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Untouchable bureaucracy : unrepresentative bureaucracy in a North Indian State.

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Untouchable Bureaucracy

Unrepresentative Bureaucracy
in a North Indian State

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Preface

Though I certainly did not realize it at the time, the research which eventually culminated in this book was conceived in the summer of 1993. A year before, I had decided to interrupt (or quit, I was not very sure) my studies in public administration at Leiden University. By pure chance I ended up working as a tour guide for a low budget travel agency in north India and Nepal. These new surroundings thrilled and fascinated me and I used all of my spare time to explore as many (preferably out of the way) places as I could. One of these trips took me to the Himalayan Kumaun hills, in the northern part of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, in what is now the newly created state of Uttaranchal.

On the way down from a trek to the locally famous Pindari glacier and Nanda Devi lake, I passed through a small village called Khaljhuni. Some friendly villagers offered me tea and –on my asking– turned out to be willing to let me stay, in exchange for a very affordable rent, in a half-built house (with a roof, though) at the upper end of the steep slope against which the village was nestled. Not quite sure what I was doing there apart from living on a shoestring and escaping the monsoon heat and humidity of the Gangetic plains, I ended up staying almost two months in the village. I did not keep a diary or take any notes. In fact, all I have to show for my stay there are six smudgy photographs.

Khaljhuni turned out to be a small and, I guess, rather typical Kumaoni village. On a day-to-day basis most of its inhabitants were busy eking out a rather precarious existence by way of farming the small and steep plots of land surrounding the village and herding goats. Many villagers also tried to earn some extra cash by hunting, dog breeding, tailoring, mat weaving, smithery and selling hand-

made hashish to local dealers (on rainy days many adults and children could be seen rubbing their hands through the cannabis flowers to release the resin; the traditional and rather time-consuming way of producing *charas*).

In no time I found myself actively participating in the affairs of the village. My "house" quickly developed into the village's tea stall; from around five o' clock in the morning onwards men from the village would flock into my room to drink my (free) tea and smoke my cigarettes ("real" and expensive *Panamas* rather than the "local" *bidis* or *hukkaas*), chat, exchange gossip and learn about "foreign". I spent innumerable hours playing chess with the local Rajput shopkeeper, a retired army man who spoke good English and acted as my interpreter. I helped (or, at least, tried to do so) a local household with the threshing of grain, assisted in the collective efforts of Khaljhuni men to repair the path leading up to the village (which had been swept away by the monsoon rains), accompanied my landlord Sher Singh on a tour of neighbouring villages to collect debts from reneging customers of the Rajput's shop and accompanied two other Khaljhuni men on a two day trek to some high altitude grazing meadows where they had hoped (but eventually failed) to buy themselves a new goat. I also came to act as Khaljhuni's inofficial doctor (thanks to my quickly ascertained and advertised possession of iodine, band-aids and bandages), photographer and courier. Besides, my -as the villagers saw it- vast financial means made me into a much sought after buyer and consumer of locally expensive goods such as chicken and mountain deer meat, curd, rum, whiskey, coconuts, cigarettes and a heavy woollen mountain coat.

Though Khaljhuni was a small village, inhabited by not more than forty households (some two or three hundred people), what struck me almost immediately was that the small Khaljhuni population was nevertheless a rather strictly differentiated one. That is to say, each and every villager could easily be seen to belong to one, and only one, of three different, clearly distinguishable groups. These groups had their own quarters in the village and most of their members' social life took place within the confines of their own group: if things -eating, playing, feasting, preparing for a trip,

chatting, smoking, washing etc.- were done commonly they would tend to be done with fellow groupmembers rather than with members of the other groups.

The Bhotiyas formed the largest group in the village and its members inhabited the houses in the centre of the village. It was the group to which my landlord Sher Singh belonged (and with which I myself, in consequence, was also commonly felt to be “associated”). The Khaljhuni Bhotiyas, as they explained to me, were part of a much larger group of Bhotiyas, the members of which lived in scattered mountain villages near and across the Nepali and Tibetan border. Though they had now settled down to become farmers or soldiers (in the Indian army’s renowned Gurkha regiments), the Bhotiyas were originally traders, specialized in plying their trade – especially salt- across the Himalayas. Their slant eyes gave the Bhotiyas a “Tibetan” rather than an “Indian” appearance and served as easy markers of their distinction from the rest of the village population.

The second and smallest group consisted of the Rajput households, headed by my friend the shopkeeper. The Rajputs were quite obviously much better off than the other villagers. Their women wore better and more beautiful clothes than the other women, their houses were bigger and better furnished than those of the other groups, and, unlike most other villagers, all members of the Rajput households, women included, seemed to have received at least some education. Besides, the Rajput shopkeeper was obviously a much respected man in the village. He was often sent for to sort out animosities between villagers and asked for advice in all kinds of worldly matters. His self-appointed role as my guardian and chain-smoking chess companion, also, seemed somehow very much in accordance with the high status he enjoyed in the village.

The third group consisted of the dozen or so families who lived just outside the main village, on a rim on the lower end of the slope. It did not take a trained eye to see that most members of these households were much poorer than the Rajputs and Bhotiyas. Many wore old, even ragged clothes, for instance, lived in smaller and less comfortable houses and could not afford, as is customary in India, to drink their tea with milk. Puzzlingly enough, the members of this

poorer segment of the village population did not seem to have a common name to go by, at least not one that was quite as easy to pick up as those of Rajput or Bhotiya (which members of these groups routinely suffixed to their surnames when introducing themselves to some stranger or if they wanted to distinguish the one Ram Singh from the other, for instance).

Also, I could not fail to notice that members of the poor group seemed much more shy than the other villagers. Whereas Rajput and Bhotiya men would freely enter my house (almost, in fact, as they felt like it) or call out to me when I walked through the village, most of the poor group's men would do no such thing. Whenever they did enter my room, they would mostly sit quietly, away from the stove on which I brew my tea, leaning backwards as it seemed, and certainly not taking part in the ongoing conversation as actively and enthusiastically as the others did. Members of the poor group were also conspicuous by their absence on the occasional and quasi-secret liquor-drinking and meat-eating sessions that Sher Singh Bhotia and the Rajput shopkeeper liked to organise for me (on my expense, to be sure).

I remember being very much intrigued by the rather special position the poor group's members seemed to occupy in Khaljhuni society. When I tried to ask Sher Singh about it he was perceptibly embarrassed. He reluctantly volunteered (after much prodding on my part) that these people were "Aryas" and that it would be best if I had as little to do with them as possible. If I so wished I might visit their quarters but I should certainly not accept any drinks or food from them. Naturally, Sher Singh's answer only fuelled my desire to learn more about these mysterious "Aryas" and I made up my mind to take advantage of any opportunity to mingle with them and visit their houses. However, after having seen me drinking tea with the Arya blacksmith, the Bhotiyas were quick to put a stop to this plan. They clearly took strong exception to my blatant disregard of Sher Singh's advice and made it understood that there were limits to their hospitality. I saw but little of the Aryas after that.

As I gradually came to understand, really only *after* my departure from Khaljhuni and some voracious reading, I had quite accidentally and inadvertently stumbled upon what, to Western eyes

at least, must seem one of the most perplexing institutions of Hindu caste society, that of untouchability. My initial fascination with this social configuration which simultaneously serves to extract the best energies and skills of a large category of people while giving them hardly anything worthwhile in return has stayed with me ever since. In fact, it has been this very fascination, unwittingly kindled by the Khaljhuni villagers, which both triggered me to undertake this research in the first place and pushed me towards, finally, finishing it too. I hope it shines through.

This book has been a long time in coming. Writing it has also been a rather lonely affair. Nevertheless, quite a few people have helped me along the way. Of course, this book could not have been written without the hundreds of netas, babus, dalaals, dabang and small people of Sitapur district who, with widely varying enthusiasm, provided me with the raw material for it. Special words of thanks must go to *shri* H.S. Saksena for his kind hospitality and much needed advice and encouragement throughout my stay in Uttar Pradesh, to Sunil Gupta for his superb research assistance and to Sita Ram for his unsurpassed cooking as well as his much appreciated companionship.

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Thanks are also due to my (former) colleagues at Leiden University, the University of Antwerp and the Free University of Amsterdam who, in their various and sometimes unwitting ways, managed to persuade me that my research *was* worth doing. I am also grateful to my aunties for their moral and practical support,

Suzie for making sure “the thing” got actually finished, Rosalie and Jeff for everything they did or failed to do to allow or prevent me from working on the manuscript, and myself for somehow completing the task I turned out to have set myself.

B.v.G.

Antwerpen, December 2007

Glossary

ADO	Assistant Development Officer, lowly development officer, attached to the block-staff, subordinate to BDO
adhikari	officer, as opposed to clerical staff (babus) or manual staff (drivers, peons, sweepers)
adhyaksh	president of the zilla panchayat
Ahir	cultivating caste, also referred to as Yadav. Ahirs or Yadavs, together with the Kurmis, form the bulk of so-called OBCs in the Sitapur countryside
babu	clerk; in plural -babus- also used to refer to public employees in general, as a social class
bakri	family/house
batai	sharecropping
BDC	Block Development Committee, executive body of the kshetra panchayat, chaired by the pramukh
BDO	Block Development Officer, official in charge of a rural development block
begar	forced, unremunerated labour exacted from low, often untouchable, castes by upper castes
bhel	small, private sugarfactory where gur (molasses) is produced
bigha	local land measure, h.l. about 800 square meters
biradari	community; caste
BPL	Below Poverty Line, administrative term for the poor

BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party, political party dominated by the Chamar constituency; controlled the Uttar Pradesh government in 1995, 1997, 2002-3 and 2007
Brahmins	ritually highest varna in Hindu society
charpay	lit. "four legs"; traditional rope bed used, among other things, for sleeping and receiving guests
CDO	Chief Development Officer, highest-ranking development officer in a district, subordinate to the DM
Chamar	untouchable jati of leatherworkers; most populous caste in Uttar Pradesh
chamarbasti	hamlet solely (or predominantly) inhabited by people of the Chamar caste
chowkidar	watchman
chuachut	untouchability
chula	simple stove; to be provided free of cost to all IAY beneficiaries
colony	colloquial name for a house (to be) provided under IAY
crore	10,000,000 rupees
dabang	"those who put pressure"; exploiters. Term frequently used by "small people" to refer to (members of) locally dominant, usually landowning, families and castes
dacoit	robber, criminal
dalaal	informal broker; fixer, middleman
Dalit	lit. "downtrodden" or "ground down" in the Marathi language. Name spawned by the untouchable writers' movement <i>Dalit Panthers</i> in the 1970s and subsequently widely adopted by politically assertive untouchables
daroga	police inspector
DDO	District Development Officer, high-ranking development officer, subordinate to the CDO

dharna	collective protest, "strike"
Dhobi	untouchable jati of washermen
DM	District Magistrate, highest district-level official. Post filled by a member of IAS in mid-career or a very senior PCS officer
DRDA	District Rural Development Agency, executive development body, chaired by the adhyaksh
DSP	Deputy Superintendent of Police, junior police officer, recruited from the IPS or the higher merit ranks of the PCS examinations
dunlop	bullock cart with rubber inflatable tires (rather than with wooden ones)
fauzdari	bloody feud; case for the criminal courts
FIR	First Information Report
gaanjar	swampy and backward lowland area in the east of Sitapur district
goonda	thug, criminal; involved in goondagiri
goondagiri	criminal activities, hoodlumism, political gangsterism
Harijan Act	colloquial name for legislation enacted by the UP government in 1989 to prevent upper caste atrocities against untouchables; officially known as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989
hotel	restaurant
hukkaa	waterpipe
IAS	Indian Administrative Service, most prestigious cadre in Indian bureaucracy
IAY	Indira Awas Yojna, free housing program, implemented in so-called Ambedkar villages
ICS	Indian Civil Service, predecessor of IAS
IPS	Indian Police Service, very prestigious national cadre, at par with the IAS
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Program, rural development program involving the

	distribution of loans and subsidies to people below the poverty line
jaj	official enquiry, inspection
JRY	Jawahar Rojgar Yojna, rural development program offering temporary off-season employment and social assets work
kam	work
kanun	lit. law; lawful order, justice
kanungo	local revenue official: in rank subordinate to the tahsildar and superior to the patwari
Kayasths	upper caste community with a strong historical presence in bureaucracy
khula betak	monthly open meeting of the gram panchayat
Kori	untouchable jati
kshetra panchayat	elective political body at block level, also referred to as BDC (block development committee)
Kurmi	cultivating caste, very populous in central Uttar Pradesh with relatively strong political clout
lakh	100,000 rupees
Lala	local name for a Kayasth
lekhpal	village accountant; also called patwari
lok sabha	national parliament in New Delhi
Mahatmaji	Mahatma Gandhi
man	weight measure, 10 kg.
mazduri	(rate of) daily wage labour
mela	fair, market
mithai	sweets
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly (<i>vidhan sabha</i>)
MLC	Member of Legislative Council, a body of the state parliament
neta	politician
netagiri	what politicians do, politics; often used in a peiorative sense, "politicking"

nyay(a) panchayat	(1) obsolete geographical unit of justice-administration; (2) geographical jurisdiction of VLOs at the time of fieldwork; comprising 5 to 8 gram panchayats
OBC	Other Backward Classes, collection of government-designated socially and educationally backward jatis; beneficiaries of reservations since 1991
pahunch	lit. approach; access, influence; deemed indispensable to get one's work (<i>kam</i>) done
panch	member of the gram panchayat
panchayat(i) raj	three-tiered system of local government, operated by democratically elected local politicians
Pandit	Brahmin
Pasi	untouchable jati of village watchmen, thieves and swineherds; populous in Sitapur district and reputed to have once held a part of Oudh
patwari	village revenue official
PCS	highest civil service cadre of the state, though less prestigious than the IAS. Senior members of this cadre may join the IAS as so-called "promotees"
PD	Project Director, high-ranking district development officer, in rank comparable to the DDO
pradhan	village mayor, president of the gram panchayat
pradhani	elective position occupied by the pradhan
pradhanpati	lit. husband of pradhan; term used to denote a male person who is <i>de facto</i> performing the role of pradhan instead of his <i>de iure</i> elected wife
pramukh	chairman of the kshetra panchayat/BDC
purva	hamlet
Raidas	synonym for Chamar; sometimes used to refer to untouchables in general

raja	king
Rajput	dominant landowning upper caste, belonging to the Kshatryia varna. In north India commonly referred to as Thakur.
sahab	sir, gentleman (honorific)
savarna	“twiceborn”; term frequently used by villagers to refer to individuals belonging to any of the three upper caste varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas)
SC	Scheduled Caste, administrative euphemism for a (formerly) untouchable caste which benefits from reservations
SDM	Sub Divisional Magistrate, official in charge of a tahsil, subordinate to the DM. Also called tahsildar
secretary/sakratari	term widely used by villagers to refer to the VLO
tahsil/tehsil	sub-division: geographical unit of revenue and general administration. In size smaller than a district and bigger than a block
tahsildar	officer in charge of a tahsil, also called SDM. Post often occupied by junior IAS officer, otherwise PCS
taluqdar	large estate holder. Term used for members of the legally privileged group of zamindars in Oudh whom the British had awarded <i>sanads</i> , i.e. unfettered proprietary titles, over their estates. The some 270 taluqdar in Oudh (mostly Thakurs) owned over sixty percent of the soil between the late 1850s and the early 1950s
tembaku	tobacco
Thakur	see: Rajput
thana	local police station
TRYSEM	rural development program, lit. “Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment”
uppradhan	vice mayor

vidhan sabha	state parliament
VLO	Village Level Officer
zamindar	landlord
zamindari	(absentee) landlordism
zilla panchayat	elective political body at district level, chaired by the adhyaksh

1 Introduction: From Passive to Active Representation?

1 The subject

In 1950, the newly independent government of India adopted a nationwide policy of preferential hiring of individuals belonging to so-called scheduled castes in civil service jobs. Scheduled castes is an administrative euphemism for untouchables or outcasts, the castes at the bottom of the caste hierarchy whose touch (or sometimes sight or presence) old Hindu scriptures held to be defiling for caste Hindus. The affirmative action policy has continued to this day. It entitles untouchables to percentual quotas of civil service jobs at all administrative levels. Although the respective state governments in India's federal system have some degree of discretion in establishing reservation quotas on the state level, the percentage of public sector jobs reserved for untouchables tends to be commensurate with the untouchables' share in any state's population. Consequently, in India as a whole, approximately 15 per cent of the vacancies for new recruits and variable percentages of promotions in public bureaucracies are reserved for untouchable individuals belonging to any of the 1086 recognized scheduled castes. In India this preferential policy is simply referred to as "reservations".

This is a study about these reservations, more specifically, an enquiry into one of their intended or expected effects. Reservations are an interesting and important subject of enquiry. Though increasingly popular and pursued in many plural societies, preferential policies, of which reservations are an example, tend to be controversial and highly contested. Because they involve the

group-wise shifting of resources and opportunities, make use of ethnic categories and are often felt to violate the principle of equality of all citizens before the law, they generally generate fierce opposition (Jenkins 1998; Young 1998: 26). Preferential policies are often accompanied by a heavy arsenal of what Albert Hirschman calls "rhetoric of reaction", that stresses the perverse and dangerous consequences of preferential policies and/or points out why the pursuit of preferential policies will turn out to be a futile exercise (Hirschman 1991).

The preferential treatment of untouchables has been safeguarded in the Constitution. Article 46 a, which prescribes that the state shall "promote with special care" the educational and economic interests of (among others) the Scheduled Castes, lays down the general commitment to preferential treatment of untouchables. Article 15 (4) exempts the preferential treatment of untouchables from the general ban against discrimination, while article 16 (4) exempts "the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any class of backward citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State" from the ban on discrimination in public employment. The Indian Constitution thus creates the possibility of preferential treatment of untouchables in civil service recruitment by way of reservations, apparently to guarantee them adequate representation. But why? The constitution remains silent on this point. Nowhere it explains what would constitute adequate representation, why "adequate" representation would be desirable, why, in particular, the untouchables need these constitutional safeguards, nor why the state's intent to "promote with special care" the untouchables' interests should take the form of reservations.

In India, few people feel the need for answers to these questions: they are considered more or less self-evident. Most Indians would probably say something to the effect that reservations are a compensation for the wrongs historically perpetrated against untouchables in the name of Hinduism or "casteism". Most of the literature on the subject concurs with the idea that "preferences for scheduled castes are meant to alleviate the disadvantages historically associated with low standing in the

Hindu sacral order" (Galanter 1989 (1967): 132; cf. also Sheth 1997). Hence, reservations for untouchables are a clear-cut example of affirmative action, pursued as a remedy for the effects of past and continuing group-based disadvantage (cf. Anderson 2002: 10).¹

The group-based disadvantages experienced by India's untouchables have been many and enduring. Untouchables owe these disadvantages to their special position in the Hindu caste system, a social hierarchy based on ritual impurity. Although every Hindu is in an impure state once in a while, so-called caste Hindus consider untouchables *permanently* impure because their traditional occupations as cloth washers, gravediggers, leatherworkers, cremation ground attendants or pig breeders involve contact with bodily excrements and (dead) animals. This ritual impurity made them untouchable (or, in some places, even "unshadowable" or "unseeable") to caste Hindus and put them at the bottom or even outside the caste system (whence outcasts). Their dismal ritual status has been accompanied by the enforcement of numerous social disabilities by caste Hindu society. Untouchables' entrance to temples, for example, was severely restricted as was their use of public goods and services such as wells, schools and roads. The use of certain "luxury" items such as shoes and umbrellas was forbidden to them. They suffered residential segregation, performed forced, free labour for upper castes and were not allowed to own land. As a result, to this day, most of India's 150 million untouchables are extremely poor.

As far as government employment is concerned reservations for untouchables have made a substantial impact. Over the past six decades hundreds of thousands of untouchable individuals have benefited from them. In this sense, notwithstanding their alleged record of generating an array of unintended and undesirable side-effects, reservations have undoubtedly been successful: without them, the number of untouchable civil servants would probably not

¹ Apart from reservations, the Indian government uses also other instruments to combat the effects of untouchable caste membership. Since 1955 the practice of untouchability is legally banned. The state government of Uttar Pradesh as recently as 1989 adopted its own "prevention of atrocities act" (see Saksena 1996).

even have been a fraction of what it is now. Untouchable beneficiaries of public employment quota constitute only a tiny proportion of the total untouchable population, however.² Because of the limited number of reserved jobs as compared to the vast numbers of potential beneficiaries, the effectiveness of reservations as a compensatory device has been, critics argue, extremely limited. Whereas, given the social status, job security and patronage opportunities involved in government employment in India, the benefits of reservations for the relatively few who have profited from them have been real and substantial, reservations have not even begun -as they were intended to- to make a dent in solving the problems of inequality and mass poverty of the large majority of untouchables.

As the Indian sociologist André Béteille has observed, the affirmative action debate in India has been largely conducted in a "language of justice" whereby "those who are opposed to it tend to dwell more on the rights of individuals, whereas those in favour speak more of the rights of groups and communities" (Béteille 1991: 591). Béteille contrasts the Indian debate's preoccupation with justice with the focus on *utility* in the United States, where, he says, the proponents of preferences have tended to make their case from "arguments about policy" (ibid.).

In the case of preferential public sector hiring, one of these arguments has been that the compensatory effects of affirmative action need not be limited to those who profit directly from it. Group-preferential hiring practices, namely, change the ethnic profile of bureaucracy to the benefit of formerly underrepresented groups. It is likely, advocates of group-wise redistributive policies argue, that bureaucracies affected by such ethnic engineering will

² Even if the untouchables had attained their statutory 15 per cent of all public sector jobs, the total number of public sector employed untouchables would still have been less than 2.6 million, or just over two per cent of the whole untouchable population (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 138). Other estimates propose a higher percentage of beneficiaries because they also count untouchable bureaucrats' family members as beneficiaries. Including Fourth Class functionaries, Isaacs and Galanter estimate that around 10 per cent of the untouchables may profit from government employment made available under reservations (Galanter 1984; Isaacs 1965).

consequently produce policy outcomes and outputs that better reflect the interests of these groups. Bureaucrats belonging to government-designated categories of preferential treatment may be more sympathetic towards members of the groups from which they have been recruited, and potential clients of bureaucracy may be more apt to participate in policies when they identify and are comfortable with program administrators (Selden 1997a: 7). Affirmative hiring, in other words, may foster more representative bureaucracies and thus, indirectly, produce secondary, compensatory, redistributive effects. Treated as a testable hypothesis, this argument that the increased recruitment of civil servants from a certain ethnic group will increase the substantive representation of the group when government implements policy is the subject of this book. To put it more concretely: does passive representation –the presence of untouchable bureaucrats– translate into active representation –the promotion of ingroup interests by untouchable bureaucrats?

2 Bureaucracy and ethnic preferences

The Indian government's pursuit of preferential policies is not exceptional. In many plural societies, governments pursue preferential policies for ethnic groups: groups characterized by inherited membership based on ascriptive criteria such as race, language, caste, or religion, rather than on acquired identities, such as socio-economic class. Preferential policies are "policies which legally mandate that individuals *not* all be judged by the same criteria or subjected to the same procedures when they originate in ethnic groups differentiated by government into preferred and non-preferred groups" (Sowell 1990). Preferential policies may vary widely in scope, formality, explicitness and intent. "Some are limited to public-sector opportunities, while others extend to the private sector as well. Some reach broadly into business and education, in addition to employment. Others are confined to particular spheres, such as higher education or civil service positions. Some policies are formally stated and openly pursued,

whereas many others are adopted *sub silentio*" (Horowitz 2000: 654). "[S]ome preferences may be "compensatory" preferences, intended to allow some poorer group to close the economic gap between itself and some more fortunate group. Other preferences are intended to maintain the existing economic advantages already enjoyed by a politically dominant group" (Sowell 1990: 16).

Typically, it is politically powerful groups who dominate government who use their power to enforce preferences that transfer resources away from other, less powerful groups. In countries as varied as Malaysia, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Guyana, Trinidad and Sierra Leone, majorities, or politically dominant groups, have voted themselves preferences over politically less powerful (but economically more successful) minorities (Sowell 1990). Government intercession on behalf of less powerful groups is far less common (Chiswick 1990: xiv). Indian reservations of public service jobs for untouchables are part of a more elaborate program of preferential treatment of various disadvantaged groups, encompassing other institutions (legislative institutions on all political levels, higher education), other groups (so-called Other Backward Classes, or OBCs, and their various, state-specific sub-categories, Mahar Buddhists, "sons-of-the soil"), and other types of benefits (such as scholarships and quotas in redistributive rural development programs). What is remarkable about India's preferences, therefore, is the extent of its policies, both historically and today, to help the lowest castes and communities (Jenkins 1998: 199). "Probably nowhere else in the world was so large a lower-class minority granted so much favourable treatment by a government as were the depressed classes of India" (Jalali 1993: 97).

As in India, also elsewhere preferential policies quite often involve government bureaucracies. The Malay government, for example, applies Malay quota to recruitment for the elite Malaysian Administrative and Diplomatic Service, to the military services and the police, as well as recruitment ratios for the professional and non-professional (technical) services (Means 1986: 104-5). In Pakistan, recruitment to most public sector jobs is subject to "ethnoregional" quotas. Ninety per cent of the vacancies to the Central Superior

Services, for instance, are to be filled on the basis of ethnoregional criteria (Kennedy 1986). The government of South Africa preferably recruits “black people” into the public service (De Zwart 2001; Ncholo 2000).

The preferential treatment of ethnic groups may be, as in the above examples, a matter of government *policy*, in that it is circumscribed by formal rules and explicitly pursued and justified. Informal and tacit deployment of ethnic preferences is probably even more widespread. Preferences may, furthermore, be operative where existing recruitment practices *appear* ethnically neutral. The application of formulas of ethnic proportionality in civil service hiring, for example, may also imply preferential treatment. Where colonial rule left the bureaucracies of many new states overrepresented by members of certain ethnic groups, present-day pursuits of ethnic proportionality translate into preferment of those ethnic groups that were either disfavoured by colonial recruiters, or that developed an interest in civil service employment comparatively late (cf. e.g. Brown 1999; Rothchild 1986: 85).³

Ethnic preferences redistribute valued positions and resources. There are, of course, other policy options available to governments that want to redress group disparities. They might, for example, refrain from group-wise distribution altogether or pursue redistributive policies which stipulate non-ethnic attributes (such as class or region) as eligibility criteria. For various reasons, however, governments in many plural societies increasingly prefer ethnic preferment over these alternatives (De Zwart 2005).⁴

Ethnic pluralism is an enduring attribute of most contemporary political societies (Young 1998: 3). Ethnic identity is particularly strongly felt in the relatively new states of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. Behaviour based on ethnicity, often accompanied by hostility toward outgroups, is normatively

³ Colonial regimes often relied in large part on members of specific ethnic groups (often early Christianised, English/French-speaking or “martial” ones) to fill the ranks of their civil, police and military bureaucracies. Examples of such preferred groups include the Ibo in Nigeria, the Baganda in Uganda, Bengalis in East India, Ewe in Togo, Tamils in Sri Lanka and the Tutsi in Burundi (Wimmer 1997: 637).

⁴ For examples, see Gurr (2000).

sanctioned, and strong ethnic allegiances permeate organizations, activities and roles to which they are formally unrelated (Horowitz, 2000: 7). Where ethnicity is salient, ethnic groups are, in a sense, “natural” or obvious policy categories.

This trend is reinforced by the fact that ethnic diversity often involves structural inequality between groups (cf. De Zwart 2005). These group inequalities do not necessarily result from discrimination. Specific groups may have their own particular sets of skills of dealing with life’s necessities and their own particular sets of values as to what are the higher and lower purposes of life as well as their own specific views on the acceptable and appropriate ways in which these purposes might be achieved. Group inequalities may, therefore, be the products of voluntary choices, as when groups choose to differ in the ways that they value current investment, future consumption, traditional life-styles, risk-taking and entrepreneurial activity (Chiswick 1990: xiii; Sowell 1994: 1; Weiner 1983: 36).

In plural societies, however, group inequalities are often perceived as a product of deliberate bias towards those groups with favoured access to the state. Ethnic groups that feel disadvantaged by the state thus constitute ready-made constituencies with a strong interest in the adoption of preferential policies to offset or compensate for this ethnic distributive effect (cf. Wimmer 1997; Young 1998: 22). Although such claims may sometimes be disregarded because the claimants are too small in numbers, or lack the power and organizational capacity to press their claims in the relevant political and policy arenas (Rothchild and Olorunsola 1983: 10), policymakers often find it very hard to construe and pursue policies that do *not* contain rewards for ethnically identified groups.

In the new states of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, moreover, ethnic preferences are often a colonial heritage. Community representation and quotas of a direct or veiled nature were commonplace arrangements in colonized societies (Krislov 1974: 17). In most of these states, as Gordon Means points out, “colonial powers attempted to establish an overarching system of European law while making some form of accommodation for indigenous cultural and legal norms. When the colony also had great cultural

and ethnic diversity, the usual strategy of rule was to compartmentalize the legal system according to major religiocultural communities; thus, in some matters the legal system became highly ascriptive and particularistic according to the categories recognized by colonial authorities as the relevant cultural boundary markers in the colonized society" (Means 1986: 96). For pressing reasons of safeguarding national unity and political stability, new leaderships often chose to extend the recognition of already existing ascriptive group rights as preferred bases for societal access to the state's resources and valued positions.

Preferences abound because they are also relatively cheap policy options. Since they involve the reallocation of existing benefits (parliamentary seats, government jobs, places in educational institutions, subsidies) rather than the creation of new ones, preferences require no initial outlay in expenditure (Horowitz 2000: 658). *Ethnic* preferences are doubly cheap. By retaining the ethnic categories of existing social structure in policy design, governments avoid the transaction costs involved in the design, communication and enforcement of new and unfamiliar, non-ethnic policy categories (De Zwart 2005).

The popularity of ethnic preferences is also due to changing ideas about justice. Since the beginning of the 1990s, advocates of multiculturalism and group rights have contested the traditional liberal individualist notion that justice can simply be defined in terms of difference-blind rules or institutions (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000 cited in De Zwart, 2002: 4). They question the universal notion of citizenship and take issue with liberal democracies' tendency to underappreciate the importance of cultural membership as an important primary good underlying people's choices. Non-recognition of the importance of cultural membership and government's reluctance to allow people to use their cultural context, they feel, is unjust, especially to minority groups in heterogeneous societies. The latter cannot generally draw on their cultural context to the same degree as majority groups and are thus prevented from making optimal choices. This context should therefore be protected as a distinct source of political rights (Meier 2000: 66).

Advocates of group rights also feel uneasy about the traditional liberal conception of representation which encompasses the representation of ideas or interests but does not consider their interference with the identities of the carriers of these interests or ideas. The liberal conception of representation is flawed, they claim, because there is no reason to assume, as the liberal conception does, that opinions and beliefs, and the ideas and interests shaped by them, are given objectively and exist independently of those who carry them. If identity, as it clearly does, plays a role in interest formation, members of minority groups, particularly, have good reasons to believe that outgroup representatives cannot represent their interests as adequately as ingroup representatives can. Since it evidently matters *who*, exactly, represents whom governments, advocates of group rights argue, should *recognize* representatives' social or cultural backgrounds and *guarantee* their presence in political institutions (Meier 2000: 67-8).

This trend toward politics of difference and recognition in political philosophy, notes De Zwart, has stimulated contemporary governments to overcome their traditional reluctance to accommodate ethnic divisions in policy design (De Zwart 2005; cf. Jenkins 1998).⁵ Rather than subscribing to the conventional view of ethnic heterogeneity as a likely source of destructive disaffection, multiculturalism pictures cultural and ethnic diversity as "nice", "fascinating", "enriching" and, therefore, a desirable societal condition. It propagates the deployment of ethnic preferences to *create* ethnic diversity, in the belief that it provides "a source of quality" and a "surplus value". In the Netherlands, for example, policy makers have been urging organizations to recruit members of ethnic minority groups by arguing that "organizations that do not use the qualities of ethnic people do not understand their own interests very well" (Verhaar 2001: 3-4).

⁵ The term "politics of difference", which "redefines nondiscrimination as requiring that we make [.] distinctions [between citizens] the basis of differential treatment" is Taylor's, who contrasts it with "the politics of universal dignity", which "fought for forms of non-discrimination that were quite 'blind' to the ways in which citizens differ" (Taylor 1992: 39).

It is easy to see why ethnic preferences often involve bureaucracies. Because they are susceptible to direct political intervention, bureaucracies are relatively easy targets of ethnic preferment. Government employment is also often highly cherished, especially so in many developing countries.⁶ In addition to steady incomes, government jobs provide relative security, social prestige, the prospects of a dignified retirement as well as, in some cases, opportunities to exercise power over fellow citizens, or to enhance one's income through official corruption (Esman 1999: 354). In many of these countries, the public bureaucracy has thus managed to establish itself as a high-status occupation offering high symbolic satisfaction.⁷

In addition, bureaucracies are the principal channels through which the state's redistributive policies are designed and implemented. Access to wealth and cherished goods such as land, capital, credit, foreign exchange, business licenses, government contracts, private sector jobs, housing, agricultural inputs, health facilities, development projects, and local public works such as roads, water supply, and electricity are often regulated by rules or informal practices enforced by the state and its officials (Esman 1990: 59). In ex-colonial societies, moreover, government employment has been a major source of ethnic rivalries because it provided "the authorities with a means both to reward the sons of the collaborationist aristocracy and to create new collaborationist groups by distributing opportunities unevenly, whether intentionally or unintentionally" (Brass 1991: 33).

Because government policies, by design or effect, tend to distribute benefits and costs unequally, they generate gainers and

⁶ Research, discussed by Horowitz, has shown that at least three-quarters of all secondary school students in countries as varied as Trinidad, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Ivory Coast strive towards positions in the civil service (Horowitz 2000: 114).

⁷ According to Guy Peters "this status may be in part related to the relatively brief separation in time from the period in which recruitment to these governmental positions -the authorities- was determined almost entirely by ascriptive criteria, and in fact the best families frequently chose to send their sons into public service . . . 'social exclusiveness and supreme confidence' of colonial administrators tended to reinforce the impression that administrative positions were to be equated with superior social position" (Peters 1989).

losers. "In ethnically divided polities these gainers and losers may be identified, in reality or by perception, as ethnic communities" (Esman 1997: 528). Because groups in ethnically plural societies tend to view the state as a partial state, access to bureaucratic office is often considered a precondition for securing policy benefits. Kennedy's assessment of the importance of public employment in Pakistan, where, he says, "denial of civilian bureaucratic office is functionally equivalent to the denial of political representation" is typically shared by most people in plural societies (Kennedy 1986: 68). Given the importance accorded to government employment it is not surprising that there is, in fact, scarcely an ethnically divided state without its "civil service issue" (Horowitz, 2000: 224) and that, as a rule, as Samuel Krislov has put it, "public office makes for public fuss" (Krislov 1974: 4).

3 The case against ethnic preferences

Policies of ethnic preference are popular. Governments in many plural societies make use of them. Wherever contemplated or adopted, preferential policies tend to be controversial and highly contested, however. Because they involve the group-wise shifting of resources and opportunities and make use of ethnic categories they usually generate fierce opposition (Jenkins 1998; Young 1998: 26). The rationales used by public authorities to justify preferential policies have tended to vary widely, ranging from "innate superiority" of racial groups -as in South Africa's apartheid-regime, Nazi Germany, and many colonial regimes-, "indigenoussness" -as used by the Malaysian government to justify its preferment of "indigenous" Malays over "foreign" Chinese-, "historical compensation" -used, for example, in the United States to justify "affirmative action" for Afro-Americans- and "under representation" -used as the rationale for the official "encouragement" of so-called "allochtonen" in Dutch public sector hiring (cf. Sowell 1990: 144-156). Affirmative action programs such as reservations for untouchables in India are a specific species of preferential policies in that they are typically associated with the

rationale of historical compensation and pursued as a remedy or compensation for the effects of past and continuing group-based disadvantage (cf. Anderson 2002: 10).

Policies of ethnic preference and affirmative action usually attract fierce criticism. Apart from claiming that preferences violate certain elementary moral principles (such as the right of all citizens to equal protection of the laws and the merit principle (cf. e.g. Newton 1973)) critics and opponents typically also oppose ethnic preferences and affirmative action on grounds of their bad consequences. Policies which legally mandate that individuals not all be judged by the same criteria or subjected to the same procedures when they originate in ethnic groups differentiated by government into preferred and non-preferred groups, critics argue, are self-defeating, harmful, dangerous, inefficient and ineffective.

Preferences require governments to identify and officially classify ethnic groups, without which it would be impossible to make reserved opportunities available to preferred groups. Ethnic preferences are thus based on the premise that official recognition of group distinctions is necessary to subvert those distinctions (cf. Jenkins 2003: 1). Critics argue that this grouping of individuals into ethnicities tends to be a hopelessly arbitrary exercise. Group boundaries are often ambiguous and contested. Rather than being fixed and unequivocal, group identities are the objects of constant definition and redefinition (ibid.), by ethno-political entrepreneurs, government agencies and by group members themselves. No matter how wide-ranging government efforts to monitor, patrol, and enforce the classifications used for preferential policies, the difficulties involved in defining pertinent groups based on elusive concepts such as race, caste and indigenusness always remain. The official categories used for group preferential treatment will inevitably turn out to be what Scott refers to as “state simplifications”, moulding complex and fluid identities into an official grid which is likely to “misrecognize” people (multiracial individuals, for example) (Jenkins, 1998: 192) but –once established and put to use- will be hard to adapt or abolish.

Where ethnic preferences are intended as affirmative action a persistent criticism has been that they are deeply contradictory and

perhaps even harmful to their intended beneficiaries. By tying the membership of disparaged and stigmatized group identities to the eligibility for highly valued public resources, affirmative action policies tend to create vested interests in the retention, activation and survival of these identities and therefore reinforce -rather than lessen- the salience of the very categories they are meant to undermine (Dushkin 1972; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1999). Affirmative action stigmatizes its beneficiaries by implying that they are less competent and cannot compete with others on an equal footing. By forcing recruiters to lower their standards, affirmative action is likely to reinforce the very prejudices deemed instrumental in causing (or having caused) group-based disadvantages in the first place (cf. Coate and Loury 1993).

Preferential policies are widely criticized because they are divisive and encourage ethnic particularism. Once a government chooses to accommodate redistributive claims from one ethnic category, it will not take long before other, latent ethnic groupings will realize the benefits of defining themselves as a collectivity, politicizing their -separate- identity and start bargaining for their own preferential treatment (De Zwart 2000; Weiner 1983: 46). Once this logic is set in motion it becomes difficult to ward off such claims and to prevent them from taking up a prominent place on the policy agenda. Politicians, in fact, have little incentive to limit or curb the use of ethnic categories. On the contrary, the fact (or perception) of ethnic preference being meted out to one group tends to act as a strong incentive for political entrepreneurs of other groupings to get actively involved in the identification of instances of neglect or injustice, in impressing their particular group's needs on the public agenda, and in combating the unjust and threatening action of ethnic enemies of the state apparatus (Esman 1990: 60). Nearly every important decision thus comes to be interpreted through "the prism of ethnicity" and has to "reaffirm the faith of ethnic equity if legitimacy and democracy are to be preserved" (Premdas 1986: 155).

Because preferences encourage individuals to identify primarily with the interests of their group rather than with the public interest, they fuel group insularity and threaten the already weak bonds of citizenship in plural societies (cf. Williams: 11).

Where countervailing, affirmative action policies redistribute highly valued employment and educational opportunities, they tend to invite harsh backlashes from disadvantaged, dominant groups who see the sources of their dominance endangered by reverse discrimination (Sowell 1990: 15; Weiner 1983: 47). Given the state's limited capacities for redistribution of wealth in many plural societies, it is only a matter of time before spiralling ethnic claim making will produce more demands on the political system than it can bear.

As a result, politics comes to be perceived as a zero-sum game, in which political gains can only be won at the expense of ethnic rivals (cf. Premdas: 2). According to Atul Kohli, it is this very logic which explains what he describes as "the growing caste conflict between the 'backward' and the 'forward' castes" in India: "Leaders in state after state have utilized 'reservations' [. . .] as means to gain electoral support of numerically significant backward castes. Higher castes, feeling that their interests are threatened, have resisted these moves. Once set in motion, however, those who have been mobilized have been difficult to satisfy or control. Conflict has often been the result" (Kohli 1991: 18).

The logical result of cumulative claims for the recognition of ethnic attachments as preferred bases for public policy will be the persistence and steady expansion of preferential policies. In an influential comparative study of preferential policies in the United States, South Africa, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, India and Malaysia, Sowell found that such persistence and expansion occurred even where preferences had been established with legally mandated cut-off dates (Sowell 1990: 16-7). Because they are so difficult to control or curb preferential policies tend to outlive the transitional and temporary utility invariably agreed upon at the time of their adoption (Galanter 1984; Weiner 1983).

Ethnic preferences, critics point out, also imperil the well-being of the institutions and organizations that are made to serve as the arenas for ethnic engineering. Ethnic preferences are systems of partially ascriptive recruitment. Even if ethnicity may, in special circumstances, be a *bona fide* qualification for a job (Walzer, paraphrased by Andersen (2002); also see Peters (1989)), ascriptive

recruitment can generally be expected to select less talented, skilled, and competent individuals than fully “rational” selection on the basis of “objective” measures such as educational achievement and technical expertise (Klitgaard 1986). The tendency of preferential programs to produce incentives for individuals to identify more with their group may, moreover, have detrimental effects on the functioning of the organizations and institutions to which they are made to apply. Preferences, some critics fear, stimulate and legitimize “the preponderance of parochial loyalties” (Shils 1970: 385) and therefore jeopardize what Kaufman has called “neutral competence”: the “ability to do the work of the government expertly, and to do it according to explicit, objective standards rather than to personal or party or other obligations and loyalties” (Kaufman (1956), cited in Selden et al. 1998: 725). Hence, it is only logical to expect that the intrusion of ascriptive criteria into institutions that value performance and achievement will vitiate their efficiency and effectiveness (cf. Béteille, 1991: 596; Shah, 1996).

Affirmative action, finally, is also claimed to be simply ineffective even in reaching its avowed aims. Affirmative action programs tend to disproportionately benefit relatively well-off substrata within target groups, fostering the growth of “new” middle classes or elites which reap most of the available preferential benefits (Sowell 1990). Other reasons why even the most stringent affirmative action policies tend to result in far more modest representational effects than they set out to achieve, is that available places in educational and public bureaucracies are sometimes not being filled up due to slack implementation or a (purported) lack of qualified candidates. The official documents certifying an individual’s ethnic identity (which are typically required as proof of a candidate’s eligibility) may be remarkably easy to forge or falsify, opening up reserved places to ineligible candidates.

To sum up, preferences are argued to be morally unjust, to rigidify group-boundaries and fuel ethnic conflict, social fragmentation and political instability, to disproportionately benefit relatively well-off, “undeserving” members of target groups, to undermine organizational efficiency, to create vested interests in the survival of stigmatized identities, to stimulate the creation,

mobilization and politicization of new ethnicities, to be liable to fraudulent use, and to slip out of government control through their tendency of unplanned for persistence, expansion and outliving legally mandated cut-off dates.

4 From passive to active representation?

In view of the fact that preferences and affirmative action tend to be highly controversial policies and many books written about it have had political agendas (Skrentny 1996), one might be tempted to qualify the above arguments as an illustrative example of what Hirschman has dubbed the “rhetoric of reaction”.⁸ And indeed, when one weighs the arguments against the facts on which they are apparently based, arguments about the unintended side-effects sometimes do appear largely “rhetoric-driven”, shaped by the imperatives and logic of argument, rather than by the careful analysis and interpretation of facts. “Writings on preferential programs”, as Thomas Sowell has said, have tended to be “heavily biased to discussing the programs’ rationales, mechanics and resource-inputs, at the expense of providing data on their actual outcomes” (Sowell 1990: 16-7).

A cursory review of available evidence appears to bear out that the worries about the unintended and unwanted side-effects of reservations are not without empirical substance, however. The

⁸ Hirschman studied the anti-rhetoric that over the past three hundred years has been unleashed against the successive laws, programs, policies and events that resulted in the welfare state. His study suggests that any reactionary or conservative group that wants to oppose or criticize a “progressive” policy has three options in terms of argumentative strategies. The group may either argue that (1) any purposive action to improve some feature of the political, social, or economic order is bound to exacerbate the condition one wishes to remedy; (2) the attempt at social transformation will be unavailing, that it will simply fail to “make a dent”; or (3) the cost of the policy is too high as it endangers some previous, precious accomplishment (Hirschman, 1991: 7). Hirschman dubs these strategies the perversity thesis, futility thesis, and jeopardy thesis, respectively, and claims that they are a standard repertoire of reactionary thought. It would, indeed, not be difficult to categorize the various arguments about the unintended side-effects of ethnic preferences into Hirschman’s triad.

increased representativeness of India's public institutions with regard to disadvantaged groups *has* come at a price. Reservations have indeed turned out to be difficult to control or curb. Since the introduction of reservations for untouchables the Indian government has witnessed a chain reaction of claims from other groups -usually (collections of) castes- claiming "backwardness" and preferential eligibility (cf. e.g. Jaffrelot 2000a; Weiner et al. 1981). Politicians have become adept practitioners of "the politics of backwardness", routinely using the promise and extension of reservations for electoral purposes and thus contributing to what some have called the ethnization of Indian politics (Chandra 1999; Mahajan 2005).⁹ That caste and ethnicity have steadily become more important in Indian electioneering and voting as a result of reservation politics is beyond dispute (cf. e.g. Chandra 2000; Chandra and Parmar 1996; Duncan 2000; Singh 1996). The resulting spiralling claims and widening access of public institutions to hitherto unrepresented groups have, according to Atul Kohli, contributed to a "crisis of governability".

Electoral mobilization through quota politics has not come without violence. Opponents and proponents of yet another piece of reservation legislation have violently clashed. The death toll incurred in such caste-reservation related riots numbers many thousands. Apart from the violence directly associated with political mobilization using the extension of reservations as a political plank, there is also the violence that follows indirectly from state efforts to emancipate certain sections, be it through preferential programs or less discriminatory forms of public policies.

Some scholars have observed that caste relations in rural India have started to change since reservations. Traditional, hierarchically determined interdependence of castes is on the wane and gradually being replaced by horizontal caste relations, in which the various

⁹ According to some observers the promise or granting of reservations has almost become a *standard* response of Indian central and state governments in dealing with distributive problems: "[G]overnments in power", writes Gurpreet Mahajan, have "used the available constitutional clause to bracket *all* issues of social and distributive justice into that of reservations [while] politically assertive groups also translated their demands into claims for reservations" (Mahajan 2005: 1, my emphasis).

castes become competitors for jobs and other social benefits (Deliège 1997).¹⁰ Crimes against scheduled castes have, arguably, become much more patent since the scheduled castes have “become aware” through educational and other programs and have started asserting their civil rights, rights against exploitation and a demand for better implementation of protective laws (Saksena 1996: 14; Sheth 1997: 235).

The benefits of reservations appear to have largely benefited those who need it least. As early as 1972, a study on the effects of reservations for untouchables, for example, concluded that benefits favoured those already more fortunate and seemed to have fostered the growth of a “new class” among the untouchables (Dushkin 1972). Marc Galanter, in a massive study, reported “a severe clustering” of “some of the larger and more advanced groups” of untouchables in the jobs reserved for scheduled caste members. Reservations for other groups have had similar effects, while efforts to remove these “creamy layers” from eligibility seem to have been largely to no avail (Chaudhury 2004; Galanter 1984).¹¹ Also, in several states sizeable numbers of members of non-untouchable castes, taking advantage of the resemblance of their caste names to untouchable caste names, have been managing to secure scheduled caste certificates and, hence, eligibility for reservational benefits (Saksena et al. 1988).¹²

¹⁰ Deliège uses the term substantialisation to describe this effect. Louis Dumont once coined this term to describe “the transition from a fluid, structural universe in which the emphasis is on interdependence [.] to a universe of impenetrable blocks, self sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another” (1972: 269). Other anthropologists use the term ethnization (of caste) to describe this process (Fuller 1997a).

¹¹ “Reservations”, claims Pradipta Chaudhury, “serve essentially as tools for the absorption of the privileged sections of the lower castes in the ruling classes” (Chaudhury 2004: 1991).

¹² In the state of Uttar Pradesh, for instance, members of the upper caste *Agrahari* caste have been claiming caste certificates by presenting themselves to the authorities as -untouchable- *Agariyas*. Members of non-untouchable castes such as the *Gonrs*, *Goals*, *Majhis* and *Baiswar Kurmis* have done the same thing by passing as untouchable *Gonds*, *Guals*, *Majhwars* and *Baiswars* respectively (Saksena et al. 1988: 27).

The above effects seem a high price to pay for policies that – purely by design- can only be expected to benefit very small proportions of disadvantaged target groups. Or can they? In India, claimants for caste quotas in public employment have occasionally argued that it is only through them that the interests of backward communities can be protected in public institutions (Béteille 1991). Echoing the multiculturalist argument about the need for political representation of marginalized groups, quota-seekers assert that, if government subsidies or services are to reach them at all, they must themselves be bureaucrats, if only because they themselves will “naturally” understand their own needs better than Brahmins (high caste traditionally dominant in Indian bureaucracy, bvg) (Kumar 1992: 300, 302).

What quota-seekers imply with this argument is that bureaucracy is the locus of the representation of group interests. They assume and expect bureaucrats to favour members of their own community or to discriminate against others when they are in a position from which favours may be dispensed (Esman 1999: 354-5). This assumed and expected tendency of ethnic loyalties to translate into group-specific, differential administrative treatment and outcomes might constitute a forceful argument for affirmative action in public service recruitment. If bureaucrats belonging to government-designated categories of affirmative action were to be more sympathetic to members of their own group in the implementation of public policies, affirmative action need not be purely or particularly a symbolical policy-pursuit. Rather, by changing the ethnic composition of bureaucracy, the allocation of public goods itself would be changed; a desirable effect wherever preferences are meant, as they are in India, to dismantle systems of ascriptive group-based disadvantage and the inequalities historically resulting from them. The question, of course, is whether affirmative action, in fact, produces this effect.

Indian quota-seeking groups are not alone in arguing that being represented by people of their own in the bureaucracy is going to benefit their groups as a whole. Doubts as to the inherent limited effectiveness of preferential policies that can, by design, only benefit limited segments of target populations are also raised by a

body of scholarship known as representative bureaucracy theory. This theory's central claim is that *passive representation* –the physical presence of group-identified bureaucrats– is, indeed, likely to translate into *active representation*, that is, the pursuit of broader ingroup interests on the part of these group-identified bureaucrats.

The logic producing this effect, representative bureaucracy theorists argue, is quite straightforward. Bureaucrats, whether positioned at the top or at the bottom of administrative hierarchies, invariably possess some degree of discretion, that is, the opportunity to choose from a range of options that one which they perceive as best suited for the particular situation at hand. Because the orders that administrative subordinates receive from their – political or bureaucratic– superiors are often, and by necessity, vague and unintelligible, bureaucrats may exercise considerable discretion in interpreting and translating the meaning of superiors' orders and in deciding on their particular course of action. Even if superiors try to structure the exercise of subordinate discretion – usually by a combination of rules and socialization– some subordinate discretion is bound to remain. Rules, after all, cannot possibly cover every contingency and organizational socialization is rarely total. Superiors also tend to lack the knowledge, time, manpower, or perseverance to detect, monitor and sanction all discretionary abuse by subordinates. Most bureaucrats thus have – to a lesser or greater extent– the power to make choices as they see fit.

While using this power, bureaucrats are bound to be susceptible, representative bureaucracy theorists claim, to the values, preferences and biases instilled and acquired during socialization experiences. Socialization experiences associated with ethnic group membership are particularly important, since they tend to be the source of a person's *enduring* values, preferences and biases. What makes the occurrence of active representation especially likely in the case of ethnic groups is their proclivity towards high “groupness”. They tend to command strong interpersonal loyalties and engender a great willingness on the part of groupmembers to sacrifice for collective welfare. Ethnic groups,

in short, often demonstrate a high capability to make their members act in the group's interest.

If representative bureaucracy theorists are right, this bodes well for the members of ethnic groups in the plural societies of the developing world. Since ethnic identity is particularly strongly felt there, active representation would seem to be the *expected* role behaviour of bureaucrats. Bureaucrats in these societies may not only be socialized to a strong sense of preferential obligation to ingroup members, they may also fear group sanctions if they fail to provide the sympathetic treatment that group members tend to expect as a matter of right from "one of their own" who has succeeded in achieving a position from which favours may be dispensed (Esman 1999).

If passive representation were to translate into active representation in the ethnically plural context of Indian bureaucracy, the prospects and scope for affirmative action as a social engineering tool might be almost limitless. In India, as Kanchan Chandra points out, "[t]he state . . . controls the 'life chances' of individuals from birth to death. Nowhere is this more obvious than at the district level in rural areas, where the majority of the population [. . .] resides: births, if they take in a hospital at all, take place in a government hospital, where access to a bed is a prized commodity; primary education is only available through government schools; chances for higher education depend upon obtaining a highly contested seat in government-funded universities in the state capital; and [. . .] the bulk of employment opportunities are controlled by the state" (Chandra 1999: 96).

This book has culminated as a result of my attempt to test representative bureaucracy theory's central passive-to-active claim for India's untouchable bureaucracy. My case for choosing and limiting myself to the untouchable bureaucracy rested upon several considerations. First, the untouchables are, without doubt, the world's paradigm pariah people, whose condition has long been defined by multiple and enduring disadvantages. Finding out if and how untouchables are affected by government efforts to "uplift" them seemed intrinsically interesting and important to me; all the more so because we are dealing here with a huge population of

around 150 million people, around two per cent of the world's population.

Secondly, reservations for untouchables were explicitly *intended* to encourage active representation. Several participants in the debates in the late 1940s and early 1950s which preceded their adoption justified reservations with the argument that untouchable officers would act as watchdogs over untouchable interests, something which, it was argued, could not be expected from the "machinery of the old pattern" dominated by upper castes (Chanchreek 1991: 127-8; Saksena 1981: 373). Thirdly, the choice of India's untouchable bureaucracy as the object of my study was also inspired by a desire to find out about the potential *scope* of representative bureaucracy theory. When I started my project ten years ago, all empirical enquiries into the linkage between passive and active representation, barring a single exception, had been confined to bureaucracies in the United States.¹³ Representative bureaucracy theory was thus very largely a parochially American affair, building upon evidence and scholarly thought about American bureaucracies and advanced by American scholars preoccupied with and sensitized to American problems and issues. My hunch was that much might be learned, both substantively and theoretically, by drawing the study of representative bureaucracy away from its restricted American confines. I dare say my hunch proved right.

Much of the empirical substance for this book was collected during two stints of field research –six weeks in the autumn of 1998, and fifteen months between February 1999 and May 2000- in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. With a population of 139 million, Uttar Pradesh is India's most populous state. Its social structure continues to reflect the dominant features of an idealtypical caste system. "High" castes tend to enjoy combined privileges of land ownership and ritual status and, by and large, occupy the dominant positions in the agrarian social structure, politics, administration, and commercial sector of the state. Uttar Pradesh lags behind much of the rest of India in terms of a number

¹³ The exception is Dennis Dresang's article-length study on Zambian bureaucracy dating from 1974 (Dresang 1974).

of important aspects of well-being and social progress. It has exceptionally high levels of mortality, fertility, morbidity, undernutrition, illiteracy, social inequality and a slow pace of poverty decline (Drèze and Gazdar 1996: 33). Within Uttar Pradesh (or UP), I spent most of my time in the central UP-district of Sitapur, where I conducted intensive qualitative fieldwork on the district's "dust-level" rural development bureaucracy. In Sitapur I interviewed and observed a large number of rural development bureaucrats and untouchable villagers as well as many local politicians, social workers and other occupants of semi-political roles who in India tend to fill the gap between state and society. The central argument developed in this book directly stems from the insights and experiences gained in this district.

5 A grounded theory of unrepresentative bureaucracy

If anything, Indian bureaucracy is reputed for its vast and wide-ranging powers and discretion, both in routine administrative decision-making and in the policy-making process. Indian bureaucrats typically enjoy high social status and constitute a considerable segment of Indian society's "elite". When I set out to study the untouchable bureaucracy there was therefore no reason to assume that a lack of discretion might prevent untouchable bureaucrats from engaging in active representation. The potential implications of untouchable identity for untouchable groupness and, hence, for untouchable bureaucrats' propensity towards active representation were, however, far less clear.

Indian castes resemble most ethnic groups in that both are extended kin groups. Castes, however, represent a *special type* of ethnic group. What sets Indian caste society apart from most other ethnically plural societies is that it is not merely *divided* into different castes but that the relations between the various castes –the caste *system*– are furthermore governed by hierarchy. Indian castes are thus, idealtypically at least, *ranked* as relatively superior or inferior to one another. What makes the untouchables a special kind of caste

is that they occupy the bottommost rank in this caste ranking and have, therefore, traditionally been considered untouchable.

Detailed ethnographic studies of untouchable groups or communities are few and far between and tell us little if anything about the interpersonal loyalties, or groupness, of untouchables. Since most studies deal with rural, poor untouchables they teach us even less about the salience of untouchable identity to untouchable bureaucrats who, almost by definition, are upwardly mobile and find themselves in the highest class strata of Indian society. There is no agreement among representative bureaucracy theorists or the broader social science literature as to the likely effects of elite status on the salience of ethnic minority identity.

What may be called the optimistic view holds that class differentials are unimportant, if not irrelevant, to ethnic minority identity salience and, hence, to a bureaucrat's proclivities towards active representation. The pessimistic view, on the other hand, expects such salience to be *inversely related* to individuals' class: the higher one's class, the lower the salience of ethnic minority membership and, hence, the propensity for actively representative behaviour. The evidence on elite untouchables' inclinations for (dis)identification which was available when I started my study was largely indirect and circumstantial. In addition, it revealed a rather mixed picture, neither fully endorsing nor fully disproving either of the two views. Some new and fresh research, explicitly addressing the issues at hand, was thus called for.

My research took the form of an intensive case study of the dust-level rural development bureaucracy in Sitapur, a rather typical UP district. The rural development bureaucracy was created in the 1950s to implement and monitor the Indian government's newly adopted strategy of planned development in rural areas. What I will call the "dust-level" rural development bureaucracy comprises of the two lowest echelons of this bureaucracy: the rural development *blocks* and the village development officers. The bureaucrats manning these echelons are entrusted with carrying out a wide-ranging package of centrally- and state funded poverty alleviation programs. In the process, dust-level bureaucrats (DLBs)

select beneficiaries and allocate and distribute money, material resources and information.

The dust-level rural development bureaucracy presented itself as a suitable case for an empirical enquiry into untouchable representative bureaucracy because it possessed four features that representative bureaucracy theorists associate with a high likelihood of active representation: a sympathetic mission, a high salience of its policies to poor untouchable villagers, the presence of a substantial mass of untouchable DLBs, and street-level discretion. To avoid the drawbacks of earlier empirical representative bureaucracy studies (which, by design, had not been able to *prove* the occurrence of active representation, nor to illuminate and explain its practice) I chose to rely on qualitative fieldwork. Through a combination of participant observation, personal interviews and the consultation of official documents I set out to develop a grounded theory which was to clarify the if, how, why and when of active representation in Sitapur and, in so doing, to provide new insights and clues for elaborating, specifying and modifying existing representative bureaucracy theory.

As favourable a recipe for active representation as conditions in Sitapur might have seemed in theory, in practice they turned out to count for little. Even though the rules informing rural development policy implementation accord substantial powers to DLBs, very few DLBs use this power. In order to prevent political punishment, to keep their jobs and successfully survive in turbulent faction political environments, they *lease out* their discretionary freedoms to political brokers in return for a fixed fraction of development rents. As a result, dust level untouchable bureaucrats turn out to be largely “untouchable” to their potential clientele.

Few untouchable dust level bureaucrats perceive their role to include safeguarding the policy interests of untouchable villagers in their jurisdiction. They are no particularly diligent deliverers of policy outputs to untouchable clients, nor facilitators of untouchable access to bureaucratic decision-making. The few who do try to be actively representative take a big risk, as they are not likely to find administrative or political support for their actions. Non-untouchable colleagues and superiors may, and often do, take

exception to this kind of “casteist” behaviour and will not easily defend a colleague who has been found to indulge in such practices.

Moreover, untouchable superiors find themselves in exactly the same situation as their untouchable subordinates. It may be harmful for them to come to the rescue of a casteist subordinate, because this itself would be considered a casteist act. The consequence of the fact that untouchable dust-level bureaucrats may *have* but do not *use* the discretion invested in their roles for the likelihood of the occurrence of active representation is self-evident: If administrators do not make decisions, it does not matter to what ethnic, social or caste group these administrators belong.

Untouchable DLBs can often get away with leasing out as a coping mechanism because they are seldom asked or pressurized by untouchable clients to exercise their discretion to the latter’s benefit. One of the reasons is that untouchable clients often have difficulties in recognizing and locating untouchable representatives in the bureaucracy. While climbing the social ladder, many untouchable bureaucrats have come to perceive their identity as a stigma, that is, as something deeply discrediting that disqualifies them from full social acceptance. Many therefore tend to escape identification with untouchability through a number of *passing* strategies such as changing their names, dissociating from members of their own caste, and by establishing close association with other, “higher” castes. Successful passing on the part of untouchable bureaucrats prevents clients from knowing whether they are in fact represented by “one of their own” in the bureaucracy and, thus, from effectively claiming preferential treatment on the basis of primordial affinity.

Even if untouchable clients manage to identify and locate “one of their own” in the bureaucracy, they are not likely to get in touch with him, since dust-level bureaucrats are not in the habit of visiting the villages in their jurisdiction. Consequently, to bridge the gap between themselves and the development bureaucracy, villagers must typically rely on the services of a broker or *dalaal*, as the occupant of this role is generally referred to in north India. Establishing direct access to bureaucracy is also complicated by the fact that it implies bypassing dominant village factions and elected village politicians. The latter, however, have a strong interest in

preventing poor and untouchable villagers from doing so, since control over access to bureaucracy is vital to the supply of patronage on which they rely for votes and group support.

In theory, untouchables might counter such monopolizing efforts on the part of dominant individuals and groups by engaging in collective action and forming grass-roots policy-pressure groups. In practice, however, they typically lack the necessary power, homogeneity, expertise, organizational capacity and leadership skills for such endeavours. Untouchability, contrary to what one might have expected, plays, at the most, a very limited role as an organizing principle within Indian district level politics and bureaucracy. The category of “untouchables” does what Charles Tilly calls “boundary work” or the work of distinction: it defines ties and locates distinctions between members of different categories more reliably than it creates internal solidarity, homogeneity, or connectedness (Tilly 1999: 72).

Two theoretical implications of these findings stand out. First, these findings force us to rethink the central -though often implicit- assumption of most theories of bureaucracy that securing and exercising discretion are a leading motive in bureaucratic behaviour. What my study shows is that bureaucrats, rather than wishing to maximize their power through the exercise of discretion in a monotonic fashion, choose to exercise discretion *depending on* whether they believe it is to their advantage or not to do so (cf. Krause 2003).

Secondly, the observed general lack of a linkage between passive and active bureaucratic representation in the case of India’s untouchables, reaffirms the wisdom -typically unheeded by multiculturalists and advocates of group rights- of steering clear of what Brubaker calls *groupism*: “the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis . . . the tendency to treat ethnic groups . . . as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed” (Brubaker 2002: 164). The extent to which group membership exerts influence upon individuals and manages to subject them to a variety of obligations to act loyally and

solidarily in the corporate interest, certainly *varies across* groups. "Groupness" -that is, groups' capacity to affect their members' behaviour- is itself a variable rather than a given (cf. Hechter 1987: 8).

This study is further organized as follows. Chapter 2 lays the theoretical and conceptual groundwork for the rest of the book's argument. I outline a theory of representative bureaucracy which spells out in some detail the logic through which the mere presence of group-identified bureaucrats might result in administrative decisions that benefit bureaucrats' ingroup members. Though its main purpose is introductory, this chapter is also intended as a contribution to representative bureaucracy theory. Even if the twin concepts of passive and active representation have structured the theory's discourse since Mosher introduced them in the 1960s, *just why* the one might translate into the other has so far received surprisingly little detailed attention.

In chapter 3, I problematize the issue of untouchable groupness. The theory of representative bureaucracy spelled out in the preceding chapter singles out two factors as preconditions for active representation: bureaucratic discretion and high groupness. Groupness pertains to the solidarity of groups, or the extent to which groups are capable of making their individual members act in the group's interests. Since the groupness of ethnic groups is usually high, ethnically identified bureaucrats -assuming they have discretion- are relatively likely to display actively representative behaviour.

Untouchables, however, are a special kind of ethnic group, a caste (or, according to another classificatory scheme, a *collection* of castes) and, since they occupy the bottommost rank in the caste system, quite a special caste at that. Drawing from the literature on caste and untouchability and from the wider social science literature, I discuss some potential implications of untouchable identity for untouchable groupness and, hence, for untouchable bureaucrats' propensity for active representation. The available evidence on untouchable groupness, it turns out, is quite inconclusive and thus calls for new empirical research. This chapter

also serves as an informative treatment of continuity and change in Indian caste society pertinent to the argument developed later on.

Though essential, discretion and high groupness are no guarantee for a linkage between passive and active representation. There are many factors that could subvert this linkage. Likewise, there may also be influences and circumstances that *facilitate* active representation. Most representative bureaucracy theorists agree on at least four of such facilitative characteristics of bureaucratic organizations: a sympathetic mission, salience of the bureaucracy's policies to passively represented groups, a critical mass of group-identified bureaucrats and street-level discretion. The dust level rural development bureaucracy possesses all four features and thus suggested itself as an obvious case for enquiry. In chapter 4, I will discuss these features in some detail. In doing so, I provide the necessary backdrop for my substantive treatment of active (non)representation in the chapters that follow. This chapter ends with a justification for and description of my fieldwork procedures.

Chapters 5 and 6 form the substantive heart of this study. In chapter 5, I adopt the perspective of Sitapur's untouchable DLBs and analyze their apparent lack of supply of active representation. I observe DLBs' -both untouchable and non-untouchable- widespread inclination to abandon the frontline and try to account for this inclination by pointing out the internal and environmental pressures under which they must operate. Frontline abandonment, as I will argue, is best (and almost literally) understood as a survival strategy which, if successfully pursued, provides DLBs with relative ease of mind, an attractive posting and a steady additional income in the form of development rents. In the second part of this chapter, I illustrate and explain untouchable DLBs' tendency to pass, that is to make themselves invisible *as* untouchables to outsiders, in their efforts to cope with the problem of stigmatized identity. Frontline abandonment and passing, I conclude, are so pervasive as to make active representation by untouchable DLBs highly unlikely, if not non-existent.

In chapter 6, the perspective shifts from the DLBs to their intended clients, the untouchable villagers. Whereas DLBs see little reason to supply active representation, untouchable clients rarely, if

ever, *demand* them to do so, even if they could. I explain this aborted subscription by way of clients' lack of practice in approaching bureaucrats directly, their fear of going behind the backs of locally powerful elements and by a prevalent narcissism of minor differences, which keeps untouchable villagers from unitedly claiming the benefits to which they are formally entitled.

In the concluding chapter 7 I briefly wrap up my main findings. I then discuss some of the implications of these findings for representative bureaucracy theory. By specifying some of the conditions under which active representation seems *unlikely* to occur, I seek to contribute to the problem of how to account for *unrepresentative* bureaucracies such as India's untouchable bureaucracy. I conclude this study with two pleas; one for appreciably widening up the currently dominant operational definition of active representation, another for more ethnographic studies of (un)representative bureaucracies.

2 A Theory of Representative Bureaucracy

1 Birth of a theory

The term representative bureaucracy is commonly attributed to J. Donald Kingsley.¹⁴ In his book with that title, which appeared in 1944, Kingsley argued that Britain was “only superficially a democracy” because British social structure had remained “essentially plutocratic”. Plutocratic tendencies, Kingsley argued, were particularly prevalent in the civil service. Despite the string of administrative reforms which -from the mid 19th century onwards- had served to gradually brake up the aristocratic monopoly over bureaucracy, the British civil service continued to reflect “the basic inequalities of the social structure and the prevailing temper of the nation” (Kingsley 1944: 141).¹⁵ “The opportunity to compete for

¹⁴ Alvin Gouldner also uses the term in his *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*. In his sense of the term “representative bureaucracy” refers to a bureaucracy which is “based on rules established by agreement, rules which are technically justified and administered by specially qualified personnel, and to which consent is given voluntarily” (Gouldner 1954: 24). Whereas Gouldner’s representative bureaucracy may be seen as representative in that its rules are representative of what bureaucratic agents, specially subordinates, want or consider to be in their interests, representation in Kingsley’s representative bureaucracy concerns the representation of interests or values of (groups or categories of) people *outside* bureaucracy. I use the term representative bureaucracy in Kingsley’s sense(s), not in Gouldner’s.

¹⁵ Kingsley dedicated the largest part of his book to a historical adstruction of “the slow and sometimes painful evolution of a representative middle class bureaucracy in England, out of the splendid ruins of government by gentlemen” (Kingsley 1944: preface). The reforms that were instrumental in breaking up the aristocratic civil service monopoly were set in motion by the publication of the famous *Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the Organization of the Permanent Civil Service* in 1854. By way of this report, Northcote and Trevelyan

appointment even to the Clerical Class", Kingsley calculated, "is restricted to about ten per cent of the youth of the nation, while the Administrative Class is drawn from a reservoir of considerably less than one per cent" (ibid.: 143). Moreover, "the fact that the service classes are linked to various rungs of the educational ladder means that each is drawn pretty largely from a distinct stratum of society . . . to a remarkable degree each Service class is also a social class – a caste- and the Service hierarchy pretty accurately mirrors the economic and social hierarchies outside" (ibid.: 148).

This mirroring effect did not surprise Kingsley. On the contrary, Kingsley –drawing from Marxian analysis– was convinced that administrative arrangements *always* tend to reflect the character of the social structure of a nation; that bureaucracy always tends to represent the dominant class in society in terms of social derivation and social philosophy (cf. Bendix 1945-6; Meier 1975). Since British society was dominated by what Kingsley called "the middle class", it was "inevitable" that –likewise– the British civil service would also be dominated by this very class and that –hence– the composition of the bureaucracy resulted in a power structure which mirrored, or represented, the power structure of society (cf. Hindera 1993a: 416).

The mirroring effect, Kingsley argued, was not only inevitable but also, obviously, quite *useful* to the English governing classes. It made sure that they did not have to bother too much about bureaucracy's inevitable "tendency towards autonomy and self-control".¹⁶ By way of being a mirror image of society British

set out to create a largely self sufficient, merit-based career civil service that would train its own administrators (instead of filling positions from outside its ranks) and recruit its direct entrants by open competitive examinations (not by patronage). The underlying idea was that these measures would create a civil service that "could be realistically seen as being politically anonymous" (Fry 1997). The ensuing reforms, interpreted by Kingsley as the middle class's "move on the civil service", included the establishment of a Civil Service Commission to hold entry examinations (1855) and the Civil Service Order in Council (1870), which introduced open competitive entry examinations for most departments.

¹⁶ "Bureaucracies", claimed Kingsley, "contain the seed-pops of autonomy": "The course of their development is marked by the regular substitution of internal for external controls over Service affairs . . . they become states within states, perfecting elaborate machinery for their governance and

bureaucracy was, namely, “so constituted” that it could “be trusted to function within the framework of the common desires of the governing classes” (Kingsley 1944: 186, 187). The reason why the bureaucracy had not been known to use the “exceptional opportunities for sabotage” offered by its administrative system, the political impartiality of the civil service had remained “practically unquestioned”, and no great cry for reform had emerged in spite of the apparent insufficiency of political controls to restrict a malevolent bureaucracy, was because bureaucracy was *representative* of the powerful in society (Kingsley 1944: 16; Meier 1975: 526-7).¹⁷ “In England today”, Kingsley argued, “the bureaucracy is responsible because it is *concerned* with being so; and that concern is a reflection of its representative character” (Kingsley 1944: 274, emphasis mine).¹⁸ Representative bureaucracy in terms of the

reducing to a minimum the area of detailed supervision by the political organs . . . [and] develop a corporate character and an independent institutional existence” (Kingsley 1944: 186, 187).

¹⁷ With the “exceptional opportunities for sabotage” Kingsley referred to the shift in “the political center of gravity” from Parliament to the ministers and, increasingly and specifically, their civil servants: “[U]nder ordinary circumstances”, Kingsley summarized the received wisdom at the time, “it is the Government which controls the House of Commons and not the House which controls the Government. Power centers today in the hands of ministers, but its use is to a large extent conditioned by the advice and assistance, even the direction of permanent officials . . . with that shift the power of the permanent officials has enormously increased . . . [T]he complexity of present-day government makes it nearly impossible either for Ministers or Parliament to exercise effective control over the Service without its consent, or even without its active assistance . . . [the power of officials, bvg] extends in many instances not only to the execution of policy but to its initiation and formulation as well. Even in the matter of control through criticism the tendency is to rely more and more heavily upon the findings of departmental committees - devices through which the permanent officials examine themselves (Kingsley 1944: 5, 6, 274).

¹⁸ Kingsley thus put the famed impartiality of the British civil service in a new perspective. Administrative impartiality refers to the doctrine that civil servants faithfully execute *any* policy, regardless of whether they personally approve of it. Kingsley argued that such impartiality was not an inherent trait or virtue of the people who manned the British civil service but, rather, a conditional favour, in that it *presupposed* a “harmony of outlook” between civil servants and political executives. Without this basic agreement administrative discretion would, Kingsley expected, surely result in sabotage, rather than in impartiality (see Bendix 1945-6: 76): “[T]he essence of bureaucratic

dominant class served as an effective instrument of political control and, thus, ensured social harmony.¹⁹

Kingsley's book also allows for another interpretation. Kingsley could not help but showing his apprehension of a British bureaucracy selectively catering to middle class interests and values. He considered the caste-like character of the civil service "antipathetic to political democracy" and "potentially of grave danger to the State". A cast-like civil service, he felt, hampers the occurrence of the "superior insight and wisdom" typically produced by "the pooling of diverse streams of experience", while it is this very pooling of diverse streams of experience which, as he saw it, defines "the superiority of the democratic Civil Service over its totalitarian rivals".

Kingsley deplored the far-reaching and disastrous consequences of the linkage between civil service recruitment and education for "civil service mentality" and its "outlook and orientation". "Snobbish" public school education, he felt, inculcated values such as conformity, valuation of good form and gentlemanly behaviour over intelligence, conservatism, thirst for power (*fanatique du pouvoir*), formal and specialized education particularly in subjects comprising "the medieval curriculum" (ancient languages, theology,

responsibility in the modern State is to be sought, not in the presumed and largely fictitious impartiality of the officials, but in the strength of their commitment to the purposes that the State is undertaking to serve The view of the Civil Servant as a disinterested assembler of facts simply will not stand examination" (Kingsley 1944: 274-5). The essence of administrative partiality, according to Kingsley, was therefore *loyalty* -engendered by a common (or "identical") background, outlook and shared values-, rather than civil service professionalism (see MacMahon 1946: 130). British bureaucracy could thus *seem* neutral, because its neutrality served the interests of the powerful classes (Moulin 1971: 168). The Labour party, were it to come to power, would surely experience, predicted Kingsley, the tangible limits of the vaunted neutrality of the British civil service (Kingsley 1944: 278-9; see also Krislov 1974).

¹⁹ Kingsley, in fact, assumed that -more generally- representative bureaucracy is the *only effective* instrument of political control. "By no other means", he claimed, "can an elaborate administrative machine be operated. By no other devices can the bureaucracy be controlled. Neither parliaments nor cabinets are adapted to the requirements of detailed or pervasive supervision" (Kingsley 1944: 186).

pure mathematics). Public school education thus produced an “aristocratic contempt for useful knowledge”, “amazing ignorance” of “the most elementary social conditions and problems”, “a failure to penetrate the problems of those in other strata of society” and “a failure to see the world as a whole” (Kingsley 1944: 152-7). “An English gentleman”, Kingsley quipped, “is a bundle of specifically qualified reactions, a creature who for all the emergencies of life has his behaviour marked out for him in advance” (ibid.: 157).

All this led Kingsley to conclude that “the democratic State cannot afford to exclude any considerable body of its citizens from full participation in its affairs”. “In a democracy”, he said, “competence alone is not enough. The public service must also be representative if the State is to liberate rather than to enslave” (ibid: 185). Thus summarized, Kingsley’s book reads as a normative call for a bureaucracy more representative of *all* social classes, rather than as an empirical description and explanation of the middle class representativeness of British bureaucracy.²⁰

Though the latter interpretation is probably more accurate, the interpretation which holds that Kingsley stressed a group approach and the notion that *all* groups were to be represented (cf. Kelly 1998: 203) has attracted most subsequent scholarly attention. Over the years it has gradually evolved into a normative theory of representative bureaucracy which contends that a bureaucracy recruited from all segments of society –not necessarily or exclusively social *classes*- will produce policies that are democratic in the sense that they are generally responsive to the desires of the public (Meier 1993b). *Just why* this might be so, is a question that has received little systematic scholarly treatment, however. In this chapter, I will therefore outline a theory of representative bureaucracy which spells out in some detail the logic through which the mere presence of group-identified bureaucrats might result in administrative decisions that benefit bureaucrats’ ingroup members.

²⁰ If his argument must be read as a plea for a bureaucracy more representative of all societal groups, Kingsley himself, to be sure, wavered between high hopes and few illusions regarding the practical possibility for effective reform. The caste-like British bureaucracy, he feared, could not be “readily disposed” because “the conditioning factors are embedded deeply in the social structure of the nation” (Kingsley 1944: 163).

2 Bureaucratic discretion

A comfortable view of bureaucracies is that they are permanent, hierarchically structured, goal-oriented organizations, designed for getting centralized decisions –“policies”- carried out through lower-level personnel. Bureaucracies are based on a clearly defined division of labour whereby each job in the organizational chart is spelled out in detail. The chains of command and responsibility -the hierarchy of authority- are carefully specified, and people are, ideally, assigned their particular jobs on the basis of their objective qualifications to fulfil them. Bureaucracies typically deploy staffing and structure as means of handling clients and disposing of cases. They establish rules for categories of activity, categorize cases or clients, and then motivate proper performance by providing salaries and patterns of career advancement. Bureaucracies seek to divorce the individual's private life and interests from his life as an officeholder through the use of rules, salary and career, and nullify outsider influences by depersonalizing and categorizing clients (Dunsire 1978a: x; Egeberg 1998; Katz and Danet 1973: 4; Meier 1997; Simon 1997 (1945); Thompson 1967: 5-6; Tullock 1987: 182).

Since bureaucracies are not generally designed to serve a representative function for a particular clientele group (Keiser et al. 2002: 555), they may seem unlikely vehicles for the pursuit of social group interests. Their reliance on rules, clearly defined task descriptions and roles, strict and extensive monitoring and control of employees' behaviour, and on job and office socialization and indoctrination all would seem to work *against* opportunities for individual bureaucrats to pursue identity related interests in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Hemmed in by all these formal and structural constraints, it is perhaps hard to see how bureaucrats might let themselves be guided and informed in their choices and activities by considerations, sentiments, interests and values associated with their upbringing, background and social group membership.

Opportunities for the active representation of group interests by bureaucrats, nevertheless, frequently arise. They do so in the form of discretion. Bureaucratic discretion pertains to a range of

choice within a set of parameters that circumscribes the behaviour of the individual (Scott 1997: 37). An official possesses discretion when he can choose from a range of options that one which he perceives as best suited for the particular situation at hand (cf. Boin 1998: 16). Bureaucratic discretion is, essentially, a logical corollary of the necessity –existing in all political systems of a certain scale– to delegate power to bureaucrats; more specifically, discretion is the product (or side-effect) of problems with which superiors in any bureaucracy are confronted *as a result of* the necessity of delegation. The first problem is that of communicating their desires –their policies– to their subordinates, the second that of seeing that these are actually carried out (Tullock 1987: 180). How these problems translate into discretion, and what exactly this discretion may entail is the subject of this section.

The communication problem

In any political democracy, legislators cannot anticipate all of the possible circumstances that may arise in the design and implementation of public policies. They cannot issue commands –orders, rules, directives, laws or statutes– that can speak authoritatively and comprehensively to all of the circumstances likely to arise in the administration of a program throughout its future history. This may be due to the rush of events, which continuously brings up new problems and issues and leaves legislators with too little time to grapple with and reflect on the many aspects, implications and details of issues on the policy-agenda. Sometimes politicians cannot agree on what exactly the problem is that needs legislation. Or they can agree on the problem but not on its solution. Or, as frequently happens, politicians know what the problem is, have a fairly good idea as to how they would want to solve it, but realize that their preferred course of action might create enemies they can ill-afford to make, given the structure of self-interest and opportunity built into the electoral process (Morgan and Rohr 1982: 2). As a result, “commands” from the top –legislators as well as bureaucratic superiors– are often and necessarily vague. Such vague commands effectively delegate –

intentionally or by default- decision-making authority to those lower down the line (Horn 1995; Morgan and Rohr 1982; Tullock 1987). Consequently, lawmakers usually rely on bureaucratic agents who deploy their expertise, judgment and intuition to make administrative decisions (Long 1952; Pendleton Herring 1936; Selden et al. 1998). Whenever bureaucrats make such decisions, they exercise discretion and thus co-determine the content and direction of programs and policies and the nature, amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions provided by their agencies (Selden 1997a: 13).

Higher level bureaucrats exercise discretion to influence public policies. They provide detail to legislative statutes or executive orders, translate vague legislative mandates into organizational procedures, and influence the content of legislation through lobbying, drafting proposed legislation, and by setting bureaucratic issues on the policy agenda (Meier 1993b; Page 2001; Sowa and Selden 2003: 700). Bureaucrats are often well placed to engage in such policy-making activities. The knowledge they possess about a problem, issue or policy is often superior to that of any other political actor. The continuity and permanence of bureaucracy allow bureaucrats extensive scope for specialization and the accumulation of expertise. Political institutions such as legislatures, on the other hand, can normally address issues only serially, depending on whichever issue gains political salience at a particular point in time. The sheer manpower available in bureaucracies, furthermore, enables bureaucrats to divide complex problems and issues into smaller and more manageable tasks (Selden 1997a: 19).

Since most bureaus are no monoliths in which control over nearly all activities is concentrated in the hands of their topmost officials, not only higher level bureaucrats exercise discretion. Because they have to consider a great many policies and can only deal with them in general terms, top-level administrators cannot avoid delegating some of their power to subordinates (Downs 1967: 133-4). Superiors at any level of the bureaucratic hierarchy thus must let their subordinates know what they want them to do; what the policy (or policies) of the organization is (are). Due to people's "almost infinite ability to misunderstand", as Gordon Tullock puts

it, giving such instructions is not an easy task. However skilfully superiors manipulate the various means to get a message across - clarity of expression, repetition, apt similes- there is always "some maximum order of complexity in a task beyond which it becomes impossible for the subordinate to form a clear idea of the desires of his superiors with respect to that task" (Tullock 1987: 182-3).

These communication problems are compounded by the hierarchical structuring of bureaucracies. Bureaucracies, says Adrian Dunsire, may be thought of as constituting "cognitive hierarchies" consisting of a (variable) number of "orders of comprehension", moving from the order of legislative work -the consideration of broad aims and political consequences of law making- through the order of organisational and financial management at headquarters and in field offices, down to the supervision and deployment of skilled operations which produce actions that alter the world in some concrete and particular way. Each order of comprehension has its own characteristic universe of discourse, sphere of interests, concepts, working vocabulary and style of going about things. Bureaucrats in one particular order therefore recognise that they "talk the same language" -even when they disagree- while those on other levels -even when they are dealing with the same subject-matter- do not (Dunsire 1978a: 2-3). The facts that members of each order speak their own particular tongues and, resultantly, perceive the world and their work *in terms of* the particular concepts of that tongue (cf. March and Simon 1958: 165), obviously complicates effective cross-order communication.²¹

Superiors may thus easily find themselves having difficulties in finding "the right wavelength" of people who speak the language of a subordinate order of comprehension. A subordinate bureaucrat who receives an order from his superior must therefore often *interpret* this order and *translate* its meaning to the world of his own order of comprehension. This necessity to interpret and translate may involve substantial individual discretion. Such interpretive

²¹ Miscommunication may, of course, remain limited when communication involves members of adjacent orders of comprehension but evidently becomes more consequential when the interchange of messages involves distant orders with widely differing tongues.

discretion, moreover, adds up every time an order passes from one order of comprehension to another.²² Often, the bureaucrat who receives a command must not only try to understand what the instruction received from higher up means for his level, he may also have “to specify for the next lower level what the instruction means for *them*” (Dunsire 1978b: 35).

Bureaucratic discretion does not remain limited to the interpretation and translation of the meaning of superiors’ orders. Once a subordinate has figured out what the order he has been given means, he still does not necessarily know what to do in order to comply with it. Subordinates frequently receive conflicting or contradictory signals from above. Bureaucracies are seldom perfect organisational pyramids in which each subordinate receives directives from one particular superior, his boss so to speak. Whenever various superiors issue orders without regard to those from other sources, a subordinate will have to decide for himself what his situation seems to require, “picking and choosing among the directives for justification” (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 2).²³

Even if a subordinate has decided which of the various available instructions applies, he may, moreover, still have to select among various concrete activities and particular behavioural strategies to comply with his superior’s instruction. Since it is impossible for organisations to specify all of the prescriptions and proscriptions associated with any given role or task, bureaucrats are often confronted with the difficult task of turning the partial descriptions of complex and detailed decision situations, as exemplified in instructions, formal rules and procedures, into

²² Higher level orders often trigger a train of more detailed, operationalized orders further down the line. Delegation in administrative hierarchies usually involves, as Kingsley observed, “minutes and memoranda [passing] up and down the line until by selective process they reach their proper level and are disposed of” (Kingsley 1944: 14).

²³ Such situations occur much more frequently than one might at first thought anticipate. In bureaucracies, orders often stay on the books indefinitely in the form of statutes and regulations. A subordinate will regularly find that in many of the concrete circumstances in which he is supposed to make a decision or to take action, *several* of such provisions apply simultaneously. Picking the right one among the various theoretically applicable, recorded provisions of sometimes uncertain origin and intent may be far from easy (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 3).

concrete practical activities. Selecting such an appropriate “script” can be a highly pragmatic and improvisational exercise involving substantial discretion (Lipsky 1980: 14; Stone-Romero et al. 2003: 331; Wagenaar 2004: 646, 650-1).

Given the problems involved in communicating orders from the top to the bottom it is clear that an individual in an administrative hierarchy is often “pretty much the judge of the matters within his competence”, as Kingsley put it (Kingsley 1944: 15). The result of this recurring “discretionary gap” is that organizational policies are not defined only at the top of the pyramid but all along the line down to the street-level (Downs 1967: 133-4).

The enforcement problem

Though bureaucratic discretion is inherent to bureaucratic organization, *the extent* to which bureaucrats or bureaucratic agencies have room for making discretionary choices obviously varies. Various factors such as the task at hand, the decisional context, personality of the official, the superior’s span of control, workload pressures, type of clientele, an organization’s culture, rules and constraints, and an organization’s wider external environment may all influence how and to what extent discretion is exercised in particular situations (Meier and Bohte 2001; Scott 1997: 37).

The extent of discretion is, in large part, a function of how well superiors succeed in solving the second problem associated with delegation, the problem of seeing that their orders are actually carried out. Even if a superior succeeded in overcoming the problems involved in effectively communicating his directives to his subordinates, he would still be left with the problem of ensuring the latter’s compliance. Securing such compliance is, however, far less obvious than it might seem. “Subordinates may know precisely what is expected of them, be perfectly capable of doing it, and still not do it” (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 3). Though a superior, by definition, has the *authority* to command his subordinate, this is no guarantee that a subordinate will effectively *accept* his command as

authoritative and carry it out (Dunsire 1978a: 22). “Bureaucracies”, says Dunsire, “by their very nature . . . do not and cannot operate by commands from the top” (Dunsire 1978a: x). Though authority usually ensures that subordinates *pay attention* to what their superiors are saying, it does not guarantee their compliance with it (Dunsire 1978a: 49).

Politicians and top-level policymakers are normally well aware that individual bureaucrats down the line exercise discretion in the design and implementation of public policies. To increase the likelihood that subordinate bureaucrats’ decisions add up to outcomes favoured by them they seek to *structure* this discretion (Balla 1998; Meier 1993b; West 1984). And since there is always the risk that they will be held accountable for deficient or undesirable policy outcomes, they usually have good reasons for trying to do so (cf. Boin 1998: 28). Superiors try to structure subordinate discretion in various ways. Perhaps most popular is the tried-and-tested bureaucratic method of specifying rules and procedures that bureaus must follow when crafting and implementing policy.²⁴ Reporting requirements and other monitoring devices such as personal inspections, internal studies, clearance procedures, and face-to-face gatherings are, essentially, attempts to *control* the behaviour of subordinates and to force them to exercise their discretion in an –from the superior’s viewpoint– appropriate or desired manner. Much of the red-tape associated with bureaucracy thus results from the efforts of superiors or individuals outside the bureaucracy to structure the discretion at subordinate levels (Meier 1993b: 3-4). But the structuring of discretion need not solely or primarily take the form of organizational rules and procedures.

²⁴ The popularity of rules as structuring devices is in part explained by their efficiency –once specified they may applied indefinitely– and in part by the fact that a rule constitutes a comparatively *unambiguous* way of giving an instruction or command. Though rules –like, for example, direct orders– specify obligations and enjoin those bound by them to do particular things in particular ways, they have usually been given more thought and deliberation –or are believed to have been– than more hastily worded personal commands. Rules also usually embody a relatively clear statement of superiors’ expectations of their subordinates. By carefully specifying what subordinates *may* or *may not* do, rules delimit –it is hoped or expected– the areas of personal discretion to the benefit of the (usually growing) area of obligation (Gouldner 1954: 162-3).

Superiors also often expect professional norms, codes and standards or the doctrine of political neutrality to provide the parameters for the exercise of discretion. Some organizations rely heavily on socialization and indoctrination, or on loyalty-based controls such as nepotism or tribalism (Downs 1967: 156-7; Meier and Bohte 2001: 457-58; Scott 1997; Van Riper 1958).

External actors and administrative superiors can never completely structure the exercise of discretion by individuals lower down the hierarchy, however. Rules and prescribed routines cannot possibly cover every contingency, organizational socialization is rarely total (Meier et al. 1999: 1026).²⁵ The loyalty of relatives or fellow group-members may prove illusory. The basic problem associated with said structuring devices is that they, *in themselves*, cannot enforce compliance. Subordinates may feel that what they are asked to do offends their personal principles or their interpretation of professional ethics or their extra-organizational loyalties and commitments or their self-interest (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 3). They must therefore somehow be *motivated* or *induced* to follow organizational rules, respect professional codes, swallow organizational myths, or act as loyal and obedient sons towards their superiors.

In order to make this happen superiors' ultimate recourse is to rewards and punishments: appointments and dismissals, increases and decreases in salary or wages, promotions and demotions, strategic replacements, allocation of interesting and boring work, comprehensive consultation of good subordinates and conspicuous disregard of the bad ones, etcetera (Dunsire 1978a: 23; Gouldner 1954).²⁶ To distribute such sanctions effectively the superior must

²⁵ Though organizational socialization, professionalism and neutrality may keep administrative discretion within bounds more severe than a legislature could prescribe or enforce, they do not, claimed Van Riper, form "much protection against the wide range of administrative decisions which lie largely outside the domains of science, the professions, and a narrow sort of administrative expertise concerned mainly with means . . . they are frail reeds in times of crisis and only modestly helpful during the ordinary course of events" (Van Riper 1958: 550-1).

²⁶ Sanctions also include the *promise* of rewards and the *threat* of punishments, which may -from the superior's point of view- be quite as effective as the actual sanctions themselves. Though the distribution of sanctions seems to be the ultimate device to bring non-compliant subordinates

know what his subordinates are doing (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 4-5).²⁷ Reliable feedback about subordinate behaviour is often very difficult to obtain, however, because feedback in bureaucratic organizations consists predominantly of data provided by the very subordinates whose behaviour is being monitored.²⁸

Most subordinates dislike being the objects of scrutiny. Active monitoring is often experienced as carrying a stigma of punishment (cf. Meier and Krause 2003: 9). Subjected subordinates may become secretive, hostile, fidgety, excessively cautious, a little untruthful or a combination of these (cf. Bacal 2001: 117; Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 71).²⁹ The information provided by subordinates is not only often rather unwillingly provided, it also tends to be biased. Since subordinates can never be sure as to the use to which the information about their behaviour and performance will be put (cf. McKeivitt and Lawton 1996: 50), they are normally quite aware of

into line, it is not the only possibility. Reasoning and pleading may also help. "The problem of securing employees' compliance", says Simon, "is not very different from the problem of securing a customer's acceptance of a particular brand of soap. In some cases formal authority may be a sufficient inducement for the subordinate to comply; but usually the communication must reason, plead, persuade, as well as order, if it is to be effective" (Simon 1997 (1945): 216-7).

²⁷ Apart from its use for distributing sanctions, knowledge about subordinate behaviour may also empower superiors to structure or curb subordinate discretion in other ways. Such knowledge may teach them how to clarify their instructions, for example, or how to improve the training of subordinates (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 5).

²⁸ In bureaucratic organizations most of the information about subordinate activities tends to be passed along upwards through standard forms filled out routinely at lower levels and assembled and tabulated at higher levels (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 6).

²⁹ Max Weber was particularly impressed by bureaucrats' "natural" tendency to favour secrecy and avoid scrutiny by their -political- superiors. "Bureaucratic administration", he claimed, "always tends to exclude the public, to hide its knowledge and action from criticism as well as it can . . . The concept of the "office secret" is the specific invention of bureaucracy, and few things it defends so fanatically as this attitude . . . Bureaucracy naturally prefers a poorly informed, and hence powerless, parliament -at least insofar as this ignorance is compatible with the bureaucracy's own interests" (Weber 1978: 992-3).

the consequences which the information they are transmitting upwards may (or will) have for them.

As a general rule, subordinates prefer to transmit the kind of information that they expect will not have unpleasant consequences for them.³⁰ They will tend to tell their superiors what –they assume– the latter will want to hear; to cover up problems and mistakes which may reflect adversely on themselves, and to accentuate the success of their decisions and activities. As a result, reports flowing upward in the organization are often “sugar-coated” (Simon et al. 1964 (1950): 240). Apart from pleasant and pleasing matters, subordinates will also tend to transmit information that the superior will hear of anyway from other channels –in which case it is better to tell him first– or that the superior needs in his dealings with his own superiors (Carzo Jr. and Yanouzas 1969: 179; Simon 1997 (1945)).³¹

Most superiors will soon enough notice subordinates’ proneness to exaggerate achievements and to understate or conceal deficiencies. (After all, most of them tend to have been subordinates themselves, and –given the near-endless replications of superior-subordinate relationships in administrative hierarchies– most of them still are.) But there are no easy solutions to the resulting problems of incomplete and distorted feedback. Intensifying surveillance, for example, may do more harm than good since greater efforts put in by superiors to monitor the behaviour of their subordinates are often easily matched by greater efforts on the part of the latter to evade or counteract such control (Downs 1967: 147; Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 71).

³⁰ They tend to have ample opportunity to present a selective picture of their own activities. “Reports can be organized and presented to emphasize what the reporting officer wants stressed and to mute what he would rather conceal. Records can be manipulated” (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 28).

³¹ Information going *downward*, as Simon *cum suis* point out, is equally suspect, for quite the same reason: superiors also find it difficult to release information that they believe would reflect adversely on their ability and judgment. In their downward communication they will thus take care to stress the *wisdom* of their decisions and to show their *benevolence* towards subordinates (Simon et al. 1964 (1950): 240; see also Carzo Jr. and Yanouzas 1969: 179).

In theory, superiors might drastically increase the *quality* of the feedback they are getting if they could rely more on data generated through close, face-to-face supervision or personal inspections, rather than on the information contained in the progress reports routinely produced by subordinates themselves. Personal inspections, however, are notoriously time-consuming. Superiors who invest heavily in such “activist” monitoring devices incur relatively substantial transaction costs -costs incurred in carrying out such oversight activity- as well as opportunity costs -time and resources that could be spent on activities that would yield greater marginal net benefits to the administration’s policy agenda (Meier and Krause 2003: 8-9).³²

Though there certainly are other viable sources and ways of generating accurate administrative feedback -personal contacts, professional colleagues, investigations, clients, the media, and zealous or disaffected employees (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 39-40)- it seems unavoidable that superiors -even if they are extraordinarily alert- will generally not be provided with all the information needed to establish how their subordinates exercise discretion. “No feedback system”, say Kaufman and Couzens, “picks up everything” (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 53; see also Dunsire 1978a: 69). As a result, superiors may often not be able to distinguish compliance from defection (Brehm and Gates 1994: 325; Thompson 1980: 905) which, of course, complicates the effective use of sanctions as a means to structure or curb subordinate discretion.

The availability of accurate information, moreover, is no guarantee that it will be actually utilized as a basis for distributing organizational rewards and punishments. The use of feedback is

³² Another drawback of personal inspections is that they make very evident exactly “who is the boss”. In egalitarian cultures, as Alvin Gouldner points out, such “visible differences in power and privilege readily become sources of tension, particularly so if status differences do not correspond with traditionally prized attributes such as skill, experience, or seniority” (Gouldner 1954: 161). By way of a cheaper and less laborious alternative superiors might try to find out what is happening down below by using or urging *subordinates* to report about the behaviour of other subordinates. But this type of monitoring often fails to generate useful information because of organization members’ general disinclination to disclose revealing information about their colleagues and friends (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 60).

namely constrained by the capacity to *absorb* the information (Lipsky 1980: 29). This capacity, in turn, is constrained by the capacity of superiors to interpret the meaning of feedback-information and by the fact that superiors –apart from tracking subordinate behaviour- have to deal with other types of information as well. Some superiors tend to shun details of the kind encompassed by administrative feedback. They may prefer or be compelled to pay attention to strategic policy problems, to be engaged in introducing innovation, expanding jurisdiction, winning greater authority and appropriations, standing off challenges by other interests and agencies, performing ritual and ceremonial functions, and representing the organization to higher headquarters and representative institutions, rather than to attend to the nitty-gritty of internal operations and subordinate compliance (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 49-66). Superiors may thus not be so much interested in maximizing real control, as well as in seeking *apparent* control (Tullock 1987: 193).³³

Even if superiors would succeed in detecting undesired or inappropriate exercises of discretion by their subordinates, and be capable, willing and in the position to utilize it as a basis for sanctioning, they still face the problem of *correcting* this behaviour. In theory, superiors have plenty of options in this regard but, in actual practice, their possibilities for effective sanctioning are rather limited. Bureaucrats often have job security and cannot be easily fired, replaced, disciplined or transferred. Civil service rules often greatly reduce superiors' ability to manipulate benefits and sanctions to induce centrally desired performance. The costs of firing or demoting workers may be so great that retaining a deviant subordinate may still seem the better option when compared to its alternatives of having to endure a prolonged period of arbitration while the post in dispute remains unfilled or, worse, remains filled by the accused deviant (Lipsky 1980: 24-5). Possibilities for effective

³³ There are also situations in which superiors would rather not *want* to know about feedback suggesting or demonstrating subordinate non-compliance. This may be so in the case of lazy or indifferent superiors, for example, or when superiors privately approve of the discretionary offences of their subordinates (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 65; Tullock 1987: 181).

control of subordinates are further constrained by the clientele support characteristic of many government bureaucracies (Kingdon 2003: 152; Selden et al. 1998: 718).³⁴

Manipulating sticks and carrots to enforce subordinate compliance is not easy. Too many rewards and too little punishments may stimulate laziness, carelessness and indulgence, while an overreliance on punishment-centered controls may provoke a variety of perverse responses ranging from shirking, subversion and sabotage, to open resistance and defection (Brehm and Gates 1994; Gouldner 1954). Since most people have to be pushed quite far before they resort to *overt* disobedience, subordinates' resistance against inappropriate or unjustified punishments is usually surreptitious, making it all the more difficult to detect (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 3-4). Because of the many difficulties involved in correcting non-compliance in bureaucracies, superiors sometimes become resigned to the limits of their ability to alter the behaviour of their subordinates (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 66-7).

To conclude, given the communication and enforcement problems associated with delegation in administrative hierarchies, bureaucratic discretion and -hence- subordinate non-compliance in large bureaucratic organizations are virtually inevitable. Orders from above are regularly unintelligible to those who are supposed to carry them out while superiors typically lack the knowledge, time, manpower, financial and legal resources, will or perseverance to detect, monitor and sanction all inappropriate exercise of discretion (cf. Meier 1975: 542). As a result, bureaucrats widely exercise discretion, in interpreting and translating the *meaning* of superiors' orders; in deciding with *which* orders to comply; in deciding *how* to comply with a given order; as well as in deciding *whether* to comply at all with central directives.

³⁴ Clients, employees and suppliers may have good reasons to support bureaucratic agencies and defend them against political intervention. Since bureaucrats often have much to offer -they manage large budgets, buildings, and other supplies, have access to computers and other high-tech equipment, and allocate services, goods, money, prestige, privileges, and other perks- a belief among or promise to their clients that some of these benefits will come their way may entice clients to support certain agencies (Selden 1997a).

3 Controlling bureaucracy through representation

The fact that administrative discretion cannot be fully structured means that most bureaucrats have –to some extent– the power to make choices as they see fit. Obviously, their exercise of discretion makes bureaucrats powerful. It enables them to authoritatively allocate scarce societal resources with their decisions and to decisively participate in *rule* (Meier 1993b: 5; Morgan and Rohr 1982: 8). Bureaucratic discretion may thus readily conflict with the democratic principle that the authority to make policy should be exercised by institutions directly responsible to the people. While bureaucrats may be legitimately involved in *proposing* policies, it is not democratic for them to actually set and decide on them. Bureaucrats lack accountability at the ballot box, nor can they otherwise be removed from office or disciplined if citizens disagree with their decisions (Meier 1975: 528; Meier 1993b: 5; Meier 1997: 195; Morgan and Rohr 1982: 2; West 1984: 340-1).

Also, the existence of discretion allows for the possibility that officials will *abuse* their discretionary power. They might engage in nonfeasance –not doing what they are supposed to do–, malfeasance –essentially doing what they are expected to, but in a wasteful, slack and inefficient manner–, or in overfeasance –zealously undertaking duties *beyond* those specified by superiors and rules. Another possibility, encompassing the above, is that bureaucrats will exercise their discretion in an arbitrary or selective manner and become biased towards serving the *special* interests of narrowly defined clientele groups, including and notably their own (Downs 1967; Finer 1941: 337-8; Krislov 1974; Morgan and Rohr 1982: 4; Tullock 1987; Weber 1978; West 1984: 341).³⁵

³⁵ Bureaucratic discretion may, of course, be quite harmless or functional. “Such satisfactions as socialization and small talk, improving personal comfort, and resisting orders that disrupt pleasant habits”, says Downs, “form a significant part of every official’s incentives for staying in the bureau and performing his tasks effectively” (Downs 1967: 136-7). Discretion may also grant public administrators the flexibility needed to adequately adapt to unexpected or changing circumstances. Moreover, superiors who aggressively seek to curb all discretion risk creating organizational chaos. By divesting them of their discretion, superiors signal to their subordinates that they are not

Over the years a large array of controls against bureaucrats' abuse of discretionary power has been proposed and advocated: strengthening legislative and judicial oversight and review; reinvigorating political leadership; limiting the span of control³⁶; defining clear and unambiguous policy objectives; installing loyalty-based controls³⁷; creating administrative pluralism³⁸; increasing public access to bureaucratic decision-making; stimulating thorough scrutiny of bureaucratic policy-suggestions through the "fellowship

trusted. The latter's likely response will be to avoid "mistakes" and penalties by keeping ever more strictly to narrowly literal and "safe" interpretations of superiors' orders and by referring even routine cases and decisions to higher levels for action, review and clearance (Kaufman and Couzens 1973: 71). As a result, superiors will soon find their agency's middle and higher levels "swamped with decisions that had to be made" (Jones 2003: 406; Meier 1993b: 4). Bureaucracies, in short, would seem to *need* some measure of discretion and freedom from political micromanagement, if they are to perform at all (cf. Meier 1997: 195, 198).

³⁶ This solution to the threat of abusive exercise of administrative discretion follows from the idea –popular in early 20th century scholarship– that the structural attributes –particularly hierarchy– of bureaucratic organizations play a major role in conditioning organizational performance. Management scholars such as Henri Fayol, Lydal Urwick, and Luther Gulick believed that adherence to a core set of management "principles" such as the division of labour and unity of command would best help organizations achieve their goals. Span of control, another such principle, dictates that superiors should oversee a limited rather than a large number of subordinates, thus making the superior's job of monitoring and controlling the work of their subordinates a less daunting task. Urwick, in fact, claimed that six was the maximum number of subordinates that any superior could realistically control (see Hammond 1990; Meier and Bohte 2000).

³⁷ Loyalty-based controls seek to prevent discretionary bureaucratic abuse by relying on the *personal* loyalties of those occupying administrative positions towards their political executive and/or his political party. The practice in the USA of filling high-level agency posts with so-called appointees and Belgian ministers' reliance on personally appointed advisory boards (the so-called ministerial cabinets) are both real-life examples of this type of control.

³⁸ Administrative pluralism, as discussed by Mosher, involves the deliberate creation of controversy, competition, and negotiation among different factions and sections within the bureaucracy on the assumption that from the resulting "melee . . . will emerge a degree of order and balance roughly responsive to the people expressing themselves through organized groups (Mosher 1968: 89-90).

of science"³⁹; inculcating in administrators a desirable set of substantive moral and ethical values; introducing managerialist, "thermostatic" controls⁴⁰; or, simply, eliminating public bureaucracy to the greatest possible extent.⁴¹

Representative bureaucracy is another such proposed control. Its proponents –like the quota seekers and advocates of a politics of recognition and presence discussed in chapter 1– assert that the potential of bureaucracy to subvert democratic ends need not be problematic as long as bureaucracies are *representative* of the population (Long 1952: 817). The more the demographic origins of bureaucrats, collectively, mirror those of society as a whole, the

³⁹ The idea of mitigating the bureaucracy problem by counting on the "fellowship of science" was originally proposed by Carl Friedrich (1935, 1940). Observing the influx of scientists in government, he argued that establishing political control over bureaucracy was difficult due to the latter's possession of technical knowledge. Bureaucrats, he feared, might easily dress their policy preferences in the guise of expertise. Friedrich's solution entailed competing sets of scientists who would serve as a check on each other and thus provide multiple viewpoints for politicians (Meier and Krause 2003). Norton Long's suggestion of building into the upper levels of the bureaucracy a "loyal opposition", comparable to that found in the legislature, to ensure "true expression to all major policy alternatives" is based on a similar trust in the "inner check" of bureaucratic policy makers (see Dahl 2000 (1947): 63; Mosher 1968: 94).

⁴⁰ Thermostatic controls involve the specification of policy output targets in advance and holding public "managers" to account for their performances relative to these targets later. The underlying idea is that the implied threat of negative feedback serves as an incentive to bureaucrats to "deliver". Christopher Hood calls such controls "thermostatic" because, like the control of heating systems, they involve a standard-setting process linked to negative feedback mechanisms (Hood 2002: 11-12).

⁴¹ Note that these proposed controls vary according to *who* should be doing the controlling (parliament, the courts, other bureaucrats, the public), at what point in *time* bureaucrats should be controlled (prior to administrative action or after policies have been implemented), the -explicit or implicit- assumptions as to *what* makes bureaucrats comply with superiors' preferences and directives (fear of punishment, personal loyalty, professional standards, sense of duty) or, conversely, what makes them liable to abuse their discretion (opportunity, temptation, self-interest, poor morals, amateurism), and *whose* directives and preferences should ultimately be complied with (those of elected politicians, or those of the people). Typologies of various control types abound. For a brief but informative discussion and references to relevant literatures, see Hood (Hood 2004).

more likely it is, they claim, that bureaucracy will produce policy outcomes and outputs that reflect the interests and needs of all groups (Selden 1997a: xiii). The logic producing this effect, they argue, is straightforward. Persons of different backgrounds undergo different socialization experiences. Socialization experiences are important because they are the source of a person's enduring values, preferences and biases. Bureaucrats are susceptible to these biases and preferences when they are exercising discretion (Hindera 1993a: 422; Kingsley 1944; Meier 1993b: 8-9; Selden 1997a: 5; Van Riper 1958: 558). Bureaucrats recruited from a particular group will therefore tend to make administrative decisions that reflect the interests, needs and desires of that group (Meier 1993b: 7-8; Selden 1997a: 42). Prospective clients of bureaucracy, furthermore, may be more inclined to participate in policies intended to benefit them when they identify and are comfortable with program administrators (Ricucci and Saidel 1997: 423; Selden 1997a: 7).

Consequently, *passive representation* -that is, the physical presence of group-identified bureaucrats- is likely to be linked to *active representation* -that is, the pursuit of broader ingroup interests on the part of these group-identified bureaucrats: They might create or help shape policies that address ingroup-problems, facilitate the allocation of public goods to ingroup members, provide access to decision makers, reactively check or otherwise express disapproval of excesses or discriminatory behaviour by outgroup-bureaucrats, or, more generally, make the process of governing more congenial to ingroup members (Hindera 1993a: 417; Lim 2006: 196; Meier 1993b: 8; Selden et al. 1998: 727). In other words, bureaucrats do not only passively represent the members of their group outside the bureaucracy -simply by *resembling* them-, they are also likely to become their active representatives, by pursuing their interests (cf. Meier 1993b; Pitkin 1967) (see appendix I for an elaborate and precise definition of active representation). Lest selective recruitment biases decisions, programs and policies at the expense of un(der)represented groups, democracy requires that bureaucracy's choice of personnel considers employee attributes or membership and pays attention to ethnic balancing (Krislov 1974:

76; Peters 1989: 79).⁴² The result, advocates expect, will be a representative bureaucracy which produces outcomes similar to those produced if the entire public participated and which thus reconciles the need for bureaucracy with the requirements of democracy (Meier 1975: 528).⁴³

4 The groupness requirement

Like most theorists of bureaucracy, theorists of representative bureaucracy assume that man -when submerged in an administrative hierarchy- does not automatically become a machine that faithfully carries out orders of its superiors who act for the whole organization in reaching policy decisions. Rather than ceasing

⁴² Advocates of representative bureaucracy usually accept that recruitment of bureaucrats on the basis of their demonstrated ability or achievement -so-called merit recruitment- will not be adequate to create representative bureaucracies and that -therefore- *special* measures such as affirmative action are likely to be needed. Riccucci and Sidel, for example, consider representative bureaucracy a "justification for social policies such as affirmative action" (Riccucci and Sidel 1997: 423). The "merit issue" is often a key issue in debates over affirmative action, and the Indian reservation debate is no exception. In response to the anti-reservationist claim that reservations jeopardize merit, Indian low-caste quota seekers typically argue that invoking merit is "Aryan bluff", a mere "slogan", a "unilaterally defined" tool in the hands of ruling upper castes and classes who fear to lose their "hold" over bureaucracy. "Merit, as it is understood today in India", writes the untouchable activist Talukder, "is nothing but political power". Echoing J. Donald Kingsley, quota seekers also criticize Indian merit recruitment -which largely takes the form of written examinations- for privileging bookish knowledge and command of the English language over qualities such as "commitment, experience, and ability to co-ordinate things" which are -they feel- needed to bring about the required changes in the living conditions of Indian low castes (see e.g. Ilaiah 1990; Talukder 1997, 1998).

⁴³ Representative bureaucracy, to be sure, is proposed for numerous *other reasons* than as a control device meant to restrain bureaucracy from harming democracy. Representative bureaucracies, advocates argue, may also prevent or mitigate ethnic strife, imply a symbolic commitment to equal access to power, increase the credibility and legitimacy of the political system, or serve as psychological boosts to marginalized social groups (Esman 1999; Naff 1995; Riccucci and Sidel 1997; Selden 1997a: 43). In this book I will be strictly concerned with the control function of representative bureaucracy, however.

to exist, an individual –even when placed in an administrative hierarchy- remains an individual, with individual motives, impulses and desires (cf. Buchanan 1987: 2). Again like many other theorists, representative bureaucracy theorists also assume that bureaucrats will try and use their inevitable discretion to pursue goals of their own, their self-interest. What distinguishes representative bureaucracy theorists from other bureaucracy theorists is their expectation that bureaucrats' pursuit of self-interest is likely to *simultaneously* further the interests of the social groups of which they are members.

The commonality in outlook and interests purportedly produced by group-related socialization experiences, so it is assumed, cannot but impose on the individual bureaucrat some form of solidarity or loyalty to the group, a self-evident sympathy for other ingroup members and an inclination to further their (and, in so doing, *his*) interests.⁴⁴ Kingsley's empirical claim of representative bureaucracy in terms of the governing classes, for instance, hinged upon his assumption that the shared class-membership of British politicians and bureaucrats ("the unity of the middle class state") *was bound* to translate in bureaucrats' tendency to act corporately in support of wider middle class interests and to oppose and sabotage any proletarian-based program (Krislov 1974: 12): "There are obviously points", so Kingsley believed, "beyond which a man cannot go in carrying out the will of another" (Kingsley 1944: 278).

Even if most representative bureaucracy theorists agree on the importance of "social background" or group membership to individual bureaucrats' interests, preferences and behaviour, they have also come to recognize that active representation cannot be

⁴⁴ The notion that groups of individuals with common interests usually attempt to further those interests can, of course, scarcely be considered a novel or farfetched idea. It is, in fact, a widely popular one, both in scholarship and popular debate. Just as single individuals are usually expected to act on behalf of their personal interests, so are groups of individuals with common interests often expected to act on behalf of *their* common interests (cf. Olson 1973: 1). The idea is almost a conventional insight and has been an important causal element in theories of labour unions, class action, pressure group politics and ethnic conflict, for example (Brubaker 2002; Olson 1973).

expected to occur for *any* group or aggregate of individuals with common characteristics. Put differently, that a group can command the loyalties of its members to the extent that bureaucrats will pursue ingroup members' interests is not a given. Though there has been little direct and explicit theorizing of this point of group-related variability in the probability of active representation, most authors would seem to agree that active representation requires *strong* group ties or, in the vocabulary of social psychology, high *salience* of a particular social identity (see e.g. Meier 1993a; Rosenbloom and Featherstonhaugh 2003; Thompson 1976), and is facilitated when the group in question is relatively powerful.

At any point in time an individual belongs to a multitude of larger and smaller groups and categories, all of which can make demands and claims upon his consideration, loyalties and sympathies: his family, friends, neighbours, recreational clubs, the agency or company which employs him, the colleagues he works with, professional peers, the voluntary organizations he may have joined. The membership in such groupings constitute what social psychologists refer to as an individual's social identity, "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1981: 255). Social identity is, in short, one's self-conception as a group member (Abrams and Hogg 1990a: 2).

Also usually contributing to this identity are larger groupings, such as those circumscribed by common nationality, race, cultural practices, religion, region, and language. Even if an individual does not typically engage in direct, face-to-face interaction with all other members of such "cognitive" groupings, membership in them can carry a strong emotional significance. Furthermore, individuals belong to many other social categories that may scarcely be conceived of as *groups* but that can, nevertheless, have a strong impact on an individual's sense of self: categories defined by commonality of gender, sexual orientation, class or occupation, for example.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Individuals may also identify with groups or collectivities of which they are *not* members: teachers may identify with their pupils, rich people with the

All these group memberships or social identities compete for an individual's attention, sympathy and loyalty. As social psychologist Henri Tajfel put it: "In an infinite variety of situations throughout his life, an individual feels, thinks and behaves in terms of his social identity created by the *various* groups of which he is a member (Tajfel 1981: 31, emphasis mine). Every individual is thus furnished with a *repertoire* of more or less discrete group memberships or social identities (Hogg 1992: 90). The relative *significance* of any one of these identities varies with time and context: "Social identity is not fixed; different ones come to the fore in different contexts and stages of the life course" (Hechter 2004: 419). Put differently, the self is made up of an ever-changing, collection of social identities, the relative salience of each of which is variable (cf. Abrams and Hogg 1990a: 3; McAdam and Paulsen 1993: 647). "The psychological existence of a group for its members is a complex sequence of appearances and disappearances, of looming large and vanishing into thin air" (Tajfel 1982a: 485).

Whenever faced with a discretionary decision situation, a bureaucrat may thus simultaneously feel the contradictory pulls and pressures emanating from various group memberships, all fighting for preferential consideration. What representative bureaucracy theorists tend to variously refer to as a bureaucrat's social background, social origins or social *class* may be one of the "groups" struggling for a bureaucrat's discretionary attention. But there seems to be no good reason to assume, as Kingsley appeared to do, that class membership is always and of necessity *particularly* salient anywhere.⁴⁶

poor, bureaucrats with their clientele.

⁴⁶ American representative bureaucracy scholars, for example, have consistently belaboured the point of low class (not: low-class) salience in the United States. They point out that the sort of distinct, mutually opposed classes that featured in Kingsley's analysis never really existed in American society. Though American society might perhaps be thought of as consisting of various "economic" classes -that is, groupings of individuals in more or less randomly identified income brackets or occupational aggregates-, Americans -unlike "Europeans"- do not tend to *think* as members of the classes to which they might be presumed to belong. "From a psychological standpoint", claimed Van Riper, "most of them belong to the middle class" (Van Riper 1958: 4). Kingsley's emphasis on bureaucrats' class has thus appeared quite "artificial" to American

Neither is it necessarily obvious to assume that *social* groups, that is, groups *external* to the bureaucrat's organization, will *generally* be more salient than the various groups internal to it. By instilling in them the norms of specificity, universalism and affective neutrality, bureaucracies typically seek to *divorce* bureaucrats' external, private lives, ties, associations and interests from their lives as officeholders.⁴⁷ Besides, many bureaucrats spend their entire working life in the public service, often in the same occupational field, or even in the same agency. If only for this reason, it is quite likely that task-, professional-, client- and other subgroups in and around the organization become important targets for identification for individual bureaucrats (cf. March and Simon 1958: 59, 65; Meier and Nigro 1976: 466-7). Given this range of possible group identifications and the differential pressures these can bring to bear on individual bureaucrats in discretionary situations, it is quite imaginable that bureaucrats may not even *want* to shape their bureau behaviour in accordance with the values they share with the population (Downs 1967: 232). "Officials", claimed Anthony Downs, "have no strong incentives to employ representative values in making decisions because the pressure on them to seek representative goals will generally be much weaker than the pressure of their own personal goals or those of their bureaus" (Downs 1967: 233).

Long bureaucratic careers not only provide incumbents with new social networks and group affiliations, they are almost inevitably also sculptors of new viewpoints, attitudes and values (cf.

scholars (Krislov 1974: 14). "A man's origins, his birthmarks", Krislov argued, "have little to do with his adult abilities. They tell very little about how he will approach his task, and are inadequate even as evidence of how others will regard his actions" (Krislov 1974: 15, 16).

⁴⁷ *Specificity* means that person-to-person communications are strictly limited to those things which are officially defined as relevant to the matter at hand. It is the opposite of diffuseness; "the kind of intimate, reveal-your-whole self relationship characteristic of families and friends". *Universalism* refers to the norm that people with similar attributes –provided that those attributes are defined as relevant to the organization– must be treated equally, on a first-come first-served basis. The norm of *affective neutrality* requires that bureaucratic communications and decisions be informed by calm and reason, rather than by passion (Katz and Danet 1973: 4-5).

Mosher 1968: 154). As the group identifications they acquired during childhood become more remote and appear less relevant as their careers progress, it is quite likely that bureaucrats, at some point, will ultimately stop to represent, and respond to, the kind of external, social group interests and points of view that representative bureaucracy theorists have in mind (Mosher 1968: 95).⁴⁸

Given the multi-group membership of bureaucrats, there is no reason why they would, *as a matter of course*, have a predilection for the active representation of some particular, external, social group's interests. Such a predilection would require that a bureaucrat experiences a strong tie with this group, a tie so strong that he may allow it to take precedence over –or, at least will not allow it to be cancelled out by– the demands placed upon him by other group ties or categorical interests. If a bureaucrat is to display active representative behaviour, his social identity as a member of a particular external, social group must induce him to *act as a group member*. It must, in other words, be salient (Abrams and Hogg 1990a: 4).

Social identity salience is no guarantee for the occurrence of active representation, however. The relative power of groups is also important. The various groups that make up a bureaucrat's social identity may differ in endless respects, an important one of which is power. Power differentials may play havoc with a bureaucrat's *possibilities* for displaying active representative behaviour, assuming that he should want to do so. Active representatives may encounter fierce resistance from within the organization. Superiors may readily interpret bureaucrats' active representation of external group interests as a failure "to do as ordered". Agencies, to avoid

⁴⁸ John Rehfuss's study of the role perspectives of high ranking bureaucrats in the Californian CEA (Career Executive Assignment system) aptly illustrates this point. As Rehfuss noticed, all the bureaucrats he studied –*regardless* of their ethnicity or sex– shared *the same* management ideology and the same drive: "Minority and female CEAs, like their nonminority male counterparts, hold management positions because they want to influence policy, they want to have their opinions heard, they want more money, and they want to get on the top. CEAs, regardless of race or sex, seem to be a self-selecting group of ambitious, aggressive managers" (Rehfuss 1986: 458).

the appearance of partiality, may expressly forbid bureaucrats to actively represent their group's interests and can invoke intensive pressures and vigorous sanctions if bureaucrats disregard this prohibition (Herbert 1974: 560; Mosher 1968: 13).⁴⁹

Outgroup representatives -that is, members of other external, social groups- within or around the organization may, moreover, take exception to a bureaucrat's efforts to promote *his* ingroup's interests (cf. e.g. Thompson 1976). If their outgroup is more powerful than the bureaucrat's ingroup, they may have few difficulties in checking the designs of the parochially orientated administrator, or even make him cater to *their* group's interests. (Such a scenario seems especially likely in *vertically stratified* systems of group relations. I will get back to this point in the following chapter). For an individual bureaucrat, as a member of a relatively powerless social group, to persevere in active representative behaviour in the face of strong outgroup cross-pressures, would seem to require *unusually* strong attachment to his group's welfare or unusually strong support and pressures from other ingroup members towards active representation, or both.

To conclude, bureaucrats may, *but are not bound to*, represent the interests of any social group they are, feel, or may be presumed to be, members of. Due to differences in social identity salience and group power, bureaucrats may stand for but, nevertheless, not act for other ingroup members. As Frederick Mosher put it: "A man brought up in Ohio who takes a job in Washington is *not bound* to represent the interests of Ohioans . . . The same might be said of a farmer's son or a farmer representing the interests of farmers; or of a business man, or a college graduate, or a poor man . . . (Mosher 1968: 13, emphasis mine). Active representation thus requires groups to have high "groupness", that is, a high capability of commanding the loyalties of their individual members to promote and act in the groups' interests (cf. Hechter 1987; Hogg 1992).

⁴⁹ The fear of such sanctions, Adam Herbert claimed in a 1974 article, led some minority public administrators in the United States to place "job security over program content or impact", to the extent that they became "impediments to efforts to address the needs of their communities" (Herbert 1974: 560).

5 Ethnic groupness and active representation

The groupness requirement implies that, even if a bureaucracy included members of all possible societal groups, this in itself would not ensure that, *therefore*, all their different interests would be articulated and brought to bear upon the decisions taken and policies formulated by it (cf. Subramaniam 1967: 1013). Some groups may simply lack the groupness required for passive representation to translate into active representation. Representative bureaucracy theorists' acknowledgement of the phenomenon of differential groupness has been most evident with regard to class-based "groups". Echoing the persistent argument in class analysis that *Klassen an sich* only very rarely seem to change in *Klassen für sich*, most theorists have failed to see how a "mere commonality" in social class origins might tempt or trick bureaucrats into becoming specially sympathetic to co-class members (Krislov 1974; Meier 1975; Mosher 1968; Subramaniam 1967).⁵⁰

By attributing low groupness to classes, representative bureaucracy theorists implicitly recognize that groupness is likely to vary with the *kinds of groups* that are bureaucratically represented. Though there has been little if no explicit theorizing on the matter, the largely implicit *communis opinio* seems to be that the groupness of groups and, hence, the likelihood of active representation, may be expected to vary with the groups' membership criteria: more

⁵⁰ The fact that classes, especially "working" classes, are usually not able to trick their members into displaying corporate solidarity is widely acknowledged (Béteille 1977: 91-2; Brubaker 2002: 165; Hechter 1987: 6; Leach 1968: 7). Representative bureaucracy theorists have generally been content to accept this general fact as *prima facie* evidence for the falsification of representative bureaucracy theory for class. As far as I am aware, only Samuel Krislov has tried to cement this position with empirical evidence. He cites three-time Labour minister Herbert Morrison, who contradicts Kingsley's prophecy that the Labour party, if it were to come to power, was bound to see its proletariat-friendly programs sabotaged by British middle class bureaucracy: "The belief among the public and even some Members of Parliament that civil servants do not work in harmony with Ministers I have hardly ever found to be justified . . . the British Civil Service is loyal to the Government of the day. The worst that can be said of them is that sometimes they are not quick enough in accustoming themselves to new ideas" (Herbert Morrison (1954), cited in Krislov 1974: 14).

specifically with whether their members are recruited on the basis of ascribed or acquired criteria. The translation of passive representation into active representation, so many theorists claim, may be *particularly* expected to occur in the case of ascribed, that is *ethnic*, groups (cf. e.g. Meier 1993b: 10-11).

The idea that ethnic groups may be highly solidary, can command strong interpersonal loyalties and engender a great willingness on the part of groupmembers to sacrifice for collective welfare, is a familiar one (see Horowitz 1998: 2). Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, for example, once described ethnic ties as “primordial attachments” that possess a particular kind of “effable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves” (Geertz 1973). Ethnic loyalty, as Stinchcombe has argued, consists “in large measure of an unreflective tendency” to promote the group’s interests (Stinchcombe 1986: 123). Ethnic groups have, in short, often, if not typically, been associated in much social science theorizing with strong “groupness”, that is, a high capability to make their members act in the group’s interest.

Several reasons for this tendency towards high groupness of ethnic groups may be cited. According to Donald Horowitz - drawing from social identity theory- the special power of ethnic loyalty derives from ethnic groups’ strong *sense of similarity*. A strong sense of similarity among group members is an important determinant of high groupness because people tend to *like* others whom they believe to be similar in tastes, attitudes, and values. Since they are characterized by inherited membership and (purport to be) founded on descent, ethnic groups offer a *greater* sense of similarity than groups founded on other premises. Shared genetic origins and early socialization, namely, are unusually potent sources of similarity and of cues that *signal* similarity, such as appearance, customs, gestures, language, clothing, tastes, and habits” (Cohen 1978: 386-7; see also Ferdman 1992: 343-4; Horowitz 1998: 16-7; Schryer 2001: 207).

What makes their sense of similarity all the more powerful is that (real or perceived) common ancestry makes members of ethnic groups inclined to think about this similarity in terms of kinship and family resemblances. The *language* of ethnicity, for example, is

usually the language of kinship: group members often address each other as “brothers” or “cousins”. Often, ethnicity can also *in fact* be viewed as a form of greatly extended, segmented kinship. “As an ascriptive affiliation”, Horowitz explains, “ethnicity is defined by congeries of family relationships, and ethnic ties are therefore pyramided on family ties . . . Some small ethnic groups are nothing more than agglomerations of kinship clusters, and many larger groups are aptly described as composites of subgroups . . . which consist in turn of networks of extended families” (Horowitz 2000: 59).

Their close association with kinship ties makes ethnic ties suffused with overtones of familial duty (Horowitz 2000: 59-60). From the viewpoint of individuals in ethnically plural societies, there may even be no meaningful boundaries between the bonds and duties associated with kinship and those with ethnicity. The virtual equation of both kinds of ties, explains why ingroup members tend to regard ethnic group membership as implying both the *right* to presume upon other ingroup members as well as the *duty* to help them in times of need or distress: “The supplicant who runs out of cousins to help him would seem likely to turn, as a matter of course, to persons of the same ethnic background. Ethnicity and kinship thus overlap in a quite direct, operational way: the former builds on the latter, the one is often confused with the other, and behaviour in one sphere is extended into the other” (Horowitz 2000: 61).

The groupness of ethnic groups is further stimulated by the “stickiness” of ethnic characteristics. That is, the characteristics or markers with which ethnic groupmembers signal their membership to others –e.g. skin colour, hair type, height, name, language, accent, place of birth and origin, gestures, clothing, habits- are often difficult or even impossible to change due to their high *visibility*: they can often be easily ascertained through such superficial data sources as the name, speech, features or dress of individuals and seldom require more careful observation and background research (Chandra 2006: 18-9). By complicating and constraining identity obfuscation or identity change, the stickiness of ethnic characteristics contributes to the groupness of ethnic groups: it

forces group members to identify with their particular ethnic group, even if they would rather not do so.

The expectation that passive representation might translate into active representation in the case of ethnic groups finds support in some empirical evidence.⁵¹ Selden found that African American, Hispanic and Asian American officials of the Farmers Home Administration in the US were significantly more likely than outgroup colleagues to award rural housing loans to ethnic ingroup clients (Selden 1997a; Selden 1997b). Similarly, Hinderer found Black and Hispanic investigators in the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to be more likely to file formal charges of employment discrimination for complainants of their own racial groups than outgroup investigators (Hinderer 1993a: 421-2). And Meier and Stewart found a higher number of African-American teachers to be associated with fewer African-American students in EMR (educable mentally retarded) classes and more African American students in gifted classes. African-American teachers were also positively associated with higher test scores of African-American students (Meier and Stewart 1992). These studies thus suggest that ethnically identified bureaucrats may act in the interest of ethnic ingroup members and that passive representation has more than symbolic value: ethnic representatives in the bureaucracy may indeed turn out to be more trustworthy deliverers of public policy outputs to ethnic ingroup members than outgroup bureaucrats (cf. Lim 2006: 198; Selden 1997a: 136).

If representative bureaucracy works in the ethnically plural contexts of American bureaucracies, this would seem to bode well for the likelihood of the occurrence of active bureaucratic representation in the plural societies of the developing world, where

⁵¹ The studies cited here have all been premised on the idea that active representation may be believed to be occurring when decision-making behaviour on the part of ingroup bureaucrats is statistically associated, and thus “systematically affects”, resource allocation to ingroup clients (Selden 1997b: 29). Consequently, the theory of representative bureaucracy is regarded as verified if bureaucracies with different levels of representation produce different policy outputs (*ibid.*: 22). I discuss the design and conceptualization of active representation in these studies, as well as some problems associated with them, in more detail in chapter 4.

ethnic identity is *particularly* strongly felt and strong ethnic allegiances tend to permeate organizations, activities and roles to which they are formally unrelated (Horowitz 2000: 7). Differently put, active representation would seem to be the *expected* role behaviour of bureaucrats in the new states of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean.

Indeed, students of third world bureaucracies have tended to depict ethnicity as a rich source of particularistic pressures acting on civil servants in these countries. The literature, in fact, abounds with observations of the pressures placed on ethnically identified bureaucrats to act as agents –“uncles”, “brothers”, “fathers”- for their extended kin and ethnic group within the administrative system (cf. e.g. Hyden 1983: 79; Riggs 1978; Wertheim 1978). Bureaucrats confronted with requests from ingroup members appealing to kinship bonds are conventionally described as finding such requests very difficult to refuse. Not only are bureaucrats often socialized to a sense of preferential obligation to ingroup members, they also fear group sanctions if they fail to provide the sympathetic treatment that group members tend to expect as a matter of right from “one of their own” who has succeeded in achieving a position from which favours may be dispensed (Esman 1999).

“In such a context”, as Donald Price puts it, “particularistic behavior on the part of the bureaucrat is, from a personal point of view, highly rational, since to violate social expectations in a society where social relations are centrally valued and in which individual existence outside of group membership is practically unthinkable, would be to court social, psychological, and even material disaster” (also see Bates 1983: 162-3; Price (1975), cited in Cohen 1980: 78-9).⁵² Clients of bureaucracy may not to be very sympathetic to fellow ingroup bureaucrats who “hide” behind administrative rules or the norms of specificity, universalism and affective neutrality that idealtypically govern the relations between bureaucrats and their

⁵² Kennedy cites a black American (not, incidentally, identified as a bureaucrat) who aptly describes how fellow ethnics tend to perceive group members inclined to downplaying or shedding ethnic advocacy roles: “[M]any . . . maintain that something would be *wrong* with me if I did not sense and express racial pride, racial kinship, racial patriotism, racial loyalty, racial solidarity” (Kennedy 1997, emphasis mine).

clients (cf. e.g. De Zwart 1994). They might readily perceive this as opportunistic defection, an attempt to duck ethnic duties and, thus, as deserving of punishment (cf. Bates 2005: 9).

Bearing in mind that it is very restricted in geographical scope, the evidence collected by representative bureaucracy scholars seems generally supportive of the assumption that ethnic groups possess *relatively high* groupness. The fact that studies have commonly found evidence for a linkage between passive and active representation for ethnic groups while typically failing to do so in the case of female bureaucrats, for instance, suggests that the groupness of ethnic groups tends to be higher than that of sex-based groups.⁵³ Meier and Nigro -in a 1976 study which, incidentally, measured the representativeness of American federal bureaucrats' *attitudes* rather than their behaviour- found that, even if "demographic variables" generally fared poorly as predictors of the attitudes of higher civil servants, race was still the "most important trait" (Meier and Nigro 1976: 465).⁵⁴

However, the accumulated evidence also suggests that high ethnic groupness cannot be taken for granted. On the contrary, it indicates that the salience of ethnic identity to bureaucrats and, hence, the groupness of ethnic groups may *vary substantially across*

⁵³ Initial tests of representative bureaucracy theory for "sex" (that is, women) failed to find any evidence for a linkage between passive and active representation (Hindera 1993b; Selden 1997a). A few recent studies, however, claim to have established active representation by female bureaucrats: by female supervisors in child support agencies; by female teachers and administrators in Texas high schools; and by female police officers in the 60 largest metropolitan counties in the United States (Keiser et al. 2002: 559-60; Wilkins and Keiser 2006).

⁵⁴ Meier and Nigro's data came from an original survey conducted in July 1974. The "higher civil servants" whom they discuss are a ten per cent random sample of so-called "federal supergrades" (GS 16 to GS 18). Meier and Nigro's usage of the term "race" is rather implicit, referring to either "minority" or non-minority membership. The "demographic variables" other than "race" included "urbanism", "occupation father", "first occupation", "education", "age", "sex" and "region". The issues for which they scrutinized said bureaucrats' attitudinal representativeness were space explorations, environmental protection, health care, urban problems, crime control, drug abuse, education, improving the condition of minorities, national defence, foreign aid and welfare (Meier and Nigro 1976).

groups, political realms, and policy issues, as well as over time. Sally Selden, in her study of the U.S. Farmers Home Administration, reported *differing levels* of active representation for various ethnic groups. While finding statistically significant linkages between passive and active representation for African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, she found the linkage to be *strongest* for African Americans (Selden 1997a: 32-36; Selden 1997b: 103-7). Students have also come across ethnic groups for which active representation simply *failed to occur*. Selden, for instance, while finding ethnic distributive effects for the ethnic groups mentioned above, did *not* find a linkage between passive and active representation for Native Americans. Likewise, Hindera, in his study of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, did find linkages for African Americans and Hispanics but *not* for “Whites” (Hindera 1993a: 426). And Dennis Dresang, in a noteworthy study of Bemba (a large tribal group) bureaucrats in Zambia, also could not establish a linkage between bureaucrats’ ethnic identities and development expenditures.

Dresang’s study also highlights the apparent possibility that ethnic groupness may fluctuate across what might be called “realms” of political activity. Dresang seems to have been rather puzzled on finding no linkage between passive and active representation for Bemba bureaucrats. After all, as he observed, in Zambia at the time, ethnicity was generally observed and recognized as being the *politically* most salient attribute: the country’s leaders routinely appealed to geographic constituencies and tended to politicize “ethnic orientations” rather than, for instance, class differences. Zambian political parties were also organized along ethnic lines. But, as Dresang observed, this high, presumably all-pervading salience of ethnicity in electoral politics turned out, quite unexpectedly, to be a poor predictor of ethnicity’s salience in bureaucratic decisionmaking. On the contrary, development expenditures did *not* flow disproportionately to provinces where the Bemba thrived but, rather, revealed a strategy of striving for rapid and *balanced* growth *regardless* of ethnoregional factors (Dresang 1974; cf. also Thompson 1976: 220-1, n. 13).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ What makes Dresang’s finding all the more intriguing is that the Bemba

The salience of ethnic identity may also vary across issues and over time. Meier and Nigro's statistical analysis of American federal civil servants' attitudes towards twelve policy areas showed that "race" had a "direct impact" on eight of them, implying that ethnic identity *did not* affect bureaucrats' attitudes towards the remaining four (Meier and Nigro 1976). And Meier, Pennington and Eller, in a recent partial re-examination of active representation in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission studied earlier by Hinderer (Hinderer 1993a; Hinderer 1993b), claim that the level of "representational effectiveness" by black employees in the 1980s as documented by Hinderer had "declined significantly" by the late 1990s (Meier et al. 2005: 175-6).

Taken together, the evidence from representative bureaucracy scholarship suggests that the groupness of ethnic groups, their ability to make their members act in the group's interest, is not fixed but, rather, that it is *itself* a variable (cf. Hechter 1987: 8). Or, as Dresang summed up his Zambian findings: "Classifying people according to their circumstances of birth or language is [. . .] not grouping them according to any criteria *necessarily* related to administrative behaviour or attitudes an ethnic group *cannot rely* on representation in the bureaucracy as a resource for effectively pursuing group interests" (Dresang 1974: 1613, 1617, emphases mine).

effectively *dominated* the upper echelons of Zambian bureaucracy, that is, the very echelons where decisions on development expenditures were being made. The Bemba, constituting 31 per cent of Zambia's population, supplied no less than 50 per cent of the Heads of Departments, and 38 per cent of Superscale positions (supervisory posts, including the Heads of Departments, the equivalent and above) (Dresang 1974: 1611).

3 The Question of Untouchable Groupness

1 Problematizing untouchable groupness

The theory of representative bureaucracy developed in chapter 2 essentially postulates that two necessary conditions must be met if passive representation is to translate into active representation: (1) bureaucrats must have discretion, and (2) the groupness of represented groups must be high. Since discretion, as I have argued, is virtually *inherent* to bureaucratic organization, a lack of discretion will not usually prevent the occurrence of active representation. Lack of discretion also seems quite unlikely in the case of India's bureaucracy. In fact, ever since the self-styled "guardians" of the colonial Indian Civil Service provided the "steel frame" of colonized India, Indian bureaucracy has almost been synonymous with discretion. After independence, the Indian government's pursuit of planned economic development stimulated the emergence of many new developmental, administrative hierarchies with vast and wide-ranging regulatory powers and discretion (Frankel 1978; Frankel 1997; Mathur 1991: 639). "In a 'license' *Raj* [government, bvg] in which permits and permissions are required for virtually everything", writes Rajeev Dhavan, "government servants soon became possessed of the kind of absolute power that corrupts absolutely" (Dhavan 1997: 276).

Bureaucratic discretion is involved both in routine administrative decision-making and in the policy-making process. From the mid-1960s onwards, politicians in Delhi and the states have come to heavily rely on their own "secretariats" staffed by

trusted bureaucrats. Placed in between the political executive and the regular administrative hierarchy of ministries and departments, these secretariats have come to function as parallel administrations, making them into major power centres and interest groups in their own right (Brecher 1966: 118; Frankel 1997: 371-2). Indian bureaucrats are thus powerful, enjoy high status and form, as Paul Brass has put it, “the leading elements of a vast dominant class” (Brass 1995 (1990): 57).

The considerable discretion invested in India’s bureaucratic apparatus indicates that many untouchable bureaucrats have the *opportunity* to display actively representative behaviour. Whether they will actually utilize their discretion to promote the interests of untouchable ingroup members will thus primarily depend upon the groupness of untouchables; upon the extent to which untouchable group membership is capable of commanding their loyalties and of making them act in fellow untouchables’ interest.

By indicating or revealing the variable groupness of ethnic groups, the findings from representative bureaucracy scholarship discussed in the previous chapter chime in with so-called constructivist approaches to ethnic identity. Constructivist approaches, which have gained wide prominence across the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, political science, history and literature, contest primordial conceptions of ethnic groups as inevitably “real, substantial things-in-the-world” (Brubaker 2002: 164). Rather than adopting a primordialist, “hard” view of ethnic groups as ascriptive, persisting, affective, clearly identifiable, immutable, firmly bounded entities inherently commanding considerable loyalty from their members, constructivists adopt a “soft” perspective (Horowitz 1998: 2). They prefer to see ethnic groups as constructed, contingent, malleable, unstable and fluctuating (Brubaker 2002; Chandra 2001a; Chandra 2001b; Horowitz 1998).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Note that I, following Chandra, use the label *constructivist* to group together an array of perspectives on ethnic identity alternatively also referred to as “situational”, “instrumentalist”, “institutionalist” or “postmodernist” (Chandra 2001b: 358-9, n. 1). Though their agreement on the proposition that groups are constructed and their ensuing challenge of primordial, “stable group being” conceptions of ethnicity warrants the use of a common label,

Group identification and groupmaking, according to constructivists, are *purposive* activities involving the exercise of choice on the part of its presumed or aspiring members. Ethnic group identities are not necessarily transhistorical essences “thrown upon” group members but may equally be far more temporary consequences of individuals’ conscious, purposive *choices* to belong to and identify with certain groups. Rather than by a diffuse, hardly escapable, primordial affection, group identification may, at least to a considerable extent, be informed by instrumental or strategic considerations based on expectations or calculations of material, symbolic or psychic rewards.

Constructivist accounts often emphasize the important role that, as Brubaker calls them, “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” may play in ethnic group construction. Paul Brass, for instance, views ethnic groups as “creations of elites, who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves” (Brass 1991: 8). By thus *invoking* ethnic groups, as Brubaker puts it, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs “seek to *evoke* them, summon them, call them into being” (Brubaker 2002: 166).

Another insight developed by constructivists is that ethnic group construction not only involves self-identification, or “inscription”, by ingroup members but also “ascription”, that is, the ethnic categorization of individuals *by others*. A popular constructivist argument is, for instance, that many of the ethnic groups in postcolonial societies that are commonsensically assumed to have “traditionally” populated these societies, are actually not

constructivists are otherwise a highly diverse bunch. Developed in sharply differing traditions of social analysis -ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, social network theory, cognitive theory, feminist theory, rational choice and game theory- constructivist work shows a wide variety of, even contradictory, analytical styles, methodological orientations and epistemological commitments (Brubaker 2002: 164-5). Also note that the constructivists’ scapegoat, primordialism, is not a very explicit, elaborate perspective on ethnic identity. It is, as again Chandra explains, “found more often as a commonsensical assumption informing arguments about other questions than as an explicit argument in itself” (Chandra 2001a: 7).

very traditional at all: they are often better understood as constructions of colonial officials who, by stimulating ethnic heterogeneity and interethnic animosity among colonized people, sought to create favourable conditions for the continuation of their rule (cf. e.g. Pandey 1990).

More cognitive strands of constructivism explain ethnic ascription as a result of individuals' need to make sense out of a complex world. Ethnic ascription is useful in this regard since ethnic identities are "easy to think" (Pierik 2004: 526). Ethnic ascription may also result from group members' efforts at achieving "positive identity". By identifying "other" ethnic groups in their environment and attributing unfavourable traits or lower qualities to outgroup members, ingroup members may try and boost or reaffirm their self-esteem (see e.g. Abrams and Hogg 1990b; Hogg 1992: 91-2; Pérez and Mugny 1990: 153; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel 1982b; Tsui et al. 1992: 550). To constructivists, then, "ethnic identities are neither ascribed nor achieved: they are both. They are wedged between situational selection and imperatives imposed from without" (Eriksen 1997: 57).

Constructivists, to be sure, do not rule out that ethnic groups *may* in fact display "hard" qualities and high groupness; what they *do* argue, however, is that high ethnic groupness is not an inevitable, natural, primordial, essentialist given. Put differently, high ethnic groupness, according to constructivists, is merely a *potential*, perhaps unlikely, probably temporary outcome of people's identification choices.⁵⁷ Just as ethnic groups may have homogenous preferences and fixed boundaries, they may *also* have heterogeneous

⁵⁷ On the basis of a close reading of constructivist approaches, Chandra concludes that constructivists differ considerably as to the likely stability of ethnic identifications. She contrasts those who argue that ethnic identities are constructed and reconstructed mainly through "major historical and institutional transformations" and who thus expect ethnic identifications to be stable in the short run to those "who argue that ethnic groups occupy a 'zone of occult instability' even in the short term" (Chandra 2001b: 345). She cites Nelson Kasfir (1979) as a representative of the latter view: "Identifying someone as a member of an ethnic category at a particular time and in a particular place does not mean that, for political purposes, he will continue to hold that identity in other times and at other places and other times [sic] . . . if categories are fluid, identity may shift dramatically not only from one category to another, but from ethnicity to class to religion" (ibid.).

preferences and porous or malleable boundaries (cf. Chandra 2001b: 337). Whereas primordialists, to paraphrase Horowitz, tend to see ethnic affiliations as made of stone, constructivists prefer to see them as potentially made of putty (cf. Horowitz 1998: 2).⁵⁸ Their claim of uncertain ethnic groupness also has repercussions for the way constructivists view “ethnic demographies”, or *systems* of ethnic group relations (Chandra 2001a: 7). Like ethnic groups, such systems may also be far more contingent, malleable, unstable and fluctuating and less immutable and rigid than commonly assumed in primordially inspired analyses.

Constructivism, as a scholarly approach to ethnic identity, is not a peripheral or marginal enterprise. On the contrary, its central notion that ethnic groups are in fact constructions enjoys wide scholarly consensus and has now virtually become conventional wisdom. Very few social scientists continue to defend explicitly primordialist positions.⁵⁹ At the same time, however, the constructivist consensus is, to a considerable extent, a *seeming*, cosmetic consensus. Even if theories of ethnogenesis, or the *origins* of ethnic groups, are now thoroughly infused with constructivist insights, most theories of the *effects* of ethnic group membership continue to assume ethnic groups as homogenous and stable entities and ethnic groupness as self-evidently high. “While primordialist assumptions have been exorcised from one part of the literature”, notes Chandra, “they reign unchallenged in another (Chandra 2001b: 337-8).

Despite its usual lip-service to constructivism much recent work on ethnic violence, the effects of ethnic heterogeneity and multiculturalism, for instance, continues to assume discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded ethnic groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis (Brubaker 2002: 164; Chandra 2001a: 8-10).⁶⁰ In theories that seek to link ethnic

⁵⁸ Brubaker suggests that ethnicity, or ethnic consciousness, may even be viable in the *absence* of actual ethnic groups, see Brubaker (2002).

⁵⁹ For a scarce exception, see for example Van Evera (2001).

⁶⁰ To illustrate the non-incorporation of constructivist findings, Chandra discusses recent work by Posen (1993), Fearon (1998), Kaufmann (1996) and Van Evera (1994) on ethnic violence, by Shvetsova (1994), Cox (1997), Easterly and

groups to outcomes, then, ethnic groups continue to be cast and treated as unitary collective actors with common purposes to which interests and agency can be attributed. Likewise, plural societies often continue to be *routinely*, rather than *deliberately*, represented as a “multichrome mosaic of monochrome ethnic, racial or cultural blocs” (Brubaker 2002: 164; Chandra 2001a: 8).⁶¹

Representative bureaucracy scholarship, another theory of effects of ethnic group membership, is no exception in this regard. Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, representative bureaucracy theorists have largely continued to assume primordially high ethnic groupness. Though findings in line with the constructivist argument of variable groupness have occasionally been reported, these subsequently tend to be ignored. Representative bureaucracy scholars, like their colleagues in other substantive fields, have shown remarkably little enthusiasm to pick up on constructivist insights in subsequent empirical research or to incorporate them in the theory’s core. Nor have they allowed these insights to affect their proposed cures and policy prescriptions.

Selden’s plausible hypothesis that Native Americans’ apparent low groupness might be caused by crosscutting tribal loyalties within the broader category of Native Americans, for instance, seems to have gone wholly unnoticed.⁶² It has not stimulated fresh and potentially very fruitful research, as suggested by Selden, on the effects of “intra-minority group differences” for active representation (Selden 1997b: 37). Dresang’s proposition, following his observation

Levine (1997), Collier (1998) and Alesina, Baqir and Easterly (1999) on the effects of ethnic heterogeneity, and by Kymlicka (1995) on multiculturalism (Chandra 2001a: 8-10).

⁶¹ The tendency to see ethnicity and ethnic demography in such “groupist” terms is, as Brubaker notes, not restricted to scholarship on ethnicity. Though specially prevalent in the study of ethnicity, race and nationalism, groupism also continues to pervade the study of “gender, sexuality, age, class, abledness, religion, minority status, and any kind of ‘culture’, as well as putative groups based on combinations of these categorical attributes” (Brubaker 2002: 164). The exception proving the rule is probably the study of the working class, “a term”, says Brubaker, “that is hard to use today without quotation marks or some other distancing device” (Brubaker 2002: 165).

⁶² Specifically, she wonders whether “Cherokee civil servants actively represent the interests of Comanche tribal members?” (Selden 1997b: 37).

of non-occurrence of active representation for Zambia's Bemba, that careerist ambitions may play havoc with ethnically identified bureaucrats' inclinations for active representation in otherwise very ethnitized contexts has met with a similar fate (Dresang 1974: 1615). Apparently undisturbed by constructivist-type findings of variable and low groupness, representative bureaucracy scholars (including, intriguingly, Selden) continue to *indiscriminately* defend and advocate ethnic group recognition and affirmative action measures on the grounds that they "may lead to different allocations of resources to minorities", even if their own research indicates that they may fall well *not* due to apparently low groupness of bureaucratically represented groups (Selden 1997b: 36).⁶³

Evidently, the non-incorporation of constructivist insights – whether unwitting or deliberate- can do great harm: it is bound to negatively affect the predictive power of our theories and the effectiveness of the cures and prescriptions distilled from them.⁶⁴

⁶³ There are probably a number of reasons why the incorporation of constructivist insights in various substantive fields has not progressed at the fast rate that the scholarly constructivist consensus would lead one to expect. Incorporation, first of all, is made difficult by the fact that constructivist insights and findings have not so far been codified. There are no authoritative, paradigmatic texts spelling out "the" cumulative constructivist findings. "In the absence of such a codification, new entrants in this subfield are required each time to reinvent the wheel, and it is not surprising that many have ended up resorting to more primitive modes of transport" (Chandra 2001a: 11). Secondly, scholars employing quantitative methods may be less than enthusiastic about incorporating constructivist insights because of the modelling-difficulties they create. Group stability, after all, is easier to model than group instability (Chandra 2001b: 345). Thirdly, constructivist insights may not be welcomed by scholars who have made careers out of studies that take ethnic groups as their basic units of analyses. Welcoming constructivism, so they may fear, might imply saying goodbye to their basic units. Finally, constructivism may be construed by some as incompatible with their political beliefs. Some representative bureaucracy scholars, for instance, testify to a concern for the plight of minority –racial, ethnic and gender- groups and, accordingly, openly advocate special measures such as affirmative action for them. Constructivist findings of low minority groupness are probably not very popular among them, since these may be felt to question the validity, that is, the expected effectiveness, of such measures.

⁶⁴ I concur with Nelson Kasfir that "imposing false concreteness on the boundaries of ethnic solidarity" may produce "a generous measure of unreality" (cited in Chandra 2001b: 345).

Therefore, to avoid such dangers, in this chapter I will make an explicit attempt to *problematize* the groupness of the group under study, India's untouchables. Drawing from the literature on caste and untouchability and from the wider social science literature, in this chapter I will discuss some potential implications of untouchability, or untouchable group membership, for the groupness of untouchables.

In doing so, I will steer a middle course between narrowly primordialist and extreme constructivist positions. Thus, I will assume that ethnic groups such as India's untouchables may indeed be fruitfully seen as groups, not -as the extreme constructivist position would have it- as merely cognitive figments of people's constructive imaginations. In line with the findings from the literature on representative bureaucracy discussed in the previous chapter, I will also assume that ethnic groups, as compared to other kinds of groups, may command relatively strong loyalties from their members, that is, generally tend towards high groupness. At the same time, I explicitly allow for the possibility that untouchable groupness may vary over time and according to context. In line with constructivist insights and with the largely implicit evidence supplied by some representative bureaucracy scholars, I also make a deliberate effort to conceptualize ethnic and untouchable group identification as a purposive activity involving the exercise of choice.

2 Caste and untouchability

Until now I have treated caste as if it were simply one of the various criteria -like language or race- that ethnic groups may use to determine whether or not some individual qualifies as a member. Castes, however, represent a *special type* of ethnic group since they both resemble and differ from most ethnic groups in potentially important respects. Untouchables, in turn, are a very special kind of

caste since they possess an attribute -untouchability- typically lacking in other castes and ethnic groups.⁶⁵

The word "caste" is derived from the Portuguese word *castas*, used by Portuguese seafarers trading on India's west coast in the 16th and 17th centuries to describe the various groups of Indians they encountered. Caste is a translation of two quite different indigenous concepts, *varna* and *jati*. When caste is used as a translation of *jati*, it refers to endogamous kin groups with a traditional occupation, their own particular name, and a hereditary membership. Indian individuals thus cannot choose their *jati*; they are born into it and remain a member of their named *jati* throughout life. The basic sense of *jati* is that of a group of people who are in some fundamental way alike because of their common origins, and fundamentally different from people who do not share these origins and therefore must belong to another *jati* (Quigley 1993: 4).

Beyond this basic sense, *jati* is an extremely relative and elastic concept. Depending on context, *jati* may refer to a more or less inclusive group. While in one context it refers to people's lineage, in another it may refer to all the lineages with whom they can intermarry (Quigley 1993: 5). *Jati* identity thus follows the segmentary principle. In its most localized sense, people use *jati* to refer to small endogamous groups of people, seldom numbering more than a few thousand, with the same name, spread over a few adjacent villages. On a regional scale, *jatis* are clusters of local *jatis*, while in the context of a state or the nation, *jatis* are clusters of regional clusters of local *jatis* (De Zwart 2000: 236). The 1086 untouchable "castes" that the Indian government has singled out for preferential treatment, for instance, are mostly regional *jati* clusters, while a few are state-wide caste clusters. Though to outside observers the boundaries of *jatis* may seem fluid, for insiders they

⁶⁵ Untouchability, as a code of restrictive and prescriptive behaviour pertaining to contact with or presence of polluted outcastes or things associated with them is not *unique* to Indian castes, however. Untouchable pariah groups associated with dirt, death, and blood can also be found elsewhere in Asia. Examples are the Eta or Burakumin in Japan, the Ragyappa in Tibet, and the Paekchong in Korea (De Vos and Wagatsuma 1966). What sets Indian untouchability apart from these other manifestations are its scale, complexity and the elaborateness of its protective codes.

are clearly defined; from the context in which the term is used, anyone can usually infer who is, in fact, an ingroup member and who is not. This contextual variability of group boundaries is far from typical for castes. Ethnic group identity also frequently follows, as I pointed out in chapter 2, the segmentary principle.

What castes and ethnic groups also have in common is that both are extended kin groups. Kinship ties extend from one's family to localized lineages (families close to one in patrilineal descent and in residence), through to wider groupings such as the clan (or *gotra*) and the members of one's *jati* (Mandelbaum 1995: 134-5). Idealtypically, in the world of caste all of life's major and minor decisions -whom to marry, what one does for a living, where one lives, what one eats and who with, which forms of address one employs for different categories of people- are regulated by kin (Quigley 1993: 87). Since a person's *jati* encompasses all his kin -"its limits are the limits of his kinship relations"- kinship ties both characterize and bound the *jati* (Mandelbaum 1995: 158).

In India's villages -where almost three-quarters of Indians live- *jati*-members typically form one's set of actual or potential kin. They are instrumental in melding one's career and define the range of one's kinsmen and closest companions. Though villagers also interact with people from other *jatis* and even develop friendships and close relations with them, these relations are very seldom so close, deep, and unquestioned as the ones entertained with fellow *jati* members (Mandelbaum 1995: 43). A person's closest ties -those of marriage and kinship- are restricted to members of his *jati*, so that "his life and aspirations are intertwined with theirs" (Mandelbaum 1995: 15).

Like other ethnically plural societies, Indian society is thus divided into different kin groups, called castes. This similarity of ethnicity and caste suggests that caste-identified bureaucrats -like other ethnically identified bureaucrats- may also experience strong group-ties and will feel inclined to become their castes' active representatives. Castes, however, also differ from most other ethnic groups in a possibly significant respect. What sets Indian caste society apart from most other ethnically plural societies is that it is not merely *divided* into different castes but that the relations between

the various castes –that is, the caste *system*– are furthermore governed by hierarchy. While separated, Indian castes at the same time constitute a *hierarchy* of groups, ranked as relatively superior or inferior to one another.

The most influential theory to account for these twin features of the caste system is Louis Dumont's who has claimed that there is one "single true principle" which informs both separation *and* hierarchy and provides its invariable structuring basis. This principle is "the opposition of the pure and the impure". It is the application of this principle, says Dumont, which both *legitimizes* the hierarchy of castes, "which is the superiority of the pure to the impure", as well as *explains* their separation –since "the pure and the impure must be kept separate" (Dumont 1998 (1970): 43; Quigley 1993).

The relative purity and impurity of castes arises from their traditional occupations and stick to castes as a whole. All members of a jati thus share its rank in the hierarchy, regardless of whether they perform its traditional occupation (De Zwart 2000: 236). Most impure and polluting are those castes whose traditional occupations involve *specialization* in tasks connected with death and bodily emissions. Traditional occupations such as skinning animal carcasses, tanning leather, making shoes, playing in musical bands (especially on leather drums), butchery of animals, removal of human waste, attendance at cremation grounds, and washing clothes, result in the attribution of "a massive and permanent impurity" (Dumont 1998 (1970): 47; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998). Since their traditional occupations are associated with such permanent impurity, the untouchable castes rank lowest in the hierarchy.

In order to justify the grading of jatis in terms of ritual purity, Indians often refer to a model developed in the ancient Hindu scriptures of the subcontinent such as the *Vedas* (1500-1000 BC) and the *Manavadharmashastra* (first century AD). This model provides the second indigenous concept, *varna* (which literally means colour), that the term caste may refer to. The classical *varna* model is a binary scheme based on the following principles. "Human beings are either within the society or outside it; if they are within society

they are either superior persons (twice-born)⁶⁶ or ordinary persons; if they are twice-born they are either holy men (Brahmins) or secular men; if they are twice-born secular men they are either princes or merchants" (Leach 1968: 10-11).

This ancient varna model thus provides the familiar five-layered idealized hierarchy of *Brahmins* (priests and scholars), *Kshatriya* (rulers and soldiers), *Vaishya* (traders and merchants), *Shudra* (agriculturalists and artisans) and polluted outsiders, or *avarna* (castes outside the varna system; the untouchables). It is from this varna model, that the distinction between *outcaste* (*avarna*) untouchables and *caste* (*savarna*) Hindus is derived.⁶⁷ Since the varna model represents an ideological, idealized hierarchy, the model's five categories are not groups in the way birth-ascribed jatis are. Nevertheless, many Hindus accept the varna categories as the primordial makeup of their society and the idea that "the world is actually made up of units called jati any one of which can, in theory, be slotted into one of the more embracing varna categories, or into the residual category of untouchables" (Quigley 1993: 7). As a result, the varna scheme is still widely used to explain a particular jati's structural position in the hierarchy of intrinsic purity and as a handy gross classification of others (De Zwart 2000: 236; Leach 1968: 11; Mandelbaum 1995: 22).

Untouchables are assigned the lowest positions in the caste hierarchy. Over the centuries Hindu society devised an elaborate system of prohibitions, prescriptions and sanctions to ensure that they stayed there, were kept at a proper distance and constantly reminded of their lowness. Practically everywhere in "traditional" Hindu society untouchables were not allowed to draw water from

⁶⁶ Twice-born persons are persons who, according to Hindu precepts, are entitled to a second birth at the end of their lives.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, the original varna model represented by the Vedas had only four varnas; the untouchables had no place in it at all. The initial absence of the untouchables from the varna scheme may have been due to the later emergence of untouchability as a social condition: untouchability is sometimes thought to have sprung into existence in the second century AD, a thousand years after the establishment of the varna principle (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 5-6). The traditional literature, in any case, discusses the untouchables in far less detail than the Brahmins, unsurprisingly perhaps, since it was Brahmins who authored it (cf. Béteille 1977: 38).

the main village wells, nor to enter high-caste temples.⁶⁸ Their use of various other public facilities such as roads, marketplaces, schools and tea shops was prohibited or, at any rate, severely limited.⁶⁹ In some areas, the distances that untouchables had to keep between themselves and higher castes were precisely laid down. In rural India, untouchables lived in their own quarters –most of them still do-, ideally situated at some distance from the other castes in the main settlement.

In certain places untouchables could not own land, at least not permanently, and it was very common for artisans and other specialists, such as barbers, washermen, carpenters and blacksmiths, to refuse their services to them. Caste Hindus could not accept cooked food and water from untouchables, nor share meals with them.⁷⁰ Untouchables publicly emphasized their lowliness by submissive acts and deferential behaviour: lowering of eyes and voices, touching the feet of high castes, asking questions beggingly, using disproportionately honorific forms of address to high castes

⁶⁸ Scholars -misguidedly taking, perhaps, Brahmin informants' normative accounts for empirical manifestations- for a long time assumed that the caste system as a rigid hierarchy based on ritual purity had existed almost since time immemorial in India, hence the term "traditional" to describe it. Contemporary historians, however, tend to dismiss the notion of the caste system as "something ancient" surviving in "traditional" villages. Some argue that the traditional caste system as we know it may only have started taking on its familiar shape from the early nineteenth century onwards. "Traditional" caste society may not be so very traditional, that is very old, after all (Fuller 1997b: 4-6).

⁶⁹ Untouchable road use was a particularly disabled affair. Sometimes it was simply forbidden. In some places untouchables could only use the road if no one else was in sight. Elsewhere, high caste people would warn untouchables of their approach by shouting, so as to enable them to disappear out of sight. In other places it was the untouchables who had to do the shouting. In some areas in west India untouchables, to avoid polluting the road, had to carry brooms or thorny bushes to brush away their footprints in the dirt behind them as they passed. There were also places where untouchables were made to carry little pots around their necks to keep the ground reserved for pure, caste Hindu spittle only (Deliège 1999; Isaacs 1965).

⁷⁰ The caste hierarchy is also a dietary hierarchy: notions of purity also apply to food which, therefore, too is ranked: vegetarianism ranks highest, followed by eggs, fish, chicken, mutton, pork, beef and, last of all, carrion. Untouchables eat beef and carrion and, if only for this reason, higher castes could not share meals with them (cf. Deliège 1999: 104).

and of contemptuous forms for self-reference (“my monkeys”, for instance, for one’s children). Untouchable women sometimes could not wear ornaments or finery. Untouchables often could not use or enjoy status symbols such as umbrellas, shoes, sunglasses, or horse-rides and music at weddings (Deliège 1999: 89-115; Isaacs 1965: 27-8).⁷¹

If compliance with these prescriptions and proscriptions was not voluntarily forthcoming, there was no shortage of sanctions. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act contains a catalogue of such sanctions -called “atrocities” in the Act: forcing untouchables to drink or eat inedible or obnoxious substances; dumping excreta, waste matter, or carcasses in their premises or neighbourhood; forcibly removing their clothes, parading them naked or with painted face or body; occupying or cultivating land owned by untouchables or dispossessing them from it; exacting *begar* (unpaid labour); sexual abuse of untouchable women; and fouling untouchables’ drinking water (Government of India 1989: 3-4). Torture and house-burning were also popular (Deliège 1999: 113).⁷²

⁷¹ It is obvious that high castes’ concern for maintaining ritual purity cannot explain all of the above disabilities: some of them were patently secular (the prohibition to wear sunglasses, for instance), intended, as it seems, more to remind untouchables of their *inferior*, rather than their impure, status (cf. Deliège 1999).

⁷² Since its adoption in 1989, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, has attracted steady litigation. These figures, collected by the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, suggest that atrocities like murder, grievous hurt, rape and arson, have far from disappeared. Besides, in 1996 more than 83.000 court cases under the Act were still pending.

Offences Committed under the Untouchability (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989), 1992-96

Type of offence	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Murder	343	293	391	380	409
Grievous hurt	760	796	965	1011	887
Rape	264	288	406	348	363
Arson	274	307	412	380	351
Other cases	6167	3276	4357	5075	3929

Source: Fourth Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1996-1997 and 1998-1999, Volume II, 24: Uttar Pradesh

Unsurprisingly, extreme poverty and powerlessness were an integral part of the untouchable condition. Differential ritual status translated into differential access to the good and valued things in life such as land, well-paid jobs, political and administrative office, good and enough food, shelter, medical care, education, justice, esteem, and pleasure (Berreman 1979: 75). To this day, Indian caste – both “high” and “low” – still has a profound effect on individuals’ opportunities in terms of education, occupation, residence, and social interaction (Jenkins 2003: 13). Consequently, untouchability, as a group attribute, continues to be powerfully associated with cumulative deprivation.⁷³

3 From untouchable to ethnic minority

Whereas the above, rather formal, account of caste and untouchability may illustrate where the untouchables have tended to find themselves in the larger scheme of things – the bottom, that is –, it tells us nothing about untouchables *as a group*: about how they tend to relate to each other, for instance, or how they try to cope with their peculiar situation. As a consequence, we learn little about the groupness of untouchables.

Though illuminating, the ethnographic literature on Indian untouchability does not provide a clear-cut picture or agreed upon model of untouchables as a group. Based on a close reading of the untouchability literature Michael Moffatt, in an influential contribution, identified *three* such models (Moffatt 1979: 9-31). The three models are all preoccupied with the question of cultural and ideological differences between high and untouchable castes. Knowledge of such differences is important because real or perceived outgroup differences are the flip side of ingroup similarities which, as we have seen, produce groupness. Put differently, ingroup favouritism, solidarity and interpersonal

⁷³ The term is T.K. Oommen’s (quoted in Delière 1999: 7).

loyalties will only develop when ingroup members perceive *other* groups as present in their environment (cf. Tajfel 1978: 10).⁷⁴

What Moffatt calls the *outcast model* portrays the untouchables as a people with a distinct culture. This culture primarily distinguishes itself from that of higher castes by its looser and freer approach to life. Unlike high castes, untouchables do not favour “ascetic control” of sexuality in marital relationships and, again unlike high castes, they put little emphasis on “otherworldliness” and on the fate of the soul after death. Engaged, as most of them are, in the practical business of earning a living through manual labour, untouchables care more for health and prosperity in *this* life. Untouchables are not only different from caste Hindus, they also fundamentally disagree with them. They do not rise to the bait of high caste religious mystifications and purity notions that purport to legitimize the caste system. Untouchables, in fact, plainly take the caste system for what it, essentially and actually, *is* -a system of oppression- and actively resent finding themselves at its bottom. If they, nevertheless, act in accordance with its codes and etiquette, it is only because they are *forced* to so act.

The *diversity model* also stresses the contrasts between untouchables and high castes but does not picture the untouchables as outrightly rejecting high-caste culture. Instead, it discerns a tendency on the part of untouchables to *selectively adapt* that high caste culture to suit their own needs or interests. A good example is the refusal of some untouchables to apply the Hindu doctrine of karma to their own lowly status.⁷⁵ Such refusal is useful to them since it enables them to avoid the psychological anxiety of having to admit that they deserve their untouchable status as a consequence of unusually wicked acts in past rebirths.

⁷⁴ The socio-psychological connection between inter-group comparisons and ingroup favouritism receives detailed elaboration in the work of social identity theorists like Tajfel, Abrams and Hogg (see e.g. Abrams and Hogg 1990b; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel 1982b).

⁷⁵ The *karma* doctrine is closely linked with two other doctrines; those of *dharma* and transmigration. Taken together, these doctrines postulate that one's caste status in a given birth is the result of the total score of one's good or bad *karma*, or “action”, in accord with one's *dharma*, or “duty”, as circumscribed by one's membership in a given caste (Moffatt 1979: 15-6).

Moffatt's *unity model* draws substantially from Dumont's theory of caste which, as I wrote earlier, sees the caste system as a continuously graded status order expressed in a cultural code of relative purity and impurity. According to Dumont, the extremes of this order -the pure Brahmins at its top and the permanently polluted untouchables at its bottom- constitute a complementarity: *both* unequally ranked parts are equally necessary to complete the "whole", or unity, of the caste system, since it is only because the untouchables take care of executing the impure tasks that the Brahmins can maintain their purity. Given the vital role played by them, untouchables are *at the very core* of the Hindu caste system, rather than -as the outcaste, varna model has it- outside it.

The unity model thus posits that the untouchables are a regular and essential part of the caste system and *share* in its common culture and ideology. They do *not*, as the outcaste and diversity models stress, constitute a category of their own: they are not "outcastes" with a separate subculture or their own particular "view from the bottom". On the contrary, even though they appear to benefit the least from it, untouchables are in fundamental consensus with the caste system and "possess and act upon a thickly textured culture whose fundamental definitions and values are identical to those of more global Indian village culture" (Moffatt 1979: 3).⁷⁶

Evidently, the three models suggest different levels of untouchable groupness, decreasing progressively from the first to the third model. The untouchables of the outcast model -bearers of a

⁷⁶ Moffatt's own ethnography of untouchables in a village in the South Indian state Tamil Nadu is an impressive, systematic empirical adstruction of this unity model. For Moffatt, however, the "fundamental cultural consensus" of untouchables is not so much borne out by their complementarity, as well as by their tendency to replicate "the entire set of institutions and of ranked relations from which they have been excluded by the higher castes by reason of their extreme lowness". Such "replication is a stronger indicator of cultural consensus than complementarity", explains Moffatt, "since it operates within the Untouchable subset of castes, where the power of the higher castes does not directly operate" (Moffatt 1979: 5). In other words, if untouchables replicate or mimic the caste system among themselves, *even* when they are not forced to do so by those higher up, they must be agreeing with the ideology and practices of the latter.

culture of their own (albeit a repressed one) which sharply differs from and is opposed to the culture of other, higher castes- almost sound like an ethnic group, with the ensuing expectations of high groupness. The untouchables of the unity model, on the other hand, are culturally and ideologically indistinguishable from other castes. Even if they are rather unluckily fated to occupy the bottom of society, they hardly, if at all, constitute a group. The question of their groupness therefore does not even arise.

When it comes to groupness, difference is not everything, however. For their groupness to be high, groups also need to be relatively powerful, that is, capable of inducing their members to promote the group's interests *in the face of* outgroup efforts to prevent them from doing so. Though Moffatt's three models differ in the way they depict untouchables' *valuation* of group power, they do agree on the fact that untouchables, more than any other category of castes, lack the power to act as a group and to pursue their own interests, if they wanted to.⁷⁷ Even if they actively resent their lowly status they cannot usually act accordingly because more powerful high castes can rather easily *force* them to act in *their* interests, if need be through the deployment of the symbolic, economic and physical sanctions discussed above.

Moffatt's models, however suggestive, probably have a rather limited utility in predicting the groupness of untouchables in *contemporary* India. In spite of their substantive differences, these models suffer from a rather static, timeless and abstract – idealtypical- conception of caste and untouchability; a conception hardly warranted by the changes in caste and untouchability that have reportedly occurred since the ethnographic studies from which Moffatt drew were carried out in the 1950's and 1960's.

Perhaps most conspicuous has been the rapid severing of the link between caste and hereditary, traditional occupation (Karanth 1996: 91-2). That occupation is no longer a reliable indicator of a

⁷⁷ Note that to unity model-untouchables, the question of group power is irrelevant: they accept their low status as justified, see themselves as regular, though specific, parts of the wider unitary culture of Hinduism. They feel no need to accentuate their fundamental difference from other, higher castes and, therefore, *do not require* power to be able to do so.

person's caste is conveniently illustrated by the subject of this book - the untouchable bureaucracy- which used to be a *contradictio in terminis*. Students of Indian society also report a distinctive waning of the importance of the purity principle in regulating caste and inter-caste behaviour. Commensality rules, for example, seem to have lost quite a bit of their prescriptive power, even in the rural villages, where they were, until a few decades ago, rather strictly respected. Upper castes are becoming less and less particular about from whom they accept food and water, and with whom they consume it, especially so in contexts and places where interdining is difficult to avoid, such as in restaurants and at public functions (see e.g. Mayer 1997). Also, traditionally vegetarian castes have now begun to eat non-vegetarian food and consume alcoholic beverages - culinary practices traditionally associated with low caste or untouchable status- even if they do not want to be *seen* doing so (Karanth 1996: 97-8).

This ongoing relaxation of purity notions has drastically affected the untouchables. The enforcement of ritual barriers to the use of public facilities and goods such as roads, schools, temples, restaurants, buses, trains and proper clothing has considerably slackened to the extent that today, as Deliège claims, *ritual* untouchability is largely a problem of the past: untouchables can no longer be considered as "untouchable" in the strict sense of the term. Though caste discrimination and the stigma associated with untouchable status have far from fully disappeared, notions of ritual pollution do no longer play a major, or decisive, role in keeping untouchables at the bottom of society (Deliège 2002).

The decreasing importance of notions of purity and pollution in regulating social life and keeping every caste at its proper level in the hierarchy is also reflected in the apparent delegitimization of caste inequality -the purity principle's inevitable concomitant- in public and political discourse. "Today", says Béteille, "anyone who speaks against equality in public is bound to lose his audience" (Béteille (1991: 206), cited in Fuller 1997b: 13). The very use of the terms caste or jati, with their inherent reference to caste inequalities,

is increasingly avoided to the benefit of terms as “community” or *samaj* that suggest equality of castes (Fuller 1997b: 13-14).⁷⁸

The waning of the purity principle as a practical guideline for day-to-day behaviour and as a normative principle for the hierarchical ordering of society and its constituent groups has not necessarily lessened the importance of caste, however. While purity-driven hierarchy is becoming less important as a characteristic attribute of contemporary Indian caste, caste *division*, quite prominently in the form of endogamy, continues. Caste members no longer tend to justify such division by their need to comply with the purity principle, but, increasingly, by claiming that the dietary customs and ways of life of their caste are distinctive and expressive of cultural differences, differences that should not be mismatched by mixing them up with those of other, quite different castes. Membership in a particular caste is, thus, increasingly functioning as a *marker of separation*, rather than as an index of hierarchical rank (Fuller 1997b: 12).

Louis Dumont predicted this tendency of the substance of caste-membership to become gradually more important than its rank in the ritual hierarchy. He referred to this yielding of structure to substance, whereby each caste becomes like a collective individual with its own distinctive culture and way of life, as substantialisation. The logical outcome of such a process, thought Dumont, would be “a universe of impenetrable blocks, self sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another” (Dumont 1998 (1970)).

As far as caste competition is concerned, Dumont’s prediction has certainly been proven right. In the past fifteen years such competition between divided, opposed castes has received a particularly strong impetus from central and state governments’ recurrent granting of reservations to a swelling collection of castes.

⁷⁸ This weakening concern for maintaining ritual purity is not absolute, however. Residential segregation of untouchables in rural and, to a lesser extent, urban India is, for example, still the norm (Mallick 1998). And the use of a casteless idiom in the public sphere may sometimes be taken as a euphemistic, coded way of justifying caste inequality rather than as a condemnation of it (Fuller 1997b: 13-14). Not being able to say what you mean does not mean that you don’t mean what you cannot say.

This caste competition is most easily described as involving three caste “blocks”: the “high” castes -comprising of the upper three, “twice-born” varnas-, the “backward” castes -roughly encompassing the jatis in the lower, but touchable, *shudra* varna-, and the untouchables.⁷⁹ Reservations have not only pitted high castes -typically not among reservations’ beneficiaries- against beneficiary lower castes, but also, and increasingly, backward castes against untouchables. Untouchables, who enjoy a relatively generous package of reservations in comparison to other preferred categories, have not escaped the jealous resentment and, at times, violent antagonism of backward -but often equally poor- backward castes (Deliège 2002).

Besides, quota competition has sponsored the accentuation of intra-block distinctions. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, subsections of backward castes have successfully claimed official recognition -as *most* backward classes (MBCs)- and separate quotas. In a number of states -Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh- such ingroup differentiation is also evident within the untouchable category, where it typically involves relatively small, newly organized, untouchable castes mobilizing their members against one or a few numerous and leading untouchable castes who, they claim, swallow all or disproportionate shares of reserved benefits (Charsley 1996).

The implications of the above changes in inter- and intra-caste relations for the groupness of untouchables seem rather ambiguous. On the one hand, the disappearing link between caste and (polluting) occupation and the waning of purity notions are eroding the very attribute -untouchability- that traditionally distinguished the untouchables from other castes and set them apart from the rest of the population. The competition for valued resources and a share in political power, and the need to safeguard existing reserved benefits from quota-hungry outgroups, on the other hand, continue to provide untouchables with strong incentives to -publicly and

⁷⁹ Note that Indian politicians, government agencies and media do not, as I do here, refer to these blocks in terms of their caste membership; they use official euphemisms such as “general category” (upper castes), “other backward classes” (*shudras*), “most backward classe” (lower *shudra* castes) and the familiar SC (scheduled castes; untouchables).

politically- cultivate their separateness, difference, and identification with untouchability. On the other hand, these tendencies toward “varna-level” salience of untouchability are, again, counteracted by intra-varna, inter-jati differentiation. Traditional, and persisting, endogamous divisions between untouchable jatis, are reinforced or supplemented by new divisions as a result of the competition for valued resources and preferential benefits (cf. Charsley 1996: 16-17).

What *does* seem clear, however, is that, irrespective of the precise level of untouchable group salience –jati or varna-, untouchables are increasingly able to pursue their own interests. As testified by their involvement in “horizontal” caste competition, untouchables have stopped being, as a matter of course, the subordinated and powerless category they used to be. Though they remain overwhelmingly poor, untouchables *are* succeeding in carving out more than a modicum of political power for themselves. This new reality of untouchable power is, perhaps, best illustrated by the ascendancy of the “untouchable” party BSP. In the 1990s, this party, even if for two brief periods, effectively controlled the state government and provided the Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh –my fieldwork state- where upper caste Brahmins and Thakurs have traditionally dominated politics and the bureaucracy.⁸⁰

One might argue that castes are gradually beginning to resemble ethnic groups in, what Horowitz refers to as, *unranked* systems of group relations: they are separate –because different- while, unlike before, the question of group superiority is no longer settled, neither ideologically, nor empirically. Hence, to refer to caste as a ranked, interdependent “system” of group relations characterized by fixed and rigid rules and roles and by *inevitably*

⁸⁰ Though the BSP (*Bahujan Samaj Party*, or “party of the common people”) has been most influential in Uttar Pradesh –where it controlled the state government in 1995, 1997, 2002-3 and is also currently (2007) in control- it has also gained influence in other states, like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. The BSP is now, avowedly, India’s third-biggest national party. Initially casting itself as an exclusively “dalit”, or untouchable, party, its leadership is now increasingly targeting all Indian minorities –Muslims, tribals and backward castes- even fielding upper caste candidates. The party’s two charismatic leaders Mayawati and Kanshi Ram († 2006), however, are untouchables.

differential distributions of power, status, mobility opportunities, and access to valued resources is increasingly inappropriate (see Karanth 1996: 106). One consequence of this system-conversion is that untouchables can no longer realistically be seen as an actively rejected pariah group (cf. Barth 1996 (1969)); their present status has begun to become akin to that of a “normal” minority group: comparatively backward, subordinated and held in rather low esteem by other castes, but no longer so by definition or principle.

4 Active representation and ethnic minority elites

Horowitz’s distinction between ranked and unranked systems suggests a last complex of potential implications of untouchable identity for contemporary untouchable groupness. Horowitz’s distinction rests upon the coincidence or noncoincidence of social class with ethnic origins. “Where the two coincide, it is possible to speak of *ranked* ethnic groups; where groups are cross-class, it is possible to speak of *unranked* ethnic groups” (Horowitz 2000: 22). In other words, whereas in ranked systems stratification is synonymous with ethnic membership and mobility opportunities are restricted by group identity, in unranked systems parallel ethnic groups coexist, each group internally stratified (*ibid.*: 23).⁸¹ One of the accompaniments of the ongoing, gradual shift in Indian caste society from a traditional, almost perfectly idealtypical, ranked caste system to a substantialized, unranked system composed of different, mutually opposed blocks of sociologically close jatis is that, today, the traditional ritual rank of castes no longer fully predicts the class of its members.⁸² Put differently, class stratification is becoming increasingly evident *among* the untouchables.

⁸¹ Needless to say that Horowitz intends these systems as idealtypes: in the real world, boundaries between them are often blurred. Apart from the traditional caste system, other examples of ranked systems are relations between Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi, between Burakumin and other members of Japanese society, between Rodiya and other Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, and between the Osu and other Ibo in Nigeria (cf. Horowitz 2000: 22-3). Most systems of group relations, however, are unranked.

⁸² Even in its “traditional” guise, the caste system did allow for mobility

In India, government jobs are relatively scarce, secure, well-paid and often involve substantial perks and privileges (Hasan 1998: 50). Since, at the same time, the availability of well-paid employment in the private sector has historically been extremely restricted, Indian bureaucrats, almost by definition, find themselves in the highest class strata.⁸³ Untouchable bureaucrats are, therefore, not simply upwardly mobile, they, in fact, form the most significant segment of a tiny but growing untouchable elite. Since it is these very elite, untouchable bureaucrats who representative bureaucracy theory expects to become active representatives, the question of untouchable identity's salience *to them* becomes a pre-eminent one. Put more abstractly, are there reasons to expect that ingroup class stratification might differentially affect the salience of ethnic minority identity to its members?

As far as I am aware, this question is seldom or never approached head-on in the literature. Nevertheless, two broad but

and there are historical examples of low castes who attempted (and managed) to escape their ritually determined rank and, hence, class. Such attempts often involved what the Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas has called "sanskritization", or the adoption of ritually informed high caste practices, such as the observance of pollution for a certain number of days at birth, death, menstruation, the birth of a calf, the death of a cow; seeking the services of high caste priests to perform purificatory rites; the adoption of vegetarianism; wearing of the sacred thread (common among twice-born Hindus) and abstention from widow remarriage. For untouchables, the first step towards social mobility through sankritization, was usually the refusal to continue carrying out their traditional polluting duties - moving dead cattle, playing funeral drums, clearing away night soil- and to give up on other marks of pollution, such as eating carrion (Srinivas 1959: 3-4). Colonialism presented low castes with alternative routes to improve their status and position. The decennial colonial census, introduced in the late nineteenth century, recurrently offered opportunities to low castes for officially claiming and, sometimes, getting higher status. Some untouchables became domestic servants of European families, others -though their numbers were few- secured employment in the colonial police force or the army (Deliège 2002: 8). It was also the British who first introduced reservations for low castes, including untouchables (then referred to as "depressed classes"), in political institutions and in the civil service.

⁸³ This explains why Indians are, as Mendelsohn and Vicziany put it, "obsessed" with government employment -hundreds of thousands of Indians participate in the annual competitive examinations to enter the civil service (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 133)- and why reservations in the public service are so eagerly sought after.

distinct views of the relationship between ingroup class stratification and ethnic minority identity salience can be distilled from it. These might respectively be called the “optimistic” and the “pessimistic” view. The optimistic view, exemplified by theorists of multiculturalism and many representative bureaucracy theorists, holds that class differentials are unimportant, if not irrelevant, to ethnic minority identity salience and, hence, to a person’s proclivities towards ingroup-sympathy and favouritism. The pessimistic view, on the other hand, holds that class stratification *is* associated with variable salience of ethnic minority identity. It expects, in fact, such salience to be *inversely related* to individuals’ class: the higher one’s class, the lower the salience of ethnic minority membership.

Multiculturalists, as we have seen, stress the importance of cultural group membership –that is, cultural background and culture-bound experiences- as primary bases of individuals’ group identification. They assume that, since ethnicity is a highly potent source of shared culture, ethnic minority members, irrespective of class, will readily identify with their ethnic group, if given the opportunity to do so (hence multiculturalists’ advocacy of guaranteed representation for minority groups in political institutions) (cf. Meier 2000). Multiculturalists thus subscribe to what Michael Hechter has called a *normativist* account of group salience: people act as -ethnic minority- group members because they approve of, or have internalized, their group’s distinctive set of rules, norms, preferences and ways of doing things. It is this very fact of a shared culture, rather than its specific content, which explains and guarantees identity salience (Hechter 1987: 8).

Most representative bureaucracy theorists, too, accept that identity salience comes about as a result of shared background and socialization experiences and is cemented by the similarity of values, attitudes, and beliefs produced and passed on in the process. Some go one step further, however, and argue that the “linkages [between passive and active representation, bvg] should be *much firmer* for members of minority groups” (Selden 1997a: 116). Though no further explanation is usually provided, the assumption underlying this expectation seems to be that minority status –and

the subordination and low esteem these typically bestow- provides group members with an *additional* similarity: a *common interest* in pushing their group higher up the social hierarchy. Hechter refers to this idea -that people who are in the same boat, that is, share group-determined social status, will tend to act as group members and display corporate solidarity- as the *structuralist* account of group salience. Individuals, according to this account, coalesce into solidary groups not because they, as the normativist account has it, carry group norms within them, but because they share common individual interests (Hechter 1987: 4-5, 9).⁸⁴

Whereas the optimistic view stresses cultural or structural similarity as all-important, or ultimate, bases of ethnic minority identity salience, the pessimistic view emphasizes *choice opportunities*. This view, associated with the social identity theory of Henri Tajfel and associates and with some critical representative bureaucracy theorists, regards ethnic minority identity first and foremost as a *negative* identity. The negativeness of ethnic minority identity is well illustrated by the habitual use of denigrating stereotypes by outgroup members to describe, and deny prestige to, minority members.⁸⁵ Negative identity, the pessimistic view holds,

⁸⁴ Since structuralist accounts *infer* common interests from the structural positions of groups, this means that they impute common interests and, hence, corporate solidarity to *all* similarly structured groups, not only to lowly ranked minorities. Marxist theory, a notable example of structuralist theorizing, for example, not only expects the proletariat to mount a struggle against the bourgeoisie -its exploiters-, but also expects the bourgeoisie -united by a common, structurally induced common interest- to defend the status quo which, by definition, serves it well.

⁸⁵ Sometimes the very names by which ethnic minority groups are known by dominant outgroups constitute such negative stereotypes. Japan's Burakumin, for example, were formerly known as Eta, meaning "full of filth" and are still sometimes referred to as *Yottsu*, meaning four and connoting four-legged beasts. Similarly, the Tausag of Sulu, in the Southern Philippines, refer to a neighbouring group as Samal Luwaan, luwaan meaning "that which was spat out" (that is, rejected by God). Stereotypes often take the form of "contrast conceptions", or embodiments of all the vices disdained by superordinate groups. The substantive content of stereotypes, furthermore, is usually a good indicator of the *extent of minoritization* of particular groups. "Parallel" groups in unranked systems often use stereotypes that allow for the simultaneous affirmation of ingroup superiority and acceptance of limited spheres of

is highly *problematic* to those so identified: it invites (and legitimizes) discrimination by outgroup members and creates acute self-image and self-respect problems among minority individuals (Tajfel 1978: 9).⁸⁶ Consequently, minority group members usually have good reasons for ingroup disidentification, for trying to diminish or drive off the salience of minority group membership to themselves, especially so in stringently ranked systems.

Pursuing disidentification may be far from easy or obvious, however. Whether minority members can or will pursue it is to a large extent a matter of opportunities and constraints. More powerful and resourceful majority groups, for example, may actively seek to discourage or prevent minority disidentification. Since the status quo of skewed group-relations bestows them with high status and “positive identity”, majority groups have, of course, good reasons for trying to maintain it. The shedding of minority identities may also be complicated by the stickiness of attributes that signal minority status. It is, for example, usually hard to disidentify from skin colour. Apart from such objective constraints, cognitive factors may also thwart disidentification. Minority members, regardless of the actual opportunities for it, may simply *believe* disidentification, whether individually or collectively, to be impossible and, therefore, not even worth trying (Abrams and Hogg 1990a: 4-5; Tajfel 1978).⁸⁷ In systems of total subordination or dependence *the idea* of disidentification may not even crop up.⁸⁸

outgroup superiority. Sri Lankan Sinhalese, for example, regard Tamils as both poor and dirty, *as well as* thrifty and diligent (Horowitz 2000: 26-7).

⁸⁶ Tajfel, for instance, discusses experiments which show that minority children “at ages from six or so to eleven” have already developed “outgroup preferences” (cf. Tajfel 1978: 10-11).

⁸⁷ Such a belief may be premised on the -tested or untested- assumption that one will continue to be treated as a minority member as long as one shares the defining criterion of the minority, *regardless* of eventual individual mobility (e.g. becoming a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor, a factory manager, or a foreman) (Tajfel 1978: 5). In case of tested assumptions it would, of course, be more appropriate to speak of knowledge rather than belief.

⁸⁸ Children, for example, will usually find it impossible to sustain cognitive alternatives to the status quo of parent superiority. In extreme cases, minority members might not even *want* to contemplate disidentification because of their belief that existing status-distributions correspond to some principle of justice that they happen to subscribe to, even if obedience to it does

Depending on the concrete mix of real and perceived opportunities for disidentification, as well as on such personal characteristics as abilities, temperament and luck, minority group members may choose to cope with their negative identity in various ways. If they have or perceive no possibilities to influence or change the status quo of their group's negative identity, they cannot but *accept* (or, identify with) their unenviable minority status.⁸⁹ Minority members with a modicum of room to manoeuvre, in turn, may try to *withdraw* as far as possible from wider society and restrict their stereotype-driven interaction with members of superordinate outgroups.

If superordinate groups do not impose constraints to individual mobility and allow minority members to freely interact with them, this will give minority members a good chance to attempt *assimilation* into majority society (which, if successful, might eventually result in the *de facto* disappearance of the minority group in question). When superordinate groups allow individual mobility but, at the same time, continue to regard successful, upwardly mobile minority members "as typifying in some important ways the unpleasant characteristics attributed to their group and at the same time as 'exceptions to the rule'", minority members may have to settle for *partial assimilation*, that is being considered as equal by outgroup members in some respects and as inferior in others (Tajfel

not seem to benefit them. This is how the unity-model of untouchables discussed above accounts for the non-occurrence of outcaste-type disidentification among rural village untouchables.

⁸⁹ Minority members may, nevertheless, sometimes *choose* to accept minority status even if they might theoretically avoid doing so. The reason is that, in some ranked systems, benefits may accrue to minority members who accept their lowly status. Such systems often contain elements of reciprocity and clientage that underpin the systemic premise of inequality: minority members who accept this premise can typically expect some protection in exchange for services rendered to members of superordinate groups. In the "traditional" Indian caste system, for instance, untouchables often maintained regular exchange relationships with other castes from whom they received a measure of protection (e.g. assistance in times of famine) as well as specified material benefits (food, clothing) in exchange for their performance of polluting menial tasks. This system of prestations and counterprestations is usually referred to as the *jajmani* system. See e.g. Gould (1977) and Berreman (1979) for informative descriptions.

1978: 14-15). A special variant of partial assimilation is *passing*, or hiding the fact that one *is*, in fact, a minority member. This option is, of course, not available to members of minority groups with sticky attributes. It is only when individual mobility and full or partial assimilation is (perceived to be) largely impossible, that minority members might resort to the adversarial, common interest-based collective action (Tajfel calls it *social competition*) to achieve a separate-but-equal-status which structuralist exponents of the optimistic view expect to occur *as a matter of course*.

The pessimistic view of the relation between ingroup class stratification and ethnic minority identity salience is pessimistic in that it expects such salience to be inversely related to individuals' class. This expectation follows from its twin assumptions that 1) ethnic minority identity is a negative identity which stimulates disidentification, and 2) that such disidentification is primarily a function of choice opportunities. Evidently, because they have more power, money, and friends in high places minority elites have more choice opportunities than less fortunate minority members. Not only can they be less easily pushed around or kept in their proper place by majority members, they also have less reason than ordinary minority members to believe that one cannot change one's destiny: they themselves are living proof that presumed minority destinies *can* be defied. Ethnic minority elites, thus, have more opportunities to disidentify with their group and will -given the negativeness of their identity- not hesitate to avail of them. As a result, other things being equal, ethnic minority identity will be least salient to its best-placed members.

Some critical representative bureaucracy theorists expect this very logic to dampen, if not foreclose, the likelihood of active representation. They argue that individuals who move into privileged administrative positions from relatively disadvantaged background will, at some point in their careers, find they have few good reasons to continue their identification with the group into which they were born. In order to be able to adjust more effectively to the demands of their new ambitions, many will want to escape their past: they will make deliberate efforts to adopt and support the interests and values of superordinate groups to which they now, at

least in part, belong, rather than those of their “original”, ethnic minority group. Bureaucratic employment’s association with individual upward mobility, these theorists expect, may thus produce “something of a paradox”: bureaucracies inhabited by officials from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds may, nevertheless, represent a striking homogeneity of interests and values (Béteille 1991: 596; Mosher 1968: 95; Peters 1989). It is this paradox, they argue, which “shakes to the foundations the basic arguments for representative bureaucracy” (Subramaniam 1967: 1014).

The available evidence on elite untouchables’ inclinations for (dis)identification is largely indirect and circumstantial and, almost without exception, does not pertain directly to untouchable bureaucrats.⁹⁰ It adds up to a rather mixed picture, neither fully endorsing nor fully disproving either of the two –optimistic and pessimistic– views. Since their emergence in the mid-nineteenth century, untouchable elites all over India have, with varying degrees of success, inspired, led and cooperated in a bewildering array of efforts to improve the social status, self-view and material conditions of the untouchables and to cope with, critique and attack “Brahminical” ideology, oppression and discrimination.⁹¹ These have included organized boycotts and abandonments of stigmatizing activities, habits and occupations; advocacy of the emulation of upper caste religious, cultural and dietary practices⁹²; untouchable leaders’ strong emphasis on behavioural self-

⁹⁰ The exception is Nandu Ram’s study *The Mobile Scheduled Castes:: Rise of a New Middle Class* (Ram 1988), to be discussed shortly.

⁹¹ The tiny, local untouchable “elites” which emerged in the mid 1900s consisted largely of those who had taken advantage of the new employment opportunities offered by colonial rule, such as soldiers or policemen in the colonial armies and constabularies, and domestic servants in the households of European families. Their numbers quickly swelled after the Indian national government’s granting of reservations in higher education, the civil services and political assemblies in the 1950s.

⁹² Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, for instance, describes the efforts, in the 1870s, of the headmen of the Namasudra caste in Bengal to have the members of their caste adopt such upper caste practices as the observation of eleven days mournings, child marriage and widow celibacy (Bandyopadhyay 1994: 24-5, 26).

improvement and the importance of education, refined and “cultured” speech and manners, and of modern dress and cleanliness; the shedding of stigmatizing surnames and the adoption of new, “pure”, “untouched” positive ones⁹³; collective conversions to other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism⁹⁴; the joining of (seemingly) egalitarian Hindu sects⁹⁵; the creation of various untouchable “religions”⁹⁶; public burnings of the *Manusmriti* (an ancient document considered the basis of Hindu

⁹³ Examples of such (attempted) name changes are many. They include the adoption of the name Balmiki (after the author of the Hindu epic Ramayana) by members of the Chuhra caste in the Punjab (Judge 2003: 2990), of Raidas (after a medieval Chamar saint) by Chamars in Uttar Pradesh (Cohn 1987 (1955): 262) and of Chokmela (after their own fourteenth century poet-saint) by Mahars in Maharashtra (Zelliot 1992: 91).

⁹⁴ Large scale conversions to Christianity occurred, for example, in south India from the 1870s onwards (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 78), but also in north western Punjab where, in the 1880s, the Churhas started going over to the United Presbyterian Church in such large numbers that “missionaries did not have time to deal with every request” (Deliège 1999: 162). Less common mass conversions to Islam have, among others, involved (sections of) the Mappillas in what is now Kerala (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 87), the Namasudras in Bengal (Bandyopadhyay 1994) and Churhas and Chamars in the Punjab (Judge 2003: 2990). Sizeable sections of the latter two castes have also converted to Sikhism. Conversion to Buddhism is primarily associated with the Maharastrian Mahar caste. Having repudiated Hinduism as irredeemable shortly before his death in 1956, Dr. Ambedkar –the famous untouchable leader and himself a Mahar– led hundreds of thousands of Maharastrian untouchables in a mass conversion to Buddhism (roughly 75 per cent of the Mahar population became Buddhists within a period of a few years) (Gokhale 1986; Jaffrelot 2003). The Buddhist conversion movement also caught hold (and is still alive) elsewhere; among some scattered untouchable groups in Uttar Pradesh, for instance (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 116-7).

⁹⁵ Most notably of the so-called *Arya Samaj*, a Hindu organization specializing in the reconversion (*shuddhi*) of low castes.

⁹⁶ A well-known example was the so-called *Ad Dharm* (“original religion”), founded in the 1920s by the Chamar university graduate and schoolteacher Mangu Ram in the Punjab. Around the same period also elsewhere (in some UP towns, for instance, as well as in south India) untouchable leaders crafted similar religious systems, all based on the proposition that the untouchables were the original (i.e. *ad(i)*) inhabitants of India and, hence, were in need of a creed of their own to resurrect their original identity (Deliège 1999: 167; Gooptu 1993; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 79, 102; Rawat 2006).

law) and other classic Hindu texts; temple entry movements; the invention of glorious caste histories; the circulation of subversive fables, folklore, songs and untouchable myths of origin that blame untouchables' untouchability to some original wicked or deceitful act by others; literary and poetic attacks on the varna system and assertion of *acchut* or *dalit* (untouchable) pride, anger, hate and pain⁹⁷; the formation of untouchable caste federations, employees' unions, welfare organizations, schools and political parties; claimmaking for an independent untouchable state (to be called *Achutistan*, a country for untouchables); the celebration and deification of (historical) untouchable heroes; the electoral targeting of untouchable constituencies; the crafting of political and cultural alliances with other low castes, and policy advocacy (most notably of the introduction, extension and continuation of reservations) (cf. e.g. Bandyopadhyay 1994; Deliège 1993; Deliège 1999; Deliège 2002; Gokhale 1986; Gooptu 1993; Gupta 2001b; Jaffrelot 2003; Jeffrey et al. 2004; Kutty 2006; Lynch 1969; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998; Narayan 2001; Narayan and Misra 2004; Nigam 2000; Omvedt 1995; Pai 2000; Pai 2002; Pandey 2006; Rawat 2006; Zelliott 1992).

The fact that untouchable elites are and have been known to identify with their caste's cause and to pursue its interests, does not mean that they -as the optimistic view suggests- do or have done so *as a matter of course*. Many instances of untouchable assertion have been episodic, short-lived and quite restricted, both geographically and in terms of the scope of untouchable jatis involved. Besides, as Harold Isaacs' perceptive study of untouchable elites (politicians, scientists, bureaucrats and teachers) carried out in the 1960s suggests, elite identification may be the exception rather than the rule. Isaacs found many of his informants to be *passing*, that is, they hid their caste identities in public whenever they safely could, and

⁹⁷ Probably the best-known anti-establishment literary movement to have sprung up among the untouchables were the Dalit Panthers (after the Black Panthers in the United States), a rather short-lived (though much-studied) movement in Bombay in the early 1970s. Dalit Panthers came from among the first generation of untouchable youth to have received educational benefits and most of them were Mahar Buddhists (cf. e.g. Contursi 1993: 325-7). Since the late 1980s, Dalit literary expression has shown a dramatic increase in the Hindi-speaking North (Wilkerson: 1).

identified as untouchables only in private or whenever else they could not avoid doing so (Isaacs 1965).

Subsequent and recent studies have largely corroborated Isaac's findings. G.G. Wankhede, for example, in a study of 150 upwardly mobile untouchables in Delhi, found *less than half* of them open about their caste identity (five of his respondents were, in fact so furious of being approached as untouchables that Wankhede "was asked to get out and doors were banged") (Wankhede 1999: 38-9). Saavala found lying about their jati or giving the impression of belonging to some higher group to be "common for middle class Malas" in the south Indian city of Hyderabad. (She even heard of Malas who had managed to form marriage alliances without revealing their untouchable identity) (Saavala 2000: 9). Less than 10 per cent of Nandu Ram's sample of 240 untouchable bureaucrats of various jatis in the central UP city of Kanpur "were not hesitant to identify themselves with their caste". More than a third said they were not willing to disclose their background "to any one on any occasion", while more than half of them did not carry any surname after their first name to avoid identification as untouchables (Ram 1988: 95, 97, 100). Most of Ram's respondents passed whenever possible, identified (in the sense of acknowledging, not emotionally committing) whenever useful (e.g. in order to benefit from reservations) or obvious (e.g. among family members).

Nowadays, if Robert Deliège is to be believed, such laborious disidentification strategies are no longer imperative. Since power and wealth take away a great deal of their social stigmas, present-day, rich and powerful untouchables, he argues, are simply "no longer really" untouchables (Deliège 2002: 6). This suggests that, to elite untouchables, the identification dilemma *itself* has become obsolete: they can routinely and effectively *escape* untouchable group membership through the porous group boundaries at the top.

In sum, the literature discussed here does not amount to a consistent, unequivocal expectation of untouchable groupness and, hence, active representation by untouchable bureaucrats. Though the untouchables may readily be considered a distinctive *category* of castes and individuals bound, as they are, by a common history and

experience of untouchability, the question of their groupness remains largely unanswered. Whereas some insights, trends, models and findings discussed above point to increasing or high groupness, others suggest it to be low or decreasing. High time, therefore, to take a look in the real world.

4 Favourable Conditions

1 Introduction

Even if bureaucrats have discretion and the groupness of represented groups is high, active representation may still not occur because of “an impressive array of influences [that] can debilitate linkage between passive and active representation” (Thompson 1976: 217-8): bureaucrats may occupy organizational positions that provide little leverage to influence agency outcomes, for instance, or work in agencies with jurisdictions that have little salience to ingroup members (Meier 1993a: 397-8). Likewise, there may also be influences and circumstances that *facilitate* active representation. Most representative bureaucracy theorists agree on at least four of such facilitative characteristics of bureaucratic organizations: a sympathetic mission, salience of a bureaucracy’s policies to passively represented groups, a critical mass of group-identified bureaucrats and street-level discretion. The dust-level rural development bureaucracy presented itself as a suitable case for enquiring into the linkage between passive and active representation because it possesses all four of these features and thus constituted a case where active representation was *most likely* to occur (cf. Keiser et al. 2002: 556).

The Indian rural development bureaucracy was created after independence, in the 1950s, to implement and monitor the central government’s newly adopted strategy of planned development in rural areas. Since then, it has developed into an intricate and elaborate hierarchy of offices and posts, extending all the way from “the center” -the federal government in New Delhi-, down to India’s innumerable rural villages. What I call the “dust-level” rural

development bureaucracy comprises of the two lowest echelons of the Indian rural development bureaucracy: the rural development *blocks* and the village development officers. The bureaucrats manning these echelons have been entrusted with carrying out a wide-ranging and varying package of centrally- and state funded rural development and poverty alleviation programs, ranging from the introduction and promotion of agricultural innovations (e.g. new seeds and fertilizers), the provision of elementary needs (drinking water, housing), the improvement of local infrastructure (roads, village assembly halls), to the creation of employment and educational opportunities. In the process, district-level bureaucrats (DLBs) select beneficiaries and allocate and distribute money, material resources, attention, knowledge and information. Nowadays, the programs of the rural development bureaucracy are specially targeted towards improving the living conditions and life-chances of the rural poor.

In this chapter I will discuss the active representation-friendly features of the district level development bureaucracy in some detail. In doing so, I will provide the backdrop for my substantive treatment of this study's central question in the chapters that follow. I conclude this chapter with a brief description of the fieldwork area in the central UP district of Sitapur and a justification for and description of my fieldwork procedures.

2 Sympathetic mission

One factor that representative bureaucracy scholars accept as facilitating the transfer of passive into active representation is a sympathetic organizational mission.⁹⁸ In keeping with their

⁹⁸ A sympathetic mission may be formally defined or informally given. Sometimes bureaucracies are created with the explicit mission to assist some particular group. The Indian Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is a good example. A bureaucracy has an informal sympathetic mission when, through its structures and cultures, it conveys messages about the value and importance of membership in particular groups. Bureaucracies that prominently embrace affirmative action measures or organize diversity trainings, for example, communicate to their employees that

missions, bureaucracies create advocacy roles for the bureaucrats they employ. Bureaucrats working in bureaucracies with missions to assist the groups of which they are members, should therefore almost automatically become active representatives (Selden 1997a).⁹⁹ India's rural development bureaucracy *has* such a sympathetic mission. It implements a large number of programs and schemes to assist the rural poor including most untouchables. Most of these programs, in fact, contain explicit preferential measures for rural untouchables.

The present day rural development bureaucracy grew out of the Community Development Programme (CDP). This program, a brainchild of the American Albert Mayer, was designed and partly financed by the US government under its technical cooperation plan. Officially launched in 1952, it entailed the training and sending into rural India of a "huge army of new-style government men" who were to "awaken village India by encouragement, by demonstration, by offers of material help to those who will stir to help themselves" (Lieten and Srivastava 1999: 20).¹⁰⁰ The program's aim was "to initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life of the villages" and to "bring about an all-round improvement of the villages and those who inhabit them" (Planning Commission, cited in Lieten and Srivastava 1999: 20; president Rajendra Prasad, cited in Maheswari 1995: 41). Each project under the program covered three hundred villages or a population of 300,000 and had a budget of Rs. 650,000 spread over three years.¹⁰¹

ethnic or other group differences are to be recognized, valued and, even, highlighted (Keiser et al. 2002).

⁹⁹ The same goes, of course, for bureaucrats who do *not* share membership with the mission-defined clientele group though they may be, as Keiser *cum suis* suggest, more difficult "to incorporate into the agency's goals" (Keiser et al. 2002: 557).

¹⁰⁰ The official adoption of the community development programme as an all-India programme, was preceded by a few pilot projects in Etawah, Nilokheri and Faridabad (Maheswari 1995: 39).

¹⁰¹ A year after launching the community development programme, the government initiated another programme of rural development, the National Extension Service blocks, which had identical aims and channelled Rs. 750,000 to selected blocks for a similar period of three years (Maheswari 1995: 42).

What eventually emerged all over India was a large scale development structure which simultaneously built upon the existing administrative structure inherited from the British and added new innovations to it. One of these was the creation of a new type of functionary, the village-level worker. In colonial times, each government department had had its own representatives in the village, with little incentives to coordinate their respective programs or activities and often working at cross-purposes. The new village-level worker was to replace these village-level functionaries and to become the joint agent of all departments. Better equipped, trained and paid than his predecessors, the village level officer was to be able to do a better job at inspiring and gaining the confidence of villagers and at solving their day-to-day problems (Maheswari 1995: 207-8).

Another innovation was the creation of a new geographical unit of administration, the development block. Until the early 1950s, the district (an area of in between 1,500 to 7,000 square miles with an average population of around 1.5 million) and the tahsil (or subdivision, encompassing around one-fifth to one-eighth of a district's area) were the lowest units of administration in India. In 1953, the Indian government decided to introduce, nationwide, a new layer of geographical administrative units below the district and tahsil levels, the blocks. These blocks, headed by a block development officer (BDO), were much smaller and territorially compact than the districts. Usually comprising of nearly a hundred villages with a population of 50,000 to 60,000 they were to bring government closer to the people and, thus, to facilitate its developmental interventions and "intensive rural work" (Maheswari 1995: 205). The BDO and his staff were envisaged to "function as a team, constantly consulting one another and exchanging experience and [to] establish the closest contacts with agriculturalists and be their friend and guide" (Grow-More-Food Enquiry Committee, cited in Maheswari 1995: 206-7). By 1963 almost all of India had been covered by development blocks (Kothari 1970: 133, n. 39), causing Jawaharlal Nehru to claim that "nothing has happened in any country in the world during the last few years so big in content and so revolutionary in design as the community projects in India" (Maheswari 1995: 42).

In the first years of its existence, the programs executed by the rural development bureaucracy were designed to be *comprehensive* in nature, that is, to cover as many areas as were deemed relevant and of concern to rural people. "Economic betterment through the improvement of agriculture and expansion of cottage industries was to be pursued side by side with an educational campaign among people of all ages, provision of speedy means of transport and communication, measures for better health, sanitation and medical aid, [and] construction of reasonably comfortable dwellings" (Maheswari 1995: 43). The improvement of agriculture, on which the large majority of villagers depended (and still depend) for their livelihood, received priority attention, however, and was accorded a pivotal position in the CDP (Maheswari 1995: 43).

The programmatic stress on agriculture as a way to promote rural development and tackle rural poverty intensified in the 1960s. Agricultural production was not increasing as quickly as hoped and the Indian government -again with the help of American experts- adopted two new programs to deal with this problem: the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) in 1960 and, in 1967, the so-called New Agricultural Strategy (NAS). Both programs were premised on the idea that food production might be increased through the introduction of new technologies and modern management methods in agriculture. Under the IADP local cooperatives were to supply farm credit, fertilisers, pesticides, improved seeds and farm implements, while the rural development bureaucracy was entrusted with the supply of intensive educational, technical and farm management assistance (*ibid.*: 87-90).

The NAS further elaborated on this idea by stressing the streamlining and mobilisation of agricultural research organisations, the introduction of new seeds, the setting up of a National Seed Corporation and State Farm Corporation, the carrying out of a soil survey program to match the fertilisers (needed for growing high-yielding varieties of wheat) with the soil of particular areas, and increasing attention for water management. Also under the NAS, village level workers received training in the use of the newly introduced technologies and agricultural practices, so that they could disseminate them among the farmers in their jurisdictions

(Maheswari 1995: 87-93). These agricultural policies were quite successful in meeting their avowed aim. Agricultural productivity, in fact, rose so quickly that, by 1969, the Indian government declared the occurrence of a “green revolution”.¹⁰²

Though effective in combating the problem they had been designed to address, the agricultural policies of the 1960s were not a *comprehensive* success. First, the policies had been *intensive* policies, in that, by design, they had been implemented almost exclusively in so-called “well-endowed” districts or areas with a steady water supply, a minimal risk of natural hazards such as floods, few drainage and soil conservation problems, and well-developed village institutions like cooperatives and *panchayats* (elected village councils). This concentrated pooling of financial, technical, extension and administrative resources and development activities led, of course, to a highly differentiated impact of the agricultural policies in various rural areas.

Second, in order to benefit from the new ideas, technologies and practices sponsored by the new programs farmers not only needed knowledge of sophisticated agronomic practices but, also, access to such essential inputs as fertilisers, water and pesticides. Many farmers, however, could not cough up the cash requirements –as much as eleven times higher than the cash required for traditional agriculture- needed for availing of these inputs. As a result, large segments of the rural population could not enjoy the benefits made available under the IADP and the NAS. While many rich farmers and cultivators of large landholdings greatly benefited from the programs –sponsoring the growth of a class of “bullock capitalists”- the position of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and rural artisans remained largely unaffected or even got worse (Maheswari 1995: 101, 127-28).¹⁰³

¹⁰² The NAS, especially, has come to be popularly associated with this revolution (Maheswari 1995: 93).

¹⁰³ The more they profited from the green revolution, the less inclined richer farmers became –as they had commonly done in the past- to lease their land to sharecroppers. In fact, rich farmers increasingly started to buy the plots of land of smaller farmers, thus taking away the major source of the latter’s livelihoods (Maheswari 1995: 127-8). As Elizabeth Whitcombe has summarized the main effect of the green revolution: “Government made *ex-zamindari* [landlording]

From the early 1970s onwards, then, the Indian government's rhetoric and policies increasingly came to reflect a concern for the rural poor who had been largely bypassed by the earlier rural development interventions. Also in response to Indira Gandhi's *garibi hatao* (abolish poverty) campaign and a shift in World Bank lending policies, the federal government rapidly expanded its rural development budgets and introduced a plethora of policies aimed at alleviating rural poverty and improving the life chances of the large masses of rural poor.¹⁰⁴ Apart from reflecting a general shift in policy emphasis from stimulating agricultural growth to combating rural poverty, post-1970 rural development policies also increasingly came to testify to a growing concern for *specific segments* of rural poor. Most policies, reiterating the constitutional directive to state policy "to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of weaker sections of the people and *in particular*

viable in practice. Within a year or two of [its] inception, virtually every district could find a crop of demonstration –the Rai Sahibs with their thirty, forty and hundred acre holdings, their multiplication farms of the latest Mexican wheat and Philippines paddy, their tubewells gushing out 16,000 gallons of water an hour, much of it on highly profitable hire, their tractors, their godowns stacked with fertiliser, their cold-stores, and their groves, their rights over fairs and bazars, their brothers and sons in the civil service and industry, the army and the police sending regular remittances to swell the family accounts in premutiny fashion; in short, a tenth of the *zamindari*, but ten times the income (cited in Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 203). By contrast, the green revolution largely bypassed the small-holders. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, the resources allocated to the SFDA amounted to no more than just 2 rupees per family of five, far too little to make any discernible positive impact (Kohli 1987: 217). Besides, as Atul Kohli has noted, "co-operatives remained entrenched in the corruption-patronage network linking political leaders to local notables. The lower classes got nothing out of them. Commercial banks followed their straightforward policy of land as collateral for loans and were generally accessible only to relatively large landowners. And sharecroppers, by definition, did not qualify because they did not own land" (ibid.: 218-90).

¹⁰⁴ In 1973, the World Bank, quickly followed by other international organisations and donor agencies, announced a shift in its lending policy in favour of schemes to eliminate rural poverty. This sponsored a large scale retuning of rural development programmes into poverty alleviation schemes in many developing countries, including –apart from India- Pakistan and Bangladesh (Maheswari 1995: 131-2).

of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes¹⁰⁵ - came to contain special measures favouring these historically disadvantaged groups, including comparatively attractive subsidies, lenient credit regimes, and quotas reserving fixed proportions of policy benefits for untouchable individuals meeting a given policy's eligibility requirements. Assisting the rural poor, and especially the untouchable poor, thus became, in effect, the mission of India's rural development apparatus in the ensuing decades and has remained so to this day. The following discussion of some of the important centrally sponsored poverty alleviation schemes adopted since the early 1970s illustrates this point.

In its Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969-74), the central government allocated Rs. 115 crore as direct financial support for the amelioration of the economic situation of "small farmers" and agricultural labourers.¹⁰⁶ It launched new programs to improve the supply of machines, farm implements, improved seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, arrange for irrigation from the most practicable sources; improve credit facilities; provide facilities for storing, transporting, processing and marketing agricultural produce; and

¹⁰⁵ The scheduled tribes, or *adivasis*, are India's original inhabitants and roughly constitute 8 per cent of its population, numbering 84 million according to the 2001 census. Tribal peoples are to be found all over India but are most numerous in central India. Though often grouped together with the scheduled castes, or untouchables, for administrative purposes, they differ from them in a number of respects. Unlike the untouchables who live quite evenly dispersed over the sub-continent among the rest of the population, scheduled tribes typically live in hilly regions somewhat remote from caste settlements. Unlike the untouchables, tribals often, but not always, speak their own recognized language. And unlike the untouchables, who have traditionally been an essential part of local caste and economic systems, tribes have tended to form self-sufficient economic units, engaging in swidden farming rather than the intensive farming typical of most of rural India. In practice, the differences between India's castes and tribes may be quite subtle, complex or even non-existent, however. Over time, many tribes have converted to Christianity or moved in the direction of becoming recognized as castes, though their preferential treatment by the government since independence seems to have slowed down this process. In this study, I will be strictly concerned with the scheduled castes, not with the scheduled tribes, who deserve separate treatment altogether.

¹⁰⁶ A crore equals 10,000,000 rupees. "Small farmers" were defined as those possessing landholdings of under two hectares

stimulate diversification into areas like dairying, poultry farming, piggery and goat and sheep rearing (Maheswari 1995: 108-9). Two new agencies, the Small Farmers' Development Agency (SFDA) and the Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Agency (MFAL) were set up to administer these new policies.¹⁰⁷ Untouchables received preferential treatment under these programs. The maximum subsidies doled out by SFDA amounted to Rs. 3,000 for "ordinary" beneficiaries, as compared to Rs. 5,000 for scheduled caste beneficiaries (Maheswari 1995: 109). The government also encouraged the SFDA to identify small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers belonging to the scheduled castes in proportion to their population shares in the project areas (Maheswari 1995: 110).

In 1980 the SFDA was superseded by the ambitious Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) which, even more than its predecessors, was targeted explicitly and exclusively at *all* the rural poor (those below an officially designated "poverty line"), not primarily those engaged in agriculture. Implemented in all the 5,011 development blocks in the country, IRDP covered a wide set of activities, ranging from traditional rural development concerns like agriculture and animal husbandry to minor irrigation, sericulture, horticulture, fisheries, cottage industries, and business activities (Maheswari 1995: 114-5, 128, 134). The decreased attention to agriculture followed from the basic idea behind the IRDP, which was, in fact, to *release* the rural poor from direct dependence on agriculture by providing them with assets –e.g. a buffalo or a small shop- from which they would subsequently be able to derive their livelihood without government assistance. Rural poor, in short, were to be made into small business people (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 161-2). The rural development bureaucracy's role was to coordinate the selection of beneficiaries, provide the money – structured as part subsidy, part loan- needed for procuring the assets and to facilitate the supply of relevant skills and vocational training. Scheduled castes and tribes received substantial preferential treatment under the IRDP: at least half of the assisted families were to be recruited from these categories (Gaiha 1995: 869).

¹⁰⁷ These agencies were merged in 1974.

IRDP's shift of attention *away* from agriculture as a springboard out of poverty was mirrored by an administrative reform of the central rural development structure. Before 1979, the central rural development authority had been the Department of Rural Development, a part of the central Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. In 1979, this embeddedness of the rural development administrative machinery in the agricultural bureaucracy came to an end. A separate, full-fledged Ministry of Rural Development was set up to become the nodal ministry in the area of rural poverty, *particularly* among scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, landless labourers, and rural artisans. The new ministry was given a wide-ranging jurisdiction covering land reforms, village and cottage industries, rural roads, town and country planning in rural areas, elementary and adult education, rural electrification, rural water-supply, housing for the landless rural people, nutrition programs and *panchayati raj* (local self-government). Besides, it became the coordinating authority of the various components of rural development programs for the rural poor, including untouchables, tribals, women and freed bonded labourers (Maheswari 1995: 209-10).¹⁰⁸

IRDP was accompanied by two subsidiary schemes, Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) and Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA), started in 1979 and 1982 respectively. The aim of TRYSEM –still implemented at the time of my field research– was to help poor rural youngsters start their own independent business by providing them with practical training, basic technical and managerial skills, a tool-kit, and a scholarship during the time of training. After completing their

¹⁰⁸ Bonded labour is a slavery-like condition which arises when a labourer accepts “bondage” in exchange for a loan in cash or kind, usually for purposes of subsistence or covering marriage expenses. An individual accepting bondage pledges to labour as a farm servant for a landowner until he has paid off his debt. In India, a bonded labourer often remained bonded for the rest of his life, as the compensation he received for his services would not enable him to discharge of his debt. Over time, in fact, this debt often increased, as a result of which bondage tended to spill over to his offspring, making bondage a permanent and hereditary affliction of entire generations of families (Breman 1993: 8). *Freed* bonded labourers are, thus, by definition poor, since they have never been able to make savings or create assets for private use.

training they would become automatically eligible for IRDP loans and subsidies (Maheswari 1995: 139-40). In the plains districts of Uttar Pradesh, 52 per cent of the beneficiaries were to be recruited from among scheduled caste youths (Government of Uttar Pradesh 1998).¹⁰⁹ The operational goal of the DWACRA scheme was the formation of groups of 15-20 women from poor families, again preferably from scheduled castes and tribes, for delivery of services like credit, skill training, cash and infrastructural support for self-employment (Maheswari 1995: 140).¹¹⁰

Another important program, the *Jawahar Rojgar Yojna* (JRY), was first implemented in 1989. It replaced a number of other existing employment creation programs such as the Rural Landless Employment Programme (RLEP) and the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), but *not* the IRDP. JRY, which soon became India's largest rural development program, absorbing half of all funds spent on this sector by 1994-5, had a dual aim. The first was to alleviate poverty through creating supplementary employment opportunities against officially stipulated minimum daily wages for the rural poor. More concretely, it set out to provide employment to at least one member in every family of the rural poor during the troughs in the agricultural cycle. JRY's second aim was to, *en passant*, create rural infrastructure such as roads, village ponds, school buildings, drainage systems, play grounds and rural markets (Gaiha et al. 1998: 928; Gupta 2005a: 10; Maheswari 1995: 142). As in the programs discussed above, untouchables (and tribals) were JRY's preferred beneficiaries. In Uttar Pradesh, in the administrative year 1998-1999, for example, no less than 60 per cent of the program's total benefits were reserved exclusively for untouchable beneficiaries (with specific sub-quota for untouchable

¹⁰⁹ Until the Himalayan hill districts in the north-western part of the state were formed into the separate state of Uttaranchal in November 2000, the implementation guidelines used by rural development agencies in Uttar Pradesh sometimes had separate rules for "plains" and "hills" districts. I give the percentage for the plains districts because my fieldwork district of Sitapur is situated there.

¹¹⁰ The IRDP and its allied self-employment schemes were restructured into one single, new program known as the *Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna* (SGSY) in April 1999 (Pradhan et al. 2002: 4).

women) (Government of Uttar Pradesh 1998). Another characteristic feature of JRY, to which I will return later, is that it, unlike other programs, largely outskirted the block-level bureaucracy and was directly executed by popularly elected village councils (Maheswari 1995: 143).¹¹¹

Two other relatively recently adopted centrally sponsored schemes, the *Indira Awas Yojna* -or Indira housing scheme, named after former prime minister Indira Gandhi- (IAY), and the Million Wells Scheme (MWS) are aimed at providing essential infrastructure to the rural poor. IAY -which, as we will see, turned out to be a very popular program in Sitapur district- provides people below the poverty line (BPLs) with a substantial subsidy of Rs. 20,000, allowing them to construct their own houses. Along with the subsidy, beneficiaries receive a stove. IAY is specially targeted at untouchables, reserving at least 60 per cent of the available subsidies for them. IAY's primary focus on assisting untouchable beneficiaries is further reflected by the fact that central authorities allocate resources for this scheme to implementing agencies on the basis of the untouchables' percentual share in the population. Under the MWS, disadvantaged categories among the rural poor are provided with free irrigation wells. In terms of financial outlay, this has been one of the more important centrally sponsored schemes, at one point in time amounting to two-thirds of Ministry of Rural Development's budget (Maheswari 1995: 144).

The poverty alleviation schemes discussed above are or have been centrally sponsored schemes, wholly or partly funded by the federal government in New Delhi. The various state governments may also run their own pro-untouchable, rural development programs, however. Starting in 1991, the state government of Uttar Pradesh, for example, has been implementing its Ambedkar Villages Programme (AVP). The scheme was named after the untouchable

¹¹¹ In April 1999, JRY was renamed the *Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojna* (JGSY). Another employment-generation scheme, the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) is continuing alongside JGSY and aims to provide at least two members of poor families with unskilled construction work in lean agricultural season for a minimum of 100 days. It is one of the rare centrally sponsored programmes that do not seem to have special provisions for untouchables and tribals.

leader Dr. Bimrao Ambedkar -the architect of India's reservations for untouchables- and adopted in the year of his 100th birth anniversary. Purpose of this scheme is not so much to provide its own separate benefits to the rural poor but, rather, to *intensify* the flow of benefits under already existing schemes and programs - including literacy drives, electrification, handpumps, pensions, and housing subsidies- to villages with a high proportion of untouchables. By its very name and symbolically charged year of introduction as well as its programmatic content, a state-run scheme like the AVP accentuates the extent to which India's rural development administrative machinery has been charged with a mission to specially assist the poor, rural, untouchable population, thus promising to be a likely arena for the occurrence of active representation.

3 Policy salience

Not all policy decisions are equally likely candidates for influence by a representative bureaucracy. Even if bureaucrats have lots of discretion, they may be exercising it in making decisions about issues that are not likely to affect the interests of passively represented groups.¹¹² For decisions to become the focus for active representation they must concern issues that are likely to be salient to represented groups, by directly affecting their interests and/or having patent ramifications for their well-being (Cohen 1978; Meier et al. 1999: 1026; Thompson 1976: 215). It is hard to see how many of the decisions made by dust-level rural development bureaucrats might *not* be salient to rural untouchables. Many of the benefits allocated by or through these officials -subsidies, loans, training, and infrastructure- would seem to be of great value to poor untouchables and must thus be in high demand.

¹¹² Meier discusses, by way of an example, the position of black employees in the agriculture programs of the United States' Department of Agriculture. They would be hard pressed, Meier argues, to find many decisions that might affect the interests of black farmers, simply because there *are* hardly any black farmers (Meier 1993b: 19).

If Indian poverty were to be defined as the sum of low standards of nutrition, health, housing, general material consumption and formal education, Indian untouchables are overwhelmingly poor. They form disproportionate shares of the landless, of the unskilled labour force, of (seasonal) agricultural labourers, of Indians living below the official poverty line, and of Indians with low calorie intake. And their literacy rate is significantly lower than that of the rest of the population (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998). In 1977-1978 -apparently the last year for which such figures are available- about 70 per cent of the untouchable population was rated "poor", relative to some 56 per cent of the overall population.

The poverty of untouchables is closely associated with their predominant dependence on agriculture. Though most rural untouchables are not, strictly speaking, landless, the plots they *do* own tend to amount to little more than dwarf holdings that generate far too little produce to feed the families owning them (Béteille 1977: 93).¹¹³ More than three out of four untouchables thus try to eke out a livelihood from wage labour and sharecropping, leaving most of them with very little room for discretionary spending and future social advancement (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998).¹¹⁴ Many cannot afford to buy enough food to eat, send their children to school, buy clothes to wear outside the house, and -a problem faced

¹¹³ According to figures presented by Ahmad and Saxena, in Uttar Pradesh untouchables typically cultivate the smallest plots. More than 80 per cent of the smallest landholdings in the state -those between 0 and 2.5 acres- belong to untouchables. Even though the UP untouchables own 15 per cent of all landholdings in UP (indicating that few, indeed, are *totally* landless), they only hold 9.5 per cent of the *area* under cultivation (as against their share of 21 per cent in the state's population) (Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 190-1).

¹¹⁴ Sharecropping is a system of agricultural production where a landowner allows a tenant, or sharecropper, to use the land in return for a predetermined share of the crop produced on it. Though declining, sharecropping still occurs extensively in India (cf. Chaudhuri and Maitra 2000). In Sitapur, farmers call it *batai* (from the verb *bātna*, to split).

by millions of rural poor- to pay off their debts (cf. Krishna 2004: 123).¹¹⁵

The untouchables in Uttar Pradesh are in no way better off than those in other Indian states. By the end of the 1980s, almost half of the state's population was living under the poverty line. Uttar Pradesh lags behind much of the rest of India: it occupies the bottom rank on the Human Development Index and has exceptionally high levels of mortality, fertility, morbidity, undernutrition, illiteracy, social inequality and a slow pace of poverty decline (Drèze and Gazdar 1996: 33; Hasan 1998: 44). For much of its population, "life in Uttar Pradesh is short and precarious" (Drèze and Gazdar 1996: 39).¹¹⁶ Besides, Uttar Pradesh is still very much a caste society in which "high" castes, by and large, continue to combine the privileges of land ownership and ritual status with dominant positions in the agrarian social structure (Drèze and Gazdar 1996: 33).

Poverty makes most untouchables, by definition, permanently short of cash. Since they effectively supply such cash, the programs executed and co-ordinated by the dust-level rural development bureaucracy are of immediate interest to rural untouchables. This cash is, furthermore, supplied in the forms of low interest loans (as in the IRDP), non-repayable subsidies (as in IRDP and IAY) or as wages in exchange for labour (JRY and EAS), all of which would seem to be far more attractive than their main alternative: high-interest loans from private credit suppliers (money lenders). Adding to the attractiveness of rural development programs is the sheer size of the funds allocated through them. The annual budget for the poverty alleviation programs executed by the rural development machinery is roughly Rs. 35,000 crores, amounting to more than six per cent of the Indian government's total budgetary expenditure (Pradhan et al. 2002: 4; Saxena 2001).

¹¹⁵ Note that these are common problems faced by *all* Indian poor, regardless of their caste or creed. Untouchables, however, face them more often, simply because they are more often poor than any other category of Indians.

¹¹⁶ According to Drèze and Gazdar, writing in 1996, female life expectancy is below 55 years, the under-five mortality rate 141 per thousand, and the number of maternal deaths 931 per 100,00 live births (Drèze and Gazdar 1996: 39).

What should also positively affect untouchables' demand for the rural development bureaucracy's services is the fact that it tends to act as a *de facto* monopolistic service provider. Though there are private and public credit suppliers *other than* the rural development bureaucracy in every locality, these credit sources –moneylenders, rural banks, cooperative societies- have a marked tendency to favour rich, high status borrowers over poor, illiterate, low status ones. Resultantly, the latter are far more likely to be charged usurious interest rates and bribes, fall prey to fraudulent accounting practices or to be unable to get a loan at all. Relatives and friends, moreover, are often not in a position to lend money to rural poor because they, themselves, are also often poor (Drèze et al. 1997: 34).¹¹⁷ Poor villagers in desperate need of a new shelter, for example, thus would seem to have few realistic alternatives *other than* to solicit funding from the dust-level rural development bureaucracy.

Finally, there is likely to be a large, *latent* untouchable demand for the rural development bureaucracy's services. According to N.C. Saxena, a former high-ranking official of the Planning Commission, the Rs. 35,000 crore spent annually on poverty alleviation programs, if directly transferred to the poor, could buy 3 kilograms of foodgrain from the market every day for every poor household and thus completely eliminate poverty (or, at least, endemic hunger) in India (Saxena 2001: 107). As is commonly accepted, however, poverty alleviation measures, despite their large outlays, have not been able to make a significant dent in rural poverty, let alone eliminate it (Gaiha 1995: 867). On the contrary, they have tended to suffer from various deficiencies that make the elimination of poverty in India a distant ideal rather than a realistic short-term possibility.

Evaluation studies routinely report a steady flow of program benefits to non-poor, even well-off, villagers to the neglect of the deserving poor targeted by the programs. Drèze, for instance, in a sobering assessment of IRDP in Palanpur village in Uttar Pradesh, found that some of the most vulnerable groups -the landless and households without an adult male- had practically no involvement

¹¹⁷ Interest-free lending, in fact, tends to be most restricted among the most deprived and vulnerable social groups (Drèze et al. 1997: 34).

in IRDP, while affluent households who failed to meet the program's eligibility requirements were nevertheless liberally included in the program. IRDP in Palanpur largely failed to discriminate in favour of the poor, to the extent that beneficiaries belonged to all classes *except* the "very poor". Even Palanpur's only landless beneficiary turned out to belong to an affluent family (Drèze 1988; Drèze 1990). Lieten and Srivastava, in a more recent assessment of IRDP in six other UP villages, estimated the proportion of "non-poor and ineligible households" at a more reassuring 20 to 25 per cent of the total number of beneficiaries. They also found, however, that there were a few beneficiaries who had benefited from more than one instalment, indicating that "there are a small number of individuals who are the principal beneficiaries of such schemes" (Lieten and Srivastava 1999: 211).

Wage employment programs have also attracted widespread adverse publicity for poor targeting. Pant and Gupta, evaluating the RLEGP in two Uttar Pradesh districts, estimated that 30 to 40 per cent of the beneficiaries of this program came from better off-groups (Pant and Gupta 1991: 43). Gaiha *et al.*, analysing all-India data collected by the Ministry of Rural Development, concluded that JRY's targeting of the acutely poor was "dismal". JRY-targeting in Uttar Pradesh, where *less than half* of JRY beneficiaries were recruited from among the poor or very poor, was even worse than in most other states (Gaiha *et al.* 1998: 930-1). Poverty alleviation schemes, in short, seem to be severely prone to what Cornia and Stewart have called F-mistakes (failures to reach the targeted population) and E-mistakes (interventions predominantly reach non-targeted population) (see Ambirajan 1999: 816).

Another oft-mentioned deficiency of poverty alleviation programs is their "corruption". The term tends to be rather indiscriminately used and may refer to a variety of distinct practices with varying, deleterious effects on program performance. One form of corruption is what is also called the "siphoning off" of development budgets. This happens when officials skim off part of the budgets earmarked for allocation to beneficiaries. Siphoning off is commonly accepted as being quite prevalent in the Indian civil service though, to my knowledge, it has not been systematically

studied in the context of the rural development bureaucracy. Another, well-established form of corruption is when officials with discretionary power accept bribes to make decisions favouring bribe givers (or, as also happens, in exchange for a *promise* to try and do so). In the villages studied by Lieten and Srivastava, for example, IRDP beneficiaries paid on average 12 per cent of the loan amount in graft to sanctioning officials, though very poor beneficiaries paid substantially more (25 per cent) than the richest ones (8 per cent) (Lieten and Srivastava 1999; see also Lawania 1992).

A third form of corruption is when officials sell off subsidised material benefits –e.g. water pumps, latrines– on the market instead of distributing them to target groups. Also usually categorized as corruption are those cases in which officials –in exchange for a cut of the profits– allow outside contractors to effectively run employment generation *cum* rural infrastructure projects. Contractor involvement, which is illegal, is usually regarded as a sure indicator of corruption because it is felt to invite poor targeting –when contractors, as they are apt to, are more interested in employing their “own” workers than in complying with official recruitment guidelines– as well as abuses of funds –as when, in the absence of official controls, contractors overreport on the work executed and manpower utilised (cf. Chathukulam and Kurien 1995; Gaiha et al. 1998: 938; Sharma 1985).

Though evidence on the forms and extent of corruption remains quite patchy and circumstantial, most observers assume corruption to be a major cause of the substantial underachievement of poverty alleviation programs. Well-known rural development expert and public administration scholar S. R. Maheswari, for instance, estimated a decade ago that “up to four-fifths and more of public funds meant for rural development” ended up in the private pockets of bureaucrats, local politicians, contractors “and others of that ilk” (Maheswari 1995: 220, 265). And according to Hasan, commenting on the particularly lacklustre performance of poverty alleviation schemes in Uttar Pradesh, “most programmes, such as the IRDP, were systematically neglected and abused”, thus contributing to “endemic deprivation, low per capita income and slow economic growth” (Hasan 1998: 46).

Poor targeting and corruption set aside, sometimes schemes are not implemented at all, leaving substantial proportions of budget outlays unspent. According to Gaiha *et al.*, shortfalls of 5 to 15 per cent in expenditure relative to budgets have been “not uncommon” in JRY and IRDP, for instance (Gaiha *et al.* 2001: 310). And Drèze and Gazdar, doing fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh, failed to observe “any sign of serious activity” under the Integrated Child Development Scheme.¹¹⁸ Other deficiencies of rural development programs include the often poor quality and maintenance of infrastructural assets created under employment generation projects (as exemplified by the proverbial “roads that get washed away” in the next monsoon) and a low level of knowledge among the poor of the very existence of programs meant to improve their life chances, automatically limiting the actual demand for the benefits they might bestow.

To conclude, the benefits allocated by the rural development bureaucracy are, in principle, of immediate interest to most rural untouchables. The fact that, in actual practice, many of these benefits do not seem to trickle down to them, makes the rural development bureaucracy an interesting and possibly very fruitful arena for a test of representative bureaucracy theory: it would be hard to think of another Indian policy area where both scope and expected demand for active representation might be as large as in this very case.

4 Critical mass

Bureaucrats who engage in the active representation of ingroup interests risk provoking opposition, hostility and counter pressures from outgroup colleagues, superiors, and agency clients. In such

¹¹⁸ This program, locally better known as the *anganwadi* program, is headed by the district’s Program Officer and funds so-called *anganwadis*, centres that provide day care, nutrition, and inoculations to children, and supplementary nutrition and health care to pregnant women and mothers of infants. The lack of serious activity reported by Drèze and Gazdar is all the more distressing because it is one of the social welfare programs to have received increased funding since the Indian government started cutting the budgets of other social welfare programs in 1991 (see Gupta 2001a).

circumstances it may matter a lot whether or not they can count on the help, protection and moral support of ingroup-colleagues. Preferably, there should be a considerable number –or *critical mass*– of such ingroup colleagues: the more “security in numbers”, the greater the likelihood of effective ingroup support (Herbert 1974: 561). Critical mass would seem to constitute almost a *precondition* for the occurrence of active representation by ethnic minority bureaucrats. Since they are likely to find themselves caught between ingroup pressures for active representation and counter pressures applied by representatives of more powerful outgroups, ethnic minority bureaucrats may need strong numerical support from ingroup colleagues to be able to effectively engage and persevere in active representation at all.¹¹⁹ In present-day India, a substantial mass of untouchable bureaucrats is in place but whether it is also a *critical mass* remains to be seen.

Until, say, six decades ago, the question of untouchable active representation would have been a non-issue, simply because at that time there hardly *were* any untouchable officials who might do the active representing. Though British colonial bureaucracies employed large numbers of native clerks, soldiers, judges, policemen, informants and collaborators, they hardly recruited any untouchables.¹²⁰ Illiteracy, of course, disqualified the vast majority

¹¹⁹ Hinderer and Young provide some empirical evidence for this proposition. Examining the interaction effect between black and white passive representations in district offices of the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, they found white bureaucrats to be more responsive to blacks when black bureaucrats became the “largest plurality” (Hinderer and Young 1998). A substantial critical mass may thus weaken outgroup resistance to minority active representation. Some theorists emphasize that a critical mass need not consist solely of colleagues within the same agency. *External*, but close, minority actors –e.g. politicians, top-administrators, community leaders– in the agency’s environment may also provide sympathetic support (cf. Keiser et al. 2002: 557; Meier 1993a: 398; Thompson 1976).

¹²⁰ From 1757 to 1947, most of the Indian subcontinent, including present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh, was ruled by the British. However, because it was much cheaper to hire natives than to import “Europeans”, most of the people who did the actual work of the British colonial state in India were not British but Indians. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the over-all ratio of British to Indians in the Madras Government, for instance, was never less than 1 to 4.4. Discounting military personnel, this ratio was roughly 1 to 100. And if only civil

of untouchables for clerical occupations.¹²¹ But even in subordinate posts in the army and the constabulary –for which literacy was not a requirement- untouchables, with few exceptions, were quite rare.¹²²

Though relatively little is known about how, exactly, the colonial state recruited its subordinate personnel, from what *has* been written about it a number of reasons for the absence of untouchables may be distilled. First, even if native personnel were formally recruited by British officers, the recruitment process itself could be decisively manipulated by native bureaucrats in influential positions. Often, these influential natives used their “silent influence” to recruit relatives to new or vacant posts, thus creating caste-bound “service monopolies” in the various echelons and posts of local, subordinate colonial bureaucracies (Bayly 1975; Frykenberg 1965). Most often, such service monopolies involved upper caste families, particularly Brahmins and scribal status groups, like the Kayasths in north India.¹²³ Due to their illiteracy, positions of silent

servants are considered, the ratio was roughly one European for every 170 to 190 Indians (Frykenberg 1965: 7). According to one estimate, by the time of Indian independence, three million Indians were employed in the colonial bureaucracy (Potter 1996).

¹²¹ For the greatest part of British colonial rule, schools appear to have been by and large off-limits to untouchable pupils. Tradition has it that, in 1856, a boy from Dharwar, in Bombay Presidency, was the first untouchable ever to be enrolled in a school (Van Gool 1996). In Madras Presidency, where untouchables constituted roughly 20 percent of the population, they made up only 0,8 per cent of the total population under instruction in 1880 (Radhakrishnan 1990: 510). In 1911, a mere 0,13 per cent of the UP untouchables was literate, as compared to 1 per cent of the intermediate (Shudra) castes and 11 per cent of the “twice-born” upper castes (Chaudhury 2004: 1989).

¹²² Notable exceptions were the Bombay regiments of the Indian Army, which recruited large numbers of Mahar soldiers in the first half of the 19th century. Though mostly employed as footsoldiers, some Mahars even made it to the rank of officer and non-commissioned officer. Mahar soldiers played a crucial role in the fight at Koregaon on the 1st of January 1818, when the Maratha regiment of the colonial army –consisting of 600 Mahar soldiers, two dozen European gunners and a few European officers- defeated the Peshwa’s army after long and heavy “hand to hand conflict” (Robertson 1938: 62).

¹²³ In a fascinating study of colonial administration in the south Indian district of Guntur between 1788-1848, Robert Frykenberg has traced how local networks of Brahmin officers succeeded in capturing the district’s bureaucracy from the nominal control of a handful of British officials. “These officers”, writes Frykenberg, “became free from supervision and acquired the perquisites

influence were well out of grasp of the untouchables. Their marginal presence in colonial bureaucracies therefore depended in large part on the benevolence and patronage of local, native, largely upper caste service groups.¹²⁴

Second, untouchables were sometimes excluded even from lowly, non-clerical posts *because* they were untouchables. The Madras constabulary, for instance, from the 1860s onwards, expressly excluded untouchables. Since they were “pariahs” and therefore severely handicapped in “mixing with the people”, colonial recruiters considered them unable to carry out basic police duties like conducting searches, making arrests and patrolling caste-Hindu areas of towns and villages (Arnold 1985: 6).

What further decreased untouchables’ chances for government employment was that colonial recruiters sometimes let themselves be guided by the new “knowledge” of Indian caste society which became available in the wake of census operations and ethnographic surveys. Over time, colonial officials and scholars became increasingly engrossed in the ranking, standardising and cross-referencing of caste listings on principles derived from Western zoology and botanical classification. The caste classifications arising from these exercises purportedly established who was superior to

and dignities of power. The aura of divinity, the borrowed glow of the *Huzur* [the royal presence; the presence of superior authority], so clung to them that they could walk like giants” (Frykenberg 1965: 230). In the colonial administration of the north Indian district of Allahabad -not too far from field district Sitapur-, posts in the *tehsil* (sub-district) offices were monopolised by members of the old service communities, particularly Kayasths and Muslims, as well as Brahmins. In the district and higher offices, a wider range of service communities including domiciled Anglo-Indians and Eurasians, occupied posts. The police establishment, on the other hand, remained a preserve of Muslims and, among Hindus, of Rajput families. The vast majority of *patwaris* and *kanungos* (village accountants and their supervisors, respectively) were either Kayasth or Muslim (Bayly 1975: 24-5).

¹²⁴ The lack of such benevolence and patronage apparently caused the drying up of Mahar (west Indian untouchable caste, bvg) recruitment to the Bombay army regiments, where Mahars had once been numerous. According to Robertson, “after the defeat of the Peshwa the Bombay army came more and more into touch with the northern regiments. In the Hindustani regiments the men put caste before the regiment [which effected] a change of devotion from the corps to the caste” (Robertson 1938: 65).

whom by virtue of their supposed purity, occupational origins and collective moral worth. Those who built these classifications were often inspired by the logic of the varna system and considered every jati as a fixed unit possessing a known place and status which could be measured against that of any other caste (Bayly 1999: 125; cf. also Dirks 2001: 14).

What thus evolved were convenient hierarchical orderings of indigenous society picturing India's population as composed of self-contained entities called castes, each with its own distinctive characteristics (Arnold 1985: 7). To colonial administrators, the knowledge and way of thinking of the classificatory exercises could, obviously, seem quite useful. They reassuringly gave the illusion of knowing the people and made it unnecessary to differentiate too much among individual Indians: "A man was a Brahmin, and Brahmins had certain characteristics" (Cohn, cited in Arnold 1985: 7).¹²⁵

To untouchables, however, the characteristics imputed to them by colonial ethnographers were sometimes far from flattering. Informed by a growing conviction that they were "habitual criminals", untouchables sometimes ended up being categorized by such unfavourable labels as the "lawless Maravan", the "thievish Kallar", or the "restless Kuravan" (Arnold 1985; Bayly 1999: 123-124).¹²⁶ Where this happened, their prospects of being hired as

¹²⁵ It should be stressed that the value and accuracy of these classifications were not commonly accepted in colonial circles. Many scholar-officials criticized the idea that castes could be identified in terms of botanical or zoological specimens, and regarded the ensuing classifications as caricatures of the complex and multi-faceted reality of caste (Bayly 1999: 125). Bayly discusses the work of such scholar-officials as Ibbetson, Crooke, Blunt and Nesfield who developed much more flexible and context-sensitive (and, hence, less rigidly essentializing and stereotypical) interpretations of caste as "fluid representation[s] of status as claimed by men of power" (Bayly 1999: 139). William Crooke, for example, who authored an elaborate ethnographic study of the tribes and castes in north western India (including present-day Awadh), saw caste as "rather a matter of sociology than of religion" and claimed that "the primitive so-called division of the people into Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vasiyas and Sudras does not agree with existing facts" (Crooke 1974 (1896): xxvi).

¹²⁶ Colonial preoccupations with the innate criminality of certain castes were often informed by propositions and ideas from ethnology -the science of

servants of the British *raj*, of course, drastically diminished.¹²⁷ In the Madras constabulary studied by Arnold, for example, it was their supposed criminal nature –*apart* from their pariahness– which made untouchables unsuitable for enrolment in the police. By the mid-1880s, Madras police recruiters acted on the principle “that ‘low

race– which acquired the status of an authoritative scholarly discipline in the second half of the 19th century. Also in India, for some time, ethnologists successfully advocated the idea that humanity was composed of peoples whose essential characteristics –weakness or strength, subjugation or dominance, slavishness or freedom-loving individualism– were racially, that is physiologically, determined (Bayly 1999: 132-3). Ideas about the racially endowed, innate criminality of untouchables (and other castes) gained wide currency through district manuals and gazetteers, census reports and ethnographical compilations (Arnold 1985: 7-8). Ethnological applications to Indian society also became codified in law. In 1871, the colonial government introduced the first of a series of Criminal Tribes Acts which contained lists of the “tribes, gangs, or classes” it declared as being “addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences”. Members of the listed tribes were obliged to register with the local magistrate and be preferably –and forcibly– removed to “permanent reformatory settlements” (labour camps). Though initially mainly comprising of wandering minstrels, fakirs, petty traders, rustic transporters and disbanded groups of soldiers, over time the category of criminal tribes became increasingly open-ended to also include *castes*. The Pasis, one of the two large untouchable castes in fieldwork district Sitapur, for instance, used to be a “criminal tribe” (Government of the United Provinces and Oudh 1920).

¹²⁷ Whereas untouchables and other castes, like Bengali Brahmins and “parasitic” Rajputs, fell from grace as a result of ethnologically informed stereotyping, others, like the “sturdy” Jats and the “manly”, comparatively “casteless”, “martial” Sikhs and Gurkhas from the Punjab and Nepal, gained official esteem. Punjab and Nepal became, in effect, important recruitment grounds for the Indian army.

caste men' were to be chosen only in areas where recruits were otherwise difficult to obtain" (Arnold 1985: 6).¹²⁸

A combination of illiteracy, adverse selection by upper caste civil service monopolies, pariahness and official pejorative labelling thus conspired to prevent the untouchables from building up any kind of significant presence in the vast complex of colonial subordinate administrative agencies. For the better part of colonial rule, untouchables did not feature as employees of the colonial state, except perhaps as in their caste-prescribed semi-official roles of sweepers and village watchmen (Arnold 1985; Bayly 1975). It was not before 1934, for instance, that untouchables started being recruited to the subordinate ranks of the police force -as opposed to "employment" as village watchmen- in the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh) (Gooptu 1993: 279-80).

If untouchable representation in the subordinate services was virtually negligible, it was almost totally absent at the apex of colonial bureaucracy, the renowned Indian Civil Service (ICS).¹²⁹ In Britain, after 1750, positions in the East India Company and, later on, the ICS became highly sought after (Cohn 1966; De Zwart 1994).¹³⁰ But since entrance to the Company was, initially, regulated

¹²⁸ The relatively sparse scholarly attention paid to colonial recruitment of subordinate, native personnel also means that little is known about the scale and geography of such ethnologically informed hiring. There is, for instance, reason to assume, as Susan Bayly has suggested, that the credibility of ethnological stereotypes may have varied with British officers' experiences of particular regions: "[I]t seems likely that the ideas of the ethnologists about human actions as expressions of immutable scientific laws and race essences would have sounded more persuasive to officials with experience of Bengal and the far south, rather than other provinces" (Bayly 1999: 140). Such and related hypotheses would seem to be fascinating questions for administrative historians to explore.

¹²⁹ ICS officers manned almost all the important administrative positions in British India, as well as most of the higher judicial offices: the ICS supplied the Lieutenant-Governors and Chief Commissioners, the chief administrators in the provinces and the presidencies of Madras and Bombay, and the District Magistrates. Besides, ICS officers served as District and Sessions Judges and held a portion of seats in all the provincial High Courts (Spangenberg 1976: xii).

¹³⁰ The principal reason for the popularity of employment in the East India Company was that it could be turned into a very profitable affair. Huge fortunes could be amassed by deploying the Company's financial and military means and commercial rights to private purposes through moneylending,

through patronage, the pool from which the early senior colonial officials were recruited was fairly small: essentially London-based banking and commercial families and landed groups from Scotland and the southeast of England (Cohn 1966: 110-11).¹³¹ The replacement, in 1855, of patronage by selection through open competition appreciably widened the social base of British colonial elite administrators. "Aristocrats" –holding more than a quarter of ICS positions in the five years prior to the introduction of competitive examinations- quickly lost ground to individuals from the "lower middle classes": the sons of accountants, farmers, millers, druggists, and railway workers (Spangenberg 1976: 19).¹³²

Though the new system of open competition also opened up the possibility for Indians to join the ICS, for quite some time only very few managed to do so.¹³³ The practical barriers for Indians seeking entrance -examinations held only in London, low age limits preventing sufficient mastery of English- reflected a stubborn and widespread opposition among British officers against the "Indianization" of the ICS, despite continuous pressure from "Indian educated classes" and British politicians with "advanced" or "moderate" opinions. Anti-Indianization lobbyists often opposed the recruitment of Indians on the grounds that they, unlike British officers, would be incapable of impartiality. The many religious and social divisions of India, they argued, simply made it unwise to rely on "native discretion" (Spangenberg 1976: 5).¹³⁴

bribe-taking, private trade activities and the supply of troops to Indian princes. Company servants who had returned to Britain after having become rich in India were commonly called "nabobs" (after the governors under the Mughal empire which preceded British rule) (Cohn 1966; De Zwart 1994).

¹³¹ According to Bernard Cohn, between 1840 and 1860 the vast majority of the civil servants who governed India may have been drawn from a restricted recruitment pool of "fifty or sixty interconnected families" (Cohn 1966: 110-11).

¹³² Remember how J. Donald Kingsley appropriately referred to the reform of 1855 and the ensuing widening of British bureaucracy's social base as the middle class's "move on the civil service" (chapter 2).

¹³³ By 1888, more than three decades after the introduction of competitive examinations, only twelve Indians had secured access to the ICS (Spangenberg 1976: x). And out of the 538 men recruited to the ICS between 1904 and 1913, only 37 were Indians (see Potter 1996: 83).

¹³⁴ The bureau-politics of anti-Indianization is vividly described in

From 1922 onwards the representation of Indians in the ICS rapidly increased. Not only had it become much easier for Indians to enter the competition -examinations were now also held in Allahabad- the interests of British individuals in taking the ICS examination simultaneously and drastically declined. Besides, there was the necessity to meet the recommendations of the Lee Commission on Indianization, which required that 40 per cent of the direct recruits to the ICS were to be Indians (Potter 1996: 90). In the period 1915-1924, Indians accounted for 44 per cent of all ICS recruits, increasing to almost 55 per cent between 1925 and 1935. Between 1936 and 1943 -when all ICS recruitment was stopped- more than half of ICS recruits (roughly 52 per cent) were Indians (calculated from Potter 1996: 97). Indianization of the ICS largely followed the pattern of passive representation in the subordinate ranks. Indian ICS officials overwhelmingly came from comfortable, professional, and service-class family backgrounds. They had typically been educated in English language schools and universities. Some of them had attended British universities. The large majority -around 70 per cent, or 400 to 500 individuals in the 1930s- of Indian ICS officials were Hindus, among whom Brahmins and Kayasths predominated. In contrast, not more than two untouchables made it to the ICS.¹³⁵

Even if they did not employ many untouchables themselves, the British *can* be credited with triggering the rapid growth of untouchable public employment after Indian independence. Beginning in the 1920s, the British faced increasingly forceful demands for self-rule by the Gandhi-led Congress. Though they were happy to contemplate and introduce limited forms of native political participation, for as long as this seemed a realistic

Spangenberg's study of the behind-the-scene manipulations surrounding the installation and functioning of the Public Service Commission of 1886-1887. This commission, better known as the Aitchison commission (after its chairman), was asked to evaluate the possibilities of enhancing the proportion of native officers in the ICS and suffered considerable sabotage from anti-Indianization lobbyists (Spangenberg 1977).

¹³⁵ Potter mentions the nomination, in 1940, of the single untouchable ICS recruit (Potter 1996: 118). Ross Mallick, however, claims two untouchable brothers from the Bengali Namasudra caste secured access to the ICS (Mallick 1997: 351).

possibility they were not willing to give up their rule. In breaking up the unity of nationalist purpose, the British' preferred strategy was to foster disagreements and rifts among native leaders and to facilitate the mobilization of minority groups that were willing to oppose Congress and its claim of speaking on behalf of the entire Indian nation. A commonly used device was to lure and reward dissenting groups with benefits (nominated seats in representative bodies, separate electorates, reservations) that they could only avail by asserting their separateness from the Indian nation which Congress claimed to represent.

For many decades, Indian Muslims were the primary targets of this colonial divide and rule strategy but the untouchables, also, were urged to play their part. The British cherished dissenting untouchables because there were, as Secretary of State L.S. Amery explained, "politically very considerable advantages in having two substantial minorities to whom consideration has to be paid, and not to be put in the position of being merely labelled pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu" (cited in Shourie 1997: 85-6).¹³⁶ The untouchables, led by Ambedkar, repeatedly proved more than willing to raise their own, dissenting voice in anticipation of special consideration by the colonial leadership (Galanter 1984; see e.g. Gupta 1985;

¹³⁶ Amery wrote this in a 1942 letter to Viceroy Linlithgow. In the same letter, Amery argued for giving the untouchables "a substantial leg-up", and for "assimilating their position increasingly to that of the Muslims". Amery realized, however, that rewarding dissenting untouchables was likely to be more complicated than placating co-operating Muslim leaders. Reservations in the services, he feared, were of doubtful use because the untouchables might "not be able to produce a sufficient number of educated candidates". Linlithgow, responding a month later, shared Amery's point "as to the political importance of recognizing so great a minority as the Depressed Classes actually are". Like Amery he also regretted the "trouble" that the untouchables were so "extraordinarily short of personnel of any quality": "Ambedkar himself is outstanding. Little Rajah from Madras is not bad but not striking. Siva Raj, whom we have sent to America, has a good deal of edge to him and might come on very well. But there are precious few others whom one has heard of in the community" (Shourie 1997: 85-6).

Shourie 1997).¹³⁷ In fact, a simplistic but quite accurate way of understanding Indian independence would be to see it as a distributive solution to British manufactured group antagonism whereby “Hindus got India, Muslims got Pakistan and the scheduled castes and tribes got reservations” (Sandanshiva, quoted in Shah 1991: 606).

Of course, nothing would have prevented India’s new leaders to abolish the ascription-based policies and benefits instituted by the British after they had wrested independence from them. By the time the Constituent Assembly (1946-1950) came round to discussing the question of reservations in the services for untouchables, however, the issue turned out to be surprisingly non-controversial. Though, after prolonged debate, members of the assembly did decide to eliminate the reserved seats and separate electorates for Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and other minorities (which had been provided for in the last colonial constitution, the Act of 1935), they retained, without much discussion, the quotas for untouchables and tribals (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 40).¹³⁸ Most participants in these debates straight out accepted that the untouchables had a rightful claim to special treatment by the new Indian state as a compensation for the historical maltreatment meted out to them by Hindu society. Some also expected reservations to act as a guarantee against any *future* maltreatment of untouchables by the state. Untouchable officers, they emphasized, would surely act as watchdogs over

¹³⁷ A famous clash between Ambedkar and Gandhi occurred in 1932. In the consultations preceding the drafting of a new constitution for India, Ambedkar –like other minority leaders had done for *their* groups- had claimed separate electorates for untouchables, a claim that chimed in perfectly with overall British strategy. Gandhi, however, claiming to represent the “vast mass of the untouchables” in his “own person”, vowed to resist such separate electorates for untouchables with his life and started fasting “unto death” (Galanter 1984: 31; Gupta 1985: 291). In the end, Ambedkar saved Gandhi’s life by dropping his claim of a separate electorate in exchange for more reserved seats in the provincial assemblies. The deal between Gandhi and Ambedkar became known as the Poona Pact.

¹³⁸ How undisputed reservations for untouchables were at the time is illustrated by the low attendance of the sessions during which they were discussed. Only 103 out of 324 members participated in the sessions, most of whom spoke only once or twice (Saksena 1981: xviii).

untouchable interests, something which could, arguably, not be expected from the “machinery of the old pattern” operated by “officers belonging to Brahmin and allied castes” (Chanchreek 1991: 127-8; Saksena 1981: 373).¹³⁹

Since their retention at independence, reservations have been instrumental in fostering a substantial untouchable bureaucracy. In the central services, as table 1 shows, the increase of untouchable representation has been most notable in the three highest classes, covering senior administrative (Class I), other administrative (Class II) and clerical (Class III) positions.

Table 1. Representation of untouchables in central services, 1953-1995

Year	Class I		Class II		Class III		Class IV		Pop. %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1953	20	0.4	113	1.3	24.819	4.5	161.958	20.5	
1960		1.2		2.5		7.2		17.2	14,7
1963	250	1.8	707	3.0	84.714	9.3	151.176	17.2	
1965		1.6		2.8		8.9		17.8	
1970		2.3		3.8		9.9		18.1	14,8
1974	1.094	3.2	2.401	4.6	161.775	10.3	230.864	18.6	
1975		3.4		5.0		10.7		18.6	
1980		5.0		8.5		13.4		19.5	
1984		6.9		10.4		14.0		20.2	15.6
1987	4.746	8.2	7.847	10.5	307.980	14.5	234.614	20.1	
1995	6.637	10.2	13.797	12.7	378.172	16.2	221.380	21.3	

Sources: Galanter 1984: 88-9; Kumar 1994; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 135; NCSCST 1998: 176; Radhakrishnan 1991: 1920.

¹³⁹ “In the circumstances”, as Prof. Yashwant Rai, an assembly member from East Punjab, phrased this expectation, “I cannot believe that the Federal Public Service Commission or other Commissions will not be injustice (sic) in the case of Harijans. I believe there will certainly be injustice in their case. We see that in the subordinate services the principle of providing friends and relatives alone is followed. Recommendations are made for relations. I have seen that even the Ministers speak to the Members on the phone in regard to their candidates and secure interviews for them . . . I want to impress that there should be some representatives of the Harijans on the Federal Public Service Commission and the Commission which are (sic) formed in the States and provinces so that they may watch over the interests of the candidates who apply for different posts and who may prevent any injustice being done to Harijans” (cited in Saksena 1981: 431, emphasis mine).

Untouchable representation in Class IV –comprising such positions as *peon* (office-bearer), sweeper and other menial occupations traditionally associated with impurity and low caste status- has remained more or less stable since the early 1950s. The percentual increases cover very large increases in absolute numbers. The total number of Class I and Class II untouchable bureaucrats in the central services rose from 133 in 1953 to 20,434 in 1995. In class I, where the percentual representation of untouchable bureaucrats multiplied with a factor 29, their absolute numbers rose no less than 331-fold. For class II, these figures were 9.83 and 122 respectively.

Figures on untouchable representation in the state bureaucracies are notoriously scarce, incomplete and unreliable. In Uttar Pradesh, where untouchables constitute a larger percentage of the population than in India as a whole (21 per cent versus 15 per cent)- untouchable representation in the two highest administrative groups hovered around 10 percent in 1996 (Table 2). In groups C and D, the untouchables' percentual shares in civil service positions roughly tripled between 1970 and 1996.¹⁴⁰

Table 2. Representation of untouchables in UP state bureaucracy, 1970-1996

	Group A		Group B		Group C		Group D		Pop. %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1970	<2.0>				-	6.0	-	6.8	21.0
1985	-	6.8	-	7.5	-	13.6	-	17.8	21.2
1995*	634	9.4	2110	12.1	45575	15.5	27666	18.6	21.1
1996**	852	9.0	3209	10.9	76858	16.4	30020	20.6	21.1

* Data with respect to 42 Departments

** Data with respect to 50 Departments

Sources: NCSCST, Third Report; Fourth Report; Radhakrishnan 1991: 1921

Though untouchable passive representation in the UP state bureaucracy has drastically increased both proportionally and absolutely since independence, it has *not* yet reached the -officially intended- level of *proportional* representation, except in the lowliest group D.¹⁴¹ Another exception (not mentioned in table 2) is the

¹⁴⁰ "Groups" are equivalent to "classes".

¹⁴¹ Proportional representation, of course, is reached when the proportion

Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the successor of the colonial ICS. In this most prestigious cadre, untouchable representation has also reached a proportional level. In 1999, approximately 114 (or 21 per cent) out of the 541 officers of the Uttar Pradesh IAS cadre were untouchables (Appointment Department 1999).¹⁴²

Even if, with two exceptions, untouchable passive representation in the Uttar Pradesh bureaucracy is still falling somewhat short of officially intended levels, there is no denying that untouchables *have* built up, almost from scratch, a substantial presence in the post-independence Uttar Pradesh bureaucracy. Untouchable bureaucrats are present in all echelons, in all departments and, quite probably, in every single agency or office. An untouchable IAS officer has occupied the highest administrative position in the state bureaucracy, that of chief secretary, untouchable officers have headed important departments like Appointments, Public Works, Energy, and Excise and served as hand-picked secretaries to various chief ministers. In Uttar Pradesh, the untouchables now form the second-largest caste block of officials, after the upper castes, whose numerical predominance continues to be formidable.¹⁴³ In the dust-level rural development bureaucracy in

of group-identified bureaucrats in a given bureaucracy equals the proportion of that group in society. Given fully efficient implementation and an adequate supply of untouchables meeting the minimum recruitment criteria, this level should have been reached by the mid-1980s (cf. Galanter 1984).

¹⁴² IAS officers, like their ICS forerunners, man the most important positions in India's civil bureaucracy, both in the central government and the respective state governments. Though the IAS is a national, "all-India" cadre, IAS-officers are assigned to a specific state cadre from which, at various points in their careers, they may be deputed to the centre in New Delhi. The number of untouchable IAS officers in Uttar Pradesh (114) is an estimate. It was arrived at with the help of a retired senior officer of the UP government and an active member of the IAS who were kind enough to supply me with what they knew or thought to be the caste of all 541 IAS officers in the gradation list (both wished to remain anonymous).

¹⁴³ Between 1984 and 1990 upper castes –notably Brahmins, Kayasths, Rajputs, Baniyas and Khattris– predominated in all important group 1 and 2 positions in the UP bureaucracy, supplying never less than two-thirds of principal secretaries and secretaries (the senior most positions in government departments), 80 per cent of the heads of department, 72 per cent of special secretaries, 90 per cent of joint secretaries, 80 per cent of district magistrates, 75 per cent of deputy and under secretaries, 84 per cent of class 1 secretariat

Sitapur, also, untouchables are, largely due to reservations, well represented among the officials entrusted with the allocation of program benefits to the rural poor. Five of the nineteen block development officers (BDOs) are untouchables, as well as 58 of the 263 village level officers.¹⁴⁴ The question which remains to be answered, of course, is whether this substantial presence is also *critical*, in the sense that it allows untouchable bureaucrats to act as active representatives in the face of likely efforts of outgroup representatives to prevent them from doing so.

5 Dust-level discretion

Though discretion is inherent to bureaucratic organization, some bureaucracies and administrative roles clearly possess more of it than others. Since their work is highly routinized through standard operating procedures, bureaucrats inhabiting the middle and lower levels of machine bureaucracies, for instance, typically have far less discretion in influencing organizations' outcomes than their managers at the top or than employees working at hierarchically similar echelons in professional bureaucracies (cf. Mintzberg 1979: 322, 371-4).¹⁴⁵ Similarly, clerical and maintenance personnel do not

officers and 79 per cent of the section officers. Similarly, between 1985 and 1990, upper castes held most of the senior positions in the UP police force, providing at least 79 per cent of director generals and inspector generals, 88 per cent of the deputy inspector generals, directors and joint directors, and 80 per cent of divisional officers (Verma et al. 1993). And in 1999, 353 (or 65 per cent) out of the 541 UP IAS officers were upper castes.

¹⁴⁴ The large extent to which the substantial presence of untouchables in the dust-level rural development bureaucracy is due to reservations is borne out by data that I collected in a survey on forty village-level officers in seven blocks in Sitapur district. Among these forty VLOs there were thirteen untouchables, ten of whom admitted to occupying reserved posts. Of the remaining three, one claimed to have gotten his job through open competition, while the other two declined to answer the question. Since securing service employment without the help of reservations tends to be a matter of pride, it is likely that these two also occupied reserved posts.

¹⁴⁵ Machine bureaucracies, as described by Mintzberg, are characterized by highly rationalized workflows; standardized workprocesses; formalization of behaviour; narrowly defined, vertically and horizontally specialized jobs;

usually possess the kind of discretion that might enable them to further the interests of ingroup members outside the organization (Meier 1993a: 397).

Because they typically bestow high levels of discretion to individual employees in supplying important services, representative bureaucracy theorists consider street-level bureaucracies particularly hospitable to the occurrence of active representation (Meier 1975: 542; Peters 1989: 99-105; Thompson 1976: 208-9). Even if its employees roam dusty roads rather than paved streets, the Indian dust-level rural development bureaucracy grants its workers quite a bit of room to manoeuvre and ample opportunities to intervene on behalf of clients as well as to discriminate among them (Lipsky 1980). In fact, such opportunities would seem to be even greater in the dust-level rural development bureaucracy than in many of its street-level counterparts in western political systems.

As mentioned earlier, for purposes of rural development administration, each district -there were 83 of them in Uttar Pradesh in 1999- has been divided into geographical units known as blocks. In Uttar Pradesh there are, on average, a little over 14 blocks in each district (Pradesh 1995: 52). The average population and number of villages in each block differ across states. In Uttar Pradesh, each block comprises on average 83 villages, or gram panchayats, with an average population of roughly 1230 each.¹⁴⁶ The typical block in Uttar

and the engagement of operating echelons in simple and repetitive tasks that require little skill, training and judgement. Both power and discretion in machine bureaucracies rest with the managers of the strategic apex, leaving hardly any discretionary room to manoeuvre to middle managers and - discounting its power to disrupt or sabotage operations- virtually none at all to the "operating core" (Mintzberg 1979: 322). Professional bureaucracies, by contrast, disseminate their power directly to their workers; provide them with extensive autonomy; command little close coordination with peers; and require the exercise of considerable judgement.

¹⁴⁶ What I refer to as villages are officially known as *gram panchayats*. A gram panchayat, literally, is a village council. Its jurisdiction may coincide with the boundaries of a single village, but often it is a little larger than that. In Uttar Pradesh, each gram panchayat consists on average of 1.5 villages (Government of Uttar Pradesh 1995: 52). Since it may be confusing to use the term gram panchayat to refer to both the area of jurisdiction of a village council and to the

Pradesh thus has a population of around 120,000.

The Block office, generally simply called “block” (in English) by both staff and villagers, is usually housed in a small cluster of buildings just outside or at the edge of a small town or bigger village. A block is headed by the Block Development Officer (BDO). The BDO is responsible for co-ordinating the efficient implementation of development programs, the guidance and supervision of the block functionaries under his control, ensuring compliance with government orders and instructions and the proper utilisation of funds, and the maintenance of accounts and records. Besides, the BDO also acts as the secretary and chief executive officer of the *kshetra panchayat*, the elective political body at block level chaired by the *pramukh* (Bhambhri 1969: 136; Maheswari 1995: 222). The BDO is assisted by a variable number of Assistant Development Officers (ADOs) who specialize in functions like agriculture, village governance (*panchayats*), cooperatives, and statistics, and by clerical and non-clerical staff (driver of BDO’s jeep, sweeper). The block staff is complemented by a contingent of Village Level Officers (VLOs). Supervised by the BDO, VLOs are frontline workers entrusted with the implementation of rural development programs in clusters of 5 to 10 villages.¹⁴⁷ At the start of my fieldwork, in the winter of 1999, an average block office had 25 to 30 employees, VLOs included.

Of all block employees, VLOs would appear to be the best placed to engage in active representation. As the rural development machinery’s lowest, “multipurpose” representative it is the VLO’s job to explain the benefits and procedures of rural development programs to villagers, prepare shortlists of potential beneficiaries, assist eligible villagers in securing rural development benefits, prepare village development plans, report on the progress of rural development programs, and to refer difficult problems to senior staff in the block office. Besides, he is expected to “specially help

village council itself, throughout the remainder of this study I will use the term “village” to refer to the former.

¹⁴⁷ Rural development officials refer to these village clusters as *nyay panchayats*. *Nyay panchayats* (literally justice councils) used to be geographical units for justice administration but, as such, have now become defunct.

sections needing special assistance”, act as “the principal and effective channel of communication” between villagers and the development authorities higher up and, generally, to be a “friendly guide”. In taking care of all this, the VLO -locals simply call him the “secretary”- can directly influence the selection of beneficiaries of rural development programs (Maheswari 1995).

The VLO’s job involves a lot of discretion.¹⁴⁸ To begin with, there is the discretion springing from the vague mandates in his job description. It is in large part up to individual VLOs to interpret and decide as to which villagers, exactly, are in need of information about rural development programs’ procedures, benefits, and eligibility requirements; who needs assistance in securing benefits and who can manage on his or her own; what issues and actions should be given priority in the village development plan; which problems are difficult or pressing enough so as to be referred to their superiors in the block offices; which are the sections of villagers that need special help, as well as who can be said to belong to these sections and who cannot.

VLOs, of course, need not only rely on vague mandates to know what is expected of them. Vague mandates are operationalized in more detailed prescriptive rules laid down in service manuals and program implementation guidelines. More often than not, however, these more detailed rules *increase* rather than curb VLOs’ discretion. They are, in effect, so numerous, detailed and complex as to make them quite impractical. A good – and by no means extraordinary- example are the astonishingly complex rules prescribing VLOs how to draw up a list of prospective beneficiaries from among villagers living below the poverty line (BPLs, in officialese) for a housing subsidy under the Indira housing scheme (IAY).

The IAY implementation guidelines stipulate that VLOs, in assessing the eligibility of candidate beneficiaries, should take into account various criteria according to a fixed order of preference: homeless people are to be considered first, followed by families with

¹⁴⁸ The data on dust-level discretion in the Sitapur development bureaucracy were collected during fieldtrips to the district in September and October 1998 and February and March 1999.

thatched-roof houses, families with mud-walled houses and, finally, families living in mud houses. In applying this preference order VLOs should also take into account candidates' castes: at least 60 per cent of the beneficiaries are to be recruited from among the untouchables. Not all untouchables, however, are equally eligible. In order to assess the eligibility of untouchable candidates within the 60 per cent quota, VLOs should apply a second order of preference: bonded labourers are to be given priority, followed by victims of upper caste atrocities, families without a male breadwinner, victims of "national calamities", villagers whose huts were burnt and, finally, ordinary poor untouchables (BPLs).

VLOs who would somehow manage to comply with the above rules would still not have fully complied with *all* the rules, however. To determine the eligibility of poor, non-untouchable candidates aspiring to a subsidy from within the remaining 40 per cent quota, VLOs are to apply a third order of precedence: retired army persons or their widows or family members take priority, followed by disabled persons and, lastly, ordinary non-untouchable poor. Besides, in ranking non-untouchable candidates, VLOs should take care not to exclude *all* disabled persons from the list (*even* if this meant bypassing candidates from among retired army persons or their widows or family members), as 3 per cent of the subsidies from the 40 per cent quota are reserved for them.

These rules are, as VLOs themselves are quick to emphasize, eminently unworkable. The biggest problem is that, apart from poorly updated lists of BPLs and sketchy census data on untouchable village populations, there are no available official registrations that categorize villagers according to the numerous criteria covered by the three orders of preference. Even apart from assuming the impossible -that all candidates *could* actually be neatly categorized into one of the various categories- full compliance with the IAY rules would practically require VLOs to launch detailed and time-consuming ethnographic enquiries in all villages earmarked for IAY implementation. Given the multitude of other programs to be implemented this is hardly a realistic proposition. As a result, VLOs are called upon to rely in large part on their experience,

accumulated knowledge and intuition, rather than on formal rules, to get their jobs done.

Further contributing to the discretion of VLOs is the fact that their activities and decisions are, as street-level decisions always are, hard to monitor by their superiors. The latter are plagued by the same dearth of basic demographic information needed to accurately select, sort and process clients according to official rules as the VLOs are. As a result, they cannot verify whether eligibility decisions made by VLOs are compliant with or made in the spirit of official implementation rules. Furthermore, it is difficult for VLO's superiors, situated as they are in the block and district offices, to get an independent, unmediated grip on the factual assessments of dust-level situations that VLOs -in the absence of such data- *do* make to reach their decisions.

Suppose a BDO, the VLO's direct superior, wanted to monitor the decision-making behaviour of his subordinates in all the villages in his jurisdiction and decided to visit a single village every day of his working week. Even with such a strict personal inspection regime this BDO could, at best, visit every village only every four months. In theory, BDOs get assistance from other superiors in gathering feedback information about VLOs' dust-level decision-making behaviour. JRY rules, for example, prescribe relatively high ranking district level officials like the District Magistrate (DM), Chief Development Officer (CDO) and the Project Director (PD) to make a fixed, minimum number of field trips to monitor program implementation every month. But even if they were to fully comply with these guidelines, it would take all of these officers no less than eight months to visit every village in the district once.¹⁴⁹

If it is assumed, furthermore, that superiors could only spend a few hours on each visit, it is doubtful that they could actually learn very much about VLOs' activities. Many villages are not so easily "visited". Though some villages are quite compact and consist of a well-defined centre and a few streets, many comprise two or more larger villages, apart from a handful to as many as two dozen

¹⁴⁹ Taken together, district-level officers are expected to make a total number of 165 field trips to monitor JRY implementation every month. There are roughly 1300 villages in the district.

smaller hamlets (or *bastis*).¹⁵⁰ When doing fieldwork, it often took me a few full days to visit a single “village” and get a rough idea of the various development activities (being) carried out in it. Villages may not only be big, however. The fact that they are often situated at a considerable distance from block and district offices and can sometimes only be reached over hardly passable roads, especially during the monsoon, further diminishes BDOs’ possibilities for meaningful personal inspections. Besides, more mundane reasons sometimes prevent BDOs from making spot checks. The jeeps used for field visits regularly break down and it often takes quite some time before they are repaired. In such cases, BDOs may have to share a jeep with other BDOs, as was the arrangement in one of my fieldwork blocks.¹⁵¹

As a result of the rather constrained possibilities for spot checks and field visits, BDOs and other superiors must largely rely on the information supplied by VLOs themselves. This, however, is also no sinecure since VLOs are notoriously hard to contact. Though assigned to a cluster of villages, VLOs do not enjoy the luxury of an office or field post in their area where they might be found or telephoned at regular times. In practice, therefore, interaction between VLOs and their BDO, in Sitapur at least, remains largely restricted to Wednesday mornings, when BDOs chair a weekly meeting in the block. At the time of my field research, a large-scale administrative reform initiated by the state government had set in motion a rapid swelling of the number of VLOs attached to the block -from around fifteen to as many as sixty to one hundred- and, thus, further weakened BDOs’ span of control.

Not only VLOs are well placed to act as active representatives. The high discretion situation of VLOs is by and large replicated for their superiors, the BDOs. BDOs also operate under vague mandates (co-ordination, guidance, supervision, control). And also in the

¹⁵⁰ Remember that the term village, when used in the context of development administration, refers to the jurisdictional area of a gram panchayat which, in Uttar Pradesh, tends to be a little bigger than what ordinary villagers would call a village.

¹⁵¹ This example concerned the BDO of Reusa, who could borrow the jeep of Sakran block for one week per month, and during the rest of the time relied on lifts.

BDOs' case, the abundance and complexity of the rules that purportedly operationalize their vague mandates tend to increase rather than curb their discretion. The manual containing the "directive principles" that BDOs are to follow in supervising and coordinating the implementation of poverty alleviation programs alone contains no less than 206 pages. And just as VLOs operate at quite a physical distance from their direct superiors -the BDOs-, so do BDOs operate at quite a distance from *their* superiors in the district headquarters. Besides, the span of control of superior officers in the district headquarters is typically larger than that of the average BDO vis-à-vis his VLOs. Whereas BDOs -under the "old" system- control between ten and fifteen VLOs, his direct nominal superior, the Chief Development Officer (CDO), in Sitapur at least, has 19 BDOs to look after.

The span of control of the District Magistrate (DM), the CDO's direct superior and head of the district's rural development apparatus, is, again, much larger than that of both BDO and CDO. Even though present-day DMs are no longer, as in British days, "rule incarnate", their authority and responsibilities remain extremely extensive.¹⁵² The DM continues to head the district's revenue bureaucracy which extends all the way from the district down to the villages and employs a large number of *patwaris* (village accountants record keepers), *kanungos* (overseers) and a handful or more *tehsildars* (revenue officers in charge of the geographical unit of administration called the *tehsil*, or sub-division). Besides, as the district's highest administrative functionary, the DM also exercises authority, though in varying degrees, over most state officials

¹⁵² The office of the District Magistrate (DM), or Deputy Commissioner or District Collector as he is also variously called, dates back to the early days of British colonial rule. In 1772, the Board of Directors of the East India Company decided to introduce the office of the collector to "stand forth as *diwan* and to take upon themselves, by the agency of their own servants, the entire care and administration of the revenues" (Maheswari 1995 (1968): 546). Though his exact duties always remained rather vaguely defined, the collector's authority and power rapidly increased and he soon became the "pivot of district administration, representing the State Government in its totality" (*ibid.*). After independence, the collector lost quite a bit of his power and authority to newly elected state and local politicians.

posted in the district headquarters.¹⁵³ Apart from the CDO and the Program Director (PD) these may include, allowing for state wise variations, the Superintendent of Police, the Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies, the District Agricultural Officer, the District Medical Officer, the Superintendent of Excise, the Civil Surgeon, the Forest Officer, the District Inspector of Schools, the District Veterinary Officer, the District Industries Officer, the District Information Officer, the Backward Classes Welfare Officer, the District Planning Officer and the District Judge.

Apart from these extensive monitoring duties, the DM, personally, has a great many tasks and responsibilities assigned to him, including the appointment of the punishing authority in respect of ministerial and inferior servants of collectorate and tehsil staff and other allied services; dealing with pension cases of district staff; submitting annual budget estimates; acting as the protocol officer in the district; arranging for stay of VIPs at circuit houses or other inspection houses; making enquiries relating to the issue of certificates to homeopaths; training junior officers in official procedures and administrative work, personal conduct and behaviour; the collection of canal dues; the relief of fire sufferers; the payment of Zamindari Abolition Compensation and Rehabilitation Grant; taking relief measures in case of scarcity conditions caused by natural calamities like fire, drought, flood, waterlogging and excessive rains; enforcement of the stamp act; the inspection of police stations; dealing with mercy petitions from prisoners; recovery of cane cess; making of reception orders for lunatics; making recommendations of schemes for the development of forests, appointment and training of census enumerators; liaison with military authorities, and ensuring the welfare of members of the armed forces, both serving and retired.

Given his extraordinarily extensive and diverse set of monitoring and substantive duties, it is no wonder that the DM tends to be an “overworked official” (Maheswari 1995 (1968): 559).

¹⁵³ Many state departments are represented at the district level by their own officers. The authority of the DM over these officials varies, though generally it is administrative and/or disciplinary. The authority over technical matters usually remains with the departmental line hierarchy.

As a result, his formal authority is in practice readily undermined. Nominally subordinate officials may easily escape his control, especially so when they can appeal to the line authority of their technical departments. In such cases, the opportunities for the DM to impose his will upon the recalcitrant may turn out to be extremely limited: he might, as a government enquiry committee once put it, “cajole and persuade” but cannot “compel”.¹⁵⁴ And even though, in Uttar Pradesh, some of the DM’s authority is decentralized to other officials -the Additional District Magistrate (ADM) at the district-level and the Subdivisional Magistrates (SDMs) in the subdivisions or tehsil headquarters- these officials do not tend to be of much help when it comes to controlling their subordinates.¹⁵⁵ Further decreasing the DM’s capacity for control is the fact that he is often much younger -in his thirties- and far less experienced than most of his nominal, direct subordinates.¹⁵⁶ It is evident that a DM, if he is to make any impact, must carefully prioritize his activities. In practice, this usually means that DMs are heavily preoccupied with “law and order” and “revenue” issues, while the monitoring of rural development bureaucrats’ behaviour and poverty alleviation interventions takes a back seat (Maheswari

¹⁵⁴ “Because each technical department, today, functions under a popularly elected Minister accountable to the legislature, there is a deep-seated reverence for the chair [sic] of command with consequent resistance to accepting instruction from other lateral or diagonal authorities, such as the District Collector (Maheswari 1995 (1968): 566-7). The quote is from the Report of the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee, 1944-45, para 65, cited in Maheswari (Maheswari 1995 (1968): 567).

¹⁵⁵ SDM positions are often filled by young, new IAS recruits who, according to Maheswari, tend to regard the SDM-posting “as a mere training post, and a stop-gap arrangement”. Also, they usually do not tend to live in their sub-divisions, but in the district headquarters (Maheswari 1995 (1968): 562-3).

¹⁵⁶ As a rule, the DM is a member of the IAS and either a “direct recruit” or a “promotee”. It is the direct recruits, that is those who have entered the IAS through competitive examinations, who are relatively young and inexperienced: they are usually appointed to a DM post four or five years after joining the IAS. “Promotees”, who are indirectly recruited through promotion from the State (or, as it is called in Uttar Pradesh, the Provincial) Civil Service, are, in contrast, not young and inexperienced at all. They are typically promoted to the IAS late in their careers: to them, a DM appointment is typically the crown on their careers (Maheswari 1995 (1968): 549-551).

1995 (1968): 552). As a result, the BDOs' job -like that of their subordinates the VLOs- is invested with a lot of discretion.

Even if street-level bureaucrats' nominal superiors are unable or unwilling to control their subordinates' behaviour, they might still be controlled to some extent by actors external to their organizations. If, for example, a bureaucracy's clients are well versed in the rules and procedures that street-level bureaucrats must apply in particular situations, this in itself may curb the latter's tendency to pursue centrally undesired courses of action or make officially uncalled-for interventions on behalf of particular (groups of) clients. Similarly, elected politicians with an active interest in street-level issues may put pressure on street-level bureaucrats to do what is expected of them.

Though the operation of such forms of external control cannot be ruled out on the Indian dust-level, it is probably not very prevalent. Illiteracy prevents most clients from building up the kind of bureaucratic competence which might egg VLOs on towards compliance. Villagers, in fact, are generally unaware of the programs executed by the development bureaucracy. Besides, even if literacy is a precondition for bureaucratic competence it does not guarantee it. The vocabulary of administrative manuals and official correspondence is heavily sanskritised and therefore hardly comprehensible even to well-educated Indians (I myself had a lot of trouble in finding someone who could translate the manual on rural development programs for me).

Illiteracy and incomprehensibility of sanskritised bureaucratise are also likely to negatively affect many dust-level politicians' capacity for effective control. Many poverty alleviation programs prescribe the involvement of gram and kshetra panchayats. Officially, these bodies, as well as the gram sabha (open meeting of all villagers), are accorded co-decision-making powers in beneficiary-selection, though the final sanction of loans and subsidies is done by VLOs and BDOs. Since *panches* (members of the gram panchayat) and *kshetra panchayat* members are often illiterate, many of them must rely on VLOs and other officials to explain the rules and procedures of rural development administration to them.

Also restricting the likelihood of political control over the dust-level rural development bureaucracy is the fact that the panchayats in Uttar Pradesh have never really developed into the kind of effective bodies of local self-governance and rural development that their many advocates, among whom Mahatma Gandhi, have typically envisaged them to be. Though *pradhans* (village mayors) have generally gained a reputation as powerful local political figures, the *pramukhs* (chairmen of the kshetra panchayats) have not.¹⁵⁷ Besides, the gram and kshetra panchayats, as political *bodies*, have tended to remain somewhat marginal, resource-poor actors in rural politics and administration, certainly so in Uttar Pradesh (cf. Lieten and Srivastava 1999).¹⁵⁸ In consequence, the policies, activities and interventions that have emerged in India under the label of rural development have tended to be largely bureaucratic affairs, designed, undertaken and “controlled” by bureaucrats rather than elected politicians.

To conclude, VLOs and BDOs are relatively free from the organizational authority of their nominal superiors. The discretion they can exercise in providing access to and allocation of development benefits, provides excellent opportunities for actively representing the interests of some over those of others. Along with its sympathetic mission, the salience of its policies and the substantial mass of untouchable employees, this dust-level discretion completed the four favourable conditions for active representation in India’s dust-level rural development bureaucracy. Before I will turn to discuss how and why these conditions generally

¹⁵⁷ The *pramukhs* are probably even less capable of controlling BDOs than *pradhans* are of controlling VLOs: MLAs, fearing their potential power, have tended to usurp the *pramukhs’* role [find reference].

¹⁵⁸ The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act of 1992 represents central government’s latest effort to revitalize the panchayat system. The Act, which came into force in April 1993, recognises panchayats as the lowest rung of self-government, with gram panchayats forming the base of a three-tier panchayat structure (panchayat bodies are also created or revitalized at the block and district levels). The Act aims to give the PRIs (panchayat raj institutions) a viable share of financial resources, creates possibilities for the delegation of hitherto administrative tasks and responsibilities and assures wide representation to women, untouchables and tribals, both as *panches* and *pradhans* (Lieten and Srivastava 1999: 14).

fail to translate into the active representation of untouchables' interests, I will first explain how my forthcoming analysis came about.

6 Fieldwork in Sitapur district

In the Indian dust-level development bureaucracy, actively representative untouchable VLOs and BDOs might benefit untouchable clients in various ways (when some particular representative act may be performed by both VLOs and BDOs, I will group the two functionaries together under the by now familiar label of dust-level bureaucrats, or DLBs). Though most of the programs executed by the dust-level bureaucracy contain substantial reserved quota for untouchables, many program benefits, as we have seen, do not reach their intended beneficiaries. Untouchable DLBs might thus benefit untouchable clients a great deal by simply, and "neutrally", following implementation rules to the letter. Untouchable DLBs might benefit their ingroup clients even more if they were to show partiality, by pushing for the selection of more untouchable beneficiaries than prescribed by the quotas, for example.¹⁵⁹

Given villagers' widespread ignorance about rural development programs, untouchable DLBs might also actively represent ingroup interests by being informative to untouchable villagers about the existence, rules and procedures of programs, by teaching them how to navigate the bureaucratic maze and, more generally, by showing them the ropes of effective client behaviour

¹⁵⁹ Indian rural development programs do not allow for such -neutral or partisan- implementational active representation in equal measure. Whereas in some programs, like IAY, the officially defined role of DLBs in beneficiary selection is quite prominent, in others it is far less so. Beneficiary and project selection in JRY, to take the most extreme example, is, in theory, fully delegated to the gram panchayats. Even such delegated programs would still seem to present opportunities for implementational active representation. VLOs still need to sign for the *release* of JRY monies, for instance. This leaves room for actively representative VLOs to make their signs conditional; upon, for example, the gram panchayat's respecting JRY's special provision that at least 60 per cent of the benefits of this program be reserved for untouchables.

(cf. Katz and Eisenstadt 1973; Selden 1997a: 14). They could also tone down their demand for bribes in case of untouchable clients or try and check corrupt or discriminatory behaviour by non-untouchable DLBs. Still another way in which untouchable DLBs could benefit the untouchable population in their jurisdiction would be through deploying their knowledge and expertise to assist local movements, organizations and leaders that seek to improve the plight of rural untouchables.

All the above representative acts may be performed by VLOs and BDOs alike, though their nearness to villagers and closer involvement in actual beneficiary-selection would seem to make them more plausible and feasible for VLOs to undertake. BDOs, on their part, might use their formal authority to perform representative acts that VLOs, as bottommost functionaries, cannot. They might support actively representative VLOs, by protecting them (or -in the case of partial VLOs- by providing cover) against non-untouchable DLBs or clients who may consider such behaviour to be damaging to their interests or normative principles. Untouchable BDOs might stress the importance of rural development programs' special provisions for untouchables and insist on their scrupulous implementation. They might also use their authority to press for sanctions against those VLOs they find failing to do so. Most programs' guidelines require BDOs to personally conduct an enquiry whenever villagers object to or complain about alleged irregularities in program implementation. Untouchable BDOs might utilize these prescriptions to closely follow up any incident that appears to have harmed untouchable villagers. Finally, untouchable BDOs might also seek to activate "dormant" programs, referred to earlier, that could be of benefit to untouchables but are not being implemented.

Sitapur

The central argument developed in this book directly stems from the insights and experiences gained through prolonged qualitative fieldwork –six weeks in the autumn of 1998, and fifteen months between February 1999 and May 2000- in the UP district of Sitapur.

Within Sitapur, most research was carried out in an area comprising of five coterminous blocks in central and eastern part of Sitapur: Kasmanda, Biswan, Parsendi, Pahla, and Reusa. Sitapur district is situated in the Lucknow division of Uttar Pradesh, in an area historically known as Oudh or Awadh. The district capital, also called Sitapur, lies around 85 kilometres north from the state capital, Lucknow.

Like other areas on the Gangetic plain, Sitapur is very densely populated. Almost 2.9 million people live on its 5743 km² large area; an average of 497 people per km². In the west, the Gomati river forms the border with Hardoi district, while in the east the wild river Ghagra separates Sitapur from neighbouring Bahraich district. Sitapur's other neighbours are Kheri-Lakhimpur in the north, and Lucknow and Bara Banki in the south. Topographically, the district consists of two main parts: the upland plain, comprising roughly two-thirds of the district area, and the eastern lowlands, locally known as the *gaanjar*. The district has no forests, hills or valleys of importance, and is for the better part extensively cultivated. The population speaks Awadhi, a dialect of Hindi.

Sitapur is in many respects a typical UP district. The large majority of its inhabitants live in the district's 1326 villages and earn their living as agriculturalists. Sugarcane, rice and wheat are the most popular crops, followed by mustard, lentils, and vegetables like carrots and potatoes. Upper castes, particularly Thakurs, and, in certain pockets, prominent Muslim families own much of the land. Some members of the middle peasant castes of Yadavs and Kurmis also own sizeable plots, though many of them, like most untouchables and many Muslims, are poor. As in the rest of UP, few untouchables are totally landless. Their plots tend to be very small, however, often not bigger than a few *bighas*.¹⁶⁰ Apart from a few large sugarmills and some brick kilns and *bhels*, there is little industrial activity in Sitapur.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ A bigha is a local measure. I am told that its usage varies across the various regions of Uttar Pradesh. In Sitapur, a bigha equals one-fifth of an acre, or approximately 800 m².

¹⁶¹ *Bhels* are privately owned factories where *gur* (molasses) is produced from sugarcanes.

Sitapur has a relatively large untouchable population. The district's 920,000 untouchable inhabitants make up nearly a third (32,2 per cent) of its population. Only one other district in UP has a higher proportion of untouchables. Almost ninety per cent of Sitapur's untouchables belong to any one of two large untouchable jatis, the Pasis (47 per cent) or the Chamars (42 per cent). The Pasis, traditionally associated with a variety of professions including village watchman, thief, and swineherd, are reputed to have once held a part of Oudh before the Rajputs began establishing their dominance in the region in the early thirteenth century. In (pre)colonial times, Pasis were often employed as mercenaries and *lathaits* (bodyguards armed with stout bamboo sticks) by the *taluqdars* (large landowners) of the area. Later they also started to cultivate areas of land as tenants. In the 1930s and 1940s, Pasis tried, in vain, to raise their status by claiming to be Rajpasis of Rajput descent and entitlement to wearing the sacred thread (Kolff 1990: 118; Metcalf 1979: 4; Narayan 2001: 71, n. 35; Nevill 1923: 52; Singh 1999: 1072).¹⁶² In Sitapur, the Pasis are still popularly associated with pig rearing, though most of them are agricultural day labourers and small cultivators.

The Chamars are one of the most populous castes in India and particularly numerous in northern India. They are the single largest untouchable caste in Uttar Pradesh, numbering almost 13 million according to 1981 census. Chamars are traditionally associated with leatherwork and have tended to occupy very low positions in the social scale.¹⁶³ To this day, villagers usually rank them lower than the Pasis. Sitapur's Chamars, like the Pasis, are usually agricultural labourers or small cultivators. In Sitapur, Chamars, in order to avoid the "polluted" epithet Chamar, sometimes call themselves Raidas, after a Chamar saint.¹⁶⁴ The term Harijan -meaning children of God,

¹⁶² The sacred thread (*yajnopavita*) is worn by Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas to signify their "twice-born" status. The Pasis' attempted social mobility failed when social ostracization by which it was followed forced them to drop their claims.

¹⁶³ The name Chamar is said to be derived from the Sanskrit word *chamakara*, meaning leatherworker (Singh 1999).

¹⁶⁴ Raidas was a Chamar shoemaker disciple of Ramananda. Raidas' stories and sayings have been preserved in the seventeenth-century *Bhakta-Mala* and in

the name Mahatma Gandhi gave to the untouchables- is also sometimes used to refer to untouchables in general. In Sitapur, the untouchable jatis other than Pasis and Chamars are quite small. Largest among them are the Dhobis (5,4 per cent) and Koris (1,9 per cent).

According to the 1991 census, in the five development blocks that I studied most intensively, more than 95 per cent of untouchables tried to earn a living in agriculture. At the time of my fieldwork, unrelenting land-hunger and a slackening demand for day labour continued to push untouchables to temporarily or permanently leave their villages in search for work as labourers in nearby brick-factories, sugarmills and *bhels*, or as construction workers and rikshawpullers in the city. They often seemed to be exchanging one situation of economic uncertainty for another. White collar employment remained out of reach to all but a very tiny few, if only because more than two-thirds of Sitapur's untouchables fail to meet the basic requirement -literacy- for such employment.¹⁶⁵

In Sitapur, the combined outlay for the four major poverty alleviation programs -IRDP, JRY, EAS and IAY- executed by the dust-level rural development bureaucracy was almost 37 crores in 1998, most of it (more than 80 per cent) in the form of non-repayable subsidies or wages.¹⁶⁶ Though far from sufficient to eliminate untouchable poverty in the short term, full allocation of this amount to the untouchable poor would have added up to a non-negligible, additional income of Rs. 1200 -or roughly 40 days' worth of

the Sikh holy book, the Granth Sahab (Cohn 1987 (1955): 262).

¹⁶⁵ According to the 1991 census, only 31.4 per cent of Sitapur's untouchables are literate, putting them among the least literate untouchable populations in the entire state (ranked 54th rank out of 63 districts).

¹⁶⁶ The program-wise outlays were as follows: IRDP: 7.34 crores, JRY: 10 crores, EAS: 9.5 crores, IAY: approximately 9.59 crores. The figures for IRDP, JRY and EAS were obtained from the district's Program Director. The figure for IAY is my own estimate based on the IAY outlays in Pahla and Biswan development blocks in the years 1997 and 1998 (obtained from the blocks' clerks). On average, dust-level bureaucrats in these blocks allocated a little over 252 IAY subsidies per year in this two-year period. Multiplied by 19 -the total number of blocks in the district- this amounts to an estimated yearly number of 4792 IAY subsidies of Rs. 20,000 each, totalling 9.59 crores.

agricultural wages- for every member of the district's untouchable workforce in that year.¹⁶⁷ At the time of my fieldwork there were 19 BDOs, among whom there were five untouchables. Out of the 263 VLOs working in the district's 19 blocks, 58 were untouchables.

Fieldwork

Other empirical enquiries into representative bureaucracy have typically sought to establish the occurrence of active representation *indirectly*. A first string of studies, carried out in the 1970s, used attitudes as surrogate measures of active representation (Hindera 1993a). Assuming that bureaucrats' behaviour would follow upon their attitudes, these studies looked for relationships between bureaucrats' group identities and ingroup-friendly *attitudes* (Meier and Nigro 1976; Rosenbloom and Featherstonhaugh 2003; Thompson 1978).¹⁶⁸ Since the early 1990s, another body of empirical research has tried to infer the occurrence of active representation from variations in policy output allocations. Assuming that active representation may be believed to be occurring when groups obtain significantly larger allocations of outputs as their passive representation increases, these more recent studies have sought to establish whether variations in the passive representation of group-identified bureaucrats systematically affect the allocation of policy outputs (or "benefits") to ingroup members (cf. e.g. Hindera 1993a; Selden 1997a). Studies using this approach have typically involved

¹⁶⁷ The scheduled caste working population in Sitapur was 288,726 according to the 1991 census (Census Directorate 1991). In calculating the potential average impact of the four major poverty alleviation schemes implemented in Sitapur I have divided their total outlay of Rs. 37 crore by 300,000, that is, my estimated volume of the untouchable workforce in 1998.

¹⁶⁸ These studies largely failed, in the sense that they did not find the expected (or hoped for) relationship between ingroup identity and ingroup-friendly attitudes. And even if they would have, it is highly doubtful whether these connections could have been interpreted as reliable indicators of active representation. The relationship between attitude and behaviour is, as Klandermans says, "the classic social psychological problem": "Countless laboratory and field studies have investigated the predictive power of attitudes, and arrived time and again at the conclusion that attitudes are poor predictors of behaviour (Klandermans 1997: 7; see also Hindera 1993a: 20).

relatively large samples and the use of multiple regression analysis to control for factors *other than* passive representation that might produce groupwise variations in policy output allocations (Lim 2006: 198; Meier 1993b).

Obvious drawbacks of inferential studies are that they cannot actually *prove* the occurrence of active representation (they can merely suggest or indicate it)¹⁶⁹; fail to illuminate the *practice* of active representation; and, by essentially treating bureaucracies as black boxes, cannot provide *explanations* as to why and when individual bureaucrats behave, or fail to behave, as active representatives of ingroup interests (cf. Lim 2006: 199; Saltzstein 1979: 467; Selden 1997a: 116). To avoid these weaknesses for my own study I chose to rely on qualitative fieldwork. Through a combination of direct, participant observation, personal interviews and the consultation of official documents I set out to develop an explicitly descriptive and explanatory account of active representation by untouchable dust-level bureaucrats.

The resulting grounded theory was to clarify the if, how, why and when of active representation in Sitapur and, in so doing, to provide new insights and clues for elaborating, specifying and modifying existing representative bureaucracy theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).¹⁷⁰ More concretely, my aim was to develop an analysis which would give centre stage to the individual bureaucrats, ingroup clients and relevant others who figure so prominently in theories of representative bureaucracy, but about whose actual

¹⁶⁹ Though policy output studies may be quite helpful in establishing that passive representation has substantive effects, they do not allow for the conclusive attribution of these effects to active representation. Even if such studies could be so designed that the effects of factors other than passive representation could be controlled for or effectively ruled out, one could still not be sure as to whether observed substantive effects must be attributed to active representation or to other, passive representation-related sources of substantive effects like restraint-inducement or resocialization. “Strictly speaking”, Lim observes, “the inference of active representation [from observed substantive effects] remains a non sequitur – possible, even likely, but not necessary” (Lim 2006: 198-200).

¹⁷⁰ “[F]ieldwork in the empirical mode”, as Fortes has argued, “remains the *sine qua non* both for the testing of theory and, what is more important, for making new discoveries” (Fortes 1978: 24).

motives and representative behaviour in real-life situations practically nothing was known when I started my project.

Practically, my fieldwork has consisted of three separate, but interconnected activities: shadowing DLBs, village visits and the collection of official data. To gain a “deep” understanding of active representation, I “shadowed” untouchable DLBs as they went about doing their jobs. I spent much time in trying to find out about the various concrete activities and issues that kept them busy, the places they visited, the time they spent in the villages and with whom, how they decided about the selection of beneficiaries and the allocation of benefits, the problems they encountered and the ambitions they had. To establish whether and how untouchable bureaucrats saw and approached things, clients and situations differently from non-untouchable DLBs, I also shadowed and interviewed many of the district’s non-untouchable DLBs. In the course of my fieldwork I had conversations with most BDOs in the district and with dozens of VLOs.

For both substantive and practical reasons most of my shadowing and other fieldwork activities were carried out in a coterminous area comprising of five blocks in the central-eastern part of Sitapur district. Since the area had a relatively substantial mass of untouchable VLOs -25 out of the entire district’s 58 untouchable VLOs were employed here- I could theoretically expect active representation to be more likely in my research area than in other areas in the district with fewer VLOs. By focusing on a relatively small and coterminous area rather than a loose collection of research sites I also increased the chances for gaining “collateral” data and insights. DLBs might have something interesting to tell me about colleagues of theirs in neighbouring blocks; or clients in a particular village might be able to provide information on DLBs’ activities in other, nearby villages. An additional advantage of focusing on a relatively small area was that it allowed me to keep time-consuming travelling to a minimum.

On arriving in the field, it soon became obvious that the topic I had come to explore was very sensitive and that many bureaucrats would be very much on their guards when discussing such issues as reservations, caste identity and untouchability, client relations and

bureaucratic performance with me. Not to arouse suspicions, I usually felt obliged to be less than wholly candid about the aims of my research. I do not think I ever told any of my informants about my specific hypotheses, background assumptions or my special interest in untouchable bureaucrats. When officials asked me about the purpose of my research, I usually simply told them that I had come to study the practice of rural development and panchayati raj (local government). I also often found myself applying what Craig Jeffrey has called the method of the crab (Jeffrey 2000: 1022), beginning by asking a few general, decoy questions that I guessed or knew would not raise suspicions, to then gradually moving on to the issues in which I was most interested. Depending on the situation and my familiarity with officials I would also often switch between different roles, from naïve foreigner to clued up observer of local life (cf. *ibid.*).

If I were to have solely relied on (untouchable) bureaucrats' stories and interpretations of events and on observing people and situations through their lenses, my interpretive account of representative bureaucracy in Sitapur might have been prone to serious distortions. No matter how cleverly I approached my issues, I could never be quite sure as to whether what bureaucrats told me was what they felt to be true, what they thought they should say, or what they thought I would like to hear. As far as untouchable active representation was concerned, it could not be ruled out that untouchable bureaucrats might routinely be engaged in various forms of active representation but not admit to it –whether verbally or behaviourally- in my presence. Bureaucrats routinely displaying discreditable partiality towards untouchable clients, for instance, might not want me to know about it for obvious reasons. Another possibility was that untouchable bureaucrats who might *not* generally or occasionally act as active representatives would nevertheless claim to be doing so; because they felt that that was what I would want to hear, or because they genuinely aspired to be active representatives but had somehow not yet gotten around or managed to become one.¹⁷¹ Strict reliance on untouchable

¹⁷¹ A number of representative bureaucracy theorists have dwelt upon the possibility that would-be active representatives may stop short of becoming

bureaucrats' opinions, interpretations and observed actions thus carried a danger of both overreporting and underreporting of active representation, without providing a way to correct this bias either way.

To diminish the likelihood of such biases creeping into my analysis I independently –that is, in the absence of dust-level bureaucrats- solicited information from those who would have stood to gain from untouchable VLOs' active representation: poor untouchable villagers. By approaching and talking to them alone I tried to learn more about their experiences in dealing with ingroup bureaucrats, and about the benefits they tended, expected or hoped to derive from untouchable VLOs' presence in their villages. As in the case of untouchable bureaucrats, I put in much effort to cross-check and compare whatever untouchable clients told me with the information I gathered by talking to non-untouchable clients in the same villages.

In talking to villagers, I ended up spending most of my time in the hamlets and central villages of ten gram panchayats that in recent years –the three years prior to my fieldwork (1996-1999)- had been adopted as so-called Ambedkar villages by the UP government. These Ambedkar villages promised to be attractive research sites because they had been eligible for intensified flows of program benefits. As such, they could be expected to have offered increased opportunities for active representation to the VLOs who were posted there. Also, the fact that Ambedkar villages, by definition, had large untouchable populations –in some they made up more than half of the population- promised to guarantee a ready *demand* for active representation.¹⁷²

actual active representatives. They have suggested two possible explanations for it. The first, which I discussed before, is that would-be bureaucrats are prevented from engaging in active representation by strict superiors or more powerful outgroup colleagues and clients. The second explanation projects non-representation as the outcome of the “role-conflict” that (would-be) active representatives may experience between ingroup members' demand for special consideration on the one hand and professional norms of impartiality and neutrality on the other (Herbert 1974: 563; Selden 1997a: 118).

¹⁷² A high proportion of untouchables was the primary criterion used by the Uttar Pradesh government in designating villages as Ambedkar villages.

The villages that I selected were so chosen that they allowed for making comparative observations of untouchable and non-untouchable VLOs' behaviour. As I discuss in appendix I, to be able to speak of untouchable bureaucrats' behaviour as active representation requires that this behaviour be *more* responsive to untouchables' interests than that of non-untouchable bureaucrats *in comparable circumstances*. Many of the villages that I visited approximated the *ceteris paribus* condition for this kind of comparative observations, as they had simultaneously been assigned two VLOs of different castes. At the time of my fieldwork there were, technically speaking, two different types of VLOs. The first was formally known as the *gram vikas adhikari*, or village development officer (VDO). The VDO was a regular employee of the rural development department and his job description fitted the one I described above as being that of "the" VLO. The second type of VLO was called the *gram panchayat adhikari*, or village panchayat officer (VPO). VPOs acted as secretaries to the gram panchayat but also performed developmental activities. These were quite similar to those carried out by VDOs, except that they were restricted to programs that had been delegated to the gram panchayat rather than to the block machinery.

Most of the villages that I selected for my visits had, or had recently seen, VDOs and VPOs of different castes *simultaneously* assigned to them; an untouchable VDO and a non-untouchable VPO, or vice versa. Untouchable clients in such villages could thus relate their *comparative* experiences with VLOs of different castes but with highly similar job descriptions to me. The fact that VLOs are quite regularly -roughly every three or four years- transferred to other postings supplied another proximate *ceteris paribus* condition for comparing untouchable and non-untouchable VLOs' behaviour. Villagers did not have to dig deep in their memories to compare "the work" done by the various VLOs who had been posted in the village in recent years.

The villages were also so selected that I might have learned more about the conditions for (the "when" of) active representation. One of the criteria that guided my selection of the ten Ambedkar villages was that they differed in two respects that might plausibly

be expected to have a bearing on VLOs' opportunities and motives for active representation. Five villages had had an untouchable pradhan since 1993, while the pradhans in the remaining five villages had been non-untouchables. A few among the latter had had upper caste pradhans for as long as villagers could remember. Such differences allowed me to explore the importance of ingroup political functionaries as enablers or, perhaps, catalysers of active representation. The selected villages also differed quite substantially in the relative strength of their untouchable populations, ranging from 28 to 64 per cent. These appreciable differences in untouchable population strengths across the selected villages allowed for appraising the relative importance of "security in numbers" of ingroup clients to their demands for, or expectations of, active representation.

Altogether I visited 41 hamlets and bigger villages in 20 gram panchayats, some of them once, others repeatedly. As in the case of the DLBs, the issues I was most interested in could not usually be approached head on. I would often start the conversation by asking villagers to tell me more about the "changes" in village life they had witnessed over the years. Once one or a few of them had warmed up to the topic other villagers, more often than not, would soon join in and discuss, in varying degrees of detail, the work they did, their relations with other castes in the village, village politics, their voting behaviour, local labour relations, their pass-times and material conditions. For reasons that will become apparent later on, villagers often displayed a marked reluctance to discuss in any detail their dealings with DLBs, however.

Most of the interviews with officials, villagers and other informants in Sitapur were conducted in Hindi or Awadhi. Though I was sufficiently proficient in Hindi to approach people, make general conversation and could usually understand the gist of what was being said, throughout my stay in the district I relied a lot on the language and people skills of my interpreter *cum* assistant, Sunil Gupta. I would usually conduct the interviews myself for as far as my mastery of Hindi allowed. Sunil usually quickly sensed whenever I had lost the thread of what officials or villagers were trying to tell me, and I could always count on him to fill me in

during lulls in the conversation or to bring the discussion back to the issues we had come to explore. The fact that Sunil was a recent public administration graduate turned out to be a great advantage. Being conversant with popular public administration theories and the organization and policies of the rural development bureaucracy, it did not take long for him to grasp what sort of information I was after and what I needed it for. I benefited a great deal from Sunil's help in explaining and interpreting the things we saw and heard. If there is any merit in the analysis presented here, a large part of the credit must go to Sunil.

Throughout my stay in Sitapur I tried (largely in vain) to collect official figures on program achievements and the proportions of untouchables among program beneficiaries in my sample villages. I had initially decided to collect such information in the expectation of using it as supplementary evidence for the patterns of active representation that I was going to find. Even if, as gradually became clear, there was little if any active representation to be documented, I nevertheless continued my official data gathering trips right to the very end as they could be made to serve a very useful purpose: they always gave me a good excuse for popping up in block and district offices of the rural development administration, and provided ample opportunities for meeting new people and starting conversations on the issues I had come to explore. These offices, especially, were the places to be, not only to get in touch with DLBs or their nominal clients but also with a special class of individuals -variously called social workers, dalaals, or netas- who tend to play a significant role in determining who gets what, when and how on the Indian dust-level.

Looking back, I think I can safely say that with some luck and determined efforts I managed to gain "access" to the dust-level Sitapur development bureaucracy. In due course, my face -our faces, rather- and spontaneous appearances became familiar to many DLBs in the research area. Though the access gained sometimes amounted to little more than DLBs' visibly reluctant tolerance of my presence, this was compensated for by the enthusiastic reception and expansiveness of others. Quite a few DLBs eventually led their guards down to the extent that they invited me to their houses for

dinner or to celebrate special occasions. In a number of cases, I may also have managed to “win over” initially reluctant DLBs through sheer obstinacy.¹⁷³ None of this is to say that, at any time, I was at risk of “going native” or becoming one of the boys (there were no female DLBs), nor of winning DLBs’ complete confidence; far from it. To most DLBs, I probably remained what I must have seemed to them from the outset, a complete, if rather funny, outsider. All things considered, it may, in fact, have been my outsider status, more than anything else, which has helped me get, if only a little, inside the rural development bureaucracy. As Sunil once reminded me, it was only *because* of my being a foreigner that I had managed to gain the kind of access that I did. “An Indian would never have succeeded”.

Though I initially envisaged my fieldwork to result in a grounded theory of active representation by untouchable DLBs, I ended up with quite the opposite: a descriptive and explanatory account of an *unrepresentative* bureaucracy. In the following two chapters I will try and show that untouchable DLBs hardly if ever engage in the active representation of untouchable clients’ interests and provide explanations as to why this is so. As this story unfolds, the reader will be introduced to a complex and vibrant local universe in which an array of actors, factors and considerations conspire to simultaneously limit untouchable VLOs’ opportunities and motivations for acting as active representatives and constrain untouchable clients’ possibilities for claiming special treatment. The interrupted supply of active representation is the topic of the next chapter; the absence of a demand for active representation will be discussed in chapter 6.

¹⁷³ At the closing stages of my fieldwork, some DLBs -though they did not exactly give the impression of *minding* my leaving- confided that they had been quite “amused” by my stubborn and unrelenting attempts to learn more about their work. One even went as far as saying that he “respected” me for it.

5 Interrupted Supply

In this chapter, I adopt the perspective of Sitapur's untouchable DLBs and analyze their apparent lack of supply of active representation. I observe DLBs' -both untouchable and non-untouchable- widespread inclination to abandon the frontline and try to account for this inclination by pointing out the internal and environmental pressures under which they must operate. Frontline abandonment, as I will argue, is best (and almost literally) understood as a survival strategy which, if successfully pursued, provides DLBs with relative ease of mind, an attractive posting and a steady additional income in the form of development rents. In the second part of this chapter, I illustrate and explain untouchable DLBs' tendency to pass, that is to make themselves invisible *as* untouchables to outsiders in an effort to cope with the problem of stigmatized identity. Frontline abandonment and passing, I conclude, are so pervasive as to make active representation by untouchable DLBs highly unlikely, if not non-existent.

1 Frontline abandonment

One of the first DLBs I met while in Sitapur was BDO Singh of Kasmanda block. Meeting him early on in my fieldwork proved a lucky coincidence. Unlike most other BDOs, Singh had not spent his entire administrative career within the rural development hierarchy. Before becoming the BDO of Kasmanda, he had served as a deputy director in the Uttar Pradesh government in Lucknow, where he had been entrusted with working out proposals for providing rural panchayat bodies with more viable shares of financial resources. In

that capacity, Singh had developed a more than strictly professional interest in the issue of panchayat raj reform. Not long before we met, as he proudly told me, he had been invited to attend a national conference on new developments in Indian local government, held in the southern city of Hyderabad. He had also written one or two scholarly articles on the subject and was enthusiastically developing ideas for more. When I told him about my own interest in rural development and panchayati raj, it did not take him long to invite me to stay for some time in his bungalow in the village of Kamlapur, Kasmanda block's headquarters.

Singh seemed genuinely happy to have someone like me around with whom he could discuss and share his ideas. I spent many hours sitting at the side of his desk, watching him sign a never-ending stream of files -brought in by respectful clerks dutifully pointing their fingers to the spot where BDO *sahab* should sign- and deal with the many clients and local politicians who came to see him for some or other *kam* ("work")¹⁷⁴; to get their paperwork done, lodge a complaint or ask a question. During intervals, Singh would patiently explain to me the details of the programs he supervised or, in outspoken moods, digress on who his visitors were, why they had come to visit him, and speculate on their motives for asking particular favours of him. Singh let me sit in at the weekly general meetings with the VLOs, which he chaired. Whenever the opportunity arose, I also accompanied Singh in his jeep on trips outside the block, to inspect ongoing development works, attend some official or social function, or meet with other officials in the district headquarters Sitapur.

BDO Singh's work did not seem to involve a lot of interaction with his nominal subordinates, the VLOs, in whose activities I was specially interested and whom I had hoped to contact while staying in the block. The weekly block meetings were usually short and had a rather ritualistic feel to them; Singh told the VLOs what he had to say, the VLOs quietly, and rather passively, listened. As soon as the meeting ended, most VLOs would quickly leave the block compound and drive off on their motorbikes. Being new to the place

¹⁷⁴ *Kam*, conventionally translated as "work", is a sanskrit based word used for activities that require effort (De Zwart 1995b: 10).

and work environment, I simply assumed that the VLOs must be busy in their villages and apparently did not need that much guidance.

After a few weeks in Kasmanda block I asked Singh whether it would be possible to see how his VLOs were doing in the villages. Though seeming a little perturbed by my request, Singh, after one of the Wednesday block meetings, called out to one of the VLOs, a man named Ram Vilas, and instructed him to show me around in his village. Vilas, clearly puzzled, got on his motorbike (a Suzuki, quite popular at the time among Sitapur's VLOs) with some unidentified young man riding pillion. Vilas beckoned us (Sunil was with me) to follow him and set off. Patara Kalan, the village where Vilas was posted, turned out to be situated quite close to the block office, some three kilometres northwest from Kamlapur, just off the highway that connects the state capital Lucknow to Sitapur.

Having arrived in the village, Vilas, who appeared to take directions from the man behind him, manoeuvred his motorbike straight to what turned out to be the *pradhan's* house. Entering the house, Vilas and the pillion rider asked us to wait outside for a moment. We quickly attracted the attention of a small crowd of spectators who did not speak to us, but seemed quite happy to just watch the scene, quietly murmuring among themselves. I caught the word *jaj* (official enquiry, investigation). After a few minutes, the *pradhan* himself appeared; a man, estimatedly in his mid-forties and wearing the traditional *dhoti* favoured by ordinary village folk and politicians.¹⁷⁵ (Ram Vilas and his companion, by contrast, wore "western-style" pants and shirts, the usual attire of Indian civil servants and other white collar workers¹⁷⁶).

The *pradhan*, who introduced himself as Shyam Lal, ushered us into a small room which gave the impression of serving as a reception room for guests. It was sparsely furnished with a small tea table and a few steel chairs with plastic mattings, of the type

¹⁷⁵ A *dhoti* is a rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, usually between 4 and 5 meters long, wrapped about the waist and the legs, and knotted at the waist.

¹⁷⁶ Lowly, 4th class government workers such as sweepers and, sometimes, drivers are an exception in this regard. They usually wear the traditional *dhoti*.

characteristically found in government offices. A young girl brought in a plate of fruits and tea and quickly disappeared. Lal told us he had won the last two *pradhani* elections and had served as Patara Kalan's *pradhan* for the past thirteen years. In so doing he had continued the family "tradition"; his father, namely, had also been *pradhan*, way back in the seventies. What was evidently a matter of great pride to Lal was that he, and his father before him, had managed to secure the *pradhani* as SCs (untouchables), in a village numerically dominated by BCs (backward castes).

Then Lal, unsolicited and excitedly, started dwelling at length on the various ways in which untruthful "people" could thwart fair elections. Principally, he explained, there were three foul ways in which candidates could be kept from winning: "Powerful" people could obstruct the nominations of rival candidates; candidates could be "obstructed" to contact their voters, and voters could be "influenced" by way of threats. The "kidnapping" of candidates, said Lal, also belonged to this category. It was all too clear that Lal himself, also, had had to overcome a fair share of said obstructions and influencing by his rivals.

All the while that *pradhan* Lal was suggestively painting us a picture of local electoral politics, Vilas and his companion had kept mostly quiet, now and then making concurring noises and gestures. Only when Lal digressed on the prevalence of "verbal threats" in village politics, did Vilas interrupt the *pradhan's* monologue. Politicians, he emphasized, were not the only ones on the receiving end of such abuses; *adhikaris* (officers) like himself also often had to deal with them when carrying out their development programs in the villages. Though I tried repeatedly to bring the chatting around to the development activities being undertaken in the village, this did not seem to arouse much conversational interest.

After finishing our teas and fruits, we all got up to leave. I asked Vilas, who seemed to be getting ready to leave the village on his motorbike, whether he could perhaps find a little more time to walk us around the village and show us some of the development projects. Annoyed, Vilas conferred for a moment with his companion, out of our earshot. Then, at a brisk pace, he started walking along the village's main road. It soon became evident,

however, that Vilas did not really know his way around the village. Apparently he and his companion, finally introduced by Vilas as “some friend” who “sometimes helps me out”, had decided to give me a tour of the recently constructed *colonies* (as locals refer to houses built with IAY subsidies) in the village, but Vilas more than once lost his way, to be quickly put on the right track by his “helper”. Lal, who was walking alongside Sunil and me, could not suppress a smile. Vilas sensed we were becoming aware of his ignorance and, as if to correct this impression, “instructed” the *pradhan*, in what was clearly intended as an authoritative voice, to make sure that a few unfinished (but already paid-for) colonies would be completed as quickly as possible. After this hurried tour, Vilas and his friend quickly got on their bike and drove off.

As I came to realize in the following weeks and months, my short visit to Patara Kalan had revealed a very common, even typical, feature of Sitapur’s rural development bureaucracy. Almost as a rule, the DLBs working in the district are quite ignorant about the villages they are supposed to be working in. Apart from the *pradhan* or some other “powerful” people they usually hardly know any of the ordinary villagers –who are, after all, their nominal clients- personally. Though they usually know –perhaps with a little help of some friend- where to find the residences of their villages’ influential people, they are typically not conversant with the names and layouts of the various hamlets in their jurisdiction. And more often than not, they are even quite unaware of the development projects being purportedly executed under their own guidance and supervision.

For one who might have had visions of rural development administration involving DLBs moving at frantic speed through the countryside to bring the fruits of modernity to the most backward areas of the country, an acquaintance with Sitapur’s DLBs is thus a sobering up experience. DLBs like Ram Vilas, in fact, seldom visit their villages and, hence, tend to see very little dust. If they are ignorant about the villages and their own developmental activities it is because they have, for most intents and purposes, abandoned the frontline of rural development program implementation (cf. Hood

1998: 31-4). They usually need a good reason to pay a visit to their villages, keep their touring to an absolute minimum and, like Ram Vilas, restrict their visits to where the locally influential people reside.

From the point of view of ordinary villagers, like the curious spectators in Patara Kalan, a village appearance by the VLO is a noteworthy phenomenon, at least in the five blocks in my fieldwork area and even more so in the poor and low-caste settlements surrounding the main villages there. The large majority of the rural development bureaucracy's prospective clients in the more than 40 villages and hamlets that I visited claimed to have never spoken to the DLB assigned to their area or village. The inhabitants of the untouchable hamlet Ghaura, for instance, claimed to have picked up whatever information they possessed about rural development programs from watching the hamlet's single TV owned by a relatively well-off inhabitant. *Secretary* Daya Ram, however, -like the inhabitants of Ghaura a Chamar by jati- had never been spotted in the hamlet, ever since he had been posted in Maholi five years ago.

The people in the untouchable hamlet Pasiapurva (Chandraseni), acknowledged that the secretary did come once in a while, "but he only halts at the school in Chandraseni". According to the inhabitants of Mahuwapurva, a mixed caste settlement with backward and untouchable castes, "nobody from the block, neither village level officers, nor the BDO or other officials, have ever visited our hamlet. Whenever we have some work, we have to ferret them out". Likewise, the name of Babu Ram, the untouchable VLO posted in their gram panchayat, did not ring a bell among the Chamars and Pasis of Bhawania purva: "Nobody", they concluded dryly, "ever comes here". In short, Sitapur's VLOs, irrespective of their caste identity, have largely abandoned the frontline. They do not regularly visit the villages and hamlets in their jurisdiction, let alone frequent them.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ My findings are remarkably similar to those of Sylvia Marion Hale, who reported on the lack of interaction between officials and villagers in five villages in eastern Uttar Pradesh two decades ago: "The restricted nature of interaction [with officials, bvg] is indicated by the fact that two-thirds of all respondents said they had never talked directly with officials. Almost half of them did not know who these people were. For others recognition was often

2 Netas do the work

The fact that Sitapur's DLBs have largely abandoned the frontline does not mean that (some) rural development benefits such as subsidies, temporary employment and rural infrastructure do not reach the rural population. On the contrary, *in spite of* DLBs' absenteeism, beneficiaries *are* selected and program benefits *are* being allocated. Rather than by the block staff, however, such allocative decisions are typically and decisively influenced and taken by local politicians or, as they are commonly referred to, local *netas*. In doing so, these *netas* effectively appropriate whatever *de iure* and *de facto* discretionary power DLBs might be considered to have. Rural development work, in other words, is in practice the business of politicians.

The political appropriation of decisionmaking-power over rural development issues is so common that few of those concerned -*netas*, DLBs and clients- deem it worthy of much surprise or comment. It is, quite simply, taken as a matter of fact. Remarking on the selection of IAY beneficiaries in the village of Bhaira Bhaikuntpur, BDO Kasmanda, for instance, noted almost in passing that "though the VLO produced a list of prospective beneficiaries the actual selection was done by the *pradhan*". When I asked an assembled group of VLOs in Reusa block how they went about selecting deserving candidates for the various programs entrusted to them they seemed rather baffled by the ignorance implied in my question. "In practice", they explained, "we hardly make any decisions at all. It is the *pradhan* who decides who will get the benefits".

Beneficiaries, on their part, typically explain their availing of certain benefits as a result of the decisive intervention by the *pradhan* or other powerful *netas*. Members of an untouchable

confined to seeing them in the market or taking tea on the *pradhan's* front porch. Only fifteen per cent of all respondents claimed frequent contact with officials. These comprise respondents mainly from among the *pradhan's* supporters and neutral higher castes. Other sections of the communities were largely ignored. Low caste respondents, in particular, often claimed that officials had never entered their street, never stopped to talk to them, and did not visit their fields" (Hale 1984: 70).

family in the hamlet of Mamarkhapur who managed to get a housing subsidy claimed they owed their “luck” to the efforts of the block *pramukh*, “who took pity on us”. In both their own and poor villagers’ accounts, DLBs hardly feature as important actors in developmental decision-making. If they are perceived to play a role at all, this role largely remains restricted to the official *sanctioning* of decisions actually arrived at by other, political, actors. As Samar Singh, the VLO of Paisiya, summed up the prevailing situation: “The VLO mostly follows whatever plans the village *pradhan* has cooked up”.

Whence this widespread political appropriation of bureaucratic discretion in, what would appear to be, *routine* implementation decision-making? Answering this question requires insight in dust-level politicians’ motives for encroaching upon formally administrative jurisdictions as well as in DLBs’ motives for their apparent toleration of this encroachment. Let me deal with the motivations of dust-level *netas* first. Put roughly, local *netas* have *good reasons* to appropriate DLBs’ discretion because securing, maintaining and extending the capability to supply the sort of benefits that DLBs are supposed to make available is what Indian politics, and also politics in dust-level Uttar Pradesh, is all, or at least largely, about.

Most politicians in contemporary India act on the assumption that the votes and group support needed to satisfy their political ambitions can be most successfully garnered by acting as *patrons* to voters. That is to say, they spend much, if not most, of their time and energy on locating, capturing and distributing *patronage* to their followers or those whose electoral support they court. In Indian politics, virtually any public resource can be, and often is, turned into patronage: government jobs, wells, housing, roads, land security, schools, telegraph lines, power connections, water, loans, hospital beds, police protection, ration cards, university admission, business licenses and permits as well as, more indirectly, *access* to political or administrative authorities who can influence or, even better, *decide* on the allocation of these benefits (cf. e.g. Brass 1966; Chandra 2004b).

According to Paul Brass, a leading scholar of India's political system, Indian politics has become "so oriented to the distribution of patronage, favors, appointments, contracts, and the like, that most politicians cannot imagine an alternative" (Brass 1997: 55). More recently, Kanchan Chandra has typified Indian democracy as a *patronage democracy* in which candidates for political office, regardless of the ideological preoccupations or policy issues raised by national level leaders on public platforms, typically seek votes and office by the simple promise "Vote for me and I will get your work done". Hence, elections may fruitfully be seen as "auctions for the sale of government services" (Chandra 2004a). Since politicians in India's patronage democracy treat public goods essentially as market goods to be exchanged for popular support, *official rules* that stipulate clients' entitlements to public benefits do not tend to count for much. Access to public benefits and resources, in other words, is typically not a matter of administratively codified entitlement but, rather, a *personal favour* to be given (or withheld) by political patrons.¹⁷⁸

Brass has traced the rise of patronage politics in Uttar Pradesh to the years directly following Indian independence. The political leadership that had thus far been exercised by prominent, charismatic and ideologically inspired leaders of the nationalist movement began to be steadily taken over by "modern virtuoso politicians", men whose positions of new found power were not

¹⁷⁸ The prevalence of patronage politics is, of course, by no means a typically Indian phenomenon. On the contrary, patronage politics *permeates*, as anthropologists and sociologists have shown, political systems around the world (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002: 2). What distinguishes India's patronage politics from many other patronage-based systems is its intimate linkage with the *democratic, electoral* process; in many settings where patronage permeates the political system, this system is not democratic in the sense that, as is the case in India, political leadership is chosen through competitive elections. Another distinguishing feature of Indian patronage politics would seem to be the *sheer scale* on which it has tended to be practiced. The Indian state long -that is, at least until the early 1990s, when its central leadership started moving towards liberalizing the "command economy" of the "license raj"- controlled, if not monopolized, most valued things in life, including security of life and property and access to education and health facilities (cf. Chandra 2004b).

built, as those of the earlier generation of leaders, upon personal “esteem and awe”, but on their practical understanding of local society and their ability to distribute patronage. In the post-independence period, then, men of power in the districts were increasingly those who could “get things done” (Brass 1966: 33, 35, 219). Nowadays, more than half a century later, little seems to have changed. Virtuoso politicians, also in Sitapur, continue to abound. If anything, they have become much more numerous than before, especially at the dust-level. Whereas the new developmental hierarchy –extending all the way down to the villages- has provided politicians with an additional and popular *source* of patronage, also the *number* of elective positions from which this patronage may be dispensed has increased, due to the strengthening of the local panchayat system.

Dust-level netas –including pradhans, BDC-members, pramukhs as well as individuals *seeking* political office- are quite a visible lot. Distinctively dressed in the traditional *kurta-dhoti*, the more successful or ambitious among them can often be seen roaming the countryside on their motorbikes (not the newfangled Suzuki’s preferred by VLOs, but sturdy, old-style native brands like Rajdoots and Indian Enfields). They flock the district’s block offices, their importance and popularity aptly signalled by the number of retainers and benefit seekers flocking to *them* rather than to the block staff. The block-pramukh of Reusa, Hasin Ahmad, for instance, is evidently a popular and influential man. Every Wednesday and Friday, Ahmad, hailing from a Muslim land owning family, holds court on the block premises to, as he explains, “meet the village people, see work, listen to BDC members and attend to pradhans’ problems”. The Kasmanda block office is frequented by a handful pradhans of nearby villages. Mostly belonging to upper caste, landowning families (whose members, if they can afford it, typically do not cultivate their land themselves), these dust-level netas are free to spend their days cultivating good relations with and leaning on the block staff, hear and exchange gossip, check rumours, and take care of some work for their clients: disposing of paperwork, speeding up files, securing eligibility for

development benefits and pressing for the sanctioning of subsidy instalments.

To appreciate the extent to which such *netagiri* (“politicking”) by dust-level politicians may weigh on purportedly technical, routine, implementational administrative decision-making in Sitapur one needs only observe the sheer number of netas circling around dust-level administrative offices in a town like Biswan.¹⁷⁹ Biswan is a busy market town and a locally important road junction. It also boasts a large government-operated sugar mill. After the sugarcane harvest, peasants from the wider region direct their hundreds of bullock and tractor-driven carts to queue up in front of the mill, waiting for their turn to offload their produce, heaped up meters high, and collect their receipts. Biswan is also a minor administrative centre. It does not only host the Biswan block headquarters but is also home to a *thana* (police station) and the tehsil offices of the revenue bureaucracy. These offices attract a continuous stream of visiting district and state civil and police officials and, especially, netas –both big and small-time ones- and other influence peddlers. At night time many of them can be found having their meals and drinking country liquor at the locally popular Gupta restaurant where “*namaskar pradhanji*” is a very frequent form of address.¹⁸⁰ To be in the thick of things, quite a few pradhans have settled themselves permanently in the town. Others operate through family members or close relations residing there.

Dust-level netas’ preoccupation with securing and providing patronage is logical in view of villagers’ expectations of them. Good

¹⁷⁹ I spent quite a lot of time in Biswan. The room which I had rented there was adjacent to the busy telephone booth of Mr. Srivastava, himself brother to one of the pradhans in the area. Srivastava, with whom I soon developed friendly relations, singled out and introduced me to quite a few dust-level netas, including his brother. It was through these contacts that I learned much of what I now know about the sort of reasons dust-level netas have for frequenting administrative offices and about their strategies for securing the cooperation of the officials working in them.

¹⁸⁰ Namaskar is a respectful version of the popular greeting “namaste”, which Hindus typically utter while folding their hands. The extension *ji* added to pradhan also denotes respect. The exchanges of *namaskar pradhanji*’s in the Gupta hotel –where Sunil and I often had our dinners- were so numerous that it sparked Sunil’s comment that “everybody in Biswan seems to be pradhan”.

politicians, by the latter's definition, are politicians who can be counted on to deliver benefits and get things done; bad politicians, on the other hand, are those who humbly spread their *angaucha*, make attractive promises but fail to do any work.¹⁸¹ The reason why a group of villagers in Haibatpur, for instance, were so happy with their pradhan was evidently because he, as they pointed out in considerable detail, was *doing* something for them: "Our pradhan", they said, "really takes care of the poor. Earlier the roads were not good, but now they are good enough. All *colonies* have been properly built. The pradhan has seen to it that they are even bigger than normal, and he has paid for this from his own pocket". In further praise of their pradhan they also credited him with arranging for loans for buffaloes, weaving-machines and with securing seasonal employment opportunities against very attractive conditions: "We got 35 to 40 rupees for a day's work, with tea, *bidis*, matches, sweets and meals provided for. Even if we had asked *jalebi* [a popular type of sweet] for breakfast", they boasted, "the pradhan would surely have given us".

The untouchable villagers in Karaundi, on the other hand, were obviously very dissatisfied with their pradhan "You can see, sir, there is nothing here: no proper roads or lanes, no drains. You can see this high voltage electricity line just crossing in front of the village, but what use is it to us? Our village is still not connected to it. Last year only a handpump was installed here thanks to BDC member Ramji but the pradhan has done nothing here. Go and see Newada, a neighbouring village. The pradhan there has done excellent work". What the villagers in Haibatpur and Karaundi, despite their different evaluations of their pradhans' effectiveness, have in common is that they employ the same yardstick for evaluating politicians' performance: getting concrete and material things done. No wonder, then, that many *netas*, who depend on villagers for votes and re-election, so eagerly seek and dispense

¹⁸¹ An *angaucha* is a multipurpose scarf. Peasants wrap it around their heads in protection against dust and heat and use it as a handkerchief and towel. The *angaucha* has also become part of the standard attire of an Indian *neta*, signifying, as Sunil explained to me, the hard labour and sweat purportedly involved in their work.

patronage and spend most of their days, as the villagers of Haibatpur described their pradhan's activities, "doing all kinds of work, such as arranging pensions for widows and old people and help for pregnant ladies".¹⁸²

3 Leasing out discretion

To say that netas "do the work" does not mean that DLBs are not involved in the allocation of development benefits. But what it *does* mean is that DLBs somehow allow netas to appropriate the decision-making discretion invested in their own roles. The implication of the fact that DLBs tend to eschew the exercise of discretion is that it makes the operation of representative bureaucracy in terms of caste on the Sitapur dust-level highly unlikely. If DLBs, regardless of their caste identities, refrain from making allocative *decisions*, it does not really matter of what caste they are. The reason why DLBs, almost routinely, go along with the appropriation of their discretion by local netas is basically twofold: The first reason is that DLBs fear the punishments that local netas can dole out when they find DLBs to be uncooperative, the second that cooperation with netas may actually be turned into quite a lucrative affair.

As we have seen, local netas typically act under a compulsion of patronage. To make such patronage available to their clients they are heavily dependent on the cooperation and complicity of DLBs. First of all, netas depend upon officials for reliable *information* on the

¹⁸² Note that rural voters employ this yardstick for *all* netas, irrespective of the level at which they operate: the better and more his work, the better the politician. One man in Biswan, for instance, argued that Amar Rizvi -a "big" politician in the area and former MLA, MP and Minister- had been a good politician because he had "done so many things in Mahmoodabad" [the town from where Rizvi was elected]: "He arranged the arrival of a cooperative sugar mill, a polytechnic, a spinning mill, a TV tower, the Rampur-Mathura road and the bridge between Sitapur district and Bahraich". Similarly, this same man was also happy with Padma Seth, a former urban development minister from Biswan because she, also, had "done good work": "She has the road dividers at the central crossing of Biswan to her credit, as well as 5 tubewells, three tanks and other road development works".

kind and amount of benefits available for "allocation" in their blocks and villages. Before it can be secured and dispensed, patronage must namely first be identified. Rural development programs are not equally intensively implemented in all localities, and some programs -like the UP government's Ambedkar village program- are even exclusively implemented in limited numbers of specially designated localities for centrally specified periods of time. Decisions regarding the activation and funding of rural development programs in specific areas, blocks and villages and the quantity of development benefits involved are typically made by higher authorities -on federal, state, divisional and district level- and then relayed to the blocks. DLBs therefore possess, or have relatively easy access to, the kind of information that is vital to netas' success as patrons.

Secondly, netas depend on DLBs for observing *secrecy*. Obviously, effective patronage politics presupposes a fair share of ignorance among the patron's clientele. If clients had full knowledge about the existence, content, procedures, and eligibility criteria of development programs they would not need netas to act as intermediaries between themselves and the block machinery; they could simply approach the development bureaucracy directly to claim the development benefits to which they are formally entitled. Since villagers' continued ignorance is essential to their survival as political patrons, netas have a vested interest in making sure that DLBs actively restrict the spread of relevant information among potential clients. An added advantage of securing DLBs' secrecy and interrupting the information supply to target groups, is that it denies clients the opportunity to evaluate the generosity of their netas and, hence, the latter's worthiness of their electoral support. In other words, client ignorance about *the extent* of development patronage available from the block allows netas to create favourable impressions of themselves as big-hearted, influential and efficient patrons even if they are, in fact, nothing of the kind.

During my village visits I often had the opportunity to experience first hand how jealously village netas tend to guard information on rural development programs and how desperate ordinary villagers are to gain whatever knowledge they can. On

several occasions when I brought up the issue of local program outlays, village politicians became visibly uncomfortable or nervous. In Majhiya, a close associate of the pradhan bluntly ordered curious by-standers to back off when I asked him about the development outlays in the village. The pradhan of Haibatpur was apparently not in a position to simply dismiss a dozen of interested spectators. When asked about the JRY activities undertaken in his village, he therefore decided –to the obvious hilarity and scorn of the spectators– to continue our conversation inside his house. Netas' reticence to openly discuss program information stood in shrill contrast with the eagerness with which many villagers absorbed every piece of information they could lay their hands on. When I showed a few men in Arro Khamajatpur a file with the village's program outlays given to me by a block clerk, I was in no time surrounded by three dozen men. When they grasped how much money should, in theory, have reached their village over the past few years, a few of them became so agitated that Sunil and I had a hard time calming them down.¹⁸³

Thirdly, netas depend on DLBs for getting the necessary paperwork in order. As in all bureaucracies, the implementation of development programs involves a lot of paperwork. Applications must be filled out, signatures or thumb-impressions collected, caste certificates produced, project monies sanctioned, development progress mapped and authorised, subsidy instalments approved, village development plans written. In other words, what may broadly be referred to as the "allocation" of development benefits is typically not a single, clear-cut event but a chain of small and

¹⁸³ Sitapur's dust-level netas' preoccupation with information control accords well with a key insight developed in Lee Komito's account of patron-client politics in Dublin, Ireland. The patron's power, as Komito observed, does not so much rest in his control over public resources –as most scholarly accounts of this kind of politics have it– as well as in his control over and access to *information about* those resources. "Dublin politicians' claim to power or influence rested on their ability to monopolise and then market their specialist knowledge of state resources and their access to bureaucrats who allocated such resources . . . Politicians used their special access and knowledge to create a reputation in the community . . . Politicians' often exaggerated claims of influence could not be disputed because knowledge of administrative procedures was severely restricted" (Komito 1984: 174, 175).

discrete administrative actions. This chain typically requires the alternating involvement of *several* DLBs -VLOs, ADOs, clerks and the BDO- and, at each and every juncture, the production of paper documents to serve as proof that centrally ordained procedures have been scrupulously followed to the letter.

Netas are well aware that their trading of access to development benefits for votes and group support is not exactly legal and might land them into trouble. One of the first questions I would typically be asked by village politicians was whether I had come for some *jaj*. Clearly, netas are quite concerned that higher and vigilance authorities might learn about their patronage transactions. Making sure that the official paperwork documents and reflects centrally desired procedures and outcomes rather than ground realities is crucial if netas, as they feel they must, are to cover up patronage transactions. But since most netas lack the necessary expertise or literacy (according to one BDO, "at least forty per cent" of the pradhans in his block were illiterate), they must rely on cooperative DLBs for doing the job.¹⁸⁴

Punishment-based cooperation

The large majority of DLBs in Sitapur see no good reasons why they should withhold their cooperation from the important netas in their jurisdictions. To start with, unlike bureaucrats in many other political systems, Indian bureaucrats, DLBs included, may be rather easily disciplined or punished by politicians if the latter somehow find them to be uncooperative. Undoubtedly the most important and commonly used tool of control that Indian politicians have over salaried government employees is the power to transfer bureaucrats from one post to another. The right to transfer senior civil servants, most notably IAS officials, formally rests with the chief minister, the highest political functionary in the state. Civil servants in the lower

¹⁸⁴ In a program such as JRY, the implementation of which has in theory been fully delegated to the gram panchayats, village netas' dependence on DLBs for "properly" taking care of the paperwork is less than in most other schemes, which are still nominally executed by the block staff. But also in JRY, netas continue to depend on DLBs -VLOs in this case- since their sign is still needed for the release of funds to the villages.

echelons, including BDOs (class 1 officials) and VLOs (class 3 officials) may, in turn, be transferred by the senior officials whose transfers are subject to the chief minister's control. All this is largely theory, however. In practice, chief ministers, to preserve and buttress the support of their allies in the state government, often feel obliged to farm out their power to transfer senior officials to MLAs. MLAs, on their part, may likewise choose to further delegate the transfer power bestowed to them to influential district-level politicians to whom they feel obligated or whose support they court.¹⁸⁵ As a result, political control over the bureaucracy is widely dispersed: "Politicians exert a chain of influence that runs down to the lowliest employee at the local level" (Chandra 2004b: 129-130).

Netas in Sitapur also try, and regularly manage, to transfer uncooperative officials. ("The former two BDOs?", replied the pramukh of Parsendi matter-of-factly when I asked him about his relations with them, "I had them transferred"). In itself, a transfer to another post or place does not need to constitute a punishment to the concerned official. On the contrary, it may provide an opportunity to escape the grind or unpleasant atmosphere of one's former posting, make new friends and see new places, or to live nearer to one's native place and close relations. Moreover, bureaucrats know in advance that regular transfers come with the job and therefore *expect* to find themselves in another locality every

¹⁸⁵ Part of the reason why politicians higher up can expect to increase their political support by granting transfer power to politicians lower down the line is that transfer power is a marketable commodity. Politicians who wield transfer power can, and often do, sell administrative posts under their control to the highest bidder. The money thus earned is an important political asset since political parties preferably field candidates who have the financial means to win elections. Another reason why politicians are willing to exchange political support for transfer power is that transfers can also be used to fill important, that is patronage-rich, posts with bureaucrats who are prepared to assist in channelling benefits to local constituencies (De Zwart 1994: 81; Wade 1982: 319). The willingness of a "big" politician to farm out transfer power to a "smaller" politician thus constitutes a politically very important favour. The office of former (and present) UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, at one time, had as many as 2,500 letters from MPs and MLAs requesting transfers or postings (Saxena 1999: 97).

once in a while. A transfer only becomes a punishment whenever the new posting does not live up to one's wishes.

In Sitapur, most VLOs especially dislike and fear a posting in the blocks of Reusa, Sakran, Rampur and Behta. These blocks are situated in the infertile and poor lowland plain in the eastern part of the district also known as the gaanjar. Hemmed in, as it is, by two large rivers, the gaanjar until quite recently was virtually an island for some parts of the year, as frequent and heavy floods would make boat crossing difficult. Nowadays the area is more easily accessible thanks to the newly constructed bridges that connect it with the larger tehsil towns on the district's "mainland" and with neighbouring Bahraich district. Despite these improvements the gaanjar continues to offer few attractions to VLOs. Its public infrastructure is still relatively poorly developed and the quality of the drinking water is poor (officials derisively call the area *kalapani*, meaning "black water"). The larger towns that serve as block headquarters lack good schools, medical facilities, shops, restaurants and lodging opportunities, making them quite unsuitable places to settle down in with one's family.

VLOs also detest the "feudal culture" of gaanjar society where they find local notables overly concerned with the scrupulous guarding of their status. Some VLOs especially resent, as they are sometimes expected or made to, touching local big people's feet as a token of traditional respect. Taken together, the blocks in the gaanjar present all those features that make a locality "backward" in the eyes of VLOs and that, hence, complicate "work culture". As such, nobody really likes to be posted there and those who *are* invariably perceive and experience it as a "punishment posting". In practice, this means that VLOs are usually willing to go to great lengths to avoid ending up in the gaanjar. If cooperation with local netas is the price to be paid for preventing a transfer to a place like this, most VLOs are quite prepared to pay it.

The posting preferences of BDOs slightly differ from those of VLOs. Unlike VLOs who, as relatively lowly class 3 officers, can only be shuffled around within the district, BDOs, as class 1 officers, may be transferred to any district in the entire state. Hence, BDOs' first priority is usually to make sure that they do not end up in any

of the backward areas of the state, rather than those of a particular district. The BDO of Biswan, presently a man in his fifties, told me with horror how, as a young ADO, he had started his career in the early 1970s in distant Uttarkashi, a Himalayan district, where he had been forced to move about on foot and where there had been nothing in the way of modern facilities.¹⁸⁶ Given their general aversion to *jangli* (jungly) and backward areas and their marked preference for a posting in the direct vicinity of a large city, BDOs could do much worse than securing a posting in Sitapur district, situated, as it is, nearby the state capital Lucknow.

This is not to say that the BDOs in Sitapur do not strongly prefer postings in certain blocks over those in others. Most coveted are postings in the southern part of the district. These allow for relatively comfortable daily commuting from and living in Lucknow, and for enjoying the city's excellent facilities. Like VLOs, BDOs generally try to avoid being posted to the gaanjar, not so much on account of its poor living conditions (they would not contemplate residing there anyway) as for its being situated quite far away from both Lucknow and the district capital Sitapur, the second best residential alternative. And again like VLOs, BDOs are quite ready to do what it takes to satisfy the wishes of powerful patronage politicians if by so doing they can prevent an unfavourable transfer. As BDO Kasmanda put it: "An officer simply cannot survive by following the rules. If he does not give in to netas' pressures, he will surely be posted for two weeks in Pittoragarh [another Himalayan district, bvg], then for one week in Basti [a district in "backward" eastern Uttar Pradesh, bvg] and so on". Transfers, or the threat of transfers, are thus a powerful, as well as frequently used, disciplining and punishing device in the hands of politicians.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ The BDO described Uttarkashi as "the district of the three P's: punishment, first posting and promotions" (officers may sometimes be seduced to accept postings in otherwise unattractive localities if they are simultaneously promoted to a higher rank). Uttarkashi, by the way, is now no longer part of Uttar Pradesh. It has become part of the newly created hill state of Uttarakhand.

¹⁸⁷ Transfers occur with steady frequency. On average, BDOs in Sitapur do not manage to stay posted in any particular block for longer than 18 months. VLOs tend to survive a bit longer, but typically not more than four years

Netas need not only rely on transfers, however. Another well-established method of exacting compliance is the discrediting or smearing of DLBs' reputations. A common, and rather ironic, form of discrediting is accusing DLBs of "corruption" (cf. e.g. Bayley 1978: 528). BDO Pahla, for instance, quite recently got into difficulties when the District Magistrate had made an inspection visit to one of the villages in his block. Though the BDO himself had not been informed of the DM's impending surprise *jaj*, the pradhan of the concerned village nevertheless blamed the BDO for having "organised" it. The pradhan had then approached a number of state ministers, other influential politicians and senior officials –including the DM. He accused the BDO of accepting a huge, ten lakhs bribe and pressed for charges. To the BDO's relief, the DM managed to avert further complications by convincing the pradhan and his allies that he had acted on his own impulse. He also pointed out that the BDO –given his inexperience and incomplete knowledge of the "requisite procedures"– could never have raised such a huge bribe even if he had wanted to.

What makes allegations of corruption such as the one discussed above harmful to DLBs is not so much the fact that they are allegations of *corruption* but that they are *allegations*. (As I will point out later on, most DLBs and their superiors are in fact "corrupt" in the sense that they usually accept bribes or (help) skim

(figures calculated on the basis of information obtained from seven blocks and from personally collected transfer histories of 25 VLOs). Note, however, that not all transfers are to be considered punishments meted out by netas for uncooperative administrative behaviour. Politicians and administrative superiors may also effectuate transfers for other reasons. Powerful netas may expressly appoint "difficult" officials –that is, officials who incline towards rule-bound behaviour– to certain posts to keep rival or rebel politicians in check. Besides, just like netas may use transfers to punish and get rid of bad, rigid officials, they can also utilize them to attract good, pliable ones. State governments, for instance, often start shuffling officers around whenever they feel fresh elections can no longer be avoided. Having sympathetic officials to oversee the polling and voting may go a long way, so it is assumed, in securing victory. In Uttar Pradesh, mass transfers right after elections have become a routine practice of establishing fresh political control over the bureaucracy (Banik 2001). Administrative superiors, moreover, may also regularly transfer subordinates, because they are looking for work, find it a healthy routine, or simply to show off their power (cf. De Zwart 1994).

off development monies). The damage that allegations can do to DLBs' reputations is that they create the impression among their colleagues and superiors that they cannot handle their jobs very well. The ability to please, pacify and "butter" netas (as well as to collect side-income without sparking controversy) are considered practical requirements integral to the DLB's job. DLBs who are repeatedly found to arouse the wrath of local netas, have their reputations smeared and charges pressed against them therefore run a real risk of becoming seen as clumsy and incompetent by colleagues and superiors. In other words, those who get into trouble once too often can expect but little sympathy.

This is precisely what happened to Vijay Mishra, one of the DLBs in Biswan Block. Mishra had been posted in the village of Sukhawankalan a few months before I met him. As Mishra explained to me, one of the first works that the pradhan, a man named Bhargav, had wanted him to do was to sanction a TRYSEM scholarship to a local boy proposed by Bhargav. Mishra, however, had refused to cooperate, arguing that the boy was a "fake" (that is, formally ineligible) applicant. Bhargav had retaliated by refusing to sign Mishra's "joining letter", an official document required for the payment of VLOs' salaries. Every time Mishra showed up in the village to meet Bhargav and get him to sign the letter, Bhargav happened to have left the village for "some work". With the pradhan glibly avoiding face-to-face contact, the conflict between Bhargav and Mishra soon took the form of an arduous and drawn out correspondence between Mishra, the BDO and pradhan Bhargav. On Mishra's prompting, the BDO sent a string of letters to Bhargav, requesting and directing Bhargav ("as per CDO's instructions") to sign Mishra's joining letter. Initially, Bhargav did not seem much impressed. In his communications he stubbornly kept instigating the BDO to retain the former VLO, a man called Hari Pal, in his post, arguing he had found Pal's work to be "extremely satisfactory". After more than two months of fruitless paper debate Bhargav finally decided to give in, however, and duly signed the joining letter.

Though he now, at last, received his salary, Mishra's problems in Sukhawankalan continued unabated. Only six weeks after having

officially joined he was, so he claimed, beaten up (*marpit*) by Rakesh and Ramesh, both sons of the *pradhan*, and Bachu Lal, one of the latter's henchmen (*chamcha*). These men had also begun to threaten him with "framing" him under the "Harijan Act" if he would not mend his ways. Mishra, an upper caste brahmin, took this threat quite seriously and understandably so. In the period preceding my fieldwork, the state government led by the untouchable, BSP chief minister Mayawati had started to pursue a stringent implementation of the "Harijan Act".¹⁸⁸ The police had been instructed to conduct fast-track investigation of any claims of abuse and to jail the accused while the case was under investigation. Besides, the alleged victims of caste-based crimes were also to be provided with Rs. 6,000 as assistance with legal expenses (see Jeffrey and Lerche 2001: 105-6). To untouchables, these new measures had suddenly made an appeal to the Act a very attractive course of action, since it could be used to kill two birds with one stone. Not only was it bound to make the accused –whether convicted or not– end up in jail, it also had the added advantage of generating a substantial sum of money. Several of my informants –both upper castes and untouchables– acknowledged that Mayawati's measures had sparked an explosion of litigation under the Act, much of it "phoney" in the sense that untouchable claimants took recourse to the Act even when the alleged "crime" had nothing to do at all with caste-based atrocities.¹⁸⁹ In short, if *pradhan* Bhargav, himself an untouchable, was to carry out his threat Mishra might in no time find himself in jail.

¹⁸⁸ What Sitapuri informants usually call the "Harijan Act" is officially known as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989 (also see chapter 3).

¹⁸⁹ Indra Pal Singh, a Yadav resident of Mahuwa purva (Haibatpur), claimed that "at least 60 percent" of the cases registered under the Act since the start of its stringent implementation had been false (*pharzi*). Others have also observed abuse of the Harijan Act. Jeffrey and Lerche found low caste individuals in Deogaon village in Jaunpur district in eastern Uttar Pradesh to be openly boasting about exaggerating Thakur violence against them in complaints to the police (Jeffrey and Lerche 2001: 107).

When I met him some four months after the entire affair had started, Mishra seemed at his wit's end.¹⁹⁰ Intimidated and scared, he had requested the BDO for a transfer and written a letter to the DM to ask for "justice and security". For the moment, however, both superior officials seemed unwilling to intervene in the matter. This did not surprise Mishra's colleague VLOs and the block clerks. "Mr. Mishra", so the block's junior clerk explained, "has a different type of nature that nobody can understand. That is why it is not easy for any pradhan to settle with him". In other words, because of his unwillingness to strike a reasonable deal with his pradhan and his lack of agility in handling such routine manipulations as exercised by pradhan Bhargav and his supporters, Mishra was felt to be needlessly "difficult". No wonder he had it coming to him.

At the same time, DLBs also recognize that it is far from easy to effectively deal with "autocratic" pradhans such as Bhargav. In the course of their careers many DLBs have found themselves at the receiving end of netas' unsettling threats of physical violence, manhandling and intimidation. "In my village", said a VLO posted in a village in Khairabad block, "political power is so much contested that every day bullets are fired". VLOs, especially, are acutely aware of the fact that they, as lone operators, present easily visible, accessible, and blameable targets (cf. Lipsky 1980: 10) and cite threats of physical harm and "danger" in the villages as the most important reasons for the infrequency of their village visits. But VLOs are not alone in fearing the political use of force. Even such a high-ranking and seemingly well-surrounded development official as the Project Director, who works from a large office in the district headquarters, said he regularly found himself confronted by small groups of strongmen barging into his office "with pointed guns and revolvers to show their strength".

In Sitapur, as in the rest of rural Uttar Pradesh, politics and the use of force and violence are, in fact, routinely and inextricably

¹⁹⁰ Mishra's desperation was in fact the reason for my learning about his predicament. Mishra initially approached me, rather than the other way around, with a thick file of correspondence and "evidence" relating to his problems in Sukhawankalan in the hope that I could help him out by using my (largely presumed) connections with higher authorities.

intertwined. Here, the crafting of political careers typically goes hand in hand with the building up and deployment of muscle and fire power. Big netas such as MLAs and MLCs invariably move around in the company of dangerous-looking, rifle-wielding henchmen, who are often themselves local politicians. Going by the accounts of Sitapur DLBs, almost every block seems to have its share of “local mafias” whose ability to capture local political office and control patronage flows is said to primarily derive from their coercive power. The *pradhan* of the village of Bhaira Bhaikuntpur in Kasmanda block, for instance, was often pointed out to me as a notorious figure known for his strong-armed tactics (he was jailed at the time of my fieldwork). And the Thakurs of village Ulra, in Biswan block, are also known and feared for their *goondagiri* (hoodlumism, political gangsterism). Since they are well aware that local *goondas* (criminals, gangsters) often receive police protection in exchange for their occasional services to big politicians, most DLBs know better than to risk antagonizing them by withholding their cooperation. After all, “since there is”, as the BDO of Biswan explained, “no boundary between politics and goonda elements, there is also no shelter against them”.¹⁹¹

Note that the existence of goonda elements and the threats of physical harm that come with them increase the effectiveness of the power over transfers as a weapon of political control. Understandably, officials are willing to go to great lengths to avoid

¹⁹¹ The existence and operation, in the north Indian countryside, of “networks of power relations among police, criminals, and politicians in which the use of force and violence is, if not routine, at least not something unexpected or exceptional” receives ample attention in the work of Paul Brass (Brass 1997: 275) (See also Jeffrey’s recent work on the political strategies of Jats in western UP (Jeffrey 2000; Jeffrey 2001) and Véron et al.’s analysis of the everyday state in village Bihar, UP’s eastern neighbour state (Véron et al. 2003)). Brass’ conceptualization of some of such networks as “institutionalized riot systems” operating under the “loose control” of party leaders points at the prevalence and importance of these networks in the conduct of political affairs (ibid.). Historically speaking, there is nothing exceptional about Indian politicians’ use of and reliance on specialists of violence, however. “Over the long run of human history indeed”, writes Charles Tilly, “most important political figures have combined [political] entrepreneurship with control over coercive means. Only during the last few centuries has the unarmed power-holder become a common political actor” (Tilly 2001: 11, 12).

being posted to a jurisdiction where they must operate under conditions of goondagiri. The BDO of Kasmanda, for example, spent many weeks frantically –and, as it turned out, successfully– mobilising his network of political and official friends in high places in Lucknow to get his transfer orders for Etawah district reversed. Not only would a transfer to Etawah –located in the western part of the state– have upset his family life in Lucknow, where he had just bought and moved into a new house; even more importantly, it would have meant being posted in the home district of Mulayam Singh Yadav, leader of the Samajwadi Party, former chief minister and, as such, a very powerful politician. Since he himself was known to be close with politicians of a rival party, the BDO had anticipated a very rough time in getting to terms with Mulayam’s goondas. Similarly, among VLOs, the villages of Bhaira Bhaikuntpur and Ulra –home villages to local mafia leaders– enjoy reputations as punishment postings despite the fact that they are not situated in the gaanjar.

Reward-based cooperation

DLBs’ fear of punishment may suffice to push them towards cooperation with local netas. The lurking threats of unfavourable transfers, reputation damage and violence are often reason enough for DLBs to be exceptionally sensitive to netas’ demands and interests and to take appropriate care of whom they deal with, which information they release and to whom, which proposed allocations they agree to sanction, and of what they entrust to official documents. The inclination of many DLBs to transfer their discretion to and cooperate with local netas does not only follow from their fear of sanctions, however. What also *draws* them towards cooperation are the financial rewards they can expect to reap in exchange for it. Cooperative officials are usually amply compensated for their services with a share of the development rents that netas routinely collect in the process of distributing patronage. Frontline abandonment and shunning of discretion are thus not unilaterally *imposed* upon DLBs. Rather, DLBs may be said

to, more or less voluntarily, *lease out* their discretion in return for a fraction of the development rents.

To say that many local netas are heavily preoccupied with doing the work of their clients is not the same as saying that their motives are wholly, or even remotely, altruistic. Most netas obviously and proudly relish their power over public resources, and the client deference and social status that typically come with it.¹⁹² Moreover, involvement in patronage politics provides plenty of opportunities to make money. As far as rural development policy implementation is concerned, netas may, and usually do, employ any of the following rent-seeking strategies.¹⁹³ First of all, netas tend to charge or accept bribes from villagers for getting the latter's work done or for trying to do so. Though the amounts of bribe money seem to vary from case to case and work to work, the sheer number of villagers who told me of having paid bribes to netas as part of their efforts to avail of development benefits suggests indeed that, as a Haibatpur villager put it, "without bribery (*ghus*) nobody does any work".

A second rent-seeking strategy is to skim off proportions of development subsidies. This strategy also seems to be quite prevalent. For example, throughout my research area almost all beneficiaries of the Indira Housing Scheme (IAY) claimed to have received anything between Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 17,000 as against the official subsidy amount of Rs. 20,000. Similarly, villagers who secured temporary employment under JRY were often being paid a bit or substantially less than the stipulated minimum amount of Rs. 47 per day. Whereas in programs like IAY, JRY, EAS and IRDP at least some, or even a large, part of the involved benefits did reach

¹⁹² As Kanchan Chandra has suggested, this very capacity of patronage politics to give *personal* satisfaction to politicians may go a long way in explaining its persistence: "Patronage politics is a unique way to keep *individuals* in power. The credit for the collective provision of goods through policy legislation goes to the leader, or to the leadership of the ruling party, and to a party as an institution, rather than to individual MPs, and MLAs. But the credit for the goods delivered through patronage accrues to individuals" (Chandra 2004a: 5).

¹⁹³ Rent-seeking involves actions by individuals and groups to alter public policy and procedures in ways that will generate more income for themselves (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002: 12).

rural clients (whether eligible or non-eligible ones), quite a few netas and officials, including a high ranking divisional official, freely admitted that the monies available under a number of other programs were being routinely “gobbled up” even before they reached the implementation stage. DWACRA and TRYSEM, particularly, were often pointed out to me as “bogus” or “paper” schemes.

Thirdly, some development programs allow for making quite substantial savings on the ground. IAY again presents a fine example. According to the official guidelines prevailing at the time, IAY beneficiaries were to collect the cash subsidy in person from a rural bank, use the subsidy for the purchase of building materials and build the house themselves. In actual practice it was quite common for pradhans to accompany groups of beneficiaries to the bank, pocket their subsidies, purchase building materials from a friendly supplier against quantity rebates and keep the savings thus made. Another saving occurred in the implementation of JRY which, in Sitapur at least, seemed to involve mostly road building activities. Pradhans or other local netas acting -against official regulations- as contractors in this program would often save costs by having the bricks laid the broad side up (*paranja*) instead of having them placed on their narrow side (*kharanja*), which would have required far more bricks. Finally, netas, according to locally stubborn rumours, were also selling government-subsidised benefits such as boring sets, handpumps and smokeless stoves on the free market rather than channelling them to eligible clients.

Netas’ rent-seeking activities do not remain confined to rural development administration. In Sitapur, local netas also collect bribes, often at standardized rates, for such varying works as arranging old age and widow pensions, *parchis* (“slips” representing the right to sell a specified amount of sugarcane to a sugarmill), *patta* (landownership titles), electricity, civil service jobs, hospitalization and educational scholarships, for instance. Besides, substantial skimming of public resources is said to routinely occur in the execution of public works.¹⁹⁴ The desire to augment personal

¹⁹⁴ In India, to be sure, rent-seeking is not strictly, or even primarily, a local affair. Given the traditionally extensive state controls over the economy -

fortune and material comfort is undoubtedly an important motive for rent-seeking. In fact, together with a desire to be of service (*seva*), the opportunity to exercise power and the promise of commanding respect, the possibility to make money is often openly cited by local politicians as an important reason for their involvement in politics.¹⁹⁵

At the same time, however, rent-seeking also seems to be a *conditio sine qua non* for starting and furthering a political career (cf. Jenkins 1999; Wade 1982). Even at the dust-level, the rupee price for successfully fighting elections is quite high. Contestants for the *pradhani* of their village may easily find themselves spending Rs. 10,000 and more, while aspiring pramukhs may have to spend at least five times this amount. The pramukh of Parsendi, for example, spent Rs. 65,000 on his election campaign, the pramukh of Reusa around 1.5 lakhs. The costs involved in securing a highly coveted legislative assembly seat may run into millions of rupees.¹⁹⁶ There is

including controls on investment, capacity creation, expansion, diversification, choice of technology, location, pricing, distribution, imports, foreign collaboration, private foreign investment, use of foreign exchange and credit supply (cf. Rajan 1988)- politicians at all levels and in most policy sectors can collect rents, even if recent policy reforms have dismantled some particularly successful and widespread skimming opportunities such as those involved in industrial licensing and import regulations on gold and silver (Jenkins 1999: 108).

¹⁹⁵ In Sitapur, the idea that netas are in politics for the money is conventional wisdom. To prove their point, informants often cited the example of Ram Lal Rahi, a poor man who made it rich through politics. In the words of a gathering of villagers in Ahmedabad: "Ram Lal Rahi had nothing and used to dance on *huduk* (the beat of a drum) to earn a livelihood. Then Sankata Prasad (a former MP, bvg) introduced him to politics and made him an MLA. After Prasad's death Rahi became MP and Minister at the Centre. Now he owns three petrol pumps, several agencies and his wife has been made chairwoman of the zilla panchayat".

¹⁹⁶ What electioneering netas spend their money *on* varies somewhat with the *kind* of seat they contest. Pradhani-contestants probably spend most of their budgets on gifts and gratuities -sweetboxes, clothes, jewellery, blankets etc.- for prospective voters, while pramukhs and, particularly, MLAs must also reserve significant amounts of money to obtain a party ticket; purchase and hire campaigning materials (loudspeakers, handbills, posters, banners), cover transportation costs (vehicle-hire, petrol); maintain campaign workers (pocket allowances, food, drinks and shelter); buy support of local notables, and organise rallies and pay "supporters" to attend them in large numbers (cf. esp.

thus quite a bit of truth in the assessment of a close observer of block-politics in Sakran that “only *paisewale* (people with money) can fight elections”. Elections apart, netas also need money to nurse their constituencies *between* elections. Followers need to be periodically compensated for their support and services,¹⁹⁷ guests hospitably received, election-related debts repaid, good relations with officialdom and netas higher-up maintained. Most local netas, in other words, would probably not be able to pursue political careers without the availability of surplus, “number two” income generated through rent-seeking.¹⁹⁸

Given the importance of number two-income to most netas, DLBs who are willing to assist netas in the collection of development rents –by supplying information on rent-seeking opportunities and covering up skimming activities in official paperwork- can expect to be rewarded with a share of the profits. Sometimes DLBs get a standard, given cut of a routinely skimmed-off amount. In one of Sitapur’s gaanjar blocks, for instance, VLOs received Rs. 500 for every IAY subsidy doled out in their jurisdiction. By common agreement, the BDO and the block clerks pocketed another Rs. 2000 per colony, to be shared among them. In another block, politicians allowed the block staff to “swallow” five per cent of sanctioned JRY budgets. Apart from allowing DLBs to pocket agreed upon shares of rentseeking income, netas may also give DLBs free reign to do a bit of rent-seeking, notably bribe-collection, on their own. According to a high ranking divisional development official, the average VLO may “eat” around rupees 60.000 to 70.000 per year to supplement his official yearly salary of around Rs. 50,000, while an average BDO may be expected to pocket

Singh 1996: 125). To increase their chances of winning, contestants may also, as one of my informants pointed out, contemplate “bringing in” a friendly official to preside over the voting procedures. The transfer needed for doing this of course also comes at a price.

¹⁹⁷ Barakke, a resident of Arro Khamajatpur, maintained that the pradhan regularly gives “two to four hundred rupees to each *panch* [member of the village panchayat, bvg] so that they will not complain and keep on supporting him”.

¹⁹⁸ Unlike MLAs and MPs, pradhans and pramukhs do not even receive official remunerations and are thus implicitly *expected* to fend for themselves.

an additional Rs. 200,000 to 400,000 on top of his salary of around Rs. 120,000. These estimated averages may disguise considerable interpersonal variations, however. As one BDO admitted: "For BDOs who ask money for everything, there is no limit. Money for schemes such as JRY does not go through the banks, so these are most easily corrupted. But even in case of schemes such as IRDP [which *do* go through the banks, bvg] nexuses can be forged between the BDO, pradhans and the bankpeople. Anything is possible".

On the one hand, the promise of substantial surplus income makes cooperation with patronage-dispensing and rent-seeking netas an attractive proposition. All the more so because having some extra money to spend is an important asset in influencing the course of one's career. Money is a very useful resource in cultivating connections with big netas and superior officials, whose protection or help may come in handy in managing various sorts of problems. In exchange for financial compensation, netas or superior officials are generally willing to reconsider unfavourable transfers or, conversely, to extend help in arranging a choice posting, for example.¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, providing assistance in the collection of number two income is, as DLBs are inclined to see it, hardly an *option*, since failure to provide such assistance tends to be backed up by the punitive sanctions discussed above. Many VLOs and BDOs maintained that they were more or less *forced* to collect bribes and skim off development monies not only by rent-seeking netas but also by rapacious superiors demanding their cut.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ According to VLOs in different blocks, the District Panchayat Raj Officer, "takes" five to seven thousand rupees for a transfer.

²⁰⁰ Several BDOs admitted to dreading the "inspection visits" of a certain divisional official who, so they claimed, was known for expecting lavish entertainment by the block staff (which, in the absence of an official budget, BDOs had to pay out of their own pockets) and for using the opportunity to collect thousands of rupees from "his" BDOs. Evidence like this may indicate the operation in Sitapur's rural development administration of a system of bottom-to-top corruption, quite like the one described by Wade for canal irrigation in South India (Wade 1982; Wade 1985). In such a system, officials buy themselves into lucrative posts by bribing political and administrative superiors. Once in position, officials are allowed to use their discretion to extract rents in order to earn back their investment and save for a new one, while also sending part of the collected

4 The problem of factionalism

To notice that DLBs have good reasons, and therefore are inclined, to cooperate with local netas by abandoning the frontline and transferring their discretion, is not to say that such cooperation, once established, is a guarantee against trouble. Political power on the Sitapur dust-level is hotly contested and seldom goes unchallenged for long. Dust-level netas tend to be locked into continuous and usually bitter battles with political enemies. These battles usually appear in the guise of factionalism and typically revolve around access to patronage vested in administrative agencies such as the rural development bureaucracy. As a result, DLBs are often drawn into political conflicts whereby *several* rivalling netas or factions mount pressure on them. Wriggling out of such situations is probably one of the most taxing challenges of the DLB's job. Since they are usually outsiders to the political arenas in which they work, DLBs' knowledge about the intricacies of local power configurations and factional alignments is inherently limited. It is this very ignorance of local politics, as the following short case study of factionalism in Ulra village illustrates, which may readily land them into big trouble. Factionalism, in other words, represents a big problem to DLBs and most of them try to cope with it by staying as far away from it as possible.

Getting into trouble anyhow: Ram Sahare in Ulra

In the course of 1996, BDO Jai Ram of Biswan block fell short of staff. Having too few VLOs to cover all the *nyay panchayats* in the block, Ram decided to solve his problem by giving one of his VLOs

rents upwards to satisfy the financial demands of superiors and big netas. If indeed such a system were to be operative in UP's rural development administration, I doubt whether it has the extremely "systematic" qualities of Wade's system, in which the costs of positions as well as the amounts to be sent upwards were largely fixed and predetermined. The constant change and adaptation of rural development policies and benefits, as well as the often selective implementation of programs in certain localities would seem to leave more incentives and room for adhoc bargaining among netas and officials than canal irrigation administration in which the public benefit itself -water- remains unchanged.

a double charge. His eye fell on Ram Sahare, who had been working quite satisfactorily in nyay panchayat Sukhawankalan (the very locality where VLO Mishra was to get into big trouble with pradhan Bhargav a few years later). Though to be given a double charge is usually considered a token of appreciation for one's "good work" and cause for professional pride, Sahare had rather mixed feelings about *this particular* additional charge: Ulra nyay panchayat. The reason was the presence, in Ulra village, of a dominant family of Thakurs with a notorious reputation for goondagiri. Widely thought to be teaming up with a gang in neighbouring Hardoi district, Sahare feared the Thakurs might mean big trouble. He therefore tried to decline BDO Ram's offer. But when Ram remained insistent and a few of his colleagues started taunting him (saying that "now Ram Sahare will know how tough this job really is"), Sahare decided to acquiesce and, as he put it, "accept the challenge".

Already on his first visit to village Ulra, Sahare realized that the Thakurs were indeed a force to be reckoned with. When he stopped by at the residence of the village pradhan for an introductory visit, he learned that the pradhan –an old, illiterate untouchable man called Ashirvadi- was not at home. Some villagers advised Sahare to go and see the Thakurs. And sure enough, Sahare, on arriving at the Thakur's house, found Ashirvadi present there. The Thakurs –a local synonym for two brothers, Nagendra and Bhupendra Singh- invited Sahare inside and offered him aniseeds as a token of their hospitality. But the atmosphere soon turned more hostile when the Thakurs silently started showing Sahare their guns and rifles. Sahare was not very impressed, however. Hailing himself from a "very notorious area where feared *dacoits* (robbers, criminals) such as Munna Pasi have their operations" and where "these dacoits walk daringly in front of the police station carrying their guns", Sahare had seen "so many of such type of people" that it took more than the mere flouting of firearms to intimidate him. Moreover, as he pointed out to me, he was not "by nature" the kind of man to be easily scared by anyone. "I simply do not like to work under the pressure of others".

If Sahare did not like to work under the pressure of others, Ulra's pradhan Ashirvadi did not seem to have much choice. It soon

became clear to Sahare, as it already was to Ula's inhabitants, that Ashirvadi wielded little power in the village. In fact, by Ashirvadi's own admission, the Thakurs were the "real", "acting pradhans". The only reason why he, Ashirvadi, had contested the pradhani that same year was because the state government had reserved it for a scheduled caste candidate. The upper caste Thakurs, barred from electoral competition, had therefore approached Ashirvadi to act as "their" candidate. Ashirvadi, whose family had served the Thakurs for generations as agricultural labourers, had not had the courage to refuse. The Thakurs had even made him "swear on his own sons" that he would give them free reign in case he won the elections. Pradhan Ashirvadi was, thus, hardly in a position to act independently, let alone act against the Thakurs' best interests; he was, as everybody knew, "bound" to them and only "pradhan in name".

Grasping whom he was up against, Sahare decided to move cautiously. Though part of him was eager "to liberate the pradhan from the clutches of the Thakurs", another part advised him to be very careful lest he provoke what would certainly be a violent retaliation by the Thakurs. For some time, this strategy seemed to work out quite well. While some of his colleagues had to tap all of their skills to avoid being trapped in the middle of IAY-related tensions, Sahare in Ula experienced no such difficulties.²⁰¹ Though the Thakurs did try to "change the list" a few times, Sahare deftly warned them that if they kept on doing so, there was a real chance that the BDO would "smell" their manipulations and obstruct the release of Ula's allotment altogether. Convinced, the Thakurs agreed with Sahare to allocate all available twenty-five colonies to inhabitants of Chamaranpurva; a hamlet, as its name implies,

²⁰¹ Among Sitapur's DLBs, IAY had the reputation of being notoriously difficult to implement. (1) IAY benefits were in high demand because they were subsidies -and not, as in some other programs, repayable loans- and very generous subsidies at that. (2) IAY subsidies were also very scarce: in every village, the number of available subsidies typically fell far short of the number of people formally eligible for them and, more importantly, much *more* short of the number of people *feeling* eligible for them. The result was that IAY implementation, i.e. beneficiary selection, often triggered fierce, sometimes violent contests among (groups of) villagers vying for IAY benefits.

inhabited exclusively by members of the untouchable Chamar jati and situated at a stone's throw from the main settlement Ulra.

Trouble for Sahare was not long in coming, however. It all started when, a few months after they pocketed the village's allotment of IAY subsidies, the inhabitants of Chamaranpurva also somehow managed to secure an electricity connection for their hamlet. However, by the time the electricity materials arrived, the Thakurs, putting their influence with a couple of senior electricity officials to good use, had the electricity line diverted to their own premises. Outraged but fearing "the bullets of Thakurs" the Chamars had not dared to stop the theft. The Chamars' leader, a man called Chote Lal, decided to seek help from higher authorities. Lal, himself a small-time neta and BSP activist, had some friends in high places. Besides, the Chamar-dominated BSP happened to control the state government at the time. If ever there was a chance to expect the government (*sarkaar*) to take a stand against upper caste Thakur exploiters (*dabang*) it had to be now, Lal reckoned, with their own people in power.²⁰² With the help of his neta friends Lal managed to meet with the minister for minorities and even with chief minister Mayawati herself, who immediately ordered an enquiry into the matter. Though investigating officials duly arrived in the village some time later, things then abruptly came to a halt. The DM, to whom the follow-up had been delegated, remained apathetic, even after repeated requests by the Chamars to take action. Both officialdom and netas appeared to have lost interest in the case. The Thakurs, so it seemed, had gotten away with theft and the Chamars were left empty-handed.

But then Mahendra Tripathi, an influential Brahmin from nearby hamlet Dafra (also part of Ulra), offered the Chamars his help and urged them to stage a *dharna* in front of the DM's office in

²⁰² That Chote Lal was justified in hoping for effective intervention by the Mayawati government is suggested by the impressions that her two short-lived governments apparently made on UP bureaucrats. Even two years after her latest rule, bureaucrats still vividly remembered the "fear-psychosis", as they called it, that Mayawati had instilled among them by personally and unexpectedly attending and chairing dust-level official meetings and by verbally abusing, transferring and even firing negligent and ineffective officials on the spot.

Sitapur. A dharna is a common form of protest whereby (fasting) participants sit constantly at the door of an offender or person whose attention is demanded.²⁰³ Though some Chamars gave Tripathi's plan a lukewarm response, Chote Lal's decision to introduce a fifty rupee "fine" for those who would fail to join in the dharna sufficed to win them over. Tripathi made himself useful by providing a tractor with trolley to transport the protestors to the district capital.

The eight day long dharna did not have the hoped for success. Though the Chamars were given some vague reassurances, it became clear that the district administration remained determined not to burn its hands on the affair. Still, the dharna *did* provide the Chamars with a break. A journalist who was covering their protest for a local newspaper told one of the Chamars that IAY subsidies - which many of the protesting Chamars had availed of a year before - were supposed to be "absolutely free". This was news to the Chamars, most of whom had paid what they had been made to believe was "security money" of up to Rs. 1000 to Nagendra Singh.²⁰⁴ Though most of the Chamars present at the dharna were not overly bothered by the journalist's revelation (being more concerned about retrieving their electricity than about reclaiming money they had never owned in the first place) Chote Lal and Tripathi immediately saw the political use to which it could be put.

Back in Chamarapurva, Lal and Tripathi organised a meeting at Lal's house and asked the villagers whether they had paid some money to the Thakurs at the time of beneficiary selection for IAY. All of them admitted to having done so. Lal and Tripathi then decided to change their tactic and purpose. Obviously, the Thakurs

²⁰³ A dharna is one of a large repertoire of typically Indian forms of protest or ways of attracting attention to issues that fail to find access to existing institutional channels. This repertoire also includes *bandhs* (general strikes in whole cities or states) and *gheraos* (condoning of men in authority). What these forms of voice have in common is that they are usually employed to demand justice for *specific* grievances such as low receipt of food rations, low wages, or bad conditions of work in offices, colleges, or industries (Kothari 1970: 219).

²⁰⁴ At the time, the levy of security money had not aroused the suspicion of the Chamars. Even after deduction of the levy, the remaining subsidy amount had still been many times higher than the only other subsidy they had ever known about - a Rs. 2000 subsidy under an old housing program called *Nirbal Awas Yojna*.

had covered their tracks well and put their *pahunch* (access, influence) to the district administration to good use. Judged by the fact that they had been able to successfully thwart even the chief minister's intervention in the matter (by evidently putting pressure on the DM), the chances for the Chamars to effectively get their electricity back looked very slim indeed. But all this did not mean that the Thakurs could not be made to pay, if only symbolically, for their theft.

Lal and Tripathi jotted down the names of all IAY beneficiaries from the hamlet and the exact amounts of security money each of them had been made to pay. Thus armed, they went to the *thana* and had an FIR (first information report) lodged under the Anti Corruption Act, in which they accused Nagendra Singh Thakur as well as pradhan Ashirvadi and Ram Sahare of corruption in IAY. Though Chote Lal and his Chamars had first only wanted to accuse Nagendra Singh, Tripathi, for some reason of his own, had insisted that also Ashirvadi be implicated in the affair. Chote Lal, anxious to keep Tripathi on his side, had consented. Tripathi and Lal then decided that it would look awkward if they did not also include Ram Sahare's name in the FIR. After all, who would believe that a seasoned official like him had not eaten a piece of the IAY-pie if even an illiterate and inexperienced "puppet pradhan" had managed to do so?

When he heard about the inclusion of his name in the FIR, Sahare was perplexed. He had of course heard about the Thakurs' theft of electricity and the Chamars' attempts to retrieve it. But since rural electrification is not among the concerns of the rural development administration he had so far been able to keep a safe distance from the conflict. It was beyond his comprehension how he had now come to be dragged into the affair. Sahare was also furious. How did Chote Lal and his people *dare* implicate him? Had it not been for his adept handling of the Thakurs, the Chamars might not have benefited from IAY at all, certainly not to the extent that they had now (after all, all but three of the hamlet's households had received a colony). The Thakurs, through their various sources, and Sahare himself, through the BDO and a friend in the constabulary, put a lot of pressure on the police to stall any investigation. Though

it did buy them some time -the case remained cold for more than a year- they could not, in the end, prevent the police from taking steps to arrest them.

When the police finally made their move, Sahare was just having tea with pradhan Ansari of village Haibatpur (to which he had been transferred in the meantime) in a restaurant near the Biswan railway station. A police party on motorbikes was searching for him and had brought a person who would be able to identify him. As chance would have it, this person was a friend of Sahare's. When this friend spotted Sahare sipping tea he managed, without alarming the policemen, to signal to Sahare that he should flee right away. Sahare, with Ansari's help, hurried to relatives of his in a nearby village from where he sent a son of the household to collect his motorbike. When night had fallen, Sahare rode to his residence in Sitapur, taking a detour in case the police were guarding the main roads. The next day, he applied for, and was promptly granted, medical leave. Having narrowly escaped arrest and temporarily relieved from his official duties, Sahare put in all his energy, ingenuity, influence and money to extricate himself from the affair by getting his name deleted from the FIR. In spite of his efforts, however, he could not avoid spending two nights in jail (Nagendra and Ashirvadi also ended up in jail, for five and nineteen days respectively). When I first met Sahare in 1999, the case, on which he claimed to have already spent sixty to seventy thousand rupees, was still pending in court.

Getting caught in the middle

Given the patronage political incentive structure in which DLBs are expected to operate, it can scarcely be argued that Ram Sahare somehow deserved what happened to him in Ulra. On the contrary, by the looks of it he seems to have followed the pragmatic rules of the game quite admirably. On the basis of the information that was available to him, he identified the village's biggest netas and established, as far as circumstances permitted, a co-operative working relationship with them. What is more, he even managed to make his mark on the selection of beneficiaries and, through his

cautious sponsoring of pradhan Ashirvadi's autonomy, perhaps brought rural development implementation in Ulra slightly more in consonance with the normative rules of the implementation manuals.²⁰⁵ Sahare may indeed have made a little money out of the distribution of IAY colonies, but even if he did, the amount he raised (some cut out of around Rs. 28,000 allegedly collected as security money in IAY) is sure to have been quite modest by local standards. Sahare nevertheless got into big trouble. The question is: what went wrong?

Even if local knowledge and the bureaucratic grapevine had it that Ulra was firmly under Thakur rule when Sahare entered the scene, beneath this surface of apparently stable and uncontested Thakur power things had actually started changing fast. The seeds for the crumbling of Thakur rule in Ulra were planted in the aftermath of the 1996 pradhan elections won by Ashirvadi with the help, and on behalf, of the Thakurs. What Sahare did not know was that the Thakurs' adoption and subsequent grooming of Ashirvadi had stirred up evil blood in the Brahmin Mahendra Tripathi. With his father a retired *lekhpal* (or *patwari*; village accountant), his brother in the Indian army, and his wife gainfully employed as a teacher in a private school, Tripathi belonged to a family of well-off village notables. Tripathi himself looked after the family's relatively small landholdings and owned a shop of automobile spare parts in Biswan. But, at least until the 1996 elections, the better part of the Tripathi family's income came from Mahendra Tripathi's activities as a *dalaal*, or broker. Whenever there was some work to be done in the village, whether public or private, Tripathi would offer or be approached to act as the middleman, arranging the execution of work –e.g. road and drainage works, house construction, litigation, the procurement of rural development benefits- in return for a commission or a slice of the profits. In the course of his *dalaali* career, Tripathi had built himself an extensive network of friends

²⁰⁵ The distinction between pragmatic and normative rules is Bailey's. A pragmatic rule recommends "tactics and manoeuvres as likely to be the most efficient". A pragmatic rule is not a statement about whether a particular line of conduct is just or unjust, right or wrong; this is what Bailey calls a normative rule. 'One must be honest' is a normative rule, for example, while 'It pays to be honest' is a pragmatic one (Bailey 1970: 3-7).

and good relations and he boasted pahunch to some very senior netas –MLAs and MPs- of various political parties.

The Thakurs had had no problems with Tripathi's mediator business. Accustomed to a life of leisurely landlordism, moneylending and occasional goondagiri, the idea of personally involving themselves in the busy, time and energy sapping nitty gritty of dalaali did not appeal to them at all. Therefore, as long as Tripathi continued to show his allegiance to them, refrained from challenging their power position in the village and let them share in the spoils of his brokerage, they had been quite content to allow Tripathi do his thing. The election of Ashirvadi put an end to this cosy arrangement, however. With an easy to manipulate pradhan of their own to take care of the footwork, the Thakurs had now gained rather direct access to the development benefits flowing into the village. As a result, they no longer felt much need for Tripathi's services and, before long, the latter saw himself cut out of some major deals, including the Rs. 28,000 allegedly raised by Nagendra Singh Thakur as security money in the distribution of colonies. When, around the same time, the Thakurs also helped Ashirvadi reclaim possession of a plot of land cultivated by Tripathi's father, Mahendra clearly saw the writing on the wall: evidently, the Thakurs had found themselves a new man.

Abruptly cut off from his most important source of income, Tripathi had to think of ways to get back into business. He first tried to win Ashirvadi's confidence and bring him under his own control. But in the early days after the election Ashirvadi was still firmly bound to the Thakurs and could not be easily weaned away. And even though Ashirvadi had once or twice shown his willingness to confide in Tripathi, the relations between the two men gradually turned sour when, after a few nasty incidents, Ashirvadi concluded that Tripathi could not be trusted.²⁰⁶ With Ashirvadi declining his

²⁰⁶ The incident that seems to have sealed Ashirvadi's resolve to stay away from Tripathi occurred shortly after the 1998 *lok sabha* elections. During these elections, Ashirvadi had helped BJP candidate Janardan Prasad Misra by "giving" him a thousand of the Ulra votes, in return for Misra's promise to arrange for Ulra's electrification from his personal development budget (all MPs and MLAs have such budgets). However, when, after Misra's victory, the time of reaping the promised reward had come, Ashirvadi had fallen ill with

favours and his own financial situation becoming increasingly sticky (according to local rumours, his shop in Biswan was heading towards bankruptcy), Tripathi desperately needed new allies to break up the patronage monopoly of the Thakur-Ashirvadi combine. So, when he noticed that Chote Lal and his people were serious in their attempt to retrieve their electricity and, in the process, seemed to have gathered enough courage to stand up against the Thakurs, Tripathi took his chance and decided to offer his help and “shelter” to his old schoolmate Chote Lal.

Chote Lal, on his part, jumped at Tripathi’s offer. Not only would Tripathi’s connections, political acumen and material resources certainly come in handy in the battle over electricity with the Thakurs, they might also help further his long-cherished political ambitions. An early dalit activist, Chote Lal had joined DS4, a forerunner of the BSP, in the early 1980s and had been a party worker ever since. After a stay of twelve years in Lucknow, during which he had saved a handsome sum working as a fourth class worker in a medical school, Chote Lal had returned to his native Chamaranpurva where he bought himself forty bighas of land and soon established himself as the hamlet’s natural and uncontested leader. By the time Ram Sahare arrived in Ulra, Chote Lal had climbed the local BSP hierarchy to become sector *adhyaksh* (president), overseeing the party’s electioneering in an area encompassing 44 polling booths in two dozen gram panchayats. Even if Ashirvadi (that is, the Thakurs) had beaten him in the past pradhan elections, Chote Lal still had high hopes that his recent good work for the party and his close relations with some powerful

filaria (a disease caused by the qulex mosquito, causing swellings and fever) and was bed-ridden. Without intimating Ashirvadi, Tripathi, claiming to act in the pradhan’s name, had then approached Misra and managed to get the MP sign the commendation letter. When the electricity materials arrived some time later, Tripathi claimed credit for the electrification. Ashirvadi also came to strongly suspect Tripathi of having gobbled up the village’s contribution to the Kargil fund, a national fund meant to support the surviving relatives of the Indian soldiers who died in the 1999 Kargil war between India and Pakistan. Ashirvadi, who had larded the Ulra donation from the sale of a village orchard, had passed the money to Tripathi to deposit it at the DM’s office in Sitapur. When, some time later, the recovered Ashirvadi stopped by at the DM’s office, the clerks told him that the money had never arrived there.

BSP stalwarts might eventually land him a ticket for one of the bigger elections.²⁰⁷ If anything, his alliance with village notable Tripathi was sure to give a boost to his political stature. It proved that he was moving up in the world and could no longer be seen as the minor Chamar ward leader he used to be.

Bound by personal ties of friendship, a common interest in hurting the Thakurs, and the promise of further, long-term private rewards, Tripathi and Chote Lal wasted no opportunity or method in getting the better of the Thakurs in the electricity conflict. When the Thakurs and Ram Sahare tried to counter their FIR-move by putting pressure on the police, Lal and Tripathi responded by feeding a string of discrediting stories to the popular local press, piling fresh accusations on top of the old one mentioned in the FIR.²⁰⁸ They also managed to get the overt backing of BSP city president Naeem Ansari who led the Chamars on a few more dharnas in front of government offices in Sitapur and Biswan.

In the end, all their clever manoeuvring brought Lal and Tripathi a comprehensive victory. They humiliated the Thakurs and Ashirvadi (by having them sent to jail), added injury to insult by also having the Thakurs return the stolen electricity to the Chamars (after putting some unrelenting pressure on the electricity administration) and, in doing so, probably dealt a severe blow to the Thakurs' future capacity to unilaterally control village politics. If, as

²⁰⁷ Chote Lal claimed to have raised 133,000 rupees for the BSP party-fund during the last election campaign. Among his "good friends" in the BSP, he cited Biswan city president Naeem Ansari, Sitapur MP Rajesh Verma, Laharpur MLA and one time state government minister Bunyad Ahmad Ansari, and Lucknow division president Ram Het Bharti.

²⁰⁸ Just like involving the police under false pretences, feeding discrediting stories to the press is a popular and -in the absence of a culture of investigative journalism- easily applied weapon in factional conflict. In the series of stories planted by Tripathi and Lal in the daily *Pratidin*, Nagendra, Ashirvadi and Sahare were accused -together or individually- of such corrupt acts as pocketing block money meant for road and drainage construction, the collection of bribes from pensioners, cutting down and selling village *neem* trees for private profit, *banderbant* ("fifty-fifty deals") and the use of old (instead of new) bricks for road construction. Ultra was portrayed as "the headquarter of corruption and bribery" while Ram Sahare was depicted in such unflattering terms as "worshipper of money", *kamau-khau adhikari* (officer who earns and eats a lot), and as one who had "completely crushed the system".

had now been amply demonstrated, the once all-powerful Thakurs could be defied even by a group of lowly Chamars, other hitherto latent political groupings might also start asserting themselves. The undisputed victory furthermore helped cement Chote Lal's reputation as an increasingly formidable (if still rather small-time) neta and provided Tripathi with some useful additional political capital (in the form of pahunch to Chote Lal's BSP friends). Besides, by offering his help to Chote Lal at a difficult moment, Tripathi had obligated the neta to him, an important asset to any dalaal.

The kind of conflict described here will be quite familiar to students of Indian politics since it is almost a textbook example of what the literature on the subject refers to as factionalism. Factionalism involves very loose coalitions of faction leaders, tied together partly by friendship, caste loyalty or patron-client ties but most importantly by political interest. It often arises out of strong (and not seldom lasting) enmities between prominent leaders.²⁰⁹ Though fought out over particular, material issues, what tends to be really at stake in factional conflict are such personal interests as power, patronage, prestige, money, revenge or a combination of these. Also typical of factionalism is the unimportance or absence of matters of principle or ideology, the unscrupulousness of its methods (including, quite prominently, the creation of incidents which cause enemies to lose money or property) and what Raymond Firth has called the "devious exercise of pressure" on the machinery of government (Brass 1966; Firth 1957; Mayer 1977; Nicholas 1977: 58; Pocock 1957).

The reason why an outsider like Ram Sahare with no vested interests in the village could become entangled (and get hurt) in Ulra's factional politics was precisely *because* he was an outsider. Sahare was largely unaware of the factional realignments which had started taking shape in the aftermath of the pradhani elections; he did not know about the reasons for Tripathi's fall out with the Thakurs, or about the strong antipathy which soon developed between Tripathi and Ashirvadi. Nor was he aware of Chote Lal's

²⁰⁹ Factional politics, as Paul Brass has aptly put it, "is personal politics with a vengeance" (Brass 1966: 55).

political ambitions and his political influence in BSP circles. Had he known about these things and about the threats they posed to the Thakurs' power position, Sahare might have thought twice before seeking cooperation with and, as it must have appeared to Lal and Tripathi, allying himself to the Thakur-Ashirvadi group. Instead, and to his own disbelief, ignorant Sahare soon found himself reduced to canonfodder on the wrong side of an increasingly bitter factional game.

Coping with factionalism

On the Sitapur dust-level, as elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh, factionalism is pervasive. The type of local village factions that Sahare encountered in Ulra -built up from two or more narrowly circumscribed "cliques" consisting of a leader (e.g. Chote Lal) and his henchmen (e.g. "his" Chamars)- typically branch out to higher political levels through transactional relationships between village faction leaders and bigger politicians with supra-local followings such as pramukhs and MLAs. These transactional ties are often forged at the time of general elections, when local faction leaders exchange the votes they control in their villages for a share in the patronage available to bigger faction leaders. Pramukhs and MLAs, on their part, tend to rally around even bigger politicians such as the leaders of political parties or their rivals, for much the same reasons. Factions, or coalitions of factions, thus function as the basic units of action in Indian politics and, by way of various intermediate connections, may stretch out from the village political arena to the state parliaments and *vice versa* (Brass 1966; De Zwart 1994; De Zwart 1995a; Firth 1957; Mayer 1977; Nicholas 1977; Srinivas 1959).²¹⁰ Since dust-level politics is almost by definition factional politics, all DLBs must somehow or other come to terms and deal with it.

As Sahare's fortunes in Ulra demonstrate, this is easier said than done. Since Indian civil service rules prescribe that bureaucrats

²¹⁰ This pyramidal structure of factional alignments is by no means typical for Indian factionalism. It has also been observed in South-East Asia and Latin America: see, for instance, Scott (1972) and Powell (1977).

are not to be posted in their native areas, DLBs are almost by definition outsiders to the political arenas in which they work. Like Ram Sahare, they therefore typically lack the local knowledge required to accurately map factional allegiances or to anticipate and influence factional conflict as well as locals can. "Reading" factionalism is far from easy at any rate. First of all, factions tend to be unstable. Though a small inner core of faction members may stay with a faction leader through thick and thin on account of the warm affection they feel for him as a person, most members of factions only continue to support a leader as long as he can provide material benefits to them (or, at least, the *likelihood* of material benefits in the near future) (Brass 1966: 56). Factions, as constellations of largely instrumental relationships between leaders and followers, are therefore quite vulnerable to anything that disrupts, or is believed to disrupt, the flow of benefits (*ibid.*). As a result, factional alignments shift continuously. For example, when I frequented Ulra village a year after the provisional end of the electricity affair, political control over the village had come to be contested by three separate factions, instead of the earlier two. Pradhan Ashirvadi with his Pasi following had gone over to the Dixits, another notable Brahmin family which controlled the village *kota* (shop where poor villagers can buy essential foodstuffs against subsidised rates) to form a third faction, apart from and in opposition to the Tripathi-Lal faction and the struggling Thakur clique.²¹¹

Secondly, factions tend to be temporary, ad-hoc coalitions. Factions usually lack permanence. They may lay dormant for a while only to reveal themselves as political conflict units on specific occasions. Factions, irrespective of whether they are active in village settings or in the high politics context of the state legislative assembly, are thus determined by the precise circumstances of their occurrence and, unlike political parties, possess little or no formal organization (Mayer 1977: 52; Pocock 1957: 296). In fact, they can scarcely be called groups.²¹² In consequence, factions often seem to

²¹¹ Factional realignments such as this one often follow the principle "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" (Carter 1972: 424).

²¹² Mayer categorizes factions as interactive quasi-groups. What distinguishes the interactive quasi-group from the group and the association is

lack a substantial reality. "It appears", as Paul Brass writes, "that there are no persistent conflicts and no permanent alliances, that all is perpetually in flux" (Brass 1966: 55). Thirdly, there is the tenuous connection between social identity and factional allegiance. That is to say, the membership of factions is usually quite diverse in that its members tend to belong to different castes, classes and localities (Brass 1966; Carter 1972: 442). People's factional allegiances can therefore not commonly be deduced from their most easily ascertainable attributes.

Seen from DLBs' point of view, factionalism thus makes for a highly uncertain and unpredictable work environment. In their interaction with "clients", DLBs can never really be sure as to whom they are actually dealing with in terms of the factions they side with, the political clout they enjoy, and the goals they pursue. Neither are they in a good position to predict what dangers might lie in store for them when they decide to extend their cooperation to certain clients and, in doing so, deny it to others. One VLO nicely captured this high degree of uncertainty involved in DLBs' work by describing his job as "being busy in puzzling works". The DLBs' environment is thus, in Pfeffer and Salancik's sense of the term, a turbulent one, in that it does not allow for the correct perception of all the external groups they depend on and of the relative importance or potency of each (Pfeffer and Salancik 2003 (1978): 79).

Their relative outsider status coupled with the relatively short durations of their assignments prevents most DLBs from becoming effective players in their own right in faction political games. As passing birds, they simply lack the time to get fully acquainted with the local political arena.²¹³ Most DLBs therefore try to insulate

its ego-centeredness (it depends on a specific person for its survival) and in the single-strandedness of relevant membership actions (the only actions that count are the one's between any member and ego or ego's intermediary) (Mayer 1977: 43).

²¹³ The problem of factionalism may have been more acute for VLOs at the time of my fieldwork than it is now. Starting in 1999, a large scale reorganization of the rural development delivery system was to result in an all-round change of VLOs' jurisdiction from the nyay panchayat (a collection of five to eight villages) to the gram panchayat, a single village. Assuming that this reform has been successfully pushed through, this would mean that VLOs no longer have to deal with the fluid and capricious factional systems of several villages but only with

themselves against unwanted consequences of devious factional pressures by establishing and cultivating good relations with those - their superiors in the departmental line hierarchy; police officials- who might be able to help them when things threaten to get out of control. Many DLBs also actively seek the protection of what they often call “godfathers”: preferably “big” politicians who occupy, or have *pahunch* to the occupants of, important positions in the state government and who may thus be powerful enough to check and restrain troublemongering local faction leaders.

On a day to day basis, most DLBs try to stay out of factional trouble by studiously avoiding the impression of siding with any faction while at the same time not seeming to be uncooperative. In the case of VLOs this usually means -again- that they only visit the villages when they cannot avoid doing so. Frontline abandonment reduces the risk of offending factional sensibilities and, thus, of inviting uncomfortable accusations and pressures. Quite a few VLOs in the research area, including Ram Vilas (see § 5.1) and Ram Sahare, had perfected this strategy by employing informally appointed “helpers” to take care of the more routine chores, such as inspection visits and the time-consuming paperwork that comes with them.

For BDOs, wriggling out of factional trouble is often a bit more difficult. Their frontline is the block office which cannot be so easily abandoned. Hence, they must largely rely on their verbal and social skills to defuse potentially explosive situations. A short interaction that I witnessed between BDO Pahla and Kamlesh Paswan, a member of the *zilla* (district) panchayat, nicely illustrates how BDOs may go about handling such situations. When he saw Paswan entering his office, the BDO (with whom I had been discussing the problem of loan recovery) at once became very friendly and smilingly gave Paswan an elaborate commendation for his “good work” in rural development. Paswan, delighted, replied that BDO *sahab* was not the only officer who held him in high esteem; only just now, the DM and the CDO had also been praising his efforts. The BDO then enquired how he could be of service to Paswan. Perhaps

that of a single one. This should of course have increased their capability to “read” the factional politics in their jurisdictions.

he would appreciate something in the way of road construction in his village? Paswan thanked the BDO for his kindness but explained that he had actually come for some other matter. He happened to have heard that some vacancies were going to be filled up in the CDPO (child development project office) and was wondering if perhaps BDO sahab could tell him just how many vacancies might be involved? The BDO, apparently a little surprised by this news, promised to enquire into the matter and to let Paswan know what he had learned.

After Paswan had left, the BDO explained the situation to me. Kamlesh Paswan, he pointed out, was a neta who should be kept in good humour. Considered very close to the zilla panchayat chairwoman Sundari Rahi, herself wife to the powerful former Congress MP Ram Lal Rahi (see § 5.3, note 195), Paswan was much more influential than his relatively modest *kursi* (chair; elective office) might lead one to expect. The vacancies mentioned by Paswan concerned the posts of kindergarten workers and kindergarten assistants. These had been opened up almost two years ago. But just before the newly recruited employees could assume their duties, some netas, angry that their "own" candidates had lost out in the selection, had made allegations about irregularities in the recruitment process. The CDO had been put under pressure to issue an enquiry into the matter and the posts, as had been the complaining netas' intention all along, had remained vacant ever since (after all, as Paul Brass has observed, in patronage politics denying patronage to one's rivals is as important as dispensing it to one's followers (Brass 1966)).

Though he had feigned surprise in Paswan's presence, the BDO was perfectly aware that, just as Paswan had heard, the recruitment of new employees for the long vacant posts had indeed finally been completed. What is more, he also knew exactly who the new recruits were. The reason why he had not told Paswan was because he was suspicious about Paswan's motives for finding out more about them. In all likelihood, the BDO pointed out, also Paswan himself knew more than he had admitted, namely that among the new recruits there was none of his own people. Therefore, the real purpose of Paswan's visit must have been to

obtain a list with the names of the new recruits. Such a list would enable him to verify whether the rumours he had heard were in fact true and, if so, to start collecting incriminating “evidence” about the new recruits belonging to rival factions. By discrediting some of the new recruits Paswan might still try and manage to push some of his own people forward.

As the BDO explained to me, he was very anxious not to get involved in this factional struggle. He had himself been in (additional) charge of the CDPO at the time of the initial recruitment of kindergarten personnel and had, as such, ended up in the middle of the political turmoil over the alleged irregularities. Fearing that the Paswan-Rahi group would not hesitate to implicate him –again– in this foul struggle for patronage if they reckoned it would help their cause, he had tried his best to keep Paswan in good humour by alerting him to the availability of road-building funds and by generally giving a cooperative impression. To his own relief, he seemed to have successfully wriggled out of the tricky situation, for the moment at least.

No matter how skilfully, glibly or cleverly DLBs may try to “escape from the thorny bushes of groupism”, as one VLO evocatively put it, a “mistake” is easily made. With around eighty pradhans and hundreds of panches, a pramukh and dozens of BDC-members, an MP and one or two MLAs and their respective followings, as well as countless aspiring officeholders and dalaals in each and every block competing for the patronage vested in the rural development machinery, it is simply impossible for DLBs to keep track of who is who, let alone who is allied, connected or has pahunch to whom (for the moment), and to keep in the good books of all of them. Almost inevitably, DLBs regularly end up scapegoats in factional conflicts and get punished for actions or omissions they could not possibly have avoided. Experiences of such unjust punishments increase DLBs’ suspicion of the motives of those who approach them and reinforce their inclination towards frontline abandonment and other, functionally equivalent, forms of distancing themselves from their immediate environment and clientele. Many DLBs are in fact so caught up in interpreting,

navigating and surviving the factional pressures that are brought to bear upon them that they often seem to be busy with little else.

5 Untouchable disidentification

The regular abuse, discrediting and unjust punishments leave most DLBs quite demoralized. In my interviews with them, almost all DLBs testified to feeling “helpless”, “exposed”, “insecure”, “powerless”, “unprotected”, or “dependent”. Many also stressed the great discomfort they experienced at having to behave in the way they did to “save” themselves. The “wrong jobs” exacted from them by “cunning”, “cruel”, “wicked”, “evil”, “naughty”, “self-interested”, “greedy”, “manipulating”, “resourceful”, “exploitative”, “powerful”, “lying”, “bribing”, “lure-giving”, “illiterate”, “characterless”, “threatening”, “dangerous” and “cheating” netas, mediators, dalaals and villagers caused them to feel “sad”, “disturbed”, “corrupted”, “ineffective” and “remorseful”. Many also strongly felt that whatever little “prestige” and “respect” their posts might have commanded earlier had now wholly evaporated.²¹⁴ Their jobs, in other words, had lost all their “dignity” and they themselves had become “defamed”, deprived of “praise” and “pride”, reduced to mere “labourers”.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ In comparison to other departments with a dust-level presence like the police, the electricity department, and the revenue administration, the rural development machinery has traditionally enjoyed relatively low public esteem, partly because its senior employees (BDOs and higher) are recruited from among the “lower merit ranks” (those who secured relatively low marks in the civil service entrance examinations), partly because it does not have the power “to force and coerce people” (Brass 1966: 213). For example, although the CDO occupies a comparatively higher rank than an SDM, the latter enjoys far more esteem because SDMs are recruited from among the higher merit ranks and because they are much more powerful than CDOs (this example was given to me by the BDO of Parsendi).

²¹⁵ Many VLOs like to take pride in the fact that they are “officers” (*adhikaris*) rather than “workers” (*sevaks*), as they were called until a few decades ago. By describing themselves as mere labourers VLOs therefore convey their hurt pride, their sense of being degraded.

The few who had purposively *chosen* a career in rural development work, to “help” and “be of service” to the rural poor, had largely given up hope of fulfilling their “ideas” and “desires”.²¹⁶ For this, they did not only blame the actions and manipulations of netas and their clients, however, but also the programs they were supposed to implement. What DLBs considered the most problematic features of rural development programs was that they were limited-availability (rather than open-ended, universal entitlement) programs and that the benefits available under the most ambitious programs were disproportionately desirable to large segments of the village population. These twin features made that the demand for many benefits under the nominal control of the rural development bureaucracy far exceeded the available supply and that program implementation therefore required the *selection* of a relatively limited number of beneficiaries from a much larger pool of (more or less) equally deserving candidates. (The BDO of Parsendi estimated for instance that for any twenty IAY colonies there were “at least two hundred” aspirants). The very design of poverty alleviation programs, DLBs observed, thus *invited* fierce competition and jealous tensions in the villages. It was therefore only “logical” and “inevitable”, they argued, that the “rule-abiding”, “eligible”, “honest”, “helpless” and “poorest of the poor” tended to loose out in the ensuing polarized, “groupist”

²¹⁶ Though all of them had purposively tried to get into “service” (that is, secure public employment), most DLBs I met –whether BDOs or VLOs– had not exactly *chosen* a career in the development bureaucracy. On the contrary, BDOs had typically aspired to a career in revenue administration or in the police. The only reason why they had ended up development officials was because they had been *assigned* to the rural development cadre on account of their relatively poor marks in the civil service examinations (some *still* severely regretted they had not done better in the exams). A few urbanized BDOs (like the BDO of Parsendi, who held a PhD in philosophy) indeed gave the impression of being awkwardly out of place in the rather boisterous and rowdy atmosphere of the block. Many VLOs also explained their career choice as a coincidence. It had simply been the only service job they had been able to secure. VLO Khusi Ram of Biswan block, for example, like many of his colleagues explained his becoming a VLO as a result of not being able to become *something else*. “I became a VLO because my appointment as a junior clerk did not get through”. More than anything else, DLBs had thus *ended up* doing what they did.

atmospheres to those who are most “closely touched” to the netas and, hence, manage to “take all convenience”.²¹⁷

Another major flaw of rural development programs, according to some DLBs, was that the benefits to be doled out under them testified to central policy-makers’ poor grasp of rural people’s real wants and aspirations. It was simply too tempting for poor people with hardly if any discretionary income to use financial benefits such as subsidies, stipends and soft loans for other than the officially intended purposes, to cover immediate subsistence needs, for example, or to pay for such emergency expenses as dowries, medical treatments, debt repayments, or “drinking bouts”. Simply put, the large majority of target clients were “only interested in the money” and had no “attachment” to the idea of rural developmental, only in their own. As a result, the programs’ long term goals of providing the rural poor with structural ways out of poverty usually came to nothing. On the contrary, the “free money” made available under the programs only served to “corrupt” the people and, by implication, themselves. “To give money”, as one BDO articulated the opinion of many of his colleagues, “is to cause ruin”.

A few older DLBs nostalgically, and without doubt romantically, remembered the good old days when “panchayats were exactly following the path”, “development officials were selflessly doing the work according to *Bapu’s* (Mahatma Gandhi’s) principles” and “villagers helped enthusiastically in the work”. They lamented today’s “degradation of morals and character”, people’s “lack of fear” (*bhay*) for the consequences of their “wrong work”, and the prevailing “blaming culture”. As one veteran BDO explained (to the obvious hilarity of a local neta waiting for the

²¹⁷ The inherently divisive character of many poverty alleviation programs has not received the scholarly attention that it would seem to deserve. Conventional explanations of poor program performance typically highlight official and political neglect and abuse. They tend to ignore, however, the very plausible possibility that such neglect and abuse may themselves be stimulated by the selection principle according to which these programs are designed to operate. After all, as Maheswari has put it, “when only ten people in a village are included in the list of beneficiaries, the eleventh fellow is apt to feel sore, for he, too, is poor” (Maheswari 1995: 263).

sanctioning of “his” road-building funds): “I have no honest (*sharif*) man in my office. I really mean it when I say that never a honest man enters here, they all have a guilty conscience . . . Everybody is complaining that the *pradhan* takes money, whether he actually takes or not. It is the blame and accusations which really are the constant, to put it in chemistry terms. Everybody has a guilty conscience, so blame is all that results”.

The large majority of DLBs thus testified to feeling very dissatisfied with their “troublesome”, “bothersome”, “burdensome” and “useless” work and work environment. What added to their distress was a widespread feeling among them that they could do little to improve things. Some DLBs, for whom their involvement in political corruption was, or had become, a considerable mental burden, tried to appease their conscience by limiting their collection of bribes and other forms of number two income. Often, however, such efforts made life even more difficult as colleagues would sneer at them (“my colleagues say I’m a fool, living hand to mouth like that, with only a fixed income and a large family to support”) and impatient wives would strongly complain about the loss of income brought about by their “sudden fits of honesty”.

Many, at some point in their careers, had seriously entertained the idea of leaving the rural development organization.²¹⁸ If hardly any of them had actually done so, it was only because alternative, equally remunerative and secure public employment had not been available.²¹⁹ “A drowning man will grasp a straw”, as one DLB

²¹⁸ If an, admittedly rather dated, study by Haragopal and Murali Manohar is anything to go by, low job satisfaction and exit considerations seem to be far from typical for dust-level rural development bureaucrats. These authors found more than ninety per cent of the 230 bureaucrats in their sample (recruited from a variety of departments and from all hierarchical levels, age groups, service groups and educational levels) to be uninterested in the nature of their work. Two-thirds of them had a desire to quit the organisation (Haragopal and Murali Manohar 1976: 728-9).

²¹⁹ None of the DLBs seemed to have contemplated finding a job in the private sector, probably because, in India more generally, leaving service employment for a private sector job is not done. Service employment is far more highly valued, secure and respectable. Bureaucrats’ families have often spent much time and money (bribery to gain entrance into the civil service, at least in Uttar Pradesh, is very common) to get their son in. “During his whole

explained his continued presence in the rural development set-up. DLBs' inclination towards frontline abandonment can thus in part be understood as the result of their gradual disidentification from their organization's mission and its clientele. It is a form of "neglect", a way of staying in the organization and receiving the appreciable benefits this bestows, while spending as little physical and mental energy as possible in doing so (cf. Martino Golden 1992: 34; Rusbult et al. 1988: 601).

Unsurprisingly, in a context in which heavily demoralized and disillusioned DLBs are so preoccupied with personal survival, active representation of caste interests is hardly an issue. I scarcely came across any DLBs –whether touchable or untouchable– who seemed to have *seriously entertained* the idea of using their official position in the rural development delivery system to facilitate the flow of policy benefits to co-caste clients. Perhaps more tellingly, in my talks with ordinary villagers, politicians and bureaucrats I never picked up any gossip or rumours about DLBs who were arguably partially disposed towards clients of their own castes. In fact, both netas and ordinary villagers seemed to be firmly agreed as to the general irrelevance of DLBs' caste identities for the way they approach their jobs and handle their clients.

"If a person becomes an officer", as the pramukh of Parsendi summarized a widely held opinion, "he forgets about his caste". Essentially the same point was made by Baba Mahant, an old Chamar from Loniapurva, with a claim to fame as one of the founding fathers of the Sitapur BSP. Mahant resolutely discarded my suggestion that his hamlet should perhaps have benefited more than it had from the Ambedkar village program. After all, the

life", as a secretariat official in Lucknow explained to me, "a middle-class boy is brought up with the idea that he gets into service. That is the only clear goal in his life". Or, as BDO Parsendi put it, "every youth educated today wants to become IAS or PCS". Service employment is therefore still widely regarded "the best deal" (cf. Taub 1969: 79). The incentives for *untouchable* DLBs to stay in service are probably even stronger than for non-untouchable officials because of the prevailing closed recruitment pattern in the private sector. Private employers tend to prefer network recommendees and but rarely openly advertise vacancies for white collar positions. This excludes many untouchables, a traditionally poorly networked category, from "any active job consideration in such [private] organisations" (Gupta 2005b: 4).

hamlet had been served by a Chamar VLO at the time of the program's implementation: "This fellow had to do a government job", he reasoned, "so what could he do? A Chamar officer may do us some good but it is equally likely that he will do us no good at all. It all depends upon a person's mind (*dimag*)".

Untouchable DLBs were usually quick to accept the suggestion that they did not do "anything special" for their *biraderi* ("community"). But, as they pointed out, their failure to act as active representatives was far less a matter of unwillingness on their part, as implied by the likes of Baba Mahant, than of sheer "inability". Even apart from netas' general tendency to "check and curb" them and to prevent them from doing their work as VLOs "according to rule", there was also the fall-out of the stiff upper caste resentment of official privileges for untouchables to deal with.²²⁰ Many untouchable DLBs (as well as many other untouchable officials I met in the course of my fieldwork) were convinced that resentful upper caste actors -both within and outside bureaucracy- were actively preventing them from building up the clout deemed necessary to serve their caste constituencies.

Even if reservations had secured them a sizeable bureaucratic presence, they still formed only a small and insignificant numerical minority in a bureaucratic and political environment overwhelmingly dominated by upper caste representatives. Untouchable DLBs believed that upper castes were routinely sabotaging the implementation of reservations for untouchables and backward classes. One VLO, for example, was adamant that "whatever they [upper caste informants, bvg] may have told you, SCs make up only 1,5 per cent of the IAS, 2,5 per cent of the PCS and

²²⁰ Upper caste resentment of reservations is widespread in India and also quite palpable (though seldom expressed openly) among the upper caste DLBs in the Sitapur rural development bureaucracy. Many considered reservations "unfair" (because "they benefit candidates who have no merit") and were "anxious to know when they will stop". What particularly aggravated these *general* bureaucrats was their impression that SC bureaucrats were getting "earlier promotions" than them. Untouchable officials who were thought to have jumped the queue, like a former colleague BDO who had speedily made it to the rank of Assistant Development Commissioner, were viewed with a mixture of pent-up jealousy, suspicion and malicious hostility by those who felt unfairly bypassed.

3 per cent of those in group III. Likewise, OBC representation in the services is only 4,5 per cent, even though there is a quota of 27 per cent for them". A few outspoken untouchable DLBs maintained that upper caste actors were deliberately preventing them from building up their own "channels" of influence, by denying them discretionary positions and by making sure that untouchable officials were always placed under the direct control of upper caste political or administrative superiors. "You will always find", so one VLO claimed, "that if there is an SC officer, the *pradhan* will be of *general* [upper, bvg] caste. If only the whole channel were SC, *then something could be done*".²²¹

In the present circumstances, with a lacking security in numbers and the absence of effective ingroup channels, most untouchable officials felt it was simply too dangerous to extend special help, however surreptitiously, to ingroup clients, even if they felt a moral obligation to do so: they would surely be "held down", "harassed", "intimidated" and "crushed" by "upper caste lobbies".²²² It was because of their "fear" of such punishments, they explained, that most among them took such good care to avoid any overly apparent impressions of themselves as caste-identified officers. Some mentioned their deliberate efforts not to be seen as

²²¹ Untouchable DLBs' stressing of the importance of "channels" suggests that representative bureaucracy theorists should not be content with spelling out critical mass as an active representation-facilitative attribute of bureaucracies. As Greene et al. have plausibly suggested, not only a group's presence *per se* (or "penetration") is likely to be an important factor conditioning the possibilities for active representation. The *distribution* of its presence over the administrative hierarchy ("stratification") may be equally relevant (Greene et al. 2000: 2000).

²²² On several occasions, untouchable informants stressed this point by referring to what had happened to Mata Prasad. Prasad was an untouchable IAS officer (1962 batch), who climbed the ranks to become UP's chief secretary, the highest administrative position in the state. At one point, Prasad was nominated to become the first untouchable chief secretary at the centre in New Delhi but his appointment was cancelled at the last moment. It was widely believed in untouchable administrative circles that upper caste lobbies had obstructed Prasad's appointment because of his openly sympathetic attitude towards the untouchable cause. One of Prasad's well-known "representative" acts had been his summoning of SC officers to make donations to the untouchable public employees' union BAMCEF, a forerunner of the BSP, in the 1970s.

forming “little groups of our own”. It was only by downplaying their identity, avoiding advocacy roles and by stimulating upper caste perceptions of themselves as “ordinary” officers, so they believed, that they could hope “to take care” of themselves now and, hopefully, of their caste fellows in the future. For the moment, however, they were still too “weak” to be able to fight for their “rights” in the way “general people” could. As an untouchable, they claimed, “you do not get any sympathy, you cannot expect any sympathy”. Even if poor and untouchable villagers suffered from untouchable officers’ forced self-centeredness, for the moment there was little they could do about it. “We do not want to raise money from the poor”, as one VLO summarised the untouchable DLBs’ predicament, “but we will have to do so”.

Untouchable administrators’ tendency to rule out the existence of opportunities for the display of active representation may also have something to do with their strong sense of obligation towards their *families* as opposed to their “communities”. Some untouchable officers hinted at the great “sacrifices” their poor and illiterate family members had had to make in allowing them to educate themselves and secure service employment. For these officials, the choice between downplaying their identities with all its likely rewards – a relatively successful career, secure income, the possibility to bring one’s family ahead- and “staying with our people” through active representation, with all its likely costs – stalled careers, frequent transfers and suspensions, unsteady incomes- must have been easily made.²²³

But untouchable DLBs’ disidentification from untouchable clienteles often extends far beyond the more or less forced practices of frontline abandonment and defensive cowering. While climbing the social ladder, many untouchable bureaucrats have continued to

²²³ As one upwardly mobile untouchable in Azamgarh district in Eastern UP justified the reasonableness of the first, appeasement, option to Roy and Singh: “Having a place to live, food to feed your children, and clothes to cover all of us with are the things we want foremost. If it is difficult for the caste Hindu, who run the society, to manage these minimum requirement, it is not going to be easier for us particularly if we challenge the Hindu outright . . . We actually have to encounter, appease and cajole the caste Hindus in a hundred different ways to secure our share” (Roy and Singh 1987: 19).

experience their untouchability as a stigma, that is, as something deeply discrediting that disqualifies them from full social acceptance (Goffman 1963: 11, 13). A general point made by many untouchable officials with whom I discussed the issue -both in rural Sitapur as well as in urban Lucknow and Delhi- was that their untouchability had never really gone away, that it was "still there", even if its outward manifestations had changed dramatically in the course of their lives. Some told me about their childhood days in the village, where traditional practices of untouchability had been manifest, common, even taken-for-granted parts of their lives. Some vividly remembered how the village school teacher had made them sit outside the class-room, how they and their family members had been provided with separate utensils at festive occasions, how they had been scolded for being a "dirty Chamar", or how upper caste boys would not play with them.

After leaving the village to pursue higher education in town or city, untouchability had typically become less blatant but nevertheless palpable. Some reported having had great trouble in finding suitable hostel accommodation as landlords, after having enquired about their caste, would find any pretext not to let their rooms out to them. Others had stories to tell about the subtle and not so subtle forms of discrimination they had been subjected to by fellow boarders and students -derogatory remarks, spiteful innuendo, sudden break-ups of friendships- once their caste identities had been revealed. Even after they had secured highly coveted public employment and become, at least in the eyes of the general public, successful careerists, the operation of stigma had not ceased.

What always remained, indeed, were the countless little, nasty, unobtrusive but hard to ignore ways in which upper caste colleagues or superiors managed to express or reveal their apparent hostility, disapproval, distrust, unease or discomfort: courteous and evasive but firm refusals to have tea or meals together, "dirty" jokes, or the grieving withholding of sociability. One high-ranking class 1 officer was still visibly pained when he told me about a particularly bad experience he had had in one of his earlier postings, in Gorakhpur district, where he had become "rather friendly" with an

upper caste subordinate officer of class 2 rank. When this friend celebrated the birthday of one of his children, all colleagues had been invited except himself. The incident, the officer told me, had taught him the valuable but painful lesson that “scheduled caste officers may be tolerated, but they will not be accepted”.

To many untouchable officials, then, their untouchability is not a mere accident of birth from which they have long since escaped by gaining entrance to bureaucracy and society’s elite. As they see it, they continue to pay a hefty price for being (considered) untouchable by being made to feel, whether regularly or on occasion, uncomfortable, uncertain, anxious, looked down upon, disrespected, inferior, loathed, insulted, unaccepted, excluded, or outrightly discriminated against. Untouchability, in short, apparently still creates spoiled identities, to use Goffman’s term, even for its most fortunate bearers.²²⁴

As the copious literature on the subject bears out, defensive cowering and trying to act “normally” are by no means the only coping, or “management”, strategies available to individuals afflicted by stigma. Depending on, among other things, the psychological costs associated with particular strategies, the type of

²²⁴ Since stigmatized individuals are often all too ready, as Erving Goffman has observed, to read “unintended meanings” in the actions of “normals” (Goffman 1963: 29), it is hard to say whether upper caste discrimination is as real, strong and all-pervasive as some untouchable officials claimed. In the dust-level development bureaucracy it was, in any case, seldom openly expressed. Most upper caste bureaucrats clearly avoided being drawn into discussions of such touchy subjects as untouchability and reservations. Those who did venture a comment usually were at pains, as might have been expected, to deny that “caste feelings” were in any way a significant element in interpersonal relations within the organization. One upper caste BDO noticed that untouchable officials did not “mix easily” and sometimes exuded a “sense of insecurity”. But he did not think these phenomena could be attributed to the operation of “casteism”. “Differences and personal antagonisms exist between all bureaucrats, also between upper caste and untouchable ones. But they are based more on *personal* preferences and dislikes than anything else”. The lack of overt and deliberate caste discrimination does not, of course, preclude the operation of covert or unintended stigmatization. “The high caste language”, for example, as Aggarwal has noted, “is full of insulting expressions for the Harijans to which the high caste themselves have become quite deaf but which the Harijans have not become accustomed to (Aggarwal 1983: 6-8, check).

audience, the length of stigma awareness, the nature of the stigma and the extent of (perceived) ingroup support, stigmatized individuals may try to deal with their negative identity by way of such widely varying techniques as the acknowledgement, denial, concealment, selective or gradual disclosure, positive reinterpretation, celebration or flaunting of their stigma; retreat and withdrawal from interaction with normals (or “self-segregation”), blaming the discreditors, or collective “fighting-back” strategies like self-organization, public (re-)education and identity politics (cf. e.g. Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Anspach 1979; Goffman 1963; Kando 1972: 479; Letkemann 2002: 512; Siegel et al. 1998).²²⁵

Probably the most commonly employed strategy by individuals who fear stigmatization is to try and conceal their stigma from outsiders in order to “pass” as normal. Untouchable officials turned out to be no exception in this regard. Most tellingly, many DLBs had adopted surnames which did not immediately give away their untouchable jati identities or which *suggested* upper caste status. Some, for example, had started using the surname Singh; a particularly unobtrusive surname, traditionally used by upper caste Rajputs and a host of middling jatis (as well as Sikhs) all over north India. Others called themselves Rawat, a name also used by Rajputs in the Himalayan region, or Verma, a surname associated with upper caste Kayasths and, more importantly, with the Kurmis, a rather populous and respected middle, landowning caste in Sitapur and the rest of central UP.

Besides, in my dealings with them I was struck by the tenacity with which many untouchable officials perceptibly refused to identify themselves as or with untouchables. Almost typically, they would shy away from discussing their or their ingroup clients’ problems in relation to untouchability. In fact, whenever the issue of

²²⁵ These techniques need not be, and in fact often are not, mutually exclusive. What warrants their categorization as stigma *management* strategies is that they all are, or can be interpreted to be, aimed at avoiding, minimizing or changing one or more of the three necessary conditions for the operation of stigma: “(1) audience members actually perceive and take note of the discrediting condition, (2) audiences consider the condition to be threatening or unpleasant, and (3) audiences deem the stigma and those afflicted by it to be at least somewhat responsible for the condition” (Nelsen 2005: 1).

caste and untouchability sprang up in conversation, untouchable officials would try and steer away the conversation to other, less touchy or painful issues. Most of them took obvious care not to refer to other untouchables –whether colleagues or clients– in such a way as to signal that these were somehow seen, considered or felt by them to be members of some ingroup to which also they themselves belonged. I do not think I ever came across an untouchable official who *spontaneously* spoke of untouchable clients as “my people” or some such label or referred to himself and purported fellow untouchable colleagues in “we”-terms.

Untouchable officials who apparently felt that I came too “close” would often avoid talking to me. Those who could somehow be persuaded to reflect upon the untouchable aspects of bureaucratic operations and interpersonal relations, often did so in awkward, objectivist, distancing terms, speaking for example about “majority” and “minority communities” in the third person singular or plural. Even then, such conversations would usually occur in the safe confines of officials’ homes, rather than in public or official contexts where there was always the danger of strangers or outsiders listening in and finding out. Many untouchable officials, then, routinely deployed an array of passing strategies, making them, for most intents and purposes, *unrecognizable* as untouchables to outsiders, including their purported ingroup clients.²²⁶ This successful passing on the part of untouchable bureaucrats prevents “their” clients from knowing whether they are in fact represented by one of their own in the bureaucracy and, thus, from effectively claiming preferential treatment on the basis of primordial affinity.

²²⁶ To say that many untouchable officials pass does not amount to saying that *all of them always* try to pass. Passing, for example, is no option when others know about one’s caste. One’s immediate colleagues, for instance, are almost invariably “in the know” because of their high alertness to the operation and occupancy of reservations. Many untouchables, furthermore, experience passing as a highly stressful activity; some passers eventually prefer outing over concealment. It is my impression, however, that untouchable *officials* almost routinely pass vis-à-vis *outsiders*, that is, people who may be assumed to be ignorant about one’s jati identity including most ordinary villagers (potentially) eligible for rural development benefits.

To sum up the main argument developed in this chapter: the survival strategies of frontline abandonment, defensive cowering and passing that untouchable DLBs routinely deploy in their efforts to cope with the problems of patronage politics, goondagiri, factionalism and stigma conspire to make the active representation of ingroup policy interests on the part of untouchable DLBs a virtual non-issue in the Sitapur rural development bureaucracy. In the ordinary course of their official lives, untouchable DLBs lack both opportunities and good reasons to act as untouchable clients' representatives. The inevitable result is an almost routine interruption of the supply of active representation.

6 Absent Demand

In this chapter the perspective shifts from the DLBs to their intended clients, the untouchable villagers. I will illustrate that, whereas DLBs see little reason or opportunity to supply active representation, untouchable clients rarely, if ever, *demand* DLBs to do so. The apparent absence of an untouchable demand for active representation is an important finding because it further detracts from the likelihood of supply of active representation by DLBs: if ingroup clients do not even ask, claim or pressurize for special treatment why would DLBs run the considerable personal risks involved in extending it? The absence of a demand for active representation is not only important, it is also puzzling. Even if untouchable DLBs tend to be busy coping with netagiri, factionalism and stigmatized identity, there would seem to be no reason why untouchable clients should not *try* and get in touch with them to demonstrate their eligibility for highly valued program benefits or to claim special treatment on the basis of caste-affinity. Here, I account for the absent demand for active representation by discussing and explaining untouchable (as well as other poor and low caste) villagers' overwhelming preference for indirect, "political" methods, such as voting and brokerage, to secure policy benefits. These methods are typically considered much more feasible, effective and, also, far less dangerous than the direct approach of bureaucrats which, therefore, hardly figures among poor clients' benefit-seeking strategies.

1 Benefit-seeking through voting

Going by the accounts of untouchable villagers in Sitapur, over the past few decades "traditional" untouchability (*chuachut*) -which

considerably complicated physical movement and implied severe handicaps in dealing with people from non-untouchable castes- has waned considerably. A few older Chamars of Chamaranpurva in Thaura still remembered the days when they were not allowed to fully cover their bodies with clothes, and that the clothes they *were* allowed to wear were not “good” clothes such as dhotis, *qamiz* and shoes. Neither could they sit on a *charpay* in the presence of Thakurs and Brahmins. Until quite recently, the Chamars in Arro’s Chamarbasti had “no right to drink water” and were expected to stand up whenever a *savarna* passed by. The Chamars of Chitauni, a mixed caste settlement of Chamars and Brahmins, claimed that “earlier” they were often “scolded and beaten”. In many villages, forced labour was very common. “Earlier”, said a Chamar from Chamaranpurva (Thaura), “even sleeping was not safe because a Brahmin might steal our thumb impression to prove that we were indebted to him so that we had to work for him”.

But now, Sitapur’s untouchables claimed, things had changed “quite a lot”, had generally become “much better” or even “hundred per cent improved”.²²⁷ The catchword used by many to describe their new situation was “free”. “Now we can do what we like”, said some Pasis from Pasinpurva in Chandraseni, “we are free to decide for whom we will work, nobody can force us”. “In *zamindari* there was *begar*”, concurred Kallu Pasi from Akbarpur, “but now we are free. We can sit right beside you [i.e. bvg]. Since *Mahatmaji* freed us, we can sit beside you and talk to you”. Or as a group of Pasi men in Amaura asserted their new found freedom with obvious relish: “Now we are free. Now, if a *savarna* passes by, we can decide to get up to pay respect, or to remain seated. Earlier we had to touch their feet. Now *they* have to touch *our* feet to get work from us”. Another new freedom is the possibility, for those who can afford to do so, to have and share meals, snacks, and tea in local roadside *hotels* (restaurants) and tea stalls and to smoke *tembaku* (tobacco) with non-untouchables.

²²⁷ Untouchable villagers typically were not able to tell very precisely *just when* things had started to change for the better. Some mentioned the time of *zamindari* or the “change of rule” (from British to Indian hands), which means the 1950s; many others simply spoke of “earlier” (*pahle*).

The opportunities to be able to *choose* one's employer and to interact -that is, "talk" and "sit"- with others on a more equal footing, were usually the first points to be mentioned by untouchables when asked to explain why they thought their situation had changed for the better. In addition, many also stressed that their poverty -an inherent attribute of traditional untouchability- was no longer as bad and pressing as before. "Earlier we worked a whole month for two *man* of grains", said some Chamars from Thaura, "but now things have changed for the better. Life in this *purva* is not all that bad, everybody earns something". The most important effect of poverty decline on the lives of untouchables is that many can now buy and grow more and better food than ever before.²²⁸ Poverty decline has also had a huge impact on untouchables' ability to move around. Almost all untouchable families now own bicycles, for example, providing them with a greatly increased access to other places, people and information, including the various agencies of the local state. "Now", many untouchables pointed out, "we can go wherever we want".²²⁹

²²⁸ This does not mean that untouchables have plenty, or even enough, to eat, though. Many are still starving.

²²⁹ All this is not to say that untouchability has fully disappeared from rural Sitapur. Residential segregation is still the norm. Upper castes still do not commonly visit the houses of untouchables. Interdining across the pollution line is still very rare, at least in people's private homes. "Pasis and Chamars have their own *lutiapatra* (cutlery)", as a, middling caste, Kurmi from Ghaila put it. I was told that in some villages in "the interior", *begar* was still sometimes enforced on highly indebted families. Scolding was also said to be still quite common ("you are dirty, you rear pigs"). Some Chamars in Arro Khamajatpur who, in an effort to improve their status, had given up pig rearing five or six years ago claimed they were still "hated", adding that "even if we stop eating meat and drinking alcohol, still we are not accepted". It should also be noted that not all new freedoms and opportunities that have come to present themselves with the fading of traditional untouchability are equally cherished. Even if temple entry restrictions seem to have been largely lifted, quite a few untouchables claimed they could not care less. "Temple, temple", said some Chamars from Lonia *purva*, "that is all useless. People should use their own minds". Chamars from Chamaranpurva (Thaura) said they hardly ever visited the nearby temple in Thangaon: "In the mornings we take bath and give water to the sun (*jal cadhate hain*). This is what we do by way of praying". Untouchables from the mixed Chamar and Pasi hamlet Bhawania *purva* told

The newly acquired freedoms of interaction, interdining, spending and mobility make that untouchability –as a personal attribute, or “identity”- no longer represents a significant barrier for most rural untouchables to approach the bureaucracy for valued resources. Rural untouchables, in other words, are no longer kept away from visiting government offices and meeting officials *because* they are untouchables. Nevertheless, the direct approach of bureaucrats is one of the least popular ways in which rural clients vie for policy benefits. In fact, on the Sitapur dust-level, clients’ claims for, and expectations of any, let alone *special*, help by ingroup bureaucrats are notable by their almost complete absence.

By far the most popular and widely practiced benefit-seeking strategy employed by poor villagers, almost irrespective of caste, is voting. By voting their “own” man or party in office, they have, or so they assume, the biggest chance of landing benefits. Politicians, in other words, are expected to nurse their *constituencies*, not necessarily their *villages*, through the allocation of patronage. To the villagers it is obvious that roads, subsidised housing, a new school or community hall (*panchayat ghar*) will be built in the quarters of pradhan supporters. “The pradhan”, said the Chamars in Bhawania purva, “provides *kharanja* roads only to those who are close to him”. According to the Pasis of Pasiapurva in Chandraseni, the pradhan (also, incidentally, a Pasi, though living in another hamlet) and panches “only do some work in their own wards. Because we voted for Munni Lal’s uncle, a man from this hamlet, in the last elections, nothing much has been done here, except for some twenty or forty metres of *kharanja*”. In the mixed caste settlement Rahika only Pasis had managed to get IAY colonies. Since the Chamars of the hamlet had not supported the incumbent pradhan in the past elections, they had not been able to induce him to do work for them (even if they were, by common consent, much poorer and far more needful than the Pasi beneficiaries).²³⁰ To most poor villagers, therefore, voting is

me that there was no temple in the village but that they did not regret this at all. “You’ll only find phoney worshippers here”.

²³⁰ Incumbents can use election results to determine to whom they will channel benefits because voting, despite the existence of a vast formal state machinery to safeguard the secret ballot, is in practice seldom secret. The people who staff and guard the polling booths are usually petty government

not so much an expressive act as an instrumental one. They vote for the candidate or party whom they believe can win the elections and deliver the goods to them.²³¹

Note that, above, I use the term “*poor villagers*” deliberately. Especially in village panchayat elections, well-off villagers may vote (far) less instrumentally than poor ones: because they can get the things they need in the private economy (cf. Chandra 2004b: 135-6) or because they have already established access to decision makers and therefore do not need a particular incumbent’s favourable intervention. An example can illustrate this point. When I visited the mansion of the Thakur landlord of Chandraseni, his sons had just returned from Sitapur town, where they had been trying to have the DM grant them a gun license. They were now contemplating whether they should back up their request with some political pressure through a big neta friend of theirs in Biswan. These rich Thakurs had no need for the small-time rural development benefits trickling in through the panchayat system and therefore did not need the village’s pradhan to secure these for them (they, in fact, remote-controlled the incumbent pradhan anyway). And for the things they *did* want, such as a gun licence, they had far better access and connections than which could be provided by anyone elected pradhan in their village. In village elections it will therefore in all likelihood be poor and low caste voters, particularly, who “tend to

officials (clerks, teachers, postmen, watchmen) who tend to be quite vulnerable to attempts at intimidation or bribery from the locally powerful. As a result, incumbents and party activists usually know perfectly well who has voted for whom in any particular locality (Chandra 2004b: 141, 2).

²³¹ As Kanchan Chandra has aptly pointed out, the intentions with which poor and low caste individuals cast their votes, make that much of Indian voting *cannot* fruitfully be seen as a variant of the collective action problem: “The collective action problem applies to voting only in cases in which the payoff from voting accrues to all individuals collectively, or to large groups. In patronage-democracies, however, the act of voting carries with it substantial, individualized benefits, and the act of not voting carries with it substantial, individualized costs. In patronage-democracies, where the value of the vote is so high, the problem is not explaining why individuals vote, but explaining why some do *not*” (Chandra 2004b: 54). Though, I am sure, Chandra overstates the inevitability of the link between voting and individualized benefits –many voters, I will argue further on, certainly *hope for* but do not necessarily *expect* or *get* rewards in exchange for their vote- her point is well taken.

vote according to a calculus of material gain" (Wade, cited in Chandra 2004b: 135-6).

Since poor villagers use their vote primarily as a way of improving their chances to secure highly valued benefits, a candidate vying for their votes must of course have the, preferably previously demonstrated, *capability* -clout, power, influence, connections- to win the elections and secure patronage over the resources vested in administrative agencies. An incumbent who lacks -or is perceived to lack- this capability simply is not considered of much use (cf. Ruud 2001: 128). But electoral prowess and access to patronage are not the only qualities that matter to poor voters. They also look for guarantees that netas will direct patronage flows *to them* rather than to anyone else. They look, in other words, for netas whom they feel can be *trusted* to live up to their promises made at election time.

In village elections poor villagers therefore prefer to vote for one of their own, that is, a candidate of their own jati, hamlet or ward (the three often coincide). Such persons are generally well-known and not seldom related to them; a better guarantee for a share in the spoils of political office than such "closeness" cannot easily be imagined. Voting for a jati fellow is not always possible, however, because pradhanis are, by rotation, reserved for particular caste-clusters: for general, OBC and SC candidates respectively. When the pradhani is reserved for an outgroup candidate, villagers tend to give their support to a candidate with whom they are or feel somehow connected, by ties of friendship or clientage, for instance.

Starting in earnest in the late 1980s, in the bigger elections for the state and national assemblies, villagers in Sitapur -as well as in the rest of UP- have increasingly given their votes to political *parties* of their own. In UP, the caste competition among the three caste blocks described in chapter three, has found expression in the development of what Chandra refers to as an "ethnitized" party system, in which each of the three major political parties overtly pictures itself, and has quickly come to be identified by most voters, as the champion of the interests of a more or less well-defined collection of jatis of roughly similar social status.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been trying to build an electoral coalition of the superordinate Hindu castes; the *savarnas*, as Sitapuri villagers tend to call them. The Samajwadi Party (SP) has come to be strongly identified with the middling Shudra jatis, or OBCs (as well as with the Muslims), while the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has primarily courted –through jati-specific mobilization and fierce anti-upper caste rhetoric– the electoral support of the untouchables and other jatis hovering around the traditional pollution line.²³² By the end of the 1990s, the three major UP parties had largely succeeded in securing their respective caste-identified vote-banks, dividing 86 percent of the votes among them in the 1998 parliamentary elections (Chandra 1999: 56-9).²³³

²³² Kanshi Ram, founder of the BSP, projected himself as the “agent” of what he called the *bahujan samaj* (the 85 or 90 percent of Indians who make up the “common people”) and defined his party’s “single point-programme” as that of bringing political power to the untouchables and the rest of the bahujan samaj. The BSP of the 1990s meticulously advertised its candidates’ jati identities to convince explicitly targeted, caste-identified voters –e.g. “Chamars”, “Mahashahs”, “Satnamis”, “Balmikis” and “Pasis”– that they were to receive their due share in power (Chandra 1999: 70). At least until the end of the 1990s, the BSP drew a clear line separating the untouchable and other low castes from the upper castes (the *brahminwadi* or *manuwadi* forces, in BSP jargon), whom it portrayed as outside and opposed and hostile to the bahujan samaj. The BSP also made furore with confrontational and biting anti upper caste slogans like “*Brahmin, Bania, Thakur Chor, Baki Sab Hein DS-Four*” (Brahmins, Banias and Rajputs are thieves; the rest are their victims); “*Tilak, Taraju, Talwar. Maaro Unko Joote Char*” (Beat those bloody Brahmins, Banias and Rajputs four times with a shoe) and “*Vote hamara, raj tumhara. Nahin chalega, nahin chalega*” (We vote, you govern. Not any more, not anymore) (Chandra 2004b: 151-157; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 223, 264; Pai 2004: 1142).

²³³ The transformation towards a tripartite ethnitized party system in UP coincided with the precipitous electoral demise of Congress (the long dominant catch-all party) since the late 1980s. With only 6 per cent of the vote in 1998 Congress had practically ceased to be a factor in the UP political arena in the late 1990s. What warrants characterization of the transformation of the UP party system as one of “ethnification” is that the BJP, SP and BSP (unlike Congress) make *open* appeals to ethnic identity and do so to the virtual exclusion of other issues (unlike Congress’ strategy of blending coded appeals with other issues) (Chandra 1999: 57-9). V.B. Singh’s close analysis of the 1993 state assembly electioneering in Atraulia constituency (in eastern Azamgarh district) nicely illustrates the extent of its ethnization. He observed all main contenders for the Atraulia seat to have “decided to use caste” as their “major rallying point”, recruiting campaigners from their own castes, forming “caste-teams” with

Also Sitapuri villagers, with few exceptions, appeared to have largely ended up voting along the above ethnic lines in the vidhan sabha and lok sabha elections. As a Thakur notable (and long-time Congress leader) in Chandraseni summarized the current electoral situation in the district: "Now the *Pandits* (Brahmins) and most Thakurs are with the BJP, though a few Thakurs are still with Congress. The Chamars and Pasis are with the BSP. The Muslims [quite numerous in Sitapur, bvg] never returned to the Congress and are now mostly with the SP, along with the Yadavs". Or, as the villagers in Ahmedabad put it even more succinctly: "This is the era of 'Jai jati, jai parti'" (Long live caste, long live party).

Most untouchables with whom I discussed their party preferences indeed readily revealed they had supported the BSP in recent elections. The Chamars of Chamarbasti, for instance, had voted for the BSP *en bloc* and had felt proud when its leader Mayawati –"she is one of us"– became chief minister. Likewise, almost all Chamars in Lonia purva had given their support to the BSP, as had the Pasis in Pasinpurva (Chandraseni), Akbarpur, Mahuwapurva, and the Koris in Korinpurva. The fact that almost all untouchables in Sitapur voted for the BSP (even despite its occasional fielding of upper caste candidates in an effort to expand its electoral appeal) illustrates the extent to which the BSP leadership had managed to convince untouchable voters that it was "their" party. "We vote for the *party*", the Chamars of Arro Khamajatpur's Chamarbasti explained, "not the leader nor the candidate".

Though voting is the primary way in which poor villagers try to influence public benefit allocations, it carries few guarantees. First

"clear-cut mandates to canvass among their own communities", providing their teams with lists of *specific castes* whose votes they were to court, and striving hard for the support of *castes* of whose electoral preferences they were not yet sure (Singh 1996: 126). The term "ethnization" also conveniently captures the "horizontal" dimensions of contemporary caste politics. Traditionally ranked castes now increasingly find themselves opposed to each other in the political arena on more or less equal terms (much like politically organized ethnic groups in unranked systems). As Baba Mahant, a long time BSP-worker from Lonia purva, put it: "Earlier, when we went canvassing for the BSP, we would be abused like 'there goes the Chamar party', but now this has changed".

of all, voting in UP is not always free. Chandra, who studied the BSP's electioneering in rural Uttar Pradesh in the late 1990s, found that the security of the voting rights of many untouchable voters depended on their willingness to strike a bargain with politicians from dominant castes through an umbrella party or an umbrella alliance. She quotes an upper caste politician from a rival party as saying: "In previous elections, Harijans told everyone 'we are with you'. But when Mayawati became strong, they opened up. Now in the next election, we know how they will vote, and no one will let them vote. Harijans here can still be intimidated and with Mayawati not in power, no one can help them" (Chandra 2004a: 2).

Apart from outright intimidation and physically barring certain sections from voting, elections may also be more subtly rigged. V.B. Singh, in a study of the grass roots electoral process in the eastern UP constituency of Atraulia, mentions (allegations of) the deployment of manipulations like the deliberate exclusion of certain age groups from the voters' list, the enlisting of ineligible voters and impersonation, for instance (Singh 1996: 122). I myself also heard many allegations of physical obstruction, intimidation, booth capturing and ballot stuffing.²³⁴ Remember, for instance, Patara Kalan's Pasi pradhan's spontaneous listing of tactics used by his opponents to thwart fair elections in the previous chapter. Allegations such as these should probably often be taken with a pinch of salt; they are, after all, the sort of discrediting allegations standard of the faction political repertoire. At the same time, it is hard to imagine elections in Sitapur as being entirely free and fair.

But even free and fair elections in themselves do not guarantee the trickling down of promised benefit flows to voters. If the candidate they voted for fails to win, poor and low caste voters cannot and, usually, do not expect benefits to trickle down to them. My Yadav and Pasi informants in Mahuwapurva, for instance, had

²³⁴ According to Ramesh Thakur, "'booth-capturing' is particularly notorious in Bihar, and to a lesser extent UP. Mercenary thugs are available to the highest bidder for forcible capture of election booths, at the point of a gun if need be. Ballot boxes are then stuffed in favour of the paymaster candidate. The security officers standing guard to ensure the sanctity of the voting process are either bribed into active connivance or intimidated into passive acquiescence" (Thakur 1995: 260).

been genuinely and pleasantly surprised when their *pradhan*, the Muslim Munna, had decided to have a road built in their hamlet even though “he did not get a single vote” from their *purva* (the whole hamlet had rallied behind a local Yadav). And in elections for the state and national assemblies there is always the risk that the party of one’s victorious candidate does not make it to the governing coalition.²³⁵ The Chamars of Chitauni, for instance, had voted for the winning BSP candidate Rajesh Verma in the last lok sabha elections; a victory which had turned out to be of little use to them, however. “Verma can’t do much”, the Chamars explained, “because his party is not in power”.

Most poor and low caste villagers thus understand, accept and act upon the patronage logic of Indian politics. They use their vote to get their own man, woman or party in office and hope to be rewarded if their candidate manages to capture an office from which favours may be distributed. Likewise, they do not really blame an incumbent who did not get their support at election time for channelling benefits to his or her own supporters. Nor do they tend to carry a grudge against an MLA or MP, whom they *did* help win the elections, for not living up to his promises when his party is not in power. But an incumbent who secures office and patronage with the help of their votes and *still* does not deliver is considered a cheater and becomes a ready target of harsh criticism and spite.

The main problem with voting as a benefit-seeking strategy, according to many of my informants, is that most of the politicians who occupy and compete for political office in Sitapur *are*, in fact, such cheaters. “Those people who are politicians around here”, claimed the untouchables in Bhawania *purva*, “are first class cheaters” (*nambari thag vidya wale*). Many other poor and low caste voters also viewed their local netas as self-serving, unscrupulous, corrupt, crooked and unprincipled individuals with an overwhelming concern for their “own development” (*apna vikaas*)

²³⁵ Seats in the national and state parliaments are contested in more than 500 lok sabha and over 3000 vidhan sabha constituencies, which return MPs and MLAs according to the first-past-the post system. With the gradual demise of virtual one party Congress rule since the late 1960s, state and national governments are by necessity coalition governments.

rather than that of their voters (cf. Ruud 2001: 116).²³⁶ “They only come here to get the votes. And if they win, the first thing they do is to try and recover their election expenses and make something for their own. Then, if we are lucky enough, we people are left with the crumbs”, roughly sums up how many poor voters feel about their netas.

“We know that money is coming for the public”, said the Pasis in Karaundi, “but those netas make their own. For every ten thousand rupees on paper, they only show a thousand worth on the ground (*das hazaar kharcha hai, hazaar dikawat hai*). “Two lakh comes”, according to the Chamars in Fatehpur, “and one lakh is eaten by netas and अधिकारि”.²³⁷ There is no doubt in poor voters’ minds as to where this eaten money ends up: in politicians’ own pockets of course. “Generally, whoever becomes pradhan, he will only take care of himself”, the Karaundi Pasis asserted. “Earlier, the pradhan’s family was not well-off”, claimed some assembled Majhiya villagers, “but when he got the *pradhani* he all of a sudden had his own house built. He also arranged colonies for his own son and daughter in law”.

It is only when they have filled their own stomachs and almost nothing is left, that netas start thinking of delivering benefits to their voters. No wonder, then, that their hamlets are “the poorest of all”:

²³⁶ My Sitapur informants apparently share their commonly held view of politicians as corrupt crooks with most of their fellow countrymen. “The axiom that politics and politicians are (almost) always corrupt is”, Fuller and Hariss note, “ubiquitous in India . . . [O]rdinary people expect the business of politics and government to be thoroughly infected by corruption and cheating” (Fuller and Harriss 2001: 19, 20).

²³⁷ Needless to say that voters’ accusations of cheating are not necessarily factually accurate. Though most netas certainly and routinely collect rent from patronage, it may not be quite as much as villagers often seem to think. Bereft of reliable information, villagers often vastly overestimate the magnitude of public benefit flows into the villages. Many think that, each year, *dozens* of lakhs of rupees are allocated to their villages and subsequently gobbled up by their netas. In practice, officially earmarked village development funds are much more modest than that. Ulra gram panchayat, for instance, received as little as 1.05 lakh in central dotations (roughly Rs. 49,000) and policy-related monies (Rs. 56,000) in the administrative year 1999-2000. In none of the gram panchayats visited for this study did yearly JRY-outlays exceed one lakh between 1996 and 1999.

“There has been no electrification of my hamlet, no drainage, no handpumps and no roads”, said a Chamar in Lonia purva, “if we ask something from them [netas], all they give is assurance. ‘*Gam khaiye*’ (‘have patience’) is their favourite expression”. “Our MP only lives 11 kilometres away from here”, a Yadav peasant in Gausapur pointed out, “but I am sure if you asked him he couldn’t tell my name or the name of this village. These people come here only during election time and only give reassurances”. “You take a good look at all the work the netas have done here”, remarked the untouchables in Bhawania purva sarcastically, “the only thing you’ll find here is a single handpump. No hamlet is as dirty as ours”.

The rural poor and low caste Sitapur public thus tends to see most of its leaders as falling far short of what is demanded of them (cf. Mayer 1981: 165). Many are, furthermore, convinced that *today’s* countryside is *particularly* badly infested with self-seeking and corrupt netas (and officials). This sentiment is nicely conveyed by a little story which was related to me by an untouchable villager in Ahmedabad:

Once there was a King who was suffering from leprosy. He asked his Minister how he could be cured. The Minister replied: “Seek any great man or saint who can tell you”. After the King had found a Saint the latter advised him: “Divide half of your wealth among the poor”. The King then ordered his Minister to do so. But the Minister took half of the money himself and gave the rest of the money to a subordinate to distribute. But this subordinate also took half of the money and gave the remainder to *his* subordinate. This went on and on so that, in the end, only two poor persons each got one rupee. The King wondered why he was not cured despite having followed the Saint’s advice. But he understood when he learned that only two persons had profited.

The story-teller then explained that the poor in the leprous King’s era had still been better off than today’s poor. “Nowadays”, he argued, “the King *himself* would first keep half of the money, and that is why we are in such a bad situation”.

To sum up, voting is the primary way in which poor and low caste villagers try to seek access to public benefits, including those under the nominal control of the rural development machinery. Even if voting is the most popularly used benefit-seeking strategy, this does not mean that it always, or even sometimes, works. The, as they see it, zero-sum game nature of electoral and alliance politics added to the dubious character of today's netas lead most ordinary voters to *expect* quite little in exchange for their votes.

2 Dalaali

When voting does not bring the hoped for results poor and low caste villagers may respond in a number of ways. Some feel there is nothing one can do about cheating netas. Like it or not, they reason, the world is made up of "small" and "big" people, the "weak" and the "dominant", the "oppressed" and the "oppressors" (*dabang*) and there is no way the small can expect, let alone *force*, the big to show kindness to them. On the contrary, it is simply inevitable that the big will use the small for their own ends and that the fruits of government will make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

"What can we hope for?", wondered the Pasis of Pasinpurva (Chandraseni) rhetorically, "those who get seats do their own thing and the poor are not listened to. They have become kings by our vote but still we are dying. Nobody troubles strong people. But we are poor, so we are troubled". "It is like this", explained Shivnat, a Chamar in Chitauni, "a rich man gets a hundred rupees, only by sitting beside the road and watching our labour, simply because it is his good luck, while we dig and dig and get only thirty rupees. Such is *our* luck". Or, as people in Mahuwa purva captured the same sentiment with a local expression, "wherever the sheep goes, it will be shaven".

The lesson that life has taught these poor villagers is that it is no use trying to defy and change what is apparently undefiable and unchangeable. Better let go of ambitions, expectations and hopes for a better, juster future, and resign to the fact that the government has few benefits in store for them, despite the attractive promises of

those sitting nicely in their *kursis*. Perhaps, their poverty is, as Shivnat in Chitauni had come to suspect, god-made and, hence, inescapable after all (“The poor man comes from God’s house”, he said, “therefore the poor man will remain poor”). There is, in any case, little use in letting oneself get bogged down by the whole situation. “The poor man”, knew some Pasis in Karaundi, “is wise enough not to be bothered about it”.²³⁸

Even if many poor villagers would rather stay away from the unsavoury game of politics, few can afford to distance themselves completely from it. The benefits -especially subsidies and seasonal labour- that might be secured through careful manipulation of the political delivery system constitute too good a potential contribution to the family income to be lightly forsaken. “Few of them”, as Ruud writes, “are independent and self-sufficient enough to be able to live wholly apart from the more powerful and to avoid being entangled in politics, even locally. They are also too cautious to take the chance of doing so. To be entangled means to engage in or derive benefit [sic]” (Ruud 2001: 130). The poor, in other words, “know they have to play the game and pick up what spoils they can” (Véron et al. 2003: 18).

For the few who can afford it, obtaining political office oneself is, of course, by far the most secure guarantee of access to valued benefits (cf. Chandra 2004a: 4-5). For untouchable and other low caste office seekers, this option has been both complicated and facilitated by the introduction of reserved seats in the panchayat raj

²³⁸ These villagers’ outlook on life is an almost perfect illustration of what George Foster has called the peasant’s “Image of the Limited Good”. According to this image, “all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honour, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in *finite quantity* and are *always in short supply* as far as the peasant is concerned. Not only do these and all other ‘good things’ exist in finite and limited quantities, but in addition *there is no way directly within peasant power to increase the available quantities*” (Powell 1977: 147, emphasis mine). This image may, by the way, have less to do with the fact that peasants are agriculturalists as with the fact that they tend to be poor: “General studies of opportunity beliefs”, as Weigert observed thirty years ago, “have [. . .] shown that those in lower social positions tend not to believe in the reality of opportunities as much as those occupying higher social positions (Weigert 1974: 58).

system in 1993. Though these reservations guarantee untouchables and OBCs a substantial share of *pradhanis* and *pramukhships* (the only elective positions that really count) they at the same time prevent them from competing in *any* constituency: whereas certain constituencies are reserved for them, others are reserved for general candidates.

Rather than by seeking office themselves, many poor villagers try and corner public benefits by calling in the services of an individual commonly known as the *dalaal*. A *dalaal* is a broker, middleman or fixer who specializes in *dalaali*, the approach of officials for favours and the exercise of pressure on bureaucracies to make them part with the benefits invested in them.²³⁹ *Dalaals*, or however they are called in local vernaculars, are ubiquitous in rural India.²⁴⁰ In many of the villages I visited in Sitapur, there were one or more of such *dalaals*; Mahendra Tripathi, one of the key players in Ulra's factional conflict described in the previous chapter, was only one *dalaal* out of many in my fieldwork area. "Dalaals", as some Chamars in Chitauni pointed out, "are everywhere". Some, like Tripathi, engage in *dalaali* only occasionally or intermittently while others, like the Pasi Ram Swarup in Thaura, are reportedly involved in it "twenty-four hours a day".

Though they operate at all levels and distributive policy areas of the polity, *dalaals* have become especially numerous and important players in the delivery systems of developmental benefits in the rural areas.²⁴¹ Strictly speaking *dalaali* is a role rather than a

²³⁹ In writing up the following discussion I have greatly benefited from informative accounts of *dalaals* and *dalaali* by especially Reddy and Haragopal (1985), as well as by Manor (2000) Krishna and Bailey (1970).

²⁴⁰ In Karnataka, in South India, fixers are commonly known as *pyraveekars*. The word is derived from the Persian word *pyrov*, meaning follower or one who pursues, and *kar*, work. A *Pyraveekar* is thus "one who follows up work" (Reddy and Haragopal 1985: 1149). Traditionally, a *dalaal* was a quality inspector (Reddy and Haragopal 1985: 1149, n. 3).

²⁴¹ In Sitapur, *dalaals* were also said to be very active as brokers between the government-operated sugar mills and sugar cane farmers. Sugar mills in Sitapur operate on the basis of quotas; only those farmers with *parchis* – a *parchi* is an official document, a "slip" – can sell their sugar cane to the mills. Though *parchis* can be procured from sugar cane inspectors directly in exchange for a bribe (*rishwat*), reportedly at a rate of Rs. 300 to 400 per *parchi*, many farmers

profession and there are therefore no restrictions as to who may ply the dalaali trade. In the Indian countryside there are, in fact, different kinds of dalaals. In many areas, low level revenue officials such as *karnams* and *patels* in South India and *patwaris* and *kanungos* in north India have traditionally functioned as fixers. In contemporary India, most holders of elective political positions, like the *pradhans* and *pramukhs* in UP, may, as we have seen, also be said to act as dalaals, or go-betweens between rural clients and officialdom. But in rural Sitapur, and quite probably also in the rest of north India, the term dalaal is commonly used to refer especially to those fixers who engage in dalaali while *not* occupying any formal political or administrative position.

It is easy to see why poor villagers enlist the help of dalaals in their efforts to secure public benefits. Dalaals, if they are any good, possess the kind of resources –education, human relations skills, contacts, knowledge, experience and mobility- that poor villagers typically lack but which are often (deemed) indispensable for successfully approaching officials and securing benefits. Unlike most poor villagers, dalaals are by definition literate and have usually received more than a modicum of education.²⁴² Thus endowed, they are far more able than ordinary clients to access, collect and elicit information on the existence of development programs and the nature of available benefits and to grasp the intricacies of cumbersome and complex official procedures.

Not only are dalaals much better informed than ordinary clients (who tend to be quite ignorant about policies and procedures), they are also far better equipped to convert this knowledge into benefits. In the course of their work of collecting information, chasing files, visiting offices and dealing and negotiating with officials and politicians, dalaals build up and cultivate extensive networks of contacts and connections, both on

employ the services of dalaals to obtain the *parchis* for them against a commission. The Thakur Munna Singh from Newrajpur was repeatedly pointed out to me as a “big” broker in this line of business in the Biswan area.

²⁴² James Manor, who studied small-time political fixers’ antecedents and activities in seven Indian states –including UP-, found that they had usually enjoyed secondary schooling and, occasionally, some post-secondary education (Manor 2000: 818).

the grass-roots and higher up, on which they can draw to get their clients' work done.²⁴³ It is the dalaal's stock in trade to know about whom to approach and lobby for particular favours and how, about officials' idiosyncrasies and soft spots, and about relations, friendships and enmities between political and administrative actors in their area of operations and expertise. Successful dalaals are usually masters in sizing up officials and in shrewdly, tactfully and perseveringly working on them with varying doses of ego-tickling, flattery, persuasion and threats. They have, as Sitapur villagers call it, "access" to the block, tehsil, police or district.

Apart from their superior knowledge, connections and social skills another useful quality of dalaals, seen from poor clients' perspective, is their proximity. Though many dalaals have lived for some time in urban centres (usually to pursue higher education) the large majority have spent most of their lives and earn their living in rural areas, not seldom in and around their native village. As local men (very few dalaals are women) they are much easier to approach by poor clients than bureaucrats who, after all, tend to stay away from the villages. The fact that they are locals and known to them also makes that villagers find dalaals much easier to trust and deal with than bureaucrats who are, almost by definition, outsiders.

Poor villagers in Sitapur in fact have little good to say about bureaucrats. Villagers not only blame them for being notoriously difficult to approach; they also tend to find them quite unhelpful and condescending whenever they do manage to establish face-to-face contact with them. "When some officer comes here and we try to gather around him to hear what he is talking about", as the villagers of Nawabpurva voiced a common complaint, "we are sent away and told that it is no *mela* [market, fair] here. Officers often scold and rebuke us. They say that we cannot understand what they

²⁴³ Generally speaking, it is of course difficult to imagine brokers, at least not successful ones, *without* good connections. A broker's capacity to help others is, after all, *predicated* on his ties with third parties (Scott 1972: 95, n. 20). "Brokerage is a business", as Boissevain has put it, in which "a broker's capital consists of his personal network of relations with people, and his credit of what others think this capital to be" (Boissevain, cited in Lemarchand 1972: 80).

tell us anyway, because we cannot read or write".²⁴⁴ I often heard poor villagers claim that they felt uncomfortable or even scared when dealing with officials. The Chamars in Loniapurva said they feared annoying and invoking the wrath of bureaucrats and, accordingly, would usually "design smiles" in the presence of visiting officials as if to say "we do not know anything, everything is okay".

Bureaucrats, like politicians, are furthermore considered expert cheaters. In poor villagers' eyes bureaucrats are not much different from most netas in that they, also, are suspected of being primarily interested in serving their own ends and lining their own pockets. Sometimes such suspicions are based on personal experience. A year before I met them some Chamars in Chitauni had lost quite a bit of money to the Pasi VLO Ram Pal, or so at least they claimed. The floods that year had been more severe than normal and quite a few villagers had ended up in dire straits. They had ruled out seeking the help of pradhan Khan, however. His family had been firmly in control of the pradhani for the past forty years by keeping the voters divided into pieces (*tukre-tukre*) and by "helping" only the village "big men" who could help them get the votes.

²⁴⁴ I had plenty of opportunities to verify statements such as these and found them to have more than a bit of substance. Officials often *do* behave haughtily, callously and casually, especially when dealing with low status clients. On more than one occasion officials made a point of alerting me to the nervous trembling of villagers who had come to see them, something they seemed to be finding quite amusing as well as somehow befitting their status. Fine ethnographic descriptions by Gupta and Ståhlberg aptly illustrate how scrupulously and routinely "court-holding" bureaucrats try to maintain the upper hand in interactions with clients and how difficult it is for clients to actually *demand* something from bureaucrats who take such good care not to give anyone in their presence their full and undivided attention. Dealing with high status and highly status-conscious Indian bureaucrats therefore indeed often requires a lot of, as Gupta calls it, performative confidence (Gupta 1995; Ståhlberg 2006: 61-2). These and similar observations lend credence to Max Weber's claims that modern officials always strive for a "distinctly elevated social esteem vis-à-vis the governed" and that such is especially the case in "old civilized countries" where a "strong demand for administration by trained experts" tends to go hand in hand with "a strong and stable social differentiation" and the predominant recruitment of officials from "socially and economically privileged strata" (Weber 1978: 959-60).

Since, as things stood, Khan would have been sure to tell them to “get out”, some Chamars from the hamlet had approached Ram Pal to arrange a colony for them. (They had not been, as they readily admitted, so much interested in the colonies themselves as well as in the Rs. 20,000 subsidies with which these were to be financed). In order to secure his cooperation and get their name on the list they had each given Ram Pal a Rs. 500 inducement. In the end, however, only two of the Chitauni Chamars were granted a colony, leaving the rest of them empty-handed and poorer. Though those who had been cheated had asked Ram Pal to return their money, the latter had not wanted to hear of it. What is more, he had cheated each of the two beneficiaries from the hamlet out of another Rs. 3,100 off their subsidies. Though Ram Pal, who had since been transferred to another village, had claimed that he had been *made* to do so by the BDO, the Chamars were firmly convinced he had only been smooth-talking. “He has looted this place”, they concluded, “so now he has taken another gram panchayat. A man goes where he can earn something”.

Poor clients are also reluctant to enter into direct transactions with bureaucrats because they tend to be very apprehensive about possible dire consequences that might suddenly crop up after a transaction is made. A young untouchable widow with two small children in Patti had applied for and managed to secure a widow pension and a colony after paying bribes of Rs. 200 to Rs. 250 to the village pradhan and several bureaucrats. Even if she desperately needed the money and had had but little choice to approach bureaucrats directly (she had not known anyone to turn to because she had only very recently moved into the village following her marriage to her now-deceased husband²⁴⁵), she now strongly doubted whether she had done the right thing. Her fellow villagers had no such doubt whatsoever; they kept warning her that the IAY

²⁴⁵ In Sitapur, as in many other parts of north India, people strictly adhere to the twin rules of patrilocality and village exogamy (Drèze et al. 1997: 32). Simply put, brides leave their native village and join their husbands' villages after marriage. While these rules, as Drèze has noted, are fine for men, they create, as is testified by the predicament of the widow in Patti, “some important forms of insecurity and vulnerability for women, especially widows” (Drèze et al. 1997: 33, n. 36).

subsidy would probably turn out to be a loan after all and that she would have to pay dearly to pradhan and officials for years to come. The same apprehension about unwanted or unanticipated consequences of dealing with bureaucracy was shown by Pasi men in Amaura. They were eligible for an agricultural loan and well knew it, but none of them had actually decided to apply for one: "We know that if you have land, you can get a loan. But we are scared to apply for loans because we also have to recover them. But what will happen if we do not have the money to recover them? Then we will surely lose whatever little we have".

Poor clients' distrust of bureaucrats tends to have little to do with bureaucrats' caste. When asked whether they had not hoped for a better treatment by Ram Pal, given the fact that he, like them, was also an untouchable, the Chitauni Chamars were quick to discard any such fanciful idea. "People like Ram Pal", they argued, "do not have any consideration for *biradari*. If anything, whenever they find someone from their own *biradari*, they will try to take even more". In other words, dealing with untouchable bureaucrats, in these Chamars' opinion, requires special caution because there is always a chance that they may abuse the trust inadvertently placed in them by ingroup clients; a sentiment I also heard occasionally expressed by untouchables in other *bastis*.

Untouchable (as well as other poor and low caste) clients thus tend to be sharply distrustful of bureaucrats and generally expect little good from them, *regardless* of what caste they are. They are quite appropriately described as "bureautics", to borrow Thompson's term: they tend have a pronounced distaste for, and reluctance to interact with, bureaucracy, feel powerless in the face of it and have no confidence in securing justice through it (discussed in Krislov and Rosenbloom 1981: 159). Poor clients generally prefer to work through local *dalaals* whom they know and with whom they may have some personal relation than through bureaucrats who tend to try and keep relations with them as impersonal and contractual as possible. They largely rely on fixers to bridge the gap

between themselves and those who control the benefits they need or want.²⁴⁶

It is quite conceivable that poor low caste clients on the (north) Indian dust-level will be availing of dalaali even more frequently and intensively in the near future than they have done until now. Several observers of Indian political life have noted the recent rise of a new class of political entrepreneurs, or *naye neta* (new politicians), who, apart from providing electoral services to increasingly uprooted political parties and acting as quasi-bureaucrats in the supervision, on site administration and execution of local development projects, also continue to deliver the sort of services to rural clients that dalaals have traditionally provided (Krishna; Mitra 1999).²⁴⁷ Even if these new leaders may not be as “new” as their

²⁴⁶ A fair idea of the *extent* to which rural villagers have come to rely on dalaals for lubricating and managing their transactions with public officialdom is provided by Krishna’s recent study of dalaals (Krishna calls them “new leaders”) in rural Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. In the sixty-nine villages studied by him, Krishna documented an overwhelming preference on the part of villagers to work through new leaders, rather than through local party organizations, traditional landowning patrons, village panchayat members or caste leaders.

Demand for Services by Villagers

Types of Leaders	Party	Patrons (<i>jajmans</i>)	Panch	Caste	New leaders
(a) Dealing with the police or the tehsil	114	72	101	372	1,172
(b) Getting a bank loan or an insurance policy	92	317	166	146	1,118
(c) Learning about agricultural technology	107	49	313	203	1,149
(e) Getting wage employment	87	64	274	156	1,431

Source: Krishna: 30

²⁴⁷ Indian political parties have an increasing need for these new -young and educated- “worker-type” persons to aggregate rural demands, allocate benefits and bring out the vote. Whereas in the first few decades after independence Congress could keep in touch with its constituencies through relatively well-developed party organisations in the districts (the so-called District Congress Committees) and its ties to local landholding notables, present-day political parties can no longer do so. They have hardly any presence below the district level and even most district-level party organisations are usually

discoverers sometimes seem to suggest (the kind of things these new leaders reportedly do, including their involvement in electoral politics, are strikingly similar to what dalaals have been doing for decades), what is certainly new about them is that, unlike before, they are increasingly and disproportionately drawn from poor, low status, middle- and lower caste groups (Krishna: 23; Manor 2000: 819).²⁴⁸ With ever more –“own”, “close”, young, educated, low caste and untouchable- “Chote Lals” and “Ram Swarups” rather than -

“bare-boned operations . . . thinly staffed, barely financed, and poorly led (Kohli 1991; Krishna: 20; cf. also Manor 2000; Reddy and Haragopal 1985). Besides, links with the old landed village notables are increasingly unlikely to generate the needed votes, as the traditional jajmani (patronage) ties between these notables and rural voters have largely (though not entirely) evaporated. The need of dust-level bureaucracies for the services of *naye neta* follows from the simultaneous expansion and fragmentation of rural development budgets. Ruling party politicians’ tendency to stretch the available budgets thin in order to reach the largest number of constituencies has vastly increased the span of administrative supervision over the multitudes of relatively tiny development projects. In response, dust-level bureaucracies are turning to educated *naye neta* for on site, informal supervision of the implementation of these projects (Krishna: 13-20).

²⁴⁸ There are several reasons for this recent democratization of the fixer role. Young, especially male, lower caste individuals are gradually becoming educated and, hence, possessive of the skills needed for the kinds of work that new leaders are expected to undertake. Rural education has increased greatly in the last two decades after a lacklustre spread in the first thirty years after independence and untouchables, also in UP, have increasingly enrolled their children in formal education (Jeffrey et al. 2004: 965; Krishna: 8). Not only do low caste individuals increasingly acquire the literacy and bureaucratic competence needed to act as new leaders or dalaals, many also have plenty of time to do so. Probably to an even greater extent than upper caste high school and college matriculates, educated low caste individuals fail to find the hoped for salaried employment in the organised public or, failing this, private sector (estimatedly only about one in every twenty-four job seekers in India succeeds in obtaining a job in the organised sector). In UP, due to a World Bank-mandated annual cut of 2 per cent in public sector employment introduced in 1991 and a generally sluggish growth of white-collar employment opportunities, the proportion of the educated unemployed is probably even bigger than in most other Indian states. Even competition for reserved government jobs –which long suffered a lack of qualified candidates- has markedly increased (Jeffrey et al. 2005: 8-9). With their general aversion to and disdain for manual labour and insignificant jobs, to the educated unemployed involvement in politics and dalaali constitutes one of very few fall-back, “respectful” and “proper” self-fulfilling and income-generating avenues (Jeffrey et al. 2004; Jeffrey et al. 2005).

well-established, educated, upper caste, village notable- “Mahendra Tripathis” joining the ranks of fixing new leaders, it is quite likely that in the near future poor and low caste clients will increasingly turn to such people, rather than to dust-level bureaucrats, to provide administrative access and policy benefits to them.

3 Further barriers to ethnic claim making: dabang and disunity

Even if many poor clients prefer using dalaals over directly dealing with bureaucrats, this does not mean that dalaali, also, does not have its price and drawbacks. Just like with voting, clients seeking benefits through dalaali also have to give something in return for the benefits they want or need. Dalaals, after all, do not spend their time and energy on spanning the gaps between government agencies and their focal clients out of friendship, pity or civic duty,²⁴⁹ at least not primarily. They usually want to be paid for their services; with money or some other share of the benefits they help procure. Employing dalaals thus almost invariably leaves clients with less than to which they are officially entitled.

Besides, dalaals, just like politicians and bureaucrats, often have a bad reputation for cheating and manipulation. This reputation is probably not wholly undeserved. Dalaals, by definition, operate in an untransparent market in which the going rates for brokerage services are not fixed. In other words, the height of the commission dalaals can charge for their services depends directly on the degrees of ignorance and gullibility of their clients. Dalaals thus have every reason to manipulate the information they release to clients, exaggerate the difficulties involved in obtaining public benefits and “sell” benefits to villagers which the latter do not really want or need (Reddy and Haragopal 1985: 1161). Dalaals’ success critically depends on their ability to convey the impression to ordinary villagers that they alone have the requisite connections

²⁴⁹ “They are mostly rough and ready types”, writes Manor, “who scarcely reflect on the meaning either of their role or of democratic government” (Manor 2000: 820). “They are mercenaries”, says Bailey, “without political principles or conviction” (Bailey 1963: 111-2).

and know-how to deal effectively with officialdom.²⁵⁰ The very term *dalaal* is far from flattering and, like the term *neta*, often carries the negative connotation of a morally dubious person who makes money by indulging in unhealthy and manipulative practices (cf. Reddy and Haragopal 1985: 1149, n. 3) (many fixers, in fact, engage in *dalaali* in the hope of a future political career²⁵¹). Those who employ *dalaals* thus risk being cheated and may even end up poorer than they were.

Still, many clients are prepared to deal with *dalaals*, rather than with bureaucrats, despite the drawbacks of doing so, because the returns on investment are often quite acceptable to them. In other words, many clients do not care about a little bit of cheating as long as their work gets done. Clients themselves, furthermore, take their precautions. Their deals with fixers often are, as Bailey has observed, devoid of any moral connotations. "Questions of right and wrong, of cheating and fair play, do not arise. The test is efficacy and all judgements are pragmatic: the measurement of success is profit and the relationship is not at all altruistic. The clients feel "beholden" . . . to the broker, but they do so in the sense that a man feels bound to someone from whom he expects to borrow money next week. If they can cheat the broker [. . .] and not suffer from it, they cheat: and they expect to be cheated. Indeed, they would hardly think the word "cheating" appropriate, any more than a man who snares a partridge can be said to have cheated the partridge (Bailey 1970: 42).

Also, many clients seem to assume, and perhaps justifiably so, that *dalaals'* cheating may be less blatant and severe than the

²⁵⁰ Such impression-management involves, among other things, the ostentatious display of intimacy with visiting officials and the rendering of "authoritative, if mystifying and unhelpful" lectures on administrative procedures to potential clients (Bailey 1970: 76-7; cf. also Reddy and Haragopal 1985: 1153).

²⁵¹ Needless to say that such hopes are not always fulfilled. The fixers and higher-level *netas* interviewed by James Manor estimated that "less than 10%" of political fixers ever became legislators, that is MPs or MLAs (Manor 2000: 819). As far as the UP context is concerned, 10 per cent seems to be an incredibly optimistic estimate. If the fixer density in Sitapur is roughly indicative of that of the rest of rural UP, I think even 1 per cent would be quite an unrealistic estimate. On the other hand, it is quite likely that in UP a fair proportion of *dalaals* find their way into local, panchayat, politics.

cheating by netas and officials. Many dalaals, after all, live in the villages where their clients reside; dalaals thus do not only live *off* their clients, they also live *with* them, a fact which may deter them somewhat from the extravagant kinds of cheating that netas and officials are generally believed to indulge in (Krishna: 17-8; Manor 2000: 822). Looking back, the Chamars in Chitauni who had been cheated by VLO Ram Pal severely regretted they had not approached the local dalaal Ram Swarup to arrange the colonies for them. He probably would have given them a better deal and could certainly not have hoped to get away as easily with cheating as Ram Pal had.²⁵²

Clients' preference for dalaali rather than for the direct approach of bureaucrats is thus partly explained by the relatively higher trust they have in dalaals. But there is also another reason why poor low caste clients do not tend to pressurize bureaucrats for benefits, let alone for the active representation of ingroup interests. By approaching bureaucrats directly, they often risk antagonizing whom they usually call the *dabang*. With *dabang*, ordinary villagers refer to whom the anthropologist M.N. Srinivas once described as "dominant castes": those (usually higher) castes who, in a village or wider area, preponderate numerically over the other castes and also "wield preponderant economic and political power" (Srinivas 1955, discussed in Srinivas 1959: 1). In the Sitapur countryside, such single strong landowning dominant castes continue to be a central reality in rural village life (cf. Mendelsohn 1993: 806-7); they still wield considerable political and economic power over ordinary low caste and poor villagers. To maintain this power, *dabang* have

²⁵² Fixers, as James Manor has pointed out, would also seem to have no long term interest in raking off (or in helping maintain a system which rakes off) more than modest amounts from the benefits intended for their clients: "When a state government becomes decidedly corrupt, its net effect on fixers eventually becomes negative. It clearly creates opportunities for them to rake off substantial sums. But it also tends to undermine the orderly implementation of development policies and the predictable distribution of goods and services on which fixers mainly focus. When massive corruption sets in, the people who profit most are those at higher levels in the political system. Fixers lower down usually gain far too little to compensate for implementation process disruptions that undermine their effectiveness. They, therefore, tend not to welcome severe corruption" (Manor 2000: 821).

increasingly come to rely on access to and control over public resources and benefits (rather than on their landed property). They thus have a strong interest (as well as the means) in preventing poor low caste villagers from establishing direct access to bureaucracy. Untouchable clients, on their part, continue to fear the might of the dabang and often lack the resources and, especially, the unity to defy dabang' attempts at monopolization of access to public resources.

Dabang dominance

In large parts of rural UP, including Oudh and Sitapur, the highly ranked, "martial", landowning caste of Thakurs has traditionally been particularly dominant. Thakur ascendancy in Oudh started as far back as the early thirteenth century when the present-day Thakurs' forefathers migrated to this region from other areas in the wake of the consolidation of Muslim rule. They gradually came to control the bulk of the land. The region's rulers, from the Mughals to the Nawabs and the British, came to depend heavily on the Thakur *zamindars* and *taluqdars* for the maintenance of order and, most importantly, the collection of revenues. The Thakurs, not so much a homogenous caste as well as a collection of dozens of mutually hostile "clans" (none of which ever succeeded in claiming distinct territories), also became very dominant in Sitapur (Metcalf 1979; Nevill 1923). Thakurs have not been the only dominant castes in the district, however. In some pockets, prominent Muslim families and Brahmins, particularly, have also played the part.²⁵³

²⁵³ The high ritual ranking of most dominant castes in UP contrasts with the situation in much of south India and Maharastra, where dominant landowning groups have traditionally been drawn from castes much lower in the ritual hierarchy, often from jatis in the shudra varna (Drèze and Gazdar 1996: 103). Also in contrast to south India, dominant castes in UP have *not* tended to preponderate numerically. The Thakurs account for only four per cent of Sitapur's population, for instance (Nevill 1923: 54). In UP as a whole, Thakurs, Brahmins, Jats, Bhumihars and Tyagis -the most important dominant castes in the state- together account for just 18.5 per cent of the state's population. Also within the villages, UP's dominant castes seldom constitute numerical majorities. In an average village of 150 to 300 households there may be as many as fifteen to twenty-five castes represented in its population

Despite the legal abolition of zamindari in the early 1950s - which stripped landlords of much of their lands and allowed erstwhile tenants to become owners of the plots they cultivated- and the concomitant erosion of rural *jajmani* (patron-client) relations, the dominance of single strong upper caste landowning jatis or families in quite a few fieldwork villages -among them Chandraseni, Thaura, Majhiya, Rikhauna and Arro Khamajatpur- has continued seemingly unabated to this day. In these villages one or a few powerful upper caste Thakur, Muslim or Brahmin families still control most of the land and local political offices and are the main suppliers of local wage labour opportunities.

The Rathor Thakurs of Chandraseni, for instance, still own most of the land in the village (estimates range from 300 to 1000 bighas).²⁵⁴ The zamindari abolition of half a century ago did not affect them too much because, as *pater familias* Lallu Singh Thakur explained, they managed to save all of their land by dividing it up and having it registered in the names of family members and servants.²⁵⁵ If there had been a downside to zamindari abolition for the Thakurs it had been that they could no longer rely on tenants or lessees to work their lands and generate their income; the Thakurs, used to a life of idle landlordism of “sitting around and eat”, were now forced to start cultivating their lands themselves (or, at least,

(Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 174). In Sitapur, the numerically strongest castes are not the dominant castes but the untouchable jatis of Chamars and Pasis.

²⁵⁴ Rathor is the clan name. According to Lallu Singh Thakur, my main Thakur informant in the village, the Rathor clan ranks “6th or 7th” in the hierarchy of “basically 36 Thakur clans”.

²⁵⁵ Many zamindars, putting their extra-legal powers over the revenue bureaucracy to good use, employed this strategy at the time. The corrupt reputation of patwaris -on whose complicity zamindars relied for tampering with the accounts and land titles- among rural folk in large measure dates back to the time of zamindari abolition. “One cannot go to a Uttar Pradesh village today”, write Ahmad and Saxena, “without hearing from ryots [farmers, bvg] about land over which they should have sirdari [ownership, bvg] rights but which went to the former landlord as bhumi-hari land [land for self-cultivation], courtesy of the Patwari” (Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 185). Zamindari politics and manipulative attempts to thwart ceiling legislation receive beautiful treatment in Vikram Seth’s monumental novel *A Suitable Boy*, set partly in the countryside of eastern UP.

actively supervising their cultivation by locally hired labourers) which had been “taboo” until then.²⁵⁶

Like many other Thakur zamindars, the Chandraseni Thakurs have sought to counterbalance the “shame” and loss of income and social status accompanying the forced shift from landlordism to cultivation by branching out into other economic pursuits. In another breach with tradition, they started educating their sons, who have gradually found their way into modern sectors of the economy, especially bureaucracy.²⁵⁷ Lallu’s eldest son, for instance, now works as an engineer in the Public Works Department, his

²⁵⁶ Abolition legislation prohibited zamindars to lease out their agricultural land to tenants. It did permit them, however, to keep in their private possession all so-called *sir* and *khudkasht* (personally supervised or “home farm”) land and all groves. Like the Chandraseni Thakurs, many zamindars exploited this loophole by shifting their cultivated lands into mango groves and converting their tenant holdings to *sir* cultivated by hired labour before the legislation came into effect (Metcalf 1967: 12-3).

²⁵⁷ For the Chandraseni Thakurs, the pursuit of higher education and service jobs had initially been far from self-evident. “In those days”, explained Lallu Singh, “it was not customary for a Thakur’s son to be educated. People would say ‘what is the use of it? You want to become a *babu*?’”. Anti-education sentiments, in fact, were quite common among Thakur zamindars, as a result of which “their representation at the middle and top levels of administration continued to be low till about 1965” (Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 187). Nowadays, Thakurs are well represented in bureaucracy, also in the highest echelons. In 1999, 51 out of 541 of UP IAS officers were Thakurs. The extent to which dominant castes have increasingly been branching out into non-agricultural employment is also well illustrated by Jens Lerche’s fieldwork in two UP villages, the one situated in the western Muzaffarnagar district, the other in eastern Jaunpur district. In the Muzaffarnagar village the proportion of Jat (the dominant landowning group of the village, *bvg*) households who had one or more members employed as government servants or in business rose from two-thirds in 1992-3 to “around three-quarters” in 1998. In the Jaunpur village, dominant Thakur households’ shift away from agriculture was even more pronounced. Whereas in 1992-3, 90 per cent of the Thakur households had members employed as government servants or in business, by 1998 *all* Thakur households had members in public service or business (Lerche 1999: 187, 227 note 11, 228 n. 14). Jeffrey’s recent study of Jats in western Meerut district documents similar trends (Jeffrey and Lerche 2001: 96-97). Though my own evidence is much more sketchy, it is perhaps telling enough that I did not hear of any traditionally dominant family in my fieldwork area which *did not* have sons in government service, whether as teachers, postal officials, revenue or police officers.

younger sons are lawyers. Again like many other ex-zamindars, the Chandraseni Thakurs have become actively involved in party and local politics. Apart from acting as the village's pradhan for more than four decades after independence (he had to give up his pradhani due to reservations), Lallu has been a locally influential member of the Congress (his mansion still boasts a hoisted Congress flag). The new pradhan, the Pasi Kanhai Lal, is still firmly under the Thakurs' control.²⁵⁸ Hence, with their considerable landholdings, control over the village agricultural labour market, extensive political networks and influence in and over local bureaucracy (as well as access to the patronage invested in it), old proprietary families and castes like the Chandraseni Thakurs often still carry a great deal of authority in Sitapur, as they do in other areas of UP and especially in Oudh.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ UP's landlords have traditionally been very active in state and local politics. Throughout the so-called dyarchy period of shared colonial-native rule in the 1920s and 1930s, UP's legislature as well as, for most of the time, its executive was dominated by landlords (making UP the only major Indian province where landlords were so pre-eminent) (Low 1968: 8). After independence, all major political parties, with an eye to reaping political advantage from their traditional local influence and large purses, eagerly sought the landlords' allegiance. In the first three UP assemblies, about thirty per cent of the MLAs came from zamindari or taluqdari families. Though they could be found in all political parties, UP's landlords were especially dominant in the right-wing *Jan Sangh* and *Swatantra* (Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 195; Metcalf 1967: 13-4). Until as recently as the mid-1980s, the "Thakur-lobby" in the Congress, consisting of more than 100 MLAs, was a major force in UP politics; its leader, Vir Bahadur Singh, was chief minister from 1985-1988 (Stone 1988: 1020). Landlords have also been actively involved in local level politics. Especially in Oudh and eastern UP they have been quite successful in contesting indirect block pramukh elections, where money power is important. Even today, after the demise of Congress, Thakur MLAs still occasionally act *en bloc* across party boundaries to protect their landed interests. As Lallu Singh pointed out to me, Thakurs of all major parties had recently succeeded in blocking chief minister Mayawati's proposal to reduce the official "land ceiling" from 18 to 12 acres.

²⁵⁹ Some of UP's most influential landlord politicians have come from Sitapur. Amar Rizvi, belonging to the family of the erstwhile Muslim Raja of Mahmoodabad, is perhaps the most prominent among them. Rizvi, once very close to the late Sanjay Gandhi, served as MLA, MP, and, repeatedly, as state and central cabinet minister (even holding the "wet" PWD portfolio for some time).

The dabang tend to be treated with a mixture of respect and fear by poor low caste villagers. The latter usually know better than to antagonize the dabang if only because many, especially the (virtually) landless and those with high debts, still depend on them for regular employment, wage labour or sharecrop land. "Still there are people", as Chamars in Chamaranpurva (Thaura) pointed out, "who own no land and take land on *batai*: they are totally dependent upon the higher castes and are still under the same pressure as before. If they are told to do some work, they cannot avoid doing it, even if they are not paid for it". "There are quite a few people here", explained some labourers in Mahuwapurva, "who are heavily indebted to large landowners. These people have no other choice than to work for the dominants, even if they get only Rs. 20 for a day's work". In Chandraseni, "approximately 10 people", Chamars and Pasis, are permanently employed by the Thakur's family. Though their wages are low (300 to 400 rupees per month) these untouchable employees get free meals and are not made to perform *begar*. In Majhiya, Thaura and Rikhauna, also, dominant landowners continue to employ farm servants against comparably low wages. Because regular employment is extremely scarce, finding employment outside the village requires investments (such as travelling and lodging expenses) which not all labourers can cough up and because the price of land is prohibitively expensive (the price for a *bigha* is around Rs. 15,000), those who depend on local labour opportunities are generally anxious to keep in the good books of the dabang.

But land possession and control over labour opportunities are no longer the most important bases for dabang's local dominance over poor low castes. Though the numbers of those who remain economically tied to the dabang's lands and their villages remain substantial, especially among low caste villagers, the numbers of those who continue to rely *solely or even primarily* on income from dabang –either from regular or wage labour or from sharecropping– are getting smaller and smaller. Whereas in Chandraseni ten people find regular, whole year round employment with "the Thakur", in Majhiya, Thaura and Rikhauna less than a handful villagers continue to be likewise employed by the village's dominant families

or jatis. And although in all villages there remain many householders whose own landholdings are far too insignificant to sustain their families, many no longer solely depend on wage labour opportunities proffered by village landowners.²⁶⁰

In fact, almost all people with marginal landholdings leave their villages, sometimes quasi-permanently, to work in nearby (and sometimes far away) towns and brickfields. Half the working population of hamlet Chitauni, for instance, goes to Lucknow, Sidhauri, Biswan and Sitapur for *mazduri* while almost all the adult men from nearby Pasinpurva, part of the same village, had left the hamlet to work in brick kilns in Gonda district at the time of my fieldwork. The wages these villagers can earn as construction workers, rikshawallahs, or brick makers are one and a half to five times as high as those offered by local landowners for agricultural wage labour.²⁶¹ Many villagers, indeed, are no longer much inclined to work for the local landlord. "Now the dabang have to beg us to work for them", claimed agricultural labourers in several villages.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ All fieldwork villages contained sizeable segments of people, especially among the low artisan castes and the untouchables, who own little more than dwarf holdings (loosely defined as plots of 4 bighas and less) and who therefore must rely on wage labour (*mazduri*) for additional cash income. In Majhiya, village informants estimated the proportion of villagers owning anything between 2 and 5 bighas at 50 to 60 per cent. In Rahika about 30 families, or 25 per cent of the hamlet's population, were said to own less than 4 bighas. In Akbarpur, no Pasi had more than 4 bighas: "Most of us own around 2". In Amaura, around 15 per cent of the villagers owned between 0 and 4 bighas.

²⁶¹ In the fieldwork area, daily wages for agricultural labour varied between Rs. 20 and Rs. 30, with the median wage rate at Rs. 25. Depending on the employer, agricultural labourers are also provided meals, *sharbat* and *bidis*. Those who manage to find work as construction workers in towns can earn Rs. 50 to 60 rupees, while *rikshawallas* sometimes earn more than Rs. 100 per day. Work in the brick fields is hardly more lucrative than wage labour, however. I was told that the standard rate paid to brick workers is Rs. 20 per 1000 bricks. As labourers cannot ordinarily expect to turn out more than 1,500 bricks a day, this puts the maximum wage to be earned in the brick fields at Rs. 30.

²⁶² Another reason why village labourers are less and less inclined to work for local landlords is that the latter are becoming less and less prepared to pay daily wages. Some only "give work" on contract basis, that is, they pay a fixed amount to a group of labourers for a pre-arranged amount of work. Labourers generally regard contract work as a worse deal than wage labour

The traditional connection between land and authority is further weakened by the current practice among dominant families to divide their estates among the family's sons on the retirement or death of their fathers, leaving these heirs with ever smaller and economically less viable plots. In some fieldwork villages, the lands of sons of erstwhile dominant families are now no bigger than those of well to do middle caste Kurmi and Yadav peasants. After the division of Thakur Suraj Baksh 150 bigha estate in village Amaura Moti Singh, for instance, his four sons have each been left with as little as 40 bighas. Landholdings of this size are simply too small to serve as a basis for creating labour dependencies among and economic dominance over sizeable numbers of villagers. Owners of such middling plots in fact often have little choice but to work the land themselves, leaving only the *remainder* to be cultivated by sharecroppers or wage labourers.

With land and authority becoming more and more delinked, the dabang in Sitapur, as in most of rural India, have increasingly come to rely on their influence over the local state to augment their incomes and to protect and retain what is left of their dominance. Through their political and public service networks dabang often have privileged access to and control over development patronage. Poor villagers seeking public benefits -be they subsidies, loans, pensions, wells or road connections- thus often continue to depend on the benevolence of local dabang. "Whatever benefits reach our village", explained a Chamar in Chitauni, "first reach the dabang".

An equally important resource in the maintenance of local dominance are dabang's pahunch to and influence over the police. Apart from on their economic preponderance, dabang's local dominance has traditionally been vested on their willingness and capability to enforce small people's respect and compliance by way of intimidation and, if need be, physical violence. "Rule in the

since it denies them the opportunity to earn more money by working slower. Some labourers also said they preferred working for Kurmi landowners rather than for the traditional upper caste landlords because Kurmis pay better and take better care of their labourers. "In Kurmi areas", claimed Chamars in Fatehpur, "labourers receive juice (*sharbat*) and a meal, but not here [where the dominant landowner is a Brahmin, bvg]. Because Kurmis believe that people work better if they eat well".

countryside”, as Paul Brass has aptly observed, “is not based on abstractions but on control over resources and safety. It is a Hobbesian world, in which security and safety are not provided by the state, but are themselves values -that is, valued objects- integral to and inseparable from the struggle for power and influence (Brass 1997: 92-3). Sitapuri villagers, indeed, never tired of impressing upon me how dangerous and violent the dabang can be, how they “fear the bullets of Thakurs” and how those who do not “accept” or “do as dabang say” can expect to “eat shoes” (i.e., be beaten), or worse.

In meeting out such punitive violence dabang can often count on the silent or apathetic complicity of the local police or, at times, their active cooperation. A Pasi in Mahuwapurva told us about his problems in bringing a plot of free village land (which had been allotted to him by the local authorities) under his own cultivation. A member of one of the village’s dominant families had occupied the plot and bluntly refused to relinquish it, threatening that he’d “slice up anyone who dares plough my land”. Though the Pasi had approached the police (as well as the revenue administration) to intervene in the matter, they had not so far taken any steps. “The police fear the dabang, that’s why they don’t come”, the Pasi explained. Dabang and police may also cooperate more actively in keeping small people in their proper place. In Fatehpur, two Chamar brothers -Gopilal and Khagesur- had ended up in jail after accusing their employer -the dominant Brahmin bhel-owner Vinod Pandey- of kidnapping and selling Gopilal’s wife and two children to the households of friends of his. When Pandey found out that Gopilal and Khagesur had been bold enough to try and lodge a FIR against him, he had immediately struck back: he fired the two brothers, bribed the police into lodging a string of fabricated FIR’s against them, and thus managed to have the Chamar brothers put behind bars for months. “The *pandits* can no longer beat us themselves because of the Dalit Act”, explained one of Gopilal’s and Khagesur’s co-villagers, “so they do it through the police”.

For poor and pahunch-lacking villagers like Gopilal and Khagesur there is often little they can do about dabang enforcing their dominance with the consent of, or through, the police. As the

police typically ask for a Rs. 2000 to Rs. 2500 bribe for lodging an FIR, poor villagers usually simply lack the money required for inducing the police to take any steps at all. Besides, there is always the risk of ending up in jail oneself on the basis of fabricated counter charges. In such cases, the police usually make matters worse by asking the “culprits” to pay a hefty “fine” for their release. Whereas, for the dabang, the local state often acts as an ally in times of conflict and opposition, to small people it represents a particularly well-organized robber band (*dacoit*), acting hand-in-glove with the dabang and primarily intent on making some money out of their misery and keeping the locally dominant happy. As the Chamars of Fatehpur put it: “The police are with the upper castes and they commit atrocities (*atyacar*). The police or any other officer (*sahab*) go where the money is. Only if you have money, they will hear you”.²⁶³

The past decade or so, the dabang have become ever more determined to cling to their privileged access to the local state and to prevent subordinate rural groups from building up and cultivating their own administrative channels. The reason is that now, after land possession has gradually ceased to be a determining base for local dominance, they acutely sense that also their grip and hold over the local state (and, hence, local society) is slipping. Firstly, the national government’s extension of reservations of public sector jobs to OBCs in 1991, soon followed by the introduction of reserved seats for OBCs and SCs in the political councils of the revamped panchayati raj in 1993, are quickly forcing the dabang out of precisely those positions they have relied on to cement their local dominance.²⁶⁴ As Lallu Singh Thakur put it: “Now the son of big

²⁶³ The police’s inclination to keep on the good side of the locally dominant, their agility in making good money in doing so, as well as the almost complete lack of trust of subordinate rural groups in the police’s willingness and capacity to right wrongs perpetrated against them have also been documented by other observers of rural life and politics in UP. For an astute analysis of the (mostly political) reasons for the lack of police accountability and impartiality vis-à-vis *all* rural sections and for the difficulties involved in instituting central control over rural police forces, see Paul Brass’ *Theft of an Idol*, especially pp. 274-9 (Brass 1997).

²⁶⁴ The introduction of 27 per cent of public sector jobs for OBCs has not only significantly decreased the *number* and proportion of jobs available for “general” individuals, it has also pushed up the *prices* of whatever posts are still

people like Jagjivan Ram and Ram Vilas Paswan [prominent untouchable politicians, bvg] will become IAS, not my sons”.

Secondly, there is the central and state governments' increasingly forceful redistributive policy focus on the special assistance of subordinate sections. Since the BSP first came to power in 1995 the UP government, especially, has pushed through a string of measures and policies that create new benefits for dalits and, often, take benefits away from dabang and other upper castes. The first Mayawati government, for instance, introduced scholarships for untouchable children up to high school; financial assistance to untouchable families during sickness, marriage and other contingencies; a fourfold increase in the IAY target (IAY, by design, primarily benefits untouchables); preferential treatment of untouchable farmers in cane supply to sugar mills, and the nomination of untouchable farmers to cooperative sugarcane committees. Besides, both in 1995 and in 1997, the BSP government distributed land to thousands of landless dalit families,²⁶⁵ gave an extra impetus to the Ambedkar Village program and stepped up, as we have seen, the implementation of the Dalit Act. In order to ensure the sympathetic implementation of these pro-dalit measures respective BSP governments have replaced considerable numbers of

left for them. In UP there is, literally, a market for government jobs in that job aspirants are expected to pay substantial amounts to recruiting bodies such as the SSC (Staff Selection Commission) at central level and the UP PSC (Public Service Commission) at the state level, as well as to individual officials or brokers assisting them throughout the recruitment process (Jeffrey and Lerche 2001: 97-8). Jeffrey's Jat informants in western Meerut district maintained that would-be police constables are expected to cough up between Rs 40,000 and 75,000, army sepoy between Rs 30,000 to 50,000, bus conductors between Rs 20,000 and to 60,000, and low-ranking clerks between Rs 40,000 to 70,000 and that prices had risen as a result of the national extension of OBC reservations in 1991 (ibid.). Similar statements about the effect of OBC reservations on job's prices were made by several of my dabang informants in Sitapur.

²⁶⁵ According to Sudha Pai, the two BSP governments, under “special drives”, granted ownership of 52,379 acres of land to 81,500 dalits. 158,000 dalits were given actual possession of lands which had earlier been officially granted to them, while a further 20,000 dalits received about 15,000 acres of *gaon sabha* (village) land. Besides, Mayawati's governments withdrew all cases of illegal occupation of such land against dalits and granted ownership (*bhumidhari*) rights to all tenants of more than 10 years standing (Pai 2004: 1145).

upper caste development and police officials at state and district levels by untouchable ones and set up special monitoring agencies (such as the AVP department) (Pai 2004: 1145).

Dabang and other upper castes strongly resent and oppose these new “pampering” initiatives, in part because they consider them unjust, in part because they perceive them (even if they hate to admit it) as the unmistakable signs of a new state of affairs in which they, as the traditional dominants, can no longer avoid making way for the formerly dominated in the rule of the countryside. But until that time has come the dabang seem firmly resigned to quell and resist the ascendance of “unmeritorious” and increasingly “cheeky”, “haughty”, “respectless” and “lazy” untouchables and other low caste groups with all the considerable strength they can still muster.

Many poor low caste villagers related how village dabang would try and keep them away from seeking public benefits and police protection by way of threats and intimidation and by actively preventing government officials from having face-to-face conversations with them or from visiting their hamlets. “Whenever an officer tries to come to our purva”, pointed out the Chamars of Chamaranpurva (Thaura), “he is kept away by the dabang on some pretext: ‘Why would you go there?’, they say, ‘there is nothing there.’” As if to prove their point, just when the Chamars were explaining the mechanics of dabang sabotage of official-client contact to me, a local Thakur came up to us and suspiciously enquired as to what our work was all about. Apparently taking us for touring officials he wanted our names and institutions (“in case any trouble will arise”) and made it clearly understood he had rather see us leave. “Whenever people like you come to a village like ours”, he said, “they are given money and then they go back”.

Untouchable disunity

In theory, untouchables might counter dabang’s efforts at monopolization of access to bureaucracy by engaging in collective action and mounting organized pressure on local bureaucracies. After all, aggressive, articulate and organized clients often have a

much better chance of impacting bureaucratic decisionmaking and of gaining access to organizational hierarchies than unorganized and apathetic ones (Tripi 1984: 40). In Sitapuri dust-level practice, however, untouchable villagers often lack the necessary courage, power and resources for such endeavours. Another important reason for rural untouchables' disinclination towards collective action is that they possess little cohesiveness. The untouchables are a category rather than a group, in that they -despite decades of categorical treatment by the Indian state- continue to be divided along jati lines. Their "lack of unity", as they themselves call it, often prevents rural untouchables from converting their large numbers into an effective, organized force and, hence, from bypassing dabang's administrative access and directly claiming the public benefits to which they are entitled.

Despite the fact that, over the past few decades, untouchables in Sitapur and elsewhere have become more autonomous, more free to pursue their own interests, and less dependent on local big people, and despite decades of special government treatment, their recent electoral mobilization by an ethnic, dalit party of their own and a quick succession of BSP controlled state governments, for the large majority of Sitapur's rural untouchables life does not seem to have changed that much. True, many among them have managed to take advantage of state-provided benefits and, through this, to improve their social status and life chances, if only marginally. But to all but a tiny few, life is still what it has always been: a struggle for survival. Most untouchables continue to be extremely poor and many are still starving. The things that would matter most to rural untouchables in the short or long term -affordable and adequate health care and primary education, access to land, employment opportunities in the organized sector, police protection- are still largely absent or out of reach.

What is more, despite the ongoing changes in rural society and continuing preferential state treatment, most of the Sitapuri untouchables I met were quite pessimistic about what the future might hold in store for them. Many expected their children to be leading the same kinds of lives that they were leading or feared that they might even be worse off, given the rapidly increasing scarcity

of land. Untouchable and low caste villagers in Nawab purva, for instance, appeared to be quite sure as to what direction the future was headed. "Things will keep on changing for the worse", they felt, "poverty will increase, the population will increase, and the five sons of those who have eighteen bighas now will be left with only three and a half". The Chamars in Chitauni felt exactly the same. "As things stand now", they said, "the rich will get richer and the poor only poorer".

Even if, by their own accounts, their future looked bleak and grim, few untouchables seemed to feel called upon to do something drastic about it. Many, of course, *were* involved in efforts to get redress for grievances and instances of unjust treatment by powerful dabang, corrupt politicians and unresponsive officials. Indeed, throughout this and the previous chapter I have made quite a few references to such efforts. But what most of these have in common is that they are almost always relatively *small-time* attempts, directed at seeking redress for *specific*, often *personal* grievances or injustices, and typically involve not more than a *few*, usually *geographically concentrated*, untouchable individuals, often from the same hamlet or ward; a far cry from the large scale, ideologically inspired, organized protest and collective action which recent scholarly claims of dalit "movement" and democratic "upsurge" would lead one to expect (cf. e.g. Pai 2000; Yadav 2000). I was particularly struck by Sitapuri untouchables' almost complete ignorance of (and disinterest in) the exploits and writings of their former leader Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, given the fervour with which the untouchable party BSP has drawn upon his life and ideas to construct its ideology of dalit empowerment and given the fact that statues of Ambedkar can now be found in almost every village and hamlet in the UP countryside as a result of BSP governments' proselytizing efforts.²⁶⁶ "We have heard his name", as the Chamars in Chamaranpurva (Thaura) phrased a common reply, "and you can find statues of his everywhere. But we cannot tell anything more about him".²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ During its short-lived rule in 1997 alone, the BSP government installed 15,000 Ambedkar statues all over Uttar Pradesh (Pai 2004: 1146).

²⁶⁷ I encountered one, exceptional, example of Ambedkarite penetration, in Arro Khamajatpur's Chamarbasti. One of its inhabitants, Mangu Lal, is

Upon closer look, reasons for the virtual absence of untouchable collective action and open defiance of dabang dominance are not hard to find. As students of collective action and protest know all too well, collectivities such as India's rural untouchables "will not organize for coordinated action merely because, as a group, they have reason for doing so" (Olson 1973: 65). Those with an interest in the outcomes of successful collective action may still refrain from instigating or participating in it; because they count on others to do it for them, because they feel that the expected or hoped for outcomes will not outstrip the disadvantages of participating, or because they deem *successful* collective action impossible anyway, whether due to a (perceived) dearth of necessary resources on their part or to an overabundance of resources at the disposal of their targets. They may also simply have become cynical from past failures (Klandermans 1997; Olson 1973; Scott 1990; Tarrow 1998; Zald and McCarthy 1979).

With the exception, perhaps, of the first ("free-rider") explanation, all of the above explanations also apply to rural untouchables. Firstly, untouchables, as noted above, commonly fear the reprisal or violent retaliation of dabang if they were to assert themselves too openly and defiantly. They are well aware that "our rights are only on paper and not in hand" and that "*kanun* has not arrived" but are usually too afraid of taking their fate into their own hands. From untouchables' point of view, it not only takes a pressing cause but also, and especially, a lot of *courage* to stand up against local dominant groups; the kind of courage and disregard of painful consequences that only few possess. "If any person raises a

member of a troupe which performs dance (*natak*) and drama on Ambedkar's life. He entertained us a whole afternoon with stories of Ambedkar's memorable exploits, including his stays in "foreign", his famous attempt to open up a pond in Nagpur to members of all castes, his role as drafter of the constitution and his conversion to Buddhism at the end of his life.

voice", knew an untouchable informant in Ahmedabad, "it will be suppressed by the dabang".²⁶⁸

Secondly, untouchables typically lack the external support that extremely deprived groups like them usually need to be able to translate their grievances into effective and organised collective action (Zald and McCarthy 1979: 2). Unlike in Western political societies, where well-organized and institutionalised pressure groups and lobbies articulate group interests, put pressure on the political and administrative system and take up the causes of so far unorganised constituencies, on the Indian dust-level such groups hardly exist. Though politicians abound on the UP dust-level, political *parties*, for instance, as *organizations* which may draw on the financial resources and expertise of its functionaries to identify constituents' problems and aggregate their demands, scarcely exist. Political parties, as several scholars have observed, have hardly any presence below the district and, in as far as they *do* exist at the district-level, tend to be bare-boned, thinly staffed, barely financed and poorly led outfits (Kohli 1991; Krishna: 20; cf. also Manor 2000; Reddy and Haragopal 1985).

Though non-governmental development and welfare organizations *do* have a presence in rural areas, also in Sitapur, its functionaries do not seem to be very much inclined to meddle into low caste politics, dependent as they are for their survival and operations on state subsidies and cordial relations with local officialdom. Discounting the fledgling Biswan unit of the BSP, there were, as far as I am aware, no explicitly dalit grass-roots organizations active in my fieldwork area that might help galvanize untouchable collective action, pressurize local untouchable officials into active representation and "mute the impact of those forces which work against the linkage" (Thompson 1976: 214).²⁶⁹ Largely

²⁶⁸ A virtually similar point is made by Dipankar Gupta. "In rural India", he writes, "it is still very difficult for poor SCs or STs to politically form independent blocs without arousing the wrath of the more affluent communities. For this reason the political ambitions of the SCs rarely get off the ground" (Gupta 1999: 281).

²⁶⁹ Whatever dalit organizations exist in UP and the rest of India often seem to be aimed at safeguarding and promoting the interests of relatively better-off dalit segments. In fact, the best known and probably most prevalent

left to their own devices, then, rural Sitapuri untouchables are usually simply too afraid, poor and unresourceful to act and agitate *en bloc*, mount collective pressure on dabang and public authorities and claim their rightful dues.

But there is still another important reason why untouchables so seldom organize for coordinated action. This reason is their lack of cohesiveness as a group or, as untouchables themselves tend to call it, their lack of "unity" (*ektaa*). Within their villages (as well as on the Sitapuri dust-level more generally) the various untouchable jatis remain firmly divided in significant respects. Interdining of different untouchable jatis, for instance, is still very uncommon. The Chamars of Chamaranpurva (Thaura) said they could eat "with all castes located above us" but not with "Dhobis, Mehtars, Kathik, Pasis and Chamars involved in removing dead cattle and midwifery". They considered themselves "the very highest" (*sab se uparwala*) among the untouchables and, as such, could not be expected to eat with members of dirty and low jatis (or jati-subsections) felt to be ranked below them. Likewise, the Chamars of nearby Chitauni, were abhorred by the idea of sharing food with certain other untouchable castes. "You can cut off my head", one of them claimed, "but I will not take food from Mehtar and Dhobi. They are the lowest of the low (*sab se niche*)". Though, in Sitapur, the castes with whom one can eat and with whom one cannot eat differ from place to place, even from hamlet to hamlet within the same village, what remains is the fact that, for any untouchable, there are always other untouchable jatis or jati-subsections with the members of which one cannot interdine.

examples of dalit organization are the unions of untouchable public servants such as (the various and rival chapters of) BAMCEF (the forerunner of the BSP) and the All-India Federation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Employees. Out of the 100 "Dalit Organisations" listed by the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi, 21 are run by and act for untouchable (and tribal) government employees: bank employees, teachers, engineers etc (Indian Social Institute 1994). Dalit organisations, moreover, seem to be largely active in the cities and larger towns. According to Robert Bates, these organizational patterns are quite typical for disadvantaged ethnic groups anywhere. Ethnic groups, he argues, are often organised in towns by "modern" elite members of disadvantaged communities because it is such elites who suffer the most from the discrimination involved in belonging to a low status group (Bates 2002: 17).

Untouchable jatis also do not intermarry. In every village where I brought up the issue, villagers were adamant that inter-jati marriages were out of the question. I would invariably be told that “a Pasi cannot marry a Chamar” or some other version of the same definitive statement. When asked why, I was usually simply told that “this is not possible in the villages”. Most untouchables could not envisage that inter caste marriages might start taking place some time in the near future. “We know that these things are going on in cities but they will not happen here”, asserted the Pasis in Chandraseni’s Pasiapurva, “not even in twenty years time”. The continuing rigid separation of untouchables in social life also regularly spills over into electoral politics. In quite a few fieldwork villages, the Pasis claimed to vote for a party other than the BSP because they considered it a “Chamar party”. In Padariya, for instance, the Chamar vote went *en bloc* to the BSP but the Pasis supported the Congress. BSP politicians in Sitapur confessed that while Chamars’ support for the party was almost total, that of the Pasis still had to be worked on.

The strong division and separation of different untouchable jatis in social and political life is not something peculiar to Sitapur. On the contrary, it is a well-documented fact of untouchable life in much of rural India. Also elsewhere, untouchable jatis are ranked (or rank themselves) in local caste hierarchies, practice untouchability among themselves, decline to interdine, refrain from inter caste marriages and are often very particular about avoiding contact with each other (Deliège 1999: 6; Isaacs 1965: 29-30; Judge 2003: 2990, 2991; Roy and Singh 1987: 110-1).²⁷⁰ Elsewhere, different untouchable jatis, both historically and today, also often unite under separate political banners and vote for different parties. Past attempts at uniting various untouchable jatis seem to have

²⁷⁰ Though perhaps most pronounced *among different jatis*, ranking and separation may also occur *within one and the same jati*. The untouchable jati of *Paraiyars* studied by Michael Moffatt, for instance, consisted of three, hierarchically structured endogamous “groups” called *vagaiyaras* (Moffatt 1979). In Sitapur, the Chamars in Ghaila distinguished between *purovia* (eastern) Chamars and *pachawan* (western) Chamars. The latter, also called *harha* Chamars, were said to be ranked below the former due to their traditional involvement in removing and processing dead cattle.

invariably failed, a tendency replicated in many parts of contemporary UP where large numbers of Khatiks, Balmiki and Pasi voters have supported other parties than the BSP in an effort to distinguish themselves from the Chamars (Jaffrelot 1998: 50; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 225).²⁷¹ The perceived tendency of certain untouchable jatis to appropriate the lion's share of reserved public benefits often drives different untouchable castes even further apart (cf. e.g. Roy and Singh 1987: 110-1).

The untouchables in Sitapur and the rest of rural India, despite receiving similar degrading historical treatment by clean castes and the purported community of interests provided by recent legislation and preferential policies, thus remain quite fragmented and "split into a myriad of widely dispersed castes" (Deliège 1999: 11). They are still a category rather than a cohesive group, community or society (Joshi 1980: 197) and, taken together, possess few if any distinctive characteristics. They have no language, common name, dietary or other cultural practices of their own of which they might boast and that could serve as a basis for merging their separate identities (Deliège 1999: 89, 104). Inter jati solidarity, hence, remains

²⁷¹ In the literature there are many references to failed historical attempts to forge political unity among different untouchable jatis. In pre-independence Maharashtra, for instance, Ambedkar never succeeded in constructing a political alliance of the Mahars (to which he himself belonged) and such other notable untouchable jatis as the Chambhars and the Mangs (Zelliot 1992: 108). The so-called Ad Dharm movement in the 1920s in the Punjab, which had set out to unite the region's untouchables on the basis of a newly invented "original religion", in the end left behind little more than a new caste. Around the same time, the Adi Hindu movement in some UP towns was equally unsuccessful in endowing the untouchables with a new and separate identity (Jaffrelot 2000b). Terms like the suffix *Adi* in the southern states and the term *Harijan*, which were once brought into use in an effort to bring different untouchable jatis together under a single name, have in the long run tended to become names used by *particular* untouchable jatis rather than by the untouchable category as a whole (Charsley 1996: 17). Efforts of the caste reformer Sri Narayana (1857-1928) to include Pulayas and other untouchable castes in his anti-caste movement in Kerala also miserably failed due to strong mutual suspicions (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 97, 99). And even if, in contemporary India, there are some organizations which bring together two or several castes from one state, "their impact is minimal, and none of the large-scale movements [. . .] has managed such a feat . . . we have no example of fusion or even of a significant *rapprochement* between two untouchable castes" (Deliège 1999: 173).

highly limited (Deliège 1999: 11). In sum, as Simon Charsley writes, “at the level of rural people’s daily lives, interactions and identities, ‘the Untouchable’ is not to be found” (Charsley 1996: 17).²⁷² Ironically, it is fragmentation and disunity which seem to be Indian untouchables’ primary characteristics (Deliège 1999: 5, 8-9; Mandelbaum 1966: 1537) and, apart from anything else, it is this very lack of unity which has rendered them *particularly* incapable of translating their considerable numbers into effective collective action, organisation, and political clout (cf. also Deliège 1999: 173).

Fragmentation, disunity and, even, mutual hostility, repulsion and disgust among jatis of fairly similar ritual status in the Brahminic ranking and with seemingly common interests are, to be sure, not typical for jatis in the untouchable category: it tends to affect *all* jatis, irrespective of their *varna*.²⁷³ As David Mandelbaum has pointed out, the fragmentation of close and contiguous jatis in rural life follows from the logic of the caste system itself. People functioning in such a system see society as a hierarchical order in which the relative positions of actors in a social situation are usually given, that is, defined *in advance* of their interaction. Hence, they do not tend to feel “particularly impelled” to challenge the superiority of those high above them in the hierarchy. But this easy acceptance of subordinate status does not concern members of jatis close to one’s own. “Subordination to someone in a proximal rank”, says Mandelbaum, “is felt to be uncomfortable and something to be

²⁷² “There is no question”, he adds, “of individual jaatis being submerged into a single Untouchable ‘caste’, any more than there is of a new unified identity of caste Hindu. Only studies which, for the sake of political correctness, merge jaatis under a single label, either ‘Scheduled Caste’, ‘Harijan’ or ‘Dalit’, fail to show this” (Charsley 1996: 16-17).

²⁷³ The Jats and Gujars of UP, both fairly highly ranked Shudra jatis, for example “are constantly undermining each other, though on the face of it they should, as owner-cultivators, be natural allies” (Gupta 1999: 280). The same holds true for the *Srivastavas* and *Patwari* Kayasthas of UP, the *meccho* and *helo* Koibartas of Bengal and the various Brahmin jatis who “quarrel ceaselessly among themselves” (ibid.). Similarly, even if there has been some fusion among the middle Shudra castes of UP -Ahirs have become Yadavas, Koris and Koeries have become Kushwahas-, on the whole, write Ahmad and Saxena, all castes remain “*extremely conscious* of their position in the vertical hierarchy” (Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 205, my emphasis).

changed as soon as possible". The narcissism of minor differences so prevalent among members of close and contiguous jatis thus largely and logically follows from the strong personal motivation of people and groups in caste societies to escape subordination to their proximate equals (Mandelbaum 1995: 624-6).²⁷⁴

It is for this reason that members of proximate castes, including those of untouchable jatis, so scrupulously and zealously guard and assert their higher status within a close bracket of rank, are so fiercely competitive about the symbols and substance of caste rank and, hence, tend to reproduce the caste system among themselves (Deliège 1999: 70; Mandelbaum 1995: 625, 1537; Moffatt 1979).²⁷⁵ And it is precisely because of untouchable individuals' overriding loyalties towards their jatis -rather than to the broad, untidy and amorphous *category* of "untouchables"- that UP untouchables have traditionally found it so hard to develop full-blown inter-caste, categorical solidarities and to mount common, effective challenges to dabang dominance (Gupta 1999: 280). Whenever rural untouchables do protest and assert themselves, their protest and assertion still tend to be aimed more at the place assigned to their own jati within the caste system than at the caste system itself and the patterns of rural dominance that sustain it (cf. Deliège 1999: 111-2). Most rural untouchables, in other words, still

²⁷⁴ The phrase 'narcissism of minor differences' is Sigmund Freud's, who coined it to describe the principle which "governs relations between groups that are physically close to one another or who have many close connections". "The relations between these groups", argued Freud, "will be characterised by ambivalent feelings. They will become jealous rivals" (Freud (1930), cited in Billig 1974: 38).

²⁷⁵ As Ross Mallick has noted, it is this scrupulous guarding of status (if successfully carried out, of course) which "also provides one of the main *psychological attractions* of the caste system: while every [quoting John Broomfield] 'peasant has someone's boot on his neck, many have the concurrent satisfaction of stepping on someone's else's face. Inequality, the bane of the hierarchical society, is also its chief delight'" (Mallick 1998: 243). As Gerald Berreman has argued the same point: "[I]f the caste system were abolished a Shudra group or even a Harijan group would get the benefit of equality with the Brahmins but would have to pay the price of losing its superiority to the lowest Harijans, and this it is not willing to pay" (Berreman 1968: 81).

want “to move up the ladder rather than to eliminate the ladder” (Berreman 1968: 81).²⁷⁶

All this means that also Sitapuri untouchables, *qua* untouchables, are not given much to collective, open defiance of dabang dominance. They do not overtly challenge dabang access to and control over the local state by seeking direct access and control of their own. They prefer, rather, to work the system to their minimal disadvantage. To secure valued public benefits they mainly rely on indirect methods such as voting and dalaali which are available to them and can be used with relative impunity. And of course they will not shy away, as testified by the successful efforts of Chote Lal and his Chamars in Ulra described in the previous chapter, from establishing their own access to the local state if the opportunity arises and conditions are felt to be favourable.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ All this is not to say that caste systems do not allow at all for horizontal mobilization of low caste groups and, even, for the effective subversion of upper caste dominance. In some of the south Indian states, for example, lower castes, from the late nineteenth century onwards, *have* collectively and successfully contested the dominance of upper caste groups and, in some instances, effectively wrested control over the state from them. According to Ahmad and Saxena, these disparities between north and south India may largely be explained by differences in the morphologies of the caste systems in both regions. “Caste structure in the north Indian plains”, they note, “differs from that of the south in a fundamental respect. In the south, the Brahmins were the only representatives of the twice-born castes (there being no counterpart of north Indian Rajputs and Baniyas in the south) which increased their social distance from the rest of the Sudra population. On the other hand, due to the presence of other groups with high social status in the north, Brahminism did not have to be tyrannical . . . [since] a greater continuity in the scale of ritual rank of castes in Uttar Pradesh [. . .] led to a general sharing of social status and political power. Anti-Brahminism seems to have flourished in regions characterised by steep and discontinuous traditional social hierarchies. Regions with relatively higher proportions of twice-born castes and having more gradual and continuous social handicaps seem to be less susceptible to horizontal mobilisations from below comprising ritually deprived castes” (Ahmad and Saxena 1994: 174).

²⁷⁷ Jens Lerche describes another successful example of successful untouchable defiance of local dabang –in this case in a conflict over agricultural wages- in a village in eastern UP. As I did in my analysis of the conflict in Ulra, Lerche also emphasises the importance of *timing* in this regard. The untouchables in the eastern UP village, he argues, *could* organize effectively

Otherwise, untouchables' resistance to and defiance of dabang dominance remains largely limited to the deployment of such weapons of the weak as the public display of (feigned) helplessness, ignorance, meekness and acceptance of authority and private, covert, inconspicuous "off-stage" gossiping, making fun and slander of upper castes (Berreman 1979: 167; Ruud 1999; Ruud 2001: 131, 132; Scott 1985; Scott 1990; Sharma 1994: 74-5). As Medhai, a Chamar in Haibatpur, explained the wisdom of such an approach: "We go along with the rest of the people and by doing this, we can still do whatever we want. What is the use of being confrontational? It only creates tension".

Summing up

As I have argued in this chapter, ordinary poor villagers—whether untouchable or not—seek policy benefits in various ways, out of which directly approaching DLBs—whether outgroup or ingroup ones—is probably the least popular. Poor clients prefer to seek public benefits through voting and dalaali not only because these methods are considered more practical or effective but also because they are regarded as less dangerous than their theoretical alternative, the direct approach of bureaucrats. Approaching bureaucrats directly often implies bypassing locally dominant dabang who may meet out uncomfortable and painful punitive treatment in exchange for such efforts. Since the direct approach of bureaucrats is something of an *ultimum remedium*, ingroup clients' demand of active representation by ingroup bureaucrats is largely absent. Ordinary clients, including untouchable clients, neither demand nor, as I argued in chapter 5, receive special treatment from "fellow" untouchable administrators. It is to some of the implications of these findings for representative bureaucracy theory that I will turn in the following and concluding chapter.

because they, just like Chote Lal *cum suis*, chose to act collectively at a time when their party—the BSP—controlled the state government (Lerche 1998: A-32).

7 Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Unrepresentative Bureaucracy

In this final chapter I wrap up, in a few broad strokes, the main substantive findings of this study. I will then discuss some of the implications of these findings for representative bureaucracy theory. Even if the case of the untouchable bureaucracy might seem to be a rather extreme one, it has much to teach us or, at the least, raises interesting and important questions, about the likelihood of active representation in public bureaucracies in patronage democracies and multi-ethnic societies. I will pay particular attention to two, what I regard as, major flaws in received representative bureaucracy theory: its underlying assumptions of bureaucratic discretion-maximalisation and groupism. Discretion-maximalisation and groupism, as the case of India's untouchable bureaucracy has borne out, cannot be taken for granted. By theorizing some of the apparent determinants of discretion-maximalisation and groupness - suggested by the findings from the case study and the larger literature- I aim to further specify the conditions under which active representation is *unlikely* to occur. I conclude this study with two pleas. The first plea is for appreciably widening up the currently dominant operational definition of active representation in terms of policy outputs; the second for more ethnographic studies of (un)representative bureaucracies.

1 Summary: untouchable bureaucracy

The question which has informed this study was whether the presence of ingroup members in bureaucracy can be of benefit to an ethnic group as a whole. The question is a pertinent one, if only because political entrepreneurs in ethnically plural societies tend to spend a great deal of energy in securing their group's access to public employment on the presumption that this is so. Besides, a forceful current in contemporary political philosophy advocates and justifies the accommodation of ethnic group rights in public policy and political institutions on the grounds that outgroup representatives cannot defend the interests of ingroups, especially marginalized ones, very well.

To find out whether passive representation -the physical presence of group-identified bureaucrats- may indeed translate in active representation -the pursuit of broader ingroup interests on the part of these group-identified bureaucrats- I studied India's untouchable bureaucracy. The case seemed an obvious one: not only does India have one of the most elaborate and long-lived systems of ethnic preferences premised on the belief that only ingroup representatives can represent ingroups, the untouchables -the world's paradigm pariah group- have at the same time been the major beneficiaries of this system.

The mechanism construed by representative bureaucracy theorists to account for the expected linkage between passive and active representation is quite straightforward. Individual bureaucrats almost invariably possess discretion, that is, room to make choices as they see fit. Superiors can never fully and adequately communicate to bureaucrats what is expected of them; and even if they could, they typically lack the means to enforce subordinates into compliance with centrally desired ends. Given these communication and enforcement problems, bureaucratic discretion is virtually inevitable in large bureaucratic organizations: orders from above are regularly unintelligible to those who are supposed to carry them out while superiors typically lack the knowledge, time, manpower, financial and legal resources, will or perseverance to detect, monitor and sanction all inappropriate

exercise of discretion. As a result, bureaucrats widely exercise discretion, in interpreting and translating the *meaning* of superiors' orders; in deciding with *which* orders to comply; in deciding *how* to comply with a given order; as well as in deciding *whether* to comply at all with central directives.

Bureaucratic discretion is not a problem, representative bureaucracy theorists argue, as long as bureaucrats are drawn from all relevant societal groups. Persons of different backgrounds undergo different socialization experiences which tend to be the source of a person's enduring values, preferences and biases. Since bureaucrats are susceptible to these biases and preferences when they are exercising discretion, bureaucrats recruited from a particular group will therefore tend to make administrative decisions that reflect the interests, needs and desires of that group. Prospective clients of bureaucracy, furthermore, may be more inclined to participate in policies intended to benefit them when they identify and are comfortable with program administrators. What makes the occurrence of active representation especially likely in the case of ethnic groups is their proclivity towards high "groupness". They tend to command strong interpersonal loyalties and engender a great willingness on the part of groupmembers to sacrifice for collective welfare. Ethnic groups, in short, often demonstrate a high capability to make their members act in the group's interest.

Within India, the dust-level rural development bureaucracy presented itself as a suitable case for an empirical enquiry into untouchable representative bureaucracy because it possessed, on the face of it, four features that representative bureaucracy theorists associate with a high likelihood of active representation: a sympathetic mission, high salience of its policies to poor untouchable villagers, the presence of a substantial mass of untouchable DLBs, and street-level discretion. To avoid the drawbacks of earlier empirical representative bureaucracy studies (which, by design, had not been able to prove the occurrence of active representation, nor to illuminate and explain its practice) I chose to rely on qualitative fieldwork. Through a combination of participant observation, personal interviews and the consultation of

official documents I set out to develop a grounded theory which was to clarify the if, how, why and when of active representation in Sitapur and, in so doing, to provide new insights and clues for elaborating, specifying and modifying existing representative bureaucracy theory.

As favourable a recipe for active representation as conditions in Sitapur might have seemed in theory, in practice they turned out to count for little. Even though the rules informing rural development policy implementation accord substantial powers to DLBs, very few DLBs use this power. In order to prevent political punishment, to keep their jobs and successfully survive in turbulent faction political environments, they *lease out* their discretionary freedoms to political brokers in return for a fraction of development rents.

DLBs seldom visit the villages in their jurisdictions and, hence, tend to see very little dust. If they are ignorant about the villages and their own developmental activities it is because they have, for most intents and purposes, abandoned the frontline of rural development program implementation. They usually need a good reason to pay a visit to their villages, keep their touring to an absolute minimum and restrict their visits to where the locally influential people reside. In short, Sitapur's VLOs, irrespective of their caste identity, have largely abandoned the frontline. They do not regularly visit the villages and hamlets in their jurisdiction, let alone frequent them.

The fact that Sitapur's DLBs have largely abandoned the frontline does not mean that rural development benefits such as subsidies, temporary employment and rural infrastructure do not reach the rural population. On the contrary, *in spite of* DLBs' absenteeism, beneficiaries *are* selected and program benefits *are* being allocated. Rather than by the block staff, however, such allocative decisions are typically and decisively influenced by local politicians or, as they are commonly referred to, local *netas*. In doing so, these *netas* effectively appropriate whatever *de iure* discretionary power DLBs might be considered to have. Rural development work, in other words, is in practice the business of politicians.

Most politicians in contemporary India act on the assumption that the votes and group support needed to satisfy their political ambitions can be most successfully garnered by acting as *patrons* to voters. They spend most of their time and energy on locating, capturing and distributing *patronage* to their followers or those whose electoral support they court. To make such patronage available to their clients they are heavily dependent on the cooperation and complicity of DLBs. Netas depend upon officials for reliable *information* on the kind and amount of benefits available for “allocation” in their blocks and villages. Netas furthermore depend on DLBs for observing *secrecy*. Since villagers’ continued ignorance is essential to their survival as political patrons, netas have a vested interest in making sure that DLBs actively restrict the spread of relevant information among potential clients. Finally, netas must also rely on DLBs for getting the necessary paperwork in order. Making sure that the official paperwork documents and reflects centrally desired procedures and outcomes rather than ground realities is crucial if netas are to cover up patronage transactions (which are illegal).

Most DLBs in Sitapur see no good reasons why they should withhold their cooperation from the important netas in their jurisdictions. To start with, unlike bureaucrats in many other political systems, DLBs may be rather easily disciplined or punished by politicians if the latter somehow find them to be uncooperative. The most important and commonly used instrument of control of Indian netas is the power to transfer bureaucrats from one post and locality to another. Since DLBs tend to have strong preferences for the kind of place they work in –they particularly hate out of the way, backward, feudal and mafia-infested places- they are usually willing to go to great lengths to avoid ending up in punishment postings. If cooperation with local netas is the price to be paid for preventing a transfer to such places, most VLOs are quite prepared to pay it.

Another well-established method of exacting compliance is the discrediting or smearing of DLBs’ reputations, including accusing them of “corruption”. Allegations such as these may be quite harmful to DLBs because they create the impression among their

colleagues and superiors that they cannot handle their jobs very well. DLBs who are repeatedly found to arouse the wrath of local netas, have their reputations smeared and charges pressed against them can ordinarily expect but little peer sympathy. Allegations are often backed up by (threats of) violence. In Sitapur, as in the rest of rural Uttar Pradesh, politics and the use of force and violence are inextricably intertwined: the crafting of political careers typically goes hand in hand with the building up and deployment of muscle and fire power against which DLBs, as largely lone operators, have no real shelter.

Punishments aside, DLBs' co-operation is also exacted by way of rewards. Cooperative officials can usually expect to be compensated for their services with a share of the development rents that netas routinely collect in the process of distributing patronage. Netas tend to make good use of the rent-seeking opportunities invested in the rural development bureaucracy: they charge or accept bribes from villagers for getting the latter's work done or for trying to do so, skim off proportions of development subsidies, and make a profit from savings on the ground. Part of the money thus generated is used for netas' personal income; part of it is, in the absence of (sufficient) remuneration, required for furthering their political careers. Given the importance of rent-seeking income to most netas, DLBs who are willing to assist netas in the collection of development rents –by supplying information on rent-seeking opportunities and covering up skimming activities in official paperwork- can expect to be rewarded with a share of the profits. In fact, those who cooperate can make it rich.

DLBs' shunning of discretion and frontline abandonment are further explained by the problem of factionalism. Political power on the Sitapur dust-level is hotly contested and seldom goes unchallenged for long. Dust-level netas tend to be locked into continuous and usually bitter battles with political enemies. These battles usually appear in the guise of factionalism, a special kind of politicking in which loose coalitions of faction leaders fight out personal conflicts of interest over concrete issues that often pertain to access to patronage vested in administrative agencies such as the rural development bureaucracy.

Since Indian civil service rules prescribe that bureaucrats are not to be posted in their native areas, DLBs are almost by definition outsiders to the political arenas in which they work. They therefore typically lack the local knowledge required to accurately map factional allegiances or to anticipate and influence factional conflict as well as locals can. Indian factions, by definition, are unstable, temporary, ad-hoc coalitions with fluctuating memberships. As a result, DLBs can never really be sure as to whom they are actually dealing with in terms of the factions they side with, the political clout they enjoy, and the goals they pursue. Neither are they in a good position to predict what dangers might lie in store for them when they decide to extend their cooperation to certain clients (and, in doing so, deny it to others).

Most DLBs therefore try to insulate themselves against unwanted consequences of devious factional pressures by establishing and cultivating good relations with politicians and administrative superiors who might be able to help them when things threaten to get out of control. On a day to day basis, DLBs try to stay out of factional trouble by studiously avoiding the impression of siding with any one faction while at the same time not seeming to be uncooperative. VLOs do so by frontline abandonment and the recruitment of informal helpers, while BDOs (shackled, as they are, to the block-office) must largely rely on their verbal and people skills to defuse potentially explosive situations. Mistakes, however, are easily made, and DLBs regularly end up scapegoats in factional conflicts and get punished for actions or omissions they could barely have avoided.

These unpleasant working conditions leave many DLBs, irrespective of their caste backgrounds, feeling helpless, deprived of respect and demoralized. They have, for the most part, given up on the idea that they might make some positive contribution to the lives of the rural poor. They are very critical of their organization's policies which, they feel, add to factionalism and groupism in the villages. If only there were alternative employment opportunities available, many DLBs would probably choose to exit the dust-level rural development bureaucracy. DLBs' general disillusionment with their organization's mission and clientele is supplemented by

untouchable DLBs' disidentification from their own stigmatized identity and from other ingroup members. Untouchable DLBs generally feel they cannot do anything special for their community because upper castes in and around the organization prevent them from building up the necessary clout to do so. In order to survive, untouchable officials typically feel forced to downplay their untouchable identity and to avoid assuming advocacy roles. Many try to escape identification with untouchability altogether through a number of *passing* strategies such as changing their names and dissociating from members of their own castes. Many dust level untouchable DLBs have thus largely become "untouchable" to their ingroup clientele.

Taken together, the survival strategies of frontline abandonment, defensive cowering and passing conspire to make the active representation of ingroup policy interests on the part of untouchable DLBs a virtual non-issue and, therefore, highly unlikely in the Sitapur rural development bureaucracy. In the ordinary course of their official lives, untouchable DLBs lack both opportunities and good reasons to act as untouchable clients' representatives. The inevitable result is an almost routine interruption of the supply of active representation.

Even if untouchable DLBs tend to be busy coping with *netagiri*, *goondagiri*, factionalism and stigmatized identity, there would seem to be no reason why untouchable clients should not *try* and get in touch with them to demonstrate their eligibility for program benefits or to claim special treatment on the basis of caste-affinity. However, in dust-level practice, as it turns out, poor low caste and untouchable clients rarely if ever demand ingroup bureaucrats for the active representation of their interests. This absence of an untouchable demand for active representation further detracts from the likelihood of supply of active representation by DLBs: after all, if ingroup clients do not even ask, claim or pressurize for special treatment why would DLBs run the considerable personal risks involved in extending it?

Even if untouchability no longer prevents untouchable clients from physically approaching local officialdom for benefits, untouchable (as well as other poor and low caste) villagers display

an overwhelming preference for indirect and informal, “political” benefit-seeking methods, notably voting and *dalaali*. These methods are typically considered much more feasible, effective and, also, far less dangerous than the direct approach of bureaucrats which, therefore, hardly figures among poor clients’ benefit-seeking strategies.

The most popular and widely practiced benefit-seeking behaviour displayed by clients is voting. To poor villagers, voting is not so much an expressive act as an instrumental one. Poor and low caste villagers vote for candidates whom they consider capable of winning the elections and whom subsequently may be trusted to deliver public benefits to them. As a result, in local elections poor villagers preferably vote for candidates from their own *jati*, hamlet or ward, while in the bigger state and national elections they increasingly vote for the BSP, a self-confessed dalit party which claims to act in all untouchables’ interests. Most poor and low caste villagers thus understand, accept and act upon the patronage logic of Indian politics. They use their vote to get their own man, woman or party in office and hope to be rewarded if their candidate manages to capture an office from which favours may be distributed. Though popular, voting is a highly unreliable way of cornering state benefits. Voting in UP, for one, is not always free. Voters are regularly kept from voting, whether by force or through manipulation of election procedures. Then, also, there is always the risk that one’s candidate loses the election or fails to secure a position from which patronage may be dispensed. Besides, many *netas*, as poor villagers see it, are expert cheaters and have no qualms about withholding benefits or filling their own stomachs whenever they can get away with it.

When voting does not bring the hoped for results poor and low caste villagers may respond in a number of ways. Some feel there is nothing one can do about cheating *netas* and appear resigned to the fact that the government has few benefits in store for them, despite the attractive promises of *netas*. For the few who can afford it, obtaining political office oneself is also an option. Alternatively, clients may also hire the services of a *dalaal*, a broker, middleman, or fixer who specializes in making bureaucracies part

with their benefits through the deployment of skill, contacts and experience. Dalaals, in fact, are ubiquitous in Sitapur and their services are much sought after. One of the reasons that clients find dalaals attractive and relatively easy to deal with is that they are usually local men with roots in the village or area in which they work. This makes them much easier to approach by poor clients than bureaucrats who tend to stay away from the villages. It also makes them easier to trust than bureaucrats who, after all, tend to be outsiders to the jurisdictions in which they work.

Poor villagers have in effect little good to say about bureaucrats. They not only blame them for being notoriously difficult to approach, but also for being quite unhelpful and condescending whenever they do manage to get hold of them. Bureaucrats, like politicians, are furthermore considered expert cheaters and suspected of being primarily interested in lining their own pockets. Interestingly, poor clients' distrust of bureaucrats tends to have little to do with bureaucrats' caste. Untouchable and other poor and low caste clients are *generally* distrustful of bureaucrats and expect little good from them, *regardless* of what caste they are. Again, as with voting, there are certain risks involved in using dalaal as a benefit-seeking strategy. Dalaals must be paid for their services and, like politicians and bureaucrats, also have a bad reputation for cheating.

Voting and dalaali are not only considered more effective and practical benefit-seeking strategies, they are also less dangerous than the direct approach of bureaucrats. By approaching bureaucrats directly, namely, clients risk antagonizing local *dabang*. In the Sitapur countryside, such single strong landowning dominant jatis or families are a central reality in village life. They wield considerable political and economic power over ordinary low caste and poor villagers. Many quasi-landless and indebted villagers depend on them for regular employment, wage labour or sharecrop land. But rather than on their land possessions, dabang have increasingly come to rely on access to and control over the local state and its resources. They thus have a strong interest in preventing poor low caste villagers from establishing direct access to bureaucracy and usually possess the means to do so. Dabang's

pahunch to the local police is an especially powerful instrument of domination.

In theory, poor and untouchable villagers might counter monopolizing efforts on the part of dominant individuals and groups by engaging in collective action and forming grass-roots policy-pressure groups. In practice, however, untouchable clients usually lack the necessary power and resources for such endeavours. Another important reason for rural untouchables' disinclination towards collective action is that they possess little cohesiveness; they are still a category rather than a group and continue to be sharply divided along jati lines. Untouchable jatis practice untouchability among themselves, do not interdine or intermarry or fuse, sometimes positively despise each other and scrupulously maintain hierarchy among themselves. The lack of unity among different untouchable jatis is largely explained by the logic of the caste system, which compels jatis to escape subordination to proximate equals by stressing their difference and relatively higher status. Untouchable disunity often prevents rural untouchables from converting their large numbers into an effective, organized force and, hence, from bypassing dabang's administrative access and directly claiming the public benefits to which they are entitled.

To sum up, villagers have an overwhelming preference for employing "political" methods to influence benefit allocation. Bureaucrats hardly figure, at least not prominently or directly, in their benefit-seeking activities. Contrary to what one might have expected, untouchable clients' demand for active representation is almost absent: they consider other alternatives potentially much more attractive and, also importantly, less dangerous. Untouchability thus plays, at the most, a very limited role as an organizing principle within Indian dust level politics and bureaucracy. The category of "untouchables" does what Charles Tilly calls "boundary work", or the work of distinction: it defines ties and locates distinctions between members of different categories more reliably than it creates internal solidarity, homogeneity, or connectedness (Tilly 1999: 72). All this is not to say that untouchable villagers do not profit from rural development policies -they surely

do. What it means is that when they do so, it is quite unlikely to be due to ingroup DLBs' supply of active representation or their own demand for it.²⁷⁸

2 Implications: towards a formal theory of unrepresentative bureaucracy

In chapter 3 I discussed a number of conditions (sympathetic mission, policy salience, critical mass and street-level discretion) which representative bureaucracy theorists regard as being particularly conducive to the occurrence of active representation and illustrated how they applied to the dust-level rural development bureaucracy in Sitapur. As my subsequent analysis of this bureaucracy bore out, however, even if all of these purportedly favourable conditions are in place, active representation may *still* fail to occur. The explanation for the non-occurrence of active representation arising out of my ethnographic explorations in Sitapur is basically an economic one: active representation fails to occur because bureaucrats are not ready or able to supply it, and because those who need it fail to pressure those who might deliver it enough for doing so. There is, in brief, no *market* for active bureaucratic representation on the north Indian dust-level, at least not one involving untouchable dust-level development bureaucrats and clients.

The grounded, substantive theory developed in this book hopefully "fits" or "works" to provide an intelligible explanation for the absence of a market for active representation in this particular case. But, as Glaser and Strauss have pointed out, substantive theories "may have important implications and relevance, and become almost automatically a springboard or stepping stone to the development" of what they call "formal" grounded theory (Glaser

²⁷⁸ My use of this probabilistic formulation is deliberate. Even if I did not find any indications of the occurrence of active representation, this does not mean that it might not occasionally occur. After all, one cannot really prove the absence of something.

and Strauss 1967: 79).²⁷⁹ In this section I explore a number of implications of my substantive theory of unrepresentative untouchable bureaucracy in Sitapur for formal representative bureaucracy. These implications all relate to the question of how to make theoretical sense of *unrepresentative* bureaucracies. In brief, I will argue that active representation will vary with type of democracy, type of group and the visibility of group attributes. Roughly put, I argue that (1) bureaucratic discretion and ingroup demand for active representation are likely to be severely hampered in patronage democracies and that (2) the groupness of lowly ranked ethnic groups, especially stigmatized and invisible ones, will tend to be low. Active representation is therefore unlikely to occur in the case of patronage democracies and/or lowly ranked ethnic groups in vertically stratified societies. I present this argument in the form of five sets of hypotheses that could be tested in future research.

(1) Bureaucrats in patronage democracies are likely to shun discretion

In order for active representation to occur, not only must bureaucrats, as representative bureaucracy theorists have stressed, have discretion; they must also be *willing* to utilize this discretion. Whenever bureaucrats do not find the exercise of discretion worthwhile –whether because it may hurt their careers, endanger their good relations with peers or offends their professional standards- passive representation will not likely translate into active representation. “Linkage” studies must therefore *not assume* discretion; they must *problematize* both its existence and bureaucrats’ willingness to exercise it.²⁸⁰ If the bureaucracy studied in this book is

²⁷⁹ The distinction between these two kinds of theories, explain Glaser and Strauss, is that substantive theory is developed for a substantive, or *empirical*, area of scholarly inquiry (e.g. rural development administration) whereas formal theory is developed for a formal, *conceptual*, area of scholarly enquiry (e.g. representative bureaucracy) (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 79).

²⁸⁰ The idea that bureaucrats seek, use and, even, maximize discretion is also fairly widely accepted outside the representative bureaucracy literature. It is, for instance, implicit in and/or central to Lipsky’s theory of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1980), public choice accounts of bureaucracy (Downs 1967;

any indication, bureaucrats' willingness to exercise discretion is severely hampered in what I, following Kanchan Chandra, have called patronage democracies. In such democracies politics revolves largely around providing material and psychic benefits to voters in exchange for electoral support. Politicians in such democracies tend to have good reasons as well as the means to appropriate bureaucrats' formal and informal discretionary decision-making powers. As a result, bureaucrats will feel forced to comply with and facilitate politicians' patronage transactions, in the hope of being compensated with a share in the benefits under politicians' control.

To put it differently, politico-bureaucratic relations in patronage democracies will tend to have a distinctly *patrimonial* feel. That is to say, politicians in patronage democracies will be strongly inclined to treat their offices and power as purely personal affairs, as their personal *properties* to be exploited at their own discretion. In order to maintain and secure the loyalty of officials on whom they must rely to perpetuate themselves in positions of power, politicians will be at great pains to influence administrative appointments. They will also be willing to grant officials considerable leeway in how they take care of their responsibilities (by allowing them to hire "more or less proletarian deputies" to do "the real work", for instance (Weber 1978: 1033)) and by providing substantial, usually informal and off-the-record opportunities to generate additional personal incomes -in the form of fee-benefices, tax-farming opportunities and the like.²⁸¹

Niskanen 1971; Tullock 1987) and to principal agent theories of political control over bureaucracy (cf. e.g. Balla 1998; Calvert et al. 1989).

²⁸¹ What Weber refers to as a fee benefice concerns "the assignment of certain fees which the ruler or his representative can expect for official acts" (Weber 1978: 1032). The prevalent understanding between Indian officials and local netas to divide the spoils skimmed off from development allocations, for instance, resembles Weber's fee benefice in most significant respects. Further adding to the Indian dust-level state's patrimonial features is that the use of administrative office for fee benefice purposes is accompanied by the saleability of office. Many administrative offices -especially those to which attractive fee benefices are attached- tend to be auctioned or granted to contestants willing to pay a certain fixed price, just as Weber observed to be the case whenever patrimonial rulers have relied on fee benefices to compensate their officials for their services.

To reduce the risk of subversion of their power by bureaucrats, politicians will tend to make creative use of various methods to reduce bureaucrats' capability to build up independent powerbases of their own, possibly including, as in India, regular travel through their constituencies to keep an eye on things, the creation of competing administrative offices, allowing bureaucrats only brief tenures in office and the exclusion of officials from districts in which they have strong roots in the form of landed property and relatives (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002: 6-8; Dua 1985: 795-6; Weber 1978: esp. 1028-44).²⁸²

Given the relatively large monetary and status rewards vested in patrimonial bureaucratic office, bureaucrats have good reasons to act loyally and in the interests of the politicians in their jurisdictions. Depending on how cleverly and ingeniously politicians manage to manipulate the various loyalty-inducing instruments at their disposal, bureaucrats may even feel (as many Sitapuri DLBs said they did) wholly *dependent* on politicians for their positions, incomes and survival, much like servants feel dependent on their masters or vassals on their feudal lords.²⁸³ Because politicians usually are (or are felt to be) more powerful than them bureaucrats are not likely to have real "jurisdictions", at least not in the conventional sense of the term of clear-cut spheres of competence, purpose and task. Rather, the boundaries of bureaucrats' actual jurisdictions will largely be delineated according to politicians' personal discretion rather than by law, rule or precept (Weber 1978: 1028-9).²⁸⁴

²⁸² Other methods historically used by patrimonial rulers to protect themselves against the disintegration of their hegemony have included the "personal guarantee" –Japanese feudal lords would demand officials' families as hostages, for instance-, the appointment of relatives or in-laws to important positions and the systematic surveillance of officials through spies (Weber 1978: 1042-4). Though potentially very effective, the use of these methods is probably rather restricted in democracies.

²⁸³ The nature of interpersonal relationships in feudalism and patrimonialism is quite similar. According to Weber, feudal relations are more ritualized, and stable than patrimonial ones, which are more *ad hoc* (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002: 6, n. 3).

²⁸⁴ "Wherever the administration of a large political realm is patrimonial", wrote Weber, "every attempt at identifying 'jurisdictions' is lost

Besides, bureaucrats, in whatever jurisdictions they may be said to have, will be expected to focus their allegiance upwards, to the politicians who can reward and punish them, rather than downwards, to their nominal clients from whom they have less to gain or fear (as long as their relations with politicians are fine). As a result, interpersonal relations between bureaucrats and nominal clients will be kept to a minimum and, as far as they take place at all, be characterised by official disinterest, condescension and predatory extraction of resources (Lindberg 1999: 19). “In neopatrimonial systems”, as Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith put it, “the state exists to serve the rulers, not the ruled. Thus a service orientation toward citizens is not simply absent, it is a foreign concept” (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002: 8).²⁸⁵ Since their survival depends critically on pleasing politicians and maintaining power over clients, bureaucrats in patronage democracies, to again borrow a phrase from Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, will “tend to opt for token implementation of official policies, doing just enough to give the appearance of delivering services according to formal regulations and procedures while informally trading public resources for power, influence and cooperation” (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002: 19).

The more political democracies function as patronage democracies and the stronger the patrimonial nature of politico-bureaucratic relations, therefore, the less likely it will be that passive representation will translate into active representation. Whereas, generally speaking, bureaucrats in modern Weberian bureaucracies may often have good reasons to utilize and maximize decision-making discretion in the implementation of public policy, bureaucrats in the patrimonial offices of patronage democracies typically have good reasons to *shun* it. Their main interest and focus will be to keep politicians in good humour, by refraining from active and intimate dealings with clienteles and from meddling into

in a maze of official titles whose meaning seems to change quite arbitrarily” (Weber 1978: 1030).

²⁸⁵ Or, as Weber argued the same point a little more laboriously: “The office and the exercise of public authority serve the ruler and the official on which the office was bestowed, they do not serve impersonal purposes” (Weber 1978: 1031).

redistributive decisionmaking. Future research could further explore these hypothesised connections between patronage democracy, patrimonialism and unrepresentative bureaucracy. Likely candidates for such research would be other substantive policy sectors in the Indian polity such as education, health and policing, other patronage-democratic polities in Africa (Nigeria, Zambia, Senegal), Latin America (Argentina, Mexico) and the post communist world, as well as ethnically plural clientelist post-industrial polities such as Belgium.²⁸⁶

(2) *Client demand for active representation in patronage democracies is likely to be low*

If democracies function as patronage democracies this will also have repercussions for the benefit-seeking strategies of policy clients. As I have shown, the most important reason why (untouchable) clients in Sitapur do not approach bureaucrats for policy benefits is because they do not expect –and rightly so– that bureaucrats can do their work as well as politicians can. Since politicians tend to appropriate bureaucratic discretion in their quest for patronage, clients have good reasons to approach politicians rather than bureaucrats. Bureaucrats may also be much more difficult to approach than politicians, given their incentive to keep their contacts with clients to a bare minimum (see above). Ethnic ties or commonalities may be important in benefit-seeking in patronage democracies. However, such ties will tend to be important in complicating or galvanizing

²⁸⁶ Going by the evidence presented by other students, further research in other Indian policy sectors would probably be not very fruitful as far as *falsification* of these hypotheses is concerned, however. According to Paul Brass, “the post-Independence structure of political-bureaucratic relationships has [. . .] been *fundamentally transformed* in the direction of a patrimonial regime in which the political leadership selects officers who are personally loyal, who serve their narrow political interests, and who expect reciprocal preferments in return” (Brass 1995 (1990): 55, my emphasis). If widespread and systematic frontline abandonment by DLBs were to be taken as a fair indicator of patrimonially induced discretion shunning, Indian policy sectors such as education and health would seem to be very unlikely arenas for the operation of representative bureaucracy (see Banerjee and Duflo 2006; Drèze and Gazdar 1996: 65-6, 79).

relations between clients and politicians, not those between clients and bureaucrats. Hence, the more political democracies function as patronage democracies, the less clients' demand for active representation.

Future research on benefit-seeking strategies of clients in patronage democracies might focus on the same polities as mentioned under (1). In as far as these polities have been described in earlier scholarly treatments as examples of the so-called "patron-client model" of politics, new empirical research should explicitly allow for the possibility that clients in these polities need not be the "pavlovian agents" that this literature has often taken them to be. Like the north Indian dust-level clients discussed in this study, clients in other patronage democracies may well act, react and engage in many different ways to the realities and logic of patronage politics, of which voting in exchange for favours and services is but one of the many imaginable ones. They may pursue alternatives to voting such as brokerage, office seeking and party militancy, for example, or refrain from seeking engagement with state officials and public benefits altogether (cf. e.g. Auyero 1999: 300-1; Hilgers 2006).

(3) Categories are not groups. This is likely to negatively affect their groupness

As this study has illustrated, passive representation, clearly, cannot be expected to translate into active representation for any kind of collectivity. Indian untouchables are, for most intents and purposes, better understood as a category rather than a group. Though differentiating those Indian individuals who possess and share the attribute of untouchability from those who do not, may be quite useful for various purposes -untouchability, for example, is a fairly reliable indicator of poverty, level of education, land possession, employment opportunities, calorie intake etc.- it has turned out to be of little use in understanding people's behaviour as bureaucrats or clients of administrative programs. Untouchable bureaucrats behave much like "general" bureaucrats and untouchable villagers, similarly, seek public benefits in much the same way as other poor and low caste, though touchable, villagers do.

Simply because categories like “the untouchables” are easy to think or seem plausible ways to make sense of a complex world, this does not mean that they are also necessarily units of social action. Even if people have in common such a seemingly bizarre, far-reaching and all determining attribute as untouchability, this need not mean that they are bound to share self-understandings, perceive common interests and act collectively to pursue shared objectives. Social *categories*, that is, collections of people sharing a common attribute, should therefore not be confused or conflated, at least not in principle, with *groups*, that is, with “mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded [collectivities] with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity and capacity for concerted action” (Brubaker 2002: 169).²⁸⁷ In other words, categorical memberships, as Brubaker and Cooper have put it, “imply nothing about the *depth, resonance, or power* of [.] categories in the lived experience of the persons so categorized” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 26-7). They are, at best, a *potential* basis for group formation or groupness (Brubaker 2002: 169). Since social categories may have low, or altogether lack, groupness, this should appropriately temper our expectations of active representation in the case of categories. Active representation, after all, requires high groupness.

Distinguishing between categories and groups may not only help us account for unrepresentative bureaucracies; it may also help account for and alert us to the possibility that levels of active representation for sub-categorical segments may be higher than for the category as a whole. Categories often comprise of sub segments that, unlike the category as a whole, *are* groups or, at least, have more group-like qualities. Each of the different untouchable jatis

²⁸⁷ This is, of course, as Brubaker and Cooper admit, a rather exigent definition of groups for which only very few real-world groups would seem to be able to qualify. Their important point is, however, that for some collectivity to qualify as a group its “members” should be bound by more than categorical commonality. This “more” is “relational connectedness” (by which I understand, with Yamagishi and Kiyonari, “the existence of actual or imaginary interactions” (Yamagishi and Kiyonari 2000: 116)) supplemented by what Weber called a *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* (a feeling of belonging together) (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 20).

discussed in this study, for example, possesses more groupness than the category of untouchables as a whole which, as we have seen, is primarily characterized by disunity and low groupness (precisely *because of the higher groupness of and mutual hostility among its constituent elements*). Even if I myself did not observe active representation in the case of jatis, it certainly seems more likely to occur in their case than in the case of the composite category of untouchables. Sally Selden's suggestion that the absence of active representation for Native Americans observed by her might be explained by "crosscutting tribal loyalties" within the broader category of Native Americans similarly testifies to a theoretically fruitful sensitivity to the importance of distinguishing between categories and their constituent groups.²⁸⁸

(4) In vertically stratified societies, the groupness of ethnic groups will tend to vary with their social status; the lower a group's ranking in the ethnic hierarchy, the lower its groupness. The groupness of stigmatized groups is likely to be specially low.

Even if we single out "real" groups, rather than categories, as units of analysis, this still does not mean that we may expect passive representation to translate into active representation. Even if group identity salience is high, that is, even if group members are willing to show solidarity and are desirous of promoting ingroup interests and extending preferential treatment to fellow groupmembers, they may still fail to do so. The reason is that group members may lack the requisite power to pursue ingroup favouritism in the face of outgroup efforts to prevent them from doing so. As we have seen, such a lack of requisite group power is also partly responsible for the absence of active representation on the Sitapuri dust-level. Quite

²⁸⁸ Frank Thompson, in an important 1976 article, also asserted that racial communities "may, of course, be heterogeneous" and that "behavior which actively represents some segments of that community may not represent other segments" (Thompson 1976: 220). The suggestion implied in these remarks, that active representation may be higher for constituent segments (groups) than for whole "communities" (categories) has gone wholly unheeded by representative bureaucracy scholars, however: they have continued to prefer categories, especially minority categories, over groups in their research designs.

a few untouchable DLBs stressed that they wanted to do “something special” for their community, but insisted that they could not do so because more powerful and resourceful general bureaucrats were taking good care to prevent and sabotage such efforts. Likewise, one of the reasons that untouchable villagers usually fail to act *en bloc* is because they fear dabang retaliation.

Indian untouchables’ low groupness thus in large part seems to stem from the fact that they find themselves at the bottom of a vertically stratified ethnic hierarchy, leaving most of them –even those among them who seem a little better-off– relatively resourceless and powerless and, therefore, unable to pursue ingroup interests, even if they actively resent their lowly status. If the case of Indian untouchables is any indication, it seems plausible to expect that members of other low status groups in vertically stratified systems of group relations, also, will find it difficult to actively promote and represent ingroup interests. Conversely, members of high status groups in plural societies will find it relatively easy to act corporately and display ethnic favouritism (as well as to sabotage outgroup active representation), simply because they have the power and resources to do so.²⁸⁹

Other things being equal, in vertically stratified ethnically plural societies active representation by ingroup bureaucrats would therefore seem to be far less likely to occur for lowly ranked groups than for highly ranked ones. This should, moreover, be especially true of bureaucratic systems in the developing world where majority groups have been known for making special efforts to safeguard their hold over bureaucracy to secure their privileged social positions (also see chapter 1).²⁹⁰ Especially in these societies,

²⁸⁹ Adam Herbert made this very point in a 1974 article with regard to minority administrators in the United States. Obviously having black administrators in mind, Herbert argued that little was to be expected of “minority” administrators in terms of active representation. They were held hostage by several powerful forces beyond their control and therefore had to overcome insurmountable odds in order to merely survive and advance within public bureaucracies (Herbert 1974; Murray et al. 1994: 411-2).

²⁹⁰ Craig Jeffrey’s research (referred to at various points in chapters 5 and 6) on the economic strategies of the Jats in western UP highlights this point particularly well for dominant caste groups in India.

then, the opportunities for relatively powerless minority bureaucrats to impact, through active representation, public distribution flows to ingroup advantage may be extremely slight. Future research could probe more deeply into the question of the extent, modalities and forms of the impact of vertical ethnic stratification on groupness and active representation, preferably by using comparative research designs. As almost all ethnically heterogeneous societies are vertically ranked, at least to some extent, opportunities for such research are near endless.

Research into the questions of differential levels of groupness and active representation in ethnic hierarchies should have special consideration for stigmatised groups, a specific species of low status groups. Members of stigmatized groups, like members of ordinary minority groups, suffer from such concomitants of minority status as relative powerlessness and resourcelessness. But what distinguishes them from ordinary minority group members is that they are furthermore plagued by stigma, or spoiled identity, making them into objects of scorn, hatred, fear or -as in the case of Indian untouchables- *disgust* to members of majority outgroups. Given the great advantages arising from being considered "normal", members of stigmatized groups, like untouchable bureaucrats in India, have good reasons to try and minimize the unwelcome effects of stigma by downplaying or concealing their stigmas.²⁹¹ Members of stigmatized groups will thus tend to disidentify from their social identity and, by implication, from other "ingroup" members. This will be specially true of elite members of such groups, who -like untouchable bureaucrats- have more leeway in manipulating their social identities than less fortunate ingroup members who -like poor untouchable villagers- can be more easily suppressed, treated as stigmatised and, on occasion, be forcibly kept in stigmatised

²⁹¹ Frank Thompson already hinted at the debilitating effects of stigmatised group membership for active representation three decades ago: "[W]hen a racial group lacks pride in its origins, civil servants from that group will more readily feel ashamed of their backgrounds. They will be more driven internally to play down their racial roots and to assimilate. To this end, civil servants may ferret out feelings of sympathy for their racial group and shuck off as many accoutrements of their racial origin (e.g. speech patterns, styles of dress) as they can" (Thompson 1976: 213).

ethnic ghettos by hostile outgroup members. Besides, bureaucratic elites among the stigmatized would seem to have little incentive to endanger their fickle reputations and hard-won careers by styling themselves as ingroup representatives since the stigmatised community at large typically has little to give in return for their services.²⁹² Other things being equal, the groupness of stigmatized groups will thus tend to be lower than that of ordinary low status groups, whence a *especially* low likelihood of active representation for such groups.

(5) *Groupness is likely to vary with the visibility of groups.*

The groupness of groups can vary because group identification involves individual choice. Individuals can and do make choices as to whether and when they will identify as members of a particular group. This also goes for ethnic groups. These are also characterized by plasticity; they are not, at least not as a matter of course, primordial givens (Barth 1996 (1969); Cohen 1978: 383; Ferdman 1992: 344-5). As a general rule, individuals will tend to activate those social and ethnic identities that are most useful to them (Yamagishi and Kiyonari 2000: 127). Untouchable bureaucrats, for instance, will more readily identify as bureaucrats than as untouchables because identification as a bureaucrat brings social status and prestige, while identification as an untouchable invites contempt, abuse, discrimination and outgroup members' withholding of social intimacy.

²⁹² As Roy and Singh describe the representational dilemmas of elite untouchables in a UP district: "[There is an] awareness [among elite Scheduled Castes] that in its struggle in retaining its advantages or in moving further in life the larger community is of little help. The larger community is still resourceless. As such, it is not in a position to render any help to those who are not only far ahead in the race of life but also require such assistance as is beyond the reach of the larger community . . . Surely they entertain the idea that [. . .] they would be able to do something worthwhile for their community. However, the very path they have chosen prevents them from effectively identifying themselves with the problems of their community and making serious attempts to solve them. It puts distance between them and their community and arouses suspicion about their intent" (Roy and Singh 1987: 122, 118).

To say that ethnic identification involves individual choice is not to say that such choices are completely free. As I pointed out above, it is easier for elite untouchables to disidentify from their stigmatised ethnic identity than it is for ordinary untouchables because the latter can more easily be forced by outgroups to identify as untouchables even if they would rather not do so. Outgroup power may thus be an important factor in constraining individuals' identificatory choices. Another such important constraining factor is the visibility, ascertainability or "known-aboutness" (Goffman 1963) of a particular identity or group membership. An individual's membership in a particular group may be so straightforward to outsiders that there is simply no use in trying to hide or suppress one's identity. This is, of course, the case for untouchable villagers whose identity is usually known about by fellow villagers, or can otherwise be readily ascertained by outsiders by their names and the location of their homes (cf. Berreman 1979: 167).

An untouchable bureaucrat's identity as an untouchable, on the other hand, is far less visible to outsiders. In the cities and towns, where most of them live, they can often rather easily disappear in the anonymous "white-shirted mass" of other white-collar workers. Besides, as Isaacs has perceptively noted, "in the busy-busy preoccupation of each one with his own concerns, and the trivialities that pass for talk between desks or over tea or soft drinks in the canteen, the prickly question of one's caste identity might just never arise, especially if one is careful to steer the talk away if it ever threatens to wander in that direction. Friendly associations can be maintained especially if they stay casual, if they are not allowed to carry over too far into the non-working hours, or to get too personal. In this way for a considerable time of every day and in a considerable area of life, one's identity as an ex-Untouchable can be quite largely effaced, or at least kept out of sight. It is not so much a matter of hiding one's caste but more a matter [. . .] of not announcing it" (Isaacs 1965: 131-2).

In other words, whether one's membership in a particular ethnic group is readily visible or, rather, may easily be kept hidden in the ordinary course of social interaction, is thus bound to have a decisive effect on one's capacity to disidentify from it. Since they are

physically indistinguishable from members of other castes, untouchable bureaucrats in India, for instance, will find it easier to disidentify than African American bureaucrats in the United States, most of whom cannot so easily conceal or suppress the skin-colour which sets them apart from the rest of the population (as Sylvester Murray, a black city manager from San Diego, put it: "I am black. There is no doubt about it. I cannot pass for white" (Murray 1988: 74)).²⁹³ Because membership in them provides both strong incentives *and* excellent opportunities for disidentification, groupness is likely to be lowest for "groups" like Indian elite untouchables who are lowly ranked, stigmatised *and* possess invisible characteristics.²⁹⁴

Even if disidentification by way of capitalizing on invisible group characteristics would seem to be preferred strategy of members of lowly ranked stigmatized groups, it may equally be pursued by "normal" individuals, including those who belong to ethnic majority groups. As far as bureaucrats are concerned, such passing may occur whenever bureaucrats feel that ingroup demands for partiality or advocacy cannot be reconciled with their professional role conceptions as neutral and impartial administrators, for example (Herbert 1974: 563; Selden 1997a: 118; Selden et al. 1998: 720).

Summing up

Though it is quite imaginable that passive representation may have its uses as a control on biased bureaucracies, this use is clearly conditional. Bureaucrats may shun the discretion required for the operation of representative bureaucracy, just as ethnic groups may

²⁹³ Passing, of course, is possible for (and has been known to be practiced by) light-skinned Afro Americans (Béteille 1977: 112; Kando 1972: 476).

²⁹⁴ Needless to say that passing, however effectively pursued, does not somehow "solve" the problem of stigma. In the long run, façade maintenance may become "an intolerable psychological burden" (De Vos 1995: 34). Besides, it provides "various possibilities for being blackmailed" (cf. Goffman 1963: 96). The "humiliation" of passing figures prominently in the autobiographical writings of north Indian Dalit writers such as Omprakash Valmiki (*Joothan*, 1997) and Surajpal Chauhan (*Tiraskrit*, 2002) (Wilkerson: 7).

fail to induce their members to act in the group's interest. Bureaucrats' willingness to utilize the discretion invested in their roles may be severely hampered in patronage democracies, where even street-level bureaucrats will find themselves spending much of their time and energy on keeping patrimonial patronage politicians in good humour rather than on channelling public benefits to nominal clients. Clients in patronage democracies, moreover, will not often seek out ingroup bureaucrats for public benefits because they have other, purportedly more effective options open to them to secure such benefits.

The capacity of collectivities to induce their members to act solidarily in the pursuit of common interests, their groupness in short, may vary widely. Sheer categorical commonality is at best a basis for groupness, but certainly no guarantee. Bureaucratic members of lowly ranked ethnic groups may be willing to pursue group interests through active representation but be prevented from doing so by their lack of requisite power and other necessary resources. Likewise, ethnic minority clients' efforts to demand active representation may be sabotaged by more powerful outgroup members. Groupness and active representation will be least likely in the case of stigmatised groups whose members have every reason to escape identification with their stigmas and, hence, with "their" group. Opportunities for successful disidentification are significantly improved when group membership is based on invisible membership criteria. The use of passive representation as an instrument of bureaucratic control is, thus, conditional: upon the type of democracy, the type of group and the visibility of group attributes.²⁹⁵ Both bureaucrats' willingness to utilize discretion and the groupness of collectivities are themselves variables, not givens.

²⁹⁵ Paul Van Riper, almost half a century ago, forefelt that representative bureaucracy as a control device might not travel well. "[T]o those at home and abroad who might desire to utilize the concept of a representative bureaucracy where it has never been in existence before [.] one must offer a warning. This concept carries with it some profound implications for any social system in which it is implanted, suggesting –as does any for of representation– at least a modest acceptance of pluralism, pragmatism and compromise. These are explosive doctrines to nations and societies which are not used to them and not prepared to accept their practical implications, political, economic, and above

3 Suggestions for future research: two pleas

I conclude this study with two pleas. The first plea is for appreciably widening up the currently dominant operational definition of active representation in terms of policy outputs; the second for more ethnographic studies of (un)representative bureaucracies.

Widening up the concept of active representation

In this study I have used the term active representation to refer to behaviour by group-identified bureaucrats through which they - intentionally or unreflectively; directly or indirectly; by way of advocacy, partiality, neutrality or a combination of these; and more than outgroup bureaucrats would in similar circumstances- actively promote ingroup interests by seeking to supply ingroup members with substantive benefits. Bureaucrats might therefore be called active representatives whenever they were found to act as advocates, defenders and watchdogs of ingroup interests. In line with common research practice I put this definition to work in a *policy implementation* context. The assumption was, as it had been in other empirical representative bureaucracy research, that active representation, were it to occur, would take the guise of *bureaucrats* channelling more and better *policy benefits* to *ingroup clients* (or, at least, of efforts to do so) within their *jurisdictions*.

I am quite sure that the untouchable DLBs whom I studied were not involved in such activities, certainly not regularly, routinely, let alone systematically. None of them, therefore,

all, ethical. Therefore, it may well be that for some the old Federalist semi-aristocratic civil service system, with its personnel selected through patronage but on a basis of relative competence may provide a better preliminary procedure. Or for others, some sort of relatively closed system based on an indigenous type of examination system may be more appropriate. Nations moving slowly toward full representation in legislative matters may find it equally appropriate to move slowly in 'reapportioning' their civil establishment. In details an almost endless number of patterns is possible" (Van Riper 1958: 558-9). In view of the findings of this study, Van Riper's early reservations about the uses of representative bureaucracy in "semi-aristocratic" civil service systems and conditions of patronage recruitment appear remarkably far-sighted.

qualified as active representatives as defined above. Nevertheless, in and outside Sitapur, I heard about and met up with more than a few bureaucrats who could quite appropriately have been branded as active representatives, had not the definition I used disqualified them. Some of these “pseudo” active representatives, for example, were indeed (reputedly) channelling benefits to ingroup members, but not necessarily or primarily to ingroup *clients* in their formal *jurisdictions*. On the contrary, they used (or, depending on the informant, were accused or championed for using) their position and influence as bureaucrats to arrange jobs, contracts, policy benefits, school buildings, bank loans, rifle licenses etc.) for family members, other close kin, or jati fellows in their native villages.

Some bureaucrats distinctly saw themselves, and were seen by others, as champions or representatives of the untouchable cause, but the way they filled in such roles did not involve the channelling of concrete or material benefits to ingroup members outside bureaucracy. Some, for example, were busy rewriting and reinterpreting Sanskrit texts and inventing glorious caste histories in an effort to create positive identities for the untouchables. Some were deeply immersed in the Buddhist conversion movement.²⁹⁶ Others were active in scheduled caste unions to defend, extend and monitor the implementation of untouchable employees’ rights. Still others were closely allied to the untouchable BSP party and used their positions of influence to channel rent-seeking proceeds to the party’s war chest. Some untouchable bureaucrats were, in effect, so involved in party politics that they had become, for all intents and purposes, politicians rather than bureaucrats. I also encountered a few retired bureaucrats who were operating private educational enterprises to train untouchable youth as skilled labourers. Also, in the decade or so preceding my fieldwork, senior untouchable officials had more or less managed to “capture” a few entire ministries of the state government -including transport, social welfare and excise; a considerable resource base from which

²⁹⁶ One retired IAS bureaucrat showed me a video of a recent conversion ceremony during which, he claimed, “thousands” of UP untouchables had adopted Buddhism as their new religion.

untouchables as a whole might profit, in terms of employment opportunities and patronage transactions.²⁹⁷

All this is not to say that I found all of the above forms of “pseudo” active representation to be very prevalent or effective. What I do feel is that there seems to be no good reason to allow such forms of active representation to remain below the radar screen of representative bureaucracy scholars. They can tell us much about what group-identified bureaucrats actually perceive as ingroup interests, to which sections, if any, of ingroup members they feel morally obligated or psychologically attached, and about what role bureaucracies can be made to play in the political economy and electoral politics of the societies in which they are embedded. If anything, it will prevent representative bureaucracy scholars from making the mistake of presuming to know what the interests of a given passively represented group really are.

More theory-driven ethnography

What I hope this study has demonstrated is that there is much to gain –theoretically, empirically and conceptually– from the sort of micro-level, fine-grained, ethnographic analysis attempted here. (By ethnography, I mean, such data-gathering methods as participant observation, in-depth interviews, conversations, passive observation of interaction and covert observation of interaction (Tilly 2006: 410)). Zooming in on everyday bureaucratic practice and routines, on the beliefs, motives, sentiments and understandings of individual bureaucrats and their clients, and on the incentives and constraints provided by their wider physical, cultural and moral

²⁹⁷ Untouchable officials provided the large majority of principal secretaries and secretaries (the highest and most influential administrative functionaries) of said ministries in the 1990s. Out of the eleven IAS officials whom I am aware of having served as (principal) secretaries Transport between 1993 and 2000, nine were untouchables. Likewise, nine out of thirteen IAS officers who served as (principal) secretaries Excise between 1990 and 1999, were untouchables. Barring the period between July 1995 and April 1997 (for which I did not manage to collect data), the highest administrative positions of the Social Welfare ministry have strictly been occupied by untouchable IAS officials.

“environments” can help us greatly in sharpening our theories, fine-tuning our concepts, and teaching us about things we did not even know existed. More than that, it can also generate new theories and fresh intriguing questions to explore.

This is not to say that ethnographers should simply get out there and start describing what they (think they) see. Fruitful, that is theoretically useful, ethnography should be theory-driven: triggered by intelligible answers to why-questions about empirical phenomena. And it is precisely to theory, our understandings of why the world is as it is, that ethnography can make such an important contribution. As Charles Tilly has put it:

If you believe (as I do) that how things happen is *why* they happen, then ethnography has great advantages over most other conventional social scientific methods as a way of getting at cause-effect relations. Most methods depend on correlations and comparative statistics, asking whether observed variation corresponds to plausible consequences of one condition or another. Ethnography engages the analyst in looking at social processes as they unfold rather than reasoning chiefly from either the conditions under which they occur or the outcomes that correlate with them (Tilly 2006: 410).

The kind of research I advocate is still in very short supply. Very few public administration scholars actually have much first hand knowledge and experience of the day-to-day issues and problems that keep their objects of study busy. Political scientists have, for the most part, not shown much interest in the functioning of bureaucracies, nor have anthropologists or, with a few notable exceptions, sociologists. “The materiality of files, orders, memos, statistics, reports, petitions, inspections, inaugurations, and transfers, the humdrum routines of bureaucracies and bureaucrats’ encounters with citizens”, as Gupta has rightly remarked, “are remarkably under-studied” (Gupta 2005a: 28; cf. also Jeffrey and Lerche 2001: 109; Punch 1986). If this study succeeds in persuading some that theory-driven ethnography of everyday bureaucracies is

useful, exciting and important it will have more than served its purpose.

Appendices

I Defining Active Representation

As is the case for most social science concepts, active representation means different things to different theorists. Since the concept is central to my study let me try and spell out as clearly as possible what, for the purpose of this study, will count as active representation and what will not. The term active representation was originally coined by Frederick Mosher, who used it to refer to behaviour whereby “the individual (or administrator) is expected to press for the interests and desires of those whom he is presumed to represent” (Mosher 1968: 12). Though Mosher’s original definition is obviously a bit nebulous and imprecise, with a little rephrasing and clarification it can be crafted into a clear and serviceable concept which may be readily operationalized for purposes of empirical research.

(1) I use the term active representation to refer to actual *behaviour*. Unlike other forms of representation that involve few or no concrete behavioural acts or activities on the part of those “doing” the representing, active representation is essentially a behaviour on the part of group-identified bureaucrats. This behaviour may comprise of *various* and *concrete* acts, activities and strategies.

(2) Active representation can be *both conscious and unconscious behaviour*: an active representative may deliberately and purposefully act for, or in the benefit of, given others, but he may equally do so out of an “unreflective tendency” (Hindera 1993a: 422; Stinchcombe 1986: 123).

(3) Active representation refers to behaviour; *not* -as some scholars have used the term- to the real or potential, expected or hoped for substantive effects of such behaviour. In my definition, bureaucrats may be considered active representatives, even if they do not

produce substantive effects. The mere fact of their *trying* to do so is enough for being defined as active representatives.

(4) Active representation is the *active* promotion of ingroup interests. One might think of various ways in which the passive representation of some group in the bureaucracy could translate into substantive benefits for that group. The very presence of ingroup bureaucrats, for instance, may *restrain* outgroup bureaucrats from acting on their biases; because they fear the formers' disapproval or exposure, for example. In the longer run, ingroup bureaucrats might even *resocialize*, that is, change the values and stereotypical beliefs of outgroup bureaucrats and thus prevent them from harming ingroup interests. Also, the sheer presence of ingroup bureaucrats may *provoke an increased demand* for bureaucratic services and benefits by ingroup clients. In meeting such increased demand, bureaucracies may produce substantive effects for ingroup clienteles without ingroup bureaucrats ever actively engaging in the representation of ingroup interests (Lim 2006: 195-7). What sets these sources of substantive effects apart from active representation is that they need not involve much action on the part of group-identified bureaucrats: whatever representation they "do", they largely do by simply being present, by *being* -in the vocabulary of representative bureaucracy theory- passive representatives. Active representation, in contrast, occurs when bureaucrats actively (seek to) influence the allocation of benefits to ingroup clients.

(5) Active representation may involve *advocacy*, *partiality* or *neutrality* or a combination of these. Bureaucrats may actively represent their groups' interests by advocating the discontinuation of (real or perceived) outgroup bias or discrimination. When active representatives take up advocacy roles they seek to represent ingroup interests *indirectly*, through influencing the behaviour of outgroup bureaucrats or other relevant others. Advocacy turns into partiality when bureaucrats' ingroup bias leads them to attempt to provide more substantive benefits to ingroup members than to equally eligible, worthy or deserving outgroup members (see Lim 2006: 195). As partial behaviour, active representation may be illegal

or otherwise objectionable (because it is felt to violate the norm of administrative neutrality, for example) but it is not always, necessarily or by definition so.²⁹⁸ Bureaucrats may also prove themselves active representatives by being neutral implementors of public policy. This form of active representation may occur in conditions in which bureaucracy as a whole is partial to specific, usually dominant, group interests. In such conditions, bureaucrats who belong to bureaucratically neglected groups may benefit ingroup clients a great deal by neutrally following implementation rules to the letter.

(6) Active representation concerns the representation of ingroup interests. Whereas passive representatives represent the *attributes* of their group's membership, active representatives represent the ingroup's interests. Active representation thus goes beyond the sharing of common traits -shared skin colour, language, dresscodes, cultural practices, cherished values, religious beliefs and ideological convictions- with other ingroup members or feeling sympathy for them; it pertains to actual behaviour of officials in the group's interest (cf. Pitkin 1967: 115-6; Thompson 1976: 202-3).

(7) Active representation strictly refers to the representation of *ingroup interests*. Though it is perfectly imaginable that outgroup-bureaucrats seek to promote ingroup interests, such behaviour does not count here as active representation.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Mosher himself saw active representation primarily as partial behavior and therefore considered it, at least in as far as it would "run rampant" in bureaucracy, "a major threat to orderly democratic government" (Mosher 1968: 12).

²⁹⁹ In a general way, people promoting the interests of groups to which they themselves do not belong is, of course, quite a prevalent phenomenon. Many whites, for instance, supported the civil rights movement in the US and the anti-apartheid movement in South-Africa. In India, religious reform movements that have historically sought to improve the status and material conditions of low caste groups have often, if not typically, been led by high caste individuals. Labour movements have usually been led by non-labourers. And likewise, present-day movements in western democracies seeking to better the plight of the poor, ethnic minority groups, and asylumseekers are often organized by non-poor, ethnic majority, national citizens.

(8) Active representation is a *relative* concept. If, in a particular case, all bureaucrats, regardless of their respective group identities, were somehow to be found equally responsive to the interests of a specified group, singling out the responsive behaviour of ingroup bureaucrats as active representation would not make any sense. In other words, ingroup bureaucrats' behaviour can only be considered as active representation when it tends to be *more* responsive to ingroup interests than outgroup bureaucrats' behaviour in comparable circumstances.

(9) Active representation of ingroup interests concerns the provision of *substantive benefits*. Defining active representation as interest representation still leaves room for, at least three, differing *conceptions* of group interests. These might respectively be called the formal, the democratic and the substantive conceptions. The formal conception holds that an active representative A represents ingroup interests whenever he produces outcomes that a passively represented ingroup member B *would have* produced had he been in A's position and circumstance (Meier 1993b: 7-8; Selden 1997a: 42). The *democratic* conception considers active representation to be occurring whenever a bureaucrat does what the *majority* of ingroup members want (Thompson 1976). The substantive conception, finally, accepts active representation as occurring whenever group-identified bureaucrats' behaviour generates substantive benefits to ingroup members (Hindera 1993a; Hindera 1993b; Meier 1993b; Meier and Stewart 1992; Selden 1997a: 63; Thompson 1976: 203).

The formal and democratic conceptions have important drawbacks. What makes the formal conception problematic is that it does not allow for empirical verification. We simply cannot know whether B would have done the same as A. And even if we could, who would be the "right" B for establishing whether active representation has occurred in a particular instance?³⁰⁰ The main

³⁰⁰ Meier and Nigro (1975) have suggested that B may be thought of as the congregated ingroup possessing the same expertise and information as active representative A (discussed in Thompson 1976: 9). While solving the formal conception's theoretical problem of determining who is B, their

problem with the democratic conception is also operational: it is usually beyond the practical means and capacity of researchers to establish what the majority of some group wants. Besides, there is the issue whether what people want is also or by definition (in) their interest. Might people not be said to have “real” interests, regardless of what they (think or say they) want?

In this study I employ a substantive conception of group interests because, unlike the other two conceptions, it readily allows for empirical operationalization. It is easy to think of the sort of benefits that actively representative bureaucrats could provide: they might create or help shape policies that address ingroup problems, facilitate the allocation of public goods to ingroup members (and prevent the allocation of public bads), provide access to decisionmakers, reactively check or otherwise express disapproval of excesses or discriminatory behaviour by outgroup bureaucrats, or, more generally, make the process of governing more congenial to ingroup members (Hindera 1993a: 417; Lim 2006: 196; Meier 1993b: 8; Selden et al. 1998: 727). A substantive conception of group interests is also quite appropriate here, since Indian quota seekers have typically and explicitly defended reservations as a vehicle for making sure that state benefits effectively trickle down to poorly represented groups.

(10) The sort of benefits that active representatives can supply to ingroup members vary with the positions they occupy in the administrative hierarchy and the roles their organizations have created for them. High-ranking senior bureaucrats may promote or create ingroup-friendly policies, for instance, or use the authority and discretion invested in their roles to hire ingroup employees or seek out ingroup contractors for agency projects (Meier 1993b: 8). Street-level bureaucrats, by contrast, are much more likely to benefit ingroup members by supplying them with concrete program benefits or offering sympathetic treatment. Active representation is

suggestion does not solve the operational problem of verifying the occurrence of active representation. To actually bring together even a small number of ingroup members with the same information and expertise as A would seem to be impossible.

thus not a certain, well-defined, characteristic activity (cf. Pitkin 1967: 112): the concrete acts and activities making up actively representative behaviour may vary widely and depend on context.

To sum up, in this study active representation refers to behaviour by group-identified bureaucrats through which they -intentionally or unreflectively; directly or indirectly; by way of advocacy, partiality, neutrality or a combination of these; and more than outgroup bureaucrats would in similar circumstances- actively promote ingroup interests by seeking to supply ingroup members with substantive benefits. Active representatives, in other words, are bureaucrats who act as advocates, defenders and watchdogs of ingroup interests and who try to provide concrete and tangible, context-dependent benefits to ingroup members.

II Rural development administration and political arenas in UP

Geographical Unit	No.	Administration	Politics
State	1	Secretary Rural Development Director Rural Development	Vidhan Sabha: Chief Minister (CM)
Division	6	Commissioner	
District	83	Assistant Commissioner District Magistrate (DM) Chief Development Officer (CDO) Project Director (PD) District Development Officer (DDO)	Zilla Panchayat: Zilla Adhyaksh
Block	901	Block Development Officer (BDO) Assistant Development Officers (ADOs)	Kshetra Panchayat: Block Pramukh
Nyay Panchayat	-	Gram Vikas Adhikari (VDO) Gram Panchayat Adhikari (VPO)	Obsolete
Village	58.605	Gram Panchayat Vikas Adhikari (GPVA)	Gram Panchayat: Pradhan

III Fieldwork hamlets

<i>village/hamlet</i>	<i>gram panchayat (block*)</i>	<i>population and caste composition</i>	<i>main informants</i>
Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad (B)	Mixed caste, main settlement. Around 2100 inhabitants, roughly 900 SCs. Jatis include Brahmins, Kurmis, Pasis and Chamars	Assembled villagers (50), including pradhan Guru Bacan Lal (SC), BDC-member Kaushal Kishore, and visiting VLO Khushi Ram (Chamar), Junior Engineer of the Public Works Department and driver of "touring" PCS recruits
Akbarpur	Ghaila (Pah)	25 families. Almost all Pasi, rest Kurmi (2)	Hamlet's biggest landowner Lalji Kurmi and around 15 others, both Kurmis and Pasis as well as a visiting Lala (Kayasth)
Amaura	Amaura Moti Singh (Par)	Around 100 families: Pasi (30), Chamar (30), Kahar (10), Thakur (6), Bhurji (2), Tamboli (Chaurasiya) (2), Yadav (3), Lohar (1), Balmiki (1), Lala (2), Kurmi (1), Brahmin (2), Dhanuk (4), Muslim Nath (2)	Assembled Pasi men
Arro	Arro Khamajatpur	Thakurs, Brahmins, Guptas, Nau, Arak,	Siraj (Muslim boy), Ram Ashis Pandey

	(Par)	Bhurji, Badhai, Lohar, Teli, Chamar, Kahar, Pasi, Dhobi, Muslim Ansari and Sardar (Sikh)	(Bhurji), Ravindra Singh Thakur ("Barakke")
Baragaon	Baragaon (Par)	Chaurasiya (700 persons), Thakur (200), Brahmin (300), Gaddi (Ghosi muslims) (700), Ahir (250), Pasi and Harijans (200), Chamars (150).	Chaurasiya villagers, IAY beneficiary Muni Ram (Pasi)
Bhaira	Bhaira - Bhaikuntpur (K)	Mixed caste village, including Muslims and Pasis	Shahid Khan and Azmal Khan (Muslims)
Bhawania purva	Majhiya (Pah)	Chamar (4), Pasi (15), Bhanghi (3), Pattarkat/Khanjar (probably Koris) (3)	Untouchable villagers (unidentified jatis), visiting Kurmi landowner Bahadur and other assembled villagers
Chamaranpurva (1)	Thaura (R)	30 to 35 families, all Chamars	
Chamaranpurva (2)	Ulra (B)	35 families, all Chamars	Mahabir Prasad, Bhola Nath and ward leader Chote Lal
Chamarbasti	Arro Khamajatpur (Par)	Population of around 350, all Chamar	Assembled villagers (20-30), including Ambedkarite dramatist Mangu Lal
Chandraseni	Chandraseni (R)	About 45 families: Thakurs (40), the rest Goswamy/Gosains (Brahmin pujaris, followers of Lord Krishna), and Chamars	Village "landlord" Lallu Singh Thakur, <i>pradhanpati</i> Kanhai Lal (Pasi)
Chitauni	Thaura (R)	50-60 families: 5 to 7 Brahmin families, rest Chamars	Assembled villagers, including Shivnat (Chamar) and a Mehtar man
Dafra	Ulra (B)	Kurmi, Brahmin, Kalwar (Jaiswal), Chamar, Pasi, Dhobi, Bhurji	Kota-operating and locally influential members of Dixit (Brahmin) family, local VLO Ram Naresh (Pasi), <i>pradhan</i> Ashirvadi (Pasi), visiting VLO Babu

Fatehpur (Chamaran- purva)	Rikhauna (Par)	Around 500 people, 25 bakris, all Chamars	Ram (Chamar) Puttu Lal, a licensed dead cattle remover; and Fakire, a beggar.
Gaura Gausapur	Mahauli (K) Arro Khamajatpur (Par)	Predominantly SCs 25 families, about 200 people. Two jatis: Yadav (75%) and Arak (25%)	<i>Panch</i> Ram Prasad Middle peasant (60 bighas) Babu Ram Yadav, Neth Ram Vishwakarma (visiting Harijan from Arro)
Ghaila	Ghaila (Pah)	Mixed caste, main settlement. Around 135 families. Thakur (3), Pandit (3), Ahir (10), Nau (12), Kahar (11), Muslim (35), Chamar (13), Gadariya (shepperd) (15), Bhurji (12), Chikwa (butchers) (6), Darzi (1), Teli (3), Lunia (4)	Assembled Chamar villagers
Haibatpur	Haibatpur (B)	Muslims (Jhula and Pathan), Chamars	Muslim pradhan supporters; Medhai (Chamar)
Karaundi Korinpurva (new)	Baragaon (Par) Majhiya (Pah)	Yadav (35 families), Lodh (35), Pasi (80) Kori	Assembled Pasi villagers Daya Ram -an old man-, and Mewa Lal, in his forties
Loniapurva	Haibatpur (B)	Around 85 voters; all Chamars	Old BSP activist Baba Mahant, various by-standers among whom one Sant Lal Pradhanpati Mishra (Brahmin)
Mahauli Mahuwapurva	Mahauli (K) Haibatpur (B)	- Ahirs, Lunias (saltmakers, probably MBC), Mangtas (beggars) and Pasis	Ahirs (Yadavs) and Pasis, including up-pradhan Nattha Ram
Mamarkhapur	Ghaila (Pah)	Predominantly Kurmi, sprinkling of Muslim and Bedhia (landless "beggars")	Prabhu Mahaut and family (Bedhia), assembled Kurmi peasants

Majhiya	Majhiya (Pah)	who raise other people's cattle; ST) Pasi (30 families), Chamar (55), Murao (10), Thakur (6), Bhurji (5), Pandit (2), (Teli) 1 and others	Old Thakur man, Nai <i>up-pradhanpati</i> , Pasi <i>lekhpal</i> , local VLO Ram Khilawan Rawat (Pasi), TRYSEM-trained youth-weaver
Nawabpurva	Arro Khamajatpur (Par)	50 families, 400 people. Harijan (22), Arak (16), Nau (1), Yadav (1), Dhobi (1), Pandits (7), and a few others	Assembled villagers, including IAY beneficiary Janki (Harijan woman) and two <i>panches</i> from the hamlet
Padariya	Manikapur (B)	Predominantly Pasi (50)	Pradhan Satrohan Lal (Pasi) and VLO Santosh Kumar
Paisiya	Paisiya (Sidh)	Around 1600 people: Thakur (137), Brahmin (11), Kahar (95), Nai (70), Yadav (141), Bari (8) Muslim (113), Chamar (754), Dhanuk (16), Valmiki (6), Pasi (145), Dhobi (35), Nath (9), Badhai (carpenters) (25), Bhurji ("gram"-heaters) (5)	VLO and local landlord Samar Singh (Thakur)
Pasinpurva (1)	Thaura (R)	About 100 "houses" and 1000 inhabitants; strictly Pasi	Assembled villagers (mostly youngsters and women)
Pasinpurva (2)	Chandraseni (R)	About 350 inhabitants, almost all Pasis. Also Lala (Kayasth) (2), Lunia (3)	Assembled villagers, including a postman and a panch from the hamlet
Patara Kalan	Patara Kalan (K)	Mixed caste, OBC-dominated	Pradhan Shyam Lal (SC)
Patti	Mahauli (K)	15 houses	Female IAY beneficiary
Piprakalan	Piprakalan (B)	Mixed caste hamlet	Pyarelal (Dhobi), Rasool Ahmed (Muslim) and an old man called Maurya

Piprasa	Haibatpur (B)	Raidas (Chamars), Vermas (Kurmis) and Bhargavas (Pasis)	Old Pasi man
Rahika	Ghaila (Pah)	Total around 120 families: Pasi (60-70), Chamar (6), Nau (2), Darzi (muslim taylor) (5), Behna (muslim weavers) (2), Kurmi (40)	Assembled villagers of most jatis in the hamlet
Rikhauna	Rikhauna (Par)	Large <i>qasbah</i> (market) village. Half of the population is Hindu -Pasi and Pandit-, the other half Muslim (Ansaris)	Mr. Shukla (Pandit)
Ulra	Ulra (B)	Thakur, Lala, Lohar, Bhurji, Yadav, Mali, Kasai (butchers), Darzi and Pattarkatia	Member of "local mafia" Bhupendra Singh Thakur, former pradhan Ram Yadav, local dalaal Mahendra Tripathi Pradhan
Lucknow village	[District Lucknow]		

* (B) = Biswan, (Par) = Parsendi, (Pah) = Pahla, (R) = Reusa, (K) = Kasmanda

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Samenvatting:

Onaanraakbare Bureaucratie

Het onderwerp

De vraag die in deze studie centraal staat is of de aanwezigheid van groepsgenoten in de bureaucratie tot voordeel kan strekken van een etnische groep als geheel. Dit is een belangrijke vraag, al is het alleen maar omdat politici in multi-etnische samenlevingen vaak heel wat energie steken in het verkrijgen en verzekeren van de toegang van hun groep tot banen in de bureaucratie in de kennelijke overtuiging dat dit inderdaad het geval is. Daarbij is er momenteel een krachtige stroming in de politieke filosofie die de erkenning van etnische groeprchten in politieke instituties zoals de bureaucratie bepleit. Van niet-groepsgenoten, zo is de idee, kan nu eenmaal niet verwacht worden dat zij de belangen van andere groepen zullen behartigen, zeker niet als het gemarginaliseerde groepen betreft.

Om na te gaan of, zoals representatieve bureaucratie theoretici het noemen, "passieve representatie" -de fysieke vertegenwoordiging van groepsgeïdentificeerde ambtenaren- zich inderdaad kan vertalen in "actieve representatie" -het nastreven van ruimere groepsbelangen door deze groepsgeïdentificeerde ambtenaren- bestudeerde ik de casus van India's onaanraakbare bureaucratie. De term onaanraakbaar verwijst in dit verband naar individuen die behoren tot de allerlaagste kasten in het Indiase kastensysteem, een sociale hiërarchie gebaseerd op noties van rituele reinheid. Hun aanraking wordt van oudsher als onrein beschouwd door leden van hogere Hindoe kasten.

Mijn keuze voor India's onaanraakbare bureaucratie was, behalve door mijn persoonlijke fascinatie voor het onderwerp, ingegeven door een aantal inhoudelijke overwegingen. Ten eerste hebben honderdduizenden, zo niet miljoenen, onaanraakbare individuen zich gedurende de afgelopen zestig jaar een baan als ambtenaar weten te verwerven. Dit hebben zij vooral te danken aan het uitgebreide stelsel van positieve discriminatie dat door de Indiase overheid in de jaren vijftig, vlak na de onafhankelijkheid, in het leven werd geroepen. Dit stelsel kende tot voor kort in de zogeheten "reserveringen" van banen en promoties in de ambtenarij voor onaanraakbaren haar belangrijkste pijler. Reserveringen waren ten tijde van hun invoering expliciet *bedoeld* om actieve representatie aan te moedigen: de gedachte was dat onaanraakbare ambtenaren als "waakhonden" de belangen van de onaanraakbare bevolking in het oog zouden kunnen houden, iets wat bezwaarlijk kon worden verwacht van de door hoge kasten gedomineerde "machinery of the old pattern".

Ten tweede zijn de Indiase onaanraakbaren een paria-groep *par excellence*, wier onbenijdenswaardige positie van oudsher gekenmerkt wordt door een opeenstapeling van hardnekkige sociale belemmeringen. Onaanraakbaren gaan traditioneel gebukt onder talrijke voorschriften (dwangarbeid, onderdanig gedrag, residentiële segregatie), verboden (op commensaliteit met leden van hogere kasten, op het gebruik van een groot aantal publieke en "luke" goederen en diensten) en sancties (huisverbranding, marteling, publieke vernedering, aanranding, vergiftiging) die ervoor moesten zorgen dat ze op hun plaats bleven, gepaste afstand van leden van hogere kasten hielden en permanent herinnerd werden aan hun laagheid. Tot op de dag van vandaag zijn de meesten van de meer dan 150 miljoen Indiase onaanraakbaren extreem arm. Te onderzoeken of en hoe zij worden beïnvloed door overheidspogingen om hun positie te verbeteren leek me op zichzelf interessant en belangrijk: het gaat hier immers om een enorme bevolkingsgroep, bij elkaar zo'n 2 procent van de wereldbevolking.

Ten derde leek me de idee dat, in India, onaanraakbare ambtenaren iets zouden kunnen betekenen voor hun kastegenoten buiten de bureaucratie niet vergezocht. Al sinds de koloniale tijd,

toen de zelfbenoemde “guardians” van de *Indian Civil Service* het “steel frame” vormden van gekoloniseerd India, is de Indiase bureaucratie bijna een synoniem voor discretie. Na de onafhankelijkheid, in 1947, vertaalde de nieuwe overheidskoers van centraal geplande economische groei zich in de oprichting van een groot aantal ambtelijke hiërarchieën met ruime en verregaande regelgevende bevoegdheden en discretie. In het “vergunningenrijk” dat in het spoor hiervan snel tot bloei kwam en waarin voor bijna alles wel officiële toestemming of een vergunning nodig was, verwierven ambtenaren al snel de soort van macht die absoluut corrupteert (Dhavan 1997: 276). Ook tegenwoordig nog genieten Indiase ambtenaren een machtige reputatie en een hoge maatschappelijke status.

Tenslotte was mijn keuze voor een studie van India's onaanraakbare bureaucratie ook ingegeven door de wens om de grenzen van de representatieve bureaucratie theorie af te tasten. Toen ik, nu zo'n tien jaar geleden, met mijn onderzoek begon, had nagenoeg al het empirisch onderzoek naar het eventuele verband tussen passieve en actieve representatie zich afgespeeld binnen ambtenarijen in de Verenigde Staten. Hierdoor had (en heeft) de representatieve bureaucratie theorie een nogal parochiaal Amerikaans karakter: nieuwe bijdragen aan de theorie bouwden voort op bewijs en nadenken over Amerikaanse bureaucratieën en werden geformuleerd door Amerikaanse onderzoekers die zich voornamelijk richtten tot Amerikaanse collega's, issues en debatten. Ik had het idee dat er wellicht heel wat te leren viel, zowel inhoudelijk als theoretisch, door het representatieve bureaucratie onderzoek weg te halen uit haar nogal in zichzelf gekeerde Amerikaanse omgeving. Ik denk dat ik gelijk heb gekregen.

Het onderzoek

De vertaling van passieve in actieve representatie is het centrale leerstuk in de zogeheten representatieve bureaucratie theorie. Het mechanisme dat volgens representatieve bureaucratie theoretici de vertaling van passieve in actieve vertegenwoordiging kan verklaren

is tamelijk eenvoudig. Individuele ambtenaren beschikken bijna altijd over discretie: de ruimte om keuzes te maken naar eigen goeddunken. Superieuren kunnen hun ambtenaren nooit helemaal en precies duidelijk maken wat er van hen verwacht wordt; en zelfs als ze dat konden ontberen ze meestal de benodigde middelen – kennis, tijd, mankracht, geld en juridische mogelijkheden- en soms ook de wil en het doorzettingsvermogen om eventueel ongewenst gebruik van discretie door hun ondergeschikten te detecteren, monitoren en sanctioneren. Als gevolg van deze communicatie- en controleproblemen is discretie praktisch onvermijdelijk in grote bureaucratische organisaties en hebben ambtenaren vaak een grote handelingsvrijheid: in het interpreteren en vertalen van de betekenis van de opdrachten van hun superieuren, bijvoorbeeld, of in het bepalen van welke opdrachten ze zullen uitvoeren en hoe ze dat zullen doen.

Ambtelijke discretie is geen probleem, zo menen representatieve bureaucratie theoretici, zo lang ambtenaren maar gerekruteerd worden uit, en hiermee een dwarsdoorsnede vormen van, alle relevante maatschappelijke groepen. Mensen met verschillende achtergronden ondergaan namelijk verschillende socialisatie ervaringen en maken zich *en passant* verschillende waarden, voorkeuren en vooringenomenheden eigen die vaak hun hele leven belangrijk voor hen blijven. Omdat ook ambtenaren zich bij de uitoefening van hun discretie zullen laten leiden door deze groepsgerelateerde waarden en opvattingen is het te verwachten dat zij beslissingen zullen nemen die de belangen, behoeften en wensen van “hun” groep weerspiegelen (of “representeren”). Mogelijke klanten van de bureaucratie zullen bovendien meer geneigd zijn om gebruik te maken van beleid dat voor hen bedoeld is als zij zich –als gevolg van hun groepsverwantschap- gemakkelijker kunnen identificeren met, en beter op hun gemak voelen bij, de ambtenaren die belast zijn met de uitvoering ervan.

Doordat etnische groepen neigen naar een zeer sterke “groepheid” is actieve representatie in hun geval des te waarschijnlijker. Etnisch groepslidmaatschap, zeker in de etnisch diverse samenlevingen in Azië, Afrika en het Caribische gebied, kenmerkt zich vaak door stevige interpersoonlijke loyaliteiten en

door een sterke bereidheid van groepsgenoten om zich opofferingen te getroosten voor het belang en het welzijn van de groep als geheel. Dit impliceert dat actieve representatie wel eens het *verwachte* rolgedrag van ambtenaren in deze politieke stelsels zou kunnen zijn. Niet alleen is de kans groot dat zij speciale verplichtingen voelen jegens leden van hun eigen etnische groep; tegelijkertijd zullen zij ook beducht zijn voor eventuele groepssancties die hen ten deel zouden kunnen vallen als zij zich aan deze verplichtingen onttrekken, zeker als zij zich, als ambtenaar, in een prima positie bevinden om gunsten aan anderen te verlenen. In samenlevingen waar etniciteit sterk gevoeld wordt kan actieve representatie dus een heel rationele invulling van ambtelijke discretie zijn.

Echter, actieve representatie kan, zelfs in het geval van etnische groepen, niet altijd en overal worden verwacht. Niet alle ambtenaren hebben bijvoorbeeld evenveel discretie. Bovendien kunnen zij werkzaam zijn in bureaucratieën die toevallig weinig te bieden hebben aan leden van de eigen etnische groep. Volgens representatieve bureaucratie theoretici wordt actieve representatie waarschijnlijker naarmate aan vier randvoorwaarden is voldaan: 1) de betreffende ambtelijke organisatie heeft een welwillende missie jegens de te representeren etnische groep; 2) het beleid van de organisatie oefent een zekere aantrekkingskracht uit op groepsleden; 3) de discretie van ambtenaren betreft discretie op "straatniveau", dat wil zeggen, het concrete niveau waarop ambtenaren en burgers in direct, persoonlijk contact met elkaar staan, en 4) er is een kritische massa van "eigen" ambtenaren binnen de organisatie aanwezig.

De zogeheten plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie voldoet aan al deze randvoorwaarden en leek bij aanvang van het onderzoek dus een veelbelovende casus voor een empirische toetsing van de representatieve bureaucratie theorie. De plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie werd in de vroege jaren vijftig van de vorige eeuw in het leven geroepen om handen en voeten te geven aan het nieuwe overheidsbeleid van geplande economische ontwikkeling van het platteland. Sindsdien is deze bureaucratie uitgegroeid tot een ingewikkelde hiërarchie van organisaties en functies die zich helemaal uitstrekt van "the center"

-de federale overheid in New Delhi- tot aan de ontelbare dorpen op het platteland. Wat ik in deze studie de “dust-level” plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie noem beslaat de onderste twee lagen van deze hiërarchie, de zogeheten “blokken” en het legertje van dorpsontwikkelingsambtenaren.

De “dust-level” bureaucraten (DLBs) die deze twee echelons bemannen (er werken geen vrouwen in deze functies) zijn belast met de uitvoering van een uitgebreid en steeds wisselend pakket van door de centrale- en deelstaatoverheid geformuleerde en gesubsidieerde plattelandsontwikkelings- en armoedebestrijdingsmaatregelen. Het gaat hierbij ondermeer om de introductie en promotie van landbouwinnovaties (nieuwe zaden, kunstmest, biogas), de voorziening van basisbehoeften (water, behuizing), de verbetering van de lokale infrastructuur (wegen, dorpszalen), de creatie van werkgelegenheid en het aanbieden van scholingsmogelijkheden. Het werk van DLBs komt in belangrijke mate neer op het selecteren van de begunstigden van de vele programma’s en, zodoende, op het verdelen van gelden, materiële zaken, aandacht, kennis en informatie.

De “dust-level” plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie beschikt, zoals gezegd, over de vier eigenschappen die representatieve bureaucratie theoretici associëren met een grote kans op actieve representatie. De welwillende missie van deze bureaucratie jegens de onaanraakbare bevolking blijkt vooral uit de aanzienlijke quota’s aan beleidsvoordelen die in nagenoeg alle belangrijke armoedebestrijdingsprogramma’s voor onaanraakbaren worden gereserveerd. Deze beleidsvoordelen zijn bovendien zeer gegeerd. Het gaat hierbij namelijk heel vaak om geld, datgene waaraan de meeste onaanraakbaren nu juist een groot gebrek hebben. De manieren waarop de “dust-level” bureaucratie dit geld ter beschikking stelt -in de vorm van leningen met lage rentes, inkomen in ruil voor werk en subsidies- zijn bovendien veel aantrekkelijker dan hun voornaamste alternatief: het lenen van lokale geldschietters of woekeraars.

DLBs beschikken, althans op papier, ook over heel wat handelingsvrijheid op straatniveau. Zo zijn de formele regels die DLBs geacht worden toe te passen bij de uitvoering van het

plattelandsontwikkelingsbeleid buitengewoon complex waardoor ze veel ruimte laten voor eigen interpretaties en keuzes. Een grote “span of control” en de opeenstapeling van verantwoordelijkheden in de lagere regionen van de plattelandsontwikkelingshiërarchie beletten superieuren normaal gesproken om zich een adequaat beeld te vormen van de handel en wandel van hun ondergeschikten. De mogelijkheden voor effectieve controle worden verder verzwakt door het feit dat de streken en dorpen waar DLBs werken soms moeilijk bereikbaar en begaanbaar zijn. Dankzij reserveringen is er, tenslotte, binnen de Indiase bureaucratie aan onaanraakbare ambtenaren geen gebrek, ook niet binnen de “dust-level” plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie.

Om na te gaan of, hoe, wanneer en waarom deze gunstig geachte omstandigheden zich ook inderdaad zouden vertalen in actieve representatie verrichte ik tussen 1998 en 2000 zo’n 16 maanden bestuursantropologisch onderzoek in Sitapur, een district in de centraal gelegen Awadh regio van de Noord-Indiase deelstaat Uttar Pradesh. Met bijna 140 miljoen mensen is Uttar Pradesh India’s meest bevolkingsrijke deelstaat. De sociale structuur verraadt er de belangrijkste trekken van een ideaaltypisch kastenstelsel. “Hoge” kasten genieten er de gecombineerde voorrechten van grootgrondbezit en hoge rituele status en bekleden er dominante posities in de landbouw, politiek, bureaucratie, handel en industrie. Uttar Pradesh is in veel opzichten een arm en achtergebleven gebied: de (kinder)sterfte-, ondervoedings-, armoede-, en analfabetismecijfers zijn er ongekend hoog.

Het district Sitapur is, net zoals de andere gebieden op de Gangesvlakte, zeer dichtbevolkt. Er wonen bijna 3 miljoen mensen op een gebied van nog geen 6000 vierkante kilometer; bijna 500 mensen per vierkante kilometer. Topografisch gezien bestaat het gebied uit twee delen: een hogergelegen vlakte die ongeveer tweederde van het areaal beslaat en de oostelijke laaglanden die lokaal bekend staan als de *gaanjar*. De bevolking spreekt Awadhi, een dialect van het Hindi. Sitapur is in veel opzichten een doorsnee Noord-Indiaas district. De grote meerderheid van de bevolking leeft er in dorpen en verdient de kost in de landbouw. Er wordt vooral suikerriet, rijst en koren verbouwd. Hoge kasten, vooral Thakurs,

en, in sommige delen, prominente Moslim families bezitten er het leeuwendeel van het land. Behalve een paar grote suikerfabrieken en enkele steenovens is er weinig industriële activiteit in Sitapur. Een derde van de bevolking is onaanraakbaar en behoort grotendeels tot één van de twee grote onaanraakbare kasten in het district, de Pasis of de Chamars. Onaanraakbaren in Sitapur bezitten vaak kleine stukjes land maar bewerking ervan levert doorgaans veel te weinig op om hun families te kunnen voeden. Veel onaanraakbaren proberen te overleven met dag- en seizoensarbeid in de landbouw. Anderen trekken weg naar omliggende steden waar ze hun geluk beproeven als fabrieksarbeiders, bouwvakkers of riksjarrijders. Veel kansen op beter, geschoold, werk hebben ze niet; de meesten zijn analfabeet.

In Sitapur waren ten tijde van mijn veldwerk in ongeveer 280 DLBs werkzaam, onder wie ruim 60 onaanraakbaren. In theorie hadden deze onaanraakbare ambtenaren talloze mogelijkheden om zich te manifesteren als actieve vertegenwoordigers. Zo zouden ze de onaanraakbare cliënten in hun blokken en dorpen bijvoorbeeld een dienst kunnen bewijzen door, heel neutraal, de uitvoeringsregels van de armoedebestrijdingsprogramma's nauwgezet toe te passen (deze reserveren immers vastgelegde quota's van beleidsvoordelen voor onaanraakbare beleidscliënten) of, iets partijdiger, zoveel mogelijk onaanraakbare begunstigden te selecteren. Of ze zouden kunnen proberen hun kastegenoten zo goed mogelijk te informeren over het bestaan, de regels en procedures van beleidsprogramma's (het grote publiek in India weet vaak weinig tot niets over overheidsbeleid dat hen aanbelangt), eventueel discriminatoir gedrag van niet-onaanraakbare collega's intern aan de kaak te stellen of zich wat minder veeleisend te betonen wat betreft het vragen van steekpenningen in ruil voor hun diensten (een endemisch verschijnsel in India).

In de tijd die ik in Sitapur doorbracht observeerde, volgde en sprak ik -in overheidskantoren, op straat en bij mensen thuis- met een groot aantal onaanraakbare en niet-onaanraakbare DLBs en dorpelingen, alsook met vele lokale politici en andere bekleders van semi-politieke rollen die in India de kloof tussen staat en

samenleving overbruggen. Toch was het geen gemakkelijk onderzoek. De onderwerpen waarin ik het meest geïnteresseerd was -reserveringen, onaanraakbaarheid, kaste-identiteit en het functioneren van de bureaucratie- bleken zo gevoelig te liggen dat ik deze, om wantrouwen, problemen en ongemak te voorkomen, bijna altijd alleen maar met de grootste omzichtigheid kon benaderen. Toch denk ik dat het me uiteindelijk, met wat geluk, goede hulp en volharding, gelukt is om “toegang” te krijgen tot de “dust-level” bureaucratie van Sitapur.

Het argument

Hoewel ik naar Sitapur vertrok in de verwachting, en met de bedoeling, daar de basis te leggen voor een “grounded theory” van actieve representatie door onaanraakbare ambtenaren, hield ik uiteindelijk precies het tegenovergestelde over: een beschrijvende en verklarende analyse van een *on*representatieve bureaucratie. Ondanks de ogenschijnlijk gunstige voorwaarden voor actieve representatie in Sitapur, bleken onaanraakbare DLBs zich namelijk zelden of nooit te manifesteren als actieve vertegenwoordigers van de belangen van hun onaanraakbare cliënten.

De meeste DLBs -zowel onaanraakbare als niet-onaanraakbare- ontvluchten routineus de frontlinie van de uitvoering van het plattelandsontwikkelingsbeleid. Om politieke straffen te ontlopen, hun banen veilig te stellen en succesvol te overleven in turbulente factiepolitieke omgevingen, verpachten zij op massale schaal hun discretionaire vrijheden aan politieke makelaars. Daarbij hebben onaanraakbare DLBs, in een poging om het probleem van hun gestigmatiseerde identiteit enigszins draaglijk te maken, de neiging om zichzelf onzichtbaar te maken *als* onaanraakbaren. Frontliniedesertie en identiteitsverhulling zijn zo gemeengoed dat ze actieve representatie door onaanraakbare DLBs zeer onwaarschijnlijk maken.

Alhoewel de regels die de implementatie van plattelandsontwikkelingsbeleid structureren, in theorie althans, aanzienlijke discretionaire macht aan DLBs delegeren, maken maar

zeer weinig DLBs gebruik van deze macht. DLBs bezoeken zelden de dorpen in hun rayons en zien, dus, maar weinig stof. Ze beperken hun rondreizen door hun rayon tot een minimum en bezoeken meestal alleen die personen die lokaal invloedrijk zijn. DLBs weten dan ook maar weinig te vertellen over de ontwikkelingsactiviteiten in "hun" dorpen. DLBs, ongeacht hun precieze kaste-identiteit hebben, zo bleek mij al snel, de frontlinie van de uitvoering van plattelandsontwikkelingsbeleid grotendeels verlaten.

Het wijdverbreide absentisme van de DLBs in Sitapur betekent niet dat de vruchten van de armoedebestrijdingsprogramma's de plattelandsbevolking niet bereiken. Integendeel, ondanks DLBs' desertie van de frontlinie, worden er wel degelijk begunstigden van beleidsprogramma's geselecteerd en beleidsvoordelen verspreid. Het zijn normaal gesproken echter niet de ambtenaren van de plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie die deze beslissingen nemen maar lokale politici ofwel, zoals ze meestal worden genoemd, lokale *neta's*. Door selectie- en verdeelbeslissingen voor hun rekening te nemen, slokken *neta's* in feite de *de iure* discretionaire macht van DLBs op. Plattelandsontwikkeling blijkt, met andere woorden, in de praktijk vooral een zaak van politici te zijn.

De meeste politici in Sitapur (en elders in India) opereren op basis van de gedachte dat de stemmen en groepssteun die zij nodig hebben om hun politieke ambities te verwezenlijken het best kan worden verworven door zich als patroons te gedragen tegenover hun kiezers: ze besteden het leeuwendeel van hun tijd en energie aan het lokaliseren, bemachtigen en verdelen van patronage. In de Indiase politiek kunnen bijna alle publieke goederen en diensten – denk aan overheidsbanen, waterputten, onderdak, wegen, grondeigendom, scholen, telefoon- en elektriciteitsaansluitingen, water, politiebescherming, pensioenen en dus ook de subsidies, leningen en werkgelegenheid van de armoedebestrijdingsprogramma's- worden omgezet in patronage en vaak gebeurt dit ook.

Om deze patronage beschikbaar te kunnen stellen aan hun cliënten zijn *neta's* sterk afhankelijk van de samenwerking en

medeplichtigheid van DLBs. Zo zijn *neta's* afhankelijk van ambtenaren voor betrouwbare informatie over de soort en hoeveelheid van de beleidsvoordelen die beschikbaar zijn voor "allocatie" in hun kieskringen. *Neta's* moeten ook op ambtenaren vertrouwen voor het bewaren van geheimhouding. Omdat (voortdurende) onwetendheid van dorpelingen essentieel is voor hun overleving als politieke patroons hebben *neta's* er immers alle belang bij dat DLBs de verspreiding van relevante informatie over beleidsvoordelen onder mogelijke cliënten actief beknotten. Daarnaast zijn *neta's* meestal ook aangewezen op de hulp van ambtenaren voor het in orde brengen van het nodige papierwerk. Om naringheid, zoals officiële inspecties van centrale instanties, te voorkomen is het namelijk cruciaal dat officiële papieren de door centrale beleidsactoren wenselijk geachte procedures en uitkomsten documenteren en weerspiegelen, in plaats van de van patronagetransacties doorspekte (en hiermee illegale) allocatiepraktijk.

De meeste DLBs in Sitapur zien niet goed in waarom zij de belangrijke *neta's* in hun werkgebied hun samenwerking zouden onthouden. Zo kunnen zij tamelijk gemakkelijk gedisciplineerd en gestraft worden door politici die hen onbehulpzaam achten. Het belangrijkste en meest gebruikte controle-instrument van Indiase *neta's* is hun macht om ambtenaren van de ene naar de andere post en locatie over te plaatsen. DLBs hebben over het algemeen een sterke afkeer van posten in afgelegen, primitieve ("backward") en "feodale" locaties, zeker als het daar ook nog eens wemelt van lokale "maffia's": netwerken of families die politieke en economische macht combineren en het gebruik van fysiek geweld tegen hun onwelgevallige elementen niet schuwen. DLBs zijn dan ook bereid erg ver te gaan om te voorkomen dat zij overgeplaatst worden naar dergelijke "strafposten": als samenwerking met lokale *neta's* blijkbaar de prijs is die hiervoor betaald moet worden zijn de meesten hiertoe graag bereid.

Een andere veelgebruikte methode om ambtelijke inschikkelijkheid af te dwingen is het in diskrediet brengen of besmeuren van de reputaties van DLBs. Heel vaak gaat het hierbij om beschuldigingen van corruptie. Zulke beschuldigingen kunnen

zeer schadelijk zijn voor DLBs omdat ze bij collega's en superieuren de indruk kunnen wekken dat zij hun werk eigenlijk niet goed aankunnen. DLBs die zich herhaaldelijk de woede van lokale *neta's* op de hals halen, hun reputaties bezoedeld zien, en rechtszaken tegen zich aangespannen weten kunnen over het algemeen op niet al te veel collegiale sympathie rekenen. Reputatiebeschadigende beschuldigen gaan daarbij geregeld gepaard met geweld of geweldsbedreigingen. Zoals ook in de rest van Uttar Pradesh, zijn politiek en geweld in Sitapur onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden: de bloei van politieke carrières gaat er hand in hand met de opbouw en inzet van geweldsmiddelen –spierkracht, (vuur)wapenswaartegen DLBs, die veelal alleen opereren, eigenlijk geen bescherming hebben.

Behalve door middel van bestraffingen proberen politici ambtenaren ook met beloningen tot samenwerking te bewegen. Samenwerkingsgezinde ambtenaren weten zich vaak beloond voor hun hand- en spandiensten met een deel van de inkomsten ("rents") die politici routinematig genereren met hun patronagetransacties. *Neta's* hebben een neusje voor de mogelijkheden tot inkomensvergarig die de plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie biedt: ze vragen of accepteren steekpenningen van dorpingen in ruil voor het "werk" dat zij voor hen (beloven te) verzetten, romen ontwikkelingssubsidies af, en maken winsten met ingenieuze besparingen op infrastructuurprojecten. Een deel van het geld dat *neta's* zo weten te verdienen dient als eigen inkomen; de rest is, gezien de ontoereikendheid of zelfs het ontbreken van officiële salarissen voor lokale politici, benodigd om hun politieke carrières uit te bouwen. Gegeven het grote belang van inkomen uit "rents" voor de meeste politici kunnen ambtenaren die bereid zijn tot assistentie bij het verzamelen ervan rekenen op aanzienlijke beloningen; ze kunnen er zelfs rijk mee worden.

De discretiemijding en frontliniedesertie van DLBs worden voorts verklaard door het probleem van factionalisme. Politieke macht in "dust-level" Sitapur is zwaar betwist en blijft meestal niet lang onuitgedaagd: lokale *neta's* zijn in de regel verwickeld in uitgesponnen en meestal bittere gevechten met politieke vijanden. Deze gevechten nemen doorgaans de gedaante aan van

factionalisme: een specifieke vorm van politieke strijd waarbij losse coalities van factieleiders persoonlijke conflicten uitvechten over concrete issues die, in essentie, vaak gaan over de toegang tot de patronage die beschikbaar is bij ambtenarijen als de plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie.

Ook al omdat Indiase ambtenaren volgens geldend recht niet gepost mogen worden in hun eigen geboortestreek zijn DLBs bijna per definitie buitenstaanders in de politieke arena's waarin zij werken. Hierdoor missen zij meestal de kennis die nodig is om factionele banden in kaart te brengen of om even adequaat te kunnen anticiperen en reageren op factionele conflicten als lokale politici dat kunnen. Indiase facties zijn namelijk per definitie buitengewoon instabiele, tijdelijke, ad-hoc coalities met constant fluctuerende lidmaatschappen. Dit alles heeft tot gevolg dat DLBs, in hun omgang met lokale cliënten en politici, nooit helemaal zeker kunnen weten met wie ze nu precies te maken hebben: met welke facties deze lieden verbonden zijn, bijvoorbeeld, of wat hun politieke invloed is en welke verborgen motieven ze hebben. DLBs zijn evenmin goed toegerust om te voorspellen welke risico's ze lopen wanneer ze zouden besluiten om hun medewerking aan bepaalde figuren te verlenen (en deze, zodoende, aan anderen te onthouden).

De meeste DLBs proberen zichzelf daarom te beschermen tegen de mogelijke, ongewenste gevolgen van factionele betrokkenheid -overplaatsing naar strafposten, reputatiebeschadiging, bedreigingen- door goede persoonlijke contacten te cultiveren met "grote" politici en ambtelijke superieuren die hen in geval van nood uit de brand kunnen helpen. Op een meer dagelijkse basis proberen DLBs factionele problemen te ontvluchten door nauwgezet de indruk weg te nemen dat zij de kant zouden hebben gekozen van een specifieke factie zonder hiermee, tegelijkertijd, onbehulpzaam te lijken. Dit blijkt maar al te vaak een zeer moeilijke evenwichtsoefening die een uitgekende combinatie van frontlinedesertie, uitbesteding van routine taken en sociale vaardigheden vereist. DLBs maken dan ook geregeld "fouten" en worden zo gestraft voor handelingen of nalatigheden die ze eigenlijk nauwelijks hadden kunnen vermijden.

Deze onplezierige werkomstandigheden maken dat DLBs, ongeacht hun kaste-achtergrond, zich meestal hulpeloos, ongerespecteerd en ontmoedigd voelen. Velen hebben zich neergelegd bij de idee dat ze weinig kunnen betekenen voor de arme plattelandsbevolking. Ook zijn ze vaak uitermate kritisch over de beleidsprogramma's die zij geacht worden uit te voeren omdat deze, zo vinden ze, juist factionalisme en "groepisme" in de dorpen *veroorzaken*. Als het niet zo moeilijk was om elders emplooi te vinden, zouden veel DLBs er waarschijnlijk voor kiezen om de plattelandsontwikkelingsbureaucratie te verlaten.

Bovenop DLBs' algemene teleurstelling over hun werk, organisatie en clientèle komt nog eens de disidentificatie van *onaanraakbare* DLBs met hun eigen gestigmatiseerde identiteit en met hun eigen groepsgenoten. Onaanraakbare DLBs zijn er over het algemeen van overtuigd dat ze niks speciaals voor hun eigen "gemeenschap" kunnen doen omdat hoge kasten in en rondom de plattelandsontwikkelingsorganisatie hen beletten de hiervoor benodigde macht en eigen "kanalen" op te bouwen. Om hun leven binnen de organisatie draaglijk te houden voelen veel onaanraakbare ambtenaren zich genoodzaakt om niet te koop te lopen met hun onaanraakbare identiteit, laat staan dat ze zich zouden profileren als actieve vertegenwoordigers van de onaanraakbare zaak. Velen proberen juist om hun associatie met onaanraakbaarheid te ontvluchten door middel van een aantal zogeheten "passing"-strategieën: strategieën die bij buitenstaanders de indruk moeten wekken dat ze eigenlijk helemaal niet onaanraakbaar zijn. Nogal wat onaanraakbare DLBs hebben bijvoorbeeld hun achternaam -die in India vaak iemands kaste-identiteit prijsgeeft- veranderd in een naam die hoge(re) kaste-status suggereert. Ook proberen ze al te intensief contact met kastegenoten te vermijden. Het resultaat van dit alles is echter wel dat onaanraakbare DLBs praktisch onherkenbaar, en hiermee letterlijk "onaanraakbaar", worden voor kastegenoten in hun clientèle.

Het wijdverbreide gebruik van frontliniedesertie, defensief terugdeinzen en identiteitsverhulling als overlevingsstrategieën impliceert dat van de actieve representatie van de beleidsbelangen

van “ingroep” cliënten door onaanraakbare DLBs nauwelijks sprake kan zijn. In de normale, dagelijkse praktijk hebben onaanraakbare DLBs noch de mogelijkheden, noch zwaarwegende redenen om zich als de zaakwaarnemers van onaanraakbare cliënten op te werpen. Het onvermijdelijke gevolg is, dus, een praktisch geroutiniseerde onderbreking in het *aanbod* van actieve representatie.

Het feit dat onaanraakbare DLBs veelal druk in de weer zijn om hun eigen hachje te redden sluit niet uit dat onaanraakbare cliënten wellicht toch zouden kunnen *proberen* om hen te benaderen: om hun verkiesbaarheid voor beleidsvoordelen te bepleiten, bijvoorbeeld, of een speciale behandeling te eisen in de naam van kasterwantschap. Echter, in de “dust-level” praktijk blijken onaanraakbare cliënten onaanraakbare DLBs zelden of nooit om de actieve vertegenwoordiging van hun belangen te vragen. Dit achterwege blijven van een *vraag* naar actieve representatie maakt het aanbod van actieve representatie door DLBs vanzelfsprekend des te onwaarschijnlijker: als onaanraakbare cliënten geen speciale behandeling claimen waarom zouden onaanraakbare DLBs dan de niet geringe persoonlijke risico’s lopen om deze toch te verlenen?

In tegenstelling tot enkele decennia geleden worden onaanraakbare dorpelingen door hun onaanraakbaarheid *an sich* niet langer belet om de lokale ambtenarij te benaderen voor beleidsvoordelen. Hun vrijheid, ook hun bewegingsvrijheid, is fors toegenomen. Toch hebben onaanraakbare cliënten (evenals andere arme cliënten van lage kaste komaf) een uitgesproken voorkeur voor meer indirecte en informele, “politieke” methoden van beleidsvoordeelverwerving, met name voor stemmen en beleidsmakelaardij (*dalaali*). Zij vinden deze methoden niet alleen veel gemakkelijker en effectiever maar ook minder gevaarlijk dan de directe benadering van ambtenaren. Deze laatste methode wordt dan ook nauwelijks gebruikt als strategie van beleidsvoordeelverwerving.

De onder arme dorpelingen van lage kaste komaf (ofwel “cliënten”) meest populaire vorm van voordeelverwerving is stemmen. Voor hen is stemmen niet zozeer een uiting van hun voorkeur als wel een instrumentele handeling: ze stemmen veelal voor kandidaten van wie mag worden verwacht dat ze de

verkiezingen kunnen winnen en dat ze, eenmaal verkozen, beleidsvoordelen naar hen door zullen sluisen. Dit betekent dat cliënten in lokale verkiezingen bij voorkeur hun stem geven aan kandidaten van hun eigen kaste, gehucht of wijk. In de grotere verkiezingen, voor het deelstaatarlement in Lucknow of het nationale parlement in New Delhi, geven onaanraakbare cliënten hoe langer hoe vaker hun stem aan de BSP, een politieke partij die zich expliciet opwerpt als de belangenbehartiger van onaanraakbaren en andere “kleine mensen”. Arme dorpingen begrijpen en accepteren dus de patronageloga van de Indiase politiek en handelen er ook naar: ze gebruiken hun stem om hun “eigen” man of vrouw op de juiste plek te krijgen en hopen beloond te worden in het geval deze persoon er ook daadwerkelijk in slaagt om een positie te bemachtigen van waaruit gunsten kunnen worden verleend.

Hoe populair stemmen ook is, het blijft een erg onbetrouwbare manier van beleidsvoordeelverwerving. Zo is stemmen in Uttar Pradesh niet altijd vrij. Kiezers worden er, ofwel door de inzet van brute kracht of door meer subtiele manipulaties van kiesprocedures, geregeld van weerhouden om hun stem uit te brengen. Er is ook altijd het risico dat de eigen kandidaat de verkiezingen niet weet te winnen of er, ondanks verkiezingswinst, niet in slaagt zich een patronagerijke positie te verwerven. Bovendien zijn veel *neta's*, althans in de ogen van arme dorpingen, getruce oplichters die er niet voor terugdeinzen om beleidsvoordelen achter te houden en hun eigen zakken te vullen als ze daarmee weg kunnen komen.

Als stemmen niets oplevert kunnen arme dorpingen op verschillende manieren reageren. Zo menen sommigen dat er eigenlijk weinig te doen valt aan politieke oplichters: zij berusten in het feit dat de overheid (*sarkaar*), ondanks de aantrekkelijke beloftes van *neta's*, weinig voor hen kan betekenen. Degenen die over de nodige financiële middelen beschikken kunnen ook proberen om zelf een politieke positie te veroveren. Een ander alternatief is om de hulp in te roepen van een zogeheten *dalaal*: een makelaar, tussenpersoon of “rommelaar” die gespecialiseerd is in het losweken van beleidsvoordelen bij *neta's* en ambtenaren. Dergelijke

dalaals zijn alomtegenwoordig in Sitapur en de vraag naar hun diensten is groot. Ze worden, als lokale mensen met wortels in de dorpen, meer vertrouwd dan ambtenaren, die juist meestal buitenstaanders zijn (en blijven). Bovendien zijn ze veel gemakkelijker te benaderen dan ambtenaren.

Arme dorpelingen zijn vaak trouwens heel slecht te spreken over ambtenaren. Ze verwijten hen niet alleen een slechte benaderbaarheid maar ook onbehulpzaam en neerbuigend gedrag. Daarbij zien ze ambtenaren, net zoals de meeste *neta's*, als onverbeterlijke oplichters die voornamelijk uit zijn op persoonlijk materieel gewin. Dit wantrouwen van arme dorpelingen jegens ambtenaren hangt overigens niet samen met eventuele verschillen of overeenkomsten in kaste-achtergrond: onaanraakbare en andere arme cliënten vertrouwen ambtenaren eenvoudigweg *in het algemeen* niet, *ongeacht* hun kaste. Hiermee is niet gezegd dat de inschakeling van *dalaals* wèl een probleemloze aangelegenheid zou zijn: *dalaals* vragen nog altijd wel een, vaak financiële, tegenprestatie voor hun diensten en om hen heen hangt, net zoals dat bij *neta's* en ambtenaren het geval is, ook vaak een schimmige waas van oneerlijkheid en dubieuze praktijken.

Ondanks de problemen en risico's die ermee gepaard gaan beschouwen cliënten stemmen en het inschakelen van *dalaals* toch als de meest effectieve en haalbare strategieën van beleidsvoordeelverwerving. Een ander, niet onbelangrijk voordeel van deze strategieën is ook dat ze, in hun ogen, *minder gevaarlijk* zijn dan de directe benadering van ambtenaren. Door ambtenaren direct te benaderen riskeren ze namelijk lokale "*dabang*" tegen zich in het harnas te jagen. Op het platteland van Sitapur zijn dergelijke sterke, grootgrondbezittende kasten of families een centrale realiteit in het dorpsleven. De *dabang* zijn, zowel in politiek als economisch opzicht, erg machtig. Zo zijn veel quasi-landloze en in de schulden stekende dorpelingen van hen afhankelijk voor werk en pachtgrond. Maar meer nog dan op hun grootgrondbezit rust de dominante positie van de *dabang* in toenemende mate op hun toegang tot, en controle over, de lokale staat en al hetgeen deze te bieden heeft: subsidies, vergunningen, werkgelegenheid, infrastructuur, rechtsbescherming. De *dabang* hebben er dus alle belang bij, en zijn ook vaak simpelweg

in staat, om arme dorpingen te beletten hun eigen toegang (*pahunch*) tot lokale ambtenarijen te bewerkstelligen. Vooral hun toegang tot het lokale politieapparaat is een bijzonder machtig instrument in dit verband.

In theorie zouden onaanraakbare en andere arme dorpingen kunnen proberen om zich te weer te stellen tegen deze monopoliseringsdrift van de *dabang* door zich te organiseren. Maar in de praktijk missen onaanraakbare cliënten hiervoor echter vaak de nodige macht en hulpbronnen. Een andere reden voor het grotendeels achterwege blijven van onaanraakbare collectieve actie is dat de onaanraakbaren zelf onderling erg verdeeld zijn; ze zijn nog altijd eerder een categorie te noemen dan een echte groep, verdeeld als ze zijn in verschillende kasten. Zo praktiseren onaanraakbare kasten onaanraakbaarheid onder elkaar, eten ze niet samen en huwelijken ze hun zonen en dochters ook niet aan elkaar uit. Soms is er sprake van sterke wederzijdse verachting, en bijna altijd van het nauwgezet koesteren (en betwisten) van onderlinge hiërarchie.

Het gebrek aan eenheid onder de verschillende onaanraakbare kasten valt grotendeels te verklaren vanuit de logica van het kastenstelsel die kasten als het ware verplicht tot het ontvluchten van onderschikking aan juist die kasten die vrijwel even "hoog" of "laag" zijn als zijzelf. Hierdoor gaat veel energie zitten in het benadrukken van onderlinge verschillen en het kracht bijzetten van claims van relatief hogere status. Hun onderlinge fragmentatie en naijver zorgt ervoor dat onaanraakbaren op het platteland er maar moeilijk in slagen om hun niet geringe numerieke sterkte om te zetten in een effectieve en georganiseerde macht. Vandaar ook dat het hun maar zelden lukt om direct, achter de rug van lokale *dabang* om, de beleidsvoordelen op te eisen waarop ze feitelijk recht hebben.

Nog eens samengevat: arme dorpingen hebben een sterke voorkeur voor politieke methoden van beleidsvoordeelverwerving. Ambtenaren spelen nauwelijks een rol, zeker geen nadrukkelijke of directe, in hun voordeelverwervingsactiviteiten. In tegenstelling tot wat men misschien zou hebben verwacht, is er onder onaanraakbare cliënten dus nauwelijks vraag naar actieve representatie: ze vinden

andere alternatieven eenvoudigweg aantrekkelijker en minder gevaarlijk. Onaanraakbaarheid, zo blijkt, speelt in het beste geval dus slechts een zeer beperkte rol als organiserend principe in het functioneren van politiek en ambtenarij in “dust-level” Sitapur. De categorie “onaanraakbaren” doet, om met Charles Tilly te spreken “grenswerk”, of het werk van distinctie: het is veel betrouwbaarder in het definiëren van verbanden en het lokaliseren van verschillen tussen leden van verschillende categorieën dan in het creëren van interne solidariteit, homogeniteit of verbondenheid (Tilly 1999: 72). Dit alles wil niet zeggen dat onaanraakbare dorpingen niet profiteren van het plattelandsontwikkelingsbeleid van de Indiase overheid, want dat doen ze zeker. Maar het betekent wel dat als ze dat doen, de kans klein is dat dit te danken is aan het aanbod van actieve representatie van “ingroep” DLBs of aan hun eigen vraag hiernaar.

De implicaties

Mijn verklaring voor de onrepresentatieve onaanraakbare bureaucratie is essentieel economisch: er doet zich geen actieve representatie voor omdat de betreffende ambtenaren niet bereid of in staat zijn deze *aan te bieden* en omdat de betreffende cliënten “hun” ambtenaren hierom onvoldoende *vragen*. Er blijkt, ondanks de schijnbaar zeer gunstige omstandigheden, dus geen *markt* te zijn voor actieve representatie op het Noord-Indiase “dust-level”, althans niet één waarin vraag en aanbod van *onaanraakbare* ambtenaren en cliënten bij elkaar komen. Het ontbreken van een dergelijke markt duidt erop dat twee centrale assumpties van de representatieve bureaucratie theorie -die van discretiemaximalisatie en “groepisme” (de idee dat verzamelingen van individuen met gemeenschappelijke kenmerken zich als groepen zullen gedragen)- niet algemeen houdbaar zijn. De door deze studie en de vakliteratuur aangereikte theoretische inzichten in de klaarblijkelijke *determinanten* van discretiemaximalisatie en groepisme suggereren dat actieve representatie, op zijn minst, varieert met de *soort* van democratie en groep in kwestie en met de zichtbaarheid van

groepskenmerken. *On*representatieve bureaucratieën, zo lijkt het, zijn vooral te verwachten in het geval van patronagedemocratieën en/of laag gerangschikte groepen in verticaal gestratificeerde samenlevingen.

Een voorwaarde voor actieve representatie is niet alleen dat ambtenaren, zoals representatieve bureaucratie theoretici benadrukken, discretie hebben maar ook dat ze *bereid* zijn deze te gebruiken. Mijn studie van de onaanraakbare bureaucratie suggereert dat de bereidheid van ambtenaren om gebruik te maken van hun discretie ernstig wordt beperkt in zogeheten patronagedemocratieën: democratieën, zoals de Indiase, waarin politiek vooral draait om het verschaffen van materiële en psychische voordelen aan kiezers in ruil voor electorale steun. Politici in zulke democratieën hebben goede redenen, en doorgaans ook de mogelijkheden, om de formele en informele discretionaire besluitvormingsmacht van ambtenaren voor zich op te eisen. Ambtenaren, op hun beurt, zullen zich –gezien de grotere macht van politici- gedwongen voelen om mee te werken aan de patronagetransacties van politici, in de hoop hiervoor te worden gecompenseerd met een deel van de door politici gecontroleerde voordelen.

Ambtenaren in patronagedemocratieën zullen normaal gesproken ook meer oog en aandacht hebben voor politici, die hen kunnen belonen en straffen, dan voor hun eigenlijke cliënten, van wie zij veel minder te verwachten of te vrezen hebben (zolang hun relatie met politici goed is, tenminste). Interpersoonlijke relaties tussen ambtenaren en hun cliënten zullen dus tot een minimum beperkt worden en, voorzover ze überhaupt bestaan, gekenmerkt worden door ambtelijke desinteresse, neerbuigendheid, plundering en afpersing. Omdat hun overleven, soms bijna letterlijk, afhangt van het behagen van politici en het onder de duim houden van cliënten, zullen ambtenaren, zoals de DLBs in Sitapur dat doen, vaak kiezen voor een combinatie van schijnuitvoering van beleid en een informele uitruil van beleidsvoordelen voor macht, invloed en samenwerking (cf. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002: 19).

Dus, hoe meer democratieën functioneren als patronagedemocratieën, des te onwaarschijnlijker het is dat passieve

representatie zich zal vertalen in actieve representatie. Daar waar ambtenaren in moderne, Weberiaanse bureaucratieën er wellicht vaak alle belang bij hebben om hun discretie in de uitvoering van beleid te gebruiken, zelfs te maximaliseren, hebben ambtenaren in patronagedemocratieën normaal gesproken juist goede redenen om discretie te mijden. Hun voornaamste doel zal zijn om politici tevreden te stemmen, door zich niet actief in te laten met clientèle's en met redistributieve besluitvorming.

Als democratieën functioneren als patronagedemocratieën zal dit ook gevolgen hebben voor de voordeelverwervingsstrategieën van beleidscliënten. De belangrijkste reden waarom (onaanraakbare) cliënten ambtenaren niet benaderen voor beleidsvoordelen is omdat ze er -waarschijnlijk terecht- geen vertrouwen in hebben dat ambtenaren hen even goed kunnen bedienen als politici. Bovendien zijn ambtenaren, die hun contacten met cliënten tot een minimum beperken, vaak toch al moeilijk te benaderen. Etnische verwantschap kan een belangrijke rol spelen in de verwerving van beleidsvoordelen in patronagedemocratieën. Maar een dergelijke verwantschap zal gewoonlijk van veel groter belang zijn bij het smeren of compliceren van verhoudingen tussen cliënten en politici dan die tussen cliënten en ambtenaren. Dit impliceert dat naarmate democratieën meer functioneren als patronagedemocratieën, de vraag van "ingroep" cliënten naar actieve representatie kleiner zal zijn.

Deze studie suggereert ook dat actieve representatie, behalve met de soort van democratie, ook varieert met de soort van "groep" in kwestie. Zo zijn Indiase onaanraakbaren in veel opzichten beter te begrijpen als een *categorie* dan als een groep. Het differentiëren van Hindoes op basis van onaanraakbaarheid kan best nuttig zijn -het levert interessante inzichten op over verschillen in armoede, onderwijsniveau, landbezit, werkgelegenheid, en calorieverbruik, bijvoorbeeld- maar het leert ons blijkbaar weinig over het gedrag van mensen als ambtenaar of beleidscliënt: onaanraakbare ambtenaren gedragen zich immers min of meer hetzelfde als "gewone" ambtenaren en de manier waarop onaanraakbare dorpelingen proberen beleidsvoordelen te bemachtigen verschilt

nauwelijks of niet van die van andere arme dorpingen van lage kaste komaf.

Het feit dat een categorie als “de onaanraakbaren” gemakkelijk denkt en nuttig lijkt voor het begrijpen van een complexe samenleving als de Indiase, wil dus nog niet zeggen dat zulke categorieën ook eenheden van sociaal *handelen* zijn. Zelfs al mensen een zo op het eerste gezicht tamelijk bizar, verreikend en allesbepalend attribuut als onaanraakbaarheid gemeenschappelijk hebben, betekent dit nog niet dat ze ook hetzelfde tegen de wereld aankijken, dezelfde belangen percipiëren of samenwerken om gezamenlijke doelen te bereiken. Sociale categorieën, dat wil zeggen: verzamelingen van individuen met een gemeenschappelijk attribuut, moeten daarom niet verward worden met groepen: “elkaar wederzijds beïnvloedende, op elkaar georiënteerde, effectief communicerende, begrensde verzamelingen van individuen met onderlinge solidariteit, een gemeenschappelijke identiteit en een vermogen tot gezamenlijke handelen” (cf. Brubaker 2002: 169). Sociale categorieën vormen dus in het beste geval een *potentiële* basis voor groepsvorming of “groepheid”. Dit zou onze verwachtingen ten aanzien van actieve representatie in hun geval dienovereenkomstig moeten temperen: actieve representatie vereist immers een hoge groepheid.

Maar zelfs in het geval van “echte” groepen hoeft passieve representatie nog niet te leiden tot actieve representatie. De casus van de onaanraakbare bureaucratie in Sitapur laat zien dat actieve representatie achterwege kan blijven zelfs als groepsleden in principe bereid zijn tot solidair gedrag en het nastreven van gemeenschappelijke belangen: onaanraakbare ambtenaren en cliënten ontberen eenvoudigweg de benodigde macht om deze bereidheid in “vertegenwoordigende” daden om te zetten. Dit gebrek aan macht hangt direct samen met de positie van de onaanraakbaren in de sterk hiërarchisch georganiseerde Indiase samenleving. Dit doet vermoeden dat ook laaggerangschikte etnische groepen in andere verticaal gestratificeerde multi-etnische samenlevingen het moeilijk zullen vinden om hun eventuele vertegenwoordiging in de bureaucratie tot voordeel te laten strekken van de groep als geheel.

Dit zal zeker het geval zijn voor gestigmatiseerde groepen: groepen, zoals de Indiase onaanraakbaren, wier leden niet alleen relatief machteloos zijn maar bovendien veracht, gehaat of gevreesd worden door de rest van de samenleving. Leden van dergelijke groepen zullen de sterke neiging hebben om hun gestigmatiseerde identiteit, en hiermee hun banden met andere groepsleden, te ontvluchten. De kans op een dergelijke succesvolle disidentificatie wordt groter naarmate de *zichtbaarheid* van stigma's afneemt: hoe moeilijker buitenstaanders kunnen vaststellen of iemand daadwerkelijk een stigma heeft, hoe gemakkelijker het voor gestigmatiseerde individuen wordt om zich als een "normaal" lid van de samenleving te gedragen. De relatieve onzichtbaarheid van hun stigma maakt bijvoorbeeld dat onaanraakbare ambtenaren relatief eenvoudig kunnen ontsnappen aan hun negatieve identiteit en daarmee ook aan eventuele groepsdruk tot actieve representatie.

Hoewel het, kort samengevat, dus niet uitgesloten is dat passieve representatie zich vertaalt in actieve representatie is dit in ieder geval niet meer dan een *voorwaardelijk* effect. Dit effect lijkt nogal onwaarschijnlijk in het geval van patronagedemocratieën en/of laaggerangschikte etnische groepen in verticaal gestratificeerde samenlevingen. Zowel de bereidheid van ambtenaren om hun discretie te gebruiken als de neiging van individuen om zich als groepsleden te gedragen zijn, zo is gebleken, zèlf variabelen, geen gegevenheden.

Curriculum vitae

Bas van Gool (Hooge en Lage Mierde, 8 December 1970) behaalde in 1989 zijn gymnasiumdiploma aan het Carolus Borromeuscollege in Helmond. Hij legde in 1996 het doctoraal examen bestuurskunde af aan de Universiteit Leiden. Na zijn AIO-schap bij de vakgroep bestuurskunde van de Universiteit Leiden (1997-2001) werkte hij als onderzoeker bij het departement politieke wetenschappen van de Universiteit Antwerpen (2002-2006). Momenteel is hij als universitair docent verbonden aan de afdeling bestuur en organisatie van de Vrije Universiteit van Amsterdam.