Section I

Bureaucracy and Governmentality

The three articles included here build on and interrogate the insights elaborated in Part I. These selections lay out important conceptual and methodological groundwork for ethnographically examining the state.

First, the authors move away from structural and functional analyses of the state that see "it" either as an autonomous actor or a set of conventional government institutions which serve the interests of particular classes and groups of people. Rather than viewing the state as a preconstituted structure, they see "it" as an effect of everyday practices, representational discourses, and multiple modalities of power. Mitchell shows how mundane governmental practices related to national frontiers such as border patrols, passport checks, and immigration laws help make abstract entities such as the state a very real presence in people's lives. Gupta uses the discourse on corruption in India – in everyday discussions as well as in public culture – to ethnographically demonstrate people's situated imaginations of the state. Brown argues that prerogative power – the legitimate power to use violence and make policies – actualizes the state in the interstate system, produces "it" as a masculinist entity, and has structuring effects on gender norms and hierarchies in society. These scholars demonstrate the difficulty in institutionally and procedurally delimiting the state. Rather than approach the state as a self-contained institutional reality, they focus on analyzing the nature, tactics, and effects of powers that operate through the entire social formation.

Second, the authors interrogate the autonomous, unified, and gender-neutral presentation of the state, emphasizing instead "its" incoherent, multilayered, contradictory, and masculinist nature. Both Mitchell and Gupta ask that we examine the conditions that enable apparently distinctive, autonomous, and cohesive constructions of the state. Gupta demonstrates that at local levels people experience the state as a fragmented and multi-leveled entity. But these localized

encounters, which are shaped in a field of state-related discourses and practices that transcend the local level (national, regional, and transnational), also help people imagine the state as a translocal entity. Brown argues that the state is not a unitary actor with singular intentions. The state does not wield one kind of power. She breaks down the multiple dimensions of power – liberal, capitalist, prerogative, and bureaucratic – and delineates how these modalities are bound up with gender norms and privileges prevalent in society, and how they shape state practices and produce the state as a masculinist arena.

Third, and related to the previous two points, the authors problematize the boundary between "the state" and its "other" (society, civil society, economy, or community), and between the public and private realms. Mitchell demonstrates the ephemeral nature of this boundary and contends that instead of separating two intrinsic and freestanding entities this line is drawn internally in order to maintain social order. Gupta argues for historicizing and provincializing the distinction between state and civil society that is so often assumed to be universal and natural. A reflection of a particular conjuncture of European history, this distinction may not describe or capture postcolonial realities where the boundaries between the state and non-state realms are blurred. Brown grounds her feminist analysis of the "state–civil society" divide in the late capitalist US state, and illustrates the effects of this division on gender identities and relations. She argues that the Western liberal distinction between state and civil society or public and private spheres is a masculinist construction that reinforces gender hierarchies. Together, the authors in this section argue that everyday practices and representations simultaneously produce state and non-state entities and arenas. Gupta demonstrates how everyday practices and discourses of corruption trouble the ideal-type Weberian bureaucracy (wherein the lines between the public and private are clearly marked), and help people at once imagine the state (the good/benevolent state versus the bad/unaccountable state) and themselves as exploited and rights-bearing citizens. Brown illustrates how the gendered discourse of protection serves to construct both the masculinist state (as protector) and dependent/vulnerable female citizens. All three authors thus emphasize the social imbricatedness of the state and the socially constructed nature of the boundary between the state and the non-state realms, and demonstrate the power-laden effects of this construction.

In laying out important conceptual groundwork relating to the study of the state, these articles open up avenues and domains for ethnographically studying the state. Mitchell and Gupta demonstrate precisely why, when examining the discursive construction of the state, it is crucial to pay attention to everyday bureaucratic practices and to cultural texts like newspapers, where differentiated discourse about the state is generated and contested. The theoretical groundwork supplied by these articles also has crucial implications for activist practices relating to state agencies. At a basic level, how we imagine the state shapes our engagements with it. If, for example, oppositional practices reify "the state," how does that limit their effectiveness? At another level, if the boundaries of the state are not given, but culturally produced and historically shifting, then how

does one resist "the state"? If, as Mitchell argues, the boundary delimiting the state is an internally drawn boundary, and if, as Gupta suggests, there is no outside to the state, then it is unproductive to think about activist practices through the binary of resistance versus cooperation. How, for instance, might one go about understanding the welfare-state-centered feminist practices that Brown discusses, and analyzing them in terms that do not fall into the dichotomy of radical versus reformist politics?

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9

Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State

Akhil Gupta

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 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, 1995, 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]

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 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.

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]

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 embodiments. The government, in other words, is being constructed here in the im-

agination 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 (l).

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 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 understandings 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 development, 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 mono-

graph 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 non-vegetarian 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, 1995). 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 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 (1983:104–28), 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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