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The criminal economics and politics of black coal in Jharkhand, 2014

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In this chapter, an analysis of the implications of the criminal political economy for criminalised politics is developed. Probing the formally registered system for coal extraction and distribution alongside the differentiated, partially registered, segmented supply chains that have developed in response to widespread unlicensed demand and the need for coal for cooking, workshop energy and winter heating over much of North India, criminality is found to pervade the entire system. Throughout the length and breadth of this criminal assemblage, interlocked political and economic transactions entwine legal and illegal activity and accumulation assumes a great range of forms and scales. Dominated by a notorious coal mafia which has evolved atypically from a stranglehold over trade unions and mine labour, vast investment portfolios at the apex co-exist with extensive petty crime, generating returns barely covering subsistence. In a classic case of intreccio, the economic power of the mafia, its caste-embedded battles for supremacy and its need for state and party-political power suggest that Jharkhand’s distinctive politics of ethnic aspiration is very likely dwarfed by the tensions between the compulsions to unsettle and undermine countervailing politics to mafia supremacy and the compulsion to dominate local ruling and opposition parties.

Introduction

The estimates are rough and vary widely but it seems that in the central Indian state of Jharkhand perhaps a quarter of the coal is mined, scavenged and traded illegally. Illegal coal has been framed by scholars either as a repository of poverty or as a generator of dangerous and unhealthy
livelhoods in regions where there are few alternative work opportunities (Lahiri-Dutt 2007, 2014). The research reported in this chapter shows however how Jharkhand’s highly differentiated il/legal coal economy is the source of immense criminal wealth dominated by a coal mafia which acts as a durable force destabilising and undermining the mainstream pro-tribal party politics of Jharkhand – a state where Scheduled Tribes form 27 per cent of the 2011 census population of 33 million.¹

Field methods for black coal

Our research on illegal coal used the political economy field methods described in the Introduction to this book and covered conditions in 2013–14 in eight coal districts in Jharkhand, around Dhanbad, Ranchi and Hazaribagh (Singh 2014, 41), silence about which has been widely purchased by the coal mafia (Singh 2014, 30). Here this silence has been broken by gathering oblique but triangulated and positioned third-party narratives (evaluated on principles described in the book’s Introduction) and by interviewing people well placed in certain businesses. The set of 45 informants that provided the field evidence used here was selected from among political party officials, labour politicians, officials in Coal India Ltd. and its subsidiaries, and representatives of the police, the law, journalism, academic research, landownership, and illegal and informal trade itself. They are listed in Appendix 1.1 on page 62. Despite this multi-sited, multi-level approach to fieldwork, major problems result from applying this method to economic intelligence. While information about relations and processes may be gathered and cross-checked, systematic evidence about assets, income, costs and returns is impossible to come by.

The social organisation of Jharkhand’s illegal coal economy

To build a political analysis of Jharkhand’s coal economy, first a model of its social organisation must be created. This is an exploratory exercise that suggests greater clarity on paper than the messy, unstable and unclear relations on the ground – which Michelutti and Harriss-White term an ‘assemblage’ in the book’s Introduction. Three sets of extractive supply chain relations can be distinguished according to their regulatory status and forms of control: first, formal (state owned and/or regulated) activity; second, illegal supply (which breaks the laws by which the economy is governed); third, activity that is distinct from illegal activity due to its being informal, i.e. work either that the state does not require to be
regulated or that is below a threshold for regulation or (more controver-
sially) where state regulation exists but is not enforced (Kanbur, Lahiri
and Svejnar 2012). However, much of the time, informal and illegal
activities are sufficiently enmeshed as to be practically indistinguishable.

The formal organisation of coal (FC)

Even in an era recognised as neoliberal (Chatterjee and McCartney 2019),
much of the FC structure consists of a large and complex set of very power-
ful state corporations operating under several ministries (Singh 2014, 30).
First and foremost, Coal India Ltd. (CIL) dominates the local economy but
is in turn regulated and formally dominated by the Ministry of Coal. Sec-
ond comes Indian Railways under the Ministry of Rail, which freights vast
quantities of coal throughout the country. Third is a set of state corporate
subsidiaries of CIL, notably Bharat Coking Coal Ltd. (BCCL), Eastern Coal
Ltd. (ECL) and Central Coalfields Ltd. (CCL). Central government public
corporations are supplemented by agencies of the Jharkhand state: the
Jharkhand Mining Authority (JMA) and the State Highways Department
(responsible for monitoring volumes and quality through the system of
check-posts). Then, major private sector entities are also formally regis-
tered and regulated: first, private coal companies (e.g. Tata) subcontracted
to public corporations. Subcontracting is thought to account for an esti-
mated 70 to 80 per cent of CIL’s production. Then come heavy industrial
companies with captive coal mines (e.g. Jindal). In both types of private
enterprise, tight security discourages illegal scavenging.

In principle, the labour forces of these public and private entities
are also formally registered and regulated. In practice, as the Sanhati
(2011) report describes:

In the mining areas re-composition of the working class through migra-
tion, “uneven development” and technological attacks is a constant
process. We can see in a very concentrated local space and time strug-
gles “within a proletariat” which represent the main lines of segmen-
tation of the global working class today. The proletariat in Dhanbad
has many faces: the pauperised Adivasi (“indigenous”) and “rural
poor” population at the fringes of the mining areas – the main base
for the Maoist armed insurrection; the village workers in the “illegal
mines”; the casualised workers in the main mines earning 10 per cent
of their permanent workmates; the unemployed sons and daughters of
local peasants and permanent workers organised in an “unemployed
movement”. As a whole the local workforce is under-layered by various
waves of migration since the nineteenth century.
Labour unions – national and local – operate in both public and private mines. They also bridge the formal and the illegal subsystems. In some private mines, the labour force is reported to be much more complicit with management than those in CIL-operated mines because leaders are privately rewarded to deter the coal mafia control that characterises the public sector labour process. In other private mines, unions are reported to be privately complicit with management over shared returns to leaked IC while publicly antagonistic to management. This results not only from class contradictions but because management is casualising the labour force, subcontracting the operation of mines and attacking the rights of labour. In practice, throughout FC, the economic security of and the returns to labour are being eroded.

The social organisation of illegal coal (IC)

The illegal economy is ‘very substantial’, accounting for an estimated 300,000 livelihoods in the eight IC districts (Singh 2014, 5), of which up to 100,000 are minors (Cantera 2015). Other estimates of the material size of the IC economy vary according to the interests involved. While ‘officially’ in the eyes of the state corporate sector IC accounts for about 5 per cent of CIL’s production – i.e. 23 million tonnes of an annual national total of 450 million tonnes (Firstpost 2014),2 a local police estimate for Jharkhand alone is 20–50 per cent. This, when Jharkhand’s production is 60 million tonnes, will be anywhere between 12 and 30 million tonnes, and illegal coal will be much more if scaled to the national level. The IC sub-sector is both stratified and segmented between supply chain assemblages in which there is an inverse relation between the strata and aggregate gross output (high at the top) and the number of firms (few at the top). Four distinctive scales of operation forge specific kinds of assemblages.

First, coal cycle wallahs (CCW), an estimated 48,000 in Jharkhand (Singh n.d.), are drawn mainly from the foot of the pyramid of social status: Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCs and STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The skills of illegal coal require ‘learning by doing’. Individuals or informal village-based groups of up to 10 people scavenge or steal from abandoned or active mines, from washeries, lorries and ‘rakes’/‘racks’ – lines of railway wagons. They thrive on public sector mines and avoid privately owned or subcontracted and managed ones, repelled by their security forces (Singh 2014, 59–60). They may dump, wash and/or coke their coal and then transport it to local destinations. Demand for their commodities comes from small local
workshop industries (e.g. brick kilns, sponge iron plants, yarn dyeing), which cannot obtain coal for power through an official supply chain, and from domestic users. Though very small in scale, this is illegal rather than informal because supply is unlawfully scavenged from abandoned mines or stolen from public sector units, mostly with the complicity of unions.

Own-account enterprise is a deceptively simple form of production masking a range of work relations. Commonly operating on a logic of survival, in which income rather than profit is maximised, CCW are independent workers: for the most part, even in groups, they are non-accumulating petty producers. However, while more or less economically independent, some are politically regulated by being members of syndicates. There, working on money advances, they may be wage-labour in a ‘formal’ disguise; and when paid by syndicates they are outright, ‘real’ wage workers (Banaji 1977).

Second, syndicates themselves are groups of 10–20 ‘goons’ (Singh 2014, 9) who bulk stolen coal from the CCW workforce and also organise larger-scale transport. A colour-coded chit system denoting the status of bribes is monitored by check-post guards en route. In the twenty-first century they have become increasingly more numerous and well organised and may occasionally have visible fixed assets, e.g. motorcycles to pull the heavily laden bikes of ‘client’ CCWs uphill, or JCBs and trucks to rent out. Most of their business is also local, but increasingly the syndicates’ illegal coal – as with coal trade and mafia coal – makes its way from Jharkhand through Bihar to the largest (informal) coal market in Asia at Chandasi, outside Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh (UP) (Rajshekhar 2014).

Third, coal traders (CT) engage in larger-scale theft, often deliberately to supplement the profits of their legitimate businesses. Sometimes known as the ‘small mafia’, they also use the chits described above to divert trucks and coordinate with check-post guards. Supplying small industries that are either unable to access FC due to the priority given to power stations and/or evading rationing, and are therefore forced to purchase unrationed coal, these illegal markets are the creatures of the state’s incomplete management of coal distribution.

At the apex, the coal mafia numbers 24 households, the most important being long-settled Rajput ‘Singh’ migrants from UP and Bihar (see Chapter 6 for the Rajput-dominated mafia in UP). While using the Indian term ‘mafia’, the coal mafia differ from many other kinds of Indian mafia through their investments in productive activity, their dealing illegally in a legal commodity and their origins in the
control of the labour force (discussed below). Their knowledge and skills are transmitted tacitly within the family – combining a profit-maximising logic with that of political power. Illegal coal is sometimes a supplement to legitimate business, such as labour contracting, union control, transport for large development projects or regulated coal trading. Illegal coal can also supplement other illegitimate business: sand, for example, which should be stored in mines to protect it from fire and subsidence but in fact is often traded (see Gupta 2013 and Chapter 2), or drinking water carried from Bihar. The largest ‘mafia’ are substantial criminal organisations under patriarchal management with labour forces numbering thousands and with a highly developed division of tasks, including specialised protection and internal surveillance (Singh 2014, 18 and 42–43).4 Their activities include extortion through threats of labour unrest, forgery of documents with fake origins and destinations for commodity transactions, and the manipulation of auctions. The large mafia houses have visible fixed assets and a monopoly of violence over their territories, along with more or less stable truces over spatial territory, rail rakes, road transport and the control of smaller CT and syndicates, punctuated by battles for power with occasional assassinations.5

A great coal mafia family, if not specialising in labour politics, will have a branch devoted to union leadership – perhaps even leadership of several labour unions. Whether or not from the mafia, union leaders liaise with CIL, politicians and officials to trade IC. Coal labour union leaders can also be found as directly elected MPs. A ‘handful’ of private mines are reliably reported as using funds from profits that are dedicated to ‘community development’ or ‘corporate social responsibility’ to pay off union mafia from challenging their security system, interfering in the labour process and diverting or stealing coal (Singh 2014, 66). This union route to mafia power is one of the outcomes of politicians’ need for votes. CCWs and syndicates break section 414 of the IPC when transporting coal by bike; they break the Coal Mines Act when stealing from a mine and the Indian Forest Act when exporting illegal coal from forests. Many more regulatory acts, including all the labour laws, are flouted by CTs and the coal mafia which scale up crime involving large-scale theft, tax fraud, assault and murder (see Gupta, Chapter 2).

The IC economy also includes sectors which exist only on paper, as fake companies/mines and factories, or exist as other derived markets and productive sectors that would have no raison d’être otherwise. Bribes, for instance, in which there is a market especially in state-owned companies, relate the size of regular ‘commissions’ to the scale of illegal
operations. Markets exist for equipment (for cycles and their fortification), document forgers, the supply of diggers and trucks (sometimes moonlighting from CIL), illegal processing (washing and coking), the adulteration of coal, and for brokerage and intermediation for retail demand on whatever scale. Transactions between the syndicates and CT and between police and politicians generate livelihoods through brokerage. Money-lending agents mediate between the Chief Minister (CM) and CCWs; political touts and money carriers earn their living by arranging political deals, and organisers of immunity mediate protection services and their labour forces. In addition, other elements of the state are drawn into the making and distribution of rents from IC. These are alleged to include officials in regulating departments, revenue and commercial taxes departments, check-post/weighbridge operators, the police hierarchy – from Inspectors General and their deputies and superintendents downwards – ultimately reporting to the Jharkhand State Home Affairs Ministry. A given station may have officers in the pay of several mafias, CTs or syndicates: mafia-money power is reported to override formal rank and status inside the police force (Singh 2014, 47). The judicial and political apparatuses at local, state and national level are not above taking rents from IC. Nor are interests inside the apparatus of public corporations: for example, managers in CIL and state corporations, Indian Railways officials and union leaders – the leadership of unions ‘recognised’ by CIL as having common interests with management. Last but not least, the parallel, formally outlawed political structures of the Maoist Communist Party, classified as terrorists in 2009, profit from both ‘providing legitimate protection’ and the policing of illegal compliance (Thakur 2009).

Comments

We can see from this summary of the social organisation of IC, first, that the illegality and the social reach of IC are both extensive. FC and IC are knitted together in a nexus of ‘interlocked transactions’. These are not necessarily the classical interlocked contracts in which a single contract binds conditions on two or more markets, e.g. money, labour and the marketed surplus (Subramanian 1992); rather they are a set of linked political obligations, contracts, payments and cooperative/complicit behaviour without which the IC sector would not work, yet which structure highly differentiated returns (Singh 2014, 10–12). For an example of large-scale theft, this system of interlocked transactions may be stylised (inexhaustively) as in Box 1.1.
While Khan (2012) has modelled such arrangements as manifestations of patronage, clientelage and faction, in fact they are more complex than these principal-agent categories would imply. Formal occupational status, social status, kinship alliances, economic assets, more or less armed capacity for physical threat against the vigilant state and criminal competitors, capacities for sharing and collective action, the capacity to protect visible fixed assets (from motorcycles for uphill stretches for groups of laden CCWs to loading equipment and transport fleets) are all at play in this system of transactions.

This summary of IC social organisation also shows how the economic and political domination over IC of a cartel of mafia families has developed from roots in labour rather than in capital. Prior to nationalisation,
private mines paid protection forces to secure the owners’ physical safety, prevent theft and monitor work shifts. Nationalisation required the reorganisation of the workforce: labour contractors and managers of labour camps for migrant workers emerged from among the organisers of protection. Some of the new class of labour contractors became leaders of unions, stimulated illegal trade and protected it. Then, in the Janata Dal era in 1970s Bihar, after the murder of a Congress union leader, they entered politics directly (Singh 2014, 51). Now leaders and management of national unions (such as INTUC and BMS) are widely alleged to have hidden interests in IC (see Appendix 1.2 and Gupta in Chapter 2). Public sector institutions have long been under pressure to privatise, yet FC is not only hollowed out through private subcontracting: even the 30 per cent of production it controls directly is also suffused with, and plundered by, illegal private arrangements. The resistance caused by these interests is just as serious a barrier to the formal process of privatisation as it is to any attempt to crush IC.

The politics of the economic regulation of illegal coal

Neither the informal nor the criminal economy is disordered, so one element of local politics concerns how order is achieved in the absence of formal state enforcement. Several kinds of overlapping politics are involved. We can approach the question of regulatory order first through the four strata of the IC assemblage, although it is the labour unions that have paramount regulatory authority. Second and later, we examine how elected and unelected party politicians regulate IC and prevent enforcement of the law; we then investigate the political roles played by social institutions. CCW are not collectively organised as gangs or associations. The groups of about 10 needed to coke coal are less structured than are the syndicates. Even when supplying syndicates, CCW coal and coke is sold by individuals through individual transactions (Singh 2014, 24). Sales routes and sales are established ‘by local custom’ through family and friends, with very loose coordination through ‘ad hoc village committees’. These divide territory, protect diggers, establish routes, counter police vigilance and suppress information (Singh 2014, 35).

Syndicates regulate the use of equipment (motorcycles) collectively but, despite their name, are not noted for other regulatory capabilities. Where they employ CCWs as labour, contracts are defined verbally, specifying quantities and periods. Syndicates may reinforce bikes to carry great weights of coal (up to 2.5 tonnes a year; Lahiri-Dutt and Williams 2005).
Where syndicates’ motorbikes are used to tow bikes on uphill stretches and to oversee cycle convoys some 400 metres long, the syndicate organises and rotates the CCW routes and group membership, liaises with the police and protects its CCWs at dump sites. Under these conditions, it is estimated that the productivity of CCWs doubles and penalties to CCWs for non-compliance with syndicates are fierce. Syndicates are self-organising, as are CT and the mafia – the latter through their system of family- and kin-based honour and discipline and their control over unionised labour. Three ‘Singh’ mafia families, originally from UP and Bihar, extort funds from the labour they lead, pay a ‘randari’ (informal) tax and share rents with CIL management so that labour and small private intermediaries can take coal. In this way they expand the illegal coal trade, lead unions, threaten unrest and price and bid for work (which may not be completed) (Singh 2014, 51). They also control violent caste-based youth gangs, liaise between other mafia and CIL and are pro- or anti- the casualisation of labour depending on the political party in power.

The coal mafia have territorial agreements such that their monopolies enable greater rent extraction than competition between mafia houses would. Through threats to the physical security of their workforces, certain mafia families also control sets of local unions. They are also able to manipulate auctions through intimidation and underbidding and can even manipulate CIL’s e-auctions this way, so that purchase prices are cheaper than the official floors. Mining labour, both legally organised and illegally regulated, has a paramount role in IC. In the twenty-first century, two opposing political forces have agitated the labour force. One is geared towards labour casualisation and the stripping of rights – via subcontracting the extraction of coal. The second, by contrast, involves the competitive coercing of labour into unions, not simply to empower labour but also to empower the mafia to control labour in IC. Individual labourers may now belong to multiple unions. Payday credit and debt have recently been introduced as a bonding mechanism by both private companies and competing mafia moneylenders. Unions such as the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC, belonging to the Congress party), the Rashtriya Colliery Mazdoor Sangh (RCMS), the CPI’s United Coal Workers’ Union (CWU) and the Anusuchit Jati-Janjati Chhatra Sangathan (AJCS) – all aligned with Congress – then help CIL and its subsidiaries by their complicity in fixing and stabilising wages at relatively low levels. In return labour unions regulate the supply of illegal coal through diversion and theft, refusal to comply with CIL directives, overloading of trucks, collection of rent (sometimes shared with managers) and conniving with tax fraud. When ordered, union
members provide the manpower for kidnap, assault and murder. Unions are reported by many informants to have more operational power than the state corporations’ apparatus. Some unions are capable of managing IC without other alliances but most take protection from union-mafia combines. Apex union-mafia families also regulate territory and control the large-scale transport of IC in railway rakes. See Appendix 1.2 for coal union leaders’ business interests.

The politics of money flows to and from illegal coal: the circuit of profit

Financing IC requires amounts ranging from little more than zero (in the case of dependent CCWs) to massive amounts of capital (for the mafia). None of this is traceable – even finance for the large-scale railway-rake transport business comes from illegal/black sources – including, it is alleged, investments in working capital from black economy sources outside Jharkhand, and even outside India. Granted that elsewhere, in less criminalised sectors and regions of India’s informal economy, businessmen have persistently expressed preferences for financial autonomy and against indebtedness (especially to official and traceable sources like banks), it is likely that mafia families themselves act as banks for the IC system. Indeed it was reported that of late they have hired agents to manage lending to CCWs and union labour (Singh 2014, 45). For reasons of political hedging alone, flows of money made from IC will differ from allegiances and political interest. In the eight coal districts, syndicates, CTs and mafia all pay politicians and their aides, officials, CIL management and the police on a sliding scale, in which mafiosi pay the most and gain the most political leverage (Daniel and Williams 2013). Mafia families are thought to be associated in quite a stable manner with given political parties despite the fact that rival wings of the largest mafia family fund them all (Singh 2014, 54 and 60) – and not just in Jharkhand but also in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in order to ease the route to the Chandasi coal trading hub. Large mafia families will fund individual politicians as well as political party activity in the territories they dominate: they invest the most and gain the most in return. Within the mafia there is a hierarchy, some families having to pay leading mafia families (such as the ‘Singh Mansion’ (The Sunday Indian 2013)) while others make direct political investments. And lately the volatility of party coalitions in Jharkhand has required mafia families with a single-party allegiance to diversify their funding opportunistically and fund candidates from a range of parties.
Criminal accumulation

Accumulation from IC is highly differentiated. At their most independent, CCWs are petty producers and traders, expanding through multiplication rather than accumulation but completely meshed in markets based on raw materials to which they have no property rights. Other elements in the assemblages for coal invest profit and accumulate. Syndicates invest in motorcycles and start to hire out JCBs; coal traders get hold of diggers and trucks. Mafia families route investments both privately and publicly. Privately, they are known to have invested in expanding IC and diversified into real estate and transport fleets, leisure resorts and pleasure parks in Jharkhand, hotels in Mumbai (and across other Asian countries), in sand, water and heavy equipment for development projects. Black money may be laundered through such investments, and mafia dons become ‘gentlemen-traders’. For instance, the upwardly mobile OBC mafioso Dhulu Mahato, leader of the union sponsored by the local Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM) party, has assets from IC estimated in 2013 at INR 200 crore (US$28 million), together with a fleet of 100,000 trucks (Singh 2014, 70).

Through public investments, the coal mafia are major funders of elections. Although local campaign requirements vary from INR 5 lakh to 50 lakh per candidate (Singh 2014, 70) funding often dribbles in through many small consignments of cash under INR 20,000 – the threshold for registered declarations. Funding denotes ‘purchase’ and the biggest mafia families are able to purchase any local politician. This generates a politics of investment, debt and dependence which will play assertively and reactively within and between parties according to their electoral success. Political and economic losses are embedded in the state: CIL’s profits and revenues on royalties go to the Jharkhand state government. Industries where costs rise through the use of adulterated or low-quality, apparently ‘cheap’ coal also lose. Political resistance ‘loses’. Political resistance so far has been countered successfully in Jharkhand by means ranging from transfers of posts to physical assault, including murder. Punishment through the legal system is rare. But when, uniquely, an ex-CM, Madhu Koda, was arrested in 2009 and successfully prosecuted, the CBI uncovered illegal trade revenues totalling around INR 4,000 crore. The case also revealed investments in 700 shell companies, in mines, in an off-shore island, in real estate, sponge iron, private colleges in his constituency, transport and trucking as far away as Punjab and Haryana, hotels in New Delhi and Puri, a theme park, distilleries and print media and TV channels (for strategic silence) (Singh 2014, 64). To the extent that this diversified
portfolio emerged from violent seizures of natural resources and the displacement of labour, its accumulation was ‘primitive’. But the productive investment in which resources have been sunk obeys the logic of advanced capitalist accumulation, with Indian characteristics.

**Party politics in Jharkhand**

Jharkhand nationalist parties are widely described as having used the idioms and rhetoric of aboriginal empowerment and the interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to plunder natural resources (Karat 2012). In this way Jharkhand is no different from other elements of the new political wave that has conceded and created non-linguistic states. The Jharkhand nationalist case involves demands for social justice and restitution from developmental marginalisation and comparative poverty, through which capital has been accumulated by outsiders to the detriment of low-caste and tribal local citizens. Inside its new borders and crammed with – to date under-extracted – subterranean industrial raw materials, Jharkhand does not lack resources for development. According to Tillin (2008), Congress has not encouraged these movements for independence – succeeding in co-opting ‘less radical elements’ (which, in Jharkhand, include the coal mafia) – so the political drivers have been an alliance of the BJP-in-opposition, local parties in which low castes and tribes compete, and new social movements. Together, these have generated a politics of claim – to education, reservations, jobs and better social status – but based on unstable alliances grounded in identity.

Among the elements of identity it is ironic that language is prominent. While for New Delhi and in the All-India optic, the local languages of the new states are dialects of Hindi, this is disputed by their speakers, whose case is that new states are language-based too; in Jharkhand’s case, multi-lingually (Pattanayak 2013).

Jharkhand’s most important local parties are the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), the All-Jharkhand Students’ Union (AJSU) and the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM). Campaigning for a tribal homeland and greater regional independence, the JMM developed with a politics unrelated to natural resources and as early as 1972 had a Marxist coordination committee led by Shibu Soren. Support was mobilised by focussing on the grievances of labourers and Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Later Soren was elected to the Government of India as an MP and forged links with Congress. While a student revolt against this arrangement created the AJSU in 1986, other splinter groups cohered to JMM in the 1990s,
and Jharkhand became a state in 2000. After the 2014 election, the JMM held only 2 of 14 Parliamentary seats from Jharkhand (the remainder going to the BJP). The AJSU's originally militant regionalism has become increasingly pragmatic and AJSU is now allied with the BJP. Their president has been Home Minister in the Jharkhand legislative assembly. Meanwhile, the JMM was consolidated in 2006 from a BJP splinter. Its MP, Dr Ajay Kumar, is an IPS officer, medical doctor, holder of an MBA and industrialist who developed an anti-mafia campaign in Jamshedpur.

Political parties in Jharkhand are funded by IC, the iron ore extractive industry, as well as bauxite, steel and construction industries. The AJSU is thought to rely on the aluminium industry. JVM has maximum financial support from the very coal areas where it attempts to challenge the mafia. Congress and BJP have mafia notables but are less dependent on their funds since they are able to supplement them with national corporate donations (Singh 2014, 36). Local cash collectors are employed to bulk the donations to all parties (Singh 2014, 63) helped by coercive pressures brought to bear by mafia families on other companies. Contemporary local politics in the state are widely characterised as grounded in ethnic divisions, local problems, and short-term and small-scale mobilisations. The rising political party instability of Jharkhand weakens the chance that the state government has of crushing IC. Its relatively small number of MLA seats (81) combined with an increasing political fragility act to benefit IC and its mafia. The Legislative Assembly is too small to prevent coalitions being held to ransom by the threat of withdrawal (Singh 2014, 72). This fragility obstructs attempts to amass political opposition to IC.

**Illegal coal and politics: *intreccio***

The entanglements between the il/legal economy, the state and party politics, for which Michelutti and Harriss-White invoke the concept of *intreccio* in the Introduction to this book, can be approached in two ways: the roles in party politics of those controlling illegal coal; and the reverse – the role of party politics in illegal coal.

**Coal interests in party politics**

Even before the 2014 election, the political interests of IC were tensely differentiated. Some CCWs have formed a political constituency of Bandhu Tirkey's Jharkhand Janadikhar Manch (JJM) – supporting the agenda of
political independence. As Tillin has explained (2013) the JJM demands the independence from ‘migrant’ Rajput capital of local OBCs, SCs and STs, along with local tribal control over natural resources and livelihoods creation. Other CCWs support Shibu Soren’s Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) on the grounds that Soren has declared their ‘right’ to take coal. Coal syndicates also pay JMM for the physical protection of the CCWs who provide their supplies.

In contrast with this paternalism in return for electoral support, the union leaders and other coal trade and mafia families position kin directly in politics. While all unions are vote banks for parties and family power prevails over party policy, the political allegiances of coal traders and the mafia are bound to labour union politics, which in turn are inextricable from the forms of ownership of mines. It is more efficient and less costly and risky to manage the politics of IC directly as an MLA than to leverage activity indirectly from outside the legislature through paying and patronising other politicians. As a lawmaker, the MLA is also immune from prosecution, a vital legal protection (Singh 2014, 71). Immunity is an important reason for active political engagement. Within the mafia elite of Rajput Singhs, active participation in both Congress and BJP politics is pervasive. For instance, within the Congress party union, INTUC, there is a three-way rivalry between the local MP and two MLAs not only for control of unionised labour but also for control of the illegal labour force of CCW paupers who scavenge and process illegal coal from mines. Within private subcontracted mines, unionised labour forces are bribed by local union-mafia into complying with management and resisting the mobilisation of casual labour. While inside CIL, a single (national) union may dominate a single mine or set of mines, and four unions have such ‘monopolies’ in mines run by BCCL, there tends to be competition between local labour unions and their local CT and mafia families. In privately subcontracted mines there is a battle to unionise their temporary casual labour because the stakes from rents and profits from IC are high and depend on the power and the roles of organised labour. In turn unions are well known to be affiliated with political parties, though some unions are diversifying their party portfolios (see Gupta, Chapter 2).

The mafia have interests in political instability because it prevents the mobilisation of sufficient political power to challenge IC. CCWs and syndicates, bound through their social identities to political parties seeking to empower them, are also bound by their livelihoods to parties protecting IC. They are unstable political resources switching according to interests and driving a politics of ‘permanent crisis management’. And the unpredictability of local election timings and alliances creates demand
both for mafia funds and the vote banks controlled by the mafia, so that compromising links between the mafia and parties that have campaigned against IC are growing. All of this serves to strengthen the political clout of the mafia.

Meanwhile there are strong political relationships between the Government of Jharkhand and CIL officials. Where a state government minister or official also has trade union interests, this link is direct. Thus, Finance and Energy Ministers belonging to Congress in Jharkhand are alleged to have shared CIL subsidies, diverted coal to parallel trade, organised the labour for illegal transport by ‘rack’ and liaised between the mafia and CIL (Singh 2014, 68). When local party politics is increasingly unstable then the nexus of mafia and CT, union leaders, police, officials in public agencies and politicians is tangled and powerful enough not just to protect IC but also to prevent the privatisation of CIL – on which this edifice rests.

Party politics in the illegal coal economy

There are no clean politicians in Jharkhand. (Senior journalist)
Jharkhand is already a failed state. (Central government minister)

Our evidence here is drawn from before the 2014 election in the pre-BJP era, when the state legislative assembly was a series of unstable coalitions under shifting control, but also when Jharkhand MPs from two local parties were aligned with the United Progressive Alliance government in New Delhi. Elected politicians have immunity at national and state level. But below the legislative assembly their less effective immunity is not de jure but secured de facto through the local political threats, bribes and allegiances described earlier in this chapter. So it is that in Jharkhand all major and minor parties – Congress, the BJP, JMM, AJSU, JVM, JJM plus the CPM (Maoist)7 – have stakes in IC. These work in various ways – direct, indirect and oppositional – and in both governing and opposition parties, inside and outside Jharkhand. The most powerful MLAs in each of the five significant parties are linked to IC, while some are also contractors to the state (in mining, water, transport and labour). As of 2013, nine MPs and MLAs, including Jharkhand cabinet ministers, ran branches of national unions and control labour (threatening ‘trouble at pit’ for non-criminal businesses); they control dumps for CCWs, divert trucks from washeries, fix timing, transport and transactions, allocate routes and, more recently, manage loans to syndicates and other groups. MLAs sit on CIL governing bodies, control police postings within their
jurisdictions and can delay police charges, reopen closed mines for syndicates, marshal the CCW vote banks, own and finance ancillary activities for IC such as transport, extort cuts from the profits of other companies and use profits to invest in loyalty and votes. Mafia families themselves engage as MPs, MLAs and mayors, not only in Jharkhand but also in Bihar and UP, controlling politicians lower down the ranks who can deliver vote banks, stabilising their own economic empires in the state arena and protecting them against threat and blackmail up the political greasy pole to New Delhi (Singh 2014, 44). In Jharkhand, INTUC leaders were Congress MLAs: alleged both to manage illegal transport and protect it politically at the Central level. A former speaker of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly is alleged to have invested in land sites for CCW scavenging (registered in his wife’s name), and to have used his caste contacts to manipulate the police and to manage permits, loading, routes and protection from obstruction for syndicates. His relations with local party officials, government officials (from district and block administrations, Revenue and Forest Departments), with unelected cadres and members of the JMM, JVM and AJSU are said to grease IC in return for fees, immunity and silence (Singh 2014, 49). As Jharkhand’s politics is increasingly negotiated through coalitions, the coal mafia MLAs have been all the more vital since they have the political and economic resources necessary to hold the balance of power.

While collusion among the coal mafia, the bureaucracy, police and politicians is thought to have been increasing since Jharkhand was formed, outright violence against people appears to have been losing relevance. The increasingly close four-way relationship benefits from proximity to the site of the seat of power, Ranchi, adjoining the coal belt. While the political analyst P.S. Jha characterises the mature clientelist state as a congeries of relations between business, career politicians, gangland mafiosi and police (Jha 2013), the fledgling state of Jharkhand is proving to be no different. Yet IC may not always require the direct involvement of local politicians. Positions in CIL, whose complicity is vital for coal theft and truck diversion, cannot be delivered at the level of the Jharkhand state: appointments are routed through the ministry in New Delhi. Businesses needing preferential access to coal can lobby the central government’s Coal Ministry bureaucracy, which formulates policy on matters such as weighbridges, CCTV surveillance and electronic stamping. Political arrangements lubricated by black money enable the ministry to command CIL to allocate and divert coal, just as it can delay or even stop the implementation of locally obstructive policies (Singh 2014, 24).
Apart from direct operational involvement, it is also widely reported that about half of the 81 MLAs and 14 MPs receive payment from IC. They take fees, divvy up cuts among themselves, the police and the Highways Inspectorate at state borders, manage the approval of bids to the Jharkhand Mining Authority and liaise – but do not directly operate in the sector. This kind of activity is resistant to shifting electoral outcomes (Singh 2014, 26). Meanwhile JVM MLAs formally express a politics of resistance – to ‘fight the mafia’. But at the time of our research, many were reported as busy skimming syndicates and controlling CCWs for both party and individual benefit (Singh 2014, 35). Mafia funding supports, and is in turn supported by, elected governments and elected oppositions. But the majority of electoral candidates do not win. Losers are indebted to their funders. Mafia financiers are thought not to require the repayment of such debt (either in cash or kind), regarding it as a political cost (a ‘loss leader’), and suggestive of Jharkhand’s political fragility and of the subversion of its aspirational politics. The mafia dominates coal politics through the constitutive politics of capital/business and the control of all relevant markets for money and material goods, of labour, parties and movements, protection and force, and state penetration. Meanwhile, syndicates and less powerful CTs have similar links lower in the system but face much higher risk, may make losses, lose elections (and the funds invested in them) and enjoy spells in jail (Singh 2014, 2–14, 26). The increasing volatility of Jharkhand politics means politicians are not secure, and relinquishing immunity through electoral losses leaves IC politicians vulnerable to punishment. Once out of office, one union mafioso, Dhulu Mahato, formerly immune from prosecution for the violent release of a client from the police, was jailed (Press Trust of India 2016). To sum up in the words of local experts: the ‘top power structure and state coal mafia are linked conceptually’. The coal mafia has achieved ‘paramountcy – instead of delegating power, they get into politics to directly control and have real power’. More coal families have sought election since Jharkhand’s formation:

They have legal authority … Jharkhand has become privatised to the local mafia. They sought the direct election to direct the resources. Now they are decision makers at the MLA and Police level and have a legal basis for being mafia … The mafia then elect their own to allow criminal exploitation. (Professor, Indian School of Mines)
The identity politics of coal

India’s extensive, socially regulated informal economy is one in which – alongside local business associations, and sometimes permeating them – so-called ‘soft’ institutions of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, place, language and caste have proved more compatible with the capitalist economy than theorists of development have been inclined to acknowledge (Harriss-White 2003; Arora 2017). They are at one and the same time being dissolved by the needs of market exchange for acquired competences rather than ascribed character, and also being reworked to become not ‘soft’ but hard regulators of economic opportunity, entry and practice. While identity reflects trust, which reduces the costs of transactions, it is simultaneously used to defend sectors against a competitive free-for-all and thus protect rents and profits. Social institutions which regulate market behaviour are powerful structural elements in India’s political economy. Though there is no scholarly consensus on what the dominant or prominent institutions are, gender, religion, caste and ethnicity are widely accepted as expressing important forms of authority that structure India’s economy. The same lens needs applying to illegal coal and the question asked – which social institutions are indispensable to the criminal economic order of IC? From the research reported here the answers can only be suggestive and need further development. Extrapolated from the narratives of informants, they are those institutions and forms of political authority that were said to make sense of IC. Each is summarised and then mapped onto other politics laid out earlier.

Dynasty

Modern India is suffused with political dynasties: after 2014, 20 per cent of MPs were from political dynasties, rising from 15 per cent in the BJP to half of the rump Congress. Non-watertight explanations for this range from ‘family culture’ and voter preference to party political encouragement for loyalty (Chandra 2016). To these, Jha would add the reduced costs when transmitted through dynasties of the knowledge, contacts and practices of mobilising untraceable party funds (Jha 2013). The mafia is not just a set of criminal organisations, it is a set of political dynasties competing against one another for ‘paramount power’ (Singh 2014, 34). Alongside the cross-generational accumulation of political power, mafia dynasties are also developing economic authority not only in IC but in related industries, the local bureaucracy and in labour control. Their private protection forces are drawn from the coal labour they also seek to control at work in the mines.
Mafia dynastic competition is also construed through caste and ethnicity. The elite Rajputs from Bihar who have settled in Jharkhand were initially challenged by local high-caste Bhumihar families (one of whose leaders was assassinated in 1977). Rajput mafia families may diversify funding to several parties – wherever they can fortify their castes as well as position their private interests strategically. These prominent business families also ensure that members are placed in the state bureaucracy and in the management of local CIL subsidiaries. Rajput networks are then consolidated in politics, the state and the economy.

But Jharkhand is a state where OBCs, SCs and STs are the largest elements in the population. The rise and fall of Dhulu Mahato should be seen in this context. Mahato, who is OBC, combines caste politics with being a union mafioso controlling the UCW (now linked with AITUC and MCC) and a party politician (in the AJSU-JVM). Two factors may account for his different party-political engagement from those of the Singhs: first, his local, ‘insider’ role as champion of Scheduled Castes and Tribes against the immigrant outsiders – despite the latter’s several generations of residence in Jharkhand. Second, the possibility of developing a defence of the coal mafia through local politics at a stage when mafia representation in the legislative assembly had not yet been consolidated (Singh 2014, 27–30).

Summing up: there is little evidence that the politics of dynasty, caste and ethnicity does anything but strengthen the grip over IC of the Rajput mafia.

Consequences

To complete the integration of illegal coal into the account of Jharkhand’s development, the final task is to suggest its implications for the economy and politics.

Economic consequences

The economic impact of illegal coal is ambivalent. On the one hand, in a so-called neoliberal era widely criticised for its jobless growth (Kannan and Raveendran 2010), IC provides hundreds of thousands of livelihoods in Jharkhand alone. IC is then supplied cheaply to satisfy a highly segmented demand for energy that lacks official entitlement to coal. These take the form of income supplements to a wide range of public sector
employees, wage labour throughout the coal economy and enterprises ranging from petty production/self-employment to large criminal organisations. The unplanned investment in IC and use of its profits may have a range of legal statuses but is productive as well as unproductive.

On the other hand, the diversion of coal has a negative impact on formal industrial capacity utilisation, output and productivity – revealed at its worst in the historically unprecedented North Indian blackouts of 2012. Shortages increased demand for coal imports (estimated at 168 million tonnes and $17 billion in 2014–15 before the shock to demand resulting from demonetisation; Cornot-Gandolphe 2016). Illegal coal invites both capital flight and unplanned illegitimate overseas investment, the opportunity cost of which is the reduction of productive investment in India and local opportunities for money laundering. The diversion of revenue starves the state of public sector resources and constrains and denies the development of a redistributivist development project, which the decades-old aspirational politics of Jharkhand has had as its objective. It has set in carbon a solid structure of economic and political interests against the destruction of illegal coal.

Consequences for politics

As a result of IC, far from being ethnically aspirational, Jharkhand’s politics is mired in instability and predation. The powers that might challenge IC and enforce its regulation are deactivated by the penetration throughout local politics of the interests of illegal coal.

In other Indian case studies in this book, the politics of illegal resource extraction has been concluded to be a destructive politics of mafia criminality (fire in Jharkhand, Chapter 2), predatory, pork barrel politics (sand in Tamil Nadu, Chapter 3), a politics of corruption (hydro-crimes in Arunachal, Chapter 4), systemic plunder (airwaves for telecom, Chapter 5), a ‘competitive mafia raj’ and ‘goonda raj’ (fuel and sand in UP, Chapter 6), that of internationalised criminal capitalism (red sanders timber in AP, Chapter 7), of a mafia state (real estate in West Bengal, Chapter 8), and of politicised predation (land and property titles in Punjab, Chapter 9).

Far from developing a shadow state whose existence is dependent on formal state institutions (as theorised by Harriss-White in India Working, 2003), or being a failed state (as Bihar’s Chief Minister characterised it in 2008; Kumar 2008), in 2014 the Jharkhand state was a highly successful mafia state. In its coal economy, legal and illegal, economic assemblages and political transactions are systemically interlocked in...
tangled relations of *intreccio*. While the mafia are often characterised as autonomous from the state, here they are an integral part of it, capable of mediating access to it and ruling large territories – both physical and political. While CIL is the nutrient base of its largest operations, abandoned public sector mines provide the resources for the smallest livelihoods. Meanwhile the politics of identity overlay those of political parties and in complex relations of collaboration, evasion and the power of assets they bring an order to the class-based criminal economy which prevails over that of the state.

**Resistance**

The powerful hierarchical assemblage of IC must not be accepted as undynamic and uncontested. Although resistance was not the central focus of field research, the latter can now be used to identify interests conflicting with those of IC. These include conflict within the coal mafia itself, as well as resistance against the mafia by syndicates, CCW, mining labour, civil society organisations and movements, national political parties, the Indian government and its public sector agencies, and by the outlawed, officially terrorist Maoist party. Deserving more space than is available here, our discussion of conflict in IC can be no more than brief, selective and suggestive. First, within the mafia itself there is persistent party-politicised family feuding ‘over business’: property ownership (e.g. Singh Mansion) and union control. This congeries of enmity is thought to have motivated the killing with three others in March 2017 of Neeraj Singh, former Congress deputy mayor of Dhanbad and unsuccessful contestant of the Jharia legislative seat. His cousin, successful BJP MLA for Jharia and coal transporter Sanjiv Singh, has been arrested, along with Sanjiv’s brother. All are from the Suraj Deo Singh, a leading Rajput mafia, dynasty (Mishra 2014; Pandey 2017).

In civil society, the alliance of peoples’ movements ranges from the National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers, the local Rajmahal Pahar Bachao Andolan and the People’s Union for Democratic Rights to religious orders. It is the illegal activities of FC rather than IC that tend to mobilise civil society. The case of Sister Valsa, a Catholic nun, economist and teacher, murdered in 2011 after years of death threats by forces suspected to be either mafia goons in cahoots with mine operators or alternatively Maoists, shows the lengths to which opposition will go to silence protest. Land encroachment by mining companies, delays in compensation and awards of contracts to tribal people reduced by displacement to scavenging coal illegally from company convoys have provoked outrage
How have these tight and yet seething and contested arrangements fared under an authoritative/authoritarian BJP regime in the state and central government? Ever since 2014, if it had wished to crush IC, the BJP has had the necessary precondition of authority. But even when political authority dominates legal due process, it is evidently insufficient to do more than reinforce local links between the governing party and the mafia.

Last, the guerrilla Maoists have aligned their political interests with those of ‘rural tribals’ and see the exploitation of coal as the economic power base of class enemies. This extends to the paramilitary forces protecting FC and even to the segment of organised wage labour that works on permanent contracts. In practice the Maoists’ need for revenue blunts their hostility to IC. Their reputed 7 per cent tax on small mines subcontracted to CIL, on abandoned mines operated by syndicates, and the levies on both CIL’s transport and that of IC have caused West Bengal’s journal of dissent, Sanhati (2011), to evoke the ‘mafianisation of the Maoists’.

Conclusions: discussion and implications

Discussion

By outlining the assemblages of formal and illegal coal, their interlinkages and implications, and revisiting the politics of Jharkhand from the perspectives, on the one hand, of the economic interests embodied in illegal coal and, on the other, of political parties penetrated by them, the wide-reaching social ramifications of natural resource crimes have been exposed. Formal-informal-illegal politics and economies are tightly intertwined and feed into each other in relations of intreccio which cross class, span labour- and party-politics, and penetrate public corporations and the range of agencies of enforcement. Here, let us draw together some observations from this case that are relevant to wider debates.

First, the coal mafia and violence. As a category, the mafia is used for (fictive) kin-based organisations developed for the protection of persons and violence against enemies; in being so used it challenges the state’s monopoly of violence. By contrast, Jharkhand’s coal mafia exercises direct violence against natural resources, and against the state’s regulation of them and violations of the property rights which protect them. The extortion of natural resources is not always violent to people: its threat alone is enough for most labour to comply with
criminal bosses. The pervasive ‘culture of silence’ constrains that of physical violence. Coal traders, syndicates and CCWs do not carry weapons. The routinely armed mafia, if attacking people, are mostly engaged in family feuding, mainly about territory.

A second distinctive characteristic of Jharkhand’s coal mafia that is relevant to general debates concerns the mafia and labour. The origins of apex mafia organisations are heterogeneous, some arising through their control over mining labour through trade unions. Indeed the labour force in criminal production and distribution of coal also doubles as the mafia’s protection force. A third conclusion involves the mafia and registered business; specifically the extent to which illegal business supplements – and is meshed in – legitimate activity, with the latter being used to mask the former. Yet another characteristic is the mafia’s dependence on extracting resources from public corporations rather than private companies.

We can make further observations concerning the role of local political parties. In Jharkhand, parties of social and regional identity or developmental aspiration have emerged not only as responses to the past neglect of factors used for their mobilisation (caste, ethnicity, regional neglect and underdevelopment) but also as a reaction to the political spaces created by the rampant criminalisation of natural resource extraction. Here we see that they are pressured to embody political forces contradictory to their social aims: illegal accumulation diverts taxable resources from a social development agenda.

Diversity and variation are built into IC assemblages. The balance of the social components described earlier and of their powers and roles varies according to the political competence of the regional state-corporate subsidiaries of CIL; the heft of local versus national party politicians and their positioning in the IC structure; the site and the economic positioning of mafia households; the degree of competition or capture of mines by national and local labour unions; and the weight of legal business.

Implications

In this case study, the resources needed to cover the periodically convulsive and the routine day-to-day costs of Indian electoral democracy have been seen to be met (in part) through illegal coal. Coal is but one of many illegal nutrient bases for democratic politics. In Jharkhand alone bauxite, iron ore, steel and construction also supply political funds. In the different case of Tamil Nadu (Jeyaranjan, Chapter 3) the vast sums of daily tribute centralised from riverbed sand are supplemented by those from
beach sand, granite, liquor and construction. The scale of these criminal flows is significant and brings corresponding political influence.

In actively abetting or ignoring this malfeasance, the state’s own developmental and distributive projects are captured. The case of coal thus leads to a rebalancing of the orthodox political analysis of Jharkhand away from redistributive social justice and towards the politics of mafia accumulation through extortion and exploitation. The political space for redistributivist development activity that might have benefitted the social reproduction of the workforce is crushed by lack of resources or of relevance to criminal politics. The workforce has come increasingly under criminal control at work and its conditions of reproduction outside work are being privatised. The kind of accumulation manifested in IC is the subject of wider debate over the balance between the creation of predatory capitalism through primitive accumulation versus expanding the production of capital through the axiom of accumulation: ‘Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the Prophets’ (Marx 1887; see also Adnan 2013 for contemporary debates). The case of IC shows that both forms of accumulation, primitive and capitalist, are at work in meshed forms and in parallel, contradictory and specific ways.

Primitive accumulation will end only when two conditions are met. First, sufficient capital will have to have been accumulated to reduce the capitalist class’s need for criminal rents; and second, conditions must be such that viable states and independent political parties are needed by capital itself to control criminal rents. But this analysis of illegal coal and the other case studies of natural resource crime in this book show that there is no guarantee that processes of predatory rent, of criminal accumulation, of the undermining of legal-ethical obligations and of the sabotage and displacement of formal state organisational capacity will yield to those from legitimate profit-seeking capitalism in the foreseeable future.

Notes

1. Based on a 22,000-word field report by Nigel Singh in 2014, ‘The Political Economy of the Informal and Illegal Coal Trade in Jharkhand’, carried out in the pre-election spring of 2014 and building on Singh’s earlier fieldwork in 2012–3, as reported in the Guardian newspaper; see Singh 2013. Page references refer to the unpublished 2014 document, where Singh’s detailed sources are identified and the quality of evidence is carefully evaluated.

2. An alternative estimate is INR 1,800 crore ($4bn at 2011 rates) (Press Trust of India 2013).

3. Singh (2014, 38) provides details of routes where payment is needed.

4. Family members are said to be shadowed by non-family members so as to evaluate performance.

5. V.P. Sinha in 1977, Suresh Singh in 2013 (Singh 2014, 31 and 34) and Neeraj Singh in 2017.

7. Maoists, internally split between faction and caste, exact ‘tax’ to ignore mining.
8. Senior journalist.
10. Dominant institutions buttressing capital can be distinguished from prominent institutions (which may be the same ones) pervading workforce relationships (Hodgson 2001).
11. See Upadhya 2009, for instance, for capital and Harriss-White et al. 2013, for self-employment.
12. Gender which persists as a fundamental structure in the economy undoubtedly plays a role in IC but was not the subject of interviews in this research. See Lahiri Dutt 2014, 229–56.
13. See Michelutti’s review in Chapter 6 of this volume.

References


Appendix 1.1: Interviewees

Names have not been disclosed, in order to maintain confidentiality of sources with inside knowledge of IC and access to mafia.

Journalists: Senior editors and journalists in Ranchi and Dhanbad of Prabhat Khabar; Hindustan Times; Dainik Jagran; Times of India; The Pioneer; a local Hindi newspaper stringer, Ramgarh; The Hindu; Reuters Bureau Chief, New Delhi.

Academics: Professors at the Indian School of Mines’ Department of Management Studies; Centre for Mining and the Environment; and Dr Ramesh Sharan, economist, Ranchi University.

Political officials: A BJP Dhanbad senior official with contacts in the ‘Singh Mansion’ coal mafia; a senior BJP official for the ECL region; an ex-Chief Minister of Jharkhand.

Traders: an established coal trader family; individual coal cycle wallahs at an abandoned mine in Ramgarh; a private sector mining contractor, operating in CIL mines; a smaller coal trader, Ranchi.

Coal India: an ex-CIL official in the Dhanbad region; a head of security for Central Coal Fields Limited (CCL); a former member of the apex Planning Department of CIL; a local trade union official in Ramgarh.

Police: an assistant director general of the Jharkhand police force; Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG)e, Hazaribagh, formerly Dhanbad, transferred for trying to prosecute coal mafia crime.

Lawyers: Chair of Dhanbad’s Bar Association.

Union leaders, politicians: MLA for Bokaro (JVM), senior leader of Dhanbad Coal Karamchari Sangh; potential JVM MLA candidate; senior leader (now deceased), a wing of Janata Mazdoor Sangh (JMS), former deputy mayor of Dhanbad; senior leader, Bihar Janta Khan Mazdoor Sangh, Congress district Secretary; local BMS union representative, Ramgarh.

Others: Bulu Imam, major landowner.

Appendix 1.2  Jharkhand coal union factions influential in illegal coal (May 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faction</th>
<th>INTUC Rashtriya Colliery Mazdoor Sangh (RCMS) – Rajendra Prasad (R.P.) Singh faction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party affiliation</td>
<td>Congress party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s official position</td>
<td>Joint General Secretary (INTUC); Congress MLA for Bermo; Jharkhand Finance Minister, Energy Minister (also Welfare)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
## Alleged ‘parallel’ business

Transportation – road; activity ‘behind the curtains’ – a euphemism for illegal activity conducted within a legitimate business; cut of union funds.

R.P. Singh’s son Anup Singh (an aspiring politician, but not yet with an MLA seat) is actively involved in this business. Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries: CCL, BCCL, ECL

### Notes

R.P. and Anup Singh are reported to work closely with Ajay and Amit Singh (sons of Suresh Singh; confirmed by others). However, INTUC leaders are careful not to have businesses owned in their name. INTUC (the national parent organisation) claims 1.16 lakh members.

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### Faction

INTUC/RCMS – Chandrashekhar ‘Dadai’ Dubey faction (General Secretary)

### Party affiliation

Congress party

### Leader’s official position

Congress MLA Bishrampur; former Congress MP for Dhanbad; MP candidate, Dhanbad 2014 (Trinamool Congress); former Jharkhand Minister of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj and Minister of Labour

### Alleged ‘parallel’ business

Road transportation; ‘behind the curtains’ activity; cut of union funds

Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries: CCL, BCCL, ECL

### Notes

Leader of a rival RCMS wing – both Singh and Dubey claim union leadership.

Dubey stood as Trinamool Congress MP candidate 2014. Expelled from Congress in April 2014, after he criticised party leadership when he was not offered Congress’s MP candidacy in Dhanbad.

In March 2014, Dubey accused Chief Minister Hemand Soren (JMM) (Congress is their coalition partner) of being engaged in illegal mining and the most corrupt Chief Minister.

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### Faction

INTUC/RCMS – Mannan Malik wing

### Party affiliation

Congress party

### Leader’s official position

Dhanbad MLA (Congress); President, Congress committee (Dhanbad)

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(Continued)
Alleged ‘parallel’ business

Transportation – road; activity ‘behind the curtains’ – a euphemism for illegal activity conducted within a legitimate business; cut of union funds.

Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries

CCL, BCCL, ECL

Notes

He does not have explicit links to coal mafia families. However, his son Hubban Malik is linked to Ranvijay Singh (below) who funds Congress.

Faction

INTUC/RCMS – Ajay and Amit Singh wing

Party affiliation

Congress party

Leaders’ official position

No official position in INTUC or RCMS; however, likely ‘unofficial’ funders of Congress.

Alleged ‘parallel’ business

Transportation; believed to work closely with R.P. Singh and Anup Singh (see INTUC/RCMS above). But they do not have their own union.

Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries

Ajay and Amit Singh’s business is focussed on BCCL; but RCMS is also active in CCL, ECL.

Notes

Ajay and Amit Singh are sons of Suresh Singh, a major coal mafia don murdered in 2011. Suresh Singh was Congress Treasurer (with close links to INTUC) and stood as a Congress MLA candidate in Dhanbad twice, losing to Kunti Singh (BJP) from the rival Singh Mansion family (below).

Alleged ‘parallel’ business

Transportation; apparently road only not rail; extortion – *randari* tax.

Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries

BCCL

(Continued)
Sanjeev Singh (a.k.a. ‘Singh Mansion’) leads this wing in rivalry with his uncle Bachcha (see below). Sanjeev and Ramadhir are accused in the murder of Suresh Singh (below).

Neeraj Singh is in his 30s; he has been speaking to various parties to find an MLA seat to contest. Neeraj had sought a Congress candidacy but was blocked by Congress leader R.P. Singh (above, of INTUC).

The Surya Deo/Sanjeev/Bachcha Singh families are rivals to the Suresh Singh family; they fund opposing parties.

### Faction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JMS – Bachcha Singh faction</th>
<th>BJP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex JDU, RJD; former Jharkhand Minister of Urban Development in Babulal Marandi’s government in 2002/3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation; apparently road only not rail; extortion – <em>randari</em> tax.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachcha Singh – younger brother of S.D. Singh – leads this wing together with nephew Neeraj Singh, deputy mayor of Dhanbad (Independent). This faction is not officially recognised by the Ministry of Coal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bihar Janta Khan Mazdoor Sangh (BJKMS) (Jharkhand) – led by Ranvijay Singh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress party</th>
<th>General Secretary, BJKMS; District (Dhanbad) Secretary, Congress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation – road and rail; extortion – <em>randari</em> tax.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly BCCL.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Ranvijay Singh is the son of Sukuldev Singh (deceased), a cousin of Suresh (see Ajay and Amit Singh above), with whom he was once linked but with whose family this faction is now in dispute over road and rail transporation. Sukuldev was also a rival of the Singh Mansion family and was attacked by S.D. Singh in the 1980s for setting up the BJKMS (and also INTUC leader S.K. Roy).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faction</th>
<th>United Coal Workers Union (UCWU) (AITUC affiliated) (Jharkhand)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party affiliation</td>
<td>JVM (de facto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s official position</td>
<td>Dhulu Mahato, Bhagmara MLA (JVM), is effectively leader (with no official title). UCWU is Dhulu Mahato’s personal power base. But General Secretary is Lakhanlal Mahato. Dhulu Mahato is the biggest funder of the JVM (led by ex-Chief Minister Babulal Marandi). Dhulu claims to fight against established mafia interests on behalf of workers. As UCWU is AITUC affiliated, Dhulu will also have links to CPI(M) leaders and AITUC General Secretary Gurudas Dasgupta. But AITUC has minimal influence in Jharkhand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleged ‘parallel’ business</td>
<td>Transportation (major scale). Road. Not clear yet if he is in rail; extortion – <em>randari</em> tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries</td>
<td>BCCL: Dhulu Mahato is believed to control a third of BCCL mines. Powerful in Bhagmara and Katras pockets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Dhulu Mahato was originally in AJSU (before joining JVM). He also worked in Samresh Singh’s union DCKS where he set up Tiger Force (an organised youth gang used to intimidate management, used in workers’ protests). At this time, Dhulu was in AJSU. He then left DCKS and AJSU and joined JVM. He is also believed to have originally been employed by Suresh Singh to help run his rail business smoothly (as Dhulu has good relations with OBC and ST groups; dubbed ‘localites’).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faction</th>
<th>Dhanbad Coal Karamchari Sangh (DCKS) – led by Samresh Singh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party affiliation</td>
<td>JVM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s official position</td>
<td>Bokaro MLA (JVM); former minister in Babulal Marandi’s government, 2002/3. Contested Dhanbad constituency Lok Sabha election 2014 (JVM). Long-standing trade union leader who has been in the BJP, AJSU and now JVM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleged ‘parallel’ business</td>
<td>Transportation (but on a much smaller scale). Road not rail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries</td>
<td>BCCL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
**Notes**  
DCKS is a small union which set up Tiger Force with Dhulu Mahato.  
Dhulu broke away to organise the United Coal Workers Union (he is also JVM affiliated).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faction</th>
<th>Central Industrial Trade Union (CITU) – led by S.K. Bakshi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party affiliation</td>
<td>CPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s official position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleged ‘parallel’ business</td>
<td>No major ‘parallel’ business – but leaders may make small profits on the side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Little power in Jharkhand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faction</th>
<th>Bihar Colliery Kamgarh Union (BCKU) – CITU affiliated, led by Nitai or Yogendra Mahato.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party affiliation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s official position</td>
<td>Founder, veteran Left union leader A.K. Roy, was Dhanbad MP for 3 terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleged ‘parallel’ business</td>
<td>No major ‘parallel’ business. Roy had a reputation for being upright (though ISM’s union specialist Pramod Patak says he too may have made profits).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal India Ltd. subsidiaries</td>
<td>BCCL; some parts of ECL (that are nearer Dhanbad/Jharia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Roy fought the three Singh families (above) and had good links to OBC and local Scheduled Tribe and Caste communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>