Unsettling memories : narratives of India's 'emergency' / Emma Tarlo; New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. (1-20 p.)

1
INTRODUCTION

One Sunday morning in February 1995, I boarded an auto-rickshaw to visit some of the ancient sites of Shahdara in east Delhi. Unfortunately—or fortunately as it turned out—the rickshaw driver lost his way. After we had made several circles through the dense winter smog on the east side of the Yamuna river, I told him to stop the vehicle and drop me off wherever we were. Little did I know at the time that I would return to this place persistently over the next three years.

I had arrived in Welcome—one of Delhi's 47 'resettlement colonies', designed for relocating families evicted from inner city slums. There was nothing spectacular about the place and it was partly for that reason that I contemplated making it a site for fieldwork. At the time I was working on a project about furniture and the uses of the body. I had done a fair amount of research in middle-class areas in south Delhi and now wanted to work in a poorer, less westernised environment. However, my project, like my Sunday itinerary, was soon to change.

What changed everything was a visit to the local branch of the Slum Department of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)—a building situated within Welcome. Here my assistant and I had hoped to gather a few background facts about the planning and resettlement of the colony. However, it soon became clear that such general information had never been collated. Instead it lay dispersed in thousands of dusty files. Opening these, I became aware of a wealth of other documents pertaining to the little-studied period known as 'the Emergency'. By the time I closed the files, my research agenda had been redefined.

This book is about unsettling memories: both the process of disrupting and unearthing memories and the unsettling nature of memories evoked. It focuses in particular on events which took place in the

Indian capital city of Delhi between June 1975 and March 1977—a period known in India as 'the Emergency'. Popular and official narratives of these events are analysed for what they tell us about the relationship between citizen, state and market in contemporary urban India. While the immediate aim is to rewrite the Emergency from an anthropological perspective, the wider objective is to demonstrate the possibility of producing an ethnography of the state.

The Emergency occupies an unusual place in the Indian past. It has been much mythologised but little studied. Too recent to be of interest to historians yet too distant to have attracted the attention of other social scientists, it has somehow slipped through the net of academic disciplines. But time is not the only factor that explains the silence surrounding this brief period. This silence can also be explained in terms of the unsettling nature of what went on during those 21 months when democratic rights were suspended under Indira Gandhi and coercive measures brought into play. Press censorship, arrests, torture, the demolition of slums and tales of forcible sterilisation have all made the Emergency fertile food for fiction,[1] but uncomfortable ground for historical, political or sociological analysis. While literary writers have been keen to evoke and, at times, embellish the horror of such atrocities, politicians and dominant political parties have been equally keen to deny their reality and suppress their memory. The silence that surrounds the Emergency 'as fact' is not entirely accidental.

This book belongs, then, to a growing body of literature which seeks to work against the areas of collective silence which often cling to violent and disturbing events. In particular it seeks to articulate the experiences and perceptions of ordinary people who found themselves caught up in the twists and turns of a bleak historical moment.[2] The key protagonists of the book are men and women who, by dint of poverty and circumstance, were targetted in the mass slum clearance and sterilisation drives, ubiquitous in Delhi during the Emergency. They are people whose lives were profoundly disrupted by these policies but whose personal renderings of the event have not been either written or heard. Other protagonists include the low-level bureaucrats, local leaders and middlemen with whom they negotiated their attempts to retain basic rights and amenities often at the risk of losing others.

[1]Nirmal Verma, 1993, *Dark Dispatches*, Delhi: Indus; Rohinton Mistry, 1995, *A Fine Balance*, Calcutta: Rupa & Co.; Salman Rushdie, 1983, *Midnight's Children*, and more specifically, 1994, 'The Free Radio' in *East, West*, both originally published in London by Jonathan Cape; R.K. Narayan, 1976, *The Painter of Signs*, New York: Viking.

[2]As such, it has affinities with the wealth of recent literature about memories of the Holocaust and Partition. For two recent examples of books conveying personal experiences of Partition see Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, Delhi: Viking, and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, Delhi: Kali for Women, both published in 1998.

A focus on the voices and experiences of the Emergency's most obvious victims does not, however, pretend to offer privileged access to the truth of the event. Like the official record itself, personal memories are fraught with ambiguity and are formulated within the context of wider experiences and agendas—local, national and global. They testify not only to the state's targeting of the poor during the Emergency, but also to the active role played by many of the poor in perpetuating state oppression at that time. The Emergency as fact leaves little space for the romanticisation of the victim.

Though much of this book is concerned with personal narratives, it is equally concerned with other avenues of remembering and forgetting—with government files assumed not to exist, with Emergency propaganda, censored newspapers, post-Emergency resistance literature and political exposés which lead us down the paths of public memory and through the intricacies and inconsistencies of the official record. These various sources offer not only different takes on the event but also different time frames through which to comprehend it. Fieldwork conversations with the sterilised and displaced re-work the past in relation to subsequent events, present circumstances and anticipated futures. The memories they engender are squarely located in the present and are never unmediated. By contrast, government files and official propaganda—both produced during the Emergency itself—lend insight into the present of the past. They offer an official memory still uncensored by subsequent developments and political trends, though such literature was of course subject to a different type of censorship at the time. Located somewhere between these two time-frames, post-Emergency exposés, letters, and judgments which surfaced immediately after the event offer a short-term memory of the Emergency—one which reads strangely now for its lack of historical depth and the imagined futures it evokes. These different time frames remind us of the relativity of all representations

of the past as well as the impossibility of historical perfection. However, they also furnish the basis for the creation of a new multi-textured narrative of the Emergency, which does not claim to represent the totality of the event but which, in allowing diversity, seeks to create a richer portrait of the elements at play.

Although at one level concerned with the specificities of a particular historical moment, this book is also concerned with what such a moment tells us of the everyday lives of the urban poor in India's capital city. What seems to characterise their situation is the extreme precariousness of their relationship to both land and state—a precariousness which came to light most intensely during the Emergency but is by no means specific to it. The discourse of development which provided the logic for the mass displacement of some 700,000 people to marginal spaces beyond the borders of the city in 1975–7 did not guarantee either security or entitlement to the displaced. And although the means by which the poor negotiated 'provisional' land rights during the Emergency were specific, the fact that they had to bargain with politicians and bureaucrats for the basic amenities of everyday life reveals the continuities with both past and present. Such continuities are all too apparent in the recent re-emergence in Delhi politics of Jagmohan, the man who had been in charge of slum clearance and resettlement during the Emergency. Now Union Urban Development Minister, Jagmohan is renewing his stringent efforts to 'clean up' the city by enforcing the closure of thousands of 'non-conforming industries' and removing 'illegal squatters' from the capital.[3] For the hundreds of thousands of citizens whose lives are inescapably enmeshed in this major re-development scheme, it must seem that little has changed since the mid 1970s. In this sense, the Emergency of

[3]In 1996, the Supreme Court ordered the closure and shifting of industrial units situated in 'non-conforming' residential areas. The precise number of such 'non-conforming' industrial units in Delhi is unknown but it is estimated at around 100,000. Following delays in implementation, the Supreme Court served a notice to the Delhi Chief Minister in November 2000 concerning non-compliance with the court's earlier instructions. This was followed by a rapid drive to close down industrial units with a view to eventually relocating some of them. Mass sealing operations are currently underway, despite organised protest from workers. An estimated 20-lakh (2 million) people are thought to be employed in these industries. The majority of these will lose their means to earn a livelihood if the closures continue to function at the current rate (see *Frontline*, 22 Dec. 2000).

1975 is a trope through which to explore the emergencies of everyday life for poor and marginalised sections of the Delhi population.

For those who may be sceptical about the interest in an event which took place over 25 years ago, let me begin by highlighting some key areas of anthropological importance.

The ethnography of events

History has often proved a stumbling block to anthropology and although the relationship between the two is in a process of radical transformation, many anthropologists still endorse (explicitly or implicitly) a false dichotomy between structure and event. Social structure—the seemingly stable state of affairs—was long seen as the domain *par excellence* of anthropologists leaving significant events—especially violent ones—to journalists, political scientists and historians.

Anthropology's refusal to engage with historical events has its origins in a variety of factors. One is anthropology's favoured methodology of participant observation through fieldwork. This method has traditionally consisted of taking up residence amongst a community or people for a period of one or two years and gathering information based on this experience of proximity. Although two years may seem a long time to journalists accustomed to darting in and out of people's lives within a single day, it is of course inadequate for observing historical change and anthropology's reverence of the ethnographic present has often given rise to works which, at best, underplay and, at worst, deny the forces of history. This problem is accentuated by the absence of historical records amongst many of the peoples anthropologists conventionally choose to study. Added to these practical dilemmas is the uneasy nature of what might be uncovered if anthropologists did delve closely into the histories of the people they studied, many of whom have uncomfortable pasts tied with European imperialist interests which anthropologists (who, until recently, were mainly from colonising countries) preferred to ignore.

It was then a combination of methodology and circumstance which served to boost the development of an ahistorical anthropology which generated a string of self-sufficient holistic models—functionalism, structuralism and society-as-text explicable through cultural exegesis. These models left little space for events which tended either to be seen as disruptions, too temporary to interest anthropologists, or as

rituals which simply served to boost or reinforce the social structure. Hence in Max Gluckman's famous 'rituals of rebellion' which find their Indian equivalent in studies of the Holi festival, violence and disruption are seen as temporary ritual devices which allow society to let off steam before returning to the status quo.[4]

In advocating the study of an event like the Emergency, I am not suggesting a return to rituals of rebellion although I would endorse Gluckman's obvious point that structure and event are not oppositional terms. Rather, I am interested in the new areas of research suggested by a few contemporary anthropologists who argue for the need for studies which explore the dynamic relationship between moments of disruption and moments of calm.[5] Such studies are necessary because violence and disruption are so integral to the lives of many modern peoples and nations that they are often experienced not as aberrations of the normal state of affairs but as inevitable elements of the everyday.[6] Viewed from this perspective, social structure is not so much a stable force temporarily disrupted by political events, but rather a dynamic form shaped and re-moulded through such events. The fact that the modern nations of India and Pakistan were born through the unspeakable violence that accompanied Partition stands as proof—if proof were needed—of the transformative potential of events.

Veena Das who has led the way in India for a new ethnography of what she calls 'critical events' has argued that a theoretical shift towards events does not so much create new anthropological objects as invite old objects to inhabit unfamiliar spaces and thereby acquire new life.[7] The events she calls critical are those which bring about new modes of action and encourage new social and political formations

[4]See Max Gluckman, 1963, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, London: Routledge and Danny Miller, 1973, 'Holi-Dhulendi: Licensed Rebellion in a North Indian Village', *South Asia*, 3, pp. 15–22.

[5]See, for example, the arguments raised in John Davis, 1992, 'The Anthropology of Suffering', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 5, 2, pp. 149–61 and Jonathan Spencer, 1992, 'Problems in the Analysis of Communal Violence', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.), 26, 2.

[6]For an exploration of the notion of the violence or violences of everyday life, see Nancy Scheper Hughes, 1992, *Death without Weeping*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Paul Farmer, 1996, 'On Suffering and Structural Violence', Daedalus 15, 1; pp. 261–83; Arthur Kleinman, 2000, 'The Violences of Everyday Life' in Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman *et al.*, eds, *Violence and Subjectivity*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[7]Veena Das, 1995, *Critical Events*, Delhi: OUP, p. 1.

as people are propelled into unpredicted terrains. What her examples of Partition (1947), the Sikh massacre (1984) and the Bhopal gas disaster (1985) share in common is the way these events 'criss-crossed several institutions, moving across family, community, bureaucracy, courts of law, the medical profession, the state and multinational corporations.'[8] Conventional anthropological studies, with their synchronic and location-based focus, can rarely capture the interrelationship between such institutions, yet it is precisely this interrelationship which characterises so much of modern life. 'A description of critical events,' Das argues, 'helps form an ethnography which makes an incision upon all these institutions together, so that their mutual implications in the events are foregrounded during the analysis.'[9]

By making the Emergency the key focus of this book, my aim is to provide just such an ethnography of a 'critical event'. The anthropological value of taking this event as a starting point is, as Das argues, that it provides a view onto a moment of intense social and political dynamism when a whole range of actors—in this case, inner city slum dwellers, displaced peoples, local leaders, professionals, traders, bureaucrats, police and politicians—were brought into interaction and, in many cases, renegotiated their position in the socio-geographic fabric of Delhi. But although it is only at such moments of intense renegotiation that such a range of social interactions becomes apparent, the relationships on which these interactions are based form part of the everyday functioning of life in the capital city. This means that despite the specificity of the Emergency as an event, it provides some sort of privileged access to the semi-obscure social and political structures of everyday life in the capital city.

The anthropology of the state

If critical events have hitherto taken a back stage in anthropological accounts, so too has the analysis of the role of the state in everyday life. The absence of ethnographies of the modern Indian state has been highlighted in particular by Akhil Gupta who uses the concept of 'blurred boundaries' to describe the enmeshed relationships by which local level bureaucrats and rural people interact in a North Indian

[8]Ibid., p. 6.

[9]Ibid.

village.[10] He points to the need for further examination of the quotidian practices of bureaucrats which might tell us about the effects of the state in everyday life. He also suggests the importance of analysing how the state is discursively constructed through popular cultural forms including newspapers and TV which inform local perceptions. Anthropological methodology which places a high value on face-to-face encounters and spatial proximity may not, he argues, be well suited to the study of so unwieldy a set of discourses and practices as the state, though a recent collection of ethnographies of the modern Indian state suggests that much can in fact be learned using conventional ethnographic methods.[11]

Unlike Gupta, I suggest that it is precisely its emphasis on face-to-face encounters and spatial proximity that enables ethnographic methodology to offer fresh insights into the lived experience and perceptions of the modern state. Furthermore, far from being ill-equipped for such an exercise, anthropologists are in many ways extremely well placed for investigating the workings of the state as both idea and practice. Not only do they daily and increasingly engage with bureaucratic structures and mythologies within and beyond academic departments, but they also learn to master a variety of relationships with high and low level representatives of the state when organising and conducting fieldwork—whether 'at home' or abroad. Often it is 'face-to-face' encounters with local officials that either open or close doors for anthropologists who are, I would argue, deeply familiar with the concept of 'blurred boundaries'—a term which might be fruitfully used to characterise fieldwork itself.

It would be inaccurate to say that my research about the Emergency led me to engage with local bureaucrats, for it happened the other way round. It was my 'face to face' encounter with local bureaucrats of the Slum Department of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and my interest in the products with which they deal—official papers—that led me to focus on the Emergency in the first place. This encounter and sustained interaction not only taught me much about the role of the Indian state during the Emergency but provided important insight

[10]Akhil Gupta, 1995, 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State', *American Ethnologist*, 22, 2, pp. 375–402.

[11]Christopher Fuller and Véronique Bénéï, eds, 2000, *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, Delhi: Social Science Press.

into the complex relationships of both bureaucrats and ordinary people to the state's administrative structures in everyday life.

My entry into the records room of one of Delhi's regional branches of the Slum Department was not, then, a prelude to my fieldwork but was very much part of the fieldwork itself. These government offices constituted a specific type of ethnographic terrain—a bureaucratic space—in which a particular type of material artefact—official papers—is produced. Like all artefacts, official papers embody social relationships: they have producers and consumers; they circulate between individuals and representatives of institutions; they are rich in symbolism just as they are concrete in form. Anthropologically their interest lies not simply in their content but in the circumstances surrounding their production, circulation and interpretation. And who is better placed to unveil the mysteries of such documents than the people whose profession it is to create them?

Too often anthropologists are prone to treat official records as mere background information and to dismiss bureaucrats and archivists as people who might stand in the way of research. But as the producers and guardians of official documents, government officials can be extremely helpful in decoding the artefacts they have produced as well as demonstrating the techniques of production. It was through conversations with low-level bureaucrats that I was able to establish a basis for interpreting these everyday artefacts of the state. I treat them here, not simply as 'evidence' of what went on before, during and after the Emergency, but as a field of 'paper truths.' The main characteristic of these paper truths lies in the fact that they are malleable and constructed on the one hand yet take on an aura of irrefutability on the other. They highlight the ever-present gap between what is implicitly known and what is officially recorded, a gap open to both negotiation and exploitation as people's experiences during the Emergency make clear.

Bringing anthropological methodology to the Slum Department not only helped expose the everyday technologies and mythologies of state practice but it also shed light on the variegated nature of official memory. Like many other studies, this one highlights the state's attempt to control the production of memory by making its version of events hold and by discouraging the memorisation of particular happenings. The voices of low-level bureaucrats complicate the issue for they maintain a distinction between what they have recorded and

what they experienced. Their status as officials gives their oral testimonies some sort of official status, though their accounts are often at variance with what they themselves recorded in the files. Furthermore, taken together, both the 'paper truths' of the records room and the memories of bureaucrats provide important material with which it becomes possible to challenge the state's official master narrative of the Emergency.

These discrepancies within the official memorisation of the event also point to the hierarchy and fragmentation found within bureaucratic structures, where different grades of officials are differently situated in relation to policies and events. This hierarchy is literally visible in the allocation of space and resources within government departments so it becomes possible to read a person's status quite literally from the size of his desk. Nevertheless, an ethnography of the Emergency which focuses only on the production and interpretation of 'paper truths' inside government offices would, of course, be limited. The other important element about 'paper truths' is their reproducibility outside Government departments. If documents are the lingua franca of the state, then citizens wishing to negotiate with the state not only learn that language but also learn to reproduce it in the form of official documents 'proving' housing and sterilisation status. The state's demand for paper proofs generates the popular production of paper truths as people mimic the very writing technologies that ensnare them. Such acts of mimesis bear witness to the reach of the state in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens but they also point to the limitations of that reach, for ultimately the state risks drowning in the artifice of its own creation. Government files relating to the Emergency point to the fact that agents of the state were often unable to interpret the proliferation of documents that they themselves had set in motion.

The 'paper truths' of the Emergency also bear witness to the multiple violences of the state which they record and embody, however obliquely. The capacity of the state to act as an implicit or explicit instrument of violence is something to which anthropologists are drawing increasing attention. What the personal narratives of victims of the Emergency bring to this debate is a chilling demonstration of how state abuses not only produce local worlds but also become re-worked within them. The process by which the poor were drawn into participation in the sterilisation campaign as a means of avoiding getting sterilised themselves directly confirms Kleinman's recent

observation concerning the inadequacy of current taxonomies of violence which draw clear distinctions between 'public versus domestic, ordinary as against extreme political violence'.[12] Too often these categories seem to merge. For example, the demolition drives which have been a regular feature of life amongst the urban poor in India's major cities since the early 1960s require demolition workers. These low-level state employees often end up demolishing each others' homes with the aid of a simple iron rod in the interests of 'doing their jobs'.

The plight of the local demolition worker who finds himself displaced and homeless even as he demolishes the homes of others reminds us that large sections of the urban poor, particularly those from scheduled caste backgrounds,[13] earn their livelihoods working for the state which promises them a degree of security, even if the conditions of the promise are subject to change over time. The limits to that security were amply demonstrated during the Emergency when those with two or three children (depending on which branch of the administration) found themselves threatened with loss of employment if they failed to get sterilised. That getting sterilised or paying someone else to do so became, in many cases the only way displaced people could obtain small plots of land in resettlement colonies, reveals the fickle nature of the state's offer of protection. But it also exposes how local people entered into deals with the state by which they negotiated their claims to land on the outskirts of the city.

The rapidity with which the family planning drive of the Emergency transformed into a market for sterilisation in the marginal spaces of Delhi's resettlement colonies is interesting for what it tells us about how people relate to the state at a local level. Situated within the wider context of everyday life in resettlement colonies this trade ceases to surprise for it becomes quite clear that the poor in Delhi relate to the state principally through the market. Basic amenities such as land, jobs, electricity, water and paving are things, not provided, but purchased in exchange for votes, money, or, in the case of the Emergency, sterilisation certificates. That people commonly

[12]Kleinman, 2000, 'The Violences of Everyday Life', p. 227.

[13]In the 1950s positive discrimination in public sector jobs and industries was introduced in favour of members of 'scheduled castes' who had previously been classified as 'untouchables'. As a result a large numbers of scheduled caste men and, to a lesser extent, women occupy the lower levels of government posts, working as sweepers, demolition workers, railway coolies and so forth.

pay bureaucrats for gaining access to what ostensibly is their due is a point made by Gupta in the context of development projects in rural India and by Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Lyon in the context of rural women's lack of access to health facilities.[14] It is not that health facilities are unavailable in Uttar Pradesh but that local people feel they cannot gain access to effective treatment without 'heating' the pockets of doctors and nurses. In effect the market, far from operating outside the state, often features as the vernacular idiom through which ordinary people negotiate with local agents of the state. Furthermore, as Gupta points out, it would be fallacious to assume that it is only at the 'lower levels' that this vernacular idiom is understood. How else might we explain the fact that the unauthorised dwellings of the rich in Delhi too often remain unscathed[15] whilst those of the poor seem to quake permanently under the threat of demolition?

Whether this threat is fulfilled or not depends very largely on the balance of power between representatives of local government on the one hand and the state or municipal authorities on the other. Despite their haphazard and spontaneous appearance most squatter settlements are nurtured by politicians who maintain close relationships of patronage with local *pradhans* (self-styled local leaders) who, in turn, promise politicians the votes of their supporters.[16] It is therefore in the interests of individual politicians to 'protect' settlements or segments of them from demolition in order to maintain these significant vote banks. Here again the fragmented nature of the state emerges as policies of slum clearance are often effectively blocked by representatives of local government. Yet such informal relationships of 'protection' are inherently unstable. A slight shift in the balance of power takes the wind out of the politicians' promise and often has drastic implications for those relying on their protection. This became clear during the Emergency when informal agreements between

[14]See Patricia Jeffrey, Roger Jeffrey and Andrew Lyon, 1989, *Labour Pains, Labour Power*, London: Zed.

[15]For discussion of the uninterrupted spread of unauthorised palatial residences in South Delhi, see Anita Soni, 2000, 'Urban Conquest of Outer Delhi: Beneficiaries, Intermediaries and Victims' in Véronique Dupont, Emma Tarlo and Denis Vidal, eds, 2000, *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies*, Delhi: Manohar. The recent crackdown on unauthorised buildings may threaten even these palatial residences.

[16]For discussion of these dynamics see Saraswati Haider, 2000, 'Migrant Women and Urban Experience in a Squatter Settlement' in Dupont, Tarlo and Vidal, eds, *Delhi*.

individual politicians and squatters were overridden by firmly implemented state action under a centralised authoritarian government, backed by force. Current attempts to close down 'non-conforming' industries and displace squatters in response to an injunction from the Supreme Court testify to the enduring sense of insecurity faced by Delhi's urban poor.

Location

The personal and official narratives that inform this text flow predominantly from one particular location—the resettlement colony of Welcome—just one of Delhi's 47 poorly serviced urban settlements created to absorb displaced inner city squatters. The specificity of such spaces lies not only in their social and geographic marginality, but also in the fact that they are made up of fragments of disrupted and dispersed settlements from elsewhere. Arjun Appadurai draws an interesting distinction between 'neighborhoods'(situated communities characterised by their actuality) and what he calls 'locality' (a phenomenological quality or feeling 'expressed in certain kinds of agency, sociality and reproducibility').[17] By creating colonies out of fragments of demolished neighbourhoods, the state authorities lump together people who may share little more in common than their poverty and displacement. As Appadurai points out, such acts of enforced localisation place severe constraints and obstacles on the 'survival of locality'. It must also be remembered that the sense of locality in the inner city areas and squatter settlements demolished during the Emergency was no doubt already tenuous. Most of the people who were displaced to Welcome in the 1970s, had already experienced displacement before, whether in the form of migration or as a response to local or state violence. Many have also experienced further displacement since their arrival in Welcome, for life in Delhi's resettlement colonies is far from 'settled'.

The inhabitants of such fragmented spaces may have difficulty building a sense of shared locality, but in the minds of Delhi's middle-class citizens, they seem to represent a unified group. What they share is the stigma of their association with the slum. Born in the name of slum-clearance, resettlement colonies are rarely ever able to shake off

[17]Arjun Appadurai, 1997, *Modernity at Large*, Delhi: OUP, ch. 9.

this association. Their very existence evokes the 'cleaning up' process out of which they emerged. And if the city is perceived as being cleaner without its poorer inhabitants, then resettlement colonies are inevitably perceived as places of dirt—containers of the city's unwanted elements. In the case of Welcome, this general stigma fuses with the colony's more specific reputation as a 'notorious place' of violence and criminality.

The process by which particular spaces and their inhabitants are characterised as being inherently dangerous has been highlighted by Dhareshwar and Srivatsan in their elaboration of the figure of the 'rowdy' who 'in middle-class imagination...inhabits the dark zone of the city, trafficking in illegal, immoral activities; a zone that is inevitably in need of law and order, and always threatening to spread to the safer, cleaner habitat of the city'.[18] It is difficult to track the specific historiography of Welcome's 'bad reputation' but it is certain that press coverage of the colony's implication in the communal violence of 1992[19] has given Welcome a special place on the map of Delhi's dubious places. This 'fame for infamy' has become a source of local pride to some young men in the colony who boast of how the police can always track a notorious criminal to Welcome. Their words testify to the production of discourses of marginalisation both from within and outside the colony. This popular perception of Welcome as a place 'to be avoided' is to some extent negated by commercial interests. Being one of Delhi's oldest resettlement colonies, it is better situated than most and rising property prices ensure its rapid development even as the reputation for violence and disrepute keeps prices competitive.

The question remains as to the appropriateness of situating a study of wider events, ideas and places—the Emergency, the state, Delhi—within the confines of a single marginal space like Welcome. Increasing

[18]See Vivek Dhareshwar and R. Srivatsun, 1996, '"Rowdy-Sheeters": Subalternity and Politics' in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, eds, *Subaltern Studies IX*, Delhi: OUP, p. 202.

[19]In December 1992 right wing Hindu activists were responsible for demolishing a medieval mosque at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh—an act that unleashed a trail of violence between Hindus and Muslims throughout north India. In Delhi, Welcome became a key site of violence. Areas of the colony, including religious buildings, were set on fire. Once the violence and curfew were over, a halo of fear seemed to linger over the colony, deterring business partners and other visitors from coming to Welcome. The event clearly served to boost the colony's reputation as a dangerous or dubious place.

awareness of the extent to which local sites are produced through trans-local power relations and cultural flows has led some anthropologists to advocate multi-locational fieldwork[20] just as it has led others to suggest a shift from location to event.[21] The peculiarity of this study is that it approaches an event through its articulation in the local, arguing that precisely because of its history of displacement, a resettlement colony like Welcome is a suitable location from which to approach wider issues, places and events.

This becomes clear once it is recognised that the inhabitants of Welcome come from over 80 different locations spread throughout the capital, ranging from the southern corners of 'New Delhi' to the historic core of 'Old Delhi'. A map indicating the key sites of demolition may look more like a bombardment plan than a development plan (the similarity is not incidental), but it testifies to the varied spatial trajectories of the displaced. This means that although today the inhabitants of Welcome are based within the confines of a single colony, they carry with them memories and experiences of elsewhere. These were people who lived and worked in varied locations all over Delhi prior to experiencing demolition, and just as many of them built new shelters in Welcome using the bricks and corrugated iron from their demolished homes, so they construct their narratives out of their complex personal trajectories. As a result, this was not a case of the anthropologist having to shift from one location to another in order to encounter the diversity of different experiences of the Emergency. Rather, diverse multi-locational experiences emerged from a single geographic space. The other side of the resettlement equation lies in the concurrent transformations that have occurred to the inner city areas where demolitions took place. Delhi would look quite different were it not for the succession of demolitions out of which the colony of Welcome was born and through which new roads, public buildings and parks were created as part of the 'beautification' of the capital. In this sense the birth of the colony was inextricably bound up with the morphology of the city as a whole, highlighting the fact that the people of Welcome are not so much marginal to Delhi's history as *marginalised* by it.[22]

[20]George Marcus, 1995, 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, pp. 95–117.

[21]See Das, 1995, *Critical Events*.

[22]For more specific discussion of the history and development of Welcome within

Once we re-establish the links between those resettled in Welcome and the places where they once lived and worked, it becomes less surprising that their narratives should lend insight into places and events of wider national importance. In fact, elsewhere I have argued that, far from standing outside national policies and events, the urban poor often find themselves deeply implicated within them for they lack the political, economic and educational resources with which to build a shield in moments of crisis.[23] This was blatantly obvious during the Emergency when an estimated 700,000 people (15 per cent of the local population) were dispersed outside the city and over 161,000 were purportedly sterilised. Whether singled out as the key targets of state policies, or simply exposed to critical events like wars and so called 'communal riots', the people of Welcome have often found themselves caught at the centre and drawn into the action. From this viewpoint, they no longer seem so marginal. Their narratives confirm Appadurai's point that in a contemporary world of complex dislocations and relocations, there is nothing 'mere' about 'the local'.

Voice and image

Much has been made in recent years of a paradigmatic shift in anthropology from the visual to the verbal, from seeing to listening, from observing the lives of others to giving them voice. Though much of this book is devoted to just such an exercise, it is important to stress that the opposition often implied between the visual and the verbal is both artificial and unhelpful. We live in a world in which we constantly interpret a complex variety of words, images and material forms which sometimes communicate in different ways and sometimes in unison. In the first chapter, I take the reader on an imaginary tour of Delhi in order to track how narratives of the Emergency and its forgetting are visibly inscribed in the city's layout, its street names, its museums and monuments. Similarly, when listening to people recount their personal experiences of the Emergency, I was aware not only of what was said and how it was said but also of the wider circumstances including the visual field: who said what in front of whom, in what types of places,

the context of national policies and events see Emma Tarlo, 2000, 'Welcome to History: A Resettlement Colony in the Making' in Dupont, Tarlo and Vidal, eds, *Delhi*.

[23] Ibid.

with what gestures and so forth. Like other anthropologists I have tried to be sensitive to the discrepancies between what people say and what they do, between how they want to present themselves and how we observe others reacting to them. These visual observations, far from belittling the research process, are essential to it. They provide a context to voices which, disembodied, can too easily be used uncritically by writers/ethnographers as a simplistic device to support the story they want to tell.

None the less the recent incorporation of different 'voices' in anthropological and historical texts has been important in all sorts of ways. Voices not only convey the subjectivity of experience, but they also disrupt the homogeneity and closure of texts as well as enabling a rejection of the spurious old anthropological assumption that all members of a given culture necessarily represent it in a direct and unproblematic way. Voices, then, allow for controversy and debate; they leave space for different personalities and they carry the potential to challenge the anthropologist's prior assumptions. Their insertion into texts seems particularly important when the subjects of research are mostly illiterate and when the events under investigation have been largely suppressed.

However, as has often been pointed out, researchers, both as ethnographers and as writers are in a position of power which enables them to be selective, to take heed of some voices and ignore others, to re-arrange different narratives within the text. For this reason some modern ethnographic writing is accused of being deceptive on the grounds that it gives the impression of allowing others to speak when ultimately these others are always subjected to the author's will. This seems inevitable, but the question remains as to whether such authorial control is necessarily a negative thing. Surely the point of researchers devoting years to a particular project is that they develop the competence to be able to follow leads intelligently, to select appropriately from different types of material, to recognise the difference between the person whose opinions are informative and the one who tries to lead them up the garden path? One striking peculiarity of the predicament of ethnographers is that they often find themselves able to mix with a much wider variety of people than any one member of the community they are studying is ever able to do. Outsider status lends at least some degree of immunity to internal factions or social divisions, whether these are based on gender, religion,

class, caste or other criteria.[24] Hence, in my research about the Emergency I found myself able to discuss with all sorts of people who would barely, if ever, interact among themselves and it is this variety of encounters which I hope lends a certain legitimacy to the nature of the collective narrative which, as author, I have orchestrated.

The use of voices in this text and the conversational form in which they are often included reflect, then, the nature of my fieldwork experience in Delhi. This was an experience based much more on talking than on participation in the classic anthropological sense. I was not living in the resettlement colony of Welcome; neither would it have been appropriate for me to do so. My outsider status—an obvious disadvantage in terms of language—was advantageous to the extent that people were often as curious to speak to me as I was to them. This outsider status was explicit throughout my fieldwork and remains so in the book. Where the questions I asked seem relevant to the types of answers people gave, I have included them in the text; where they seem insignificant, I have chosen to omit them and at times I simply report conversations which were triggered off by my initial inquiries but in which I barely participated. This was a fieldwork which bore the character of one long collective, open-ended conversation based on people's accounts of their own experiences and it is precisely this quality that I seek to retain in the text.

Ultimately the narrative I have produced is not without its imperfections: some voices may dominate more than they should; others will always remain inaccessible; official records reveal much, but there are also things that they conceal. This is a text made up of many fragments which, put together, will never make a perfect whole. None the less, I was struck throughout the research by the high degree of coherence between official papers, bureaucratic interpretations, photographic documents and personal narratives which, when critically examined and pieced together, are mutually supporting in the story they collectively tell even if they tell that story in very different ways and add different elements to it.[25] In this sense, this account of what

[24]Following Kiran Narayan, I would argue that the very process of doing ethnography creates both intimacy and distance between researcher and researched, making all ethnographers both part-insiders and part-outsiders, whatever their ethnic background (Kiran Narayan, 1998, 'How Native is a Native Anthropologist?' in Meenakshi Thapan, ed. *Anthropological Journeys*, Delhi: Sangam).

[25]In his attempt to rewrite the history of a violent event which took place in

went on during the Emergency takes distance both from fiction and from earlier stereotyped renderings of the event in spite of the fact that it relies on the notoriously complex and imperfect instrument of human memory and its verbal and material embodiments.

The photographic sequences between chapters are intended not so much to illustrate the text as to run parallel to it. They make visual observations on the themes of memory, marginality, state policies, leadership and everyday life. Like other forms of documentation, they should be interpreted as a powerful form of paper truth.

The book begins by examining the various means by which the memory of the Emergency has been handed down, distorted or suppressed. The first chapter is intended to introduce those unfamiliar with Delhi and the Emergency to the existing master narratives of the event. As a moment of national shame, a blot on India's democratic record, the Emergency has been built more as a moment for forgetting than as one for remembering. This agenda for forgetting the Emergency is marked by the lack of public monuments which might invoke its memory as well as by memorials which encourage a very different reading of the past. Inviting the reader on an alternative guided tour of the city—I trace the material deposits through which the Emergency might be remembered but also the contours through which it has become forgotten. The chapter is also intended to provide a taste of the early stages of the research process characterised by moving about from place to place, meeting with different people and working through existing literature. The aim is not to analyse the rhetoric of the Emergency but to give a sense of the ingredients with which the ethnographer starts and from which she eventually departs.

Those already familiar with the rhetoric of the Emergency may wish to move straight to chapters 3 and 4 which lay the foundations for the emergence of a new narrative of the event. Based on an analysis of official documents and letters pertaining to slum clearance and sterilisation, these chapters trace the role of the state bureaucracy in

Chauri Chaura in 1922, Shahid Amin suggests the impossibility of surmounting the high levels of discrepancy, distortion and fragmentation which exist between official records and different personal narrations of an event. My own research, though by no means suggesting the possibility of historic perfection, does imply a far greater degree of coherence between the various fragments of history with which a researcher can work, see Shahid Amin, 1995, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*, Delhi: OUP.

carrying out Emergency measures. Unlike existing renditions of the event, bureaucratic memories portray it, not as a moment of wild unfettered violence, but as a period of meticulously orchestrated state oppression. They also problematise conventional dichotomies drawn between the official and unofficial, between victim and agent, highlighting the many grey areas, not only in state policy but also in popular responses to it. These issues are examined more closely in the remaining chapters which take us out of the Slum Department and into the homes of the people of Welcome—craftsmen, vendors, rickshaw pullers, sweepers and other low level government servants and their husbands and wives. Their personal accounts reveal the links and disjunctions between political intentions and lived realities. Taken together they provide a powerful collective critique of the Emergency even if this critique remains fragmented and retains many contradictions. Though focused principally around a specific historical moment, their narratives tell us much about the dynamics of life amongst the urban poor in Delhi.