

Lo spazio dell'India
Luoghi, collocazioni, orientamenti e trasposizioni

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ENACTING NATIONALIST HISTORY: BUILDINGS, PROCESSIONS AND SOUND IN THE MAKING OF A VILLAGE IN CENTRAL INDIA¹

Abstract

In questo articolo mettiamo in luce come, negli ultimi sessant'anni, alcune importanti idee relative al nazionalismo e alla religione siano state tradotte all'interno degli spazi quotidiani di un villaggio dell'India centrale.

Il villaggio oggetto dell'analisi è stato studiato da Adrian Mayer negli anni cinquanta e, più recentemente, da Tommaso Sbriccoli. Ciò fornisce al nostro approccio etnografico una solida e originale dimensione diacronica.

Nell'articolo suggeriamo che la religione ha sostituito la gerarchia castale come modalità principale di discussione della differenziazione sociale, e che il discorso anti-musulmano permette agli indù di casta

¹ The research for this article was undertaken as part of a larger programme on which Simpson was the Principle Investigator: 'Rural change and anthropological knowledge in post-colonial India: A comparative 'restudy' of F.G. Bailey, Adrian C. Mayer and David F. Pocock'. The project was based at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London and funded by the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-23-3052). We acknowledge the contribution to our ideas made by all those who took part in seminars and workshops associated with the project. Patricia Jeffery, Tina Otten, Alice Tilche and Adrian Mayer contributed directly to the research and collective credit remains with them for the development of some of the ideas expressed here.

alta di depoliticizzare, e conseguentemente nascondere, le relazioni strutturate di ineguaglianza con le caste basse.

Esaminiamo quindi come progetti edilizi in competizione, processioni rituali e il suono siano utilizzati per contestare differenti produzioni di significato al livello del villaggio. Invece di considerare gli spazi pubblici come arene conservatrici intese a controllare eccessi ed esuberanze, li intendiamo qui come luoghi per la sperimentazione e il cambiamento sociale, e come gli spazi in cui la storia post-coloniale dell'India viene messa in scena.

Introduction

'village' means a village specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purposes of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified.

Clause (g) of Article 243 of the Constitution of India.

'A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose'

Gertrude Stein

Definitions often have a tautological character. Their nature is arbitrary or they exist to serve a particular purpose – sometimes, of course, both applies. Small changes to the words of a definition can have important consequences, especially in political and legal spheres. The definition of a village quoted above has been in use for a long time in India, identifying both the objects and subjects of local governance. Another contrasting definition can be found in the so-called 1996 Panchayat Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act (PESA):

A village consists of a habitation or a group of habitations or a hamlet or a group of hamlets comprising a community and managing its affairs in accordance with traditions and customs.

In this second definition, we see an emphasis on place, culture and politics: people living in the same place form a community; members of a community share same traditions and customs; they deal with the daily choices and decisions of a *polis*². It is on such pre-imagined

² This act refers to 'tribal' areas, but the ideas underlying the definition in the Act are still held by many in India, both at the political level and in some

'objects', the 'little republics' as Sir Charles Metcalfe famously saw the Indian village, that state policies from above should be enacted. These definitions allow for the existence of a hierarchy of order and power, but they diminish the possibility of conflict and disagreement within the object which becomes the 'village'.

These opening observations are far from incidental because such ideas remain dominant in the practice of governance in India, as well as in the theoretical paradigms of some social scientists who see the village as a bounded and discrete unit³.

In this article, our aim is twofold. First, we are interested in what makes a village a village in ethnographic terms. We know that villages have names, cartographic and ritual boundaries, electoral registers, and local state officials, offices and revenue records. We also know that villages are related to other villages and towns in particular ways, which often give them quite distinct characters. The struggle to define the 'village' in agrarian and rural sociology is an old one⁴. Instead of rekindling such debates here, the major thrust of the paper examines the use, production and occupation of public space within a particular village in Central India. We do this in order to show how the inhabitants make the village appear as a meaningful unit through specific sets of social practices, which often hinge on notions of contestation and division rather than cohesion or harmony. Instead of imagining an object (a village) from the outset, we will tease out how people living in a particular place imagine it to be, want it to be, and struggle to make their realities correspond with the imagined village. To put this in other words, what we present here is the ethnography of how villagers conceive a village. We warn the reader that the ethnography might be rather uncomfortable to digest, not because it is sensational or vulgar, but because it places spaces in the village

academic circles. See also note 3.

³ For instance, in legal matters the Government of India has addressed dispute settlement forums other than its own by trying to subsume them within new official paradigms that were intended as a formalisation of local and traditional ones, see the literature on Nyaya Panchayats and Lok Adalats by Galanter (1972, 1978) and Baxi and Galanter (1979). For a discussion on the role of social sciences in India in producing and reinforcing such paradigms see Inden (1990) and Dirks (2001).

⁴ From a large literature see Datt Singh (1956), Dewey (1972), Dube (1955), Jodhka (2002) and Dumont and Pocock (1957) for strong variations on the theme.

largely in the non-spatial terms of social hierarchy, contested meaning and status competition. Space becomes a form of sociology, rather than geography, and is, we think, largely understood as such in the village itself.

We will present two case studies collected during a year of fieldwork conducted by Sbriccoli (2012-2013). We will show how the occupation of public space through building works, ritual processions and the competitive use of sound reveals much about the ways in which social fission and fusion gains salience or irrelevance at particular moments. To be clear, in this analysis, space is not a 'container' of something (a community, a culture or a political unit), but emerges as the result and condition for social acting (Turco 1988).

Public space in Indian villages is often described as playing a conservative role in policing the exuberances of the population. Public space is seen as a regulating mechanism for excess and impropriety. The gaze and scrutiny of the civic body and the harm of the envious eye are seen to maintain the social order. The distribution of people and institutions within the village is the product of history, in the sense of social practices, political choices and economic trends. As such, the village poses constraints on the types and scales of actions people can perform and aspire to perform. In the village at the heart of this paper, people also often claim conservative qualities for their streets and civic institutions, at least in what they say; however, as we shall see, public space, due to the very social processes that produce it, remains intrinsically ambiguous. As such, it also leaves room for various kinds of freedom, innovation and imagination which, at the same time, also generate new conflicts and oppositions.

Our second aim is to add an ethnographic note to the most divisive of issues in contemporary India, namely, the politicised distinction and separation of majority Hindu and minority Muslim populations. During his fieldwork, Sbriccoli witnessed such a distinction intensify in the daily life in the village. It is clear that Hindu-Muslim relations in the region have a long and complex history, but people in the village themselves sensed that new kinds of changes were occurring, which were more profound and ran deeper than before. Following in the footsteps of other ethnographers, we will illustrate how the discourse of animosity and difference can readily be called upon to obscure other more local conflicts of interest, which can be seen

clearly in the ways in which both communities contribute to notions of fear and politicised imaginaries in the public sphere.

There is now a significant literature on the rise of Hindu nationalism in India. It has been demonstrated how the thought and words of pre-Independence ideologues, often engaged in battles against colonial rule, have entered into general public discourse (Jaffrelot 1996). The spread of such ideas has much to do with the increasing popularity of the Hindu nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (commonly BJP) and a cluster of allied cultural and spiritual organisations, collectively known as the Sangh Parivar (Hansen 1996). Other scholarly work has shown how these organisations have strategically planned to penetrate Indian society at the grassroots (Chatterji 2009, Mathur 2008). One of the most recurrent tactics is to demonise or 'Other' a particular group, most often Muslims, but also Christians and linguistic minority groups, in order to create communities of Hindus brought together by fear and suspicion. This is often accompanied by a portrayal of a national history of loss: India has been repeatedly invaded, foreigners of various kinds have done damage to, and taken liberties with, the ancient wisdoms and achievements of Indian civilisation; it is now time for the hurt Hindu to stand up to past injustice and to work towards a future in which religion and politics are reunited. The result is often an inflammatory mixture of fear, suspicion *and* pride.

Since the 1970s, there have been studies conducted on the language of community polarisation on religious grounds in India. The pioneering work of the political scientist Ghanshyam Shah (1970) in Ahmedabad is significant in this regard. At the village level, scholars have shown how such ideas have been made to take root. Notable among these for her ethnographic precision is Froerer (2006), who has described how through education regimes and other interactions with villages, the language and ideas of Hindu nationalism have entered the lives and thoughts of ordinary people.

The following material furthers these debates, but looks primarily at the interaction of those who 'Other' with those who are 'Othered' in the village. From the ethnographic material we wish to draw out two main points. First, Muslims (in this case those 'Othered' by Hindus) are also enmeshed in their own complex and competitive identity projects, which sometimes intersect with those of Hindu nationalism

but are sometimes carried along by an autonomous impetus. Secondly, through seemingly-mundane activities, such as building projects and processions, the whole village is complicit in dramatising the religious distinctions and hierarchies involved in the Hindu nationalist vision. In this, Muslims too play their role.

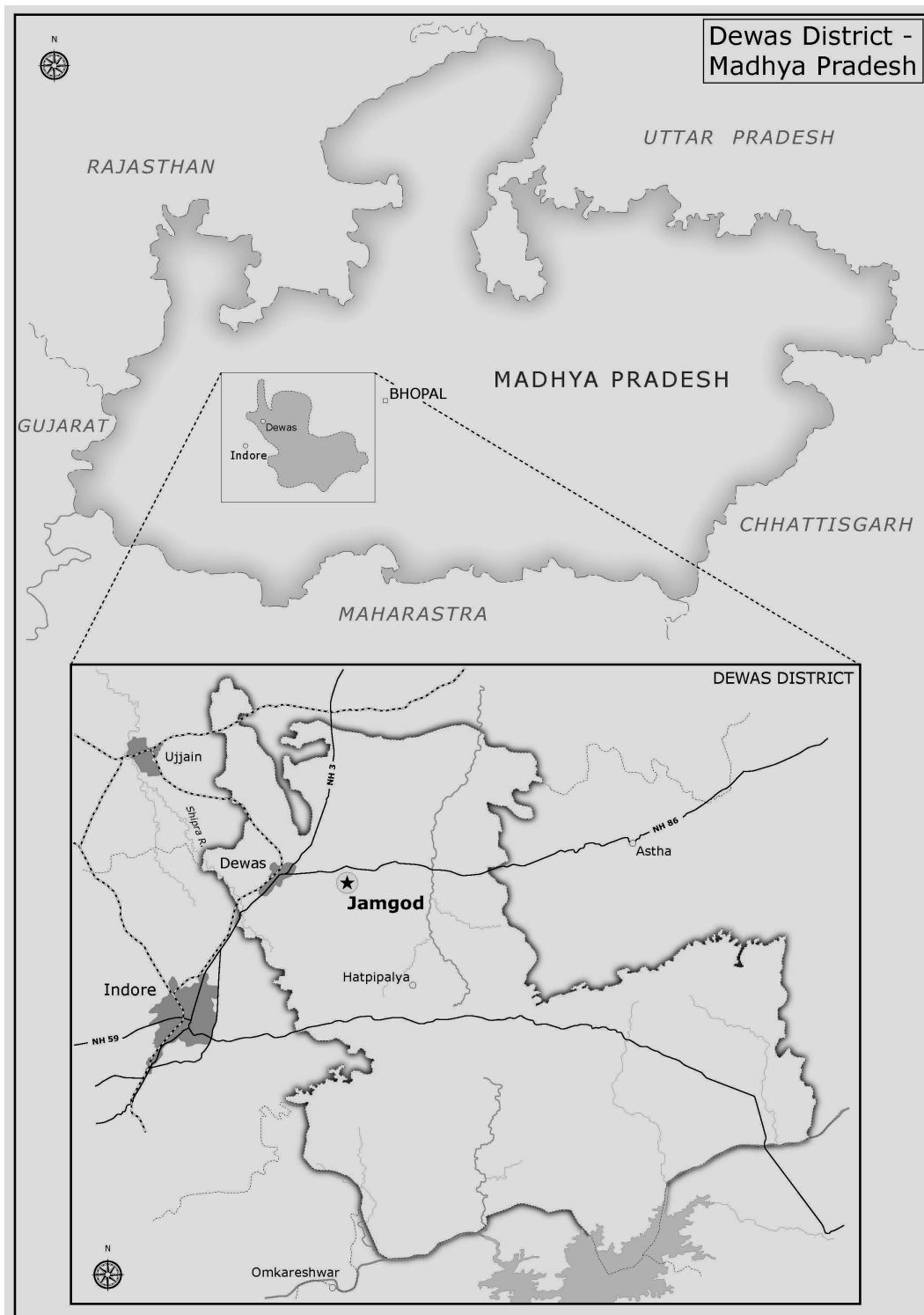
The particular village

Jamgod is a village of about 4,000 people, lying in the region of India which is called Malwa. Jamgod is some 11 kilometres from the town of Dewas in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Dewas was once a small town, but has grown to become a major industrial centre, with more than 250 factories. Jamgod was studied in the 1950s by the British anthropologist Adrian C. Mayer and is the subject of his seminal book *Caste and Kinship in Central India* (1960)⁵. At the time of Mayer's first visits, a mud road led from the village to Dewas, which then had a population of 30,000. Today, a four-lane highway transports the villager to a town more than ten times that size.

At the beginning of his book, Mayer describes Jamgod: 'About three-quarters of a mile from the village the traveller leaves the motor road, and continues along a track which in the wet weather becomes a stream. This runs between six-foot banks, and hides the village until it is almost reached' (ibid. 14-15). Today, that track has become an all-season concrete and cement road which tees off the highway. The 'track' which runs south to the old core of the village is now lined with new houses, shops and other businesses, forming what is known as 'New Settlement'. In the 1990s, new houses started to appear on the southern side of the highway, forming another settlement now known as *Pawan Urja Road*, the Neighbourhood of the Windmill Road – so named, of course, because a road leads to a hydroelectric wind-farm on the hills above.

⁵ Mayer returned frequently to Jamgod until the 1990s. As part of the research on which this article is based, Sbriccoli was granted access to his fieldnotes and other research materials. Together we have also had the opportunity to talk to Mayer at length about his research and memories of the village.

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When Mayer first studied Jamgod, the economy was primarily agricultural, with some castes providing services to farmers and rulers in exchange for a share of the crop. The cash economy was insignificant, and only a very few people had regular employment with the government. Today, the village remains agricultural in its orientation and ethos, but most household economies are tied to other kinds of income. However, significantly, the older system of inter-caste interdependences has almost disappeared⁶. Labour, whether in the village itself or in nearby Dewas, has become the principle form of income for the poor and landless, while jobs in factories, the government sector and private businesses are now held by many villagers more generally.

In the sixty years since Mayer began his study, the fundamental logic of social relations has been transformed by the penetration of the capitalist economy, the coming of the road and attendant ideas of petro-mobility, and the expansion of the village into new kinds of settlement. The same period has also seen the entrenchment of party politics at the local level, in part due to revolutions in communication and mobility, but also due to various legislative and constitutional measures which continue to place the idea of the village at the centre of the democratic set-up.

The composition of those who live in the village has also changed. Jamgod remains a multi-caste village, comprising about 28 castes, of which two are Muslim (Fakir and Pinjara)⁷. However, today, unlike in 1955, the Muslim Pinjaras have become the largest caste in the village

⁶ The so-called *jajmani* system has long been considered the traditional economic model of Indian villages. Service castes provide labour to landholders and receive in exchange fixed parts of the crop. See, among the others, Wiser (1958), Beidelman (1959), Gough (1960) and Dumont (1972). For a detailed ethnographic description of the workings of the Jamgod economy in the 1950s see Mayer (1960). For a critical discussion of anthropological understandings of the *jajmani* system see Fuller (1989) and P. Mayer (1993).

⁷ We use the term 'caste' following Mayer: 'These Muslim groups are endogamous and have many customs quite foreign to Islam, though consistent with their caste customs. The people of these castes are conscious of this and distinguish themselves and other similar Muslim castes (Mewati, Naita, etc.) from those they call 'Musulman' (Sheikh, Sayyid, Moghul and Pathan)' (1960: 35).

with some 110 households, followed by Hindu Khatis (86) and Rajputs (61)⁸.

Traditionally cotton carders, over the last fifty years the Pinjaras have demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit, developing commercial interests in transportation, poultry farming, highway restaurants and wedding tents and plant machinery rentals. Some have invested their profits in land, although many continue to rely on daily wage labour in the local town, but overall the community is regarded as up-and-coming and clever. Their rise is key to understanding the post-colonial history of the village and the changing patterns of contest and meaning taking place on its streets.

Now, as in the past, they were not considered to be 'proper' Muslims (in Hindi the word *pake* is used) – either by themselves or by others. They were understood to be rather half-hearted converts from Hinduism (itself a highly politicised designation), who still maintained many of their older religious and social practices. For example, they continued follow Hindu sanctions on marrying within the lineages of ego's mother, father, and maternal and paternal grandmothers. They also worshipped the village deity Bheru and continued to acknowledge their lineage goddesses (*kul dēvī*). These practices were thought somehow to make them 'improper' as Muslims, because Islam is well-known, and often it seems especially well-known among non-Muslims, to permit first cousin marriage and to prohibit reference to gods other than Allah. In recent times, however, the Pinjaras have become more interested in developing a clearer Muslim identity and acting in accordance with what they understand as Islamic prescriptions. Among younger men, there is now a public denial of older forms of marriage and uncomfortable embarrassment about their association with local and lineage gods⁹.

⁸ In 1955, Mayer carried out a complete census of the village, which is the one we refer to here. Aggregate data is available in Mayer (1960). Sbriccoli also reviewed the Mayer's disaggregated data. A work comparing the two censuses is forthcoming.

⁹ The census Sbriccoli conducted recorded no Pinjara marriages between kinship grades prohibited by the rule of four lineages. While many older Pinjara men continue to take part in the rituals of the village, the only occasions with a significant Muslim participation are during the procession on the last day of Navrātrī and worship of Śītalā Mātā (a goddess protecting people from smallpox). On the second of these occasions, almost all the Pinjara women

When we read Mayer's (1960) *Caste and Kinship* today, the absence of antagonism between Hindu and Muslim communities in Jamgod is striking. Not only because it is now become a dominant ethnographic trope for much critical social science in India, but because Mayer conducted his fieldwork just a few years after the Partition of the country, an event which had seen many millions of people die in the name of religion. There might be many reasons for the absence in his ethnography, but the most likely is that then the Pinjaras were reckoned to be of little account as a power bloc, given that Hindu castes clearly held the reins.

As in the national politics of the period, Muslims (and improper ones at that) were seen as adjunct to what was really going on. Then, local politics were not drawn on communal lines, but primarily on the basis of caste; the logic of inequality providing a uniting logic, of which Muslims were not obviously part. Thus, the Pinjaras were subservient and marginal to the interests and concerns of the dominant politics of the village. Mayer's attention to hierarchy and inter-caste relations in the village and his relative neglect of the Pinjaras simply reflected an ethnographic reality present in, and greater than, the village.

Today, many Pinjaras enjoy positions of respect and power in village and within district-level politics. Some of them are seen by villagers as 'big men', to whom they refer when help or advice on controversial matters is needed. At a familial level, some Hindus still entertain good relations with Pinjaras, sometimes even fictive kinship relations. Others, however, actively avoid all interaction with Pinjaras. Today, many Hindus in Jamgod have become increasingly hostile and suspicious towards Muslims in general and Pinjaras in particular.

It is common to hear Muslims described as cow eaters, anti-nationals, pro-Pakistan, terrorists, and variously dirty and polluted¹⁰.

seek protection for their children. Furthermore, many Pinjaras decorate their houses with illuminations and lamps for Dīpāvlī.

¹⁰ In this case, the accusation of pollution refers not to dietary but funerary practices. Unlike most Hindus, Pinjaras take a ritual bath before burying the dead, rather than after. When asked to explain why they would not drink water in the houses of Pinjaras, many Hindus said that Pinjaras use a single glass to take water from the house water pot and touch their lips to the glass. Such practices were formerly considered 'polluting' but are now generally discussed in terms of poor hygiene.

Within these succinct and obviously derogatory accusations are a great many other inter-related meanings, often tied to the big frames of nationalism derived from recent history, which has been politicised and shaped in particular ways. Cows maintain a well-known and special place within Hindu thought and affection. Those who eat cows are instantly placed in a position of opposition to the core values of Hinduism. When the nation is also associated with Hindu civilisation, it is then only a small step to accusing Muslims of anti-national sentiment. This can then be tied with hindsight (because we know it was not there in the 1950s) to the historical tragedy of Partition in which India was ripped apart by the machinations of foreign powers. The ways in which these ideas fit together are very much a product of Hindu nationalist organisations putting thoughts and words together in particular ways.

Hindu nationalist organisations are active in Jamgod and have contributed to the promotion of anti-Muslims discourses and campaigns. The BJP, the nationalist political party, has also gained a large following, especially among higher caste voters¹¹. Together, these factors have brought about a situation of increasing opposition between the two religious factions. As a consequence, both Hindus and Muslims tend to be acutely aware of what makes them distinct from one another. These differences are routinely rehearsed in daily conversations, to the point that disagreements on seemingly petty things are often reframed in terms of a fundamental religious opposition.

In October 2013, Indian television broadcast coverage of state-sponsored excavations for hidden treasure in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. The exact spot had appeared in a dream to a famous religious figure. Everyone was watching and waiting anxiously for the recovery of what was rumoured to be a staggering 50,000 tons of gold. India would be able to repay its National Debt and become a world superpower.

During one of the many on-going conversations in Jamgod on this matter, a Pinjara was sceptical – as many ‘educated’ persons were regardless of their religious affiliation – about the possibility that so

¹¹ The current village *sarpañc* (chairman) represents the BJP. BJP is in power also at the District and Tehsil level, and the MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) of Jamgod Constituency (Hatpipliya) comes from BJP.

much gold would be recovered. He voiced his opinion to a group of Hindu acquaintances. As soon as he left the conversation, the group started to complain about the lack of respect the man had showed toward their *dharm* (religion). For them, the Muslim who dared to be sceptical in a public space was disrespectful towards the Hindu nation. The readiness with which such thought is conjured is remarkable. It is as if people have fallen into the trap of their own thoughts. The logic of Hindu nationalism is so powerful that it can be called upon to serve as an explanatory trope for all manner of mischief and social ill. As the group of men continued to gripe about Muslims having no right to feel superior to Hindus, one of them ominously added ‘But soon we will fix them (*unke sudhār deṃge*)’.

It is not only that such comments have become more common and can be uttered in public without fear of sanction, but as we will see, through residential practices and the staged dramas of village life, Muslims are also encouraged into legitimising and acknowledging their own subordination.

In the past, the organisation of the village tended to segregate lower castes and allow members of the same caste to reside within the same neighbourhood. Today, the situation is rather more mixed, neighbours often occupy very different positions within the caste hierarchy. This is not just a casual fantasy of the lost innocence of the past, but born out in the census and maps made by Mayer, Sbriccoli and others. In his 1960 monograph, Mayer presents both the history of Jamgod’s settlement, and an outline of dwelling practices within the village. He defines wards as multi-caste divisions, even though of the 12-14 wards (*bakal*) identified, six were named after the caste mainly, or exclusively, inhabiting there. The maps of the village (1960, 53-54) also suggest that castes of similar status tended to reside in the same area. In his detailed discussion on neighbourhoods and sitting places (1960, 132-136, comprising a map of 14 wards and 20 sitting places), Mayer also points to the informal cooperation between households living in the same ward at important several rites. Overall, present day patterns of cohabitation and collaboration might appear to resemble older ones; however, the actual residential patterns and cooperation practices suggest important changes to the ways in which interaction between hierarchically ordered castes has changed.

In the 1980s and 1990s, as liberalisation policies began to free up land in the New and Windmill settlements, housing plots were allotted by the village council on the basis of patron-client relations and individual economic gain, rather than by ideas drawn from Hindu cosmology or idealised caste hierarchy (see Singh and Khan, 1999). The resulting residential arrangements refuse any meaningful aggregation, to the point that the house of the village priest stands next to those of families belonging to a lowly untouchable community – this arrangement was unthinkable in the Jamgod of the 1950s.

It is unquestionable that village space became more variegated in the last decades of the twentieth century. Inter-caste and inter-religious neighbourhoods became common in ways that were literally and morally unthinkable six decades earlier. A neighbourhood is seen by many villagers as the pre-eminent social unit, one within which good and friendly relations have to be maintained. Among neighbours run a flow of invitations, food and other kinds of ritual gifts. Fictive kinship ties with neighbours are common and, in general, solidarity and collaboration with those who live nearby are thought to be necessary for the physical wellbeing and general auspiciousness. Thus, the dwelling patterns which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s allowed for the creation of strong and new relations between formerly hierarchically-ordered Hindu castes and between Pinjara and Hindu communities.

At the same time, and over in the same period, there has also been a marked increase in the general level of suspicion and covert hostility between religious communities. While these two identifiable trends clearly have some relation, we do not think that there is a simple causal relation between them at the local level. In Jamgod today, we are beginning to see a new and reactionary trend visible in the rearrangement of housing in the village, a post-liberalisation rebellion, as it were. As property continues to be bought and sold, a new wave of voluntary aggregation and segregation is taking place. Hindus are selling property in neighbourhoods where Muslims are in the majority and buying new houses in Hindu-majority areas. Muslims also tend to buy new plots in the same area where other Muslims live. New inter-religious tensions and fear are important motivations for such moves. Crucial for these latest rearrangements are the public spaces found in the gaps between houses and neighbourhoods.

Processions and the reconfiguration of space

On the night of Muharram in 2012, four Hindu wedding processions (*bārāt-s*) passed along the eight hundred metres of street connecting old Jamgod village to the new highway. They were destined for the main temple in the old village, where reception rituals and a collective meal were scheduled. On the same night, another procession, the Muharram procession (*julū-s*) was also supposed to take part of the same route from the New Settlement to the mosque in the old village.

All afternoon, conversation had been ongoing between the organisers of the wedding, some village elders, members of the council and representatives of Pinjara community. The risk of a violent clash between the two processions was clear to everyone. A few dozen drunk Hindu youths could easily and suddenly turn a joyous moment into one of anti-Muslim violence, should the paths of the processions be allowed to cross. Eventually, the Pinjaras agreed to postpone the start of their procession in order to avoid such a possibility. As one of the Pinjara elders put it, ‘A wedding happens only once in a lifetime, while Muharram is every year. It is better for us to give way to the wedding processions, we can wait for some time’. Nonetheless, once the four wedding processions arrived at the temple, angry shouting began. At first, it seemed like a normal dispute between young men who had drunk alcohol with enthusiasm. Slowly, it became clear that the men were deliberately waiting for the Muharram procession to approach.

As agreed, the Pinjaras had set off only once the Hindu processions had passed. Now they were approaching the small square from where the road split, one branch leading to the mosque and the other to the Panderināth Temple, where the wedding meal was due to be served. Many bystanders anticipated that once the Muslims arrived at the intersection, a well-aimed stone would be all that it would take to trigger violence on a greater scale.

The wedding was taking place within the Khati caste, the largest Hindu caste in the village. Some of those responsible for the wedding had started to urge the young men into the temple for the meal. Crowds had begun to assemble near the temple to see what was happening, perhaps in anticipation of violence. The atmosphere was tense. Eventually, the older men involved in the Hindu processions,

who, until now, had been content to watch the youth insult and menace each other, took control of the situation. They ushered and pushed the drunkards into the dining hall. The street emptied. A few minutes later, the Muharram procession arrived and reached the mosque without incident.

As was said soon afterwards:

We have no problems in controlling a bunch of drunks, it often happens at weddings. We are not afraid. The villagers are greater in number and generally ready to fight if necessary. But a fight between Hindu and Muslim processions is quite another matter. You never know with whom a villager will side. It can grow and become a big issue. Luckily, we have managed to avoid it¹².

After the meal, a few young men started another fight outside the temple. This time, a number of Khati men immediately intervened before the shouting could escalate. One of them told a visibly drunk boy: 'You feel invincible because you drank two packs [plastic bags] of liquor, but I had eight! Now let's see what you want to do!' This man was famous in Jamgod for his drinking. For this reason, he was not considered to be very respectable. But for days after this incident, his humorous words were repeated often in the village and he took on something of a heroic status, as the one who put an end to the aggression.

This sequence of events reveals how the public space of the village is crossed by multiple logics of occupation and meaning. These are in turn based on and produce different affiliations, claims and identities, both at collective and family levels. Two contrasting spatial, religious and social logics were made to oppose one another. The clash between the two, avoided at the last moment, would have made explicit through the outburst of violence the two contrasting underlying regimes of identity construction and social and political

¹² This was told to Sbriccoli in the main square of Jamgod, 24/11/2012, by one of the men who had organised the wedding.

claims¹³. This can be seen even more clearly if we now increase the ethnographic resolution.

Muharram processions and the lesser rituals contained within them make particular kinds of claim on the public spaces of the village. For the three days of the festival, the Pinjaras gather at night by the mosque. They display and honour mock shrines (*ta'zīyas*) with garlands. Two of these ritual vehicles are financed collectively, one by Pinjaras of the old village and the other by those from the New and Windmill settlements. On each of the three nights, processions make the way from the new settlements to the old village, led by a pickup truck carrying a sound system playing songs and prayers related to Muharram. This was the procession delayed by the Hindu wedding processions. The many other mock shrines visible around the mosque had been constructed by families as votive offerings. In front of them, and surrounded by crowds, men engaged in battles with sticks, others performing spectacular demonstrations of strength. Some spin with bicycles, their bite attaching them to the machine; others lift heavy logs above their heads. There is, however, little of the bloody flagellation commonly reported elsewhere in India.

On the final day, a procession starting from the mosque passes through the entire village, stopping in front of the Panderināth temple in the main square of the village, where more playing takes place. Eventually, the mock shrines are taken to the lake outside the village and 'cooled down' by immersing them in waters. The structures represent Imam Husain's mausoleum and the simulated battles and demonstrations re-enact the battle of Karbala. In this sense, Muharram processions and rituals reconfigure the village space as a sacred and Islamic one, linking the locality to all other places where Muharram is celebrated and all these in turn to Karbala. The idea of religious unity is affirmed, and along with it are the particular relations within a local community of believers.

In contrast, Hindu wedding processions enact a conquest of the village, as the lineage of the groom come to claim the bride. Usually

¹³ For studies dealing with occupation of public space and the emergence of communalism in India see Krishnaswami (1966) and Freitag (1989). For an analysis of the relation between struggles for public space and community in another context (USA) see Staeheli and Thompson (1997). For a study of the relation between the private spaces of the Hindu house, public space and women identity in India see Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1999).

composed of younger relations of the groom and his friends, a wedding procession starts at the entrance of the village and proceeds slowly towards the interior. It is also headed by a pickup truck or a tractor from which enormous loudspeakers project deafening music. In Jamgod, techno remixes of Bollywood film songs are popular for the task. Strips of exploding firecrackers and clouds of acrid smoke add to the assault of the senses. Behind the mobile sound system follows a confusion of drunken dancers, who try to occupy as much of the road as possible, so as to make difficult for traffic of any kind to pass. Bystanders are forced to stop and watch the procession by the actions of the procession itself. The procession is violent, aggressive even, in the way that it moves into the village and in what it demands of those who happen to be in its path. If someone joins or is pulled or pushed into the dance, the other dancers often jostle him, sometimes even beating him until he is expelled, exhausted, from the troop.

Finally, and attended by a relative, the groom follows this disruptive turmoil, dressed like a king and mounted on a white horse.

If coming from another village to claim the bride, these processions are staged assaults on space of other people¹⁴. As such, they are demonstrations of strength and superiority. They question the autonomy and credibility of the bride's village. 'Bride-takers' enact their superiority through simulated conquest. The aggression within the processions commonly spills over into physical fighting. Typically, members of the caste organising the wedding greatly outnumber those coming with the procession to claim the bride, and the responsibility for managing violence falls to them. In this case, however, circumstances were rather unusual. First, four processions took place on the same day. Secondly, the target of their aggressiveness, this time, was not just the men of a different village,

¹⁴ Many people in Jamgod confirmed this point. But they stated that in the past it was not like this. A wedding party came to stay for three days, hospitality was given, and atmosphere was friendly and pleasant. Nowadays, the wedding party stays just for the time of a meal, and wedding takes place the very evening of their arrival. Furthermore, new generations have adopted the Rajput model, as a sign of upward mobility. Rajput weddings are famous for their vitality and vigour. As an elderly old Rajput man once told Sbriccoli: 'if no brawl happens in a *bārāt*, then it is not a real *bārāt*' (October 2013, Jamgod). Fighting between different wedding parties arriving in the village at the same time is also not uncommon, as in the case here reported.

or another wedding procession, but the threat they perceived from the Muslims. On this occasion, the procession was no longer a dramatisation of status competition between two sections of a single caste, but a matter for the entire village and, as such, could easily have spiralled out of control. In this sense, a fight with Pinjaras would have reconfigured the meaning of the procession: ‘Hindus performing their ritual practices’ against ‘Muslims performing theirs’. From there, it would have been a small step to ask: ‘who in India has the precedence and higher right to perform rituals?’ Jamgodians would have been forced to take a position.

The overlapping paths of Hindu and Muslim processions that evening brought about an active and tangible competition for space in the village. The road from the highway to the old village became a contested space, displaying in the most visible terms some of the ambiguities of the social order. The road brought to people’s mind questions of rights and precedents in ways that they could see and hear. In these moments, who had right of way was no longer an abstract or a latent question. Things that were usually separate and discrete came together.

As we have said, there were many in the village who were aware of the danger and said they wanted to avoid violence. In their discussions, of course, they contributed to bringing alive the possibility of violence. Some said tension in the village never gave way to violence. Others were patiently waiting for their chance to contribute to targeted violence. There was a thrill in these discussions, whether the speaker was for or against the possibility. In the end, however, when all had been said and done, villagers had generally aligned themselves in ways that made the cohabitation of Hindus and Muslims in the village continue to be possible.

Although Hindu and Muslim calendars differ in the ways months are calculated, auspicious days and associated public events commonly coincide. Suitably auspicious days for weddings are not plentiful, but the coincidence of public processions in India has been well publicised as a possible point of rupture and violence to the point that nearly everyone is aware of the creative and political potential. In addition, the simple fact that the drunk youngsters were allowed to issue abuse and threats until just before the Muharram procession arrived and the older men hauled them inside the temple, points to an

element of deliberately staged drama. Nothing was allowed to happen, but it could have done. The Hindus clearly proved to themselves that it could have done, and this gives them power to know that the possibility and the power of violence is with them.

In all of this, the Pinjaras had to pay a price. They had to grant what we might think of as a right of precedence to the Hindu wedding processions. In effect, the entire staged and manufactured performance served only to enact and then reinforce a new village hierarchy based on religion rather than caste. The concessionary words of the Pinjara man 'But, a wedding happens only once in a lifetime' have a bitter ring to them when seen in this light.

New mosque and temple: dissecting community

At the border of New Settlement and the highway is a small temple or shrine dedicated to the Hindu deity Hanumān. One hundred metres over the highway is a newly built mosque, freshly painted in shiny greens and pinks. In this section, we turn to the inter-related recent history of these structures. Mosques and temples might initially be assumed to be the discrete projects of particular religious communities, but in Jamgod the relationship between the two construction projects reveals much about the multiple and differentiated layers of meaning, fear and intent underneath the apparently straightforward communal discourse about Hindu-Muslim relations in the village.

The mosque was built quickly between 2012 and 2013 and inaugurated on the 26th of January 2013 (Republic Day in India and a national holiday). Some money for its construction came from the village council and a fund collected from among Pinjaras. The bulk of the finance, however, came from a private trust based in Karnataka. According to many in Jamgod, this trust was funded by money from Saudi Arabia¹⁵. The fact that the money had categorically not come from Saudi Arabia did not prevent rumours to that effect circulating among both Hindus and Muslims in the village. Everyone already knows that the cash-rich Saudis are intent on solidifying the support

¹⁵ In actuality, the Faizul Islam Academy of General Education is a Karnataka-based Non-Profit Trust which acted as an intermediary for funds coming from the International Islamic Charity Organisation (IICO), based in Kuwait.

base of Islam in India because this is a story they have heard very often before.

Two reasons were commonly given for the need for a second mosque in the village. First, it was erected on the ground where collective Īd prayers are performed annually by the Pinjaras. Thus, there was a village-wide interest in creating a comfortable environment for an important religious ceremony. Secondly, the Pinjaras living in the two new settlements had to walk a long way to reach the mosque in the old village.

About 60 families, half of total of Pinjaras, had pushed for the construction of the mosque. When it was ready, they called on the services of an Imam from Dewas to establish a new *madrassa* (Quran school) and to lead daily prayers. Soon after his arrival, problems began to emerge within the community.

In India, there are two main indigenous forms of Islam which take their names from famous seminaries in towns in the north of the country. The old Imam belonged to the Deobandh School, the new one was a Bareilvi. The former school has a reputation for being more rule bound and against syncretic practices. In contrast, Barelvis are generally seen as reflecting the more indigenous concerns of many Indian Muslims for whom local rituals and inter-cessionary relationships form important parts of daily religious practice. In this case, however, it was the Deobandhi Imam who had slowly developed a blind eye to the syncretic religious practices of the Pinjaras. In contrast to this attitude which appeared accepting, the new Bareilvi Imam was intransigent from the outset.

At different points in the drafting of this paper both authors assumed that those who had provided material for this story had got their seminaries confused. They had not, however. Again, as with the other examples discussed in this paper, we think that such topsy-turvy elements in the story point to the hegemony of received wisdoms on the interpretive lenses through which complex social life is simplified – in this case, the anthropologists had fallen into the trap of thought that had been given readymade to them.

The first dispute among the Pinjaras occurred with the death of an elderly lady. According to customary practice, the family of the deceased was to offer collective meals on the 3rd, 10th, 20th and 40th days following the death. A photograph of the deceased was hung on a

wall, so that the dead lady could be remembered. Incense burned in front of the image as an additional form of worship and honour. The new Imam strongly criticised such practices, saying they did not belong to Islam and had to be stopped.

In response to the criticism, Muslims in the old village allied themselves with the old Imam. Many families in New and Windmill settlements sided with the new Imam. A division on the basis of allegiance to mosque and Imam appeared for the first time in the known history of Jamgod. The dispute took a turn for the worse when Pinjaras in the old village started to claim that it was against community traditions to accept money from outside the village for religious buildings. They were also concerned that the origins of such money were not clear, which would make it easy for their detractors to attribute all manner of negative publicity to the donation. Hindus might legitimately spread rumours about the foreign and unknown connections of the Muslims and the conspiracy to spread Islam.

The new mosque, therefore, was the cause of an incipient division within Pinjara community. It became quite clear that in the future two clearly separated communities with different customs and practices could emerge. For the first time, many Pinjaras had also to acknowledge the existence of 'different Islams', with different rules and conceptions about life, death and Allah. This, for many, was hard to accept and an unwelcome distraction. Their conscious and unconscious convictions had been shaken by the arrival of the new Imam. Along with a fracture in the community, the new mosque had produced a fracture in some Pinjaras' minds. They suddenly and unexpectedly found themselves dealing with the intricacies and subtleties of Islamic theology and rival institutions within the village.

Hindus living in New Settlement were at first surprised, and then worried, about the rapidity with which the new mosque had been built. They were not aware of the complexities of the dispute the new mosque had created among the Pinjaras. The Hindus continued to see the Pinjaras as united in thought and deed – but now also expansive in their territorial ambitions. The Pinjaras became the local expression of the much greater discourse, on which we have touched, in which Islam is seen as a fundamental threat to the Hindu nation.

The new mosque was a sign of the increasing strength and confidence of Muslims in the village. Urban Muslims came from

Dewas and elsewhere to attend the inauguration ceremony. Their presence gave further strength to the rumour that money from outside the immediate community had supported construction. Their participation also enforced the idea that Islam is a homogenous religion, with all Muslims from local to national levels being united in their aims and intentions: what Rolan Robertson (1992) has defined the ‘particularisation of universalism’, that is, the rendering of the world as a single place. This sense of unity and common purpose is often made to appear in sharp contrast to the divisions and factionalism supposed to be inherent to the Hindu population.

The feeling of being ‘outdone’ among the Hindus was intensified by other practices associated with the mosque. The most evident and problematic was the call to prayer, which was made five times a day. The mosque had acquired powerful loudspeakers, through which the Imam’s call could be heard far and wide. Soon, there were protests from among the Hindus who were awoken early in the morning by the amplified sounds. Furthermore, the regular coming and going of Muslims to prayer, gave them a new visibility in the neighbourhood. Sounds and bodies coupled to create the impression of a continuous and relentless process of ‘Islamisation’ within the village. Feeling challenged, and surrounded by an increasingly strong and numerous Muslim community, they decided to react. In order to resist or to spite these unsettling changes then counter ideas and practices had to be sent forth into New Settlement.

The small and semi-abandoned shrine of Hanumān lying near the highway had such a potential. BJP activists hatched a plan to construct a larger marble temple to replace the old cement platform. The leader and main promoter of the operation was a Brahman. He began to create interest in the idea of a new temple and managed to get himself elected as the Chairman of the newly formed committee¹⁶. Soon, daily evening rituals commenced at the temple at which devotional songs were sung. At first, the Brahman sponsored these rituals himself, but in time others were attracted to the temple, as they saw the increased activity at the site as they moved in and out of the village. The

¹⁶ Interestingly, the committee was called the Committee for the Construction of the Kherapati Temple. Kherapati is Hanumān in his form as Lord of the Village. In Malwa, a temple to him must always be built before constructing a new village, along with a temple to Śakti Mātā, Bherujī and Thuni, a stone to an unspecified god of the village, see Mayer (1960: 17).

Brahman ensured that his unemployed brother-in-law became the temple priest.

In time, a virtual collection of money for the construction of the temple was held. Everyone in the neighbourhood was asked to promise a sum. The Chairman of the temple committee offered to double the highest single sum collected. He also became responsible for contacting the local parliamentarian to solicit a donation of sufficient size to get construction moving.

During the rituals of the evening, the site of the planned Hanumān temple became the place where the imagination of a new Hindu space was enacted and materialised. People gathered there to sing. They did so as loudly as they could. At the end, they shouted victory praises to various gods and goddesses: 'May Hanumān be victorious'. Sound, once more, was used both as an identity marker and as claim to materialise an imagined space. The rituals held to mark the start of the construction of the new temples were completed in February 2013, just one month after the inauguration of the new mosque.

It became known in Jamgod that Professor Mayer was planning another return visit after an interval of a few years. Consequently, a village celebration was organised. The official purpose was to inaugurate a new village council building in New Settlement. The local parliamentarian was also invited. When he arrived, the crowds were suddenly ushered towards the Hanumān shrine. Land purification rituals (*bhūmipūjā*) were conducted on the site. The parliamentarian became the lead actor, with Mayer being made to play a strong supporting role. As the rituals came to a close, the parliamentarian, as was his duty given the circumstances, promised money for the erection of the temple. Then, everybody returned to the new council building to listen to further speeches and to mark Mayer's return. In only few hours, the organisers of the event had managed to reconfigure village space effectively along three different sets of oppositions, that is, secular-religious, past-present and Hindu-Muslim.

The hijacking of the parliamentarian and the previously unannounced doubling of the ritual burden for the day was deft work on the part of the Brahman. Bringing together rituals for the temple and the council building, he annulled the division between governance and religion. Furthermore, Mayer is seen by many in Jamgod as a representative of the old times. He holds past memories of the village,

acting as something of a bridge between past and present. Through his presence and participation, the past was brought into the present during the inauguration ceremonies, showing the continuity within changes that the village had gone through in the last sixty years. The stage managed performance brought together different kinds of imagination: the new council building and the old Hanumān shrine, the old council system and the new temple. However, the performance also had clear communal overtones, the parliamentarian pressured by circumstance to pledge money for a Hindu temple at the very entrance to the village and in earshot of the new mosque. The rituals for the inauguration of the new council building were only conducted after the protection of Hanumān had been secured. The temple and council building became linked by the pathways of inauguration the assembled had been encouraged to follow¹⁷.

If we look carefully at the dynamics of these competitive building programmes, we can begin to see that at an empirical level the lines of fracture within the village remain more complicated than a straightforward Hindu-Muslim divide. Muslims were divided by the new mosque, as a familiar tension between reformers and traditionalists emerged in the village. While presented as a sensible response to the new mosque, the construction of the temple cannot simply be seen as representing a united Hindu will within the village. At one level, the Brahman chairman of the temple committee played a deft game by promoting the temple and then ensuring that his brother-in-law was appointed as the main priest. In these acts, there was obviously self-interested material benefit. At the same time, the establishment of a temple also contributes to detachment of New and Windmill settlements from the old village, exactly as the new mosque had divided Jamgod's Pinjaras.

At first sight, the drama of the mosque-temple case could appear as an example of Hindu-Muslim rivalry and opposition, detailed ethnographic enquiry reveals other motivations and forces at play. In addition however, there is a further important point to be made here.

¹⁷ Sbriccoli too was inserted in this complex play. Even though he did not directly participate in the rituals and functions, he was thought of as Mayer's disciple (*celā*), representing the continuity of the memory of the village and its connection to the world as a place of scientific interest. Their names were inscribed together in stone at the inauguration of the new building, as honorary members of the council.

Hindus in Jamgod, in part perhaps because of the local dominance of the BJP, often like to imagine that the state represents their interests, over those of Muslims. We refer the reader back to the state-sponsored hunt to gold mentioned earlier to force this point home. The party political system also seen or presented as if it were suggestible. However, when it came to it, of the funds pledged by the parliamentarian only some went towards the fund for the new temple. Significant amounts were instead donated towards the restoration of a temple in the old village and for a construction of a boundary wall at the site of the new mosque.

Finally, while the politician probably saw these three donations as the most efficient way of keeping sweet the largest portion of the village, we can also see that certain groups of both Hindus and Muslims were working in parallel to promote the interests of their settlement, New Settlement, over those of the old.

Conclusions

The ethnographic material presented here suggests that village space cannot be understood as something that is fixed, against which other variables and processes can be simply measured and validated. By looking at the space of the village as the product of social practices, which involve specific forms of identity and imagination, we have been able to project shadows of doubt on some of the dominant discourses in Jamgod itself. The village is not simply the vessel for accommodating change and fashion made out there in the world. Neither is the village a static set of independent and self-sustaining social mechanisms. Jamgodians themselves use a series of pre-fabricated ideas about nationalism, fear and hierarchy, and the tension between tradition and modernity to describe their village. At the same time, they know from their own lives that this fantasy village is often not the village they actually inhabit. But then, what is a village?

Paradoxically, the definition of it given in Indian Constitution and quoted at the beginning of this article, appears to resonate with life in Jamgod, and this is probably because it describes a (legal) truism. As Gertrude Stein wrote about her rose: 'I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years' (Stein 1947, v). If we paraphrase Stein's words, and say that 'a village is a

village is a village is a village’, then we are approaching a definition. Social scientists are not usually allowed the simplicity of poetic truth. The correlate in our discipline might read: ‘The village is an administrative unit’. As soon as we move to the next step, that is, how this administrative unit should be understood, we run the risk of falling headlong into problems inherent to a culturalist definition such as that provided by the PESA Act.

In this article, we have looked at a village not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what specific practices of occupation of public space in a particular locality can tell us about a particular dominant discourse – that on Hindu-Muslim opposition and communalism – and how this in turn can help us to disentangle the complex relation between space and the way people imagine and produce it. The village, of course, does not disappear in the process, nor is taken for granted; rather, some aspects of its contemporary ontology can be questioned. Similarly, space embodies the past, social relations and political choices. At the same time, the stratified spaces of the village also allow a degree of freedom and space for innovation.

In quite a straightforward way, the subjectivities we have discussed fit snugly into the mould of what Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004) call ‘symbolic violence or domination’. This phrase is not intended to conjure gashing or genocide; but rather, tacit and unconscious modes of domination which commonly occur in everyday life. For them, symbolic violence is exercised upon someone with their complicity and confirms a place in a social hierarchy. Symbolic violence requires a dominator but it also requires the dominated to accept their position in the *exchange* of social value that occurs between them. Symbolic violence maintains its effect through the misrecognition of power relations. Misrecognition means that the economic and political interests present in a set of actions are denied. Symbolic practices deflect attention from the interested character of actions and thereby contribute to their appearance as disinterested pursuits. This misrecognition legitimises these practices and thereby contributes to the reproduction (or formation in this instance) of the social order in which they are embedded. Activities and resources gain in symbolic power, or legitimacy, to the extent that they become separated from underlying material interests and hence go misrecognised as representing disinterested forms of activity.

In Jamgod, communal discourses are drawn upon to discuss relations between religious communities and the future direction of the village. In the process, they become a series of grades of symbolic violence. Of course, communal discourses disguise the material and political interests of those serving parliament, mosques and temples. In Jamgod, we can see how prefabricated communal discourse has become the model through which anything and everything can be explained. The simplicity and convenience of the model is clearly addictive. At the same time, through rival processions, Muslims trace defeat, the sorrow of martyrdom and betrayal onto the streets of Jamgod. Their movements connect where they live to where they pray. In contrast, the Hindu marriage procession is a simulated conquest of the village as wife takers boast and slur their superiority. When these processions are made to coincide, the steps people take in Jamgod's public spaces remind them of the potential for violence. The possibility of violence is brought to the fore, discussed, imagined, allowed to run wild through the streets, before it is placed back in its box. The Muslims delay their procession and, as they do so, accept their position in the exchange of social value that occurs between them and the Hindu wedding processions. At the same time, the Muslims continue their rise, profiting from trade and investing their new wealth in land and the religious institutions which divide them.

When we cast our minds back over the last six decades of anthropological work in Jamgod, we can see that quite dramatic and important changes have taken place. The village has expanded tremendously and agriculture is no longer the backbone. Religion has replaced caste hierarchy as the principle mode in which social differentiation is discussed. Anti-Muslim discourse permits high caste Hindus to reproduce the older inequalities of power, economy and access to symbolic resources by de-politicising and thus concealing them. The village itself has stretched and buckled with post-colonial history. The magical pull of the highway and the seductive charms of a petroleum mobile economy have detached New and Windmill settlements from the old. Ensuing battles have been waged to determine what is modern and what is authentic, creating further significant divisions among the good folk of Jamgod. Political wars now rage for control and influence over a constituency now broken in new ways.

Tommaso Sbriccoli
Edward Simpson

Enacting nationalist history: Buildings,
processions and sound in the making
of a village in Central India

When Mayer first went to Jamgod, there was nothing remarkable about the track that connected the world to the village. Today, almost as if a staged metaphor, it is this very stretch of road – that bridging the old and the new – on which we see most of the local battles for meaning taking place. In a very real sense, Jamgod is not what it used to be. The tensions which made the village in the 1950s, have given way to a new series of dramas and the staged rituals of everyday nationalism.

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