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CRIMINALIZING CHILDHOOD:
THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE AT DELHI'S URBAN MARGINS

A Dissertation Presented

by

RAGINI SAIRA MALHOTRA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2020

Sociology

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CRIMINALIZING CHILDHOOD: THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE AT DELHI'S URBAN
MARGINS

A Dissertation

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DEDICATION

To my parents: Anita Malhotra and Kamal Malhotra

and

To the boys and girls of Aakash Sadan and Manohar Nivas

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ABSTRACT

CRIMINALIZING CHILDHOOD: THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE AT DELHI'S URBAN MARGINS

MAY 2020

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The intensification of neoliberal economic reforms and new patterns of middle-class consumption in India have coincided with rising levels of urban inequality and poverty. Yet India's capital, Delhi, positions itself as a "world-class city," invoking neoliberal state aspirations to justify widespread violence against communities living and working in state-contested spaces. While much has been written about the reproduction of urban inequality and poverty in India, this body of scholarship under-emphasizes mechanisms of social control and violence, specifically, criminalization by the state.

To understand these dynamics, children's experiences are particularly important given their age-based potential and vulnerabilities. To give visibility to children's accounts, I analyze working children's narratives about the regulatory aspects of everyday social life in their residential communities, on the streets, and in schools. In doing so, I draw from over two years of multi-sited ethnographic research in one of

Delhi's "informal" communities and in the city's most underserved homeless shelter and its surrounds. Centering children and families living and working in state-contested urban spaces, I ask: How, and to what end, does state-produced violence operate in people's everyday lives? To address this question, I analyze participant observation data, extensive informal interviews, and over 70 formal and semi-structured interviews with girls and boys, adult guardians, legal activists, and civil society and state representatives.

Conceptualizing the "state" not as an abstraction, but as a diverse set of practices, institutions, and people, in a series of empirical chapters, I examine people's everyday interactions with "street-level bureaucrats," and nodal agencies of the Delhi state. In Chapter 2, examining the role of the police and Delhi state agencies through a comparative analysis of my empirical cases, I argue that regulatory power operates through *spatial territorialism* and *stigmatized surveillance* in "invited," or state legitimized and dominated, residential spaces. Conversely, in "invented" residential spaces, which exist in opposition to the state, regulatory power operates through *spatial cooperation* and *discretionary surveillance*.

In Chapter 3, following girls in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* as they attempt to secure access to water, I examine their (and their family's) everyday interactions with the state's nodal agency for water distribution. I argue that "waiting" for water is a form of state-induced structural violence that gives rise to micro-forms of gendered violence at the community level. As they wait for the state, young girls navigate local "fights" for water to meet the care needs of their families. In Chapter 4, following boys living in Aakash Sadan shelter and working on the streets, I argue that street-level bureaucrats (i.e., teachers and the police) use strategies of *performative policing* to criminalize boys in

public schools and on the streets. These everyday forms of criminalization, I argue, are both social and legal and serve as a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced, and poverty and stigmatization are entrenched as dual processes.

By unmasking the hidden ways in which children are intimately socialized to the presence of the state and its violence in their daily lives, while also acting to resist this domination, I offer a unique lens through which to theorize neoliberal politics from the perspective of the political economy of childhood.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Our clothes. They took everything and went. The committee people . . . hit us a lot, hit us a lot. . . . Then they said, ‘There is a homeless shelter there. You go there.’ The people from the government said it . . . the police said it. They said, ‘Over there is Aakash Sadan. . . . You go there, you can live there.’

- Saurabh, 15, Aakash Sadan Shelter¹

Saurabh, who was 15 when we first met and born in Delhi, was one of many children in Aakash Sadan shelter who had been evicted from his home by the state. As we sat on a *charpai*,¹ in a ground floor room of the shelter, Saurabh lamented his family’s deepening poverty in the aftermath of the eviction. Before moving to the shelter, Saurabh told me, his family had lived in a *jhuggi*²—a house. Like many families in the shelter, when Saurabh’s family was evicted in anticipation of Delhi’s 2010 Commonwealth Games, they were left with nowhere to go. As Saurabh explained, the violence of evictions was often followed by direct forms of physical violence enacted by “committee people”³ and the police. In addition to hitting and beating children and their families, like Saurabh, many others recounted having their belongings, including their food, confiscated by the police.

For many children, the police were synonymous with the government, or the state. Saurabh’s account demonstrates how after forcing people out of homes, however insecure and temporary, those acting on behalf of the state have no mercy. Instead, there is an expectation that children like Saurabh will simply accept their fate and follow state directives. Across both my field-sites—a shelter and a *jhuggi*—children’s experiences of state-produced violence were

¹ I use pseudonyms for most places and people in this dissertation to protect their identity, with some exceptions discussed in the methods section.

¹ A *charpai* is a woven bed without backboard made of natural fibers.

² A *jhuggi* is a temporary room-sized home, made of makeshift materials.

³ Children used this term to refer to representatives of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

characterized by a profound sense of indignity which they did not accept as fair. This was true in a variety of spaces, with demolition evictions being just one of several ways in which the routine violence of the state impacted the everyday lives of children and their families.

Saurabh and his friends, for instance, worked at intersections and traffic lights selling toys and balloons. Work for them was characterized by routine encounters with police violence and experiences of criminalization that threatened their very survival. This in turn increased their food insecurity, deepening their families' experiences of poverty and stigmatization as dual processes. Owing to their social status as non-upper caste (i.e. SC/ST)⁴ street workers, Saurabh and his friends were criminalized in government schools by teachers, a process that excluded them from the formal education system, thereby further exacerbating existing social inequalities.

In Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*, children were intimately socialized to the presence of the state and its violence in their daily lives. As residents of urban spaces characterized by “illegalities” (Bhan 2016; Ramanathan 2006), children most commonly identified the police with the government, or *sarkar*. In these communities, children's awareness of the state was a function of their heightened vulnerability relative to even other children living in urban poverty. It was precisely because they had no shelter, experienced the risk of demolition evictions, or worked on the street, that children could comprehend the state and its violence. I found, for instance, that children living in the *bastis*⁵ surrounding Aakash Sadan shelter did not share this understanding. Though these children were also non-upper caste and resource poor, they had not experienced the loss of their homes; most who worked, did so at home or in small family-based shops. These

⁴ Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are officially classified by the central government as “disadvantaged” groups. These categories refer to the “castes” and “tribes” given special status (and benefits) by the state, based on their historical disadvantage and social exclusion.

⁵ I use *basti* here to reflect how children and their families described their community. A *basti* is a settlement consisting of concrete room-sized homes. *Basti* is used here in contrast to the temporary *jhuggis* made of makeshift materials.

empirical distinctions serve as a reminder of the relative nature of urban poverty and inequality, particularly in childhood. In this spirit, the arguments presented in this dissertation pertain to the lived experiences of the children and families in my two primary sites of research rather than to *all* children living in urban poverty in India.

While much has been written about the reproduction of urban inequality and poverty in India, this body of scholarship underemphasizes mechanisms of social control and violence, specifically criminalization by the state. To understand these dynamics, children's experiences are particularly important given their age-based potential and vulnerabilities. Yet scholarship on urban India rarely accounts for children's own narratives about everyday encounters with the state and its violence. To address these gaps I analyze working children's narratives about the regulatory aspects of everyday social life in their residential communities, on the streets, and in schools. In doing so I draw from over two years of multi-sited ethnographic research in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*, one of Delhi's temporary "informal settlements,"⁶ and Aakash Sadan Shelter, the city's most underserved homeless shelter, and its surrounds. To contextualize, reinforce, and complicate children's narratives, I also engage accounts by parents, adult guardians, legal and civil society activists, social workers, and state representatives.

Throughout this dissertation, I conceptualize the "state" not as an abstraction, but as Sharma and Gupta (2006:6) put it, an "ensemble of institutions, practices and people." Centering children and families living and working in state-contested urban spaces, I extend the work of Javier Auyero (2012) to examine people's everyday interactions with "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky 2010) and several nodal agencies of the Delhi state. As such, I ask: How, and to what end, does state-produced violence operate in people's everyday lives? In three empirical

⁶ I engage with scholarly critiques of informality as applied to residential spaces/settlements and economies, in subsequent sections of this chapter.

chapters, I examine how street-level bureaucrats use their discretionary power to produce and routinize violence in the following *domains of regulatory power*: residential communities characterized by illegalities and surveillance; public/government schools; and the streets, as sites for work.

Why Study India and Its Capital City?

The world's fastest growing cities over the last few decades have been in Asia (Roy and Ong 2011). These urban centers have been characterized by rapid middle-class growth and Indian cities are no exception. In fact, India's emergence as an economic power during the so-called "Asian century," has depended heavily on the intensification of economic liberalization policies in the 1990s and the rise of a new middle class that embodies the image of a "global" India (Bhan 2019; Fernandes 2004; Ghertner 2011; Roy 2009; Roy and Ong 2011). High levels of economic growth coupled with intensified urbanization and a growing middle class have been central features of how the state has done "development." Yet the positioning of India's cities as important engines for economic growth has coincided with growing levels of urban poverty and social and economic inequality (Bhan 2019).

As Leela Fernandes (2004) puts it, the development of new Indian middle-class lifestyles and consumption patterns have generated a politics of "forgetting" social groups marginalized by economic liberalization policies. The increased concentration of wealth amongst the country's middle-class and urban elite has coincided with the growth of India's so-called informal economy. Those working in these spaces in urban India lack legal and social protections, and many live in state-contested informal settlements where access to basic services, like water, is scarce and demolition evictions are routine.

With the intensification of market reforms in the 1990s, state officials and politicians in Delhi began promoting an ideal of India's capital as "slum free" and "world-class." In this spirit, with at least 100 million people in India living in urban poverty/informal settlements (Biswas 2012),⁷ in Delhi alone, more than 50,000 homes were demolished between 1990 and 2003 in the name of "slum clearance." Between 2004 and 2007, as efforts to sanitize the city intensified another 45,000 homes were demolished. Evictions have continued unabated since 2007, with most families receiving no resettlement support (Bhan 2009).

The magnitude of children affected by these orders is overwhelming, although not yet well understood or quantified. Existing data on urban poverty in childhood, for instance, grossly underestimates the scale of the problem; one in ten of nearly 200,000 living without homes in urban India are estimated to be children, while at least 8 million children are estimated to live in informal settlements (Salve and Tewari 2015). These figures, however, are likely to be exponentially higher in reality. Estimates for the number of working children across the country are also low; the widely quoted estimate of 28 million excludes children under the age of five as well as those engaged in paid and unpaid work not classified as child labor (UNICEF 2011). Contributing over 20 percent of child deaths in the world, child mortality is disproportionately concentrated among non-upper caste communities (Mathur 2009). This is likely exacerbated by rising rates of malnutrition in cities, with close to 50% of India's urban poor being underweight due to food insecurity and the lack of access to basic services (Salve and Tewari 2015).

And yet, despite these staggering social challenges, as India's capital, Delhi has been positioned as an emerging global or world-class city despite the unmet needs of the urban poor (Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2011; Roy 2009). Speaking to Delhi's efforts to become world-class,

⁷ These numbers, widely accepted to be gross underestimates, exclude those without homes.

Véronique Dupont (2011) emphasizes the unique pairing of overriding state power with interventions by the courts in efforts to “clean up” the city in advance of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. To facilitate the event, which put Delhi on the global map, state-orchestrated demolition evictions left large segments of the urban poor—including many of the children and families whose stories I recount in this dissertation—without shelter. These families are among some of the most vulnerable among an already vulnerable category of “urban poor.” Yet they do not appear to exist in the imagination of the state. They are misunderstood and loosely invoked as numbers in poverty debates that obscure multiple dimensions of deprivation (Mathur 2009; Ortiz, Daniels, and Engilbertsdóttir 2012).

Shonali, who was part of an anti-eviction advocacy collective I joined, and worked with a social movements-influenced Civil Society Organization (CSO), shared some of these dynamics with me. She expressed her regret about the tendency of Delhi’s middle-class/urban elite to misrecognize the poor. As we sat in a small meeting room in her South Delhi basement office, Shonali spoke to these dynamics in the context of those without shelter:

I know like street kids who have died just getting hit by trucks and cars. . . . Who’s counting that? Nobody. Like, homeless deaths are just so high that there’s no accountability of the state you know, and people die of starvation and then *cold* and health illnesses that don’t get detected in time. . . . They have accidents, they go to the [government] hospitals, they’re turned out you know. . . . Where do they recover? They’re *lying* on the *pavement*. . . . I just saw this woman, she’s just had a miscarriage and she’s just lying on the side of the road you know, and the doctor’s telling her . . . ‘eat an almond’ and I’m like, do you know how expensive almonds are? . . . Then they’re like, you need to rest, you need to wash yourself with hot water, and I’m like, they don’t even have water.

As Shonali points to the invisibility of the homeless, even in death, she also underscores the inability (and, arguably, unwillingness) of doctors to understand the needs and realities of the urban poor. Referring in this case to those without shelter, Shonali stresses that the doctor who prescribes remedies or medicine without thinking about cost, or viability, has no regard for their

patients' daily struggles for survival. Whether it be a prescription for unaffordable medication, or the policing of the urban poor at hospitals and their exclusion from basic care, these experiences were common among the families whose narratives shape this dissertation. I heard accounts and saw this exclusion play out at government hospitals, schools, and shelters. In one instance, I witnessed the policing and dehumanization of a mother and grandmother trying to save their acutely malnourished child, who later died. In another instance, a mother was denied care upon arriving at a government hospital with her dead infant who had not survived childbirth. She and her husband were physically abused and turned away until they later returned, thanks to assistance, in an ambulance.

These acts of discretionary violence by street-level bureaucrats have only become more visible this year. Since the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 alone, the violence of the Delhi police has become ubiquitous. The events that have unfolded during this time mirror the police violence and patterns of criminalized poverty that I uncover in this dissertation. Police brutality has extended, for instance, to peaceful anti-government protestors,⁸ survivors of a state-sanctioned communal massacre, and now to migrant workers struggling to survive an unprecedented nation-wide lockdown brought about by the Coronavirus.

As Shonali notes, and as this dissertation reveals, the absence of water for many across Delhi is of growing concern in the wake of the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic. But a more immediate concern is hunger. Like the children and families whose accounts shape this dissertation, thousands across India are currently unable to earn to eat. Yet, the policing and criminalization of Delhi's working poor has only intensified as they experience heightened

⁸ Civil society groups fear that India's exclusionary anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) would disproportionately disadvantage the urban poor, especially those without homes or proof of residence.

struggles to subsist. Children, and young boys in particular, have been the target of much of this violence, reinforcing many of the dynamics I unveil in this dissertation.

Even as thousands of migrant workers from Delhi walk home to their villages across the country, the children whose narratives shape this dissertation call Delhi home. Like many young parents, most of these children were born in the city. The village, therefore, is a distant symbol of their grandparents' time. And yet, Saurabh's mother, Nohar, told me that when the police confiscated food and utensils from her family after they were forcibly evicted, they told her to go back home. As we sat on the ground floor of the shelter, in a dispiriting account, Nohar explained these dynamics to me. "What's in someone's heart, what's in my heart or his heart? Who knows, we cannot tear it open to see. These are the kinds of days we are living . . . they ask, where have you come from? Go back to where you came from." The inability of Delhi's street-level bureaucrats—in this case, the police—to accept that the city's most vulnerable might identify more with the country's capital than the village, reinforces an exclusionary urban politics of violence. This, in turn, bars many urban residents from enjoying the "right to the city"⁹ (Lefebvre 1968; Bhan 2016).

**Making the World-Class City:
Development, Dispossession, and the "Southern" Neoliberal State**¹⁰

Saskia Sassen (2012:85) argues that with the onset of new forms of globalization, cities have become both "key sites where new norms and identities are made . . . [and] strategic economic, political and cultural sites." This has coincided with the intensification of rural-urban migration in many parts of the world and the centering of cities as key players in global economies and politics in an increasingly urbanizing world (Darling 2016; Sassen 2006). In

⁹ Bhan acknowledges Henri Lefebvre's original conceptualization of this widely used idea.

¹⁰"Southern" here refers to cities in the Global South.

cities of the Global South, internal migration and urbanization have fueled new forms of development, the benefits of which have not been extended to internal migrants themselves (Gidwani 2015; Gill 2010; Miraftab and Kudva 2015; Denis, Mukhopadhyay, and Zerah 2012). Migrant workers and those with migrant histories, typically from socially excluded communities, comprise a flexible and precarious workforce characterized by routine economic insecurity (Gidwani 2015; Gill 2010; Shah 2014).

In India, neoliberal state aspirations and market logics have fueled new modes of governance and development that have deepened social and economic exclusion and inequalities (Bhan 2009, 2019; Ghertner 2010; Roy 2004; Sassen 2006). This has coincided with attempts to fashion the country's resource and infrastructure to turn poor mega-cities into global or world-class cities (Davis 2006; Ghertner 2010; Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Roy 2004; Roy and Ong 2011). As such, in India's capital the production of urban space has been governed by disciplinary forms of social control driven by state logics of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault 1977-78). With the rise of city beautification projects and initiatives aimed at making Delhi infrastructurally "smart," state-orchestrated demolition evictions have become a daily reality for large segments of Delhi's urban poor (Bhan 2009, 2019; Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2010; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008; Miraftab and Kudva 2015; Ramanathan 2006; Roy 2004).

Extending Erika Larkins' (2015) Brazilian "Olympic exception" metaphor, efforts to sanitize and clean up the streets were heightened in the lead up to India's 2010 Commonwealth Games which marked Delhi as an aspiring global city (Baviskar 2011; Dupont 2011; Ramanathan 2006). To meet the desired image, the state sought to exclude "undesirable elements" and "unwanted citizens" from the city (Dupont 2011:549-550). Above all, this included families working and living under arrangements and circumstances mediated by

“informality”—spaces where economic activities occur outside the legal purview of the state and are, therefore, characterized by precariousness, insecurity, and an absence of social protection (Agarwala 2013; Breman 1996, 2013, Gill 2010; Roy 2009). Non-upper-caste workers are disproportionately represented in the so-called informal economy (Gill 2010; Shah 2014).

Workers in the so-called informal economy, including those engaged in street work, often live in fear of evictions. As Véronique Dupont (2000) argues, many others are unsheltered. Reconceptualizing homelessness, Dupont posits that even when communities lack physical homes of their own, they create and maintain “familial moorings” (2000:101). The significance of this, however, is obscured by state and middle-class discourse on “homelessness.”¹¹

Not only does the Indian state misunderstand its urban poor, it excludes these communities from its vision for its cities (Baviskar 2006; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008). To this effect, Asher Ghertner quotes an unnamed Delhi government officer, “Delhi is . . . cleaning up. Only the best people will live in Delhi. Soon, there will be no slums here. Only the deserving people will stay, but everyone else will have to go” (2010:203). It is only the “deserving” who are deemed worthy of Henri Lefebvre’s (1968) widely invoked notion of the “right to the city.” As such, the urban poor in Delhi experience what Gautam Bhan (2016) termed the “unmaking of citizenship.”

These dynamics are inextricably tied, Bhan (2016) argues, leading to the erroneous conflation of urban “informality” with “illegality.” This blurring of the two obscures, for instance, the fact that most space in Delhi is informally produced and characterized by some degree of illegality. Yet, when “spatial illegalities” are associated with Delhi’s urban elite they

¹¹ This conceptual distinction is not reflected in state and civil society discourse, where “homelessness” is used to denote those who live on the streets without homes, and those who live in shelters. In this dissertation, I use “unsheltered” to refer to all those without homes of their own, including those living in state-NGO run shelters.

are accorded a legitimacy that is not granted to the urban poor (Bhan 2009; 2016). Speaking to these dynamics, Leela Fernandes (2004) argues that it is not just the state, but also India's urban middle-class that actively participates in producing an exclusionary form of spatial politics and cultural citizenship in India's cities. As such, space and class are mutually reinforcing (Fernandes 2004; Shah 2014).

The Politics of State Violence and Practice

Foucauldian theories of state power underscore the disciplinary forms of social control that drive state logics of “governmentality” in schools, hospitals, and other public spaces (Foucault 1977-78). Complicating ideas about governmentality, post-colonial theorists emphasize the many “hands” and rationalities of the state, as well as its varied institutional practices, and techniques of governance (Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Morgan and Orloff 2017). As Sharma and Gupta argue, the state is not a monolith, but rather a “multilayered, contradictory, trans-local ensemble of institutions, practices and people” (2006:6). In reference to the latter, Michael Lipsky (2010) conceptualizes frontline workers of the state—like the police, health-workers and school teachers—as “street-level bureaucrats.” Tasked with a social control function, street-level bureaucrats, he argues, exercise considerable discretion in their interactions with citizens and clients of the state (Lipsky 2010). He points to the deep controversies surrounding the discretionary choices made by street-level bureaucrats, which deeply impact people's daily lives and social and economic trajectories.

Reaffirming this dynamic, as Javier Auyero and Maria F. Berti (2015:109) argue, “[T]he state is both an abstract, macrolevel structure and a concrete, microlevel set of institutions with which the urban poor interact in direct and immediate ways.” Examining how frontline

bureaucrats of the state use their discretionary power, Javier Auyero (2012) examines everyday state practices as enacted through encounters between street level bureaucrats and Argentina's urban poor. Auyero (2012) argues that experiences of prolonged waiting—in lines and in waiting rooms—for services from the state, requires Argentina's urban poor to surrender to state domination and power. As such, the poor are expected to be compliant patients of the state. Theorizing the state's disregard for the urban poor, Auyero argues that the state denies these communities "interactional citizenship," defined as a "set of vague and diffuse but vitally felt expectations and obligations that pertain to interactional displays of respect, regard and dignity for the person" (2012:21).

Examining the multiplicity of the state and its everyday practices, Timothy Mitchell and George Steinmetz (1999) and Veena Das (2007) argue that the state is defined by a paradox of illegibility whereby even its own representatives cannot decipher its rules. In executing the law, this illegibility is often invoked to justify the arbitrary use of violence at the so-called margins of the state (Caldeira 2001; Das 2007; Das and Poole 2004). Underscoring this, Veena Das writes about those living in spaces defined by informality: "*Jhuggi Jhopdis*¹² can be sites that are particularly important for understanding how states manage the populations at the margins, but also how those living at the margins navigate the gaps between laws and their implementation" (2007:175).

As such gaps emerge, residents of state-contested spaces navigate daily life in continued negotiation with the state (Bayat 1997; Das and Poole 2004). These spaces have been theorized as sites *for* and *of* politics (Pithouse 2014), in which violence and politics coexist (Chatterjee

¹² *Jhuggi jhopdi* clusters (JJs) are a state classification used to identify urban poor settlements/dwellings that exist on public or private land, and lack formal and legal titles (Bhan, Goswami, and Revi 2014). A *Jhuggi jhopdi* is similar to a *Jhuggi*, but some *Jhuggi jhopdis* may be made of mud or wood, rather than more makeshift materials (i.e., blankets, plastic, wood, corrugated tin and aluminum).

2004). Thus, as Partha Chaterjee (2004) argues, even though most inhabitants of India are not regarded by institutions of the state as rights-bearing citizens, in actuality they live in the domain of politics.

Scholars of contemporary urban violence in the Global South center questions about everyday state practice and power in their analyses (Auyero 2012; Auyero and Berti 2015; Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes 2015; Bourgois 2004; Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Larkins 2015; Moncada 2016; Penglase 2014; Perlman 2010; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Much of this scholarship focuses on state-induced structural violence, broadly conceived as harm resulting from social structures that prevent people from meeting their basic survival needs (Bourgois 2004; Farmer, Nizeye, Stulac, and Keshavjee 2006; Galtung 1969; Larkins 2015). Speaking to these dynamics, Nancy Scheper-Hughes argues that experiences of urban poverty at the margins of the state are often “brought on by the indifference to human suffering caused by institutional and structural violence and discourse” (1989:220).

According to Paul Farmer and colleagues (2006) the “structural” quality of violence lies in its rootedness in political economies. When violence is structural, it reveals mechanisms of oppression, shedding light on the realities of poverty, hunger, and sickness from a historical materialist approach. For instance, resource deprivation in the form of water insecurity is one of many forms of structural violence that has engendered impacts in much of the Global South (Keefer and Bousalis 2015). Following Farmer (2004), Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (2004) argue that structural forms of violence be thought of on a continuum, with everyday and routinized forms of chronic violence, including structural violence, being on one end of the spectrum, and direct forms of physical violence being on the other. These small violences of everyday are produced and co-produced (Bourgois 2004; Penglase 2014; Scheper-

Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Strategies for survival and resistance to this routinized violence are widely theorized to be locally constituted (Auyero and Berti 2015; Auyero, Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes 2015; Bourgois 2004; Larkins 2015; Penglase 2014; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Scheper-Hughes 1989).

Scholarship also emphasizes the critical role of the police in the local production of violence on behalf of the state (Auyero et al. 2015; Auyero and Berti 2015; Bourgois 2004; Caldeira 2001, 2002; Henricks and Harvey 2015; Larkins 2015; Merry 1998; Penglase 2014; Shah 2014; Wacquant 2008, 2009). The use of policing strategies to exert social control over communities deemed a “threat” often involves violence that is less about inflicting physical harm and more about cautioning against resistance to state dominance (Osterholtz 2013). Speaking to this, Ben Penglase (2014) underscores how the police impose categories onto the urban poor in Brazil in an attempt to re-signify them and their neighborhoods. In this context, the favela becomes a site marked by the prejudice of criminality. These spaces exist in opposition to what Teresa Caldeira (2000) identifies as fortified enclaves—exclusionary spaces the urban elite invoke as necessary to justify their classed prejudices and fears of violence and crime.

The Political Economy of Everyday Criminalization in Childhood

Childhood is a social construct that evolves historically within and across contexts (Aires 1962; Zelizer 1985). At the heart of competing conceptualizations of childhood are debates about whether children should be relegated to a world of formal learning and play, sheltered from the demands of the adult world, or be able to participate in economic activities to support their families (Bourdillon 2006; James and Prout 2015; Niewenhuys 1996; Weiner, Burra, and Bajpai 2006; Zelizer 1985). Although children are often treated as incomplete actors, scholars point to the importance of recognizing children as social beings with desires and capacities for decision-

making, as well as the right to make choices about work (Balagopalan 2014; Niewenhuys 1996; Swanson 2010).

Most of these debates by childhood and feminist scholars have centered around questions of children's agency (Arneson 1981; Bachman 2000; Burman and Stacey 2010; Elson 1982; Mankekar 1997; Niewenhuys 1996). However, following Svati Shah's (2014) call for an understanding of agency as a capacity to act and to negotiate survival, it is pertinent to think instead about children's potential for transformative change, to use the power they have to generate outcomes that matter to them even when choices are constrained (Castaneda 2002; Levinson 2000).

Constructions of childhood are also often mediated by ideological frameworks, institutions, and social practices pertaining to nation, community, and gender (Mankekar 1997). Across historical and geographical contexts, the social construction of childhood has been shaped by intersections of race, class/caste, and gender (Auyero and Berti 2015; Balagopalan 2014; Dumas and Nelson 2016; Ferguson 2001; Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998). Constructions of the "street child" or "child beggar," for instance, as dirty and violent, a "nuisance," and a "threat" stand in contrast to middle-class and sentimentalized constructions of childhood (Luiz de Moura 2002; Mathur 2009; Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998; Swanson 2010; Zelizer 1985). These divergent and classed constructions serve to reinforce the vastly unequal nature of childhood across and within societies (Auyero and Berti 2015; Luiz de Moura 2002; Liebel 2012).

The discursive power that lies in rhetoric about the urban poor as "dangerous" or "threatening" is, according to Sally Merry (1998), a core feature of the criminalization of everyday life. The police play a particular role, she argues, in shaping daily practices and

identities associated with criminality, while imposing new social apprehensions on excluded communities. Delineating the ways in which crime has been redefined and reconstituted through an analysis of colonial labor and vagrancy laws and practices, Merry demonstrates how criminalization is deeply embedded in colonial legacies and processes of capitalistic transformation.

Merry's (1998) framework is reflected, even if not explicitly, in scholarship on policing, social control, and the criminalization of young people in state institutions and public spaces. Scholars like Loic Wacquant (2007) emphasize close linkages between the policing of urban spaces perceived to represent "danger" and criminality, and processes of stigmatization. These dynamics, according to Wacquant, Slater, and Borges Pereira (2014), can lead to reduced service delivery by street-level bureaucracies and state agencies to stigmatized spaces which simultaneously experience heightened surveillance.

Exploring everyday forms of criminalization in public schools and public spaces, Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001) unveils how intersections of race and class drive the construction of a "threatening" and "unsalvageable" black masculinity. Boys and adolescents in public schools in the United States are subject to labelling practices and disciplinary rules which operate to punish and brand them as "criminal" (Ferguson 2001). Even when they are innocent, these boys are labelled "thieves," stigmatized when entering stores and while on the streets, and routinely treated without dignity and respect. Victor Rios (2011) examines similar dynamics within Black and Latinx communities in the United States, focusing on the hyper-criminalization of boys and men. The latter, he argues, refers to processes by which everyday behaviors are routinely treated as deviant, threatening, or criminal across social institutions and contexts, leading to constant punishment. Focusing beyond the scope of the law, Rios unveils pervasive patterns of

criminalization that comprise what he calls the “youth control complex” (2011:14). He delineates a system wherein schools, the police, probation officers, community centers, families, the media, and businesses all systematically contribute to criminalizing young people’s everyday behaviors.

Complicating earlier labelling theories, Rios (2011) argues that labelling is not just about the internalization of marked identities, but about repeated interactions with state agencies that heighten criminalization and deepen stigmatization. Describing this process as a “labelling hype” Rios (2011:55) examines how criminalization is multiplied through contact with multiple agencies of social control like schools and the police. He also underscores the ways in which young boys and men internalize the labels they are given and begin to behave in accordance with the stereotypes placed on them. Although Rios finds some evidence of resistance among young boys and men, these acts, he argues, often involve engaging in low-stake criminal activity to subvert ideas about hyper-criminalization.

In this dissertation I draw from the preceding strands of literature, broadly focusing on neoliberal governance and spatial politics, everyday forms of state practice and violence, and the political economy of childhood. Centering the experiences of children and families living and working in state-contested urban spaces, I ask: How, and to what end, does state-produced violence operate in people’s everyday lives? In the following section I discuss the methods and approach that motivated and sustained my research and the data I collected, while contextualizing my sites of research and how I gained access to them.

Methods: Approach, Data, and Setting

Approach

When I began this project, I was concerned with understanding how gender and caste mapped onto children's experiences of paid and unpaid work across family and nonfamily settings. Delhi's informal economy was my research context, and my comparative design was inspired by debates about India's 2016 Child Labor Amendment Act.¹³ But as is the case with all ethnographic work, my research evolved. It soon became clear that if I wanted to understand children's work, particularly as performed outside the home and on the streets, I had to ask questions that would allow me to better understand the indivisibility between precariousness in housing, work, and health, and structural dislocation more generally.

I conducted this multi-sited ethnographic project in Delhi between 2016 and 2018, with some follow up research in the summer of 2019. I chose my ethnographic sites of research based on the work that children in each respective space did. I gained access to my research sites through civil society organizations, which served as my gatekeepers. In the case of Aakash Sadan Shelter, this is a service-oriented Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) school (SAHAY)¹⁴ attended by the children from the shelter and neighboring *bastis*. My conversations and interviews with children began here and I followed them back to the shelter (with some difficulty). In the case of Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*, I gained access through DISHA, a community-oriented civil society organization with nonformal education and other programs in the community. I concentrated my ethnographic research in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* and Aakash

¹³ This act was widely contested by civil society groups for its presumption that the loosely defined terrain of "family-based" work is more protected than market-oriented work.

¹⁴ I use pseudonyms, not acronyms, for all organizations. They are Hindi words which I capitalize to avoid using the names of existing NGOs.

Sadan shelter (rather than the SAHAY school and neighboring *bastis*). In both these residential communities, children engaged in a mix of paid and unpaid work and school. I elaborate upon these settings and my process of gaining access below.

Having tried for almost a year to gain access to sites where working children had direct relationships with employers, I concluded that the potential risks of speaking with children in these situations would be too great. Before arriving at this decision, I met with a range of civil society workers and anti-child-labor activists, one of whom offered to facilitate 15 to 25 minute conversations with children working in rented rooms/workshops. I decided against this, not only because of the restricted research context, but primarily because children might face potential backlash from employers.

Some civil-society activists and workers told me that in the aftermath of the 2016 Child Labor Amendment Act, which banned nonfamily work for children under 14, it would be particularly challenging and risky to speak with children who had direct relationships with employers. During one meeting with a civil society group working with home-based workers, I learn that the police had conducted raids in workplaces where children were employed, shutting them down. Children were also less visible as workers across the city, and some members of the civil society were concerned that those working on the street were being rounded up by the police and pushed into less visible forms of work.¹⁵

Recognizing the unique challenges and sensitivities associated with research with children living in poverty, my methods were initially informed by child-centered research ethics

¹⁵ While my own research didn't confirm this, I learned about some of this during a visit to a community of home-based workers which I did not explore further as a site for research. However, I did conduct one formal semi-structured interview and several informal interviews with women, children, and civil society workers here. Other civil society workers also told me that children previously employed in certain parts of the city were no longer visible; I observed this myself, both alone and during visits to the area with civil society workers.

and techniques (Boyden & Ennew 1997; Morrow 2009; Scott 2000). Following this body of scholarship, in both Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* and the NGO (SAHAY) school near Aakash Sadan shelter, I first interacted with children through group discussions, recommended for building trust, comfort, and openness (Boyden and Ennew 1997; Morrow 2009). In Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*, and initially at the SAHAY school, before conducting individual semi-structured interviews with children, I first got to know them. I visited children during their nonformal education classes, interacting with them about what they were learning and chatting with them after their lessons. This process, which I discuss below, differed in Aakash Sadan shelter.

Ethnography in each of these spaces, including a *basti* near Aakash Sadan shelter, involved forging in-person relationships with children and their mothers consistently and over time. These interactions also extended beyond the time I spent with families face-to-face. While living in Delhi, and during periods of travel, I kept in touch with children and their families over the phone (often through a designated person in the family or community who had access to one). This mode of communication proved particularly useful in the face of several crises during the course of my fieldwork, which were often a matter of life and death. Given the nature of these challenges, I chose to participate in community-engaged work when my support was invited. I did this, for instance, following a 2018 fire that devastated Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*, and in the immediate aftermath of the death of an infant during childbirth when I was visiting the community. My support in the latter case entailed helping the mother who needed, and was denied urgent care, to receive it. In Manohar Nivas, the support I provided also consisted primarily of accompanying mothers and their children to hospitals (where they were often policed and denied care), and trying to ensure children did not succumb to illnesses (though, regrettably, they often still did).

Providing non-monetary support to the children and families who invited me into their most intimate spaces, and gave me so much of their time, was the most ethical way in which I could proceed with my research. In doing so, however, I made sure to arrive at a balance between my engagement and maintaining my primary role as a researcher (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). I also participated in advocacy and social movements-influenced collectives, both in the aftermath of the 2018 fire and independently of that event. While this was not my motivation, I found that taking this approach furthered the ethnographic depth of my research (Parvez 2018), providing me with unique data and deeper insights into how the spaces in which I was engaged operated. Given the violence and extreme poverty that characterized my informants' everyday lives, while in the field (and afterwards) I reflected on the politics of ethnographic representation, cautioning myself against exoticizing and/or essentializing human suffering (Parvez 2018; Small 2015).

Data

Across my field-sites I collected ethnographic data through participant observation and hundreds of informal conversations/interviews with children, their parents or adult guardians, and civil society and social workers. To supplement ethnographic data I also conducted 73 formal, semi-structured interviews. Of the children I interviewed, 20 were boys and 21 were girls. I also interviewed 25 mothers or guardians. I conducted 7 interviews with practitioners; a mix of civil society and scholar-activists, and representatives from the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB). Throughout my research process, I wrote fieldnotes that I coded using NVIVO. I also wrote analytic memos based on un-coded fieldnotes. The interviews were transcribed and coded in NVIVO and through supplementary coding methods.

As anticipated, age was not always a meaningful category; children and parents did not always know exact ages. Those with whom I conducted formal semi-structured interviews were typically between around 7 and 17 years old. I spoke repeatedly with many children who were younger than 7 and draw from this ethnographic data. Most women I interviewed and had informal conversations with were in their twenties or thirties; a few were older. Owing to cultural norms it was not appropriate for me to conduct semi-structured interviews with men. However, with time, after families saw me returning to their communities consistently over several years, my interactions with men and older boys shifted, and many spoke with me with great openness. I initially navigated challenging gender dynamics with boys and men, who at times did not appear to take me seriously, perhaps owing to my positionality as young Indian woman with class privilege. This was particularly true with older boys in Aakash Sadan who were accustomed to observing boundaries with young women and were sometimes shy (or too playful) with me. However, the same boys grew to be very expressive and also protective towards me.¹⁶ More generally, my gender interacted with misconceptions about my age; people thought I was much younger than I am, which was mostly advantageous.

Although almost all families in both communities were non-upper-caste, most did not know their caste. In some instances, women/mothers would call out to their children instructing them to ask their fathers about this; most often, however, I did not get answers to questions about caste from residents of the community. I therefore verified what I heard about caste from community members with civil-society workers engaged in these spaces. Almost all children

¹⁶ During the initial phase of my research in Aakash Sadan shelter, the boys I spoke with would keep their distance physically whenever we were speaking. This shifted over time. Boys would behave more informally with me and were less distant physically and emotionally (i.e., some extended their hands to shake mine on occasion, or would confidently tell off strangers/men who would try and interact inappropriately with me outside the shelter). In Manohar Nivas, young boys (and girls) would also exhibit protective tendencies (i.e., alerting me to leave for home when the sun went down because they felt it was unsafe for me to travel alone in the dark).

were born in Delhi, as were many parents. Historically, most families in Manohar Nivas were originally from Uttar Pradesh, while those in Manohar Nivas were predominantly from Maharashtra or Karnataka.

Interviews with children ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, while interviews with adults were typically 45 minutes to an hour, with some being slightly shorter or longer. Given that almost all my informants were semi-literate or illiterate, with some exceptions among school-going children, I obtained verbal consent before recording interviews. To protect anonymity, I use pseudonyms for all of my informants, my field-sites, urban spaces in the city, and the civil society organizations/NGOs with which I interacted. I do not use pseudonyms for Delhi state agencies or entities, regional areas within the city, and locations outside of Delhi. I conducted all interviews with children and their mothers or guardians in Hindi. Many conversations with civil society and NGO workers were in Hindi, and some of these conversations and interviews were a mix of mostly Hindi and some English. A few of my interviews with civil society and scholar-activists were predominantly, or exclusively, in English.

Setting

Manohar Nivas Jhuggi

In July of 2016, I boarded an overnight bed-bus to return to my home in Delhi from Bhim, Rajasthan, after completing a two-day residential course on “Law and Poverty” at the School for Democracy (SFD). I had been invited to attend the course by Kaashika, a legal scholar-activist and well-regarded expert on law, justice and poverty, who had first agreed to meet me in a South Delhi library to discuss her work. Kaashika was directing the course at SFD. After hearing about my research interests, she told me that if I made the trip to Bhim, she would

introduce me to her colleague who directed a civil society organization she held in high esteem. Kaashika's praise for DISHA was not something I took lightly. Having by then met with several non-governmental and civil society organizations, none of which I felt comfortable engaging with, I rescheduled my plans and booked my travel.

This marked the beginning of my engagement with DISHA, and my access to Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* where the organization had been working for years. The DISHA social worker I met at the residential course invited me to visit Manohar Nivas where the organization worked to support non-upper-caste children (and families) engaged in street-based work (such as recycling and sorting, begging, and playing the *dhol* at weddings). It took several meetings with DISHA staff and informal visits to the community over several months to navigate access to the space.

The easiest way for me to get to Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* was by metro. While approaching or leaving the metro station, from the train window you can see over 200 *jhuggis* made of a mix of wood, blankets, and other scrap material, including plastic and polythene bags. Children can also be seen running, playing, carrying water, and working amidst homes, small shops and stalls, and by the metro itself. Upon exiting the station, you have to walk across an overpass connected to a busy main road, and then cross it and walk down some steps before you can reach the community. There is also an alternative, less taken path across the train tracks.

On a typical day you will see traffic police directing cars, buses, and pedestrians, as they simultaneously keep an eye on who comes up and down the steps that connect the community to the main road and metro station. After reaching the foot of the steps leading toward the entrance of Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* you have to navigate a cluster of cycle rickshaw drivers and fruit and vegetable vendors, and then walk diagonally across a muddy open surface toward the entrance of the community. Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* is located on state-contested land under the Delhi metro

flyover and between the Delhi government railway tracks. The politics surrounding this land means daily insecurity for residents of the community. These dynamics became particularly pronounced during and in the aftermath of the 2018 fire that devastated the majority of homes in the community.

Aakash Sadan Shelter (and Surrounds)

Aakash Sadan shelter is hidden amidst scattered tea and food stalls and a small truck depot on a narrow, dusty side street off a busy Central Delhi road. Located not too far from Shiva Ganj, Delhi's "backpacker's paradise," it is a short e-rickshaw ride from one of the busiest metro stations in the area. On a typical day, upon exiting the station, groups of women and children are selling balloons and/or begging by the traffic lights at the adjoining intersection. There is invariably a cluster of eight-seater e-rickshaws on both sides of the intersection with each driver vying for a sufficient number of customers to justify his next ride. Still, whenever I asked to be dropped at Aakash Sadan shelter I was refused, amidst a mix of surprised and disapproving looks. Eventually I stopped asking, deciding to get off in front of the more highly regarded and more visible Bawani shelter which, although not more than a 10 to 15 minute walk from Motia Khan shelter, was located on the main road.

I first encountered the shelter by accident. After many months of trying, I managed to schedule a meeting with Lina, a social worker at the SAHAY NGO school near Akash Sadan shelter. I had been trying to meet with Lina for some months after hearing about the school's engagement with children working on the street (and other spaces). Within the first five minutes of our meeting a young mother with a visibly, and severely, malnourished child arrived at the school unannounced. She walked up to Lina, whom she seemed to know, interrupting our conversation. Danish, her baby, was unable to retain food or drink and Tara, his mother, came to

ask Lina for help. Within a few minutes, Danish threw up a piece of food he was given to eat. As we started to clean up the space around us Lina apologized, acknowledging that we had met for all of a few minutes, while asking me if I would be willing to help her. She needed to take Tara and Danish to the hospital, as Danish might not survive. If I weren't comfortable accompanying them, Lina said, I could come back another day. In that moment, the decision seemed obvious to me. I accompanied Lina, Danish, and his family to the hospital. In retrospect, had I made a different choice my research would have evolved quite differently.

Choosing to assist Lina that day led to my first encounter with Aakash Sadan shelter where Danish was born and lived. It also gave me remarkable insight into the exclusionary policing and violence families at the shelter faced while trying to seek urgent care at government and public-private hospitals. Because the health system failed Danish while also shaming his family, I provided nonmonetary support for Danish's recovery during my continued, though infrequent, initial visits to the shelter.¹⁷

It was through these initial visits that I developed connections with families at the shelter. I maintained these connections through interactions with children at the SAHAY NGO school, while also making infrequent visits to the shelter. After almost eight months I managed to negotiate complete and daily access to the shelter on my own.

Aakash Sadan was widely identified by civil society groups as Delhi's "worst" and most underserved shelter. The shelter falls under the purview of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) which works in partnership with an appointed NGO. "I can call it the absolute worst shelter," Sharmila, a social worker and teacher at the SAHAY NGO school told me.

¹⁷ Although Danish fully recovered, he later succumbed to another illness. Very regrettably, I only learned about this after it happened. His untimely death coincided with a phase in which I had been travelling out of Delhi and had established clearer boundaries with Danish's family to privilege my role as a researcher.

Sharmila, like Lina, had been one of my gatekeepers and allowed me to conduct my early conversations with children at the SAHAY school who lived in the shelter and the neighboring *bastis*. The children and families living in the shelter were non-upper-caste; most sold balloons, toys, and other items on the streets. While most children had been born in Delhi, and viewed it as their home, their grandparents mostly migrated to the city from Maharashtra and Karnataka. The shelter housed at least 300 families at any given time but did not have the capacity to do so; it also lacked basic amenities. To further contextualize the residential space, I provide a thick description of the shelter in Chapter 2.

Dissertation Overview

In the following chapters, I present three overarching empirical arguments that I summarize below. I organize Chapter 2 in terms of a comparative analysis of my empirical cases, centering on the accounts of children, their families, and practitioners. In Chapter 3 I follow girls in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* as they attempt to secure access to water, and in Chapter 4 I follow boys in Aakash Sadan who are engaged in street work. Across all chapters, focusing on people's encounters with the practices, institutions, and people that comprise the Delhi state, I demonstrate that despite structural dislocation, children and their families negotiate their vulnerabilities in powerful ways.

In Chapter 2, through a comparative analysis of my empirical cases, I bring theories of spatialized power into conversation with Faranak Miraftab's (2004) framework on the mutually constitutive concepts of "invited" and "invented" spaces of participation. Extending this framework, I conceptualize Aakash Sadan shelter as an invited, state-sanctioned space, supported by a state legitimized NGO. Conversely, I conceptualize Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* as an invented

space that directly confronts state authority and the status quo with the support of a social movements-influenced civil society organization. I argue that regulatory power operates in each residential community in different ways. This happens through *spatial territorialism* and *stigmatized surveillance* in the invited space of Manohar Nivas, and *spatial cooperation* and *discretionary surveillance* in the invented space of Aakash Sadan. Residents resist their domination to varied degrees in each space, with regulatory power being most detrimental in the invited space of Aakash Sadan. Both empirical cases underscore important connections between the production of urban space and unequal urban citizenship.

In Chapter 3 I examine the Delhi “state” through the everyday encounters of Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* residents with the workings of Delhi’s nodal agency for water distribution, the Delhi Jal Board. I argue that the denial of access to water in Manohar Nivas is a form of state-induced structural violence that gives rise to microforms of violence at the community level. Extending Auyero’s (2012) work on waiting, I demonstrate how waiting for water from the state is a core feature of structural violence. Yet, contrary to Auyero (2012), I argue that residents of Manohar Nivas do not inevitably become patients of the state. As they wait, they simultaneously negotiate alternative sources of water through acts of resistance. Responsible for familial care, girls take the lead in doing so, navigating what they frame as “fights” for water at a local water tank. As such, I underscore the mutually reinforcing nature of violence that is at once structural and direct, and commonly located on opposing ends of a continuum (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004).

In Chapter 4 I argue that street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010)—government school teachers and the Delhi police—use strategies of *performative policing* to criminalize children engaged in street work. This form of policing cautions against resistance to state dominance, by

employing overt (e.g., physical) and covert violence (e.g., verbal abuse). The resulting mechanisms of everyday criminalization, in turn, serve to maintain and reproduce inequalities in social status and income, entrenching poverty and stigmatization as dual processes. Extending Sally Merry (1998), I conceptualize everyday criminalization as both social in nature and existing in connection with the law. As both schools and the streets become sites of regulatory state power, strategies of *performative policing* deny interactional citizenship (Auyero 2012) to street workers, who are not accorded respect and/or dignity by the state. However, extending Victor Rios' (2011) concept of "labelling hype," I find that children do not internalize criminal identities. They are, instead, critical of their dehumanization and resist violence and injustice where they can.

CHAPTER II

THE POLITICS OF SURVEILLANCE IN “INVITED” AND “INVENTED” SPACES: FROM SPATIAL TERRITORIALISM TO COOPERATION

“Your *jhuggi* will be demolished [they said]. . . . They made us sit in a garbage truck . . . we were hungry. Our children were small and were hungry.” In her despondent account of the day the Delhi police demolished her family’s Kolapur *jhuggi*, Sheetal, a mother of five, echoed narratives I heard repeatedly in Manohar Nivas and Aakash Sadan shelter. Children and their parents shared collective and varied memories of bulldozers entering their communities unannounced, flattening their homes, and destroying everything they owned. While they demolished homes, in some instances the local police also beat women and children, throwing away food and breaking utensils. Amidst this, the police made false promises of new homes and demolition receipts to legitimize their violence— none of which materialized.

In both Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* and Aakash Sadan shelter, children are intimately socialized to the endemic violence of evictions and the state’s production of exclusionary space in the name of city beautification (Bhan 2009; Dupont 2011; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008). When sharing their experiences of dispossession and their everyday negotiations with local state authorities like the police, children as young as six or seven spoke to me with great clarity about the *sarkar*¹⁸ and its power. These narratives were not about victimization, nor were they about agency.¹⁹ Children and families did not accept the exercise of power by state authorities as fair or just. Their accounts reflected everyday negotiations for survival, imbued with aspirational assertions and capacities for resistance.

¹⁸ *Sakar* is loosely used to denote “government” and the “state.” It literally translates as “administrative government.”

¹⁹ Theories of childhood center questions about agency. Recognizing that agency is a fraught concept, I follow Shah’s (2014) call for an understanding of agency as a capacity to act and negotiate survival. My analyses therefore examine children’s capacities for resistance.

Both residential communities are uniquely positioned across a continuum of shelter options; Aakash Sadan residents are unsheltered while Manohar Nivas residents are temporarily sheltered. In Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* some children identified *zameen*, or land, as fundamental to their daily challenges. In Aakash Sadan shelter children believed that the solution to most of their struggles lay in finding a small home or *jhuggi*. Despite their different locations, everyday life in each community tells a unique story about the politics of land and the politics of space.

In this chapter, I build on the concept of spatiality as a dynamic set of relations between actors; produced, politically organized, and embedded in complex power relations (Foucault 1977; Lefebvre 1970, 1974; Soja 1971, 1989; Shah 2014). Specifically, I bring theories of spatialized power into conversation with Faranak Miraftab's (2004) framework on the mutually constitutive²⁰ concepts of invited and invented spaces of participation, through a comparative analysis of my empirical cases. In Miraftab's (2004) framework, "invited" spaces are sanctioned by the state and operate with the support of donor and/or state legitimized Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These spaces contain limited scope for collective citizen action, reinforcing existing structures of oppression and the status quo. Conversely, "invented" spaces confront authorities and the status quo; they resist dominant power relations through citizen participation.

Extending this framework, I conceptualize Aakash Sadan shelter as an invited space, one that is operated through a partnership between the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and ROSHAN, an NGO which is appointed, funded, and therefore, legitimized by DUSIB. Established under the 2010 Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Act, DUSIB is the

²⁰ In her later writings, Miraftab (2009) emphasizes that "invited" and "invented" spaces should be thought of on a continuum, rather than in binary terms. While I recognize that both of my sites of research may be characterized by elements of "invited" and "invented" spaces, my argument reflects my analyses of those features that best characterize each respective space.

designated nodal agency for the city's *jhuggi jhopdi* clusters (JJs),²¹ often also referred to as informal settlements. The Delhi state agency is responsible for the overall well-being of these residential communities, including their upgrading, rehabilitation, and relocation to more secure housing. Soon after it was established, DUSIB was made responsible for managing state-funded shelters for the homeless.²² Aakash Sadan shelter was established in the same year as DUSIB, following the Delhi High Court's directive to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to convert an unused DUSIB community center into a temporary shelter to house a community the MCD had forcibly evicted in the lead up to the Commonwealth games.

In contrast to Aakash Sadan shelter, I identify Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* as an invented space. Following conceptions of insurgent citizenship (Holston 2008, Miraftab 2009), I locate the community's occupation of "illegal" land as an assertion of nonformal citizenship. Residents of Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* disrupt relations of domination by occupying land characterized by "illegalities" (Bhan 2009, 2016; Holston 2008; Miraftab 2009). They do so with the support of DISHA, a social movements-influenced NGO or Civil Society Organization (CSO)²³ that directly confronts state authority and policy, and the hegemonic status quo (Miraftab 2004).

Extending the conceptual boundaries of Miraftab's (2004) framework, I theorize Aakash Sadan shelter and Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* as invited and invented *spatial domains of regulatory power* wherein members of each residential community express capacities for resistance to differing degrees across a continuum. Specifically, I argue that the following distinctive features characterize how regulatory power operates in each type of residential space: *spatial*

²¹ *Jhuggi jhopdi* clusters are a state classification used to identify urban poor settlements/dwellings that exist on public or private land, and lack formal and legal titles (Bhan et al. 2014).

²² Before DUSIB, The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) was responsible for providing civic amenities to the urban poor.

²³ Although I use the terms NGO and CSO interchangeably, with the exception of ROSHAN, the NGOs referenced in this chapter are more CSO in orientation. This is true of DISHA, which is also social movements-influenced.

territorialism and *stigmatized surveillance* in the invited space of Aakash Sadan shelter, and *spatial cooperation* and *discretionary surveillance* in the invented space of Manohar Nivas Jhuggi. These mutually reinforcing spatial features also serve as distinct mechanisms through which precarity is enforced and poverty is entrenched, to differing degrees.

Neoliberal State Governance and the Production of Urban Space

With the intensification of neoliberal governance and market logics in the Global South, the production of space in southern cities has been characterized by an “aesthetics” of poverty (Bhan 2009; Ghertner 2010; Miraftab and Kudva 2015; Roy 2004). The aspiration of the Indian neoliberal state to transform Delhi into a global or world class city—without signs of visible poverty—has changed how the urban poor have been understood and represented (Bhan 2009; Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2011; Rao 2013). Monolithic representations of the poor as an urban “problem” and “nuisance” are prevalent in state and middle-class/urban-elite discourse on “slum free” cities (Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2012). Paradoxically, despite meeting the demands of the middle and elite urban classes and contributing to the functioning of major Indian cities, the urban poor have been identified as non-viable and threatening (Bhan 2009; Ghertner 2010; 2011; Dupont 2011; Ramanathan 2006). Usha Ramanathan (2006) shows how the Indian judiciary has itself constructed the urban poor as “encroachers” of public land. This particular illegality has been invoked by the state to justify the violence of evictions in the name of city beautification and cleaning, and in making Delhi infrastructurally “smart” (Baviskar 2004; Bhan 2009, Bhan, Goswami, and Revi 2014; Dupont 2011; Fernandes 2004; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008; Ramanathan 2006).

The illegality of the urban poor is, according to Gautam Bhan (2016), largely spatial in nature. In a critique of the historical conflation of urban informality with illegality Bhan (2016)

argues that, in fact, “informal” and “illegal” practices also extend to Delhi’s urban elite. Just as the condition of informality is produced by the state, spatial illegalities are planned by the state as well (Bhan 2009, 2016; Bhan et al. 2014). These illegalities exist on a spectrum. As Bhan (2016) demonstrates, most land in Delhi is informally produced and characterized by some degree of “illegality.” Yet the state does not treat all spatial illegalities equally; it legitimizes the acquisition of unauthorized land on the outskirts of the city by the urban elite, for instance, while criminalizing *jhuggi jhopdis* (Bhan 2016). As such, the illegalities of the wealthy and those living in poverty are mutually constitutive. Scholarship on other parts of India and the Global South also underscore the dynamic and relational production of urban space (Bayat 2010; Holston 2009; Shah 2014). Challenging binary representations of “legality”/“illegality”—and “licit”/“illicit”—Svati Shah (2014) demonstrates how urban spaces in Mumbai are produced in relation to one another through varied practices, actors, circumstances and laws.

Elaborating on this discussion and building on Ramanathan (2006), Bhan (2016) argues that the urban encroacher becomes a non-citizen excluded from the “right to the city.” This idea is reflected in other scholarship on India and the Global South that underscores how the production of space has increasingly been tied to the limited and exclusionary nature of urban citizenship (Fernandes 2004; Shah 2014; Holston and Appadurai 1999; Holston 2008; Miraftab 2004, 2009).

State-Citizen Relations: From “Invited” to “Invented” Spaces

Faranak Miraftab (2004, 2009) argues that the relationship between citizen action and space is shaped by neoliberal governance logics²⁴ that legitimize state dominance through

²⁴ Although Miraftab is influenced by a Gramscian perspective, many writing about such logics draw on Foucauldian notions of neoliberal governmentality, wherein power exists beyond conventional state politics and through disciplinary techniques of social control in a variety of aspects of social life.

political inclusion without redistributive equity. Theorizing the relationship between the state and civil society, she introduces the mutually constitutive concepts of “invited” and “invented” spaces of citizen participation. Invited spaces are state sanctioned; they operate with the support of state or donor legitimized NGOs that reinforce, rather than challenge, government interventions and the status quo (Miraftab 2004). NGOs in these spaces replace social movements, reinforcing existing structures of oppression and containing the scope for collective citizen action (Miraftab 2004, 2009). Conversely, invented spaces are occupied by communities that confront authorities and the status quo. Citizen participation here is supported through a focus on resisting dominant power relations.

Complementing Miraftab’s (2004, 2009) framework, scholars have argued that the neoliberal Indian state has “hijacked” NGOs to serve its own interests (Kothari 1990). This has coincided with the NGO-ization of grassroots movements, wherein the self-sustaining impulses of organizations can sometimes prevail over their cause (Kamat 2002; Kothari 1990). This can coincide with NGO competition over resources and ideas, rather than collaboration among them (Nawyn 2010). Scholars have theorized a diverse set of NGO types on a spectrum that locates NGOs operating as extensions of the state on one end and people’s organizations or social movements-influenced NGOs on the other end (Constantino-David 1998; Kamat 2002). The former style of NGO is typically state funded, while the latter CSO-style is not.

Extending her framework empirically, Miraftab (2009) builds upon Holston’s (2008) concept of insurgent citizenship in informal settlements in Brazil. The illegal occupation of land in the Brazilian favela, Holston (2008) argues, is one form of citizenship practice. Here, communities excluded from formal citizenship leverage claims to the city, disrupting relations of domination, and destabilizing the hegemonic status quo (Holston 2008, Miraftab 2009).

Exploring similar dynamics in South Africa, Miraftab (2009) examines an anti-eviction campaign as an invented space.²⁵

The Politics of Space: Power, Territoriality and Stigmatization

Michel Foucault (1977:149) writes that “a whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of *powers*—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.” Whether within or outside formal institutions and structures, a Foucauldian framework identifies space as synonymous with power; and power as ubiquitous. Also writing about the politics of space, Lefebvre (1970, 1974) characterizes space as a *means* of power and domination, and a means of production. He argues that space is produced through a confluence of multiple actors, none of whom are rendered powerless.

Edward Soja (1989), who coined the now widely used concept of *spatiality*, argues that relations of power and discipline are part of the spatiality of social life, rendering human geographies inseparable from politics and ideology. Spatiality has been theorized as a dynamic set of relations between actors; produced, politically organized, and embedded in complex power relations (Foucault 1977; Lefebvre 1970, 1974; Soja 1971, 1989; Shah 2014).

Soja’s (1971) conceptualization of territoriality is shaped by spatial politics. Operating through spatial discontinuities that confine group activities, territoriality creates barriers to external contact. With an emphasis on the formation of group spatial identities, Soja (1971) argues that territoriality provides a link between social groups and the space they occupy; it is fundamental to how space is politically organized. Examining spatial territoriality by building on

²⁵ Scholars of Delhi have also extended Miraftab’s (2004) framework, including in the context of incremental insurgence by communities “illegally” occupying land (Braathen 2013; Dupont 2011; Aranya and Ulcet 2016). Dupont (2010) examines the process that resettled families into Aakash Sadan shelter. She does not examine the shelter as a space.

Bordieuan theories of symbolic power, Loic Wacquant (2007; Wacquant et al. 2014) examines how territorial stigmatization operates to shape the way in which a multitude of actors feel, think and act. Territorial stigmatization as conceived by Wacquant (2007; Wacquant et al. 2014) refers to how those who live in so-called “dumping grounds” for the urban poor, marked by “spatial taint,” can experience the social disintegration of their communities. According to Wacquant (2007), residents of areas perceived to represent disorder, danger, and criminality, internalize their stigmatization.

Territorial stigmatization, according to Wacquant et al. (2014) has impacts at several levels. First, for residents of tainted areas, it corrodes their sense of self, limiting their capacities for collective action. Residents of these spaces adopt coping mechanisms that validate their stigmatization, even though some try and resist it. Second, neighbors and those in surrounding communities avoid stigmatized residents. Third, the quality of service delivery in tainted spaces by street-level bureaucracies and state agencies diminishes, while intensive surveillance might increase. Fourth, journalists and others involved in symbolic production negatively represent stigmatized communities. And fifth, territorial stigmatization negatively impacts the beliefs, decisions, and policies held by the state about these spatially tainted communities. Across all these levels, territorial stigmatization is linked to existing sources of stigma like poverty, race, and citizenship status (Wacquant 2007). It is also concomitant with spatial inequality. Together, territorial stigmatization and spatial inequality drive advanced marginality such that the stability once associated with “place” can often be replaced by the more threatening and unstable domain of social “space.”²⁶

²⁶ Michel de Certeau (1984) first distinguished the more stable quality of place from the unpredictable nature of space. Scholars building upon Wacquant (e.g., Kornberg 2016) appear to use the concepts of place and space interchangeably.

These diverse sets of literature on spatiality and power, and the production of urban space in the context of neoliberal logics of governance, inform my analyses in this chapter. Extending theories of spatial power to my empirical cases in the next section, I demonstrate how the production of space is inseparable from the power and violence of the state. However, in each residential community that I examine, spatial power operates distinctly, owing to differences between state-confronting and state-legitimizing politics.

The “Invited” Space of Aakash Sadan Shelter: Situating a State-NGO Partnership

Aakash Sadan shelter is a large four-storied yellow building, surrounded by an open-air cemented space. It is encircled by an unpainted and dirt stained cement wall, which has several black iron rodded gates attached to it. The same black iron rods, on which residents dry and air their clothes and blankets, extend upwards from the cement wall. Attached to these rods are several bamboo sticks onto which Indian flags are mounted, signaling the state’s presence, and its ownership and oversight over the building.

About 300 people reside in Aakash Sadan shelter at any given point; some come and go seasonally. Each floor of the shelter contains two large hall-like rooms. One is reserved as office space for shelter management (ROSHAN-DUSIB), while clusters of families live together in the other rooms, with little to no privacy. Most families sleep directly on the ground or on *charpais*,²⁷ and in rare cases, *divaans*.²⁸ Families living in the two smaller ground floor rooms typically have less privacy than those on the upper floors. The open cemented area, where some families also sleep and live, has no privacy. Even on days when there is running water it is scarce, and toilets are rarely functional.

²⁷ *Charpais* are woven beds without backboards made of natural fibers.

²⁸ *Divaaans* are wooden sofas without arms or backboards used to sit and sleep on.

Families with greater relative resources live on the upper floors. Kamla, Danish's aunt, was the first person to explain this to me. She used to live in the open-air space of the shelter on the ground floor, but now lives upstairs in what she refers to as her "in-laws' house." Her husband earns a moderately reliable monthly income, and Kamla's spatial location in the shelter signifies that she has married up, quite literally. Still, conditions on the upper floors of the shelter are only relatively improved, with toilets remaining dysfunctional, and only two families having access to small gas cooking stoves. Other shelter residents either cook on wood in the open cemented space or rely on low-cost street food when they can afford it. Hunger, and crises in health and sanitation, predominate in the space.

Despite the many floors in the shelter, representatives from both the state agency, DUSIB, and its partner NGO, ROSHAN, told me that only one portion of the middle floor of the shelter is officially under the purview of the shelter. This technicality, unknown to most, may account for why the building, widely accepted to be Delhi's most underserved and "absolute worst shelter," is so grossly underserved and spatially unequal.

This perspective is not limited to CSO representatives, social workers, and Delhi state bureaucrats. Shelter residents, too, expressed this view. Asha, who lived on the ground floor of the shelter and was either in her late fifties or early-mid sixties, told me one day that "this is the worst shelter, there are small children here and in not one room is there a cooler,²⁹ not in one room." The extreme temperatures of Delhi summers, coupled with the concentration of bodies and lack of ventilation in the shelter, made surviving heat particularly challenging.³⁰

²⁹ Coolers are much cheaper substitutes for air conditioners. They blow out cool air with a fan and water. The coolers Asha was referring to were even more basic (and much cheaper) than coolers that would be observed in middle-class households.

³⁰ The lack of shelter, or of adequate shelter, is a major cause of deaths in Delhi. At least 10 people living without shelter in Delhi die every day (Mander 2010). This number is likely much higher, particularly in summer and winter months.

Asha and I continued our conversation, crouched down next to one another on the open cement area of the shelter. Roop, who was Kamla's mother and Danish's grandmother, was sitting with us also. Asha continued to explain why Aakash Sadan was so much worse than other shelters. Other shelters, she told me, had basic functional amenities, including consistent water, even water machines, and coolers. In this shelter, she said "there is *nothing* of that kind." Like Asha, most residents of Aakash Sadan shelter felt their living space did not meet even their basic needs. They were aware of the lack of sanitation in the space, and felt that ROSHAN, the NGO working to manage the shelter in league with the Delhi state (i.e., DUSIB) was negligent.

Civil society representatives, too, were critical of how ROSHAN operated the shelter. Shonali, who worked with a social movements-influenced NGO, and was part of an anti-eviction advocacy collective I joined, was vocal about this. It became clear during one of our meetings that she knew of Akash Sadan shelter and its challenges, so I asked her for an interview. We met in a small meeting room in her South Delhi basement office. Shonali told me "they [ROSHAN] wanted to have it [Aakash Sadan shelter] on their own, have their *own* space, and they wanted to *manage more* shelter." ROSHAN's interest in maintaining exclusive authority over the spatial governance of the shelter dated back many years. The organization, Shonali explained, had been invested in expanding its managerial reach and funded partnerships with the Delhi state. It had not wanted to collaborate with civil society-oriented NGOs.

Having developed expertise in a niche market for shelter management, borrowing from Miraftab (2004), ROSHAN was "legitimized" by the Delhi government's urban poverty interventions which it reinforced by uncritically executing state policies. Emphasizing ROSHAN's unwillingness to challenge the Delhi state, Shonali traced the evolution of Aakash Sadan shelter from its inception. Just as others told me, she explained that the shelter was

established when the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) forcibly evicted a community living in another shelter near Moti Lal roundabout. This happened toward the end of December 2009 and in the first few days of January 2010 following the death of an evicted former shelter resident.³¹ The Delhi High court denounced the eviction, directing the MCD to find temporary shelter, and ultimately, adequate housing for the community. But when the MCD established Aakash Sadan shelter it only authorized the space to run during the night.

To respond to this, Shonali elaborated, a civil society collective formed to fight for the conversion of Aakash Sadan into a 24-hour family shelter. The social movements- influenced NGO/CSO that Shonali worked with was a central member of this collective and invited ROSHAN to join forces. However, unwilling to take a critical position against the state, ROSHAN declined to join, aligning itself with the Delhi government instead.

Shonali's account located ROSHAN's alliance with the Delhi state in a broader critique of state policies on urban homelessness and poverty. "In the imagination of the state, shelters . . . [are] the end goal," she told me, emphasizing the failure of the state to conceive of housing rights on a continuum. This critique reflects the fundamental tension between housing rights advocacy by CSOs and the state's exclusion of the homeless from its housing policy. Central to the state's shelter management infrastructure, NGOs like ROSHAN are, by design, invested in the proliferation and maintenance of shelters as a narrow solution to Delhi's urban housing crisis (Bhan 2009).

ROSHAN can therefore be characterized as an NGO in league with the state, as one of many actors in a complex political economy of shelter management partnerships that serve to

³¹ The community had also been evicted before that, at least once, from a *Jhuggi* settlement. Following the 2009 eviction, a young man (and some say, a child) died while sleeping on the pavement in the cold. Negative press and a court case led to the formation of the civil society anti-eviction coalition/collective.

reinforce state policy on homelessness. These types of NGOs have been classified as extensions of the state (Kothari 1990; Kamat 2002). As Miraftab (2004) might argue, ROSHAN serves to reinstate and legitimize relations of dominance, and to serve, rather than challenge, the governance strategies of the neoliberal Indian state. By virtue of its very existence, ROSHAN indirectly strengthens the case for state-orchestrated evictions aimed at transforming Delhi into a world-class city (Bhan 2009; Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2011; Rao 2013).

ROSHAN's management of Aakash Sadan shelter characterizes the residential space as one that is an invited *spatial domain of regulatory power*. By design, the NGO was established to reinforce dominant state-citizen relations and fill a gap in state services without disrupting the status quo (Miraftab 2004). The organization's very existence and capacity to self-sustain, therefore, depends on the continued proliferation of homeless shelters as the solution to state-induced violence in the name of city beautification (Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008). Rather than challenging the violence of demolition evictions that create the need for shelters in the first place, ROSHAN works together with the state to reinforce its power and dominance. Following Miraftab (2004, 2009), by containing the scope for collective citizen action into an invited spatial domain of regulatory power, ROSHAN, in alliance with DUSIB, reinforces the structures of oppression that legitimize continued violence against the urban poor.

The 2009 Moti Lal roundabout eviction that led to the establishment of Aakash Sadan shelter was an event that even representatives of the state agency, DUSIB, were open with me about. Kumar, a senior DUSIB representative who had been a social worker at the time of the eviction, invited me to interview him at the Delhi Secretariat of the Aam Admi Party (AAP).³² We first met at Delhi's 2018 National Public Consultation on Rights and Dignity of the Urban

³² AAP, in Hindi, stands for the "common man's party." Known to have "pro-poor" policies, AAP currently governs the National Capital Territory, which includes Delhi.

Poor. After hearing his remarks, I approached Kumar with questions, asking if I could speak with him further. As we sat on the sprawling lawns of the AAP secretariat estate on a sunny winter afternoon, Kumar shared his account of the eviction:

It was in 2009/2010. The Commonwealth Games were going to happen, so the beautification of Delhi was taking place. . . . They [state representatives] took a lot of people off the streets, they were covering up many slums. . . . They sent a lot of people out of Delhi. . . . The Municipal corporation of Delhi (MCD), in the name of beautification, destroyed/broke down this shelter³³ . . . they *broke* it.

Here, Kumar invokes the Indian state's own language of city "beautification" as he speaks to the logics of neoliberal governance driving the state's continued violence against the urban poor (Baviskar 2004; Bhan 2009; Bhan et al. 2014; Dupont 2011). His account invokes scholarly critiques of world-class city-making, a process by which the urban poor are excluded from the state's vision of urban citizenship (Bhan 2009; Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2011; Rao 2013). This is especially true for those who are unsheltered and/or live in continued fear of demolition evictions.

Elaborating on the Moti Lal eviction case, Kumar explained how an old, abandoned DUSIB community center was used to establish Aakash Sadan shelter. After evicting the community, Kumar told me, the MCD "didn't know where to shift [the community] . . . so they shifted them to Aakash Sadan."³⁴ Following the Delhi High Court's directive to find housing for the evicted community, the Delhi government instructed the MCD, as its then appropriate nodal agency, to convert this derelict community center into a shelter. In doing so, the state was able to appease the court with little effort or accountability, absolving itself of the responsibility to provide the community with permanent, long-term housing, as per the official court directive.

³³ The evicted community had been living in a state-established homeless shelter; most had been previously evicted from *jhuggis*.

³⁴ In addition to marking the name of the shelter, Aakash Sadan is also the name of the area surrounding the shelter.

Shelters like Aakash Sadan represent temporary, band-aid solutions to a crisis in urban housing which is fueled and deepened by state-orchestrated demolition evictions. This dynamic reflects a vicious cycle wherein the state strips communities of shelter, leaving them unsheltered (or “homeless”), thereby deepening their vulnerability and impoverishment. Ultimately, then, these communities become increasingly dependent on a state that fails to protect them.

These histories of urban dispossession are the backdrop against which ROSHAN’s use of regulatory power to produce and govern the invited space of Aakash Sadan shelter must be understood. The eviction of families living in the Moti Lal roundabout shelter—many of whom, years prior to that were evicted from their *jhuggis*—was an act of violence that ROSHAN, as an NGO in league with the state, validated. Rather than confronting what Miraftab (2004) might call the status quo on homelessness policy, ROSHAN served to reinforce it. A prominent actor in the business of shelter management, ROSHAN itself was not only legitimized by the state (Miraftab 2004), it was in equal measure, *legitimizing* of the state.

In the following section, I demonstrate how during the course of my research at Aakash Sadan shelter, ROSHAN actively sought to bar CSOs involved in state-opposing politics from accessing the shelter. By exercising its regulatory power, in concert with and legitimized by the state agency DUSIB, ROSHAN used what I call *spatial territorialism* as a mechanism to govern and manage Aakash Sadan shelter to the detriment of its residents.

“They Just Don’t Let Them In”: Spatial Territorialism in Aakash Sadan Shelter

When Shonali told me that ROSHAN “wanted to have it [the shelter] on their own, have their own space,” I was reminded of similar accounts I heard from civil society and social workers who wanted to provide needed services to residents of the shelter. As we spoke more about Aakash Sadan shelter and the challenges its residents faced, Shonali told me “They [shelter

management] don't allow any NGOs to go there firstly." She had learnt this when her own colleagues, who were aware of the inadequate amenities in the shelter, tried to better understand what kinds of support the community needed. Noticeably frustrated, Shonali told me that her colleagues tried unsuccessfully to gain access to the shelter in an effort to learn more about residents' needs; they found, instead, that "no one can go in there."³⁵ Elaborating, Sonali shared an example:

We wanted to do, like, some kind of workshop with the women and find out what the kids' problems are, like just a discussion, but they just *don't* allow it. . . . Like they [her colleagues] know Akash [ROSHAN's Director] and they know ROSHAN, but they *just don't* let them *in*, so it's really sad [sigh].

Shonali expressed similar feelings of sadness about the lack of access civil society-oriented NGOs had to Aakash Sadan shelter on several occasions during our conversation. Her account emphasizes how ROSHAN governed the shelter to produce an exclusionary space. Specifically, ROSHAN barred shelter access to the coalition of organizations that it had declined to join in the aftermath of the 2009 eviction. Despite continued efforts made by many of these organizations to support the needs of the community, ROSHAN prevented their attempts to forge sustained connections with shelter residents.

I call the production of space in this exclusionary manner *spatial territorialism*, a mechanism by which a single actor, or actors in partnership, regulate a spatial domain to exclude others, thereby maintaining their organizational and institutional power within the space. This concept builds on Foucauldian (1977) and Lefebvrian (1970, 1974) notions of space as power, and a means of power. Following Lefebvre (1974), spatial territorialism does not imply complete domination; rather, it may coexist with capacities for resistance. Extending Soja's (1971) conceptualization of territoriality, I demonstrate how ROSHAN, in league with the state agency

³⁵ Shonali refers here to institutional/organizational access, not access to individuals like myself.

DUSIB, creates barriers to access for civil society organizations external to the shelter. While Soja's conceptualization of spatial territoriality centers on the development of group spatial identities, I focus instead on how a state-legitimized NGO uses territorialism to regulate and contain citizen participation in an invited space. In doing so it reinforces the NGO's power and authority over the space.

Accounts about the use of *spatial territorialism* to govern the shelter were frequent. Sharmila, who worked for SAHAY, a service-oriented NGO running a nonformal education school near the shelter, spoke to this dynamic. As we stood at the end of the narrow lane outside the school one evening after it had closed for the day, Sharmila explained ROSHAN's approach to governing the shelter:

They are working, but they are not giving attention [to the people]. . . . I also realize that they are not *cooperating*. One time . . . I was very *angry* that time, and you know why, because I told one of the caretakers, on the first floor [of the shelter], you know, the French group [of volunteers] is coming. They are checking the students, sorry, shelters' kids and giving medicine . . . , but ROSHAN is not allowing them into the space. He [the caretaker] told them that 'this [space] is mine'. . . . If they [ROSHAN] are doing anything, they are watching like a statue.

Here, Sharmila uncovers several aspects of *spatial territorialism*, how it operates, and her feelings about it. Like Shonali, Sharmila's response to ROSHAN's unwillingness to cooperate with SAHAY is emotive, although she expresses anger rather than sadness. During our conversation, Sharmila clarified that she and her colleagues had also called ROSHAN's Director, Akash, on a number of occasions. They proposed to cooperate with ROSHAN to support the needs of shelter residents who asked for their assistance. The SAHAY NGO school was not mandated to provide medical support; it was a space for children to participate in nonformal education activities and share cooked meals. But parents from Aakash Sadan shelter often sought out SAHAY staff for emergency medical support for which they otherwise had no access,

especially when their children suffered from acute malnutrition and other severe illnesses. I witnessed these unannounced visits from parents with children in dire need of medical treatment.

As a service-oriented NGO, SAHAY's attempt to provide voluntary medical assistance to Aakash Sadan shelter residents was not unsolicited; it was a direct response to self-articulated and unmet needs from within the community. By preventing SAHAY from establishing a service or programmatic presence within the shelter, ROSHAN was exercising its regulatory power to govern the space in a manner that worked against the interests of the community. At the same time, ROSHAN grossly failed to provide this support itself.

As Sharmila noted, if ROSHAN was doing anything at all in Aakash Sadan shelter, it was “watching like a statue.” Indeed, under the watch of ROSHAN in partnership with the state agency DUSIB, the families of Aakash Sadan shelter negotiated everyday forms of structural violence without the support of the ROSHAN-DUSIB shelter management team. All too often, this meant residents of the community experienced prolonged illnesses. Children under the age of three were particularly susceptible and vulnerable to lingering illness and disease, to which they often succumbed. Even local *Anganwadi*³⁶ workers were not servicing the space despite the dire need. Because public hospitals failed them, residents were also being exploited by fraudulent private doctors.³⁷

It was typical that on my visits to the shelter, residents would ask me for medical support, which I provided almost exclusively through nonmonetary means. However, after continued

³⁶ Government Integrated Child Development Service Scheme (ICDS) aimed at combatting child malnutrition, nutrition and hunger. Akash, the Director of ROSHAN, promised to follow up with the local Anganwadi but I found that he never did.

³⁷ There are a growing number of “fake” and uncertified private doctors in Delhi who provide services to communities who have been denied public health care and cannot afford mainstream private care. Even the more minimal fees charged by these uncertified “doctors” often set families back for weeks, even requiring families to borrow or beg for money. I witnessed cases where doctors had prescribed medicines erroneously, with no concern for how residents invested all they had in some cases, into buying these medicines. I found that there are currently no legal mechanisms in place to hold fraudulent doctors accountable.

requests for help, and no positive responses from the ROSHAN-DUSIB management staff, I contacted a local civil society street medicine initiative to see whether they could provide sustained services to the shelter. “They won’t let the street medicine doctor or nurses enter the shelter,” said Komal, who coordinated the street medicine initiative through AARAAM (a social movements influenced NGO), about shelter management. I was hearing mixed messages from residents of the shelter about whether the AARAAM street medicine van had been coming. Some said that no one came, or that they hadn’t seen a van, while others said they saw a vehicle parked far away. It turned out that the AARAAM street medicine doctors and nurses were not permitted to enter the shelter. The street medicine team wanted to ask shelter residents about their medical needs, but ROSHAN staff instructed them to park further down the lane, away from the shelter, and wait outside the shelter for residents to come to them. Many shelter residents, however, did not know when the van came and went, even less that it came for their benefit. When I raised this with Kumar during our conversation at the AAP Secretariat, he immediately reassured me that no additional medical assistance was required. He told me that a Delhi state (DUSIB) medicine van was servicing the shelter. I told Kumar I had not seen the DUSIB van by the shelter even once, and that to the best of my knowledge the residents hadn’t either. Kumar was then quick to acknowledge that, in fact, the van had not been servicing the shelter all year round as mandated.

Given the failure of shelter management to address the community’s basic needs, the use of *spatial territorialism* by ROSHAN-DUSIB as a mechanism to regulate the shelter and consolidate exclusive spatial authority has been particularly detrimental for residents. Although NGOs funded to operate shelters in partnership with the Delhi state (DUSIB) are only expected to exhibit “managerial” expertise, this includes ensuring access to basic infrastructure and

amenities for residents' everyday survival. ROSHAN's use of this form of territorialism is arguably tied to the political economy of shelter management, whereby NGOs must bid for funds to manage shelters.³⁸ This dynamic reinforces scholarly critiques of the adverse consequences of NGO competition over resources (Nawyn 2010).

And yet, ROSHAN's negligence of shelter residents' needs, combined with its rejection of support from other organizations, has meant the difference between life and death in more than several instances.³⁹ These deaths, spoken about by adults and children alike, remained invisible to most ROSHAN NGO staff, including its Director who rarely visited the space. DUSIB staff appeared to be equally unaware. This was initially puzzling to me, and I wondered if ROSHAN-DUSIB staff were feigning ignorance. But it became apparent over time that, indeed, shelter management staff were, to the best of my knowledge, unaware. This lack of awareness was a reflection of how little, if at all, shelter management interacted with residents; and how even if a child's very survival was in jeopardy, residents did not feel they could seek support from shelter management.

The logics residents had about this were clear. "Do you tell ROSHAN staff about all these things that are happening?" I asked Roop, who was in her fifties and lost three grandchildren in the span of about six months. "No," she responded vehemently. "Why not?" I asked naively, "they might be able to help you." Her response was clear: "Nobody helps us with

³⁸ Dupont (2011) highlights examples of corruption in shelter management tendering processes. I also heard about evidence of corruption. One informant, who did not want to be quoted on this issue, noted that shelter staff were underpaid, working double shifts, and sleep-deprived. Even if these staff members wanted to, therefore, their material and work conditions did not enable them to serve shelter residents adequately, I was told. I also heard that shelter management staff were charging Rs 10 [USD 13 cents] to non-residents, in exchange for somewhere to stay at night. They took the money, gave people a slip, and told them to come back at 7:00 p.m. Although I only heard this from one child at the shelter, she was concerned that this practice might mean that those families, like hers, who could not pay to live there would slowly be asked to leave.

³⁹ Although I was unable to corroborate these figures, Lina, from the SAHAY NGO school told me that approximately 15 infants had died in the two and a half years she worked in the area.

anything.” I heard similar accounts from other residents who reinforced the lack of support, attention, and care they received from shelter management. Asha, Roop’s friend who earlier in the same conversation lamented that Aakash Sadan shelter was the worst shelter in the city, said, “There’s no one, nobody gives us love, nobody does *anything* at all.” Identifying the absence of love and care, as a key feature of shelter management’s negligence, Asha underscores the lack of humanity and the indignity with which Akash Sadan shelter’s residents are treated.

Extending her critique, Asha said “the shelter people are [just] sitting there, and their stomachs are getting full.” She was unapologetic in identifying shelter management as a job that fills some stomachs while others, like her, go hungry. Asha’s family was, after all, living “hand to stomach” and struggling daily to afford food. Her account reveals how the self-sustaining impulses of some NGOs can trump their efforts to support the communities they are paid to support (Kamat 2002; Kothari 1990). It was not just Asha’s family that faced food insecurity. This was common across families living on the lower levels of the shelter, and for a significant number of families living on the upper-level floors as well. Roop, who lived in the open-air space on the ground floor, used to break bricks when she was younger. Now, because of her age, she can’t find work. She begs and sometimes sells balloons, but struggles daily to secure food:

It’s been five days now and I haven’t been able to buy food and I’ve been asking for food, taking food from different people. . . . So somehow, I’m managing. I’m sitting here without *roti*.⁴⁰ . . . On the ground [outside] I sleep—do we have a home?

Roop spoke about the indignity associated with begging, emphasizing that she did not let her children do this. They sold balloons, toys, and *dream catchers*⁴¹ instead. Depending on what

⁴⁰ *Roti* is round flat bread made from whole-meal flour.

⁴¹ Like balloons and toys, children would typically sell *dream catchers* to other children. *Dream catchers*, which are originally Native American, are handmade willow hoops with a woven web from which feathers and beads often hang. Children and women told me they “catch” —or guard against—bad dreams.

Roop was doing to be able to fill her stomach, she would either sleep in the open space within the shelter or on the Delhi street pavements.

Like Roop, other shelter residents also sometimes left the shelter to live on the streets and pavements near the roundabout intersections where they sold items. Because Aakash Sadan was so far away from where they worked and lived before the eviction, residents often could not afford daily travel to and from their spaces of work and the shelter. Some also disliked living in the shelter so much, there were periods when sleeping on the pavement seemed more desirable.⁴² As we sat in the basement office of the social movements-influenced CSO/NGO Shonali worked for, she spoke to these very dynamics. “I just feel really sad because we really struggled to get the shelter and when I heard people are leaving and going back to the roundabout . . . that is *sooo sad* . . . and you don’t know what’s going on inside.” Again, Shonali invoked her sadness about being blocked from better understanding the challenges people faced within the shelter. She stressed her knowledge about people choosing to sleep on the street again was limited to second-hand sources.

While all this unfolded, as Sharmila from the SAHAY NGO school noted, ROSHAN was simply “watching like a statue.” Its staff were doing little, if anything, to improve living conditions within the shelter, and mitigate residents’ challenges. To exacerbate its negligence, ROSHAN prevented others from playing this role, enforcing precarity in housing, work, and health within the shelter. Although this was not something that ROSHAN or most DUSIB state representatives were willing to acknowledge, Karan was an anomaly. Having joined DUSIB as

⁴² With the exception of Roop, all those who told me this were men and boys. While specific reasons for this preference varied, men sometimes cited greater levels of freedom as a reason for why they chose to sleep on the pavements. Boys sometimes said they left the shelter when there was a lot of fighting. Many families sent their daughters to live at an NGO facility, which was like a school that appeared to run with the support of state funding. However, they were not able to see their daughters for long periods of time, as once they were sent to the space, they were not permitted to visit the shelter and their families regularly.

an engineer after college, Karan, who was in his twenties, emphasized how unprepared he had been to address Aakash Sadan's infrastructural challenges. As we sat in the shelter management office on the third floor of the shelter, he told me that he felt his job required expertise in social work that he didn't have. But he learnt how the system worked and had a structural critique. "The populations that are getting displaced, it's almost like two or three generations are *ruined*. . . . It is actually the obligation of the government to relocate them." Acknowledging the state's role in fueling urban dispossession, Karan also pointed to its violation of its own policy to provide unsheltered families with adequate housing.⁴³ Like many others, Karan who worked in other Delhi shelters, believed Aakash Sadan was indeed the worst he had seen. "Whatever their [residents'] situation [previously], it was better than this," he said regretfully.

ROSHAN's use of *spatial territorialism* to produce an exclusionary space in Aakash Sadan only deepened the effects of state-enforced precarity owing to urban dispossession. By using regulatory power (Foucault 1977) and a top down governance approach to bar civil society organizations from accessing the shelter, ROSHAN limited the scope for citizen and collective action within the residential space (Miraftab 2004). Despite this, however, shelter residents were vocal about shelter management's failure to fulfill its mandate to provide them with basic amenities and adequate living conditions. They were not rendered powerless by the exercise of regulatory power and domination in their daily lives (Lefebvre 1970, 1974).

"It's a Behavioral Issue": Stigmatized Surveillance in Aakash Sadan Shelter

"Don't go telling people it's dirty here, tell them we want a home," Samrat, who was almost 13 when we met and lived in Aakash Sadan, told me during one of our earliest

⁴³ I heard varied understandings within DUSIB about this policy and obligations to the homeless (who some maintain are treated differently than those living in informal settlements/Jhuggis).

conversations. Samrat sells balloons, toys, car wipers and *dream catchers* at traffic lights and intersections. He lives on the ground floor of the shelter, where privacy and space are compromised, and sleeps in an unpartitioned room with his family and several other families. As we spoke, Samrat and I stood with some distance between us on the ground floor of the shelter. This interaction happened in the earlier period of my research and Samrat and I had not yet spoken in depth. It was only later, when I got to know him, his friends, and other shelter residents, that I began to grasp how deeply sensitized children and adults were to the spatial stigmatization of their residential community.⁴⁴

Samrat's forceful resistance towards this kind of stigmatization, together with his directive about what to tell outsiders, reflects his own critique of the continued dehumanization of children like him and their families. Other children also emphasized that all they wanted was to have a home. Like Samrat, they remembered living in *jhuggis* from which they had been evicted. They expressed that living like that was better for "families" and less conducive to in-community fighting. In their contrasting narratives about shelter and *jhuggi* living, the children demonstrated the same keen awareness of the stigmatization of their residential community as Samrat. Extending Wacquant's (2007) theory of territorial stigmatization, Samrat and his friends are aware of the spatial taint of the shelter. While they are sensitive to dehumanization and indignity, they do not internalize their stigmatization to validate or reinforce it; this challenges Wacquant's (2007) reliance on Bordieuan notions of symbolic violence as the basis for his framework.

I witnessed how this stigmatization operated as women and children, in particular, were shamed for how they looked, smelt and dressed on the streets surrounding the shelter, and in

⁴⁴ Understanding Samrat's concern and its reflection of how accustomed he was to having his living space stigmatized, I spoke further with him, reassuring him that I had not come to expose the shelter in negative light.

public spaces. In hospitals, for instance, I saw residents being denied care by security, or shamed for their appearance when allowed in. Shelter residents were aware that this treatment was inextricably tied to their location within Aakash Sadan shelter. Like Samrat, Roop expressed a similar awareness. As we sat on an old *charpai* opposite the shelter one day, Roop told me that “they could have put us in a building . . . but they have put us here, in this shameful/dishonorable place.” She explained to me that her family faced daily indignities because they lived in the shelter. Lamenting this to be her situation even as she was aging, Roop looked at me with what appeared to be a deep sadness in her eyes and said, “I am like the insects living in dirty drains.”

With residents’ own accounts reinforcing the characterization of Aakash Sadan as Delhi’s “absolute worst” shelter, I argue that its spatial stigmatization far surpasses the stigmatization of other communities living in urban poverty. Although the non-upper-caste status (i.e., SC/ST) of the community undeniably shapes its stigmatization, what appears to distinguish Aakash Sadan shelter residents from other non-upper-caste communities is their physical location.

I argue that Aakash Sadan shelter residents experience *stigmatized surveillance* as a feature of their invited and regulatory residential space. They are under surveillance in two primary ways: 1) by shelter management staff who work for the state (DUSIB) and its partner NGO (ROSHAN); and 2) societally, by outsiders in the neighboring areas and in some cases, even by social workers. The process of stigmatized surveillance is best defined as the everyday scrutiny and stigmatization of a residential community and the way in which the residents live, in a manner that evokes the threat of evictions or continued dispossession. Importantly, although Aakash Sadan residents experience surveillance by the police while working on the streets, I conceptualize this form of policing to be rooted primarily in residents’ labor processes rather than their spatial location.

Children in Akash Sadan shelter were deeply attentive to the historic and everyday presence of the state and its surveillance in their lives. As Akhil, a 15-year-old Delhi native, recalled, “We used to live by the Moti Lal roundabout. There, the police came and were violent with us in all sorts of ways, hitting and beating us.” Just as with many other families in Aakash Sadan, this was not the first time Akhil’s family had experienced dispossession. His grandparents, who had migrated to Delhi from just outside Mumbai, Maharashtra, had been evicted multiple times:

Over there [Maharashtra], too, the police did something like this. So, then they [grandparents] came here. They started living in Shiva Ganj . . . but they [the police] broke the whole *jhuggi* there. . . . They made them leave from there, *too*.

Like Akhil, many children and their parents lived with recurring memories of the violence of demolitions. Many also experienced the violence of the state in their interactions with police on the streets. With most families, like Akhil’s, having experienced multiple evictions, the continued threat of dispossession shaped their imaginations about the future. Some women recalled how, after being evicted from their homes, the police left them on the sidewalk, confiscating their utensils and possessions. In some cases, they didn’t even let their children bathe. Many families feared being evicted again, or never finding homes of their own. Those who previously lived in *jhuggis* were particularly concerned about being stuck in the shelter indefinitely.

Fauzia, a single widowed mother in her forties, had a mix of these fears. Living on the upper level of the shelter, Fauzia’s family was economically advantaged in comparison to most, if not all other families in the shelter. She was Muslim, and because of her higher relative social and economic status within the community she was uniquely tasked with occasionally cleaning the shelter for ROSHAN, the NGO managing the space in league with the state. This provided

her with stable, though very minimal, income in addition to other odd jobs she did. Fauzia called her section of the large room she shared with others “home.” It was partitioned with a curtain and equipped with more amenities than other family’s living spaces. In it was a *divaan*, a small stove and gas connection, a few plastic chairs, a trunk on which clothes were kept, and a medium-sized fridge. While Fauzia emphasized her sorrow about “staying in such a dirty place,” she prided herself in having a home space within the shelter that was always clean.

Fauzia’s sister and her family also lived in the shelter. Together, they were the only residents of the shelter I spoke with who expressed having once had access to social and financial capital. Fauzia was not in Aakash Sadan because of an eviction; she moved to the shelter with her family after her husband lost his job. With three children and no stable income source, her family had to leave the place where they were living. When Fauzia’s husband eventually died of alcoholism, he left her with nothing; his previous wife, whom he had not divorced, was his legal beneficiary. After losing a protracted legal battle, Fauzia did not inherit any of her husband’s pension money. During our first of many subsequent conversations, Fauzia and I sat side-by-side on her *divan* as I listened to her share her story, her anxieties about life in Aakash Sadan, and her aspirations:

I have worked hard so that I can get some money. I wanted to make my children’s future [good]. I thought that since my husband is no more with me, and if I get some money then I can lead a smooth life with my children. At least, if I can get a small place to stay. If I take a home at rent and earn money, then with that money I will feed my children or pay rent to my landlord. . . . I tried hard to get away from this place. For how long I can stay here? I don’t know how long they are going to keep us for, or whether or not they are going to demolish this building. . . . [If they do] then where we would go?

Even though an eviction was not what led Fauzia to Aakash Sadan, knowing why others were there left her fearful this might happen to her. At the same time, she wished she didn’t have to be in the shelter—she had “tried hard to get away.”

Fauzia often spoke about her family, and those residing on the ground floor in particular, in terms of “us” and “them.” She dis-identified with others in the shelter and struggled to protect her children from what she characterized as the bad influence of drugs and unsanitary living. “Until *when* will we live here? My wish is to get a small house/home, so we can *get out of here*,” she expressed with despair and sorrow.

This was a concern that Fauzia raised almost every time we met. She was particularly worried for her children, all of whom attended the local government school and nonformal education classes at the SAHAY NGO school. They did not work. On a subsequent afternoon when I visited Fauzia in the shelter she told me once more of her aspiration: “I want to get a small *jhuggi*, then we can slowly, slowly make it. . . . It would be *our own*.”⁴⁵ With sadness, she emphasized that as the “kids get older, they have friends, they ask, where do you live? They [her children] say, in the homeless shelter.” And yet, as a reminder of the invited (Miraftab 2004) nature of Aakash Sadan shelter, Fauzia (like her daughter, Rhea) wondered how long the shelter would “keep” her family.

Other shelter residents also noted that they lived in a *sarkari*⁴⁶ building where life did not conform to mainstream standards of health and sanitation. A significant number of children and adults in the shelter used drugs; but outsiders, including some social workers, assumed it to be true of even those who did not. The community at large was under surveillance by shelter management (ROSHAN-DUSIB), making some families fearful, Fauzia said. They “feel that they would be thrown out of the building . . . if someone comes to check in with us,” she explained. Shelter management sometimes sends people to check on families. The focus of these

⁴⁵ Upon hearing about the fire at Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*, Fauzia was in shock and said she didn’t know which was worse.

⁴⁶*Sakari* refers to something belonging to the State or government.

visits, according to Fauzia, is to ascertain what parents are like; to gauge “how much they earn, whether they earn or not” and “how much [their] children are progressing.” Ground floor residents in particular, Fauzia continued, worry that people come to “click pictures and show those to the government . . . [to say] they drink alcohol here or take drugs.” This experience of what I call stigmatized surveillance underscores how shelter management check-in visits serve more to monitor and scrutinize families than to support them. The coexistence of this kind of surveillance with poor servicing by the state is consistent with how Wacquant et al. (2014) characterize territorial stigmatization.

My conversations with senior representatives of the state agency DUSIB and ROSHAN, its partner NGO, confirmed how prevalent stigmatized surveillance was as a feature of the invited shelter space.⁴⁷ This was particularly clear during a conversation with Akash, the Director of ROSHAN who agreed to an interview with me only very reluctantly. As we sat in a small room at the back of the ROSHAN head office, Akash emphasized that the problematic “culture” and “habits” of Aakash shelter residents explained their continued challenges; “They’re not willing to change.” Invoking linguistic barriers as a symbol of cultural difference he said, “They have their own grammars . . . own alphabets.” According to Akash, the community took to using drugs and unsanitary practices only after the Moti Lal roundabout eviction. But this, Akash suggested, was on them. He offered no structural critique, and did not recognize state-enforced precarity and violence as factors contributing to shelter residents’ lived experiences. These attitudes are consistent with Wacquant et al.’s (2014) assertion that state bureaucrats often

⁴⁷ I was often asked to justify my presence to shelter management staff and required to provide them with information about myself. My status as an independent student, not affiliated with a CSO/NGO allowed me access to the site. The fact that I had established contact with Akash, the Director of ROSHAN (again, this was possible because of my identity as a student) also helped me navigate interactions with shelter management staff.

develop negative perceptions about communities characterized by territorial stigmatization, leading in turn to poor state servicing of these communities.

Aakash's remarks reflect how very deeply stigmatized Aakash Sadan shelter is spatially, even by the head of the NGO tasked with its protection. Kumar, too, as a senior DUSIB state official echoed this. "The whole community's culture is different," he told me, referencing its deviation from the culture of Delhi's middle-class. Leveraging this cultural argument further, Kumar even questioned the legitimacy of Aakash Sadan's status as a shelter:

Aakash Sadan is not a homeless shelter actually. Practically, we can say Aakash Sadan is a homeless shelter . . . , but actually . . . there is no discipline. There is no way of living . . . so they [residents] live, they do whatever they want to do, the children there, they sit anywhere

Kumar's critique of the community's lack of "discipline" and "way of living" underscores the manner in which representatives of the state stigmatize and keep the residential community under their watch. His account absolves the state of all responsibility, ignoring its role in deepening shelter residents' material deprivation:

Look, their counseling . . . mainstreaming them, a lot of things need to be done, it's a behavioral issue, they're not changing, they're living, and it's not their fault. For so many years they were living by a roundabout, they have built their own culture.

For Akash, all this was first and foremost a "behavioral issue," not a structural one. It all came down to "culture" and people's unwillingness to change. Kumar's emphasis on parental negligence and his claim that shelter residents need to be "mainstreamed," also suggests residents need to be disciplined by the state, and its partner NGOs (Foucault 1977). This regulatory form of governance in an invited residential space, diminishes scope for what Miraftab (2004) calls citizen participation.

Surveillance and stigmatization were thus dual processes characterizing everyday life in the shelter. Adults and children living in the better resourced *bastis*⁴⁸ surrounding the shelter often reinforced this stigmatization. Consistent with Wacquant et al. (2014), they avoided children from the shelter, but also made their perceptions about them clear. With disapproving looks, children from these communities often asked me why I was going to the shelter. Sometimes, when these children would see me standing outside the shelter with some of the boys who lived there, they would stop and ask me what I was doing with surprise. Their parents also had perceptions of the shelter that reinforced its spatial stigmatization. These attitudes were likely reinforced at the SAHAY NGO school, where children from both communities encountered each other. My visits to the school made it clear that children who did not live in the shelter scrutinized and judged those who did.

On one afternoon while at the NGO school, I was sitting with a group of young boys, all under 10, who were coloring. We were talking about their typical day when Kai started explaining to me that they didn't do "bad" things like the shelter children. When I asked what he meant by "bad" he started gesturing with his hands to show me how boys at the shelter sniffed drugs in handkerchiefs. They also begged, Kai said, as he touched his feet, and cupped his hands to mimic how they asked for food and money.⁴⁹

Boys living in the shelter were themselves aware of the scrutiny and stigmatization they faced from some at the NGO school because of where they lived. While many continued to go to the SAHAY school, albeit irregularly, Akhil had stopped going. There was one teacher who used

⁴⁸ I use *basti* here to reflect how children and their families described their community. A *basti* is a settlement consisting of concrete room-sized homes. *Basti* is used here in contrast to the temporary *jhuggis* made of makeshift materials in Manohar Nivas.

⁴⁹ While some children may have begged in the shelter most of the children I spoke with did not. They sold items on the street. A number of parents I spoke with did beg, often combining this with other forms of work. Some took their youngest children with them while doing so.

to verbally abuse and insult him, Akhil told me. The same teacher once said, “‘When you come [to the school] the place starts to smell. . . . Stay far away from me’. This is why I don’t go,” he explained. Although most teachers at the SAHAY NGO school knew children couldn’t bathe regularly because the shelter lacked sufficient water, they did not consider this when reacting to how children smelled (and sometimes looked).

Even Sharmila who worked for the SAHAY school focused disproportionately on how parents at the shelter “used” their children for begging, despite knowing most children sold items on the street. She focused not on structural explanations, but on parental negligence, critiquing children’s exposure to drugs and sex in the space. But Jagdish, who worked for the social movements-influenced CSO/NGO, DISHA, was critical of this perspective. Acquainted with Aakash Sadan shelter’s history and the continued stigmatization of the space, he problematized the fact that “Everybody thinks that those people only [who are] living there, *they* are the problem and they are responsible for this. . . . Their mindset is that they are doing begging, they are responsible, they don’t want to work . . . they are useless/worthless.”

This “mindset” Jagdish spoke of was reproduced within the shelter itself. While I was visiting Fauzia one afternoon on the upper floor of the shelter, her mother, who would sometimes stay with her, was complaining about the other shelter residents. She was talking about her mobile phone going missing, suggesting that it had been stolen by residents on the ground floor. Stealing was their “only work” she told me, linking that to the terrible living conditions within the shelter. Fauzia’s mother’s depiction of most adults, and even children, as criminals, was something for which I found no evidence. Contrary to Wacquant et al (2014) I also found no evidence to support the claim that children internalize their joint stigmatization and criminalization. Still, Fauzia’s mother’s accounts reinforced the spatial stigmatization of the

shelter as a site for deviant behavior. Even Fauzia herself suggested that the shelter was under constant watch because the other shelter residents behaved in the “wrong” way.

The “Invented” Space of Manohar Nivas *Jhuggi*: Civil Society Cooperation and Community Engagement

Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* is home to over 200 families. The community is located under the Delhi metro flyover and between railway tracks. It is adjacent to a neighboring settlement, Kalaknanda *jhuggi*, located on the other side of the Metro. While approaching or leaving the Manohar Nivas metro station, you can see clusters of *jhuggis*, made from makeshift materials like wood, old blankets, and recycled plastic and polythene. The entrance to the residential community is marked by a small, multi-purpose shop, also made of makeshift materials. There is a clear path that runs through the middle of the community, with people’s homes on either side. Built on mud, each home is the size of a small room with minimal variation in plot size. Almost every home has a *chula*⁵⁰ at its entrance; sometimes two households will share one between them. On a typical evening, as the sun goes down, wafting flames can be seen outside almost every *jhuggi* as women and young girls cook over their *chulas*, typically while covering their heads with their colorful *sari pallus*⁵¹ or *dupattas*.⁵²

Three wide cement pillars that serve as the physical foundation for the Delhi metro stand tall toward the left side of the community. On the outer boundary of the community, beyond these pillars, rectangular concrete slabs discarded by the Delhi Metro lay piled on top of one another in disarray. Children can sometimes be seen playing on them. The metro pillars running through the community are a daily reminder of the politically contested nature of the land on

⁵⁰ A *chula* is a traditional Indian mud cooking stove made from clay.

⁵¹ A *sari pallu* is a length of fabric that is draped around the body and worn with a blouse. A pallu is the decorated end of a sari that typically hangs loose when worn.

⁵² A *dupatta* is a shawl-like scarf.

which the community lives. The Delhi metro and railways claim the land residents live on belongs to the state, while residents say they arrived before the metro was built. The community was evicted in 2014, and although residents were able to return and rebuild, the community remains both settled and unsettled.

Until 2018 when a fire devastated the community, there was one communal potable water source established by the Delhi state near a cluster of blue portable toilets. But this water container was burnt during the fire. Because water is so scarce, residents rely on infrequent water supplies from the Delhi Jal Board⁵³ while engaging in struggles for water from a government tank located near Kalaknanda *jhuggi*. Most women and girls bathe themselves while dressed, for safety and privacy. Some bathe outside the community. Towards the middle of the community, there is an aluminum shed painted with a cursory coat of blue. It is big enough to fit two medium-sized rooms in it. This structure was originally established by the state agency DUSIB as a night shelter. Officially, the shelter is operated by DUSIB and its appointed NGO, SAHARA. But in actuality, the space is used as a community center by DISHA, the social movements-influenced NGO/CSO that runs nonformal education classes and other programs in the community. DISHA has a strong presence in Manohar Nivas and has gained the trust (and in some cases, friendship) of its residents.

DISHA's presence in the community is independent of SAHARA's, the shelter management NGO. The two organizations have distinct political orientations. DISHA is an independent, social movements-influenced organization involved in anti-eviction politics and advocacy in opposition to the state, while SAHARA is a shelter management NGO funded by,

⁵³ State nodal agency responsible for potable water supplies in the National Capital Territory region of Delhi.

and in league with, the state.⁵⁴ SAHARA plays a minimal role in the community, and unlike DISHA, the organization does not advocate for the self-articulated needs and aspirations of Manohar Nivas residents, nor does it have their full trust.

Despite these differences, DISHA works in cooperation with SAHARA to use the shelter as a community center for its educational programs. During my time in Manohar Nivas, in addition to speaking to residents of the community outside and inside their homes, I often also spoke to residents, especially children, in the shelter which served as a community center. I also stopped by to say hello to Nausheen, a confident young Muslim woman in her twenties who ran DISHA's nonformal education programs five days a week. Nausheen lived with her sister walking distance from Manohar Nivas. She was well-loved by the children and well-respected and appreciated by women and men in the community.

I was first introduced to Nausheen by Jagdish, one of DISHA's senior staff members who was deeply engaged in Manohar Nivas and other similar communities across the country. Jagdish visited Manohar Nivas frequently and was well-liked in the community. He would spend most of his visits going from one *jhuggi* to another to speak with families about their concerns. I often met with Jagdish in Manohar Nivas, and as with Nausheen, keep in regular contact with him over the phone. He had become an important resource person to me. On one afternoon when I was well into my research, I asked Jagdish if I could interview him formally. Jagdish agreed, inviting me to his office where we were first introduced to one another. I wanted to get his take on some of the accounts I was hearing about police violence, and to better understand how different state agencies of the Delhi government operated.

⁵⁴Unlike at Aakash Sadan shelter, not once did I see DUSIB staff visit the shelter or work with SAHARA staff.

“They [the police] never realize that their duty is to support [the vulnerable]. . . . They use their authority on them [the vulnerable] only,” Jagdish said, as we sat sipping on chai [tea] in his modest office, a short e-rickshaw ride from one of the busier metro stations in North West Delhi. Jagdish’s critique of the police, and his focus on their abuse of power, was not surprising. DISHA had a long history of advocacy in opposition to the state, particularly in connection with the criminalization of poverty.⁵⁵ Although DISHA is not a service-oriented NGO, its community-driven focus accounts for its interventions in Manohar Nivas which were established in response to residents’ self-articulated needs.

Locating DISHA as a politically engaged social movements-influenced NGO/CSO committed to community-engaged work, I conceptualize Manohar Nivas as an invented space characterized by what Miraftab (2004) would identify as citizen participation and collective action. DISHA’s commitment to confronting the state and the status quo, and the community’s own resistance to these forces, are central features of Miraftab’s (2004) invited spaces. However, extending her framework, I argue that DISHA’s participatory and cooperative style of working with the community and other civil society organizations coexists with everyday forms of surveillance by state representatives, particularly the Delhi police.

Identified by the state as “encroachers,” residents of Manohar Nivas practice insurgent citizenship by occupying the land on which they live (Bhan 2009; Holston 2008; Miraftab 2009; Ramanathan 2006). This counter-hegemonic practice is an act of resistance against structures of oppression and the status quo (Miraftab 2004; 2009). As a community residing on land characterized by “spatial illegalities” (Bhan 2016), I conceptualize Manohar Nivas as an invented *spatial domain of regulatory power*.

⁵⁵ The organization played a pivotal role in advocating for the de-criminalization of begging, which happened during the course of my research in 2018. DISHA is also deeply embedded in Delhi’s anti-eviction movement.

“We All Came Together”: Spatial Cooperation in Manohar Nivas *Jhuggi*

During my visits to Manohar Nivas I met social workers, independent researchers, and volunteers, and knew of journalists who had visited. As an invented space, the community was characterized by what I call *spatial cooperation*—the coming together of diverse organizations and individuals in the spirit of collaboration, and in consultation with the community. At the level of civil society engagement, DISHA set the tone for this culture of spatial cooperation, maintaining a deep, but non-exclusionary presence in the community. This, in turn, shaped the relative trust and openness residents typically displayed towards outsiders.

The shelter which served as a community center had an important role to play in cultivating a sense of community among Manohar residents. It was not just used to foster children’s growth and education; it was an open space that almost all residents knew they could visit at any point. Full of life, women, men, and children often stopped by to consult Nausheen and ask for her support, even when these requests extended beyond her official responsibilities. I watched Nausheen respond to complex challenges in a number of instances, and when she couldn’t, she would consult senior colleagues who would often pay a visit to the community. When Nausheen wasn’t teaching children, she was often visiting families, checking in about their health or re-enrolling children at the local government school.⁵⁶ There was perceptible mutual trust between DISHA and the community; this was a central feature of spatial cooperation.

⁵⁶ After nonformal education classes were over, children would often stay back to ask Nausheen questions about what they had learned, or to tell her stories. Younger children often sat in Nausheen’s lap, laughing and playing with her hands, or affectionately playing with or braiding her hair. With time, they began to do the same with me, too. Physical affection from children became increasingly common as they got to know me.

On one afternoon when I had planned to be in the community, there was a devastating fire. The community center was burned and over 200 *jhuggis* were reduced to ashes and soot. When I visited the community almost immediately afterwards, barely anything was left. Only a cluster of *jhuggis* and the shop at the entrance of the community were saved; they were farthest from where the fire began. Although some initially suspected arson to be the cause of the fire, it was an accident. A spark in one of the *jhuggis* set off the fire. The flammable nature of people's homes, coupled with the scorching Delhi heat, accounted for the rapid speed with which *jhuggis* caught on fire.

Although some families were able to escape the fire with their most valued possessions, most families lost everything including their IDs, which they needed to receive government benefits. People also lost their livelihood tools (e.g., *dhols*).⁵⁷ Aside from the loss of their homes,⁵⁸ the majority of women in the community expressed sadness and anger about the destruction of their *bhartans*⁵⁹ which signified their inability to feed and cook for their families.

Ananya, a mother of five in her thirties, expressed her anguish over this, emptying a jute sack filled with burnt *bhartans* onto the flattened plot that used to be her home. I visited Ananya's home on my last trip to the community, just six days before the fire. Her daughter, Deepika, who was about 12, had excitedly insisted I come and see the new fridge her family bought. This was their most prized asset and a very rare possession in the community. As we stood together with some of her children, Ananya lightly kicked the *bhartans* around in anger,

⁵⁷ *Dhols* are drums played at weddings to generate income. Magnetic gadgets used to collect and sort garbage were also burnt.

⁵⁸ With great sadness, women and children also told me about a young girl, Deepika's cousin, who had been visiting that day. Due to a series of misfortunes, and despite attempts made to save her, she died in the fire.

⁵⁹ *Bhartans* are cooking utensils such as pots and pans.

pointing to a mangled and unidentifiable heap of burnt metal lying in the corner. That was the fridge, she told me.

The children in the community spoke primarily of other losses. On the same day I stood with a group of at least seven children where people's homes had once been. They spoke to me at length about the fire. Shruti, who was younger than 10 and went to the local government school while also helping her family with work, said with a sad face, gesticulating with wide-open arms, "All our copies have burnt." Children who went to the local government school, many of whom echoed Shruti's sentiments, referred to their school notepads and books as "copies." These, Shruti told me, were expensive and cost Rs 200 (under USD 3.00). Some families, Shruti continued, lost all their cash, which went up in flames. Given that most families were unbanked, those who had life savings were left with none. The children were also particularly upset about their animals. Gesturing with her hands to explain how small they were, Kamini, who was younger than Arti said, "All the little *bakris*⁶⁰ that were small like us, caught on fire." Frowning, she pointed to herself to draw a comparison. Many children chimed in, visibly upset, to reinforce Kamini's account.

The animals—goats and monkeys—were household assets, and boys in particular were responsible for their care. They went up in flames because they were tied to people's homes for safekeeping. With countless other examples of devastation, the majority of families in the community became unsheltered within an afternoon. Until they could rebuild, most families slept on the open mud surfaces marking their plots of land.

To assist the community with their immediate survival in the initial days after the fire, and later with rebuilding, DISHA invited support from civil society organizations and

⁶⁰ *Bakris* are goats; in this case, baby goats.

independent volunteers. A coalition, including social architects, researchers, and community-engaged organizations, formed within days. SAHARA, the shelter management NGO, also joined the coalition. The community received donations⁶¹ and residents of Manohar Nivas noted that this strategy of *cooperation* was crucial in supporting them to recreate their homes and regain their livelihood in the aftermath of the fire.

Many of the individuals and organizations involved in these efforts understood the importance of coalition building and its challenges. Kunal, a researcher and member of the coalition, spoke to me about this following a meeting of a social movements oriented collective we both attended. “Manohar Nivas was an experience where we all came together. . . . This should happen every time, whenever there is [such] a situation . . . because . . . you know, coming together, coming to a platform takes a long time,” Kunal explained. Having worked in a number of communities like Manohar Nivas, Kunal emphasized that “. . . something of such a magnitude [the fire]. . . . A single organization, a single movement cannot [deal with it alone], you know, it’s . . . not possible.”

The *spatial* quality of *cooperation* at Manohar Nivas was evident from the outset. The community and coalition converged around a single priority: to ensure families in Manohar Nivas were able to recreate their homes and community on the same land. As Jagdish, who worked for DISHA, told me one afternoon as we worked to provide post-fire assistance in the community, “There are a lot of politics surrounding the land.” He explained how important it was to consider this when strategizing with the community on how best to meet their needs going forward. With the community having been identified as a “threat” to the safety of the Delhi

⁶¹ These non-monetary donations consisted, for example, of second-hand clothes, and *bhartans*. Food was also distributed. I was invited to join the coalition that formed. I participated, with some distance, in most activities discussed in this chapter.

metro even before the fire, Jagdish was even more concerned about backlash from the Delhi state now.

Like Jagdish, others within the community and coalition fearfully anticipated the Delhi government might use the fire to heighten its argument about “threat.” People worried there might be an impending eviction as a result. This was a reminder of how, despite being an “invented” space with scope for citizen participation, Manohar Nivas was a regulatory domain of state power in equal measure. The “illegality” associated with residents’ “encroacher” status (Bhan 2009, 2016; Ramanathan 2006) left the community and coalition cautious. The priority, within the community and coalition was, therefore, to continue resisting state power and violence, while centering the interests of the community to guard against an eviction. Extending Miraftab’s (2004) conceptualization, the case of post-fire spatial cooperation in Manohar Nivas underscored how state-confronting politics can coexist with cautious negotiations with the state.

The politics around land and space were central to these negotiations. In (re)inventing itself in the aftermath of the fire, residents of Manohar Nivas tasked the coalition with advocating on its behalf. The coalition consisted of four NGOs/CSOs, an existing collective comprising of multiple CSOs, and others who were independent. Based on consultations with community members about their fears, needs, and aspirations, the coalition lobbied the Delhi government while maintaining an anti-eviction, anti-status quo position. Two main demands were put forward. The first was that every *jhuggi*, or household, be compensated an equal and significant amount of money in accordance with a Delhi Fire Act, so that they could rebuild.⁶² Lobbying for state compensation was an immediate strategy used to respond to the scale of

⁶² A much higher sum in compensation was provided to the family who lost their child.

devastation the community had witnessed.⁶³ It did not signal a reconciliatory politics with the state, nor did it undermine the continued fight for the community's self-articulated rights over the land.

In order to petition for this demand, members of the coalition identified a senior Delhi state representative with demonstrated political will as a point of contact. The initial plan was to conduct a comprehensive rapid survey of assets and IDs lost in the fire to determine compensation needs. But upon agreeing to consider the request, the Delhi government requested household data within less than a day. The coalition developed a standardized format, collecting basic data at central points within the community and in the shelter that served as a community center once it had been rebuilt.

After making an initial submission of data for 81 households, obtained in just over a day and a half, an extension was granted for the submission of more household data. Since many families lost their IDs (or never had them to begin with) this caused delays in data collection. Selected members of the coalition coordinated over the course of about a week to collect, digitize, and merge datasets from the morning, until late in the night, and often into the next morning. The petition was ultimately successful and set a historic precedent for compensation on this scale in Delhi. Each family received the same sum of money, and DISHA helped get families banked so they could receive compensatory cheques. These transfers not only helped families to rebuild their *jhuggis*, it allowed many to recreate the tools (such as *dhols*) they needed to start working again. Before this, many adults felt compelled to beg since they couldn't resume their work.

⁶³There is an important structural critique of compensation politics, but I supported the coalition and community in this effort as it meant the difference between whether families were able to start working and subsist or not.

The coalition's second point of negotiation with the Delhi government pertained to the community's desire to rebuild their homes with more permanent and nonflammable materials. The flammability of *jhuggis* remained a concern and rebuilding differently would make the community less vulnerable in the future. Holding the politics of the land in mind, the coalition decided to address this aspiration by negotiating with the Delhi state, rather than by lobbying.

One of Manohar Nivas' *pradhans*,⁶⁴ together with residents and members of the coalition, planned a community meeting to better gauge how many people were in favor of rebuilding more permanent structures. Consideration was given to the fact that doing this without first engaging with the state might provoke an eviction. The meeting was held in a second shelter that was less functional than the one used as a community center. It was a particularly hot day; the space was packed with people spilling out of it. Women, men, and children all attended, along with several members of the coalition. Roshini, a social architect in her thirties who was part of the coalition and had been visiting the community to assist in the aftermath of the fire, presented a small 3D model of a low cost, nonflammable structure. She explained its components and what it would cost to build. Since many community members already expressed their interest in building homes like this, the idea was to gauge the extent of that interest after sharing more information, and to better understand resistance to the idea.

The meeting ran for about an hour and a half. After about 30 minutes, several members of the coalition asked residents of the community whether or not they were in agreement or ready to rebuild in this way. Over half of the people in the room raised their hands to signal they were ready. Kamini, one of the girls who told me about the baby animals perishing in the fire, had made room for me on the floor next to her. She raised her hand, too. Several other children did

⁶⁴ A *pradhan* is a local community leader and point of contact with the state and outsiders, who wields power within the community.

the same and, like Kamini, appeared to understand what was at stake. After a few minutes, a middle-aged man standing on the left side of the room towards the front, spoke out loudly, “We will all make them, *all* of us.” No one voiced disagreement.

To ensure people were fully on board, Mohsin, who was part of the coalition and worked with AARAAM (which ran the street medicine initiative that tried to service Aakash Sadan shelter) asked the group, “So, do you think there is *benefit* in doing this?” Mohsin had been in the community almost daily after the fire and spent time talking to many residents. Without hesitating, at least a quarter of the room said, “There *is* benefit.” People spoke to one another in agreement, while others sat silently and observed. After a few more minutes, another middle-aged man spoke up: “We are ready, but we need to have the money . . . what’s burnt is gone, and from the money we received, we are feeding our children.” Most families received their government compensation by now. This money went towards meeting subsistence needs, recreating livelihood tools like *dhols*, and rebuilding homes.

After further discussions about a variety of alternatives, all the while keeping potential backlash from the state in mind, a collective decision was made; the community would build a test structure that was semi-permanent, taller than their previous homes, and nonflammable. They would propose to the Delhi government that the structure function as an *Anganwadi*⁶⁵ center, and the community would only start building after a successful negotiation. This was conceived as a short-term plan. Members of the community, with support from the coalition, would continue to strategize about a longer-term vision for rebuilding.

⁶⁵ A community-based child care center, part of the Indian public health care system.

**“It’s A Matter of Land”:
Discretionary Surveillance and Spatial Illegalities in Manohar Nivas *Jhuggi***

There was much excitement in the community about building the new *Anganwadi* structure. Both adults and children contributed their collective labor to the project. Not everybody participated, but those who did invited members of the coalition to join. On one afternoon I was in Manohar Nivas while community members were building. I left that day with Shyamolie, who was about 16 years old. Nausheen had suggested she accompany me to the neighboring community, Kalaknanda *jhuggi*, as I wanted to clarify some details about the eviction they had faced. Shyamolie left after we got there and I soon found Loknath, the leader of the community with whom I had been encouraged to speak. As we sat talking on a *charpai*, some of the young men from Manohar Nivas came walking quickly towards us; they evidently had been looking for me. They told me that the police came and destroyed the new *Anganwadi* structure. They wanted me to come and see, so after speaking with Loknath for a few more minutes, I thanked him, and we agreed I would return later that afternoon.

When I arrived at the site of destruction, Vinod, who was about 12, was standing near the collapsed structure looking visibly deflated and upset. He was with a younger friend I did not know, and the two boys started telling me what had happened. It was clear that the structure had been destroyed to the point of dysfunction, with the bamboo rods left in disarray. Vinod’s friend explained what had happened: “He [Vinod] was going to catch a pigeon and he looked towards one side and then he saw. . . . Who is this man who has come?. . . . Then he [the policeman] . . . started to break it down.” The boys continued to fill me in, clarifying that two policemen appeared unexpectedly; they didn’t know how or from where. “It took a lot of hard work [to

build . . . and now they've spoilt it and gone. And now we'll have to make it again," Vinod ended in laughter that was filled with both frustration and sadness.

Despite their deep disappointment, however, both Vinod and his friend were ready to rebuild and resist the violence of the police. This was the case despite the callousness of the act; the police allegedly mocked children as they destroyed the structure in what was a literal shattering of their aspirations. Vinod and his friend stressed that they "gathered a lot of people" to build, and Vinod even "cut his hand on a piece of glass." Getting visibly more upset, with sadness in his voice, Vinod's friend said, "He [Vinod] was digging the ground. *Didi*,⁶⁶ we did a lot of work." The boys' investment in the structure and what it symbolized was clear. As he spoke, Vinod started drawing a picture of it, narrating to me and pointing to it as he did so, "See, like this [he said], 1.2.3.4.5, yes, and see . . . five sticks like this."

When I spoke with other residents of the community about this incident, some told me they knew police would frequently circle the edge of the community, watching and monitoring residents' activity. The spontaneous assertion of violent power by the police, as Delhi state representatives, underscores residents' experiences of everyday surveillance. The discretionary nature of this surveillance was clear. After all, the Delhi government was advised about the community's plan to build this semi-permanent structure and they consented to it. The policemen who destroyed the structure were, therefore, most likely not acting on specific orders, but rather using their own discretion on behalf of the state. They knew this was a community living on contested land. Their assertion of authority was a reminder to the community that the land on which they lived did not belong to them. I call this everyday use of regulatory power

⁶⁶ *Didi*, or older sister is how children referred to me. It was *Ragini Didi* for most who knew me well.

discretionary surveillance—the exercise of power by the police at their own discretion, without clear directives from state institutions, to produce and maintain urban spatial illegalities.

This act of discretionary surveillance validated concerns about potential backlash from the state. It was a reminder for residents that the state could evict them at any point given their status as encroachers of public land (Bhan 2009, 2016). In what was primarily a symbolic act, the police were signaling that the community should not deviate from the norm by trying to lay a more permanent stake to the land. The act also demonstrates how state enforced precarity operates to keep people susceptible to extreme vulnerability.

The experience of discretionary surveillance was not new to residents of Manohar Nivas. In addition to the community’s collective memory of the 2014 demolition eviction, most families experienced multiple evictions before moving to Manohar Nivas. These histories of dispossession shaped their imaginations and anxieties. “The government will break these homes as well,” Gita told me as we sat together on the floor of her half-built *jhuggi* in the aftermath of the fire. Gita was in her late twenties or early thirties. She is the mother of Shruti, who told me about the “copies” and animals that had burnt in the fire. Gita’s anticipation of further violence through state orchestrated evictions reflected her awareness of the state’s presence and power in residents’ everyday lives.

Like Gita, Nayana, a young lady in her thirties and a mother of four, shared her apprehensions about being evicted yet again. “Now once again the case is on . . . that our *jhuggis* will be broken after *holi*.”⁶⁷ Nayana heard this from her neighbors. “People get agitated about it [evictions]. . . . All the *jhuggi* people hear about it,” she told me in distress. Around the same time as Nayana expressed her concern, I also heard from DISHA that there was a court stay order

⁶⁷ Holi is the Hindu festival of colors that celebrates the arrival of spring and the victory of good over evil.

on the land, and therefore no immediate threat of eviction. Yet, Nayana's words reflected a sentiment shared by many children and adults in Manohar Nivas; even when an eviction may not be imminent, the potential threat remained alive in peoples' everyday thoughts and sensibilities. Residents understood police could appear in the community at any point, and that this was unpredictable and discretionary. Pointing to the routine and discretionary nature of surveillance within the community, Lalita, another young mother said, "They keep coming around, you know, the policemen."

Reinforcing this same awareness of the discretionary quality of surveillance, Anant, who was in his forties, told me about the 2014 eviction in Manohar Nivas. The police said, "Remove all your things because all the *jhuggis* will be broken. . . . They broke all the homes . . . 200 [of them]." Anant explained that the police told residents that if they didn't move their possessions and they were destroyed, they would not be responsible. Not everyone was able to move their things on time, and many families were out working and unaware of what was happening. But with great clarity, Anant noted that the government kept giving similar orders, with unannounced evictions remaining possible at any time.

Sheetal, whose words open this chapter, reinforced this idea through her account about the Kolapur eviction her family experienced before coming to Manohar Nivas. "We didn't get any notice. . . . They [the police] just broke everything," she lamented on more than one occasion. After beating the women and children, breaking utensils, and throwing away precious cooked food, they never even gave residents of the community the promised demolition receipts to prove they had been evicted.

However, residents of Manohar Nivas resist the exercise of power by the police. This is true not just of adults, but children too. Just as Vinod was not deterred from rebuilding the

structure the police destroyed in front of him, other children challenged the violence of the state and its surveillance. Some children, like Gopi, who was 11 when I met him and born in Delhi, had a particularly keen awareness of what was at stake. Gopi used to beg to support his family. By the time I met him he had stopped doing this. He was studying at the local government school, which he loved, and spoke with great excitement about becoming a doctor and moving further ahead in life.

Although Gopi and I had spoken alone on several occasions, on one evening when I was in the community his parents invited me into their home to ask me some questions. As we sat together in a circle, Gopi and his family told me about the many evictions most residents in the community had faced and their concern that this would happen again in the future. As I was speaking to Gopi's mother, Sadhana, he interjected. Banging his fist on the mud surface of his family's home, Gopi expressed his understanding of the state and its presence in the community poignantly:

“It's a matter of land. . . . This land that we are on, we are asking for it from the government, we are saying give us homes, give us land. . . . We will have to seize it/take it back. We are going to fight for our rights. . . . When they start running the bulldozers then we will show them, we will fight and show them.”

Gopi's emphatic account about the politics of land reflects how intimately socialized children like him are to the presence of the state in their daily lives. His clarity about the question of *zameen*, or land, and its importance to families like his was striking. By framing the land on which the community lives as an entitlement, one that they must collectively seize as their own, Gopi expresses his intention to resist the state and its violence.

Other children, too, understood how the politics of land shaped the production and maintenance of spatial illegalities in their community. Shika, who was about 12 when we met, told me about the many times she saw houses being destroyed and bulldozed by the *sarkar*, or

state/government. When I met Shika, her typical day consisted of collecting and sorting garbage, and begging to support her family. She also attended DISHA's nonformal education classes. But having studied only until fifth grade, after which she was de-enrolled because she failed, Shika explained that she cries when she sees other children going to school, and wants to return and eventually get an MBA.

As we sat together in the community center/shelter, Shika elaborated upon her family's historical experiences of dispossession. She explained that evictions would always be a threat in her lifetime, saying, "When houses will be demolished here then we will go. . . . If this year houses are demolished then we will go." Shikha knew that evictions were happening in communities like hers for years and that another one could happen at any moment. She also knew that because the *sarkar* did not want families occupying land in Manohar Nivas they could be forced out at any time. And yet, in an expression of resistance and defiance, Shika was adamant her family would stay put and not succumb easily to the threat of the state. She expressed a clear understanding of the space she called home; a community under the discretionary surveillance of a state that continues to exercise its regulatory power, but a state whose power she and her family will ignore until it no longer can.

For many children like Shikha, the police themselves are synonymous with the *sarkar* or government/state. They know the police have the power to authorize the destruction of their homes and to exert other forms of violence. Aman, who was in his midteens, emphasized the role of the police in the 2014 eviction in Manohar Nivas. He said the police came into the community unannounced with bulldozers. They destroyed people's homes one by one. Aman, who was one of the few children in the community with access to a phone of his own, recorded the eviction and images of the flattened ground in particular. In the video, he told me, you could see two

large bulldozers and the police chasing everyone away. Like Gopi, and many others in the community, Aman's memory of bulldozers running homes down is something he carries into the present.

Although many children were able to articulate their own understandings of the state, learning to negotiate its presence in their daily lives, many parents remained most concerned about their children's capacities to cope. During the same conversation we had in her half built *jhuggi* after the fire, Nayana asked me, "In the cold, where will the children go? We've been living mouth-to-mouth for many years in this place. . . . The older people have even died here for this piece of land." Nayana spoke about land in connection with struggles for survival and subsistence. She told me that while some people think the land on which the community lives belongs to the metro, families like hers have been living in the community a long time. Questioning the very logics driving state-orchestrated violence and neoliberal world-class city-making, Nayana asked me where the state expected families like hers to go. We are "poor people," she told me. Emphasizing the number of very small children living in the community, she asked again, "Where are we supposed to go?"

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how Aakash Sadan shelter and Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* are invited and invented spaces of citizenship participation (Miraftab 2004, 2009). Having extended the boundaries of this framework in the context of my cases, I showed how Aakash Sadan and Manohar Nivas are similarly situated as *spatial domains of regulatory power*. This is true for two distinctive reasons. First, in each community there is a focal NGO that plays a role in the production of space, each with its own motivations, politics, and commitments. These

differences inevitably shape the way in which each organization makes its presence felt—by exercising regulatory power through *territorialism* in the case of Aakash Sadan shelter and by diffusing power through a culture of *cooperation* in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*.

Second, everyday forms of surveillance and histories of dispossession characterize both Aakash Sadan shelter and Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*. However, in each case these forms of policing and regulation manifest distinctly and to different ends. In the invited space of Aakash Sadan, an NGO in league with the state operates the residential space. It uses *spatial territorialism* as a mechanism to consolidate its authority over the shelter community, barring access to civil-society style NGOs willing to provide support to shelter residents. This form of territorialism is driven by a top-down and non-consultative process which does not center the needs and interests of shelter residents or encourage citizen participation. Still, in acts of resistance and disobedience, shelter residents do offer critiques of the state and its allies (such as NGO shelter management), who treat them poorly and without dignity. However, because of the highly regulated space in which they live, there are limits on the extent to which they can do this.

In contrast, in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* the presence of a social movements-influenced NGO (DISHA) engaged in advocacy in opposition to the state served to mitigate the effects of state-enforced precarity for residents. DISHA's community-engaged approach and emphasis on *spatial cooperation* meant that in the aftermath of the 2018 fire it welcomed the formation of a coalition to better assist the needs of the community. The efforts of the coalition were informed by residents' self-articulated needs, and helped to facilitate their capacities to rebuild their homes and starting working again, preventing them from falling deeper into poverty.

In both communities, experiences of surveillance are inextricably linked to histories of state-induced dispossession. Although Aakash Sadan is best characterized by *stigmatized*

surveillance and Manohar Nivas by *discretionary surveillance*, both spaces contain elements of stigmatization and discretionary policing along a spectrum. Because Aakash Sadan shelter was established by the state for residents to live in, albeit forcibly, the production and maintenance of “spatial illegalities” (Bhan 2016) is less central to the way in which surveillance operates here. Instead, the surveillance of shelter residents and their way of “living” reflects the deep stigmatization of the community. The shelter’s “spatial taint,” leaves its residential community underserved by state bureaucracies (Wacquant 2007). These effects are exacerbated by *spatial territorialism*, accounting for residents’ experiences of enforced precarity and entrenched poverty within the community. In Manohar Nivas, precarity is enforced through *discretionary surveillance* and the maintenance of spatial illegalities by the police. These dynamics, in turn, prevent residents of Manohar Nivas from establishing greater levels of housing, health, and economic security.

Although in both residential communities children and families leveraged critiques of the injustice they perceived in their lives, the production of invited regulatory space by ROSHAN-DUSIB in Aakash Sadan shelter limited the scope for collective citizen action. This deepened residents’ insecurity, reinforcing structures of oppression and the status quo (Miraftab 2004). In Manohar Nivas, the community’s occupation of illegal land disrupts relations of domination as an assertion of non-formal citizenship (Bhan 2016; Holston 2008, Miraftab 2009; Ramanathan 2006). Collective cooperation in the community, with the support of a social movements-influenced CSO/NGO, broadens the scope for resistance to the hegemonic status quo (2004). Although both residential communities experience the denial of formal characteristics of urban citizenship, it is clear that the invented qualities of regulatory space in Manohar Nivas make alternative forms of citizen participation more likely.

CHAPTER III

“THEY THROW US IN THE DRAIN AND BEAT US”: THE EVERYDAY POLITICS OF WATER IN MANOHAR NIVAS

“They use filthy, filthy, and very bad abuses. They say ‘Whore, don’t keep coming here to fill water, go to another place, their tanks are not empty.’” In her dispiriting account of daily struggles for access to water, Romila, who was 13 when we first met, echoed narratives I heard from many children (and women) living in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*. Romila combined unpaid work fetching water, cooking, and cleaning with school. Because water in the community was scarce, young girls like her were tasked with collecting water for their families. To do so, they walked to a nearby water tank adjacent to the neighboring community, Kalaknanda *jhuggi*. Although the water tank was installed by the government, Kalaknanda *jhuggi* residents claimed ownership over it because of its proximity to them. In an effort to thwart access to it, they would use physical violence and verbal abuse against children, and some women, from Manohar Nivas who came to fill up water. The use of gendered and disparaging slurs like “whore” by Kalaknanda residents as they interacted with children like Romila was not uncommon.

At the heart of these struggles over water, and girls’ consequential experiences of violence, was the problem of water scarcity or deprivation. State-mandated water provisioning was unreliable and inadequate in Manohar Nivas, and residents of Kalaknanda *jhuggi*, who also depended on the state for their water, lacked sufficient supplies as well. As Romila explained, this is why Kalaknanda residents often told children from Manohar Nivas to seek water elsewhere. With this as context, in this chapter, I conceptualize the denial of access to water in Manohar Nivas as a form of state-induced structural violence that gives rise to micro-forms of violence at the community level. Consistent with the analytical approach I use throughout this

dissertation, I examine the state not as an abstraction but, as Sharma and Gupta (2006:6) put it, an “ensemble of institutions, practices and people.” Specifically, I examine the Delhi state through people’s everyday interactions and experiences with the workings of its public water utility, or nodal agency for water distribution, the Delhi Jal Board.

Borrowing from several scholarly definitions, I conceptualize structural violence as the systematic exclusion of a community from the resources required to ensure its basic survival, thereby causing harm or threat to its well-being or existence (Bourgois 2004; Scheper Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Galtung 1969; Farmer et al. 2006; Keefer and Bousalis 2015; Larkins 2015). Specifically, I examine the Delhi Jal Board’s failure to provide Manohar Nivas with a basic and consistent supply of potable water as a form of state-induced structural violence. Following Farmer (2004), I use the concept of structural violence to unveil how mechanisms of power and oppression operate. I do so by extending Javier Auyero’s (2012) work on waiting—an analytical framework that conceptualizes waiting for services from the state as a form of domination over the urban poor. Extending this frame, I show how residents of Manohar Nivas experience “waiting” for water from the state as a key feature of structural violence.

While this does subordinate them to the state and its arbitrariness, contrary to Auyero (2012), I argue that residents of Manohar Nivas do not inevitably become patients of the state. As they patiently wait for water from the state, they simultaneously negotiate alternative sources of water through acts of resistance. Women and children, especially girls, take the lead in doing so, experiencing violence and abuse during fights for water at the water tank near Kalaknanda *jhuggi*. With each of the two communities facing water scarcity, these struggles over water are, I argue, a response to the violence of the Delhi state’s structuring of unequal access to resources.

The effects of this community-level violence are gendered; they also shape, and are shaped by, the political economy of care in childhood. In conceptualizing water collection, I respond to calls for an expanded definition of care in urban India, one that accounts for the disproportionate time and energy women and girls spend on collecting water in resource-poor urban areas (UNICEF 2012; Zaidi and Chigateri 2017). I conceptualize water collection as domestic subsistence work that is an integral component of care work in Manohar Nivas. In doing so, I draw on feminist economist Indira Hirway's (2015) definition of care as activities carried out to meet the physical and emotional requirements of individual family members.

While most studies on gender and care in childhood focus on girls' lost opportunities for schooling and learning (Kambhampati and Rajan 2006; Keefer and Bousalis 2015; Morrow 2015),⁶⁸ we know little about how care relates to structural violence at the community level. Studies that focus on the broader relationship between unpaid work and children's well-being emphasize cognitive and social development (Dayıoğlu 2013; Morrow and Vennam 2012). Little is known about the everyday forms of violence children may experience as they perform caring labor for their families. Even less is known about how children might use autonomous capacities for resistance in doing so. Understanding these dynamics within and between communities is particularly important in urban India where the politics of water (and care) are often shaped by the politics of land—namely, the state's production of unequal access to urban space and resources, and efforts to negotiate and respond to this from within communities. In Manohar

⁶⁸ Although struggles over water can mean some girls from Manohar Nivas have to skip days of school, this does not systematically prevent girls from attending school. I find other factors (e.g., sibling care and paid work) more salient in contributing to adverse impacts on schooling. Both girls and boys agreed that girls did the most work of the two, and had less time to play and study. In contrast, according to girls, boys who didn't engage in paid work only played. However, as I discuss, in some case, boys shared accounts about how they collected water in addition to occasionally providing sibling care. They also consistently reported being responsible for the care of household animals (family assets and sources of milk).

Nivas *jhuggi*, this is certainly the case. Water deprivation is a state-produced condition that is pervasive here and in other residential communities deemed to be “illegal.”

In Manohar Nivas girls are, therefore, particularly susceptible to mutually reinforcing forms of violence that are at once structural and community-based. Underscoring this synergy, I show that there is an inextricable link between systemic violence and direct forms of violence that are typically located at opposing ends of a continuum (Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). These experiences of violence do not preclude girls from engaging in daily forms of disobedient resistance.⁶⁹ Although they sometimes have the support of women and boys, their accounts exhibit a keen understanding of the state and its role in their lives. In fact, despite the Delhi state’s production of the very conditions that have given rise to struggles for water at the Kalaknanda tank,⁷⁰ girls invoke the state’s role as a service provider to negotiate and bargain for water with adults who exercise power and authority unforgivingly.

Structural Violence and the State

As Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1989) argues, experiences of urban poverty at the margins of the state are often brought on by an apathy to suffering induced by institutional and structural violence. Originally coined by Johan Galtung (1969), the concept of structural violence, broadly defined, refers to harmful social structures that prevent people from meeting their basic needs, or quite literally, from surviving (Bourgois 2004; Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969; Larkins 2015).

Although structural violence can be induced by state and nonstate (e.g., market) institutions, scholarship on urban violence often centers the state and its power (Auyero 2012; Auyero and

⁶⁹ Theories of childhood center questions about agency. Recognizing agency is a fraught concept, I follow Shah’s (2014) call for an understanding of agency as a capacity to act and negotiate survival. My analyses therefore examine children’s capacities for resistance.

⁷⁰ I refer to the government tank over which struggles for water occur as the Kalaknanda tank. I do so for the sake of clarity; not to indicate that the tanker does, in fact, belong to the neighboring community.

Berti 2015; Auyero et al. 2015; Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Larkins 2015; Moncada 2016; Penglase 2014; Perlman 2010; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004).

Breaking down the concept, Paul Farmer and colleagues (2006) write about structural violence in terms of social arrangements that put individuals in the way of harm. These arrangements, they argue, are structural because they are inseparable from political economies, and violent because they can be injurious. The concept has utility, Farmer (2004) argues, precisely because it can unveil social mechanisms of oppression, shedding light on the realities of poverty, hunger, and sickness from an historical materialist approach. This approach is at once critical of political economies of oppression and neoliberal economic policies.

Consistent with this position, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois argue that connections between power and the social and cultural dimensions of violence give the “slippery” concept of violence its full meaning (2004:1). Following Farmer (2004), they propose that violence be thought of on a continuum, with everyday and routinized forms of chronic violence, including structural violence, being on one end of the spectrum, and direct physical violence being on the other.

How, then, do people cope and survive in the face of such violence? As Ben Penglase puts it, to survive everyday forms of urban violence and insecurity in Rio De Janiero, favela residents pay close attention to “knowing how to live” (2014:7). Like Penglase (2014), many underscore the importance of understanding strategies for survival and resistance as locally constituted (Auyero 2012; Auyero and Berti 2015; Bourgois 2004; Larkins 2015; Penglase 2014; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Scheper-Hughes 1989). Acknowledging people’s capacities for resistance, Farmer (2004) invokes James Scott’s work on weapons of the weak. Yet, scholars like John Gledhill (2015) argue that even greater emphasis must be placed on understanding how structural

violence operates in the everyday. He calls for a focus on the micrologics of power and the duality of state-produced chaos and the daily order in people's lives.

The Politics of Waiting

In his work on urban poverty in Argentina, Javier Auyero (2012) argues that everyday forms of state domination can be understood through the politics of waiting. He demonstrates how, as the urban poor wait for services from the state in lines and in waiting rooms, they simultaneously surrender to its domination and its power. In their routine interactions with state bureaucrats, Auyero (2012) argues, the urban poor experience powerlessness and thus become patients of the state. Like Farmer (2004), he also engages Scott's work on power and resistance, arguing that the urban poor in Argentina do not use "hidden transcripts" of resistance as they wait (1990:287). Although they display frustration, engage in problem solving, and even leverage complaints, Auyero (2012) concludes that these are not to be confused with acts of resistance.

Waiting, Auyero (2012) argues, is an invisible form of dominance by the state which is characterized by uncertainty and arbitrariness for its recipients. It demands the silent compliance of the poor as they experience the following: veiling (the masking of human actions responsible for waiting behind non-human operations like a computer); confusion (contradictory and puzzling messages to justify waiting); and rushing or delaying (sudden or unexpected service provisioning, or post-postponed services without reason). For Auyero (2012), in all of these interactions the urban poor are at the whim of the state and subject to its arbitrary exercise of power.

Extending his analyses, Auyero (2012) argues that experiences of prolonged waiting for the state reflect the state's disregard for the urban poor, signaling that they are inferior and less worthy of services. The expectation is that the poor must simply be patient and compliant. In this sense, Auyero argues, the state denies the urban poor interactional citizenship, the "set of vague and diffuse but vitally felt expectations and obligations that pertain to interactional displays of respect, regard and dignity for the person" (2012:21). For this reason, the urban poor are not full citizens, but rather, patients of the state.⁷¹

Childhood, Gender, and Care in Urban India

Studies have examined the role of the state in enabling structural forms of violence that disproportionately impact women's experiences of work in resource-poor areas. Specifically, some have identified water scarcity as an example of structural violence that creates barriers to paid work for women across the Global South (Keefer and Bousalis 2015). While there is a growing body of feminist scholarship on women's unpaid work and time-use in India, children's unpaid work, and girls' work in particular, has been under-theorized (Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White 2010; Morrow & Vennam 2012). Where it exists, scholarship on children's unpaid work has focused disproportionately on rural India, with academic research on children's unpaid work in urban India being limited (Dayioğlu 2013; Morrow and Vennam 2012; Rustagi 2008; Zaidi and Chigateri 2017). Literature on women's unpaid work can therefore be informative.

⁷¹ Lara Millan (2014) uses mixed methods to highlight how the urban poor receive rushed health care resources when they are wards of the U.S. criminal justice. However, when they enter health care organizations individually, they are policed, delayed, and prevented from accessing care.

This is especially true given that, like women, girls are typically responsible for domestic, subsistence, and care work (Dayioğlu 2013; Morrow 2015).

Limited access to basic services and infrastructure like water, sanitation, and adequate shelter, exacerbates the unpaid care work burdens that women shoulder in much of the Global South (Bapat and Agarwal 2003). In resource-poor urban areas in India, women and girls spend disproportionate amounts of time and energy collecting water (UNICEF 2012; Zaidi and Chigateri 2017). The resulting intensification of women's time poverty, because of limited access to resources and services, is widely accepted to deepen gender inequities (Keefer and Bousalis 2015).

The relationship between limited access to resources and girls' unpaid work is not well studied. Most research on the adverse effects of children's unpaid work focus on lost opportunities for girls' education and cognitive and social development (Dayioğlu 2013; Kambhampati and Rajan 2006; Keefer and Bousalis 2015; Morrow 2015; Morrow and Vennam 2012). While studies on children's unpaid work are not typically concerned with conceptual questions about childhood, or children's capacities for resistance, these issues have been debated by feminist and childhood scholars (Arneson 1981; Bachman 2000; Burman and Stacey 2010; Castaneda 2002; Levinson 2000; Elson 1982; Manekakar 1997; Niewenhuys 1996). As Deborah Levinson (2000) and Claudia Castaneda (2002) suggest, children have the potential for transformative change, and the capacity to use their power to affect outcomes that matter to them even when their choices are constrained. These scholarly perspectives on childhood can inform our understanding of children's capacities to resist challenges even as they navigate unpaid care work.

Conceptually, unpaid work is typically understood as the housework and care that occurs within people's homes and families without remuneration (Antonopolous and Hirway 2010; Budlender 2010; Hirway 2015; Razavi 2007; Razavi and Staab 2012; UNRISD 2009). This includes domestic and house work like cooking, washing clothes and utensils, the collection of firewood and water, as well as the care of children and the elderly. Although some distinguish unpaid household and subsistence work from direct care work (Razavi 2007), others argue for a broader conceptualization of unpaid care (Hirway 2015), especially in resource-poor areas (UNICEF 2012; Zaidi and Chigateri 2017). As feminist economist Indira Hirway (2015) argues, carework comprises all activities that meet the physical and emotional requirements of dependent adults, children, and other family members. Viewed in this way, all unpaid work is a constituent part of the care economy. There are both direct forms of unpaid care (physical and educational care for children) and indirect forms (minding children, household upkeep to provide for family members) (Hirway 2015). Consistent with scholarship identifying intensified burdens of care where resources are limited, Shahra Razavi (2007) notes that the preconditions for care are not to be taken for granted; good care requires multiple resources, and policies and structures can therefore either hamper or facilitate care provisioning.

Building on these diverse strands of scholarship, I conceptualize water deprivation in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* as a form of structural violence, and water provisioning by girls in particular as a form of care work (Farmer 2004; Hirway 2015; Keefer and Bousalis 2015; UNICEF 2012; Zaidi and Chigateri 2017). We know that across India, in resource-poor urban areas, women and girls spend disproportionate amounts of time and energy collecting water (UNICEF 2012; Zaidi and Chigateri 2017). While this is true in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*, in the

sections that follow, I focus not on the time spent doing this work, but rather, the violence that girls in particular must endure as they negotiate access to water for their families.

**“We Are Helpless About Water”:
Structural Violence and the Politics of Waiting in Manohar Nivas**

I first met Ananya, Deepika’s mother, before the fire that devastated her residential community, including her family’s home and life’s possessions; they lost their new fridge bought after years of saving. During this first conversation of many that we had, Ananya told me that one of the biggest challenges residents of Manohar Nivas faced was inadequate access to water. “What can we do? We are helpless about water,” she lamented as she explained there was only one shared water source for more than 200 families living in the community. Water was stored in a large container in the middle of the community, Ananya told me, but it was not fit to drink:

We are very irritated with this water storage thing. The water is salty. We don’t drink the salted water. There is a tank behind that colony [pointing towards it]. We go there and ask people for the water from there. . . . We only bathe with this water.

Ananya clarified, as did many others, that even when her family wanted to use this water for bathing, it was rarely available. Because the storage tank was located in a central part of the community, women and girls especially, had to find private spaces in which to bathe to protect their modesty and safety. Even then, they almost always bathed in their clothes.

Like other women and children, when Ananya and her daughters tried to access water from the government water tank behind the neighboring community, they would face routine violence and abuse. The residents of this adjacent community, Kalaknanda *jhuggi*, did not want to share the water. They believed it was theirs because of its proximity to their community. Like families living in Manohar Nivas, Kalaknanda residents live in makeshift homes and cannot afford potable water of their own. The community, consisting of over 60 families, also relies on

the Delhi state to supply this basic resource. Given that the nearby government water tank is the community's primary water source, residents guard against the use of the tank by outsiders.

To do so, Ananya explained, Kalaknanda residents would beat, hit, and verbally abuse women and children from Manohar Nivas who came to collect water, denying them access and sometimes causing children to cry. On some days, after enduring abuse and physical violence, Ananya and/or her daughters would manage to fill their recycled plastic bins and containers with water from the tank. But on days when they could not they had to walk further toward another water source that was at least 30 minutes away., This was particularly challenging for Ananya because of injuries to her legs that prevent her from walking properly. For this reason, her daughters often went to collect water in groups with their friends without her.

Like Ananya, other women in Manohar Nivas spoke with distress about how Kalaknanda residents pushed and shoved their daughters while obstructing their access to water. Despite the concerns of many mothers about this violence, children (and some women) continued to negotiate access to water from the Kalaknanda tank. They did this daily, often more than once. These "fights" over water, as some children called them, occurred because both communities were resource-poor and socially excluded. In addition to their shared experience of water scarcity, residents of both Manohar Nivas and Kalaknanda experienced land and housing insecurity, and state-orchestrated demolition evictions which remained a continued threat.⁷² Kalaknanda residents also grew to experience increased insecurity owing to a decline in demand for their labor.

⁷² Kalaknanda residents experienced forced evictions in 2013 and 2017.

While residents of Kalaknanda are an historically nomadic community and officially belong to the Scheduled Tribes (ST),⁷³ residents of Manohar Nivas belong predominantly to both Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC).⁷⁴ These state-produced social and economic categories refer to non-upper-caste and economically deprived groups, and are often used interchangeably as SC/ST. However, there is a fundamental difference; being a scheduled caste implies an historical, and arguably continued, experience of untouchability,⁷⁵ whereas being scheduled tribe does not, and may or may not imply being Hindu. While Manohar Nivas residents being seen as scheduled caste might account for why Kalaknanda residents use violence to dehumanize them, I found no evidence that caste was used to justify this behavior.

What I did find, however, was that some Manohar Nivas residents called Kalaknanda residents “Bihari” or “Muslim.” Those who did, did so dismissively, even though the majority of residents in Kalaknanda were not Muslim, nor were they from Bihar. Despite misidentifying Kalaknanda residents in this way, most of the residents of Manohar Nivas I interviewed did not, in fact, know their own caste or tribe status. Another factor that bestowed upon Kalaknanda residents a marginally higher social status than residents of Manohar Nivas was their labor. While declining in demand, the small-scale manufacturing and selling of iron tools and utensils that Kalaknanda residents have historically done for a living is deemed slightly more “skilled”

⁷³ The Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are officially classified by the central government as “disadvantaged” groups. These categories refer to the “castes” and “tribes” given special status (and benefits) by the state, based on their historical disadvantage and social exclusion. Manohar Nivas is home primarily to the Kapadias (SCs) and Mahawats (STs), while Kalaknanda is home primarily to the Gadia Lohar (STs). The basis on which these categories were constructed has been subject to much critique.

⁷⁴ Some residents are also Denotified Tribes (DNTs) – these are the “tribes” that were initially listed under the Criminal Tribes Act which I discuss in Chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Anupama Rao (2009) writes that “Scheduled Caste” (SC) is the government’s term for “untouchable” castes. Untouchability was officially banned when India adopted its constitution in 1950, but the practice persists today. Although the politics of caste and untouchability is not something I theorize, “untouchability” can loosely be understood as the identity that is inscribed onto someone by their birth into a caste system that deems them impure, or less than human.

than work performed by Manohar Nivas residents (such as *dhol* playing, garbage-sorting/collecting, selling *nimbu mirchi*⁷⁶ and vegetables).⁷⁷ Although, again, this might explain Kalaknanda residents' use of violence against Manohar Nivas residents in a broad sense, the two communities are positioned very similarly to one another. Residents of both communities are non-upper-caste, housing-insecure, resource-poor, and vulnerable to state violence.

More specifically, both communities experience the failures of the Delhi Jal Board to fulfill its mandate to provide them with adequate potable water. This is particularly true of residents of Manohar Nivas, whose dependency on the Delhi Jal board for the supply of water intensified after the 2018 fire. Their only water storage container was burned in the fire, and although DISHA, the social movements-influenced NGO/CSO running nonformal education programs in the community, brought this concern to the Delhi government, two years later the community was still waiting for the state to replace the container.⁷⁸

Strikingly, despite the many challenges families in Manohar Nivas navigated daily, some women identified water scarcity as their only real problem. Sheetal, who spoke with me at great length about the violence of demolition evictions, said, "From the time the shelter [and the programs running it] has been opened for us, we no longer have any problems. We just have the problem of water." As we sat, crouched down on the outside mud surface of Sheetal's home, we spoke about how at least before the fire there was one water storage container in the community. Even though it hadn't been sufficient, and the water was salty, Sheetal's family used to drink that

⁷⁶ *Nimbu mirchi* are strings of lemons and chilis assembled at home and sold informally at traffic lights and other public places.

⁷⁷ Some residents in Manohar Nivas also beg. Although this is not viewed as real work by the state, or societally, I conceptualize begging as work.

⁷⁸ In the last few months, a handpump has been placed in the community, however it is not as large as the water container that was previously there and even less adequate.

water. Alternatively, when there was no access to water from the water tank or the Delhi Jal Board tanker, many simply drank *khara pani*.⁷⁹

After the fire, and despite the support the community received, water collection had become more challenging. Sheetal's family now had to depend even more on getting water from the tank near Kalaknanda. Like Ananya, Sheetal was disabled. She only had one leg, so it was difficult for her to go to the Kalaknanda tank with her children. She lamented the fact that when her children went they would be beaten with sticks and badly abused verbally.⁸⁰ The same happened even when she accompanied her children, she said. Not only did Sheetal think this violence was unjust, she offered a broader critique of Kalaknanda residents' denial of water to her community. "They say that we [Kalaknanda residents] have paid money for this water, [but] water should be there for everyone." Sheetal then explained that, in fact, Kalaknanda residents had not paid for this water as the tank was put there by the government. Framing access to water as an entitlement and as a basic need that should be fulfilled, in her critique Sheetal points to the injustice of the state's denial of adequate water to communities without adequate access to it. Others presented similar critiques and expressed their need for access to another tank. These aspirations existed before the fire and were heightened after it.

Others expressed similar sentiments. Roshini, a woman in her forties who I initially interviewed a couple of months after the fire, spoke to me about the importance of water, too. We met for the first time one night after she had finished her evening prayers. As Roshini and I spoke a group of women and children continued to pray a few houses down. This was a common

⁷⁹ *Khara pani* is untreated ground water which typically tastes bad and often carries disease in urban India. This water is ideally only used for watering plants, fields, etc. By untreated, I mean it has not been filtered by the government and cleansed of possible sewage or defecations.

⁸⁰ Sheetal was the only resident in Manohar Nivas who told me Kalaknanda residents sometimes called her family *kanjar*. This degrading slur, the semantics of which I explore in depth in Chapter 4, implies criminality. However, other women and children did not mention hearing this particular abuse at the water tank.

part of the early evening routine; some also prayed in the middle of the day. It was chilly, so the mud surface of Roshini's home that we were sitting on was cold. As we spoke, Roshini told me that with the support they received in the aftermath of the fire most families in the community had been able to resume their lives again. She explained that things had settled down, but "there's just one problem, *Didi*—water." Roshini's framing of the community's lack of access to water as the only major problem facing the community reinforced Sheetal's account. The articulation of water as the "one problem" the community faced was striking given its many other challenges. Such accounts underscore just how critical water is as a resource.

Because they lacked direct access to adequate water, residents of Manohar Nivas waited for the state, specifically the Delhi Jal Board, to provide them with water (Auyero 2012). They did this before the 2018 fire, even when they had access to a water container as it did not meet everyone's needs and was not considered drinkable (for many families). However, in the aftermath of the fire the need for water heightened as did the daily anticipation with which residents waited for a new storage container and for mandated visits from the Delhi Jal Board tanker tasked with supplying the community with water. More often than not, even when I stayed in the community until after dark, the tanker never arrived.

These tankers were large trucks that carried big conical cylinders of water. Typically painted light blue, and sometimes metallic, these cylinders often had "Jal" [water] or "Save Water" painted on them in white or yellow, along with markers of their status as state property. Hoses for dispensing water were attached to the top of these cylinders. While mandated to visit communities like Manohar Nivas regularly, the supply of potable water by these tankers was not only infrequent, it was unpredictable. This meant families waited for these visits, not knowing whether they would be present to collect water when the tanker came or if they would miss the

opportunity to fill up water for drinking, cooking, and bathing. The daily wait for water from the state was characterized by the routine uncertainty, arbitrariness, and rushing after the prolonged waiting that Auyero (2012) describes. I find, like Auyero (2012), that these aspects of waiting are tied to the invisible exercise of power by the Delhi state and its nodal agency.

Because waiting was imbued with uncertainty, and visits by the Jal Board tanker were unannounced and arbitrary, families were always ready to maximize water collection if the tanker came while they were home. Almost all families in Manohar Nivas kept a mix of recycled plastic cylinders, bottles, and containers of varied sizes ready for water collection and storage. Children were used to locating these within minutes and when the tanker came they swiftly picked them up and ran towards it. Although men did not go to the Kalaknanda tank to collect water, they did contribute to water collection during visits from the Jal Board tanker. These visits were so anticipated that when they happened even the gendered division of (care) labor was momentarily altered.

Children were just as sensitive as adults to the unpredictability and uncertainty of waiting. Gopi, who was 12 and had already taught me much about the politics of land, spoke about how he and his brother collect water when the tanker comes. “He fills. I fill. Sometimes the tanker comes, and sometimes it doesn’t. . . . Sometimes we get water and sometimes we don’t.” His matter of fact account points not only to the uncertainty of water provisioning by the state, but also to its discretionary nature.⁸¹ Whether families like Gopi’s get water is contingent upon uncertainty and arbitrariness (Auyero 2012).

⁸¹ Both the media and scholarly studies point to the role played by “water tanker mafia” (Shah 2014) who interrupt the Delhi Jal Board water provisioning process by establishing a black market for already limited water that is too costly for residents like those in Manohar Nivas to purchase. Some characterize the water mafia as stealing water meant for the poor and selling it to the rich (or less poor), although I did not find evidence of this occurring in this community.

One afternoon I was in the community when the tanker arrived. It was shortly after the fire and residents were still rebuilding their homes. As the tanker entered the community women, children, and men dropped what they were doing and rushed to pick up their water containers. They ran from different directions towards the tanker. Family members shouted and gestured to one another; some of the younger children screamed in delight. As the tanker drove into the community residents jumped onto it, reaching for hoses to fill up their containers. Water came gushing out full force, splashing here and there and spilling over onto the ground. People squabbled and fought over hoses. By the time the tanker parked by the community center/shelter at least 30 people were piled onto it. Many more stood on the ground below waiting with their containers.

The energy in the community transformed; a mix of urgency and excitement took hold. As I stood to the side and out of the way, I saw a young woman turn toward me. Her face lit up as she looked at me and smiled widely. She had just filled up a large recycled oil container to the brim. She was calling out to one of her children to pass it on to them, signaling that they should bring over another empty container. She then moved to pick up a *matki*⁸² full of water she had been guarding. Other women, too, were calling out to their children who responded quickly to calls for assistance. Girls, in particular, balanced full containers of water carefully on their heads. Some of the older girls also bent down steadily to pick up a second full container of water with one hand. They then walked with intention, upright, and toward their homes, often with wide smiles and eyes that seemed to shine.

It almost appeared in this moment as if the waiting had been worth it. But not everyone left the tanker so happy. While many families collected a good amount of water for themselves,

⁸² *Matki* are earthen clay pots used to store water and keep it cool.

other families didn't get much. Some missed out altogether. Water was inevitably distributed unequally during visits from the tanker. This explained the momentary rush as all else came to a standstill (including my own interviews and conversations with residents). Although struggles over water emerged momentarily within the community, these tensions dissipated soon after the tanker left. Residents would soon be waiting collectively once more.

Unlike Auyero (2012), I did not find waiting rendered residents of Manohar Nivas passive. Although the state's nodal agency for water distribution, the Delhi Jal Board, did wield power, unlike Auyero (2012) I did not find this process rendered the community powerless. Their waiting coexisted with daily efforts by women and children, and girls in particular, to find water even as they endured violence and abuse. These daily struggles for water were acts of resistance against their position and an assertion of the community's right to water. Residents of the community were simultaneously helpless in relation to obtaining water while also engaged in defiant struggles to secure access to it.

Young girls took the lead in these efforts. With care responsibilities being gendered in childhood they were primarily responsible for the collection, storage, and use of water within the family (to cook, clean, etc.). Some boys accompanied girls to the tank, typically because they didn't have sisters, or their sisters were too young, or already married and responsible for other households.⁸³ Girls and boys may also have visited the Kalaknanda tank more often because of the widespread consensus within the community that children would be more likely than adults to elicit sympathy in negotiating access to water. Some mothers accompanied their daughters on visits to the Kalaknanda tank, but they, too, faced aggression and verbal abuse. Women were not typically successful at getting water from the neighboring tank, nor were they able to mediate

⁸³ Although one boy, Ram, told me he collected water daily to feed his family's goat, other boys did not tell me that their caretaking responsibilities for animals involved collecting water.

physical violence. They typically focused their energies on paid work instead, most often garbage collecting, sorting, and selling.⁸⁴ When children went to the Kalaknanda tank they would go in groups. While girls were primarily responsible for doing so, they had the support of some boys too.

**“These Children Are Such Bastards, Even When They Die They Will Not Get Water”:
The Politics of Water at a Local Government Tank**

One afternoon when I was in the community, Seema, who was 12, and Mrinalini, who was about 9, came to sit and speak with me. Within minutes some of their friends who used to go to the Kalaknanda tank to collect water with them joined us. I knew one of girls’ friends, Sonal, who was younger than both Seema and Mrinalini. The girls were expressing their sadness, and disgust, about the way they were accustomed to being treated by Kalaknanda residents who alleged the girls were taking *their* water. But in all their accounts, children from Manohar Nivas challenged this claim, stressing that the water tank had been established by the government and was therefore for everyone’s use.

As we sat together in a group near the community shelter/center, the girls spoke to me in animated, sometimes high-pitched, voices that expressed how upset they were. I mostly listened, asking questions only rarely, and expressing support and emotions, where appropriate. It was not uncommon for the girls to speak all at once, or to interrupt each other to confirm or elaborate each other’s accounts. During the course of the conversation, the girls told me repeatedly that when they tried to ask for water Kalaknanda residents would use very dirty curse words, or very bad forms of abuse⁸⁵ to insult them. “The things they say, you can’t even listen to them [they are

⁸⁴ Some girls helped their mothers with this work sporadically while others did this work daily.

⁸⁵ Here “abuse” is translated from *gaali*. Although *gaali* can also loosely mean “curse” or “swear-word,” after consultations it became clear that “abuse” was the most accurate translation in context.

so bad],” Seema said with sadness as the girls spoke loudly and hurriedly, each gesturing with her hands to accompany her account. Mrinalini recalled an incident that had been particularly upsetting to her, telling me that, “One time they pushed me into the drain. I was this small [gesturing to indicate size]. . . . It was a big pool of water [in the drain], and they pushed me into it . . . such filthy, filthy swear words of abuse they use.” Before Mrinalini could even finish, one of her friends, Nandini, chimed in echoing Mrinalini’s account about the “filthy, filthy” abuses the girls were accustomed to hearing. Using wide gestures to accompany her account, she said:

The *panditain* [boss lady]⁸⁶ threw such a big stone at me and I got a wound here [pointing] . . . curses/abuse . . . whore, your mother and father are like this . . . filthy, filthy. They used very bad abuse words when talking about our mother and father.

When girls in Manohar Nivas referenced the *panditain*, they were referring to the “boss ladies” or women who held power and authority in the community, perpetuating, encouraging, and legitimizing violence and abuse. Nandini not only underscores the varied forms of abuse she and her friends were used to experiencing, she expresses her disgust towards this abuse critically. As she emphasizes the *panditainens*’ [plural] use of “filthy, filthy” abuses to characterize her (and her friends’) parents, Nandini demonstrates her sensitivity to the degrading quality of these words (along with the gendered slur, “whore”).

After Nandini spoke, there was a gap of about thirty seconds that seemed filled with sadness. No one said anything until Mrinalini explained, “We go to fill water. If we were swearing and verbally abusing them [Kalaknanda residents] and they abused us back at us it would be ok, but we’re not even saying anything. Then what’s the point of swearing at us?”

⁸⁶ This meaning of *panditain* is multi-layered. While it could mean the wife of a priest, more appropriately in this context, when children use the word they mean to refer to an older “boss lady” or “aunty” who wields power and authority in the community. For the sake of clarity and consistency I translate *panditain* as “boss lady.”

Mrinalini's hypothetical question points to the futility of the abuse unleashed by Kalaknanda residents in an effort to deter and prevent Manohar Nivas children from accessing it. She asserts that in trying to respectfully fill up their water containers, children from Manohar Nivas are doing nothing wrong. They are not swearing or acting poorly like the adults in Kalaknanda; this abuse, according to Mrinalini and her friends, was not only unwarranted, it was unfair and unjust. In all their accounts, children were acutely aware of the dehumanizing quality of the violence and abuse they faced.

Providing a more detailed account of what happens on a typical day when they try and fill up water, Sonal, Seema and Mrinalini's friend, said,

When we go, we first take the drums/vessels . . . and we say 'aunty⁸⁷ please give us water to drink.' . . . They swear at us . . . [saying] 'You come to fill water, but you do shit and urinate over here and dirty the place and swear, and do this and that.'

Suddenly the other girls interrupted Sonal, each shouting, "No we don't do it!" making clear that this characterization of them by the Kalaknanda aunty was false and offensive. Sonal continued with her account, explaining that when they face abuse, she and her friends sometimes call their parents who come and verbally fight with the Kalaknanda residents, usually women, on their behalf. However, their parents also face abuse and are not easily allowed to collect water either. For this reason, the girls have to walk further in search of water, Sonal explained:

We go very, very far . . . far to fill water. From the other side, from very far . . . we lift and carry them [containers] from far away. . . . My [inaudible] starts to tremble because we carry the vessel on our head. . . . My head starts to go dizzy . . . we use such big, big vessels . . . *sooooo* big [gesturing to indicate considerable height and width]. *Didi*,⁸⁸ we have to go so far because here they don't let us fill water. . . . They squabble and fight . . .

⁸⁷ "Aunty" is a respectful form of address for older women in India, even when they are not biological kin.

⁸⁸ *Didi* is the form of address used for an older sister in Hindi. Children, girls/women typically use *Didi* when speaking to/of older girls/women in much of North India, even when they are not biological kin. While *Didi* is respectful, it is also informal and implies familiarity and closeness. Women of the same age group will sometimes call each other *Didi*, too. For instance, when I first visited Manohar Nivas, children insisted on calling me "ma'am" (formal), but they soon began to address me as *Didi*. Women and Men in Manohar Nivas also called me *Didi* unless they were visibly much older than me, in which case they called me *Beti* (child/daughter).

and such big, big stones they throw. It [the stone] hits me here [pointing]. . . . Women and men, girls and boys . . . and mothers and fathers. . . . *Didi*, girls and boys both swear, *didiii! Veryyy* filthy, bad abuses. One day, I went with my little sister and those people beat her . . . and she's very small, only this big [gesturing below the waist].

Here, Sonal emphasizes how difficult it is to walk so far to collect water, especially given the large containers/vessels she and her friends must carry on their heads. She has a sharp awareness about why she must bear this additional burden, attributing this challenge to the refusal of Kalaknanda residents to share their water. Sonal is critical of the physical and verbal abuse she and her friends experience, and particularly critical of how mothers and fathers from Kalaknanda encourage their children to participate in this violence. Sonal's account of the violence her little sister experienced reflects her protective stance as an older sister responsible for sibling care, while also underscoring her view that the adults from Kalaknanda *jhuggi* are wrong to encourage violence and abuse of even to the most vulnerable of children.

The impact of this violence on the group of girls was reinforced by the number of times they mentioned having stones and rocks thrown at them to prevent them from accessing water. They stressed that this was true despite them carrying big, *big*, drums and containers to the Kalaknanda tank. In explaining this to me, the girls gestured with wide arms to show me just how big these vessels were. Their disbelief about the violence exhibited by children living in Kalaknanda *jhuggi* was evident from both the content and repetition within their accounts. In one instance, for example, the girls spoke to me in unison, saying, "Even small, *small* children [in Kalaknanda] curse and swear [at us] in a very crude way." In some cases, because these children were younger (and literally, smaller) than the girls, this violence was particularly discomfoting.

Other girls, like Romila, whose account opened the chapter, told me similar stories. Speaking about Kalaknanda residents and their children, she said "*Didi* you *know*, their children? The small ones . . . *this big* [pointing to her waist], they [aunties] even give *them* canes to beat us

with . . . and [they] say ‘beat this one/her.’” Again, as she explained this to me, Romila’s tone was one of disbelief. She elaborated to emphasize that the aunties from Kalaknanda *jhuggi* don’t simply legitimize this violence, they instruct their own children to beat girls from Manohar Nivas, publicly humiliating and hurting them.

I heard about the use of canes by Kalaknanda aunties, in particular, on multiple occasions. I was told that Kalaknanda aunties stood by the water tank with long canes to deter children from Manohar Nivas from coming forward. When they did come closer to the tank, the Kalaknanda aunties would run toward them and hit them. Shruti, the young girl who explained to me how the baby goats died in the 2018 fire, also spoke to me about these dynamics. She often collected water with Romila and Mrinalini and described her experiences of violence when negotiating water:

They throw us in the drain and beat us. They don’t even let me lift the containers. They beat us. These *panditaainen* [plural] take sticks and canes. When small children come out, they hit them very hard with the stick. They [the children] cry. They have beaten me also. All the *panditaainen* staying here make the dogs bite us. Children [like us] who come . . . they make the dog bite them. If the dog is not there, then they hit with bricks, throwing them or bringing a stick to beat us. One day, we all went there to fight . . . [at one point] I was alone and they pushed me in [the drain].

Like Mrinalini, Shruti had also been pushed into drain by the *panditaainen*, or “boss ladies.” Quite apart from the overt quality of this violence, Mrinalini and Shruti appeared to be aware of its profoundly denigrating nature, as drains are widely accepted in the community to be unsanitary and dirty spaces.⁸⁹ Reinforcing and adding to what Mrinalini and her friends had described, Shruti stressed how the *panditaainen* used not just big stones and canes, but sticks, bricks and dogs that bite to keep children away from the water tank.

⁸⁹ Residents of Aakash Sadan shelter, my other site of research, also invoked images of “dirty drains” in accounts about stigmatization and dehumanization.

As with many other children, my conversations with Shruti about daily struggles for water continued even after this initial interaction. During one of those many conversations, Shruti and I stood towards the entrance of the community with some of her friends. They were getting ready to visit the Kalaknanda tank to try and get water. As Shruti spoke with me again about the challenges she and her friends faced, with furrowed eyebrows and sad eyes, she said, “We take abuse in exchange for water, *didi* . . . what to do. . . .”

And indeed, this is exactly what young girls in Manohar Nivas did daily. While the accounts they shared with me reinforced one another, I also heard about instances of violence and abuse that were particularly extreme. Seema recounted one of the most disparaging of these accounts during the same conversation we had with her group of friends (Mrinalini, Shruti, Sonal, and Nandini). With a deep and perceptible sadness in her voice and eyes, she told me, “[The] *panditain* [singular] says ‘these children are such *bastards*, even when they *die* they will not get water.’” After she spoke, the other girls went quiet; each one appeared aware of the deeply dehumanizing quality of this statement.

First, the derogatory use of “bastard” was an insult that extended beyond the girls, to include their parents; something they seemed to understand despite their young age. But even more striking was the assertion that children like Seema and her friends were so wretched that they would go thirsty even in death. For most communities in North India, this remark is profoundly disparaging. In asserting this, the *panditain* was stripping the girls (and other children from Manohar Nivas) of their humanity and dignity, both in the present and in their lives after death. In all their experiences of abuse, including this one, young girls were deeply attuned to the degree of degradation and the dehumanizing nature of these claims made about them.

And yet, despite their experiences of violence and abuse, girls in Manohar Nivas were not deterred from returning to the Kalaknanda tank day after day to try and collect water for their families. Not once, for instance, did children conclude that because they had been injured physically, or abused beyond measure, they should stop trying to access water. Water was needed, and girls knew this was a vital part of the various responsibilities they had for family care. Although Mrinalini and her friends did explain that there is a *mandir walli aunty* [aunty from the temple] who “is very good . . . [and] always says ‘fill it, fill it,’” they also told me that she is not always at the Kalaknanda tank. This was the only account I heard that referenced this particular aunty; most narratives focused on children’s persistent fights for water. Children were engaged in these struggles knowing that the Kalaknanda water tank was established by the government, and that its water should, therefore, be available to all families in need of it.

In the next section, I examine how girls from Manohar Nivas, take the lead in engaging in acts of resistance as they negotiate and bargain for water. In doing so, they interact and reason with women (or aunts) at the Kalaknanda water tank; not with men or other children. Specifically, they respond to the many abuse-filled allegations made against them by using a clear sense of what is fair and just. These logics are also informed by children’s understanding of the government’s mandated role as a service provider in communities like theirs.

“We Say Aunty, This Tank Is From The Government”: Narratives of Resistance and Disobedience

Although girls in Manohar Nivas expect to face violence and abuse when visiting the Kalaknanda tank, they persist in fulfilling their care work obligations by defying the authority of Kalaknanda aunts through disobedient acts of resistance. Almost all the children I spoke with about struggles for water at the Kalaknanda tank were clear about one thing: it was a government

water tank and the water in it should therefore be accessible to anyone. Children continued to return to the tank with the firm belief that it was their right to access the water in it, and that they were doing nothing wrong by attempting to do so.

Romila spoke directly to these dynamics. She described how amidst physical violence and abuse, girls negotiate and bargain with Kalaknanda aunts, responding directly to their allegations, “[They say] ‘What? Did your father establish this tank?’ We say, ‘Aunty this [tank] is from the government, so no one should be refused this water.’” In her response to the aunty’s offensive questioning of Romila’s right to access water from the tank, Romila lays claim to water as a state-provided entitlement to which everyone should have access. Not only does Romila express a clear account about the role and responsibility of the state, she demonstrates her capacity to resist the power exerted by Kalaknanda aunts.

To reinforce her account, Romila shared an example of how one day her cousin used a similar logic with another aunty:

The aunty didn’t let me fill the water. I was standing there waiting for one and a half hours and then I left. They didn’t let me fill the water over there, and still, I waited there. Then my aunt’s [mother’s sister] daughter . . . said, ‘aunty, let us fill, it feels and looks like this is your tank, [but] it has been put here by the government, [so] don’t stop anyone from drinking water.’

In this bold negotiation, Romila’s cousin challenged the aunty at the Kalaknanda tank, explaining to her that while it appeared that the tank belonged to her community, this was not in fact true as it was established by the government for everyone. In other words, Romila’s cousin claimed that the mere proximity of the tank to Kalaknanda residents, which made it feel or look like the water was theirs, did not carry any meaning. Although Romila’s cousin’s negotiations that day were successful, and she was even able to bring Romila some water, the outcomes of such negotiations at the Kalaknanda tank are unpredictable. This uncertainty, which exists even

when children use these same logics, permeates verbal negotiations and extends to waiting and standing by the tank in anticipation of being able to access water, something Romila explicitly references in this account. In this case, waiting does not occur in the context of interactions with the state (Auyero 2012). While children did, on occasion, mention waiting while negotiating access to water, this was less central to their accounts, all of which focused on the violence they experienced as they bargained for water.

Although children persisted in their negotiations for water to provide subsistence and care needs to their families, they did so without knowing whether they would leave the tank with empty or full containers. While children did not expect success, they were nonetheless hopeful in their persistence. On days when I was in Manohar Nivas and girls had successfully filled water at the tank, they would often walk proudly towards me with carefully balanced containers of water on their heads, and sometimes in their hands, too. As they did, they smiled widely with eyes full of excitement, indicating that they had just collected water. Bringing back water always brought them visible happiness.

Children's negotiations for water also involved bargaining with aunties who asked for money in exchange for water from the tank. Mrinalini told me that some aunties asked for ten rupees for each container of water. In relaying this account to me, she frowned and said that she refused to pay because the water tank had been put there by the government for everyone. She didn't have cash to pay for so many containers of water, anyway. Later in the conversation, with a deep sense of frustration, Mrinalini raised her voice slightly and said, "Why can't they [the state] just put a water container near us? The water tanker doesn't even come [to us]."

Mrinalini's hypothetical question reflects her own understanding of the root of the problem—the government's failure to supply sufficient water to Manohar Nivas via a permanent water system,

and the Delhi Jal Board tanker. She and other children I spoke with understood that while the government had established the Kalaknanda tank, it hadn't supplied enough water to the area. And it was because of this that families in Manohar Nivas had to undergo the uncertainty and waiting, and the violence and abuse.

When Kalaknanda residents negotiated with the children of Manohar Nivas, they also leveraged incriminating allegations, suggesting that the children who came to get water were somehow spoiling it. In a conversation with Damini, who was 11 when I met her, I learned more about this. Echoing other accounts I heard, Damini emphasized that residents of Kalaknanda used very, very, bad, and dirty words to abuse her and her friends. Elaborating, she recounted a typical conversation near the Kalaknanda water tank:

They say, 'Isn't there a tank over there [towards Manohar Nivas]? Go and fill water there, why do you come here? Who knows what you do when you are here.' We said, 'Aunty, we come and fill water, then go straight home. It's not as though we do anything in the water there.'

By alleging that children from Manohar Nivas do something to damage the water, Kalaknanda residents are suggesting that they dirty it. This is reminiscent of the allegations made against Sonal and her friends, who like Damini, unequivocally rejected the idea that they went to the tank to “shit and urinate and dirty the place.”⁹⁰ Although Kalaknanda residents may have felt empowered to dehumanize Damini and her friends because they were assumed to be “Scheduled Caste” (while Kalaknanda residents were “Scheduled Tribe”) I found no explicit evidence to this effect.

Although it was typically girls who went to collect water at the Kalaknanda tank, some boys accompanied girls. Of those who did, very few shared detailed accounts about their

⁹⁰ Damini also used the phrase “let the dogs bark” in reference to Kalaknanda residents to emphasize how she would resist their violence by ignoring it, getting water, and going directly home. The phrase “let the dogs bark” was also used by women to refer to men who tried to solicit sex from them as they collected garbage on the street. This was again used in the context of accounts about resisting this form of sexual violence.

experiences. Because they did not appear to go to the tank daily, their experiences of violence and abuse were less central to their everyday lives. Gopi, the young boy who explained to me how the Delhi Jal water tank only visits Manohar Nivas sporadically, was one of the few boys who spoke to me about water collection. He used to accompany his younger sister to the water tank frequently and spoke extensively about the struggles for water he experienced and witnessed. Like the girls in Manohar Nivas, Gopi's accounts were emotive and critical of the adults in Kalaknanda. We are just "small kids" but they are "adults, and elders," he said, implying that they should know better. "They keep on abusing us verbally. At that time, I get very angry and I ask them, why are you abusing me?" Strikingly, while Gopi speaks explicitly about his anger and calling out Kalaknanda residents' behavior as abuse, none of the girls in Manohar Nivas expressed anger in this way. Gopi's explicit expression of anger may be shaped by his gender socialization and the fact that as a boy his interactions were with adult women who may have interacted with him differently than they did with girls. Elaborating further, Gopi said:

They call us beggar, pig; they verbally abuse us. . . . We don't like it when they abuse us to our faces. We are small, so we can't raise our hands to them. . . . [We say] we will also become like you one day and *then* we will show you. One day, we almost got into [physical] fighting.

Like girls in Manohar Nivas, Gopi's account points to his acute awareness of the degrading and humiliating nature of verbal abuse experienced at the tank. Although Gopi was not subject to gendered slurs (i.e., whore) the word "beggar,"⁹¹ which implies criminality, was also insulting to him, particularly because he used to beg as a child. Like girls, Gopi made it clear that he viewed the abuse he faced as unjust and unwarranted. However, again, differently from girls, Gopi

⁹¹Anti-Beggary laws from the time of British colonial rule have criminalized the act of begging in India. In August 2018, the Delhi Court in a landmark judgement ruled sections of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act (1959) unconstitutional. Although this ruling de-criminalized begging legally, those who beg remain socially criminalized.

suggested that if it weren't for his smaller size he would retaliate with violence when confronted with adult abuse. He noted that when he and other children from his community get older, they will do so.

In contrast, girls did not articulate their resistance in this way. Their accounts emphasized the logics they used to challenge the assumptions Kalaknanda aunties had about who could access water. Although like Gopi, girls in Manohar Nivas spoke consistently about fighting for water, they did not discuss potential physical retaliation in the way that Gopi did, nor were their accounts imbued with the same sense of vengeance. This is not to say girls did not, or should not, feel anger. But simply that they enacted their resistance differently, perhaps owing to gender differences in childhood socialization. Gopi's emphasis on his experience of verbal abuse, without any mention of physical violence in the present, also suggests that he (and other boys) may not have been subjected to the same kinds of violence as girls. This may be because boys like Gopi were more outwardly aggressive and confronting, posing some degree of threat to Kalaknanda aunties. Since very few boys from Manohar Nivas went to the tank to begin with, there is not sufficient evidence to support the idea that children were treated in systematically gendered ways at the Kalaknanda tank.

It was not only anger which Gopi expressed. Describing his feelings when he was turned away from the Kalaknanda tank he said, "At that time, we feel very sad. From so far, we have to carry water. My hands pain." Like the girls in the community, Gopi expressed his sadness about having to walk much further, more than 30 minutes one way, in search of water at another tank. He also spoke of the challenges of doing so, and how this work was physically painful.⁹²

⁹² None of the girls in Manohar Nivas mentioned that their hands hurt when carrying water, and I often witnessed them carrying water on their heads. Gopi also told me that his sister carries water on her head, while he doesn't. Given this and the fact that aside from one young boy who was playing around with empty containers I did not

Elaborating further, he described his experience at the other tank, saying that even when he and other children went far, “[If] there is a big rush then we must wait. They [Kalaknanda residents] don’t allow us to fill the containers/buckets. They push us and ask us to go away from that place. At that time we feel very bad.” Like Romila, Gopi speaks about waiting for water as well as the invariable “rush” that accompanies it. Although Manohar Nivas residents did not explicitly discuss waiting in connection with encounters with state representatives, the fact that they did have to wait for water is a function of the failure of the state to adequately service communities. As a key feature of structural violence in Manohar Nivas, Gopi’s account reinforces the fact that waiting did not appear to make people powerless patients of the state.

Across all these accounts of resistance, questions about ownership over the Kalaknanda water tank was a recurring theme. This was particularly true in girls’ verbal negotiations with women in the community. Their accounts underscored that the source of these struggles over water was, in fact, structural violence or the deprivation of sufficient amounts of water by the state. Even when it appeared to children that there was an adequate amount of water at the Kalaknanda tank for their families too, children were not granted access and faced routine violence and abuse instead. Romila was particularly upset about this. She told me, “We said, ‘Aunty so much water is falling, so just give it to us, so we can also drink.’ [But] then they abuse us, so we go away.” Although children may sometimes have been deterred by abuse as Romila suggests, this was momentary; everyone emphasized their determination to resist the authority of Kalaknanda aunties as they persisted in their efforts to collect water.

For instance, Romila explained to me what she and her friends tell the Kalaknanda aunties when they exert violence and power, “We say that that we all *will* fill water.” Despite

record examples of young boys carrying water on their head. This practice of carrying water on the head is itself gendered.

their determined attempts to claim access to water for their families, these experiences of violence and dehumanization did take a toll. This was true even when children were successful in filling up water from the tank. Speaking to the essence of these struggles with sadness in her voice, Romila said to me, “*Didi*, but we had to listen to the abuses [to get the water].”

Conclusion

In negotiating access to water, children and families in Manohar Nivas feel the power of the state through both the absence and arbitrary presence of its mandated services. Waiting patiently for a sufficient and sustained water supply is a central feature of state-induced structural violence in Manohar Nivas. Following Auyero (2012), I find that as they wait, families in Manohar Nivas are at the whim of the state and its arbitrary exercise of power and dominance. However, waiting does not render families powerless. As they wait for visits from the Delhi Jal Board tanker—and for the agency to establish an adequate potable water fixture in their community—residents of Manohar Nivas simultaneously seek out alternative sources of water. Patient waiting for the state coexists with fights for water at the Kalaknanda tank led by young girls. In acts of resistance, girls, with support of some boys and women, carry out their care responsibilities by negotiating and challenging the violent authority and exercise of power by Kalaknanda aunties.

Girls, especially, traverse both ends of the violence continuum (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). As they navigate everyday survival amidst structural and state-induced violence, they experience direct forms of physical and verbal violence at the whim of Kalaknanda aunties. The synergy between both kinds of violence, enabled by dominance in each case, reflects the mutually reinforcing nature of power exercised at systemic and community levels. Responding to

Linda Green's call for more research of this kind (cited by Farmer (2004)), struggles for water in Manohar Nivas reveal how state-induced chaos coexists with the daily routines people create to survive. In this case, daily struggles for water are shaped by the social organization of care which is gendered even in childhood.

Through their critiques of the violence they faced and their resistance to it, girls (and some boys), demonstrated an awareness of the dehumanization they faced and their lack of access to what they considered a basic service and entitlement. Children framed their abuse and violence at the hands of powerful Kalaknanda aunties as unwarranted and dehumanizing. They also understood that the reason they were compelled to subject themselves to routine forms of dehumanization and violence was because of the state's failure to provide them with direct access to sufficient water. Implicitly, then, young girls in Manohar Nivas understood that they were denied key features of what Auyero (2012) calls interactional citizenship—respect, regard, and dignity. And yet, this did not leave them merely compliant to the state; their fights for water were, in equal measure, fights for dignity and respect.

CHAPTER IV

“YOU ARE A PARASITE—THE SCUM OF THE EARTH”: THE CRIMINALIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Across all my conversations with boys living in Aakash Sadan shelter, one thing was consistently clear: children experienced violence routinely as they struggled to learn and earn. In both government schools and on the streets where they worked, children reported experiencing a mix of verbal abuse and physical violence. Be it teachers in government schools, or police on the streets, borrowing from Lipsky (2010) I conceptualize these local state authorities as street-level bureaucrats, who, acting on behalf of the state, use informal and punitive mechanisms of social control to criminalize children and their families.

In this chapter I focus on the experiences of boys living in Aakash Sadan shelter who sell toys, balloons and other items at traffic lights and intersections across the city.⁹³ This work is not done by girls living in Aakash Sadan shelter unless they are accompanying parents who also do this work. I conceptualize government schools and the streets as domains of regulatory state power in which boys experience varied forms of violence. In government schools teachers use physical violence and verbal abuse to attach markers of criminality onto children based on their embodied social status as street workers. In doing so, they push children out of the school system, reinforcing inequalities in education, and intensifying children’s already blocked opportunities. On the streets, where children and their parents sell their goods, the police use physical violence along with verbal abuse. Most prominently, this involves the destruction and theft of workers’ goods and additional forms of police criminality like corruption and bribes

⁹³ I draw upon selected empirical accounts from Manohar Nivas in the section on violence in schools. While some boys who worked on the streets and lived in Manohar Nivas also experienced violence, these cases were isolated within the community.

(Albrecht 2017; Ross 2003). The police also engage in wrongful arrests and incarceration of men in particular, but also of children. In combination, these tactics place families' survival in jeopardy.

With this as context, I argue that as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010), government school teachers and the Delhi police use overt (i.e., physical) and covert forms of violence (i.e., verbal abuse) to criminalize children engaged in street work. In doing so, they use strategies of what I call *performative policing*—an enactment of discretionary power by representatives of state institutions that is fundamentally symbolic, even when physical in nature, signaling to the urban poor that they are unequal citizens, while potentially threatening their capacities for survival. This form of policing is less about inflicting physical harm and more about cautioning against resistance to state dominance (Osterholtz 2013).

Extending Sally Merry (1998), I demonstrate how in schools the everyday criminalization of boys engaged in street work occurs socially, rather than within the realm of legal institutions. This remains true on the streets, too, where the social criminalization of boys and men intersects with criminalization in connection with the law. As such, government schools and the streets become sites of regulatory state power for children and families living in Aakash Sadan shelter.

The everyday forms of criminalization I examine are rooted in perceptions about boys and men as masculinized “threats.” (Ferguson 2001; Victor Rios 2011). The characterization of boys and men as “criminal” and “threatening” is inseparable from a casteism that is tied to criminality and conceptions about street work. I argue that strategies of performative policing, as employed by street-level bureaucrats, deny interactional citizenship (Auyero 2012) to street workers, who are not accorded respect, regard, or dignity by the state. These strategies, in turn, reinforce an exclusionary urban citizenship that drives everyday forms of criminalization. As

such, mechanisms of everyday criminalization serve to maintain and reproduce inequalities in social status and income, entrenching poverty and stigmatization as dual processes.

However, extending Victor Rios' (2011) work on "labelling hype," I find that children do not internalize criminal identities in schools or on the streets. They are critical of the abuse and violence they experience in schools and on the streets, and resist this where they can. Contrary to Rios (2011), even as police violence and theft deepens their economic insecurity, I find that boys living in Aakash Sadan shelter do not turn to theft and crime for survival. While they express feelings of hopelessness, invoking a sense of futility about the work they do and about attending school, their accounts do not suggest that they feel unworthy of respect or protection. To the contrary, both children and adult residents of Aakash Sadan shelter leverage critiques of the routine violence, indignities, and injustices they face.

The Criminalization of Everyday Life: Situating Colonial and Contemporary Constructions of Criminality

Writing about the criminalization of everyday life, Sally Merry (1998) argues that the law constitutes everyday life by (re)defining social practices as crimes. Merry emphasizes that the rhetoric that surrounds criminalization is central to its operation. Target groups are typically defined as a "threat" or source of "danger," and as requiring social control and interventions by authorities and the law. The very process of criminalization, according to Merry, "is the reinterpretation of everyday behavior as an offense against the state" (1998:21). Historicizing the redefinition of crime through an analysis of colonial labor and vagrancy laws and practices, she demonstrates how criminalization has been a fundamental part of the capitalistic transformation and colonial history.

This framework extends to pre-independent India where the historical construction of criminality was fundamentally rooted in ideas about caste and labor (Dirks 2001; Kannabirān and Singh 2008; Nigam 1990; Piliavsky 2015). Scholars have written extensively about the colonial construction of the “criminal tribe” stereotype which branded entire communities as “criminals by birth” or “professional criminals” (Kannabirān and Singh 2008; Nigam 1990; Piliavsky 2015). The constructed category of “criminal tribes and castes” was encoded in the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871, where “tribe” and “caste” were used interchangeably. The CTA criminalized nomadic communities, sanctioning violence against them by labelling them “habitual criminals” (Kannabirān and Singh 2008; Nigam 1990).⁹⁴ This involved the criminalization of the occupational mobility and varied forms of street work performed by many nomadic communities. Modelled on British vagrancy laws that criminalized gypsies (Kannabirān and Singh 2008), the colonial state treated itinerant street trading and performances, for instance, as synonymous with vagrancy.

Following India’s independence, the CTA was replaced with the 1952 Habitual Offenders Act and nomadic tribes were at once de-notified, re-stigmatized, and re-criminalized. Branded by the Indian post-colonial state as a “special type of criminal” or “habitual offender,” these communities were constructed as having a consistent practice of crime (Dirks 2001; Kannabirān and Singh 2008). Even in post independent India the treatment of nomadic communities was based on an understanding of English vagrancy laws. Consequently, the work that gypsies and nomads did for a living was conflated with the work of vagrants. These underlying assumptions were reflected in the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959 that targeted nomadic

⁹⁴ This included a particular community, the *kanjar*, who were also identified as a “caste of thieves” (Piliavsky 2015).

communities in particular, criminalizing them and the act of begging into the twenty first century.⁹⁵

Extending her analyses to contemporary forms of criminalization, Merry (1998) notes that in the twentieth century, colonial stereotypes about criminality were replaced with discourse on the culture of poverty, wherein poor communities of color were policed and marked as “immoral” and “dangerous.” The police, she argues, shape daily practices and identities, while imposing new social apprehensions on excluded communities. Speaking to the discursive power of contemporary criminalization, she further points out how incarceration by the police reinforces a rhetoric of dangerousness, often also reconstituting racial and gender identities.

Policing, Criminalization, and Gender

The use of policing strategies to exert social control over communities deemed a threat, often involves violence that is less about inflicting physical harm, and more about cautioning against resistance to state dominance (Osterholtz 2013). Although few studies delineate the mechanisms of violence that reproduce poverty, Henricks and Harvey (2015) demonstrate how the police impose fines and fees on communities of color as part of a larger racialized system in the United States. These communities are, in effect, made to pay for their oppression, which keeps them poor. Others point to how the police themselves can engage in acts of criminality, through corruption and the soliciting of bribes, for instance (Albrecht 2017; Ross 2003). Scholars have argued that underpaid state employees extract bribes from the urban poor in an effort supplement their own incomes from sources outside the system (Bayat 1997).

⁹⁵ Begging was de-criminalized legally in 2018 but remains socially criminalized.

The policing and criminalization of the urban poor is not limited to interactions with the police. A variety of state actors may, in fact, be involved in driving mechanisms of social control. In this context, Michael Lipsky's (2010) conceptualization of "street-level bureaucrats," representatives of the state like the police, health-workers, and school teachers, who possess considerable discretionary power, is a useful frame. Focusing on school teachers in U.S. public schools, Ann Arnett Ferguson demonstrates how young Black boys are policed and branded as "unsalvageable" and "bound for jail" (2001:9). Although they are just children, race and class intersect with gender to drive perceptions about threatening and racialized masculinities. These perceptions are held in school and in public spaces. Similarly, others point to the construction of the "street child" or "child beggar" as a similar threat in need of policing (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998; Swanson 2010; Zelizer 1985).

In schools, Ferguson (2001:2) finds that school labelling practices and the use of disciplinary rules, operate as part of a "hidden curriculum" aimed at punishing and criminalizing boys. Teachers treat boys who are Black and poor without respect, using verbal disparagement when addressing them. These boys are identified as having behavioral problems, and in schools some boys intentionally act up to reclaim a sense of competence and worthiness. Even outside schools, they are labelled "thieves" and stigmatized when entering stores, as shopkeepers view their very presence as a threat to good business (Ferguson 2001).

Victor Rios (2011) also examines the policing of young Black and Latinx boys and men living in poverty. These children and young men indicate that police and school teachers are excessively punitive towards them. In order to cope with this treatment and in an effort to attain dignity, boys engaged in routine attempts to prove their innocence. Focusing on criminalization beyond the law, Rios shows how young people are treated as deviant, threatening, and criminal

by adults across a range of institutions, including school. Referring to this omnipresent pattern of criminalization as the youth control complex, he examines a system wherein schools, police, probation officers, community centers, families, the media, businesses, and other institutions converge to systematically criminalize the everyday behaviors of young men of color.

Extending early scholarship on labelling, Rios (2011) further argues that many young boys and men internalize their criminalization, behaving in accordance with these labels and even growing to believe they do not deserve protection. However, complicating earlier theories, he argues that labelling is also about repeated interactions with state agencies that exacerbate processes of criminalization, further stigmatizing and marking boys in accordance with their original label. This leads to what Rios calls “labelling hype,” wherein experiences with criminalization are multiplied through contact with multiple agencies of social control like schools and the police.

Although Rios (2011) finds some evidence of resistance among young boys and men, these forms of resistance involve engaging in criminal activity. Specifically, to resist their hyper criminalization, he argues that young boys and men commit nonserious offenses. Rios (2011) references work by Paul Hirschfield to emphasize that labels may, in fact, have less impact on the individual identities of poor men of color, while having greater impact on blocking social mobility and perpetuating criminalization.

“They Call Us *Kanjar*”: Constructing Criminality in Government Schools

“The sir [teacher] there was *very* bad. He would say, ‘[Look] *kanjar*⁹⁶ is coming to study’. . . . He used to say, ‘You are *kanjar*. You *kanjar* people, what will you study and become?’” In

⁹⁶ In this section I discuss the semantic undertones of the word *kanjar* which has multiple meanings.

his despondent account about why he stopped attending school, Akhil, who was 14 when we met and lived in Aakash Sadan shelter, echoed the experiences and sentiments of many of his friends. I heard repeated accounts about how government school teachers insulted and verbally abused children who sold balloons, toys, and other items on the street. They told Akhil and his friends that studying would be futile for them because of their social status. In recounting their experiences of violence and abuse in schools, boys at Aakash Sadan shelter used one word repeatedly: *kanjar*.

When they used this word, children spoke with a mix of sadness, revulsion, and anger in their voices. Some children would look down instead of directly at me; others would make eye contact, sometimes with furrowed eyebrows or a look of sorrow in their eyes. I knew from the emotion in children's voices and on their faces, that *kanjar* was deeply insulting. But neither I, nor the average Delhi resident I knew, understood the precise meaning of the word. When I asked them what exactly they meant by *kanjar*, in different ways, children would indicate the word was a terrible, degrading form of abuse or curse word.

The centrality of *kanjar* to children's accounts meant I needed to better understand its semantic undertones. I consulted several authorities on colloquial Hindi, including social workers and translators with appropriate linguistic expertise. I also consulted scholarly texts. In combination, these sources revealed the many layers of meaning implicit in the word, as well as its colonial origins. In contemporary India, the colloquial use of *kanjar* implies a constructed caste criminality that dates back to colonial India (Dirks 2001; Kannabirān and Singh 2008; Nigam 1990; Piliavsky 2015).

I was told that when translated literally, *kanjar* is a nomadic community that the British defined as a "criminal tribe" during colonial rule. Subaltern scholars, especially those focused on

colonial constructions of (caste) criminality, trace the semantics of the word to the category “criminal tribes and castes” encoded in the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871.⁹⁷ The CTA criminalized nomadic communities like the *kanjar*, sanctioning violence against them by labelling them “habitual criminals” or “criminals by birth” (Kannabirān and Singh 2008; Nigam 1990). The *kanjar* community which is historically from North India, where the CTA was mostly applied initially, has also been called the “caste of thieves” (Piliavsky 2015:327).⁹⁸

The criminalization of the *kanjar* is historically rooted in the CTA’s punitive treatment of the community’s occupational mobility and street work. The colonial state treated itinerant street trading and performances, for instance, as synonymous with vagrancy.⁹⁹ When the CTA was replaced with the 1952 Habitual Offenders Act in post-independent India, the *kanjar* were at once de-notified,¹⁰⁰ re-stigmatized, and criminalized. Branded by the Indian post-colonial state as a “special type of criminal” or “offender,” members of the community were identified as having a consistent practice in crime that needed policing (Dirks 2001; Kannabirān and Singh 2008). This was reinforced when vagrancy was subsequently conflated with beggary under a national anti-beggary act¹⁰¹ that targeted nomadic communities or Denotified Tribes (DNTs) by design (Kannabirān and Singh 2008).

Colloquially, in India today *kanjar* has multiple meanings, all of which are rooted in the community’s historical criminalization and stigmatization. The best translation I was given is

⁹⁷ The terms “tribe” and “caste” were used interchangeably in the CTA.

⁹⁸ Nicholas Dirks (2001) writes about the “kallar” community in Tamil Nadu which was also branded as criminal under the CTA when it was extended from North India to the Madras Presidency in 1911. Dirks (2011) notes that the word “Kallar” has often been translated as “thief.” Although subaltern schools focus on the evolution of caste criminality as a colonial stereotype, Piliavsky (2015) argues that there is some indigenous basis for claims that *kanjars* engaged in thievery.

⁹⁹ The CTA was modelled on British vagrancy laws that criminalized gypsies (Kannabirān and Singh 2008).

¹⁰⁰ The Denotified Tribes (DNTs) are the “tribes” that were initially listed under the CTA.

¹⁰¹ The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act was established in 1959. Significant parts of this act were ruled unconstitutional by the Delhi High Court in 2018. Although begging is now legally decriminalized—with jails previously designated for beggars reportedly closed—begging remains socially criminalized in India.

“parasites; scum of the earth.” Jagish, who worked with the social movements-influenced NGO/CSO DISHA, clarified this for me after consulting his colleagues. Offering further explanation, he explained why the *kanjar* community was equated with parasites; like criminals, parasites survive by feeding off others in society, he told me. These semantic undertones can be traced to the construction of the *kanjar* not only as criminals, but also thieves. The more general colloquial translation for *kanjar* given to me by social workers and children was the worst abuse or curse word for society, or the “the lowest of the low.” Thus, *kanjar* is not only synonymous with a community of parasitic thieves and beggars akin to the scum of the earth; the community itself is linguistically equated with the worst form of verbal abuse for a given society.

Government school teachers are not simply degrading children like Akhil when they repeatedly say to them, “You *kanjar* people, what will you study and become?” As representatives of the state, or street-level bureaucrats, teachers are ascribing a criminal identity onto children they associate with begging and thievery. In the process, they also construct corresponding narratives about the futility of studying for boys like Akhil. Although children of all ages were subject to this kind of abuse and violence in schools, children’s own accounts suggest this intensified for boys as they became teenagers, perhaps owing to the perception of them as greater threats (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2001). As Ferguson found in her study (2001), teachers criminalized boys in schools even though these children had not been charged with illegal acts. The markers of criminality teachers selectively attached to boys from Aakash Sadan shelter were, thus, based on their embodied class and non-upper caste status as street workers.

Following Ann Ferguson (2001) and Victor Rios (2011), my focus in this chapter demonstrates how the criminalization of boys in government schools intersects with perceptions

about them as a racialized masculinized “threat.” Here, racialization is shaped by a casteism¹⁰² that is tied to children’s occupational status as street workers. Extending Sally Merry (1998), I demonstrate how in schools, boys engaged in street work experience everyday forms of criminalization socially, rather than in relation to the law. This process exists beyond the realm of legal institutions and permeates daily life.

Everyday criminalization occurs through what I call *performative policing*, an enactment of discretionary power by representatives of state institutions that is fundamentally symbolic, even when physical in nature, signaling to the urban poor that they are unequal citizens, while potentially threatening their capacities for survival. In exercising strategies of performative policing, street-level bureaucrats use overt (i.e., physical) and covert (i.e., verbal abuse) forms of violence to fuel everyday criminalization.¹⁰³

But Akhil and his friends reject the criminal label placed on them and do not identify with the *kanjar* community or “tribe.” As we sat in a partially enclosed area on the street opposite the shelter, Akhil explained these dynamics to me:

All the kids used to go to school. There wasn’t even one child who didn’t go to school. . . . Now all the children have left school. . . . When we go there [to school] they [teachers] call us *kanjar-wanjar*¹⁰⁴ [parasites, scum of the earth]. . . . If it is like this, which children will go to school?. . . . Better than this is to earn a living and eat.

Like many other boys in Aakash Sadan shelter, Akhil had studied until fifth grade, combining school with work despite its challenges. As his account suggests, he wanted to continue going to school, but only if he was going to be treated with respect. If daily abuse was going to be par for

¹⁰² Caste and race scholars have written about racialized casteism (Jayawardene (2016) and the ethnicity of caste (Reddy 2005). While I do not build on this body of work, I recognize the importance of these intersections.

¹⁰³ Scholarship on torture in war highlights the performative nature of violence (Osterholtz 2013). While aspects of this violence (i.e., cruelty and humiliation) resonate with the accounts I examine in this chapter I do not engage with or build on this work directly.

¹⁰⁴ In colloquial Hindi it is quite standard to say a word and then pair it with a rhyming version of the word for emphasis.

the course, as Akhil noted, the better alternative was to focus on earning a living. Akhil's rhetorical questioning of why any child would want to go to school only to face such debased humiliation, points to his awareness of the deeply denigrating quality of the label *kanjar*. Thus, complicating Rios' (2011) notion of labelling hype, I find that instead of internalizing the criminal identities teachers marked them with, Akhil and his friends articulated a desire to be treated with dignity and respect. Their accounts consistently rejected the dehumanization and denigration they faced as unwarranted and unjust.

In addition to enduring the indignity of verbal dehumanization, Akhil and his friends also faced physical violence in school. Their teachers hit them, as did other children who didn't work on the street or live in Aakash Sadan shelter. When these other children instigated physical fights with Akhil and his friends, the teachers did not say or do anything. In contrast, if Akhil and his friends fought (back), they were chastised by teachers. Akhil was acutely sensitive to teachers' prejudiced treatment of boys, who like him, worked on the street. His accounts consistently revealed how he and his friends were policed by teachers who would degrade and punitively humiliate them. Not only did teachers fail to protect children like Akhil against violence from other children, they punished them disproportionately, reinforcing their criminality and stereotyping them as more violent and unruly than other children.

These stereotypes used by teachers to construct boys as criminals rather than as students, with little to no knowledge about the nature of their work, underscores how perceptions about masculine "threat" can intersect with a racialized casteism that is inextricably linked to children's occupational status and, in turn, their living conditions. Selling toys, balloons, and other items on the street involves extreme exposure to dirt and pollution, and children in Aakash Sadan shelter often lacked water with which to bathe and wash their clothes. This, however, was

not the case for many other children who also attended government schools and lived in the better resourced *bastis*¹⁰⁵ surrounding the shelter.

I first spoke to children from the neighboring communities at the local NGO (SAHAY) school which they, like some children from Aakash Sadan, attended. With time, some of these children invited me to their homes to speak with them and their mothers, and in some cases just to pay them visits. Although they were also non-upper-caste (i.e., SC/ST)¹⁰⁶ and resource and income-poor, unlike children in Aakash Sadan their families had homes. These were solid room-sized and brightly painted homes, unlike the temporary *jhuggis* made of makeshift and flammable materials in Manohar Nivas. Families paid a modest rent for them, and each household had access to water and gas. Children¹⁰⁷ living in the two *bastis* I visited did not work on the street and typically combined some variation of unpaid home-based work, paid home-based work, and family work with school. None of these boys or girls¹⁰⁸ reported experiencing abuse or violence from teachers; instead they emphasized how much they enjoyed school. Although one boy I spoke with complained that teachers in the first government school he went to didn't teach, he eventually moved to a better government school to pursue his studies.

But for Akhil and his friends from Aakash Sadan, their inability to learn was inseparable from routine violence, dehumanization, and teachers' claims that they shouldn't be in school in the first place. While Akhil told me there was "no use" in going to school, as teachers didn't

¹⁰⁵ I use *basti* here to reflect how children and their families described their community. A *basti* is a settlement consisting of concrete room-sized homes. Basti is used here in contrast to the temporary *jhuggis* made of makeshift materials in Manohar Nivas.

¹⁰⁶ Children did not typically know their caste, and only some adults did. I verified questions I had with adults from the community and staff from the local service-oriented NGO, SAHAY, where children attended nonformal education classes.

¹⁰⁷ I do not intend to suggest that these particular children were the ones instigating violence against boys from Aakash Sadan shelter.

¹⁰⁸ Some girls said that boys fought among each other and with them, but the teachers protected them

even teach, he repeatedly identified abuse and denigration as the reasons he was no longer in school. “I think, if I go [again] to school, then once again there will be insults over there. If there weren’t going to be insults then I would study, but if I have to take insults then there’s no point.” Akhil’s logic and choice, albeit constrained, is clear; if he could study with dignity he would, but insults weren’t a price he was willing to pay to be in school. His feeling that there was “no point” or “no use” in studying came up more than once in our conversation. Therefore, although these children do not internalize criminal identities in schools as Rios found students did in his study (2011), they do internalize feelings of helplessness and ideas about the futility of studying. They do so because of teacher abuse and denigration, not because they believe they are unworthy or not fated to learn as teachers tell them.

Although Akhil rejected teachers’ dehumanizing treatment and did not internalize the criminal identity they constructed for him, his experiences in school left him believing that, indeed, it was futile for him to be in school. He did not attribute this futility to what teachers claimed was true— that he would get nowhere by studying because he was *kanjar*. Yet, on more than one occasion, he stressed that this was what teachers told him. “They [teachers] say you people are *kanjar*, with all this reading and writing [studying] what will you be able to do?” Akhil told me. Yet Akhil continued to believe that in the absence of violence, school could be beneficial for him. He dis-identified with the criminal label and did not internalize the belief that studying was inevitably futile for him. Yet, at the same time, he did not return to school as maintaining his dignity was paramount. Without it, he did not feel he could tolerate school or learn. Complicating Rios’s (2011) notion of labelling hype, then, I found the children living in the shelter reject their identification with criminalization and simultaneously exhibit an unwillingness to tolerate dehumanization and denigration.

I cannot substantiate whether government school teachers believed Akhil and his friends were, in fact, from the *kanjar* tribe (or caste), or whether they invoked the term loosely as an affront. However, one thing was clear; teachers used the word *kanjar* to debase children, implying that they were inevitably doomed to a social status so low it afforded them no future prospects. Like Akhil, other boys living in the shelter told me that teachers would verbally abuse them, calling them *kanjar*, and that they had left school as a result. Even when Akhil contemplated returning to school, he said he would only do it if the other boys from the shelter went, too. I heard the same thing from Akhil's friends and other boys who felt they needed one another's support if they were to attempt to face abuse and violence in schools again.

In addition to experiencing verbal abuse, some boys from Akash Sadan were forced out of school by teachers. On a busy and noisy evening in the shelter, Saurabh, who was 15 when we met and born in Delhi, told me how this happened to him. To avoid us having to leave the shelter, Saurabh's friend Gautam had asked Kushal, a young man in his twenties who I knew well,¹⁰⁹ whether we could use his living space on the ground floor. Smiling with pride, Saurabh pointed me to a small enclosure in a spacious room which had a light curtain on one side for privacy, and a *charpai* for us to sit. Like other boys in Akash Sadan shelter, Saurabh and Gautam) wanted us to speak in a part of the shelter that wasn't "dirty."¹¹⁰

As we spoke, Saurabh explained that less than a year ago he went to school only to find his teacher had "cut" his name from the enrollment list. When Saurabh asked his teacher why his

¹⁰⁹ I had assisted Kushal when his child, who later died, was very ill. I used to speak with Kushal periodically as for a period of time he had access to a phone. He and one other young man at the shelter were my points of contact with many of the boys; I would often call them before visiting.

¹¹⁰ Children and adults in the shelter would often caution me against sitting in particular spaces. On one afternoon, for instance, several boys and some young men told me not to sit behind the water source on the open ground floor space. It was too dirty for me they said, as people had done "potty" [gone to the bathroom] there. While I would avoid covering my nose and mouth with my *dupatta* [long scarf] out of respect, it is true that smells in the shelter were, indeed, often overwhelming. This was particularly true on days when there was no water.

name had been cut, the teacher hit him a lot and gave him no explanation. He simply told Saurabh to go away, and to go home.¹¹¹ When I asked Saurabh why he thought this had happened, he said, “They [teachers] used to call us *kanjar*, that’s why. . . . They used to call us *kanjar* [emphasis, louder] . . . filthy, filthy/dirty, dirty.” Expressing disgust as he spoke these words, Saurabh told me he was not the only child to have experienced unenrollment by teachers without justification. He was certain it was because teachers thought so poorly of him and his friends that they felt they could act in this way.

Having already reached fifth grade, Saurabh had wanted to continue studying. Before he was unenrolled from school, unlike most of his friends, Saurabh said he wasn’t working on the street and “only did homework.” But even before his school seat was suspended he had begun to feel studying was futile for the same reasons as Akhil. “They [teachers] say you’re *kanjar*, you’re filthy/dirty, you beg. . . . How can we learn?” Saurabh asked me rhetorically, with a mix of anger, remorse, and disgust reflected in his voice and on his face. Like Akhil, Saurabh revealed how teachers criminalized boys like him by singling them out and policing them because of their embodied social status, including their appearance as filthy/dirty which they erroneously conflated with beggary.¹¹² Complicating Ferguson’s (2001) Foucauldian analysis of disciplinary control techniques in schools, I find that boys are socially criminalized in schools even when, according to them, they do not exhibit behaviors that need disciplining. Thus, the aim of performative policing in schools is not to inflict violence on children; rather, teachers use this strategy to criminalize children socially, such that schools become sites of regulatory power.

¹¹¹ This was sadly ironic given that teachers knew Akhil and his friends had no physical homes of their own.

¹¹² Some children in Manohar Nivas had similar experiences. Vamsi, who was nine when we met, told me that when he used to beg for vegetables and money near the metro, passersby would say: “He’s come here to beg, and when we beg there, they call us *kanjar*.” Vamsi’s mother and her friends were also called *kanjar* by passersby while working at collecting and sorting garbage.

Branding children as unworthy of an education, and thereby pushing many of them out of the education system, school teachers, as representatives of the state, deny children the core qualities of interactional citizenship (Auyero 2012).

As we continued to sit and talk on the *charpai*, Saurabh shared more about his experiences in school, pausing every time other children and adults came in and out of the room, while periodically reassuring me that the giant rat darting around us was harmless.¹¹³ Throughout our conversation, Saurabh emphasized that teachers used *kanjar* “a lot” to abuse him and other boys. Visibly upset, he explained that by calling children *kanjar*, teachers were calling them “filthy filthy people,” and that some of the other children at school would also use the same form of abuse, mimicking teachers.

Saurabh was conflicted about whether he wanted to return to school or not. The verbal abuse and dehumanization deterred him more than anything else. He also felt that even if he tried, “Who will put our name on the list?” Aware of how challenging it was for children who had been unenrolled from school to get a seat again, Saurabh didn’t think he would be able to re-enroll without assistance. With these combined factors in mind, Saurabh expressed to me that “working to eat [for food]” was the better alternative for him. But almost immediately after having said this, Saurabh paused, and lowering his voice asked me, “Will you put my name on the list?” Not being sure of whether I could successfully do so, I told Saurabh I would talk to people who knew how to do this and I would try to help. We also talked about the other boys in the shelter who might want to go back to school, and Saurabh told me he would bring me a list of names.

¹¹³ Although I had tried to ignore the rat which was circling the *charpai*, I unfortunately reacted, betraying my discomfort and fear, and accounting for Saurabh’s protective reassurance.

It was not the first time I tried to understand how best to assist children who wanted to resume their studies in government schools. Social workers doing this work across the city consistently told me the process was deeply fraught. This time was no different. The same was true for government de-addiction centers, which many boys (and parents) at the shelter asked me to help them access or re-access. Like government schools, the quality of care at these centers was poor. Still, boys at the shelter who used drugs had been able to break their addictions while living in de-addiction centers. After doing some research, I managed to meet with a social worker who understood how enrollment in government schools and de-addiction centers worked. Kishore *bhai*¹¹⁴ and I met at the shelter on an afternoon when he could also meet some of the boys interested in returning to school or going to de-addiction centers. He was generally helpful, and after meeting some of these boys and their mothers, and noting down their information, he said he would try and get them all a spot at Delhi's biggest government de-addiction center. When I spoke to Kishore *bhai* about the boys who wanted to go to school, most of whom did not do drugs, he was not willing to entertain the idea that they were genuinely interested in studying.

Kishore *bhai* gently, and also patronizingly, explained to me that "these children" and their parents weren't serious about school. He insisted that children would not attend once they were enrolled. Since I knew Saurabh was at the shelter and hadn't yet gone to work, I thought it would be good for Kishore *Bhai* to see how genuinely interested Saurabh was in studying. Perhaps naively, in retrospect, I did not expect the humiliation that followed. Within seconds of my introducing Kishore *Bhai* to Saurabh, Kishore *Bhai*'s body language and manner changed. As the three of us stood in the open space on the ground floor of the shelter, I watched Kishore *Bhai* scrutinize Saurabh, making it visible that he was looking at him from head to toe disapprovingly.

¹¹⁴ *Bhai* means brother in Hindi. I was introduced to Kishore in this way and called him *Bhai* as a sign of respect.

Then with a smirk and mocking tone to suggest his disbelief, Kishore *Bhai* said to Saurabh “*You?* You want to go to school?” Saurabh’s body language changed in response. Aware of the humiliation implicit in this question, Saurabh stood up taller pushing his chest out slightly and said “Yes.”

Kishore *Bhai* continued to question Saurabh mockingly, and I could see Saurabh get visibly more upset and even a little aggressive in his responses. I had never seen this side of him before, as he was typically soft spoken and always had a pleasant demeanor. It was clear Saurabh was aware of, and responding to, the ridicule he had been subjected to. I decided to intervene, and when Kishore *bhai* realized I did not approve of the spectacle he wrapped up the conversation with Saurabh, leaving things hanging. This interaction was not only deeply saddening; it was revealing. I had heard boys at the shelter speak critically about the dehumanization and humiliating abuse they faced, as well as teachers’ lack of faith in their capacities as students. In all of their accounts, children made it clear that they did not feel they deserved this treatment, rejecting it instead.

But observing the interaction between Saurabh and Kishore *bhai* demonstrated to me how quickly Saurabh picked up on the ridicule and the denigration. He automatically responded to defend himself and his dignity. This exemplifies how boys like Saurabh, who are stereotyped for being “aggressive” and “rough” with outsiders, and for having “threatening” masculinities (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2011) often exhibit confronting behaviors because of provocation. Like teachers in government schools, Kishore *bhai* ridiculed Saurabh, treating him without respect and dignity. Despite making it clear that I believed Saurabh wanted to be in school,¹¹⁵ my

¹¹⁵ It is likely that Kishore expected me to react in solidarity based on my class positionality. I had observed interactions like this in other contexts before. After this regretful interaction, Saurabh and I spoke. He was upset but still wanting to go to school. I learnt more about the challenges surrounding re-enrollment after subsequent conversations with social workers.

presence did not deter Kishore *bhai* from mocking Saurabh publicly. While sharing his own experiences, Saurabh had told me about some of his friends who also had experienced violence and abuse in schools. One of these boys was Ram, who born in Delhi and was 14 when I first met him. Like Saurabh, Ram had studied until fifth grade at the same school. But Ram was the only boy I consistently met at the shelter who no longer lived there.¹¹⁶ He typically spent time at Aakash Sadan because his friends were there. They would leave to sell toys and balloons together at the same roundabout and traffic intersection. Ram and I spoke to each other while sitting outside a small roadside *mandir* [Hindu temple] a few minutes away from the shelter. Like Saurabh and Akhil, Ram explained to me that he no longer studied at the local government school. “They [teachers] used to say ‘*kanjar* has come, *kanjar* has come, chase [drive away] all these [*kanjar* people],” Ram told me regretfully. Although Ram was able to study at a relatively low-cost private school after leaving the government school,¹¹⁷ like his friends, he wasn’t willing tolerate studying amidst routine insults.

Most boys who shared accounts about verbal abuse in government schools were well into their teenage years. However, some younger boys also reinforced these accounts. One afternoon I was speaking with Akhil’s brother, Amar, who thought he was about 8 years old, and Samrat, who was almost 13. Two of their friends joined us, too. Instead of staying in the shelter, we walked down the road because the shelter was very noisy that afternoon. In need of shade from the strong summer sun, we sat in an abandoned red e-rickshaw in a side gully.

Both Samrat and Amar used to go to the local government school, but both left for the same reason as most of the other boys in the shelter. “They [teachers] say *kanjar*, *kanjar*” to us

¹¹⁶ Ram was the only boy who I would meet at the shelter, but who no longer lived there. His was an unusual case as while his family had been able to move to a *basti*, he still needed to work for a variety of reasons.

¹¹⁷ Though his father still struggled financially to afford the cost of schooling, especially after Ram’s mother passed away, he earned a somewhat stable income for half the year playing the *dhol* at weddings.

Amar told me with a sad face. He barely completed his sentence when Samrat chimed in to reinforce this, noting that even his parents, who wanted him to study, had been upset about this. Samrat said that his mother said, “If this is the way they [teachers] talk to you then leave it.” Other boys also said that while their parents told them to study, they didn’t want them to go to school if teachers were going to humiliate and treat them badly. Instead of going to school, Samrat and Amar now sell items on the street at roundabouts and intersections in the center of town. Samrat sells large-sized *dream catchers* and sometimes also sells toys and balloons. Amar used to sell *dream catchers*, but when he couldn’t afford the more profitable large ones he started alternating between selling balloons and small flower wreaths for girls’ hair.

I heard similar accounts from Sukminder, who was 12 when we first met, and sold car wipers at traffic intersections. He also explained to me that many of his friends stopped going to school. “Sirji [the teacher] use to say ‘*kanjar, kanjar,*’ you know. It is for this reason that we all have left school.” Sukminder elaborated saying, “Over there [in school] all of the boys like us you know, the teacher used to say [to us] ‘*kanjar,*’ and all the other boys over there used to say ‘*kanjar*’ [to us too].” Like Samrat’s mother, Sukminder’s mother was very upset upon hearing how he was being treated in school. Because of this, Sukminder studied until third grade, after which his mother de-enrolled him from school.¹¹⁸

Even in Manohar Nivas, boys were often no longer in government schools because of the way teachers treated them. While criminalization through verbal abuse—and insults like *kanjar*—was not systematic in schools, physical violence was routine. The local government school held classes for girls in the daytime for safety, while boys had evening classes. Accounts

¹¹⁸ This was the only case I had heard of a mother actively withdrawing her child from school. Many boys spoke about being called *kanjar* – one likened this to being called a dog. While I mostly received reports of men teachers using this kind of abuse, I also received reports of women teachers doing so.

of violence were prevalent among boys in particular. Like in Aakash Sadan shelter, this was especially true for boys doing street work. It was not clear that this was the case for boys and girls who did other kinds of work (such as playing the *dhol*). Fights with other boys in schools, and physical violence on the part of teachers, were the main reason boys had stopped studying. Many girls, on the other hand, combined school with a mix of unpaid and paid work. DISHA, the social movements-influenced NGO/CSO, working in Manohar Nivas tried to address the issue of violence in schools. Jagdish, who worked for DISHA, spoke with me about this on the afternoon that I visited him in his office. He told me that children explained to him that teachers “hit them and scare them to control them.” When Jagdish asked children whether they wanted him to confront teachers about this, and to have them suspended from their jobs, children said, “We don’t want them [teachers] to lose their jobs.” Jagdish explained that most children said, “We just want them to stop beating us” or “We just want them to stop hitting us.” With this informing his approach, Jagdish met with the principal and some teachers from the local government school. When he raised the issue of teacher-inflicted violence, the school principal said:

We don’t hit them. Some children are really mischievous and badly behaved. . . . Sometimes they don’t come [to school]. . . . The clothes aren’t clean . . . and they bring food that’s nonvegetarian . . . and when they open it the whole place smells. Other children then get affected; this happens, that happens. . . . Their parents don’t listen to anything.

This account, which appears to both deny teacher violence while simultaneously justifying why it might be happening, points to how teachers single out students because of their embodied social status. Teachers in government schools do not attach a “criminal” label to children from Manohar Nivas, using violence against some, but not all children from the *jhuggi*. But still, these accounts from Manohar Nivas reinforce the underlying tendency government school teachers have to punish and police children for their differences and constraints in relation to those who

are relatively more privileged. Teachers also suggest that, like children, parents are somehow noncompliant (they “don’t listen to anything”). However, while children in Manohar Nivas who attended school weren’t always able to do so regularly, either because of sibling and elder care responsibilities, and/or paid work, along with their parents they repeatedly expressed a value for education.

Continuing with his account, Jagdish told me he asked the principal, “Have you ever gone to the community?” When the principal responded affirmatively, Jagdish was skeptical and responded with “You said they don’t bathe, do you know that over there, there is no water connection? They eat nonvegetarian food culturally. . . . You should be able to understand it’s a choice, how can you decide?” The principal, Jagdish told me, avoided addressing the issues he raised, repeating that students had no “regularity” instead. Jagdish then explained that although he had gone to the school in a collaborative spirit, when he found the principal and teachers unwilling to engage he changed his strategy. “I understood people in authority understand authority . . . understand through fear. . . . I didn’t want to scare them . . . but then I asked them ‘Tell me your name.’ Until that point no one had given me their name. . . . They got so scared.” Jagdish told the school staff that he would invite them to the community to learn more about how families in Manohar Nivas lived, and that he would also speak to a senior government representative about these challenges. His recognition that people in power who exercise their authority respond only in kind reinforces how teachers, as street-level bureaucrats, produce schools as spaces that serve as domains of regulatory power.

Ultimately, then, by using strategies of performative policing, teachers deny children respect, regard, and dignity, key features of interactional citizenship (Auyero 2012). They enforce an exclusionary form of urban citizenship through everyday forms of criminalization that

serve to maintain and reinforce inequalities, not only in education, but in social status. Teachers' use of a mix of physical and verbal abuse to do this in ways that are inextricably linked to a parallel process of discouraging and dehumanizing students. Rather than schools being spaces for equitable learning and socialization, they become spaces that regulate some children, and not others. Extending Sally Merry, everyday criminalization becomes a mechanism through which inequalities in access to education are reproduced, thus intensifying already blocked opportunities for children who are viewed as an "offense against the state" (1998:33).

True, the poor quality of education in government schools disadvantages all children learning in this system, versus those attending more resourced schools. However, as Saurabh noted, prior to his involuntary de-enrollment from school, he "only did homework." This protected him against the violence of street work, which as discussed in the subsequent section, involves strategies of performative policing that criminalize children and their families both socially and in connection with the legal system.

**"They Burst All the Balloons":
Criminalized Street Work, and Police Destruction and Theft**

There is no use/benefit [in doing this work] at all . . . the police come and burst our balloons and break our toys, or do something. . . . If we see them from a distance, we can at least run away, if they come close it is difficult to run away. . . . They take a rod and hit directly onto the toys . . . They slap us . . . , they burst our balloons. . . , they pick up the toys [and take them].

- Akhil, 14, Aakash Sadan Shelter

On most days of the week, from 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. until midnight or 1:00 a.m., Akhil sells balloons, wipers, *dreamcatchers* and other toys at near a roundabout in Delhi's central business district. His main clients are other children; while their parents usually buy them what he sells, sometimes children buy these items from him directly. Akhil typically works with two of his

younger brothers, Amar and Sachin, at a traffic light near a large intersection and roundabout in Delhi's central business district. Work for Akhil and his brothers requires knowing how and when to run away from the police and who hit and broke the toys they sell, bursting their balloons. The police also seize toys from children with force, Akhil told me on a number of occasions. But because, as Akhil notes, he and other children can only run from the police if they see them from a distance, more often than not work entails experiences of violence.

Not only are the police physically violent, slapping and hitting children in addition to destroying the items they sell, they also verbally abuse Akhil and his friends. As street-level bureaucrats using discretionary power in this way, the police turn the streets, intended as public spaces, into regulatory domains of power. These efforts by the police to produce a regulatory space are supported by members of the Municipal Committee of Delhi (MCD), which children and families in Aakash Sadan shelter refer to as "committee people." They sometimes help police seize children's goods.

While we know that experiences of childhood are unequal, and that childhood itself is a social construct, the bursting of a child's balloon by an adult invokes an image of cruelty. This takes on a new meaning when the adult exhibiting this cruelty represents the state, and the child's balloon represents not "play" but work. The discretionary use of violence by the police described by Akhil is cruel and callous. In equal measure it is selective and exercised only with particular groups of children, thus challenging classed ideas about how we expect adults to behave with children. The very same police officers, for instance, who taunt and use violence against Akhil and his friends, dare not behave this way with more privileged children in Delhi who enjoy a social status that is more advantageous than that of the police, and whose parents might have better access to protective measures. Lamenting the "filthy, filthy" abuses that police

hurl at children in particular, Shohini, Samrat's mother explained, "They swear at children and us. . . . [They] also chase after children. . . . For them, there's no difference."

The cruelty and callousness underlying the use of police violence to criminalize working children, is a key feature of performative policing. Whether by slapping and abusing children, or bursting their balloons, the police use their discretionary power on behalf of the state to caution children against using the streets freely. Police violence serves as a mechanism of social control to remind Akhil and his friends that they are not entitled to use the streets as they do; that they are not entitled to interactional or full urban citizenship (Auyero 2012; Bhan 2009).

The state's behavior is something that Kaashika, the legal scholar-activist who introduced me to DISHA, commented on during one of many conversations we had. As we sat in her home one afternoon, Kaashika explained to me how the state employs informal practices to ensure citizen behaviors don't become too commonplace, or like an "entitlement." Using the example of the Indian Forest Rights Act, Kaashika explained that the state had historically treated certain behaviors as "offenses" in the forest. It kept signaling this to people in subtle and informal ways:

You'll find that almost every family had some *parchi* [paper receipt] given to them at some time or other to establish "you're doing something wrong and you're an encroacher." They [the state] are not throwing them out. They suffer them there. But it has to be asserted that this is not ok, that we [the state] have a right to change it if we want to change it.

According to Kaashika's account, the state asserts its power with the objective of warning communities that at any time, it can (re)define social norms, determining which social practices are legitimate or illegitimate. These are mechanisms of informal social control, Kaashika explained, used to indicate that the state might "tolerate" certain practices at a particular moment, but that its willingness to do so was not guaranteed. Elaborating, Kaashika told me it is like the state is saying, "We can take it [a given practice], but we don't know how far we can take it, and

since we haven't made a distinctive policy about this we will tolerate it but we need you to know that we are in control here.”

The case of the Indian Forest Rights Act, and Kaashika's discussion about how the state leveraged power around it, underscores the similarly performative nature of policing in a variety of settings. Importantly, selling items at traffic lights and intersections is not illegal by law. Thus, the treatment of children as if they were criminals has no legal basis. In fact, the Indian constitution grants this right to citizen workers,¹¹⁹ while conferring upon the state the license to regulate selling on narrow streets and near hospitals. But, still, because street workers are branded as a public “nuisance” and “threat,” the police use informal mechanisms of social control through overt and covert strategies of performative policing to socially criminalize children (and their families).

This form of everyday criminalization is not unconnected from children's experiences in schools and in their residential community (Merry 1998). In these spaces, for instance, they are assumed to beg, even when they do not; and they are identified as “thieves” even when they do not steal. It is the informal acts of performative policing that allow police to retain their power. As Jagdish from DISHA in Manohar Nivas, told me during our meeting in his office, “They [the police] don't want things to go to the level of the courts because once that happens they have no power. . . . If things go to the level of the court then they have to behave.” According to Jagdish, the state police should not be regulating urban spaces in the way that they do; “It's not their job,” he told me. But using informal mechanisms of social control gives the police more discretion and power. It also leaves them less accountable to what Jagdish described as “pressures from above.”

¹¹⁹ Article 19 (1) (g) guarantees every citizen the right to engage in trade or business. These citizenship rights extend to “hawkers,” those who sell goods for a living, but can be regulated by the state to guarantee the rights of commuters to free movement without “impediment” (Article 19 (1) (d); Article 19 (6)).

The consequences of performative policing are far reaching and transcend the negative impacts of physical and performative violence. The characterization of Akhil and his friends as threatening is deeply ironic given that it is the police that pose a grave threat to the survival of so many families like Akhil's. Speaking to one of the many ways in which this threat manifests, Akhil asserts that there is "no use" or "benefit" to the work he does because of frequent net losses. This sentiment reinforces Akhil's feeling about school, and following Rios (2011), underscores how community-level interactions with multiple representatives of state agencies—in this case, school teachers and the police—exacerbate processes of criminalization.

The losses that families living in Aakash Sadan face when their goods are seized by the police can set them back financially by weeks, sometimes even months. I conceptualize the confiscation of goods in this way as police theft. Even when they do not suffer losses, many struggle to buy the items they sell for a living. Thus, in cases of police theft, not only do families suffer losses on their investments, they earn nothing from those items. This often means they cannot afford to keep buying new goods, which puts their families' ability to work and subsist in jeopardy.

Even under regular circumstances, when Akhil buys toys he pays between Rs 30 and Rs 50 each [USD 0.66] and sells them for between Rs 60 and 70 [under USD 1.00]. With balloons, too, the capacity to earn is limited. Explaining that a packet of 100 balloons costs Rs 300 [under USD 4.00], Akhil said, "We sell one balloon for Rs 10 [USD 0.13]. You make Rs1000 [USD 0.13] from 100 balloons. But in a batch of 100 balloons, 40 to 50 burst." When I asked Akhil why so many balloons go to waste, he said that some have too much air in them, and in other cases someone on the road throws stones at them or does something to them. Akhil also told me that he sold regular balloons as he could not afford to buy the new LED glowing balloons that

were popular at the time and other children and families sold across the city. Those cost Rs 80 [USD 1.00] each, Akhil told me, and were typically sold for Rs 120-150 (USD 1.50-2.00). At the best of times, Akhil stressed, he doesn't earn much from this work. But police destruction and theft of goods can lead to losses of at least Rs 1000 (USD 0.13) in a week, an estimate significantly lower than what others told me.

Thus, despite the long hours he put into working, Akhil told me that he often felt he was unable to achieve anything. And yet, when he did encounter police violence and theft, Akhil resisted it. "They [the police] say, 'don't sell, go somewhere else and sell. . . . We won't let you enter this area.' They say things like this." Elaborating, Akhil told me that he responds to the police directly, saying, "Where else will we go and sell? There is no other place to sell." Confronting the police with disobedient resistance often means more violence Akhil told me, because "if you start talking to them then they get a rod and hit you directly." Boys like Akhil resist their criminalization, and rather than turning to criminal activity as Rios (2011) suggests; Akhil and his friends emphasize the importance of protecting their capacities to work and earn for themselves and for their families.

Echoing Akhil, Revant, who was born in Delhi and 14 when we met, also shared accounts about how he confronted the police in the face of violence. Before moving to the shelter, Revant used to sleep on the footpath and also lived in a de-addiction center. As we sat on the uncovered ground floor area of the shelter, Revant told me that his older cousin, Rakesh, who lived in the shelter had taken him in, "I don't have anyone, this is why he keeps me." Revant's mother died in an accident and his father struggled with addiction and wasn't able to care for him. Like Akhil, Revant sells balloons at traffic intersections and experiences routine violence when interacting with the "committee" and police. "They burst all the balloons. All the

balloons—they burst them.” When I asked him why the police do this, he said, “They don’t let us sell over there. They seize everyone’s things.” At various points in our conversation, Revant expressed a keen understanding of what police were signaling through their punitive acts of violence and theft. He knew the police were not willing to let children like him occupy the streets as workers; they were asserting their power through informal measures of social control. And yet, Revant and others living in Aakash Sadan shelter continued to return to the streets to try and make a living, and to ensure their daily subsistence needs were met. When I asked Revant about how he responded when the police seized his goods, he said:

... We say, ‘Give it, give it [back].’ They don’t give it. They say ‘Go over there and fill out a receipt and come back, then we will give it back after seeing your money and that you’ve paid.’ . . . They say, you know, ‘Give us money, Rs1200 [USD 15.50].’ They take that much money, then they give the goods back.

Revant resists police authority by continuing to return to the street in the face of violence, and by confronting the police directly and asking for his goods back. Although this negotiation is not typically successful for Revant, because of the added layer of police corruption and criminality, through bribes Revant and many others continue to claim their “right to the city”¹²⁰ and to their work.

The police know that the bribes they ask children (and men) to pay in exchange for their confiscated goods are unaffordable. These punitive instances of police criminality (Albrecht 2017; Ross 2003), through theft mixed with corruption, reinforce the discretionary use of power by street-level bureaucrats as they engage in performative policing. Police theft and bribes¹²¹ reflect the use of locally produced mechanisms of social control rather than the execution of

¹²⁰ The “right to the city” is a concept first proposed by Henri Lefebvre (1968) and now used widely in contemporary urban scholarship on the Global South.

¹²¹ Scholars suggest that local state authorities, when underpaid, seek alternative sources of income informally, as they, too, feel the injurious effects of neoliberal policies (Bayat 1997).

directives by the police as an institution. These punitive and callous acts of overt violence against children like Akhil, who do not violate the law, are informally sanctioned.

More broadly, however, these informal acts of violence are consistent with the logics of the neoliberal state and state-sanctioned efforts to clean up and beautify the streets. As the streets are experienced as domains of regulatory power for families living in Aakash Sadan shelter, Delhi is simultaneously being fashioned into a world class city (Dupont 2000; Ghertner 2011). These neoliberal state aspirations are at odds with visible signs of poverty, including street work. Thus, performative policing is less about causing physical harm and more about controlling communities viewed as an “offense against the state” (Merry 1998), while cautioning them not to deviate from, or challenge, the authority of the state.

These accounts about police violence were not uncommon. Viky, who like Revant, used to live on the footpath before moving to Aakash Sadan shelter, sells small, medium, and large *dream catchers* near the same roundabout and intersection as Akhil and Samrat. The police over there “verbally abuse and curse at us, hit us, seize our goods and go. . . . [They] seize the goods. They seize it and don’t give it back.” Viky continued, emphasizing that the police and committee people appear. “We have goods with us, you know, and while we are selling them then [they] come from behind you and catch you,” Viky told me. The discretionary nature of policing is something Viky pointed to at various points during our conversation. Elaborating, he said:

From somewhere or the other, they quietly come and catch you. . . . Like, if we are working here, they are doing a round, and you don’t get to know if they are coming from in front of you, ahead of you, or behind you. For example, while we are involved with a customer, then they come from behind and catch you.

The characterization of the police as always on the watch, spontaneously appearing out of nowhere, is reminiscent of how surveillance operates in so-called “illegal” settlements like Manohar Nivas. Reiterating, at various points, that the police come and “catch you,” while

working, Viky explained that when they do this, they also “seize your goods” and then “it all goes.” In order to survive these instances of police theft, Viky lamented that his family and other families at the shelter might sometimes go into debt, borrowing money with interest to be able to continue working.

Many other boys living in Aakash Sadan shelter, including Samrat, Amar, and Saurabh, shared similar accounts about police violence, everyday criminalization, and the cycle of poverty and debt it placed families in as they struggled with daily survival. Saurabh, who had told me about being forcibly disenrolled from school, explained some of these dynamics to me in a separate conversation. He, like others his age, emphasized that the police hit children, seizing their goods. Speaking more generally about this work, he said, “Sometimes there is benefit, sometimes there is [economic] loss.” Saurabh made it clear that what happened on a given day of work was unpredictable, and although there were days when his goods were not taken from him by the police, on days that they were taken he estimated losses of at least Rs 1000-2000 [USD 13.00-26.00], sometimes more.

It was evident, therefore, that the net gains from this work were questionable. While talking about the relative benefits of his work, Saurabh noted that, ultimately, there were “none at all” because invariably “there would be losses” on some days. And yet Saurabh and his friends continued to risk these losses in the absence of alternatives. “If we don’t go to [Khanna bazaar] then how will we eat food, earn a living?” Saurabh asked rhetorically. Unlike Saurabh, some boys at Aakash Sadan avoided going to the center business district to sell, weighing the costs of working in a heavily policed area with lots of clients against the benefits of working at smaller intersections with less business but also less policing. These choices varied, however, and making these decisions required a calculus based on avoiding net losses due to police violence

and theft. This calculus was also central in determining whether adults, especially men, went to work, the dynamics of which I discuss below.

“Why Would We Steal?”: Gendered Policing and Wrongful Arrests

In all their accounts, children and adults emphasized that they did not steal, with some even questioning why they would do so. Consistently, children and adults emphasized that they wanted simply to be permitted to earn an honest living. After all, as Saurabh’s mother, Nohar, insisted, the streets are “not their [the police’s] space nor is it our space.” The streets were viewed by families at Aakash Sadan as public spaces that they should be free to use. Yet the police criminalized children and adults by barring them from selling goods on the street, threatening their livelihoods. Despite this, residents of Aakash Sadan shelter stressed that they did not respond by turning to criminal activity (Rios 2011). Their goal, instead, was to cultivate strategies to avoid police violence and criminality (Albrecht 2017; Ross 2003).

In all their accounts, children and their parents emphasized that it was men who faced disproportionate violence and economic loss while selling goods on the street. Speaking to this, Akhil explained to me that “the police hit men more . . . so father doesn’t sell. . . . That’s why father doesn’t go . . . even if someone else steals, they look at us and say we are the ones who have stolen. . . . [They] put us in jail.” Akhil’s father, for instance, had spent several months in Tihar jail¹²² for a crime he did not commit. While he was more fortunate than others as he was released relatively quickly, Akhil’s father stopped selling flower garlands at traffic lights after this experience. He felt that the risks of doing this work far outweighed the benefits. But not

¹²² Tihar Jail is India’s largest and most notorious prison, and the largest prison complex in South Asia. It is run by the Department of Delhi Prisons, Government of Delhi. As of 2012, Tihar had 10,533 inmates despite its sanctioned capacity of 5, 200.

having found an alternative and stable source of income, Akhil's father doesn't have consistent work.

To try and make ends meet Akhil's mother begs on the street with his two-year-old sister. His younger brother, Amar, goes to work with Akhil on most days. Amar spoke to me about his work on the same afternoon that he and his friends spoke to me in an abandoned red e-rickshaw, not far from the shelter. Looking toward the ground, with sadness in his voice and on his face, Amar said, "They [the police] say 'We will put you in jail. . . . We will catch you and put you in jail.'" Amar explained that many other boys had similar experiences with the police who threatened to lock them up for doing the work they did. While some shelter residents recounted incidents of children and women being incarcerated, residents' accounts emphasized that men were most vulnerable to incarceration and economic losses due to police theft.

The everyday criminalization of children and adults as street workers can, therefore, also be legal. Even when children themselves are not incarcerated, having parents in jail legally criminalizes them by association. This is true even though selling items on the street does not, in fact, violate the law and there is no evidence to support the characterization of children and their families as thieves. This is particularly ironic given that strategies of performative policing entail police theft in addition to elements of police criminality and corruption (Albrecht 2017; Ross 2003).

One afternoon when I was visiting the shelter, Abhay, who sold decorative hanging nested birds, and Arun, who sold car wipers, stopped to speak with me on the open ground floor area of the shelter. Both in their twenties, the two of them were heading out to work, each with a medium-sized backpack full of the goods they planned to sell. Abhay told me that their bags were packed with hundreds and sometimes thousands of rupees worth of items. He opened his

backpack to show me the dozens of hanging nested birds he had stuffed into it. I had seen these being sold at traffic lights all over Delhi by young men who looked similar in age to Abhay. Echoing many of the accounts I already heard about police theft, both Abhay and Arun ruefully recounted times when the police seized their backpacks. The losses they suffered were devastating.

In an attempt to circumvent police theft and wrongful arrests, families developed survival strategies if they could. Akhil's father stopped selling on the street to avert incarceration, but also to minimize economic losses. While Akhil himself experienced police theft and losses, children were still less susceptible to this than adult men, perhaps owing to men having more threatening masculinities. In fact, children and adults, including those from Akhil's family, stressed that women get beaten by the police less often than men and boys. For this reason, some families adopted strategies whereby women accompanied children when they went to work, sitting on the footpath and guarding items to be sold. Women also often cared for the younger children they brought with them. As women guarded the goods, boys would take a few items to the traffic lights to sell, making trips back and forth as necessary. Families felt that this would reduce the likelihood of all goods being seized by the police at once. Not all families, however, were in a position to operate in this way, and of those who could they were not always able to do so consistently.

In cases where this gendered response to a gendered pattern of policing was employed, women often assumed double and triple burdens. Although women living in Aakash Sadan shelter did not perform domestic work in a conventional sense as they lacked homes of their own, they typically assumed the primary responsibility for care work and looking after their family's living space. They also often worked in other ways to generate income.

Both Samrat, one of Akhil's friends, and Akhil's younger brother, Amar, spoke about how their mothers did most of the work to keep their families going. They felt this work should be equally distributed across their parents. The boys were aware that their fathers were often not generating income as they had not found alternative sources of work after they stopped selling items on the street. Women whose husbands were in this situation were all too aware of this. When asked what their husbands did for work, some simply responded with *time-pass*¹²³ or referred to their husbands as *bekar*.¹²⁴ Yet, this unemployment reflects a context in which men's work on the street—their best opportunity for employment—is criminalized.

Despite these gendered survival strategies, families still faced losses. When this happened, the devastation was deeply felt. On one day while I visited the shelter, I saw Akhil's grandmother distraught and crouched down on the open area of the shelter as she tried to cook for the evening. She was wailing and every now and then she would speak out in anger. I asked what was wrong. While cursing the police, she explained that they had seized the goods the family was selling that day. Her family lost around Rs 600-700 [USD 7.80-9.00], which given their daily earnings of a couple of hundred rupees when lucky, represented up to two to three weeks' worth of savings.

Other women like Ila, a young mother of two, spoke about the detrimental impact of these kinds of losses due to police theft, underscoring gender differences in policing:

They swear at us. They beat the men and seize our goods. They sometimes do it with the women, but mostly the men. . . . We buy Rs 5000-6000 [USD 65.00-78.00] worth of goods after borrowing money with interest. We buy goods and toys and take them there [to sell], but if they seize it all then what's the use? There's no use.

¹²³ *Time-pass* is a colloquial phrase used in many parts of India to mean doing nothing of much importance.

¹²⁴ Literally, *bekar* means useless/worthless; it is also used to refer to those who are unemployed as in this instance.

Emphasizing the gendered nature of police violence Ila, like Akhil, perceives the work her family is engaged in as futile. The feeling that this work was of “no use” or “benefit” was widespread and similar to how some of the boys from Akash Sadan shelter felt about attending school given the routine abuse they faced there. Ila also stressed that police theft is particularly devastating for families who need to take loans in order to be able to generate income on the streets in the first place. Echoing this, Vaibhav, a young man in his twenties, joined in my conversation with Ila. He emphasized that men in particular are targets for both police theft and wrongful arrests. “The police catch us and stop us. When we go [there] they stop us, and they say we are the ones who have stolen or are thieves. They put us in jail. . . . The things we sell, you know, they seize those.”

Nonetheless, children and adults consistently told me in different ways that “we don’t steal” and spoke about their refusal to engage in crime and theft to survive, lamenting the fact that sometimes they were forced to beg (Rios 2011). Raghu, a young father in his twenties who sold items on the street with his wife, spoke to the complex ways in which performative policing was detrimental for families in Aakash Sadan shelter. Raghu and I sat down on the open cement space of the shelter next to his toddler son. I noticed immediately that Raghu’s son’s leg was very badly injured, with a scar that appeared to cover the length of his tiny, slightly crooked leg. I asked Raghu what happened to his son’s leg and he explained that his son’s foot had been badly injured amidst police violence while he and his wife were working on the street. Explaining this in detail, Raghu said:

Suddenly he appeared with a rod . . . the policeman. . . . He was drunk. To try and catch us he began to use the rod, to beat us. We thought he would throw the rod and beat us, so we began to run. I don’t know how—the child’s foot came in the way of his [policeman’s] foot or some lady’s foot. In the process of running, someone stepped on his foot. He had a fracture; his bone had dislocated.

Like many others, Raghu described the spontaneous and “sudden” appearance of the police on the street. This was the only account I heard that referenced police violence instigated by drinking on the job. As Raghu elaborated, he explained that for three or four days, he and his wife massaged their son’s foot with oil as he was crying so much. They eventually managed to get him to a doctor and eventually understand he needed an operation. They did not have money for this or the medicine initially prescribed.

Following his son’s injury by the police, Raghu and his wife were left with no option but to beg to cover the costs of their son’s operation. Because the public health system failed them, Raghu and his wife were compelled to seek care from a low-rung private hospital. At Rs 50, 000 [USD 695.00] the cost of the operation for their son was significant even for many middle-class Indians. Raghu described how he and his wife begged in many, many places, showing medical papers and their son’s foot to people as they did so. He spoke about this regretfully, with a sense of the indignity about having had to do this. Raghu mentioned that one individual gave them Rs 12,000 [USD 157.00] for which they were very grateful, noting that he still prays to God for the good health of that man’s son. Although his own son’s leg is still healing, the young child is no longer in pain and is able to function.

Nonetheless, this incident deepened poverty and stigmatization (i.e. through begging) as dual processes for Raghu’s family. Quite apart from the detrimental impact of the physical injury his child incurred and the resulting economic and social challenges the family faced, Raghu explained how wrongful allegations and arrests against boys and men living in Aakash Sadan shelter drive their everyday criminalization. Pointing to how this happens both socially and legally, Raghu explained, “If I have not stolen, they [the police] will [still] cast a false accusation

upon me and say I am a thief.” He asserted in different ways that he and others in the shelter did not steal, and that they were simply trying to earn a meagre living:

If we are making a profit of Rs 2 to 4 rupees [under USD 0.50] in any work . . . in that much our stomach is full, why would we steal, then? . . . Why are they [the police] compelling us to do the wrong things? . . . People like us, balloon sellers, people who eat by begging, how will they benefit by catching us?

By focusing on his family’s motivation to earn just enough to feed themselves, Raghu questioned the very premise of his and other workers’ alleged criminality by the police. Without suggesting that he and his wife would, in fact, steal if their stomachs were “empty,” Raghu regrets that it was his family’s experience of police violence that compelled him and his wife to beg to save their son. As Raghu notes, it is the police themselves that compel people to do the “wrong things.” In Indian law, begging was criminalized until 2018. While Raghu shared his account with me after it had been de-criminalized legally, the practice remains socially criminalized. These dynamics reinforce Rios (2011) who argues that interactions with state agencies, in this case representatives of the state, only serve to exacerbate processes of criminalization.

As we continued our conversation, Raghu emphasized that he and others in the shelter want only to make an honest living. “If a person doesn’t do some work to eat (to earn), then what can he/she do. He/she will die of hunger,” Raghu said. And yet, with regret and frustration in his voice, Raghu lamented the efforts by the police to prevent families from trying to “work to eat (to earn).” Elaborating, Raghu emphasized that, in fact, the police were responsible for compelling families to take on undesirable means of survival:

The policemen—they compel people like us to do wrong things. They don’t like it when we eat food [earned] from our own hard work. They feel it is a useless waste when we move our hands and feet and earn money from our blood and sweat. They think it is useless/wasted time.

Emphasizing that the police do not feel his work is legitimate, Raghu demonstrates an awareness of the disregard the police have for him and his community. They prevent residents of Aakash

Sadan from doing work they consider honest and dignified, Raghu explained. As we spoke more, Raghu provided an even clearer critique of the role of the police as street-level bureaucrats. Speaking specifically about the many surveillance or CCTV cameras at intersections and traffic lights, he said, the police should:

Look at them [the cameras] to see who is the person who is stealing . . . murdering. Look in there [surveillance cameras] and see their faces and catch them. It is blind justice. If they cannot find the criminal, they just pick someone like us and lock us up. . . . We just say to them, brother, why do you do this to us? As much as they don't get from the government . . . they get from catching criminals. . . . Like they will say, ok, give me Rs 2000 [USD 26.00] I will let you go. And if a poor person cannot give that, they will lock them up straight away.

Here Raghu highlights the deep injustices inherent in policing, and how the police use bribes to serve themselves, not justice. Following Bayat (1997), the extraction of bribes in this way exemplifies how state employees—often underpaid themselves—supplement their own incomes. As Raghu notes, the police use arrests, even when wrongful, to bolster their government salaries. He suggests that even when the police know they are arresting and incarcerating someone innocent, they do so to fill quotas and their pockets when they fail to find the true offender. Raghu's critique of the police evokes a clear rejection of his criminalization (Rios 2011).

It is clear that the performative elements of policing lay in the assertion of power by the police to control the urban poor and punish them while trying to extract from them in the process. Following Henricks and Harvey (2015), the police engage in activities (such as theft and imposing bribes) that not only keeps them poor, but entrenches their poverty and stigmatization.

To better understand the dynamics driving police violence and the everyday criminalization of children and families living in Aakash Sadan, I spoke with several civil society activists who had experiences with the Delhi police. My conversation with Idnani, a well-esteemed housing and human rights activist, was particularly revealing. Idnani invited me to meet him at his

family's modest home in an "affordable housing" colony. In an effort to contextualize an informal system of transactions, different state actors solicit from the urban poor. Idnani explained to me how street vending operates in the city:

If you ask any vendor, in any city of the country, they all will say that they have to pay bribes to the municipal authorities and the police . . . all over. . . . Even the vendor in front of my house, I've told him not to give the police money, [but] he says the police won't let me do my work, so Rs1000 [USD 13.00] rupees to MCD, Rs1000 [USD 13.00] rupees to the police.

Idnani's account underscores how, although street vendors have more capital than those who sell individual items at traffic lights and intersections, they are at the mercy of the same two state agencies, the police and the MCD. Unlike residents of Aakash Sadan, some street vendors can afford to pay high bribes. But like residents of Aakash Sadan shelter, they are prevented by the state from doing their work and asked to pay a price for their attempts to earn a living.

Elaborating on the pervasiveness of police criminality, Idnani explained that "[the] police always gets a cut, [the] police takes the cut . . . even from the *homeless*, even from the *beggars*, they seize money. . . . Can you believe it? . . . They seize money, they take money from them also." Idnani's critique of the police, specifically their willingness to take bribes from the city's most vulnerable, was consistent with the experiences of Aakash Sadan shelter residents.

Speaking about the criminal justice system and crime more broadly, Idnani said, "The police . . . they are enabling it, they are *facilitators* of crime." He told me that the police burn drugs in open spaces for "show," while simultaneously driving the drug economy, carrying smack or opium in their pockets to sell. They are involved in "peddling," Idnani told me, even though their mandate is to protect the urban poor.

In his interactions with the Delhi police, Idnani noted he would invoke Article 60 of the Delhi Police Act and provisions in the Indian constitution that stipulate the obligation of the

police to protect, not exploit, the poor. Much like Jagdish's remark about government school teachers responding only to authority, Idnani noted that using the law as a strategy is "very effective. . . . You need to challenge the authority using the name of another authority."

Ultimately, then, there is a clear sense that families selling goods on the street are caught in a real bind. They don't steal, yet they suffer from police theft and losses that set them back. Families don't want to beg; but some adults are compelled to beg, even as they try to protect their children from doing so, with the view that selling goods is more dignified labor than begging. Attempting to express the extent of these blocked opportunities, during one of our many conversations on the ground floor of the shelter Saurabh asked rhetorically, ". . . on the one hand if you steal, that's a mistake [wrong], if you do *dhandā*¹²⁵ and if you try and earn money that's wrong. So what do we do?" This despondent, but poignant expression of what lies at the heart of Saurabh's dilemma, evokes Paul Hirschfield's argument about labelling (cited by Rios (2011)). Labelling, according to him, is less about how people construct their identities and more importantly about how social markers can contribute to reinforcing social exclusion and blocking social mobility. The feeling of being stuck, of hopelessness and futility are, in this spirit, fueled by the everyday criminalization of children by teachers and police on behalf of the state.

Numbing Pain: "Because When You Are High You Don't Feel Sadness"

For some children in Aakash Sadan shelter, drugs are a coping mechanism in the face of these blocked opportunities. Although many of the boys I spoke with did not do drugs, several did. When they spoke to me about drugs, most boys and adults referred to *solution*, a white liquid that children (and some adults) would place in a handkerchief and sniff. It was expensive and

¹²⁵ *Dhandā* means professional work as well as ad hoc work.

cost Rs 90 [USD 1.00] a packet. Idnani also told me about solution, explaining it was like white-out, or correction fluid, sometimes also mixed with fevicol. It was highly addictive, he said, and it “takes you for a toss.” The drug emitted a potent odor, and on the few occasions when I was exposed to the smell I was able to understand how it could be so quickly addictive. There were some other drugs that children and adults consumed, but solution was most commonly consumed.

Boys like Saurabh who didn’t do drugs prided themselves on this. They were very aware of its stigmatizing effects and sometimes disidentified from those who used substances. Many who did so had tried to stop, or were still trying. Gautam, Roop’s son, who was about 14 when we met, used a variety of drugs like smack and opium, or *ganja*,¹²⁶ and most frequently, solution. He wished he didn’t use these substances, and was one of many boys who asked me to enroll him in a government de-addiction center. After living in one of these centers previously, Gautam had returned to Aakash Sadan shelter sober. Although government de-addiction centers are not well-resourced, Gautam preferred living there over Aakash Sadan shelter. Soon after returning he started using drugs again because of his exposure to them in the shelter and on the street while selling balloons. Lamenting her choice to bring Gautam back from the center he had been living in, Roop, Gautam’s mother, also often asked me if I could “put him in a center.” She explained to me that she had not realized returning to the shelter might be risky even after Gautam had become sober.

As we sat outside the shelter one afternoon, Gautam spoke openly with me about why he took drugs, “We are left with no other option. . . . I look at studying a lot but because I am high, I can’t do it. . . . I can’t even bathe or wash clothes. I live in dirt with the insects in the drain, that’s

¹²⁶ *Ganja* is hemp or Marijuana.

all.” Gautam’s account underscores the deep stigmatization he feels on account of his drug use, which for him is tied to living in Aakash Sadan shelter. He aspires to return to school and be able to look after himself, but is caught in a vicious cycle. He feels his lack of options deeply, yet also feels that if he could break his addiction his life would improve. The drugs are a coping mechanism for Gautam, given the harsh realities of his daily life. “Drugs make you crazy, you come, you sniff the thing . . . then you become [feel] loose, loose . . . “ Gautam explained to me, emphasizing how the substance had a relaxing effect that made one feel a sense of lightness. Elaborating even further, Gautam explained that he wasn’t able to feel certain feelings when he took drugs “because when you are high, you don’t feel sadness.”

Although being high allowed Gautam to cope with the violence of his everyday life, he also spoke consistently about wanting to break his addiction. He told me that a lot of people die on drugs and things “go wrong.” As he rubbed his hands up and down his torso with vigor, Gautam said that his kidney would soon be destroyed. In the same conversation, he spoke extensively about the stigmatization he felt, “I am like the insects living in dirty drains. If you ask anyone, they will say this a useless boy; don’t bother to talk to him.” By drawing an analogy between himself and insects living in dirty drains once again, Gautam emphasized the extent to which he felt stigmatized and dehumanized.¹²⁷ This feeling was connected to other people’s perceptions of him as “useless” and not worthy of being spoken to. Passersby would reinforce this for Gautam, “People say things like this—‘Look, how dirty he is, look at his teeth, look, look at his feet.” Although I had not witnessed these interactions, I heard remarks like this made about Gautam’s family members.¹²⁸ I also often saw residents from the neighboring communities, and others

¹²⁷ Roop, Gautam’s mother, used the same phrase when lamenting the fact that she lived in Aakash Sadan, which itself, was spatially stigmatized.

¹²⁸ I also saw and heard people shame Gautam’s mother in the same way, making similar remarks about her teeth and embodied appearance at a hospital. In fact, these remarks were directed at me—about her—with the expectation

walking on the street, look at Gautam with disapproval and disgust when we stood outside the shelter.

Yet Gautam did not appear to fully internalize this stigmatization (Auyero 2012) and was continuously focused on how he could become sober. Speaking specifically about questions of (in)dignity, Gautam explained to me that he felt people would treat him better if he could break his addiction again. “I feel like . . . if I didn’t do drugs right now, if I could bathe right now . . . then how much respect people would give me,” Gautam said. He was aware of the indignity with which he was treated and wanted very much to be accorded respect. Gautam felt that returning to live in the de-addiction center would help him get to where he wanted to be:

I think a lot about going to the center, to become worthy/useful, to do something, study, to come of age, [so] going ahead I will have a life and have something. To have a good life. But what to do *didi*, when you are intoxicated people curse at you, using really bad curses and abuse (i.e., referencing your brother or sister).

Gautam’s aspiration to become “useful” was clear, but he did not see this as a possibility for himself while living in the shelter. Again, emphasizing the denigration and dehumanization he faced from passersby, Gautam told me that he travelled quite a distance to buy drugs with dignity (and more cheaply), “Over there you get it for Rs 70 [USD 0.90] . . . and also, you don’t have anybody cursing, and judging or saying anything.” Here, entrenched stigmatization exists with entrenched poverty in a dual process. The stigmatization means, for instance, that fewer people want to interact with Gautam, which could impact his ability to earn. Entrenched poverty, in turn, deepens stigmatization, which can intensify drug use, driving a cycle that reproduces inequality in social status and income.

that I should share in a classed solidarity that legitimized this kind of denigration of the urban poor. The lady who was seeking this solidarity with me was surprised when I rebuked her instead, which provides a window into how class operates in the stigmatization of the poor or addicted.

Civil society activists recognized the way in which the police contributed to fueling poverty for the urban poor. Speaking in particular about those who are unsheltered and working on the streets, Idnani spoke about how drugs are used to survive food insecurity. “If you don’t have food for hours at length, it doesn’t matter then you know,” Idnani said. As Raghu, Roop, and others from Aakash Sadan emphasized, food insecurity and hunger were deeply felt by many shelter residents. I witnessed this myself during my visits, and this was most visible through cases of severe malnutrition in infants. Shonali, who had spoken to me about the history of Aakash Sadan shelter, also discussed the use of drugs among the homeless:

It starts with hunger, to deal with hunger pangs and the cold, and the heat. . . . A lot of women do it, like to numb . . . after sexual violence experiences, a lot of them, they have no redress, right, no access to justice . . . , no access to police complaints, no access to remedy. . . . A lot of them just take drugs to survive and forget the pain. . . . There’s no psychological counselling . . . , there’s nothing available. . . . They’re like ‘oh all homeless people are drug addicts,’ now *why* are they?

Although Shonali focuses in her account on sexual violence survivors, her assertion that drugs are used “to survive and forget the pain,” reinforces Gautam’s account about drugs as a coping mechanism. In acknowledging the lack of access to police complaints and redress for women who have survived sexual violence, Shonali is offering a systemic analysis of the failure of the state to protect vulnerable populations. As the experiences of those living in Aakash Sadan shelter show, far from offering justice the police misuse their power and the criminal justice system, perpetrating injustice instead of protecting against it. Offering a structural analysis, Shonali critiques behavioral explanations for drug consumption amongst unsheltered/homeless communities, challenging characterizations of the urban poor that stigmatize them without examining systemic failures that contribute to their circumstances.

In this spirit, Shonali stressed that even when people manage to break their addictions, if they are unsheltered the likelihood of them maintaining sobriety is slim. “After you get out of

that de-addiction center, then you need to have a home . . . [but] then you are back on the street [instead],” Shonali lamented. Her remark, while not made in direct response to Gautam’s experiences, largely reflects his reality. While Gautam has shelter and does not have to live on the footpath, he does not live in a home of his own or in an environment conducive to maintaining sobriety. Thus, despite having been sober and wanting to attain sobriety again, Gautam is caught in a bind where he uses drugs to cope and survive, while simultaneously aspiring to “have a life and have something.”

Indeed, with so many families in Aakash Sadan being food insecure, as Shonali and Idnani point out in their accounts, hunger was a daily concern. Speaking to these dynamics, as we sat together in one of the rooms on the ground floor, Saurabh’s mother, Nohar, said, “When we can move our hands and legs [only when we work] will we earn Rs 5-10 [under USD 0.01]; only then can we eat, only then can we raise our children...” Yet the police prevented families from doing the only work they could do to earn a living. The inability to feed children and maintain food and health security was thus inextricably tied to the cycle of everyday criminalization children and their families experienced on the streets.

By using strategies of performative policing to criminalize children and their families, the police further entrench poverty and stigmatization as dual processes, reproducing inequality in social status and income. With despair and anguish in her voice, Nohar summarized the essence of what is at stake, “We are poor, if we get work we eat, if we don’t, then not. . . . We can bear it, but what about the children? Will they bear it? We can just drink water and go to sleep, but how will the children bear that?” And indeed, many children could not bear the insecurity their families faced. This was most true of children below the age of three, for whom survival was in particular jeopardy Aakash Sadan shelter.

Conclusion

Whether in schools or on the streets, children's narratives about the regulatory aspects of everyday social life center around their interactions with street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010). Through these interactions, boys living in Aakash Sadan shelter experience heightened levels of exclusion, poverty, and stigmatization. Consistent with Rios (2011), children's experiences with criminalization are multiplied through contact with multiple agencies of social control—in this case, schools and the police. Rather than providing children with a nurturing school environment conducive to learning and growth, government school teachers criminalize boys based on their embodied social status as street workers. This often leads to the exclusion of boys from access to formal education. While many children combine school with work, those who only work on the street have different trajectories from those who split their time. Contrary to fulfilling their mandate to protect the poor, the Delhi police use varied informal mechanisms of social control to threaten and punish (and benefit from) children and adults selling goods on the street. These strategies of *performative policing* have enduring and adverse effects, with implications for food and health (in)security.

At the heart of what is performative about policing in government schools and on the streets, is a set of practices that signal to the urban poor that they are not deserving or entitled to equal access to public spaces and services. A central feature of the performative quality of policing is the discretionary use of power by street-level bureaucrats—teachers and the police. While both government school teachers and the police represent the state, the strategies they employ to criminalize children are informal and not sanctioned by senior state authorities. Nonetheless, government school teachers and the police still possess considerable power that

they misuse instead of offering protections to Aakash Sadan shelter residents. They face no consequences for doing so, even as they deepen insecurity and already blocked opportunities for children and families living in Aakash Sadan shelter. Despite this, however, children and their families are not without power of their own. By rejecting markers of criminality, residents of Aakash Sadan shelter develop strategies of survival while simultaneously resisting their subjugation to violence where they can.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate *how*, and to *what end*, the “state”—as a series of practices, people and institutions—produces violence in the everyday lives of children and families living and working in state-contested spaces in Delhi. Extending the work of Javier Auyero (2012) and Lipsky (2010), I illustrated how street-level bureaucrats (and nodal agencies of the Delhi State) use their discretionary power to routinize violence in three domains of regulatory power: residential communities characterized by illegalities and surveillance; public/government schools; and the streets as sites for work. As I show, mechanisms of social control and violence, specifically criminalization by the state, operate across a continuum to deepen stigmatization and poverty as dual processes and reinforce inequality in social status and income.

I located these dynamics as part of a larger trend toward growing levels of urban inequality and poverty in the context of neoliberal state aspirations to make Delhi a “world-class” city and new patterns of middle-class consumption. Having followed girls and boys in different settings, and contextualized their experiences and accounts against those of their families and practitioners, each empirical chapter in this dissertation demonstrates how children—whose voices often go unheard—understand the state and what it means to them. Despite structural dislocation, children and their families negotiate their vulnerabilities in powerful ways; they do not accept the exercise of power by state authorities as fair or just. Their accounts reveal everyday negotiations for survival, resistance, and critiques of local state practice.

In Chapter 2, I extended Faranak Miraftab's (2004) framework on the mutually constitutive concepts of "invited" and "invented" spaces of participation to show how everyday life in two different residential communities, positioned across a continuum of housing/shelter, tells a unique story about the politics of land and the politics of space. Specifically, I show how Aakash Sadan shelter is an invited space operated through a partnership between the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and ROSHAN, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), which is appointed, funded, and therefore legitimized by DUSIB. As I demonstrate, children and their families leverage critiques of ROSHAN—as an NGO in league with the state—and do not accept their treatment as just or warranted. Still, citizen participation is relatively contained in this state-sanctioned space.

Conversely, I show how Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* is an invented space that operates to confront state authority and the status quo with the support of DISHA, a social movements-influenced civil society organization. I demonstrate how the occupation of land deemed illegal by the state is a form of resistance and an assertion of nonformal citizenship (Bhan 2016; Holston 2008, Miraftab 2009; Ramanathan 2006). I use children's own accounts to underscore this, pointing to the different ways in which they articulate their resistance to state domination and lay claim to the land on which they live. I show how the scope for resistance against the status quo was broadened within the community through collective cooperation and with the support of DISHA.

Having extended the conceptual boundaries of Miraftab's (2004) framework, in conversation with theories of spatial power this dissertation shows how regulatory power operates in both invited and invented residential communities (Foucault 1977; Lefebvre 1970, 1974; Soja 1971, 1989; Shah 2014). In each community there is a NGO, each with a different

focus; one is in league with the state and one is social movements-influenced. Each shapes residents' well-being in distinct ways. While both communities fear evictions and everyday surveillance, *stigmatized surveillance* in Aakash Sadan shelter cannot be separated from how authority is exercised by an NGO in league with the state to enforce *spatial territorialism*. The surveillance of the space due to the perceived criminality of the community is connected to its spatial stigmatization (Wacquant 2007). This stigmatization is inseparable from the community's historically enforced precarity and dispossession by state agencies and their allies. The empirical case of Aakash Sadan demonstrates how the convergence of these spatial features in a state-sanctioned community can lead to reduced access to basic, and urgently needed, services. While Wacquant (2007) speaks to this dynamic in the context of reduced servicing by street-level bureaucracies, in Akash Sadan, ROSHAN also bars civil-society organizations from providing support to shelter residents, even as it (together with DUSIB) fails to do so.

In Manohar Nivas, I demonstrate how residents who are branded as “encroachers” and “illegal” occupants of state-contested land are subject to continual *discretionary surveillance* by the police. However, they are not as deeply stigmatized through this surveillance as the unsheltered residents of Aakash Sadan. Their resistance to state authority (for example, through insurgent citizenship) is supported through a culture of *spatial cooperation* that DISHA, as a civil society-influenced organization, facilitates. As evidenced in the aftermath of the 2018 fire, through its cooperative style DISHA diffused its own authority within the community. Far from being territorial, the organization supported the self-articulated needs of the community by inviting a civil-society coalition to join forces with the community. This shows how in an invented space, still marked by regulatory power, can make space for collective citizen action in opposition to the status quo (Miraftab 2004).

This culture of cooperation marked the difference between whether residents of Manohar Nivas would be able to rebuild their homes after becoming unsheltered, or whether they would remain unsheltered and experience deepened levels of poverty. For example, because of the support they received, residents of Manohar Nivas were able to reconstruct their livelihood tools (such as *dhols*) and re-establish their capacities to earn after the 2018 fire. Those who had been compelled to beg temporarily did not have to rely on this method of supporting themselves for long. The particular approach taken by the coalition and community also extends Miraftab (2004), highlighting how state-confronting politics can coexist with cautious negotiations with the state.

In Chapter 3, I show how the denial of access to water in Manohar Nivas is a form of state-induced structural violence that gives rise to micro-forms of violence at the community level. Examining the Delhi state through residents' encounters with Delhi's nodal agency for water distribution, the Delhi Jal Board, I extend Auyero's (2012) work to show how "waiting" for water from the state is a core feature of structural violence. Yet, contrary to Auyero (2012), I argue that residents of Manohar Nivas do not inevitably become *patients of the state*. As they wait, they simultaneously negotiate alternative sources of water through acts of resistance. Girls take the lead in doing so, navigating fights for water at a local water tank to provide care to their families.

In doing so, girls, with the support of some boys and women, traverse both ends of the violence continuum (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). As they navigate everyday survival amidst structural and state-induced violence, they experience direct forms of physical and verbal violence at the whim of Kalaknanda aunties who also face resource and water deprivation. The synergy between both kinds of violence, enabled by different forms of dominance, reflects the

mutually reinforcing nature of power exercised at the systemic and community levels. Responding to Linda Green's call for more research that highlights these synergies (cited by Farmer (2004)), struggles for water reveal how state-induced chaos coexists with the daily routines people create to survive. In this case, daily struggles for water are shaped by the social organization of care that is gendered even in childhood.

Far from becoming patients of the state, through their fights for water for their families, young girls both critique and resist violence. They understand that the source of their water deprivation was the state, while simultaneously invoking the role of the state as a provider of water when negotiating access to the government water tank. Through their accounts, girls point to the dehumanizing nature of the verbal abuse and physical violence they face. Although they are denied respect, regard and dignity—key features of interactional citizenship (Auyero 2012)—girls (and the boys who accompany them) do not become compliant to either the state or to the authority of aunties at the Kalaknanda tank. They demonstrate, instead, how fights for water are, in equal measure, fights for dignity and respect.

In Chapter 4, I show how street-level bureaucrats—government school teachers and the Delhi police—use strategies of *performative policing* to criminalize boys engaged in street work. The resulting mechanisms of everyday criminalization in turn serve to maintain and reproduce inequalities in social status and income, entrenching poverty and stigmatization as dual processes. Extending Sally Merry (1998), I show how government school teachers criminalize boys socially based on their embodied social status as street workers, invoking notions of caste criminality as they do so. This often leads to the complete exclusion of boys from access to formal education. On the streets, contrary to fulfilling their mandate to protect the poor, the Delhi police use informal mechanisms of social control to threaten and punish boys (and men) who sell

goods on the street. They do so in keeping with neoliberal state aspirations and directives about world-class city-making (Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2010). Here, criminalization is social, and sometimes also tied to the legal system through incarceration. This process of criminalization is intensified through interactions with multiple representatives of the state (Rios 2011) and in two different sites of regulatory state power, schools and the streets.

Thus, as this dissertation shows, the performative nature of policing is reflected in the set of discretionary practices used by street-level bureaucrats to signal to the urban poor that they are not deserving or entitled to equal access to public spaces and services. As boys' accounts about their criminalization show, cruelty and callousness are key features of performative policing. Whether by slapping and verbally abusing children, or bursting the balloons they sell, street-level bureaucrats use their discretionary power on behalf of the state to caution children against their right to be in schools or to use the streets freely. However, the implications of police theft and criminality, for instance, are not merely performative; the mechanisms of social control and everyday criminalization on the streets, in particular, have dire consequences for food and health (in)security. Whether on the streets or in government schools, boys engaged in street work are denied access to interactional or full urban citizenship (Auyero 2012; Bhan 2009).

Extending scholarship on gender and youth criminalization (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2011), I frame the criminalization of boys and men as tied to perceptions about masculine threat that intersect with a racialized casteism. However, extending Victor Rios' (2011) concept of "labelling hype," I find that children do not internalize criminal identities. They are, instead, critical of their dehumanization and resist violence and systemic injustice where they can.

At a broad level, in this dissertation I contribute to scholarship on the intersections between neoliberal governance, creating a world-class city, and exclusionary urban citizenship

(Baviskar 2006; Bhan 2009, 2019; Dupont 2011; Fernandes 2004; Ghertner 2010; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008; Roy 2004; Sassen 2006). I do so by examining these dynamics from the perspective of everyday encounters with the state—its practices, institutions, and street-level bureaucrats—to extend work by political sociologists and anthropologists of the state (Auyero 2012; Auyero and Berti 2015; Sharma and Gupta 2006). Specifically, I contribute to scholarship on the politics of space and spatialized power, including urban spatial illegalities (Bhan 2016; Foucault 1977; Lefebvre 1970, 1974; Soja 1971, 1989; Shah 2014), which I put into conversation with Faranak Miraftab’s (2004) conceptual framework on “invited” and “invented” spaces. In doing so, I also contribute to scholarship on the intersections between stigmatization, urban poverty, and spatial surveillance (Wacquant 2007; Wacquant et al. 2014).

Each empirical chapter contributes to contemporary scholarship on urban violence in the Global South from the lens of everyday state practices (Auyero 2012; Auyero et al. 2015; Auyero and Berti 2015; Bourgois 2004; Galtung 1969; Farmer et al. 2006; Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Larkins 2015; Moncada 2016; Perlman 2010; Penglase 2014; Scheper-Hughes 1989; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). By extending scholarship on urban violence and neoliberal governance from Latin and South America to the Indian context, I point to how state violence and social control might operate in similar, yet distinct, ways across diverse regions of the Global South.

I also extend Sally Merry’s (1998) work to examine how criminalization by street-level bureaucrats, like the police, shape daily practices and identities associated with criminality (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2011). I examine criminalization as a social and legal mechanism that children and families critique and seek to resist, rather than subordinating to. Specifically,

Chapter 4 underscores the importance of incorporating studies about state-constructed criminalities into scholarship on cities and urban citizenship.

Across all chapters of the dissertation, by centering children's accounts about the regulatory aspects of everyday social life in their residential communities, on the streets as sites of work, and in schools, I contribute to scholarship on theories of childhood (Auyero and Berti 2015; Balagopalan 2014; Liebel 2012; Zelizer 1985). In doing so I locate children not as victims, but as actors with capacities to resist what they identify as unjust through critical narratives about the state and its power in their lives. Children's accounts about the dehumanization and indignities they face point to the importance of examining the politics of urban governance from the perspectives of their encounters with the state.

Thus, by unmasking the hidden ways in which children and their families are intimately socialized to the presence of the state and its violence in their daily lives, this dissertation calls for social policies to address how mechanisms of state violence and criminalization operate to deny communities access to housing, food, water, and health. These interventions must be designed with an understanding of the inextricable link between work, housing, education, and health.

At an even broader level, this dissertation challenges the very premise of the state as a protective force in the lives of the most vulnerable amongst the urban poor. My findings demonstrate that, overwhelmingly, street-level bureaucrats fail to protect children and families, regardless of whether they are sheltered in Manohar Nivas or unsheltered in Aakash Sadan. The violence of government school teachers toward boys working on the street, for instance, is rarely accounted for in education reform policies. Policy advocacy aimed at improving the Indian government school system focuses on quality of education vis-à-vis resources and teaching

instruction. Although undoubtedly important, these interventions fail to consider how children who are already stigmatized because of their positionalities as workers on the street are policed and criminalized in schools, and often consequently excluded from the system. This dissertation calls for further research on these dynamics, as well as the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure that schools do not become spaces for the regulation and criminalization of children who are already amongst the most stigmatized and insecure.

This dissertation also underscores the lack of accountability within the police force, as well as its own role in perpetuating criminality. By using their discretionary power, not only do the police fail to uphold their obligations to “protect” per Article 60 of the Delhi Police Act, they prevent boys and men from trying to earn daily wages with dignity. Specifically, by confiscating or destroying the toys and items children sell, and by soliciting bribes the vendors cannot afford, the police contribute to heightened levels of food insecurity and hunger among families in Aakash Sadan. According to human rights activist, Idnani, they are also facilitators of street crime.

The mechanisms of brutality and violence the police use to criminalize boys and men have not historically been given attention in mainstream political or media discourse. In fact, as I conducted my research I found that many working within civil society were unaware of the particular nature in which violence and police brutality manifested amongst street workers; the average middle-class Delhiite was oblivious. However, since the end of 2019 through early 2020 alone, the brutality of the Delhi police has been given heightened attention in Indian and global media.

The patterns of police violence and brutality that I unveil in this dissertation must, therefore, be examined in the context of these increasingly visible examples of brutality by the

police that continue to unfold. Some of these examples include, for instance, the widespread police violence that was unleashed against peaceful anti-CAA protestors and the policing of Muslims in Delhi before and following the massacre in North East Delhi earlier this year. These events underscore the willingness of the police to use violence and force not only against the poor, but against religious minorities and those resisting the authority of the state. While street workers might be viewed as a threat to Delhi's world-class city-making, the socially and economically diverse group of protestors that dared to resist the discriminatory nature of the CAA were also viewed as a threat to the state and its power.

In the first week of April 2020 alone, the policing and criminalization of Delhi's daily wage earners, as they experienced heightened struggles to subsist in the wake of India's nationwide Coronavirus lockdown, elicited shock and horror across the globe. Images of young boys and men being beaten with rods and canes as they are prevented from working and feeding themselves have elicited critiques even from an otherwise silent middle-class. In many ways these images mirror the dynamics I unveil in this dissertation. Young boys living in Aakash Sadan shelter, for instance, have been experiencing similar forms of daily violence at the hands of the police long before the state's response to the global pandemic in India. The callousness and cruelty that drives strategies of performative policing, as evidenced by the bursting of the balloons that boys in Aakash Sadan sell, for instance, is now manifesting in new ways as media reports highlight the humiliating nature of police violence in the aftermath of the lockdown. The callousness of the state has been portrayed in a plethora of images, including those in which the police are found to be forcing daily wage earners to do frog jumps or forcibly spraying them with disinfectant.

Amidst all this violence, those under attack are also experiencing hunger and extreme food insecurity because they cannot work. This is something that families in Aakash Sadan experienced even prior to the pandemic, specifically because of what I conceptualize as theft by the police of the items children and their families sell to earn and eat. Hunger and food insecurity are now only heightened in the community, and for many other children and families across the country, not only those in Manohar Nivas.

The execution of India's lockdown underscores the complete disregard for the country's urban poor, especially its daily wage laborers. It reinforces the unequal nature of urban citizenship in cities like Delhi, as thousands of daily wage earners make their way home to their villages on foot. Although the majority of residents in Manohar Nivas and Aakash Sadan are not among those leaving Delhi in the aftermath of the lockdown, as they view the city as their home, these communities will likely only survive because they are receiving support from civil society organizations.¹²⁹ The arguments I present in Chapter 2 are relevant in this context also; the state-sanctioned and invited nature of Aakash Sadan has left shelter residents at greater risk than residents of the invented space of Manohar Nivas. This points to yet another instance in which a community-engaged, social movements-influenced CSO/NGO can play a supportive role within a community, while NGOs in league with the state can be detrimental for a community's well-being.

More generally, what the lockdown demonstrates is the failure of the Indian state to protect its citizens at the national level. In Delhi in particular, despite efforts by the state

¹²⁹ Some organizations have lost institutional funding in the aftermath of the lockdown. They are now soliciting private donations. I assisted with fundraising for food distributions and in liaising with CSOs to try to ensure that residents of Aakash Sadan shelter are able to access food. Because of the dynamics of territorialism discussed in Chapter 2, this has been particularly challenging. In fact, these dynamics evidently have heightened after ROSHAN, the NGO managing the shelter in league with the state, was replaced by another shelter management NGO. In Manohar Nivas, however, DISHA has managed to facilitate and coordinate access to food for residents more smoothly.

government (AAP) to establish some provisions for food distributions and shelter, communities unable to work and earn suddenly find themselves relying for survival on charitable initiatives by civil society and service-oriented organizations that are often supported through individual, private donations.

The execution of the lockdown signals to all those reliant on daily wage earnings that they do not, in fact, enjoy the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968; Bhan 2016) in the same way as those better positioned to survive the lockdown. While hunger is the immediate concern for daily wage earners, health insecurity is also heightened in communities like Manohar Nivas and Aakash Sadan where hand washing is a luxury and social isolation an impossibility. As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, water deprivation is a form of state-induced structural violence, the adverse implications of which have heightened in the last month.

Many of the dynamics this dissertation addresses have been rendered increasingly relevant across urban spaces in India over the past several months. Questions about everyday forms of violence and criminalization by the state are now, more than ever, essential for scholars of urban poverty and inequality to consider. Accounting for children’s experiences in this context is imperative. For residents of Manohar Nivas *jhuggi* and Aakash Sadan shelter, even if basic food security is externally sustained in the near future, it is unclear when or whether families will be able to resume their work as before. These communities remain particularly health insecure given their lack of access to basic sanitation and a consistent water supply at this time. Moreover, the shifting political terrain across India, specifically, the very premise of the widely disputed CAA, leaves residents of both communities particularly vulnerable. In both communities many children and families lack birth certificates and other IDs required to prove citizenship under the

CAA. Thus, residents of Manohar Nivas and Aakash Sadan shelter might find their citizenship status in even further jeopardy in the future.

APPENDIX: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW DATA¹³⁰

Table 1: Total No. of Semi-Structured Interviews

Boys	Girls	Mothers/Adult Guardians	Practitioners
20	21	25	7

Table 2: Semi-Structured Interviews in Aakash Sadan shelter and surrounds

Boys	Girls	Mothers/Adult Guardians
11	7	8

Table 3: Semi-Structured Interviews in Manohar Nivas *jhuggi*

Boys	Girls	Mothers/Adult Guardians ¹³¹
9	14	17

¹³⁰ These figures refer solely to the formal, semi-structured interviews I conducted across my sites of research to supplement ethnographic data. These numbers exclude the many informal interviews and conversations I had while conducting participant observation.

¹³¹ One of these interviews was conducted in a community not far from Manohar Nivas.

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