ARTICLE

Differences in Workers' Narratives of Contention in Two Central Indian Towns

Manjusha Nair
Rutgers University

Abstract

Contract work in India, though legally regulated by a 1970 Act, is widespread and mostly unrecognized. With the implementation of neoliberal policies in India since the 1990s, contract work has become the norm. There are now few spaces in which contract workers can get redress through the legal system. Using oral history narratives of contract workers' participation in a labor movement, this article shows how narratives of contention differ in the rendering of agency, success, and future, between one group of contract workers employed in the 1970s in a state-owned mine and another employed in the 1990s in an industrial area owned by private and foreign capital. The evidence for the article is ethnographic, collected in Chhattisgarh region in central India. This article suggests that these workers' narratives show the transformation in practices of citizenship, resistance, and militancy in India over time. Such differences are essential in understanding phenomena like the resurgence of the Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh.

Introduction

In 1977, the contract workers of the state-owned iron-ore mines in Dalli-Rajhara Township in Chhattisgarh region in central India[1] unsettled the entire township with an insurgent strike. They rebelled against their union leaders and mine management, left work, and squatted on a field for twenty-one days, singing revolutionary songs. These workers were predominantly Chhattisgarhiya, or natives of Chhattisgarh, a region with ethnic and linguistic characteristics separate from the rest of central India. They were already members of the two national trade unions, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), affiliated with the Communist Party of India, and the Indian Trade Union Congress (INTUC), affiliated with the Congress Party. The spark that led to the split of these contract workers from their unions was a bonus hike issue: While the mine management raised the festival bonus of the regular workers to 308 Indian rupees, the contract workers' bonus was raised to just seventy rupees. This raise was implemented after negotiations with the AITUC and INTUC. The decision enraged the contract workers from both unions. A worker whom I interviewed in 2006 recalled those events:

International Labor and Working-Class History
No. 79, Spring 2011, pp. 175–194
© International Labor and Working-Class History, Inc., 2011
doi:10.1017/S0147547910000323

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> We, the red color union [AITUC] people, got into the road shouting, and met the tricolor union [INTUC] people, who also were shouting against their leaders. We all gathered in one place. We said: "The unions are doing injustice on us. Our problems and your problems are the same. So let us go to the mine management and demand that we also need to get 308 rupees." Thus we assembled in a field, leaving our work, and started a strike. Our union leaders came and advised us not to stop work, or we will be thrown out of the mines. We didn't listen to them. Our strike continued. For twenty-one days, we were sitting in that field striking.

All twenty-two workers whom I interviewed[2] vividly recalled the events, which happened almost thirty years before, as if they had occurred just the previous day. Equally etched in their memories was a striking sense of collective awakening. In the repetitive use of the collective pronoun *we*, they denoted their new common identity, which had previously been demarcated by the red-color and tricolor union divide. In the *we*, they also buried their "personal" past, which had lost its significance in the new collective self.[3] The beginnings of their life stories coincided with the start of their movement; sometimes, they even suggested eliminating personal stories[4] from the narrative, not because they were embarrassing, but because they did not fit with the chronological order of their narrative's events, conflicts, and accomplishments. They formed their own union, won demands, and became prosperous. By 2006, while I was interviewing, most of them had retired from the mines and led comfortable lives.

About thirteen years after the mine workers' successful insurgency, around five thousand Chhattisgarhiya contract workers in the adjacent Bhilai industrial area[5] started a similar strike. It started as a "tool down" in a factory owned by the Associated Cement Company (ACC)[6] and evolved into a full-blown movement of all the contract workers and their families, with protest marches, hunger strikes, public meetings, and road blockages. As in the Dalli-Rajhara mines, the movement in Bhilai was led by Sankar Guha Niyogi, known as Niyogi *bhaiyya* ("brother") among the workers. The impact of this strike was so enormous that the industrialists had to plead to the state to protect their factories and production.[7] Sixteen years later, a participant recalled those events:

> I worked as [a] supply[8] laborer for two years. If I work as a regular laborer, I can be made permanent in ninety days; there is provision in the laws. To evade the law, the management used to lay us off in between and take us again. The management could not recruit new workers because they could not understand the molding job easily. I was a member of the red color union, and the leader was fooling me by assuring me that I would become a permanent worker.[9] One day I met some old workers near the push cart selling tea. They told me to go to the meeting of the new red-and-green-flag union.[10] I went to the meeting, and heard the ideas of Niyogi *bhaiyya*.[11] I felt he had something in him; and this union would do something for the worker.

Unlike the vivid collective memories of the Dalli mine workers, the Bhilai industrial workers' memories were fragmented and personalized. The above

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

worker had interests that were quite narrow and instrumental: to be a permanent worker and stop being fooled by the management and the red-color union. His account was also passive: He was "told" by the workers to go to the meeting where he "heard" Niyogi and "felt" that the union might do things for the workers. This motif of passivity was widespread; even the workers who spearheaded the movement from the ACC factory narrated a similar story of being led and privileged Niyogi for organizing their movement.

This movement had insurgent beginnings similar to the one in the mining township. But why did the participants remember it with less of a sense of ownership? Why did they show a weak sense of collectivity and agency in their memories and readily pass organizing credit to Niyogi? These differences, I suggest, emerged from the different lived experiences of being workers and citizens. These workers faced different opponents (state and industrialists), struggled in different times (1977 and 1990) and spatial contexts (mining township and urban town), and faced contrasting outcomes (success and failure). The insurgent miners and the industrial workers had much in common: Both groups were Chhattisgarhiya who had migrated to native towns for work. Both were part of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (Chhattisgarh Liberation Front; CMM henceforth), which has heroically led a movement for the eradication of contract labor in the region. However, their movements took different trajectories. With militant trade unionism, the miners forced the state-owned mine management to confer benefits, including regularized wages and working conditions. The movement's final demand—the absorption of manual laborers, who included most of the miners—was fulfilled in 1996. The industrial workers, on the other hand, were employed as contract workers in privately owned industries. They demanded labor rights in the 1990s, a period when neoliberal policies were officially launched in India.[12] These workers were expelled, their leader (Niyogi) was assassinated, and their union was reduced to a routine client in court. Some workers returned to their villages, some worked full time in the union, some found alternative employment, and some simply did not survive.

The workers' narratives showed systematic differences: The mine workers claimed that "they" started the movement, challenging the accounts by the media that it was Niyogi. In contrast, the industrial workers of Bhilai gave credit to Niyogi for organizing them. The mine workers outlined their gains in terms of material prosperity and symbolic gains as "workers" or "productive beings." The industrial workers outlined the symbolic gains of creating a fraternal space for everyday problem solving. The mine workers narrated their challenge to and triumph over the political parties through public displays of their mobilizing capabilities while the industrial workers narrated their vague yet inspiring "historic role" as the working class. Unlike the miners, who abhorred the use of any kind of violence despite their militant and somewhat violent past, the industrial workers were more likely to favor radical tactics, which was evident in their support of the Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh.[13]

The differences in the workers' narratives point to variation in lived experiences due to temporal changes in worker rights and social citizenship in India.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The mining township in the 1970s–1980s represented the phase of postcolonial governance in India where the state still held the reins of a developmental structure that partially acknowledged the role of citizens as laborers. The state-employer was responsible for the welfare of its employees. The state was not benevolent, and it was up to the union to form and struggle for rights. However, the state was more protective of the mine workers and provided a platform for them to organize and resist. On the other hand, the Bhilai town in the 1990s represented a phase in which the state was becoming more a facilitator of capital than a protector of workers. While the impact of the state's withdrawal from its previous role created unprecedented hardships for organized labor (just eight percent of the workforce), its impact on unorganized and undocumented urban labor (perhaps thirty-two percent of the workforce) is beyond elucidation. The contract workers in Bhilai were already on the fringes of development before the 1990s: Their educational skills were minimal, and they were pushed to the towns through rural poverty.[14] While neoliberal policies undoubtedly cut back any sustained economic opportunity that contract work provided, they also chained the political opportunities of those workers to organize. Hence, these workers were already contemplating alternative political tactics to effectively counter the state and industries.

Most of the evidence in this article is from accounts of the movement collected from the Dalli-Rajhara mining township and Bhilai, mainly in the spring of 2006. These participant narratives were crucial in the construction of the workers' identities. As Francesca Poletta has written, "In telling the story of our becoming—as an individual, a nation, a people—we establish who we are."[15] The factuality of these narratives was not my concern; I was more interested in which events these workers "chose" to tell and their mode of narration. "Oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility," writes Alessandro Portelli. "The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge."[16] At the time the narratives of the participants were recorded, the Dalli miners were comfortably retired and the Bhilai workers had little hope, despite some excitement of the recent wins of the Maoist movement. These narratives were "filtered reflections" of the past: filtered through the sieve of specific histories, the present, anticipations, emotions, and subjectivities. The act of filtering was also an act of modifying the meanings of past events. As Portelli reminds us, "[W]hat is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings."[17]

Research Methods

The stories of movement participation were gathered through semi- and unstructured interviews, as well as numerous casual conversations and observations. I interviewed around forty participants in the movement, including nine women, tribal people, and non-natives. Most of them were *mukhiyas* (meso-level leaders) who had some knowledge of Hindi[18] and were more or

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

less educated in the nitty-gritty of trade unionism. The participants in Dalli were more than willing to be interviewed. In contrast, in Bhilai, people were always busy with one odd job or another, and I could meet many only after repeated efforts. Along with interviewing, I participated in protest marches, accompanied their street theatre troupe, visited their households, and was a regular guest at their union offices. Finally, I have used regional newspaper coverage of the movement to find out how CMM was perceived by the wider public.

I have been careful to include and interpret the multiple levels of distillation of the events that originally occurred. Accounts of the movement were actually accounts of what was lived, experienced, and interpreted by the participants and presented to the "ethnographer" who was their audience. When I entered the room, the workers in the Bhilai office always switched off the TV or shifted channels from Bollywood movies to the Discovery or National Geographic channels, to assume a more professional role. This shift was useful in knowing how they wanted to be known, what they wanted to project. Their working-class consciousness and agency was "activated" in front of the interviewer, who was considered an educated outsider, similar to a journalist.[19]

While I prompted some workers to talk about their movement, many already had a narrative arranged in chronological order.[20] This started with their insurgency, the formation of their union, the events that led to a police shooting,[21] the experience of the police shooting, and the assassination of Niyogi. The narratives fizzled away after these episodes, and I had to probe into such other details as worker's personal lives, villages, earnings, etc. I was identified as the "reporter," since the participants were accustomed to being interviewed by many journalists sympathetic to the movement. During the interviews, the workers "acted" as the aggrieved, yet liberated workers, also to let me know what needed to be covered in the report. Many workers pointed at "what ought to be written" and what should not be written among the stories they told me. In this article, I draw on both their chronologically arranged stories as well as the "residues."

Contract Work in Chhattisgarh

The labor insurgencies in central India discussed here were structured by the perceived betrayal of the state and the other trade unions that subjugated workers' interests to capital. These insurgencies are, additionally, instances of workers being empowered to engage in effective, nonviolent politics.[22] The Indian state, after attaining political independence in 1947, started a program of economic modernization to catch up with the developed nations. The huge Bhilai steel plant industrial complex was completed in 1960.[23] Since its launch, Bhilai has become the center of industrial undertakings extending to nearby regions of Rajnandgaon and Raipur. These include 120 small industrial units that depend on Bhilai Steel Plant for by-products, as well as large enterprises like the ACC, the Simplex Engineering and Foundry works, and the Beekay Engineering Corporation, which were owned by indigenous capitalists.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

While the state deployed skilled workers in its steel plant and mines, the unskilled local population became contract workers in the mines and in the privately owned industries in Bhilai. The workforce in the steel plant and the mines was mostly from educated parts of India. This regular workforce was represented by the AITUC and the INTUC. In the steel plant, INTUC was the only union allowed. In other places, the AITUC and the INTUC acted as "company unions," negotiating with management to secure the interests of the workers. Despite these regulations on union activism, labor unrest occurred in Bhilai, as is evident from the annual reports of the steel plant that tried to portray them as mere "personnel" issues.[24]

The Dalli-Rajhara iron-ore mines, which went into production in 1960, employed two types of workers, regular and contract; the latter mainly worked manually in digging and transporting earth laden with iron ore. Digging was done in couples, usually a husband-wife pair, and transportation was mostly done by male workers, though some female workers participated. Recruited through the *tekedars* (contractors), they came chiefly from the neighboring villages and districts, pushed by Chhattisgarh's persistent droughts. They came as seasonal laborers, lived in temporary sheds in the so-called labor camps, and returned to the villages to farm when it rained. In 2006, most workers formed "gangs" that more often consisted of fellow workers than spouses.

In Bhilai, contract labor was predominant. The contractor acted as the mediator between the industrial management and the workers. Under the contract labor system, management passed the legal responsibilities to the workers while the contractors maintained the herds of workers through long-established means of control.[25] These contractors, who had their offices in the company yards, visited the labor camps to "call" workers, if there was some demand from the industrialists. Those who were around during that call got that job. Unlike the miners, most Bhilai workers were men, though I met a few women workers as well. Some estimates of contract workers in the Bhilai industrial region are as high as ninety-four percent,[26] and their numbers are increasing since economic liberalization in the 1990s.[27]

Miners' Narratives

Claiming Agency The mine workers almost always started their stories of movement participation with their insurgent beginnings in 1977. While these stories highlighted the spontaneity and rebelliousness of the workers, they also claimed that these workers "knew their rights" as citizen-workers and hence decided to take things into their own hands. After the AITUC and INTUC negotiated for a festival bonus and agreed on 308 rupees for the regular workers and seventy rupees for the contract workers, the contract workers "who knew the law" got agitated, tore the agreement papers, and left the union offices. Their leader was a miner, "who has had some education." These workers gathered in a nearby field, which subsequently was named the red field (*laal maidan*), and spent twenty-one days striking. Their households,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

including goats and chicken, participated too. Their union leaders advised them to return to work, lest they lose their jobs. The police arrived in search of their leader, and the women hid him beneath their dresses (*sarees*).[28] At the end of the action, the workers decided to form a union of their own, and Chhattisgarh Mines Sramik Sangh (Chhattisgarh Mine Workers Union) was born.

Strikingly, these accounts differ from the dominant accounts of the beginning of the movement in the mining township. Researchers, mine management, rival union leaders, and the media highlight the role of Sankar Guha Niyogi, a trade union leader who went in search of the oppressed mine workers to organize them. Niyogi was just released from prison, where he had been incarcerated for his radical political activity. Prior to his arrest, he had spent time studying the lives of the "poor" Chhattisgarhiya people, working in stone quarries, and wandering in villages. The mine officials, rival union leaders, and contractors repeated the story of Niyogi appearing to save or manipulate the simple Chhattisgarhiya. One mine official went as far as saying that "they [the workers] cannot dissect; only we can."

The Dalli miners' accounts clearly differed. The miners placed themselves at the center of the movement, thus reclaiming it. They talked about how they wanted a leader who was English-educated so that they could negotiate with management. After discussing many leaders they already knew, they decided on Niyogi: "We went and told Niyogi: '*bhaiyya*, our organization has grown a lot. We have around ten to twelve thousand *mazdoor* [workers], but no leader. The red and tricolor flag people have left us.' He said: 'If *mazdoor* is ready for the fight, I am coming.' Thus our union began." In other words, although the workers were handicapped by their lack of knowledge of the language of official discourse, it was their decision that resulted in the invitation.

From Peasants to Prosperous Workers Most miners narrated their stories from the comfort of their village homes. Though these workers migrated from the countryside, they still maintained their village networks, at least in the beginning, because of the uncertainties involved in mine work. They returned to do farming seasonally, and food from their villages sustained them during the strikes. While working in the mines, they expanded their farms in the villages, and with the lump sum they received from the mines upon retirement, they returned to the village as proud owners of partly mechanized farms that their children cultivated. Their multi-storied concrete houses, which towered over the usual mud huts in the village, symbolized their new status. Those still in the township also had this double life in the villages, where their children managed the farms.

Workers' narratives reflected this new identity of being "different and better" than their peasant counterparts, who now represented their past. They said that being unionized transformed the "peasant miners" into "workers," both by experientially distinguishing their work from the peasants' work and by improving their social status. Before they organized their union, the miners

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

did not differentiate mine work from farm work, except to acknowledge that it was more dangerous; instead of going to their fields, they were going to the hills.

Accounts narrated the hardships of mine work, in contrast to the prosperity that followed unionization. "We used to wear sandals to work and there were no helmets as well," reminisced a retired worker. The workers used to leave early for work, and they would survive the whole day on porridge made from the previous day's rice. They had to walk two miles uphill, carrying their hammers and hoes. Working from seven in the morning till five in the evening, they were paid according to a piece rate, which was as low as three rupees (about six cents). The contractors who recruited the workers moved around in surveillance. There was no shade and no rest center. Sometimes boulders would fall from above. Workers also emphasized the emotional toll from mine work: They left home before their children woke up and returned after they went to sleep; they hardly were part of their children's growing up.[29]

In contrast, the workers described the time after they organized their union as a time of prosperity:

> After we started the movement, everyone had a cycle and had radio. Didn't we get more money? We got bonuses and arrears every three months; so people used to go to the mines listening to radio, listening to songs and news. The women folk started wearing silver jewelry. Now they even wear gold ornaments.

Once the union was organized and bargains were won, mine work became prestigious and "going to work was now a celebration".

Another feature of the mine workers' new identity was as a "productive being."[30] This was expressed most often using construction motifs, echoing the motto of the CMM, "Contention and Construction" (*Sangarsh Aur Nirman*). In contrast to the peasants, who lived on "kindness," the Dalli miners pointed to their accomplishments using physical labor, their "blood and sweat." They narrated attempts to create a viable neighborhood of workers, who were otherwise relegated to dwellings made of temporary shacks called labor camps.[31] By collecting contributions, workers built a concrete building for their union and bought their own cars and jeeps. They also built a hospital[32] for the workers and villagers around the mines, who had little access to state health facilities. Their logic was that "Workers built the roads and bridges; why can't the *mazdoor* have their own hospitals?" Participants were keen to emphasize that the hospital was made with "their" money and "their" hands: "The hospital was made with our blood and sweat"; "it was made with our two rupee contribution"; and "we used our hands to make the hospital."

Challenging the Congress Party The miners' narratives portrayed the triumph of overcoming a state that was threatening and deliberately trying to sabotage their movement. Narratives did not pay much attention to the mine management except as officials whom the miners could intimidate through militant tactics.[33] Rather, the miners' suspicions and wrath fell on local representatives

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the Congress Party, which held power in the region for a prolonged time.[34] (Interestingly, they held the national leaders of the Congress Party in high regard.)

The miners' repertoire of political protest included public performances,[35] the most prominent among them being martyr day celebrations.[36] The workers' triumphant accounts of these celebrations narrated how they, the "little people," challenged the powerful politicians. One such celebration was the Narayan Singh martyr day, observed every year on December 19 to commemorate a local tribal chieftain hanged by the British in 1859 for instigating a peasant rebellion. The miners recalled the spectacular aspect of their celebrations:

> We all had helmets on our heads. We also were wearing uniform; men wore red shirts, green pants, helmets, and shoes and carried bamboo poles. We [women] wore green blouses and red sarees. We had a huge procession where Narayan Singh was hanged. The people in the city were shouting that the "black stone" people have arrived.

The black stone (*kala pathar*) reference is to a 1979 Bollywood movie in which coal mine workers organized against their exploitative masters. The participants' militant worker attire—helmet and shoes (an integral part of a miner's attire), red and green dress (the colors of the CMM flag, signifying the worker-peasant duo), and bamboo poles showing defiance—must have terrified onlookers, as was the intention of the workers.

The workers contrasted their ability to organize a mass demonstration to the failure of their rival politicians to do the same. They ridiculed the Congress Party for attempting to steal the CMM icons and appropriate the CMM martyr day:

> Once during our Narayan Singh martyr day, the then chief minister[37] came here in his helicopter for his own meeting and procession. All facilities were given to him and we were given the dirty playground where now the school is. But all people were with us. Their march crossed the town intersection in an hour, while ours took three hours. And their people were walking faster. The chief minister was so upset that the local representative of the Congress Party did not get a ticket in the next election.

The impact of the event was so strong that the standing member of the legislative assembly in the surrounding election precinct was declined ticket. The Dalli worker who narrated this episode became so animated during the interview that he got up from his chair and gave a comical demonstration of the disappointment of that particular aspirant to a crowd of cheering listeners who had gathered for their routine black tea in the backyard of the CMM office. The participants in the Dalli rallies were given free food, heaps of white rice, and lentils, freshly cooked in the backyard of the CMM office in bamboo baskets and iron vessels. The fact that the "poor" Dalli miners did this through their

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

monthly fee collections elevated their pride: "The Congress Party gave just bananas to the attendees. We gave our workers a full meal." These and other stories marked the folkloric success of the poor Chhattisgarhiya people in humbling the Congress Party.

Conformist Futures? "I cannot read and write, but those who have read Niyogiji's writings have not found a word about using violence," said a mine worker in hushed and anguished tones after my tape recorder was switched off. She was commenting on what she had heard about some of the Bhilai industrial workers' talk of the need for violence and justifying violence using the writings of Niyogi.[38] This worker was angered and pained that the Bhilai industrial workers were not paying attention to her: She had even sacrificed her children's education for the sake of the movement. Bhilai industrial workers were not listening to their peers (*siyan*), who had more experience in running a movement.

As discussed earlier, most Dalli mine workers were comfortably retired during my fieldwork in 2006, and many had returned to their villages. The miners were complacent about the present, with the retirement of many, and even the last of their demands—that all laborers be absorbed as regular workers—had been met in 1996. The mine workers, despite their militant and often violent past, shunned violence. This was not just a reflection of their victories, or their old age. Union participation had left a visible mark on their lives, as well as life in the mining township.[39] Despite the comforts of their retired life, they were still actively involved in the movement. One of them said, "When there is a call from the office for a meeting, though I am weak, I still pick up my bamboo pole and walk to the bus stand."

The denunciation of violence was, rather, a reflection of the miners' old style of politics and the relationship with the nation-state. They had from early on spurned any suggestion of association with the Maoist movement, though accusations had been plenty. Maoist allegiance in the 1970s was a sure way of delegitimizing a movement. Rival unions claimed Niyogi was a naxalite (the Indian term for Maoist, after the Maoist-led insurgence in Naxalbari village in West Bengal in 1967).[40] Miners explained that this was a "rumor" to destabilize their movement, which they insisted was a disciplined trade union: "We would sit down with the administration and talk before taking to the streets." The miners' denunciation of the Maoists' violent tactics in 2006 was a restatement of their support of militant, yet nonviolent tactics.[41]

Industrial Workers' Narratives

Passive Agency Most Bhilai industrial workers joined the movement for similar reasons: irksome trade unions and contractors. Once they became aware of the movement and its leaders, they recalled, they were "swept away": "We never knew there was workers' movement like this before. First time we saw the battle of the people." In another account, "When meetings used to happen outside the gates of my company, I used to listen carefully.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I understood that this is how exploitation happens." By listening to CMM leaders' speeches, they realized that their demands were not individual, their exploitation was universal, and their battle was the "battle of the people."

Unlike the silencing of external influence in the Dalli accounts, the Bhilai industrial workers solely credited their "awakening" to Niyogi *bhaiyya*. The workers who started the movement in the ACC talked about their activism as a result of Niyogi deciding to take up their cause: "A few people from among us went to Dalli and conveyed our problems to Niyogi *bhaiyya*. We had heard of the union that was made in Dalli in 1977. Somehow we managed to communicate with *bhaiyya*. Then we started our struggle to make the contract workers permanent." Instead of "starting" the movement, the Bhilai industrial workers used more passive language: they "listened," "heard," were "attracted," "understood," or "felt good," and thus joined the movement.

Familial Metaphors Unlike the language of collective awakening in the miners' accounts, the cement workers described their movement as a brotherly relationship, built on filial emotions toward Niyogi rather than expectations that their demands would be fulfilled. Most of my interviewees remembered a fraternal metaphor that Niyogi used in his speeches: "He was talking about two brothers; one brother is given *lathi* [a bamboo club] by the industrialists to beat the other brother, who is unionizing. I felt that it is true; all workers are brothers."

This fraternal metaphor must also have been necessary for mobilizing workers in Bhilai, where, compared to Dalli, the workers worked in different factories, lived in different neighborhoods, and intersected each other's paths rarely. As a worker pointed out, before joining the movement, he did not know that many Chhattisgarhiya workers existed in Bhilai. After they joined the union they all became part of a big family: "Everyone was considered a member of Niyogi *bhaiyya*'s family. If we had financial or personal problems, he would sit with us and solve it."

The workers' use of fraternal signifiers and filial emotions in their participant accounts transferred meaning, desires, and feelings to a familial terrain rather than one of action and direct agency. The Bhilai industrial workers felt that their movement was not as successful as the Dalli miners' since they could not show successful outcomes in terms of realizing workers' interests. The industrialists refused their demands early on, and most of them were expelled in the beginning. The state favored the industrialists,[42] and Niyogi was assassinated, thus weakening the workers' bargaining power considerably. The union, with the help of the contributions of the Dalli miners, did run services, including an office canteen and a health clinic, for some time. However, what the workers remembered or chose to remember fondly was how they gave each other a helping hand when there was no work. The interviewees always recalled fixing each others' roofs, which needed yearly repair.

The Bhilai industrial workers' fraternity was not bound by territories; they imagined that the Chhattisgarhiya workers were part of the universal working class:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Our movement is not for the money of the management. That we will get money, good job, good salary, it is not a fight like that. This is a class struggle, for the freedom of working class, this is a long struggle, it is possible that you will get some benefit, your job will be permanent, our struggle is not up to then, it will continue till the end when every worker is free.

With the expulsion of the workers, the assassination of their leader, and the weakening of their movement by a court takeover of their cases, the Bhilai industrial workers must have found more than mere rhetoric in Niyogi's words, which helped their everyday sustenance. That they were "interpellated" in a universal workers' identity must have helped them to live beyond the movement objectives of permanent jobs. They asked me questions about the Chicago workers' movement and the celebration of May Day in the United States, showing a keen, educated awareness of workers' struggles in the United States, a country, which in daily parlance, was equated to the bastion of "imperialist" intentions.

Problem-Solving and Meaning-Making The Bhilai workers outlined the role of their union as a "problem solving mechanism,"[43] a social support group that intervened in contract workers' everyday lives. The union helped them to run police cases against neglectful and "inhuman" employers. An interviewee mentioned that the union took up the case of a worker who had an accident after working for twenty-four hours. Since he was a contract worker, the management refused to give him proper treatment. The friends of this worker approached the union. Being pressured by the union, the management provided medical treatment to this worker for two years in the steel plant hospital. Though he has started moving again, he has not been given any employment and was sitting idle.

The Bhilai industrial workers' union was understood in terms of the sacrifices involved in community building and the fulfillment attached to it. The services of the union were extended to everyone who was in need. As one interviewee put it, the union was about "how to live our life":

> This union is not like other unions; it is a twenty-four-hour union. It is not for company work. It is for how to live your life. No union is like that … It is true that our families sacrifice because of our union work. But if a hundred people have to benefit, ten people have to sacrifice. We get fulfillment from such work. At least people can tell the union what happened. Or we can take an affected worker to the police. If it is a villager, even if he is not a CMM member, we can take him to Dalli hospital.

The union was in fact an essential component of their life, a requirement of their ontological well being.

Countering the "State-Industrialists Nexus" The Bhilai workers frequently talked about the industrialists as looters of the nation's wealth and accused

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the state agents of conniving in this banditry. They referred to the nexus of the state, industrialists, and politicians who were not only subjugating their interests as workers, but were also detrimental to the nation. This "national" concern was relatively absent in the miners' accounts. Part of the reason was that unlike the miners, who faced mostly a single employer state, the industrial workers constantly faced the state in its multiple and layered forms: state government, district administration, labor department, justice system, security force, and the police—all of which seemed to favor the industrialists. The state agents were understood through a more familiar narrative lens of corruption,[44] as well as a more radical lens of "oppressors."

A worker in a casting factory in Bhilai narrated the success of industrialists thus:

> After the [Bhilai] steel plant was made, the riches here were so great that these people [industrialists] were restless in their homes. They wanted to come here. They said, "let us go to Bhilai, the people there are simple and easily manipulated." Initially they started small industries, like a small lathe-machine operating unit in a shed. They started their work like that. Now they are becoming steel king and casting king. How did they become rich? Of course they loot workers, but they also loot the Bhilai Steel Plant.

The industrialists are identified as a "class" of greedy and manipulative "outsiders" who came to loot the "simple" workers of Chhattisgarh.[45] These industrialists were looting not just the workers, but also the riches created by the Bhilai Steel Plant, which is state's property, and hence belongs to the workers as people of India. The workers also have a separate claim to the steel plant as natives of Chhattisgarh, whose wealth has enabled the creation of the steel plant.

While the industrialists were only displaying their selfish interests as a class, the state agents were implicated in selling the interests of the Indian nation due to "greed." Workers expressed their helplessness at the connivance of the local labor department officials in allowing the irregularities perpetuated by the industrial owners. Along with their own loss of rights, the workers bemoaned the plight of Bhilai, a genuine state project, having been destroyed at the hands of the industrialist-state agent nexus. The state agents who were responsible for ensuring the welfare of the workers collaborated with the industrialists:

> If we go to administration or to the labor department, there are no results. The labor department people, for instance, inform the management [of factories] before each inspection. The management then keeps only regular workers and shows that safety requirements are met. The labor department knows everything. Even after getting paid from the government for everything, the officials there do this out of greed. This is how Bhilai is.

The workers implicated the police in assisting their subjugation to the industrialists, but this implication was qualified and nuanced. One worker

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

suggested that "The industrialists' people even wear police dress and beat the *mazdoor*. One pregnant comrade [*sathi*] was beaten on her belly by one such fake policeman." Notable here is the characterization of the cruel policeman as fake, a goon of the industrialists, rather than a true employee of the state. Despite the troubled interactions between the police and the CMM activists, especially during the police shooting of 1991, the workers were reluctant to implicate the police, in part because they belonged to the same (subaltern) social class. Instead, the activists always implicated the police officers in charge, who were giving the orders.

Workers had lost faith in the court system, to which their cases had been referred to by a state-instituted inquiry commission. They felt that the court system favored the industrialists: "Once a court decision is made, these people [industrialists] have so much of black money that they go from lower court to upper court. The legal system has this problem that it continues forever and people can die in between as well." Workers felt cheated by the judges and other experts. Once when I was in the CMM office, some workers returned empty-handed from the regional court, which was five hours away, because their names did not appear on the judge's list. An irritated worker wanted to ask the judge, "Pardon me if I am doing the wrong thing. Am I a thief or beggar that you behave like this to me?" Workers also resented that all accused, except the hired assassin, were acquitted in the Niyogi murder case in 2005. They believed that the court had all the evidence against the accused industrialists. One of them said, "Everyone in this country, starting from the president, is *sold*."

With the increased power given to the private industrialists due to economic liberalization, the formation of the new state of Chhattisgarh, and the consolidation of power by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), even the idea of the state as a guarantor of workers' rights was falling apart. The state as the highest national authority, not the greedy state agents, was openly supporting the expulsion of excess labor: "Atal Bihari Vajpayee [prime minister of India during BJP rule from 1998 to 2004] gave this speech in Bhilai that any industrialist can throw away any worker, if the worker is in excess. The prime minister of the country is saying such bad things; the administration is openly supporting it. So we can be thrown out any time." Informants cited cases of workers arbitrarily thrown out immediately after this speech.

Mellow Radicalism? When I was doing research, the Maoist movement was strong in the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh. This region had a predominantly tribal (*Adivasi*) population, which was mobilized by the Maoists. Allegedly, the Maoists were creating a contiguous liberated corridor cutting through the tribal-dominated belt from Andhra Pradesh to Bihar through Chhattisgarh, Orissa, and Jharkhand.[46] The movement was declared a "problem" that demanded a military solution, and efforts like the state-sponsored military endeavor (*salwa judum*) were in place to counter the movement.

The Bhilai industrial workers expressed happiness in the growth of the Maoist movement. They were keen to understand the Maoist "problem" from

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the point of view of "historical juncture," which also emphasized their historic role as workers. This perception of their significance created a new vigor in the movement; workers were talking about yet another imagined future: "If one does not study or try to understand history, one does not know which path to take, because one does not understand at what juncture one is. Niyogi himself understood all these by studying history." The workers were enthusiastically planning public performances, picketing factory gates, and scuffling with the police. They were organizing street plays in the villages and at the factory gates during various shifts, and the workers met every evening in the office yard to plan their strategies. They had faith in the ability of the workers to mobilize and act:

> Workers here know how to fight. They know that court, leaders, or magic words cannot do anything. The fight you will do in battle field will be the fight for your honor, and whatever you get out of it, will be your earnings. Our movement is continuing like that. Little by little Chhattisgarh is waking up.

The Bhilai industrial workers, nevertheless, were not ready to embrace radical politics challenging the state. One activist said, "CMM agrees to the aim of the naxalites, but do not 'right now' follow the path it takes. There are two types of path, through friendship and animosity. It takes the friendship path now." While the above remark could be treated as a cautious response to an outsider, there was more evidence that the Bhilai industrial workers' politics were still anchored in the past of old-style "nationalist" trade unionism. For instance, they did not join the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004, instead affiliating with an oppositional Mumbai Resistance Forum, which advocated a return to more militant and nationalist resistance to "imperialism."[47]

While the Bhilai industrial workers were more inclined, due to their lived experiences, to take a radical stand against the state and capital than the Dalli miners, they were still complacent about their present and reluctant to radicalize their tactics and attitudes. While their union helped the workers to face the absent, withdrawing, or countering state, it excluded certain other forms of politics that were possible.

Conclusion

The Dalli miners' accounts had a salient sense of agency: Their stories told how they, the "simple" Chhattisgarhiya people from the countryside, had, by the end of the 1990s, challenged and overpowered the state, contractors, and other trade unions. They, who were pushed to mine work due to famines in the countryside, were outraged by the "betrayal" of the mine management, contractors, and *rakhel* (concubine) trade unions. They started an insurgent strike and formed an insurgent union. With the new sense of collective empowerment as unionized *mazdoor* (workers), they directly challenged the state and mine management to give them the legal status of regular workers. They did not stop at that; with their "laboring hands" they literally built their own hospital, union office, and schools.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

With their union fees, they maintained a "twenty-four-hour food service," bought trucks and cars, and published newsletters and pamphlets. They mobilized masses in the countryside, organized enormous martyr day celebrations, visited Delhi (twenty-four hours away by train), ran and won local elections, and were still a visible presence in the local village and township governance. The miners, understandably, still shimmered in this past glory; each narration of their movement created so much enthusiasm that it gathered a crowd of eager, applauding listeners.

Bhilai workers told how they, a fragmented group of contract workers in different industries, were brought together as a fraternal group by the union.[48] Facing a withdrawing developmental state[49] following economic liberalization in the 1990s, and industrialists that had increasing power, the union had become more like "family," a sheltering metaphor often repeated by workers. The union gave them the power to face up to the nexus of state agents and industrialists, provided an alternative space to solve their everyday survival issues, and created meaning beyond their immediate lives.

The narratives represent the temporal changes in citizenship and labor rights in India from the relatively state-centered governance in the 1970s to a private capital-centered economic organization in the 1990s. The Dalli miners started their movement in 1977, in a state-owned mine. They contended with a state that was protective, though not that forthcoming in accepting them as regular workers. The state was discriminatory, while the mine management was scheming with the contractors and rival unions to maintain its cheap supply of Chhattisgarhiya manual workers. It was the tireless efforts of the workers themselves that resulted in their recognition as regular workers and the gaining of benefits. However, the state acted as a platform within which such rights could be recognized and given. The significance of the mere presence of the state in this context is accentuated in comparison with the case of the Bhilai industrial workers, who faced the naked profit motives of the private industrialists. With the proliferation of industries in the region and the growth of an accompanying workforce, the industrialists indiscriminately resorted to using contract labor.

These workers' experiences highlight the discrimination based on indigeneity and ethnicity in the postcolonial states. Attention has never been paid to how much the modernization of states like India was predicated on such discrimination, which has a long history rooted in colonial forms of labor deployment.[50] Some scholars have suggested that the marginalization and displacement of tribal people due to postcolonial Indian modernization[51] led to the tribal support of Maoist movements. Yet my evidence shows that many such marginalized people are dependent on the very processes of modernization for their survival. Agriculture in Chhattisgarh, which is still seasonal, cannot absorb all its workforce. Even the new state identity of Chhattisgarh does not translate to sustainable practices to alleviate poverty; rather, they continue to become a stronger foothold of private and global capital that need not pay attention to the local environmental concerns.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A final point concerns the role of the state in the neoliberal era. Instead of the alleged delimited role of the state in its ability to enforce and regulate labor laws in the face of unbridled expansion of capital, scholars have pointed to ways the state is significant in protecting workers' rights as citizens.[52] They thus show the significance of territorially determined resistance to global capital, unlike those who point to the "uprooted proletariat" that may and can demand global citizenship.[53] However, for most workers, especially those who are increasingly joining informal labor markets, the institutionalized channels of negotiations, with the state playing an active part, might have been in use, though not effectively. My evidence shows that there are ways in which the state and other power-holders can slow down and sabotage the results of negotiations through such channels. I argue that there is more of a "blind faith" in the powers of the state as a protector from the part of the workers, rather than real results that perpetuate such perceptions. Ethnographic research needs to be done to assess whether and how much such faith has materialized into actual entitlements.

The real success of the Dalli and Bhilai workers, I suggest, was in carving out a recognizable social space for the ethnically Chhattisgarhiya workers within the framework of the nation-state. They used this new social space to challenge, counteract, and replace the hesitance of the Indian state to grant them justice and entitlements as citizen-workers.

NOTES

This article has benefited from comments by József Böröcz, Ethel Brooks, Robyn Rodriguez, Paul McLean, Ann Mische, and two anonymous reviewers of *International Labor and Working-Class History*. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Politics and Protest Workshop at the CUNY Graduate Center and the Rutgers University Sociology Colloquia in October 2009. The research for this article has been funded by the Social Science Research Council—International Dissertation Research Fellowship, as well as generous grants from Rutgers and Princeton Universities. The author thanks the American Sociological Association Labor and Labor Movements/Critical Sociology Section for giving the Honorable Mention Award to this article in 2010. The interviews for this article happened due to the cooperation of the workers in Bhilai and Dalli-Rajhara and countless facilitators; this article is testimony to their relentless struggle for survival and dignity.

1. The mines provided raw material to the Bhilai Steel Plant, one of the first state-owned steel plants in independent India.

2. The interviewees included men, women, leaders, followers, peasants, and tribal people. Chhattisgarh has a huge tribal population (thirty-seven percent of the total population belongs to the Scheduled Tribes category of the Indian census), and the mining township is located in an election constituency reserved for the tribal people. The tribal people, whom I interviewed, however, classified themselves as peasant-cultivators, thus distinguishing them from the tribes of the forests and linking them to the lower-caste peasants.

3. Passerini has stated how left-wing activists consider only their collective identity worthy of being passed on, and hence silence their private life in oral testimonies of their life. Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory* (London, 1987), 41.

4. Such personal narratives included stories of alcoholic husbands, death or illnesses of children, and sibling rivalry.

5. Bhilai is significant due to the presence of one of the first state-owned steel plants in postcolonial India and many private industries supported by this steel plant.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

6. The company, one of the first mergers of significant industrial groups in India—the Tatas, Khataus, Killick Nixon, and Dinshaw—became a part of the Swiss multinational corporation Holcim Limited in 2005.

7. This rally by the industrialists was covered in the newspaper *Deshbandhu*, January 29, 1992. The newspaper *Roudramukhi* featured an industrialist of the Simplex Company pleading with the public to forgive his sins and save his company from the clutches of the CMM. June 9, 1992.

8. The worker who was supplied by the contractors on demand.

9. Regular worker.

10. The red and green colors in the CMM's flag represent workers and peasants.

11. Sankar Guha Niyogi, known as Niyogi *bhaiyya* (brother) among the workers, is usually credited with organizing the workers in Dalli-Rajhara and Bhilai. He was shot dead on September 28, 1991, allegedly by an assassin hired by the private industrialists in Bhilai. The accused were initially sentenced to death and life imprisonment by the lower court but eventually were acquitted (except the assassin) by the Supreme Court of India in January 2005.

12. The Indian state initiated a complete revamping of the postcolonial developmental structure in 1991 in response to a foreign debt crisis. A caveat of the new program was the state's loosening the regulations within which labor could be deployed, which in turn provided a free space for private capital to deploy labor at its will, especially in a third-world country such as India, where labor does not possess any comparative advantage in numbers or skill. In the previous mixed-economy model, the workers, especially those in the organized sectors, either worked for state-owned enterprises or were protected by the elaborate state laws and guidelines that made workers' movements possible. However, the state actively withdrew from such a protective and facilitating role since the 1990s.

13. The Maoist movement in the bordering states of Chhattisgarh got the support of the tribal population that was protesting the proposed Tata steel project as well as rural poverty and neglect of the Indian state in general. See the BBC news report of June 30, 2010: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/south_asia/10446513.stm.

14. Chhattisgarh is known for the seasonal migration of rural workers to other regions of India to work in brick kilns, construction, and as domestic helps. The firsthand evidence of this is the swarm of poor Chhattisgarhiya alighting and boarding the trains from and to Chhattisgarh at the New Delhi railway station.

15. Francesca Poletta, "'It was like a fever. . .': Narrative and Identity in Social Protest," *Social Problems* (1998): 137–59.

16. Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event* (Albany, 1991), 51. See also Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories* (Orient Longman, 2003).

17. Portelli, *Death of Luigi*, 52.

18. While Hindi was the official language in Chhattisgarh, most people spoke Chhattisgarhi, an eastern dialect.

19. I worried at times that my coming from the US, which the Indian Left stereotypically considered as the bastion of imperialism, would be a problem for doing fieldwork, despite my being an Indian citizen. The workers, to my pleasant surprise, were not bothered by such stereotypes, and wanted to know how people in the United States lived, what they ate (how much a kilogram of rice or okra cost), produced, etc. On the other hand, I was accused of being a spy by some government officials in Delhi while I was requesting access to public government of India documents in the heavily guarded Department of Industries library of the Udyog Bhavan. Some of my worries and experiences as a field researcher have been shared by Ann Mische and Ethel Brooks in their own work. Ann Mische, *Partisan Publics* (Princeton, 2008). Ethel Brooks, *Unraveling the Garment Industry*, (Minnesota, 2007).

20. Portelli elegantly notes that "To tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time, to resist time, or to harness time." Portelli, *Death of Luigi*, 59. This somewhat fluid "chronology" of events that my interviewees have been offering is an attempt to withstand time and preserve and transmit their collective memory.

21. Both groups of workers had confrontations with the police that led to police shootings, the first in 1977, the second in 1991.

22. Kalb argues that class-based politics created "effective politics," creating disappearance of violence, increased use of "industrial muscle" and the strike weapon, and the general shortening of labor conflicts. See Don Kalb, *Expanding Class: Power and Everyday Politics in*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Industrial Communities, The Netherlands, 1850-1950 (Durham, 1997), 59; See also E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (New York, 1963), 424. These politics were possible because the workers were using what Charles Tilly would refer to as social movement repertoires. See Charles Tilly, "Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834," *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*, 15–42.

23. Report 1960-61, Ministry of Steel, Mines and Fuel, Department of Iron and Steel.

24. Steel Authority of India Limited Annual Reports 1955-2005, Ministry of Steel Annual Reports 1959-1960 to 2005.

25. For some history of subcontracting of labor in Indian factory system, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-class History: Bengal, 1890-1940* (Princeton, 1989); Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge, 1998); Dilip Simeon, *The Politics of Labor under Late-colonialism: Workers Unions and the State in Chotanagpur* (New Delhi, 1995); Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (Cambridge, 1999).

26. Editorial, *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 5, 1991, 2273–4.

27. Praveen Jha, with Dipankar Mitra and Manjusha Nair, "Economic Reforms and the Poor: A Study from Madhya Pradesh, India." (*Focus on Global South, Bangkok*, 1999). See also for a discussion of casualization of labor as a characteristic feature of globalization, Beverley Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870* (Cambridge, 2003).

28. Passerini has argued that women's recollections are subversive of the moral code; these women excelled in showing how they deployed their bodies in the struggle. Passerini, *Fascism*, 1987.

29. This experience was common to the loading and transporting workers. Most workers pointed to this experience of transport workers as a prima facie evidence of workers' hardships, because of the emotional toll.

30. Roy argued that the Indian steel towns were upheld as exemplary national spaces for the new India after independence; and the workers in these steel towns were the "producer patriots." Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham, 2007).

31. The industrial labor camps started initially in the 1950s to temporarily house the laborers engaged in the construction of the mines. They have stayed on to become almost permanent mud housing clusters, where the local miners lived. Many miners, later, refused to shift to the official "quarters" of mine employees, which for them was "unclean" since it had toilets within the apartment. Workers preferred the open fields to "stinking" toilets.

32. *Shahid* (martyr) hospital still caters to the needs of workers as well as villagers from the surrounding regions. The workers also started their schools, many of which have been taken over by the state.

33. The miners narrated stories of intimidating the mine management with their threats of violence. While the mine officials were treated with respect as the educated sahib, the management in general was derided for keeping the rival unions as concubines (*rakhel*) and for engaging in secret deals with the contractors.

34. The Congress Party has more or less continuously ruled, with some interruptions, the federal state of Madhya Pradesh till 2003, of which Chhattisgarh was a part. Currently, Chhattisgarh has a BJP government.

35. For the relation between "repertoires" and "performances," see Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge, 2008).

36. CMM celebrated at least four martyr days a year and more depending on the availability of funds.

37. The head of the state cabinet. Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh at that time was Arjun Singh. He has been under recent scrutiny for his alleged role in orchestrating the escape of Warren Anderson, the chairman of the Union Carbide Corporation after the Bhopal Gas tragedy. Bhopal is the state capital of Madhya Pradesh.

38. The Bhilai workers were disillusioned with the state after their long rather fruitless struggle and were openly voicing support to the Maoist movement, which angered the Dalli miners.

39. The interviewees referred to their eternal youth in the mining township due to the presence of iron in drinking water. Going back to the countryside, literally and figuratively symbolized frailty and old age.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press

40. An AITUC leader told me: "Niyogi was a naxalite. He was associated with the naxalite movement in Durg (district capital). He was brought to Dalli by me and two other persons. When he came, we made him take a vow by keeping his hand on the photo of Lenin that he is interested in trade union activities only and nothing else."

41. For more in this aspect of Indian trade unionism, see Manjusha Nair, "Mixed Repertoire of an Indian Labor Movement, 1990–2006," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22 (2009): 180–206.

42. To give one instance of the reality of state support to the industrialists, a previous researcher told me that none of the files of the complaints filed by the workers were available with the state-appointed labor officials. They, most probably, must have been destroyed to suppress evidence.

43. Javier Auyero uses this term to describe the functioning of Peronist clientele networks in Argentina. Javier Auyero, *Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita* (Durham, 2001).

44. Akhil Gupta has argued that corruption is the narrative lens through which state agents are routinely viewed in India, while others argue how in practice, the narrators themselves collaborate in producing such state governance. The Dalli workers, in this instance, point at their ideals of state and leadership, faced with the failures of the postcolonial developmental state. Akhil Gupta, "Narratives of corruption: Anthropological and fictional accounts of the Indian state." *Ethnography* 2005. See also "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics and the Imagined State," *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader* 22:375–402.

45. The miners and the Bhilai workers perceived themselves as simple country bumpkins that were easily manipulated. Terms like Chhattisgarhiya Parbuddhiya (A Chhattisgarhiya follows another's brain) were used by the workers and villagers alike to refer to their simple mindedness.

46. Nandini Sundar, "Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006), 3187–92.

47. See http://www.ilps-news.com/central-info-bureau/events/mumbai-resistance-2004/program/, accessed February 2, 2009.

48. Unlike the mining township, most workers in Bhilai were men. There were strong women leaders in Bhilai, some workers and others who organized the families of the working men, but only two of my interviewees were women, compared to seven in the mining township.

49. The developmental state is "roughly, those agencies of state and governmental practices that are charged with improving or protecting the incomes, capabilities and legal rights of people." Stuart Corbridge et al., *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India*, (Cambridge, 2005), 7.

50. The theory of white supremacy was used to vertically segregate ethnic labor in imperial corporate plantations. Philippe Bourgois, *Ethnic Diversity on a Corporate Plantation* (Cambridge, 1985); Sidney Mintz, "The Rural Proletariat and the Problem of Rural Proletarian Consciousness," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1974): 291–325.

51. Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley* (Oxford, 1985).

52. Gay Seidman, *Beyond the Boycott: Labor Rights, Human Rights, and Transnational Activism* (New York, 2007); Rina Agarwala, "Reshaping the Social Contract: Emerging Relations Between the State and Informal Labor in India," *Theory and Society* 37 (2008):375–408.

53. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000323 Published online by Cambridge University Press