Subaltern counter-urbanism
dynamics of urban and industrial change in Gurgaon, India’s millennium city

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Subaltern counter-urbanism: dynamics of urban and industrial change in Gurgaon, India’s millennium city

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Abstract

Since the liberalisation of the economy in the early 1990s, India has experienced rapid urbanisation which has received a wealth of scholarly research and debate. There is now growing interest in the private sector led models of urbanisation unfolding across the country. Gurgaon, a city in the north Indian state of Haryana, has been almost exclusively planned, developed and governed by the private sector and as such is seen as a prototype of the Greenfield urban developments of the contemporary period. Nevertheless the city’s urbanisation has not yet received scholarly attention at great length. In this thesis I will explore how transformations in the political economy of land and labour in Gurgaon played a crucial role in facilitating and shaping the city’s urbanisation.

To do so I carry out semi-structured interview and ethnography of land and labour in the city. First through ethnography and interview in Gurgaon’s urban villages, I explore how the city’s agrarian transition hinged upon the partial integration of the region’s peasant agriculturalists into urban land markets. I will explore how this partial integration, facilitated by the enclaving of landowners’ residential property, mediates the city’s truncated political economy, shapes new rentier subjectivities and produces distinct spatial and social disjunctures among the city’s peasant-rentier classes. Second, I will explore how new production-social reproduction geographies in the city intersect with and are interrupted by the gendered discourses and material practices of work. In doing so I am interested in exploring how new modes of industrial accumulation, that vitalise rentier economies across the city, are laminated and intersected by workers’ cultural and material practices. Finally, I explore how the hedging of rentier interests in manufacturing, and the disorderly and gendered reproduction of labour in the city articulate together to produce nascent and discrete modes of urban politics engaged in by the city’s female migrant workforce.

In engaging in Gurgaon’s urbanisation through these three points- land, labour and urban politics –I seek to explore the role of social difference in mediating and disrupting the city’s continued reproduction. In doing so I mobilise a relational dialectical approach (Hart 2016) which builds on Lefebvre’s (1991) critique of abstract space and feminist and postcolonial scholars’ attention to cultural and material practices (Chari and Gidwani, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2004) to sketch out the open, dialectical relationships between abstract categories of capitalist urbanisation and their disorderly, differential concrete conditions.
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**Glossary of terms**

*Aza* - free

*Azadi* – freedom

*Bahubali* - strongman

*Crore* – ten million

*Ekta* – oneness/unity

*Gali* – Alley

*Gulaam* – slave

*Izzat* – respect/dignity

*Lakh* – one hundred thousand

*Lal dora* – administrative boundary of the urban village

*Lathi* – wooden truncheon

*Mabila* – woman

*Makaan malik* – landlord

*Makaan malik raj* – landlord rule

*Mehanati* – hardworking

*Nari* – woman

*Panchayat* – rural governing body

*Pradhan* – boss

*Sarpanch* – head of *panchayat*

*Tankha* – wages

*Tehsil* – administrative sub-division

*Thekedar* – contractor
Chapter 1

Between two cities

1.1 Introduction

“When the idea took hold of me that a world-class city could be built on the vast tracts of desolate land at the foot of the Aravalis in Haryana, nobody took me seriously...Somehow, I just could not stop myself from driving down to the outskirts of Delhi and staring for long hours at the wide open spaces all around with nothing but miles and miles of rocky but austerely beautiful landscape. In my mind’s eye I could see modern, tall buildings made of glass and steel, I could visualize wide, tree-lined avenues with smooth-moving traffic and people walking on them and children playing in the lush green parks.”

K.P. Singh (2011, 95).

In his autobiography K.P. Singh, the real-estate mogul responsible for the rapid, private sector-led development of Gurgaon, retells a fantastical origin story of the city's development from a small agricultural town to a luxury metropolis of 1.5 million people. For Singh, prior to India’s real estate boom in the 1990s, areas on the peripheries of India’s metropoles like Gurgaon were terra nullius: barren, empty, nowhere places waiting to be filled up with value by a new, entrepreneurial and global India. K.P. Singh’s ‘mind’s eye’ projects the city as an empty plane of global accumulation and luxury consumption, a space holding the material and representational characteristics required to self-produce value at an ever-expanding scale. Today’s Gurgaon of towering skyscrapers, expansive golf courses, high-tech industry, privately managed infrastructure and luxury real estate, stands to retrospectively affirm Singh’s dazzling promise of property-led modernity.

In 1981 when the first license was issued to K.P. Singh’s Delhi, Land and Finance (DLF) for the development of residential colonies in the region, the prospect of a city entirely planned, developed and governed by the private real estate sector would have seemed bizarre. The country was recovering from the violence of Indira Gandhi’s emergency and urban areas were still the ostensible purview of the post-colonial state’s extensive bureaucratic infrastructures. At the time Gurgaon was establishing itself as an industrial hub, with the opening of the government owned Maruti Suzuki automobile plant on the Delhi-Gurgaon road on land gifted by the Haryana Chief Minister. Yet after the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, the empowerment of cities as urban growth machines under the 74th amendment to the constitution in 1992 (Mahadevia 2006), and the iterative deregulation of the real estate and mortgage markets that followed, Gurgaon’s rapid, private sector-led urbanisation and propertied mode of citizenship would come to stand in as an “urban metonym” (Kalyan, 2011) for India’s broader embrace of global, liberalised real estate capital, what Shatkin (2014) refers to as India’s “remarkable urban moment”.
Yet there is equally disquiet over the looming contradictions in Gurgaon’s remarkable story. Today the city is equally portrayed as metonymic of the failures of neoliberal urbanism, of highly fragmented and enclaved private governance, entangled privatised urban services, sharp socio-economic segregation, and extensive land banking, speculation and corruption. A 2012 *Forbes India* titled “Gurgaon: How not to build a city”, decried the city as an urban calamity symptomatic of a hapless state and greedy builders. The article rails that “Gurgaon is a disaster, a horror story”. The *Forbes* article is by no means unique in its portrayal of Gurgaon, in 2011 *The New York Times* with the article “Gurgaon, India: dynamism wrestles with dysfunction”. Even the reputation of K.P. Singh’s DLF has been mired by the city’s contradictions. In 2011 the company were fined ₹ 6.3 billion (US$98 million) for a series of real estate scams that have raised the reputation of Gurgaon as a city of the excessive greed and malevolence that real estate growth has brought on the country. Indeed, there have been two high-budget Bollywood films in the past five years, *NH10* and *Gurgaon*, portraying the city as wracked with crime, corruption and creeping dysfunction.

Alongside Gurgaon’s representation as a material placeholder for a modern, millennial India (with all its blemishes) the city also erupts into public discourse, entirely separately, as a space of rapid industrial accumulation. Since the early 1990s Gurgaon has developed a globally connected automobile and garment-export manufacturing industry, facilitated by expansive, state-planned industrial estates and crowded, vernacularly produced worker neighbourhoods. Gurgaon’s rapid urbanisation has coincided with a period of rapid labour law liberalisation at state and central government levels, the stripping back of the post-Independence social contract, removal of secure employment conditions, and widespread use of highly flexibilised and temporary labour (Breman, 2001, 2010; RoyChowdhury, 2005; Sanyal and Bhattacharyya, 2009). The city’s imposing automobile and garment-export factories and near-continuous episodes of industrial struggle stand as material reminders of India’s dramatic industrial transformation in the post-liberalisation period.
In short then, the political economic foundations of the city’s urbanisation has been forged through two key forces of state-facilitated liberalisation: real estate and industry, land and labour. What is happening in Gurgaon? How do we reconcile the continuing presence of a globalised real estate sector, one which relies on increasing land prices and caters for high-skilled labour, with an industrial economy that depends on cheap land and labour prices? In Gurgaon there remains a key disjuncture between the city’s luxurious and dazzling expanses of commercial and residential property, and propriety modes of citizenship (Srivastava, 2015), and its heavy dependence on groups of people excluded by that very mode of urbanisation. How is this geographical contradiction reconciled, and how does that reconciliation shape particular subjectivities and urban politics? While the academic and policy literature typically represents the city in disciplinary silos, in this thesis I aim to examine the relationships between political economies of land and labour in the city, to tunnel between these two cities that occupy the same physical, if not discursive, space. It is the contention of this chapter that Gurgaon’s duplicitous political economy presents an opportunity to explore the latent and subversive relationalities that underscore the city’s spectacular production as a globally-connected urban centre.

1.2 Urban villages and abstract space

It was during my first visit to Gurgaon as a Masters student in 2012 that I was brought to these questions. In 2012 I visited Kapashera village, a sprawling urban village on the boundary between Gurgaon and New Delhi which houses much of the workforce for Gurgaon’s garment-export sector. Kapashera is one of over a hundred urban villages within and around the city of Gurgaon that’s agricultural land was acquired by private real-estate developers like DLF from the early 1980s, but that’s residential land was exempt from acquisition by post-Independence planning legislation. On the exempt land ‘dispossessed’ peasants constructed dense rental accommodation for migrant workers from 1990s (see Chapter 4). Jutting up against the city’s spectacular and luxurious new urban developments, today Gurgaon’s urban villages house the hundreds of thousands of low-wage migrant workers who labour in the city’s construction sites, factories, shopping malls and upper-class homes.

On my first visit to Kapashera I was immediately struck by the rationalised and dominating composition of the worker lines. The village is composed of line upon line of identikit worker ‘blocks’ (consisting of around sixty, six square metre rooms, housing around 300 people) and ‘lines’ (long bungalow lines of rooms covered by corrugated iron roofs). Gali [alley] after gali is composed of a rigid grid of iteratively developed blocks and lines, interrupted every so often by landlord-run ration shops (see Chapter 5). This appeared completely alien to the vernacular development of slum housing that I had come across in my studies of urbanisation in the Global South. The alleys of Kapashera were a far cry from the territorial autogestion and “occupancy urbanism” (Benjamin, 2008) that I had taken with me to my field research. The militaristic grids of Kapashera’s worker housing, far from evoking the autogestive and spontaneously developed mega-slum of the Global South, seemed to mimic the modernist planning and development of the neighbouring luxury residential enclaves. It was during these first visits to Kapashera that I was reminded of Lefebvre’s (1995) visits to the new town of Mourenx in the South West of France.
In *Notes on the New Town (April 1960)* Lefebvre (1995) compares his hometown, the medieval town of Navarrenx, with a nearby new town Mourenx that had been built to house workers of an oil plant in neighbouring Lacq. With much nostalgia Lefebvre describes Navarrenx’s stone buildings as a product of centuries of social life. Evoking the analogy of a sea snail, he remarks that the town resembles, “a living creature that slowly secreted its structure” (ibid, 116). In contrast Lefebvre remarks that “whenever I set foot in Mourenx I am filled with dread” (ibid, 118). Of the highly rationalised apartment blocks of the town, Lefebvre remarks:

“Here, objects wear their social credentials: their function…in the best diagnosis, when the new town has been successfully completed, everything in it will be functional, and every object in it will have a specific function: its own. Every object indicates what this function is, signifying it, proclaiming it to the neighbourhood. It repeats itself endlessly” (ibid, 119).

Crucially in the new town Lefebvre saw the coming together of the contradictory conditions of capitalist social space, of simultaneous fragmentation and homogenisation. He writes that in the new town:

“We are offered the ‘world’ as though it were a Meccano set, broken up into thousands of little ‘worlds’…At the same time, this dislocation…is underpinned by an increasingly vigorous integration” (ibid, 121).

It is through a comparison between Navarrenx and Mourenx that Lefebvre builds his critique of capitalist abstraction and the alienation of everyday life: in the new town “abstraction…rides roughshod over everyday life” (ibid 120). Lefebvre lays out his critique of abstract space, as an analysis of the dialectical tussles between fragmentation, integration and totalisation that constitute the hegemony of capitalist logics within everyday life.

Which is Kapashera? Mourenx or Navarrenx? How does Lefebvre’s critique firmly rooted in European post-war state urbanisation translate and travel across to post-liberalisation urban India? In truth Gurgaon’s urban villages shatter the romantic binary that structures these two paradigms. On the one hand urban villages are vestiges of postcolonial planning practices and represent the materialisation of
centuries of Haryanvi pastoralism together with more recent petty rentierism. The village’s dense, repetitive rental space is not the (direct) product of capital-intensive state urbanisation programmes, but rather the result of the iterative and “informal” real estate practices of a nascent class of peasant-rentiers (Chapter 4). On the other hand, Kapashera’s totalising and fragmented worker housing would continually remind me of Lefebvre’s experiences in Mourenx. I was interested in the complex ways in which Kapashera’s disciplined spatial landscape “proclaimed” its particular function and type of occupant to the surrounding world (see Chapter 5). Following the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s and withdrawal of the Indian state from the (anyway partial) provision of subsidised housing, urban villages like Kapashera are intended to perform precisely the same function as Mourenx: to reproduce a cheap labour force. In this manner, the urban village represents a contingent materialisation of “abstract space”, wrought through the fractured and territorialised practices of non-state sovereign actors that dominate modes of urbanisation in India at the current conjuncture. For my purposes, the urban villages are a key spatial terrain for thinking about the disorderly relationships between land and labour in contemporary Gurgaon. It is in and through the urban villages, Gurgaon’s “vital nodes” (Gidwani and Maringanti, 2016), that disorderly factions of labour and real estate capital are mediated, shaped and put to work. In this manner, this thesis mobilises Lefebvre’s (Lefebvre, 1991) critique of abstraction and abstract space, alongside contemporary feminist and postcolonial urban critique (Katz, 2001a; Roy, 2011), as a critical tool for exploring the vernacular and everyday processes that underpin the production, reproduction and interruption of abstractive capitalist urban space in the new city of Gurgaon.

1.3 Research Questions

To do so this thesis attends to three research questions, each addressed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

1. In what ways has Gurgaon’s agrarian-urban transition shaped the city’s urbanisation?
2. What role does labour play in the city’s urbanisation, and how is labour organised and reproduced?
3. What kinds of political subjectivities, alliances and actions are produced within Gurgaon’s fragmented, highly privatised urban landscape?

In attending to these three core questions, the thesis critically analyses dynamics of urban and industrial transformation in Gurgaon. I am particularly interested in how the land and labour markets, which uphold the dazzling veneer of the “millennium city”, are reproduced within discourses, practices and everyday spaces.

Despite the city’s short history, there is a growing body of work that has sought to conceptualise Gurgaon’s rapid urbanisation. Some anthropological studies have focused on the city’s “worldly” upper-class residents and their participation in the production of elite space in the city (Srivastava 2015). Others have examined the postcolonial planning frameworks that have allowed the Haryana government to “flexibly” facilitate privatised urbanisation (Gururani, 2013). Searle’s (2016) research explores the local-global networks of real estate capital which have unevenly shaped the city as a “landscape of
accumulation” (Searle 2016). While Narain’s (2009) work has focused on dynamics of agrarian change on the hinterlands of the city. Elsewhere labour scholars have focused on the particular configurations of global industrial production in the city, and the political insurgency of the city’s unruly industrial working-classes (Barnes et al., 2015; Dey and Grappi, 2015; Schgal, 2012).

Each of these accounts have contributed to and shaped my thinking on the city. However, often these accounts of the city play out in disciplinary silos that correspond to the city’s seemingly binary political economy (of the urban and industrial). In this thesis I attempt to provide a full account of the relationships between production and reproduction, materiality and representation, labour and land, structure and superstructure which uphold the disorderly capitalist production of space across the city. In doing so I mobilise a conceptualisation of the “urban” not as a static, bounded analytical unit, but as a set of lived, material and representational spatial processes ordered in reference to a particular hegemonic project of capitalist production. It is the intention of this thesis to tunnel between the dominant representations and materialisations of the city; to understand the way in which quotidian discourses and practices of difference – as they correspond to land and labour as commodities- are integrated into, and mobilised against logics of accumulation which seek to reconcile the city’s disorderly political economy.

To do so I mobilise Lefebvre’s (1991) work on abstract space alongside feminist and postcolonial marxist conceptualisations of difference and everyday life (Buckley and Strauss, 2016; Goonewardena et al., 2008; Hart, 2006; Katz, 2001a) to explore the ways in which relations of difference vitalise and contaminate capitalist productions of value that discursively and materially produce Gurgaon. It is through an analysis of this war of attrition, between capitalist urbanisation and its own disruptive, vitalising conditions that I seek to explore an immanent, differential and oppositional mode of spatial practice and urban politics in the city.

To do so, in this chapter I want to begin by exploring the manner in which Gurgaon comes to be known, both discursively and materially, as a space of industrial and real estate accumulation. I will then examine the particular role of the state in Gurgaon’s urbanisation, drawing on existing debates within urban studies and anthropology on state space. I will end by outlining the structure of the thesis.

1.4 Gurgaon and the urban question

From 1981, when the first development license was issued by the Haryana Town and Country Planning Department (HTCPD) to DLF, until 2014 when this research was undertaken, 35,000 acres of land (85%) in the Gurgaon district were purchased and developed by the private sector. From the 1990s, after the liberalisation of the Indian economy, the city developed as a key finance and real estate hub, and today Gurgaon has one of the largest real-estate markets in India. Gurgaon is now the home to the Indian headquarters of Microsoft, General Electric, Google, KPMG, 4% of the global BPO workforce. The city accounts for 10% of India’s software exports (HSIIDC, 2015; Vinayak, 2006) and holds 70% of commercial real estate in the NCR (the second largest share in the country) while in 2015 alone the city
witnessed real-estate and re-financing deals worth over US $1 billion (Khan, 2016). In the 2000s DLF developed and manage their own rapid metro network, the city’s only formal mass transport system that exclusively serves their residential colonies and Cyber City IT SEZ.

### Table 1.1: Top four real estate developers by development license, Gurgaon 1981-2014. (HTCPD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Real estate developer</th>
<th>Development licenses (acres)</th>
<th>Land acquired of total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delhi Land and Finance</td>
<td>3410</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansal Properties</td>
<td>1620</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitech</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatika</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7330</strong></td>
<td><strong>44%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the city’s development began in earnest in 1981, much of Gurgaon’s rapid urbanisation took place after the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, when the Indian government sought to repeal Nehruvian protectionism, liberalise the real-estate, mortgage, export manufacturing sectors and encourage foreign direct investment (Ghosh, 1992; Kumar, 2000; Searle, 2016). The 74th amendment to the Indian constitution, passed in 1992, paved the way for devolution of powers from national and state to municipal levels and aimed to transform Indian cities into entrepreneurial nodes of competition. Shatkin (2014) argues that liberalisation represented an epochal shift in Indian political economy, introducing new powerful interests – international real estate developers, global banking and finance institutions and multinational corporations - into India’s political system; shaping new political alliances and policy agendas. These transformations have been facilitated by new mega-urban infrastructure investment, as the regional and central state has sought to incentivise these new players to invest in their cities and regions. In the liberalisation period, as competition for investment between states and city-regions heightened, “under-maximized” land has become a key source of income in the emergent urban economies. This process is embodied in successive central government initiatives (the JNNURM, AMRUT and Smart Cities programmes) that have financially incentivized municipal governments to liberalize land development regulations and environmental protections, maximize rent-generating uses of public lands, and privatize public infrastructure delivery (Bhan, 2009; Dupont, 2011; Mahadevia, 2006). Scholars point to the violent dispossession which facilitated the integration of India’s urban landscape into global networks of finance, real estate and service provision (Banerjee-Guha, 2009; Goldman, 2011) shaping an emergent post-liberalisation consumer citizen (Fernandes, 2004).

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1 Nevertheless, as Sivaramakrishnan (2013) argues, the transformational designs of the 1992 constitutional reform have failed to materialise.
These new urban landscapes, such as Gurgaon, have appealed to a new “global” upper-class tired of the lethargic ‘modernisation’ of the existing city and eager to create a future urban India in their own image (Fernandes 2004). Searle (2016, 24) contends that Gurgaon’s contemporary landscape is not “merely self-consciously global” but “futuristic” specifically developed to cement India’s position in a “global” real estate-laden urban future. Haines (2011) draws attention to the manner in which Gurgaon’s glut of gated, luxury real estate, replete with monikers referencing “global” spaces of Singapore, Europe and North America, intends to project a “world-class aesthetic” (Ghertner, 2011) onto the city and its prospective residents, offering the modernising and civilizing promise of private property ownership within a cleansed space unbridled by the blockages and compromises of the existing Indian metropole. The idea of Gurgaon conforms to national discourses which explicitly link property-ownership and luxury consumption to modernity (McFarlane, 2008). Indeed Gurgaon’s real estate developments explicitly brand themselves as escape routes from the lethargic, antiquity of the traditional Indian city.

This Gurgaon then, sometimes referred to in the media as India’s “millennium city”, not only represents a material affirmation of India’s speculative gamble on real estate led growth and private sector governance (Searle 2016) it also comes together as an urban imaginary which holds in and captures the dreams and aspirations, not only of an emergent, consumptive upper-class (Fernandes, 2004) but equally, as Chapter 4 argues, of subaltern communities.

Figure 1.3: Number of development licenses issued in Gurgaon per year, 1981-14. (HTCPD).
In this regard, my initial reading and approach to understanding Gurgaon resembles debates in the European academy in the 1970s and 1980s concerning what has come to be known as the “urban question”. These debates focused on the extent to which capitalist modernity is marked by urban (rather than agrarian or industrial) processes and forms. Much of the debate on the urban question has emanated from the post-war experiences in Europe and North America (Castells, 1977; Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1970/2003). In *The Urban Revolution* Lefebvre (2003) argues that the post-war European state oversaw a “capital switch” shifting the primary mode of capitalist accumulation from industrial production to urban production, from the factory to real estate. Indeed one of Lefebvre’s key contributions to marxist critique has been to expand our conceptualisation of capitalist production and revolutionary praxis by introducing land, difference and everyday life into the labour-capital relation. For Lefebvre, the fruits of resistance to capitalist productionism evolved not solely from the factory floor but within the immanent conditions of everyday life. Castells’ (1977) work in *The Urban Question* flipped Lefebvre’s urban question on its head, to examine how the city functioned for capitalism, principally in organising the reproduction of labour power (Merrifield 2002). For Castells (1977) labour-power was reproduced in the city through sites of “collective consumption” – state redistribution of housing, welfare, public transport and healthcare. In turn these spaces of social reproduction and consumption not only came to define the urban but in turn became primary sites of new forms of class struggle.

Yet in the Indian context, as numerous scholars have highlighted, there has seldom been a consistent urban form, tied together by meaningful state developmentalism (Chatterjee, 2004; Kaviraj, 1984). Rather a number of studies have shown the patchwork and vernacular expression of state jurisdiction which has carried from the colonial to post-Independence and contemporary context (Chatterjee, 1986; Fuller and Harriss, 2001; Kaviraj, 1984). In this context the urban question in India, as Roy (2011) argues, has come to the fore most patently under neoliberal rubrics since the 1990s. This “new urbanism” (Smith, 2002) and political economic transition reconfigured the state’s role from one which was principally attuned to redistribution and planned industrialisation of the post-Independence period to one which was geared toward promoting and facilitating private sector led growth through large-scale infrastructure, urban and industrial investments.

Thus the contemporary Indian state, fractured between various competing municipal and regional institutions, has developed a variety of legal and spatial technologies together with violent programmes of slum clearance and land dispossession to entice globalised real estate capital to India. Special economic zones, billion dollar infrastructural and industrial corridors, mega-dams, greenfield urbanisation and urban beautification characterise this contemporary mode of Indian state-led urbanisation (Banerjee-Guha, 2013; Baviskar, 2003; Levien, 2013).

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2 With exception of the state development of large-scale steel towns in the post-Independence period, but these are more the exception than the rule (Roy, 2007).
The landscapes of India’s new urbanism are not organised around materialities of collective consumption, as Castells (1977) argued, but rather increasingly in terms of private consumption; of private gated enclaves and luxury spaces of consumption. Roy (2011, 261) argues these strategies are not carried out by a fixed and monolithic or mono-logical institution called “the state”, but are rather embarked on in “discrete and disparate ways” in heightened territorial competition between alliances of parastatal authorities, domestic and international capitalists, private sector governance actors, and municipal governments. In this context however, a number of scholars highlight the manner in which the productionism of the contemporary neoliberal state has been routinely obstructed and denied by the vernacular practices of everyday urban politics (Benjamin 2008). This disjuncture, between “high” structures of state and capital and “low” processes of everyday politics, some argue, is reflective of the Indian state’s failure to achieve hegemony and its subsequent pursuit of a fractured programme of “passive revolution” in the post-Independence period (Chatterjee 1986; Kaviraj 1984).

While the contingent urban form in India may be different to that of post-war Europe, the way in which scholars approach urbanisation in India, remains refracted through the urban question debates (see Chapter 6). Much of the literature on the urban question in India is prefigured by Lefebvre’s (1970/2003) “capital switch” and Castells’ (1977) definition of “the urban” as an organisation of urban commodities (albeit not collective ones). Indeed, it is not difficult to conceptualise dynamics of urban transformation in Gurgaon as falling neatly into these discourses of neoliberal urbanisation and territorialised urban politics. Yet the more closely one looks at the particularities of Gurgaon’s urbanisation, the harder it is to reconcile an understanding of the city solely through the lens of land dispossession, an entrepreneurial state, and a politically emboldened metropolitan upper-class. I was drawn to Gurgaon because of the dual representation and materialisation of the city, of righteous working-class revolt and elite spatial productionism, and became increasingly interested in the relationships between the city’s fragmented and privatised urban form and industrial accumulation and politics. In this manner, my approach takes three key departures from contemporary formulations of the urban question within urban studies.

Firstly, I conceptualise urbanisation processes in Gurgaon not as expulsive or dispossessive (Sanyal, 2007; Sassen, 2014) but rather as principally integrative: “underpinned by an increasingly vigorous integration” of social difference (Lefebvre 1995, 121). Building from Lefebvre’s critique of abstract space I am interested in the manner in which the postcolonial state and real estate developers seek to integrate the spatial practices and social space of peasant agriculturalists into urban and industrial land markets, and how those integrations shapes territorialities of social reproduction and urban politics in the city (Chapter 4 and 5).

Here my interests converge with agrarian studies debates that have long investigated the contingencies of agrarian-urban transitions (Byres, 1986; Chari, 2004; Levien, 2015; Sami, 2013).

Secondly, I take on both Lefebvre’s critique of abstract space and Castell’s focus on the role of the city in configuring the reproduction and (de)valorisation of labour-power. Yet building from postcolonial marxist geography (Chari, 2004; Gidwani, 2008a) on the cultural and material relations that laminate
practices of work, and feminist reproduction scholarship (Buckley and Strauss, 2016; Katz, 2001a; Mitchell et al., 2004) I am interested in how real estate and industrial capital accumulation is wrought through particular caste and gender-based spatial practices and discourses. In Chapter 5, I am interested in how vernacular organisations of social reproduction and labour flexibilisation are cut through by stubborn gendered discourses, practices and spatialities that are iteratively pushing migrant women into waged work. Thus I seek to demonstrate how the spectacular production of Gurgaon as a globally connected site of hyper-accumulation pivots on the integration of particular gender dynamics within the household and everyday life.

Finally, in this context, I am interested in how an urban-industrial settlement, founded upon gendered discourses of work and a heterogeneous agrarian-urban settlement shape nascent political struggles of those urban subjects that are not only materially marginalised from the city, but also have no ontological claim to the itineraries of urban consumption (housing, public space, the commons) or territorial belonging (Chapter 6). I am thus interested in developing an understanding of an urban politics that exists outside of the strict relation between “consanguinity” and “contiguity” which has come to define the way we think about the Indian subaltern figure in the contemporary period (Guha, 1983a). The following section will examine the question of labour and the city in more detail.

1.5 Gurgaon the industrial city

Fifteen kilometres south-west of central Gurgaon lies IMT Manesar. IMT Manesar is Haryana’s largest industrial estate, developed from the early 2000s through a partnership between the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) and the Government of Japan. Around 70% of Japanese investment in India is in Haryana, the vast majority of which goes into Gurgaon’s automobile sector (Financial Express, 2008). Industrial production in IMT Manesar centres upon the Maruti Suzuki and Honda automobile assembly plants, which are fed by numerous auto-component manufacturing companies operating within the estate. Two thirds of all domestically produced passenger cars and motor cycles are produced in the estate which formally employs over one hundred thousand migrant workers (HSIIDC 2015).

In June 2011, while I was carrying out field research for a Master’s degree in Gurgaon two thousand workers at IMT Manesar’s Maruti Suzuki plant tooled-down and occupied the factory for two weeks. The workers were demanding the registration of a factory-level union. Four months later on the 7th October 2011, in response to the dismissal of 1200 sub-contracted workers, the workforce again stopped production and undertook a week-long occupation of the factory. The occupation was instigated by permanent workers, mostly young Haryanvi3 men fresh from industrial training institutes, in partnership

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3 Most Maruti Suzuki permanent workers at the IMT Manesar plant, prior to 2012, were in their early 20s, hired from Industrial Training Institutes, and from northern districts of Haryana. In this regard, unlike most industrial workers in Gurgaon, these workers had access to local social reproduction, spoke local dialects and were relatively educated. In contrast the temporary workforce were predominately migrants from eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa.
with the vast majority of precariously employed, migrant contracted workers. The protests became a key talking point of newspapers and news channels in both India and internationally. During my fieldwork I interviewed and got to know a number of Maruti Suzuki workers involved in the strike. Gajan, a Maruti Suzuki worker involved in the occupations retold the events of the initial occupation as such:

“On the morning of the 4th June [2011] the management asked us to sign blank pieces of papers. Our [unofficial] union had a coordinator on every line by that point, one coordinator for every twenty workers. We sent out an SMS, telling everyone to allow the B-Shift workers to come inside before leaving the factory…suddenly everyone hooted, we all gathered right underneath the management office…for the first time we were together, not separated by the factory…permanent, temporary even the cleaning and catering staff…everyone was very happy, some comrades began swearing at management, others were singing songs of delight.”

In conversation with another permanent worker involved in the strikes, Pritesh, he remarked:

“For the first time there was an element of freedom [azadi]. Before we were not allowed to go to the toilet or take our medicine, we were equal to slaves [gulaam], but there we found a sense of freedom and power. We saw our struggle in the newspapers and felt happy, that this is ours, look what we’ve done. We would receive support from other factories, people would come from all over to speak to us at the gate, even from other countries.”

The workers were eventually evicted and the strike ended on 17th October when management agreed to take back the 1200 temporary workers, although still refused to recognise the worker’s union. The two strikes together, according to the Indian Chambers of Commerce, cost the company US $200million and 25,000 units in production, while suffocating the entire supply chain across Gurgaon and beyond (AIOE 2013).

Nine months later on the 18th July 2012, following an instance of caste-based abuse directed at a contract worker in the factory, three thousand workers clashed with management. During the clashes a member of management died, hundreds were hospitalised and parts of the factory were burned down. The management immediately embarked on, what the then CEO reportedly termed ‘class war’, dismissing five hundred permanent and two and a half thousand temporary workers. One hundred and fifty workers were arrested after the clashes and held in Bhondsi prison for five years without charge. In March 2017, despite a lack of credible evidence, thirteen workers were given life sentences for their alleged participation in the events of July 2012.
The 18th July 2012 riot marked an end to thirteen months of sustained solidarity and collective political action among automobile workers in Gurgaon. Inside the factory, senior management used the event as an opportunity to again re-organise the work-force and instigate changes to workplace conditions, announcing that the company would cease to employ labour through contractors and instead hire “company casuals” a new layer of directly employed precarious labour. Workers and local worker newspapers reflect on the period of sustained struggle as expressive of a brief moment of solidarity and unity across an erstwhile unbridgeable material divide between permanent workers and the flexibilised and hypermobile contract workers. A worker-run news pamphlet carried the following account of a participating contract worker:

“The time [occupying] the Maruti Suzuki factory…was extremely good. There was no tension of work, there was no tension of coming to the factory and going back, there was no tension of catching the bus, there was no tension of cooking, there was no tension that food has to be eaten only at seven o’clock or only at nine o’clock, there was no tension as to what day or date was that day…We had never come so close to one another as we came in these seven days.”

Anonymous Maruti Suzuki worker diary, December 2011 (GWN, 2012)

The images of striking workers occupying factories, burning trucks and clashing with police, occupy an entirely distinct set of discourses on the city than detailed in the previous section yet have become equally synonymous with Gurgaon. If Gurgaon the “millennium city” materialises as a place-holder for India’s real estate boom and post-liberalisation urbanisation, industrial Gurgaon materially and discursively indexes significant transformations in the Indian economy which have seen the mass flexibilisation of ‘organised’ labour and production of urban-industrial landscapes characterised by legal and fiscal exemption, and permanent labour precarity (Standing, 1999; Vanamala, 2001). While the Maruti Suzuki
2011-12 struggles are somewhat an outlier within an industrial landscape characterised by much more discrete and dispersed political struggles (see Chapter 5 and 6), the strike comes to signify broader transformations in labour regimes in the region, and draws our attention to a mode of urban citizenship closely tied to a politics of industrial capital and discourses of migration and work which occurs within touching distance of the glimmering steel towers of the millennium city.

**Figure 1.5: Maruti Suzuki IMT Manesar plant. The plant produces 3500 cars a day. (Leighton 2016).**

1.5.1 Labour informalisation in India.

Transformations in Gurgaon’s industrial economy and labour market composition are unevenly reflected in trends across the country. In 1951 India’s services sector contributed a 30% share of total GDP, a figure that rose to 38% in 1981 and 60% in 2014. Within that same period, agriculture declined from 52% to 14%, while industry increased modestly from 16% to 26%. As such some scholars argue that since 1992, India has experienced “industry-less growth” or development without industrialisation (Aiyar, 2002; Maurya and Vaishampayan, 2012). While organised manufacturing in 2012 accounted for 14% of GDP and 13% of the workforce, the Finance, Services and Real estate (FSRE) sector accounted for 20% and 2% respectively (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2014). Thus the 9% growth rates India experienced throughout the 1990s were mostly concentrated in capital-intensive, low labour absorbing industries.

Without mass industrialisation, scholars have argued that the contemporary political economic moment is productive of a mass surplus population uncaptured by capital (Bhattacharya and Sanyal, 2011; Sanyal, 2007; Whitehead, 2013). These dynamics have been aided by a net increase in employment in the “unorganised” sector of the economy and an informalisation of labour within the “organised” sector.

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4 Share of total GDP at Constant 2004-2005 prices, data taken from the Planning Commission (http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/datatable/index.php?data=datab2)
Developmental attempts to prevent the post-1991 decimation of the agricultural sector with, for example, rural guaranteed employment schemes, have been diluted by continued state-led land clearances in the large agricultural states (Banerjee-Guha, 2013) that have pushed peasants into migratory labour circuits (Breman, 1996).

Experiences of Gurgaon and Haryana however paint a slightly different picture. In 2008, industrial growth in the Gurgaon district was at 40%, twice the national average, with an annual turnover of 73,500 crore rupees (US $11 billion) (One India, 2008). Haryana as a whole has the highest net domestic product (Financial Express, 2011) and highest per capita industrial investment in the country (Indian Express, 2009). In addition to the city’s automobile sector, Gurgaon’s 675 garment-export units form part of an exports hub that accounts for US$ 1.3 billion of garment-exports, the second largest share of garment-exports in the country (HSIIDC 2015). In the state as a whole, industrial investments in Gurgaon amounted to 70% of total investment in 2014-15 (Kumar, 2015). This industrial picture has been facilitated by active state investment in industrial infrastructure including 27,000 kilometres of national highway, and incorporation into the US $90 billion Delhi-Mumbai Infrastructural Corridor.

What explains Gurgaon’s robust industrial economy? Gurgaon’s industrialists have undoubtedly benefited from the city’s proximity to New Delhi and its international airport, and the liberalisation of industrial production in the state, but more broadly have remained competitive through extensive reconfiguration of its workforce over the past two decades. Labour in both the city’s automobile and garment-exports has significantly informalised over the past fifteen years. The vast majority of labour in both industries is employed through sub-contracting agencies on temporary and casual contracts. While there has not been the dramatic “putting-out” and disaggregation of production within Gurgaon’s garment-export sector seen elsewhere (Banerjee, 1996; Mazumdar, 2007) the sector remains extremely reliant on informal workshop and household piece-rate production. This corresponds to broader labour informalisation across the country since the early 1990s as industrialist firms take advantage of a business-friendly atmosphere to outsource and subcontract production to small-scale informal units, retrench permanent workforces, and implement labour flexibilisation (Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015; Sanyal and Bhattacharyya, 2009). The share of sub-contracted workers in the organised economy nationally went from 17% in 1999 to 32% in 2010 (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2014). The two organised sectors that I concentrate on in this thesis, contract labour in the automobile sector rose from 24% to 41% between 2002 and 2012, and in the garment-exports sector from 79% in 2005 to 86% in 2012 (Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015), pointing to widespread informalisation and sector-wise differentials in flexibilisation.

These processes have been institutionalised by the state at a regional level through a series of labour and industrial reforms which have dismantled the “social contract” of state-provided employment benefits and security forged by post-Independence governments. Primarily this has materialised in the withdrawal of the state from (scant) worker housing provision, and an expansion in the legal use of temporary

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5 Including auto-parts supply chain.
“contract labour”, regulated by the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970, the removal state oversight of hire and fire policies, increase in maximum working hours and diluted collective bargaining rights protected by the Industrial Disputes Act 1975.

In Haryana, labour law reforms have operated in tandem with the state’s industrialisation-led urbanisation policies. From 1999 to 2011 Haryana introduced successive industrial policies which, mobilising the *Industrial Township Framework* of Article 243Q of the Indian Constitution, cede governing authority within industrial zones to non-state actors (Sood et al., 2014); introduce self-auditing of labour laws; provide subsidised land to industrialists; extend maximum working hours; and notify certain industries as exempted from labour regulations under the Factories Act 1948⁶. Noting this trend to link land markets to industrialisation across India, Dey (2012, 7) argues that the flexibilisation of labour – in other words the dismantling of secure employment within the organised and public sectors - has coincided with the development of rationally planned and legally exempted sites of industrial production, wherein “labour can be controlled and managed to the needs of capital”.

In Haryana and Gurgaon, IMT Manesar is the materialisation of these policies. The estate has been at the forefront of both new technological advances in automated production, new regimes of labour informalisation and fervent land speculation as industrial property is entered into wider real estate markets (see Chapter 4). The failure of the Maruti Suzuki strike in 2011-12, and prior strikes at the Gurgaon plant in 2000 and at the Honda plant in 2005, mark not only a new era of labour informalisation and flexibilisation across the city, but also heralded a significant break from the existing organisation of production-reproduction geographies. Prior to this transition, Maruti Suzuki developed two residential plots in the city, Maruti Vihar and Maruti Kunj which were sold at subsidised rates to its workforce. The subsequent withdrawal of the state (Maruti Suzuki was a public company) from the provision of low-wage workers’ social reproduction correlates with and reflects broader trends of a retreat from State-led welfarist urban governance (however partial) to real-estate led urban development of which Gurgaon is nationally and internationally symbolic. In this regard the move of Maruti Suzuki to IMT Manesar, where they opened their second Gurgaon plant, heralded the new industrial era of flexibilised labour regimes, and represented a clean break from the production-reproduction relationship of the Import Substitute Industrialisation period.

Scholarship on informalisation and flexibilisation within India’s organised sector has thus tended to focus on transformations in labour organisation, new legal technologies of the neoliberal state and the changing dynamics of globalised capital (Dey 2012; Barnes et al 2015). Labour regimes in contemporary India are characterised by shrinking permanent workforces, temporary contract labour, low levels of collective bargaining, hypermobile rural to urban labour and high levels of labour flexibility (Lerche, 2010; Upadhya and Vasavi, 2006). The region’s new urban working-classes are not only conditioned by the making of the urban-rural divide (Harriss-White, 2003) but also by multiple, flexibilised forms of employment. As such,

contemporary organised production relies on the constant reproduction of a highly flexible, hypermobile working subject in seamless, constant movement between workplaces and rural-urban destinations.

While some scholars have argued that processes of informalisation, together with the ascendance of FSRE and immaterial production mark the end of industrial-led growth and secure industrial employment in India (Aiyar, 2002; Sanyal, 2007), less attention has been paid to the continuing role informal and flexibilised work plays in contemporary regimes of real estate accumulation. Furthermore, as a number of scholars have argued, it is crucial to note that while the state and industrial capitalists have attempted to institutionalise labour informality through a variety of spatial technologies and liberalisation policies, labour informalisation both predates liberalisation (Dey 2012) and has been a mainstay of work in India more generally despite post-independence labour protections (Cross, 2010).

In this thesis, beyond bringing questions of labour back into our analyses of the contemporary urban noted previously, I seek to make the two key contributions to labour debates.

First, departing somewhat from analyses of the structures of labour flexibilisation induced by the neoliberal state and global and local capital, I am interested in the ways in which labour flexibilisation hinges upon gendered dynamics of work within the household and everyday life. In doing so the thesis explores how capital accumulation, organised through the state and industrial and real estate capitalists, unevenly incorporate labour into the value relation; I conceptualise flexible labour as not excluded but rather as partially integrated into capitalist production (Marx, 1939/1993). If narratives within urban studies extoll that material labour is no longer the primary mode of accumulation in new urban India (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011), labour scholarship which seeks to draw attention to the prevailing significance of material labour, indexed to industrial Gurgaon, tends to do so by positioning labour as a negation of overwhelming abstract structures of political economy (Samaddar 2009). Scholars note that the seemingly permanent precarity which labour faces, whether working in the informal or organised sector, is compounded within the current conjuncture by mass land displacement (Banerjee-Guha 2013) and exemptive and secessionary urbanisation (Roy and Ong, 2011). Labour in the contemporary conjuncture, according to Samaddar (2009) in a somewhat straightforward application of Marx’s primitive accumulation, is a “floating commodity”, expelled from land to make way for Special Economic Zones, mines, and mega-infrastructure, only to be reincorporated as a reserve army and compelled into an unassailable current of migration that drags millions of people from one space of value extraction to the next with as little interference as possible. For Breman (2009), these systems of circular migration complement and co-constitute processes of labour flexibilisation. The author notes that urban environments increasingly hostile to low-wage migrant residents (Benjamin 2008), together with flexible conditions of employment at the point of production, blockade labour’s ability to collectively organise as a class, and push labour into constant circulation between urban and rural areas.

Breaking from analyses of the structures of flexibilisation and logics of an abstract capitalism, in this thesis I am interested in the everyday practices and discourses which at points, constitute migrant
workers’ complicity in processes of flexibilisation, and at others generate resistances and mediations. In doing so, drawing from social reproduction scholars (Katz, 2001a; Mollona, 2005; Smith and Winders, 2008) I zoom out from the point of production and into urban everyday life to examine how the spatio-temporal organisation of social reproduction interacts with structural processes of flexibilisation.

Secondly, I am interested in the role in which property ownership, possession and dispossession figure in indexing the “urbanity” of an urban politics and citizenship. How do we conceive of workers’ power if workers themselves are in constant movement, stripped of property rights and seemingly under the thumb of rampant capitalists? For Breman (2009, 12) workers in India’s kilns, households, factories and informal workshops are, without security of tenure nor property rights, “nowhere people, drifting around in a nowhere landscape”. These narratives align the labour question with Marx’s initial formulation of primitive accumulation as discussed in chapter 4. For example, in De Neve’s (2015) work on Tiruppur’s working-classes the author examines the interaction between local real-estate actors and precarious working-classes. The author argues that the monopolisation of land markets by the Gounder men has meant the “steady dispossession of labouring classes from property ownership” and the reproduction of an excluded, property-less precariat that are “deeply integrated into the capitalist economy” and yet “increasingly subject to pervasive processes of dispossession that turn them into a casual, precarious, dependent…resource for capital” (ibid, 360).

While De Neve’s intention here is to highlight an understanding of property as a value-producing social relation, the author’s conclusion tends toward a reproduction of a logic, evocative of Hernando de Soto’s (De Soto, 2000) The mystery of capital, which purports that property ownership and land titling, is foundational to both social mobility and political belonging, and a de facto pre-requisite for collective resistance amongst the labouring classes. The ‘mystery of property’ here, for neoliberal economists and labour scholars alike, is that it alone imbues workers with the resources to be more than simply a resource of capital. The picture of contemporary labour presented particularly within political economy and labour migration scholarship then, is of a characterless labour pushed and pulled in and out of employment by a dynamic and mobile capital. This characterlessness is decidedly determined by their externality to the dialectical tussles between possession and dispossession which construct our urban imaginary. Through this register it is difficult to understand the politics of workers, be they organised automobile workers or “unorganised” domestic workers, outside the immediate conditions of labour-capital relations, thereby eliding a politics of land and territory which, we are told, defines the story of Gurgaon. This register tells us little about workers’ position within new urban-industrial landscapes, other than their subjugation to brutal regimes of industrial accumulation and externality to real-estate dynamics.

The more time I spent at picket lines, at worker-friendly NGO meetings, and discussing work and life with my neighbours while staying in a workers’ tenement block in the city, the more I realised that flexibilisation was more than simply a set of empirical structures put on workers’ at the workplace. Rather I increasingly encountered the way in which labour flexibilisation was both reproduced through
hierarchies of power outside the workplace, and equally lived and felt, given consent to, resisted and appropriated within the everyday discourses and practices of workers themselves. For me the gender, caste and class-based configuration of everyday urban space provided a different point of entry for understanding formations of capital accumulation and resistances in Gurgaon.

In approaching these questions I seek to contribute to a wealth of scholarship on labour geographies that have sought to resurrect subjective agency (here in the form of “the worker”) as an animating, spatial determinate of geographies of capital (Chari and Gidwani, 2005; Cross, 2012; Herod, 2001; Padmanabhan, 2012). I will explore this question in more detail in Chapter 2, here it suffices to highlight that this work follows labour geography scholarship to draw attention to the mundane, complicated, often unremarkable politics which produce contested geographies, understanding both subaltern spaces, but also those spaces which are effaced, violently removed, oppressed, or unable to be produced. In short, an approach which appreciates the production of hegemonic social relations, “as an incomplete, produced totality” and countering views of capitalism as a closed, natural and determined phenomenon (Kipfer, 2008, 200).

To be clear, I am not arguing that the position taken by labour scholars - that work in contemporary India is precarious - is unfounded. Rather, in this thesis I deploy a relational dialectical approach (Chapter 2) to understand the contingent ways in which labour flexibilisation is achieved, reproduced and resisted.

Crucially, to do so I explore how the production of urban land economies in “millennium Gurgaon” (explored in Chapter 4), which informs the particular spatio-temporal organisation of social reproduction in the city, articulates with gendered discourses of work and everyday life (Chapter 5), to frame labour flexibilisation and the political struggles of migrant workers in the city (Chapter 6). In doing so I am interested in broaching the seemingly unbridgeable divide between the urban and labour questions.

1.6 State space in Gurgaon

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Gurgaon’s urbanisation has been underpinned by a complex assemblage of fragmented territorialised governing actors (see Table 1.3).
Privately developed residential and commercial areas, as outlined by the Haryana Urban Development and Regulation of Urban Areas act 1975 (HDRUA) (see Chapter 4) are the jurisdiction of the private developer. The HDRUA states that all infrastructure within Gurgaon’s private ‘colonies’ – security, water, electricity, maintenance – are the responsibility of the developer. State developed sectors of the city, as well as the old Municipal town, are the jurisdiction of the state urban parastatal, the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA). Due to increasing land prices through the 1990s, only a small area of land around the municipal town was developed and then managed by HUDA. In many developer and HUDA sectors day-to-day management of infrastructure and services has been delegated to a Residents Welfare Association (RWA). As such in much of the city, day-to-day governance and management of the city is carried out by property-owner associations. Urban villages, the subject of Chapters 4 and 5, were governed by the gram panchayat’ system prior to 2012. In 2012 councillors were elected to the newly inaugurated Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG). Nevertheless, the MCG at the time of writing only holds jurisdictional authority over urban villages within the urbanisable limit and has not authority over private nor residential colonies that make up the bulk of the city’s land area. Thus the only democratically elected municipal body has extremely restricted territorial jurisdiction. While all sectors were intended to be transferred to the MCG in 2012 there is significant opposition from both the developers and RWAs to the transfer of privately managed space into the public sector. This has significantly weakened the MCG in terms of territorial jurisdiction, political clout and tax revenues.

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7 Rural governing bodies
Table 1.2: Governance actors and jurisdictions in Gurgaon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Governing body</th>
<th>Land administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private colonies</td>
<td>Developer or RWA</td>
<td>HUDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public colonies</td>
<td>HUDA or RWA</td>
<td>HUDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban villages</td>
<td>MCG or Panchayat</td>
<td>District of Gurgaon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial estates</td>
<td>HSIIDC</td>
<td>HSIIDC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the absence of formal city-level governance, Gurgaon is governed overwhelmingly by private actors and as such, urban citizenship in the city is bound up in private and associational forms of legitimacy, whether that be property ownership and territorial belonging. The highly privatized and fragmented governance and territorial organization of Gurgaon might be thought of in terms of Graham and Marvin’s (2001) secessionary and splintered urbanism. Gurgaon’s expansive private residential colonies are all serviced with private security, electricity and water provision, and are being incrementally hooked up to the city’s privately developed and managed Rapid Metro System which exclusively services high-end residential and commercial spaces of the city. Citizenship in Gurgaon is thus indexed to particular territorialised jurisdictions defined by residents’ particular relation to property or territory.

While providing an extremely useful lens through which to understand upper-class territorial and political capture, the lifestyles, practices and discourses of Gurgaon’s elite residents are not the focus of this study. In this thesis I am interested in the way in which particular hegemonies of urbanisation, including ones which mobilise property as a marker of the sovereign citizen, are negotiated within and across unbounded materialities of the city. That is, I am interested in the intimate relationships between seemingly enclaved and secessionary spaces and economies. As such in this thesis I implicitly deploy an understanding of state sovereignty and political hegemony, as not simply an abstracted realm of legal-institutional and ideological power, but equally a lived terrain wherein identities, meanings and practices – the formation of what Gramsci (1971) termed “common” and “good” sense – are played out and contested. Crucially I conceptualise the interplay of hegemony as always contingent, in motion and practice. While this thesis does not primarily consist of an investigation of the state, I am interested in the way in which capital, facilitated by the state, negotiates its hegemonic position within the everyday and vernacular spaces of the city. I am concerned with how sovereign relations which hold together and seek to stabilise hegemonic formations of capital.

Recent scholarship within urban studies and political geography has sought to examine the shape and scale of state space under neoliberalism. Scholars have invariably sought to highlight the variety of scales of governance, patchworks of territorial jurisdictions, hierarchies of power and everyday ruminations of state bureaucracy (Allen and Cochrane, 2010; Brenner, 2004). Scholarship on state space, has broadly fallen into two camps. One which examines state space topographically as multiple scales and geometries of hierarchized power (Brenner 2008) and topologically as mediated, horizontal “powers of reach” (Allen and Cochrane 2010). Topographical understandings of state space have been incredibly instructive in
demonstrating the multiple, shifting scales of state power, particularly in an era characterised by outsourced, re-scaled and devolved jurisdictional authority. In the global South, literature on zones of exemption and corridorisation, for example, have drawn implicitly on a topographical understanding of state space (Ong, 2006).

As Ghertner (2017) notes, topological approaches pay less heed to the formal hierarchies of the state and focus on the way in which state hegemony is negotiated and constituted through ebbing relations of influence, power and control. Topological views of state space, in the postcolonial context, have much in common with the anthropological literature on the everyday state, and focuses on the vernacular, illegal and indeterminable mediations of state power (Anjaria, 2011; Das and Poole, 2004; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). This topological view lends itself to the wealth of scholarship on subaltern negotiation and patronage with the state (Chatterjee 2004; Benjamin 2008). Indeed, dispersed, fragmented governance structures are not unique to contemporary Gurgaon, fragmented jurisdictional authority is commonplace in urban and peri-urban India, a phenomena contiguous with practices of government throughout the colonial period wherein sovereign rule was founded upon fragmented and “unruly coalitions” (Kaviraj 1986) between state and non-state actors (Blom Hansen and Verkaaik, 2009).

These two ways of conceptualising state spatiality, while not mutually exclusive, are often at odds. For example, topographical scholarship on India’s special economic zone or smart city programmes, has drawn attention to the manner in which the state draws out exceptional spaces for the free accumulation of capital, re-scaling jurisdictional authority to parastatal or private actors in the process (Sampat, 2008). Their topological counterparts stress that while the formal organisation of state space may be exemptive and re-scaled in these zones, the way in which state power is negotiated and mediated remains markedly unchanged (Cross, 2010).

In the context of Gurgaon, and the city’s highly decentralised, territorialised and privatised state actors it is perhaps possible to view the state, or sovereign power, relationally between the two perspective points. As previously noted, formal governance of the city has been historically indeterminable, viewed topographically the state appears in the form of the Chief Ministers office in far-away Chandigarh. Yet, in practice the shape and form of the city has been subject to multiple, flexible negotiations and nodes of influence between powerful private developers and high-level state figures. From this perspective the topographical state melts away leaving a highly horizontalised landscape of negotiated and lively hegemonic jurisdictions. Formally the subjects of this topological state are those with recognisable legal or political claims to property or territorial belonging. Yet how do we conceptualise the state for those outside of these political and legal categories, those whose daily lives are caught up between the long stretch of work and brief moment within the urban village? Within the lifeworld of the migrant worker, for example, not all those with sovereign power are the state actors or even state-like, rather jurisdictional authority is meted out by informal sovereigns within enclaved, associational spaces of seeming domination.
In this thesis, I adopt a topological perspective on state hegemony, yet one which seeks to connect the situatedness of topological accounts through tracing the dialectical articulation between structures and logics of capital and the practices and materialities of social difference. I am interested in how subaltern actors negotiate, demand or reconcile their position within hegemonic landscapes of. In this respect, in regards to state space, I am interested in how the various avatars of sovereignty in the city are negotiated with, fought against, gamed or consented to.

1.7 Between two cities

This thesis as such seeks to bring together what I have proposed as the labour and urban question and in doing so seeks to bring labour back into analyses of urbanisation. In addition, I seek to reconcile the division of worlds between upper-level logics of globalised accumulation, and perceived lower-level practices of work, culture, identity and difference. If “Millennium Gurgaon” is discernible through the real estate-led capital accumulation and propertied citizenships—tied to housing, territory, service provision—how might we think of the modes of citizenship of the city’s migrant working-classes who are not only materially distanced from these materialities, but under increased scrutiny within the academy, are ontologically and epistemologically placed outside of “the urban”? Of what relevance is material labour to these emergent and nationally symbolic immaterial economies? To do so I seek to momentarily centre the space of the household, neighbourhood and gendered social relations in my analyses of urbanisation.

As noted previously, I am interested in how vernacular, quotidian practices of gender, work and territory shapes the way in which we come to understand attendant geographies of the city. Gurgaon is a useful space to explore these dynamic articulations given its highly fragmented, outsourced and privatized modes of state governance, and the city’s seemingly duplicitous modes of accumulation. I am interested in the ways in which a politics of possession and emplacement, nominally indexed by land and real-estate, articulate unevenly with a labour condition characterised by flux, flexibility and marginality, nominally indexed by work and industry. How an industry which relies on the miraculous self-expanding value of property is reconciled with one which demands low land and labour prices. How industrial rents come to be recycled into property capital by an emergent rentier class, and how such recycling implicates the precarious labour of the migrant worker in the reproduction of the “glimmering” skyscraper. How flexibility as a mode of urbanisation, labour control and industrialisation is reproduced and conflicts with a contingent discourse and practice of gender and work among the city’s working-classes. How urban governance in the city, defined by possession, makes opaque and aporic the emplacement claims of itinerant workers.

In drawing out these relationships and connections across the following chapters I make no pretence that these representations and materialities of the city, of labour and land, offer a definitive reading of the
city’s urbanisation, nor are there relationships easily reconcilable or transparent. I do not intend to present some kind of structural functionalism to these two aspects of the city; nor am I making the case that these urban forms, representations and political economies fall into neat linkages and easy co-dependent relationships. As much as I would have liked there to have been a workers’ strike which indirectly or directly obstructed a “world-class” real estate project or a migrant workers’ struggle for the right to habitation, I have not found evidence of this at the time of writing.

In part this is because the thesis’ focus is on how the incoherent subaltern figure – the peasant rentier and migrant worker – whom directly or indirectly produces value for the city, comes to negotiate their position as the ‘constitutive outside’ (Mouffe, 1993) of the epistemological and ontological condition of the hegemonic “city”, defined by tentative claims to registers of property and territorial belonging. Gurgaon’s itinerant workers in particular, are simply not known on these embodied terms of reference. In order to understand the place-making practices and politics of itinerant workers, I trace the alternative “cartographies” (McKittrick, 2006) of the urban - the camp, the subaltern pamphlet, the abandoned room, memory of migration, act of spectacular violence - I hope to draw out a form of urban politics characterised not by discernible claims to and of a bounded urban, but by the articulation between contingent, situated forms of urban life, cut through various forms of social difference, and logics and ‘structures’ of urban political economy.

The figure of the female migrant worker, the focus of Chapters 5 and 6, is particularly obstinate to Gurgaon, a city that is driven by real estate accumulation and constituted by propertied citizens. The female migrant worker is, as a migrant worker, subject to flexible regimes of industrial employment and oppressive and exploitative conditions within the workers’ neighbourhood which push low-wage workers into circuits of impermanence, hypermobility and ontological distance from possession, the antithesis to propertied and territorial citizenships. However, the female migrant worker, is equally out of place on the heavily masculinised factory shop-floors and worker tenements; structured by patriarchal codes of morality, immobility and domestication; and legally and materially detached from property ownership in the “home village”. The female migrant worker as such is not only excluded from property discourses of the real estate-dominated city and dis/possession focused academy, they are also excluded from the hegemonic space of contemporary work, obstructive to industrial regimes which demand hypermobility and placelessness. It is precisely the exclusion of women workers from the hegemonic space of hypermobile work and everyday urban life, that shapes contingent (if incoherent) subjectivities, political practices and discourses that (i) coalesce around the situated space-time of work (in its multiple forms), and (ii) in turn that materialise situated demands for emplacement. In chapter 5 I term this, rooted flexibility. As chapter 5 notes, these demands represent a non-territorial outside to a body of work on urban politics in South Asia which is dominated by a discourse of territoriality and dis/possession.
Throughout this thesis, with particular focus in Chapter 6, I mobilise the concept of “subaltern counter-urbanism”. Subaltern counter-urbanism denotes a methodological focus on the everyday subaltern practices which underpin, disrupt and destabilise existing epistemologies of the urban. In this regard it denotes a centring of subjective difference and agencies in conceptualising emerging capitalist urban forms. Equally, drawing on Gramsci-inflected scholarship on hegemony and the “person” (Bannerji, 1995; Holland and Lave, 2001) subaltern counter-urbanism draws attention to the material spatial practices engaged in by subaltern actors that appropriate, contaminate and oppose the “roughshod” abstraction of everyday life by fragmented capitalist production of space. In addition, throughout the thesis I seek to mobilise and develop subaltern counter-urbanism as a methodological tool which, akin to Katz’s (Katz, 2001b) “countertopographies”, describes the movement between the disorderly and disruptive movement between the abstractions of global capital and the specificities of everyday difference. In sum as a polyvalent concept it characterises both the methodological and analytical approach I have taken in this thesis and the political and spatial practices of subaltern figures within this research.

1.8 Thesis outline

The following chapter will outline the theoretical approach I take in this thesis. Utilising marxist scholarship on “abstraction” together with subaltern studies’ historiography, and materialist feminist social reproduction theory, the chapter attempts to draw out a framework for thinking about urban hegemony with the subject as an active, disorderly, contingent and relational force. In Chapter 3, I will outline the methodological approach taken in this study, as well as briefly sketching the field sites and the challenges of conducting the research. In Chapter 4 I examine the partial and selective integration of Gurgaon’s former landowners into hegemonic urban land markets. Drawing on household survey, interview and ethnographic research, the chapter explores how land acquisition processes, exemptive planning technologies which produce the city’s “urban village” and the vernacular real estate practices of ‘the dispossessed’ have mediated political opposition to urbanisation and reconcile the duplicitous political economy of the city. In doing so the chapter seeks to understand the partial integration of former landowners into unstable, hegemonic formations of capital. Drawing on Ghertner’s (2015) work on the “propriety of property” the chapter highlights the manner in which Gurgaon’s rentier subjects come to experience their integration and exclusion as propertied citizens. Chapter 5 draws into the everyday life of the urban village. The chapter draws on ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews to explore how the “urban village” operates as a fixing point for the flexible labour regimes which the city’s economy relies on. It is shown that contingent gendered codes of mobility, in particular, fix female migrant workers in rooted flexibility, between flexible regimes of labour at points of production and gendered regimes of immobility at points of reproduction. The female migrant worker comes to be understood as an obstructive and obstructing figure within urban environments premised on flexibility and mobility. Chapter 6, building from the previous two chapters, explores two kinds of women-led political struggles and interruptions in the city. It is argued that the politics, discourses and practices of
the women involved in the strike constitute an alternative mode of emplacement, what I term a “subaltern counter-urbanism”. I conclude the thesis in Chapter 7, returning to the research questions set out at the beginning of this chapter, and drawing out the thesis’ key contributions to urban studies debates.
Chapter 2.

Towards a disorderly relational dialectics

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined how two common representations of Gurgaon’s urbanisation, as the ‘millennium’ city and as an industrial city, correspond to prevailing debates within the academy concerning the significance of labour and land to India’s contemporary political economy. In this respect, Gurgaon was positioned as metonymic of broader transformations in political economy over the past twenty years. It is my intention in this thesis to tunnel between these two representations and epistemological frames, in order to explore the city as a dynamic socio-spatial terrain through which a contingent mode of capitalist accumulation is organised, contested and fought over. Here I build from a body of scholarship on geographies of the Global South that have sought to explore the unruly and differential articulation of accumulation with subaltern histories, discourses and social practices (Chakrabarty, 2000; Chari, 2004; Gidwani, 2008a; Guha, 1983a; Roy and Ong, 2011).

If Castells (1977) understood the urban strictly in terms of its function as a terrain for reproducing labour-power, in this thesis I am interested in how particular relations of class, gender, caste and territory contaminate and give life to these abstract structures of urban capital. In particular I build on the work of postcolonial marxist scholars (Gidwani 2008; Hart 2006) and feminist urban scholars (Katz 2001; Wright 2006) to explore how particular gendered and territorialised organisations of social reproduction shape both the urbanisation process and with it an emergent form of urban politics in the city.

In order to get to grips with these urban processes I deploy a relational, dialectical approach. One which draws from Marx’s (1993) conceptualisation of abstraction in the Grundrisse, Lefebvre’s (1991) critique of abstract and differential space and marxist accounts of spatial hegemony (Bannerji, 1995; Hall, 2000; Loftus, 2012; Willis, 1977) in order to explore the contingent, open and dialectical articulations between social difference, capitalist logics and everyday life. Crucially this dialectical approach refutes the explicit negations, determinisms and sublations of Hegel and Hegelian marxist analyses. Rather it is a relational dialectics precisely in its focus on how urban processes come together through and in dynamic relation with multiple, historically and geographically specific social relations within and across everyday life (Hart 2016). Crucially this approach takes the abstractions of “capital” and “difference” and seeks to demonstrate the ways in which they are dialectically constituted in disorderly fashion through a series of complicities, interruptions, processes and relations. Disorder, interruption and complicity thus become key ethnographic features of this research project. Such processes are not transhistorical, pre-determined, nor necessarily mono-logical, but constituted through and within particular historically and geographically situated social relations.

There are ways in which one could interpret the urbanisation of Gurgaon purely through a reading of the contested relationship between the abstract economic categories of capital, land and labour. This
Gurgaon, stripped of its animating substance, could be understood as the product of globalised capital, an entrepreneurial state, liberalised regional and local land markets; one in which labour is only discernible for its cheap and pliable character; and agrarian society only intelligible through its violent dispossession and exclusion from its land. This urban triadic, of land, labour and capital mediated by the State, forms the primary conceptual resource for a series of political economic geographical interventions into understanding the urban of which Harvey’s work (1982) is, perhaps undeservingly, synonymous. Hart (2016) notes that while Harvey’s (1996) dialectical schematic lays the ground for an open, non-foundational dialectical method, he nevertheless holds a “commitment to parsimony and generality” eager to sublate specificities into a general political-economic story of capital’s mediation through space-time. More recently, readings of Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991) advanced a similar position of generality to understand the “explosion” of urbanisation at a “planetary” scale (Brenner and Schmid, 2014). The Planetary Urbanisation thesis rails against both the nominalism of the urban-rural divide, a point well established within feminist, agrarian and postcolonial literature (Breman, 1996; Buckley and Strauss, 2016; Byres, 1986; Simone, 2004); and particularistic accounts which mystify a general narrative of capitalist urban accumulation (Brenner, 2013).

These abstractive accounts of the urban form can only conceive of contingency and difference as “variants” to a dominant and sublating logic. While important contributions to the manner in which we come to understand the reproduction of capitalist accumulation through the urban form, these accounts provide little room for understanding the incorporation of the contingent materialities of social life – of the centrality of social difference - in (re)producing hegemonic urban landscapes. This kind of marxist geography has been critiqued by feminist scholars (Bannerji, 1995; Deutsche, 1991; Katz, 2001a) for effacing all evidence of subjective material practice from understandings of totality – be they “capital” or “the city” or “the urban”, of rendering a multitude of social differences - gender, race, sexuality – as secondary components in already prefigured urban analyses.

My attempt to understand the (re)production of Gurgaon as a socio-spatial dynamic form, constituted through articulating understandings, practices and meanings of gender, work and territory, would be difficult using orthodox political economic urban analyses. Indeed such an approach tells me little about Gurgaon’s uneven and heterogeneous agrarian-urban transition, the maintenance of the city’s duplicitous political economy (Chapter 4), or dynamics of industrial transformation that are founded upon a particular enlistment of gendered difference and household relation into modes of capitalist production (Chapter 5).

Instead I seek to draw from Marx’s dialectical method as laid out in the *Grundrisse*, and spatialised in Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, together with feminist materialist scholarship on the contingent, gendered and racialized organisations of the “real abstractions” of everyday life (Buckley and Strauss, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2004) in order to understand the vernacular, quotidian and disorderly reproduction of the city.
Crucial to this, as noted in the previous chapter, I have found Gramsci’s (1971) and subsequent scholarship on hegemony useful. In this thesis I advance a conceptualisation of hegemony as a contingent organisation of socio-political authority that permeates economic, political and social scales, congealing around not only formal institutional spaces of the state but equally laminating what Gramsci terms the social “superstructure”; culture, symbolism, social practices and ideologies. Hegemony refers to the contingent, situated strategies engaged in by bourgeois class alliances to immanently secure political, social and economic authority across diverse and fragmented social formations. Primarily I am interested in two aspects of the concept of hegemony. Firstly, hegemony is an approach to political power which refuses to accept structures and logics of dominance as prefigured, static elements. Rather hegemony directly infers contestation, struggle, in other words a politics. Mobilisations of hegemony allows scholars room to challenge lingering determinisms and abstractions within dialectical approaches, and push our focus toward the ways in which socio-political orders are under constant re/constitution and contestation. Secondly, hegemony extends our understanding of seeming abstract structures into the “low-level” and highly differential realm of everyday life. Drawing attention to the consolidation of particular formations of power through their articulation with lived practices of domination, complicity and subordination. This approach opens up a way of thinking about the central role of social difference - of culture, experience, the environment, gender and caste for example – in securing conditions for capital accumulation (See Hall, 2000; Hart, 2006; Kipfer, 2008; Loftus, 2012; Williams, 1977; Willis, 1977). In other words, a mobilisation of an understanding of hegemony implies a critique of abstraction which I will outline in this chapter.

This chapter will begin by outlining how Marx’s open, dialectical method informs my approach in this research. I will then outline how Lefebvre's work spatialises Marx’s method, drawing in “everyday life” as a crucial mediator of the concrete and universal and developing Marx’s conceptualisation of abstraction to understand the two-fold, differential nature of social space. Subsequently, I will draw on feminist and social reproduction theory to demonstrate how scholarship has developed an understanding of the instrumentation of space, gender and difference in reproducing everyday life. The chapter will then explore contentious debates around the position of subject experience within understandings of “the political”. Finally, the chapter will outline this research project’s aim to develop a framework for understanding non-possessive urban subjects, what I term in Chapter 6, “subaltern counter-urbanisms”.

2.2 From the abstract to the concrete

In the introduction to the Grundrisse (1993) Marx makes two related moves which are pertinent to my approach. First, a methodological provocation, foregrounding a dialectical methodology which takes abstract categories, moves toward their concrete conditions and back to abstract concepts in dynamic relationality. Second, a related analytical claim that categories such as “labour”, understood thus dialectically exceeds definition as solely “use value-for-capital”. These two points form an important base to my research project in that they (i) provide a methodology for breaking down “totalizing” analyses
which take “the economic” as the universal “last instance” (Althusser and Balibar, 1970) in capitalist articulation; (ii) intimate an open, dialectical yet non-teleological way for thinking the relationship between the particular and the universal; (iii) and in doing so provide a way for understanding how the contingent and dynamic articulation of various material urban forms, of subjectivity, territoriality, caste, gender, work and so on, can be understood as both laying the conditions and providing obstructions and “breaking points” for capitalist accumulation.

2.2.1 Abstraction
For Marx, in order to get to grips with the dynamic manner in which a multitude of social difference comes to articulate with the capital form, and in doing so extend beyond the capital-labour-land economic relation, requires a method of analysis that appreciates the contingent and active role of socio-spatial difference as it articulates with capital. Marx critiques Hegelian idealism, to argue for a contingent and critical approach to deconstructing abstract categories, he argues that:

“The method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as concrete in the mind” (Marx 1993, 101).

For Marx even the simplest “category” of social life, one thought to be in its absolute essence, is in fact composed of multiple, contingent realities and thereby always already an abstraction; “it can never exist other than as an abstract, one sided relation within an already given concrete living whole”. Using the example of “the category of labour” Marx sets out his dialectical method as taking seriously the relation between historical contingency and abstract category. He argues the example of labour:

“Shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity - precisely because of their abstractness - for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations” (Marx 1993, 105).

Marx’s method of dialectically moving from the abstract to the concrete was drawn upon by Harvey in his development of a dialectical schema in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996). In this work Harvey conceptualises a dialectical approach that focuses on:

“Elements or ‘things’ [as] constituted out of flows, processes and relations...[these] things and systems which many researchers treat as irreducible and therefore unproblematic are seen in dialectical thought as internally contradictory by virtue of the multiple processes that constitute them...If all things are heterogeneous by virtue of the complex processes...which constitute them, then the only way we can understand the...attributes of ‘things’ is by understanding the processes and relationship which they internalise” (ibid, 49).

Echoing Marx, Harvey asserts an understanding of totalities, such as the “city”, as composed dialectically through multiple contingent relational processes. This conceptualisation of dialectics as “flows, processes, and relations” pulls attention away from sublating logics and structures and directs focus toward the
dynamic historical and geographically contingent constitution of social life. It is this conceptualisation of
dialectics that I mobilise in this research project.

An understanding of what Marx means by the abstract is key here. Ollman (2003, 61-63) argues that Marx
uses the term “abstraction” in a number of different ways. Firstly, to describe the process of abstracting,
of “doing”. For example, of pulling out the economic category of “labour” from its immediate historical
and geographical relations. Secondly, to describe the resultant abstracted category “labour”. Thirdly, as a
“basic unit of ideology” and narrowly defined and reified ‘thing’. Finally, perhaps most importantly for
this research project, what Marx calls “real abstractions”. Real abstractions, Ollman (ibid) contends, are
the active “objective underpinnings” for the previous “mental” elements, they refer to how abstractions
“become true in practice” (ibid, 62). Ollman argues that real abstractions:

“Exist in the world and not…in the mind. In these [“real”] abstractions, certain spatial and temporal
boundaries and connections stand out, just as others are obscure and even invisible, making what is in
practice inseparable appear separate and the historically specific features of things disappear behind
their more general forms” (ibid, 62).

Real abstractions, nourished by contingent spatio-temporal relations, thus come laminate certain bodies,
spaces and practices, and shape and govern particular ways of coming to experience and know social life.
Real abstractions might be used to describe various ideological-material divides, including racialised and
gendered divisions of space and work, of urban and rural, formal and informal, but equally to
concealments, including gendered and racialized burdens of labour (Bhandar and Toscano, 2015).
Feminist and postcolonial geographers have long sought to not only deconstruct these abstractions,
moving from their abstract reality to their concrete conditions, but also demonstrate the work such
abstractions perform for both mediating value for capital and epistemologically binding our
understanding of social life to narrow totalities (Federici, 2012; Salzinger, 2003).

In this manner social reproduction scholars in the 1970s sought to demonstrate the manner in which
social reproductive work carried out largely by women in Europe and North America, organised around
naturalised gendered boundaries between the workplace and household, was key for mediating the value
of labour as a commodity (Costa and James, 1975; Federici, 2012). This body of work has been critiqued
both for itself abstracting the historical experience of white, married women as a general condition of
gender the world over (Davis, 1982) and elsewhere for simply “annexing the home to capital” abstracting
complex reproductive relations to their economic content (Bannerji 1995). I will return to the question of
social reproduction later in this chapter, here it suffices to note that a conceptualisation of abstraction and
“real abstractions” in particular provide a way of thinking about how relations of gender, caste and space
can be integrated into logics of exchange value, without being totally subsumed, or thought of as external
to, those logics.
Crucially then, the relational dialectical approach taken in this thesis seeks to study dominant structures and hierarchies of power as they articulate in practice within everyday life, with contingent material and cultural discourses, meanings and practices. The point then is not to reify rather zero dimensional particularisms over general narratives, but to hold these two ‘sides’, the abstract and concrete in dynamic dialectical tension.

In this respect my reading of Marx's method holds parallels to Althusser's conceptualisation of the “complex whole” as developed in *Reading Capital* (1970). Althusser conceptualises Marx's totality in its “complexity”. The “complex whole” is structured at various scales, each scale or part holds “relative autonomy” and articulates with each other according to contingent determinations, “fixed in the last instance by the economy” (ibid, 97). In this way Althusser develops his “complex whole” as an articulated social formation laced with economic dominance. Here Althusser draws from a passage in the *Poverty of Philosophy* where Marx castigates Proudhon, like Ricardo elsewhere, for abstracting an ideological system purely from political economic categories, in the process “dislocating” the “limbs of the social system”. From this, Althusser develops, as do I, from the dialectical method of Marx of moving from the abstract to understanding the concrete conditions which render it possible. Althusser names this “structure” a “complex whole”:

“...The co-existence of limbs and their relations in the whole is governed by the order of a dominant structure which introduces a specific order into the articulation...of the limbs and their relations.”

(Althusser 1970, 98)

Althusser develops this “complex whole” further in his following work *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971) in order to develop a framework for understanding the relationship between superstructure (schools, family, religion) and structure (capitalist productive forces). While opening up an expansive discussion around the relationship of social reproduction to production, the insistence in Althusser’s “concept whole”, on structuring the relationship between the body and limbs through the economic “in the last instance” has proved contentious (Mitchell, Marston and Katz 2003). Althusser qualifies this clause by stating that the dominance of the economic, “cannot be reduced to the primacy of the centre” and that, ultimately the “lonely hour of the last instance never comes”. Nevertheless, the author asserts that the economic is the “only” determination able to escape “arbitrary relativism of observable displacements”; of gender, race, ethnicity, social difference that ruffle the feathers of formalistic ‘Marxist’ analysis the world over. As such Althusser’s “complex whole” is peculiar. Beginning as he does by drawing out from Marx's dialectical method, one which critiques British political economists’ distrust of historical conditions and material practices, Althusser resurrects distrust “in the final instance”. In this manner, as Mitchell et al (2004) argue, Althusser’s analysis “falls flat” precisely in its disregard for the role lively and differential material practices play in articulating the “complex whole”.

Althusser’s reluctance to hold to his initial assertion of the “relative autonomy” of social differences is rooted in his suspicion of all things experiential, humanistic, and subjective. Central to Althusser’s project...
in *Reading Capital* (1970) was the expunging of “ideological remnants” of Marx’s earlier humanism from marxist theory. This required a reification of the philosopher and the crystallization of Marxist politics as first and foremost a science, a move which became extremely influential in post-Althusserian readings of the “ontological difference” especially within political philosophy in Europe (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Marchart, 2007).

Althusser’s work disavowed both humanism and historicism of Marx’s early writings, replacing the figure of the subject with ‘Marxism’ as science, which was required to identify the concrete conditions from the abstract and by analogy a true emancipatory politics from bourgeois ideology. Such an abstraction relies, for Althusser, on the invocation of the subject as an always empirical, ideological effect of bourgeois idealism, in opposition to the identifiable science of Marxist theory. Here ‘Science’ steps in and becomes the active dimension of history (Thomas, 2009, 389). It is this dismissal of the subject, of their experiences and dialectical relations to totality, which allows Althusser to abstract, particularised and historicised social relations to what Bosteels (2011, 25) terms “theoretical operators that continue to be the sole purview of the Marxist philosopher as the master and proprietor of truth”. Here “Marxist political philosophy” operates outside of history, as neutral ground upon which to reinsert the economic as the structuring condition of the social “complex whole”. It is this intervention, Power (2006) notes, that allows Althusser’s successors to break from Marxisms in all their previous forms, including the spectre of a “humanist” Stalinism, and identify a new, emancipatory political Marxism free from the vestiges of actually existing politics.

### 2.2.2 Abstraction and the political

This thesis in part hopes to explore the disorderly geographies of Gurgaon cut through by a politics of social reproduction, gender, land and work. This politics, as I understand it is embedded, contingent and negotiated by an active albeit incoherent subaltern agency. It is through these relational negotiations that we come to a “politics” as an unstable abstract form. This conceptualisation stands in contrast to the abstract, “Politics” of much post-foundationalist thought.

Stemming from an Althusserian-inflected foundationalist dilemma (Loftus, 2014), the post-foundational ‘Political’ asserts a distinct difference between the representable, identifiable qualities of politics, the *ontic* dimension, and the separate if related, total significance or nature of politics its *ontological* dimension. The ontological-turn, at the centre of contemporary European calls for ‘a political’, whether conceptualised as associative (via Arendt) or conflictual (via Schmitt) is founded upon a hesitant rejection of an ultimate ground of subjective experience (foundationalism) – the denial of an ultimate determining essence – and the embrace of a plurality of conditional foundations which fleetingly substantiate an essence only to be confronted with the impossibility of completeness (Marchart, 2007). It is my contention that, this body of work can be read as a specific convergence between the post-foundationalist dilemma and a post-Althusserian moment, wherein the role of the political philosopher takes centre stage, as identifier of the
ontological difference, to differentiate the essential moment of autonomous human experience from the ontic-like qualities of everyday politics.

It was Althusser’s critique of humanism and historicism, and reification of the philosopher as purveyor of Marxism, that former student Rancière critiques in his polemic, *Althusser’s Lesson* (Rancière, 1974). Here Rancière contends that Althusser’s anti-humanism and anti-historicism are both “false symmetries” in which Althusser sets up (via a reading of *The German Ideology* which appears as a critique of the subject) the necessity for the intervention of the philosopher, as the interpreter of history, an ideological construct too complex for the masses to comprehend. As Rancière (1974, 10) notes with tongue firmly in cheek:

“When it is a matter of organising history, the masses should wait for the “theses” that specialists in Marxism work out for their benefit. Roll up your sleeves and transform nature; for history, though, you must call on us”.

Yet beyond Althusser’s contrived conceptualisation of a scientific Marxism, the underlying ideological “difference” which informs the post-Althusserian project of a Marxist politics anew remains problematic. While Althusser, in *For Marx* (1969) and *Reading Capital* (1970) does not directly engage with Heidegger’s ontological difference, the convergence of the post-foundationalist adoption of “difference as ontological distinction” alongside the legacy of Althusser’s anti-humanism, I would argue, allows for a particular Althusserian reading of difference to infer ontic-like variation or externality from a general, ontological and economically defined structure. In this light Althusser’s “limbs” are tied tightly into the structural body. As a result, Althusser’s and Althusserian marxist work maintains a particularly consistent fidelity to an autonomous, neutral, axiomatic conceptualisation of difference; one which requires the economic to structure and a philosopher to identify. In such a conceptualisation, ‘politics’ is no longer visible as a dialectically negotiated and historically contingent terrain of social relations.

Rancière, as previously noted, positions himself as a strong adversary of his previous teacher at this point. Indeed Rancière’s oeuvre stands in opposition to the “meta-politics” of political philosophy which purports to hold autonomy from “ideology” via “reference to the scientific status of its knowledge” (Žižek, 2000, 192); a political philosophy with a sole purpose to obstruct the subjectivisation of the political. It was, indeed, Rancière who coined the term “speculative leftism” in reference to the resurrection of the metaphysical in the contemporary continental philosophy to which he speaks to. Yet while Rancière distances himself from the speculative nature of his contemporaries’ annihilation of the subject and reification of Theory, as Bosteels (2011) notes, the “speculative” makes an unlikely return in Rancière’s project, in his conceptualisation of a proper, axiomatic and somewhat empty “political-police” relation. Indeed, as Žižek (1999) and Mejia (2013) note, what first appears as the ‘return of the subject’ in Rancière’s “part of no parts”, under closer scrutiny, amounts to the reduction of the subject to first a metaphysical process of subjectivization (Žižek 1999), an empty, ideological signifier with no real reference point to actually existing practice nor the historical material conditions of a subject’s constitution (Mejia 2013).
For Rancière (2001), politics directly implies a process of subjectivisation and a relation with the “logic of the arche”, which is necessarily conflicntual and contradictory. More broadly, for Rancière, politics proper is the enunciative actions of those who, by principle of the impossibility of universality, do not fit within the social body wherein each part must have its part. “Politics proper”, for Rancière, involves the “short-circuit” between the whole and its parts— the subject appears as an expression of the impossibility of a final ground, of which ‘the police order’ in its various forms, plays a part to separate or disavow (Rancière 2001).

Indeed, Rancière’s (2001) 7th and 8th Theses on Politics, explicitly reference an opposing relation between politics and the police, “politics is specifically opposed to the police” (ibid, 8). The functioning logic of the police order is the “partition of the sensible” that which operates to “[cut] up the world” into proper spaces with explicit reference to what is not ‘proper’. Politics, in contrast, is the dissensual release of a particular mode of subjectification of the supplement, that which has no part in the order of the police (Rancière 2001). Yet there is a contradiction in Rancière’s project in that while he remains loyal to a nominalism in his critique of meta-politics, for example in stating that “politics...has no proper place nor does it possess any ‘natural subjects’” (Rancière 2001); the political and its disavowals (archipolitics, metapolitics, parapolitics) are simultaneously presented as axiomatic abstractions (Bosteels 2011). It is this confusion within Rancière’s work which I would argue is typical of the Althusserian-inflected tendency to infer speculative axioms from a distinguishing and externalising reading of difference. It is precisely this which Bosteels (2011) characterises as Rancière’s fall to Manichaeism (over an embrace of dialectics) wherein one can seek to understand “places where one paradoxically divides and inscribes itself into the other, as well as to investigate the historical modalities of this inscription” (Ibid, p. 155).

While Rancière may reject Althusser’s assertion of “the subject” as ideology, the subject he proposes remains in the form of an ethical moment which obstructs the grounding of foundations (Žižek 1999). The subject here, and for other continental philosophers on the political (Badiou 2010), emerges as a matter of decision-based presence or action, and thus rather than representing any constitution of historical social relations, the subject is rather seen as a vacuous signifier of society’s absent ground (Žižek 1999, 232). For Žižek (ibid) this understanding of the subject, of its momentary enunciations toward impossibility, constitute the discipline’s fatal flaw, an un-rigorous and ambiguous conceptualisation of that to which the political itself is disavowing. In this manner, Rancière’s political subject and police order seemingly operate exclusively as an abstraction.

Mejía’s (2013) post-colonial critique further unpacks the metaphysical abstraction at play in Rancière’s, and implicitly Althusser’s, anti-humanism. Namely that it offers a dehistoricised and structurally passive subject, only identifiable as process of subjectivisation, detached from any particularisations of its constitution other than its “disidentification” from the “police order”; the latter, itself remaining vague. For Mejía, Rancière’s work “reproduces the idea that the political is spontaneous and sporadic, opposing a collective history of resistance” (Mejía 2013, 4), thus eliding questions of difference. For Mejía, women
of colour; “experience a language by the police that is not shared by other political subjects, the multiple of oppressions of race, class and gender in which we exist must exist as the outcast and the insane” (ibid, 6). In this manner, Mejia highlights that Rancière’s “politics” falls flat for those very same reasons as Althusser’s, that it is principally inadequate in showing how certain subjects are contingently (re)produced in relation to the “police order”. Both Mejia and Žižek’s critique, usefully identify the tendency within Althusserian scholarship to serve an anti-humanist abstraction; as seen in the reification of universalising signifiers such as “politics” or “the police” to the detriment of the dialectically related plurality of actually existing histories which constitute and are constituting material political practices of domination, coercion, subversion and emancipation.

2.2.3 The Subalterns and the difference
There are subtle resonances between the Althusserian debates on the political and the Subaltern studies’ project to write subaltern history. Indeed, as Spivak (1988) notes in her introduction to the Selected Subaltern Studies, the early Subalternist approaches were somewhat trapped between inflections from European post-foundationalist critiques of humanism, of the subject-as-sovereign, and their own task to retrieve a “subaltern” consciousness into a history of colonial India (ibid, 10). Much of the early Subaltern Studies output thus sat awkwardly between an Althusserian anti-humanism and a Gramsci-inflected project to explicate peasant and working-class consciousness.

The question of autonomy within the Subaltern studies project, consisted of an explicit rejection of a historicism which had thus far seemingly understood social relations and colonial relations in India, as only ever a precursor to capitalist modernity reaching Indian shores, or else as an internal negation to the universalising drive of capitalism (Guha 1983). A project of resurrecting the agency of the subordinated within History, mandated an appreciation of an agency that surpassed mere negation of European experiences, a rejection of both (a) an abstraction of the lived experience of subordination, in its variegated forms, to European hegemonic understandings of “class” and principally subjectivity, and in turn, (b) a rejection of the colonised body as necessarily a “negative in history’s dialectical march...the anti-ethical moment in search of a higher truth” (Gidwani, 2008b, 2579).

Guha (1983b) marks the (early) Subaltern Studies key contribution of a subaltern domain of politics – constitutive of culture, caste, ritual, kinship – as ontologically distinct, if not “hermetically sealed off” from, elite domains. Guha, now notoriously, asserted that:

“Parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were...the subaltern classes and groups...that is, the people. This was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from the elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter” (ibid, 3).

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8 Or indeed Heideggerian affirmations of an ontologically autonomous “political”.
In *The Prose of Counter-Insurgency*, Guha critiques colonial and liberal historiography for consistently dismissing peasant revolts under the Raj as “spontaneous, premeditated” and pre-political affairs, of a population not-yet enlightened by modernity, and accuses Marxist accounts of attempting to assimilate the ‘peasant-rebel’ as only ever “a contingent element in another history [that of European socialism] with another subject [the European working class]” (Guha, 1983b, 70). Rather, Guha and the Subaltern project attempted to draw out other forms of ungrounded non-derivative relations within subaltern politics, for example, religion, caste, kinship, community and belatedly gender. In doing so Guha seeks to both demonstrate the political character of subaltern insurrection, and in addition, demonstrate that capital’s incarnation within the Indian context was productive of socio-political phenomena markedly distinct from the “general” history of Europe. Guha’s assertion of the subaltern’s autonomous realm was key to the group’s critique of the universalising tendencies of capital, and is one which has carried across the diverse works of the Subaltern studies project, from Partha Chatterjee’s citizen/governed, political/civil society (2004) and “fragment” (1993), to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s controversial bifurcation of “histories of capital” (2000).

What marks the Subalternists understanding of difference apart from Althusser-inflected debates occurring in Europe was their greater willingness to critically engage questions of difference and subjectivity. The subaltern studies project, in affirming an autonomy to the subaltern political identifies a difference in conceptualisations of the political without an overriding, reducible signifier in the ontological. I argue that in its founding premise to pluralise the historicism of Western Marxism, the aims of Guha and the Subaltern Studies chime with that of this thesis, to develop a way of thinking contingency, subjectivity and difference in relation to broader structural conditions of “capital”, “the city” or “nation”.

Spivak’s (1988a, 1988b) interventions into and critique of the Subaltern Studies project, here were important in shaping the group’s intellectual output from the late 1980s. While Spivak acknowledges the collective’s anti-teleological and dialectical reading of history, she also highlights the tension within the work, between its stated project to uncover a historically-specific subaltern ‘consciousness’ and its metaphysical anti-humanism, represented in the groups assertion of the irreducibly discursive and elitist task of identifying ‘consciousness’. For Spivak, the recovery of subaltern consciousness is a positivistic task which cannot help but re-essentialise the Subaltern as *the* Subaltern; the foundational other to the Intellectual’s will to recover (Spivak 1988a). Here, in many ways Spivak’s critique of the Subalternist’s implicit theoreticism (famously invoking an imagined debate between Foucault and Deleuze) mirrors that which Rancière had claimed of Althusser.

Key to Spivak’s critique is an anti-theoreticism, a critique of the intellectual as purveyor of an objective knowledge and unproblematic spokesperson for his subject; displacing the subalterns material experiences through the act of representation (Spivak 1988b). Spivak thus seeks to read Subaltern Studies itself “against the grain” and place the project within a double movement between a historicised-political
humanism and metaphysical rejection of a “speaking subaltern” (Spivak 1988a). In this manner Spivak inserts the concept of the ‘subaltern’ itself within an “immense discontinuous network of politics, ideology, sexuality, history” such that the subject’s “persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian…the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narratized into logic” (Spivak 1988b, 16).

Spivak’s intervention into the Subaltern Studies group was incredibly influential, and for some deeply controversial (Sarkar, 2002), marking a turning point in Subalternist enquiry, from a focus on drawing attention to the role of a subaltern politics in shaping the modern nation, toward an interrogation of the manner in which hegemonic European knowledge-power comes to delimitate a fixed, essential subaltern experience (Chaturvedi, 2012). For Sarkar (2002), the Subalternists’ representational turn amounted to a relinquishment of the actually existing struggles of subaltern classes in India, while others chastise the group for mistaking “autonomy” and historical difference for the necessarily uneven geographies of capital (Goswami, 2004). Spivak’s “moment” for the purposes of this research presents an interesting conjunctural position, of both a critique of a theoreticism which seeks to speak for a desired subject and a rejection of a retrievable subjective subaltern agency.

O’Hanlon (1988), like Spivak before her, equally rebukes the contradiction within the Subaltern Studies group of recovering the particularities of subaltern histories, and simultaneously, in that act of recovery, affirming a sovereign, self-actualising agency; characteristics which the project seek to displace. In order to escape the fall back toward the figure of European subjectivity while remaining committed to a critique of metaphysical abstraction, O’Hanlon argues for an incessant rejection of origins and indigeneity too often found within the Subalternist project, and appreciation of representational complicity and a refocus on the creative practice of the subaltern, her participation (subversion, appropriation) in the historical-material constitution of her being, as a constitution of “fragments” which do “not contain the signs of any essential belonging in them” (O’Hanlon 1988, 81).

Here we are between two Subalternist strategies of (a) highlighting the effacement of the subaltern as a place-holder for her irretrievable agency and (b) a focus on her active and creative participation in her own being. Rather than trigger abstraction to a metaphysical “political”, reading the Subalternist discourse alongside Marx’s method of moving from the abstract to the concrete (and back again), draws attention to the complex interplay and complicity of academic representation, subjective agency, material practices and abstract forms. By moving dialectically between these dynamics of materiality and representation, without reifying any discrete point, we can move away from the determinisms and abstractions deployed by Althusserian and ‘speculative left’ (Bosteels 2011), and focus on the role of disorderly subaltern agency as articulated through multiple social determinates and abstractive projects.

2.2.4 Gramsci’s “person”.

The question remains, what this contingent and articulated subaltern agency might look like? At this juncture I have found re-readings of Gramsci’s conceptualisation of the subject useful. For Gramsci,
situating critique and analysis through a *philosophy of praxis*, means allowing for a non-essentialist, dialectical reading of hegemony. As Thomas (2009) notes, Gramsci’s reading is composed of a trinity of moments: absolute historicism, absolute immanence and an absolute humanism. Each ‘moment’ reflects the dialectical appreciation of the plurality of situated moments and the competing “conceptions of the world” which operate therein, noting the tension in causality between the abstract and concrete which emerge from particularised historical and spatial practice (Loftus 2014). Gramsci in a critique of the metaphysical remnants implicit in historical materialism, argues:

“The philosophy of praxis is absolute "historicism", the absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history. It is along this line that one must trace the thread of the new conception of the world” (Gramsci 1971, 465).

Importantly for Gramsci, rather than falling to some essentialist conception of the “subject” as autonomous ‘natural’ author of history, for which he is critiqued by Althusser (1970) in an echo of the Subalternists dilemma, Gramsci’s “absolute humanism” involves a conception of the individual as neither an abstraction nor a fixed coherent essence, but a “bizarrely ‘composite’” ensemble of “historically determined social relations” – not explained rationally but rather conceived externally “as a Kampffplatz of competing hegemonies of relations” (Thomas 2009, 394). These externalities dialectically influence the “person” such that they are internalised into her own “subjective modes of being-in-the-world” (Ibid, 394). In this manner the “subject” for Gramsci is imbued by existent conditions and conceptions of the world; the term is “ shorthand for the processes it describes” (ibid, 394-395).

Here then, we might understand Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis, rather than holding to a closed class-determinism, as bearing traits of a “disorderly dialectic” (Gidwani, 2008a) wherein “the subject” is not understood as essential, nor homo-relational, but rather as “bizarrely composite” of multiple, fleeting conceptions of the world concretely expressed in relation rather than negation (Thomas 2009). As Thomas (2009) notes, Gramsci’s “person” reinforces the principle, that just because the subject is one of constant external (re)composition in “continuity”, does not infer that the “person” is of a singular, “pure” essence reminiscent of the Cartesian “soul” but rather that such continuity is a fractious symptom of the individuals constant interaction with and “interpellation” by the State as a singular, identifiable being (Hart 2013).

This partial move away from Hegelian dialectics, indicated by Marx’s method discussed previously, echoes Fanon’s rejection and “insurrectionary fidelity” (Gidwani, 2008b) to Hegel’s dialectic. Gidwani (ibid) notes that Fanon, while rejecting “the journey of the Spirit” to freedom, nevertheless holds to the colonised body as “excess”, constantly frustrating and evading the rationalising ambits of capitalist modernity; achieving liberation through a violent dialectical tussle to remove “the certitudes and their world and to stake one's life in the task”(ibid, 2586). Here Gidwani, through Fanon, asserts the need for an appreciation of the role of negation in the concrete existence of the colonised, and the importance of a
“non sublative politics” (ibid) wherein the political activity and potentiality for insurrection of the subordinated is never completely sublated to the whims of the coloniser.

Such a framework, might usefully be deployed to work out conditions of possibility between hitherto opposing dialectical camps, of internal versus external dialectics, which have plagued the Subalternists’ work (Gidwani, 2004). Indeed, it is in this conceptualisation of the subject within a philosophy of praxis, that Thomas (2009, 394) is able to term Gramsci an anti-humanist “avant-la-lettre”, and with which we might understand both Spivak’s aforementioned project to highlight the intersection of bourgeois and subaltern conceptions of the world alongside O’Hanlon’s call for attention to the practice through which the subaltern is actively constituted and reconstituted in the world. Reading within the tension between these bodies of work we might understand the emergence of the subject as a fragmented, yet active element in a multiplicity of “hegemonies of relations”.

In this thesis, the “disorderly” articulation of capitalist accumulation and the subaltern subject become useful, in Chapter 5, in order to understand the reproduction of flexible labour power. Chapter 5 explores how the vernacular rentiership of Gurgaon’s dispossessed landowners, articulates with gender discourses of work and mobility circulated by workers themselves, to shape a particular gendered reproduction of labour power. It will be shown that while Gurgaon’s spatialized system of social reproduction seeks to reproduce a highly mobile and flexible labour power, the iterative movement of women into breadwinning roles interrupts this vernacular system of flexibilisation; placing discursively immobilised subjects in hypermobile roles. In doing so, I focus on how subaltern agency actively participates in the process of social reproduction in the city.

In sum, Marx’s dialectical approach of moving from the abstract to the concrete, put in conversation with both post-Althusserian and Subaltern debates, provide a framework for taking seriously the articulation of the creative agency of the subject with dominant structures and logics of power that include the knowledge-power of the researcher, and provides a way of thinking dialectically without sublation nor teleological determinism. Moving between the abstract and concrete (and back again) in this sense takes us down numerous pathways which are not constricted by a return to the original abstract form but allow for an appreciation of the concrete, lived discourses, identities and practices which are both structured and disciplined by abstractions, yet equally give life to and are perilous to abstractions. I have found these approaches, useful for understanding the internally contradictory and duplicitous character of abstract space and labour in Gurgaon. One which can only be partially explained through a general narrative of capitalist accumulation. At this point, I return to Marx’s writings in the Grundrisse.

2.3 Difference and Possibility

The second related contribution of Marx’s Grundrisse, is the provision of a framework for understanding difference within the dialectical relation. In the Grundrisse, as Gidwani (Gidwani, 2008c) notes, Marx offers a double-sided reading of capital, one as totality that subsumes difference, “stitching” together multiple forms of (re)production into the value form; and another as possibility, of use-value and creative
subjective practices un-subsumed as abstract labour. Marx principally locates this possibility, through the duplicitious category of labour. Here Marx notes that a worker is transformed into a commodity through a process of abstraction, and only “becomes exchange value in labour time” (1993, 266). For Marx, a person’s use value is in dialectical relation to capital it “does not exist apart from him at all, thus exists not really but only in potentiality, as his capacity…it becomes a reality once solicited by capital”. Marx makes the case explicitly in his letter to Engels in 1867 contending that labour has a “two-fold character” (Marx, 1867). In making the distinction between objectified labour and “living labour” as use value “not for specific, particular use or consumption” (1993, 469) Marx is demonstrating capital’s always partial abstraction of labour. Here labour appears as both use-value for capital, subjectified by the factory or household worker, and, elsewhere as “living labour” as a completely ‘denuded’ abstraction, the subjective and creative practice of labour.

As Gidwani (2008c) argues the conceptualisation of “living labour” allows for a reading of labour as both potential value-for-capital, but equally one which posits labour as subjective, creative practice that does not necessarily take the value form; or indeed that of any subsuming force. In doing so, Marx draws attention to the manner in which labour’s mobilisation as a commodity, its being in the time of value, is internally distinct from its potentiality. Drawing back to Marx’s critique of abstraction, Marx demonstrates the ways in which “abstract labour” is composed of numerous concrete differences which are unevenly held together by abstractive capitalist forces, thereby opening up a concrete way of thinking about the role of difference (from capital) as active elements in the composition of actually existing social formations. It is this conceptualisation of difference which I mobilise in this research project. In doing so, I am not making an argument that nothing is external to capital’s logic. Rather I am concerned with shifting the lens slightly, rather than foregrounding an understanding of capital as a homogenous logic I want to explore capital as a structuring logic that demands abstraction to the commodity value, but (i) requires difference to do so, and yet (ii) is not always successful in this demand. In this thesis, I am interested in the everyday relationship between urban-industrial capital, subjectivity and space. As such, I find Lefebvre’s mobilisation of Marx’s work on living labour instructive.

2.3.1 The two-fold character of place.
Marx’s conceptualisation of two-fold character of labour, is crucial for Lefebvre’s (1991) critique of abstraction and understanding of a two-fold character of space, or what the author terms “differential space”. Importantly, Lefebvre draws explicitly on and seeks to expand and spatialise Marx’s dialectical method. Through Lefebvre’s (1991) “regressive-progressive” method, the author highlights the need for analyses which walk back from present structures to their concrete historical conditions and then “retrace” their steps back to the present. Lefebvre (1991, 66) writes:

“For how could we come to understand a genesis, the genesis of the present, along with the preconditions and processes involved, other than starting from that present working our way back to the past and then retracing our steps?”
In Chapter 4, I use this conceptualisation to understand both the “double space” of Gurgaon’s urban villages, which set the terms for peasant rentiers’ integration into urban land markets and yet provide their ultimate exclusion. Similarly, in Chapters 5 and 6 I use this conceptualisation to understand how the organisation of social reproduction in the city, sets the terms of workers’ reproduction as flexible labour yet equally provides the terrain for a subversive and oppositional politics. Crucial for both arguments, is a way of thinking about the urban as a negotiated terrain of hegemony, and not simply a prefigured space of agglomeration, consumption and (re)production.

In Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991) “abstract space” refers to the concrete historical process through which conceptions, materialities, and experiences of space intertwine. For Lefebvre, under dominant conditions of capitalism, the state attempts to produce an abstract commodity in space, homogenous and fragmented, parcellised along cleavages of “minimal difference”. Here “minimal” difference refers to alienated PARTICULARITIES their difference extends as far as the “diversity between villas in a suburb full of villas” (372). Lefebvre (ibid, 320) notes that “under its homogenous aspect, space abolishes distinctions…simultaneously this same space is fragmented and fractured in accordance with divisions of labour and divisions of needs and functions”, “space is whole and broken, global and fractured” (ibid, 356). Crucially, Lefebvre argues that to present these two aspects of space, homogenous and fragmented, as a conflictual binary “is to betray its truly dual nature” (ibid, 355-356). He writes (ibid):

“It is not, therefore, as though one had global (or conceived) space to one side and fragmented (or directly experienced) space to the other…For space ‘is’ whole and broken, global and fractured, at one and the same time.”

Here, Lefebvre is implicitly evoking Marx’s two-fold character of labour, drawing out the internal, relational dialectics within capitalist, abstract space. For Lefebvre, each historical configuration of state power seeks to produce and hold together its own particular mode of (abstract) space. Lefebvre was writing in reference to a post-war bureaucratic state in France that sought to manage crises of capitalist accumulation by facilitating the movement of capital into everyday life; spatially represented in large-scale private and public urban projects – public housing; suburbs; highways; tourist resorts and so on. For Lefebvre, then, abstract space is thus always political. Lefebvre, echoing Marx, remarks of this “abstract” space:

“On first inspection it appears homogenous; and…serves those forces which make a tabula rasa of whatever stands in [its] way…of differences. These forces seem to grind down and crush everything before them, with space performing the function of a plane, a bulldozer or tank” (1991, 285).

The production of an abstract space, operates through a fetish, the production of spectacular spatial images that denigrate all other sensations, re-presenting parts of the whole as the entire “homogenous” whole. For Lefebvre this representation of space, is “maintained” as a “global space” where differences are flattened, one that is “fragmented…disjunctive”, voraciously searching for differences to integrate,
regulate and control. In this manner, social difference is not abolished by capitalist totality, but rather partially employed as its own. Lefebvre, drawing from Marx, principally understands the hegemonic character of this abstract space as one wrought through the dialectical movement between the abstract and the concrete. To do so, Lefebvre develops a “spatial triadic”, a methodological tool for understanding the dialectical movement between representations of space (the spatial designs of the sovereign); spatial practices (the social practice of space); and representational space (phenomenological, experienced space).

Crucially, Lefebvre draws upon Marx’s understanding of “living labour” discussed previously to draw attention to the processual and incomplete character of abstraction. For Lefebvre, the hegemonic production of abstract space and its representation in Euclidean space, is merely that - a representation. He notes, “abstract space is not homogenous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its lens” (ibid, 287). In this manner Lefebvre conceptualises the production of space, from the abstract to the concrete, dialectically seeking to distinguish between capital’s quest to “bulldoze” and master space, and the aporic, un-mastered conditions of space’s potentiality. If conceptualisation of the abstract allowed Marx to note the two-fold character of labour, here Lefebvre’s writings on abstract space, provide a way for thinking about the two-fold character of space.

Lefebvre’s mobilisation of abstract space draws from Gramsci’s conceptualisation of hegemony (Kipfer 2008). Crucial for Lefebvre were Gramsci’s attention to creative, daily practices which the author places at the centre of an understanding of hegemonic space. Kipfer notes: “The degree to which the production of abstract space takes on hegemonic importance stands and falls with its capacity to incorporate everyday life” (ibid, 198). Here Lefebvre’s methodology and focus on hegemony and everyday life clearly differs from Althusser’s “final instance” and economistic readings of the urban. This “everyday life” is fraught with tension, differences, contradictions and must be “underpinned” and unevenly held together through hegemonic contestation. Everyday life (a mental abstraction of complex daily practices) which gives the “urban” its substance, is not dominated or expressed through the economic, but is in constant political negotiation within hegemonic structures. Hegemony for Lefebvre is incomplete, precisely because it can only accumulate and integrate “minimal” or “induced” differences into an abstract form; of for example the gendered spatial divisions of production and reproduction; or of racialized ‘suburbs’ and ‘ghettos’; gated enclaves; and cleansed city centres (Kipfer 2008). In this sense Lefebvre’s “minimal differences” are analogous to those “use values-not-for capital” developed in the Grundrisse. Kipfer (ibid, 205) remarks that the “process of producing and incorporating lived space into abstract space [is achieved] not by homogenizing diversity…but by incorporating…minimal difference into the alienations of property, segregation and reified particularisms”. In other words, through the re-presentation and containing of differences as “real abstractions”.

Against minimal difference, Lefebvre posits an understanding of “maximal differences” that “presuppose the shattering of a system” (1991, 372). Crucially, these maximal differences are not understood as outside

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9 Or indeed any other condition of “primacy”. 
or autonomous to the closed system of abstract space, but rather “endure…on the margins of the homogenised realm” (ibid). The translation between minimal and maximal difference is wrought through the dialectical movement between representations of space, spatial practices and representational space. For Lefebvre “the urban” operates as a mediation point between global structures of capital and everyday life, fixing in both minimal and maximal differences in disorderly relation. It is upon this terrain that hegemonic regimes find their instability. Like labour, space’s abstraction into the commodity form is not prefigured by the presence of capital, but rather is under constant dialectical negotiation. Lefebvre (1991, 356) notes:

“The opposition between exchange value and use value…assumes a dialectical character…use re-emerges sharply at odds with exchange in space, for it implies not ‘property’ but ‘appropriation’…the more space is functionalised…the less susceptible it becomes to appropriation…it is the political use of space, however, that does the most to reinstate use value”.

In this manner, Lefebvre’s development of an understanding of the dialectical, hegemonic production of space contributes to our understanding of the urban not as a homogeneous plane of sovereign power, nor derivative solely of economic conditions, but as a terrain fraught with tension between multiple conceptions and practices of space. Both Lefebvre and Marx conceptualise abstraction as fundamentally partial and incomplete, it’s constitution as an accumulation of differences necessarily productive of incoherence and instability.

This conceptualisation of space, difference and capitalism is vital to the way in which I conceive of dynamics of urban and industrial change in Gurgaon throughout this thesis. I find Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of difference useful to understanding the limits to industrial and real estate capital search to rationally organise and suture together particularities of gender, caste, territorial belonging and class, in order to produce conditions of capital accumulation. Both Lefebvre and Marx’s critique of capitalist abstraction provide a way for thinking about land and labour with subjective experience and social and material practices as active and constituting, rather than negated and subordinated, features.

In a slight departure from Lefebvre however, I conceptualise the “maximal differences” those aspects of everyday life unencumbered by the value relation to be central and immanent conditions of abstract space. While Lefebvre’s argues that maximal differences cohere on the “margins of the homogenised realm” (1991, 372), for me, it is precisely the incomplete and partial character of the subject or space into the homogenised that provides the central terrain for the expression of an oppositional politics. While this may be a purely semantic departure from Lefebvre, it becomes particularly pertinent to my understanding of a subaltern counter-urbanism in Chapter 6. This internality of difference is well demonstrated when Lefebvre’s work is put in conversation with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe, a work that has been deeply influential in recent postcolonial urban debates (Derickson, 2015)
2.3.2 Provincialising Space

A central figure within the Subaltern Studies Collective, Chakrabarty’s oeuvre, has sought to critique the pervasiveness of knowledges which sublate historical difference to the essentialising, all-encompassing logics of capital or the experiences of European Enlightenment. To do so, Chakrabarty (2000) reads from the very same pages of the *Grundrisse* as Lefebvre, to develop a non-foundational conceptualisation of subjectivities in relation to capital’s abstraction. From *Rethinking Working Class History* (1989) to *Provincializing Europe* (2000) Chakrabarty’s work follows that a critique of abstraction provided Marx “a way of explaining how the capitalist mode of production managed to extract from people and histories that were all different a homogenous and common unit for measuring human activity” (Chakrabarty 2000, 50). Abstract labour for Chakrabarty describes capital’s encounter and subsumption of “the differences of history” (ibid). Echoing Marx and Lefebvre then, Chakrabarty asserts that the concrete is integral to the process of abstraction; the author notes that capital’s subsumption of “living” difference “is what makes this labour a source of resistance to capitalist abstraction” (Ibid, 61). Capital both requires and must demolish the vitality of labour; producing conditions for its own contradiction.

In an explicit move away from the internal relations of Marx however, Chakrabarty draws from Marx’s distinction between the “being” of capital, its logical subsumption of difference, and its “becoming”, “the historical process in and through which the logical presuppositions of capital’s “being” are realized”(Chakrabarty, 2000, 62) or in other words, the historical which capital retrospectively affirms. Drawing on the *Grundrisse*, Chakrabarty notes that until this history of being is acted out “capitalists and workers do not belong to the “being” of capital” (ibid, 63). The distinction is made then, between “the universal and necessary history we associate with capital” (History 1) and those antecedents encountered by capital “not as forms of its own life process” (History 2)\(^\text{10}\). Chakrabarty concludes that “Marx accepts...that the total universe of pasts that capital encounters is larger than the sum of those elements in which are worked out the logical presuppositions of capital” (ibid, 64).

In this respect, Chakrabarty’s position is perhaps uncontroversial, the historical distinction between capital’s being and becoming is typical of many analyses of capital’s development (Sanyal 2007). The two authors, Lefebvre and Chakrabarty, share a refusal to affirm a singular, positivist subject as foundational signifier to the transcendence of capital nor a singular and complete conceptualisation of capitalist space-time, and like Gramsci understand human activity as deeply imbued in a continual, incomplete material and representational processes.

Nevertheless, the two approaches are divided in their approach to difference. While Lefebvre builds from Marx’s method an understanding of the incomplete and disorderly internal relations of capitalist social formations, wherein “maximal” and “minimal” differences actively shape the capitalist urban; Chakrabarty’s insistence on externality and ontological difference, inadvertently re-establishes those “History 2s” as mere temporal variants to an otherwise homogenous History 1. In other words, perhaps

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\(^{10}\) Chakrabarty’s reading of being/becoming influences Sanyal’s (2011) work on primitive accumulation discussed in Chapter 4.
unwittingly Chakrabarty appears to reify a stable and homogeneous “abstract” in his pursuit of difference. The conceptualisation of History 2 on the other hand, appears to relegate “difference” to a secondary and passive position, interrupting, disrupting, the otherwise prefigured totalities assumed by History 1 (Hart 2016).

In this thesis, I foreground an understanding of difference as a vital and contaminating internal component of capitalist abstractions. Capitalist hegemony thus plays out in Gurgaon as an internal war of attrition between “maximal” and “minimal” differences as they are put to work for capitalist accumulation in complex and incomplete ways. As such I conceptualise “capital” not as a singular, monolithic structure that simply frontiers the globe sublating all difference into the value-form, but rather as holding to a “molecular existence” (Gidwani, 2008a) a dominating structure that articulates with a variety of contingent social relationships, modes of (re)production, and forms of value, but is not a mere expression of such practices. Rather it is understood as a historically and geographically specific disorderly relation that dialectically traverses a diverse range of particular social, cultural, political and other practices in an attempt to patch together the conditions for its general reproduction, but where “the wounds of that suture are never completely effaced” (Gidwani 2008a). Indeed it is precisely the necessity of capital to abstract use-values “not for capital” that provides key limits and internal contradictions to accumulation.

A relational dialectical approach thus enables one to analyse how “the urban”, “property”, “the worker” and “the citizen” are constituted in dynamic articulation between multiple, hegemonic competing discourses, materialities and processes that do not necessarily neatly correspond back to their original abstract forms. In doing so the thesis, while drawing from Lefebvre (1991) and Katz (2001) in particular, does not seek to reify the thought of a particular scholar. Rather I seek to move generatively between marxist, feminist and postcolonial geographical thought, and my own research, to unpack latent abstractions that underpin the material and discursive reproduction of Gurgaon.

2.4 Analytical points of entry

In the following section I will utilise this relational dialectical approach to return to the three analytical focuses of this study: gender, social reproduction and urban politics. Each provide a way for me to think about the vernacular articulations between the urban, labour and capital that detailed in the previous chapter.

2.4.1 Gender

Lefebvre’s spatio-temporal framework for understanding capitalist abstraction inserts questions of subjectivity and “everyday life” into conversation with the traditional capital-labour dialectic. As Coronil (1996) has argued, the introduction of land and everyday life into the capital-labour dialectic provides a different lens with which to understand colonial capitalism. The centrality of “everyday life” and subjective experience to Lefebvre’s exposition of the capitalist urban, as Strauss and Buckley (2016) argue, brings his body of work into conversation with feminist scholarship which has long sought to draw attention to the role of gendered organisations and experiences of everyday life in shaping capitalist social
formations. Massey’s work (1994) has usefully contributed to Lefebvrian analyses of everyday life by providing a framework for thinking the gendered character of difference is mobilised through “space/place”. Massey argues that one ought not only focus on the production of contingent gendered spaces, but also that this process of gendering space, comes to constitute the way in which “gender” as a mode of analytical difference is understood and experienced. In doing so, Massey’s work moves away from the rather metaphysical language of Lefebvre’s minimal/maximal difference, and provides concrete analyses of how gender – as lived and experienced - articulates with contingent organisations of everyday life (McDowell and Massey, 1984). This mobilisation of gender aligns with feminist marxist approaches to understanding the role of gendered discourses and practices in shaping uneven (masculinised and feminised) terrains of complicity and compulsion to systems of capitalist hegemony (Roy, 2003; Willis, 1977; Wright, 2006).

Within Indian scholarship debates concerning relationships of gender, space and capital within colonial and post-colonial era have, to some extent, been pre-empted by Partha Chatterjee’s analysis of the “women’s question” (Chatterjee, 1989). Chatterjee writes that the domestication of women (in West Bengal at least), the binding of the female body to the spiritual domesticity of the home, was an outcome of nationalist and anti-colonial projects to preserve the “spiritual distinctiveness” of Indian culture against the material pursuits of the West. Chatterjee argues that the spiritual/material-inner/outer binary is implicitly gendered when applied to “concrete day to day living”:

“The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign Supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world — and woman is its representation” (Chatterjee 1989, 239).

Significantly for the anti-colonial and nationalist project, while the coloniser had subjugated India’s external world, it had not and could not colonise India’s inner spiritual essence, which must be defended at all costs from material transformation: “In the world, imitation of and adaptation to western norms was a necessity; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity” (ibid, 240). Chatterjee, argues that this binary, of bahar [outside] and ghar [home], articulated with gendered hierarchies, to position women’s fixed, bounded essence in the home:

“The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality” (ibid, 241).

The embodied site of the domestic, the home, thus both became the principle site of the “new woman’s” politics and the site wherein nationalist patriarchy concretised its hegemony (Rege, 1998). Chatterjee’s assertion that this spatialised binary “resolved” the “women’s question” for the nationalists is heavily critiqued within feminist scholarship for appearing to “celebrate” a “resolution” founded upon a Brahmanical upper-class ideology of femininity (Bannerji, 2001) and in doing so eliding the lived struggles
of numerous Dalit and lower-class women active at the same historical juncture to which Chatterjee is speaking (Rege 1998). Principally feminist scholars argue that Chatterjee’s position essentialises women as a monolithic subjective entity and fails to take seriously the active dimension of heterogeneous subjective experience in mediating historical and geographical conditions. In this regard, Chatterjee’s resolution mirrors debates within and between the Subaltern Studies scholars discussed earlier in this chapter.

In this study I find Scott’s (1988) conceptual schematic of ‘gender’ useful. For Scott, ‘gender’ operates as a signifier of relationships of power that consists of four key elements: (a) culturally available symbols, (b) normative concepts that advance a meaning to those symbols, (c) politics and institutions that calcify around these concepts and (d) as a subjective, embodied identity. Here I seek to understand how particular organisation of these conditions within everyday life, as “real abstractions”, are integrated into market dynamics but equally tentatively provide limits for accumulation through the city.

Mies’ influential *The Lacemakers of Narsapur* (1982) draws out these dynamics. Mies’ work draws attention to the way in which gendered discourses, organisations of social reproduction, and globalised industrial capital come together to articulate industrial capital accumulation in south India. Mies’ highlights how the labour of women engaged in small-scale home-based production activity is devalued through persistent “housewification”. Such “housewification” is achieved through the placing of production activity within the reproductive space of the home and the persistent characterisation of women workers as housewives, not workers. This system provided the foundation that made manufacturing capital competitive in south India, and platform for male “breadwinners” to advance their class position through the appropriation of women’s non-work:

“It is absolutely necessary for the extraction of surplus value from the lace-making women by the exporters (and their anonymous international counter-parts, the lace-importers) that the ideology of seclusion, of the 'woman sitting in the house' is maintained”. (Mies 1982, 492)

Mies’ work carefully draws attention to the co-constitutive relationship between discourse, ideology and material practice that produce place-bound identities and value-relations responsive to historically specific market demands, building on and forming part of a wealth of feminist and postcolonial scholarship that highlights the manner in which the separation of the household from labour markets serve to mediate the differing forms of value, are induced through discursive as well as material means.

Following the advent of ‘globalisation’ and ‘neoliberalisation’ from the 1970s, much feminist and social reproduction scholarship turned its attention to understand how particular transformations in global commodity production, whether that be through “feminised” export-led manufacturing in the Global South or “precarious work” across the globe, hinged upon a re-organisation of existing gendered and racialized spatio-temporalities of production-social reproduction (Bair, 2010; Caraway, 2005; Elson and Pearson, 1981). As Bair (2010) argues, this period of feminist analysis sought to understand the “persistence” of correlation between the new international division of labour and the incorporation of a
perceived docile and dexterous female worker, which marked a key reversal in the previously assumed organisation of women in the home and men in the workplace. While instructive, aspects of this work prefigure women – typically in the Global South– as a prefigured homogenous group, bound together by “a sociological notion of ‘sameness’ of their oppression” (Mohanty, 1988, 377). The woman worker toiling in the export-houses of the Global South thus emerges as coherently docile, meek, powerless and exploited figure (ibid). In this context Mohanty calls for analyses which reveal the “material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as ‘powerless’ in a particular context” (ibid, 338).

Feminist political economy and anthropology in this vein has sought to examine the contingent relationships between gender, work and global capital by zooming into the spaces and dynamics of social reproduction; the household, family and culture (Ong, 1987; Wolf, 1992). Wolf’s work on female factory workers in Java, draws attention to the importance of complex family and household dynamics, and young women’s own ambitions, experiences and perceptions of work, in mediating the availability of this mode of labour, erstwhile prefigured in its abstraction, for Capital. Wolf’s work in this respect is of key importance for Chapter 5. Elsewhere scholars sought to understand the contingent reproduction of the working subject. Take, for example, Burawoy’s (1976) work on migrant labour “systems” in apartheid South Africa and agrarian California, that drew attention to the manner in which the daily reproduction of the “migrant worker”, is chiefly maintained through a political separation of labour’s maintenance and renewal across stretched and fragmented legal-political scales.

More recently, Wright’s (2006) work, following Salzinger (2003), focuses on the manner in which management discourses of women’s work, in the maquiladoras of Mexico and export-houses of South China, operate to mediate the movement of women workers, as a particular form of variable capital, from that of value to capital to that of waste. Wright takes on the “myth of the disposable third world woman” by demonstrating, in and across contingent experiences, how discourse and practices of gender produce certain kinds of labouring subject that shape and relate to landscapes of global capital. Wright argues that the “myth” of the docile female worker is constituted through the “merging” of the idea of an “inflexible feminine subject” with the cogent, thinking and trainable male subject; “these male/female bits must join together continually throughout the working day…they are not autonomous since the thinking cannot be seen without the action that animates it…he must reveal who he is through what she does” (62). In doing so, Wright genders Marx’s two-fold character of “labour” as detailed previously, demonstrating how gender discourses and practices at the point of production articulate differentially with global capital. Wright’s work is instrumental in my reading of women’s factory work in Gurgaon, detailed in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.4.2 Social reproduction
In this thesis I focus on the role of gender and gendered discourses and practices in organising and interrupting regimes of production and social reproduction: how gender as a set of contingent meanings
and practices, is mobilised as an organising principle and disruptive force within reproduction configurations that constitute the urban.

In this regard I partly follow Castells (1977) in understanding the “urban” in its function for the reproduction of labour-power. Yet, I conceptualise spatio-temporalities of social reproduction key terrains of hegemonic contestation. In this regard, I seek to break from analyses that conceptualise social reproduction purely in relation to its structural-functional role for capital (Castells 1977) and those which position social reproduction as purely derivative of an economic relation (Althusser 1971). Rather I conceptualise social reproduction as equally constituted through a set of mutable gendered, embodied, and contingent processes that dialectically articulate with logics of production. In this regard I have found new materialist social reproduction theory instructive (Katz, 2001a; Meehan and Strauss, 2015).

Reproduction scholars in the 1970s sought to develop Marx’s and Marxist ambiguous approach to social reproduction and production-centric analysis by interrogating the “hidden abode” of production, and in doing so critiquing the analytical separation of spatio-temporalities of production and reproduction (Costa and James, 1975; Fortunati, 1995). For autonomist reproduction scholars, the division of labour within the family and household unit directly mediates the value of “labour” as an abstracted commodity. The reproduction of the abstract category of labour, here is understood to be dependent on the unwaged work erstwhile considered outside of productive relations. The historic maintenance of female ‘domestication’, through various means, as such was of crucial importance to the mediation of “socially necessary labour time” (Federici 2012).

This period of social reproduction theory was crucial in drawing elements of social life into our understanding of capitalist formation and in doing so politicising a relationship between the household, labour and capital that had erstwhile been considered solely economic. Nevertheless, this period of social reproduction theory was critiqued for abstracting a contingent historical operation of gender, to a general condition and in the process “denuded” race, gender and household relations to everything but their economic attributes (Bannerji 1995). For Bannerji this aspect of social reproduction theory reflected a broader Althusserian structural gaze within feminist scholarship at the time that nervously erased any features of concrete practice from analyses and in doing so produced an understanding of social reproduction without an integral understanding of race. Against this the author calls for the reinsertion of subjective experience into our understanding of capitalist social formations: “We need scholarship that give us a world of commodity production with producers as living, conscious agents rather than as functional assumptions of the production process”.

This thesis builds on these literatures to understand how the (re)production of urban space in Gurgaon, is wrought through an uneven integration of gendered and territorialised difference within everyday life. I examine how gendered discourses of work are articulated not only through employers and the state (Caraway, 2005; Salzinger, 2003; Wright, 2006) but also within the self-identifications and discursive milieu of everyday life (Ong, 1987; Salzinger, 2003; see Chapter 5). In doing so, mobilizing Scott’s (1988)
schematic conceptualisation of gender, I try to attend to the dialectical movement between meanings and practices of gender, the reproduction of everyday life through institutions and politics of the city, and of identity, subjectivity and consciousness. Here I follow Bannerji’s Gramsci-inflected call for a “historical-materialist standpoint” that takes seriously the “transformative relation between self, labour and society”.

In light of substantial critique of the social reproduction scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, and my own focus on relations of everyday life, I have found the more expansive conceptualisation of “life’s work” instructive (Katz 2001, Mitchell, Marston and Katz 2003; Smith and Winders 2007; Strauss and Meehan 2015). Katz (2001) draws attention to the “vagabond” character of capitalism, which under globalization is increasingly able to “shuck” responsibilities to place, and sticky spaces of social reproduction in particular. The consequences of capitalism’s relinquishment of social reproduction (in North America and Europe) are born out in mass inequality, precarious work and poverty. For Katz a focus on social reproduction allows one to attend to the problematic travails of vagabond capitalism. For Katz (Ibid, 711), social reproduction refers to both the “messy, fleshy, and indeterminate stuff” of everyday life, and a “set of structured practices” that dialectically relate to “production”. Through this focus Mitchell, Marston and Katz (2003) explore the shifting and blurring boundaries of “life’s work” under conditions of flexibilisation and casualisation of “late capitalism” in the global North. The dominance of precarious work in North America and Europe is understood to be constitutive of a reshaping of the contours and discernible boundaries of production and reproduction, as “work” proceeds to flexibly consume ever larger portions of daily life. Concurrently, as work stretches across spatio-temporalities of social life, reproduction is cramped into shorter periods, and with the removal of capitalist and state support, under more volatile and precarious conditions (Strauss and Meehan 2015). Crucially, while some of the conclusions of Mitchell et al (2003) are perhaps specific to a particular moment in the global North, this body of work prompts us to displace nominal and fixed understandings of the space of production and reproduction and seek out the historically and geographically contingent matrix of “life’s work” as produced through flexible working subjects (Meehan and Strauss 2015).

Smith and Winders (2007) constructively push against subtle assumptions within the “life’s work” literature that prefigure the boundaries of work and life, waged and unwaged, as always “blurred” and amorphous, they note that the shape and contours of “life’s work” are subject to specific class, gendered and racialised experiences that may sharpen boundaries as much as they flatten and blur them. As Chapter 5 seeks to demonstrate, the urban village in Gurgaon, as a mediator of the city’s migrant labour regime, sharpens existing boundaries between work and life for migrant working classes, enveloping daily reproduction into the working day.

As detailed in this chapter, while feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the crucial role of spaces and material practices of social reproduction in the constitution of capitalist social formations, it remains a point of contention within the literature the extent to which the subjective experience of “oppressed” groups inform our understanding of these processes; with scholarship divided between those which
foreground the experience of the living, knowing subject (Guha, 1983a; Hartsock, 1983) and those that propose more structuralist or economic determinist readings (Althusser 1970). Even if we do concede the primacy of subjective experience, the question remains, how we might position subjective experiences within broader, historical and geographical structures. This research project draws from ethnographic, interview and survey-based research to attempt to understand how dynamics of urban and industrial change, are cut through by a politics of identity, territory, gender and space. As such, at its base my research seeks to understand an urban sociospatial terrain with subjects as active, participating elements. In this thesis, these questions come to the fore in Chapter 5 where I investigate the role of the gendered discourses and practices, that constitute and reconstitute bounded terrains of masculinity and femininity, shape complicity and compulsion to the flexible labour markets underpin Gurgaon’s duplicitous political economy.

2.4.3 The urban and urban politics
In the final section of this chapter I want to address the third analytical focus of this study, urban politics in India. I am interested in how the epistemological field of urban politics is delimitated; how we come to know and understand an ostensibly “urban” politics and how those epistemologies shape the ways in which certain narratives of “city-ness” are valued and which are elided. In the context of rapidly transforming urban landscapes it becomes pertinent to explore how both the urban and thereby urban politics come to be epistemologically concretised. In doing so I seek to contribute to wealth of contemporary scholarship that seeks to re-balance the overwhelming empirical domination of the Global North in our understandings of urbanisation (McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2002).

Understandings of urban politics in India have been prefigured by (at least) two bodies of literature. First, what Roy (2011) calls “subaltern urbanism”, is deeply influenced by the Subaltern Studies Collective (Guha 1983; Spivak 1988) discussed above. This body of work has sought to trouble Eurocentric understandings of class consciousness and explore the diverse ways in which heterogeneous subaltern figures negotiate and mediate State urbanisation projects in the contemporary period (Appadurai, 2001; Benjamin, 2008; Bhan, 2009; Dhareshwar and Srivatsan, 1996; Roy, 2003). Take for example Benjamin (2008) which traces processes of “occupancy urbanism”, the “stealth-like and…subtle occupancy of terrain” engaged in by slum-dwellers in the face of “world-class” city-making strategies of urban state municipalities. Occupancy urbanism consists of engagement in vote-bank politics, negotiation with lower level bureaucrats, and the physical occupancy of land. For Benjamin such a politics represents a concrete expression of Harvey’s (2008) “right to the city”, a form of autogestion that directly opposes real estate led urbanisation (Benjamin 2008, 723).

As Shatkin (2014, 2) argues, these kinds of subaltern approaches to urban politics draw from the Subaltern Studies Collective, an understanding of a division within colonial and postcolonial society, between a subaltern or popular realm of politics and a state and elite realm of politics. Shatkin (ibid) notes that the focus on a subaltern urban politics has attributed to Indian cities a distinct political, economic
and social logic. There are equally synchronicities between contemporary subaltern urbanist accounts and the broader traditions within anthropology on the everyday state in India (Kaviraj 1986), which have sought to examine the historic role of negotiation and mediation within the liminal space of the colonial-postcolonial state (Fuller and Harriss, 2001; Hansen, 2005; Lerche, 1995; Srinivas and others, 1962).

Roy (2011) notes that as Subaltern Studies scholarship filters into contemporary urban studies, the former body of work’s focus on retrieving subaltern consciousness (Guha, 1982) is transposed into a quest for retrieving subaltern spatialities; wherein the “slum” and “slum-dweller” have become particularly dominant. I have found subaltern urbanist literature incredibly instructive in thinking about the active engagement of the subaltern groups in the production and obstruction of contemporary neoliberal urbanisation, thinking beyond conceptualisations which solely rely on an understanding of urban space as a passive receptor for the insertion of totalities of the state and capital.

Second, I read in subaltern urbanist literature an implicit synchronicity with EuroAmerican conceptualisations of the urban question, as they developed from the 1960s and 1970s. One of Lefebvre’s key contributions in *The Urban Revolution* (2003) was to trace the switch of capital accumulation from the primary (industrial) to the secondary (urban) circuit of accumulation; the subordination of industry to real estate and financial modes of accumulation. This “switch” was equally vital for Harvey’s (1973) work on spatial fixes. Equally important has been Castell’s (1977) conceptualisation of the urban as a contingent configuration of the reproduction of capital. In the post-war and post-imperial context this reproduction was handled by the state through materialities of collective consumption – of state-provided housing, transport, education, public space and so on. Despite their distinctions, the implicit assertion of both author’s work is that urbanisation processes are wrought through particular transformations in capital accumulation such that the primary sites of political struggle, citizenship, and contestation are identifiable by their correlation to these urban forms. In other words the contemporary site of an ostensibly anti-capitalist struggle is no longer the factory, but the public housing estate; citizenships are discernible through the relationship between urban materialities of consumption – water, education, welfare – and the state. In this context debates on urban politics tend to understood as claims to “rights to the city”, territorial conflicts, anti-eviction movements and so on.

In the postcolonial Indian context, where as noted in the previous chapter, there has been an absence of holistic state hegemony, an absence of extensive levels of labour-intensive industrialisation (Aiyar 2002), and in the contemporary period, an ascendance of real estate and finance actors’ influence on the Indian political economy (Searle 2016), it is perhaps not surprising that EuroAmerican urban epistemologies have found some, perhaps implicit, currency. In a sympathetic critique of this heterogeneous body of work Roy (2011) acknowledges it’s contribution to challenging Eurocentric tendencies within Urban studies which tends to understand urbanisation in India as a general variant to European histories, as discussed, and as metonymic of underdevelopment and unbridled, apocalyptic capitalism (Davis 2006). Nevertheless, Roy urges to return to the Subalternist work of Guha (1988) and Spivak (1988) to focus on
the “subaltern as demographic difference” that which elides a foundational identity or territory. The
author notes that: “At best, subaltern politics can be seen as a heterogeneous, contradictory and
performative realm of political struggle” (Roy 2011, 230).

Similarly, I am interested in the ways in which subaltern urbanist literature delimitates the “urban” field of
analysis remains problematic. Indeed while Shatkin (2014) calls for a “reassessment of prevailing
frameworks for analysing urban politics” in light of dramatic transformations in the shape and form of
social and political dynamics in contemporary urban India, the areas of investigation the author highlights
– real estate-led urbanisation; new legal geographies of accumulation; and middle-class political
movements – all remain decidedly within a bounded epistemological terrain of what can be conceived of
as “urban”; that which materialises through consumption, territory, belonging, and the public.

In Chapter 6 I will outline through a study of a series of migrant worker struggles in Gurgaon, forecloses
ways of thinking about contemporary struggles in Gurgaon as contingent modes of differential urban
politics. I argue that an overt focus on particular “urban” typologies and subjects has ascribed an essential
and fixed urban politics and subjectivity to subaltern urbanism, which often elides forms of urban life
which play key roles in reproducing accumulative landscapes of capital.

Recent urban scholarship in this manner has sought to explore the intimate, negotiate and tentative
relationships of dis/possession in the contemporary period (Blomley, 2008; Porter, 2014; Roy, 2017). Roy
(2017) for example, in her research on anti-eviction movements in Chicago and Cape Town, mobilises
McKittrick (2014), to ask what “politics is possible outside the grid of secure possession and sovereign
self?” Of course, my interest is slightly different, I am interest in drawing, not from outside the grid of
secure possession, but from outside the ontological terrain of possession altogether.

In doing so, I find Butler and Athanasiou (2013) instructive. The authors highlight the manner in which
conceptualisations of politics and personhood are so tightly tied to an ontological terrain of
dis/possession – of the dialectical tussle between possession and dispossession – such that they “come to
structure and control our moral concepts of personhood, self-belonging, agency and self-identity” (ibid,
13). The authors call for a way of thinking about resistance, subjectivity and politics that resists re-
establishing “property as the primary prerogative of self-authoring personhood” (ibid, 6).

In this thesis I look to scholarship on/from cities in the Global South, much of which has sought to get
to grips with forms of urban life dominated by spontaneity, flexibility and negotiation. Such ways of
thinking are apparent in McKittrick’s (2011, 2006) scholarship on a black sense of place which explores the
relation between the historic racialized geographies and structures in the Americas which have sought to
violently efface, and concurrently draw value from black people and black geographies; and argues that
within this context discerning black geographies and a black sense of place requires shifting out
epistemological register. In addition, Simone’s (2004) work on “people as infrastructure”; Mbembe’s
(2004) conceptualisation of “superfluyity” and Fredericks (2014) work on vital, embodying infrastructures
in Dakar all contribute to a burgeoning body of work that one way or another de-territorialises our understandings of urban politics and social life. In South Asian scholarship, Gidwani and Sivarakrishnan (2003) draw from “ethnographies of migration” to develop an understanding of the “somewhat paradoxical figure” of the rural cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitan, for the authors, is the figure of the migrant whom moves restlessly between nominal spaces of the home-rural and work-urban, deploying knowledge and experience from one fixed place to the other, disseminating ideology and practices across the modern nation. In their development of the “rural cosmopolitan” the authors both seek to demonstrate the active role people without fixed territoriality have in shaping contemporary landscapes, this process is not fixed nor predetermined but rather reflects “general and historically deep experience of living in a state of flux, uncertainty” (ibid, 345).

In this regard, I mobilise a relational dialectical approach drawing from the empirical context in Gurgaon to explore how contingent textuality of everyday life in the city is productive of particular modes of urban politics. Chapter 6 in this research project attempts to demonstrate the manner in which urbanisation processes which rapidly transformed Gurgaon throughout the 1990s and 2000s were wrought through uneven and complicated politics of dis/possession which deeply implicated the social reproduction of migrant workers in the transforming landholding peasantry into a nascent rentier class that fixes capital flows through the city.

2.5 Conclusion
In this chapter I have sought to lay out the theoretical framework, and provide a critical and selected review of the literature, that frame the empirical content of this chapter. At its core, I am attempting to utilise Marx’s open dialectical method, developed upon, critiqued and revised by marxist, feminist and Subalternist geographers, to attempt to draw out the negotiated and complex relationships between Gurgaon as a historically and spatially bounded, representable urban form, and the multiple situated and complicit relations which operate to reproduce, distort and contaminate it. We arrive thus at an approach that seeks to draw out the disorderly relationality between land and labour, key materialities which both sustain and contaminate the city. In doing so, I hope to both build an understanding of how the discursive and material practices of political economy, planning, territoriality, gender, caste and class are employed and integrated into the negotiated hegemonic practices which reproduce the city. In doing so, I hope to elevate and mark out the “contour lines” (Katz, 2001b) between seemingly marginal and inconsequential elements of social life in the city and the hegemonic manner in which Gurgaon comes to be understood and known.
Chapter 3.

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I turn to the methodological approaches I used to carry out the research, and the implications of those approaches. This chapter is intended to both outline the methodologies I engaged in, the sites of research, why I chose the methodologies, and reflection on how the thesis has been shaped through various points of re-presentation.

This thesis predominately draws from ethnography and interview-based research. Ethnography and interview have been used historically to examine the extra-economic, everyday patterns, strategies and knowledges which discretely produce the contemporary urban condition. Ethnography is unique in its close attention to local, quotidian practices, yet it is equally a methodology which has been plagued by histories of colonial and postcolonial knowledge capture. From the early Chicago ethnographers’ focus on localities and their relation to institutions of social control, to the Manchester school’s focus on extended case-studies “in the field”, urban ethnography had broadly allowed a politics of representation to continue unquestioned (Burawoy et al., 2000; Holland and Lave, 2001). In the 1980s ethnographic practice experienced what has been termed the “crisis of representation” a metaphysical, “postmodern” turn away from post-imperialist pursuits of fieldwork and toward to a study of representation and text. A turn reflected somewhat in the Subaltern Studies collective’s own turn from a “history-from-below” pursuit of precolonial subaltern consciousness toward an ontological and epistemological critique of hegemonic (European) knowledge-power. Relevant in this respect is Spivak’s critique of the “conscientious ethnographer” whom “desires” to transparently identify and retrieve a singular, sovereign “subject-of-the-West” (Spivak 1988) with little or no acknowledgement of their own role in reproducing conditions of inequality they ostensibly seek to remedy. Calling out Deleuze, Spivak remarks: “The unrecognised contradiction within a position that valorises the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual, is maintained by a verbal slippage. Thus Deleuze makes this remarkable pronouncement: “A theory is like a box of tools. Nothing to do with the signifier” (Spivak 1988, 275). Elsewhere Strathern’s (1996) work stressed the inherent relationality and active dimension of the ethnographer’s perspective within the field of her research and the divergent ontologies existent across cultures, often effaced by dominant Eurocentric knowledges. As Strathern (1996) notes, the postmodern critique allowed for the entrance of text and the anthropologist herself to become the object of study for the first time.

The turn toward the discursive within ethnographic practice has not been without its critics, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue that the metaphysical turn forgot that there exists inherent ideological and theoretical frameworks before representation is even played out:
“Power does not enter the anthropological picture only at the moment of representation, for the cultural distinctiveness that the anthropologist attempts to represent has always already been produced within a field of power relations. There is thus a politics of otherness that is not reducible to a politics of representation…the issue of otherness itself is not really addressed by the devices of polyphonic textual construction” (ibid, 12).

As detailed in the previous chapter, in this thesis I adopt a relational dialectical approach that seeks to draw attention to everyday agencies, practices and discourses, and yet recognises the role epistemological refraction and re-presentation plays in articulating processes. In other words, the translation from the abstract to concrete, detailed in the previous chapter, is my translation. My study is partial, contingent and highly refracted through my own limited position as a foreign researcher. These debates were constantly on my mind as I carried out my fieldwork. I carried them around with me everywhere, thrusting them into the “field” as my interlocutors thrust them back at me. My discussions, interviews and observations were refracted by my own position as a British, white, middle-class man in India. As such this chapter seeks to reflect on how these refractions shaped the field data and analysis which form the core of this thesis. First I will outline how I arrived at carrying out this research project in Gurgaon. I will then briefly outline the sites the research was carried out in and the “entry points” I negotiated in order to access these sites. I will then explain the primary research methodologies used, why I chose these methods and how they shaped the epistemological contours of the research. I will finish with a reflection on my representative position and the limits to the study.

3.2 Sites of research

This research project was carried out in Gurgaon and Delhi, in North India over fifteen months between September 2014 and January 2016 complimented by two four week periods of preliminary research trips in 2012 and 2014. The survey, interview and participant observation-based research that forms the basis of Chapter 4 was carried out across three village clusters in Gurgaon and one village, Kapashera, on the Gurgaon-Delhi border, although administratively in Delhi. The interview and ethnographic-based research that forms the basis of Chapter 5 was carried out in urban villages surrounding the Udyog Vihar and IMT Manesar industrial estates. The interview and ethnographic-based research forming the basis of Chapter 6 was carried out in Sikanderpur village, IMT Manesar industrial estate and the homes of workers in various villages across Gurgaon. Much of the background research was carried out in the offices of Nari Shakti Manch in Gurgaon and in roadside meetings of Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar as will be explained later in this chapter. These sites are below:
Figure 3.1: Map of Gurgaon research sites (Google Maps, Author).
3.3 Initial moves

In June 2012 I conducted field research in Gurgaon for my postgraduate thesis. I spent six weeks conducting interviews with labour activists, manufacturing workers, upper-class activists, municipal councillors and former landowners. The purpose of that research project to examine the uneven, hierarchy of citizenships expressed through Gurgaon's fragmented and territorialised urban planning and governance framework. The research was later published (Cowan, 2015) and in part forms the preliminary research to this project. The project was assisted by friendship networks and comrades engaged in labour activism in the UK and Gurgaon who would thankfully later assist in the research in this project. As stated in Chapter 1, I carried out the research project in the midst of the IMT Manesar Maruti-Suzuki struggles which had caught the attention of activists and news outlets in the UK. Concurrently, I was made aware of Gururani’s (2013) work on flexible urban planning in Gurgaon. These two avatars of the city immediately interested me. I was interested in the relationship between what was projected as the archetypal neoliberal city, metonymic of broader trends of rapid urbanisation in the global South, and the lively industrial politics breaking out across the city.

I returned to Gurgaon in Spring 2014 to conduct an initial two months field research for this study. Initially I had intended to carry out research on aspects of urban politics within the city's urban villages.

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11 Gurgaon was officially changed to Gurugram in 2016 after the election of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party to state government. As the research preparation, field research, data analysis and much of the writing occurred prior to name change, I use Gurgaon in this thesis. Nevertheless some of the map images used in the thesis have been accessed from Google Maps after the official change in name and as such will state “Gurugram” as the title.
Prompted by the two representations of Gurgaon that I had encountered I was interested in the urban claims of migrant workers and dispossessed farmers. I initially spent two months of my research moving from conversation to conversation attempting to get to grips with migrant workers’ claims to what I understood to be “the urban”. I had spent years within Geography departments reading the ‘canon’, Lefebvre’s (1996) work on “right to the city”; Castells (1977) on collective consumption, Holston’s (2009) “insurgent citizenships”, Sassen’s (2001) “global cities”, Roy’s (2005) “urban informality” and Chatterjee’s (2004) “political society”. In each case, explicitly or implicitly, urban politics comes to be defined in relation to nominal integers of dis/possession and consumption. The hegemonic terrain that is negotiated over is composed of who gets access to housing, water, infrastructure, public space and so on. I was interested in how political demands and practices were carried out under a system of urban governance dominated by the private sector, and thereby prefigured for property owners. How might we conceive of Benjamin’s (2008) “occupancy urbanism” for example, within a context devoid of patronage or developmental politics, extensive public land or territorially bound subjects? Rather in a context where private governance and private property ownership dominate the political landscape of the city. What would “occupancy urbanism” look like when practised by itinerant, precariously employed workers whose everyday life is nearly completely consumed by movement and work?

In the first months of my field research, nearly all my discussions on the topic with various subaltern actors across Gurgaon’s urban villages were met with bemusement. Very few people that I spoke to had the slightest interest in Gurgaon, of occupying land, demanding housing, services and so on. Those who did were local landowning communities with historic claims to belonging. Among the city’s migrant working classes, the classical “urban rebel” was nowhere to be seen. The lives of the women and men I spent time hanging out with and interviewing, were dominated by two conditions: highly precarious work and constant movement. In many cases I was simply privileged to a momentary snapshot of fixity in otherwise highly mobile and flexibilised experiences of “life’s work” (Mitchell et al., 2004). I returned to London from a six week pre-fieldwork trip to Gurgaon in spring 2014 feeling dispirited and confused. I decided to reorient my study towards the empirical context that I had found, rather than limiting my study to instances of a politics predetermined as related to dis/possession and collective consumption, I would explore the negotiated and precarious lives of urban subjects who occupied an entirely different urban terrain.

Upon my return to Gurgaon in the autumn of 2014 I was immediately occupied by two factory struggles in IMT Manesar both led and dominated by women workers, both in auto-component factories. Through visiting the protest camps and participating in late night discussions, my interests began to crystallise around certain lines of enquiry that shape this research project. The first was to attempt to understand the relationships between these politically dynamic industrial spaces, and the real-estate driven imaginary of the city as a landscape of immaterial accumulation, projected both materially in the visually dominating skyscrapers, luxury high-rises and expansive golf-courses, and discursively within public and academic discourse on the city. While nearly all scholarly work on the city recognises an “other Gurgaon”, usually
heralded as emblematic of India’s unequal economic growth (Gururani 2013; Searle 2015) or its incapacity to plan its cities (Roy, 2009a), I wanted to get to grips with how the relationships between these urban spaces mediated dynamics of urban and industrial transformation in the city.

The second was, as detailed in the previous chapter, to look at how gender, as an embodied organising dynamic and analytic (Scott 1988), shaped workers’ political practices and engagements with place. How could I explain the sudden emergence of women-led industrial and workplace action? What was the relationship between these situated struggles and working lives stretched out across the breadth of the country and compressed and contorted within the precarious spaces of the workplace and urban village? I soon realised that in order to get to grips with these dynamics it would require more of an ethnographic base than I had previously envisaged, and in the spring of 2015 I moved into a room in a workers’ block in Kapashera urban village on the Gurgaon-Delhi border.

Thirdly returning to my initial struggles to come to terms with an urban politics in Gurgaon, I became interested in how dis/possession as an ontological and epistemological marker of the urban and urban citizenship elided other modes of urban politics in the city. I was interested in exploring two aspects of this politics. First, it was clear to me that while a politics of dis/possession did not characterise the everyday struggles of migrant working classes in the city, it certainly had a role to play in the agrarian-urban transition detailed in Chapter 4. Second, these conditions framed the marginalisation and flexibilisation of migrant workers in the city. Migrant worker’s exclusion from the terrain of dis/possession was itself a product of processes of social reproduction and an urban politics which I explore in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.4 Research Methodologies

In order to get to grips with these issues I draw on multi-sited ethnography, structured and semi-structured interviews, household survey and everyday encounters.

3.4.1 Ethnography and Interview

The primary means of research in this project were semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation. As my focus was on everyday discourses and practices, I decided to engage in semi-structured, loose interviews. These interviews overwhelmingly took place within the home or neighbourhood of the interviewee. As will be detailed later in the section in some of these interviews I was accompanied by an interpreter or friend, others and particularly those conducted after my move to Kapashera urban village in spring 2015 were conducted alone. I began my field research by interviewing a number of industrialists and state officials in the planning, industrial development and labour departments. This is perhaps because at the time my Hindi was at a lesser standard and these interviews were easier for me to carry out in English. While some of these interviews feature in this thesis, it became clear after a short time that the thesis’ focus would be to explore the everyday discourses and practices of Gurgaon’s subaltern actors primarily working-classes and former landowners. As will be detailed in greater detailed later in this chapter, my interviews were semi-structured and I allowed the interviewee to
take hold of the interview as much as possible in order not over determine the kinds of answers I would receive. I was wary not to trap my interlocutors’ responses within the limited contours of my own knowledge of work and life in the city. This approach was influenced both by the interpreter I worked alongside at the beginning of the field research (as I will detail later on) and by my own experiences during my preliminary field research trip.

Very broadly, my interviews with migrant workers focused on their experiences of and motivations for migrating to Gurgaon, how they came to work where they worked, how they came to terms with the highly precarious conditions of work and life in Gurgaon, and what aspirations they had for the future. Equally, broadly, my interviews with former landowners concerned their experiences of the agrarian-urban transition; their post-agrarian economic activity; their attitudes toward the transformations in Gurgaon; and their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Alongside interview-based research, I also carried out ethnographic observation. This ethnography was carried out alone while I lived in the workers’ block or through my participation in a women workers’ rights organisation, Nari Shakti Manch, and a worker-run news pamphlet distributed in the city, Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar. I will elaborate on these entry points of my research in a following section.

3.4.2 Survey
In Chapter 4 I draw from a household survey consisting of 198 households across Gurgaon. I decided to carry out the survey in order to get a snapshot of the factors impacting Gurgaon’s agrarian-urban transition. In part this is due to a lack of data on agricultural and urban land prices in the region. As Chapter 4 highlights, land sales in Gurgaon are nearly always carried out in cash, with a smaller amount recorded as the official sale price. This made it difficult for me to understand transformations in land price dynamics in the city. If I was to determine what factors affected the price received for land - whether that be year of sale, type of sale, type of land - I would first need to discern the price per acre landowners received for their land. The survey also provided a useful access point and framework for exploring the attitudes and experiences former agriculturalists more broadly.

The villages were selected and grouped into three clusters (see Figure 1). Cluster 1, composed of Dundahera, Carterpur and Kapashera all villages located along the old Delhi-Gurgaon road, whose land was acquired in the 1980s and 1990s for industrial and residential purposes. Cluster 2, Nathupur, Jharsa and Badshahpur villages all of which form part of New Gurgaon, to the south-east of the National Highway. The land of cluster 2 villages was primarily acquired by the private sector in the 1990s and 2000s. Finally, cluster 3, Rampura, Manesar and Kherki Duala are all villages in west Gurgaon which straddle the NH8. The land of these villages was acquired by both the private and public sector from the late 1990s to mid-2000s when the Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Complex was expanded to encompass Manesar. I chose these three separate clusters in an attempt to capture as diverse range of experiences of urbanisation as possible. Cluster 1 villages were primarily villages whose land was acquired for industrial
development; Cluster 2 villages were all acquired for residential and commercial development; and Cluster 3 were all acquired more recently for a mixture of industrial and urban development.

Table 3.1: Village clusters where I carried out a household survey (Author).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village Cluster</th>
<th>Type of acquisition</th>
<th>Period of acquisition</th>
<th>Area of the city</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>North East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1980s-1990s</td>
<td>Central and South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Public/Private</td>
<td>1990s-2000s</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The specific households were selected after a grasp of village social geography was ascertained in order to get a spread of respondents from different communities. The survey was conducted by myself and three research assistants, working in pairs. Efforts were made to interview respondents alone and in pairs. Nominal prices were taken in some cases verified by sales slips, although it was rare for landowners to agree to show documentation when asked. Some level of verification was attained in instances of group interviews, where neighbours or family members could discuss and disagree over price per acre received12.

3.5 Data analysis

My own notes from interviews were transcribed on the day of the interviews. The vast majority of my semi-structured interviews were recorded, so I used both my notes and the interview recordings to produce the transcripts. I opted to immediately transcribe interviews so as not to lose any of the ethnographic observation or interview detail. This also provided me the opportunity to build on conversations and themes of research as they were coming out in the interviews. Some of my longer interviews were fully transcribed from Hindi in weeks subsequent to the interviews by first-language Hindi speakers. I used the fully transcribed interviews alongside my own transcriptions to double-check the material and draw into specific themes that were coming out in discussions. The survey was conducted with a structured set of questions which my research assistants and I filled in during the interview. I collected the surveys at the end of each session and typed them into a spreadsheet the same evening. This allowed me to trace emerging dynamics that the survey was uncovering while it was being carried out. It also allowed me to see what was and wasn’t working, which questions respondents were uncomfortable answering, and which questions were most generative.

12 Despite the inability to record real prices, the nominal prices given in the survey are intended to demonstrate an indication of factors affecting PPA.
3.6 Entry points

I had three primary entry points to carrying out research in Gurgaon. The first was Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar (FMS) a small collective made up of former workers and activists, who produce and distribute a monthly pamphlet primarily consisting of short, verbatim accounts of working conditions at various factories taken from workers, an editorial, and occasionally workers’ poetry, creative writing and stories of migration. The pamphlet is distributed over the course of two weeks at four sites in Gurgaon (Udyog Vihar, Maruti Gurgaon, IMT Manesar Khooh entrance, and IMT Manesar Naharpur entrance), Okhla and Faridabad. I stood with FMS activists on the side of the road from 5am to 10am when the final morning shift begins, handing out copies of the pamphlet and taking down short accounts of workers.

Figure 3.3: FMS activists in Okhla, west Delhi (Hafeez 2016).

I participated in the distribution of FMS monthly at Udyog Vihar and bi-monthly at IMT Manesar. Reading and distributing FMS gave me the opportunity to speak Hindi. I found reading these neat, short ten sentence accounts perfect for practising and developing my Hindi. Each account had a similar structure: name of company, industrial area, workers' position, account of workplace conditions or situations. Prior to my move to Kapashera I was living in south Delhi enjoying the privileges of the lively academic environment at Jawaharlal Nehru University, all of which however was carried out in English, with short bouts of Hindi and Hinglish. Thus at the time, FMS provided me with an opportunity to speak Hindi at length with workers on the side of the road. As a result of my Hindi vocabulary developed along bizarrely factory-related lines, limiting my conversations to topics concerning wages [tankha] permanent [sthayee] and temporary [asthayee] contracts, production targets [utpaadan lakshya], freedom [azad], discord [kalah] and harmony [talmel]. FMS also provided an academic environment to discuss issues, strategies and histories of industrial struggle in the region. It was through conversations with workers on the side of the road during the early mornings, that I formed relationships, friendships and planned
interviews with many of the interlocutors of this project. Long conversations with the core FMS activists, whose politics lean toward an autonomist-marxist position, enriched my understanding of the history of industry and industrial politics in the region.

My second entry point was through the NGO Society for Labour Development (SLD) and more specifically their Gurgaon-based worker advocacy branches Mazdoor Ekta Manch, Worker’s Solidarity Platform (MEM) and Nari Shakti Manch, Women’s Strength Platform (NSM). Activists in NSM provided me with access to meet and interview women working in the garment-exports and domestic service industries that feature in Chapters 5 and 6. NSM held weekly open meetings in Kapashera and Sikanderpur urban villages, which I attended and was given permission to observe. During this period I was also supporting NSM, not all that successfully, in gaining access to meetings with factory management. Through my participation in both FMS and NSM I sought to draw back from the spectacular events of the workers’ protest and examine the everyday lives and experiences that were in practice and shaped workers’ demand-making. How does the imposition of flexible, precarious life and work gain consent or provoke dissent from workers? In what ways do precarious, temporary and gendered urban formations, intersect with a politics of flexibilisation at the workplace and urban village?

My third entry point came through living in a workers’ tenement block in Kapashera village. Through FMS, I made friends with Sambhavji who worked as a line manager in an informal garment-export unit in Kapashera. After approaching Sambhavji to ask if he knew of any rooms going in the blocks, he organised for me to take a room in a tenement block in Kapashera owned by his landlord. I took a room on the ground floor recently vacated by a group of young men who had fought with the landlord’s nephew. During my eight months living in the workers’ tenement block I was supported on a day-to-day basis by Krantiji, a middle-aged woman who lived in the room opposite to mine and worked as the pradhan [boss] of the block. I will revisit Krantiji and her integral position in the organising architecture of Gurgaon’s urban village labour system in Chapter 5. Without the day-to-day support of Krantiji, who would bring me sickly sweet, ghee-toped chai twice a day and would share her family’s dinner with me each evening, my time in the tenement block would have been much more difficult.

In the workers’ block I conducted observational ethnographic research, encounters and casual discussions with my neighbours, local industrialists and Kapashera’s Yadav landlord community. A period of my research, coinciding with the household survey featured in Chapter 4, I spent time with a number of rentiers and members of the Yadav community in the area. Here I was interested in how Yadav rentiers’ experienced their transition from agriculturalists to rentiers. How was the partial integration of Yadav communities into circulations of real-estate achieved? If Yadav rentiers’ relied on migrant workers’ rents how did that shape the position of the rentier and worker in Gurgaon’s hierarchical and fragmented political geography? My time in Kapashera equally provided me with a more general understanding of the rhythms of everyday life within Gurgaon’s key sites of working class social reproduction that feature in
Chapter 5. Through the late night and early morning discussions with my neighbours I would come to understand the gendered discourses of work and everyday life that feature in Chapter 5.

3.7 Interpreters

During the first six months of my field research, during interviews carried out with those who did not speak English I was accompanied by an interpreter. I began language training prior to carrying out research and could read, write and speak Hindi yet my language was not at that point proficient enough to have the kind of discussion I wanted. In addition, most of my interlocutors were not Hindi first language speakers themselves, between my ropey Hindi and their second language I did not want to miss any part of the conversation. Even while carrying out interviews with an interpreter sometimes this linguistic divide was palpable. Towards the end of an interview with a group of young, contracted autoworkers in IMT Manesar, my interlocutor a man in his early 20s from Orissa, said to me: “see, we are foreigners like you, we too don’t speak this language”. Reflecting on the conversation later, I found it strange that the man would associate with me, not least as I was a foreigner, he was not. His statement reflects the extent to which migrant subjectivity is lived and experienced through regional linguistic and cultural difference as much as any sense of urban or national citizenship. Nevertheless it somewhat represented the language barrier that I had with the interlocutors of this study. I was therefore accompanied by an interpreter for the first six months of this study, and for some later interviews with those who spoke neither Hindi nor English. As I could at the time speak and understand Hindi fairly well I could follow the conversation and responses and knew at which points my questions were lost in translation, poorly explained, or not quite understood.

The primary interpreter Shivangi, who worked alongside me and later would work as a research assistant on the household survey was a scholar in her own right, at the time applying for postgraduate study in Delhi. During meetings and interviews in those first months she guided me through conversations, taking control when my language was failing me. Outside of interviews Shivangi had extensive influence on my research practice and fundamentally shaped the methodology that formed the basis of Chapter 5 and 6. A scholar of Dalit history, Shivangi would castigate me for not taking caste more centrally, on our way to and from field sites she would give me quick-fire lessons on the articulations of caste and work, correcting my partial and awkward knowledge, enthusing me to go home and read more. Shivangi came from a strong scholarly tradition within South Asian historiography which centres upon oral histories, and as such pushed me to allow my interlocutors to speak freely, go off on a tangent, criticise me, my questions, my presence as a researcher; Shivangi compelled me to give up the interview as much as possible to the interviewee.

In late 2014 I had spent some time with a small group of domestic workers who were informally organising around their workplaces (see Chapter 6) and planned to meet one of the leading figures in the group for a more prolonged, in-depth interview. Wanting to ensure I understood everything going on, I asked Shivangi to join us. That day the interview went well, we rode back to the MG Road metro stop in
a shared auto-rickshaw filled to the rafters with young men on their way to work, I told Shivangi how happy I was with how the two-hour discussion went. To this she pointedly rebuked me, “Tom, you weren’t having a *discussion*, you were asking questions and she was answering them. There was no dialogue, she didn’t ask you questions, she didn’t disagree with you, criticise you, it was a one way discussion only”. While Shivangi primarily worked as an interpreter whose task was to translate between the interlocutor and myself, I am indebted to Shivangi’s methodological teaching without which I am certain this thesis would be different. Alongside becoming more familiar with my interlocutors over the course of the fifteen months of research, the research method that Shivangi impressed on me in those first few months, took my research away from narrow epistemology of disciplinary geography which I had designed. My conversations with my interlocutors wandered through a variety of spaces, times and experiences; of misdemeanour, aspiration, love, relationships, distinctions, mobilities and seclusions. As Shivangi noted, my encounters and interviews especially with precariously employed migrant female workers, were always over-determined by an imbalance of power, even after months of familiarity I was far from having a conversation with some of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, through the research method Shivangi pushed me toward adopting, alongside the ability to embed myself in the everyday spaces of my interlocutors, I was able to adapt my research to partially move out of the confines of its design and delivery.

### 3.8 Reflections

Having FMS and NSM as entry points into my research inevitably shaped my research in certain directions. Attending the weekly meetings of NSM my interests and interventions were inevitably prefigured as related to workers’ rights and working and living conditions in the urban villages - of expensive rents, hostile landlords, arduous work and precarious contracts. My interlocutors in the first months of my research project would only describe their day to day life in Gurgoan in negation. While I did not want to refute or minimise the precarious and harsh life most migrant workers in Gurgoan lead, I was keen not to re-present that oppression as an always already predetermined social death (Mbembe 2009); not least because there is much scholarly work that already details the difficult and powerless position many migrant workers in South Asia hold in relation to patriarchal, brahmanical capital (De Neve 2009).

The difficulty I had in moving beyond workers’ powerlessness, was of course not only a consequence of my entry point but also a direct product of my whiteness and foreignness. I was and remain, for good reason, a limit to my research. While Gurgoan’s urban villages remain fairly understudied by foreign or indeed domestic researchers, the presence of a young white man with a small pad of paper sat cross legged at a NGO meeting or bedroom floor immediately provokes a certain frame of reference, conversation or capture. In this manner, at first meeting with most of my interlocutors, not only was I stumped by their general disinterest in the nominal materialities of the “city”, itineries thought to be in the ontological possession of their landlords and local “sons of the soil”, I equally found it difficult to move beyond a conversation in which I was expected to desire; primarily concerning the poor living conditions
within the urban village and the workplace. Compounding my whiteness, foreignness (and a ‘Britisher’ at that), as my part of my research interests calcified around questions of gender and work, of the reverberations of masculinity, femininity and points of (re)production, my maleness presented another barrier.

Yet if my identity as a white, male, foreign researcher provided a substantial barrier to my research on gender and work, these same characteristics no doubt were key in my gaining access to some of the offices of village landlords, government officials and private developers. This part of my research was difficult, not wanting to scupper the possibility of a long-term association with these figures I felt anxious about being open with my politics and opinions with landlords, developers, factory owners and what I term subaltern rentiers (see Chapter 4). While maintaining honesty at all times, I wanted to understand the factory owners understanding of labour flexibilisation or subaltern rentiers’ attitudes toward their tenants and neighbours who had made it ‘big’ in Gurgaon’s real-estate game. Thus at times I was party to opinions and conversations that I found objectionable; of ‘dirty migrants’, ‘little’ workers, or backward villagers. Nevertheless, this was undoubtedly a space and conversation I could access with greater ease than comrades in FMS or NSM I was therefore aware of the potential use an engagement in these spaces might prove.

If my opinions were somewhat concealed in my encounters with rentiers, landlords, developers and factory management, my engagement with migrant workers on the avenues of the industrial estate with FMS, weekly NSM meetings or in late night conversations in the workers’ block, I was upfront with my politics and opinions. When I stood in the morning darkness distributing FMS and having conversations on the avenues of IMT Manesar, I was engaged in political discussions, disagreements and debates. I did not think workers’ ought to be dominated by a system of flexibilisation that pulled them apart from one place to the next, I did think that workers’ ought to be paid the legal minimum wage and brought onto permanent contracts, I did think that women should fight back against violence at the workplace and urban village. In this respect, I accept that my own opinions and understandings framed my engagements in the field. Nevertheless I did not presume my interlocutors aspirations, goals or desires. Indeed in many instances my research interests were scuppered by my interlocutors (see Chapter 7). Equally while I had no qualms about critiquing my interlocutor’s accounts and memories, I was wary to allow doubts and scrutinies to over-determine my reading of the material. Many of my interlocutors’ entire existence in Gurgaon is elided, critiqued and admonished. I was wary to reproduce an epistemological doubt which already laminates the everyday lives of my interlocutors. In part my project is an attempt to bring some of those narratives and geographies, otherwise elided, to light.

3.9 Conclusion

This thesis is one ultimately refracted through my own experiences, limits and privileges. In drawing largely from people’s personal experiences, narratives and life histories, I must concede the ultimate
partiality of my research. I offer a contingent snapshot and way of reading Gurgaon’s urban political economy differently, but not definitively.

In carrying out interview, multi-sited ethnography and survey-based research over fifteen months, there is of course a wealth of empirical material that have not made it into this thesis. I spent four weeks, sitting in and observing processes of Gurgaon’s low-level land officials, Patwari in order to develop a critique of state space in the urban periphery; I spent a week interviewing senior members of the state urban and industrial development corporations in Chandigarh, I had multiple interviews with senior planners and real estate developers; I interviewed labour contractors and a huge number of migrant workers. All of these research experiences influenced this thesis, nevertheless in order to produce as tight and focused thesis as possible, which builds from the broader theoretical and conceptual focus, much of this research material has not made its way into the thesis.

The research process was personally incredibly formative for me and I have learnt great deal in simply carrying out the study. The research process was not always easy. The research involved working through the fifty degree heat of the Gurgaon summer, moving across the disparate urban landscape through a series of shared-autos, jeeps and informally organised buses. It was at times difficult to move between interviews in quick succession. My interlocutors were under no illusion as to why I was carrying out research, they knew full well that I was in Gurgaon to do a study for my own purposes. Nevertheless they shared their, often incredibly difficult, experiences of everyday life in the city with me.

The thesis is an attempt to draw out the relationships between people’s situated experiences and practices and the contingent reproduction of spaces, materialities and discourses that shape Gurgaon in a disorderly fashion. There are numerous ways in which we might approach “Gurgaon”, or “the city in the global South” that would heed little attention to the practices and experiences of those lives lived in and through it. I might have sought to carry out research which had as its centre the powerless and entropic figure of migrant, female, working-class life within the violence of India’s new urban landscapes. Instead this research project, although not able to achieve as much, took inspiration from the divergent work of Mohanty (1988), Bannerji (1995) and more recently McKittrick (2006) to be wary of rehearsing the violent negation of life within my analyses. Instead tracing the demand-making and place-making of people in their own terms, draw attention to the manner in which the “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1988) of my interlocutors of this research project resist and critique their always partial capture by abstractive forces of capitalism, patriarchy, and urbanisation.
Chapter 4. Urban villages, agrarian transition and rentier capitalism

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the manner in which Gurgaon’s agrarian-urban transition has mediated the uneven character of urbanisation in Gurgaon. It is the contention of this chapter that postcolonial planning technologies, which have exempted village residential land from private sector land acquisition and urban planning regulations, has mediated political opposition to land acquisition, reconciled the city’s duplicitous political economy, and provided a terrain for the partial integration of landowning communities into urban land markets. Thus drawing from scholarship examining rural to urban transitions in contemporary India (Balakrishnan, 2013; Byres, 1986; Chari, 2004; Sami, 2013) and against analyses that foreground urbanisation in India as an expulsive or exclusionary project (Banerjee-Guha, 2013; Sanyal, 2007; Sassen, 2014) I seek to explore the manner in which the partial integration of local landowners into urban real estate markets shapes urban and industrial dynamics in Gurgaon. In this manner, I draw away from K.P. Singh’s revisionist gaze over the city as terra nullius, so often repeated in public discourse on the city, and focus in on the vernacular social practices of caste, land and property in upholding spectacular landscapes of globalised real estate.

Scene 1:

“Here they took all the land. Everything. It was a scam and everyone – the government, the opposition – they were all involved.”

Vivek Chauhan sat playing cards with six other former landowners outside a small real estate broker’s office in the village of Harsaru in Gurgaon overlooking an 1800 acre expanse of flattened, fenced off land. In 2005 Vivek’s three acres of land were acquired by the Haryana Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation (HSIIDC) and turned over to Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) to form what was touted to become India’s largest Special Economic Zone (SEZ) on 25,000 acres of land in west Gurgaon. The SEZ was planned as a multi-sector development inclusive of luxury residential and commercial space, industrial production, processing and a cargo airport. Under the Special Economic Zones Act 2005, the Reliance SEZ at Garhi Harsaru was exempt from sales and export taxes, duties, while as a “public facility” labour laws in the prospective zone would be relaxed. The SEZ was projected to receive ₹ 1.4 trillion in private investment and provide half a million jobs in the process (Kennedy, 2014). The SEZ was to be developed on the land of two Gurgaon villages, Harsaru and Garhi. Land in Garhi a Yadav village a mile north of Harsaru was bought up directly by Reliance at market prices. Land in Harsaru a Rajput-dominated village was notified for government acquisition.
The SEZ model, in part a development of the Economic Processing Zones of the 1970s, was the preferred model of new town development by the then Congress-led central government (2004-2014) and was given legal weight through a series of SEZ policies at the central and state level throughout the 2000s. The SEZ policy was promoted as a way of unlocking potential real estate value in land otherwise bogged down in complex patronage relations, property rights and ownership titles; lowering the cost of labour prices by exempting the zones from the oversight of labour legislation; and de-politicising points of accumulation by privatising the governance of industrial spaces (Sood, 2015). Anticipating the development of the Reliance SEZ, the Haryana Town and Country Planning Department (HTCPD) redrew the Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Masterplan to include the 25,000 acre development.\textsuperscript{13}

By the end of the 2000s however the SEZ policy was politically toxic. Plans for a ten thousand acre chemicals SEZ in Nandigram, West Bengal were withdrawn in 2007 after violent clashes between the State and peasant farmers. The high-profile violence directed at the peasant protestors ultimately lead to the downfall of the thirty-three year rule of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in West Bengal. Building on this anti-SEZ current, landowners in Harsaru and surrounding villages began to protest the acquisitions for the Reliance SEZ in 2006. In June 2008, as the Haryana government was due to take formal possession of the land in Harsaru, landowners blocked roads, held rallies, fought with police and set fire to buildings. For six weeks amid the height of the protest, the village was placed under martial law, all access to and from the village was shut down. Vivek notes:

\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, between 2007 and 2012 the Gurgaon masterplan was redrawn three times to accommodate shifting movements of real estate capital.
“The police came and lathi [baton] charged us—there were ten thousand police here. They closed off the village for fifteen days no one could come in or out. We tried to organise a protest but we were crushed by the police”.

For a moment in the summer of 2008 it seemed as if the anti-Reliance SEZ movement was destined to become Haryana’s Nandigram (Kennedy 2014). By 2012 following the global financial crisis, the withdrawal of fiscal concessions connected to the project from Central government, and the politically toxic environment surrounding SEZs in Gurgaon and across the country, RIL withdrew from the project and returned the 1,400 acres of state-acquired land to the government. The Reliance SEZ, projected to bring half a million jobs to this agricultural expanse on the western side of Gurgaon, and with it luxury, “modern” standards of living, was over. By 2014, nine years after RIL’s withdrawal from the project, the land remained vacant. In Haryana as a whole, of the 29 SEZs notified under the SEZ act 2005, today only five are listed by the Haryana government as operational14.

Today, lying between the National Highway 8 and the Gurgaon-Pataudi road is a large expanse of flattened land interrupted on occasion by the villas of important local bureaucrats and businessmen who were able to force the release of their land during the initial state acquisition process. The villas, protruding from the horizon are physical reminders of the uneven processes of dispossession and urbanisation in India’s contemporary urban moment.

Across the road from Vivek Chauhan’s group, was the grocery shop of Ashok Mehra, the former Sarpanch of Harsaru and key figure in the village’s scheduled caste community:

“As Harijans [scheduled-caste communities] we didn’t own any land around here, we worked the land…They [landowners] only began to protest the land acquisition after they had been handed compensation…a meeting of the Panchayat15 was called and we were asked to join their protest, but why should we? It’s not our land, why should we kill ourselves for them…it’s wrong to take the compensation and then to protest. [Since the land was acquired] nothing has changed, only for the landowners – for everyone else no change. We used to work on the land, now we work somewhere else”.

In 2015 the vacant land was repackaged as the location of “Gurgaon Global City”, a new “smart city” development funded in partnership between the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation, the parastatal managing the 1,500km real estate corridor, and the NDA-coalition government’s Smart City urbanisation programme. The 1400 acre site of the prospective “Gurgaon Global City”, eerily echoes the faded promises of the SEZ: luxury residential developments, business

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14 All are in Gurgaon’s IT/ITES sector and are less than 12 acres in size. See https://haryanaindustries.gov.in/statistics
15 Village-level governance committee. Literally meaning committee (ayat) of five (panch) members. Ashok was the Sarpanch, the head of the committee. It is likely that the Sarpanch position was reserved for a member of the Harijan community in the Garhi Harsaru seat.
centres, museums and a “global” convention centre. The recycling and rebranding of the Harsaru land from “India’s largest SEZ” into Gurgaon’s “Global City” is characteristic of the “world-class” urban imagineering (Haines 2011) engaged in by the regional and municipal State in contemporary India, which has sought to build consent for the transformation of urban and peri-urban land in India into globally legible fragments of real estate through dazzling appeals to the magical and modernising character of “global” property (Ghertner, 2011; Searle, 2016). In addition, the rebranding of the SEZ represents the looming presence of volatility and failure (Goldman 2011; Roy 2009) implicit within highly speculative real estate projects.

**Scene 2:**
In late 2015 I sat with three elderly Yadav men in Badshahpur village in south Gurgaon. Badshahpur had been incorporated into the city in the Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Development plan 2021 which brought expanses of the village’s agricultural land into the urban real estate market. Land sales in the village spiked in 2010 as a group of developers lobbied the Haryana state government to expand the urbanisable area further to include two thousand acres of land in nearby Sohna (Sinha 2015). Mukesh sold his four acres of agricultural land in 2008 to Unitech, one of the largest real estate developers in the country, for 30 lakh rupees, earning himself ₹ 1.2 crore from the land sale.16 Seeking to capitalise on rumours of Sohna’s pending urbanisation, Mukesh used the cash to buy eight acres of land in north Sohna, he remarked:

“I built myself a pukka house and bought some land over in Sohna, let’s see if we can sell it…land is the only way we can make money these days”.

Along with his investment in peri-urban agricultural land, Mukesh joined a group of villagers to invest in a new shopping mall development in central Gurgaon. The developer leading the project had drawn in 160 crore rupees of investment from around three hundred and fifty small landholders like Mukesh across south Gurgaon. Unbeknown to Mukesh, the developer had not received a license for the development. Three years after their initial investment the shopping mall was nowhere to be seen. Mukesh remarked: “We were scammed, looted. All of us here invested, each of us gave five lakh, ten lakh, twenty lakh…the developer’s in jail now”. Mukesh and his friends who I sat and discussed real estate business with that afternoon were eager to impress that, despite their active participation in real estate market across the city, Gurgaon’s rapid urbanisation was no success story for the landowners of the region. Mukesh insisted: “Listen son, we are peasants, we are in a situation without future nor past. We should never have sold our land”.

16 1 lakh = 100,000; 1 crore = 10,000,000
4.2 The internal frontiers of dis/possession

Both scenes provide compelling insight into the ways in which agrarian transitions continue to shape Gurgaon’s urbanisation. Gurgaon has experienced profoundly uneven urbanisation over the past thirty years, condition by sedimented relations of property-ownership, caste and class. Often overlooked in Gurgaon’s rapid development over the past few decades has been those complex negotiations between developers, the state and small-scale landowners which have shaped the way in which the city has developed. While the example of the Reliance SEZ in the first scene might be considered somewhat characteristic of the ‘land wars’ across South Asia in the contemporary period (Levien 2013), in Gurgaon pitched battles between landowners and the state are incredibly rare. It is telling that the landowners at Harsaru were not protesting their dispossession or displacement, as the former Sarpanch noted, they were demanding a higher sum of money for selling their land. While Harsaru landowners were the recipients of the government rate of land per acre, in neighbouring Garhi village where land was acquired directly by Reliance, residents received nearly four times the amount for their land; unsurprisingly their protests were rather muted. The Harsaru example equally draws our attention to the manner in which the uneven mode of land acquisition, and embedded caste-based land relations come to mediate experiences of land dispossession in the contemporary period. On the other hand, Scene 2 draws attention to the enlistment of landowners and landowner subjectivity into the transformative space of real estate accumulation, an enlistment that hinges upon both the containment of landowners within the enclaved space of the urban village and the speculative promise of propertied citizenship. Both scenes draw attention to the roles of dispossessed or alienated landowners in mediating the shape and form of ongoing urbanisation in Gurgaon that I would like to explore in this chapter.

The chapter will begin, drawing on the agrarian studies and primitive accumulation debates, to demonstrate how state planning technologies of the 1960s and 1970s, intended to regulate “haphazard” and uncontrollable urbanisation were capitalised upon in the 1980s and 1990s to support the private sector led urbanisation in the region. Key in this regard was the exemption of urban village settlements, like Badshahpur and Garhi Harsaru, from land dispossession. The chapter will assert that the exemption of urban villages mediated political tensions to land ‘dispossession’ by providing a platform for certain landholders to enter into “formal” real estate markets. Utilising household survey data, the second half of the chapter will explore how the land acquisition process influenced and shaped rentier class formation in the post-dispossession period. From this base, the chapter will utilise interview and ethnographic material to draw out the variegated ways in which particular factions of the nascent rentier class in Gurgaon to cement their position in the social life and political economy of the city.

In doing so the chapter makes three interventions. First, the chapter argues that the exemption of residential village land from state and private-sector acquisition has quelled opposition to urbanisation seen in other parts of the country. It is not post-liberalisation planning but post-Independence state
planning legislation that has provided an unlikely framework to allow the private sector to acquire and develop 85% of agricultural land between 1981 and 2014. Crucially in this regard, the vast majority of Gurgaon’s landowners were not “dispossessed” through eminent domain like the landowners at Harsaru, but sold their land on the open market to private developers. The exemption of urban village land from acquisition and urban development regulations, protected landowners from wholesale displacement and provided former landowners an opportunity to develop dense rental accommodation within the urban village boundary for the city’s industrial workforce, thus transforming themselves into a rentier class. In turn, the development of rentier capital has provided former landowners, like Mukesh, investment opportunities in real estate outside the village boundaries. In this context, the contained urban village emerges as a key territorial compromise, akin to China’s villages-in-the-city (Hsing, 2010), between the state, real estate capital and local landowners that has allowed for the rapid development of real estate property while mediating the political concerns of local landowners.

In addition, the chapter will highlight a key division in the city’s nascent rentier class wrought through contingent histories of land acquisition and political capital. If the focus of Searle’s (2016, 4) research on Gurgaon’s urbanisation is on the “encounter between international investors and their Indian intermediaries as they attempt to produce an international market in Indian land”, my research here steps out of the policy “frictions” which manifest the conceived space of real estate portfolios, to focus on the vernacular real estate practices, ambitions and aspirations of an emergent and disorderly rentier class born out of political planning practices of containment. In doing so, I seek to make a break from analyses that foreground urbanisation in the Global South as solely an expulsive process (Banerjee-Guha 2013; Sanyal 2011; Sassen 2015) and instead, building on a buoyant body of work on new urbanisation in South Asia (Balakrishnan 2013; Levien 2015; Sami 2103) seek to understand how the ‘expelled’ – indexed through the planning category of the “urban village”- form an integral part in the production of the contemporary urban landscapes. In short, India’s “remarkable urban moment” (Shatkin 2014) which has transformed thousands of acres of agricultural land into high-rise apartments, shopping malls, and cyber parks has been unevenly achieved because of, not in spite of, agriculturalist landowners.

The second purpose of the chapter is to explore how exemptive planning in Gurgaon has not only provided a terrain for the active participation of people alienated from their land in emergent real estate economies, but in doing so, has also produced punctuation points for the tensions and disjunctures in Gurgaon’s fragmented and heavily privatised urban landscape. Gurgaon’s political economy as noted in Chapter 1 has historically operated across two seemingly discrete silos, of real estate and industry, the former reliant on ever-increasing value of land, the latter dependent on cheap land and labour prices. The chapter seeks to show how the rentier and urban village, link and mediate these two urban materialities. Not only do urban villages provide cheap social reproduction for Gurgaon’s industrial sector, the wages of the migrant worker, as they are recycled into property capital by landlords and rentiers, become key features in the ongoing reproduction of real estate markets in the city. This in turn implicates industrial
political struggles at the workplace in ongoing reproduction of property in the urban village and wider city. In this regard, the implication of the urban village and rentier in the emergent reproduction of the city is materially underpinned by the industrial wage, pulling the significance of industrial politics out from the confines of the factory gates to laminate property relations across the urban villages and city more broadly.

Finally, in this chapter I am interested in the uneven character of Gurgaon’s agrarian-urban transition; why despite complicity in in Gurgaon’s urban land market, Yadav landowners like Mukesh continue to describe their position in Gurgaon’s contemporary social order utilising a language of dispossession. To do so I will trace the differential, non-linear and uneven incorporation of Gurgaon’s former landowners into urban land markets. While some rentiers have been able to move out of the urban villages and cement their position within the city’s organised real estate sector, most rentiers’ engagements in urban land markets remain speculative, tentative and marked by their continued presence outside the ‘formal’ urban areas and within the contained space of the urban village.

As such I am interested in the role of the promise of property ownership (Ghertner 2015) in shaping rentiers’ subjective position within the city. In Gurgaon, this subjectification occurs through two, often simultaneous forms, as “land” which has historically structured caste hierarchy and identity, and “real estate” a category laced with aspiration, modernity and class transformation. In this manner, this chapter in part explores both how historic caste entanglements with land-ownership are maintained or transformed through urbanisation, and how what Ghertner (2015, 159) terms, the “propriety of property” shapes rentiers integration and exclusion from ‘Millennium Gurgaon’. Navigating through Gurgaon’s ring-fenced urban villages one encounters an uneven landscape of rentierism, of small investment committees speculating on peri-urban agricultural land, village landlords amassing rents from migrant worker accommodation, and families letting skyscrapers to multinational corporations in Cyber City. The uneven and unequal integration of landowners into emergent real estate markets of the city is productive of particular forms of dis/possessive identities. In this manner, I conceptualise the urban village as a double space, holding to a two-fold character. On one hand, the boundaries of the urban village provide the terrain for the development of rental accommodation and thereby transformation of agrarian into rentier capital, on the other these boundaries represent the very limits of the rentiers’ inclusion into the material and discursive space of the city.
4.3 Beyond “bypass urbanisation”

Gurgaon’s particular mode of urbanisation, led by a buoyant real estate sector and underpinned by the “flexible planning” technologies of the Haryana state (Gururani 2013), is somewhat distinct from a general narrative of urbanisation in India in recent times. Commonly, conceptualisations of Greenfield urbanisation tend to foreground a complex and often violent politics of dis/possession. This literature tends to focus upon pitted battles between the regional and municipal state, private developers and dispossessed agrarian classes (Banerjee-Guha, 2013; Levien, 2013; Patnaik, 2007). In this case, the politics of dispossession is either reduced to one of opposition, or set aside for readings of dispossession overdetermined by the economic calculus of the state and private sector. This is not a groundless analysis, yet within the current conjuncture, where the spectre of Nandigram and Singur weigh heavily on the minds of politicians, regional governments have increasingly mobilised modes of urbanisation that seek to gain consent and complicity from landowning communities for their own land alienation.

The *dispossessive* lens through which to understand urbanisation in contemporary India draws heavily from the primitive accumulation debates and, in particular, Harvey’s (2003) “accumulation by dispossession”. Building from Adam Smith’s formulation, Marx used “primitive accumulation” to describe the violent introduction of capitalist modes of production through processes of dispossession and enclosure. For Marx, primitive accumulation describes a double movement of, first, separating people from land, closing off non-capitalist land uses, and second, putting these displaced populations to work, as “labour”. For many then, Marx’s initial formulation speaks directly to a particular historical moment, that which inaugurated capitalist modes of production through the real abstractions of property and labour.
Contemporary scholarship has sought to extend, critique and complicate the foundationalism of Marx’s initial formulation, pointing to the integral role which dispossession, of various kinds, continues to play in reproducing the conditions for capitalist accumulation (De Angelis, 2001; Glassman, 2006; Kropotkin, 1995). In this regard, scholars have sought to broaden the lens of primitive accumulation to a whole host alternatively organised materialities, of the environment, the family and post-war EuroAmerican welfare state. Harvey’s (2005) “accumulation by dispossession” for example, accounts for a much broader process of capitalist expansion and capture of alternatively managed forms of production. Indigenous scholars and scholarship from the Global South have highlighted that Marx’s double movement pays little attention to the manner in which colonial-capitalist development was dependent on the violent dispossession of populations without the reintegartion of the dispossessed into commodity circuits (Abele et al., 1989; Wolfe, 2001). As such, scholars have sought to draw attention to the manner in which processes of primitive accumulation unfold in relations to contingent relations of social difference, scholarship thus focuses on the uneven gendered and racialized forms of dispossession and reintegration (Chakravartty and Da Silva, 2012). This body of work explores the manner in which the real abstractions of social difference, of class, caste, race or gender, articulate to shape the frontiers of accumulation (Bhandar and Toscano, 2015).

In *Rethinking Capitalist Development* (2007) Sanyal contends as such, that those dispossessed and excluded from the means of labour during processes of colonial and postcolonial capitalist accumulation principally occupy a space *outside* of capital, as retrospectively-affirmed unnecessary features of “capital’s arising”. This in part allows Sanyal (2007) to explain the persistence of the informal sector and low-levels of participation in waged labour across India in the contemporary period.

For Sanyal, during the post-Independence period, the expulsive mode of accumulation wrought through colonial India was mediated by a developmental and paternal state. For Sanyal, Nehruvian primitive accumulation operated through its own double movement, of exclusion from capitalist production and simultaneous rehabilitation into economies of subsistence, “non-capitalist production activities” that Sanyal names the “needs economy”. In the contemporary “neoliberal” period however, Sanyal contends the moral imperative of the developmental state falls away and there is no longer the requirement to recuperate the dispossessed into a “needs economy”; thus the ‘dispossessed’ occupy a “survival circuit” drifting from one place to the next piecing together a precarious existence. In a later essay, Bhattacharya and Sanyal (2011) contend that this movement is most patently clear in India’s new towns. The authors argue that, “the making of the new towns reflects a running away of capital from its own shadow – the shadow of capital in which the *excluded* population survive”. The production of new urban landscapes, according to the authors, requires mass dispossession but unlike previous forms of primitive accumulation, no function for the dispossessed in the resultant economy:
“The non-capitalist producers who are so displaced have no – or an extremely precarious – place in the new economy hegemonised by immaterial labour… the very production of the new economy creates its own wasteland – the social space of a dispossessed labour force” (ibid, 42).

For Bhattacharya and Sanyal (2011), the development of new urban landscapes and economies, which manage the surpluses of a burgeoning internationally-connected finance and services sector necessarily carry the exclusion of identities and spaces non-functional for this new hegemonic economy. Such city-making is catered toward a new hegemonic class of immaterial labour – call-centre workers, bankers, BPO workers – detached from the local political economy and spatially represented in the eponymous gated colonies and high-rise apartment complexes, of which Gurgaon is nationally symbolic.

In the 2011 essay, the authors argue that in the development of new urban areas hegemonised by new modes of production, the “needs economy…redundant to the economic needs of capital” (ibid, 44) functions to provide subsistence to the army of low-waged labour required to construct and service immaterial labour (“survival circuits of labour”). This system is productive of deeply segregated urban landscapes:

“If new towns are constructed to keep material production at bay, the presence of a survival circuit within its space brings back the squalor and dirt of material production” (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011, 44).

While Sanyal (2007) and Bhattacharya and Sanyal (2011) present a compelling case of the movements between colonial, post-Independence and neoliberal modes of capitalist development, the authors’ work, which falls into a broader trend of scholarship which conceptualises urbanisation as dispossessive, fails to take seriously the complex politics of landownership, identity and work which not only exist prior to new town development, but are fundamental to the shape and character of the urbanisation in the contemporary period.

In this respect, I conceptualise urbanisation in Gurgaon as fundamentally a political process, wrought through particular political negotiations, cleavages, and tensions with non-linear hetero-logical outcomes. The subjects and practices of contemporary ‘dispossession’, are neither predetermined by the over-accumulation of capital, nor are they external variants which a capitalist logic confronts and sublates. Rather, contemporary land transformation in India is a deeply contested mode of accumulation that operates across numerous “logics”, that often require the complicity and participation of the dispossessed, “non-capitalist activities” and existing social hierarchies as much as they require their expulsion.

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17 Indeed K.P. Singh the architect of Gurgaon’s development dedicates an entire chapter of his autobiography to dealings with local landowners.
4.3.1 Accumulation by containment

In this chapter I want to draw attention to the manner in which urbanisation in Gurgaon is couched in a particular mediation of regional landholding caste politics, globally connected real estate demands, and national and regional industrialisation imperatives. To do so I draw from debates within marxist agrarian studies, to demonstrate the role of postcolonial state planning, agrarian tenure systems and vernacular real estate practices of Yadav landowners in shaping the hegemony of urban capital in Gurgaon.

There is a burgeoning body of scholarship within urban studies in India which focuses on the active role of the dispossessed and agriculturalists in both facilitating corporate capital’s access to land (Balakrishnan 2013; Chari 2004; Sami, 2013; Sud, 2014) as well as their engagement in processes of real estate speculation itself (De Neve, 2015; Sarkar, 2015). In Fraternal Capital (2004) for example, Chari demonstrates the manner in which Gounder men in Truppur iteratively diversified from agrarian work utilising local economic dynamics, social and political capital and self-narratives of toil, to come to dominate industrial ownership in the region. Chari’s work challenges universalistic assumptions of modes of agrarian transition, and demonstrates how subaltern actors are able to capture processes of accumulation in exclusionary and individualistic ways.

Elsewhere Sami’s (2013) research examines how an agricultural community took advantage of the “participatory spaces” of liberalisation, access to credit, and political networks to pool and convert 400 acres of agricultural land into mixed-use real estate in eastern Pune. Sami’s analysis highlights the active role the dispossessed, state and non-state actors play in real estate development. Such an analysis thereby re-frames real estate activity as a contested site of a variety of interests rather than as the abstract, monolithic face of new capitalism. Drawing in part from the same site Balakrishnan (2013) draws our attention to the manner in which “new institutional arrangements” between village co-operatives, parastatals and developers are reflective of a trend toward “inclusionary” state-led urbanisation.

Seeking to build from these accounts, in this chapter I want to draw attention to the manner in which Gurgaon’s rapid real estate and industrial urbanisation is shaped by the city’s Yadav landowning community within the exempt urban villages. Crucially, the city’s urban villages unevenly implicate peasant-landowning communities, migrant working-classes and new immaterial labour in the hegemonic space of the contemporary city. Thus, more than simply an inevitable consequence of over-accumulation, or a violent display of state power, I conceptualise the politics of dispossession as a terrain actively participated in by a variety of local actors – real estate developers, the local state, landholders, and itinerant workers. In Gurgaon this processes is pinned down and held together territorially by the urban village, enclaved spaces which cover the urban landscape exempt from land acquisition, corporate capital and planning and development regulations; what I term “accumulation by containment”. Accumulation by containment thus refers to the uneven political compromise between the local state, landholding caste communities and real estate developers, spatially concretised in the “urban village”.

4.4 The urban village and “accumulation by containment”

Gurgaon’s particular urbanisation process, what has come to be termed the “Gurgaon model”, finds its legal genesis in town planning legislation in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1963, prior to the splitting off of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh states in 1966, the influential Modernist Punjab chief minister, Partap Singh Kairon, passed the Punjab Scheduled Roads and Controlled Areas Restriction of Unregulated Development Act (PSRCA). The PSRCA sought to control and regulate urban development in the state by identifying “controlled areas” within which the transfer of agricultural to urban land would be managed by a parastatal urban development authority. In the Haryana region, this was delegated to the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA).

The PSRCA is somewhat characteristic of the post-Independence Nehruvian urban and infrastructural programmes that sought to manage and regulate urbanisation through Modernist planning and development technologies (Roy 2007) while preserving agrarian and pastoral culture by ring-fencing residential lands from state acquisitions. This is particularly pertinent in Haryana where rural landowning caste communities, the Jats and Yadavs, are politically and socially dominant. Kairon, the architect of the legislation, is an influential figure in Punjabi politics, he played a key role in the planned development of both Chandigarh and Faridabad new towns, the latter of which neighbours Gurgaon, and was up until the 1980s thought to be the more likely site of urban growth (Narain 2009). Kairon was also responsible for consolidating land reforms which stunted tenancy-cultivation in Punjab setting the conditions for the green revolution.

Crucially for this chapter, the PSRCA excluded all village residential land (abadi) from land acquisition and thereby urbanisation. Abadi land, what are officially termed “urban villages”, were demarcated from urbanisable agricultural fields by the lal dora; a cartographic boundary line put in place under British colonial government in 1908 in order to demarcate residential from agricultural taxable areas (Chakravarty 2015). It is this lal dora boundary which the PSRCA uses to demarcate the exemption of village residential land from agricultural-urbanisable land. As a consequence, as Haryana state sought to urbanise the Gurgaon region in the early 1980s by liberalising land regulations, pockets of land – “urban villages” - deep within towns were excluded from land acquisition, and HUDA’s development and planning regulations. As of 2011 there were ninety-four urban village abadis within the Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Complex.

The exemption of urban village land has not only contributed to a patchwork urban landscape with pockets of rural land within it, but has equally constructed an urban-rural overlapping governance system in the city. As discussed in Chapter 1, Gurgaon’s ‘urban’ areas are planned, regulated and development

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18 The PSRCA utilisation of “controlled areas” and exemption of abadi areas are not unique to Punjab or Haryana but characteristic of a Nehruvian planning technology utilised across North India, particular moment of Nehruvian urbanisation. For example, Delhi also excluded village abadis from urbanisation.
licenses issued by HUDA, the state’s urban development authority. While, territorial jurisdiction is fragmented between private developers, HUDA, resident welfare associations and the newly inaugurated Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG). As discussed in Chapter 1, this is the ostensible territory of property-led urbanisation and propertied citizenship. The urban villages on the other hand are governed by a coalition of the authoritatively weak MCG, the rural panchayat system and local pradhans [bosses]. If the “urban areas” are governed by property relations, community, caste and land relations index authority and belonging to the urban villages. Land records in ‘controlled’ urban areas appear cartographically in digitized planning documents used by HUDA and the MCG to manage “smart” tax collection and land sale registrations, while abadi areas appear as blank dots indiscernible from the seeing eye of the municipal state.

Abadi land is instead recorded by the Patwari, a village-level bureaucrat under the rural arm of the regional state (the Gurgaon district), who records agricultural land, crops, land mutations, and draws out the village agricultural land by hand on a large cotton sheet, the shajra. In the summer of 2015 I spent significant time at the Gurgaon patwari offices watching this vernacular and esoteric arm of the state negotiate and manoeuvre land information requests of the staff of international real estate firms and local peasant landowners. In Gururani’s (2013) exposition of the “flexible” planning technologies which ensonced the development trajectory of Gurgaon, the author notes that amidst the fervent political jockeying between Haryana politicians and real estate developers in the early 1980s, the boundary lines of the controlled areas drawn out by the PSRCA were routinely redrawn and improvised to accommodate the interests of various political pacts. Through the course of my time at the Patwari office it became patently clear that this vernacular and liminal state space, prefigured as non-urban, was a key articulator of the improvisation and flexibility discussed in Gururani’s work.

In this regard, Gurgaon’s urban villages share similarities to the “villages-in-the-city” in China that have been subject to extensive scholarly analysis in recent years (Hsing, 2010; Wu, 2009). Like in the Chinese case, Gurgaon’s urban villages are governed by rural governance institutions, are exempt from State planning and development regulations, and form the primary residential space for the city’s rural to urban migrant working-classes. In addition, land within the urban village is often owned and held on collective, ancestral and community titles, subject to complex subdivisions in order to make way for the construction of rental accommodation, and as such forms a key base for the development of a rentier class among the former peasantry (Wu et al., 2013). Elsewhere, urban villages in the Global South have often made their way into scholarly analysis within debates concerning suburbanisation (McGee, 1991), peri-urban development (Aguilar et al., 2003) and state informality (Roy 2003). Roy’s work (2003; 137) for example has highlighted how the routine “unmapping” of Calcutta’s urban periphery has made possible the flexible and fuzzy negotiation, transition, exchange and development of land. “Informality” for Roy (2005) thus ought to be thought of as a state practice and “mode of urbanisation”, denoting the sovereign jurisdiction over which urban forms and processes are deemed illegal and legal. Here I do not intend to
intervene in the formality/informality debates usefully taken up elsewhere (Roy 2005; Ghertner 2011). The urban village’s “informality” is a moot point given the extensive flexibility and fuzziness through which most of the city has been produced (Gururani 2013). Instead, I want to understand the uneven integration of the city’s former landholders, which the urban village comes to spatially represent. The chapter asks, how the flexible incorporation of urban villagers has shaped both the ongoing urbanisation process in the city and the experiences of place among those contained.

Figure 4.3: Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Complex 2021 (Haryana Town and Country Planning Department).

In 1975 the Haryana Chief Minister, Bansi Lal, passed the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act (HDRUA) that allowed landowners to acquire development licenses from the State government for the purchase and development of land within controlled areas. While under the short stewardship of Bansi Lal licenses were reserved for HUDA developments, in 1979 after the election of pro-business Bhajan Lal as Chief Minister, licenses were opened up to the private sector initiating a process of private sector-led urbanisation which would later come to be known as the “Gurgaon model”. The Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Area (HDRUA) act allowed developers to directly negotiate and purchase land from landowners within controlled areas. As noted in Chapter 1, during this period Gurgaon did not have a municipal level governance, the city was governed directly by municipal council through the Chief Minister’s office. As Gururani (2013) notes, this centralised decision-making on development licenses and plans within the Chief Minister’s office, provides the Chief Minister significant power in negotiating with real estate developers. In this manner, while the HDRUA’s initial purpose was to introduce a formal system of land development to be managed and regulated by HUDA, from the 1980s onwards successive Haryana Chief Ministers, who had discretionary powers to authorise development licenses, utilised the legislation to sell off vast tracts of land in the region (Hiro, 2015). For example, Bhajan Lal, who held the Chief Minister’s office between 1979 and 1996 oversaw the allotment of six thousand acres in development licenses to the private sector.
In this regard, Haryana’s planning framework can be characterised as principally flexible and exemptive (Gururani 2013), one which produces a patchwork landscape of accumulation through the flexible practice of state power. For this chapter, the HDRUA is equally significant to the contemporary landscape of Gurgaon for at least three reasons.

Firstly, while the PSRCA gave the State government “powers of relaxation” in land use change, the HDRUA bypassed the requirements for land use change approvals within the controlled/urbanisable area altogether\(^{19}\). The controlled areas of Gurgaon – at the time agricultural fields - were at once prefigured as urban, thereby bypassing deeply politicised and bureaucratic procedures that had stymied urbanisation processes in other states\(^{20}\).

Secondly the HDRUA, together with the PSRCA, set urbanisation apart from those in many neighbouring states where large urbanisation projects were primarily undertaken by parastatals that utilised the highly controversial and litigious Land Acquisition Act 1894 to acquire land (Levien, 2013). Through the license system in Gurgaon it was the private sector and not the state that acquired and developed 85% (35,000 acres) of urbanisable land in the city between 1981 and 2014. In enacting the PSCRA and HDRUA, the state government both passed on acquisition responsibilities to the private sector, and mediated political tensions with landowners by cordoning off urban village land, nominally non-urban, from corporate capital\(^{21}\). As a result, opposition to land acquisition has been much more muted than in other parts of the country. This is in part due to the higher prices received from private acquisitions that account for 85% of all acquisitions in the city, but also can be explained by landowning communities’ access to political power in Haryana. Unlike states such as West Bengal where urban political elites and small-scale farmers are socially divided and acquisitions have proved incredibly controversial (Patnaik 2007), Haryana’s landowning caste communities\(^{22}\) dominate the state’s political landscape. Kennedy (2014) argues that the social and political dominance of caste identity particularly among the landowning communities, together with their social and political dominance across the state have both pacified prolonged political opposition, even to state acquisitions, and in part explains Haryana’s seemingly pro-landowner model of urban development.

Crucially the HDRUA and PSCRA together provide a legal, political and planning underpinning for the production of a “differential space” (Lefebvre 1991) one primarily negotiated by the “alienated particularities” of property ownership and territorial belonging. Together the policies transformed disposessions into alienations, providing the framework for the mass transformation of land and livelihoods in the contemporary period.

\(^{19}\) Change of land use permissions are still required for land within abadi areas.

\(^{20}\) See Balakrishnan 2013.

\(^{21}\) Furthermore as nominally rural areas urban village areas are exempt from urban property taxes and continue to pay rural chula taxes.

\(^{22}\) Predominately Jats, but Yadavs dominate in Gurgaon.
Thirdly, Gurugram’s particular urban trajectory was shaped by transitions in urban development regulations in neighbouring New Delhi. Indeed up until the early 2000s Gurugram was considered a satellite town of New Delhi. As Gururani (2013) notes the ambiguous planning and development jurisdictions around the Delhi-Gurugram border, particularly as they pertained to the Urban Land Ceiling Regulation Act which curtails private land banking, together with heightened regulation of urban development in New Delhi in the 1970s pushed private developers, including Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) the developer synonymous with Gurugram’s transformation, to the city’s flexible and negotiable land market.

In sum, these particular planning technologies in the period prior to liberalisation transformed dispossession into alienations and provided the framework for the mass transformation of land and livelihoods in the contemporary period. Following liberalisation in the early 1990s and the rapid transformation of the Indian economy toward real estate and finance (Searle 2016), urban villages have become crucial mediating points or “vital nodes” (Gidwani and Maringanti 2016) for the continuing reproduction of the capitalist social relations which constitute contemporary Gurugram.

4.4.1 The ‘thrifty Yadavs’

Other than these state planning interventions, there are two other factors that have instrumentally impacted Gurugram’s urban trajectory: historic land tenure systems and the impact of the green revolution on Haryana’s uneven agrarian development. Both processes have contributed to a particular expression of caste identity by Gurugram’s largest landowning community the Yadavs (also known as Ahirs) which continues to shape real estate practices and investments in the contemporary period. In his revised settlement report of 1889, Wilson writes:

“At the head of the prevalent castes in this district I would place the Ahirs [Yadavs], as the most industrious thrifty and prudent: though much of the land occupied by them is of an inferior description and the incidence of the revenue in Rewari tehsil, where most of the villages are owned by them, has for thirty years been very high as compared with the rest of the district, they have by unremitting toil, compelled the soil to yield them as wonderful amount of produce, and have by prudent thrift kept themselves and their lands free from debt. Next to them come Jats, who own many villages in the east and north east of the district. Their land is very fertile...in industry and thrift they are inferior to the Ahirs though superior to other castes; while on the whole very well-to-do, they have not been careful to keep themselves free from debt and their land from mortgage...last of all come the comparatively lazy and superlatively unthrifty Meos who own some 350 villages in the two southernmost tehsils of the district. Without excuse of a barren soil or an excessive revenue, they live so closely up to their income, are so negligent in developing the resources of their land, and indulge in unwarranted

23 By “alienation” I refer to the sale of land on the open market.  
24 An administrative sub-division.
expenditure, that the failure of one harvest plunges them irretrievably into debt… It is pleasant to turn from this state of things to that of the Ahi... with all their disadvantages, their industry reduces the evils of a year of drought to a minimum, and their thrift supplies them with a means for tiding over it, and reduces their expenditure for the time.”

(Channing and Wilson, 1889, 39-40)

As the colonial report notes, land ownership in Gurgaon has historically been dominated by two communities, the Yaduvanshi Ahi...s, or Yadavs, and Jats. While Jats are a much more powerful political force within Haryana as a whole Yadavs are numerically and politically dominant in the Gurgaon district, returning Yadav politicians to both national and state assemblies in every election since the state was inaugurated. According to my household survey (Table 4.1) Yadavs owned the largest plots of land in the city, with average individual landholdings of 11 acres, compared to Jats’ 9 acres, Gujars’ 6.5 acres and Scheduled Castes’ 3 acres. Historically, Jats have held their land on bhayacharya tenures where land is formally subdivided non-ancestrally across the village, leading to highly fragmented, small landholdings. In contrast, Yadavs have historically held their land through pattidari tenures where land is held through ancestral lineage and family members own and cultivate land - or supervise workers - in common.

As the above account attests to, this system of land tenure made Yadavs incredibly popular under British colonial rule. The priming of the Yadav community as a dominant landowning force, evocative of Chari’s (2004) work on Tiruppur’s Gounder caste, is perhaps explained by the high levels of participation of Yadav men in the colonial military and, unlike Meo and Gujjar castes who were much derided by colonial officials (Channing 1882) low-levels of participation in the 1857 mutiny in the region. Crucially however in my research on agrarian transitions I was interested in how the characterisation of the 19th century Yadav community by colonial officials, as “thrifty” toilsome workers were contiguous with and permeated into contemporary auto-portrayals given by Yadav men.

As part of my household survey of 182 households in Gurgaon I included three questions regarding (i) how participants would summarise Yadav identity, (ii) the extent to which Gurgaon’s rapid urbanisation had altered a sense of caste identity, and (iii) what marked Yadavs out from other landowning communities. Most respondents summarised Yadav identity through appeal to local domination, pastoralism and an ancestral lineage to Lord Krishna. To the second question, many argued that urbanisation had altered a sense of community and brotherhood, a common retort that I will touch upon in a later section. Importantly here however is the response to third question. Most argued that what marked out Gurgaon’s Yadavs not only from other local landowning communities but equally the Yadav communities that politically dominate areas of Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous state, was their superiority, hard-work and relative peacefulness. One respondent remarked that: “[What is different?] A lot….we Yadavs work hard, they loot and we work. They cheat, we work.” When I brought the question

25 In contrast the Gujar and Meo community were constantly derided as “feeble criminals” throughout the settlement reports.
up with a local Yadav politician he remarked that: “Our people here in Gurgaon are softer and more peaceful, we don’t get into disputes and conflicts like in Rohtak”. Rohtak, a nearby Jat dominated district, was often brought up in discussions concerning Yadav identity. In a Jat dominated state where the Chief Minister has regularly come from the Jat community it is commonly perceived that the revenues taken from Yadav-dominated Gurgaon are redirected to Jat districts. This self-identification with hard-work, peacefulness and moral superiority, as will described in later sections is put under significant stress by an unevenly distributed urbanisation process which has caused significant ruptures in this caste narrative.

4.4.2 Uneven agrarian development

An equally important factor in Gurgaon’s urbanisation is its history of poor agricultural cultivation. In the forty years of settlement reports, from 1837 to 1889, Gurgaon had the lowest revenue return in the entire district (Channing and Wilson 1889). The impact of this was sharpened through processes of agrarian reform under the green revolution in the 20th century. The low-yield and barren land in the Gurgaon district meant that land consolidation and increases in farm-work that the green revolution brought to other parts of the state largely bypassed the Gurgaon region (Bhalla, 1999; Patnaik, 1987). As Bhalla (1999) notes, in other parts of Haryana the green revolution brought consolidated landholdings within the hands of large landowners and pushed small-scale landowners into waged farm work. In Gurgaon the absence of the green revolution, together with urban growth in neighbouring Delhi and regional changes in non-agricultural wages meant that employment patterns among landowning communities had long diversified out of land cultivation. Indeed many Yadav landowners I met with during my field research were involved in transport, construction and mining employment prior to rentiership. A secondary important factor was that land prices in Gurgaon were much lower than in neighbouring districts, thus negotiation over land sales less politically complicated (Gururani 2013).

All these factors impacted the dynamics of land acquisition and post-acquisition economies in the region as they began in earnest in the early 1980s. In order to understand the impacts of agrarian-urban transition for landowners in Gurgaon I carried out a household survey with those whose land had been bought or acquired over the past thirty years (Table 1).

This section has argued that the production of new urban landscapes in contemporary India is a far broader process than simply an act of extra economic dispossession and subsequent spatial and economic segregation. “Flexible” planning technologies wrought through the early years of Haryana’s formation were to play a key role in how land acquisition and dispossession played out several decades later. In the following section, I utilise a household survey within three village clusters in Gurgaon in order to understand how the messy and complex process of dispossession/alienation unevenly produced a class of rentiers who would become key, not only in mediating opposition to urbanisation, but active agents in vernacular circuits of capital through the city.
4.5 Land transformation and the creation of rentier capitalists

In Gurgaon the dominant land-owning caste community, Yaduvanshi Ahirs or Yadavs, have capitalised on processes of dispossession and containment to transform their agrarian economic and social capital to urban capital, and in the process formed a heterogeneous peasant-rentier class. However, cleavages in how landowning communities were dispossessed mediate their entrance into property-based accumulation after dispossession, marking the distinction between what I call village rentiers and elite rentiers.

In order to understand the impacts of agrarian-urban transition on landowners in Gurgaon I carried out a household survey with those whose land had been bought or acquired over the past thirty years (Table 4.1). As discussed in Chapter 3, the survey was conducted by myself and three research assistants. The villages were selected and grouped into three clusters. Cluster 1, composed of Dundahera, Carterpuri and Kapashera all villages located along the old Delhi-Gurgaon road, whose land was acquired in the 1980s and 1990s for industrial and residential purposes. Cluster 2, Nathupur, Jharsa and Badshahpur villages all of which form part of New Gurgaon, to the south-east of the NH8. The land of cluster 2 villages was primarily acquired by the private sector in the 1990s and 2000s. Finally, cluster 3, Rampura, Manesar and Kherki Daula are all villages in west Gurgaon which straddle the NH8. The land of these villages was acquired by both the private and public sector, much of which from the early 2000s when the Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Complex was expanded to encompass IMT Manesar. I chose these three separate clusters in an attempt to capture as diverse experience of urbanisation as possible.
Figure 4.4: Map of field sites included in the household survey in this research project (Author produced, Google Maps).

Cluster one (green), cluster two (blue) and cluster three (red).
Table 4.1: Median Price Per acre. Taken from field research survey (n=184).

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Median price per acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gujar</td>
<td>₹196,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jat</td>
<td>₹260,520.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>₹784,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadav</td>
<td>₹1,100,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 4.1 demonstrates, there are great discrepancies in experiences of dispossession in Gurgaon. The difference in price per acre (PPA) received by landowners provides an indication of the factors shaping dispossession. As the survey demonstrates those whose land was acquired after the year 2000 received 182 times more per acre than those prior to 1990; and those who sold their land to private developers received, on average, eight times more per acre than those whose land was acquired by the government. While there is some inconsistency in PPA received by those with small to medium landholdings, those with more than ten acres of land received one and a half times more for than both categories. In sum, landowners who received most from land acquisition, were either dispossessed after the year 2000, had land purchased by private developers or had a landholding larger than ten acres.

The dramatic increase in PPA post-2000 can be partly explained by heightened deregulation of the real estate and mortgage sector at a national level in the 2000s. Specifically, the deregulation of foreign direct investment into real estate in 2005 coincides with both a spike in PPPAs and in development licences allotted from the Town and Country Planning Department. Concurrently, between 1989 and 2012 the Gurgaon urbanisable area – as detailed across four city masterplans – increased by close to 300%, from

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27 The survey shows some impact of caste belonging on PPA. The data I collected on caste is however somewhat skewed given that 56% of my respondents were from the Yadav community, the dominant landowning caste group in Gurgaon, and 100% of Jat respondents – who make up 30% of the Haryana population and are more politically powerful in the state outside of Gurgaon – came from one village (Jharsa). This made it difficult to compare prices received by the two communities across the city.

28 Or six times more when adjusted to 2014 prices.
9,900 acres to 37,000 acres opening up just over 27,000 acres of land to alienation. In the space of five years from 2007 to 2012, under the stewardship of Congress Chief Minister Bhupinder Hooda, three masterplans were drawn up, tripling residential and commercial space. By “urbanising” 27,000 acres, state planners were effectively opening up landowners to dispossession, initiating the process of contained integration and enabling a process of speculation as the land is inserted into global real estate markets. These changes in planning and real estate regulation are demonstrated in Table 4.1, as PPAs increased by around 3000% between 2000 and 2014.

The difference in PPA between government and private acquisition can in part be explained by the politics of the “circle rate”, the government-recognised value of land. In short, circle rates are purposefully set low in order to provide the state government with access to cheap land by eminent domain when needed. This was described to me as a “win-win situation” by a number of landowners and state bureaucrats. The meteoric rise in market prices across the city from the early 2000s as the urbanisable area expanded, and real estate investment and mortgage lending was liberalised, produced large differentials between government-recognised and market prices, stoking local opposition to circle-rates and prompting a proliferation of lawsuits against government acquisitions (Sura et al 2014). While government acquisitions have historically formed a minority of acquisitions in Gurgaon, amidst widespread opposition government acquisitions have reduced considerably in the post-2000 period, indeed all government acquisitions in the survey fell between 1963 and 2000 contributing to the higher average PPA in the post-2000 period.

The ability to have one’s land exempt from state acquisition is heavily influenced by pre-existing class and caste dynamics. Any period spent in Gurgaon one will become accustomed to the sight of lone villas sticking out from otherwise cleared agricultural fields, encircled by peculiarly shaped acquisition boundaries, while conversations with landowners throughout this research project were littered with extended explanations of negotiation and counter negotiation between landowners, private developers and the state. Typically low-level district and village officials – the Sarpanch and Patwaris - those within close vicinity to the liminal space of the local state are those who most commonly have land released from notification. This usually occurs within the statutory cooling-off period between Section 4 notification of acquisition and the eventual Section 9 physical acquisition, as mandated in the Land Acquisition Act 1894. This can take years, a period Sheth (2017) calls the “urban time lapse” wherein landowners privileged with social capital lobby for the release of their land, quickly sell their land to developers at a higher prices, or in some cases form business partnerships with developers (a common feature of rentiers’ initial foray into real estate). The “urban time lapse” equally proves extremely obstructive to state land acquisitions. As elite landowners sell off parts of their notified land within a designated land development, state development plans lose their contiguous character. In conversation with state planners in Gurgaon during my field research, nearly all highlighted this factor as the key reason the state was unable to carry out infrastructural development in the region.
Nevertheless, the discrepancies in the PPA received by landowners point toward significant inequalities within agrarian communities which shape post-agrarian fortunes. Those landowners whose land was acquired by the government, which is more likely to have occurred prior to 2000, have not been able to mobilize the same kinds of compensation capital as those who were able to sell their land to private developers. As such this group of former landowners are far more likely to rely on rents and internal village property as key accumulative assets in the post-agrarian period. I call this group of former agriculturalists, village rentiers. While those who were alienated from their land through private-sector acquisitions from the mid-1990s onwards, and as such received significantly higher PPAs, are far more likely to derive their incomes from investments in property in Gurgaon’s formal real estate market. I call this group of former agriculturalists, elite rentiers. The difference between an elite rentier and a village rentier is at once blurred and also reflective of distinct intra-caste class hierarchies. I use the term subaltern only to indicate the vernacular, if prosaic, real estate practices which low-level dispossessed landowners engage in; this I will return to in the final section of the chapter.

Table 4.2 shows responses to survey question regarding what respondents did with the money received from selling land. Despite discrepancies between the kinds of engagements in real estate, the survey shows high levels of probability that landowners of all kinds will invest in property or land following dispossession (see Table 4.2). That those who received the highest PPA invested in property and or land is hardly surprising (98% of those with landholdings of 10 acres or more invested in property and/or land). More interestingly perhaps, investment in land and or property among those who received the lowest PPA, those we might consider as lacking the political and social capital to significantly influence the PPA received, nevertheless remained at just below 60%. At the very least this demonstrates the prodigious character of participation in real estate markets by both village rentiers and elite rentiers from as early as the 1960s. The kinds of investment made however, and the subjectifying role those investments held for many landowners will be explored in the next section.

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29 It is also the case that those selling land to private developers prior to the 1990s may well also rely on internal village property for income and would also fall into the subaltern-rentier category.
Table 4.2: Percent of respondents who invested land sales cash into property. Taken from field research survey (n=184).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landholding (acres)</th>
<th>% of those who invested in property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 and less</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 to 9.9</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of those who invested in property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-1989</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-2000</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2014</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sale</th>
<th>% of those who invested in property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>% of those who invested in property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gujar</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jat</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadav</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The village survey provides a glimpse of conditions determining the relative benefits of dispossession on the dispossessed: year of sale, type of dispossession and to some extent landholding size. The survey also demonstrates that property investment is a prodigious feature in the post-dispossession period, at a basic level evincing the existence of non-subistence economies and, more importantly, of a relation between spaces of the dispossessed and the incoming extractive modes of production. The extent to which former landowners have been able to integrate and capitalize on new accumulative strategies, however, is responsive to numerous conditions not least the city’s diverse, geographically situated modes of extraction and production, which can be more usefully drawn out qualitative research.

The following section will explore the manner in which emerging property relations in Gurgaon are not only shaping the city’s accumulative trajectory but also trace key instabilities within the hegemonic pact between the state, landowners and corporate capital. In the following section I mobilise an understanding of property relations as not simply productive of material value within formal markets but also deeply embedded in a variety of social relations that unevenly permeate intra-caste class distinctions, between those “big men” that have embedded themselves in the city’s elite landscapes and those who remain in the villages dependent on migrant workers’ rents.
4.6 The village rentier

In early 2014 I sat on the stoop of an empty office room in Kapashera while Sanjay and three others smoked hookah on plastic chairs watching the deluge of people passing through one of the village’s main arterial lanes. Around 90% of Kapashera residents are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and migrated to Kapashera from the early 1990s in order to work in the garment-export companies in Gurgaon’s Udyog Vihar industrial estate; a five minute walk from the village. Sanjay was a tall brooding man, who wore kajal eyeliner and the white kurta that marked out the minority Yadav landlords from majority migrant residents in the village. The group were deriding outgoing Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, architect of Delhi’s flyover-strewn world-class aesthetic (Ghertner 2015), for “losing the ear of the people” in her rush to transform Delhi and loot farmers in Gurgaon, and praised Prime Minister Modi’s recent policy intervention allowing migrant workers to reside in urban centres without local registration. As a demographic minority in their own villages, urban village landlords typically withhold migrant household registration and thereby voter registration in order to hold onto political power within the villages. This has the adverse effect of obscuring census figures relating to the villages upon which infrastructure investment is often based, leaving Gurgaon’s urban village infrastructure underfunded and overwhelmed.

Sanjay was the middle-brother of three sons, all living in Kapashera. Like many elders from the Yadav community his father had been in the military and was now living from a pension. Most of the family’s agricultural land was bought by private developers for luxury farmhouse development in the 1980s, leaving them with a small plot of land across the Gurgaon border. Sanjay explained to me that it wasn’t until after having sold his land that migrant workers began to come to the village and his fortunes dramatically transformed. Starting in the early 1990s, along with his elder brother, the family began to develop a mixture of single-room rental lines and blocks for migrant workers on a small plot of land they owned in the western side of the village. A worker “line” of rooms typically consists of two rows of five to ten rooms separated by an open courtyard. A “block” then is a vertical development of the line incrementally built up three or four floors.

30 Kapashera is officially in Delhi and is enclaved and categorised by the Delhi Municipal Government as a “rural village” and therefore no Kapashera land can formally be “urbanised”. Yadav families in Kapashera own and build on land both in Kapashera, and across the liminal Delhi-Gurgaon border and as such are also affected by Gurgaon’s controlled areas. Furthermore, following the development of Udyog Vihar industrial estate adjacent to Kapashera, the village became the primary workers neighbourhood for the industrial estate.
31 A tangential reference to the DLF-Robert Vadra land scandal which was a popular topic of discussion among landowners at the time.
32 Many SC local residents also claim to have been denied household registration by Yadav landholders and landlords.
33 See Chapter 5
34 Yadavs have formed a large part of the Indian military since colonial rule (Channing, 1882).
From the mid-1990s the family were able to invest in more buildings on their remaining agricultural land, starting with single worker lines by the gane nali gali [dirty river alley] which were later developed into larger four-storey blocks. Sanjay now has two hundred rooms across five buildings on rent in the village, as well as a number of informal lines built on land in neighbouring Dundahera village, his net monthly income from rent alone is around six lakh rupees (US $9000). This is significantly above the median income in the Delhi NCR. Principally deriving income from renting rooms to migrant workers within the village, sold his family’s land in the 1980s, Sanjay’s family are an example of village rentiers. This kind of development of rental accommodation was by no means rare in this area of Gurgaon.

During my fieldwork, I rented a room in a workers block in Kapashera. My landlord, a cousin of Sanjay, had four “blocks” on rent in the village and was building a fifth during the period of my research. For most village rentiers the development of rental blocks and lanes was a key investment practice in the post-dispossession period. Village rentiers are not registered real estate developers, their investments tend to be hidden from official land registrations, speculative and tentative.

After finishing up the hookah I sat in Sanjay’s empty office, occupied by a small desk stacked with battered pieces of paper and two plastic chairs. Kapashera has many of these empty office rooms,
sometimes used to sell cooking gas or SIM cards, other times used as temporary accommodation for workers during the high demand periods in the winter. I had assumed Sanjay’s room was much like the others and asked him what he sold from the room, “This is for our committee” he replied. He explained that as landlords with large incomes, they needed somewhere safe to put their money, and other landlords to invest it with. Initially the committee would collectively pool money each month to pay for the construction of new rental buildings in the village or for weddings. However, today Sanjay’s committee are earning enough to invest in agricultural land in areas touted for urbanisation, and plots in Gurgaon’s developed colonies. He remarked, with much pride:

“In the beginning we were dealing with just a few lakhs but these days we have crores, so our ambitions are higher…we have bought plots here and invested in a mall in New Gurgaon.”

Sanjay’s dilapidated office, where he would sit and oversee migrant passer-by each day as if they were agricultural labourers on his forgotten fields, was used to discuss new investments, sewerage or water problems in the blocks, plans for adding new floors to buildings and issues with migrant tenants. One morning I spent an hour sitting with Sanjay and his co-committee member Praveen while they heatedly discussed the expansion of a worker line into agricultural land through a series of sketches on the back of a piece of paper. Sanjay’s office doubled up as a space where problems would be worked out, day-workers could be hired, and committee meetings held. The group would meet with other landlord groups at the Shiv Mandir every Sunday morning to discuss “village issues” including disorderly tenants, building expansion and infrastructure delivery.

Like Mukesh’s investment group detailed at the beginning of this chapter, I encountered these kinds of savings committees, sometimes referred to in Gurgaon’s urban villages as chit funds, across Gurgaon. Indeed nearly all the landlords I met with throughout the course of my research, either participated in a savings committee or noted the existence of one in their village. According to survey respondents from Kasan-Khob village, the core workers’ neighbourhood for IMT Manesar industrial estate, around a quarter of Yadav landowners in the village, participated in one single savings committee like that of Sanjay’s. In part these committees are a legacy of Yadav land tenure systems, wherein land plots were held commonly across a family. In the contemporary period Yadav families have tended to share incomes from land sales across the male members of the family and invest in common. The savings committee, then, is somewhat of a coming together of the family-investment unit across the village.

4.6.1 Fabricators

In the urban villages that surround industrial estates like Kapashera and Dundahera, landlords not only provided residential dwellings for migrant workers, but also rented out space for informal workshops, or fabricators, providing production back-up, or “job-work” to the factories in the adjacent industrial estate. There are around 300 fabricators in Kapashera and Dundahera working with companies in the formal
industrial areas of Gurgaon. Typically fabricators are found in the basement floors of rental buildings, noticeable by their bright strip lighting and the loud whirring of the sewing machines. Renting out fabricator space is often much more favourable to renting out single rooms, as the owner has only one tenant to deal with.

As noted in Chapter 1, manufacturing industry in the post-liberalisation period has a highly precarious position within existing cities that have experienced both increasing land prices due to the growth of the FSRE sector and political opposition from urban-elites who have sought to cleanse India’s cities of spaces of “dirtying” industries (Sharan 2006). As such, the general trend in India’s traditional metropoles has been the expulsion of “informal” workshop-scale manufacturing to the urban periphery and its replacement with FSRE sector developments. The transfer of manufacturing industry to rural and peripheral areas has, in turn, been a key frontier of contemporary dispossession. In Gurgaon, however, small-scale manufacturing facilities within the urban village provide a vital outlet for the city’s organised garment-exports industry at times of high demand and seasonal labour scarcity. While the enclaving of village land from formal acquisition has produced areas of cheap social reproduction for neighbouring factories; the rents appease Yadavs and consolidate hegemony for property driven growth.

Figure 4.6: A fabricator in the basement of a worker’s block in Kapashera (Author).

The preponderance of fabricators-as-property demonstrates the integral articulations of modes of production across administratively bounded space, which operate on a mass scale particularly within village rentier networks in Gurgaon. The utilisation of worker and petty industrialist rent as capital for investing in property highlights the circulatory relationship between two seemingly contradictory spaces of capital: Gurgaon’s industry which requires cheap accommodation for low-waged workers, and Gurgaon’s FSRE sector, which survives from the increasing profitability of land. The production of rentier networks within Gurgaon’s contained spaces then serves to mediate these contradictions. Importantly the accounts of village-rentiership within Gurgaon’s urban villages highlight the important
function that local landowners play in managing accumulative strategies in the formal city and, crucially, in mediating labour, land and finance pressures on industrial production by providing ready investment, and cheap land and labour. Furthermore, property relations engaged in by village rentiers demonstrate the integration of the dispossessed into urban-based economies even among the village-rentier members of former landowning communities. This, in part, explains the close support village rentiers tend to provide industrialists during periods of industrial unrest.

It is in this context that the contained urban villages can be understood as “vital nodes” (Gidwani and Maringanti 2016) and mediation points between the new and old forms of production, articulating truncated agrarian-industrial-urban relations. The production of ring-fenced urban villages on the one hand allows corporate capital uncomplicated access to urbanisable land, while on the other, it offers factions of landowners the opportunity to enter into formal real estate markets. By producing areas of cheap social reproduction, containment processes not only help to transform agriculturalists into a new rentier class, in so doing they mediate a key contradiction in Gurgaon’s economy, between its manufacturing and services economy which depends on low labour (and therefore land) costs, and a FSRE economy which depends on rising land prices.

4.6.2 “We were looted”
While the previous accounts highlight the integral role of the village rentier in the circulations of capital between the urban and urban village areas, as Mukesh’s account at the beginning of the chapter illustrated, the boundary lines of the urban village continue to confine village rentiers to the village. For many village rentier’s these boundaries that have shaped contemporary Gurgaon’s urban trajectory, while holding the promise of social mobility through the opportunity to amass rental property, also painfully represent their exclusion from the luxury spaces of the city.

Of his savings committee Sanjay remarked: “It is a great responsibility - only a babubali [strong man] can look after this money”. He clearly drew great pride from his senior position in the village, and carried himself with particular authority as he was driven across the village on a scooter by his thekedar [contractor]. Yet despite being a babubali within the village boundary, the proud and boastful manner in which Sanjay and many village rentiers across the city spoke of their property investments together with their evident power within the confines of the village boundaries starkly contrasted with frequent refrains to having been left behind and “looted” in Gurgaon’s rapid urbanisation.

This disquiet concerning village rentier’s relative position in Gurgaon’s fortunes was expressed on two registers. In the first instance, Gurgaon village rentiers frequently rail against the social mobility that Gurgaon’s new service economies have offered lower-caste members of the villages. The development of Gurgaon’s FSRE economy provides call-centre and BPO employment principally attractive to those communities without land and property interests. The movement of local scheduled caste residents into
low-wage FSRE jobs was seen to have undermined previously established codes of social (im)mobility enshrined by the caste system. One Yadav elder in Mullahera, a Yadav village adjacent to the Maruti-Suzuki factory remarked:

“These people who used to work our land, they now work in the companies in New Gurgaon and claim to have a rich ancestry. This is nonsense! The irony that we landowners have nothing and these people are rich”.

Here the landowner’s complaint is not that Yadavs cannot get jobs in Gurgaon’s services economy, but rather that jobs and labour are providing social status where, under previous circumstances, it was precisely the withdrawal of labour from which caste-based social standing was derived. The further “irony” is that despite his protestations to “have nothing” he actually had invested in land in Rewari as well as a building on rent in the village. The investment in land and property by lower-class village rentiers is not simply a reaction to local capitalist’s desire for cheap social reproduction. Nor, despite the prodigious character of village rentiership, are all rentiers able to produce large surpluses from their investments. For many the investment in land is fuelled by the desire to retain material and social security amidst rampant dispossession and social change. Experiences of containment, often expressed as “dispossession” among those who in effect sold their land voluntarily, point us to the manner in which, while village rentiers locate their belonging to Gurgaon through their speculative investments in property, the containment which in many cases provided the material terrain for those investments is the very boundary-line of their exclusion from the city.

Secondly, while Yadav landlords were often referred to, and referred to themselves as babubali [strongmen] in the villages, conversations with most landlords in Gurgaon were littered with references to cousins or village members that had made it as hade admi [big men] in New Gurgaon by moving out of the village and into private colonies; foregoing their “brotherhood” in the process. These men, what I term elite rentiers, had often through perceived, or in some cases actual, good fortune, class status or patronage been able to move their families out of the village and cement their position both as property-owning citizens discernible to Gurgaon’s private sector dominated State, and within the city’s organised real estate sector. These men would occasionally return to the villages in new cars to shake hands with old neighbours, drawing the attention, and much ire, from those villagers that remain. Many of these men worked their way up through property and land brokerage for the very private developers that acquired the village land. Typically, private developers approach one or two members of the village to negotiate and agglomerate land, from which the villager would receive a 5% commission. While I cannot substantiate a strict commonality of the caste and class background of entry-level brokers across Gurgaon, most brokers I met either held senior positions on the panchayat (e.g. the Nathupur village

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broker was also the son of the Sarpanch) or were the village’s largest landowner (e.g. the Badshahpur village broker).

Take for example the account of a village rentier in Rampura village on the western periphery of Gurgaon. His house was lavish, encircled by gates, guarded by two dogs, with three-storeys and a lush green lawn. The house was surrounded by small dilapidated bungalows of the other villagers, and was cast in the shadow of the new Vatika residential towers in the distance. This was very typical of the unequal landscapes in Gurgaon, large villas stick out from dilapidated abadi areas physically marking out those who had benefited most from urbanisation yet remained in the villages. Despite his evident wealth (he had made a series of investments in urbanising agricultural land in the urban periphery) he was quick to deride villagers who had made their money through brokering the village land to developers. Gesturing over to the Vatika towers he remarked that:

"Here we were looted, we made a few crore but others (villagers) are making much, much more and here we’re left with nothing…a lot of people around here have been looted".

Elsewhere landowners interviewed while carrying out the survey made regular reference to the use of coercion, by both developers and family members, in order to force them to sell their land. Many elderly men in particular, remarked that they felt obliged to sell family land due to pressure from younger family members. One landowner in Rampura village, exasperatedly told me that:

“I did not want to sell my land. My sons forced me. They promised me ₹ 8 crore, but I ended up with one and a half. I feel very bitter about it.”

In most cases however these village-rentiers of course were not looted nor were they left with nothing, nevertheless, many village rentiers continued to express their experiences of agrarian-urban transition utilising a language of dispossession. Here, narratives of dispossession become important rhetorical devices for rentiers’ to reconcile their tentative and partial claims to inclusion in Gurgaon’s hegemonic urban order. As Blomley (2008) contends, the utilisation of a language of dispossession can provide a powerful “political register for naming, blaming and claiming” to those with tentative claims to possession.

While village rentiers locate their place in the contemporary city Gurgaon by appeal to caste-belonging and through speculative investments in property, the containment of urban villages which in many cases provided the material terrain for the development of rentier capital equally represents the very boundary-line of village rentiers’ integration into the city. This is the double space of the urban village. Despite village rentier’s active role within real estate markets, the urban village for most village rentiers remains in a state of stasis, defined in immutable antiquity in relation to the glimmering high-rise apartments that jut up against it.
It is perhaps no surprise then that Yadav village rentiers openly derided men that had experienced social mobility for their greed, “forgetting [their] culture” or for wasting away money on vices such as alcohol or material goods. Nevertheless, stories and anecdotes of the vast wealth and success of the village’s bade admi disseminated the mystery of the transformative promise of property investment within everyday discourses and discussions of village rentiers. In amidst these narratives and discourses, and despite village rentier’s active role within real estate markets, the urban village for most village rentiers and indeed non-rentier ‘villagers’ remains in a state of stasis, defined in immutable antiquity in relation to the glimmering high-rise apartments that jut up against it. Devpal the former sarpanch of Carterpuri village, so named after the legend that a former US President was born in the village, described this feeling of stasis to me as such:

“This village has not changed, look around! The old panchayat land is still used as a goshala [cow shed], it’s been six or seven years since the panchayat ended…We all thought the change of name to Carterpuri would bring development to the village. But nothing happened. The village is captured on all four sides by secta logon [sector residents], they put up gates so we cannot pass through - we only have one entry and exit from the village. We have been captured on all four sides.”

In Ghertner (2015) the author explores how slum residents touted for dispossession to make way for the “world-class” city, align themselves with a discourse which, enjoining increased social value with property ownership, foregrounds their own dispossession. For Ghertner (ibid, 182), the slum residents’ investment in a propertied future, is not due to an ignorance of the mythical processes which underline the value of property, but rather is reflective of a broader social order which affirms to property a miraculous power of value. Like in Ghertner’s “world-class” Delhi, village rentiers in Gurgaon, as active participants in urban land markets, know full well and actively speculate on the fictitious mysteries of land value. Yet their consent to market dynamics and participation in urban land markets has not imbued them with the cultural nor social attributes value of bade admi. Here containment within the double space of the urban village painfully reflects the myth of the property fetish back to its practitioners. Confronted with their awkward position within the liminal space of the urban village, one which is mediated by both integration and exclusion, village rentiers fall back on a narrative of dispossession. In this manner “accumulation by containment” not only describes the contingent alternative materialisation of urbanisation, but actively constitutes a discrete subjectifying force, one in which the boundaries of exemption and integration come to provide the conditions for the awkward participation and exclusion into the city’s fortunes.

From these spaces of the village rentier, from large village mansions and Sanjay’s cramped, empty office I observed the inner workings of an emergent class identity in between two prevailing features of post-dispossession life, the affective experience loss and the material but often speculative hope, implicit in property ownership, of transition from mere village rentiers of migrant labourers to fully-fledged
members of Gurgaon’s booming real estate economy. As noted by a village rentier from Kherki Daula, a village in west Gurgaon undergoing rapid urbanisation:

“We invest in land because we have to. We cannot just keep the money, it would be spent by our children on alcohol and cars…the government would take it. It is better to buy land…We cannot anticipate the next boom, we can only hope to be involved”.

4.7 Elite Rentiers

I use the term “elite rentier” to refer to those who were able to capitalise on private-sector acquisitions from the 1990s onwards and tend to derive incomes from the city’s highly speculative real estate market. In late 2015 I attended the wedding of a Delhi state assembly member who was originally from Dundahera, a Yadav village that borders Kapashera to the west. The groom’s family owns Fun ‘n’ Food Village a large water park opposite Kapashera village and a series of luxury resorts in Kapashera Estate. Politicians from Delhi’s governing Aam Admi Party took to the stage for photos with the bride, while drones circled the sky taking videos projected onto large screens behind the bride and groom. Informally dressed security guards with open-carry guns stood around the periphery of the tent watching events unfold. The wedding was lavish, alcohol was served, there were a number of international cuisines on offer and tables were populated by important Delhiites and real estate brokers and businessmen of Gurgaon’s elite rentier networks. While a lavish wedding is perhaps not uncommon among the urban upper-classes, the wedding contrasted with those of village rentiers from the same villages that I attended. They were modest affairs held in large tents in old Gurgaon, with brash disco music, nimbu paani [lemon soda] and pure vegetarian cuisine. Old Yadav men sat in white kurta smoking hookah and playing cards just as they do on the Kapashera galis throughout the day. The politician’s wedding was an entirely different affair.

That day I was a guest of Vikram Yadav a cousin of the bride who was also the president of one of Gurgaon’s many industrialist associations. Vikram is a middle-aged man from a family of Yadavs who moved out of Dundahera village to the neighbouring private colony, Surya Vihar in the early 1990s. During that time his father was a contractor developing the Udyog Vihar industrial estate and was subsequently the president of the industrialist association. Following his father’s death, Vikram took over the business and presidency of the association. Vikram’s family, whose significant wealth came after their land was acquired by private developers in the early 1990s, typify the movement of factions of the Yadav community in industrial villages into local positions of relative power, particularly tied to construction, real estate and industry. Along with his cousin, who was a member of the Delhi State Assembly, his uncle runs a large transport finance firm in the city, while numerous family members I met were eager to discuss their time spent studying in England. The family owned industrial properties across Gurgaon’s

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36 According to a 2013 report Gurgaon holds over 70,000 vacant properties which account for 21% of total residential stock. Despite this Gurgaon also holds the second highest price appreciation rates (28%) in the country (howindialives, 2014).

37 The distinction between elite and village rentiers is not intended to infer autonomy, the two positions are deeply co-constitutive.
industrial estates including a high-end commercial property in Gurgaon’s Cyber City. Through Vikram I met former panchayat members who were leasing out skyscrapers to multinational corporations, and property dealers who have used personal connections to hold on to land in prime locations. Vikram, and those he introduced me to, are an example of what I term elite rentiers. Vikram’s family land was acquired in the 1990s by the private sector the family now invest in property and industrial lettings outside the village boundaries as key income generating assets. Vikram spoke of the integration of villagers into industrial and commercial property ownership over the past twenty five years.

“At first, here in Udyog Vihar (industrial estate), there were only automobile companies, then in the 1990s came garment-exports and after 2000 IT and E-commerce. Really it wasn’t until the IT companies arrived that the estate had large demand that’s when we began buying plots, today around 50% of plots are leased out here by 10 or so families originally from Dundahera”.

Vikram explained that villager investment in industrial plots back then was far less common as property didn’t seem a viable business for local people. Vikram’s family however were already involved in the construction business working as contractors building Udyog Vihar industrial estate, they had connections with businesses so investment in property was seen as a “natural” progression. Today, he notes, the E-Commerce companies seeking plots in Gurgaon simply don’t have the capital to buy land so lease plots from families like his. E-Commerce he argued was the future, “with these garment-export companies, you don’t receive much, ₹30 a square km, but the new e-commerce companies will pay ₹70 square km, this is the future”. He notes that by the time Gurgaon’s other industrial estate, IMT Manesar, was built in the mid-2000s however, local people were well aware of the profitability of industrial real estate.

The Haryana Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation (HSIIDC), which develops and manages the State’s industrial spaces, initially held relatively loose regulations on industrial plot ownership, plot-buyers were expected to produce on only 25% of the plot and run operations for a minimum of one year before reselling, a stipulation which was later replaced with a one-time 25% resale fee. The loose regulations on industrial plot ownership allowed local villagers a relatively risk-free avenue into speculating on industrial property. Vikram explained: “In Manesar, only thirty per cent of plot owners are industrialists, seventy per cent are people from our villages who saw what happened in Udyog Vihar, had come into money and wanted to invest. There must be at least two hundred families from our villages who own plots in Manesar…these people have no real interest in manufacturing”. According to the president of the Manesar Industrialist Welfare Association only 40% of allotments in Manesar are operational, while a 2012 report in the Indian Express put the figure as low as 25% contending that HSIIDC officers explicitly encouraged landowners to draw value from land sales rather than engage in production (Khandelwal, 2012).

Despite the deluge of offices in Gurgaon emblazoned with Star Properties or Yadav Properties, very few admit to being land or property brokers. In one case, upon arranging a meeting with the owner of “Yadav Real Estate” the owner flat out denied being involved in Real Estate, claiming to be a flower salesman.
One afternoon I swung by Vikram’s office in Udyog Vihar. The walls are decorated with framed photos of a young Vikram and his father sternly posing with various Haryana politicians, including Bhupinder Hooda the chief minister closely associated with Gurgaon’s development boom in the 2000s. Vikram, at the point, did not know that I lived in Kapashera village, next door to his family’s old home in Dundahera. Vikram lived in Surya Vihar a gated apartment complex that sits on the Delhi-Gurgaon border and is encircled on all sides by what he termed “encroaching” urban village land. I had thought that it could give the wrong impression to let on that I lived in among his old neighbourhoods, not least in a workers’ block. Like many of my interactions with elite rentiers I hid behind the anonymising privilege of being a foreign student from London. That day, he asked where I was staying, avoiding the question somewhat I told him I was living “somewhere around Kapashera”. He was nonplussed and nonintrusive. I asked him, what he, and his family, felt toward his old neighbourhoods, and their awkward integration into the everyday life of the city. He remarked to that:

“The problem is both the government and the villagers. The government have no reason to extend services and provisions to the villages. For the villagers, it is a question of rights not service, they will demand water, electricity, pukka roads, but they’re not willing to pay for it. This is why they are not developing”.

This attitude toward the urban villages, was common among the elite rentiers that I spent time with. Crucially, elite rentiers like Vikram drew no discernible relationship between their own positions and that of those who remained in the urban village, as the village rentiers’ poignantly remarked to me, Vikram had forgotten the village.

Crucially for this chapter, the accumulative strategies of both elite and village rentiers are made possible by an activist state creating accumulative landscapes through planning, inserting both agricultural land and landowner subjectivity into logics of speculative property-based accumulation. It is within this articulation of state-planning and the dominance of speculation in the city’s property market that elite-rentiers engage in the urbanisation process. These engagements in part stand opposed to those of village rentiers detailed earlier in the chapter. If village rentiers principally accrue income through manufacturing worker’s rents which they reinvest in formal real estate, elite rentiers often draw incomes through land banking industrial plots; and in doing so foreclosing potential manufacturing rents. This material fracture between the economic interests of village and elite rentiers is another aspect of incoherence among Gurgaon’s hegemonic subjects. Yadav rentierism, as an emergent intra-caste class project at the heart of Gurgaon’s urban hegemonic alliance, might as such be understood as constitutive of a “ruptural unity” that has both enabled capital accumulation and might also confound or provide its limits (Gidwani, 2008a). The boundaries of the urban village thus play a duplicitous, somewhat cruel role, representative of the awkward partial integration of former landowners into the millennium city. In this manner the hegemonic
pact between Yadav landowners, corporate capital, and the state detailed earlier in the chapter, sees instability in the material and social character of real estate practices of its subjects.

In this section I have attempted to demonstrate the manner in which the boundary line, so important for Gurgaon’s urbanisation, governs the heterogeneity of strategies engaged in by those differentially integrated into processes of accumulation by containment. In doing so, I have suggested that while there is broad uniformity in economic activity engaged in after dispossession, not all former landowners have been able to capitalise on dispossession in the same manner leading to a key material bifurcation of the landowning classes, between village and elite rentiers.

4.8 Conclusion

The above accounts demonstrate the deep implication of post-agrarian communities in the viability of emerging urban economies in Gurgaon. Underpinning the abstract space of developers and state planners is a complex, negotiated process of land transformation which crucially depends on winning the consent of local landowners through the spectacular promise of property ownership and rentiership. In short, it is through integrating former landowners into the hegemonic promise of property-ownership that this “whole and broken” space (Lefebvre 1991) is maintained.

In contrast to empirical studies and theoretical analyses that conceptualise new urbanisation in India through the lens of dispossessions and exclusions (Sanyal 2007) the data above demonstrates the deep integration of identities and spaces, formally excluded from urban Gurgaon by the PSRCA, into the vernacular practice of making the city. In doing so I have highlighted how rentiers mediate implicit contradictions within Gurgaon’s duplicitous political economy, between real estate capital which depends on increasing land prices and manufacturing capital which determine the depends on cheap land and labour prices. In addition, drawing from marxist agrarian studies debates (Byres 1987; Chari 2004), I have sought to demonstrate how Gurgaon’s particular urban and industrial development has been has been wrought through the agrarian question, histories of land tenure, urban planning, political economy and intra-caste dynamics.

In this context, I have shown that “consent” for market dynamics and an exclusionary urban form is premised upon an investment in the miraculous promise of property value. Crucially for most village rentiers the practices of containment and exemption which have provided the material basis for their transition into a rentier class, equally represents the boundary lines and limits to their awkward integration into the hegemonic space of the city. In this regard, Gurgaon’s urban land market, often depicted in scholarly and popular discourse as metonymic of globalised real estate and neoliberal urbanisation in India (Searle 2016), is equally upheld by tentative and speculative attempts by subaltern actors to capture processes of accumulation, retain social status and get to grips with rapid urban transition in the contemporary period.
From renting rooms to migrant workers, to leasing out office space to multinationals, to village fabricators, the urban village articulates relationships across seemingly disparate modes of production and reproduction. On the one hand, in the context of India’s increasingly urban-led economy together with the government’s National Manufacturing Policy 2014 that seeks to pull millions into manufacturing employment (predominately through liberalized FDI) the urban village performs a vital function in enclaving areas of cheap social reproduction and thus enabling conditions for production-based accumulation. On the other hand, in the production of heterogeneous rentier classes ever integrated into the speculative logics of extraction in the city, rental-economies both inside and out of the village contribute to the speculative FSRE economies that pushes land prices ever higher.

For this chapter, more important than the sheer size of the wealth accumulated by various fragments of Gurgaon’s former peasantry, is the implication that such a relation has for city-making in India more broadly. The data above demonstrate the deep integration of identities and spaces formally excluded from “urban” Gurgaon by the PSRCA into the continual practice of making the city, as village-rentiers not only utilize the space of the excluded village to amass rents from industrial workers, but also mobilize that rent as capital in the purchase and letting of industrial and commercial real estate back to industrialists. The circulation of rents, from formal industry to informal housing and back to formal industry, implicates an incoherent class of village rentiers in the political-economic fortunes of the city and also reconfigures the political possibilities of the industrial worker whose labour provides material value to this local circulation of capital. In this way the urban village can be conceptualized as a spatial mediator for otherwise uncompetitive forms of land-use in industry, a spatial practice that enables the dispossessed to further engage in real estate development outside of the village. This is particularly the case for village-rentier engagements in real estate who are unlikely to have otherwise engaged in real estate as an income generating activity.

While it is certain that local participation in real estate markets account for a small proportion of Gurgaon’s total real estate ownership – ten developers own 53% of land in the city – it is nevertheless important to recognize that without the consent, participation and integration of the dispossessed into processes of urbanisation, developers would not be able to purchase land free from the controversy and litigation which has blocked property and industrial based accumulation in other parts of the country. Furthermore, amidst a wealth of scholarship highlighting the decreasing relevance of material labour and industrial production to contemporary accumulation, a focus on the economies which produce both the factory and the worker’s neighbourhood, particularly in geographical areas of strategic importance for manufacturing, such as India’s National Capital Region, reposition the “excluded” spaces of the “dispossessed” such as the urban village as integral to the continuing hegemonic reproduction of capital. Given the proliferation of new urban developments across India, embodied by the current central government’s 100 Smart Cities programme of state investment in urban transformation, it is important to
appreciate that these processes require not only violent displacement, dispossession, and immiseration but also the production of consent and participation of the dispossessed.

Chapter 5.

Rooted flexibility: social reproduction and gendered work in Gurgaon.

5.1 Introduction
Gurgaon’s rapid and fragmented urbanisation has not only been wrought through transformations in agrarian relations, the city’s growing consumptive and industrial economy has brought hundreds of thousands of low-wage migrant workers to the city. If the previous chapter sought to sketch out a material relationship between industrial and real estate capital, mediated through the material and discursive practices of peasant rentiers in the urban villages, in this chapter I am concerned with the ways
in with processes of labour informalisation that uphold Gurgaon’s industrial and service economies, pivot not only on transformations in the organisation of production, but equally on particular gendered discourses and practices of work wrought through the particular spatial and moral production of Gurgaon’s worker neighbourhoods. Here again the urban village materialises as a key spatial mediator and “vital node” (Gidwani and Maringanti 2016) for the disorderly reproduction of capitalist urbanisation in Gurgaon.

An exploration of the dialectical interplay between the workplace and workers’ neighbourhood reveals the ways in which gendered ideologies and practices are put to work to mediate particular configurations of labour power and powerlessness. Here I am interested in exploring the iterative movement of a group of migrant women into wage-earning roles in Gurgaon’s heavily masculinised garment-exports industry. How do gender discourses shape women’s movement into waged work? How does women’s movement into waged work shape or challenge the gendered spatialities of housewife and worker? To what extent does the integration of gendered difference into regimes of capitalist abstraction represent a source of peril or obstruction to the city’s urbanisation?

I will address these questions by bringing together Lefebvre’s (1991) work on spatial productionism, feminist social reproduction theory (Katz, 2001a; Mitchell et al., 2004; Smith and Winders, 2008) and marxist scholarship on culture and hegemony (Gidwani 2008a; Hall 1988; Willis 1977) to explore the lived and discursive hegemonic negotiations through which labour power is spatio-temporally constituted. In doing so I seek to respond to Buckley and Strauss’s (2016) call to put Lefebvre’s oeuvre in conversation with the wealth of feminist geographical scholarship that has highlighted the role of difference, and gendered and racial difference in particular, plays in mediating capitalist urban production. In this body of work, Lefebvre’s more *abstracted* theory of social difference is animated and challenged by scholarship that attends to the historically and geographically specific ‘genderings’ of urban space – the masculinised worker/workplace and feminised housewife/home - that anchor continued capitalist urban productionism (Massey 1994; Buckley and Strauss 2016; Wright 2006). In doing so I seek to develop an understanding of the geographies of production and reproduction – which uphold Gurgaon’s urbanisation – not as predetermined categories of capital’s abstraction, but as fundamentally shaped by lived, contested practices and spatialities of difference.

In particular I am interested in exploring how the abstract figure of the worker, that underpins circulations of both rentier and industrial capital, is constituted and reproduced through the dialectical reverberations between the organised production process, vernacularly organised social reproduction, and gendered spatialities, discourses and practices of work. Building on Chapter 4’s exploration of the integrative project of real estate accumulation in Gurgaon, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the ways in which differential subjectivities and relations of everyday life are hauled together in an uneven and disorderly fashion to incite complicity and compulsion to processes of capitalist abstraction. In doing so, again I am interested in drawing out particular identities and subjective experiences that produce the city,
exploring the uneven, improvised and negotiated gendered spatialities that underpin the materialisation of Gurgaon as a site of global accumulation. These processes in the Gurgaon context can be conceptualised as holding to two key dimensions.

Firstly, it is my contention that the partial feminisation of low-wage, precarious shop-floor positions within Gurgaon’s garment-export factories pivots on shrinking household contributions from male relatives who have embraced the masculinised qualities of unemployment and permanent labour circulation. This trend corroborates research elsewhere on the feminisation of poverty and informalisation in the global South (Roy, 2003; Standing, 1999). I thus locate the partial feminisation of the garment-export industry, and masculinisation of the conditions of flexible work, as a result of changing labour dynamics within the household and not solely within the workplace. In this regard, I understand the introduction of women workers into the garment-export factories as largely a disruptive and interruptive process that requires particular techniques of labour discipline and reveals new strategies of labour flexibilisation.

Secondly, I am interested in the stubborn gendered geographies of the workplace and household. Here I am concerned with how migrant women and men negotiate gender and class differences across the workplace and household, how the reproduction of labour power is sedimented by the reproduction of particular identities. Rather than take these identities as static and transhistorical, I conceptualise subjective experience as in constant and fluid practice, sedimented by spatial practices and legitimated by historically and geographically contingent organisations of power; what Holland and Lave (2001) term “identities-in-practice”.

Throughout the chapter I mobilise the term “rooted flexibility” to refer to the “double gendering” (Roy 2003) of work in Gurgaon’s urban villages, women’s position as simultaneously highly flexibilised, hyper-mobile factory workers and rooted and domesticated housewives. Here I am interest in demonstrating the explicitly spatial and contingently gendered quality of precarious work and life in the contemporary city in the Global South (Strauss, 2017). Rooted flexibility then refers to a form of vernacularly organised abstract space that is cut through by gendered discourses and practices which allow the free movement of male workers and fix in place female workers. Here gender relations within everyday life, those “minimal differences” (Lefebvre 1991) both suture together conditions of capitalist accumulation through urban space, and present challenges and interruptions. Crucially my focus on gendered discourses of flexibility, following Willis (1977) and Katz (2001), seeks to examine migrant workers’ own participation in the reproduction of gendered spaces of production and reproduction of capital accumulation. In doing so, I seek to contribute to an understanding of the organisation of social reproduction with workers themselves as active agents. Rooted flexibility draws attention to the dialectical image (Benjamin, 1935/1999) of the flexible female worker, held in place by rooted household labour and

39 The English word root is derived from the French racine and the Latin radix, from which we also derive the word radical, to overturn from the root. Rooted flexibility provides the context for a series of women-led workplace struggles discussed in Chapter 6.
gendered restrictions on mobility, and yet compelled to labour within systems of production premised upon hypermobility and flexibility of its workforce\textsuperscript{40}. The material practices of everyday life thus dialectically articulate with urban structures to immobilise female subjects within environments of hypermobility. Rooted flexibility is thus evocative of what Benjamin (1935/1999) called a \textit{dialectics at standstill}, the enjoining of flexible and rooted labour power in an internal dialectical relationship of hypermobility and immobility; waste and value (Wright 2006), fixed in by the gendered, spatio-temporal organisation of the urban village.

The chapter is split into three core sections which each correspond to the material and representational space of flexibilisation: the workplace; the urban village; and everyday discourses and practices.

I begin the chapter by exploring the spatial terrain of Gurgaon’s worker neighbourhoods, the urban villages. It will be shown how Gurgaon’s urban villages are governed by a network of rentier-sovereigns who seek to reproduce a flexible, placeless tenant through spatial practices and systems of governance that obstruct and efface migrants’ place in the city. Crucially this “system” of social reproduction relies on the reproduction of a particular spatial-moral order that reconstructs the feminised household and masculinised public realm, restricting women’s access to mobility and autonomy that, it will be shown, conflicts with their new found roles on the factory shop-floors. I will then explore and outline the flexibilisation and informalisation of labour in Gurgaon’s garment-export sector. Here I seek to demonstrate both the role of production in shaping productive identities, and draw attention to the limitations of taking the workplace as the sole space of analyses of processes of informalisation and flexibilisation. The second half of the chapter will then explore the ways in which lived practices and discourses of gender cut through and interrupt the imagined and material production of the migrant worker. Drawing on ethnographic observation from ten months living in a workers’ block in Kapashera village alongside semi-structured interviews with women working in nearby garment-export factories, I explore how embodied and discursive practices of everyday life shape particular configurations of labour power, how those gendered modes of labour are acted upon and disciplined on the factory-shop floor and the ways in which workers’ own participation in hegemonic ideologies of femininity reconstruct the patriarchal values that underpin capitalist accumulation in the city. In this sense this chapter seeks to understand the urbanisation of Gurgaon through an exploration of ways in which the city’s subjects make and reproduce themselves spatially and discursively as workers, housewives, locals and migrants.

5.2 The urban village

I want to begin by exploring the spatial terrain the urban village as it is shaped by rentier capitalists and migrant workers. As discussed in the previous chapter, most migrant workers in Gurgaon reside in the dense rental accommodation within the city’s exempt urban villages. Tenement blocks and single-room lanes were developed from the 1990s onwards by an emergent peasant-rentier class. Thus the reproduction of labour-power, the analytical focus of Castells’ (1977) urbanism, is predominately carried

\textsuperscript{40} See Smith and Winders (2007) for exploration of the conflict between rooted social reproduction and hypermobile, flexible work.
out by and within the urban villages. In the urban villages the ambitions of local industrialists to reproduce a flexible labour regime enjoin with rentiers’ ambitions to reproduce a highly mobile, territorially unmoored and flexible tenant. The urban village labour system is thus organised dialectically between the workplace and the urban village, and aims to piece together materially and ideologically the “flexible migrant worker”.

As of 2014 there were ninety four urban villages within the Gurgaon-Manesar urban complex, and numerous urban villages that lie on the peripheries of the city (including Kapashera) each catering for particular kind of industry. The cluster of villages around Udyog Vihar industrial estate in the northern corner of the city provide dense, mass tenement housing for the city’s labour-intensive garment-exports and textile industries. The urban villages around old Gurgaon town provide smaller-scale, more typical apartment rentals for the higher-paid Maruti Suzuki and Honda automobile workers. The urban villages deep within New Gurgaon – Sikanderpur, Chakkarpur, Nathupur – provide rental rooms for the city’s residential and commercial sector workers; domestic maids, security guards, gardeners, rickshaw drivers. The urban villages in and around IMT Manesar provide mass, dense tenement rooms similar to that around Udyog Vihar for the estates large-scale automobile, auto-component and plastics workers41.

Table 5.1: Organisation of urban villages in Gurgaon (Author produced).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Urban Villages</th>
<th>Governance (de jure/de facto)</th>
<th>Land Acquisition</th>
<th>Occupations</th>
<th>Housing type</th>
<th>Average Rent (₹)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Udyog Vihar</td>
<td>Kapashera; Dundahera; Mullahera</td>
<td>Municipality/ Rentier committees</td>
<td>1970s and 1980s</td>
<td>Garment-exports; construction; security; fabricator</td>
<td>Dormitory blocks and lines</td>
<td>3000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Khoh; Aliyar; Kherki Duala; Rampura</td>
<td>Panchayat/ Rentier committees</td>
<td>1990s and 2000s</td>
<td>Auto-components; Automobile; Pharmaceuticals; Plastics; garment-exports</td>
<td>Dormitory blocks and lines</td>
<td>2400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Gurgaon</td>
<td>Nathupur; Sikanderpur; Jharsa; Badshahpur</td>
<td>Municipality/ Rentier committees</td>
<td>1980s and 1990s</td>
<td>Security; domestic work; Construction; auto-rickshaw</td>
<td>Courtyard, Apartments and dormitory blocks</td>
<td>8000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41 Gurgaon’s migrant workforce have come from states to the east of Gurgaon, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa in particular. Most migrant workers are young, between the ages of 18 and 25.
The development of the urban village labour system in Gurgaon follows a short period of state-provided worker housing in the city, and conforms to national trends in regional, municipal, and central state priorities shifting from the organisation of consolidated, planned production-reproduction geographies – characteristic of the post-Independence period (Roy 2007) - toward the construction of legal, spatial technologies that make way for enslaved and privatised urbanisation. The entrance of the garment-exports sector into Gurgaon from the early 1990s, alongside an automobile sector incrementally liberalised through the 1990s, has led to production-reproduction geographies commanded by logics of exemption, flexibilisation and mobilised by a disorderly coalition of state, rentier and industrialist interests.

Formally Gurgaon’s urban villages fall under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon. While old Kapashera, the only village in the study in Delhi, is formally registered as a ‘rural village’ and falls under the jurisdiction of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation. In practice however the peripheral position of these neighbourhoods together with explicit manipulation of population figures, is such that governance within the urban villages falls to a fragmented and heterogeneous class of village rentiers, that which my neighbours referred to as the makaan malik raj [landlord rule].

In the urban village the interests of village rentiers to cater for a rootless and precarious tenant population enjoins with industrial capital’s interests to draw from a highly flexible and precarious labour power; in other words the “migrant worker” and the “migrant tenant” dialectically enjoins to tentatively reproduce conditions for the accumulation of capital in the city. The following section will traverse the spatial and social terrain of Kapashera urban village to explore everyday practices through which this abstract figure is configured.

5.2.1 Kapashera
To reach Kapashera village from the luxury malls, golf courses and elite neighbourhoods of new Gurgaon one must navigate a network of flyovers and highways on multiple forms of private transport. From the MG Road metro station a shared “tempo” auto-rickshaw will take you down the highway to the IFFCO Chowk flyover. From underneath the flyover, which itself marks out “new” “global” Gurgaon from “old” industrial Gurgaon, one must pick up another shared “tempo”. From IFFCO Chowk the tempo will take you along the service road side of the National Highway 8; squashed between DLF’s private rapid metro network and luxury residential areas on one side, and the expanse of factories in Udyog Vihar on the other. From the gleaming office towers of Cyber Hub the tempo turns left at Shankar Chowk and into the wide-berth gridded avenues of Udyog Vihar industrial estate lined with trees, interrupted every so often by street vendors selling apple juice, salted bananas, chana masala, hot chai and biscuits to more than

42 I am wary of mobilising discourses of “informality” and “exception”, popular within urban studies, to conceptualise the urban village. As Roy (2005) argues narratives of informality and exception often elide the ways in which geographies of value are always already spatially and legally mediated by structures of state power able to bestow legitimacy and illegitimacy upon urban spaces and subjects. Instead I am interested in the vernacular social practices, organised through everyday modes of fractured sovereign power that seek to rationalise and organise the urban village as abstract space.
200,000 casually employed workers who labour in the estate’s factories. The gates of the heavily guarded factories are plastered with worn “avashyakta hai” [wanted] posters advertising casual day work that newly arrived, or recently expunged workers can apply for in the early mornings⁴³.

Figure 5.1: Women waiting to be recruited outside factory gates in Udyog Vihar (Chaudhary 2016).

The tempo navigates across the estate’s avenues periodically dropping workers off at their respective workplaces before finishing the trip at Kapashera Border, a busy junction where Gurgaon borders with Delhi. Here at Kapashera Border, an informal market lines the wide-berth road. Vendors sell fish from paddling pools, tattoo artists lay out their instruments on the road. Here, straddling the Delhi-Haryana border is Kapashera village, the primary workers’ neighbourhood supporting Gurgaon’s garment-export sector.

⁴³ This system appears to bypass the village-urban contractor system that occurs in other industries/regions in India. For the most part workers in Gurgaon access factory jobs by queuing up before dawn to be interviewed and recruited by thekedar at the factory gates, “they come to us” as one thekedar put it to me. In 2015 I carried out interviews with seven thekedars operating in Gurgaon. See Appendix 4.
Figure 5.2: Tempos navigating workers in Udyog Vihar (left); Kapashera Border between Gurgaon and Delhi (right) (Author produced).

The village’s vast network of *galis* [lanes] are rationally planned into grids and hierarchized into three core settlements by the spatial topography and informal maps and plans of the village rentiers (See figure 5.4).

First “old Kapashera” the original village running from “High Voltage Gali” to the Shiv temple at the top of gyara gali [eleventh lane]. This area is noticeably upscale, brightly painted houses, with covered drains and paved lanes. Old Kapashera is where most Yadav landlords and *village rentiers* have their family property and small businesses.

From *gyara gali* to the Gande nala gali [dirty river lane] is Kapashera Central, the core residential area for migrant workers in the village, described by my neighbours as “the birdcage”. Here, Sanjay and other village rentiers introduced in the previous chapter developed dense rental accommodation from the 1990s. Kapashera Central spatially dominates the village and is comprised of a strict repetition of blocks
and lanes, structured and rationalised into a repetitive and consolidating gridded plan. Each (numbered) gali [lane] in the grid comprises a dense series of five-storey (numbered) tenement blocks accommodating around 150-200 people each. Rooms in blocks are rented at ₹ 2,500 a month and are occupied by garment-export workers, either in groups of three to six men or small families to a room. Each gali is lined with open sewers and every twenty metres, with almost exact precision, has one grocery shop, one SIM card shop and one cooking gas shop. Kapashera Central’s highly structuring, numbered galis extend from the old Delhi-Gurgaon road a kilometre north-west up to the luxury farmhouses developed on the village’s agricultural land in the early 1990s.

Finally, Kapashera Border is built on agricultural land outside the village lal dora. The area straddles the Delhi-Gurgaon border and is composed of military-style single-line brick bungalow rooms separated by a single sewerage line. Rooms in the lanes of Kapashera Border are the cheapest form of worker-housing in the core settlement, at around ₹ 1500 a month, and are usually rented to unskilled garment workers, construction workers, scheduled caste cleaning workers, and low-pay informal sector workers.

Figure 5.3: Kapashera Village. Old Kapashera in the north, Kapashera Central in the middle and Kapashera Border in the south (Author produced).
Figure 5.4: “The birdcage”: block and lane housing in Kapashera (GWN 2011).

Figure 5.5: The long, line structure of settlements in Kapashera Border and, on the right, the blocks of Kapashera Central (Author produced).

The highly regimented, militaristic and segregating space of the urban village here provides a variety of functions. The homogenous-repetitive characteristics of both Kapashera Central and Border mark out the bodies of its residents as babari [outsiders]. The dirty river that divides Kapashera Border from Kapashera Central marks out the more relatively secure from the highly precarious and lower-caste migrant communities. The rationalised blocks and rooms of landlord’s accommodation ostensibly fragments
migrants in the village, as quantifiable rent-providing tenants. From a Lefebvrian perspective the blocks and lanes of Kapashera Central and Border – conceived in the plans and sketches of village-rentiers, represent the abstract space of rentier capital. Here localised forms of capital accumulation, postcolonial state planning, the technocratic rationality of village landlords, and relations of caste and territorial belonging rigidly demarcate the space of the urban village along lines of caste, gender and territorial belonging.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Lefebvre’s writings on the repetitive-functional spatial terrain of Mourenx new town would come to remind me of the vernacularly produced abstract space of Kapashera (and indeed many of Gurgaon’s industrial urban villages). Yet, my conceptualisation of the urban villages in Gurgaon differ somewhat from Lefebvre’s critique of the new towns. Lefebvre’s (1978) critique of abstract space hinged upon what he termed the “state mode of production” (SMP) which refers to a particular post-war configuration of state power in the USSR, Europe and North America premised upon hyper-productionism and welfare redistribution (Brenner, 2008). In Gurgaon the state and state power appears in more fractal fashion, the formal state’s role is one of planning and everyday absence, sovereignty here is held in disorderly coalition with rentiers’, industrialists and developers, and is geared more solely toward facilitating frictionless industrial and urban real estate accumulation. Under this specific rendering of the state the production of space is more disjointed, more easily appropriated and contorted.

5.2.2 Block Life
For ten months in 2015 I lived in a tenement block on Kapashera’s central eleventh gali. My block had ten single-rooms on each of five floors separated by a central gangway where clothes were hung to dry, people would sit and drink chai and young children would run around in circles playing games in the early morning. At the end of gangway was a row of metered and padlocked taps which each correspond to a room, two toilet rooms and an enclosed room used by women to bathe. The block is woken at five when the gates are opened, the noisy water pump is turned on and people blast Hindi songs from old radios while cooking food for the day. Most workers in my block came from villages in Vaishali north of Patna in Bihar, with many on my floor originating from the same village, and all worked in some way or another – as tailors, thread-cutters, fabricator-hands, security guards or delivery drivers - in the garment-exports factories. Room turnover in the blocks was high, people moved in and out with high frequency, sometimes due to disputes with the landlord, more commonly due to the seasonal harvest or festivals in Bihar. My room was on the ground floor opposite the room of the block pradhan Kranti. Each morning Kranti would bring me a cup of ghee-topped chai and some vegetables. I might be enlisted to help a new group move in or out with their furniture by the block thekedar, but typically I would sit on my room step with the thekedar while he mocked my Hindi and probed me with questions of life and work in England.

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44 As far as I could ascertain from conversations with landlords across Kapashera, all of the blocks and lanes in Kapashera were developed by a single Yadav contracting company who worked out of Dundahera village and had originally designed the forty-room lay-out, unfortunately I was unable to secure a meeting with the contractor during my field research.
By 9am everyone would have left, Krantiji’s husband would have returned from his twelve hour night shift and collapsed onto my bed and I would go about my day.

The village was overwhelmingly dominated by young men. This is partly due to the masculinisation of garment-export work in the Delhi NCR, the scarcity of space, poor living conditions and extra fees charged by landlords for family members which has generally deterred male workers from bringing their families with them to the city. Nevertheless there are women living in the urban villages and working in the garment-export sector. After a number of years of work in Gurgaon, it is not uncommon for male workers to bring their families to live in the urban villages, often moving out of a shared room to rent a single room for the family. In many cases, due to the high costs of living and increasingly precarious conditions of work, which I will discuss in the second half of the chapter, women take up work in the garment-export sector soon after arriving in the city.

The village’s gridded matrix tenement blocks is every so often interspersed by tailoring training centres where young men and women are trained up on garment-work, dhobi-walas washing and ironing uniforms, dhaba-walas cooking lunches for single men, and informal gyms where young male workers replenish their muscles in the early morning. Other than a small informal bar that occupies a pitch of land between the village and the waste dump on the western side of the village, frequented by young men on chutti [days off], for migrant residents nothing in the neighbourhood is superfluous or utilised for spontaneity or pleasure. Every inch of land is occupied by towering blocks. There are no community clubs nor subaltern temples that marked out working class civil society of nineteenth and twentieth century worker neighbourhoods in Calcutta and Bombay (Fernandes 1997; Roy 2003; Chandarvarkar 1994).

Figure 5.6: Row of padlocked taps on my floor (Author produced).

In Kapashera and Gurgaon’s urban villages gendered divisions of space are integrated and maintained by the particular socio-spatial structuring of everyday life between landlords, shop-floor supervisors and landlords and therefore off limits for most migrant residents. Instead workers’ tend to keep small household shrines in their rooms and celebrate festivals on the block roof away from the disciplinary gaze of the landlords.

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45 My room was preferred as I had no cooking equipment and as such was much cooler than other rooms. As such my room was used by many of my neighbours to relax or sleep in. I paid Krantji a small sum each month to cover the chai and dinners I would join in on.

46 Kapashera’s large Shiv Temple is regularly attended by workers but is ostensibly used as a space of relaxation and leisure for the village’s landlords and therefore off limits for most migrant residents. Instead workers’ tend to keep small household shrines in their rooms and celebrate festivals on the block roof away from the disciplinary gaze of the landlords.
workers themselves. The particular structures of everyday life, much of which is taken up by the twelve hour shift - is such that sociality, time-pass, leisure and so on are temporally constricted to brief moments before and after sleep, and spatially regimented, particularly for women, inside the block room.

Take for example, the most popular outdoor pastime among the itinerant young men, gunne [wandering]. Before and after work, men roam the galis in small groups as a form of exercise or simply as time-pass. Indeed waiting and boredom operate as key spatial practices expressive of a space entirely rationalised toward spontaneity, movement and the impossibility of emplacement in the urban village. Gunne is of course fundamentally a male privilege. It offers men the illusion of the flâneur trapped in the oppressive-repetitive gridded landscape of the urban village. Women living in my block remained inside the block throughout the day or else moved in groups to the factories early in the morning and before sunset in the evening. As discussed in Chapter 2, the discursive and material separation between outside and inside, public and private is a persistent feature of contemporary urban North India (Chatterjee 1988; Rege 1998). In Gurgaon this gendered spatial dynamic is reproduced through the rationalised and mimetic production of everyday life in Kapashera that feminise the fixed, domestic space of the block, and masculinise the mobile materialities of work and the public realm. As Nair highlights in her work in Bangalore: “a complex matrix of gestures, markings, bodily controls, and language enables the safe passage of the woman through the urban space…the privileges of the flâneur…are uniquely male” (Nair, 2005, 302).

In my interviews and discussions with my female neighbours and research respondents, most of whom divided their time between household and factory work, I tried to discern how this explicit gendering of urban space was experienced and felt. My perhaps naïve question - “what do you do in your free-time” - was frequently met with bemusement, confusion or laughter:

“We’ve started going out [of the room] a little…otherwise, we hardly step out. When we get time, we spend it sitting in the room. To go around, you need to know your way, you need to know people…we don’t know anyone at all.


When i’m free?…ahhh well…I like to stay happily in the room. I finish the cooking and the dishes and lie down for a bit…You can’t really mingle with people here. Even the slightest misunderstanding causes big trouble. Better to stay in your room. Isn’t it?”

Sangeeta, Kapashera. Fieldwork interview, January 2015.

This feeling of entrapment was exacerbated somewhat by the highly precarious position of my interlocutors (introduced in the following section) who for the most part had been abandoned by their husbands and male relatives and were managing both relentless conditions of work in the garment-export factories and precarious conditions of reproductive work in the urban villages. Crucially I consider these gendered spatialities, the production of a moral-spatial order in the urban villages not to correspond to
some naturally determined division of gender roles, but to be produced and wrought through particular configurations of power and identity. The production of abstract spaces like the urban village, as Lefebvre (1991) argues, are the spatial practices which political sovereigns utilise to underpin and hold together “whole and broken” space. While these practices are varied and dispersed here I want to draw attention to three key strategies employed by rentiers’ that seek to organise and capture everyday life of the urban village: de-numeration, surveillance and violence.

5.3 Makaan Malik Raj

“No-one here stands up to the landlords, it’s impossible, it’s their rules or find somewhere else to live...there is a landlord union you see - they discuss tenants, fix prices and so it’s difficult to shift rooms in the neighbourhood...we live in this room like birds trapped in a birdcage”

Notes on meeting with Pinky, Kapashera Border

5.3.1 De-numeration

The primary way in which landlords ensure their tenants are maintained as a flexible and placeless form of labour power, is by denying them access to local state-subsidised welfare and electoral registration. According to the census, Kapashera’s population grew from around 20,000 in 2001 to 74,000 in 2011, of which 80% are migrants and 30% are women (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner [ORGCC], India, 2011). Neighbouring Dundahera village, another neighbourhood wherein many garment-export workers reside, grew from 5,000 to 46,000 during the same period.

Figure 5.7: Population of Kapashera urban village (Author produced, ORGCC 2011).

This number is disputed informally by NGOs and local residents who put the figure closer to 200,000. In reality it is incredibly difficult to obtain reliable statistics on Gurgaon’s and the urban villages’ population as most migrant residents hold no formal registration in the city. The 2011 electoral role for Kapashera has only 1300 names as registered to vote in the village (1.7% of the official population)47. While carrying out the household survey explored in the previous chapter, I included questions regarding whether respondents rented out accommodation, how much rent they charged and whether or not they provided

47 This pattern is not unique to Kapashera, the urban villages within the IMT Manesar and New Gurgaon cluster equally shared this characteristic.
registration papers to their tenants. Nearly all respondents did not provide tenants with the necessary paperwork so as to provide them access to local ration cards, *aadhaar* card\(^{48}\), below-poverty-line cards, and employment guarantee subsidies. Landlords would justify this practice by arguing that workers’ high turnover and general footloose character meant that local registration made little sense, or that local registration would allow migrants’ to vote in local elections and thus challenge local Yadav political dominance in the villages, the last remaining territories where local Yadavs held political authority. One landlord and municipal councillor remarked to me that: “If we were to give them papers, we’d have an outsider politician, we don’t want that.”

This muddying of census data represents a mode of subaltern governmentality that breaks from existing literature on ‘census governmentality’ in India’s working-class neighbourhoods (Appadurai, 2001; Ghertner, 2015; McFarlane, 2004). Here it is precisely landlord’s conscious perversion of the census, which obscures State authorities from ‘seeing’ the thousands of residents in Kapashera and urban villages across Gurgaon. While this ensures the impermanence of migrant tenants in the city, it comes with disadvantages for landlords. The practice of withdrawing or obstructing the official presence of workers in the city conversely undercounts urban village population, denying urban villages’ appropriate infrastructure investment which is measured on population size. In addition, urban village *lal dora* boundaries are calculated in relation to official population figures, if the accounted population were to rise, the *lal dora* could potentially be extended allowing village rentiers greater amounts of land to develop rental accommodation thereby expanding their material and territorial power. Nevertheless the threat of losing social and political control in the villages for most landlords far outweighed the benefits of expanding their village property base (Cowan 2015).

Together with dominant employment practices in the garment-export industry that operate through nine month fixed contracts, the denial of residency to migrant working-classes, splits the workers’ social reproduction between the factory – where the vast majority of workers’ time is spent, the urban village, where workers’ momentary daily reproduction is carried out, and the home village, where workers take part in festivals, harvests, marriages, education, vote and are able to access state-subsidised social welfare. In this respect “de-numeration” practices operate to entrench labour circulation and flexibility at the point of reproduction. Drawing from the wealth of scholarship on labour migration in China (Hsing 2010; Smith and Pun, 2006) I conceptualise this vernacular mode of governance as a form of *homegrown hukou*\(^{49}\). In Chinese cities, scholars argue (Hsing 2010) that the communist era urban-rural administration system, *hukou*, dis-locates urban migrant workers’ social reproduction from the city to the home village. While in Gurgaon there is no legal dislocation of social reproduction, the *de facto* practices of village rentier’ essentially stretch apart workers’ day to day lives as workers in the city, their access to state subsidised welfare, land, suffrage, relationships, education and so on, between Gurgaon and their home villages. In this context the capacity to be flexible and mobile is key to navigating Gurgaon’s stretched and

\(^{48}\) A biometric identity card used to distribute state welfare.

\(^{49}\) Here I draw from Roy’s (2011) “homegrown neoliberalism”
contorted geographies of production and reproduction, a capacity as I will discuss in section 4, largely limited to male workers.

In this manner the population of Kapashera, and many urban villages, is markedly effaced, informally made alien and indiscernible to the state only to be seen on the factory shop-floors and the records of the punitive arm of the state. In place of the state census, the landlord’s rent book and collection of village sketches and plans, perform the governmental practice of the vernacular state. This draws our attention to the two-faced character of the urban village. The urban village labour system operates to temporarily fix in a *valorisable abstract* worker-tenant, this fix is highly temporally sensitive: the longer the worker-tenant remains situated the more likely the danger that they will become rooted and make claims to place. Thus simultaneous to this fixing in are spatial practices of landlords which seek to render migrant workers, as “migrant”, placeless and rootless forms of labour power. This two-faced character becomes particularly significant as we begin to examine changing gendered organisations of work, and the feminisation of breadwinning positions in particular, that represent a significant vulnerability to this spatially determined, time-bound mediation of value and waste.50

5.3.2 Krantiji

Beyond this bureaucratic discipline, the landlord rarely if ever directly interferes with the day-to-day rhythms of the workers block or lane. This is delegated to a series of appendages: the block pradhan, the labour thekedar, and ration shop worker. Take for example, Krantiji the *pradhan* [boss] of my block.

Krantiji’s role as block *pradhan* was markedly different from that of *pradhans* that feature in the existing literature (Jha et al., 2007; Srivastava, 2015). Typically ascribed to basti settlements but also a term used to describe senior village figures, *pradhans* are senior figures in a neighbourhood that control relationships with the formal state, managing political access and infrastructure delivery and mediating a community’s relationship to other neighbourhoods and spatial scales. As Srivastava (2015, 7) notes, “the urban pradhan is a master of the hybrid cultural and social economies of the city that relate to the poor…on behalf of whom he negotiates with the world beyond the basti”. Krantiji is decidedly not this pradhan. Krantiji works as the landlord’s eyes and ears in the block, operating in a double fashion, ordering and rationalising behaviours and every day rhythms inside the block and monitoring and regulating the block’s relationship to the outside neighbourhood. If Gurgoan is to be thought of as an entire city of informality (Gururani 2013) where state power is topographically constituted, emerging through a variety of multi-scalar actors – the RWA, the private developer, the village landlord – the block pradhan is one sovereign actor in a “honeycomb” (Holston and Appadurai, 1999) of jurisdictions, obstructing ‘vernacular’ relations between the ‘urban poor’ and the State, which appear in much subaltern urbanist literature.

Krantiji was in her mid-40s, originally from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, she lived with her husband who worked fourteen hour shifts as a security guard at a garment-exports factory, and eighteen year old

50 See Gidwani (2008a) and Wright’s (2006) analyses of the dialectic of value and waste.
daughter who worked part-time as a phlebotomist at an informal clinic at the end of my gali. Krantiji collected, negotiated and delayed rents with all the tenants in the block, she held keys to all the rooms, organised the payment and bonus of the cleaning workers, operated the water pump, screened incoming residents and held authority over the behaviour and movement of workers in the block, arranged advances for people in between temporary contracts and stalled payments to the landlord. Each morning she would open up the gates to the block and each evening at 10pm she locked them again enforcing a curfew on the movements and freedoms of the residents. In short, Krantiji managed and regulated the day to day governance of flexibility in the workers’ block. Krantiji’s authority reinforced gendered codes of mobility, work and morality within a space dominated by precarity, flexibility and mobility. There were figures like Krantiji in each of the hundreds of blocks in Kapashera and in rental blocks across Gurgaon. I would often stop to chat with them as I visited blocks across the city to carry out interviews. A high proportion of pradhans were women, perhaps due to its situation with the domestic space of the tenement block. Krantiji’s authority within the block was premised on an essential domesticity, structured by a moral order that re-establishes women’s role as sovereigns of the domestic sphere. While Krantiji would scold male tenants for missing payments, drinking, fighting or not tending appropriately to their wives and children, she would rarely if ever leave the building itself. She sent out younger women to fetch rations or groceries, and would sit with her overweight guard dog Monti overseeing the lane and taking requests for directions and rooms from newly arrived or internally displaced tenants. Her jurisdiction, embedded within a multi-scalar network of jurisdictions, forms part of the dispersed power of the urban village which reproduces migrant worker flexibility and transience within the workers’ neighbourhood.

5.3.3 Violence

One Saturday I sat in the doorway of a room on a newly constructed lane in Kapashera Border with Rohit. Rohit was married to one of the women that attended the weekly Nari Shakti Manch meetings in Kapashera, we had met at the meetings and I would often stop to chat with him on my walks around the neighbourhood. Despite having a college-level education, Rohit was unemployed. Originally from Bihar, Rohit had come to Kapashera in 2010 with his brother to work in the garment-export companies although didn’t enjoy the stressful and what he saw as demeaning conditions of work. Through a contact with the lane thekedar (maintenance supervisor) Rohit got a driving license and a job as a driver for the management of a call centre. Soon after he negotiated to drive for his block landlord whenever needed, driving around Delhi and Gurgaon. Rohit and his wife had a son living and attending school in Bihar and made frequent trips to see him. After refusing to work night-shifts, both Rohit and his wife (who worked in a garment-exports company and was the main household breadwinner) were evicted from their room and had to find somewhere else to live. Rohit had managed to find a room in a lane a hundred meters deeper into Kapashera border. I sat with Rohit and we began to discuss daily life in Kapashera over the past five years. We discussed a recent incident at the factory that his wife worked at where two hundred workers were dismissed for attempting to register a factory union with the labour department. It had long occurred to me that while structurally weak and invisible to the State in both the factory and the
neighbourhood, migrant workers’ collective political practice came through much more explicitly on the factory shop-floors and workplaces than it did in Kapashera were there was seldom collective protest. I asked Rohit why there was such an absence of collective resistance to landlord rule in Kapashera. His neighbour interjected that workers’ are “little people” with “very little education” they don’t know their rights. Frustrated by both of our insinuations, Rohit remarked that:

“The landlords are dominant [majboot] here, we’re outsiders…in Kapashera it’s much more dangerous [than the factories] the locals here kill people. In our village there is a panchayat system which provides support, in Kapashera there is nothing…It’s not a matter of education, we know about rights. Here, we have no one to turn to, there is no police, no union, no panchayat…If I raise my hand I need someone reaching down to help me, and then I can grab onto it – we don’t have this.”

The final component of makaan malik raj that I would like to highlight is the use of and threat of violence by landlords in the urban village. Conversations with my neighbours in Kapashera were littered with references and stories of episodic outbursts of violence and extortion directed toward tenants. Sometimes violence was meted out upon tenants who refused to purchase groceries from the landlord’s ration shop, other times due to late payments. Violence was used as way in which to re-establish gendered, caste and local-based spatial hierarchies across the village. These stories and experiences operated alongside the more discrete disciplinary forms of power of figures like Krantiji, to inscribe landlord sovereign power into the everyday textures of life in the block. Sangeeta, a garment-exports worker living in Kapashera described this looming presence of violence as such:

“You cannot unite because there are so many kinds of landlords you cannot fathom… the other day they were beating up a man in the neighbourhood. He was a hefty fellow, seemed from Haryana but was from Bihar. He had gone home for two months without informing the landlord of his absence. They had made him strip naked in the bitter cold and were whipping him with a jagged stick…blood running down his fair skin…I could not eat for two days after that. My husband says this is why…one must never get too familiar with the Landlord.”

Like Datta (2016) I understand these mobilisations of urban violence as not only a prosaic aspect of everyday urban life for many migrant workers, but one which equally shapes and affects migrant workers’ imagined place and temporary status within the city, and ultimately inscribes a certain degree of flexibility and mobility at the point of reproduction. The frequency of narratives of violence, as I will return to in section 5, also draw our attention to the role that violence plays in “bulldozing” everyday life into abstract space (Wilson, 2009, 2014). The violence of the urban village (as abstract space) operates through a number of scales. As Wilson (Wilson, 2014) highlights, the violence of abstract space materialises structurally through the reproduction of rationalised, disciplined space of property and exchange, symbolically through the bureaucratic organisation of a space of accumulation, and directly through practices of sovereign power (Ibid 520). The dialectical movement between these modes of violence thus mobilise, integrate and discipline social difference in order to underpin conditions of accumulation.
In this section I have sought to sketch out the ways in which the reproduction of labour power through the urban village relies on both dispersed, disciplinary power – the everyday regulation of workers’ movements and moral conduct – and spectacular, episodic acts of violence. Sovereignty over the block is transposed into subsidiary agents, the materialities of the psychologically dominating structures of the neighbourhood, and an everyday environment dominated by the looming presence of violence.

In this manner, Gurgaon’s urban villages can be thought of as abstract space, the coming together of a re-scaled state eager to facilitate real estate and industrial capital and ameliorate landowning communities and rentier’s technocratic ambitions to produce an alienated space of rental extraction that hinge upon particular representational, symbolic and material practices that seek to control and capture everyday life. The spatial hegemony of block life in Kapashera, is induced through the integration and maintenance of fragmented “minimal” differences (Lefebvre 1991) – those mediated between everyday life and global-national structures of capital – materialise through the situated family-unit, patriarchal household-relations, and spatial fragments of class, caste and bahari-ness. It is precisely these differential conditions which provide the immanent conditions of disruption detailed in Chapter 6. In this manner the urban village, does not only operate as an exemptive planning technology which enriches subaltern rentiers, nor as simply a mode of organising transient labour power. In addition the urban village mediates and materialises the awkward relationship between the disposability of labour power on the one hand, and the instrumental value of labour power on the other. This is evocative of McKittrick’s (2011) work on the plantation in North America, a historically specific spatial form which was premised upon both holding black lives in-place and extracting their value, yet simultaneously rendering them placeless and disposable.

The urban village operates as a similar fixing point and “vital node” (Gidwani and Maringanti 2016) for suturing together fractions of subversive labour and capital. For the purposes of this chapter however, I am interested in more than simply using Lefebvre’s abstract space as a way in which to describe a re-present the function of Gurgaon’s urban villages. Rather I am interested in the dialectical manner through which integral differences are induced, negotiated and put to work. The organisation of difference into repetitive, functional sets is not predetermined by the violent designs of rentier-capitalists, these differential spatialities are not transhistorical or fixed to an abstract North Indian “culture”. Rather they reflect a negotiated spatio-moral order that is constituted and reconstituted through discourses and practices of workers, production processes in the factory and what migrant workers term the makaan malik raj, landlord rule. Crucially, despite the seeming homogeneity and everyday discipline of urban villages like Kapashera, as Lefebvre notes “abstract space is not homogenous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, it’s lens” (Lefebvre 1991, 287) what Goonewardena refers to as refers to as the “will to abstract” (2008, 128, in Wilson 2009, 40).

The urban village system is organised around conditions of “minimal” and “induced” differences, those empirical, repetitive sets which Lefebvre (1991, 372) argues are sutured together in a system “generated according to a particular law”. Yet simultaneously, “maximal” differences those which “presupposes the
shattering of a system” (ibid, 372) internally cohere as an incomprehensible set of discourses and practices. I conceptualise these minimal and maximal differences to be internal and immanent conditions, fraught and negotiated over within discursive, ideological and uncaptured terrains. In the section 4, utilising interview and ethnographic observation, I will begin to open up my critique of structuralist accounts of social reproduction and explore how the gender discourses and practices of work, within the space of the household and urban village, actively shape the reproduction of what Katz (2001) terms “life’s work”. First however the following section will briefly outline processes of labour flexibilisation in Gurgaon’s garment-export sector.

5.4 Labour flexibility in Gurgaon’s garment-export sector

As discussed in Chapter 1, Gurgaon and the Delhi NCR’s garment-exports industry took shape following the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1992 marking the beginning of a period of extensive labour deregulation and removal of tariffs to readymade garment exports. From the early 1990s garment-export industries began to expand across the Delhi NCR’s three industrial clusters (Okhla; NOIDA; Gurgaon). Following the expulsion of much industry from Delhi in the late 1990s, much of the city’s export industry shifted to the large, unregulated, cheap plots of Udyog Vihar industrial estate in Gurgaon (Sharan, 2002). Between 2004 and 2010, the number of garment factories in Delhi decreased by 9%, while Haryana saw an increase of 64%; with particular steep increases (160%) in the number of units employing more than 250 employees (Mezzadri and Srivastava 2015) (See figure 5.9). Many of the plots in Udyog Vihar had been made vacant after the city’s auto supply chain moved operation to cheaper plots in IMT Manesar in the mid-1990s. By the mid-2000s following the end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement, the export industry took particular hold in the city; between 2004 and 2010 the number of garment-export units in Gurgaon increased by 180% (ibid).

The flexible, precarious conditions of work in Gurgaon’s garments-export industry is the product of decades of labour deregulation at the national and regional scale together with particular transformations in the organisation of production from the 1980s onwards as detailed in Chapter 1. While I use the terms “flexibilisation” and “informalisation” in some respects interchangeably, it should be noted that “informalisation” refers to a general restructuring and weakening of labour conditions (detailed in Chapter 1) through liberalisation or non-application of labour legislation, while “flexibilisation” refers to specific transformations in the (re)production process itself, facilitated by informalisation, whereby industrialists seek to reproduce a hypermobile, un-skilled yet multi-tasked working-subject employed on short-term precarious contracts (Vanamala 2001).

Historically, the Delhi NCR textiles industry had operated across hundreds of fragmented small-scale, informal units that specialised in skilled embroidery, lacework and high-end, small-batch production. In this regard, unlike garment-exports in South Indian clusters such as Bangalore and Tirrupur, the

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Labour law deregulation at both the central and state level have for example permitted contract labour across all aspects of the production line, established self-certification procedures, permitted flexible hire and fire policies, increased maximum working hours and exempt workers from collective bargaining rights under the Industrial Disputes Act 1975. It should be noted that labour legislation is rarely if ever implemented.
flexibilisation of Gurgaon’s garment-exports sector was achieved without the permanent feminisation of the workforce, but rather through the consolidation of scattered “fabricator” production into large industrial units, and the concurrent introduction of chain-system tailoring (de-skilling of the labour force). Mazumdar (2007) notes that transitions between small-scale informal production to export-led mass production in the late 1990s, was met with a brief period of feminisation as employment of women increased to close to 20%, but by 1998 this figure dropped to 15%.

**Figure 5.8: Number of workers engaged in the Garment-export sector 1998-2008, (Annual Survey of Industries, GOI 1998/99-2007/08)**

In contrast to other parts of the Delhi NCR, Gurgaon’s garment industry is nearly entirely export-led (88%) and chiefly consists of large consolidated units. As of 2009, there were 675 readymade garment units in Gurgaon, employing around 100,000 workers including 15,000 women (Mezzadri and Srivastava 2015). The cluster specialises in woven, outer-wear and fashion products, and is worth US $10.64 billion with a projected year on year growth of 15% (Jain, 2010).

Nationally the share of contracted labour in the garment industry (hired on three to six month contracts through a network of labour *thekedars* [contractors]) rose from 79% in 2005 to 86% in 2012, while an estimated 52% of those employed within Gurgaon’s organised garments industry are hired as contract workers (Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015). Workers on garment factory shop-floors earn between ₹ 3500 and ₹ 7000, and typically work twelve hour shifts. As statutory minimum wages are calculated for a nine hour working day, only an estimated 0.6% of Gurgaon’s garment workforce receive the statutory minimum wage (Manicandan et al 2006).

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52 Small-scale informal units.
53 Figure 5.9 demonstrates the prolific increase in garment-export work in Haryana between 1998 and 2008, all of which is concentrated in Gurgaon-Manesar. The chart does not demonstrate the stark decrease in garment manufacturing work in New Delhi partly because the “Delhi” category includes the Noida and Okhla satellite towns where some garment-export work equally shifted to from the early 2000s.
54 This data is taken from unit-level ASI records, and rely on ‘registered contract workers’ and so does not account for large numbers of non-registered contract and casual workers in the industry. When accounted for, some including Mezzadri and Srivastava (2015) put the NCR figure closer to 90%.
### Table 5.2: Wage structures in Gurgaon garment-export sector (SLD, 2013) *From fieldwork 2015.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of worker</th>
<th>Tailor</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>Checker</th>
<th>Ironer</th>
<th>Stitcher</th>
<th>Helper</th>
<th>Piece Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment category</strong></td>
<td>Regular/Casual</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>Regular/Casual</td>
<td>Regular/Casual</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contract</strong></td>
<td>Permanent/Contractor</td>
<td>Permanent/Contractor</td>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of skill</strong></td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Semi-skilled</td>
<td>Semi-skilled</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>Skilled/semi-skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gendered</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Wage</strong></td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>5500</td>
<td>5300</td>
<td>5200</td>
<td>&lt;5400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overtime rate (monthly)</strong></td>
<td>1620</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>1380</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>1380</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual harassment reported</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.9 Garment exports-sector contract type (Field work 2015)**

![Garment exports-sector contract type (Field work 2015)](image)
In contrast to the city’s automobile sector which has a long history of labour activism and high levels of union activity, the historic organisation of the Delhi NCR’s garments industry into multiple, small-scale informal units has contributed to persistent ‘informality’ and an absence of a strong union culture. As such, disputes between workers and management depend on personal leverage and small, collective actions on the shop-floor; go-slows, factory-breaking, and individualised negotiations of wage increases. Overt disputes typically result either in dismissal, quiet negotiation or rioting.

5.4.1 Aadarshplex
Take for example, one of Gurgaon’s largest export units, that I will call Aadarshplex. Aadarshplex specialise in outerwear, and claim to be the largest exporter of jackets in India. The company operate across five units in Gurgaon, wherein 6000 workers, including 1800 women workers, are hired on three to six month contracts through a variety of sub-contractors. They export around 200,000 pieces a year to retailers in Europe and North America and have an annual turnover of US $60 million. The organisation of production at the company is characteristic of garment-export companies across the Delhi NCR. Production operates through a chain system, wherein each individual component of the garment is stitched by a separate worker all seated in a line. On my visit to the factory shop-floor women were predominately engaged in thread-cutting and piece-rate sampling work. During my tour of the factory I asked the shop-floor supervisor how he accounted for the high proportion of women working in the factory (Aadarshplex employed twice the average number of women working in the sector in Gurgaon). The supervisor nonchalantly remarked, perhaps misunderstanding my question that most male workers

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55 As stated by the company records, hard to ascertain the reliability of these figures.
do not want their wives and daughters to work, only the very poor households send their “girls” to work in the factories. The Aadarshplex managing director (MD) explained the company’s approach to labour flexibilisation as such:

“Tom, you see we are still very dependent on labour, we go wherever the labour prices are low…When we first shifted to Gurgaon from Delhi [in the 1990s] we stumbled around for the first few years not making much profit…but we did our research, we looked into education rates, labour costs, and the dexterity of our employees’ hands”.

The MD noted that the transition into chain-production systems in his units in the 1990s:

“Enabled us to shift away from high-skilled labour, we were able to take decisions away from the worker, we can change how he would want to work– taking his choice away” (Emphasis added by author).

The MD remarked that the automation and de-skilling of the production process was key to tackling high labour costs which he attributed to archaic labour legislation that resisted market flexibility. In the same breath, the manager decried the impact the transition had on labour retention noting that the policy had led to a significant “labour scarcity”. The company have a 40% attrition rate, which the MD attributed to a “culture of restlessness” among workers; their willingness to move employers for “just a little extra money”. The MD’s account in this manner both described flexibilisation drives as a demand for corporeal control over the production process, transitioning his workforce from skilled to unskilled and therefore flexible; and yet contraditorily attributed this flexibility to “migrant cultures” of turnover. In doing so, the MD echoes narratives that position labour turnover as a natural inevitability of working with “rural people” despite quite explicit structural transformations which have required the dislocation of (re)production and the significant flexibilisation of labour power.

The MD’s account is characteristic of Taylorist management practices that utilise technological advances to de-skill workers and deepen the alienation of the production process (Braverman, 1974). Yet, the MD argued that despite high turnover the company retained, what he termed “our pillars”, long-standing workers that the MD claimed had progressed from unskilled ‘helpers’ to lower-management positions. The MD’s account of “our pillars” (perhaps highlighted to pacify my questions concerning labour flexibility) and his company’s high attrition rates point to the awkward relationship between achieving flexibility through de-skilling and, what Burawoy terms “manufacturing consent” (1979) habituating and consolidating workers as “family” within the production process. It is the contention of this chapter, that “consent” or complicity for flexible conditions of work operates on two terrains. First, I locate this process of ideological capture, as playing out on a hegemonic terrain that extends out of the factory and management discourses, to the spatial practices, institutions of power and everyday discourses within the urban village. Second, “manufacturing consent” (ibid) pivots on gendered discourses, identities and practices that are shaped and negotiated through the household relation. What is clear on the shop-floors
of Gurgaon is that consenting “family members” are always men, the shop-floor and urban village remain key terrains of conflict over gender roles, divisions of labour and job and personal security for female workers. The second half of this chapter will now draw from interview and ethnographic research in Gurgaon to explore the discursive and material gendered mediations within everyday life that shape disorderly forms of abstract labour which underpin Gurgaon’s urbanisation.

5.5 Gendering Work

I first met Sangeeta on a sunny February afternoon on the roof of a workers block in Kapashera. Sangeeta worked as a tailor in a fabricator in Kapashera, working an 8am to 8pm shift, on a piece-rate earning ₹5000 (US $75) a month56. Her income supports her husband and two children. We were introduced at a weekly meeting of Nari Shakti Manch [NSM] on the roof of a block of informal garment units57. Sangeeta presumed she was in her mid-20s, originally from the small northern city of Gorakhpur and had lived in Dundahera urban village for around eight years. She had spent the previous eight years moving between various positions - thread-cutting, stitching, finishing - in a number of garment-export factories in Udyog Vihar and unorganised garment fabricators in Kapashera. She had never held a permanent position. We sat on the far corner of the roof overlooking Kapashera’s busy Veer wali gali [Hero’s Lane] that leads off the old Delhi-Gurgaon road through the centre of the village, over looked Fun’n’Food a large water theme park frequented by South Delhi and Gurgaon’s upper-classes, developed on former village land.

The roofs of Kapashera provide one of the only free-spaces for leisure for workers in the urban village, a brief respite from the tightly packed and heavily surveyed tenement blocks and galis. On the roofs of Kapashera, away from the disciplining gaze of landlords and pradhans of the blocks and galis, women sit together in circles chatting, boys play cricket, and young men huddle around mobile phones listening to Hindi songs. In the summers the roof is used as a mass bed space for residents eager to escape the trapped heat of the rooms and on Diwali and Surya puja, people assemble to set off fireworks and watch the more lavish displays of the neighbouring farm-villas. It is incredibly rare to find landlords or labour contractors on the roof, they are contained spaces of free sociality in neighbourhoods dominated by disciplinary surveillance.

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56 Like most in Dundahera and Kapashera, Sangeeta pays out ₹3000 of her ₹5000 wage in rent with utilities to her landlord.
57 NSM, who will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6, did not formally unionise garment-export workers, but provided a space each Sunday afternoon for women in Dundahera and Kapashera to meet and discuss workplace and neighbourhood issues, provide information on factory facilities and seek support in contesting dismissals or evictions.
Sangeeta explained to me how she came to live in Gurgaon:

“We came here to earn a living. We didn’t lack anything [at home]…I already had a quota [of work] for myself [but] there was a quarrel with my father-in-law, so we had to leave. It was regarding a job. My husband was requesting them to get him a job and asked them to invest thirty thousand [US $450] for his bribe…But my father-in-law refused. So my husband poisoned himself. All of this trouble, for a job. Poisoned himself. I had only been married then, my gauna58 hadn’t even taken place yet…my in-laws informed us that he had poisoned himself and that there was very little chance of saving him…besides me, all of my family members - all of them had arrived at my in-laws’. They stayed over in Gorakhpur for a month-a month and a half. Then our fields were sold to pay for the medications…”

I asked Sangeeta why her husband didn’t want to work in agriculture like she had, she replied:

“No, no! He didn’t want to do work [kaam karna], he wanted to do a job [naukri karna]!”

In Sangeeta’s case, the reproduction of the household, hinged upon her husband’s access to a job or her compulsion to work. While everyday life in the workers’ tenement block in Kapashera, regulated by makaan malik raj, operates to reproduce a precarious and transient migrant tenant-worker spatially and temporally dislocated from sites and practice of social reproduction. Sangeeta’s account demonstrates how household relations, and particular gendered discourses and practices of work play a role in shaping the organisation of flexible production and social reproduction.

In this section I will explore the slow and uneven movement of migrant women into household breadwinner and wage-earning roles. This movement resembles Roy’s (2003) study of urban poverty in

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58 Ceremony which marks the bride’s move into the household of the groom’s family.
Kolkata, that highlights the “double gendering” at play in Kolkata slums; as male workers embrace conditions of unemployment or permanent labour circulation, their female relatives move into wage earning roles to support the household income. Although female employment within Gurgaon’s garment-export sector remains relatively low (15%) compared to garment hubs in south India, while carrying out this study I followed a series of households wherein women had taken on the primary breadwinning role. Here I am interested in how the material and discursive reproduction of a “flexible” labour power is wrought through particular gender relations and in turn, how the iterative feminisation of breadwinning roles presents new challenges to regimes of labour flexibilisation premised upon the hypermobile, male worker. In doing so I locate the conditions of labour market decisions and systems outside the seemingly bounded space of the factory or workshop, and seek to draw into the material social practices of the household and everyday life. In doing so, I am interested in how the shifting discourses and practices that cleave im/mobilised, non/working subject-positions around gender. In doing so I draw attention to the deep contradictions between “flexible” modes of accumulation which demands a highly “labile” and “unmoored” working body, and practices and materialities of social reproduction which often take place in bounded space (Smith and Winders 2008).

Sangeeta’s life history highlights the manner in which gendered meanings and values of work, expressed through the household relation, frame labour’s availability as a form of variable capital. In this way abstract labour, materialised across gender as “work” and “jobs” is organised as much through material and discursive practices of gendering, as structural systems of social reproduction explored in the first half of the chapter. Women’s role in the reproduction of the workforce required for ongoing capitalist accumulation here is not limited to carrying out unwaged social reproductive labour, it extends to the physical substitution of workers wasted or rendered absent by flexible regimes of production (Wright 2006).

There is a wealth of scholarship that has highlighted the role of “women’s work” on the factory shop-floor and production process (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Salzinger, 2003). Some scholars have focused on how processes of workforce feminisation depend on broader social gendered discourses of feminine docility and expendability (Elson and Pearson 1981), more recently scholars have focused on how management gender discourses operate to reproduce a flexible, feminine labour power directly through the point of production (Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006). My concern is slightly different, I am interested in how gendered discourses and practices within everyday life which bind women to the immutable space of the home, articulate and conflict with practices on the shop-floor which demand a circulating and flexible workforce. The woman worker in Gurgaon is thus constituted as androgynous (Roy 2003) straddling a masculine world of work and a feminine world of the domestic. In this context, the dis-location of workers’ social reproduction depicted in the first half of the chapter, is fixed-in by the emergence of the woman worker.
5.5.1 Freedom and the masculinisation of flexibility

Sachin

Sat in a recently abandoned workers’ room in Rampura, whose previous occupiers had clearly departed in a hurry - leaving blankets, floor cushions and cutlery - I was in conversation with Sachin a thirty-year old originally from Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh who had moved to Gurgaon with a school friend to find work. We had met that evening in order to sort through new editions of the Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar that we would be distributing the following morning at 5am before the A-shifts began in IMT Manesar. The FMS headline detailed the short uprising in Udyog Vihar the previous month, when garment-export workers attacked factory buildings, cars and delivery trucks in response to an incident of physical abuse directed at a tailor. The report ominously ends noting that what began with half a dozen workers intensified into a riot involving ten thousand workers; “500 policemen were deployed...machines and factory buildings were targeted, 100 cars were damaged [but] no one was arrested, by evening all was normal again” (FMS 2015). The riot in Udyog Vihar was over just as it began. The events sent shockwaves through Kapashera, that day I walked past the ruins of burnt out lorries and the smashed windows of the factory on my way home, where the police were patrolling the galis on look-out for potential suspects while everyone stood crowded on the doorsteps of the blocks each sharing their own version of events – the tailor had been murdered; the rioters were hired by the company in order to clear out workers, and so on. In conversation with neighbours who worked at the factory, many of the rioters were said to have simply moved on, picked up and moved to other urban villages in Gurgaon and other workplaces. The following day the factory was back in operation.

During my research, carrying out distributions of FMS and residing in the worker dormitory these kinds of disputes were reported on a weekly basis, and were discussed by workers in my block with a level of matter-of-fact sobriety that jarred with the righteous displays of working-class struggle within the auto-worker struggles in 2011-2012 (See Chapter 1).

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59 Detailed in Chapter 3. A worker-run newsletter operating across Gurgaon, Okhla, and Faridabad industrial areas that publishes short accounts from workers of workplace relations, events, etc.
Sachin and I sat on the open roof of the building, lit by large sodium lights and shadowed by half-built towers as we sort through and count editions of the newsletter. After some small-talk I asked Sachin where he worked. “Work? I work everywhere”, he replied laughing. Noting my confusion he straightened up and added, “See, right now, I work in an auto-parts company here in IMT Manesar.”

There had been a three month long strike at the sister plant to Sachin’s factory over the previous winter but Sachin took little interest in discussing it other than to remark that he saw no likely resolution to their cause. It initially struck me as strange that someone like Sachin, who was actively engaged in labour activism with FMS, would be so dismissive of work-place activism in his own company. Our conversation turned toward Sachin’s time in Gurgaon as a whole, I asked if he had worked in other companies previously, to which he exclaimed: “Of course! I have worked here for ten years now - in garments, pharmaceuticals, auto-parts, leather, shoes, electronics…here nothing is permanent, we go back to the village, change jobs - we work, change rooms as we like, we’re outsiders [bahari log] here!”

While finishing off the batch of newsletters I asked Sachin what he planned to do next, he had worked in Gurgaon for so long I wondered if he had plans to settle here in the city. This formed part of my incessant curiosity to discern the migrants’ place in the city that I discuss in greater depth in Chapter 6.

“Future?” He replied laughing; “There is no future – tomorrow I could go to another city, the future is not in our thinking”.

This despondency toward accessing secure work was repeated to me by many male workers during my time carrying out research in Gurgaon. Indeed for many men, including Sachin, these conditions of flexibility, were a fundamental aspect of being a worker in the contemporary period; ‘here we have freedom’.

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60 The strike at the partner factory to Sachin’s took place within a sector which, unlike garment-exports, has experienced sustained worker struggle over the past few years as discussed in Chapter 6. There have been two notable formal strikes in Gurgaon’s garment-export sector in the past ten years, both organised by the Garment and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), a union-NGO affiliated with the New Trade Union Initiative. The first strike in 2010, workers appealed for a wage increment. The company responded by dismissing all contract workers. GAWU drew in support from international union networks and pressured buyers to drop the contracts with the company. The company ceased production in 2011. The second strike in 2013 was participated in by 200 workers following the dismissal of a couple of workers who attempted to register a union. After two weeks of protest, the dismissed workers were re-hired, but both the company and labour department refused to register the union.
a common, somewhat self-satirising response to my persistent questions about the precarious conditions of their life and work.

Sachin’s remarks reminded me of those made by the protagonist of Aman Sethi’s acclaimed novel *Free Man* (2012). Ashrafbhai, a day-labourer who has flitted from organised manufacturing, street-hustling, construction work and series of odd-jobs throughout his life, extolls the benefits of working precariously on day-rate [dehadi]. He narrates a story wherein a contractor begins paying his workers the promised rate only to reduce the promised amount each week, by the fourth week the contractor is in debt to his own workers, who are now compelled to work in order to recall the debt. The protagonist remarks, “What are you now[?]… A gulam! A slave. A khacchar, a mule with neither kamai [earnings] nor azadi [freedom]. Which is why the best way to earn is on dehadi.”

Sachin’s narration of the past decade of working in low-paid, temporary jobs in Gurgaon – evocative of Sethi’s *Free Man* – reveals two key characteristics of Gurgaon’s industrial sector. First, Sachin’s experiences of numerous modes of work and job-skill are quintessential characteristics of the contemporary flexibilised worker, able to manoeuvre and negotiate between temporary contracts at different factories, skill-up for new tasks and move freely and autonomously across different urban spaces. Sachin, and many of my male neighbours and interlocutors’ ambivalent attitude toward precarious work hinges precisely upon an identity premised upon conditions of autonomous mobility, rationalised by many male workers as their azadi [freedom].

Second, the capacity and willingness to access azadi is not only the distinct privilege of male workers, it also fundamentally shapes a dominant mode of politics engaged in by garment-export workers characterised by riot, sabotage and spontaneous exiting. In all my conversations and encounters with migrant male workers, especially those working in the garment-export sector, there was very little appetite for workplace resistance, unionisation or overt struggle. Such is characteristics of work in many sectors in Gurgaon contestations over pay, working conditions or poor treatment are rarely met with sustained, situated work-based struggles, but rather responsive to the careful balance of earning kamai or tankha [wages] – the word for wages that my neighbours used - and maintaining one’s azadi. While labour scholars might point to the combination of, an absence of “structural” or “associational” power (Silver, 2003; Wright, 2000) among footloose male workers within a footloose industrial sector, or the vested entanglement of interests between the state and industrialists to prevent union registration, Sachin’s account draws attention to ways in which male working-class identity is entangled with the logics and materialities of flexible work (see Hart, 1991). Crucially, narratives of azadi feed into the production of gendered everyday life described in the first half of the chapter articulating with the fixed order of the household, and to some extent feminisation of wage-earning roles in the household. This masculinised perspective on freedom and work is echoed in the editorials of FMS:

“Ebullitions all around, unshackling factories. Taking away the occupation of factories by the management. Making factories unfettered spaces for collective gathering. Creating environments that
invite the self, others, the entire world to be seen anew. Ceaseless conversation, deep sleep, thinking, exchange of ideas. Sudden immersion of many in relays of songs. Inventing new relationships and whirling in the currents of possibilities that are opened up in collective living.”

Excerpt from Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar, April 2014.

Excerpts from worker accounts taken for Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar, November 2015

Company: Modelama (Garment-exports)  
Industrial Estate: IMT Manesar

On the 26th October twenty five workers (both male and female) who had collectively left their jobs the previous week returned to receive their final payments. The thekedar [contractor] came to the gate but refused to give the final month’s salary. The workers slapped and beat the thekedars forcing their way into the factory and then into the HR department. The manager was very panicky, saying “sit, sit” we will pay you. By 3pm all of their money was paid.

Company: Kalmakari Designs (Specialist garments-exports)  
Industrial Estate: Udyog Vihar

More than 700 workers working in the factory. In September the factory was closed for two days ye ESI/PF [pension and social security payments] were taken for both days. This year the company didn’t give a Holi bonus, so all 700 workers stopped work on the line. All production stopped for the entire day, then two days advance was given, but a bonus was not given. Meanwhile, the company announced wages would increase from November 1st.

Jitender

Take for example my neighbour in the dormitory, Jitender. Jitender, like many workers in Kapashera, was from Gaya in Bihar and migrated to Kapashera around 2005 to work in the garment-exports companies. Jitender shared a room with five other men – all in their early 20s – in the room two doors down from mine. It was incredibly common for groups of young men to share rooms in the tenement blocks in Kapashera. Typically five to six men sleep in shifts and pool rent as well as cooking and washing responsibilities. In my building around half of the fifty rooms were shared in this way. Jitender’s room was shared by six men, who slept in shifts, half taking night-shift work and sleeping during the day, while the other half worked the day shifts. The room was in constant flux, of red-eyed men ambling into the building in the morning as their freshly bathed and groomed roommates departed for the day’s work. On the odd Sunday or national holiday I would sit in the room and attempt to play cards with the whole group, although they were otherwise seldom all in the room at the same time.

Jitender works on a three month contract hired through a rotating contractor as a tailor earning ₹ 8000 a month. Every three months Jitender moves back to Bihar to visit his wife and children for one month before returning and taking employment back at his previous employer or elsewhere. He has worked in a
total of three companies since arriving in Gurgaon. Both Jitender and his roommate Raja wake at 5am, they take turns to wash and cook three meals for the day, they leave at 7.30am and work the 8am to 8pm shift. Unlike some of the families on my floor, Jitender’s room does not have a television nor any notable furniture beyond a mat on the floor and some hanging cooking equipment: “we have no time [for television] we don’t even have time for cards, here we are always working”. The working conditions of Jitender and his roommates in other words, are exemplary of dominant conditions of precarious and flexible life and work in Gurgaon. The spatio-temporalities of Jitender's reproduction as a “worker” were fragmented across tea-breaks, shop-floor relationships and brief moments in the dormitory room; Jitender’s domestic realm, like so many other workers, is ostensibly a factory shop-floor (Mitchell et al 2001).

I sat with Jitender one evening as we both read a local newspaper which noted the increase in the Haryana minimum wage, a wage which Jitender was not, and likely would not be receiving. While Haryana has some of the highest minimum wages in the country, statutory wages are rarely if ever implemented (Barnes et al 2015). In response to my continuous protestations on his behalf, Jitender remarked “It is not use complaining about this, we’re outsiders only…we are here to work”. More important for Jitender was that his powerlessness was not the defining characteristic of his working life. Of course like most he works because he has to earn money to send home to his family, but in our evening conversations together he would persistently refuse a characterisation of working life as suffering, rather he repeated a characterisation of his working life as one of freedom [azadi]:

“Sometimes we work, then we go back to the village, then we come back, then we work more…this is our freedom [humare azadi].”

Jalal

Another neighbour in my block, Jalal, originally from Bihar had come to Gurgaon two years previously. Jalal had worked in a garments unit in Udyog Vihar but recently, through a contact in his village, gained employment at a local NGO office that provided legal representation for migrants in the city. At the office he worked on the field, distributing information on worker’s rights and access to welfare services. His partner had just given birth and he was supplementing his NGO salary with working night shifts in a Kapashera fabricator. Now, not a worker, he would often sum up the experience of garment work to me as such:

“[Garment workers] have no education, they work November to June and most are very young, like you. Some of them, younger than 35 they come and go as they may have a little land in the village, teenagers they come and hope to save for studying, others move around from one place to another…but most, around seventy-five percent, they demand this life…you can’t really blame the companies.”
I asked Jalal whether higher wages and proper implementation of labour legislation might encourage people to set up a life here in Gurgaon: “No, in my opinion, it’s the workers who are careless, they demand their freedom…to shift jobs, shift rooms, and so on.”

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Sachin, Jitender and Jalal’s attitudes toward work are characteristic of dominant ideologies of flexibilisation highlighted in the literature. In his essay on the Pleasures of Work, Donzelot interprets structural changes to employment relations in 20th century France, enacted through “formation permanente” (flexibilisation) as operating to “to break down the split within the subject between a world of work, which is disagreeable but confers an identity and rights, and that other world external to work, which is protected by the law and yet has no real value in itself” (Donzelot, 1982, p. 273). For Donzelot, these changes, buoyed by new managerial and “psychopathologies of work”, broke down the embodying nature of skilled work for the worker, replacing it with a focus on “the individuals’ autonomy, his capacity to adapt…to become an agent of change in a world of change”. Under new regimes of flexible labour, geographies of work – the shop-floor, company-bus, tea-break – are stretched and overlapping, respectively the space of reproduction, “the territory of the social” (Ibid, 252) is made explicit across geographies of work and everyday life. Reproduction scholars and labour anthropologists have argued that transformations in modes of labour in the contemporary period have rendered spatial and temporal boundaries of work and life meaningless (Mollona, 2005). Mitchell et al (2004, 417) argue that contemporary forms of re-spatialised labour, often configured through de-skilling, represent a “complete breakdown of the barrier between worlds” constitutive of a new kinds of being in the world. This work is evocative of Marx’s understanding of the role of automation and de-skilling in mediating the transition between formal and real subsumption of labour (Marx, 1993, 361). The violence of this subjection of labour to capital evokes violent responses – rioting, sabotage – but also a sense of elective freedom, Marx (ibid, 488) notes:

“Modern Industry…compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of today, grappled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers”.

In Gurgaon this “individual” is decidedly masculinised, access to autonomous mobility across urban spaces undergirds the “free scope” of workers flexibility. The valorised azadi of Sachin and Jitender are expressive of these new life-worlds of work, their legal and social marginalisation from both formal labour unions and local territorialised community together with flexibilised landscapes of capital, are productive of forms of gender and class-based subjectivity that draw value from, precisely those conditions that render their labour disposable, de-skilled and precarious.
For many labour scholars conditions of labour flexibility that produce cheap labour, are constitutive of a certain degree of labour “unfreedoms” that operate across a “spectrum” of descending unfree-free waged labour relations (Lerche 2007; 2010). Sachin and Jitender, and many workers’ self-identifications with valorised azadi are reflective of transforming labour-capital relations in which modalities of unfreedom come to be understood and expressed as freedoms by workers themselves. In this manner Sachin and Jitender’s identifications with azadi form a key aspect of the reproduction of flexible production; as Gidwani (2008a, 197) notes “Identities…validated in the name of ‘freedom’ as vessels of emancipation are easily annexed to the commodity logic of capital, becoming its spectacular production”.

These expressions of flexibility-as-freedom might be perceived as irrational, as instantiations of false consciousness, of the short-sighted working-classes’ self-denial. However, one might also understand these proclamations of azadi as expressions of complicity in regimes of flexible labour, a complicity which is premised upon a particular masculinisation of flexibility. In Willis’ now seminal work Learning to Labour (1977) the author explains why working-class boys attending a Grammar school chose to engage in “counter-school culture” and opt for employment in traditional masculine working-class jobs. Willis argues that:

“There is a moment…in working-class culture when the manual giving of labour power represents a freedom, election and transcendence, and a precise insertion into a system of exploitation and oppression for working people. The former promises the future, the latter shows the present. It is the future in the present which hammers freedom to inequality in the reality of contemporary capitalism” (Willis 1971, 120).

Many male workers hold no specific allegiance to any one shop-floor, industrial estate nor urban village; the precarious pact between workplace and neighbourhood facilitates a mobility premised on the incorporation and rationalisation of masculine identity into logics of flexibility.

Yet there is equally something quite disruptive and anarchic about this complicity, particularly as it unfolds into rioting, sabotage and spontaneous exiting. Much like the subaltern rentier nostalgic for a period wherein the withdrawal from the labour market signified high social standing, for many of my male neighbours the ability, or compulsion, to withdraw from a particular workforce provided a certain sense of social value, “freedom”. Here, the self-devalorisation of labour power, necessitated by flexible forms of employment and validated by identifications of azad, provides a material instantiation of “labour’s potentiality” as a disruptive, creative “not-for capital” (Marx 1993) aspect embedded within contemporary labour regimes, yet one ostensibly substituted by the division of labour within relations of reproduction. In contemporary working spaces, like Gurgaon and Kapashera, a gendered valorisation of flexibility and hypermobility might be understood as both a recalibration by industry of the working subject as the flexible subject and its open, dialectical relationship to valorised conditions of mobility and individualised autonomy within urban-industrial frameworks which would otherwise doom workers to lives of constant work.
Nowhere is the gendered contingency of *azadi* more apparent than in women workers’ new found precarious position in *both* the household and the workplace as a result of male workers’ embrace of flexibility. If flexibility-as-freedom describes male workers’ ideological complicity and anarchic disruption of production processes, *rooted flexibility* refers to the ways in which gender discourses that hold women in to the space of the domestic articulate with labour regimes premised on flexibility. This is the “double gendering” (Roy 2003) that characterises the hegemonic terrain of flexibilisation within Gurgaon’s space of reproduction.

5.5.2 Rooted flexibility
One Sunday afternoon on one of my early visits to the NSM weekly meetings a tall, middle-aged woman dressed in the bright salwar kameez and sari dress that marks out migrant women from the *Yadav* local women in the village, stood up in front of the assembled cross-legged crowd of women and, without introduction, made a rousing speech about the need for women’s unity [*mahilaon ki ekta*]; to physically combat violence and extortion on the shop-floor, and to end exploitative *makaan malik raj*. The group all nodded silently in agreement and the NSM official attempted to shift the conversation toward another topic. This woman, who I would get to know over the course of my time in Gurgaon, was Radhika.

Radhika was in her forties and worked as a “stitcher” in the sampling department in one of Gurgaon’s large garment-export companies earning 6,400 rupees a month. Formally, a “stitcher” is a semi-skilled and feminised position, relative to the skilled and masculinised “tailor” position. Nevertheless on the shop-floor a stitcher and tailor may well perform the same tasks. While Radhika worked on a salary, stitchers usually work on piece-rate and are typically required to produce around 80 pieces an hour. While permanent and temporary workers are able to access social security payments through the company, in most cases piece-rate workers, nearly always women, do not pay into a social security scheme (SLD 2013).

Radhika had been informally organising women on her “line” on the shop-floor and during tea breaks and the walk to work, to collectively resist management harassment and violence that was a permanent feature of women’s experiences of work in Gurgaon’s garment-export factories.

Radhika noted that collectively, under her leadership, her line had agreed to physically beat any male worker attempting to harass or “eve-tease” them:

“'At [the factory] it is always the young, new workers that receive insults and harassment…so they come to me…last week a master was abusing a *beti* [daughter] on my line, using bad words with her, so my sisters and I thrashed him with our *chappals* [shoes]’.”

Radhika proudly claimed to have forced the dismissal of a series of male line supervisors who had been harassing female workers in the factory.

After a number of encounters with Radhika at the NSM meetings, we met for chai in her room in Dundahera urban village a short walk across the border from Kapashera. Radhika had an eighteen year old son living in Uttarakhand who couldn’t stay with her as the landlord demanded an extra 1000 rupees
per occupant. She wakes at 4am to access water from a borewell pipe, which the landlord had begun to ration to a bucket per week. Radhika’s room was smaller than average with only a single-bed, small table with gas-stove and various pieces of cutlery, the room had a miniscule square window by the ceiling through which a sparse amount of light seeped in.

Radhika had been living in Gurgaon’s industrial villages since the early 2000s and has, remarkably, been working at one of the larger garment manufacturers in Udyog Vihar for the past eight years, directly employed on a fixed nine month contract. From 1997-2001 her husband had lived and worked in Saudi Arabia with a second wife and family while Radhika resided with his family in Uttarakhand, where she notes that she “suffered the greatest abuses”. In 2001 Radhika heard through her in-laws that her husband had returned to India and was living and working in Gurgaon, sensing the opportunity to escape work in her in-laws’ home, she immediately came to meet him. “As soon as I stepped from the bus, he gave me two thousand rupees and told me to leave, but I refused”.

Not long after Radhika moved to Gurgaon, her husband, who had been working as a security guard earning 9000 rupees a month, had gotten drunk at the theka [alcohol shop] in Kapashera Border and lost his company phone. Distraught and fearful of what his employers might do to him he refused to return to work. Violent beatings have been frequently cited as forms of punishment within Gurgaon’s garment-export industry. In 2014 a worker was hospitalised by security guards for arriving at work fifteen minutes late. Since that day, Radhika remarks, her husband spends his time sitting at home and drinking alcohol; “everything I earn he takes for drinking…he pretends to be unwell so he doesn’t have to work” she remarks. In the context of her husband’s withdrawal from the labour market eight years ago, Radhika took up employment in the garment-exports factories and the household breadwinning role. Like Sangeeta, Radhika’s movement into wage-earning household position was predicated on her husband’s withdrawal from the labour market.

That day, Radhika’s retelling of her journey from the northern state of Uttarakhand to this small, dark room in Gurgaon, a story of movement between differentiated spaces of entrapment, freedom, flexibility and emplacement, was interrupted by her husband, who was extremely drunk, questioning who I was, shouting, and anxiously making a number of cups of tea. I was at that point quite used to her husband’s alcoholism, he would make similar interjections during the NSM meetings in between bouts of disinterest and sleep. Beyond the “double burden” of Radhika’s abstraction as household and factory labour-power, there equally remained a radical disjuncture between the emancipatory space of the factory and NSM meeting, and the dormitory room. Between a critique of patriarchy and capitalist labour discipline advanced on the factory shop-floor and the social hegemony of marriage and female domestication within the household.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the withdrawal of male earnings from household incomes was a persistent feature of working women’s lives in Gurgaon; one that framed most women’s entrance into
waged “outside” work but also one which implicated many working-class women in a duplicitous and androgynous position as both workers and housewives. The duplicitous interpellation of working-class women as both domesticated housewives and masculine workers, in this respect differs from cases of housewification highlighted in previous scholarship on the feminisation of work in India (Mies, 1982). Radhika, and Sangeeta’s account earlier in the chapter, highlight that the ontological gap between the workplace and the home persists and is reproduced even after women move out of home-based employment. For both Radhika and Sangeeta, the movement from the home, to her husband’s home to the factory shop-floor demanded an iterative movement back and forth between spatially embedded identities as “housewife” and worker. As such conditions of feminisation in Gurgaon provide a historically and geographically specific grounding to contemporary work of the political economy of reproduction. In reference to Mitchell et al (2004)’s analytical focus on the articulation of labour flexibilisation and shifting practices of social reproduction, while Sangeeta and Radhika’s movement into waged work might be considered as a melting away of distinct worlds of life and work, it is precisely the buttressed conditions of gendered space, of the conditions of minimal difference, that heighten actually existing material barriers between the subjects of both worlds. In this sense the “the barriers between worlds” for many migrant women are re-established through belligerent discourses of “housewification” or “domestication” (Mies, 1986). The re-production of such barriers are productive of disorderly, often contradictory, “emplacements” and space-bound subjectivities (Bondi and Davidson, 2005).

Working-class women’s identities as both housewives and workers articulate in complex ways with space-bound mediations of value that demand a flexible labour power. Echoing Sangeeta’s movement into work, there is a distinct “double gendering” (Roy 2003) of work at play as Radhika’s entrance into waged work materialised definitively both as an escape from household work but also to supplement the unemployment of her husband. Nevertheless, the persistent discursive domestication of migrant women in contemporary Gurgaon obstructs labour regimes founded upon the reproduction of placeless, labile working body. The entrance of immobile workers into highly mobile production regimes both demands extra-economic management strategies to induce devalorisation and flexibility and (as will be explored in Chapter 6) provides women workers with a situated, place-bound terrain upon which to advance a variegated politics of demand-making, that is precisely foreclosed by many male workers’ embrace of azadi.

Reading the previous accounts of working lives of men and women in Gurgaon together it becomes apparent that the reproduction of flexible labour power is mediated between the vernacularised abstract systems and logics of capital, and everyday gendered practices and discourses of work. Women’s decisions to enter into waged production, are framed by gendered discourses of work and their material implications for the reproduction of the household. Regimes of work and life, their material practices,

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61 This research featured life history accounts of twelve migrant women. Of the twelve, ten women were working due to the withdrawal of a husband from household income, either through abandonment or unemployment. The remaining two were working due to the precarious and casual conditions of work of their husbands.

62 See Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of the urban as a mediation between the global and the everyday.
conduct, and regulations, are neither trans-historical nor mono-cultural, rather historically and
gEOGRAPHICALLY concrete social relations come to mediate the meaning, value and identification of flexible
work and thereby practice of reproduction.

5.6 Coercion, Femininity and Flexibility

The question remains, if male labour power is reproduced through uneven consent to regimes of
flexibilisation (through the valorisation of azadi); how is female labour power reproduced as flexible,
placeless despite their rootedness to spaces and practises of social reproduction? In this section I draw
attention to two entangled materialisations of feminised flexibility, violence and flexibilised femininity.

Earlier in the chapter I noted how direct violence formed a key aspect of the production of abstract space
in the urban village. In my numerous encounters, discussions and interviews with women working in
Gurgaon’s garment-exports sector, violence and harassment, were equally understood as a way in which
the terms of their employment, mobility in outside spaces, and access to work was entrenched. In this
final section I am interested in the articulation of gendered hierarchies across the shop-floor and everyday
life. Crucially, I am interested in how women workers themselves actively participate in the interplay
of gender discourses and practices, in order to reconcile subjection to harassment and violence, and
ultimately survive in incredibly precarious urban environments.

The presence of gender-based violence on the shop-floors of garment-export factories features in much
of the academic and NGO literature on the industry in the Delhi NCR, India and elsewhere (Wolf 1992;
Siddiqi et al 2003; Kabeer 2004; Ong 2010; Ganguly 2013; PUDR 2015). All female garment sector
workers I spoke with highlighted some experience of gender-based abuse or coercion, whether through
gali [sexualised expletives] or physical harassment. Crucially most women framed their subjection to
gender-based coercion as a way in which the terms of their employment was negotiated.

There is a wealth of scholarship which argues that gender-based violence within the workplace, often a
response to feminisation, is founded upon the construction of the transgressive female worker (Ong,
2010; Wolf, 1992). Scholars remind us that the coupling of women’s “outside” work and promiscuity and
sexuality is understood to serve to justify harassment and violence (Wright 2013). Political economic
research on female garment-export workers, such as Siddiqi et al (2003), notes that the use of gali [verbal,
often sexualised expletives] and sexual coercion on the factory shop-floor can be understood in relation
to the material conditions of production (factory size, the kind of product being manufactured,
production targets). Yet my interlocutors’ constant references to being hassled and prevented from
working, points to relations within the space of production which extend beyond the materialities of
factory size and production speed. Speed cannot account for the uneven experience of sexual harassment
and coercion across different sites of production and ignores the ways in which feminisation is a
contested process which centres upon historic and ongoing gendering of work.
In their report on flexibilisation in the Delhi NCR garments industry, Mezzadri and Srivastava (2015) conclude that the role of sub-contracting in “labour control and segmentation” is not simply used to reduce labour costs but primarily used to subdue a “potentially militant male workforce”. As I have sought to demonstrate in the above discussion, in Gurgaon the “potentially militant male workforce” is fragmented and pacified not only through sub-contracting, but equally through an ideological embrace of flexibility. Women’s double responsibility as housewives and breadwinners, ties women’s everyday lives to immobile, spatially disaggregated spaces of social reproduction. In this context many women simply do not have access to the  

azadi which prefigures male flexibility. In this context, while the reproduction of flexible male labour is achieved by their insertion into endless circuits of movement or else withdrawn from value altogether through unemployment or alcoholism, the flexibility of female labour is reproduced directly through coercion and appeal to hegemonic tropes of femininity.

5.6.1 The importance of being nari

Sangeeta

I introduced Sangeeta in the previous section, noting how her husband’s unemployment and fractious relationship with his family had compelled her move to Gurgaon to take up work in garment factories. When I met Sangeeta she was seeking the support of NSM to take legal action against her former employer, one of the largest garment-export companies in India, after having been dismissed for beating a man who had spent months harassing her.

Here she recounts her experiences of working in Udyog Vihar:

“They made me work all day and then gave me “faulty” pieces to alter. In making 150-200 pieces, any human being can go wrong in one or two pieces…I said sir, I do not make wrong pieces all day- for two faulty pieces a day you summon me to the inner offices- I have my honour too…Then the same drill again, the next day. These two men- Raju and Santosh used to tell me- to make friends with them, to call them to my room for tea, serve them meat and fish, only then will we let you work, else we won’t let you work here…

On the day, I had to go to the ladies’ room upstairs and Raju was coming downstairs. He said, “If you do not listen to what we say…either we will take away that honour or get you kicked out of here”. I was furious…I had collared him and burst into a stream of abusive language…gave him a taste of my chappals [shoes]…Then everyone who had gathered began screaming in my favour…I had hit both of them with my chappals. I cannot simply lie there…Soon, the manager and the supervisor all had come to inquire into the matter…He fired me on the spot…I don’t know whether he fired them or not…after me, they fired eight or ten more people. However, their case has been settled. Everyone got a neat five thousand bucks. Now who’d want to take the case further?

Pending legislation among Prime Minister Modi’s Make in India labour reforms, which would allow women workers in the manufacturing sector to work longer hours and night shifts, would suggest some comfort among capitalists of women’s enduring flexibility.
Kalpana

Kalpana, has worked in twelve factories in Gurgaon over the past five years. Originally from Jharkhand, Kalpana moved to Gurgaon after marrying Rohit, introduced earlier, who had been living in Kapashera for some time working sporadically as a driver. Kalpana and Rohit lived in the cheapest housing types in Kapashera, “worker lines”, grid-like bungalow rooms with dirt floors that dominate Kapashera Border, the informal extension to the neighbourhood. Kalpana had worked in “10 or 12” garment jobs since arriving in Kapashera, leaving each one following workplace harassment. As the sole household breadwinner, responsible for funding the education of their son and two daughters, this had had particular detrimental impact on the household income:

“The previous month I received 2400! I’ve never picked up five or six thousand in any month [the minimum wage]…The [last] place where I was working it was piece rate…they gave forty-five paisa [0.45 rupees] per piece. I am always employed for the least profitable pieces. I had been made to sit before a machine that they knew I had never known to operate. Now I receive 2400 a month, they torture us in every way there, what will you do with 2400!”

Kalpana spoke fondly of her romantic relationship with her husband, eager to stress that marrying “down” caste to a scheduled caste man, hers was not an arranged marriage. She spoke of her ambition to move back to Jharkhand and start up a beauty parlour one day, but for the moment she cannot leave: “There are no factories back home-nothing to be able to earn and raise our children well. There’s nothing. My son says that he wants to be a somebody, my daughters too.”

Figure 5.13: A worker “line” in Kapashera Border (Chaudhary 2016).

Kalpana remarked of her time working in Gurgaon’s garment-export industry:

“The atmosphere…here is very dirty, very, very dirty…In the company, the women who develop close contacts with the supervisor or the manager get the easy work…I have already quit ten or twelve companies due to that…We want to live here just the way we used to live back in our village. The master of the company I worked in fired me because of this the day before yesterday…He always pestered me to give him my number…I told him point blank that Sir, I am here to work not for the
give and take of numbers…Women who cooperate with them stay and work- but I don’t cooperate- so I am kicked out. In two or three companies- I had slapped them before I walked out… I slapped and left…

For both Sangeeta and Kalpana, subjection to gender-based harassment was not directly related to unachievable production targets - both demanded that they could achieve the targets at ease – rather both attributed arbitrary surveillance of production targets and quality control as strategies utilised by men in the factory to justify harassment, and ultimately inscribe flexibility into lives tied to sunk spaces of reproduction in the urban village; what I term rooted flexibility. As Kalpana describes: “The way they treat us- I cannot describe… I cried inside these companies. They tell me to leave. How much longer can I keep quitting- quit this place, quit that place- where will I work?”

Both Sangeeta and Kalpana’s refusal to co-operate with disciplinary strategies can be understood as a form of direct resistance and refusal. Their actions are particularly remarkable considering their relative structural weakness as sole breadwinners for their respective households. Both Sangeeta and Kalpana, following their dismissals from the factory, took up work in Kapashera’s fabricators earning considerably less and under more precarious conditions than in organised production. In addition, many women’s (including Radhika previously) deployment of physical violence against their aggressors – not only disrupts the figure of the docile female South Asian worker, but also appropriates a political practice usually attributed to men for their own means; an evident if fleeting sense of empowerment. It is my contention then that strategies of labour control and reproduction within the factory must be understood in relation to broader conditions of reproduction-production which in certain workplaces (including the household) have embedded harassment and abuse as key features of labour discipline and flexibility.

Yet despite their own exposure to management exploitation, neither Sangeeta nor Kalpana empathised with women who did cooperate with violence and harassment; and indeed often blamed women workers for the violence. Kalpana remarked:

“Most of the times, it’s the women… who make the atmosphere dirtier… Some of the women make it worse- all because of money. No matter how much they receive- they find that it’s not enough- they think that if we do aaise-aaise-kaam [sexual favours] we’ll be paid more. If we try and go against them, action will be taken against us. What’s the use in trying to make them understand? Isn’t it better to stay at home and earn instead of doing that? We are here to work- give us work…

I want to go back home… we came here to work, to be able to educate our children- not to become a prey to these people… another possibility is to find a workplace- where we are allowed to work… at our ease. If we are nari let us remain that way.” [Added emphasis]

Kalpana’s mobilisation of “nari” the Hindi word for “woman” but more specifically “respectable woman” distances herself from (the more common term) “mahilaon” [women] which she used to describe those who “make the atmosphere dirtier”. I am wary here to imply that that there ought to be any sort of
natural alliance between working women, or that a diverse range of women’s experiences of work might even be characterised as similar, as Sangeeta remarked:

“Ahh…the ladies-in-charge are all caught up. One is sleeping with the Manager, another with the head-tailor…There are all kinds of women. Not just one.”

Nevertheless, I am interested in why many working women I met throughout the study mobilised a hegemonic discourse of femininity in response to experiences of gender-based coercion induced through the disjunctive spatio-temporalities of being a housewife and a worker. In this respect, Sangeeta and Kalpana’s derision for women “caught up in it” might be understood as an attempt to reconcile their compulsion to work outside the feminine space of the home. Indeed it was often through the “transgressions” of other workers, that both Kalpana and Sangeeta constructed their own identity as nari [respectable women]. In contrast, the construction of the working woman as “loose” is of direct consequence to her transgression from her natural space, the home, and socially acceptable identity as honourable, married nari. This is underscored by Kalpana’s claim that women who engage in relationships with male workers at the workplace have better working conditions and are paid higher salaries. She remarked:

“If you know to cooperate and you’re good, you’re given the best machines- whether you work or not- your salary will keep pouring in, each girl picks up almost thirty five thousand rupees, thirty-five thousand!”

Whether or not this is true, the claim allows Kalpana to oppose the materialism of co-operating women with the moral fullness of being able to resist, of being nari. Appeals and mobilisations of izzat [honour] and nari [respectable womanhood] in this sense draw attention to the impossibility of maintaining one’s nari-ness and a fulfilling the duties of the factory worker. As Kalpana remarked, uncharacteristically forlorn, despite the fact that she was nari in reality it “never happens, it’s the same torture everywhere- we work due to our desperation”.

Wilson’s (2015) research on women’s social movements in India highlights the manner in which “izzat” [respectability/honour] has been historically mobilised by male patriarchs to assert ownership and protection over their wives, daughters and sisters. For Wilson (ibid), women lose izzat by transgressing naturalised spaces of femininity; the home, family and community. Wilson however highlights an alternative “subaltern izzat” mobilised by women against patriarchal oppression within the community, workplace and household. Wilson shows how the meanings of gendered difference is itself a site of contestation, domination and appropriation. Following Wilson (ibid), I argue that when pulled apart across different sites of marginalisation and exploitation from the neighbourhood, to the home, to the

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64 This amounts to three times the average salary of a factory supervisor.
workplace, many migrant working women mobilise patriarchal discourses of gender in order to provide some stabilising force and legitimacy to incredibly precarious lives.

In some ways Sangeeta and Kalpana’s appeal to being “nari” and upholding of the “izzat” [respect] of the married, Hindu housewife contrasted with their actual experiences and attitudes toward being married. Over the course of my many conversations with Sangeeta, for example, she was quick to ridicule her husband, referring to him as “mentally unhinged” and openly derided her marriage as a mistake, asserting that one day she would return to her parents’ village. In the same breath however she would reaffirm her ‘nari-ness’ as a dutiful housewife– whose primary responsibility is to the household reproduction and upkeep of her husband. In this manner, in my final meeting with Sangeeta she resolutely remarked: “Now I have a family to care for. This was the reason there was the beating involved.”

Sangeeta’s marginality and vulnerability in the space of the home and workplace, is in some sense fought against by her differentiation as a respectable woman, and yet this contrasts with her own dissatisfaction within the natural space of nari. What is clear in Sangeeta’s case, is her personal struggle to reconcile her subjective articulation with practices of value and (un-value) creation; her identifications as nari, breadwinner, and factory worker. Women like Sangeeta and Kalpana may be working outside the home, for which they have to suffer gender-based abuse and violence but their nari-ness excuses this, provides a point of distinction and differentiation. The evocation of “being nari” then may at first appear as a contradictory gesture, one which reproduces the hegemonic pathology of working women as morally contaminated. In evoking their moral fullness, Sangeeta and Kalpana reaffirm their own de-valued abstraction in the workplace, neighbourhood and home. I would propose however that such internalisations are important ways in which working women reconcile their social devalorisation in the face of their transgressions in the outside world.

In tracing the use of violence and harassment as a strategy of labour discipline I am wary of reproducing power dynamics that prefigure South Asian women as docile victims (Mohanty 1988), as always already negated as “radically outside conceptual boundaries of emancipation [and] humanness” (McKittrick 2011, 954). Following Mohanty (1988) and McKittrick (2011) I depart from understandings that both affirm an overtly materialist conceptualisation of gender-based violence, and those that are foregrounded by abstract understandings of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ usually attributed to the hyper-visible ‘dangerous migrant’ and working-classes (Datta 2016). Rather I want to highlight the manner in which violence comes to constitute particular localised relationships between regimes of flexible accumulation in Gurgaon and specific gendered discourses and practices of work; how forms of direct violence intertwine with gender discourses and (re)production processes in the urban villages and factory-shop floors, highlighting the manner in which coercive practices come to reconcile disorderly and inconsistent identities of production and reproduction of the shop-floor, household and family in Gurgaon.
5.6.2 Hidden Identities

I first met Rakhi in the aftermath of a riot at a garment exporter in Udyog Vihar. A male worker arrived late for the morning shift, and was beaten and hospitalised by the security and HR staff. News of the incident spread quickly onto the factory shop-floor, by mid-morning workers had stopped production and began breaking machines and smashing windows in the factory in protest.

The NSM meeting the following Sunday, held in a large empty room in Kapashera was attended by around thirty women, most with young children and husbands in toe, who were discussing the events at the factory. The union, whose representative had come down from Delhi, assured the room that they were assisting the family to file a report with the local police, and were taking the issue up with the company management. Rakhi sat at the front of the meeting and spoke only to answer questions from the union organisers concerning the development of a women’s disputes committee in the factory. I met with Rakhi the following week at her home in Kapashera.

Rakhi met us at the foot of her building and ushered us quickly up the stairs. On hearing that Rakhi spoke Bengali I asked a Bengali-speaking friend to accompany me to the meeting. So often I found myself at a limit, between both my own and my respondent’s ropey Hindi, the language of their migration, their factory work and their life in Gurgaon. I hoped that the presence of a Bengali-speaker may help to normalise the conversation and narrow the unbridgeable distance between Rakhi and myself. Eventually we reached the top of the building, the least coveted floor owing to Gurgaon’s intensely hot summer months, and sat down in a typical small, square room with a small single-bed, adorned with calendar, an old television and a small shrine.

“Originally I came with my sister and her husband, but after a year here they left, I’ve been here, alone now for ten years… I come from a very poor family, I was completely dependent on my father, I didn’t want to be dependent on my father, and I didn’t want my son to be in the same position as I was when he was older. I had to get out.”

Rakhi works as a sewing operator in a large ready-made garments unit in Udyog Vihar. She is hired through a contractor, earning ₹ 6400 a month. Rakhi’s role is in stitching, she stitches single pieces as part of chain production, there are around 100 women working in various positions on her floor. The production process is split into compartments, from textiles, to cutting, to stitching, to washing, to sampling. Men dominate the design, stitching and cutting roles, with women typically placed in washing, finishing and sample production.

“Some women have an option not to work. I do not have this option. Of course, I would prefer to live with my family, not alone here. Of course I would prefer not to work…

…At first I worked just cutting thread, I was only earning ₹ 1700 so I had to leave…the thing is…in this place, you cannot ask for more money or to move position…if you say anything you just have to
leave. That is how it works here, you leave, you work somewhere else, there are many people that want jobs… after I took a job, paying more for around three years, then in 2004 I took this job…At my previous job [six years ago] I suffered a great deal of verbal abuse because I am Muslim…after three years I decided I had to leave the job and I went back to Assam.”

Rakhi’s identification as a Muslim, at first, seemed very strange. She did not have a typically Muslim name while her dress and the shrine in her room gave strong indications that Rakhi was in fact a Hindu. We carried on to discuss Rakhi’s reluctant involvement in the union, which she repeated was purely for safety reasons, as a lone woman in the neighbourhood she needed some kind of support in case of emergencies, she remarks “I live alone so I cannot afford to make any situations”. Rakhi openly admitted not really understanding her role as ‘women’s disputes officer’ for the union, and that her friends and co-workers discouraged her from engaging in this kind of activity anyway.

After some time, it appeared our stuttered conversation was coming to a short-lived end. At the point of our conversation breaking down, Rakhi recognised my friend as a Bengali speaker: “I love Bengalis! It is such a beautiful language!” Immediately our conversation, now in Bengali, decidedly changed. Rakhi passed around some supari [betel nut], we chewed and discussed television. Rakhi remarked:

“In ten years, I have never had any visitors to my room…without these four channels I’d go mad…when my sister left, I was alone, and I befriended a Bengali shop-keeper, we fell in love and spent nights together.”

She explained that, despite her love for the shopkeeper, he had recently moved his family and children to Kapashera from Kolkata. The shopkeeper had also enrolled Rakhi in a series of money-making schemes, and alternative medicine programmes, in which she had invested ₹10,000 rupees cumulatively. There is a slight irony that in an environment where patriarchal exploitation dominate Rakhi’s experience of everyday life in Kapashera her mobility and access to secure employment, that it is from her adulterous, somewhat exploitative male lover that she received most support and comfort from. As Datta (2016) has argued, it is often through intimate relationships, however transgressive, that belonging and security is carved out within highly precarious urban environments. Rakhi reached toward the shelf on a hanging mirror piece, and showed us an old passport photo of a young, moustached man. She remarked:

“While I went [back to Assam] I decided that when I return, I would dress like a Hindu and take a Hindu name…I am all alone so I cannot afford to make any situations…[he] taught me Hindu customs, the correct things to say, how to arrange the shrine, carry out the things like this.”

Rakhi brought out a folder packed with papers and pulled out her real identity proof with a faded photograph of a young Rakhi, accompanied by an altogether different name. She was insistent that we spoke quietly about her hidden identity, her landlord didn’t know and she didn’t want to give him any reason to evict her. In the eyes of many men and women in Kapashera, Rakhi’s real identity and relationship with the shopkeeper is characteristic of “loose” working women; in Kalpana’s words, women
like Rakhi make the atmosphere “dirty”. Yet Rakhi’s account highlights the role in which difference, in this case religious and gendered, intersect with capacities to resist exploitation and claim an identity of respectability. Rakhi’s instrumentalisation of both the NGO-Union and the Bengali shopkeeper are illustrative here of the tactics and strategies available to, and mobilised by different women to negotiate the spatially and temporally fixed identities of work. Rakhi’s significant precarity as a single migrant woman, working on contract in a highly exploitative industry, compelled her toward forging safety networks whether they be in the form of traditional institutions like the NGO or more informal, exploitative relationships with men in the neighbourhood.

How does Rakhi’s life history fit within the previous discussion of coercion and social reproduction? As Fernandes (1997, 527) notes, bourgeois and worker discourses on gender often converge to enforce a singular model of acceptable female spatiality and identity, typically that of the married woman within the family. This discursive mobilisation, ontologically excludes the disruptive, single woman, and obstructs her access to the material goods and political support which might otherwise alleviate her poverty. Lacking the necessary qualities of a respectable woman, Rakhi had to rely on altogether different, more precarious kinds of support, kinship networks with Bengali speakers and the affection of transgressive relationships in order to manage and survive in the city.

Unlike Kalpana and Sangeeta who mobilised an identity of nari-ness in order to come to terms with their exposure to coercion and their transgression as workers in the “outside” realm, Rakhi was compelled to perform an altogether different identity, constitutive of different dress, language, and rituals in order to protect herself from further precarity and ensure her access to paid employment. In this manner, Rakhi’s account highlights that which is obscured in Sangeeta and Kalpana’s construction of “nari”. In Rakhi’s case, it was not enough to perform an identity of a respectable working woman, she was in addition compelled to outwardly obscure her Muslim faith. The cleavages between Sangeeta and Kalpana, who mobilise a notion of “nari” related to their identities as married, secure, housewives, and Rakhi who lacks these qualities, highlight the often conflicting mobilisations of gender and work. While in Wilson’s (2015) work these cleavages rest between the patriarchal and emancipatory, the nari mobilised by Sangeeta and Kalpana conforms more explicitly along hegemonic tropes of womanhood.

Nevertheless, in each of the accounts above conditions of gendered precarity, brought about by particular production and social reproduction geographies demand the construction of respectability, whether that be through morally distancing oneself from those women who “cooperate” or by obscuring one’s identity to appear more respectable. In this respect the accounts point to the manner in which gendered discourses and practices continue to provide the terrain upon which women workers enter into factory employment, and upon which geographies of production and reproduction are organised.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to zoom into the everyday life of Gurgaon’s urban villages and its migrant residents, to explore the manner in which gendered hierarchies and discourses that circulate between
subaltern actors and capitalist firms, contribute to the contingent reproduction of a flexible, rootless labour power. To do so I have sought to put Lefebvre’s critique of abstract space (1991) in conversation or conflict with feminist geographers’ scholarship on the gendered codings of abstract space (Strauss and Buckley 2016) and marxist conceptualisations of hegemony as a lively and negotiated terrain that dialectically moves between discourse, ideology, and material practices (Gidwani 2008a).

Returning to debates within urban studies outlined in Chapter 1 (Castells 1977; Lefebvre 1991) I have called for an examination of “the urban” which pays close attention to the articulation of relations of everyday life – and the reproduction of gendered difference in particular – in mediating the disorderly reproduction of abstract space and labour. In short this chapter has sought to trace the manner in which capitalist logics suture together valorised and de-valorised space, through the gendered organisation of space and labour; the minimal differences that form the fragmentary space through which political resistances (see Chapter 6) are forged. I have argued that beyond the conceived space and spatial practices of village rentiers, who seek to reproduce an abstract space for the churning of flexible, rootless labour-tenant power, the mobilisation of hegemonic gender discourses within everyday life play an equally important role in dynamics of industrial and urban change.

To do so, I have sought to elevate the significance of ideology, hegemony and identity. In Holland and Lave (2001) the authors assert the always relational and dialogic character of ‘identities-in-practice’. Echoing, in part Gramsci’s development of the disorderly, “bizarrely composite” ‘person’ (Thomas 2009), the authors argue for an understanding of “dialogic selves”, constituted through “the dynamic tension of a socially given constellation of self (selves) and others, identified and interpreted through culturally given discourses and practices”. Identities and identifications are continually in process, contested, improvised, appropriated and refused. For the authors these “intimate interiorised practices of identity” dialectically relate to structural, historical processes to form sites of local contentious practice. This chapter has sought to draw attention to these identities-in-practice, demonstrating the manner in which meaning and value map onto flexible labour regimes and household incomes.

Here women’s work and household relations, stretched across vast, bounded spaces, fractured by various times indicate affective connections which express uncertainties embedded within modes of local capitalist accumulation. By highlighting the role of relations of reproduction, of the household, and family – ostensible “feminine” domains – in producing conditions of capital, the accounts demonstrate the role of relations in reproduction in shaping a flexible industrial-urban accumulation in Gurgaon. The following chapter will explore how these contingent and disorderly subject-positions form the basis of nascent political struggles led by migrant women across the city.
Chapter 6.

Subaltern counter-urbanism: women workers’ struggles in the city.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the political struggles of women workers in Gurgaon. In doing so the chapter seeks to address the third research question of this study: What kinds of political subjectivities, alliances and actions are produced within Gurgaon’s fragmented, highly privatised urban landscape? I am principally concerned with how conditions of work and life in Gurgaon, mediated by village rentiership (Chapter 4) and rooted flexibility (Chapter 5) expressed through the urban village, shape a contingent form of urban politics engaged in by Gurgaon’s female, migrant working classes. That is how the politics of the household and urban village intersect and articulate with a politics of the shop-floor. Tracing collective actions engaged in by three groups of women across the city I am concerned with how we might think about these struggles as forms of urban politics carried out by subjects not only materially marginalised from the urban order, but equally whose ontological position exist entirely outside of the hegemonic epistemologies of the urban. This requires rethinking and de-territorialising our understandings of the urban. In doing so, again I mobilise Lefebvre’s work on differential space and the two-fold character of place. I am interested in how the experience of being tied into abstract space in disorderly and vernacular fashion, is productive of the terrain for an explosion of a “maximal” differential politics of difference.

To do so, in this chapter I draw on interview and ethnographic based research with three different women-led political struggles across Gurgaon. I understand these political struggles as wrought through the contingent material conditions of work and everyday life detailed in the previous two chapters. Building on Roy’s (2011) “subaltern urbanism” and Fraser’s (1990) “subaltern counter-publics”, I conceptualise the struggles as instances of a subaltern counter-urbanism. Firstly, I consider the struggles as “counter urban” as they are expressed through and against conditions of rooted flexibility crystallised in the urban villages. If Chapter 5 sought to explore how particular working identities were (re)produced within the gendered discourses and practices of everyday life, this chapter examines how these ‘genderings’ shape a contingent form of urban politics engaged in by women at the workplace and urban village. Secondly, I conceptualise the struggles as “counter Urban”, as they break from hegemonic understandings of urban politics in India that often bind subaltern political agency to territorial belonging and the dialectical and sublative tussles between possession and dispossession (Chatterjee, 2004; Guha, 1983a; Holston and Appadurai, 1999). The women workers’ struggles evoke demands for emplacement that are non-territorial, future-oriented, speculative and always tentatively under erasure. In this regard, tracing the differentiated and relational articulation between the three struggles, “subaltern counter-urbanism” refers to a polyvalent and disorderly abstraction of a gendered urban politics in the neoliberal city.

In this chapter I will begin by exploring the nascent political organising of a group of domestic workers in the Sikanderpur area of Gurgaon. I will then, returning to the discussion in Chapter 2, outline the
contours of the chapter’s contribution to understandings of urban politics in India at the current conjuncture. I will then explore the dynamics of struggles led by women workers at two auto-parts factories, Azadiplex and Rokaplex65 in IMT Manesar, conceptualising the women’s struggles as mobilising a contingent politics of emplacement.

6.2 Gharelu Kamgar Sangathan

As discussed in Chapter 3, *Nari Shakti Manch* (NSM) is a women’s rights NGO based in Gurgaon which seeks to politically organise female domestic and garment-export workers66. Over the course of the fifteen months of my research I followed NSM activity. The organisation primarily operate within four urban village clusters in Gurgaon: with garment-export workers in Kapashera and Dundahera; and with domestic workers in Sikanderpur village, amongst the plotted villas of New Gurgaon; Carterpuri adjacent to Palam Vihar, one of Gurgaon’s first upper-class enclaves; and Nathupur a sprawling village which juts up against DLF Cyber City. NSM are a subsidiary of Delhi-based research NGO *Society for Labour and Development*, and a formal affiliate of the *New Trade Union Initiative* (NTUI). The NTUI formed in the early 2000s and primarily seeks to organise within India’s vast non-unionised informal sector. Unlike most prominent national trade unions, the organisation operate without any formal party affiliation and advance a strategy which draws on both traditional union activity as well as NGO-style empowerment, education and rights-training (Kumar, 2014). NSM organise events in central Delhi for their participants to share knowledge and experience and take part in national NTUI organised campaigns against labour law reforms.

NSM forms part of a much broader network of internationally connected urban poor NGOs across India that organise women’s savings groups, community auto-enumerations, rights-trainings and international knowledge exchanges for the country’s urban poor. The activities of SPARC a Mumbai-based NGO that has become somewhat of a figurehead of these new pro-poor participatory NGOs in India (and globally), have been characterised as representative of an “insurgent” (McFarlane, 2004) and “deep democratic politics” (Appadurai, 2001) well-equipped to advance democratic claims and negotiate the everyday politics of the liminal Indian state. Elsewhere SPARC and other pro-poor NGOs have been criticised for foreclosing political confrontation; constructing a pernicious “civic governmentality” (Roy, 2009b); facilitating anti-poor urban renewal; centring a De Sotoian figure of the entrepreneurial urban poor; reproducing hegemonic gender narratives; and engaging in modes of poverty alleviation that integrate the urban poor into circuits of credit and debt (McFarlane 2004; RoyChowdhury 2005; Roy 2009). Here however, I am less concerned with the immediate intentions, or “programming”, of NSM; not least because the ambitions, activity and organisation of the group appears to pale in comparison to other groups in the country. Rather I am interested in the ways in which the NGO provides a fixed space of

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65 I have given the two plants the pseudonyms Azadiplex and Rokaplex.
66 In Hindi “Shakti” means power, but more feminine creative strength and action. Shakti is understood more broadly to refer to fertility and benevolence, and creative destruction (Chattier 2012). This double-meaning, although never expressed as such by NSM officials is an apt analogy of the organisation’s work.
sociality and uneven sense of identity for domestic workers to mobilise an oppositional and emplacing politics; one which often exceeded the meagre intentions of the NGO.  

It was through NSM that I was introduced to the Gharelu Kamgar Sangathan (GKS) [Domestic Workers Organisation] a NSM subsidiary union that organised domestic workers in various locations in Gurgaon. There is no legislation which covers domestic work in the state of Haryana, working-conditions are instead negotiated on an individual and ad-hoc basis between upper-class ‘masters’ and the migrant ‘help’. There are currently an estimated 3 million women working as urban domestic servants across the country, “more than 12% of all women workers in urban India” a figure which rose by 222% between 1999 and 2005 (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2007). While there is no official data on the number of “part-time” domestic workers in Gurgaon, there are an estimated 500,000 women working as domestic workers in the National Capital Region alone (ibid). Some reports have shown that 96% of domestic workers in the Delhi NCR earn less than ₹ 3500 a month. In Gurgaon, the average wage of a domestic worker ranges from around ₹ 2000 to ₹ 8000 depending on the number of households worked at, the stability of work and childcare and household commitments.

Domestic work was considered by my interlocutors across Gurgaon as the most precarious form of employment among those in my study. Discursively de-valourised as “women’s work” and characterised as unstable and atomised mode of labour (Sharma and Kunduri, 2015) domestic work is perceived as exploitative and unrewarding work by most of my research interlocutors. Despite this, domestic work is in many cases better paid than factory-based work, some of my interlocutors working as domestic workers earned as much as ₹ 9000 (US $135) per month across a series of different households compared to ₹ 6000 (US $90) which the average female assembly line, auto-components worker might earn.

6.2.1 Migration and domestic work
Subia lives in Sikanderpur village on the eastern edge of Gurgaon. The village sits in the shadow of a privately managed metro-system that encircles several elite residential neighbourhoods and facilitates the daily commute of young upper-classes from the luxury condos to the Cyber City SEZ. Subia works as a domestic worker in a number of households in the upper-class Silver Oaks Avenue neighbourhood which juts up alongside the village. Sikanderpur is a much smaller, denser village than Kapashera: landlords and tenants live in tight proximity which contributes to a sense of claustrophobic surveillance in day to day life of the village.

I first met with Subia at a meeting of the Gharelu Kamgar Sangathan (GKS). Subia was busy handing out pamphlets detailing the group’s campaign for regularised pay, holiday, working conditions and freedom from sexual harassment. Most of the women in the park had migrated to the city from Orissa or West Bengal and live in the urban villages adjacent to the city’s elite residential complexes. The group sat in a private residential park while the GKS officials detailed various laws which should safeguard domestic

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67 It is equally the case that organisations like GKS provided a “fixed terrain of sociality” for my research interventions.
works from exploitation. Various women interjected to provide personal stories of exploitation and abuse, while residents of the nearby condominiums, with their overweight dogs in-tow, stood around with seeming disapproval.

Figure 6.1: Sikanderpur village (left) and in the shadow of the Delhi-Gurgaon metro (right) (Author produced; Merinews).

Subia was originally from Raja Bazaar in central Kolkata and migrated to Bihar after marrying her husband at the age of sixteen. She had originally planned a marriage with a boy from Kolkata, but after her father fell ill she was forced to take a marriage with a cheaper dowry. In Bihar, she explained, she witnessed poverty like she had never seen before. She remarked that:

“Everyone lived in one piece of clothing! I used to think that there is so much freedom in our Kolkata, if they’re living like this here why can’t they send their husbands to Kolkata to work? But I didn’t have enough Bihari language with me to voice this idea.”

As a self-identified “daughter of Kolkata” Subia explained to me how she brought her “city knowledge” to the village, organising reading, writing and arithmetic lessons for the women in the neighbourhood. In addition, Subia was also a lead participant in a local village savings group which was organised from her eldest son’s school. She remarked that:

“These village women had never stepped outside the four walls of the home, they didn’t know what freedom was. I was to help these women understand education, to educate their children, dress them well, treat the boy and girl equally and so on”.

After six years in Bihar, Subia fell ill. In order to pay off the debt of ₹ 70,000, Subia and her husband migrated to Gurgaon for work leaving her son in the care of her brother, she remarked that:

“I’d never thought that I’d come to Delhi and Gurgaon, and see so many places. To start working with my children so far away from me. I’d never thought this would happen…”
Now living in Sikanderpur, Subia works in four households in neighbouring Silver Oaks Avenue each day earning ₹2700 in the first household, ₹2000 in the second, ₹1000 in the third and ₹3000 in the fourth. She explained the general working conditions for domestic workers in Gurgaon:

“They don’t give us leave if we are ill and they’ve never paid for our medicines...and start picking up a huge fight if you ask for [sick leave]... [recently] a friend’s master slapped her when she’d made a mistake with the food...he literally hit her...She told him that she would clear out of there as soon as he tells her- but not to hit her.”

In some ways Subia’s life thus far had been dominated by mono-directional mobility. In this regard her auto-narration of her life, mediated by misfortune, encounter, negotiation, and change is evocative of the “subaltern cosmopolitanism” attributed to many labour migrants within the literature (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2004). Subia picked up and translated her “city knowledge” across the reified boundaries of urban and rural, workplace and home. If, as Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2004), these subaltern cosmopolitans orchestrate the *techne* which transfers disruptive and progressive skills and knowledge across the modern nation – what Simone (2004) terms “people-as-infrastructure” – then Subia’s narrative represents a particular mobilisation of women’s empowerment, mediated by third-sector actors, from the old metropole to the village and finally to the neoliberal city. And yet as we shall see, the translocal cosmopolitanism (Appadurai, 1995) often ascribed to India’s migrant workforce, in Subia’s case, is mono-directional. As described in the previous chapter, this circulation, flux and mobility is partly driven but equally interrupted by quotidian gender practices which fix women into precarious urban environments. In Gurgaon like so many of my research interlocutors, Subia’s migration had come to an end.

Subia initially heard of GKS through a neighbour and quickly became a leading figure in the group. That day in the park Subia was organising smaller groups of women to distribute informational pamphlets in various neighbouring villages. The primary activity of GKS was to provide rights-training, distribute informational pamphlets and develop mutual support networks with other domestic workers across the city. The GKS women make clandestine trips to other residential colonies in the city, handing out pamphlets, holding brief road-side discussions and passing on mobile phone numbers to other domestic workers. As Subia explained to me:

“Suppose that we could fix the wages [a certain amount] for doing their laundry or a certain amount for doing the dishes. We must also get [fixed] wages for doing extra work: in case guests arrive and we have to cook for more people, we must get the payment accordingly. All the GKS women with us are relentlessly demanding for four days leave a month and fixed wages. They can make us work according to the money they pay us. Anyways, they always take a lot of labour from us!”

During the 2011-12 Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement Subia took a group of fifteen of fellow domestic workers on a ninety minute trip up to the infamous June Ramlila rally in central Delhi.
Recounting her experiences she remarked, “I really loved it. They discussed labour and the amount that must be paid. They also discussed our rights.” Upon arriving at the ground after a long and arduous journey on a series of public buses from Gurgaon, Subia ran into one of her employers:

“She’d caught me red-handed. I said lightly that I’d not committed any crime…I told her that I’m now part of the Domestic Workers’ Union. She advised me not to go around engaging in such groups and making a mess…there’s no one here for you. What if something happens to you? I assured her that nothing would happen that it was only for bringing together the domestic workers…I told her that we discuss about how to work, how to receive our payment, how to take leave, and so on. Well, my mistress visibly stiffened. I read her body language and told her that I’d not go against the hand that feeds me.”

The week after our conversation in Subia’s room, Subia and I went to meet another worker I met that day in the park, Nadiya. Nadiya, who lived in a workers’ courtyard similar to Subia’s in Sikanderpur, had been living in Gurgaon since the early 1990s, she married in the early 2000s but her husband abandoned her while she was pregnant. Nadiya sent her young son to live in her home village in Murshidabad in West Bengal to access a Christian missionary school and as such lived alone. Nadiya had been working as a domestic servant since the age of nine. She describes her life at the time moving from one workplace to the next:

“The employer whom I’d worked for [at nine years old] - he was childless- he had promised that ‘you let her work here and I will look after her education’. He never did anything for my education…my elder sister…was so glad that I could finally study as I had always wanted to…He used to wake me up at dawn- after that once I had finished all the chores in his house- he’d drop me at his mother’s house. There would be three-four iron pails full of dirty laundry that I had to do. I had never even washed my own clothes till that point…I hate doing laundry to this day…I worked six months for him at thirty rupees a month at the end of that my elder sister had come and told him that neither had he admitted me to a school, nor had he given me a raise- and you’re making her work in two houses. I won’t let her work here any further.”

Nadiya has spent her entire life working as a domestic worker. The spatio-temporal organisation and regulation of her life had long been consolidated by the informal working conditions set by work and family. She notes that, “Even if they do give you food, they say ‘Eat fast!’ So the rest of the work is quick and ready”. Bringing her wrinkled hands out from underneath her sari, she remarks, “look at my hands, I look like an old woman!”

While ostensibly characterised as an “informally” arranged economic activity, as Subia and Nadiya’s accounts attest to, domestic work operates through the tight physical and discursive control of the movement and practices of its (entirely female) workforce. In this respect the space of social
reproduction is transplanted into the home of work, or squeezed into the brief moments between shifts in different households (times I would attempt to catch the women for a conversation).

At the entrance to each residential colony domestic workers are required to display their gate pass, and open their bags so that security guards can write down their possessions. Domestic “help” in most gated enclaves is required to use a separate elevator and entrance to residents, while access to bathroom and toilet facilities is frequently limited. Jyotsna, a member of GKS remarked to me that in the complex she works in, “they won’t let us use their [toilet]. There’s a common bathroom downstairs. Since I work on the sixteenth floor, I have to come all the way down to use it…It’s falling to pieces actually- but we don’t really have an option there.” The tight regulation of women’s movements within the gated enclave is reflected in broader discourses of untrustworthiness that circulate among upper-class Gurgaon residents, and indeed inform the founding premise of the gated enclave in Gurgaon. The “domestic worker” is a somewhat characteristic figure of exclusive urban landscapes, Mbembe (2004) terms domestic workers the “living metaphors” for the “disjunctive inclusions” which marked the dependency of whites on black labour in apartheid South Africa. Yet the domestic worker is disjunctive precisely in their embodied challenge to codes of separation hard-wired into Gurgaon’s moral order. Srivastava (2014) argues the gates of Gurgaon’s exclusive residential colonies “ensure the elaborate unfolding of events [inside] with an intensity that control makes possible, and without the fear of ‘disruptions’ the open-street holds” (175). The freedom which upper-class residents enjoy is immediately predicated on the distinction and difference from spaces and people on the constitutive outside of the community boundary. The gated enclave in this manner is the direct other to the surrounding urban villages, the spatial practices which constitute the two spaces ensure fragmentation and distinction are dialectically entwined around the regulation and control of “outsider” bodies. It was precisely against these everyday conditions, clenched between logics of the urban village and elite residential enclave that both Subia and Nadiya sought to mobilise an oppositional politics.

6.2.2 Going rogue
Indeed, Subia and Nadiya were part of a smaller group of women involved in GKS that had gone rogue. Not settled with the GKS programme, the group utilised the rights-training they had attained from GKS to mobilise direct opposition to gender and sexual-based violence at the workplace and urban village.
Indeed, while some of the women had been able to negotiate with their employers for standardised pay and working conditions, most recognised the partiality and individual nature of these demands; one woman had managed to negotiate one day off per week, while another was struggling to earn enough to feed her children. Both Subia and Nadiya accepted that these were conditions of work and life not unique to Gurgaon, nor where they likely to be addressed through the NGO’s activity programme.

One afternoon I went with Subia to visit Nadiya. The week previous both women had been arrested for obstructing the entry of a local police station. That day they had visited Nathupur to hand out pamphlets with phone numbers and information. Not long after they received a call asking for help, Nadiya and
Subia set off to Nathupur. Nadiya explained: “We found her hanging from the fan in her room…if it was a suicide…why were her feet were still on the chair below? …She was hanging there from her own dupatta [scarf]…The knot was so loose she could have easily come undone…” Both Nadiya and Subia knew this scene disturbingly well, it fell neatly into migrant women’s discursive milieu dominated by discussions and stories of physical and sexual violence. Despite the protestations of the GKS women, the police concluded that the woman had committed suicide. Nadiya and Subia attempted to block the police from leaving the scene, and subsequently organised a rally at the police gates where they were later lathi-charged and arrested. Nadiya poignantly remarks that: “It is because of GKS that we understand these things”\(^{69}\). As discussed in Chapter 5, I understand gender-based violence as not only a prosaic aspect of everyday urban life for many women\(^{70}\), but one which equally shapes and affects migrant women’s subjective and imagined place within the city (Datta, 2016). For the GKS women the discovery of the murdered woman, brought relations of the private and domestic out onto the galis of the urban village, the choice to relay this particular story speaks to the way in which the women’s everyday lives and political subjectivities are specifically wrought through these kinds of spectacular, disciplinary events. In this manner, while the women were ostensibly brought together through the identity and spatiality of work, it was toward the violence of everyday life that their political agency was primarily mobilised.

At another meeting with Subia she retold a story of how she physically confronted her neighbour who had been violently beating his wife for months. Subia admitted that she had been reluctant for months to intervene in the “private” space of her neighbours, yet after speaking with her GKS sisters she was convinced to act. GKS organised for the woman to stay elsewhere and blocked the man into his room while Subia convinced the police to come to the home. Subia noted, “[The policeman] told him that he had no right to get drunk with the money that his wife had brought home through hard labour, while he sat there doing nothing”, with evident delight she remarked that the policeman ridiculed the violent man, “he doesn’t dare meet my eyes these days… …My husband [tells] me don’t go looking for trouble, but I tell him, it’s alright good will come out of it…I always consult my sisters from the union before I take any step.”

While appeals to state force wouldn’t ordinarily be considered an act of subaltern resistance, Subia’s instrumentalisation of the police speaks more broadly to a willingness to fight back against gender-based violence in the neighbourhood and formed part of a diversity of tactics – from physical confrontations to mutual support – engaged in by the GKS women that often exceeded the meagre demands of the Union. For both Nadiya and Subia, GKS provided a fixed terrain upon which they could mobilise particular subject-positions as migrants and workers – to build gender and class-based solidarity out of divergent experiences of life and work. Subia’s political activity in particular were incarnated by a stretched life of migration, exploitation, and empowerment across fragmented political spaces and subject-positions. In a

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\(^{69}\) The subaltern woman’s suicide is a common reference point of subalternity within colonial and post-colonial discourse (Guha, 1987; Spivak 1988).

\(^{70}\) As indeed most of the world.
break from the kinds of insurgent urban citizenry developed elsewhere (Appadurai 2002) Subia, and indeed a number of women involved in workplace and neighbourhood-based organising featured in this study; express a desire to create forms of unity and solidarity that broke from the immediate spatio-temporalities and surrounding integers of their lives in Gurgaon. Subia and Nadiya’s willingness and capacity to engage in vigilante political struggle is shaped precisely by their fixity within the city and their own experiences of encounter, distanciation and precarity.

Nearing the end of one of our conversations in Subia’s home, discarding my rather formulaic list of questions, I asked Subia what marked out Gurgaon from the many other places she had lived in over the past fifteen years. Here I quote her response in full:

“The difference is that I work here only. One day I will leave this place, I want to create a better atmosphere for those who are going to come after me. If we could fix proper wages for them, then they will work well and we can achieve a form of ekta [unity] in all of us. This will be important for when we are in trouble - if the help is being beaten up by the master, or if she is falsely accused of theft by her mistress - then people can stand together for her against them. We don’t have any of our own people here. We need a support system to live here. I think then that I should stay associated with this - so that when trouble comes, I have this group standing up for me… I’ve worked hard to come here and I want to go to better places.”

Subia’s response speaks directly to the kinds of urban politics that I want to draw attention to in this chapter. Subia’s demand for unity among female domestic workers stretches across times, spaces and subject-positions. In a couple of sentences Subia shifts from one time to another, from her present self to future potential selves, and from the contingent conditions of her life in Gurgaon to an abstract and speculative claim to a future-oriented ekta [solidarity]. The temporality of this call for ekta, stretches across the spatio-temporalities of flexible work and itinerant movement, shaped by the particular mode of gendered abstraction that ties women to the spatially bound domestic, and simultaneously to (re)production regimes of flexibility. In this context, the urban village does not only set out the conditions for Subia and Nadiya’s subsumption as flexible “migrant workers” and outsiders, but equally acts as a caesura, a spatio-temporal fixing point providing a terrain for potential emplacement, and an oppositional politics, in Subia and Nadiya’s otherwise fraught and precarious lives.

6.2.3 Memories of home
Subia’s memory of her movement from her home in Kolkata, to her husband’s home in Bihar to Gurgaon, is anchored around a fluctuating sense of dis/placement. Subia would speak with great nostalgia of the Kolkata she left at the age of seventeen, in “humare Kolkata” [our Calcutta] there was infrastructure for the poor, services for women and plenty of jobs for everyone. She recalled:

“In our Kolkata, we have a factory for everything- for medicines, for light-bulbs, bread, cake, biscuits. There’s an ice factory behind my house- it’s so big! I can work in any factory in Kolkata where my mother’s house is”.
I did not doubt Subia’s statement, I have never visited Kolkata. Yet I was interested in why Subia shapes her Kolkata as a bountiful city of opportunity. This is particularly the case given that this memory of Kolkata, is not one which Subia could return to. As she remarked:

“There’s a small mud house of ours in the village [but] there’s no place for me. I live in my mother’s house. This is why I can’t return to the village. There’s nowhere for us to be. I am the only one in my extended family who works. Apart from my mother and sisters, no one at my in-laws knows that I work here in Gurgaon and earn money. That is why I’ve come so far away to work so that no one gets to know about this and I can solve my problems as well…When the entire family comes together- I can’t even mention that I earn my bread…the other sisters…have been married into big families in Bombay and elsewhere…When they come together for a festival or a wedding, sometimes I feel bad that I’m not up to their level- that I earn and live- if they find out- they’ll say ‘she is so dirty’”.

Crucially then Subia’s speculative and trans-temporal demand for ekta is shaped by her own experiences and memories of displacement, characteristic of the rooted flexibility discussed in the previous chapter. In this regard, even as Subia’s demands fall outside of the episteme of territorialities of urban politics, they are nevertheless shaped by the contingent, material conditions of displacement.

In this regard, in this chapter I want to highlight the partial and incomplete domination of the workplace, home and urban village over female, migrant workers. Rather I am interested in drawing attention to the manner in which articulations between gendered spatialities and identities discussed in the previous chapter mediate and produce the conditions for an oppositional politics in the city. It is this articulated hegemonic terrain which provides migrant women a platform to innovatively work out spatial practices that disrupt both the conditions which render them placeless and uphold the continued accumulation of capital. In the following section I will expand on how the spatial practices of women like Subia and Nadiya correspond to an epistemological break with dominant contemporary understandings of urban politics in India.

6.3 A deterritorial urban politics

As discussed in Chapter 2, I approach the question of urban politics through a broader critique of dominant epistemologies used to delimitate the ontological boundaries of the urban. I argue that prevailing ways in which we come to know and understand “the urban” and thereby “urban politics” are refracted through both the Subaltern Studies Collective’s focus on the everyday, micro-politics of subaltern figures and European scholarship that has implicitly posited a conceptualisation of “the urban”, urban politics and urban citizenships that is ontologically bound up in a fixed and immutable territory of dis/possession, production, reproduction and consumption. Between these two influential bodies of work, what Roy (2011) has termed “subaltern urbanist” literatures have examined subaltern strategies, actions and claims to the city within the current conjuncture wherein the city is increasingly influenced by an ascendant upper-class and globalised real estate capital. An example of this trend is in the work of Partha Chatterjee (2004).
In his influential book *The Politics of the Governed* (2004), Partha Chatterjee asserts that in “most of the world” there is a determinable split between elite civil society, materialised in property relations and institutional democracy, and popular political society that transgress modes of legality and wherein people are “governed” as the population groups. This split, for Chatterjee, is productive of discrete modes of political practice. While elite civil society relies on institutional democratic rights of discernible citizens, popular political society make demands based on their categorical status as “populations”; as slum-dwellers, pavement-hawkers, religious sects and so on. For Chatterjee “refugees, landless people, day labourers…are all demographic categories of governmentality” (ibid, 59) and despite “transgressing the strict lines of legality” nevertheless in somewhat Lefebvrian terms “make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right” (author’s emphasis added). Echoing my conceptualisation of hegemony, explained in Chapter 2, Chatterjee argues that due to the postcolonial state’s inability to form cohesive hegemonic authority over the nation, the State in “must descend from…high ground” of civil society “to the terrain of political society in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well-being” (ibid, 41).

This conceptualisation of “passive revolution” is echoed by other scholars writing on the post-Independence Indian state (Fuller and Harriss, 2001; Kaviraj, 1984). Here I am interested in the particular terrain through which Chatterjee ascribes hegemonic encounter between the state and it’s governed. In *The Politics of the Governed*, the “terrain” which Chatterjee describes is, nominally at least, “urban”. That is, it refers implicitly to forms of political practice within the ontological boundaries of possession and dispossession, reaffirming a relatively bounded and circumscribed epistemology of urban and urban politics. Chatterjee’s terrain is a terrain of squatters, pavement dwellers, and ‘informal’ traders. In the book, Chatterjee draws from the example of a community living on railway land in south Calcutta. Here he describes the community’s struggles for legitimacy through numerous negotiations with low-level state officials to stave eviction and gain access to infrastructure service provision and public education. Crucially for Chatterjee, the ability for the community to negotiate with the state is derived from both their subjected position as a discernible population group, and their own homogenous kinship and sense of “family” ostensibly bound to territory. He writes:

“It is not any biological or even cultural affinity that defines this family. Rather, it is the collective occupation of a piece of land – a territory clearly defined in time and space and one that is under threat” (ibid, 58).

It is not my intention here to dissect Chatterjee’s vague empirical field and strange homogenisation of the railway community which appear at odds with his previous work on the “differentiated unity” of peasant groups (1993). Rather I wish to highlight the manner in which, the characterisation of “most” subaltern politics as responsive to State practices of governmentality, and it’s concretisation and definition as essentially bound to a politics of territory elides both the manner in which certain populations are precisely dis-located and rendered indiscernible to practices of State governmentality (as explored in Chapter 5), and in turn the manner in which certain groups untied from territory and possession make
collective political demands outside the ontological terrain of the dis/possession. As noted in Chapter 2, Chatterjee’s work forms part of a broader body of work within the Subaltern Studies Collective that folds into contemporary readings of urban politics. Take for example Guha’s (1983) landmark *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* that dedicates a whole chapter to fixing the politics of the Indian peasant rebel to the structural interplay between what he terms “ethnic” and “physical” space. Here Guha (ibid) reads a series of peasant insurgencies – and the formation of the subaltern peasant rebel – as fundamentally anchored around the defence of territorially defined identities and politics.

As noted in Chapter 2, this body of work has been particularly influential in the development of contemporary “subaltern urbanist” (Roy 2011) literature that has broadly sought to understand the clash between the developmental, and now neoliberal Indian state and the vernacular, subaltern politics of everyday life. This clash materialises over “right to the city”-type demands to territory, shelter, access to urban services and infrastructure, public space, and exclusion by “world-class city” projects (Benjamin, 2008; Bhan, 2016; Ghetner, 2015; Weinstein, 2014). In this regard, Appadurai (2002, 27) conceptualises a subaltern mode of citizenship through appeal to the nominal features of housing, infrastructure, public space – arguing that “housing [is] the single most critical site of [Mumbai’s] politics of citizenship”.

Elsewhere, Holston’s (2009) influential work in Brazil claims that settlement practices within the world’s urban-peripheries constitute the emergence of an “insurgent citizenship”.

In this chapter I am interested in exploring how experiences and demands of place coalesce outside of these nominal integers of the urban episteme; what I term a “subaltern counter-urbanism”. In doing so I am not seeking to dispute the importance of urban territoriality for the development of particular modes of citizenship, rather I am seeking to open up a view of the urban that isn’t hemmed in by itineraries of consumption and dis/possession. In making the case for a de-territorial and counter-topographical *urban* (Katz, 2001b) I do not seek to make the claim that a territorial mode of politics does not materialise or are not relevant in Gurgaon. Indeed the practices, agencies and strategies of village-rentiers explored in Chapter 4 bear similarities to those described in the subaltern urbanist literature. Village rentiers, ontologically intelligible by their legitimate claims to territory and property are able to make “urban”-based claims of Gurgaon’s fractured and spectral state institutions.

However, my focus in this chapter is on the political claims and subjectivities of those who come to be known, and understand themselves, as entirely outside registers of territory, property and belonging. In this regard I have found McKittrick’s (2011) work on a *black sense of place* instructive. Here the author explores the ways in which the contingent racial geographies of the Americas have continually elided and erased black geographies and sense of place. Rather than seeking to find a place for black communities within a hegemonic epistemological terrain defined by their erasure, McKittrick explores the alternative cartographic repertoires which provide glimpses of necessarily disturbing and indiscernible black geographies. A “black sense of place” thus analytically draws attention to the way in which
epistemologically and materially violent structures seek to erase but cannot fully capture and define black geographies (ibid, 947).

In addition I have found useful postcolonial scholarship which has sought to etch out the spatiotemporalities of migrant social worlds gripped by spontaneity, flexibility and negotiation (Mbembé, 2004; Simone, 2004; Ong and Roy 2011). This body of work has drawn attention to how “translocal”, “transnational” or “worldly” practices of migration, construct novel ontologies of place, identity and belonging (Datta, 2016; Smith, 2000). In the Indian context, Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) describe circular migrants as subaltern cosmopolitans the “awkward misfits of the nation”, who “traffic” skills, knowledge and discourse across and between vast, stretched out spaces of difference.

Here I ask how we might understand a politics of place and emplacement of those who are always already excluded from the epistemological terrain of dis/possession. It is my assertion in this chapter that female migrant workers’ everyday political struggles disrupt the certitudes of the politics of dis/possession through which their rooted flexibility is wrought. I am interested, following Katz (2001b), to not only discern the contours of this contingent politics but equally to think about how we might draw out the “counter-abstractive” connections between the divergent sets of struggles outlined in the chapter.

To do so I follow two different bodies of work. First as detailed in Chapter 2, I find Marx’s and marxists’ exposition of the “two-fold nature of labour” and Lefebvre’s spatialisation in The Production of Space (1991) instructive. Second, I borrow from urban geographers, a way of thinking about place contingently (Lefebvre 1973; Massey 1994; Hart 2006; McKittrick 2014), not through an abstracted or general narrative of possession, but rather as constituted through relational and contingent social relations. In this manner, unlike male workers most of whom engaged in a spontaneous politics of circulation, sabotage and factory-breaking, women workers in this study engage in situated demands for emplacement. I understand this condition of rooted flexibility, and as an instance of differential space, that which fixes in and consolidates a flexible, placeless labour power and yet provides the centralising terrain through which women workers’ are able to make demands of emplacement, what Lefebvre calls the “maximal differences” embedded within the rationally ordered, gendered spaces of everyday life (Lefebvre 1991). I conceptualise this rooted flexibility as precisely the terrain which, in Lefebvrian terms, while organised around the alienated particularities of minimal difference, equally provides fixing point for women workers to mobilise a contingent oppositional and solidaristic urban politics.

Secondly, these demands for emplacement are not necessarily fixed in to the here-and-now of everyday life, as the GKS women demonstrate migrant women are well aware of the partiality of their political actions, in light of this they appeal to a future-oriented, transtemporal imaginary of place in the city. In a break from the kinds of translocal or insurgent urban citizenry indexed to migrant workers elsewhere (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Holston and Appadurai, 1999), migrant women workers in this study express a desire to create modes of emplacement that break from the immediate spatio-temporalities and surrounding locality of their lives in Gurgaon. By dialectically tracing the “contour
lines” (Katz 2001) between the women’s struggles I aim to discern both the contingencies and abstractions of a materially and epistemologically disruptive urban politics.

If I began this thesis in Chapter 4 exploring the internal frontiers which framed the complicity of agriculturalists in the urbanisation of Gurgaon, here I arrive in Chapter 6 an interest in the kinds of politics generated by lived experiences of embeddedness within regimes of flexibility and hypermobility. Drawing on, Fraser’s work (1990) I posit an understanding of the worker’s struggles for emplacement as expressions of a “subaltern counter-urbanism” a mode of solidaristic spatial difference that operates to unevenly appropriate and occupy spaces and discourses otherwise used to alienate and dispossess workers’ social lives. In this following section I will seek to do so by drawing on ethnographic and interview-based research with two groups of women engaged in workplace struggles within Gurgaon’s auto-parts sector.

6.4 Down in the battlefield

“Earlier women were not given any position in society. Now to get a position we have to get down in the battlefield. Whether at home or outside, housewives now want to be valued as they should be, girls want the same wages as boys are given, even though we work more than they do!”

_Sonu, Azadiplex worker._

On 10th February 2014 two thousand workers at the Azadiplex auto-components plant in IMT Manesar arrived for work and refused to enter the factory. The workers demanded wage increases for assembly line workers, made up entirely of women, from ₹ 5800 to the Haryana state minimum wage of ₹ 8100, as well as demanding that sub-contracted workers be given permanent contracts. The following day the company attempted to prevent a repeat of the strike, by ordering bus drivers to drive directly into the factory premises. As a result, the workers collectively decided to disembark from the company buses at IMT chowk on the highway and marched two and a half miles across the industrial estate’s wide avenues to the factory gates. Seventy per cent of workers at Azadiplex are women, eighty per cent are hired on casual contracts through a network of sub-contracting agencies, thekedars. The workers’ strike was entirely illegal, there was no union registered to the factory, nor was there one single body or committee representing the workers. This was a wildcat action. On the 13th February, after three days of action, the company relented and agreed to increase all wages by ₹ 1,000 and institute double-pay for all over-time. Nevertheless, the strike in February 2014 set-off a series of wildcat actions at the plant, carried out by its female workforce over the following six months.

The Azadiplex strikes fell in the direct aftermath of a factory occupation by one hundred women at Baxter Pharmaceuticals in IMT Manesar demanding the registration of a factory union, and only a few years after the internationally notorious Maruti-Suzuki factory occupations of 2011-12 (detailed in Chapter 1). In the short period between IMT Manesar opening up as Haryana’s premier industrial space, organised around tightly aggregated auto supply chains, equipped with high-tech automated assembly-
lines and bespoke surveillance and security services, the estate had been embroiled in near continuous upheaval. Significantly, the 2014 struggles were nearly all led by female workers. Sonu was a prominent figure in the 2014 Azadiplex strike. She explained that:

“The reason was that if you complete three months, you’re supposed to be through the company…become permanent that is. That’s how it works in other companies, within three or six months you get to become permanent. In [Azadiplex] there was nothing like that, you could neither get to become permanent, nor get a bonus or even a raise…this is why we had to go on strike.”

In her late 20s, Sonu was from a scheduled caste community in Rajasthan and moved to Gurgaon in her late teens along with her parents and older sister Varsha who also worked at the plant. In October 2014, I met with Sonu in Kamla Nehru Park in old Gurgaon. Kamla Nehru Park is one of Gurgaon’s few municipal parks and has been used by workers as a public meeting place for rallies and meetings for a number of years. The park sits underneath the old Gurgaon gurudwara hidden away from the roads and street life of old Gurgaon. That day hundreds of women sat under the park’s pagoda while Sonu and others took turns to lead discussions on the previous six months of struggle at the plant. Rallying calls of “mazdoor ekta zindabad!” [long live worker unity!] common in workers rallies in Hindi-speaking India, were peppered with evocations of dignity [izzat], hard-working commitment [mehanati], strength [shakti] and the necessity for the women to remain resolute outside the factory gates, against violent “boys” and exploitative thekedars.

The park rallies were different to the GKS meetings, where NGO workers provided legal information, distributed leaflets, and facilitated orderly discussion, and the traditional union rallies where elderly union officials sat on chairs on a stage giving sermons on capitalist greed and workers’ strength. The Azadiplex meetings were far more anarchic affairs. Women sat in a circle and gave their opinion on the struggle often interrupting each other, disagreeing and breaking off into discussion about sympathetic thekedars [contractors] or particularly bad management figures, while small children ran around, in and out of the pagoda. Intrigued men, not accustomed to seeing such large groups of working-class women out in the park raising slogans and discussing political strategy, surrounded the pagoda looking in. A male representative of a prominent Communist party union stood outside the pagoda, notes in hand at a safe distance waiting to be invited in to speak by the women. Sonu eyed up the male onlookers remarked that the women should be wary to speak too openly here in the park, the company might have sent spies and ‘local boys’ may recognise them from the villages. As the meeting wound to an end, the union official got five minutes to make his speech of support, before the women picked up their children and quickly departed on shared tempos. As quickly as the meeting had assembled, the park was deserted again.

6.4.1 Gurgaon’s auto-parts industry
The history of auto-component industry in Gurgaon dates back to the opening of the first Maruti-Suzuki plant in the city in 1981 and the Hero Honda motorcycle plant in 1985. Following the establishment of large assembly manufacturing facilities in the city a deluge of auto-component manufacturers opened first
in Udyog Vihar and upon Maruti-Suzuki’s expansion, to IMT Manesar in the mid-2000s. Gurgaon’s auto industry forms the core of the Bawal-Manesar Investment Region one of nine Special Investment Regions within the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor, a 1500km industrial-urban corridor project with US $90 billion worth of investment from both the public and private sector. The Bawal-Manesar component which spans over 400km² currently contains projects including “Gurgaon Global City” an industrial and commercial development built on land controversially violently acquired for the failed Reliance Industries Special Economic Zone (see Chapter 4).

The city’s auto-component industry has relatively high-capital intensity and highly localised linkages to the large assembly plants. For example, Maruti Suzuki is North India’s largest automobile producer, and sources 93% of its components from the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial hub. Nationally the sector which experienced average annual growth rates of 17% between 2005 and 2011, grew by only 11% over the following five-year period (ACMA 2016). This may be a consequence of a more general economic slowdown across the country, with high inflation rates hitting domestic consumer spending more harshly. In addition, stagnation in the sector might be a response to the liberalisation of component imports over the past five years. Between 1980 and 2014 import duties on component parts fell by 60%, as such since 2009 imports on component parts have grown at a faster rate than local manufacturing, pushing local components manufacturers to seek export markets (Jha and Chakraborty 2016). In short, since 2009 a national economic slowdown together with quickening liberalisation has hit the auto-component sector’s profits and pushed companies to quicken labour casualisation and bring down labour costs.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turnover (USD billion)</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% growth</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
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Auto-parts manufacturing, an industry which almost exclusively feeds into domestic automobile production, is intimately tied to India’s highway-laden urbanisation. Nevertheless the products produced at Azadiplex and Rokaplex plants and finished within the large Honda and Maruti Suzuki assembly plants are not accessible to auto-component workers. Nationally, the share of contract labour in the automobile sector (that includes both assembly and components sectors) rose between 2002 and 2012 from 24% to 41%. In Gurgaon, 71% of workers in the sector were hired through contractors (GOI ASI 2011-12). The share of contract workers at the two auto-component plants featured in this study are both 70% (Azadiplex and Rokaplex) and have an unusually high level of female employment of 73% (Azadiplex) and 71% (Rokaplex).
Table 6.2: Outline of the two auto-parts companies studied in this chapter. Data collected by author.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Contract workers</th>
<th>Female workers</th>
<th>Number of contractors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azadiplex</td>
<td>Speedometers; Harnessing</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rokaplex</td>
<td>Harnessing; PC boards</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The auto-component sector in Gurgaon relies on highly localised, tightly aggregated supply chains, to compete with cheap import markets. Nevertheless, the sector’s relatively low capital intensity of certain products assists in the easy relocation of production. These factors provide some auto-component labour with a relative degree of what Wright (2000) terms “structural power” within the sector. Labour’s ‘structural power’ in India has however been significantly eroded under industrial and urban regimes characterised by highly mobile fixed and variable capital and spatially dis-aggregated sites of production and reproduction. Transitions to post-Fordist dis-integrated production processes, somewhat embodied by the auto-component industry has significantly weakened workers’ bargaining power.

In the context of unevenly weak structural bargaining power, workers in Gurgaon more commonly mobilise “associational” power (Wright 2000), based not on legally recognised labour institutions (which cannot legally represent contract labour) but based on informal, affective relations in workplaces. Women workers in particular mobilise associational power based on common gendered experiences of life’s work. While Wright’s typology of working-class power is a useful way to understand workers’ relative opportunities to disrupt and assert control over the production process, the framework is limited in its locating of a politics of work and production solely within formal relations of production at the workplace. In the cases detailed in this chapter, working-class solidarities, associations and disruptions were derived explicitly across the dialectical spaces of exploitation and abstraction, in the household, street, and factory shop-floor.

Women workers at both Azadiplex and Rokaplex have shirked traditional models and subjectivities of industrial insurrection to engage in a politics intimately tied to their experiences of work across urban-rural, formal-informal and waged-unwaged divides. Both the Rokaplex protest, which ostensibly called for the reinstatement of contract workers, and the Azadiplex workers combination of strike action and internal confrontation were mobilisations of a spatial politics of staying intimately tied to women’s positions outside of the formal workplace. Women workers at both plants are not represented by traditional trade unions, themselves suffering from decades of labour deregulation, that are legally unable to represent workers not officially hired by the company and historically unwilling to mobilise women workers. Trade union culture, in North India at least remains extremely masculine and predominately
represents a collapsing number of permanently employed workers. Alternatively, women workers at the plants factories have advanced modes of organising responsive to their gendered position within precarious and highly segregated urban landscapes.

6.4.2 Azadiplex
Azadiplex is a subsidiary of Azadicorp an Indian-Japanese joint venture that manufacture auto-components. The Azadiplex plant forms a complex of three plants on adjacent sites in IMT Manesar. The Azadiplex plant predominately manufactures locking devices and switches for scooters and cars, supplying the local assembly plants of Yamaha, Maruti-Suzuki and Honda. The company boasts that 90% of automobiles driven in India contain a component made in one of its factories. The three-plant complex, is the company’s primary manufacturing facility in North India, with eleven plants in total across India’s other auto-hubs in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Orissa, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The plant opened in 2001 relocating from Udyog Vihar in central Gurgaon and hires 3500 workers.

Table 6.3: Outline of Azadiplex workforce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total workforce</th>
<th>Female workforce</th>
<th>% of total workforce</th>
<th>Contract workforce</th>
<th>% of total workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azadiplex</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azadicorp (across three plants)</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>2485</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>2800</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
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Like most workers in Gurgaon’s organised sectors, Azadiplex workers are hired through a series of subcontractors and do not possess access to legal employment rights, territorial belonging, property nor local citizenship rights. In addition, as women, the Azadiplex workers do not possess the gendered attributes of mobility and flexibility that underpin the city’s hegemonic labour systems. Azadiplex workers thus operate under altogether different conditions to male workers and as such express altogether different kinds of political demands. Take for example an account of the Maruti-Suzuki 2011-12 strikes, discussed in Chapter 1, by Siddarth a former Maruti-Suzuki worker:

“The unifying factor at Maruti was that we were all Haryanvis, we knew each other – we were all from the same village or same school or same training institute – and that’s how we would bond and come together – and that’s how the contract-permanent divide would be bridged – but in case of [auto-component plants] almost 70% are migrants and they are dispersed in terms of where they come from, their roles, and of course that some are women and others men.”

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71 Data compiled from company website, interviews with workers and accounts within FMS.
The feminisation of the auto-components workforce is difficult to trace historically given their relatively short tenure in Gurgaon, however the discursive justification for hiring women in the sector maps onto global hegemonic narratives of the woman worker, discussed elsewhere (Salzinger 2003) of malleability, docility and an essential aversion toward workplace struggle.

“Bringing [women] in brings about an overall improvement in discipline, appearance, behaviour and social environment…Women are very good at repetitive work/tasks and can carry it on for lengths of time without losing interest…and hence fit perfectly for the more detailed and repetitive processes on the shop floor…They are far more peaceful and malleable”

“Women on the shop floor”, Anand Group, leading auto-components company in Gurgaon and India.

While the sight of women numerically dominating the shop-floors of Gurgaon is incredibly uncommon, women are beginning to make up an increasing share of assembly-line workers in the auto-components sector. As shown in Table 6.3, of the 3500 workers at Azadicorp, 71% are women. While of the 1115 workers at the Azadiplex plant 815 are women (73%) unevenly spread across assembly line roles: 440 in the lock-set department, 350 in the switch department, and 50 in the moulding department. Eighty percent of the workforce across the three plants are hired through sub-contractors and therefore can not avail the benefits of permanent employment.
Sat in her home in the Khandsa road area of Gurgaon, Varsha, an assembly-line worker at the Azadiplex plant, explained the gendered division of labour at Azadiplex: “Men are nearly all in lockset and quality checking – women do most of the actual work”. Feminised assembly-line roles are waged at ₹ 5800 per month, masculinised checking roles are waged at ₹ 7000 per month. Not only are Azadiplex workers more generally precariously employed with low, unstable wages, women workers, who carry out the lion share of the physical labour earn significantly less than their male colleagues. In the context of a labour market dominated by men, albeit precariously employed, the auto-worker in Gurgaon is typically constructed as strong, macho and male, the female Azadiplex worker stands out in an army of hundreds of thousands of male workers in IMT Manesar.

Varsha’s explanation of the gendered division of labour at Azadiplex hints toward a broader feeling expressed by a number of my research interlocutors that women’s work is qualitatively superior to men’s work by virtue of a longer experience working throughout life. A feeling of practical superiority among the women at the Azadiplex plants fed into the development of gender-based collectivities that were essential for the strike. The female, migrant workers that predominate the Azadiplex shop-floor do not possess the gendered attributes on which hegemonic (re)productive relations are premised. Women working in Azadiplex thus operate under altogether different conditions to male workers and as such mobilise a politics on an altogether different terrain. Varsha notes as such: “Women can do much more work than men, women do better quality work than men, are more sincere with their work…men just have fun”. Sonu remarks that: “Girls ought to get [paid] as much as boys do! When boys work, they make a mess of it, one of the components falls here, another there, one of the parts left out, they work carelessly. Women actually work hard and sincerely!” It is my contention that the value women place on not only their labour but equally the workplace, despite the moral connotations of women carrying out waged work outside the home, was shaped by their fixed positions in the city, their relative rootedness to the labour (and household) process in comparison to male workers; thus highlighting the intersection of a politics of the shop-floor with the politics of the stretched and contorted space of social reproduction (Chapter 5). In her work on female agricultural workers in rural Malaysia, Hart (1991, 104) highlights a similar tendency, noting that the women’s “willingness and ability to attempt collective action within the labour process contrasts vividly with the way men typically expressed their resistance…namely in individual and largely clandestine acts of sabotage.”
I asked Sonu and Varsha why women in other plants had not been willing or capable to participate in wildcat strikes like those in Azadiplex. Sonu was quick to respond that: “Azadiplex is very different. It’s all women here. There are no men. This company is running thanks to its women”. Thinking that perhaps I hadn’t expressed myself properly, I suggested that even if there were a lot of women, what was it about Azadiplex that lead the women to strike? Sonu remarked: “Well…maybe the girls are different here. If any trouble happens, they are the first to step forward. This is special at Azadiplex, we have unity”. The Azadiplex workers’ expression of a gendered value of work, specifically reflective of working-class women’s subjectification and material experiences as ‘life workers’, feeds into and shapes the mode of political demand-making on the shop-floor.

6.4.3 The Azadiplex camp
The resolution between Azadiplex management and the workers, described at the beginning of the chapter, was short lived. On the 12th September 2014, two hundred women and one hundred male workers stood at the assembly-line and refused to start working until the pay increase was initiated. Not long after, the police arrived at the factory and forced the striking workers out of the plant. The following day, the workers repeated the actions, stopping work at the assembly line, again they were expelled from the factory by the police and private security. On this occasion, rather than returning home, the workers decided to remain, constructing a protest camp at the factory gates, refusing to enter the factory or return home.

The following day the women obstructed the factory gates in order to block other workers and materials from entering the factory. The police responded by lathi-charging the workers and violently beating the women away from the gates. I enquired with Sonu how she felt about taking such confrontational action, this was after all the first time in IMT Manesar’s history that women had participated in such a public political struggle. She remarked:

“For those twelve days we had been right in front of the company gates…The company had set goons on us to get us out of the way [but] even throughout the night, the women stayed as did the men. [Locals] got drunk and wandered around us [but] we created this entire ruckus for them and they disappeared. [The company] had tightened the security a lot- the police were around twenty-four hours… [but] in the hot sun, at nights we stuck together.”

I was interested in how Sonu’s participation in the camp, and as a leading figure of the protest more broadly figured within her household and position as housewife. Throughout the strike, the company’s contractors had made extensive appeals to the families of the workers’ to, as one contractor to put it to me, “get their daughters home, and off the streets”. In addition, the camp was the subject of violent attacks from both police, security guards and local “drunks” wandering around at night. On the subject Sonu remarked:
“Honestly, fear had long gone—almost completely gone by the fifth day. We did not care for our jobs. I really did not care if I was fired, but I did think that those of my friends who remain after me must get their rightful due. I still think the same way....”

I replied to ask, perhaps naively, whether the violence and pressure from contractors ever made her question her participation in the strike.

“At first [my family] refused. All of our families had said that there’s no need for a strike. Either you work or you return back home. But I had two hundred and fifty, three hundred girls watching my back and at least one hundred, a hundred and fifty guys too. Seeing all that, who wants to give up such a long battle and return home? I told my family that we’d either enter the company on our own terms or come back home together. Then my husband intervened: he said: ‘Go ahead, do as you please, if you’ve so many girls with you, I’ll support you. When this strike is over— even if you get fired—make sure that the five hundred workers behind you are able to get in there on their own terms. Even if you have to give up your job in the process’. So yes, my family did support me a lot.”

While, the worker’s spatial practices through the strike—blocking roads and obstructing the factory gates—are in many ways archetypal of industrial strikes the world over, the women’s engagement in prolonged struggle at the explicitly public space of work, transgressed gendered boundaries of public and private space, and re-appropriated IMT Manesar’s avenues for their own means. The Azadiplex workers were ostensibly demanding emplacement, for many the dominance of the workplace within their everyday lives together with the material distanciation of their home villages, was such that basic daily reproduction—eating, friendships, education, relaxation, courting—occurred not in the urban village but on the factory shop floor. In this manner for women working under regimes of rooted flexibility, where structures of gendered domestication come into conflict with regimes of labour flexibilisation, the territory of everyday life is productive of a set of political demands the diverge significantly from their male counterparts. Rather than engaging in a politics of flexibility, these workers were making demands for emplacement.

After twelve days on strike the company agreed to the workers’ demands but refused to take back twenty-seven workers, and so the strike continued. In response, the women increased their militancy, and began to blockade the main avenues of IMT Manesar from passing traffic. Sonu remarked:

“When we jammed the road, then the police had attacked one or two girls with lathis. But we remained sitting on the road—jamming the way [then] at last, there was a hearing... the head of HR [said] that I will take the women back, but ten of them I won’t...Gradually, it became nine days on strike—more and more women came forward...On the ninth day, men and women workers from [the other two factories in the complex] also came forward.”

As the Azadiplex factory sits at the corner of one of IMT Manesar’s main arterial avenues that leads executives and buyers up to the Maruti-Suzuki plant, the public character of the Azadiplex camp was particularly provocative. News of the camp spread to activists and students in Delhi who made daily visits...
to the camp, while workers from neighbouring villages offered facilities for the women to take a rest and wash. At the camp the female workforce freely mixed with each other along with male workers, visitors and passers-by, breaking with hegemonic disciplining of the spatio-temporality of the factory, where women were segregated not only from male workers on the shop-floor, canteen and company buses, but also from each other. In this regard, the Azadiraplex workers broke from the “moral code” of the factory and urban village that bind women to the private and domestic realms; here at the heart of Gurgaon’s premier industrial estate migrant women asserted their oppositional politics in full view.

One Sunday afternoon in Khoh, the village adjacent to IMT Manesar that accommodates a large share of workers’ for the industrial estate, I met with Paroj a twenty-year old worker at Azadiraplex who had participated in the camp; “I’d come to visit my aunt, when I saw lots of women working in the factories, I wanted to try it too”. She explained that she was imminently to be married back in West Bengal so was trying to experience as much freedom as possible before her return, referencing a particular critique of marriage that came up in discussion with garment export workers in Chapter 5 and will be returned to later in this chapter. I asked Paroj about the protest camp, what motivated her to participate and her experience sleeping out on the side of the road throughout the night. She remarked that:

“The strike was not uncomfortable – the problem was the company. They cut off our water supply so we had to bring in provisions from elsewhere, and the police they harassed us – they took the side of the management and when we blocked the road they lathi charged us”.

I asked her whether the experience of being beaten by police officers made her rethink her participation in the strike, to which she replied:

“No, not at all. This was a fight, these things happen. My salary was not going to be increased and conditions [at the factory] were very bad so I thought we should strike. We knew about other factories…we speak to sisters, mothers, friends, neighbours so we knew our conditions were bad.”

Paroj was young and fully expected that her participation in factory work was temporary, so one could presume she may have had less at stake than other Azadiraplex participating or not participating in the strike. Much to the seeming annoyance of her elderly auntie who sat with us, there was a sense in the joyful way in which she recounted the camp that Paroj revelled in relative freedoms waged factory work had allowed. Paroj spoke explicitly to the manner in which spatially restricted experiences of everyday life, and gendered organisations of production, come to calcify around a gender and class-based identity which informed the workers’ demands. For Paroj the problem was not her presence as a woman sleeping on the road at night, “the problem was the company”. Sonu and Paroj’s repeated assertion that the strike was about entering the workplace on one’s “own terms” speaks to the will of many women at the plant to control the terms of their labour, a control which as the previous chapter outlined, stands in contrast to the conditions under which many women enter into waged and formal work.
On the 25th September, after two weeks of protest, the company management agreed to allow all workers back into the factory, promising another wage increase, festival holidays while fifteen women were promised permanent contracts. The two week strike cost the company ₹ 60 million in revenue and, disrupting IMT Manesar’s just-in-time auto supply chain, prompted key vendors (Maruti-Suzuki, Honda, Yamaha) to switch their supply to other component plants. Remarkably, against a backdrop of highly precarious, structurally weak labour relations, non-unionised temporary female workers managed to secure concessions on nearly all demands made of the factory management.

While Sonu insisted that the promise of permanent contracts to a handful of workers, was a way to divide the striking workforce, she nevertheless felt vindicated, “They gave in. We got our solution!” The women re-entered the factory with a renewed sense of solidarity. While there was increased levels of shop-floor discipline in the aftermath of the strike, the women equally mobilised collectively to make small gains within the everyday of workplace. Varsha, Sonu’s elder sister, who did not participate in the strike, remarked of the atmosphere on the shop-floor in the aftermath of the strike:

“The thing that has changed is that women in the company are much more confident now…before management wanted us to plead for every issue…to say ‘don’t throw us out’ we’re not doing this now.”

Upon the workers’ return senior supervisors patrolled the factory with guns, toilets were manned by security guards, phone-jammers were installed to prevent communication through social media, and talking and meeting between workers on the assembly line was prohibited. On the eve of Diwali in the immediate aftermath of the strike, the workers were notified that that they would not be receiving a Diwali bonus. The Diwali bonus is significant component of a workers’ salary, typically relied on to pay for Diwali costs, ongoing debts and for journeys back to home villages. The withdrawal of annual bonuses in Gurgaon and other industrial hubs across the country has routinely sparked protests, strikes and riots. The following day, Sonu led one hundred and fifty of her colleagues to the management office, the women blocked the office doors, demanding their bonus. The manager soon relented, the worker took bonus slips and walked out of the factory returning home for the day.

Soon after Sonu was moved to the male-dominated moulding department. She explained that upon shifting to the departments she was told that she would henceforth be taking tea-breaks separate to her former co-workers. Tea-breaks were for many workers a momentary point of leisure and interaction across a working-day dominated by repetitive assembly-line work. It is not a coincidence that it was on tea-breaks that tactics and strategies for the previous strike were discussed and where women were persuaded to join up. On the third day of taking tea-breaks in isolation, women in Sonu’s previous department came looking for her.

“I told them that I’d been asked to take separate tea-breaks. Around fifty of them gathered and went to the [management] offices…the girls told them squarely in the face that this was not going to
happen. They could not just do as they pleased. So the girls stopped work at the line. Then the personnel came and said that she’ll have her tea-break with you just as you want to. So, you see there’s a lot of unity there. If one person is suffering, four will raise their voice.”

The women’s actions express the struggle around control over the spatio-temporal rhythms of everyday life on the shop-floor, the workers utilised the production process itself to establish this control, demonstrative of changing internal labour relations after the strike.

6.4.4 Life outside
Twelve months after my first meeting with Sonu in the park in Old Gurgaon, she had invited me to visit her home in the Khandsa area of Gurgaon. I waited by the chemist on the intersection between Hero Honda Road, the arterial road that marks out the western boundary of old Gurgaon from the small industrial estate surrounding the Honda motorcycle plant. To the south lay the urban frontiers of new Gurgaon, luxury residential towers, commercial districts and residential blocks towering over empty agricultural land. To the east is old Gurgaon, a tightly packed neighbourhood, densely plotted by large landowning families into low income colonies in the early 1980s. I was met by Sonu’s eight-year old nephew and ten-year old daughter who guided me through the galis of the neighbourhood, taking turns to ride a bike, still wrapped in plastic and foam, across the dirt-track galis of the neighbourhood.

Sonu’s neighbourhood, Bhawani Enclave, is an informal working-class neighbourhood of old Gurgaon that was regularised by the Chief Minister’s office in 2013. It was very different to the worker dominated urban villages which surround the industrial estates, there appeared to be a far less rigidly defined separation of wealth. While in Kapashera and Khoh, richer Yadav families live in grand villas in separate areas of the village that starkly contrast with the densely populated, highly rationalised worker blocks; the social geography of Bhawani Enclave appear more at ease, no ostentatious displays of wealth typical of the village rentiers in industrial villages. After a ten minute walk through the neighbourhood and a brief stop-off for a juice, we arrived at Sonu’s home, a small ten foot room, like so many low-income rooms completely occupied by a high-rise wooden bed. It had been one year since the Azadiplex strike and upon greeting Sonu, she revealed that she no longer worked at the plant:

“I was sacked. My mother was very sick in September, I told them I had to take care of my mother for one week, when I returned they refused to take me back. My husband told me I should just accept it.”

To Sonu’s evident discomfort, her husband interjected to explain that Sonu, now pregnant, would have had to leave the plant sooner or later anyway. The Sonu I met that day was altogether different from the one rallying women in Kamla Nehru park or from our previous meetings in Gurgaon. Her dismissal from the factory, had withdrawn her from the collective social realm iteratively developed on the shop-floor.

“I miss the work, I miss my sisters— I worked there for six years, and to be honest it’s boring here. I miss the tea breaks, the lunch breaks and chatting with friends – these days after my husband leaves in the morning I’m so bored.”
The contested social space of the Azadiplex shop-floor, and the avenues of IMT Manesar that Sonu and her co-workers had successfully shaped to their advantage, seemed a different world to daily life here in the neighbourhood, “staying here you get involved in all this neighbourhood gossip, which I don’t like. I go over to my mother’s to hide from it all”. Sonu was clearly nostalgic for her time in the factory and resented her transition from a spatially disjointed housewife-worker to a housewife spatially bound to the home and neighbourhood.

After catching up, our conversation turned to her memories of the strike. I was interested in Sonu’s thoughts on the seeming disjuncture between the righteous political struggles led by women in the factories and the fraught and individualising environment of the urban villages. I asked Sonu why she thought that women fighting tooth and nail on factory shop-floors across Gurgaon were not able or willing to mobilise collectively within the urban villages. Below I quote her response at length:

“I’ll tell you my situation, we were returning from work and there was this drunk man…beating up his wife on the road…there were men standing there but they never asked him why he was beating up his wife. Then, myself, my four other girlfriends and my elder sister, six girls together, we caught him and gave him a few sound slaps. Then we gave a hand to that woman wounded on the road and gave her some water. I asked her who the man was…she said it was her husband. I said that ‘If he’s your husband, can he just do what he wants?’ I told her to leave such a husband and get a good job. Women are the best in everything. It’s no use to lean on such a man. I can’t speak for other women, but I really hope that any woman if she sees any wrongs being committed against another [in the neighbourhood] she should step forward. That’s all I believe. All six of us, we try to step forward in everything. After being married off, we have all been separated, but my elder sister is still around to lend a hand every time I take the courage to step forward.”

Like the GKS workers at the beginning of the chapter, for Sonu while the workplace, and workplace identities, may provide a centralising terrain for building collective agencies and actions, the women’s political struggle was not determined by the labour process alone. Rather, the women’s political praxis was explicitly shaped by the intersection of a gender and class-based politics of the household, urban village and factory shop-floor. In this context, the struggle at Azadiplex was not alone caused by conditions within the production process nor confined to the factory gates, but was equally wrought through and so spilled out into everyday life in the urban village. This relational dialectical understanding of the dynamic spaces of life and work speaks to the method of analysis detailed in Chapter 2.

Sonu’s choice of example, the public beating of a violent husband, speaks directly to the shape and scope of the battlefield she had mentioned in our previous meetings, this battlefield was not limited to the factory gates or demands for work, but stretched out to all aspects of everyday life. Sonu’s short account draws attention to the manner in which the workplace spatially and temporally centralises a previously-formed gender-based collectivity; since disintegrated by the domesticating institution of community and marriage. Like the GKS workers before, the public beating of a violent husband is transgressive of
hegemonic feminine docility and deference, and disruptive of the masculinity that marks Gurgaon’s galis marked by male dominance. As I will discuss in the final section of the chapter, I conceptualise these kinds of politics as practices of subalterncounter-urbanism.

6.5 Rokaplex

Two months after the Azadiplex workers dismantled their camp and returned to work, another wildcat action led by a predominately female workforce of an auto-components plant began on the other side of IMT Manesar. On the 1st November 2014, 350 contract workers were immediately dismissed from work at the Rokaplex plant.

Rokaplex is a subsidiary of Rokacorp a Japanese conglomerate that manufacture wiring harnesses, switches and printed circuit boards for nearby automobile assembly plants. The plant is the company’s only facility in India, with two plants in Vietnam and two in southern China.

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<th>Table 6.4: Workforce composition at Rokaplex, IMT Manesar (Author collected).</th>
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<td>Total workforce</td>
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Rokaplex is a smaller plant than Azadiplex, employing 500 workers, 375 workers are hired through three sub-contractors, and the remaining 125 workers are employed on permanent contracts. Like Azadiplex, the shop-floor is divided by gender. Women, who make up 71% of the workforce and are nearly all contract workers, are employed in assembly line roles in the wiring and switch departments. Male workers are mostly hired in checking and supervisory roles. Contract assembly line workers (female) earn ₹ 6000 per month while permanent (male) checkers, that number 125 workers, earn close to ₹ 8000. As in most factories in Gurgaon, the distinctions between permanent and contract workers is not one of a vast difference in wage. Rather, contract type infers a particular workplace role, degree of labour or toil, and differential access to workplace benefits, including access to labour unions, security of employment and subsidised pension and healthcare. The assembly line workers, nearly all female, reported that the work was tiring and tedious, with mandatory overtime during periods of high-demand. Despite this, conditions at Rokaplex compared favourably with the workers’ other experiences of organised manufacturing. Most women workers at the plant that I spoke with described the plant as different. Priya an assembly line worker in her mid-20s from Orissa, described internal relations at the factory as such:

“We liked that job because they did not mistreat women. The pay was not all that great but menfolk did not dare to raise their eyes at you. The rules and regulations were perfectly implemented. If we go to some other company, sexual harassment starts on day one.”

One of the key distinctions between the Rokaplex and Azadiplex struggles, was that the Rokaplex struggle was mediated by a factory union that represented the permanent workers. In
early 2014, both the 375 contracted “temporary” workers and the 125 directly-employed “permanent” workers underwent a series of internal tool-downs and go-slow in order to force through the formal registration of a factory union. The process of registering a factory union passes according to the Trade Union Act of 1926. After a body of workers completes registration with the labour commissioner’s office, the commissioner then seeks ratification from the factory management. This point of ratification requires the disclosure of the details of the prospective union members and as such usually leads to the dismissal of all participating workers and the blockage of union registration (Kumar 2014). In this case however the Rokaplex workers funded a bribe for the labour department in order for their registration to pass through. While contract workers, as non-factory employees, were not legally represented by the union, they nevertheless carried out solidarity strikes alongside the permanent workers and contributed between two and five thousand rupees each, a total of ₹ 500,000 to the factory union registration.

Pratap, was one of the few male contract workers at the plant, and self-appointed representative of the Rokaplex contract workers. Pratap came from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, he had engaged in student politics at his university in Kanpur, but admitted to not taking an interest as such until entering Rokaplex. There, with a friend he joined a local communist group that organises contract workers within IMT Manesar. His small room in the Khandsa Road area of Gurgaon, fifteen minutes from IMT Manesar, doubled up as an office space for organising the struggle, liaising with media and legal representatives and holding meetings. When I visited Pratap’s office-cum-home, his roommate hurried around the room making chai for guests and organising Pratap’s papers. Pratap explained why the contract workers engaged in the union process:

“We were given the wrong direction. The union told us that contract workers could join, they [promised us] that everybody – contract and permanent – would be together, and that there would be no difference in wage between us, everybody would be promised a job, and so on…but when the union settlement was made, suddenly they said ‘contract workers cannot join a union’…these unions and the permanent workers they are both part of the capitalist system itself, for the exploitation of the contract workers. They [unions] only work for people earning ₹ 25,000 or more”.

Throughout May 2014 the newly formed union, alongside the contract workers, initiated a slow-down in production in the factory calling for the management to bring contract workers in-house. In August 2014, in response to the slow-downs, the management came to an agreement with the permanent workers to introduce a wage increase of ₹ 10,000 for permanent workers and ₹ 3,000 over three years for contract workers. The interruption of the Rokaplex workers’ political praxis by the factory union, affiliated to and supported by Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) a national-level industrial union, marks a significant distinction between the Rokaplex and Azadiplex struggles. The Azadiplex workers – who operated completely independent of any external institutional or legally bound body were able to develop a political position reflective of broad-based identities as women and life-workers, and as such were able to flexibly manoeuvre their practices and demands independent of sluggish, legal and bureaucratic processes. The
intervention of HMS in the Rokaplex dispute came to materially divide the workforce, between a unionised-male minority and non-unionised female majority.

On the morning of the 1st November 2014, the 350 contract workers were dismissed from the factory. A notice was pinned to the noticeboard in the plant’s canteen stating:

“Due to lack of work in the company…it is necessary that all contract employees be removed, this is agreed with the union representatives…all contract workers will receive paid holiday between 3rd and 8th of November. Permanent employees will continue to be present on their respective tasks.”

Figure 6.5: Notice of dismissal at Rokaplex plant signed by management and union representatives (Author produced).

Immediately two hundred and fifty stopped production and sat at the assembly line effecting a factory occupation. By the evening the police violently cleared the factory of workers. Pratap remarked:

“By the evening there were 50 or 60 bouncers, and around 300 police. It wasn’t possible to stay in factory, we had not support from other factories. We had to leave”.

Two days after their dismissal from the factory 350 workers set up a protest camp at the factory gates demanding their immediate reinstatement; the workers were not calling for money, better conditions, or permanent contracts, they were demanding that the company give their jobs back; a demand for emplacement.
6.5.1 The Rokaplex Camp

I visited the camp regularly throughout its duration. Unlike Azadiplex, the Rokaplex camp was tucked away in the far northern corner of the estate, far away from the arterial avenues and swathes of workers walking to work in the mornings. Around 300 women sat under the marquee in their Rokaplex uniforms, each day they would march one hundred yards toward the factory gates for a rally; where the police would arm up ready for battle. This routine was repeated daily. Union leaders and workers from neighbouring factories would visit the camp to give stirring speeches of solidarity much to the ire and exhaustion of the protesting workers. Upon the visit of the union official who had signed the workers' dismissal notice, Shilpa, one of the leading figures in the protest confronted him, shouting “We will all commit suicide here, and put your name on the note, as the person answerable for our deaths!” (Kafila, 2014).

While the camp operated to break down the spatio-temporal grip of life's work, fashioning a space of provocation on the side of the road, conditions at the camp were not comfortable, the camp was surveyed at all times by contractors standing on the opposite side of the road, while the company paid a cameraman to film the camp throughout the day. Below is a conversation I had with three women workers (R1; R2 and R3) who participated in a hunger strike during the protest.

Me (T): How did you find the camp?

R1: It was good.

R2: We had been sitting there for a six weeks, it was very hard.

R1: There were so many mosquitos at night.

R3: And drunken men came around at night.
R2: Sometimes I feel like crying. Something like this must not happen to anyone else.

R3: There was harassment every day. The police were supposed to stay around, but they did nothing to protect us. Just roamed around doing nothing.

R1: The company had called them for their own safety, so we wouldn’t attack them. We would not do such a thing, we were sitting there because of the courage we had gathered, we believed in ourselves.

R2: There was heavy rain we sat through that.

T: What motivated you to continue?

R1: We were in this together. If we had not been united, we could not have done it.

R2: Even then the company tried to break our unity, luring us with more money…They offered twenty-five thousand, what can we do with twenty-five thousand?”

If the Azadiplex strike was collectively led by a disorderly and leaderless group of women, tactics at the Rokaplex protest, as directed by Pratap, decidedly turned on hegemonic perceptions of women’s embodied morality, that the presence of women protesting and starving on the factory gates would in itself pressure the company to reinstate the workers.

Nevertheless, while the strategies of the Rokaplex male leadership aligned with hegemonic gendered discourses and practices, the political praxis and particular character of demands at the Rokaplex protest was galvanised and wrought through the particular conditions of both the Rokaplex shop-floor and everyday life for female workers; the protest was a call to stay put expressed by a group of workers with a specifically gendered relationship to place. Shilpa remarked that:

“At first it was not great, we were outside and it was winter so it was very cold. But we came to know each other, other workers, night-shift workers that we’d never met before, we began listening to each other, and helping each other…this was important.”

A report, written by two local labour activists, noted a similar dynamic at the camp:

“During gate meetings, one only sees the formal aspects of things, workers agitated and protesting against the barricades …In the evenings, there is a different sense of solidarity, of collective sharing of joy and pain, gossip, jokes and songs…” (Kafila 2014)

The camps at Rokaplex and Azadiplex were significant for at least two reasons. First, the camps expressed a spatial provocation, precisely a politics of difference that sought to reclaim both the masculine, homogenising realm of the public and the fragmented dislocations between the space of work and home. The protest camp offered the women an opportunity to contest hegemonic socio-spatial temporalities which operate to conceal working women’s movements between feminised “private realms” of the household and work on the shop-floor, in doing so the women engaged in a spatial practice productive of
new kinds of social engagement. The camp represented an opportunity to stake control of the social space of the industrial estate, and fashion out an autonomous social time, where workers were able to speak and listen to each other, previously prohibited by the conditions of rooted flexibility which hold these women in place, demanding class flexibility and gendered immobility.

Equally significant was the epistemic interruption which the camp performed. Aside from the social media pages of local labour activists, these kinds of struggles are absent from public discourse and media attention, the “industrial strike” is so prosaic an event in the industrial estate that the nuanced dynamics of the event are often elided. Just as the “squatter” and the third world city form part of the same epistemological urban totality often found within urban studies literature, the righteous worker forms the constitutive other to manufacturing industry in the Global South. The expression of righteous, confrontational protest led by women in Gurgaon, ignites agencies, spatialities and materialities otherwise often elided within academic literature. In this manner, in this study the camp forms part of an alternative cartographic repertoire of a subaltern politics (McKittrick 2011) that marks a presence of migrants in the city within a material and discursive milieu which renders migrant women’s place indiscernible.

On the 26th December 2014, the Rokaplex protest camp was violently torn down by local boys from nearby Aliyar village. That it was boys from the local village that tore down the camp was perhaps no surprise. They had been harassing the workers during the evening for weeks, while the village panchayat had directly appealed to the management and local police to remove the camp from the streets, declaring the presence of women sitting all night on the open roads as distasteful and immoral. In the aftermath of the camp’s destruction, the protest moved off the streets of IMT Manesar, the workers returned home. Soon after, in order to stave off legal action taken by the workers, Rokaplex offered the 375 contract workers ₹ 25,000 each in compensation. Most of the workers took the compensation. Shilpa was one of thirty workers who refused the compensation and continued with legal action.

6.5.2 Becoming known
“I hate weddings, I don’t go to them” Shilpa remarked as two young men struggled to erect a wedding gazebo at the entrance to her village on the side of the NH8 highway. Shilpa’s had been working through a contractor at Rokaplex since 2011 earning ₹ 6000 (US $90) a month. Shilpa originally moved to Gurgaon alone with her brother-in-law and sister, both of whom hold permanent positions in the factory and as members of the Union continued working at the plant throughout the Rokaplex protest. I asked, how it was she came to work at the company:

“I come from a family that is open-minded but after marriage I had to live with my in-laws, and it was very, very controlling, I had to get out of there, I could not stay in the home all the time…I couldn’t bear it… I felt strongly that I had to leave…These days women are getting out of the home because the husband…wastes all their money on alcohol, so they have to go out and get a job to support their families…for me, I am financially stable, but I was not psychologically stable I could not live there…”
Distinguishing herself from women, like those in the previous chapter, whose labour market decisions are mediated by alcoholic husbands or abject poverty, Shilpa explained that it was the conditions of her unwaged household labour within the extended family structure that compelled her to “get out” and migrate to Gurgaon. I asked Shilpa what the key differences were between work in her in-law’s home and here in Gurgaon, she remarked:

“Inside [at home], you come into a new family and there is only so much you can do. There’s no training and you cannot progress, you just have to accept it. But in the company, you join, you get training and then at some point you understand and you become the equal of that person that taught you. At home, your mother-in-law is always your mother, you can’t change anything you have to put up with things that you can’t do much about, no chances or choices...Outside [at work] you can learn, you can become equal...Of course, you adapt yourself to your environment, when you’re inside you behave like this [gesturing to the room around her], but outside you have eight hours and you can behave differently...in the company, after a while, you can speak up and respond. Even my seniors [at work] are scared of me these days!”

Shilpa’s remarks on the embodying characteristics of the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ speak to the spatially fragmented, and androgynous experiences of “life’s work” (Katz 2001), marked by dis-aggregations between household and workplace, inside and outside. Shilpa expresses her understanding of social reproductive work in the extended family home as work, yet work that can neither provide the meritocratic promise of the factory, nor the platform to “speak up” and remedy the conditions of her subordination.

This was an experience of work echoed in an earlier conversation with Varsha, an Azadiplex worker, who noted:

“In the factory, as workers we are actually obliged to answer back to speak with the supervisors, so in that way we learn how to speak out, but outside [the workplace] you cannot speak out against anything because it is so dangerous.”

Shilpa’s attitude toward “outside” work in part explains why it was so important to her, and her co-workers, that she retained employment at Rokaplex. For Shilpa, and indeed many workers at the plant, the workplace and the collective sociality developed within it, had a personally transformative impact. During our many conversations over the course of my field research Shilpa was always keen to explain her transition from a quiet, compliant housewife to Shilpa-didi, a leader of the “known” Rokaplex strike:

“At first I worked on my own...most people work in a group, but I worked alone. I had a reputation for being nice and submissive, but then the strike began...there was a time, at the beginning...one of the company drivers [assaulted] a woman worker, I told him you can’t do this to us, look how many of us there are. That’s when the men started to take me seriously.”
In part this, according to Shilpa, is what made the Rokaplex strike so notorious, garnering attention from activists and students in Delhi and the local and national press. Shilpa noted that the assumption of women’s docility was both “condescending” and what spurred women workers on to take struggles forward: “no-one thought we could come together like this”.

During my afternoon at Shilpa’s home, her brother and sister intermittently came to sit with us. Shilpa’s brother-in-law remarked that he fully supported the protests, but couldn’t afford to lose his job. He noted that since the contract workers’ dismissal the company had extended over-times, concentrated production on low labour intensive PC boards, and hired casual day-workers to fill in for the missing labour. It seemed jarring to me at first to listen to Shilpa’s righteous anger in conjunction with the ambivalent and matter-of-fact tones of her brother. But it soon became apparent to me that Shilpa and others were well aware that not only did Rokacorp not want to take the contract workers back, in practice they could not take the contract workers back. I asked Shilpa why despite this she was pursuing legal action.

“I don’t want to have to start from scratch, there is a lot of pressure on the factory, I think it is worth fighting for. All the companies here have a policy of only hiring women under the age of 25…they just look at your face and decide…My family are putting a lot of pressure on me…my mother-in-law doesn’t know what lies outside the door. I was offered 40,000 she thought it was a lot and I should take it. She doesn’t really know…There is no guarantee that if I go to the next work I won’t be treated exactly the same, I could have a lifetime like this.”

Shilpa’s continued participation in the action, it became clear, while a demand for emplacement, was not a demand to Rokaplex in particular. Like the workers’ at Azadiplex, and Subia and Nadiya previously discussed, Shilpa participated in the legal case ostensibly to disrupt a “lifetime” of rooted flexibility. This politics of lifetimes is explicitly gendered. As Kavita, another Rokaplex worker who was pursuing legal action, poignantly remarked:

“The result of our fights will affect all of us. The women at [Rokaplex] are known for their ekta [solidarity]. We do not want these women to be known because they are oppressed.”

The Azadiplex and Rokaplex political struggles coalesce around two political demands. First, toward challenging and re-shaping the conditions of future work otherwise defined by precarity, and second, in turn, in opposition to hegemonic urban and labour systems premised upon hypermobility and flexibility. In other words they coalesce around demands for emplacement.

The women workers’ struggles form a particular mode of urban politics and personhood that are dialectically produced in the articulation between a gendered politics of the workplace, household, urban village and community. The dialectical relationality between the specific geographies of capitalist (re)production and precarious daily lives within deeply gendered urban landscapes are productive of a historically and geographically contingent politics of emplacement at both the factory and the urban village. In this manner, the Azadiplex and Rokaplex workers’ willingness to engage in a politics of
emplacement, related precisely to the manner in which for many women, the factory shop-floor and later the protest camp, had themselves become key spaces of collective reproduction, free domains of control and meritocracy within urban everyday lives otherwise dominated by oppression and alienation. A politics of emplacement signifies not only a stake to the security of employment at the particular workplace, but a claim to the right to inhabit working-life across formal points of production under conditions of the workers choosing. Sonu and the Azadiplex workers, and Shilpa and her co-workers at Rokaplex, thus were not engaging in workplace struggle solely for their own material benefit, they were also expressing attempts to reconfigure the conditions of life’s work for a speculative future lifetime of work.

6.6 Subaltern counter-urbanism

In this chapter I have traced the collective actions of three different groups of workers, each engaging in a politics of emplacement. This kind of politics, carried out by itinerant female workers, is somewhat peculiar and jarring when situated in India’s prototype neoliberal city. The women workers struggle, not least a publically discernible strike, has no place in the material and discursive repertoire that has come to define “world-class”, “neoliberal”, or even the “subaltern” city. Against discourses which “evacuate” everyday spaces from “the epistemological terrain upon which knowledge and theory about… the ‘global city’ is produced” (Buckley and Strauss, 2016) and breaking from “subaltern urbanist” approaches that bind “popular politics” to territory and possession (Chatterjee 2004) the women workers’ struggles draw attention to the manner in which gendered discourses and practices, household relations and experiences of everyday life shape particular forms of urban politics and in turn particular urban and industrial landscapes. In Gurgaon, it is a precisely a “rooted flexibility” which constitutes the hegemonic terrain, or “battlefield” upon which women workers’ come to make demands of emplacement and radical difference from the homogenising and fragmentary forces of industrial and rentier capital. In this regard, while each of the struggles were different, the recurrence of female led political struggles all pivoting on a speculative and tentative place in the city, can be explained by women’s fixed positions within flexible worker-tenant regimes and marginalisation from institutional union politics and everyday politics of the urban villages. In this regard, the women workers’ oppositional politics was not restricted to the point of production, but as the accounts of the GKS and Azadiplex workers show, equally expressed toward quotidian conditions of oppression within the urban villages.

In this manner, I conceptualise the divergent struggles of the women as a politics of emplacement which materialise in two key related ways.

First as a speculative and abstract demand for solidarity. The appeal to a future oriented ekta, in the accounts of GKS, Azadiplex and Rokaplex workers at first seems absurd. While I had originally carelessly taken to understand the repeated references to ekta to mean solidarity, in Hindi the term more closely refers to “unity” or “oneness”. In this manner ekta seems to foreground a unitary and fixed sense of place, which would stand in contrast to the future-oriented, speculative demands of the workers. Yet the interlocutors of my research invoked a sense of solidarity or unity that transcended the immediate
spatiality and temporality of their everyday lives. When Subia, the GKS activist, makes a demand for “a sense of ekta in all of us”, she is appropriating the language of solidarity associated with the traditional male industrial worker, and repurposing it to conjure up a speculative and “extroverted” emplacement in the city. In this chapter I have sought to understand these struggles as forms of urban politics, by sketching out the dynamic relationalities between situated social relations in the city. In doing so I conceptualise the workers’ politics, following Massey (1994, 154), as “extroverted”:

“Instead...of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings...this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted”

Crucially these struggles make demands for emplacement which recognise the partiality of their position within broader structures of violence and abstraction. This place while abstract and future-oriented, is equally embedded and contingent. This extroverted place is evocative of McKittrick (2011)’s work on a black sense of place which points to the tentative nature of black geographies always already under violent negation and therefore only recognisable through alternative epistemic registers. This kind of extroverted place is an alternative abstraction (Katz 2001b), discernible only by taking capitalist differential abstractions, of the gendered household and workplace, and moving relationally between their concrete and abstract forms in “regressive-progressive” movement (Lefebvre 1991).

Secondly, in turn, I understand the women workers’ demands for emplacement as wrought through “differential space” (Lefebvre 1991). The action of occupying the factory or confronting abusive men in the urban village are modes of spatial appropriation, which ignite the place of the migrant woman within landscapes in which they are flexibly rendered placeless. Attempts to consolidate workers’ lives within the endless overview of the workplace, has in this case ultimately aided in fostering a centralised fixing point for spatially and temporally stretched and fragmented practices of social reproduction. This is the other side to the abstract spaces of the workplace and urban village, that which works toward the consolidation of a flexible, rootless commodity, and reveals the centralising force through which workers’ are able to make alternative demands on everyday life, what Lefebvre calls the “maximal differences” embedded within the rationally ordered, and gendered spaces of everyday life. Kipfer (2008, 203) writes of this kind of politics:

“Asserting a (maximal) right to difference implies a two-pronged quest for revolutionary transformation. In the more general sense, asserting a right to difference means laying claim to a different, no longer capitalist world defined by use-value relationships and generalized autogestion: the self-determination of all aspects of life, from workplaces to territorial units...This general differential quest is tied to a commitment to strip existing social differences of the very alienating, often state-sanctioned aspects (productivism, sexism, racism) that make them minimal in the here and now.”
It is this sense of “generalized autogestion” as self-determination, unhinged from any fixed territorial characteristic, that I am interested in here. As discussed in Chapter 2, these maximal differences represent capital’s inability to fully capture the labouring body nor everyday life into the rhythms and logics of abstract space, and are productive of a contingent, gendered mode of emplacement. The materialisation of these demands for emplacement more broadly refer to what I term subaltern counter-urbanism.

In Fraser’s (1990) critique of Habermas’ “publucs” the author conceptualises “subaltern counter-publics” in order to understand “parallel discursive arenas” where oppositional and subversive identities and discourses are able to ferment and circulate separate from bourgeois civil society and its publucs. The subaltern counter-public is not outside of the bourgeois realm, but exists as point of “regroupment” a “training ground” for alternative public worlds. Following from Fraser’s “counter-publucs” then, I understand the marginal and tentative struggles of women in Gurgaon as constitutive of a subaltern counter-urbanism that is not separate nor autonomous from hegemonic modes of urban production, but rather deeply embedded and dialectically constituted through it.

For my interlocutors, everyday life was dominated by flexible and often violent working conditions, landlord rule in the urban villages and absent or wasted male relatives. It is precisely their spatial and temporal exclusion from the demographic categories of state governmentality (typically ascribed to community and territory (Chatterjee 2004) and marginalisation from the ‘urban’ realm that explains the coalescence of political identities and demands around the space of the shop-floor and a collective gendered experience of class. Without claim to territorial or biological “community” within the urban village, the women’s political identities and demands centralise and coalesce through the workplace and yet fold out into relations of everyday life. In making this assertion, I am not seeking to advance the ontological primacy of class above other modes of political identification. Rather I am demonstrating that under the contingent geographical and historical conditions of Gurgaon, a gendered experience of class and a speculative future of rooted flexibility comes to form the basis for these women’s willingness and ability to take collective action and make political demands of everyday life.

The women’s struggles do not conform to the expressions of disciplinary subaltern urbanism. Rather, they highlight an opening up of modes of urban life and subaltern subjectivity to a political that cuts across and is not wholly constituted through a bounded conception of urban and urban productionism. The ethnographic and life-history accounts presented here demonstrate that the urban village labour system is not a pre-given, consolidated space of rentier and industrial accumulation, a petri-dish of flexibility, but a dynamic hegemonic terrain fraught with disorderly tension. The urban village, as an abstract space as Lefebvre (1991, 363) remarks: “can be at once the whole set of locations where contradictions are generated, the medium in which those contradictions evolve and which they tear apart, and…the means whereby they are smothered and replaced”.

Building from Fraser’s “counter-publucs” then, I understand these marginal and tentative struggles as constitutive of a “subaltern counter-public” that is not separate nor autonomous from hegemonic modes
of urban production, but rather deeply embedded and dialectically constituted through it. This mode of collective action operates outside of the hegemonic episteme of “urbanism” that binds political demands of the subaltern to territorially defined spaces. This subaltern counter-urbanism is precisely wrought through an urban, gendered politics that moves and mutates across the heightened, fragmented boundaries of Gurgaon.

What is “counter” about subaltern counter-urbanism? My answer is two-fold. Firstly, subaltern counter-urbanism attends to the material and creative practice of the female migrant worker. It is a practice which, in Lefebvrian terms, reflects a mode of contingent political difference that seeks to appropriate and reclaim stretched and fragmented spaces of everyday life, enacting forms of radical gender and class-based difference against the abstractive and “homogenising forces” of local capitalism (Strauss and Buckley 2016). In doing so, the women workers precisely seek to transform what Lefebvre calls the “minimal differences”, “alienated particularities” of possession, gender and everyday life that fragment and segregate urban space and its inhabitants into reified abstractions – the housewife; the migrant; the industrial worker – into “maximal” difference, a gender and class-based collective action that might contest the oppressive spatio-temporalities of everyday life. Secondly, relatedly, it refers to the indiscernible and aporic quality of the female migrant worker and her demand for a kind of place which is temporally delayed, speculatively placed in the future. This subaltern figure is unspeakable and certainly unheard (Spivak 1988) because it bears no reference to the immediate epistemologies of the Urban that binds the urban subaltern to territorially defined spaces.

6.7 Conclusion

In Chapter 2 I sought to sketch out an understanding of a disorderly and relationally constituted subject, through a critique of Althusserian and post-foundational marxism. I sought to bring together the Subalternists attention to difference, representation and subaltern agency with Lefebvre’s critique of abstract space to develop an understanding of the subject – or person – as “bizarrely” composed within the internal battleground of competing hegemonic relations (Thomas 2009). A framework which took account of the “situated knowledges” of the subaltern subject, but equally interrogated the “real abstractions” that structure and organise those knowledges in historically and geographically contingent place. This was in part my way of working through and reconciling globally recurring logics of capital with the contingent narratives of everyday life in my research project. As discussed in Chapter 2, while I am eager to unpack powerful abstractions that structure how we understand urbanisation in India, I am aware and wary of the zero dimensionality and relationally evacuated nature of standpoint perspectives (Katz 2001b, 1230). I have throughout this thesis sought to engage in a relational approach which moves dialectically between the abstract and contingent in order to get to grips with industrial and urban change in Gurgaon. I interpret the divergent political actions taken up by women in Gurgaon during my field research not as contingent interruptions to a pristine global capital, but as expressive of the immanent contaminations of difference that cohere within global capital.
As I have sought to show, each of the struggles detailed in this chapter are different. The dynamics of domestic work and auto-component work are fundamentally different, the sectors have differing workforce compositions, levels of feminisation, and “structural power” (Wright 2000) relative to capital composition. In addition the workers engaged in these sectors have different backgrounds. All of the domestic workers in this study were female, lower-caste Muslims, nearly all widowed or abandoned and all from West Bengal. The auto-component workers in comparison were more commonly Hindi-speaking, and from a mix of lower and general caste communities. While there is no legislation that regulates domestic work in Gurgaon, nor any history of institutional collective bargaining, auto-component work is notionally regulated by labour legislation and has a strong sectoral history of collective bargaining. Each of these conditions contributed to differing dynamics, including levels of willingness or capability to engage in workplace struggles. Nevertheless, despite these differences women in each of the struggles evoked similar future oriented and trans-local demands for emplacement and ekta. Together these claims come together as an “alternative abstraction” (Katz 2001b) which I name “subaltern counter-urbanisms”, “bizarrely” articulated between subjective and abstractive forces of industrial capital, rooted flexibility, rentier spatialities and personal histories of labour migration (Thomas 2009). Much like the rentier identity explored in Chapter 4, the abstract unity of these claims are “ruptural” and unstable, only discernible through a close reading of their concrete conditions. Nevertheless they point us toward and depict a radically different understanding of urban social life than that commonly ascribed to cities in India.

In this chapter I have sought to depart from analyses that foreground urban politics in the ontological space of territory and dis/possession. Instead I have sought to draw out how the reverberations between the village rentiership, gendered conditions of rooted flexibility and particular shop-floor conditions coalesce to produce contingent political geographies. Drawing on postcolonial scholarship which seeks to unbind the agency and identity of the subaltern and Lefebvre’s work on *differential space*, I have sought to demonstrate how women workers in Gurgaon build counterhegemonic, counter-urban power within conditions in which they have very little structural power. In doing so I have mobilised a relational dialectical approach which takes serious the concrete, experiential conditions of workers themselves in blockading capital accumulation and violent structures of power, and forging disruptive and creative urban geographies.
Chapter 7.

Conclusion: A relational dialectical approach to the city

7.1 Introduction

Nearing the end of my field research in late 2015 I paid a final visit to Sonu’s family home in the Bhawani area of the city. I always enjoyed my visits to the neighbourhood, perhaps due to the way in which it contrasted with most of the urban villages I spent my time in across the city; perhaps because my visits to the neighbourhood were predominately consisted of sitting with Sonu’s family. Sonu’s father was a wily elderly man who worked on off as a whitewasher in the private colonies in New Gurgaon. Her husband worked every now and again as his assistant. We sat together in the sun in a small courtyard in front of her parents’ room. As always I was keen to reflect on the Azadiplex strike with Sonu, now some time after she had left the plant. I asked her thoughts, expecting to engage in a conversation about solidarity, oppressive working conditions and the awkward and spatially contingent experience of being a woman worker.

Sonu: “Of course it all began with Alka…you’ve met with Alka right?”

Tom: “Alka? No I don’t think I have”.

Sonu: “Before our strike, there were three women [Alka and two others] who were very supportive of us. They wanted me to take a stand as I was confident and spoke out. Then suddenly they didn’t come out on strike with us. I only realised after… Alka had fallen in love with one of the thekedars [contractors]…he was going to be transferred to a factory somewhere in [Uttar Pradesh], they knew that if there was a strike he would have to stay and supervise for the management – this woman fell in love with him and encouraged a strike so that he would not get transferred… beforehand these women would come on cycle to the company soon after they were arriving on motorbikes!”

Confused I brought it up with a friend who was very much involved in the protest; “Yes, they fell in love, you didn’t know?” I didn’t know. Coming at the very end of my field research, indeed the very final field research activity I carried out in Gurgaon, my final conversation with Sonu disrupted the previous months of research. Sonu’s alternative interpretation of the strike’s genesis placed my existing understanding in conversation with multiple possible competing narratives and ways of reading that remain uncaptured by my research. Sonu’s alternative reading of the strike, expresses what perhaps my field research couldn’t grasp. That is, the manner in which worker’s engagements in the industrial shop-floor are not only characterised by a pitched battle between workers’ use values for or against capital, but equally point to the ways in which contingent, contextual material practices and discourses of gender, work and mobility come to intertwine, entangle and contaminate capital’s abstracting logic. Here I am reminded of Mitchell, Marston and Katz (2004, 418) call for approaches to labour which attend to:
“...the ways in which individuals make and understand themselves as workers, consumers, students, parents, migrants, and lovers, and how these subject positions are constituted and entrenched spatially through the discourses and material social practices of public and private, inside and outside, alien and citizen, home and away, natural and unnatural, imaginary and real, and work and leisure, among others.”

Sonu’s disruptive account of the strike represents a constitutive outside to the hegemonic reading of industrial actions like that at Azadiplex. Reaching beyond the abstract representation of the industrial strike in the third world city, Sonu reveals the significance of inter-personal relationships in shaping events disruptive to accumulation. In doing so, Sonu’s account wreaks epistemic disorder, drawing attention to the everyday relationships which contaminate and plague otherwise pristine labour-capital relations and epistemologies.

In addition, Sonu’s account shines light on the ways in which my research, my representation and showing of Gurgaon’s urbanisation, is intimately tied up in my own position and refraction as a researcher. In this respect Sonu’s late intervention into my representation of Gurgaon, draws attention to what Jazeel (2014) has called the “quite other spatialities” that unmoor our hegemonic representational centring and primacies. What would my thesis look like if I had taken inter-personal relationships of workers as my core entry point? What would our urban theories look like were greater analytical weight given to these “quite other”, seemingly mundane aspects of urban life? In this thesis, I have sought to offer a contingent snapshot and way of reading Gurgaon’s political economy differently, but certainly not definitively.

In the beginning of this thesis I drew attention to the ways in which Gurgaon has typically come to be understood and represented in public and academic discourse. First, as a materialisation of India’s “remarkable urban moment” (Shatkin 2014), a city which marks the urban elites’ break from the political inertia of existing cities dogged by tussles between the developmental state and subaltern communitarianism (Kaviraj 1984; Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011), and embrace of global property-laced modernity. Second, as reflective of key transformations in India’s industrialisation, reflected somewhat in this thesis by my focus on two sector – domestic servitude and auto-manufacturing – that are intimately tied up in urbanisation. More broadly Gurgaon is said to mark the disbanding of Nehruvian-era industrial development and a turn toward highly globalised, flexibilised and politically volatile industrial production (Barnes et al 2015; Kumar 2014). In Gurgaon the urban question and labour question comes together in a series of central and regional state policies to reorganise industrial development as an organ of real estate-led accumulation, materialised in Special Economic Zones, industrial corridors and disaggregated production-reproduction geographies.

These two representations of Gurgaon’s urbanisation equally corresponded to a broader debate within contemporary political economy in India concerning the labour question: in a post-liberalisation era dominated by “immaterial” labour (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011) and globalised economic activity, what
place is there for labour and material production? As Goldman (2015, 137) asks, contrary to the predictions of neoliberal economists, what if India’s “‘maturing’ and globalising economy depends upon the declining significance of labor? (sic)”. My entry point - informal labour within Gurgaon's highly globalised, organised industrial sector - of course immediately confounds Goldman’s premise. I accept that had I carried out research in many other parts of the country I may have witnessed manufacturing industry in decline, or agriculturalists wrapped with debt and rural areas dogged by unemployment. Indeed, were I to carry out this research in ten years’ time Gurgaon's expansive industrial space may well have been converted into items of high-end real estate; industry nothing but a distant memory of an antiquated Indian urban.

Nevertheless, as the title of this thesis notes, here I have attempted to broach the relationship between urban and industrial change in Gurgaon in particular, by drawing into the contaminated value relations which uphold logics of accumulation. To uncover the relationships – institutional and vernacular - that knit together a duplicitous political economy driven by real estate and industrial capital accumulation. In doing so, I have been wary of producing a narrative of Gurgaon as a functional set of linkages between spaces of production, reproduction and consumption, or between industrial and real estate markets.

There is no tidy coherence between industrial and urban dynamics of the city. Rather I have sought to unpack the disorderly suturing of Gurgaon’s “lived space” (Lefebvre 1991) into use values for capital and draw attention to processes of consent, participation, complicity and revolt that underpin the glimmering veneer of the millennium city.

In this chapter, I begin by returning to the research questions set out in Chapter 1, elaborating on the key contributions of each chapter. I will then return to the contours of my theoretical approach set out in Chapter 2 and then discuss potential future research avenues. The final section will explore some broader research implications of the thesis.

7.2 Revisiting the research questions

In Chapter 1 I set out the following research questions:

1. In what ways has Gurgaon’s agrarian-urban transition shaped the city’s urbanisation?
2. What role does labour play in the city’s urbanisation, and how is labour organised and reproduced?
3. What kinds of political subjectivities, alliances and actions are produced within Gurgaon’s fragmented, highly privatised urban landscape?

In each chapter I have sought to mobilise a relational dialectical approach to unpack the contingent and contextual relations that interrupt and contaminate capitalists’ ambitions.
7.2.1 In what ways has Gurgaon’s agrarian-urban transition shaped the city’s urbanisation?

In Chapter 4, I was concerned with tracing out how Gurgaon’s urban land and industrial economies were reproduced and mediated. Drawing on household survey and ethnographic field research, I explored Gurgaon’s rapid urbanisation through the region’s agrarian-urban transition over the past thirty years. In doing so I argued that analyses that foreground dispossession and exclusion as a defining characteristic of peri-urban and Greenfield urbanisation elide the ways in which both the state and industrial and real estate sectors require the complicity, acquiescence and participation of factions of the rural landowning communities. It was argued that urbanisation in contemporary India, of which Gurgaon has become nationally symbolic, requires more than simply the violent appropriation of the means of production – land – from the rural masses, rather it has involved playing on existing agrarian social dynamics to incite complicity in real estate-led accumulation. In Gurgaon, it was shown how this complicity hinged upon the spatial production of ring-fenced urban villages and the speculative promise of urban property ownership.

In doing so, Chapter 4 broached a much broader question regarding the very nature of agrarian-urban transitions in the contemporary period. That is that these processes draw our attention to the crucial role subjective practices, meanings, and discourses play in shaping and mediating accumulative trajectories. In Gurgaon these practices, meanings and discourses are grounded by the urban village which, I argue, operates as a double-space and caesura (Benjamin 1935), mediating expansive real estate and industrial accumulation through the integration of Yadav landowners into urban land markets, and yet also representing the material boundaries of integration and social mobility for many of those same landowners.

In this regard Chapter 4 moves from the abstract conditions of India’s “new urban politics” (Chatterjee 2014) and draws into its multiple, concrete conditions. Exploring the manner in which the city’s unevenly integrated hegemonic actors – Yadav rentiers - seek to unevenly catch on to capital’s game, appropriate it’s aims and mobilise them in multiple, non-linear ways. Throughout my field research with Gurgaon’s rentier class I was as such reminded of Chari’s (2004) work on Tiruppur’s self-made men. In Fraternal Capital (ibid) Chari explores how Tiruppur’s Gounder caste iteratively transition themselves from peasants to workers to industrialists; the author argues that Gounder men explain their transformation through caste-specific narratives of toil and capitalist autogestion. Crucially Chari’s work sets out an example of the contamination of hegemonic economic rationality and globalised capital, by disperse gendered logics. Chari’s work demonstrates: “…how purportedly universalistic processes of accumulation are used by unlikely agents in exclusionary ways” (2004, 783). Chapter 4 equally seeks to explore the ways in which Yadav landowners had experienced agrarian transition, how it had interpellated a particular post-agrarian identity and the ways in which their incorporation into urban land markets provided a terrain upon which they could appropriate the logic of accumulation albeit in uneven and “exclusionary ways”. Gurgaon’s Yadav rentier-class are fractured, uneven and marked out by the material divide of the urban village boundary, yet it is precisely this boundary which offers the promise, implicit in urban property, of becoming bade admi. Implicit in Chapter 4 then is the mobilisation of a particular conceptualisation of
capital in relation to difference that, detailed in Chapter 2, forms the analytical spine of this thesis, one which I will return to in later in this chapter.

Finally Chapter 4 showed that Yadav rentier real estate activity and the ring-fencing of urban villages by Nehruvian planning legislation, performs a mediating role for Gurgaon’s disjunctive political economy. In short, the enclaving of urban village land not only acquiesces political opposition to urbanisation, but importantly provides cheap labour prices and additional manufacturing output for nearby manufacturing industry. In this regard, the urban village was conceptualised as a “vital node” (Gidwani and Maringanti 2016) one which mediates the valorisation and devalorisation, the vitality and waste72 of commodities that both real estate and industrial accumulation requires. Attention to the role postcolonial state planning and vernacular real estate practices – as they materialise through the urban village – thus sets up the thesis’ focus on the way in which the conditions of accumulation are reproduced through sedimented, quotidian practices. This is taken on in greater detail in Chapter 5.

7.2.2 What role does labour play in the city’s urbanisation, and how is labour organised and reproduced?

Chapter 5 explores the ways in which Gurgaon’s army of migrant labour, that upholds the city’s globally connected manufacturing and service industries, are reproduced as a flexible, placeless commodity. The chapter sets out by explaining the particular spatial organisation of (re)production in Gurgaon. Drawing on ethnographic and interview field research in Gurgaon’s urban villages, and Kapashera urban village in particular, the chapter draws attention to the role of makaan malik raj, a particular materialisation of vernacular state power enacted by Gurgaon’s rentier classes within the urban village boundaries. It was shown that processes of flexibilisation through the labour process at the point of production are complimented by strategies of flexibilisation at the point of reproduction. Within Gurgaon’s highly privatised, territorialised spatial matrix of jurisdictions the urban village and industrial estate enjoin to awkwardly constitute flexible labour power. I conceptualise this rationale, organised between a network of vernacular actors in Gurgaon, through by appeal to Lefebvre’s (1991) abstract space: the concretisation of a material and discursive project to accumulate social differences into use-values for capital. The desired space of the state, industrialists and rentiers, thus presents itself to us as contradictory dialectical totality, as “whole and broken” (ibid, 356). Yet the point of the chapter is to draw attention to the interruption of this spatial rationality. As in Chapter 4, I am interested in the ways in which the desires and ambitions of this motley crew of capitalists is shot through, interrupted by and reliant upon particular contextual valences of everyday material practices; and in particular gendered discourses and practices.

Chapter 5 draws in particular from recent materialist social reproduction theory (Mitchell, Marston and Katz 2004; Meehan and Strauss 2015) and scholars which attend to the coherence of relations of identity, gender and culture within hegemonic capitalist formations (Willis 1977; Holland and Lave 2001; Roy 2003; Gidwani 2008a). Here I highlight a discrete “double gendering” (Roy 2003) at play in Gurgaon’s

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72 Vitality and waste are constant metaphors of value used in Gidwani’s Capital, Interrupted that I have found useful in thinking about urban villages in Gurgaon.
urban villages, of the masculinisation of conditions of flexible labour, and the feminisation of rooted work (within environments of flexibility). The latter I refer to as rooted flexibility. Building from the Chapter 4’s interest in the subversive character of subalternity that rests at the heart of accumulative projects, Chapter 5 seeks to understand the role which gendered valences play in inciting complicity and compulsion to industrial capital. This is not a prefigured terrain, but one of heated contestation and counteraction, the insertion of inflexible labour into flexible production-reproduction regimes requires new modes of discipline and flexibilisation. Here I was drawn in particular to the work of Holland and Lave (2001) whose work on “identities-in-practice” refers to the always incomplete, contingent working through of identities in relation to wider hegemonic practices.

Chapter 5 explicitly attempts to mobilise the household and shop-floor, spaces often considered outside the epistemological terrain of urban theory, as key analytics for understanding the reproduction of globalised capital. In addition the chapter, most explicitly attends to the seeming unbridgeable divide between the urban question and the labour question as detailed in Chapter 1. It is in the everyday space of the urban village, awash with competing identity-informing practices and discourses, which the reproduction of labour and land come together. This coming together is not unilineal or decidedly functional, rather it is awkward and disorderly. Chapter 5 sews the seeds for the following chapter, exploring the capture of everyday life by gendered strategies of capital which in Chapter 6 provide the fleeting foundation for political praxis of migrant workers.

In respect to the broader relation between capital and labour then, Chapter 5 draws attention to the ways in which a contextual and embedded form of labour is enlisted in the project of accumulation. As Gidwani (2008c) notes, the two-fold character of labour that Marx details in the Grundrisse does not simply materialise as a binary of domination and resistance but equally points to the ways in which capital relies on its subjects to create conditions for its expansion. Gidwani argues that the capture of labour – into an abstract form - entails: “…the work of inciting individual desires in ways that are useful for capital, not to mention critical in its relentless drive for self-expansion.” (ibid, 197). The chapter explored the role gender plays in entrenching particular forms of labour power. A contextual reading of labour, as active, interruptive and complicit in logics of accumulation, provides a way of thinking about the other aspect of abstract space. What Kipfer (2008a, 203) terms its “chaotic-differential” side that which represents the partiality of capital’s capture of everyday life. Thus more broadly Chapter 5 is an attempt to get to grips with the hegemonic tussles that cohere within abstract space, the ordering of minimal social differences, and the crucial role ideology, discourse, and discipline play in suturing together conditions for continued accumulation. These conditions, framed in large part by the vernacular real estate and sovereign practices of Yadav landlords detailed in Chapter 4 set the stage for particular modes of urban politics detailed in Chapter 6.
7.2.3 What kinds of political subjectivities, alliances and actions are produced within Gurgaon’s fragmented urban landscape?

In Chapter 6 I was interested in understanding the way in which diverse modes of political action and consciousness emerged across the city. Drawing on ethnographic and interview-based research, I explored three women worker struggles across the city. The chapter conceptualises the struggles in two key ways. First, as materially constituted out of the fraught, gendered conditions of everyday life. Primarily I sought to draw attention to the ways in which conditions of rooted flexibility discussed in Chapter 5 were productive of particular working identities and urban-industrial politics exclusive to migrant women. These struggles were understood as materialisations of, what Lefebvre calls “maximal difference”, wrought through contingent conditions of work and life in the city. Here particular fragments of abstract space - the urban village, the shop-floor, the NGO - are vital in providing a centralising terrain for the development of nascent gender and class-based collectivities. Second, I draw attention to the epistemologically jarring character of these struggles when placed within subaltern urbanist debates. The struggles carry little semblance of the urban politics that have come to define and constitute the way in which we territorially and topographically understand the urban. The women workers’ claims are not made to items of collective consumption through which the urban is so often defined, nor to belonging, territorialised autogestion or an orthodox right to the city. Chapter 6 seeks to take the political activity of Gurgaon’s women workers on their own terms. Here I develop the conceptualisation of subaltern counter-urbanism. The struggles are understood as counter-urban precisely because they seek to contest the capture of everyday life by patriarchal, capitalistic abstraction. They are equally counter-urban as they take as their root an epistemology of the urban, which is mutable, relational and unbounded. In this regard the struggles are understood as emerging out of particular conditions of rooted flexibility in response to organisations of everyday life dominated by flexible work and life.

What of subalternity? Here I draw from Roy’s oeuvre (2003; 2005; 2011) in particular. As noted in Chapter 6, Roy (2011) argues for a return to Guha’s (1983) understanding of subalternity, to understand subaltern politics as the “heterogeneous, contradictory and performative realm of political struggle” (Roy 2011, 230). In this regard, the women worker struggles detailed in Chapter 6, are not only representative of the inability of capital to fully capture the body into its own logic, but equally represent the inability of hegemonic epistemologies of subaltern urbanism to fully capture a subaltern urban politics within the metonymic categories of territory, housing, public space, infrastructure and so on. The women’s speculative demands for emplacement thus appear as jarring, unrecognisable and subaltern claims. The intention is not to re-centre the kinds of subaltern politics given expression in Chapter 6, rather in displacing territorial understandings of subaltern urbanism and unmooring the “city” as a site of consumptive, citizenship claims, I seek to point to the “heterogeneous, contradictory and performative” character of a subaltern urban politics.

The political struggles of women workers in Chapter 6 point to precisely the contradictory and two-fold condition of abstract space outlined by Lefebvre (1991). The struggles do not bend strictly to an abstract
category of class, nor are they restricted to the boundaries of production (even if the Rokaplex and Azadi diplex struggles were workplace struggles). Following Mitchell et al (2004) I argued that the struggles are rather reflective of contingent conditions of “life’s work” that belie the fragmented boundaries of life and work, public and private, and resist systems which seek to homogenise everyday life. This reflects what Lefebvre calls, “a right to difference”, political claims formed against the integration of social difference into an abstract form, and for the development of a “maximal” solidaristic difference.

Numerous accounts of subaltern or popular politics ascribe to their subjects a particular territory or territorial claim, and in doing so implicitly assert a stable, discernible territory – the urban. In Chapter 6 I attempt to draw attention to subaltern autogestion that cohere outside the stable terrain of territory. The makeshift protest camp, the NGO, the household and the workers’ tentative and future-oriented demands for emplacement mark a mode of autogestion responsive to everyday lives characterised by negotiation, flux and precarity and untied from any particular territorial claim. These kinds of future-oriented discursive and spatial practices are somewhat reminiscent of Simone’s “worlding-from-below” (2001). That is attempts by a coalition of industrialists, rentier and international real estate capitalists and the regional state in Gurgaon to produce globally-connected and referential landscapes articulates with the agencies and practices of women workers and indeed village and elite rentiers to craft “alternative urban worlds” (Roy 2011). These alternative worlds, expressed in Chapter 6 through speculative demands for solidarity, articulate with hegemonic modes of urban politics and production in complex and unpredictable ways.

7.3 Future research

The question remains what kind of analysis would have been produced if I had approached a different theoretical-methodological approach. This may have involved an analysis of the gendering of labour-power through a study of factory management discourses and practices, akin to the approach taken in the formative works of Salzinger (2003) and Wright (2006). Equally I could have analysed the political practices of workers through global value chain analysis (Kumar 2014) that examines workers’ relative “structural” and “associational” collective bargaining power vis-à-vis globalised dynamics of capital (Silver, 2003). I may have also sought to examine dynamics of agrarian transition through a closer study of Haryana state agricultural and industrial policy or through analysis of upper-class spatial practices (Srivastava 2014). Each of these approaches to questions of labour and land in Gurgaon would prove incredibly fruitful investigations. Nevertheless in each case I was interested in examining the role of quotidian difference in upholding, contaminating and resisting accumulative projects. A relational dialectical approach allows me to do so without reifying militant particularisms of difference, nor falling back on grand narratives of a universal political economy.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, I have not presented a definitive account of Gurgaon’s urbanisation, rather I have zoomed into particular dynamics in order to address the research questions. In this regard there are a whole host of gaps in this study which provide avenues for future research. The
first is the question of the state. While I attended to my conceptualisation of hegemony and the postcolonial state in Chapter 1 and return to questions of political hegemony in Chapter 5, Gurgaon’s particularly unique assemblage of territorialised governance actors provide a fruitful terrain for a closer study of the dynamics of neoliberal state space. A study of the state in Gurgaon could include questions such as: How does intra-state competition, between de jure and de facto state actors interpellate particular kinds of urban citizen and expressions of urban politics? What role does state fragmentation play in the vernacular rendering of land and labour legislation which is vital to reproduction of capital in Gurgaon? How are vernacular relations of makaan malik raj within the urban villages organised, decided and acted upon? This third question was a channel of enquiry in this study, however I found it incredibly difficult to gain access to the landlord committee meetings wherein I would have been able to observe debates, discussions and systems of organisation within landlord-governors. I did participate in one landlord meeting in Kapashera village but was subsequently asked not to attend future meetings. I am still deeply interested in the inner working of the vernacular state as it articulates with questions of migrant labour and rural-urban land markets and would like to pursue this channel in future research.

A second gap relates to questions of caste. While I did include questions concerning caste in both my household survey and my semi-structured interviews, only in my research on rentiership and agrarian transitions (Chapter 4) did caste emerge as significant recurring empirical feature. Even then the demographic and geographical dominance of Yadavs in my household survey meant that most of my analysis focused on intra-caste rather than inter-caste dynamics. As I noted in Chapter 3, I did seek to pursue questions of caste in my semi-structured interviews with workers in Gurgaon. However, I found my interlocutors reluctant to discuss caste dynamics at much depth. This is likely due to my own position as a foreign, white man and perhaps anxieties over caste discrimination articulated by a few of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, it would be fruitful to examine in closer detail the way in which the reproductions of labour power detailed in Chapter 5 and the political praxis detailed in Chapter 6 hinged upon not only gender, but equally particular practices and structures of caste. Equally it would be interesting to examine the articulation of caste practices with gendered and territorial practices within makaan malik raj. Again this is a potential avenue for future research.

A third gap relates more strictly to the empirical scope of Chapter 4. When I had completed my field research time in Gurgaon I was really only just getting going with my research on real estate practices of village and elite rentiers. It took me months to build the relationships and trust with various people and networks engaged in vernacular property investments that would allow me insight into real estate practices in great depth. There is a great deal of scope for a more detailed investigation into how savings committee decisions are made, their internal dynamics, motivations and aspirations. This is an issue I will be pursuing, particularly in relation to nascent “smart city” development projects which are being planned in the region, in future research in Gurgaon.
7.4 Implications of research

In Shatkin’s (2014) introduction to a symposium on *Contesting the Indian City*, the author calls for analyses which take account of the radical shift in contemporary urban India ostensibly inaugurated under liberalisation in the early 1990s. Shatkin (ibid) contends that contemporary urban India is fundamentally shaped by emergent dynamics of globalised real estate, upper class civil action and new spatial technologies of growth. Although not cited as such, Gurgaon stands in for and holds together a number of the key aspects of Shatkin’s epochal shift. First, Gurgaon is popularly understood as the product of India’s economic liberalisation and embrace of globalised real estate capital (Searle 2013). More than many others, the city’s development is understood as produced through the rapid commodification of Delhi’s urban fringes which has empowered an alliance of domestic and international real estate developers and regional parastatal agencies and bureaucrats. Gurgaon’s transformation has been understood as characteristic of a dramatic shift from the post-colonial developmental state, which sought to inculcate national identity through consolidated spatial production (Goswami 2004; Roy 2007), to a *state entrepreneurialism* (Harvey, 1989) that promotes propertied citizenship and real estate accumulation. In addition, Gurgaon’s expansive upper-class gated colonies, privatised infrastructure and luxury spaces of consumption (Srivastava 2014), have become metonymic of the growing empowerment of upper-class political alliances that seek to occupy the erstwhile subaltern space of patronage politics (Ghertner 2011), set municipal agendas, and contest shape and form of urban spaces (Fernandes 2004). Finally, Gurgaon’s territorialised, private governance and envelopment into new spatial and legal state technologies is reflective of new institutions which, Shatkin (2014) notes, are intended to bypass subaltern spaces and incentivise the local state to engage in entrepreneurialism.

In this thesis I have sought to interrupt and unpack these abstractive renderings of Gurgaon by decentring the binaries of domination and resistance; the everyday and the state; and sought to position vernacular relationships, identities, discourses and practices as central to the reproduction of the city’s political economy. In doing so while I do not seek to refute the significance of the transformative impact of liberalisation – or it’s materialisation in Gurgaon - in the presiding chapters I have sought to explore the ways in which contingent and disorderly subject-positions are reproduced, integrated and mobilised in opposition to structures and logics of contemporary capitalism. It is precisely in these practices that the representation of Gurgaon as “urban megalomania” (Roy 2011) finds its instability.

The presiding chapters have explored the political economy of Gurgaon’s urbanisation through the spaces of everyday life. In doing so I have brought the space of the household, the workplace; and the indiscernible place of the migrant worker into the epistemological terrain upon which both the city in the Global South and the neoliberal city in the Global South come to be known, represented and understood. Principally I have sought to show how cultural valences of gender, caste, territory and belonging

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73 Searle (2013) on the relationships between international and domestic real estate developers in Gurgaon is one of the papers in the symposium.

74 Often referred to as “middle-class”, I don’t necessarily recognise this term as referring to the civil society groups in Gurgaon who tend to be internationally educated, English-speaking, and high-earners.
contextualise and mediate political economy, and in doing so sought to displace narratives which come to identify and define urbanisation in the post-liberalisation period through meta-narratives of global capital flows, *a priori* analyses of value, and bounded and inert spaces of production, reproduction, consumption and distribution.

### 7.4.1 Bringing labour back in

One of the key motivations of this research was to try to bring labour back in as a constitutive element of the epistemological terrain of “urban” and scholarship within urban geography. As I have noted in Chapters 1 and 6, narratives of the “urban turn” (Prakash, 2002) within urban studies literature often building from Lefebvre’s *The Urban Revolution* (2003) alongside post-globalisation political economic dynamics particularly within Europe and North America which have seen finance, services and real estate sectors dominate economic output, have led to a relegation of questions of material labour from our conceptual frameworks of the urban. This is of course not restricted to Europe and America – nor the materialisation of EuroAmerican empirics as urban theory. India’s stunted post-liberalisation manufacturing sector alongside an ever-dominant FRES sector supported by new state infrastructures and increasing informalisation of work, has led some analysts to question the continuing significance of the labour questions (Goldman 2015) and for analyses to frame workers in complete negation to rampant capital-intensive urbanisation; as discarded elements without a place in contemporary social life (Breman 2010).

While in no way does this thesis seek to refute these dynamics, the presiding chapters have sought to challenge narratives that would either (i) place the labour question as separate from the urban question, or (ii) conceptualise labour as a secondary element of social life now determined by seemingly more ‘urban’ questions (housing or citizenship for example). An examination of the quotidian discourses and practices of workers and landowners themselves, taken on their own terms, draws attention to the prevailing importance of labour to contemporary urban configurations; even the seemingly most real-estate driven ones like Gurgaon. Furthermore the thesis has sought to demonstrate the integral role territorialised and gendered differences continue to play in organising and distributing labour power in the contemporary period.

My interest in the prevailing relevance of labour to the contemporary Indian city actually originated from the reverse perspective; I was interested in what if anything, questions of land, territory, housing and property, had to say about the lively world of industrial politics in the city. I was drawn to the relationship between the local landowning communities, who had their own cross to bear with incoming industry and private real estate developers, and labour politics. What explained landowners opposition to workers’ strikes? What connected landowners experiences with land acquisition and migrant labourers experiences of work? In this regard, Chapters 4 and 5 showed the vernacular relationship between Gurgaon’s globalised real estate and industrial economies were tied together in disorderly fashion by material and discursive practices of migrant workers and the former peasantry within urban villages. That is a coming
together of the subjects of real estate and industry, held together by transformations between Nehruvian-era and post-liberalisation economic and spatial planning. The thesis has sought to show that material migrant labour provides the ready capital which both integrates former peasantry into urban land markets and ameliorates political opposition to exclusive urbanisation. In turn this dynamic incites rentiers to seek to organise and reproduce labour power conditions in particular ways.

In this regard, the key contributions of this thesis to labour-urban debates are as following. First is that the common characterisation of informal and informalised labour in contemporary India hinges labour’s disempowerment, poverty and exclusion upon formal legal and political vulnerability to workplace and urban exploitation. This thesis does not take these systems for granted, and has sought to draw attention to the lively hegemonic dynamics of capital formation, wherein quotidian practices and discourses play a key role in shaping complicity, vulnerability and resistance. In doing so I have shown that despite significant vulnerability and exclusion from the contemporary urban order, informalised labour in Gurgaon remains a vital element of the city’s political economy.

I seek to distance myself from analyses of contemporary labour that simply serve to re-establish the precarity and subservience of labour already materially and discursively achieved by hegemonic practices of labour discipline and management. In her now infamous *Genders in production* (2003) Leslie Salzinger chastised the 1970s marxist-feminist political economists for taking at face-value women’s “preset docility” that arises uncomplicatedly from entrenched societal patriarchy. In contrast Salzinger’s (ibid) productive femininity describes the constant discursive (re)production of feminine tropes which themselves mediate the value of women’s labour. Setting aside Salzinger’s conceptualisation of feminisation – that differs somewhat from the approach I take in Chapter 5 – *Genders in production* (2003) strikingly reminds us of the dangers of re-producing hegemonic discourses of powerlessness and docility which only reconstitute the agency of labour as transhistorical and immutable (see Mohanty 1988). As Thomas (2009, 31) reminds us in his critique of abstraction, one should be wary of “repeating the unilateral and eternalising translation of particular political practices into a speculative, metaphysical concept that has already been achieved by bourgeois hegemony”. Thus while I am in no denial about the prevailing precarity of labour, I seek to contribute an approach to the labour question which does not presume powerlessness as predetermined by structures of capital, but rather seeks to understand how powerlessness is produced, circulated and opposed, taking seriously the capacity and potential for subjects to be active elements in un-determined and un-bound environments. In doing so I follow Herod (2001, 3) who argues that:

“…it is important to recognise that workers, too, are active geographical agents whose activities can shape economic landscapes in ways that differ significantly from those of capital. Hence, understanding how workers actively shape economic space is important if we are to conceptualize how the geography of capitalism is made.”
Secondly and crucially, this thesis has sought to bring the worker back into the epistemological terrain of the urban. To do so I have sought to draw out the embedded and relational character of real estate and industrial accumulation to examine work-based political actions as urban actions, as political praxis that emerges in direct relation to hegemonic struggles over the use of everyday life. In doing so I have sought to expand the internal boundaries of the urban and the urban subaltern to include those who are materially unintelligible within common conceptualisations of the urban.

This shifts us to a third implication of my thesis to questions of labour. That is it’s centring of a relational understanding of gender to the study of labour geographies. In this thesis I mobilise gendered difference not simply as an empirical difference, but as an organising concept and “real abstraction”. In Chapter 5 I argued that gendered social practices and discourses that articulated within and across the fragmented workplace-urban village continuum have significant bearing on both inciting complicity to regimes of labour flexibility but equally in organising particular configurations of everyday life which embed migrant women in spaces tailored toward hypermobility and flexibility. It is here that I locate an entry point in to understanding of Gurgaon’s free men and working women. In this regard, I have sought to show how particular capitalist hegemony – the reproduction of industrial and urban accumulation, the labour and urban question in Gurgaon - hinges upon mobilisations, negotiations and contestations of gender (Scott 1988; Willis 1977). These negotiations operate unbounded not solely interpellated through management discourses or village-rentier designs but equally within quotidian spaces within and across the workplace and urban village. In doing so I seek to build from gramscian marxist accounts (Chari 2004; Gidwani 2008; Loftus 2012; Williams 1977; Willis 1977) that interrogate the everyday negotiations of hegemony; feminist political economy that has studied the way in which gender mediates labour value (Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006) with recent feminist social reproduction theory (Mitchell et all 2001; Smiths and Winders 2008; Meehan and Strauss 2015) that interrogates the role of gender in organising loose geographies of production and reproduction. More broadly I seek to, following Buckley and Strauss (2016), radically decentre the labour-urban relation by drawing into gendered spaces of everyday life as contingent and mediating points with which to understand contemporary capital.

While a number of scholars have highlighted the pernicious impact of labour law reforms and new spatial technologies of flexibilisation (RoyChowdhury 2015; Dey, 2012) the narratives drawn out in this thesis would contend that labour flexibilisation is secured by more than simply legislative programmes. As Cross (2010) has highlighted, while new legal-spatial technologies embarked on by the past two Indian central governments have allowed for the production of ‘exceptional’ zones wherein labour laws are relaxed or suspended, in India labour legislation has seldom been the sole arbitrator of employment relations and capitalist value. The patriarchal gender discourses and practices - that include routine gender-based violence - mobilised to entrench migrant women into conditions of heightened precarity, placelessness and flexibility at the workplace and urban village, ought to signal to scholars and policymakers to look
further than simply bettering the *de jure* living and working conditions of the workplace or urban village\(^75\), and address broader material-discursive milieu which make gender a useful ally to mediating the value of personhood\(^76\). A reasonable start would be an implementation of existing labour laws including legal minimum wages, redress for violence and harassment, recognition of rights to collective assembly, implementation of statutory affordable worker housing provision, recognition of migrants legal access to local state welfare and provision of statutory work-based childcare provision. If the vast urban inequality and increasingly precarious working conditions – hinged around class, caste and gender difference – what Breman (2010) terms India’s “social question”, is not broached by the government the social, political and economic order is no doubt in for significant turbulence in the coming decade.

### 7.4.2 A relational dialectical urban theory

The travels of capital are chaotic, continuously remaking the latticework of connections that animate accumulation. Precisely because capital is heterogeneous, composed of a dizzying multiplicity of fractions, moving at different velocities, the terrains of difference produced and exploited by it can lead to booms in one place and, via entirely unforeseen connections, crises in other places. (Gidwani 2008a, 184)

The second implication of this research on broader debates within urban studies pertains to a contribution to postcolonial urban or southern theory. There is now burgeoning body of work that has drawn attention to the geopolitical imbalance of urban knowledge (Robinson 2002; Hart 2006; Roy 2009; McFarlane, 2010). Broadly, according to these scholars, “the urban” as an abstract category of knowledge tends to all too easily reflect histories and experiences in Europe and North America (McFarlane 2010). New York, Paris, London thus emerge as the “regulating fiction” for all urban processes (Robinson 2002).

This issue has been subject to lively debate within urban studies in recent years, with a range of scholars jockeying for position to define the urban field, from Scott and Storper’s (2015) positivist functionalism, and Brenner and Schmid’s (2014) theses on planetary urbanisation, to McFarlane and Robinson (2012) “comparative urbanism” and Roy’s (2015) Spivakian postcolonial urban theory. Where there is common ground in the latter body of work is of the former’s fundamental misreading of difference as deviation. These narratives make the implicit assertion that whatever shapes urbanisation in Cape Town, Mexico City or Gurgaon is merely an empirical deviations from a general, abstract form of urbanisation drawn from the experience of Euro-America.

In this thesis, I have sought to contribute to these debates through an analysis of Gurgaon’s urbanisation which focuses on dialectical spatio-historical relationality - putting difference, subjectivity, slippage and

\(^75\) Or indeed the current NDA government labour reform which seeks to extend the legal working day for women workers.

\(^76\) See Datta (2015) for an extended analysis of materialist prescriptions of remedy to gender-based violence.
disruption at the heart of analyses of totalities and abstract structures77. My intention in exploring Gurgaon – a city in the Global South – is not to provide another case of difference from an abstract urban norm but rather to unpack the city as it is commonly represented and represents itself. Utilising Lefebvre’s work on abstract and differential space alongside postcolonial and feminist social reproduction scholarship, I take social and spatial difference as the central mobilising force which engenders both urbanisation processes and urban politics. This takes into account the always incomplete material practices of capital, and the always incomplete epistemological project of scholarly research (Spivak 1988).

In doing so, throughout this thesis I have attempted throughout this thesis to mobilise a relational dialectical approach. In her recent paper Relational Comparison Revisited, Hart (2016) sets out a schematic of “relational comparison” as an open, non-totalising dialectical analytical tool for understanding, “how key processes are constituted in relation to one another through power-laden practices in the multiple, interconnected arenas of everyday life” (ibid, 6). For Hart relational comparison allows a way of thinking about race, nationalism, culture, gender and global capitalism in situated place and relationally across global contexts. For Hart (2006, 996) an examination of these “connections and mutual processes of constitution – as well as slippages, openings, and contradictions – helps to generate new understandings of the possibilities for social change”. In this thesis I have sought to advance Hart’s relational comparison, by putting it in conversation with Marx’s work in the Grundrisse, Lefebvre’s (1991) work on abstract and differential space, and feminist and postcolonial urban theory (Mitchell et al 2004; Roy 2015).

A relational dialectical approach, when drawn out through the empirical contexts detailed in the presiding chapters, speaks to the way in which I approach questions of the urban, the global, totality and difference. Empirically I set out to explore these questions through an ethnography of the material practices of labour and space. Following Lefebvre (1991) I conceptualise the abstraction of labour and space as a hegemonic project never fully realised, but rather one which is constantly played out through articulations of state power, material social practices, discourses and cultures within a lively hegemonic terrain.

As noted in Chapter 2, for Lefebvre abstraction refers to a historical process wherein capitalist logics confront and attempt to integrate space, and concurrently, an abstractive discursive and symbolic order which materialises in the technocratic rationality of the state. Together these material and discursive modes of abstraction, upheld by political power, seek to represent a homogenous urban space that is emptied out of characteristics owing to alternative ontological conditions. My interest in this thesis has been in the partiality of this project, I have sought to take seriously the role of difference and everyday social practices in carving out capitalist landscapes. As Lefebvre (1991, 287) remarks, “abstract space is not homogenous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its lens”. I have sought to show how projects of real estate and industrial accumulation that seek to return space and labour as abstract commodities are themselves reproduced through sedimented quotidian practices and discourses that at

77 See work of Sekyi-Otu, (1996), Kipfer (2008) and Hart (2016) who mobilise the works of Fanon and Gramsci to explore an open and relational dialectic.
times internalise and reproduce capitalist logics (Chapter 4 and 5) and at others provide the conditions for its interruption and displacement. In this respect, I conceptualise the concrete conditions of accumulation, following Gidwani (2008a), as “contaminations” which provide the sustenance for conditions of accumulation and yet pollute potential conditions for a fully captured use value-for capital. At times these contaminations aid and abet conditions of accumulation, as shown in Chapter 5 where gender discourses and practices shape the availability of a particular kind of labour power. At other times these contaminations develop into full-blown revolt, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, the disparate gender and class-based alliances of women workers mobilised the conditions of rentier-industrialist grip on everyday life to mobilise an oppositional politics. The women workers, as Lefebvre (1996, 195) remarks, expressed a “refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organisation”.

The implication of course is the assertion that there is an irreducible, unassailable feature of the two commodities – labour and space – that maintains prior to, alongside and after abstraction. This is precisely Marx’s point in the Grundrisse, to draw out the two-fold character of labour, Marx writes:

“Labour is not only the use value which confronts capital, but, rather, is the use value of capital itself. As the not-being of values in so far as they are objectified, labour is their being in so far as they are not-objectified; it is their ideal being; the possibility of values, and, as activity, the positing of value.”


The relational dialectical approach adopted and mobilised in this thesis therefore attempts to get to grips with this dialectical duality, not by reifying a binary between use-values for capital and use-values not for capital, but rather by drawing into the constant, internal tussles of difference - between objectification and non-objectification. This tussle is political. My interest, following Hart (2006; 2016) is to pay close attention to the component parts and disorderly constitutive processes which give rise to abstract concepts, and ´economically rational´ or “encompassing” analyses. In this regard I have sought to position practices and processes of social difference – of gender, caste, belonging- as a key motivating aspects of broader urban and industrial geographies. In doing so, I have treated “capital” not as an external nor totalising logic but rather, following Gidwani (2008a), a “molecular” and “combinatorial” force which seeks out to transform social differences into its own, what Lefebvre (1991) terms “minimal” differences, and yet it is those very disorderly and heterogeneous differences which cohere uncaptured that provide the animating force (rentiers’ ruptural unity in Chapter 4), instability (gendered practices in Chapter 5) or subversion (subaltern counter-urbanism in Chapter 6) for capital’s abstraction. As Gidwani (2008a, 197) argues, the “electric buzz” of the subject, labour or space “never vanishes” they remain subaltern features of capital, unintelligible, uncaptured, always holding to a principle of “not-for-capital” which remains a “omnipresent source of fear and peril”. In sum an approach which takes account of heterogeneity, subalternity and difference – as seen across varies works in marxist and postcolonial geography –
provides a snapshot of the dynamics, which I have attempted to unpack in the presiding chapters, between globalised structures of capital and gendered and caste-based contaminations of difference.

Returning to questions within urban studies, this relational dialectical approach allows us to begin with an understanding of specific structures and forms – the city, the nation and so on – as always in constant epistemological and material interconnectedness, slippage and disturbance, which can be drawn out through methods of dialectical analysis. It is precisely the dialectical incorporation of difference that lays the ground for the abstract’s inevitable contradiction. The question for urban theory, as highlighted by the urban scholars previously mentioned, is how to think across situated place without privileging one or other urban form?

In this thesis I have sought to trace relations between different urban phenomena, both topographically and topologically, as held together by particular spatio-temporal moments. In doing so, drawing on Katz’s (2001b) “countertopographies”, I have sought to sketch out the relationships between various dizzying dialectical movements, drawing attention to the messy “contour lines” of intersecting relations of gender, caste, territory and capital. These relations or moments materialise in particular spaces in the city, most prominently in this thesis, the urban village. Throughout the thesis the urban village is referred to in numerous ways, as abstract space that materially and discursively holds together unruly factions of capital, as a “vital node” (Gidwani and Maringanti 2016) that mediates political relations of value and waste, and as a caesura holding in lives bound by mobility and expressing the gendered valences of work. The urban village thus materialises in this research as a useful entry point into understanding the unstable interconnectedness between labour, gender, territory and capital that shape urban and industrial change in the city. While the urban village is an esoteric feature of the North Indian peri-urban landscape, the intention here has been to demonstrate how urban spaces like the urban village – and the camp and household elsewhere in the thesis – can be unpacked to both provide understanding of concrete and abstracted conditions of Gurgaon’s urbanisation. Crucially just as capitalist abstractions are under constant threat of erasure by the conditions of their own existence, these epistemic spatialised abstractions that momentarily hold together relations of difference, are methodological entry points, not end-games and as such are always under constant erasure and instability as we move dialectically up and down, side to side, between abstractions and concrete conditions. This is the double movement which the subaltern counter-urbanism, discussed in Chapter 6, refers to.

In this regard, this thesis has not sought to present Gurgaon as a case-study of Indian urbanisation. In mobilising a relational dialectical approach, my intention is not to simply replace abstract categories with their concrete conditions, or as Roy (2011, 309) argues, “supplant universality with emplaced heterogeneity”. Rather I approach Gurgaon dialectically, the concrete conditions animate and disrupt our abstract concepts, that themselves haul together and express the concrete. This is precisely Marx’s intentions – to demonstrate how the abstract category of labour holds together a variety of modes of being which while simultaneously submissive and disorderly to capital, are nevertheless expressed as
labour. By drawing from everyday experiences of rentiers and female migrant workers I have sought to draw attention to the manner in which an expansive set of unbound practices cohere and contaminate abstract, universal categories of capital.
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Figures and Tables:

Figures:

1.3: Author produced, data accessed by author from Haryana Town and Country Planning Department.
1.6: Author produced, Google Maps.
3.1: Author produced, Google Maps.
3.2: Author produced, Google Maps.

4.2: Author produced.
4.3: Author produced, Data from Haryana Town and Country Planning Department
4.4: Author produced, Google Maps.
4.5: Author produced.
4.6: Author produced.

5.2: Author produced.
5.3: Author produced, Google Maps.
5.5: Author produced, Google Maps.
5.6: Author produced.
5.7: Author produced, data taken from Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011.
5.9: Fieldwork 2015, data taken from survey sample of 18 neighbours in Kapashera.
5.10: Fieldwork 2015, data taken from survey sample of 18 neighbours in Kapashera.
5.11: Author produced.

6.1a (left): Author produced.
6.2: Author produced.
6.3: Author produced
6.5: Pinjra Tod, 2016. 4 Instances When Women Workers Marched For Their Rights, And Kicked Ass. URL accessed on 01/09/2016 <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2016/05/labour-day-womens-movements/>.

Tables:
5.1: Author produced.
5.2: SLD (2013)

6.2: Data collected by author from company website and interviews with workers.
6.3: Data collected by author from company website and interviews with workers.
6.4: Data collected by author from company website and interviews with workers.
## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Household survey

**Gurgaon Village survey; (Researcher copy)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father/Mother’s occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-Acquisition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Acquisition Land holdings (acres/hectares/bighas)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Acquisition Land type (Agricultural/OWN/Arid/Residential)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Agricultural land: did you work on the land or hire labourers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Acquisition Land location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of land tenure (Fully owned/common land/co-operatively owned/rented/leasehold/freehold)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit sources (Bank, dalals, panchayat)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings (pre-acquisition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acquisition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of acquisition</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much land acquired (hectares/acres/bighas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of land (per...)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who bought the land (broker/developer/government)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was partnership formed with buyer? What kind?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is currently on the land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the village common land sold? Who to? What for?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Post-Acquisition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remaining Land</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monthly income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt and Credit sources (Bank, dalals, panchayat)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If renting rooms:**

| Number of rental buildings |  |
| Number of rental rooms |  |
| Average rent (per 1 room) |  |
| How was development of rental buildings funded (credit/mortgage/compensation) |  |
| Monthly rental income |  |

---

4. Some Acquisitions by private developers occur in partnership. There are different types of partnership some include; (i) The Landowner retaining titles to the land and entering into a development partnership agreement until full development area has been acquired, usually in return for some land parcel in larger development. (ii) Developer purchasing land, landowner lending the money back to the developer at interest.
| Main source of investment of rental income (where do you invest your rental income) |
| Do you take part in a village saving group |
| Where do saving group invest? |

**Additional questions for Yadav/Jat/Gujjar respondents (use additional paper if needed)**

| How would you describe who the Yadav’s are? |
| How has village transformation changed Yadav identity? |
| What is different about Ahirwal Yadav’s to those in Yadav dominated States such as UP? |

**For non-Yadav/Jat community members**

| How has urbanisation of the village changed community relations (between land owning and non-land owning)? |
| How has urbanisation affected non-land owning communities? |
| Now that the Panchayat is dissolved, what other village-based mechanisms are in place? |

**Other notes**

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Thank you for taking part in this survey on land acquisition and village change in Gurgaon, Haryana. All results from the survey are anonymous and will only be used as supporting evidence in the PhD thesis of Thomas Cowan, King’s College London. If you do not want your responses to form part of the research they will be erased. For more information you can contact Thomas Cowan: (+91) 8826885140, Thomas.cowan@kcl.ac.uk

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\[1\] This is an important question — if you can, try to discuss investment opportunities of villagers, e.g. “we invest in land in Gurgaon.” What kind of land, property, agricultural land? Etc.

\[2\] Also to other dominant land-owning groups if applicable, for example Jat or Gujars.
Appendix 2: Informational sheet for survey respondent

King’s College
London
University of London

में आपको गुड़गांव, हरियाणा में भूमि अधिग्रहण और गांव परिवर्तन पर इस सर्वेक्षण में भाग लेने के लिए आमंत्रित करना चाहिए है। इसका परिणाम गुड़गांव, हरियाणा में शहरीकरण और औद्योगीकरण पर में पीएचडी शीर्षक के लिए सहायक सबूत प्रदान करेगा।

यह सर्वेक्षण गुड़गांव-मानेसर के 4 गांवों (Dundahera-कापसहड़ा, खोह, Jharsa और सिंकंदरपुर बाँध) में किया जा रहा है। इस सर्वेक्षण का उद्देश्य भूमि-अधिग्रहण के प्रभाव और जमीन के स्वामित्व, गांव व्यवसायों, संस्कृति और आम पर नए गुड़गांव के विकास पर सबूत प्रदान करना है।

इस शोध के नाम पर यह भविष्य के नए शहरों के शहरीकरण में गांव-यामात्सी एकीकरण के लिए सिफारिश करने की आवश्यकता है।

शोध के लिए किए गए सर्वेक्षण में दी गई सभी जानकारी गुड़गांव और गोपनीय है।

यदि आप एक बार पूरा अंतिम शोध की एक पत्रित्विणी चाहते हैं, तो यह भेजने के लिए एक पत्र बताए।

यदि आप कोई प्रश्न या इस अध्ययन के बारे में अधिक जानकारी की चाहते हैं, तो मुझसे संपर्क करने में सहायता न करूँ?

सदर,

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किंग्स कॉलेज, लंदन
+91 8826888140
Thomas.cowan@kcl.ac.uk
Appendix 3: Selected list of semi-structured interviews with workers.

Sangeeta, Kapashera, New Delhi, 25th January 2015
Sangeeta, Kapashera, New Delhi, 8th February 2015
Sonu, Kamla Nehru Park, Gurgaon, 25th October 2014
Sonu, Kamla Nehru Park, Gurgaon, 7th June 2015
Sonu, Bhawani Enclave, Gurgaon, 6th December 2015
Priya, Gurgaon Law Courts, 7th June 2015
Kalpana, Kapashera, 4th January 2015
Kalpana, Kapashera, 25th January 2015
Komal, IMT Manesar, 4th December 2014
Paroj, Khoh, 5th March 2015
Rakhi, Kapashera, 15th November 2015
Radbika, Dundahera, 4th January 2015
Shilpa, Dharuhera, 25th November 2015
Varsha, Bhawani Enclave, 6th December 2015
Subia, Sikanderpur, 12th December 2014
Subia, Sikanderpur, 20th January 2015
Subia, Sikanderpur, 27th January 2015
Subia, Sikanderpur, 8th February 2015
Nadiya, Sikanderpur, 27th January 2015
Nadiya, Sikanderpur, 8th February 2015
Jyotsna, Sikanderpur, 8th February 2015
Pratap, Raj Nagar, Gurgaon, 8th March 2015
Jalal, MEM offices, Gurgaon, 6th August 2015
Deepak, Khoh, 22nd March 2015
Roni, Gurgaon, 20th January 2015
Raj Kumar, Dharuhera, 12th February 2015.
Ashok, Khoh, 22nd February 2015.
R1, R2, R3, Gurgaon, 7th June 2015.
## Appendix 4: Survey interview with labour contractors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Industries</th>
<th>No. of workers (per month)</th>
<th>% Commission</th>
<th>Contract offered</th>
<th>Position provided</th>
<th>Wages</th>
<th>Workers from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ekta Thekedar</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Auto; Garments</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Monthly rolling Helper</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>Bihar; UP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuldeep Yadav</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Auto; Garments</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5-8%</td>
<td>Monthly rolling Helper</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>Bihar; UP; West Bengal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraswati Ents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Auto; BPO; IT</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Monthly rolling Helper</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>Bihar; UP; West Bengal; Assam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai Manpower</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Auto; IT; BPO</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5-8%</td>
<td>Monthly rolling (registered to Thekedar)</td>
<td>Helper; ITI</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>Bihar; UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Ents</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>5-8%</td>
<td>Monthly rolling (registered to Thekedar)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>Bihar; UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himadstian Placements</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Auto; Sheet Metal</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>5-8%</td>
<td>Monthly Helper</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>Bihar; UP; Other states</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Experience of business.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Experience of business.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ekta Thekedar</td>
<td>Less work, there used to be much more people to employ. Since past 2 years manpower has reduced it’s hard to find workers, in villages these days there is more employment - they can get 400rs a day so why would they come here? Much of the new industry is IT, but they don't come here for workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuldeep Yadav</td>
<td>Bigger companies have come in, new sectors like IT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraswati Ents</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai Manpower</td>
<td>When we began there people queueing up for these jobs, but now wages are so low they've moved away, mainly south, wages have really improved since we started.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Ents</td>
<td>Well before among the staff (management) there was a much better environment. Workshop conditions have improved but not much for management staff, there's a lack of respect between staff as due to quotas - that x amount of people must be x amount of rupees someone with 20 years experience and someone with 2 will hold the same position and the same superiority. This makes people resentful and less likely to help each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hindustan Placements</strong></td>
<td>Manpower has significantly reduced over past 5 years, the Commonwealth games scared away many workers and now there is a lot of industry in Rajasthan. Also now it's a lot more IT which we don't really provide for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ekta Thekedar</strong></td>
<td>Interesting office, in a barsathi on the top of the building at Kapashera Chowk, next to and blocked by the new steel walkway, it was drab - and empty - dark with one shoddy fan. He was helpful but not too talkative. He was a Jat from Gurgaon itself - he discussed that there were Jat enclaves in Gurgaon just not in this area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuldeep Yadav</strong></td>
<td>Says it helps somewhat being a Yadav in a Yadav area. Second guy forces us to come next door to his office, was very boisterous and intimidating a little. He took about 5 selfies with me, made us stay for some Pepsi. The interview was a little manic and the room was full of blokes so wasn't ideal environment hence why the lack of full information. I felt intimidated. As we left the guy said jokingly &quot;If you insult me in England, I will come to your country and kill you&quot;. Possibly not a full thekedar but a &quot;placement company&quot; which provides places for Thekedars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saraswati Ents</strong></td>
<td>Wouldn't say much. Didn't want to talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sai Manpower</strong></td>
<td>Friendly man but the office smelt bad. Feeling he is a placement company rather than a Contractor proper. There are 20-30 thekes that supply Maruti alone around here, 90% of thekes don't succeed it's a hard business, I am looking to get a government job. <em>Why do companies need thekes?</em> They can't or won't advertise themselves and they know we have a large access to labour/that lots of workers come to us for jobs. <em>Are the employees registered with you or the company?</em> We pay the wages so they are registered to us. <em>Why can't I see any Garment-sector Thekes?</em> Garment workers are very poor and won't pay the 500rs registration fee they go directly to the factory gates to find contractors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SS Ents</strong></td>
<td>The most chatty and open man. His room was on the top of a building near Bus Stand and was like a Sauna, when we left into the 40 degree heat it felt so cold. It was a dreary office with only him smoking beedies and eating peanuts and watching TV, it seemed like once it was more busy had many empty desks and unused broken ACs but both the room and he seemed tired of this business - perhaps why he has so angry about the changing environment and why he was so open with us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hindustan Placements</strong></td>
<td>The room was on the top floor and smelt of piss. The two young women were sitting on the side desk and the boss sat at the horizontal desk, brooding and flexing his muscles, he was very suspicious of me and asked me for ID proof and &quot;what will this do for me?&quot; &quot;Who sent you here&quot; Not as bad as the fucking teacher but still at bit spiky.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5: Selected interviews with government officials, union officials, industrialists and developers.

Municipal Councillor, Dundahera village.
Municipal Councillor, Badshahpur village.
Sarpanch, Kapashera village.
Sarpanch, Manesar village.
Sarpanch, Carterpuri village.
Sarpanch, Khoh village.
Sarpanch (son of former), Nathupur village.
Municipal Councillor, Fatehpur Jharsa village.
Municipal Councillor, Raj Nagar village.
Sarpanch (former), Harsaru village.
CEO, Puri Developments.
Finance Director, Delhi, Land and Finance.
MD, Aadarshplex.
Senior Planner, Haryana Town and Country Planning Department.
Senior Enforcement Officer, Haryana Town and Country Planning Department.
Assistant to Senior Planner, Haryana Town and Country Planning Department.
Senior Planner, Haryana Urban Development Authority.
Estates Management, Haryana Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation.
Senior Planner, Haryana Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation.
President, Honda Workers Union.
President, Rico Workers Union.
Provisional Committee Members, Maruti Suzuki Employees Union.
Appendix 6: Sample interview questions for Kapashera neighbours (garment-exports).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole breadwinner?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of years in Gurgaon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you return to your village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much land do you own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did you come to Gurgaon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary rise?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract/Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT Comp?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many factories worked in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many units per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most effective way to make demands?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most effective way to improve situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem at work who do you speak to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three things to improve at factory?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent+Bills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What problems do you encounter in your neighbourhood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Physical Abuse

Relationship with locals

When there are problems who do you speak to?

Do you have papers where are they registered?

If not why not

Police listen to your problems?

Local Pradhan listen to your problems?

What do you do in your free time?

Will you live in X in the future?