Doing Theory
Locations, Hierarchies and Disjunctions

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I first met Navjyoti1 in Navada, a remote Santhal hamlet in the western Tundi ravines bordering Dhanbad and Giridih districts of Jharkhand, India, where she had spent her childhood, met with the left radical armed group Maoist Communist Centre (MCC),2 and a year earlier, had been 'captured' by the Jharkhand police. Out on bail after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) intervened against her prolonged torture in police custody (her condition was acknowledged as serious after maggots appeared in her fist-deep wounds), Navjyoti had received prior information about my "movements" before I reached her village. Tensely poised, surrounded by those she trusted, she shot a volley of questions at me with an authority that belied her age, relaxing only when certain that I had arrived alone and carried no arms, cameras or recorders.

When she spoke to me later, it was not about the party or about Maoism, but about herself, and the kind of forces that drew her to the party. The youngest of three sisters, she reminisced that she had thought she might become a 'leader'. 'Ham soche achha hai, kuch seekh rahi hai... leader bhi ban sakte hai (I thought it's good, I am learning something ... I may even become a leader)'. I had previously met with some of those who had known her before she left with the MCC, including a schoolteacher associated with the National Literacy Mission (Sakshartha Yavini), who remembered how she became close to the 'partywallahs'. 'She had a good voice and was useful for the Nari Mukti Sangh [MCC front organisation]. She got a lot of attention from them.'

* Some of the ideas in this chapter have been discussed in "Why does the subject speak? Prejudgement in fieldwork with Naxalites and Hindu Rioters", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (n.s.) 23, 2017, 155–74.
Her teacher believed she had had a different 'bent of mind' from other girls (including her own sisters), and it was the party's recognition of her sense of self-worth that led her to them. Not too different from many of her male compatriots whom I met at different sites over that year, Naviyoti's narrative too held imaginings of the movement as an avenue leading to opportunity and recognition; and despite the brutalising experience of capture, torture and subsequent near total closure of options, the spark to overcome her life conditions had survived. As I was to leave, she said,

I will never forget what these people [police] did to me. But now I have to think about what I should do next. If I have the support of more women like you, I can do a lot even now. If you have come so far to meet me, I too can come to Delhi with you.

Arrested and tortured by the state police under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) and deserted by MCC (barring rare exceptions, Naxal parties are known to swiftly withdraw association with captured cadre), Naviyoti was cornered from all fronts when we met. She spoke willingly and I learned much, but I have not been able to erase the troubled memory of a slight, ramrod straight figure standing alone after by the road that led away from Navada, watching for at least as long as the vehicle was in sight. When I met her again (in Dhanbad city, where she had come to attend the hearing of her case), she had been advised against talking to me by her lawyer and was mostly silent. I met Naviyoti only a few times after I left Navada, mostly outside the district court when she came for the hearings of her case.

My meetings with Naviyoti and the 'academic dealing' of those consensual but complex interactions raise questions that I think have a bearing on oral history and anthropology. What, in truth, are the chances in an engagement skewed by differential cultural capital, life chances and power between the researcher and the researched? How can the subject's assessment of the researcher's (and the study's) intentions and possibilities meet with what the researcher can offer? Does consent suffice when the subject's who (choose to) speak, are unempowered members of an armed guerilla group, fighting against state power, whose acts of speech put them at deep risk of reprisal not just by the state, but by the very group, they are members of? How is the question complicated when the subject is not the survivor of ethnic violence, but its perpetrator? Is understanding why the subject involves herself in the ethnographer's academic efforts, particularly within sensitive and politically troubled contexts, a critical task in itself? Anthropology has looked closely into issues of representation, problems of voice, or speaking for the subject in general; must the existing lens on the politics of the researcher be stretched to include the interrogation of not only one's own ideological positions and politics, but to ask, also: Why does the subject speak?

I argue in this chapter that the question of 'why' the subject speaks has not only ethical, but also significant epistemological ramifications. Exploring the shifting trajectory of dramaturgical encounters between researcher and subject in the course of my fieldwork in radically disparate contexts of political violence in contemporary India— with participants in the 2002 pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat, and Naxalite armed cadre in Jharkhand and Bihar—the chapter attempts, through a comparative lens, to detail how construction of knowledge about a politically troubled 'field' is linked to these uncertain performances. I have previously drawn on those years of ethnographic engagement in my documentation of contemporary histories of participation in the Maoist movement, work on the politics of mobilisation in ethnic violence in Gujarat, and the structural linkages between the two ideologically disparate movements (see Chitralekha 2010, 2012). Here, I make a retrospective, but perhaps relevant, attempt to detail how the complicated, contradictory, shifting process of that documentation occurred over the course of a series of dramaturgical encounters in these 'fields', where both the subjects of my study and I continuously anticipated, postured and play-acted to the (imagined) expectation of the other. Why (and therefore what) the subject speaks has to be located within the larger text of these encounters between researcher and subject, and as critically involving the pre-judgement (in a Gadamerian sense) of the researcher, and of the subject. The researcher's prior 'knowledge' of the location, history and politics of the subject, and the subject's continuous (but not necessarily consistent) assessment of the researcher's performance predetermine possible outcomes of interaction with 'subjects' in the study, and inform the enterprise of oral history in troubled contexts.
Demonstrating that there were things, places and people that he did not want to know about (Feldman 1991: 12.), fieldwork with the Naxalites entailed many barriers to traditional ethnographic practice; to begin with, I could not base myself in a village, or even a block, but travelled extensively, and mostly hurriedly, within Dhanbad, Giridih, Ranchi, Palamu, and Latehar districts of Jharkhand, and Gaya and Aurangabad districts in Bihar. With increasing surveillance and heightened policing in a newly formed state (Jharkhand had just about come into existence then), cadre I did succeed in meeting spoke against deep odds, and at risk to themselves. I myself took time getting acclimatised to the harsh conditions of fieldwork: walking miles at a stretch over uncertain terrain, using the khet (agricultural fields) as a toilet, bathing under a public chappakal (hand pump), reconciling to the lice in my hair, being physically searched (even if by women cadre), abruptly being asked to return on suspicion of being a police implant, and so on.

Framed as I was in those early days of struggle in an unfamiliar terrain within dramaturgically predictable ‘fronts’, such as elitist means of transport (taxis versus state transport buses, for instance), visible associates in the field (non-governmental organisational workers, rights activists, regional news reporters, and so on), the text of what was elicited, though extended and detailed, stayed within the safe tenets of literate ideology, rhetoric or polemical debate, pre-limited within the politically safe domain of ‘interviews’ that could be given to ‘visiting’ persona from big cities (activists/intellectuals from Delhi/mediapersons, and so on). This was far from the layered, more complicated oral histories I was to encounter later as I de-moored from the safety or comfort of familiar modes and associations, moving with a dasta, or living in the villages with the families of some of those who had joined the armed dastas. While learned barriers of secrecy, suspicion and fear are evidently inherent to the communicative lives of members of guerilla organisations, the sheer rigidity of hierarchies within the dasta, the unrelenting discipline with which they are maintained, and most of all, the consciousness of being watchfully observed by one’s peers, or worse, seniors, make it difficult, if not unlikely, to break through barriers of programmed speech and protocol. I found deep differences between what was said or communicated by cadre in an organisational setting—with a dasta, for instance—and what was
said when met with individually, outside the organisational context, through kin, family, or trusted friends.

Means of documentation (notepad, recorder, camera—or the choice to rely on a linguistically less precise memory) employed by the researcher also then contribute to describing not so much whether the subject will speak or not, as the trajectory of that narrative as the chosen means of representation within the manifold possibilities of self-portrayal, intervening with ongoing (or possible) flows of the subject's narration. Constituting an integral part of the researcher's dramaturgical performance, which may employ myriad, not always consistent settings in the researcher's own effort (even if unwitting) to project a consistent front for those performances, it in turn contributes to the hardening (or unsettling) of the subject's own pre-judgement of the researcher's proclivities, interests and ideological inclinations. The subject's speech then may be determined not only by the pragmatic assessment of the consequences of speech for the subject (personal safety, social risk, reprisal, etc.), but also the fact that the subject speaks, as it were, to the tune of what the researcher may be expected to relate to, or safely hear without a disruption in performance. In my own work, I found significant differences between what was said by (the few) participants who were recorded, what was said (by them) in more informal settings later, and what was conveyed after even the traditional ethnographic staples of pen and pad had been conspicuously put aside.

Within this context, the question of why Navjyoti spoke, and the text of what she shared is then linked not so much to my offered communication of purpose, the facticity of my gender identity, that I had ventured far, or alone, or was interested in listening to her (versus 'recording' her), as it is to the meanings she imputed to these 'fronts'—as indication perhaps of evidence of my sincere interest in and admiration for her, linked in many ways to the recognition and self-fulfilment that she had sought from the movement itself. Her history, recounted as a personal struggle to 'achieve' in the face of desperate odds, resonated repeatedly in the narratives of many other young armed cadre I met with later in several other districts (and contexts) in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand. She had joined MCC with dreams of becoming a leader. Brijesh joined the People's War to 'make something of himself'; Suresh joined after he failed in the 'banking sector'; Pandeyji said they (MCC) treated him with respect and said they would help him study further, Vijay had been in pursuit of success, and so on. Navjyoti did not have much formal education, but Nisha, area commander of a couple of villages in Khelari district, had completed high school in Sundur, Lohardaga, before joining the party. She recalls walking 6 km each way to attend school in an adjoining village, then again attending 'coaching' after school—sometimes without lunch. Her family did not have too much land, but there was, as she put it, 'enough to eat'. Once she joined the armed cadre, she went through a period of intensive training. 'I found it hard to learn the firing positions ... sitting, standing positions ... fire straight at the target. At first, I felt uneasy ... how to eat, how to sleep, how to bathe.' When we met on the far outskirts of a remote village in Khelari, she was a 'confirmed'—and evidently influential—cadre of the party. 'Now I have a uniform, a gun ... people have even published about me in the press ... they must have seen me in jan adalats (court sessions held by Naxal parties) or other meetings.'

**Precarious Performances**

I turn now to some aspects of my fieldwork with women participants in the 2002 riots in Gujarat, particularly my interactions with a senior functionary of the then ruling right-wing dispensation in the state, accused by Muslim survivors of instigating the murderous mobs in Naroda Patia and Naroda Gam.

I met Jayabehn a little more than a year after the pogrom at her home in an upper-middle-class suburb of Ahmedabad. She had agreed to meet me as I had been referred by a trusted aide, a reporter from a leading Gujarati daily close to the ruling right-wing dispensation in the state. I had said that I wanted to understand more about the events of 27 February 2002, why the Hindus did what they did, and her own life history and ideas. I promised anonymity, possibly indicated prior understanding, and carried no recorders; only a notepad, which I put aside as her narrative progressed. Cautious to begin with, in time she spoke freely and at length (of her standpoint) on the events of the day in Naroda, and more importantly for my project at the time, over those several hours at her home, shared details of her childhood—growing
up in a family with strong Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) roots (her father, from Sindh province [now in Pakistan], had been closely associated with the RSS there even before Partition); schooling and everyday life in Deesa (a small town in Banaskantha district of Gujarat); memories of how both she and her brother were sent regularly to RSS shakhas and training camps as children (she started attending shakhas of the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, the women's wing of the RSS, at the age of fourteen); and her ongoing association with and continuing staunch loyalty to the RSS. Recalling that she contacted the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to move into politics when she and her husband moved to Ahmedabad in 1988 ["Around that time, the Shah Bano case was on ... I felt it was wrong and I should play a more active role in electoral politics ..."], she says there was never any other party for her. 'Brain me ghusa hua tha ke hamne Sindh choda, partition hua, because of Congress ... magaz me ghusa hua tha ke ye log kuch bhi kar sakte hai (It was ingrained in my mind that we had to leave Sindh, that partition happened because of the Congress party ... It was ingrained in my mind that these people can do anything').

Deriving coherence and validity perhaps from a deeply internalised meta-narrative of 'Muslim' as a historically verified and unchanging perpetrator, Jayabehn—despite her own agency and activity in the mythification of powerful local communal tropes—seemed quite unselfconsciously, if incongruously, co-opted into the self-propagating, powerful discourses of her own creation. Her narrative is littered with allegories of Juhapur1 (it is always Muslims from 'Juhapur' [the first amongst other 'notorious' old city areas such as Kalupur, Dariaipur, etc.] who start the trouble in every riot: 'Even on the 28th, Juhapur Muslims came here to provoke (in Naroda) ... Sindhi shops in Revari Bazar and Panchkuan [Muslim-dominated areas in the old city] were burnt by them again this time'; 'rathyatra'? 'Rathyatra shanti se ho jai, aisa kabhi Muslims ke taraf se nahi hua (Muslims have never allowed any rathyatra to pass in peace) ... when their Id julus goes, Hindus let them pass in peace ... but they cannot be trusted'; and so on.

Towards the end of our time together, Jayabehn recalled that as a practising gynaecologist in Naroda (before she entered full-time politics), she had had several Muslim patients, some of whom would invite her for (the festival of) Id. She reminisced that not so many years ago, she had even accepted some of these invitations and visited their homes in the festive season. These patients, she was confident, had voted for her as Corporator in 1995 and again as Member of Legislative Assembly in 1998. The relaxed narrative, however, was broken when I asked if they would vote for her after the Naroda killings. She replied guardedly that it was unlikely. It was not a matter of consequence, she added, however, that amongst the many Muslim women raped and killed in the Naroda violence, some were likely her patients. 'Our daughters are not safe with them (Muslims) ... girls are taken away and raped ... Muslim boys roam around colleges with Hindu aliases and trap poor girls who have never seen motorcycles.'

It became apparent very early into my fieldwork, going by their own accounts, that those who had led the killing mobs across Gujarat were more than just 'angry Hindus'. These men and women had functioned as empowered representatives of political, or affiliated ethnic organisations whose presence at the site of violence—and participation therein—was led in great part by organisational diktat. While my sample of respondents was randomly selected from testimonies of Muslim witnesses/survivors of the 2002 violence, it turned out that all of them, without exception, were also associated with the then ruling political party at both the state and the Centre. Many expressed surprise that they had to undergo whatever little discomfort they had been subjected to with a supportive government in power. As Jayabehn put it, 'My government is in power ... and yet there was an FIR on me. You wouldn't have seen this anywhere.'

Jayabehn was arrested by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in March 2009. Convicted for murder and conspiracy to murder, she was sentenced to twenty-eight years in prison. I have addressed elsewhere how participants located in different structures of role play were motivated variously in the 2002 pogrom, examining the politics of identity and mobilisation in communal violence (Chitrakule 2012). Here, my interest is specifically with the implications of my prior 'knowing' of the subject as planned subject of research, the fissured, fluctuating, but nevertheless perpetually unfolding text of Jayabehn's narrative, that in many ways holds forth the troubled questions of dramaturgy and epistemology, method and ethics that I grappled with in the course of my fieldwork in Gujarat after the riots. Why did Jayabehn speak? Why would those who killed in the Gujarat riots speak to a researcher studying ethnic violence? I had had months
women's prior locations within dominant structures of knowledge that mediated not only the reading of, but also the affective 'feeling' about the (violent) practice of the time. I learnt much about the significance of these local, communitarian, yet deeply political idea-structures in co-opting women as domestic partners in a campaign of 'action' against Muslims, marked when viewed in the light of crimes committed by Sangh cadre that threatened the stability of the perpetrators' own value frameworks and families—rape, for instance.

During our last meeting at the VHP headquarters in Ahmedabad, Archana took me to an inside room and surreptitiously showed me photographs of Durga Vahini cadre taken during the Hindu festival of 'rakhsha bandhan'. The (then recent) pictures showed the young girls tying the traditional rakhi (sacred thread), signifying the protective bond between a brother and sister, on the wrists of the Ahmedabad police force. The celebration of raksha bandhan with the Gujarat police force was, by Archana's own admission, an effort laden with deep symbolic meanings, suggestive of the (Hindu) police brother protecting his (Hindu) sisters against (Muslim) enemies. Given the extensively documented evidence of police complicity in the 2002 violence in Gujarat, it did seem to me an effort oriented towards goals similar to those held on the domestic front—in this case, an attempt to make heroic the (potential or retrospective) dereliction of duty, taking the Sangh ideology (and propaganda) further and deeper, even into state domains restrictive to more formal methods of penetration. At this last meeting, my veneer of engaged, admiring Hindu supporter-researcher also cracked, and I involuntarily asked questions that ended our interactions. I saw fear on her face in that last visit as she asked me what I was really seeking to document. I was fearful for my own security as well and left the VHP headquarters hurriedly.

**Conclusion**

Joseba Zulaika, describing his ethnographic research into the ETA violence in his native Basque country, in Itzian, where his childhood friends had become prominent members of a separatist armed movement, addresses the dilemmas and complexities of studying political violence at a local level where the actor of violence has a face,
and most people witness and know of politically motivated murder in their neighbourhood. Zulaika asks whether research on political violence can at all justify dialogue with the users of political violence (Nordstrom, et al. 1995: Ch. 10, cited in Krohn-Hansen 1997: 235). Although Zulaika’s research is, in the context of armed group violence, structurally disparate from that of the ethnic riots in Gujarat, his query raises not only questions of what then differentiates (and renders unworthy of even study) the practice of a separatist nationalist group from the more legitimate ‘political violence’ of state actors, but also draws us towards the larger problem of how that practice may, to the anthropologists pre-judgement, be already ethnically reprehensible, or non-justifiable: as the actions of the Hindu rioters who killed Muslims in Gujarat were perhaps to me.

My work in Gujarat, as I see it in retrospect, started with prejudice. I had been through disturbing accounts of survivors of and witnesses to the macabre events of February and March 2002, and often before I met my respondents, I ‘knew’ them. Although I did not conceal my identity or the subject of my research, Hindu perpetrators of violence in these riots, on the other hand, spoke on the premise that I was seeking to understand ‘their side of the story’. While their assumption was true (my work was an attempt to document the standpoint and history of the perpetrator), it was also true that, based on that premise, those who spoke had also likely relied on an ideological correspondence, which was not there. Through the several months of fieldwork in Gujarat, starting from its earliest days in Naroda, in Sardarpura village in Mehsana district, and later with the Bhils in Sabarkantha district, I found myself struggling to put away, or put into perspective, my own horror and, often, sheer incredulity at what I was listening to; and the feeling of sufferer, of living a lie, even if I had not, in fact, lied about my work in the region, persisted.

The anthropology of violence has often been viewed as involving responsibilities beyond those associated with traditional ethnographic research: the need to write against terror (Taussig 1987); enable a more just world by exploring ‘complex links’ between analytical and experiential varieties of knowledge (Green 1995:6); or more directly, to be an activist-by-proxy (Skidmore 2003:6). In a much contested article, Nancy Schepet-Hughes in fact calls for political activism as an integral part of doing anthropology amid horror. Arguing for the formation of a ‘militant anthropology’, she envisions a new cadre of ‘barefoot anthropologists’ that must become alarmists and shock-troopers—the producers of politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity, and bad faith that allow the suffering and death to continue without even a pained cry of recognition (Schepet-Hughes 1995: 417). So, if Zulaika wondered whether doing research justifies the dialogue that is consequently entailed with users of political violence (Zulaika 1995), Skidmore is categorical that her fieldwork interpretations and, in fact, the very framework by which she determines whom to interview and why, are determined by the need (following Taussig) to ‘write against terror’. Adopting a methodology that she sees as appropriate for fieldwork conducted in a totalitarian state, she also places herself, as someone opposed to human suffering and authoritarianism, ‘in the ethnography’ (Skidmore 2003: 5–6).

There could be many ethical objections to an anthropology that advocates an ideological partnership even before it starts; there are serious epistemological questions that it raises as well. It is of course neither possible nor desirable to do away with the researcher in the research; the researcher’s location, ideological leanings, ethics, and prior knowledge are linked to, at the outset, the very bases of her sociological inquiry, with virtually no Archimedean point from which to remove oneself from the mutual conditioning of social relations and human knowledge (Rosaldo 1989:169). But somewhat in line with the (even if now unfashionable) Weberian philosophy of sociological work, whose purpose is to clarify, rather than change, while we can by no means eliminate our own pre-judgements, it seems dangerous to eliminate discomfort with knowing that they exist. How do you ‘place yourself’ in the ethnography, when your respondents are rioters, killers, mobs responsible for the unspeakably brutal burning, murder, rape, and mutilation of victims, many of whom were women and children whose only error was to have belonged to a certain religious community? If anthropology is to be activist, it may entail a rejection of the epistemological value of factoring in the voice of the perpetrator of ethnic violence into existing discourse, which is based, as it exists today, mainly on fieldwork with the survivors of such violence. Or, within such (an uneasy) framework, would the anthropologist have to engage in activism against the very subjects she seeks to understand?
The routinisation of violence, fear and silences in the everyday lives of people has been the subject of significant anthropological work (see, for instance, Das 1990, 2000; Feldman 1991; Green 1995, 1999; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Skidmore 2003). Skidmore includes her own fear (of the repressive Burmese state) as a 'way of intuiting affective dimensions of the lives of Burmese with whom she associated, privileging the subjective and emotional content of the relationship involving informant, ethnographer, and environment' (Skidmore 2003: 6). But how are these intuitive affective dimensions sought to be forged when it is the subject himself who is the site of the researcher’s fear, and when it is the researcher who is shrouded in secrecy and silence? In contexts of horrifying loss and violence, and when the subject is also the perpetrator, what then may be the relationship between the researcher’s pre-judgement about the subject’s practice to the production of discourse/knowledge?

Gadamer argues that our prejudices, far from closing the doors to knowing, are themselves what open us up to what is to be understood; a hermeneutically trained consciousness is sensitive to the text’s 'alterity', but this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' nor the extinction of one’s self, only the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own 'fore-meanings'—or prejudices. What is important is the awareness of one’s bias, and the effort to allow the text to present itself in all its otherness and assert its own truth against one’s own, fore-meanings (Gadamer 2006 [1975]: 271–72); our prejudices, through this process of understanding, become apparent to us, and can (and must) in turn become the focus of questioning themselves.

Every encounter with others ... means the ‘suspension’ of one’s own prejudices ... always something more is demanded than to understand the other: that is to seek and acknowledge the immanent coherence contained within the meaning-claim of the other ... this requires a readiness to recognize the other as potentially right and to let him or it prevail against me. (Gadamer 1979: 108)

As Gadamer sees it, then, although we cannot escape our pre-judgements, through the dialogical interaction with other horizons, the possibility arises for understanding ourselves, our pre-judgements, or our 'tradition'—as mistaken. Yet, if I began by already ‘knowing’ my subjects—both amongst the Naxalites and in Gujarat—its text was hardly overwritten. Amongst the Naxalites, I already aspired to summon the ‘intellectual love’ that Bourdieu demands of the researcher, the forgetfulness of self, a gaze that consents to understand the subject as they are in their distinctive necessity (see Bourdieu 1999). In Gujarat, I am not sure I could do justice to ‘understanding’ (the context to) Jayabhuvn’s or Archana’s practice in the sense that Gadamer envisages, but there were other important spaces (rioters in Danilimdwa in Ahmedabad, Bhil youth in Palla, the Patel community in Sardarpura, student rioters in Sardarpura, and so on) which in time I (perhaps) became part of, progressively bracketing away the gravitating compulsions of both the lifeworlds I belonged to prior to my induction into the field, and those of the worlds I lived in later. More immersed than I realised then, I found myself looking up historical records, official data and even police files, trying to contextualise narratives accumulated from Hindu respondents through the course of study about perennial Muslim wrongdoing in the locality. Muslim ‘bad characters’, numerous atrocities committed by Muslims on Hindus in ‘previous riots’ in Gujarat; yet, at the end of each search, invariably concluding that these ‘remembered’ histories about offences perpetrated by the Muslim community that I had begun to accept as likely partial truths, could not be accounted for except as local threads of conjectural history connected to (and deriving from) the surviving, powerful meta-narrative of ‘Muslim’ as perpetrator in Gujarat: As opposed to Gadamer’s project of understanding, many of my prior ‘knowledges’ about ‘ethnic violence’ were reinforced in the course of my own work with (Hindu) perpetrators of violence in Gujarat.

If immersion involves an instinctive ‘playing to’ the manifest or latent social-psychological needs of the subject, the reworking of performance in the face of narratives that may in different circumstances have elicited horror, fear, repugnance, or even ideological opposition, amounts to deception: with the subject’s consent, and despite having ‘spoken’ no lies, we deceive the subject who speaks so s/he may continue to do so. If the troubled question of why the subject speaks involves addressing (as evidenced in previous sections) the perpetual dramaturgical process of the subject’s reflexive
factoring of the perceived ideological/pragmatic dispensations of the researcher, it also necessitates the acknowledgement of the linkages of performance with cultural capital and prior knowledge, and the researcher's manipulation of the (perceived) social-psychological-political dispensation of individual subjects. Barring a few highly committed cadres with sentiments rooted in memories of the first flush of a radical social movement, who saw me as comrade, desiring not much more than an exchange of ideas, most 'Naxalites' I met were not quite quintessential 'revolutionaries' driven by goals of the collective, fighting for the cause of the subaltern. Nor were all participants in Gujarat driven to act by Hindu nationalist goals. In a globalised and media-shrunken world, where no one—not even the poorest of the poor—is really insulated from the glittering possibilities and racy success stories of those with more access, both groups had succeeded in filling the void with entirely human, universal needs for recognition, achievement, or 'success': the majority had in fact participated in violence to fulfill needs as ordinary as a sense of achievement, social status, izzat (respect/honour) in peer group/community, 'success,' and so on. Ironically, most narratives were infused with bravado, seeking approval and kudos for having done the 'right' thing, for having taken—as they may have liked to see it—the road less travelled. The 'extremist' politics I experienced closely in both locations was, in many ways, a politics of recognition; linked for many to their willingness to be 'studied,' or to be the 'subject' of interest.

If what is gathered thus is entangled with pre-judgement and performance, it is still perhaps closer to approximations of truth. An anthropology of violence that does not engage with its participants is at risk of working within, and perpetuating, existing, engrained, perhaps highly powered concepts and categories; disinterested in or disengagement with the question of why the subject speaks has deep epistemological ramifications for theory produced out of such fieldwork. It is at the least equipped to traverse beyond performances that tell what should be told, to locate the powerful threads of human desire and motivation that tie seemingly distant worlds of violence to 'ours,' or to register missed realities or radical changes in these troubled lifeworlds. As Goffman said, 'All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify' (Goffman 1972 [1959]: 78). It would be dangerous to not even try.

**NOTES**

1. Names have been changed.
2. The banned party was renamed Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) in 2003. MCCI merged with the Peoples War in 2004 to form the Communist Party of India (CPI) (Maoist).
3. In this light, see the 'interview' of top-rung Naxalite leaders (Ganapathi 2010, interviewed by Myrdal and Navilaka), or, for instance, an article by author-activist Arundhati Roy, who was invited to interact with members of the dasta by the party leadership, and spoke with (CPI [Maoist]) cadres with their consent (Roy 2010).
4. Possibly the most powerful front I had in Gujarat was enabled by my acquaintance in the field with this reporter—a Saughi Parivar favourite—and frontline bystander to the butchery (near and around his home) in Naroda on 28 February 2002, who agreed to support me in my stated project of documenting the perspective of those who killed Muslims on the day. I subsequently stayed for extended periods with his family at their residence—an experience that located me as a researcher completely within the inner circle of those involved in the 2002 violence.
5. Juhapur, a Muslim-dominated area in the old city, was a recurring trope in the narratives of almost all my respondents in Ahmedabad, including the Mob Leaders—as a primordial and typical 'Muslim den' housing 'notorious elements' of the Muslim community in Ahmedabad (see Breman 1990: 259–83 for a fascinating window into the history of Juhapur, formerly a small village on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, now integrated within the city limits). The year 1990 saw (for the first time) hundreds of Hindus and Muslims engaged in a bitter gun-battle over a plot of vacant land, which left eleven dead and sixty injured. Relations between the two communities have been turbulent here ever since, reaching flashpoint easily in the event of communal trouble in the city.
6. The natyastava, traditionally a Hindu religious procession carrying a deity, has been practised more in the domain of political activity in contemporary India, kickstarted by Lal Krishna Advani of the BJP in the late 1980s in a bid to associate their campaign for the Ayodhya temple with a popular Hindu epic symbol (the Mahabhara)...
7. Deeya, for instance, her compatriot and co-worker in the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, who completed a doctorate and then post-doctorate in Biochemistry from a reputed university in the US, knew of my university’s history as a left-leaning institution, was extremely polite, even hospitable, but guarded with what she chose to reveal. Over the course of our meetings, and later at a family lunch at her home that she insisted I attend, she asked directly why Jayabehn had agreed to speak to me.
REFERENCES


Ganapathi. 'Interview with General Secretary, CPI (Maoist)' by Jan Myrdal and Gautam Navlakha, 14 February 2010.


Roy, Arundhati. 'Walking with the Comrades,' Outlook Magazine, 21 March 2010.


