Article

Towards a critical geography of resettlement

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Abstract

Resettlement is a governmental program with inherent spatial effects in that it drives the rearrangement of capital, labour, and land, and seeks to render people and space more governable. This article examines the extent to which this disruptive phenomenon has been theorised. We first review the existing literature, finding a distinct polarisation between mainstream studies and more critical scholarship. We then propose a critical geography of resettlement centred on its multiple logics, agents and expertise, and subject-making and spatial practices. An invigorated critical geography of resettlement is needed to challenge the legitimisation of an expanding resettlement industry.

I Introduction

The World Bank describes resettlement[1] as 'the process by which those adversely affected [by development projects] are assisted in their efforts to improve, or at least restore, their incomes and living standards' (World Bank, 2015). Resettlement is a distinctive form of mobility in that why, where, and how people move are determined by authorities ahead of displacement. The degree of external planning, preparation, and investment distinguishes resettlement from reactive movements in response to disasters or conflict, or more self-directed forms of mobility in response to slow onset economic and environmental change.

While a near-universal phenomenon, resettlement is more prevalent in the Global South, and has occurred most often as a result of large dams and other infrastructure projects. Indeed, it is large dam projects like Ghana's Akosombo Dam, Egypt's Aswan Dam and China's Three Gorges Dam that have shaped enduring images and understandings of resettlement. And it is in response to such hydropower projects that the World Bank developed the first guidelines and standards for involuntary resettlement. No reliable figures exist to indicate the scale of global resettlements: the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre is currently collating figures to provide an up-to-date estimate of global

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resettlements, but until released, one estimate is about 20 million people annually (Cernea and Maldonado, 2018). We posit that one of the reasons for this lack of clarity is that the practice of resettlement has expanded well beyond dams and well beyond World Bank-related projects; and, as such, a re-evaluation of the nature of contemporary resettlement is timely.

Resettlement now occurs for conservation purposes, for poverty alleviation, to facilitate urban expansion, and in response to climate change impacts. China, for instance, is resettling 2.4 million people in just one province (Shaanxi) under a poverty and environmental protection project between 2011 and 2020 (SNWTP Construction Committee Office, 2015). Unlike other forms of internal displacement, therefore, resettlement is not only an unfortunate by-product of an event or project, but has become a development project in its own right. The question of how resettlement has come to be normalised in this way provides much of the motivation for this article.

For decades the World Bank has shaped resettlement praxis in various donor and recipient countries. Its first resettlement policy was released in 1980, recognising the disastrous impacts of projects it had funded on those displaced (for instance the violence of Guatemala's Chixoy Dam resettlements; Clark, 1997). This policy and subsequent iterations[2] have been hugely influential in defining social and environmental safeguards for resettlement projects with the aim of better protecting those displaced (Cernea, 1993, 2016; Vandergeest et al., 2007). However, the first principle of the original policy – that involuntary resettlement should be avoided wherever feasible – does not seem to have had the effect of curtailing resettlement. In recent decades resettlement projects and the justifications for them have only proliferated. In what follows we argue that a central driver is the extensive use of resettlement in China as a development project in its own right, and the growing prominence of China as a source of resettlement

knowledge and expertise. Another driver is the accelerating impacts of climate change, and the ongoing legitimisation of resettlement in academic and policy discourse as an adaptation strategy for certain places in the Global South (see, for example, De Sherbinin et al., 2011; Hino et al., 2017).

On this shifting ground, there is a need to revisit the conceptual roots of resettlement to understand the ideas and practices on which its expansion and legitimisation rest. The considerable body of literature that examines resettlement is yet to be systematically reviewed to consider its theoretical reach. In this article we address this gap and advance critical scholarship on resettlement through two key contributions. Firstly, we review the literature[3] and outline three primary approaches to understanding resettlement: a state planning or mainstream approach, and two critical approaches – political-economic and Foucauldian. We argue that a mainstream lens has extensively documented the impacts of resettlement and led to better policies and practice, but is less able to explain the normalisation of resettlement as a development project in its own right. Critical scholarship, on the other hand, which delves into questions of resettlement's temporal and spatial complexity, its subjectivities, and the actors, interests or technologies of government that coalesce around resettlement projects, provides a foundation for a critical geography of resettlement that can both document and challenge this normalisation. While we broadly categorise this scholarship into either (Marxist) political-economic or Foucauldian approaches based on the main focus of the particular studies in question, we recognise that these are not mutually exclusive categories, and further, that many studies are also informed by political ecology.

Secondly, we provide a synthesis of this critical scholarship with the aim of constructing a critical geography of resettlement that will drive forward our understanding of this disruptive phenomenon. Within the two strands of critical

literature, the multiple sites where they intersect, and their omissions, we find the building blocks for a critical geography of resettlement, one that explains not just *how* resettlement happens, but also *why* it happens. Expanding on these building blocks, we outline a critical geography of resettlement that centres on the multiple logics of resettlement, its agents and expertise, and its subject-making and spatial practices. We argue that a distinct critical geography of resettlement is needed because 1) the logics of resettlement continue to multiply and have been inadequately interrogated; 2) the production of knowledge and expertise about resettlement is in flux, which critical development literature is yet to account for; and 3) the spatial practices of resettlement have been insufficiently theorised. To advance such a critical geography we redefine resettlement as a governmental program with multiple logics, one that seeks to render people and space more governable.

II Review

Before delving into key studies in mainstream approaches, it is important to give a sense of the breadth of the resettlement literature and its current concerns. To very briefly summarise its reach, this scholarship has centred on specific projects in India (Parasuraman, 1999; Jain and Bala, 2006; Mathur, 2013), Southeast Asia, particularly upland resettlements in Laos (Evrard and Goudineau, 2004; Blake and Barney, 2018; Sims, 2017; Baird and Shoemaker, 2008), Latin America (Escobar, 2003; Hanna et al., 2016), and China (see below). There is a smaller subset of literature on resettlement in the Global North, beginning with an early account of rural communities relocated off marginal land in the United States (Wehrwein, 1937), but more commonly focused on the dispossession and forced removal of indigenous people in settler states (see, for instance, Billson, 1990; Marcus, 1995; Van Meijl, 2012; Windsor and McVey, 2005).

It must be said that case studies of Chinese resettlement projects and their impacts have proliferated, catalysed by the high-profile Three Gorges Dam resettlements but now extending across the country (see Heggelund, 2003; Tan et al., 2005; Tan, 2008; Wilmsen, 2016; Brown and Xu, 2010; Habich, 2016; Li et al., 2017; Rogers and Wang, 2006; Webber and McDonald, 2004; Yan et al., 2016; Bauer, 2015; Du, 2012; Ptackova, 2012; Tan et al., 2013; Wu, 2015; Xue et al., 2013). A number of overviews of China's resettlement practice can be found in Li et al. (2001), Shi et al. (2012) and Wang and Lo (2015). What our reading of these studies highlights is the expanding set of justifications for resettlement, including land degradation and deforestation, the sedentarisation of herding communities, water pollution control, climate change impacts, and entrenched poverty, and the sheer scale at which resettlement occurs, including millions of people in this decade for poverty reduction. This literature details how, over time, China has developed a particular set of institutions, policies, finance instruments, and networks of expertise that allow resettlement projects to be implemented at scale and for shifting justifications.

While much of the resettlement literature has focused on dams and, to a lesser extent, conservation and poverty-related resettlement, in recent years a body of work has begun to coalesce around using planned resettlement as adaptation to climate change, typically proposed for small-island states and large deltas in the Global South, or marginal (often indigenous) communities in the Global North (Johnson and Krishnamurthy, 2010; Johnson, 2012; McNamara and Des Combes, 2015; Arnall, 2018; Maldonado and Peterson, 2018). A number of studies attempt to draw out principles or lessons from past experience for climate-related resettlement (De Sherbinin et al., 2011; Mathur, 2015; Tadgell et al., 2017), but critiques of past resettlement practice that raise concerns about

maladaptation are also emerging (Wilmsen and Webber, 2015b; Rogers and Xue, 2015).

1 State planning and mainstream approaches

Within this expansive literature, there is a dominant approach which we describe as a state planning approach. Developing from early case studies of dam resettlements and their effects, this approach is focused on understanding and proposing solutions to the problems caused by resettlement (Adu-Aryee, 1993; Bartolomé, 1993; Guggenheim, 1993; Guggenheim and Cernea, 1993; McDowell, 1996). In Guggenheim's (1993: 227) words: 'Even the best planned programs carry with them risks for the people who must move. But adequate research, planning and resources can help relocated communities reconstruct and develop'. While there is recognition that resettlement involves basic political choices about who gains and suffers from development and that it will always remain a 'traumatic process' (Cernea, 1993: 34), the focus of these studies is on reforming policy, legal, and evaluation frameworks for better outcomes.

A number of prescriptive resettlement frameworks have been proposed in this vein, the most influential being Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model (see Cernea, 1996, 1997). IRR is described as a tool for guiding action as it 'anticipates displacement's major risks, explains the behavioural responses of displaced people, and can guide the reconstruction of resettlers' livelihoods' (Cernea, 1997: 1570). There is an assumption here that resettlement can be controlled by planners to achieve favourable and relatively predictable outcomes. IRR continues to be an influential model and has been used in a number of studies to frame the impacts of resettlement (see, for instance, Tan et al., 2005, 2013; Rogers and Wang, 2006). But it has been less useful in explaining the uneven nature of these impacts,

and, by positioning a homogenous state as in conflict with development 'victims' (Cernea, 1997: 1576), IRR does not provide a framework for understanding the workings of power in resettlement projects (see also Wilmsen et al., 2018).

Besides IRR, two temporal models have been developed (Downing and Garcia-Downing, 2009; Scudder and Colson, 1982) that account for the socio-cultural responses of resettled people to specific phases of the relocation process. We also identify two further mainstream approaches: a sustainable livelihoods framing of the impacts of resettlement (see McDowell, 2002; Tan et al., 2009; Rogers and Xue, 2015; Wilmsen, 2016; Chen et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2018), and a focus on protecting the human rights of resettled people (Barutciski, 2006; McDowell and Morell, 2007; Modi, 2009; WCD, 2000).

While many of these studies are critical of resettlement and its impacts, they position the resettlement process as knowable, predictable, and manageable as long as there is better research, planning, participation, and evaluation through the project cycle. For instance, some attribute failure to a lack of an 'orderly and uncorrupted passage from policy to implementation' (De Wet, 2006: 4), while others argue that better results can be achieved through greater inclusion and dialogue or strengthened institutional capacity (Gongbo Tashi and Foggin, 2012:, 149; Singer et al., 2014; Mathur, 2013). To some extent then, by focusing on individual projects and how they can be improved, and not addressing the circumstances that result in dispossession and displacement in the first place, mainstream approaches help to normalise resettlement as a necessary cost of development. Ever more elaborate models are developed for accomplishing 'good resettlement' (Vandergeest et al., 2007: 25), rather than understanding it as a process of coercive redistribution (Dwivedi, 2002; Aiken and Leigh, 2015; Levien, 2017).

2 Political-economic approaches

Resettlement facilitates land dispossession, enables capital accumulation, increases the availability of cheap labour, and produces new forms of commodification and consumption. The true costs of mega-projects are externalised and unfairly borne by local populations. These are the conclusions of the studies outlined below and others that take a political-economic approach to resettlement such as Chakrabarti and Dhar (2010), Chatterjee (2008), Chung (2017), and Sanyal (2007). This is not simply a repurposing of primitive accumulation to understand the proliferation of land dispossession through resettlement projects: by being attuned to place, to specific arrangements of class, gender, ethnicity, and power, and to specific technical practices such as compensation, these studies develop a nuanced understanding of the capitalist logic driving contemporary resettlement.

In China, for instance, Yeh observes how the urbanisation of Tibetans 'fuels capital accumulation for coalitions of real estate development companies and local governments' (Yeh, 2013: 212). Also in China, Webber (2012) views land dispossession as one of three principle means of accumulation in rural areas (the other two being the transformation of state and collective enterprises into capital and the voluntary migration of farmers from agricultural to industrial pursuits), while Chuang (2015) notes the uneven impacts of accumulation by dispossession, with some villagers profiting and others losing out. The need to drive higher household consumption through resettlement is quite explicit in China: according to Premier Li Keqiang, every rural resident who moves to the city will consume an additional 10,000 RMB per year (Wilmsen, 2017). In Laos, Barney (2009) examines the state's upland resettlements that achieve coercive enclosures and attempt to engineer the transition of upland Lao communities from swidden to commodified production. In short, through resettlement, people and places are made more amenable to incorporation within the capitalist economy (Wilmsen and Webber, 2015a).

Political-economic studies also highlight the key role of compensation in furthering the capitalist logic of resettlement. Compensation may be a package of cash or in-kind provisions and increasingly includes post-resettlement infrastructure and livelihood restoration. The terms of exchange are based on inventoried and commodified land (and sometimes crop) assets. Nielsen and Nilsen (2015: 203) describe such negotiations as a 'compromise equilibrium' between dominant groups with an interest in exploiting spaces of accumulation, and subaltern groups whose consent is needed. In Laos, Green and Baird (2016) show how compensation facilitates the expansion of capitalist social relations by producing new commodified relationships to land, assets, and some natural resources, while simultaneously decommodifying other resources. Rather than protecting the rights of the displaced, these arrangements favour the interests of elites by keeping costs to a minimum, whilst ensuring that resettlement is done just well enough so as not to impede construction (Wilmsen and Webber, 2015a).

Political-economic approaches also highlight the precursor to dispossession: exclusionary politics. In cases of resource extraction resettlements, a resource frontier is produced where it did not exist before (Barney, 2009). In developmental resettlements those to be resettled might first be cast as 'backwards' or 'lacking', in need of development intervention. For instance, Sargeson (2013: 1063) observes the characterisation of China's rural residents as 'institutionally insecure, disorderly, economically underproductive and incompatible with modernity'. This production of marginality (of people or of space) might begin long before displacement is even conceived. Examples of politically-produced difference preceding resettlement can be seen in Milgroom and Spierenburg (2008), Ptackova (2012), Feldman and Geisler (2012), Xun and Bao (2008) and Chatterjee (2014). While

the main thread of such political-economic studies is how the production of marginal people and peripheral places facilitates the expansion of capital, the social and cultural dynamics underlying this production are also explored, just not in the same terms as the Foucauldian studies outlined below.

What a political economy lens does, therefore, is expand the gaze beyond a narrow, prescriptive focus on resettlement as a spatially and temporally bounded event, drawing attention to the key drivers and modalities of land dispossession and resettlement. For example, private capital – both foreign and domestic – and a reconfigured neoliberal state are identified as the key drivers of the Maheshwar hydropower project that displaced some 35,000 people in India (Nilsen, 2008). In this case, resettlement was induced by processes of privatisation of public utilities and liberalisation of the financial sector; resettlement did not begin and end with a project. Levien (2017) goes further by tracing changing 'regimes of dispossession' in India, from state-led projects for industrial and agricultural transformation, to private and decreasingly productive investments. He argues that these changing regimes draw variously on coercion, material compensation, and normative persuasion to achieve compliance, and can no longer be adequately explained as primitive accumulation.

We offer two key reflections on this body of work. First, subsumed within categories of class, peasant, and marginality, people and the ways in which they respond to resettlement projects by forging different futures do not always feature prominently. This is not simply about local agency in compensation negotiations (see Green and Baird, 2016; Habich, 2016), but about how resettled people experience and challenge the rearrangements of labour and the commodification of local resources facilitated by resettlement projects. Second, there could be deeper engagement with the production of space and uneven development through resettlement, be that through spatial integration or capital mobility/

immobility (Smith, 1984). For instance, is resettlement in China's western provinces a spatial fix for surplus capital, and if it is, what kinds of geographical landscapes are being created and what kinds are being rendered obsolete (Arrighi, 2007)? If at some point labour becomes surplus to capital's requirements, what happens to these people and where do they go (Li, 2010)? In what follows we consider the extent to which Foucauldian approaches take up such questions, and return to them again in the second section of the paper in our discussion of the multiple logics of resettlement and its spatial practices.

3 Technologies of government and subject-making

The body of work outlined in this section draws on Foucauldian notions of the art of government and capillary power to highlight the ways in which resettlement is used as a technique to produce particular kinds of subjects and spaces, and the role of discourse in this subject-making. These studies are significant in that they draw attention to a number of elements of resettlement practice that are largely ignored by mainstream studies, and not necessarily centred in political-economic studies, including: how a problem is defined for which resettlement is the solution (and by whom), and the means through which governable subjects and spaces are produced. Similar to political-economic studies, resettlement is not conceived of as bounded by a project in time and space. Rather, resettlement is one of many overlapping and ongoing governmental programs that seek to manage a population, to 'arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved' (Foucault, 1991: 95).

An early example is Gellert and Lynch (2003), who consider the epistemic communities – elite groups or groups from state agencies, international lending and donor institutions, and the private sector – that shape mega-projects

in ways that foster displacement. Central to these epistemic communities are ideas of the public good, progress, rationality, and long-held racial biases, which play a central role in producing displacement. Another key study is from Yeh (2005), who examines Chinese government grazing bans in western regions as an emergent form of green governmentality. These practices are part of a broader definition of western China as 'a coherent territory characterised by degraded landscapes and impoverished people' and of the people of western China as 'underdeveloped, impoverished and a potential threat to social stability' (Yeh, 2005: 12–13). While there is conflicting data on the extent and causes of such degradation (see for instance Webber, 2012, on the role of the household responsibility system), discourses linking herding communities with environmental degradation are used by the Chinese state to justify the large-scale resettlement of ethnic minorities. There are also environmental resettlement projects in Han Chinese areas (see for instance Rogers and Wang, 2006) that similarly attribute environmental degradation to the practices of herders and farmers. In these cases, environmental sustainability becomes a new technology of government, within which resettlement is one tactic used to shape the conduct of marginalised farmers and herders.

The formation of more governable citizens is explored further by Gaerrang (2015: 267), who argues that resettlement projects for Tibetan herders in Sichuan produce 'new forms of subjectivity shaped by market forces, the state's development agenda and the transformation of cultural landscapes'. By living settled lives in new houses, shifting from herding to wage labour or small business, and becoming consumers, this process of subjectification also lays the groundwork for further interventions by the state. Through resettlement, Tibetans become objects of the state's efforts to modernise, educate and raise their 'quality' (Huatse Gyal, 2015). In Tibetan areas a distinct concern for social stability is also bound up in this discourse

of modernity (Nyima, 2010). Thus an economic imperative (accumulation by dispossession) and subject-making work hand-in-hand.

It is this small sub-set of studies that has begun to highlight how resettlement produces space. Yeh (2013), for instance, describes the urbanisation of Tibetans through resettlement and reflects on the spatial techniques and implications of such interventions. This is a process that 'through concentration and spatial rearrangement reshapes the embodied experiences and social-spatial practices of everyday life' (Yeh, 2013: 211). The orderliness of the new living arrangements 'lays down a new grid of legibility and discipline' (Yeh, 2013: 211). Resettlement is therefore a process of deterritorialisation tied to a separation from a set of relations between villagers and their land (such as local deities), and reterritorialisation in that newly urban villagers are rendered more governable by the Chinese state. In a Tibetan context, it enables an extension of state control over territory (Yeh, 2005). This deterritorialisation has also been recognised in Han majority areas: Hsing (2010) argues that relocation projects deterritorialise by prompting economic deterioration, accelerating social disintegration, and opening rifts among villagers. The Foucauldian-inspired literature takes up the question of how resettlement produces space to a greater degree than the political economy literature, but as we discuss below, there is more work to be done.

Beyond China, Katus and others (2016), while not drawing explicitly on a Foucauldian framework, nonetheless view hydropower development in Laos as a technology of power, examining local power geometry in the resettlement process, including local elites and more or less powerful actors within villages. Gransow (2015) also frames social assessment as a governmental technology, one that aims to make the social risks of resettlement identifiable, predictable and calculable. These authors do not necessarily delve into how these technologies work, but at least one study does look more intently at

the tools and techniques that are used to shape the conduct of resettlers: Serje (2015) describes the practices of resettlement in Colombia as an initial social diagnosis (classificatory devices used in the design of resettlement projects), bureaucratic procedures (norms and regulations, validation of assets and entitlements, etc.), and the physical design of new settlements. These practices identify, classify, and regulate the everyday lives of people pre- and post-resettlement. Again, while this critical scholarship gives us a far greater understanding of how resettlement works as a technology of government, its somewhat disparate threads need to be drawn together and further developed.

4 Review summary

Our reading of the resettlement literature leads us to two conclusions. The first is that there is, unsurprisingly, a strong polarisation between mainstream studies and more critical scholarship. The former is concerned with *what* happens in the resettlement process (losses, compensation, and reconstruction of livelihoods) and on changes to policy and practice that will make resettlement projects better. The latter concentrates on the *why* (logics) and *how* (techniques) of resettlement, and in doing so, begins to make sense of the normalisation of resettlement. The scale and timeframes also vary. While mainstream scholarship is defined by the project boundary and construction timelines, critical scholarship considers multiple scales and extended timeframes. The second conclusion is that while, overall, two broad and sometimes contradictory theoretical traditions frame the critical literature, there are important sites of convergence which we expand on below. If we read these two strands as complementary, in general (recognising that there is great complexity in this empirical and theoretical work), the political economy work describes the logic(s) of resettlement (the *why* of resettlement), while the Foucauldian work delves into

discourse, subject-making, practices, and the production of space (the *how* of resettlement).

III Toward a critical geography of resettlement

Having reviewed the existing resettlement literature, both mainstream and critical, this section discusses what we consider to be the most important sites where the critical literatures converge and should be developed further: the multiple logics of resettlement; agents and expertise; and subject-making and spatial practices. Through a discussion of these three sites, their interconnections, their relevance to key debates among geographers, and some examples from China, we begin to construct a critical geography of resettlement that challenges the normalisation and expansion of resettlement practice that has to some degree been facilitated by the steady build-up of mainstream 'knowledge about' resettlement. Like Li (2007), we tolerate the tension introduced by different theoretical traditions because of the tools they offer to guide a more explicitly *geographical* research agenda to challenge this legitimisation. And while the theoretical traditions that have most shaped the resettlement literature are centred, we certainly do not wish to preclude other perspectives. Indeed, it is hoped that the three sites – the multiple logics of resettlement, agents and expertise, and subject-making and spatial practices – open up space for greater dialogue with, for instance, feminist political ecology, feminist economic geography, mobilities, and postcolonial perspectives.

1 The multiple logics of resettlement

Ferguson's (1994) classic analysis of Lesotho reminds us that while development projects routinely fail, they do have important effects, political or otherwise, which may reveal a logic that goes beyond the project's stated intentions. These side effects 'are at one and the same time

instruments of what "turns out" to be an exercise of power' (Ferguson, 1994: 255). The resettlement literature catalogues how resettlement projects routinely fail: they do not properly compensate those affected; they are unable to engineer the successful re-establishment of livelihoods; and they are unable to protect against impoverishment. Resettlement is rarely, if ever, a development opportunity: even minimal livelihood restoration is not usually achieved several years after displacement (Cernea and Mathur, 2008). So, looking beyond the immediate goals of a particular project, what does resettlement actually achieve?

Political economy provides an entry point into a critical geography of resettlement by laying bare the underlying capitalist logic of resettlement. While couched in terms of development and progress, resettlement has been used to facilitate the enclosure of forests, farmland, and pastures, to almost completely eliminate herding as a viable livelihood in western China, and to proletarianise smallholder farmers. But, as the critical literature clearly shows, it is not enough to simply say 'capitalist exploitation'. Resettlement as climate change adaptation introduces new tropes of security and resilience (Artur and Hilhorst, 2014), extending earlier uses of resettlement to protect environments in 'crisis'. And dam resettlements do not just displace, they also create: as well as hydroelectricity, the role of big dams in building nation and modernity has long been recognised (Kaika, 2006). Tropes of social stability, cultural transformation, environmental fragility, and the modern subject are often overlaid onto and complement the logic of capital. In central China, the massive push to end absolute poverty by 2020 relies heavily on resettlement, and is rationalised through a discourse of progress, and the need to eliminate 'backward' thinking and make space for new 'professional' farmers (a rationalisation by no means unique to China – see Li, 2011). In Laos, clientilist, neoliberal, bureaucratic and extractive-accumulation rationalities overlap in upland

resettlements (Barney, 2009). That resettlement often takes place within authoritarian states suggests that more attention needs to be paid to how projects can be inflected with socialist (or other) mentalities such as mass campaigns, model villages, and Party supervision.

What a focus on the multiple logics of resettlement would do is to open up analysis of the many things that resettlement as a governmental program seeks to achieve, and of the broader social, political, and economic processes that shape these objectives. By countering mainstream approaches that are bounded by a project, such analyses would help make sense of the expansion and normalisation of resettlement and bring resettlement studies into closer dialogue with key debates in geography. Building on existing work, a critical geography of resettlement as a governmental program will amplify questions of capital, uneven development, power, and the state in particular places. For instance, China's extensive use of resettlement for all manner of social and environmental ills provides fertile ground for exploring the (re)production of uneven economic geographies through 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. If, as Lim (2014) argues, China pursues neoliberal logics but also employs massive redistributive mechanisms to ameliorate uneven economic development, does the practice of resettlement reflect only one or both of these, or perhaps something else? In other words, what can resettlement tell us about the nature of Chinese capitalism amid enduring socialist logics?

Well outside political economy, another line of inquiry is the effects of the multiple logics of resettlement on non-human actors. While some of the critical scholarship we have reviewed is informed by political ecology and asks questions about environmental practices that are marginalised or disallowed by resettlement, non-human actors do not typically feature. Poverty resettlement in China, for instance, often takes the form of manufactured urbanisation – what Gomersall (2018) calls 'the urban ideal' – breaking links

between people, land, plants, animals, and ecological knowledge, and producing new urban environments in which there is limited space made for non-human life. Further, when resettlement happens in tandem with sedentarisation or agricultural scaling-up, diversified smallholder livestock production and seasonal herding are marginalised in favour of industrialised meat production. A critical geography of resettlement should encompass how logics of conservation and poverty alleviation remake human/non-human relations and wellbeing.

2 Agents and expertise

Multiple logics are possible because the practice of resettlement relies not just on the state, but on a complex network of agents who engage in knowledge production and whose goals become intertwined with those of the state. Building on Levien (2017), these networks are regimes of dispossession, but much else besides: they develop new resettlement communities, they train and provide jobs for resettlers, they mobilise an army of consultants, they produce new knowledge on resettlement practice and technologies, and they render this knowledge mobile. To account for the logics of resettlement, these networks and their objectives need to be understood. Beyond an acknowledgement that non- or semi-state agents such as property developers, construction firms, agribusinesses, and hydropower companies play a role in resettlement, the existing literature has not adequately described these agents, their reach, their interconnections or the flows of finance between them.

We suggest that what is needed is both description of resettlement networks and analysis of how resettlement expertise is reproduced through such networks. The agents and networks that coalesce around a particular resettlement project will differ depending on the country and on the stated goals of the project (dam construction, poverty alleviation, climate adaptation, environmental protection). Much like Webber

and Han (2017) have done recently for China's 'Water Machine', a description of these networks that move money, resources, people, and ideas would include their composition, their emergence, their maintenance, their links to other networks, and their effects. Emphasis should be given to the collection of organisations, individuals, and indeed practices that move in and out of these networks to produce *expertise* about resettlement. These are the associations that train and socialise consultants and academics who then become a community of resettlement practitioners, who shape individual projects and the broader norms and tools (models, impact assessment, regulations, monitoring and evaluation) that coalesce around resettlement; all of which provides impetus to what is in effect a resettlement industry. Emerging geographical work on how experts in other fields, such as climate change adaptation, cultivate agendas, authority, projects, and new markets (see Keele, 2017) can provide further theoretical and methodological guidance.

While traditionally this industry has been largely housed in and perpetuated by the World Bank and to a lesser extent the Asian Development Bank,[4] China is playing an increasingly influential role. Its National Research Center for Resettlement is an intellectual apparatus that produces new knowledge, theories, models, and strategies for resettlement, and trains graduate students and scholars in resettlement 'science'. As a consulting organisation, it is regularly appointed by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to design, monitor, and evaluate Chinese resettlements (Shi, 2018). Based on China's extensive practice of resettlement, this apparatus promotes 'best practice' for resettlement, thus rendering resettlement 'naturalized, legitimate and durable' (Goldman, 2005: 5). It plays a very active role in problematisation (how a problem is defined for which resettlement is the solution), helping to render alternatives unworkable, undesirable, or just off the map

(Li, 2016). As the Director of the National Research Center recently wrote:

> The PRC must regard the *need* to displace people as the propitious *opportunity* to create the conditions for the overall advancement of the uprooted population as well, since lifting people from poverty is the ultimate objective of the country's policies. (Shi, 2018: 148, emphasis added)

By rendering resettlement natural and legitimate, it can be more easily taken up in new arenas and combined with other forms of expertise, most obviously in depoliticising discourses of climate change and migration (Kothari, 2005; Barnett and O'Neill, 2012).

By mapping these Chinese networks, the knowledge production they engage in, and the ways in which they intersect with and perhaps challenge well-documented networks from the Global North, resettlement scholarship will intersect with a discussion about the production of distinctly Chinese models of 'big-D' development (Mol, 2011; Yeh and Wharton, 2016; Harlan, 2017). As Mawdsley (2017) argues, in the past decade there has been a rupture in the North–South axis of international development, which can be traced through material, ideational, and ontological flows. We might consider that critiques of norms and practices within an earlier North–South hierarchy, including of pro-poor politics, participatory development, and microfinance (Hickey, 2009; Green, 2010; Roy, 2010), can be extended to this new landscape. But we might also argue that quite different questions need to be asked about how illiberal, non-western norms and practices travel. China does resettlement in particular ways, shaped by Party supervision, collective ownership of farmland, campaign-style programs, a constricted civil society, and powerful discourses perpetuated by state-owned media. The extent to which these norms and practices are made mobile by Chinese networks (particularly as China rolls out its infrastructure-heavy Belt and Road Initiative) is yet to be documented.

3 Subject-making and spatial practices

In the face of a resettlement industry that has a ready solution for so many problems, how do those impacted by these projects fare? There are a plethora of case studies detailing the costs of resettlement and the long-term process of regaining security over one's livelihood post-resettlement. There are also examples of outright resistance to resettlement projects, particularly in India where farmers have mobilised to defeat imposed projects (Oliver-Smith, 2010; Nilsen, 2010), and in China's many stubborn 'nail' households (Hess, 2010). And of course, people desire a better life, so their objectives may overlap considerably with the material compensation and normative persuasion offered through particular projects. While not wishing to diminish these effects and responses, we argue that a critical geography of resettlement must be attuned to how people's lives become entangled in the transformations of self and community sought through resettlement as a governmental program. It is through resettlement that certain types of subjects are made: small-island inhabitants become climate resettlers, herders become sedentarised agriculturalists or urban labourers, smallholder farmers become wage labourers, people become 'project-affected', and existing communities become 'host' communities. However, the existing literature does not adequately explain the extent to which these transformations are actually achieved: do people come to experience themselves through these qualities and statuses? What counter expertise – what messiness – can be identified? We might turn to existing geographical approaches to green governmentality and other critical scholarship on subject-making as guides to how these subjectivities manifest in local places in partial, varied ways, with not all people being incorporated into systems of rule in the same way (Cruikshank, 1999; Rutherford, 2007; Dressler, 2014; Forsyth and Walker, 2014; Li, 2016).

In understanding these transformations to be attempts to render subjects and space more governable, we might ask two further questions: how does resettlement attempt to normalise a particular temporality, and how does it attempt to impose a particular spatiality? We consider these questions to be at the heart of how governmental practices create and maintain disciplinary or prescribed spaces for capitalism's further extension into people's everyday lives (Prince and Dufty, 2009; Jones and Murphy, 2011; Lasslett, 2015). In China, dispersed smallholder farmers are being extensively resettled into high-rise communities and rendered landless, and therefore solely reliant on urban wage labour. Resettlement is not necessarily a transition from subsistence to capitalist modes of production – most smallholders already work as temporary labourers in the urban economy – but it does accelerate a transition to the rhythms and tasks of wage labour and consumption, removes farmland as a social safety net and a source of food, and rearranges labour and capital in space. 'Inefficient' smallholders are expected to become low-saving, high-spending and often highly indebted urban consumers, as large-scale farms or agribusinesses appropriate their land. In reality, they (particular the elderly) are more likely to become urban residents reliant on transfer payments to survive (Li, 2010; Wilmsen, 2017). As Marsden (1999) argues, it is through disciplinary power (training, establishing rhythms, imposing tasks) that labour is organised into a productive force in the interests of capital accumulation. We consider the kind of ethnographic work done by Chuang (2015) with dispossessed farmers and their new bosses in the construction industry to be critical to detailing the temporal changes to labour, consumption, and reproduction that occur through resettlement. Training programs offered by local governments with the aim of preparing resettled farmers for new urban jobs would be a particularly productive site for delving into such questions of labour and subjectivity.

Vandergeest (2003: 47) argues that 'all development projects involve reorganising the meaning and control of space', while Blake and Barney (2018) show how hydropower resettlements in Laos discipline and territorialise populations on party-state-defined logics. Resettlement is a fundamentally spatial project, and yet the literature only incidentally examines the spatial practices that enable these interventions and the modalities of power that these reflect. We argue that a critical geography of resettlement should be attuned to land as a political-economic relation (linked to the changing temporalities and spatialities discussed above), but also territory as a political technology (Elden, 2010). In this vein, how does resettlement as a governmental program enable territory to be represented, appropriated and controlled; how does it enable boundary-making?

This is where the physicality of resettlement villages matters: the orderliness identified by Yeh (2013) as laying down new grids of legibility, the spatial reordering briefly discussed by Blake and Barney (2018), and the logic of site selection. Architecture is not built simply to be seen, 'but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it' (Foucault, 1977: 172). Compared to a nomad camp, or a dispersed farming village, resettlement villages enable a far greater degree of surveillance and control through the circumscription and enclosure of space. Of course people modify or abandon these spaces, a further rich line of inquiry, and one that must recognise that 'resistance' may take the form of evasion, subversion, containment, or modification (Oakes, 2016). Nonetheless, scaled up to the hundreds (possibly thousands) of such villages China has constructed over the past decades throughout its inland territories, resettlement can be understood as a central tool in mapping, knowing, and controlling the (rural) periphery, and remaking the boundaries between rural and urban, and Han majority and ethnic minority space. The selection of sites that bring labour

closer to centres of industrial production and the consolidation of farmland for industrialised agriculture following resettlement might also be seen as part of a broader project to 'optimise' the use of space (Braun, 2000). Resettlement can be understood, therefore, as a governmental program that rests on territorialising ideas and practices. Future scholarship should delve into the different modalities of power (not just coercion, but seduction, negotiation, persuasion, etc.) reflected in these territorial practices and the ways in which these might be differently constituted in space (Allen, 2004).

IV Conclusion

In reviewing the literature on resettlement we have found it to be an understandably quite polarised body of work. On the one hand are state planning and other mainstream approaches that have sought to improve the process of resettlement by tracing its implementation, documenting and modelling its impacts with the aim of reforming policy. Our intention is not to diminish this work, which we ourselves have at times contributed to, but to draw attention to its blind spots, namely, why and how the practice of resettlement has expanded and resettlement has gained legitimacy as a development project in its own right. On the other hand is a disparate collection of studies that critique resettlement largely through political-economic and/or Foucauldian lenses. The purpose of this article has been to synthesise and amplify the contributions of this work in order to provide a way forward for a critical geography of resettlement.

There is a sense of urgency to this intellectual project. The detrimental impacts of resettlement have been documented time and time again. The efforts of those in the academy, in governments, in development banks, and in consultancy firms to better design and implement resettlement so that these impacts are not endlessly reproduced have been productive – at least most resettlements now include impact assessment,

participatory mechanisms, and ongoing monitoring. But these efforts have important unintended effects. They reduce a profoundly political phenomenon to teleological models and the logic of state planning. Further, attempts to render resettlement predictable and a belief (particularly in China) that it can be perfected have engendered a resettlement industry that no longer positions resettlement as a last resort. The proliferation of training in best practice, the rise of resettlement 'science', and hasty and possibly maladaptive proposals to resettle communities affected by climate change impacts are all providing momentum to an apparatus that facilitates land dispossession, impoverishment, and sociocultural marginalisation. Chinese capital is breathing new life into the kinds of mega infrastructure projects that drive large-scale resettlement and that traditional donors had begun to step away from. The just-announced Mambilla dam project in Nigeria, for instance, to be built by a Chinese consortium and funded by China's Export-Import Bank, will require the resettlement of 100,000 people (Monks, 2017). We suggest that best-practice resettlement might be one of the ways in which China is remaking the global development landscape.

Drawing on existing critical scholarship, we understand resettlement to be a governmental program with multiple logics, one that seeks to render people and space more governable. Resettlement projects cannot be perfected because, much like Ferguson's (1994) anti-politics machine, resettlement is an exercise of power that relies on a broad apparatus, reproduces power relations, and has multiple intended and unintended effects. A critical geography that further examines resettlement's multiple logics, its networks of agents and expertise, and its subject-making and spatial practices is needed to both document and contest the expansion of this industry. An understanding of *why* resettlement happens, and *how* it happens is central to this undertaking and emerges at the messy intersections of different theoretical traditions.

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Notes

1. Another commonly used term is 'development-induced displacement and resettlement' (DIDR), but throughout this article we use the broader term 'resettlement' to highlight that it is not only large development projects that induce this particular kind of mobility, and that 'displacement' is an assumed precursor to resettlement. Displacement is always a feature of resettlement, even if resettlement does not always follow displacement.
2. OP 4.30 (1990), OP 4.12 (2001), and most recently the Social and Environmental Framework (Standard 5).
3. The scope of this review is limited to English-language studies of planned, state-driven resettlements (hydro-electric, environmental, poverty-related, etc.): we do not consider reactive resettlements (conflict- or disaster-induced); nor do we consider other forms of displacement such as temporary internal displacement or the resettlement of refugees.
4. The IFC's performance standards and the Equator Principles might also be considered here as extending the reach of the World Bank's policies to the private sector.

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blurred boundaries: the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state

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While doing fieldwork in a small village in North India (in 1984–85, and again in 1989) that I have named Alipur, I was struck by how frequently the theme of corruption cropped up in the everyday conversations of villagers. Most of the stories the men told each other in the evening, when the day's work was done and small groups had gathered at habitual places to shoot the breeze, had to do with corruption (*bhrashtaachaar*) and "the state."[1] Sometimes the discussion dealt with how someone had managed to outwit an official who wanted to collect a bribe; at other times with "the going price" to get an electrical connection for a new tubewell or to obtain a loan to buy a buffalo; at still other times with which official had been transferred or who was likely to be appointed to a certain position and who replaced, with who had willingly helped his caste members or relatives without taking a bribe, and so on. Sections of the penal code were cited and discussed in great detail, the legality of certain actions to circumvent normal procedure were hotly debated, the pronouncements of district officials discussed at length. At times it seemed as if I had stumbled in on a specialized discussion with its own esoteric vocabulary, one to which, as a lay person and outsider, I was not privy.

What is striking about this situation, in retrospect, is the degree to which the state has become implicated in the minute texture of everyday life. Of course north Indian villages are not unique in this respect. It is precisely the unexceptionability of the phenomenon that makes the paucity of analysis on it so puzzling. Does the ubiquity of the state make it invisible? Or is the relative lack of attention to the state in ethnographic work due to a methodology that privileges face-to-face contact and spatial proximity—what one may call a "physics of presence?"

In this article I attempt to do an ethnography of the state by examining the discourses of corruption in contemporary India. Studying the state ethnographically involves both the analysis of the *everyday practices* of local bureaucracies and the *discursive construction* of the state in public culture. Such an approach raises fundamental substantive and methodological questions. Substantively, it allows the state to be disaggregated by focusing on different bureaucracies without prejudging their unity or coherence. It also enables one to problematize the relationship between the translocality of "the state" and the necessarily localized offices, institutions, and

In this article I attempt to do an ethnography of the state by examining the discourses of corruption in contemporary India. I focus on the practices of lower levels of the bureaucracy in a small north Indian town as well as on representations of the state in the mass media. Research on translocal institutions such as "the state" enables us to reflect on the limitations of participant-observation as a technique of fieldwork. The analysis leads me to question Eurocentric distinctions between state and civil society and offers a critique of the conceptualization of "the state" as a monolithic and unitary entity. [the state, public culture, fieldwork, discourse, corruption, India]

practices in which it is instantiated. Methodologically, it raises concerns about how one applies ethnographic methods when the aim is to understand the workings of a translocal institution that is made visible in localized practices. What is the epistemological status of the object of analysis? What is the appropriate mode of gathering data, and what is the relevant scale of analysis?[2]

An ethnography of the state in a postcolonial context must also come to terms with the legacy of Western scholarship on the state. In this article I argue that the conventional distinction between state and civil society, on which such a large portion of the scholarship on the state is based, needs to be reexamined. Is it the "imperialism of categories" (Nandy 1990:69) that allows the particular cultural configuration of "state/civil society" arising from the specific historical experience of Europe to be naturalized and applied universally? Instead of taking this distinction as a point of departure, I use the analysis of the discourse of corruption to question its utility in the Indian context. The discourse of corruption turns out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined. Instead of treating corruption as a dysfunctional aspect of state organizations, I see it as a mechanism through which "the state" itself is discursively constituted.[3]

In addition to description and analysis, this article also has a programmatic aim: to mark some new trails along which future anthropological research on the state might profitably proceed. The goal is to map out some of the most important connections in a very large picture, thereby providing a set of propositions that can be developed, challenged, and refuted by others working on this topic. In so doing, this article seeks to add to a fast-growing body of creative work that is pointing the way to a richer analysis of "the state" (some examples are Abrams 1988; Anagnost 1994, in press, n.d.; Ashforth 1990; Brow 1988; Cohn 1987a, 1987b; Handelman 1978, 1981; Herzfeld 1992a; Kasaba 1994; Mitchell 1989, 1991; Nugent 1994; Taussig 1992; Urla 1993; Yang 1989).

I should point out that much more needs to be done to lay the empirical basis for ethnographies of the state. Very little rich ethnographic evidence documents what lower-level officials actually do in the name of the state.[4] Research on the state, with its focus on large-scale structures, epochal events, major policies, and "important" people (Evans et al. 1985; Skocpol 1979), has failed to illuminate the quotidian practices (Bourdieu 1977) of bureaucrats that tell us about the effects of the state on the everyday lives of rural people. Surprisingly little research has been conducted in the small towns (in the Indian case, at the level of the subdistrict [tehsil]) where a large number of state officials, constituting the broad base of the bureaucratic pyramid, live and work—the village-level workers, land record keepers, elementary school teachers, agricultural extension agents, the staff of the civil hospital, and others. This is the site where the majority of people in a rural and agricultural country such as India come into contact with "the state," and this is where many of their images of the state are forged.

Although research into the practices of local state officials is necessary, it is not by itself sufficient to comprehend how the state comes to be constructed and represented. This necessitates some reflection on the limitations inherent in data collected in "the field." The discourse of corruption, for example, is mediated by local bureaucrats but cannot be understood entirely by staying within the geographically bounded arena of a subdistrict township. Although in this article I stress the role of public culture and transnational phenomena, I do not want to suggest that the face-to-face methods of traditional ethnography are irrelevant. But I do want to question the assumption regarding the natural superiority—the assertion of authenticity—implicit in the knowledge claims generated by the fact of "being there" (what one may call the "ontological imperative"). Such claims to truth gain their force precisely by clinging to bounded notions of "society" and "culture." Once cultures, societies, and nations are no longer seen to map unproblematically onto different spaces (Appadurai 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Hannerz 1986), one has to rethink the relationship between bodily presence and the generation

of ethnographic data. The centrality of fieldwork as rite of passage, as adjudicator of the authenticity of "data," and as the ultimate ground for the judgment of interpretations rests on the rarely interrogated idea that one learns about cultural difference primarily through the phenomenological knowledge gained in "the field." This stress on the *experience* of being in spatial proximity to "the other," with its concomitant emphasis on sensory perception, is linked to an *empiricist* epistemology[5] that is unable to comprehend how the state is discursively constituted. It is for this reason that I have combined fieldwork with another practice employed by anthropologists, a practice whose importance is often downplayed in discussions of our collective methodological tool kit. This is the analysis of that widely distributed cultural text, the newspaper (for an early example, see Benedict 1946; an exemplary recent discussion can be found in Herzfeld 1992b).[6] I have looked at representations of the state and of "the public" in English-language and vernacular newspapers in India.

By focusing on the discursive construction of the state, I wish to draw attention to the powerful cultural practices by which the state is symbolically represented to its employees and to citizens of the nation.[7] These public cultural practices are enacted in a contested space that cannot be conceptualized as a closed domain circumscribed by national boundaries. Folk, regional, and national ideologies compete for hegemony with each other and with *transnational* flows of information, tastes, and styles embodied in commodities marketed by multinational capital.[8] Exploring the discursive construction of the state therefore necessarily requires attention to transnational processes in the interstate system (Calhoun 1989). The interstate system, in turn, is not a fixed order but is subject to transformations that arise from the actions of nation-states and from changes taking place in international political economy, in this period that has been variously designated "late capitalism" (Mandel 1975) or the era of "flexible accumulation" (Harvey 1989). For instance, the new liberalization policies being followed by the Congress government in India since the 1990 elections can only be understood in the context of a transnational discourse of "efficiency" being promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the collapse of the former Soviet Union, one of India's most important strategic and economic partners. Similarly, intense discussions of corruption in India in 1989,[9] centering on a transaction in the international arms economy, bring home the complex intermingling of local discourses and international practices. What is the theoretical importance of these observations? Briefly, it is that any theory of the state needs to take into account its constitution through a complex set of *spatially* intersecting representations and practices. This is not to argue that every episode of grassroots interaction between villagers and state officials can be shown to have transparent transnational linkages; it is merely to note that such linkages have structuring effects that may overdetermine the contexts in which daily practices are carried out. Instead of attempting to search for the local-level or grassroots conception of the state as if it encapsulated its own reality and treating "the local" as an unproblematic and coherent spatial unit, we must pay attention to the "multiply mediated"[10] contexts through which the state comes to be constructed.

In developing my analysis I have drawn substantially on other ethnographers of South Asia who have paid attention to the state. In her analysis of the rituals of development performed at the inauguration of a large water project in Sri Lanka, Serena Tenekoon (1988) demonstrates that the symbolic distribution of water in all directions across the landscape of the country becomes a means by which the reach of the state is represented. In this case, the literal enactment of traversing the space of the nation comes to signify the ubiquity and translocality of the state. Conversely, James Brow (1988) shows how a government housing project in Sri Lanka makes the state concretely visible in the eyes of villagers. Here, the emphasis is on the possibilities of imagining the translocal that are enabled by the embodiment of the state through spatial markers such as houses.[11]

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Since the ethnography of the state developed in this article focuses on the discourse of corruption, and since corruption lends itself rather easily to barely concealed stereotypes of the Third World,[12] it might be worthwhile to say something about how I proceed to develop a perspective on the state that is explicitly anti-orientalist. When notions of corrupt "underdeveloped" countries are combined with a developmentalist perspective, in which "state-society relations" in the Third World are seen as reflecting a prior position in the development of the "advanced" industrial nations, the temptation to compare "them" to "our own past" proves irresistible to many Western scholars.[13] Instead, one needs to ask how one can use the comparative study of Third World political formations to confront the "naturalness" of concepts that have arisen from the historical experience and cultural context of the West. Focusing on the discursive construction of states and social groups allows one to see that the legacy of Western scholarship on the state has been to universalize a particular cultural construction of "state-society relations" in which specific notions of "statehood" and "civil society" are conjoined.[14] Instead of building on these notions, this article asks if one can demonstrate their provincialism in the face of incommensurable cultural and historical contexts.[15]

I begin with a series of vignettes that give a sense of the local level functioning of "the state" and the relationship that rural people have to state institutions. Everyday interactions with state bureaucracies are to my way of thinking the most important ingredient in constructions of "the state" forged by villagers and state officials. I then look at the broader field of representations of "the state" in public culture. Finally, I attempt to demonstrate how local level encounters with the state come together with representations in the mass media. This is followed by the conclusion, which systematically draws out the larger theoretical issues raised in the article.

encountering "the state" at the local level

For the majority of Indian citizens, the most immediate context for encountering the state is provided by their relationships with government bureaucracies at the local level. In addition to being promulgated by the mass media, representations of the state are effected through the public practices of different government institutions and agents. In Mandi, the administrative center closest to Alipur, the offices of the various government bureaucracies themselves served as sites where important information about the state was exchanged and opinions about policies or officials forged. Typically, large numbers of people clustered in small groups on the grounds of the local courts, the district magistrate's office, the hospital, or the police station, animatedly discussing and debating the latest news. It was in places such as these, where villagers interacted with each other and with residents of the nearby towns, as much as in the mass media, that corruption was discussed and debated.

Therefore, looking closely at these settings allows us to obtain a sense of the texture of relations between state officials and clients at the local level. In this section I draw on three cases that together present a range of relationships between state officials and rural peoples. The first concerns a pair of state officials, occupying lowly but important rungs in the bureaucratic hierarchy, who successfully exploit the inexperience of two rural men. The second case concerns a lower-caste man's partially successful actions to protect himself from the threats of a powerful headman[16] who has allies in the bureaucracy by appealing to a higher official. The third example draws on a series of actions conducted by the powerful Bharatiya Kisan Union (literally, Indian Peasant Union), a grassroots farmers' movement that often strikes terror in the hearts of local state officials. Because they give a concrete shape and form to what would otherwise be an abstraction ("the state"), these everyday encounters provide one of the critical components through which the state comes to be constructed.

Small but prosperous, Mandi[17] houses the lowest ends of the enormous state and federal bureaucracy.[18] Most of the important officials of the district, including those whose offices are

in Mandi, prefer to live in another, bigger town that serves as the district headquarters. Part of the reason is that rental accommodation is hard to come by in Mandi (as I discovered to my frustration); equally important, it enables them to stay in closer touch with their superior officers.

Sharmaji was a *patwari,* an official who keeps the land records of approximately five to six villages, or about five thousand plots, lying on the outskirts of Mandi. The patwari is responsible for registering land records, for physically measuring land areas to enter them in the records, and for evaluating the quality of land. The patwari also keeps a record of deaths in a family in the event of a dispute among the heirs about property, or the need to divide it up at some point. There are a number of officials above the patwari whose main—if not sole—duty is to deal with land records. On average, the total comes to about two officials for each village. Astonishing as this kind of bureaucratic sprawl might appear, it must not be forgotten that land *is* the principal means of production in this setting.

Sharmaji lived in a small, inconspicuous house deep in the old part of town. Although I was confused at first, I eventually identified which turns in the narrow, winding lanes would lead me there. The lower part of the house consisted of two rooms and a small enclosed courtyard. One of those rooms had a large door that opened onto the street. This room functioned as Sharmaji's "office." That is where he was usually to be found, surrounded by clients, sycophants, and colleagues. Two men in particular were almost always by his side. One of them, Verma, himself a patwari of Sharmaji's natal village (and therefore a colleague) was clearly in an inferior position. He functioned as Sharmaji's alter ego, filling in his ledgers for him, sometimes acting as a front and sometimes as a mediator in complex negotiations over how much money it would take to "get a job done," and generally behaving as a confidant and consultant who helped Sharmaji identify the best strategy for circumventing the administrative and legal constraints on the transfer of land titles. The other person worked as a full-time Man Friday who did various odd jobs and chores for Sharmaji's "official" tasks as well as for his household.

Two of the side walls of the office were lined with benches; facing the entrance toward the inner part of the room was a raised platform, barely big enough for three people. It was here that Sharmaji sat and held court,[19] and it was here that he kept the land registers for the villages that he administered. All those who had business to conduct came to this "office." At any given time there were usually two or three different groups, interested in different transactions, assembled in the tiny room. Sharmaji conversed with all of them at the same time, often switching from one addressee to another in the middle of a single sentence. Everyone present joined in the discussion of matters pertaining to others. Sharmaji often punctuated his statements by turning to the others and rhetorically asking, "Have I said anything wrong?" or, "Is what I have said true or not?"

Most of the transactions conducted in this "office" were relatively straightforward: adding or deleting a name on a land title; dividing up a plot among brothers; settling a fight over disputed farmland. Since plots were separated from each other by small embankments made by farmers themselves and not by fences or other physical barriers, one established a claim to a piece of land by plowing it. Farmers with predatory intentions slowly started plowing just a few inches beyond their boundary each season so that in a short while they could effectively capture a few feet of their neighbors' territory. If a neighbor wanted to fight back and reclaim his land, he went to the patwari who settled the dispute by physically measuring the area with a tape measure. Of course, these things "cost money," but in most cases the "rates" were well-known and fixed.

But however open the process of giving bribes and however public the transaction, there was nevertheless a performative aspect that had to be mastered. I will illustrate this with a story of a botched bribe. One day, when I reached Sharmaji's house in the middle of the afternoon, two young men whose village fell in the jurisdiction of Verma were attempting to add a name to the title of their plot. They were sitting on the near left on one of the side benches. Both were

probably in their late teens. Their rubber slippers and unkempt hair clearly marked them to be villagers, an impression reinforced by clothes that had obviously not been stitched by a tailor who normally catered to the "smart" set of town-dwelling young men. They appeared ill at ease and somewhat nervous in Sharmaji's room, an impression they tried hard to dispel by adopting an overconfident tone in their conversation.

Although I never did find out why they wanted to add a name to the land records, I was told that it was in connection with their efforts to obtain fertilizer on a loan for which the land was to serve as collateral. When I arrived on the scene, negotiations seemed to have broken down already: the men had decided that they were not going to rely on Verma's help in getting the paperwork through the various branches of the bureaucracy but would instead do it themselves.

Sharmaji and the others present (some of whom were farmers anxious to get their own work done) first convinced the young men that they would never be able to do it themselves. This was accomplished by aggressively telling them to go ahead and first try to get the job done on their own and that, if all else failed, they could always come back to Sharmaji. "If you don't succeed, I will always be willing to help you," he said. Thereupon one of the farmers present told the young men that Sharmaji was a very well-connected person. Without appearing to brag, Sharmaji himself said that when big farmers and important leaders needed to get their work done, it was to him that they came.

Perhaps because they had been previously unaware of his reputation, the nervous clients seemed to lose all their bravado. They soon started begging for help, saying "*Tau* [father's elder brother], you know what's best, why should we go running around when you are here?" Sharmaji then requested Verma to "help" the young men. "Help them get their work done," he kept urging, to which Verma would reply, "I never refused to help them." The two patwaris then went into an adjoining room, where they had a short whispered conference. Sharmaji reappeared and announced loudly that they would have to "pay for it." The young men immediately wanted to know how much would be required, to which Sharmaji responded, "You should ask him [Verma] that." Shortly thereafter, Verma made a perfectly timed reentrance. The young men repeated the question to him. He said, "Give as much as you like." When they asked the question again, he said, "It is not for me to say. Give whatever amount you want to give."

The two clients then whispered to each other. Finally, one of them broke the impasse by reaching into his shirt pocket and carefully taking out a few folded bills. He handed Rs. 10 to Verma.[20] Sharmaji responded by bursting into raucous laughter and Verma smiled. Sharmaji told him, "You were right," laughing all the while. Verma said to the young men, "I'll be happy to do your work even for Rs. 10, but first you'll need the signature of the headman of your village, that's the law." Sharmaji told them that they didn't know anything about the law, that it took more than Rs. 14 just for the cost of the application because in order to add a name to a plot, the application would have to be backdated by a few months. At the mention of the headman, the young men became dismayed. They explained that relations were not good between them and the headman and that they were in opposite camps. I sensed that Verma had known this all along.

Sharmaji then told the young men that they should have first found out "what it cost" to "get a name added to the register" these days. "Go and find out the cost of putting your name in the land register," he told them, "and then give Verma exactly half of that." He immediately turned to one of the farmers present and asked him how much he had paid ten years ago. The man said it had been something like Rs. 150. Then both Sharmaji and Verma got up abruptly and left for lunch.

The young men turned to the other people and asked them if they knew what the appropriate sum was. All of them gave figures ranging from Rs. 130–150 but said that their information was dated because that is how much it had cost ten or more years ago. The young men tried to put

a good face on the bungled negotiation by suggesting that it would not be a big loss if they did not succeed in their efforts. If they did not get the loan, they would continue to farm as they usually did—that is, without fertilizer.

No one could tell them what the current figure was. Even Man Friday, who was still sitting there, refused to answer, saying it was not for him to intervene, and that it was all up to Sharmaji and Verma. The "practice" of bribe giving was not, as the young men learned, simply an economic transaction but a cultural practice that required a great degree of performative competence. When villagers complained about the corruption of state officials, therefore, they were not just voicing their exclusion from government services because these were costly, although that was no small factor. More importantly, they were expressing frustration because they lacked the cultural capital required to negotiate deftly for those services.[21]

The entire episode was skillfully managed by Sharmaji and Verma. Although they came away empty-handed from this particular round of negotiations, they knew that the young men would eventually be back and would then have to pay even more than the going rate to get the same job done. Sharmaji appeared in turns as the benefactor and the supplicant pleading with his colleague on behalf of the clients. Verma managed to appear to be willing to do the work. The act of giving the bribe became entirely a gesture of goodwill on the part of the customers rather than a conscious mechanism to grease the wheels. Interestingly, a great deal of importance was attached to not naming a sum.

In this case, state officials got the better of a couple of inexperienced clients. Petty officials, however, do not always have their way. In the implementation of development programs, for example, local officials often have to seek out beneficiaries in order to meet targets set by higher authorities. The beneficiaries of these programs can then employ the authority of the upper levels of the bureaucracy to exert some pressure on local officials.

Several houses have been constructed in Alipur under two government programs, the Indira Awaas Yojana and the Nirbal Varg Awaas Yojana (literally, the Indira Housing Program and the Weaker Sections Housing Program, respectively). Both programs are intended to benefit poor people who do not have a brick (*pucca*) house. The Indira Awaas Yojana was meant for landless *harijans* (untouchables), whereas the Nirbal Varg Awaas Yojana was for all those who owned less than one acre of land, lacked a brick house, and had an income below a specified limit.[22]

I was told that one of the "beneficiaries" was Sripal, so I spoke to him outside his new house. Sripal was a thin, small-boned man, not more than 25 years old, who lived in a cluster of low-caste (*jatav*) homes in the village. When I saw the brick one-room dwelling constructed next to his mother's house, I could not help remarking that it looked quite solid. But Sripal immediately dismissed that notion.

Sripal was selected for this program by the village headman, Sher Singh. When his name was approved, the village development worker[23] took him to the town, had his photograph taken, and then opened an account in his name in a bank. For the paperwork he was charged Rs. 200. After that he was given a slip (*parchi*) that entitled him to pick up predetermined quantities of building material from a store designated by the village development worker. The money required to get the material transported to the construction site came out of his own pocket. The village development worker asked him to pay an additional Rs. 500 to get the bricks. Sripal pleaded that he did not have any money. "Take Rs. 1,000 if you want from the cost of the material [from the portion of the house grant reserved for purchasing materials], but don't ask me to pay you anything."

Sripal claimed that this was exactly what the village development worker had done, providing him with material worth only Rs. 6,000 out of the Rs. 7,000 allocated to him.[24] Once again he had to fork out the transportation expense to have the bricks delivered from a kiln near the village. Sripal claimed that the bricks given to him were inferior yellow bricks (*peelay eenth*) that had been improperly baked. He also discovered that the cost of labor was supposed to be

reimbursed to him. Although he had built the house himself because he was an expert mason, he never received the Rs. 300 allocated for labor costs in the program.

As if this were not enough, Sripal did not receive any material for a door and a window, so it was impossible to live in the new house. No official had come to inspect the work to see if there was anything missing. Sripal complained that those whose job it was to inspect the buildings just sat in their offices and approved the construction because they were the ones who had the authority to create the official record ("They are the ones who have pen and paper [kaagaz-kalam unhee kay paas hai]"). Sripal himself is illiterate.

Frustrated about his doorless house, he lodged complaints at the Block office and at the bank that lent him the money for construction. Meanwhile, Sher Singh, who had been employing Sripal as a daily laborer on his farm, became angry at Sripal for refusing to come to work one day. Sripal explained that he could not possibly have gone because his relatives had come over that day and that to leave them would have been construed as inhospitable. In any case, Sripal said, he could not do any heavy work because he had broken his arm some time ago.

When Sher Singh found out that Sripal had complained about him and the village development worker at the Block office, he threatened to beat him up so badly that he would never enter the village again. Fearing the worst, Sripal fled from the village and went to live with his in-laws. Despite the threat to his life, Sripal was not daunted in his efforts to seek justice. When he saw that his complaints elicited no response, he approached a lawyer to draft a letter to the District Magistrate, the highest administrative authority in the area. This strategy paid off in that a police contingent was sent to the village to investigate. When I asked Sripal to tell me what the letter said, he produced a copy of it for me. "What can I tell you?" he asked. "Read it yourself." The letter alleged that the village development worker had failed to supply the necessary material and that because the headman had threatened to beat him up he had been forced to flee the village.

After the police visit, Sher Singh made peace with Sripal. He even hired Sripal to construct a home for another person under the same program. In addition, Sher Singh stopped asking Sripal to come to labor on his farm. But the village development worker threatened Sripal with imprisonment unless he paid back Rs. 3,000 toward the cost of completing the house.[25] "One of my relatives is a jail warden [thanedaar]," he reportedly told Sripal. "If you don't pay up, I'll have you put away in jail." Sitting in front of the empty space that was to be the door to his house, Sripal told me that he was resigned to going to jail. "What difference does it make?" he asked. "Living like this is as good as being dead."

Even though he was ultimately unsuccessful in his appeals for justice, Sripal's case demonstrates that even members of the subaltern classes have a practical knowledge of the multiple levels of state authority. Faced with the depredations of the headman and village development worker, Sripal had appealed to the authority of a person three rungs higher in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Because the central and state governments are theoretically committed to protecting scheduled caste people such as Sripal, his complaint regarding the threat to his life was taken quite seriously. Sending the police to the village was a clear warning to Sher Singh that if he dared to harm Sripal physically, he would risk retaliation from the repressive arm of the state.

Before leaving this episode with Sripal, I want to address explicitly what it tells us about transnational linkages. Clearly, one cannot expect to find visible transnational dimensions to every grassroots encounter; that would require a kind of immediate determination that is empirically untrue and analytically indefensible. For example, IMF conditionalities do not directly explain this particular episode in the house-building program. But by forcing the Indian government to curtail domestic expenditure, the conditionalities do have budgetary implications for such programs. These influence which programs are funded, how they are implemented and at what levels, who is targeted, and for how many years such programs continue. Similarly, if one wants to understand why development programs such as building houses for

the poor exist in the first place and why they are initiated and managed by the state, one must place them in the context of a regime of "development" that came into being in the postwar international order of decolonized nation-states (Escobar 1984, 1988; Ferguson 1990). What happens at the grassroots is thus complexly mediated, sometimes through multiple relays, sometimes more directly, by such linkages.[26]

Sripal's experience of pitting one organization of the state against others and of employing the multiple layers of state organizations to his advantage no doubt shaped his construction of the state. At the same time, he appeared defeated in the end by the procedures of a bureaucracy whose rules he could not comprehend. Sripal was among those beneficiaries of "development" assistance who regretted ever accepting help. He became deeply alienated by the very programs that the state employed to legitimate its rule. The implementation of development programs therefore forms a key arena where representations of the state are constituted and where its legitimacy is contested.

One can also find contrasting instances where local officials are on the receiving end of villagers' disaffection with state institutions. Some examples are provided by several actions of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). One of the most frequent complaints of farmers is that they have to pay bribes to officials of the Hydel Department to replace burned-out transformers. Each such transformer typically serves five to ten tubewells. A young farmer related a common incident to me. The transformer supplying electricity to his tubewell and those of 11 of his neighbors blew out. So they contributed Rs. 150 each (approximately $10 at exchange rates prevailing then) and took the money to the assistant engineer of the Hydel Department. They told him that their crops were dying for a lack of water and that they were in deep trouble. He reportedly said, "What can I do? We don't have the replacement equipment at the present time." So they gave him the Rs. 1,800 they had pooled and requested that the transformer be replaced as soon as possible. He took the money and promised them that the job would be done in a few days, as soon as the equipment was in. Being an "honest" man (that is, one true to his word), he had the transformer installed three days later.

When the same situation recurred shortly thereafter, the young man went to the Kisan Union people and requested that they help him get a new transformer. So about 50 of them climbed on tractors, went straight to the executive engineer's house and camped on his lawn (a common form of civil disobedience in India is to *gherao* [encircle and prevent movement of] a high official). They refused to move until a new transformer had been installed in the village. The executive engineer promised them that he "would send men at once." Sure enough, the linemen came the following day and replaced it.

Not all such incidents ended amicably. The quick response of these officials was due to the fact that the Kisan Union had already established itself as a powerful force in that particular area, as will be evident from a few examples. In one incident, a crowd walked off with six transformers from an electricity station in broad daylight (*Aaj* 1989f). The farmers no longer feared the police and revenue officials, on occasion "arresting" the officials, tying them to trees, and making them do "sit-ups." They refused to pay electricity dues (up to 60 percent of agricultural sector dues remain unpaid in a nearby district) and forced "corrupt" officials to return money allegedly taken as bribes. I also heard about an incident in an adjacent village where employees of the electricity board were caught stealing some copper wire from a transformer by irate villagers who proceeded to beat them up and "jail" them in a village house.

It should be clear from all the incidents described above that lower-level officials play a crucial role in citizens' encounters with "the state." Obviously, no singular characterization of the nature and content of the interaction of villagers and bureaucrats is possible. In contrast to Sharmaji and Verma, who manipulate their gullible clients, stand the officials who are manhandled by the peasant activists of the BKU. Similarly, just as local officials employ their familiarity with bureaucratic procedures to carry out or obstruct a transaction by maneuvering

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between different levels of the administrative hierarchy, so too do subaltern people such as Sripal demonstrate a practical competence in using the hierarchical nature of state institutions to their own ends. At the local level it becomes difficult to experience the state as an ontically coherent entity: what one confronts instead is much more discrete and fragmentary—land records officials, village development workers, the Electricity Board, headmen, the police, and the Block Development Office. Yet (and it is this seemingly contradictory fact that we must always keep in mind) it is precisely through the practices of such local institutions that a translocal institution such as the state comes to be imagined.

The local-level encounters with the state described in this section help us discern another significant point. Officials such as Sharmaji, who may very well constitute a majority of state employees occupying positions at the bottom of the bureaucratic pyramid, pose an interesting challenge to Western notions of the boundary between "state" and "society" in some obvious ways. The Western historical experience has been built on states that put people in locations distinct from their homes—in offices, cantonments, and courts—to mark their "rationalized" activity as office holders in a bureaucratic apparatus. People such as Sharmaji collapse this distinction not only between their roles as public servants and as private citizens at the site of their activity, but also in their styles of operation.[27] Almost all other similarly placed officials in different branches of the state operate in an analogous manner. One has a better chance of finding them at the roadside tea stalls and in their homes than in their offices. Whereas modernization theorists would invariably interpret this as further evidence of the failure of efficient institutions to take root in a Third World context, one might just as easily turn the question around and inquire into the theoretical adequacy (and judgmental character) of the concepts through which such actions are described. In other words, if officials like Sharmaji and the village development worker are seen as thoroughly blurring the boundaries between "state" and "civil society," it is perhaps because those categories are descriptively inadequate to the lived realities that they purport to represent.

Finally, it may be useful to draw out the implications of the ethnographic material presented in this section for what it tells us about corruption and the implementation of policy. First, the people described here—Sharmaji, the village development worker, the Electricity Board officials—are not unusual or exceptional in the manner in which they conduct their official duties, in their willingness to take bribes, for example, or in their conduct toward different classes of villagers. Second, despite the fact that lower-level officials' earnings from bribes are substantial, it is important to locate them in a larger "system" of corruption in which their superior officers are firmly implicated. In fact, Sharmaji's bosses depend on his considerable ability to maneuver land records for their own transactions, which are several orders of magnitude larger than his. His is a "volume business," theirs a "high margin" one. He helps them satisfy their clients and, in the process, buys protection and insurance for his own activities.

This latter aspect calls for elaboration. It is often claimed that even well-designed government programs fail in their implementation, and that the best of plans founder due to widespread corruption at the lower levels of the bureaucracy. If this is intended to explain why government programs fail, it is patently inaccurate (as well as being class-biased). For it is clear that lower-level officials are only one link in a chain of corrupt practices that extends to the apex of state organizations and reaches far beyond them to electoral politics (Wade 1982, 1984, 1985). Politicians raise funds through senior bureaucrats for electoral purposes, senior bureaucrats squeeze this money from their subordinates as well as directly from projects that they oversee, and subordinates follow suit. The difference is that whereas higher-level state officials raise large sums from the relatively few people who can afford to pay it to them, lower-level officials collect it in small figures and on a daily basis from a very large number of people. It is for this reason that corruption is so much more visible at the lower levels.

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The "system" of corruption is of course not just a brute collection of practices whose most widespread execution occurs at the local level. It is also a discursive field that enables the phenomenon to be labeled, discussed, practiced, decried, and denounced. The next section is devoted to the analysis of the discourse of corruption, and especially to its historically and regionally situated character.

the discourse of corruption in public culture

Analyzing the discourse of corruption draws attention to the powerful cultural practices by which the state is symbolically represented to its employees and to citizens of the nation.[28] Representations of the state are constituted, contested, and transformed in public culture. Public culture is a zone of cultural debate conducted through the mass media, other mechanical modes of reproduction, and the visible practices of institutions such as the state (Appadurai 1990; Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988; Gilroy 1987; Gurevitch et al. 1982; Hall et al. 1980; Waites et al. 1982). It is "the site and stake" (Hall 1982) of struggles for cultural meaning. For this reason the analysis of reports in local and national newspapers tells us a great deal about the manner in which "the state" comes to be imagined.[29]

The importance of the media was brought home to me when, barely two months after Rajiv Gandhi was elected prime minister in late 1984, a higher-caste village elder whose son was a businessman with close connections to the Congress (I) told me, "Rajiv has failed." I was surprised to hear him say this and asked why he thought so. He replied, "Rajiv promised to eradicate corruption in his campaign but has it happened? He hasn't done anything about it." Although Rajiv Gandhi had not visited the area around Alipur during his campaign, this man was keenly aware of all of his campaign promises. Like many others in Alipur, he listened nightly to the BBC World Service news broadcast in Hindi as well as to the government-controlled national radio (*Akaashvaani*). He was well-informed on international events and would often ask me detailed questions regarding contemporary events in the United States or Iran.

Although radio and television obviously play a significant role as mass media, newspapers are perhaps the most important mechanism in public culture for the circulation of discourses on corruption.[30] In the study of translocal phenomena such as "the state," newspapers contribute to the raw material necessary for "thick" description. This should become evident by comparing newspaper reports—conceptualized as cultural texts and sociohistorical documents—to oral interviews. Since newspaper reports are invariably filed by locally resident correspondents, they constitute, as do oral interviews, a certain form of situated knowledge. Obviously, perceiving them as having a privileged relation to the truth of social life is naive; they have much to offer us, however, when seen as a major discursive form through which daily life is narrativized and collectivities imagined. Of course, the narratives presented in newspapers are sifted through a set of institutional filters, but their representations are not, for that reason alone, more deeply compromised. Treated with benign neglect by students of contemporary life, they mysteriously metamorphize into invaluable "field data" once they have yellowed around the edges and fallen apart at the creases.[31] And yet it is not entirely clear by what alchemy time turns the "secondary" data of the anthropologist into the "primary" data of the historian.

Apart from theoretical reasons that may be adduced to support the analysis of newspaper reports, the importance of all vernacular newspapers, whether regional or national dailies, lies in the fact that they carry special sections devoted to local news.[32] These are distributed only in the region to which the news applies. Thus, if one picks up the same newspaper in two different cities in Uttar Pradesh, some of the pages inside will have entirely different contents. News about a particular area, therefore, can only be obtained by subscribing to newspapers within that area. In this restricted sense, newspaper reports about a particular area can only be obtained within "the field."[33]

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The method of studying the state advanced in this article relates the discourse of corruption in the vernacular and English-language press to statements made by villagers and state officials. We will see that local discourses and practices concerning corruption were intimately linked with the reportage found in vernacular and national newspapers. This point will be demonstrated by first looking at a few examples from the national, English-language press and then mostly at vernacular newspapers.[34]

Corruption as an issue dominated two of the three national elections held in the 1980s. In its summary of the decade, the fortnightly news magazine *India Today* headlined the section on "The '80s: Politics" in the following manner: "The politics of communalism, corruption and separatism dominates an eventful decade" (Chawla 1990:18).[35] Rajiv Gandhi's election in November 1984 was fought largely on the slogans of the eradication of corruption and preserving the nation's integrity in the face of separatist threats from Sikhs. Precisely because he was initially dubbed "Mr. Clean," the subject of corruption later came to haunt him as his administration came under a cloud for allegedly accepting kickbacks from Bofors, a Swedish small-arms manufacturer. In fact, Bofors became the centerpiece of the opposition's successful effort to overthrow his regime. In the elections of 1989, in which a non-Congress government came to power for only the second time in 43 years of electoral politics, another Mr. Clean, V. P. Singh, emerged as the leader. He had earlier been unceremoniously booted out of Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet because, as defense minister, he had started an investigation into the "Bofors Affair." The effect of Bofors was electorally explosive precisely because it became a symbol of corruption at all levels of the state. For example, the conductor on the notoriously inefficient Uttar Pradesh State Roadways bus justified not returning change to me by saying, "If Rajiv Gandhi can take 64 crore in bribes, what is the harm in my taking 64 paisa on a ticket?"[36]

The discourse of corruption, however, went far beyond just setting the terms of electoral competition between political parties. It not only helped to define "the political" but also served to constitute "the public" that was perceived to be reacting to corruption. Since this was done largely through the mass media, we must pay careful attention to newspapers as cultural texts that give us important clues to the political culture of the period. In a series of major preelection surveys, the widely read metropolitan English daily, the *Times of India*, attempted to analyze the political impact of Bofors and set out to establish how the *electorate* viewed corruption. One of its articles begins by quoting a villager who remarked, "If one [political party, i.e., Congress] is a poisonous snake, the other [opposition party] is a cobra" (*Times of India* 1989:1). The article went on to say: "Whether the Congress is in power or the opposition makes no difference to the common man and woman who has to contend with proliferating corruption which affects every sphere of life. . . . Bofors doesn't brush against their lives. The pay-off for a ration card or a job does" (1989:1).

The article further elaborated the relationship between the "ordinary citizen" and the state with reference to the role of formal politics and politicians:

> In U.P., the majority felt that [increasing corruption] stemmed from the growing corruption in political circles. M. P. Verma, a backward class leader from Gonda pointed out that politicians today are driven by a one-point programme—to capture power at all costs. And the vast sums expended on elections are obtained by unfair means. "Without corruption there is no politics," said Aminchand Ajmera, a businessman from Bhopal. [*Times of India* 1989:1]

The theme of corruption was prominent in an article on a central government scheme to help the poor in *India Today*, which pointed out how the resources being allocated by the central government were being misused by the state government in Madhya Pradesh (1989).[37] In this example, formal politics was not reduced to competition among political *parties* and the bureaucratic apparatus (where payoffs for jobs are given) was not confused with the regime (where the benefits of Bofors presumably went). Instead, the discourse of corruption became a

means by which a fairly complex picture of the state was symbolically constructed in public culture.

In addition, I examined the local editions of six Hindi newspapers with different political orientations most commonly read in the Mandi area: *Aaj, Dainik Jaagran, Amar Ujaala, Hindustan, Rashtriya Sahaara,* and *Jansatta.* There were significant differences between the English-language magazines and newspapers mentioned above, with their urban, educated, "middle-class" readership, and the vernacular press. The reason lay in the structural location of the national English-language dailies within the "core" regions—the urban centers of capital, high politics, administration, and education. The vernacular newspapers maintained a richer sense of the multilayered nature of the state because their reportage was necessarily focused on events in different localities, which corresponded to lower levels of the state hierarchy. They could not, however, simultaneously ignore events at the higher levels of state (region) and nation. By contrast, metropolitan newspapers focused almost exclusively on large-scale events, with local bureaucracies featuring chiefly in the letters of complaint written by citizens about city services. The vernacular press therefore particularly clearly delineated the multilayered and pluricentric nature of "the state."

The Hindi newspapers with limited regional circulations, read mostly by the residents of the many small towns and large villages dotting the countryside, in fact were, as opposed to the "national" Hindi dailies such as the *Navbharat Times,* much less prone to reify the state as a monolithic organization with a single chain of command. They made a practice of explicitly naming specific departments of the state bureaucracy. The vernacular press also seemed to pursue stories of corruption with greater zeal than its metropolitan counterpart.[38]

For example, the daily *Aaj* had headlines such as the following: "Police Busy Warming Own Pockets" (1989a),[39] "Plunder in T. B. Hospital" (1989e), and "Farmers Harassed by Land Consolidation Official" (1989d). In none of these reports was the state (*sarkaar*) invoked as a unitary entity. In all of them, specific departments were named, and very often specific people as well. They also documented in great detail exactly what these corrupt practices were. For example, the article on the tuberculosis hospital stated exactly how much money was "charged" for each step (Rs. 5 for a test, Rs. 10 for the doctor, Rs. 5 for the compounder, and so on) in a treatment that was supposed to be provided free of charge. The article on the land consolidation officer named him and stated how much money he demanded in bribes from specific farmers (also named). Similarly, the news story on the police reported that a specific precinct was extorting money from vehicle owners by threatening to issue bogus citations.

Two features of these reports were particularly striking. First, state officials higher up the hierarchy were often depicted as completely unresponsive to complaints and even as complicit with the corrupt practices. "Despite several complaints by citizens to the head of the region, nothing has been done," was a familiar refrain in the reports. For instance, one short report stated that the dealer who had the contract to distribute subsidized rations of sugar and kerosene was selling them on the black market with political protection and the full knowledge of regional supervisors (*Aaj* 1989b). Similarly, another story, "To Get Telephone To Work, Feed Them Sweets" (*Aaj* 1989c), reported that corrupt employees of the telephone department told customers that they could go ahead and complain as much as they wanted, but, unless the telephone workers got their favorite sweetmeats,[40] the customers' telephones would not work.

The second noteworthy feature in regional newspaper accounts was their emphasis on, and construction of, *the public.* A common discursive practice was to talk of "the public" (*janata*) that was being openly exploited by the police, or "the citizens" (*naagarik*) who were harassed by blackmarketeering, or "the people" (*log*) whose clear accusation against the hospital was given voice in the paper, or "simple farmers" (*bholaay-bhaalaay kisaan*) who were ruthlessly exploited by the land consolidation officer. In all cases, the function of the press appeared to

be that of creating a space in which the grievances of the masses could be aired and the common good (*janhit*) pursued.

The press was of course doing much more than simply airing preexisting grievances. The state constructed here was one that consisted of widely disparate institutions with little or no coordination among them, of multiple levels of authority, none of which were accountable to ordinary people, and employees (secure in the knowledge that they could not be fired) who treated citizens with contempt. At the same time, these reports also created subjects[41] who were represented as being exploited, powerless, and outraged. I foreground the newspapers' functions in order to draw attention to the rhetorical strategy deployed by the mass media to galvanize into action citizens who expect state institutions to be accountable to them.

Although I have sharply differentiated the English-language and vernacular press in their representations of "the state" and the construction of subjects, one must keep two caveats in mind at all times. First, if one looks at newspapers from different regions of Uttar Pradesh, and published in other languages (for example, Urdu), wide variations are to be found within the vernacular press.[42] Second, the mass media is not the only important source for the circulation of representations of "the state" in public culture. Police and administration officials repeatedly voice their frustration at their inability to counter "wild stories" and "rumors" that contest and contradict the official version of events. Police officials in an adjoining district are quoted in the *Times of India* as saying, "They go about spreading rumours and we can't fight them effectively. These rumours help gather crowds. And the agitated crowd then turns on the police, provoking a clash" (Mitra and Ahmed 1989:12). The "bush telegraph" [*sic*] spreads rumors quickly and convincingly (Mitra 1989).[43] Unlike other technologies of communication such as newspapers, radio, and television, rumor cannot be controlled by simply clamping down on the source of production (Coombe 1993). Rumor therefore becomes an especially effective vehicle to challenge official accounts, especially when agencies of the state transgress local standards of behavior.

By definition, corruption is a violation of norms and standards of conduct.[44] The other face of a discourse of corruption, therefore, is a discourse of accountability.[45] Herzfeld puts the emphasis in the right place when he says that "accountability is a socially produced, culturally saturated amalgam of ideas about person, presence, and polity . . . [whose] meaning is culturally specific . . . [and whose] management of personal or collective identity cannot break free of social experience" (1992a:47). Expectations of "right" behavior, standards of accountability, and norms of conduct for state officials, in other words, come from social groups as well as from "the state."[46] Sometimes these standards and norms converge; more often, they do not. Thus, there are always divergent and conflicting assessments of whether a particular course of action is "corrupt." Subjects' deployment of discourses of corruption are necessarily mediated by their structural location (this point is developed further below). But state officials are also multiply positioned within different regimes of power: in consequence, they simultaneously employ, and are subject to, quite varying discourses of accountability. The manner in which these officials negotiate the tensions inherent in their location in their daily practices both helps to create certain representations of the state and powerfully shapes assessments of it, thereby affecting its legitimacy. In fact, struggles for legitimacy can be interpreted in terms of the effort to construct the state and "the public" symbolically in a particular manner.

Moreover, if one were to document the transformations in the discourse of corruption from colonial times to the present (a project beyond the scope of this article), it would be clear that the postcolonial state has itself generated new discourses of accountability. Actions tolerated or considered legitimate under colonial rule may be classified as "corrupt" by the rule-making apparatuses of the independent nation-state because an electoral democracy is deemed accountable to "the people." The sense of pervasive corruption in a country such as India might then itself be a consequence of the changes in the discourse of accountability promulgated by

postcolonial nationalists. In addition, significant changes *during* the postcolonial period have arisen from the pressures of electoral politics (as evidenced by the Bofors controversy) and from peasant mobilization. In the Mandi region, the Kisan Union has been very successful in organizing peasants against the state by focusing on the issue of corruption among lower levels of the bureaucracy.

Although there are variations in the discourse of corruption *within* regions and *during* the postcolonial era, the end of colonialism constitutes a significant transition. One of the reasons for this is that nationalist as opposed to colonial regimes seek the kind of popular legitimacy that will enable them to act in the name of "the people." They thus place new responsibilities on state employees and vest new rights in subjects who are then constituted as citizens. The postcolonial state consciously sets out to create subject positions unknown during the colonial era: "citizenship" does not just mark inclusiveness in a territorial domain but indicates a set of rights theoretically invested in subjects who inhabit the nation.[47] One of the crucial ingredients of discourses of citizenship in a populist democracy such as India has been that state employees are considered accountable to "the people" of the country. The discourse of corruption, by marking those actions that constitute an infringement of such rights, thus acts to represent the rights of citizens to themselves.[48]

The role of the Kisan Union further highlights significant regional variations in the discourse of corruption. Western Uttar Pradesh, the region where Mandi is located, has been the center of very successful agrarian mobilizations led by the class of well-to-do peasants. This movement was first led by Chaudhary Charan Singh, a former prime minister who consistently mounted an attack on the "urban bias" of state policies. It is now been given a new direction by the Kisan Union led by Mahendar Singh Tikait.[49] The landowning castes in this region have become fairly prosperous as they have been the chief beneficiaries of the green revolution. But this newfound wealth has yet to be translated into bureaucratic power and cultural capital. In other words, given the central role that state institutions play in rural life, these groups seek to stabilize the conditions for the reproduction of their dominance. Because they perceive the state to be acting against their interests, they deploy the discourse of corruption to undermine the credibility of the state and to attack the manner in which government organizations operate.[50]

The discourse of corruption is central to our understanding of the relationship between the state and social groups precisely because it plays this dual role of enabling people to construct the state symbolically and to define themselves as citizens. For it is through such representations, and through the public practices of various government agencies, that the state comes to be marked and delineated from other organizations and institutions in social life. The state itself and whatever is construed to stand apart from it—community, polity, society, civil society (Kligman 1990), political society—are all culturally constructed in specific ideological fields. It is hence imperative that we constantly contextualize the construction of the state within particular historical and cultural conjunctures. I have employed the discourse of corruption as a means to demonstrate how the state comes to be imagined in one such historical and cultural context. The discourse of corruption here functions as a diagnostic of the state.

the imagined state

Banwari, a scheduled caste resident of Ashanwad hamlet, 25 kms. from Jaipur said, "I haven't seen the vidhan sabha or the Lok Sabha.[51] The only part of the government I see is the police station four kms. from my house. And that is corrupt. The police demand bribes and don't register complaints of scheduled caste people like me." [*Times of India* 1989:7]

So far, this article has dealt with the practices of local levels of the bureaucracy and the discourses of corruption in public culture, respectively. Together, they enable a certain construction of the state that meshes the imagined translocal institution with its localized

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embodiments. The government, in other words, is being constructed here in the imagination and everyday practices of ordinary people. Of course, this is exactly what "corporate culture" and nationalism do: they make possible and then naturalize the construction of such nonlocalizable institutions. It then becomes very important to understand the mechanisms, or modalities, that make it possible to imagine the state. What is the process whereby the "reality" of translocal entities comes to be experienced?

To answer this question, one must grasp the pivotal role of public culture, which represents one of the most important modalities for the discursive construction of "the state." Obviously, not everyone imagines the state in quite the same manner. So far, very little research has been done on the relationship between diversely located groups of people and their employment of the different media of representation and of varying resources of cultural capital in imagining "the state." For example, Ram Singh and his sons are relatively prosperous men from one of the lowest castes (jatav) in Alipur. They had recently acquired a television set as part of the dowry received in the marriage of one of the sons. Ram Singh told me, in a confession born of a mixture of pride and embarrassment, that since the television had arrived their farm work had suffered because, instead of irrigating the crop, they would all sit down and watch television. (Both the pumpsets used for irrigation and the television set were dependent on erratic and occasional supplies of electricity.) Television was a constant point of reference in Ram Singh's conversation.

I interviewed Ram Singh in the context of the impending elections (the elections took place in December 1989; the conversation dates from late July). He said:

> The public is singing the praises of Rajiv [Gandhi].[52] He is paying really close attention to the needs of poor people [Bahut gaur kar raha hain]. Rajiv has been traveling extensively in the rural areas and personally finding out the problems faced by the poor. For this reason, I will definitely support the Congress (I).
>
> We consider the government which supports us small people as if it were our mother and father [Usi ko ham maa-baap key samaan maantey hain]. If it weren't for the Congress, no one would pay any attention to the smaller castes [chotee jaat]. Not even god looks after us, only the Congress.

At this point, his son intervened:

> The Congress is for all the poor, not just for the lower castes. It is exerting itself to the utmost, trying to draw people into [government] jobs [Bahut jor laga rahen hain, naukri mein khichai kar rahen hain].

Ram Singh returned to the discussion:

> Although the government has many good schemes, the officials in the middle eat it all [beech mey sab khaa jaate hain]. The government is making full efforts to help the poor, but the officials don't allow any of the schemes to reach the poor.

"Doesn't the government knows that officials are corrupt?" I asked. "Why doesn't it do anything?" Ram Singh replied:

> It does know a little bit but not everything. The reason is that the voice of the poor doesn't reach people at the top [Garibon ki awaaz vahaan tak pahuchti nahin]. If, for example, the government sets aside four lakhs for a scheme, only one lakh will actually reach us—the rest will be taken out in the middle.[53]

Ram Singh's position here displays some continuity with an older, hierarchical vision of the state.[54] Typically, in such views, the ruler appears as benevolent and charitable whereas the local official is seen as corrupt. While this may very well be the case, I think that one can adequately explain Ram Singh's outlook by examining contemporary practices rather than the sedimentation of beliefs.[55] One should look at practices of the state that reinforce this outlook. When a complaint of corruption is lodged against a local official, the investigation is always conducted by an official of a higher rank. Higher officials are thus seen as providing redressals for grievances and punishing local officials for corrupt behavior.

Ram Singh's case reminds us that all constructions of the state have to be situated with respect to the location of the speaker. Ram Singh's particular position helps us understand why he imagines the state as he does. He is an older, scheduled-caste man whose household now owns

one of the five television sets in the village, a key symbol of upward mobility. Several of his sons are educated, and two of them have obtained relatively good government jobs as a consequence.[56] The scheduled castes of this area in general, and the jatavs in particular, have historically supported successive Congress regimes.

The first thing that impresses one about Ram Singh's interpretation of "the state" is how clearly he understands its composition as an entity with multiple layers and diverse locales and centers. Although the word for regime and state is the same in Hindi (*sarkaar*),[57] Ram Singh maintains a distinction between the regime and the bureaucracy. He sees the regime's good intentions toward the lower castes being frustrated by venal state officials. Clearly, Ram Singh has a sense that there are several layers of "government" above the one that he has always dealt with (the very top personified by then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi), and that the different levels can exert opposing pulls on policy (specifically, those that affect a scheduled-caste person like him). Interestingly, Ram Singh reproduces an apologetics for the failure of policy (the formulation is all right, it is the implementors that are to blame) pervasively found in India's "middle classes," delivered by politicians belonging to the regime in power, and reproduced in the work of academics, higher bureaucrats, and sympathetic officials of international agencies.

The second striking fact about Ram Singh's testimony is that apart from his nuanced description of the state as a disaggregated and multilayered institution, his analysis closely parallels a discourse on the state that is disseminated by the mass media and is therefore translocal. Ram Singh's example demonstrates the importance of public culture in the discursive construction of the state: he talks knowledgeably about "the public's" perception of Rajiv and of Rajiv's itinerary. His son's perception of the Congress as being "for all the poor" clearly also owes a great deal to mass-mediated sources.

My suspicion that the close association with Rajiv Gandhi and the explanation about the corrupt middle levels of the state was influenced by the impact of television gained force when one of his sons explained:[58]

We are illiterate people whose knowledge would be confined to the village. This way [i.e., by watching television], we learn a little bit about the outside world, about the different parts of India, about how other people live, we get a little more worldly [*Kuch duniyaadaari seekh laayten hain*].[59]

In the buildup to the elections, the government-controlled television network, *Doordarshan*, spent most of the nightly newscast following Rajiv Gandhi on his campaign tours. Obviously, it was not just the country that was being imagined on television through the representation of its different parts but also the national state through the image of "its" leader. Popular understandings of the state therefore are constituted in a discursive field where the mass media play a critical role. Ram Singh's words reveal the important part that national media play in "local" discourses on the state. Clearly, it is not possible to deduce Ram Singh's understanding of "the state" entirely from his personal interactions with the bureaucracy; conversely, it is apparent that he is not merely parroting the reports he obtains from television and newspapers.[60] Rather, what we see from this example is the articulation between (necessarily fractured) hegemonic discourses and the inevitably situated and interested interpretations of subaltern subjects. Ram Singh's everyday experiences lead him to believe that there *must* be government officials and agencies (whose presence, motives, and actions are represented to him through the mass media) interested in helping people like him. Only that could explain why his sons have succeeded in obtaining highly prized government jobs despite their neglect by local schoolteachers and their ill-treatment by local officials. Yet when he talks about "the public," and with a first-person familiarity about Rajiv's efforts on behalf of the poor, he is clearly drawing on a mass-mediated knowledge of *what* that upper-level of government comprises, who the agents responsible for its actions are, and what kinds of policies and programs they are promoting.[61]

There is obviously no Archimedean point from which to visualize "the state," only numerous situated knowledges (Haraway 1988). Bureaucrats, for example, imagine it through statistics (Hacking 1982), official reports, and tours, whereas citizens do so through newspaper stories, dealings with particular government agencies, the pronouncements of politicians, and so forth. Constructions of the state clearly vary according to the manner in which different actors are positioned. It is therefore important to situate a certain symbolic construction of the state with respect to the particular context in which it is realized. The importance of the mass media should not blind us to the differences that exist in the way that diversely situated people imagine the state.[62]

For instance, Ram Singh's position as a relatively well-to-do lower-caste person, whose family has benefited from rules regarding employment quotas for scheduled castes, explains his support for the higher echelons of government. At the same time, his interaction with local officials has taught him that they, like the powerful men in the villages, have little or no sympathy for lower-caste people like him. Therefore, he has a keen sense of the differences among different levels of the state. On the other hand, if he seems to share with the middle-class a particular view of the failure of government programs, it is the result of the convergence of what he has learned from his everyday encounters with the "state" with what he has discerned, as his son indicates, from the mass media. Congress rhetoric about being the party of the poor obviously resonates with Ram Singh's experience; that is why he calls the Congress government his guardians (*maa-baap*) and blames the officials in the middle for not following through with government programs. Ram Singh's view of the state thus is shaped both by his own encounters with local officials and by the translocal imagining of the state made possible by viewing television.

conclusion

In this article I have focused on discourses of corruption in public culture and villagers' everyday encounters with local government institutions in order to work toward an ethnography of the state in contemporary India. Such a study raises a large number of complex conceptual and methodological problems, of which I have attempted to explore those that I consider central to any understanding of state institutions and practices.

The first problem has to do with the reification inherent in unitary descriptions of "the state."[63] When one analyzes the manner in which villagers and officials encounter the state, it becomes clear that it must be conceptualized in terms far more decentralized and disaggregated than has been the case so far. Rather than take the notion of "the state" as a point of departure, we should leave open the analytical question as to the conditions under which the state *does* operate as a cohesive and unitary whole.[64] All the ethnographic data presented in this article—the cases of Sharmaji, Sripal, Ram Singh, and the Kisan Union, and the reports from the vernacular press—point to a recognition of multiple agencies, organizations, levels, agendas, and centers that resists straightforward analytical closure.

The second major problem addressed in this article concerns the translocality of state institutions. I have argued that any analysis of the state requires us to conceptualize a space that is constituted by the intersection of local, regional, national, and transnational phenomena. Accordingly, I have stressed the role of public culture in the discursive construction of the state. Bringing the analysis of public culture together with the study of the everyday practices of lower levels of the bureaucracy helps us understand how the reality of translocal entities comes to be felt by villagers and officials.

The third important argument advanced in this article, also tied to the significance of public culture for an analysis of the state, has to do with the discursive construction of the state. Foregrounding the question of representation allows us to see the modalities by which the state

comes to be imagined. The discourse of corruption and accountability together constitute one mechanism through which the Indian state came to be discursively constructed in public culture. It must be kept in mind that the discourse of corruption varies a great deal from one country to another, dependent as it is on particular historical trajectories and the specific grammars of public culture. Taking the international context of nation-states into account, however, brings their substantial similarities into sharp relief.[65] In order that a state may legitimately represent a nation in the international system of nation-states, it has to conform at least minimally to the requirements of a modern nation-state. The tension between legitimacy in the interstate system and autonomy and sovereignty is intensifying for nation-states with the continued movement toward an increasingly transnational public sphere. The accelerating circulation of cultural products—television and radio programs, news, films, videos, audio recordings, books, fashions—has been predicated on gigantic shifts in multinational capital. When this is tied to the reduction of trade barriers, the worldwide debt crisis (especially visible in Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe), offshore production, and the restructuring of markets (exemplified by the European Union), a pattern of extensive crisscrossing emerges (Appadurai 1990). These complex cultural and ideological interconnections reveal that discourses of corruption (and hence of accountability) are *from the very beginning* articulated in a field formed by the intersection of many different transnational forces. In short, to understand how discourses of corruption symbolically construct "the state," we must inspect phenomena whose boundaries do not coincide with those of the nation-state. At the same time, however, these discourses do not operate homogeneously across the world. Rather, they articulate with distinctive historical trajectories to form unique hybridizations and creolizations in different settings (Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

The fourth significant point, which attends to the historical and cultural specificity of constructions of the state, has to do with vigilance toward the imperialism of the Western conceptual apparatus. Rather than begin with the notions of state and civil society that were forged on the anvil of European history, I focus on the modalities that enable the state (and, simultaneously, that which is not the state) to be discursively constructed. Looking at everyday practices, including practices of representation, and the representations of (state) practice in public culture helps us arrive at a historically specific and ideologically constructed understanding of "the state." Such an analysis simultaneously considers those other groupings and institutions that are imagined in the processes of contestation, negotiation, and collaboration with "the state." There is no reason to assume that there is, or should be, a unitary entity that stands apart from, and in opposition to, "the state," one that is mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive of the social space. What I have tried to emphasize in this article is that the very same processes that enable one to construct the state also help one to imagine these other social groupings—citizens, communities (Chatterjee 1990), social groups (Bourdieu 1985), coalitions, classes, interest groups, civil society, polity, ethnic groups, subnational groups, political parties, trade unions, and farmers organizations. For the purposes of my argument, assembling these groups into some overarching relation was unnecessary. I therefore did not employ the notion of "civil society," which usually fills such a need, in this analysis of the discourses of corruption in India. Furthermore, it is not a concept indigenously invoked in the various processes of imagining identity that I have described here.[66]

The final question that this article addresses concerns political action and activism, concerns that should be included in the field of applied anthropology. In the context of the state, the collaboration/resistance dichotomy is unhelpful in thinking of strategies for political struggle. The reason is that such a gross bifurcation does not allow one to take advantage of the fact that the state is a formation that, as Stuart Hall puts it, "condenses" contradictions (Hall 1981, 1986a, 1986b). It also hides from view the fact that there is no position *strictly* outside or inside the state because what is being contested is the terrain of the ideological field. Any struggle against

blurred boundaries   393

currently hegemonic configurations of power and domination involves a *cultural* struggle, what Gramsci has called the "war of position." What is at stake is nothing less than a transformation in the manner in which the state comes to be constructed. It is a struggle that problematizes the historical divide between those who choose to do political work "within" the state and those who work "outside" it, because the cultural construction of the state in public culture can result from, and affect, both in equal measure.

By pointing out that advocates of applied work and those who favor activist intervention may sometimes unintentionally share a common project of reifying "the state" and then locating themselves with respect to that totality (the one inside, the other outside), I neither intend to equate different modes of engagement nor to belittle the often politically sophisticated under-standings that practitioners bring to their activities. All I wish to emphasize is that one's theory of "the state" does greatly matter in formulating strategies for political action. Just as Gramsci's notion of hegemony led him to believe that 1917 may have been the last European example of vanguardism (what he called the "war of maneuver"), so my analysis of "the state" leads to the conclusion that we can attempt to exploit the contradictory processes that go into constituting "it." These contradictions not only address the divergent pulls exerted by the multiple agencies, departments, organizations, levels, and agendas of "the state" but also the contested terrain of public representation. If it is precisely in these practices of historical narrative and statistical abstraction, in equal parts thin fiction and brute fact, that the phenomenon of state fetishism emerges, we must remember how unstable and fragile this self-representation is and how it could *always* be *otherwise*. For example, I have shown how the discourse of corruption helps construct "the state"; yet at the same time it can potentially empower citizens by marking those activities that infringe on their rights.

One way to think about strategies of political action, about such dichotomies as applied/activist, inside/outside, policy analysis/class struggle, and developmentalism/revolution, is to draw an initial distinction between *entitlement* and *empowerment*.[67] The "machinery" of develop-ment, with its elaborate yet repetitive logic, focuses on the goal of delivering entitlements. As Jim Ferguson (1990) has argued, it does so in fact only to remove all discussion of empowerment from the discursive horizon (hence the title of his book, *The Anti-Politics Machine*). Yet the two are not mutually exclusive. And it is here that seizing on the fissures and ruptures, the contradictions in the policies, programs, institutions, and discourses of "the state" allows people to create possibilities for political action and activism.[68] I see critical reflection on the discourse of development as a point of departure for political action, not as a moment of arrival. Even as we begin to see that we need, as Arturo Escobar (1992) has felicitously put it, alternatives *to* development, and not development alternatives, we must learn not to scoff at a plebeian politics of opportunism, strategies that are alive to the conjunctural possibilities of the moment. Keynes served to remind economists and utopians that "*in the long run* we are all dead."[69] The poor, I might add, live only half as long.

notes

1. Instead of adopting the cumbersome technique of putting "the state" in quotation marks throughout the text, I will henceforth omit quotation marks except at points where I want to draw attention explicitly to the reified nature of the object denoted by that term.

2. Similar questions were raised earlier by Nader (1972:306–307).

3. Such an analysis has important implications for political action, as it suggests that the struggle for hegemony is built into the construction of the state. It rejects the reification of the state inherent both in vanguardist movements that seek to overthrow "it" and reformist movements that seek to work within "it."

4. Herzfeld remarks: "Thus anthropology, with its propensity to focus on the exotic and the remarkable, has largely ignored the practices of bureaucracy. . . . Yet this silence is, as Handelman has observed, a remarkable omission" (1992a:45). Handelman's work (1978, 1981) develops a call made by scholars such as Nader (1972) to "study up," and attempts to do for bureaucracies what ethnographers such as Rohlen (1974, 1983) have done for other institutions such as banks and schools.

5. It should be obvious that I am making a distinction between an empiricist epistemology and empirical methods. I am definitely *not* saying that empirical research needs to be abandoned.

6. The larger project has a significant oral historical and archival dimension as well as a wider sampling of the various media. See also Achille Mbembe's (1992) wonderful article for its suggestive use of newspaper reports.

7. See the articles by Mitchell (1989) and Taussig (1992) on this matter.

8. Handler's work (1985) very nicely demonstrates how these struggles work out in the case of objects that the regional government of Quebec wants to designate as the region's *patrimoine*.

9. The scandal, which came to be known as the Bofors Affair, allegedly involved a kickback in a gun ordered by the Indian government from a Swedish manufacturer. What gave the scandal such prominence is that it was widely believed that the kickback went to highly placed members of the government and the Congress party, perhaps even the prime minister. Naturally, the ruling party did not pursue the investigation with great enthusiasm, and no concrete proof was ever uncovered.

10. The phrase is Lata Mani's (1989).

11. Michael Woost's (1993) fine essay also addresses similar questions.

12. The term "Third World" encapsulates and homogenizes what are in fact diverse and heterogenous realities (Mohanty 1988). It implies further that "First" and "Third" worlds exist as separate and separable spaces (Ahmad 1987). I will thus capitalize it to highlight its problematic status. In a similar manner, "the West" is obviously not a homogenous and unified entity. I use it to refer to the effects of hegemonic representations of the West rather than its subjugated traditions. I therefore use the term simply to refer, not to a geographical space, but to a particular historical conjuncture of place, power, and knowledge.

13. A phenomenon that Johannes Fabian (1983) calls "allochronism."

14. This point has been made by Partha Chatterjee (1990) in response to Charles Taylor (1990); his recent book (1993) restates it and develops the argument further.

15. I am grateful to Dipesh Chakrabarty for first bringing this to my attention. See the excellent concluding chapter of his monograph of the working class in Bengal (1989), in which he tackles this question head on.

16. The headman is an official elected by all the registered voters of a village. Political parties rarely participate in village elections in the sense that candidates do not represent national or regional parties when contesting these elections. Headmen are neither considered part of the administration nor the grassroots embodiment of political parties, although they may play important roles in representing the village to bureaucratic and party institutions.

17. Like all the other names in this article, this too is a pseudonym. In addition, owing to the sensitive nature of this material, the identities and occupations of all the people mentioned here have been altered beyond recognition.

18. Since the word "federal" is rarely used in India, I will refer to it by its Indian equivalent, that is, "central."

19. I use the term "hold court" because Sharmaji's mode of operation is reminiscent of an Indian *darbaar*, a royal court.

20. At the exchange rate prevailing at the time of the incident in 1989, $1 = Rs. 18, the client in effect handed Verma the equivalent of 56 cents. That figure is misleading, however, since it does not indicate purchasing power. Ten rupees would be enough to buy a hearty nonvegetarian lunch at a roadside restaurant for one person or one kilogram of high quality mangoes, but not enough for a pair of rubber slippers.

21. I find Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender as performance very useful in thinking about this issue, particularly as it emphasizes that the agents involved are not following a cultural script governed by rule-following behavior. I am grateful to Don Moore for emphasizing this point to me.

22. This level was defined as Rs. 6,400 (approximately $215) per year for the 1992–93 fiscal year.

23. The village development worker is a functionary of the regional government who is responsible for the implementation of "development programs" in a small circle of villages, the number in the circle varying from three to a dozen depending on their populations. Like other government officials, the village development worker is subject to frequent transfers, at least once every three years.

24. Sripal claimed to know the exact amount by consulting "people who can read and write." The officials at the Block office told me, however, that a sum of Rs. 8,000 was allocated for such projects.

25. I later learned that Rs. 3,000 of the total cost is given as a loan that has to be paid back in 20 installments stretching across ten years.

26. To have explored the implications of the full chain of mediations for each ethnographic example would have taken the article far afield in too many different directions and made it lose its focus. This is a task that I propose to undertake in a full-length monograph. Here, I wanted to stress that we not forget that the detailed analysis of everyday life is overdetermined by transnational influences.

27. I would like to thank Joel Migdal for pointing this out to me.

28. The symbolic representation of the state is as yet largely unexplored territory, with a few notable exceptions. Bernard Cohn, for instance, has demonstrated how the Imperial Assemblage of 1877 enabled the British colonial state to represent its authority over India at the same time as it made "manifest and compelling the [colonial] sociology of India" (1987b:658). See also Nicholas Dirks's study of a small, independent state in precolonial and colonial South India (1987).

29. I have deliberately avoided use of the term "public sphere" in this article. As Habermas (1989[1962]) makes clear, the "public sphere" is the space where civil society emerges with the rise of bourgeois social formations. It is there that critical, rational debate among bourgeois subjects could take place about a variety of topics, including the state, and it is there that checks on state power emerge through the force of literate public opinion (Peters 1993, in press). Since the argument that follows raises doubts about the wholesale import of these categories to the particular context being analyzed, this notion of the "public sphere" is not particularly helpful. I should hasten to add that I am by no means implying that "the West" is unique in possessing a space for public debate and discussion. The notion of the public sphere, however, denotes a particular historical and cultural formation shaped by feudalism, kingly rule, the rise of capitalism, the importance of urban centers, and the dominant role of the church as an institution that is not replicated *in the same form* elsewhere in the world.

30. For those unfamiliar with the Indian context, it might be useful to point out that the reason why I am concentrating on newspapers is that whereas radio and television are strictly controlled by the government, the press is relatively autonomous and frequently critical of "the state." The only other important source of news in rural areas, transnational radio, remains limited in its coverage of India in that it remains focused on major stories and hence lacks the detail and specificity of newspaper accounts.

31. This is not to imply that anthropologists have not incorporated newspapers into their analysis in the past (see for example Benedict 1946). Herzfeld explains the marginal role of newspapers very clearly: "Journalism is treated as not authentically ethnographic, since it is both externally derived and rhetorically factual. . . . In consequence, the intrusion of media language into village discourse has largely been ignored" (1992b:94). Herzfeld makes a strong case for close scrutiny to newspapers even when the unit of analysis is "the village"; others such as Benedict Anderson (1983) and Achille Mbembe (1992) have stressed the theoretical importance of newspapers in the construction of the nation and for the analysis of "the state," respectively.

32. This analysis of newspapers looks at connections between local and transnational *discourses* of corruption but not at the links between transnational *capital* and local newspapers. For example, although none of the locally distributed newspapers (English-language or vernacular) are even partially owned by transnational corporations, many of them depend on multinational wire service bureaus for international news. A detailed study would also have to account for the complex relationship between domestic and international capital accumulation. Further, the connection between the ownership and content of newspapers is an incredibly difficult one to establish and is quite beyond the scope of this article and the competence of the author. I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising these stimulating questions.

33. Herzfeld has issued a warning that we would do well to heed: "We cannot usefully make any hard-and-fast distinctions between rural and urban, illiterate and learned (or at least journalistic), local and national. These terms—urbanity, literacy, the national interest, and their antonyms—appear *in* the villagers' discourse, and they are part *of* that discourse . . . the larger discourses about Greece's place in the world both feed and draw nourishment from the opinions expressed in the tiniest village" (1992b:117). "Attacking 'the state' and 'bureaucracy' (often further reified as 'the system') is a tactic of social life, not an analytical strategy. Failure to recognize this is to essentialize essentialism. Ethnographically, it would lead us to ignore the multiplicity of sins covered by the monolithic stereotypes of 'the bureaucracy' and 'the state' " (1992a:45).

34. Although literacy rates are relatively low throughout the region, the impact of newspapers goes far beyond the literate population as news reports are orally transmitted across a wide range of groups. Political news on state-run television, *Doordarshan*, by contrast, is met with a high degree of skepticism, because everyone concerned knows that it is the mouthpiece of the government.

35. *India Today* is published in a number of Indian languages and has a large audience in small towns and villages. Corruption also figures prominently in the vernacular press, and in what follows I will compare the coverage there with magazines such as *India Today*.

36. At prevailing exchange rates, Rs. 64 crore = $36 million. Therefore, 64 paise was equal to 3.6 cents, less than the cost of a cup of tea.

37. The program in question is the Integrated Rural Development Programme.

38. This fact should dispel the myth that the discourse of corruption is to be found only among the urban middle class of "Westernized" Indians.

39. To warm one's pockets is a metaphor for taking a bribe. I have translated all the titles from the Hindi original.

40. The sweet in question is a regionally famous one—*pedaas*, from Mathura.

41. It would perhaps be more accurate to talk of "subject-positions" rather than "subjects" here.

42. In this article my analysis is limited to Hindi newspapers that publish local news of the Mandi region.

43. An excellent study of the importance of rumor in the countryside is to be found in Amin 1984. A fuller analysis would draw on the role of radio and television (both state-controlled) in all of this.

44. It is in this sense of violation of norms that the term is often extended to moral life quite removed from "the state," to mean debasement, dishonesty, immorality, vice, impurity, decay, and contamination. The literature on corruption has been bedeviled by the effort to find a set of culturally universal, invariable norms that would help decide if certain actions are to be classified as "corrupt." This foundational enterprise soon degenerated into ethnocentrism and dogma, leading to a prolonged period of intellectual inactivity. Of course, not all the contributions to the corruption literature fell into this ethnocentric trap; some quite explicitly set out to undermine the assumptions of modernization theory. The only reason I have chosen not to spend too much space here discussing the corruption literature is that it has very little to say about the chief concerns of my article, namely, the ethnographic analysis of the everyday functioning of the state and the discursive construction of the state in public culture. The only exception is to be found in the series of studies by Wade (1982, 1984, 1985), which ethnographically describe corruption through observation and interviews with state officials. A representative sample of the different viewpoints in the corruption literature can be obtained from Clarke 1983; Heidenheimer 1970; Huntington 1968; Leff 1964; Leys 1965; Monteiro 1970; Scott 1969, 1972; and Tilman 1968. For a recent monograph, see Klitgaard 1988.

45. I am grateful to Lata Mani for stressing this point to me.

46. For example, a highly placed official who fails to help a close relative or fellow villager obtain a government position is often roundly criticized by people for not fulfilling his obligations to his kinsmen and village brothers. On the other hand, the same people often roundly condemn any official of another caste or village who has done precisely that as being "corrupt" and as guilty of encouraging "nepotism."

47. The modernism of the postcolonial nation-state is exemplified by the concept of citizenship enshrined in the Indian constitution, a notion clearly rooted in Enlightenment ideas about the individual. My use of the term "citizens" might seem to hark back to a notion of "civil society" that I argue against in the rest of the article. What I am attempting to stress here, however, is that in a postcolonial context the notion of citizenship does not arise out of the bourgeois public sphere but out of the discourses and practices of the modern nation-state. Citizenship is therefore a hybridized subject-position that has very different resonances in a postcolonial context than it does in places where it is inextricably blended with the emergence of "civil society."

48. The discourse of accountability opened up by the rhetoric of citizenship need not become politically significant. Whether it does or not has to do with the level of organization of different groups that are affected by it.

49. Interestingly enough, although the rhetoric of the Kisan Union predicates its opposition to the state in terms of the state's anti-farmer policies, most of its grassroots protests are organized around local instances of corruption. The behavior of corrupt officials then becomes further evidence of the state's exploitation of farmers. Except at the very lowest levels, all officials have jobs in which they are transferred frequently. Although the circle in which they can be transferred varies by rank, in a state as large as Uttar Pradesh, what Anderson (1983) has termed "bureaucratic pilgrimages" usually cover quite an extensive area. Officials cannot be posted to their "home" village, block, tehsil, or district (depending on their circle of responsibility).

50. If one were to analyze the discourse of corruption in a region where dominant landed groups and lower levels of the state were more overtly complicit (as, for example, in certain regions of Bihar), one would probably find that it attains a very different texture.

51. The Vidhan Sabha is the upper house of Parliament and the Lok Sabha the lower one.

52. At the time this interview took place, Rajiv Gandhi was the prime minister of India.

53. One lakh = 100,000. At the time of the interview, Rs. 1 lakh were approximately equal to $6,000.

54. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this important question.

55. Other peasants who believe that lower, but not upper, levels of government are corrupt may not hold that belief for the same reasons as Ram Singh.

56. All government positions have reservations or quotas for the scheduled castes—a certain percentage of jobs at any given rank are kept aside for people from the lowest castes.

57. Sometimes the word *shaasan,* which is closer to "administration," is also employed.

58. I am by no means implying that the viewing of television explains *why* Ram Singh holds this opinion of the corrupt middle levels of the state. He may very well believe in it for other reasons as well. Television, however, seems to have influenced his views on this matter: "we get a little more worldly."

59. His reference to "illiteracy" must not be taken literally.

60. This point has been emphasized by Herzfeld in his discussion of the Greek village of Glendi and the provincial town of Rethemnos: "There has never been any serious doubt about the importance of the media in connecting villagers with larger national and international events. Like the folklore of earlier times, the media spawn an extraordinarily homogenous as well as pervasive set of political clichés. Much less well-explored, however is *how* this discourse is manipulated" (1992b:99; emphasis in original). Talk of manipulation sometimes seems to make it appear as if there is a "deep" intention working toward particular goals; I prefer to think of employability, the diverse ways in which such discourse can be used in different circumstances.

61. It is not surprising that Ram Singh, like other people, neither occupies a space of pure oppositionality to dominant discourses and practices nor is simply duped by them. Maddox (1990) suggests that scholars may have their own reasons for looking so hard for resistance. Forms of unambiguous resistance are rare

indeed, as Foucault recognized (1980:109–145), and the simultaneity of co-optation and resistance baffles the familiar antinomies of analytical thought (Abu-Lughod 1990; Mankekar 1993). Indeed, the effort to show resistance even in overt gestures of deference requires the positing of hyperstrategic rational actors, an analytical strategy that is of dubious value.

62. It might be objected that this kind of statement involves an analytical circularity: constructions of the state are contextual and situated; yet any attempt to define context and situation involves the use of discourses that may themselves have been shaped by constructions of the state, among other things. Following Foucault and especially Haraway (1988), I want to argue that the search to escape the mutual determination of larger sociopolitical contexts and discursive positions is untenable. The analyst, too, is part of this discursive formation and cannot hope to arrive at a description of "situatedness" that stands above, beyond, or apart from the context being analyzed. This is precisely what "scientific" discourses seek to achieve—a universally verifiable description that is independent of observer and context. Haraway brilliantly undermines the claims of objectivity embodied in these discourses by showing that the "the view from nowhere," or what she calls the "god-trick," masks a will-to-power that constitutes its own political project. She argues that all claims to objectivity are partial perspectives, context-dependent, and discursively embedded visions that are not for that reason unimportant or unredeemable. In other words, the recognition that the truths of scientific discourse are themselves located within specific webs of power-laden interconnections does not signal a slide toward "anything goes" randomness where all positions are subjectively determined and hence irrefutable (see also Bernstein 1985). My effort to describe Ram Singh's position according to class, caste, gender, and age hierarchies flows out of a social scientific discourse and a sense of political engagement as a postcolonial subject in which inequality, poverty, and power are the central concerns. I doubt if an upper-caste villager would describe Ram Singh in this way; neither in all likelihood would a government official; nor would an official of the World Bank. While being a particular description, it is, I would argue, anything but an arbitrary one. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for forcing me to clarify this point.

63. Frustrated with the reification of the state and convinced that it was just a source of mystification, Radcliffe-Brown (1940:xxiii) argued that the state be eliminated from social analysis! One of the most thoughtful discussions on this topic is to be found in Abrams 1988.

64. Richard Fox's fine study of the colonial state in Punjab demonstrates the mutual construction of Sikh identities and "the state." He stresses that "the state" is "not a 'thing' but a 'happening' " (1985:156) and that it is riven by internal contradictions, incomplete consciousness of interests, incorrect implementation of projects aimed at furthering its interests, and conflict between individual officials and the organization (1985:157).

65. Anderson points to the similarity of nation-states by emphasizing the "modularity" of "the last wave" of nationalism (1983:104–128), and Chatterjee (1986) stresses the "derivative" character of Third World nationalisms.

66. I am not defending the naive possibility of "indigenous" theory, for it is not clear to me what such a concept could possibly mean in the era of postcolonialism and late capitalism. Instead, I am arguing that the use of concepts that originate in "the West" to understand the specificity of the Indian context enables one to develop a critique of the analytical apparatus itself (Chakrabarty 1991). Jim Ferguson (personal communication, July 8, 1992) reminds me that even in the United States, the notion of "civil society" has very little purchase outside academic circles.

67. Amartya Sen's study of famines (1982) employs a theory of entitlements to explain who suffers in a famine and why. See also Appadurai 1984.

68. It should be clear that I am not suggesting that it is only here that possibilities for intervention exist.

69. The source is A Tract on Monetary Reform (Keynes 1971[1923]).

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A Qualitative Study on How Perceptions of Environmental Changes are Linked to Migration in Morocco, Senegal, and DR Congo

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Abstract

Environmental migration is a growing concern of academics and policymakers, who foresee a rise in the number of such migrants. However, most prevailing academic and policy discourses ignore the variety of perceptions of environmental changes among people living in highly affected areas across the world. We examine the perceptions of environmental changes and how these are seen to be relevant to migration in Senegal, DR Congo, and Morocco. In total, we conducted 410 interviews with people living in two regions in each of these countries. Results indicate differences in the perception of environmental changes across regions, gender, education, and livelihoods. The economic activities of individuals determine exposure and sensitivity to environmental changes, while educational levels increase familiarity with prevailing environmental discourses and policies. Despite country-specific and regional differences across research sites, few people perceived environmental factors as directly related to their own or family members' migration projects.

Keywords Environmental change · Migration · Perceptions · Democratic Republic of Congo · Senegal · Morocco

Introduction

Awareness of environmental migration has exponentially increased over the last two decades, placing it high on the agenda of both policymakers and academics (McLeman & Gemenne, 2018). As a result, theories on how migration and environmental changes are related have developed rapidly (Nielsen & D'haen, 2014). While migrants declare financial constraints and professional goals as the most common reasons for migration, empirical studies show that environmental

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changes and limitations play a role in migration processes (de Longueville *et al*., 2020), notably in Africa, where environmental changes are severely affecting livelihoods and livelihood strategies, including migration. Migration can thus function as an adaptation strategy (Afifi *et al*., 2016). Since the end of the 2000s, global consortia of academics commissioned by governments and international organizations have been eager to develop models to connect migration and environmental changes on the one hand, and migration and adaptation to climate change on the other (Foresight, 2011). Nevertheless, these consortia frequently overlook the fact that people do not link their own migration aspirations and trajectories with ongoing environmental changes (de Longueville *et al*., 2020; Few *et al*., 2017; Howe *et al*., 2014, authors). Social, political, and economic changes interact with environmental changes and therefore mask their importance. This relationship is even more difficult to perceive in regions confronted with slow-onset environmental changes, such as drought, that coincide with societal changes (De Longueville *et al*., 2020; McLeman & Gemenne, 2018; Van Praag & Timmerman, 2019), again notably in Africa, one of the continents most affected by climate change, where data availability and reliability are poorest, technological change is slowest, and domestic economies largely rely on climate-sensitive livelihood activities (WMO, 2020). In this

study, we use a qualitative approach to further our understanding of how inhabitants living in two regions in three countries—Morocco, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—perceive and explain environmental changes and how they connect these changes to migration. Although the perceptions of people involved may also be biased and do not necessarily match the observed data (De Longueville *et al.*, 2020; Rebetez, 1996), they matter when deciding on adaptation strategies (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014).

## The Relationship Between Perceived Environmental Changes and Migration

Considerations of how perceived environmental changes relate to migration aspirations and trajectories are often overlooked in policies and academic research (de Longueville *et al.*, 2020). Ongoing research and policy debates too frequently connect environmental changes to actual migration without questioning (1) whether the people involved perceive and interpret these environmental changes and (2) whether these perceived changes are linked to migration aspirations and trajectories. Rather, migration and environmental changes are often associated in a causal way without including the views of the actors involved. More particularly, in policy and scientific documents migration is often depicted as a last resort strategy whereby people respond to a specific short- or long-term event (e.g., Perruchoud & Redpath-Cross, 2011). This is for instance visible in references to 'climate refugees' (Hartmann, 2010). The automatically assumed relationship between environmental changes and migration is problematic, as views on environmental changes vary considerably depending on contextual and individual factors (Wodon *et al.*, 2014; Jenkins *et al.*, 2018; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021, 2021a; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021b). Furthermore, these policy discourses too frequently assume that migration is only seen to address environmental changes in the end stage of the response to environmental degradation or as a measure of last resort, ignoring all other kinds of adaptation strategies. These discourses also mainly focus on actual migration outcomes—especially transnational migration—and neglect (im)mobilities and migration aspirations (Van Praag, 2021b; Zickgraf, 2019). Instead, migration as a response to environmental changes could be seen as part of a wider process of transformation in which households and migrants, in particular, try to ensure a secure livelihood (Jónsson, 2010) and should be studied together with ongoing societal changes.

Here we do not focus solely on groups that have already migrated (transnationally) but also examine groups still living in regions heavily affected by increased environmental changes in recent decades through exploration of the linkages people make between migration and environmental changes. This helps to understand what other adaptation strategies they have considered, whether they are seen as viable together with migration, and whether individuals identify and categorize themselves as (potential) 'environmental migrants.' These issues are overlooked in many policy documents, yet enhance understanding of how environmental factors contribute to individual and household migration decision-making or the extent to which local and diaspora communities help to address environmental stressors and changes in their home environment or region of origin (Authors). This is relevant since the groups that may be struggling most to secure their livelihoods are not necessarily those that are able to migrate. Yet, (im)mobilities are highly diverse and uneven in terms of people's abilities and aspirations to move, "when, how, and under what circumstances" this takes place (Sheller, 2018: 51), and how it is experienced. These asymmetries reflect and reinforce factors such as unequal resources in individuals' networks and within larger communities, as well as different levels of external control, shaping migration opportunities and capacities (Rogaly, 2015).

By examining people's perceptions of environmental changes, we aim to better understand how environmental changes inspire people to migrate and how they relate these migration aspirations and trajectories to such changes. Previous research indicates that it is difficult to observe and capture such environmental changes (Nielsen & D'haen, 2014; Wodon *et al.*, 2014). Environmental – especially climatic – changes often span a period of approximately 30 years of weather characteristics such as wind, temperature, humidity, rainfall, and sunshine (IPCC, 2014). Without systematically tracking these parameters, it is very difficult for individuals – especially younger generations – to assess these climate (or broader environmental) changes without familiarity with climate change discourses or noting gradual differences over time or generations (Nielsen & D'haen, 2014). People mostly refer to temperature and rainfall when discussing their natural environment (Bele *et al.*, 2014). However, some changes are more easily noticed (e.g., precipitation patterns or extreme events) than others (e.g., temperature changes) (De Longueville *et al.*, 2020; Few *et al.*, 2017; Howe *et al.*, 2014). People are more aware of these environmental changes when they affect livelihood activities, such as agriculture, water availability, or vegetation changes (e.g., Bele *et al.*, 2014; Howe *et al.*, 2014; Wodon *et al.*, 2014; De Longueville *et al.*, 2020; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021a; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021b; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021). Perceptions of environmental changes vary depending on how people learn about these changes (Weber, 2010), their livelihoods (Bollig & Schulte, 1999; Mbow *et al.*, 2008; Mertz *et al.*, 2010), their understanding of traditional knowledge and local discourses (Berkes, 2009;

Fig. 1 Field work was undertaken in three different countries located on the map: Morocco, Senegal and Democratic Republic of Congo
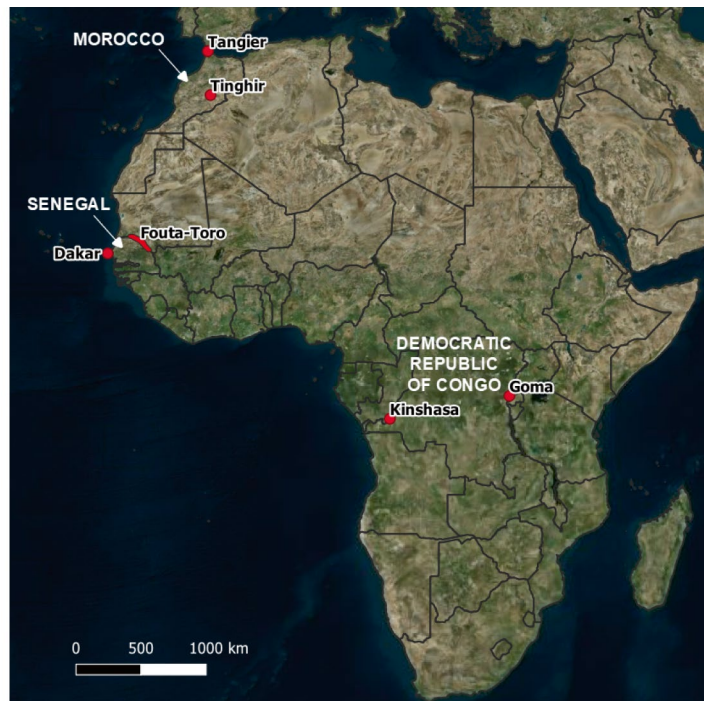
In each of these countries, study areas correspond to the red patches locating 5 cities (Tangier, Tinghir, Dakar, Kinshasa and Goma) and a rural area (Fouta Toro).

Bollig & Schulte, 1999), individual and demographic variables (e.g., household size and migration of labor force: Mertz *et al.*, 2010) and media discourses (Marin & Berkes, 2013).

Moreover, these perceptions vary across research settings, for various reasons. Previous research indicates that country-specific factors matter due to differences in the overall economy (Afifi, 2011), demographic characteristics (Plane, 1993), current political stability and ongoing conflicts (Black *et al.*, 2011), previously developed policies dealing with environmental changes (e.g., Plan Maroc Vert in Morocco: Balaghi, 2014), and the emphasis on climate change in prevailing discourses (e.g., climate change conferences, etc.) (Marin & Berkes, 2013; Mertz *et al.*, 2009). Regional factors also matter, due to rural–urban differences (e.g., Howe *et al.*, 2014), contrasted vulnerability and exposure to environmental changes (e.g., mountain areas, coastal proximity, etc.: De Longueville *et al.*, 2020; Howe *et al.*, 2014), and cultures of migration and migrant networks (Van Praag *et al.*, 2021, 2021a; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021b). Cultural and religious factors also play a role in perceiving, explaining, and coping with environmental changes, as there are shared cultural notions of risk and vulnerability (Vedwan, 2006; Leclerc *et al.*, 2013; Mertz *et al.*, 2010; Jenkins *et al.*, 2018). Most previous studies focus on one country or region (Nielsen & D'haen, 2014), e.g., West Africa (Mertz *et al.*, 2010, 2012; Afifi, 2011; De Longueville *et al.*, 2020), the MENA region (Wodon *et al.*, 2014; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021, 2021a; Van Praag *et al.*, 2021b; Van Praag, 2021a, 2021b),

DR Congo (Bele *et al.*, 2014; Few *et al.*, 2017), India (Howe *et al.*, 2014), or Eastern Africa (Leclerc *et al.*, 2013).

Methods and Materials

This study is part of a research project entitled "Making Migration Work for Adaptation to Environmental Changes. A Belgian Appraisal" (MIGRADAPT) that examines the role of the environment as a driver for migration from Morocco, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) to Belgium, connecting this to how migrants in Belgium support the adaptation and resilience of their communities of origin (Fig. 1).

Countries were selected based on two factors: (1) large migrant populations living in Belgium; (2) impacted by environmental/climate changes. Within each country, two regions with varying degrees of urbanization and migration patterns were selected (Table 1).

In each research setting, we attempted to recruit a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, occupation/livelihood, social status, and personal migration history. We selected participants with and without migrant networks (in- and outside the country) and with and without personal migratory experiences, to fit the main research question of the MIGRADAPT project. To realize this purposive sample variation, some recruitment strategies were adjusted over the course of the fieldwork. Depending on the local context and support, we used distinct recruitment strategies in each research

Table 1 Selected regions and research strategy

Countries	Morocco		Senega[l]		DR Congo	
Region	Tangier	Tinghir	Migrants of the Mid-valley of the Senegal river living in Dakar Metropolitan area	Mid-valley of the Senegal river (incl. 12 villages)	Kinshasa	Goma
City type	Industrialised port city, large number of internal migrants	City in mountain area, oases valley	Capital of Senegal, low-lying vulnerable coastal city	Halpulaaren (Fulani) agro-pastoralist villages	Capital city of DR Congo	Regional trading hub, intense traffic, highly insecure area
Migration context	Large number of internal migrants networks in Europe since WWII	Internal migrants from surrounding saller villages and large emigration to in Europe since WWII	Large number of internal migrants networks in Europe since WWII	Internal rural-urban migration and international migration towards Europe	International migrants left Kinshasa mainly for economic reasons	International migrants left Goma mainly for security reasons
Environmental changes	Mediterranean regime, precipitation and temperature changes	High impact of precipitation and temperature changes. Drought, desertification, water scarcity, more extreme weather events	Coastal erosion, flooding in low-lying areas, various types of pollution (air, water, plastics, …)	High impact of precipitation and temperature changes. Drought, desertification, water scarcity, more extreme weather events	Erosion at the origin of large gullies, and flooding	Several environmental issues, from forest overexploitation to volcanic eruption
Inhabitants (year of census)	947952 (RGPH, 2014)	42044 (RGPH, 2014)	2452656 (ANSD, 2014; 2020)	12 villages between 1000 and 7000 inhabitants	13743300 (UNdata, 2020)	974800 (INS-Nord-Kivu, 2017)

setting. In Morocco, participants were selected 1) through their connections to immigrants living in Europe, to include people with transnational migrant networks, and 2) during the fieldwork, through a wide variety of channels, such as social media posts, local conferences, local NGOs, tourist guides, etc. During the study, we made additional efforts to recruit elderly female participants. For Senegal, similar purposive, and snowball sampling methods were used. The key personalities in the villages, especially the hosting village chiefs, located people and representatives from various social groups (socio-professional statutory groups, females, young people) for the interviews and 38 focus group discussions. For DR Congo, half of the interviews conducted in Kinshasa were organized with the help of Congolese immigrants met in Belgium who facilitated contact with a close family member still living in Kinshasa. The rest of the interviewees were selected using a snowball sampling method. In Goma, all interviews were based on the snowball sampling method.

This resulted in some differences in selection criteria and sampling across countries and regions. While in DR Congo we interviewed mainly people living in urban areas, in Senegal and Morocco we also interviewed people living in rural areas. In Senegal, more interviews were conducted over a longer time span with the support of research assistants for interviews and transcripts to allow the researcher to elaborate on other topics as well (not discussed in this paper) (Table 2).

All fieldwork was conducted as part of the MIGRADAPT project; however, different researchers (and research assistants) conducted the fieldwork in each country. Research was conducted in April–May 2018 in Morocco, November 2019 – April 2020 in Senegal, and in Kinshasa (March–May 2019) and Goma (October-December 2019) in DRC.

Taking a qualitative approach, in which we contrast the findings of three countries and six research settings, we aim to highlight constants across all dimensions and to verify similarities and variations across different socio-environmental contexts. We based ourselves on ethnographic observations to conduct semi-structured interviews. All interviews followed a similar topic guide, adjusted to the local context, first asking about socioeconomic background characteristics (e.g., gender, age, profession, place of residence, birthplace), followed by open introductory questions on factors affecting living conditions and livelihoods. Afterwards, more in-depth questions were asked about the migration history of the region and participants' personal migration experiences and aspirations. Subsequently, more tailored questions were asked about specific environmental changes and the impacts on the interviewees' livelihoods. Finally, questions were asked about familial and communal (local and transnational) solidarity, with a particular focus on migration and environmental changes. By starting from a common set of interview questions, we also facilitated systematic and comparative thematic analyses. Although no shared Nvivo file was made (also to safeguard the anonymity of the participants), the codes and comparisons correspond and are in line with the shared interview guidelines. For this paper, we focus only on the commonalities and similar topics addressed during the fieldwork. We analyzed our data per country sample using thematic analyses (Boyatzis, 1998), comparing and framing the analyses within broader transnational migrant networks, migration histories, and colonial past, as well as local and global initiatives to adapt and mitigate environmental changes within these respective countries. Afterwards, we triangulated all data analyses across regions and countries, and considered individual-level characteristics, such as gender, profession, and age. After initial discussions on the significant emerging issues, thematic analyses on the selected topics were conducted and summarized. After discussing these topics and reflecting more critically on the differences and similarities, more in-depth analyses were conducted to triangulate the data and give a better understanding of the data. For the country-specific analyses, data analysis facilitating software Nvivo was used to structure, code, and analyze the data. In all settings, participants were given information about the MIGRADAPT project, were asked for informed consent to participate, and were informed that they would be able to withdraw from the project at all times, and that their names and background information would be made unidentifiable. All interviews were transcribed and translated from the respective language (mainly French) to English.

Table 2 Participants interviewed per country and region

Countries	Morocco		Senega l		DR Congo	
Region	Tangier	Tinghir	Dakar	Mid-valley region	Kinshasa	Goma
Total interviewed	18	30	94	238	15	15
Female/male	7/11	13/17	41/53	90/148	5/10	6/10
Age variation in years	24-70	20-64	12-78	12-85	27-65	19-67
Fieldwork difficulties	Gender and languages issues, fear for political repercussions		Gender issues		Suspicion of the persons to interview resulting sometimes in very concise answers	

Results

Perceived Environmental Changes in Changing and Fragile Socio-Political Contexts

Across research sites, we found considerable variation in perceptions of environmental changes; these variations seemed to depend on both individual factors, including profession and socioeconomic status, age, and gender, and contextual factors, such as the reliance on agricultural activities in the region, local political activities, and policies. Furthermore, the specific migration history and patterns (e.g., rural–urban migration patterns or transnational migration) of each region mattered in that migrant networks and policies made people aware of changes in their natural environment, potential adaptation strategies, and alternative ways to manage the adverse impacts of environmental changes.

Morocco

In Morocco, where two entirely different research settings (urban and rural) were selected, large differences were noted between Tangier and Tinghir concerning people's perceptions of environmental changes related mainly to participants' daily economic activities and their connection with their surrounding environment (also Nguyen & Wodon, 2014). Due to the mountainous area, subsistence economy, and importance of the oasis valley, people in Tinghir are more aware of environmental changes than those in Tangier. Conversely, in Tangier, climate was often interpreted in terms of sunny weather and living in an overall warmer climate (compared to many European countries). Mainly people with relatives outside Tangier or who themselves migrated to Tangier were aware of deteriorating environmental changes in the countryside and their impact, particularly on water scarcity, drought, desertification, and all associated adaptation strategies (e.g., wells, dams, change of crops, migration, etc.). For example, a 31-year-old male participant living in Tangier, with family from Talafilet, stated that people are used to and adapt to drought. Those who want to migrate do so to "improve their standards of living." By contrast, in Tinghir more people were aware of the deteriorating natural environment making it unattractive for young people to invest in agricultural activities or stay in this region due to the lack of attractive employment opportunities. Lack of investment also led to continued use of traditional methods in agriculture, badly maintained water canals and wells, deserted land plots, and so on. Water management took a central role in informants' accounts, together with changing standards of living, new technologies, and the attraction of larger cities (in terms of health care services, educational and employment opportunities):

"The last 15 years, the palm tree oasis has changed due to the drought. Normally, in March and April, there used to be a lot of snow on the mountain ridges, but this year, there was nothing. Normally, this is the start of a dry period and drought, as every five years, there is a change in climate and the drought starts. Even the palm grove in Tinghir changes. There are many changes due to water. There is no water here, not like before. It's not like 40 years ago, not like 30 years ago, not like 20 years ago, even the last 10 years, it has changed. This year there wasn't any snow, or at least not like other years." (64-year-old male, Tinghir)

The Moroccan data suggest a mismatch between those familiar with discourses on climate change and its dynamics and those who have seen changes over the last decades in their immediate environment. Perceptions of environmental changes differed across educational levels, professional experiences, and access to migrant networks. People with a relatively higher educational level and close migrant networks in Europe seem to know more about specific scientific climate change discourses, connecting CO_2 emissions and pollution to global warming. They interpreted climate changes, such as global warming, more in generic terms, such as the warming of the Arctic and endangered polar bears. As international migrant networks send social and financial remittances, people are not only able to invest in their education but improve their understanding of climate change discourses. This group mainly referred to economic, political, and social changes as reasons why people tend to leave their agricultural activities. Nonetheless, they failed to apply their knowledge on climate change discourses to their immediate natural environment. Most of this group did not refer to increasing drought and desertification in their surroundings and how it has turned agriculture into a lost investment. The group that was not familiar with climate change discourses often had tacit knowledge of environmental changes through personal experiences and networks. They saw changes that affected agricultural activities that aligned with general changing standards of living, and reduced interest to invest in agriculture. Most informants with relatives living in rural areas or who themselves worked in agriculture could specify in more detail changes over the last decades. Many referred to reduced or unexpected rainfall or snowfall, water shortages, and increasing drought. A 62-year-old male living in Tinghir reported: "We used to have rain and there was water. But now, it's quite the opposite, especially in the regions of Tinghir, Ouarzazate, Errachidia, Zagoria." His male friend added that "There is no rain!" This group provided alternative explanations for these gradual changes, referring to the collapse of harmony between mankind and nature, as well as to God and their religious beliefs. We can

state that professional experiences, especially of people in agriculture or nature conservation, and location (Tinghir vs Tangier) are crucial in linking climate change discourses to changing local natural environment.

Senegal

Most participants in the Senegalese fieldwork lived in the Mid-valley in Northern Senegal, where climatic conditions have worsened over the last 50 years (Faye *et al.*, 2019; Lietaer *et al.*, 2020). A rural exodus has taken place, mainly because of policy reforms combined with major droughts in the 1970s and 1980s (Dia, 2020). Hence, the villagers interviewed, both farmers and non-farmers (practicing agriculture as a secondary activity), seemed to be very concerned not only about the changing climate but also about broader (rapid- and slow-onset) environmental changes impacting their living conditions. Additionally, participants mentioned that, in line with Grolle (2015), the unfavorable timing of rainfall during agricultural seasons is perceived as more serious than the drought itself. Sandstorms and heat waves are also considered to be strongly impacting living conditions of most villagers, especially of vulnerable people (i.e., the sick, children, the elderly) who do not have a pied-à-terre in Dakar "to take refuge there" as some elderly people in the village noted. Similar to the findings in Morocco, these analyses indicate the importance of migrant networks. They also show the need for a differentiated approach towards the impact of environmental changes, considering individual vulnerabilities in specific socioeconomic and political conditions.

Participants perceived the artificial flooding caused by unannounced releases of water from the Manantali hydroelectric dam and rainfall variability as the most important factors causing socioeconomic damage. Both were considered unpredictable as no prior information was provided by any public or private service. However, most villagers blamed the government for not managing and communicating these hazards better (Kamara, 2013). The representative of the farmers of the Commune of Ouro Sidi places these developments in their historical context:

> "Since the construction of the dams [of Manantali upstream and Diama, respectively in 1988 and 1986] near the river mouth, farmers who do not have access to irrigated perimeters suffer, especially since they can no longer rely on rainfed cultivation every year. Fishing has also become bad, because the river water is no longer good as it used to be, either for fish reproduction, or for feeding the land [through river alluvium, which acts as a natural fertilizer during floods], or for allowing us to drink for free, as before." (52-year-old male, Matam region).

Droughts partially influence ecosystems, but the links with anthropogenic pressures were not clearly perceived. Many believed extreme climate events and their impacts to be caused by the divine will ('act of God') and did not necessarily link them to climate change discourses. Nonetheless, the direct effects of climate change on living conditions are of great concern: soil degradation, rainfall variability, and droughts (Bleibaum, 2010). Most participants attribute the lack of work and insufficient agricultural yields to insufficient financial and technical means and capacity. In a second narrative-line they refer to various environmental hazards (including birds, insects, plant diseases, etc.), climate events, and the construction of the dams. In addition, fieldwork in Dakar shows that even when rainfall is perceived to have become heavier, many floods are believed to be caused by bad sewer and dredging infrastructure. Many saw it as a political responsibility – currently lacking – to adapt neighborhoods to better absorb rainfall to avoid floods in Dakar's low-lying areas.

DR Congo

Recent decades in DR Congo have seen considerable migration from rural to urban areas; the main drivers for migration have been socioeconomic circumstances, conflicts, and bad governance (Gemenne *et al.*, 2013; IOM, 2017). These movements have resulted in increased degradation of natural resources (forests, crop lands). Combined with poorly managed urbanization, overcrowding, and informal settlements, more people have been exposed to risks and the potential negative effects of environmental changes (Makanzu *et al.*, 2015; Michellier *et al.*, 2020). In both study cities, people recognize that the environment has changed considerably. Although the interviewees emphasize the rural areas, where they identify deforestation, shrinking rivers, erosion, and seasonal rainfall changes, those living in Kinshasa also indicate that the situation of the capital city is worrying. This is striking, as it shows that environmental changes are also perceived in an urban context and seen as independent from agricultural activities (in contrast to Morocco and Senegal). People experience different types of environmental changes and impacts (gullies, floods, landslides), strongly affect their perceptions of environmental changes. The more abrupt/rapid and intrusive nature of environmental changes in Kinshasa seems to make these changes more visible to a wider audience. People in Kinshasa experience these environmental effects as a real hardship and describe their neighborhood and the climate as having undergone major changes, creating a "hostile environment."

> "There are changes that poison our peace of mind at every moment: when it is not unbearably hot, there are

violent winds that raise swirls of dust and make the air unbreathable, followed by torrential rains that hits the ground and roofs." (65-year-old female, Kinshasa)

Participants describe such threats as causing widespread damage, affecting many people. They identify environmental changes as a reality they are confronted with daily. Large gullies affect many districts of the city. Heavy rainfall is expected to increase in the following decades combined with ongoing urban sprawl, which worsens the current situation (Makanzu *et al*., 2015). Several participants indicated that "everybody is affected by environmental changes, in Congo and everywhere." Although the situation is particularly difficult in Kinshasa, their feeling is that their experience is reflects that of people in other parts of the world.

"In the Congo, as in many other countries, there are big changes; they concern temperature, rain, and winds, each of these completely natural phenomena is exaggerated and has disastrous consequences. This destabilizes the ordinary activities of many people, especially those who work the land." (46-year-old male, Kinshasa)

Faced with such phenomena, the prevailing feeling of many participants are helplessness and lack of knowledge. Information availability is crucial for people to feel a sense of control over the situation, as well as development of adaptation strategies, and attitudes towards local politics, but information regarding environmental issues is not easily accessible or widespread in DR Congo. People feel unprepared to face an increasingly frequent events such as floods, drought, storms, stating: "Here we are unarmed when it comes to dealing with it." (59-year-old male, Kinshasa). Among those most affected, some consider irresponsible behavior of the population helps to amplify the dramatic consequences of environmental changes. Many blame the authorities for not fulfilling their responsibilities.

"Don't talk to me about our politicians, they have always sacrificed their people and I am not sure that it is today that this is going to stop. Neither migration (apart from sending their families to live in the West), nor climate change is of interest to them, their only concern has always been to line their pockets." (32-year-old male, Kinshasa)

People living in Goma are in a different context, and therefore do not perceive environmental changes as strongly as in Kinshasa, although they are aware of environmental changes affecting several parts of the country. However, most declare that such phenomena do not affect Goma and the surrounding region. For example, a 21-year-old female in Goma said that: "We hear about environmental changes especially in Kasai and Katanga. Rivers are said to be drying

up. Thank God my community is spared in this respect." A 52-year-old male stated: "I often hear about catastrophic climate change in other provinces of Congo. Here at home, they are minor: sometimes the rain is delayed, but the farmers are adapting quickly." Goma inhabitants think that their community is simply not affected by environmental changes causing floods or droughts, and only farmers are identified as potentially having difficulties. Yet, despite their limited technical and financial capacities (IOM, 2017), it is thought they can adapt quickly. Comparing the findings from Senegal and Morocco with those in DR Congo, one striking similarity is that when people's livelihoods are threatened or impacted by environmental changes, they are more likely to perceive them, particularly when they are not well-managed by the local authorities.

Linking Environmental Changes to Migration

Relating environmental changes to migration requires a better understanding of other adaptation strategies developed to deal with such changes. The focus on migration needs to be interpreted within the local context, depending on whether people perceive environmental changes and the factors behind such changes. As we show, perception of environmental changes depends on individual professions and networks, familiarity with environmental changes and climate change discourses, the nature of the experienced environmental changes (slow-onset or abrupt), and the rural/urban as well as socio-political and socioeconomic local contexts. Such perceptions are a starting point for the development and implementation of adaptation strategies, with migration as an alternative if these strategies are not attractive or possible (McLeman & Gemenne, 2018).

Morocco

The mismatch between those familiar with the discourses on climate change and its dynamics and those who have seen changes over the last decades in their immediate environment also hampered the development of adaptation strategies to mitigate these changes over the long run, or migration projects. In some cases, people are generally more aware of the impact of climate change due to projects addressing its consequences. For instance, one participant (45-year-old female, Tinghir) refers to drought, but immediately connects it to the development of a project aimed at mitigating the effects of drought:

"There is a lot of drought; we are currently working on a small-scale project with volunteers, because in the region of Anif – a region with a lot of water scarcity – the rain doesn't fall there and there are many people

suffering from drought. They don't have water, there are some people who want to make it rain there."

Knowledge of climate change discourses as well as explanations given of these changes mattered considerably to the development of adaptation strategies, including migration. These strategies are not always consciously developed, as changes occurred slowly over the past decades that make working in agriculture, for instance, not really a viable option for younger generations. They therefore do not really reflect ways to adapt or cope with such changes. Groups with vulnerable livelihoods exposed to natural environmental changes tend to explain these changes according to their religious beliefs. Consequently, acceptance is often mentioned as a strategy to deal with such changes, as people respond to the outcomes of environmental changes, but do not anticipate or seek to prevent future changes, for instance, building wells or seeking alternative income sources. People in Tangier, however, refer to governmental and scientific discourses but were no longer exposed to environmental changes.

Migration was frequently mentioned as a solution to the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas and to find better living conditions. Young people, especially, do not see agricultural activities as an option, due to the deteriorating natural environment, the lack of investment in modern infrastructure and techniques and the fragmentation of agricultural land. All these factors result in low revenues from agriculture.

Senegal

Participants perceived the need for additional means and investment to address environmental hazards and enable commercially viable farming, since agricultural production systems characterized by flood recession cultivation (beans, sweet potatoes, millet, and maize) have been disrupted. Additionally, the "lack of good politics and policies," including "barriers to accessing finance" is seen as a major reason for insufficient rural income. This affects more than agriculture since most households have adopted livelihood diversification strategies. Nonetheless, when addressing impacts of environmental changes, other factors must be considered. First, people distrust public investment incentives and state agencies providing support to farmers. The concerns surrounding environmental issues are heavily intertwined with attitudes to the building of dams and other policy initiatives. As argued by a village chief in the Mid-valley: "You can't see a sign of the government except for a few minor things" (50-year-old male). These political frustrations are heightened by private investments putting more pressure on key resources such as land along the river. Second, changing political structures – especially regarding land and water management – are increasingly impacting

awareness of environmental issues. More specifically, ongoing decentralization processes have imposed administrative boundaries that do not match traditional village boundaries and historical socio-political links between villages. This results in conflicts and frustration, as people belonging to a village have their land belonging to another administrative unit. Such conflicts increase the need for coherent land policy practices and support from elsewhere, notably from and through diverse types of diaspora remittances. And apart from these political shifts, changing living standards in society and family structures hamper the development of adaptation strategies. For instance, an important trend that clearly impacts how people deal with environmental changes is the shift from a non-cash to money-based system (Dia, 2020). Many agro-pastoral households have members who moved to Dakar or to Europe, and so lack labor to guard cattle and raise crops. As a resilient solution, they pay in cash or in kind for the services of extended family members or kin whom they trust.

Overall, these factors have increased the attractiveness of internal and transnational migration, perceived as a powerful resource providing different revenues and (political) networks. Indeed, many villagers believe that it is important to be able to rely on (return) migrants with strong political connections, to attract public resources to improve livelihood conditions (e.g., hydro-agricultural facilities, such as dykes and irrigation systems; agricultural machines). Since the severe and subsequent droughts of the 1970s, international migration has become one way to adopt other coping and adaptation strategies (Tacoli, 2011; Dia, 2020):

> "The short rainy season limits our working hours [in the Mid-valley]. After the 'hivernage' [rainy season], we have nothing else to do so we have to come to Dakar to work. We ask our migrants in Europe to invest in water boreholes and irrigation means to cultivate in the dry season as well. But there are not enough of them left yet and they don't have enough means to help us in agriculture in the village." (28-year-old male, internal migrant from the Mid-valley Commune of Méry, interviewed in Dakar).

Internal and/or international migration of at least one family member, who will then contribute to the family's livelihood by sending remittances (financial, material, and immaterial), was generally perceived as necessary by most participants from the Mid-Valley (Lietaer et al., 2020). These migrant networks have sent material and non-material remittances to most of these villages; this has resulted in greater independence from vulnerable local agro-ecological conditions (see Doevenspeck et al., 2011), triggering more international migration due to environmental hazards. Besides the constraints on their livelihoods, there are also strong social and cultural reasons behind the migration of Senegalese youth. Amongst the Haalpulaar popular culture, migration stems more from

the culturally embedded idea that it is normal to leave the community of origin. [1] The migrant's project is usually also a community project (Tandian, 2018). Most participants considered migrants' contributions—via collective remittances through their hometown organizations – as crucial for their community's resilience. Likewise, individual financial, material (home or water pump solar panels, smartphones, etc.), and immaterial remittances (ideas, skills, 'political' contacts, etc.) are also perceived as enhancing household living conditions in an adverse socio-environmental context.

Importantly in the suburbs of Dakar internal migrants also face new adverse environmental effects as they settled in flood-prone areas during the 1970s droughts, are now confronted with recurrent floods, water, and air pollution, and thus increased expenses. Our participants often relied on international migrant networks to cover some of these expenses. Young people interviewed confirmed that this also triggers aspirations to move abroad to "avoid being a burden," and "become capable of improving their family's living conditions" (also Van der Land, 2018). Fatoumata, a 22-year-old student, who lives with her aunt in a flooded neighborhood of Pikine, Dakar, states:

> "Almost the whole neighborhood is flooded every year because there is no sanitation system, and we experience these problems in our homes every year. The administrative authorities don't do anything, it's the neighborhood volunteers who do everything. Fortunately, when it's too bad, we can ask some help from family in Europe (…) I don't like that, because we want to be independent!"

Besides a perceived lack of opportunities in Senegal to meet their own personal development aspirations, most also wanted "to be part of these successful contributing village and family members", as many village members expressed it, both in Dakar and in the Mid-valley villages. To conclude, fieldwork in Senegal shows clear perceived and experienced concerns about environmental changes and their impacts on daily living conditions. While such changes and hazards may not be perceived as a main direct driver of migration *per se*, their interlinkages with other drivers contribute to migration aspirations.

DR Congo

In both Kinshasa and Goma if people notice environmental changes they seem disinterested. This does not reflect the reality of these urban areas, where many occupied by the poorest populations are endangered by sudden events, such as landslides and heavy rainfall. Nonetheless, we can

attribute such perceptions to the fact that people have other daily concerns, which for many are a question of survival (Michellier *et al.*, 2020). However, the viewpoint of people living in Kinshasa differs significantly from those in Goma. In Kinshasa, most participants indicated that they have no resources to address such changes, but in Goma, they do not feel affected by such events, as expressed by a 43-yearold male: "I don't know the people who are undergoing these changes. My community is not affected." From both points of view, the consequence is that there is no real willingness to adapt or to help those negatively impacted. During interviews, participants frequently mentioned their sole aim was to improve their daily life and standard of living.

Consequently, in DR Congo, migration, whether internal or international, appears to be frequently due to a multitude of social, political, or economic factors (Sumata *et al.*, 2004; Gemenne *et al.*, 2013), themselves driving environmental change and degradation, such as uncontrolled deforestation, urban sprawl, mineral extraction leading to industrial pollution, or overexploitation of agricultural land resulting in soil erosion. Although these may influence the decision to migrate, they alone seem insufficient to determine migratory behavior, as shown in previous studies (Gemenne *et al.*, 2013; IOM, 2017). Insecurity (physical and income security) and lack of basic social services (clean water, healthcare, sanitation systems, education) and personal development opportunities systematically dominate the Congolese participants' discourses. These worries and related hardships experienced reflect the typical characteristics of a "failed state" or "fragile state" (Trefon *et al.*, 2002). Nevertheless, public services are somehow provided by a wide range of actors (including non-state providers such as NGOs). Our interviewees, however, did not perceive these services as sufficient to preserve them from environmental stress, nor to allow decent living conditions.

Local institutions responsible for environmental protection and disaster risk reduction have limited intervention capacity. These issues are not a priority for the authorities, which are trapped in weak governance and short-termism. Such a system prevents the implementation of effective disaster risk and land degradation reduction actions, such as prevention and awareness-raising programs; teams are untrained, understaffed, and underfunded (Michellier *et al.*, 2020; Trefon, 2016). Until more attention is devoted to disaster risk reduction and environmental degradation, the population, continually growing, will continue to suffer. Combined with a lack of family planning and the importance of large families for long-term survival, natural resources will become even scarcer and more precious (Trefon, 2016). While political and economic drivers appear to have several direct effects on the migration aspirations of our Congolese interviewees, environmental changes do not appear to influence them.

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[1] In fact, popular culture is full of proverbs that highlight the importance of migration: 'If you have a son, let him go. One day he will come back, either with money or with knowledge or with both' (Tandian, 2018).

Discussion

Our objective is twofold: to understand firstly how people perceive environmental changes, and secondly, how such perceptions are linked to migration (and other adaptation strategies) in DR Congo, Senegal, and Morocco. We first examined how inhabitants of the selected research settings perceived environmental changes to better understand the reasons for diversity within these perceptions as well as to examine how they fueled specific adaptation strategies (or the lack thereof). This linkage is interesting: adaptation is a somewhat artificial notion, but it is useful to grasp which livelihood strategies are adopted in response to environmental stressors, and how this relates to migration aspirations and/or trajectories—which are often proposed as an adaptation strategy (Barnett & Webber, 2010). 'Adaptation' in contrast to 'coping' describes longer-term, strategic measures taken to counter environmental risks, by creating new resources or by addressing vulnerability factors (Birkmann *et al*., 2013); it is therefore necessary to examine how migration could be an adaptation strategy to also understand its consequences (Authors).

People perceived environmental changes in various and distinct ways, depending on their living environment, the type of environmental changes that affected their livelihoods as well as their individual characteristics. This means that regions, policymakers and environmentalists cannot automatically build on just one set of shared ideas concerning the locally changing natural environment. Moreover, interpretations and explanations given for these changes seemed to rely on people's knowledge of climate change discourses, local environmental policies, social struggles, personal experiences with their home environment, and (religious) beliefs (Authors; De Longueville *et al*., 2020; Jenkins *et al*., 2018). Large rural–urban differences were noted in Morocco relating to whether people perceived the environmental changes in their local environment and the effect on their own lives; yet in Senegal and DR Congo, people living in cities, such as the urban areas of Dakar and Kinshasa, also experienced and perceived adverse effects of environmental changes and hazards. This highlights the importance of the nature of these environmental changes and their recurrence, which in turn impacts how they fuel the development of adaptation strategies, including migration. For example, in DR Congo, respondents, particularly those living in Kinshasa, are often confronted with gullying and sudden environmental disasters (e.g., landslides during the rainy season). However, few or no coping strategies have been developed in the face of their daily struggle for survival (food security, physical security, etc.). As a consequence, they do not necessarily feel able to or responsible for developing adaptation strategies, for instance to face land degradation. Certainly,

structural deficits make it even more difficult to consider longer-term (coping) strategies. By contrast, in Senegal, people from both Dakar and the Mid-valley are confronted with recurrent events, such as annual floods and droughts, that severely impact their livelihoods. Consequently, these events and their effects are more easily recognized expressed and reacted to, notably by mobilizing members of the diaspora. Also, in Morocco, adaptation-specific actions, such as the construction of a dam, and associated political and social conflicts are more common in people's discourses, compared to actions undertaken to stop ongoing drought and desertification.

These findings are in line with the political ecology framework (Taylor, 2015). People's perceptions of environmental changes are in many cases linked to more concrete and visible consequences (e.g., on their own livelihood and/or political conflicts and actions). While food security and health are often perceived as affected by environmental stress (droughts, floods, erosion, etc.), other major domains, such as the weak (or almost absent) healthcare system, income insecurity and fair access to markets, are considered more pressing political issues. Furthermore, not all aspects of such environmental changes are considered problematic. For instance, as shown in the Senegalese case study, unpredictable timing and shorter periods of the rainfalls, potentially disrupting all harvests, were seen as more problematic than increased rainfall (if not too intense), especially by people in agriculture. Nonetheless, in all research settings, political and policy initiatives facilitate a growing awareness of environmental issues and how human-made factors intervene and thus adapt or aggravate such changes. In regions that are more appealing for local and international investors and policymakers, more efforts are made to invest in adaptation strategies, such as land and water management, and to invest in agricultural production. This also makes all inhabitants more aware of the ongoing environmental changes and the disruptive effects of policy/company initiatives. Other regions that have suffered environmental degradation for longer are less interesting for investors and are slowly abandoned. People then focus more on household income diversification, migration, and switching professions. This trend is so strong that it already disconnects migration motivations from (perceived) environmental change, and only reconnects them when environmental changes give rise to political and social conflicts.

Across research sites, migration was often not immediately linked to environmental factors and changes by persons living in affected regions. Our case-studies show that most people would not migrate because of environmental adaptation considerations, certainly not when aspiring to international and permanent migration. Other drivers of

migration, such as education and job opportunities, were mentioned—which could act as adaptive capacities in the longer run. Rather, migration was in some cases seen as a path to "success" for unemployed people, particularly young people (e.g., Tandian, 2018), and a path to greater security (especially in the case of DR Congo, Schoumaker & Flahaux, 2016). The only exception is when people face extreme environmental rapid-and-slow-onset events and temporary internal relocation is deemed necessary, for example after damage to buildings caused by heavy rainfall in all three countries, landslides in DR Congo, and tidal waves in the suburbs of Dakar. Nevertheless, both Senegal (Panizzon, 2008; Toma & Kabbanji, 2017) and Morocco (Lacroix *et al*., 2008) have implemented migration policies with international development partners that encourage co-development through hometown organizations' collective remittances, investment, and return of emigrants. Governmental agencies are promoting Diaspora investments in government-run infrastructure projects and utilizing business contacts and professional networks established by emigrants abroad. The effects of these policies in the study zones of these countries were relatively significant, although not in DR Congo. These findings indicate that policymakers could see how remittances can be invested to build other tangible and intangible resources, which could be used for adaptation purposes. However, due to differing perceptions of environmental changes within and across groups, and because environmental changes are rarely linked with migration, the potential of migration as an adaptation strategy is not (yet) fully exploited or strategically coordinated (Michellier *et al*., 2020). The immediate spending of remittances on household consumption, education, land, and other property has long-term economic, social, and generational impacts that affect people's aspirations (especially young people) and their opportunities to realize them. And yet pertinent adaptation measures that allow for long-term adjustment of economic strategies can reduce forced movements (Geddes, 2015).

Finally, both the perceptions of environmental changes and how such changes are related to migration (and other adaptation strategies) should be understood within the changing societal structures and incomplete decentralized policies in these countries. These changes further complicate the development of long-term and sustainable investments to tackle environmental changes, to make agriculture more attractive, and to develop adaptation strategies. The main concern in all these regions is the vulnerability of people exposed to environmental impacts, their loss of human and economic security (Tschakert, 2007) and their limited freedom of choice as to whether to move (Zickgraf, 2019). Environmental changes are an additional stress, undermining the confidence of older and younger people in staying as a reasonable option, and hence bolstering migration aspirations.

Some limitations of this study should be noted that are relevant for future research. When interpreting these results, it is important to be aware of biases in perceived climate changes. These biases tend to categorize and imagine past weather always as 'better' (Mertz *et al*., 2012) and to focus on extreme events and rainfall as environmental changes, rather than slow changes in temperature. More research is needed to fully understand how different cultures and religions perceive environmental changes and which cultural/religious factors contribute to distinct perceptions (De Longueville *et al*., 2020; Howe *et al*., 2014). Future research should include more factors, such as the number of people engaged in agriculture in a region, dependence on agriculture for regional prosperity, networks in rural areas, and the internal migration background of city dwellers.

Conclusion

Through a comparative study regions in Morocco, Senegal, and DR Congo facing distinct environmental changes and migration trajectories, we mapped differences in the perceived linkage between environmental changes and migration. Our findings indicate that awareness of environmental changes and whether this results in the development of migration aspirations is closely linked to the political and social consequences of these changes. This also reflects a bias in people's awareness of sudden or slow-onset environmental changes. Apart from these socio-political factors, an individual's profession and livelihood influence their awareness of environmental changes. In this regard, differences are found across regions/countries, reflecting distinct social structures, gender divisions, and dependence on agricultural activities within these settings. While migration sometimes appeared to be part of an adaptation strategy responding to broader socio-environmental change, the meeting of immediate needs took precedence, as often in developing countries (Conway & Mustelin, 2014): current and future trends in environmental and climate change and other drivers are of lesser concern than immediate consequences of under-development and modernization (e.g., Boissière *et al*., 2013).

Availability of Data and Material Data is available upon request in a pseudonymised way to safeguard the identity of the participants.

Code Availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Ethics Approval All research was conducted according to the ethical guidelines provided by the host institutions the authors are affiliated with.

Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests Not applicable.

Consent to Participate All participants have formally agreed to be part of the research and have given informed consent.

Consent for Publication All participants were aware that the interview data would be used for publication and scientific purposes.

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