

Networks that Make a Difference

The Production of Social Cohesion in Lucknow, North India

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Preface

“Lucknow bestowed on me an invaluable gift. It taught me to look at the human being rather than his religion or his caste or the colour of his skin” (Mehta 2007: 219)

When the word Lucknow slips from the tongue the whole imaginary landscape of the rich, extravagant and peculiar culture of the times of the Nawabs of Awadh unfolds in front of our eyes. The Urdu poetry, courtesans, exquisite cuisine and fashion, kite-flying, cock-fighting, elaborate etiquette, marvellous architecture, mosques and imambaras, kathak performances, the mourning festival of Muharram...

The Lucknow of today is a bit different; it is a modern North Indian city with its characteristic buzz in the streets, with its “struggling” middle class and new shopping malls; with its abysmal difference between the urban rich and poor. But still, behind the facade of modernity, when we look closer, the old Lucknow is still alive. *The Lucknow* imagined and portrayed as a secular, peaceful place with a distinctive culture of intercommunal tolerance, *the Lucknow* as the legacy of the Nawabi rulers with their etiquette and morals still lives in the imagination of its inhabitants. Lucknow of today is a remarkable blend of “tradition” and “modernity”, it is an example *par excellence* of how the discursive material of the past is redefined and adapted to new conditions and how it, in its consequences, recreates the imagined past making it in nowadays reality - only under different conditions.

I investigate *the city* of Lucknow which is imagined as secular, peaceful and as distinguished for its communal¹ harmony. In contrast to the vast majority of studies concerned with communal violence in general and the Hindu-Muslim violence in India in particular, I opt the opposite point of departure, the one of communal peace². There is a great deal of knowledge on why intercommunal conflicts emerge, what ideas sustain them and how they are produced, but what we lack is a more nuanced understanding of why there are some places which do not fall in the above mentioned category.

I thus present an analysis, which tries to answer the riddle of why Lucknow, lying in the heart of an area stricken in periods by communal violence has throughout its history always remained as peaceful; particularly focusing on the period from the 1990s on. In my work I argue that there are several deeply interconnected factors which play a salient role in the preservation of the peaceful relationships. These are *the local history as it is imagined by the Lakhnawis*; *the local informal embroidery industry which is well known under the name Chikan* and which creates intercommunal networks of economic dependency; *the spectacular show-case of this handicraft in Bollywood cinema*; *intercommunal networks* outside the realm of the industry; *the role of the emerging middle class, its lifeworld and consumerism* all set within the framework of globalization. Throughout the different chapters I treat these salient factors as analytically separated, while in the concluding chapter I elaborate on the interrelationships and interconnections between these factors and analyze the discussed factors within a greater framework of the general processes of globalization and emphasize the extra-local networks which work for the sustenance of the peaceful cohesion. I thus present “anthropology of the city, rather than *in the city*” (Fox 1977).

¹ In the context of South Asian studies the word “communal” usually connotes an extreme form of group exclusivity, which is associated with the practices of discrimination and violence.

² It may be noted that similar logic led T. H. Eriksen in his investigations in Mauritius (Eriksen 1998).

Before we proceed to the discussion of the challenges connected with doing the anthropology *of the city*, I would like to thank people who helped me on the way, as I am fully aware of the fact that without them the fieldwork and the thesis would look much different, and I must emphasize that every single person will be inscribed somehow in the text and in me. First of all, I would like to thank my landlady, Naheed Varma, for taking such a motherly care of me and for her witty observations of the Indian life. My thanks go also to Ram Advani, the famous bookseller well-known to everyone who did research in or just travelled through Lucknow, for hours spent in his bookshop discussing all different topics over a cup of tea and biscuits and for his invaluable help with my research. My thanks for warm discussions and friendship go to Sarah Pinto, professor of medical anthropology at Tufts University, to Robert Phillips, professor of Urdu at the University of North Carolina, Rakesh Chandra, professor of philosophy and director of the Institute of Women's studies at the University of Lucknow, Roop Rekha Verma, the former vice-chancellor of the University of Lucknow, Sanne Van Der Kaaij, PhD student at the University of Amsterdam, to my dear friends and devoted Urdu students Devon Lee, Justin Smolin and Brian Wolfe. My thanks go also to Chander Prakash, Mrs. Mangalik, Nawab Syed Ibrahim Khan, Mamta Varma, Shri Mar Prasad Agarwal, C. M. Naim, Urfi Khan and of course to many people I worked with, who became my friends and who opened my eyes to a different world. Special thanks go to Christian Krohn-Hansen and Michal Tošner.

Chapter I - Doing Anthropology of the City: Meditations on Theory and Method

“The whole world could not be called one if each of its parts did not somehow influence every other part, or, if at any one point the reciprocity of effects, however indirect it may be, were cut off” (Simmel 1984[1908]:23)

Doing anthropology of the city, where the city is not understood as a site of inquiry but rather an *object of inquiry* (Donner & De Neve 2006), represents a crucial challenge for the anthropologist. The data gathered through participant observation, in-depth interaction with different actors which result in an intensely personal experience, must be set in the larger cultural, social, economical and political context, not only of the city, but possibly of the world, which often requires great amount of imagination considering the wealth of data available (Gmelch 1988:147). At the same time as this is the anthropologist’s greatest challenge, it is his greatest asset, too. The in-depth, close and intimate knowledge of the field places him in the unique position of having the potential to understand the ways in which social actors actively create the social structures and produce discourses and ideas which in turn form and shape them; he is in the unique position to understand *the dialectics of social life* (Simmel 1984, see Coser 1977:182-188, *cf.* Murphy 1971:85)³.

³ I am using the word “dialectic/dialectics” in non-Marxian meaning.

The Production of Place

The historical and cultural trajectories, the economic sphere and the political culture are the cornerstones of the city, both *forming* and *formed by its inhabitants*. “What gives place its specificity (...) is the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relationships, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (Massey 1994: 154). The investigation of this particular constellation is what forms the core of the anthropology of the city, as I view it.

The production, reproduction and constitution of a place is always deep-rooted in human agency, in the day-to-day praxis and activity of individuals (Tilley 1994:10), in the relations they create between each other, the networks they are part of and that they sustain and are sustained by. The place is produced through discursive practices of individuals who are related to it in different ways, through their social relationships and networks as well as through their physical practices and lived experiences. Place is thus about “situatedness in relation to identity and action” (Tilley 1994:18, *cf.* Comaroff 1996), it is “intimately related to the formation of biographies and social relationships” (Tilley 1994:11). The uniqueness of each place stems from the particular ways and contexts in which people engage with and dwell in the world (Ingold 2000). A place is not something which exists ‘automatically’, it “is ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality” (Appadurai 1996:180-1). Therefore if we want to understand how a place is produced, we need to take the point of departure in the tangible acts of the social actors, we need to explore how people talk about the particular place, how they negotiate boundaries and how places work as identity markers (DeNeve & Donner 2006: 5); further we have to connect these particular acts to the wider structures and broader contexts which these produce.

For this purpose we need a perspective that not only recognizes the social actors as active agents who, through their daily engagement with a particular place, create it and give it its specific meaning, but that also “recognizes the interdependency of the world's cultural systems and deals with this interdependency in the conduct of anthropological research” (Rollwagen 1988:152), because places are not made in isolation but in *relation* to each other (*cf.* Tsing 2002). Not only are we obliged to depict a particular ethnographic case study, but also to look for the processes and causes in a larger framework that have produced the results we have depicted (Rollwagen 1988:152). I thus argue for a holistic perspective, suggesting that any aspect of the social world which we select for investigation should be understood and examined in the light of the broader contexts which it is part of, in the light of *the most pertinent features* of this larger system. When we combine the *emic* and *etic* approaches, we can understand the nature of the city through the diverse perspectives of the actors related to it and at the same time contextualize these in relation to larger systems, which these actors in actuality *produce* (*cf.* Rollwagen 1988:154-7). “Urban” can be viewed more in terms of a *process* rather than a category; the city being a site of day-to-day practices and providing valuable insights into the cultural, socio-political and economic macro-processes (*cf.* Low 1996). The city is a point of articulation of complex relationships between the flow of goods, labour, services and capital between metropolis, countryside and other metropolises; these local and supralocal linkages must be taken into account in the analysis (*cf.* Leeds 1973, Sanjek 1994).

If we thus want to account for a city, we have to attempt to understand its meaning through the thorough knowledge of people who live there (Rotenberg & McDonough 1993: xi). The city is a sort of a discursive realm which links everyday practices with broader socio-economic, cultural and political processes (*cf.* Jacobs 1993), and we have to account for it as such - focusing on the interrelatedness, connections and interdependency. The structure and the identity of the city is ultimately grounded in the actions of people who are related to it, in the symbolic constructs they use in coping with their local reality (*cf.* Fine 1993), but at the same

time “the identity of the city also structures residents’ urban experience, adding urban identity to a place and time as universal sources of metropolitan knowledge” (Low 1996: 401, *referring to Rotenberg 1996*). The dialectics of social life, which gets even more pressing when we are engaged in the investigation of the city, must be dealt with both theoretically and methodologically within a fitting framework.

The Theoretico-Methodological Framework

The theoretico-methodological framework, which I present here, has been developed for the purposes of the anthropology of the city as I will pursue it; particularly for the investigation of the city of Lucknow. Throughout the different chapters I will use different aspects and parts of this framework. This framework should be understood first and foremost as a source of inspiration for thinking about the social world rather than as a strict dictator of theories and methods to be used.

The theoretico-methodological framework centres on and acknowledges the meaning of the following key features that are the most pertinent to the study of a city as I perceive it, i.e. social and symbolic interaction; language and discourse; social and economic networks; relational and processual approach; locality/place and its historical biography.

The general theoretical approach to the social reality and society is formed by the social constructionist perspectives and the sociology of knowledge as suggested by Luckman & Berger (1966). Further, *symbolic interactionism* (1) serves as a theoretical framework for understanding of the social and symbolic interaction approached through the method of participant observation in the field (Blumer 1998 & 2004; Charon 2001; Mead 1934; Simmel 1984). I let myself inspire by the symbolic interactionism, since I consider it especially suitable for the purposes of the anthropology of the city, being “both a theory of experience and a

theory of social structure” (Denzin 1992:3). The use of this approach can be of an invaluable help in figuring out how social structures actually function in directing conduct through imposing constraints on social actors and how the conduct and social acts of these actors, in turn, transform and redefine social structures (*cf.* Mead 1934). Particularly the structural versions of symbolic interactionism (Stryker 1987 & 2002, Denzin 1977, Cavan 1972, Bucher & Strauss 1961, Glaser & Strauss 1964, Freidson 1975, Buckley 1967, Maines 1977) are very fit since they provide a conceptual framework which facilitates movement across the levels of person and organization, emphasizing also the importance of history. The potential of this theoretical and methodological approach to the study of the Indian context has been already noted by Gerald D. Berreman, who believed that “the application of this emerging body of theory to Indian data would be of great significance to the understanding of Indian society” (Berreman 1979:61). Symbolic interactionism is again theoretically easy to combine with and enriches the *social network analysis* (2) (Coleman 1990; Scott 2000; Emirbayer 1997; Emirbayer & Goodwin 1994; Barnes 1954; Granovetter 1973; Somers 1994; Wellman 1988), which helps us understand the networks of interdependency, the interrelatedness of phenomena and provides us with understanding of the larger system. *Discourse analysis* (3) (Phillips & Jørgensen 2006; Bakhtin 2004; van Dijk 2006; Fairclough 1995; Foucault 1972; Bourdieu 1991) as a theory and method can be applied to both levels of analysis as represented by the above mentioned approaches. The understanding of language and discourse is implicitly informed by the philosophy of language, mainly postanalytical philosophy as represented by Davidson (1986, 1989, 1997), Rorty (1989, 1998), and Quine (1960, 1969, 1992), but also late Wittgenstein (1953) and other theorists such as Lakoff & Johnson (1980, 1999).

This theoretico-methodological framework that combines symbolic interactionism with network analysis and diverse approaches to the study of discourse enables movement from the level of person to that of a large-scale social structure and back and thus facilitates the

conceptualization of the reciprocal impact of the social person on the social structure. It can be summarized as follows:

Social network analysis (2)

(Network analysis as a theory and method, esp. new qualitative trends) Acknowledges the importance of social, economic, family etc. networks and emphasizes their relational and processual nature, viewing actors and their actions as interdependent and conceptualizing structure as lasting patterns of relations among actors. It is suitable for mapping kinship ties, social roles, affective linkages, actions, cognitive data as well as transfer of material resources.

Symbolic interactionism (1)

(Participant observation and network analysis) Symbolic interactionism acknowledges the importance of social and symbolic interaction that gives rise to symbols, language and perspectives central to human life and to the formation of society, as well as it acknowledges the importance of human agency. The structural versions of symbolic interactionism further acknowledges that "it is social structures - including systems of positions around which societies are organized - that shape social interaction" (Stryker 1987:91) and provides a theoretical framework for the conceptualization of the dialectical and reciprocal relationship between social forms and persons.

Discourse analysis (3)

(As a theory and method) Acknowledges the central importance of language, the symbolic nature of the world and the textuality of the reality and conceptualizes the relationship between language (discourses) and power.



Doing Anthropology of the City: Theory and Method in the Field

In the preface I have anticipated the riddle which the next pages are going to solve, the riddle of why a city of Lucknow, lying at the heart of an area stricken at times by communal violence, remains peaceful, even throughout such events as the Partition of India in 1947, and the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 by Hindu nationalists in Ayodhya, a town no more than hundred fifty kilometres far from Lucknow.

I argue that at the heart of the peaceful nature of Lucknow is a particular blend of local history and networks of economic dependency which cut across the boundaries of class, caste, religion and even locality, and which are, in the last three decades, sustained by something I will, for the present moment, briefly call the “middle-class discourse”. The intercommunal economic dependency became the springboard of my investigation. I soon understood the importance of the embroidery industry, which goes by the name of Chikan, and for which the city is well-known all over India, and of the intercommunal networks it creates. Chikan is a traditional Muslim craft, embroidery produced mostly by Muslim girls in the city and the surrounding villages and traded mostly by Hindu businessmen (though there are more and more Muslim traders as well as Hindu embroiderers in the last two decades). More than twenty percent of the city population is somehow connected with this informal industry and it forms at least a part of their income. Throughout my time spent in the field I have tried to understand the way how this informal industry works, the networks which it creates, what relationships emerge within its borders, how the work is organized, which actors are involved in the production of the garments and what ideas surround it. The Chikan industry will be discussed in depth in chapter III, but what is important to emphasize now is the meaning of it as a point of departure. As it already has been said, the Chikan informal industry cuts across the division of

class, caste, religion and locality and creates an incredible network of mutual dependency, obligations and expectations. And at the heart of this network stands the businessman.

Therefore the choice to work with the traders-cum-entrepreneurs in the first place has been no accidentality, I have chosen them intentionally. Not only are they crucial nodal points in these networks but they also “often operate between distinct social spheres, bringing together diverse cultural or economic resources into a business operation” (De Montoya 2004:339) and they are thus well-plugged into the society and its culture, presenting an interesting group for investigation. This starting point also enabled me to follow the networks the traders-cum-entrepreneurs daily use, map these and understand how they integrate diverse people; it enabled me to actually map a great part of the city and its neighbouring villages and their inhabitants. Not only did I get to know the people involved in the production process, but I also came into close contact with the buyers, coming again mostly from the middle class. This methodologically strategic point of departure thus enabled me to understand the actual actions of social agents in relation to the broader social structures in a rather concrete manner. It also enabled the investigation of the interconnections and intersection of several spheres, i.e. the economic, the social, the cultural and the discursive. Operating in a network defined universe and in the context of the city’s particular historical biography I could, in a sense, get hold of the *structure* of the city and the city itself. Hence we can see in practice how the urban localities may be viewed “as constitutive of social relationships which they reflect, challenge or reproduce” (De Neve & Donner 2006:3).

Now let us focus more closely on what it meant to do anthropology of the city and what concrete actions it involved. During the time I was in the field I have combined several methodological strategies, which roughly followed in time in this order: unstructured basic interviews, more structured and longer interviews, life-history interviews with a broader spectre of questions and last but not least participant observation as the crucial method of obtaining data during the whole period of five months in the field. In addition, reading locally

relevant literature, newspapers and other magazines was a part of my daily practice. I have also joined several social networking websites of the type of Facebook.com, which enabled me to view the relationships between people I studied in a different light and which provided additional insight in who knows whom and proved as a valuable source of data even in the after-fieldwork period still holding me in active contact with the field.

When gathering data I implicitly used the theoretico-methodological framework which has been sketched above, i.e. I made use of the symbolic interactionist perspectives (Blumer 1998 & 2004; Charon 2001; Mead 1934, Stryker 1987 & 2002) and tried to inquire about what people do in face-to-face interaction; I tried to discover how they choose among alternative behaviours and what various meanings different social situations have to them and to those with whom they interact. My approach was mainly *cognitive*, in terms of being interested in peoples own views of their social world and the principles upon which they organize its constituent elements, define systems of relevance and make choices. I was interested in finding out which social identities are relevant according to people's own views, what stereotypes are expressed about these identities and how people identify themselves as belonging somewhere. Using the network analysis approach (Coleman 1990; Scott 2000; Emirbayer 1997; Emirbayer & Goodwin 1994; Barnes 1954; Granovetter 1973; Somers 1994; Wellman 1988) I mapped the networks the people I worked with were engaged in. I focused on the intercommunal networks within the industry and explored more deeply how "social networks – built on kinship or friendship, trust or good will – sustain economic relations and institutions" (Lie 1997:349) in the given context. I wanted to know what it meant to be a part of those particular networks and understand the ways these networks made possible certain things while they restricted others. Particularly in relation to the business-middle class there was "something about the structure of the player's network and the location of the player's contacts in the social structure of the arena that provided a competitive advantage in getting higher rates of return on investment" (Burt 2004:281). I also focused on the importance of and function of the vertical ties - within

the Chikan industry, between business people themselves and in the cultural location in general – be it in a form of highly personalized and localized patron-client relationships or relationships between hierarchically differently positioned business people (either in terms of income, age, class or caste). This type of ties is of immense importance since “in times of crisis it is vertical ties that will make the difference for you. Basically economic goods move down the hierarchy and social and political support move up” (Granovetter 2004:247). It can be said that I combined the network analysis and the sociology of economic life (Granovetter 1985), where social relations are fundamental to the market processes, with historically and culturally sensible understanding of social structures, relationships and developments in the urban India since the 1990s, while emphasizing the importance and meaning of the social actions of individuals and the interactions between them.

Now that we have briefly sketched the theoretical and methodological approaches and the subject matter of our investigation, let us proceed further and immerse in the sublime representations of the past of Lucknow and rather puzzled representations of its present, and become more familiar with our city.

Chapter II - Imagining Lucknow: The Mythologies of a City

If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences

(W.I.Thomas 1928:571-572)

The various ways in which a particular place is imagined are crucial for its identity, and thus for the identity of its inhabitants. The unique biography of a city is sewed from the substance of people's actions, social relationships and material production. In the following pages I focus on the various ways in which Lucknow is not only imagined but also produced and recreated by its contemporary inhabitants, by people I met and daily interacted with. There is a great deal of literature on the subject of the history of Lucknow and Awadh, on the peculiarities of the Nawabi rule, on the interaction of the Nawabs with the British, on the politics of the last century, which all have formed the cityscape in their own ways and created an unusual cultural, architectural and imaginative blend. But instead of presenting an overview of the history of the city, which others have already done in great detail, I will focus on the *representations of the past*. I will identify several crucial *notions* around which the city is imagined and try to show the ways in which "society's sense of its past is integral to its self-production through time" (Peel 1984:111). And I will focus on how the inhabitants using the *past as a scarce resource*, select certain aspects of it and attribute greater importance to them than to others, creating a particular "Lakhnawi" identity and the notion of "typical Lakhnawi".

The Representations of the Past

We live in other people's pasts, the environment we live in is itself "pregnant with past" (Ingold 2000:189) and in the web of life the representations of past play a significant role. They relate past to present, they are derived from present practices which work mainly upon present evidences of the past (Peel 1984:111) and are used for new ends. "History, then, is very much a mythical construction, in the sense that it is a representation of the past linked to the establishment of an identity in the present" (Friedman 1992:195). The representations of the past, as any other discourse, i.e. a particular system of thought which is composed of ideas, attitudes, viewpoints, beliefs, actions and practices that systematically construct different subjects and the worlds of which they speak (*cf.* Foucault 1972), create and construct realities - they make realities factual. Hence I view the representations of the past *as real in their consequences* and the individuals as active agents who produce and construct the reality, sustain it and reproduce it by their actions, ideas and interaction in the real time and space, as well as at the same time they are shaped by their own constructions. Representations of the past can thus be considered as "purposeful social actions" (Tonkin 1992:3); past is not only continually redefined in the light of present, but it also has a structuring effect on what is likely to occur in the present (Mead 1929). In the following pages I allow myself the liberty of bracketing the "truth value", believing that what is important for us to understand is rather the representations of the past and the ways in which the past is imagined by the residents and the visitors of Lucknow. These are the representations that have the impact on and the potential to structure the present. This approach also enables us to understand how belonging to a particular place is constructed and from which discursive material.

The Narrative of Glorious Past, Decline & Old Charm

*Yeh Lakhna'u ki sarzameen
Yeh rang-roop kaa chaman
Yeh husn-o-ishq kaa vatan
Yahi to voh maqaam hai
Jahaan awadh ki shaam hai
Javaan-javaan haseen-haseen
Yeh Lakhna'u ki sarzameen*

*This land of Lucknow
This garden of colour and form
This home of beauty and love
This is the very site
Of twilight for Awadh
Fresh and exquisite
This land of Lucknow*

(Oldenburg 2007:3)⁴

Lucknow, though a modern city of about three million inhabitants⁵, a political centre and the capital of the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, is still portrayed and imagined as a *City of Nawabs*. When one talks to Lakhnawis or just Googles the word “Lucknow” one of the first images which one is confronted with is that of Wajid Ali Shah, the tenth and the last Nawab of the princely kingdom of Awadh; it is him on the famous painting, showing his left nipple and suggesting the extravaganza and decadency of the royal court. It is not Mayawati, the current

⁴ Lyrics written by Shakeel Badayuni for the opening sequence of Guru Dutt's movie *Chaudhvin ka Chand* from the 60s, the song still being remembered by Lakhnawis.

⁵ Lucknow has according to the 2007 census 2,611,300 inhabitants, but the unofficial estimates suggest a higher number.

“ruler”, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, whom we see first, even though the city is flushed with an enormous amount of her images on the billboards. Some images live on, while others are doomed to perish. Representations of Lucknow continue to be marked by a sense of loss and a great amount of nostalgia, in which the “Nawabi” and the ideas which this word evokes and associates play a crucial role, be it in the popular, cinematic or literary imagination.

The Nawabs, who elaborated from a Shi`i nobility and a cultural base in Persia, have formed a peculiar Indo-Persian culture in Lucknow, which flourished most vigorously between the reign of Asaf-ud-Daula (1774-98), who in 1775 shifted his capital from Faizabad to Lucknow and enlivened the city with flamboyant monuments and the reign of the last of the Nawabs Wajid Ali Shah (1848-56). In this period of blossom Lucknow became known as the *Venice of Orient*, as the *Golden City of East*, as *Shiraz-i-Hind* or *The Constantinople of India*, to add one more name. It has built its reputation as a city of languorous grace, of *Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb*⁶, of marvellous palaces and imambaras, art and craft, courtly manners, delicate cuisine, beautiful courtesans and refined language and poetry. Despite the vast majority of Hindu population, Lucknow is still imagined as a centre of Muslim culture. This fact is no mystery if we realize that all the crucial notions around which life was organized in the times of the Nawabs of Awadh are still there and live on through the present practices which work upon present representations of the past. Let us have a closer look at these notions and actions that are still to be observed though under changed political and economic conditions.

⁶ Used to designate the *tehzeeb* (“culture” or “refinement”) of friendship between Muslims and Hindus, Ganga and Jamuna being two holy rivers meeting. When discussing Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb with one older Hindu lady who has been doing the Chikan business for the last twenty years, I was told that “you will find it in so many other cities too, like Varanasi, but in Lucknow there is a different aura about this. And I think that every aspect, like we have these imambaras, and I have been brought up in an area where the imambaras have always been there, it has a very good effect on your mind, sort of tells you that this is it, this is our heritage (...) there is a difference, we have a lot of Muslim-Hindu mix, which you do not find in so many other cities, so I like that, see because I like to meet people of all religions” (from an interview, 23.3.2008).

The Significance of Muharram

Though the Nawabs came from Persia and brought with them Shiism and their remarkable culture they, at the same time, “created a unique set of cultural expressions that came to be seen as distinctively Lakhnawi” (Freitag 2006:238). One of these cultural expressions, which was integrated into the local cultural discourses, is the mourning festival of *Muharram*. This festival commemorates the anniversary of the battle of Karbala and is observed to mourn the death of Imam Hussain ibn Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad⁷. With the Nawabi rule “the underpinning of Awadh culture became Shia faith and practice centered around the martyrdom of Prophet's family” (Khan 2007:25). The mourning of Muharram was thus not meant only for Shias. The Nawabs, well aware of their rule over people of different religion, tried to bridge faiths and to include diverse and large population in this symbolic action. They built *imambaras*, special buildings used particularly during Muharram to house tazias⁸ between the observances; in *imambaras* various ceremonies were held, such as recitations of poetry, *marsiyas*⁹ or elegies in memory of the battle of Karbala, within their walls the ulama delivered sermons to crowds that easily exceeded ten thousand. *Imambaras* were, and still are, open for anybody who wishes to enter (unlike mosques) regardless of religion, they still host thousands of people during Muharram who gather there for sermons, only recitation of poetry almost disappeared from this public place, remaining though a practice performed privately in elite homes. “The *imambaras* of Lucknow (...) have served as a binding thread in the diverse social fabric of India (...) and serve as symbols of peace and harmony” (Ahmad Khan 2007:57),

⁷ For more on Muharram in India see Pinault 2001.

⁸ Replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb.

⁹ See part on Poetry, Language and Etiquette.

“as symbols of communitarian solidarity, and as platforms for articulating individual and collective experiences” (Hasan 2006:116). It was thus “particularly through the elaboration of Muharram that the Nawabs had defined a cultural identity for their regime and their capitol city” (Freitag 2006:240). The Shia observance of Muharram has been elaborated to the tiniest detail; it achieved prominence and was embraced by the entire population of Awadh (Ahmad Khan 2007).

I had a great opportunity to become a part of the commemoration of the battle of Karbala and to experience the mourning period of Muharram. This unique time proved to be invaluable for my understanding of the place, its relation to the past and the ways in which it is shaped through the practices of its residents. These practices being based on the representations of the past as they are passed on from generation to generation, at the same time reflecting the present. During Muharram the city, and especially the area of the old city around Chowk, falls into a mourning mood, shops owned by Muslims close down, because they will devote their time to the observations for next ten days. But it is not only the Muslim shops that close down, a great number of shops owned by the Hindu population also close down “to show respect”¹⁰, while others, on the other hand, benefit from the sudden dependency of Muslims, who refrain from working, and try to sell them things of daily use as well as religious items used during Muharram. Everybody thus seems to profit, be it spiritually or financially. During this time imambaras are decorated with lights and tazias, the smell of scented sticks fills the air, as crowds of people visit the imambaras and stop to pray for a while. Hundreds of people are involved in making the decorations and preparations, creating the charm of this sad celebration through their work. A special pink Kashmiri tea is served on the streets to literary thousands of people coming out of the imambaras after the ulama's sermon. In the late afternoon the processions start and continue until early in the morning, both Muslims and Hindus walking in

¹⁰ From a conversation with a Hindu shopkeeper in the Chowk area, who himself took active part in the processions and even fire-walking, believing that it will prevent him from illnesses, 17.1.2008.

huge numbers through the streets of Lucknow, beating their chests with their hands while screaming “Ya Ali”. In the middle of the processions a white nicely decorated horse trots to commemorate Imam Hussain’s horse Zuljenah, returning from the battlefield. As I was told by the janitor of one of the imambaras “in the old days the horse was brought to Lucknow either directly from Karbala or from Iran, this time they have obtained him from a man in Delhi, times have changed”¹¹. Muharram is produced through an active remembrance of the past, not only is it a commemoration of ancestors in the form of the Prophet’s family but it is grounded in the reproduction of the past practice; though there is no longer a real horse from Karbala, there is still a white horse who is supposed to be the one of Karbala. “Muharram is a time when people of Lucknow come together and remember their ancestors”¹² and this, as I believe, is the reason why the Nawabs succeeded in linking to popular culture; we all have our past and remembering it is common for all of us and this makes the message of Muharram easily graspable.

The Idea of Secularism

But as it is remembered till today, not only did the Nawabs want people to take part and include them in their celebrations, they themselves participated in their people’s celebrations. The story of Wajid Ali Shah, who was also a great poet and playwright, and his incorporation of Hindu deities in his poetry is well-known. “Faiths were bridged when the king, Wajid Ali Shah, wrote and danced as Lord Krishna or a lovelorn yogi” (Ali 2007:61). The king dancing as Lord Krishna is very well remembered and when in Lucknow, one comes across this story very often. Almost all accounts of the oral history that I gathered began like this: “In the times of

¹¹ 18.1.2008.

¹² From a conversation with a descendent of the Nawabs, 19.1.2008.

Nawabs, the arts and architecture flourished, it was the time when a Muslim king danced as Lord Krishna...now where you can see that". The Nawabs thus became associated with *secularism*; it is them who made Lucknow a "peaceful, clean and a neat city"¹³. It seems as if everything imagined as the Lakhnawi stems from the times of the Nawabs and a very little space is left for the modern history. Thus it is said that when the partition of India took place in 1947, "there were no riots in Lucknow" and "it was due to the efforts made from time of Wajid Ali Shah who created an atmosphere of friendship between Hindus and Muslims" (Aziz 2007:49)¹⁴. It is again the Nawabs who are the ultimate explanatory principle. It is the "secular underpinnings of Lucknow society" that stand behind the fact that "even when most parts of the country were rocked by Hindu-Muslim violence during the early 1920s and on the eve of India's partition and thereafter, Lucknow remained an island of peace and sanity. Its record, barring some isolated and sporadic incidents, has not been tarnished since Independence" (Graff, Gupta & Hasan 2006:11). When we leaf through the books it is the secular outlook of the Nawabs and its survival through the coming centuries that is considered to be the explanation of the peacefulness of Lucknow. On the other hand I will argue that the situation is much more complex and that the reasons for Lucknow's relaxed¹⁵ intercommunal relationships are rather more complicated. Even though the Nawabs and the ways in which they are represented play a crucial role, things are likely not as straightforward, as other aspects come into play. Now let us focus further on how Lucknow is imagined, and turn to the case of language, poetry and etiquette.

¹³ 3.1.2008. This was the way Lucknow was introduced to me on my first day there, I wondered what "clean and neat" meant, since the roads were filled with nothing more than rubbish as it seemed, later on I understood that it had to do more with the "laid back lifestyle" of its inhabitants and "relaxed" relations, which were the "legacy of the decadent Nawabs", as I was told by the same person - noteworthy in his twenties; but I also understood that the streets were considerably cleaner than in Delhi...(17.2.2008).

¹⁴ Nasima Aziz in her article reproduces the life-histories of several Lakhnawis, this being a statement of one of them.

¹⁵ A word very often used in this context by Lakhnawis themselves.

Poetry, Language & Etiquette

The state of Awadh and the Nawabs offered generous patronage to poets, writers and scholars of Urdu and Persian. These came to Lucknow from Delhi, settled there and worked under the greatest patrons of literature, Shuja ud Daula, Asaf ud Daula, and Saadat Ali Khan. They developed Urdu further and most notably the genre of *marsiya* or elegy. *Marsiyas* are poems commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, which were “declaimed in a distinctly dramatic fashion by the poet or by a trained reader before a gathering, or *majlis*, of believers” (Naim & Petievich 2006:167). The elaboration of Muharram went thus hand in hand with the refinement of language, which was also tightly connected with elaboration of etiquette, the so called *pehle aap* (after you) or *Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb*. The Lakhnawis often repeat the old joke, which goes as follows: “*pehle aap karte karte train chhoot gayi*”, which can be loosely translated as, “letting the other one first, the train has gone”, suggesting the refinement of etiquette to the extent that none of the men standing in front of a train ever got in. Though the times of the Nawabs and great poets are just a reminiscence, the language still reflects some of this refinement and etiquette; it is still recognizable as distinctive of a particular area. As I was told:

People are recognized by their language, when they go to other parts of India or in the world, if you meet any Indian or Pakistani or any person who has a good knowledge of this language, he or she will ask you if you are from Lucknow, whenever you start speaking. That particular gesture makes you feel proud, your language is recognized and it stands out, and this is not particular for Muslims, because all the generations which have lived here, Hindus, Christians or Sikhs, whoever have lived here and spent some time in Lucknow has acquired

*this etiquette of language, this mannerism of speaking, the particular vocabulary, as for example hum, aap or huzoor, you can not find these things anywhere else.*¹⁶

The language thus bears a strongly identity bound message; there is the same chance that you hear a *hum* slipping of the tongue of a rikshawala as from that of a university professor. But the delicate words of Lucknow poetry did not remain at home, they have made their way to the Bollywood cinema, and new poets have taken them over.

The Delicate Cuisine

Not only did Lucknow under the Nawabs achieve perfection in poetry, language and manners, it also dictated Indian fashion and cuisine¹⁷. The cravings of the rulers for luxury, pleasure, and debauchery resulted in enormous networks of patronage downwards from the Nawab to the nobility and to the landholders, which supported retainers, servants, artisans, singers, musicians, poets, chefs and others (*cf.* Mukherjee 2007)¹⁸. They created networks of dependency that held the people and the city together. And as we will see later on there are similar networks that hold the today's city together, only the nobility has changed.

¹⁶ Excerpt from an interview with a descendent of the royal family of Awadh, 28.3.2008. *Hum*, which literary means *we* is in Lucknow used instead of *mai*, that is I, this mannerism stemming again from the times of the Nawabs, the use of *aap*, meaning *You*, which implies respect toward the other (it is actually used everywhere, where Urdu is spoken, and it is used even in Hindi, but Lakhnawis seem to have the tendency to patronize it as distinctively Lakhnawi), *huzoor* is a title of majesty usually used in poetical or literary language, can be translated as your honor, your majesty, or my lord.

¹⁷For the description of the extravaganza of the Nawabi rulers and the peculiar details of their lifestyle see Sharar 2005[1975].

¹⁸ For more on the model of aristocratic patronage see Platteau 1995.

Lucknow became renowned not only for its art of gastronomy, a blend of Mughal, Persian and Indian tastes, but also for “what was decidedly unique about Lucknow (...) - the intimate connection between the aristocracy, the foods that were gifted away under religious auspice known as *tabaruk* (blessing) and the foods of the bazaar” (Shaffer 2007:30). The food in a sense created a common language between the ruler and the ruled. After Lucknow was annexed by the British in 1856¹⁹, and the king Wajid Ali Shah exiled, some of the royal cooks found work with the taluqdars²⁰ “who became the new elite of Lucknow and kept alive the glories of the Nawabi culture – including its cuisine” (True 2007:126). Nowadays, there is nobody to give away the foods, but there are bazaars, where one can meet cooks that claim to be the descendants of the kitchen masters who worked for the Nawabs, and who protect their knowledge and recipes willing to pass them on only to their descendants. It is hard to say if their ancestors really worked under the Nawabs, there is a certain obsession of claiming whatever connection with the Nawabs in this city, but what is sure is, that through their daily practices the cooks of the bazaar, as well as those of the five star hotels, recreate the past. Some may say that this is the past devoid of its pomp and splendour, others that it is no more than commodified culture or desperate search for the good old times. Maybe it combines all these aspects, the cooks use the word “Nawabi” to sell their food, because “Nawabi” simply sells, it is the dream of pleasure and luxury, the dream of the good old times, and at the same time this is why the food and the Nawabs still live on. There is a “continuation of tradition which is still seen in the old city, in the attempts by families to remember ferociously and to make something living again. Still there is an overwhelming sense of *was*. It makes me wonder if there ever was an *is*. Then you come across memory” (Shaffer 2007:31).

¹⁹ For a marvelous literary rebuilding of the city before 1856 and the story of how India became annexed to the British crown – see Llewellyn-Jones 1985.

²⁰ A landholder with administrative power over certain districts and a tax collector.

Handcrafting Past

As already noted above, not only did the Lucknow of the old Nawabi times dictate the cuisine all over India but it dictated the fashion, too. It became renowned for its specialty, the *Chikan*, originally a fine and delicate embroidery done by white cotton thread on white muslin. The origin of the Chikan is to a certain degree unclear and the myths of the origin differ (*cf.* Singh 2004:43, Wilkinson-Weber 1999:9). Some place its origin to Persia, believing that it was brought to India “as a part of the cultural baggage of the Persian nobles” (Tyabji 2007:33), whereas most written accounts trace it to Bengal, wherefrom the male artisans came to work under the patronage of the Nawabs in Lucknow (*cf.* Irwin & Hall 1973, Wilkinson-Weber 1999). At the same time most people I worked with adhere to the first option and have a more romantic idea tracing the origin of the craft back to Nur Jahan, the beautiful wife of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. No matter how it all started, Chikan thrived in the patronage of the Nawabs and so did the artisans; it developed into something so delicate that it is said that “it took two years for an artisan to embroider just one kurta”²¹, and having seen the subtlety of the work, I do not doubt about it. When the Nawabs were gone and the British came, some of the networks of patronage and dependency were broken, some changed their form. But even though there was a longer period of decline, the craft was revitalized and made into a well-prospering business during the last five decades. Several actors played an important role in the

²¹ 24.4.2008. From a discussion over a private collection of 100-150 years old pieces of Chikan work of one of the traders at Chowk.

revitalization, some of the most prominent being SEWA Lucknow²², the Bollywood cinema and the designers from the NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology).

As we will be concerned with Chikan more in detail in the next chapter, what is important for us to understand at this point is the relation between Chikan and the imagined local past. Chikan as a craft stems from this idealized period and today it has turned into a literally *living* material proof of the imagined presence of the past. It therefore has a specific symbolic value of its own; it is not only a Lucknow souvenir *par excellence* but also a materialization of the discursive representations of the city. Through Chikan we can understand how the past is recreated in the present and how it can serve new ends.

The multiple ways in which the relationship between the present and its pasts can be established is nearly synonymous with the experience of “modernity” in India (*cf.* Das 2000). In this chapter we have discussed a particular way in which a city is imagined and we have seen how the past is reproduced through the current practices. I attribute a great importance to the concept of imagination in social life (Appadurai 2000, Mitchell 2000) and particularly to the imagination and representation of the *past*, since I believe that “an appropriation of the past is constitutive of the present, and a nostalgia for an imagined past appears central to “modernity”” (Favero 2005:23). To conclude with an example: it is the imagination and

²² A non-governmental organization headed by Runa Banerji, which began revitalizing and increasing the quality of the craft in the 80s at the same time as it has been working for higher wages of the female artisans and for their empowerment.

representation of the local past as we have portrayed it, which stands behind what Kathinka Frøystad observed on her way in a train from Kanpur to Delhi via Lucknow:

“The Lucknavites tended to associate “Muslims” with the Nawabs (...) almost everything the Lucknavites took pride in about their city – the architecture, the poetry, the “sweetness” of the Urdu-derived language, the *pehle aap* (you first) politesse – was attributed to the Nawabs and their influence. For passengers from Lucknow, then, the word “Muslim” had a predominantly positive connotation. Passengers from Kanpur, however, squarely associated the term “Muslim” with poverty, illiteracy, and a number of other negative features (...) the Nawabi history of Lucknow seemed to make Hindu notions of Muslim more nuanced” (Frøystad 2005:168-169)

In the above excerpt we clearly see that the representations of the past of the city have an impact on how the social reality is constructed and on what attributes will be associated with which community labels; and we can see how different it may be in two geographically proximate cities.

In the words of Roland Barthes (1993, 1973: 89-94) we can observe that representations not only simply denote, but they also connote, they offer a second order. To put it more clearly, let us imagine a photograph of Lucknow. The first which would come across the mind of a Lakhnawi would possibly be a photograph of Bara Imambara²³, a great imambara complex built by Asaf-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Lucknow. The first order here would be the iconic sign, where photograph of Bara Imambara would simply refer to Bara Imambara. On the other hand in the

²³ This photograph has notably also been used on the cover (among others) of the book *Shaam-e-Awadh: Writings on Lucknow* (Oldenburg 2007).

second order of signification, there would be a whole range of connotations, which this photograph possible evokes. In the Indian context the photograph of Bara Imambara would commonly connote the past glory of the Nawabi times, the greatness and prominence of Lucknow, the cultural heritage which distinguishes this city from the others as well as the elaborate, extravagant and peculiar culture of the Muslim nobility. For a Lakhnawi this image may, in addition, be filled with the sentiments of remembering the protective hand of the Nawabs, as the Bara Imambara was built in 1783 during the time of a devastating famine, where the objective of this grandiose project of Asaf-ud-Daulah's was the employment generation for the people in the region and the wage for their work was food. It is said that



while the workers worked the whole day constructing the imambara, the noblemen were called in during the night to destroy what was built, just to guarantee enough work during the whole period of the famine. This story of the great

patronage of the people by the aristocracy is known to every Lakhnawi and is remembered with great sentiments and a sense of nostalgia. As Barthes points out, when we are looking at connotations we are looking at the activation of meanings deeply rooted in particular culture as these connotations arise through experiences and associations which have been learnt to be coupled with particular signs. And going even further we could say that at the mythical level we can understand this sign, this photograph of Bara Imambara, as activating the myth of Lucknow (*cf.* Barthes 1993: 115-120). This myth of Lucknow, or if we want to call it the third order of signification (Fiske & Hartley 1978:43), consists of the representations, signs and codes which we have discussed throughout the chapter. These representations are on one side generated by myths, but on the other they maintain them, too. To a certain degree we can imagine a myth as

an extended metaphor, as metaphors help us to make sense of experience within particular culture (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 185-6). But myths also serve the ideological function of *naturalization* (Barthes 1977:45-6), they make dominant cultural and historical values, beliefs, attitudes seem natural, i.e. common-sense, self-evident and thus objective. They make the myth appear as a “true reflection of the way things in the world are”. The third order of signification thus provides ideologically coloured representations of the world and refers to the sets of myths which operate as organizing structures within a culture and organizing the meanings which are attached to signs.

If we now turn our attention back to what has Kathinka Frøystad observed on her way by the train, we can say that behind this observation is the ideological impact of the myth of Lucknow, the particular constellation of the mythologies of a city. This imagination of anything or anyone as “Lakhnawi” goes in result beyond the dichotomy of Muslim vs. Hindu; it is rather about belonging to a particular place, which is populated by “Lakhnawis”, first and foremost. The most persistent logic of the reasoning of why Lucknow is a peaceful city thus goes (tautologically enough) in the field as follows: “Lucknow is a peaceful city, because it is Lucknow, Lakhnawis do not fight, it has always been like that here and anyone who comes here just has to adopt that culture”²⁴. “Lucknow” thus through its mythology creates a community of its own, including people who have lived in this city, as well as people who have experienced and adopted the imagined values and rules of conduct of this place. According to the local logic, one does not have to be born in Lucknow to become a part of this particular imagined community (Anderson 2006) – being Lakhnawi can be achieved after several years spent there - to repeat the above mentioned words of the descendent of the royal family of Awadh: “whoever have lived here and spent some time in Lucknow has acquired this etiquette of language” and he will be thus identified by others as “from Lucknow”. Or in the words of my

²⁴ From a conversation with a Hindu businessman, 25.3.2008.

landlady “the city embraces anyone who comes here and tunes them to its pace and life”²⁵. The city here becomes more of an active agent forming people who cross its borders through its powerful mythology.

Having discussed the discursive material from which this city is fabricated, let us now turn our attention to the economic basis and economic and social relations and ties within the largest industry in this city – the already introduced Chikan industry. Later on we will discuss how these two realms, which we have analytically separated here, work together and influence each other.

²⁵ 14.2.2009.

Chapter III - The Significance of Cross-cutting Ties: The Economic Networks of the Chikan Industry

When I sketch clothes I design a trance made of moments of the past and present, and project them as valuables that people would cherish. To me these clothes are sacred as they enclose the temple of the human form. I have sketched clothes for ten years, interpreted them as silhouettes, as embroideries, as surface textures with the sensibility of a painter and filmmaker. I have designed to provide a vocation in my village, Kotwara, to upgrade the craft of Chikan and Zardozi in my city, Lucknow and its environs.

(Muzaffar Ali)²⁶

The Chikan, as we have pointed out in the previous chapter, is a handicraft which flourished vigorously in the idealized period of the local past. As such it is laden with various meanings, which are no less relevant today and which, to a great degree, stand behind the revitalization of this craft as well as behind its still emerging popularity. But before we proceed further to the discussion of this particular discourse bound to this commodity, let us turn our attention to the Chikan industry itself. The organization of this industry is not only a bedrock for answering our main question, i.e. the one of communal peace in Lucknow, but it may also raise questions about the very often mentioned “rigidity” of the Indian social system, at least in the popular discourse.

²⁶ <http://www.muzaffarali.com/html/fashion.htm> ; the statement of a filmmaker turned into a fashion designer, Muzaffar Ali.

The only anthropological discussion on the Chikan industry, resp. on the artisans within the industry so far, is presented by Claire M. Wilkinson-Weber in her book *Embroidering lives: women's work and skill in the Lucknow embroidery industry* (1999). Even though she devotes some space in her book to a discussion of the production process, she is not concerned with the networks which the industry creates and their meaning – as is our intention, but rather with showing “the plight of embroiderers” which, according to her, “stems largely from an ideology in which their work is regarded as a leisure-time activity, unworthy of serious wages and serious attention” (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:xix). Whereas for her “learning about Chikan means getting away from the visible, public world of Indian markets and commerce into the concealed, productive worlds of poor artisans, and still further into the homes of secluded embroiderers upon whose labour a vast hand-powered industry is founded” (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:xxiii) for me, learning about Chikan means understanding the connections between different actors, continuity and change in these relations, and their meaning for the construction and structuring of the social reality (chapter III). This, as it turns out, results in the urgent need to go beyond the dichotomies of Hindus and Muslims, of traditional vs. modern, of rural vs. urban (chapter V); it means immersing in the public and commercial sphere, and in homes and *lifeworlds* of the middle-class businessmen and the customers (chapter IV). Through the Chikan industry and through Chikan as a commodity, we can learn something about the fluidity of the social systems, about change and continuity, about the importance of the cross-cutting networks, about the discourses which govern the market and people's choices and last but not least about the experience of modernity in India.

The Chikan Industry Trivia

The Chikan textile industry became progressively the heart of Lucknow's economy, emerging significantly since the 1970's. It has become a booming industry which is based on piece-wages and which can be classified into an informal resp. unorganized sector (cf. Varshney 1997). The term 'unorganized sector' is used in the Indian context to refer to all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services connected with all these activities and it constitutes the largest economically active workforce in India (about 93%). The central problem of the unorganized sector is the employer-employee relation, which either does not exist at all, as for



example in the case of self-employed labour or in the case of the agricultural workers, or this relationship is difficult to prove, as for example in the case of home-based workers – such as the artisans within the Chikan

industry. These informal relationships between employer and employee result generally in the lack of social security and pensions for these workers (cf. Ray 2004). But at the same time, other mechanisms, such as the patronage, substitute the formal social system and provide certain protective policy for the clients. The Chikan industry is “one of the biggest industries in Lucknow, employing tens of thousands of people, generating millions of rupees in sales. Its

organization and productive relations fit wholly within the contemporary capitalist world. Whole parades and streets in Lucknow's major retail and wholesale markets are occupied by shop after shop specializing in Chikan goods, and Chikan-embroidered goods are worn by Indians all over the country" (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:xx). Chikan has, in the last two decades, become a part of the haute couture in India and has been spectacularly showcased in grand Bollywood movies such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*, *Mughal-e Azam*, *Hum Saath Saath Hain*, *Devdas*, *Pakeezah*, *Zubeidaa*, *Umrao Jaan* and many others. Famous fashion designers have patronized this craft and innovated the traditional white embroidery on white muslin by adding different colours, styles, fabrics etc. This enormous promotion led to a rapid emergence of the business in the last two decades and today we can estimate that about twenty percent of the population of Lucknow is connected with the embroidery industry on a daily basis. But even more people are connected to the industry on a rather irregular basis and it forms at least a part of their income²⁷. As will be shown in the forthcoming paragraph on the Chikan production process, the industry integrates diverse actors across the spectre of class, religion, gender and place and makes them cooperate in this production process. It thus, in a sense, integrates the city and its diverse population through the networks which it creates.

The Chikan industry has several distinctive features which we must bear in mind. There is *no centralization* (cf. Varshney 1997, Wilkinson-Weber 1999), which means that there is no place like a factory in which the whole product is manufactured. The production of Chikan involves different actors who are both spatially and socially distant from each other. Artisans from diverse quarters of the city and from the neighbouring villages too are involved in the production process. Further there are *no wage contracts* and the artisans and other workers at

²⁷ As we are discussing informal industry within an unorganized sector it is nearly impossible to tell the exact number of people involved in it. Many businessmen working with Chikan focus exclusively on export or concrete orders and do not even have showrooms in Lucknow, using their own houses for certain parts of the manufacturing process. Most businessmen I worked with estimated around 400-600 000 people involved.

all levels work mostly for piece wages from the trader-cum-entrepreneur, which is again one of the defining features of informal industry; the *division of labour is thus informal*. Another important feature of the industry is, that none of the artisans can do solely all the items of work and create a finished product. This fact establishes an unavoidable need for cooperation, which necessarily develops into mutual interdependency. Conventionally it is said that the businessmen are only Hindu males, whereas the workers at all other levels are mostly Muslim (*cf.* Wilkinson-Weber 1999). Though this may still hold true in percentage, there have been many Muslim businessmen as well as female Hindu businesswomen²⁸. At the same time there are more and more Hindu embroiderers, who are learning the traditionally Muslim skills from the Muslim girls in their neighbourhood. Due to an enormous speed of the growth of the industry there is a great need for new embroiderers every day, at the same time as the possession of these skills means additional income for girls making embroidery. As we have already indicated above, Chikan is made in a multi-staged production process that encompasses productive specialists in each stage and work of each stage depends on work in the previous one; any change in one stage can therefore effect the whole production. But before we turn our attention to the description of the production process, let us enliven this rather austere description of the industry with the words of a businesswoman, who has begun with the manufacturing of Chikan about thirty years ago and now has a nice and neat showroom in a main lane next to the Chowk market:

I will be able to tell you what happened in the last 40-35 years. There were a lot of people who were doing Chikan, not that many, but a substantial number. At that time the artisans, the printers, everybody was very low paid, but things were different, times were different, things were much cheaper, so people were able to make two

²⁸ This fact has been mentioned neither by Wilkinson-Weber (1999) nor by Varshney (1997).

ends meet, and even the traders were not greedy. Frankly what I see in the 20-25 past years I think we have 300-400 times more people coming into the industry and with the coming of SEWA people like Runa Bannerjee, the coming of the NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology), the designers who, I would not say patronize it, but, whatever, they made Chikan a fashion statement today, it is used all over the world today. There were exporters, but on a very low scale, but now you name it and you have it. When I was a kid, Chikan had become absolutely defunct, there was a very ordinary kurta which was in fashion and the quality of embroidery was bad, there were no styles and the traders would just give it to the printer and he could do whatever, then they could have it done and so on. Now it is a big industry in Lucknow, lots of business thriving on it, and everybody is willing to understand that this is something good, they realize the value of it, and they appreciate the value, so people are taking a lot of interest in it. The younger generation is taking even more interest, because it became their bread and butter, and good bread and butter. Initially it was something very cheap, but now it has become something very good also and when you come to know something of that kind, then I feel that there is an interest in it all over the world. The Chikan is developing now so fast, you don't know in next 15 years what changes will come, I show you only (showing me a piece of embroidery) ---this has come from somebody whom I work with, they have used the stitches used in Chikan but the concept is completely different, and it excites you. I feel that in next years changes will happen. It is exciting in that you are getting something different to do, you are not just restrained to the traditional, and of course the traditional is there, so I would love it. ²⁹

²⁹Transcription of an excerpt from an interview conducted on 27.2.2008.

The Multi-staged Production Process

Let us now turn our attention to a description of the multi-staged production process, which will cast light on how the industry integrates different actors and on how it creates networks of interdependency which cut across the divisions of class, religion, locality and gender. The word multi-staged used here may be understood not only as referring to several stages of production, but we may understand it also conceptually. The word *multi-staged* already implicitly contains the notion of hierarchy; it emphasizes the cascade nature of relations as well as the interdependency of different levels (not only) within the industry. After this short introduction, let us turn to the description itself.

It must be pointed out here that there are many ways in which the business and the production process are organized, depending on the businessman and his particular organizational ideas and skills. Especially recently new ideas have been applied which make the production easier and more effective. What I want to present here is therefore an idealized model of this process, a certain kind of an ideal type (Weber 1968:3-26). This model can serve us to understand the basic organizational principles, but we must bear in mind that in reality the ways of organizing the production are more varied and to a certain degree they are also a production secret of the businessmen. In this context I have noticed that many businessmen I worked with have been thinking of their own model of the organization of the business as of the only possibility and would not believe that others may organize the business in different ways³⁰.

³⁰ The businessmen never seem to discuss the way the business is done with each other. Firstly there is a great competition and secondly there seems never to be time for these talks. I can recall that once when working with a Hindu lady who has been into the business for last twenty-five years I made her meet her

We can imagine the *businessman* as the one who stands in the core of the Chikan industry and who holds the networks tightly together through his capital and organizational skills. He knows where and how to get work done and where to sell or how to export the manufactured products further. He is the one who gives wages to all the artisans and workers within the industry. Through his organizational skills and orders, he creates the networks which will be



essential for us and which are essential for the manufacturing process, too. The businessman invests most of his capital in the purchase of cloth which is to be used (i.e. mostly muslins, mulls, organdies and cotton, georgettes, crepes and chiffons). After purchasing the cloth the production process begins by sending the cloth to the *master cutter*, who cuts the cloth into pieces according to what is going to be stitched (mostly it is *kurti* or *salwar-qamiz*³¹). The master cutters either work directly in the shop or in the

neighbourhood. They are both lower class Hindu and Muslim men, though Muslims are said to dominate this profession. The master cutters I met have been working for years for the same trader-cum-entrepreneur, together with their families, their sons maybe helping here and there

cousin whose family has been into the business for the last hundred years, as I wanted to see some old pieces of Chikan he has possessed and treasured a lot. We were talking and discussing the business over these old pieces of Chikan and over lots of cups of a nice tea for several hours and after the pleasantly spent time she told me that she had never talked with him about the business in this way and that she actually learned a lot about how the others do the business and about the history of Chikan. The occasions when she used to meet her cousin were mostly family functions, weddings etc., where they never had opportunity and time to discuss the Chikan business (in addition we might think here of the gender as a factor which makes the discussion of these topics even more difficult).

³¹ Kurti is either a short or a long top for both men and women; salwar-qamiz is a woman wear which usually consists of three pieces – long kurti, a shawl and trousers.

in the shop and doing small jobs which are needed. When the pieces are cut, they are taken to the *tailors (darzees)* by some of the young boys who work as shop assistants for the businessman. The tailors usually live and work for piece wages in their houses in the older parts of the city, but there is also a changing trend in the bigger or higher quality production businesses to actually have the tailor located in the showroom. This enables the businessman to have a certain control at least over a part of the production process. The tailors are both women and men³², both Hindu and Muslim. Tailoring is a profession which can be taken up by anybody and especially with the expansion of the industry and the great production of the cheaper and lower quality Chika, many young men and women without any previous experience learned this profession and started living on the Chikan industry. After the tailoring is done, the pieces are returned to the trader-cum-entrepreneur, who sends them to the *printer*. The printer prints the designs on the cloth, which are to be embroidered, with the use of special Chikan wooden printing blocks. The printer is almost exclusively a Muslim man specializing only in Chikan prints. There are some families which have been into Chikan printing for the last two centuries and they possess delicate old printing blocks which can be dated back into the 18th century. At the same time there are also many newcomers, who have simply learned the printing skills as the apprentices of older printers. Though in the last two decades the printing became a renowned and respected business and some of the printers turned into well-off men and even raised themselves into the ranks of businessmen, it still remains a rather neglected part of the production process which is rewarded low. But we will get back to this point later on. From the printer the clothes are sent back to the businessman, who mostly, with the help of the *middle-man* or an *agent*, dispatches the printed clothes to *embroiderers*. The embroiderers usually work in their homes, either at the outskirts of the city or in the neighbouring villages, sometimes even hundred kilometres remote. Some of the middle-men I talked to have been

³² Even though women do the tailoring I have still noticed that it is men who work as tailors in the high quality showrooms, which specialize in more expensive pieces, whereas women are employed mainly in the mass production of the cheap quality Chikan.

working for the businessmen for several decades. They usually come from villages in the surroundings of Lucknow and know the women embroiderers who live there. They thus possess a valuable knowledge, which is essential for the businessmen themselves. They distribute clothes to be embroidered to the women in the villages and even in the city, they have a grasp of how much they pay to each girl and which pieces she received and which she is supposed to deliver; they themselves live on provision from every single piece delivered. A middle-man or agent can be both a man and a woman, usually Muslim. The women involved in this business commonly dispatch clothes in a lower scale only to several women, whereas men deliver to hundreds. The number of middle-men working for a businessman depends on the size of the business; it can vary as much as from 6 to 200. But at the same time there are alternative ways how to organize the embroidery phase of the production process. Several businessmen I worked with have established their own manufacturing houses not far from their showrooms, where the women from the city are used to come and embroider for a defined number of hours. Others have set up small centres in each village, where women work for several hours every day. The businessmen, in all these cases, have a certain control over who is working for them and they deliver piece-wages according to the quality of the embroidery and the number of stitches made. After the clothes are embroidered they are laundered, laundering being "a traditional, caste-based job and unlike many producers in other stages of production, *dhobis* (washermen) have been washing clothes as their hereditary occupation for many generations" (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:48). After laundering, garments are subsequently ironed, which is commonly done by the *dhobi's* wives. Both these processes having been finished, the clothes are sent back to the shop for the final adjustments (for example to make button holes or to repair flaws). These last steps are made by several Muslim or Hindu women, but sometimes even men are involved, referred to as *finishers*, who work in the shop on a daily basis. Finally, the product is ready to be sold.

As we have seen there is an incredible amount of active actors engaged in the production of the Chikan garments. The Chikan industry cuts across spatial and social boundaries and integrates people of different origins - rural, urban, lower class, middle class, men, women, Hindus, Muslims. This means that “work within the production process is carried out in socially distinct settings, including the artisans own homes, shops and shop fronts, workshops and semi public areas of the city, including the riverbanks” (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:26). Later on I will argue that the networks of economic dependency which the industry produces are essential in the prevention of the occurrence of Hindu-Muslim communal violence as they constrain the polarizing strategies of the political elites. Not only do these networks make people dependent on each other, but they also make people interact and get to know each other, which necessarily lead to better mutual understanding. The Chikan, a symbol of the glorious mythical past, the time of wealth and no less of the communal harmony, thus seems to bring this message further through the networks the production of the Chikan creates.

Let me now mention one more thing. According to Wilkinson-Weber “there have been, as yet, no efforts to collect labour together into factories or to rationalize production in other ways” (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:27). Though this may hold true for most of the Chikan mass production, an innovation has taken place recently, as we have seen in the case of the manufacturing centres. Some of these centres include the cutting, tailoring, printing and embroidering stages of the production all inclusive. The printers who have traditionally run their own establishments in the markets, and the embroiderers who were bound to their homes, now come and work at the centre, which is already equipped with all the necessary tools. These measures taken by the merchants can thus be viewed as recent and useful attempts to rationalize the working process. To understand the late changes more in depth, let us now turn our attention more closely to some of the actors we have mentioned above and get to know more about the people whom the networks of the industry integrate.

The Chikan Block Makers (tappagars)

The print block makers are not directly integrated in the production process, and there is only a few of them. Most of the printers I worked with estimated that there are less than twenty block makers in the whole city. In addition to the new blocks, printing blocks that date back from several decades to some hundreds years are used today. These old blocks have very old and splendidly carved designs which “are very fine and for very fine embroidery, the buyers and artisans are few – besides it is very time-consuming” (Singh 2004:89). The print block makers deal mostly directly with the printers or the businessmen themselves; they are thus independent craftsmen selling their own products. With the growth of the industry they specialize mostly in easily embroidered motives and large blocks, as compared to the old small and delicate blocks. These printing blocks are made from Indian rosewood (*Dalbergia sissoo*). The designs are drawn mostly in free hand on the wood and then carved by a hammer and a chisel; after this rough treatment they are given a neat finish using sand to rub off all the protrusions and after that are soaked in mustard oil for half a day.

I was lucky enough to meet one old block maker who was working for many printers, but has been specially patronized by one. He cooperated with him on the innovation of the classical motives according to the demands of the market and the trends which are coming from the whole-India famous designers. These designers come to Lucknow and as the printers and traders use to say, “steal the treasures of the craft and go away giving nothing in return”³³.

³³ This has been a very common statement among the traders and printers. The designers are viewed as a kind of infiltrates earning on something which they actually do not understand, they are believed to come and steal ideas and have most of the work done elsewhere; in addition for the same kurta they charge about 50 times more than a usual trader does, as they refer to “the unique design”. This is possibly what provokes and creates unrest among the traders, as the designers are viewed as not bringing anything special at the same time as they are paid exorbitant sums of money for the same thing



Noteworthy enough, the motives which the designers “steal” and innovate, using new ideas, new types of cloth etc. are “stolen back” by the traders, who immediately start to imitate and copy the designer's clothing. The innovation thus occurs even in this pre-production stage. As

in this case and in many others, the cooperation of the block maker with the printer resulted in new designs, higher prices for the print of them and generally in better chances for the trader to sell the newly designed clothes. The innovation processes thus start both thanks to the workers in the industry and thanks to the famous designers, who in a sense, influence, motivate and challenge one another. It thus cannot be said that it is only the designers who innovate, though maybe initially it was them who came with the idea of innovation itself, but this idea has become integrated in the business-thinking and over the years became an essential part of the industry.

The Printers (Cheepis)

Printing is a craft of long standing and the printer usually specializes exclusively in Chikan. Printers are



one can buy in the Lucknow streets. On the other hand, it is also because of the popularization by the name of these designers that the industry is such a great business, this fact though acknowledged, is neglected by the traders in their daily talks.

almost exclusively Muslim men. For some of them printing is a hereditary profession. But as already mentioned, there are also many newcomers to this industry. The printers usually have their own establishments in the old parts of the city, many of them can be found at the Chowk market and the near surroundings. The printer uses mostly blue dye for printing (made from the gum obtained from babool - the gum tree, *Acacia nilotica*), which is done simply by pressing the particular block on a selected place on the cloth. Printing is a rather fast process and an experienced printer can state to be able to make up to one hundred kurtis a day. The printing of saris and table linens on the other hand takes a longer time and it is exclusively the job of an experienced printer who knows how to place the blocks properly and has a good grasp of the spatial organization. The printer is rewarded according to his experience and skills, young printers are usually given lower wages and much easier workload³⁴. But “even among young printers competition for the cheapest and simplest kind of work has intensified” (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:31).

I have talked to many printers, some of them possessed only a limited space of their own in the market, some worked directly on the doorsteps of the Chikan showrooms under the daily shining sun and some had big shops in the market and printing was their family business. There are great differences in the skills and social status of the printers, some are well-known to everybody in the business for their exquisite abilities and skilfulness in printing and others are well known because of making cheaper products and are sought after when bulk orders of cheap Chikan *bakhya*³⁵ work are to be done. I recall one printer, whose family has been into printing for more than hundred years and had an enormous reputation for high quality

³⁴ The piece-wages for printing vary according to the skill of the printer; the young printers can get around 3-5Rs for one kurti, whereas an experienced printer can get around 10Rs for kurti and 30Rs for a time-consuming sari.

³⁵ *Bakhya* is a term for the cheaper embroidery, with bigger and rougher stitches; it is opposed to *murri* work, which is more delicate and requires special skills from the embroiderer as well as much more time.

printing. They possessed very old and fine printing blocks which, though not daily used, were a pride of the family as they came from the glorious times of the Nawabs. And with the growth of the Chikan business in the last two decades the family, in addition to printing, began also manufacturing Chikan and has established two showrooms in a new part of the city (Gomtinagar). The expansion of the market thus enabled the vertical mobility of the family, which nowadays is viewed by others as a higher middle-class family. But this case is not an exceptional one as I have noticed, there are many printers who also began manufacturing in the last ten years and are commonly working on bigger export orders, even though they may not have their own Chikan showroom. Similar processes of vertical mobility and business expansion are noted and observed also by Wilkinson-Weber (1999:32).

The Traders-cum-Entrepreneurs

The businessman, as has already been pointed out, holds the networks and the production process tightly together through his capital and skills. It is the businessman who decides what the latest fashion should be; it is he who buys the fabrics and coloured threads according to the latest market and it is he, who owns a showroom. The businessman makes bulk purchases of material (cotton, voiles, chiffon, crepes, silk, georgette etc.) and manufactures this material through the above described process and sells and exports the final products to customers from all over India; some of the traders also export overseas. In the words of Prakash, a Hindu merchant who has started the retail business in 1981 and today is a manufacturer and wholesaler of the Chikan goods: "I control the whole process; it is my cloth, my design and totally my setup. The cloth is purchased from the markets in Bombay, Calcutta. Many types of materials are used today. Today Chikan is modernized. See all the TV-serials, films, see all the tops and suits which the heroes and heroines are wearing, all of it you can see in the main

market. Before only white kurta was available for 30Rs and saris for 40Rs and only two types of cotton were used. Today many types of goods are available. If you like, kurta from 100-10000Rs is also available; if you like ladies suits are available from 200-20000 Rs”³⁶.

The most showrooms in Lucknow are to be found in the Chowk market in the old part of the city, but showrooms are all over Lucknow, the area in Hazratgunj (the new part of the city built under the British) and in the Janpath and Aminabad markets, and even in the prestigious area of Gomtinagar (the newest part of the city, generally viewed as a middle-class area famous for its shopping malls). Some of the merchants have been involved in the business from the beginning of the century, in some cases over hundred years and the Chikan manufacturing is usually their family business. But there are also many newcomers to the industry; as Lakhnawis use to say: “there is somebody new in the business every single day”. According to Wilkinson-Weber “the majority of mahajans are of the Rastogi subcaste, whose traditional occupation is moneylending” (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:36)³⁷, but what I have observed was a much greater diversity. There were Hindus of various family origins as well as Muslims involved in the business and there were also women³⁸; the Hindu male thus no longer seems to be the one and only dominating the Chikan business. And I would also claim that it can no

³⁶ Excerpt from an interview conducted on 28.2.2008.

³⁷ The term mahajan which Wilkinson-Weber chose to use for all the traders-cum-entrepreneurs and manufacturers in the Chikan industry “implies a series of economic and social relations based on the manipulation of credit” (Bayly 1973:352) and it is especially associated with moneylending. Which again corresponds to her idea that most of the mahajans are of Rastogi caste; as “the Rastogis of Lucknow (...) specialized in short-term loans to artisans and the poorer sections of the urban population” (Bayly 1973:353).

³⁸ Wilkinson-Weber (1999) notes on the page 35 that she has never come into contact with or got to know about a female merchant. I have on the other hand worked very intensely with 7 female merchants and have heard from them also about many others. All of them have joined the business about 25-10 years ago, i.e. at the time of Wilkinson-Weber’s fieldwork they had already established their own businesses.

longer be said that the traditional business families, for example the Rastogis, dominate the Chikan business. The majority of the entrepreneurs I have come into contact with were actually, as they call themselves, self-made men. None of these people necessarily had to have any previous connection with the business and they were motivated by the potential financial gains, as they often came from the lower classes. Here we can also see the potential of the business sphere for the vertical mobility of individuals and families, as well as for a social change. But let us turn back to the occurrences, which are no longer so sporadic, of women in the business. I have witnessed several cases in which the wife's passion and interest in Chikan and fashion design made her set up a small business, more or less as a hobby. After several years, when her enterprise proved to be thriving, her husband left his original profession joined her and they together transformed the small business into a much bigger family business. Here the woman was the real initiator of the business idea and the entrepreneur. When talking about women in business, it might be appropriate at this point to tell a story of one of them. Here we will see what can motivate the entrepreneurship and we will also have a closer look at how she organizes her business to portray the relations she has developed with the other actors on a concrete example.

Preity is now in her fifties and runs a small Chikan showroom in the Chowk market. She mostly works with particular orders and specializes in higher quality Chikan. She comes partly from a business background, as her father was a businessman, but got married into a doctor's family. Her husband was in a pharmaceutical business, at the same time as he was interested in theater, which he was very passionate about. He loved dance and music and has acted in several distinguished plays and surrounded himself with artistic milieu. As she pointed out, it was a love marriage and though she was generally very grateful for all experiences in her life, which has, in her own words, "changed her into a better person", unfortunately there was another side of this coin. Her husband had great problems with alcohol and became slowly unable to provide for the family. Due to these family problems, Preity started the business with

an exhibition in 1984, as she had to earn money to sustain her own family and two little children. Chikan business was a natural choice, as she has always been interested in fashion and felt, that she could bring new ideas in the craft. When she started earning money, her husband stopped working completely, and though she did not believe at the very beginning that the business would turn into anything successful and great, she opened her own shop in 1992. As the problems at home grew up, she was forced to leave her husband and after that she had to rely only on herself. It was thus the great need and the stifling situation which turned her into an entrepreneur, but she also pointed out that she “wouldn’t be that successful if she hadn’t been seeing her father working every day”. At the same time she associates most of the business people with arrogance and selfishness and believes, that the experience she had with the artistic milieu as well as the suffering she has gone through in her life, made her more human. In her own words: “if something was not there I would maybe be a demon, not realizing what I was up to. I would be very aristocratic, very arrogant, very spoiled. Whatever has happened has happened for the best and good, and I do count my blessings in every aspect”. She basically divides businessmen into two categories; those who are passionate about the business, the craft and their workers and those who are greedy. This distinction of hers coincides with the common distinction between good and bad patrons. We will come back to the discussion of patron-client relationships later on.

There are similar stories in the background of each business enterprise I had the opportunity to get to know. The reasons to start business were commonly a great need, lack of capital and ambitions to achieve a higher social status. The business started on a very low scale and it took years until it became possible to open the first showroom. Though these people are *bare log*³⁹ today, it has not always been so. It is only very few people who actually came from business families and basically continued in the enterprise of their parents. “In most cases (...)

³⁹ *Bare log*, literary translated as big people. Common distinction between big and small people (*chote log*), between those who have money and power and those who do not.

traders are discussed as traders, as if they were born such; and there is little scrutiny of the process of entrepreneurship” (de Montoya 2004:333). In reality, people are far from born as traders. On the other hand I would argue that the business sphere in India is one that enables the greatest possibilities for the vertical mobility, because it gives a space for the concept of achieved status and for the logic of self-made man. But now let us turn to a closer discussion of how Preity organizes her business, so that we can see the way how the relationships evolve in practice.

I have spent several days with Preity, observing what she does and how. I was impressed when I saw that she runs the whole business exclusively by herself, because, as she remarked, no one else can be trusted in these matters. She has a two-floor showroom divided into four rooms, two situated downstairs and two upstairs. In the first room there is a space for her and the customers; there one can find cabinets with Chikan pieces and diverse cloths, hangers with finished orders and some ready-made pieces; in the middle of the room there is a table behind which Preity sits and on the opposite side of the table there are three chairs for customers. Long discussions about the orders to be placed and about all the wishes of the customers take place every day over this table and over endless cups of tea with biscuits. But let us get back to the spatial organization of the showroom; in the room which is situated downstairs, but hidden from the eye of the customer, there work a master cutter and a tailor in one person and two men doing machine embroidery⁴⁰; these three men work in the shop on a daily basis for a monthly salary. On the second floor one room is used as a storage room for cloths and varied necessary equipment, and in the other room there are about six women working on all the small jobs which are inevitably to be done, some of them young some old, some Muslim some Hindu. They check the finished pieces, repair the defects in the embroidery, create buttonholes, but even make tea for the customers, or clean up; they simply do all the small jobs throughout the day

⁴⁰ Machine embroidery is usually a cheaper version of Chikan, used especially for linens, table cloths, but also some daily wear. Machine embroidery is usually done by Muslim men.

which must be done. They work in the shop on a daily basis and receive a monthly salary, according to their skills and abilities. In addition to this staff you can meet one older man in the shop, who basically helps with the delivery of the stitched pieces to and from the printer, picks up the ordered cloth, delivers bulk purchases and special orders to customers and even works as a driver or as a servant at times. Except for the staff in the shop a number of other actors are bound to her business, as we have already seen – represented by the printer, the embroiderers and the washermen.

Preity organizes the embroidery stage of the production in a bit different way than sketched in the ideal-typical model above; she uses middle-men or agents for some bulk orders, but because she generally specializes in particular orders, she needs to exercise more control over the embroidery stage and has therefore established centres in the neighbouring villages, in the radius of around 80 kilometers from Lucknow. She has about twenty-five centres with about 300 girls altogether working for her. In each centre there is a lady who is responsible for the girls and their work and who travels between the city and the village with orders as well as with monthly wages for each girl. These wages are set according to how much embroidery the particular girl did, how many days she worked in the month and which type of stitches she specializes in. Preity herself checks the centres about once in two months and if there, she delivers the wages in person. She also provides a paid, two week training for new girls. Some of the girls who work for her have been with her since the 90s when she set up the business and she knows them very well. At the same time she also gives opportunities to young yet unmarried girls. I have been travelling with her around the villages and was truly impressed when I saw that she knew every single girl by name and remembered precisely which pieces went to the particular centre, which colour combinations and stitches should be used in these pieces and which girl actually does which stitches⁴¹. She noted that most of her embroiderers

⁴¹ It is common that about seven girls work on the same sari, each working on different types of stitches, complementing thus each others abilities.

were Muslim girls, but she also pointed out the emerging number of Hindu girls. The centres she has established also enable the Hindu girls to come and learn the craft, which was previously transmitted almost exclusively within the Muslim families, from mother to her daughters. Preity, to a certain degree, patronizes these girls, she knows about their lives and their problems, and if needed she helps them out with money, even though she knows that these will never be returned; she gives them higher salary when she knows they are about to get married or expecting baby. She is basically the only person the women turn to when they have a serious problem which they do not have the power to handle themselves; and they even turn to her for advice. This coincides with Wilkinson-Weber's observation that "old manufacturers also stress their close, paternalistic relations with producers, remarking that neither do they exact penalties over spoilt or late work like newer *mahajans*, nor do they hold back wages" (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:38). Some of these relationships have evolved over many years and they are now based on mutual trust and respect. But we will discuss the patron-client relationships later on, now let us turn back to the organization of the business.

The embroidered cloth is usually delivered by the head of the centre back to the showroom, where it is checked by the girls and repaired if necessary. Then it is sent to a laundry. Delivering the clothes to the washermen was usually the job of the older man mentioned above; he distributed the pieces and paid the washermen according to the standard piece-wages. The washing and ironing of one piece of Chikan takes about three to five days, as the print has to be removed completely; after that the pieces are gathered and delivered back to the store. There is thus only a limited contact between the businessmen and the washermen. Though Preity made me meet some of them and she knew generally who they were and where they lived, the relationships with them were more superficial. The relations to the printers on the other hand were different. Printers doing cheaper work were used for lower quality bulk orders, but she was also cooperating with two specialised printers. These were selected for particular orders, discussed directly at Preity's table sometimes for hours; saris and suits for exceptional

occasions, weddings and different family and work functions. Though Wilkinson-Weber notes that “mahajans claim to take active interest in the choice and layout of print designs, in practice, they probably do not” (Wilkinson-Weber 1999:39), Preity certainly proves her wrong. She usually goes to the printer with a clear idea of what kind of a design she wants him to make, she makes active choices when selecting the particular printing blocks which should be used and guides him precisely. Though of course he uses his skills and abilities and the resulting print is thus more or less a collective product; both of them are actively participating on its creation. Preity is even in contact with a block maker and from time to time she has several blocks done by him according to her sketches and ideas; these are later used by the printer exclusively on her cloths. In the same way she decides over the colour combinations of cloth and embroidery, as well as over the styles of tailoring. We can thus distinguish between two types of work. The first being a cheaper work which is basically meant for bulk orders or ready-made pieces for sale. In this case Preity also decides over colours, cloth and threads to be used, and directs the printer to a certain extent, but she leaves more creative space on the artisans and she shares only the general idea with the printer as well as with the embroiderers. The second being special orders. In this case she is very concrete about what types of stitches should be used in the embroidery, about the colour combinations and patterns. After the years in business Preity has established relations with exporters and traders in Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta, as well as a network of rather faithful customers from Lucknow and Kanpur, mostly coming from the middle-classes.

We have thus seen that Preity overlooks and directs the whole process of the production and as noted above, stands in the centre of the production process. She engages very closely and daily with her workers which, as she noted, led her to a more nuanced understanding of their lives. We can conclude with her voice: “Actually I started the business basically to run my family. Then I also wanted to do some higher quality work. I would not say that when I started I was not interested in money, of course I was, but everybody grows and gets mature. You want

the money but you also want to do more for the craft and at this point in life I feel like I would definitely want to do more for my workers. When you are interacting with them, when you see their plight, then it is very hard.”⁴²

In the previous paragraphs we have discussed the way the industry is organized and we have seen that it integrates many different actors within particular networks of economic interdependency and it makes them interact with each other on a daily basis. I have described these actors and categorized them among other characteristics also as Hindus and Muslims. This I did mainly to portray that diverse people are integrated within these networks and give the reader a general idea about how the economic networks cut across the imagined communities. At the same time it must be made clear, that religious identities were, in fact, very little talked about and “open discussion of the communal dimension of economic relations followed my question about it, rather than arising spontaneously in conversation” (Wilkinson-Weber 1997:58). Religious identities did not seem to be of any importance in the daily interactions and they did not represent any barrier for mutual cooperation either. It was skills and abilities what mattered most. At the same time the divisions of class seemed to outdo the ones of religion, as people were viewed mostly in terms of property, money and skills or education they possessed. The economic networks of interdependency thus seem to make other social identities than the religious ones more important; religion being something which is viewed generally as a private matter. The logic of the classes was thus enhanced by these economic networks which cut across the diverse imagined communities, and at the same time

⁴² Excerpt from an interview conducted on 20.3.2008.

it made abilities, skills and amount of capital into the crucial markers of distinction. I would argue that this effect of the economic ties is crucial for answering our central question of communal peace, as these cross-cutting networks of economic interdependency basically prevent thinking about people primarily in religious categories. We will come back to this point in chapter V, and we will try to go beyond these dichotomies. But now let us discuss further the networks which the industry creates.

The Meaning of the Networks of Economic Interdependency

When talking about *networks* we have to bear in mind that “there is not any such thing as “the network”, although many of us persist in writing as if this were so. How we define the members and ties of a network strongly affects what we will find out about it” (Wellman 1996:347). When using the word network I am fully aware of this, the networks I have identified and, to a certain degree, constructed through my writing, I have highlighted to the prejudice of other vast number of possible networks. I have done so because it is this type of networks which integrate the society on the macro-level and it is therefore where we can find the answer to our central question. The networks between the actors within the industry which we have focused on above have the character of the *bridging weak ties*. These ties are “far more likely to connect individuals who are significantly different from one another” (Granovetter 1983:204). Most of these ties are *vertical*, connecting the businessman and his capital to people with less resources and diverse skills, at the same time as the businessman himself is also dependent in the business on his ties with people who possess more resources than he himself does. These vertical ties are of great importance as “in times of crisis it is the vertical ties that will make the difference” (Granovetter 2004: 247). While the intimate relations and strong ties mostly divide the society into small groups, “the integration of these groups in the society

depends on people's weak ties, not their strong ones" (Blau 1974:632). Weak ties stretch themselves beyond diverse groups and lie at the heart of the macro-social integration. The ties and networks which the industry creates thus form the basis of the macro-social integration of a significant number of the city's inhabitants. In addition, these networks and ties are *ex definitione* not based on strong and communal relations and they operate in a universe of achieved statuses thereby integrating various people. Because of this feature these networks exhibit, they prevent and place a serious constraint on the polarizing strategies of the political leaders. The *cross-cutting ties* thus make the polarizing strategies lose their appeal when faced with possible breakage and loss of these ties, because the breakage of these ties would mean the loss of the basic economic profits these ties bring. In addition to the networks that we have discussed, there exist networks between mostly upper class businessmen and politicians - even though they are not very often talked about. And as a great deal of money for the support of different political parties in the city comes from the Chikan business enterprises, and as these enterprises can thrive only when there are no communal grievances, the local politicians are, to a certain degree, forced to contain the possible tensions and balance their communally biased political rhetoric (*cf.* Varshney 1999). Network in all these cases can thus be viewed as one's "access to people with specific resources" which creates "a correlation between theirs and yours" (Burt 2004: 284); and thus as social capital in its own right, social capital being at once "the structure of contacts in a network and resources they each hold" (Burt 2004: 285).

The Patron-Client Relationships

At the same time as the Chikan industry can be viewed as an example *par excellence* of these bridging weak vertical ties, we can also observe within its realm how these ties in the local setting create patron-client relationships, which add on importance and depth to these ties. The

patron-client relationships, in a sense, highlight the already existing weak ties adding another dimension to them. The businessman can be viewed here, to a certain degree, as a patron for a vast number of clients who are economically dependent on his activity and who, at times of crisis, turn to him for help and support. We have seen this aspect when discussing Preity and her relations to her workers. But it is not only her, a great number of the traders-cum-entrepreneurs I worked with, use the same workers at all stages of production for many years and even decades, developing over the time close relations with them, as they are naturally exposed to their life-stories. Though the primary motivation of the entrepreneur is, in nearly all the cases, the financial gain, over time he gets involved with the actual lives of his workers and sooner or later patronizes them. The patron-client relationship in these cases can be nicely portrayed by a story I was told by one old businessman at the Chowk market. Therefore, before I proceed to the discussion of the nature of patron-client relationships in the industry, let me tell this story which is in no way exceptional and through which we can learn a certain lesson about continuity and a change in these relationships.

Rajiv came to Lucknow like many others in the turbulent time of the Partition, when a great part of the Muslim population was moving to Pakistan, while he, as a Hindu, was forced to move to India. His first steps led to Delhi, where he stayed for several months and having no prospects for his future there, he moved on to Lucknow with one small bag and without a rupee in his pocket. As he says, great ideas stem from a great need and this great need certainly did awake his entrepreneurial skills. He quickly identified the potential of the Chikan industry and began with small investments, selling only several pieces of Chikan every month. After three years he managed to open his own small showroom and today he is, together with his son, exporting to Delhi and Mumbai⁴³. When in the initial phase of his enterprise he needed to create a network of people who would work for him; the tailors, printers and dhobis could all

⁴³ One can suspect that he was surely initially helped by someone, but it is just not the way these stories are told...

be easily reached on his own, but he needed someone who knew the embroiderers located in the neighbouring villages and at this point the middle-man comes on the scene. The middle-man possesses this valuable knowledge and lives from a provision from each piece he mediates between the businessman and the embroiderers. Rajiv was told about Sameer, a poor Muslim boy from neighbouring village who was able to provide these services and he started working with him. After several years a mutual trust has developed, and in times of need when Sameer's mother was sick, Rajiv helped out with money for the doctors and medicine and when Sameer was getting married, Rajiv paid most of the wedding costs. After 15 years Sameer collected enough capital to start his own business and with the knowledge he possessed about the industry, he made it to a prospering showroom. This would probably never happen without the patronage of Rajiv. Sameer is dead now, but talking to his sons I heard the same story. They run their father's business and now they act as patrons themselves. When entering their showroom in the afternoon you will find there two small boys running around bringing you a nice cup of tea. The first thought which might pop up in the westerners mind could be the one of the child labour and exploitation. The reality is a bit different though, the father of those boys was working for Sameer as a tailor, some years ago he died and the mother was left alone without a rupee. Sameer's sons are now sending the boys to a private school during the day and make them work in the afternoons in the showroom giving the money they earn to their mother. The kids being in the showroom "not only learn a profession but they are also protected from the life on the street"⁴⁴.

I have described only a fragment of the great wealth of relationships these people are involved in considering that, for example Rajiv, for his current business is actively working with more than 60 middle-men and thus providing work for about three thousand women in the villages as well as to many other actors. The reason I told this story which, as already pointed out, is rather common than an exceptional one is, that it casts doubt on the popular

⁴⁴ From a conversation with Ali, the son of Sameer, 23.3.2008.

notion of Indian society as one where ascribed status and identities are at the core of creating communities and where upward mobility is almost impossible. But before we discuss this point further, let us turn to the analysis of this story and the patron-client relationships.

Patron-client relationships are about structure and action, about the networks which the patronage creates and their meaning, they “denote, in their fullest expression, a distinct mode of regulating crucial aspects of institutional order: the structuring of the flow of resources, exchange and power relations and their legitimation in society” (Eisenstadt & Roniger 1980:49). The patron-client relationships we are dealing with here are defined by simultaneous exchange of different types of resources; they are basically economic in character and marked by long-range obligations. The relationships they establish are not fully legal contractually, they are informal. Most importantly they are vertical relationships between individuals or networks of individuals which are based on strong elements of inequality⁴⁵. “The patron offers protection in the face of danger, greater security in an insecure world, greater predictability for the powerless, more resources for the resource-starved or –deprived, reduction of stress, stability in the face of uncertainty, and reliability in an untrustworthy world” (Stein 1984:51). At the same time it is also him who stands behind the insecurity, as otherwise there would be nothing to protect from, because “patronage requires the very gap which it assists the client in bridging. For surely the patron does not help his clients to change the system (or themselves) and thereby abolish the gap” (Stein 1984:51). But as we have seen in the above story, where the middle-man after some years becomes the businessman and turns from the client into a patron, the patronage can actually lead towards vertical mobility. The upward mobility from a middle-man to a businessman was observed by many people I worked with; it was even labelled as a current emerging trend. The enterprises established by the artisans and workmen are nothing new; they were already noticed by Agarwal (1975:61). I

⁴⁵ As we see these observations fit nicely to the definition of the Chikan industry within an informal and unorganized sector.

want to argue that the domain of the business is far more flexible than the other domains and is itself marked by fuzziness and blended categories. One reason for being so is, that the idea of self-made man stands at the core of the entrepreneurial stories and this domain thus guarantees an access to the business as well as the middle-class world according to one's abilities rather than by an ascribed status; status in the business realm is viewed more in terms of accumulated capital and personal skills. The research also indicates "that people from all classes, castes and religions are engaged in trade and business" (Agarwal 1975:198), which also corresponds with my observations that most of the today's influential businessmen I met paradoxically did not come from wealthy families, but from rather poor low class families. This fact was striking. We can thus conclude with Morris that "to attempt to link occupation and jati rigidly is to find one's self operating in a universe of exceptions. The Indian society historically has exhibited a reasonably high degree of fluidity. (...) Once one leaves the formal world represented by the Laws of Manu and the static analysis of the anthropologist, one enters a realm where caste and jati seem to be as fluid as change requires" (Morris 1967:607). It may be argued then, that over a long period of time the breakout from the patron-client relationship is possible and can lead to a change in the system. The women embroiderers would probably never profit from patronage in the same way, not only because remaining clients is the core of the business itself and the gap is what is needed, but it is possible that also because there is a certain lack of aspiration for the vertical mobility. The Chikan industry is very often accused of a great exploitation of these women, but according to what I have seen, the stories are something varied, there is no doubt about a great poverty, and there are businessmen who have, in their whole life, never seen any of the girls who actually work for them, but at the same time I have seen many who do care and act as patrons, giving away money for the schooling of the children of these girls, for their healthcare or for their weddings, money that they are never supposed to see again, as many expressed it they "feel obliged and responsible, because being privileged".

In this chapter we described the networks in a theoretical way to see how diverse social settings and different social actors can become integrated within the realm of these networks. The networks, as we have seen, create a unique social universe which produces social structures that actually function in directing the social conduct and social acts of the actors, at the same time as they are produced by these actors. The mutual interdependency of diverse actors prevents the social conduct or acts from leading to a breakage of the established relationships and thereby from the loss of the economic profits. At the same time the interdependency, or if you like - the bridging weak ties, enables a better knowledge of the other; the "rich" are no longer seen exclusively as greedy, self-interested and westernized, the "poor" are no longer seen exclusively as uneducated, primitive and easily manipulated; the "rich", "poor", "Hindus", "Muslims", "villagers", "urbanites" all of them suddenly have their good sides as well as a great number of faults. The mutual knowledge and contact leads to a more nuanced view of *the other*. This consequence of the existence of the networks together with the noted mutual economic dependency, obligations and expectations has the effect of minimizing the potential of the occurrence of communal violence, especially when related to the previously discussed imagination of the local past. The discourse of the mythical past seems to work hand in hand with the economic structures and the social and economic networks in the city, creating both economic and discursive basis for the establishment of "relaxed" communal relationships.

The theoretical use of networks thus makes us reject "all attempts to explain human behaviour or social processes solely in terms of the categorical attributes of actors, whether individual or collective" (Emirbayer & Goodwin 1994:1414). This means that the relationships

gain priority over categories and the explanations are based on the patterns and nature of particular relationships rather than on any static qualities attributed to certain categories of actors. It can thus be said that “the organic solidarity of a social system rests not on the cognition of men, but rather on the interlock and interaction of objectively definable social relationships” (Boorman & White 1976:1442) or taken even further - what is cognized by men depends to a great degree on the interlock and interaction of social relationships and the discursive universe within which these operate. The social structure here is therefore understood more in terms of patterns of relationships between particular actors, rather than in terms of harmony among abstract norms and values or classification of these actors and entities by their attributes (*cf.* White et al. 1976). The social and economic networks we have described, i.e. the basis of the social structure and organization of a significant part of the city’s population thus in fact lead to the priority of the processes of *togetherness* as opposed to the processes of *othering* (Ramaswami 2007), i.e. for example the polarizing strategies of the political elite.

The networks and the social structures we have described are, by no means, static or ever-present; on the contrary, they must be continually sustained and reproduced through the daily actions and practices of social actors, both physical and discursive. The predominance of the processes of *togetherness* in Lucknow is thus a fragile state dependent on the interplay of many factors, which are negotiated on a daily basis. To be able to understand what kind of ideology sustains the social relationships and networks that stand behind the processes of *togetherness*, we have to trace certain connections within a greater framework. In the next chapter we will therefore focus on the question of what actually enables these networks and what are the pre-conditions of their existence. Throughout this chapter we have noted the presence of many newcomers in the Chikan business and the importance of the notion of a self-made man and of an achieved status. The vertical ties we have identified in the city divided people economically into classes, cutting across the “traditional” imagined communities which, to a certain degree,

lost their importance in favour of the logic of the class and money. These processes can be understood within the framework of what is popularly labelled as “the emergence of the new middle classes” and it gives the city a certain capitalistic ethos. The middle class lifeworld will therefore constitute our greater framework for understanding of the pre-conditions of the existence of the networks we investigated. With its help we will trace the necessary constellation of networks, processes and discourses that together actively sustain and reproduce the “relaxed” communal relationships.

Chapter IV - Drawing Connections: Contemplations on the Indian Middle-Class, Bollywood Cinema & Chikan

“Erotics constitute a force field of power, pleasure, and danger through its articulation of desires and anxieties pertaining to upward mobility, class, modernity, tradition. At stake in these desires is not only the reconfiguration of hierarchies of gender, caste and class within India, but also the very definition of Indian culture” (Mankekar 2004:428)

After reading the introductory quote above, we might think: “well, sounds nice, but what is modernity and tradition anyway; and have the hierarchies always been so static that they are reconfigured now, in the light of modernity; and what is meant by the Indian culture, considering the enormous cultural diversity of India”. And we could continue like that. But what is crucial here is the fact, that the notions of “middle-class”, “modernity”, “tradition”, “Indian culture” and other similar all-encompassing constructs, are all categories playing an important role in the imagination of the “common middle-class man”, as he likes to call himself. Though these concepts may not be clearly defined and though they may even be in contradiction, they are used daily and with a great confidence; according to the context and the need they are played with, acted upon and manipulated in diverse directions. These concepts are of crucial importance when perceived and analyzed from the *emic* perspective, as they can tell us a great deal about their users. Throughout this chapter we will thus treat these categories mostly as *categories of practice* as opposed to *categories of analysis* (*cf.* Brubaker & Cooper 2000). We will treat them as categories of practice, because they are significant in the

imagination of the people. Therefore the work of imagination, the “space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai 2005:4), and the imagination as a social practice will be both our red thread throughout this chapter and analytical concern.

Through the exploration of the middle-class lifeworld and its imagination, we will draw the connections between the experience of modernity in urban India, the imagination of the past and the role of Chikan. And drawing these connections even further, we will relate them to our central question of the communal harmony in Lucknow. We will try to identify and understand the preconditions of both the appeal of the idealized local past and the economic networks of the Chikan industry which, I believe, lie in the understanding of the logic of the middle-classes and the discourses the middle-classes produce, reproduce and consume at the same time. We will see that it is a particular constellation of social and economic relations and discourses that is at work in the background of the “relaxed” communal relations. We take the point of departure in what is labelled as “middle-classes”, as it is them who are both the producers, recipients and reproducers of the narratives of “modernity”, “tradition”, “nation”, “Indian culture”, “West” etc. and at the same time the most vicious consumers and buyers of these narratives in their materialized form of commodities. In addition - as the term itself suggests - middle-classes stand in the *middle*, continually differentiating themselves from those positioned above and under. Being a middle-class can thus be viewed more as a project (*cf.* Joshi 2005), in which the other is necessarily identified, constituted and characterized so that the middle-class can be produced and reproduced. This continual negotiation of the self positioned somewhere in the middle makes the middle-class even more interesting object of study. Because for this negotiation, and for pursuing this project, they have to draw on and pick from, sometimes contradictory, discourses and from available reservoirs of knowledge and combine them together in multiple ways.

We have discussed a significant part of the financescape of Lucknow, as well as the community of imagination created by the Lakhnawis, or what we can call the community of sentiment (Appadurai 1990, 1991, 2005). Now we will elaborate on this discussion and set these topics into a larger perspective of the ideoscape and mediascape. We will see, that even though what we have described in previous chapters, might have appeared as locally bound processes, it has been a mere appearance. These processes, structures and imagination are necessarily connected together into extensive contexts which determine and influence them, and the other way round. To put it differently, we will now take a closer look at how these structures, processes and imaginations are produced in the articulation with the translocal, at the same time as the translocal is reconfigured and changed in contact with the local (*cf.* Gupta & Ferguson 1997). The local here is thus viewed as neither autonomous nor separate; it is always produced through global forces and always situated within interconnected spaces which cut across any imagined local boundaries. So let us now explore the part of urban India where “images of the “West” and “India” meet and dance confusingly with notions of “modernity” and “development” and with nostalgic dreams and imagined memories of the great Indian civilization” (Favero 2005:11).

The Middle-Class Lifeworld: Discursive Oscillations

While doing the fieldwork and observing the daily interactions, my attention has been drawn more and more to the striking importance of socioeconomic categories of division over any possible caste divisions in the urban context. People identified, spoke about and judged one another primarily in the class-related ways, and this held true for those perceived as lower classes, middle-classes as well as upper classes (*cf.* Bêteille 1986, 1992). As Sara Dickey points out, “class, which is more mutable than caste and derives more directly from both economic

and social standing, has become one of the most potent idioms of identity, rank and political power in contemporary India, particularly in urban areas” (Dickey 2000:464). But to say that class classifications are of increasing importance in the urban Indian context is not to say that caste is missing. As Kathinka Frøystad pointed out it still holds “remarkable relevance for upper and middle class Indians, namely in everyday domestic life and in master-servant relations” (Frøystad 2003:74). The relationships in our study are marked by the prominence of class as a classificatory principle and therefore caste is not discussed here. The indigenous models of class can be divided into two-part and three-part models, depending on the user (*cf.* Dickey 2000 for similar observations). The two-part model commonly divides society into *chote log* (small people, or “low class”) and *bare log* (big people, or “high class”) and it is used by those labelled as the *chote log*⁴⁶. Those labelled as the middle-class people on the other hand, usually divide the society into a three-part model, which includes low class, middle-class and *affluent* class⁴⁷. Both of these models rely on divisions in terms of economy and status. But these divisions can take many expressions, which go beyond the commonly used two-part and three-part models. To illustrate this point, let me reproduce a part of a daily chat with a servant working in our house, a young, single and a lively boy, whose entertaining company and great coffee I could enjoyed every day:

Raju: Hi Tessa-ji, how are you doing today?

Me: Everything fine, you tell me, what did you do yesterday; you had a free day, no?

Raju: Yeah, have been to a cinema, watched a movie.

Me: Really! What movie, have you been to a mall?

⁴⁶ Note that the concepts of small vs. big bear much more additional meaning in terms of power, influence, wealth and status than the simple distinction of low vs. high.

⁴⁷ This term was generally given priority over the word “upper”. Note that it also connotes much more than the word “upper”; it fires up the imagination of wealth, status, power, influence, foreign education, big offices and global travels. It also stands clearly in contrast to a rather neutral designation of the “middle-class”, even though this one is also laden with innumerable meanings.

Raju: No, at the bazaar in Aminabad; an English movie.

Me: English?

Raju: Yeah, really enjoyed.

Me: What was its name? Who was acting?

Raju: I don't know.

Me: So what was it about?

Raju: A lot of love.

Me: Lot of love? Well, then it was almost like Bollywood...

Raju: Not at all. There was a big white lady, big like Kate, who was taking off her shirt and showing her big stomach.

Me: What? You mean porn? Oh god...Is there a porn cinema at Aminabad, did not know...well...who is going there?

Raju: Everybody, all kinds of people. People who walk, people who go on rickshaws, and those who cycle, people on scooters and motorbikes, but also people with cars, even big ones, bare log, and there was even one policeman. It costs 50Rs. Now I will go every week, at least ones, it is great fun. And the funny sounds, I was laughing.

Me: Raju! (laughing) Well, take me with you next week!

Raju: Tessa-ji! It is only for men! (laughing)

Me: Well...yeah, that was a naïve suggestion, but maybe you can smuggle me in, I want to see it with my own eyes!

Raju.: Let's see (laughing)...but do not tell anything to our landlady, she would scold me badly!

Me: Don't worry, secret. ⁴⁸

⁴⁸ From a chat with Raju on 23.3.2008, originally in Hindi. Note that the word "English" commonly stands for anything foreign. And by the mall there is meant the shopping mall, as it is a place where cinemas are commonly located.

At the end of this conversation we see how Raju divides the society in practice, and we see that it happens in terms of money and social standing. He uses the “vehicle division” to refer to differences in income and status. Though he himself belongs to the category of “people who walk” or at times go by rickshaw, once he was gifted a scooter by an American girl staying at the guesthouse. This was commented on and perceived by the landlady as the result of his “slyness and a kind of inborn ability to manipulate people”. Several times I went with him to buy some groceries and other things on the scooter, which made him obviously happy. Having a white girl at the back of his scooter brought him a great deal of attention and it definitely increased his social standing even more than the scooter itself, though maybe only for a while. Via these small daily happenings we can see how “the economic” and “the symbolic” interact in everyday life. Here we can consider even me, “the white girl”, as a symbol bearing different connotations from acquired education, social status and beauty to depravation and unrestrained lifestyle. What we also clearly see is that the class is a *contested category*; it is always under threat, because it is - in opposition to any caste-based division - *mutable*. We can see the ambivalent and fearful reaction of the landlady when Raju appropriates a symbol of the lower middle-class man: the scooter. The landlady’s positioning as a middle-class woman is threatened by the visually reduced difference between her and her servant. The master-servant and the middle-class vs. the lower-class division must be sustained by her striking dissemination of the information that his acquisition of the scooter was rather a result of his morally impugnable behaviour than of his actual ability or income. The middle-classes must continually negotiate their place, using both symbolic and physical techniques. The trend of *fortification*, i.e. building of walls with gates protected by guards around the higher middle-class properties, which are supposed to keep the distance between them and the lower-class people, is now a commonplace in New Delhi (Waldrop 2004) and has its parallel also in Lucknow, especially in the new areas of the city, such as Gomtinagar. We have pointed out the importance of thinking in terms of the classes in the daily life as well as the contested and unstable nature of the classes, so now let us turn to a closer discussion on the middle-class.

The Indian middle-class is a favourite topic of social commentators and social scientists in India. Therefore, we will firstly take a closer look at how this middle-class is imagined by these people (notably themselves middle-class people) and what characteristics are attributed to it. Though there is no definition of the middle-class to be found in the texts of the previously mentioned social commentators, everybody seems to know perfectly well what segment of society they are talking about. The middle-class thus seems to be paradoxically enough defined by its lack of definition. The common tension in the discussion on the Indian middle-class seems to arise from the fact, that the middle-class is to a great extent a product of the British and is associated with the westernized and consumerist lifestyle. The Indian middle-class can be said to have been created intentionally by the British to serve as a link between the colonizer and the colonized (*cf.* Favero 2005, Varma 1998). “The creation of a native elite in its own image was the most spectacular and enduring achievement of the British colonialism in India” (Varma 1998:2). In this context, I can clearly recall the words of one middle-class woman talking about her husband, “You see, my husband, Rahul, is like an Englishman, he drinks tea and eats scrambled eggs with bacon for the breakfast, he reads only newspapers in English and he himself is a journalist and educated”⁴⁹. It was definitely an enduring achievement. One which also leads to a common portrayal of the middle-class as betraying its own country, as unconcerned with the social issues and as lacking social responsibility at the same time as it is expected to be the example for the rest of the society. The middle-classes are said to be imitative, driven by media, westernized and culturally at hazard. Ashish Nandy thus, for example, claims that the West has created a class of mimic men, of “modernists, whose attempts to identify with the colonial aggressors has produced (...) pathetic copies of (...) Western man in the subcontinent” (Nandy 1983: 74). Or as Dipankar Gupta claims in a conversation with Paolo Favero, “the Indian middle-class is not the “harbinger of modernity” but rather a “pretender class” lacking in social consciousness, which always “tries to get away”

⁴⁹ From a relaxed conversation, 25.4.2008.

with their responsibilities towards the other citizens and the state” (Favero 2005: 18-9). Pavan K. Varma then associates the new middle-classes with their “horribly bloated unconcern for society itself and (...) acceptance of a certain kind of lifestyle: insular, aggressive, selfish, obsessed with material gain, and socially callous” (Varma 1998: 132).

But to understand these complaints of the Indian social critics and scholars, let us have a brief look at the historical conditions, that formed the middle-classes in India. At the time when India gained its independence, in 1947, the middle-class represented only a small percentage of population. It was strongly influenced by both Nehru’s ideas of supra-religious modernity and progress, and Gandhi’s eclectic religious faith and social agenda. The “old” middle-classes, as they are sometimes called, consisted basically of educated people, journalists, writers, governmental officials, rich capitalists, hereditary aristocracy and others. They shared an ideological project, which consisted of critique of the decadent upper classes, of concern with the social issues and of the project of building India. Similarly the formation of the middle-class in the colonial Lucknow can be viewed as a project. “It was through defining their distinction from other social groups, through their activities in public sphere, that a group of educated men, and later women were able to define themselves as middle-class” (Joshi 2001:172). The cultural project of the middle-class was aimed at distinguishing itself from other social groups; the norms they were disseminating were supposed to be superior to those of the lower classes, as well as those of the aristocracy or elite and those of the British. This project led in Lucknow to a particularly ambivalent relationship between the Nawabs and the middle-class. At the same time, as the Nawabs played a central role in the local imagination, they were also criticized for too luxurious lifestyle associated with extravaganza, waste and decadency. This critique was basically aimed at diminishing their political and economical significance. But at the same time the lifestyle of the Nawabs, criticized intensely by the middle-classes, is what the same middle-classes struggle to achieve and try hard to imitate.

This after-independence period in the middle-class history is usually idealized in the writings on the middle-class; for example the chapter on this period in Pavan K. Varma's book *The Great Indian Middle Class* is fittingly called *The Age of Hope* (Varma 1998). But in the 1960s and especially after the arrival of Indira Gandhi at the scene, the Gandhi-Nehru legacy lost its appeal. At the same time the self-made man and entrepreneur arrived on the stage with greater power (*cf.* Varma 1998:89-108). These two processes are said to have changed the focus of the middle-classes towards things, money, consumption and desire for commodities. It is time when the “new” and “spoiled” middle-classes began to take shape. In the 1990s the era of liberalization came up with its full force, which meant a major change in the state policy. The capital goods were displaced with consumer goods production and the acquisition of commodities became the crucial and central indicator of upward mobility; as we have also seen in our scooter story (*cf.* Mankekar 1998, Mankekar 2004). At the same time, the 1990s marked the revived popularity of India and Indianness. The popularity of the Hindu nationalists and BJP (*Bharatiya Janata Party*, i.e. the Indian people's party) and the RSS (*Rashtrya Swamyasewak Sangh*, i.e. the national organization of volunteers) was on the rise. The idea of Indianness was framed in the terms of “Hinduness”, creating thus enemies particularly out of Muslims, Christians, the West or Sonia Gandhi. The national fantasy of the idealized India, which is symbolized by the village, traditional lifestyles and spiritual heritage, can be traced back to the constitution of independent India and the beliefs of Gandhi, has been revived in the 1990s with a new strength. The villagers and peasants, who were selected by the elites as symbols of purity and true Indianness for the cause of independent India, (*cf.* Seth 1992) came back on the scene. Their images now not only appeal to the young middle-class people but are “also used and reproduced by multinational companies in their marketing of products as well as by Indian TV, movies and political organizations” (Favero 2005: 71).

This distinction between the “old” and “new” middle-classes, as well as the ambivalent relationship between the Nawabs and the emerging “new” middle-class is nicely exemplified in

the statement made by an older man, a descendent of the Nawabs of Awadh and Sayyid⁵⁰. He can be perceived as taking the position of the aristocracy at the same time as he expresses some of the ideals of the “old” middle-classes:

The middle-class is what I feel a confused class because it does not know. Though it maybe knows, but it acts in such a way as if it does not. For instance, they try to be what they are not, because their means are limited. The means are of course better than those of the lower classes, but not to the extent of the upper classes or the elite of the society. So once they start behaving like the elite and the higher classes, they try to imitate. And once you imitate you are branded as the middle class. But I sincerely feel that this lower-class, middle-class, upper-class, elite, aristocracy – what is that? It has always been the same. It has been there throughout from the beginning. And an aristocrat is not made over night, you become one and it is a graduate change. When you start thinking about others, when you start thinking that you want to leave a legacy behind, then you become an aristocrat, because aristocrat thinks for the future. He thinks ahead. While the so called middle-class bothers only about what is going on around them. If a person who is from their own layer of society starts moving around in Mercedes, they want to buy one themselves. (...) There is a sort of jealousy among each other and there is competition and the constant need to show-off. That is where the class differences lie. An aristocrat will stand out and he or she will think of the future, being concerned with what legacy he or she is going to leave behind. (...) Classes are there and always will be. And they are everywhere, in India as much as in the West. These differences are natural, that is God given. One person is earning two hundred dollars in a week and the other two thousand, so how can you classify them in the same class? They are class apart. But it is not only a matter of money. The way of thinking is also different. It is there where your thinking, your mind steps in that the classification into classes begins. Society without classes is impossible.⁵¹

⁵⁰ The title used for a descendant of the family of Muhammad.

⁵¹ From an interview conducted on 15. 4. 2008.

The Indian middle-class was thus formed both by the British and by its resistance to them, and it therefore finds itself in a dilemma of the “rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity” (Varma 1998:6). The middle-class is thus viewed as if caught in a trap somewhere in the middle, it is a queer category where the “tradition” or even “orthodoxy” persists despite the “enthusiastic endorsement of the project of ‘modernity’” (Varma 1998:123). We could possibly and with an ease argue, that the “traditions”, which the middle-classes adhere to, are to a great extent the product of modernity. But even though this may hold true, the contradiction between “tradition” and “modernity” is a lived experience for the middle-class person. He symbolizes the struggle against the colonial ruler, the ideals of Indianness incorporated in the project of building of the Indian nation and the “western” soul of the country. The categories and dichotomies of “traditional” and “modern”, “urban” and “rural” are reproduced by him and they create a particular lifeworld of his, which is marked by this blend.

The appropriation and use of these categories and dichotomies as representations with an array of connotations can be viewed as a defining feature of the experience of modernity in the urban India. In the popular notions “modernity” is simply associated with what comes from the West, be it the cultural influences and trends, consumerism, particular commodities or a specific lifestyle. I want to claim on the other hand, that we should not view modernity as bound to a particular place or a centre of origin, i.e. the West. We should rather understand it as being constituted in the very interaction between West and non-West, bearing in mind that the categories of “West” and “non-West” themselves come into being in this very process (*cf.* Krohn-Hansen 2003:78). “White and non-white, European and non-European, West and non-West, were identities often elaborated abroad and only later, like nationalism itself, brought to Europe” (Mitchell 2000:4). The presence of modernity occurs as a representation; the world is

staged as a representation and the work of imagination has increased importance (*cf.* Appadurai 2005, Mitchell 2000). “Representation is the key, first of all, to how we imagine the construction of modern selfhood” (Mitchell 2000:20). What we are concerned here with, are thus the various ways in which “modernity” itself, “tradition”, “Indianness”, “middle-class” etc. are represented. The modernity in India is constituted through *the dialogue of representations*, the “dialogue between visions of the Indian past, local images of the ‘West’ and international views on India” (Favero 2005:71). “In Lucknow, as in other parts of the world, modernity was built with a variety of resources, including much that modernity labels either tradition or non-modern. The “traditional” and non-modern, whether it is in the form of patriarchal ideas, racism, notions of patronage and deference, or religion, never quite disappears, but does become a resource of the modern” (Joshi 2001:185)

The middle-class person thus finds himself in the whole realm of, at times contradictory, messages and images he has to relate to and from which he selects according to a situation. I remember being, at the very beginning of my fieldwork, confused with the apparently contradictory statements made by my middle-class friends and acquaintances. At one point they were able to dispraise the “Indian traditions” as backward, and as brakes of the progress and development, praising the West for its social and educational system, lack of poverty and high level of development and five minutes later to discuss the power and strength of India which lies in its spiritual heritage and adherence to the traditions, which the West lacks, representing thus all the evils from the high divorce rate, promiscuity, consumerism to drug addiction. They “simultaneously spoke in the voice of reason and sentiment, of the need to preserve tradition and initiate radical change, advocated liberty and authoritarianism, equality and hierarchy, often at the same time” (Joshi 2001:179). The interesting point here is, that the producers of these statements did not see any kind of contradiction in them. “The ability to move within a complex multi-referential “lifeworld” and to carve out novel meanings” (Favero 2005:6) seems to be one of the characteristics of the middle-class men and women in the post-

liberalization India. They actively position themselves according to context and situation. At times appeal to tradition is relevant, at times acting as “modernized” or “westernized” is what counts. These “switches can become weapons to grasp the competence of their counterparts in managing the contemporary “hybrid” lifeworld and to mark out belonging to specific communities of imagination” (Favero 2005:115). The middle-class person can be defined by his continual and changing positioning in relation to situation, building on the realm of relevant representations. He is the producer of these representations as well as the spectator and consumer of these representations as they are played out at the stage of modernity, the stage of mass media, news, cinema, novels, official knowledge, statistics etc. (*cf.* Mitchell 2000). The middle-class *self* is the example *par excellence* of the self positioned in terms of story lines, available categories and representations (*cf.* Harré & Davies 1990).

I recall one situation which nicely illustrates this dialogue of representations. It took place in a night club in the local shopping mall; shopping mall being the typical hang-out place for the middle-classes and those who aspire to become their part. This night club was the only real night club in the city at that time and our popular Saturday night hang-out place, too. But this club is much more than a place where to enjoy. The entrance fee is high enough to let in only the upper strata of the middle-class. The age of its visitors varies significantly, the young, the old and sometimes even couples with small kids join for the whole night. The purpose of the clubbing culture is not only to enjoy, but more importantly to promote oneself, to create new business contacts and sustain the already existing ones. It is a place where one shows-off. Talking in the garages in front of your new fancy car definitely is a part of the management of the self; it sends the message of being successful, wealthy and trustworthy partner in business. And little does it matter that maybe the car has been bought on a loan, having invested all the money one had for the down payment and that one lives in one room together with six younger brothers. The status is shown-off, image created and business might be hopefully done. Finally the purchase of a car may act as a self-fulfilling prophecy of the coming success and wealth.

Even the presence at the club gives one the appropriate status, but on the condition that you are a regular visitor. Sometimes those considered “lower middle-classes” or “bike boys”⁵² enter, after having saved enough money to afford a night at the club. This usually creates a wave of whispering: “look who is here, those...” and one is constantly warn to stick only to the boy one came with and to his acquaintances and not to come in contact with these guys, as “they can not be trusted”. But differences in status are created even between the regular visitors. Those who purchase a membership fall into the category of VIPs and hold themselves to a special area in the club reserved only for them. I can lively recall the time when a friend of mine, a regular visitor of the club, was invited to join the VIPs for a drink inside the restricted entry area; he was shining with happiness and the aura of increased status, though for the only night, was almost visible. But let us finally turn our attention to the promised situation that illustrates the active use of the diverse representations of “tradition” and “modernity”.

Once we were sitting at the opposite side of a huge screen on the wall of the club, where as usual clips and songs from the latest Bollywood movies were featured. It was in March 2008 when the movie *Race* with Katrina Kaif⁵³ was released. She was just dancing seductively on the screen in an extremely short blue dress in the song *Zara Zara Touch Me*, when I noticed that the sight of my friend was almost literally glued to the screen. I asked him what he was so fascinated about. Not even turning his head to me he replied: “God, she is so hot, yaar⁵⁴, imagine having such a girl, I am telling you seriously, I will go for a model career in Mumbai”. That made me laugh, “Yeah, right, you better stick to your business career. And come on I shoot some nice

⁵² Notice again the “vehicle” differentiation into the socioeconomic categories. This time notably expressed by the upper middle-class people. Note that by the word “bike” a motorcycle is meant here and that all the regular guests usually owned very expensive cars.

⁵³ A popular London model turned Bollywood actress. Born to an Indian father and a British mother in Hong-Kong.

⁵⁴ Common expression for “buddy” or “friend”.

pictures of you, which is the beginning and end of your model career". Several minutes later we were standing next to the bar having some drinks and then again I caught his eye fixed on a tall slim Indian girl in western clothes, white closefitting trousers and provocative sheer top dancing alone in the middle of five boys on the dance floor. "What are you staring at now?" This time he turned to me and lowering his voice he said: "See how she behaves? She is dressed like a whore, dancing with five guys, while the guy she came with is sitting at the bar. She should be ashamed, spoiling her reputation like this, what does she think, that nobody knows who she is? I always say, first become true Indian and then turn to the West".

Going to the night club I realized very quickly that it is inappropriate for a woman to show up in provocative clothes. I always had to watch to have the whole body covered. I remember once getting scolded by my friend when I showed up in a knee-length skirt and black tights. I did not understand what made him so mad and argued that even Indian girls go there in such skirts and even without tights. But the answer was clear enough: "You, my dear, are a white girl, you have to watch for your decency even more than the Indian girl or otherwise you will be misunderstood. And you know, I do not like even Indian girls wearing short skirts, it is not appropriate. I know you are a good girl, so behave like one, *chalo chalo*⁵⁵, go and change the clothes, no discussions or you want to spoil my reputation, too?" I obeyed without a word and changed into a white Chikan embroidered long-sleeved kurta and white trousers and took on silver bangles and long shiny earrings. I thought this might please him, as white embroidery is the ultimate symbol of woman modesty and decency. His reaction speaks for itself: "Oh God, see that, that is my girl, looking gorgeous right?"

We thus clearly see that compared to male dress, which is usually westernized and the traditional Indian dress for men is used only during such events as weddings, the woman dress is of extreme importance. It is the woman who is supposed to stand for "tradition" which is

⁵⁵ Go, go (quickly).

inscribed in her body and behaviour while the man commonly stands for “modernity” and “cosmopolitan outlook”. The woman thus seems to turn the man into an Indian; she is the protector of the “traditions” and “family values”. The woman dress, as the keeper of “tradition”, was particularly institutionalized through the project of the nation building. “The maintenance of traditions of female modesty, the code of dress, and the ritual encoding of tradition found their natural habitat in the home, which became the sphere in which Indian identity was protected from the colonial onslaught” (Das 2000:169). Ashish Nandy thus, for example, identifies womanliness with the spirit of India, while masculinity is associated by him with cosmopolitanism and modernity (Nandy 1994). As we can see, this representation of woman is evident in all these expressions mentioned above, and as my observations of the daily life of the middle-class woman suggest, the women themselves operate within the realm of these representations of womanliness, varying between the westernized clothes and traditional Indian ones. Also the “aspirations to upward mobility into the middle-class were frequently expressed in terms of greater preoccupation with female modesty and respectability and, in many cases, an increased surveillance of women’s sexuality” (Mankekar 2004: 411).

Traditional clothes are thus perceived as communicating obedience, modesty and virtue, while western clothes worn by women usually stand for the opposite (*cf.* Kabir 2001). Sometimes my friend, a married Hindu business woman with two kids, went to the club wearing western clothes and at times she wore Indian clothes. I questioned her on why is that so and she answered that she is wearing Indian clothes, especially heavily embroidered salwar-qamiz, when she knows that there is going to be somebody important at the party, otherwise westernized clothes, usually jeans with a decent top were acceptable and were even a sign of the middle-class lifestyle. Let us highlight here the salwar-qamiz worn by a Hindu business woman to show modesty and traditionalism. “The salwar-qamiz is conventionally a “Muslim” or “Punjabi” form of dress for women, but today is considered a suitable wear for young women and, increasingly, older women of variety of backgrounds and faiths” (Wilkinson-Weber 2005:140), and particularly in Lucknow, marked by the notable proximity of Hindus and

Muslims. The middle-class person thus draws from a variety of representations and positions himself according to situation. Katrina Kaif might be sexy and hot on the screen, but an Indian girl in far less provocative clothing on the dance floor is indecent and spoiled. Similarly, we can take the example of the movie *Main Hoon Na (I am Here)* in which Amrita Rao as Sanjana continually tries to impress Lakshman (Zayed Khan); wearing westernized clothes she has little success, but once she undergoes a makeover and shows up at the college in a purple sari, the job is done. Being beautiful here is thus clearly associated with traditional looks. And even I had to relate and submit to these representations of womanliness and always consider carefully what to wear. One reason for that was, that I was staying for a long time at one place and after several months I was obviously expected to understand the situations in which particular dress code is appropriate.

Let us now turn back to the statement “I always say, first become true Indian and then turn to the West”. Noteworthy enough, these words about true Indianness came from the mouth of a Muslim middle-class boy (as some people would not like to have it). The secular, Nehruvian inspired, version of nationalism was what the middle-classes mostly adhered to. Far from the BJP ideal of Hindutva, where Indianness is equalized to Hinduness, most of these people saw India with its cultural and religious diversity, where Muslims were no less Indian (and it was Muslim traditional code of dress which was used to stand for the “Indian tradition” and used by the women to adhere to the representations of womanliness we discussed above). One reason for that may be that the middle-class groups of friends and acquaintances commonly cut across the conventional community boundaries such as Hindu vs. Muslim (*cf.* Favero 2005 for similar observations). Another interconnected reason and possibly even more powerful, is the thinking of these people in terms of socioeconomic categories. We have seen that those young men who came once to the club were not labelled for example “poor Muslims ...” but rather “bike boys”. It mattered little if they were Muslim or Hindu, they were just the “bike boys”. It is the amount of wealth, achieved status, education, the acquired commodities, the clothes and the appropriate

etiquette and notions of respectability what distinguishes people. That is not to say that the religious differences are not there, of course there are Muslims and Hindus and it is usually quite clear who falls in which category, but it is not those identities which are made relevant. It is the distinction in terms of money and status what counts. Some of the factors, which might support this way of differentiation particularly in Lucknow, might be a rather positive image, better knowledge and greater concentration of Muslims, and at the same time greater concentration of business class and the resulting "capitalist ethos" in the city. The business class consisting, to a great degree, of self-made men, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, seems more likely to distinguish people in terms of money and achieved status than by any ascribed categories.

But the creation of the middle-class communities of imagination, which cut across conventional community divisions and which are defined primarily in terms of accumulated material goods and money can, at times, take the form of more ingenious projects, in which other than just the material properties have to come into play. This can be nicely exemplified by the recent popularity of Buddhism among the middle classes. Let me now introduce Rozina, a woman in her thirties from a Shia Muslim family, divorced and re-married to Vikram, a journalist with a son from his first marriage and, as the name prompts, a Hindu man. The best expression of the love marriage they contracted, is their eleven year old daughter Sita, a very bright and sharp-tongued (in a good way) girl perfectly fluent in English. The religious blend in their relationship never seemed to be a cause of any problem and so to make the situation even fuzzier, they all converted about two years ago to Nichiren Buddhism, a version of Japanese Buddhism, established by Daisaku Ikeda. As the Facebook page called *Daisaku Ikeda Appreciation Forum* informs us, "this Buddhist practice leads to empowerment and inner transformation or "human revolution" which enables individuals to take responsibility for their lives and contribute to building a world where people of diverse cultures and faiths can live in

peace”⁵⁶. Feeling curious about what is happening at the meetings and what the practicing of this strain of Buddhism involves; I attended several meetings together with this family. It quickly became apparent that the meetings serve more as a platform for the socialization of the middle-classes than for anything else. People who attended them were both (previously or still) Hindus and Muslims. The purpose of these meetings was thus more the expansion of the networks and relationships with other middle-class people, with whom one would possibly not come into contact otherwise, as well as the creation of networks one could possibly profit from. As compared to Rozina, I did not see the enthusiasm for the Buddhism itself shown on Vikram’s face, but he seemed to acknowledge the importance of joining these sessions and being engaged in all the lively talks with other men. These sessions consisted mostly of the presentations of what Nichiren Buddhism stands for, which was followed by several success stories of how this faith has positively changed people’s lives. At that point several speakers came on stage and presented their life-stories. At the end of the meeting several children, among them also Rozina’s daughter, performed something similar to Bollywood dance, only on a British song from the 80s. The attendance of these meetings and practicing of Buddhism can be also perceived as a part of the middle-class struggles for sustaining of their distinction from the lower as well as the upper-classes. It can be read in the same way as the above noted processes of fortification, as a distance maintaining mechanism. Some days ago I read Sita’s status update on the Facebook which said: “Sita is proud to be an Indian!” Fifteen of her friends clicked on the “I like” link under her status update. Sita can be our example par excellence of the middle-class lifeworld in which, at times, contradictory messages coexist and where the knowledge of the foreign goes hand in hand with the expressions of pride in India’s culture and where people in their choices of friends ignore the conventional definitions of community

⁵⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?ref=home#/group.php?gid=29725504534> This page can be found among Rozina’s favorite “Groups” and noteworthy enough in the category “religious views” on her facebook profile we can read: “Muslim-Hindu-Buddhist!!!”

affiliation and even create good reasons to mingle with each other across these imagined boundaries (*cf.* Favero 2005).

Having discussed the middle-class lifeworld from a rather general point of view, let us now focus on the role of the commodity, on the relationships between merchants and buyers and the role of the cinema in the imagination of the middle-class subjects. Later on we will relate this to the previous chapter and to our fundamental question.

The Merchants & Buyers: The Production of Selves through Commodity Consumption & Display

Discussing the middle-class lifeworld we have noted the centrality of commodity consumption and display, with its boom after the liberalization of Indian economy in 1990s. The shopping mall, the night club, and all the public places as well as the middle-class homes turned into the spaces of commodity display. It is through acquisition of particular commodities, that the vertical mobility is enabled and struggled for. Commodities are seductively displayed in mass media and presented as a necessity for a lifestyle of a successful middle-class man or woman. Working with the business people in the Chikan industry, I spent sometimes whole days in their showrooms. Chatting with them in between selling, I was observing the daily interactions with their customers, predominantly middle to higher class women, depending on the quality and renown of the particular showroom. Men were not as frequent visitors and if they dropped in, they were usually accompanied either by their wife or in the case of young boys by their mother or a group of friends. These women therefore turned out to be the central buyers, they were those who decided not only about their own clothing, but also about their children's and husband's clothing. They could spend sometimes up to several hours at one showroom discussing into the slightest detail what they wanted or did not

want or, at times, just making the men working in the shop take out all the available clothes and leaving without purchasing anything. At one side, shopping seemed to be one of the most favourite pastimes of a woman and basically a housewife married to a middle class or wealthier man. But on the other side, there was much more hidden behind these shopping sessions, it seemed obvious that in many cases “rather than to pursue her own interests or career, the wife of a wealthy man must consume “conspicuously,” that is, purchase valuable goods for herself, her husband, and his household – goods that provide evidence of his wealth and dominance in a social hierarchy of invidious distinction” (Roberts 1998:819). It became clear that “consumption was more than individual choice set within a market system” (Miller 2001:4).

While the women customers kept talking and discussing what is to be stitched and how and what kind of embroidery is to be used, I noticed an overwhelming pattern of all these conversations – nearly all of them drew on the ideas from and were structured around the cinematic images of womanliness, the “true” and “traditional” Indian woman, that Ashish Nandy labelled “the spirit of India”. But at the same time, as the dress was supposed to be “traditional” it was also supposed to be trendy, fresh and modern, with new cuts and styles. It should be strictly distinguished from the “traditional” dress of the lower classes and villagers – distinguished by its designed nature and fine embroidery. Having listened to these conversations over the clothes I realized the importance of the cinematic texts and messages. To be able to imagine such a conversation over a dress which should be made, let us have a look at an excerpt from a conversation between Preity and one of her long-time customers Deepti, a middle-class girl in her late twenties, unmarried and working as a doctor in a local private hospital.

Deepti (entering the showroom): Hi Preity-ji, how are you doing? Such a nice weather today, isn't it?

Preity: Hi, Deepti. Yes, very nice today. I am fine, thanks. But you tell me, what is new and what brings you here.

(...): *a long discussion of private matters followed*

Preity: Oh, I see, so you are going for the wedding of your good friend to Delhi next month? You have an idea of what you wish to wear on that occasion?

Deepti: Yes, actually, but let me first have a look at the fashion catalogues you have here.

(...): *going for a while through the catalogues*

Preity: So, found something you like or some inspiration?

Deepti: Well, I am not sure. But I was thinking if you have seen the movie *Partner*? The last year release with Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif?

Preity: Yes, I can recall it, was a bit crazy comedy, but...

Deepti: Great! Well maybe you remember the song *Dupatta Tera Nau Rang Da*? Lara Dutta is wearing there a beautiful sari, yellowish with white heavily embroidered border in silver and it changes colour to light orange at the bottom. I was thinking something like that, it is very decent and at the same time very beautiful. But the *choli* (blouse) must be with longer sleeves, not the sleeveless *choli* she is wearing.

Preity: Sure, we can certainly do something like that.

(...): *this led to about an hour long discussion of the concrete measurements, types of embroidery, new trendy styles of choli to be used and much more.* ⁵⁷

“Affluent Indian men and women have drawn on film costume to inspire their own clothing choices for several decades” (Wilkinson-Weber 2005:135) and the cinema and *filmi* dress plays definitely an important role in the imagination of the viewers. As the remark of the designer Bhanu Athaiya suggests, “once for Hema Malini I made one sari. An embroidered sari. That sari sold so much that somebody from Lucknow once sent me a whole basket full of mangoes with a letter that, “Madam, we sold so much Hema Malini sari that we are sending these mangoes as a token of our respect” (Wilkinson-Weber 2005:146). But at the same time the cinematic images and ideas are not appropriated unreflectively by the spectators. And this does not hold true

⁵⁷ Conversation originally in Hindi, with occasional English words. 10.4.2008.

only for the *choli* in the above conversation which must be turned into one with longer sleeves, as sleeveless one would be too provocative and extravagant. But before we turn our attention to a detailed discussion of the relation between the cinema, clothes and consumption, let us first make an excursus into Indian cinema as such and relate it to the middle-class lifeworld to understand how the films stimulate consumption.

Bollywood Cinema: Living the Dream-worlds

The experience of modernity in India can be read and approached through the experience of the middle-classes but also through *the cinematic*. The world of the cinematic and the lifeworlds of the middle-classes are not a long way apart from each other but are rather constitutive of each other. The cinematic dream-worlds, which the Bollywood cinema⁵⁸ creates, are both produced by and the products of the middle-classes and their experience of modernity, at the same time as the middle-classes incorporate the various interpretations of the cinematic messages into their daily lives. The cinema “provides a fictive arena in which the depredations wrought by modernity can be worked out and imaginary compensations rendered to the victim” (Vasudevan 2000:5). It has introduced the world of aesthetized commodity, it opened a window for global travel and exploration, and it has become a sort of phantasmagoria of Indian modernity (*cf.* Favero 2005, Mazumdar 2007). The cinema creates a

⁵⁸ The term *Bollywood cinema* refers to the film production located in Bombay (Mumbai), which represents about one third of the whole India movie production. But the language of this medium being Hindi, it is consumed in most parts of India as well as it is central for the Indian diaspora or so called NRIs (Non-resident Indians). Bollywood does not represent just movies; it involves also a great range of distribution and consumption activities from websites to music, cassettes, DVDs, VCDs, music compilations, news, radio coverage etc., which are available all over the world.

fantasy of a lifestyle unblemished by the chaos and poverty which exists all around; there are no filthy streets and hardly ever one can see any slums. The Bollywood cinema represents a “distinctly different regime of visual culture that constantly generates a fascination for visual spectacle” and a “a new kind of urban delirium, in which commodity display, the crisis of space, new kinds of architecture, the spectacle of film, and television converge” (Mazumdar 2007:111). The Bollywood cinema tries to cope with the transforming impact of modernization (*cf.* Dawson 2005), and that happens through the thematization of and mediation between the “tradition” and “modernity”. Thus at the same time as the *seduction of commodity* takes a central position in the Bollywood movies, so does the *seduction of tradition*. Here we can stress the parallel between the discursive oscillations of the middle-classes discussed earlier on. The cinematic messages oscillate between what is imagined as “modernity” and “tradition” in similar ways as the middle-class people do in their daily interactions. This phenomenon can be called for *neo-traditionalism* (Rajadhyaksha 2000), a word borrowed from the film studies. The “tradition”, as it is presented on the movie screen, can be divided into several types. Tradition can represent “the pretension of an inner space that fortifies Indian society against the wounds of modernity”(Das 2000:167), as well as it can be understood as the “tradition” created and claimed by the modern project of the nation building; other time “tradition” can stand for the “*past present* that has become rotten, toward which the subject experiences a fierce nostalgia and a mountainous sense of loss” (Das 2000:167) or “tradition” can be considered simply as the “natural” compared to “modernity” which leads one in an unknown and insecure future. All these cinematic representations of “tradition” have their parallels in a “real life”. Just remember the way Lucknow and its past was imagined by its inhabitants. Is it not, to a certain degree, an expression of “tradition” as the *past present* which has become rotten? And is not the popularity and prestige of the Chikan embroidery an expression of the nostalgia for “tradition”, connected to the pretension of the inner space that fortifies the Indian society via the notions of womanliness and nostalgia for the family values?

The connection between the cinematic imagination and the middle-class lifeworld and imagination thus seems very interesting. But before we focus “on how audiences recognize and identify with particular codes of entertainment” (Vasudevan 2000:3), let us first discuss a related topic, i.e. the one of creating and imagining of the film production for particular audiences. The filmmakers must develop a certain mental map, or a set of images of the anticipated audience and they must cater to diverse publics who, at the same time, seek similar pleasure and satisfaction. I would argue, that through their acts of anticipation and imagination of the audience, the filmmakers, to a certain degree, also create and construct the categories of the audiences. In a discussion on the filmmakers, Srinivas points out, that the most striking division of audiences made by the filmmakers, is into *class* vs. *mass*. “The most encompassing category has to do with the viewers’ class background. Audiences as well as films and even stars, are distinguished into “class” and “mass”. (...) Class divisions among viewers fragment the audience for films; a film that appeals to “class” audiences is considered a very different animal from a “mass” film and each draws its own viewership” (Srinivas 2005:103). We can recall the two-part model discussed above, which divided the society into “small” and “big” people. The “mass” vs. “class” distinction is only a variation on this division. But the key point to be mentioned here is that the audiences do not exist a priori, but they are rather actively constructed through the programming decisions, nation-building projects as well as by the transnational flow of information. We can thus see, that it is in a continual interaction between the production and reception and reproduction of these dichotomies, representations and imaginations that the class distinctions and the imagination of the class itself comes into being.

But it is not only the filmmakers who produce and reproduce these class distinctions. In the academic writing, the non-elite audiences are often considered as distanced from the cinematic production, as they are believed not to be identifying with the characters (*cf.* for example Rao 2007). They are believed not to be identifying with the characters, because those usually come from a wealthy upper class, travelling around the globe and sometimes even the whole movie

takes place for, example in New York. It is argued, that the “non-elite” audiences necessarily can not enjoy such movies as the topics presented are too far from their lifeworld. This way of thinking, for the first, reproduces the class distinctions, imagining the “non-elite” audiences as incapable of imagining and identifying with a story created rather in a dream-world than any possible version of real-world. The dream-world is neither a real-world of the middle-classes or the elite. There is thus no good reason why the issue of “identification” should play any role at all. And for the second this way of thinking, as I believe, misrepresents the genre of the Indian cinema. The Bollywood movie is necessarily a showcase of better lives; it is a hyper-reality, opium, and kitsch, imagination of flawless beauty, an escapist and over-the-top fairy-tale which sustains the middle-class dream. It is “social porn for poor”. *But at the same time it is strikingly true to experience.* And as my data suggest not only the middle-class people but also the so called “non-elite” audiences, appreciate and identify with the movies. “The absence of reality effect does not signal a film's irrelevance, but instead contributes to viewers ability to make sense of their real world” (Anjaria & Anjaria 2008:126). I would argue that to claim the opposite, to claim that “non-elite” audiences do not identify with the movies, based on the logic of the contents of the movies which are viewed as too far from the “non-elites” lifeworld, is rather a wishful thinking of the academic, who tries to pursue his own social and political agenda and who is critical to these movies himself (*cf.* Larkin 2004). So “while audience members insist upon films relevance to their lives, scholars and critics continue to maintain their irrelevance by identifying an increasing distance between the idealized world they portray and “real”, immediate changes in Indian social life” (Anjaria & Anjaria 2008:126). The scholars thus seem to be reproducing the categories of “class” vs. “mass”, not going beyond or questioning these dichotomies. I thus want to argue not only that the potential and the reason why the Bollywood movies appeal to all segments of the society is, that they operate rather in the domain of the “psychically real” and access the affective realm, but also that the movies serve the same function as the above mentioned fortification. They aim at keeping distance between the “class” and the “mass” and the fact that “mass” or the “non-elite” audience may

enjoy and possibly even understand these movies would diminish these distances and threaten the middle-class status. To portray this, let us take an example of the movie *Rang de Basanti* (*Colour of Sacrifice*). I shortly noticed that this movie was one of those so called “class” movies. Whenever I asked any of my middle-class acquaintances to name their favourite movies, this one was sure to be among them. What basically makes this movie a “class” movie, is the way it is shot; it uses cuts where scenes from the past and present are juxtaposed against each other, showing thus a slow change in the mindset and attitudes of the characters. As one of the filmmakers noted in Srinivas' study, these skips are what the “mass” do not understand and what among other things distinguishes the “class” movies (Srinivas 2005). Once I discussed the movie with Raju, our servant and also a passionate lover of Bollywood. I wanted to know what does Raju think about this movie, and I questioned him thoroughly on its plot, and – he got it all right and had apparently no problem understanding what is going on in the movie. The next day I chatted with my landlady and mentioned that Raju suggested me to watch *Rang de Basanti*. She stared at me for a while and then said, “well, you know, he likes any kind of movie, he is crazy about them, but I doubt he knows what *Rang de Basanti* is about, see it is a bit different movie. But sure, I can lend it to you”. The distance needs to be kept and negotiated and the liking for and understanding of certain movies is just one other way how to do that.

People receive films in a complex way and even though the influence of the cinema and the mass media on people's minds is significant, it is not a simple internalization which bereaves people of their active agency and active choices. I view people as oscillating between different contexts, possessing knowledge and contextual keys to this knowledge, applying it according to different situations. As we have seen in a typical case of Deepti who, though influenced by Lara Dutta's filmy costume, nevertheless decides to have it reproduced with particular changes, which make the final product more appropriate and less filmy. This being said, let us now elaborate on the seduction of commodity and particularly the seduction of fashion and let us relate the middle-class and the cinematic imagination to the popularity of Chikan. Bearing in

mind, that its popularity is what enables and sustains the economic networks of dependency, we have discussed in the previous chapter.

Chikan in the Cinema and in the Wardrobes of the Middle-Classes: The Hidden Meanings of Clothes

Clothes have been neglected by the anthropologists to a great degree, and paradoxically even in the Indian society, which is characterized by hierarchy that necessarily manifests itself through clothing (*cf.* Tarlo 1996). An exception to this rule is Miller's and Banerjee's book treating the evolution and various meanings of sari (Miller & Banerjee 2003). As they point out and as we have seen in our earlier discussion, especially for women, clothes are an essential matter of their lives. Their clothes can connote anything from the nationalistic discourse which draws on the romanticisation of village and of the "tradition", which is expressed in the Bollywood cinema and the costumes of particular characters, to westernized middle-class lifestyle, cosmopolitanism and translocality. Re-dressing enables building as well as casting aside different identities, choosing alternative ones and re-discovering as well as managing *self*. Clothing thus represents for many women an everyday topic of great importance (*cf.* Wilkinson-Weber, Tarlo 1996, Gold 1988), particularly in "modern" India, where as we have seen classifications are open to manipulation and new ways of expressing one's identity are continually opening up. Clothes, because of their particular proximity to our bodies are the crucial thing for the management of the self and the theatre of everyday life (*cf.* Goffman 1969). The clothing can be viewed as a way of "fortification" of the middle-classes, "protecting" them from the lower strata; it is a way of communicating of the commonly sensed differences. And "while clothes, like language, communicate, they are, like language, capable of communicating anything from truth to lies, from the intelligible to the unintelligible" (Tarlo 1996: 18). People

do not only follow the classifications, they also produce them, they are active agents who make particular choices and the clothes they choose convey certain messages (*cf.* Lurie 1992). Showing oneself off in a particular dress is thus a creative act (*cf.* Lurie 1992, Tarlo 1996, Gell 1986). In a similar way as for the Machiavelli's prince politics becomes not only the art of statecraft but also of stagecraft, i.e. the art of managing of the public appearances (Machiavelli 1995, 2005), so for the middle-class woman or man becomes stagecraft the management of the self and home through acquisition of particular commodities. These commodities are thus used in the art of stagecraft in the daily lives of these women and men. But this holds true not only for their lives, but for lives of all of us experiencing modernity, in which the modern is staged as a representation (Mitchell 2005). The commodities which people choose thus may be said to embody certain values, which are created by the society; commodities communicate complex and context-dependent messages (*cf.* Appadurai 1986). Similarly to other social phenomena, clothes are often dehistoricised, naturalized and converted to myth (*cf.* Barthes 1993). The image-clothing is manifested through iconic structures, whereas written-garment is manifest in verbal structures. To understand a particular garment we thus have to turn our attention to what Barthes calls verbal structures and examine the supercode which words impose on the real garment (*cf.* Barthes 1983). But before we continue our discussion on Chikan and cast a light on the above mentioned issues, it must be noted that "the semiotic character of material things means that outcome is not, in principle, settled. It is not simply that their meanings are undetermined, but also that their semiotic orientation is, in part, toward unrealized futures" (Keane 2005:193). The account which we give here is thus temporally limited to our time and we can only predict its evolution, since the meaning is never settled.

In the previous chapters we have discussed Chikan, a revived craft which is thriving greatly in the wardrobes of a vast number of Indian population, but especially of the middle-classes. The revitalization of this craft is related to the discussions of the destruction of the "Indian tradition" by imitation of the West, in which the need for revival of the local textiles was

identified. These discussions date back to late 19th and early 20th century (*cf.* Tarlo 1996: 10-12), when even the nationalist leaders such as M. G. Ranade⁵⁹, Dadabhai Naoroji⁶⁰ and M. H. Gandhi reverted to the Indian traditional dress. This moral aesthetics flourished even more intensely after the Independence, when the Indian Handicrafts Board (1952) was founded. The board aimed at stimulation of the revival and appreciation of the traditional Indian handmade cloth and crafts. Today, it is the Ministry of Textiles and the Handicrafts Board which aim at the revival of handicrafts, especially when faced with the processes of urbanization, industrialization, modernization and westernization. As Bernard Cohn points out “dress codes are often at the centre of a number of wider issues concerning modesty, honour and respect, and a clash between different styles of clothing is often symbolic of wider conflict between different cultural and social values and norms” (Tarlo 1996:13, referring to Cohn). And here we are back to the clash between the imagination of “tradition” and “modernity”. “The 1980s had seen an “ethnic boom” throughout India, with “ethnic” clothes selling in every major city, whether in street markets, state emporiums or exclusive boutiques” (Tarlo 1996:294). This ethnic boom can be easily connected to the return of “Indianness” and the re-emergence of nationalism as well as more intensely and closely experienced foreignness and foreign values symbolized by the “West”. The “Indianness” is cool and trendy, and so are the Indian symbols and things which are promoted on TV and movies (*cf.* Favero 2005), and which are “presenting an idealized image of (Indian) culture to a wealthy cosmopolitan elite” (Tarlo 1996:315). As it has already been pointed out earlier on, the village is romanticized in these idealized images as a place where a sort of an ideal existence in harmony with nature and beauty is found, it is a place where “authentic” India is to be found (*cf.* Dewey 1972). In her description of Hauz Khaz, a village turned into a fashion centre specializing in designer ethnic wear, Emma Tarlo notes

⁵⁹ M. G. Ranade (1842-1901), Indian judge, author and reformer.

⁶⁰ Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), Parsi intellectual, educator, cotton trader, and an early Indian political leader, famous for his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*.

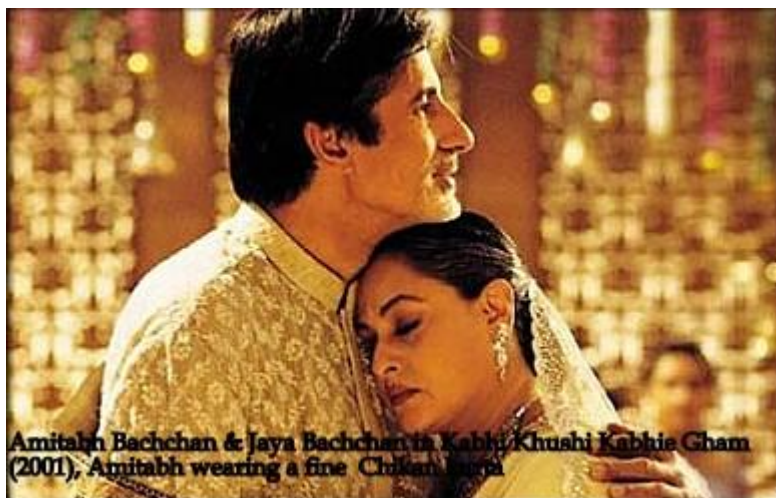
that, “when a woman bought a garment from Hauz Khaz, she was buying not only an outfit but a slab of carefully marketed village life. It was through exploiting the exclusive appeal of this “village life” that the boutique owners were able to sell their clothes at inordinate prices” (Tarlo 1996: 293-4). A similar logic can be also applied to our case of Chikan. Designating things as the “traditional” ones, does not only represent the means of implying their authenticity and justifying their continued existence (Tarlo 1996: 317) but also a way how to market them successfully to the “new” middle-classes and all aspirants to upward mobility, given the logic of the neo-traditional discourse which dominates their imagination. But it must be noted that “just as the romance of a village is venerated by those outside it, so the “traditional village dress” and hand-woven fabrics are often appreciated mostly by those, who do not have to wear them but choose to do so” (Tarlo 1996:316).

In the previous chapter we have discussed how a particular commodity is produced, now let us discuss how the same commodity can situationally produce distinct kind of people. “The system of commodities, Marx pointed out, is an arrangement of production and exchange in which objects present themselves to us always as representations of something else” (Mitchell 2000:21) or as Barthes says, they connote a whole range of things (Barthes 1983). The mystical character of commodities lies in the fact that “an object can acquire value only by appearing to embody, or represent, some quality beyond itself” (Mitchell 2000:21) almost like a character on a stage. The “myth of Chikan” is located somewhere at the point of connection between the imagination of the local history and the cinematic and nationalistic discourses playing with the notions of womanliness in modern India. It represents the nostalgia for “tradition”, so typical for the modernity. The commodity can thus be viewed as a particular cultural artefact spirited with the discursive formations and representations connected to its production and reception.



If we thus want to comprehend why a particular commodity secures the sales, we have to understand it as a cultural artefact and localize it in the cultural universe and in the discourses which surround it. But what is more, “no longer can we regard things as passive receptacles of discursive thought; rather, as we have indeed long suspected, thought can conduct itself in things, and things can be thoughtlike (...) things partake not just in thinking, but also in the shaping of knowledge” (Küchler 2005:225) at the

same time as they have the potential to change and manipulate social reality, creating particular relationships of production. Having discussed the power of the cinematic imagination earlier as well as the endless talks of the women customers about the movies and fashion, we are aware of their role. The answer to what makes Chikan to be sold so well, is thus that *Chikan is a commodity par excellence of the neo-traditional discourse of the modern urban India (and Indian cinema)* as we have discussed it throughout this chapter. I therefore want to argue that to be properly understood, the Chikan industry and the question of communal *peace* must be understood within the broader context of the middle class discourse and the lifeworld,



which we have discussed above. This discourse, as we have seen, is a particular mixture of capitalistic consumption ideals with a blend of traditionalism and the experience of urban modernity in India. Being

convinced that capitalism is as much a semiotic as an economic system; let us focus on the

commodity itself – Chikan and the discursive universe which surrounds it. On one hand both the Bollywood cinema and the Chikan are resisting certain aspects of modernity, and on the other hand they are being produced and sustained by it. The political dynamic of the popular Bollywood films lies in their “symbolic enactment of the “traditional” society's self-exclusion from the domain of an instrumentalist rationality” (Nandy 1995:6). Of course that is the same cinema that “played the crucial role of introducing to its audiences the aestheticized world of the commodity. Cinema became the window for (virtual) global travel, urban exploration, and commodity display (...) it provided its audiences with a modern “window-shopping” experience” (Mazumdar 2007:95). Fashion is naturally an important aspect of the cinema, and especially of the film song parts, which emerged in the 1990's as “one of the most important spaces for an aggressive and sophisticated form of fashion display” (Mazumdar 2007:96). Fashion, as it is conceived of in the Bollywood cinema, generates very strongly the dispersed notions of identity and selfhood. “By functioning as mobile electronic catalogues of the post-globalization commodity experience, the song and dance sequences have mapped out a certain desiring yet consuming subject. The symbolic association of commodity with fashion, globalization, and spectacular travel gestures to an image of a sexualized middle-class female consumer” (Mazumdar 2007:108). Chikan as a revitalized Muslim craft, which flourished during the times of the Nawabi rulers in the Awadh region, who patronized the best craftsmen, has always symbolized the royalty, wealth and excess, as well as the virtue, decency and tradition⁶¹. The Chikan products thus convey a strongly identity bound message even nowadays. In the newspapers we can, for example, read, that Chikan has glamorized the protagonists in the movies and “successfully revealed their social standing in the context of the story and even succinctly conveyed their taste and finesse. Always used as a tool to communicate the grandeur and haute sophistication of the cine-characters, Chikan kari has traditionally been present in larger than life movies. (...) in *Devdas* it was used to good effect to

⁶¹ Note the ambivalent relationship between the middle-class and Nawabs discussed earlier.

display the sartorial extravaganza of the Zamindars.”⁶² Or we can read how happy, for example Sanjay Dutt, a popular Bollywood actor is, that his girlfriend wears Chikan, “It is about simplicity, dignity and elegance – everything that the Dutt family represents (...) Sanjay is a traditional guy. He is very happy when Manayata wears Chikan kurtas and sarees”⁶³

The talkative women customers can be imagined as the nodal points of the *connections* between a *traditional Muslim local craft*, a physical and living survivor of the idealized past, *the imagined past*, *the revitalization of this local craft*, the consequent *promotion of Chikan in the cinema* and the boom of the production of Chikan since the eighties and the release of Muzaffar Ali's movie *Umrao Jaan* (1981). The boom of the production of the Chikan came precisely in the period when other cities in the same area became striven by Hindu-Muslim violence and the Hindu nationalist ideology emerged. And even though a great part of the Lucknow population joined the Hindu nationalist ideology, the *economic bridge* created by the involvement in the Chikan business and by the relations and networks of trust, which this industry brought into existence, managed to prevent the occurrence of the communal violence. The simple rule that “cross-cutting ties reduce the chances of violent conflict” (Eriksen 2005:29) appears to work pretty well when set into the context of a particular local history and recent developments which actually enabled the growth of these networks. It is thus these relationships between the financescape, mediascape and ethnoscape which result in the maintenance of the local communal peace.

⁶² <http://www.hand-embroidery.com/movies-Chikan-kari.html> (19.9. 2008).

⁶³ <http://entertainment.oneindia.in/bollywood/news/manayata-attire-changed-100907.html> (19.9. 2008) The talk is about Sanjay Dutt's - popular Bollywood actor's - girlfriend.

It seems thus *as if the imagined history turned into reality* through the revitalization of a cultural artefact of the past which has been placed on the capitalist market of the consumerist modern society and pompously show-cased in the Bollywood spectacle. And this in turn created a great informal industry which cuts across the divisions of class, religion and caste and creates networks of dependency on the local level, which work as a prevention of the communal violence. We can now say, together with the Lakhnawis, that “it is the particular history of this city, the Nawabi spirit, their secular outlook and the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb which makes us live in harmony here”⁶⁴, though we now understand that the reasons for it appearing this way are not so simple and straightforward.

⁶⁴ A reformulation of a phrase I heard numerous times when discussing Lucknow.

Concluding Remarks

"It's a heavy confusion.

Veda, Koran, holiness, hell –

Who's man, who's woman?

A clay pot shot with sperm.

When the pot falls apart, what do you call it?

Numskull! You've missed the point!"

(Kabir in Hess 1986:67)

Answering the question why the city of Lucknow is marked by a considerable communal harmony and social cohesion as compared to the neighbouring cities has been our key concern throughout this work. Soon we have understood that the answer to this question is not a simple or a singular one, but rather a complex and an intricate one. The answer was to be found in the particular social, economic and imaginative constellation of the city, which led us to the examination of several interconnected processes and areas - from the imagination of the local past and the representations of the city via the economic networks of the Chikan embroidery industry to the experience of modernity in India, particularly by the middle-class people. In this conclusion we will firstly discuss and summarize the multiple factors which work for the maintenance of the communal peace and secondly we will discuss the theoretical implications of the study.

The Riddle of the “Relaxed” Communal Relationships

The question why the communal relationships in Lucknow have a rather peaceful character, as compared to the surrounding cities and areas, made us select and emphasize certain aspects of the social reality as relevant and essential for its answering, at the same time as other aspects have been given less importance. From the beginning we had to accept this limiting principle, i.e. the principle of relevance, which “is decided to describe the facts which have been gathered from one point of view only, and consequently to keep, from the heterogeneous mass of these facts, only the features associated with this point of view, to the exclusion of any others” (Barthes 1967:95). In our account and investigation of the cityscape of Lucknow we have thus selected only those aspects and processes that can be said to participate actively in the maintenance of the local communal peace. We have come to see that it is a particular combination of variables related to broader processes and trends in the society that is responsible for the existence of the local peace. We have discussed the *mythologies* of Lucknow, the various ways in which the city is represented and in which the past is actively used to produce the present. We have noted the importance of the Nawabs in the imagination of Lucknow, who are remembered with a great amount of nostalgia and who are imagined as standing for the “true” Lucknow, at the same time as the period of the British rule is often undercommunicated. We have seen that the “glorious” Lucknow lives on not only in the imagination of its inhabitants, but also on the cinema screens. But this presence of the Lucknow of the past in the imagination is not only a passive fact; it is rather an active act. Through this imagination and representations of Lucknow the aspects of the imagined past are recreated and given new meanings. To cast light on these processes of redefinition and recreation, we have picked out the example of Chikan. This traditional embroidery can be viewed as an example *par excellence* of the *past present* of the mythologies of the city, but it can also be

viewed – together with the imagination of the past - in terms of the processes described in the previous chapter, i.e. in terms of the increased popularity of “India”, the emergence of nationalism and patriotism and consequent vogue of ethnic fashion, especially after the 1990s. This ethnic boom and increased popularity of the Chikan handicraft had important consequences for the maintenance of the local communal peace, particularly throughout the 1990s, which were marked by the emergence of the exclusivist ideology of Hindu nationalism. As we have seen, the networks of the economic interdependency, which cut across the divisions of religion, gender, caste, class and locality and which the Chikan industry creates, proved crucial to the maintenance of the peaceful relationships between Hindus and Muslims in the city. The growth of the industry and these networks, especially after 1990s, that is noticeably connected to the emergence and the ideology of the Hindu nationalism, has at the same time prevented the negative effects of this ideology, which have been violently felt in Lucknow’s neighbouring areas. This happened by expanding the cross-cutting networks and by turning a craft, which could have possibly been labelled as a “Muslim” craft, into a “traditionally Indian” craft. Chikan has been turned into embroidery which is worn by both Muslims and Hindus to express their Indianness, sense for tradition and fashion, but it is, among others, also worn by Judi Dench at Oscars, turning Chikan into a fashion statement. We could even say that the “Nawabi discourse”, the discourse of the imagined past of Lucknow, works as a contra-discourse to the Hindu vs. Muslim rhetoric and, contingently created, it enables the capitalistic production, which parasites on this contra-discourse. This is closely related to what we have discussed in the previous chapter, namely to the middle-class life-world, which is to a great degree marked by the quest for appropriate commodities, Chikan being undoubtedly one of these. The middle-class life-world and the discourse of the Bollywood cinema thus created a framework for our understanding of the possibility of the local peaceful communal relationships. We have identified the most salient factors which interplay and create the right blend that maintains the local peace, but there are also other factors which play, to a certain extent, an important role. This being firstly the religious festivals, be it Hindu or Muslim ones,

in which usually both communities participate and interact. We have pointed out one of such occasions in the second chapter, i.e. the mourning festival of Muharram. Secondly, the Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb, popularly understood as the culture or etiquette of friendship across the boundaries of religion, is both a key point of the imagination of Lucknow and of the social conduct. It is associated with the positive values of cultural blending, but at the same time as I have learned, it is to a certain degree also etiquette of pretending. As one of the decedents of the Nawabs told me, “there is a tension, but even though one would behave towards one's worst enemy as towards the best friend, it is about controlling oneself”⁶⁵. The Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb is also closely related to the occasions such as the festivals; we can thus read in the *Indian Express* from 10th March 2009 that:

*Keeping the spirit of "Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb" of Awadh alive, the descendants of the Nawabs in Lucknow continued to organise Holi festivities and celebrate the festival of colours with their Hindu brethren. The royal families residing around the city station area in Lucknow have been organising holi functions to share the joy and mirth associated with the festival, strengthening the bonds of brotherhood nurtured since the times of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. (...) By celebrating the festival together, an atmosphere of trust and confidence has been created in Awadh and these festivals reinforce it time and again, the descendants of law minister of the first ruler, Shah Ali Khan Bahadur, Prof Nawab Sayed Ali Hamid said.*⁶⁶

And thirdly, the social composition of the city is of a significant importance. Lucknow, being the governmental centre, is populated by a great number of governmental officials but, as we have seen, there is also a great concentration of businessmen. The middle-classes thus have a strong position in the city. The market and business in the city is still growing, new shopping

⁶⁵ From an interview, 24.4. 2008.

⁶⁶ Descendants of Nawabs keep Holi traditions alive.

malls are built and the consumerist ideology is increasing its impact. This all gives the city a particular capitalistic ethos. It thus seems as if the discourse of the market is suspending the ethnic/religious discourse, becoming more important and ruling the imagination of people as well as making the categories of the class into the most pertinent differentiating criteria. It naturalizes the power differences in terms of the class, rather than in terms of any ascribed categories. The concentration of business people and governmental officials also leads to a great number of strong networks of an associational type that can be found in the city. Be it business organizations, sport clubs, trade unions, universities or, to add one more example, the Buddhist platform mentioned in the previous chapter (*cf.* Varshney 2002). These networks generally cut across the boundaries of religion, but at the same time are open mostly only to people labelled as the middle class. These networks are significant as they add on to the networks of interdependency formed by the Chikan industry, which cut across both religion and class. At this moment we can recall the words of Jawaharlal Nehru: “the real thing to my mind is the economic factor. If we lay stress on this and divert public attention to it we shall find automatically that religious differences recede into the background and a common bond unites different groups. The economic bond is stronger than the national one.” (Nehru 1972-82: 203). In his speech from 1931 he insisted that what is necessary for “peaceful” relationships is the dependency of different communities on each other. When this dependency exists, it is the economic problems that acquire salience, not the religious ones and the important category in this respect becomes the category of the social class. We have seen that this statement is certainly valid for the case of Lucknow, but one could ask to which degree it is also a product of the statements made by Nehru, which still have impact on the thinking of especially the older generations of the Lucknow middle-class.

To summarize the above mentioned, we can say that we have moved to a more nuanced picture of the Muslim vs. Hindu categorization. We have seen that a Muslim businessman has genuinely more in common with a Hindu businessman, than with a Muslim villager. The

identifications based on other than religious categories appeared to be more important in most contexts. It was the differences in knowledge, abilities, skills and capital that naturalized into the construction of the social classification in terms of class, rather than in terms of any ascribed statuses. In addition, the close cooperation of people of different religious backgrounds made it hard for exclusivist political discourses operating with religious identities to appeal. The dense networks of interdependency and cooperation, as well as networks of friends, which all cut across the religious boundaries, work as the prevention of the communal violence. And the many cases of intermarriage, I have observed in the field, only strengthen this thesis. It is thus the cross-cutting nature of the social and economic networks found in Lucknow that is crucial for the maintenance of communal peace.

Having summarized the basic findings, let us now turn to our last discussion, a discussion on the theoretical implications of the study. Firstly, we will turn our attention to the concept of *identification*, instead that of identity. And secondly, we will discuss the necessity to abandon the dichotomies of global vs. local, west vs. non-west, Muslim vs. Hindu, tradition vs. modernity and others and the advantages of a network approach.

Thinking in Terms of Identification instead of Identity

The term “identity” tends to be ambiguous, meaning either too much or nothing at all. In addition, it has the strange aftertaste of reification, which is discomforting. “Identity” necessarily has its place as a category of practice, it is used and abused daily and in many ways, and as such it should be analysed, but this does not mean that it should be also appropriated as a category of analysis (*cf.* Brubaker & Cooper 2000). Not only does social scientist need rather unambiguous categories, which the concept of “identity” is not, but also, as we have seen throughout the study and particularly in the preceding chapter, “identity” is not anything static

or unchangeable. On the contrary, it is a *process*. It is played out differently in diverse settings. The term “identity” as a certain (usually reified) quality ascribed to certain people thus loses its meaning. “It is not clear why what is routinely characterized as multiple, fragmented, and fluid should be conceptualized as “identity” at all” (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:6). Therefore I propose together with Brubaker & Cooper to replace the static concept of “identity” with the one of “identification”. This concept lacks the reifying connotations and it “does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve. Identification of oneself and of others – is intrinsic to social life; “identity” in the strong sense is not” (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:14). The empirical data presented in this study clearly show the *relational* and *situational* character of *identification*. We have seen throughout the text that static identities like Hindu and Muslim, whatever is imagined under these labels, simply do not work in reality. The concept of identification thus, being much richer, gives us more space to acknowledge the discursive shifts, which occur when the identifications are played out. At the same time as it acknowledges the situational and relational character of identity. To put it simply, identity is not an (unchangeable) thing that people own (*cf.* Eriksen 2002, 2003: 135-150). We have even seen that what is usually considered as unchangeable identities, particularly in the Indian context, namely the religious identities, are as mutable as any other. They are *identifications*, that might be at times stronger, at times weaker and at other times they might be replaced by new ones. People play with these identifications in a similar way as the popular Bollywood cinema does. Let us just recall the grandmother Lajjo from *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (Tomorrow May Never Come, 2003), played by Sushma Seth, who throughout the movie turns from a devoted Sikh lady, who wants her granddaughter to be married to a handsome Sikh boy, into a servant of Allah and finally at the end of the movie turns to Christianity, which has been practiced by her daughter-in-law. Though this might be viewed as an over the top cinematic representation, it conveys an important message about the situational character of identity, or better the identification. And she surely does remind us of our friend from previous

chapter, who turned from Islam, to Hinduism and ended up with Buddhism, breaking the imagined boundaries and identifying with and incorporating in herself all these faiths. The Bollywood cinema reaches across the imagined boundaries of caste, class, religion, region and status at the same time as it is “renowned for its openness, and tolerance of, diversity, and for its relative lack of discrimination on the basis of religion or caste. Hindu actors portray Muslim characters and vice versa” (Wilkinson-Weber 2004:5). And the real life turns out to be a very similar act.

Thinking in Terms of Networks instead of Dichotomies

Throughout the study the importance of networks and of the crucial interconnectedness of phenomena has been emphasized. The interconnectedness of the economic networks and the discursive formations and main trends in society was pointed out. It could be said that we tried to connect the micro and macro level of analysis, but we must be aware of the fact that “micro” and “macro”, as well as for instance “global” and “local”, is only a matter of perspective. “*Rural* or *urban* or *local* or *cosmopolitan* are not temporally distinct states of being in which one evolves into another, but rather are produced in relation to each other within the same social field.” (Larkin 2004:93). The network based approach that was selected, proved being the best way to understand that these words do not stand for anything “global” or “local”, but that things are always necessarily *glocal*. And the network approach clearly shows that *glocal* can be understood in terms of extensions of the networks, which can be on a larger scale imagined as *flows*. ““Flows,” for all their seemingly disembodied nature, require material conduits, and they appear because a place (...) is embedded in precise networks of social relations built over time” (Larkin 2004:93). The network approach reminds us of the complexity of the social life and its situations, as well as of the impossibility to divide and classify the flow of social and economic

interactions into clear-cut categories. The network approach thus focuses on extensions and interactions; turning the dichotomies of “micro” vs. “macro” or “global” vs. “local” in “not two processes, but two perspectives on the same point” (Nustad 2003:127). I believe that the presented study has shown us the need to sheer away from these dichotomies which, rather than fuelling thought, restrict it - as Bourdieu rightly points out the “social dichotomies relayed by the education system, becoming categories of perception, hinder or imprison thought” (Bourdieu 1990:16). Anthropology in general and I believe this study in particular, “has the authority and the ability to collapse a number of counterproductive dichotomies: the local and the global, the virtual and the real, the place-bound and the “non-place”, the universal and the particular. In real-life settings such contrasts evaporate” (Eriksen 2003: 15). “The “India”, where the past is inserted into the present and then projected into the future, questions the colonial dichotomies of “India” vs. “West”, “modernity” vs. “tradition”” (Favero 2005:24).

We end our explorations at this point. So let us end them with a remembrance of Kabir, a mystic poet and a saint of India and his rather rough words reminding us about the universality and physical baseness of all human beings, which undermines any ascribed distinctions:

It's all one skin and bone,

One piss and shit,

One blood, one meat.

From one drop, a universe.

Who's Brahmin? Who's Shudra?

(Kabir in Hess 1986:67)

“The popular story of Kabir’s death depicts the debate between his Hindu and Muslim devotees over whether his corpse should be burned or buried, according to Hindu and Muslim custom, respectively. In the end, the argument proves empty because the corpse disappears entirely” (Gottschalk 2000:21). Kabir did, in the same way as his writing, transcend the communal distinctions. And I have full hope that we will live up to his example.

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