Criminal Capital

Violence, corruption and
class in industrial India

Andrew Sanchez

CRIMINAL CAPITAL

Criminal Capital explores the relationship between neo-liberalism, criminality and the reshaping of class in modern India. It discusses how the political vocabularies of urban industrial workers reflect the processes by which power is distributed across the region. Based upon field research among a 'casualised' workforce in the industrial city of Jamshedpur, the book examines the links between the decline of employment security, and criminality in trade unions, corporations and the state.

This volume compares popular discourses of corruption against the ethnography of local labour politics, business enterprise and debt collection and shows how corruption and criminality consolidate class power in industrial environments. Using an interdisciplinary ethnographic approach, this study interrogates the relationship between capitalism, corruption, violence and labour politics in contemporary Indian society.

An important intervention in the study of Indian political economy, this work will be of interest to scholars and researchers of Indian politics, social anthropology, economics, labour relations, and criminology.

Andrew Sanchez is Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent, UK. He is a specialist on the anthropology of class, labour and corruption, and has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in urban India among industrial workers, trade unionists and entrepreneurs. Prior to joining the University of Kent, he held positions at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. He is currently conducting a study of the Indian scrap metal industry.

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CRIMINAL CAPITAL

Violence, corruption and class in industrial India

Andrew Sanchez

This book is for my mother, Barbara Lee,
who taught me to think critically,
feel passionately and speak plainly.
None of this could have happened
without her.

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Andrew Sanchez's book could not have come early enough. In a climate of increasing changes in the economic regimes in the world, his ethnography of a flagship 'steel town' in India provokes a discussion of the real consequences of such changes. The study is located in Jamshedpur, a town in the eastern state of Jharkhand, well-known for steel production. The town is named after the industrialist, Jamshedji Tata, who set up this plant during the colonial period to provide locally made steel for various British projects, most notably, the Indian Railways. Jamshedpur is, therefore, synonymous with both steel and the Tatas, one of the oldest and best-known business houses in India. Jamshedpur itself grew as a planned township to house not only the steel and automobile plant, but to provide accommodation and services for the workers and their families. It has been held as a successful example of a 'company town' model in India. Unlike state-owned enterprises, Tata Steel made consistent profits from the 1950s onwards. The plant attracted a workforce from far and wide, and their skills and aptitudes were variously deployed for a hierarchical and highly specialised industrial workforce. This heterogeneous labour pool was gradually given local stability through hereditary employment opportunities for subsequent generations of workers and this created an enviable loyalty to the firm. This loyalty, combined with the value placed on traditional family work, has defined the Tata working class. As Sanchez puts it, 'The tenacity of this system is evident in the extent to which even casually employed Tata workers from company families currently accept low wages and a high degree of job insecurity for many years: such employees are inured to the value of Tata employment, and tend to build not only their ambitions, but critiques around it'.

This book picks up the Tata story more than a decade after India's economic reforms that reconfigured relations between the state and economy were introduced in the early 1990s. Until this point, Tata Motors had a virtual monopoly on the domestic automobile market, but the neo-liberal reforms had allowed foreign competitors such as Suzuki and Toyota into the automobile market and they were able to provide quality products at more competitive prices. The only way in which that Tata could reduce their production costs was to casualise their labour force. By the time Sanchez started his research in 2006, the casual workforce was greater than 75 per cent – nearly *three times* higher than what it was before the reforms. In order to achieve this extraordinary change, Sanchez's data shows how criminality and corruption were essential tools.

This fine-grained ethnographic work shows how neo-liberal reforms impact an industrial workforce on the ground. It is a story about individuals and systems that demonstrate the fallout of these reforms, the change they force in labour policies and the impact that these have on particular families and communities. While the literature on the negative impact of neo-liberal reforms on India's rural poor is well-established, this path-breaking study charts their impact in an urban industrial setting. Fundamentally, this book queries the claim that economic liberalisation creates a more transparent and meritocratic society. While competition might have forced companies to drive their costs down, this forces criminalisation of the post as it allows the entry of new brokers, and ultimately, the financial and social costs of the process are borne by the industrial labour force.

The title of the book, 'Criminal Capital', draws attention to the central role criminality plays in making modern capitalism work. In order to show this, the author re-grounds the concept of 'class' in the idea of struggle and shows how class struggle is a 'pursuit of power through criminality and the expression of political consciousness through corruption discourses'. If class is about a struggle over capital, then Sanchez shows us the likely and unlikely collaborations that exist between elites drawn from business, politics and labour organisations in the ownership, production and movement of capital. Sanchez's discussion of crime, capital and corruption shows us what practices of corruption can tell us about the functioning of class power in modern capitalism. We witness how 'the Tata Workers' Union maintained their monopolistic strength of former years, and was now said to turn its power against their own members'. A combination of factors – a

decline of employment security, a resultant erosion of collective action and the entrepreneurial criminal activities of political elites – together effected this brutal change.

The resulting understanding of 'corruption' is thus not merely the 'episodic' instances that are anecdotally recounted by all and have hegemonic prominence, but the author argues powerfully for an understanding of corruption that is 'systemic'. This systemic understanding of corruption requires us to view individual transgressions not just as isolated incidents, but as symptomatic of a wider logic that requires negotiations between different elites in order to facilitate a consolidation of class power. The agents of these systemic corruption – corporate capitalists, political representatives, entrepreneurs, and gangsters – apparently distinct agents are 'engaged in deliberate, mutually beneficial negotiations that fulfil shared class interests'. Sanchez shows that these actors not only act in mutually beneficial ways, but in the process, they also 'create a class of people that are dispossessed by these processes and articulate a critical consciousness through systemic corruption discourses'.

This book, thus, makes a unique contribution by showing in extraordinary detail, through specific examples, how capitalism, corruption and criminality have a mutually beneficial relationship. While the empirical evidence comes from a single location, the study uncovers the underlying logics of capital and labour everywhere.

Mukulika Banerjee
London
April 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BMS	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (Maoist)	Communist Party of India (Maoist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of Indian (Marxist-Leninist)
HMS	Hind Mazdoor Sabha
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
JLA	Jamshedpur Labour Association
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
JMU	Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union
NRI	Non-Resident Indian
PMK	Pattali Makkal Katchi
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAIL	Steel Authority of India Limited
TELCO	Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company
TELCON	TELCO Construction Equipment Company Limited
TISCO	Tata Iron and Steel Company
TWU	Tata/TELCO Workers' Union

NOTES

The term 'casual' has been used throughout this book to refer to the non-permanent, non-unionised full-time employees of Jamshedpur's Tata industries. At the time of research, Tata management officially designated these employees as variously 'Trainees', 'Apprentices', 'Temporary Workers', and 'Contract Workers', depending on their respective salaries, training and benefits.

Where given, the Pound Sterling equivalent of Indian Rupee sums is based on exchange rates at the time of fieldwork: GBP 1=INR 80.

Pseudonyms have been used throughout the text, except in the case of trade union officers, politicians and high-profile criminals where the public nature of individuals' positions precluded their use.

Legend:

- state border
- district border
- Jharkhand state
- ● Jharkhand state capital
- ○ field site
- ● major town

Map 1 Jharkhand state

Map 2 Jamshedpur

highway
main road
railway
green space
water body
Tata industries
Tata Workers' Union
Tatanagar Railway Station

① Tata Steel Plant
② Tata Agrico
③ Tata Tinplate Plant
④ Tata Steel-Tubes Division
⑤ Indian Steel and Wire Products Plant (Tata)
⑥ Telcon
⑦ Tata Motors Plant

NEIGHBOURHOOD

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MANGO
AGRICO COLONY
TUBE COLONY
TINPLATE
CABLE TOWN
TELCO COLONY
GOVINDPUR
BISTUPUR
SAKCHI
Jubilee Park
JUGSALAI
Subarnarekha
Kharkai

22°49'08"
86°11'03"

0 km   2 km
        2 mi

Cartography: Jutta Turner   Ascertained data: Andrew Sanchez   Base map: openstreetmap.org

Part I

CLASS AND CAPITALISM

1

CRIMINAL CAPITAL

On a hot night in the summer of 2006, I sat in the back of an autorick-shaw with a smartly dressed industrial manager named Ashok, who claimed that the iconic Indian corporation which he worked for was run by murderers. Ashok's hometown of Jamshedpur in eastern India is the site of the Tata Steel plant,[1] which is arguably the first integrated works of its kind in South Asia, having been built in 1907 by the industrialist Jamshed Tata, after whom the city is named (Bahl 1995; Fraser 1919; Pillai 1923).[2] From its original base in steel, Tata has since diversified into precious metals, automobiles, engineering, telecommunications, sugar, salt, tea, and business consultancy. As an Indian venture embarked upon during the colonial era, both the Tata Company and the city it administers occupy an important place in the national consciousness. With knowledge of this illustrious history, I found Ashok's allegations shocking. Tata is popularly renowned for its high levels of corporate social responsibility, and Jamshedpur enjoys a reputation for civic order that compares favourably to the poverty and corruption of the surrounding Jharkhand state (Behar et al. 2006). Today, Jamshedpur is a prosperous city that is home to more than one million residents, many of whom are descendants of the labour migrants who arrived in the region during the first half of the 20th century, displacing the local Adivasi tribal population (Weiner 1978: 161).[3]

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1 Formerly Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO).
2 Jamshed Tata is popularly referred to with the honorific 'ji' suffix, i.e. Jamshedji Tata.
3 The Census of India 2001 (the most current at the time of initial field research) records an official city population of 1,104,713: of that number, 91 per cent live in urban conditions and 91 per cent are regarded as working in 'Other Work', i.e. non-cultivators, non-agricultural labourers and non-household industry employed.

I had arrived in Jamshedpur several weeks earlier to begin 15 months of ethnographic research on Tata labour politics, and I first met Ashok at the reception desk of the Tata Motors plant while attempting to schedule a meeting with the plant's corporate communications department. As he passed by me on the way to his office, Ashok stopped to talk. He was a likeable and softly spoken man in his mid-forties, who spoke impeccable English with the clipped tones of the Indian upper middle class. After listening to a loose summary of my project for a few moments, he offered to take me on a tour of his workplace, after which he would introduce me to his senior colleagues. A few weeks later, with a freshly laminated Tata Motors gate pass hanging around my neck, Ashok and I made the 8-km journey from his home in a suburban company township to my apartment in the city centre. I had spent the evening talking with his wife and young son, and with an unshakeable concern for the well-being of lone foreigners, Ashok now insisted that he accompany me home, lest I be cheated or misplaced by a rogue rickshaw driver. We walked through the silent, clean streets of his neighbourhood to a nearby junction, where Ashok negotiated a fair price for the 30-minute round trip with a waiting rickshaw driver. Climbing into the back of the vehicle, Ashok and I watched a model steel town go by as we drove towards my home.

The Tata vision in the early 20th century imagined a cohesive company town of the North American model, where settled workers would live in company homes, be cared for by company hospitals and their children educated at company schools (Keenan and Sorsby 1945: 33). Throughout the 1900s, Tata laid miles of wide, straight roads, along which they planted trees for the benefit of future generations. The roads led to townships that housed tens of thousands of steel workers in bungalows and apartments. Parks, sports clubs and colleges followed, and the town grew as the company diversified into the manufacture of an array of metal products and heavy goods vehicles. As we puttered through the night in the back of our rickshaw, Ashok and I passed the neighbourhoods named for their respective Tata industries: 'Telco', still known by the old name for Tata Motors; Tube Colony; Cable Town; Tinplate and Agrico, where the company produces agricultural tools. In each of these neighbourhoods, we passed the same small square workers' houses, plain apartment blocks and grand white villas of senior management, occupied by the descendants of migrants from the Indian states of Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa. Peppered between the industrial townships

were eclectic non-company neighbourhoods, built on land leased from the Tata Company. Here, in various states of poverty and prosperity, lived hundreds of thousands of merchants, petty entrepreneurs, service sector workers, and labourers. Jamshedpur's old guard of professionals and business people dwelt in grandly decaying art deco houses and smart apartment complexes in the centre of town, while their children gradually retreated from the crowded city centre to the sterility of suburban gated communities.

As we drew closer to my apartment in one of the city's oldest neighbourhoods, the air became thicker with the smell of rust, concrete and exhaust fumes. We were approaching the Tata Steel works, which occupied seven square kilometres in the very centre of the city. More than 30,000 people worked behind the plant gates, and the siren that signified breaks and shift changes could be heard echoing over the lanes of nearby neighbourhoods day and night. It was here that the Indian steel industry was born, where the company town model first came to South Asia and where a corporation owned by Indians famously flourished at the height of British colonialism. The Tata Iron and Steel Company at Jamshedpur (TISCO) supplied cheap steel for the building of India's railways, and largely relied upon British trade for many decades. However, the city of Jamshedpur, with its cosmopolitan workforce residing in comfortable modern homes, was a utopian vision in the struggle for Indian independence throughout the years leading up to 1947. Today, the city still occupies an iconic place in the Indian national imagination, and Tata is popularly regarded as a company of flawless pedigree.

Like most company managers, Ashok was in thrall by the personal example of company founder and national hero, Jamshed Tata, the Parsi industrialist who had anticipated the vast mineral wealth that lay below the soil of eastern India in the late 19th century, and famously built Mumbai's opulent Taj Mahal Hotel after being refused entry to one of the city's 'Whites only' establishments. When he died in 1904, Tata left behind him the makings of Jamshedpur and an industry that prefigured the industrial ambitions of the postcolonial state. Ashok was proud of this ancestry, and enjoyed discussions of company history, during which he was an animated and eager source of information. However, Ashok's demeanour would change quite noticeably if pressed on more current local matters. When asked about wage levels in his workplace, for example, or union politics in the city's Tata industries, his characteristic enthusiasm and good humour would begin to

wane. If our conversation strayed into such areas, he spoke quietly and hesitantly and made vague allusions to things that he did not care to elaborate upon. He was also strangely reticent to talk about his own career. Whereas his colleagues typically entered into long, relaxed discussions about their childhood, schooling, work history, and ambitions within hours of our first meeting, the finer details of Ashok's employment history remained a mystery to me for weeks. I knew only that he had been an executive in Tata Steel for 20 years before transferring to one of the smaller Tata industries two years earlier to take up an almost identical position. That evening, in the back seat of an autorickshaw, weaving between trucks and motorcycles while our driver constantly blared his horn, Ashok chose to tell me why he had changed jobs.

Ashok asked if I had heard of V. G. Gopal, the famed president of the Tata Workers' Union (TWU), who was assassinated in 1993. I was aware of Gopal's murder, and knew that he had been shot outside the union's building in Jamshedpur while exiting his car. I told Ashok that I had visited the building several weeks earlier, where I found a bronze bust of Gopal garlanded with marigolds at the entrance. On that day, a polite administrator took me on a tour of the building's lecture theatres and library. As we passed through the silent and spotlessly clean building, my guide directed my attention to shelves of management textbooks, monographs on labour relations and framed portraits of union luminaries. With some discomfort, he told me that the bust outside commemorated a union leader who was 'killed by gangsters'. Metres from the memorial, the macabre monument of Gopal's car sat slowly rusting in the parking lot, where he had left it. Ashok nodded his affirmation: it was true that Gopal had been shot by gangsters. However, he felt that my guide had omitted important details from his story. He claimed that Gopal's assassination had been orchestrated by corrupt officials in the TWU, who had collaborated with the company to implement an unpopular programme of redundancies in Tata Steel. Ashok described how the company homes, schools and hospitals that characterised Jamshedpur were a costly expenditure that could not be sustained in a competitive global market. Throughout much of the 20th century, Indian taxes on imports were high, foreign investment tightly controlled and foreign ownership of Indian companies all but prohibited. The older national corporations flourished in this environment, and the company town model provided Tata with a stable labour force. However, when India's economy was liberalised in 1991,

Tata's monopolies in the production of trucks and private sector steel began to collapse in a matter of months. Cheap imports flooded the domestic market, and Tata's ailing rivals were reinvigorated by investment from Japan, Europe and North America. Faced with declining profits, Tata proposed early retirement for large numbers of employees in Jamshedpur, whose jobs could then be filled by cheaper casual workers. This new flexible labour force would enjoy lower wages and none of the employment benefits that characterised Tata work for several decades. Families that had worked in the same plant and lived in the same townships for generations now faced a future where children would enjoy a lower standard of living than their parents.

Ashok described how, when Tata redundancies were first proposed in the early 1990s, much of the Tata Worker Union's leadership prided themselves on a harmonious relationship with the company that had not seen its members strike since the 1920s. To maintain this harmony, the union refused membership to thousands of disgruntled maintenance persons and seasonal labourers, and had been beset by popular allegations of corruption for decades. When the union's president, V. G. Gopal proposed a general strike to resist the casualisation of permanent jobs in 1993, it was not altogether unexpected that he met the strongest opposition from within his own organisation. While our driver bullied his way through the traffic, Ashok leant towards me to whisper that Gopal's assassination had been orchestrated by the senior management of Tata Steel and the union's inner circle, who conspired with one another to facilitate the company's redundancy scheme. Ashok suggested that Tata favoured corrupt trade unionists with gifts of cars and housing in the city's best neighbourhoods, and that the union was permitted to run a profitable 'mafia' in the allocation of increasingly scarce workers' housing quarters. He claimed to have left Tata Steel to extricate himself from the criminality of its management, and warned me that I should be careful when researching such matters.

Ashok's allegations may seem extraordinary, but they are at least partly based on facts. Gopal's assassination was orchestrated by a TWU official named Amrendra Kumar Singh, who was convicted of his murder in 2006. Kumar Singh's prosecutors alleged that he was a key member of a corrupt group at the heart of the TWU, which coerced its opponents with the aid of contacts in organised crime. However, this line of inquiry was hampered by the disappearance of two of the city's criminal enforcers, who were widely suspected to have

carried out Gopal's assassination.[4] Following Gopal's death, the casualisation of Tata labour met no further resistance from the TWU, and was highly successful in reducing the company's liabilities towards its workforce. By the time I began research on the shop floor of the Tata Motors plant in 2006, more than three-quarters of workers were employed on fixed-term contracts. These employees could be terminated with no notice, were barred from membership of the plant's only trade union, took home as little as one-fifth of the wages of their permanent colleagues and were not entitled to sick pay, pensions, company healthcare, homes, or schooling for their children. Such 'casual' workers were recruited from company families, and accumulated years of continuous service on a single shop floor as they were shifted back and forth between different job titles.

By the time our autorickshaw pulled up outside my home, Ashok's story had finished. He had spoken for no more than 15 minutes, but his words lingered in my mind for a very long time. I was intrigued by his suggestion of a mutually beneficial relationship between capitalism, corruption and violence, and wondered how widely such an idea might be subscribed to in Jamshedpur. As I came to know the city's people better, I discovered that Ashok was not alone. I stood on the shop floors of factories, sat in the offices of business people, drank tea with school teachers, and socialised with debt collectors and criminal entrepreneurs, and heard variations on the following three key ideas repeated constantly in the popular discourses of local people. First, that life was harder for Tata workers now than it had been in the past. Second, that since the 1990s, elites and corporations had seized a larger share of India's wealth, to the detriment of those at the bottom of the pile. Third, that this process was facilitated by the use of corruption and violence. What my informants in industry suspected, and my informants in business readily confirmed, was that criminality consolidated the broad class positions of modern Indian society. This book is an interrogation of these ideas, which is to say: this study considers how people use discourses of corruption to explain the consolidation of class, before exploring the relationship of these models to the

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4 The Telegraph (India), 15 October 2003, quotes a 'Central Bureau of Investigation official': 'Shukla and Sahu were the key figures and their arrests would have enabled us to track down the main conspirators involved in the murder case. But so far, there has been no trace of either Shukla or Sahu. We fear that they might have been killed by the conspirators for obvious reasons'.

actual operation of capitalism. After establishing popular corruption discourses as an incisive political consciousness for Tata employees, the book goes on to consider how the everyday contradictions that potentially undermine this consciousness are negotiated, and what the local counter-models to this discourse are. My analysis is primarily based upon an initial 15 months of ethnographic research conducted in Jamshedpur between January 2006 and July 2007, and focusses on three inter-related fields.

First, the changing face of Indian industry is explored through participant observation on the shop floor of the Tata Motors plant, which employs 11,000 people and produces between 300 and 400 heavy goods vehicles per day, primarily for the Indian haulage and construction industries. I explore how the decline of industrial employment security in Tata Motors relates to broad changes within Indian capitalism, and consider how the plant's workers and managers variously explain this development. Research in the Tata Motors plant began with 16 continuous weeks of ethnography on the shop floor of the Cab and Cowl Division, which employed 1,471 apprentices, casual workers and permanent workers alongside a small cadre of managers. During my time in Tata Motors, I attended the plant for an average of six hours per day, six days a week, to loosely coincide with the plant's 'A' shift, which ran from 6:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Following the end of formal access to the shop floor in September 2006, research was conducted in the homes and leisure spaces of Tata Motors research participants until July 2007. Quantitative data on the composition of the Tata Motors labour force is based upon internally circulated company figures for June 2006, which were obtained from a Tata Motors manager. In order to protect this individual's personal and professional interests, they are not identified in the text.

Second, ethnography of two trade unions in Jamshedpur considers the role played by corruption and coercion in labour politics. I discuss how displays of violence erode the legitimate authority of trade unions in the eyes of their constituents, while also entrenching the power of the organisations' leadership. I suggest that the casualisation of labour in Jamshedpur is facilitated by corrupt unions, whose members perceive them to be impervious to opposition. Research on trade union politics was conducted between January 2006 and July 2007, in the form of unstructured interviews with officials and organisers in the TWU and its factions, and the Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union, who are the TWU's historical opponent in local labour politics. Interviews

were complemented by ethnographic research among union members, non-members and worker activists in Tata industries.

Third, the broader working relationship between capital and criminality is explored through research on the business ventures of local entrepreneurs, and ethnography of a leading firm of financiers and debt collectors. I discuss how the successful negotiation of capitalism in Jamshedpur requires an engagement with an array of specialist interlocutors that include corporations, the state and criminals. Research on this topic was conducted between January 2006 and July 2007, and took the form of ethnography in the workplaces, homes and leisure spaces of research participants. It should be stressed that while participants allowed me to openly discuss and witness the operation of their criminal enterprises, I did not engage in any form of illegality during the research. As discussed in Chapter 3, I was, however, encouraged to enter into criminal enterprises on a number of occasions throughout the fieldwork. I suggest that the ease with which I could potentially be incorporated into the broad negotiations of Indian organised crime expresses the entrepreneurial logics of such practices.

Concerns for the safety and legal culpability of research participants dictate that individuals are anonymised in this book wherever feasible. This has been accomplished against the wishes of certain individuals who requested to be named in the text. These persons were local entrepreneurs, who anticipated that my writings about them would invite international recognition of their skills and insight. However, I believe that sacrificing the anonymity of individuals is both unnecessary and ethically unsound in this instance, and as such, the names of all local entrepreneurs in Jamshedpur have been changed. However, politicians, trade union leaders, institutions, and corporations are not anonymised. This is partly since the public profile of such actors renders anonymisation ineffective, but also because the book's primary purpose is to interrogate the operation of modern capitalism, and to understand how these processes are discursively imagined. In order for this project to be successful, the reader must be aware of the historical context in which the study is located, and know enough about the contemporary local environment to assess whether the case is representative of broader trends in modern capitalism. Anonymising key corporate and political actors in Jamshedpur would require one to obscure the identity of the city itself in a way that limits the scope and value of the analysis.

The book discusses emic discourses about the relationship between criminality and capitalism, which I argue are insightful understandings of political–economic processes. These discourses are founded on rumours and popular suspicions surrounding the association between criminal violence, politicians, trade unions, and the Tata Company. However, these broad suspicions reference processes that are very real – namely, a local history of coercion against labour activists, and a precedent for criminal entrepreneurship among elected representatives. This book suggests that employees on Tata shop floors are implicitly disciplined by their suspicion that agitation in the workplace will be met by coercion from a functional partnership of social elites. In an attempt to interrogate the origins and foundations of this popular discourse, this book follows an approach that is unique among ethnographic studies of corruption. By comparing popular corruption discourses in Jamshedpur with close ethnography of local labour politics, business enterprise and debt collection, I examine how practices of corruption and criminality consolidate class power in modern India. By addressing a wider range of criminal practices than has been attempted in previous ethnographies of corruption, I suggest a corruption concept rooted in entrepreneurial negotiations between industrial corporations, political representatives, entrepreneurs, and violent enforcers. I argue that the working class discourses that emerge from this environment question whether economic liberalisation has created a more transparent and meritocratic society in India.

The first four chapters of the book relate the Tata corruption discourse to the conditions of the local political economy, and discuss the decline of employment security for industrial workers, the erosion of collective action and the entrepreneurial criminal activities of political elites. When judged against these contexts, I argue that emic corruption discourses of this type are insightful forms of political consciousness, which bridge distinctions between permanently and casually employed Tata workers. The last two chapters of the book consider how the tensions and contradictions of this political consciousness are negotiated. In Chapter 5, I explore the idea that if Tata workers express a critical corruption discourse that seemingly unites them against their employer, then the same people must also negotiate the precedent for divisive communal violence in Jamshedpur. I argue that the multi-ethnic labour force speaks ironically through reciprocal profane and racist joking, to construct itself as a cohesive community of modern and tolerant persons, whose chief local antagonists are

social elites, rather than ethnically diverse colleagues. The final chapter of the book situates workers' commentaries on class, corruption and violence against the discourses of Tata managers, who rationalise the casualisation of labour as a project that is continuous with the company's historical interests in the modernising of the region. This chapter discusses how discursive and practical continuities with historical Tata capitalism serve to explain, structure and discipline the current employment regime, despite workers' critical perspective on corruption. Building upon this argument, the conclusion of the book suggests what the political limits of the Tata corruption discourse may be.

Many of the arguments that I make in this study invite a critical perspective on the corporate milieu of modern Jamshedpur. However, the book is not a treatise on the Tata group of companies, or indeed of the regional context in which the research is situated. The analytic and political aims of the text are somewhat broader, and the study is not motivated by any special antipathy to the local environment. The casualisation of employment that I describe, the intersection of criminality with labour politics and capitalism and the popular discourses which these processes inspire, are neither exceptional, nor are they emblematic of any particular regional or corporate culture. On the contrary, the processes that this book discusses are replicated to varying degrees in a wide variety of global industrial contexts. Many of the book's analytic touchstones on criminal enterprise and precarious employment are drawn from European and Eurasian research contexts, and the comparison is drawn in order to model the relationship between the exploitative and coercive logics of modern capitalism, and the way in which these processes are popularly understood. In advancing this argument, the book does not suggest that contemporary capitalism makes criminality. However, I do suggest that criminality helps to make modern capitalism, and argue that this is a global, rather than local, phenomenon.

The empirical contribution of this project is an ethnographic analysis of the relationship between systemic criminality and the experience of labour in modern industrial environments, which considers both the political–economic processes by which capitalism functions, and the subjective ways in which they are imagined. The book's chief analytic contribution rests first in theorising the entrepreneurial logics of criminality in a way that collapses conceptual distinctions between violence, corruption and capitalism, and offers a more sophisticated

understanding of the integral relationship between these processes. Second, the book suggests a distinction between what I term 'episodic' and 'systemic' corruption discourses.[5] While the former are popular ideas that model corruption chiefly in reference to localised and personalised acts of individual criminality, the latter is concerned with the mapping of functional relationships between different types of actors, and the relationship between corruption and seemingly legitimate enterprises. What the book suggests is that while episodic discourses are often hegemonic understandings that limit one's conception of the political economy, systemic corruption discourses articulate a broad and potentially insightful modelling of power, authority and enterprise that should be engaged with as a political consciousness in itself. Finally, the book's attention to the progressive casualisation of labour suggests a model of class that is less reliant upon sectoral distinctions between the formally and informally employed. The class concept advanced here is grounded in the notion of political struggle, and how the experience of precarity has an increasing tendency to bleed into secure employment. Rather than creating a sharper distinction between permanent and temporary employment, I suggest that the casualisation of work is emblematic of a global and generational weakening of labour, whose economic effects and discursive responses are also evident in the homes and workplaces of the securely employed – who increasingly share kinship ties with the 'precariat'.[6]

Jamshedpur: the making and reshaping of a company town

In 1883, the Indian industrialist Jamshed Tata made an ambitious proposal to the viceroy of India to produce local steel for colonial railway construction. Tata proposed the formation of an industry that would compete for state contracts against costly European imports, and would be based in a company town on the Pittsburgh model (Keenan and Sorsby 1945: 33). At the time, the bulk of the nation's steel was shipped at great cost from England. The colonial administration had hoped to lower the cost of railway construction by encouraging private Indian firms to enter the steel market with purchase guarantees,

5 See Chapter 3.
6 See Standing 2011 for a discussion of this concept.

thereby absorbing some of the cost of establishing the nation's industrial infrastructure.

The establishment of the Tata steel industry had been preceded by a number of abortive attempts at similar ventures since the early 19th century. In 1830, the British civil servant Josiah Marshall Heath established the nation's first ironworks in the Madras Presidency, in partnership with the East India Company. After three years, in which Heath's Porto Novo Iron works produced pig iron of a high quality, yet remained unprofitable, the company was saved from bankruptcy by an INR 571,000 advance from the Madras Presidency, who renamed the works 'The Indian Iron and Steel Company' (Fraser 1919: 4–5). Following further financial difficulties, the Madras Presidency intervened again in 1853, at which time, the company was reinstated as 'The East India Iron Company'. This incarnation fared little better, and after two decades of near insolvency, the works closed permanently in 1874 (*ibid*.: 7). Heath himself had returned to England in 1857, where he died shortly afterwards (*ibid*.: 6). Following the failures in Madras, in 1875, British iron works were also established at Jerriah, in West Bengal. However, the works closed in 1879, until they were resurrected in 1889 by the Bengal Iron and Steel Company. After a limited run of modestly successful production (in 1900, the company recorded that they had produced 35,000 tons of pig iron), the site was eventually abandoned in 1906 (Pillai 1923: 56).

Jamshed Tata's industrial ambitions initially seemed doomed to the same fate as his British predecessors. In 1883, Tata secured a licence to mine low-quality iron ore in the Central Provinces districts of Chanda and Lokara, where his company proved highly unprofitable. On the brink of failure, in 1902, Tata contracted an American prospecting team, led by Charles Perin, to locate viable iron reserves in the forests of eastern India (Pillai 1923: 59). In the districts of Singhbhum and Mayurbhanj, Perin identified a vast deposit of iron ore, which as of the mid-20th century, still contained two-thirds of the total known iron reserves of South and East Asia (Karan 1957: 350–51). Tata acquired rights from the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj to mine the district's iron ore on a sliding royalties scale (Bahl 1995: 71), and provisionally sited his steel works in the village of Sakchi, 70 km away. With a good deal of state assistance, and the private investment of the Indian elite, the Tata project began to take shape. The colonial administration constructed a rail network linking

the mines to Sakchi, and encouraged potential investors by guaranteeing to purchase 20,000 tons of steel per year (*ibid.*: 72). The Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) was formally registered in Bombay in August 1907, with capital of GBP 1,545,000 raised from 8,000 shareholders, almost all of whom were prominent Indian landholders, merchants, industrialists, and politicians (Pillai 1923: 59). Forest clearance in Sakchi began in February 1908, with the plant's coke ovens fired for the first time on 12 October 1911 (*ibid.*). The city was symbolically born on 2 January 1919, when Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy of India, renamed Sakchi 'Jamshedpur' in honour of the company's founder (Fraser 1919: 103).

The TISCO project was conceived on a grand scale, and was financed and managed almost entirely by Indians at a time when the British Empire had failed to construct profitable steel works in South Asia. To many leaders of the independence movement, the Tata example was an inspiring one, which suggested that a postcolonial state would be successful, modern and efficient. In the first three decades of the 20th century, a close relationship emerged between independence leaders and Tata industries, which prefigured that of Nehru's steel towns. Such was the depth of this relationship that in 1925, Mahatma Gandhi directly intervened in a TISCO industrial dispute, urging striking workers not to undermine the stability and prosperity of a uniquely Indian company (Singh 1998: 31). Throughout the 1920s, TISCO's political capital also allowed them to successfully lobby for the raising of import taxes on foreign steel, and to avoid bankruptcy with the aid of sizeable government loans (Gupta and Thavaraj 1974: 59; Nomura 2011; Slater 1925: 62; Varshney 1964: 30; Wagle 1981: 123). Nonetheless, Tata industrialisation was informed by a profit motive that seldom guided state-sector industry, and envisaged a company town in Jamshedpur that was permanently populated by settled migrants who were wholly dependent upon TISCO employment (Keenan and Sorsby 1945: 33). Early Tata recruitment polices assumed that the most capable workforce would be drawn from diverse communities across India. Migrants from Bengal and south India were deemed suited to managerial positions, Biharis to manual labour, while local Adivasis were regarded as largely unfit for permanent employment. The provision of jobs for local peoples was not a consideration of this vision, which is furthermore characterised by a civilising narrative, which suggests that Jamshed Tata founded the Indian steel industry

in a jungle where there was little human activity to be impinged upon (Fraser 1919; Harris 1958; Keenan and Sorsby 1945; Lala 1981; Pandey et al 2005).

Prevalent racial hierarchies dictated that the bulk of TISCO's early senior managerial and engineering posts were filled by Europeans and Americans, while Bengali and Telugu migrants were associated with clerical positions and middle management. The majority of the manual labour force was comprised of non-Adivasi peasants, pushed from northern and central India in the 1900s by environmental crisis, and deemed suitable for strenuous industrial work. The 1900s had seen a gradual degradation of soil in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, forcing successive numbers of mainly low-caste peasants to seek Tata employment. Likewise, reliance upon peasant farming in much of Orissa and Chhattisgarh left the population susceptible to periodic famine and drought. Monsoon failure in 1921 caused large numbers of Chhattisgarhis to migrate to Jamshedpur, followed by a wave of Oriya migration in 1927 instigated by localised crop failure (Bahl 1995: 100). Local Adivasi communities were isolated from permanent TISCO posts, being employed almost exclusively in contract work gangs, and have historically comprised a small percentage of the city's permanent population (*ibid.*: 106).[7]

Material conditions in the first few years of Tata industrialisation were poor, and growing discontent among the city's migrant labour force culminated in a 1920 TISCO general strike, led by the TWU's forerunner, the Jamshedpur Labour Association (JLA). The 1920 strike articulated popular workers' demands for pay increases, annual leave and family compensation payment in the event of death (Bahl 1995: 221–22). Following the murder of five picketers by local police in March 1920, the strike ended with a 10 per cent pay increase for all employees. The JLA was officially recognised by TISCO in 1925, and

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7 The Jharkhand state's formation in 2000 follows 40 years of petitioning from tribal interest groups, who claim the southern areas of Bihar to be a homeland for the autochthonous peoples of the region, mainly those from the Ho, Munda, Santal, and Oraon Adivasi communities. However, while the state has a tribal population of 26.3 per cent, there is a pronounced lack of integration between the state's urban industrial regions and poorer rural communities. The Census of India, 2001 (the most current at the time of field research) recorded an official city population of 1,104,713: of that number, 12 per cent were members of Scheduled Tribes (Corbridge 1988, 2000, 2002; Devalle 1992; Weiner 1978).

in the years that followed, workers' collective action went on to secure maternity pay (Keenan and Sorsby 1945: 133–36) and a minimum wage in Tata industries. However, despite the early centrality of class struggle to shaping the city's labour regimes, throughout the bulk of the 20th century, the political struggles of the Tata workforce have been largely concerned with maintaining the heritability of company jobs within families (Breman 2004; Sanchez 2012b, 2012c; Standing 2011), rather than the safeguarding of skills (Braverman 1974; Hobsbawm 1984; Moorhouse 1978, 1981) or attainment of greater control over the labour process (Burawoy 1985; Freeman 1998, 2000; Kasmir 1999; Wilson 1999). Furthermore, as is discussed in Chapter 4, the struggles of seasonal company workers have been all but excluded from Tata class politics, which largely defines itself in reference to the heritability of company work.

The principal that TISCO employment should be heritable was established as an early means for Tata to stabilise a migrant labour force, in a private-sector industry that called for continuous year-round production. By 1938, the policy was successful in as much as that less than 3 per cent of TISCO workers engaged in any agricultural production in their home regions, and a quarter claimed to have severed relations with their 'native place' entirely (Bahl 1982: 34). Scarcely a generation into Tata employment, workers lived year round in company homes and depended almost exclusively on company salaries for their subsistence. For the four generations since, Tata has offered a guarantee of lifetime employment to the children of its workers, with all employees nominating a 'ward' for preference in recruitment. A ward will preferably be one's eldest son, who will join Tata following school or university graduation, anticipating a company home, healthcare plan and lifetime of employment thereafter. Throughout much of the early 20th century, the securely employed Tata workforce was a notable counterpoint to the insecure modes of urban proletariat production so well described by Chandavarkar and Gooptu (Chandavarkar 1985, 1994, 1999; Gooptu 2001). Even after the establishment of Nehru's socially informed state steel towns in the 1950s and 1960s, Tata workers remained the national archetype of a secure and well-compensated labour force (Parry 1999a, 1999b; Parry and Strümpell 2008). However, following India's economic liberalisation of the early 1990s, Tata's employment regime in Jamshedpur underwent a dramatic reconfiguration, as the company struggled to maintain profitability against the foreign capital that flooded the

domestic market. In an effort to cut production costs, the past two decades have seen the majority of permanent company positions in Jamshedpur casualised, taking with them the right to company homes, healthcare, education, and pensions for all but a minority of employees, pulling Jamshedpur's industrial workers sharply down the labour hierarchy. Tata wards now enter the labour force on short-term, wages-only contracts.

India's economic liberalisation was a broad reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and economy, which removed the protectionist edifices of Nehruvianism from agriculture and the public sector, and encouraged the expansion of technology, outsourcing and manufacturing through increased foreign investment (Corbridge and Harriss 2000: 147). That neo-liberalism should fail to enrich India's rural poor is a point well made elsewhere (Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Harriss-White 2003). However, the impact of the reforms upon India's industrial aristocracies of labour has been explored in comparatively less detail. In the company town of Jamshedpur, the formally employed Tata workforce experiences neo-liberal reform as a process of dispossession, whose mechanism is primarily the casualisation of urban labour (Harvey 1987, 2003). This development invites a reconsideration of the ways in which ethnographic studies have conceptualised the impact of Indian neo-liberal reform, and challenges any easy binaries one might construct between formal sector privilege and informal sector poverty (Sanchez 2012c).

Prior to the 1990s, Tata's position in the nation's economy was strong, and its workforce a relatively enviable one. Compared to the state-owned Steel Authority of India Limited, many of whose plants ran at intermittent losses for decades, Tata Steel had remained consistently in profit since the 1950s (Sud de Surie 2008: 168). For workers too, the Tata model reaped considerable rewards – wages were traditionally high, and the TWU had secured maximum working hours, holiday pay and pensions for its members 70 years earlier (Bahl 1995: 144). However, due to governmental restrictions placed upon private sector industrial expansion and the largely domestic nature of their interests, many Tata companies were ill-placed to compete following the relaxation of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act in 1991, which enabled foreign investors to acquire controlling interests in Tata's competitors, and subsequently, improve upon their infrastructure and business models. Ultimately, Tata would use

liberalisation to expand their interests through local partnerships with foreign firms, and to move further into international markets. However, in the first instance, Tata Motors saw their domestic monopoly collapse when international giants, such as Suzuki and Toyota, flooded the Indian market with lower-cost, higher-specification vehicles (Sud de Surie 2008: 172). Tata responded to foreign competition with technological and structural innovations that provided a higher standard of products and service to consumers. They also reduced their production expenses in Jamshedpur through a progressive casualisation of the labour force, which drastically lowered immediate wage costs. Older employees were offered early retirement packages, while those joining the company found that they were no longer eligible to become members of the plant's only trade union, and that their employment benefits were virtually non-existent. For the first time ever, some younger Tata workers began to earn less than the national minimum wage.

In the late 1990s, the proportion of non-permanent workers in Tata Motors was less than a quarter. By 2006, this number had risen dramatically; the plant division in which I conducted fieldwork classified 76 per cent of their 1,471 employees in various grades of casual and trainee employment.[8] Although the logic of casualisation is to replace unionised employees with cheaper casual workers, Tata recruitment structures remain directed towards traditional company families. Recruited through the still-functioning 'wards' scheme, a casual employee is invariably the son or sibling of a permanent worker employed in the very same division of the plant, suggesting a persistence of the Tata family despite changing patterns of employment.

Today's wards enter Tata Motors as either a Full-Time Apprentice (FTA) or Tata Motors Skilled Trainee (TMST), positions in which they undergo three years of shop floor 'training' for a salary between 19 per cent and 30 per cent of the minimum permanent basic rate. At the time of field research, Tata Motors classified almost 35 per cent

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8 In the Cab and Cowl Division, as of June 2006, 12.3 per cent (n = 181) of the workforce were FTAs, 22.5 per cent (n = 331) were TMSTs, 25.6 per cent (n = 377) were '0' or '6', and another 15.7 per cent (n = 231) were classed in four separate grades of training programmes: comprising 21 individuals in preliminary training for permanent positions, and 220 individuals from non-permanent grades engaged in three forms of lower-paid 'refresher training'.

of their total Jamshedpur workforce as apprentices, a section of the labour force whose daily work is indistinguishable from that of their colleagues. Although this seems an exceptionally large number of apprentices for any facility, the rationale for such high proportions of trainee labour is perhaps clear: Sections 15 and 18 of The Apprentices Act (1961) stipulate that Indian apprentices have no maximum working hours, minimum wages or prescribed level of training that would differentiate their work from that of other employees. Tata apprentices enjoy neither trade union representation nor the most basic of legislative protection, and as such, are efficient motors of flexible accumulation.[9]

Tata training programmes conclude with written exams, which, if failed, will usually result in acceptance onto the lowest grade of non-trainee casual labour. Workers in this grade of employment can earn up to 60 per cent of the minimum basic salary. A successful apprentice, however, will progress to the next rung of the ladder, where they will earn 75 per cent of the minimum basic salary. The possibility of promotion from either of these grades is uncertain, and during research, I met only two permanent workers in the division who had successfully achieved regularisation from casual employment. Table 1.1 summarises employment grades in Tata Motors at the time of fieldwork; their numeric titles deriving from the coding of company identification badges. All casual workers are ineligible for union membership or the large numbers of supplementary allowances that add between 23 per cent and 34 per cent to a permanent worker's monthly take-home pay.

The structuring of casual employment as a training process for company sons, followed by a slow and uncertain regularisation, entails an implicit disciplining of flexible labour by workers themselves. Jamshedpur's casual workers bring to their employment a good deal of investment and look at Tata work as an ideal form of family employment. Furthermore, the possibility of incremental

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9 The Apprentices Act (1961), Section 15, states:
'The weekly and daily hours of work of an Apprentice while undergoing practical training in a workshop shall be as such as may be prescribed'.
The act goes on to stipulate, in Section 18:
'a) every Apprentice undergoing Apprenticeship training in an establishment shall be a trainee and not a worker. b) the provisions of any law with respect to labour shall not apply to or in relation to such Apprenticeship'.

Table 1.1 Summary of Tata Motors work grades and salaries, 2006[10]

Employment grade and description	Union membership	Monthly salary (in INR)	Monthly allowances (in INR)[11]
FTA 'Tata Motors Full-time Apprentice' Worker on a 3-year training programme. Usually ward of permanent employee. To sit government exam.	Ineligible	1,500 Year 1 2,000 Year 2 2,400 Year 3	None
TMST 'Tata Motors Skilled Trainee' Worker on a 3-year training programme. Usually ward of permanent employee. To sit company exam. Identified as 'skilled'.	Ineligible	2,400	None
/0 'Temporary Worker' Usually, previously failed Tata Motors training Or Not ward of permanent employee.	Ineligible	5,000	None
/6 'Contract Worker' Usually ward of permanent employee and either: I) A graduated Apprentice or Trainee Or II) A previous recipient of discontinued 'temporary' work through labour bureau on 3–5 week contracts.	Ineligible	6,000	None
/2 'Basic Worker' (i.e. permanent) Usually ward of permanent employee.	Eligible	8,000–12,000	2,701–2,759

10 Source: Tata Motors Company, Jamshedpur.
11 Dearness Allowance' (INR 1,235–1,293 pcm); 'Travel Allowance' (INR 685 pcm); 'House Maintenance Allowance' (INR 276 pcm);'Uniform Maintenance Allowance' (INR 455 pcm); 'Sanitation Allowance (INR 50 pcm).

progression up the labour hierarchy leads workers to remain engaged in work that frequently pays less than the state's minimum wage.[12] The forms which casualisation assumes in Jamshedpur appear somewhat atypical in comparison to the older literature, and point towards an emerging intersection of company town permanence with more familiar forms of casual labour, in which migration is often a determining factor (Burawoy 1976; Gill 2000; Parry 1999, 2003). Mark Holmström's classic analysis of casual labour in south India initially likened permanent industrial employment to a citadel, with casual workers vainly hammering at the gates, seeking entry (Holmström 1976). Those inside the citadel were said to be a secure and well-remunerated section of the workforce, often defined by a shared caste and regional identity. Conversely, and necessarily, the casual worker was likewise defined through their ethnic identity, being conspicuously composed of migrants. Holmström went on to revise this model somewhat in later work, where the metaphor of a sloping plain was better employed to illustrate the gradations of formal sector privilege (Holmström 1984).

In Tata Motors, there are indeed two distinct sections of the workforce, one of which is a minority that enjoys benefits denied to the majority of employees. As such, the 'labour aristocracy' model that informs Holmström's analysis cannot be discarded (Harriss 1986; Hobsbawm 1984; Moorhouse 1978, 1981). However, the character and composition of Tata's labour aristocracy does not correspond with the original – which is to say, Leninist – formulation of the concept that characterises such workers as the 'labour lieutenants of the capitalist class' (Lenin 1996: 8). Tata's aristocracy of labour are the parents, uncles and elder siblings of casual employees, and therefore, are also immersed in the same household economy, possessing concomitant class interests. In an analysis of the flexibilisation of global labour, Guy Standing (2011) likewise identifies the increasing prevalence of 'precariats' in international workplaces, who are insecurely engaged on part-time or short-term contracts, and lack access to pensions and holiday pay. Standing locates the 'precariat' in the lower half of a seven-class system, below oligarchic elites; the 'salariat' securely employed by states and corporations;

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12 INR 80 per day at the time of initial field research.

skilled 'proficians', specialists and consultants; and the traditional working class. However, the precariat's status and security is greater than the lowest two classes of Standing's model – the unemployed; and a nebulous alliance of unproductive and socially alienated persons. While Standing's observation of increasing global employment precarity is both accurate and timely, the wider conclusions that he reaches vis-à-vis class politics are problematic. The central analytic thrust of Standing's work is that the precariat constitutes a class that is empirically and politically separate from the unionised and permanently employed working class. What Standing's 'precariat' concept does not account for, however, is the possibility that the erosion of job security may break down distinctions between permanently and temporarily employed classes, as traditionally secure labour forces begin to share their homes and workplaces with casually employed younger colleagues. In Jamshedpur, we may argue that the permanent workforce finds the articulation of its elite interests in its membership of the TWU, a reading certainly proposed by Bahl's historical analyses (Bahl 1982, 1995). However, this model of elite class action is rendered problematic by a prevalent assumption of trade union corruption that leads both casual and permanent employees alike to consider the organs of collective action to be devoted to the class interests of the Tata Company (Sanchez 2010).

The cynicism with which Tata workers regard their union is by no means an isolated ethnographic phenomenon. On the contrary, the Tata case is reflected in a range of Indian industrial contexts, especially those in which there is a marked level of casualisation (Breman 2004; Mamkoottam 1982; Parry 2009; Ramaswamy 1973, 1977, 1983, 1988). What makes the ideas of Jamshedpur's Tata workers particularly significant in terms of Indian corruption discourses is their suggestion of deliberate, mutually beneficial relationships between capitalism and collective action (Gupta 1995; Parry 2000). These corruption models suggest that the transformation of employment regimes are the local fulfilment of a wider neo-liberal agenda of capital accumulation, enabled through the disempowerment of large sections of the labour force (Sanchez 2010). The assumption of institutional corruption serves to level the class antagonisms of a highly stratified workforce, with the responsibility for flexible accumulation being deemed to rest with a powerful though corrupted elite, and not permanent workers themselves.

However, this book argues that the durable relations that unite employees also constrain them since the potentially empowering social networks of casual employees are almost exclusively rooted in Tata employment. Unlike Breman's 'footloose proletariat' model, casual Tata employment is not characterised by migration, and does not operate through national networks of caste and kin, which afford a flight from employers' authority (Breman 1996b). Tata apprentices are invariably drawn from company families that have relied upon the security of industrial employment for 100 years, and have usually severed significant economic ties with the 'native place' generations earlier, a place that, although often conceived to be the graveyard of ambition, is nonetheless a valuable resource for unemployed Indian industrial workers elsewhere (Parry 2003). In the event of a breakdown in industrial security, Tata workers are left with little in the way of a village refuge or an alternative infrastructure to realise their subsistence. The Tata apprentice cannot usually choose to join their 'footloose' cousins in Mumbai, since their cousins are likely to be in Jamshedpur. They cannot 'return' to their village to wait out the slow passage of frustrated years, since there is not likely to be anybody waiting there to receive them. Both of these facts explain, in part, the failure of a footloose labour market to arise in Jamshedpur, and present ways in which the embedding of labour in social and kin relationships may serve to reinforce, rather than mitigate, political and economic alienation (Carrier 1992; Polanyi 1957).

As is explored in Chapter 2 of this book, India's economic liberalisation may be said to have encouraged growth in largely urban areas of the outsourcing and 'knowledge industries'. That this process has tended to impact negatively upon the nation's rural economies is a point well-established in a wealth of literature on crises in Indian agriculture, as is the tendency for liberalisation to enable the expression of a broader range of social inequalities among the urban middle class. However, the sudden slide of the Tata labour force into casual work should be accorded attention as an expression of neo-liberalism's general degradation of labour. Furthermore, the paradoxical permanence of Tata casual work suggests important ways in which modern capitalism might weaken labour while also stabilising it through the exploitation of ambition, potentially explaining contexts as varied as apprenticeships, internships and contract labour in elite professions. This book, therefore, starts from the assumption that while the experiences of the Tata working class may be a small part of the global

puzzle of modern capitalism, they are, nonetheless, an illuminating one. Building upon this foundation, I make an original contribution to the understanding of modern class politics, by theorising class as a struggle for control over the production and movement of capital, which is facilitated by systemic criminality.

Class, corruption and violence

As Christian Strümpell and I discuss (Sanchez and Strümpell 2014), a classic 1978 essay by E. P. Thompson suggests a surprising convergence between the work of Karl Popper and Louis Althusser (Thompson 1978b). In a denunciation of the philosophical turn in Western Marxism, Thompson cites Althusser as the chief proponent of an intellectualism that posits class as a subject of primarily philosophical, rather than historical, enquiry (*ibid*.: 212). For Althusser, historical process is unknowable, and historical knowledge is a product of theory (*ibid*.: 214). Accordingly, Althusser proposes a radical re-reading of Marx, which claims that history appears in *Capital* as an abstract object that does not relate to any 'concrete society' (Althusser 1970: 117, 1971: 76). Thompson equates the writings of Althusser to the liberal work of Popper, for whom only the most discrete facts constitute true historical knowledge, while ideas about causal relationships and social transformations are themselves historical constructions (Popper 1974). In both scholars' works, Thompson sees a denial of the historical method, whose analytic purchase rests upon interrogating the objective relationship between conditions and events. For Thompson, historical processes are tangible objects that involve struggles for power that create hierarchies, identities and political solidarities (Thompson 1991). In this schema, conditions and events conspire towards observable outcomes, and class is a dynamic and contingent process that is best approached through a critical historical method that does not assume the fixed typologies with which some schools of history have applied Thompson's ideas (Chandavarkar 1997).

Following Thompson, this book considers that rather than being an abstractable object, class is a historical struggle for political–economic power that entails competing ways of explaining how this process works. I consider what Stedman Jones calls the twin ontological and discursive dimensions of class (Stedman Jones 1983: 8) by describing how class struggle in modern India entails the pursuit of power through criminality, and the expression of political consciousness

through corruption discourses. I show how the types of economic reforms that are associated with neo-liberalism bring historically secure labour forces into shared class positions with their counterparts in traditionally less privileged sectors, and how popular explanations of this process model capitalism as a form of criminal accumulation. Rather than focussing upon the consumption patterns that have dominated class studies in recent decades (Bourdieu 1984; Carrier and Heyman 1997; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Goldthorpe and Jackson 2007; Hunt and Satterlee 1986), this study re-grounds the class concept in the idea of struggle.

Since the concept of class struggle is so strongly associated with the historical discourses of the labour movement, it is not surprising that the topic has thus far received the greatest ethnographic attention in studies of workplaces and trade unions (Breman 2004; Gill 2007; Mills 1999; Mollona 2009; Nash 1979; Parry 2009, 2013; Turner 1999). However, although this book is rooted in the tradition of labour studies, the analysis moves beyond the implicit assumption that class struggle is something that is done principally within working-class political institutions. In the context of a global economic reform that inspires greater degrees of precarity for some sections of society, and increased opportunities for speculation and profiteering for others, this book approaches daily life as a struggle between social classes for political and economic power. I interrogate the notion of class struggle in modern India by discussing how industrial workers negotiate the quest for secure employment for themselves and their families; the ways in which jobless youths chase financial success through entrepreneurship, and how radical unions oscillate between agitation and self-preservation in their dealings with violent rivals. Defined by their comparative economic powerlessness and shared critical discourses on the political economy, these sections of society constitute a newly emergent class in Jamshedpur, whose bridging of the formal/informal sector divide invites a more dynamic and reflexive class concept of the kind suggested by Thompson.

If the making of class involves the meeting of forces over time, then in Jamshedpur, networks of industrial capitalists, corrupt political actors and criminal entrepreneurs meet their working-class antagonists with an equally veracious class struggle of their own, which involves the exploitation of mutually beneficial relationships in the pursuit of political–economic power. United by commonly pursued interests, and sharing complementary power over the production and movement of

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capital, large sections of Jamshedpur's dominant class are drawn from those parts of society which profitably negotiate the use of corruption and violence in the pursuit of power. While Jamshedpur's trade union leaders, industrial capitalists, successful entrepreneurs, and violent enforcers manifest different types of authority and areas of expertise, a conceptual framework that is historically reflexive, and yet grounded in control over capital, allows for an understanding of how the class power of social elites is consolidated through cooperation between apparently dissimilar actors in dynamic political contexts.

The anthropology of India currently benefits from pervasive critical attention to the processes of economic liberalisation, which has inspired a rich body of work that considers how macroeconomic change allows India's middle classes to access new avenues of distinction (Brosius 2009, 2010; Donner 2008, 2011; Fernandes 2000, 2006; Gupta 2000; Lukose 2009; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 2001; Sridharan 2004; Thapan 2004; Waldrop 2004). The field has likewise inspired attention to the impact of liberalisation on the rural poor, whose agricultural base is eroded by cheap imports, corporate resource extraction and the predations of creditors.[13] But while research on the living standards and habits of India's working and middle classes has expanded in recent years, the class concept itself has undergone a little less intellectual refinement. This development is not unique to regional studies, and relates to a general decline of focus upon the class concept in the social sciences since the postmodern turn. With some excellent exceptions (Evans 2006, 2012; Wacquant 2008), in many areas of the world, ethnography has progressively jettisoned the assumption that social structure is an appropriate object of analysis, and has begun to turn its back on the broad social formations of class altogether (Carrier 2012). In some sense, this process most likely mirrors the evangelical individualism of neo-liberalism (Gregory 1997: 1–40 ; Harvey 1990).

However, the decline of the class concept is not distributed evenly across the study of different global regions. As Chibber suggests in a discussion of the decline of class analysis in South Asia, the study of class, capitalism and imperialism notably persisted in Latin America

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13 Agarwal and Sivaramakrishnan 2000; Aiyer 2007; Arnold 2001; Assayag 2005; Banerjee 2009; Bijoy 2006; Bijoy and Ravi Raman 2003; Deshpande 2002; Ghosh 2006; Halliburton 1998; Jacob 2006; Mishra 2006; Mohanakumar and Sharma 2006; Mohanty 2005; Nair and Menon 2009; Ravi Raman 2005; Stone 2002, 2007.

and Africa in spite of the postmodern turn (2006: 358). The revolutionary socialist and anti-imperialist struggles taking place in Africa and the Americas in the 1960s had a pronounced impact on the students of these areas. In the generations of regional scholarship that followed, matters of kinship, ethnicity, gender, religion, colonialism, statecraft, development, and labour relations were widely discussed in terms of class struggle, sometimes with quite creative results (Auge 1978; Bloch 1975; Campbell 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Coquery-Vidrovitch 1978; Gates 2002; Gill 1987, 1994, 2000, 2004; Harris 1995; James 1980; Meillassoux 1981; Moore 1988; Nash 1979; Rodney 1969, 1970; Scheper-Hughes 1993; Seddon 1978; Stephen 2002; Taussig 1980; Terray 1975). In contrast, outside the field of labour studies, comparatively little of the vast body of work produced about India in the past 40 years has been concerned with class, where the topic has remained of relatively marginal interest in a field dominated by the tropes of caste and colonialism (Chibber 2006: 365ff).[14] Following the postmodern turn of the 1980s, regional class analyses were dominated by the Subaltern Studies group, based at Sussex and Canberra Universities – a development that inspired a sharp rise in the number of regional labour studies (Arnold 1980; Chakrabarty 1981, 1983, 1989; Ramaswamy 1983, 1988), which, Chandavarkar notes, was paradoxically accompanied by a general degeneration of the class concept itself (Chandavarkar 1997).[15]

Inspired by Thompson's Marxist historiography of the English working class (Thompson 1991), throughout the 1980s, Subaltern Studies provided a platform for the loose collection of historians that united under Ranajit Guha to recover the colonial history of India's subaltern classes (Guha 1982). The Subaltern Studies historians borrowed freely from Thompson's early analyses of English labour politics to theorise class as the outcome of political struggle, while using his later studies of pre-industrial plebeian culture to frame a class analysis of regional and ethnic distinctions (Thompson 1978). However, the Subaltern Studies scholars tended to reduce the subtlety of Thompson's class concept to

14 Andre Beteille's classic essays on class and Jan Breman's work on agrarian relations stand out in Indian sociology of this period. See Beteille (1979); Breman (1974).

15 Notable exceptions during this period include Mark Holmström's monograph on South Indian industrial labour, John Harriss' analysis of the relationship between the urban labour aristocracy and working poor and Jan Breman's study of rural labour migration in Gujarat. See Breman (1985); Harriss (1986); Holmström (1984).

a prescriptive typology, while reifying an orientalist notion of a robust and pre-capitalist Indian culture. In classic analyses of wage labourers and the peasantry, Subaltern Studies championed the insurrectionist politics of its subjects, while simultaneously claiming that their consciousness was still governed by the feudal hierarchies and communal conflicts of traditional village life (Arnold 1980; Chakrabarty 1981, 1983, 1989; Guha 1999 [1983]: 76).

Working on an assumption that the weakness of capitalist development in colonial India prevented the emergence of an Indian working class (Guha 1982: 6), Subaltern Studies' analyses of Indian workplaces unwittingly reproduced a series of entrenched colonial stereotypes – most notably, the prevalence of violence and communalism on industrial shop floors (Arnold 1980; Chakrabarty 1981) and workers' acceptance of managerial paternalism (Chakrabarty 1983). However, as is suggested by Chandavarkar, Indian capitalism had not failed to develop during the 19th and early 20th centuries, but had rather assumed a distinctly Indian shape that was based upon cyclical labour migration between rural agriculture and urban industry (Chandavarkar 1997). This pattern was antithetical to the ideal-type industrial proletariat against which Subaltern Studies measured its imperfect peasant subjects, but was well-disposed to the creation of rational and radical class consciousness, rooted as much in neighbourhoods as workplaces (Chandavarkar 1994, 1997: 179). As Chibber (2006) and Sarkar (2000[1994]) have argued, the Subaltern Studies reading of Thompson inspired a cultural essentialism that failed to properly consider the wider political–economic contexts in which subaltern histories are placed – principally, the fact that internal divisions of caste, gender, region, and religion were frequently the aggravated and contested products of industrial capitalism itself, rather than the expression of timeless and intrinsically Indian cultural logics (Sen 1999; Joshi 2003). During the years in which the history and anthropology of India could well have developed a class concept that embraced the finer points of Thompson's work, influential areas of the field seemed to run out of ideas. The Foucauldian 'textual turn', which the Subaltern Studies collective took after its fourth volume in 1984, eventually bereaved its subjects of agency altogether, by constructing colonial rulers as the motors of Indian history (Chandavarkar 1997: 191)

Galvanised by the economic liberalisation of the 1990s, regional scholarship has since turned its attention to the macro processes of modern Indian political economy, in an effort to understand the

mechanics that underpin the widening gap between India's haves and have-nots (Corbridge and Harriss 2000: 147; Harriss-White 2003). Significant studies of this process include Kalyan Sanyal's modelling of postcolonial global capitalism (2007), and Partha Chatterjee's provocative analysis of its effects in *Politics of the Governed* (2004). As discussed, the 'neo-liberal turn' in regional scholarship has more broadly inspired a serious engagement with the habits and politics of India's middle classes. Closer to this studies' interests, Chandavarkar's call for a more subtle and historically grounded class concept has been met in some excellent regional histories (Gooptu 2001; Joshi 2003), while a generation of Indian labour studies have addressed important empirical questions regarding sociality, work discipline, employment security, labour migration, and enterprise (Breman 1996a, 1996b, 2004; Chari 2004; Cross 2010; De Neve 2005; Fernandes 1997; Harris-White 2003; Heller 1999; Heuze 1996; Nadeem 2011; Nisbett 2009; Parry 2009, 2013; Ramaswami 2006; Strümpell 2014; Upadhya 2009).

However, although a critical mass of labour scholars have put the study of India's working classes firmly back on the regional agenda for the coming years, the field would yet benefit from a sustained rethinking of the class concept itself, in terms that encompass the historical contingencies inherent in struggles for power. It is the contention of this book that many regional analyses tend towards binary tropes that clothe class struggles in terms of distinctions between relatively homogenous sectors of the rural poor and the formally employed urban elite (Sanchez 2012a). While this work brings the field into productive dialogue with comparative cases of neo-liberal reform elsewhere, Indianist studies are nonetheless inclined to analyse broad class struggles without sufficiently interrogating the formations which fit into them. What this book contributes to these debates is an examination of the instability inherent in conceptual units such as the 'formal sector', which undergo adjustment in response to broader economic reforms and the prevalence of coercion and corruption in the Indian political economy. In reference to the case study of Jamshedpur, I consider how systemic criminality in political institutions, and within industrial and financial capitalism, shifts the lines of class struggle in liberalised economies.

Corruption is presently the subject of a great deal of popular attention in India, and invites a systematic analysis of its relationship to the

political economy (Sanchez 2012a). A small corpus of ethnographic research has explored the prevalence of corruption in the Indian civil service, public institutions and state-run enterprises (Das 2001; Gupta 1995; Parry 2000; Wade 1982), while a slightly larger body of work has tackled criminality and patronage in Indian politics (Hansen 1999, 2001; Jeffrey 2002; Mehra 2002; Michelutti 2004; Noorani 2002). The field has made valuable advances in our collective understanding of how brokers and bribe-takers are able to feed at the frontiers of the local state by exploiting the desperation of their constituents (Gupta 1995; Parry 2000). Likewise, the clientelism of violent communal politics has been well explored in Hansen's excellent study of Marathi nationalists in Mumbai (Hansen 2001). However, my analysis seeks to rethink previous approaches to systemic criminality in India in a number of ways. I suggest that while an ethnographic focus upon the mechanics of patronage and petty bribery may provide a useful insight into the day-to-day operation of the state, the approach tends to limit the understanding of corruption to specific abuses of power that are grounded in the morality and charisma of individuals.

By situating locally authoritative personalities at the heart of the corruption concept, studies on bureaucratic bribery and patronage rarely trace the broader criminal networks within which corrupt actors are inserted (Wade 1982). Far from operating at the fringes of the state and economy, corrupt actors are enmeshed within long-term negotiations with an array of specialists in organised crime, industrial capitalism, financial services, labour contracting, development, and the judiciary. Limiting one's ethnographic gaze to the fields of petty bribery and clientelism raises the further possibility of representing provincialising moral discourses about the actions of local individuals as dominant popular understandings of corruption per se (Gupta 1995). The implicit risk in such a method is the tendency to understand discourses on corruption and criminality as hegemonic commentaries that obscure, rather than illuminate, the operation of the economy – an issue that I explore with reference to a conceptual distinction between episodic and systemic corruption discourses. Addressing a broad spectrum of criminal practice, the corruption concept that this book advances is based upon criminal enterprise between actors with dissimilar skills and areas of authority. I argue that the systemic discourses which emerge from this environment identify the functional relationships between different types of

criminal actors and posit that they are determined by a shared desire to accumulate capital. In this regard, corruption discourses are critical models of how India works.

However, although this is an anthropological study, it is not an investigation into what may be termed the 'culture' of Indian corruption. On the contrary, although there are important cultural specificities that inform how bribery and nepotism are negotiated in different contexts (Bayart 1993, 1999; Das 2001; Gupta 1995; Jeffrey 2002; Kang 2002; Parry 2000; Yurchak 2002), the focus of this book is rather upon what such practices can tell us about the functioning of class power in modern capitalism. In this respect, this is a study about the profitable exploitation of criminality by the dominant classes of a liberalised industrial economy, which takes Jamshedpur as an instructive, but by no means exceptional, case. This book, therefore, questions the assumption that capitalism is inclined towards transparent and democratic political processes, by considering how systemic criminal negotiations between social elites impact negatively upon the security and well-being of large sections of the urban population.

To better theorise the relationship between capitalism, corruption and violence in India, this book engages with comparative studies of organised crime in liberalising economies, which focus less on popular discourses of civic decline, and more on the mechanics of enterprise. In particular, Vadim Volkov's 2002 study of Russian organised crime provides a working framework for understanding how criminality enables the consolidation of capital and infrastructure in free markets (Volkov 2002). Volkov's notion of the criminal entrepreneur, who enters into 'enforcement partnerships' with corporate capital, provides an elegant model of how illegality and coercion are implicated in the reshaping of modern economies. Much as I suggest that economic deregulation in India stimulated the dispossession of India's working classes by increasing competition between corporate capital (Sanyal 2007), so Volkov describes how the liberalisation of the Russian economy inspired conflict within an emerging class of oligarchs, who used violence to consolidate their seizure of national resources.

While the dismantling of the Soviet economy in the early 1990s was ostensibly inspired by economist Jeffrey Sachs' proselytising vision of the entrepreneurial 'Kiosk Boom' (Gaidar 1999, 2003; Lipton et al 1992: 213; Sachs 1994), Volkov describes how economic liberalisation

largely served to concentrate Russian wealth in the hands of elites and stimulated a national increase in organised crime.[16] In the first flourishes of post-Socialism, a small section of Russian society amassed immense profits by speculating on the country's deregulated natural resources, energy, transport, and communications infrastructures (Krishtanovskaya and White 2005). However, in the absence of an effective judiciary, the fragile contracts of Russian capitalism were underwritten by criminal organisations that safeguarded their clients' competing interests through the threat of force. Comprised of unemployed police, soldiers, state security agents, and athletes from the socialist sports academies, the New Russian Mafias largely subverted traditional criminal organisations such as the 'vory-v-zakone' (thieves in law). The vory-v-zakone flourished in Soviet prisons, where they were characterised by fixed internal hierarchies and strict codes of anti-authoritarian behaviour, which included the refusal of formal employment, military service or marriage (Handelman 1994: 19). By contrast, the criminal organisations that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union sought out unfettered business partnerships with a wide variety of state actors, investors and enforcers, and exemplify Anton Blok's earlier modelling of the Sicilian Mafia as 'Violent Entrepreneurs' (Blok 1974).

Volkov's modelling of criminal enterprise serves to critique the notion that modern organised crime functions within formally structured subcultures that are governed by principles of honour and retribution (Arlacchi 1983, 1986; Gambetta 1993; Herzfeld 2009; Kang 2002; Varese 2005; Yurchak 2002). While some excellent studies have explored the role played by cultural endogamy in urban criminality (Bourgois 2003; Whyte 1993), a culturalist analysis generally obscures the political–economy of crime by drawing boundaries around different types of practice, rather than tracing the lines which flow

16 The writings of Egor Gaidar, the architect of Russia's liberalisation and the country's first Post-Socialist prime minster, reveal that liberalisation was guided more by a desire to rapidly deconstruct communism, rather than a sophisticated conception of what to replace it with (see Gaidar 1999, 2003). Gaidar was strongly influenced by Sachs' evangelical calls for deregulation, favouring a swift procession to laissez faire capitalism free from the interference of government, an approach popularly termed 'shock therapy'. While Sachs' work of the period reveals a championing of small commercial enterprises, deregulation tended to aid the consolidation of wealth by oligarchs.

between them.[17] Following Volkov, organised crime is best understood as a series of ongoing business partnerships that not only transgress national, cultural and institutional boundaries, but rather, exploit the spaces between them. Since such criminality is motivated by a tenaciously economic logic, participation within the enterprise is not culturally inaccessible to parties who may seem distant or distinct from a 'culture' of crime. Following from this observation, what Volkov's model of acephalous entrepreneurial networking contributes to this book is the injunction to trace the functional relationships between quite different kinds of criminal actors, and to theorise how institutional corruption relates to coercion, labour reform and the consolidation of class power. Rather than sporadically diverting capital to the informal peripheries of capitalism and the state, I theorise corruption as a systematic series of negotiations between institutional authority, corporations and violence, whose objectives are control over the production and movement of capital. By constructing a political economy of how corruption and violence relate to the transformation of industrial labour regimes, I show how criminal capital helps to reform the structures and processes of class struggle in modern India. The book's attention to the discursive dimensions of this struggle considers how these processes are conceptualised in competing ways by their antagonists, and what the functions and contradictions of these rationalisations are.

The structure of the book

This book is written as an answer to three questions. First, have the lines of class struggle changed in India following economic liberalisation? Second, to what extent is this process enabled by criminality? Third, how do people understand these processes? Of course, these questions are not as simple as they seem. The making of class is approached in this book as something that is both structural and

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17 Randol Contreras' monograph on Dominican New York city drug robbers is an instructive example of how to reconcile the cultural and political–economic dimensions of urban criminality. Contreras' analytic synthesis of the global cocaine economy, urban planning, the US prison system, entrepreneurship, and Dominican masculinity provides a persuasive explanation for the emergence of professional drug robbers in New York following the subsidence of the crack epidemic in the 1990s. See Contreras 2013.

discursive. So, while the book discusses concrete changes to labour regimes, political institutions and the operation of various types of business enterprises, it also considers the subjective ways in which people talk about these things. Parts 1 and 2 of the book consider how corruption discourses constitute a type of political consciousness for people that express them, while Part 3 explores the everyday tensions that potentially undermine these discourses – namely, the precedent for ethnic violence within the labour force, managerial contentions that current corporate practice is an ethically sound project of modernisation and the continued reification of the company town model among critical industrial workers. Furthermore, the answers to these questions are presented in critical dialogue with a relevant strain of academic thought. So, in the course of making specific points about the operation of class and criminality in India, I also engage in intellectual debates about the ideas themselves.

The book is structured so as to provide the reader with the tools necessary to engage with the argument. Many of the key ideas concerning capitalism, class and criminal enterprise have been introduced in this chapter, and are elaborated upon throughout parts 1 and 2. The chapters themselves each address an aspect of the material which I believe to be particularly important to an understanding of the political economy and discursive landscape of Jamshedpur. Chapter 2 considers how the casualisation of labour erodes economic and discursive distinctions between sections of the working class; Chapter 3 asks whether it is true that a successful entrepreneur must be a criminal; Chapter 4 investigates the declining effectiveness of collective action in Tata industries; Chapter 5 considers how the critical Tata workforce negotiates the historical ethnic violence that potentially undermines its class identity, and Chapter 6 explores Tata managers' counter-discourse that the casualisation of industrial labour is a socially productive correction to the inefficiency of their labour force. The conclusion of the book considers the political limits of the Tata corruption discourse, which critically defines contemporary capitalism against the historical ideal of the company town.

2

DISPOSSESSION AND THE CLASS CONCEPT IN INDUSTRIAL INDIA

When we met in 2006, Rajiv was in his late twenties, and like his father before him, constructed heavy goods vehicles on the assembly line of the Tata Motors plant. Today, Tata steel builds bridges in Europe, Tata vehicles travel the roads as far afield as Southern Africa and Tata cell phones connect people across the whole of India. In my native country of Great Britain, millions drink Tata tea under the label of Tetley, government ministers travel in luxury Jaguar cars built by the Tata group and *New Statesman* magazine lists former company CEO, Ratan Tata, as the 28th most important person alive.[1] Overall, this is an ambitious and successful company that has seen its place in the world change dramatically over the course of the previous 20 years. Accordingly, many company employees look to be the type of enterprising individuals that economic liberalisation was supposed to create in India – ambitious and well-qualified people who are willing and able to step into the global marketplace of labour, skill and ideas. Rajiv corresponds to some aspects of this template rather well. He speaks fluent English, possesses a master's degree in political science and discusses global economics with a great deal of insight. He is also hard working, adaptable and fiercely ambitious and comes from a family inured to the experience of formal sector employment. These are all characteristics that must be nurtured with a certain amount of cultural capital, which the majority of Indians lack due to an uneven distribution of education, wealth and access to the state. It seems clear then that in this new Indian marketplace of enterprising individuals, some are destined to lose at whatever game is being played, while

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1 '50 People Who Matter 2011', *New Statesman*, 26 September 2011.

many more will never even begin to play at all. With his stores of cultural capital, Rajiv should be an obvious winner; however, a closer look at the more tangible issues of job security and wages reveals that by most measures, Rajiv and almost all of his peers employed in Jamshedpur's formal sector industries are actually losing the game.

Like a third of the plant's entire workforce, Rajiv was employed in Tata Motors as a three-year apprentice. As Rajiv and his cohorts enter the shop floor of their parents for years at a time, they slip decisively into insecure, poorly paid and informal work as the boundaries between the formal and informal sector in Jamshedpur seem increasingly indistinct. What this chapter considers is how such processes should be reconceptualised vis-à-vis academic understandings of class politics. Certainly, it would appear that once enviable sections of the urban Indian labour force are experiencing some of the effects of liberalisation negatively, and that while they may work for an international conglomerate, live side by side with permanent employees and receive a monthly pay cheque, their experiences are, nonetheless, closer to those of impoverished daily wage workers than would have been the case 20 years ago. Furthermore, the systemic corruption discourses with which this labour force explains their position would also suggest a critical political consciousness of the type usually attributed to 'subaltern' classes in agriculture and the informal sector. What this problem invites is a closer interrogation of the impact of economic reform on previously secure areas of urban India, and a critical re-evaluation of the formal sector concept and its association with urban privilege.

This chapter makes three arguments: first, I argue that the Tata casualisation process expresses a broader weakening of labour that cuts across the traditional class distinctions of Indian society, and that this process has its origins in neo-liberal economic reform. I show how dispossession extends beyond the boundaries of the rural subaltern, and into the once secure domains of the middles classes and traditional 'aristocracies of labour'. Second, I argue that the regional binaries of formal/informal sector, urbanite/peasant (Chatterjee 2004, 2008; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Harris-White 2003; Sen et al 2004a, 2004b) are not useful analytic tools with which to understand dispossession in modern India. I show that working lives within these sectors are subject to great variation and that the boundaries of these categories are increasingly porous. Finally, I make an argument regarding the political consciousness of Tata workers, whose allegations of corruption critique the success of elites in an increasingly uncertain economy. I argue that systemic corruption

discourses of this type represent a critique of the ideology of the enterprising individual, which is ostensibly a key feature of the contemporary urban Indian experience (Gooptu 2009; Mankekar 2010). I suggest that these discourses constitute a political consciousness that is both critical and undermines the traditional distinctions between the politics of the insecurely and securely employed. This observation challenges the assumption of the bourgeois political consciousness suggested by Partha Chatterjee for workers in the urban formal sector (Chatterjee 2008).

The dispossession of urban India

In a widely discussed 2008 paper, Partha Chatterjee asks how the liberalisation of the economy has affected the structures of Indian political power, and whether the urban middle class has developed a greater faith in corporate capitalism over the previous 25 years. Inspired by Sudipta Kaviraj's Gramscian analysis of the Indian state (Kaviraj 1988), Chatterjee portrays the postcolonial state as a coalition of dominant classes, comprising landholders, state actors and corporate capitalists (Bardhan 1984). Chatterjee argues that since independence in 1947, the relationship between these classes was one of constant struggle since no single faction could ever arrive at absolute control (Chatterjee 2008: 56). The structure of the Indian state represented this blocked dialectic, and was characterised by a democratic system which expressed the interests of class factions through political parties; the influence of corporate capitalists and rural elites on government; and the converse influence of government on industry, expressed through licensing regimes in private manufacturing, the dominance of the state sector in heavy industry and support for import substitution.

Kaviraj and Chatterjee's model of dominant class struggle in independent India is well-substantiated, and provides a necessary complication to the problematic idea of the socialist Nehruvian state, whose supposed dominance over the Indian economy from the late 1940s was tempered by the demands of a faltering private sector in need of periodic state investment, protection from foreign competition, and in some cases, nationalisation (Bagchi 1981, 1972; Chatterjee and Sen 1988; Sen 1982; Zachariah 2005). In Jamshedpur, the Tata Company had benefitted from state financial assistance from as early as 1925 (Gupta and Thavaraj 1974: 59; Nomura 2011; Slater 1925: 62; Varshney 1964: 30; Wagle 1981: 123), and benefitted from Congress Party political support throughout the 1920s (Singh 1998: 31). Following

Indian independence in 1947, like most domestic companies, Tata continued to enjoy state support in the form of protectionist economic policies, which made the export of industrial commodities to India non-cost-effective for most producers.

Chatterjee contends that the liberalisation of the economy fundamentally changed the relationship between the dominant classes in independent India. The deconstruction of a notoriously corrupt licensing regime, the greater ease with which foreign capital and goods were able to enter the Indian economy and the establishment of new areas of investment in telecommunications, technology and finance, all served to erode the monopolies of existing national corporations such as Tata, whose chief antagonists were, increasingly, other capitalists (Chatterjee 2008: 56). Outside of the formal sector, liberalisation prompted a hardening of class lines, as a vast swathe of Indian society stood to gain little from the entry of foreign capital, but was further alienated from the means of production, and saw the value of the product of their labour decline in the face of market competition. Chatterjee defines this sizeable section of Indian society as a faction made up of the peasantry, urban poor, artisans, and petty producers in the informal sector (Chatterjee 2008: 53, 57). Though impoverished, this faction possesses a great deal of political power, which is wielded on an ad hoc and unstable basis in direct political negotiations, and is termed 'political society' (Chatterjee 2004, 2008: 57).

Chatterjee's model of liberalisation's impact on national corporations, and the unstable political power of India's subalterns is well-considered. Particularly well-observed is his observation on the role of governmental aid in softening the political impact of primitive accumulation (Chatterjee 2008: 55, 62) – an inspiration from Sanyal's discussion of capitalist development, which has an affinity with Polanyi's writings on the double movement and the welfare state (Polanyi 1957: 130; Sanyal 2007). However, Chatterjee's model becomes highly problematic in its definition of the clear class antagonists of 'political society' – a faction termed 'civil society', which is comprised of urban classes employed in corporations and the elite professions (Chatterjee 2004, 2008: 57). This faction views the political apparatus as atrophying under the pressures of corruption and bureaucratic incompetence, and has turned its back on its traditional role as the guardian of the developmental state. Civil society pins its hopes for India's future on the efficacy of corporate capital, whose professionalism and dynamism it admires. This is then a hegemonic

class, which has 'come under the moral-political sway of the bourgeoisie' (Chatterjee 2008: 57).

Chatterjee's model constructs a broad binary with which to understand a complex series of problems surrounding class, dispossession and its relationship to economic reform – a binary which suggests that macroeconomic processes create factions of market winners and losers located within discrete sectors, whose political consciousness is at odds with one another. It is my contention that while there are obvious winners and losers in the game of Indian neo-liberalism, the experiences of dispossession do not correspond to factions defined in the terms that Chatterjee presents, which are a familiar opposition between the formal and informal sector that characterises many studies of Indian political economy (Chatterjee 2008: 57; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Harris-White 2003; Sen et al. 2004a, 2004b). Neither, I argue, is the consciousness of India's civil society necessarily a hegemonic and uncritical one. On the contrary, workers in the formal sector may express a suspicion and moral antipathy towards corporate capital that is markedly similar to that described for India's peasants (Chatterjee 2008: 61). The erosion of formal sector employment security, and the increasingly critical ways in which these processes are conceptualised in terms of criminality and systemic corruption, would suggest that the class concept requires some rethinking both within India and beyond. The tendency to posit antagonisms within the working class is an approach that limits our collective understanding of the processes of neo-liberal capitalism, whose chief characteristic is the weakening of labour.[2]

A closer interrogation of India's formal sector reveals that its boundaries are increasingly porous, and that the use of the term to approximate a loose class concept is not well substantiated. Phenomena such as the casualisation of corporate labour create a sizeable section of the workforce that is employed continuously in the same workplace for lengthy periods of time, who identify closely with the values of formal work, yet enjoy little or no employment security (Breman 2004). I suggest that such processes create entirely new categories of citizens outside of the formal/informal distinction – namely, long-term casual workers with critical perspectives on corporate capital, whose labour

2 See Chapter 1 for a critical discussion of Guy Standing's concept of the global 'precariat'.

is disciplined by a desire for permanence (Sanchez 2012b). This type of worker is increasingly typical not only of manual employment in industrial corporations, but in the new and apparently skilled professions of India's offshore service and technology sectors, which epitomise India's neo-liberal ambitions (Nadeem 2011; Nisbett 2009).

The IT and outsourcing workers of the Indian metropoles, who would seem the strongest candidates for membership of Chatterjee's 'civil society', invariably perform work that is both highly insecure and characterised by an acute alienation from the labour process (Nadeem 2011). These types of work may well be central to the discursive repertoire of Indian neo-liberalism (Biao 2006). However, the labour performed in these sectors is usually characterised more by routine and closely regulated tasks than enterprise and innovation. Furthermore, the disjuncture between ideology and practice in these professions is the subject of a good degree of cynicism on the part of workers themselves, who refer to their employment as low-skilled, poorly rewarded and contingent on the demands of employers, lacking any guarantee of permanence (Nadeem 2011: 192). Compounding this perception, suspicions of nepotism in recruitment and the persistence of caste and class prejudices are common areas of complaint for employees, who question the relationship between one's competence and career success (Nisbett 2009). This suggests not only a less secure position for members of India's civil society than that proposed by Chatterjee, but a fundamentally more critical consciousness regarding corporate capital (Chatterjee 2004, 2008).

The recent extension of employment insecurity to India's middle classes and aristocracies of labour is a development that is entirely consistent with the logics of economic liberalisation, and one should imagine that workers in urban professions would indeed begin to negotiate the labour market with greater degrees of uncertainty. The relaxation of restrictions on the movement of capital is intended to facilitate more open markets, in which there is a greater degree of competition between producers, traders and investors. As such, there is a greater incentive towards flexible labour in most liberalised economies, facilitating a long-term lowering of labour costs (Harvey 1987, 2005). This incentive is usually accompanied by an increased legislative ability on the part of employers to circumvent obligations towards workers, and the advent of greater constraints on the power of collective action, both developments which transform the essential character of formal employment and show continuities with the precarity of the

informal sector (Cross 2010). Comparative studies of labour in liberalised economies reveal that the erosion of security is emblematic of numerous types of work in contemporary capitalism (Carbonella and Kasmir 2008; Freeman 1998, 2000; Genda 2005; Gill 2000; Harvey 1987, 2003; Kasmir 1999; Kosugi 2008; Mathur 1998; Wilson 1999), a development which many readers of this book will no doubt be familiar with in the context of academic employment (Bousquet 2008; Nelson 2010). That a sizeable proportion of India's 'civil society' should also experience liberalisation as a process of increasing precariousness is, therefore, not surprising.

The formal/informal distinction has utility in so much as it may describe the characteristics of a specific relationship between an employer and employee, broadly defined in terms of legal obligations and job security (Hensman 2011: 99–104, 164–70). However, the reification of formal and informal characteristics to a unified 'sector' with a shared class position is ill-advised (Breman 1976, 1996). The formal sector presents itself as an increasingly fractured and degraded collection of global work experiences, while the informal sector necessarily refers to a broad range of practices, from which it is unwise to infer a commonality of experience. Security, stability and prospects for advancement are difficult to quantify in informally organised workplaces, which are frequently structured by obligations of caste and kin (Harriss-White 2003: 184ff). As such, a unity of class experience within this sector is unlikely. For example, an excellent ethnographic analysis of the informal garment sector of Tirupur, Tamil Nadu, describes how labour in that industry during the late 1990s was characterised by a great deal of exploitation and debt bondage, embodying many of the problems popularly associated with informal employment (De Neve 1999, 2005). By comparison, a contemporaneous ethnographic study conducted in the same sector, in the same town, reveals a rather different picture (Chari 2004). Chari's analysis of Tirupur's informal garment factories suggests a pronounced level of upward mobility for workers, and a popular sense that enterprise has the capacity to better one's standing in a liberalised global market for Indian products. Here, the ideology of the 'self-made man' is an integral means through which small-scale producers in the informal sector imagine a positive relationship with corporate capital, as they manufacture goods for foreign consumption (Chari 2004).

The primary distinction between De Neve and Chari's research contexts is the way in which informal networks of caste and kin are

used to structure employment and distribute capital in specific work-places. Standards of living, degrees of exploitation and levels of job satisfaction are not determined by informality per se. Furthermore, one's political consciousness regarding the efficacy of capital and the corruption of the state is also unlikely to be guided by the formal-ity of one's workplace. Chari's research participants express a politi-cal consciousness in greater thrall to capital than the employees of Jamshedpur's Tata industries, who widely doubt the ability to attain market success without recourse to corruption and violence, yet frame their experiences in terms of three generations of formal corporate employment.

The purpose of this discussion is not to deny that very large num-bers of Indian artisans, petty producers, peasants, and the urban poor are negatively affected by economic liberalisation. Evidently, they are – a fact well borne out in studies of urban gentrification (Baviskar 2006; Randeria 2003) and a large body of work on the relationship between market forces and agricultural crisis.[3] However, the inference that such types of dispossession are primarily associated with a definite sector, which encompasses almost all of India's informally employed, is highly problematic. Furthermore, the political opposition of this sector to a hegemonic, bourgeois class, whose privilege is inversely related to subaltern loss, is overly simplistic (Chatterjee 2008).

Liberalisation has certainly created new avenues for the expression of elitism in urban India – from changes to the urban environment in the growth of gated estates (Brosiuis 2009; Waldrop 2004) to greater opportunities for middle-class consumption (Brosius 2010; Fernandes 2000; Gooptu 2009; Gupta 2000; Lukose 2009; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 2001; Sridharan 2004; Thapan 2004). However, these developments are not experienced consistently across India's urban middle classes, and certainly not across the broad coalition of Indi-ans who are directly employed in formal sector industries, some of whom may experience their labour in ways that undermine the very distinction between the formal and informal sector (Nadeem 2011; Nisbett 2009; Sanchez 2012b). Nor could the expression of elitist aspirations in civil society be said to indicate any real increase in eco-nomic and social security. Fernandes' landmark study of India's new middle classes suggests that the nation's urban elites experience acute

3 See Chapter 1, footnote 13.

indebtedness and status anxiety, and have a relatively weak grasp on their privilege, however forcefully patterns of consumption may suggest otherwise (Fernandes 2006).

In reconfiguring the struggle between dominant classes, liberalisation did not only accentuate the disenfranchisement of those traditionally lacking economic power, it disenfranchised those in apparently comfortable urban sectors, in entirely new ways (Jeffrey 2010). Understanding this process entails a move beyond the rigid class and sectoral binaries that limit analyses of the relationship between economic processes, dispossession and political consciousness (Chandavarkar 1997; Arnold 1980; Chakrabarty 1981, 1983, 1989; Ramaswamy 1973, 1977, 1983, 1988). A serious reading of class, labour and capitalism requires a focus on how people move across conceptual categories, and indeed, an understanding of the contingent spaces between them (Chandavarkar 1985, 1994, 1999; Gooptu 2001). The casualisation of labour in Jamshedpur's Tata industries does not only undermine the distinctions between the formal and informal sector by introducing new types of employment insecurity into corporate labour forces. The process also closes the gap that ostensibly exists between the hegemonic consciousness of India's civil society and its 'political' counterparts (Chatterjee 2004, 2008). Permanent and casual Tata workers alike share a critical perspective on capital, which uses languages of corruption to question the success of corporations and social elites.

Critiquing enterprise on the Tata shop floor

Rajiv's workplace in the Tata Motors plant is overwhelmingly composed of men whose wages, job security and standards of living are lower than those of their fathers. That this shop floor is to be found in a prosperous company town, in the midst of a sharp rise in national Indian living standards makes this all the more significant. The Tata workforce, which once claimed a cohesive self-identity rooted in secure employment (Bahl 1995), now labours under a great deal of uncertainty regarding the future. The workforce is composed of no fewer than four types of non-permanent employees, each entailing their own distinct pay scales. Apprentices and trainees share the bottom rung of the Tata employment ladder, although apprentices have a marginally higher status by virtue of sitting a government-approved examination at the end of their programme. As discussed in Chapter 1, the apprentice and trainees earn between INR 1,500 and INR 2,400

per month,[4] working six days a week for three years in a range of usually menial shop floor tasks, a period in which they receive a bare minimum of formal training. Apprentice training is available almost exclusively to the children of permanent company employees, and as such, Tata maintains a consistency with the 'industrial citizenship' that characterises company town employment regimes (Burawoy 1979: 113); indeed, it is the commitment to the value of formal sector employment that enables casual labour in the city to progress with such stability. Many employees cling to the uncertain hope of regularisation for years at a time, and are, as such, rather easily disciplined by their superiors.

Despite the variety of Tata work grades, there are two important points which are consistent across the shop floor. First, all non-permanent employees are barred from membership of the plant's only trade union, receive none of the housing or healthcare provisions of permanent workers and lack any certainty regarding their future. Second, almost all such workers are the children of permanent employees, and there is a notable lack of antipathy between the various grades of the workforce. Relations between permanent and casual employees are informed by a shared critical perspective, which suggests that casual workers are unjustly excluded from a secure career, and that permanent workers are unable to effect change on the plant's corrupt trade union.

In the previous 10 years, practically no non-permanent workers have actually made it to the top of the regularisation ladder and into a secure job. As older workers have retired or accepted redundancy packages, the workforce has become cheaper and weaker, definitively embodying the logics of urban flexible accumulation (Harvey 1987). Rumours, myths and critiques circulate on the shop floor, which contemplate the likely course of the future, and the means by which it deviates so strongly from the past. Ethnographic comparisons can be made to a broad range of contexts. Most notably, Verdery's study of the collapse of socialism in Romania (1996); Rofel's research on the historical emergence of neo-liberal values in Chinese industrial workplaces (1999); Navaro-Yashin (2002) and Ozyurek's (2006) studies of modernity and secularism in Turkey similarly describe how everyday citizens negotiate contexts of social change and ideological and

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4 Approximately GBP 19–30 at the time of research.

economic uncertainty. However, the popular relationship to the notion of progress and modernity in these contexts is rather different. Rofel's work skilfully traces a generational schism between the historical and political imaginaries of Chinese industrial workers, and shows that for older female employees, memories of atrocity during the Cultural Revolution invite cynicism and fear of state authority, while their daughters broadly embrace an ideology of neo-liberal progress. In Turkey, memories of communalism and state violence, likewise, inspire a popular binary with an imagined future of secular modernity. In Romania, historical experiences of authoritarianism, state violence and material deprivation are unfavourably compared to the emergent opportunities of a liberalised society. What the subjects of these ethnographies would seem to share is a sense that although the future may be uncertain, it is likely to be better than the past. In Jamshedpur, the future is conversely reckoned in terms of social decline from a historical highpoint of employment security and effective labour politics. In this environment, the technology of social change is believed to be a systemic relationship between capitalism, criminality and the state that encompasses phenomena as varied as coercion, economic exploitation, the corruption of collective action, and legislative and judicial failure.

Key to workers discourses surrounding the casualisation of labour are generally well-informed suspicions that the process dwells in a dubious grey area vis-à-vis employment legislation. Certainly, the lack of regularisation for continuously employed non-permanent workers conflicts with the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act.[5]

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5 The extent to which Jamshedpur's 'casual' Tata workers are actually casual would seem fairly limited. Reference to the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 would lead one to suspect that they are eligible for regularisation. The act states that government reserves the right to demand the regularisation of casual workers in any industry if their labour is said to meet a specific set of criteria, all of which apply to Tata Motors:

a) whether the process, operation or other work is incidental to, or necessary for the industry, trade, business, manufacture or occupation that is carried on in the establishment;

b) whether it is of perennial nature, that is to say, it is of sufficient duration having regard to the nature of industry, trade, business, manufacture or occupation that is carried on in that establishment;

c) whether it is done ordinarily through regular workmen in that establishment or an establishment similar thereto

d) whether it is sufficient to employ considerable number of whole-time workmen.

Workers are correct to note that the company's periodic shifting of employees into forms of 'refresher training' breaks their contract, and sends them back to the bottom of the state labour commissioner's mythical regularisation list. Apprentices and their fathers also note that a third of workers registered as apprentices and trainees is an awfully large number for any facility. But then, apprentices are the only Indian workers formally denied a minimum wage or maximum working hours, and the apprenticeship schemes are accordingly regarded in a cynical light.[6] What united popular understandings of the casualisation of labour in Tata Motors was the suggestion that changes in employment regimes constituted a means to, first, lower wages, and second, disenfranchise workers from the trade union representation that could potentially raise them again. It was understood that the process involved a level of corrupt complicity from the legislative arms of the state. It was expressed even more frequently that the corruption of the plant's only trade union was critical to the denial of non-permanent worker representation.

Contemporary discourses of corruption in the Tata Workers' Union (TWU) suggest an alignment of union interests with capital, in which the organisation helps to facilitate the weakening of labour by excluding the current generation of casual Tata workers from representation. While this model may be deployed on the shop floor to explain developments arising from economic liberalisation, the union has been characterised by conservatism since the 1920s, and corruption discourses surrounding the organisation must be placed in their proper context (Bahl 1995). The TWU is the founder member of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), a federation aligned to the Congress Party, which has traditionally pursued a non-confrontational, and sporadically complicit relationship with capital, evidenced in the failure of INTUC unions to challenge the decline of permanent employment in the Ahmedabad textile industry during the 1990s (Breman 2004: 163), managerial collusion during industrial action in Bombay during the 1950s and 1960s (Wersch 1992) and the refusal to extend representation to seasonal contract workers in Jamshedpur at any point during the 20th century (Sanchez and Strümpell 2014). More broadly, INTUC unions have framed their struggles almost exclusively in terms of the narrow economic interests of their members, as opposed to anything

6 See Chapter 1, footnote 9.

approaching national class politics (Ramaswamy 1983). Importantly, therefore, Tata workers' corruption discourses do not imply that the union was ever the champion of broader class interests, since the organisation's conservative history is a matter of common local knowledge. Rather, popular discourses suggest that the power of the organisation, which once principally maintained the boundaries of a city-wide aristocracy of labour, has more recently been turned inwards, towards the dispossession of its traditional membership. The systemic corruption discourse of the Tata shop floor situates this process within a broader network of entrepreneurial negotiations between political representatives, corporate capital, the state, and violent coercion. Such negotiations are understood as the primary technology through which elite class struggle is pursued, and working-class dispossession enabled.

Rajiv's experience of Tata dispossession was rather typical. He was a well-educated and hard-working man from a company family, who had once anticipated a career in a corporation internationally renowned for their employment benefits. However, at some point in his teens, the Tata dream began to unravel. The secure jobs that were previously inherited from one's parents became quite hard to access. The jobs available paid less than in previous years, did not offer the security of a company home and healthcare plan and could be withdrawn at almost no notice. By the time we met in 2006, Rajiv's working life had taken a path that seemed to lead to nowhere in particular. At the same point in his own life, Rajiv's father had a home and a wife, could save money, take holidays with his children, and looked forward to a monthly Tata pay cheque until retirement. Rajiv's experience was quite different. His salary of INR 2,000 was not enough to leave his parents' home, and his likely progression to the ranks of contract employment in the next two years did not make him a sought-after marriage partner.

With his neatly trimmed moustache and carefully parted hair, Rajiv appeared older than his 27 years. He strongly resembled his father, who, like him, was slender and nearly six feet tall, had dark skin, wore a moustache, and was impeccably tidy in his personal appearance. After completing secondary education at a Tata school, like most of his younger peers on the shop floor, Rajiv attended a local university, where he completed an MSc in political science. During the course of his studies, he developed a particular fondness for the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, whom he still enjoyed reading in his spare time. When we met, Rajiv was 18 months into the

three-year Tata Full-Time Apprenticeship programme, and anticipated that he would remain in casual employment for many years.

He still lived in his childhood bedroom, in a state of suspended adolescence, while he considered how best to work his way out of his current predicament. Rajiv owned two changes of clothing, which hung from hooks on his bedroom wall, and two dozen Hindi editions of classic works of political philosophy. The books were diligently covered in brown paper to protect them from dust. In their parents' homes, some young men in non-permanent employment dreamed of becoming players for European football teams. Others spent their evenings tutoring school children in mathematics, and hoped to pursue PhDs so that they might become lecturers in state universities. Others chased distant relatives in Chennai for job contacts in the international call centres. Rajiv tried to become an entrepreneur. How he came to understand his experience of pursuing this ambition reveals a great deal about the ways in which the Tata systemic corruption discourse models not only processes of overt criminality, but the broader operation of enterprise, capitalism and power itself.

One hot and humid day in August, Rajiv left work early, went home to his parents' house and changed into the smarter of his two sets of non-work clothes; he had an interview for a loan at the bank. Rajiv had been asked by one of the plant's middle managers if he would like to engage in some informal outsourcing work for the Tata Motors Company. The plant relies on a good deal of secondary manufacture, which is contracted to small industries across the city, chiefly, the assembly of components and the tooling of axle hubs for some models of trucks. The manager charged with the axle tooling contract knew that Rajiv's father owned a small and disused workshop where this work could be undertaken. It was also evident to anybody that knew him that Rajiv was an ambitious, serious and dependable man.

Rajiv was excited by the proposal. He hoped to save money, marry at some point in the future and finally begin to live the life that befitted a man of nearly 30. His financial projection for the year ahead led him to believe that these goals were eminently attainable. He had been promised INR 20 for every completed axle hub he finished, and he anticipated that his workshop could complete 24 pieces per day. His income would be further supplemented by selling the scrap iron castings from each hub for a further INR 20. On the basis of these estimates, Rajiv's business would generate significant revenue, which would allow him to hire an employee who could carry out the work

while he finished his Tata apprenticeship. After paying wages of INR 100 per day, Rajiv stood to make INR 247,680 per year,[7] or roughly 12 times his current salary. However, the workshop was still an empty shed, and he would first need to invest in tools and transportation. For this, he needed a loan of INR 300,000.[8]

Rajiv returned to work the next day dejected. His application for a loan had initially seemed to go well. The bank manager was friendly and helpful, and was impressed by Rajiv's carefully compiled figures. However, it turned out that becoming an informal sector entrepreneur was quite difficult, and those most likely to succeed were people that already possessed a certain amount of wealth. After patiently listening to his projections, the bank manager refused Rajiv's loan since he had nothing to put up as collateral. The things which Rajiv did possess were anachronistic investments from a paternalistic company town past: he was polite and hard-working, and had ironed his only smart shirt that afternoon. These were qualities that potentially said something about his character and his family background, but they were not ready substitutes for the security of a home or car to take possession of. In the aftermath of his loan rejection, Rajiv returned to his earlier cynicism regarding the nature of success in the liberalised Indian economy. He suggested that the same uneven distribution of power and privilege that had stranded him in non-permanent employment had now conspired to alienate him from the tools required to leave it. He argued, like many of his colleagues, that success in the Indian market place was skewed towards those already in possession of wealth and political influence. Experience taught him that acquiring these investments in the first place was more than likely facilitated by some type of corruption or criminality, and he referenced the ease with which local politicians established their own businesses through the use of patronage and coercion. Rajiv went on to explain his belief that for large corporate houses, political complicity was likewise integral to the consolidation of class power, before referring to the beheading of British King Charles I to suggest that such political despotism might result in popular revolt:

> The world today is completely in the hands of Capitalists. People from Reliance, from Bajaj are moving into Government,[9]

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7 Approximately GBP 3,100 at the time of research.
8 Approximately GBP 3,750 at the time of research.
9 Reliance and Bajaj are two of India's largest corporations.

they have got Government positions. And now they are mak-
ing all the rules about how things should be . . .

Do you know what happened in your country in 1668 [sic],
when there were similar conditions?[10]

The lowering of wages and the erosion of employment security are
important developments for all of Jamshedpur's industrial citizens, and
discourses which relate these developments to perceived infractions of
labour legislation are usually well-informed. Rajiv's suggestion that
his own lack of entrepreneurial success was the consequence of some
type of unseen political machination is perhaps a highly personal and
rationalising commentary, which attempts to assign reason to the mis-
fortune of daily life. A classically trained ethnographer may thus be
inclined to interpret personalised commentaries on the inner workings
of neo-liberal capitalism through the same lens as Azande perceptions
of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1937). We might even regard these
discourses as something analogous to the metaphorical commentar-
ies of dispossession that have been said to characterise the myths and
rumours of subaltern communities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993;
Scheper Hughes 2000). This type of reading would not, however, be
well-founded. What the modelling of personal misfortune represents
in this context is a far more pervasive and insightful discourse on the
relations of production, which suggests a political critique of the wider
neo-liberal project; that this critique speaks plainly and directly to the
structures of the economy is significant.

For Jamshedpur's industrial workers, the assumption that Indian
capitalism benefits the corrupt, the wealthy and the powerful relates
to a wider context of highly public elite criminal entrepreneurship,
which makes such assumptions appear well founded. In Jamshedpur,
the assassination of union president V. G. Gopal in 1993 gives rise to an
assumption that the union is in the grip of an organised criminal subver-
sion, in which violent entrepreneurs enter trade union politics to extract
bribes from industrial capitalism (Sanchez 2010: 168ff). In this context,
violence may well be popularly regarded as central to the hegemony of
corrupt institutions, and as facilitating the casualisation of labour.

The assassination of the union's president can be seen to have
curbed the influence of an internal faction, which was prepared to

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10 An inaccurate reference to the beheading of King Charles I in 1649.

break with the organisation's conservative agenda. The most immediate effect of this type of violence is the reassertion of authority within the union itself, dictating the future course of institutional politics. More broadly, the implicit threat of violence continues to intimidate further opposition to the union from workers and rival organisations. The result is an almost complete absence of radical collective action in Jamshedpur's Tata industries, which weakens labour by virtue of consolidating the authority of corrupt trade union leaders. Tata workers' knowledge of this recent history – and direct experience of its continued impact – inspires a political consciousness that logically aligns corruption and violence with the interests of corporate capital.

The common suspicion that the Tata Company pays bribes to state politicians and legislators to forestall regularisation must, likewise, be properly contextualised, since the surrounding Jharkhand state is home to many politicians whose power and personal wealth coincides with highly publicised criminal charges for murder, kidnapping, assault, and bribery. That the criminal travails of these state figures have been linked to corruption scandals in the once inviolable Congress Party lends discourses of elite criminal success an added air of plausibility, as does the high proportion of Indian elected representatives that are charged with a criminal offence.[11]

The close relationship between corruption, violence and institutional authority has been a pronounced feature of the regional political economy since the 1970s. The widespread recognition that criminality has played a role in the Indian political economy for many years supports, rather than undermines, the critique of corporate capital that contemporary Tata corruption discourses represent. What the corruption models of Rajiv and his colleagues articulate is a powerful popular indictment of the ideologies surrounding neo-liberal progress in India. Far from having entered a new corporate age of transparency, professionalism and opportunity, liberalised India is perceived to function on the same corrupt, oligarchic terms as the past, albeit with an altered cast of victims and a greater variety of business opportunities. As is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, this perception is well-substantiated in the public operation of business, parliamentary and labour politics.

Commentaries on corruption may well express discontent with the practices of elites in ways that inherently reproduce the structures of

11 See Chapter 3.

oppression. Certainly, in Jamshedpur, the desire for permanent wage labour is at the heart of such commentaries. However, I am loathe to call the discourses of Jamshedpur's shop floors a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott 1985), since the content of the critique tends to question the legitimacy of broader social structures. This is achieved by identifying the enduring relationships between a range of social institutions, and positing self-interest and corruption to determine these relations. That criminality and violence are said to be inculcated within political and economic success lends corruption discourses a certain ethical weight. However, these commentaries are primarily systemic as opposed to moral, and should be regarded as distinct from the broader modelling of epochal social decline which characterises Hindu cosmology (Pinney 1999).

The commentaries of Jamshedpur's dispossessed suggest a need to move beyond the ethnographic denial of an incisive political consciousness in corruption discourses. In the analysis of India, this trend stems from a focus on localised and bureaucratic forms of corruption, which suggest a provincialising and mystifying series of outcomes from the discourses that surround them, principally the popular belief that corruption is concentrated in the petty institutions of the local state (Das 2001; Gupta 1995), and the conclusion that perceptions of corruption are exaggerated and primarily serve the interests of bribe-takers (Parry 2000). Analyses of hegemonic discourses regarding petty bribe-taking are not appropriate analytic frameworks to approach the wider gamut of Indian corruption. Corruption discourses that conceptually unite the broader operations of capitalism, political power and criminality are wholly different types of commentaries to those surrounding petty bribery, and require a fuller consideration of their political consciousness (Jeffrey 2002; Wade 1982). It is such a model that allows Rajiv to explain his lack of entrepreneurial success in highly political terms that encompass the global trend towards urban dispossession and flexible accumulation (Carbonella and Kasmir 2008; Freeman 1998, 2000; Genda 2005; Gill 2000; Harvey 1987, 2003, 2004; Kasmir 1999; Kosugi 2008; Mathur 1998; Sanchez 2012b; Wilson 1999).

Conclusion

The perceptive reader may well ask, if Rajiv cannot become an entrepreneur in Jamshedpur, then who can? And to what extent will this entrepreneur's success really depend upon a relationship with

corruption and criminality? These questions explore the role currently played by criminality in the Indian economy, and ask whether Rajiv's discourses are nothing more than urban mythologies. The answers to these questions are prefaced here, and elaborated upon in the chapter that follows, in which I advance a conceptual framework of criminal entrepreneurship to understand the relationship between corruption, capitalism and violence.

While many sons of Tata workers opt for the uncertain rewards of a company career, some do not. Often, these men's fathers have accepted early retirement prior to their son's coming of age, and as such, they are ineligible to apply for training positions reserved for company children. Or more rarely, some Tata sons simply choose to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Through either of these routes, a certain number of people find themselves outside of the company gates. A number of such men follow the same reasoning as Rajiv, and attempt to become entrepreneurs. Unsuccessful entrepreneurs typically made similar mistakes to Rajiv, in that their business proposals relied on personal investments that were wholly unmarketable. The young man named Lucky whose story opens the following chapter, aspired to become a successful criminal entrepreneur, and was consistently engaged in fanciful scams of an almost cinematic form (Sanchez 2010: 179ff). This individual mistook the organised crime of Bollywood for its real-life incarnation, and as such, believed that charismatic investments such as daring and ingenuity were substitutes for capital and powerful friends (*ibid*.: 181). For this reason, his speculations never bore fruit. The successful entrepreneurs of the city's finance sector pursued quite a different business model, and their investments were underwritten by more tangible forms of collateral that tacitly confirmed many of Rajiv's suspicions. Wealthy entrepreneurs maintained a wide network of corrupt state officials, organised criminal enforcers, accountants, mediators, and bureaucrats. Their continued success involved a flair for negotiating between apparently distinct skills and institutions, which is revealing of the relationship between criminality and capitalism in India's liberalised economy.

The most commonly pursued sources of profit for the successful entrepreneurs among whom I conducted research were debt collection contracts for high-street banks and international companies. When appropriate, these goals were pursued through the informal patronage of a local politician or police officer. At other times, one's firm might hire contacts in organised crime to enact coercion upon debtors or

reluctant business partners. In other contexts, it was prudent to rely on the more immediate powers of wealth, which was used to offer a well-placed bribe or dazzle one's interlocutors with displays of largess. Sources of profit loss, such as imprisonment or extortion, were also minimised by skilfully applying a combination of political influence, violence and capital, which eroded any easy distinction between the formal and informal sector, between corruption and organised crime, and certainly, between criminality and capitalism.

Whatever the ideology of neo-liberal progress, business success in Jamshedpur is frequently dependent upon one's ability to negotiate the applied use of violence and corruption – an observation analogous to that articulated in Anton Blok's classic 'violent entrepreneur' analysis of the Sicilian Mafia (Blok 1974). This criminality proceeds in ways that are integral to the operation of capitalism, and performs an important role in directing flows of wealth and power. This insight, while seldom articulated in South Asian research, is not a new one. Comparative understandings of criminality and state corruption routinely benefit from a close analytic focus on the ways in which informal criminal practices not only intersect with, but directly serve, the interests of formal sector capitalism, particularly in contexts of economic liberalisation (Arlacchi 1983, 1986; Gambetta 1993; Handelman 1994; Herzfeld 2009; Kang 2002; Varese 2005; Volkov 2002; Yurchak 2002).

One of the basic conclusions to be drawn from this observation is that the movement of capital undermines the broad conceptual boundaries created by social scientists. The capital flows of corruption and criminality collapse many of the distinctions between formal and informal economies, and largely confirm Rajiv's model of the origins of entrepreneurial success. This suggests a critical engagement with the ideological underpinnings of economic liberalisation that is significant, and questions the extent to which once secure areas of the urban formal sector regard corporate capital in politically favourable terms (Chatterjee 2008). However, there is a broader lesson to be learnt here, which is that the tendency towards intellectual 'purification' in the social sciences can create analytic binaries that are as much constraining as they are productive (Latour 1993). Nowhere is this truer than in the easy opposition between a dispossessed, yet critical, informal sector and a secure, yet hegemonic, formal sector.

Part II

POWER AND ENTERPRISE

3

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

One evening, I received a somewhat mysterious telephone call from a close research participant. Known to his friends as 'Lucky', he was the 21-year-old unemployed son of a retired worker in the Tata Tin-plate company. Lucky's family were the descendants of Punjabi Sikh migrants who travelled to Jamshedpur in 1907 to seek employment in TISCO, and had worked in Tata industries ever since. Almost a century later, Lucky's father was forced into early retirement and was unable to petition for Tata employment for either of his two sons. He did, however, benefit from a substantial company retirement settlement, which Lucky slowly squandered in a variety of business ventures, while his elder brother migrated to London to work in a convenience store. The films and photographs which Lucky's brother sent home showed him strolling through Trafalgar Square in a leather jacket and new white trainers, sitting in a McDonald's restaurant talking loudly in English on a mobile telephone, listening contentedly to an iPod in his bedroom in Hounslow. His proud family were pleased that their considerable financial investment in his migration had made him comfortable and happy. For Lucky, however, things did not seem to be going as well.

Lucky, clean-shaven, dressed in white trainers and bleached jeans, embodied the Bollywood *Badmarsh* aesthetic,[1] and was part of a crowd of heavy-drinking, young Punjabi men that congregated each evening at the end of my street. Lucky was fairly typical of an early retirement package son; although he probably had a couple more years of drinking and idle roaming to look forward to, this could not feasibly last forever. Eventually, either his father's funds or patience would

1 Badman/Villain.

be exhausted, at which time Lucky's probability of securing decent employment did not appear high, since he lacked any discernible skills and possessed only a school-leaving certificate. When not drinking or riding the Enfield motorcycle that was his pride and joy, Lucky spent his time planning an endless series of criminal enterprises, with which he hoped to earn his fortune.

The tone of Lucky's call that evening was vague – he asked simply that I meet him that evening in a local bar to discuss a 'personal problem'. After a round of drinks, Lucky's problem became clear. It transpired that his successful elder brother had entered the United Kingdom on a tourist visa, which expired some months earlier. The brother now faced the very real prospect of a humiliating deportation, which he intended to avoid by entering into a sham marriage with an English woman and claiming British citizenship. Lucky felt that this was a common enough occurrence in London. However, for a recently arrived migrant, finding the right type of spouse was no mean feat. One's accomplice must be unscrupulous enough to break the law for money, yet, still be reliable enough to maintain the deception months, or even years, into the future. Lucky suggested that deals such as this were best brokered through a well-connected local agent, and since I was a Londoner, he proceeded to offer me INR 100,000 (approximately GBP 1,200) to find his brother's spouse. It soon became apparent that Lucky's 'personal problem' was, in fact, a business proposal. He claimed that family woes aside, there was good money to be made in finding brides for Indian migrants. Lucky suggested that we start a business together, matching fee-paying men from Jamshedpur with women in London. For each of these transactions, I would collect the same commission of INR 100,000. Lucky's father was so taken with the idea that he had already contacted more than a dozen potential customers, who were apparently eager to migrate as soon as their brides were located. For Lucky himself, this was simply one in a long line of criminal enterprises. During the same year, he also cultivated a relationship with a corrupt member of the Indian civil service in an attempt to procure fake Indian passports, which he hoped to sell to local gangsters. The character of Lucky's enterprises, and their failure to match the success of more established entrepreneurs, is highly revealing of the functional relationship between criminality, capitalism and class power that Rajiv's corruption discourse describes.

Lucky's businesses were attempts to enter into the types of negotiations that are popularly termed 'organised crime': a cooperative practice that brings together capitalists, corrupt institutional actors

and violent entrepreneurs in mutually beneficial relationships, and is based upon the exchange of distinct skills and areas of authority (Arlacchi 1983, 1986; Gambetta 1993; Handelman 1994; Herzfeld 2009; Kang 2002; Varese 2005; Volkov 2002; Yurchak 2002). I was initially unsure why Lucky would regard me as a suitable partner in such a venture, since I had no prior personal experience of any form of enterprise, criminal or otherwise. However, with time, I realised that for criminal entrepreneurs, the right business partner is one that acts as a 'valve' between enterprise and any resource that would not otherwise be accessible – be it violence, capital, political influence, or in my case, knowledge of an unfamiliar territory (Yurchak 2002). In Jamshedpur, Lucky's entrepreneurial networking was the rule rather than the exception, and relied upon the incorporation of a wide variety of individuals into the business of organised crime. In the year that followed, another research participant proposed that I smuggle readily available nine-carat gold from the UK to India, where we could use contacts among local jewellers to fraudulently sell it as 18-carat gold to consumers. In this proposal, the sporadic criminality of both the jewellers and myself was contingent upon nothing more than the viability of a given business proposal. Another research participant presented me with a scheme to smuggle tiger bones from China to India, and on to the UK, where I could sell them to expatriate East Asians at highly inflated prices. I could be regarded as a potential interlocutor in eastern Indian criminal enterprise precisely because the crime in question was essentially an entrepreneurial partnership between persons of complementary skills and resources, whose chief logic was the pursuit of profit. The same logic governed Lucky's dealings with his partner in the Indian civil service, whose role in the grand enterprise of organised crime collapsed the distinctions between organised crime and corruption, and between licit and illicit economies.

This chapter considers what the business practices of Lucky and his more successful peers can tell us about the political economy of capitalism, corruption and organised crime in India, and how it relates to the systemic corruption discourses described in the opening chapters of the book. Inspired by Volkov's landmark study of Russian Mafias (Volkov 2002), I present an ethnographic account of a firm of Jamshedpur debt collectors, through which I discuss how successful entrepreneurship relies upon cooperation between criminal, corporate and state actors. I argue that rather than operating at the fringes of capitalist democracies, criminality is integral to the economic and

political processes by which power and wealth change hands in parts of India. Second, I consider what the implications of this model are for anthropological understandings of Indian corruption, since organised criminal entrepreneurship necessarily engages with abuses of institutional authority. I suggest that as anthropological approaches to India largely focus upon public discourses surrounding petty bribery, they are inappropriate conceptual tools with which to analyse systematic and violent forms of elite criminal enterprise. With reference to the intersecting criminal enterprises of local business people and politicians, I argue that a model of 'criminal entrepreneurship' provides a more solid conceptual basis from which to understand the broad field of corruption, and go on to suggest practical reasons for the failure of anti-corruption legislation. In the type of environment that I describe, the systemic corruption discourses of the Tata shop floor should be regarded as insightful emic models of the relationship between power, violence and capitalism.

Criminal entrepreneurship and the idea of corruption

I first met Suchir in the bar of a Kolkata hotel. I had arrived in the city that morning, and planned to make the 200-km journey to Jamshedpur for the first time the next day. Suchir was the unmarried 26-year-old son of a local police officer, and when I met him, he was drinking beer with a group of loud, friendly young men from his neighbourhood. His family were Bihari migrants of Rajput caste, who had settled in Kolkata several generations earlier, and while he proudly claimed an ancestral home in a village outside Patna, he was most comfortable in the crowded, cosmopolitan milieu of the big city. Sitting beside their increasingly boisterous table, I struck up a conversation with Suchir and his friends, who were intrigued to know why I was in India on my own. As we chatted, Suchir and I learned that we shared a common interest in Jamshedpur. He explained that he worked for the finance division of General Electric Money in Kolkata,[2] and was celebrating a promotion – the next day, he would be transferred to Jamshedpur, where he would manage consumer finance packages for the purchase of motorcycles. He did not know the town well, which enjoyed a somewhat contradictory reputation for both civic order and

2 The consumer-finance arm of the American conglomerate.

organised crime, but was sure that he would be in good hands once he arrived. His bosses had introduced him to their contracted collection agent in Jamshedpur, a local man named Rishi, who operated out of a large house in the middle of one of the city's slums. At the age of 38, Rishi had precociously made a name for himself as one of the city's most prominent debt collectors, and mixed as easily in the offices of executives and politicians as he did on the streets of his dilapidated neighbourhood. Rishi's connections would help Suchir negotiate the difficulties of an unfamiliar place.

Suchir and I arranged to meet the next day at Howrah Junction railway station, where we boarded an early morning express train to Jamshedpur. As we travelled through the Bengali countryside and into Jharkhand, Suchir was nervous. He had never lived away from home, and would miss his family and friends. But he took comfort in the fact that Jamshedpur was regarded as one of the cleanest, quietest and most comfortable towns in India, with drinkable tap water and an abundance of green spaces. As we both settled into the city, found apartments and started work in the weeks that followed, it seemed that Suchir's characterisation was at least partially correct. Jamshed Tata's legacy had endowed the city with exquisitely manicured parks, gardens and tree-lined streets. And while many of these streets were congested with heavy goods vehicles, and invariably coated in thick black dust from the Tata Steel plant, the tap water was indeed safe to drink. Nonetheless, as I began research at the offices of the Tata Workers' Union, I began to discover that the order and prosperity of the company town concealed a popular fear of violence and coercion – neighbours urged me not to allow people into my home; friends were concerned that I might be harmed by local trade unionists; police officers advised me to be alert for violent extortion demands by the menacing estate agent that managed my apartment building. In time, I learned that these concerns were part of a broader popular modelling of the integral relationship between power, enterprise and violence. Within six months, Suchir had begun to express this discourse himself, and professed that he might not suit his new job after all.

Colleagues in Suchir's Jamshedpur office were helpful, and his apartment was clean and spacious. He could also buy well-prepared Bihari and Bengali food at any number of cheap eateries across the city, which partly satisfied his cravings for a home-cooked meal. However, his work bought him into contact with a variety of local entrepreneurs who had unsettling means of negotiating their business

deals. Collections contracts for finance companies were highly profit-able businesses in Jamshedpur, partly since so many young men were eager to possess motorcycles that far exceeded their budgets. Suchir's partner, Rishi, was a major player in the motorcycle repossessions market, and his name was familiar to countless people who had been unable to meet their payments, including several of Lucky's compan-ions. However, Rishi was not without his competitors. Syndicates of entrepreneurs, investors and enforcers periodically cut into his busi-ness by martialling the patronage of criminal politicians and gangsters, with which they coerced his partners into transferring their contracts to new firms. During the period of fieldwork, Rishi enjoyed a particu-larly strained relationship with the city's then Member of Parliament (MP), Sunil Mahato, who was locally purported to run a protection racket among the city's illegal alcohol producers and to traffic in stolen heavy minerals. Mahato's feud with Rishi began with demands from the MP for protection money, which when refused, were followed by threats and the successive poisoning of several of Rishi's guard dogs.[3] By the time Suchir arrived in Jamshedpur, Mahato had begun to coerce Rishi's partners in General Electric Money.

As our first months in the city passed, Suchir became increasingly unhappy. He began to express concern for his safety, and was tired by the everyday criminal coercion that informed his working life:

> Boss, I have seen these things before in films you know, but until I came to this place I hadn't known that it was real, this is the place where it is happening.

Suchir had hitherto equated organised crime and serious violence with their Bollywood portrayals, where charismatic gangsters drive imported cars and spend the greater proportion of their time in liaisons with enigmatic women. The seemingly legitimate business of hire-purchase bought Suchir into contact with all manner of threatening characters in Jamshedpur, many of whom could wield political, legal and violent influence in their favour. In Jamshedpur, Suchir found himself playing a minor part in a criminal drama that lacked any discernible romance. Throughout the summer of 2006, Suchir received a series of worrying telephone calls from Sunil Mahato's enforcers, urging him to transfer

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3 Between January 2006 and June 2007, four of Rishi's dogs were killed.

General Electric's debt collection work to the local MP. Suchir was not senior enough to award Mahato any form of tender; nonetheless, he had been identified as a convenient local 'valve', through which his interlocutors might access a lucrative contract (Yurchak 2002). This then was a business proposal to an individual perceived to have access to resources. However, if such negotiations seek resources at all, it is only because they can be used as investments in further negotiations. The MP may have lacked access to the Kolkata offices of General Electric Money, but had been immersed in Indian organised crime for many years, and his earlier partnerships had allowed him to accumulate wealth, political influence and an army of enforcers. For his dealings with Suchir, he relied on the latter, and eventually sent several men to his office, where they threatened to shoot him. In a state of panic, Suchir managed to convince his aggressors that he lacked the authority to do business with them. He directed their attentions to his boss in Kolkata, whom they accordingly set about harassing in his stead. The threat to Suchir's life evaporated as soon as it had appeared, once it became evident that he could not facilitate the access which his would-be business partners had hoped for. It is in such an environment that systemic discourses on the relationship between criminality and power are formed, and where they represent a political consciousness for the generally working-class people that express them.

Understanding the actions of Sunil Mahato requires a conceptual step beyond regional analyses of corruption and political criminality, which largely focus upon the phenomenon of bribery (Das 2001; Gupta 1995; Parry 2000), and tend to relate political violence to communalism (Hansen 2002). Even where regional studies have made important advances in interrogating the political economy of corruption, the role of coercion in the consolidation of power remains under-theorised (Jeffrey 2002; Wade 1982). Drawing upon the comparative case of Russia, Volkov's analysis of the role of organised criminal violence in the transition to capitalism is highly instructive. Building upon Blok's classic study of the Sicilian Mafia (Blok 1974),[4] Volkov's work subverts the received wisdom that organised crime stifles free-market capitalism (Galeotti 1998), by demonstrably showing how the fragile

4 Despite popular emphasis upon vendetta and honour as the traditional structuring principle of Italian organised crime, even a rather cursory historical survey of the field shows its origins to be firmly economic and political, resting in the feudal patronage of post-unification Italy. See Arlacchi 1983, 1986; Gambetta 1993.

contracts of Russia's nascent free market were underwritten by violent entrepreneurs, who entered into 'enforcement partnerships' with capitalists (Volkov 2002). Volkov contends that this entrepreneurial ethic allowed new types of criminal syndicates, comprising former state security agents and athletes, to undermine the authority of older criminal organisations, whose enterprises were constrained by complex codes of honour and a power base largely restricted to the prison system (Handelman 1994; Volkov 2002). Volkov's notion of violence as a form of 'market protection' has since become highly influential (Varese 2005), and for the purposes of this chapter, provides a conceptual model with which to understand how criminality may be purposefully related to political and economic negotiations that consolidate class power.

Volkov's enforcement partnership model can be productively applied to the field of corruption, by exploring how political elites mobilise institutional authority and coercive power in mutually constitutive ways in the pursuit of their entrepreneurial goals – a practice that I consider to be a process of elite class struggle, whose aims are accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2004). Sunil Mahato is a criminal entrepreneur, and it is reasonable to regard his political authority as a resource to be capitalised upon in further negotiations. Somewhat supporting this assertion are the entrepreneurial partnerships which the MP builds with his interlocutors. Mahato may seek a relationship with Suchir for what he can give him, but it is also true that his partners do likewise in their dealings with Mahato himself, since he acts as valve to a reserve of political influence, wealth and violence. When I suggested to Suchir that Mahato's 'enforcers' might be entrepreneurs simply operating with the MP's patronage, he thought this explanation plausible. Mahato was known to contract his services in enforcement partnerships, and since his patronage was underwritten by real political power, it was highly prized. In this respect, the functional relationship between a criminal politician and his/her partners could be conceptualised using Sahlins' model of the Melanesian Big Man (Sahlins 1963). However, unlike Sahlins' Big Man (whose authority is based upon durable personal relations, and risks entropy beyond a certain scale), the criminal politician deliberately cultivates a wide range of partnerships, often with quite distant and dissimilar actors. It is the fluidity and variety of these partnerships which underpin Mahato's political and economic position, and which are at the core of the systemic criminality that popular corruption discourses describe.

However, if the model of a networking criminal entrepreneurship that I have proposed is well substantiated, then evidently, a good deal of people must find themselves engaging with criminality on a semi-regular basis. This fact raises important questions regarding the moral rationalisations which individuals make for their engagement in illegality, and suggests potential ethical contradictions in the systemic corruption discourse. Parry's analysis of Indian bribery provides a useful framework from economic anthropology with which to approach aspects of this tension (Parry 2000). Building upon the conceptual foundations laid in earlier work, Parry considers that that since the economy is embedded within social relations, material transactions must be subject to moral evaluations on the part of their agents (Parry 1989). In the Indian context, this tendency is further reinforced by the Hindu conception of religious gift-giving, which allows for material objects to corporeally embody the sin of their donor. The role of the religious specialist in demanding and then receiving such a gift is to become an 'eater of sin', and absolve the donor of her moral transgressions (Parry 1986). Parry's insight that Hindu cosmology enables material objects to embody and transmit the sins of their transactors is productively applied to the field of corruption. For Parry, the primary means through which most common people engage in Indian corruption is through the giving of bribes to petty state functionaries and their intermediaries. He argues that these types of everyday corruption are popularly conceptualised through the lens of Hindu religious gift-giving, which allows the large number of bribe-givers to transfer the sin of their actions to specialist bribe-eaters (Parry 2000). This model, then, is an important means through which ordinary people are able to engage in everyday corruption, whilst rationalising the morality of their actions. The systemic corruption discourse of Jamshedpur functions in similar terms, to construct a model of integral criminality that is resistant to change and which compels the participation of its actors. For persons such as the debt collector Rishi, these rationalisations play an important role in explaining and legitimating one's everyday work. While Rishi's enterprises involved profitable negotiations with the types of practices that are critiqued by the systemic corruption discourse, he was, nonetheless, highly critical of both corruption and the decline of Tata employment security. Referring to the apparent monopoly of criminals over the political economy, Rishi regarded his engagement with such practices as an enforced gateway to economic maximisation (Murphy and Robinson 2008).

Parry's study of sin and materiality in Indian corruption provides a subtle framework with which to comprehend the moral tensions of everyday corruption. Furthermore, his focus upon the popular conception that bribes are demanded from their recipients as a condition for fulfilling institutional responsibilities helps to explain, in part, the extent of popular engagements with corruption. However, being rooted in the conceptual framework of an economic anthropology that focuses primarily upon material exchange, this model does not provide the conceptual tools to understand those types of corruption that rely upon negotiations of power that cannot properly be called transactions. I have argued that Sunil Mahato's relationships with some of his interlocutors may be considered in terms of an enforcement partnership, in which the MP contracts his patronage to lose business partners. However, in properly accounting for Mahato's corruption, one must consider all the relationships that his patronage engenders. At their further reaches, these negotiations reach Suchir's office, or the kennels of Rishi's poisoned dogs. Here, they become coercive practices, and are only transactions in the loosest sense. Like the implicit threat that lingers over labour activism on the Tata shop floor, conceptually, these are political–economic, rather than economic processes, for which I argue that Volkov's modelling of coercion provides a more productive analytic framework. While analytic frameworks premised on an understanding of bribery may provide useful ways of theorising the purchase of preferential treatment, and even the withholding of institutional services for private gain, they do not engage with criminal abuses of authority that function primarily through threat and coercion, and which include acts of extortion, racketeering and assassination. That these types of practices are functionally and conceptually integral to corruption and capitalism is one of the central arguments of this book, and invites a somewhat broader conception of both.

However, Parry's work provides helpful cues in reading the material discussed here, by suggesting how discourses of corruption may constitute a form of popular political commentary, albeit one that he argues overstates the incidence of corruption. Pursuing a similar line of inquiry, in an influential analysis of provincial north Indian corruption discourses, Gupta observes that the most visible interface between the state and citizenry are personal negotiations with provincial bureaucrats, through which one 'imagines' how the broader state functions and is structured (Gupta 1995). Following this premise, the everyday business of civil politics is exercised in the workplaces, bazaars and tea

stalls of Indian towns, as people share commentaries upon local political processes. Such commentaries are often cast in the terms of corruption scandals, and are heavily informed by the emphases of local print media. Gupta's notion of corruption discourses as a way of publicly talking politics is broadly applicable across the regional context: in Jamshedpur, such practices do indeed express types of political consciousness. However, corruption models rooted in the analysis of local media discourses may be of limited utility in understanding the linkages between the types of corrupt and criminal actors that this book discusses.

The political commentaries of provincial print media tend towards local-interest stories, and focus upon the corruption of junior state actors for reasons that are perhaps as much commercial as political. Since the bribery demands of provincial bureaucrats are frequent and frustrating features of local lives, stories surrounding them may be emphasised by media professionals, who seek to anticipate the appetites of their consumers. Presentations of this material assume personalised terms that are consistent with the journalistic genre of modern scandal reportage and stress the moral transgressions of their objects (Sabato et al 2000). Accordingly, the popular corruption discourse which relates to this process is a provincialising one, which suggests that corruption is concentrated at the level of the local petty state, and is primarily rooted in the bribery demands of isolated and self-interested individuals.

The great strength of Gupta's work lies in his interrogation of the frustrations, contingency and failures of bureaucratic structures – themes expanded upon with success in his Foucauldian analysis of the structural violence of poverty (Gupta 2012). However, since the 'imagined state' of his analysis is premised on discussions of petty bureaucratic bribery, the corruption discourse that emerges tends to suggest that a core of decency and accountability persists at the higher reaches of Indian politics, which is deviated from by the profiteering of local bureaucrats. As such, this is a corruption discourse about specific abuses of local power, rather than the operation of power per se, rendering it substantively different from that in Jamshedpur, whose attention to the principles of networking and entrepreneurship serves to relate local practices to global processes. The idea of corruption suggested in Gupta's early work is what I term an episodic discourse. This is to say, that corruption exists as a potentiality, which is then concretised in specific encounters with corrupt individuals. The core of an episodic

discourse is that it discusses processes primarily in reference to the particular actions of deviant individuals, whose behaviour is considered to be the expression of personal values, tendencies and self-interest: Das's formulation of corruption as 'public office for private interest' articulates such a discourse in reference to corruption (Das 2001), while popular notions of deviant personality types expresses such a discourse in reference to violent behaviour (Toch 1992). By comparison, the corruption discourse of Jamshedpur is systemic, and is applicable to the study of a broader range of phenomena, whose functional relationships with one another are the primary object of the discourse. A systemic discourse resists the tendency of episodic approaches to draw conceptual and moral boundaries around events and people, and rather, emphasises the relationships between broad networks of actors. Since a systemic corruption discourse focuses upon the general technologies through which power is consolidated, it has the critical capacity to question the core principles and practices of the political economy in ways that do not necessarily provincialise criminal practice. As such, I regard systemic corruption discourses as expressions of political consciousness, which essentially articulate understandings of class struggle. Rather than describing criminality as isolated acts of deviance from society's key norms, the systemic corruption discourse posits violence, coercion and bribery to be expressions of the key principles of modern capitalism (Contreras 2013: 154). The discourse is about power and enterprise itself.

Some weeks after Suchir's encounter with the MP had passed, I spoke with Rishi about the relationship between political corruption and organised crime. His version of the systemic corruption discourse rationalised the ethical tensions of his work, in reference to the ubiquity of criminal practice in all areas of India's political economy. During a long conversation, I suggested to Rishi that the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)[5] party to which Sunil Mahato belonged might locally be considered a criminal organisation. It seemed likely, since Mahato engaged in such a wide variety of illegal businesses, and was evidently predisposed towards the use of violence. Rishi thought this quite an astute observation, but cautioned that one should not think this true for the JMM alone, which largely represented the state's tribal

5 'Jharkhand Liberation Front': an ostensibly tribal interest party, which enjoys a high degree of support across the Jharkhand state.

peoples. Rishi suggested that criminality was inherent to the negotiations by which anyone accesses real power and wealth. Mahato, he said, was simply someone who had been more successful in such negotiations, and it was logical that he would seek to consolidate his position through a parliamentary career. Referring to some of the region's most prominent political parties, he claimed:

> Look, you have the tribal people here in Jamshedpur, and their goondas [gangsters] are the JMM, and you have the BJP,[6] and they are the Brahman[7] goondas, and then there are the RJD,[8] and they are like me, they are the Yadavs.[9] But, they are goondas too. All of them are goondas . . . if you are a big goonda and you have some charge against you, what can you do? You will be caught eventually, and you will go to prison. So you simply must become a politician and then get the charges dropped. That is why there are so many criminals in politics.

Like his counterparts on the Tata Motors shop floor, Rishi held the local political economy to function through negotiations between corruption, organised crime and entrepreneurship, which effectively eroded the boundaries between these fields. Based on his own personal experience, he felt sure that his ideas on this matter were correct.

Rishi was an articulate and gregarious man, who possessed a natural charisma that served his business negotiations well. He was well-known across a broad swathe of the city, and prided himself on his ability to mingle in the offices of corporations, the dark corners of seedy bars and the family homes of his friends. He possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge about the city's history, economy and power structures, and could seemingly locate any person or resource at a moment's notice, and with nothing more than a phone call. When we first met, he was 38 years old and lived in the house where he had been born, in the largely Adivasi Jamshedpur neighbourhood of Old Sitaramdera. Rishi's father was a Tata Steel worker, whose family settled in Sitaramdera during the 1930s, when their company home in

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6 Bharatiya Janata Party. A conservative political party aligned to the Hindu Nationalist movement.
7 The highest order in the Hindu caste system.
8 Rashtriya Janata Dal.
9 A large, low-status north Indian caste.

a neighbouring district was demolished to make way for a Tata Steel storage yard. The handful of families displaced by this project were relocated to new homes built on vacant lots in Old Sitaramdera, at the very edge of the Tata Steel works and adjacent to the city's Slag Road, along which an endless stream of trucks conveys the plant's industrial waste. By the 1950s, almost all of the area's Tata residents had purchased 150-year leases on their homes. Rishi's small neighbourhood enjoyed a less than enviable reputation, as a place blighted by alcoholism, violent crime and a perpetual covering of dust that settled from the nearby steel works. Nonetheless, for Rishi's family, life in Old Sitaramdera was essentially defined by their Tata employment, which traditionally entailed an enviable package of benefits and remuneration.

At the age of 18, rather than following his father onto the shop floor of the steel plant, Rishi decided to study accountancy at a local college, where he supported himself by working nights at a petrol station. After graduating, Rishi proved to be a capable accountant. He quickly built a healthy and respected local practice that handled accounts for a number of factories in Jamshedpur's large Adityapur industrial zone. After several years, he secured an accounting contract for the local offices of the Reliance Corporation, where his superiors were impressed by his work ethic, proficiency with new software packages and knowledge of the city. Sensing that he was well-placed to manoeuvre between different aspects of Jamshedpur's urban environment, Rishi's boss at Reliance offered him additional work, pursuing local debts that other employees had proved unable to collect. Rishi prospered in this work, since he possessed the considerable technical skills needed to manage weekly payments from large numbers of debtors. He was also highly adept at recruiting, developing and maintaining a small staff of people that possessed a variety of skills. But just as importantly, over the course of his life, he had made valuable connections with entrepreneurs, politicians, police officers, and gangsters which gave him access to capital, institutional patronage and the violence with which to coerce debtors. By 2006, Rishi was a successful businessman whose services were in high demand by some of India's most respected companies. He was married to a beautiful woman with whom he had fathered two young children; worked in an air conditioned office that he built himself; drove a formidably large four-wheel-drive vehicle; was the chief collections agent for General Electric, and enjoyed productive partnerships with some of the city's most powerful organised crime figures.

Rishi's evident flair for enterprise was contingent upon his ability to recognise areas in which an appropriately placed valve might profitably mediate between resources, and he maximised his ability to stand between licit and illicit economies by structuring his office as a microcosm of the local political economy. In this respect, he was an entrepreneur *par excellence*, whose practices typified a broader neoliberal subjectivity (Foucault 2001). It was this emphasis upon a flexible, networking enterprise with a wide range of specialists that eluded Lucky, whose ventures generally failed owing to their reliance upon the charismatic investments of daring and the mastery of the 'gangster' aesthetic. By contrast, Rishi was a family man, who shrewdly employed smart, young middle-class Bengali women to communicate with the Kolkata offices of corporations. For his dealings with Jamshedpur's Sikh merchant class, he hired two local Punjabi men. For his enforcement needs, he retained the services of a man connected to the large and violent criminal organisation of Akhilesh Singh, whose father, Chandra Gupta Singh, was the secretary of the Jharkhand Police Association. For his immediate relations with law enforcement, he employed the husband of a local police officer, despite regarding him as slow-witted. Through the latter relationship, he was corruptly informed of accusations levelled against him by victims of his firm's violence. With the aid of well-placed bribes, he ensured that such accusations were seldom formally investigated.

The bulk of Rishi's work involved filing for court orders, calling debtors on their mobile telephones, completing reports for clients, and collecting weekly payments. However, in the minority of cases where debtors either refused or were unable to meet their payments, Rishi's firm would illegally repossess the vehicle for collection by an agent of General Electric Money. In the 5 per cent[10] of contracts where repayments had ceased and the vehicle could not be recovered, Rishi would use criminal contacts to enact violence upon debtors. Such acts of coercion constitute what Paul Goldstein terms 'systemic violence', which relate to the instrumental regulatory measures of an economy, and are distinct from acts of personalised and potentially random aggression (Goldstein 1985). However, where this analysis differs from Goldstein (*ibid.*) and Contreras' (2013: 137) use of the concept to study urban drug markets, is that I relate coercion to what are apparently

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10 Rishi's own estimate.

legitimate industrial and financial services economies. Far from being mystified and hegemonic understandings of the political economy, systemic corruption discourses relate critically to these types of processes, and posit criminality as an instrumental tool in the struggle between India's classes.

The 'Jungle Raj' and political criminality

In March 2007, Sunil Mahato, MP was assassinated at a football match outside Jamshedpur by Maoist guerrillas representing India's Naxal uprising. Local print media contended that an unsatisfied business partner had contracted the murder, which was inspired by a financial, rather than ideological, difference of opinion.[11] This assertion was vehemently denied by the local party wing of the Maoist uprising, which maintained that he had been executed as a corrupt 'sycophant' of the state's industrial corporations.

The *Times of India* addressed Mahato's assassination in an editorial provocatively entitled 'India's Wild West', which portrayed the region as an oligarchic frontier where 'the gun dictated the law'.[12] This 'Wild West' model is an elaboration upon a popular national discourse of the 'Jungle Raj', which portrays Bihar and Jharkhand as a violent pre-modern backwater, distant and distinct from the shopping malls and stock markets of metropolitan India. It is true that levels of violent crime in Bihar and Jharkhand are significantly higher than the national average. Murder accounts for 4.73 per cent of all reported crimes in Jharkhand, against a national average of 1.83 per cent (Bhandari and Kale 2007: 86). In the region's urban areas, this bias is more pronounced still; in the Bihar state capital of Patna, the murder rate is 23 times higher than in the Bengali Metropolis of Kolkata (Dreze and Khera 2000: 335–52). However, the Jungle Raj discourse that builds upon these facts is essentially a provincialising one, which argues that Bihar and Jharkhand's problems are symptomatic of a localised culture of violence, which draws upon supposed impetuousness, sectarianism and ignorance among Biharis and Adivasis.[13]

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11 See: *The Telegraph* (Jamshedpur edition). 2007. 'Broken vow led to killing', 25 March.
12 *The Times of India*, 2007. 'India's Wild West', 7 March.
13 This discourse is discussed in fuller detail in Chapter 6.

By contrast, the systemic corruption discourses of Rajiv, Suchir and Rishi reference not only the violent scandals of local politics, but also the well-publicised criminality of national elites. Beyond Rishi and Suchir's local engagement with Sunil Mahato, the popular discourse of political criminality is at least partly founded in the extra-legal activities of Sibu Soren, the first leader of the JMM who was implicated in the Indian Parliament's 1993 'bribes for votes' scandal. During this affair, Congress Prime Minister Narasimha Rao allegedly paid JMM MPs in excess of INR 10,000,000 for their support in a parliamentary vote of no confidence. One year later, it was alleged that Soren's personal aide attempted to blackmail him with information relating to the bribe, before he disappeared and was discovered dead in a Jharkhandi forest in 1999. After being charged with his aide's murder, Soren's political career flourished. He became the first chief minister of the Jharkhand state and the coal minister of the national government. During his tenure as a cabinet minister, he spent one year behind bars and several months actually absconding while on bail. In November 2006, Soren was convicted of his aide's murder, and sentenced to life in prison. After serving nine months of this sentence, his conviction was overturned on the grounds that the identity of the body could not be established beyond reasonable doubt. Soren walked free from Dumka Jail in Jharkhand on 25 August 2007, and a year later, on 27 August 2008, was once again reinstated as the state's chief minister.

As shocking as Soren's criminal travails may seem, their significance to the formulation of popular systemic corruption discourses lies in the fact that they are not particularly exceptional. As of early 2014, of the 543 elected representatives in the lower house of the Indian parliament, 158 (29 per cent) were charged with a criminal offence. More troubling still, 74 (14 per cent) were charged with crimes in the most serious category of offence, comprising murder, rape, extortion, banditry, and theft. While it is problematic to draw a simple relationship between criminal charges and actual guilt, it is apparent that politicians fall foul of the law far more frequently than almost any other section of Indian society, posing the pertinent question of why particular types of people are so often attracted to a political career. Alternatively, though less plausibly, one could ask why it is that politicians are so disproportionately targeted for spurious criminal investigations.

The distribution of criminal charges within the Indian Parliament is weighted towards MPs broadly representing the smaller parties, whose support bases rely upon the politics of caste and ethno-regionalism.

Among the two major parties, the Congress Party, whose ideology is a secular state-socialism, has 5 per cent of its 205 MPs under criminal charges as of 2014, while the Bharatiya Janata Party, representing a broad platform of Hindu nationalism, saw 16 per cent of its 116 MPs charged. At the other end of the spectrum, the regional Samajwadi and Bahujan Samaj parties, who predominantly represent the interests of untouchable castes, have 60 per cent of their MPs currently charged. Other ethno-regional parties fare similarly poorly. Interrogating this phenomenon better substantiates the contexts in which criminals are likely to enter Indian politics.

Many of the Indian political parties strongly associated with criminality do indeed have their support bases in a vast northern swathe of the country, running from the state of Haryana in the centre-west, across Uttar Pradesh to the eastern states of Bihar and Jharkhand. Obscuring the understanding of political criminality in these states is the popular national perception of this region as a violent, culturally conservative backwater, plagued by poverty and communalism. In reality, the emergence of political criminality in this part of India relates to the use of political violence by the central government from the 1970s, and the present relationship between provincial criminal politicians and their ostensibly more legitimate counterparts is closer than one would suspect.

Explaining the rise of India's criminal politicians, one might consider the possibility that a new type of charismatic political leader emerged during the 1970s that broke with the 'statesman' model of the Congress Party, and was valued for their willingness to dirty their hands on behalf of their constituents. Certainly, a profound change overtook political leadership during this period, as violence began to be valued more highly by certain sections of the electorate, particularly within ethno-regional movements. However, the widespread incorporation of criminals into Indian politics stems initially from the use of coercion during Indira Gandhi's 'State of Emergency' from June 1975 to March 1977 (Mehra 2002). During this period, the Congress Party embarked upon a dictatorship, ostensibly to secure national unity in the midst of parliamentary turmoil.

The 'emergency' saw many civil liberties suspended and political dissent silenced through widespread arrest and coercion, a significant proportion of which was conducted by criminal enforcers at the behest of the state. The Congress Party's use of violence made criminal enforcers an integral element of political control in many areas of the

nation – enforcers who then subsequently used state connections and increased economic power to consolidate their own positions. Ethical failings aside, the practical flaw of the Congress' use of violence lay in their failure to anticipate that the criminals which they courted would remain part of the political landscape long after their immediate usefulness had been exhausted. The most successful of these criminals amassed sufficient enough power and influence to enter parliament themselves, where the status of their office could further their enterprises. The present concentration of India's criminal politicians in quite particular areas of the nation can be explained with reference to the political economies of the regions concerned.

Across Haryana, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, post-independence rural relations have been characterised by a progressively open state of conflict between lower-caste tenants and their upper upper-caste landlords. In this climate, the use of politically orchestrated violence is increasingly salient, and charismatic criminal leadership is more likely to flourish. In Bihar, criminal authority was further entrenched by 1975's state-wide alcohol prohibition, which created a lucrative market for bootlegged liquor. Regional criminal organisations prospered in the 1970s by providing coercive political services and fulfilling black market demands for consumer goods. These organisations eventually diversified into labour contracting, haulage, mineral extraction, metal trading, and waste disposal as the region's industrial sectors expanded throughout the 1980s. During the 1990s, the power of regional criminal politicians received a further boost from the centre, as a series of weak coalition governments allowed the smaller parties on which they were dependent to wield a disproportionate level of power in parliamentary votes. It is during this period that Prime Minster Narasimha Rao was convicted of corruption and Sibu Soren imprisoned for murder.

It is not coincidental that the areas of the nation in which political authority currently enjoys the least confidence (namely, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh) are also those regions which afford political entrepreneurs some of the greatest economic opportunities through land seizures, industrial contracting, racketeering, and labour brokerage. The penetration of known criminals into parliament has its clearest origins in the Emergency's use of applied violence (Mehra 2002). One might also conclude that the class and ethnic conflicts of particular regions explain why violence initially became a feature of charismatic leadership in Indian politics. However, it is the capacity

of parliament to enable the personal consolidation of power and capital that presently explains the allure of a political career to criminals, as well as the Indian electorate's increasingly strident denunciation of such forms of authority.

The momentum of the 2011 hunger strike by anti-corruption campaigner, Kisan 'Anna' Hazare saw India's Parliament wrestle with the formation of a national corruption ombudsman, which came into effect with the passing of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act in December 2013. Hazare's campaign rested upon the proposition that the democratic ideals with which the Indian state was formed in 1947 are all too often subverted by the self-interest of public servants. Hazare's supporters argue that this process has two primary effects. First, corruption allows wealthier citizens to access resources and preferential state treatment to which they are not entitled. Second, corruption constitutes a drain on the coffers of many ordinary Indians, in the form of demands for bribes by state functionaries, without which their services cannot necessarily be procured.

Hazare's formulation is largely correct, and if popular support for his campaign is any indication, he has articulated a political frustration with bribery that is unique in spanning the regional, ethnic and religious divisions of Indian society. However, this book argues that the discontent which Hazare's movement expresses relates to a corruption that is broader than bribery alone. 'Corruption', in this context, encompasses a more pernicious subversion of the Indian state that has seen substantial numbers of often violent career criminals enter parliament since the 1970s, and has consequently weakened popular faith in governmental institutions. The current relationship between politics and criminality is a consequence of a culture of entrepreneurial corruption that adheres to Indian public office. While parliamentary service remains such a lucrative profession, it will continue to attract individuals whose ambitions extend beyond the confines of their position, and whose means of satisfying them include coercion. It is unlikely that the scrutiny of an ombudsman alone can provide the framework necessary to combat corruption at the higher reaches of the Indian state. The task requires a substantial overhaul of the wider legislation that currently protects the most powerful public servants who abuse their positions, and a real engagement with the influence of violence and organised crime on national politics and corporate capitalism.

Anti-corruption watchdog, Transparency International's 2013 report ranks the national perception of corruption in India to be 83rd

highest in the world (in an index of 177 positions). While many nations fare better than India in this ranking, many evidently fare much worse, including regional neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, the real significance of perceptions of corruption does not lie in the extent to which phenomena such as bribery are perceived to be prevalent across society. A more important assessment is of how differing forms of corruption are deemed to be concentrated at different levels of the state, and whether such practices are seen as integral to the consolidation of power. In India, public scandals of the previous 20 years – which link numerous elected politicians and even government ministers to repeated acts of parliamentary corruption, embezzlement, land seizure, blackmail, extortion, kidnap, and murder – serve to erode the assumption of legitimate political authority and the efficacy of the ballot box. While bribery in its many forms undoubtedly impedes the proper functioning of institutions, the preponderance of India's criminal politicians corrupts the very notion of the accountable and democratic state on which the idea of India rests, and furthermore, tends to relate their criminality to the capitalist project of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2004).

The challenge presently facing the Indian state is to restore public confidence in the morality and capacity of the nation's politicians, by ensuring that criminals find it harder to gain entry to a potentially lucrative parliamentary career. Meeting this challenge requires an as yet absent governmental will to reform the legislation that enables those charged with serious offences to stand for office, and to avoid future criminal investigation, once elected. The current governmental response to Hazare's campaign seems encouraging, and at the very least, testifies to the power of a well-informed citizenry to press its demands upon the state. However, one must doubt the depth and perhaps the sincerity with which the Indian Parliament presently searches its collective soul. Neither the issues raised by Hazare nor their proposed remedies are new. On the contrary, the corruption and criminalisation of politics has been the subject of numerous governmental commissions since the 1960s, most of which have reached the same conclusions as Hazare, and have vainly made almost identical suggestions for reform.

For example, the first Indian Committee on the Prevention of Corruption reported its findings as early as March 1964, having been convened to investigate a perceived rise in ministerial corruption since independence. The committee concluded that India's legislative

framework was ill-equipped to deal with political corruption, and out-lined a procedure whereby complaints against MPs could be investi-gated by an independent committee, prior to police referral (Noorani 2002: 63). If the 1964 committee's suggestions seem well-suited to the current political climate, it is because they were never acted upon and the legislative failings which they identified have remained largely unaddressed during the previous four decades. Likewise, the Lokpal bill currently so fiercely debated has a long and faltering ancestry in Indian politics. Between 1969 and 1998, six separate Lokpal bills have been passed in India, only to lapse with the dissolution of parliament (*ibid*.: 73).

What the historical farce of the Lokpal bills suggests is that the consistency with which independent enquiries diagnose and prescribe against political corruption in India is matched only by the uniformity with which their activities are ignored or obfuscated by parliament. The fate of proposals directed at more flagrantly criminal acts is worse still. The 2010 background paper on electoral reforms prepared by the Indian Election Commission revisited two unheeded recommen-dations with which to combat the criminalisation of Indian politics, both of which were first proposed in 2004. The commission advised that prospective candidates for the lower house of the Indian parlia-ment be required to declare all previous convictions, pending criminal cases and assets prior to standing, and suggested that the withhold-ing of such information should be made punishable by a minimum of two years imprisonment. Moreover, the commission recommended disqualification for all candidates against whom charges have been brought at least six months prior to election for the most serious cate-gory of offences. While a number of the committee's wider recommen-dations (regarding restrictions on the publication of exit poll results and the closer scrutiny of deposit monies) have been enacted, the bulk of suggestions that would curtail the entry of criminals into parliament have yet to find favour.

The will to restrict the entry of criminals into politics has, to date, not been present in any Indian government, and it is sensible to question the likely effectiveness of a corruption ombudsman whose architects are a parliament composed of such a high number of sus-pected criminals. Furthermore, the tenacity and success with which the prosecution of political corruption will be able to proceed in the future requires the redress of a number of substantial legislative fail-ings. These include inadequate provisions for commissions of inquiry,

courts and investigative bodies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation, which are open to nepotistic appointments, and a legislative position of public officials that places them beyond the scope of some forms of legal scrutiny.

The Lokpal bill's critics argue, quite reasonably, that the omniscient scrutiny of a central ombudsman potentially trades one form of despotism for another, and it is prudent to ask whether the commission can itself remain immune from corruption, even if the institution were theoretically powerful. Certainly, many of the proposals in Hazare's original bill were considerably diluted in the version passed by parliament in 2013. As admirable as Hazare's campaign has been, the wider struggle against state corruption in India is unlikely to be fulfilled by the Lokpal alone.

In addition to the Election Commission's suggestions to broaden the disqualification of criminal electoral candidates, this book suggests that at least three major reforms are necessary to forestall India's further slide into systemic criminality. First, the state needs to address the substantial legislative failings surrounding the pursuit of judicial and political corruption, which presently grant public officials inexplicable immunity from prosecution in a bewildering array of contexts.[14] In short, powerful public officials must be not only liable to public scrutiny, but also subject to the same forms and extent of punishment as the citizenry. Second, the state must endeavour to create a more transparent culture of business, through a rigorous and systematic enquiry into the context and financing of corporate mergers, the sale and development of land and the securing of contracts for the supply of labour, goods and services. The chief avenues by which criminal politicians presently find their business profitable must be subject to far greater attention. Third, the effectiveness of violent coercion by political authorities must be curbed by strengthening and rehabilitating India's law enforcement agencies, which presently suffer from their own crisis of public confidence owing to perceptions of corruption and institutional incompetence. If wielded by the state at all, the use of

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14 For example, The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, Section 197, effectively renders judges immune from prosecution in corruption cases without the prior sanction of central or state government. Furthermore, on 17 April 1998, Article 105, Section 2 of the Constitution of India was used by the Supreme Court to rule that the prosecution of an MP for accepting bribes in return for parliamentary votes was unconstitutional.

violence must be the preserve of an accountable and publicly trusted judiciary and not of political autocrats.

Conclusion

While popular national understandings of the relationship between corruption, violence and capitalism in Bihar and Jharkhand stress the cultural specificities of highly visible personalities in local politics and organised crime, the systemic corruption discourses of Jamshedpur make a more insightful commentary upon the functioning of the modern Indian political economy. Lucky's ambitions to profitably mediate between the licit and illicit economies, and Rishi, Sunil Mahato and Sibu Soren's ability to actually do so, suggest an incisive popular understanding that capitalism, corruption and violent coercion function as mutually dependent forms of capital accumulation. By collapsing conceptual and institutional distinctions in favour of an understanding of the linkages between actors, such systemic models afford an understanding of how political corruption may be the expression of an ethic of criminal entrepreneurship that spans the conceptual and institutional distinctions of the modern Indian political economy.

For Lucky, Suchir and Rishi, the practices loosely termed 'corruption' are not conceptually limited to abuses of bureaucratic and legal authority (Weber 1978: 217ff). Nor are these practices necessarily expressed as bribery. Indeed, for Suchir, corruption may be a coercive practice that is not rooted in material transactions at all. At the very least, this raises the pertinent questions of how far one might apply the transactional frameworks of economic anthropology, and whether emic discourses on corruption should be regarded in a more sympathetic light. In the systemic discourse of Jamshedpur, 'corruption' refers to the broad spectrum of criminal enterprise by which institutional actors not only abuse, but reach beyond the authority of their offices. Conceptualised as the abuse of power within a defined area of authority (Das 2001), popular models of corruption lack the conceptual breadth with which to understand one of the basic principles of criminal enterprise, which is the use of one type of authority to pursue sources of power that might, in turn, create new authorities of their own. For Sunil Mahato, MP, political corruption is a constituent element within a broader entrepreneurial project that is focussed upon the economic opportunities of mercantilism, debt collection and racketeering, the accumulation of coercive resources and the exercise of

legal influence. What the Mahato case most clearly illustrates is how corrupt practice is inserted within the political–economic negotiations that constitute organised crime, which current anti-corruption frameworks are ill equipped to tackle (Arlacchi 1983, 1986; Blok 1974; Gambetta 1993; Handelman 1994; Varese 2005; Volkov 2002).

Rishi's conception of political criminality collapses the distinctions between corruption, violence and enterprise, by intriguingly suggesting that his business functions on the same principles as Mahato's and Soren's. What Rishi's discourse suggests is that the differences between him, the region's gangsters and politicians are ones of degree, rather than kind. This systemic discourse suggests that corruption and organised crime are integral features of the Indian political economy, and is notably distinct from the episodic corruption discourses discussed by Gupta. Importantly, this popular model in Jamshedpur has an empirical foundation, as well as a discursive significance. The precedent for coercion in city labour politics, the much-publicised engagement of elected representatives in criminal entrepreneurship, the criminality of local business negotiations, and even the ease with which research participants attempted to co-opt the author into their criminal endeavours, suggests that such discourses are incisive commentaries upon everyday processes.

I suggest that the systemic corruption discourse is part of the discursive terrain of class politics in Jamshedpur, and serves as an explanatory political–economic model of how individuals and social groups access power and resources. The chief characteristic of this discourse is its focus upon the interrelations between disparate aspects of political representation, economic production and exchange. As such, the model encompasses the judiciary, parliamentary politics, financial capitalism, and industrial production. In the chapter that follows, the systemic discourse is related to the declining effectiveness of collective action in Tata industries. The chapter discusses the instrumental role played by coercion, corruption and legislative failure in establishing the conservative TWU's monopoly of Tata labour representation.

4

THE DECLINE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Two weeks after Suchir and I arrived in Jamshedpur, I was introduced to Tata Workers' Union (TWU) president, R. B. B. Singh. I had first visited the union's offices in Bistupur earlier that week, where I received a pleasant reception from the director of the union's resource centre, S. Chatterjee.[1] I arrived at the building armed with a general desire to learn more about the organisation, and found S. Chatterjee to be an obliging host. He was generous with his time, spoke freely and at length about the organisation where he worked, and was delighted that the union remained an object of interest to social scientists. After furnishing me with me a tour of the building and a thick bundle of pamphlets, S. Chatterjee kindly offered to drive me home on his motorcycle. Parked outside my apartment building, the two of us drank a quick cup of *Chai* as he wished me luck for the research. Before he left to return to the TWU offices, he invited me to come and speak with him again.

   Two days later, I returned to the TWU offices to find that the atmosphere had changed for the worse. S. Chatterjee seemed testy and distracted, and almost immediately, ushered me out of his office and into the care of his librarian. My companion sheepishly offered to introduce me to the union president himself. Seated at his desk surrounded by stern supporters, I found that the abrupt president was also unhappy to see me. Maintaining blank, unsmiling eye contact, the president was not in a mood to talk. He advised me that he would not allow any further interviews of union committee members. If I wished to research the union, I should submit a list of questions directly to his office, which would be answered in writing.

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1 Pseudonyms are not used for trade union officers.

As I learned later that day, only hours before my arrival an effigy of the president was burned outside the TWU offices by a rival union faction, who contested the organisation's elections of January 2005. The effigy burning was the latest in a long series of ugly incidents centred on the building, which included the *Gherao*[2] of committee members by their rivals and the assassination of union president, V. G. Gopal many years earlier. For an ethnographer in the early stages of field research, these events were intriguing indications that important political negotiations were occurring within and around the union. The effigy burning also seemed to suggest an impersonal reason for the union's hostility during our meeting – implicitly raising the possibility of a more welcoming response in the future. Following the president's request, I compiled 12 written questions for submission to the union office. The questionnaire asked for basic quantitative data regarding the size of the Tata Steel labour force, the number of registered TWU members and whether these figures were currently declining or increasing. Arriving at the TWU offices the following week, I was asked to wait in the lobby while my questionnaire was passed to a union officer, who could answer my queries. Within minutes, S. Chatterjee arrived to meet me, questionnaire in hand. His manner was brief:

SC: We will not be able to answer any of your questions at the present time. 'Is the size of the TISCO workforce declining?' etc. We can't answer any of these questions.
AS: Why?
SC: At the moment, we are in trouble. So, the report you were going to send . . .
AS: I'm not planning to send a report.
SC: [raising both hands] Very sorry. Goodbye

Without shaking my hand, S. Chatterjee turned and walked back into the building, marking the end of my professional relationship with the TWU.

Interrogating this experience, one should consider the likely explanation that an engagement with ethnographic research is simply an unpredictable and unnecessary distraction to an institution in crisis. Or,

2 A form of Indian political protest in which large groups of people besiege targets in their homes and workplaces.

perhaps S. Chatterjee's final statement suggests a belief that I intended to carry information between union factions, or even back to the Tata Company itself. Although either interpretation is plausible, the real significance of this event is how it was interpreted by other research participants. In the days that followed, I was interested to learn that few people in Jamshedpur found my experiences at the union surprising; most assumed that the union was a corrupt and violent organisation, which would rather not invite close scrutiny. With time, it became apparent that this assessment was even more pronounced among members of Tata families. Some research participants feared that my dealings with the union might place me in danger, and made the unsettling observation that TWU officers had established where I lived the very first time that we met.[3] Since the TWU is regarded with such suspicion in Jamshedpur, one should ask why alternative unions do not provide effective representation to casual employees or their disgruntled parents in Tata industry. The answer to this question is provided in this chapter, which outlines the historical, ethnographic and legislative conditions by which the TWU enjoys a monopoly on labour representation in Tata industries.

The systemic corruption discourse suggests that the TWU has enabled a dramatic local decline in the wages and employment security of industrial workers since the 1990s. This discourse is rooted in the union's unwillingness to resist the erosion of permanent jobs, and its refusal to grant membership to the casual employees who comprise up to 76 per cent of the labour force on some shop floors. Popular ideas about labour politics in Jamshedpur seem to articulate dissatisfaction with an inactive trade union leadership. But these ideas also express a tangible fear of the active coercive power with which the TWU consolidates its monopoly in Tata industries. In this respect, popular local discourses on trade unionism conceptualise labour politics in terms of a functional relationship between corporate capitalism, corrupted institutional authority and criminality. Principally, the 1993 assassination of V.G. Gopal, and the violent suppression of a 1981 strike by contract workers in Tata Steel inform a popular assumption that the TWU is an organisation that responds violently to opposition.

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3 These concerns proved to be unfounded. I was not subject to any form of threat or harm by TWU members or officers at any point during the field research.

In this chapter, popular discourses about the union are tested against the conditions by which collective action has declined from its historical ability to fulfil the interests of workers in Tata industries. I begin by considering how the conservative politics of the modern TWU are informed by discourses of industrial harmony and pragmatism vis-à-vis the demands of neo-liberal capitalism, before discussing the legislative framework and coercive practices that constrain the effectiveness of alternative collective action. Referencing two unsuccessful incidences of non-TWU collective action in Tata industries during 1981 and 2006, I argue that the monopolistic control of conservative trade unions over local labour politics is integral to the casualisation of labour in Jamshedpur.

The Tata Workers' Union

The TWU represents permanent employees in the Tata Steel plant, and, by extension, members of the Telco Workers' Union in Tata Motors.[4] The TWU claims a long relationship with the elites of the Congress Party, which secured minimum wages, maximum working hours and maternity pay for their members as early as the 1920s (Bahl 1995; Keenan and Sorsby 1945: 133–36). The trade union leaders that I met in Bistupur were proud of this illustrious history, about which Vinay Bahl had written an exhaustive monograph (1995). Apparently delighted by my interest in the organisation, on the first day that we met, S. Chatterjee, enlisted the office's librarian to take me on a guided tour of the facilities.

My guide was a quiet man in his early forties, who spent his mornings seated in the union's library, clipping articles about Jamshedpur from newspapers and magazines before neatly pasting them into scrapbooks. Walking softly through the imposing building, he showed me the union's 1,000-seat auditorium, spacious lecture theatre and library. The corridor leading to the library was lined with glass cases that proudly displayed histories and sociological studies about the city along one wall, and a far larger collection of correspondence from Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose and Motilal Nehru opposite. The small library was generously stocked with

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4 The recognised trade union of the Tata Motors plant in Jamshedpur, which operates as a faction of the TWU.

Management and Industrial Relations textbooks, which were largely used by workers enrolled in corporate training programmes. At the end of our tour, the librarian presented me with an array of dusty TWU publications, which he invited me to read while he worked through the day's clippings. Some of the texts were notices of union meetings that were nearly 40 years old and hand-typed on single sheets of yellowing paper, some presented fascinating collections of correspondence between the union and TISCO throughout the 1920s and 1930s (Singh 1998), while others provided brief summaries of the union's history (Tata Workers' Union 1978) or were 'souvenirs' to commemorate a prominent institutional anniversary (Tata Workers' Union 1982, 2000). The TISCO workers' struggles of the 1920s featured prominently in almost all of the texts, which situated the organisation within an emotive history of 'sufferings and sacrifices' (Tata Workers' Union 1978: 1).

The forerunner to the TWU (The Jamshedpur Labour Association) was formed in 1920 during a strike by TISCO's manual Indian labour force against the low wages, poor living conditions and lack of job security that characterised much Tata employment at that time (Bahl 1995: 221–22). Prior to the mid-1920s, many unskilled TISCO employees were recruited on a temporary basis by foremen, whose bribery demands left workers vulnerable to the predation of loan sharks. Lacking secure housing and employment, indebted temporary workers' wages were a paltry INR 20 per month, compared to permanently employed European engineers, who earned an average of INR 650 per month (Bahl 1982: 34–37). In 1920, the discontent of the Indian labour force culminated in the iconic strike from which the TWU traces its ancestry. After several weeks of action, TISCO workers sought political support from the Bengal Indian Congress, who sent the activist Surinder Nath Halder to TISCO to found the Jamshedpur Labour Association (JLA).

Serving as the union's first president, Halder formulated ambitious strike demands for a 50 per cent pay increase for the lowest grade of employees; a 35 per cent pay increase for mid-level employees; sick pay in line with that awarded to civil servants; one month's paid annual leave for all workers; paid leave for religious holidays; and family compensation for deaths in the workplace (*ibid.*). After early negotiations with TISCO collapsed, the JLA abandoned most of their demands in favour of a more modest 15 per cent pay increase

for all workers.[5] Apparently frustrated by the nascent union's lack of progress, on 15 March 1920, a large group of workers attempted to block the railway line that transported rural strike-breakers into TISCO from the surrounding areas. During a violent confrontation with the mounted police that were sent to disperse the crowd, five striking 'martyrs of the working class' were shot dead (Tata Workers' Union 2000: 1). Shortly after, the JLA accepted an offer of a 10 per cent pay increase and allowed work to resume on 20 March 1920.

The JLA initially fared poorly in the years that followed. First, the union's negotiating power was constrained by TISCO's refusal to formally recognise the union's legitimacy in the aftermath of the 1920 strike. Second, the JLA's lack of support to a further strike by worker-activists in 1922 cost them the support of many potential members. However, from the mid-1920s, the championing of the TISCO experiment by the independence movement provided the impetus for the consolidation of trade unionism in Jamshedpur. Concerned by the poor living standards and wage disparities that he observed in the Indian-owned company town, Mahatma Gandhi decisively intervened during a 1925 TISCO dispute to secure the formal recognition of the JLA and the improvement of working conditions. In his address to TISCO workers that year, Gandhi emphasised TISCO's importance to a nationalist project where Indian employers and employees should maintain harmonious relations with one another:

> It was my ambition to see one of the greatest – if not the greatest Indian enterprises in India, and study the conditions of work there. But none of my activities is one-sided, and as my religion begins and ends with truth and non-violence, my identification with labour does not conflict with my friendship with capital. And believe me, throughout my public service of 35 years, though I have been obliged to range myself seemingly against capital, capitalists have in the end regarded me as their friend. And in all humility I may say that I have come here also as a friend of the capitalists – a friend of the Tatas. . .

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5 Proceedings of the Department of Political Special. F. No 176/1920. Bihar State Archives. Cited in: Bahl 1995: 227.

> I wish to this great Indian firm all the prosperity that it deserves and to this great enterprise every success. And may I hope that the relations between this great house and labourers who work here under their care will be of the friendliest character . . . May God grant that, in serving the Tatas, you will also serve India and will always realise that you are here for a much higher mission than merely working for an industrial enterprise (Singh 1998: 31).

In the decade that followed, the JLA enjoyed the presidency of Bengali independence leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, and secured the world's first eight-hour working day in 1928 (Bahl 1995: 144).[6] Under the leadership of Abdul Bari between 1936 and 1947, the organisation was renamed the 'Tata Workers' Union' and successfully lobbied for the revision of the TISCO wage structure and the introduction of incentive payments (Tata Workers' Union 1978: 2). However, as illustrious as the organisation's history undoubtedly is, the TWU publications which I read that morning included a number of important inaccuracies. Union literature referred to the TWU/TISCO settlement of 1956 as 'the "magna carta" of the working class' and 'a landmark in the history of the trade union movement in India' (Tata Workers' Union 1978: 3). The 1956 Settlement established the Tata 'Joint Consultation' system, which delineates three tiers of association between employer and union, and was not unknown in India prior to 1956.

Elsewhere, union literature consistently made the erroneous claim that the TWU – not established in any form until 1920 and unrecognised until 1925 – was one of the country's first trade unions (Tata Workers' Union 1978: 1). In fact, Bombay and Madras experienced dozens of organised strikes throughout the 1880s that were led by workers' committees in the textile industry. Later, in 1895, some 8,000

6 Bahl's comprehensive 1995 history of TISCO debunks the company's claim to have instituted the world's first eight-hour working day in 1911. In fact, until the late 1920s, the majority of TISCO employees worked a scheduled 56 hours a week, which did not include overtime of up to four hours per day. This overtime was usually involuntary, and most workers received no off-day, in order to compensate for employees in non-continuous shops who had already successfully fought to work seven hours per day, six days a week. The remaining workforce only won the eight-hour working day after a 1928 industrial dispute.

weavers in Ahmedabad struck against proposed fortnightly wage payments (Jha 1970: 82). Formalised unions from this period, including The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma founded in 1897, the Calcutta Printers Union in 1905 and the Bombay Postal Union in 1907, all predate the TWU by some years (*ibid*.: 87). During 1918, a flurry of industrial unrest led to the foundation of a number of organisations that eventually formed the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). First and foremost, the Madras Labour Union was formed in 1918, followed by the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association in 1920 (Revri 1972: 71–79). The first meeting of AITUC in 1920 claimed to represent 140,000 members from 171 organisations at a time when the JLA was still only loosely organised (Jha 1970: 105).

However, most significant among the TWU's historical revisions was the claim that no industrial disputes had occurred in TISCO since the last union action in 1928, which is popularly presented as a moment of TWU triumph (Tata Workers' Union 2000). In contrast to the '71 Years of Industrial Harmony', which the union claims to have presided over during the 20th century (*ibid*.), TISCO witnessed sporadic unrest among contract labourers throughout this period. Furthermore, the union's portrayal of the 1928 dispute as a TWU action is misleading. The 1928 dispute in TISCO was based around workers' *hartals* (sit-downs) on a number of the plant's shop floors between February and June 1928. The *hartals* were primarily driven by demands for wage increases and 10-week maternity payments for female employees. After a two-month lock-out of the labour force, TISCO conceded to workers' demands in September 1928, by making provision for maternity payments, a slight increase in wages and the extension of company loans to those employees whose wages had been affected by the lock-out (Keenan and Sorsby 1945: 133–36). The 1928 *hartals* were organised by former TISCO boiler engineer, Manech Homi, whose platform was an explicit opposition to the TWU and Subhash Chandra Bose's leadership. In addition to the demands for wage increases and maternity pay, Homi's movement also demanded that TISCO withdraw their formal recognition of the TWU, whose high-caste Bengali leadership was increasingly distrusted by the low-caste manual labour force from present-day Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, and Chhattisgarh. Homi had an overwhelming popular mandate in Tata Steel during 1928, and collected up to $10,000 per month in membership dues that year (*ibid*.: 136).

During the union factionalism of 1928, Homi's opposition successfully exploited a popular perception that TWU leaders valued a harmonious relationship with Tata management above the interests of the company's poorest workers. After a morning spent reading through several decades of TWU literature, it was indeed apparent that while class struggle was integral to the union's origin myth of the 1920s, it was Mahatma Gandhi's 1925 injunction against the disruption of the production process that most strongly characterised the institution's politics throughout the 20th century (Singh 1998: 31). As we sat drinking Chai in his office later that afternoon, S. Chatterjee explained the importance of restraint and cooperation to the TWU's success. He said that the union's expansive building catered to more than 20,000 members, before adding that not all company workers were in the union. When asked to elaborate, he explained that almost all 'cleaners and labourers' in the Tata Steel plant were today employed through sub-contractors and were ineligible for union membership. Defending Tata's decision to casualise large sections of its labour force, Chatterjee explained, 'We're never in favour of this, but cost control is the thing'. He described how the demands of global markets required unions to help Indian companies modernise their operations. Just as the TWU helped to lay the foundations of industrial working-class politics during the struggle for independence, so today, the organisation had a responsibility to help India embrace liberalised capitalism. Handing me a corporate booklet entitled 'Working Together in Tata Steel' (Tata Steel Personnel Division 1999), he contrasted the 'win-win situation' of Joint Consultation that it described, with the confrontational strikes and sit-downs that were endemic to the labour politics of neighbouring West Bengal. Emphasising the important role which the TWU played in modernising Jamshedpur's industry, S. Chatterjee explained that any opposition to the casualisation of the Tata labour force was essentially reactionary.

The closed-shop and economistic trade unions

The conservative TWU has an effective monopoly on representation in Jamshedpur's largest industries, since alternative unions struggle to gain employer recognition in Tata workplaces despite a lack of formal legislative compulsion towards 'closed-shops'. The Industrial Disputes Act (1947) does not stipulate the need for a sole bargaining agent on

a given shop floor.[7] Rather, the act legislates that any group of work-ers may engage in collective bargaining with their employer via five elected representatives, who are not required to be formally registered through the process described in section two of the Trade Unions Act (1926). However, existing convention and the pervasive influence of political patronage make all of Jamshedpur's Tata industries effective closed-shops.

In the event of there being more than one union in a workplace, employers conventionally follow the Code of Discipline agreed at the 16th session of the Indian Labour Conference (May 1958). The Code of Discipline privileges the recognition of officially registered unions, and provides guidelines for arbitrating the legitimacy of two such organisations in the workplace. The code states that for a union to gain employer recognition as a representative organisation, it must have membership of at least 15 per cent of the establishment's work-force; members being defined through the payments of union dues for a minimum of three months in the six months preceding arbitration. In the event of two unions meeting this criteria, both must have been in existence and functioning for a period of one year following official registration; the organisation with the larger proportional member-ship being deemed the 'representative' union (Chandrashekar 1968: 175). While the Code of Discipline has no legislative weight to speak of, the ubiquity of its use make its model of union recognition the norm in states not already covered by the more rigid Industrial Rela-tions Bill (1978).

In Jamshedpur, there is little prospect of an effective alternative to the TWU arising in Tata workplaces. All of Jamshedpur's Tata indus-tries have an explicit policy of negotiation with unions affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), of which the TWU is a founding member (Tata Motors Ltd. 2001). Assuming the unlikeli-hood of a rival to the TWU emerging from within INTUC, non-INTUC unions in Tata industries operate in opposition to a company policy that has been extant since the mid-1920s. Such issues of political influ-ence and allegiance impact more strongly upon local labour politics than conventions such as the Code of Discipline. INTUC is closely

7 The Industrial Disputes Act (1947) differs from both The Bombay Industrial Rela-tions Act (1947) and Industrial Relations Bill (1978), which are in effect in a minority of Indian states.

affiliated with the Congress Party, with whom the Tata Group has long-standing political connections. These relations have their historical origins in Mahatma Gandhi and Motilal Nehru's early identification of TISCO as a national Indian industry that was run by a private company, and are partly explained by the high levels of investment which Congress shareholders made in the foundation of TISCO (Pillai 1923: 59).[8] Certainly, the company's ability to successfully lobby for the raising of import taxes on foreign steel, and to avoid bankruptcy with the aid of government loans in the mid-1920s (Gupta and Thavaraj 1974: 59; Nomura 2011; Varshney 1964: 30; Wagle 1981: 123) was questioned by contemporary commentators, who pointed to the relationship between the Tata Company and national political elites (Slater 1925: 62).[9]

In addition to INTUC, modern Indian labour relations are dominated by two other umbrella organisations – the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), affiliated to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI (M). The CPI (M) is the historically dominant political party in the neighbouring state of West Bengal. Other significant union federations include the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), aligned to the right-wing Hindu Nationalist

8 By the mid-1970s, the Indian state itself was reckoned to own 42 per cent of TISCO, and 25 per cent of Tata Motors shares (Gupta and Thavaraj 1974: 59).

9 After India was granted fiscal autonomy in 1921, an extension of state guarantees enabled TISCO to apply for World Bank assistance (Varshney 1964: 39). Then, in 1925, the state stepped in to save the company from near collapse in the face of competition from cheap imports of Belgian steel (apparently 'dumped' in the Indian market during the continental European recession). During 1923, Belgian steel was retailing in India at prices ranging from INR 90–100 per ton, at a time when Tata claimed to be unable to produce steel at a cost of less than INR 150 per ton, and was reportedly losing INR 1,500,000 per month (Wagle 1981: 123). In response to TISCO lobbying, duties on imported steel in India were doubled to 30 per cent in 1925, before a further TISCO request for a tariff of 60 per cent (Slater 1925: 62). In response to an objection from the Viceroy, an agreement was brokered to maintain the inflated 30 per cent rate of duty on imported non-British steel, with British steel being charged at the standard rate of 15 per cent. This policy suited both the UK and Tata equally well; with the company's primary competition coming from low-grade European imports and not from the British Standard 'Bessemer' steel used in heavy construction (Wagle 1981: 123). In addition, Tata managed to negotiate a one-off payment from the Indian state of INR 6,200,000, given in lieu of the failed petition for higher levels of steel duty (Slater 1925: 66).

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), whose party allegiances are more shifting. For INTUC unions such as the TWU, concepts of casual regularisation, national strikes and solidarity motions have little salience; rather, union practice is ostensibly based around the immediate provision of financial reward for members, as opposed to wider notions of 'working-class' interest. As part of this model, the more disruptive tactics of labour politics are foregone in favour of joint consultation between union and management, to assure the security of both members and their employers. This perspective is well-represented by Gandhi's 1925 TISCO address, which emphasises the importance of industrial harmony to national development. With this position established, the TWU's lack of interest in regularising casual workers appears as a coherent aspect of their wider ideology and function. However, the denial of regularisation to casual workers does not currently serve the personal interests of the permanent Tata workforce in Jamshedpur, who share close familial relations with the greater mass of casual company employees.

In an analysis of INTUC industrial relations, Ramaswamy suggests the term 'economism' to describes unions that are marked by a focus on the narrow economic self-interest of members, rather than the fostering and support of effective working-class solidarity (Ramaswamy 1983). Despite moments of collective action that solidified the identities of their workforces in the 1920s, class politics in Tata industries has historically excluded sections of Jamshedpur's labour force from decent wages and permanent employment. In Jamshedpur, until the mass casualisation of Tata work reached traditional company families in the 1990s, the politics of permanent employees displayed a marked disinterest in the struggles of Tata cleaners, labourers and maintenance workers.

Despite the discursive centrality of struggle to TISCO union history, Tata labour politics has historically reproduced class privilege within families over time (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). More importantly, formal Tata labour politics has been historically silent on the struggles of TISCO's casual workers – most notably, in the TWU's lack of support for the 1981 regularisation of approximately 10,000 Adivasi migrants in unskilled manual posts, who were subsequently forcibly removed from the shop floor by company thugs following a sit-in. If, as Bahl (1995) suggests, there is any direct parallel in TISCO to the English working class described by Thompson (1991), it is with the elite community of English artisans whose experiences dictated national class politics, yet whose control vis-à-vis production was

greater than that of labourers, with whom they felt only a partial affinity. Regardless of the discourses of 'sacrifice' and class martyrdom that profligate in TWU histories (Tata Workers' Union 1978: 1, 2001: 1), the historical TISCO workforce is best conceptualised as an 'aristocracy of labour', which has historically bounded itself on the basis of descent, to the exclusion of more distant and frequently more radical labour struggles. A broad class consciousness based upon a relationship to production has not historically typified the Tata workforce, regardless of suggestions to the contrary in union discourses. Indeed, it is only since the mass casualisation of Tata labour in the 1990s that such a consciousness may have emerged, as members of traditional company families find their prospects, standards of living and popular discourses converging with India's informal sector workers.

Ramaswamy's (1983) model of trade union economism is well-reflected in the historical case of the Tata working class – an aristocracy of labour, whose iconic struggles of the early 20th century were restricted to the interests of the permanently employed local elite. However, the class that once found its interests articulated through the TWU has changed considerably since the 1990s. Following the casualisation of permanent company employment, the Tata aristocracy of labour now shares its homes and workplaces with sons that earn as little as INR 1,500 per month and have little prospect of ever securing a permanent job. While Tata workers' privilege was once consolidated by the TWU's political allegiances and refusal of membership to non-permanent employees, today, the same policies erode the Tata working class, and serve to de-unionise a labour force that lacks alternative means of effective collective action.

Violence, the courts and the alternative

In contrast to the TWU's large centre in Bistupur, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)-affiliated Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union (JMU) occupied two dilapidated rooms in a decaying Sakchi building beside a busy roundabout.[10] The structure was built around a central courtyard, with access leading off two roads. To the front of the building, the lower floors were occupied by a phone booth/copy shop, opticians and liquor store, outside which, Lucky's youthful group of

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10 The JMU office has since moved to smaller premises nearby.

aspiring entrepreneurs would gather in the evening to drink beer and whisky. The rear of the building was taken up by the 'Delhi Dhaba' eatery, which specialised in the preparation of Mutton Dhal. A small opening beside Delhi Dhaba led into the courtyard that accommodated the restaurant's outdoor kitchen. Here, teenage boys chopped mutton and onions on low wooden tables sheltered by sheets of polythene, while large steel pans sat on gas stoves slowly boiling pulses. The floor of the courtyard was unsurfaced, with jagged pieces of masonry and assorted construction debris protruding through the dirt. During the monsoon season, the dusty courtyard became a cloying mass of mud.

The JMU office was located up a steep flight of stairs, with windows facing out onto Delhi Dhaba's kitchen. The small office contained a large heavy wooden desk, low wooden bench that ran along one wall, three chairs and a bureau. One wall had two long stone shelves built into the masonry, on which sat piles of yellowed, dusty papers. The walls of the office glorified the founding fathers of international communism; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were both represented by framed portraits, as were Ho Chi Minh and Joseph Stalin. Elsewhere, a revolutionary watercolour of Lenin sat beside a poster advertising the latest AITUC activity, while Che Guevara's iconic stencilled face was emblazoned on a bright red map of South America. One wall displayed a photograph of Bihar's first Communist MP, V. K. Mishra, the grandfather of one of the JMU's ageing committee members, S. Mishra. Beneath his portrait was the legend: 'He gave his life to the cause of the working people of Jamshedpur'.

With the exception of one middle-age man engaged in a long struggle to unionise the workers of a local sponge iron plant, the JMU's committee comprised men in their late sixties. In contrast to the TWU leaders, the JMU were eager to spend long periods of time discussing the politics and history of the town. The office served as a forum for older Bengali men to debate the declining fortunes of the state's communist movement, with regular infusions of sweet tea and chewing tobacco that were sent for from stalls outside the building. When we met, the union's raison d'être was an ongoing legal struggle surrounding a 1981 strike by contract workers in TISCO. The JMU maintains that in 1981, a government edict based upon the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act (1970) demanded that a large number of contract workers in Jamshedpur's Tata industries be given permanent employment. At this time, approximately 10,000 unskilled labourers, cleaners and maintenance operatives were eligible for regularisation in TISCO, most

of who were Adivasi migrants from surrounding rural areas. Discussing the matter one afternoon in his office, JMU president, Dulal Munshi[11] stated that while most industries in Jamshedpur complied with this requirement, TISCO refused to do so. Although the TWU were unwilling to provide any support to the aggrieved workers, the JMU organised a three-day sit-down among 1,500 contract employees, which effectively closed an entire TISCO division. The JMU alleges that the sit-down was finally broken by company-hired thugs, who stormed the shop floor with local police and detained the demonstrators:

> They were put into trucks, at midnight, like this [miming bound hands], and taken to Chaibasa.[12] Then they put them out and left them in the Jungle.

Munshi claimed that once the striking workers had completed the long walk back to Jamshedpur, they discovered that their jobs in TISCO had been filled by new contract labourers. He explained that the extreme poverty of the region's rural areas provided TISCO with a ready supply of desperate migrant workers, who were prepared to break the strike for even lower wages than their predecessors. Speaking candidly, Dulal Munshi's colleague, S.K. Mishra explained that in 1981, the JMU failed its members because they lacked the political and coercive influence of their rivals:

> We did not give them [the strikers] the leadership at that time to resist. We don't have the resources to resist or [tapping his temple] the mind-set. Who can stand against the SP [Superintendent of Police]?

Like the systemic corruption model with which the debt collector Rishi and industrial apprentice Rajiv understand the Indian political economy, the JMU's relationship to TISCO and the TWU suggests the consolidation of elite interests through the exercise of institutional and criminal influence. In the context of a costly regularisation of thousands of workers, conservative monopoly trade unions such as the TWU are believed to be complicit in the safeguarding of corporate profitability. The monopoly of the TWU is supported by long-standing allegiances with

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11 Dulal Munshi stood as the Communist Party of India Candidate for Jamshedpur, in the 1999 Indian Lok Sabha general election.
12 A town approximately 60 km from Jamshedpur.

national political parties and the de facto closed-shop in Tata industries. However, as the 1981 strike-breaking suggests, the TWU's position is also entrenched through the use of corporate and state violence.

Unable to negotiate with a potentially coercive employer that did not recognise their legitimacy, in 1981, the JMU submitted a complaint to the State Labour Commissioner on the grounds that TISCO had violated the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act (1970). Although a state employment tribunal originally ruled in favour of the 1981 strikers, TISCO successfully contested this judgement, arguing that the case was too important to be judged at tribunal level. A resulting High Court judgement against Tata was also appealed, followed by a Supreme Court ruling, which was also appealed. Each of these hearings had taken several years to progress, and in 2000, the case was bought before the Supreme Court for the second time. The Supreme Court ruled that it was not the correct institution for such a matter, and referred the case back to the state employment tribunal – where the case had first been heard 19 years previously. At the time of research six years later, the state employment tribunal had still reached no decision. Munshi disclosed that of the original 10,000 contract workers whose regularisation was being debated, about 700 were still traceable. Many were seriously ill or deceased, and most had returned to their native villages in rural Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh. Referencing the corrupt relationships that they perceived between Tata and the state, the officers of the JMU believed that the case was unlikely to be resolved by any Indian court.

When I came to Jamshedpur 25 years after the 1981 strike, large sections of Jamshedpur's traditional aristocracy of labour shared the JMU's perception that the TWU were integral to Tata's exploitation of its poorest workers. In a conversation that was typical of many which I had on the shop floor of the Tata Motors plant, a middle-aged Bihari man asked me to look across his workplace, to see where the union were 'right now' and if they were doing anything useful. Using his own predicament as an illustration, he explained that he had been continuously employed as a contract labourer in the Tata Motors plant for 12 years, earning significantly less than others performing the same work. He believed that he was adept at the relatively low-skilled tasks, which he had performed for more than a decade. However, a month earlier, he was selected by his foreman to undergo a compulsory period of 'refresher training' for the next six months, which entailed a pay cut of INR 1,000 per month and included no actual change in his daily work. Furthermore, his temporary shifting into a new job title scuppered his hopes of petitioning for regularisation in the near future. The

union was indifferent to his complaint since he (like three-quarters of his colleagues) was not allowed to become a member. Beyond the largely disinterested TWU, the extreme precarity of the labour force constrained the effectiveness of alternative collective action.

In September 2006, the Tata Motors apprentices began to agitate for a bonus during the religious holiday of Durga Puja,[13] ostensibly since the occasion called for personal expenditure that other employees were compensated for. In the plant's hierarchy of payments, permanent workers receive a 17.99 per cent bonus during the month of Durga Puja, casual workers 7.9 per cent, while apprentices receive nothing at all. Although the apprentices' bonus complaints were real enough, the issue articulated a broader dissatisfaction with Tata employment structures that made close reference to the systemic corruption discourse. In the days leading up to the holiday, apprentices across the plant began to voice their discontent in increasingly vocal and indignant terms, which questioned the legality of their employment:

> We [the apprentices] are supposed to only do four hours' work a day, the rest is supposed to be training, but this is a big company and gives a lot of money to the government, so they [the government] will do nothing for us. The company even claims back money for our wages under the Apprentices Act. Tata Motors are making two profits; they are using us for work and production and are claiming back our wages also.

Led by a small group of charismatic agitators, the apprentices of the Tata Motors Chassis Division followed the example of the famous 1928 *Hartals* in TISCO, and staged a sit-down to halt production. The Chassis Division was one of the hotter and more crowded production lines, notorious for the noise and machinery that contributed to an oppressive working environment. Management considered the apprentices of the Chassis Division to be the most volatile, and the apprentices there obligingly felt themselves the most aggrieved. However, the man quoted above had misread the law that surrounded his employment, and the strike failed after only one afternoon. Key areas of the Apprentices Act serve to primarily disenfranchise trainees from legislative protection, and several strikers were summarily sacked that

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13 The festival that honours the Hindu Goddess, Durga.

same day.[14] For those who remained on the shop floor, further unrest was forestalled by the threat of redundancies, and the refusal by the plant's only trade union to oppose them.

Conclusion

The day after the failed apprentices' strike, I took a shared rickshaw across Jamshedpur to the Tata Motors plant. After my photo ID was checked by the guards at the plant's main gate, I made my way to the Cab and Cowl Division to meet Rajiv. As I walked down one of the plant's main roads, a white jeep containing senior Tata Motors manager, Pramod Kumar, pulled up beside me. Stepping from the vehicle, Pramod asked how my research was proceeding, before telling me that it was now 'time to wind it down'. Getting back into his jeep, he instructed me to leave my gate pass at the reception on my way home that afternoon. Leaving the plant for the last time that day, I did as I was asked. A week later, a small group of men from the Cab and Cowl Division came to my home in Sakchi, to ask whether I would be coming back to the plant.

The men of the Cab and Cowl Division were angry at the treatment of the plant's apprentices and scornful of the TWU's failure to support their industrial unrest. All of them were convinced that my own expulsion from the plant was related to the recent disputes in the workplace. Thirty-year-old Ayaz, who had worked as a temporary worker for nine years without promotion to permanent status, articulated that the company and union were conspiring with one another to obscure their disenfranchisement of the workforce:

> In Tata Motors, we are wasting our youth . . . for people who are married with children, they have no choice, what can they do? You know, you have come and seen what is happening here. And now, they have thrown you out

Discourses such as this are deeply critical perspectives on the modern Indian political economy, and suggest that ordinary people suffer through mutually beneficial relationships between corporate capitalism and institutional corruption. However, the systemic content of

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14 See Chapter 1, footnote 9 for a summary of the legislative position of Indian apprentices.

these discourses also explains the general lack of resistance to the Tata–TWU nexus in Jamshedpur – if diverse elites are believed to deliberately and effectively cooperate with one another in an attempt to divest working people of their security and standards of living, then the collective power which they possess seems all the more difficult to counter. In any imagined resistance to the casualisation of industrial labour, Tata workers conceive opposition from their employer, local and national politicians, the judiciary, trade unionists, and gangsters. Largely employed on precarious contracts, lacking any formal representation, fearing violent reprisals, and vainly hopeful of future regularisation, the Tata working class has been progressively weakened to the point where effective collective action in the workplace appears all but impossible. As such, the systemic corruption discourse plays a somewhat contradictory role in the class politics of Jamshedpur; while the suggestion of elite criminal enterprise inspires a critical and cohesive class consciousness, it also constrains alternative forms of collective action through the implicit threat of violence. More radical actions, such as the 2006 apprentices' strike, are exceptional, short-lived and involve relatively small numbers of agitators.

This chapter has established the conditions by which the modern Tata shop floor has undergone an effective de-unionisation in the previous two decades. Integral to this process is the monopolisation of collective representation by conservative trade unions, who value harmonious relationships with employers above the interests of their weakest potential members. Despite the long local history of union economism, Jamshedpur's Tata workers increasingly interpret this practice as a form of corruption. The corruption discourse that critiques the union is systemic, and suggests that if the TWU is in cooperation with the Tata Company, then both parties are also in corrupt cooperation with the state and organised crime. In this model, legislative and judicial obfuscation forestalls the formal recognition of alternative unions, allows employers to circumvent the regularisation of their casual workforces and ensures that legal challenges are frustrated by apparently arbitrary institutional processes. Importantly, the same networks of corruption and mutual aid that consolidate class power in Jamshedpur are perceived to include violent criminals, whose assassination of trade union leaders and coercion of workers constrain the effectiveness of resistance. In the Tata Company town of Jamshedpur, the type of political networking through which the monopolistic TWU once secured the privilege of their members, today enables their alienation.

Part III

DIVISION AND CHANGE

5

ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND THE DAILY POLITICS OF LABOUR

The preceding chapters of this book have suggested that a functional relationship between capitalist enterprise and criminality is a means by which social elites access power and resources. The book has argued that these processes are acts of elite class struggle, whose object is accumulation by dispossession. I discuss these ideas with reference to the decline of industrial employment security for Tata workers since the 1990s, which is the local expression of a global weakening of labour power. In Jamshedpur, popular ideas about this process are systemic discourses that interrogate the relationship between industrial corporations, corrupt political authority and violence. In comparison to the episodic corruption discourses of petty bribery, the systemic corruption discourse is concerned with the consolidation of power and resources by a cooperative network of criminal elites, and expresses a critical perspective on the politics of class. One of the effects of this discourse is that the Tata Motors labour force maintains a high degree of ideological coherence, despite its fragmentation into blocs of permanent employees, apprentices and numerous grades of casual work. Since the systemic discourse suggests pervasive and violent criminality among social elites, antipathy within the labour force is undermined by the contention that rank and file employees are unable to effect change on their workplace. The argument of the book, then, is that the practice of systemic corruption makes and expresses class power, while talking about these processes makes and expresses class consciousness.

However, there are aspects of the book's argument that require complication and refinement. First, if discourse and critique are articulations of political consciousness, then one must consider that not all such expressions are as explicit as the systemic corruption discourse. Some political expressions are hard to detect, and exhibit great intellectual subtlety. Some are hard to interpret, since they speak in the register

of irony. Others are expressed only implicitly, in the social exchanges of everyday life. These types of political expressions are important technologies of class, since one necessarily requires a good deal of cultural intimacy in order to effectively engage with them. Second, if distinctions of pay and security on the Tata shop floor can be mediated through shared discourses on criminality and dispossession, then one must consider how the labour force negotiates other types of internal difference – the technologies for doing so may well be different. This chapter addresses these two issues through a focus on the subtle everyday practices by which the Tata working class negotiates its ethnic divisions, which are significant in a national climate of communal tension. If discourses of corruption enable a fractured labour force to speak in terms of shared experiences and values, then the practices described in this chapter resolve one of its most important internal cleavages.

Communalism and the shop floor

Late in the evening rush hour of 11 July 2006, a series of seven bombs exploded on Mumbai's suburban railway network; in just 10 minutes, more than 200 people were killed and another 700 injured. Responsibility for the bombings was claimed by the Islamic terrorist organisation, Lashkar-e-Qahhar, which claimed to avenge the Hindu persecution of Muslims in the Indian states of Kashmir and Gujarat. As awful as the Mumbai train bombings may be, they were not exceptional. The history of modern India is punctuated by sporadic bombings, riots and massacres that emerge from communal tensions and have a reproductive logic all of their own.[1] As ethnicities and religions

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1 Excluding the tremendous violence that accompanied the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, most notably, in December 1963, rumours that Hindus had stolen a lock of hair belonging to the prophet Mohammed from a mosque in Kashmir were ostensibly the cause for waves of violence across eastern India (Zinkin 1966: 143). In 1984, a bloody four-day pogrom against Delhi's Sikh population followed Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards (Das 1985). In December 1992, a long campaign by Hindu nationalist leaders culminated in the destruction of the 16th-century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, ostensibly since the building stood on the site of Lord Rama's earthly birthplace (Assayag 1998; Van der Veer 1992). In Mumbai alone, 900 people were killed in the communal rioting that ensued, following which, a further 250 died in bombings conducted by Islamic terrorists on a single day in March 1993 (Hansen 2001:125). More recently, in February 2002, a Muslim attack upon a train carrying Hindu nationalist activists in Gujarat resulted in three months of violence across the state, in which more than 2,000 people lost their lives (Heitmeyer 2009: 104).

are victimised by chauvinistic movements in India, so reprisals have historically sought to avenge injustices and reinstate the honour of violated communities (Brass 1997, 2003; Das 1985, 1990, 2007; Jeffery and Jeffery 1994; Mander 2007; Tambiah 1997; Varshney 2005). Since the 2006 Mumbai train bombings might have incited retaliation, in the days following the blasts, the Indian media was saturated with analyses of national communal relations.

At the time of the bombings, I was spending my days on the shop floor of the Tata Motors plant. Although Jamshedpur endured more than its fair share of communal unrest during the 1960s and 1970s (Zinkin 1966: 141), today, the heterogeneity and relative communal harmony of the city's Tata workforce is distinctive among regional industrial towns (Parry 1999; Parry and Strümpell 2008; Sanchez and Strümpell 2014). In the Tata Motors plant, while the management cadre mainly comprises Bengali elites, the blue-collar workforce is a varied mix of low-caste Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and a smattering of individuals from impoverished Hindu high castes. With the exception of a simmering antipathy between the Bengali managerial class and their subordinates,[2] relations between the plant's ethnicities are strikingly free of any evident communal tension, and workers are united by a shared critical perspective upon the perceived relationship between corporate capital and the state in India. As I arrived at the plant the morning after the Mumbai train bombings, I wondered what the workforce would say about the events of the previous evening.

Stepping onto the shop floor at 7:00 a.m., the day seemed much like any other. Young apprentices in blue uniforms strode smartly between the assembly lines, while their fathers and uncles drifted at a more leisurely pace in grey shirts and trousers. Dozens of rivet guns and welding torches chattered and roared across the low hum of conversation, as sheets of steel and trays of components were shaped into 40-tonne trucks. At the end of the paint shop line, the usual gathering of dispatch drivers was clustered in the small space between a robotic crane and a decrepit tractor. Here, a dozen men took turns to load freshly-sprayed truck cabs onto trailers, from where they would be towed across the plant for further assembly. Idle drivers sat on paint tins to drink Chai, chew tobacco and make jokes about the incompetence of their foreman, as their friends stood and worked beside them.

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2 Discussed in Chapter 6.

As each long train of trailers was filled with freshly painted cabs, a new man would rise to take his colleagues' position, content that after 20 minutes of labour, he could rejoin the circle of chatting, chewing and drinking on the floor below. As the morning lurched towards midday, no one had yet mentioned the bombings. The blasts were the lead story in all print and broadcast media that day, and it was implausible that the dispatch drivers should be unaware of them. After five hours of curiosity, I eventually asked Sadaqat and Jaswinder what had happened in Mumbai the previous night.

Muslim Sadaqat and Sikh Jaswinder would seem an unlikely pair of friends, whatever their faith. Where Sadaqat was short and slightly built, his friend Jaswinder towered over his workmates. Dishevelled Sadaqat's shirt was never ironed and his shoes were never tied. In comparison, Jaswinder's clothes were neat and freshly washed every day. Sadaqat's rasping voice betrayed the fact that he smoked heavily. Jaswinder, in contrast, was a keen athlete. Sadaqat's days were spent clearing the shop floor and making minor repairs to tools and machinery, while Jaswinder's were filled with towing cabs to the Chassis Division. When we spoke about the previous day's events, Sadaqat told me that the train bombings were very serious, and that hundreds of people had been killed. Jaswinder agreed that the events in Mumbai were an important issue for anyone in India, and thought that in the days to come, riots might break out in any number of cities. However, both men agreed that nothing of the sort would happen in Jamshedpur. The city, they told me, was a place where working people of all backgrounds could feel at ease with one another. That afternoon, I ate lunch in the dispatch drivers' break room with a quite typical group of four Muslims, one Sikh, four low-caste Hindus, and a Nepali. In the days that followed, it transpired that Jaswinder and Sadaqat's opinions were shared by all of their colleagues in the paint shop, who would talk about the blasts with me in snatches of private conversation. However, in the public space of the break room that lunchtime, an intriguing silence pervaded over the bombings and no one particularly wanted to discuss the news from Mumbai.

One might consider that at times of communal atrocity, ethnicity is a topic that is simply too dangerous to broach in a multi-ethnic working environment. After all, the workplace demands cooperation between people that could easily be strangers, or even antagonists, were it not for their shared employment. On a day of communal outrage, it would seem wise for a roomful of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus perhaps to

simply avoid the topic of religion and ethnicity altogether. However, the politics of the shop floor engages with ethnicity in ways that are somewhat more subtle than avoidance, and which speak obliquely to a shared perspective on the proper public life of religion. These expressions complement more explicit class discourses, by performatively stating shared political values within a heterogeneous labour force. As I sat wondering at the shop floor's silence on the bombings, one young Muslim man reached into his pocket for his mobile phone, and called the break room to attention. He sat upright on the low table, which served as a sleeping platform and cleared his throat. Opening an SMS, he read aloud to his colleagues:

> Three men are waiting at an airport, one Muslim, one Hindu and one *Sirdar* [Sikh]. The Muslim says to the other men: 'Brothers, my *Nawabzada* [princely-son] is coming'. The Hindu replies: 'I am waiting to meet my *Amirzada* [rich-son].' The Sirdar says to both of them: 'Brothers that is nothing. My *Haramzada* [bastard-son] is coming.'

Laughter and knowing nods broke out across the room. It was followed by an offering from Jaswinder:

> What do Guru Nanak [the founder of the Sikh religion] and Mahatma Gandhi have in common? They were both born on public holidays.

At first sight, the day's coincidence between communal silence and ethnic joking seems strange. However, when I knew the dispatch drivers better, I discovered that the two forms of behaviour were governed by a complementary logic that typified sociality within the Tata Motors plant. In the weeks that followed, it was true that lunchtime debates would often contain analyses of political processes, alongside the lighter talk of sport, family and sex. Discussions might even encompass the personal fortunes of politicians who exploit communal sentiment. However, what were never openly discussed in lunchtime debates were specific incidences of communal atrocity, where the sanctity of one community had been profaned by another in a manner that would demand restitution.

Murders, rioting and bomb blasts that ostensibly pit one Indian ethnic group against another were largely off the agenda for public

discussion in the workplace. The city's own history of communal riot-
ing in 1964 and 1979 was never mentioned in everyday life, and like
Jaswinder and Sadaqat's opinions on the Mumbai train bombings,
discourses on communalism were only forthcoming from workers if
solicited by myself – a fact which, incidentally, highlights the ecological
fallacies generated by direct questioning (Cicourel 1982). However, the
very same people who seemed to so often avoid an engagement with
the public life of ethnicity and religion in India were not entirely silent
on the topic. The Tata shop floor was a profoundly ethnicised space
in which insulting, obscene and generally profane forms of humour
derided the alleged stupidity of Sikhs, the coarseness of Biharis and
the conservatism of Muslims without evident animosity. In the weeks
that followed, ethnic jokes were read aloud from mobile phones in the
break room most lunchtimes, while boisterous teasing characterised
many inter-ethnic friendships on the shop floor. For example, the Nep-
alese driver, Sandeep, was often teased by his colleagues for his alleg-
edly East Asian facial features, to which he responded by humorously
profaning the ethnicity and customs of his abusers. The daily theatre
of Sandeep's ethnic joking exemplifies the profanity that characterised
inter-ethnic sociality on the Tata Motors shop floor.

When we first met, Sandeep's Bihari companions introduced him
to me as the 'Chinese man', while they used the tips of their index
fingers to draw the corners of their eyelids sideways in racist parody.
His grinning friends did not have to wait long for his response: Sand-
eep promptly spat a thick jet of chewing tobacco on the floor and
denounced his colleagues as a pack of *Bahinchodh* ('Sister Fuckers').
Amid howls of laughter, he said that Bihari *Matachodh* ('Motherfuck-
ers') liked nothing more than 'to sniff the asses of dogs' – an activ-
ity which he mimed at length with provocative gestures. As one man
began to literally cry with laughter, Sandeep said a few solemn words
on his family's proud 'Mongol' history among the degenerates of
north India. While Sandeep could be relied upon to meet racist jok-
ing with the appropriate degree of humour and profanity, he was also
well adept at initiating such exchanges. The same week, a pious Mus-
lim worker with a full beard and no moustache, had the misfortune
to meet Sandeep head-on while the two drove their tractors past the
paint shop. Bellowing to attract his attention, Sandeep fixed the man
with a comically obscene leer, while vigorously stroking an imaginary
beard of his own. As the tractors drew closer, Sandeep contorted his
face in a theatrical gesture of confusion, while raising a questioning

hand palm upwards, as if to ask what the man thought he looked like. His laughing opponent thrust out his chin to display his beard to fuller scrutiny as they passed, much to the delight of the assembled crowd of onlookers. Such profane exchanges took place between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs everyday on the Tata shop floor, where they might assume the narrative form of SMS jokes read aloud to groups of colleagues, extended public bouts of creatively obscene insults or impromptu comic observations on the cultural shortcomings of one's interlocutors.

This chapter supposes that when exchanged between ethnicities in this way, ethnic humour may be an ironic practice that speaks critically to the politics of communalism. By approaching ethnicity largely through the lens of profane humour, workplace interlocutors do more than avoid or deny communal politics (Jeffery and Jeffery 1994; Navaro-Yashin 2003). On the contrary, I argue that profane styles of humour should be accorded more analytic attention as indirect articulations of political perspectives on Indian public life. In comparison to the retaliatory logics of communal honour, joking uses irony to establish ethnicity as an object of mutual parody between dissimilar, yet tolerant actors (Chock 1987). Furthermore, I suggest that the style of ethnic humour is part of a broader aesthetic field of profanity that structures exchanges on the shop floor, the mastery of which expresses intimacy on the part of its actors. In this respect, this chapter establishes how the Tata working class, for whom I have posited a critical class consciousness expressed through corruption discourses, overcomes some of the potentially destructive divisions that exist within itself. Here, the implicit political positions that are expressed through joking and commensality complement the more explicit commentaries on the Indian political economy, which likewise, establish a shared perspective on critical aspects of Indian society.

First, I explore the idea that while the politics of communalism in India demands the punishment of sacrilege and outrage, joking relationships require a performative tolerance for the profaning of sacred things. Put simply, people that *do* joke with one another about their race and religion, implicitly distance themselves from the types of people that would *never* do so. Here, humour speaks on a meta level to defame the politics of sanctity, as jokers construct ethnicity as a subject fit for mutual parody. As indirect critical languages that make communities of their speakers, I argue that in this context, ethnic jokes are best understood as inclusive and exclusive forms of irony (Boon 2001;

Fernandez 1984, 2001; Fernandez and Huber 2001; Herzfeld 2005; Steinmüller 2011). This is to say, ironic practices of this type both make communities of people that participate in them, and implicitly exclude those that do not.

Second, I relate the exchange of jokes and insults to other forms of profane commensality in the workplace. I argue that an aesthetic of profanity structures most social exchanges within the workplace, and is the articulation of a working-class style of everyday interaction that expresses something of the values of this class, and creates a community of the people that participate within it. Drawing upon Cant's idea of the relationship between aesthetic fields and communities of practice (Cant 2012), I suggest that a broad aesthetic of profanity helps to construct a work-based community that cuts across ethnic distinctions, and defines itself against the effete practice of managers, and the divisiveness of public life. In this regard, stylised practices of joking and commensality complement the systemic corruption discourse of Tata workers, whose primary effect is the creation and expression of a shared political consciousness.

History, silence and irony

Muslim Mohammed had worked on the Tata Motors shop floor for 15 years, and spent his days towing loads back and forth between sections of the plant with a tractor. Since he was a gregarious character, the work suited his personality. Whereas most of the plant's workers were confined to a few square meters of an assembly line, Mohammed roamed freely from the cab section, to the Chassis Division, past the engine shop, to the foundry and even, on occasion, to the distant wastes surrounding the test track. As he careered through the plant, he stopped to chat, borrowed cigarettes, paused for a swift *Chai*, and shouted greetings and insults to his friends. He was well-known and well-liked. One summer afternoon, I joined Mohammed on his rounds. After dropping a load of cabs at the Chassis Division, we stopped by the side of the road to smoke a cigarette. Mohammed produced a strip of newspaper printed with the phrase, 'Allah is the most merciful', in both Arabic and English. With his face contorted in concentration, and his cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth, he used a tube of strong glue to fix the paper to the inside of his tractor cab. Mohammed leaned back to survey his work. Satisfied with a job well done, he proceeded to inhale deeply from the glue tube. With a

conspiratorial raising of the eye brows, he used his index finger to make a circling motion around his temple. Feigning a pantomime of intoxication, he teased me for not joining him in a spot of recreational glue sniffing: after all, didn't foreigners like me spend all their time on drugs anyway?

As a Muslim, Mohammed felt comfortable in Jamshedpur. His Sikh and Hindu colleagues in the dispatch section were frequent guests at his home, and he guessed correctly that they would attend his brother's wedding later that summer. Nonetheless, he felt that in India, communal violence might begin from the smallest provocation, or as he put it, 'stone throwing'. In December 1963, reports that Hindus had stolen a lock of the Prophet's hair from a Mosque in Srinagar enflamed latent communal tensions that led to a wave of Muslim violence against Hindus in Bangladesh, followed by Hindu reprisals against Muslims in eastern India. In Jamshedpur, 1,500 Muslims were killed, and a further 41,000 forced from their homes (Zinkin 1966: 150). Later, in April 1979, a procession through one of Jamshedpur's Muslim neighbourhoods by the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh resulted in rioting that killed 79 Muslims and 25 Hindus. These were moments of serious communal violence that occurred within living memory, and it seems reasonable to assume that the feelings of violation and triumph which they inspired would still figure explicitly in the popular imagination. However, this was not the case.

For Mohammed, the stone throwing of communal violence belonged to Jamshedpur's past, where it should rightly remain for the conceivable future. He drew my attention to the communal violence that had swept across India in 1992, following the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Mosque) by a coalition of Hindu nationalists, who claimed that the 16th-century building stood upon the site of Lord Rama's earthly birthplace (Assayag 1998; Hansen 2001; Van der Veer 1992). While hundreds had been killed in riots across the country, Jamshedpur remained calm. Mohammed claimed that by the 1990s, the vast majority of people in Jamshedpur no longer wished to do violence to one another, while local police prevented the few that did from gathering together. Like almost all of his colleagues in the Tata Motors plant, Mohammed went on to claim that since Jamshedpur was a 'modern' town, its citizens did not define themselves in reference to the communal past. Whatever the atrocities of history, today, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs mixed freely in their working environments and neighbourhoods. It is clear that Mohammed's discourse is a modernising

one, which relates communalism to the shameful trope of 'backwardness' that so often stalks the Indian imagination (Parry 2008; Strümpell 2008). This discourse may well serve to legitimate the 'modern' behaviour of those that voice it. However, a critical perspective should not detract from the fact that at the time of research Jamshedpur had indeed been free of communal unrest for three decades. As Mohammed's Brahman[3] colleague, Sunil drew my attention to some weeks later, today, people of all backgrounds 'sit, talk and eat' with one another in the plant every lunchtime, after which they lay side by side on the break room's sleeping platforms.

Sunil was a softly spoken man in his late fifties, whose colleagues respected the generosity with which he gave his time to others. Sitting with Jaswinder and me on the floor of the break room one lunchtime, Sunil explained that his own Hindu religion was the oldest in the world, while Sikh Jaswinder's was much younger. As Jaswinder sadly conceded that his faith was 'only 600 years old', Sunil consoled him that though all of the world's religions travelled on different roads, they all came from the same place, and it was only through poverty and political agitation that different faiths had begun to resent one another. Like many of his Muslim and Sikh co-workers, Sunil subscribed to the idea that communal resentments are chiefly inflamed by politicians, who build their support base by reminding constituents of perceived offences committed decades or even centuries earlier. In the context of the Tata shop floor, this account is highly consistent with the broader systemic corruption discourse that explains suffering and social entropy with reference to the exploitative behaviour of elites. The destruction of the Babri Masjid, Sunil said, showed what happened when politicians did not leave the past well alone. Key to the dialectic of offence and retaliation which Sunil described were historical touchstones of communal suffering and victory that shaped some Indian peoples' understandings of the present. Sunil claimed that modern India could well do without the public remembrance of such moments.

The bulk of literature on communalism in India places analytic emphasis upon the spectre of violence itself, as embodied in memory, memorials and narratives of atrocity (Brass 1997, 2003; Das 1990, 2007). Further afield, comparative studies of genocide posit *Lieux de*

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3 The highest order in the Hindu caste system.

Memoire (Nora 1989) as key spaces in which communities refer atrocity as a means of negotiating the present (see Caplan 2007 and Cook 2006 on the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda; Young 1993 on the Jewish Holocaust). However, less serious attention has been accorded by ethnographers to the tendency for *Lieux de Memoire* to vanish from the business of everyday life (Meierhenrich 2009), raising important questions as to how societies not only remember (Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1992), but move beyond their pasts. In Jamshedpur, ethnic violence lacks a public language of atrocity. No profaned spaces exist in the urban landscape, no collective narratives recall the horrors of previous decades and no political leaders speak on the need for communal restitution.[4] The popular relationship to communalism in Jamshedpur posits ethnic violence as a shameful, and ideally silent, historical anomaly.

The popular suggestion in Jamshedpur that communalism is a relic of former years, which only ever emerged in response to political agitation, is a 'normative' discourse that sees violence as exceptional (Heitmeyer 2009: 110). One might suggest that discourses of this kind principally obscure the true horror of the past, and are symptomatic of the denial that accompanies grief and recovery (Kuebler-Ross 1997). Or more critically, one might consider that these ideas distance individuals and communities from the shame and guilt that accompany violence. Certainly, ethnographers should be wary of those collective discourses that deny the culpability of their informants in acts of atrocity (Jeffery and Jeffery 1994). However, the reduction of discourses on communal violence to mere 'ideology' (Navaro-Yashin 2003) underestimates their subtlety. Following Heitmeyer (2009: 113), I suggest that normative discourses on communal violence should be taken seriously as one of the means by which the business of everyday peace is constituted in multi-ethnic environments (Ring 2006; Varshney 2005; Williams 2007). Integral to this process is the popular engagement in forms of everyday sociality that are distinct from the distant relations of communalism, and which subtly express political coherence. In the Tata workplace, the two poles of communal silence and ethnic joking are mutually reinforcing means by which everyday peace is constituted.

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4 Owing to Jamshedpur's population by labour migrants in the 1900s, the ethnic politics of the region's Adivasi tribal communities remain comparatively marginalised in public life.

Where the local communal past was characterised by durable recollections of disrespect, which divided ethnic groups, the everyday present is characterised by a performative profanity that unites them.

Tata's racist jokes posit ethnicity as a subject ripe for modern parody, the very practice of which is opposed to the 'offence and restitution' logic of communalism. I argue that by articulating a rule of sociality that is opposed to the logic of communal politics, ethnic jokes voice political positions in the indirect register of irony (Boon 2001; Fernandez 1984, 2001; Fernandez and Huber 2001; Herzfeld 2005; Steinmüller 2011). The workers who fall silent on the subject of the Mumbai train bombings, nonetheless, use humour to speak critically to the retaliatory values that informed them. The tendency to publicly defame one another's ethnicity in the workplace, and to expect to receive nothing more than a humorous insult in return, counters communal logics in ways that are subtle, yet important. In this context, ethnic jokes may be read as a particularly dense and opaque form of social play, which contains a great deal of social information and creates insiders of people that can be crudely said to 'get the joke'. By implicitly drawing distinctions between the sociality of the workplace and the broader Indian public, racist jokes render the shop floor a space that is culturally intimate (Herzfeld 2005).

In an instructive analysis of ironic political commentary in rural China, Steinmüller defines irony as a practice of dissimulation, where the true meaning of a statement is usually the opposite of its superficial content. Since irony tends to say one thing while meaning another, it is a highly interpretive type of communication that relies upon the intimacy of its speakers (Steinmüller 2011: 25). In ironic exchanges such as ethnic jokes on the Tata shop floor, one's meaning is obscured through a language of insult, which implicitly assumes that one's interlocutors possess the cultural know-how to decode it. Since such exchanges are fraught with the potential for misinterpretation, they create communities of people that successfully negotiate them. Which is to say, that what appears to be the expression of ethnic prejudice among Tata workers, is, in fact, the articulation of a profane inter-ethnic sociality that undermines the communal tropes of honour, offence and retribution. The political content of these exchanges is obscured beneath layers of profane, humorous misdirection that require mutual intelligibility on the part of their players. In games of this kind, irony is an effective technology of intimacy since both the

meaning of the joker, and the interpretation of their listener, is left unstated for less familiar ears.

Steinmüller's analysis of political irony in China draws an interesting contrast between such types of interpretive irony and their 'cynical' counterparts, which, he argues, rest upon contentions of epistemological certainty (Steinmüller 2011: 25). I suggest that Steinmüller's model might prove helpful to an understanding of ethnic humour, with the caveat that his opposition between cynicism and interpretation be collapsed into a consideration of how the two extremes relate to one another in any given instance. On the Tata Motors shop floor, actors use profane humour to make indirect statements on the principals of inter-ethnic sociality – a process that clearly belongs to the field of interpretive irony. However, if Steinmüller is correct in his suggestion that interpretative irony creates culturally intimate spaces (*ibid*.; Herzfeld 2005), then one must consider that cynicism and certainty may well pervade understandings of what lies beyond them. In Tata Motors, the interpretive ironies of ethnic joking are mutually constitutive with the cynicism by which Sunil and Mohammed understand communal politics. In short, the ironist cynically defines themselves against a reactionary public that does not speak the same language.

The modelling of irony as intimacy (Herzfeld 2005; Steinmüller 2011) provides a slightly more nuanced understanding of joking than is usual in labour ethnographies (Borman 1988; De Neve 2005; Lundberg 1969; Ramaswami 2006; Roy 1960; Yelvington 1996). It is the capacity of Tata's ethnic jokes to say one thing and mean another, and to say it with such subtlety that the imagined public of communalism would be excluded from the exchange, that makes joking an effective technology of intimacy on a multi-ethnic shop floor. As a game that references mutable symbols and anticipates the private interpretations of one's interlocutors (Wittgenstein 2001: 190), joking is a deep social play that supposes a listener's ability to recognise meanings that are never directly articulated, and to furthermore share in perspectives upon them (see Osella 1998 on the closely related principals of flirting). I suggest that whereas commentaries on corruption and relations of production reference the things which unite workers, and may be explicitly spoken of without fear of undermining the social relations of the shop floor, discussions of the identities which divide workers use a shared register of irony to implicitly restate cultural intimacy.

In a context of communal violence, where recollections of ethnic conflict, dishonour and offence are a motor of retaliation, silence on atrocity is a means of everyday peace (Heitmeyer 2009; Ring 2006; Varshney 2005; Williams 2007). However, in this context, silence constitutes neither avoidance nor the disavowal of guilt. On the contrary, I suggest that the Tata workforce speaks indirectly to the politics of communalism in everyday forms of profane sociality, which articulate an understanding of ethnicity that is distinct from the logics of ethnic violence. When judged as a form of irony and dissimulation, racist jokes may be understood as the tacit expression of values and ideas that run counter to their superficial content. In this sense, when exchanging humorous ethnic slurs with one another, Tata workers distance themselves from the more transparent public racism that answers insult with violence. I suggest that ethnic jokes create an intimate cultural space in Tata Motors, which inverts the logics of communal sanctity. While popular debates about the political economy of criminality reference a discursive repertoire of clearly distinct victims and aggressors, communal violence is a more epistemologically ambiguous object, in which antagonists are potentially to be found with the labour force itself. The value of ironic profanity in this context is that it defines communal antagonists in reference to their intolerance, rather than their ethnicity. This process helps to construct a shared political identity for the Tata workforce, vis-à-vis the destructive object of communal violence.

Intimacy, danger and joking

In two influential essays, Mary Douglas argues that the core of successful humour is the inversion of social order, such as the disrespect showed to one's mother-in-law in a narrative joke, the failure of a person to see the obvious misfortune which is about to befall them or the utterance of a profane word in an unexpected context. In environments where inversion is at least partly conceivable and acceptable to the social order, then a joke may be said to be 'funny' (Douglas 1975, 1996). However, where an audience perceives fear, anxiety and conflict in the social order, then humour on those topics may be rejected as harmful and insensitive (Douglas 1996: 6); in many contexts, this is the case with racist and sexist jokes.

Douglas' framing seems helpful to an understanding of joking on the Tata shop floor, which wilfully subverts the sacred objects of race

and religion for the purposes of humour. Where in Indian public life, the beard of a pious Muslim is an earnest precept that should not be mocked, on the Tata shop floor, this sacred symbol is profaned alongside Gandhi's birthday and Sandeep's ancestry. It is beyond the interest of this book to say whether this humour is funny in any objective sense. However, it is clear that the people who exchange ethnic jokes on the shop floor respond to them as though as though they were funny: it is here that Douglas' framing begins to break down. In a national context where communal violence has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people throughout the second half of the 20th century, one might assume that ethnic humour would be both dangerous and distasteful. The fact that ethnic jokes are socially productive in the workplace requires a fuller exploration of the role played by profanity in mediating precarious social relations.

Beneath the shared class experience that unites Tata workers in Jamshedpur is a gulf of ethnic distinction between low-caste and high-caste Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and numerous competing regional identities, which the communal atrocities of public life necessarily draw attention to. Bought together in public relationships of mutual dependency, inter-ethnic sociality is a potentially hazardous, yet unavoidable aspect of shop floor life. What this chapter argues is that the inter-ethnic relations of the workplace are mediated by a profanity that inverts the logics of communal conflict and effectively closes the social distance between colleagues. This argument can be pieced together through a rethinking of Douglas' insights on intimacy, profanity and danger.

For Douglas, the social logic of respect is contingent upon distance between actors, in an index which she calls the 'dignity register' (*ibid.*: 9). Put simply, the further the social distance between people, the less permitted are references to profanity and vulgarity – allusions to bodily functions being a particularly common area of respectful avoidance in most societies (*ibid.*; Elias 1978). For people that are closer to one another, taboos on profanity may be broken more freely, and the act of doing so is a sign of closeness (Borman 1988; Harlow 1997). Where strangers are bought together in precarious relationships of public sociality, such as those between colleagues or affines, the performative transgression of taboo may be integral to the cementing of intimacy. This is the heart of Radcliffe-Brown's classic analysis of joking between African affines, and may just as well be applied to pranks and consensual hazing rituals in schools, colleges and the military (Foster 2008; Howard 2006; Radcliffe-Brown 1940). In the Tata

Motors plant, the exchange of profanity is a similar performance of intimacy between potential strangers, and suggests that participants enjoy a degree of closeness that permits disrespect. As discussed in Wilson and Thomas's analyses of West Indian cultures of masculinity and 'slackness', profanity is a highly effective technology of intimacy (Thomas 2004; Wilson 1973). The emergent hierarchies of the labour force may be mediated by the critical corruption discourses of the shop floor. However, the ethnic distinctions within the workforce also require discursive negotiation in order for the class to maintain its coherence. The value of reciprocal joking in this environment is that it confronts difference while performativity suggesting a tolerant perspective upon it.

The conceptualisation of ethnic jokes as a technology of intimacy allows one to consider the implicit distinctions that jokers make between themselves and those outside of their immediate public. If a joking affine or colleague is one with whom one may safely invert the sacred, then beyond this intimacy is a more distant public for whom such inversions are fraught with danger. If Douglas' analysis of danger and vulgarity in joking is lacking, it is in the failure to recognise the plurality of publics that constitute social life, and the divergent humours that pertain to them. While in the national public of Indian communal politics, ethnic jokes are indeed dangerous, in the Tata Motors Plant, the very same humour is 'funny' and functional since it implicitly distances itself from spaces where it could never be so. Likewise, that which is acceptable on the profane space of the shop floor may well be unthinkable in the home (Ramaswami 2006: 218) – a fact which allows jokers to play ironically with the sanctity of their identity in one context, while still retaining its meaningful core elsewhere. The tendency to read workplaces as basic mirrors or synecdoches of society would suggest that prejudicial jokes primarily support and compound existing social inequalities (Lundberg 1969; Roy 1960; Yelvington 1996). On the contrary, I argue that in contexts of serious communal conflict, humour of this form articulates a permitted disrespect that suggests closeness. In this case, prejudicial and vulgar humour may articulate subversion of dominant social mores (for a comparison, see Seizer's 1997 analysis of conservative sexual humour in Tamil theatre). Furthermore, the style of profanity is itself an aesthetic that defines the community which articulates it. This style is an important means by which actors build intimate relationships, and encompasses a broad range of social exchanges. In the section that

follows, I consider the aesthetic of profanity in light of recent rethinkings of Bourdieu. I suggest that in their tendency to insult, degrade and undermine sacred things, Tata jokes articulate an aesthetic of profanity that styles a variety of shop floor exchanges, including, but not limited to, the sharing of jokes, insults, chewing tobacco and *ganja*. Building upon Cant (2012) and Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1993) modelling of the relationship between aesthetics and practice, I argue that profanity is a matrix of working-class sociality, which cuts across distinctions of ethnicity in Tata Motors.

Profanity, aesthetics and community

Each lunchtime after Sadaqat has eaten his food, and Sunil has read his newspaper from front to back, the men of the dispatch section make their way to the alleyway behind the break room to smoke ganja. Not everybody joins them: health-conscious Jaswinder and hardworking Rajiv prefer not to smoke. But from the assembled company of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus of all ages, most take part. The Tata smoking sessions are highly stylised and repeated each day with little variation. However, like the ethnic jokes of the break room, the smoking sessions are not quite what they seem to be. If communal ganja smoking in the dispatch section is a ritual, it is one that potentially profanes the sacred ideas and practices to which it is aesthetically related. By choosing to imbibe ganja in a style borrowed from Hindu ascetics, Tata smokers satirise and reshape symbols of sanctity. Clothed in the trappings of stylistic orthodoxy, high-caste and low-caste Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs deny communal restrictions by smoking with one another in the banal setting of the lunch hour. Furthermore, the practice is reckoned in binary terms against the consumption practices of Tata managers, whose ways of smoking, drinking and chewing stimulants are markedly different. I argue that this tendency to subvert the rules and values of sacred things, and to consume in what are locally regarded as distinctly working-class ways, is the expression of an aesthetic of profanity that characterises shop floor sociality. Whereas the preceding sections of this chapter have largely addressed the ironic *content* of such exchanges, here, I broaden the analysis to encompass their *style*, which creates intimacy through what Cant terms an 'aesthetic field' (Cant 2012).

In the alleyway behind the break room, a First Aid box sits beneath a low bench. The box contains an unbent clay *chillum* pipe of the type

favoured by Hindu ascetics; a *safi* cloth for wrapping around the cool end of the pipe; a wooden cutting board; a *Mezzaluna* knife improvised from a steel blade and plastic clamp; a length of blackened wire; a spool of twine and a pinch of the strong chewing tobacco known as *khaini* that is typical of the region. This is the dispatch section's smoking kit, which, much to the amusement of the group, has long since displaced its First Aid supplies. During a smoking session, the oldest man present arranges his tools in front of him on the floor, and collects pinches of locally bought ganja from his colleagues. He then cleans the ganja as he would while chewing tobacco: using the thumb of his right hand to reduce it to dust in the palm of his left. After removing stems and seeds, a few drops of thick, tar-filled water is squeezed from the moistened Safi cloth onto the ganja, which is kneaded into a paste before being finely chopped on the cutting board. Setting the ganja to one side, the process is repeated with a handful of khaini, before it is blended with ganja for smoking. Satisfied that his blend is even, the officiate carefully packs the chillum, before fashioning a disc-shaped ember from a tightly knotted length of twine impaled onto a length of wire. Touching the chillum to the ground, and then, the forehead, he blesses the pipe in the manner of a *Sadhu*,[5] before lighting it with the ember. Drawing deeply, he brings the pipe to life before passing it to his colleagues. The ritual form which Tata smoking sessions assume is significant. The careful cleaning of the ganja itself, the use of a clay chillum pipe and the blessing uttered by the officiate speak in the stylistic register of ritual smoking by Hindu religious ascetics (Burghart 1978, 1983; Gross 1979). Judged against this example, Tata smokers seem to consume ganja with ritual care and a tangible sanctity. Indeed, the sessions may well inspire feelings of awe and contemplation among participants that are entirely sincere, and it is not the place of this book to claim otherwise. Nonetheless, a social play is also taking place during the smoking sessions, which performatively undermines the sanctity that they seem to reference.

First, in a climate of relative cynicism where Tata workers are only marginally less sceptical of religious leaders than they are of politicians, one might regard the incorporation of religious symbolism into smoking sessions as a satire that playfully blurs the sacred and the profane. In the popular discourse of the workplace, for each genuine

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5 A wandering Hindu ascetic. See: Burghart 1978, 1983; Gross 1979.

Sadhu wandering barefoot on the path to enlightenment, a charlatan cheats the public. And for each Hindu religious leader driven by a desire to reform the souls of their followers, another abuses their power through financial and sexual indiscretions. In this environment, choosing to speak in the register of religiosity does not necessarily reference the value of the sacred. On the contrary, in a context of satire and cynicism, where workers furthermore enjoy the sensation of intoxication, the use of religious ritual may just as well reference the contradictions of worldly existence. Indeed, when the ritualised smoking sessions are closed at the end of the lunch hour, a number of participants see no reason to stop, and continue to smoke ganja cigarettes throughout the rest of the day. No particular honour is attached to one's ability to consume recklessly in this context (Mars 2003; Stewart 1997: 187–203), and individuals gain no reward, save the worldly pleasure which it gives them.

Second, if Tata workers satirise rituals in ways that highlight their relationship to worldly profanity, then the ritual itself is also profane. In comparison to the prohibitions on inter-caste contact that have traditionally informed Hindu life (Dumont 1980; Marriot 1968; Mayer 1966), the dispatch drivers readily pass their chillum between high-caste Brahmans and low-caste Yadavs. While it is true that inter-caste contact is an increasingly typical feature of Indian public life (Fuller 1996; Mayer 1996; Parry 1999, 2008; Strümpell 2008), it is significant that in the Tata smoking sessions, liberal sentiments are voiced in the midst of rituals themselves, and cannot help but satirise them. Furthermore, the incorporation of Muslims and Sikhs into smoking sessions potentially undermines their status as a Hindu ritual altogether. The world-renouncing Sadhu may break the rules of ritual pollution, and eat, smoke and drink with whomever they choose – for some ascetics, this is an integral aspect of their sanctity. However, unlike the Sadhu, the worldly Tata Motors worker does not sanctify spaces and events with their presence, and lacks the spiritual efficacy to turn profanity into sanctity. In their stylised subversion of sacred things, the Tata smoking sessions are most fundamentally a ritual of profanity. I argue that profanity is a *style*, or aesthetic field, that is locally associated with the shop floor culture of the industrial working class, albeit not exclusively so.

By destabilising sacred things, shop floor exchanges are an important matrix of sociality in a multi-ethnic work environment. Where the communal public takes offence to insult, ethnic jokes are tolerated

in the workplace. And where the rituals of Hinduism might elsewhere be regarded as fixed frameworks that relate to separation and hierarchy, in the workplace, rituals are more fluid practices, which allow inter-ethnic exchanges. As apparently dissimilar as the two exchanges may seem, they belong to a class-based aesthetic of profanity that values a willingness to cross boundaries, and extends to the telling of ethnic jokes, the violation of caste restrictions, a fondness for obscene sexual humour and homoerotic teasing (Ramaswami 2006). Certainly, Bourdieu's classic formulation of 'distinction' is reflected in the discourses of Tata's managers, and patterns of consumption and exchange may relate to social class (Bourdieu 1984). In the aesthetic modelling of the workplace, where the food of managers is sweet and skilfully prepared, the food of workers is hot and coarse. Where managers chew spiced preparations of betelnut after meals, workers chew strong, foul tasting khaini at any time of the day. While managers drink ganja on auspicious occasions blended into yoghurt, workers inhale lungfuls of thick smoke whenever the desire takes them.[6] However, I suggest that Cant's formulation of the 'aesthetic field' (Cant 2012) is a more productive framework for the analysis of Tata profanity than 'distinction', since the modelling allows for a more sophisticated appreciation of the stylistic content of the practices that Bourdieu discusses largely in terms of social structure (Born 2010: 177–79).

In a recent ethnography of an indigenous Mexican craft community, Cant (2012) considers how Bourdieu's concept of the social field (Bourdieu 1993) might be applied to the study of 'communities of practice' (Wood 2008: 15). Bridging the analytic schism between practice and aesthetics that endures in ethnographies of craft (Adams 2006; Aragon 1999; Colloredo Mansfeld 2002; Terrio 1999; Tice 1995; Weil 2004), Cant draws upon Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and the social field (Bourdieu 1977, 1993) to posit aesthetics as a relational space that is constantly reshaped by the actions of those who engage with it (Cant 2012: 34). Following Bourdieu, the working capital of any field are charisma and social connections (Bourdieu 1986); however, each field functions according to its own rules and definitions, and a mastery of one aesthetic does not confer legitimacy within another (Cant 2012: 34). It is for this reason that individuals who speak fluently in one register remain relatively powerless in environments that are not

6 These ideas are further explored in Chapter 6.

their own. For Cant, the aesthetic field is a dynamic social register that structures power relations and articulates social intimacy.

In the Tata Motors plant, the aesthetic field of profanity structures a sociality that is primarily inclusive. The field of profanity defames sacred things in ways that are incomprehensible and offensive to less intimate publics. Just as importantly, the finer points of this language are unintelligible to Tata managers, who regard the profanity of workers as a form of cultural poverty. It is true that like all social fields, profanity trades potentially divisive capital in the charisma and popularity of individuals (Bourdieu 1986). Some people, like Sandeep, may be particularly adept at conjuring obscene insults, while their colleagues fail to respond with the right timing or wit. Others may possess greater degrees of the skills necessary to officiate rituals. However, the aesthetic field of profanity in Tata Motors is largely non-divisive. While there may be inconsistencies between workers' abilities to perform the language of profanity, profane exchanges undermine the social inequalities that labour ethnographies have claimed are reinforced by joking (Yelvington 1996). Assuming that aesthetic practice shapes the environments in which it occurs (Appadurai 1996: 182; Cant 2012: 34; Wood 2008: 15), I suggest that the aesthetic field of profanity in Tata Motors is an intimate and inclusive register, the speaking of which structures and determines the sociality of the workplace. The aesthetic field approach offers an understanding of workplace exchanges that are sensitive to their ability to indirectly articulate values in ways that make communities of individuals. In political terms, what the aesthetic of profanity articulates is a distance from the social logics of communalism; to borrow Wilk's formula, aesthetics enable actors to express a position of 'common difference' from their antagonists (Wilk 2004: 89)

Conclusion

In his analysis of African joking relationships, Radcliffe-Brown describes marriage as a moment of contradiction, where two families with potentially conflicting interests are thrust into enduring social relations with one another (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 197). The humorous insults that characterise the sociality of affines reference their evident distance, while also establishing a principle that one should take no offence to insult. Speaking across several generations of anthropologists, Radcliffe-Brown might still shed light on the permitted

disrespect of ethnic jokes on the Tata shop floor. One's colleagues, like one's affines, are, after all, potentially strangers, with whom one must establish the right degree of distance and intimacy. However, moving beyond functional analyses of the joking relationship (Ramaswami 2006; Yelvington 1996), I suggest that humour is something more than the rules and social structures which surround it. Jokes have both content that may be only indirectly articulated, and a style which relates to community aesthetics; an appreciation of both is necessary to grasp that which is counter-intuitive in joking relationships, and to understand the significance of the way in which one speaks.

This chapter makes two conclusions. First, that profane exchanges on the Tata shop floor have an ironic content that implicitly articulates a position on communal politics. The profanity of ethnic insults and ritual subversion are a performative statement that the workplace functions on principles that are distinct from the communal tropes of offence, retaliation and conservatism. Where communal politics is a social field that never forgets, never forgives and values the fixity of the past, the workplace can be seen to operate on more flexible and tolerant principles that are rooted firmly in the present. Here, the most opaque and contradictory statements are significant, and I suggest that irony belongs in the conceptual canon of political anthropology, where it might inform our understanding of how communities are formed through values and ideas that may not be directly articulated at all. The importance of this point to the argument of the book, is that everyday practices of ironic joking allow some of the most conspicuous and potentially threatening distinctions within the Tata labour force to be confronted and politically rationalised. While systemic corruption models are an important expression of political consciousness, they do not exist in a discursive vacuum. The subtle language of communal tolerance complements the discursive proposition that Tata workers are the shared victims of external violence and exploitation. Second, I argue that social exchanges should be considered with greater attention to their aesthetic field (Cant 2012). I suggest that aesthetics are an important technology by which social values are articulated and communities bounded – a fact that has been under appreciated in studies of joking (Radcliffe-Brown 1940; Ramaswami 2006; Yelvington 1996). By considering the aesthetic of jokes, humour might be placed in its proper social context, as one expression of a meaningful genre of exchanges. Here, I suggest how the style of joking and commensality shapes a shared class identity, in a context of communal tension and social transformation.

6

CONTINUITY AND THE CASUALISATION OF LABOUR

The systemic corruption discourse of the Tata shop floor suggests a critical explanation for the casualisation of labour. The core of this discourse is a concern with the mechanics of political economy that focuses upon relations between social elites. While the discourse professes to explain negotiations of power, it says very little about the motivations behind them, and assumes a rather uncomplicated principal of self-interest for its class antagonists. The purpose of this chapter is to place the systemic corruption model within its proper discursive context, by situating it against the managerial counter-discourses that offer alternative explanations for the casualisation of labour. These discourses express something more reflexive than naked self-interest, and suggest important continuities between the current and former employment regime. Such continuities allow the transformation of the city and its labour regimes to not only be explained, but also implemented.

Managerial explanations for the erosion of employment security reference compulsion from global economic forces, and a deeply entrenched discourse of corporate paternalism. The latter idea suggests that company managers are engaged in a *longue durée* project of regional civilisation, in which the culling of coarse and unproductive workers from the labour force is an act of social improvement. These ideas rely heavily upon fixed ethnic stereotypes that contrast the behaviour of predominantly Bengali managers with their largely Bihari employees. Like the systemic corruption discourse, these ideas serve to rationalise the tensions and contradictions of working life for the people that express them. Principally, the contention that corporate policy is continuous with the developmental ambitions of the company's founder allows managers to positively identify with their

work despite allegations of corruption and self-interest. Expanding upon this concept, this chapter considers how discursive and practical continuities between casual labour and the traditional company town model serve to structure a process of social change.

Corporation as civilisation: 'soft capitalism' and the company town

One morning in March 2006, I arrived at the office of the Head of Corporate Communications and Social Responsibility in the Tata Telcon construction equipment plant. I had come to meet Paul Chatterjee, a Bengali Catholic who had worked in Telcon since 1975 and was responsible for the plant's public relations and community outreach programmes. Mr Chatterjee was an important and well-respected man, and I considered myself fortunate to have been granted time with him. Chatterjee's office was small, sparsely furnished and fastidiously tidy. The walls were covered with photographs, leaflets, posters, proverbs, and handwritten quotations from songs, poems and religious texts. Religious iconography from the Hindu, Sikh and Christian traditions was also particularly well-represented. Dozens of such items had been arranged with meticulous precision on a large notice board that filled an entire wall. In keeping with the prevailing order of the room, Chatterjee's personal appearance was immaculate – his shirt crisp and dazzlingly white, his trousers creased to a knife's edge and his short hair neatly combed. I noticed that his computer had prominently displayed on its screen a poetic work in progress. The text began 'O God, O Tata', evoking the Tata corporation for whom he worked, and went on to develop into what can accurately be termed a corporate psalm, offering praise to both God and company. Another wall was taken up by a large white board displaying an esoteric handwritten chart, accompanied by cryptic diagrams reminiscent of those found in particle physics. This was rendered in neat red, black and green handwriting, and illustrated the tenets of a philosophy that drew freely on Vedic Hinduism, millennial Christianity and self-help jargon. The chart was titled 'The Holistic Personality in the Third Millennium'.

Gesturing to the board, Chatterjee exclaimed, 'You have never seen anything like this before!', and began to elaborate upon a spiritual and social thesis that he had been formulating since 1985. In describing his long process of enlightenment, Chatterjee cast himself in the mode of Indian religious ascetics, and compared his place in human

civilisation to that of Aristotle, Stephen Hawking and Bertrand Russell. He believed that he had pioneered a new mode of thought which synthesised spiritual and civic concerns, and it was in the Tata Company town of Jamshedpur that his model was to be realised, imprinted on the intellects, souls and working bodies of his employees.

That Chatterjee should embrace such a broad discursive framework in his professional life is not surprising, since his mission in Jamshedpur builds upon generations of self-avowed corporate paternalism. For a century, the company town model has provided Tata workers with lifetime employment and access to an array of benefits. The same model has allowed managers to consider their work in terms of a benevolent, missionary industrialisation, and local discourses on managerial authority have often assumed a moral, spiritual and intellectual form (Fraser 1919; Keenan and Sorsby 1945; Pillai 1923). However, in the previous two decades, the company welfare packages that would once have legitimated such aggrandisement have all but disappeared. As much as Chatterjee suggests the centrality of corporate management to the moral, spiritual and intellectual life of the city, the paternalistic structures of permanent employment and company welfare have been locally replaced by the types of flexible labour regimes that are typical of global neo-liberal capitalism, potentially signalling the end of the company town model altogether, and raising the question of how discourses such as Chatterjee's should be considered in light of flexible accumulation (Harvey 1987).

It is tempting to place sole analytic focus on the rapidly changing conditions of company town employment, such as the lowering of wages and the decline of job security. This approach is consistent with that adopted by comparative studies of flexible accumulation, which tend to stress the ruptures, rather than continuities, of neo-liberal change. Such approaches frame neo-liberalism as a thoroughly distinctive body of ideas and practices, characterised by the transformation of economic and social relations (Carbonella and Kasmir 2008; Freeman 1998; Genda 2005; Kasmir 1999; Kosugi 2008; Mathur 1998; Thrift, 2005; Wilson 1999). The Tata case certainly involves a great many neo-liberal ruptures that constitute civic crises for those that experience them, and the greater part of this book is an investigation of them. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to argue that neo-liberalism is possessed of wholly new and global discourses that displace existing local values. Rather, this chapter explores the idea that while flexible accumulation may transform relations of

production in incredible ways, this transformation relies upon a necessary level of continuity with the local discourses and structures that precede it. It is in this context that ideas such as Paul Chatterjee's present themselves as key means through which neo-liberal change is locally structured and understood.

In the Tata workplace, I argue that the moral and cultural discourses of the company town serve to actively legitimate, rationalise and structure flexible accumulation. For managers engaged in the casualisation of their workforces, historic languages of paternalism legitimate their endeavours, while long-standing discourses of cultural superiority allow for the discursive construction of idle permanent employees – 'deadwood' whom casualisation is believed to trim from the workforce. For casual workers themselves, working life is similarly structured by values continuous with the company town past. The systemic corruption discourse – while critical – nonetheless, judges social decline against an idealised model of company town employment. The bulk of non-permanent workers are recruited from traditional Tata families, and harbour ambitions to rejoin the company's 'aristocracy of labour', making them an especially stable and easily disciplined casual workforce (Harris 1986; Hobsbawm 1984; Lenin 1996: 7–8; Moorhouse 1978, 1981). The marketisation of company town employment, which appears at first sight to be a clear rupture with the past, in fact, relies upon the appropriation of ideas, values and structures that have a decidedly longer historical trajectory.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the casualisation of Jamshedpur's industrial workforce proceeds in ways that are highly structured, and which exploit workers' commitment and dependency on formal sector employment. With this in mind, flexible accumulation cannot be said to wholly displace pre-existing relations of production in favour of new and distinctly neo-liberal practices of labour. A discursive and social continuity exists between the paternalism of previous years and the apprenticeships of the present day, which enables casual labour to operate in regulated and dependable forms. However, as profitable and well-fashioned as this flexible accumulation may be, the loss of company welfare programmes for the bulk of employees, the lowering of wages and the answering allegations of corruption present a significant challenge to the once inviolable Tata self-image. In response, company managers did not discuss the politics of labour in reference to a disembedding pragmatism. Rather, they established continuity between their current endeavours and the Tata ideal, by referencing a

series of historical discourses founded on corporate paternalism and durable ethnic stereotypes.

Chatterjee's theory, 'The Holistic Personality in the 3rd Millennium', was based on three millennial stages, beginning with the birth of Christ. Each millennium entails a different type of cosmology for those that live within it, is endowed with a gender and a polarity. The first millennium is male and is the age of Energy, 'Yahweh' and Determinism. The second is female, is the age of Matter, 'Ying-Yang' and Relativism. The third, and current, millennium is without gender and is the age of Fusion, 'The Just World Order' and Holisticism. Table 6.1 reproduces Chatterjee's chart, with original spelling and formatting.

On asking Chatterjee what it was that he did in his work, other than liaise with individuals such as myself, he told me that it was his mission to help develop the villages and slums of 'primitive tribals'. He guided me through a photo album, conveniently to hand on his desk, of photographs titled with neat printed labels. They showed company initiatives in which Telcon's machinery was put to good use, mainly

Table 6.1 Paul Chatterjee's chart: 'The Holistic Personality in the Third Millennium'

Understanding 'The Holistic Personality in the 3rd Millennium'		
1st M		
	Determination level - 'Nirmay Sthiti' - Extrovertic	Seperateness (election) – individuality (Personal) - Foundation State (will + desire: 'Sansthapansthur') - Soul X heart = 'I am'
2nd M		
	Action level - 'Karma Stithi' - Introvertic	Oneness (evolution) - Facilitation State (thought + word + deed: Sahayak Sthar) - Soul X Mind = 'self'
3rd M		
	Personality level - 'Vyaktitwa Sthiti' - Holistic	Completeness (Synthesis) – team (Creative) - State of Whole (order: 'poornasthar') - 'I am' X 'Self' = 'We'

sinking borewells in the villages surrounding the city. Extending his arm across the desk and grasping his hand downwards, he said:

> We have reached out of the factory into the home. The community is not just one stakeholder in the company, it is the most important element of the company.

Chatterjee believed that the (re)unification of work and home would be a key component of the 'third millennium', along with the reuniting of man and god. As part of this unifying remit, Tata had mandated him to organise classes at company secondary schools, where he could elaborate his theories to the children of permanent workers. Attendance at these classes was compulsory for all pupils, and he had last held such an event six months previously. The pupils' feedback forms were stacked in a neat pile on the corner of Chatterjee's desk. The class was aimed at 17- and 18-year-olds, and had proceeded uninterrupted for a full three hours. The feedback forms that I read showed the pupils to be tired, and bewildered by the details of 'The Holistic Personality'. Several also queried why they were being taught such things when they had more important study that needed to be done. On being asked to explain the goals of the programme, Chatterjee held out his open palm and replied cryptically, 'Five fingers. The energy dissipates'. He then made a fist, 'Now there is solid power'.

He went on to elaborate that the current separation of the worker and the company was previously less pronounced, and that at one time, the two had worked together in a productive utopian harmony. Chatterjee explained that once there had been a relationship between worker and company that was one of father and son, but that 'education' and other undefined social changes had undermined this relationship. He called my attention to the state's peoples, arguing that previously they were placid and easily controlled, but that with education and political agitation, they have become rebellious and violent. The company now had a moral imperative to civilise them and control their impetuous tendencies, which would necessarily involve bringing such individuals under the wing of managerial authority. Drawing on the Judaeo-Christian discourse of the fall from grace, he claimed that at one time, the state's people

> worshipped birds, trees, the sky, the fish in the water. But nature is docile, so they were also docile and innocent. With

> knowledge has come the soul, and they realise they have choices. Now what will they do? They will rape, they will loot, they will kill.

Whilst a growing body of literature has identified the processes by which religious authority attempts to access the rewards of neo-liberal capitalism (Bornstein 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Wiegele 2004), Paul Chatterjee was engaged in the converse endeavour of appropriating a wide range of religious and social ideologies in a broadly corporate project. Crucially for Chatterjee's model, in the third millennium, capitalist corporations, rather than religious institutions, could attain positions of social and moral authority upon mastering diverse ethical and civic lessons. Chatterjee's theories may seem idiosyncratic, especially considering the context in which they were expressed. However, it would be a mistake to dismiss Chatterjee as an eccentric, or to view his philosophising as an unprecedented deviation from his professional remit. Within the walls of the Tata Motors plant, in which Chatterjee's smaller Telcon works was based, he was widely regarded as a serious and capable individual. Outside of the plant, he facilitated important linkages between the company and the national media, between Tata and the town's citizenry, and just as importantly, between the uncertain present and the idealised past. Furthermore, his modelling of the 'Holistic Personality' has an evident ancestry in the company's former paternalism.

Chatterjee's 'Holistic Personality' posits the world's people to labour under immorality, confusion and sectarianism, and suggests the benign authority of industrial capitalism to embody a solution to many of these ills. Certainly, this modelling finds its analogues in what has been termed an emerging 'soft capitalism', by which neo-liberal corporations engage in ever more determined, and yet, highly metaphorical, means of 'knowing' themselves (Thrift 2005). In the soft capitalism model, neo-liberalism is presented as a peculiarly unique and intrinsically modern phenomenon, which deploys the ideologies of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in novel ways. However, the tendency to read such ideologies as new and primarily neo-liberal constructions is misleading. Corporate capitalism is presently judged to be 'soft' only by virtue of its comparison to the 'hard' market discourses that emerged from the financial sector during the 1970s and 1980s. The briefness of this historical comparison yields understandings that are analytically limited. Judged against the longer history of

industrialisation, 'soft' discourses such as CSR are not new and distinct ways of knowing capitalism; they are, rather, a recent resurgence of a far more significant historical trend, which has sought to align paternalism and philanthropy with the interests of corporations since the industrial revolution (Cunningham and Innes 1998; Jordan 1959; Owen 1965). What Chatterjee's ideas express is a discourse buried deep within the foundations of industrial capitalism.

Although industrialisation was most certainly characterised by an alienation of workers from the control of their labour, and a certain attenuation of 'work' and 'home' (Thompson 1967), the process was not one in which social concerns fell entirely away from production. While Polanyi's seemingly prophetic sketch of an emerging neo-liberalism is rightly influential, the suggestion that the industrial revolution constituted a disembedding of production from social relations requires more critical attention (Polanyi 1957). The emergence of industrial capitalism was heavily characterised by the development of legitimating ideologies of corporate paternalism and elite philanthropy (Beynon 1984; Chakrabarty 1983). The prevalent institution of the company town placed these discourses at the heart of production.

Neo-liberalism's attempts to construct itself as a civilising force have been the subject of a good deal of attention, which has generally sought to emphasise the historical distinctiveness of this development (Hopkins 2007; Prahalad 2006; Zadek 2007). However, discourses such as Chatterjee's do not appropriate a particularly modern language; they are the articulation of characteristically industrial capitalist ideologies. These ideologies retain the capacity to perform important, legitimating functions for the politics of labour, even amidst transformations in the relations of production. However, the modelling of paternalism relies upon more than the construction of corporate benevolence. It must also construct the objects of that authority in a durable and compelling fashion – a process that is potentially problematic vis-à-vis the disappearance of permanent employees. The construction of 'the Tata worker' in these discourses, therefore, draws upon ideas that outreach the politics of labour, by referencing fixed cultural prejudices that express the ethnic divisions between mainly Bihari workers and mainly Bengali managers.

Paternalism and the unruly child

For Tata managers, paternalistic notions of their employees as the childlike recipients of pastoral care were incredibly widespread and

were frequently used to undermine the validity of complaints regarding casual wages and job security. A subsuming character of the 'permanent worker' emerged in these discourses that was Bihari and childlike, and therefore, considered prone to impetuousness and a lack of insight.

Bengali Tata Motors manager, Pramod Kumar outlined that the Tata Motors plant was engaged in a necessary programme of casualisation that would continue for the foreseeable future, without which the company would more than likely collapse. This was a process that, Pramod argued, was not understood by workers and others with a less nuanced grasp of business. With a directness particular to himself, he noted: 'The fault of the matter is that we have 3,500 contract workers. They all want to be regularised. This isn't going to happen'.[1] He went on to say that the company had been driven towards the casualisation of its workforce by increased market competition, but that they were currently under ill-advised pressure from three main areas to regularise their employees. He identified 'pressure' as coming first from the central government, whom he described as 'turning the screw'. Here, he referenced the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970, implicitly (and perhaps not fully consciously) confirming the legally tenuous position of the company on the issue. Second, he viewed the company as under pressure from 'splinter unions', such as the Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union, whom he identified by name, and third, from workers themselves. Here, he referred to 'charismatic' individuals in the workforce who might seek to stimulate unrest. He characterised worker-activists and splinter unions as troublemakers, and intimated that they were working short-sightedly in opposition to a far wider programme of national development. Pramod invited me to consider a company poster that he had designed four years earlier, which illustrated the importance of team work to the nation and company's future. The poster showed a lattice-work globe, at the bottom of which, several individuals milled about aimlessly. Overshadowing these isolated and feckless characters stood a human pyramid of more industrious persons; the topmost figure reached out of the globe, towards an

1 The manager in question defined casual workers in reference to the company's categories of: 1) Permanent, 2) Temporary and 3) Contract. The category of 'Contract', which the manager refers to in this statement, identifies the highest category of casual labour (/6) and does not include the various grades of apprentices or the lower grades of casual work (/0), which comprise the children of employees.

industrial worker sitting atop the structure in a hard hat, diligently working at a lathe. However, Pramod's more rationalistic justifications of casual labour were seldom presented by his managerial peers without the subjective legitimation of paternal authority and Bihari workers' cultural poverty.

During a lengthy discussion on health and safety, the chief Industrial Relations manager of one of Tata Motors' divisions, Gourav, suggested that he was engaged in socialising his workers into the culture of safe practice, claiming that they were 'like kindergarten children' and must be told a simple thing several times before learning. To his credit, Gourav, an affable and well-spoken Bengali in his early fifties, had recently put some considerable personal effort into ensuring that the workers' toilet blocks were refurbished, and then, regularly cleaned. Unlike many managers, he also made an effort to make daily personal inspections of the shop floor. However, on this particular occasion, the more benign aspects of his ideas were undermined by his embarking on a discussion resplendent with a racist discourse on Bengali cultural superiority. He claimed that Biharis were usually the most troublesome employees, and that they were constantly requesting transfer to carry out easier work, as well as being quick to complain about their lack of regularisation. Gourav's characterisation extended into a wider discourse of 'low culture', in which I was informed that Biharis spit on the street, are always seen shouting to one another and generally make an unnecessary amount of noise. By contrast, Bengalis were presented as 'quiet, softly spoken people', who are cultured and have a high level of self-control. This, Gourav told me, explained their success and resourcefulness. Echoing Chatterjee's ideas of paralysing communalism, Biharis were said to cleave to the types of narrow regional and caste loyalties that have no place in modern industry and which serve only to undermine the productivity of the workplace. 'A Bihari will ask always, "Are you a Bihari?", then "what is your caste?", "what is your region?"'

Gourav claimed that predominantly Bihari workplaces such as Tata Motors were characterised by lackeyism, in which more forceful workers made attempts to construct themselves as leaders, while others sought their favour through flattery and communal loyalty. Gourav readily identified the source of the perennial distinctions between Bengali managers and unruly Bihari workers, which he claimed were expressions of uneven acculturation. Bengalis had a natural affinity for rational authority, based on their history as a Gangetic plains culture, in which the farming of rice left people free of labour for most of the year,

and therefore, better predisposed to the development of cultural sophistication. This sophistication extended to broader aesthetic distinctions:

> In their [Bengali's] food you will always find something sweet. In Bihar and Bangladesh they will always use a lot of chillies. And Bangladeshis will eat anything. Like this small snail that you get in ponds that the ducks eat. We will not eat that. And in their [Bengali's] dress, you will see they will wear this Kurta, nicely ironed.[2]

The claim that unruly and dissatisfied Biharis manifest a cultural handicap which is peculiar to themselves, emerges from a broader discursive framework that has underpinned elite Bengali politics since the mid-19th century (Banerjee 2006). Gourav's suggestion that Bengali culture is the standard bearer of Indian civilisation relates to a common national perception that Bengalis have made disproportionate contributions to the political, intellectual and artistic life of the subcontinent – a perception routinely reproduced in regional histories (Chakrabarty 1989). It is the historical antecedents of this discourse that make its use as a matrix of authority so powerful. Judged against the discursive terms of history, the shortcomings and poverties of Bihari workers are seen to persist beyond the structural reformations of the shop floor. Furthermore, since the discourse of Bengali acculturation rests implicitly on the perceived cultural poverty of ethnic antagonists, such models are an especially durable means of rationalising casual labour. The binaries of the model enable the reification of one's own authority as rational and benign, while retaining the capacity to emotively denigrate the cultures of others. As is evident in the managerial discourses discussed, the rationalising of casual labour involves both of these processes. When ordering the terms of a new and potentially dislocating employment regime, one might say that managers find cultural caricatures 'good to think with' (Levi-Strauss 1966).

Company paternalism translates on the shop floor into a discursive coding of difference between management and worker, in which Bengali managers are calm, intelligent, resourceful, honest, and diligent. This is contrasted to Bihari workers who are loud, impetuous, close-minded, partisan, and lazy. The paternal relationship of worker

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2 Knee-length collarless cotton shirt.

and manager is predicated upon specific relations of employment, and as such, is potentially unstable in a climate of casualisation. However, when supported by the historically grounded coding of Bihari inferiority and Bengali superiority, paternalism acquires strength. Drawing support from more fixed regional and caste identities, managers can claim fatherly authority over Bihari employees even while not fulfilling many of their traditional parental duties.

'Deadwood' on the shop floor

The idle and disruptive Bihari permanent worker was integral to the legitimating discourses of Tata managers, who saw such employees as undermining the company's productivity and progress. As such, it is not surprising that casualisation should be regarded as a curative measure for the deficiencies of the production process, since these workers can be progressively replaced with their more vulnerable and easily disciplined sons. One Tata manager, Ashok, argued that casualisation had resulted in a sharp rise in plant efficiency, by virtue of the early retirement of large numbers of older workers who 'don't do much work and are not productive for the company' – workers who he termed 'deadwood'. Despite his own critical assessment of the relationship between criminality and casualisation in Tata industries, Ashok went on to describe how the threat of redundancy prompted casual workers of all ethnicities to work harder than their 'deadwood' cohorts.

While it would be easy to dismiss the 'deadwood' discourse as a prejudicial slur, as a model, it is, nonetheless, grounded in some fact. During my time on the shop floor of Tata Motors, it was indeed obvious that standards of work discipline were notably higher among the casual workforce. The attempts by management to instil tighter time-keeping and efficiency in permanent workers were sporadic and inconsistent, and the ability of a given manager to do so was largely dependent on their personal relationship with the workers in question. Similar forms of work discipline are a characteristic feature of much Indian industrial ethnography, and in Tata Motors, it would seem that practices of 'shirking' were the preserve of permanent, rather than casual, workers (Parry 1999a).

It is notable that the company has not yet pruned back all of its deadwood, and I am inclined to conclude that regardless of the prevalence of managerial discourses, permanent workers continue to perform an

important function on the shop floor, albeit one that is only indirectly productive. Some permanent employees may well exhibit a disregard for productivity, and indeed, they have little practical need to work harder. However, what the small number of securely employed workers provides to the shop floor is something akin to the legitimating discourses of management – a productive continuity with the past. For casual employees, the status, power and security of the plant's deadwood enable the discursive maintenance of the company town ideal, and ensure a good degree of stability among a flexible workforce who hope to join them in the aristocracy of labour. The following discussion interrogates why it is that 'deadwood' may work in the manner that they do, and what their role is in the wider processes of flexible accumulation.

As described in the previous chapter, permanently employed Sandeep was known for his gregarious manner, as well as his skill in trading explicit, often sexual, insults. Conforming to the Bihari proto male ideal, he was almost always to be seen chewing tobacco and/or smoking ganja quite openly in the plant, even while driving. In testament to his vices, he had an oral tumour the size of a golf ball that visibly bulged beneath his right cheek. Although his friends teased him about his oriental features, such an assertion was more than mediated by his mastery of the matrixes of Bihari masculinity.

One lunchtime at 12:00 p.m., 15 minutes after he was supposed to have returned to work, Sandeep began making a ganja cigarette in the shop floor's break room. Unlike the division's other ganja smokers, who clustered in the adjacent alleyway with their chillum, Sandeep chose to take such pleasures publicly, in plain sight of the shift's unpopular foreman. Shortly after Sandeep had drawn his first lungful of smoke, the foreman came to the break room and asked for someone to tow a load of completed truck cabs to the other side of the plant. No one answered him. He began trying to wake the mainly sleeping men by pleading, 'Get up, get up! It's 12 o'clock. Let's go, it's our work'. Sandeep's typically boisterous response was to call the manager a '*Matachodh*' ('Motherfucker'). He told the foreman that he was busy smoking a cigarette and that he needed a rest. Did he want him to go out there tired on his tractor and cause an accident, to kill someone? He concluded, 'At the moment, there won't be any work in Plant 1 [the Chassis Division of the plant]. I'll go at half twelve'. Sandeep continued in his previous endeavours, figuratively and literally blowing smoke in the face of his supervisor. Ultimately, all of the

assembled permanent workers returned to work at 12:20 p.m., some heavily intoxicated, after nearly a two-hour lunch break. In contrast, the assembled apprentices had refrained from smoking in the foreman's presence, and had returned to their posts shortly after his arrival.

The company currently claims to favour a form of self-imposed work discipline in which behaviour such as Sandeep's is worker-regulated by 'Self Directed Teams' (SDTs), who are also encouraged to suggest minor innovations to the work process. Each SDT is assessed monthly on a number of criteria, which include the number of work process improvements they have proposed, material waste reduction, met or missed production targets, and 'morale', which is measured by the team's number of unapproved absences. The 'Man of the Month' in each section is the one who has scored best in these criteria and receives INR 1,000 as reward. However, regardless of the evident skill and experience that permanent workers invariably possessed, like Sandeep, few held the title of 'Man of the Month' in any great esteem.

One imagines that management's intention is to stimulate workers towards a Taylorist culture of rationalised efficiency, healing the divide between the interests of company and worker, which caused Paul Chatterjee so much consternation (Taylor 1947). However, during the period of research, I failed to see the development of this ideal. Although permanent workers strongly identified with the company town model, almost all professed a marked disinterest in the efficiency of the labour process, the productive capacity of the plant and the products produced therein. While presumably some workers actually were participating in the SDT programme, I never heard the scheme mentioned again, and even among the more conscientious apprentices, many men were unaware of what the term meant. Although the deadwood model's suggestion that workers' shortcomings were a distinctive cultural handicap of Biharis is evidently based on prejudice, the model's proposition that older permanent employees work less hard than their younger casual workmates is not pure fiction.

Based on research in the United States, Michael Burawoy observed that modern factory industries secure productivity not through simple and overt alienation, but via the workforce's internalisation of the production process. The ability of a worker to produce more and faster must be seen to lead to defined rewards, such as free time and bonuses. Workers in Burawoy's analysis, therefore, approach labour as a game, which can, of course, be 'won' if one follows the rules (Burawoy 1979). 'Playing the game' may be as much about engaging in dominant

work culture and reducing boredom as it is about attaining economic rewards; however, the net result is beneficial to production (*ibid*.: 85). In Tata Motors, 'playing the game', for men such as Sandeep, was not based around mastering the production process. Rather, if there were any skills to be mastered in order to reduce boredom and improve one's standing among peers, they were located in the less immediately productive spheres of trading insults and blending chewing tobacco in the palms of one's hand while driving. The notion of a mode of production which secures its goals through the hegemony of unconscious workers is perhaps not useful here, since the culture of the Tata workplace is so strongly marked by a manifestly low level of work discipline and a critique of the relations of production as corrupt.

For Burawoy's Chicago factory workers, the mode of production is essentially stable and the activities of the people that control it do not occupy a significant portion of workers' imaginations. Nor are the owners of the means of production subject to denunciations of moral and legal dereliction. In a stable and accountable environment such as this, one may assume that a given amount of effort results in a predictable and quantifiable degree of reward. In Jamshedpur, a hegemonic production regime of this particular form cannot entirely prosper, not only due to the practical lack of production bonuses, but in response to workers' perception that the mode of production is an unstable one, subject to drastic and rapid upheavals of its employment regimes that have negative consequences for its subjects. Furthermore, the workplace is not an essentially rational space in Jamshedpur. The Tata shop floor is characterised by moralising discourses of corruption, paternalism and cultural essentialism.

In Tata Motors, production occurs, then, on the basis of more than simple economistic logics of effort and reward, and involves a discursive and ideological interaction between workers and managers, of which the discourses of company civilisation, cultural prejudices and charges of corruption are instances. Set within the wider search for a receding company town ideal, Tata workers' relationship to production is better understood in terms of a negotiation with ideological notions of citizenship, morality and class identity, and to use the terms of Burawoy's later work, the wider 'politics of production' (Burawoy 1985). Despite discursive emphases upon Self-Directed Teams, Tata profitability does not rest upon instilling workers with an innovative identification with the production process. Rather, it rests decisively upon the peculiarly stable casualisation process itself, which has

achieved success in two significant areas – the lowering of the company's total wage bill and the erosion of collective action. For company managers, discourses of paternalism and cultural prejudice legitimate, and at times, obscure this dynamic, while the 'deadwood' themselves perform an unexpected role in stabilising casual labour.

If flexible accumulation of the Tata model constructs cheaper and more efficient labour, the question remains as to why the plant continues to employ any of its permanent workers at all. In answer to this question, I argue that the 'deadwood' are not merely a fading remnant of a Fordist past, but rather, perform an effective role in the casual labour system. If management testimony is to be believed, casualisation and de-unionising curtail the greater excesses of shirking for non-permanent workers. However, this cheap and compliant workforce is only advantageous if it remains reliable. Casual Tata workers are not a 'footloose proletariat' who hope for little more than wages (Breman 1996b). If this were so, then the discipline which managers are able to wield over them would be diminished. It is not simply the threat of redundancy that compels apprentices to return to work while Sandeep smokes; it is also the possibility that with the good favour of their foreman, they might someday join him.

The permanent workers, with their right to company homes, benefits and the security of national labour legislation, are the embodiment of the hope that the Tata town model still functions. Without Sandeep on the shop floor, this proposition would be untenable and one could venture that wards might indeed seek employment opportunities elsewhere, or even react to Tata industrial capitalism in radical and unexpected ways.[3] As noted in Gramsci's analysis of Fordism, the profitability of the corporative trend depends, in part, upon the disenfranchisement of certain sections of the workforce. The potential for social disorder that this tendency raises among the insecurely employed is effectively lessened through the maintenance of certain minimum standards for those who enjoy permanence, suggesting an attainable ideal to be strived for (Gramsci 1971: 294). The systemic corruption discourse, then, has decisive limits on its capacity to inspire rebellion and social change. The discourse essentially articulates frustration at the decline of company town paternalism, and is expressed

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3 It is potentially significant that the Maoist guerrilla insurgency, which enjoys a good deal of support in the rural areas surrounding the city, is presently a less relevant feature of Jamshedpur's political life.

by a community which holds the somewhat contradictory belief that regularisation is forthcoming.

Conclusion

Like many of his managerial colleagues, Paul Chatterjee initially seems hard to situate in a neo-liberal economy that contradicts many of the principles by which he understands himself. In a material world ostensibly dictated by the market, Chatterjee aspires to an authority that is transcendental. In a labour regime where the bonds between employer and employee can be dissolved at almost no notice, Chatterjee claims corporate fatherhood. Amidst an increased focus on productivity, he is as much concerned with the culture and morality of his workers as he is with their output. What is most significant about this material is that these tensions do not erode Chatterjee's faith in the company project; neither do they impact upon his ability to order the daily mechanics of a casual labour regime. On the contrary, it is the ongoing reference to the durable and fixed models of corporate paternalism, cultural superiority and Tata benevolence that allows Tata managers to enact and rationalise the demands of a changing workplace. Flexible accumulation in the Tata Company town continues to engage productively, and even deliberately, with the discourses and values of a rapidly receding way of life.

The structuring mechanisms of flexible accumulation in Jamshedpur are still rooted in a paternalistic employment regime, and furthermore, exploit the expectations and constraints of a historically permanent urban workforce. The peculiar Tata casual labour system invests a degree of stability in non-permanent work, and affords a congruence of class interests among apparently dissimilar types of employees. Even the 'deadwood', who seem to linger on the shop floor from the industrial past, can be said to be inculcated within the emerging casual labour economy. The distinctiveness of this data makes it of empirical importance to the existing ethnography of casual labour. However, there is a wider conclusion to be drawn from this material, which is important to our understanding of the historicity of neo-liberalism; regardless of the apparent distinctiveness of structures and ideologies with which it is associated, the neo-liberal project relates productively to seemingly anachronistic discourses and values.

Countering the political–economic systemic corruption discourse of Tata workers, the ideological repertoire of managers draws heavily

upon discourses of corporate paternalism and cultural superiority. It is the association of these discourses with the legitimacy and successes of the past that allows them to be productively applied to the tensions and uncertainties of the present. Faced with the task of rationalising a rapidly changing working life, Tata managers refer themselves to moral and cultural models that seem distinct from the neo-liberal project. Such discourses establish a degree of continuity between Tata's civic model and the company's present-day actions, which are visibly dominated by interests of profit more than at any point in the company's history. In strong contrast to the present-day casual labour economy, the popular image of company founder, Jamshed Tata, is not one of sheer financial self-interest. It speaks of the conquering of jungles, the triumph of the nation's industry during the long march out of colonialism and an employer's benevolent care for its workers. For present-day Tata mangers, the apparent profiteering of casualisation is rationalised as something more meaningful, as a service in the name of decency and progress, a paternal pruning of the cultural deadwood. Building upon the concept of continuity, the conclusion of the book considers the ideological constraints which the city's history and urban culture place upon the critical discourses of Tata workers.

CONCLUSION

On a chilly early evening in February 2014, I stood on the narrow street outside Rishi's family home in Old Sitaramdera. A popular song by the Indian rapper, Yo Yo Honey Singh blared deafeningly from a nearby house, while a group of teenaged boys danced with one another outside. Further down the street, one of Rishi's neighbours had just returned from the city's largest market with several kilograms of vegetables, which she was now preparing to sell from a small stall. Across the street, Rishi's brother-in-law, Ramesh had just returned home from his shift in the Tata Motors plant. Like most company employees, Ramesh inherited his position from his father and grandfather before him. He was now 44 years old and had spent nearly two decades of his life as a casual worker on the Tata shop floor. He strolled across the road to meet me.

Raising our voices above the music, Ramesh and I chatted about the unseasonably damp weather, our families and our work. After another long day in the plant, Ramesh told me,

> I don't want to work for this company anymore. They treat the workers like dogs. My friends in Tata Motors can tell you what management and the union are doing to us.

In the eight years since I first visited Jamshedpur, the conditions of Tata work and the discourses that they inspired seemed largely unaltered. Ramesh was unhappy, but explained that he would not, of course, actually leave his work. First, alternative employment might prove difficult to find; since the state of Jharkhand was so poor, there was no shortage of rural migrants prepared to work for even less

money than him.[1] Second, he hoped that with a little more patience, he might still access the permanent Tata work that had eluded him his entire life. He proceeded to recount a recent shop floor rumour, which claimed that in one month's time, several hundred of the plant's longest-serving casual workers would be given permanent jobs. According to the popular understanding on the shop floor, these new posts would become available following the upcoming retirement of the plant's oldest permanent workers. As a man with 20 years of service, Ramesh was hopeful that his long wait was finally over. As he spoke, his hopes began to sound more and more familiar. A number of research participants in Tata Motors had articulated the same regularisation rumour to me several years earlier. The rumour did not prove to be true, and was eventually dismissed once apparently more credible scenarios suggested that regularisation would come in another 3, 5 or even 10 years.

Understanding why Ramesh would remain in his work is perhaps not an overly difficult question. For a man of his age and skills, the local alternatives in Jharkhand are not good, and even insecure casual work in the company town is more desirable than the vagaries of the regional labour market. However, if it is easy to understand why Ramesh does not leave the city, it is much harder to understand his belief that his position in Tata would be likely to improve at any point in the future. Indeed, Ramesh believed that since I first visited the city, the total size of the Tata Motors workforce had been further reduced by one-third, while the proportion of casual employees had correspondingly risen. Nonetheless, like many of his colleagues, Ramesh was prepared to believe that the traditional employment regime might be reinstated in his particular case. This faith in the essential tenacity of the company town model is an important balance to the corruption discourses that posit decline, and serves to stabilise what could potentially be an extremely unstable employment regime.

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1 At the time of initial fieldwork, while the national average per capita income in India was INR 25,825 per year, in Jharkhand, the figure stood at only INR 13,798, and for Bihar, INR 6,776. Income aside, only 32.15 per cent of Jharkhandi households had electricity, compared to a national rate of 64.09 per cent and only 27 per cent of births were attended to by a trained medical practitioner (against an Indian average of 42.8 per cent). Central Statistical Organisation, Economic Census 2005. Cited in Bhandari and Kale (2007: 19).

Needless to say, the Tata worker of 2006–07 was not the empowered labour aristocrat that occupies the pages of industrial history (Fraser 1919; Harris 1958; Lala 1981; Pandey et al 2005). In these presentations, the Tata worker is an agent of national development, who labours under the direction of India's most decent employer and is represented by one of the nation's most powerful trade unions. By the time of my field research, the job security, wages and benefits of the Tata workforce had been pervasively eroded, and the organs of industrial labour politics subverted apparently in the interests of capital itself. Rather than degenerating into the politicking described for the labour politics of the Ahmedabad textile industry, where huge numbers of employees similarly lost their permanent positions (Breman 2004), the Tata Workers' Union maintained their monopolistic strength of former years, and was now said to turn its power against their own members. In this environment, the bulk of Tata workers assumed that the modern Indian political economy was characterised by social elites' use of systemic criminality to consolidate their control over the production, ownership and movement of capital.

Corporate capitalists, political representatives, entrepreneurs, and gangsters usually have distinct skills and working environments. However, what this book has argued is that these apparently distinct agents are engaged in deliberate, mutually beneficial negotiations that fulfil shared class interests. I suggest that the entrepreneurial relations of corruption and criminality not only create classes of actors that benefit from one another's transgression of the law, they also create a class of people that are dispossessed by these processes and articulate a critical consciousness through systemic corruption discourses. One of the book's aims is to demonstrate that the broad range of practices conceptualised as 'corruption' are not sporadic, isolated events that are incidental to the functioning of a political economy. On the contrary, individual incidences of corruption may express systemic criminal negotiations that are integral to the consolidation of class power. Furthermore, the model which I have advanced suggests that while concerns over petty bribery might reasonably occupy the greater part of many popular corruption discourses, the study of corruption should be expanded through a fuller consideration of violence, coercion and the conceptual framework of criminal enterprise. Although this argument is grounded in the ethnographic case-study of Jamshedpur, I suggest that the book describes a broader tendency in capitalism that is well supported in comparative ethnography – namely, that if class is a

dynamic struggle for control over capital, then dominant classes cooperate in this struggle though the exchange of skills and resources that include, but are not limited to, criminality.

With some basis in experience, a large section of Jamshedpur society professes the belief that corporate capitalists and political representatives use criminality to further their shared class interests, to the detriment of an increasingly precarious industrial workforce. I describe this type of corruption discourse as systemic since it primarily focuses upon the enduring relationships that exist between criminal parties, and describes the general principles that are believed to determine the processes of political economy. I argue that systemic corruption discourses express a shared class consciousness among ageing labour aristocrats and urban casual workers that has emerged in India following economic liberalisation. What the Tata case suggests is that the class distinctions between the formal and informal sector are presently being eroded through a convergence of the employment security and living standards of those concerned. This class shares a critical perspective of the efficacy of corporate capitalism and the plausibility of the meritocratic principle.

However, this book does not claim that the class consciousness of Jamshedpur's Tata workers has stepped beyond the ideological constraints of capitalism. In the systemic corruption discourse of the Tata steel town, moral authority does not rest in the reified and distant political centre of India, since high-profile corruption scandals suggest a close relationship between national political elites and violent state politicians. However, moral authority does potentially rest in the historical company town ideal, of which city founder Jamshed Tata is the symbolic embodiment. In popular nostalgia, the uncertainty and corruption of the present day is contrasted with the enveloping provision of universal Tata healthcare, education, housing and employment. The Tata workforce is, therefore, united by a cohesive identity based around the company criticised by popular corruption discourse – an observation that most clearly illustrates the character and direction of the casualisation of labour in Jamshedpur, distinguishing the process from earlier Indian ethnographic cases, where casual and permanent employees experience a disjuncture in their experiences and culture, which preludes the development of class consciousness (Holmström 1976, 1984). In striking at casualisation, the Tata worker refers to the loss of an established norm of employment and civic organisation about which a moral and nationalistic discourse had been built

generations earlier. This mode of nostalgic critique tacitly agrees that industrial employment is a meaningful vocation, and that Tata's management of the city has formerly been well-guided. The centrality of these values to Jamshedpur's urban working-class culture stems from the city's foundation as an original industrial space.

Redfield and Singer's distinction between orthogenetic and heterogenetic cities (Redfield and Singer 1954) suggests a helpful way of theorising the particularities of Jamshedpur's urban environment, and the effect that they have on the city's ideological landscape. Redfield and Singer describe orthogenetic cities as urban conglomerations that have arisen organically and endogenously, and usually over lengthy periods of time. In these spaces, rural folk culture becomes progressively systematised by urban elites, who create an indigenous civilisation in an emergent urban space. By contrast, heterogenetic cities are spaces that are frequently planned, and whose foundation is directed by dissimilar, often colonial, cultures. In such spaces, urban life is defined by a dynamism that is at odds with the local folk culture. Jamshedpur is a cohesive urban space whose shape, culture and purpose was conceptualised by distant architects prior to the building of its physical infrastructure. Likewise, the town was founded according to developmental ambitions, which assumed that the city should be a space of technological and cultural innovation. In Jamshedpur, the city was imagined as a modern space in which the exploitation and regressive failures of colonial industry would be overtaken by the benevolence and success of Indian entrepreneurship. Clearly then, the company town can never be orthogenetic in the sense that Indian cities such as Varanasi are understood to be, and the environment's ideological repertoire is intrinsically constrained by the corporate context.

Based upon a notion of Indian industrialisation as a pioneering, entrepreneurial force, Tata urbanisation supposed that industrial modernity would wholly supplant the indigenous culture in the areas where it emerged. In Jamshedpur, this was to occur amidst an ostensibly undeveloped and thinly populated region of the country, in a planned city where all space was effectively company space, and urban life reckoned against its relationship to industrial productivity. As such, the urban culture that began to emerge in Jamshedpur in the 1900s was premised on replacing existing ways of life with new, modern forms that could maximise the productivity of the city's central industry. Key to this project of heterogenetic city building was the initial project to replace a local culture of subsistence farming and hunter-gathering

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with a diverse migrant population, whose various skills and dispositions might be applied to a hierarchical and highly specialised industrial working life. In the years that followed, the stabilisation of this migrant labour force through the heritability of company employment was central to the creation of a heterogenetic urban culture in Jamshedpur. It is this culture which effectively defines the Tata working class in reference to familial descent, and which places a great deal of emphasis upon the intrinsic value of engaging in traditional family work. The tenacity of this system is evident in the extent to which even casually employed Tata workers from company families currently accept low wages and a high degree of job insecurity for many years; such employees are inured to the value of Tata employment, and tend to build not only their ambitions, but critiques around it.

What the systemic corruption discourse does not seek is a return to an imagined pre-industrial utopia, or even the reorganisation of labour, independent of the managerial cadre. Instead, Tata workers' complaints seek the return of the company's omniscient civic control, and the reinstatement of their place within it. While the Tata worker crafts their complaints in reference to recent corporate entropy, for the company managers charged with reforming employment regimes, paternalism posits delinquency in the behaviour of its company children. If 'weapons of the weak' are to be an effective means of resistance, then to some extent, they rely upon elite recognition of the legitimacy of the complaints directed towards them (Scott 1985). However, Tata managers' prejudicial suggestions of sloth, ignorance and impetuousness among their labour force, substantially reduces the efficacy of workers paternalistic appeals.

The regional context of public criminal enterprise may provide the systemic corruption discourse with an empirical foundation for its critique. However, this context is also a means through which the Tata model finds legitimacy in the discourses of corporate actors. In a history of company towns of the US Pacific Northwest, Linda Carlson observes that many such communities were historically marked by economic, cultural and spatial isolation, and a corresponding dependency of employees upon company infrastructure (Carlson 2003: 115). In 1907, this was also true of Jamshedpur, with the Adivasi village of Sakchi village entering the history books as a 'jungle' to be civilised by the benevolent wisdom of Jamshed Tata. The jungle clearing project is one that still resonates to the core of the Tata self-image, with company managers eager to cast their own initiatives and personal prejudices in

terms of a wider programme of regional civilising. However, Jamshedpur is no longer a lone community in the wilderness – tigers, rogue elephants and dense forests no longer press at the city's borders and draw the town's residents to their employer.[2] Today, company legitimacy rather defines itself against a perceived absence of alternative civic order in the much maligned states of Bihar and Jharkhand. The popular discourse of the Jungle Raj, with its emphasis upon criminal autocrats, bandits and Maoist guerrillas, emphasises Tata authority as stable and responsible.

While workers seek to integrate Tata industrial capitalism into their discourses of systemic corruption, the local representatives and architects of the company project have their own explanatory models of corruption and criminality. For corporate managers, violent 'crony capitalism' is a renegade and anti-modern political process that is distinct from Tata production (Kang 2002). As Paul Chatterjee reminds us, this force is the ideological antagonist to metropolitan Tata capitalism, and is the preserve of reactionary Biharis and Adivasis. Discourses of corruption can then serve at least two distinct functions. First, for social elites, corruption discourses may be appropriated as a means to establish the particular authority of given social classes and processes. The discourses of corporate actors cut the network of regional and national criminality, rendering their specific node within it distinct and inviolable, while accentuating the failure of those nodes immediately surrounding them. Elite discourses of corruption are episodic models that obscure the dynamic of actual political and economic processes, by placing emphasis upon the character and specificity of given actors. For corporate actors in Jamshedpur, company actions are rendered distinct from the machinations of state corruption and violence by emphasising processes that are ostensibly culturally separate from, and therefore, inaccessible to the company and its managers.[3] Conversely, for those dispossessed by capitalist accumulation, corruption

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2 See the introduction to first TISCO general manager, John Keenan's autobiography for an account of the region's perceived wildness in the first decade of the 20th century. Keenan and Sorsby 1945.

3 Dirks' (2006) study of the 'Scandal of Empire' provides an intriguing comparative example of a similar process. Investigating the place of corruption scandals in the legitimation of colonial authority in India, Dirks describes how the British state emphasised the ethical and moral failures of the East India Company, by suggesting a vulnerable and orientalised India, which was betrayed by a rogue East India Company.

discourses suggest a model of criminal enterprise that relate the actions of social elites to one another, explaining the divide between those who suffer in liberalised economies, and those who prosper. Where the elite discourse of corruption emphasises the failings of the culturally distinct other, the systemic model emphasises the flow of capital, violence and political influence between elite groups. What this book concludes is that the systemic discourse of corruption is an empirically well-substantiated model of how modern capitalism works, which articulates a critical perspective on the processes of class struggle. However, while this discourse builds ideological coherence within classes, and has the capacity to inspire and explain truly radical political action, in Jamshedpur, such action is constrained by the enduring ideal of the company town.

Appendix

POSITIONALITY AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In a highly personal analysis of violence and alienation in New York, Randol Contreras suggests that studies of criminality often risk being perceived as 'Cowboy Ethnographies', which sensationalise their subjects, and present the researcher in narcissistic, macho terms (Contreras 2013: 26–27). Contreras' concerns are well-founded, and many of the more dramatic and personal experiences of the fieldwork are deliberately not included in this book. The peculiarly enduring fetish of the ethnographic 'adventure' tends to divert attention away from the analytic work at hand, and this book attempts to minimise this problem by avoiding overly many references to my own experiences and character in the text itself.

However, since ethnographers are not natural scientists, the objects of our research build analyses of their own, and engage with us in determined and unpredictable ways. Furthermore, we are attracted to particular research questions for reasons that can be quite personal, and about which we feel strongly. With this in mind, it should be acknowledged that this study has conceptual interests and methodological limits that are contingent on my subjectivity as a man of a certain age, nationality and class background. The two sections that follow provide the reader with brief and honest descriptions of my own positionality vis-à-vis class, sex and gender – the topics which I believe to have had the strongest impact upon the research process.

Class

My conceptual and political interest in questions of class is derived from a working-class upbringing that is untypical for a British academic. I was raised in social housing in and around London, in

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communities where substance abuse, unemployment and casual violence were endemic concerns. For the bulk of my formative years, no member of our household held a full-time permanent job, and my family subsisted on state benefits that were sporadically supplemented by illegal employment in the service and light industrial sectors. As such, the reader should be aware that the category of 'working class' is one to which I feel a personal connection.

The home that I was raised in was literate and politicised, and despite the social obstacles ranged against a mixed race, working-class child, I was encouraged by my family to have high expectations of achievement. At the age of 13, I gained entry to a local grammar school,[1] and with the encouragement of my teachers, became the first member of our family to graduate school and enter university, followed a year later by my younger sister. It is both an indictment of selective state education and proof of its worth to note that while I flourished in grammar school, those that remained in local comprehensive schools often did not. Almost none of my male peers in the surrounding social housing were offered grammar school places, and 15 years after I first entered university, it is distressing to see that many have since experienced prolonged periods of substance addiction and repeated imprisonment.

It should, therefore, be clear that my elite social status in India as a Westerner was an experience to which I had no significant parallel prior to beginning ethnographic fieldwork. Indeed, up until that point, I had never lived more than 30 miles from my birthplace. However, Indian people are similar to the British, in that they are both concerned with the question of status, and have an astonishing social acumen for identifying the class of those that they engage with. Quite typically, my interlocutors in Jamshedpur would subject me to the local interrogation, 'What is your father's job' within minutes of our meeting. On learning that my estranged father was a bus driver and my mother a barmaid, industrial workers routinely declared me to be from the 'labour class' or 'working class', despite the evident privilege that came with an academic career. Perhaps my greatest methodological advantage during the research for this book was that Tata workers often (and to my surprise) identified me as coming from the same class as themselves. Whether or not this emic assessment was actually correct, it helped me

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1 British state schools that select pupils on the basis of perceived aptitude.

to build close and candid relationships with the critical working class that this book is about. The book is presented with the caveat that while my formative experiences at the lower end of the British class structure may have aided the day-to-day process of the fieldwork, the text is not written from a politically objective point of view. On the contrary, it is written with a personally informed wish to describe, analyse and effect positive change upon the living and employment conditions of the global working classes.

Gender and sex

While the research for this book was positively affected by local perceptions of my class position, my gender identity as a lone, heterosexual English man has had a generally negative effect upon the scope of the research. Most notably, I enjoyed severely limited engagements with local women throughout the fieldwork. The local culture in Jamshedpur predicated that I cultivate respectful fictive-kin relationships with informants' partners and female relatives. While I entered into these relationships with my fictive sisters-in-law, our associations remained constrained by a certain level of formality that I struggled to overcome. The composition of my industrial field site was also heavily gendered. The Tata Motors workplace was almost entirely composed of male employees. Likewise, the union cadres with whom I had significant interaction were all male, as were my informants in business and criminality. The lack of women in Jamshedpur's trade unions, industrial shop floors and enterprises by no means implies their irrelevance to the dynamic that I discuss. For a company town model based so strongly around the reproduction of work roles within the home, the place of women is of great significance. The lack of female voices is, therefore, a limitation of this particular research project that I hope to pursue in future work. Until that time, I encourage more capable researchers to engage with the themes of class, corruption and gender in Jamshedpur.

Throughout the period of research, the moral and ethical complexities of sexual politics were an area of tension in my interactions with male informants. For the majority of my time in Jamshedpur, I lived without a sexual partner. A number of male interlocutors regarded my living situation as an opportunity to invite female prostitutes to my home, and several research participants wished me to have sex with a 'Jharkhandi girl' before I returned home. Local prostitutes

were routinely offered to me in the course of homo-social commensality, much in the manner of cigarettes, alcohol and chewing tobacco. The fact that I would not have sex with prostitutes in Jamshedpur, or allow sex work to take place within my home, occasionally resulted in tense interactions with a minority of research participants, who perceived my actions as prudish, selfish or un-masculine. However, the most persistent area of moral and political tension that I negotiated as a fieldworker lay in research participants' ideas on sexual violence against women. While the data collected on this topic benefitted from my positionality as a lone man, this aspect of the research proved to be more personally difficult to negotiate than the other forms of violence and criminality which this book discusses.

The subject of sexual violence was a conversation topic of some frequency for a number of male research participants in Jamshedpur, with several men professing that they either fantasised about committing rape, or had unsuccessfully attempted to do so in the past. The majority of my research participants were unmarried men between the ages of 20 and 35. These men had usually had sexual contact only with prostitutes, and consumed a large amount of western hard-core pornography. A recurring discourse among this demographic suggested that while Western women derived pleasure from recreational sex (as evidenced in pornography), Indian women were passive and unenthusiastic sexual partners (as evidenced in liaisons with local sex workers). The men who voiced this discourse routinely explained rape in India as the outpouring of male sexual urges, which were unjustly constrained by the conservatism and passivity of Indian women. Any researcher with an analytic and political interest in questions of power, status and violence should consider the sexual abuse and coercion of women to be one of the most widespread and deeply rooted of global injustices. However, after long reflection on the material, the data on this topic is not discussed in this book since it is not clear that there is a definite relationship between sexual violence and the themes of class and criminality that i explore here. Where expressed, the content of discourses on sexual violence was generally consistent among similarly aged men of different social classes and occupations. However, I would note that employees on the shop floor of the Tata Motors plant generally discussed sex with less frequency than research participants in enterprise.

The book is, therefore, presented with the second caveat that data collection proceeded in a patriarchal, and routinely misogynistic milieu that constrained my ability to conduct research among women.

While the data collected among men on the subject of sexual politics has important significance, I believe that the topic outreaches the relationship between class struggle and capitalism, and deserves to be treated in a more focussed manner during future research. As such, I have chosen not to address the subject of sexual violence in this study of class and criminality.

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