government. Rather than “filing a grievance,” the workshop instructs Bhagidars to define the problem, conceive of possible solutions, and finally consider how that solution can best be reached. The individual sessions then create mock situations and ask RWAs, in conjunction with the bureaucrats at their table, to write up a proposed solution to the

problem at hand. The answers discussed in at each small group table are then shared with the large group and written responses are collected by Bhagidari staff so they can be typed up and summarized for the next day. These summaries are then passed out to all new Bhagidars, showing them the consensus strategies that should be adopted for the particular problems discussed. This establishes procedural protocols for civic action, guiding RWA concerns and conduct toward certain problem areas and pre-defined improvement strategies.

A related function of these workshops, thus, is to define RWAs as governors, to train them to conduct themselves and attempt to conduct the conduct of others in a way amenable to Delhi's world-class ascent. Bhagidari becomes an exercise, in part, of cultivating a pattern of self-government among the middle class, but more importantly of instilling a set of civic concerns within a privileged segment of the population that can demand adherence to "world-class standards" from the lower branches of the state—via Bhagidari itself as well as in the media. While all RWAs come to Bhagidari with a set of demands they hope to place upon the state, Bhagidari Membership Workshops inculcate among RWA members a concern for a mutually agreed upon quality of urban life. After membership training, RWA representatives return to their neighborhoods and are expected to pursue the problem-solving strategies learned. They are handed workshop summaries broken down by problem type and given a final instruction sheet on how to educate other RWA members and neighborhood residents.

The membership workshops conclude with closing remarks from the Chief Minister and a group sing along to the Bhagidari theme song, which Bhagidars also sing at the Bhagidari Thematic Meetings held periodically through the year and discussed below: "*Hawa sudhar gayi, sadak sudhar gayi, ... har mushkil ki hal nikali, Bhagidari se bhagidari nikali.... Meri Dilli main hi sanwaroo...* (the air is cleaner, the streets have improved,... a solution for each problem has emerged, Bhagidari has led to cooperation,... I will nurture my Delhi...)"

Bhagidari Activity 2: Thematic Workshops

As of May 2007, Bhagidari had coordinated 68 thematic workshops taking up issues as diverse as "Water problems in Delhi" and "Future Delhi: 2010," which was a collective exercise to define how Delhi should look come 2010. Bhagidari thematic workshops are structured around a principle of "Large Group Dynamics" that ACORD drew from management practice, systems theory and psychoanalytic research (see Jacobs, 1997; Levine, 2006). Broadly concerned with the relationship between large group and individual identity, ACORD applies this approach in an effort to overcome institutional "inertia and resistance to change" (Government, 2007, 10). As the President of ACORD told me over the course of a Bhagidari thematic workshop, "bureaucrats have never had a reason to listen to the citizen. There was no way to foster such an interaction. We have to find ways to bring all levels into this so that everyone sees the need for change."¹² Building on the Chief Minister's idea of using Bhagidari to bring about a transformation in the operation of the state itself, ACORD designed the Bhagidari workshops, which it calls "large group interactive events", in order to make the bureaucracy's ear more attuned to RWA demands, especially at the ground level. The workshops begin this process by bringing a mix of 300-400 RWAs and bureaucrats across departments together to "engage in

¹² Ms. Kiron Wadhera, President and CEO of ACORD, October 13, 2006.

intensive and participatory dialogue” on problems and solutions in the city (Government, 2007, 10). Bhagidari literature describes this approach in the following terms:

In a Large Group Interactive Event/‘Bhagidari’ workshop the large group is further fragmented into 25-40 identical ‘small groups’, each small group constituted of members from various stakeholders of an area/locality. Each small group works in a large group environment on specific issues identified by the stakeholders themselves and evolves consensus solutions. During the workshop, the suggestions, views and outputs of each group are fed back to all the small groups so as to keep everyone involved in the process intimately. This energises the large group as well as the small table groups, and creates a momentum for implementing change. This helps generate surprisingly common grounds, common interests, common solutions among all the small groups and hence a common ownership of the change process. The small table groups... give specific commitments to these agreed solutions.... ‘Action teams’ are formed on the concluding day of the workshop for implementing the agreed solutions within a timeframe.... These action teams are given a mandate, by the Large Group itself, as well as by the ‘senior leadership group’ to go ahead and implement the workable solutions (ibid., 11).

The workshops therefore take up particular themes and draw the diverse opinions of RWAs and bureaucrats together to develop consensus solutions. The idea is that because the final solutions are based on the input of the small groups, which are collaborative efforts between RWAs and bureaucrats, all participants will “buy in” to the proposed changes. ACORD’s interpretation of “large group dynamics” insists that these events

must span at least two-and-a-half days (if not three) with two nights in between. This is based on interesting findings from sleep research, that during sleep, the day’s discussions and experiences in the small and large group are “processed” by the participants [*sic*] “subconscious minds. Only after such “sub-conscious” processing... does the phenomenon of “paradigm-shift” (or “change in the mind-set and attitude”) take place in 80% to 90% of the participants at the “experiential level” (GNCTD, 2001, 7).

Further, the Report notes, “Since people do not function based only on logic and reasoning, the LGIE [workshop] smoothly processes both *reason and feeling* simultaneously, to create ‘consensus’ and ‘ownership’ (‘Left-brain/right-brain integration’ of logic and emotion).” ACORD thus designed Bhagidari workshops as a forum in which participants, RWAs and bureaucrats alike, would be inculcated with new urban governance norms and priorities.

In a workshop focused on “improving public service delivery,” for example, bureaucrats from more than 60 government departments, along with RWA members, discussed strategies to increase government responsiveness to citizen demands. After the heads of various departments spoke to the large group on the importance of adapting to 21st century governance styles, all tables were handed a sheet that said the following:

The challenge in public administration is that even though the civil service holds i) a ‘monopoly’ (with no “competition”), and ii) “permanence” of service, it needs to find effective ways and means to keep constantly improving “public service delivery” in terms of the above 7 parameters [discussed below]. In the 21st century, the civil service needs to achieve a superb balance between its “control/regulation” function and the “citizen-service-delivery” function. We need to translate the vision of “citizen-centric administration” into a reality.

The sheet continues by saying, “Through the day, today, we will focus all our work sessions on identifying consensus-based solutions & suggestions to improve public service delivery, and raise citizen’s satisfaction levels.” The seven parameters were pre-determined by ACORD and the Bhagidari staff and included such things as “reducing citizens’ time and effort,” “reducing citizen’s cost,” “improving the quality of service,” “improving attitude, language/communication, & behavior of officials,” “achieving honest, ‘clean’, service delivery”, and “getting and utilizing continuous feedback from citizens.” These distinctly middle class concerns—many of which have little to do with the actual delivery of services and more with the style of delivery—hence structured the conversations throughout the workshop, precluding certain topics of bureaucratic procedure (e.g., equity) and elevating the relevance of others (e.g., courtesy and politeness). These parameters were framed in response to the RWA criticism that bureaucrats do not behave as if they are educated and do not express concern for citizen problems. As one RWA member commented, “*Anybody* can just push to the front of the queue. It isn’t like in other [corporate] offices where you are attended to and given a number.” The question, of course, becomes who this “anybody” is and how Bhagidari modifies this “anybody’s” ability to get to the front of the queue.

Over the course of the workshop, individual hour-long sessions were run in small groups to identify possible solutions to improving each of these seven areas. Small group discussions specifically treated these seven parameters as part of an effort to minimize the type of back-office, under the table interactions typically negotiated between slum residents, bureaucrats and politicians—operations connoted by the phrase “dirty politics.” Of the final recommendations shared with the large group and summarized in a list of agreed upon action points, five of the seven parameters led to recommendations to increase interaction with RWAs, which reinforces the importance of specifically RWA-government, not the more broadly construed “citizen-government,” interaction. After the sessions, bureaucrats were told, “action-points based on the agreed solutions/suggestions, will be implemented by HODs [head of departments] & officers in all the participating departments, to improve public service delivery, monitor a) the rate of improvement, and b) citizen’s satisfaction levels.”

While bureaucrats from the lowest to highest levels of office participate in Bhagidari, only low- and mid-level bureaucrats sit at the tables with RWAs. Top officers sit together at the front of the conference hall and respond to the final recommendations made by the small tables. While Bhagidari workshops are intended to guide bureaucrats toward taking charge of improving the city and the government on their own accord, the oversight and monitoring mechanisms put in place via Bhagidari and implemented by their seniors make it clear that change is a requirement of the job, even if there is not “buy in.” The Chief Minister’s endorsement of the recommendations on the final day of the workshop furthers this sentiment. A bureaucrat from the Delhi Water Board alluded to the tension between bureaucratic initiative to improve

government responsiveness versus a simple tightening of the chain of command when he told me over lunch, “How am I supposed to do my regular work when I have to say all this ‘please and thank you’ and answer all these calls?”

In addition to broader efforts to develop bureaucratic responsiveness to RWA demands, Bhagidari workshops often aim to construct mutual agreement between RWAs and bureaucrats on the future direction of the city. In the “Future Delhi: 2010” workshop, participants agreed that top goals necessary for Delhi to become world-class include removing/re-housing slums, discouraging begging, removing encroachments on public land, increasing greenery in the city, reducing litter, and expanding the Delhi Metro, among others. A clear bureaucratic vision emerging out of this and other workshops was thus that slums represent obstacles to Delhi’s progress. In a workshop on “Citizens Partnership in Governance,” small group sessions focused on the role of RWAs and the Municipal Corporation, respectively, in “keeping the colony and surroundings clean” and improving the quality of urban public space. Here too, final recommendations had a distinctly middle class, anti-poor bias: a final recommendation was to give RWAs authority to certify work done by staff of the Municipal Corporation (MCD), to encourage RWAs to be vigilant about illegal land occupation and use, and to create a regular line of communication between RWAs and the Head of Department of the MCD. Specific attention was given to various “security concerns,” with multiple sessions devoted to fostering RWA-police cooperation, verification of the status of servants, creating lists of “authorized” service providers (e.g., hawkers, repairmen, sweepers) to prevent “unauthorized” people from entering the colony, and the security threat of slum clusters. As we will see below, RWA interest in “cleaning up” Delhi via slum removal has not only been translated as a goal of everyday urban governance, but has also been formed into an official bureaucratic mandate.

Bhagidari Activity 3: Monthly Bhagidari Meetings

The third and most important Bhagidari activity is the monthly district-level meeting. These meetings bring the highest-ranking officer (called the “district nodal officer”) from each government department at the district level to the district office once a month for a two-hour meeting, during which all RWA Bhagidars from that district can attend and raise grievances they face in their neighborhoods. Monthly Bhagidari meetings were institutionalized through an executive order from S. Reigunathan, the Chief Secretary of Delhi, in 2002, which required each department in the Delhi Government to

Designate... Nodal Officers in the districts... for a group of RWAs... for the purpose of Bhagidari scheme immediately.... The nodal officers designated by the department should within ten days hold a meeting with the listed RWAs.... [These] officers in consultation with the RWAs should work out an ‘Action Plan’ for priority scheme as reflected in the Commitments and Action-Steps worked out during the [Thematic] Workshop.... The schemes are to be implemented within the department’s budgetary provisions for the year.... The Nodal Officers are to hold a monthly meeting with RWAs thereafter for continued implementation of the Action Plans.... The Deputy Commissioners of [the 9 districts] shall hold a review meeting with the RWAs and District Nodal Officers

on the last Friday of every month and send the status reports as per prescribed format to the office of the Chief Minister.

The Deputy Commissioner (the highest ranking bureaucrat in the Delhi Government at the district level) chairs these monthly review meetings and begins each session by asking about progress in addressing the problems from the previous meeting. If problems have been resolved to the satisfaction of the concerned RWA, they are removed from the list. If not, then the Commissioner asks when work to solve the problem will begin and what progress has been made, which usually leads to a discussion of timeline and the proposed remedy. If the RWA is dissatisfied with the response, which is often the case, it can push the Commissioner to apply pressure to the officer at hand. As a result, RWAs have a tremendous amount of influence over problem definition and resolution. If the Commissioner perceives a problem to be petty, s/he dismisses it forthright. But, over the course of the three monthly meetings I attended, RWA concerns were taken seriously, and if a satisfactory solution was not reached after multiple months, the officers in charge faced some sort of public embarrassment. For example, in one case where an RWA had complained about water logging in a park that had not been addressed in three months, the Commissioner picked up his cell phone and called a more senior official in the Delhi Water Board on the phone, asking him why the drain had not yet been cleared when the officer present knew about the problem for so long. In this instance, the officer in the meeting quickly promised that he would take care of the issue by the next month.

By forcing low-level bureaucrats to directly address the concerns of RWAs under the watch of higher-level bureaucrats and constructing a common space in which RWAs can engage all relevant government departments, Bhagidari monthly meetings significantly reconfigure state space, as Figure 11 illustrates.

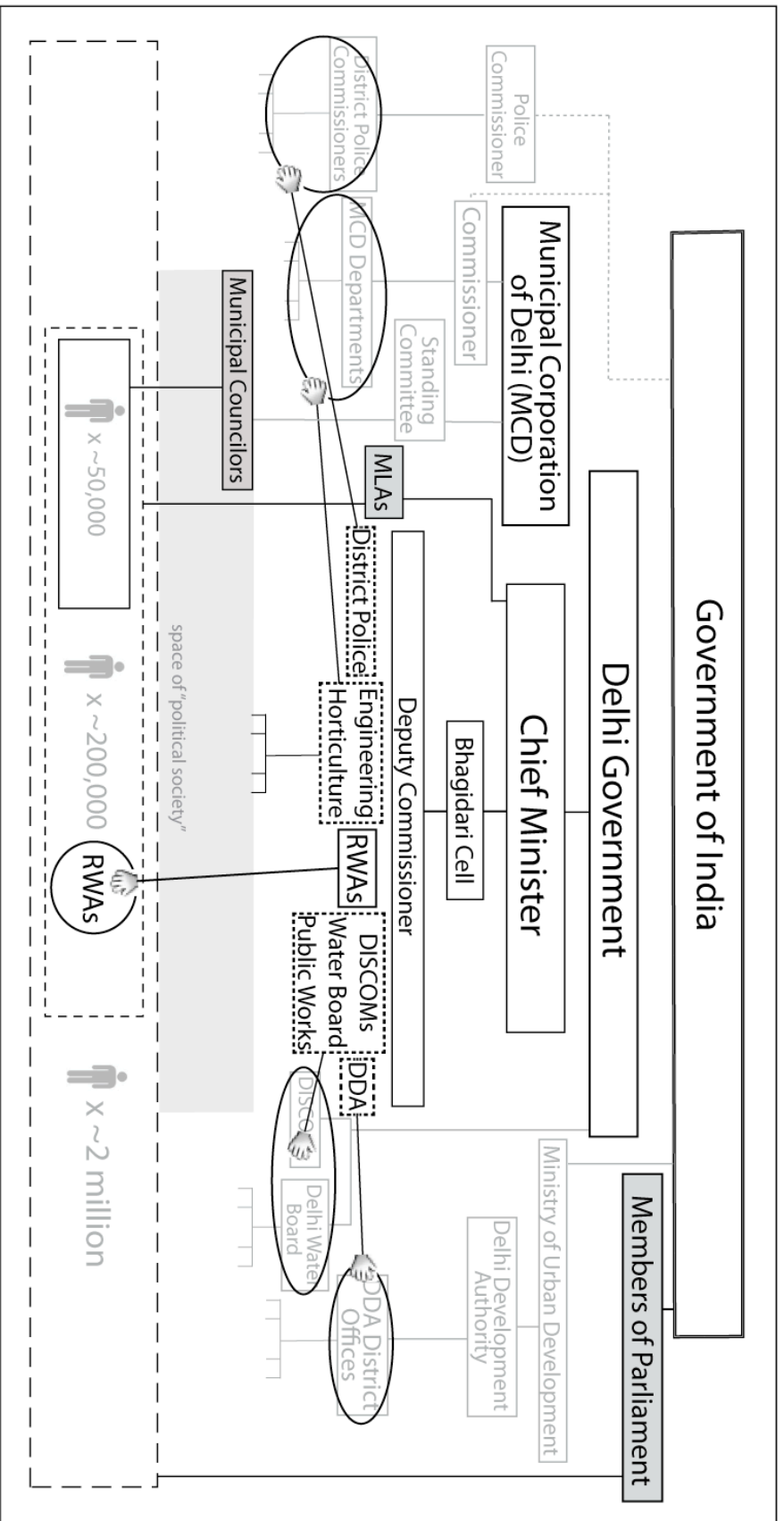


Figure 11. Reconfigured administrative hierarchy under the Delhi Government's new Bhagidari Scheme. This shows how the space of "political society" has become both shallower—i.e. those in political society cannot reach high enough up into the state to access the bureaucrats that can bend the rules in their favor—and narrower—i.e. the poor now cannot as wide a range of government departments.

As we can see from Figure 11, in place of a more representative system of local governance, as envisioned by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act and illustrated in Figure 9, Bhagidari has created a centralized governance space in which cross-departmental and -sectoral decisions and concerns are deliberated and in which only a privileged segment of society is given access. Via Bhagidari, RWAs, which represent only the 25% of the population living in DDA-recognized residential colonies, are elevated above the common citizen and placed within the apparatus of the state itself. By bringing upper and lower level bureaucrats together, the idea was that there would not be a need for the complex space of political negotiability through which abstract plans are reworked to meet local needs since action plans would be designed to address the problems faced by low-level state workers. However, Bhagidari, I now want to argue, has not eliminated the space of political negotiability (labeled “political society in Figure 11); it has gentrified it. It has done so in two ways.

First, Bhagidari creates a parallel governance mechanism through which RWA interests earn the special attention of government officials. Whereas those outside of Bhagidari have to go through the existing grievance redressal process, RWAs have direct access to the relevant officials, both in monthly meetings and through personal communication. As the president of ACORD told me,

Everyone starts at the local office, and if that doesn't solve their problem, then they go to the district office. If this doesn't work for Bhagidars, they go to their monthly district meeting and talk directly with the nodal officer, who is a much higher position than the district officer. They can also contact the Bhagidari Cell, which records complaints and forwards them to the chief officer of that department. If you are a non-Bhagidar, then after district office, all you can do is write to Grievances Cell of the Delhi Government.¹

My interviews and surveys with RWAs show that the first steps described here—going to the local then district offices—are rarely even considered by RWA Bhagidars. Instead, they go straight to a higher officer, either by phone or through the monthly meeting. In a survey of 25 RWA members actively involved in Bhagidari (see Methodological Appendix for details), 22 said they agree or strongly agree with the statement “Because of Bhagidari, you know more government officials and contact them more often;” two of the remaining three respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and only one disagreed. I often asked RWA members and bureaucrats if they had each other's phone numbers stored in their cell phones to confirm this increased familiarity. Without fail, bureaucrats involved in Bhagidari had the names of Secretaries from the most active RWAs on hand and said they are in regular contact.

Bhagidari monthly meetings also establish a direct line of communication between RWAs and the Chief Minister's Office, giving RWAs a platform to indirectly influence policy decisions and frame the debate on urban issues. As the supervisor of the South District Office said, “ultimately, if a problem isn't addressed it'll go to the CM's office.... If we have a problem we can't address, we tell the CMO and they call high level meeting in chairmanship of the CM with the highest

¹ Conversation with Dr. George Koreth, Chairman of ACORD, October 13th, 2006.

officers. This is how bigger issues get addressed.”² For example, consistent complaints by RWAs in West Delhi led the Chief Minister’s Office to send a request to the District MCD Office to investigate the matter. The Chief Minister or Delhi Cabinet have also, on multiple occasions, called special meetings with RWAs to address issues ranging from the government’s approach to water privatization and delivery,³ cable television, and the approach to mixed land use and commercialization. In the case of charting out the government’s policy on mixed land use, a highly contentious issue at the time, the Chief Minister specifically said the recommendations received from RWAs would be summarized and forwarded directly to the Group of Ministers charged with devising the central government’s policy on the matter.⁴

Bhagidari monthly meetings are a forum in which any RWA can develop a one on one relationship with public officials working in a particular ward or sector. They also directly introduce RWAs to those most capable of implementing change at the neighborhood and area level. This reduces the anonymity of RWAs and helps build a rapport between RWAs and bureaucrats. As the Secretary of a relatively high-income neighborhood in South Delhi said, “We no longer see them as some *babu* in a government office; we understand their constraints and are assured that our problems will be resolved. And they [problems] are resolved most often” (quoted in Chakrabarti, 2007, 62). Bureaucrats also prefer to discuss problems directly with the RWA rather than have to face scrutiny in the public meeting or by the Deputy Commissioner. As the above-quoted RWA Secretary said, “They [MCD officers] give us numbers, sometimes personal cell phone numbers; we know who to call for our water problems or for maintaining roads, or our garden. Earlier we [RWAs and residents] wasted all our time being redirected from one office to another to register our complaints. This was definitely a change” (Ibid.). The Secretary of an active North Delhi RWA expressed a similar point: “We have a close relationship with the D.C. [Deputy Commissioner] thanks to Bhagidari. Before we’d try calling an officer and his PA [personal assistant] would say he’s busy or in a meeting. Now, we know these officers well. Bhagidari has made a huge difference in our ability to make our point and voice heard.... We are the government now!”⁵ As another RWA leader said, “My RWA business card has the most powerful logo in the city, the Bhagidari logo. It opens doors, makes officials sit up and listen.”⁶

Twenty out of the twenty-five RWAs who completed my survey agreed with the statements “RWAs have been empowered because of Bhagidari” and “Because of Bhagidari, government departments listen to you more.”⁷ Only two respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with

² Interview, November 30, 2006. S. Regunathan concurs, “The government has on many occasions consulted RWAs directly on the drafting of civic policy. It sought cooperation on provisions of certain acts and infrastructure provision in general at the neighborhood level.”

³ “Govt faces heat at RWA meet”, *The Times of India*, New Delhi, July 15, 2006.

⁴ “Cabinet meets RWAs to figure way out”, *The Times of India*, New Delhi, November 21, 2006.

⁵ Interview, February 3, 2007.

⁶ Lakshmi, Rama. “Indian Cities Eye New Delhi’s Quiet ‘Citizen Revolution’”, *Washington Post*, A15, March 2, 2008.

⁷ A public perception survey conducted by the Delhi Government shows that RWAs report an overall increase in the quality of service delivery. Forty percent and forty-three percent of the 240 RWAs surveyed found their interactions with the MCD and DDA (which do not fall under the command of the Bhagidari Cell and Delhi Government), respectively, to be “successful,” meaning these interactions showed a marked improvement thanks to Bhagidari (GNCTD, 2006a, 95).

these claims, with one respondent in each case neither agreeing nor disagreeing. I was unable to secure enough responses to a survey I designed for bureaucrats on their perceptions of Bhagidari, but informal conversations with officers in various departments in the Delhi Government (e.g. Engineering, Horticulture, Water) confirmed that they personally know the leaders of RWAs in their area, understand their perspectives, find out about problems in RWA neighborhoods more quickly, receive more complaints from citizens, and solve RWAs' problems more quickly thanks to Bhagidari. This partially contrasts with RWA members' responses, which showed only a slight agreement with the statement "Government departments respond to you more quickly because of Bhagidari," and five of the 25 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "Bhagidari has helped you solve your neighborhood problems." Most of my interaction with government officials, usually during breaks between workshop sessions or before or after monthly meetings, also revealed their belief that citizen groups that are not in Bhagidari would be more powerful if they became Bhagidars. Most bureaucrats agreed (sometime reluctantly, perhaps suspicious of my line of argument) that they spent more time engaging with RWAs thanks to Bhagidari.

The frequency and intimacy of RWA-bureaucrat interactions make monthly meetings a context in which middle class sensibilities enter into the day-to-day culture of governance. As bureaucrats learn common RWA concerns and perspectives, their priorities shift to accommodate RWA civic sense. Although not all RWAs in Delhi perceive the same threats/challenges to healthy neighborhoods, a cross-RWA platform has emerged that the removal of slums and "encroachments" on public land and space is a necessary step in urban improvement. While I discuss the manner in which this argument is culturally expressed and discursively consolidated in the following chapter, copies of monthly district meeting summaries, as reported to the Bhagidari Cell, show that RWAs regularly raise this issue. I obtained these summaries for four of the nine districts in Delhi for three consecutive months. Each summary showed at least one grievance related specifically to a slum, with at least 15% of problems in each meeting pertaining to encroachments (e.g., slums, hawkers, illegal parking) on public land or roadsides. For example, one meeting summary reported a problem as such: "Footpath of Hunuman Lane encroached by the anti social element/smack addicts and beggars by installation of tentage [*sic*]" and reported that the Anti-begging squad, Police and Social Welfare Department would be deputed to resolve the issue. Another summary states, "Road on south of Soami Naar Colony and MCD flats from Savitri Nagar corner upto [*sic*] Chirag Delhi nala [drain] is heavily encroached by jhuggis [slum huts]."

In talking with the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi's Eastern District, she described how Bhagidari has slowly broken down the "people-government divide" and specifically, in her district at least, taken up the issue of slum removal:

We listen and respond to the needs of people more directly. So, because we have to meet RWAs every month, we have to at some point show progress on their wishes. We can't just keep saying 'dekh lenge' [we'll see]. At some point we have to actually do the work, and now we are beginning to understand *mentality*

[sic] of the people and act more proactive. This is why I really want to work on the slum rehabilitations, to improve the district and address the needs.⁸

When I asked if she specifically follows up on RWA requests to remove slums, she replied, “As long as their claims have some evidence, we pursue them.” One of the main reporters for the *Hindustan Times Live*, a weekly supplement published in each district that covers RWA activities and concerns, concurred with the new power of RWAs to influence slum removal decisions:

... the councilor is the head of the MCD for that area, so his opinion is important if the slum is on government land. If you can convince him to remove the slum, or the DC [Deputy Commissioner], then you can get the slum removed. Bhagidari has made the link between RWAs and the DC and the councilors closer.... They are getting things done today.⁹

RWAs’ anti-slum views are further translated into the public arena and official policy discourse through the Annual Bhagidari Utsav (festival) in which approximately 10,000 RWAs, bureaucrats, politicians and citizens spend three days at the city’s largest conference space, the Pragati Maidan, to display the achievements of Bhagidari through the year. In addition to the display of model slum upgradation/removal schemes, Bhagidari gives out awards to the “best citizen groups,” an event featuring prominent guest speakers that is widely covered in the English and Hindi media. In 2007, two RWAs earned top awards for having neighboring slums removed.

In addition to strengthening RWAs and incorporating their problem definitions as part of the “mentality” of government, Bhagidari’s second effect is the weakening of the electoral process and forms of bureaucratic “fixing” upon which slum dwellers have historically been most dependent. That is, whereas on the one hand, Bhagidari builds new bonds and strengthens old ones between the middle class and the state, on the other it weakens the linkages between residents of slums and the lower-level bureaucracy and diminishes elected councilors’ influence on both the bureaucracy and development decisions. The lowest branches of most government departments are now pulled into the sphere of Bhagidari, which elevates the concerns of the middle class above all others and reconfigures the chain of command such that low-level bureaucrats, who have typically been effective “fixers” in negotiating benefits for slum residents, now face more regular oversight from senior officers. An RWA secretary explained how this works through a gendered analogy:

Municipal Corporations are like housewives. I know a guy who just complained to his wife always: “You do nothing. There's no good food; you've left a mess everywhere.” Like that, he always complained. One day, she just left, and the whole house fell apart. Municipal Corporations are like that only. But, if you praise them, then all the work gets done. If you announce with great pomp and circumstance when they do a good job, if you call everyone in the neighborhood up and announce praise to the junior engineer, then the deputy commissioner [his

⁸ Interview with Ms. Rashmi Krishnan, Deputy Commissioner (East), February 3, 2007.

⁹ Interview with Mr. Ravi Bajpai, November 6, 2006.

senior] will also be there, so the junior engineer gets praised before his boss. He'll do even better work for you later.¹⁰

The ability to build these kin-like ties, here compared with household patriarchy—the ability to bring upper- and lower-level bureaucrats into a single “house”—I argue, is one of the primary effects of Bhagidari, suggesting how everyday state-civil society relations are structured by the spatiality of the state itself.

That Bhagidari has led to an enervation of representative democracy is perhaps best illustrated by municipal councilors' views of Bhagidari. Bhagidari's first couple of years of operation led to conflicts between the MCD and Chief Minister's Office, with the former claiming that the latter was encroaching on its political space. As *The Hindu* reported in 2005, “Interestingly, the Congress [the ruling political party] Councilors have from the very beginning opposed the *Bhagidari* scheme, describing it as an attempt to clip the wings of the elected representatives.”¹¹ The councilors had earlier claimed that the Chief Minister was trying to run the MCD “through a remote control called the ‘Commissioner’ and implementing her plans in the name of ‘*Bhagidari*’.”¹² This led councilors to demand that “MCD's Zonal [district] staff be stopped from attending the district-level ‘Bhagidari Workshops’” because while at the workshops, the zonal offices were empty to address regular public grievances.¹³ This sidelining of elected representatives and weakening of the avenues by which the non-Bhagidar public can access the state are points celebrated by many active RWAs. As the President of the Jangpura Extension RWA told me,

Before, only the poor people voted and had voice. Politicians lived off these vote banks. Middle class didn't vote. Because of Bhagidari, middle class has come up and expresses its right. And, we now have very active participation in government policies... RWAs are platforms for this movement against illegal activities of the land mafia: commercialization and slumification; these are what we stand against.... Now, all the politicians are corrupt and support the builders and land mafia. The politicians act like goons and threaten, via their supporters, the RWAs. We perform the duties of the active representatives.¹⁴

Here, RWAs' increasing role in neighborhood and district-level governance is viewed as a positive step toward increased efficiency, transparency and equity in government, despite the entirely unrepresentative nature of RWAs. I address the question of “dirty”, “vote bank” politics in greater detail in the following chapter, but most of my interviews and conversations with RWA members and, more generally, with the middle class in my everyday interactions confirm that this opinion is widespread.

Adding fuel to the debate over representative structures and democratic process, in 2004, the Bhagidari Cell first proposed extending Rs. five million (~ USD 125,000) to each district that

¹⁰ Interview date: November 15, 2006.

¹¹ “Delhi Govt., MCD set for a clash”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, June 3, 2005.

¹² “MCD chief faces corporators' ire”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 16, 2002.

¹³ “Bhagidari workshops”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 5, 2005.

¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Monu Chadha, November 17, 2006.

would be allocated to RWAs on the basis of project proposals. Elected politicians (both councilors and MLAs), who rely on the dispersal of their annual development funds (Rs. 7.5 and 20 million, respectively) to garner political support, claimed this proposal was “not only undermining the role of the legislator but also throwing up a parallel administration by creating a new system and a new set of administrators.”¹⁵ Although this proposal was finally approved and implemented in 2007, the leader of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, perhaps best summarizes the implications of this program:

This shows that Ms. Dikshit [the Chief Minister] has been trying to bypass the deliberative wing of the MCD. “This is undemocratic,” he alleged. “This is an insult to the MCD,” he observed. “We as responsible opposition cannot let this happen as this is nothing but an attempt to throttle grassroots democracy in the Capital,” he stated.¹⁶

By extending almost as much development money¹⁷ to Bhagidari RWAs as the elected councilors have for their wards, this money, called the “My Delhi, I Care” fund, further establishes RWAs as the de facto representatives of wards and neighborhoods and bestows middle class notions of urban development with official sanction. For example, in justifying the need for this “general development” fund, the Chief Minister said one of the key activities for which it would be put to use includes the “protection of vacant public land in the colony”—that is, discouraging slums.¹⁸ As *The Times of India* reported after the final approval of the fund, “The Delhi government seems to be going in sync with what the citizen groups have been advocating.”¹⁹

The debate over MCD participation in Bhagidari and its attempt “to clip the wings of representative democracy” ultimately settled down once councilors realized that they too could access RWAs through Bhagidari and claim that area development work spearheaded by Bhagidari was of their own doing. Since this controversy, the Chief Minister’s Office has begun directly contacting elected representatives to ask them to help bring RWAs into the Bhagidari process and, in so doing, coordinate their own development efforts with Bhagidari. While I attended one specially organized session where an MLA brought RWAs from his constituency to the State Secretariat building to recruit them into Bhagidari, I did not see councilors or MLAs present at any of the Bhagidari workshops or monthly meetings I attended. A series of interviews with councilors conducted by the Hazards Centre in 2006 showed, in contrast, that four of the five councilors interviewed attend Bhagidari meetings regularly (Leena & Sharma, 2007). Regardless of the extent to which elected representatives have been directly pulled into the Bhagidari fold, slum residents increasingly complain that they have been abandoned by their councilors and MLAs in favor of the *bade log* (big people) living in private homes. This is a question to which I return in Chapter 5.

¹⁵ “Bhagidari runs into rough weather with MLAs”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, January 2, 2005.

¹⁶ “Government bypassing MCD, says BJP”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, October 30, 2004.

¹⁷ Bhagidari staff indicated in 2007 to RWAs in thematic workshops and to me in conversation that the fund is expected to grow in quantity from Rs. 5 million to 10 million in the near future.

¹⁸ “Bhagidari monitoring system launched”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 2, 2008.

¹⁹ “Rs. 50 Lakh”, *West Delhi Plus*, *The Times of India*, New Delhi, September 9, 2006.

2.6. RWA Power in and beyond Bhagidari

While Bhagidari has clearly gone to great lengths to recalibrate the gears of government to the demands of middle class interests, perhaps Bhagidari's most important effect has been to increase the status and influence of RWAs in the eyes of the media, the judiciary and throughout the branches of the central, state, and municipal government. In addition to the "My Delhi, I Care" fund described above, which gives financial backing to RWAs, RWAs have gained quasi-official authority as units in the governance structure through the efforts of the MCD, DDA, judiciary as well as the Delhi Government. For example, the MCD floated a scheme to invite RWAs to take over its responsibilities in maintaining neighborhood parks. As a senior MCD officer told *The Hindustan Times*, "Under this, we invited registered RWAs to take up the maintenance of municipal parks in their areas. For this, the MCD would pay them Rs 60,000 per acre per year in the first year and Rs 50,000 per acre in every subsequent year.... Till now, we have given away 155 sites to private organisations for maintaining the green spaces there."²⁰ The Delhi Government also directed executing agencies to "supply a copy of the estimates of all civil works awarded to contractors to the RWAs of their locality" and "a brief summary of the project report in layman's language highlighting the nature of works proposed to be undertaken".²¹ Individual departments have made similar efforts to explicitly incorporate RWA interests and energies into neighborhood level development and oversight activities. For example, the Police Commissioner in the abovementioned thematic workshop on "Citizen Partnership in Governance" described an initiative to involve RWAs in minor dispute resolution and crime assessment and monitoring. Despite the fact that official magistrates in the Delhi Government are meant to fulfill this role, this is just one of many steps toward incorporating RWAs into the everyday structure of urban government as if they are impartial judges or "experts," rather than self-motivated actors pursuing the betterment of only their own members. One RWA secretary told me, for example, that "The power of the vigilance department signature is now coming down to RWAs."²²

RWA influence on local development decisions is best reflected by their empanelment on the "District Development Committee" or "District Task Force",²³ the closest thing to the ward committee envisioned under the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act for decentralized governance discussed in Section 2.5. Whereas these committees were intended to consist of elected representatives, the top district-level officers from all government agencies, and elected community members, these committees today are made up of the same officials along with three RWA representatives.²⁴ These committees, which control key district-level budgetary decisions and deliberate over local land use, economic development, and infrastructural planning hence treat RWAs as de facto citizen representatives. The Deputy Commissioner of Eastern District

²⁰ "Many schemes, but few takers", *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, June 24, 2006.

²¹ Office Order No.F. 17/17/AR/02/Vol.11/9988-10137, dated October 10, 2004.

²² Interview date: November 15, 2006.

²³ Different District Offices seem to call these committees by different names. Some councilors call them ward committees, some zonal committees, etc. (e.g., see Leena & Sharma, 2007, 45-54)

²⁴ See website of the Office of the Deputy Commissioner (South), http://dcsouth.delhigovt.nic.in/district_development_committee.htm, accessed February 6, 2009

told me these committees have become a key arena in which RWAs contribute to development decisions, a big component of which, she said, was their efforts to remove slums.

In addition to this influence over local- and district-level development, RWAs now enjoy considerable power in citywide policy formulation and standards of urban progress. In an interview with A.K. Jain, the Commissioner of Planning in the DDA, he told me that RWAs had "preparatory input" into the review process that preceded the drafting of the most recent Delhi Master Plan.²⁵ As he said, "interaction with RWAs as 'stakeholders' took place prior to drafting of the plan and showing it to the public." He also said that the DDA was planning on "requesting RWAs to make local plans to achieve higher efficiency and denser land uses."²⁶ Over the course of some of the most vitriolic battles over land use the city has ever seen regarding how to address the Supreme Court order to close down all shops operating commercially in non-commercial areas of the city, the Delhi Cabinet engaged in high level negotiations with RWA members, while the Supreme Court's specially formed monitoring committee to deal with the matter called for formal statements from RWAs to consider how to proceed. The monitoring committee held multiple meetings with representatives from RWAs, treating them as the de facto "stakeholders" presumed to represent residential interests in the city.²⁷ For example, the Urban Development Minister "ruled out relaxation for allowing commercial activities in posh 'A' and 'B' category colonies except on recommendations by residents' welfare associations of these areas,"²⁸ giving RWAs effective veto power of the course of commercial development in wealthy localities. In "non-posh" areas, the Ministry of Urban Development declared that recommendations for changes in local land use categorization would be "entertained only if more than 50 per cent of the RWA office-bearers back the proposal."²⁹ Furthermore, the Supreme Court appointed an Amicus Curiae (friend of the court) to specifically represent the RWA position on the question of mixed land use and commercialization of residential areas of the city. No other interest group was assigned such a court representative. During the course of a long-running case in the Delhi High Court dealing with unauthorized land use (including land use violations, slums, and building code violations), the Court appointed Court Commissioners to monitor the ground situation and report back during court hearings. The Commissioners soon after issued a public notice saying, "RWAs and individual citizens can send their written complaints regarding unauthorized construction on public land and other unauthorized constructions, as well as commercialization of residential premises/misuses, preferably along with photos, to the Court Commissioner of their respective zone." While the Commissioners' relationship with RWAs started as a mere information collection strategy, it soon became more of a collaborative effort to identify slums and unauthorized areas. As *The Hindu* reported in May 2007,

²⁵ Interview date: May 26, 2005.

²⁶ Presentation by Mr. A.K. Jain at the "East Delhi Workshop on Development and the Delhi Master Plan 2021," April 12, 2005.

²⁷ "SC panel to hear RWAs on May 2", *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, May 1, 2006.

²⁸ "Speed up process of enlisting roads", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, November 24, 2006.

²⁹ "Ministry directs changes in new Master Plan", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 19, 2006. Mr. A.K. Nigam, the Commissioner of the MCD, opposed this process, saying "The RWAs can give their suggestions, but consulting them should not be made mandatory," "What corporation wants from Master Plan", *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 16, 2007.

A pilot project for removing encroachments from government land will soon be launched at East of Kailash in South Delhi. During the project, residents' welfare associations and non-government organisations will work closely with the Delhi High Court-appointed Monitoring Committee.... During the meeting, the residents had put forth their concerns about growing encroachments on government land in various parts of Delhi. It was then decided that RWAs and NGOs would aid and assist the panel in removing encroachments from government land. For this purpose, they will develop a list of prioritised actions required in their area for maximum impact in the shortest period of time and place it before the Monitoring Committee.

The Secretary of the East of Kailash RWA told me in an interview that the purpose of this project was to increase the pace with which slums and unauthorized constructions are removed from the area:

We will bring the Court Commissioner to each colony after RWAs make their complaints. He'll bring the demolition squad and take one colony at a time. He can demolish on sight because he is empowered by the court.... This is how the court comes to the grassroots. The court commissioners become the voice of the court. They interact with RWAs, get views then tell court and direct the MCD and police how to respond. They keep vigil over misuse of property and public land.

When I asked how the pilot project was launched, he replied, "About 50 RWAs met at the monitoring committee headquarters and drew up this plan.... We can't have a dictatorial [slum] cleaning program, but the monitoring committee is a good step of slowly improving the city." The Court Commissioner for the South District confirmed the role of RWA initiative in not only launching this special pilot project, but also the Monitoring Committee itself: "This is the first committee dealing with unauthorized constructions on a city-wide scale. It is the first committee that is permanent.... RWAs were the catalysts for it because they were the ones who were most affected, but there was a confluence with the court view on this."³⁰

A high-level committee set up by the central government under the chairmanship of the Lieutenant Governor to examine the question of unauthorized constructions and misuse of land in preparation for the completion of the most recent Delhi Master Plan found a need to give RWAs decision-making power to determine the appropriate land use in their localities.³¹ This recommendation goes well beyond the most aggressive policies of decentralized governance proposed to date, giving RWAs planning power well beyond what elected councilors and MLAs have ever seen. Even if this committee's recommendations are never heeded, the already extensive ties between RWAs and the courts show the extent to which RWAs have begun to influence not only local governance and policy decisions, but also the application of the law itself. This is a question to which I will return in Chapter 4.

While RWA members acknowledge Bhagidari's initial role in spurring RWA activism, the program has come under heavy criticism from RWAs for not transforming Delhi thoroughly or

³⁰ Interview with Mr. Sidharth Mridul, November 30, 2006.

³¹ Tejinder Khanna Committee Report. 2006. Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India.

quickly enough. These RWAs specifically complain that Bhagidari does not produce real results and that they themselves have to lobby and act to make things happen. As an active member of a women's RWA said, "Bhagidari is a bit of a disappointment. Bhagidari monthly meetings tend to be dominated by discussion of single areas.... Bhagidari is too slow."³² Harsher criticism comes from RWAs not actively involved in Bhagidari. As the president of an East Delhi RWA told me, "it is just a game for the Chief Minister. If you want to get anything done, you have to do it yourself. Nothing happens in those meetings."³³

Criticism of Bhagidari has a surprising effect, however. While it certainly weakens the public's perception of the ruling Congress Party, it treats Bhagidari only in the limited sense of the monthly meetings and thematic workshops and ignores the larger reconfiguration of governance structures that Bhagidari produces. While the Chief Minister's Office imagines Bhagidari as a way to inculcate, "through both reason and feeling", a middle-class, consumerist, modernity, it is in fact a product of this very experience of the urban. People coming to Bhagidari already believe in the dream of making Delhi "world-class." Bhagidari is so successful in reconfiguring state space, even though rarely acknowledged, because it presents its *premise*—a consolidated, property-owning class ready to intervene into state practice—as its *outcome*—an activist "citizenry." Even when criticized, Bhagidari reinforces the vision and desire for a "world-class" city because criticism of Bhagidari is based on the claim that it does not implement this vision fast enough. In provoking this criticism though, Bhagidari simultaneously provokes the demand for greater RWA power, which is precisely the goal of Bhagidari in the first place. That is, Bhagidari has effectively governmentalized the state, fostering the sentiment among elite RWAs that they should be and are becoming Delhi's governors. For example, take the following argument, voiced by Delhi's most well known advocate of transparency building and anti-corruption measures:

Bhagidari has done nothing so far. But, RWAs started getting together, created a database and network. Various groups started forming around topics and regions. When Bhagidari didn't provide answers, people started raising their voices. They started demanding things of the state. RWAs are trying to fill the vacuum of no self-government in Delhi. There are no lower level tiers of governance for people to get together. RWAs are trying to fill this.³⁴

Or, as Pankaj Agarwal, the Secretary of Delhi's largest RWA federation called the Delhi RWA Joint Front, said, "Bhagidari isn't working very effectively, but it has brought authorities closer to RWAs. Now, the government can't ignore RWA issues. This is largely because RWAs are getting more media attention. The newspapers have even appointed special RWA correspondents."³⁵ Here, the suggestion is that RWAs have sprung up and taken charge, forcing the government to respond: the causal arrow points from RWAs to the state. But, as I have shown, this "empowerment" of RWAs was the very intention of Bhagidari in the first place. Now, RWAs see their governing role as natural and necessary, operating outside of, but upon,

³² November 28, 2006.

³³ Interview date: February 12, 2007.

³⁴ Interview with Mr. Arvind Kejriwal, April 23, 2006.

³⁵ Interview with Mr. Pankaj Agarwal, Secretary of the RWA Joint Front, a federation of more than 300 RWAs, on April 24, 2006.

the state. The fact that a reconfiguration of state space itself gave rise to this rationality is consistently elided in RWA accounts, especially among those less active in Bhagidari. As a journalist for *The Times of India*'s special weekly RWA supplement said of the effect of Bhagidari, "It was as if all of a sudden people started seeing governance, seeing their lives and seeing space in the city differently: new concerns emerged in a very short period that all of a sudden were considered noteworthy and important to people."³⁶ My argument here is that Delhi's property-owning classes were positioned to stamp their will upon the city, but the program put in place through Bhagidari (i) consolidated, or at least partially combined, these groups' normative stance vis-à-vis urban disorder and modernity, (ii) cultivated their desire to act upon this normative stance, and (iii) put in place the conditions necessary for them to intervene in and through the state.

While there has been much talk of providing RWAs with formal executive power similar to that exercised by village panchayats³⁷—this is indeed one of the most prominent demands by the largest RWA federations in Delhi today—planners, judges, bureaucrats and politicians already treat them as de facto representatives. As Mr. E.F. Ribeiro, one of the top planners in Delhi who was the first Planning Commissioner in the DDA and a key advisor to the DDA today, said, "RWAs are administrative. They are keeping people in check for proper community use."³⁸

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the Delhi Government's Bhagidari scheme has reconfigured state space to facilitate the rise of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) as a new player in neighborhood and citywide urban governance. Whereas slum residents have historically enjoyed close cultural ties to the low-level bureaucracy, allowing them to win some degree of tenure and economic security, Bhagidari has re-engineered Delhi's administrative hierarchy and loosened these ties. It has done so by creating a parallel governance mechanism outside of electoral politics that is accessible only to RWAs (cf. Chakrabarti, 2008). Specifically, Bhagidari has forged multiple "new state spaces" (Brenner, 2004) in which low-level bureaucrats are put into direct contact with RWAs and held accountable for implementing their visions for urban change. If gentrification is broadly defined as the displacement of a lower class from a space into which a wealthier class is entering (cf. N. Smith, 1996), then Bhagidari brings about nothing less than the gentrification of political participation, or the gentrification or privatization of spaces of political association once open to the public. To use Chatterjee's (2004) language, the space of civil society has expanded into the territory of political society, a spatial politics I will explore more closely at the neighborhood level in the following chapter. As we saw in Section 2.5, elected representatives and low-level bureaucrats, the primary nodes through which those in "political society" access and influence the state, have been increasingly drawn into civil society. As the latter group has been pulled under the closer watch of more senior bureaucrats who are beholden to the interests of RWAs, councilors—who historically have the closest ties with the urban

³⁶ Interview with Ms. Uttara Rajinder, November 15, 2006.

³⁷ "Bigger role for RWAs envisaged", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, June 21, 2003.

³⁸ Interview, May 18, 2005.

poor—have increasingly had to cater to the demands of RWAs in order to maintain their political relevance and visibility.³⁹

Bhagidari, as we have seen, has been justified as a program to increase government transparency, reduce corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency, and produce “good governance” in Delhi. It won the 2005 UN Public Service Award on the basis of its performance in these areas and is being implemented in other states in India as an example of participatory “best practice”.⁴⁰ The media, government, NGOs, and high-level state officials celebrate Bhagidari for its effectiveness in rooting out of “vote bank” politics and government corruption, even while acknowledging that it has made property-owning residents of Delhi, who represent less than 20% of Delhi’s population (GNCTD, 2004b), de facto citizen representatives. Just as processes of gentrification in housing have increasingly been “sugarcoated” and interpreted as a sign of urban progress and renewal by policy makers and academics (Slater, 2006), so too here does the gentrification of participation get read as a necessary step toward more efficient, modern and world-class cities. The irony is that the same forms of bureaucratic contact once called “dirty” and “corrupt” when practiced by the poor are today celebrated as “efficient” and “transparent” when exercised by the elite. As an RWA correspondent for *The Times of India* told me while praising the merits of Bhagidari, “the conclusion is obvious: transparency, anti-corruption and good governance lead to more money, more power and control for the middle class.”⁴¹

Whereas most scholarly analyses suggest that internal changes within the middle class itself explains its recent rise in power and influence, I argue that only by looking at how this class’s interests articulate with the local state is the origin of this power revealed: that is, the state must be examined as a key arena out of which sociospatial inequality is produced. Like Wacquant’s (2008a) criticism that recent gentrification research leaves out the central role of the state in producing both physical space and the cultural spaces of consumption, I here argue that contemporary inquiries into India’s “new middle class” propagate neoliberal rhetoric that the state has somehow been “rolled back” and that current social trends are but the natural fruition of transformations in “civil society” (see Chatterjee, 2004; Fernandes, 2004).⁴² To make this argument, I drew from scholarship on postcolonial state form in India—in particular, Chatterjee’s distinction between “civil society” and “political society.” However, I found that to come to grips with the complex dynamics by which state and class formation articulate—and to treat these two domains of class society as actively produced through political contestation, rather than as fixed categories into which differently situated actors enter and exit—it was

³⁹ India’s first-ever national-level report assessing urban poverty, jointly published by the Ministry of Housing and Poverty Alleviation and the UN Development Program, thus finds that, “A substantial portion of the benefits provided by public agencies are cornered by middle and upper income households” (India. Ministry of, Urban Poverty, & United Nations Development, 2009).

⁴⁰ See note 24. Also see Baud and Nainan (2008) for an example of a similar, but less extreme, program in Mumbai, where neighborhood associations are delegated responsibilities for local waste management. Mumbai’s ward committees are far more functional and representative than Delhi’s, making the risk of gentrified participation less extreme there.

⁴¹ See note 36.

⁴² Indeed, Gramsci’s original conceptualization of “civil society,” from which Chatterjee departs in his more Foucauldian reading of the concept, insists on seeing “civil society” and “state” as interconnected domains upon which hegemony is produced.

necessary to adopt a more spatially attuned conceptualization of the state. I thus drew from Lefebvre (2003) to show how the production of state space, just like the production of physical and social space, is an ongoing historical process subject to multiple, intersecting forces and pressures. Without attention to concrete practices of state formation, our understanding of contemporary processes of urban change risk falling into familiar neoliberal narratives. Thus, while discussion of India's middle class through the 1980s never strayed far from a coupled discussion of "the developmental state," today's analyses of middle class politics presume that just as the state has shed its developmental stance, so too has it stepped away from its "ethico-political" function. This is a fallacy that must be countered through concrete, historical analysis, a preliminary attempt at which I have offered here. If the final stage of the "passive revolution of capital"—the complete embourgeoisement of the state and consolidation of a bourgeois hegemony—are indeed upon us, as Chatterjee and other scholars of the "new middle class" suggest, it has yet to be shown how this transformation has occurred, and how the urban "subaltern classes" that previously held sway over the lower levels of the state now consent to bourgeois programs of urban improvement. My analysis of Bhagidari shows how a reconfiguration of state space has laid the groundwork for middle class discourses and visions of urban improvement to circulate and become hegemonic.

In the following chapter, I turn to how the middle class in Delhi consolidates its hegemonic position through the management of a discourse of legitimation. That is, I look at how the discourse and image of a world-class city, expressed through the concept of "nuisance", both legitimates the violent restructuring of the urban landscape and gives rise to a set of practices that ensure this image takes hold as "common sense" in everyday life. The present chapter set out to specifically establish the basis on which middle class power can be evaluated: to what do we refer when we invoke the term "middle class" in Delhi today? I have argued that the primary criterion on which middle class privilege is accorded today is *private property ownership*. Participation in Bhagidari, the cultural significance and leadership role proffered to the middle class, and the official celebration of middle class lifestyles all hinge on property ownership as the present-day urban ideal. As we shall see in the following chapters, the imagination of an ownership society is tightly wrapped up in how the aesthetic of a world-class city is circulated and rendered hegemonic.

Chapter 3. Nuisance talk and the propriety of property: Middle class discourses of a slum-free Delhi

“Differentiation depends on disgust.” –Stallybrass and White (1986: 191)

3.1. Introductory boundaries

“Slums are the culmination of unwanted elements”, an RWA secretary in West Delhi told me in perhaps the most concise statement of the middle class “theory of the slum” I encountered during my fieldwork. This deployment of technicized language to convey fears of contagion and degradation is one of the focuses of the present chapter, along with an effort to trace how key tropes of the slum are transformed from everyday neighborhood talk into an organizing lens for remaking the city. Thus, if the previous chapter established the institutional changes through which the shift from a “passive revolution” to a full-on bourgeois revolution (Chatterjee, 2004) is emerging in Delhi—that is, how property owners were granted the authority to define the wanted/unwanted and desirable/undesirable—then this chapter sets out to specify the cultural politics through which this revolution is being carried out. Following Moore et al. (2003: 44), I take cultural politics to mean the processes by which “people and nature are positioned as out of place, disturbing the natural and social order” and the various forms of “boundary work” through which geographies of inclusion and exclusion, purity and pollution are constituted. Such boundary work creates a bar against which social order can be evaluated, rendering that which falls below/outside the bar visibly deviant and in need of improvement or removal. Part of my argument here, as part of a larger claim of this dissertation, is that the bar for evaluating urban order in Delhi is increasingly established not with reference to maps, plans or statistics, but rather in terms of an aesthetic discourse of the world-class city that takes shape largely through struggles over the meaning of “the public” and proper uses of public space.

Through the frequent narration of “the slum” as a deviant zone of criminality and defilement, RWAs, I will show, construct slum removal as a process of environmental improvement, a positive form of violence necessary to “clean and green” Delhi, install a new symbolic order, and further Delhi’s march toward world-class city status. My more than fifty conversations with RWA members in Delhi confirm Douglas’s (1966: 2) arguments about the symbolic meaning of dirt and that with which it is associated: “Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative moment, but a positive effort to organize the environment.” Douglas’s work has contributed to a lineage of scholarship on symbolic violence that argues that the purpose of demarcating good and evil, pure and polluted, is “to select a certain form of violence and mark it as good and necessary in opposition to other forms, which are deemed bad” (Caldeira, 2001: 36). I borrow from this work in showing how the rise of RWA power in the early 2000s (the topic of Chapter 2) has enabled property owners to establish hegemonic norms of urban order and civility that represent slum removal as a purification process, an act of (re-)establishing an orderly and beautiful city.

The first goal of this chapter then is to trace how RWAs position slums on the “outside”, both symbolically vis-à-vis idealizations of the bourgeois public sphere and private self as well as

materially in terms of property value and urban form. Here, I specifically argue that “nuisance” has become the key principle according to which discourses of the slum are both organized in everyday speech and translated from the neighborhood into official policy and practice. As a technical and legalistic language for describing bourgeois anxiety over the threat from the outside, nuisance talk simultaneously (i) supplies an “objective” vocabulary for characterizing the slum as beyond the bounds of bourgeois civility, and (ii) establishes a “grid of specification”—a system according to which governmental objects are contrasted and related (Hannah, 2000: 56)—for evaluating social relations.

More than just showing how slums are symbolically coded in the everyday discourse of the middle class, a second goal of the chapter is thus to show how tropes of the slum are mobilized through everyday speech and diverse technologies of power, including municipal “clean-up” campaigns and the media, to construct a repertoire of images and typifications—a mode of viewership or visual disposition—that determine what is considered pleasant and abhorrent for the imagined “world-class” future. Thus, as the aesthetic sensibilities of activist RWAs become routinized both in everyday conversations and in governmental and popular representations of the city, residents of Delhi who desire a world-class future adopt certain expectations of how the city should look. This chapter, then, is about how RWAs take a bourgeois ordering of social and symbolic space and map that order onto physical space by disseminating a “principle of vision and division”—a “system of preferences... which orient[s] the perception of the situation and the appropriate response” (Bourdieu, 1998: 66). By way of introducing how nuisance talk is mobilized in everyday speech, I begin with an extended account of my first encounter with an RWA actively mobilized against slums. I follow by describing the contestations over the public/private and outside/inside through which RWAs frequently depict slums as public nuisances. Next, I use the distinction between the outside/inside of bourgeois space to detail how RWAs evoke specific geographic imaginaries of transgression in everyday neighborhood speech. I finally trace how these geographic imaginaries are transmitted through broader media and government campaigns into a governing rationality of slum removal.

3.2. Sant Ravi Das Camp

I had visited Sant Ravi Das Camp numerous times before, both in 2005 and leading up to its eventual demolition in May 2006. I had listed it as a primary field site in my dissertation fellowship proposals and planned on engaging in an extended ethnography there when my dissertation fieldwork was to begin in late 2006. In the days before its demolition, I watched DDA (Delhi Development Authority) surveyors enumerate the settlement’s households and eventually saw the bulldozers roll in and raze the more than 800 huts settled there. When I came back to Delhi six months after Ravi Das Camp’s demolition, I returned to the site, curious to see what the DDA had done with the open space (see Figure 12).

A thick, concrete fence had been erected on all sides of the empty land, with yellow signs staked in the ground saying “Property of the DDA: Do not enter.” Dotted with mounds of rubble and scattered brick, the site lay vacant, except for a Hindu temple still nestled in the corner of the lot (see Figure 13). After I had parked my scooter and pulled out my camera, a shopkeeper

approached me from the housing society across the street. We began talking about the scene before us.



Figure 12. The left and right photographs show two settlements, outlined in black, before and after, respectively, the DDA demolished them on May 4, 2006. The larger of the two settlements, located on the left side of each of the two photographs, is the site of Sant Ravi Das Camp, and the smaller settlement located on the right side of the photographs is what was known as Sanjay Camp. Both photographs were captured from Google Earth and are satellite photographs taken in September 2004 and September 2006, respectively. The small “x” on the photograph on the right (shown below the former site of Ravi Das Camp) shows the position from which the photograph shown in Figure 13 was taken. © Google 2009.



Figure 13. Former site of Sant Ravi Das Camp, which was demolished on May 4, 2006. The temple is visible in the top right of the image. Photograph by author, taken October 22, 2006.

I told the shopkeeper that I had visited months before when a *basti* (settlement) was here and wondered what had happened. With this subtle prompt, he launched into a tirade:

Those people were a major problem in the area. They made lots of noise, spread filth, and disturbed the area. They just sat in the road and smoked cigarettes. They screamed a lot and made all kinds of noise. They were always drunk and would fight for no reason. The space was such a mess. There were 1,000 *jhuggis* [huts] here and many thousands of people. They were such dirty people.... But, don't think they were poor. They just occupied the land, took rent on it, and got rich.... We filed a petition in court, and the court had them removed. The place is better now, no?¹

Pointing across the vacant lot, he asked me how things looked. I was not sure what to say. It appeared quite ruinous, with the foundations of huts and other signs of the previous inhabitants still visible. "Seems okay," I said, to which he quickly shot back, "Yeah, it is nice. It is good place now. It is clear and peaceful and quiet. There is no filth, no more noise and troubles. The air is totally clean. It's beautiful, no?" He then offered to walk me around and introduce me to his neighbors.

The first person we met as we strolled around the neighborhood was a man in his early 70s, perched against the society's boundary fence. The shopkeeper addressed him as "Uncle": "Uncle can tell you about all the problems we had." "Ofo," Uncle began, "these people troubled us so much. They would just come into our park and *ease*² themselves here," as he looked over his shoulder to a small playground. "There was filth everywhere. We couldn't use our own park. It was so bad we wanted to sell our homes and leave, but we couldn't sell. The price fell so much, and it took a lot of time. As soon as anybody saw the huts here, they weren't interested. The stench of fish and meat destroyed the atmosphere [*vaataavaran ko barbaad kar diya*]." Uncle then said the value of his flat had increased threefold after the demolition: "I was only offered 7 lakh before. Now people are selling for more than 20! But, what's the reason to leave? Now this will become a posh area."

Our next encounter was with a carpenter who was renting a flat in the housing society and used to rent a hut in Ravi Das Camp for storing his supplies. The shopkeeper joked that the carpenter, like the slum dwellers, had earned excessive profit through his slum business, a claim the carpenter disputed along with the shopkeeper's repeated suggestion that the slum residents were actually rich due to the free government services they received. As a participant in the slum economy, this man challenged the shopkeeper and Uncle's effort to draw a sharp distinction between the residents of their lower-middle class housing society and the slum: "I have lived here for 32 years. I came here to build for the Asiad [Asian Games in 1982] and applied for an

¹ The transcript of this encounter is based on a combination of field notes jotted during our conversation and a reconstructive effort to "fill in the gaps" of the conversation immediately after leaving the scene. All remaining conversations/interviews were either recorded or based on careful note taking. The present encounter took place in Hindi. Translations are my own. All conversations after section 3.2 took place in English unless otherwise noted.

² He used the word "ease" in English, meaning to defecate.

LIG [lower income group] flat, like here. But, it wasn't in my fate. You had good fate. Maybe I'll get one someday."

The shopkeeper and Uncle live in DDA-built LIG flats, constructed by the earliest residents of Ravi Das Camp who were recruited, employed and settled by a government contractor in the early 1980s. Through the 1970s and 1980s, DDA flats were the primary means to access land in Delhi, but the DDA failed to provide the quantum of housing mandated by the Delhi Master Plan, leading to the gross under-provision of planned housing in the city, especially in the LIG and EWS (economically weaker sections) categories—the two lowest income classifications the DDA uses.³ Due to the shortage of housing, competition to obtain a DDA flat was (and still is) fierce; fewer than ten percent of applicants receive flats. Most lower income residents that are denied DDA housing either rent or move to slums and unauthorized colonies. The carpenter's "bad" fate, he hinted, was based on this fact. If Uncle and the shopkeeper had not been in the lucky ten percent, they would have been like the carpenter and slum dwellers: unpropertied.

While conversing with the carpenter, a woman with a small child in tow approached along the road, mumbling, "Here is the man who had our homes demolished." The shopkeeper responded, "So, tell me. Are you sad?"

"What should I do, cry?" she sardonically posed, without slowing or looking back.

"Laughing or crying, one or the other!" the shopkeeper laughed back, before turning to Uncle and loudly proclaiming, "She used to have three different plots there. She's used to taking rent from each of these places and making so much money. Now she has to pay rent just to live! Nothing is free for her. She pays like the rest of us now."

After Uncle and the carpenter took their leave, the shopkeeper walked me through the gate into the housing society, where we met three men who had just returned from work. The shopkeeper introduced me and said I wanted to know about the old slum. Again, with little prompting, they began describing how much their lives had improved after the demolition. One of the men pointed at my scooter and said, "see your helmet there? If you had left it like that [unlocked] before, it would have been stolen right away. You couldn't have even parked there! I wanted to buy a car, but had no place to park it safely. Out there anything could have happened."⁴

³ In response to a Right to Information request I filed in 2006, the Southwest Zone headquarters of the DDA wrote me that in all of Zone G, the zone in which Sant Ravi Das Camp is situated and that has a population of 1.4 million people (DDA, n.d.: 10), only 808 EWS housing units were built between 1990 and 2006, none before 1998. This is not enough to house even half a percent of the population, whereas the Master Plan mandates that 25 percent of residential plots be for EWS and LIG categories.

⁴ Almost six months after the demolition of Ravi Das Camp and with the main road clear, this man still did not own a car. He had driven in on a scooter as the shopkeeper introduced me to the others. I take his statement about his inability to purchase a car as an act of boundary-making, in this case along class lines. He was making an argument that his potential for upward mobility (a car is the consumer item that best symbolizes middle class status in Indian cities today, replacing the scooter or color television of the 1990s) was thwarted by the spatial proximity of the slum. Just as Uncle suggested that the absence of slum equals "posh" neighborhood status, the removal of the slum for this man represented the removal of an obstacle to acquiring symbolic capital. Did he no longer need a car to symbolize his status once his neighborhood became "slum-free"? Was he ever able to afford a car?

The four of us sat for tea on plastic chairs directly in front of the large iron gate that enclosed the society's inner road from the main street, our backs to the park where Uncle had been standing and the former site of Ravi Das Camp a stone's throw away. The shopkeeper retreated to his shop. After introductions, we returned to the topic of the slum. One man began, "Before, we wouldn't have been able to sit here like this. There would have been so much crowd. Those people walked straight in and used our park and bothered us so much. Our own children couldn't play here."

The three men looked out over the empty lot, as if it were a picturesque landscape: "It is so clear. The weather is also nicer now. You feel the wind, right? Before, we didn't have such wind."

When I asked what they did to avoid the trouble of the slum, they said they installed the gate to prevent the slum residents from entering, but "they threatened us, so we had to open it in the day." The man hosting us, whose flat was on the ground floor and just two doors down from the main road, pointed at the iron grilling in front of his veranda and said he built this wall with a roof and locking gate to prevent theft: "I have valuable things out there. Without this, those people would have just taken it all.... For security, I built this cage and locked my own family in, like animals, but the real animals were out there!" Turning to the other men, he laughed at his joke, "Imagine what state we were in [*Hamaari haalat maan lo!*]" The other men nodded in approval, watching me laugh at what seemed a familiar line to them.

Later in our conversation, I asked about the temple still erect on the empty plot. One of the men said the DDA could not clear it because of its religious significance, adding, "The land there is worth lakhs of rupees. They run a guesthouse out of it so people from Bihar can come stay. The people who run it are Bihari. Now they are making their own little Bihar here! The rest of the people, we had them thrown out [*painkvaayaa*]. They lived in trash; wherever they went, our roads, our parks, filth also came.... They were filth. We had them tossed."

While Ravi Das Camp had been cleared many months before, the symbol of the slum continues to operate in these narratives as the constitutive outside against which property bearing and middle class selfhood is defined. Against the filth and disorder of the slum, the housing society emerged as "posh." Against the violence and decay of slum life, the men found the caring and secure home. The stories the shopkeeper and his neighbors told me that day had been recited time and time again, supplying a generative symbolism for distancing self from slum, even in moments of categorical mixture, as presented, for example, by the status of the carpenter.

The three men with whom I sat were members of the local RWA that, along with two neighboring RWAs, filed the petition in the High Court in 2002 that eventually led to Ravi Das Camp's demolition. I obtained a copy of the petition later, the tone of which closely resonates with the three men's narrative, only here it has entered into the official domain of the judiciary:

[T]he encroachment [Ravi Das Camp]... has now grown and taken a mammoth shape threatening the natural environment in the area and has started jeopardising the life of the residents of the area by posing problems... like pollution of all sorts, health hazards, insanitary conditions due to garbage dumping..., blocks of

roads and entry points... and also giving rise to social problems like theft, robbery etc. and has threatened the security of the residents.

Both the petition⁵ and the RWA members described the slum solely according to its exterior appearance: a polluting, filthy, and defiled space; a place from which foul stench, unsightly scenes, and sensory revulsion emanate; a site of “alien” bodies and criminality; and an unbounded and disorderly domain from which desires and demands spill over into otherwise orderly public and hallowed private space. The slum emerges here as an illegal environment based purely on its aesthetic impropriety and the nuisance it causes to legitimate, property-owning residents of the city.

I begin this chapter with an extended description of this encounter because it highlights the metonymic associations RWAs in Delhi frequently make between dirt and slums (e.g., “they were filth”), as well as how such associations both (i) are used to enforce the social and physical boundary between private property and slum (inside and outside), and (ii) travel into the domain of official state and juridical discourse. Following Douglas’s (1966) formulation of dirt as “matter out of place”, scholars have long noted how talk of dirt and excrement is used to represent residual people and places: “excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without” (Kristeva, 1982: 71). As Sibley (1995: 56) remarks on the symbolic distancing of rich from poor that accompanied spatial segregation in the 19th century capitalist city, “the middle classes have been able to distance themselves from their own residues, but in the poor they see bodily residues, animals closely associated with residual matter, and residual places coming together and threatening their own categorical scheme under which the pure and the defiled are distinguished.”

Stallybrass and White (1986) similarly trace how 19th century schemes to reorder the city operated as purification processes, designed to either exclude groups associated with pollution—slum dwellers, prostitutes, the unemployed—or morally reform them through close surveillance and disciplining, a practice deepened in the colonial context (see Gooptu, 2005; Legg, 2007; Prakash, 1999; Prashad, 2001). This “unattainable desire to expel those things which threaten the boundary” (Sibley, 1995: 19) is what Kristeva has theorized as abjection, where the abject is “everything that the subject seeks to expunge in order to become social” (McClintock, 1995: 71). Following McClintock, I am interested here in not just psychic processes of abjection (revulsion, disavowal, fetishism) by which the self encounters and affectively registers the other, but also in showing how such processes are transformed into political processes of abjection—in this case the large scale removal of slums as abject objects/outside. ⁶ Unlike more structural analyzes that read abstract programs of spatial discipline into the rationalities and habits of individuals, or

⁵ I return to the legal basis of slum demolitions in the following chapter, where I engage in a discourse analysis of both recent court decisions that led to slum demolition, as well as five original civil writ petitions filed by RWAs.

⁶ This is what de Certeau (1989) has called the creation of “clean space,” the vision of the rational city he attributes to modernist planning. While de Certeau’s attention to the role of visual order and the “mythification” of the city aligns with my approach to aesthetic politics, for him, functionalist planning and social engineering privilege time and ignore space, thereby leaving space as a residual category—an arena of politics. I do not see such a sharp distinction between time and space in the practice of rational planning, nor do I consider spatial practices a necessarily progressive force, as de Certeau seems to suggest.

psychoanalytic accounts that consider intimate aversions and desires to be the organizing logic of social life and disciplinary order more broadly, I here consider how everyday spatial practices become socialized and articulate with broader political-economic forces to generate a coherent, albeit contingent, politics of space. To make this move, it is necessary to consider in greater detail how the boundary between inside and outside has been historically negotiated in the Indian public sphere, before examining how contemporary bourgeois aesthetic codes have been mobilized to discursively and affectively rework the vision of a sensible city.

3.3. Inside out: Bourgeois contestations over the public

Scholars of colonial and postcolonial India have long acknowledged how constructions of middle class selfhood have been “replete with these themes of the enclosed inside and the exposed outside” and the “protective power” inhering in the symbolic and material boundaries dividing these two domains (Chakrabarty, 1992: 542). Chakrabarty, for example, finds that the “outside”, at least for middle class Hindus, “always carries ‘substances’ that threaten one’s well-being” (Ibid.) and “produces both malevolence and exchange between communities and hence needs to be tamed” (544). Extending Chakrabarty’s insights, Kaviraj (1998) examines the uneven articulation of (i) colonial and postcolonial efforts to produce a bourgeois public sphere with (ii) Hindu conceptions of inside/outside. He begins by insisting, following Chatterjee (1993), that the inside/outside dualism in India is if not orthogonal to, then at least operates on a different, non-parallel plane from, the private/public dualism introduced under colonial rule. By emphasizing the historical specificity of the rise of the public sphere in the modern West, he differentiates the Western concept of “the public” from uses of open space in pre-colonial India that might better be called “common”—a less official, undocumented, and informal domain in which mutually agreed upon uses of open space contingently accrete, but which can just as easily dissipate. Common space is therefore regulated less by the stable rules of a modern bureaucracy than by norms of civility and sociality that emerged between private parties. Highlighting various examples of how the Western and Indian “publics” do not neatly overlap, Kaviraj argues that whereas the Western concept of the public is the product of “a tendency toward universality”—i.e., “the idea that an activity is open to all, irrespective of their social attributes”—“the Hindu social universe works in the reverse direction. Small cohesive units like the family, which uses a universally understood distinction between *apan/par* (own/others or self/not-self), designate spheres of restricted inclusivity” (90). That is, this “Hindu” conception of space and social ordering begins with the inside, a domain of “stable and patterned relationships” (94) out of which subjects exit and (re-)enter.

Here, the inside stands not for the private—since, for example, the middle class Indian home is often shared by an extended family “and is not driven by a desire to be left alone” (94)—but rather represents a realm of security against which stands the outside—an inhospitable and unordered domain of mixing, surprise and potential offense. Kaviraj demonstrates the inside/outside division through the example of household rubbish: while the middle class kept their households meticulously clean, the waste they so fastidiously gathered was disposed of by simply throwing it over the house’s boundary wall. This act, he argues, shows that the “street was the outside, the space for which one did not have responsibility, or which was *not one’s*

own.... It was merely a conceptually insignificant negative of the inside.... [not] a civic space with norms and rules of use of its own" (98).⁷

For Kaviraj, the concept of the "civic" is central to understanding how struggles over public space play out in Indian cities. For the property owning middle class, "open spaces" become "public places" through the introduction of civic sense: rules of order and access that adhere to the logic of "the inside". The colonial park best exemplifies this:

Parks were effectively extensions of the Bengali *pada* or residential neighbourhood, where families normally had stable, long-term residences and every household knew every other.... These spaces were characterised by sociability in which the relation between people was not the transient reciprocity of interests but more stable common pursuits, temperaments, social bonding. People from lower orders would be allowed ingress, but in strictly defined and restricted roles—as sellers of snacks, *malis* or municipal gardeners, or servants. (102).

In this way, "middle-class publicity" takes shape through an extension of the "inside" into previously unordered space—that is, through the extension of standards of comportment, appearance, cleanliness, and sociability found in the home outwards into the neighborhood, park, and beyond. For the unpropertied poor, in contrast, the "public" "came to mean that which is not private, spaces from which they could not be excluded by somebody's right to property" (Kaviraj, 1998: 104). The private thus stands for the ability to exclude others, operating more as a legal domain of rights and exclusions, whereas the inside is a symbolically secured domain in which interactions, whether public or private, are predictable and venerated. For the poor, then, the inside is always lived in public (since they lack a legally defined "private") and bourgeois civility is experienced as rules and limits on access and mobility.

Kaviraj ends with a discussion of the processes by which the public was plebianized in the 1960s-1990s: "As the pressures on the city grew more intense, the fortresses of the middle class started falling, and being divested of their generally aesthetic function, the parks opened to the poor" (106).⁸ We might read plebianization, then, as a gradual process by which the bourgeois "inside" contracted, receding into the "private" as the "civility" of public culture eroded. Chatterjee (2004) relies on a similar reading of the contraction of middle class cultural and political space through the 1980s in developing his formulation of political society and civil society—where the former, through the language of Kaviraj, can be seen as the terrain on which the poor struggle to defend their access to unregulated public spaces, and the latter the terrain on which propertied classes defend the private and seek to extend outwardly their conceptions of the inside into the public sphere. Bourgeois efforts to reclaim public space today can thus be read as efforts to return the neighborhood and park to its pre-plebianized days by projecting the

⁷ Chakrabarty (1992: 541) adds, "The street presented, as it were, a total confusion of the 'private' and the 'public' in the many different uses to which it was put", leading colonizers and Western-educated nationalists alike to deplore the "absence of citizen-culture", or a public sphere, in Indian cities.

⁸ For further discussion of the "plebianization" of politics in India and middle class backlash against it, see Hansen (1999).

bourgeois inside beyond home into the neighborhood and city at large.⁹ In Ravi Das Camp, for example, we saw how RWA members sought not only to defend the boundary of their housing society, but also to reclaim the nearby roads and parks, and more generally impose bourgeois norms of order and appearance—what we might call a certain civility—on public space.

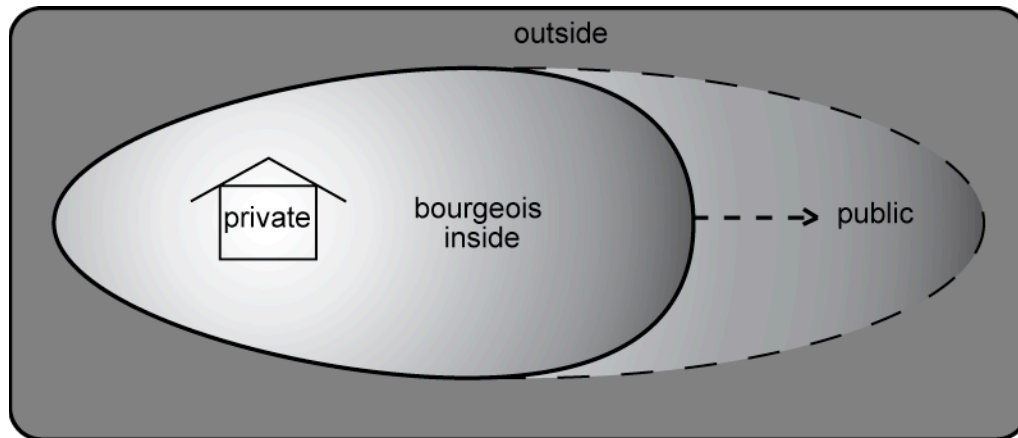


Figure 14. Schematic of RWAs' spatial practice in Indian cities

Figure 3 shows a schematic representation of this process, which will serve as a theoretical map for analyzing the spatial politics of RWA commentaries in the following sections. The inner polygon labeled “bourgeois inside” represents a domain of stable and patterned relations, but which gradually dissipate (indicated by the shading) as one moves away from the more private realm of the home (again, the private exists within the inside). The “outside” is a less predictable domain of mixing and, for the bourgeois family, potential offense and risk. Contemporary urban spatial politics for the middle class and the RWAs that represent them consist of an effort to project the norms of appearance and civility found within the “bourgeois inside” into previously “outside” spaces. In doing so, bourgeois “public” space is secured/civilized. As a highly simplified example, the “inside” might represent an existing middle class neighborhood, where a primary RWA spatial strategy is to fortify that neighborhood into a secure enclave, sequestered from the threats of the outside. A secondary strategy, then, is to establish aesthetic norms and rules of order in spaces even beyond the immediate neighborhood (e.g., parks, streets, or the city as a whole), an effort represented in the figure by the dashed arrow expanding the “bourgeois inside” into formerly “outside” space. This is a spatial politics of (re-)civilizing public space. According to this schematic, RWA efforts to remove slums represent a strategy of displacing substandard settlements from newly bourgeoisified/civilized “public” spaces.

While I showed in the previous chapter how new privatized governance mechanisms—via the Delhi Government’s Bhagidari scheme—emerged in the early 2000s that facilitated the process of bourgeoisifying previously “plebianized” public spaces, I now turn to how this effort is discursively justified and symbolically represented among RWAs through what I call “nuisance talk.” Specifically, I suggest that “nuisance” operates as a catchall category that allows a diverse array of private grievances and anxieties to be expressed in terms of environmental welfare and

⁹ This is what Roy (2004) describes as the effort to return Calcutta to the “gentleman’s city” it once was. For further examples of bourgeois efforts to reclaim Indian cities, see (Baviskar, 2003; Fernandes, 2004; Gandy, 2008; Rajagopal, 2001).

the public interest. What I seek to show here then is how discursive portrayals of slums as nuisances—i.e., as illegal environments—are part of a spatial politics of criminalizing aesthetically “improper” uses of the bourgeois public sphere. That is, uses of “public” space (located in the polygon labeled “public” in Figure 3) that do not conform to bourgeois codes of civility acquire the label “nuisance,” an actionable offense under environmental law that I discuss in detail in the following chapter. As a side note, nuisances are spatially-specific activities, meaning an action becomes a nuisance only if it infringes upon the bourgeois inside. The same activity if relocated to the “outside”—i.e., to its rightful place—is unlikely to be considered a nuisance.

3.4. Nuisance talk

After my encounter with the RWA members adjacent to Ravi Das Camp, I began contacting other active RWAs in Delhi to ask them about their perceptions of slums and urban space. Most RWA members were enthusiastic to meet me, calling me to their homes or offices after I reached them by phone. Upon meeting, I usually initiated conversation by describing my research, where I study and live, and my interest in RWAs and urban governance. In most cases, my interlocutors would follow not with a response to my research interests, but rather with their reflections on the contrasting civic culture in Delhi and abroad, usually the US. In fact, we rarely even began talking about RWA matters until they had sufficient time to display their knowledge of and, in many cases, admiration for the West. As one man said, “Oh, California, such a lovely place! Where do you live, San Francisco, L.A.?... I took a trip there while visiting my son in Arizona.... When I first went there—it must have been ten years ago—Delhi was some 30 plus years behind. Today, we have caught up so much. We must be only 10 years behind now. Much better, but still a way to go.” Such comments provided an opportunity for me to then ask about their perceptions of Delhi, as in, “In what ways is Delhi behind?”

Across a diverse array of neighborhood-specific concerns, most RWA members, especially those in wealthier South Delhi colonies, expressed a clear desire for Delhi to become “world-class.” When I asked what a “world-class” city meant to them, they often gave examples of the Delhi Metro, a new shopping mall, or the Commonwealth Games, but they most often expressed a general sense of a clean, comfortable and what I will describe as a “nuisance-free” public life. Regardless of how optimistic they were that Delhi would become “world-class,” residents agreed that Delhi required a significant upgrade in infrastructure, services, and visual appearance. In my in-depth survey of 25 RWAs members that I described in the previous chapter, all respondents agreed that a “slum-free Delhi” was either “very important” or the “most important” factor in Delhi becoming world-class. All RWAs with whom I spoke stressed the value of their neighborhood specific efforts in terms of their contribution to increasing the quality of life in, and appearance of, Delhi as a whole. For example, the secretary of an RWA in one of South Delhi’s wealthiest colonies said, “Our goal is to maintain and enhance the posh character of [the colony]”, an effort that he directly linked with the image of Delhi as a whole:

I had a friend whose boss was visiting from Germany. They were driving in [the colony], and he had just told his boss how [it] is one of Delhi’s poshest areas. Just then, some pigs crossed the street. He was so embarrassed! No matter what we do, this city is still a mess. We have to do more to change things and put the proper

systems in place. Everyone needs to get together and make Delhi look like a planned city.

One of the main problems his RWA worked to solve in both his colony and in Delhi as a whole was the presence of hawkers and other “street encroachments”, as he called them:

[T]he hawkers that operate under the Tehbazari scheme [a license program granting temporary vending rights] are a big problem. They aren't supposed to cook in the open, but they do. They create filth, causing danger to human life and making the colony unsightly. They sit in an unauthorized way, cook and create filth.... Near “D block”... 20-25 rickshaws stand there and eat breakfast. People taking morning walks have to see this. It's not a pleasant sight to see auto drivers eating their breakfasts and then easing themselves, just taking a leak on the street. We aren't against the poor people trying to live, but are against the creation of filth and unhygienic living conditions.

We here see how grievances of a primarily aesthetic nature—the hawkers as eyesores, as stains on an otherwise “posh” landscape—gain expression through a rhetoric of public health, hygiene, and public nuisance. His main complaint was not about illness in the neighborhood or noxious smells, but rather the appearance of “filth” and a general revulsion of the senses. This statement also demonstrates the manner in which RWAs frequently depict their interventionist efforts to structure and discipline public life as a struggle to secure “the inside” from the alien and impure threats of “the outside.” This RWA secretary moved on to say, “Overall, we are against traffic flow and outsiders entering into the colony unnecessarily”—thus marking his move from the identification of an abject object (hawkers) to the formulation of a spatial politics of abjection (displacing outsiders in order to “maintain and enhance the posh character” of the colony).

Most RWA members with whom I met similarly attributed neighborhood deficiencies to external forces, whether visible or remote—an effort to not only define external threats in need of disciplining, but also forge a community (the “inside”), like all political communities, in which incivility is necessarily exogenous (Watts, 2004). After I asked a South Delhi RWA member, a retired man in his 70s, what the main problems his RWA faced were, he responded with his own question: “Did you smell the *nallah* [drain] on your way in?” I had noticed the strong smell of sewage in his otherwise upscale neighborhood, but was unsure whether I should conceal this fact out of courtesy. I hesitated, and he proceeded: “There is a *nallah* outside our boundary wall and slums and their fecal matters and foul materials ruin things here.” I asked him where the slum was located, and he said his RWA had won a three-year court battle that eventually led to the slum's demolition earlier in the year:

The problem was that the DDA was letting people occupy the land. In the city there are 35 lakh [3.5 million] slum dwellers.... This has given rise to crime because they are mostly unemployed and coming from all states. A car was stolen here even.... They occupy public land, set up *jhuggis* [huts] and create health hazard. Because the infrastructure in the city isn't even enough for [real] inhabitants, so they should stop immigration.... These people used to roam into this area; their children played here. Our children couldn't even go outside. These people are of a different lot.

He went on to describe how neighborhood crime had gone down after the slum's removal and how the quality of public services in the city would only improve by demolishing the city's remaining slums. When I asked him why the stench of the *nallah* remained even after the slum's demolition, he conceded that the environment of the colony had not improved with the removal of the slum, but attributed the sewage not to other formal colonies, most of whose untreated sewage flows through such *nallahs* across the city and directly into the Yamuna River, but rather to an upstream slum: "The root cause for the filth is the slum. Delhi is infested by this problem." Referring to the problem of open defecation, he continued, "Just travel by train and you'll see along the tracks how people behave. It's shameful." Despite the physical distance between slums and his residence, this man attributed waste in his social environment to the slum problem, bolstering his claim by referring to the aesthetic impropriety of the poor who, in their compulsion to openly defecate, he argued, were the source of urban decay. When I asked him about the legal basis for his RWA's court petition against the old slum, he replied, "Basically, these people do not belong in Delhi.... They ruin Delhi's environment. They don't follow any of the rules and create so much nuisance. This is a posh colony. How can we have such slums nearby?"

Even in colonies with no nearby slum, RWA members often described slums as a source of disease and danger that if not controlled would spread into purer spaces like neighborhood and home. One man exemplified this in describing how a scorpion had crawled out of the drain in his kitchen sink while his wife was using it: "She was very frightened. This is a dangerous thing! I mean, it can't kill you, but it's dangerous. Now how does a scorpion come out of a drain like that?" I said I did not understand where the scorpion came from, and he proceeded to answer his own question, "All these sewers are connected. Our waste flows into them, and the slum waste flows into them before ours. It is all mixed. This scorpion just climbed through the sewer and came into our house." Here, he was signaling the invisible risk of the slum through the city's subterranean and public infrastructure. The scorpion represented a violation of the bourgeois inside, the perceived threat that the sanctity of the home could be punctured at any moment by external risks. Even the boundary walls, security guards and dogs dividing his home from the street could not tame the disease that overflows from the slums. Although no slum was within miles of his home, the mere presence of such degraded spaces in the same city posed the threat of contamination. Whereas this man had begun his conversation with a partial recognition that the degraded state of slums was the product of social conditions for which slum residents were not themselves responsible (namely, a shortage of low-income housing), the social origins of slum degradation were quickly elided in his move to refer to the natural, animal essence of the slum. It is here, in stories about invasion and savagery, that the metonymic associations of filth with slums is often displaced by a metaphoric language of the slum dweller as animal, a theme that emerged in a number of my interviews. As one RWA President proclaimed, "These people live with dogs and pigs. Of course their habits will be like that only." "Slums", he continued, "aren't part of society; they aren't integrated. And, anything not integrated into society can't last forever.... They have to be removed. They are all bound to be relocated." When he realized that I might find his words unethical, he said, "Slum people are used to going from place to place. It's natural for them." Animalized slums, naturalized dispossession.

If not through the transgression of the boundary separating human and animal, then RWAs seeking to justify their aggressive stance vis-à-vis slums evoked transgressions of "natural" boundaries dividing the urban from the rural, educated from uneducated, and Indian from alien.

As one RWA president told me, “The people who have encroached on parks here by habit don’t develop a taste for sanitation.... We haven’t yet changed the culture of these people to be urban. We need to change the rural mindset. We need to change the attitude to cleanliness and responsibility. All people in Delhi were once migrants. These people need to change or else they don’t belong in the city.”

This trope of the slum-dwelling migrant unhabituated to urban life dovetails with a more deeply rooted neo-Malthusian concern about resource scarcity, overpopulation, and government handouts. Delhi’s second largest RWA federation, called People’s Action, has hence staked out an explicitly anti-immigrant political platform, drawing popular support from the widespread belief that shortages in electricity and water supply are caused by overpopulated slums and not rising middle class consumption. As Sanjay Kaul, a savvy media professional and the spokesman for People’s Action, told me in an interview in his office, “the biggest problem for Delhi is that 500,000 people come here every year.... Delhi can’t become world-class if it lets 5 lakh people in tattered clothes come to the city.... It can’t be world-class without security.” He continued, saying, “In Delhi, those who legitimately own land, pay taxes and those with papers are getting pushed out of the city to the satellite cities because the prices are going up so much from letting illegal occupation go on for political benefit.... The culture of illegality is crowding out the good, working man who buys land and pays taxes.... You are marginalized if middle class and educated.”¹⁰ This “culture of illegality”, according to Kaul, contaminates not only physical space, sully neighborhoods and street sides, but also political space, producing “vote bank” politics and corruption. The response to the slum problem, then, requires measures both to insulate important decision-making processes from the poor (the role of the Bhagidari Scheme I discussed in the previous chapter), as well as to bolster physical security within colonies.

3.5. Nuisance on the move

A primary strategy that individual RWAs deploy to reclaim “their city” is to fortify and securitize their neighborhoods by building fences, closing colony entrances at night, increasing the number of hired security guards, and requiring domestic workers to register with the police. Such efforts are considered necessary to ensure neighborhood security, a primary concern among RWAs involved in Bhagidari and with whom I spoke during fieldwork. An RWA secretary in West Delhi thus stated that the main goal of his RWA was to turn his residential block, a pocket of 400 houses and approximately 2,000 residents, into a “sub-city”—a vision of a privatized, urban utopia shared by many RWAs:

[W]e would have our own small market with only approved vendors and shops so the residents don’t have to go outside for daily requirements. There would be a food supplier, a *dhobi* [clothes washer], milkman, daily rations, all these things. We would have the colony fully developed and maintained by the RWA only. So the RWA would be in charge of services and oversight; it could also manage the primary school and childcare for young children. We would build gates and have permanent security guards to monitor who could enter and when.... We are now

¹⁰ Interview date: April 24, 2006.

trying to work with the police to start a checking system for security enhancement. We want to check domestic workers and record their information.

Unlike other cities that have experienced new forms of urban segregation in the wake of economic liberalization (see Caldeira, 2001; Davis, 1990), however, Delhi has not seen an increase in either violent or property crime. After asking Pankaj Agarwal, the Secretary of Delhi's RWA Joint Front, which is the largest RWA federation in Delhi with over 400 member RWAs, about why there is so much opposition to slums, he said, "they drain resources, create security problems, and create negative impression in the minds of tourists when they see beggars on the streets.... You see, today, a house costs some 3-4 crore rupees [~\$750,000-\$1,000,000]—for a small house. The middle class has to pay so much to live here, and then to have all these security problems. The middle class is discriminated against." I interjected and asked what security problems slums cause, and he replied, "The feeling is there that crime is a problem, even if it is not true. It is a psychological feeling."¹¹

These feelings are enhanced by sensational media coverage of violent crime and dangerous slums, which depict an increasingly violent city in need of securitization, despite significant declines in crime over the past decade.¹² Without questioning the basis of the police analysis—viz. the absence of a sociological study to back the police report—or interviewing criminologists with competing hypotheses, *The Hindustan Times*, for example, reported that the "Police's annual crime report attributes the incidence of sexual abuse to a number of sociological factors, including mushrooming of JJ clusters [slums] and sub-human living conditions. Last year, about 80 per cent of the accused belonged to the poor strata."¹³ It further drew upon the fallacy of rising crime to justify RWA securitization when it stated in the same article, "With murders and burglary increasing by the day, security concerns have led RWAs to build more gates around colonies." Elsewhere, it suggested that "Hiring a domestic help, especially a Nepalese or Bangladeshi, is fraught with dangers, say the police."¹⁴ An interview with Ravi Bajpai, an RWA beat writer for *The Hindustan Times* and the author of the previous quote explained the source of the English media's pro-middle class stance: "My job is to cover RWA concerns. We cater to that segment. We are a medium to put peoples' grievances forward to the government."¹⁵ A writer for *The Times of India* expressed a similar view: "The [weekly] supplement [catering to the middle class] is a link between communities and civic agencies. It is an outlet for expressing

¹¹ Interview date: April 20, 2006.

¹² Between 1998 and 2006 in Delhi, all categories of violent crime decreased in incidence, with the exception of rape, the occurrence of which increased from 441 to 623 cases, and kidnapping for ransom (25 to 32). The number of murders fell from 649 to 476, robbery from 823 to 541, rioting from 195 to 50. Property crimes fell even more drastically, with burglary dropping from 3764 to 1101. Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 942, dated 7.03.2007. According to the Chief of Police, the increasing incidence of rape is likely due to "an increase in reporting." Most cases of rape, he said, were "perpetrated by members of the victim's family, or a person known to the victim." "Police chief says crime in India's capital under control," AP Worldstream, January 6, 2006.

¹³ "Unsafe city - 3 cases a day in 'rape Capital'," *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, May 1, 2008.

¹⁴ Ravi Bajpai, "Verification drives not being given weightage," *The Hindustan Times*, South Delhi edition, October 1, 2007.

¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Ravi Bajpai, The Hindustan Times office, Delhi, on November 6, 2006.

concerns and problems of a civic nature in neighborhoods... Government officials also read and respond to these articles.”¹⁶

Police support for neighborhood securitization further fuels RWA rhetoric of outside intruders. As the Police Chief said during a Bhagidari meeting,

The attacks that took place in Ayodhya were organized by people staying in Delhi.¹⁷ There are many anti-social elements that stay in Delhi, its slums and unmonitored places. We have to watch out for suspicious people, terrorists, and criminals. This is the duty of RWAs. RWAs need to restrict and control this movement with security to remove anti-social elements and security risks. They must contact the police, monitor workers, build security mechanisms in order to achieve this.

Thus, the rhetoric of slum illegality is mutually reinforced between the middle class public and the state, rendering discussion of slums as criminal, polluting spaces a routine part of neighborhood and public speech. A South Delhi RWA president justified his successful court petition to demolish a nearby slum on the same terms, saying the slum was inhabited “by illegal immigrants and anti-social elements. They had big brawls with the cops and a month and a half back stole a cop’s gun.... They also could have been involved in the terrorist issues. There were many Pakistanis and Bangladeshis there. I don’t believe that all Mohammedans are terrorists, but all terrorists are Mohammedans. Pakistan is the root of all problems. You can never trust Pakistan.”¹⁸

Unlike in Ravi Das Camp, we here see how perceived threats to the bourgeois inside are read beyond home and neighborhood, across the city (and sometimes nation) as a whole. The efforts of activist RWAs are thus not just about reclaiming local parks and neighborhoods, but the entire city, controlling the entry of workers and servants into both the residential colony and city at large.¹⁹ The anxiety about immigration hence operates as an extension of the boundary of the bourgeois inside beyond the neighborhood to the borders of the city itself. Nuisance not only serves as a coherent discourse for uniting the diverse geographic imaginaries of transgression we have considered here, but also represents a vehicle through which broader efforts to restructure the land economy and visual landscape are advanced. That is, it is part of an effort “to make the spatial pattern both a reflection of and an active moment in the reproduction of the moral order” (Harvey, 2003: 40).

¹⁶ Interview with Ms. Uttara Rajinder, The Times of India office, Delhi, November 15, 2006.

¹⁷ Ayodhya is the former site of the Babri Mosque, which was destroyed by Hindu nationalists in December, 1992. This act and the controversy surrounding it fueled a rise in communal politics that led to rioting in numerous cities across India. While the demolition of the mosque was carried out by Hindu activists, the Police Chief here seems to be making reference to Muslim extremists in this quote.

¹⁸ “Mohammedan” is a term I never heard in Delhi outside of this conversation.

¹⁹ This aligns with Deshpande’s observation that with the advent of the reform era in the early 1990s, the middle class began to claim not just that it represents the ideal nation—what he calls the “proxy” citizen, an idealized product of state developmentalism seen as carrying the nationalist project forward into the postcolonial era—but “rather that it is itself the nation” (2003: 150).

3.6. The propriety of property: Evaluating waste

In both their internal meetings and in conversation with me, RWA members consistently raised concerns about slum sanitation and cleanliness, most often by arguing that behavior they consider distinctly “private”—for example, washing, bathing, drinking, and defecating—is unpleasant, morally degrading, and harmful when conducted in public. Seeing public land as the material foundation for urban order and an aesthetically gratifying life, the spatial imaginary RWA members expressed to me opposed the use of such land for subsistence purposes. As Pankaj Agarwal told me, “We want gardens in front of our houses, but there’s all kinds of filth there now. They [slum residents] wash clothes there. How can I enjoy my balcony?” Thus, while couched in the language of danger and insalubrity, RWA members engaged in nuisance talk often betrayed more of a concern with property value and the quality of their private life than with environmental risk or crime. A wealthy South Delhi RWA member candidly conveyed this sentiment while giving me a tour of his house:

We have a back entrance also. It was on the side [of the house] with the *jhuggis*, so until we had them removed we never even opened the door.... Why would someone in a posh colony want to walk that way [near the slum]? This house is worth so much, and to just see these people squatting on free land! One wants to be reminded of the value of his property, not faced with encroachment and nuisance.

“Nuisance” here has a striking resemblance with colonial applications of the concept under British rule. As “the coercive arm of property rights” (M. R. Anderson, 1992: 17), the doctrine of nuisance “was closely wedded to a regime of private property...., affording [property owners] a promise of protection against extrinsic interferences” (ibid., 4). The law of nuisance also “played an important role in the appropriation and reconstitution of a specifically ‘public’ social space” (ibid., 16), curtailing previous modes of “common access” by “introducing a fresh geopolitical ordering” that “permitted new entrepreneurial and middle class groups to sustain an attack on the customary rights of those with limited access to [and ownership of] productive resources” (17). That is, the colonial distinction between public and private—like in urban India today—had to be actively constructed and maintained so that, for example, “while it was perfectly legal to urinate in the open on one’s own property (if one had property), it was not legal alongside a public thoroughfare” (ibid., 16).

The act of calling something a nuisance, then, is simultaneously an act of identifying the wastefulness of an existing land use—i.e., its restricted or unrealized property value, or its restriction on the realization of another property’s value (cf. Gidwani, 2008, Ch. 1).²⁰ Nuisance hence signifies a theory of value as much as it indexes biological risk, mobilizing a politics of

²⁰ In this manner, nuisance talk and the rhetoric of crime in Delhi differ starkly from that found in gated communities more generally. Most analyses of urban fortification and gated communities read such strategies primarily as defensive efforts to protect the self from the risk of others (Caldeira, 2001; Low, 2001). I am here suggesting that fortification is also part of an expansionary endeavor: by withdrawing private land uses from public, such practices also seek to define public spaces as territory in which private life should be banned. That is, nuisance talk is a politics of property, seeking to restrict “common” uses of public space by banishing non-property owners’ subsistence uses.

propertied citizenship couched in the language of public safety. As a full time RWA activist told me: “You have to create space for the rich. I don’t know what you think about the U.S., but we think capitalism isn’t a bad word. Rich people only spread goodness. Poor people spread dirt.” Arguing against the new Master Plan’s approach to densifying residential space, he continued: “It [densification] will squeeze out the rich making posh colonies too tight. They want to make the whole city for the poor. You need to encourage rich people to live here because they bring good things.... If you make things too tight, they’ll go outside the city and it will crumble like a slum.”

While such stark binaries of wealth-virtue and poverty-degradation may appear extreme, the media and government have launched various public campaigns couched in similar terms, explicitly drawing upon middle class affective responses to poverty and the discourse of nuisance. The Delhi Government’s “Clean Delhi, Green Delhi” campaign, for example, is a city-wide public information drive aimed at instilling a sense of civic pride in the city’s cleanliness and appearance, primarily through aesthetic projects (e.g., roadside landscaping, park rejuvenation) that do little to address underlying sources of environmental stress.²¹ The “Clean Delhi, Green Delhi” phrase has been specifically used to criminalize public urination and littering and to fence and beautify road medians to remove space for begging. Under the guise of “cleaning up” Delhi in preparation for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the DDA has similarly banned approximately 300,000 vendors of street food, and the courts have demanded the removal of all beggars from city roads. As the Delhi Government’s advertisement shown in Figure 15 attests, the discourse of infestation not only circulates from the middle class to government, as discussed above, but becomes a part of official problematizations of urban poverty that are subsequently conveyed to the public at large. Because nuisance talk establishes a pattern of identifying its problem objects (the slum, the beggar, pollution) as sources, not products, of urban decay, the reader of the advertisement in Figure 15 is asked to inhabit a subject-position with a particular bourgeois politics vis-à-vis the poor. By drawing upon a shared affective response (guilt, discomfort, abjection), the advertisement interpolates its subject, hailing the reader to respond on the aesthetic terms with which he is familiar. As the advertisement’s text brazenly reads: “For all you know, your alm may cause... Traffic Jams... Unemployment... Alcohol... Heroin... Robbery. Rape... Murder... Slums.” Here, the reader is positioned in an automobile (a bourgeois, “inside” space) facing the onslaught of social ills listed in the text, his senses educated for later embodied encounters with poverty/disorder. The message is clear: the source of social decay is the urban poor, donations to whom (an instinct of the liberal bourgeoisie) encourage their illicit conduct and inhibit urban progress.

²¹ For example, consider the primarily aesthetic function of the 34 million rupee Green Delhi Action Plan, which focuses on roadside landscaping, litter removal, and strategic tree planting without attention to broader sources of resource degradation or deforestation. “Delhi is gearing up for a new green revolution”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 6, 2008.

For all you know, your alm may cause...



...Traffic Jams. Accidents. Illiteracy. Inconvenience. Unemployment. Biri. Cigarette. Alcohol. Bhang. Ganja. Charas. Heroin. Crack. LSD. Brown Sugar. Opium. Hashish. Mandrax. Robbery. Rape. Sex. Theft. Murder. Prostitution. Handicapped. Assault. Hooliganism. Slums Poverty. Debt. Ignorance. Aggression. Encroachment. Molestation. Mugging. Onslaught. Intoxicants.....
If you wish to pay, give it to some credible NGOs working for this cause.

Discourage Begging



Figure 15. Delhi Government advertisement appearing in *The Hindustan Times* on November 25, 2006

The government has advanced this message perhaps most aggressively in attributing high pollution levels in the Yamuna River to the presence of slums, despite the Delhi Water Board's public acknowledgement that the main cause of pollution is the twenty-two open drains that carry untreated sewage from mostly middle class residential colonies across the city directly into the river.²² The Managing Director of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation thus writes, "A handful of self-styled environmentalists is stalling this idea [of modeling the Yamuna on the Thames in London and clearing all slum settlements from sight]. The result is rampant encroachments on the riverbed by jhuggis[,] which catch fire at regular intervals every summer, often burning alive a few people. Sewage and untreated industrial waste are let into the river without treatment."²³ The Chief Minister similarly held "the slums responsible for the condition of the Yamuna," even though the Central Pollution Control Board found "no improvement in the quality of water" following the removal in 2004-5 of 40,000 *jhuggis* [slum huts] housing approximately 200,000 people from its banks.²⁴ Here, the evidentiary basis for proving slums as the source of environmental stress and public nuisance is not a techno-scientific or "mechanically objective" (Porter, 1995) calculative rationality—nor, as we shall see in the following chapter, is it based on

²² "Yamuna pollution issue: Delhi High Court summons top officials", *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, February 15, 2007.

²³ Sridharan, E., "Restrict Yamuna with walls and develop low-lying areas", *Times of India*, New Dehli, May 20, 2009.

²⁴ "CM concern for green lung, seeks expert panel", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, May 14, 2009 and note 4.

legal precedent or statutory law. Rather, the “fact” of slum pollution/illegality is known via a shared aesthetic disposition, acquired through subjective engagement with nuisance talk.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has shown the different geographic imaginaries of transgression that both mobilize and are mobilized by RWAs in Delhi. These imaginaries operate across scales from the neighborhood to the nation and engage anxieties and aspirations traversing the material, symbolic, and sensate. Nuisance, I have shown here, has proven itself equally transmutable, taking on ecological, economic, and affective registers allowing for the easy identification of the abject “outside.” As it circulates beyond local settings, becoming incorporated in public service announcements, the mass media, commercial advertisements, and government proclamations, nuisance talk shapes the terms on which poverty and urban space can be described in the city as a whole. By designating the objects of urban disorder and calibrating individuals’ perceptions of that disorder to a broader program of social action (world-class city-building), nuisance-as-aesthetic clarifies and confirms the unsightliness of poverty, disclosing its inherent structure to be as it appears: out of place, disturbing the natural order, illegal. “[E]thico-political duty has been internalized as spontaneous inclination;” that is to say, the mechanism of rule has shifted from the head to the heart, “from abstract decisions to bodily dispositions” (Eagleton, 1990: 114). Slums are known to be polluting and illegal because they look polluting and illegal; slum removal is a necessary process of urban improvement because it contributes to a more beautiful city. Slums are hence rendered a particular type of governable space.

By routing residents’ affective response to urban disorder through an aesthetic field defined in terms of the image of the world-class city, nuisance talk establishes its own rules of order, hierarchies of meaning, and legitimate opinions. Because nuisance talk makes certain types of disorder visible (e.g., pollution caused by open cooking) and not others (e.g., automobile exhaust), those entering into this aesthetic field embody certain visual dispositions—what Bourdieu (1998) calls “schemes of perception”—in order to gain membership in communities defined in terms of the field. In the case of the lower-middle class residents adjacent to Ravi Das Camp, it was an effort to claim middle class status. In the case of the upper-class RWA members we met, it was membership in a global community of “world-class” citizens, or a more general desire to “catch up” with the West. As I will explore in Chapters 5 and 6, slum residents too seek membership via this field, at times strategically adopting nuisance talk to construct themselves as potential world-class citizens—i.e., worthy of government resettlement and property ownership and critical of “the nuisance of slums.” In this way, nuisance talk is not just a type of speech. It also actively shapes the social world by projecting aesthetic codes that are indexed to social status: as subjects desirous of a world-class future sensorily experience forms of disorder identifiable as “nuisances,” this aesthetic seems to tell them: “anyone in a world-class city would find this abhorrent.” In other words, nuisance talk posits, via a shared discourse and image-repertoire, a particular form of aesthetic engagement, allowing concrete experiences of disorder to be linked to a broader social project of urban improvement.

As nuisance talk has become legitimated by the media’s adoption of “citizen concerns” and the Delhi Government’s efforts to “clean and green” Delhi, RWA federations and activists have

effectively consolidated their de facto role as nuisance experts. This is not to say that all RWA members embrace an aggressive anti-slum stance, but a vanguard segment of this population has shaped public discourse effectively by advocating a form of propertied citizenship and a vision of the urban future in which occupants of public land have no part. This group not only defines the norm for urban aesthetics, but also now judges what constitutes an infraction of that norm. Without the need to scientifically assess resource degradation, pollution levels, or ecological health, middle class quality-of-life concerns and aesthetics have become the proxy for environmental quality in Delhi today. As experts, then, activist RWAs' goal of removing slums is construed as a legitimate social cause: the valiant and award-worthy²⁵ effort of local civic activists struggling for a cleaner, greener city. Removing slums and other visible blotches from the landscape, they suggest, is a necessary and politically progressive step in the transformation of the city.

Late in 2006, the Delhi Government, for the first time, began strict enforcement of child labor laws.²⁶ In a week of aggressive raids across the city, the police drove around in lorries collecting barefooted, raggedy children working in hotels, restaurants and other commercial establishments, shipping them out of the city, out of sight, and fining their employers. While celebrated by the Left as a human rights victory, this action might be better read as one in a series of acts of aesthetic disciplining, in line with the DDA ban on informal food vendors, the Supreme Court's 2001 order banishing industry to the city's peripheries, the criminalization and round-up of beggars, and the broader aesthetic reconstitution of the urban core. Nuisance, I have shown, provides the coherent aesthetic framework that unites these disparate actions as part of a rational process of urban improvement, despite their adverse livelihood implications for the numerically dominant urban poor.

²⁵ Bhagidari issues annual awards for the best RWAs, which are widely celebrated in the media. The top award in 2006 went to an RWA that cleared two slums in its colony.

²⁶ Gentleman, Amelia. "In India, ban on child labor to be tightened," *The International Herald Tribune*, New York, October 9, 2006.

Chapter 4. The nuisance of slums: Environmental law and the production of slum illegality in India

“Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all.” –Adam Smith (1776 [2009]: 224)

4.1. Introduction

As noted in previous chapters, the pace of slum demolition in Delhi increased starkly in the early 2000s. Conservative estimates suggest at least a tripling in the annual rate of *jhuggi* removal (Dupont, 2008), with up to a million slum residents displaced since 2000. This increase, it has been widely noted, is the direct outcome of the judiciary's expanded role in demanding slum clearance (see Bhushan, 2006; Ramanathan, 2005; D. Roy, 2006). Whereas the decision to raze a slum was previously the almost exclusive domain of Delhi's various land-owning agencies, in particular the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), these wings of government now have little say in determining the legal and political status of such settlements. Instead, the primary avenue by which slums are demolished today begins when a Resident Welfare Association (RWA), files a writ petition requesting the removal of a neighboring slum, proceeds through the court's granting of the RWA's request, and ends when the land-owning agency abides by the court's direction. Thus, whereas the previous two chapters considered the spatial and cultural politics through which the middle class, and specifically the RWAs representing private property owners, has gained authority to define slum demolition as a necessary step in Delhi's march to becoming a “world-class” city, this chapter seeks to identify the legal and technical mechanisms by which slum demolitions are actualized. I do so by engaging in a discourse analysis of both (i) the orders and judgments of the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court of India related to slum demolition over the past approximately 25 years, as well as the (ii) original civil writ petitions filed in five different cases that directly led to the demolition of a slum in Delhi.

By highlighting key words and phrases that arise within the proceedings of slum-related cases, I set out to show how the basic statement that “slums are illegal” is a very recent juridical discourse, despite its widespread circulation in India today. I further argue that proving this statement in the courts today rests on a different and less rigorous evidentiary procedure than other types of truth claims: to prove a slum's illegality, one must demonstrate that it *appears* to be a nuisance. I find that the recent criminalization of informal settlements in general and the rise of court orders to demolish slums in particular is occurring not simply because the judiciary is suddenly “anti-poor,” as most legal analyses suggest (Bhan, 2009; Bhushan, 2006; Dupont, 2008; Ramanathan, 2006), but rather because of a reinterpretation of nuisance law, the main component of environmental law in India (Ashok K. Jain, 2005). Nuisance has thus become the key legal term driving slum demolitions and has been incredibly influential in resculpting both Delhi's residential geography and how the city's future is imagined. Picking up where the previous chapter left off, then, this chapter shows how middle class aesthetic norms, mobilized through a discourse of public nuisance, are translated into the law, providing a governing

intelligibility according to which the courts adjudicate the legal standing of different types of land use.

While the documents I examine relate primarily to Delhi, rulings in the Supreme Court and High Courts establish precedent across the land, thus determining how cases pertaining to slums are to be judged in all cities.¹ Therefore, in addition to making a set of specific claims about the discursive reconstitution of legality and citizenship in Delhi, I suggest a set of more far-reaching implications for Indian urbanism. In particular, I show how the legal category “nuisance” is fundamentally aesthetic, tied to dominant perceptions of acceptable conduct and visual appearance. The ability to criminalize, punish, and expel populations (of the poor, informal, migrant, etc.) that do not conform to the aesthetic norms of Indian cities—i.e., those that look like nuisances—hence presents a new, or at least newly significant, arena for urban struggle in the post-colonial Indian city. This is especially the case given the widespread observation that India’s elite have cultivated a “world-class” aesthetic that they are using to try to create “bourgeois cities,” largely through the language of “environmental improvement” and “beautification” (Baviskar, Sinha, & Philip, 2006; Chatterjee, 2004, 143-4; Fernandes, 2006, xxii-iii; Nair, 2005, Ch. 5). Building on these previous studies, I show how the reinterpretation of nuisance law has reconstituted the meaning of “public interest,” defining distinctly (bourgeois) private interests as public matters and projecting a vision of urban order—i.e., a world-class aesthetic—founded on property ownership. Thus, I specifically show how Indian cities’ embourgeoisement is taking place not through a simple assertion of elite power, but rather through the more subtle production of a new aesthetic ordering of “the public” and its “proper” uses.

In section 4.2, I proceed by describing the basis of nuisance law in India, with special emphasis on how it was understood and implemented through the 1980s and much of the 1990s. In section 4.3, I analyze key rulings in the courts that led to a re-problematization of “the slum” in terms of nuisance in the early 2000s. In section 4.4, I examine a set of recent petitions filed in the Delhi High Court praying for the removal of slums and situate them in the context of these key rulings to show how the interpretation of nuisance has been used to mark informal settlements as polluting and thus illegal. Specifically, I describe how the courts have consolidated a “new nuisance discourse” that codifies a “world-class” aesthetic and provides a visual basis for removing slums and visible signs of poverty. I conclude in section 4.6 by drawing out the implications of this “new nuisance discourse” for the future of urban development in India.

4.2. The foundations of nuisance law

A nuisance is legally defined as “any act, omission, injury, damage, annoyance or offense to the sense of sight, smell, hearing or which is or may be dangerous to life or injurious to health or property” (Ashok K. Jain, 2005, 97). In common law, nuisances are of two types: public and private, where the former is an “unreasonable interference with a right common to the general public” and the latter is a “substantial and unreasonable interference with the use or enjoyment of

¹ See Hosbet (2000) for commentary on how these changes are reflected outside of Delhi.

land” (ibid). The primary statutes in the Indian legal system that provide channels to redress nuisance are Section 133 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (hereafter Cr. P.C.) and Section 91 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, both of which derive their definitions of nuisance from British common law. Section 133 Cr. P.C. was written more recently with the intention of providing an independent, quick and summary remedy to public nuisance by empowering a magistrate to order its removal (Sengar, 2007). The nuisances referred to in Section 133 include: obstructions to a public place or way, trades or activities hazardous to the surrounding community, flammable substances, objects that could fall and cause injury, unfenced excavations or wells, or unconfined and dangerous animals.² Nuisances are thus limited to two categories: (i) objects or possessions, and (ii) actions—categories that I will re-examine in section 4.3 below.

Case law during the 1980s and 1990s significantly elaborated the judicial and administrative considerations that must be brought to bear in addressing any problem of nuisance. This section proceeds to highlight the framework for dealing with public nuisances connected with slums as it emerged from case law during these decades.

The landmark case pertaining to slum-related nuisance was decided in 1980 in *Ratlam Municipal Council vs. Vardichan*. In this case, the Ratlam Municipal Council was directed by a magistrate, empowered under Section 133 Cr. P.C., to construct and improve drains in a municipal ward to eradicate nuisance caused by stagnant, putrid water. The Municipal Council subsequently filed an appeal in the Sessions Court, which overturned the magistrate’s ruling. The initial order was later upheld by the High Court and finally brought before the Supreme Court, where Justice Krishna Iyer, in defending the magistrate’s initial order, affirmed the statutory nature of Section 133 Cr. P.C. and declared it to be the primary remedial mechanism for dealing with public nuisance: “Wherever there is a public nuisance, the presence of Section 133 Cr. P.C. must be felt and any contrary opinion is contrary to law.”³ The judge further stated that Section 133 Cr. P.C. should be the main channel by which courts ensure that municipal bodies carry out their duty to provide clean and safe environments for city residents.

In this judgment, the court also clarified that the municipal authorities and *not* slum dwellers are the party responsible for nuisances arising from slums with inadequate municipal services. The judge explained: “[T]he grievous failure of local authorities to provide the basic amenity of public conveniences drives the miserable slum-dwellers to ease in the streets, on the sly for a time, and openly thereafter, because under Nature’s pressure, bashfulness becomes a luxury and dignity a difficult art.... [P]roviding drainage systems... cannot be evaded if the municipality is to justify its existence.” The removal of public nuisance in slum-related cases, then, is to occur through the application of positive technologies (e.g., building drainage systems). That is, instead of removing, disciplining or punishing those denied adequate sanitation services, government here should operate through positive means to manage and mitigate waste and effluent and thus improve the population subjected to the same. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the Ratlam decision set a precedent for upholding the statutory duties of municipal authorities to ensure public health, particularly that of slum residents.⁴

² The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, Section 133.

³ AIR 1980 SC 1622. See also, AIR 1979 SC 143, *Govind Singh vs. Shanti Sarup*.

⁴ See, for example, CA No. 1019 of 1992 in the M.P High Court, *Dr. K.C. Malhotra vs. State of M.P.*

In this context, it is useful to examine the character of petitions filed during this same period by private RWAs seeking judicial intervention to address slum-related nuisances, the type of petition that has become a major instrument of slum demolition today and that I examine in detail in section 4.4. As an example, take the case of *K.K. Manchanda vs. the Union of India*,⁵ a matter that appeared before the Delhi High Court regularly until 2002 and that became the lead petition in a summary ruling of 63 related slum matters that we will discuss in detail in the following section. The petitioner, the Ashok Vihar RWA, submitted that residents were aggrieved by the squalid conditions of a vacant piece of land in front of their colony that, according to the approved zonal plan, was supposed to be a “Green Belt-cum-Community Park.” The petition states that the primary source of grievance is “public nuisance” and “health hazard” created by nearby slum dwellers’ use of this land as an “Open Public Lavatory”: “Adjacent to this Green Belt... there are large number of jhuggies and jhompries [huts] situated in the said vicinity... [and that] people residing in these jhuggies..., all of them ladies, gents, their offsprings make use of this Public Ground... for easing themselves throughout the day [*sic*].” The petition goes on to say that this has made the lives of the RWA residents “miserable” and has “transgressed their right to very living” because “thousand of people easing themselves pose such uncultured scene, besides no young girls can dare to come to their own balconies throughout the day [because] obnoxious smells pollute the atmosphere [, thus] the entire environment is unconducive to public health and morality [*sic*].”

The petition thus clearly states that the source of public nuisance faced by the petitioner is slum dwellers’ misuse of public land. Yet, because the petition was written in a discursive context structured by the *Ratlam* decision and the strict definition of public nuisance provided above, the petition does not target the slum itself, as similar petitions filed a decade later would do. Rather it states that the petitioner is aggrieved “Because the inaction on the part of the Respondents [the Delhi Administration, what would later become the MCD, and DDA] has posed various problems like public indecency, public immorality, health hazard etc. which the Respondents are statutorily liable to control....” Following the norm set forth in the *Ratlam* decision, the petition thus states that the slum residents are forced to ease themselves on public land because “there is no provision of latrines (Public Toilets) for the people residing in these jhuggies.” Again, the blame for the public nuisance falls upon the authorities, as is clear from the petitioner’s prayer that the court order the authorities to build a community toilet near the slum, develop the vacant land into a community park, and control access to the park by building a boundary wall. In August 1992, the court disposed of the petition while ordering the respondents to prevent the slum residents from defecating in the park.

The problem defined and targeted in this case therefore had nothing to do with the presence of the slum or its legal basis; rather, it merely concerned the nuisance-causing activities of this community. Furthermore, nuisance law was used here as a mechanism by the courts to provide municipal services to slum dwellers. In the following section, I will examine how nuisance has been redefined in such a way that this same category of the population gets re-read, on terms quite similar to the “nuisance talk” I discussed in the previous chapter, as themselves a nuisance.

⁵ CWP No. 531 of 1990 in the Delhi High Court.

While cases through the mid-late 1990s continued to rely on the Ratlam decision in dealing with slum-derived public nuisances, a new problematization of the slum begins to emerge within juridical discourse at the same time, a trend that portends how slums would be seen by the beginning of the next decade. This trend begins to surface in *B.L. Wadehra vs. the Union of India*,⁶ a case addressing the problem of inadequate waste disposal in Delhi. Whereas the original petition concerned the failure of the MCD to dispose of municipal waste across the city, and whereas the final orders issued by the Supreme Court direct the MCD to fulfil its statutory duties to “collect and dispose of the garbage/waste generated from various sources in the city” by increasing the efficiency of waste collection, the judgment makes occasional mention of a growing “problem” of the slum. The MCD in particular presents slums as a key problem obstructing it from carrying out its duties, stating in its affidavit that because of “problems of Jhuggi Jhompri Clusters [and] floating population and for various other reasons, it is not possible to give the time schedule regarding the cleaning of Delhi as directed by this Court.” While this type of statement does not yet target slums for demolition, it forms the basis on which future decisions equating slums with nuisance will rely.

4.3. Equating slums with nuisance

In 2000, highlighting the need for Delhi to be the “showpiece” of the country, the Supreme Court’s judgment in *Almrita Patel vs. the Union of India*⁷ radically altered the discursive terrain of nuisance law. Without a single mention of the Ratlam decision, this judgment begins where the Wadehra case had left off by hauling up the municipal authorities for failing to improve the waste disposal situation in Delhi. However, the court here quickly introduces a new problem in addressing this citywide nuisance: “when a large number of inhabitants live... in slums with no care for hygiene, the problem becomes more complex.” Based on the inherent deficiencies of the slum population, this sentence declares, slums are essentially spaces of filth and nuisance, lacking basic concern for health and environment.

These words set the tone for the following paragraph, wherein the distinction between slums and slum-derived waste is blurred:

Instead of ‘slum clearance’ there is ‘slum creation’ in Delhi. This in turn gives rise to domestic waste being strewn on open land in and around the slums. This can best be controlled at least, in the first instance, by *preventing the growth of slums*. The authorities must realize that there is a limit to which the population of a city can be increased, without enlarging its size. In other words the density of population per square kilometre cannot be allowed to increase beyond the sustainable limit. Creation of slums resulting in increase in density has to be prevented.... It is the *garbage and solid waste generated by these slums* which require to be dealt with most expeditiously (emphasis added).

⁶ 1996 2 SCC 594.

⁷ 2000 2 SCC 679.

And so emerges the new definition of nuisance: nuisance arises from the problem of population. Nuisances in the city, it is stated, originate from overpopulation and slum growth; not from the government's failure to provide municipal services, nor its failure to provide low-income housing as guaranteed in the Delhi Master Plan. If we examine the two italicized word clusters shown above, we find that this paragraph not only redefines nuisance, but also proposes a new solution: "waste generated by these slums" can be dealt with "by preventing the growth of slums."

The formal definition of nuisance described in Section 4.2 included only particular categories of *objects* possessed, or *actions* performed, by an individual or group, whereas the current interpretation includes *individuals* or *groups* themselves as possible nuisance categories. This vastly expands the range of procedures that can be administered: no longer simply regulating the nuisance-causing behaviour of individuals, we will find that nuisance law can soon be used to remove individuals themselves. Order number six in the same judgment sets the stage for this very strategy in future cases: "We direct [the respondent authorities] to take appropriate steps for preventing any fresh encroachment or unauthorized occupation of public land for the purpose of dwelling resulting in creation of a slum. Further appropriate steps be taken to improve the sanitation in the existing slums *till they are removed and the land reclaimed*" (emphasis added). Here, it is clear that the court sees the need to remove all slums to resolve the problem of municipal waste in the city. Thus, within the space of a few paragraphs, the strategic implication of nuisance law shifts from a positive technology of building municipal infrastructure to a negative and disciplinary technology of elimination and displacement. The MCD's lackadaisical approach to installing public waste bins, the main problem raised in the Almrta Patel petition, leads to a court order to eliminate the residential spaces of the working poor, and the "polluting poor" discourse is (re-)born.⁸

The statement "slums are illegal" and reference to slums as "illegal encroachments" gained widespread circulation in judicial discourse only after the Supreme Court's equation of slums with nuisance in the early 2000s. If we look back at petitions and court matters filed before the main orders from Almrta Patel were issued, for example the Manchanda petition we examined in the previous section, we see that there is little to no mention of slums as "illegal encroachments." Where encroachment or misuse was accused, it was buoyed by concrete evidence related to a land use violation. Such is not the case with contemporary petitions filed against slums, as we will see in section 4.4.

The Almrta Patel judgment inaugurated a key discursive shift regarding slums and nuisance and marks a critical break from previous case law that emphasized the formal definition of nuisance laid down in Section 133 Cr. P.C. However, it was a case proceeding before the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court in the early 2000s that gave technical traction to this new discourse by designating a program of slum removal capable of re-inscribing Delhi's landscape according to the moral grid of filth and nuisance.

⁸ Anti-poor environmental discourse has circulated widely in India since colonial times (see Prakash, 1999; Prashad, 2001; Sharan, 2006). For historical uses of nuisance law to facilitate industrial development, see Anderson (1995) and Rosen (2003).

In 1999, the petitioner in the Manchanda case filed a contempt motion against the municipal authorities for failing to improve the environment in its neighbourhood. Prior to the continuation of this matter, however, numerous writ petitions “mostly filed by various resident associations of colonies alleging that after encroaching the public land, these JJ clusters have been constructed in an illegal manner and they are causing nuisance of varied kind for the residents of those areas” appeared before the court.⁹ Therefore, the court lumped these 63 related petitions together under the lead petitions of Pitampura Sudhar Samiti¹⁰ and K.K. Manchanda¹¹ while embarking on the stated goal of taking up “the larger issue of removal of unauthorized JJ clusters from public land which were in the vicinity of various residential colonies.” Here, we already find a stark contrast with the court’s approach to the Manchanda case in the early 1990s. The introductory comments to the judgment (hereafter called the Pitampura judgement) issued in September of 2002 clearly enunciate the purpose behind bringing these 63 cases together: to rid Delhi of the persistent nuisance of JJ clusters. An interim order passed in January of 2002 justified this goal by invoking the problem of overpopulation in controlling slum-related nuisance: “the agencies... have not taken any effective steps to check the growth of these jhuggies which are still mushrooming on public land.”

However, the task of removing the more than a quarter of Delhi’s population living in slums required a far more complex assemblage of justificatory and legal argumentation than the simple description of their “uncontrolled growth.” This is so because Delhi’s more than one thousand JJ clusters did not surreptitiously crop up (like mushrooms) in Delhi’s shady, vacant corners. Rather, as stated above, they have a complex legal and political history that includes formal entitlement to 25% of residential land, only a fraction of which they were provided.¹² Further, the Delhi Government’s various resettlement policies protect slum residents from demolition without compensation. In fact, just months before the drafting of the final judgment in this case, the Planning Commission published a report explaining Delhi’s slum problem as the direct outcome of the DDA’s failure to implement the mandatory 25% housing provision for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). How then was the court able to flout the poor’s legal and regulatory protections in favour of the more recent and seemingly offhand remarks of the Almrta Patel judgment?

The Pitampura judgment begins by discursively dividing “the problem of the slum” into two individual dimensions: “One is the removal of JJ clusters and the other is their rehabilitation.” Because the second aspect was pending before a different bench of the High Court¹³ during the proceedings of this case, the court here determined to focus on the removal of JJ clusters alone. Uncoupling Delhi residents’ entitlement to land and right to live in the city from their present place of residence was an unprecedented twist in logic. In hindsight, however, this uncoupling

⁹ CWP No. 4215 of 1995 in the Delhi High Court.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See note 5 above.

¹² See Verma (2002), for a discussion of Delhi’s slum population as what she calls “Master Plan implementation backlog.” Verma deftly shows how the current slum population is equal in size to the gap between the EWS housing stock the DDA was supposed to build according to the *Delhi Master Plan 2001* and the DDA’s actual EWS housing provision.

¹³ Wazirpur Bartan Nirmata Sangh vs. Union of India and Okhla Factory Owners’ Association vs. Govt. of NCT of Delhi, CWP No. 2112 of 2002, 108(2002) DLT 517.

appears the only way that the courts could simultaneously sustain the position that slums are spaces of filth and nuisance *and* that slum dwellers are entitled to land and livelihood. Once the question of the entitlements of the urban poor to public land (i.e., the question of “rehabilitation”) was bracketed off,¹⁴ the court could easily proceed to summarize the entire history of slum settlement in a single sentence: “There is large scale encroachment of public land by the persons who come from other States.” That is, slum dwellers are alien, come from “other” places, and deprive the true residents of Delhi of what is rightfully theirs. Despite 45 years of the DDA’s existence and a longer history of informal settlements in Delhi, the court disregards the messy conditions that led to the development of slums¹⁵ and declares: “There is no denying the fact that no person has right to encroach public land.... [I]t is the statutory duty cast upon the civic authorities... to remove such encroachments.”

From this text, we see that legality is primarily gauged by the exterior character of a settlement—is it on public or private land? Is it a formal or informal colony? The question of a settlement’s legal status now ignores (i) the economic and political context that led to the use of public land for informal housing, (ii) the manner in which residents of these spaces have been de facto formalized by receiving various forms of residence proof from the state (e.g., ration and identity cards, registration tokens, etc.) and enjoying state-funded infrastructure improvements (e.g., government run schools), and (iii) the patent failure by the state to fulfil the statutory housing provisions of the Master Plan. Separating the question of entitlement from one’s present residential status, then, does not treat these two issues as logically distinct, as the tone of the judgment would suggest. Rather, this discursive separation makes accessing one’s housing entitlement incumbent on his current settlement status.

The judgment next briefly acknowledges the second aspect of the slum problem—slum dweller’s entitlement to public land—but denies its relevance by referring to the broader logic of nuisance: “No doubt, shelter for every citizen is an imperative of any good government, but there are *cleaner* ways to achieve that goal than converting public property into slum lords’ illegal estates” (emphasis added). “Cleaner” is of course the key word in this sentence, here used as if it were a referent to a specific legal code. However, it is not clear to which statute this word may be referring. One might think that the legal procedure for addressing cleanliness would derive from nuisance law, but the entire judgment makes no reference to section 133 Cr. P.C., the key statute dealing with public nuisance. Rather, this word, “clean,” derives its effectiveness from the dominant discourse of nuisance we have been describing. That is, “cleanliness” becomes a symbolic code of settled meaning within judicial discourse, agreed upon without explication of its origins or legal foundation. It is of course preposterous to say that any settlement is “illegal” because it is not “clean” enough. Yet, this is precisely what the judgment says, for there is no other justification provided in the judgment for clearing slums; there is no mention—implicit or explicit—of any of the statutes governing displacement: not the Public Premises Act, 1971, nor the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. The statutory laws for dealing with the cleanliness of urban

¹⁴ This logic has been applied to subsequent cases as well. For example, see *Federation of Paschim Vihar Group Housing Societies vs. MCD*, CWP No.17869 of 2005 in the Delhi High Court, order dated October 6, 2005.

¹⁵ During previous cases, judges considered the circumstances leading to the settlement of a slum before making its final decision. In particular, see *Olga Tellis vs. Municipal Corporation of Greater Bombay*, AIR 1986 SC 180, and *Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation vs. Nawab Khan and Ors.*, AIR 1997 SC 152.

space are distinct from those for displacing a population. However, here, these two procedures are melded.

If it is not yet clear that the new discourse of nuisance is the primary mechanism of slum demolition in the Pitampura case, consider the judgment's final paragraph before the bench's orders are recorded:

The welfare of the residents of these [RWAs'] colonies is also in the realm of public interest which cannot be overlooked. After all, these residential colonies were developed first. *The slums have been created afterwards which is the cause of nuisance* and brooding [*sic*] ground of so many ills. The welfare, health, maintenance of law and order, safety and sanitation of these residents cannot be sacrificed and their right under Article 21 [of the Indian Constitution] is violated in the name of social justice to the slum dwellers. Even if the government and civic authorities move at snails pace and take time at their own leisure for the rehabilitation of these clusters, this is no excuse for continuing them at the given places [*sic*] (emphasis added).

This paragraph provides the logic upon which dozens of JJ clusters would be demolished in the subsequent five years. The declaration that slums are “the cause of nuisance” completes the discursive reworking of nuisance and establishes a new legal precedent for informal settlements.

Let us now examine three concrete components of the Pitampura judgment's discursive work. First, as was initiated in the Almrta Patel judgment, this paragraph divides “the public” into two categories: “normal” residents of formal colonies and slum dwellers, the former owning private property and the latter occupying public land. Based on earlier text in the judgment, the court makes it clear that these two categories of settlement and the regulatory arrangements that support them are at odds. Therefore, the judgment states that because the former category own their property, came “first,” and suffer from the nuisance of the latter's presence, their “right to life” under Article 21 of the Constitution should trump the latter's. This marks a change in the interpretation of rights, away from a framework envisioning the even distribution of rights across a population and in favour of a zero-sum conception of rights in which the enhancement of one's well being necessarily detracts from another's. It is in this vein that the judgment defines slum dwellers as a secondary category of citizens whose “social justice” becomes actionable only after the fulfilment of the rights of residents of formal colonies.

This decision reversed the prevalent interpretation of the “right to life” in Article 21 regarding slum dwellers that was established almost twenty years earlier in *Olga Tellis vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation*.¹⁶ Whereas the *Olga Tellis* judgment emphasized the (alienable) right of the working poor to occupy public land to fulfil their livelihood requirements—“...the right to livelihood is an important facet of the right to life”—the interpretation advanced in this judgment elevates the quality of life and enjoyment of land for propertied citizens over the livelihood of slum dwellers.¹⁷ This is the transformation of Article 21 lamented by most critical legal studies

¹⁶ See note 15 and *P.G. Gupta vs. State of Gujarat*, (1995) Supp. 2 SCC 182.

¹⁷ See Ramanathan (2006) for a discussion of the *Olga Tellis* case and the interpretation of Article 21 therein.

of slum demolitions (see Bhushan, 2006; Ramanathan, 2005).¹⁸ However, the Pitampura judgment clearly shows that it is only through the new mechanisms of nuisance law that this reversal is enacted. That is, the reinterpretation of Article 21 is a legal effect or outcome of the new nuisance discourse, not its cause. The new construal of Article 21 becomes an implicit and necessary effect of this discourse because, once it is established, this discourse inheres a set of assumptions about (i) what defines the proper citizens of a city—residents of formal colonies, (ii) who constitutes the “public” in whose interest “public interest” is defined—private property owners, and (iii) the elements of a “world-class city”—an urban environment that is clean, nuisance-free, and thus slum-free.¹⁹ Nuisance discourse is so powerful, then, precisely because in performing the simple semiotic task of transforming what everyone knows—“slums are dirty”—into the new truth statement that “slums are a nuisance,” it simultaneously carries out much deeper ideological work. By rendering the statements “slums are illegal” and “slums are nuisances” acceptable, it reorients the terrain of citizenship, social justice and access to the city—categories that would typically fall in the domain of Article 21. Once these categories have been re-engineered, the reinterpretation of Article 21 becomes but a pre-determined formality or logical extension of the new nuisance discourse.

The second effect of the new nuisance discourse, which derives from the first, is a blurring of the distinction between public and private nuisance. If we return to the above quoted paragraph from the Pitampura judgment, it becomes clear that the court (and petitioners) is concerned with removing impediments to the security and welfare of the private colonies. This concern overlaps perfectly with the definition of *private* nuisance provided at the beginning of section 4.2—a “substantial and unreasonable interference with the use or enjoyment of land,” meaning private property. Yet, each of the cases discussed in this chapter was filed as public interest litigation (PIL), a requirement of which is that the matter affects the broader public, not only a private party. Whereas the cases in question are ostensibly treated as matters of *public* nuisance, many of the actual grievances fall under the strict definition of *private* nuisance; it is thus apparent that the distinction between public and private is breaking down in the course of these hearings; or, as Anderson (1992, 17) found in the colonial context, nuisance begins to serve as “the coercive arm of property rights,” defending private interest in the name of public purpose.²⁰

¹⁸ Bhan (2009) too notes this weakening of the “right to life” under Article 21, calling for future research into the underlying causes of this shift.

¹⁹ The High Court made the link between slum removal and world-class city status clear when it noted in a 2006 case that, at the current pace, it would “require 1,263 years to demolish the illegal constructions carried out over the last 50 years, and convert Delhi into a world-class city”, quoted in ““So, it'll take you 263 years to wash sins!””, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, August 19, 2006.

²⁰ Anderson (1992, 15-6) notes of colonial jurisprudence in India: “Propertied groups were able in many instances to invoke public nuisance provisions against anyone threatening the value of their property.” However, he found that such claims, in which “public nuisance complaints were blatantly driven by private material interest,” “gave rise to some alarm in judicial circles” prompting some judges “to issue warnings of abusive or improper litigation” (16). Such litigation was dismissed outright in the post-colonial period until approximately 2000, when the defence of private property owners’ civic sensibilities (and land values) started to be treated as a matter of public interest. Indeed, contemporary applications of nuisance law closely resemble those under British rule, in which nuisance was a category invoked to maintain the boundary between native and European, public and private (see also Gooptu, 2005; Legg, 2007; Sharan, 2006).

To better grasp the import of the blurring of private and public nuisances taking place today—and to understand how this blurring is used to impose a distinctly bourgeois sense of social order over public space—let us return to the distinction between “normal” society and slum dwellers, which we found above to rest on the variable of property ownership. This was even more categorically stated in the Okhla judgment, which was the case proceeding alongside the Pitampura case concerning the issue of slum rehabilitation.²¹ In quashing the Delhi Government’s slum resettlement policy, the final judgment in this case makes a clear distinction between “those who have scant respect for law and unauthorisedly squat on public land” and “citizens who have paid for the land.”²² Once land ownership is established as the basis of citizenship as such, the preservation and prosperity of private property becomes an elevated concern. That is to say, when “the public” is defined by its ownership of property—and conversely those without private property are excluded from this category—the minimization of private nuisance or the defence of private property becomes a matter of public interest. Thus, whereas the first effect of this judgment was to divide “the public” into two categories—property-owning citizens and others—the second effect is to reinvest “the public” with the attributes and interests of the first of these groups. This is nothing less than the juridical embourgeoisement of Delhi, a privatization of the definition of public life and interest: the public’s right is to act according to private interest, and private interest is what earns one the right of public life (cf. Marx, 1844 [1994]). As discussed in the previous chapter, the aggregate spatial politics of the property owning middle class can be read in Delhi as one of projecting the norms of civic conduct and appearance found on the bourgeois inside outward into public space (see Figure 14 above). Here, we see how this very definition of the public—i.e., an ordered domain in which various “private” parties freely interact—is inscribed into property law, restricting previous forms of “common access” and reconstituting public social space according to a propertied form of citizenship.

This construal of “the public” has stark implications for the prosecution of nuisance and the overall manner in which land use is legally treated because, as Diwan and Rosencranz say in their comprehensive review of environmental case law in India, “The test which has always been found to be useful in distinguishing... [whether a nuisance exists or not] is the test of ascertaining the reaction of a reasonable person according to the ordinary usage of mankind living in a particular society in respect of the thing complained of” (2001, 97). That is, nuisance is defined as conduct that the court determines to be outside the range of what a “reasonable person” would do. Once “a reasonable person” and “ordinary usage of mankind” are defined in terms of residents of formal residential colonies, who make up less than 25% of Delhi’s population (GNCTD, 2004b), the conduct of slum dwellers can easily be labelled deviant and unreasonable, be it even their mere existence. Whereas the Ratlam decision discussed in section 4.2 sympathized with the compulsion slum dwellers face to defecate in the open, this same act in the current legal environment comes to represent the behaviour of a population with “no care for hygiene”;²³ a clear affront to urban order; and, as the Delhi High Court declared, an impediment

²¹ See note 13.

²² The judgment goes on to say that the former occupy areas of land adjacent to the latter, making the latter “inconvenienced”: “An unhygienic condition is created causing pollution and ecological problems. It has resulted in almost collapse of Municipal services.” Thus, we come full circle: inadequate municipal services are not the cause of nuisance, but rather the outcome according to the new nuisance discourse.

²³ See note 7.

to the “building of modern India.”²⁴ This construal of legality flows from the view that the protection of private property is a component of public nuisance prosecution.

Coming to the third effect of the new nuisance discourse, we find that once slum dwellers’ lives are defined as outside the normal range of citizen conduct, their access to representation and formal appeal is also brought into question. For, if they are outside of normal citizenship, then the procedures for administering their conduct will also fall outside the normal domain of civil society. It is in this capacity that the final order of the Pitampura judgment states: “We may also note at this stage that some petitions were filed by various occupiers [slum residents] against whom Orders for removal were passed.... Since they are encroachments of public land... they have no legal right to maintain such a Petition.” This statement militates against the position established by the Supreme Court in 1996: “When an encroacher approaches the Court, the Court is required to examine whether the encroacher had any right and to what extent he would be given protection and relief.”²⁵ Here, the possibility that an “encroacher” has a “right” to occupy public land is maintained. That is, an occupier of public land is not presumed *ex ante* to be illegal. However, the definition of citizenship does not extend as far in the present context as it did in 1996, for the new discourse of nuisance has adjusted the procedures of natural justice.

Today, as we will see in the next section, slum residents have become objects to be managed and disposed of, not citizens with rights. This recalls Chatterjee’s (2004) distinction between “civil society”—the privileged domain of citizens wherein rights are defended through law—and “political society”—the extra-legal domain through which non-citizens informally negotiate political representation and security. Only, whereas Chatterjee describes these as stable categories springing from postcolonial state form, the analysis here shows how they are actively produced through struggle over the public/private divide (cf. Chakrabarty, 1992; Kaviraj, 1998). The contemporary bourgeoisification of Indian cities, then, cannot be summarized as a simple oscillation of power from “political society” to “civil society”, as Chatterjee suggests. Rather, we have to trace how the division between these categories is maintained and given meaning through the mechanisms of law and state, a point I elaborated in Chapter 2.

4.4. Nuisance discourse as mechanism

The previous section tracked the emergence of what I have been calling the “new nuisance discourse” and how it has recalibrated the factors used to determine a settlement’s legality. In this section I will show how petitioners’ invocation of slum illegality along the parameters of nuisance has become an effective mechanism of removing slums. Specifically, by submitting petitions against slums as nuisances, petitioners are able to bypass the typical procedures of eviction. Here, I analyze the factors that drive this nuisance-based demolition mechanism by

²⁴ CWP No. 6553 of 2000 in the Delhi High Court, order dated February 16, 2001, an order banning open defecation.

²⁵ See note 15, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, paragraph 20.

examining five original civil writ petitions filed in the Delhi High Court,²⁶ each of which uses the new nuisance discourse, was filed by an RWA, and led to a slum demolition between 2005 and 2008. What is striking in these petitions is how directly the petitions' descriptions of the slum problem borrow from the everyday nuisance talk explored in the previous chapter. While discussing the details of her case, the Vice President of the Kailash Fraternity RWA (CWP 8556 of 2005) told me that the General Secretary of the RWA had written most of the petition himself, while the lawyer "only changed some words to fit the argument to the finer points of argument and law."²⁷ To illustrate the extension of everyday nuisance talk into court petitions, I quote at length from the Kailash Fraternity petition:

The unhygienic conditions are created by the dwellers in hutments as they excrete, urinate and throw garbage just along the residences, which create hazardous health risks... The situation is aggravating with the increase in number of hutments and also the garbage dumping grounds created by them in the locality. The petitioner submits that the park is being used by the encroachers for mass celebrations. Their functions cross all noise pollution limits. Loud sound blasting forth from TVs, music systems and high pitched drunken brawls and fights between themselves, which are part of daily nuisance, continues in midnight. It is submitted that men and women folk also indulge in unlawful activities ranging from thefts of private and public property, hideouts of criminals and illegal immigrants.... The many hutments have even been converted into double storied permanent brick and mortar dwellings with all amenities like illegal power connection and abundant free use of... water meant for the colony... This has created serious hindrance to the civil amenities like sewage, rainwater drainage and supply of tap water choking up, meant for residents of the Colony.... The smoke of firewood envelops the entire area and settles heavy measure especially in winter, which is harmful and injurious to health of the residents of the society [*sic*].

To show how "the new nuisance discourse" is activated in the courtroom, I begin by briefly identifying discursive devices—turns of phrase producing a specific effect—common across the petitions. These reveal the patterns by which "nuisance" gets identified empirically and is summoned as a key term that transforms the identification of "slums as dirty" into the legal claim that "slums are nuisances."

The first discursive device used by all five petitions is reference to slums as a problem of overpopulation: "the area has virtually turned into a slum and the illegal and unauthorized encroachments has not only double, tripled over the years but has attained mammoth proportions and is threatening to burst at its seams [*sic*]."²⁸ The words "bursting", "infesting", "infectious" or "mushrooming" are invariably used to evoke neo-Malthusian fears that the poor's mere presence will endanger the welfare of society at large: "The slum dwellers are living in highly infectious

²⁶ CWP Nos. 593 of 2002, K-Block Vikas Puri RWA vs. MCD; 6160 of 2003, Maloy Krishna Dhar vs. Govt. of NCT Delhi; 8556 of 2005, Kailash Fraternity vs. Govt. of NCT Delhi; 3494 of 2006, Pawan Kumar vs. MCD; and 9358 of 2006, Jangpura RWA vs. Lt. Governor of Delhi.

²⁷ Interview on November 17, 2006.

²⁸ CWP No. 593 of 2002.

and contagious conditions thus exposing themselves as well as the residents of the society to epidemics.²⁹ The language in three of the petitions goes so far as to dehumanize slums by using the word “slum” not as a noun, but an adjective. Slums are then not places in this discourse; “slum” is a condition or a disease that infects certain spaces and must be eliminated, lest it spread to purer places. One concrete discursive device that plays upon this fear of “society” becoming slumified is the emphasis in four of the petitions on the special problem of slum dwellers’ open defecation; two of the petitions go so far as to include photographs of residents “caught in the act”: “these people defecate in the open creating ghastly scenes and spreading foul smell and infection.”³⁰ Overall, the overpopulation device is used to show the un-civic conduct of slum dwellers and the importance of removing them to maintain Delhi’s “world-class” image.³¹

The second discursive device shared by all five petitions is the description of the dual categories of citizenship explored in section 4.3: one, rightful, tax-paying citizens who live in formal colonies and the other, unlawful residents of slums. Four of the petitions bolster this viewpoint by explicitly relying on the interpretation of Article 21 that prioritizes private property owners over all others (see section 4.3). Further alluding to the second-class status of slum dwellers, four of the petitions describe formally non-evictable actions like slum dwellers’ un-metered use of electricity or hosting of “mass celebrations” that deprive RWA residents of resources and “tranquillity” as a justification for slum removal. Three of the five petitions also argue that slum dwellers are alien by citing the presence of “anti-social” or “criminal” elements and people of “Bangladeshi origin” in slums.

These common discursive devices reveal the petitioners’ middle class anxieties over urban environmental order, but more importantly show the channels by which slums are equated with nuisance in many contemporary petitions. However, to see how the presence of a “nuisance” gets calibrated to a legal framework that requires slum demolition, let us look at the basis on which illegality is adduced in the petitions.

Each of the five petitions makes reference to “illegal slums/JJ clusters” or describes “illegal/unauthorized encroachers” more often than it provides any specific details or discussion of what makes the slum in question illegal. None of the petitions state an explicit statutory basis for eviction. Three of the petitions only vaguely mention the MCD Act, Delhi Development Act or Delhi Master Plan, the invocation of which, in and of itself, does not justify demolition. So, although “illegal” is used as if it was a precise term, it does not actually carry any statutory precision. Therefore, to determine what these petitions infer when they describe slum illegality, I conducted a line-by-line analysis by marking lines in the petitions’ text based on the justification they provide for requesting demolition. Because the primary statutory basis on which slums can be, and historically have been, demolished is their violation of land use codes, I tracked lines in the petitions that make explicit mention of *land use* as a basis for the petitioner’s demolition request. The second category I tracked consists of lines referring to the *slum as a nuisance*. Before presenting the results from this analysis, let me clarify that the argument here is not that

²⁹ CWP No. 9358 of 2006.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The courts’ reference to Delhi as a “showpiece”, “heritage”, “world-class” and “show window” city are widespread since the early 2000s, showing the import the judiciary places on the outward, aesthetic appearance of the city.

nuisance is the only basis for slum demolitions cited in the courts today.³² The land use category of the land on which slums are settled continues to play a role in slum demolition cases. However, petitions targeting slums for land use violations were filed regularly before the current round of (accelerated) slum demolitions. What is *new* and dominant about current juridical discourse about slums is the import accorded to nuisance.

In the five petitions analyzed, lines referring to land use as the basis for demolition appeared 139 times, whereas lines referring to slums-as-nuisance appeared 346 times, or two and a half times more frequently. In all of the petitions, nuisance-based lines appeared at least fifty percent more frequently than land use-based lines. This shows that these five petitions rely most forcefully on nuisance-based argumentation for declaring slums illegal. We can therefore say that the declaration of slums as a nuisance performs their illegality, and conversely, declaring slums illegal presumes their ontological status as a nuisance.

Related to the treatment of “slum illegality” as an ontological given is the petitions’ extensive use of photographs *showing* slums-as-nuisances. These photos appear in the petitions as annexures and show both the presence of the slum as well as what the petitioner considers ill effects of the slum’s presence: accumulated trash, standing water, stray animals, open defecation, etc. The manner in which these photos are described makes it clear that the petitioner expects the court to agree that the photos demonstrate a need to remove the slum: “The acuteness of the situation can [be] seen clearly from the photographs of the affected area.”³³ All of the petitions’ bold, dehumanizing claims about slums as spaces of filth are given moral license upon the presentation of a few photographs. It is useful to note here that the Manchanda petition I examined in section 4.2, which was submitted prior to the rise of the new nuisance discourse, did not make use of such photographs. This type of depiction therefore appears as a new visual technology that puts the bench in a position to see slums and slum-derived nuisance as one in the same.

The power of this technology is revealed in the case of R.L. Kaushal vs. Lt. Governor of Delhi, the petition for which differs from the five nuisance discourse-based petitions examined here in that it neither prays for the removal of a slum nor uses any of the above discursive devices. This petition was submitted “for better civic amenities and for nuisance caused by open wide drain [*sic*],”³⁴ but does not make a single mention of a slum. Only in the petition’s annexures containing letters to elected representatives and photos of the drain with such captions as “Jhuggi dwellers defecate in nallah [drain]” was it revealed that a slum exists beside the drain. Nonetheless, the court observed that “Photographs were filed of the area showing the filth at site and encroachments in and around the nallah” and ordered that “The area should also be cleaned and the encroachments removed.”³⁵ Without initiating an inquiry into the settlement’s size, location, history, or legal basis, the court ordered the slum’s demolition.

³² Likewise, nuisance-based petitions are not the only type used to target slums.

³³ CWP No. 6160 of 2003. I was able to obtain only low-resolution photocopies of these photographs, the quality of which is too poor to reproduce here.

³⁴ CWP No. 1869 of 2003 in Delhi High Court, order dated November 14, 2003.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Each of the five petitions examined here was met with a positive response by the Delhi High Court, which not only ordered the neighboring slums to be cleared, but in many cases also adopted the language of nuisance in emphasizing the priority basis on which the demolitions should take place. As the court stated in an interim order in the Vikas Puri case in March, 2006, the same order that led to the demolition of Sant Ravi Das Camp, the settlement I discussed in the previous chapter:

The encroachment has not been removed and it is this lackluster approach of the DDA which has resulted in unscrupulous elements to make encroachment on government land.... [W]e only observe that on the one hand a citizen has to pay handsome price for acquiring land... for his habitat and on the other hand unauthorized encroachment and habitat on government land is allowed to go on, [which]... deprives the rights of citizens of Delhi to water, electricity and other civic services. The right of honest citizens in this regard cannot be made subservient to the right of encroachers [*sic*].³⁶

Here, we see the same process of dehumanization found in the RWAs' petitions repeated by the bench: slum residents are called "unscrupulous elements," whereas RWA members are called "citizens." And, in constructing the second sentence quoted above in the passive voice (i.e., without a subject), the court completely erases the slum subject from the order. This makes the solution to the "problem of the slum" appear purely technical, despite its deeply ethical and political nature. In reiterating the reasons for needing to remove the entire slum in question, the order further states:

We have seen from the photographs filed as to how illegal electric connections have been taken, the Delhi Vidyut [Electricity] Board has been used as a junk yard, service lane has been completely blocked [by carts and supplies], the encroachment has been made on road and footpath.... The whole area has been converted into a garbage landfill. No legal right is vested in the encroachers [*sic*].³⁷

Here, with the exception of "the encroachment... on road and footpath", none of these activities statutorily permit the removal of the slum. The huts built on the roads and footpaths, as shown in the drawing submitted by the petitioner, made up less than ten percent of the total area of the slum and were the most recently constructed. However, the court lumped the entire settlement together in passing its demolition order. The court's other observations here must then constitute the only reasons for clearing the entire settlement. On what basis do these activities—i.e., illegal electricity use, blocking a service lane with carts, and using vacant land for dumping garbage and scrap material³⁸—add up to a demolition notice? "Illegal electric connections," according to the Electricity Act, 2003, require imposing a fine. The remaining activities are nuisances whose removal is governed by Section 133 Cr. P.C., which nowhere states that the party responsible for

³⁶ CWP No. 593 of 2002, order dated March 8, 2006.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸ It should be noted that there is no indication that the slum residents alone were to blame for the improper garbage disposal.

a nuisance is to be displaced. However, nuisance law today clearly has new legal and moral coordinates.

The overall thrust of these five petitions shows that nuisance has today become the predominant discursive justification for slum demolitions, even when a land use violation is also identified. Further, even in the absence of petitions that specifically target slums for demolition, like the Kaushal petition just described, the courts themselves have taken up the task of identifying slums-as-nuisances and ordering their removal. This pattern emerged in the proceedings leading up to the demolition of Yamuna Pushta, a settlement housing more than 150,000 people on the banks of the Yamuna River. In a March, 2003 order in the Okhla case, the bench arbitrarily took cognizance of the problem of pollution in the Yamuna River, despite the lack of any mention of the issue in the original petition. While referring to other causes of pollution, the bench quickly identified the true source of the problem: “In view of the encroachment and construction of jhuggies/pucca structure in the Yamuna [river] Bed and its embankment with no drainage facility, sewerage water and other filth is discharged in Yamuna water [*sic*].”³⁹ In the total absence of any evidence demonstrating the Pushta settlement’s contribution to the Yamuna’s pollution levels, as described in the previous chapter, the court passed its demolition order. And, like the RWA petitions we just examined, the most “scientific” evidence the court used to justify this claim was a set of photographs submitted by the Ministry of Tourism—part of its proposal to develop the site of Pushta into a riverside promenade and tourist attraction—ostensibly showing slum dwellers as “polluters” and carrying captions indicating the unsightliness of slums for foreign visitors and dignitaries.⁴⁰ In a later judgment, the court justified this order by referring to the Pitampura case, which we showed in the previous section to be the case that most strongly equates slums with nuisance.⁴¹

After these orders were passed, the court continued to target slums as the primary source of Yamuna pollution by launching its own *suo moto* case⁴² and setting up an expert committee—not to monitor the Yamuna’s environmental quality, the basis for slum clearance in the first place, but rather to ensure that other “encroachments” on the river were removed apace. Between 2006 and 2008, an additional 10,000 huts were cleared under the watchful eye of the monitoring committee,⁴³ with 30,000 more identified for future removal.⁴⁴ It is in the immediate aftermath of these demolitions—what the court labelled a “clean up” drive necessary to prevent the conversion of the Yamuna “into a huge sewage drain”⁴⁵—that the Central Pollution Control Board showed “no improvement in the quality of water. Instead, it had deteriorated over the years and several crore [1 crore=10 million] rupees spent by the Government on the Yamuna

³⁹ See note 13, order dated March 3, 2003.

⁴⁰ In contrast, research by the non-governmental organization the Hazards Centre (D. Roy, 2004) found that Pushta contributed only 0.33% of total sewage released into the Yamuna.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, order dated October 19, 2003.

⁴² CWP No. 689 of 2004, The court on its own motion vs. Union of India.

⁴³ Okhla case, order dated 11.08.2006

⁴⁴ “Yamuna pollution issue: Delhi High Court summons top officials”, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, February 17, 2006.

⁴⁵ Okhla case, order dated 01.06.2006.

Action Plan has virtually gone down the drain."⁴⁶ Slums anywhere near the Yamuna continue to be targeted on this basis, an ongoing practice of “environmental violence” premised on a particularly bourgeois appropriation of nature (Peluso & Watts, 2001).

While the final judgment in this case does refer to the fact that Pushta existed on the Yamuna floodplain and thus violates the layout plan for the area, a handful of other developments with a different, what we might call world-class, “look” than Pushta—including the Akshardam Temple (the world’s largest and certainly most modern Hindu monument), the Commonwealth Games Village, an IT park, and a Delhi Metro Rail depot—similarly fall on the floodplain. The fact that the court targeted Pushta and ignored these developments proves that the nuisance logic formed the strongest basis for the demolition.

Closing this section with the Pushta case is useful because it neatly captures key characteristics of how nuisance has altered the terrain of judicial argumentation pertaining to slums. This case shows that the courts do not have anything close to what could be called a sound calculative basis for assessing whether a slum is a nuisance or not. Rather, if a slum *appears* to be polluting or filthy, based on a judge’s aesthetic view of acceptable, “clean” conduct, then the slum is deemed polluting, a nuisance, and therefore illegal.

4.5. Courtly visions, from bench to *basti*

What might explain judges’ increased reliance on world-class aesthetics in their judgments of land-related cases in Delhi? One possible reason is that judges (both in the High Court and the Supreme Court, which is located in Delhi) are themselves members of the upper-middle class who live and own property in elite residential colonies in Delhi, read the English newspapers in which stories of slum-related nuisances circulate, and participate in the same symbolic economy as any other wealthy professional. Indeed, a number of judge-initiated, *suo moto* cases in the High Court have been based on grievances judges have faced in their daily lives.⁴⁷

A second, and perhaps more compelling (and empirically testable), reason for the shift to this more aesthetic evaluation of slum space pertains to the inefficiencies of previous slum removal procedures. In the late 1990s, in response to the rise in RWA-filed petitions against slums, the courts began to take notice of “the dismal and gloomy picture of such jhuggi/jhopries [slum huts] coming up regularly”⁴⁸ and in 2002 observed that “it would require 272 years to resettle the slum dwellers” according to existing procedures and cost approximately USD 100 million.⁴⁹ This set of conditions was incompatible with Delhi’s imagined world-class future, so the courts, in response to the RWA petitions, began intervening in slum matters and increasingly rebuked the DDA and other land-owning agencies for failing to address the “menace of illegal encroachment” and slums.⁵⁰ However, when the courts pushed these agencies to act more

⁴⁶ See note 44.

⁴⁷ See note 42.

⁴⁸ Pitampura Sudhar Samiti versus Government of India, CWP 4215/1995, order dated May 26, 1997.

⁴⁹ Okhla case, paragraph 22.

⁵⁰ Affidavit filed by Mr. Satish Kumar, Under Secretary, Ministry of Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation (Delhi High Court), CWP 2253/2001.

aggressively to clear slums, judges were befuddled by messy ground realities, missing government records, ambiguous tenure statuses, and outdated surveys. The courts found themselves in a position where they were unable to even assess the size of the problem, not to mention issuing informed action orders. For example, in a case against a slum in South Delhi, the High Court stated, “There are several controversies, claims and counter claims made by the learned counsel for the parties. The records are, however, scanty and the said claims and counter claims cannot be decided on the basis of existing material and documents on records.”⁵¹ In the case of the clearance of slums along the Yamuna River, the High Court observed that “in spite of repeated directions no progress has been made by the DDA as the DDA has not submitted area-wise sketch plans showing clusters of jhuggis and other structures on various parts of Western embankment of the river Yamuna. It seems that the DDA itself does not have [a] plan.”

In many instances, the ownership of the land occupied by slums was itself ambiguous, putting the court in the strange position of being prepared to order a slum demolition, but not knowing which agency was obligated to carry out the order. For example, responding to an RWA petition against a slum in 2002, the High Court found, “Respondent No.1, DDA and respondent No.2, MCD have both taken the stand that the land does not belong to them. This is rather un-fortunate position. Since public land has been encroached upon due to the inability of the public authority to agree between themselves as to in whose jurisdiction the land vests.”⁵²

Such an absence of cadastral precision is widespread in slum-related cases, which led to the absence of a synoptic vision by which upper-level bureaucrats and thus the courts could “survey a large territory at a glance” (J. C. Scott, 1998: 45) and “govern from a distance” (Rose, 1999). For Latour (1987), such “action at a distance” relies on a “cascade” or relay of measurements and inscriptions (e.g., survey registers) that can be combined and simplified into more generalizable and thus legible re-presentations of the territory (e.g., maps and statistical tables) as they move up the chain of administrative command to “centers of calculation,” like courtrooms and centralized government offices. The absence of accurate baseline surveys in Delhi, however, broke this cascade, rendering knowledge of slum space highly localized rather than abstractly knowable and manipulable from above. As a result, land-owning agencies could easily delay slum-related court decisions for years by postponing court hearings in order to survey and reassess the ground situation. Until accurate visual simplifications of slum space were secured (i.e., until the “cascade” of inscriptions was complete), bureaucrats sitting in state offices and judges in courtrooms had their hands tied, or so it seemed.

Therefore, in the early 2000s, the court began appointing its own monitoring committees and court commissioners to do ground level field assessments in place of the state bureaucracy. The court hence viewed a lack of legibility as a technical failure—the product of an incompetent or corrupt state—that could be overcome by more efficiently implementing existing calculative practices. But, producing calculations capable of administering the law and accurately reflecting local conditions required extensive field knowledge of not only the current ground reality, but also the history of such spaces. These court-appointed surveyors ended up producing equally (or

⁵¹ Resident Welfare Association vs. DDA and Ors. (Delhi High Court), CWP 6324/2003, order dated August 29, 2007.

⁵² Vikas Vihar Vijay Vihar Awasiya Hitkari vs. DDA, CWP 4576 of 1999, order dated October 7, 2002.

more) flawed simplifications of the ground reality, as was pointed out by a civil writ petition contesting a court committee's recommendation to demolish a slum in north Delhi:

[I]t is apparent that the inspection and scrutiny performed by the Learned Court Commissioner appears, at best, perfunctory... [and contains] marked discrepancies about the area and size of the basti [slum]... [The Committee's report] is also incomplete, cursory and factually inaccurate. [The letter by the Court Commissioner] requests the Court to give directions for removal of encroachments without clarifying what are considered encroachments.... further the Monitoring Committee also differs from the Learned Court Commissioner in its assessment of the size of the basti... the authorities appear to be unclear even to the extent and demarcation of the land area in question - the land of two Khasras [plots]... are shown in the Revenue record as merely Government land, without designating a specific land owning agency.⁵³

In this particular case, the legal boundary between “planned” developments and “encroachments” did not accurately reflect the mixed land uses found on the ground—the state had itself placed the so-called “encroachers” on vacant lots as part of a temporary housing policy in the 1970s. The effort to parse dynamic and amorphous tenure arrangements⁵⁴ into this clear binary produced “factually inaccurate” simplifications.

By the 2000s, through a combination of an increasingly complex and unruly ground situation and the inability of existing calculative practices to render that ground sufficiently legible to the courts and upper-level bureaucrats, the epistemological foundation of existing calculative practices was called into question. Despite regulators', bureaucrats', and jurists' best efforts to devise categories of knowledge suitable to the domain to be governed, simplification is by definition partial, forcing processes and patterns that arose independently of state plans into a state rationality (cf. N. Blomley, 2008; J. C. Scott, 1998: 128). Compounding these calculative challenges is the fact that, according to the Municipal Corporation, seventy percent of Delhi is “unauthorized,” meaning it violates land use codes or building bye-laws in some way or another.⁵⁵ What is more, as the former Commissioner of the Slum Wing of the Municipal Corporation told me in an interview, “the rich have unauthorizedly grabbed far more land in Delhi than the poor. The total land under squatters and slum dwellers is far less than the illegal land held by the rich and famous, it's just that nobody sees those violations.”⁵⁶ If the court were to begin removing all unauthorized land uses, most of Delhi would have to be razed, including many developments central to Delhi's “world-class” ambitions. Thus, strict enforcement of the Master Plan or development codes, which had been avoided for almost fifty years, would lead not just to a “slum-free” city, but also a business-, mall-, and industry-free city. Recognizing this dilemma, the Municipal Corporation submitted in the High Court that the problem of

⁵³ Civil Misc. Petition 6982/2007 (Dayavanti & Ors.) in CWP 4582/2003 (Delhi High Court).

⁵⁴ Such a diversity of tenure arrangements is common throughout India, providing the basis for economic clustering and dynamic informal growth economies (S. Benjamin, 2005). In Bangalore, Benjamin (2005: 30), identified more than 10 forms of tenure, and in Madikiri, a town in Karnataka, 24.

⁵⁵ See Municipal Corporation of Delhi affidavit filed in 2006 in Kalyan Sansthan vs. GNCTD (Delhi High Court), CWP 4582/2003.

⁵⁶ Interview with Mr. Manjit Singh, May 11, 2006. See also Verma (2002).

unauthorized constructions and slums is “mammoth in nature - and cannot be controlled by simply dealing under the existing laws or under the provisions of [Delhi's] master plan” (Biswas, 2006).⁵⁷ That is, it called upon the judiciary to exceed existing law in carrying forward what had become the agreed upon *telos* of Delhi’s development: a world-class future.

The courts did so by abandoning the previous bureaucratic and statutory requirement that land-owning agencies create calculative, map- and survey-based simplifications of slum space. Through the 1990s, government surveys were conducted to summarize slums according to the duration of the slum population’s occupation of the land in question, residents’ eligibility for resettlement, the land use category of the occupied land, and the density and size of the population settled thereupon. Only then would summary statistical tables and maps that simplified messy ground realities into compact “planes of reality” (Rose, 1991: 676) be relayed up the bureaucratic chain so that state decision makers and judges could assess their legality. But, assembling such calculative and “scientific” simplifications was slow, inefficient, and contentious. So instead of requiring these complex calculative procedures, the courts started using a surrogate indicator to identify illegality: the “look” or visual appearance of space.⁵⁸ Thus, if petitions could prove that slums violate codes of urban order and appearance—i.e., that they were nuisances—judges were willing to pass demolition orders. In contrast, contemporary slum cases in which the petitioners dwell on questions of land use or property records (or where the ownership of the land in question is especially ambiguous or disputed) are often mired in complicated and indeterminate court proceedings. As a “social vision” then, law “defines our idea of discursive relevancy, positing distinct epistemological criteria for verification” (Singer, cited in Nicholas Blomley, 1994, 12-13), in this case, aesthetic norms. As of approximately 2000, the manner in which slum space is rendered intelligible—that is, the system of verification used to deem the representation, or picture, of the slum truthful—shifted away from the statistical procedures described above to an aesthetic evaluation.

In speaking with the General Secretary of the Kailash Fraternity RWA, whose successful petition I discussed in the previous section, he told me, “From the very first hearing, the judges were very responsive. On that day itself they gave an order to MCD to clear all the *jhuggis*.” Later, the junior lawyer representing Kailash Fraternity confirmed this: “The MCD didn't dispute the facts

⁵⁷ In fact, the Municipal Corporation confronted this dilemma after the Supreme Court had ordered it to close and seal all commercial establishments operating in residential zones of the city in late 2005. This led to the sealing of thousands of businesses with tens of thousands more threatened, citywide protests by traders leading to the death of three young men, the demolition or partial demolition of hundreds of private residences not conforming to building codes as well as a shopping mall under construction in South Delhi, and a political nightmare for the ruling Congress Party. In 2006, the Lower House (Lok Sabha) of the Indian Parliament passed a legislative act postponing all demolitions and sealing drives in Delhi for one year. While this act also included slums, the courts did not acknowledge their protected status and continued with slum clearance apace. The DDA finally modified the Master Plan *ex post facto* to regularize Delhi’s commercial land use violations in 2007 (DDA, 2007).

⁵⁸ This does not mean that these government-run slum surveys have lost their utility. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, through the 1990s, and especially in the 2000s, they took on a new role: not just to know and monitor the territory, the slum survey now operates as a governmental technology to instill a set of observational practices into the slum population—that is, to cultivate an aesthetic normativity in this population that aligns with the parameters of the new nuisance discourse.

of the case, so it had to just accept the order of the judge.”⁵⁹ When I asked her about the legal basis for the demolition order in her case, she said:

Our strategy was to highlight the nuisance caused by the slum. This is what the court responds to, and indeed the court took cognizance of this problem and made the order to clear the slum. The courts now recognize the growing problem of encroachments. This problem has been growing for the last 20 years, so the courts have changed their approach to dealing with this. Now if we show how an encroachment is reducing the quality of life of colony residents, the courts respond favorably. Encroachment wasn't such a big problem before, so the courts weren't taking up the issue so strongly.

To see for myself how slums are viewed by judges passing judgments from their benches, I began attending slum and encroachment-related cases in the Delhi High Court. In a case being heard before the Chief Justice of Delhi, an RWA in the South Delhi colony of Kalkaji was demanding the removal of the Govindpuri transit camp, which the Slum and JJ Wing had intentionally settled in 1980, but which had since expanded onto neighboring land that the MCD claimed had been allocated for a school and that the RWA argued was meant for a park. This complicated matter, in which the MCD and DDA were the main respondents, had produced six independently filed civil writ petitions, one review petition, and six contempt motions, all lumped together as a single court matter. On the day of the hearing, after the judges concluded their discussion of the previous case, a veritable army of lawyers representing the different parties involved, each with tall stacks of paper tucked under their black-robed sleeves, shuffled to the front of the courtroom to plead their case. The lawyer representing the DDA began by reminding the judges that the case pertained to Govindpuri transit camp. When she said this, the secondary judge briefly recounted a slum case, perhaps to remind the Chief Justice of the case details, or perhaps to ensure that he had the right case in mind. Nobody objected to the judge's quick description, and the main petitioner's lawyer followed by raising a question related to granting the slum residents freehold tenure rights, an issue that had been discussed in the previous hearing. The Chief Justice responded abruptly, “How can freehold be a question before us? These are slum dwellers?” The lawyers stood frozen for a moment, before the DDA lawyer, noting the judges' confusion, corrected them, saying the case they were thinking of pertained to a settlement in North Delhi that would not be heard for another month.⁶⁰ After further details of the case were discussed, the DDA lawyer requested additional time to respond to the freehold question since the petitioner had only submitted its fresh affidavit four days before, which the judges granted. This entire interaction took only four minutes.

I recall this brief incident not to question the precision of judicial knowledge in Delhi, but rather to provide a sense of the conditions under which judges form interpretations of slum space. High Court judges, on most days, see between twenty-five and forty cases, one following the other from around 10 AM until 5 PM, punctuated by an hour and a half lunch break. If thirty matters are seen in a day (which, after subtracting the time it takes to transition from one matter to the next, means around five working hours), each matter, on average, receives ten minutes of time.

⁵⁹ Interview with Ms. Yasmit, January 15, 2007.

⁶⁰ The fact that the same lawyer often represents the same agency (e.g., the MCD) in multiple cases before the same bench no doubt contributes to such confusion.

On this particular day, I observed twenty matters, timing the duration of each and taking notes on the proceedings. The longest matter I observed lasted thirteen minutes, the shortest only one minute (where one of the main lawyers was absent), with a mean hearing time of eight minutes. If orders were passed, the main judge spent a couple of minutes dictating to a typist, further reducing the time for adjudication.

Prior to hearing these matters, the judges are presumed to have reviewed all documents related to the case submitted by the parties. The original petitions for the cases I obtained, including annexures, often surpassed 150 pages in length. The affidavits, counter-affidavits, and supporting documents submitted by the numerous respondents (usually between five to ten government agencies) were often as long as the petitions. Judges are thus expected to compress a minimum of 600 pages of material (some of it no doubt superfluous), often much more, into a simplified vision of the case so that they can, in eight minutes or so, ask the relevant questions, weed through the verbal testimony and explanations provided, confer with each other, and, if ready, pass an order. The vast majority of cases that are not immediately dismissed extend across multiple hearings, granting more time to the parties to assemble their arguments and to the judges to make decisions. But, follow-up hearings never appear less than two weeks after the former hearing, with many months often passing between court dates. It is also common for matters to be moved to alternate benches, where the case details have to be looked at afresh by new judges.⁶¹

What does this imply for the adjudication of slum-related cases? The Kalkaji case shows how judges must necessarily pare down diverse residential geographies into an easily intelligible typology of space in order to keep track of the huge number of cases they see. In addition to sometimes blurring the details of specific cases (a simple and correctable error), judges must no doubt form simplified mental images of slum space, allowing them to quickly locate (both spatially and cognitively) the case and make a decision. Given the lack of details at their disposal and the speed with which they have to act, it is no surprise that heterogeneous slum spaces are homogenized into a single, conflated geographical imaginary, as the judge in the Kalkaji case inadvertently demonstrated.⁶² It is also perhaps no surprise that simplified visual representations of slums, such as the photographs presented in RWAs' petitions, media portrayals, or everyday neighborhood talk, help judges index individual settlements to a broader image of "the slum." It is here, then, in the interstices of legal norms and the popular spatial imaginary that nuisance discourse circulates, lubricating the gears of urban transformation in contemporary Delhi.

⁶¹ The fast pace of High Court decisions is a symptom of an incredibly high case backlog, with more than 370,000 cases outstanding in India's High Courts, and, according to legal experts, an insufficient number of judges. See "77,000 judges needed to clear backlog: CJI", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, December 22, 2007.

⁶² A hearing in the court case pertaining to Shiv Camp, the slum I address in Chapters 5 and 6, produced a similar misunderstanding, where the judge only realized which case he was addressing after he had granted an extension to one of the parties.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how the law has codified middle class aesthetic norms, giving them material leverage over urban space. The new nuisance discourse, as a concretized inflection of bourgeois aesthetics, has given propertied residents of cities increasing power over the lives of the non-propertied, threatening to destroy the last vestiges of planned, integrated, and socialistic urban planning and, perhaps more importantly, common space. This represents, perhaps, the pinnacle of what planner Gita Dewan Verma has called a shift from land use-based regulation to land ownership-based regulation, in which the conditions of access to land and the ability to intervene in planning decisions are contingent upon property ownership.⁶³ Although I have not yet said it, the processes I have been describing provide the regulatory backing to what Marx termed “so-called primitive accumulation”, or what Harvey (2002) calls “accumulation by dispossession”: the expropriation of the direct producers from the means of production, the transformation of non-capitalist land uses into a system of private property relations (i.e., land commoditization), or a new round of enclosures. But, if this is the case, what is the need for this long-winded analysis of legal discourse? Can’t we just assign eviction politics in Delhi to the ongoing logic of capital accumulation, where the law simply operates as a medium of class exploitation?

There are two risks in making such an assumption. First, it assumes that a change in political economic conditions (e.g., increasing land speculation, a rising rent gap on public land, an empowered property owning class) leads to a corresponding shift in the law. While some such shift is to be expected, its details, how it is instantiated, and with what material and ideological effects are open empirical questions. To simply attribute anti-poor judicial outcomes to a new class configuration, as most legal studies of demolition politics in Delhi have done, risks treating law as mere superstructure, with no role other than to confirm and consolidate class power, or “as a pliant medium to be twisted this way and that by whichever interests already possess effective power” (Thompson, 2001: 435).⁶⁴ Such a crude reading of legal change fails to see the law as itself an arena of conflict over which criteria of justice and norms of equity are debated and fought out. That is, it is to deny the ideological power of law, which depends on the appearance of being just, universal, and free from manipulation, as E.P. Thompson (2001) reminds us. My focus on the role of aesthetics and discourse in defining bourgeois property relations as the basis of citizenship as such, then, is an attempt to track the concrete ideological work of the law.

A second risk in treating land privatization as an inevitable outcome of consolidated bourgeois power (i.e., the rise of RWAs) is to assume a particular form of privatization, without noting the historically and geographically specific details of the transformation itself. As Harvey (1982: 346) notes, “The actual history of landed property under capitalism has been a confused and confusing affair. It is difficult to spot within that history the logic of a necessary transformation of landed [or common] property into its capitalistic form.” While Marx analyzed this process in

⁶³ Master Plan Implementation Support Group list-serve, message dated January 8, 2007.

⁶⁴ As Foucault (1976: 100) says, “anything can be deduced from the general phenomenon of the domination of the bourgeois class,” but this tells us little about how or why particular configurations of power arise.

England at great length, he, according to Harvey, acknowledged that “relationships on the land have been extraordinarily slow to adapt to the dictates of purely capitalist relations of production in many areas of the world” (ibid.). In this and the previous chapter, I have shown the stakes in how everyday discourses shape, first, the broader urban imaginary and, second, how this urban imaginary gets codified in law. In doing so, I have insisted that economic transition must be understood as unfolding through everyday symbolic economies as much as an economic calculus of cost-benefit, a juridical redefinition of property, or the will of a dominant class. Next, I turn to how this urban imaginary is conveyed to and received by those often depicted as obstacles to Delhi’s world-class transformation—slum residents. The form and politics of land privatization, I will suggest, depends centrally on how this population appropriates and reworks the vision of the world-class city and cannot be read off the demands or profit projections of the city’s official governors.

Chapter 5. World-Class Detritus: Welcome to Shiv Camp

“The lords and nobles were upsetting the social order, breaking down ancient law and custom, sometimes by means of violence, often by pressure and intimidation. They were literally robbing the poor of their share in the common, tearing down the houses which, by the hitherto unbreakable force of custom, the poor had long regarded as theirs and their heirs’. The fabric of society was being disrupted; desolate villages and the ruins of human dwellings testified to the fierceness with which the revolution raged, endangering the defenses of the country, wasting its towns, decimating its population, turning its overburdened soil into dust, harassing its people and turning them from decent husbandmen into a mob of beggars and thieves.”

–Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, pg. 35

5.1. Governing shock

This chapter takes as its starting point the literal “robbing” of the “poor of their share in the common, tearing down the houses which,” by Delhi’s hitherto statutory Master Plan and the “unbreakable force of custom, the poor had long regarded as their and their heirs’.” Polanyi’s discussion of the enclosure movement during the Tudor period in England served as an example for him of how “society” reacts to the destructive forces of economic change (described in the epigraph), how it struggles to re-embed economic decisions within itself, and so guide the economy according to social norms and collective desires instead of the utopian promises of what he called “the liberal creed” and the self-regulating market it aimed to implement. Along with describing what he famously called the “double movement” of capitalism—a social response *within* capitalism to the havoc wreaked by the commoditization of land, labor and money—he emphasized the importance of the social regulation of the rate of economic change: “For upon this rate, mainly, depended whether the dispossessed could adjust themselves to changed conditions without fatally damaging their substance, human and economic, physical and moral” (Polanyi, 1944: 37). This balance between change and adjustment might be understood as a question of shock: is change gradual and something to which society can respond, or is it a shock, something that fundamentally alters the human substance—physical, moral, and economic—thus requiring a protective response?¹ Polanyi suggests that a more “shocking” economic crisis, in which the conditions of life are radically altered and the rate of change exceeds the rate of adjustment, will necessarily lead to a stronger protective countermovement.

Polanyi’s insights have been incredibly productive in helping develop relational understandings of socio-spatial change that allow us to link diverse land- and labor-based struggles with a broader process of commoditization. Yet, as Burawoy (2003) reminds us, his understanding of “society” is undergirded by a Durkheimian notion of organic solidarity, of a cohesive sphere that, through diverse countermovements, would almost automatically regulate the ravages of “free” markets: what Polanyi calls a “spontaneous reaction” (149). This homeostatic conception of the

¹ Polanyi uses the language of “shock” primarily to describe extreme fluctuations in exchange rates caused by the gold standard (see, for example, pages 25 and 208), but also to describe the social effects caused by the repeal of Speenhamland, a system of aid in wages that provided a minimum income to the poor regardless of their wages, and the depredation this inflicted on wage laborers in the 1830s (106).

countermovement, Hart (2010) has recently argued, has contributed to mechanistic readings of resistance in which the ravages of liberalized economies generate automatic, “bottom-up” reactions. Such conceptions of resistance—in which objective forces generate equal and opposite subjective reactions—backed teleological notions of revolution in much of classical Marxism and became a defining feature of early critical urban studies (e.g., Castells, 1977).² It also, as Hart reminds us, remains a prominent component of scholarship in political geography and on “globalization from below” (e.g., Hardt & Negri, 2005). But, as we now know, there is no guarantee that counter-movements will arise, even in the face of the most socially destructive economic reforms. As I will show in this chapter, this is most certainly the case in the context of the commodification of land and the ravages of large-scale slum demolition in Delhi. Yet, while Polanyi presumes that economic shock automatically translates into a corresponding social backlash, I want to retain an attention to the question of shock. To do so, I consider shock not as an objective measure of the rate of change, but rather via the lens of the everyday experiences and affects³ through which violence is made sense of—that is, the various ways in which the human subject actively *shields* herself against, and through diverse technologies *is shielded* from, external shocks. For, how “objective” shocks are aesthetically mediated—that is, how cultural apparatuses, modes of viewership, and affective techniques modify individuals’ perceptions—can be as important in shaping the political process as the objective danger of those shocks themselves. As Walter Benjamin (1968: 162) writes, “the acceptance of shocks is facilitated by training in coping with stimuli, and, if need be, dreams and recollection may be enlisted.” For Benjamin, whose concept of shock I return to in greater detail below, it is consciousness that undergoes this training: to prepare the human psyche for shock (i.e., to avoid trauma), it must give the incident that occasions it an ordering logic. How “dreams and recollection”—both the past and the imagined future—are “enlisted” to dampen the shock of displacement is a key question I take up here.

In this chapter, I draw from nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in a single informal settlement—Shiv Camp—to examine the everyday narratives, forms of habitation, and political vocabularies through which large-scale state violence in the form of slum demolitions is greeted

² Of course, Castells (1983) and others in this tradition did not insist that the counter-movement to crises of collective consumption would necessarily materialize as what he called “urban social movements”—mass mobilizations that would posit the urban as a use value opposed to commodification and that would fundamentally change the “urban meaning”—but could rather take varied, often non-revolutionary expression. That these movements would arise, however, was taken as a given.

³ Following Mazzarella (2009: 292), I take the study of affect to concern an examination of how “society is inscribed on our nervous system and in our flesh before it appears in our consciousness.” The study of “technologies of perceptions” (Rajagopal, 2001), which supply particular sensory vocabularies and modes of viewership, therefore provides a lens into how actions are registered in the body prior to their subjectivation—that is, to examine how embodied dispositions are informed independently of, yet sometimes in alignment with, discursive rationalizations. While “affect” has become a hot topic in scholarship on subjectivity and rule as of late, particularly in Geography and Anthropology (e.g., Ben Anderson, 2006; Mazzarella, 2009; Richard & Rudnykyj, 2009), I take my cue more from the longer philosophical concern with aesthetics, which I see as encompassing the key analytical attributes of “affect”—the question of how the body adopts and adapts to sensory experience, the role of non-discursive (non-representational in the jargon of current academe) and embodied practices—while retaining a closer acknowledgement of the particular techniques by which aesthetic experience is formed. Aesthetics are particularly useful for understanding how vision becomes an active site of rule.

with non-confrontational responses. I do so in order to ask what such responses might tell us about the relationship between citizenship, aesthetics, and hegemony. Overall, I argue that despite slum residents' profound ideational critiques of Delhi's world-class redevelopment, their will and aspirations are shaped as much by embodied experiences of urban change, patterns of daily habitation, and everyday aesthetic practice as by ideology or a governing rationality. That is, I want to examine how a type of aesthetic hegemony is being forged in contemporary Delhi that captures not necessarily the rational "interests" of the people, but their emotions. It is this realm of aesthetics—the question of whether patterns of change are subjectively registered as contributing to a well-ordered urban environment, even if such changes are against the "interest" of the viewer—that I will show to be the key terrain on which the urban question must be framed in contemporary India.

Insisting on the political centrality of aesthetics in hegemonic social formations, Eagleton (1990: 22) writes, "What finally secures social order is that realm of customary practice and instinctual piety, more supple and resilient than abstract rights, where the living energies and affections of subjects are invested."⁴ My task here is to consider how the law of a "good" moral order is internally appropriated, how "social harmony registers itself on our sense, imprints itself on our sensibilities" (ibid., 37). I do so by examining a specific set of political technologies that aim to normalize people's affective responses to violence and disorder, and by analyzing how slum residents' embodied experiences of a changing urban landscape shape their expectations of self and city.

This relates to a broader aim of this dissertation, which is to challenge recent neo-Foucauldian treatments of governmental reason that read the circulation of power through mentalities, ideas, reason, and rationality, but that often pay less heed to other domains of human experience and will. While Foucault understood the human subject to be a complex assemblage of ideas, discourses, *as well as* bodily dispositions (i.e., the non-discursive), much of the literature on governmentality focuses almost exclusively on the programmatic dimensions of governing rationalities—i.e., on mental schemas (Hart, 2004; Li, 2007; O'Malley, Weir, & Shearing, 1997)—ignoring the rough and tumble of everyday life in which subjectivities and everyday meanings are forged.⁵ As Rose (1999) writes, "studies of governmentality are not sociologies of rule. They are studies of a particular stratum of knowing and acting" (19) or "a certain form of reason" (7) that emphasize "political thought" (8) and that bracket off the domain of lived experience (12). While Foucault developed his analytics of governmentality with the purpose, in part, of offering a critique of ideology for its failure, as a concept, to account for the specific technologies by which consent is secured, much of the scholarship that has extended these analytics simply deletes the question of human agency, leaving open whether the governmental programs they describe actually enlist, "incite" or "seduce" (Foucault, 1983: 220) human conduct as they are intended. This leads to the sense that governmental rationalities operate automatically—i.e., as an "abstract machine," to use Deleuze's (1988) language—without the active engagement of the subjects of rule. If there are shortcomings in the theory of hegemony, as these authors suggest, then situated, ethnographic research shows that the search for

⁴ "Man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking but also with all of his senses" (Marx, 1844 [1988]: 90).

⁵ Mazzarella (2009: 295), somewhat flippantly, calls the governmentality approach "rationalized, affect-evacuated technicism."

overarching rationalities of rule does little to address them; instead, it simply inserts a new attention to diagrams of power and agent-less rule in place of questions of the concrete mechanisms and experiences through which subjectivities are forged. By tracing how both discursive and non-discursive practices shape available forms of political struggle in Shiv Camp, I aim to bring questions of shock, affect, and aesthetics into conversation with the study of urban movements and politics, moving back and forth between abstract programs of government and the everyday indeterminacies of how they gain meaning and momentum. In this way, I build on recent ethnographies of government that insist that engaging the “messy actualities” of rule “is not merely an adjunct to the study of government—it is intrinsic to it” (Li, 2007: 283; also see D. Moore, 2005; Watts, 2003).

5.2. Displacement

January in Delhi brings cold, heavy fog that chills one’s bones, leading people to hover over stoves in anticipation of the coming spring. On the evening of January 3rd, the dawn of 2007, on a night when temperatures would dip as low as three degrees Celsius, a team of fifty policemen, four bulldozers and a dozen Municipal Corporation officers descended upon Shiv Camp. Women were fetching water from the community taps, children were playing in the streets, fighting the cold, and day laboring men had not yet returned from their construction sites. A child yelled “*sarkar aa gayi* [government has come],” and the group of officers stepped forward, asking for the *pradhan*.⁶ While the demolition squad went for *chai*, Shiv Camp residents were told that in 30 minutes, the bulldozers and sledge hammers would begin their work: a High Court order had been issued to clear a 45-foot wide path through the middle of the *basti*. People panicked: Which huts would fall, which would remain? What was going to happen to those displaced? Why was this happening? The chief officer recommended that people remove the belongings from their home, before turning to retrieve his cup of *chai*. People scattered, some shouted, others followed the officers, begging for answers.

Around five o’clock, in the final hour of daylight, the bulldozers began their work. With people running in and out of huts carrying televisions, bags of clothing, and cookware, the machines rolled forward, toppling walls, crushing bricks, and smashing dreams. Night fell, but they pushed on, razing 122 huts in two hours. People shouted, some teenage boys pelted stones at the machines before running into the night to avoid the pursuing police, and three men were arrested for arguing with, and according to the police, slapping a Municipal Corporation officer. At the end of the row of huts, a woman’s scream pierced the cold night air as a bulldozer knocked the wall of her hut onto her two week-old son lying inside. The child died instantly due to “blunt trauma,” an autopsy report later showed.

I received a phone call two days later by an activist friend who had heard about the demolition: Have you been to Shiv Camp? It was just demolished and is very close to your home. I set off from my flat, walking through the middle class West Delhi colony where I lived, and arrived at Shiv Camp fifteen minutes later.

⁶ A *pradhan* is a headman, a term used primarily to designate an informal or elected leader in villages and rarely used in urban contexts except in *bastis*. *Pradhan* literally means prime or first. Prime Minister in Hindi is *Pradhan Mantri*.

Because of the infant's death, the demolition squad had not returned after the demolition raid to fully clear the land, so by the time I arrived, residents whose homes had been razed were stacking bricks, living in makeshift tents, and considering rebuilding their huts (see Figure 16).



Figure 16. Shiv Camp residents organizing their belongings in the aftermath of the January 3rd demolition. Huts outside the designated demolition zone can be seen in the background to the left. Photo by author.

I entered Shiv Camp asking residents what had happened and received a range of responses indicating that no single explanation for the demolition had emerged. Some mentioned a High Court order, while many insisted that the neighboring Residents Welfare Association (RWA) had simply bribed the police and Municipal Corporation to clear the area. Prem told me a variant of the most common explanation:

Yes, there was a High Court order, but it was only for 45 feet. Look here, [in some places] they cleared an area 150 feet wide. Why? Why did *sarkar* come here only at night? This doesn't happen. They [government workers] only work in the day. Something bad was happening here. All the officers were visiting the *kotis* [neighboring bungalows owned by the RWA members] before and during the demolition. They [the RWA residents] gave them booze and bribed them to clear the whole area. They did as much as they could, *behen chod*⁷, but could not finish us off.

⁷ Suketu Metha (2004: 9) writes of this word, used widely throughout North India: "It does not mean 'sister fucker.' That is too literal, too crude. It is, rather, punctuation, or emphasis, as innocuous a word as 'shit' or 'damn.' Parsis use it all the time, grandmothers, five-year-olds, casually and without any discernable purpose except as filler: 'Here, *bhenchod*, get me a glass of water.'" I would not go so far as to say it is an innocuous word in Delhi, where the Hindi language is more honorific than in Bombay. Children would not call an adult "*behen chod*," and it is far less common in wealthy, more educated

Because the Municipal Corporation had never supplied a written order, because many residents arrived on scene only after the demolition began, and because few people heard the initial, terse remarks by the Municipal Corporation officers; memory, rumor and conjecture mixed in people's efforts to make sense of the events that had unfolded. Generally, whether their homes had been razed or not, residents expressed anger at the seemingly wanton nature of the violence directed against them. As Deshraj told me,

When we first moved here, the area was totally desolate [*sunsaan*]. You could see all the way to [the village] and [the jail]. There were only fields. Once the *kotis* came, all the owners had to do was raise a shout and we came and scared away the thief. We built their homes and ran off the intruders, and in return they are now running us off our land. Now our home is being crushed here. Sarkar, *behen chod*, says on the map there is a road here. Well, we've been here since before any maps and there was never a road in this place!

Feelings of betrayal were premised both on residents' direct labor contribution to the colony ("we built their homes") and an attachment to place ("we've been here since before any maps").⁸ Prem, for example, found an argument that Shiv Camp residents attributed to the RWA—that the land upon which Shiv Camp was settled should be a local market—disingenuous: "For so many years we had to go so far to buy supplies and reach the market. Now, you can get everything you need around here. For 40 years they never wanted to build a market here, and now that all the space is gone and there are markets in all directions, they want to kick us out to build a market?" The feeling of betrayal was most sharply put by Motilal:

A lot of these big people are Panjabi, Sikh. After the Indira incident [*haadsaa*]⁹, these people were in great danger. What did we do? We are Hindu [implying

circles, where it is considered crass. It, like all highly dexterous Hindi swear words, has different registers too: "*behen ka lowda*" being a more serious, anatomical elaboration of the same meaning. While it is often used as a term of endearment within intimate spaces, when used to refer to an unknown person, it is almost always derogatory or malicious in intent.

⁸ See Kosek (2007: Ch. 3) for an extended discussion of the experiences of place-based belonging. He identifies three primary experiences: attachment, possession and appendage. I see the first two at work in Shiv Camp, whereas recent bourgeois discourses of environmental improvement, as discussed in Chapter 3, construct Shiv Camp residents not as naturally "appended" to the land, but as a type of tumor or growth that has unnaturally become affixed to place.

⁹ This refers to the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard in 1984, after which primarily Hindu mobs flooded the streets killing thousands of Sikhs in Delhi. In 2000, the central government formed what was called the Nanavati Commission to evaluate claims that political leaders in the Congress Party had incited and facilitated the riots. Although the report was submitted to the Home Ministry in 2005, it has yet to be released to the public, although information leaked from this highly contested report suggests that Jagdish Tytler, a Delhi MP at the time, "very probably" had a hand in organizing the riots. See "Credible evidence against Tytler: Nanavati," *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 9, 2005. Many social activists in Delhi mark these riots as a key turning point after which upper class property owners began installing gates to prevent the entry of "outsiders" into their colonies. Although lower class Sikhs were killed in much larger numbers and wealthy neighborhoods experienced minimal property damage, the fear

piousness]. We went into the streets, and when people [i.e., mobs] came looking for Sikhs, we said we live in this area and have taken care of everything. We protected them. Now look what we get in return!

Some residents were forthright in assigning blame for the demolition, as when one among a group of boys pointed to the tallest *koti* on the block and said, “Him, Chawla, that bastard. He’s been trying to have us cleared for years, *behen chod*. All these big people want us gone.” Others, however, disapproved of such direct accusations, instead attributing the demolition to governmental procedure, law, or fate, as when a man everyone reverently calls Uncle Ji, an elderly Rajasthani who runs a small provision shop in Shiv Camp, castigated the boys: “What’s the use in giving the names of others when what’s happened has happened.” The boys paid no heed to Uncle Ji and continued describing their wealthy neighbors, the “big people”: “These big people tried to clear us earlier too. Some 20 years back a woman from one of these *kotis* tried setting us on fire [*basti ko jalaane ki koshish ki*], but someone caught her and put it out. We are dogs to them.” A young boy, maybe 12 years old, told me what others were perhaps expressing in more round about ways: “Everyone feels fear when the police come. Nobody could even take his children and belongings out in time. It all happened so quickly.”

Although I later found out that one of the *pradhans* had been informed of a pending High Court case against Shiv Camp, almost everyone was shocked by the demolition, grasping to assign meaning to the event and understand its significance for their future: Was it a random, malicious act? Did it apply only to some homes and not the rest? Was it a portent of things to come? In the month after the incident, there was no word from the police or Municipal Corporation, leaving residents to speculate about their futures and in search of an explanation for what had happened. Residents were afraid to leave Shiv Camp during this time, lest *sarkar* return while they were gone. Even those whose homes had not been touched ensured someone was at home at all times, either to help others or out of fear that they might return to a demolished home. In mid-February, I initiated a survey of 51 households across Shiv Camp. One goal of the survey, which I describe in greater detail below, was to assess the loss of employment caused by the demolition. The survey results show that of male heads of household who the survey respondent (either the male himself or his wife) identified as “actively working” for wages/salary (n=30) lost, on average, 10 working days due to the demolition. This represents a loss of more than half of these men’s total average monthly days of work during a “normal” month (=18).¹⁰ This includes both those whose homes were demolished (n=15) as well as those who were not directly affected by the demolition (n=15). The most employable men (n=15)—as represented by those who had resumed working at least 15 days a month within three months of the demolition—lost, on average, 12 days of work due to the January demolition. Female heads who were identified as “actively working” for wages/salary and who had resumed work within three months of the demolition (n=17) lost, on average, 10 working days. Although employment for residents of Shiv Camp is, on average, highly irregular, as I discuss in detail in the following chapter, these numbers indicate the severe loss of income the demolition imposed, not to mention far greater

of violent mobs, so the argument goes, contributed to a more isolationist psychology, which has since articulated with a social vision of isolation/security as a form of status/distinction.

¹⁰ A “normal” working month was established for each respondent by return interviews during months when there were not extreme tenure-related insecurities underway in Shiv Camp (e.g., months other than January and April 2007, when demolition actions took place).

property losses, especially for a population that largely lives on wages that range from 80-150 rupees (~2-4 dollars) a day for adult males and 60-120 rupees a day for adult females for fulltime work.

Immediately after the demolition, those whose homes were demolished, as well as many who avoided the bulldozers that fateful day, placed their valuables in storage to avoid the risk of a future raid. Those who could afford to do so rented nearby rooms, and the wealthiest residents—those owning plots of land elsewhere or those with enough money to purchase them—began to consider life after the *basti*. Everyday conversation in that first month was dominated with discussion of this event, both in an effort to place the demolition within a coherent narrative frame and to gauge how one's neighbors were preparing for the worst.

In addition to their everyday ruminations, conjectures, and anxieties, four days after the demolition, a group of Shiv Camp men organized a hunger strike on the main road outside the colony and in front of the entrance to the nearest Delhi Metro station. Through a connection with the Lok Janshakti Party—a political party with considerable national recognition, but which holds no seats in either the municipal or state governments in Delhi—they erected a large tent where eight men sat for three days on strike, while 30-50 more shouted slogans, gave speeches, demanded an investigation by the Central Bureau of Intelligence (CBI), and denounced the injustice of the demolition. Soon after, the de facto leaders of Shiv Camp—a collection of older, wealthier, or more-educated men supported by two college-aged boys¹¹—found and hired a lawyer to file a petition in the High Court to prevent a future demolition. These actions, what the men called the “grassroots battle” (the strike) and the “paper battle” (the legal struggle)(*zamiinii ladaaii* and *kaagazii ladaaii*) seemed to indicate that Polanyi's “spontaneous reaction” was in motion. This was confirmed by people's overall “fighting” spirit: For example, when I asked residents what they would do if the bulldozers returned, most people said, “fight” (*ladenge*). As I would soon find out, however, this initial reaction to the violence of displacement was shot through with people's efforts to identify and define their place in a rapidly transforming urban environment, an endeavor that drew not only upon people's sense of historical entitlement to their land (the “force of custom” as Polanyi called it in the epigraph), but also upon their deeply entangled conceptions of self, citizenship, development, and value. This effort to explain the demolition, I will now show, often moderated their willingness to criticize or oppose the forces that they clearly understood to be driving their displacement.

¹¹ In this and the following chapter, I adopt Shiv Camp residents' own “folk” categories for describing age difference. “Men” (*aadmii*) generally refers to those over 30 years of age, while “boys” (*ladke*) refers to those under 30. “Women” (*mahilaa*) refers to those who are married, have children *and* who exercise relative independence vis-à-vis other women in the household, whereas “girls” (*ladkiyaa*) include all other females and is a category with a much fuzzier age boundary. Of course, these terms are not consistent and are used in different situations to include or exclude individuals from the status that is accorded to more senior residents. I also add my own category, “youth,” to refer to those under the age of 35 and who do not live in a separate accommodation from their parents to identify a group that, for the most part, was born in Shiv Camp or another *basti* in Delhi and that therefore has a different experience of the city from those who migrated to Delhi from their village birthplaces.

5.3. “Those/us dirty slum dwellers”

A few days after the hunger strike ended,¹² I met Kishan, a thirty-seven-year-old man from northern Madhya Pradesh with a penchant for a drink, a keen political acumen, and a sharp tongue. Asking him what would happen after the hunger strike, he replied with a breath of Gandhian civil disobedience: “If you are going to do a hunger strike for only three days, what’s the point? You have to do an unending hunger strike until your point is heard, otherwise you die.... A hunger strike is not about display or self; it is about getting the truth. When you have the truth you sit and stay until the end: death or truth.” He extended his combative tone into a discussion of the “paper battle” as a group of youth formed around us. “These people have lived here for 15, 20, 30 years. Where was the MCD [Municipal Corporation of Delhi] that whole time? Why weren’t they told then that this is the place for a road?!” Dhaniram, a nineteen-year-old high school graduate who helped the Shiv Camp leaders on legal and documentary matters, piped in: “There is a law that says *sarkar* cannot kick us out without resettlement.” Others agreed, but said even beyond the resettlement question, they had a fundamental right to live in Shiv Camp. Kishan elaborated: “All over India, if someone uses land and lives on it for three years, then they are given property rights [*maalikaanaa haq*].... In Delhi though, this is not true. There is a different right here.” I asked how long someone has to stay to secure this right (legally called “adverse possession”) in Delhi. “I don’t know, but if someone is here for eighteen years like me, they have the right [*haq*],” he said. A boy added, “If you were here before 1990 you definitely have it, but anyone who stays here and sets up a house has it too.” 1990 was the year that then Prime Minister V.P. Singh initiated a survey of all slum settlements in Delhi; those enumerated were given a token, which is today known as the V.P. Singh token and that guarantees them resettlement in case of displacement. While Kishan, Dhaniram and the other boys freely mentioned these formal, government entitlements, their conversation signaled a deeper sense of justice that extended beyond the material artifacts and evidence (survey registers, V.P. Singh tokens, ration cards) linked to formal rights. Based on the intersection of historical entitlement (i.e., the adverse possession argument Kishan made), their belief that the demolition constituted a fundamental violation of their rights as citizens of India, and the value they placed on their role as active political participants, the group expressed great faith that the “paper battle” would lead this deeper sense of justice to prevail. This sense of justice, they further suggested, would exceed the power of any formal, documentary basis for the demolition—e.g., the rumored “map” showing a road through the middle of the settlement.

This group’s faith that the courts would favorably review their case, then, was clearly based on a situated experience and collective sense, as *basti* residents, of a moral right (*haq*) that they considered inviolable and that they showed a strong willingness to defend. Later in our conversation, however, when I began posing more broadly phrased questions about changes taking place in the city as a whole and the meaning of abstract processes like “development”

¹² After three days, a Party leader from the neighboring state of Haryana, rumored to be the *pradhan* of more than 200 villages, along with representatives from two dalit parties, spoke, announcing that their party chiefs were aware of the situation and were making inquiries that would prevent such injustice from happening again. The Lok Janshakti Party speaker declared the Ram Vilas Paswan—the head of the party who came to national prominence in the 1970s for his opposition to Emergency rule and an MP from Bihar—would raise the issue in the lower house of the Indian Parliament. Shiv Camp residents, gaining mild media attention from the Hindi press, declared victory and broke the strike.

(*vikaas*) and “improvement” (*sudhaar*), the group seemed to embrace a different positionality, as if they stepped out of themselves and spoke from a distant, disembodied perspective. For example, when I referred to the array of slum demolitions that were taking place across the city and asked what they meant for Delhi, a boy replied: “It means the city will become more beautiful and the roads will be better. More things like the Metro will come.”

“So, because of the Metro, people like you are getting kicked out?”, I asked.

“Yes.”

“So all this beautification [*sundarikaran*] is bad?”

“No,” the group said collectively. “It is good for Delhi. Delhi will improve,” the boy continued. Kishan interjected: “It is good because this is the capital of India and should be beautiful. People from all over the world come here.”

“So on the one hand they are improving the city, but on the other this means they have to kick you out?”, I continued, exploring how they reconciled what they considered the objective benefit of world-class redevelopment (“It is good for Delhi and India”) and the violence this inflicted in their own lives.

“The *Olympic* game will happen in Delhi. They are preparing for that, fixing the city, making everything new. It is okay if we are *shifted* outside of the city, but they have to give us the right to stay there. That is all we ask,” Kishan said, responding to my apparent confusion.¹³

“So you think that you should be removed from the city?”, I asked, using the verb “remove” (*hataanaa*) instead of *shift* to try to make the violence of this action, which they had been describing earlier, explicit.

In near resignation, Kishan said, “Yes, it is good for Delhi if we are removed from the city. Look at us. We spread filth. The area is dirty. Anybody can see this. Such places are a problem for Delhi.” A boy reaffirmed Kishan’s original position: “It is okay if they want to *shift* us, but they are doing it in the wrong way. They have to give us *notice* and new land.”

Whereas their earlier demands, as expressed through the “grassroots” and “paper” battles, were framed in terms of defending a right (*haq*) to occupy their current land, and whereas these demands were aimed at confronting what they considered the fundamental injustice of their displacement, when framed in terms of the broader development of the city, they identified with the world-class city-building project, even referring to common emblems of aesthetic improvement such as the Commonwealth Games (which residents commonly referred to as the “Olympic” or “international” game) and the Delhi Metro. Thus, within the course of an hour-long conversation, they had invoked competing notions of entitlement and property: their inviolable right to occupancy and almost militant defense of place, both based on either length of residence, government approval, or their direct labor/political contribution to building the neighborhood and city; versus a demand for compensation, procedural clarity, and adequate resettlement in the face of the obvious need for their displacement. Their earlier reaction was to the violence of their “removal” (*hataanaa*), but they understood the necessity of being *shifted*—a rationalized procedure, part of a larger urban improvement agenda. A boy summarized this contradictory moment of self-description: “If one finger is bad, then you don't cut off the whole hand. You just remove the one finger. Sometimes you have to do that to save the whole hand.”

¹³ I use italics to indicate words spoken in Hindi, some of which are recognized English words such as *shift*.

Such seemingly contradictory positionalities—at once defending their stake as occupants of public land while simultaneously identifying *bastis* as spaces of filth or nuisance—were common throughout my nine months of field research.¹⁴ In my first month visiting Shiv Camp, such moments utterly confused me. Were people opposed to their displacement or in support of it? One particularly confusing conversation occurred at the site of the hunger strike while chatting with Lachmi, a 50-year-old from southern Uttar Pradesh who moved to Shiv Camp thirty years earlier as a mason working for *sarkar*. Sitting on a rug underneath the tent, Lachmi, pointing across the landscape in front of us, said, “I worked for *sarkar* and helped build many of the big buildings in this area. The district center, the school, these offices, I made all of these things.” Immediately in front of us was the elevated rail of the Delhi Metro, which he incorporated into his description of the landscape: “Now that this has come, people want to get rid of us. People like this sort of thing, but with it comes ideas that everything should be clean, so they don’t like us and want us to leave.”

Why don’t people like you?, I asked.

“Because our clothes smell. They want order and cleanliness.... As this type of thing comes more and more, the more and more they want to run us away,” an opinion reflecting his positionality as a slum resident threatened by a new vision of urban development in which he had no place. But, without hesitation, his next sentence moderated this stance, embracing a more distant, almost nationalistic pride in this same urban vision: “But, I also like the Metro. Anyone in India will tell you it’s a good thing. It brings you where you need to go quickly. I also want to use it.”

Continuing the theme of his contribution to the built environment, I asked Lachmi if he knew anyone who worked to build the Metro, and he responded: “No. It was built by a company. Nobody here was involved in the construction. We learned how to build it from you [foreigners] and we then built it here,” the “we” pronoun in this statement referring not to Shiv Camp residents but Indian people as a whole. His words signaled both an appreciation and desire for the Metro as well as a simultaneous recognition of his exclusion from the production and consumption of this particular infrastructure and the broader model of urban development it represents: “All we want is to be given new land. Just put us somewhere outside the city. Or, just wipe all of us poor out [*bas, gariibo ko goli maarna chaahiye*]! Really. Then the city will be rid of us. We also won’t have to worry about this all. But, if they are going to let us stay, then they have to give us land, and it is okay if it is far away, but they should put us near this Metro.”

A similar interaction ensued with Lachmi and Gopal the next day. I asked Lachmi, again seated under the tent, if anyone from the neighboring RWA had come to see the hunger strike. “No. They will not come. They are like enemies and only want us removed, *behen chod*,” again expressing anger toward the immediate actors mobilized against them. But, Gopal, a moment later, forcefully described Shiv Camp from this very group’s imagined perspective: “This *basti* is dirty, right? We live on very small space. As people have children, the population grows. Therefore people have to do *latrine* outside, and this spreads filth [*gandagii*]. Because of this the whole area is dirty, so they want to clear us.”

¹⁴ These nine months of research were conducted in the spring and fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008.

This conversation indicates Lachmi and Gopal’s anger and sadness that their houses (or those of their neighbors) were destroyed. However, their broader contextualization of this event betrays a type of empathy with, or at least acknowledgement of, the logic upon which the state and local RWAs were trying to improve the city’s image. That is, in discussions framed in terms of overall urban development, Lachmi and Gopal adopted key components of the middle class “nuisance talk” I described in Chapter 3: the trope of overpopulation in particular—of the helpless poor unwillingly growing in size and spreading filth and disease—resonates strongly in both of their narratives. After reviewing my field notes and returning, confused, to Shiv Camp the next day, I asked Gopal again why the government was trying to remove Shiv Camp. He replied, “Because we are dirty and make the city look bad.... Nobody wants to step out of his home and see us washing in the open or see our kids shitting.” This “nobody” is described as a universal subject, yet one that is clearly not a slum resident: this subject has a balcony, and thus owns property, and observes the city from an elevated, removed position. This is the exact type of nuisance-based argument RWA members made in justifying their efforts to remove neighboring slums, as discussed in Chapter 3. Yet, to my surprise, slum residents were not only familiar with this middle class positionality and argumentation, but in some instances deployed it in their own speech.

I first met Shambu—a 50-year-old Rajasthani who was a construction worker and contractor until he fell ill—a month after the January demolition. Shambu was one of the most active members of the leadership committee that organized the “grassroots” and “paper” battles to defend Shiv Camp and became a friend who I would visit almost daily in the ensuing months. Shambu explained the demolition that day as a mere whim of *sarkar*: “*Sarkar* wanted to build a road here,” he said, as we squatted, looking across the area where people were rebuilding their demolished homes (see Figure 17 and Figure 18).



Figure 17. Rebuilding a Shiv Camp hut. Photo by author.



Figure 18. Shiv Camp homes in March 2007, two months after the January demolition. Photo by author, taken from the same position as Figure 16, showing the huts that were not demolished in the background and the temporarily reconstructed huts in the foreground.

After Shambu said that the *koti* owners in the RWA were not involved in the demolition, I asked him what these wealthier neighbors thought of Shiv Camp. He said, “They think we are bad and want us to leave. We are insects to them [*Hum unko kide-makode lagte hain*].”

“Do you think your struggle is against them?”, I asked

“No, we have no animosity [*dushmani*] with them. Why should we?... They only want their own space... It is like when you are eating and you get a stain [*daag*] on your face, you wipe it clean. That is what they are doing here. They see us as a stain. If you get something stuck in your teeth, you pick it out. We are the same for them.... This is happening all over Delhi. They want to make Delhi like Paris. They want it to be beautiful.”

“What does beautiful mean?”, I asked.

“It means wider roads, cleaner areas, less traffic and crowd, removing *jhuggis*.”

“Is this improvement?”

“Of course it is improvement. Everyone will tell you that.”

To be sure, residents did not want to be displaced, but most understood and many even empathized with a project they clearly saw as requiring their removal. One woman named Kishani, for example, stated: “I have lived here for 30 years. This is my home. It is wrong to remove us from here,” expressing a clear opposition to slum demolition. However, when I asked her what she thought Delhi would look like in 10 years, she calmly and without sarcasm said, “Delhi will be a beautiful city, totally neat and clean. All the slums will be removed and there will only be rich people.” Shiv Camp residents often expressed such a desire for Delhi to become “neat and clean,” despite their knowledge that this would require removing “dirty and polluting spaces,” like *bastis*. When I would push residents to clarify how they could want a world-class city even if it required their displacement, I noticed that we often reached a point where my interlocutor would, almost in exasperation, talk about slums in a different voice. If she earlier described her experience in slums in the first person voice, as when Kishani told me, “After we

built our huts, we thought the land was our own,” or in second-person voice, as when she said, “When you are given a ration card, you become a permanent resident of Delhi,” she would shift and start talking about slums “in general.” Thus, while Kishani had earlier been describing her personal hardships in Shiv Camp, when I asked why slums are being demolished, she said, “slums are dirty. They aren’t permanent. Slum dwellers don’t live on their own land.” Where is the subject located in this third-person description? From where does this omniscient, distant voice depicting “dirty slums” come?

As I argued in Chapters 3 and 4, world-class aesthetics, which increasingly posit urban social relations through the binary terms of “public nuisance” and “private citizen,” is a nearly ubiquitous normative framework within contemporary Delhi. The media’s celebration of new, high-tech development projects, monuments of capitalist development, and consumer-citizens as examples of India “on the rise;” the Delhi Government’s billing of the preparation for the 2010 Commonwealth Games as the city’s “top priority”¹⁵; the legal codification of world-class aesthetics that I discussed in Chapter 4; and the more diffuse effects of what Mazzarella (2003) calls India’s new “consumerist dispensation” all work to extend the elite spatial politics that I described in Chapter 3 (aimed at enforcing bourgeois codes of appearance in the public sphere) into the domain of everyday habits and modes of public viewership. That is, as I will discuss more fully in the following sections, a variety of what Rajagopal (2001) calls “technologies of perception”—including news media campaigns, public service announcements, political rumors, and government survey exercises—work to put in place historically specific aesthetic principles that train the viewing public (or those who seek to be recognized as a legitimate “public”) to embrace particular standards of taste, criteria of judgment, and subject-positions. Perhaps the clearest indication that Shiv Camp residents encounter the changing political economy of land in the city as an aesthetic transformation comes in their acknowledgement that the visual appearance of Shiv Camp today, unlike say ten years ago, represents a “problem” in the new urban economy. While residents would often contest the suggestion that demolition was the solution to this problem, they nonetheless identified with the middle class critique of Shiv Camp’s “look.”¹⁶ Thus, although some residents retained a sense that their poor appearance was a structural effect—the outcome of being denied adequate services and space by *sarkar*, as when Phoolvati said, “We also don’t like living in *jhuggis*, but what can we do? If *sarkar* gives us space, we’ll be better off”—many residents, like Gopal above, embraced middle class aesthetic discourse to characterize “dirty slums.” This, as I will discuss below and in the following chapter, often operated as a strategy to deflect the stigma of slum life onto internal “others”—the rotten few who have spoiled the *basti*—or as a strategy to show that they can occupy the middle-class slot, to suggest that they are “improvable,” or to confirm their belief in *vikaas* (development).

¹⁵ “C’wealth Games top priority of Govt.,” *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 6, 2008.

¹⁶ As Lachmi indicated above, and as I briefly discussed in Chapter 3, smell played a role in how *bastis* were constructed as nuisances. As I argued in Chapter 4, however, visual appearance provided the primary legal basis on which slums were equated with nuisances. Thus, while smell figured in “nuisance talk” and more general descriptions of filth and decay, appearance plays a far more authoritative role in defining nuisances in contemporary Delhi.

5.4. History

To understand the means by which Shiv Camp residents engage nuisance talk—a form of speech that betrays a middle class positionality through its reference to norms of visual order and comportment articulated through a public/private divide that does not exist, at least not formally, in *bastis*¹⁷—it is first necessary to situate Shiv Camp within a longer history of urban and property development in Delhi, for it is only with an understanding of how residents’ sense of historical entitlement to land emerged that we can understand the import of what I will show to be their expectation of displacement.

As described in Chapter 2, the Delhi Development Act of 1957 gave monopoly power to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to acquire, develop and dispose of all land in Delhi. This meant that all land within the city of Delhi was defined as “public” and that the DDA was charged with allocating use rights to different classes of users. Particularly on the outskirts of the city where it could not itself develop land, the DDA sold land it had acquired to private developers who were charged with establishing the basic infrastructure for planned residential colonies, within which a fixed amount of land in the form of individual plots could be sold to private buyers to offset the costs of construction. The first residents of Shiv Camp were labor contractors from the nearby state of Rajasthan, recruited and hired by the land developer who purchased the large tract of land upon which Shiv Camp is settled from the DDA in the mid-1960s.¹⁸ These contractors first brought a team of men from their villages to help build the roads, buildings and drains that would serve as the basic infrastructure for the planned colony being developed. As Vidhya said, affirming her *jhuggi*’s legal standing: “sarkar called us here. It wanted us to do its work, to build this colony. Sarkar wanted us to build these jhuggis and live here.” Shiv Camp thus arose as a labor camp, but soon grew as the developer continued to offer steady construction work while expanding, developing, and selling individual plots in the colony, and as more workers, and soon their families, migrated to Shiv Camp from the villages.

By 1977, a group of 40 or so huts had been built, all with the permission of the developer. During the monsoon that year, Delhi experienced exceptional rains, leading to severe flooding in West Delhi.¹⁹ Shiv Camp old timers remember standing water so high in the nearby village that

¹⁷ I remind the reader here of the distinction I made in Chapter 3 and 4 between inside/outside and private/public. In asserting that nuisance talk is framed in terms of the public/private divide, I am making explicit reference to the private as a realm of property ownership backed by the authority of the state. As I showed in Chapter 4, property ownership increasingly provides the basis on which citizenship as such is defined in Delhi today. Nuisance talk is a form of speech aimed at eliminating private uses of public land on the basis of their aesthetic impropriety. Because *bastis* are settled on public land, the adoption of nuisance talk—which is more than a discourse of cleanliness—by slum residents, I am suggesting, conveys a distinct politics of property, which I discuss below.

¹⁸ One resident told me his family had settled in Shiv Camp in 1966, showing proof in the form of a letter from his school sent to his address in the *basti* dated 1968.

¹⁹ Taranjot Kaur Gadhok writes of this flood: “Najafgarh drain experienced heavy floods due to discharge from the Sahibi River. The drain breached at six places between Dhansa and Karkraula, marooning a number of villages in Najafgarh block [the western most district in Delhi]. Six human lives were lost due to house collapse. 14 persons died in a boat mishap. Crop damage was estimated at Rs 10 million.” See http://www.gisdevelopment.net/application/natural_hazards/floods/nhcy0008pf.htm, accessed October 30, 2009.

it covered people's entire homes. At this time, a second wave of settlers moved to Shiv Camp, situated on higher ground than most of the surrounding area, to escape the flood. A group of ten families, mostly construction workers, settled within a few hundred feet from the original residents and built tents and later more permanent *jhuggis* after the flood subsided. As Ramkali told me, "Indira Gandhi [India's Prime Minister at the time] told us to seek high ground during the flood. All of Delhi was drowning.... The Congress Party drove around and announced that people should move to better land. They said it on the radio. They wanted us to settle here," a statement she made to indicate that there was no question of their legality at the time of settlement.

This second group of settlers was originally from the Bundelkhand region of southern Uttar Pradesh and northern Madhya Pradesh, an area that had some of the highest rates of bonded labor in the wake of Independence and that continues to have an extremely high incidence of landlessness. With time, as the surrounding area grew, Shiv Camp residents told relatives and neighbors in their villages about the opportunity to earn a decent wage and, often, escape the oppressive oversight of upper-caste landlords, employers and government officials in their birthplace. As the Rajasthani and Bundelkhandi settlements expanded, a single *basti* divided by geographic origin soon emerged, each side with its own *pradhan*. To this day, the settlement is bisected along these same lines, a division now marked by the 45-foot wide path the Municipal Corporation cleared through the middle of the settlement (see Figure 19). Once big enough to draw the attention of political parties and Delhi's Department of Food and Supplies—which gives out ration cards that entitle those designated "below poverty line" to free and reduced-rate food staples and that, at the time, was the sole evidence required to vote—the land developer gave the settlement, occupied entirely by Hindus at the time, the name "Shiv Camp."

In 1980, having sold off most of the individual plots to middle class government and private sector service workers and businesspeople, the land developer turned the entire area over to the Municipal Corporation, which provides municipal services (e.g., lighting, waste disposal, and water connections) to the residents and businesses of planned colonies and maintains such areas' public infrastructure (e.g., parks, roads, and parking) once the land developers have completed basic development works. To Shiv Camp residents, who by then had diversified their sources of employment and no longer worked for the developer, this was an almost insignificant event. The Municipal Corporation did not challenge their settlement status, and most of the families had received ration cards and voter ID cards that, in those days, confirmed their residential status. In the late 1990s, the Corporation had enumerated 637 households in Shiv Camp, by then a densely packed *basti* abutting a state sports college on one side, private *kotis* on the other, and small colony roads and a Delhi Electricity Board station on the other two sides. In addition to a toilet block built by the Municipal Corporation, Shiv Camp is settled on approximately 90,000 square feet of land, or just over two acres. With an approximate population of 3,200 people, this represents a population density of one person per 28 square feet of land.²⁰ Individual huts in Shiv Camp vary in square footage and in family size, with the smallest huts just big enough for a single bed and a trunk and the biggest (and oldest) occupying up to 80 square feet of ground space and standing two stories tall. Despite these relatively dense quarters, Shiv Camp residents

²⁰ This is equivalent to 4,000 people per hectare, whereas the Delhi Master Plan 2001 guideline for residential density is nowhere greater than 600 people per hectare (DDA, 1990), or less than one sixth as dense as Shiv Camp.

considered the settlement well-serviced. Although residents had to regularly put collective pressure on electricity board staff and their municipal councilor to ensure electricity supply, and although the community water taps only ran twice a day, Shiv Camp was well-integrated with the surrounding colonies, had excellent transit links, and neighbored bustling commercial districts where work could be found.



Figure 19. These three aerial photographs show Shiv Camp in September 2004, March 2007, and April 2007, respectively. The leftmost shows the approximate peak density Shiv Camp reached, the middle one shows the extent to which residents had reconstructed their homes after the January 2007 demolition, and the rightmost shows Shiv Camp immediately after the Municipal Corporation had returned to clear the 45 foot path. The black lines outline the approximate boundaries of Shiv Camp, showing standing *kotis* to the south (lower on the image). The left and center images show that a new *koti* bordering Shiv Camp was built between 2004 and 2007. The rightmost image shows what appears to be a bulldozer (see arrow) parked on the left side and in the middle of the path cleared through the settlement on April 19. All images were captured from Google Earth. The center photograph includes Google Earth's grids demarcating roads, which are a bit askew from the actual position of the roads. © 2009 Google.

5.5. Tenure

A month into my research, I decided to initiate an in-depth survey to both understand how residents collectively understood their place in the city and to provide an opportunity to begin one-on-one conversations with residents with whom I had had limited interaction. As a male youth, I had no difficulty conversing with other males under the age of 35, or with elderly men, but had very few sustained interactions with women of any age, or middle-aged, working men, who were often away from Shiv Camp during the day. Further, because privacy is so restricted in *bastis*, most of my conversations took place in groups, which often meant consensus answers emerged, potentially restricting my research to only what Scott (1990) calls peoples' "public transcripts." With the assistance of Dhaniram, I designed and implemented a survey instrument that served as a script for eliciting people's residential and work histories, conceptions of law and property, and fears and hopes for the future. Thirty-two men and 19 women participated in my survey, most of whom were born in a village, migrated to Delhi, and were over the age of 35. Dhaniram and I together carried out 49 of the 51 surveys/interviews, and I conducted the

remaining two alone. Dhaniram spoke Bundeli, a dialect of Hindi that many especially elderly Bundelkhandis interspersed in their everyday speech and that I could not easily understand. Our routine consisted of the following: After a potential respondent agreed to the interview and we secured a secluded place where the three of us could sit, Dhaniram would ask the primary survey questions, we both recorded our own versions of their responses, and we both asked unscripted follow up questions where it seemed appropriate. Each survey took between one to two and a half hours to complete.

State of origin		Reason for departing village		Family owned land at departure?	
Uttar Pradesh	26	Economic hardship	25	Yes	31
Rajasthan	15	No land	3	No	20
Haryana	1	Debt	6	Avg Age at Departure to Delhi	
Bihar	2	Death of parents	3	Male	15.5
Madhya Pradesh	6	Hunger	10	Female	18
Nepal	1	In search of work	3	Type of oppression faced	
Total	51	Strife with landlord	1	Bonded/unpaid laborer	6
Oppressed in village?		Total	51	Debt	6
Yes	19	Means of Shiv Camp arrival		Land taken away	2
No	22	Direct migration	18	No answer	5
Total	41	Due to flood	4	Total	19
Arrival date in Shiv Camp		Followed relative	12	Did you think you would stay in Delhi forever?	
Before 1980	18	New work	6	Yes	28
1980-1984	17	Old home demolished	3	No	22
1985-1989	10	Marriage	8	Total	50
After 1990	6	Total	51		
Total	51				

Table 1. Shiv Camp demographics and migration history

Table 1 shows basic demographic information about the population we surveyed. As is clear, more than 60% of those surveyed were Bundelkhandi (indicated by their origination from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), 30% were from Rajasthan, and the remaining less than 10% were from other North Indian states or Nepal. Respondents were extremely frank in indicating their reason for leaving the village, with the most common answers including “we weren’t able to get by” (*guzaraa nahii ho rahaa thaa*), shown in Table 1 under the category of “Economic hardship” and “*pet khaali thi*,” which literally translates as “our stomachs were empty” (“hunger”). Those who left “in search of work” (3) explicitly framed their departure not as a move to escape challenges in the village (“push factors” in migration speak), but rather as a strategic choice to seek out better opportunities in the city (a “pull factor”). The remaining responses all indicated hardship in the village.²¹ Although approximately three fifths of respondents (31 of 51) said their families owned land at the time of leaving the village, nobody owned more than two hectares. Forty-three percent (22) of respondents said their family profession in the village was laborer, 45% (23) said it was farmer, 8% (4) said carpenter, and 4%

²¹ Thirty-five percent of respondents said they migrated to Shiv Camp directly from the village, 24% came after a relative who was already settled there called them, 16% came due to marriage, 12% arrived following a nearby work opportunity, 8% came due to the flood of 1977, and 6% came after their *jhuggi* elsewhere in Delhi was demolished.

(2) said cobbler (*mochi*). The “farmer” and “laborer” responses were difficult to distinguish as only 7 (14%) of 49 total respondents said their families worked “for themselves;” the remaining 42 respondents worked for an employer, which indicates that few people were able to survive primarily off of their own land. The depressed socioeconomic status of most Shiv Camp residents is further indicated by responses to my question, “Were you oppressed in the village?” (*kisi ne aapko sataane ki koshish ki?*). Although respondents were often visibly uncomfortable saying so, which is an indication of possible under-reportage, 19 (46%) of 41 respondents answered in the affirmative, the most common forms of oppression they faced including “bonded or unpaid labor” (6), extreme “debt” (6), or theft of land (2). Although my survey did not have any caste-specific questions, people’s family occupations, contextual descriptions of their village experiences, and explicit and implicit references to caste confirmed that almost all of those surveyed were dalit. For example, many residents, regardless of their state of origin, expressed great pride and happiness when, in 2007, the Bahujan Samaj Party, a dalit party, won the general assembly in Uttar Pradesh. In fact, at no point in my field research did any resident indicate that they were *not* dalit.

The survey population was almost equally divided between those arriving (i) before 1980 (~35%), (ii) between 1980 and 1984 (~33%), and (iii) in or after 1985 (~31%). There is no comprehensive household survey of Shiv Camp available from any government departments, so there is no way to assess the representativeness of the surveyed population. We requested surveys from individuals in all parts of Shiv Camp in an effort to gain a representative sample. However, perhaps due to Dhaniram being Bundelkhandi and more comfortable requesting interviews from people he knew, these responses likely over-represent non-Rajasthanis. The Rajasthani side of the settlement (the northern side of the settlement shown in Figure 19), is almost entirely made up of Rajasthanis. The Bundelkhandi side, being the newer portion of the settlement, is where people from regions other than Rajasthan or Bundelkhand (e.g., Haryana, Bihar) typically settled. Of those surveyed, 20 respondents’ homes had been demolished in January.

Upon arrival in Delhi, the vast majority of male heads worked as day laborers (34) or carpenters (5), 3 were cobblers, 3 were security guards, 2 were tailors, 2 were shopkeepers, and 1 each was a rickshaw puller and factory worker. 15 of the 19 women surveyed reported working upon arrival as laborers (14) and as a saleswoman in a small shop (1). Although most women said they worked upon arrival in Delhi, only 1 of the 32 men surveyed said his wife worked upon arrival, a result likely structured both by the lack of male acknowledgement of women’s labor contribution and the low status (especially among Rajasthanis) attributed to households with working women.

Table 2 shows how individuals in 2007 described their desires when they first arrived in Delhi. Because this was an open-ended question, respondents were not limited to only one answer, so this table can be read as showing that 38 of 51 respondents stated that a main desire was “good work,” 17 stated that they desired “shelter,” etc. This table shows that residents’ considered their primary desires upon arrival to be largely based on survival, livelihood, shelter, and contributing to the welfare of their families. Only four responses were given for desires that we might term “quality of life” or “lifestyle” focused (i.e., clothing, jewelry, and comfortable lifestyle). Also, it is worth noting that few people considered land ownership in Delhi (as distinct from shelter,

which did not require ownership) a high priority, which we will soon see to no longer be the case today.

Desires upon arrival in Delhi	
Good work	38
Shelter	17
Good food	17
Education for children	10
Land in Village	9
Land in Delhi	5
Money to send relatives	5
Clothing	3
Jewelry	1
Comfortable Lifestyle	1

Table 2. Shiv camp residents’ desires upon arrival in Delhi

While my interlocutors in Shiv Camp frequently commented on issues of tenure, law, and property, they did not have a settled vocabulary for designating and describing these and similar categories. For example, the topic of legality was rarely phrased through the formal language of law, rules, or documents. Therefore, instead of saying “we were legal,” people responded in such ways as “nobody bothered us,” or “if *sarkar* didn’t want us to stay, it would have stopped us.” For most residents, the law operated as a field that functioned to prevent certain forms of action from taking place. That is, most people saw it as a set of usually unstated rules that maintained a form of negative freedom: the law restricted people’s full range of potential pursuits. Different individuals also had different conceptions of who represented the law and what “*sarkar*” meant. To most, however, *sarkar* and the law [*kaanun*] were interchangeable. *Sarkar* was used by residents to refer to not only what is usually considered “the state”—for example, the Municipal Corporation, the police, the elected Delhi Government (*Dilli sarkar*), and the central government—but also the courts, a broader conception of law and moral right, politicians (both in and out of power), local leaders within the *basti*, neighboring upper-class households, as well as (usually jokingly) me. *Sarkar* often simply referred to institutions or people of authority who have influence over the life of the speaker.

Given the diverse ways in which people referred to law, tenure, and rights, Dhaniram and I incorporated multiple questions into the survey that we used to gradually hone in on people’s specific conceptions of place, legality, and property. The sequence began by asking how people knew that it was acceptable (*uchit*) to build a home where they did; from whom they had to seek permission, if anyone; whether they considered their home permanent; if neighbors, the police or other government officials considered them “illegal;” and what forms of proof, if any, they considered necessary to remain settled. We repeated similar questions with different phrasing at different points in the survey to cross-tabulate responses for consistency and to assess how people’s responses were structured by the context in which the question was posed. For example, a direct question asking, “Did your neighbors consider you illegal when you arrived in Shiv Camp?” asked in the course of a series of questions about housing might produce a different response from a similarly phrased question in a section on residents’ relationship with the *koti*

owners. Thus, the final answers I present here represent my best effort to assess, on the whole, how residents conceptualized their relationship with various types of authority, and how they understood that authority conferring them (or not) with property rights.

This approach to treating property as a social formation, a contingent pact between an individual or group’s access claim and an institutional authority’s validation of that claim, is based on a constructivist approach that reads property not as a fixed or permanent form of entitlement; rather, it considers any existing property arrangement as but one possible outcome among competing claims to legitimacy—i.e., what matters is not only whose claim has a stronger evidentiary basis, but also gains institutional validation (Sikor & Lund, 2009). By asking Shiv Camp residents not only about the basis of their access claims, but also in which authority those claims might be validated, my goal was to tease out how people’s sense of both entitlement and legitimate authority had changed with time.

Year house built		If no,	Source of approval to build		Did you think the land was yours after construction?	
<1980	14		Nobody objected/others settled	17	Yes	29
1980-1984	18		Relatives settled already	10	No	16
1985-1989	11		Purchased land	6	No answer	5
1990-1994	6		Govt/politician approval	5		
1995	2		Approval from pradhan	3	Did you think you could stay for 5-10 years?	
		Had ration card/ID	3	Yes	45	
		Land developer settled them	1	No	3	
				No answer	3	
Was home permanent after construction?		Did your home ever become permanent at a later date?				
Yes	36	Yes, when received ration card	6	Who was sarkar at arrival?		
No	12	No	3	Nobody	28	
No Answer	3	No answer	3	Politicians	8	
				Police	7	
Scared your home would be demolished?		Was your home ever previously demolished?		Public service workers	4	
Yes	28	Yes	7	DDA	2	
No	23	No	44			

Table 3. Perceptions of tenure in Shiv Camp’s early years

Table 3 shows people’s conceptions of land tenure, legality and authority at the time when they first built their homes in Shiv Camp, based on their recollection in 2007. The average year when residents constructed their homes was 1983. What stands out from this table is that 82% (37 of 45) of respondents located the authority to grant “approval” to build with local property owners and neighboring residents: 37% (17 of 45) of respondents said they knew it was okay to build homes upon their land because others were settled in the area and nobody objected to their construction, 22% (10) said they had relatives already settled on the land, 13% (6) purchased their land from a previous resident, 6% (3) received approval from the *pradhan*, and 2% (1 person) were directly settled by the land developer. The fact that only 18% (8 of 45) of respondents located the authority to grant approval to build with the state (5 people said they received approval directly from *sarkar* or a politician, and 3 from a ration card they received

prior to constructing their home) shows that people understood property rights at the time to be highly localized and, in most peoples' minds, not based on a centralized, state-based conception of tenure. This position is strengthened by people's response to our question, "Which government officials came here at the time?", where 28 of 49 respondents (57%) said that no government officials were present. Almost all respondents (45 of 48) believed they would be able to reside in their homes for at least 5-10 years, and 65% (29 of 45) of respondents considered the land their own after they had completed the construction of their homes. An even larger majority (36 of 48 respondents, or 75%) considered their homes "permanent" (*sthaayi*) at the same time.

Were you illegal then?		Why illegal then?		What did legal mean then?	
Yes	8	→ Not owner of the land	6	No meaning	31
No	42	We were poor	1	Ration card (RC)	6
No answer	1	Lived on government land	1	No meaning, then RC	6
Did neighbors think you were illegal?		Why?		Govt approval	4
Yes	11	→ Did not own land	1	Land ownership	2
No	40	We were dirty to them	10	Approval of developer	1
Did sarkar think you were illegal?		Why?		No answer	1
Yes	4	→ Did not own land	3	Total	51
No	47	We were dirty to them	1	→ Became legal to sarkar after?	
				Yes, with ration card	3
				No	1

Table 4. Conceptions of tenure in Shiv Camp's early years

Table 4 shows Shiv Camp residents' perceptions of their legality when they first built their homes. What stands out is that while 8 people considered themselves illegal, 11 people felt that individuals owning *kotis* in the neighborhood considered them illegal, while only 4 said that *sarkar* considered them illegal. Not only does this signal that different senses of legality were at work, each associated with different social groups (i.e., the *koti* owners' idea of legality differed from Shiv Camp residents'), but it also suggests that residents considered the authority of law to be vested in entities beyond *sarkar*, strictly defined as state actors. For example, of the six people who considered themselves illegal due to a lack of ownership, only 2 stated that *sarkar* considered them illegal.

Individuals' conceptions of legality and tenure in those early days were largely based on their experiences in the village. For most, their ability to occupy land in their villages was based on informal approval from village *pradhans* and upper-caste landlords. For those few who had had profound experiences related to land title, ownership emerged more prominently as the foundation of legal occupancy in Delhi. For example, two respondents' families had been landless in their villages until they were given formal title during Indira Gandhi's rule. As Bhagawati, a 70-year-old Bundelkhandi widow, told me, "Indira Ji did a lot for us. She made harijan [dalit] bastis from vacant government land. People who had no or little land could apply and were given land by sarkar. Indira Ji gave my family title to our land in the village. Before

that, we had no rights.” For her, this was a moment of great significance since before that, she said, her family had no formal standing in her village. Her sense of land rights in Delhi was, as a result, premised on this village experience in which legal title operated as a means to a recognized life that granted legal rights beyond the arbitrary rule of upper-caste village leaders. This experience provided another foundation for her understanding of property: “Before these harijan bastis, people in villages did not live according to a map. These bastis were settled according to a map, so everyone in them was formal [*pakkaa*].” The absence of a map in Shiv Camp contributed to her sense that Shiv Camp residents were less legal. Another man who displayed a strong sense that ownership, even at the time of his initial arrival, was the basis for legal standing had had his land in the village taken away by an upper-caste landlord. In 2006, his family had successfully won a case to recover the land in the Uttar Pradesh courts, which granted him formal title. This experience (both the loss of land, which took place sometime in the early 1980s, and its legal recovery) endowed him with a strong sense of the importance of ownership in obtaining tenure security.

Most people, however, did not consider ownership a requirement for the legal occupancy of land in the 1960s-1980s. According to Prem, “when we first came here land cost only four rupees per *gaj* [square meter]. If they [the *koti* owners] had tried kicking us out then, we could have just bought some land right next to them.”

“Why didn’t you buy land then?”, I asked.

“At that time none of us thought of such things. That wasn’t the way we did things at the time. We cared about work. Where there was work we wanted to live.”

Kishan affirmed a similar position in responding to my question of whether anyone bought land in Shiv Camp or if they just moved in: “people just moved in. Nobody bought land then. Even if you did try to buy the land, it wouldn’t have been recognized... Nobody thought of this as somebody else’s land. It was just here and we were allowed to stay.”

In trying to gain a sense of how residents specifically defined legality, if not on the basis of property ownership, I asked them what legal meant when they first arrived and what evidence was required to become legal occupants of a piece of land. People were in widespread agreement that at first, no specific proof was required to occupy a piece of vacant land, but when ration cards started being given out, this became the foundation of one’s legal right to occupancy. Therefore, as long as local landowners—an amorphous social category that in the village meant upper-caste landlords and, in Delhi, usually the police and land developer—did not prevent you from settling on land, you became legal once you constructed a home. Four of 34 respondents said they bribed the police when they first built their homes, but those who did so treated this not as a sign of illegality, but as a necessary step in securing the validation of a legitimate authority. Once ration cards were introduced, almost everyone (43 of 48 respondents) believed that this “made them permanent,” and only 10% of respondents (5 of 48) said the ration card did not provide permanence. As Ramkali said, “why would *sarkar* have given us ration cards, identity cards, tokens, if it didn’t want us here?” Vidhya said there was not only an implied permanence that came with the ration card, but that this was explicitly stated: “Those who gave us ration cards, they said that now this [*gesturing to her jhuggi*] is formal [*pakkii*].”

Once ration cards started being issued, residents began to understand this material artifact as the primary basis upon which tenure rights were secured, marking a shift in legitimate authority away from local actors to the centralized state. Of the 43 respondents who understood the ration card as the basis of their permanence, however, “permanent” (*sthaayi*) had different meanings to different people. For those who considered the ration card residence proof (43%, or 27 respondents), it meant that they were permanent residents of their current land. Kishanlal, for example, said, “Ration cards and ID cards were made because *sarkar* said that you are Delhi residents at this place. They came and did a survey and made us permanent here. *Sarkar* gave us this, so what could it mean other than we are legal?” For those who saw it granting them resettlement and voting rights (33%, 14 respondents), the ration card made them permanent residents of Delhi—meaning if not in Shiv Camp, they would be given land somewhere else in the city. Our data also shows the ambiguity in Shiv Camp residents’ minds at the time of survey concerning who formally owned the land upon which they were settled. Almost half (25 of 51 respondents) said they had never been told who owns the land.²² Of those who had heard whose land it was (n=26),²³ more than half (14) had only heard in the past five years, showing that the question of “formal title” and state-documented ownership were secondary concerns in the question of property rights and access.

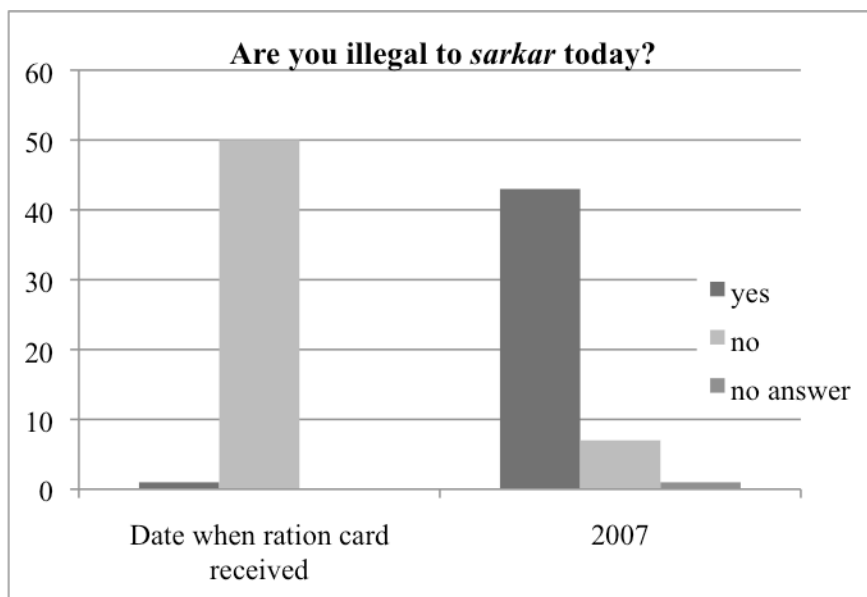


Figure 20. Change in Shiv Camp residents’ understanding of legality in the eyes of the government between the period when they received their ration cards and the time of survey in 2007. 49 of 51 respondents had ration cards, for whom the average year of receiving the ration card was 1985.

Figure 20 shows how respondents’ perceptions of legality had changed from their initial period of arrival (i.e., once they were settled and started receiving ration cards) and the time of survey. Whereas only 1 of 51 respondents said that *sarkar* considered them illegal by the time they

²² Of the remaining 26 respondents, 7 said they heard who formally owned the land they occupied in 2007, 7 answered in 2002-2006, 4 in 1995-1998, 2 in 1990-1994, 3 before 1990 (but sometime after their arrival), and 3 said they heard who owned the land ever since they first arrived.

²³ Of these 26 respondents, 19 said the land was a specific agency’s (usually the DDA or the municipal corporation) or *sarkar*’s, 2 said the developer’s, 3 said nobody’s, and 2 gave no answer.

received their first ration card, 43 of 50 respondents felt *sarkar* considered them illegal in 2007, an almost complete reversal. Three of these 43 said *sarkar* had always considered them illegal (even though two of them had earlier said once they received their ration card, this was not the case), 38 said that *sarkar* began considering them illegal only after 2003, and 1 dated his illegality to 1997.

Residents' perception of their illegality in 2007 suggests that a transformation in the meaning of legality had taken place over the past twenty years, which most respondents assigned to changes that had occurred within the previous ten years. This is the precise moment of legal transformation I explored in the previous chapter, only here I am considering the lived experience of what I called the "new nuisance discourse" and the form of propertied citizenship it codified.²⁴ When I asked residents if the meaning of "legal" had changed with time, 35 of 41 respondents said "yes." Of these 35, 31 attempted to explain the basis of these changes, of whom 11 said the law has become anti-poor (either that it directly benefited the rich or hurt the poor), 8 attributed the change to the law being more strictly enforced, 8 to a new map or new government, 3 to increased corruption, and 1 said earning resettlement had become more difficult. Perhaps more revealingly were people's responses to our question, "After the demolition, do you think owning private land is more important?": 51 of 51 respondents said "yes." This reflects people's clear sense that the right to occupy land in Delhi today requires private ownership. The varied historical entitlements and non-private property-based regime of tenure that people saw at work from the 1960s well into the 1990s had clearly been replaced, in their minds, by a new private property regime in which they, as residents of public land, were hanging on as remnants of a previous era.

The question of how private property, both as a tenure regime and as an object conferring particular citizenship rights, gained meaning and shaped Shiv Camp residents' aspirational strategies and everyday desires is something to which I turn in greater detail in the following chapter. For now, the important point is that Shiv Camp residents clearly linked their increased insecurity to a shift toward a more private property-based tenure regime, and that this regime is expressed and gains meaning in their lives not merely as a formal change in law, but also as a challenge to their conceptions of self, city, and as I will address further in the following chapter, value. If we compare people's responses to the question of whether they perceived themselves as having a permanent right to their land in (i) their early years of residence in Shiv Camp with (ii) their responses in 2007, we see a marked change in their sense of entitlement. As Figure 21 shows, whereas 88% percent of respondents (42 of 48) said they had a permanent right (*haq*) after obtaining a ration card (which was, on average, in 1985), only 51% (26 of 51) believe they have that same moral right today. What explains these radical shifts in Shiv Camp residents' conceptions of their place in the city? What are both the everyday as well as more episodic ways in which residents situate themselves in the context of Delhi's rapidly changing urban environment? How does world-class aesthetic discourse and the visual restructuring of the cityscape interpenetrate with transformations in law and governance to give new meaning to urban citizenship? That is, to what extent are these deeply structural and institutional changes in

²⁴ The link between property ownership and citizenship was extended early in 2010 when the Delhi High Court stated that "any person aggrieved by the demolition will be heard in the court only after he places title deed before it, otherwise HC [High Court] will refuse to hear their contentions." "HC: Notice not needed to raze encroachments," *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 30, 2010.

Delhi’s urban geography and economy instantiated and made meaningful through shifts in the city’s symbolic economy and in everyday, public sensibilities?

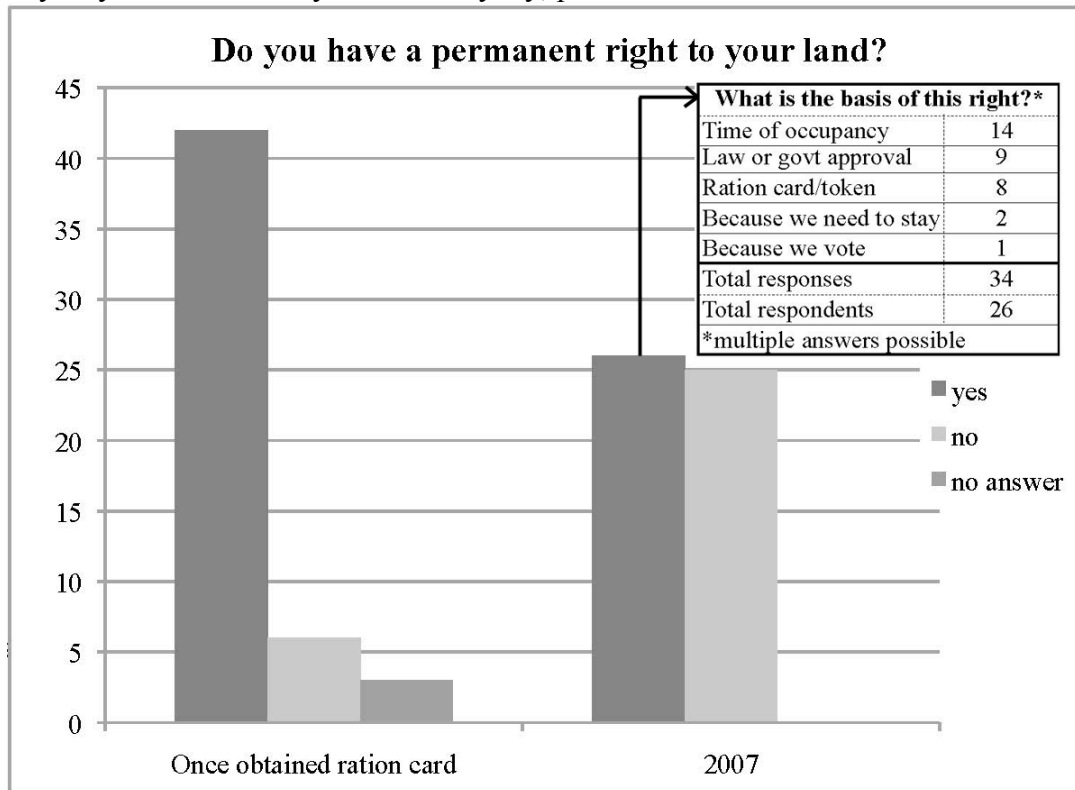


Figure 21. Change in Shiv Camp residents’ conceptions in their moral right to their land between the time they received their ration card and 2007.

5.6. Naturalized displacement

The January demolition, as described above, was a shocking moment. But, Shiv Camp residents have long been aware that the state, the law and the elite—unlike in the previous, more socialistic and developmental era of the 1970s and 1980s—no longer view them as integral components of the city. The previous section showed that Shiv Camp residents recognize that the entitlements, protections, and sense of belonging they once enjoyed as occupants of public land are being weakened as a private property regime is inscribed on the city’s physical and regulatory landscape. But, the legal field is but one, more remote, social force influencing how people’s conceptions of self and city are formed. This section turns to the more mundane and embodied experiences of a changing city by considering how residents’ everyday habitations shape their responses to the violence of displacement.

More specifically, what I seek to explore in this section is how what Marx called “so-called primitive accumulation”—the “historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” (Marx, 1867 [1990]: 875)—has come to be naturalized in the lives of Shiv Camp residents. According to De Angelis (2004), what distinguishes “primitive accumulation” from “normal” accumulation—a distinction Harvey (2002) explains through the clearer terminology of

“accumulation by dispossession” versus “expanded reproduction”²⁵—is that the separation of direct producers from the means of production in the former “is imposed *primarily* through ‘[d]irect extra-economic force’, such as the state or particular sections of social classes. In other words, primitive accumulation, for Marx, is a social process in which separation appears as a crystal-clear relation of expropriation, a relation that has not yet taken the fetishistic character assumed by capital’s normalisation, or the ‘ordinary run of things’” (De Angelis, 2004: 67). De Angelis elaborates further: “The key difference between what he [Marx] calls ‘the ordinary run of things’— that is, the normalised silent compulsion of economic relations – and ‘primitive accumulation’, seems to be the existence of ‘a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws’” (Ibid.: 70). De Angelis’s reading of Marx thus treats primitive accumulation not just as an objectively unique form of accumulation (i.e., direct expropriation), but also as a process that produces subjectively different experiences of economic power: primitive accumulation “appears as a crystal-clear relation of expropriation” whereas normal accumulation appears “natural.” However, violent expropriation cannot be presumed, *ex ante*, to be experienced as unnatural. Rather, as I will here show, “crystal clear expropriation” is often itself read as a “self-evident natural law.”²⁶ To do so, I turn to the various affective and narrative techniques by which slum residents perceive extra-economic forces driving their displacement as an inevitable process of urban improvement. World-class aesthetic discourse, as conveyed through these diverse techniques, provides the coherent narrative framework within which these shocking experiences can be ordered and made sense of.

Walter Benjamin, whose method for studying the lived experience of the “mythic history” of capitalist urban life I draw from here, considered the role of the critic to be to reveal the myths and fetishes of the discourse of “progress,” to “expose ‘progress’ as the fetishization of modern temporality” (Buck-Morss, 1989: 56), and thus make visible the latent possibilities for social transformation within lived history. To begin this endeavor, I seek to reveal how the myth of progress, as conveyed through what I have been calling world-class aesthetics, is received and propagated in Shiv Camp, before turning to how residents there position themselves vis-à-vis this discourse of improvement. This goal is built on an insistence that structures of power must also

²⁵ Harvey’s distinction draws directly from Rosa Luxemburg’s (1951) early distinction between different modes of accumulation. But, in doing so, Harvey treats grassroots struggles against “accumulation by dispossession” as mere “reactions,” rather than as constitutive of the very process of capitalism (Hart, 2006: 983).

²⁶ This is both an empirical and methodological point. Most of the literature on primitive accumulation has remarkably little to say about the key actors involved. While historical studies (e.g., Nicholas Blomley, 2007; De Angelis, 2004; Perelman, 2000) of land enclosures as a particular form of primitive accumulation tend to emphasize relations of force, studies of contemporary and ongoing moments of displacement framed explicitly through the lens of primitive accumulation rarely engage questions of subjectivity or social meaning, even when dealing with problems that seem uniquely about subjectivity (e.g., Roberts, 2008). While it is important to continue tracing the ways in which capital as a social relation relies on the continuous use of “extra-economic” force to sustain itself, at some point we must ask how this force is made sense of both by its executors and recipients. Here, I take a cue both from E.P. Thompson’s study of economic transition as a political and cultural project as much as an economic one, as well as Hart’s (2002) rejection of what she calls “impact models” of globalization that simplistically read macro-forces descending upon static locales. Instead, we must be attentive to the constitutive relations through which socio-spatial change is enacted.

become structures of feeling; that is, they must take account of sensible life by managing their subjects' aesthetic impressions of events. Hegemony thus has a necessarily affective dimension, and a ruling power's ability to modify physical space is crucially dependent on how that space is not only represented, but also aesthetically perceived and affectively registered by the subjects of rule. I divide Shiv Camp residents' experiences of world-class progress into two sub-sections relating to (i) the visual landscape and (ii) the way in which slum demolition is narrated by the government and media as a "normal" future, largely through government run slum survey exercises. In the following section, I turn to the various ways in which the anticipation of this future dampens the shock of demolition.

Landscape effects

As the pace of slum demolition in Delhi has increased over the past decade, few large slums remain intact, leaving scattered slum "clusters," as they are called by the government, tucked along railroad tracks, wedged between government-approved residential colonies, and dotted across the now rapidly expanding periphery. As a result, one sees few slums in Delhi while traveling on its main streets, creating the sense, among slum and non-slum residents alike, that slums are anomalies, mere aberrations from the visual and legal norm. Demographic numbers, however, do not confirm this common observation: only a quarter of the city's population of 15 million lives in "formal" residential colonies, the rest residing in unauthorized colonies, *bastis*, resettlement colonies, or the old walled city (GNCTD, 2004b). Similar data are not available for individual districts within Delhi, but given that there have been more slum demolitions in core areas of the city, the relative percentage of occupants living in "formal" colonies is likely to be lower near Shiv Camp, which is in more peripheral West Delhi. Along the same lines, the Municipal Corporation recently estimated that 70% of the city's buildings are "illegal" for violating building codes or land-use plans,²⁷ suggesting that the legal "norm" in Delhi is to be illegal. Nonetheless, the discrepancy between the city's increasingly world-class "look" and its class makeup, combined with (i) the intensifying enclosure and fragmentation of slums into denser settlements and (ii) the government's celebration of world-class urban monuments (for example, the Delhi Metro, shopping malls, and gated condominiums) perpetuate the overall sentiment that slums represent a visual affront to contemporary urban aesthetics. Figure 22 and Figure 23 show Shiv Camp residents' responses to my question of whether there are more huts (*jhuggis*) or *kotis* in the colony surrounding Shiv Camp and in Delhi, respectively. Within Delhi as a whole, and especially near Shiv Camp, most residents (56% and 64% of respondents, respectively) thought that the population living in *kotis* outnumbered that living in *jhuggis*.

²⁷ See Municipal Corporation of Delhi affidavit filed in 2006 in the Delhi High Court in Civil Writ Petition No. 4582 of 2003, Kalyan Sansthan vs. Government of National Capital Territory, Delhi.

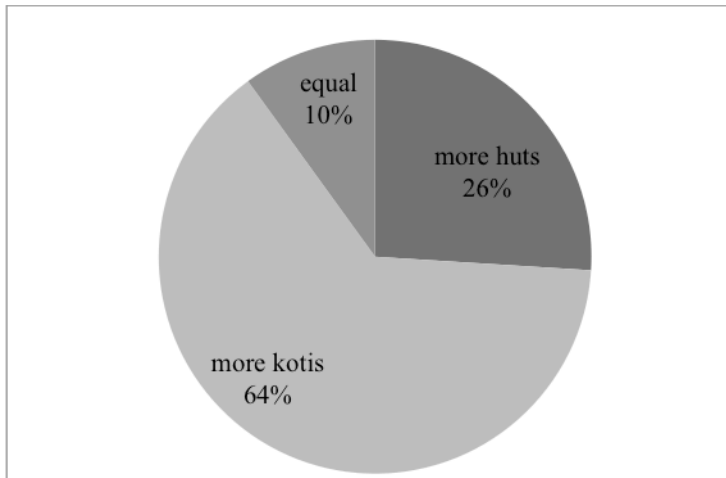


Figure 22. Shiv Camp residents' perception of number of *kotis* vs. huts in the surrounding colony

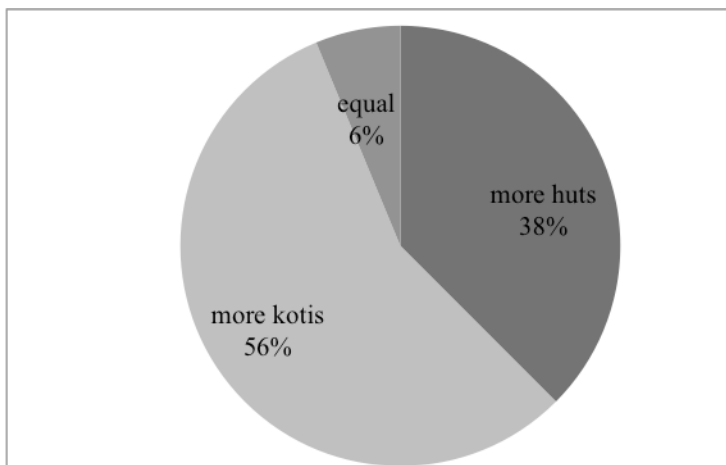


Figure 23. Shiv Camp residents' perception of number of *kotis* vs. huts in all of Delhi

The sense of being outside of the legal and aesthetic norm is especially strong in Shiv Camp for three reasons. First, three archetypical world-class monuments—the Delhi Metro, a five-star hotel, and a 12-storey shopping mall—have recently been built within a kilometer of Shiv Camp. The sheen of these structures' excessive mirrored glass and polished steel testifies to their material modern-ness, making the brick, tin and tarp of Shiv Camp huts incongruous blotches on the landscape. The look of the area's world-class buildings, as well as that of the corporate-branded consumer-subjects who occupy them,²⁸ evinces a deeper economic rift that marks capitalized from under-capitalized spaces: private land versus public land, “planned” houses and

²⁸ As Rana Dasgupta (2009) writes of branding and social status in Delhi: “There is nothing superficial about brands in contemporary Delhi. This is a place where one's social significance is assumed to be nil unless there are tangible signs to the contrary, so the need for such signs is authentic and fierce. And in these times of stupefying upheaval, when all old meanings are under assault, it is corporate brands that seem to carry the most authority. Brands hold within them the impressive infinity of the new global market. They hold out the promise of dignity and distinction in a harsh city that constantly tries to withhold these things.”

flats versus slums, “big people” vs. “little people,” binary terms Shiv Camp residents increasingly use to describe their city today. As Buck-Morss (1989: 87) writes, such monuments of modernity are “called upon to give visible 'proof' of historical progress,” to inscribe into urban form both an expectation of (self-)transformation and a dividing line between what fits this imagined future and what does not.²⁹

This divide is further entrenched for a second reason. While for many years Shiv Camp grew and changed along with the surrounding residential colony, that colony has since grown to vastly surpass Shiv Camp in physical stature and area, with private *kotis* encircling and towering above Shiv Camp’s tightly packed huts. The *kotis* are three or four storey brick and concrete houses, often with gates, carefully manicured gardens or boundary walls on their street side, and sometimes with façades embellished with fake columns, decorative arches, or vaulted windows sculpted out of cement in what architect Gautam Bhatia (1994) calls “Punjabi baroque.” During the course of my fieldwork in Shiv Camp, one of the abutting *kotis* was being rebuilt from the ground up, and two nearby *kotis* underwent exterior stylistic work to enhance the “posh character” of the building.³⁰ In contrast, Shiv Camp looks much like it did ten years ago, contributing to the sense among residents that they are anachronistic: remnants of the past, clinging to their place, outsiders in a city that has been home for decades. This experience of stasis in a sea of change, of an anticipation of a future “slum-free” city, is enhanced by the absence of the 122 homes that were razed in 2007, as well as the demolition of two nearby slums in 2006.

Finally, as the urban aesthetic field has increasingly been tuned, as I described in Chapter 3, to the symbolic goal of attaining world-class city status, the diverse array of visual forms across the city have come under an increasingly homogenized lens of aesthetic scrutiny. As middle class codes of comportment and appearance are increasingly codified as near-universal standards of taste by (i) their serial repetition throughout middle class residential and commercial spaces, (ii) media and government celebrations of world-class development projects, and (iii) the privatization of once public land; those outside this class encounter these standards as a universal standard of daily life: an aesthetic norm that is used not only to judge them, but by which they are expected to judge themselves and others. In other words, the way in which the economy of visibility that I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 structures available modes of viewership and patterns of intelligibility supplies slum residents with a collective experience established via embodied sensory experience and norms of viewership. Thus, if the everyday habits and sensibilities of the lower and upper classes in Indian cities have historically been mutually unintelligible—divided by unique appropriations of public and private land—then the deepening of propertied forms of citizenship and the “distribution of the sensible” with which they are associated (e.g., the normalization of middle class aesthetic preferences) work to endow the urban poor with a keen sense of the terms on which urban space is increasingly evaluated. The

²⁹ Writing in the late 1960s, Baudrillard argued that a symptom of bourgeois modernity is the need to give visible proof to the equality of happiness: happiness “had to be measureable in terms of signs and objects” that were evident through “*visible criteria*” (quoted in Crary, 1989: 98).

³⁰ For examples of anthropological studies of architecture and the organization of domestic space as practices of social distinction, see Bourdieu (1979) and Sahlins (1976).

urban poor, in other words, participate in the world-class “community of sense” (Ranciere, 2009), even if that community carries with it fraught political implications.³¹

The mysterious, almost magnetic force of world-class aesthetics is felt especially prominently on the urban peripheries and in neighborhoods that have only recently been shaped by the world-class imaginary. As property prices began soaring in Delhi following the liberalization of the land market in the mid-1990s (see Introduction), real estate developers and speculators began to expand their horizons beyond the urban core to the less dense and undercapitalized peripheries. By re-branding these spaces as potential sites for “greener” homes that are closer to nature, near but not too close to the main city, real estate developers have effectively presented neighborhoods beyond South Delhi as desirable destinations for young professionals. As a result, the peripheries have seen torrid increases in property price over the past decade and a half. A property developer who works in the colonies adjacent to Shiv Camp told me, “After the Metro came, property prices doubled, just like that. From 2005 to 2006, your home was worth twice as much if you lived in [this colony].” In 2007, he said that the land for a standard *koti* in the area, a 125 square meter plot, would sell for at least Rs. 1.75 crore (~\$400,000). All the property dealers with whom I spoke confirmed that property prices have gone up more than 500% since 2000 and believed that this trend was nowhere near abating: “Reliance bought a 2.5 acre plot near here about a year back. The land used to be a government wedding ground, but now it will be made into a commercial complex. Reliance paid 290 crore [~\$70 million] for it! So prices are going through the roof.” When I asked how things would change in the next few years, he replied, “By 2010 the Commonwealth Games will come and the whole city will look different. There will be different buses, a different map, different buildings, and different people. People who earn 50,000 rupees per month will stay in Delhi. Everyone else will have to live outside. Delhi is changing like that. It will only be for that type of people.”

Shiv Camp residents encounter this perspective in multiple arenas of daily life. Because most men are involved in construction work, they are acutely aware of the changing political economy of land in the city, and they would often marvel in their conversations with me at the spectacular changes taking place both in the built environment and in the price of land. Certain men who were construction contractors and who had greater familiarity with the changes in land rent would explain the threat to Shiv Camp in terms of what Neil Smith (1996) calls the “rent gap”: the gap between maximum potential land rent and actually existing land rent. As Kishan told me, “Look here. These *kotis* are all worth 2 crore (20 million) rupees each. The land here? None of us paid for it. They could sell this for crores. Of course they want to kick us off and sell it.” Others simply recognized that a world-class future—a program of urban development many summarized with the phrase “they want to make Delhi into Paris”—meant the extension of new aesthetic codes across the entire territory. In a conversation with Gopal about how Delhi is changing, for example, he said, “The government has made a new map that shows how the new city will look. There will be nice clean roads, big buildings; it will be beautiful and will be clean and maintained. There will be less [traffic] *jam* and not so much filth.” When I asked how he knew what the map looked like, he said, “Well, we have not seen the map. That is only for

³¹ I have not yet discussed how slum residents engage, contest and rework this aesthetic through their participation in this community of sense, which is my aim in the following chapters. This chapter is principally concerned with the terms on which the world-class economy of visibility supplies a particular community of sense, how slum residents enter into that community, and the exclusions it entails.

government officials to see, but they tell everyone about it. They say that the city will look beautiful and have all these things. The newspapers tell us about it, and we read those and learn about the map slowly.” While revisions to the Delhi Master Plan were being widely discussed in the media at the time, this hypothetical “map” clearly lays out more than just land-use codes and infrastructure norms. In Gopal’s mind at least, it also establishes a complete vision of urban space against which normative assessments of individuals, neighborhoods and whole urban districts can be rendered; it suggests the presence of a coherent aesthetic lens for viewing the urban, what Walter Benjamin called “the standardization of perception” (Crary, 1989: 103).

Like Gopal, most residents of Shiv Camp understood that a world-class city means a “slum-free” city, that many in the city equate slum-removal with an act of “clean up,” and that this type of aesthetic upgradation is one metric by which “improvement” is being assessed by *sarkar* today. Figure 24 shows that 3 of 4 Shiv Camp residents believe that recent changes in the cityscape have made Delhi cleaner, while Figure 25 shows that 3 in 5 believe these same changes constitute “improvement.” The youth, whose views are not represented by the survey data, displayed an even stronger enthusiasm for the changing urban environment. They often spoke with great excitement about the new malls, hotels and cineplexes springing up around them, even while acknowledging their constitutive exclusions. Sitting among a group of boys in their late teens to late 20s, Sanjay began describing how the nearby district center, which houses domestic and foreign retailers, numerous upscale eateries, and a movie theater, is a sign of a bright future in Delhi: “It is something you have to go and see, especially in the evening. Women dance there every night and you can just go and watch. It is fun to go there to pass time.” Ignoring another boy who disagreed about the presence of regular dancing women, he continued: “One has to go and see these places, like [the cineplex nearby]. They are so great and nice. So clean and fun to see.” The other boy again interjected, saying one cannot just roam there without purpose: “You have to pay to go inside for it to be fun.” Rajesh disagreed, saying, “No, you can even enjoy just looking from the outside. Just being there and walking around and seeing.”

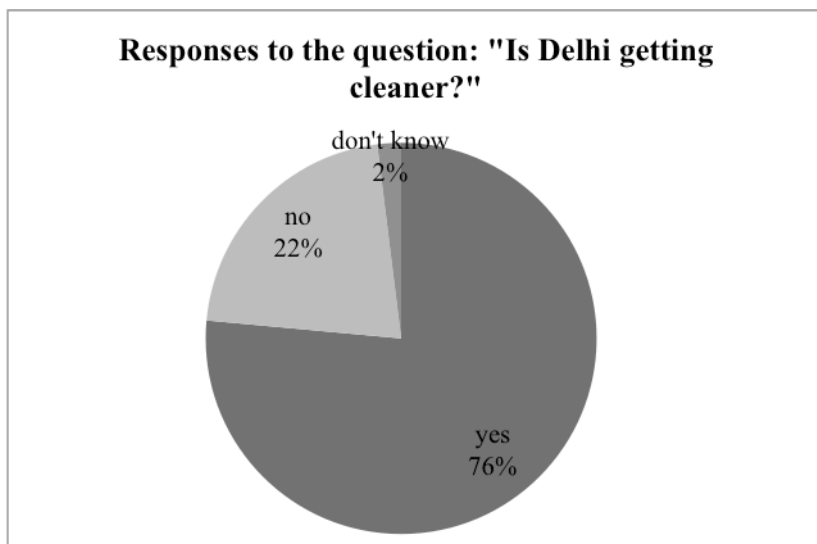


Figure 24. Shiv Camp residents’ sense of “cleanliness” in Delhi

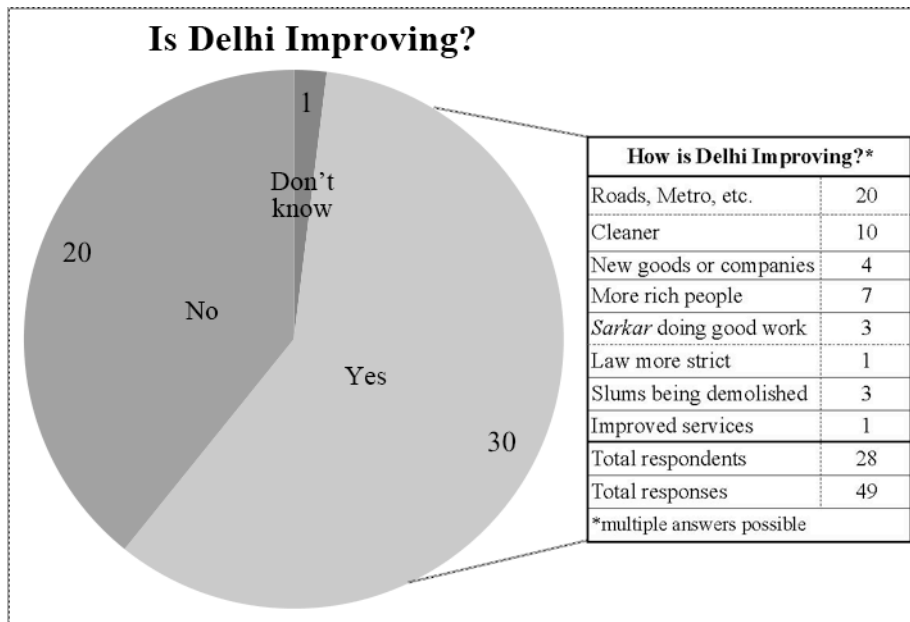


Figure 25. Shiv Camp residents' sense of "improvement" in Delhi

Sanjay's statement indicates that the feeling of being part of urban change, the pleasure of "just being there and walking around and seeing," is a form of urban life that has taken on increasing significance in the lives of slum residents. Whether actualized through boys' fascination with the latest mobile phones, through the excitement of riding the Metro in a mixed-class environment, or in merely residing in the capital city of one of the world's most rapidly growing economies, the world-class vision is something in which many Shiv Camp residents feel a deep affinity and seductiveness. As Donald (1999: 47) writes of Second Empire Paris, "the displacements brought about by Haussmannisation lent a fantastic and elusive quality to life in the city," resembling the contradictory moment at hand in Delhi where the threat of "displacement collides with the dream of a better life" (Baviskar, 2003: 97). As Delhi changes, so too do residents want to acquire attributes and statuses that indicate their "place" in the world-class future. Citizenship, as a form of belonging, then, is actualized for Shiv Camp youth through particular forms of aesthetic practice and engagement as much as the attainment of formalized rights. Shiv Camp residents encounter with and adoption of world-class aesthetics, then, requires adopting a particular subject-position vis-à-vis the complex urban sensorium, rationalizing certain futures as desirable or inevitable, and undergoing a complex techno-aesthetic training by which the experience of the city changes along with one's imagined place in it.

Aesthetic training: The slum survey

The overwhelming sense of a rapidly approaching future—the subjunctive desire for and anticipation of a city yet to come—is built into everyday experiences of the changing urban landscape, but also takes form through particular narratives of improvement. One concrete technique by which slum residents are inserted into an aspirational field structured by the narrative of the world-class city and the idealized model of propertied, middle class citizenship is the slum survey. Since the formation of the Delhi Development Authority in 1957, slum settlements were surveyed by field staff in both the DDA and revenue department to monitor and assess uses of public land. In 1990, when V.P. Singh initiated the first comprehensive survey of

Delhi slums and issued what came to be known as V.P. Singh tokens, the survey took on a different function. Previously part of the sovereign exercise of knowing and controlling the territory, the survey began to take on a more governmental function aimed at directing the slum population's interests towards the "convenient ends" of a modernizing and orderly city.

The V.P. Singh token gave token-holding slum dwellers a permanent right to live in the city, defining all registered slum families as Delhi residents and formalizing their right to resettlement in case their slum was removed. At the time of a slum demolition, therefore, any slum family that could prove it had resided in Delhi since before 1990—most easily by showing a V.P. Singh token—was entitled to a government-issued resettlement plot. To slum dwellers looking back at the resettlement schemes from the 1970s and 1980s, however, resettlement meant much more than the right to the city. Resettlement was also seen as a means to escape the stigmatized space of the slum and was thus viewed as a pathway to improvement.

A complex mix of government rhetoric, popular history, and personal desire informed slum dwellers' conceptualization of resettlement through most of the 1990s. Early, targeted slum resettlement actions carried out during Indira Gandhi's rule as Prime Minister in the 1970s and early 1980s came to be viewed by slum dwellers as a best-case scenario. In these limited resettlement drives, slum dwellers were usually relocated within a five kilometer radius of their previous settlements and given well-serviced and relatively large plots, free of cost, on a permanent leasehold basis. Such resettlement sites have since been developed and integrated into the surrounding residential areas, bearing little to no visual distinction with the neighboring, middle class residential colonies.³² Due to financial and space constraints, the terms of resettlement were far less favorable by the early 1990s,³³ with plot sizes having decreased from 50 square meters in the 1970s to 12.5 square meters for those with ration cards after 1990, and less than a third of displaced slum families were receiving resettlement plots by the late 1990s (Leena, 2007). Further, while plots provided on a leasehold basis could be sold much the same as private property, resettlement plots are now provided with five-year licenses, after which the

³² The slum re-housing that took place in the 1980s was called "resettlement," whereas by the mid-1990s it was formally called "relocation." The terms and reasons behind such re-housing differed, with the latter carrying weaker tenure rights, but the point here is that slum dwellers in the post-1990 scenario did not recognize this distinction and saw contemporary relocation programs through the lens of the positive experience of earlier slum re-housing programs. Slum residents and government officials use the same word in Hindi (*punarvaas*) to describe both types of re-housing. This positive interpretation of resettlement of course militates against the experience of forced resettlement during the Emergency (1975-1977), in which earning resettlement often hinged on agreeing to be sterilized or recruiting others to do so. But, as Tarlo (2003) argues, the Emergency has been systematically purged from state history and popular memory, and it is not rare to encounter slum residents envious of the plots people received during this authoritarian moment.

³³ Resettlement plots are now 12.5 or 18 m² in size, depending on the date of one's residence proof, whereas they were 50 m² in the 1970s. See Tarlo (2003: 73) for a history of resettlement eligibility and plot size from the 1960s through 1990s. Unlike old resettlement colonies located within the city limits, current resettlement plots are typically more than 30 kilometres away from residents' original jobs and homes, have access to far fewer public services than slums, have few local job prospects, and have grave health and environmental conditions (see Menon-Sen & Bhan, 2008).

DDA is free to relocate allottees as it sees fit.³⁴ The licenses further stipulate that if the original allottee transfers the plot to another holder, the land will be seized and issued to someone else.³⁵ Despite the decrease in tenure security and service provision, the DDA and Municipal Corporation still actively perpetuated (and continue to perpetuate) the perception of resettlement as a positive process, something akin to private property ownership, through media campaigns and the slum survey.

While attending three of these slum survey exercises, I observed how the survey process trains slum residents to see the city through the lens of world-class aesthetics—to see themselves as “illegal” for being outside the “normal” visual order. The chief officer during all three surveys, after assembling the residents, began by describing the nature of urban development in Delhi. On one occasion, the officer said:

Today Delhi does not look how it used to. In ten years, it won't look like it does today. Delhi is developing. It is cleaning up. Only the best people will live in Delhi. Soon, there will be no JJ clusters here. All the deserving people will stay, but everyone else will have to go. The International [Commonwealth] Games are coming to Delhi and people from all over the world—America, England, Japan—will come here and see our city. We all want Delhi and India's name to grow. Look around; you see the Delhi Metro has come, all these malls have come. It is time for Delhi to rise. That is what we all want. Everyone must fit.

The survey thus starts by invoking world-class aesthetics as the desired end of government. Over the course of the survey, individual surveyors then locate the slum and households being assessed in relation to this norm. For example, one surveyor told an angry resident, “In the whole world, no settlement that looks like this is legal,” and suggested that the resident's demand to remain settled at his current location is at odds with the interests of the rest of the city. “Can't you see that nobody wants this type of slum?... You bother [*pareshan*] these people,” he said with a gesture toward the neighboring middle class colony.” The slum's physical conditions thus get tied to a notion of illegality and are, in part, the deficiencies of the population that must be corrected. These deficiencies, surveyors either directly stated or indirectly intimated, include overcrowding, congestion, unhygienic living conditions, lack of property ownership, and other environmental and public health risks that slum dwellers' “illegal” residency imposes on the land.

In addition to highlighting the technical deficiency of the slum population, the officers describe a possible means by which residents can escape the label illegal: by following the procedures of

³⁴ Despite the state's legal power to do so, allottees have never been evicted after their initial five-year license expires.

³⁵ These licenses are provided in accordance with the Slum Basti Multi Purpose Cooperative Society Bye-Laws, the object of which is to “acquire land on Lease or License basis for eligible slum dwellers as per policy of the Govt. from Slum Wing or other land owning Agencies for construction of residential accommodation for its [the cooperative's] members.” The Bye-Laws say of such a license that members are provided with “a right of self occupancy only[,] which may be either lease or rent or as may be prescribed by the Govt. but ownership of land and of residential building, [*sic*] shall remain with the licensing authority i.e., Slum & JJ Wing of MCD or other land owning agency.”

the survey, government will improve eligible slum dwellers by resettling them to serviced plots, thus removing their deficiencies and furnishing the conditions necessary for “normal” urban life. Only by following the enumerative steps of the survey, residents are told, will resettlement be provided. These steps include the following: Residents have to collect all forms of their residence proof (e.g., ration cards, identity cards, voter cards, V.P. Singh tokens) and have them ready when the officers reach their houses (see Figure 26). Next, they have to remain present at their homes so that their family can be registered, display their pre-1990 residence proof, demonstrate a legitimate (non-commercial) use of the land, and have their house inscribed with a survey number and recorded on a chart (see Figure 27). Finally, they have to wait in line after the entire settlement has been enumerated and have their residence proof scrutinized by the chief officer, who adds the family to a list of those either “eligible” or “ineligible” for resettlement. In slums whose demolition is imminent, residents who are added to the former list (and thus deemed “improvable”) have to sign a piece of paper agreeing to the terms of resettlement, which include paying a sum of money and abiding by certain land use and site development norms. These calculated steps aim to “render technical” (Li, 2007; Rose, 1999) the complex “slum problem” by depicting slum resettlement as a procedural, not political, exercise. Bracketing off the question of whether the slum should be removed or not, the survey concentrates attention on resettlement eligibility, the success or failure of which is placed upon the internal dynamics, desires and practices of the slum population itself.



Figure 26. The surveyed: a resident of a slum displays his ration card and the allotment slip the DDA gave him, entitling him to an eighteen square meter resettlement plot. His hut would be demolished the following day. Photo by author.



Figure 27. Shambu indicating the place on his hut where surveyors mark hut numbers during slum surveys. Photo by author.

During the course of the survey process, the survey team compiles preliminary summaries of households according to three categories: eligible, ineligible, and ambiguous. Residents become aware of these overall numbers as well as their own classification status. Households marked “ineligible” or “ambiguous” thereafter attempt to provide further proof or bargain otherwise to enter the “eligible” category. Community leaders are often called into this negotiation process, out of which some reconfiguration of the final numbers emerges. Because resettlement is something many residents desire—either over and above continued habitation in their slum or in recognition that they are better off being resettled than risking protest against the demolition—slum residents see the act of being enumerated and registered as a positive technology, something to be promoted and worth struggling to attain. The first effect of the slum survey, then, is to draw slum residents into the practice of government by soliciting interest in the survey process: the introduction of the right to resettlement achieves this. Second, it fosters the slum population’s desire for resettlement—that is, the desire to be deemed permanent and legal by the state and public—by (a) identifying a deficiency within the slum (its violation of law, its lack of recognition by the state and general public), and (b) depicting resettlement as an attainable and desirable means to remove that deficiency. In doing so, the survey also encourages slum residents to identify as eligible resettles, “encroachers,” or other terms provided by government. Third, by bifurcating the slum population into “eligible” and “ineligible” categories, the survey divides the interests of the slum population. Residents “eligible” for resettlement are thus provided an incentive to *not* resist displacement, instead viewing it as an inevitable step in the city’s and their own personal development: why oppose the demolition when they are the lucky few granted resettlement? This reduces the number of residents likely to directly oppose slum clearance.

Although the technical aim of the survey is to register and monitor households, surveyors spend as much time narrating the physical traits of the slum as they do producing the survey log. The survey thus becomes a type of narrative technique through which the surveyors constantly move back and forth between describing the particular slum being surveyed and the problems with

“slums in general.” For example, one surveyor said to a group of women, “This area has become a complete [traffic] jam. Delhi can’t function like this. Sarkar will improve these areas, and you. Everyone will benefit. Look at Kali Basti [a nearby slum that had been resettled years earlier]. They have become such good people and the area is clean now.” The survey thus operates by instilling a set of observational practices into the slum population, an act of “impression management” (Goffman, 1959) aimed at educating a proper way of seeing and consuming the city. By constantly pointing to the aesthetic impropriety of the slum (“this area has become a complete jam”) and referencing slum deficiencies to the aesthetic norm established by nuisance law and the repertoire of media and government representations of world-class urbanism, the survey process trains slum dwellers to see slum space through lenses provided by government.

The slum survey thus operates not just as a technique to make individual slums visible, bounded and calculable. It is also about taking easily identifiable, visual attributes of slums and linking those attributes to a particular normative category of space—illegal encroachment. A clear effect of the slum survey is that it makes use of what slum dwellers already know about the slum—that it is dirty, congested, *kachcha* (constructed in a “temporary” fashion), unserviced, on public land, different from private residential colonies—to produce a vision of slum space as illegal and lacking the characteristics necessary for “normal” citizenship. This makes slums knowable through their outer, visible characteristics. Spaces that look like slums, that look dirty and overcrowded, are learned to be illegal, despite their far more complex political, residential and legal histories. Thus, participants in the slum survey learn a way of seeing and identifying the essential traits of urban space and are, in the process, trained to conceptually link locations in the city that share these same traits. That is, “slum space” across the city, as a category, is rendered imaginable and intelligible through the survey. By offering resettlement in conjunction with producing this vision of slum space, the survey shows slum dwellers that the government is attempting to improve this category of space; that individual slum dwellers are part of a larger deficient population whose improvement is necessary for the city’s improvement; and that it is in their interest to cooperate with this process. This “will to improve” (Li, 2007) is induced, as Rose says, “by throwing a web of visibilities, of public codes and private embarrassments over personal conduct: we might term this *government through the calculated administration of shame*” (Rose, 1999: 73). In Delhi, the only difference is that this personal conduct is not an individual act or particular type of “deficient” behavior; it is a status of being. Being a slum dweller in and of itself is criminalized and denigrated through this lens. The slum survey thus operates as a key “technology of perception” (Rajagopal, 2001) that redistributes the aesthetico-political field of possibility—in this case, to make the division laid down by nuisance law between clean/polluting, private/public, legal/illegal *sensible* in the sense of both (i) easily perceptible, and (ii) logical, sensical and natural (see Ranciere, 2004). A key effect of the survey, then, is to recruit slum residents into the new visual regime premised on world-class aesthetics.

Participating in the slum survey requires slum dwellers’ active self-identification as “illegal.” Waiting in line, being compliant with government officers and pleading with them to register your name, displaying your residence proof and being observed and inspected, accepting that the procedure and timing of your home’s demolition is something you neither control nor have a right to influence, and accepting your displacement as a gift from the government are all subjectifying practices that guide slum residents’ desires in predictable ways. As Dean says of the way in which the population’s “identity” becomes a key target of governmental practice:

“Regimes of government do not *determine* forms of subjectivity. They elicit, promote, facilitate, foster and attribute various capacities [in the case of the slum survey, the capacity to be resettled], qualities [supplicatory, dirty] and statuses [illegal] to particular agents [slum dwellers]. They are successful to the extent that these agents come to experience themselves through such capacities..., qualities... and statuses...” (1999: 32). Therefore, as slum dwellers participate in the survey, identify resettlement as a best-case-scenario, and adopt world-class aesthetics as their rationalization of change, they occupy a subject-position—i.e., they “subject” themselves (Foucault, 1983) to the meaning of world-class aesthetic discourse—that sees slums as out of place, as dirty, as illegal. Forced resettlement, through the slum survey, hence comes to be seen not as the violent limit of sovereign power, but as the necessary action of an improving government. Displacement and self-improvement, once situated on opposing poles, are aligned within a narrative of progress.

While the Delhi Development Authority did not conduct a slum survey in Shiv Camp during the course of my research, most residents recall such an exercise having taken place at some point in the previous ten years. Residents would often refer to the survey as the source of their information about the resettlement process. Conversations with slum organizers and residents elsewhere in Delhi confirm that the vast majority of slums in Delhi have undergone a slum survey along these lines at least once after the original 1990 survey, even when the survey is not followed by a demolition.³⁶ This suggests that the slum survey has become a consistent governmental technology of shaping and guiding the slum population’s interest. As I will now show, the way in which the slum survey depicts *bastis* as out of place, along with a deeper remaking in slum subjectivity via the constant threat of displacement, contributes to a broader shift in how urban change is affectively registered among the unpropertied poor.

5.7. Prolepsis

In mid-April, 2007, three months after the January demolition, a group of Municipal Corporation officers entered Shiv Camp, informing residents that the bulldozers would return a week later. The Shiv Camp leadership committee sprung into action, calling lawyers, arranging meetings with government officials, and mobilizing all available political capital to delay the demolition. For most residents, however, this was the moment they had been waiting for. Demolition, by this time, appeared an inevitability to most: it was the future they had already anticipated; a future told and retold through previous visits from government officials, through the neighboring RWA’s petition against Shiv Camp, through the media’s countdown to Delhi’s slum-free future, and through residents’ own desire for a resolution, of whatever sort, to their ambiguous tenure and citizenship status. Throughout my nine months of field research in Shiv Camp, residents frequently evinced this politics of fatigue—this desire for rupture to the empty time of waiting for history, for their fate to be determined, for the next step. As Lalaji said a week after the April demolition, “We have no faith in living here [*yahaa par rehne ka vishvas nahii hai*].”

³⁶ DDA Annual Reports through the 1980s and 1990s show that, each year, fewer than 10% of the structures surveyed and given notice for encroaching public land are demolished. This is because the DDA initiates proceedings under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 1971 only when it intends to use that land for a particular purpose.

After I had become closely engaged in Shiv Camp’s legal struggle—through translating legal documents into Hindi, arranging meetings with lawyers and government officers, and attending court hearings—residents began to regularly ask me for updates on the status of the case against them. In my early months, residents’ most common question was “will we be demolished?”, which was often coupled with an unwillingness to accept displacement as a likely future. With time, however, that frequently asked question morphed into “When will be demolished?” By September 2007, five months after the Municipal Corporation cleared the 122 huts and paved the permanent road bisecting Shiv Camp, residents’ most commonly asked “Will we receive resettlement?”, a question in which the possibility of *not* being demolished no longer figured. My survey perhaps best captures this feeling of the inevitability of displacement: 40 of 50 respondents agreed with the statement “In ten years Delhi will have no *bastis*.”³⁷ To many, Shiv Camp seemed a space of relegation.

On the morning of the April demolition, hundreds of residents assembled at the edge of the settlement, blocking the bulldozers’ and police’s entrance into Shiv Camp. The chief officer responded to this show of force by displaying the High Court order that directed the Municipal Corporation to clear the 45-foot wide road and to ensure that the surrounding inner-colony roads were free of encroachment. After he assured Shiv Camp leaders that he would only clear those areas listed in the order, the residents made way for *sarkar*, and the bulldozers began their work. Residents, while aggrieved, were remarkably at ease. The more than fifty police officers stood spread around the *basti*, chatting with residents as the bulldozers advanced (see Figure 28).



Figure 28. Police officers and Shiv Camp residents watching the bulldozers advance, April 19, 2007. Photo by author.

³⁷ Waquant finds this to be a key feature of the territorial stigmatization he found in the ghettos of Chicago: “two thirds of the inhabitants of the South Side and West Side of Chicago expect that their neighborhood will either stay in the same state of blight or further deteriorate in the future; the only route they see for improvement is to move out, to which nearly all aspire” (2006: 178).



Figure 29. Demolition of 122 *jhuggis* in Shiv Camp, April 19, 2007. Photo by author.



Figure 30. Home no more, April 20, 2007. Photo by author.



Figure 31. The cleared 45-foot-wide path through Shiv Camp, April 22, 2007. Photo by author.

Many people said they were unsure what life would be like elsewhere, but most within the demolition zone had made arrangements in anticipation of this event, relocating their belongings to rented huts elsewhere in Shiv Camp, to nearby rooms in the surrounding colony, or to the homes they owned and had built elsewhere. In a brief, retaliatory moment, a group of residents realized that the neighboring *kotis*, including those owned by the leaders of the RWA that had filed the case against Shiv Camp, had encroached on one of the inner-colony roads. As the bulldozers began toppling the Shiv Camp huts along this road, residents demanded that the Municipal Corporation also raze the boundary walls, driveways, and elevated gardens owned by the violating *kotis*. The Municipal Corporation officers half-heartedly complied, and, in an effort to put further pressure on the officers, those present quickly called upon their neighbors to join them in solidarity to put pressure on the officers to ensure equality before law. Once the main 45-foot wide path had been cleared (see Figure 29, Figure 30, and Figure 31), however, most residents had returned to their daily lives and were busy playing cards, preparing food, or chatting with neighbors. The mass of residents demanding action by the officers remained small, and the excitement of challenging the uneven use of law dissipated.

After the January and April demolitions—two instances of unshielded state violence—residents were unsure who to target or blame for their insecurity... other than themselves. Although anger was often directed at the neighboring RWA, this was not a criticism of the property-owning elite as such. While many residents felt betrayed by their more privileged neighbors, this did not necessarily lead to blame. In fact, many Shiv Camp residents told me that they would do the same thing were they in the *koti* owners' position. As Rampal said, "They have everything. Our living here bothers them. Filth, noise, and mosquitoes come from this place. Every person wants cleanliness. What can we do? In ten years, Delhi will be too expensive for the poor anyway. There won't be room for us." In this way, the violent act of displacement was prefigured in residents' imaginations, envisioned in mind before occurring in reality. The January demolition made the implications of displacement clear to all residents, but the uncertainty surrounding their futures, the limbo of remaining unchanged within an ever-changing landscape, produced a unique experience of time.

The constant repetition of an event in one's mind, the imagination of a future before it takes place, the narration of a city yet to come, produced an experience of prolepsis for most residents: an anticipatory disposition in which the means to one's future, its timing and the particular sequence of events, were unclear, but wherein that future condition was already known. This extended anticipation produced the temporal effect of inevitability, which serves to dampen the shock of violence when it finally takes place. Displacement becomes a given, and its arrival becomes anti-climactic, despite its ruthlessness. One feels outside of history: fate is determined, but its timing is uncertain. "Time becomes palpable; the minutes cover a man like snowflakes" (W. Benjamin, 1968: 184), and individuals long for an experience that can break the unending continuity, the repetition of the same. As Shambu told me after the April demolition, "One day we're going to have to leave this place. Such jhuggis have no place in Delhi. Our future isn't here." Or, as Walter Benjamin (*ibid.*) writes, "The man who loses his capacity for experiencing feels as though he is dropped from the calendar," outside of history. This feeling of passivity, of a loss of control and belonging, of detachment from the production of urban space and historical

time,³⁸ led many Shiv Camp residents to desire rupture, of whatever sort, in order to re-enter history. As Lachmi (quoted above) told me, "... just wipe all of us poor out! Really. Then the city will be rid of us. We also won't have to worry about this all."

This externalization of time, this experience of life events as pre-given, as if part of a pre-determined time-series, is what Benjamin describes as the predominant mode of historical experience in the shocking world of capitalist modernity. Benjamin specifically described this as an experience of machine time, "the rhythm of the second hand," "the empty passage of time;" a form of experience free of reflection, in which we pass from moment to moment, without making experience socially meaningful (ibid.: 183-4, 199).³⁹ For Benjamin, it is the proliferation of "shock" in everyday life that produces this "increasing atrophy of experience" (ibid.: 159), this alienation from the city and feeling of being expelled from history. And, it is Benjamin's concept of "shock" that I now draw from to explain the inevitability of displacement Shiv Camp residents encountered, to explain how displacement was anticipated as a means to insert oneself back into the production of urban space-time—i.e., to connect with the world-class city-building project—and to explain how the conscious rationalization of violence prior to its occurrence informed particular modes of daily habitation. What I want to suggest is that the fetishization of change inherent in the spectacular redevelopment of Delhi's urban landscape constructs the present as a "de facto preface" to what appears an immanent and therefore realizable future (Krupar, 2007: 6).

Benjamin relies on a Freudian insight to explain the operation of shock: "the idea that consciousness is a shield protecting the organism against stimuli" (Buck-Morss, 1992: 16).⁴⁰ Consciousness thus works to parry shock: "The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli" (W. Benjamin, 1968: 163). Consciousness, on this formulation, is a buffer the ego employs to protect the human sense-response system from "the excessive energies at work in the external world," and "the more readily consciousness registers these shocks, the less likely they are to have a traumatic effect" (ibid.: 161). For Benjamin, the type of shell shock Freud explored through war trauma, for example, "has become the norm" of modern life (W. Benjamin, 1968: 162): "In industrial production no less than modern warfare, in street crowds and erotic encounters, in amusement parks and gambling casinos, shock is the very essence of modern experience" (Buck-Morss, 1992: 16).⁴¹ How the human psyche is trained to respond to these shocks through mental

³⁸ Lefebvre (2009: 191) makes a similar observation about capitalist modernity: "Time has disappeared in the social space of modernity. Lived time loses form and social interest except for the time of work.... The primacy of the economic, and still more, of the political, leads to the supremacy of space over time."

³⁹ Benjamin differentiates between this pre-reflective, mechanical form of experience and a rich, historically attuned form of experience through the German words *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, respectively, each translated as "experience." See Jay's (2006) *Songs of Experience* for a discussion of how these two concepts have been discussed in continental philosophy, and Chapter 8 in particular for how Benjamin uses the terms to examine the effects of the trauma of modern capitalist life.

⁴⁰ Benjamin (1968: 161) cites Freud: "For a living organism, protection against stimuli is an almost more important function than the reception of stimuli; the protective shield is equipped with its own store of energy... [operating] against the effects of the excessive energies at work in the external world."

⁴¹ See Frisby (1988: 67) for a discussion of how Benjamin's conceptualization of shock draws from that of Georg Simmel, who argued that modern life itself "makes us more and more sensitive to the shocks and turmoils which we confront in the immediate proximity and contact with people and things."

rationalizations (conscious reflection), then, becomes a central question of how political possibilities are forged and linked to bodily dispositions and the experience of social change.

Benjamin draws on Freud's hypothesis "not to confirm it" (W. Benjamin, 1968: 160), but rather to use it as a lens for exploring the experience of modernity. For him, "The acceptance of shocks is facilitated by training in coping with stimuli, and, if need be, dreams as well as recollection may be enlisted" (W. Benjamin, 1968: 162). Here, "dreams and recollection" are not simply individual psychic processes, but, as I have suggested, they are produced by specific technologies of perception and mobilized via collective memory and norms of aesthetic experience. That is, one has to consider the various techniques that mediate shock by bringing into consciousness (in the case of Shiv Camp) the violence of demolition. So long as consciousness—which provides mental rationalizations of sensory perception—can remain alert as a screen against stimuli, Benjamin suggests, then the shock impulses of an increasingly hazardous urban environment will remain in the sphere of "machine time," lived through safely—i.e., without damaging the psyche—but without registering as cultural experience [*Erfahrung*]. This is the contradiction: while consciousness protects the psyche, its rationalization of threats disassociates them from their broader historical context, from tradition, and from their connectedness with the space-time of the city: consciousness is a "shock absorber" (ibid.: 176) that comforts the psyche, but "comfort isolates" (174).

To explain how the experience of time I am describing in Shiv Camp—the repetition of the same, the drilling into consciousness of prepared reactions to anticipated stimuli (demolition)—becomes a normal condition of modern life, Benjamin compares the alienation of the city dweller with the alienation of the factory worker.⁴² Quoting Marx, Benjamin writes that "All machine work... requires early drilling of the worker" (176), and that "workers learn to co-ordinate 'their own movements with the uniformly constant movements of an automaton'" (175). Reading Poe's representations of the psyche of the urban crowd, Benjamin finds that the same drilling of the factory worker, his alienation from experience, can be found in the automatic response of the city dweller to the shock of the modern metropolis: "pedestrians act as if they had adapted themselves to the machines and could express themselves only automatically. Their behavior is a reaction to shocks. 'If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers'" (176). "Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy. Circumscribing the experience of shock, he calls this a 'kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness'" (W. Benjamin, 1968: 175). By drilling individuals to respond to external stimuli through conscious rationalizations, they are equipped to manage the shock of urban life, but not to *live* it.

While Benjamin's aim was to explain the experience of capitalist modernity more generally, I find his insights extremely useful in considering how techniques of aesthetic training can dull the sensory response to Marx's "so-called primitive accumulation;" i.e., how they facilitate the normalization of a "crystal-clear relation of expropriation" into a rationalized procedure—Marx's "ordinary run of things." Not just through the tedium of the factory floor or the sensory overload of the urban phantasmagoria, but more specifically through directed techniques that train unique sensory responses and that insert sensory data within a coherent narrative is it that "the perception of time is supernaturally keen; every second finds consciousness ready to

⁴² "The shock experience which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to what the worker 'experiences' at his machine" (W. Benjamin, 1968: 176).

intercept its shock” (W. Benjamin, 1968: 184). The slum survey, the constant narration of a slum-free future, and the celebration of an urban form premised on the erasure of existing lived space all serve to put into consciousness a rationalization of a shock before its occurrence.⁴³ In Shiv Camp, consciousness is mobilized not only in relation to past or present shocks, but also in anticipation of a forthcoming shock: individual affects are trained to respond to pre-narrated shocks on terms aligned with the world-class future; elements of the psyche are transformed in advance to meet the conditions of the forthcoming future. The narration and anticipation of demolition prior to its occurrence not only inserts residents into a time-series that feels outside and disconnected from history—i.e., residents see a changing city, but their change will only arrive with the bulldozer—but also leads residents to view demolition as a necessary pathway to reconnecting with a “true” experience of the city.⁴⁴ This is the profoundly penetrating nature of the apparatuses of affect, the manner in which a recurrent vision invades (is inserted into) consciousness, modifies the realm of the possible, and directs the imagination. It was the announcement of History before its occurrence, the anticipation of what is to come, that made illegality and temporariness ontological givens in Shiv Camp. Illegality was embodied even before imposed by law.

Through the complex techno-aesthetic training I described in the previous sections, as well as the anticipatory disposition slum residents acquire via the changing visual landscape—one in which the cityscape itself lends a teleological reading of an already-known, slum-free future—Shiv Camp residents have been supplied with a narrative of urban improvement, a vision of order and beauty, necessitating their displacement. While they may rationally oppose this end, this opposition produces a contradiction in the self, as their own affective response to the changes it entails has been aligned to the dream of a world-class future. How this end is rationalized through the promise of world-class citizenship, and how government resettlement allays residents’ fears and constructs displacement as a pathway of improvement are questions to which I turn in the following chapter.

5.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the means by which many residents of Shiv Camp have come to perceive slum demolition as an inevitable step in Delhi’s world-class city-building project. I specifically argued that residents adopt world-class aesthetics—and in some instances the middle class tropes of the “dirty slum” described in Chapter 3—as a strategy to position themselves as potential world-class subjects. In other words, as the world-class aesthetic becomes increasingly hegemonic, slum residents register the sharp binary it produces between

⁴³ Quoting Valery, Benjamin (*ibid.*, 161) writes, “Recollection is... an elemental phenomenon which aims at giving us the time for organizing the reception of stimuli.”

⁴⁴ Commentators have recently noted a similar expectation of displacement, or anticipation of the loss of “tradition,” in areas of rapid rural transformation. Chatterjee (2008: 59), for example, writes of peasant production in India that “the sense of a looming threat, the ever present danger that small peasant agriculture will, sooner or later, have to succumb to the larger forces of capital” has produced “a generation of peasants whose principal motivation seems to be to stop being peasants.” Rigg (2006: 189) too finds that in many rural areas of Southeast Asia, farming “has become a low status occupation to be avoided,” which has led smallholders to make efforts to accelerate their transition to distant, often unknown occupations and locales in hopes of a better future.

“public nuisance” and “private citizen.” Adopting nuisance talk, insisting on one’s “improvability” and desire for a world-class visual landscape, and struggling to define oneself as eligible for government resettlement represent efforts to re-inscribe or re-imagine the self on the positive side of this binary—to prepare oneself for the future city. The “inevitability” of world-class redevelopment, I thus suggested, is actualized, in part, through slum residents’ own desires, actions and politics. It is not a forgone conclusion to which they are resigned, but an active social imaginary in which they participate.

This is a necessarily contradictory position: on the one hand, slum residents’ status as occupants of public land ideologically inclines them to contest the process of land privatization and the displacements it entails. On the other hand, their insertion into world-class aesthetic discourse, and the anticipation of a slum-free, world-class city aesthetically disposes them to read slum removal as a program of improvement and thereby empathize with the bourgeois politics driving contemporary slum demolitions. Slum residents’ *ideological objection* and *aesthetic acceptance* of demolition, however, does not strike them as contradictory because, as Eagleton (1990: 88) reminds us, thought and aesthetic taste “remain on different planes, signify different registers, and to that extent do not interfere with one another even when they yield up mutually incompatible versions of reality.” Shiv Camp residents’ cognitive recognition that the “world-class city” means a slum-free city does not contradict their aesthetic desire for such a city, because aesthetic judgment operates by assigning to the “object itself a power and plentitude... which belongs properly to ourselves alone” (ibid.). That is, in adopting world-class aesthetics, Shiv Camp residents read the world-class city as *objectively* desirable—their subjective response to the image of the world-class city gets interpreted as universal. To be sure, many Shiv Camp residents are vehemently opposed to being resettled elsewhere, but the technologies of perception I described at work in Delhi—which include direct governmental techniques like the slum survey as well as the more diffuse circulation of new urban aesthetics and landscape changes—compel many residents to register slum demolition as a necessary step in Delhi’s improvement: the bitter pill in a city’s evolution. The world-class aesthetic, we thus see, provides a means not just to measure Delhi against other “global cities,” but also, as Krupar (2007: 5) says, to “measure up” society. In the following chapter, I turn to how private property becomes a fetishized object, a venerated target of urban life. It is there that I explore how the experience of uncertainty, combined with the aesthetic training I explored here, construct resettlement as a means to obtaining a private plot of land, and how the pursuit of private property and the dreamworld it mobilizes help insert the violence of displacement into a compelling urban imaginary.

Chapter 6. The Myth of Private Property

“Going to Bawana [a resettlement colony], people improve a lot. Once *jhuggi* residents arrive there, they don’t drink so much; they stop gambling. All these bad habits go away.... If we get plots there, we’ll be better off. Our children will go to school, and we will find good work.” - Jagdish

“If we receive a plot, all our problems will go away. We will become big people, like the *koti* owners. Our men will find good work; our children will get good educations; our daughters will marry good boys. There, life will become good. We will have big houses and maybe even a car.” -Ramkali

6.1. Possessive property

These quotations testify to the transformative power Shiv Camp residents often attributed to government-issued resettlement plots. To Jagdish and Ramkali, resettlement offered not only enhanced tenure security, but also a means to a more substantive form of citizenship and improved livelihood and lifestyle. Resettlement was a topic of regular conversation during my fieldwork, an object that often incited passionate discussion and controversy. Talk of resettlement and private property often led residents into a subjunctive register evocative of a hypothetical, sometimes dream-like future. For many of my interlocutors, private property was the source of fortune, a token of belonging, and an object over which they were willing to make extraordinary sacrifice. In this chapter, I examine how land, and private property in particular, took on fantastical qualities in Shiv Camp residents’ narratives, mobilizing new urban imaginaries and inhering the power to magically transform both self and city. Efforts to conjure a mental image of a better future through the lens of property ownership, I will show, were simultaneously efforts to align oneself with the speculative promises of world-class development—that is, to index propriety to property.

Recent changes in Delhi have produced a dazzling display of new wealth, along with an exponential increase in new commodities and signifiers of value. Objects of urban fantasy once encountered in only exceptional circumstances are now thrust before the eyes of even the poorest households through both the widespread penetration of new commodity-images into public culture¹ as well as the capitalization of land markets long accustomed to what economists once (somewhat) facetiously called “the Hindu rate of growth.” For the laboring men and women of Shiv Camp who are set apart from the speculative economy driving changes in Delhi’s urban form—i.e., for those with neither capital nor land to play the real estate game—the city itself sometimes appeared ghostly and “phantom-like” (Marx, 1867 [1990]: 128), as though the earth were itself animate, erecting new buildings and guiding human energies. The rewards that might come from this rapidly changing landscape—e.g., improved employment and commodity

¹ As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently commented: “The electronic media carries the lifestyles of the rich and famous into every village and every slum.” From the press release titled “PM’s address at CII annual general meeting – 2007,” Press Information Bureau, May 24, 2007, <http://www.pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=28178> accessed on January 12, 2010.

consumption—seemed attainable, but always just beyond reach; they could be seen, but not held; value appeared, but could not be apprehended.

While Chapter 4 described the legal codification of a form of propertied citizenship, and Chapter 5 showed how government-run slum survey exercises depict resettlement as a means to property ownership and world-class citizenship, this chapter explores how what I will call the myth of private property produced new divisions within both self and settlement—crystallizing new desires, mobilizing new conceptions of value, and dividing old allegiances. In particular, I seek to show the diverse ways in which world-class aesthetic discourse and the re-structuring of Delhi’s economy created the structural and symbolic conditions out of which private property emerged as an exalted target and fetishized object for Shiv Camp residents: that is, how property is, quite literally, possessive, but also possesses. My overall argument here is that slum residents’ attribution of transformative powers to land arose from their experience of being alienated from both the labor process and the more broadly defined production of the urban. Their difficulty in securing sustained work, the low wages they earned, and their residence in stigmatized spaces contributed to the contradictory experience, which I set out to describe here, of being participants in a vibrant landscape and economy, but estranged from its direct production. This estrangement, however, does *not* mean that the urban poor are not active agents of change: the world-class city-building project relies on the ongoing recruitment of the desires of even the most economically “marginal” populations. Slum residents’ pursuit of resettlement plots, for example, which requires accepting displacement, is a key means by which this project is realized. I thus diverge from Wacquant and Davis’s accounts that read the world’s “surplus populations”²—those functionally disconnected from macroeconomic trends (Wacquant, 2008b: 236)—as “redundant” (Ibid.: 266), without “*any* identifiable economic or political utility” (Ibid.: 18)), and with questionable “historical agency” (Davis, 2006: 201). The world-class city is not a structural inevitability to which the urban poor are resigned, but an active imaginary in which they participate and that relies on their ongoing participation.

Throughout this chapter, I use the language of “value” in two senses. On the one hand, I mean “value” as the “measure of worth” and, on the other, I consider “values” to be the “beliefs and ideas which inform assessments (evaluations) of worthiness” (Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, & Watts, 2000: 886). The concept of “value,” as it is commonly used in human geography, concerns both the study of economic value—as in how capital is accumulated through the labor process—as well as the assessment of social worthiness—as in what is considered desirable, important, or useful for a particular purpose. While much of political economy treats value as the price at which one commodity can be exchanged for another one (exchange value), I follow a Marxist method in seeing the “market forces” that determine exchange value as themselves arising only through the incentives, desires and passions that are produced within historically and geographically specific contexts—i.e., we have to understand the conditions in which humans derive and define usefulness in order to understand how particular value regimes are instantiated. As Retort (2005: 20) cleverly puts it, “there would have been no Black Atlantic of sugars, alcohols, and opiates without the drive to shape subjectivity into a pattern of small (saleable) addictions.”

² Both authors cite other texts in calling “urban outcasts” and informal slum dwellers an “absolute surplus population” (Wacquant, 2008b: 266), a “surplus population,” or “surplus humanity” (Davis, 2006: 175, 201).

Understanding contestations over and contradictions in value requires that we engage in a relational study of both what symbolizes value and the framework within which certain objects/processes and not others are defined as valuable—what Harvey (1996: 11) calls “processes of valuation.” As Wright (2001: 2186) writes, the social production of value is also “a battle over how the materials of value are recognized as such within people and within the things they make.” Thus, while I will to some extent engage in a discussion of exchange value, my primary interest here is in considering how shifting sources of material value (e.g., the perceived decline in the value of labor) shape Shiv Camp residents’ conceptions of social worthiness: value, in the following pages, primarily concerns questions of belonging and desirability, of places, people, and practices. It is in this sense that my interlocutors used the term, either describing things in terms of *kiimat*, the Hindi word for value, or through the English word itself.

I proceed in Section 6.2 by recounting some of the fantastical stories of wealth and value youth told each other and me, which I use to situate their experiences of urban change and to locate the type of land fetishism many Shiv Camp residents evinced. Making sense of how residents came to read land ownership as the key to inserting themselves into a world-class regime of value requires that I next explore the gradual casualization and feminization of work that has taken place in Shiv Camp over recent years, the topic of section 6.3. As men’s ability to access reliable work has waned, Shiv Camp’s broader identity as a settlement of workers has been challenged, throwing into question men’s implicit conceptions of value, work, and home. Section 6.4 considers how the derogation of (especially manual) labor in contemporary Delhi and the rise of more service-based, property-driven, and speculative economies has deepened internal differences within Shiv Camp along axes of age and education, leading to the castigation of internal “others,” who are scapegoated as those responsible for Shiv Camp’s decline. The indeterminacies of work, just like the indeterminacy of when Shiv Camp might be demolished, led many men to locate games of chance within the same experiential horizon as finding employment. Section 6.5 thus turns to the question of fate, exploring the prevalence of gambling as an allegory for Shiv Camp residents’ broader experiences of chance, accident, and the vagaries of slum life. As workers struggle to align themselves with the developmental horizons of world-class Delhi, fate, I show, has become a device both for explaining their marginality and registering a search for alternative life pathways. It is in this context that property often arose as the key to the puzzle of value creation, the means to a changed destiny and improved lifestyle. The proliferation of new forms of value springing from the landscape itself has led many Shiv Camp residents to see resettlement as the key to this new fate, the contradictory meanings of which I explore in section 6.6. I conclude in section 6.7 through the question of how we might understand urban politics today if not on the terms of counter-movements and collective mobilization.

6.2. Magic

I was seated among a group of boys under the *peepal* tree at the edge of Shiv Camp, responding to questions about cities in the US, when Rajiv, a 20-year-old Rajasthani, approached asking if there were tantrics there. I thought this was a lead-in to a question about sex in the West, a topic the boys liked to raise with me, but I misunderstood his cue. Today, he wanted to discuss magic: “There are tantrics here. They make things appear. If you ask them, they can show you anything,

but it only stays for a short time. After that, it goes away, or you have to pay for it. They can get you so many *notes* from the bank. They can show you hundreds of *notes*, but then they have to return them to the bank. They can just make it appear in your hand. They can put jewelry and clothes on you, but it doesn't last. You have to return it, or pay for it." I asked how they do it. "It is magic [*jaadu*]," he said with a smile. "They can show you expensive things, but you can only see them, and then they go away. They aren't yours, but it's still fun."

While Rajiv's was the only discussion of tantrics I encountered during my time in Shiv Camp, boys often told each other fantastical stories about the sudden appearance of wealth, commodities and money in the contemporary city, sometimes suggesting that these objects sprung directly from the landscape itself. On one occasion, Rajesh and Sanjay, boys in their early 20s with slicked back hair who often drove through the middle of the *basti* on Sanjay's motorbike, approached me, saying that Sanjay had found a bill worth "one lakh" on the ground. One lakh what?, I asked, rupees? It was a foreign note, Sanjay said, maybe a dollar? I told him dollars do not come in such high dominations. He persisted, saying it was not a dollar and did not think it was a pound, but he was sure it was real: "Maybe it isn't a note, but more a *draft* from an old time. It was lost by somebody and is very valuable." "*Bhaiya*, take a look!", Rajesh implored. The two boys quickly ran off to collect the note, while I waited with Dhaniram, wishing I had brought my camera.

They delivered the note to me and studiously watched as I inspected it, my status as a foreigner apparently giving me the authority to assess its value. The bill looked real to me, with "100,000" written on its corners. A large, pillared building appeared on one side and an owl on the other. The note was written in a script that I could not recognize, had no Roman text, and was free of images of political figures. I had no idea where the note was from, or if it was real. I told the boys that it was certainly not a dollar or pound, but that it could be real. They looked content with my response, moving on to explain how it landed in Sanjay's hands. Only then did I realize that they were not looking for an assessment of its exchange value; marveling at its appearance and its sudden materialization in their hands was enough.

Sanjay had been walking along the street one day when the note hit his food [*per lag gaya*]. He picked it up, put it in his wallet, and never told anyone about it for an entire year. He began showing it to others only after Rajesh had noticed it when he opened his wallet one day. Over the year of wear and tear, however, the note had developed a tear down the middle. Only after Rajesh saw it and encouraged him to take it to a local moneyman did he attempt to assess its exchange value. Rajesh then jumped in, saying the moneyman had told them that the note was worth "lots of money. Lots!" However, because of the tear, the moneyman would not accept it.³ If he had thought of it earlier, Sanjay said, he would have taken the note right away, but by putting it in his wallet, it "went bad." Both boys continued to assert the value of the note, holding

³ Indian banks long had a habit of stapling currency together. When a teller would remove notes from a bunch, it would often leave a hole in one of the corners. With excessive wear, such notes often became fragile, and many stores and smaller banks would not accept them. I recall numerous instances in the early 2000s having to cycle through bills in my possession to find one acceptable to merchants. The most damaging wear a note could face, however, was a central tear. Sanjay's suggestion that a tear made his note un-exchangeable is thus based on the material history of currency exchange in India.

onto it like a curio,⁴ an artifact that emerged from the landscape and into Sanjay’s grips. Was the note a symbol of value, or of its spontaneous and fleeting appearance?⁵



Figure 32. 100,000 Greek drachma (circa 1944), the same note Sanjay found on the street. Image from Banknotes.com.

A few days after this meeting, while having *chai* with Uncle Ji at his shop, Rajesh and Uday Prakash joined us in conversation. After recounting the story of Sanjay’s note to Uday Prakash and Uncle Ji, Rajesh said that he had similarly happened upon a wad of money one day. “I was just walking and saw this wad of money on the ground.” Bound upon itself, Rajesh picked it up, saying that other people had walked by without even noticing it. He did not recognize the bills, so he started distributing them out to children, thinking they must have been play money (*nakli paisa*). Why else would so many others fail to pick up so much money? He gave away almost all the bills, keeping only one as a souvenir. Later on, his uncle saw him fiddling with the bill and asked where Rajesh had found what turned out to be a dollar! By this time, it was too late; Rajesh had already given his fortune away. Rajesh told this story jovially, expressing no regret for his loss. Luck (*kismet*) brought him this wealth, but he did not recognize its value, so he squandered it.

Value in each of these stories was fleeting, always slipping away, out of reach. Such was the experience of money for many Shiv Camp residents, especially its youth. Laboring boys and men

⁴ A number of boys in Shiv Camp had small foreign currency collections, and I quickly exhausted my supply of U.S. coins adding to their stock. One boy had a collection of coins from England, the U.S., Iran, China, Japan, and Pakistan. It is perhaps no surprise that the stories of wealth the youth often told involved foreign, alien currencies more often than domestic ones. The sudden appearance of new forms of wealth in the city was most easily attributed to foreign processes, either magical or transnational (cf. Taussig, 1997).

⁵ After returning to the U.S. many months later, I found out through an Internet search that the note was a Greek drachma issued in German-occupied Greece during World War II, a period of extremely high inflation (according to Wikipedia, the only textual source I could find on the old currency). See Figure 32, which shows the “ruins of the Temple of Athena Aphaea on Aegina” (<http://rg.ancients.info/owls/paper.html>, accessed January 17, 2010). This “old” drachma was later converted into “new” drachma once Greece entered the Bretton Woods system in the 1950s, and the drachma ceased being legal tender in 2002 when it was replaced by the Euro. I have no idea how this note might have arrived in Shiv Camp.

would occasionally earn good money in a single day, but might go weeks after without a day of work. As Appadurai (2000: 628) has written of the contradictions of wealth in millennial Mumbai, “the circulation of wealth in the form of cash is ostentatious and immense, but the sources of cash are always restricted, mysterious, or unpredictable.” New urban infrastructures and speculative projects, as I discussed in the previous chapter, have brought a variety of new commodity forms and commercial spaces into close proximity with the poor, but most of this is pure sheen: individuals see nice things around them, but cannot possess them. Their stories of the magical appearance and disappearance of wealth were testament to their experience of seeing but not holding wealth—that is, their ability to visually participate in the speculative landscape around them, but not to reap its rewards. This experience, while certainly common among the urban poor, is not unique to them.⁶ My middle class landlord, a retired postal worker, one day used a metaphor similar to the boys’ stories to describe wealth creation, and perhaps to praise his sons’ successful photography business: “There is money just lying on the streets in Delhi. People smart enough can pick it up and become rich; everyone else will be left behind.”

Like the stories of commodity fetishism and devil imagery explored by anthropologists Michael Taussig and Gaston Gordillo, I consider it essential to see “the production of magic as inseparable” from “the magic of production,” or the production of value (Taussig, 1980: 21). Similar too, I find the fabulations⁷ I have retold here revelatory not because they are “ideological mystifications of conditions of dispossession” (Gordillo, 2004: 208) or “ill-conceived instruments of utility” used “to relieve anxiety” when “limitations of reason” overcome people (Taussig, 1980: 14-5), but rather because they provide a lens into how their narrators assign meaning to changing material circumstances. Stories of magic, while often generating disbelief among listeners, were mobilized not to convince others of fundamental truths, but to evoke shared reactions and collective responses from an audience—that is, to try to identify a shared experience.⁸ After Uncle Ji and I marveled at Rajesh’s story of the lost dollars, for example, Rajesh continued to explain the uncanny: “Just like in the village, there are *sheitaans* [devils] here. They do not always do bad [*buraaii*]; sometimes their work is to deceive,” he said. To Uncle Ji, this was going too far: “*Sheitaans* don’t exist!” But Rajesh persisted: “Uncle Ji, if you believe in god, you must also believe in *sheitaans*.” Uncle Ji then changed his tactic, no longer interested in disputing the truthfulness of magic, he used *sheitaans* to make his own point about the changing city: “When there’s not even room for people to live in this world, then where is there room for *sheitaans* [*Jab is duniya mein insaan rehe ke laane jagah nahiin hai, to sheitaan jagah kahaan mile*]?” The three of us burst into laughter. There is no room for *sheitaans* in Delhi. They’d be evicted too!, we joked.

While there are certainly homological similarities between Shiv Camp residents’ examples of magic and those told by the peasant workers encountering wage relations for the first time that

⁶ Marx (1867 [1990]: 190) asserts the normalcy of fabulous tales of money when he writes of political economists’ own theories, “In its function as measure of value, money... serves only in an imaginary or ideal capacity. This circumstance has given rise to the wildest of theories.”

⁷ I do not mean by this term a false statement or belief, but the act of relating an event or experience as a story or fable, the truth of which is secondary to the construction of a shared experience.

⁸ As Benjamin (1968: 161) writes, “It is not the object of the story to convey a happening per se, which is the purpose of information; rather it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening.”

Taussig and Gordillo consider, Shiv Camp residents' stories pertain to the commoditization of land, not labor. Further, while the introduction of "market relations" was "intimately associated with the spirit of evil" (Taussig, 1980: 18) in the accounts of agrarian transition these authors consider, the stories here indicate their narrators' enthusiasm for these new sources of value. If magic for Rajiv, Sanjay, and Rajesh indexed an alternative and unknown source of value, then it was one they found deeply compelling. Land-as-fetish, as automatically producing value, had positive attributes, in part due to the aesthetic training and narrative techniques (e.g., the slum survey) I explored in the previous chapter, but also due to what I will show in the following sections to be private property's auratic qualities. Following Benjamin's much discussed concept of "aura," what I mean by this is that something proximate, within reach and knowable, acquires the quality of distance: you can see it; it is near, but it is fleeting. New sources of wealth seemed accessible, but shined beyond control. This was world-class Delhi for many residents of Shiv Camp: a terrain that could be known but not grasped, wherein possession itself was fetishized, in part becomes of its unattainability. It is this almost spectral power of land—its ability to be owned, but also its power to possess (Mbembe, 2004: 401)—that sometimes made the visual experience of this new wealth—"just being there... and seeing" as Rajesh said in the previous chapter—enough.⁹

On the surface, these stories of magic might be taken as a symptom of what the Comaroffs call "occult economies," broadly defined as "the conjuring of wealth by resort to inherently mysterious techniques, techniques whose principles of operation are neither transparent nor explicable in conventional terms" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999: 297). However, Shiv Camp youth's stories did not correspond with distinctly occult practices (e.g., witchcraft, turning others into zombies, illicit sale of body parts), "acute moral panics" (282), or "effort[s] to eradicate people held to enrich themselves by [the means of magic]" (284), as the Comaroffs describe. Nor do these stories signal the loss/destruction of economic rationality as such, as in the Kinshasa explored by Devisch (1995) where hyper-inflation and the collapse of the informal economy led to "an imaginary yet vicious mentality of sorcery" (604). Instead, these stories signal the identification of a newly significant source of value—private property, a new form of value production and a new means to economic improvement—and an attempt not to punish those falsely benefiting from its magic, but rather to participate in this production. To make this argument and to show how these stories were as much about self-transformation as the transformation of value, however, I must first consider Shiv Camp residents' conceptions of value and work, and how they have been challenged in recent years.

⁹ A brief note is in order to specify how my use of spectrality differs from Appadurai's (2000). Whereas Appadurai reads the spectrality of housing through the lens of land deals, real estate speculations, rumors of sale, and the "surfeit of cash" governing the experience of land shortage in Mumbai—that is, through the lens of exchange—my interest here is less in considering how land sales and transactions, both actual and imagined, generate new fantasies of wealth, but rather in considering how the commoditization and privatization of land instantiate new regimes of value and urban imaginaries. Whereas Appadurai traces "public dramas of consumption" in which "Bombay's working poor and nonprofessional service classes produce their own spectral domesticity," I do not see Delhi's urban poor producing the same congeries of value, especially not on terms equal to those of the urban elite. In Appadurai's analysis, it is unclear how "the specters of eviction" shape the "agencies of consumption" that he analyzes; they seem, rather, to be disarticulated registers. Such is not the case in Shiv Camp, where eviction threats become incorporated into the aspiration for housing.

6.3. Labor value

To understand the broader conditions in which the political economic restructuring of Delhi is forcing people to adopt new conceptions of work, value, and the relationship between the two, I now consider how Shiv Camp residents' experiences of work have changed in the context of urban redevelopment and the rise of a more service-based economy.

Household Wealth and Savings						
Monthly savings (Rupees)		Ownership and Expenses			Does your household own land?	
0	33		Yes	No	No	19
1-500	3	Does your HH own a mobile phone?	28	23	In village/not Delhi	22
501-999	9	Does your HH own a vehicle?	6	45	Plot + house in Delhi	4
1000-2000	4	Is someone very ill?	22	29	Plot only in Delhi	3
>2000	1	Do you have adequate wealth?	6	45	Delhi resettlement plot	3
Total	50				Total	51

Table 5. Household wealth and savings in Shiv Camp

Table 5 summarizes key indicators of household wealth in Shiv Camp and shows that 66% of households (33 of 50) reported zero monthly savings. Six of 45 households reported owning a vehicle (a motorcycle in all cases), a considerable investment and perhaps the most prominent middle class consumer item in urban India today. Forty-three percent of respondents said that someone in their household was extremely ill, requiring weekly medical expenses on medicine and often more costly procedures or medical visits. Ten of 51 respondents reported owning land somewhere in Delhi, either in an unauthorized colony (7) or in a resettlement colony (3). The 3 who “owned”¹⁰ land in a resettlement colony said they had purchased their plots only after the January demolition to mitigate the risk of being displaced in the future without resettlement. Figure 33 shows how people, in 2007, assessed the adequacy of their income both upon arrival in Delhi and at the time of being surveyed. Whereas 62% (31 of 50) felt they had adequate wealth when they first arrived in Delhi, only 12% of respondents believe they have adequate wealth today. This could indicate that residents have different understandings of “adequate wealth” than they did in the past, as exemplified through their reference to middle class living standards and their desire to obtain more consumer durables (e.g., TVs, refrigerators, motorcycles). It could

¹⁰ As I described in the previous chapter, resettlement plots are offered to recipients on a license-basis, preventing their legal sale. This has not prevented a large and growing black market for plots in resettlement colonies. While slum-based NGOs had long claimed that government officers facilitated fraudulent land transfers to private land developers, it was only in the summer of 2007 that their suspicions were confirmed. At this time, the Central Bureau of Intelligence revealed a “land scam” worth crores of rupees in which multiple DDA and Municipal Corporation officers and the retired Additional Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation “entered into a criminal conspiracy” with a private developer and the then Under Secretary of the Delhi Assembly (the legislative house of the state government). In 2000-2002 they used “fake ration cards” to fraudulently allot 180 plots that were “meant for distribution among displaced slum dwellers” to “fictitious persons,” leading to the siphoning of “crores of rupees.” Each government official “allegedly received a bribe of Rs.10,000 per plot,” and the plots were subsequently sold by the developer at rates ranging from Rs. 2 lakh to Rs. 3 lakh.” See “Charge-sheet filed in Delhi land scam,” *The Hindu*, New Delhi, November 19, 2007.

also reflect residents' feeling of being economically squeezed out of the city by rising costs, stagnant wages, and the threat of someday having to pay rent for shelter.

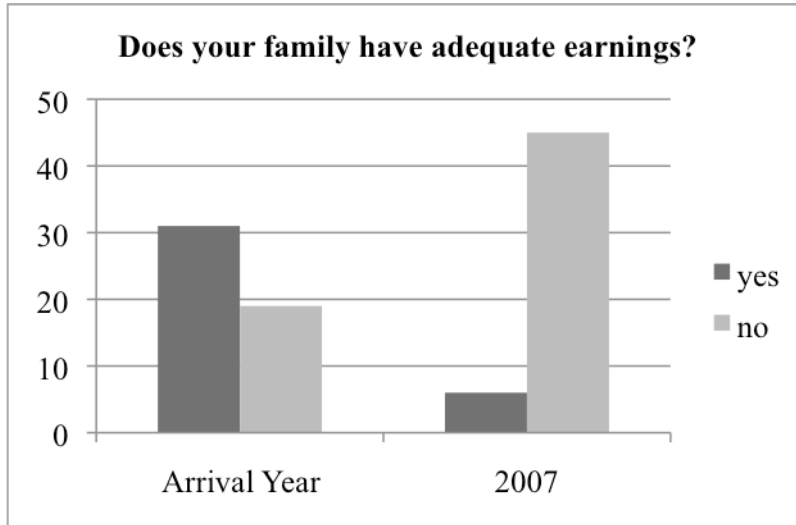


Figure 33. Shift in perception of wealth in Shiv Camp (Date of arrival-2007)

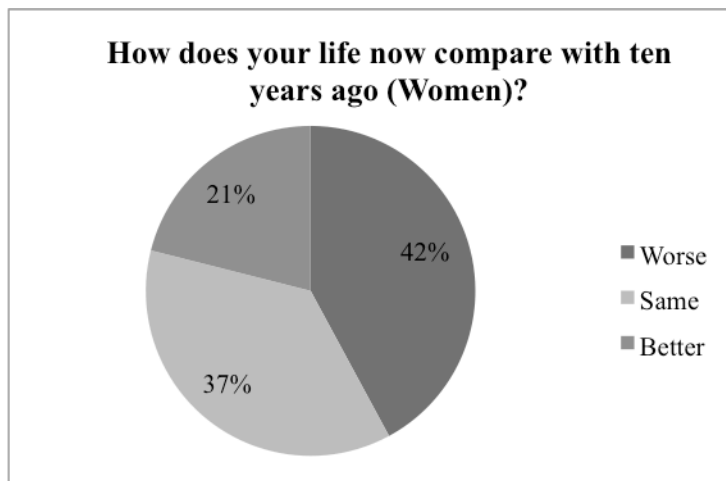


Figure 34. Women's perceptions of life changes in Shiv Camp

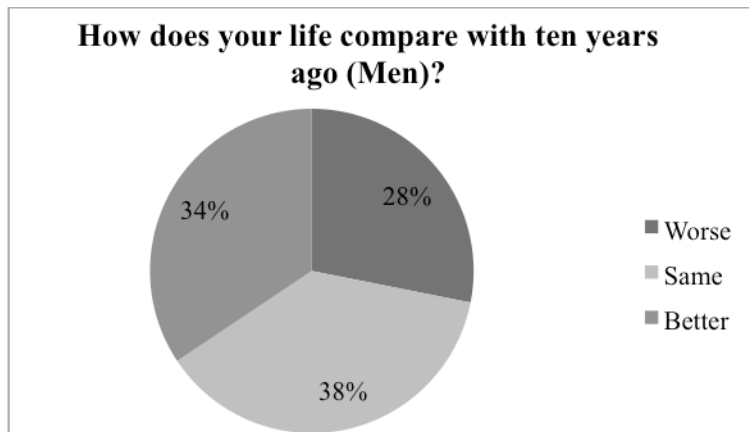


Figure 35. Men's perceptions of life changes in Shiv Camp

Figure 34 and 4 show women's and men's sense, respectively, of how their quality of life had changed in 2007 in relation to ten years earlier. Across gender, 17 people said life had gotten worse over the past ten years, 19 said it was the same, and 15 said it had improved. Figure 36 shows a breakdown of the reasons people stated for why their lives had changed as specified over those ten years. As is clear, the strongest reason people indicated for either improvement or decline in their quality of life pertained to the availability of work, with residents generally perceiving an overall decline in the adequacy of household earnings.

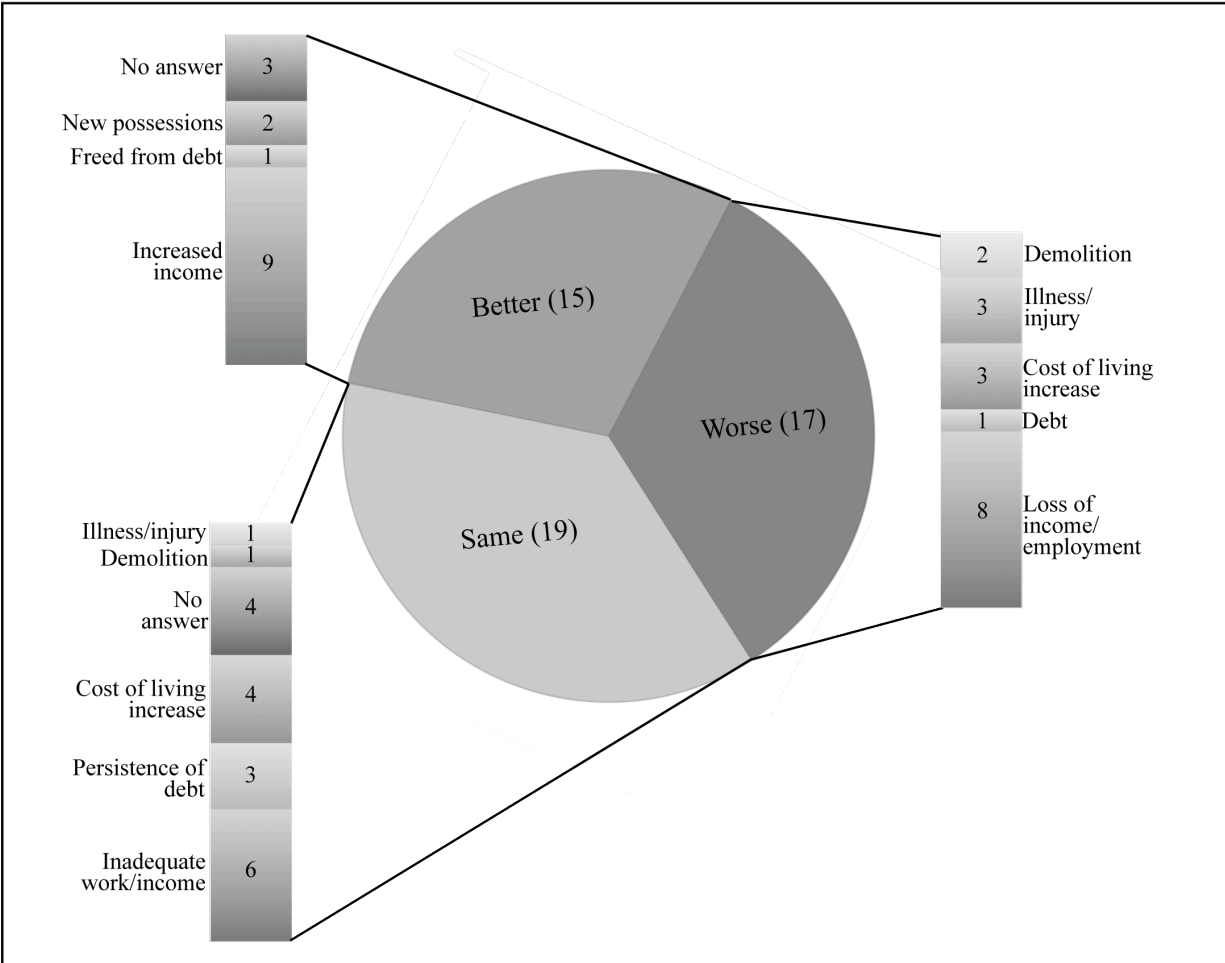


Figure 36. Men and women’s combined responses to how their lives have changed over the past ten years, broken down by reason for their lives being better, worse, or the same as before.

Of the 49 people surveyed in whose homes a male head was still alive, 41 of those heads were identified as “actively working.” Table 6 summarizes the work type and monthly wages these men or their wives reported. The average monthly earnings of actively working male heads was reported as 3,160 rupees. According to follow-up questions and contextual conversations, reported monthly wages were optimistic and represented conditions of full employment. Only contractors, those who earned a government salary, and some specialist carpenters were able to find regular work. The rest maintained highly flexible work schedules and could go weeks at a time without finding employment. Most men were day laborers. When unable to find sustained work from their network of contacts, they would stand on certain street corners and hope contractors would show up offering a job. Wages averaged around 100 rupees per day for healthy male brick layers, head loaders, and concrete mixers, and around 80 rupees a day for women doing the same work.

Employed Male Head					
Work Type		Monthly Salary (Indian Rupees)		Primary Activity While Not Working	
Laborer	14	<2000	11	Wander	12
Carpenter	13			Watch TV	12
Salary	6	2000-2999	8	Gamble	8
Contractor	4	3000-3999	10	Drink	2
Barber	1	4000-4999	5	Look for work	2
Tailor	1	5000-7500	4	Play with kids	2
Cobbler	1	>7500	3	Work on home	2
Shopkeeper	1	Total	41	Working for <i>basti</i>	1
Total	41			Total	41

Table 6. Employment status of male heads in Shiv Camp in 2007



Figure 37. A “non-working” woman. Photo by author.

Of the 19 women surveyed, 13 reported being “actively working” at the time of survey, whereas of the 32 men surveyed, only 12 said their wives worked. This indicates the overall devaluation of women’s labor contributions in Shiv Camp that I introduced in the previous chapter and which I discuss further below. Of the 25 working female heads described by respondents, 10 worked as maids/domestic workers, 6 as laborers, 3 as vendors, 3 as shopkeepers, 1 earned a salary as a gardener for the Municipal Corporation, 1 collected a pension, and 1 was a carpenter. The average daily wage of these women was 67 rupees, with a high of 130 rupees a day for the salaried gardener and a low of 25 rupees a day for a maid who worked a couple of hours a day in a neighboring *koti*.

Given the irregularities of work and the fact that Dhaniram and I conducted our survey over a multi-month period, it is very difficult to estimate overall household income. While we asked parents about their children’s income, it was often unclear what role such earnings played in household expenditures and when children should be considered part of a separate household or

included in a larger joint family. In huts where as many as six people would roll out beds on the floor, determining who slept where was complicated enough; tracking household budgeting would have required a more extensive study of income, which was beyond the scope of my research. My extremely rough approximation of household income suggests average household income in Shiv Camp was 2,900 rupees per month (~65 USD).¹¹ If we presume that this income sustains a family of four (wife, husband and two dependents) and take the official poverty line in Delhi at 613 rupees per capita (GNCTD, 2008), then average household income in Shiv Camp is just above the official poverty line (~2,400 rupees for a family of four). If we presume that this income sustains households of five, then Shiv Camp households, on average, live just below the official poverty line.¹²

Only 8 of the 41 respondents in households with actively employed male heads reported that those men had adequate work at the time of survey. Whereas men reported that work shortage was a serious problem for themselves, only half (6) of the 12 men who stated that their wives worked observed a similar shortage of work for women. Of the 11 women who answered, 8 reported not having adequate work. Of the 15 women who responded, 10 said women work more outside of the house than they did a decade earlier, 3 said they work the same amount as a decade earlier, and 2 said they work less, which confirms a broader trend of women playing a more active role in securing household income.¹³

Throughout my research in Shiv Camp, men, women, and boys regularly complained about the shortage of steady work. As an older, non-working man told me, expressing sadness at what had become of men today, “three of four men here have become total drifters [*ekdam aavaaraa ban gaye hain*]. They have no work at all.” Residents attributed the shortage of work, in part, to the Supreme Court’s 2006 order to close and “seal” all commercial establishments operating in residential areas, which led to the Municipal Corporation’s drive to “seal” (i.e., to lock and literally put a wax seal on the door of) thousands of businesses across the city and a decrease in construction activity in the city in 2006-2008. Men also blamed the declining availability of manual work on mechanization, as when Gopal told me, “what used to take ten days to complete now takes two days, so we have eight days of no work.” These extra eight days, to continue his analogy, supplied men, whose identities had been premised on being the primary breadwinners

¹¹ This estimation of the average across 41 households is made using the following assumptions: I excluded households where the male head of household was not “actively working” and counted only the earnings of the female and male heads of household in the month of March. That is, instead of using respondents’ responses to the broad question of their monthly income, which was more prone to mis-reporting, I used their answers to the number of days they worked within a sample month.

¹² As I discussed in the Introduction, official poverty lines in India are kept deliberately low to conjure an image of declining poverty. Using the method of direct poverty estimation described by Patnaik (2007) and used in the Introduction, monthly per capita expenditure to meet minimum nutritional standards is Rs. 1,150 in Delhi, which would place more than 90 percent of Shiv Camp households below the poverty line.

¹³ One of the women who said women work less than before is an old, disgruntled woman who spends much of her time yelling at younger Shiv Camp residents and worrying that they are ruining the settlement. She said women work less today, I surmise, so as to indicate that the “new generation” is lazy, not to refer to structural changes in women’s work schedule. The second woman who said women work less today was mourning the fact that after the demolition, she was unable to leave Shiv Camp and work as she used to.

of their families, with an abundance of idle time. The right hand column of Table 6 shows the primary activities of “actively working” men when they are not employed, where “wandering,” “watching TV,” and “gambling” are the three most common activities, together making up almost 80% of responses. Most of my days of fieldwork in Shiv Camp began when a group of men huddled together along the *basti*’s main paths playing cards, gambling, or gossiping called me over to join them (see Figure 38).



Figure 38. Shiv Camp men taking *chutti*. Photo by author.

Although the lack of work generated deep anxiety among men, because underemployment was a generalized condition in Shiv Camp and because most men relied on the same networks of contractors to find work, they freely discussed the challenges of securing steady employment in these settings. However, to deflect the stigma of economic marginalization, they often described days when they did not find work as *chutti*, which literally means “holiday” or “day off,” to suggest that not working was a willed choice, not an imposed condition. This, I want to suggest, reflected the profound challenge the shortage of work presented to men’s sense of self and conceptions of the value of labor.

One day, Ramdas met me at the edge of Shiv Camp and began describing a job lead. After telling me he had taken a *chutti* for the day in hopes that this lead would materialize later in the week, his daughter-in-law approached while on her way to work in a nearby *koti* and asked him to bring cooking fuel from the ration shop. He yelled back: “You are my daughter! I don’t get things like this for you. I have taken a *chutti* so I can do my own things. Get someone on your own to do it, or do it yourself,” one in a series of displays Ramdas would make that day to re-establish gender hierarchy and diminish the value of women’s work.

After following Ramdas to a group of men seated in a circle, throwing cards on the ground between them, I asked him what people do when they cannot find work. “Nothing. The boys wander, the men sit around home; lots of people gamble and play cards. We sweep the floor and

take care of the home, and the women go and work,” he replied, indicating his displeasure with shifting gender roles. When a group of young women, mostly unmarried daughters, walked by, Ramdas extended the blame for deteriorating conditions in Shiv Camp—both economic and aesthetic—onto women: “Girls didn’t wear such obscene clothes [*gande kapde*] around here before. They used to always wear full [salwar] suits and saris. Now look, there are pants and things like this [i.e., western clothes] everywhere.” I never saw women wearing pants in Shiv Camp, but by describing women in this distinctly masculine attire, Ramdas was further indicating how women were “out of place,” occupying roles that did not suit them, and thus throwing off the balance of the neighborhood.

Men frequently vented their economic frustrations via verbal abuse of women, a pattern of deflecting criticism away from the generalized conditions of economic marginalization they experienced onto a more vulnerable social group. Dhaniram and I attempted to assess the extent to which these public displays extended inside the household by explicitly asking both our male and female survey respondents how men felt when they do not find work. Of the 37 respondents (11 women and 26 men) who said that the male head of their household did not have adequate work and who answered the question, 18 said these men felt worried or sad, 14 said angry, 4 said bored or lonely, and 1 said it made him consider returning to his village. Phulvati, a 50-year-old widow, spoke more freely than most married women: “Women work and men gamble and beat their wives. In the past two years it has gotten even worse. Now, boys too have kids and just play cards. Right?”, she asked, looking up at her 18-year-old son whose peers she was describing. Her son, who joined the conversation to help explain Dhaniram and my questions for her, nodded in agreement. She continued: “Women’s status [*haalat*] is much worse than before. Today, women work more and men drink more [*mahilaae zyaadaa kaam karti hain, aur aadmi zyaadaa pite hain*].... And, these politicians don’t do us any good. When an election comes, they give money and booze only to the men, while we work!”

6.4. Value, old and new

Labor casualization and the feminization of work in Shiv Camp not only challenged men’s understanding of masculinity and increased the incidence of physical and verbal abuse against women—phenomena widely observed in the context of economic liberalization around the world (see Gamburd, 2007; Ong, 1987; A. Roy, 2002; Wright, 1999)—but they have also deepened gender- and age-divided conceptions of value and work. Over the course of my fieldwork, residents often mobilized competing notions of value to symbolically position themselves against less valuable “others.” While men, like Ramdas above, frequently suggested that women’s increasing entrance into the workforce was contributing to a rise in household disputes and an overall decay in the quality and appearance of Shiv Camp, age represented an even deeper fault line in implicit notions of value.

Working-age boys in Shiv Camp recognized that finding secure jobs in present economic conditions required that they move beyond the manual labor and construction-based professions of their parents’ generation. This was a reality most adults acknowledged, but the rise of higher paid and more economically adept youth nonetheless challenged their authority, leading to frequent intergenerational quarrels both within and across households. While male youth continued to consider government jobs—once the mainstay of the urban middle class—highly

desirable, such positions were beyond reach for most, which made private sector, service-based jobs the most common type of employment boys discussed and pursued. As 19-year-old Sohanlal told me, “Yes, you have to be more educated and have more experience [to acquire a government position], but you also have to have money. *Government* looks at money, not mind.” Dhaniram, one of the few people in Shiv Camp to have completed 12th standard, felt particularly betrayed by his lack of employability, despite his qualifications: “*Government* tells us education is the most important thing, but then they come demolish our homes. How can we study without a home?”

Most working age boys in Shiv Camp had completed no more than 8th standard, after which they dropped out of school and began looking for work.¹⁴ When I asked a group of boys one day why they did not want to complete more schooling, one boy responded, “We know that even when people do more school, they don’t get anything out of it. Why not just work instead?”¹⁵ The few who did study beyond 10th standard, however, saw themselves as far more competitive and prepared to excel in the changing economy, a point they frequently raised with their less educated peers. Ravi, an 18-year-old who was doing a correspondence course to earn his BA, one day told me, “Without education, people have no value [*kiimat*]. Without education, you can’t do anything but masonry here. And that’s not good. You can at best get 3-4,000 rupees, which is nothing. You can’t even live off that.” I asked what most boys in Shiv Camp do during the day, to which Ravi responded, “Most are *bekhaar* [useless, without value]. 90% just roam around, some do little jobs, but most don’t do anything. Most don’t study and can’t get jobs. They don’t want to be construction workers, so they just live off their parents. See, there are two types of people here: old minds and new minds.” Old minds, Ravi and Uday Prakash went on to explain, are usually those who, like their parents, are uneducated and have what they called a village mentality—a belief that individuals are rewarded according to their effort, that steady employment from and loyalty to a single employer is the pathway to success, and that money earned provides money to be spent. But, based on the new desires and aspirations that come with city life, even old minds do not want to do manual labor [*mazdoori*] like their parents. Instead they seek out low-level security jobs, work as bus conductors, or are sales boys—the bottom end of the retail food chain. More often, they do not work at all and instead “depend” on their families for income. As Manoj, a 19-year-old “old mind,” said, “*mai free rehta hoon* [I remain free/unoccupied].”

¹⁴ My survey asked about the education of respondents’ children. Only 16% of respondents’ sons and fewer than 5% of their daughters had completed 12th standard or were still pursuing education.

¹⁵ For a study of the promises and betrayals of formal education among youth in north India, see Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffery (2007).



Figure 39. “I remain free.” Photo by author.

Prior to Ravi and Uday Prakash’s explanation of the new mind/old mind divide, Ravi’s brother-in-law, the older Rajesh, had been attempting to explain his work life to me using verb-less English, while Ashok, a younger, more educated boy who was clearly a new mind, would interrupt Rajesh’s sentences with witty phrases that rhymed with Rajesh’s last words. His verbal dexterity and prowess in turning Rajesh’s words against him proved he was sharper and funnier than Rajesh, and the laughter of the other boys confirmed Ashok’s verbal triumph over this old mind rival. Ashok closed with a final quip: “if *school* is useless, then why are you still a *fool*?”, leading Ravi to offer Rajesh as an example to affirm his point about old minds: “See Rajesh, he only drinks and plays cards. He’s not educated. He’s married, has two children, and he’s not *independent*. He completely *depends* on his parents [*apne maataa-pitaa par depend kartaa hai*].” Rajesh agreed, resigning himself to Ravi’s far more balanced assessment in the face of Ashok’s taunts, saying in English, “I not independent.”

In contrast to these old minds, Ravi, Uday Prakash, and Ashok are new minds: educated youth who have hopes of earning salaries well above the 3-4,000 rupee monthly incomes the old minds can at best receive, and who are committed to finding salaried jobs in offices that involve *dimaag* (brains), not *haath* (hands). Their imagined pathway to income and wealth varies, but they understand the necessity of being strategic in job decisions, playing employers against each other to move up the career ladder, and displaying middle class attributes and style. Most of the new minds with whom I regularly conversed cycled through jobs, sticking with one for a few weeks or months, before moving on in hopes of finding something with better “career” potential. In the fall of 2007, while I was maintaining almost daily contact with Ashok, Ravi, Uday Prakash, and other youth, Ashok had a weekly assortment of new options he seemed to be considering. Within two weeks of our first discussions of work, he had described a variety of low-level clerical and service jobs available to him—a bill collector for a bank, a call center worker, an advertisement salesman for a magazine—but he had yet to begin any work. Each day, Ashok recited a list of jobs, work responsibilities, and pay scales, methodically weighing the positives and negatives of each opportunity, but as he explained it, “the problem is I just can’t decide which job to do!”

New minds like Ashok faced the challenge of high work expectations due to their level of education, but restricted employment prospects. Faced with the potential embarrassment of taking up low-skill jobs like the old minds, Ashok chose unemployment, criticizing the old minds' jobs for their lack of career scope, as when he said of Sanjay: "He was just married, but he has a job as a guard [*chaukidaar*] that only pays 2,000 rupees. What good is that? How can he start a family?" Sanjay responded nonchalantly, "I get by [*guzaaraa hotaa hai*]," displaying no anxiety about his perceived lower status.

For some new minds, like Dhaniram, it was the *basti* itself that held them back: "I went for a job in a call center office. The advertisement said that the salary was 6,500 rupees per month. When I wrote my address, they saw where my home is and offered only 4,000, *behen chod*." Dhaniram here felt what Wacquant (2008b) calls territorialized stigma, a heightened stigmatization in daily life and public discourse of certain urban spaces that are associated with social ills, decay, and violence/crime. According to Wacquant (2008: 25), the combination of mass unemployment, the relegation of the working class to "decaying neighborhoods," and the stigma that attaches to these locales leads to a breakdown in solidarity among residents, a desire by those who can escape to do so, and a broader effort to distance self from settlement. Dhaniram hence began lying about his address in job applications, an effort at what Goffman (1959) calls "impression management," like changing one's style of dress, accent, and mannerisms to convey social status. Taking on such traits, however, requires more than external presentation; these performances of self are also subjectifying practices aimed at producing social distinction by aligning with a value regime distinct from one's surroundings. Despite their labor insecurity and shared structural position with "old minds," Shiv Camp's "new minds" actively portrayed themselves as modern workers poised to capitalize on the city's shifting economy, an effort that had clear de-solidarizing effects: what Wacquant (2008: 184) calls "the sociofugal and fissiparous tendencies of social strategies" to overcome territorialized stigma. Let me now consider how these strategies played out in Shiv Camp daily life and how the *basti* emerged for many new minds as holdover from a previous system of value, as a "space of relegation" (Balibar, 2007).

After returning from his job collecting bills for a mobile phone company one day, Uday Prakash met me under the *peepal* tree, where I was already talking with a group of boys. Uday Prakash interrupted, excitedly telling me he had met his daily quota for bill collection, and, if the rest of the month went well, he would earn 7,000 rupees. Across from us, a group of five middle-aged day laborers were seated on the back of a cycle rickshaw platform. When Uday Prakash said he had completed his work in only three hours and that his salary was more than double theirs, the men suddenly turned inward among themselves, redirecting their attention away from us.

Moments that conveyed such stark divisions in labor value were frequent during my fieldwork, as when Mukesh—a trained electrician who said he earned 9,000 rupees per month—began telling Dhaniram he should work in an office that plays the "share market." After Mukesh insisted that even the most basic workers in such offices, "where people just push buttons buying and selling gold, copper and *shares*," earn at least 15,000 rupees per month, Jagdish, a man in his late 40s who works as a mason, suggested Dhaniram, one of the most educated youth in Shiv

Camp, find a government job. Mukesh replied: “There are no government jobs, and, anyway, he can earn more working for a company.”

Mukesh was working at the time wiring rooms in the nearby five-star hotel under construction. After I asked about his work, he began describing the grandeur of the hotel, before extending his discussion to include changes taking place across the city as a whole: “New buses will be running all over the city, and people from all countries will come visit Delhi for the Commonwealth Games.” I asked him if Delhi really would look different in ten years, and he replied, “Yes, I think. Only educated people will remain. Laborers [*mazdoor*] will have no *value*. They’ll have to leave.”

Why is this?, I asked.

“Since 1990, everything is getting more expensive. Look at the price of onions now!... Only in 1995 did old things [i.e., household essentials] become expensive. Ordinary people cannot buy anything today. They are getting pushed out. Things are getting more expensive, and earnings [*kamaai*] are becoming less,” he said. His characterization of these changes conveyed an incipient critique of economic policy and the broader social conditions driving the urban poor into increasingly precarious living condition, and he alluded to the deeper economic changes brought on by the policies of economic liberalization when he described the appearance of foreign companies and products in place of the domestic brand names and small retailers with which he was familiar as a child. But, Mukesh then quickly departed from this economic critique, positioning himself as a participant in this new, high cost-high reward economy: “But, the main problem is all these people coming from UP and Bihar. Because of them the wages are falling. That is the problem: someone earns 12 rupees for something, then a cousin from the village comes and asks for only 11 rupees for the same job, then 9, then 7. Labor [*mazdoori*] has no *value* today.” He continued, pointing to a man seated nearby, “This man here is uneducated. He will have no *value*. He won’t be able to stay here. He doesn’t understand things today.”

“What does ‘value’ mean?”, I asked. Mukesh responded using an example of fixed deposit schemes and health insurance plans: “Anyone working can save something. If you earn 3,000 rupees per month and can’t save 500 rupees, what’s the point in earning? You should save that money and it will grow. See, I got a 20,000 rupee check from my LIC [the Life Insurance Corporation, which offers a variety of insurance and savings schemes], but I didn’t take it; I put it back in. It will be worth 3 lakh [300,000] in 15 years.” He went on to describe the benefits of a health insurance program he had purchased for his family, here explicitly suggesting that *value* for him meant saving money and letting it grow for a future in which the *basti* did not figure. Turning to Jagdish, who had been listening all along, Mukesh said, “I try to tell others about these programs, but they don’t understand.” Jagdish responded, “Yes, big people can benefit from this all.” Mukesh shot back: “No! Anyone can benefit. You can buy in at different levels, but these people will never understand.” Turning away from Jagdish, he redirected his focus to me: “People here earn only 100 rupees per day, but they’ll still spend 30 rupees at night on booze or games. Jhuggi people cling to their jhuggis like they are all that matter. They don’t look beyond; they don’t see the need to save. They don’t understand *value* today.” “*Value*,” he said, responding to my second attempt to assess what he meant by the word, “comes from education, brains, and connections.”

If the “new minds” celebrated the earning potential of the new economy, attributing the downfall of the *basti* to the low value of manual laborers ill-suited for the world-class city, the “old

minds” mourned the loss of a more communal, earlier moment when the *basti* symbolized the working class itself. Describing the loss of an earlier sense of community in Shiv Camp, Ramlal told me, after I had asked about the prevalence of gambling in Shiv Camp, that “there used to be good *society* here. People were together.... But now, nobody listens to anyone anymore. They all think of themselves as the Prime Minister of the place... When people came from villages, they were used to getting together for meetings. After being in the city for so long, people don’t care about each other as much. Also, people drink too much, and gambling is a big problem. People just waste their money.”

“Why do people gamble so much?”, I asked.

“People just don’t think like they used to.”

“Is it because there is less work?”

“No, it is the youth. The youth don’t respect earnings. They don’t know how to run a home. Older people play cards, but not with money. It is only *time pass* for us. It is the youth that have ruined unity here. People here are themselves ruining the *basti*.... Everything is only about themselves. Unity has been broken.”

Ramlal’s sense of value, then, clearly differed from that of Mukesh. Like other older men with whom I met, he considered *value* to be respect for work and an overall attachment to community and place. Many adults disagreed with what they saw as the youth’s infatuation with “big things,” like motorcycles, fancy new mobile phones, and lavish lifestyles beyond the *basti*. “They are busy looking at the sky, while losing the ground [*aasmaan mein lage hain, jaise zamin kho jaa rahi hai*],” Motilal said to me one day.

The efforts by Ramlal and Mukesh to associate the downfall of Shiv Camp with the forms of value (new or old) of particular sub-groups (the youth or the uneducated) reflect strategies to deflect public opprobrium and the territorialized stigma of slum life onto internal, deficient populations—i.e., to attribute one’s estrangement from place to an active agent. “By devaluing a little more their own neighbors and neighborhood,” and deploying “a range of strategies of social distinction and withdrawal”, these strategies serve to undermine community cohesion, affirm micro-hierarchies within the settlement, and create internal splits in strategies of political organizing and claims making (Wacquant, 2008b: 183). This is not to say that Shiv Camp had a completely fractured political makeup. After the January demolition, almost all households contributed to a common pool of money for what I described in the previous chapter as the “grassroots” and “paper” battles, and residents showed up in force when the *pradhan* brought the municipal councilor to answer people’s questions. But, everyday conversations conveyed a subtler micro-politics of difference, particularly as it became clear in March that the first phase of the legal battle pertained only to the 122 households that had been targeted by the Municipal Corporation in the January demolition. Ram Kishan, a 22-year-old studying for a masters degree in education, for example, attributed the failure to defend these 122 households in the wake of the April demolition to the people of Shiv Camp themselves: “Of the main members of the association [what I called the “leadership committee” in the previous chapter], only a few are active. The rest don’t participate much. And, the people that weren’t elected to be in the association are upset and try to give the organization a bad name. They say that people won’t get resettlement, that the lawyer is no good. Most residents don’t think too much about the issue. They don’t care about their future.”

These subtle, everyday practices of difference making, no doubt a common attribute of communities everywhere, were not necessarily directed against well-defined categories of residents. Rather, such efforts were often aimed at distancing the self from the unsightliness of slum life in a context of more generalized middle class and private property-based aesthetic codes. By embracing a subject-position situated favorably vis-à-vis these codes, residents were actively constructing themselves as members of an improvable population, in contrast to others who hindered Delhi's trajectory of world-class redevelopment. These internal "others," however, were not a stable category, and while the "folk categories" "new mind" and "old mind" worked for many youth in explaining differences in employability and lifestyle, individuals embraced different systems of value depending on the company and context in which they found themselves. Thus, while gender, age, and educational status represented key categories of difference, almost any resident was prone to potential criticism in moments of civic impropriety.

For example, when one among a group of toddlers running onto the road stopped to shit, 19-year-old Sanjeev said, "people in this area don't know how to take care of children. They just let them wander around and don't watch over them. The kids just walk around in dirty clothes. They are all dirty. This place used to be nicer. It used to be less dirty and bad. Now it is really dirty." I asked why this happened. He responded: "The population had grown." Perhaps with an eye towards his family's more secure resettlement eligibility—his father had a V.P. Singh token and paperwork showing his family's continuous residence in Shiv Camp since the late 1970s—this statement may have been made less as a general criticism of Shiv Camp's reproductive rate, and more with the aim of identifying his family as an earlier, "original" inhabitant, in contrast to residents who arrived more recently, causing Shiv Camp to grow and become a nuisance to the neighboring *kotis*. While Sanjeev and others critical of the outward appearance of Shiv Camp often acknowledged that "filth" was a structural condition produced, for example, by the shortage of toilets and piped water in the *basti*, this did not temper their efforts to distance self from the scorn of the public eye.

Such criticisms of aesthetically deviant residents performed a double function. On the one hand, they attributed the low value of the *basti* to the deviant habits of a sub-set of low value residents. On the other hand, by displaying disapproval of the aesthetic impropriety of others, the aesthetic critic affirmed his affiliation with an alternative system of value. Whether by affirming the value of Shiv Camp itself (against those who were ruining the place), or by locating value in distant resettlement plots (against those who "cling to their jhuggis like they are all that matter"), the production of social difference in Shiv Camp also produced differentially valued spaces. This practice of linking social worthiness to place-based value was especially common among those who owned land elsewhere or who had moved away from the *basti*. Uncle Ji, for example, had lived in Shiv Camp until 2004. After his wife passed away, his son insisted that Uncle Ji move in with him in a nearby unauthorized colony. Uncle Ji conceded, converting his *jhuggi* into a provisions shop where he began selling rice and pulses by the gram, along with cigarettes, candles, and other household items. Despite moving in with his son, Shiv Camp was his life: he arrived every morning by bicycle and returned to his son's house only after the sun had set, divvying out gossip and rumor with each transaction, a veritable switchboard of *basti* information. His children insisted he shut the shop, but he persisted, reveling in the rich sociality of Shiv Camp life. Despite this attachment to place, Uncle Ji registered the stigma associated with the *basti* and did not hesitate to criticize its residents when doing so would affirm his social

distinction. One night, after finishing a cup of *chai* with him, I asked how he reaches home. “My route is totally safe and clean. Correct, good, educated people live on my route. People of class [*dhang ke aadmi*],” he said. Using my question about place and travel to index social status, he continued, saying his neighborhood is like the nearby middle class colony: “Only hard-working people live there. You won’t find people getting drunk or playing cards [like here].”¹⁶ Here, again, gambling and drinking appeared as signs of decay and disorder. While these social ills were often attributed to deficient “others” within the *basti*, gambling, I want to now suggest, provides an insight into the psychic experience of urban change for slum residents in contemporary Delhi.



Figure 40. “People of class.” Photo by author.

6.5. Fate

As I described in section 6.3, women frequently expressed frustration to me about the habits of non-working men in Shiv Camp, often slapping their hands together one on top of the other, turning the upper hand from palm to topside to gesture the motion of turning cards. Gambling and drinking, both highly visible forms of social pathos, became key targets of women’s usually reserved scorn, emblematic of their disappointment with both the lack of steady work for men and how men passed time while unemployed—stories of husbands squandering precious earnings on the game, or blowing “big wins” on cigarettes and booze for friends and relatives were common.¹⁷ Men too, even those who played, criticized gambling, often symbolically

¹⁶ James Holston’s work on Sao Paulo’s autoconstructors—i.e., those who purchase land, often “informally,” and gradually build their own homes—shows how the property-owning poor similarly strive to distinguish themselves from squatters who they consider “depraved, dishonorable, and dirty” (1991: 458).

¹⁷ See Sangtin and Nagar (2006) for a discussion of the relationship between economic marginalization among men and the prevalence of gambling and domestic abuse in Uttar Pradesh.

linking this vice with those who “don’t understand value,” as Mukesh had said. Gambling certainly was widespread in Shiv Camp, and on more than one occasion I saw men lose an entire week’s worth of pay after a sequence of unfortunate hands. But, rather than considering gambling a sign of weakness or social ennui, or a marker of the absence of hope, in this section I explore gambling as an allegory for the more generalized uncertainties of slum life and the contradictions of attempting to find stability as an occupant of public land in the context of rampant land privatization and socio-spatial upheaval.

In the lead up to the April demolition, Shiv Camp residents were constantly speculating about when the bulldozers would return. A few weeks before the municipal elections, which happened in the first week of April, one among a group of men wagered, “After the election, this *basti* will definitely be broken. We are just waiting for the elections, then we are gone. We’ll be thrown somewhere on the outside of the city.” The indeterminacy of work, of tenure, and of the timing of displacement led many to see their life trajectory through the lens of chance, and discussions of fate saturated everyday attempts to make sense of residents’ economic and political vulnerability. In this context, games of chance, which dotted the *basti*’s open spaces during the day, served as a means to accommodate the uncertainties of the day, almost mimicking the vagaries of slum life: walking to the street corner each morning in search of work resembled the indeterminacy of each hand of cards. In each, the outcome of the present operation was independent of the outcome of the previous one—i.e., experience did not matter—leading men to occasionally blur their descriptions of the two in conversation. For example, while discussing work prospects with Ramdas and a group of men playing “cut,” a version of the card game “war,” where ten rupee hands were being played, a man, enraptured by the game, overheard our discussion and quickly looked to me, saying, “Oh *bhaiya*, I sit here vacant [*khaali*] everyday. Give me some work. I’ll do anything,” before returning his gaze to the game, as if his hand of cards determined the fate of not just his bet, but work too.

The ease with which fate was introduced into conversation to explain events beyond my interlocutors’ control indicates that the prevalence of gambling in Shiv Camp ought to be read not only in relation to increased male leisure time or the shortage of work (cf. Davis, 2006: 183; Evers & Korff, 2001: 143), but also vis-à-vis a particular experience of socio-spatial change, or a particular “structuring of experience” (Simmel, 2007 [1913]: 83). Walter Benjamin observed during the peak of urban change in Haussmann’s Paris that, “On the boulevards it was customary to attribute everything to chance. . . . even political events were apt to assume the form of occurrences at the gambling table” (W. Benjamin, 1968: 198). Benjamin refused to see such fatalism as the product of cultural disposition or even individual preference. Instead, he said, an individual’s decision to submit to “chance” takes place when “he is increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience” (W. Benjamin, 1968: 158).¹⁸ In the previous chapter, I described the effect on the psyche of experiencing time as external to oneself, of watching the city change and evolve around oneself while remaining isolated in a static landscape—i.e., waiting for an already narrated future to arrive, waiting for progress. This experience of time is what Benjamin called *Erlebnis*: the insertion into machine time, or the time of the second-hand, in which life is lived moment to moment in an “eternal repetition of the

¹⁸ To Benjamin, the prevalence of gambling in the 20th century showed that gambling and “fate” had become the “intentional correlate of ‘lived experience’” (quoted in Frisby, 1988: 68), replacing “the adventure” more prominent in the 19th century.

same,” instead of as integrally united with the fabric of historical change.¹⁹ Whether one wins a hand or not, whether one secures employment on a given day or not, whether one’s home is demolished or not seemed, to many unemployed Shiv Camp men, sealed by their fate, built into a pre-given time-series. As Rajiv told me, “whatever is in someone’s fate (*kismet*), that is what they get,” a response I frequently received when asking what people would do in the face of, what seemed to me, unbearable uncertainty. But, while social activists working in Delhi *bastis* often told me that this type of fatalism was a disposition common among lower caste Hindus like those in Shiv Camp—a tendency to attribute the unknown to karma—I do not see Shiv Camp residents’ references to fate (*kismet*) primarily as a “cultural attitude” or sign of ideological submission. On the contrary, accepting fate, residents suggested, was not a failure to assert oneself and take control; it was not a sign of weakness, but rather operated as a way of asserting one’s courage to face the uncertain.

The Hindi word *kismet* means both fate and luck, relaying subtle differences in meaning ranging from one’s destiny, in the sense of a predetermined outcome, to one’s lot, as in the likelihood that chance will serve one well. When residents would refer to something as “written in fate [*kismet ka likhaa*, or *maathe par likhaa*, which literally means written on one’s forehead],” they were expressing more a sense of destiny. But fate was also something to be tempted. Despite the frequency with which residents criticized gambling as a social pathology and sign of residential decay, the game itself often affirmed the courage, even masculinity, of the gambler. Thus, while the unemployed gambler was resigned to his fate, he could play the game of chance in hope that a better future or a new opportunity might arise.²⁰ Perhaps as escapism, but also perhaps as an attempt to leap back into history—to turn the card instead of having it turned for you, to establish agency in an uncertain world. Shambu once said, while stepping into a card game, that he was going to “test his fate/try his luck [*kismet aazmaanaa*],” while someone benefiting from a favorable turn of cards, or a man who landed a multi-week job might be called “*kismet ka dhani*,” literally meaning a man rich in luck. Following Rajiv’s above profession of fate, he said, “In the village, there are still gold coins that people sometimes find. Whoever has it in their fate gets crores of rupees. But he never knows what he might find if he doesn’t go looking!” What does it mean to treat fate as something to be tempted, something one can play? Shiv Camp residents’ narratives suggest that the invocation of fate is not about a denial of agency, nor is it a form of resignation, nor is it merely an affirmation of a higher power or collective destiny. And, while Benjamin is useful in helping identify gambling as a particular immersion in modern, alienated life—as when he says gambling is “the narcotics” with which those “sealed off” from experience “seek to submerge the consciousness that has delivered them to the march of the second-hand” (Benjamin, 1968: 180)—mine is an ethnographic rather than metaphysical interest in considering how fate becomes a device for making sense of the uncertain. In this sense, it is

¹⁹ This is the difference between a “symbolic” temporality, what Buck-Morss calls “eternal passing,” and “fleeting eternity,” an allegorical temporality (Buck-Morss, 1989: 19). The latter is present in a form of historical experience that Benjamin calls *Erfahrung*, which unlike *Erlebnis* is open to a shared discourse of reflection and communication: a collective, non-alienated experience.

²⁰ Phillips (1997: 239-40) writes of the *reason* in poor people’s expenditure on lottery tickets in the US, “maybe poor people actually have a good understanding of what their life chances are; maybe lottery players are *right*. At issue is not the lottery per se, but the chance of personal mobility, the question of where you can get ahead by saving up money; the lottery should make sense to anyone for whom the answer is nowhere.”

useful to consider not only how fate is deployed in everyday speech to explain residents' dispositions vis-à-vis chance and uncertainty, but also to examine how key events or experiences were attributed to fate and what this tells us about their sense of value.

Here, Georg Simmel's (2007 [1913]: 83) elaboration of fate as more than that which overwhelms the subject is useful: "In everything advantageous as well as destructive that we call our fate, a certain something is not only incomprehensible to our understanding, but may indeed be received by our life's intention without being fully assimilated." Fate indicates an attempt to internalize and give meaning to external events, or to appropriate them as our own. Let us consider more carefully what he means. For Simmel, the concept of fate, philosophically speaking, presupposes, on the one hand, the existence of a subject "that, on its own and independently of any 'event', contains or represents a sense of something [Sinn], an inner tendency, a demand" (ibid., 80). In the language I have been using in previous sections, this "sense of something" is what I am calling value, and it is the means by which one understands his and others' place in the scheme of things. On the other hand, and in addition to this inner sense of the subject, there exist external events that, independently and without cause, either advance or impede the "inner tendency" of the subject. We thus have standard Cartesian ontological categories: inner subject and external event. Fate though, according to Simmel, signals the merging of these two elements, a blurring of the subject and object, as "merely causal events take on *a meaning* [einen Sinn], a retrospective teleology, as it were" (ibid.). According to this framework, fate "expresses the ability of the human being to adapt" as "certain elements are integrated into its [the subject's] life as defining occurrences" (ibid.). A subject's identification of something as fate signals his effort to make sense of the fluidity between self and other, to incorporate seemingly objective events into the meaning of the self. Perhaps more important for understanding Shiv Camp residents' use of fate, assessing occurrences or experiences as fate, Simmel's framework suggests, means that individuals are encountering alternative frameworks of value that either contest or further their "inner tendency." Whether willing to incorporate these alternative senses of value into their own lives or not, attributing events to fate, I want to suggest, at the very least indexes encounters with different value regimes. Let me elaborate through Shiv Camp narratives.

It was extremely common for men in Shiv Camp to tell elaborate stories of their one-time opportunities to become rich and successful, except, they would say, such was not in their fate. One day, while I was answering a group of boys' questions about obtaining employment outside of India, Lakshman began describing his experience working in Mauritius as a clerk for the Indian Foreign Service: "I lived there for six years. I had a great boss; work was easy; and I earned 5,000 rupees per week!... I fell in love with a Muslim girl there, who I had helped complete some forms. She loved me very much, and there was no difference between us.... But, her family said I had to become Muslim to marry her, and I couldn't give up on my India. So I didn't marry this beautiful woman.... She would send me lakhs of rupees even now if I asked." He used this story to suggest that the fleeting nature of certain experiences is a product of one's fate. He was able to live in a foreign country, find love, and earn good money, but those things were not in his fate: "I got in a fight with a top official, and had to leave that place." He returned to "his India," where his fate guided him. Here, it was the intersection of a set of external events with his inner tendency that led him back to India. A differently fated person, i.e., someone with different values, placed in the same situation might have arrived somewhere else. Even the right

knowledge, he went on to say, could not ensure success and fortune, a point he made through his description of another missed opportunity:

I was offered a visa to work in America. The passport, visa and even airplane ticket were ready. There were six days before my departure, so I went to Pune to see a relative. I had 100 rupees with me. I bought food and took a taxi and was left with only 30 rupees. I didn't have enough money to go to Mumbai, so I asked a friend for money, who laughed, saying, "you're going all the way to America and can't even buy a train ticket to Mumbai!" I got angry and said, "forget it! I don't want to go to America anyway," and I returned [to Delhi?]. It wasn't in my fate to go there, otherwise I too would be living in one of these kotis. I would have had lakhs of rupees and a car here. Where our fate takes us, we must follow.

Looking back at the events that had befallen him, Lakshman signaled that his return to the *basti* after failed attempts to journey abroad—the topic of the group's conversation into which Lakshman entered—were due to his "inner tendency"—his own decisions and dispositions that, had they differed, may have led to a different fate.

Shambu shared a similar story. When he first came to Delhi, he met a Briton with whom he worked to build a road: "We used to joke with each other and became good friends. At that time, work was good, so I didn't even think about it, but I should have had that man get me work in England. He told me I could work with him there. Who knows where I would have been today? But then, work was good and I was happy here, so I told the man I don't want to become the slave of England." The man left, and Shambu never saw him again. Dhaniram, who was sitting with Shambu and I, added, "God gives everyone one chance in their lives. If they see it and take it, they can become *crorepatis* [millionaires]." Both Shambu and Dhaniram here indicated that one's fate is produced through the combination of inner dispositions, how one locates and defines value, and external opportunity. This also represents the terms on which many Shiv Camp residents made sense of their relationship with the resettlement process.

In October, having just returned from spending three months in his village, Motilal asked me about the status of the Shiv Camp legal case. Hearing my ambiguous response, he replied, "this [the *basti*] could break anytime." Motilal's wife had fallen extremely ill, which is why he had been in the village for so long. "I spent 5,000 rupees for a cure, but she's in [the hospital]. Now what can I do? We've spent money; now everything is in god's hands." He had suggested the same idea of fate when referring to the demolition process: "who knows if we'll get anything." Motilal continued describing the relationship between resettlement and fate: "In the past, we were offered resettlement in Kali Basti, but we refused. Now that people have built their homes there, they could sell the plots for 5 lakh. They have 25 gaj.... Anywhere in Delhi with that much [land] will get at least 1.5 lakh. After you add all the expenses and house and that the colony has existed for some years, it adds up to that much. We could have had that all, but we didn't act. Now we are too late." In the months after the April demolition, this became a common refrain throughout the *basti*. As Lalaji, one of the core members of the leadership committee, said, "at that time [~5 years ago], sarkar was offering 25 gaj plots, but we refused. Our pradhan said we wanted bigger plots, so they left, and nothing happened. Now, we will be lucky to get 18 gaj plots. We had the opportunity to have a good plot there, but we lost it." Bhagavati, having made

a similar statement, followed by saying *sarkar* had surveyed Shiv Camp like all the other *bastis*. Even though these other settlements were not as old as Shiv Camp, she said, they had already been resettled and had become well off: “they received nice plots... only six kilometers away. When will our fate change?”

What stands out in these narratives is that, in each, an opportunity to capitalize on an external event—the offer of resettlement, the chance to work in England, the opportunity to marry a rich, beautiful woman—did not align with the “inner tendency” of the protagonist, who was unwilling to leave “home,” defined either as one’s house/neighborhood, country, or religion/family. Whether these were indeed available options or not, the narrator interpreted them as such, appropriating these external conditions as self-defining: in each case, by attributing chance encounters to individual choice or disposition, they used the language of fate to affirm their attachment to place. Looking back, often with regret, the narrators of these stories were also registering alternative value regimes: Maybe they should have acted differently? Maybe they will act differently next time? In present day Delhi, slum residents continuously face an external challenge to home: to fight to defend life in a known place, or to invest hope in another destiny. This problem of resettlement, I now want to suggest, signaled a particular form of value contestation for many residents, specifically posing the comfort of home-as-use-value against the promise of plot-as-exchange-value.

6.6. Land fetish

In addition to the state-run slum survey—a governmental technology of narrating resettlement as a program of (self-)improvement (see Chapter 5)—the history of resettlement in postcolonial Delhi offers another “object lesson” in the progressive promise of relocation.²¹ At the time of Indian Independence, Delhi’s population doubled almost instantaneously, as primarily Hindu and Sikh families fled the new state of Pakistan into North Indian cities (Pandey, 2001: 122). To accommodate this new citizenry, the postcolonial state established multiple resettlement colonies on Delhi’s periphery, many of which have since become affluent neighborhoods. The story of these colonies’ rise from tent cities to booming upper class colonies continues to animate the myth of resettlement as a pathway to not just property, but also prosperity.

While waiting for a judge in a dispute mediation room in the Delhi High Court, for example, the lawyer representing Shiv Camp began discussing possible outcomes to the case with members of the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) that had petitioned for Shiv Camp’s removal. As six Shiv Camp residents listened in, one RWA member described how surprising it was to think that Jangpura, Lajpat Nagar, and other affluent South Delhi colonies were once resettlement colonies. “The best thing for these people,” he said, nodding toward the Shiv Camp residents seated in the back of the room, “would be to get resettlement plots.” The Shiv Camp lawyer agreed, saying those areas were once worth nothing, but now a single plot there would cost crores of rupees. “Not even lawyers can afford to live there,” he affirmed. Resettlement plots, everyone agreed, lead to property wealth.

²¹ See Glover (2008) for a discussion of the role of “object lessons” in colonial pedagogy and governmental practice.

In this section, I explore how the chasm in value between *bastis* and resettlement plots gave rise to discourses of social worthiness that associated differentially valued individuals with these differentially valued spaces. Specifically, these discourses assigned the attributes of world-class citizenship and middle class civility to the occupants of resettlement plots. A key to transforming one's fate from a low-value worker to a high-value property owner thus lay in affirming a linkage between self-proprietorship and the implicit value of property. But, in conjoining the "inner tendency" of the self to settlement, such linkages also invested land itself with the power to improve subjects: acquiring more valuable land implied a more valuable personhood, and residents' pursuit of resettlement often took discursive expression by symbolically linking their value/worthiness with the value embodied in private property. I now turn to the different forms of value Shiv Camp residents understood to be at work in the question of resettlement, and how their narratives of self-transformation were also narratives of place.

Ghar (home) versus *plot*, these were the terms on which Uday Prakash and Rampal, boys in their early 20s, framed the resettlement process among a mixed-age group seated in front of the *paan* stall (where betel nut, cigarettes, and chewing gum are sold) one March afternoon, a few weeks before Holi. When I joined them, they were already talking about resettlement. Rampal was saying how sad it would be if they were removed from Shiv Camp: "How would we celebrate Holi? We know everyone here and celebrate together. Everyone is open." Rampal had recently visited Bawana, where a friend from another *basti* had recently been resettled. What he saw of Delhi's largest resettlement colony, situated thirty kilometers north of the city, did not fit the image of resettlement government officials typically present. Instead of a well-serviced plot, his friend's family was living in a *jhuggi* in an open field, awaiting an official land allocation: "They live beside a canal; there are snakes there, and people are scared to go out at night. There's no work." Uday Prakash disagreed with this summary of resettlement, but he used terms quite different from those of Rampal: "Everyone sent there receives a *plot*. If not immediately, then after some time they will have their own *plot*, their own land [*apna khud ka plot, khud ki zamiin*]." Rampal replied, "Even if everyone receives a *plot*, they are only 18 gaj [square meters]," suggesting that this was far too little space. "Do you know how much those *plots* cost?", Uday Prakash rhetorically asked, before answering his own question: "They cost 1.5-2 lakh rupees now and will cost even more soon! But, yes, they don't have *ghar* yet, only *plot*."

In replying to Rampal, Uday Prakash had introduced two unequal entities, which had to be equated for the resettlement process to make sense: *ghar*, on the one hand, is a place that provides comfort and security—a particular use value—whereas *plot*, on the other, is a piece of land that is primarily defined by its exchange value. Uday Prakash agreed with Rampal that 18 square meter plots were too small for a comfortable life—it was certainly not *ghar*—but wondered if the value of the plot was enough to compensate for the loss of *ghar*: "If we are going to *shift* from here, we should receive good compensation [*muaavzaa*]. 18 gaj is small, but it will grow with time. Two lakh rupees will someday become five [*ek din, do laakh rupaye paanch banen*]."

Shiv Camp residents often framed resettlement as a question of compensation, which they understood as an exchange of *ghar*—including the sense of community and the social networks they had built over the years—for something of monetary value—i.e., a piece of property, something first possessed and only later lived. By its very nature, plots had the power to produce

value (two lakh will become five), which Uday Prakash and many of the other boys saw as a highly desirable trait. Sonu, who had earlier in the day been telling me about Shiv Camp's relationship with the neighboring *kotis*, added his perspective, "If we are removed from here, we won't leave until all the koti windows are broken. What happens must happen. But, if we are given compensation, then we will be happy and they will be happy. We will get what we want [plot] and they will get what they want: more space, more cleanliness, more roads." Sonu, Rampal, and Uday Prakash here evoked the conundrum of commodity exchange: could the value of *ghar*, a concrete particularity, be measured in monetary terms, an abstract system (what Marx calls "the universal equivalent of value")? To Sonu, such a transaction seemed fair, even if strange, a point with which Rampal sympathized when he said that although he would prefer to stay in Shiv Camp, resettlement was acceptable to him: "Bawana will slowly be built. It will improve. It takes time to build *ghar*," that is, to establish the use value of *plot*.

Resettlement, to Uday Prakash, provided the conditions necessary for one to harness the power of property and be inserted into its system of self-generating value. Others too found this power compelling, even if they considered displacement too high a cost to obtain it. For Motilal this power was everywhere visible. Describing the neighboring *kotis* to me one day, he said: "These people bought the land when it was cheap. Now they have one family living here and they rent out to three renters and ask for lots of money. They just sit and make money. They can work for a month or sit and make the same money [through rent]." On another occasion, even after acknowledging that resettlement plots do not have all the traits of private property—viz. they cannot be sold for the first five years—Sonu said of a hypothetical resettlement plot, "Its price will go up with time. You see, if you look anywhere in Delhi... you can't find anything, even the smallest plot, for less than 1.5 lakh. So, this area in Bawana, which is central and has all these services, will have a lot of value [*uski kiimat bahut hogi*]."

Hernando de Soto describes the "mystery of capital" as the power of formal property rights within a capitalist bureaucracy to give assets that serve "immediate physical purposes" (like "houses used for shelter") a "parallel life as capital outside the physical world" (de Soto, 2000: 39). Formal property, according to de Soto, allows for the coordination of use and exchange value by mobilizing the "dormant value," "the potential energy," of an asset (*ghar*) for the purposes of generating surplus value, i.e., by transforming it into "live capital" (ibid.: 40-45). The primary means by which this happens is land titling, which provides owners with the ability to use their property as collateral for mortgages and credit, "to produce surplus value over and above its physical assets" (51). While the speculative nature of this process of valuation has become more evident in the wake of the subprime mortgage crisis and the subsequent global financial meltdown, this story of the power of formal property to generate value by representational means—"capital is born by representation in writing" (49), de Soto writes; "endowed with representational existence, these [Westerners'] houses can now lead a parallel life, doing *economic* things they could not have done before" (63)—is a foundational premise of capitalist economics.²² This "representational sorcery" (Christophers, 2010: 95)—the treatment of property as a source of value, not merely as a means to redistribute the value produced through the labor process, as Harvey (1982) (following Marx and Ricardo before him) shows it

²² For critiques of the practical implementation and effects of de Soto's approach to property formalization, see Gilbert (2002) and Varley (2002). For theoretical critiques of his representational work, see Mitchell (2007) and Christophers (2010).

to be—also relays common populist elements of what I am describing here as the myth of private property: the promise that attaining formal property will endow the entrepreneurial poor with the cure to their misery and marginality by inserting them into an alternative value system: the acquisition of title is enough to morph penury into plenty. While many Shiv Camp residents identified with this myth, they also saw the requirements for accessing private property in starkly different terms than de Soto. In particular, acquiring plot-as-exchange-value required relinquishing *ghar*-as-use value. That is to say, acquiring the power to “generate surplus value” was not an additive process, but a substitutive one (i.e., replacing a use value with a new exchange value). It consisted more of a direct material exchange than a mere representational transformation “outside the physical world.” It required an act of sacrifice—dispossession—even if it was compensated.

This substitutive process is what Marx describes through the equation C-M-C, the exchange of a commodity (C) with a certain use value for money (M), which can then be used to purchase further commodities (C). Use value and exchange value are usually considered different attributes/representations of a single commodity—i.e., the usefulness of a thing on the one hand, and its value relative to other things of potential use on the other: commodities appear to us as objects “with a dual character, possessing both use-value and exchange-value” (Marx, 1867 [1990]: 131).²³ This is what de Soto means in talking about assets having a “parallel life” “outside the physical world” of “immediate physical purpose” (or use). In resettlement, however, the exchange process (C-M, *ghar*-plot) is spatially displaced. That is, there is a spatial transposition in which the acquisition of an exchange value requires a geographic dislocation—the representation of value in an “elsewhere.” Here, exchange takes place through the loss of *ghar* (use value) in one’s neighborhood for the realization of plot in a distant locale.²⁴ The distance in C-M thus acquires geographical expression, and accessing M, which we might take as shorthand for a property-based system of value, means accepting displacement. But, resettlement plots have an intimate association with *ghar* since they represent the associated exchange value—the value equivalent (?)—of *ghar*. Yet they are also geographically distant. This distant present-ness of housing, this auratic or ghostly quality, inspired sometimes speculative imaginations about life in resettlement colonies. As a value already possessed (the “potential energy” of *ghar*) but not yet activated, the aspiration for resettlement often signaled a desire for self-transformation: C becomes M (and then C’, i.e., something more than C).

One day in November, Pappu began describing a *basti* that had recently been resettled. Although in the April Demolition, just seven months earlier, many of his neighbors had been displaced without compensation, his tone evinced a faith in the trusteeship of the state: “Those people now have their own land [*apni khud ki zamin*]. They have homes in Bawana.” I had visited Bawana a year earlier to meet with the displaced residents of Sant Ravi Das Camp, the settlement I discussed in Chapter 3. At the time, Bawana had unpaved roads, irregular bus service and electricity supply, and no schools or medical dispensaries. I saw conditions very similar to those Rampal described above. Many men spent only weekends in Bawana, sleeping at their work sites in the main city for the remainder of the week to minimize the arduous and costly commute.

²³ This “diversity of the measures for commodities arises in part from the diverse nature of the objects to be measured” (Marx, 1867: 125-6); i.e., because objects have different attributes.

²⁴ “The major contradiction of space arises from *the pulverization of space* by private property, the demand for interchangeable fragments...” (Lefebvre, 2009: 189).

Most women had completely stopped working outside of the home, a condition they bemoaned.²⁵ Pappu's image of Bawana differed from what Rampal and I saw: "Bawana is really nice. It is like a field. There is open air, a canal, and big, wide roads. It has a factory atmosphere [*factory ka mahaul*]. It is a planned area." I asked if people's lives there are better than in Shiv Camp. "Oh yes," he responded, "There, everything is clean; you have 24 hour electricity, good clean water at any time; there are factories all over."

Sensing that Pappu saw Bawana more as an imagined landscape than a physical locale, I asked him what Bawana would look like in 5-10 years. Would it look like the rest of Delhi? He stared at me, confused, before rejecting the basis of my question: "Bawana *is* in Delhi." Noting that it is far away from central Delhi and its conveniences, he affirmed that it would look like the rest of Delhi: "It has factories and good roads." Insistent, I asked if Bawana would look more like the *basti* or the neighborhoods with *kotis*. Sonu had joined our conversation, and both he and Pappu agreed that Bawana homes would look more like the *kotis*. As Sonu explained:

People will have permanent [*sthaayi*] and *pakka* houses. It will be *nishchit* [guaranteed] there. You can have all of your family in one place. If someone gets married, they too can stay there. You'll have a permanent address.... Here, if you want to have nice things, you are always worried because the government could come and break this place. Then you'll lose all that. There is no such worry in Bawana.

For Sonu, it was the permanence of resettlement plots that would allow individuals to acquire "nice things." His suggestion was that *basti* residents and *koti* owners did not fundamentally differ; it was the impermanence of tenure that prohibited *basti* residents from transforming their homes into *kotis*, from investing their wealth into a permanent asset. Sonu, like many of the youth, saw wealth around him, but believed that without a plot, that wealth could never be grasped. Here was de Soto in the *basti*, making a standard neoliberal argument for the importance of clear property rights. Tenure security was only a piece of the puzzle, however. In many residents' accounts, there was something particular to property ownership and the sacrifice required to achieve it, something that fundamentally changed the fate of its owner. As Pappu went on to say, describing how individuals were transformed through the resettlement process, "There [in Bawana], I saw someone with a cart of ice that spilled over. Nobody took the ice; they just let it stay. Here, these people would have taken it all." Bawana, it seemed, instilled its residents with social worthiness and civility. When I asked Ramkali, Pappu's wife, what life in Bawana would be like, she said, "If we get a plot, all our problems will go away. We will become big people, like the *koti* owners. Our men will find good work; our children will get good educations; our daughters will marry good boys. There, life will become good. We will have big houses and maybe even a car." Pappu tempered her response, while still affirming the transformative power of property: "We can't rise so much (*itna nahii barhe*). No matter what, a laborer will be a laborer. We can have a *pakka* home, but we won't become big." Sonu too read aspirational qualities into resettlement, although he first explained the transformative power of resettlement through its demarcation of a clear boundary between public/private:

²⁵ See Menon-Sen and Bhan (2008) for a comprehensive survey of resettlement conditions in Bawana and Narela, two of Delhi's largest resettlement colonies.

When people have their own land, then they make their own houses and gates. If someone is bothering you there, you can have them removed from your land.... But, here you can't stay away from those people. People just sit around and gamble. They get drunk every day and then fight in the night. You can't escape that here. In Bawana, people don't do that. If people gamble, they do it in their own homes, not in the open. They don't bother people like here. Here, the atmosphere is dirty. The men play cards all the time. If they don't want to go to work, they just stay and gamble. Then, what are the children going to do? Of course they are going to gamble and drink too. In Bawana it isn't like that. Even if people don't have good work, even if they only earn 50 rupees a day, they still go to work. The system is better there.

While Sonu here explained the habits of individuals through institutional arrangements and social norms, he also considered certain “natural” inclinations to arise from the land itself. As he went on to say, “See, here, there is no reason for a child to get educated. He is in an atmosphere that won't let him improve. But, there, other people study. People work hard, they aren't dirty like here; they aren't thieves and they don't try to harm others. There, people will be able to do more.”

Not all Shiv Camp residents were willing to sacrifice *ghar* in hopes of receiving resettlement plots. Many residents—old and young, educated and uneducated, male and female—completely rejected the premise that resettlement was a process of improvement, instead reading it as raw state violence. Such residents were typically less willing to speculate about their futures in everyday conversation, and framed their interests almost entirely in terms of tenure security and sustained work prospects. Deshraj, for example, had purchased a piece of land in an outer resettlement colony. When I asked him if his plot would become more valuable (*zyaadaa kimtii*) with time, I meant “value” (*kiimat*) in terms of the price of the land, which was its connotation among many other Shiv Camp residents in discussions of land. Deshraj agreed that the land would become more valuable with time, but what he meant by this was that it would receive additional services, better public transport, and improved job prospects. Repeating the word I had introduced—*kimti*—he turned it around on me and started talking about how value operates for him: “*Society* is important for us. Wherever these people [i.e., his neighbors] are, that is where we want to go. By living here for so long, for staying here for 25 years, by sharing the same villages as all these people, wherever they go, that is what we will find to be *kimti*.” In my attempt to ask him about exchange value, Deshraj stayed in the register of use value and talked about connection to place, a sense of community, and access to family and friends as what defines value to him.

Because resettlement plots-as-property contain an explicit exchange value,²⁶ the extent to which residents aspire to this exchange value as a means of self-improvement—i.e., the extent to which

²⁶ This is not to say that *jhuggis* in Delhi *bastis* have no exchange value. There is an informal land market that operates within such settlements, but they are far less commodified/exchangeable than pieces of land in planned or even “unauthorized” colonies. While there is much talk of slumlords and a land mafia in Delhi, I never encountered such characters during my research in *bastis* in West Delhi, and most residents of Shiv Camp were the original “squatters” on the land they occupied. Land sales did take place within the *basti*, but at highly depressed rates, and the few purchasers of Shiv Camp *jhuggis* who I met described

they invest hope in this imagined “elsewhere”—also shapes the extent to which resettlement becomes part of this geography of aspiration. Deshraj was not particularly inspired by the imagination of a speculative future, so the value of land for him remained firmly emplaced within use value. Nonetheless, when I asked Deshraj what he thinks Delhi will look like in ten years, he said, “There will only be koti people left. You won’t see any jhuggi dwellers.” Deshraj had little faith in the resettlement process, but was unsure where his fate would take him. When I asked him what his biggest dream was, he responded, “to have big property, to reach as high as I can and have a big home.” Deshraj’s rejection of resettlement and struggle to imagine his future in the face of uncertainty was a common response from Shiv Camp residents, and despite his affirmation of *ghar-as-use-value*, the promise of property was not lost on him.

Although I argued in the previous chapter that individuals’ dispositions vis-à-vis resettlement and the broader world-class city-building project were more aesthetical than “rational,” and although individual judgments on the question of resettlement were dynamic and often self-contradictory, I nonetheless asked my survey respondents whether they wanted to be resettled: “Do you want to be removed from this place and resettled elsewhere?” Thirty-seven of forty-nine respondents (75%) said “yes” to this question.

6.7. Conclusion

If the world-class urban imaginary, as I have suggested in previous chapters, puts in place new standards of aesthetic judgment, then it also mobilizes new aspirational strategies among those situated as “other” to these new standards. In attempting to specify the particular experience of “otherness” in Shiv Camp, my aim here has also been to describe the conditions in which private property became an aspirational object, a target through which desirous subjects imagine alternative futures and alternative selves. If we take aspiration to mean “an earnest wish for that which is above one’s present reach or attainment, especially for what is noble, pure, and spiritual,” and if an object becomes “aspirational” when an individual’s orientation vis-à-vis that object “indicates a desire for personal transformation, in line with a widely diffused and thus generally recognized index of advancement” (Mazzarella, 2003: 102), then understanding the particular terms on which Shiv Camp residents frame their desire for self-transformation is central to specifying what it is that property might transform. As I have argued here, it is the combination of (i) a decline in the perceived value of labor and the stigmatization of slum life with (ii) the widespread circulation of world-class aesthetic norms that together provide the index according to which Shiv Camp residents make sense of their social position. And, it is private property that provides the means to access the world-class system of value from which they have been excluded.²⁷ What can this tell us about urban politics in spaces of territorialized stigma today?

their purchases entirely in terms of tenure security and convenience—i.e., as use value. In this sense, Delhi *bastis* might differ significantly from those in Bombay and Kolkata, perhaps due to the widespread perception that Delhi slums will eventually be demolished.

²⁷ This might be read as an achievement of a particularly spectacularized, in the Debordian sense (Debord, 1995), form of consumption, through which the commodity itself becomes the means to connect with a broader sense of community and self.

Etienne Balibar, writing about the stigma associated with Paris's *banlieues*, says that such "spaces of relegation," publically defined as "essentially *negative* place[s]," render those who occupy them "eternally *displaced* (*out of place*) persons, the *internally excluded*" (Balibar, 2007: 57). The "void of belonging" (60) that such stigmatized spaces impose on their occupants, I have shown in the case of Shiv Camp, made residents feel trapped in time, both spatially and temporally relegated to the "outside." For Balibar, how this void is filled represents the central political question handed to the displaced (those "out of place"): how do they reassert their place and right to the city?

While the void Balibar describes has indeed been produced in Delhi, it is not a permanent position or a structurally determined outcome of public discourse. Instead, I have tried to show how it is an active moment in the production of the urban, an unstable condition produced out of a specific set of governmental technologies (the slum survey), renegotiations of the meaning and measure of value, and aesthetic discourses of belonging. Delhi's governors understand the instability of this condition and have inserted a distant presence—resettlement—in place of this void/absence. That is, the void of displacement is filled with the offer of resettlement: resettlement, the outcome of voluntary displacement, has been introduced as a possession that confers upon its holder a status and *belonging* denied by the fact of being displaced, in Balibar's sense of the term—as in a person "out of place." Resettlement thus denies and supplies, takes and gives. This represents a different political situation than that described by Balibar.

For Balibar, the 2004 "insurrectional" uprisings in the *banlieues* represented the logical result of territorialized stigma, the beginning of a political movement to overcome that stigma. Here is Balibar's statement of politics: "A movement's continuity and its *becoming political* depend on its capacity to transform the sense conferred on illegality by the dominant system" (61-2, emphasis mine). "The void of belonging"—the construction of territorialized "illegality" in the form of the ghetto or slum—is filled/fixed by the displaced themselves, politics means overcoming "the dominant system," and the question for the poor becomes "how they appropriate... their urban 'territory'" (65). Wacquant (2008) and Davis (2006), whose work I discussed in the Introduction, share a similar conception of politics, in which historical agency is measured by the capacity of urban outcasts to re-assert their place in the city via Polanyian counter-movements.²⁸ This model of politics presumes a clear separation between "the dominant system" and the occupants of spaces of relegation and establishes an index of political action independent of, or prior to an examination of, the desires of the urban poor themselves. As Ranciere writes, "What is proper to politics is thus lost at the outset if politics is thought of as a specific way of living. Politics cannot be defined on the basis of any pre-existing subject" (Ranciere, 2001).

²⁸ This, I would argue, is a symptom of sociological theories of collective action more generally, which measure politics according to universal standards of liberal humanism: agency equals resistance to "the dominant system." Auyero and Swistun's (2009) ethnography of environmental suffering in a marginal shantytown therefore reads the absence of collective action as a symptom of "confusion" and residents' attribution of change wholly to external actors. In discussing the possibility of "state-society synergy," Evans (2002) writes that "As long as they [communities] act by themselves, the capacity to reshape the larger urban environment is beyond them," a claim that reifies the boundary between state and society and poses "community" as structurally isolated, an ontology of space that reads place as bounded unit, not as dynamic node constituted through the intersection of multiple, trans-local forces (see Massey, 1994).

In contrast to the “void of belonging” Balibar, Wacquant, and Davis describe, in Delhi, the stigma of slum life arises in the same moment as the promise of resettlement is introduced. Thus, the void is provisionally filled the moment it is created, and the territorialized stigma of slum life is inserted into an aspirational field inflected by the promise of a better life elsewhere. Shiv Camp residents’ own politics of filling the void of belonging, of entering into a world-class system of value, does not take shape only through how they “appropriate” home, but, in at least some instances, in the how they seek identity through its abandonment.

Does this represent an absence of politics? Does this signify residents’ resignation to “the void” or the loss of hope? I do not believe so. Hope in Shiv Camp is not lost, but rather displaced, invested in an “elsewhere.” As the voices in this chapter have shown, we have to see politics arising within specific aesthetic conditions of possibility, what Ranciere (2004) would call a particular “distribution of the sensible.” Not just through rationalities of rule, juridical debates about citizenship and belonging, or relations of force, politics must also be understood in terms of the aesthetic horizons and visions of the governed. The way in which different forms of action are constructed as sensible, in Ranciere’s double sense of being both *perceptible/visible* and *sensible/feasible*, thus fuses the ideological and rational with the aesthetical and embodied. Shiv Camp residents’ politics show that the pursuit of resettlement—what might seem a politics of middle class assimilation—was indeed “sensible” to many. And at the conclusion of my research in 2008, the approximately 550 families remaining there saw their fates lying in the balance between the continuation of a stigmatized “slum life” in the *basti* on the one hand, and a world-class citizenship in a resettlement colony on the other. Until the aesthetico-political field is restructured—until the *basti* is redefined as a world-class territory, or until the world-class city is exposed for the violence it entails—Balibar’s politics of insurrection will remain utopian—beyond the political. Urban politics in Delhi’s *bastis*, I have shown, lie in contestations over value—how does the value of home change when labor is devalued?—debates over what “belonging” actually means when securing property requires expulsion to the periphery, and struggles over the meaning of citizenship—what happens to the promise of property when its fulfillment comes at the expense of a (sense of) place in the city? Following Aristotle, Ranciere insists that political agency must be located at the contradictory intersection of ruling and being ruled, in decisions to act upon others and in disposing oneself to be acted upon. I have followed this attention to these two modes of political life in examining how Shiv Camp residents submit to the act of being ruled, and how this self-disposition shapes the ability to govern others and intervene in what is typically thought of as the field of politics.

In my concluding chapter, I focus on a union-cum-movement of slum residents in Delhi, called the *Dilli Shramik Sangathan* (DSS), that insists that reshaping the aesthetico-political field of possibility is a necessary step to remake the urban, and that re-visioning the urban first requires asking these questions of value and belonging through the material and affective realities of everyday slum life. DSS’s efforts to reaffirm the historical place of the *basti* as a space from which the city is actively produced (i.e., not an outcast place), I will show, confirm that the greatest potential to reconfigure the Indian urban lies in the everyday, situated aesthetic practices of slum residents, and not in an abstract “civil society,” workplace-centered organizing, or in a pre-formulated politics of insurrection/insurgence.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1. The city on display

Throughout this dissertation, I have highlighted the political technologies through which a world-class aesthetic became consolidated as a distinct regime of planning, operating as a means of directing interventions into urban space without rigorous map-based and statistical procedures. At the same time, I showed how this “rule by aesthetics” does not operate exclusively within elite circuits of power, but rather becomes an active vector of social transformation only insofar as it is adopted and enacted in everyday life. Overall, I have attempted to show how aesthetic hegemony does not arise from an abstract or singular force—be it globalization, neoliberalism, or a “bourgeois revolution.” Rather, it emerges through situated political practices operating upon and through the state, law, and civil society; it draws upon aspirations for a utopian future as well as nostalgic recollection of a unified nationalist past; and it is mobilized through colonial legacies—such as the re-deployment of British-era nuisance law—as well as new political equations—such as the Delhi Government’s “good governance” scheme called Bhagidari.

Organized as a critical ethnography of world-class city making, this project has sought to step inside the uneven production, circulation and reception of this project of aesthetic rule. As such, I have attempted to move beyond studies of rule that methodologically privilege either (i) the discourses and technologies of government, without examining the effects these discourses and technologies have on everyday life, or (ii) the effects of these discourses and technologies on the governed, without examining the institutional, political, and affective mechanisms by which programs or rule are performed and consolidated. Rule, I showed, must be understood as a contradictory relationship between how subjects partake in the acts of both ruling and being ruled (Ranciere, 2001). Further, this relationship is mediated not only by discourses, rationalities, and reason, but also embodied practices, affect and the optics through which subjects sense and perceive the conditions in which they live. How these optics are tuned—how “a distribution of the sensible,” or a certain configuration of the perceptive field, emerges that establishes a shared mode of aesthetic engagement, a particular “community of sense”—then, becomes key to how subjects see and intervene in this contradictory project of ruling and being ruled.

No project of rule is ever complete; hegemony is always contingent and contested, it must be constantly performed and renewed, and it rests on enabling simplifications prone to reversal and refusal. In Delhi today, as I have tried to show, the aesthetic dimensions of rule require regular visual confirmation of the merits of the progress in the name of which people are expected to sacrifice: maintaining a world-class “community of sense” is an ongoing accomplishment. This visual validation appears in Delhi in the form of spectacular projects that are presumed to benefit the city and nation as a whole. These projects—such as the Delhi Metro, the public works being carried out for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, and the city’s proposed “signature bridge”—are intended both (i) to affirm the ideals of world-class cityness, providing visible confirmation of the city’s impending arrival on the global stage, and (ii) to confirm their function as public goods—i.e., to operate as signs of the collective benefit Delhi’s public receives by sharing the same city-space as these emblems of modernity (e.g., through the ability to travel on the Metro, watch the Games, and claim residence in a “signature” city).

In addition to these spectacular performances of the city's aesthetic progress, the politics of urban space, I have also suggested, play out in more localized and everyday visual displays: performing the world-class city requires the mobilization of crystallized images and concrete visual acts: photographs, models, advertisements and the like. For example, in Chapter 4, we saw how civil writ petitions filed against slums often include photographs intended to portray the inherent "nuisance of the slum." Once appended to petitions to give judges a visual sense of the areas under question, photographs now constitute a form of primary evidence upon which slum legality is adjudicated. In the absence of the rigorous inscriptive devices (e.g., maps and surveys) intended to establish the legal standing of slums, these images provide simplified visual representations of the territory, enabling judges to quickly locate the slum in question within broader spatial and visual categories. Forming such simplified mental images of "the slum," I showed, is a necessary step in the legal process, yet once granted the epistemological status as proof, judges began to rely on these photographs to pass orders primarily on the basis of slums' presumed desirability or undesirability—that is, to pass aesthetic judgments.

Such visual depictions, map-like in their power to organize and arrange, are not only found in the courtroom, but also circulate within public and private spaces, providing regular visual cues for reading and interpreting urban order. The annual Bhagidari Utsav (festival), a three-day event intended to highlight the achievements of RWAs and state departments involved in Bhagidari, is a space particularly rich in such imagery. Taking place in India's largest conference space, the Pragati Maidan, the festival fills multiple sprawling conference halls with display booths, each arranged by an individual state department or RWA to showcase their "successes" over the year. More than 10,000 people visit this event, also heavily covered in the English media, making the festival a visual workshop for disseminating images of world-class urban works and shaping a mode of world-class public viewership. In the 2007 festival, an RWA that would go on to receive one of the three annual Bhagidari awards in the festival's closing ceremony was offered a display booth at the front of the main conference hall. In a "before and after" tableau, the RWA had printed large posters showing how it had improved its colony through a legal case against a neighboring slum. The "before" showed the intermingling of trash, animals and *jhuggis* along the railroad tracks in the colony. The "after" revealed a *jhuggi* being demolished by a Municipal Corporation bulldozer, the outcome of the RWA's legal action against the slum. The booth thus offered an instructional example of how urban improvement and world-class city making are to be enacted, a project of aesthetic improvement that other RWAs might follow to earn future Bhagidari awards.

In addition to such photo collages, numerous display booths at the festival included miniature models of urban improvement. The Slum and JJ Wing of the Municipal Corporation, the DDA, the office of one of the Deputy Commissioners in the Delhi Government, and a number of RWAs constructed idealized visions of how "slum upgradation" might contribute to a healthier, more beautiful and orderly urban environment. Figure 41 shows the Slum Wing's model, intended to depict the sensibility of a slum re-housing policy—widely discussed in government and planning circles—to relocate slum residents from core urban areas and extend low interest loans for the purchase of subsidized flats in tenement housing on the outskirts of the city. One side of the model shows a slum (visible in the bottom half of the photograph), represented as a set of densely packed tin huts, with no people present. The opposite side of the model shows the

post-demolition housing arrangement: a set of multi-storey buildings surrounding a central park. The presence of the cars parked in front of the building signals that the slum residents, once relocated and in possession of private homes, would meld into the storied middle class, acquiring the attributes necessary to engage in a private and consumptive mode of urban living. What this model elides is that the cost of obtaining such plots is prohibitive for the vast majority of slum residents, as well as the fact that these multi-storey settlements, if they are ever built, are expected to be located on the outskirts of the city, far from the places of work and communities with which the slum residents are associated.



Figure 41. Dreaming away the slum. Photo by author.

Another feature of the model is the army of tall, faceless figures surrounding the scene in vivid, block colors. These figures are borrowed from Bhagidari's symbol for the "My Delhi, I Care" program discussed in Chapter 2 (see the bottom-right corner of Figure 15) and represent the middle class participants ("bhagidars") in Bhagidari, whose care and guidance, it is claimed, will usher the city toward a world-class future. I asked one of the staff members at the booth why the bhagidars are shown in the model, and he replied that through the oversight and vigilance of the bhagidars, slum residents would be effectively moved into these homes: "the city will clean up, and these people can begin normal lives."

This disciplinary model of civic politics was indeed evinced in RWA conversations both at the Bhagidari Utsav and in the narratives I explored in Chapter 3, but the models on display framed this engagement not as "politics," but in a more "objective" visual vocabulary, one that seemed to emerge from the city itself. A Deputy Commissioner described how she instructed her staff to design her model of slum removal as follows: "I wanted them create a true picture of the slum, to show the filth and dirt and how bad the area is. You can see here [pointing to the model] how there are hooks connecting the wires to homes where people steal electricity. See, the environment in this area encourages theft and crime. If we put people in a better place, they

won't act so badly.” This visual simplification of slum life posited electricity theft and public nuisance as the defining features of slum space—anybody can see this “truth”—which the model contrasted with a multi-storey building “that isn't built yet, but this is our dream: to have people moved out of their huts and into this... I also included playgrounds and dispensaries, which aren't in slums.” The model thus paints slum removal as progressive: who would not want dispensaries and playgrounds? Who would not want slum dwellers to escape the filth of the slum?

These images provide miniature examples of how to read and act upon urban space, and I therefore want to argue that they represent key sites at which world-class city making takes place. Instead of seeing them as representations of an existing world “out there,” these exhibitionary efforts might better be read as attempts to make reality itself (see Bennett, 1995; Mitchell, 1991). In a context in which photographs of trash are enough to signify slum illegality and where cardboard models stand in for comprehensive urban plans, these everyday visual displays have become a key terrain on which the politics of the city are staged.

Propertied RWA members and state officials, however, are not the only ones actively engaged in these exhibitionary practices. Slum residents familiar with the violence of forced removal also visualize resettlement and imagine a world-class urban order. In the remaining sections of this conclusion, I therefore want to consider two types of images that engage the world-class urban imaginary: decorative posters of private bungalows displayed in the homes of Shiv Camp residents and the images conveyed through the “cultural programs” of the *Dilli Shramik Sangathan* (DSS), a union of slum residents who use theater, poster displays, and clay models to try to forge a platform to defend public land and its occupants. By examining these two types of image work together, I conclude this dissertation with a series of questions about the aesthetic politics of city making and the political stakes inherent in efforts to reimagine the sensible city.

7.2. Picturing property

The importance of reading the aesthetic politics of the city beyond the exhibition halls, government offices, courtrooms and middle class homes in which we might typically look for them became especially clear to me one day while talking with Shambu, whose home I visited almost daily during my fieldwork in Shiv Camp. Although the political and legal scenario in Shiv Camp was constantly shifting during this time, Shambu often laughed at my sometimes-overbearing questions. The slightest update in the Shiv Camp legal case might, for example, lead me to ask, “do you think the *basti* will be demolished?” One day, as I recalled in Chapter 5, Shambu responded to such a question by saying, “Look, one day we're going to have to leave this place. Such slums have no place in Delhi. Our future isn't here.” On this particular day, I pushed Shambu, asking him what such a future might look like. Sipping his chai, and perhaps sensing that I wanted a more concrete reply, he said, “Only God knows, but we hope it will be like this,” as he turned to the back corner of his hut and pointed to a small paper poster nailed to the wall.

The poster shows a house (see Figure 42), unlike any I have seen in India, nestled in a surreal landscape. Although it looked photographic at first, it is actually a computer-generated collage, with an enhanced, orange sunset-like skyline, a cartoonish foreground of landscaped trees,

flowers and a pond, and something of a hybrid American ranch and Swiss chalet styled home depicted as the image's central object. In the backdrop to the left, a second house is shown, making it clear that the main house is just one within a larger terrain of private, plotted homes. After asking Shambu what the poster shows, he replied, "it is a beautiful place. There is no noise or filth there. It is a proper (*sahi*) house." I sought clarification on what the word "proper" meant to him, and he said: "It is one's own (*khud ka*) house. A private (*niji*) house."



Figure 42. "It is a proper house." Photo by author.

I had noticed the decorative posters in Shiv Camp homes before. They adorn the walls of most huts, with some enthusiastic interior decorators hanging more than a dozen in their small, usually one-room homes. But, the significance of the images displayed had never struck me. When Shambu indicated that his aesthetic choice to hang a "house poster" might be linked to his desire for private property, I realized that these posters might provide a useful device for talking with residents about their future, both imagined and feared.

I therefore made sure to ask about such posters whenever I encountered them in Shiv Camp. This always surprised people. When I asked why they hung a particular poster, they would say, "I like it," "it is pretty," or "it is nice to look at." These seemed to them to be obvious answers to a stupid question. This was not the response they gave, however, when I asked about devotional posters, or even film posters, both of which were common decorative fixtures in Shiv Camp homes. If I asked why they hung a poster of Shiv, for example, their reply was a description of who Shiv is, when they pray to him, and why he is important. Similarly, when I asked about a poster of Shah Rukh Khan, India's most popular film star, I was led into a discussion of Khan's greatest movie hits: "you haven't seen *Dilwale Dulhaniyan Le Jayenge*?!". When it came to house posters though, residents did not know what I was asking: their aesthetic appeal seemed self-evident, beyond words.

Therefore, in order to understand what the posters might mean to residents, I had to pose more specific questions, like “what is shown in that picture?” or “Why is the house beautiful?” Only then would residents (usually reluctantly) state the basis on which they considered pictures of private homes aesthetically pleasing. One man who had purchased a vacant plot of land in an unauthorized colony, but had not yet built a house on it, said the poster represented what he hoped his home would one day become when he had enough money to begin construction. A woman stated, as she nodded toward her poster, “rich people live in these houses. We also hope to live like that one day.” Another man said, “it is our dream to someday have a private house. If we live there, all our problems will go away. You can live cleanly there.”

These images, no doubt, served a primarily decorative function, embellishing narrow walls with colorful landscapes and vibrant colors. Yet, during my inquiries into poster art, poster sellers and consumers insisted that house posters were a relatively new phenomenon in Shiv Camp. Five years ago, they said, very few if any residents had such posters hanging in their homes, even though they have been available in markets for decades. As a poster salesman in Shiv Camp said on the day before Diwali—the Hindu festival of light when most poster purchasing and hanging takes place in Hindu homes: “Today, after photos of gods, photos of houses sell the most.... When I started doing this [2001], they weren’t popular.” This is, of course, the precise moment when slums came to be legally defined as nuisances, and I therefore briefly want to consider what the sudden appearance of house posters in Shiv Camp might tell us about residents’ aesthetic engagement with the shifting politics of land in the city. How might we read these posters?

Is this the “cultural reproduction” of bourgeois visual ideology, the working poor’s appropriation of an aesthetic unconscious that reproduces the conditions of their own domination (Willis, 1981)? The sudden appearance of perhaps the most powerful and enduring (post)colonial symbol of private property—the bungalow—in the homes of those being criminalized for their lack of property ownership would seem to suggest such a reading. As Anthony King writes (1984: 160), “[A]s a symbol of private property the detached and territorially separate bungalow – the irreducible minimum of a house within its own grounds – was patently second to none.” House posters and the narratives of self and city conveyed through them often did seem to relay shared attributes of what I described in Chapter 6 as the myth of private property: an aspirational vision that acquiring a private home, even if through violent displacement, would bring with it the attributes of world-class citizenship.

Yet, residents sometimes used house posters to enter a more speculative register, expressing desires that otherwise appeared beyond the realm of the possible. As Motilal told me through his poster, “This is what *sarkar* has promised us. This is what we should get. Maybe not like this [pointing to his poster], but we need plots.” As I argued through my discussion of the government-run slum survey in Chapter 5, the state strives to secure consent to slum demolition, in part, through the politics of resettlement. This is an effort to democratize aspiration, to cultivate a popular desire for a life beyond the slum through the promise of a plot and state sanction—a promise that everyone can become world-class. But, this effort is also a speculative wager, for the world-class city is not an inclusive city: as neighboring slums are demolished without compensation, as resettlement colonies are moved further and further out of the city, and as the promise of property comes at the expense of a (sense of) place in the city, how long can

this democratization of aspiration persist without a democratization of rights, without a democratization of space?

Might Shiv Camp residents' house posters be read, in this light, as a subaltern aesthetic practice: an effort to appropriate the promise of bourgeois civility on residents' own terms: to pursue not cramped apartments in multi-storey apartment buildings or wasteland on the outskirts of the city, but bungalows and farmhouses, just like those desired by the elite? Or, are these posters and the aspirations they signal merely part of an effort to forge dignity and dream a better life in the face of structural uncertainty? Perhaps this is what Shambu meant when he described his poster as a "proper house," or, as a Ramkali once told me, "people with property are okay, those without will die."

There are no single or straightforward answers to these questions: the meanings ascribed to posters, as with those ascribed to the transformation of the urban, are multiple, contingent and adjustable. As I discussed in Chapter 6, residents supplied different meanings to resettlement, property, and home at different times, shifting between alternative conceptions of value and belonging. These posters nonetheless suggest that residents make sense of the changing politics of the city through everyday aesthetic practices: they try on, appropriate and sometimes rework the meaning of emergent urban form. The desires, visions and aesthetic practices of the urban subaltern need to be seen in terms of both how they partake in the act of being governed—in this case, how they partake in world-class aesthetics—and how they reiterate, reshape and re-signify seemingly dominant aesthetic forms. This is the terrain on which the theater of the *Dilli Shramik Sangathan* (DSS) gains significance, attempting to transform individual responses to the image of the world-class city into a collective appropriation.

7.3. Aesthetic counter-conduct

It was a warm March afternoon in Shiv Camp, and "Mera Bhaarat Mahaan" (My Great India), a play composed and performed by youth activists in DSS, had just ended. In the performance, the residents of Ravi Das Camp fruitlessly seek relief from politicians, beg and bribe state workers for resettlement plots, and succumb to the persuasions of a land developer to sell those plots for a pittance. Ravi Das Camp is finally bulldozed, and in tears, the DSS actors conclude the performance by raising placards from the rubble of the staged demolition site inscribed with slogans denouncing the violence the working poor face in Delhi (see Figure 43). Huddling together, refugee-like, they sing the final lines of India's most well known patriotic song, "Saare Jahaan se Achcha" (Better than the entire world). Anju's placard, shaded like the Indian flag, reads "Mera Bhaarat Mahaan," and she circles the group in slow, deliberate strides, tracing a path on the ground that encloses the actors, an imagined nation framed by destitution and suffering. Widely performed at school and government functions across India, the song is celebratory, always sung in an upbeat manner. The DSS's somber delivery—nothing like the most popular rendition, sung by Lata Mangeshkar and backed by the triumphant instrumentation of a marching band—transforms the song's chorus from a bold validation of the nation's strength into a rhetorical question of the integrity of an imagined "world-class" India: "*Saare jahaan se achchaa, Hindustan hamaaraa hamaaraa saare jahaan se achchaa* (Our Hindustan is better than all places, ours is the greatest of all)." DSS's inflection of these last lyrics as a question left the

more than two hundred men, women and children assembled in Shiv Camp to watch the play in silence.



Figure 43. “My great India.” Placards read: “Why do the poor have to sacrifice in the name of development?”, “This city stands on our labor, it breathes through our strength, yet still we suffer,” “In the last five years, more than a lakh *jhuggis* have been demolished,” “The poor are being played in the national [Commonwealth] games of the rich”, and “Why is resettlement given without basic services?” Photo by author.

But the performance was not yet over: the actors then restaged an earlier scene from the play, only this time they asked members of the audience to step onto the makeshift stage and respond to the politicians who had so boldly denied Ravi Das Camp residents their rights. Wearing a Nehru cap (the marker of a political leader), Anil-the-politician responded to a Shiv Camp boy’s demand that the *basti* be left alone (see Figure 44). Brilliantly playing the role of provocateur, he said: “You can’t just sit on this land. This is public land, not your own. This is government land!” A man at the back of the crowd burst out in response, “We are the public! Public land is our land!” The crowd joined in, building a powerful slogan that rang through the settlement, bouncing off the walls of the nearby *kotis*: “Public land belongs to the public” (*saarvjanik zamiin, jantaa ki hai and sarkaari zamiin hamaari hai*)! I stood shocked, wondering where this oppositional politics had been a year earlier when a sequence of events not unlike those enacted in the play had befallen 122 families in Shiv Camp.



Figure 44. “We are the public!” Photo by author.

In Chapter 6, I traced the everyday ways in which Shiv Camp residents came to understand their occupation of public land on terms largely supplied by world-class aesthetic discourse: that is, as an act violating the codes of bourgeois civility and world-class citizenship. Despite their sometimes trenchant critiques of the threat of demolition, many residents, I showed, invested hope beyond the *basti*—in a resettlement plot or a piece of land purchased somewhere on the outskirts of the city—and often resigned themselves to the seeming inevitability of their displacement. “Mera Bhaarat Mahaan” provoked an alternative vision of self and city, even if only momentarily, in which residents collectively defended public land and their right to the city.

DSS has been operational in slums in west Delhi since the early 1990s, organizing communities of slum residents and unorganized sector workers in pursuit of housing and labor security. In the early 2000s, DSS felt that the traditional forms of community mobilization (e.g., information campaigns, marches, protests) were becoming increasingly ineffective, which is when its core activists began conceptualizing their “cultural programs.” As Ramendra, one of the founders of DSS, told me: “At that time, we felt that telling people they had to struggle, telling them about the problems in the city—housing rights, corruption, all that—wasn’t enough. Even when people knew about these things, they still stayed home. We realized we’d have to show them the problems, make them see what was happening. This is the only way to make change. That’s why we started thinking about theater, posters, and models.” In 2005, after it had begun performing in *bastis*, DSS became associated with *Jana Sanskriti*, an organization operating in West Bengal since the early 1980s according to the principles of the “theater of the oppressed,” a form of democratic theater conceptualized in Brazil by Augusto Boal (1979) and premised on building

interactive audience forums (Forum Theater, as it is known).¹ At this time, the core DSS theater team, made up entirely of youth from Delhi's *bastis*, joined other people's movements for a weeklong workshop in Calcutta with *Jana Sanskriti* to learn and practice this performance technique. DSS theater, based on this training, aims to provide a platform for slum residents to voice their experiences to each other, on their own terms, and in response to dominant depictions of slum life. As Subhash, one of the actors told me, "Our plays are a stage for people to speak. This is our goal: to build people's power to speak (*bolne ki kshmata*)."² The play is also part of DSS's broader aim to create "an image of an alternative city (*dusre sheher ki tasvir*)," as a DSS activist/actor described the goal of DSS "cultural programs" to me. In this sense, I want to consider "Mera Bhaarat Mahaan" as a provisional attempt to "redistribute the sensible"—to enact a "political redistribution of shared experience" by changing the frame within which the urban is rendered visible (Ranciere, 2004: 17).

"Mera Bhaarat Mahaan" begins after its actors parade through the gullies of a *basti*, leading children in song to draw the attention of households, the members of which are assembled in a circle around a makeshift stage. Kailash next introduces DSS and the play, saying DSS is a worker's organization: "It's not a party, it's not an NGO. It is run by the people who make the city—the workers. The actors in the play are not showing an imaginary story, but a play based on real events—events that have taken place in their own lives." The play, Kailash insists, is not like TV or regular street theater. Instead, it has two parts: "in the first part, we will show you events, but the play doesn't end there. That is when the real play begins, when we will ask you to respond to what you saw. You have to think of how we can change these circumstances."

Speaking with Kailash one afternoon after a performance, he told me: "If you just speak to people, the message doesn't come across." Rajan later added, "We try to show everything with our bodies, not with words. If we were to start saying our slum was demolished in May, this many people lost their homes, etcetera, then the message wouldn't work. Instead, we start with a central *image* [he used the English word] we want to show, then we make the play based on it. This *image* is more powerful, and it gets people talking." "Mera Bhaarat Mahaan," like all DSS plays, is organized around a central image—in this case, the image of the world-class city as a violent one that is premised on displacing the public from public land. But, the play also freezes at various places—like when Anju encircles "India," broken and battered (see Figure 45) or when the policemen stand over the cowering slum dwellers, ready to deliver their final blow (see Figure 46)—and in this way the actors capture power relations in key moments. One of the play's first scenes offers one such image of power. Lawyers stand on two sides of a courtroom, presided over by a judge hearing a slum case:

RWA lawyer: Vikas Puri is a planned colony made beautiful for responsible, good citizens of Delhi. But, dirty slum dwellers have illegally taken the land, spread filth, and ruined the posh character of the neighborhood. Honest citizens can't even go out of their homes at night because of the danger of the slum.²

¹ See Mohan (2004) for a detailed ethnography of *Jana Sanskriti*'s linked political and theatrical action in rural West Bengal.

² The "script" of "Mera Bhaarat Mahaan" is not written, and different actors play different characters with slightly modified lines in each performance. My translations from Hindi are based on video and field notes I took while attending seven performances and two rehearsals in the spring of 2008.

Lawyer for the DDA: We can't just remove the slum. The Delhi Government has a policy that people must be resettled before they can be removed.

RWA lawyer: Honest people will be able to breath only after this slum is cleared.

Judge: I don't care what policy there is for resettlement, just remove them! This court struck down that policy already. Giving land to slum dwellers is like giving a reward to a pickpocket. Who invited these people to Delhi? Delhi has to be clean by 2010. Remove this slum; that is my order!

The play thus begins by depicting a slum-related court case, showing the distance between on-the-ground conditions and the expert decision-making process. Pulling lines directly from famous slum-related cases, such as the pickpocket phrase (taken from the Amrita Patel judgment discussed in Chapter 4), the actors show how slum residents' voices are rendered silent in the courtroom, where only judges and lawyers (none representing the slum) can speak. Further, by showing how "nuisance talk" becomes a powerful device for explaining and organizing the city, the actors make clear the symbolic violence of this familiar form of speech, elucidating how seemingly natural descriptions of slums as spaces of filth carry great political import.



Figure 45. Enclosing "India." Photo by author.



Figure 46. A picture of violence. Photo by author.

Later in the play, this type of nuisance talk is parodied in a scene where two middle class women, Mrs. Sharma and Mrs. Varma, encounter a slum while casually strolling to the market:

Mrs. Sharma (in disgust): Oh, these dirty people! They're always blocking the way.

Slum resident (seated on the road): Sorry madam.

Mrs. Varma: What can we do? We have to walk here because it's the fastest way to the market. My flat is so cheap because it is next to these jhuggis.

Mrs. Sharma: Their children go to the bathroom wherever they want. I can't even open my window because the stench from the slum is so great.

Slum resident (after Mrs. Sharma and Mrs. Varma have passed): They call us dirty, but who cleans their houses? Let us leave for even one day, then see who is dirty!

Showing an encounter with which most slum residents are intimately familiar, this scene not only depicts the common middle class construction of the slum as “out of place,” but also shows a typically apologetic slum resident’s response (as well as her later hidden transcript). In doing so, the actors raise the question of whether slum residents’ silence in such situations grants legitimacy to middle class power and whether this silence is also a part of the performance of bourgeois norms. When this scene was re-enacted in a slum with a high percentage of domestic workers, the actors asked the audience how the slum resident that faced Mrs. Sharma and Mrs. Varma should have responded. “What would you have said? Who wants to stand in her place?”, Kailash asked. A woman stepped forward: “I have something to say!” The audience applauded as she faced her middle class adversaries:

Mrs. Sharma: *Chee!* These dirty people. Why do they sit like this all day?

Woman: I have a right to sit here. This is my road as much as yours.

Mrs. Sharma: Maybe you can be here, but you shouldn't make such a mess. We purchased our homes; you've come here and sat on this land as if it's your own. What right is this?

Woman: Where else can I go? *Sarkar* hasn't given me anything.

Mrs. Sharma: *Sarkar* has given you so much: you have free electricity and water! You don't belong. You can't dirty the area like this. This is a posh colony. I will call the police.

In such re-enactments, audience members take turns trying to persuasively perform effective responses, but these stagings rarely end in a resolution. In this case, a man in the audience intervened after the woman's attempt to confront Mrs. Sharma and Mrs. Varma: "See, remaining silent is the right thing to do, otherwise the police will come, then what's the benefit? And, if you lost your job, then what?" Although the audience did not agree on an approach to this situation, the social structures (including the police and the law) enforcing the slum dweller's initial silence were at least made visible through this re-enactment, and the play helped raise the question of when such silence can be confronted and when it is better maintained. Furthermore, the actors' parodic reiteration of middle class discourse—their exaggerated restatement of Mrs. Sharma and Mrs. Varma's disgust—can have a destabilizing effect, provoking responses from audience members that, while not quite confronting or refusing the unjust situations performed, might repeat those situations in hyperbolic fashion. Such reiterations of power also suggest a performative politics through which the actor/audience member might see how his or her "agency" is enabled/produced by that power, and thus how that power might be performed otherwise (Butler, 1993). Slum residents understand better than the ethnographer or comrades in other slums why more bold acts of resistance are rarely possible, but these re-enactments of power provide a stage for people to conduct lived rehearsals for appropriating and challenging norms, trying out their own responses, and voicing their concerns publically.

A broader aim of DSS theater is to make visible the power relations that structure slum residents' conditions of possibility: only then, DSS actors insist, can an "alternative city" be imagined. After the courtroom scene, the play goes on to show residents discussing what action to take to stop the demolition. Once they resolve to approach their politicians, the scene moves on to show two political leaders who stand facing the audience as the residents approach them, seeking relief. Each politician accuses the residents of having voted for his competitor, makes false assurances that he will defend the *basti*, and sends the residents to meet the next politician. The scene ends when the slum residents, running in a circle between the politicians, fall to the ground, dizzy and confused. A later scene shows the politicians talking to each other over the phone, bartering votes and rupees, after which they don black cloaks written with mock party names—the "national robber's party," the "Indian insider's (*chamchaa*—literally meaning "spoon") party," and the "national devil's party"—behind which stands the "World Bank,"

playing a *daffli* (a wide, shallow hand drum). In a comedic transition to the next scene, the politicians dance to the beat of the Bank (see Figure 47). The play goes on to show the seclusion and lack of services and employment opportunities in resettlement colonies, shattering the image of resettlement as a pathway to improvement.



Figure 47. Dance for the bank. Political parties (the “national robber party” and the “Indian insiders’ party”) dance to the beat of the World Bank. Photo by author.

Once the play ends—after Ravi Das Camp is demolished and the actors sing “*Saare Jahaan se Achchaa*”—Anju begins the process of “awakening” the crowd, preparing its members to respond:

Why do only the poor have to suffer in the name of development? Sometimes in the name of the Metro, sometimes in the name of malls, sometime in the name of beautifying the city, we have to sacrifice. We clean the city, we remove the city’s filth, so why are we thrown out of the city and called dirty. We, who ourselves build the roads, the big hotels, the malls, don’t have a home to live in. We construct these tall buildings and the schools, but our children don’t have education. Do we have no right to the city? Will the poor always suffer this fate?

Pointing to the remaining actors, crestfallen and broken, who she has just encircled as the imagined nation (see Figure 45), she asks, “Is this the justice of our country?” The audience takes stage from this point, denouncing the plight of the poor, calling out politicians for their lies, and demanding a place in the city. DSS actors lead the audience during transitions between re-enactments in loud sloganeering: “*Sau mein sattar hum mazdoor, kyon jaaengen Dilli se dur* (We workers are 70 of 100, why should we leave Delhi)?”, or “*Jab mazdoor bolegaa, Dilli ka shaasan dolegaa* (When the worker speaks, Delhi’s administration will tremble!)” In Shiv Camp, the neighboring *kotis*’ doors and windows were pulled closed at this moment, and middle class

onlookers scowled at the display, but residents stepped forward, expressing their anger, taking stage. Such scenes are in marked contrast with residents' otherwise withdrawn and indeed introverted public disposition. The play's power to generate audience responses that perform the violation of bourgeois norms, I now want to suggest, is perhaps its most powerful effect, which DSS actors see as the first step toward imagining an alternative city.

Performing the city otherwise

As I described in Chapter 5, most Shiv Camp residents see themselves as a numerical minority in the city, consistently claiming that there are more occupants of *kotis* than residents of *jhuggis* in both the surrounding colony and Delhi as a whole (see Figures 22 and 23), even though the opposite is true. The feeling of being alienated from the ongoing production of the urban, combined with the experience of remaining isolated in a rapidly developing cityscape, further contributed to a sense that residents did not belong in the city. The "slum dweller's" withdrawn reply to Mrs. Sharma and Mrs. Varma, described above, is one indication of this public disposition, and residents regularly betrayed an intimate awareness that their public face might be read as an affront to world-class aesthetic norms. They said as much in conversation: "The *kotiwaalaas* don't like to see the poor. Workers have no value to them (*Unhe mazdooron ka koi matlab nahiin*)," Prem told me one day. One concrete way in which this feeling of isolation manifested was in residents' seeming reluctance to extend their social world beyond the immediate *basti*, which surprised me given the variety of parks and open spaces within walking distance.

Youth, for example, often praised new urban developments cropping up across the city, discussing in vivid detail nearby urban accomplishments—shopping malls, cinemas, the Delhi Metro, new parks and monuments. Although their words suggested a psychic investment in the city's spectacular redevelopment, they rarely ventured out to experience these sites/sights. This disposition was symptomatic of a broader pattern of lingering in the *basti*, what I read as a response to the extension of bourgeois aesthetic and civic norms into the neighborhood and city at large. Although I had heard stories of the local RWA closing down a smaller neighborhood park due to "misuse" by *basti* children, such transgressions of the boundary between *basti* and middle class colony were rare: boys rarely ventured into the large parks and open cricket grounds nearby, and I saw nothing of the "disjointed geographies" or youth efforts to "delink themselves from the familiar social contexts in which they have been embedded" that Simone (2004: 7, 214) observes in urban African. If the "possibilities of social reproduction are foreclosed for increasing numbers of youths" in urban India, as they are in urban Africa, this did not produce the multi-scalar experimentation Simone describes: the "relational webs" that "promote a capacity for residents to be conversant with sites, institutions, and transactions at different scales" (ibid.: 7). The stigma of slum life and the diminishing political and economic prospects the youth faced were more often lived through physical confinement than outward social experimentation.

The only instances in which I encountered groups of residents openly transgressing bourgeois civility outside of the *basti* were during religious festivals. During a *jaagaran* (meaning wakefulness or awareness in English), for example, which is an event hosted by a single family in which *bhajans*—devotional songs—are blared through loud-speakers late in the night to quite

literally awaken the participants to the presence of the divine, residents freely yelled, sang, danced, and drank in the roads and open spaces outside the *basti*. On the last day of *navraatri*, a festival of nine nights in which various forms of the goddess Shakti are worshipped, residents carried sprouted wheat, which had been seeding over the previous eight days, in a procession around the colony, singing *bhajans*, occupying the streets, smoking ganja, and shouting. The final ritual was a spirit possession, which began after the sprouted wheat—containing a divine presence—had been placed underneath the *peepal* tree at the edge of the *basti*. These proceedings marked the public space around the *basti* with a distinctly village atmosphere, no doubt gaining sanction because of their religious significance.

“Mera Bhaarat Mahaan” performed a similar violation of bourgeois codes, only here it was a celebration of the role of workers in the city, not of the divine. As scenes were re-enacted, DSS actors implored the crowd to respond to the conditions depicted, a demand that people collectively speak up against situations that often demanded the most profound public silence. Through the play’s powerful invitation to rupture the boundary between stage and audience, and through its call to re-script social problems—to join in and create slogans affirming the worker/slum dweller’s voice—audience members were hailed as active city makers and legitimate owners and occupants of the city. Thus, if part of hegemonic cultural production is to foreclose certain forms of representational practice and to offer only certain subject positions from which one can be heard—that is, to allow certain subjects only to be spoken for—then DSS theater represents an effort to create a space in which these subaltern subjects might speak to each other, even if that speech is heard merely as noise to those looking in. Of course, not all scenes from the play can be re-enacted, for some are beyond the reach of the audience, such as the courtroom, the politicians’ backdoor dealings, and the private conversations among the elite. But, by re-scripting certain scenes in which the audience’s voice might provoke an alternative vision, the play suggests that there are key moments in which people can actively reimagine and remake the city.

7.4. Re-distributing the sensible city

It is in view of these violations of world-class aesthetics—the fleeting transgressions of bourgeois norms and the validation and celebration of public land and those that work and make life on it—that I call DSS theater a form of aesthetic counter-conduct. In providing a platform for audiences to create “a picture of an alternative city,” DSS activists also offer a model of politics to youth living in slums. After each performance both male and female youth clustered around the actors, asking about the plays, where the actors live, and how they became involved in theater. Slum youth, who we have seen are typically the most lured into the spectacular and structured world of the middle class, are here drawn in a different direction. Many of the DSS actors/activists themselves became active in DSS only after participating as audience members in earlier cultural programs, and these post-performance conversations became important sites of politicization: this is where descriptions of “housing rights, corruption, all that” gain traction—that is, the political content that Ramendra had said (above) is difficult to convey through conversation alone.

By making visible the structures of power and forms of violence necessary to maintain the world-class city building project, DSS cultural performances shift the terms on which political possibilities can be thought and lay the ground for alternative visions of the city. According to Subhash, “the problem is that the youth are angry, but they don’t know what to do with that anger, so they join parties. The parties give them 100 rupees to set up a little booth during election time to try to get everyone they know to vote for the party. But, this divides everyone.” Subhash went on to describe how Hindutva youth groups prey on this anger to recruit activists, recalling how a rally for the Shiv Sena had been organized in Delhi a few years earlier, when posters of Sena leader Bal Thackeray were plastered around Vikas Puri. The next day, when he walked around the neighborhood, he saw DSS posters with a slogan for workers’ rights pasted on top of the Sena posters. He had not joined DSS by then, but this image stuck with him, remaining a powerful reminder in his mind of the importance of worker unity in the face of a politics of religious, linguistic and economic division.

Such popular “culture jamming” is indeed part of a larger DSS strategy, although its members do not describe it on these terms. Alongside its theater rehearsals, DSS occasionally runs workshops in which youth and children from slums draw posters and learn to make miniature clay models based on their life experiences. Trained artists volunteer art supplies and time to help participants put their visions on paper, while DSS activists ask questions about the participants’ experiences in much the same way as the forum theater discussed above. Once posters and models are complete, DSS members organize mini-exhibitions, during which the art is displayed centrally in the *basti* to show residents what the children and youth see taking place in the city around them. Figure 48 shows a girl drawing a poster in one such workshop, where a *basti* is being cleared to make way for the Delhi Metro. Figure 49 shows a completed clay model of the demolition of Ravi Das Camp. Unlike the models shown at the Bhagidari Utsav (see Figure 41), the violence of slum removal is made explicit in these images, with both the victims and agents (bulldozers, police and politicians) of the demolition in view. The multi-storey buildings at the top of the photograph of the clay model are not resettlement flats, as in the Bhagidari model, but the apartments owned by the RWA members who petitioned the courts to have the *basti* removed. Instead of pulling together fragmented geographies of both slum and resettlement that combine disparate temporal moments that invisibilize the violence of the transition from “before” to “after,” this model focuses on the act of demolition itself. The model further conveys the relative power of the different people depicted in this scene through the size of the clay figures, with the police, state workers and politicians towering above the *basti* residents. A side of the model not visible in the photograph shows a blindfolded judge, sitting on top of a bulldozer, larger than even the apartment buildings in the model. These images thus reveal the more complex web of political actors involved in this brand of “urban improvement” than that conveyed through the Bhagidari model’s more naturalized depiction.

While this art is constructed primarily for *basti*-based viewership, DSS, in collaboration with other civil society organizations, has organized exhibitions in venues in the cultural heart of south Delhi, which is most often visited by wealthy, English speakers. For example, the Hazards Centre, an NGO aligned with DSS, organized a multi-day exhibition of performance and visual art from Delhi’s *bastis* at the India Habitat Centre, an elite cultural and conference space. The event, called Shehar.com (*shehar* means “city” in Hindi), took place in the winter of 2006 and drew a broad audience of south Delhiites. By putting this class in conversation with slum

residents' art, this exhibition inserted the *basti* into the core of world-class aesthetic production, asking viewers to consider the world-class city from the perspective of those being displaced for its arrival. As Dunu Roy, the director of the Hazards Centre said, "It is also important for people who may not have property rights in Delhi but contribute to its economy to have the confidence to be seen and heard in places which are at the heart of the new world class vision for Delhi. They must say, 'Don't look at us only as being poor. We are talented and have ideas.'" In fact, the Habitat Centre agreed to host Shehar.com only because it had requested that the Hazards Centre, a research NGO, present its "expert opinion" on the Master Plan revision underway at the time. The Hazards Centre used this as an opportunity: "Instead of saying here are our experts, we said here are our people and they would also like to participate—rickshaw-pullers, slum-dwellers, children from the street, ragpickers."³ It is through this strategic redeployment of expertise that the *basti* made its way into the image-space of the world-class city, challenging state officials and wealthy world-class aspirants to see the city on other terms.

These examples testify to the power of aesthetic practices in shaping people's uses and visions of urban space. Residents participating in DSS cultural programs are incited to see the city otherwise, to problematize the aesthetic consensus of the world-class city making project, and to perform the city on their own terms. This does not mean establishing a complete picture of an alternative—a consolidated counter-hegemony—but more an effort to render visible forms of life and spatial practices that are otherwise invisibilized. As DSS theater and art shows, what once had the status of being objective—for example, the sacrifices necessary to achieve world-class city status—is called into question by making visible that which has not, under the optics of the existing perceptive field, been visible. By attempting to recalibrate this perceptive field, to redistribute the sensible, these practices become tools of urban politics, making visible ways of life and spatial practices that might modify the relationship between "ruling" and "being ruled." By attempting to change how slum residents are identified as subjects of rule—not as encroachers, but workers, city builders, and citizens—as well as how those residents might affect the process of ruling, DSS aesthetic practices are also a politics of space.

³ "What is a world class city?" *Civil Society*, March 2006.



Figure 48. Squeezed. A girl shows a slum being squeezed being demolished and forced into a tighter space to make way for the Delhi Metro and high-rise buildings. Slum residents flee the demolition site in the bottom of the image, with politicians planning the future in the bottom-right corner. Photo by the Dilli Shramik Sangathan.



Figure 49. Modeled violence. A DSS model made by youth from Ravi Das Camp showing the violence of slum removal. Photo by the Dilli Shramik Sangathan.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the politics of aesthetics and the politics of space are dialectically related: not only does how we perceive the city shape the space of the city, but

so too do the city's material conditions enable and constrain our ability to perform and enact compelling urban visions. In the case of DSS, this means that its cultural programs cannot operate in isolation from the hard work of assembling people, organizing, and building campaigns and alliances. DSS thus continues to coordinate political protests, information campaigns, marches, workshops, and recruitment drives. Some of its most successful efforts have indeed emerged through these more traditional organizing techniques. For example, a continuous twenty-one-day occupation of the lawn of the local DDA office, organized by DSS, ensured that Ravi Das Camp residents, who had been demolished an entire year earlier, were finally allotted the resettlement plots they had been guaranteed. Components of their cultural programs, such as the radical sloganeering and poster displays are incorporated into such events, and all DSS programs aim to make visible the role of the worker and the slum dweller in the production of urban space.

Yet, just as this aesthetic politics is linked with the politics of space, so too is the ability to perform these aesthetic acts contingent upon access to the city. DSS's main office was located in Ravi Das Camp, which was close to eight other *bastis* and two resettlement colonies, forming a close knit network of communities with a large enough membership to ensure sustained participation in and broad slum-based support for DSS events. After Ravi Das Camp's demolition, DSS lost its central organizing and meeting place, along with its means to aggressively recruit new activists and coordinate large programs. While DSS continues to struggle to build alternative visions of urban space, its displacement to the periphery of the city—the office was moved more than ten kilometers away—has constrained its ability to sustain its organizational capacity and popular energy, and although slum residents across the city continue to be drawn into this powerful slum-based association, how can they access the same shared space? Thus, while DSS aesthetic counter-conduct suggests the possibility of forging grounded visions of an inclusive city, the prospects for such visions to spread appear severely constrained in the current political-economic context. As slums become increasingly fragmented and isolated—squeezed into ever-tighter spaces or sent to the peripheries—and as slums are broken up, their residents scattered across different resettlement colonies, how might consolidated networks emerge to articulate the vision of an inclusive city? Will segmented cities continue to be constructed as sensible cities, or are there emergent urban meanings, not yet visible, that might posit a different urban form?

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Methodological Appendix

Introduction: Poverty analysis

To calculate the poverty estimates described in the Introduction, I used the method of direct observation described by Patnaik (2007) and data from National Sample Survey reports to establish the minimum monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) necessary to meet minimum calorie norms during large-sample years (1983, 1988, 1994, 2000, 2005) for both rural and urban areas (Data source: NSS Organization reports Nos. 405, 471, 513 and Patnaik (2007)). For base years, this meant adjusting urban and rural expenditure groups to real 2000 rupees using consumer price indexes for industrial workers and agricultural workers, respectively (Data source: Indian Labour Bureau Annual Reports and International Monetary Fund) and then simply adding together the percentage of the population in expenditure groups that did not consume at least the calorie norm. The poverty line for base-years was defined as the upper limit of the expenditure group that did not quite meet the calorie norm. For non-base years, I calculated the weighted average of the poverty line (in real 2000 rupees) from the base years between which the given year fell and then used the tables showing the percentage of the population in each MPCE for the non-base year to calculate the percentage of households below that poverty line (Data source: NSS tables from rounds 38-62, excluding rounds 39-41 and 43-45 because MPCE tables were either not presented or I could not acquire the NSS reports for the given year). To determine the total number of people in poverty in India, I multiplied the percentage of the urban and rural population below the poverty line by the total urban and rural population of India (derived from the total population of India and from the percentage of India living in rural vs. urban areas) (source: Census of India).

The official estimates for the poverty rate in India are taken from the press releases of the Indian Planning Commission and Virmani (2006) for the years 1983, 1988, 1994, 2000, and 2005. My numbers correspond to, but are more conservative than Patnaik's (2007, 2008). This is because whereas I took the expenditure number from the upper boundary of the expenditure category whose calorie intake was just below the 2,100/2,400 calorie norm, she estimated the exact expenditure number at which the 2,100/2,400 calorie norm was met—a number necessarily in between the upper bound of the expenditure group not quite meeting this norm and the upper bound of the next highest income group.

The official poverty rate in India is calculated using two different reference periods, one called the uniform recall, in which all items consumed are monitored over a single 30-day period, and another called the mixed recall, where food is monitored over a 30-day period and infrequently purchased goods (e.g., cooking fuel) are monitored over 365 days. NSS tables since 2000 provide data for both reference periods. In 2000, the Planning Commission started using the mixed recall period, whereas the earlier numbers are based on the uniform recall period. The mixed recall period produces a poverty rate of only 21.6 percent in 2005, whereas the uniform recall period produces a rate of 27.5. My estimation that 590 million people who do not eat enough food are officially considered non-poor is based on the Planning Commission's use of the uniform recall period. If we use the lower poverty rate (21.6 percent) provided by the mixed recall period, an additional 70 million people are erased from the records of those in poverty—

i.e., a total of ~655 million people who do not eat enough food are denied being poor. I have used the mixed recall period in my own analysis, which is the approach advocated by the National Sample Survey Organization.

Chapters 2 and 3: Bhagidari, state bureaucrats, and the middle class

I spent three months in late 2006 and one month over the spring of 2007 studying the Delhi Government's Bhagidari scheme, interviewing and meeting with members of diverse residents welfare associations (RWAs) across Delhi, and attending public and private RWA meetings. I contacted the Bhagidari Cell in the Chief Minister's Office directly, and was invited to visit and interview members of the Bhagidari staff, whose names will remain anonymous in accordance with the conditions of my human subjects protocol. I was supplied with all available annual reports from Bhagidari between 2002-2006, a district-wise list of all RWAs active in Bhagidari, along with worksheets and summary reports from three Bhagidari membership workshops and four thematic workshops. I also obtained copies of monthly meeting minutes for three consecutive months from three district offices.

In addition to this documentary material, I attended all three days of one Bhagidari membership workshop and at least one day of five thematic workshops. I interacted with Bhagidari staff, observed both the small group and large group interactions, shared lunch and tea breaks with participants, and interviewed the Chairman and President of ACORD, which designs and helps facilitate Bhagidari workshops. I also attended the two-day Bhagidari Utsav in January 2007, an event in which over 10,000 people (RWAs, bureaucrats and other members of the public) participated, showcasing their achievements from the past year, and joined Bhagidari staff in the Chief Minister's Office for three independently hosted RWA events: a meeting with an MLA, the first-ever e-conference in which the Chief Minister and the senior ranking Bhagidari staff tele-conferenced with those attending a monthly Bhagidari meeting at the district office, and a meeting where highly active RWA Bhagidars were invited to provide input into how to improve the Bhagidari process. Upon the invitation of Bhagidari staff, I also attended three Bhagidari monthly meetings in the South Delhi district. I interviewed two staff in the District Office of the Delhi Government involved in facilitating the monthly meeting and collected the schedule of issues to be addressed at each meeting. I also interviewed two Deputy Commissioners, who coordinate the Bhagidari monthly meetings.

In addition to informal interactions with state bureaucrats and RWA Bhagidars in the above venues, I distributed mail-in surveys to RWAs and bureaucrats, described in Chapters 2 and 3, at meetings and through the Bhagidari list of RWAs. I mailed 77 surveys and received 25 responses. The survey for RWAs is reproduced below.

Because I was primarily interested in how RWA perspectives were translated into official policy and practice, I started my research on RWAs by contacting members recommended by Bhagidari staff or whose names appeared in newspapers. Interviews with officers in Delhi's two highest profile and largest RWA federations—People's Action and the RWA Joint Front—provided useful leads, and I used a method of snowball sampling based on these initial contacts to identify, in particular, those RWAs that had faced or were facing slum-related problems. Although the majority of highly active RWAs are located in South Delhi, I specifically requested contact

13. Because of Bhagidari, government departments listen to you more.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

14. RWAs have become empowered because of Bhagidari.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

15. RWAs should be given more economic power.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

16. RWAs should be given more political/administrative power.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

17. Government currently favours vote banks. Bhagidari will help change this.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

18. JJ clusters/slums should be included in the Bhagidari scheme.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

19. Because of Bhagidari, you know more government officials and contact them more often.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

20. The MCD's sealing drive, while maybe sad, was a necessary process in Delhi.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

21. Slum removal, while maybe sad, is a necessary process in Delhi.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

22. What do you think is a more effective way to improve government and the city?

Political Elections

Citizen participation programs, like Bhagidari

23. Of the following, who do you trust the most to work for you? (Select your top 3 by writing "1" next to your 1st choice, "2" next to your 2nd choice, and "3" next to your 3rd choice.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Councilor	<input type="checkbox"/> MP	<input type="checkbox"/> MLA	<input type="checkbox"/> Delhi Government	<input type="checkbox"/> MCD
<input type="checkbox"/> Chief Minister	<input type="checkbox"/> The Courts	<input type="checkbox"/> Police	<input type="checkbox"/> District Commissioner	

24. Will Delhi be a ‘world-class city’ by 2010?

Yes

No

25. Are the following important for Delhi to become world-class?

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Most Important
Build more fly-overs	1	2	3	4
“Slum free Delhi”	1	2	3	4
Build more malls	1	2	3	4
Improve environment	1	2	3	4
Affordable housing	1	2	3	4

26. Name two things in Delhi that are already world-class:

1. _____

2. _____

Comments: _____

Chapter 4: Nuisance law and the courts

I identified slum-related cases based on key-word searches on the Supreme Court of India and Delhi High Court websites, through review of existing academic, legal, and popular literature on slum-related cases, by reviewing newspaper stories reporting on slum related cases, and by interviewing lawyers, NGOs, and slum organizations involved or familiar with such cases. Judgments and orders were downloaded from the court websites or using online, proprietary legal databases. Unlike orders and judgments, however, petitions and affidavits submitted in court are not in the public domain and had to be gathered by other means: directly requesting them from the petitioners or government agencies involved, or through what is called “backdoor entry,” a system of (sanctioned) bribery in which clerks “leak” documents outside the court to be photocopied at a rate dependent on the perceived spending power of the researcher/lawyer. This service appears to be used regularly by High Court lawyers. I met “my” clerk while waiting in line to have a pass for entry into the High Court issued. Although a lawyer had signed my official pass request form, this clerk approached me, saying (in Hindi) that he could get me into the court for 100 rupees. I later asked him what other services he could provide, and our relationship began from there.

In addition to reviewing the legal cases from more than 75 slum-related cases, I attended hearings in the High Court on five different occasions (either for single cases or to observe the proceedings of the court more generally), in addition to one visit to the mediation room in which Shiv Camp residents and their lawyer met with the RWA that had petitioned for their removal. I also interviewed two lawyers representing RWAs in slum-related cases and interviewed the High Court’s Commissioner for South Delhi, who was appointed to address the issue of unauthorized land uses.

Chapters 5 and 6: Shiv Camp

I spent approximately twelve months visiting Shiv Camp between January 2007 and May 2008. My most intense periods of fieldwork took place between January-May and September-December of 2007, when I visited Shiv Camp for at least four hours five times a week. I described my initial encounter in Shiv Camp in Chapter 5 and here want to briefly add some notes on the rhythms and indeterminacies of my fieldwork. After Ravi Das Camp was demolished, which is the settlement I initially intended to study for this project (described in Chapter 3), I chose to begin my work on RWAs and Bhagidari in lieu of immediately searching for a new slum. In the meantime, I rented a flat in a middle class colony in West Delhi that had a high concentration of slum settlements nearby and which is where the *Dilli Shramik Sangathan*, a group with which I had spent significant time in 2005 during preliminary fieldwork, was most active. I entered Shiv Camp in the wake of its partial demolition without any organizational contact, and although an NGO had started a micro-credit scheme for women there, its activities had almost entirely ceased by the time I began my fieldwork.

While my interest was in studying Shiv Camp residents' changing perceptions of land, labor and city, I was often asked to join the Shiv Camp leadership committee on their visits to government departments, the courts, and to the offices of lawyers and politicians to contribute to their efforts to postpone or prevent their displacement. My experience working with the Hazards Centre, my English ability, my familiarity with the legal issues pertaining to resettlement and demolition, and my status as a white, male student from the US positioned me well to gain access to state officers, legal documents and RWA conversations that were otherwise unavailable to Shiv Camp residents. The ethnographer's effort to lay claim to a "community contribution" should always be questioned, as fieldwork is an inherently uneven, and often extractive, encounter. I describe my contribution to "the defense" of Shiv Camp not to assert some authentic experience of slum resistance, but to say something about the voice that Shiv Camp residents expected of me as well as the political context in which they challenged the boundary between researcher and activist. When Dhaniram or any other resident of Shiv Camp described "my aims" (*uske iraade*) to others, I often received a request: "Tell them about us. Tell them what we told you. Tell them what we want," where the "them" was an unspecified outsider, presumably those in positions of power, those they saw as more capable of enacting change.

Shiv Camp voices and desires are heterogeneous and divided, as I try to allow in my analysis. However, its residents, I believe, asked me to present a picture of a place and its people struggling to survive, struggling to make sense of a precarious position somewhere between accepting displacement and facing perpetual insecurity. This is the balance I saw residents negotiate every day, it is the anxiety they wore on their brows, and it is the interpretation I offer of their struggle. As much as I would like to say I am "speaking with" my ethnographic subjects (Spivak, 1988), my analysis clearly shows that this is unavoidably an act of "speaking for" them. While this is a necessary effect of the ethnographic encounter, it is also a deliberate choice I make in my writing. That is, in the face of what Spivak (1999: 270) calls "the problem of the permission to narrate," I chose narration over silence, for given the immediacy of the threat of displacement, the subaltern subjects whose voices I attempt to amplify faced an even greater silence than that of academic representation: as Spivak (*ibid.*: 272) says, "the intellectual's

solution is not to abstain from representation,” but rather to acknowledge our own complicities in structures and representational regimes that maintain subaltern positionalities.

While I strive to incorporate the voices of my interlocutors into my analysis, I have also tried to paint a picture framed in terms of the defense of place, for even those willing to accept resettlement and “move on” read the potential demolition of Shiv Camp as a loss. At the same time, I try to make my own persuasions clear, pointing to the ways in which Shiv Camp residents’ everyday desires challenged my own conception of politics, forcing me to see their efforts to forge identity and enact agency in ways that often partook in the “act of being governed” (Ranciere, 2001) as part of a politics of place. As much as I wanted their politics to be one that transformed the “sense conferred on illegality by the dominant system” (Balibar, 2007), it just as often found expression by embodying that very illegality (cf. Mahmood, 2005).

Shiv Camp residents were highly skeptical of my presence over my first month of fieldwork there. Many believed I was a government worker. During this time, I would join Uncle Ji for tea as groups of boys would enter in and out of our conversation, curious what a white boy from America was doing speaking Hindi and visiting this far-off place. My greatest asset in those early days was a group of boys who took interest in me and started to express my research question in language easily comprehensible to others in the *basti*: “He’s here to understand our problems, what our demands are, and what injustices we face so he can tell the world about them,” Dhaniram often said. My affiliation with the Jawaharlal Nehru University, named after India’s first Prime Minister, a name everyone recognized, gave me further legitimacy. By early February, the group of people who asked me where I came from and what I was doing in Shiv Camp shrank, and I soon became a familiar face. A moment of stupidity on my part, when I foolishly stepped in front of the path of Municipal Corporation bulldozers set to raze Shiv Camp huts in April, won me further respect, even though my naïve effort was fruitless.

I had no research assistant for my ethnography, but hired Dhaniram to help me design and implement my survey of 51 residents, which I describe in the chapters. Studying expectations for the future and the day-to-day anticipation of displacement meant doing a lot of listening and not a lot of asking. When I tried asking more pointed questions, residents often changed the topic of conversation. My most fruitful interactions emerged as residents raised issues of housing, tenure, work and resettlement on their own: these were common topics of everyday conversation at the time. The questions I did ask were broadly framed and often repetitive. Looking back over my field notes in the summer of 2007, which I spent in the US, I noticed that asking the same questions over time was incredibly useful. It is through this approach—asking residents the same questions, soliciting opinions on the same topic—that I noticed subtle changes in respondents’ expectations and anxieties: for example, as I described in section 5.7, I was able to note how residents increasingly asked not *if* they would be displaced, but *when*, a gradual shift that took place over a few months of thwarted efforts to win meaningful guarantees from politicians. This insight was made clear only by diligently recording answers that seemed to be the exact same as those offered the day or month before. Returning to my notes at the time of writing allowed me to track shifts in language, meaning and intent that were not evident to me in the course of fieldwork.

Conclusion: DSS and slum theater

I first met members of the *Dilli Shramik Sangathan* (DSS) through *Sajha Manch*, the network of slum organizations with which I was affiliated in the spring of 2005. I maintained regular contact with the DSS throughout my field research, joining their public meetings, protests, and symposia as well as making numerous field visits to slums in which they were active. I attended DSS's "cultural programs" through the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008, observing rehearsals and performances for the play "Mera Bharat Mahan" most intensely over February-April. I saw seven performances of the play, attended two rehearsals, interviewed five of the actors/activists involved, and had numerous conversations with DSS organizational leaders and activists about their goals and how they saw their work fitting into urban politics in Delhi.