People Out of Place

Pavement Dwelling in Mumbai

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An examination of the circumstances in which a set of pavement dwellers in Mumbai came to the city, allows one to link their imperiled urban material and political circumstances to the green revolution and the changes it wrought both in the relations of social reproduction and the form of electoral politics. Methodologically, their life stories also suggest that the space of rural poverty in India cannot be coterminous with the village border. Thus, the hinterland is not a physical location but a relational one, a configuration of historical and spatial relations that could as easily be found outside a city's limits, as it can be found inside a city.

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In December 2004, the newly elected Maharashtra state government that had come to power at least in part by promising to provide low-income housing to the insecurely housed residents of Mumbai, proceeded to embark on a three-month orgy of violence against the slum and pavement dwellers of the city. Their actions were widely applauded by the middle class. In one month alone, 72,000 slum dwellings were razed to the ground, leaving 3,50,000 people completely without any form of shelter (see Koppikar 2005). All across the city, families were living on the rubble of their former homes. In one of the newspaper reports of these demolitions was the story of Ranjani Vetale, a slum dweller, who pleaded with the demolition crew as they razed her house: "amhala pay theyvala teri zaaga dhya" (give us some place to stand on at the least), before wondering aloud where she was to go now (*Cybernoon* 2005).

When we consider Vetale's predicament and more generally, the abject living conditions of the city's poor, it is quite apparent that those compelled to live on the pavements and in slums of the city are quite literally a people who have run out of place, who have routinely been denied a place on which to carry out the business of reproducing life. It is to this task of explaining how pavement dwellers were historically produced as the "other," as a people out of place, that this paper attends to. This is done by historicising the fragile living conditions of a set of pavement dwellers in Mumbai, that is, by examining the circumstances by which they came to live on the pavements of the city. In the process, what becomes clear is that the social relations that produce, and are in turn reproduced and transformed by, the spatial politics of Bombay (now Mumbai) cannot be understood within "city limits." Rather, this paper suggests that analyses of urban India must be located within the political economy of agrarian change and processes of de-peasantisation, for it is only then can we apprehend the direness of the situation confronting Vetale. By doing so, this paper offers a methodological intervention into the efforts to conceptualise the relationship between the rural and the urban, and locate the hinterland by drawing attention to the importance of developing a relational analysis of the spatial categories being invoked. The hinterland is not a physical location but a relational one. It is a configuration of historical and spatial relations that could as easily be found outside a city's limits as it can be found inside a city. The relentless evictions of the urban, poor and their production as a people out of place, prompt a conceptualisation of the hinterland and its constitutive spatial relations, where the figure of the pavement dweller *as* the city's limits comes into view.

It is clearly not sufficient to bring to light the precarious living conditions of the urban poor, for that, on its own, serves little by way of explaining *how* they have become the other on the terrain of citizenship. As Joan Scott (1994) has argued in connection with efforts to visibilise the experiences of the marginalised, that effort alone does little to restore the marginalised to the histories from which they have been written out of. Rather, she demands, such experiences must be explained, which is to say that the production of marginalisation, of the historical production of a people out of place, must be pieced together if we are to challenge the discursive foundations of othering. Taking a cue from Scott (1994), in this paper the narratives of pavement dwellers are located within the changing configurations of authority over land and life as the Indian state pursued the project of "national development." This paper draws on the work of Farshad Araghi (2000), Philip McMichael (2014), Doreen Massey (1993), David Harvey (1997), James Ferguson (1999), and Ayse Çağlar (2016) to explore some of the methodological imperatives of analysing the spatial relations at play in the routine evictions and encroachments that shape pavement dwellers' struggle for shelter. The world-historical lens that these theorists provide situates these evictions within broader historical processes of displacement that are essential to bring into focus if we are to understand how a people out of place have been produced. Here, the focus is on the processes by which pavement dwellers have been untethered from the land and constructed as "squatters." Essentially, understanding the social relations through which this precarious subject-position is historically produced is critical to understanding how they become a population that is perceived to be a legitimate target of violence.

The paper draws from 18 months of ethnographic and archival fieldwork conducted in Mumbai in 2003 and 2004, where one sought to understand the struggles for shelter and quests for home that the residents of the city's pavements were engaged in. While typically seen as transients, many of the pavement dwellers encountered in the course of fieldwork had been living on the same stretch of pavement in Byculla for over 20 years, having withstood the violence of countless evictions and demolition drives. Whilst investigating the circumstances of the pavement dwellers' migration to the city, what one found lodged in their ragged encampments on the side of the road was a history of the changing practices of sovereignty that have shaped political power and the terms of life in postcolonial India. Initial attempts by the newly independent state to reduce its dependence on food aid, and thereby register its sovereignty within the community of nations it had just joined, were severely compromised as its agricultural strategy failed on several counts (Gupta 1998). To recoup its rapidly diminishing claim to be a sovereign entity, the state adopted a process of agricultural modernisation that we now know as the green revolution. This project, while succeeding in its mission to reduce food imports, radically transformed the basis of social reproduction and the nature of electoral politics as it cast out millions of peasants from rural India and transformed them *en masse* into the "other" against which the subject of sovereignty—whose right to protection from state violence is recognised—is constructed. It not only transformed the space of the agrarian but also that of the urban.

While scholars of the current conjuncture, drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt (1951) and Giorgio Agamben (1998), have provided some extremely important analyses of the violence inflicted on populations considered to be "out of place" as indicative of the new "internal" theatre of sovereignty (see Hansen and Stepputat 2005), less recognised is the fact that these displaced bodies are a product of the pursuit of the external aspect of sovereignty (the terms by which states seek to establish themselves as independent entities). This paper brings these two theatres of sovereignty in relationship with each other through its investigation of how the pavement dwellers of Byculla come to be a people out of place. I now turn to the historical structuring of land and life that is vested in the concept of sovereignty, of the terms by which the boundaries of territory and humanity are recognised, and consequently gain protection from state aggression.

Subject of Sovereignty

Food shortages and green revolution: Agriculture, at independence, was marked by low productivity. Seeking to transform the low productivity of agriculture and the great disparities of wealth and power in rural India, the post-independence government sought to develop an economic policy that would raise productivity through the introduction of new techniques, develop institutional mechanisms to bring about redistribution, and promote the growth of industry, which would in large part act as a sump for the "underemployed" rural population (Menon 2009). However, Jawaharlal Nehru's attempts to effect redistributive change in the institutionalised nature of rural inequality foundered as the Congress party remained beholden to rural landlords to deliver votes at election time (Sherman 2013; Cullather 2010; Frankel 1978; Kohli 1987; Ladejinsky 1977; Thorner and Thorner 1962).

The government was not able to make much headway in improving agricultural productivity either. The labour-intensive agricultural strategy adopted by the state in the light of its redistributive goals failed to take off as the institutional incentives for the small farmers, who were the target of this strategy—land redistribution, cooperatives, etc—were blocked by the extant rural power structure (Frankel 1971). The ensuing food deficits led the government to accept American food aid, under PL-480, by the late 1950s. In the first half of the 1960s, continued food shortages and the very modest gains in agricultural output made obvious the failure of the government's ability to realise its agricultural development strategy, for neither redistribution nor productivity increases had occurred at any significant level.[1] Introducing his work on the critical role of agriculture in the making of the Indian nation state, Akhil Gupta (1998: 60) points out that while initially the low level of industrialisation was perceived by India's planners to compromise the sovereignty of newly independent India, "it was a crisis in the agricultural sector that truly challenged the sovereignty of the nation-state." Cumulatively, the failures of agricultural policy on both the productivity and the redistribution fronts served to make "population pressure," that is,

the inability of the land, so long oriented to the pursuit of colonial interests, to meet the subsistence needs of those who tilled it, the stumbling block of the nationalist quest for sovereignty.

Three events in the 1960s hastened the abandonment of the previous redistribution-oriented, labour-intensive strategy for achieving food self-sufficiency and agricultural growth: the death of Nehru in 1964, sharp dips in food stocks as a result of the failure of the monsoon in 1965 and 1966, and the "short-leash" food diplomacy exercised by the American government. Together they heralded the green revolution, a development whereby the subject of public action and investment narrowed from the large populations of the poor and the marginalised, who would have benefited from land reforms, to the vastly smaller target population of upper- and middle-class farmers, whose size of landholding allowed them to take advantage of the green revolution's agricultural technologies and the public subsidies that made it possible. As Atul Kohli (1987: 75) puts it, the green revolution represented an understanding that "the only way to improve the 'food situation' was to support private profitability by public action." Where the land reform initiative sought to incorporate millions of marginal farmers and landless agricultural workers in the effort to overcome the state's dependency on food imports to feed its people—food self-sufficiency being an important index of sovereignty—the green revolution saw it worthwhile to engage, and thereby valorise, the efforts of only a small segment of the country's farming population to participate in resolving the crisis of feeding the body politic.

To get a sense of how this pursuit of sovereignty changed course, and understand how these changes that were expressed on the international front created the conditions for producing a people out of place domestically, we need to return to Nehru's death in 1964 and the resulting change of guard that allowed a new lease of life for the proponents of intensive, targeted agricultural strategies. They had previously lost out to those advocating a redistribution-based strategy of attaining agricultural self-sufficiency, and thereby national sovereignty. Strengthening the case made by the former was the food deficit crisis of the mid-1960s. For two consecutive years, 1965–66 and 1966–67, the monsoons had failed, leading to the worst drought in 50 years. The resulting food shortages were dire; the government urged people to give up a meal a week in order to conserve scarce resources. For many, however, as news reports of that period (*EPW* 1966; Sherman 2013) and present-day recollections of the urban poor in Mumbai attest, missing a meal was not a choice, death by starvation was a very real and immediate possibility. Reporting on the conditions in Bihar in 1966, where food shortages were compounded by fraught centre–state relations (Brass 1986), the state where many of the Byculla pavement dwellers came from, an *EPW* correspondent (1966) reveals that

> Starvation deaths are already occurring, cattle have been let loose to fend for themselves in the drought-hit areas. Hundreds of villagers queuing up in front of bania shops to pawn their few belongings is now a common sight in most towns of Bihar… (and the) trek to the big cities has already begun. (pp 656–67)

Food aid from the United States (US), having grown from 3.1 million tonnes in 1956–57 to 10 million tonnes in 1965–66, came to the rescue, but on terms that made plain the state's complete dependence on the US to provide food for its people, and the failure of its strategy for "national development." President Lyndon Johnson completely undercut any illusion that the Indian state might have had about acting as a sovereign nation state, by demanding that the government present its food requirements on a month-by-month basis, keeping India on a "short tether" in order to bring its economic policy in line with the US' interests. The US government would make its decision depending on the Indian government's monthly progress on the reform front. As Gupta (1998) has pointed out in his discussion of this crisis and the "food diplomacy" exercised by the US, while policymakers were already moving from a redistribution emphasis to a capital-intensive national agricultural strategy in the wake of Nehru's death, "the *manner* in which Johnson treated Indian leaders and policy makers was to hasten the drive to food self-sufficiency to no small extent" (pp 62–63; emphasis in original).

Rural inequality and flight to the city: Thus was the green revolution born, a strategy that disproportionately favoured large farmers and marginalised small farmers (Frankel 1971) in the effort to minimise the country's humbling dependency on food imports. Census data indicates that by 1971, half of the farming population was classified as marginal farmers, cultivating holdings of less than 2.5 acres, and accounted for only 9% of all farmed land, whereas in 1961 small and marginal farmers who comprised slightly over half of all cultivators, farmed approximately 19% of all agricultural holdings (cited in Frankel 1978: 493). The amplification of rural inequality—a consequence of the move to a capital-intensive agricultural strategy—hastened rather than lessened the massive exodus of subsistence farmers and landless labourers to urban India that had started with the famine of 1965–67. Keeping these changes in landholding patterns and demographic movements in mind, what we find is that the green revolution—understood as a strategy of recouping national sovereignty—was made possible through a particular ordering of land and humanity that rendered as by-products, a significant proportion of India's rural population.

Most of the pavement-dwelling families encountered in Byculla in the course of this research hailed predominantly from rural Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and locate their departure from rural India within this period of agrarian transformation. While the route to survival in times of hardship in these areas, that is, migrating to cities in search of work, was well-worn, the conditions under which they took place are historically specific. For these erosions of home and subsequent departures are located within the emerging political economy of the green revolution, succinctly described by Kohli as "a growth-oriented alliance between the dominant political elite and the less than self-sufficient private sector" (1987: 75), and the relationship between land and life, that is, the living conditions that it entailed for those cast off from the fields of rural India and compelled to piece together a living by encroaching on the public spaces of urban India.[2]

While the distribution of agricultural holdings across the farming population provides some indication of the growing socio-economic polarisation in the countryside, less visible is

the transformation in the moral economy that this shift in state strategy precipitated. Traditional relationships of patronage that bound landlords and tillers of the land buckled with the commercialisation of agriculture, promoted by the green revolution (Breman 2010). As Frankel (1971) has pointed out, as large landowners benefited from the green revolution they not only got disproportionately richer, but they also reneged on traditional tenurial understandings, choosing to employ a market-based rationale to make their decisions about how to use the land and under what terms. For the vast majority of the rural population, this shift in the rationale spelled tenurial insecurity, a condition that compounded the impoverishing effects of the famine, and their ongoing marginalisation by the green revolution's emphasis on capital-intensive strategies. While the political consequences of this polarisation in rural India are addressed in the subsequent discussion of populism, at this juncture, the crisis of social reproduction that both precipitated the green revolution, and that the green revolution subsequently deepened is attended to. For it is in this concatenation of events and processes that the stories of the pavement dwellers of Byculla are located, precipitating their journeys from Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and other drought-stricken areas, including Maharashtra, to Bombay in a bid for survival.

Recording the Fragment

This crisis is revealed in Amina's story, relayed by her one afternoon, as she squatted on the pavement and sorted through scraps of cloth (readying them for sale in the city's vast market for recyclable goods), when asked about the circumstances under which she first came to Bombay. She came over 30 years ago but cannot tell when exactly. An attempt to triangulate the story, to pin a date, aside from the reference to famine-like conditions that suggest the mid-1960s, there is little by way of objective historical markers. Later, reflecting on one's hesitation to include a story that is so bereft of history, it occurs that the story's absence of markers is itself an index of the very abjectivity that it narrates. Amina's memories are not unlike the fragments of cloth she sorts through, left-over pieces from the bolt of history. She frames her story of departure and arrival by relaying her mother's response when Amina, a young widow, and her three children showed up in Bombay after an arduous journey from Madhubani, close to 2,000 miles away. What the story conveys is a sense of the multiple and intimate ways in which she was cut loose from the relationships constitutive of social reproduction.

> "Why did you come here?" my mother rebuked, "You should have stayed there and begged." But there was no one we could beg from ... someone should *have* something in order for you to beg from them. People were dying of starvation in my village. I had no choice but to take my children and leave for Bombay, travelling ticketless all the way here. My mother did not want to help me though—I had three children you see. Besides, she lived in the house in which she worked. My first few years, we lived in Jhoola Maidan[3]—at that time there were only 2–3 *jhopras* (slum huts)—and I earned money cutting thread for the mills.

The anguish and anger with which Amina narrated this period of her life offers a small window into the ways these traumatic memories, distant in time and space, live on in the current moment. These memories are not only of dearth and near-death but, perhaps more profoundly, of being cast off the land and by kin. By framing her story of departure and arrival in terms of the villagers' inability to respond to her pleas for food and her mother's refusal to help, provide a window into Amina's experience of discovering that the bundle of social relations that provided her with a sense of home had unravelled, leaving her not only materially but culturally homeless.

One learned that some memories of this period are more deadly than others when, one hot afternoon in November 2004, news of Mubina's death was conveyed. Mubina was a fierce Mahila Milan leader who, like Amina, had arrived in the city from Madhubani as a young widow, over 30 years ago. When she first arrived, Mubina was unable to even afford a stretch of pavement, and slept next to the public toilet, and *on* her children so that they would not be assaulted while she slept. Like many of those around her, she worked as a domestic help, washing dishes in nearby apartment buildings, and in the city's vast, informal, recycling market. Allegedly, she had died from overeating, not a cause of death typically associated with the Indian poor. Vibha, who worked with a non-governmental organisation, Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers, Mumbai, and had had a long association with Mubina, resolved the anomaly:

> The memory of hunger drove her to eat and eat and eat, she could not help it, you know? It was all that starvation in Bihar when she was growing up ... (personal interview, 2004)

And so, one learned that it was the betrayal of memories, not overeating, that killed Mubina. Yet, such memories of hunger cannot be admitted as a cause of death, there is no place for it in the state's roster of mortal conditions. As Eric Klinenberg (2001: 132) points out, "The social nature of death, in disaster as well as normal conditions, escapes the categories and classifications of modern states and societies."

Thus, the record of Mubina's death remains incomplete.[4] "Overeating," after all is a medical condition that, in its abstraction, betrays little of the biopolitics that provided the social conditions both for Mubina's living, and for the memories that eventually relinquished her tenuous hold on life.

The stories of these two women are recounted not as anecdotes but as methodological puzzles. Methodologically speaking, it is only when we historicise Mubina's death—by locating her life story within the tumultuous changes in the relationship between land and life in postcolonial India and the conditions of social reproduction that they produced and that clearly marked her body—that we create the epistemic conditions for challenging the reductive assessment of her suffering that is produced by the medicalisation of her death. By historicising her death and making her memories count, we begin to apprehend Mubina's life and living conditions as relationally constituted, an outcome of processes by which the normative political subject of postcolonial India is produced. That is, her body is made to articulate[5] and she is made to matter, so to speak, providing evidence of a historical experience that has been elided in developmentalist narratives about the making of the nation. By refusing to limit our understanding of the cause of Mubina's death to "overeating" and insisting on a sociological assessment of her suffering, we thus create the conditions for restoring her life to the history

of the land. This history is a narrative that in its celebration of the green revolution and the recovery of national sovereignty that it claims to represent, marginalised and imperilled the lives and stories of the many people like Mubina who were compelled to perch precariously on the city's pavements in order to live. Furthermore, Çağlar's study (2016) on the construction of the otherness of migrants in Europe, informed as it is by Johannes Fabian's (2006) work on the politics of coevalness, underscores the importance of bringing the migrant and the "native" into the same temporal frame. The methodological puzzles that Amina and Mubina represent, deciphering the fragments of history that their memories and bodies render, similarly require us to bring the production of the migrant squatter into the same analytical frame as the subject of sovereignty that the green revolution sought to restore.

From *Garibi Hatao* to *Garib Hatao*

It is also important to recognise, not only for its own sake but also for the broader political changes that it precipitated, that the process of being cast off the land, that we get glimpses of in these accounts, did not go unchallenged. Cases of agrarian conflict doubled between 1967 and 1968, from 19 to 43, according to home ministry records (Frankel 1971). Commenting on this growing rural insurgency, Francine R Frankel (1971: 10) makes the point that

> Poor peasants who had appeared resigned to their handicaps under the existing agrarian structure as long as the prospect of material improvement was relatively limited, had become increasingly resentful of institutional arrangements which deprived them of their "legitimate share" in the greatly increased production now possible with modern technology.

Electorally, a consequence of these changes in the moral economy of rural India, she indicates, was that where previously landlords (who were often also politicians) had "delivered" the votes of "their" peasantry, the transformation of tenurial relationships that occurred as a result of the green revolution had rendered peasants less obliged to heed the political affiliations of their landlord. The narrow victory of the Congress party in the 1967 parliamentary elections has been attributed in large part to the changing electoral conditions wrought by the green revolution (Frankel 1971; Gupta 1998).

Political populism: There were much long-term political consequences that emanated from these changing relations of social reproduction and the displacement of the rural poor to the cities that they precipitated. As Gupta (1998) and others have pointed out, populism emerged as a way of containing the agrarian unrest that threatened to derail the processes of accumulation set in motion by the green revolution (and a means of providing Indira Gandhi a victory over her detractors in the Congress). *Garibi Hatao* (abolish poverty) emerged as a tremendously successful electoral campaign in the context of the wide-scale immiserisation that was taking place, ironically enough, as the rural poor were being displaced and dispossessed, and delivered Indira Gandhi to power in 1971 with a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Significantly, Gupta (1998) argues, her campaign was addressed to "the people," a strategy that established the poor as a critical audience to be catered to on the electoral plane.

There is an aspect of Frankel's (1978) commentary on the 1971 campaign and elections that Gupta (1998) hones in on as a critical moment in the formulation of development policy, and that is essential to grasp in order to understand subsequent middle-class resentment of the plebiscitary power of the poor, and of "squatters" in particular. Whereas previously development was pursued as growth with redistribution, what Indira Gandhi succeeded in doing was to

> decouple the two goals, pursuing standard policies of providing incentives for industrial growth, on the one hand, and thinly disguised welfare programmes whose main goal was redistribution, on the other. (Gupta 1998: 69)

That is, not only was welfare of the poor hived off from the pursuit of growth of the national economy, but populism also made the provision (or at least the promise) of welfare programmes a critical player in the calculation of electoral prospects.

The decoupling of growth and redistribution that Gupta (1998) highlights in his analysis of development suggests that what populism did was to create the conditions where the welfare of the poor was perceived to be not only distinct from economic growth but also as a siphoning off of the wealth created by middle-class effort. Populism, thus, had the effect of constituting the poor as the other against whom the interests of the middle class were to be protected. By separating growth from redistribution, it created the conditions for fuelling middle-class hostility towards the poor, who were seen as encroaching on the economic growth and prosperity of the middle class (Fernandes 2006; Gooptu 2011; Sur 2017). It also created the condition for elite frustration with politicians, whose electoral prospects were obtained, as Gupta (1998) points out, by addressing the welfare needs of their poorer constituents, which the elite came to see as "pandering" to vote blocs.

Particularly galling to the middle class is the fact that the poor to whom the politicians pandered not only fed off, that is, encroached upon, the growth created by middle-class industry, but also that they were actually encroachers. The demographic shift that the green revolution precipitated, where millions of the rural poor migrated toward cities in search of a living, resulted in growing numbers of slum dwellers. In 1971, Bombay's slum population was approximately one and a quarter million, about 20% of the city's population (Patel 2003: 20–21), by 1976 around 41% of the city's population lived in slums (Swaminathan 2003: 82), and in contemporary Mumbai, it is commonly held that 60% of the population lives in slums or on pavements. It was the votes of this population of encroachers that politicians had to harness in order to secure their election, by promising to improve their living conditions.

However, because they were encroachers, as Partha Chatterjee (1998) has pointed out, they are not treated as part of civil society, whose welfare is a matter of entitlement. Rather, the relationship between politicians and the urban poor was one of negotiation, where public goods such as a water connection or toilets became highly valued currency in the transaction of electoral democracy. What we see therefore, is that while populism created the

conditions where the welfare of the poor became politically important, it did so in the wake of the demographic shift precipitated by the green revolution that created squatters out of peasant bodies.

Departing steadily from fields all across India in the wake of the green revolution, these peasant bodies became pavement and slum dwellers, encroachers on the land. In Mumbai, between 1971 and 1981, migration accounted for 47% of the increase in the city's population (Patel 2003: 21). While there is no way of accounting what proportion of these migrants made their journey to the city as a consequence of the changes in tenurial relations in agriculture wrought by the green revolution, it is possible to make a safe bet that most of the new migrants were those cast off of the land by the green revolution. For, in the following decade, migration constituted only 17% of the increase in the city's population (Patel 2003: 21).

War of attrition: Most of the families, spoken to for this paper, had lived in Byculla, often on the same street, for over 20—often 30—years, surviving countless demolitions. While many of the older residents claimed that when they first settled in Byculla, in the 1960s, there were no pavement dwellings, by 1970, newspaper reports of demolitions conducted in the area indicate that most of the streets in the area were flanked by pavement dwellings. On Souter Street in Byculla, where Aziza lived, 120 houses were reportedly torn down, and around the corner on Water Street, where Nargis lived, a report of entire rows of houses being demolished indicates that the pavements in the area were already home to many (*Times of India* 1970: 1). A *Times of India* (1970) report on the newly constituted "slum improvement cell" of the Bombay municipality reveals that while slum dwellers might benefit from the improving ministrations of the unit, pavement dwellers were not so lucky and were being targeted for a war of attrition that the municipality was resolved to win. That it was a war that was being waged was made quite clear in the language used in the report of the demolitions.

> Like the mythical monster hydra, hutments along Bombay's roads are hard to extirpate. This is the exasperating experience of the newly-created municipal slum improvement cell … 2,200 huts put up on pavements along 95 roads had been removed but 75 per cent of them are to be seen again … What is more, the more hutments are muffed out, the more they proliferate in other places …
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> The municipal demolition squads… are assisted by the police (each squad has a sub-inspector and five policemen) lest there be an attack on the demolition workers … Detection squads have also been set up in all the 17 municipal wards, one in each ward. Their job is to inform the demolition squads of huts put up in any place in the city and suburbs.
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> The official was confident that with adequate staff, shanties which mar the beauty of the city's well-paved roads would be eventually eradicated. (*Times of India* 1970: 1)

The reporter goes on to reveal that what really infuriated the municipal squads was the truculence of pavement dwellers, who through their continued occupation of the pavements even after their huts had been destroyed, living on top of the rubble, clearly refused to be "disheartened" or cowed down:

> Demolition of their shacks has not disheartened the shanty-dwellers of Water Street who manage to live in the same place by putting up tent-like shelter along the pavements, using sack cloth and blankets. Water Street is one of the roads on which the demolition squad removed entire rows of huts a few days ago. (*Times of India* 1970: 1)

For the pavement dwellers, sitting atop the rubble that once was their home was not an expression of defiance, but of having no other choice. Where *were* they supposed to go? The state hoped, through the violence that it inflicted on these populations, that they would be able to beat them back to the village. But for the poor, that was not an option. To live was to sit atop the rubble, not to leave. As Jamila and others relayed, they would sit atop the site of their demolished homes, along with their children and whatever possessions they were able to retrieve for days, and then slowly begin the process of rebuilding.

The city's authorities were clearly of the opinion that employing a "strong hand" would not only send a message to the pavement dwellers, but also to the hordes reputedly amassing at the city's borders. An article published in 2003 written by B G Deshmukh, who was the municipal commissioner of Bombay in the 1970s, reveals as much:

> When I was working as Secretary to Chief Minister Vasantrao Naik in the early 70s, the question of people pouring into Bombay from outside had already engaged our attention. No doubt the Shiv Sena was exploiting this issue for a foothold in the city and, therefore, any agitation against outsiders coming into Bombay has assumed the controversy of Marathi versus non-Marathi people. But we in Government were more concerned with (the) rapid spread of slums and pressure on the civic infrastructure. If I remember right, we were examining whether legally it was possible to impose some reasonable restrictions on this immigration. But then when the news leaked out, there was an uproar especially from constitutional luminaries… My thrust is that you cannot stop immigration into the city legally or by imposing restrictions, however reasonable they might be. But this inflow can be controlled and reduced, if no authorised residential structures, hutments or slums are allowed to come up at all. There should be a very strict, if not harsh, implementation of this policy. Anybody would think twice before he or she knows that there is no place to stay or even sleep in the open on the footpath … (Deshmukh 2003: 8).

The "strong hand," however, did little to staunch the flow of migrants in search of a living. What we do learn from Deshmukh's object lesson, and as the urban poor no doubt learned as well, is that the poor had run out of place. The green revolution had cast the small farmer and landless agricultural labourer off the land and the cities offered them no accommodation. The tenurial insecurities that were the outcome of the rural differentiation that occurred and were amplified as a result of the green revolution continued to reverberate through the frequent demolitions of the shelters that they propped up in the city (Araghi 2000). Politically too they had little traction, for as squatters, they were reviled by the middle class and toyed with by politicians, who only brought them into the political fold when elections occurred by dangling access to public goods. Physically and politically out of place, these cast out bodies of the poor constituted the boundaries of citizenship, for their ability to have their lives registered by the social order and recognised as part of the body politic was extremely tenuous.

Conclusions

To do justice to the stories of the pavement dwellers requires that they be restored to history, to the making of history. Any other treatment of the stories would only serve to perpetuate

the injustices that erode the lives narrated in these stories. It is only by historicising these individual stories of de-peasantisation that we are able to avoid reproducing the terms by which they are "othered" and cast out. For the tenuousness of their claims to belong to the body politic emerges out of a long process of othering, that is, of suppressing the historical relationships that have produced them as pavement dwellers. This is how the history of capitalist modernity represents itself, by othering destitution.

Through a process of being untethered from the land and its history, pavement dwellers become materially and politically insecure, and as the "other," are subject to sustained violence. The vital political significance of this epistemological stance, of establishing a relationship between their precariously balanced encampments on the side of the road and the unfolding of broad world historical processes, is starkly revealed in the case of the pavement dwellers. The invisibility of these relations lies at the heart of their crisis of belonging—providing "confirmation" that they are "matter out of place" (Douglas 1964/2005: 44). What this paper establishes by bringing the urban and the rural into the same analytical frame is that they are a doubly dispossessed population: materially so through processes of de-peasantisation that leave them placeless, and politically so through a suppression of the historical relations that tie their lives to the history of the land. They are, thus, relegated to the hinterland of history.

NOTES

1 One index of this double failure is the level of malnutrition that existed: "According to estimates made by the Indian Planning Commission in 1960/61—after the first decade of planning—fifty to sixty percent of the rural population, or approximately 211 million people, could not afford minimum levels of consumption, calculated primarily in terms of caloric intake necessary to avoid the onset of malnutrition" (Frankel 1978: 4).

2 These rural-to-urban migrations are part of a much longer historical trajectory of hunger-fuelled migration from Bihar and neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, that reaches back to the colonial period and continues today, and that has brought manual labour not only to the streets of Bombay and the fields of Punjab, but as indentured labour to colonial plantations in the Caribbean, Africa and South-east Asia (Masselos 1995; Ludden 1999).

3 "Jhoola Maidan" is a corruption of "Julaha Maidan" (weavers' park), and references the history of the locality. This area was home to the labour that worked in the many textile mills that had appeared at the turn of the 20th century and provided the engine of the city's economic growth and prosperity.

4 In his analysis of the social ordering of deaths that took place during the 1995 heatwave in Chicago, Eric Klinenberg (2001) revealed the "epistemological sovereignty" wielded by biological explanations of death, and the displacement of sociological analyses of the conditions of death.

5 See Klinenberg's (2001) excellent analysis of the body's evidentiary status and the discursive ways in which it can be rendered silent on the social context in which it materialises.

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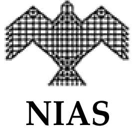

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