Making the Past in a Global Present: Chennai’s New Heritage

Christmas, 2004

News of the Indian Ocean tsunami flashes on my computer screen. Almost real-time images of confusion and agony appear in short order. I see women searching for missing children and battered fishing boats run aground. Soon, bloated corpses will be nudged to shore. After trying unsuccessfully to telephone, I rely (again) on the promises of electronic immediacy and send frantic e-mail messages to friends in Chennai. Within a couple of days, replies have arrived. I am relieved to hear that all are okay if rather shaken. The same cannot be said for the city’s beachfront, much of it occupied by fishing communities and hut colonies. The destruction in Chennai, including more than two hundred casualties, was concentrated along its twenty kilometer shoreline. Although Chennai fared better than areas farther south and in Sri Lanka, the tragedy was compounded by the loss of motorboats, catamarans, baskets, and nets—all of which portended disaster for the livelihoods of many in the city’s fishing communities.

The tsunami struck India’s eastern coast when I had nearly completed a draft of this book, and although I do not deal with that event in any detail, it has shaped the book’s direction and lent urgency to some of its questions. On a personal level, my concerns about its devastating effects were sharpened by the fact that it struck a city I had called home for several extended periods from the mid-eighties on. And there was painful irony in the coincidence of my having just completed a chapter on Chennai’s Marina Beach memorials as the wave’s force overtook those very sites. More important than any personal coincidences, however, is that the tsunami’s impact is not explicable outside the transformations in statecraft, culture, and political economy that India, like other postcolonial nation-states, has
experienced in recent decades. Natural disasters are rarely natural in their gen-
esis or effects and Chennai’s commercial and industrial development, especially
with the impetus of privatization and deregulation, contributed to conditions that
exacerbated the effects of the 2004 tsunami. Beachfront commercial developments
from tourist resorts to shrimp farms have led to the removal of the buffers such
as mangrove swamps and casuarina stands that would have mitigated the wave’s
intensity and its inland reach. And like the redevelopment that has occasioned
the resettlement of inner-city slumdwellers in the city’s hinterland, the tsunami
added fuel to existing efforts to relocate fishing groups from beachfront sites that
were being eyed for lucrative commercial use and high-end residential develop-
ment. The instant destruction of the tsunami, like that of the bulldozers used for
street clearing and demolition, wiped away the material fabric of everyday life and
livelihood with its embedded forms of remembrance, both the implicit memory
of bodily habitus and the explicit memory of semantic understanding, even as it
brought forth new memories.?

The tsunami was an exceptional event, scarring indelibly the places it struck.
The creative destruction of global capitalism, however, is remaking many of those
same cities, towns, and villages in both catastrophic and routine ways.3 These
transformations, while exacerbating the destructive impact of the tsunami and
other such disasters, also echo the globalizing force of capital during earlier cen-
turies of European colonial expansion. Then, as now, the collisions and conflu-
ences of knowledge, goods, persons, and spaces have demanded reorientations to
both shared pasts and futures. Like the outbreaks of nostalgia that, according to
Svetlana Boym, followed episodes of revolutionary change in Europe, so also has
the radical restructuring of neoliberal globalization called forth a “yearning for a
different time,” not only for a glorious past, but also “for unrealized dreams of the
past and visions of the future that became obsolete.”4 Such yearnings are congealed
in the imagery, narratives, built form, bodily practices, and artifacts by which
shared pasts are represented and through which memories together with aspira-
tions are engendered. It is the making of the past—the creation of both spaces of
the past and the knowledges and sentiments glossed as past-consciousness—in the
present conjuncture of neoliberal globalization that this book explores.

Several broad questions thread the chapters together. As a group, they hinge
on the relation between cultural memory and postcolonial statecraft, in particu-
lar, their intersecting and diverging social spaces represented in the memorials,
monuments, and commemorative place names authorized by the state, as well as
the heritage sites, museums, and themed cultural environments sponsored by pri-
ivate organizations and individuals.5 It is within these intersecting spatial fields
that collective identities and political institutions are reified, acquire force, and
incite resistance in the daily lives of citizens. Unpacking these processes, however,
requires more than attention to the encoding of authority; as important are the
ways in which state projects intersect with what Halbwachs termed “social mem-
ory,” the common landmarks that constitute a shared framework for individual
recollection.6 In this book I am concerned, on the one hand, with the nature of
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the state's institutional investment in spaces of public memory and in the ways that those investments themselves mark transformations in statecraft from the planned, welfare state of the fifties, sixties, and seventies to the neoliberal designs of the nineties. What occasions the state's creation of public memoryscapes, and what do those sites “do” within statecraft? How is the phenomenology of remembrance implicated in the dynamics of postcolonial statecraft? How, for example, do technologies of memory “hail” or interpellate subjects as “citizens”? On the other hand, I attend also to the claims on the past made by non-state actors, with the forms of cultural citizenship negotiated with and through public spaces of cultural memory. How are competing forms of ethnic, sectarian, class, orgendered belonging mediated through the work of memory? What forms of counter-memory are deployed against—and outside—the state?

In the chapters that follow I explore these questions through investigations of Chennai’s historical geography and its sites of cultural memory. Like those anthropologically minded historians who have charted the richness and dynamism of popular historical consciousness in the United States, I, a historically minded anthropologist, am interested in the processes by which past-consciousness is generated and how the past, as history, myth, personal biography, and memory, animates and inscribes futurity within life as it is lived. By framing my topic as “past-consciousness,” I intend to move past the rather tired debate on the relative value and proper domains of “history” and “memory,” a debate in which history’s textuality, objectivity, and secular underpinnings are set in opposition to the subjectivity, religiosity, and orality of memory. While attentive to the different evidentiary bases, media, and effects of various representations of the past, I propose to treat both history and memory, along with myth, genealogy, and life story as competing modalities by which individual and collective pasts are objectified and made representable. These modalities encompass the various cultural landscapes, artifacts, and built environments that represent the past and evoke affective responses to it, as well as the statutory measures pertaining to the declaration and preservation of heritage sites, the governmental and nongovernmental bodies that concern themselves with retrieval and representation of the past, and the popular and educational media that communicate about the past.

My focus extends, therefore, to both the political economic and phenomenological matrices in which pasts are conjured, materialized, lived in, and denounced. I bring cultural phenomena to bear in analyses of globality, but, rather than relying on the abstract notions of culture informing the work of theorists of globalization such as Jameson and Miyoshi, and Hardt and Negri, my book privileges culture as lived and thus spatialized experience, negotiated within contradictory political and ethical terrains of postcoloniality. In this book, I ask why, how, and by whom pasts are remembered, concentrating on the ways that the spatial dimensions of memory and its practice have become increasingly implicated in the creative destruction of the urban landscape, the cycles of construction and deconstruction tied to the growth and contraction of capital, and the formation of transnational imaginaries within the spaces of national statecraft.
The “Now” and “Then” of Statecraft

Public sites and practices of cultural memory are generally understood to be implicated in governance in at least two ways. Such representations may be treated as contingent outcomes of political decisions as well as the grounds on which political action and institutions are conceived. At the same time, they are also the material media with which the state, the nation, and other communities of imagination—territorial, ethnic, gendered, and sectarian—are represented, narrated, and inhabited. Put differently, the spaces and practices of public memory are not only subject to control by markets and governing bodies; they serve also as crucial representations of the principles that undergird specific systems of governance. Indeed, they may be critical media for communication between the state and its citizenry. This is a crucial point but one that is sometimes lost in analyses focusing solely on the political economy of heritage. I argue, however, that sites of public memory are among the principal landscapes on which such work is done. Such an analysis allows reflection upon the cultural mediation of state sovereignty, while providing an opportunity to prise open the bureaucratic apparatus of governance in which pasts are solicited, represented, and managed.

The direction I take in this book follows previous efforts to enculture the state. The cultural emplotment of state power was considered in early work by Cassirer and explored more systematically by Corrigan and Sayer, in their analysis of English state formation, and by Abrams in an often-cited essay on the relations between ideological representations of the state and the exercise of power in modern statecraft. The state, maintained Abrams, was the amalgamation of the state system—the institutions for rule making, policy formation and implementation, governance, and so forth—and the state idea, the repository of images and practices at the center of political life. The latter, comprising emblems, ceremonies, ritual discourses, architectural spaces, and so forth, represent “the state” as a unitary institution and, more crucial, mask the forms of domination it exercises. Abrams’s intervention was twofold: he sought a more accurate and broadly applicable definition of the state as both idea and system, but he also intended to explain why the task of defining it was fraught with difficulties and inconsistencies. Rather than attributing this ambiguity to inadequacies in scholarship, he argued that it was strategic, that it was itself the means by which power was masked. He asserted:

The state is ... a triumph of concealment. It conceals the real history and relations of subjection behind an a-historical mask of legitimating illusion; contrives to deny the existence of connections and conflicts which would if recognized be incompatible with the claimed autonomy and integration of the state. The real official secret, however, is the secret of the non-existence of the state.

The state, understood rhetorically, was not as much a unified entity that preceded discourse as an effect of political discourse, created semiotically and meant to mask the instrumentalities by which it dominated society.
For Abrams, semiosis was significant mainly insofar as it concealed the state's institutional power. For subsequent interpreters, however, his notion of the “state idea” has served as a ground for productive inquiry, prompting questions about its particular historical and cultural forms, the means by which it is produced, and the affective charge that it carries. Timothy Mitchell, using Abrams’s argument as point of departure, identified the “state effect” as an object of inquiry:

We should address the state as an effect of mundane processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision and surveillance and representation that create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society or state and economy. ... These are processes that create the effect of the state not only as an entity set apart from economy or society, but as a distinct dimension of structure, framework, codification, expertise, information, planning and intentionality.  

As generated in the domain of monuments and public memory, the state effect can both mask the state’s power as well as produce the state in the imaginations of its officials, political leaders, and subjects, and engender complex affective ties. Visual culture, understood as both culturally salient visual representations as well as practices of looking, is a crucial medium for the state effect. For example, state sovereignty can be represented as “natural” and thus inevitable and encompassing through monumental images that liken the state to a mythologized body—by borrowing figures from myths and folktales or by representing bodies of historical figures in mythic trappings. In Hindu South Asia, the implication of visuality in spatial practice acquires added significance given the visual logic of *darsan*, the grace-laden exchange of gazes between deity and devotee that is a central part of Hindu praxis. Though *darsan* glosses a ritualized interaction, its logic pervades other arenas of popular visual practice, such as cinema, painting, and photography, and thus exerts influences in a wide range of visual and spatial fields including, as I show, spaces of public memory.

I draw on the above cultural approaches to statecraft in calling, with Ferguson and Gupta, for an exploration of the metaphors and avenues of embodied practice by which states come to be understood and experienced as concrete, overarching, spatially encompassing, and invested with verticality and encompassment. I extend Ferguson and Gupta’s argument, however, in proposing that the spatialization of the state is also, and necessarily, a temporalization: that the state’s qualities of verticality and encompassment are rooted in pasts—of the body, of landscape, of built form—and oriented toward futures; that its ontology is spatially inscribed. Memorials, in particular, may play significant roles in naturalizing the state because of the ways that they conflate the temporalities of the body and of the state.

Public memory sites are, in short, crucial embodiments of the state’s spatiality and temporality; they emplot both logics of rule and modes of dissent within morally compelling stories and imagery. This dynamic becomes even more pronounced under conditions of neoliberal globalization, in which states cede some parts of sovereignty but still seek to retain the loyalties and affective attachments
of their citizens. How does the privatized, deregulated state retain or rewrite its myths of origin? How do spaces of public memory enact and challenge the state effect in these contexts? How is political voice mediated or silenced through the work of public memory? While remaining mindful of the calculated and exploitive political effects that state-sponsored sites of public memory are designed to have, I wish to take on, rather than dismiss, their visual culture and spatial practice in order to expose the role of technologies of memory in the "masking of practice and the practice of masking."²⁰

Cultural Memory and Global Exchanges

Kanchi Kudil

On that overcast Sunday morning in February, I seemed to be the only visitor at Kanchipuram’s newest “heritage” attraction, a century-old courtyard house named Kanchi Kudil. For a modest entry fee of Rs.20, visitors could “witness the lifestyle of a bygone period.”²¹ Kanchipuram, a temple town west of Chennai that had gained prominence in the seventh century CE as the center of the Pallava state, attracted scores of Hindu tourist-pilgrims each week, as well as a much smaller stream of international tourists, discouraged perhaps by the observation in the
Lonely Planet Survival Kit that, “other than the temples, Kanchipuram is a dusty and fairly nondescript town and there’s precious little to see or do except when the temple cart festivals take place.” Kanchi Kudil’s owner, the daughter of the original residents, had reclaimed the house from its tenants, and refurnished with her parents’ and grandparents’ original possessions. The house was indistinguishable from other courtyard houses in the town’s center—indeed, the owner anticipated that its very typicality would be its selling point. Her reasoning served to demonstrate that it was not domestic travelers but foreigners who were the target audience, a fact borne out by the response of the Indian friend who declined my invitation to join me on this visit: “For you, it’s okay. But for us, it’s nothing special. I can see the same thing at my mother’s place.”

After taking up residence in one of Chennai’s newer residential divisions a decade earlier, Kanchi Kudil’s owner had hired Kannaki, a young woman from a nearby village as a hostess. “Kannaki,” a warm and articulate young woman who held a bachelor’s degree in commerce, was unmarried. Her family had struggled to achieve a middle-class status and welcomed the small salary provided by Kannaki’s job. They also valued the limited demands the job made: Kannaki told me that her parents were in the midst of making marriage arrangements for her and she knew that, depending on how negotiations proceeded, she might have to leave the job at short notice. I spent almost three hours with her, as she told me about the home’s original occupants (who, she was careful to point out, were non-Brahman like herself) and explained domestic life of the century past, making thoughtful and effective use of the material objects displayed in the house as illustrative props. Only
gradually did I notice, however, that many of those objects bore price stickers. Although, like other museums and historic sites, this house had a small gift shop offering the usual postcards, guide books, and souvenirs, it seemed that the enterprising owner had transformed the entire space into a permanent estate sale.

The abandonment of family homes in villages and towns has been one of the consequences of the rural-urban migration that followed successive waves of urbanization and industrialization throughout the twentieth century. The re-signification of these former homes as sites of regional or national heritage and the reliance on the flexible labor pool of educated, underemployed women borrow on a template that has enjoyed success in Europe and North America during the past century, but yokes that model to possibilities and challenges specific to India and to other parts of the developing, postcolonial world. I return to this particular heritage house and to the issue of tourism's gendered labor in chapter 5. Here it can be read as an exemplar of the popular concerns with cultural memory—sites, practices, and discourses that represent collective pasts—that have proliferated and grown in contentiousness in India during the past two decades, a period during which the Indian state has become increasingly committed to neoliberal economic policies and institutions. The changing articulations of state and market have been inscribed in urban and rural spaces, as new metropolitan centers emerge and old ones are reconstituted around knowledge- and service-based economies. And it is on these new and remade landscapes that competing claims on the past are being staked and possible futures envisioned, for, as challenges to state sovereignty are lodged, the historicism of political modernity, its linear temporality and progressive telos, is questioned and the state's own myths of origin revisited and revised. Demand-driven tourism, environmental activism, resurgent nationalisms, and sub-national quests for ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian autonomy draw inspiration from, and nurture, diverse public memory sites and practices.

These claims on the past and the spaces of cultural citizenship that they engender are not reducible to the structural conditions of economic liberalization or neoliberal state formation. They are, nonetheless, productively engaged in the processes of political and economic restructuring—sustaining, resisting, and mediating those forces. The proliferation of politically and affectively charged pasts is a symptom of what Andreas Huyssen has called the "globalization of memory," an expression meant to capture the global circulation of templates for representing the past as well as the global influences and interactions that all pasts disclose. The political effects of memory's globalization are ambiguous. Those who participate in the work of memory, whether selling, conserving, recounting, or merely decorating themselves with the artifacts of heritage, do so in ways that are laden with contradictory desires and outcomes—whether arising from deeply felt needs for ethnic authenticity or from nostalgic yearnings, or to advance the critical perspective of counter-memory—and are always addressed to real or imagined others. Memory work, understood relationally, is suffused by what Michael Herzfeld has termed "cultural intimacy": the sharing of known and recognizable traits that define insiderhood but are also felt to be disapproved by powerful outsiders.
Cultural intimacy may be apparent in the ironic or confrontational play of stereotypes insofar as it works through the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality... [and through the] familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation.26

Again, consider Kannaki. She told me that she found satisfaction in a job with “no hurry up” and that she particularly enjoyed learning about the “traditional ways that people lived,” describing in detail, and with apparent admiration, the lives of the non-Brahman women who had lived in the house during the early twentieth century: their management of household affairs, their dowry goods, their religiosity. Yet, in telling me about her own aspirations, she admitted that her own family’s efforts to arrange a marriage were a source of tension. She herself recognized the importance of “adjusting” to her future in-laws’ expectations, but since earning her B.A., she had continued to study computer programming and accounting through correspondence courses. If she were able to take up work outside the house, she said, she hoped for a government job. Did her account of traditional gender roles and expectations and her hesitation in assuming them anticipate a foreigner’s stereotypes about India? I do not wish to speculate about her intentions, but it does seem fair to consider our interaction as a small instance of cultural intimacy. As the forces of globalization enable wider circulation of templates of mnemonic practice, for example, in the form and function of museums and in the labor of historical interpretation, they also expand and multiply the forums in which cultural intimacies are engendered and exchanged in self-fashioning and in the imagination of the Other.

Chennai

With a population now estimated at 4.5 million, Chennai, the capital of the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, is one of India’s mega-cities and one of the nodes through which forces of neoliberal globalization are transforming the country. A former colonial port, Chennai was known officially as “Madras,” the name used by the East India Company, until 1996 when, like “Calcutta,” “Bangalore,” and “Bombay,” the Anglicized moniker was abandoned in favor of its vernacular counterpart, “Chennai.” Even as it is reclaiming a regional identity, however, the city is poised to follow other South Indian metropoles as a center for global software production, export processing, and back-office services. State and municipal authorities have launched new efforts to create a hospitable climate for investment and consumption by foreign nationals and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), not only with regulatory changes in capital and financial markets but also by expanding its tourism industry.27 Changes in land use have brought with them the “formalization” of the city: the creation of modernized, sanitized enclaves for formal
sector activities and the marginalization of informal sector spaces and activities. Changes have also included the creation of a "peri-urban fringe," as new industrial, export assembly, leisure, and residential sites have cropped up alongside the villages just outside Chennai's municipal boundary.28 Villages in the urban
hinterlands have also been designated as resettlement sites for slum communities, who have been evicted from urban core areas to allow for redevelopment projects, such as the demolition of old building stock, expansion of transportation networks, and erection of high-rise office and residential structures.
Infrastructural and demographic changes have been accompanied by state, corporate, and voluntary efforts to fashion a heritage-conscious cityscape, one with historic precincts, museums, and memorials, portending (for some) the creation of Chennai as a recognizable “brand” among investment and travel destinations. In an updated take on what Renato Rosaldo called “imperialist nostalgia,” the transition to a neoliberal political economy has invited mourning for what it has eliminated.²⁹ This dialectic is at the heart of new nostalgic formations, though their genealogy is deeper and can be linked to longstanding forms of identity politics. Historical consciousness, in the form of Tamil cultural nationalism, or Dravidianism, has been cultivated in southern India as a potent political force for more than a century and Tamil nationalist parties have controlled the state since 1967. Dravidianist public memory has included statues of political leaders and cultural heroes, commemorative sites such as Valluvar Kottam (honoring the Tamil sage, Tiruvalluvar), and the memorial parks created for two of the state’s deceased chief ministers, M. G. Ramachandran and C. N. Annadurai.

While Dravidianist themes dominated urban memoryscapes during the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s saw the appearance of new narratives on the past. Tamil nationalism has remained potent, but competing notions of the past, including Dalit history, colonial nostalgia, and Hindu nationalism, have made new claims on urban space and popular loyalties.³⁰ Among the sites that mediate these claims are parks, open-air museums, urban heritage districts, house museums, libraries, and cultural performance spaces. They can be monumental, like the modernist stelae marking the site of Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination just outside Chennai or the re-created Buddhist stupa built to remember the Dalit legislator B. R. Ambedkar. Some are historicist: a new archive of Tamil periodicals and ephemera, the Roja Muthiah Research Library, commemorates the man whose collection was the library’s nucleus while providing a carefully cataloged archive of primary historical materials. Many are more intimate, like the converted residence in north Chennai that houses a small museum and educational center honoring the Tamil mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. By contrast, a well-endowed craft museum and cultural center, DakshinaChitra, occupies a ten-acre campus south of the city, where it represents premodern southern India using the template of the outdoor museum, popularized in Europe, North America and East Asia. Others, like several of the city’s temples and churches, follow the model of the registered historic site and are valued by conservationists not for their assertion of religious roots but because they bear the patina of time’s passage. Still others—notably the vernacular architectural styles favored by some conservation architects for both community housing and upscale urban residences—are meant as embodied reminders of Gandhian values.³¹ Reliant on globalized technologies of memory and fueled by state and market interests in heritage, these varied spaces retrieve and valorize the evanescent worlds of both plebian and elite pasts.

Chennai’s growth and its formalization have meant that the boundaries between the city’s urban core and its rural hinterland have become more permeable, re-creating what A. K. Ramanujan called the “rurban” landscape. The rurban,
a recurrent topos within modern and classical Tamil literature, refers to urban centers that are “continuous with the countryside.” These changes in social space have engendered an anxious nostalgia among those elite city dwellers and their diasporic counterparts for whom “the village” is both a touchstone for familial and national pasts and a wellspring of national heritage. The built environment of rural Chennai expresses both neoliberal futurity and its nostalgic longing, with heritage-themed resorts, house museums, and cultural centers that call forth the iconic past of the village even while transforming the villages of the hinterland with the introduction of new commercial and residential spaces.

In terms that evoke Nora’s argument about the transmutation of milieux de mémoire into lieux de mémoire that modernization precipitates, the production of public memory in the hinterland is encoded as a salvage operation, dedicated to the retrieval and preservation of almost lost traditions of oral narrative, performance, and plastic arts in workshops, performances, and exhibitions. For city dwellers, these representations of the past in the form of folklore offer hedges against the anomie that the liberalizing economy has introduced. In the words of the director of one conservationist organization, they provide “cultural spaces for gathering, reflecting, creating and transforming our social life” in an urban environment made up of “broken families . . . partial families in diaspora communities, [a] widening gap between the classes . . . unaffordable consumables” and characterized by “the lack of community life and . . . basic amenities.” The folkloric past is treated as a trust that holds within it the nation-state’s own authenticating traditions, even while constituted as remote, temporally, spatially, and experientially, from the worldly, metropolitan center of the nation-state.

Lying in the shadows of these new leisure and industrial spaces are the actual villages where the majority of India’s population continues to reside, though in conditions that have changed significantly over the past decade. While “the village” as icon is an object of nostalgic longing, actual villages of rural Chennai are complex mixes of rural and urban spaces, fears, and desires. As India’s cities have expanded and industrialization accelerated, the rates of rural population growth have declined and rural poverty has increased. Many villages, especially those on the borders of major cities, have been transformed with the piecemeal introduction of industrial production and assembly facilities, urban services, and infrastructure. Although many villagers have migrated to urban centers, others—especially those in suburban Chennai—commute by bus to schools and jobs in Chennai and satellite towns. Others find work closer to home in chemical plants, automotive assembly sites, and export-processing zones.

In heritage venues and discourses, these rural settlements are cast in contradictory terms. They are both living examples of a past of virtuous rusticity as well as stagnant residues of a past that is soon to be abandoned. Within the life-worlds of villages, however, cultural memory takes various forms. The embodied pasts of caste difference and stigma persist in caste-segregated living spaces and in bodily performances (through dress, for example) of deference, avoidance, and defiance. Oral narratives and community shrines also engage difference
though often to assert distinct genealogies, worldviews, and identities. Since the mid-1990s, an explicitly Dalit social space has been claimed with the erection of Ambedkar statues and busts. Cultural memory is also produced and disavowed in domestic space. Villages have long been sites of state surveillance and intervention, particularly through the succession of rural housing development programs inaugurated since the 1950s. Modernist in their implementation, goals, and architectural design, they were intended to erase the past (as known and embodied), though a few have made use of architectural praxis inspired by Gandhian nationalism's commitment to local self-sufficiency. These latter projects rely on vernacular materials and design to engender spaces of cultural intimacy in which new memories, to counter genealogies of stigma, could be produced and circulated. Just as urban and rural spaces are being rearticulated under neoliberal restructuring, so also are spaces of cultural intimacy with the past being reengaged to make claims on space and citizenship at Chennai's spatial and social margins.

About the Book

The book's chapters move from sites in Chennai's urban core (part 1) to its outskirts (part 2). The three chapters of part 1, "The Formal City and Its Pasts," deal with state-sponsored memory projects—the institutional contexts in which they function and the state effects that they mediate. I elaborate on the city's history and political economy in chapter 2, "Governing the Past: Chennai's Histories," organizing that narrative around the different ways that Chennai's past has been encoded and narrated over time and considering how those changing representations have articulated with patterns of land use and, more broadly, with successive phases in state formation. In chapter 3's exploration of the former chief minister M. G. Ramachandran's memorial, titled "Memory, Mourning, and Politics," I analyze the technologies of memory that encode the kingly models of sovereignty on which Dravidianist parties rely—noting the persistence, if not intensification, of rhetorics of kingship within statecraft as the state has ceded some areas of control to market forces with deregulation. Moreover, although efforts to enculture the state often retain an implicit focus on the nation-state, I use this case to argue for the heightened significance of sub-national units as mediators of the state effect, particularly as the state is reshaped under neoliberal globalization. Chapter 4, "Modernity Remembered: Temples, Publicity, and Heritage," investigates efforts by a private conservationist organization to designate a Hindu temple as a heritage site. I use the case as a spatialized frame on emergent debates—in this instance on secularism and statecraft—that I consider emblematic of the wave of "public-private" initiatives associated with neoliberalism.

Part 2, "Restructured Memories," moves from the urban core to the new, rural hinterland that has expanded with the economic restructuring of the 1990s. Chapter 5, "Consuming the Past: Tourism's Cultural Economies," charts the development of regional tourist circuits. Working alternately from the macrostructural perspective of the tourist industry (managed, until recently, by the state) and
from the more situated perspectives of tourist "hosts," I analyze tourism in terms of its mediation of changing national narratives and forms of cultural intimacy. Chapters 6 and 7 examine the technologies of cultural memory that have been entangled in the creation of Chennai's peri-urban fringe, noting their different engagements with the discourses and practices of Gandhian nationalism. The site dealt with in chapter 6, "Recollecting the Rural in Suburban Chennai," is the interactive museum and cultural center, DakshinaChitra, mentioned above. That site, I argue, engenders and sustains neoliberal nostalgia through its re-creation of a craft-centered rural world that invokes, without fully engaging, the artisanal commitments of Gandhian nationalism. Chapter 7, "The Village as Vernacular Cosmopolis," deals with a neo-traditionally styled village housing project that offers a new template for analyzing the politics of cultural memory. I explore the ways that its linkage of vernacular architecture with embodied historical consciousness draws upon Gandhian philosophy to propose that implicit memory—activated by changing the material lifeworld—can provide grounds for political voice. In this case, it is not the semantic memory of historical narrative that provides paradigms for present action but rather the embodied praxis and implicit memory associated with vernacular architecture, including participants' production of building materials and their acquisition of skills. Both cases consider the ways that pasts are deployed to make claims on space and citizenship at Chennai's spatial and social margins considering these in light of the various templates for heritage that have arisen with the restructuring of the urban landscape.

The book's chapters can be read as stand-alone essays. They work together, however, to argue that the diverse interests in the past and its material legacy are not contained by the goals of economic development but are embedded in other social, cultural, and political projects, new and longstanding, some of which are sharply critical of India's neoliberal turn. This polysemy, as it is mediated spatially and in narrative, is my point of departure. I consider how memory claims are both occasioned by and inscribed in the rapidly changing spaces of urban life—in the contexts of debates on development and planning, in memorialization and musealization, and in state-market couplings in the service of heritage. The result is an empirically grounded, but theoretically informed, anthropology of, rather than simply in, the city, which treats the metropole as subject of and stage for the evocation of the past as part of (and interruption in) the modern lifeworld.

My goal is to capture the semiotic complexity and dynamic tension in the ways that public memory is created and used by interweaving informants' personal narratives and oral histories—their recollections, reinventions, and nostalgic laments—with accounts of the institutional and macrostructural conditions as they have evolved over time and with analysis of the visual culture and architectural space. Attention to these differently positioned narratives and narrators, moreover, is meant to underscore the agentive role that memory practices may fulfill, by enabling people to envision structural conditions as invented, unfinished, and malleable. Here I refer to the ways that discourses on the past were often punctuated by anxious assertions and queries about directionality—what
does it mean to be Indian now? To be Tamil? I am interested, centrally, in the ways that acts of recalling and rewriting the past provide platforms for statecraft and governance, as well as for popular interventions in the cultural and political life of the present. Although territorialized Hindu nationalism has gained political strength and popular support over the past decade, the challenge for many is to imagine forms of collective belonging, citizenship, religiosity, and territorial identification that are less exclusionary, that incorporate the experiences and desires of de-territorialized groups, and that may provide a counterforce to the deleterious effects of neoliberal globalization even while working through global networks.

Engaging these issues has entailed that my project be conceived as an interdisciplinary one. Although the research has been rooted in ethnographic methods of inquiry and analysis, I have relied equally on historical sources (primary and secondary) and methods. Interdisciplinary work in history and anthropology, of course, has a deep and illustrious legacy. Attention to the historical record and to ethnohistory enabled anthropologists to interrupt the synchronic and presentist paradigms of structuralism and structural functionalism. Such work was particularly important in exposing the ways that relations of power associated with capitalist expansion engendered cultural forms and invented “traditions.” Critical interventions such as these have been especially important in the scholarship on South Asia, notably in the contributions of Bernard Cohn and the Subaltern Studies Collective. The history-anthropology interface is also exemplified in social history, in public and community history, in oral history, and in the path-breaking work of the Annales school and the social and cultural historiography that it influenced. In these settings, historians cultivated an ethnographic eye, as they attended to the minutiae of daily life and its material spaces, and excavated historically specific forms of “common sense” and everyday practice. My work recasts this interface in yet another way, by asking how people remember their pasts and what the effects of remembrance are. That is, while retaining the historical past as an object of inquiry, I have expanded the scope of my inquiry to the discursive, visual, and spatial practices, in the present, with which histories are made. This interdisciplinarity is meant to foster attention not merely to how historical events influence the present but to how histories are made and made effective in social and cultural life.