Anthropology of Work Review

The Bureaucrat's Wage: (De)Valuations of Work in an Irrigation Bureaucracy

Maira Hayat, Stanford University
maira8@stanford.edu

Abstract

Drawing upon ethnographic research conducted in Pakistan's Punjab, the country's agricultural heartland and home to the world's largest contiguous irrigation network, this essay posits a structure of feeling of devaluation among officials of an irrigation department. It examines everyday practices of supplementing salaries, anti-corruption measures, World Bank intervention, and officials' efforts for an enhancement of the bureaucratic scale and refusals of work. It argues that alienation from official roles, erosion of authority, knowledge practices amid patchy information, and ill will vis-à-vis donor organizations cohere as a structure of feeling of devaluation. The devaluation is inflected by individual career trajectories, challenged, and deepened even as quotidian corruption yields gains. Examining corruption as part of the labor process, the essay expands the scholarly lexicon of corruption and bureaucratic work.

Keywords: labor, salary, corruption, structure of feeling, World Bank

On a still, humid September morning, I sat in Hamdan Sahib's office, a decrepit room inside Kinzabad's grain market shared by eleven *patwari*.[1] The patwari is the lowest-tier employee of the Punjab Irrigation Department's Revenue Wing. As I quietly read my copy of the 1873 Canal and Drainage Act, colonial-era legislation that underpins the irrigation regime, Hamdan Sahib was agitatedly drawing and erasing a map. For such days, I had mastered the skill of melting into my wicker chair and flipping pages back and forth to appear productively occupied, not needing his attention. Map work was done on the straw mat covering the office floor because the paper sheets were large and needed to be spread out. He was preparing a case in an ongoing water dispute. Such disputes could involve someone taking water out of turn, polluting a watercourse, or blocking flow to other water users. A first step in a complaint brought to the Irrigation Department is for the patwari to conduct an investigation of the area in which the dispute occurred.

Suddenly, he smacked his pencil on his right knee and asked, "What section are you reading?" When I said I was reading the one on how the application for a change in *warabandi* (irrigation water distribution schedule) is made, he exclaimed in exasperation, "No applications here! Phone calls are operating procedure!"

An influential politician, who had a *wari* (water turn) at night and wanted it changed to the morning because it was more convenient, had been calling Hamdan Sahib and his executive engineer ("XEN") every day. This put pressure on Hamdan Sahib, who was fielding phone calls from his superior and promises of favor from the politician if her request was fulfilled. The warabandi is pushed forward by twelve hours every year so that those who had turns at night the previous year would get morning turns, and vice versa, to distribute the inconvenience of night water turns among all water users (Hayat 2019). The politician wanted to avoid her year of night turns.

Hamdan Sahib, "What do you think officers think every morning when they get ready to go to work?"

Without waiting for an answer, he continued, "They don't think 'What good will I do today? Who will I help today?' They are thinking, *Mein aaj diharri kaisay banaoon ga?* (How will I make the daily wage today?)."

Hamdan Sahib's use of *diharri* (daily wage) is jarring. To use it in the context of government officers doing their duty is starkly ill fitting. Officers get a monthly salary, so there *should* be no diharri. It would appear that Hamdan Sahib is referring to corruption. But his condemnation of his own and his colleagues' work ethic and practice in terms of diharri does more than add to idioms of corruption. While this is a common way of interpreting the reference among officials and Pakistanis in general, I argue that it misses the depth of his critique. Hamdan Sahib's use of diharri opens up a semantic space where diharri could also be construed as a reference to the "extra work" of corruption. Had he heeded the politician's phone requests, he would have had to do all or a combination of the following: negotiate with the other water users on the same warabandi as the politician; make excuses and explanations for how his hands were tied to try to convince the water users to agree to the change in warabandi; and attempt to coerce some water users to support the change. This is consonant with the fact that diharri

refers to both the daily wage (*diharri banana*/earn a wage) and to the act of laboring (*diharri karna*/to do labor). Hamdan Sahib's presentation of the paradox of salaried officials making diharri could also—as many officials subsequently averred—be a "simple reference" to the labor of earning a living when the salary alone does not suffice. Instead of reducing the meaning of Hamdan Sahib's statement, this essay argues that it opens a space that coheres in viewing labor as a devaluation of bureaucratic work.

Marxist and feminist writing on labor has long problematized the space between work and its recompense (Federici 1975; Weeks 2011). The literature has examined the conversion of human action into standard units of labor (Polanyi 2001 [1944]); shown formal systems of waged work to be shored up by nonwaged or otherwise inadequately remunerated labor, often female (Millar 2018; Yanagisako 2002); and conceptualized the wage as anchored in social action (Prasad-Aleyamma 2017).

The salary as a specific modality of remuneration has not attracted as much attention (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Weber 1921 [1968]). Salary at the Irrigation Department is determined by bureaucratic scale and the number of years since recruitment ("seniority")—the more recently a patwari was inducted, the lower their salary will be. Currently, salaries for the most senior patwari range from Rs. 43,000–51,000 per month ($278–330). Irfan Sahib, who entered service more than thirty years ago, and is thus one of the most senior patwari, currently draws a salary of Rs. 51,000.

My focus in this essay on government officials' salaries and their practices of supplementing them is an attempt to rethink the boundaries of categories such as bureaucrat and laborer and to direct attention to the state as employer. By looking beyond familiar sites of labor such as factories, plantations, and ports (Bear 2014; Besky 2014; de Neve 2005), I seek to bring ethnographies of work into conversation with bureaucracy. In times when the routines, values, and possibilities of work are changing (Ferguson 2015; Hull 2012)—whether as public-private partnerships proliferate, or in response to transparency measures enacted by national governments or imposed by organizations such as the World Bank—it is important to understand the varied effects on workers and the people they serve. How do officials' views of their work matter to government performance? It is also important to examine the promises of a salaried life today, given that state employment is one of the largest sources of employment the world over. With a sanctioned strength of 34,400 persons, the Irrigation Department is one of the largest government departments in the Punjab.[2]

Focusing on the "class" constituted by the government salary, Hamza Alavi posited the "salariat" as an auxiliary class in postcolonial societies, one with origins in British colonial policies. The salariat allowed natives—the "westernized oriental gentlemen" among them—to join the administration (Alavi 1989, 1527). Literature on statecraft in South Asia that examines the "fractured rationality of rule" in the postcolony (Akhtar 2018; Kaviraj 1984) has addressed the higher–subordinate bureaucracy divide more explicitly, asking why policies enacted in the higher echelons rarely resemble the actual practice of the state at the lower level. Conceptualizations such as "street-level bureaucracy" have the merit of recognizing the distinctiveness of the work of some bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980); however, in an "important"/"sensitive" (*ehem*/*nazuk*) case in the department, an official as "high" as the XEN would become a street-level bureaucrat, personally conducting site inspections and leading teams to the field to oversee progress. Thus, one implication of my analysis is that it shows how inadequate the undifferentiated category of "bureaucracy" is for appreciating hierarchies of authority, effort, and remuneration.

Bureaucracies lend themselves to analyses of rule following and flouting, the ongoingness of structural violence, and the struggles of citizenship (Anand 2011; Gupta 2012). They are less often seen as sites to examine understandings, experiences, and valuations of labor and il/licit remuneration, or as affect-laden lifeworlds (Mathur 2016; Navaro-Yashin 2006). I complement the recent anthropological focus on materials moving (among) bureaucrats (Feldman 2008; Hull 2012) by turning to anxieties, desires, and resentments among bureaucrats and individual career trajectories to show how these, too, are powerful mediators of, say, a file's movement or disappearance. As we see in the final section, a file for a water-theft case never comes to be because Hamdan Sahib says, "*Mujhe kya* (What's it to me)."

I employ the structure of feeling (Williams 1977) as analytic and method and show that folded into it is the recognition of the patwari's diminishing role and status in a governance regime; practices and pressures that threaten to devalue bureaucratic work; and impending change associated with the World Bank. The last section considers two refusals of work—one around a World Bank study and another that foregrounds a particular patwari's career trajectory—that, while rooted in the structure of feeling of devaluation, challenge it. By attending to specific elements of this structure of feeling, the essay builds the argument that the structure of feeling of devaluation orients the work, knowledge, and interpretive practices of patwari. They resent and resist it; their own quotidian transactional

practices deepen it; and while the devaluation is shared, officials' lived experiences of it are inflected by individual career trajectories and biographies.

A Structure of Feeling of Devaluation

The Punjab Irrigation Department is known to be very corrupt. Specific offices within the Department, such as the patwari, are particularly notorious. Patwari are Scale 7 employees; they assess water charges, maintain revenue records, conduct preliminary investigations into water disputes, and prepare cases. The patwari is as much an office and function as it is a stereotype, slur, and metaphor for corruption. In January 2019, during court proceedings the Chief Justice of Pakistan referred to patwar offices as "dens of corruption." Here is an illustration of the predominant view regarding the patwari's wiles: On December 26, 2012, *The News* carried an item titled, "Patwari made Osama give Rs. 50,000 bribe." It went on: "The wonders of Pakistani patwaris will never cease as even the most wanted terrorist of the world, Osama bin Laden, could not escape them without paying Rs. 50,000 bribe to allow him to build a house in Abbottabad."[3]

The devaluation of the patwari—their work, office, and role in the national order of things—manifests in and realizes a structure of feeling that coheres around specific events, acts, actors, and agendas. There are several reasons why Raymond Williams's conceptualization of structures of feeling (Williams 1961, 1977), conceived around literary forms, is helpful. One is the tentativeness about what is going on. There is little certainty among the patwari about what to expect: Will a World Bank reform expand or be shelved? Will digitization—taking away control over revenue records—succeed or fail? Will their scale be increased or not? These uncertainties and experiences are shared and patterned (Filmer 2003)—for example, there is a generalized ill will among patwari vis-à-vis the World Bank and "the bureaucracy" (defined by my patwari interlocutors as those in Scale 17 and above). Within this structure of feeling of devaluation, suspicion and refusal become "way[s] of responding" (Williams 1969, 18, 321). The structure of feeling of devaluation, then, comprises ways of experiencing, knowing, and interpreting institutional change. But if the structure of feeling typically discerns the emergent, I deploy the analytic here to understand an order that is unraveling. This is a structure of feeling of decline. After all, out of 3,400 sanctioned patwar posts in the Irrigation Department, 59 percent have been lying vacant for years. The last patwari recruitment took place more than twenty years ago.

The patwari is not only on the threshold of the public and private—as the lower bureaucracy is generally thought to be—but also of the modern (qua future) and a past that the country is trying to shed. What makes the patwari's corruption distinctive is the perception that they inhabit an other, anti-modern, chronotope. I met Aleem Sahib, a senior official at Pakistan's Ministry of Climate Change, in Stockholm at the 2015 World Water Week. He asked me with skepticism what I would gain by working at patwar offices. Interrupting me midway through my response he said, "But you've seen their cloth maps, right? Maps made from cloth in the twenty-first century! Here we are, wanting to go into the twenty-first century. How can we do it with a sixteenth-century workforce?" (Figure 1).

Figure 1. This is a *Shajrah Parcha*. Patwari are creators and custodians of these cloth maps that show size and location of landholdings [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Stories and stereotypes about the patwari travel well. During fieldwork in Lahore I met Sadiq, a software specialist at one of the newly set-up Land Records Management Information Systems (LRMIS) Computerization Service Centers. The LRMIS is a World Bank-funded project to digitize manual land records in Pakistan. Sadiq appeared amused to hear that my primary research modality at the time was spending my days at patwar offices. As I had come to expect by then, he had his own patwari story to share. This one was about the pressures of being "turned into a patwari." A landowner came to the service senter to obtain a copy of his official land record. Like everyone else, he was given a token from the kiosk and asked to wait for his turn at one of the three counters. He waited a few minutes, grew impatient, and went up to one counter offering to pay extra if he could be served before his token number was announced as he had to get back to his village.

> Sadiq: "Disgusted, I said, 'Sir, please, don't turn us too into patwari.'"

What does this deployment of the patwari enable? Several things: It anchors a national narrative of

modernization; supports the belief that the problem is not something more fundamental, but the simple one of replacing bad mediators with good ones, people with computers (Mazzarella 2006); and renders corruption fixable, as it is easier to go after the one figure seen to embody the problem. Further, it is especially useful in the current political climate where the incumbent government has made vigorous efforts to portray the previous ruling party as a corrupt "*patwarione kii* party" (party of patwari).

The Bank

The structure of feeling of devaluation, however, is not a provincial or national matter alone. It is how an international political economy of aid registers among, and enlists the lower bureaucratic tiers of a department by way of reform. To demonstrate this point, I examine how a World Bank-funded reform contributed to this structure of feeling. Pakistan is among the world's top ten water borrowers at the Bank, with a total portfolio of $3,931 million (Parker 2010, 12). In the early 2000s, some functions of the Punjab Irrigation Department were transferred to lower-level bodies as part of a decentralization move sponsored by the World Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). These donor organizations were collectively referred to as the "Bank *walay*" (from the Bank) among patwari. The "institutional reforms component" of decentralization was formalized as the Punjab Irrigation and Drainage Authority (PIDA) Act in 1997, with a total cost of $785 million. PIDA entailed the creation of a tiered structure of bodies, the newly instituted Farmer Organizations among which would take over some of the patwari's functions.

PIDA's Staff Appraisal Report identified the following challenges to improving social services and management of natural resources: redefining public and private sector roles to get the public sector out of tasks that the private sector could perform more efficiently; restructuring public expenditures so that the public sector works in an efficient and cost-effective manner; and building public sector capacities for newly defined roles. The ADB, as part of this "common reform agenda," also made a case for "fewer but better trained staff," citing "antiquated modalities" of system operation as a reason for reform (ADB 2006).

The gamut of changes associated with the reform was referred to as PIDA among my interlocutors: *jab se PIDA ko laye* (ever since PIDA was brought in); *jab se PIDA aya* (ever since PIDA came). The Irrigation Divisions where I did my fieldwork were not included in PIDA. Here, officials frequently pointed out how PIDA was failing, bound to fail, and that they had warned from day one that it would fail. Many patwari critiqued the modularity of PIDA by describing it as a "*parrha likha"* (literate) system which would not work in Pakistan owing to low literacy, awareness of formal rights, and concentrated power among big landholders. My interlocutors, sometimes resentful and at other times anxious that PIDA would spread to their jurisdictions, were arguing that the system was designed for contexts "like Australia where people are educated and have had decades of democracy;" "I have heard they sell and buy water online in Australia."

PIDA was also thought to be a conspiracy against Pakistan among my patwari interlocutors—sometimes by Western governments, sometimes by the international community, sometimes by the World Bank. I heard laments such as, "Why else would an institution be experimented with and broken up? You tell me, what is the logic of a bank? How could the Bank function without keeping countries indebted? No, the Bank did not have the country's interests at heart. How could it, it was a bank!" Then the lament would turn inwards. "Why should any bank be concerned about our welfare when our own leaders don't care? PIDA is evidence of our leadership's insincerity. Why was a multimillion-dollar loan taken without thinking about national economic welfare? Now Pakistan is indebted, and an institution has been fragmented and destroyed."

When I discussed this widespread resentment among Revenue Wing officials with an ex-Secretary of the department, I was told, "We were doing resource management. We don't care if they were upset. We were concerned about water; that's what we had to manage." This speaks to the fantasy of resource management—no labor—itself conceived as replacing older bureaucratic approaches and its concurrence with the fantasy of modernization. On the question of conspiracy involving the World Bank, the official went on to dismiss it as *jahallat* (ignorance). Amid the general devaluation of the patwari's office, dismissal of their views is not surprising. I contend, however, that from the patwari's vantage, patching together the information that becomes available, such views are a critique of World Bank style reform *and* a way of knowing. Dismissing such critique as conspiratorial *jahallat* is less helpful than recognizing in it the insistence that a reform program be seen through to its end. The patwari are refusing to separate policy from upshot: it is not enough for the Bank to initiate a multimillion-dollar project and then conduct studies deciding its degree of success/failure. The patwari's views are a function of putting together—and interpreting amid the ongoing devaluing effects of reform—the fragments of what ultimately becomes recognizable as failure. Some (the World Bank) had to do a survey to call it that (the subject of the last section); others (the patwari)

lived it and announced it much earlier. In May 2019, PIDA was abolished.

Having plotted the larger determinants of the sense of devaluation, I now turn to bureaucratic practices of supplementing the salary and show how these gains, paradoxically, end up furthering the feeling of devaluation.

Gains in Loss

The desire for government employment is for more than the salary, or even *in spite* of the salary. A government job brings prestige, a network of colleagues that serves as vital infrastructure for everyday life, and retirement benefits. My interlocutors routinely mentioned as a virtue that the government salary transfers to a family member in case of the government official's death. A common way of talking about a government job is to say, "*naukri pakki karwa dain*" (*pakka* means strong, firm, in that one can't be laid off suddenly and is certain to retire and draw a pension). Government employment is the quintessence of long-term, stable work. Getting into government service, then, can be an escape from the instability, temporariness, and unpredictability of doing and having to earn diharri. While a monthly salary (*tankhwa*) is paid regardless of the work done on a particular day, diharri is tied to the work performed.

Why, then, did Hamdan Sahib describe officials as occupied with making diharri? His use of diharri could be understood as a reference to the corruption they do every day. But even as such everyday transactions yielded monetary gains, they contributed to a general devaluation of bureaucratic work by leading the patwari to view themselves as doing the demeaning work of making diharri, of doing daily labor. Such laments referred not only to what other officials were doing but also to what they themselves were doing. The transactions I was told about, heard about, and saw do not exemplify a singular logic such as *paisay khana* (eating money). Corruption is usually seen in terms of illicit "extra" money; I focus instead on the "extra" work that is involved. Attending to the intricate forms of reasoning and modes of calculation underpinning them makes for better recognition of the labor of transacting and corrects for the automaticity of tropes of corruption such as leakage and eating (Sneath 2006). The act of taking a bribe is typically thought of as an illicit gain made in a finite moment of exchange; but if we consider the longer horizons of calculations in light of which these transactions are conducted, we can appreciate how such transactions are invested in other, possibly more enduring, stores of value (Guyer 2004). For example, if we pay attention to the careers that officers are building, and the lives these anchor, it makes sense to see these practices as investments—sending children to better schools and hospitals; renting a bigger house in a better neighborhood; buying a house or land. Some supplementations simply enabled official work. Six patwari in division A, for example, had rented a room in a grain market for their office. They were collectively responsible for paying the rent from private resources. Once, I started a statement with "*aap afsaran*" (you officers) and was instantly corrected: "*Kaise afsar? Iss kamray ka karaya mang kar deytey hain!*" (What officer? We have to ask others (solicit bribes) for the money to pay this room's rent!)

Some transactions were more devaluing than others. It mattered whether the money was taken for something "*na jaiz*" (illegitimate, such as enlarging the size of an outlet to increase water flow to particular lands) or for "*jaiz kaam*" (legitimate work). The latter could be an application or request in accordance with rules (e.g., reducing area recorded in a warabandi), but delayed for some reason. This could just be an official deliberately obstructing the processing of a request until money was given. Or it could be the delay that is no one's fault but results from the need to have x signatures on y papers from z offices. Seeing such an application through—collecting the necessary paperwork and signatures quickly; reminding appropriate officials every few days; ensuring that the appropriate official saw the particular file—was *jaiz* for many officials. An officer might also start "making money" more frequently during a family illness. Such transactions would stop when the illness did. Then there was that absolutely unacceptable type of transaction: money was taken by the official, but the promised work was never done. Proportionality mattered, too. Everyone might be giving and taking money, but a patwari, for instance, should not be doing "a prime minister's level corruption," as Hamdan Sahib once said to an office full of his colleagues, who nodded in agreement.

The currency in which transactions were conducted was also an element of devaluation. If earlier, people would give part of whatever they grew on their land as a bribe—such as sacks of wheat—cash was now the norm. One explanation among patwari for this switch from grain to cash was that people's landholdings were getting progressively smaller as they were divided among inheriting kin. In Sikandar Section, where Hamdan Sahib had served for over ten years, most landholdings were one to five acres. With landholdings that small, people supplemented income with small side businesses and could only pay bribes in cash. Hamdan Sahib explained, "At first a cultivator was just giving what he had grown. He has so many kilos of wheat, what does it matter if he gives a few sacks to an officer for a slightly lower water bill?" With cash, the quality of the transaction had changed.

With something like grain, there was still ambiguity given its gift-like and need-like quality. Money, however, was unambiguously non-gift and non-need like (see Peebles 2012).

Flat Rates

While "corruption" was devaluing of the patwari's work, paradoxically, so too were anti-corruption measures. In 2003 the Department adopted a measure intended to eliminate a category of these salary-supplementing transactions by eliminating the margin available for corruption. A core duty of the patwari is to prepare a water bill for each crop season. The Department implemented a "flat rate" to replace crop-based water charges for irrigation (*abianna*). Under the flat rate, regardless of the crop grown, one would be charged Rs. 85.5 per acre of land for irrigation water in summer (*kharif*) and Rs. 50.5 in winter (*rabi*).[4] The charge would now be the same for an acre of rice and an acre of maize (despite their very different water requirements). Flat rates were intended as curbs on patwari corruption. How, specifically, was this "corruption" done?

Consider the *abiana* for Kharif 1999 in Figure 2. Suppose that a farmer is growing sugarcane on 1 acre. Sugarcane, at 177.16, has the highest abiana in 1999 and gram (44.3) the lowest. The farmer and patwari make a deal such that both gain. Let's suppose the patwari enters 0.5 for gram and 0.5 for sugarcane. The farmer's total recorded bill is Rs. 110.73 (0.5 acres charged for sugarcane and 0.5 for gram), instead of Rs. 177.16. The farmer has saved Rs. 66.43 (177.16 – 110.73), and the farmer and patwari will devise some way to divide up the Rs. 66.43 among themselves. The patwari's gain is some proportion of the Rs. 66.43.

Girdawri, the process of recording the acreage under particular crops, necessitated regular field inspections and interaction with landowners to determine if cultivation on the ground tallied with the official record. Now, with the flat rate, all that needs to be recorded for *abiana* assessment is the area under cultivation, not the crop cultivated. The flat rate did not just change assessment rates. The patwari say it ended their authority. Firoz (patwari) says, "*Abb ttu koi muun nahin lagatta*" (Now no one wants to have anything to do with us). The Rs. 66.43 were not only the financial gain the patwari could make; they also provided room for negotiating and transacting. This was the margin anchoring the patwari's authority. The patwari's authority, then, was a function of the power to record a higher or lower water charge and crop A instead of crop B. The source of the patwari's authority was not so much the law that gave them the mandate to record crop cultivation, but rather the possibility that patwari *could* break the law.

Firoz's comment also highlights a distinct view of work wherein exercising one duty affects the role and ability to fulfill others. His lament reveals an expanded conception of work as relationship-building, which the "revenue assessment" description does not capture. One hears in this idiom of work a recognition of the labor of public dealing. Indeed, many patwari described the Revenue Wing's work as "basically, public dealing."

The *Hartal* (Strike) That Failed and the One That Didn't

Amid these ongoing, relatively quiet practices of supplementing salaries among patwari, now consider a collective attempt at raising the salary that illustrates how patwari resisted their devaluation. This involved pushing for the patwari's scale to be increased from 7 to 9, which would result in a higher salary, greater retirement benefits, and more prestige. The effort failed. The upshot was resentment, cynicism, and a strengthening of the structure of feeling of devaluation. The latter cannot be understood without reference to a parallel effort around the same time by engineers in the department, which succeeded. This is because the patwari's valuation of their standing and work is relative and responds to other officials' recognized worth. The space between the work one does and its recompense is partly a function of others' salaries.

That the engineers successfully lobbied for a scale raise is consonant with a longer national history of valorization of the engineering profession. Given the association of patwari with corruption, and efforts to reform or replace them, it is not surprising that their demands went unfulfilled. But the failure also spoke to more proximate dynamics that highlight the significance of differences within the same department.

Umair, an XEN heading the engineers' "struggle," began his account like this: "Scale 17 doctors

IRRIGATION WATER RATES (Rs. per acre)				
	Sugarcane	Rice	Wheat	Gram
Kharif				
99	177.16	88.53	59.8	44.3

Figure 2. The *kharif* crop season runs from April–September. Acre is a measure of land

get Rs. 100,000/month ($650), while Scale 17 engineers get Rs. 35,000 ($226)!" The engineers routinely shared their grievances, such as inadequate salary and allowances, on a WhatsApp group. In 2017 they decided to formalize as an association, finalizing a charter of demands, and creating and filling five positions using a Facebook poll. The elected persons began meeting with senior officials and politicians to communicate engineers' grievances.

I detail one of the grievances: third-party validation (TPV). TPV, which involved three stages of "checking" engineers' work by a third party—pre-execution, during execution, and after execution—was felt to be humiliating and dispiriting. For the engineers, having money to use without first requesting approval for every project or maintenance work was about "initiative and ownership." TPV did not only take away discretion over funds. One XEN, Faizan, explained, "I used to feel that this was my canal if I saw the lining was broken and needed repair. There was a sense of ownership." When asked about TPV, members of the bureaucratic elite tell a story of standardization centered on international standard forms of contract issued by the Geneva-based International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC). FIDIC contracts are considered the industry standard by organizations such as the World Bank.

In June 2018, engineers in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (northwestern province of Pakistan) staged a sit-in (*dharna*) that succeeded in getting them a salary raise and enhancement to Scale 19. Describing the effect this had on Punjab engineers, Umair said, "We went mad with anger." Following black ribbon protests (i.e., coming to the office wearing a black ribbon tied around one sleeve), pen-down strikes, press conferences, and a *dharna* on Lahore's heavily trafficked Mall Road, their demands were met.

In contrast, the patwari's movement ended in failure. From conversations with Revenue Wing officials, I discerned three elements that contributed to this failure. First, their "strength" was weak relative to the engineers. Since the number of patwari is smaller, a sit-in by patwari put less pressure on the upper tiers of the bureaucracy. Second, because many patwari had side gigs, necessitated by inadequate salaries, many felt that their heart was not in the collective struggle. Third, they emphasized that the nature of their work, for example, that they are "needed" only every six months when the crop season is ending and water bills have to be finalized, meant that the department could afford to ignore their strike, unlike other departments such as Police and Railways, where striking employees could bring everyday operations to a standstill. Comparisons with the engineers' effort always noted that the engineers succeeded close to "flood season." These factors that made it hard for the department to resist the engineers' demands did not apply to the patwari.

As the patwari's movement unraveled, resentment among the patwari vis-à-vis the engineers, the department, and each other increased. The resentment was rooted in the feeling that patwari had not invested in the collective cause to the same extent that they did in personal matters, such as individual promotions; that patwari had caved to bullying—such as threats of suspension—from "the bureaucracy"; and that patwari had not been supported by the engineers. When I visited the department in the winter of 2019, after some months in the United States, Ahmad Sahib (patwari) greeted me with this: "Welcome. We are now the first department where a *hartal* occurred and ended without a single gain."

Making everything worse was the alarm caused by the introduction of a new monitor: sitting atop a narrow desk in one corner of Ahmad Sahib's office was a forlorn computer announcing the beginning of the digitization of patwari's records. Seven months later, amid much resentment and anxiety, digitization was paused—no one among my patwari interlocutors seems to know when and if it will resume. Jafar Sahib says it was probably a punishment for the patwari's attempts to push for a scale raise; Hakim Sahib thinks it was the World Bank's idea; and Saqlain Sahib thinks it was the new Secretary trying to exert control.

Refusals of Work

While shared, the structure of feeling of devaluation arcs differently for every official given that each bureaucratic career is anchored in a unique life trajectory. Mehboob Sahib is doing well by "obvious" metrics: He owns a car in which he comes to office, his children are married or studying at good colleges, and he owns a business. He often remarks that he does not need to do government work given his profitable business. Unlike Mehboob Sahib, Hamdan Sahib is on the verge of retiring. If at the beginning of the essay we saw him resisting the combined pressure by a politician and superior to do illegitimate work, we end with him close to retiring, resentful that a life's work was not valued as seen in his denied promotion. The resentment feeds into his ultimate refusal to do even "legitimate" work.

This refusal is a function of (i) intimate dynamics, such as Hamdan Sahib's lone quest to be formalized as a *zillehdar* (the tier of Revenue Wing officials above patwari), that intersect with (ii) overarching, shared ones, such as ill will vis-à-vis the Bank resulting from a long history of departmental debt. Refusals of work illustrate the problematic expectation and demand made by superiors, members of the public, and the Bank that extra work be performed. But they also raise the question of whether they are better understood as

claims on work: the tasks patwari *should* be given, the scales they *should* have, the salaries they *should* be paid, the conditions within which they *should* work, all articulate a claim to a particular type of work.

"The Courts are Running on World Bank Money Too!"

In 2015, some Bank personnel embarked on a study of PIDA to determine if the program had reduced corruption. Part of the data collection for this paper was fielding a survey, which was delegated to the patwari and involved making copies of the survey form (a 15–20 page booklet), translating it into Urdu, and setting up meetings with village headmen in each village in their jurisdiction (Figure 3). This required making special transport arrangements. For some village visits, I arranged transport, paid for by my fieldwork grants. The Revenue Wing officials resented being asked to conduct a survey whose purpose they were not privy to nor trusted, and the costs of which—fuel, time, stationery—they were expected to cover from their own pockets.

A few weeks into data collection, at a meeting the deputy collector (DC) had called to assess progress on the survey, Mehboob Sahib said, "I'm already overburdened, I don't want to take on extra work."

DC: We all are, but we don't have a choice. The orders have come from on high. This has to be done and done soon.

Mehboob Sahib:: [short laugh] I can't be forced. I'm an irrigation officer, not a World Bank employee. I'll complain to the department heads!

DC: The Bank runs half your department—remember PIDA? [laughter]

Mehboob Sahib:: Well, then, I'll go to court!

DC: How do you think the courts are running? They run on Bank money too!

This drew even more laughter from all of us in the room.

This refusal is better understood as a definitional claim on work—what is the work that can be demanded of a patwari and by whom? As the patwari say, "The patwari does everything from arranging election events to preparing for the bureaucracy's tours. Do you find all this in the Department manual? No!" The demand for extra work from on high is devaluing in this case as it turns the predictable routines of salaried life into arbitrary labor that can be imposed at any time.

Some months later I took a printout of the paper for which the survey had been conducted to the DC's office. The paper had been sent to me by several people at the Bank whom I met during the course of my dissertation research. I asked if anyone had heard anything about what was done with the data they had gathered or if there was any update on compensation for the expenses they had incurred conducting the survey. They had not. The DC added that one of the Bank personnel had given him a slip of paper with an email he could use if he ever needed to get in touch. He never followed up as he does not have email and misplaced the slip of paper. I read a little from the paper, translating the English into Urdu sentence by sentence. I said that their main finding was that water theft had increased on water channels where PIDA was introduced. One patwari replied, "They could have just asked one of us! I would have given them this in writing!" There is a double irony here: the officials collected the very data on which their corruption was empirically "decided," but their practiced knowledge could not be counted on, for it has no value in such evidentiary regimes.

"Mujhe kya?" (What's it to me?)
November 2017, a village in Kasur

I ask Hamdan Sahib why he doesn't initiate proceedings against the farmers of Thatta Khurd (a village in Kasur) who have been stealing water through a *daaf*. *Daaf* is a common means of water theft. Just

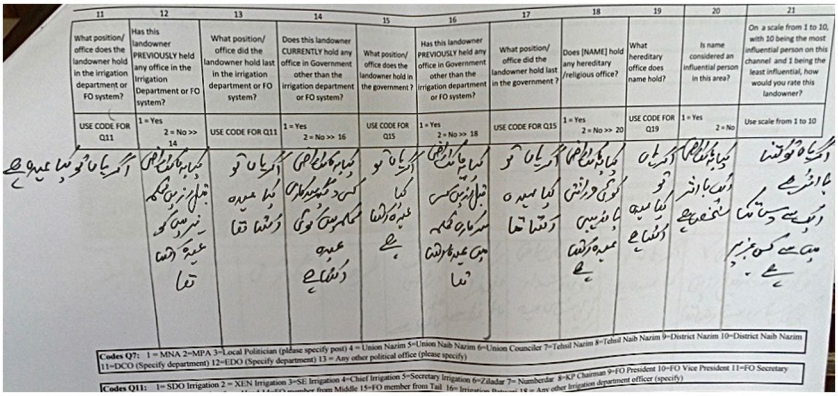

Figure 3. This is one page from the survey. The Urdu text is the work of translation that fell on officials from the Revenue Wing and was added to the survey [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

after one's outlet, an obstruction is placed along the breadth of the canal to raise the water level and cause more water to flow through the outlet. If someone is allocated water for three hours/week, the *daaf* will allow more water to flow through the outlet onto the person's land during those three hours.

Hamdan Sahib responds, "*Mujhe kya? Kartey jayein*" (What's it to me? Let them do it). We stand under the unmoving sun, staring at the *daaf* at our feet calmly doing its work.

Mujhe kya? (What's it to me?) is a question of responsibility, of ownership of a problem, and of alienation from one's role. When officials start saying *mujhe kya?* something somewhere has lapsed.

Just before I asked Hamdan Sahib why he wasn't starting proceedings against the water theft, he had told me a story from a few years ago. It was about a patwari who reported water theft on a military farm. The patwari was picked up by some men, given a thrashing, and then let go. Then Hamdan Sahib flicked off a blade of grass from his sandal, as if he was flicking off responsibility, with a resigned curl of the lips. It wasn't a smile.

The Department Is Ending, June 2018

I call Hamdan Sahib every other month. This evening I ask him if his leg is better. A few months ago he was in a motorbike accident on his way to the office. I say I hope I'm not missing much while I'm away in the United States. I expect him to respond in his usual manner, "It's the same as always, you know how it is."

> Today he says, "What is going to happen! The department is ending" (*Hona kya hai, mehekma bandd horaha ha)*.
> "What do you mean?"
> He replies, "If they don't hire men, how will the department go on?" (*Banda bharti naen karna, mehekma kaisay chalay ga*).

He says he has withdrawn his application, submitted years ago, for formalization of zillehdar status: "I refused to give *rishwat* (a bribe). Nothing happens on the basis of merit here." For about a decade he had been doing the work of zillehdar, supervising patwari, but was officially still a patwari. He adds that his knee gives him constant trouble. "My son has also finished college now." Then abruptly, "They think they can find a better zillehdar? Let them!"

Hamdan Sahib regrets joining the Irrigation Department. His friend just retired from the Education Department in Scale 18 as school headmaster: "That could have been me," he says. He retires in two months, after thirty-four years of service, in the same scale (7) at which he entered. I asked him once about a government notification that said someone could not be in the same scale for more than ten years. He responded, "Do you remember Shaukat Aziz? Another gift from the World Bank. He changed that rule to twenty-five years."[5]

The department is ending—how could I have missed it? If there are no more hires, and as patwari retire and leave, the Department as Hamdan Sahib knew it would end. Multiple efforts at multiple departments are underway to eliminate (the role of) the patwari. There are many presents, articulated with and against each other. The future needs some of those presents. Hamdan Sahib's may not be one of them.

Conclusion

In this essay, I employed the structure of feeling as analytic and method to examine the devaluation of bureaucratic work in an irrigation department. Recent literature on bureaucratic artifacts, practices, and processes contributes to de-reifying bureaucracy, but leaves unaddressed the intricacies of reasoning, calculating, and feeling among those comprising bureaucracy. Attending, as I do here, to distinct transactional logics and career trajectories shows that the lower bureaucracy is no monolith; demonstrates the work of doing corruption; and allows us to see how state functionaries themselves are affected by the ensuing devaluation. This is important for understanding how and why officials feel alienated from work; what the effects of this alienation are; and how it fosters structures of feeling where they begin to say, *mujhe kya*.

There is corruption; my interlocutors call it that, do it, acknowledge and lament it.[6] But this cannot be an indictment of lower-level state functionaries alone, given the volume of funding and the extent of involvement of organizations such as the World Bank. Informed by the patwari's skepticism, we might ask, Why do donor-funded initiatives aimed at promoting good governance end up fragmenting institutions? The Bank attributes, in part, the "unsatisfactory" performance of programs like PIDA to the departure of "reform champions" due to a change in government and transfers among upper bureaucratic tiers (World Bank 2007, 5). These are usually senior officials, such as the Secretary who termed patwari views *jahallat*. The analysis in this essay suggests that such champion-led change—requiring officials to work in particular ways, subjecting their work to inspection—would be short-lived if experienced by officials as devaluing their work. Such a structure of feeling not only alienates officials from their roles, it also erodes trust in the organizations seen to be authoring reform. Structures of feeling, then, do not only offer insight into officials' experiences and valuations of work, they are key determinants of the sustainability of reform measures.

Acknowledgements

I thank the anonymous reviewers and editors of the Anthropology of Work Review; Adam Sargent, Anna Weichselbraun, Colin Halverson, Hannah Chazin, James Ferguson, Saad Gulzar, Umair Javed, William Mazzarella and Zahra Hayat for their helpful comments on earlier drafts; and Akhtar Hayat, my constant reader. People affiliated with the institutions that are the subject of this essay have enabled my understanding and analysis, and while I have decided not to name them, I remain indebted to them. My research was supported by the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, and the Committee on Southern Asian Studies at the University of Chicago.

Notes

1 I use *patwari* for both singular and plural. All names are pseudonyms. I also obfuscate details—divisions, dates, and designation—at times to maintain interlocutors' anonymity.

2 Punjab Development Statistics http://www.bos.gop.pk/system/files/Punjab%20Development%20Statistics%202018.pdf

3 To be clear, these two specific references are to *maal patwari* (employees of the Revenue Department) rather than to *nehri patwari* (employees of the Irrigation Department, who in this essay are referred to simply as patwari); nevertheless, with respect to these comments, as the nehri patwari lament, the two groups share this *badnami*/bad reputation.

4 These rates were doubled in 2019.

5 Aziz was Pakistan's Finance Minister and later became the Prime Minister.

6 In other work, I examine distinct genealogies of corruption and their gendered embodiment (Hayat 2018).

References

ADB. 2006. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors*. Project Number: 37231. Proposed Multitranche Financing Facility Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Punjab Irrigated Agriculture Investment Program.

Akhtar, Aasim S. 2018. *The Politics of Common Sense: State, Society and Culture in Pakistan*. Cambridge University Press.

Alavi, Hamza. 1989. "Nationhood and the Nationalities in Pakistan." *Economic and Political Weekly* 24 (27): 1527–34.

Anand, Nikhil. 2011. "Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai." *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (4): 542–64.

Bear, Laura. 2014. "For Labour: Ajeet's Accident and the Ethics of Technological Fixes in Time." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20 (S1): 71–88.

Besky, Sarah. 2014. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

de Neve, Geert. 2005. *The Everyday Politics of Labour: Working Lives in India's Informal Economy*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.

Federici, Silvia. 1975. *Wages against Housework*. Bristol: Falling Wall Press (for) the Power of Women Collective.

Feldman, Ilana. 2008. *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917–1967*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ferguson, James. 2015. *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Filmer, Paul. 2003. "Structures of Feeling and Sociocultural Formations: The Significance of Literature and Experience to Raymond Williams's Sociology of Culture." *British Journal of Sociology* 54 (2): 199–219.

Gupta, Akhil. 2012. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Guyer, Jane I. 2004. *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Hayat, Maira. 2018. *Ecologies of Water Governance in Pakistan: The Colony, the Corporation and the Contemporary*, Doctoral dissertation, Department of Anthropology, the University of Chicago.

———. 2019. "The Knot of Ecological Time: An Outlet, An Election, and an Irrigation Office." *Engagement*, Anthropology and Environment Society. November 12. https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/2019/11/12/the-knot-of-ecological-time-an-outlet-an-election-and-an-irrigation-office/.

Hull, Matthew S. 2012. *Government of Paper: Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Kaviraj, Sudipta. 1984. "On the Crisis of Political Institutions in India." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 18 (2): 223–43.

Lipsky, Michael. 1980. *Street-Level Bureaucrats: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Mathur, Nayanika. 2016. *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State in Himalayan India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mazzarella, William. 2006. "Internet X-ray: E-governance, Transparency and the Politics of Immediation in India." *Public Culture* 18 (3): 473–505.

Mbembe, Achille and Janet Roitman. 1995. "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis." *Public Culture* 7: 323–52.

Millar, Kathleen M. 2018. *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio's Garbage Dump*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Navaro-Yashin, Nael. 2006. "Affect in the Civil Service: A Study of a Modern State-System." *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy* 9 (3): 281–94.

Parker, Ronald. 2010. *An Evaluation of World Bank Support, 1997–2007. Water and Development, 1. IEG Study Series, no. 1*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. Accessed 5 March, 2020.

Peebles, Gustav. 2012. "Filth and Lucre: The Dirty Money Complex as a Taxation Regime." *Anthropological Quarterly* 85 (4): 1229–55.

Polanyi, Karl. 2001 [1944]. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Prasad-Aleyamma, Mythri. 2017. "The Cultural Politics of Wages: Ethnography of Construction Work in Kochi, India." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 51 (2): 163–93.

Sneath, David. 2006. "Transacting and Enacting: Corruption, Obligation, and the Use of Monies in Mongolia." *Ethnos Journal of Anthropology* 71 (1): 89–112.

Weber, Max. 1921 [1968]. *Economy and Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Weeks, Kathi. 2011. *The Problem with Work. Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Williams, Raymond. 1961. *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto and Windus.

———. 1969. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

World Bank. 2007. Implementation Completion and Results Report (Ida-29990) on a Credit in the Amount of SDR 198.4 Million (US $ 126.6 Million Equivalent) to Islamic Republic of Pakistan for a National Drainage Project. Report No: ICR0000372. Pakistan Country Unit, South Asia Region.

Yanagisako, Sylvia J. 2002. *Producing Culture and Capital: Family Firms in Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

DOI: 10.1111/awr.12207

