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In 2004 I spent time with a student named Jaipal in Meerut College, Uttar Pradesh (UP). Jaipal was in his late twenties at that time and came from a lower middle class, rural background. He had failed to obtain a salaried job; Jaipal described himself as “unemployed,” someone “just waiting.” Politics was Jaipal’s métier. He was often at the forefront of collective student demonstrations against the Meerut College bureaucracy. A typical morning might find him leading protests against the corruption of university officials or lambasting a government official for neglecting student issues. Curiously, however, Jaipal often spent his evenings at the homes of university administrators and government bureaucrats colluding over how to make money from illegal admissions. It was an open secret in Meerut that many student leaders (neta) protested alongside other students against corruption while also making money from their political influence.

How common is it for young men in Meerut to imagine themselves as “just waiting”? Why and how do young men like Jaipal engage in such contradictory forms of politics? And what might answers to these questions tell us about class, politics and “waiting”? This book addresses these questions with reference to field research conducted in the North-Western part of Uttar Pradesh (UP) State. I focus on educated unemployed young men and rich farmers from a threatened middle class in order to engage with three main areas of scholarly inquiry. First, I contribute to emerging debates on postcolonial middle classes. Second, I examine the micro-politics of class and
Caste dominance in UP. Third, I reflect on how different forms of “waiting” are implicated in processes of social change.

I consider issues of class, politics and waiting through telling the story of a lower middle class of Jats in Meerut district, especially students from this caste studying in Meerut. A prosperous, socially confident and politically influential set of rich Jat farmers emerged in North-Western UP in the first four decades after Indian Independence, partly as a result of improvements in agricultural production. During the 1990s they faced new threats to their power associated with the rise of lower castes. They addressed these threats by trying to influence the operations of local government and by investing in their children's education—strategies which farmers imagined as forms of “waiting” (see Chapter Two of this book). Yet only a few of the sons of these rich farmers were able to obtain the salaried jobs that they had been led to expect and many had come to imagine themselves as people who had no option but to wait. I examine cultures of limbo among educated unemployed young men. Unemployed young men were advertising their aimlessness through a self-conscious strategy of hanging out—a masculine youth culture that challenged the dominant temporal logics of their parents and the state (Chapter Three). This culture of masculine waiting was precipitating collective youth protest in Meerut, especially around issues of corruption, students' progression through academic institutions, educational mismanagement and government officials' harassment of students. In Meerut young men from a wide variety of social backgrounds sometimes came together to orchestrate agitations against the state and university (Chapter Four). Yet class and caste inequalities fractured collective protest around unemployment and corruption. In particular, among unemployed students a set of Jat “leaders,” who also called themselves “fixers” (kaim kurinella), used their social contacts to monopolize local networks of “corruption”—practices that undermined young people's collective action (Chapter Five). Through documenting these different forms of youth cultural and political action, alongside an analysis of the strategies of rich farmers in rural areas, the book highlights the micro-politics of class power in north India and the importance of waiting as a basis for mobilization.

This chapter locates my study with reference to broader literatures on time, middle-class unemployed youth and everyday politics in India. In the next section, I introduce recent literature on waiting and the Indian middle classes. I then focus on the experiences of educated unemployed young men within the lower middle classes, especially their temporal anxieties and political responses to waiting. This is followed by a consideration of how the politics of lower middle-class young men in India might be theorized. Finally, I outline my research strategy and the structure and argument of the book.

Waiting and Middle India

We all wait. Waiting has always been a characteristic feature of human life. Waiting for rain, harvests, birth and death are important components of the social organization of non-industrialized societies. Waiting is also a key dimension of modernity; during the twentieth century the increasing regimentation and bureaucratization of time in the West created multiple settings—such as traffic jams, offices and clinics—in which people waited (see Corbridge 2004; Moran 2004; Bissell 2007). But what of long-term waiting? What of situations in which people have been compelled to wait for years, generations or whole lifetimes, not as the result of their voluntary movement through modern spaces but because they are durably unable to realize their goals?

There is a growing literature based in different parts of the world on forms of “waiting” wherein people have been incited by powerful institutions to believe in particular visions of the future yet lack the means to realize their aspirations. Of course, there is nothing new about such chronic, fruitless waiting, which characterized the experiences of colonized populations (Chakrabarty 2000) and the lives of Europe's large population flottante in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Darnton 1999), for example. From a rather different perspective, Siegfried Kracauer (1995 [1963]) argued that many professionals in urban Germany in the 1920s had a profound sense of "just waiting." Kracauer described upper middle classes boror waui (fear of empty time and space) in the context of a decline in religious faith.

Yet in a recent book, Jean-Francois Bayart (2007) has argued that long-term experiences of “waiting” became a more prominent feature of the experiences of populations, especially subaltern people, across the world after the 1960s (see also Bourdieu 2000). Bayart cites as evidence: an increase in
the numbers of international migrants occupying detention centers on the edge of industrial states; the rising prison population in the US and parts of Europe; and people forced to move between countries in the global south in the aftermath of war or economic collapse. Bayart also suggests that there are whole nations, such as Zimbabwe in 2008, effectively waiting for a future and great swathes of the world’s population, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa and north India, who have written into their minds certain hopes but for whom social goods are elusive and, who, as a result, define themselves as people in wait (see Ferguson 2006). Much recent scholarship supports the tenor of Bayart’s argument. Ethnographic research on asylum seekers (Conlon 2007), refugees (Wong 1991; Stepputat 1992), urban slum dwellers (Appadurai 2002), the unemployed (Mains 2007) and rural poor (Corbridge et al. 2005), for example, is full of references to people waiting and their associated feelings of boredom and lost time. Moreover, these waiting populations are often subjected to discourses that stigmatize people as “surplus to requirements” or “lottering” (Mbembe 2004).

During my fieldwork I met large numbers of unemployed young men in north India who were engaged in forms of waiting characterized by aimlessness and ennui. Unemployed young men in Meerut commonly spoke of being lost in time and they imagined many of their activities as simply ways to pass the time (“timepass,” as it is often described in India). This waiting was not wholly purposeless, however: it offered opportunities to acquire skills, fashion new cultural styles and mobilize politically.

I also discuss another form of “waiting” in this book. Several scholars have referred to how situations of rapid change in the contemporary world may persuade people to readjust their temporal horizons. In particular, they may come to prioritize long-term over short-term goals: they choose to wait. For example, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2002) has described how activist organizations in Mumbai improved the living conditions of the urban poor by deliberately adopting a “long-term political horizon.” These organizations encouraged their members to disregard the near-term development targets of foreign NGOs in favor of pursuing longer range goals. Such deliberate forms of investment have also been discussed in studies of household decision-making. In many situations, and perhaps especially during periods of rapid socio-economic change, people forego a desire for immediate consumption in favor of investing in the future of their families (Berry 1988). In the north Indian case I examine in this book, rich farmers made an explicit decision in the mid-1990s to prioritize their children’s education and they imagined this strategy as a form of “investment” that entailed “waiting.”

In elaborating on these two different forms of waiting—relatively purposeless youth timepass and more strategic investment on the part of rich farmers—my aim is not to construct a meta-narrative about the significance of waiting in India or across the world. I adopt instead an ethnographic approach that discusses the nature and social implications of waiting from the perspective of a struggling lower middle class, especially educated unemployed young men.

Middle classes of different types are highly visible social and political actors in many parts of the postcolonial world. Middle classes in Latin America, Africa and Asia often include struggling indigenous elites created through colonialism (e.g. Schepers-Hughes 1992), class fractures seeking to protect their access to state largesse in the face of the downsizing of the state (e.g. Harris-White 2003) and entrepreneurs who have taken advantage of nation-building projects, economic restructuring and projects of international development to separate themselves from the poor (e.g. Berry 1985; Mawdsley 2001; Robinson and Goodman 1996; Fernandes 2006). What tends to unite these disparate classes is a shared anxiety about the possibility of downward mobility and a determination to use their economic and social resources to shore up their position vis-à-vis the poor (e.g. Barr-Melej 2001; Cohen 2004).

India offers an example of how middle classes in postcolonial contexts are reshaping social and political life. The much vaunted emergence of Information Technology (IT) allied to the rapid economic growth rate in India since the early 1990s are often said to have raised increasing numbers of Indians into the middle class. There is considerable debate over the size of the Indian middle class; estimates vary from 50 million to 350 million (see Deshpande 2003; Nijman 2006), in large part because of disagreement over what combination of factors—lifestyle, income levels, consumption patterns and employment status, for example—should be used to delineate classes. For example, Deshpande (2003: 138) reports that if ownership of consumer goods is a
key criterion for defining the Indian middle class, this segment of society was small in the mid-1990s: less than 8 percent of Indian households possessed a color television in 1995–96. If we examine the middle class as a social category actually used by people on the ground it may be even smaller than Deshpande suggests; Sheth (1999) argues that people tend to define themselves as “middle class” in India only when they possess a suite of consumer goods, education, a brick-built house and white-collar occupation. There is nevertheless a consensus that a reasonably substantial, moderately prosperous stratum now exists in India that does not herald from traditional elites but which exerts a profound influence over the politics, culture and social organization of the country (Fernandes 2006; Fernandes and Heller 2006; Varma 2006; see Milanovic 2009 for a dissenting view).

Fernandes and Heller (2006) identify three tiers within the Indian middle classes: first, senior professionals; higher bureaucrats and others with advanced professional credentials; second, a petit bourgeoisie that seeks to emulate the upper tier and which is comprised of rich farmers, merchants and small-business owners; and third, those with some educational capital who nevertheless occupy positions low-down within bureaucratic hierarchies. Fernandes and Heller stress that class and caste tend to overlap: middle classes tend to be from higher castes.

There is an important strand of research that has focused on the contemporary social and political practices of the highest tier in Fernandes and Heller’s schema: the upper middle classes usually residing in urban India, and especially in the metropolises of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai (e.g. Favero 2005; Harriss 2006; Nijman 2006; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007; Van Wessel 2007). This research suggests that upper middle classes benefited from the liberalization of the Indian economy from the early 1990s onwards. Rich urbanites were able to use their social connections and accumulated cultural capital, especially their mastery of English, to capture the most lucrative and secure positions that emerged in IT and allied industries in India or to expand their own businesses. Fuller and Narasimhan (2007), in a study of IT workers in Chennai, write of a mood of “prevailing optimism” and a sense among IT professionals of the multiple benefits wrought by the opening up of the Indian economy since the early 1990s (see also Favero 2005).

There is rather less research examining the second and third tiers of the middle classes in Fernandes and Heller’s categorization: the assortment of “lower middle classes,” including rich farmers, merchants, small-business owners, low-ranking bureaucrats and also sections of organized labor (see Harris-White 2003; Gooptu 2007). The expansion of the Indian state bureaucracy, democratization of access to education and capital intensification within agriculture between 1947 and the late 1980s expanded the size and power of these middle-class fractions. For example, in many parts of the Indian countryside, a stratum of rich farmers emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, largely as a result of government subsidies for farming and technological changes in agriculture (e.g. Harriss 1982; Upadhye 1988; Rutten 1995; Gidwani 2008). Capitalist intensification and increased state expenditure on agriculture and business also heightened the importance of a wide range of merchants and entrepreneurs in India, who Harriss-White (2003), following Kalecki (1972), terms the “intermediate classes” (see also Chari 2004). The expansion of Indian state bureaucracies also swelled the ranks of the middle class, especially in urban areas (Fernandes 2000).

Economic reform threatened the accumulation strategies of many sections of this heterogeneous lower middle class, who typically came from middle-ranking castes. Between 1947 and the mid-1980s, India’s approach to macroeconomic planning combined a leading role for the private sector in economic decision-making with state intervention aimed at accelerating growth and redistributing social opportunities (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2002). In the face of a growing fiscal crisis, however, and under pressure from multilateral lenders, the Indian state began a program of economic liberalization in the mid-1980s which intensified in the early 1990s (see Corbridge and Harriss 2000). Economic reforms, while benefiting some sections of the lower middle classes (Chari 2004), often threatened middle classes’ access to state subsidies, reduced the supply of government jobs and undermined state services, such as educational and health facilities. By the late 1990s a gulf was emerging between an upper middle class in metropolitan India, the apparent beneficiaries of liberalization, and the lower middle classes, who typically found their jobs, educational strategies and access to state goods under threat. The rise of lower castes within formal politics in many parts of India and the
related emergence of a small Dalit (ex-untouchable) and lower caste elite in the 1980s and 1990s unsettled middle classes still further (Jaffrelot 2003).

Leela Fernandes (2004, 2006) has shown how these economic and political threats to lower middle classes in India coincided with the circulation of new images of rapid social mobility. In particular, the onset of liberalization was accompanied by intense efforts on the part of sections of the state, business interests and media organizations to promote images of “new middle-class” success. Depictions of prosperous urban Indians occupying expensive suburban homes equipped with all modern conveniences became prominent at almost the precise moment at which lower middle classes were struggling to maintain their standard of living. This disjuncture between image and reality generated a feeling among some lower middle classes of being somehow “in limbo” and of their “waiting” for development (Faver 2005; Fernandes 2006). For Fernandes it was such a sense of waiting that staved off more radical protest among the middle classes: “anticipation of future benefits mediates the immediacy of political opposition to the economic disruptions or deterioration produced by reforms” (Fernandes 2006: xx).

Such lower middle-class anxiety is obviously not limited to India. Solvay Gerke (2000) has argued that a threatened Indonesian middle class in the 1990s were forced to resort to a form of “virtual consumption,” a set of strategies designed to display standards of living that they could not afford. Shana Cohen (2004) has described the emergence of middle classes in Morocco in the 1970s and 1980s, who saw similar a gap opening up between their aspirations and social realities. As in Fernandes (2006) work, Gerke and Cohen argue that middle classes increasingly imagined their individual mobility to involve participating in the drama of Western social progress, either through migrating or via the consumption of consumer goods and education.

Neither Gerke nor Cohen discusses in detail the politics of the middle class. But in India lower middle classes have devoted considerable energy to preventing downward mobility and expressing anxieties within political spheres. Several studies describe middle-class involvement in Hindu nationalist political organizations as a response to social frustration (Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Hansen 2001; Fernandes and Heller 2006). Others refer to politicking outside the realms of formal political organizations (Rutten 1995; Harriss-White 2003; Fernandes and Heller 2006). For example, Harriss-White (2003) shows that intermediate classes in Tamil Nadu reacted to economic liberalization through intensifying efforts to collude with local government officials within dense webs of “corrupt” and violent local-level practice. Similarly, Fernandes and Heller (2006) emphasize the “opportunity hoarding” of India’s lower middle classes within local networks of political relations.

Educated Unemployed Young Men

Threats to middle-class power in India are often especially keenly felt by educated young men excluded from secure employment. Indeed, such unemployed men may be key political actors in contemporary India. The scale of the employment crisis in India meant that some of the country’s bourgeoisie and upper middle classes experienced unemployment in the 1990s and early 2000s (see Faver 2005). Increasing education among formerly marginalized communities in India, such as Dalits and Muslims, also exacerbated problems of educated unemployment among historically poor sections of society (see Parry 1999; Jeffrey et al. 2008). Yet educated unemployment in India is often a particular problem for lower middle-class young men, who commonly possess the financial backing to obtain education and engage in a prolonged job search, but lack the funds, social networking resources and cultural capital to succeed within fiercely competitive markets for government jobs and positions in the new economy (see Fernandes 2000).

Official figures collected at employment exchanges and by the National Sample Survey (NSS) are poor indicators of joblessness because few people in India register themselves as unemployed (UI Haq 2003). Nevertheless, according to NSS data, 12 million people were openly unemployed in 2004-5. Desai (2007) suggests that in the same year, about 150 million were in low-quality employment, many of them young people with high school and college qualifications. Rates of employment in India’s organized sector of the economy were stagnant in the late 1990s and early 2000s despite rapid economic growth. Industrial and service-sector growth in India was skill- and capital-intensive during this period and therefore tended not to generate employment. Sharp projected increases in the young adult population in the next
ten years are likely to aggravate this problem. Joshi (2009) states the situation succinctly in a discussion of one of India's apparently vibrant new sectors: "The IT sector currently employs 1 million people; in five years, it may employ 3 million. But in five years India's labour force will grow by around 65 million and much of the rise will occur in backward states."

Educated unemployment is not new in India. The colonial state often encouraged large numbers of young people to enter formal education, and not all of these men acquired salaried work (see Coleman 1969). Complaints about "semi-educated" young men "hanging about" around government offices surfaced in the reports of colonial officials at least as far back as the mid-1950s in India (Dore 1976: 31). Moreover, Robert Dore (1976) argued over thirty years ago that a combination of population growth, a lack of expansion in manufacturing and service industries and increased enrollment in education created a large cohort of unemployed young people in many parts of India. Yet educated unemployment has become especially pronounced since the 1970s.

Similar contradictions have been noted in other postcolonial settings, as well as in the West (see Kaplinsky 2005). A recent rise in the visibility of unemployment or underemployment among educated youth has been discussed in places as diverse as Papua New Guinea (Leavitt 1998; Demerath 1999), Ethiopia (Mains 2007), Morocco (Cohen 2004) and Peru (Steppurat 2002). Substantial numbers of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America, especially those from lower middle classes, have looked to formal schooling as a means of social mobility since 1970, and they have been exposed via this education, the media or development institutions to images of progress through education and entry into white-collar work (e.g. Silberschmidt 2001). At the same time, global economic changes since 1970 have failed to generate large numbers of permanent white-collar jobs within manufacturing or service. The result has been the emergence of a global surplus population, which, unlike the "reserve army of labor" discussed by Marx in the nineteenth century, possess educational qualifications and are sometimes highly skilled (see Kaplinsky 2005). Indeed, many in this group perceive themselves to be "underemployed" rather than wholly without work. They are dependent on involuntary part-time work, engaged in intermittent unemployment, and/or involved in poorly remunerated labor (Prause and Dooley 1997: 245). I therefore use the term "educated unemployed" to refer both to people who are unemployed and underemployed.

Emerging work on joblessness in the global south suggests that educated unemployment bears most pressingly on men in their twenties or early thirties. This is not to deny the importance of unemployment for older people (see Breman 2000; McDowell 2003) or for young women, who comprise a substantial section of the educated unemployed in some regions of the global south, such as the Middle East (Miles 2002) and parts of South America (Miles 1998). But the prevalence of male breadwinner norms in the global south often means that educated unemployment has especially direct negative consequences for young men.

Scholars employing ethnographic methods have started to uncover the anxieties of educated unemployed youth in the 1990s and 2000s within and outside India. Educated unemployed young men are often unable to marry (see Masquelier 2005; Chowdhury 2009). They frequently find it difficult to leave home and purchase or rent independent living space (Hansen 2003). Educated unemployed young men are also commonly dogged by a sense of not having achieved locally salient norms of masculine success (Osella and Osella 2000; Cole 2004); they might conform by dint of their education to a particular vision of successful masculinity but lack the resources necessary to assume the role of male adult provider (Cole 2004, 2005). Public discourses of educated unemployed young men as "louts" (McDowell 2003) or hyper-masculine and violent "threats" to the state and civil society exacerbate this gendered crisis (Stambaugh 1998, Rotman 2004).

An intriguing aspect of recent work on youth unemployment is scholars' tendency to mention young men's anxieties about time. Educated unemployed young men may feel that they need to pass time in new ways in

"My focus on educated unemployed young men should not obscure the importance of examining the strategies of uneducated young people. On this point see some of the comments on my blog on The Guardian's website: http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/craigjeffrey. See also my Rethinking Democracy blog: http://rethinkingdemocracy.wordpress.com/;
the face of their joblessness (e.g. Corrigan 1979). Indeed, time may become a central social preoccupation, as Ralph (2008) argues in a recent essay on "young men "killing time" in urban Nigeria and as Mains (2007) also suggests in research among youth in Ethiopia. This dimension of educated unemployed young men's experiences must be contextualized with reference to changes in how time has been imagined and experienced over the past two hundred years. The onset of modernity in Europe and North America was associated with the institutionalization of chronological time (see Thompson 1967; Zerubavel 1985; Thrift 1996). Rather than operating according to seasonal rhythms, people began to measure their lives and activities more closely with respect to abstract units of time, such as days, weeks, years and decades. From at least the nineteenth century onwards, and via development institutions in the postcolonial period, national governments and large capitalist organizations often imposed Western ideas of linear time in the global south (Postone 1993), and young people were often exposed to such visions of time through their schooling. In addition, the colonial and postcolonial project of "development" reconfigured notions of linear time in an especially ideologically potent manner (see Gidwani 2008). As Raymond Williams (1985) has argued, powerful institutions in the West combined the biological notion of development (the life cycle of an organism) with evolutionary ideas to present a vision of social and economic development as a linear unfolding of progress (see also Cowen and Shenton 1996). Western nations were presented as the mature form of development for other countries to emulate—Walter Rostow's Stages of Growth (2008 [1959]) model of modernizing development became a well-known example of this ideological drive. Reflecting the weight of such ideas, countries in the global south were frequently perceived as occupying the "waiting room of history" (Chakrabarty 2000: 256): a permanent state of "not now, not yet."

For young people in postcolonial countries the force of such dominant visions of time has another dimension. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Euro-America, there was a formalization of how societies imagined people should move through their biological lives and increased emphasis placed on distinct life "stages" (Johnson-Hanks 2002). Particular models of how social lives should be mapped onto chronological time became enshrined in new laws and public institutions (Cole and Durham 2008: 6): childhood, youth, adulthood and old age were institutionalized as distinct phases of life (e.g. Aries 1962). In addition, the notion of school trajectories and adult (usually male) working careers became ubiquitous (Wiener 1998). During the colonial and postcolonial periods, dominant institutions promoted these visions of maturity, which often replaced older models of how people matured or lent a new force to indigenous life-stage models (Osella and Osella 2007). In doing so, Western models frequently exerted a type of symbolic violence on people, such as educated unemployed young men, unable to "transition" between various "stages of life" (see Johnson-Hanks 2002; Ruddick 2003; Cole and Durham 2008).

In the face of these multiple pressures, educated unemployed young men in the global south commonly experience their exclusion from secure salaried work as a triple temporal hardship. First, they are unable to conform to dominant visions of how people should comport themselves with respect to linear, clock time—they "miss years" or have "gaps" on their resumes, for example (Olan 2004). Second, they are unable to obtain the social goods, such as a secure white-collar job, which connote "development," as this is articulated by Western governments and international organizations (e.g. Heuze 1996). Third, they are incapable of moving into gendered age-based categories, especially male adulthood, such that they come to be labeled or label themselves as "drop outs," "failures" or people "on the shelf" (Mbembe 2004; Argenti 2005; Ralph 2008).

The theme of waiting emerges strongly in recent research on unemployed young men in India. The author Pankaj Mishra (2006) has written evocatively of towns in north India where young men appear to be "waiting," and his novel on youth politics in Benares is saturated with images of young men in limbo (Mishra 2004; see also Myrdal 1967 on waiting in India). Gerard Heuze's work in provincial central India brings out these themes even more clearly. Heuze describes a population of lower middle-class young men who spent long periods in education but who were unable to acquire government work or marry and spent most of their time simply "hanging around" at major road intersections. Heuze (1996: 105) concludes that "waiting has become an art and may become a profession for the majority of India's youth." The
cultural and political importance of unemployed young men haunted by boredom and a sense of being left behind is also well attested in Indian cinema. Ranjita Mazumdar (2007) has traced a move in Bollywood films from depictions of “angry young men” in the 1970s, typified by Amitabh Bachchan, to representations of unemployed young men as disoriented loafers (tapori) in the 1990s (see especially the movie Rangeela (2004). The educated unemployed young man, wandering about, flirting or simply “waiting for something to happen,” was a central motif in some of the popular comedies produced by Hirishkesh Mukherjee (see the film GolMaal, 1979) and Sai Paranjape (for example Chashme Buddoor, 1981) in the 1970s and 1980s. But in the 1990s and 2000s the tapori became a staple of popular Indian cinema.

Recent research within and outside India has chronicled educated unemployed young men’s political responses to situations of uncertainty. R. Harris (2003), for example, has described the role of educated unemployed young men in political demonstrations in Argentina in the early 2000s. Following the collapse of the Argentine economy in 2001, educated young men joined union members, indigenous leaders, women and younger children in a nationwide network of picketers and popular assemblies. In his account of “pavement politics” in Cape Town in the mid-1980s, Bundy (1987) emphasizes the often covert and micro-political manner in which unemployed youth challenged Apartheid. In Bundy’s account, it was educated unemployed young men who possessed the educational training, time and motivation to work as provocateurs. At a more everyday level, De Vries’s (2002) study of political brokerage in Mexico suggests that educated unemployed young men, including those from middle-class backgrounds, often use their educated skills to assist the poor in their negotiations with the state. Similarly, Demera (1999) documents the emergence of a set of educated unemployed youth in Papua New Guinea who occupied positions in local government organizations, circulated radical political discourses and acted as mediators between the poor and urban state bureaucrats (see also Weiss 2002).

Jennifer Cole (2004, 2005) argues for the capacity of threatened youth to challenge and transform dominant structures of power, and she does so with special attention to the changing lives of underemployed young men and young women in urban Madagascar. Cole observes that whereas many educated young men in a Madagascan city had been forced to enter poorly paid criminal activity, young women were often able to earn substantial amounts of money through engaging in transactional sex with foreign visitors to the country. These dynamics led to a change in the regional politics of gender relations wherein young men (joamhibo) relied on their female partners for money and in return provided sex, companionship and the image of a youthful style. Cole argues that youth in Madagascar had responded to economic uncertainties through rethinking the gendered structures framing their lives.

Recent research in India offers a vibrant picture of the often informal nature of the politics of educated unemployed young men and their engagement in politicized and gendered cultural practices (Hansen 1996, 2001; Pai and Singh 1997; Krishna 2002; Nisbett 2007; Rogers 2008). Some accounts emphasize the reactionary, self-serving nature of educated unemployed young men’s cultural and political activism. For example, Hansen (1996) describes how widespread exclusion from secure employment led lower middle-class young men in Bombay in the 1990s to craft identities as Hindu nationalist political bosses. These men reconstructed a sense of masculine prowess through assuming roles as brokers between the urban poor and government officials. They also acted as provocateurs during anti-Muslim agitations and “hard men” capable of intervening violently to assist their friends (see also Heuze 1992). Hansen emphasizes the capacity of lower middle classes to mobilize through local politicking to defend their narrow class, caste and religious interests. Paralleling Hansen’s account, Prem Chowdhury (2009) has studied unemployed young men in Haryana, north India, who channeled frustration into work in all-male caste panchayats (caste associations). These young men used the panchayats to engage in illegal reactionary political practices, for example violently punishing those who marry across caste boundaries.

Other work highlights the democratic activity of lower middle-class young men in India. Where educated unemployed young men come from formerly subordinated communities they may act as political entrepreneurs, assisting their communities in matters of everyday social and political endeavor. Richer educated unemployed young men also sometimes become spokespersons for the poor, forging links across caste and class boundaries. Krishna (2002) argues that educated unemployed young men from lower middle-class backgrounds...
in rural western India in the 1990s often used their schooling to assist impoverished villagers in their negotiations with the state, circulate political discourses and intercede in local disputes (see also Kamar 2002). In a similar vein, Gooprui (2007) has described relatively wealthy young men from families historically associated with organized labor in West Bengal who engaged in "social service" (samaaj seva). Studies of educated unemployed young men in India therefore resonate with other scholarship on the educated unemployed by highlighting the importance of mundane forms of mobilization. Educated unemployed young men often advance their goals—be they reactionary or progressive—along relatively hidden pathways, in everyday spaces of social life and through cultivating relationships with diverse representatives of the state.

Theorizing the Politics of Unemployed Young Men

The varied, informal nature of the political practices of unemployed young men, and their concern with cultural forms of political action, points to a need for a flexible, fine-grained approach to theorizing politics, one that examines micro-tactics and everyday endeavor as well as institutions, social movements, electoral politics and major epochal events. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, there was a rich vein of political anthropological work that addressed questions of quotidian political action in India, including Frederick Bailey's (1957, 1961) multiple studies of local politics in Orissa, Paul Brass's (1969) work on Congress politics and Anthony Carter's (1974) detailed analysis of the political strategies of elites in south India. With notable exceptions (e.g. Wade 1985, 1988; Robinson 1988), political science research on South Asia in the 1980s and 1990s shifted to a certain extent towards analysis of elections and the construction of large-scale models of political behavior.

Recent anthropological research on the relationship between state and society within and outside India suggests a renaissance of interest in ethnographic approaches to politics and offers a useful starting point for thinking about the political strategies of educated unemployed young men (e.g. Gupta 1995; Das and Poole 2004; Ferguson 2006). Drawing on Foucault, scholarship on the anthropology of the state has exposed the subtle discursive and material apparatus through which the state and other powerful institutions constitute people as subjects of rule (e.g. Fuller and Bénéi 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). This emphasis on governmentality, understood as the micro-political processes through which state power conditions people to act in specific ways, demonstrates how visions of moral and social behavior disseminated by dominant institutions come to shape the practices of people on the ground. A governmentality perspective encourages reflection on the mechanisms through which powerful organizations persuade or compel unemployed young men to remain in situations of "limbo" or "waiting," for example through the social production of visions of hope and development (see also Verder 1996; Spivak 2004).

Building on these ideas of how power operates, scholars have begun to rework Foucault in order to show how threatened young people and other liminal social actors inhabit, manipulate and contest broader governmentality logics (e.g. Gupta 1995; Appadurai 2002; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Chatterjee 2004; Li 2005). Many authors have described how subordinated populations negotiate governmental power in the global south, including, for example, Tania Li's (2005, 2007) research on the politics of Indonesian development and Akhil Gupta's (1995) account of discourses of anti-corruption in north India. These studies usefully highlight the importance of what Li (2005) calls "micro"—messy, contextualized forms of knowledge and practice that lie outside the purview of state planners and tend to be ignored in mainstream political science (see also Moore 2005).

At the same time, however, studies of governmentality in the postcolonial world sometimes emerge from an engagement with Foucault presenting a somewhat unhelpful binary picture of political practice wherein the state and urban bourgeoisie is pitted against a local "political society" (Chatterjee 2004) or "public culture" (Gupta 1995). The search for some broad arena of radical non-state action—the politics of "the masses"—takes precedence over analysis of how ordinary society is divided, for example between relatively prosperous people and the very poor. One of the effects of this de-emphasis on class divisions at the local level is to distract attention from the often crucial role played by lower middle classes, including youth from this section of society, in political dynamics on the ground.

This argument can be drawn out through reference to the influential recent
work of Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee (1998: 59) makes a distinction between “civil society” and “political society” in India. In Chatterjee’s model, civil society refers to institutions originating in Western societies which are founded on legal norms and moral ideas of fair play. “Civil society in India today, peopled largely by the urban middle classes, is the sphere that seeks to be congruent with the normative models of bourgeois civil society” (Chatterjee 2008: 57). For Chatterjee, political society refers to a zone of political action in which the urban poor and the majority of those living in rural areas bargain with the state. “Those in political society make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations” (ibid.) These “contextual and unstable arrangements” — often illegal and sometimes violent — typically involve the members of political society developing their own moral claims to resources based on particular notions of community. The denizens of political society rarely make reference to bourgeois norms of liberal government: they hustle, negotiate and break the law.

In his elaboration of how political society works in practice, Chatterjee frequently emphasizes broad-based political mobilizations in which “the masses” obtain resources from the state. Chatterjee therefore tends to see political society as a democratizing force. Moreover, Chatterjee foregrounds instances in which different lower middle classes, such as party workers or schoolteachers, have assisted the poor within political society.

Chatterjee’s emphasis on informal political practice occurring mainly outside of elections is useful for an understanding of the politics of unemployed young men in India. And his conceptualization of how lower middle classes, such as teachers and local-level party workers, may assist the poor in negotiations with, or campaigns against, the state and bourgeoisie is important. But Chatterjee overlays the distinction between civil and political society, ignoring how civil and legal practices often characterize the politics of ordinary people in India — a point I will demonstrate in a discussion of student politics in Meerut. More importantly, in emphasizing the democratic potential of political society, Chatterjee distracts from destructive forms of lower-middle-class politics. Barbara Harriss-White (2003) has demonstrated how threatened lower middle classes in India are crucially important in reproducing geographies of social exclusion and privilege within a sphere analogous to Chatterjee’s “political society.” Yet the accumulative tactics of these muddling sections of society are rarely the explicit object of discussion in Chatterjee’s analyses or, indeed, the work of many anthropologists concerned with the everyday relationship between the state and society in India (e.g. Gupta 1995, 1998; Appadurai 2002). One of the principal contributions of this book is therefore to highlight the importance of a lower middle class in the constitution of politics on the ground and to show how such micro-politics might be theorized. I argue in particular for examining the multiple “fields” in which middle classes and poorer groups compete for social advantage.

In developing a conceptualization of the everyday politics of social reproduction in North-Western UP, I build especially on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Drawing on an analysis of French society, Bourdieu (1984; 1986) argued that people are differentiated according to their possession of economic capital, social capital — which he defines as useful social connections accruing to individuals or class fractions — and cultural capital: a range of goods, titles and forms of behavior that provide distinction in social situations. Bourdieu was especially interested in the practices through which class advantage is communicated and reinforced; and he stressed the manner in which power is contained within the “habitus”: internalized orientations to action inscribed in people’s demeanor, reflexes and tastes that both reflect people’s histories and shape their futures. Bourdieu (2001: 38) refers to the operation of the habitus as a type of “magic,” which works “on the basis of the dispositions deposited, like springs, at the deepest level of the body.”

Bourdieu has stressed that the habitus must be understood in relation to the concept of “field.” He viewed society as comprised of distinct fields of social competition in which people with greater economic, social and cultural capital and with a habitus attuned to possibilities for gain tend to outwit poorer groups. Bourdieu often used the analogy of the game to express what he meant by field. Like the game, the field has stakes (enjeux). Similarly game-like is people’s tendency to invest in competing within different fields based on their shared appreciation of the value of the goods at stake: “Each field calls forth and gives life to a specific form of interest, a specific illusion, a tacit recognition of the
value of the stakes of the game” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 117). Bourdieu stresses that the value of a particular form of social capital, such as connection in a government bureaucracy, or cultural capital, such as an educational qualification, varies within different fields. “Just as the relative value of cards changes with each game, the hierarchy of the different species of capital (economic, social, and cultural) varies across the various fields” (ibid).

Bourdieu’s theoretical schema is valuable in highlighting inequalities within a population of educated unemployed young men. Bourdieu’s practical application of the concepts of habitus and field pointed to the ability of those from advantaged backgrounds to negotiate markets for social goods with relative confidence and ease. Bourdieu also focuses on the type of confidence that comes with being able to succeed routinely within multiple spheres of social competition: Middle classes habituated to being able to acquire the right schooling for their children, negotiate with state agents and obtain favors and subsidies from the state are liable over time to acquire a sense of entitlement and privilege that is itself a form of capital and is communicated in people’s everyday demeanor, movements and speech. Bourdieu stressed especially powerful people’s “feel for the game” and a corresponding lack of gamesmanship among the poor (see especially Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 356ff).

Time is also important in this analysis. At the micro scale, Bourdieu wrote of how temporality is woven into people’s ability to navigate fields of power on an everyday basis. The skilled footballer passes the ball into the space into which a teammate will run, rather than directly to the teammate. In a similar way, advantaged classes typically have an excellent sense of how to micro-manage complex fields so that they act in a timely way. Bourdieu also emphasizes that routine success across a number of fields instills in people an ability to project their lives into the future. Like a chess grandmaster plotting tactics eight moves ahead, advantaged classes have an ability to imagine alternative futures and plot their hypothetical responses. In this account the poor are at the very least doubly subordinated: they lack the assets that confer advantage in everyday struggles and the spatio-temporal acuity that comes with routine success (see also Appadurai 2004).

Social class in this Bourdieuan analysis is not defined, as it is in Marx’s work, in terms of a person’s position with respect to the social relations of production. Rather, class refers to people with a similar volume of social, economic and cultural capital and thus with a similar capacity to navigate fields, plan futures and embody success in their habits. As Mike Savage et al. (2001: 40) argue, class in this Bourdieuan apprehension does not emerge out of a person’s location within a structural hierarchy but is the emergent product of individuals’ agency. Similarly, “politics” for Bourdieu does not refer only to elections, political parties and large-scale social movements but also to the daily business of gaining advantage over others in different spheres of competition, for example for school places, good jobs and government assistance.

In sum, Bourdieu highlights the durability of class power, the multidimensionality of dominance and the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which class attributes are stored in people’s bodily comportment and transferred across generations (Savage 2003). Bourdieu’s emphasis on social reproduction as a set of complex games and his reference to the importance of timing and a feel for the game are especially instructive for an analysis of how middle-class jars in western UP negotiate socio-economic threats.

Bourdieu has defended himself against the charge that his vision of social life is deterministic and that it does not allow for human creativity and change. Bourdieu emphasizes that fields do not transparently reproduce dominant structures of power within broader society but “refracts” them. He also suggests that people are capable, often through a type of “warrenning from within” (Thompson 1963), of transforming the operation of fields. Through describing fields as games, Bourdieu demonstrates his openness to people’s improvisations: for example he points out that “[my model] does not imply that all small capital holders are necessarily revolutionaries and all big capital holders are automatically conservatives” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 109).

Yet much of Bourdieu’s work does suggest that narrow class-based interests usually determine the social and political strategies of relatively powerful actors within a field, and that thus people’s activities within different fields are patterned in predictable ways according to their social class (e.g. Cloke et al. 1995; see also Savage 2003). Bourdieu’s writing does not fully anticipate the possibility that lower middle classes may in certain circumstances seek common cause with the poor, for example in coordinated protests against the
state and bourgeoisie, in ways that partially escape class logics. It is therefore useful to set alongside Bourdieu's framework the emphasis of other scholars on agency and resistance (e.g. Chatterjee 2004), and especially the agency of youth (Gramsci 1971; Willis 1982; Hall 1983; Butler 1997).

The British sociologist, Paul Willis, a lead figure in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) or "Birmingham School" of the 1970s and 1980s, offers concepts that are more open than Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field to the creativity of young people. Willis conducted research with working-class young men but his arguments are relevant to understanding the politics of educated unemployed young men belonging to the lower middle classes. Willis (1977) built on his analysis of the everyday social practices of young men in a Midlands school to stress young people's "cultural production": the active and creative use of available symbolic materials in ways shaped by people's structural position (see also Hebdige 1979). Willis also used his fieldwork to show that working-class young men in the school engaged in "partial penetrations" of dominant structures. On the one hand, the young men with whom Willis worked were capable of critiquing the class-based philosophies peddled in school; for example they realized that it would take more than good results in their examinations to obtain a white-collar job. On the other hand, however, working-class young men's rebellious practices within school—"having a laugh" and "wagging off," for example—involved them in reproducing aggressive forms of heterosexual masculinity. Recent post-structuralist writing is often said to have moved beyond Willis by questioning the notion that youth cultural practices can be traced to underlying class interests (Butler 1990; Arnot 2003; Blackman 2005). But Willis's (1977) notion of cultural production and partial penetrations anticipated many of the themes of more recent post-structuralist inspired work, for example by showing that practices do not always cohere into "identities" (Butler 1990), emphasizing ironic and mischievous dimensions of politics (Demerath 2003; cf. Foucault 1988; Bakhtin 1986) and extending analysis of the political into intimate arenas of feeling, bodily practice and demeanor (e.g. Yon 2000; see also Blackman 2005). Willis's work encourages a search for youth practices that are orthogonal to class or that undermine class power in addition to those that perpetuate inequalities.

I therefore offer a critically minded Bourdieuan approach to a study of middle-class power in India. This approach relies centrally on Bourdieu's insights with respect to how advantages of strata in society perpetuate privilege. At the same time, my Bourdieuan analysis is tempered by sensitivity to instances in which people do not straightforwardly pursue their material interests as these are defined by their class position. This is precisely what the example of Jaipal's double-dealing at the beginning of this chapter appears to require: attention to middle-class micro-strategies that serve narrow goals and to middle-class actions that are contrary to, or removed from, class "interests."

Field Research

This book examines middle classes, micro-politics and waiting with reference to research I have conducted in UP since 1995. My research in India began with an interest in rural social transformation. One of the most pressing questions of agrarian development in the early 1990s concerned how a burgeoning rural middle-class of "rich farmers" in the Indian countryside was investing their agricultural surplus. Were rich farmers reinvesting in the local economy in such a way as to promote local growth? Or were their investments and consumption practices being channeled in other directions? Reflecting my interest in these issues, I carried out doctoral research on the social and political strategies of rich farmers in 1996 and 1997. This book draws on this work and, to a greater extent, on more recent research I conducted in 2004 and 2005 in Meerut City, North-Western UP.

My focus on Meerut district reflects my interest in agrarian change in the early 1990s. When I first arrived in India in March 1996, scholars in Delhi advised me to base myself in North-Western UP, a region often grouped with Punjab and Haryana as part of the heartland of India's "Green Revolution." I ultimately worked in a large village on the main road north of Meerut, called Daulatia, and two moderately sized villages in other parts of rural Meerut district, one, Masuri, which Meerut academics said was a "typical prosperous village" and one, Khampur, in which farmers had begun to grow mangoes, as they had done in large parts of south-western Meerut district. Members
of the middle-ranking Jat caste dominated the agricultural and social lives of these three villages, and in this respect Daurala, Masuri and Khanpur were similar to many other villages in rural Meerut district (see Singh 1992).

Dr. OP Bohra worked as research assistant in 1996–97. OP was in his early forties and comes from an upper-middle-class Brahmin family with roots in Rajasthan. In 1997, he worked for a government public policy organization in New Delhi. OP acted as a facilitator and rapporteur during interviews; he was a superb communicator and was frequently able to draw out our respondents on sensitive topics. We worked in Daurala, Khanpur and Masuri between December 1996 and December 1997 and interviewed male farmers. We focused on farmers possessing more than 4 hectares of agricultural land, which corresponded to local definitions of a “rich farmer.” We worked with local genealogists (bālī) to construct ten-generation lineages of Jats in each settlement—two lineages in Daurala and one each in Masuri and Khanpur. These served as a basis for mapping processes of economic accumulation. The lineages offered a comparative framework wherein we could ask rich farmers as well as those possessing less than 4 hectares about the fluctuating fortunes of varied members of their extended family (see Jeffrey 1999).

In each village, we conducted semi-structured interviews regarding farmers’ assets and production; off-farm business and employment; education and fertility; relationship with in-laws, marriage and dowry; and political activity and affiliations. We memorized topics and questions that could be discussed under each of these subject areas, and we usually interviewed each farmer twice, in his home, for about an hour or two hours. I recorded responses in a notebook and wrote up my notes on a computer within the next few days.

As the research progressed, I became less concerned with farmers’ economic investments and more interested in how they were investing in their families, through education and dowry, and in political networks centered on government. I became aware of the significance of social networking in farmers’ efforts to navigate multiple “fields” of social competition, especially in their attempts to protect land, market crops and obtain a good education and public-sector employment for their sons. Investigating these issues entailed becoming more peripatetic. We moved out from the three villages to discuss the politics of multiple fields of practice. We spoke to land revenue officials, police officers, lawyers and politicians in small towns and in Meerut and Delhi. In all we conducted 290 interviews with 25 rich Jat farmers in Daurala, Masuri and Khanpur, as well as interviews with 20 of the wives of rich farmers, 25 Dalits (former untouchables) across the three villages, and 76 government officials or politicians. The Dalit households were selected using a snowball sample (see Harper 1993) whereby an initial low-caste contact in each village provided an introduction to another household. The interview work was interspersed with substantial periods of unplanned non-participant observation. Before or after interviews, we were often involved in tours of sugar mills and long sojourns in offices and tea stalls. OP and I were frequently included in social events, group debates and trips to fields, industrial units and local towns.

In the three villages in which we were mainly based, at least two Jats had obtained PhDs and there were tens of MAs. Rich Jat farmers were able to understand why I was interested in conducting research and they often volunteered advice on interview questions and asked for my conclusions. Indeed, some of the rich farmers with whom I worked acted as mentors and guides during the research process, introducing me to key contacts, offering meals in the village and collecting useful newspaper reports. I often felt less that I was conducting research “on” rich farmers and more that I had entered a type of interpretative community. This is neither to deny the inequalities that existed between me and many of my informants nor to downplay the mistakes associated with fieldwork. But in many situations I was able to find ways of building alliances with Jat farmers, who became research interlocutors, mentors and friends. Moreover, I was often able to use the obvious differences that existed between myself and rich farmers as a basis for generating conversations, for example about the nature of education in Meerut district as compared to other parts of the world or the impact of colonialism on policing, schooling and the operations of the state in UP.

In 2000–2002 I carried out fourteen months of intensive field research with Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery, professors at the University of Edinburgh, on educational transformation and the reproduction of social inequalities in rural Bijnor district, which lies immediately to the east of Meerut district. One of the products of this research was a monograph on the social
and political strategies of educated unemployed young men in rural Bijnor
district (Jeffrey et al. 2008). In this book we use an account of the strategies
of young men, including youth from Dalit and Muslim backgrounds, to cri-
tique Amartya Sen's (1999) notion that education is an unproblematic social
good. We argue instead that education is a contradictory resource: providing
certain economic and political opportunities while also drawing people more
tightly into systems of inequality.

During the Bijnor research, I became aware of the salience of student
politics in North-Western UP. I was also intrigued by the apparently increasing
number of bored unemployed young men in rural areas of Bijnor district
and in Bijnor Town, men who discussed themselves as just doing timepass.
In 2004 I decided to conduct a project on student politics and youth activism
in Meerut. This project allowed me to take forward my interest in educated
unemployed young men by focusing on their political strategies within the
particular context of a large regional education center. It also allowed me to
focus more specifically than had been possible during the Bijnor research on
unemployment among lower middle-class young men. Building on my 1996–97
research with rich Jat farmers, I decided to focus on the political practices
of educated unemployed Jats in Meerut. The new research on student politics
also offered a means to think through the importance of young male “idle-
ness” in processes of social change.

When embarking on research into student politics in Meerut, I decided
not to conduct a straightforward intergenerational research project wherein
I would seek out the sons of men I had interviewed in 1996 and 1997. This
strategy would not have allowed me to build up a large sample of student
politicians active in Meerut in 2004 and 2005. Thus, I did not undertake a
“longitudinal” study of the type conducted by Patricia and Roger Jeffrey
(1997) for two villages close to Bijnor (see also Lanjouw and Stern 1998).
Instead I concentrated on interviewing Jats from rural backgrounds who were
involved in politics and a sample of Jats and other students not involved in
politics studying in two Meerut higher educational institutions. Initial inter-
views suggested that it would be useful to work in both Meerut College (MC),
a government-funded institution, and the institution to which it is affiliated,
Chaudhry Charan Singh University (CCSU).

In the Indian system of higher education, universities assume responsibility
for postgraduate education and the coordination of syllabi; semi-autonomous
colleges cater mainly for undergraduates. Universities are supported by State
governments but also receive recognition and grants from a central authority,
The University Grants Commission (UGC). In 1950–51, there were 6 universi-
ties and 40 colleges in UP enrolling roughly 50,000 students. In 1999–2000,
there were 27 universities and 763 colleges in the State and 13 million students
in higher education (Kingdon and Muzammil 2003). CCSU was founded in
1966 and caters for postgraduate students. Between the early 1990s and mid-
2000s, CCSU vastly expanded its educational operations through establishing
privately funded departments on its home campus and granting affiliation to
other educational institutions scattered across North-Western UP, which
is affiliated with CCSU, was founded in 1892 and enrolls undergraduates and
postgraduates. There are ways in which CCSU and MC differ from higher educa-
tional institutions in some other areas of UP. But analysis of CCSU and
MC may offer insights into processes of student mobilization in urban UP
more widely: the pattern of a new, highly privatized affiliating university exist-
ning alongside an older government college is repeated in many cities across
the State.

I conducted 38 interviews with student politicians, 18 in MC and 20 in
CCSU, and 44 with students who did not identify themselves as politicians,
24 in MC and 20 in CCSU. In total, I conducted 160 interviews with 62 men
and 20 women. Of these 82, 38 were Jat, 15 Dalits, 11 Muslim and 18 from
other Hindu castes. I also interviewed a range of people who interacted with
student politicians: thirteen teachers in MC and CCSU, four politicians, five
ex-student leaders, three journalists, two lawyers, two police officers, two dis-
trict magistrates, the Vice-Chancellor of CCSU and Principal of MC. These
interviews improved my understanding of issues raised by students and also
offered valuable perspectives on the representation of students in public dis-
course.

The semi-structured student interviews varied from arranged meetings
to opportunistic discussions. They focused on students’ biography, political
practices, opinions of higher education and cultural styles. Non-student inter-
views commonly concerned the person’s views on student politics and youth
cultures. I conducted interviews in classrooms, tea stalls, offices and on the street, as well as in people's homes and hostel rooms. Students and other interlocutors were usually uncomfortable with interviews being recorded. Instead, I took detailed notes and wrote up descriptions of the interviews on a computer within 24 hours. I analyzed these interviews using Atlas Ti data analysis package. I carried out the interviews alone; the variety in the social backgrounds of interviewees and the need to work flexible hours made it impossible to conduct interviews with a full-time research assistant. Ninety percent of interviews were carried out in the local forms of Hindi or Urdu spoken in Meerut and the others were in English.

Beyond interviewing students, in 2004 and 2005 I engaged in participant observation during political rallies, demonstrations and visits to government offices; I collected over 2,000 newspaper cuttings related to higher education in Meerut from two regional Hindi newspapers, Dainik Jagran and Amar Ujala, from March 2000 to March 2005; acquired data on student enrollment, staff numbers, faculty/department structure and teaching facilities in MC and CCSU; and, using a questionnaire, I obtained information about the background of hostel students. I also organized eight workshops to discuss political issues with students and six more informal “tea-shop conferences,” which did not follow a regular schedule and occurred in relatively private areas of the campus. The students formulated a list of rules for the tea-shop conferences whereby we agreed not to disclose personal opinions aired in the meetings and encouraged those usually silent in seminars to participate. These conferences frequently resulted in debates on sensitive issues such as student violence and corruption.

To a greater extent than during my fieldwork in rural Meerut district, students in Meerut were eager to guide, even sometimes direct, my research: introducing me to key figures, steering conversations towards hot topics, warning me against particular interviews and assisting with logistics in the city. Richa Nagar, currently a professor at the University of Minnesota, and colleagues based in eastern UP have recently engaged in a collaborative form of research practice in which the boundaries between the Western-based researcher and north Indian research subjects are problematized and reworked. Nagar and six women based in UP formed an intimate collective and wrote a book about their experiences of childhood, gendered social relations and development praxis (Sangin Writers and Nagar 2006). Such an approach would not have enabled me to collect broad information on the varied cultural and political activity in which young men engaged. But I did often feel part of an interpretative community of young people interested in social and political change. Many of my informants said that they valued our discussions as opportunities to vent frustration and reflect on their socio-political position. It also became clear early on in the research that for many students I was a resource: a source of information on what was happening outside UP and a sounding board for students’ own ideas about how north Indian society was changing. That I had been conducting research in UP for a decade, spoke Hindi fluently and knew a large number of the senior students in the two educational institutions, was crucial in terms of building up trust and facilitating exchange of information and views.

I nevertheless faced multiple dilemmas and frustrations in the field (see also Jeffrey 1999; Jeffrey et al. 2008). First, I was often preoccupied with the question of my productivity. I often experienced fieldwork not as the steady accretion of perspectives and information but as long periods of relative inertia interrupted by moments of tremendous excitement. Most of the time I was either travelling to meet someone, dealing with practical aspects of the research process, waiting for an interview or talking to an informant who had little interest in my questions. But at other moments, the research seemed to move forward at breakneck speed, for example when an informant poured forth on topics central to my interests; the research almost seemed to be doing itself during these moments. My fieldwork sometimes felt like a species of waiting in the double sense that I had to spend long periods in enforced idleness and in that my research seemed slow relative to that of many colleagues in the UK and US who are not carrying out long-term ethnographic studies. These points were not lost on many of my student friends, who often joked that I, like them, spent substantial periods of the day “doing very little” and asked me several times, “Was your previous research so unsuccessful that you had to return?”

Another set of tensions were moral and political. During research on student activism and cultures of unemployment it was difficult not to become
too closely associated with particular social groups, a problem that OP had done much to anticipate and address in 1996 and 1997. Students at CCSU and MC commonly tried to persuade me to support their political campaigns, for example by giving speeches at political events or appearing at cultural functions that they had organized for students. I had to walk a difficult line between “giving back” some of my time and energy while not becoming too closely associated with any one faction. I found that living off campus at the home of a friend on the outskirts of Meerut helped in this respect, but I sometimes felt that my work with Dalits was compromised by my being too closely associated with the Jats. I was also aware of the possibility that my work might put some of my informants at risk. Reflecting these concerns, I avoided alluding to other conversations when I interviewed students. It should also be noted in this context that I have used pseudonyms when referring to individual people throughout this book and have also changed details of people’s background and activities to prevent their being identified.

A further set of concerns I had in the field related to my position as a university teacher. In 1996, when I lived for a few weeks in Meerut College, I was perceived as one of the students, younger than many of the men with whom I was living. But in 2004 and 2005 I had a job at the University of Edinburgh, and some students regarded me as a symbol of authority and as embodying aspects of a dominant higher educational culture from which they were excluded. I managed this in part by stressing my close interest in student life and by becoming involved in jokes, games and protests on campus. I also tried to use the gap between my structural situation and that of many long-time students in Meerut as a basis for opening up discussion on issues such as unemployment, mobility and aspirations. But these efforts were constantly being unpicked in practice, through my own mistakes, because I lacked the time to get to know informants better, and as a result of being enrolled in the social projects of professors and administrators. The last point is especially notable: on two occasions university teachers invited me to classes and proceeded to pillory students for their apathy in a way that implied that I would agree with their views.

Dilemmas and tensions continued when I returned from the field; questions of power and representation remain crucially important during the writing up of research, as many feminist scholars have pointed out (Mohanty 2003; Madison 2005). Some have accused ethnographers of ventriloquizing others by setting out accounts that purport to be true representations of “subaltern voice” but which always reflect the proclivities and will of the author (Spivak 1988). There is no gaining these arguments, except to point out, as have others (Scherer-Hughes 1992, 1995; Gold and Gujar 2002; Tarlo 2003), that ethnographers have typically devoted substantial time to trying to understand and represent particular social situations. I continue to believe in the possibility and importance of spending long periods attempting to appreciate people’s social practice and of presenting the resulting findings in a way that others, including my informants, find meaningful. Moreover, I am committed to developing ways of interacting with and learning from my interlocutors in North-Western UP that are not founded on the assumption that certain modes of political and social practice, for example those characteristic of the US, are inevitably superior to those prevalent in UP. My focus in this book on storytelling, long-term learning and reciprocal exchange is broadly consistent with Spivak’s own position as articulated in some recent writing (see Spivak 2004: 577 n.66). Making these points should certainly not obscure the manner in which this book is a form of cultural capital that bolsters my position in the academy while inevitably doing less to address the pressing concerns of my interlocutors (see also Gidwani 2008 on this point). This is a persistent and troubling aspect of ethnography crafted in part for a Western audience.

There are three other important points that I want to draw out on the topic of the process and presentation of my research. First, I found detailed note taking to be crucial in terms of building up an understanding of everyday politics in north India. I typically spent only two or three hours “in the field” every day and six to eight hours writing field notes in my room. These notes recorded in micro-detail aspects of people’s dress, speech and comportment and I found these non-verbal minutiae to be highly important as I wrote this book. Second, the capacity to improvise was a key skill that I developed through the research process. In Chapter Six of this book I describe a north Indian notion of improvisation (jagā) that stresses the value of creative ingenuity and opportunism. During the total of 38 months I have spent conducting ethnographic research in north India since 1995, I have found jagā to be
crucial. On numerous occasions I discovered that the person I had hoped to interview was unavailable and I had to revise my plans or sit for several hours waiting. But it was often these detours and holdups that yielded the richest ethnographic material. Indeed, such moments sometimes compelled me to examine aspects of rural or urban life that I would otherwise have taken for granted. Third, I believe that a constant attention to various forms of reciprocity is crucial to successful ethnographic fieldwork. Although my research sometimes felt highly "extractive" (cf. Gutmann 1996; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006), it involved constant back and forth with my informants as we debated striking contrasts and unexpected similarities between politics and society in the UK and India and repeated efforts to share my emerging results via seminars and articles that I wrote in local newspapers. One of my lasting memories of conducting research in UP is of the willingness of farmers and young people to debate my work and involve me in local events.

Argument and Structure of the Book

This book uses a focus on the strategies of rich farmers and unemployed young men to reflect on middle classes, micro-politics and waiting. A central aim is to rethink how middle classes reproduce their power. I argue that a lower middle class of Jats defended class advantage through a dual strategy. First, Jats invested in cultural capital and social networking. Other studies of middle classes in the global south stress their enthusiasm for "global" and "Western" symbols and social networks (e.g. Cohen 2004; Fernandes 2006). What was perhaps remarkable about Jats' social networking and cultural capital accumulation in the 1990s and early 2000s was their tendency to concentrate on maintaining local power, for example through monopolizing access to relatively good schooling opportunities within and around the village, in the case of rich farmers, or dominating campus politics in Meerut, in the instance of student politicians. At the same time, Jats were stretching "the local" via their rural-urban practices in North-Western UP, bringing together villages, urban offices, schools and universities in a tight weave.

The second prong of Jats' reproductive strategies was to co-opt and colonize the local state. Some recent research on the middle classes, most notably Cohen's (2004) work in Morocco, stresses middle classes' disengagement from the state and nation in favor of cultivating a global identity. In Meerut district the state remained crucially important, materially and ideologically. Jats looked to the state as a provider of resources and believed in the ideal of the nation-state. And yet I will suggest that Jats were primarily interested in shaping local, informal incarnations of "the state." Rich Jat farmers in the mid-1990s and Jat student leaders in 2004 and 2005 tended to eschew intensive investment in party politics and formal civic associations in favor of a politics oriented around the pursuit of leverage in varied informal fields of local state practice: networks built around influencing the police, agricultural marketing and government education, for example.

I use these points about cultural capital, social capital and fields—as they become important in the telling of the story of the Jats—to argue for the continued salience of Bourdieuan theorizing for an understanding of social change in India. The notion of field is especially helpful for apprehending the micro-politics of class advantage in India. Yet I also acknowledge the limits of Bourdieuan theory. In Meerut in 2004 and 2005 there was a prominent set of Jat young men social reformers, who worked alongside poorer Dalit and Muslim students and avoided using their power to advance their material interests. The existence of these reformers points to the dangers of assuming that lower middle classes inevitably exhibit an aggressive individualism. Moreover, a spirit of irreverence characterized youth cultural and political activity in Meerut which is difficult to understand through a Bourdieuan lens.

I make two somewhat different arguments about "waiting." First, threaded through the book is a concern with how middle classes maintain their power in part through a strategy of deliberate "waiting": they invest in specific futures based on their knowledge of likely "returns." The ability to wait patiently before cashing in on a social connection or wait for sons to acquire urban jobs depends on people's knowledge of how fields operate. At the same time, this "waiting" strategy is not always successful, as evident in the increasing numbers of unemployed youth in Meerut, men like Jaipal who were forced to engage in a form of unplanned, comparatively aimless waiting. I argue that it is precisely young men's sense of being somehow "in limbo" in Meerut in the 2000s that generated cross-class action. Standing around, self-consciously
unemployed on street corners in Meerut, young men struck up friendships across caste and class lines and engaged in political protests together: limbo can be a crucial context for novel cultural and political practice.

Chapter Two describes the rise of Jat power in North-Western UP. Rural Jats historically engaged in farming, and this caste became locally dominant in large parts of North-Western UP in the second half of the twentieth century. But rich Jat farmers faced two new threats to their power from the early 1990s onwards. First, the emergence of the pro-Dalit Babajan Samaj Party (BSP) in the 1990s presented a new political challenge. Second, economic liberalization since the early 1990s had a negative impact on agricultural production, reduced opportunities for government work in UP and tended to undermine state welfare provision. I examine how Jats were responding to these threats using fieldwork that I conducted in the mid-1990s in rural Meerut district. I show that Jat farmers were channeling resources into influencing the local state and investing in the education of their children. These social networking and educational strategies required farmers to adjust their mental horizons: long-term goals were prioritized over short-term gains. These “waiting” strategies were largely successful in bolstering Jat power.

At the same time, however, Jat strategies were creating a new cohort of self-consciously “unemployed” youth. Indeed, one of the most important outcomes of rural parental strategies in North-Western UP in the 1980s and 1990s was the formation of a large and visible generation of young men who had spent long periods in formal education but who had failed to acquire secure salaried work.

Chapters Three, Four and Five examine the cultural and political strategies of these educated young men through reference to research conducted in 2004 and 2005 among students in Meerut City. In Chapter Three, I document the emergence of a sense of limbo among unemployed students in Meerut. Young men were often engaged in an unfulfilling wait for secure employment. They felt bored and disoriented in time and space. Indeed, many of these men said that they spend much of their days doing timepass, for example standing about at street corners and tea stalls. At first blush, this form of apparently “purposeless” waiting presents a stark contrast to the “purposeful” waiting of Jat parents. Youth waiting in Meerut was not wholly fruitless, however: time-pass provided opportunities to acquire educational qualifications and knowledge about local politics and the informal economy. Moreover, young men used their time in Meerut to develop a shared youth culture based around hanging out. Street corners, tea stalls, bus stops and other nodes within the city provided a site for the development of a distinctive culture of masculine waiting that included Jats, Dalits and Muslims. At the same time, time-pass cultures further entrenched pernicious gender norms. In addition, class, caste and religious divides sometimes became apparent among young men hanging out, especially in fights over young women.

A sense of relatively purposeless waiting among young men not only created opportunities for relatively novel cultural practice but was also a foundation for political action. In Chapter Four I consider the extent to which a culture of urban waiting had precipitated collective political protest on university and college campuses in Meerut. I argue that waiting had generated a poorly institutionalized but vibrant form of politics built around informal demonstrations and networking. In particular, unemployed young men mobilized around the issues of the costs of education, corruption, young people’s stalled progress through university and the harassment of students. A set of Jat “social reformers” was at the forefront of these protests, but the agitations involved young men from a variety of caste, class and religious backgrounds and sometimes also young women.

Chapter Five considers how class and caste inequalities fractured a collective youth politics with reference to the political work of Jat student leaders or “fixers” in Meerut. Unemployed Jat students from relatively prosperous backgrounds publicly sought to articulate the demands of unemployed young men as a whole. But after winning a student union post, middle-caste leaders capitalized on their power to make large personal incomes, mainly through acting as intermediaries between private educational entrepreneurs and the state educational bureaucracy. In addition to offering cash, a position on a university student union provided student leaders with a sense of spatial and temporal security and belonging. Other students often viewed student leaders’ “corrupt” practices as a betrayal. Yet Jat fixers had a range of justificatory tactics at their disposal to shore up their reputation, including euphemism, denial and obfuscation. More than this, I show that Jat student leaders had used the
"guilty secret" of their double-dealing as a basis for solidifying friendships with other middle castes and generating an image of accomplished masculinity oriented around notions of shrewd improvisation (jagār). The capacity of a small set of lower middle-class politicians to perpetuate power was therefore founded in large part, and to a greater extent than was the case with rich Jat farmers in the 1990s, on energetic cultural production.

The conclusion highlights the relevance of my account for thinking about the Indian middle classes, micro-politics and waiting. A focus on the reproductive strategies of rich Jat farmers and educated unemployed young men offers something of a counterpoint to broader work on Indian and postcolonial middle classes, laying emphasis on the local, state-centric means through which a class perpetuates power. My ethnographic work also offers an opportunity to rethink everyday politics in India with reference to fields. Finally, I throw light on waiting as a basis for counterintuitive forms of cultural and political practice.

2 Cultivating Fields: The Rise and Resilience of a Rural Middle Class

This chapter considers the strategies of "rich farmers": agriculturalists who own the means of production, hire in labor for most farming tasks and possess between 4 hectares and 10 hectares of land (Patnaik 1976). More specifically, I examine the consolidation of a class of prosperous Jat farmers in North-Western UP, focusing on their political and social practices in the mid-1990s. I argue that a lower middle class of rich Jats had emerged from the ranks of the rich peasantry in the 1970s and 1980s and chart how this section of society defended its privileges in the context of new social and economic threats.

Several scholars have examined the growing visibility of a set of rich farmers in rural India from the late nineteenth century onwards (e.g. Upadhyya 1988; Rutten 1995; Gidwani 2008). Much work has linked the recent strength of these agriculturalists to changes in the political economy of India from the mid-1960s onwards. In 1964 the Indian Government shifted the direction of development planning from a model of industrial growth towards a more committed drive to improve agricultural production. C. Subramaniam's appointment as India's Food and Agriculture Minister in 1964, advice from the World Bank, changing US aid policies and concerns over a communist threat in the Indian countryside conspired to effect a move away from the Nehruvian policy of low food prices and institutional reform. The Indian state focused instead on creating incentive prices for producers through the establishment of an Agricultural Prices Commission and the Food Corpo-