A MARKET FOR DEAD THINGS: THE GUJARI BAZAAR AND THE POLITICS OF URBAN REFORMATION IN AHMEDABAD

A THESIS
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family,
for their continual support and guidance. Perhaps,
it wasn’t all for the birds...
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGA – Ahmedabad (or Ahmed Shah) Gujari Association
AMC – Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation
AUD – Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority
CEPT – Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology
EPC – Environmental Planning Collaborative
HCP – Hasmukh C. Patel Design, Planning and Management Pvt. Ltd.
IIMA – Indian Institute of Management – Ahmedabad
IIT Roorkee – Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee
JNNURM – Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
NID – National Institute of Design
PAA – Project Affected Area
PIL – Public Interest Litigation
RFDP – River Front Development Group
RFP – Request for Proposal
RTI – Right to Information
SPV – Special Purpose Vehicle
SRFDCL – Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited
SRFDP – Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the inclusion of the Gujari Bazaar into Ahmedabad’s (located in Gujarat, India) most ambitious development project to-date, the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project (SRFDP), and maps the contentious politics of reformation engendered by that process. By early 2013, when I began my fieldwork, this modernist riverfront renewal initiative had displaced all of the self-established settlements along the Sabarmati River’s narrow banks, an estimated 13,000 homes. Estimates of evicted homes remain highly contentious. Many scholars cite estimates around 14,000 (Desai 2012: 49). During an interview, the current Director of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation Guruprasad Mohapatra estimated the number of evictions around 13,000. Meanwhile the official estimate done by a Mumbai-based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) estimated 12,000. Despite the number of homes, others have estimated that these structures housed close to 40,000 families (Mathur 2012: 64). Some were relocated, but the spike in evictions produced an uncertain and skeptical environment for remaining activities. The Gujari Bazaar, a weekly “informal” market often claimed to be 600-years old, operated on the eastern bank of the river near Ahmedabad’s “Old City” area (located adjacent to Ellis Bridge and around the Mahalaxmi Mandir) throughout these evictions. Fearing removal, representatives of the Gujari Bazaar, including external actors, filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to secure its future. By 2012, the PIL was settled and the Gujarat Supreme Court ordered that the market be included and given a new space. Early 2013 was a time of greater security for the market. My field research lasted for four months from February to May. Research methods were largely ethnographic, including participant observation and in-depth field interviews.
In order to make a compelling case in the PIL, the representatives of the Gujari Bazaar argued that it was a piece of historical value and part of Ahmedabad’s heritage. The new spatial context of the market and its “thematic programing,” however, suggests contesting visions of “heritage,” and provokes the question, “what does heritage mean in the simultaneous preservation and consumption of the past and the perception of cultural authenticity in light of a substantial modernist reimagining of city space? Contesting notions of heritage supplied the terms for both Gujari’s inclusion in and co-option by the SRFDP.

Despite a larger discourse of inclusion and social justice, the process of Gujari’s absorption in the SRFDP was not internally consistent or harmonious. The uncertain environment of forced evictions and legal contest produced a new set of contesting relations within the market. The PIL painted a simplistic and ultimately romantic narrative of dominance and resistance that sanitized these internal politics. It placed the Ahmedabad/Ahmed Shah Gujari Association (AGA), especially its president Nafis, as the representative of all market vendors. However, during my fieldwork several of my informants rumored that Nafis was corrupt and the AGA’s management incompetent. Conceptualizing rumor as a social register of dissent, I explore the social life of these rumors and argue that Gujari is in a state of fundamental political realignment and negotiating its own modernity. Rumor is a subterranean cultural architecture that provides the basis for an internal discourse on representation, power, and community morality. In addition, this complex internal discourse reveals the collective agency of market vendors and effaces the simplistic narratives of a united struggle for inclusion and suggests that the PIL process was an effort driven by elite actors unintentionally harnessing the power to speak on the market’s behalf.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Conducting a thesis is an extremely humbling experience. For me, it came by acknowledging that it cannot be done alone. I would like to extend my first gesture of gratitude to my informants who extended their kindness and friendship and dedicated a considerable amount of their time to answering my many questions, including Amit, Sureshbhai, Bharatbhai, and Satyam. I must thank my thesis advisor and mentor Dr. Nihal Perera who, over numerous cups of coffee, meetings, and phone calls around the world, provided constant feedback, critique and encouragement. His mentorship and guidance in this process has been as much personal as academic. Without him I may have never developed an interest in India. Certainly, without the CapAsia study abroad program (which he organizes) I would have never encountered Ahmedabad, the developments along the Sabarmati River and the unique perspective towards urban transformation which privileges the agency of ordinary people. His influence cannot be overstated.

This thesis would never have been possible without the help, friendship, guidance and encouragement of the Gagdekars. Without their enormous generosity, my time in Ahmedabad and my fieldwork at the Gujari Bazaar would be lost in the dark. I am eternally indebted to them. I am not sure how I will ever repay their kindness, but I will spend a lifetime trying. I must thank Kushal Batunge, Tarun Gagdekar, and Abhisheik Indrekar who helped me considerably with translating and photographing.

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No acknowledgement would be complete without those who provided insight and forced me to question my approach and myself. Particularly, I want to thank Dr. GN Devy and Dakxin Chhara. In a similar vein, I must acknowledge the enormous help of Jim Nyce, Jeff Brackett, Amit Baishya, Nick Kawa, William Gould, and Ornit Shani. Finally, I want to thank my family, to whom this endeavor is dedicated. Your influence cannot be expressed in enough words. You were always there for me when I needed, despite my, at times, emotional and geographic distance. To my parents: Mom, from you I inherited the ability to talk to anyone. This has served me well in research animated by interview. Dad, you were my first teacher and impressed on me the need to find one’s own way. I thank you and love you for your dedication to this principle, even when it has, at times, sent me away from you. Your value to me has only grown over time. I am excited to explore new phases of our relationship.

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A MARKET FOR DEAD THINGS: THE GUJARI BAZAAR AND THE POLITICS OF URBAN REFORMATION IN AHMEDABAD

by

Jeffrey M. Lauer
“Every city realizes too late to start caring about their architectural heritage...by the time you start caring about it, it's too late to save it.”

- Greg Girard

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I first learned about the Gujari Bazaar in Ahmedabad, India, in 2011 as a participant on a south-Asia based study abroad called CapAsia. Given my workload, I was unable to pay close attention to the events taking place there. Nevertheless, I visited this 600-year old “informal” market several times. I was struck by its proximity to the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project (SRFDP) and grew curious and concerned about its future. After returning home, I began researching the Sabarmati Project in its entirety. This proved a far more ambitious task than I anticipated. So, in an effort to focus, the project that ultimately became this thesis sought to ethnographically capture the market’s social nuance.

By late 2011, the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited (SRFDCL), acting through the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), had relocated or displaced many of the existing self-established settlements (or “slums”) along the Sabarmati River. Representatives of the Gujari Bazaar and some external actors filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) with the Gujarat Supreme Court in order to challenge any potential displacement and gain more control over its fate. The court decided that Gujari must be included in the Sabarmati Project and its vendors given adequate space to conduct their trade. The market was given a new place for 1,200 vendors roughly 550 meters (approximately 2,000 feet) south of the current
market. This thesis follows that process of inclusion. Gujari is significant because it is the most substantial, previously existing activity along the riverfront to be brought into the fold of the SRFDP.

Gujari’s journey of inclusion, however, was forked. Gaining legal tenure and inclusion was only the beginning of more nuanced and grounded social processes of “making sense” within the market itself. For instance, how extant socio-spatial practices will be reformed to fit the Sabarmati Project’s envisaged moral and aesthetic image remains a lingering question. My fieldwork occurred after the PIL decision and subsequent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Ahmedabad/Ahmed Shah Gujari Association (AGA)—the representative association for vendors—and the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). Although a time of security for Gujari, this highly politicized context produced a new set of contesting relations between the AGA and some Gujari vendors; negotiations that appeared to resist the AGA and critique its leadership.

Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative research approach. I conducted participant observations, spending almost every Sunday for nearly five months at Gujari recording the day’s events, observations, and interviews. I met with government officials, private consultants, scholars, journalists, market vendors and buyers as well as social activists. For example, I interviewed the chief architect of the Sabarmati Project and its current manager at Hasmukh C. Patel Design, Planning and Management Pvt. Ltd. (HCP), the professor who initially assisted in filing the PIL on Gujari’s behalf, and journalists and scholars who have written about the Sabarmati Project or Gujari Bazaar. Most importantly, I interviewed market vendors themselves (more on this in the
next section). In this, I explored their different life-journeys in an attempt to better understand how Gujari functions as a social space, how vendors view their place within the Gujari community, and its place in relation to the Sabarmati Project. My first stint of fieldwork occurred between January and February 2011. The second occurred between February and June 2013. Most of the field data, including most of the observations and all interviews, came from this second stint of fieldwork.

As this project evolved, I became more interested in understanding Gujari’s redevelopment from the market’s vantage point. Ethnographic methods were required to capture this cultural life-world in its rich and finely granulated detail. There is no consensus within ethnographic literature for conducting and documenting interviews in the field. Many record interview sessions with audio or video devices. I, on the other hand, did not take any video or audio recordings of my interviews. I took this approach whether I was interviewing government officials or informants in the market. To me, it made no difference. The reason I decided against it was because, in my experience, conducting interviews with film equipment or audio devices obscures the human connections at the heart of research relationships. When people know they are being recorded, they tend to tense up, stumble for just the right word or remain so cautious that one gains little, if any, substance. Furthermore, it can invite more skepticism towards your project as informants worry about the ways in which recordings will be used. Perhaps, they fear retaliation from certain individuals. For these reasons alone I avoided audio or video recording. Instead, all of my interviews, observations and reflections were captured by hand in two 80-page bright orange reporter-style Rhodia notebooks.

Key Informants
I was able to develop close and constructive research relationships with three young men who quickly became valuable informants. I met all of them serendipitously. I believe our chance meetings couched our relationships in a casual atmosphere that made the exchange of information comfortable and opened up the otherwise “restricted” avenues of rumor and speculation, which I discuss in Chapter 4. I would like to paint impossibly brief biographical sketches of my key informants.

My closest informant was a twenty-three year old charpie (wooden beds) vendor named Satyam [see Figure 1.1]. He is a very thin and handsome man who speaks with a high-pitched raspy voice. He was the first person I ever spoke with at the market. As I wandered around on my first day—translator in tow—we found an old man, Ayyob Khan, kneeling at work on a charpie. I attempted conversation, but he quickly stopped me and suggested I speak with his neighbor. He brought over Satyam. As two gregarious and energetic young men, our relationship was easy and comfortable. As a third generation vendor, he fondly remembers helping his father sell charpies as a seven year old, while doing homework for his courses the following morning. Satyam, like other vendors, does not rely exclusively on his income from Gujari. As he grew into adolescence, he did not take interest in tailoring, like his father, or anything related to textiles for that matter. Instead, he became a mechanic and went to work for a shop across town.

Satyam has a unique perspective on the dynamics of the market because he used to live in a home within eyesight of Gujari, just on the other side of the fort wall dating from the 15th century. This grants him a rare familiarity with the site of investigation. Furthermore, his family (grandmother, uncle and nephew) still live in a small hutment attached to the side of the Mahalaxmi Mandir, opposite the AGA office. His long established and deep connection to the
Gujari site cannot be overstated. Additionally, he is Nafisbhai’s half nephew granting him an intimate and personal (if, however, problematic) view of this important personality.

Figure 1.1: Satyam at this vendor stall in Gujari. Photo: Kushal Batunge 2013.

A second key informant was one of three “brothers.” When I first met them, they jokingly introduced themselves as, “big brother,” “middle brother,” and “little brother.” All of them sell books, magazines, textbooks, diaries, etc. If it’s made of paper “the brothers” either have it or know where to find it. As second-generation vendors, they have been selling at Gujari for over fifteen years. Their father used to sell textbooks to schools around Ahmedabad. Eventually, he opened a shop called “Pravin Traders” in Khanpur (a neighborhood of the Old City). His three sons inherited this business as well as his tenacity for hulling hundreds of pounds of books to the riverfront every Sunday, laying down a mat, putting up an umbrella for shade and vending all day long. It took several weeks before I discovered that these three “brothers” are not actually biological brothers.
Figure 1.2: Suresh bhai at his vendor stall in Gujari. Photo: Kushal Batunge 2013.

I developed a close relationship with the “older” and “middle” brother, Suresh and Bharat, respectively. Suresh was probably in his early to mid-forties. Bharat is twenty-eight years old and the eldest of three siblings. Extroverted by nature, he is jovial and always busy ensuring everyone around is in high spirits. Throughout our relationship, both were extremely generous with their time and made sure I was as comfortable as possible. Unlike my other informants, Suresh, Bharat and I were able to communicate in English (even if broken slightly). This added another dimension to our relationship because it felt more raw, genuine, and direct.
A third key informant was Amit. He is a young, thin man with a seemingly permanent smile that punctuated an otherwise serious face covered in coarse facial hair. His perspective was always fresh, provocative and critical [see Figure 1.3]. He was born in a self-established home underneath Ellis Bridge. As a matter of fact, I saw his house the first time I visited the market in 2011, of course I did not meet Amit until much later and by that time his home had been demolished. Amit sells antiques that he rescues from the many rivers and water bodies surrounding Ahmedabad. Some of the things Amit salvages are enormously impressive: statues of Buddha, piles of rudraksha beads (prayer beads), broken cell phones, etc. He is a second-generation vendor and has been selling at Gujari anywhere between ten to fifteen years. He now lives in Naroda with his wife and two children, but they still come to “hang out” underneath Ellis Bridge with his mother, father, and friends. In fact, every time I went to visit the site of Gujari any day other than Sunday, Amit was there.

Figure 1.3: Amit at his vendor stall located underneath Ellis Bridge close to the home he grew up in. Photo: Kushal Batunje 2013.
The first time I met him I was walking the length of the unfinished lower promenade. Up ahead of me was a parked auto-rickshaw with three men gathered around. As I approached them, they seemed a bit weary of my presence but I quickly made conversation in order to diffuse any tension. Anyway, I was curious of their use of the space. They were smoking hash. I was surprised that the activity was so out in the open, in this context it seemed subversive. As we started talking, Amit mentioned that his surname is Dataniya. I figured he was a member of a highly discriminated Denotified Tribe (DNT)\(^1\) known as Waghri or Devipujak. I knew that many of the non-Muslim vendors at Gujari were members of DNT communities, so I asked Amit whether he sold at Gujari. A big smile flashed across his face and he quickly shook his head up and down. That next Sunday I stopped by Amit’s shop and our relationship only began to grow.

I am still convinced that Amit was somewhat amused by my presence, or, maybe confused as to why I was interviewing him. I admit that I could have been much more upfront and clear with Amit about my intentions. Because of this, I suspect he was justifiably confused, but no less cautious with his illuminating perspective. Nevertheless, he was incredibly open about his life and I am extremely grateful. His honesty and friendship are still special to me.\(^{[1]}\)

**Limitations**

The analytical approach taken in this thesis poses several limitations. The type of data used in this study (from observations and interviews) required varying degrees of translation and critical interpretation.

\(^1\) The British Raj “notified” or labeled all nomadic and semi-nomadic communities as “criminal tribes” following the adoption of the *Criminal Tribes Act of 1857*. Amit belongs one such notified community known as Waghri (which has become a pejorative and offensive term) or Devipujak. However, six years after independence, the Indian government repealed it with the *Criminal Tribes Act of 1952*. Creating 192 De-Notified Communities across India. Despite these efforts, these ethnic communities face severe police harassment and brutality, not to mention tremendous social stigmatization and prejudice.
The first limitation is my physical body; it mediated my experience. My body no doubt influenced the responses I received from my informants. The observable characteristics of my body—the identities one is forced to wear, or what Linda Martin Alcoff calls “visible identities” (2006), such as my race and gender—marked me as an outsider even before I spoke. I am a white, American, middle-class male. While these facts posed significant challenges of understanding across considerable social and cultural differences, I nevertheless believe this ‘outsider-ness’ in one respect granted me greater access to my informants. However, it created at least one significant limitation. There is one glaring absence in this study: that of women. It is often reported that forty percent of Gujarati vendors are unaffiliated, independent women. I cannot confirm or deny these statistics, but during my fieldwork it was evident that women make up a significant portion of vendors, many of which vend pots and pans, steel containers or clothing. All of these trades occur in close proximity to one another, thus most of these women vendors were positioned roughly adjacent to one another on the southern end of the market.
On several occasions, I attempted to interview some of these women vendors. Yet I required translators and all of them were men. On one occasion I entered the market with two translators and myself. Thus, three men approached a woman sitting alone, knelt down beside her and tried to ask probing questions about her business and life. Looking back I should not have been surprised by her reaction. Many replied, “I can’t talk. I am busy with my customers.” Usually there was no one at her stall and very few people around. I accepted her rejection at face value. I picked up my things and walked away. Only later did I realize something deeper might have motivated her need for distance.
After this happened a few more times it was evident these women were uncomfortable, perhaps even intimidated by a group of young men hulking over them asking questions when they were probably already skeptical of my intentions. I became convinced of this later on towards the end of my fieldwork. While interviewing Leela [see Figure 1.4], a female laborer at Gujari, several of the other female laborers gathered around us and requested that I take their names and information as well, not just Leela’s. Only later did I learn that they assumed I was a
representative of the government or international aid agency collecting information to provide money and relief.

Several weeks into my fieldwork, my informants solidified into a close and open group of men and a few women. By and large, however, I never overcame the hurdle to approach women in the market. I was not able to interview any female vendors. This study deserves considerable scrutiny for its absence of their perspective. Without it I did not have time to adequately investigate the differential effects of gender at Gujari. In short, this study admittedly contains a gender bias. During my research I only interviewed two women on a regular basis, Leela and Bhavna, but by and large this study does not address questions of gender.

Another major limitation to this study is language. Even the casual observer of India is quick to discover the diversity and centrality of language and dialect. However, I was not open to this rich and vibrant worldview because I am not fluent in Gujarati or Hindi. Consequently, I required the assistance of translators in order to conduct direct interviews. This barrier of direct communication necessitated considerable interpretation from my translators. As a result, throughout this study I hesitate to directly quote from my informants, because I would in effect be quoting my translators and run the risk of falsely attributing it to my informants. Instead quotes in this study indicate responses to my questions, but should not be taken as verbatim quotations (unless otherwise noted) but paraphrased interpretations of what I received from my trusted translators. Due to these interpretations I remain conservative in over-analyzing or over-theorizing from any one informant’s response, although I may take one response as representative of a common refrain. By and large what was translated to me came in a very blunt and abbreviated fashion. As a result theorizing from these verbal sketches would be disingenuous to my informants’ subtle and poignant perspectives.
Site of Investigation

I would like to briefly address the site of investigation and how I analytically discriminated the Gujari Bazaar in an unenclosed space of vending activity. In fact, one of the most intriguing things I discovered during my fieldwork was the absence of any boundaries spatially demarcating Gujari. If any existed, I was not able to determine them. The market had a strong identity wedded to a particular location, but any spatial boundaries implied were flexible, porous, and ambiguous.

First, there are no “formal” indicators of the market, such as a physical gateway or signage and certainly little consensus among vendors of where Gujari began and ended. However, to enter the market one must walk a long, slightly declining ramp [see Figure 1.5]. The passage way is narrow and crowded on market days. Vendors crowd around the entrance, leaving only eight feet of clearance for people coming and going. During my fieldwork, I took this entrance as the symbolic gateway into the market. In fact, I meet several people there, like translators or friends, before leaving or entering the market. It severed as a convenient landmark and place to congregate; however, I rarely noticed locals doing the same.
Furthermore, Gujari’s boundaries are complicated by the fact that other vending activity occurs around it, bleeding into its activities. On market days, the vending of Gujari and that surrounding the Masjid of Ahmed Shah and Bhadra Fort in the Old City become indistinguishable. “Non-Gujari” activity (vending at the margins) certainly increases on Sundays, perhaps hijacking the traffic of Gujari. During my time in the field (early 2013), the Royal Maidan between Bhadra Fort and Teen Darwaza (Gate of Three Arches) was under construction.
in order to return the space to the way it looked in the 17th century. Had I more time in the field, I may have been able to ascertain which vendors in the vicinity identified with Gujari and which did not. This self-affiliation would have no doubt revealed a more complex spatiality. However, without doing this, I took the vending activity that appeared exclusively on Sundays around Ellis Bridge and the Mahalaxmi Mandir as the boundaries of the market. To be sure, there are no easy ways to map such as space, because doing so would be necessarily exclusive. Furthermore, no mapping would be complete and would most likely not take into account wholesale vendors like Bhavna Sisodiya.

I first met Bhavna while trying to speak to someone at the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), which is just opposite the market. As I was pulling on the flimsy door, a raspy voice shouted over in Hindi that they were closed. I went over to her with my translators and asked if I could speak with her. She always seemed to have a smile on her face and enjoyed speaking with me. She was jovial and gregarious and quick with jokes, even making fun of my translators and I. Bhavna was a wholesaler to Gujari vendors. In Ahmedabad (as in many cities in India), steel, copperware, and/or utensil vendors travel to different communities on laries (carts). Often clients cannot pay with money, so it is culturally acceptable to barter clothes. Bhavna has connections with many of these vendors and they bring her their accumulated clothes. She repairs, washes, and bundles them. Then, early Sunday morning she brings about five to eight bundles to SEWA’s front porch to sell to Gujari vendors in bulk.

Bhavna is not a register vendor and she does not see herself as a part of the Gujari

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2 This was done according to ancient travel accounts written by Islamic and early European explores who came to Ahmedabad during the Mughal period—a time when conventional narratives claim the city experienced its “high period” (cf. Citation). A further study of this plan would have surely have yielded promising insights to Chapter 3 in this thesis, which deals with the relationship between tradition/heritage and modernity.

3 The PIL defined Gujari by the number of registered vendors (1,200). However, this definition excludes unregistered multi-generational vendors operating within the marketplace itself, like Amit.
Bazaar. This could be partly due to her temperament, because she is not a member of SEWA either, even though she vends on their stoop. But it could also have to do with the fact that she does not come every Sunday, but only when she has enough product and she typically leaves around 12:00 or 1:00pm. Bhavna’s case animates the ambiguous and porous boundaries of Gujari quite well. She does not identify as a member, but is, nevertheless, a critical component of its success. I am sure Bhavna’s case is not unique.

The interconnectivity of social spaces also makes determining Gujari much more difficult. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

One thing that I cannot overlook is that it [the Gujari Bazaar] occurs on Sunday, which is a ‘holiday’ (word often used in India, referring to a weekend or day-off) for most people. The balance between leisure and work can be found both within the market as down time and lunch provide interesting opportunities for congregation, relaxation, joking, sharing and expression. But this balance is most visibly expressed on the margins of the market space or immediate vicinity. The most fascinating example of a social space in service of leisure is just in front of the market in a colonial-era park named Victoria Garden. The space offers solitude away from the congestion of the market and the traffic of Ellis Bridge, all of which has been compressed due to the construction of the Bus Rapid Transit corridor and the Royal Maidan. It also offers thick shade from an otherwise relentless Ahmedabadi sun in the grueling summer months of April and May. The space is actually quite small and difficult to enter (at least it was for me) because the dense row of stalls and people flocking to the market conceals its one entrance. When I finally found it, it was quick to see this as a leisure space. A row of young men were seated on an iron railing about three feet off the ground observing or perhaps policing the new admits to the space. They did not notice me much as they were busy observing the young women. The most striking thing about Victoria Garden on Sunday morning is the stark, near clinical separation between men located at the front and women located at the back around the shaded gazebo, where I sit writing these observations (Fieldnotes March 3, 2013).

Unfortunately, I was unable to spend more time observing Victoria Garden, because I was more focused on the market itself, but this example demonstrates the interconnectivity of space and activity that complicates any basis for defining the Gujari bazaar, much like Bhavna’s case did earlier.
Additionally, the market is not the same size in successive weeks. Rather, it undulates. According to Nafis, there are 1,200 vendors that set up every Sunday. However, on a rather full market day (comparatively speaking with the other days I had observed), I counted approximately 750-800 vendors. This swelling and shrinking produces an impressive flexibility among vendors. Moreover, many at Gujari are multi-generational vendors. For instance, Amit, Bharatbhai, Sureshbhai, Satyam, and Moksood are all third generation. This tradition has inscribed itself within the social fabric of Gujari, but this does not mean that there are not negotiations.

Typically, vendors set up in the same location every Sunday with minor variations. But, on some occasions vendors do not show up to vend. One Sunday “the brothers” (Sureshbhai, Bharatbhai, and Kishorlal) did not show up. When I saw them the following Sunday they explained that they were observing a religious festival that required walking to their ancestral village. A similar instance happened with Moksood, the *chaiwalla* towards the front of the

![Figure 1.6: Moksood at his chai stand located along the declining ramp into Gujari. Photo: Kushal Batunge 2013.](image)
market [see Figure 1.6]. He was absent for three weeks. When he finally returned, he said he was attending to his father’s death and funeral, which occupied several weeks.

In both cases, adjacent vendors who desired more space or visibility (and therefore traffic) occupied their spaces. Monsoor took over “the brothers” position, which allowed him to lie out all of his books. This was the first time I have ever seen Monsoor’s stall organized. Usually, his books were still kept in their bundles and strewn around his tarp. Similarly, the sugarcane juice vendor took over the place that Moksood usually occupied. This allowed them more seating to accommodate more people.

However, when “the brothers” and Moksood returned they set up in their traditional spaces and the others returned to theirs. Here, we can see the flexibility as well as the inscription inherent in the spatial organization of the market place. On non-market days, this area is used by fruit vendors, rickshaw mechanics, barbers, kids playing around the construction materials, and the occasional group of young men smoking a bidi (tobacco rolled in a tobacco leaf) or chillum of hashish. Furthermore, the area still draws people for religious observance due the popular Mahalaxmi Mandir and the complex of three temples across from it, the largest of which is a shrine to Hanuman (the monkey-god). These examples show the space’s multiplicity of meanings.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into four chapters based on … contributes to an expanding literature that investigates how major urban renewal schemes meet the ground and questions how global imaginations and ambitions engage with everyday practices and local aspirations of ordinary people negotiating between.
In Chapter 2: A Literature Review, I situate the start of the Gujari Bazaar’s encounter with the Sabarmati Project in the discourse of “informality.” My review demonstrates that “informality” is a culturally embedded concept that produces susceptibility to redevelopment. By applying radically new aesthetic norms, spaces are Othered. Similarly, Asher Ghertner argues that New Delhi’s move towards a world-class city is characterized as a “rule by aesthetics” (2011a), which argues that redevelopment is based on non-conformity to a desired aesthetic, i.e. an envisaged built and social form. Ananya Roy’s (2009) work suggests the fulcrum of this discourse rests upon cultural notions of “legitimacy.” Labeling a space as “informal” delegitimizes its place within a larger middle-class reimagining of city space, thus justifying its reformation.

In Chapter 3: The Politics of Urban Reformation: Public Interest Litigation and Heritage, I provide a context by briefly exploring the history of Ahmedabad and proposals for the Sabarmati River. Furthermore, I detail the PIL process and how it played out in the case of the Gujari Bazaar. The PIL was decided in 2012 and the market was included in the Sabarmati Project and provided a new space just south of its current location. Central to its inclusion was an argument that the market contained significant historical value and is part of the city’s identity and heritage. Thus, in chapter 3, I focus on “heritage,” asking the question: What does heritage mean in the simultaneous preservation and consumption of the past and the perception of cultural authenticity in light of a massive modernist reimagining of city space?

Chapter 4: A Market for Corruption: Rumor and the Arts of Resistance is the most ethnographically rich account in this thesis. In this chapter, I explore rumors of the AGA’s incompetence and Nafis’ corruption. When seen in relation to Gujari’s absorption in the Sabarmati Project’s modernist development regime, rumors constitute market vendors as a
political community through which they are asserting their own political aspirations. They are both critiquing internal forces and locating their own middle-class aspirations within the Sabarmati Project.

In Chapter 5: Conclusion: A Market for Dead Things, I conclude by demonstrating that the Gujari Bazaar was simultaneously co-opted and included in the Sabarmati Project’s modernizing enterprise, more effectively stage-managing its redesign and relocation. The Sabarmati Project’s planners displaced a perceived “informality” by spatially re-contextualizing it and repositioning it within a thematic program, effectively rebranding the Gujari Bazaar as a “Heritage Bazaar” in order to create a cultural spectacle for the purpose of tourism and entertainment.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mapping the Landscape

Recent transformations in Indian cities have been dramatic and influenced by a number of complex processes and actors. Their urban geographies have been rhetorically reimagined, discursively redefined and physically reshaped in the past few decades accompanied by new aggressive regimes of governance (cf. Mathur 2012; Desai 2012) often characterized as “entrepreneurial urbanism,” which is nurtured in a discourse of “taming” or “discipling” the “unruly” or “chaotic” city (cf. Roy 2009). The typical response to this perceived “crisis” by planners and policy makers has been to initiate massive efforts of urban renewal bent on urban beautification and social upliftment. The high watermark of these efforts has been the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) that was inaugurated in 2005. JNNURM provides a comprehensive framework for urban renewal and considerable funding for the rehabilitation of residents in the so-called “Economically Weaker Sections” (EWS). Some have argued that these urban renewal initiatives have led to an “aesthetization of space” fitting a “global” or “world-class city” image (cf. Ghertner 2011) displacing urban residents deemed improper or unfit (cf. Mathur 2012) with the intention of freeing up prime real estate land for global investment and further development—a process David Harvey (2003: 158) calls “accumulation by dispossession”—ultimately producing “geographies of exclusion” (Harvey 2006).

This strand of literature employs a structural approach to urban change through the veil of ‘globalization’ and ‘global flows’ and analyzes the mechanisms, operations and discourses involved. However, others have tried to stress actors or actor groups. Partha Chatterjee’s thesis
(2004: 131-147) claims that the reshaping of public space and subsequent displacements are consequences of making Indian cities bourgeois. Here the dominate conclusion argues the new Indian middle class and urban elites play the central role, influencing public officials who set about cleansing and reclaiming public space for privileged consumption. Parallel to this, in the American context, is Neil Smith’s (1996) idea of the “revanchist city,” where urban elites make concerted efforts to “re-conquer” and control public space. Where Smith’s urbanization is disciplinary, Chatterjee’s is a by-product of postcolonial class formation. Although these perspectives seem to highlight actors they are deceptively structural approaches. From this vantage point, contemporary urbanization is a means to gentrify and refurbish space and urban development is reduced to a simplistic arena where class antagonisms play out. Furthermore, at the same time they try to emphasize actors they homogenize them into groups. If agency enters the conceptual frame at all it does not penetrate any further than social formations such as class and typically does not acknowledge the autonomy and creativity of individuals.

While concepts such as “class,” “elite,” and “ordinary” serve useful purposes for analytical inquiry, using them runs the risk of homogenization. There is a scholarly danger here. Just because individuals may be affected by the same circumstances of urbanization or modernization, does not mean they respond the same ways. This is where affect and response become more significant. Emphasis on individual agency illuminates the profound diversity and human complexity at the heart of social phenomenon. Although the literature above offers considerable insight into contemporary urban transformation in India, accepting it outright introduces a limitation. As Hansen (2011) points out specific to Chatterjee’s thesis, “…this overarching narrative of postcolonial class formation must be complicated by a more layered
story…and…and more socially nuanced dimensions.” The present work can be seen, in some sense, as an attempt to take up Hansen’s call.

While the literature cited above draws on powerful operations in the urbanization of India they entrench a view that either westernization is simply happening to Asia or that the only actors of urban transformation are the rising middle class, whereas the poor remain inert and passive subjects to larger structures or global systems (cf. Perera 2012). While some of these arguments are partially valid in the case of the Gujari Bazaar, I attempt to take a different approach in an effort to foreground agency and view urbanization from a “more socially nuanced” perspective. In this, one of my main motivations rests on the conviction that ordinary people are active participants in the production and inscription of urban space (cf. Elsheshtawy 2008, Perera 2009a; Perera 2009b).

The Discourse of Informality and the Politicization of Heritage

Urban renewal schemes in South Asia (and elsewhere in the global south) have gained considerable traction using the term “informal.” The informality discourse has become a common rationale for urban renewal schemes. Therefore, it is necessary to explore and critique what this term might mean and provide a context of its contemporary use. This section explores the apparent contradiction in labeling Gujari as both a site of informality—worthy of reformation—and heritage—worthy of preservation.

The term typically refers to urban spaces and social arrangements lacking structure, legal ownership, political representation and recorded business transactions. The ubiquity of large-scale urban renewal schemes—and their accompanying discourses—has reduced the tolerance

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4 Thomas Blom Hansen’s plenary speech at the 40th Annual Conference on South Asia at Madison, Wisconsin, October 18, 2011
for such spaces and practices in India today and many come under threat of demolition and redevelopment. Their residents are often displaced, relocated, or in some instances “rehabilitated.” In this view, the “proper” trajectory is from informal to formal, which is often a move from temporality to permanence, state evasion to state sanction and unregistered means of economic exchange to licensed and taxable business transactions, all of which requires an adherence to middle-class social values, behavior, and aesthetics.

Paradoxically, one of the most striking emergences in India’s social and spatial landscape has been the proliferation of informal spaces of habitation and work (Roy and AlSayyad 2004; Neuwirth 2000). This has caused some authors to suggest that such informality is the future of urbanization itself (Neuwirth 2000; Davis 2003; 2006). Such prognostications are not of interest here, but they represent a growing optimism for informality in “worlding cities.” In this view, the growth of self-established settlements (slums), areas of street vending, begging and bazaars represent forms of insurgent practice which are contributing a significant, if albeit, officially unacknowledged role in India’s economic success. As early as the 1970s economists started referring to the “informal sector” to vaguely describe sporadic migrations in the labor market and unprotected casual employment. After the infamous 1972 report of the International Labor Organization (ILO), a dualistic framework between formal/informal has haunted the discourse. However, by the 1990s, the discourse became much more complicated and involved vastly different approaches.

“Discussing urban informality, Nezar AlSayyad notes that Cathy Rakowski made a fundamental division between two approaches in her analysis of the urban informality debates, the structuralist approach and the legalist approach” (Desai 2008: 197). According to her, the structuralist approach (which some may trace back to the critiques of developmental discourse in
the 1960s) argued that informality was a consequence of “the uneven nature of capitalist development” (AlSayyad 2004: 12). The legalist approach, however, foregrounded the dichotomy between legality and illegality in order to better understand and distinguish informal practices. Still heavily influential in the legalistic approach are scholars advocating neoliberalism, like Hernando de Soto (1989). Writing in the context of South America, de Soto established a framework that, as Nezer AlSyyad points out, “…attributed the rise of the informality phenomenon to excessive state regulations” (AlSayyad 2004: 13). Here, property rights and less government intrusion are the paths to progress.

I take some issues with both sides of this debate. First, the framework is removed from everyday experience and approaches informality from the analytical distance of global structures. Second, in doing so, it entrenches a false dichotomy between formal/informal underwriting it with another: legal/illegal. Furthermore, either side of the debate rarely considers the space of informality—conceptualizing it as part of the built environment, i.e. as an urban form or typology. On this point, Rahul Mehrotra (2008: 205-218) provides us with a new way of seeing informality. He argues that Indian cities exist in the negotiation between two different worlds, what he calls the “static and kinetic cities.” The “static city” is roughly equated with elite culture and the “kinetic city” with a subaltern one. Although this vision retraces some of the contours of the formal/informal debate—including its dichotomous framework—Mehrotra shows that kinetic urbanism is not strictly the domain of the powerless in the same way that the formal/informal discourse does with its undercurrent of legal/illegal. He illustrates this point by showing that government buildings, religious festivals, and middle-class houses all employ temporary (kinetic) fixtures and/or structures. Although I am not interested in picking up Mehrotra’s

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5 The recent Maha Kumbh Mela is a prime example of this in which a veritable temporary city was built to accommodate the world’s largest gathering, around 100 million people.
framework here, his argument situates informality as an urban typology by showing that it is a
culture of building in South Asia. A similar point can be found in Ananya Roy, whose work,
along with Mehrotra, allows us to escape the rigid dichotomy.

Ananya Roy…writes of a ‘complex continuum of legality and illegality, where squatter
settlements formed through land invasion and self-help housing can exist alongside upscale
informal subdivisions formed through legal ownership and market transaction but in violation of
land use regulations.’ Both forms of housing, she argues, ‘are informal but embody very different
concretizations of legitimacy (Desai 2008: 198).

Rather than retracing the formal/informal, Roy’s thesis (2009) displaces the categories by
suggesting that informality is the “idiom of urbanization in India.” This idiom provides a useful
and effective means of economic transaction and social negotiation in South Asia and is a
strategy used by governments in order to bring about spaces that fit a “world class” image and
ordinary citizens to carve out space for their daily activities.

Within this conceptualization, Roy introduces the notion of legitimacy. When we
approach informality from this vantage point it is exposed as discursively constructed, rather
than ontologically valid. That is, it refers less to something ‘out there,’ than to a subjective ‘way
of seeing’ borne out by changing aesthetic aspirations. That is, “legitimacy” is culturally defined
and determined, not an objective state. This socially produced aesthetic has promoted individual
aspirations for private property, consumerism, and spaces that are ordered and clean, like indoor
shopping malls—perhaps the symbol of modernity in India today.

Thus, the renewal of informal space has more to do with its perceived legitimacy (or
illegitimacy) in an urban context of “world class” aesthetics. Asher Ghertner’s work (2011a;
2011b) has brilliantly argued that Delhi’s move towards a “world-class city” has come on the
back of a legal constellation he calls the “rule by aesthetics,” where the look of a community (or
building) is enough to justify its demolition and redevelopment.

“…the making of world-class cities is not instantiated solely (or even primarily) through an
economic calculus of cost–benefit or through a juridical redefinition of property; rather, it also takes
shape through the dissemination of a compelling vision of the future – what I will here call a world-class aesthetic – and the cultivation of a popular desire for such a future – the making of world-class subjects” (Ghertner 2011a: 281).

Taking a cue from Ghertner’s work, informality is a discursive formation that marks out a particular urban typology as “incompatible” with an envisaged urban aesthetic—which Paratha Chatterjee would say is bourgeois—by sneaking in images of spatial chaos and social anarchy. In this way, informality discursively constructs susceptibility to redevelopment. The term informality is vague enough to circumscribe an enormous swath of urban geography offering little opportunity to escape it. However, if legitimacy is so central to the informality discourse, as I argued above, then we should find discourse in resistance to it that provides the means to establish legitimacy. But, what would such a discourse look like?

With the rise of large urban renewal schemes across India and their aggressive (often heavy-handed) implementation, the discourse of heritage has become a compelling tactic to challenge informality and establish cultural legitimacy. For some informal spaces, such as slums, establishing legitimacy through the discourse of heritage is often not an option. However, for other actives such as bazaars (like the case presented here), making a case for its cultural value is viable.

I have explored above the apparent contradiction in labeling Gujari as both a site of informality—worthy of reformation—and heritage—worthy of preservation. However, when placed within the context of India’s urban ambitions following the liberalization of its economy in the 1990s, informality and heritage go hand-in-hand—the previous as an Otherizing discourse and the latter a counter narrative. The agenda of urban reformation took on Westernized norms of city planning and heavily references global practices—what Ananya Roy calls “models in circulation” (2011). This discourse began Otherizing spaces not fitting an envisaged urban look and feel, such as slums, traditional bazaars, and street vending, as “informal” and began
portraying them as sites of social chaos, anarchy, filth, and congestion. Such characterizations marked informality as an impediment to urban success in the global competition for economic and social investment (cf. Desai 2012), justifying the renewal schemes that Otherized them in the first place. However, the rapid proliferation of informal spaces became too much to handle in piecemeal and on a case-to-case basis. So, a new legal and aesthetic framework was devised to more effectively manage and “reform” informal settlements and traditional bazaars, bringing cities in greater line with predetermined urban imaginaries. Asher Ghertner calls this legal constellation the “rule by aesthetics” (2011a), which provides a highly effective means to evict sites not fitting a certain aesthetic convention. However, as Ghertner notes, this is not applied wholesale, but strategically. This discourse is vague enough to circumscribe an enormous portion of India’s urban landscape, essentially framing them within a discourse that justifies nothing less than their complete reform. This discourse locks them in place. Modifying Roy slightly, this informality discourse delegitimizes informality in the way of progress. However, heritage has become an effective way to gain incorporation in modernizing schemes. This has ultimately politicized heritage as a tactic of resistance to the erasure of urban renewal projects.
A City’s New Image

In 2007, construction began on the most ambitious development project to-date in Ahmedabad, India (located in the northwestern state of Gujarat). Called the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project (SRFDP), this inner-urban riverfront redevelopment initiative is unique in its scale and vision. First proposed in 1998, it aims to completely redevelop a 10.5 to 12 kilometer (6.5-7.45 mile) section of the Sabarmati River that bifurcates Ahmedabad. It seeks to transform Sabarmati’s marginal and leftover riverbanks into two-tier waterfront promenades; something reminiscent of the hardscape around Paris’ Seine, London’s Thames or Seoul’s Cheonggyecheon. By reclaiming about 200 hectares (0.8 square miles) of land, the project will function as a central development and infrastructure corridor activated with new public facilities, social activities and commercial landuses. “It [the SRFDP project] is an ambitious multidimensional environmental improvement, social uplift and urban rejuvenation project” (Patel 2011a: 1). Its goals are clearly expressed by Gujarat’s Chief Minister Narendra Modi:

The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project will transform Ahmedabad’s historic but neglected riverfront into a vibrant and vital focus for the city. The project consists of several linked initiatives aimed at addressing the many environmental and social problems of the riverfront (http://www.sabarmatiriverfront.com/1/about-us).

Under the most recent plan, the project’s 200 reclaimed hectares will be broken down into the following landuses: twenty-two percent for roads, fourteen percent for gardens, eighteen percent for open space, fourteen percent for public purpose, thirteen percent for the lower
promenade, fourteen and a half percent for multi-use commercial that will be sold off to finance the project, and four and a half percent for sports venues. The final activities proposed along this riverfront are unprecedented at this scale in the city and the intended aesthetic of the project is sleek, high modernist and uniform. In this vision, Ahmedabad’s riverfront becomes a new spine of post-colonial modernity; offering a cohesive look and feel that intends to spill over and remake other localities in its image. In 2011, a special issue of METROPOLIS magazine appeared with the title Indian Cities: Managing Urban Growth, in which Bimal Patel (architect of the project) wrote an article called “Riverfront Renewal” (Patel 2011b: 95-105). In this rare instance, where the project is characterized as “renewal,” Patel states:

The Sabarmati Riverfront Project by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation is a good example of changing the character of a city from the centre [sic] outwards in a way that is environmentally and socially responsible [emphasis my own] (ibid: 104).

Here, the project is envisioned as a new spatial archetype for Ahmedabad’s future development, both reorienting growth towards the city center and injecting a new aesthetic intended to change its surroundings “…from the centre outwards…” (ibid). Meanwhile, the official advertisements for the project proclaim it as the new face of a globalizing Ahmedabad. The project has been hailed as progressive and highly innovative by several national and international organizations. For instance, it has received the Prime Minster’s National Award for Excellence in Urban Planning and Design in 2003, the Housing and Urban Development Corporation’s Award for Innovative Infrastructure Development 2012, and was ranked among KPMG’s 100 Most Innovative Global Infrastructure Projects 2012.

Despite these accolades, as early as 2008, issues of public engagement, governance, and displacement had been raised regarding the project’s implementation (Desai 2008; Mathur 2011; 6

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6 In fact, during my first meeting with HCP in February 2011, all of these examples were cited as precedent studies for the Sabarmati Riverfront project.
Local residents, vendors, academics, and social activists began to scrutinize the project’s implementation more closely and expressed highly skeptical attitudes towards its official rhetoric. This eventually led to the filing of a Public Interest Litigation in 2011 to avoid the potential displacement of the Gujari Bazaar, a weekly “informal” market that operates on the eastern bank of the Sabarmati River adjacent to Ellis Bridge and the Mahalaxmi Mandir. I will discuss this project and resistance to it later in this chapter, but first I would like to provide the historical context of Ahmedabad and the conceptual genealogy of the Sabarmati Project.

**Brief History of Ahmedabad and Changes in Spatial Form**

Ahmedabad is the fifth largest city and seventh largest metropolitan region in India. It is the largest city in Gujarat, and although not its political capital, Ahmedabad remains its financial and cultural epicenter. In 1960, the colonial state of Bombay was split in two, forming modern-day Maharashtra and Gujarat. Today, Gandhinagar—located about twenty kilometers (or thirteen miles) north of Ahmedabad—is Gujarat’s capital city, originally constructed in the 1970s as a planned town. Today, many commentators assert that Gujarat is the most developed state in India. An impressive economic development record and increasing percentages of foreign direct (FDI) investment from non-resident Indians (NRIs) living abroad may testify to this assertion. With its heavy-handed emphasis on the development of physical infrastructure and amenities, Ahmedabad has transformed considerably in the past few decades through the intervention of major urban renewal and infrastructure projects, like the SRFDP, which lies at the center of this thesis. Despite this relatively recent change, Ahmedabad has a rich history.
In 1411 CE, Sultan Ahmed Shah established a strategic citadel on the banks of the Sabarmati River. This provincial stronghold became the capital of the infant Gujarat Sultanate, which had recently split from a waning power in Delhi. This decision indicates the importance of this region, both militarily and commercially in its early years.

He [Ahmed Shah] was ambitious to be the founder of a great line of kings and he wanted to replace the old Hindu capital of Anhilvad Patan, 70 miles to the north, with a capital of his own making (Gillion 1968: 14).

From 1411 to 1458 CE, the city consisted of few structures, because it was predominately a military garrison. The earliest structures were the citadel and Jumma Masjid (Friday Mosque). Along this axis—of what is today Gandhi Road—were a series of significant gateways and social spaces. The axis originates at Bhadra Fort, along the Royal Madian, through Teen Darwaza (or Three Gates) past the Jumma Masjid and continues to the main social and commercial space known as Manek Chowk. This corridor served as the center of life and was the main organizing principle in early Ahmedabad. This axis is rather common in India of cities influenced by Islam. This corridor connects administrative/military, sacred spaces, and public/commercial spaces.

Ahmedabad was also planned along the lines of an ancient Hindu ritual cosmography (Raychaudhuri 2001: 680). The city grew in this fashion for several decades, forming a unique housing and community form called *pols*. Residential and commercial areas developed roughly equidistant from the Jumma Masjid, perhaps within comfortable walking distance, because the growth appears to pivot in a half circle around Friday Mosque with the Sabarmati River forming a hard boundary to the west. These two apparent trends continue: growth occurring along the “Citadel-Jumma Masjid” axis, eventually enveloping both.

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7 Gandhinagar is named after the Gujarati-born social reformer Mohandas K. Gandhi, or Mahatma Gandhi—the suffix “nagar” means community or settlement. This was one of the first planned towns in India along with Bhubaneswar and Chandigarh.
The next significant spatial transformation does not come till 1458 CE when Ahmed Shah’s grandson, Mahmud Begada, constructed a fortified wall six miles in circumference. The defenses consisted of twelve gates and over 6,000 battlements. Everything contained within this fort wall forms what is today called the “Old City.” During this time, the city expands around the citadel and within the fortified wall, but there is some evidence of building outside the fortified wall. This mostly consisted of puras, which are essentially suburbs or pleasure gardens for the wealthy or religious sects of early Ahmedabad (Yagnik & Sheth 2011: 23-6). The time following the Gujarat Sultanate was filled with conflict and the city is wrought by conquest. The Sultanate period ends in 1575 CE when the Mughal Empire captures the city, thus beginning a period of Mughal reign. Emperor Akbar led the Mughal Empire at this time.

The most significant spatial developments during the Mughal period happened within the Old City. Ahmedabad saw the continued growth and fortification of the pols. A pol is a group of houses organized around a central well with few entrance points to allow for better protection. These enclosed neighborhoods are still very evident today, and are denoted by large gateways and guardhouses. Many contain secret passageways between pols. Eventually, the Mughal Empire fell to the Maratha Empire in 1707. The next significant period of Ahmedabad’s historical and spatial history begins with British imperial expeditions in India.

By this time, Ahmedabad had grown into a significant economic center. According to Kenneth Gillion:

“"This Asian city was not dependent on the whims of a despotic court, nor was it peopled by quivering subjects, too ridden by magical beliefs and divided by caste to show any corporate spirit or economic rationality. It was a city of mixed type, more than a political capital and more than an

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8 The fort wall was partially demolished in the early 20th century under controversy. In fact, in 1915 Scottish planner Patrick Geddes was invited to Ahmedabad to pass judgment on whether or not the wall should be removed or not. Surprisingly, Geddes opposed removing the wall. In general, his opinions disappointed colonial officials wherever he was invited. He advocated “conservative surgery.” So, despite the removal of the wall, the spatial form of the “Old City” remains distinct and the circulation pattern into and out of the Old City remain similar to what they were with the wall.
The economic success of Ahmedabad had partly to do with its location as a crossroads of overland trade connecting both the silk and spice routes, but it also had to do with inter-caste cooperation and the enterprising ambition of a rising indigenous elite. In the early part of the twentieth century, Ahmedabad was referred to as “the Manchester of the East” due to its large investment in the production of textiles. The so-called “father of modern Ahmedabad” Ranchhodlal Chhotalal built the first textile mill in 1861. World War I dramatically opened the domestic market and by 1900 Ahmedabad was one of the largest textile producing centers in India, second only to Bombay. These mills employed tens of thousands of workers across the city and the division of labor was determined by religious affiliation and caste. For instance, Jains acted primarily as financiers, high caste Hindus managed day-to-day operations within the factory, Muslims acted as highly skilled weavers, and lower-caste Hindus were general laborers (Gillion 1968: 89-91). Due to their increasing wealth, many of these indigenous elites became enormously influential in city affairs, even during colonial rule. They had direct influence over the Ahmedabad Municipality (a forerunner to the modern-day AMC), which provided for the planning and development of the city.

As early as 1817, however, the British annexed Ahmedabad. Direct administrative control did not begin until 1858 when it was brought under the Bombay Presidency following the “Sepoy Munity” (aka: The First War of Independence). As Spodek notes, “in comparison with other large cities, British rule rested lightly on Ahmedabad. Of the largest cities of India, it was the most Indian, the least influenced by British rule” (Spodek 2011: 28). By this time the city of
Ahmedabad had increased in density, pressing up against the city walls and had spilled over creating an eastern outer area where most textile mills where located. Perhaps the most significant change in Ahmedabad’s urban morphology came at the dawn of the twentieth century. By 1919, the colonial administration started developing the opposite side of the Sabarmati River after constructing the first crossing called Ellis Bridge. The construction of Ellis Bridge allowed, for the first time in Ahmedabad’s history, a continuous connection between both sides of the Sabarmati River. Subsequently it conditioned urban expansion opposite the historic core. The British began to establish administrative and residential centers on the west bank, such as the Town Hall, M.J. Library and V.S. Hospital. These buildings are situated along an abstract and geometric street system.

“The growth now is characterized by a total reversal of the fabric due to the introduction of British planning norms. It is now fragmented owing to buildings set in their individual compounds” (Vastu-Shilpa Foundation, 2002: 92).

The Western planning norms were based on different values of how to build. British planning, at that time, was comprehensive in scope and based on abstract principles. It led to individual lots and campus-type designs of major institutions. Due to the high concentration of British administrative offices on the west bank, a large residential pattern began to grow largely following this distinct character. Initially, these began as residences for colonial officials in the bungalow style, but soon became hybridized as residential areas grew around the educational institutions (i.e. Gujarat College).

The residential styles of the eastern and western outer areas began to form a sharp contrast during British interventions. This was not necessarily a consequence of them but

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9 Gillion 1968: 81. He received the title Rao Bahadur (or Brave Prince) for his service to Ahmedabad and his country. He is also known affectionately today as “Rancho.” Later he became the first Indian president of the Ahmedabad Municipality.
coincided with them. In the seventeenth century, Agra or Delhi were fully realized, Ahmedabad had been perhaps the most beautiful city in India. Many Islamic and European travellers wrote about Ahmedabad’s splendor. But by the British arrived:

“The fine, tree lined streets had been narrowed to winding thoroughfares, choked by the traffic of pack animals, horses, and pedestrians. Gardens, which had once been open to the public, had long since reverted to nature, and the fountains were dry. The dust was bad as ever—after all, the Emperor Jahangir had called Ahmedabad “Gardabad” (dust city)—and the mud in the rainy season was worse since there was now more obstruction to the surface drainage of the city. This water-supply and drainage had been dangerously neglected” (Gillion 1968: 106).

Add on top of this a rapidly industrializing city and Ahmedabad had quickly fallen into disrepair. Furthermore, the booming textile industry required a high number of workers, many of which located, with their families, in dense pockets around the textile mills. A housing style soon formed called chawls, which are large ‘tenement-like’ buildings with many dwelling units, all sharing a common kitchen. Furthermore, because of over-crowding, poor sanitary conditions, and lack of infrastructure this housing style degenerated over a few decades into “slum-like” conditions.

According to K.M. Kulkarni, this contrast has continued into the contemporary period. Socio-economic status remains a major distinction across the Sabarmati River. The eastern outer area as a whole is of relatively low socioeconomic status (Kulkarni 2011: 132). Many primary schools teach in non-English medium. However, the western area is of relatively high socio-economic status. It has a greater intensity of service industries, stronger educational institutions, including at the collegiate level—all of which are on the western side—and a higher circulation of newspaper of financial, global and political news (ibid: 131-132). I cite the development of disparity across the Sabarmati River as the most relevant spatial transformation for the following discussion in this chapter. It marks a natural barrier that has continued to socially, politically and

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10 There were two bridges built across the Sabarmati River, however, both were called Ellis Bridge. The first, made of wood, was built in 1870, but was destroyed by a flood in 1875. The second, built in steel, was completed in 1892.
economically segments the city. But it must be noted that the Sabarmati does not divide; rather it provides a convenient condition for people to segment themselves. Of course social, spatial, and economic factors predated the construction of the western outer area, but many were further entrenched and reinforced by uneven development.

**Attention Towards the River**

The Sabarmati River, throughout the development history highlighted above, has been the subject of much attention. The earliest proposal for the Sabarmati River this author could find was made in 1894, which was shortly after the second Ellis Bridge was completed (1892) and corresponds to increasing industrial ambitions. Does this signify a shifting attitude towards the river? A few indigenous elites\(^{11}\) gathered and proposed to dredge the river in order to make it a navigable route to the Arabian Sea through the Gulf of Khambhat (Gillion 1968: 99). British authorities quickly dismissed this proposal and another would not emerge again for over sixty years.

The proposal to dredge the Sabarmati River is provocative, but it is easy to see why it was dismissed when one consider the physical features of the river. The Sabarmati is naturally non-perennial. Meaning, it is rain-fed by the monsoons and remains flowing, on average, three months out of the year. This alone would be enough to make the Sabarmati River impractical as a commercial route to the sea. However, it is also too shallow and narrow in many places to bare substantial traffic.

The Sabarmati River would not capture much attention again until 1961. French

\(^{11}\) This collection of businessmen included: Ranchhodlal Chhotalal as president of the Ahmedabad Municipality, Mansukhbhai Bhagubhai, Shambooprasad Bechardas, Lalbhai Dalpatbhai, Motilal Amratlal, Sarabhai Maganbhai, and Girdharlal Amritlal Desai (Gillion 1968: 99).
Architect Bernhard Kohn, who was living in Ahmedabad, had joined Balkrishna V. Doshi to run the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT). Kohn proposed the first modern development of the riverfront that included “the development of parkways, playgrounds, gardens, river-drive, [a] boat club, civic centre [sic], restaurants, government offices and high density housing on the banks of the river between the Gandhi Bridge and the Sadar Bridge” (Shah 1981: 20). In addition, his proposal “called for the reclamation of about 30 hectares of land, of which part was to be sold or leased for commercial development” (ECP 1998: 2). To answer Kirtee Shah’s article profiling Kohn’s proposal, “Will it remain a blueprint?:” yes!  

Although the current Sabarmati Project differs, there is little conceptual difference from Kohn’s proposal. In recent years, since the Sabarmati Project, Kohn has more or less disavowed his influence on the current scheme, claiming that he conceived an environmentally sensitive and socially responsible project that would act as an “ecological valley” (Jha 2013). Compared to the Sabarmati Project, Kohn’s proposal was small in scope and, according to Shah, failed to attract the “political will, a committed and far-sighted leadership, a desire to invest in the future of the city and an entrepreneurship to see and exploit the potential that is the Sabarmati” (Shah 1981: 21).

The Sabarmati’s source resides in the Aravalli Hills in Rajasthan (probably one of the oldest geological formations in India) and its mouth lies in the Gulf of Kambhat, a total distance of 371 kilometers. Throughout its course, the Sabarmati passes by some of the most water-deprived regions in the country. As a result, the Sabarmati River became highly attractive as a means to irrigate massive swaths of rural land in the 1970s. Several major dams were constructed. There are three dams located in the northeast region of Gujarat: the Hathmati Dam

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12 To the knowledge of this author, this article—in the now defunct monthly journal *Amdavad*—is the only remaining profile of any detail of Kohn’s proposal for the Sabarmati Riverfront.
completed in 1971), located on the Hathmati River; the Guhai Dam located on a major tributary to the Hathmati River; and Dharoi Dam (completed in 1976), located on the Sabarmati River in Gujarat, just south of its border with Rajasthan. The Dharoi Dam has a moderate retention capacity and typically discharges water only three or four times a year. A dam called Vasna Barrage located just south of Ahmedabad, also completed in 1976, was designed to collect this overflow and discharge. However, due to the scarcity of rain in the region this never worked according to plan. Most of this water was diverted for irrigation or evaporated before it reached Vasna Barrage. Therefore, the stretch of the Sabarmati River that runs though Ahmedabad remained dry almost year round. Apart from the three rivers mentioned above, there are two others of significance in Gujarat—the Saraswati River in the northwest and Narmada River in the south. The Sadar Sarovar Dam was constructed on the Narmada River in 1979. This project was highly controversial due to the large number of displacements caused by its massive retention capacity. However, a short time later an irrigation canal was constructed. On its way to Surasta and Kutch, this canal crosses the Sabarmati River just north of Ahmedabad. This allowed for renewed interest in developing the Sabarmati Riverfront. Prior to these developments, in which Kohn made his proposal, did not adequately address how to fill the Sabarmati River, effectively making it a year round attraction. The next benchmark in the genealogy of the SRFDP came in 1976 in the form of a voluntary organization of planners, architects and decision makers called the River Front Development Group (RFDG) that attempted to take Kohn’s proposal even further. It should be noted that one prominent member of this group was Hasmukh Patel, the father of Bimal Patel, the chief architect of the current SRFDP. Although “[t]here is no fundamental conceptual difference between [Khon’s] scheme…” the RFDG “…[advocated] a more pragmatic, incremental approach” (Shah 1981: 21). For instance, it produced the first
technical survey for the riverfront’s development and provided a much more financially feasible scheme. However, this proposal met the same fate as Kohn’s. It was shelved. The next proposal for the Sabarmati River came in 1997 and 1998 by way of a Feasibility Report conducted at CEPT University and the EPC proposal, respectively, upon which the current SRFDP is based. The next section goes into greater detail about the formation of this project.

**Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project, Displacement, and Resistance**

Ahmedabad’s contemporary urban vision began to crystalize following the liberalization of India’s economy in the 1990s. Ambitions grew considerably after the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) became a solvent enterprise, receiving a AA credit rating in 1994. Keshav Varma, then Municipal Commissioner, is widely credited with this turnaround. Given its ability to secure bonds at lower interest rates, the city initiated ambitious development projects, including Chimanlal Girdharlal (or CG) Road. One of the lead designers on this project was Dr. Bimal Patel. In my interview with him, Patel spoke fondly of his time working on CG Road, although he mentioned that he did this work pro bono. It offers a clinical separation of transportation modes, particularly between automobiles and pedestrians, but also between parking and street activity. The design included “a service lane, paid parking, sidewalks, cutouts for sidewalk vendors, street lighting, crosswalks, and more” (Patel & Kansal 2011: 5). This design was “an alien concept at the time.” Patel recalled having to “hustle” his designs to decision makers around the city. Despite its “anlien-ness,” today CG Road is one of the most desirable commercial locations in the city. The economic development opportunity unleashed by the CG Road project led Keshav Varma and Suendra Patel (no relation to Bimal Patel), who was

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13 Interview with Dr. Bimal Patel in his office, April 26, 2013.
the chairman of the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA), to recruit Bimal Patel
to reevaluate the potential for a development scheme along the Sabarmati River.

Emerging from this context, the Environmental Planning Collaborative—a non-profit
founded and headed by Bimal Patel—published the Sabarmati Project for the Special Purpose
Vehicle (SPV) SRFDCL in May 1998. It proposed to redevelop an approximately 10.5-12 km
stretch of the Sabarmati River that bisects Ahmedabad into a two-tier concrete promenade filled
with public assets and private investment opportunities. It is important to mention that the
SRFDP is the first riverfront redevelopment project in India and already serving as a “best
practice” to other cities across the country. Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee (IIT Roorkee)
and the National Hydrological Planning Council both vetted the initial environmental impact
assessment. And, under the administration of IP Gautam, construction began in 2007. However
construction along the river fell into controversy due to the high number of dense self-established
settlements (or slums) that had located there over several decades. Guruprasad Mohapatra
(successor to IP Gautam) said these slums were “the only stumbling block”\(^{14}\) and their residents,
some of whom had lived there for generations, were seen as annoying obstacles to progress.
These self-established communities on the Sabarmati were defined as “slums” and determined
illegal, but their presence on the riverfront were intimately linked to the often volatile history of
twentieth century Ahmedabad.

During the latter part of the twentieth century, Ahmedabad faced several social and
economic traumas, including labor protests, communal riots, and the collapse of the once vibrant
textile industry.\(^{15}\) Ahmedabad’s textile mills had been experiencing decline since the 1970s, but

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\(^{14}\) Interview with AMC Commissioner Guruprasad Mohapatra in his office, April 27, 2013.
\(^{15}\) Ornit Shani 2007, Ipsita Chatterjee 2013, William Gould 2012, and Yagnik & Sheth 2011 have all discussed
Ahmedabad’s history of communal riots and its subsequent displacements. For further discussion of Ahmedabad’s
decaying textile mill industry see
the 1990s brought India’s “opening up” to the global capitalist economy and by “the mid/late 1990s…more than 50 mills [had] shut down” (Desai 2008: 261). This put an enormous segment of the population out of work. Furthermore, in 2002, Ahmedabad witnessed the worst communal riots since the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. On February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express train carrying several Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya was torched in the rail yard of Godhra, Gujarat, killing 59 passengers, many of whom were woman and children. The following three days were some of the most deadly and barbaric riots in the history of independent India. Official estimates place the number of deaths at 822, but unofficial surveys suggest a number closer to 2,000 as a result of “post-Godhra” violence, many of whom were Muslim. Many have described this riot as sanctioned by the state government, labeling them a pogrom, yet there have been few convictions of state officials. The outbreak of violence, especially the serial burning of Muslim homes in particular led to mass displacement. It is estimated that 140,000 people fled to temporary relief camps for shelter and aid following the riots. About 114,00 of the 140,000 forced to flee to relief camps were Muslim (Spodek 2011: 256). It is unclear how many of those displaced by riots or unemployment required temporary relief and how many were permanently displaced. However, due to these and other vagaries of Ahmedabad’s real estate and housing market, marginal and leftover spaces, like the Sabarmati Riverbanks, became increasingly attractive to those with few options, such as displaced residents, incoming migrants, and self-builders. While many argue the root of Ahmedabad’s acute socio-spatial exclusions lay in the Gujarat riots of 2002 (Chatterjee 2008), acting as the

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16 For more on this case see: Yagnik and Sheth 2011: 281-6; Spodek 2011: 248-270
17 For more on these displacement see: Desai 2008
18 In Dr. Bimal Patel’s doctoral dissertation The Space of Property Capital in Ahmedabad (1995) he traces the history Ahmedabad’s property stock especially during the 1980s and 90s when there was a conjuncture of both the declining, and subsequent collapse, of Ahmedabad’s textile industry and India’s “opening up” to global financial and trade markets. This volatility produced great housing shortages across the city.
proverbial “last nail in the coffin.” I resist retracing such narratives. The socio-spatial exclusions in Ahmedabad exist across communal lines and find their roots in deeper, albeit more subtle forms of difference such as caste and class (cf. Kulkarni 2011; Hansen 2011; Shani 2007). While the intersection of Hindutva politics and the contemporary urbanization in Ahmedabad is significant in its own right (see Desai 2008; Mahadevia 2007) it is not the focus of this thesis. I sidestep such commentaries and merely link traumatic events like the collapse of the textile industry, the lack of housing, and communal riots to the rise of self-established settlements across the city (Desai 2008: 134).

However, early on in its construction, it was clear that the Sabarmati Project would displace self-established settlements on the riverfront. According to the “official” survey (conducted by a Mumbai based NGO)\textsuperscript{19} concluded that by 2000 at least 14,550 (ibid: 172) families resided on the Sabarmati River; however, an “unofficial” survey estimated a number closer to 40,000 (Mathur 2012: 65).\textsuperscript{20} The initial plan from 1998 determined there were only 4,400 households in the Project Affected Area (PAA) and it proposed rehabilitating 6,000 “slum dwellers” on the riverfront (cf. EPC 1998: 43-5), however, as time passed and substantive construction began it was decided to relocate them (Desai 2008; 2012). By 2010, heavy construction had increased in scope and it became necessary to clear the riverfront of self-established settlements within the PAA. Thus, displacements began in earnest starting in mid-2011, although some relocation had occurred as early as 2009 (Desai 2011: 49). For these

\textsuperscript{19} See Desai 2008: 159.
\textsuperscript{20} The have been several surveys done to determine the number of households on the riverfront. One was conducted in 1991 by the Ahmedabad Study Action Group (ASAG). Another was the 2000 survey mentioned above and another conducted by EPC itself. The disparity between the “official” and unofficial surveys resulted from different methodologies. The unofficial survey used an unconventional but highly creative approach designed to more accurately estimate the number of families, because it is common that many families live in one house. To capture this they counted the number of gas cookers within each household resulting in an estimate of 38,000 families on the riverfront.
residents, relocation and rehabilitation schemes were prepared with eight separate resettlement sites dispersed across the city. According to an interview I conducted with Ahmedabad’s Municipal Commissioner, Guruprasad Mohapatra, out of 13,000 applications for rehabilitation only 12,000 were approved. Of these, 9,000 were actually resettled. The remaining 3,000 had either not applied or were unable to furnish the necessary documents or initial payments (see Desai 2008 for further discussion on slum resettlement). By the time I returned to Ahmedabad to conduct fieldwork in 2013, all self-established settlements had been displaced from the riverfront. These displacements produced an uncertain and insecure atmosphere for all other activities still operating along the Sabarmati River, especially those within the SRD’s PAA. One such activity is the Gujari Bazaar—a weekly “informal” market currently operating along the Sabarmati River.

The Gujari Bazaar and Public Interest Litigation

“Gujari,” which may be translated from Gujarati as “departed,” “dead,” or “passed,” refers in this context to “antiques,” “things that have past away” or “gone out of style” (hence: the title of this thesis). “Bazaar,” which means, “market,” is a term broadly used across South, East and Southeast Asia. Today, this market occurs every Sunday (Gujari is also known as Ravivari or “Sunday Market”) on a small piece of open land along the Sabarmati River, adjacent to Ellis Bridge and around the Mahalaxmi Mandir (temple to the goddess Laxmi, the goddess of

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21 Approval was based on arbitrary eligibility criteria, principle of which was a 1976 “cut-off date.” This criteria established a minimum basis for habitation be met, i.e. residents had to have lived on the riverfront prior to 1976 otherwise there were no longer eligible for resettlement; furthermore they had to furnish proof of this fact to AMC or SRFDCL authorities.

22 Resettlement and Rehabilitation due to the SRFDP was elaborate. According to this rehabilitation scheme, an approved family had to furnish 5,000 rupees in order to secure and move into a home. After this, each family was required to pay 60,000 rupees in monthly installments.

23 For instance the Gujarati word gujar may be translated as “dead.”
wealth and prosperity).

Figure 3.1: View from the top of Ellis Bridge looking down into the market. Shows the dense activity on market days and the organization of the market by trade with distinct lanes. Photo: Tarun Gagdekar 2013.

Figure 3.2: The Mahalaxmi Mandir, which is a major landmark for the Gujari Bazaar. This building, which dates to 1938, has an interesting history in its own right. Photo: Tarun Gagdekar 2013.

I first encountered the Gujari Bazaar as an undergraduate student on a study abroad. I
packed into an auto, with some friends, and took off towards the edge of the Old City. Our autowalla dropped us on top of Ellis Bridge. From there, I could see the entire marketplace. Looking down, it appeared chaotic and haphazard. It was an impressive mass of humanity bustling in, out and about a small space. It was shortly after *Uttarayan* (the annual kite festival in Gujarat) and several children were still flying their kites on the rooftops of homes scattered along the riverbank. This added a sense of life and chaos to the whole scene. Eventually, I made my way into the market. As I passed individual stalls, the diversity of products overwhelmed me. Here is a random list of things one may find as they wind themselves through Gujari: books, magazines, steel containers of all sizes, pots and pans, cans of paint, cots and their roping, antique coins, forgotten electronics, tools, hand carts, portable DVD players, bird cages, music CDs, toys, sports equipment, exercise bicycles, new and used furniture, goats, chickens, rabbits, and mirrors. Many of the people I interviewed during my fieldwork described Gujari as a precursor to the modern mall—a historic version of the convenient one-stop shopping experience. Furthermore, the religious, ethnic, and age diversity among vendors and buyers was striking, especially in a city I knew to be polarized by communal tension and violence. Perhaps that is why one informant was proud to announce that, “Our association president is a Muslim and our secretary is a Jain in a majority Hindu marketplace.”

The more I walked an underlying sense of order began to reveal itself. It belied the chaos I saw from above. When experienced from within, an elaborate order disabused me of my earlier caricatures. Vendors are arranged in multiple rows grouped by trade. For instance, one row (or section of a row) is for books, while another is for *charpies* (wooden cots), another for tools, and so on. However, there are no definite boundaries. Spatial claims are flexible, fluid, and negotiated. An antique vendor is just as likely to be found among vendors selling mirrors as cans.
of paint. My recent stint of fieldwork furthered these impressions by revealing that many vendors have been selling in the same spot for several generations. Every vendor knows their place and sets up each week with little variation.

As I walked further to scene was interrupted with construction. I tried to keep my balance as I climbed over construction materials and around part of a reinforced wall. Maneuvering down a few small earthen declines I finally arrived at the river’s edge and stood on a dirt pathway, looking west. I had unwittingly entered a construction zone and stood on what was to become the lower of two riverfront promenades. This side of Sabarmati River was long from finished, but its future was clear to me. Its fate was mirrored on the opposite bank. I stood with my back to the market. To my left was a heap of large concrete sections of sewer piping and a procession of dump trucks parked without operators. To my right the dirt pathway tapered off as it tucked under Ellis Bridge only to emerge again on the other side. The pathway continued on for as far as I could see in either direction, until it curved out of sight. The feeling was much different than on Ellis Bridge. From there I saw the ‘leftoverness’ of the space in both directions and on either side. During my first stint of fieldwork in 2011, construction was well underway and the riverfront space was a confused site. Existing activities along it, including the Gujari Bazaar, were interrupted by all kinds of building activities—a staging area for materials, a roadway for heavy machinery, iron rods for reinforcement, and other construction instruments for land reclamation. At that time, I remember standing on top of Ellis Bridge looking down into the market and being instantly struck by the existence of these two spaces side by side: one historic, established, and the product of local social, cultural and spatial practices; the other claiming to be the face of new Ahmedabad, still in a state of becoming, and the product of global urban aspirations.
According to an obscure colonial-era legislation all unclaimed or public “resource lands” came under the jurisdiction of the Collector, such as the Sabarmati River’s banks. When the Gujarati Bazaar was displaced from the Royal Maidan in 1941 (see next section), it briefly relocated near Sidi Sayyed Masjid and Lal Darwaza. Perhaps this space was contested, crowded, and provided insecure tenure, because around 1947 the Ahmedabad collector offered to lease Gujarati vendors a small piece of land next to Ellis Bridge they quickly took the offer and relocated. Throughout the 1960s and 70s the AGA was paying 151 rupees a year to the Collector for rent. This agreement, whether verbal or otherwise, stated that the land cannot be sold to a third party. This agreement continued until 1973. In that year there was a suspect exchange of land between the Collector of Ahmedabad and the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). The Collector was given land in Gyaspur in exchange for the land along the Sabarmati River.

After this exchange, the riverbanks came under the direct authority of the AMC. However, according to Nafis, the AGA continued to pay rent and taxes under his father’s administration to the Collector even though the land had been transferred to the AMC. At this point, the AMC issued an eviction notice to the AGA. Naifs’ father, M. Ishak Allahwalla, upon receiving the eviction notice became aware of this suspect exchange of property and filed a lawsuit in 1973. The case was finally resolved in 2003 with the new agreement, but the AGA was paying as much as 302 rupees per month up to that time.

In the 1998 plan (and subsequent update in 2004) for the Sabarmati Riverfront, informal markets are provided land and Gujarati is explicitly mentioned in that section of the report (EPC 1998: 5-6; 2004: 5). However, the market’s extended legal battle over the eviction notice issued in 1973 led to a feeling of vulnerability and great deal of distrust of the AMC’s initiatives. Furthermore, towards the end of 2011, the controversial eviction of slums along the riverfront
produced an uncertain and skeptical environment for remaining activities like Gujari. According to Dr. Navdeep Mathur, professor at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA), Nafis Ahmed M. Ishak Chhipa, president of the Ahmedabad Gujari Association (AGA)—the market association which represents vendors—personally contacted him requesting that he file a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). In April 2011, a PIL was filed on the market’s behalf by Mr. Mathur vs. the State of Gujarat (Mathur 2012: 70). A PIL is a legal instrument that provides recourse to historically oppressed and underrepresented communities throughout India. Unlike American law where a plaintiff must have standing, in India anyone can file a PIL as long as there is a substantial public interest to do so. At this time, Gujari’s leadership recruited students from IIMA and the National Institute of Design (NID) to redesign the market and rethink how it might engage with the Sabarmati Project. By then, HCP conducted highly publicized exhibition of professional designs for the Sabarmati Project, including the promenades and the Gujari Bazaar. Upon receiving a Right to Information (RTI) request, market officials, and other social activists, discovered that despite renderings showing Gujari’s inclusion there was:

“…no formal plan to rehabilitate the market, nor had it announced a request for proposal (RFP) for the design of the bazaar. There had been no official communication about the status of the bazaar with the traders’ association. However, space for their operation was decreasing everyday owing to construction work for the riverfront project” (Mathur 2012: 70).

Thus, a PIL was filed on behalf of the Gujari Bazaar to “[protect] the fundamental rights of vendors of the 600 years old Historical [sic] bazaar …” (PIL No. 48: 1). Although concerns of social justice motivated the PIL, claims about the market’s historical value established its legitimacy for inclusion and linked it more firmly to Ahmedabad’s identity. While establishing a compelling case for inclusion, the discourse of heritage opened many problematic issues that I explore in the next section.

24 Interview with Navdeep Mathur, February 2013
Development, Heritage, and Tourism

There is no published history of the Gujari Bazaar, although there are elaborate oral histories that I usually heard from elite members of or associated with the market. According to these histories, the market descends from a royal decree issued by Sultan Ahmed Shah—founder of the city of Ahmedabad—in 1414 C.E. Due to this, many government agencies, brochures, newspapers and academic articles claim this market is 600-years old, carrying on a tradition from the early 15th century. In fact, the Gujari Bazaar was frequently mentioned amid the fervor of Ahmedabad’s recent bid to become the next UNESCO World Heritage City. This history, however, must be viewed ambivalently because its oral history is contested among vendors. Furthermore, within the oral history there are many points of rupture that, at the very least, complicate any continuous narrative from the past.

According to elite narratives, the Gujari Bazaar took place on Fridays in the Royal Maidan between Bhadra Fort and Teen Darwaza (Three Gates) around BhadraKali temple. Its occurrence on Fridays corresponds to its early Muslim influence. The market continued on Fridays uninterrupted in the Royal Maidan for 527 years until 1941 when communal riots forced its closure. This event marks a major rupture in its historical continuity. When the weekly market reopened after two months, vendors, whether same or not, could no longer operate in the Royal Maidan. It was unclear to me why, but vendors briefly relocated around Sidi Saiyyed Masjid but soon found a new home at its current location along the Sabarmati River—under the dubious circumstances I discussed in the previous section. Additionally, in 1952, legislation by the State

25 While it is not published, the longest serving market president—M. Ishak Allahwalla—has hand-written a roughly 600-page history of the Gujari Bazaar in Gujarati. This history is currently held by his son, Nafis Chippa, the current president, in the AGA office located besides the Mahalaxmi Mandir.

26 Interview with Nafis Chippa, March 2013
of Bombay\textsuperscript{27} shifted the operation of Gujari from Friday to Sunday. In my view, all of these serve to complicate the elite narrative for the Gujari Bazaar developed in the PIL. Furthermore, there were contested histories among vendors I interviewed.

Although elite narratives claim the market is 600-years old, none of my close informants (nor other vendors I interviewed) identified with this history. All of them said the market was between 50- to 100-years old. Of course their dating of the market varied, but they roughly corresponded to familial connections. That is, a dating of 50 years came from first or second generation vendors, while a dating of 75 to 100 years came from third or fourth generation vendors. Speaking more generally, most vendors did not extend the market’s history beyond its reopening after communal riots or relocation along the Sabarmati River. This provides more evidence to suggest ruptures in the social history of the market.

The PIL re-presented the market’s history as one continuous practice from the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. I argue this was done to link Gujari with Ahmedabad’s recent bid to become UNESCO’s next World Heritage City. This can be seen as more of a political tactic, given its contested history shown above, than a historically valid narrative, i.e. tradition as tactic. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the discourse of informality aims to delegitimize certain spaces and practices from the movement of progress. However, heritage becomes an especially compelling counter-narrative in which to establish cultural value, and, therefore legitimacy. But, this politicization of heritage poses interesting questions. Particularly, what does heritage mean in the simultaneous preservation and consumption of the past and the perception of cultural authenticity in light of a massive modernist reimagining of city space?

\textsuperscript{27} In 1960, the former Bombay Presidency was split into the modern states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.
There is a popular view that modernity (like a disease) infects, corrupts, and destroys tradition—dimensions seen as culturally “authentic” to a society. Built in this view is the classic Durkhiemian dichotomy between modernity and tradition that is amplified in post-colonial societies where the force of globalization is often viewed as erasing heritage, or culture itself.

When we consider the preservation of Gujari in the context of the Sabarmati Project, John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s comments become highly instructive:

“We admire and try to collect things not so much for their beauty or value as for their association with a phase of our past...history means less the record of significant events and people than the preservation of reminders of a bygone domestic existence and its environment” (Jackson 1980: 89-90).

In his highly perceptive essay “The Necessity for Ruins,” Jackson is interested in how this “novel interpretation of history” manifests in the “reconstructed historical environment” (ibid: 90). This allows a critique of Gujari’s new marketplace. At the time I conducted my research, Gujari still operated every Sunday underneath Ellis Bridge and around the Mahalaxmi Mandir—as it had since the 1940s. However, after the PIL, Gujari secured a place in the Sabarmati Project, and, during my fieldwork, HCP released several renderings of its new design. While it was originally designated as a “Heritage Park,” this narrow strip of land was reassigned for Gujari following the outcome of the PIL. Although it is a place for a “Heritage Market,” the spatial design can only be described as modern. Gujari’s framing within a modern environment appears to stray from Jackson’s idea of a “reconstructed historical environment,” its repositioning and thematic programing reveals otherwise. According to the plans, Gujari’s new space will be stuck between the convention center, exhibition halls and showrooms and the historic fort wall from the 16th century. This node has the highest concentration of activity, and is geared towards domestic and international tourists. Furthermore, Gujari is not the sole possessor of the space. During an interview with the Sabarmati Project’s lead designer, Nikki Shah, he
stressed that providing for Gujari quickly encountered a problem, “Gujari only takes place on Sundays. So we had to answer: how will the space be used the other six days of the week?” The most utilitarian solution was to share the space among several activities, including the flower market that currently takes place just south of Gujari.

It is clear then that the Sabarmati Project’s planners hope to establish a “reconstructed historical environment” in which Gujari is intended to operate as a spectacle of authentic culture. Taking a cure from Cotofana (2011), the presentation of “authenticity needs authority” (522). In the case of Gujari, this authority comes from its spatial formalization and its proximity to the state. However, authenticity is a dubious notion that necessitates a cultural politics. As Handler and Linnekin assert that terms like “traditional” and “new”—which conjure questions of what is authentic or genuine to a culture—are “interpretative rather than descriptive” (1984: 273). Thus, they argue, “…that tradition resembles less an artifactual assemblage than a process of thought—an ongoing interpretation of the past” (ibid: 274). They call performances of tradition and claims of cultural authenticity “models of the past” (ibid: 276). Gujari’s location within a nexus of tourism activity, historical presentation, and labeling as a “Heritage Market” suggests its co-option in the Sabarmati Project for the benefit of tourism.

Conclusions

My findings challenge the classic Durkhiemian dichotomy between modernity and tradition. I argued that the discourse of heritage provided the terms for both Gujari’s inclusion and co-option by the Sabarmati Project. Additionally, as Handler and Linnekin argued, traditions

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28 Interview with Nikki Shah at HCP’s office called “Paritosh,” May 2013.
are interpreted “models of the past” (Handler & Linnekin 1984: 276). In this view, the invocation of heritage is discursively constituted in the “here and now,” invested with contemporary relevance, and shaped by present interests—political or otherwise. Thus, modernity does not destroy or erase heritage or culture; rather, it provides the impetus for its reinterpretation.

In the case of Gujari, its inclusion in the Sabarmati Project required an emphasis on its historical value, wedding it to the heritage and, therefore, the identity of the city whose progress was threatening its displacement. While the emphasis on heritage created a compelling narrative that ultimately lead to its inclusion, serving as a tactic of resistance, it also served as a strategy of co-option for planners to more effectively assimilate it in Ahmedabad’s new modernity. That is to say, heritage linked Gujari to local and global narratives of cultural legitimacy, but also allowed Sabarmati Project planners the ability to contextually reframe, spatially reposition, and thematically reprogram a local practice in order to mimic the project’s global city imagination in order to create a cultural spectacle for the purpose of tourism.
CHAPTER 4

A MARKET FOR CORRUPTION, RUMOR, AND THE ARTS OF RESISTANCE

To my surprise, several of my informants gossiped about the AGA and rumored that its president, Nafis, is corrupt. Nafis has come under a higher level of scrutiny from within the market due to his proximity to state officials and his power brokering both within and without the market. The information in these rumors were consistent: Despite the ethnic, class, and political differences among them and varying degrees of involvement with Nafis, all key informants expressed similar accounts of his (alleged) corrupt actions and applied similar criteria of what constituted corruption. They also made these claims ‘matter-of-factly.’ By exploring the use rumor, this chapter investigates the expression of an insurgent culture within the market and the formation of new subaltern subject positions.

Rumors of Nafis’ corruption disheartened me, because by that point I was in the process of repairing a relationship with him. In the beginning, I got the impression he felt disrespected that I did not seek his permission to conduct research. In fact, after our first meeting he immediately called Mathur inquiring about my intentions. Nafis was skeptical. Fortunately, Mathur reassured him during their phone call. Since then he was more open to interviews and assisting my research. This is significant because as the AGA president he was a gatekeeper. He not only had sole access to certain resources, but his position was influential and the absence of his blessing may have kept me from desired information. As a result, our interactions were mired with mutual uneasiness. I was more curious then to explore how vendors viewed his presidency and this led me to the rumors regarding his leadership. My relationship with Nafis was never
antagonistic. In fact, we were rather cordial.

I encountered rumors of corruption at different times and they were enunciated by a variety of different vendors. My informants alleged that Nafis was withholding money and not distributing it equitably. In their view, this behavior was corrupt and his management incompetent, often using these exact words in English. I did not consider it my position as researcher to verify the truth of the rumors I encountered during my fieldwork. Regardless of their veracity, in this chapter, I analyze one rumor’s social life and how it functions within the Gujari community during its redevelopment.

In the following pages, I explore these rumors of corruption and demonstrate that when seen in relation to Gujari’s absorption in the Sabarmati Project’s modernist development regime, rumors of corruption represent a critical discourse of modernity, representation, and social power. According to Akhil Gupta, claims about corruption are normative cultural assessments that necessarily require “…a standard of morally appropriate behavior against which corrupt actions are measured” (2012: 80). In this sense, rumor is also a constellation of speech acts that express standards of morality and responsibility to the community. Moreover, rumor is a binding agent for community and, in addition, represents a discourse of community morality.29 Taken together these discourses given voice through rumor signify a fundamental political realignment in the market.

Communicative Networks and Rumor

“Word of mouth” is a common occurrence on market days. It could well be said that rumor fits within a wider network of news. Sureshbhai, one of my closest informants, was, for
me, a node in this communicative network. He is a tall, skinny, and handsome man in his early-forties with an unassuming demeanor. Yet, he was one of the most charismatic vendors I met. He is Bharatbhai’s older cousin and Kishorelal’s younger brother. All three sell books together at Gujari. They occupy adjacent spaces at the left flank of the market.

One Sunday I arrived later than usual, around noon. The market was already bustling, but there seemed to be more activity around the entrance. I parked my motorcycle across the street and entered only to find a police barricade that constricted the already narrow access and egress corridor even more. Police were on careful watch checking any bags or containers entering the market. When I was checked, I asked what had happened that required such security. As my friend translated, the police became distant. I found a superior officer, but he refused to answer any questions. Eventually, I was given entrance and, after briefly stopping for chai, met with Sureshbhai. I asked him what was going on, he said, “There’s a report of a bomb in the marketplace.” I must have immediately tensed up, because Suresh quickly reassured me by saying, “Don’t worry. There’s always a bomb in the marketplace. Everything’s fine.” This assured me some, but I remained tense and vigilant for the rest of my time in the market. At the time, I was unable to trust the credibility of this network of information, but this example suggests Gujari’s word of mouth news has some way of determining severity and urgency, even when police and other state officials take the utmost concern. I was surprised later to find the local news station TV9 Gujarati portray the incident as a panic, even though they reported it correctly as a hoax and there was no atmosphere of panic in the marketplace.30

Yet the communicative network of the Gujari Market was war more accurate from the

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29 I use the Foucauldian conceptualization of “discourse.” “Discourses govern existing groups of statements and regulate the generation and distribution of new statements. In circular fashion, a statement is defined as meaningful if it is [able to be stated] within a discourse” (Alcoff 2005: 6).
standpoint of utility to the community. I was struck by the efficiency of this network, which was able to ascertain the severity of threats more accurately in the moment than the spectacle-biased news media could several hours later. On a separate occasion, while receiving a shave, on a non-market day, I noticed a cadre of police officers huddled together in Victoria Garden (a colonial-era garden adjacent to the Gujari Bazaar. A young officer came over to the barber and began asking questions in Hindi. I asked what had happened and was told that a homeless man with asthma collapsed from heatstroke and shortly after died. The following Sunday I asked Sureshbhai, and a few other informants, if they heard about the incident. He was aware of the death, but unaware of the cause and fuzzy on many of the details.

It may be surprising how accurate this news can be. The first time I met Sureshbhai and his “brothers” was by chance. My iPhone5 was stolen from the breast pocket of my button-up shirt somewhere around his booth. I did not notice the theft for some time, but eventually retraced my steps to his stall and hastily asked if he had seen anything suspicious. He replied that no one had turned in a phone, nor had he seen anything worthy of report. Our first meeting was, as a result, tense and uncomfortable. I continued retracing my steps and eventually wound up at Satyam’s stall, my closest informant in the market. Satyam tried several times to call my phone. After a few minutes, Satyam gave me over to his sister-in-law in order to file a report. I figured I would be making an official report to the police, of which there were usually one or two present inside the market acting as crowd managers. However, after passing one police officer, I stopped her and asked where she was taking me, gesturing towards the police officer. She replied, “No, we don’t use to them.” Before long she stopped and was talking with the head guard of the AGA. She asked me to report the theft to him, but without a translator present this task was almost

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30 Aired March 25, 2013. The segment (in Gujarati) can be found on youtube.com at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QudEu8PTXSA
impossible. I became so frustrated that I left without giving a full report to the AGA guard. I filed an official police report with the help of a friend.

A few weeks later I met a man in the market, close to Satyam’s stall. He was a short older man with a white beard and dressed in a white _kurta_ and _Taqiyah_, the typical dress of Muslim men. His English was extremely good. He approached me unsolicited and began warning me to keep a watchful eye on all of my belongings, especially my phone. “There was an American boy, just like you, who had his iPhone stolen from his shirt pocket on the other side of the market a while back.” I began laughing. I accepted his advice and didn’t tell him till much later that he was describing me. I discovered later this man was Monsoor’s father and Monsoor was a close friend of Bharatbhai and Sureshbhai. Certainly, the message did not travel far, but with it did so with great accuracy. These are scant anecdotes, but I retrace them here to demonstrate that the existing word of mouth network in Gujari is surprisingly accurate and efficient.

However, within this communicative network existed a highly motivated and targeted malicious rumor. By prying rumor loose and isolating it from this larger communicative system, in the following pages, I use rumor as a lens to explore the Gujari Bazaar’s internal political dynamics, which were sanitized (cf. Ortner 2006: 46) during the PIL process, and tease out the shifting subject positions occurring due to the leadership’s response to redevelopment.

Taking an ethnographic look at the social life of rumors of corruption may seem, at first glance, like a distraction. Rumor may not register as a serious academic topic. However, throughout this chapter I reinforce the notion that rumor is a fertile site for cultural analysis. A popular view holds that rumor is simply an impulsive form of communication to exchange “dirt” or “sling mud” on others. Here, rumor is held synonymously with false and malignant speech, usually to be ignored, dismissed, and brushed aside. However, rumors have
enormous social power that, regardless of their truth, are circulated, judged, and acted upon. In this sense, they become ‘social facts’ with potentially disruptive (or disastrous) consequences. Rumors introduce social disorder and upset the status quo by defaming a public image of power or unmasking an abuse of it. Even from this basic fact, rumors can be conceptualized as a political technology to augment prevailing social attitudes and structures, changing the public reception of an event, symbol or individual (cf. Coombe 1993; Scott 1990: 142-148; Guha [1983] 1993: 251-277; Bhabha 1994: 199-205; Gupta 2012: 97, 159; Srinivas 1976: 276-279).

On the reverse, however, rumors function as socializing agents around which disparate members of communities coalesce and find the mutual grammar of affiliation and solidarity. They also criticize an “out” group while simultaneously forming an “in” group. One can think of “inside jokes” as a similar cultural game, albeit more benign than rumor typically. Thus, rumors help to mediate a shared sense of community and belonging while identifying both internal and external threats. Nevertheless, one of the most intriguing aspects of rumors is that they are deeply embedded within what James Scott (1990) calls the “hidden transcript” of communities. That is to say, rumors are spoken behind the back or under the breath and rarely, if ever, ostentatiously advertised. They are spectral.

Following the theft of my iPhone5, I felt compelled to return the following Sunday to talk with Sureshbhai. This eventually led to an interview. He invited me across the vendor-buyer divide (which was symbolized by a blue tarp underneath a pile of neatly arranged books) to join him and his “brothers” for lunch. During these conversations, I asked him several times how he felt about the AGA and Nafis. Even early on he did not hesitate saying that Nafis was corrupt. When I asked him to elaborate, he said, “Look, we give all this money to the AGA for

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31 The “Hidden Transcript” is Scott’s (1990) term for the power-absent back channels of cultural expression and political contestation.
application fees and membership dues and every Sunday we still have to pay to vend. Where is all this money going? The AGA does not provide us anything. They allot us a space and hire some guards, but that’s it. The rest goes in their pockets.”

In this, Sureshbhai believes that the vendors are paying more than necessary and assumes that the difference ends up in Nafis’ pocket. At the same time, he also believes that AGA is not providing enough, although he is not explicit about the services the AGA should provide.

Theorizing this rumor within the space of the Gujari bazaar begins by unpacking its enunciative qualities, or vocalization. That is, we must first distinguish between the speech act and its content. Ranajit Guha refers to rumor as “an utterance par excellence” ([1983] 1999: 256); sharply distinguished from the practice of writing this utterance captures and expresses feelings that would never find their way onto paper. Citing Vachek, Guha adds that uttered communication responds more urgently and emotionally than written communication (ibid: 257).

Utterance begets temporality. The notion of temporality haunts the social life of rumor, both in the literature and in my fieldwork. According to Scott (1990: 145), rumor “can also serve as a vehicle for anxieties and aspirations that may not be openly acknowledged by its propagators.” In this view, rumors are social valves that release the pressure of worry and fear boiling under the surface, situating rumor more firmly in the “hidden transcript” of culture. Rumors in the market went further, however, and expressed acute dissatisfaction and anger. Suresh, for instance, seemed rather annoyed and upset about paying what to him seemed like redundant and excessive fees, especially when there were no perceived return for vendors.

The temporal utterance of rumor is distinguished in another way, by its susceptibility to

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32 Suresh’s comments are representative of the rumors I heard during my fieldwork. I also heard similar rumors from Satyam, Amit, Bharathbhai, Monsoor and Monsoor’s father.

33 By “susceptibility,” I am not suggesting that oral communication is any way inferior to written communication. In fact, this embellishment belies an enormous creativity and flexibility.
embellishment. As Scott argues, “the oral transmission of rumor allows for a process of elaboration, distortion, and exaggeration…” (ibid: 144). Connected to this is Gyanendra Pandey arguing rumor’s importance “in the record of partition violence” (Pandey 2002: 165), following India’s independence in 1947. His analysis demonstrates how rumor acted as a vehicle to inflate death tolls, fabricate [counter] attacks, and their brutality. Here, I would like to bring in G.N. Devy’s (2007: 46-57) discussion of communal violence among Adivasi communities in Tejgadh, Gujarat during the riots in February and March 2002. He shows how rumor functioned as a deceptive device igniting and perpetuating the violence, partly by convincing rioters they were protected from bullets or swords by magic or divine blessing. Although these examples are extreme, they demonstrate the power embedded in rumor as a form of communication to dramatically exaggerate and distort social life in the pursuit of certain ends; essentially constructing an alternative reality. These examples demonstrate rumor’s ability to construct power and mobilize people, but rumor also contains the tools to resist power. The temporality and flexibility of rumor does not satisfactorily explain why it is used as a political device to resist power among rather powerless social actors. For this, I turn towards its covert “authorship.”

When my informants said that Naifs was corrupt, they did so assuredly and were brief in

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34 Here, Scott conceptualize this dimension of rumor as its “democratic voice.” The way in which Scott sketches this out is directly connected to why Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls rumor a “…truly subaltern form of communication” (quoted in Coombe 1993: 266). According to Scott, “There is, arguably, something of a disguised democratic voice about gossip [read here “rumor”] in the sense that it is propagated only to the extent that others find it in their interest to retell the story” (Scott 1990: 142).

35 Within the academic literature, rumor is closely linked to magic and/or the occult. This connection cannot be overlooked, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter and this thesis.

36 I prefer to use Michel de Certeau’s distinction between “strategies” and “tactics” (1984) here. According to de Certeau, actors with power use strategies in order to assert control or maintain dominance; however, the powerless use tactics in order to navigate the strategies of power or subvert them. de Certeau appropriates the term “bricolage” from Claude Levi-Strauss ([1962] 1966) which suggests this notion of “tinkering” or making due with available cultural resources despite, often drastic, limitations. Tactics are the domain of the powerless to respond to the surrounding environment and navigate, negotiate with, or contest the strategies of the powerful. In this formulation, tactics are well suited to Gujarai vendors who spread rumors about Nafis’ corruption because vendors, although not subordinate to him are comparatively powerless within the Gujarai community.
their elaborations. They were definitive and absolutely certain it was true. When I asked how they knew it to be true, they dismissed my questions outright and said they were simply restating a fact. My closest informant, Satyam, who was the most stubborn about Nafis’ corruption, turned out to be Nafis’ half nephew—a member of his estranged family. This fact opens many insightful and potentially problematic theoretical questions. However, it gives a paradoxically unnerving credibility and distrust to these rumors. Regardless, however, I believe rumor’s power is made apparent. It not only reiterates the tendency of rumor to transmute rather quickly into social fact, but notice how Satyam, as well as other informants, did not see themselves as perpetuating a rumor, but restating a ‘matter of fact’ truth among the community. Scott’s discussion of gossip is instructive:

Gossip, almost by definition, has no identifiable author, but scores of eager retellers who can claim they are just passing on the news. Should the gossip—and here I have in mind malicious gossip—be challenged, everyone can disavow responsibility for having originated it. (Scott 1990: 142)

In my estimation, this authorial distance, which my informants amply demonstrated, does two things. First, it absolves them from responsibility and the potentially unethical consequences of spreading a rumor may it turn out to be false. And second, it conceals their source and obfuscates all paths of acquisition.

I would like to pause briefly here and develop an analogy that I believe sheds considerable light on rumor’s rather bizarre social life. Rumor is strikingly analogous to spectral

37 Satyam’s father is Nafisbhai’s half-brother. They share the same father, M. Ishak Allahwalla, but different mothers. Satyam’s family is Hindu and Nafisbhai’s is Muslim. M. Ishak Allahwalla remarried a Muslim woman and converted to Islam. According to Satyam, the families used to be close, but following the communal riots in Ahmedabad in the 1980s family relations have become tenser. It was unclear whether the tension simply coincided with the riots or was a result of them.

38 Scott’s analysis of rumor makes little distinction between rumor and gossip, besides calling rumor the “second cousin of gossip.” I am not inclined to parse out more subtle and nuanced cultural distinctions, whatever they might be, here. Furthermore, doing so would be within the specific framework of my own cultural background—a cultural background (American) that does not gain much analytical salience when discussing the contemporary nature of a post-colonial society, especially that of India. Therefore, I view them in the present discussion as synonyms in a social tactic of speech (or utterance) as “political disguise.”
That is to say, ghosts—simultaneously ever present, yet hidden and, for that reason, terrifying. There are three analogous pillars I would like to develop: substance, uncanniness, and haunting. Rumors, like ghosts, are made of an eerie and elusive substance—a substance without origin. Rumor is elusive, ephemeral, and its covert spread removes it from the materiality of social existence and effectively camouflages its point of origin. For its target, however, rumor presents a very real and always present danger, but is simultaneously intangible, agile, and moving.

Furthermore, an encounter with a spectral substance, in whatever form, is a startling and uncanny experience that provokes questions in the observer like, “what is real?” challenging their perception of reality, basis of truth, and standards of verifiability. Rumor is an analogously startling and uncanny social encounter that radically shifts the perception one has for another—perhaps familiar to us, yet rendered in a new and terrifying disguise, that challenges whether or not such claims can or should be believed in.

In addition to the substance and uncanniness analogies, rumor functions like a social haunting. A common motif of popular ghost stories is that they haunt or stalk a particular place, bounded or confined by their prior deeds (Bennett & Royle 2004: 133-141). A haunting is a reassertion of the past searching for healing or revenge. The notion of “unfinished business” is a common narrative expression in this motif. In a similar way, rumor reasserts past deeds alongside contemporary actions and critiques them intending to produce disorder within a social structure. A rumor lingers in the collective memory of a particular community, paradoxically

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39 I would like to thank Professor Amit Bhasiya, Ph.D. for pointing me in this direction and giving me the idea of rumor’s “spectral” qualities.

40 My use of “uncanny” here is deliberate. I use the classic psychoanalytic definition of the uncanny developed by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay The ‘Uncanny.’ Freud develops this concept from aesthetic theory to represent a response that is simultaneously familiar and terrifying, or eerie. According to Freud, the uncanny happens when the
temporal and rarely forgotten. I risk pushing the analogy further than it wants to go, but comparing rumor to spectral phenomena is a way of looking at a quotidian and ordinary social experience from an extraordinary angle.

It was also an effort to reemphasize its covertness, anonymity and boundedness. From here, I would like to conclude with some thoughts on its covert authorship and the near impossibility of rumor’s domestication.

Rumor is elusive and transitive, anonymous, and without origin. It belongs to no one and is possessed by everyone. Endlessly in circulation, it has no identifiable source. This illegitimacy makes it accessible to insurgency, while its transitivity makes it a powerful tactic, one that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls a truly subaltern means of communication. (Coombe [1997] 1999: 251-252)

As Akhil Gupta says, “…rumor cannot be controlled by simply clamping down on the source of production. Rumor therefore becomes an especially effective vehicle for challenging official accounts…” (2012: 97). Members of a speech community become eager retellers to circulating rumors commensurate with their interests. So, “[p]assing on [a] rumor involves a desire on part of the transmitter to affect other people’s behavior, to bring their perspectives in line with his [sic], or at the very minimum, to share a valuable bit of information” (Lang & Lang 1963: 96, quoted in Guha [1983] 1999: 257). The very fact that a rumor is retold speaks to its character as a political agent.

But, rumor is a temporal social performance. Retelling a rumor serves particular purposes and is rarely enunciated rhythmically or frequently, rather, at convenient times for decidedly tactical purposes. As Rosemary Coombe (1993) noted in the above passage, lacking a source makes rumor accessible to insurgency. By this she means, virtually anyone is free to contribute and slant circulating rumors to their purposes. Scott (1990) places rumor within a political constellation that he calls the “arts of resistance”, or, more suitable to my purpose, an act of familiar is alienated and provokes feelings of discomfort, horror, and dread. “…the ‘uncanny’ is that class of the
“political disguise”. Coombe (1993: 252) conceptualizes rumor as one form of “cultural guerilla tactics.”

The above discussion shows the rumor as one of the most effective and disguised forms of political contest for those in positions subordinate to power, because it abdicates the social risk involved in perpetuating statements that assassinate a superior’s character while effectively undermining his or her authority in the political structure of their community. Furthermore, without origin or path of acquisition, malicious rumors cannot be satisfactorily refuted or challenged by their target, because they are difficult to trace making retribution virtually impossible. Once a particular rumor gains traction in a community, it has already done its intended disruption; the extent to which varies by its reach, rapidity of its spread, and extent of embellishment. In short, its enunciative wrapper, covert authorship, and socially disruptive nature make rumor an alluring political tactic. And one in which Gujari vendors have seized upon to voice their frustrations with and suspicions of the AGA and Nafisbhai.

The Adhesiveness of Rumor

Another significant dimension of rumor is its tendency to generate closer interaction and solidarity. Rumor mediates and maintains a shared sense of community and is certainly at play within Gujari. I would like turn now in order to discuss this “communal adhesiveness” (Bhabha 1994, quoted in Coombe 1999: 252), among subaltern or powerless groups in particular.

Rumors, in general, tend to have an exotic quality about them that impel their continued transmission—rumors of corruption being a prime example (cf. Srinivas 1976: 113). “[T]he possession of the item of information by an individual seems to create a force to communicate further. This force or impulse is what makes rumor bring people together” (Guha [1983] 1999: terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud 1919).
According to Bhabha, this impulse makes the spread of rumor analogous to contagion (1994: 200). This was evident in Gujari as well, except rumors did not spread indiscriminately, as the analogy of contagion implies. Within the face-to-face community of Gujari, rumors spread among preexisting relationships of trust, such as kinship and friendship networks, before seeping into other communicative relationships, where the analogy of contagion becomes more relevant. That is to say, rumors spread where a modicum of trust is already established and can be appealed to, otherwise the reteller runs the risk of being “sold out” and exposed to retribution from the rumor’s target.

However, appealing to relationships of trust does not mean rumors are transmitted secretly—and here I return to the amplification of rumor that I briefly touched on in the previous section. Before conducting my fieldwork, I thought of rumor as a discrete, quite, and intimate affair—something whispered in one’s ear. My experience in the field quickly contradicted this view. Rumor’s amplification in this case is critical. In the field, retelling rumors of corruption were audible, even loud, as if to make sure others heard. When I was interviewing Sureshbhai, for instance, he retold the common rumor about Nafis, and then immediately looked around for approval. Interestingly, he received approving nods from Monsoor across the path and the two women sitting behind us, probably having vended with them for a decade or more. Due to their proximity, it is likely he was familiar and comfortable with them.

The transmission was transparent. Sureshbhai’s actions in this case not only retold the rumor to whomever was in audible distance, but his gesture for consensus highlights rumor’s

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41 Generally speaking, analogizing the spread of rumor to contagion is appropriate when discussing the rapidity of its spread. Analogizing rumor’s spread to a contagion pays little or no mind to the conduits of trust that ensure its path of acquisition will be difficult, and likely, impossible to determine.

42 The spatial layout of the market is organized, yet extremely flexible. Each vendor holding a license, or a legitimate spatial claim, is assigned a stall by the AGA. Many spaces are owned (or leased) by multiple generations,
ability to draw people in and, more importantly, establish a basis for the exchange of mutual political interests. There was a decidedly “us versus them (or him)” dimension to this gesture. Certainly this could be analyzed in various ways, but perhaps, it was a means for Sureshbhai to assert his autonomy by challenging a perceived authority figure. Or perhaps, if he already knew how others felt (which is likely the case) it could have been a means to cheaply purchase more social currency by attacking a common “enemy” (cf. Guha [1983] 1999: 249) and exorcise popular frustrations about the AGA, its officials, and/or Nafis himself. Then again, it could have been a means to simply give me—a young, foreign, and curious researcher—something he thought would interest me.

Rumor also has the ability to motivate “collective agency” (Bhabha 1994: 199). In his groundbreaking study *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Ranajit Guha ([1983] 1999) pays close attention to the relation between rumor and revolution. In fact, much of the historical work on rumor highlights its power as a revolutionary driver. “No riot ever occurs without rumors to incite, accompany, and intensify the violence” (Allport and Postman 1965: 159, quoted in Guha [1983] 1999: 252). Such a definitive statement can be further evidenced by the examples I drew on earlier from G.N. Devy and Gyanendra Pandey, both of which convincingly establish links between riots, violence, and rumor (Devy 2007; Pandey 1997). According to Guha, rumor—whether in ancient Rome, medieval London, revolutionary France or Russia—had pride of place in greasing revolutionary motion, or at least, breaking social inertia. At one point, he refers to rumor as a form of “insurgent communication”

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43 “…communication of a report to other members of a group implies an underlying bond of community among the members. It helps to invoke a ‘comradeship response’ which, as was observed during the Bihar disaster, made the community less one where superiors confronted inferiors and more one in which all people were pretty much on an equality” (Guha [1983] 1999: 257).
Guha talks considerably about how rumor has, throughout history, sustained and furthered revolutionary tendencies against imperial and colonial authorities, in particular (Guha [1983] 1999: 252-254). Rumor played a primary role in mobilizing rebel agency during the “Seapoy Munity” of 1857 (aka: The First War of Independence or Great Rebellion). For instance, when it was discovered that British forces began using a new Enfield rifle in which cartridges were greased with, what was likely, a combination of cow and pig lard, rumor quickly spread among the troops (Bhabha 1994: 200). Furthermore, the procedure to load this new rifle required biting the cartridge thus forcing Hindus and Muslims to place the substance of either sacred or forbidden animals, respectively, in their mouth. This was deeply offensive to most within the Sepoy ranks (indigenous military forces hired by the British) and sparked the formation of a rebellious collective agency that cut across distinctions of religion and caste as well as urban and rural societies (Keay ([2000] 2010: 438). Once again, we encounter rumor’s communal adhesiveness.

Kim Fortun’s idea of “enunciatory communities” locates rumor’s communal adhesion within a wider conceptual framework. Her book *Advocacy After Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders* (2001) traces the environmental and human rights activism that occurred in the wake of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh in 1984. Enunciatory communities pick up where stakeholder models fail. According to Fortun, stakeholder models include diverse interest groups, but once brought to the table, are viewed as homogenous units and the goal of the stakeholder model is ultimately consensus seeking despite a plurality of perspectives within each group. Instead:

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Enunciatory communities are produced by double binds, which call into play both new and entrenched ways of engaging the world. The ‘identity’ of enunciatory communities is strategically configured; collectively is not a matter of shared values, interests, or even culture, but a response to temporally specific paradox (Fortun 2001: 11).

Her work is important in two different ways for my purpose. First, her work, along with many others (Appadurai 1996; Gupta & Ferguson 1997), reinforces the idea that “community” is not a necessarily grounded or closed network of affiliation. That is, community is not bounded. Rather, a sense of community membership is incredibly plastic and has gone global, existing beyond conventional borders and maintained despite substantial distance. Second, she demonstrates that such malleable community relations can coalesce and crystalize in response to a single, common issue that is expressed through common speech acts, despite radically different views, customs, culture, etc. When seen as a commonly shared and circulated speech act, rumor then fits quite easily within Fortun’s concept. Furthermore, her formulation of enunciatory communities conceives it as a grassroots response to external political stimuli.

Thinking in terms of enunciatory communities is a way to account for the emergence of new subject positions, as entrenched signifying systems are being challenged and displaced. Subjects are drawn into new realities and fields of reference. Traditional constructs of society and culture no longer seem adequate. Enunciatory communities emerge in response, as a social register of profound change (Fortun 2001: 13).

The concept of enunciatory communities forms a larger framework through which rumor sits quite comfortably. This does not displace my earlier placement of rumor within Scott’s notion of the “arts of resistance,” rather I see them as parallel concepts derived from two different analytical approaches. Where Scott is focused on subaltern forms of communication, Fortun is primarily focused on advocacy and its various manifestations and affects within a community. These are two sides of the same coin. Rumor’s adhesiveness is one asset that establishes it as an influential and powerful political tactic. We can see these when Sureshbhai loudly voiced his criticisms of the AGA and retold the rumor of Nafis’ corruption, all the while searching for consensus from those around him all within the same enunciatory act.
The Performance of Power and the Bazaar as Social Space

Positioned at the apogee of the market’s internal political structure, Nafis’ power is both invested with meaning because of that space and maintained within it. Power is not a stable possession, but has a context that is both relational and spatial. Power is asserted and maintained through everyday performance. Viewing the construction of institutional power as a series of performance acts reveals this and establishes a strong link between power and space. In this context, this section explores how the bazaar as a social space facilitates and animates Nafisbhai’s influence among vendors. It also provides a context for the vendor’s resistance to and critique of it. I introduce some of the contours of Nafisbhai’s power by way of ethnographic sketch.

At the center of the market there is a chowk (intersection or public square) covered by a few weathered tarps hastily strung up to surrounding anchors like light posts, the Mahalaxmi Mandir, and a nearby residence. As a node of activity, this chowk is the most highly trafficked and visible space in the entire market—perhaps second only to the narrow access and egress point. The chowk terminates the main ramp that descends into the market, taking shoppers past several vendor stalls and the landmark Mahalaxmi Mandir. In terms of circulation, this space is vitally important because it disperses all traffic throughout the market, functioning as a crossroad. This has ample locational advantage.

One day I arrived at the market around 8:00am and found Nafisbhai sitting in a chair on the opposite side of the chowk. He was directly opposite the lemonade vendor, named Uumar Farooq, whose cold lemonade is a popular attraction in the Ahmedabadi heat. I kept my distance initially and sat down on a stoop next to the temple. 8:00am is usually the time vendors start
arriving by loader rickshaws, bicycles, or wooden hand carts packed with goods. From there I observed Nafisbhai greeting many of the incoming vendors as they arrived and passed by or through the chowk. Sometimes this would lead to short conversation, but none lasted more than a few minutes. After about an hour, I made my way over to Nafisbhai and shook his hand briefly. As my translator had not yet arrived, I was unable to converse with him. I stood around for a few more minutes so as not to make my departure abrupt and impolite. But eventually, I carried on with my day and left to meet with my informants. As a site of exposure, this chowk is very beneficial for Nafisbhai to assert his presence at the beginning of the day by greeting vendors and buyers as they arrive. However, this whole scene took on new significance when, later in my research, I got to know Uumar.

Uumar has an intimidating physical presence. He is tall and usually sits on a stool, elevating him even higher, next to a large table where he and two other workers prepare lemonade. A bidi (tobacco rolled in tobacco leaf) was a permanent fixture in his mouth. Puffs of smoke escaping as he talked. And instead of style, Uumar wore a uniform. Every Sunday he could be found in blue jeans and a white sleeveless undershirt. Overtime, I began to know a sensitive man, whose handshake was delicate but whose perspective was sharp.

He has been vending lemonade at Gujari since 1948; a mere one year after India gained independence from Britain. Of all my informants, Uumar never once rumored about Nafisbhai. This is all the more striking when one considers that Uumar is perhaps his most outspoken critic. Uumar’s position seemed widely known so perhaps he had no need for the protection rumor provides. He openly disapproves of the way the AGA handled Gujari’s redevelopment through the SRFDP. He adamantly objects to relocating. He described his vending at Gujari this way: “In 1947, India got its independence. In 1948, I got mine.” He sees his vending activity intimately
connected to his personal liberty and perhaps sees any relocation as an infringement thereof. He told me, “I don’t care if I have to go to the Supreme Court of India. I’m staying here!”

The scene I described earlier may be analyzed in a new critical light. Standing at this intersection in the market allows Nafisbhai to not only assert his presence to vendors, but also to remind Uumar, a strong and outspoken critic, of his influence of the wider community. A gesture of: “look how many friends I have!” It positioned him well to ‘see and be seen’ and establish his power and authority over Uumar.

Despite Uumar’s critique of Nafisbhai and the SRFDP, he, along with many other informants, was operating on incorrect information regarding the Gujari Market’s relocation and redevelopment. Despite the AGA’s possession of the PIL, MoU, and design schemes for the new market, no vendor I spoke with had seen them, nor were they aware of them in any detail. I encountered confusion about the market’s future frequently. Several informants had contradictory information about the market’s future location, the role of the AGA and AMC, the provisions for vendors, and the design of the new market. One scholar has argued that this ignorance was intentionally produced to limit dissent of the SRFDP. She calls this a paradigm of “deliberate policy confusion” (Mahadevia 2012: 57). Another scholar has characterized SRFDP’s implementation has “flexible” and sporadic, ultimately moving in the path of least citizen resistance (Desai 2012: 53-6). Others have argued that the SRFDCL’s efforts and methods to inform those affected by the SRFDP were not adequate (cf. Mathur 2012). Despite this, following the PIL and especially during my fieldwork in early 2013, the AGA possessed all the critical documents necessary to inform vendors, in both Gujarati and English. However, Amit and Leela, for instance, were completely unaware that they will not be able to vend in the new
market because they did not already have a license on file with the AGA prior to the PIL. Moreover, Satyam, Sureshbhai, and Bharatbhai had incorrect information about the placement, design and conditions of the new marketplace. The more I talked with vendors it became clear that information regarding their vending activities at Gujari as a result of the SRFDP was not actively disseminated, and may have been intentionally withheld, especially from multi-generational vendors without licenses, like Amit, who will be excluded from accessing the new marketplace.

Controlling the flow of information is a highly effective method of maintaining power. Nevertheless, Nafis gave me a copy of the MoU between the AGA and AMC on one of my last days in the market, yet there is reluctance to share such information with vendors. Additionally, HCP produced 8x3-inch post cards with imaginative computer renderings of a finished SRFDP. While these were popular among journalist, architecture and planning students, as well as social justice advocates (especially at CEPT[2]) none of my informants were aware that such renderings existed, nor had any of them seen what the new marketplace was supposed to look like. Uumar had never seen these design post cards. Despite joint outreach campaigns by the private consultant and SRFDCL/AMC, everyone I spoke with in the market had some misinformation or incorrect details. Although this may be expected from a project of this scale—a self-declared “mega-project”—this ignorance becomes more significant and alarming when it concerns the place of the new market, costs of vending, which vendors will be allowed to vend, and the role of the AGA and, by extension, Nafis. Ultimately, questions that deeply concern these vendors’ future, of which they were not made aware by a vendor association claiming to represent their interests, at least a full year after the PIL was settled.

45 It is my understanding, and certainly the understanding of Nafisbhai, that as a result of the PIL, all of Gujari’s vending activities are capped at 1,200 vendors. I was unable to receive a clear answer from either the SRFDP’s
In fact, on one occasion I met with Monsoor’s father, Mohammed Hussein, outside of the market at a tea stall across the street. Working as a teacher and principle at an English medium school, Mohammed is extremely intelligent with excellent English. This allowed for direct conversation without the assistance of a translator and his sophisticated perspective was refreshing, especially from someone who had been vending at the Gujari Bazaar for so many years. Our conversation began generally regarding the SRFDP. He responded, “We build big dams, bridges, and rivers but we don’t build character. What is the point of building these things without character?” After this, our conversation naturally drifted towards character until I finally asked about the AGA. I told him about some of the rumors I was hearing regarding corruption and he hesitantly said, “The AGA is practical. You see there is corruption everywhere. They take bribes and they give money to manage all this.”

This comment was followed by tension. (See below for a discussion on corruption.) The leadership of the AGA consists of Nafis, his son, and a secretary. They also hire five “security guards” or watchmen. Because of this, an accusation of the AGA is often coded-speak for Nafis himself. I had noticed with other informants a hesitation to mention him by name, especially when discussing allegations of corruption, although some like Suresh showed no hesitation. Our conversation carried on, but before too long I asked Mohammed about Nafis specifically. The conversational air fell heavy. He began to look around, as if to see who was listening. He began to say some things about Nafis, but he quickly stopped himself and said, “I shouldn’t be speaking such things. He would not want me to discuss this.” This 70-year old man seemed shaken, scared even. It was an awkward moment for me and I did not want to push Mohammed into further discomfort. Our conversation ended shortly after that because he wanted to return to his stall at project manager at HCP or AMC/SRFDCL.
These anecdotes open up Nafis’ power and authority to scrutiny. It is significant to briefly elaborate on a few peculiar dimensions of Nafis’ power within the context of the marketplace. First, the market only occurs on Sundays. Thus, the presidential authority is rhythmically activated on market days. This contours the temporal character of the rumors circulating about him. As power of Nafis is never fixed and stable, neither is resistance to it. Resistance to Nafis is as temporal as his power, each undulating in response to the other.

Another dimension of Naifs’ power within the market has to do with his lineage. While his authority is conferred through a quasi-democratic process, I strongly believe that vendors view his legitimacy as President ambivalently. Most vendors I spoke with, including my key informants, still favorably remember Nafis’ father, M. Ishakh Allahwalla, who, by all accounts, made the AGA what it is today. He was the longest serving president, from 1965 to 2000 and was “re-selected” without any opposition during that time. There are no market-wide democratic elections. Rather, a council, made up of representatives from each trade, “selects” the AGA president for a five-year term. He was the third person selected since 1952 (after Abdul Rahim Kadgi and Badulal Balwant Rao). This roughly coincides with the market’s arrival at its current location by the Mahalaxmi Mandir. M. Ishakh used to be a vendor in the market and sold hardware tools. Nafisbhai fondly recounted that his father had a special knack for finding or creating unique solutions to vendor's complaints, disputes, and/or concerns. As this reputation grew, he was selected as the market’s President. After Allahwalla died in 2000, Nafisbhai was immediately selected the same year. This was the first dynastic transition of power since the

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46 This exchange could be analyzed in a number of different ways. The impression left on my memory was that Mohammed was worried, if not scared. This may indicate a pressure coming from the AGA or particularly Nafisbhai. However, this could have been a cultural cue suggesting that Mohammed did not want to talk about
AGA began selecting Presidents. This means the Gujari Bazaar’s internal power structure has been wedded to the personality and influence of one family since its arrival in its current location.

Furthermore, this dynastic transition likely had little effect on the day-to-day operations of the market. When Nafisbhai shared old pictures of his father (circa the late 1970s/early 1980s), several of them were taken inside the AGA’s office. I noticed that very little (if anything) had changed since his father was President. The desk is in the same place, as well as the cabinets and chairs. The office clutter seemed unmoved. The office space was identical and seemed to operate as if his father was still present. Additionally, by all accounts, Allahwalla was an active and compassionate President. Evidence of this can be found in the tireless efforts he took to have the AGA legally recognized and the unpublished 600-page history of the Gujari Bazaar he hand wrote in Gujarati, during his off hours. His commitment and dedication are seen as unparalleled. However, Nafis is viewed as comparatively passive. Some of my informants hinted at the notion that Nafis occupies the office, but did not earn the position. It seems Nafis serves as President with nostalgia for his father’s ways of doing things. Perhaps, the idiom “working in the shadow of” is instructive here. Certainly one pillar of Nafis’ influence among vendors emanates from his father’s prestige, which some vendors may see him continuing. Yet others see him dramatically falling short.

Despite these internal tensions, the Sabarmati Project and PIL elevated the AGA as the representative body of all Gujari vendors. Thus, Nafis’ influence has increased dramatically due to the Sabarmati Project. The encounter has placed him personally as the representative voice of all vendors and positioned him at the helm of Gujari’s future. This opened a new source of someone behind their back, because once conversation turned toward an individual he be increasingly uncomfortable.
political legitimacy upon which he may rest his claims to authority. Even if this external pillar of legitimacy was never seized, the PIL brought the AGA and AMC into their closest proximity since 1978, when the eviction notice was first issued. It has certainly created the closest substantive relationship between the two entities in their history, because the Gujari Bazaar has been absorbed into the AMC’s jurisdiction and now beholden to its regulations. Consider Mohammed’s belief that the AGA is now obsolete because of the MoU. This new source of political contest has produced new expressions of political power and resistance that can be seen through the presence of rumor at Gujari bent on assassinating Nafis’ character at this critical time in its journey.

The bazaar as social space facilitates both Nafisbhai’s power and the persistence of rumors about him. The social space of the market plays a significant role in this. Virtually any public space in India, like tea, paan (beetle and tobacco) shops and markets, become key sites for social and cultural transmission, as M.N. Srinivas noted in his classic The Remembered Village (1976: 23, 276-279). Upon reading Srinivas’ take on this, it struck me that all rumors communicated to me came during chai (of which I was usually offered a dozen or more every Sunday) or lunch; i.e. rumors usually began to flow after there was a sharp break in business. Every time I met with Satyam, Amit or Sureshbhai, conversation would only commence after we drank tea together. On a few occasions while Sureshbhai ordered tea from the chaiwalla who roamed the market I would begin to ask questions while we waited. Sureshbhai usually put up his hand indicating: “let’s wait till after the tea.” Consider for instance my meeting with Mohammed that occurred at a teashop outside the market and across the street. Such places offer casual terms of sociality and conversation. However, it struck me that Nafisbhai still had

47 It is still unclear, even from the MoU, what the extent of this relationship will be. For instance, it is unclear what autonomy the AGA will still retain as far as setting their own rules and regulations. The MoU does require higher
influence on Mohammed, i.e. on his willingness to share his opinions outside the core space of the market.

The Indian bazaar, as a social space, has long been considered a key site of sociality and exchange in India, including the transmission of gossip, rumor, and revolutionary ideas (Guha [1983] 1999: 258-266). During the British Raj, bazaars were kept under the watchful eye of colonial administrators. In fact, it was a site the British desired to discipline most. Failing this: to domesticate. Guha has convincingly shown that many social upheavals, such as riots or full-fledged revolutions often began in the bazaar (ibid: 258; Chakrabarty 2002: 76-77). The existing bonds of trust and the mass “coming together” of separate communities create the kind of socializing environment in which rumors flourish.

This colonial perception was guided by two kinds of fears, political and medical. Politically, the bazaar was seen as a den of lies and rumors, *bazaar gup*, through which the ignorant, superstitious, and credulous Indian masses communicated their dark feelings about the doings of an alien *sarkar* (government) [*sic*] (Chakrabarty 2002: 76). The British grew squeamish anytime there were large local gatherings. He also mentions *melas* (religious festival) as a similar open space or public gathering that concerned, even frightened, British officials. As Chakrabarty notes above, there was another rationale for this fear: medical. As David Arnold (1988: 391-394; 1993) has convincingly shown, the importation of Western (particularly British) public health norms attempted to clamp down on large, dense gatherings of the indigenous population. The treatment usually consisted of separation and distance in order to fight the spread of communicable diseases (see also Foucault 1977).

In Dipesh Chakrabarty’s essay *Of Garbage, Modernity and the Citizen’s Gaze* (2002: 71-77), he takes the Indian bazaar as “the paradigmatic form of the outside” (ibid: 71). In his view, the bazaar is a theater of exposure to which one encounters strangers and strangeness. The “bazaar is the name that I give to that unenclosed, exposed and interstitial outside that acts as the

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vending fees to off-set the future maintenance costs for the marketplace.
meeting point of several communities” (ibid: 72). Chakrabarty’s insights are extremely relevant to the case of the Gujari Bazaar. The market is a public space of exposure, of both the strange and familiar. Its ambiguous and porous boundaries offer easy terms of access and sociality. This generates strong linkages across kinship and communal membership. The resulting milieu is a busy, loose, friendly place where words are exchanged and social bonds are maintained.

This history opens more questions than it answers. Why was the bazaar the principal site for challenging hegemony and colonial rule? I can only speculate, but perhaps the bazaar was hydraulic: the more attempts were made to discipline it, a symmetrical push back occurred, eventually morphing into a cultural symbol of resistance and community. Such questions bring the bazaar as social space to the foreground. Viewing it as such through the lens of social space underscores the AGA as a spatially bounded political institution and Nafis’ power as well. Furthermore, given the fact that Indian bazaars are both public sites of exposure, it should not be surprising to find it as both an effective stage for the performance of power. The scene of Nafis using the chowk as a moment to glad-hand vendors can testify to this. However, with a long genealogy of resistance, it is also not surprising to find “cultural guerilla tactics,” like rumor, challenging such performances.

**Corruption**

One of the most popular attractions in the market is an auction located in the southwest corner. It is certainly a spectacle to witness [see Figure 4.1]. I found myself there a few times in awe of the process. The auction stands out easily by the two large red umbrellas used for shade.

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48 However, it also becomes the place where arguments begin and fights occur, if however rare. I only witnessed one argument that became violent during the four months I was there. The argument occurred between a goat trader and a middleman. The argument was over commission rates. The middleman felt he deserved significantly more than he was currently being paid. I arrived late on the scene, at the point when the shouting caught my attention.
They can be seen across the market. The auctioneers are a group of three men. The leader is a large man with an intimidating presence, especially when he stands on the tall stool behind the table allowing him to display his goods and see all the bidders. The items up for auction range from household goods to portable DVD players. The bidding process is quite elaborate. Anyone who bids on an item receives a small gift, whether a pencil or some other small token. This functions to keep people, especially those willing to bid, around, engaged in the process, and eager for the next round of bidding.

All of this occurs despite being explicitly prohibited by the AGA. The AGA has codified a list of nineteen rules that every member is expected to follow. If not, members risk having their membership status revoked and their privilege to vend at Gujari terminated. Number eight on this list states: “Auction of any goods in the Gujari Bazaar is prohibited.” These auctioneers do not possess a license to vend at the Gujari Bazaar. Thus, without a license I was curious to know why their activities were allowed and tolerated given explicit prohibition.
I discovered later that these auctioneers come with the backing of three young police officers in Ahmedabad’s police force. Twice when I was interviewing Nafis in his office these police officers came to collect their money. This money is mediated through Nafisbhai from the auctioneers to the police officers. They walked into the office unannounced without their uniforms. As they entered they crowded around the door in one hulking mass blocking the sunlight. Nafis nodded in their direction. As he was still answering one of my questions, I was unaware of the new guests behind me. Eventually, one-by-one they maneuvered around me and
sat down at three chairs in front of the desk directly opposite Nafisbhai. The men sat in silence looking straight ahead with their sunglasses still on. They seemed undisturbed by my presence. Nafis continued with me and even offered to answer my follow-up question before addressing his new guests. I was sitting in such a way that required Nafis to angle himself away from the direction of the police officers so that he could address both my translator and I. This allowed for no eye contact between them.

This awkward ballet continued for about five minutes until Nafis opened the top desk drawer and slowly pulled out a stack of rupee notes folded with a one thousand-rupee note on the outside. I cannot be sure of the total amount which changed hands that day, but I witnessed this two other times and similar amounts of cash were exchanged leading me to believe it was a standard fee not a percentage of the auctioneers take. Nafis held this money in his hand close to his body for a little while until extending his arm outward gesturing towards the discreet men. The man closest to me stood slightly from his chair and gently took the money from his hand quickly putting it in his pocket. Strangely the men did not leave immediately. They sat in silence. I do not remember a single word spoken by any of them. During this whole time Nafis was attentive to my questions. After a few minutes, they all rose from their seats and began to leave. Nafis also rose to see them off. He stood tall. He asked whether he could offer them some tea, but they refused and slowly left. I witnessed this occurrence two more times, once with Mathur and the other with Gagdekar, a respected journalist. The situation was the same each time and felt tense every time.

I would like to unpack this scene. Corruption has had a growing presence in academic literature. Approached from various theoretical angles, corruption offers a wide analytical nexus where issues of power, influence, and bureaucracy collide. Most attempts to conceptualize
corruption, however, identify it as a signature of the state (Gupta 2012; Gould 2011; Shani 2010). That is to say, most literature defines corruption as an abuse of public trust, power or resources. In some respects, it has become synonymous with bureaucratic dysfunction. Furthermore, corruption usually arises only when someone or some group gains monetarily from a transaction. Certainly the police officers in this case are engaging in corruption using Nafis as an intermediary, acting as a middleman (vahitadar), distancing the two parties. As a result of their non-member status, the auctioneers pay Nafis a “fee” or “rent” to vend in the marketplace. This money is then handed over to the police officers that, because of their publicly endowed power, have pressured Nafis into allowing auction activities.

According to Vena Das (2012), corruption forms a moral community. This is not to say that corruption is a moral act; quite to the contrary, you can have a moral agreement to commit an immoral act. Instead, she argues that behind every system of corruption there is a thick web of trust. For instance, there must be trust to proposition others to join a scheme of corruption, trust that everyone involved will keep the secret, and trust that the person who takes the money will distribute it equitably based on the pre-determined arrangement. If we think about the scene I described earlier in this way, Nafis is also an integral member of this moral community of corruption. I am not implicating Nafis, but the scheme could not work without him. As I argued before, most literature on corruption conceives it as an abuse of public trust, publically endowed power, or misuse of public resources. In this sense the principle actors are the police officers.

Furthermore, performance plays a central role in establishing power. As the police enter Nafis’ office, they become possessed by hyper-masculine personas. This is done through the show of numbers, bringing three officers, and physically contorted the body, i.e. puffed chest and

49 I heard Veena Das present this thesis at the 41st (2012) Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison, WI.
tall stature. This pushes Nafis into a more submissive social and political position. But, Nafis makes the officers wait and does not show them much urgency or hospitality. Waiting, as Ghassan Hage (2009) has convincingly argued, can be a deeply political act. This suggests unease with his involvement. He is resisting his “lower” position of power within the scheme.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to show the complex social relations within the Gujari Bazaar. Rumors of corruption aimed at Nafis—the only person with power and authority in the market—is one part of an elaborate subterranean “enunciatory community” through which dissent is expressed and shared. This is done in an attempt to readjust the terms of Gujari’s political structure. It not only exorcises the tension and frustrations embedded within Gujari, but, once circulated, rumors form a mutual grammar around which members find the terms of affiliation and solidarity, what Homi Bhabha its “communal adhesion.” Furthermore, rumor in this context critiques a perceived “wrong” in a community, mediating a shared sense of community and effectively regulating morality. Rumor, because of its potential for political resistance and communal adhesion, constitutes vendors as a political community. In this sense, we are witnessing the rise of Gujari’s political consciousness and a start to an emerging development from within.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS: A MARKET FOR DEAD THINGS

This thesis has tracked the Gujari Bazaar’s encounter with the Sabarmati Project and explored the politics of ‘getting included’ in Ahmedabad’s modernizing development agenda. In Chapter 2, I attempted to place the Sabarmati Project in its redevelopment context. In doing so, I discovered that the discourse of informality Otherizes spaces not fitting a world-class city image. This discursively produces susceptibility to redevelopment. In the initial plan for the Sabarmati Project, published in 1998, Gujari was labeled an informal market along with other vending/hawking and residential activities along the river.

Exploiting this Otherizing discourse, evictions of self-established settlements began along the river, especially between 2010 and 2011. This led market officials and a local professor/activist to file a Public Interest Litigation in order to secure the market’s future. The PIL made a compelling case for the market’s inclusion by arguing that Gujari is a part of Ahmedabad’s heritage and must be preserved. This was highly effective because it was able to draw simultaneously from local understandings of historical value and global notions of heritage preservation through transnational organizations like UNESCO. Thus, in Chapter 3, I argued that this led to a reinterpretation of “heritage.” While projecting a glossy “world-class city” image for its future, Sabarmati planners and policy makers have repackaged informality as heritage and exploited it to serve its global city aspirations. Thus, heritage served as both the terms of its inclusion and co-option. We can see this in the new space provided for the market. The space that the market will come to occupy was designated as a “Heritage Park” years before the PIL decision. Thus, once the case was made for its heritage status, Sabarmati planners reframed
Gujari within the Heritage Park making little contextual modifications. This positioning of Gujari is problematic. It will now be placed between large exhibition halls, the convention center, and various showrooms and the city’s historic fort wall from the 16th century. Thus, the reconstructed historical environment, sandwiched between modernity and history, will come to symbolize, as metaphor, a reinterpretation of heritage. Additionally, Gujari will be one of several activities in the new marketplace. While Gujari will continue to operate on Sundays, the space will have a thematic program in order to maximize its utility, i.e. on Tuesdays will be the flower market, etc. This new spatial context and series of regulations established in the MoU between the AMC and AGA constitutes Gujari as a spatial community. They are now beholden to a single image in a way they never were before. Pervious to redevelopment, vendors’ stalls were unique and varied in size and shape. However, the new marketplace establishes a uniform design and use of the space. Additionally, the new marketplace demarcates Gujari as spatially defined and determined.

Within this new development environment, Gujari is also experiencing shifting subject positions. In Chapter 4, I explored the social life of rumors about corruption aimed at Nafis. I argued that rumor, because of its enunciative wrapper, communal adhesion, and ability to mediate a shared sense of community, constitutes Gujari as a political community. In this, rumor signifies the emergence of a political consciousness among vendors negotiating their own modernity. However, I also attempted to give a more nuanced picture of Nafis, by showing the external pressures with which he is forced to navigate with both the AMC and Ahmedabadi police force.

What we find in the case of the Gujari Bazaar is by no means unique. The Sabarmati Project is perhaps an extreme expression of India’s world-class city ambitions, but the
reformation of urban informalities is occurring across the global south. These ambitions have systematically evicted spaces not fitting a predetermined aesthetic and co-opted those spaces/activities fortunate enough to gain inclusion, either through the courts or some other means. In the case of Gujari, co-option has come by way of reinterpreting heritage for the economic benefit of tourism and cultural spectacle. Gujari has been reframed and repositioned as the location of authentic culture and continuity with the past.

Throughout its fight for redevelopment, the PIL granted elite members of the market extraordinary representational authority. Many vendors, however, took issue with his handling of the PIL process and began rumoring that he was corrupt. These rumors served to undermine his authority and assert the political aspirations of vendors within the market. My exploration of Gujari Bazaar reveals that the politics of “getting included” in Ahmedabad requires a counter-narrative of legitimacy in a world-class image. In the case of Gujari, this was done through the discourse of heritage. However, this process has elevated local officials to new levels of social and political authority engendering new forms of subaltern resistance.
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