On October 2nd 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, leader of the far-right wing party the Bharatiya Janata Party, launched the “Clean India” Mission (Swachh Bharat Mission, or SBM), promising to make India clean by October 2nd, 2019. This launched a massive national push towards sanitation, the safe disposal of human fecal waste. This dissertation explores the networks and lifeworlds of NGOs engaged in sanitation, focusing on ethnographies of three distinctly different NGOs: WaterAid, an international professionalized NGO; Sulabh International, an Indian NGO that functions as a business; and Safai Karmachari Andolan (“Manual scavenger mission”), an activist NGO that works to eliminate manual scavenging.

Through these NGOs and work exploring the range of other actors, this project examines how NGOs negotiate with the social, political, and cultural meanings of shit while influencing national policies and conversations in the fraught political context of a far-right government.