

# Ruled by records:

## The expropriation of land and the misappropriation of lists in Islamabad

### ABSTRACT

In this article, I investigate the ongoing battle between villagers on the outskirts of Islamabad, Pakistan, and the state development agency attempting to expropriate their land. This battle has been waged through the medium of documents, particularly lists, which villagers and colluding officials have used to defraud the Pakistani government of the equivalent of millions of dollars. Through this case study, I develop an approach to contemporary state governance as material practice, showing how government discourse is shaped by the material forms it takes and highlighting the issue of reference and predication (or how words relate to things). [*governance, documents, state, semiotics, technology, materiality, South Asia, Pakistan*]

Between sectors G-11 and G-12 in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, where a four-lane avenue has been planned for decades, a narrow road has recently replaced an uneven muddy path. This road marks the battle line between the Pakistani federal government and the villagers of Badia Qadir Bakhsh (or, as it is bureaucratically designated, BQB), who reject the compensation the government offers for their expropriated land and houses in the area of the proposed thoroughfare. On one side, large, marble-faced houses guard the western front of the city. On the other side, water buffalos lumber among the village's low, sprawling house compounds and patches of wheat.

The city planning and administrative agency, the Capital Development Authority (CDA), has expropriated "undeveloped" land in western Islamabad and paid villagers like those of BQB the equivalent of millions of dollars in compensation. Meanwhile, the villagers continue to occupy the land and houses for which they have been paid. How does one account for this stalemate in one of the most highly planned and bureaucratically unified cities of the South Asian subcontinent? One day in 1998, I put the question to the special magistrate of the CDA, an elite officer who dealt with building and commercial regulation. He told me the key was to control "the list," that is, the list of property holders entitled to compensation for expropriated land and structures. "Why is the CDA begging for land?" he asked. "If I were doing this job, I would make a final list and keep it in the custody of the CDA chairman under lock and key. . . . Every day the list is tampered with. No one should be allowed to see or tamper with the list." Surprised by his answer, I wondered at the importance of this list. And why did the magistrate emphasize controlling it physically, rather than discursively?

Addressing these questions requires treating governance as a material practice. In this article, I develop an approach to contemporary state governance from the perspective of semiotic technologies—ideational and material means for producing, interpreting, and regulating significance for particular ends. I argue that scholars must attend to the material dimensions of bureaucratic semiotic technologies to understand the workings of

government. The focus on materiality foregrounds the issue of reference and predication, often underemphasized by discursive approaches to government that focus on classification schemes, statistics, and rules and pay little attention to concrete practices by which they are linked to people, places, and things.

Fraud in the land-expropriation process constitutes a challenge to the original vision for the city. Islamabad was established in 1959 under martial law as a highly planned administrative city. It was sited on agricultural land several miles north of Rawalpindi, then a city of several hundred thousand. Sealed off from the influence of the surrounding society, Islamabad was to be a bulwark against corruption, a tool to ensure the political dominance of the bureaucratic-military government that came to power in a 1958 coup (Hull in press). A powerful bureaucracy, the CDA was established with complete administrative and judicial authority over planning and development in the city.

The Master Plan for Islamabad, designed by the Greek modernist planner Costantinos Doxiadis, called for Islamabad and Rawalpindi to expand indefinitely on parallel rays out from their nuclei but to be forever divided by a green belt, a major transportation artery, and a linear industrial zone (see Figure 1). This division echoed that between New Delhi and Old Delhi, a division that represented the relation of the imperial government to its subject population and reinforced the social separation of rulers and ruled. In the Islamabad master plan, a monumental national administrative area dominated a grid of 1.25-square-mile sectors. This uncompromising numbered and lettered grid, materi-

alized by roads cutting through hillocks and spanning shallow gullies, symbolized the dominance of the government over even the land itself.

Doxiadis called Islamabad a “dynapolis” (from *dynamic* and *metropolis*) and praised the grid because it could “develop dynamically, unhindered into the future, into space and time” (Doxiadis Associates 1965:26). However, all did not go according to plan. The boundless westward expansion envisioned by Doxiadis stalled in the 11-series of sectors, just six miles from the president’s house, at the border of the village BQB.

In the English-language press and official writings of the early 1960s, inhabitants of villages such as BQB were referred to as “displaced persons,” “oustees,” or “evictees”—premature labels that confidently invoked their future dispossession. Today, the official designation for these people is still “displaced persons.” However, in most official writings, the English press, and conversation, they are more commonly called “affectees,” reflecting the fact that they are affected by planned development but are rarely displaced anymore. The Urdu press, from the beginning more in touch with the perspective and tactics of the villagers, has always called them what they call themselves, *mutassareen*, or “the affected.” The term *affectee* captures a whole vision of the relation between government and populace. It is applied to a broad range of people whose interests are negatively affected by the government: shopkeepers who have to pay a general sales tax, government servants whose state housing tenure is limited by eligibility policies, and worshippers who pray beneath the hot summer sun

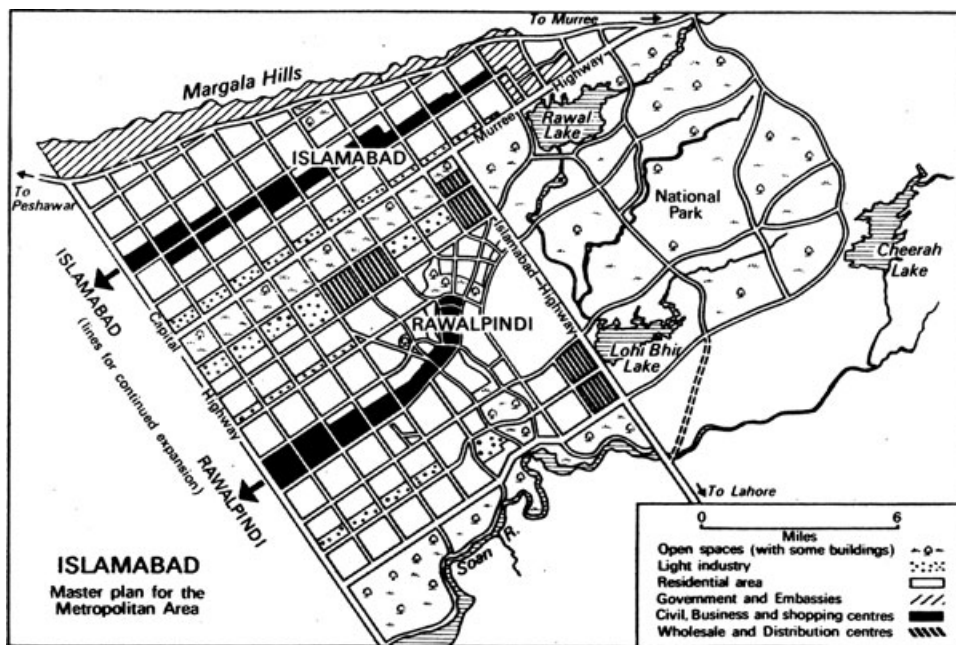


Figure 1. Master Plan for the Islamabad Metropolitan Area, 1960. Image first published in *Town Planning Review*, v. 36, Issue 1, pp. 1–28, 1965, article by Doxiadis Associates, “Islamabad, Creation of a New Capital.”

because the government has not completed a mosque. The term is also applied to the victims of droughts and floods. Government action, like a natural force, is figured as an overwhelming power wholly external to the people it controls.<sup>1</sup> As a term for the villagers tangling with the CDA today, however, *affectee* is less accurate than *effectee*, the misspelled version one occasionally finds in official writings and poorly edited English-language newspaper articles. This oxymoronic term captures the peculiar mix of agency and subjection that has characterized the owners of expropriated land in the last decade. For, these disaffected “effectees” have come to effectively control what the CDA does to them.

Although affectees have managed to change no laws or policies, they have established a strong basis from which to increase their compensation profit from expropriation: a mass of fraudulent documents. Affectees have gained control over the production and circulation of the documents through which regulations and laws are exercised, in Max Weber’s terms, appropriating (or misappropriating) some of the means of administration. The fraud illustrates the paradoxical relationship between government documentation and corruption.

### The problematics of reference and materiality in government representations

The intervention of Islamabad villagers in the expropriation process suggests the need to adjust the accounts of governmental technologies that have followed from Michel Foucault’s treatment of the modern European state. In such accounts, cartographic, statistical, and other documentary techniques plunge into sociocultural domains that were previously crudely known and controlled, to document and reorganize them. Governmental techniques generate an aggregate, synoptic view of reality, a schematic knowledge necessary to implement regimes of control. As James Scott puts it, modern administrative technologies attempt to “make a society legible” (1998:2) to the government. The history of Islamabad land expropriation challenges such accounts by presenting a case in which illegibility and opacity have been produced by the very instruments of legibility.

Backed by authoritarian power and facing little organized opposition, the modernist schemes Scott describes are carried out mostly according to plan and run into problems mainly because of informal processes they ignore. But, more commonly, the effort to use categories and measuring techniques to create bureaucratic objects—actual houses and land to be expropriated, displaced persons to be compensated—is a much more complicated task than planners envision, one mediated by elaborate documentary practices. Complications arise not only from the infiltration of the formal by the informal but also, as Harold Garfinkel (1967) emphasizes, from the formal procedures

themselves, especially from the translations of official categories into the operational realm of documentary artifacts. These translations shape the work done by state categories. As work on passports has shown, for example, the functioning of categories of nation-state membership depends on how they are translated into documents identifying individuals as members of a particular category (Bowker and Star 1999; Caplan and Torpey 2001; Torpey 2000).

The very term *bureaucracy* points to a form of governance built around a thing, the writing desk, and the documentary practices it supports. Accounts of bureaucracy commonly emphasize norms, rules, informal behavior, and coercive power but not writing, although writing has long been recognized as central to modern organizations, the state, in particular. Weber observed that “bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge” (1978:225). He saw the documentation of rules and facts as a function of writing unique to bureaucratic organizations: “The management of the modern office is based upon written documents (the ‘files’)” (Weber 1978:957). This emphasis on writing as an instrument of control through the storage and transmission of information has continued within much scholarship on states and other forms of organization (Blau and Meyer 1971; Goody 1986; Yates 1989). Recently, anthropologists have observed that documents, like other forms of material culture, such as uniforms, cars, and official buildings, are central to the everyday representation and, thereby, the reproduction of states (Das 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Messick 1993; Poole 2004; Sharma and Gupta 2006). Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, for example, argue that “proceduralism”—routine, repetitive practices of rule following—and its violation are central to “how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population” (2006:12). This emphasis on the broad symbolism of writing and other bureaucratic practices is a welcome corrective to an exclusive focus on the knowledge function of records.

However, the focus on the normative commitment to rule following or the aesthetics of form (Riles 2000) can lead to the view that the specificities of individual documents are secondary, even unimportant beside their formulaic and pro forma aspects. Although one should not lose sight of how documents index the state, attention should be paid to the way their participation in different projects within the state arena depends on their variable material qualities, discourses, and careers. A property document and a government file may inhabit the same world of bureaucratic inscription, but they circulate differently, gather around themselves different people and things, and are put to very different sorts of ends. The significance and function of bureaucratic inscriptions are heterogeneous.

Although the powers of graphic artifacts depend on their place within a regime of authority and authentication (Hull 2003), they are not bureaucratic fetishes, simply

embodiments of social relations in the bureaucratic arena, idols of statist proceduralism whose qualities can be dissolved in a bath of context. As Daniel Miller has argued within a general theory of culture as objectification, the “medium of objectification matters” (1987:129). His account emphasizes artifacts as human creations, but he argues that their production, distribution, use, and meaning depend on their properties and are not simply determined by social factors (Miller 2005). Similarly, Bruno Latour argues that people lend artifacts properties of themselves in exchange for properties of the artifacts, a process he calls “translation.” “We so incessantly recruit and socialize non-humans . . . not to mirror, congeal, crystallize, or hide social relations, but to remake these very relations through fresh and unexpected sources of action” (Latour 1999:197). Indeed, documents and other artifacts were unexpected sources of action with which villagers of western Islamabad remade their relations with the government and the built environment.

Additionally, too much emphasis on proceduralism can deflect attention from the problematics of reference at the center of bureaucratic practices. For Sharma and Gupta, the importance of “observing the correct bureaucratic rule” (2006:12) is evidenced by the divergence of documentation from the reality it purports to represent, as in their example of a supervisor accusing a subordinate of cheating because the subordinate irregularly documented a meeting the supervisor must have known the subordinate, in fact, attended. But, in accounting for the efficacy of documents, one does not have to choose between proceduralism and reference. Procedures compel compliance not because the documents they generate supersede the realities they purport to represent but because, much like scientific protocols, bureaucratic procedures normatively embed documents in those realities (Latour 1999:24–79). Although proceduralist concerns shape the production and use of all official documents, particular utterances and referential processes, even when they are compromised, account for much of the efficacy of individual documents. Bureaucratic practices have their own logics, concepts, norms, and sociology, but scholars need to account also for how they engage (or do not engage) with people, places, and things to make bureaucratic objects or, in Annemarie Mol’s terminology (2002), for how bureaucratic objects are “enacted” in practice.

This approach to bureaucratic objects suggests two shortcomings of Scott’s powerful visual metaphor. First, figuring the state as an observer looking from a singular perspective can lead one to assume the unity of state representations, rather than demonstrate how such unity is achieved (or not) through coordination in practice (Abrams 1988; Li 2005; Mol 2002). I return to this point below. Second, Scott’s account insightfully demonstrates the importance of classificatory schemes and conceptual logics employed by state

actors. But the visual metaphor can suggest these conceptual schemes and logics are rather flat filters that color the viewer’s image of the object. The metaphor underplays the numerous mediations necessary to achieve links between state representations and the objects they represent.

Accounts of the discursive dimension of governmental semiotic technologies need to be supplemented with an understanding of how such technologies work through material artifacts, particularly through what I call “graphic artifacts”—files, maps, lists, visiting cards, and so forth. Bureaucratic organizations are, to use Latour’s term, “object institutions” (1999:192), collectives of people and artifacts, graphic artifacts, in particular. These collectives are not reducible to sociologically defined coalitions that put artifacts to use; rather, these collectives are formed in part through encounters precipitated by artifacts. Although one should not lose sight of the ideological distinction between the state and the society it governs (Fuller and Harriss 2001; Mitchell 1999), the concept of “the collective” can help gather together people, things, and processes that associate across a poorly defined border between the state apparatus and its social surround.

Timothy Mitchell (1999:76–77) rightly warns against separating the material and discursive forms of states, and Scott similarly merges the functions of documents and statistics: “The functionary of any large organization ‘sees’ the human activity that is of interest to him largely through the simplified approximations of documents and statistics: tax proceeds, lists of taxpayers, land records, average incomes, unemployment numbers, mortality rates, trade and productivity figures, the total number of cases of cholera in a certain district” (1998:76–77). However, the material and discursive aspects of bureaucratic representations provide different handles for connections with other people and with things. The agents who engage with bureaucratic discourses (such as narratives, laws, classification schemes, and statistics) and the strategies they employ may be very different from those engaged with the artifactual vehicles of those discourses. Actors themselves differentiate the discursive from the material aspects of representations in this way. As I describe below, owners of expropriated land were entirely unsuccessful in altering expropriation laws, policies, and administrative techniques. However, the artifactual basis of legal decisions, policies, and administrative techniques proved to be a much more permeable domain.

Within the Pakistani bureaucracy is a great variety of graphic artifacts: files, office registers, minutes, organizational charts, plans, visiting cards, “chits,” petitions, powers of attorney, memos, letters, revenue records, regulations, reports, policy statements, and office manuals. There are some commonalities in the use of and ideological constructs related to most of these documentary genres. However, each genre has its own material form, pattern of use, discursive characteristics, graphic conventions, and

interpretive frameworks through which readers produce and make sense of it. The interpretation and use of most of these formal genres are governed by an official graphic ideology, elaborated in office manuals. A graphic ideology includes conventions for the interpretation of graphic forms, views about how artifacts are or ought to be produced and circulated, and more general conceptions regarding the ontology and authority of graphic artifacts (Clanchy 1979; Derrida 1974; Messick 1993).<sup>2</sup> The graphic ideology governing artifacts in Islamabad strictly regulates the production and circulation of official documents, views words as corresponding to things, and identifies autographic authorship with individual agency. This official ideology opens up a world of different practices that honor it in the breach.

As Charles Peirce (1955:98–119) observed and Webb Keane (1997, 2003) has recently explored, all signs are material and their material properties shape their signification. The study of governance must attend not only to communicative practices but also to the social life of things (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). In Islamabad, graphic artifacts are not only written and read but they are also duplicated, bound to other artifacts, supplemented, fabricated, defaced, and burned. They are circulated, delayed, locked up, stored, misplaced, lost, forgotten, stolen, and bought. Such events in the social career of artifacts shape the social organization of communication and, thereby, the outcome of events. For example, the career of a file, especially its path of circulation, is often more decisive to a case than the organizational hierarchy that is supposed to judge its merits (Hull 2003).

Although the material characteristics of documentation always shape its function (Chartier 1995; Latour 1990; Pellegrin 1998; Riles 2000; Torpey 2000), the colonial history of government in South Asia and the genres of records in use make the materiality of records especially salient in places such as Islamabad. Contemporary South Asian bureaucracies are the successors of the Kaghazi Raj, or Document Rule of the British colonial administration, an administration built on two kinds of distrust. First, the directors of the English East India Company in London distrusted their faraway agents, who routinely served their own interests alongside or even through their work for the company (Hejeebu 2005; Marshall 1976). Likewise, colonial traders and administrators recognized that Indian functionaries were often more committed to their own interests and social institutions than to the company or government. British officers in India were frequently transferred among different posts. They lacked knowledge of the locales they administered and of the permanently posted native functionaries on whom they helplessly depended. In response to these uncertain loyalties, the British, building on the elaborate written procedures of the Mughals and nascent European commercial practices, fashioned a graphic regime of surveillance and control. This solution

took form within the horizon of the empiricist metaphysics prevalent in Britain: a practical attack on the problem of words and things, an attempt to make discourse part of a more trustworthy material order.<sup>3</sup> Of course, comparable documentary techniques have been underpinned by different ontologies in South Asia and elsewhere (Bedos-Rezak 2000; Connery 1998; Lewis 1999). It was precisely the materiality of graphic signs that made them useful as a palpable sedimentation of the real. Official discourse was anchored in people, places, times, and artifacts through an elaborate use of signatures, dates, and stamps. Officials transferred from London often noted that the Indian colonial government used written documentation far more extensively than its metropolitan counterpart did (Government of India, Secretariat Procedures Committee 1963, a reissue of a 1920 report). Normative procedures were laid down in hundreds of manuals produced for every sphere of administration in the late 19th century (Saumarez Smith 1985). In much the same fashion, the successors of these manuals define procedures in contemporary Pakistani bureaucracies.

But this regime does not always supply the certitude and stability it promises. An 18th-century Yemeni commentator, writing in a Muslim metaphysical tradition that placed more stock in spirit than matter, saw the problem clearly.

As for the falseness of the position of him who holds for the valuation of documents without restraint, this is obvious. Because if the door of unlimited acceptance of them were opened, the wealth of the community would be lost and people's possessions would be removed from the permanence and security of their hands. In this position there is immoderation and a disdain for principles, because any claimant can make for himself what he wants in the way of documents, proceeding with craft and skill in reproducing the papers he thinks will advance his circumstances. [Messick 1993:212]

This commentary points to the bureaucratic irony that dependence on written artifacts to secure fixity can result in the opposite effect. Crucially, the basis for insecurity the commentary identifies is not only falsity (referentially incorrect representation) but also the manipulation of artifacts. Following this insight, I describe the fraud endemic to the Islamabad expropriation process as an illicit production and circulation of things, showing that this fraud is less like lying and more like the theft or forgery and sale of a painting, a material intervention in discourse.

Graphic artifacts as representations do not live apart from a represented realm. They are entangled with the people, places, events, and other artifacts they represent. This is especially clear in the Islamabad expropriation process. The paper regime the British designed to hermetically seal the bureaucracy never worked as planned (e.g., Hejeebu

2005; Khan 1866; Misra 1977), despite the nostalgia for the incorruptible Raj one sometimes finds among Islamabad bureaucrats. But the traffic in and out of the CDA is certainly brisk. Far from remaining in desks and file cabinets, graphic artifacts are now crucial mediators of the engagement of the government and populace, shaping settlement patterns, social networks, political cleavages within villages, and financial compensation.

### Early planning and failed opposition

On the original planning maps for Islamabad (e.g., Figure 1), the squares of sectors are empty white spaces, and early documents describe the site for the new city as “open land,” but officials were well aware that over 54,000 villagers inhabited the area of the future capital (Federal Capital Commission 1960:12). Early plans envisioned preserving some of the villages located on the periphery of the area to be developed, as “tokens of traditional village life.”<sup>4</sup> Most of the villages, however, lay within the grid of sectors and were to be removed. One official wrote regretfully, “While it is not a pleasant job to throw people from their houses or land, we have to do it in the larger public interest of establishing Islamabad.”

Under the CDA Ordinance, executed under Martial Law Regulation 82 of 1960 (MLR 82), owners of expropriated land were paid the average 1954–58 market price for their land, plus 15 percent for compulsory acquisition. Compensation for built structures, “built-up property” (or BUP), was similarly based on average 1954–58 market sales using a formula that included square footage of the structure and quality of construction. Later, these rates were augmented to offset monetary inflation, but the base rate was frozen at 1958 levels. Under this regulation, compensation for land and houses was effectively fixed at the rate a farmer or shepherd might have paid for them in the 1950s, although eventually it would be not farmers but investors and tycoons of various sorts who would buy the land from the government at high rates for construction of large houses and commercial plazas. This was all according to plan. The fixed rate of compensation was intended to prevent a speculation market from developing, which would slow construction and drive up development costs for the CDA. More importantly, as the government saw it, the benefits of government actions should accrue to government. If land prices went up as a result of the development of the capital, then the government, rather than “individuals,” should earn the profit (Federal Capital Commission 1960). For the CDA, this was not only just but also financially necessary, as the funds raised from the sale of developed plots would finance future developments.

Under the same expropriation law, new construction on land publicly designated for expropriation was banned. The CDA relaxed the enforcement of this law in a grow-

ing number of cases in which only part of the land was acquired, leaving a substantial portion to be looked after by owners. But the ban was rigidly enforced on wholly acquired lands. In 1965, five men were sentenced to a year in prison for the construction of new houses on land acquired by the CDA.

Many villagers were unwilling to part with ancestral land. In conversations with me in 1997, Raja Zahoor Ahmed, *numberdar* (lit. keeper of numbers, or official headman) of Sheikhpur, a village yet to be possessed that spread over sectors I-14, I-15, and I-16, said that residents, especially elders, were devastated by the news that they would have to move. Retelling a story that has entered the folklore of the expropriation process, he claimed that four or five elders died from the shock. “They loved the land. Their ancestors had cultivated the land with such effort—now there are tractors, but in those days it was all done by hand and with plows and bullocks. And this land was the source of their honor.” A long-standing rural vision of the city as a place of alien and immoral ways fueled villagers’ anxieties that they would be duped out of their money and perhaps corrupted as well. Other reasons for their opposition to surrendering their land were more economic. CDA rates of compensation were often below market rates prevailing in the late 1950s, because the sales on which the average market values were calculated included a large number of transfers within families at low, nonmarket rates. Moreover, if they declined to farm agricultural plots granted to them elsewhere, most villagers would have had trouble finding another source of income.<sup>5</sup> As uneducated farmers, they would have had difficulty making a livelihood from the new business of the region, government. Nevertheless, villagers inhabiting areas affected by the early phases of development left their houses and lands peacefully in the face of bulldozers.

Although associations of affectees proudly professed their willingness to sacrifice for the new national capital, they often criticized the expropriation process as a grand scheme to take land at low rates from the poor for the benefit of well-placed government officials and the wealthy. In 1970, a spokesman for a group of affectees demanded that “acquisition should not be made for allotments later to capitalists” (*Nawa-i-Waqt* 1970). At a meeting of the Association for Islamabad Displaced Persons in 1977, the head of the organization demanded that “land should not be acquired for forests, clubs, race courses, golf courses and for favoring the rich and bureaucracy.” In public discourse and conversation, villagers characterized the whole process as a cruel injustice (*zulum*).

However, some villagers eagerly took the cash the government offered them and quit their land. Although the Punjab is known to have some of the richest agricultural soil in South Asia, the land in the Islamabad area is rocky and yields a poor crop. In the early 1960s, few thought that the government would make a go of the new capital and that

their land would someday be worth millions. Through the mid-1960s, the name *Islamabad* was embraced by doubtful quotation marks even in Rawalpindi newspapers. According to one official, some residents approached the CDA and requested that their land be expropriated. When they were told that the government had not yet allocated funds to acquire their land, they insisted that the CDA take it immediately and pay them whenever the financing came through. After giving up their land, many former male residents could be seen stepping out in Rawalpindi dressed in fancy clothes and gold-embroidered Kohati sandals, driving cars or new horse carts. Some gambled away their financial awards. Others who were thrifter bought land, a long-standing use for surplus funds in rural Punjab.

Those opposed to expropriation or to the specific compensation awarded, however, had little recourse. Under martial law, the CDA could not be challenged politically. There were also no legal options. MLR 82 declared that regulations made under its broad provisions overrode any other existing law or contract and explicitly banned recourse to any court, including the Supreme Court. Paragraph 49E of the CDA Ordinance, buttressed by MLR 82, also explicitly denied court jurisdiction in disputes with the CDA over any matter, including expropriation and compensation. Under the populist government of Zulifkhar Ali Bhutto in the early 1970s, courts began to accept petitions from villagers. In numerous legal cases against the CDA expropriation laws in the 1970s and early 1980s, affectees invoked the rights of sons of the soil, the just-price ethics of the market, and the Quranic injunction never to compel a sale. However, except in a few cases that turned on technical aspects of the expropriation process, courts found against these petitions. Although the legal basis for courts to hear these cases was shaky, the CDA law was clear regarding the CDA's powers of expropriation and requirements for compensation.

In very different kinds of disputes over land in Brazil, described by James Holston (1991), and in postsocialist Romania, described by Katherine Verdery (1996, 2003), most of the conflict centered on the role of law in defining categories and systems of meaning. In those cases, categories defined by different laws conflicted; different laws were embedded in different historical narratives of the individual holdings and the polity. In contrast, the martial law and CDA regulations of Islamabad are paragons of clarity and simplicity; no court rulings have involved significant reinterpretation of these laws. However, contention over the evidentiary artifacts required to implement these laws has been as productive of conflict and irresolution as in Brazil and Romania.

### Shifting houses and dummy houses

In this section and the next, I describe how, through the 1980s and 1990s, affectees were able to intervene in increas-

ingly sophisticated ways at later and later stages of the referential practices (Hanks 1990) through which compensation records were generated. My narrative begins, as affectees began, with the initial material referents in the chains of documentation leading to compensation checks: houses. Money for fancy duds, gambling, or the purchase of more land was not the only reason some villagers were eager for expropriation. Early on, there were indications that "oustees" were, as one official wrote, "shifting to adjoining areas unauthorisedly." By the mid-1960s, officials were already concerned that the expropriation process had changed the dynamics of settlement in the area. Officials noted that mud huts were springing up at night like mushrooms north and west of the city. In 1971, a CDA representative, in response to complaints about CDA efforts to evict residents of one village without compensation, claimed that half the population "consisted of itinerant villagers who had flocked to the area in hope of getting compensation money and other privileges intended for bonafide displaced persons" (*Pakistan Times* 1971).

The CDA itself inadvertently promoted this process by allowing oustees to buy the building materials (*malba*) of their demolished houses for 15 percent of the house value. The original objective of this policy was to help displaced persons build houses elsewhere at no financial cost to the CDA. In explaining why this policy of selling the building materials was reversed in 1989, the head of the Lands Directorate within the CDA wrote that the "selling of malba invariably resulted in the issuance of a fresh lease for exploiting the Authority as the malba was conveniently transported a little distance away and the new houses used to be built with old material which was sufficient evidence to support false claims." Today, the hodgepodge of brick houses faced with concrete gives BQB the look of an old village renovated by the affluence that has come to the area in the wake of the establishment of the capital. In fact, most of the structures are less than 20 years old. The original village straddled sectors G-11 and G-12 (see Figure 2). According to CDA records, 263 acres of BQB land lying in G-11/1 and G-11/2 were acquired in 1969, with compensation following two years later. The built-up property on this land, 97 houses, was legally acquired by the CDA more than six years later, in 1975, the compensation award for which came nearly a decade later, in 1984, in the form of money and 109 plots in I-10/1. Through the mid-1970s, the 31 acres of BQB lying in G-12 was mostly occupied by structures (*baiteks*) used for entertaining guests and travelers on their way from Rawalpindi to the popular shrine of Golra Sharif to the north. Before the CDA took possession of the G-11 land, residents there began to move across the border into G-12, converting the hospitality structures into their primary residences, becoming guests of themselves on their own land. Others who did not have such structures in G-12 built new houses there in violation of the fraying CDA ban

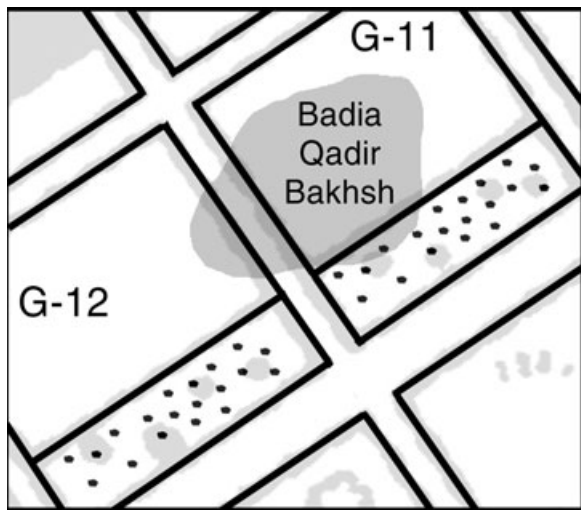


Figure 2. The village of Badia Qadir Bakhsh as it straddled sectors G-11 and G-12 before expropriation.

on construction in areas designated for expropriation. After building their houses anew, they simply waited to profit from another expropriation. One CDA official I talked with likened the CDA effort to rolling up a carpet.

This resettlement tactic of villagers was inadvertently promoted by the disjuncture between two kinds of land-reckoning systems used by different organizational divisions of the CDA. Although people generally know that all the land of the region will eventually be expropriated, by law compulsory land acquisitions have to be made under some definite development scheme. Determination of which land is to be acquired in any particular proceeding is made by the Planning Wing of the CDA, which plans by sector. Officials of the Planning Wing submit requests to the Lands Directorate, which then determines who owns the land falling in a particular sector and what built structures exist on it. Through the chairman of the CDA, the district commissioner of the CDA (DC-CDA), an official with special judicial powers within the larger administrative structure of the Pakistani state, is directed to acquire these lands and to award compensation.

Planners, viewing the city in terms of land area and topography, rely on survey maps produced by modern transit-stadia measurements using metric-system units and organized by the areal division of the sector. Although the field notes of surveyors are usually recorded in Urdu, the notations on the survey maps as well as accompanying documentation are in English. In contrast, the Lands Directorate uses the revenue record, the landholding system of great complexity developed by the British from a Mughal system (Baden-Powell 1892; Saumarez Smith 1996). This record is written in Urdu (CDA functionaries often called it the "Urdu list") and uses the areal divisions of village or revenue estate (*mauzah*); plot (*khasra*), measured

in units of acres; one-eighth of an acre (*kanal*); and 50 square feet (*marla*). Village-level revenue staff (*patwaris*) measure holdings using chains (and sometimes pacing) and landmarks. They keep village records on scrolls of cloth on which they sketch the property shape in black or blue pen and record the ownership, tenure, and size of the holding. As the records are organized around individual landholdings for taxation purposes, they do not readily or accurately offer the synoptic areal perspective of the planning maps. Revenue maps (*naqshas*) are made by tracing the individual plot shapes from the scroll onto white paper, so the revenue map is a haphazard assemblage of the shapes drawn on the scroll.

Survey maps and revenue maps are not incommensurable but uncommensurated, because the practices that generate them include no common elements. To overcome this problem, CDA surveyors add something to the landscape that can be shared by the two practices: a concrete pillar sunk into the ground that can be located on both maps. This pillar translates between the maps to determine which land and built-up property have to be acquired under a given acquisition directive. Although erecting a pillar is not usually a problem, in Sheikhpur, a village that spans sectors I-14, I-15, and I-16, villagers physically threatened surveyors, refusing to allow pillars to be established, and the police would not come to force the issue.<sup>6</sup> After making their measurements, the CDA surveyors could ostensibly have referenced which lands and built-up property in the village were to be acquired under acquisition directives for I-14. Without sinking markers, however, they could not legally determine which holdings these were on the basis of the revenue map. Similarly, CDA officials could not prohibit new construction in the village because the location of the structures could not be legally established. The villagers affected the legal discourse about their houses by controlling the artifacts necessary for its production.

Functionaries in both the planning and acquisitions divisions of the CDA know something about both land-reckoning systems, but expertise is not evenly distributed. The Planning Wing employs its own revenue-record specialists to deal with problems blending planning and ownership of undeveloped land. Frustrated in my early attempts to understand the technicalities of the revenue records, I acquired a copy of the Urdu-language manual for training revenue staff. When I mentioned this to officials in the Planning Wing, several asked me to make them copies, eager to be free of dependence on their subordinates' command of this system.

In normal operations, each land-reckoning system is used by different CDA organizational divisions, so discrepancies are never even noted. In fact, the problem of reconciling the two systems was pointed out to me not by a CDA planner or acquisition official but by a private town planner who worked for housing societies, organizations that must



both acquire and plan their developments and, therefore, must square revenue and survey records. “The physical survey never co-ordinates with the patwari [revenue official] records,” he explained. “You cannot fit khasras [plots] in the master plan survey. When you superimpose the [revenue] map with the survey, they never coincide. For example, the patwari says a [plot] is 500 kanals, the survey shows it is 450 kanals . . . it is almost always a decrease because the patwari measures by walking on undulating land . . . sometimes they even walk over little piles of dirt.” Like the length of the British coast (Mandelbrot 1967), the size of a landholding varies with the size of the unit of measure—the smaller the unit, the larger the holding. Furthermore, graphic representations of plots can diverge from their numerical representations. For example, a 20-kanal plot may be represented on the khasra map as larger than a 25-kanal plot. With this insight, I coordinated acquisition records and planning records for several sectors and concluded the CDA also usually acquires more land than it receives. None of the officials in the Lands Directorate and the Planning Wing whom I questioned about this discrepancy were concerned—or should have been.

If one is tempted by Foucault’s image of the modern state as a panopticon, this disjuncture between two land-reckoning systems within the same bureaucratic organization should give pause. Here, rather than one, there are two observers in the tower and the prisoners know that these observers are not looking at them the same way. Furthermore, as Latour argues, many mediations are necessary to construct a representation with credible claims to command a wide field. Latour’s counterimage of the “oligoptic” is much more appropriate here: an organization employing multiple techniques with limited and particular visions (Latour and Hermant 1998). Latour points out what most bureaucrats understand: Administrative techniques do not all converge in a unified set of representations. They generate ensembles of artifacts of limited and differing perspectives that are often very difficult to commensurate. The residents of expropriated land also understand this quite well. Those in Sheikhpur defy the CDA by controlling the mediating artifacts (pillars) necessary to generate legal representations for expropriation proceedings. Those of BQB exploit the disjuncture between the two systems: Whereas the CDA acquired land by sector, they resettled by revenue estate (mauzah).<sup>7</sup>

But more than simply resettlement is going on in villages like BQB. For reasons I describe in more detail below, population and house figures are hard to come by and are highly contested. The 1972 Census of BQB counted 68 households holding a population of 425. A federal government survey conducted in 1985 put the population of BQB at 183, suggesting that a substantial portion of residents had left after the CDA took possession of their land in G-11 (Capital Development Authority 1985). The 1985 govern-

ment survey was the last one conducted before such information gathering became a highly contentious activity. However, Shehla Parveen Shamil and Roohi Sadiq gained broad access to the village in 1986 for their anthropology master’s-degree research at Quaid-i-Azam University. According to their survey, BQB had 387 residents, in 50 “families” or households (Shamil 1987:29), a striking increase in just a couple of years. Shamil and Sadiq wrote that, of these 50 households, only 19 were “joint families,” in which adult brothers do not divide ownership of residential property. Residents told them that separate houses for nuclear families began to be built in the early 1980s under pressure from daughters-in-law, common figures of subjection in South Asian kinship arrangements. However, it is likely that the CDA policy of compensating on the basis of built-up property occupied by a “family unit,” a term that has entered the common vocabulary of Urdu- and Punjabi-speaking villagers, played a significant role in this change of residential arrangements. According to Sadiq (1987), residents of BQB upheld the status and propriety of the village by refusing to allow members of lower castes to settle there. They seem to have been much more welcoming of fictitious residents. Natural increase and even the most thorough division of joint family holdings cannot account for the fact that, by 1993, 663 more affectees of BQB had established the right to compensation for built-up property.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the claims for built-up property have been made on the basis of what CDA officials call “dummy houses,” houses built not to be lived in but to be counted. As one CDA official testified, many of these houses “came up suddenly over-night” when the process of marking houses was begun. Although some of these houses are brick, they are more commonly short structures with walls of clay or a mix of stones and clay, no floors, and no roofs or, at most, “roofs” consisting of a few iron bars supporting some bricks. If they exist, doors and windows are usually broken and made of narrow strips of rotten wood.

For these cheaply built houses, “owners” would receive hundreds of thousands of rupees in compensation, which was sometimes regretted as bitterly as it was struggled for. One village resident involved in such schemes lamented to me that the CDA made a thief of him: “The CDA did not give us our rights so we were helpless, we had to do this dishonest work . . . if the CDA had given us our rights, then outsiders could not have come in and gotten involved.” The prospect of such a high return on investment attracted many people from outside the village to join affectees as investors or brokers in these schemes. In the early 1990s, a property dealer operating in E-12 offered a friend of mine a chance to build a house there. The dealer took him out to the area of his “dream house” accompanied by the contractor who would build it. Although compensation for the structure’s expropriation would depend on CDA policies, which change, the dealer offered to

have a one-room house built for Rs. 4,000–5,000, to earn an eventual estimated return of Rs. 300,000 (then about \$7,200), or a three-room house for Rs. 10,000–12,000, to return as much as Rs. 800,000 (about \$20,000). Unlike routine systems of illegal payments (e.g., Parry 2000; Wade 1982), these kinds of deals were entrepreneurial ventures promising large gross returns, over 60 times the investment, from which the dealer, CDA functionaries, and villagers who would vouch for an individual's residence could be easily paid off. One CDA official even made his own son the owner of a dummy house. An assistant in the Lands Directorate who had extensive knowledge of BQB claimed that many of the owners of such structures there have used the compensation they have received so far to purchase houses in the developed sector of G–11. They have installed their servants in their dummy houses and plan to eject them when the full compensation is awarded.

Dummy-house schemes have been helped by the difficulty of applying any definition of a house to actual houses in rural Punjab. Residential structures in rural Punjab usually consist of at least two rooms giving onto a courtyard with a stove or cooking area to one side. If grown male relatives with families occupy the same residence, each family will tend to have predominant use of one or more rooms. One of the rooms in the houses of poorer villagers will be used as a sitting room for receiving guests. Wealthier villagers more concerned about observing *purdah*, like many inhabitants of BQB, may also have a one- or two-room structure entirely independent of their residential compound for this purpose. This combination of physical structure and kinship patterns has created problems for CDA compensation policies. CDA compensation for built-up property is awarded to a “family unit,” defined in 1984 as a bureaucratic entity combining kinship and a material structure: “husband/wife and dependent children or single person owning a separate independent house” (Capital Development Authority 1984). Given the ambiguous relationship between physical structure and settlement of kin units, the CDA, like its British colonial predecessors (Glover 2008:38), has never been able to work out a formal definition of the house for compensation purposes, in terms of either kinship or physical structure.<sup>9</sup> In the early period of acquisitions, this was less of a problem, because what is now called a “joint family” (father, mother, and brothers with or without wives and children) occupying a single compound was the norm and compensation was made on this basis. In the mid-1980s, as nuclear families occupying independent compounds became more common—partly as a way to increase compensation—heads of nuclear families living together in one compound began to claim that one house is actually many, because each room has a “family unit” living in it. This drove the CDA to recognize even single rooms as “houses,” which promoted vigorous building. In light of these problems, in 1996, the CDA ejected the house as a ba-

sis for delineating the “family unit,” which was redefined in purely kinship terms.<sup>10</sup>

### Demolition certificates, files, and lists

Although the dummy-house schemes had been successful, affectees and their partners in the bureaucracy soon realized that all the shoddy building was unnecessary. They did not have to be concerned with the referents of records but could go straight to the records themselves to secure compensation. Furthermore, the direct engagement of village leaders with records gave them even greater influence as essential points on the path of various graphic artifacts necessary to the business of profiting from compensation.

Village leaders, the heads of families that have dominated villages for a century and a half or more, recognize that their political authority is embedded in their current settlements. As one leader from BQB told me, “The CDA can give us land, houses, and money, but who will make us the leader [*khan*]? Who will put the turban [*pagari*] on our heads?” This same concern was articulated by the Mahbood Ilahi, the headman of BQB before the capital was established: “As long as I have the land, I will be numberdar.” However, it is not the land but the process of expropriating land that has given these local leaders a new lease on power. It is one of the many ironies of Islamabad that this modernization project has strengthened the so-called traditional leaders it aimed to supersede.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to Lesotho, as described by James Ferguson (1994), state practices are extended but not state power. According to Sadiq, even in 1986, fewer than half of the men in BQB still farmed as a primary occupation; more than half of the men (46 of 83) were employed outside the village in the government and construction, giving them independence from village society even as they were brought under the influence of different authorities beyond the village. Such a trend would likely have continued even if the village had remained undisturbed by expropriation measures. Now, however, the village leaders represent important village-based interests of residents to the bureaucracy. Village leaders eagerly reproduce the paternalistic modernization discourse on the ignorance and childishness of villagers. In contrast, to defend their efforts to bypass leaders and deal directly with individual villagers, government bureaucrats highlight the knowledge and savvy of these same villagers.

In one dramatic incident in 1988, affectees gathered at the CDA offices to protest the slow processing of their claims. One official's file narrative of the event goes as follows:<sup>12</sup> A “procession of affectees” came to see the chairman. He was not “on his seat,” so they went to see Reza Sajjad, the member of the CDA board who oversees land acquisitions.<sup>13</sup> The affectees demanded that he withdraw the appeals the CDA had filed against a particular

compensation award. Sajjad said he could do nothing himself. Then, according to the file, the

Mob got furious and inflicted injuries on the person of Member (P) [Member, Planning, i.e., Sajjad] by everything whatever they got in the room i.e. Flower Pot, Stainless Steel Trays, Table Glass, Chairs, and tools like sicle [*sic*]. Member (P) was badly hurt and ran out of his room to save his life. Member (P) came out of CDA Sectt. Building by cutting open the wire gauze of the window of the room of Member (F) and thus saved him [*sic*] from inflictions of further injuries of the Mob.

Sajjad was in intensive care for a week. Subsequently, “the Mob wrecked office of Dir. Rehab [the head of the Rehabilitation Directorate],” who had already fled, and tried to steal office files. The mob then attacked the deputy director of Rehabilitation, after smashing in his locked office door. The “free for all” at Rehabilitation lasted an hour, and then the angry affectees were off to the Lands Directorate offices, where they used “rude unparliamentary language.” Officials there had fled, but the offices were destroyed. The account concludes that the mob also made off with records. As I discuss below, there is more to this story and to Sajjad’s role as victim.

Since that violent episode, affectees and their colleagues have established more routine methods of obtaining and even fabricating records. Some of these leaders and their assistants, “approach-walas,” as one of their group called them, spend the entire day at the CDA offices or in the courts.<sup>14</sup> Zahoor, the headman of Sheikpur, joked that he arrives before government employees and leaves after they do, even though no one makes him sign a daily attendance log—one reason many CDA employees turn up at the office with some regularity. The approach-walas sit in the offices of any officers who will receive them and cultivate relationships with clerks and peons (runners), who are informed about meetings among officers and, especially, about the movement of files. The efforts of approach-walas and brokers to develop networks within the CDA have been aided by a CDA recruitment policy aimed at the “rehabilitation” of displaced persons. Despite federal rules requiring that posts within the CDA be filled from a “surplus pool” (a group of people with the status but not the work position of employees of the federal government), the CDA gave preference to affectees in the hiring of lower staff from the 1960s through the end of the 1970s. This was an early concession to a demand of affectees that could be satisfied at little cost. From the list of displaced persons maintained by the Establishment Section of the Federal Secretariat, the CDA hired hundreds, perhaps thousands, of clerks, drivers, peons, guards, and sweepers. Over the years, many of these people have risen from driver or peon to lower-division clerk or from lower-division clerk to upper-division clerk or even assistant. Even those who remain at the bottom

are well informed of daily goings-on within the CDA.<sup>15</sup> For many such CDA staff employees, the pecuniary motives that make them open to traffic in information and artifacts are augmented by sympathy.

The head of the department in charge of land acquisitions estimated to me in 1998 that an astonishing 95 percent of the original files dealing with expropriation cases were in the possession of people outside the bureaucracy, who brought them in to CDA offices whenever any work was to be done on them, sometimes at the request of CDA staff whose superior called for them. Such people thus became virtual extensions of the office bureaucracy. The possessors of files removed papers that recorded denials or objections to compensation claims and added documents supporting claims, with signatures forged or paid for. Several officials alleged that a forgery racket operated through at least the early 1990s that specialized in the signatures of all the CDA officials involved in the compensation proceedings. Brokers were often better informed of the movement of files and the progress of cases than the officers responsible for them. One senior official in the Lands Directorate complained to me that, sometimes, affectees and brokers came into his office to push their cases and inform him that their files were sitting on his desk—before he had even had a chance to review them.

The BQB fraud illustrates the power of this control over the modest artifacts of the compensation process. Once liberated from their houses, affectees and their bureaucratic partners began to work on artifacts with a more and more mediated relationship to the houses they were supposed to represent, a movement not from the real to the representation or from word to thing, but from one thing to another.

The paper artifacts were more easily manipulated than houses and enabled the fraud schemes to vastly increase in scale during what one official described to me as a period of “lust and plunder” from 1987 to 1993. At the heart of the new schemes were “proformae,” or surrender certificates documenting that houses of a certain size owned by certain persons had been surrendered and demolished. The central government figure in the fraud was none other than Sajjad, then the CDA board member in charge of the Planning Wing, the official who was attacked by the mob.<sup>16</sup> He had formed an alliance with the CDA district commissioner, who had judicial powers to review and amend the compensation awards submitted by the Lands Directorate. Sajjad also brought in a group of fellow officials from the province of Sindh to staff the middle ranks of the Lands Directorate: an assistant director, technical (ADT), and several subengineers, whose job it was to gather information and produce documentation on built-up property.

In 1987, 1988, and 1990, the DC–CDA claimed to have heard 1,071 compensation review petitions and to have directed the technical staff to go out to the sites to verify the veracity of the claims. Whether the technical staff looked at

any house sites is unclear, but they certainly did the paperwork: hundreds of fraudulent demolition certificates were produced. Several CDA functionaries I spoke with alleged that the “owners” of the demolished houses paid the ADT Rs. 10,000 for each certificate. Sajjad ensured that these certificates would not be challenged by diverting files from their normal paths through the organization hierarchy, effectively altering the control of the expropriation process. He “marked” files (i.e., gave written orders for their transfer) directly to the DC–CDA and ADT, and they sent their files to him, bypassing the senior officers of the Lands Directorate, who would normally have signed these files but who were outside the collusive circle.

On the basis of the demolition certificates, the ADT then produced compensation lists and submitted them to the DC–CDA. Many of the petitioners were not owners of land in BQB. No petitions from the supposed petitioners were submitted to the CDA, and no separate files for individual cases were opened. Most houses acquired before 1988 had been documented to be less than 1,000 square feet in area, and nearly all were less than 2,000 square feet; in sharp contrast, the new certificates showed the demolished houses to have been between 2,000 and 5,000 square feet. According to the dates on the certificates, a single bulldozer on two separate busy days demolished over 700 houses. The ADT’s list alone would have been sufficient grounds for the DC–CDA to make the awards. It seems likely that the only reason the surrender certificates were fabricated is that they had to be presented to the officials disbursing the compensation funds. The surrender certificates themselves had a convenient autonomy, because they testified that the owners of demolished structures had bought and removed the building materials—leaving no traces of the dwellings. Thus, these certified records were, by their own testimony, factually unverifiable, their referents no longer existing!

On the basis of these surrender certificates, the DC–CDA accepted 747 of the 1,071 claims. Most of the claims were probably bogus, so the reason he rejected some of them is unclear. Perhaps he was trying to make the review process appear authentic, or perhaps some of the house “owners” did not meet his price. The scheme was clearly in the financial interest of all parties, but the alliance showed strains at times, most evidently in the attack on Sajjad by his partners, described above. Sajjad might have been forced to support a review of the lists suggested by a subordinate or superior. Alternatively, he might have been slow to deliver on his promises of compensation (for which the affectees had already paid) or he might have made further demands on the affectees before disbursing the compensation funds. Funds equivalent to millions of dollars were disbursed, although affectees remained on their land to demand more.

However, as the special magistrate I talked with observed, the most vexing artifacts for CDA officials trying to curb fraud have been the lists of affectees and their houses.

Understanding why requires examining their specific characteristics as a graphic genre. Jack Goody argues that, in written lists, isolated linguistic units are ordered outside the frame of a sentence, “where they appear in a very different and highly ‘abstract’ context,” a process he calls “decontextualization” (1977:78). Goody is interested in what he considers the cognitive consequences of this decontextualization. However, his observation can be recast in more precise sociological and linguistic terms to understand how the place of lists in discursive and artifactual contexts shapes their role.

Lists of compensation for built-up property included the name of the claimant, the location of the property, the house number, the size of the structure, the quality classification of the structure, and the rupee amount to be awarded. As discrete artifacts, these lists were linguistically divorced from the oral and written propositional discourse that asserted their factuality. Most CDA genres are anchored in the human, spatiotemporal, and artifactual orders of the CDA by elaborate use of signatures, dates, stamps, and interartifactual references (Hull 2003). In contrast, the lists submitted by the Lands Directorate for execution by the DC–CDA were inscribed with almost none of these indexes of context. The space of the paper was no match for the great volume of activity and artifacts that was supposed to attest to the validity of every entry on the list. According to official procedures, the lists were to be compiled by junior officers after consulting the supporting documents, including petitions, verification certificates, and the revenue record. There simply was not enough space on the list to document who had added a particular entry on what documentary grounds. Official procedures called for review and approval of the lists by the more senior officials, but this was impractical given the volume of documents that would have had to be seen for verification of the hundreds of entries on even a single list. Furthermore, in many cases, such documents were hard to locate because they had been mislaid or removed from the office altogether. In terms of Latour’s concept of “circulating reference” (1999:24), the list lay at the end of a chain of transformations, transmutations, and translations that links a representation to its purported referent. Tracing entries on the list back along this chain to their supposed referents was difficult, if not impossible. The compensation lists, therefore, were relatively autonomous (decontextualized, in Goody’s terms), weakly linked to the process that was supposed to generate them.<sup>17</sup>

This characteristic of lists opened them up to rather easy manipulation. When a list was being prepared, an entry could simply be added, without the difficult (and expensive) effort of fabricating supporting documents, which would have involved other functionaries. Because signs of the process by which the list was actually produced were not inscribed on the list itself, functionaries could evade prescribed procedures and open the list preparation process

to “outside” parties.<sup>18</sup> In practice, lists were produced by a variety of irregular activities in the murky transactional arenas of money, favors, friendship, and kinship. They gradually came to resemble Tchichikof’s registers of dead souls (Gogol 2004), except these souls were living—elsewhere.

When a list was approved by senior officials, fraudulent entries were secured. Common recognition of the practical difficulty of thoroughly verifying the lists relieved the approving officials of much of their responsibility. Senior officials, some of whom had also added fraudulent entries, could approve the lists with the certainty that false entries, if discovered, would be evidence of managerial incapacity, rather than criminality. But the lists sometimes betrayed affectees and their partners as well. As lists were being finalized, the CDA often received letters alleging that many of the names on them were fraudulent. These letters were usually submitted by one faction of the village against the fraudulent (and even genuine) claims made by other factions. Documents gave rival factions a new way to feud. Although it could not verify these claims, the CDA found it difficult to go forward with compensation proceedings after receiving allegations of fraud.

Such complications have driven the disputes into the courts. The CDA has fought the BQB case and others like it to the Supreme Court of Pakistan—with no success. In court too, the CDA has been betrayed by its own records. In postcolonial Pakistan, as in the British Indian colonial state, government records have a powerful official presumption of truth, despite the widespread knowledge that they are routinely manipulated. In official ideology, the validity of records (or, more precisely, their referential correctness) is ensured by following the procedures established for their production. Courts have been unsympathetic to factual claims by the CDA that the house counts simply did not square with earlier census data on the area or with the possibilities of biological reproduction. For the courts, even physical evidence from later CDA site inspections showing the houses never existed paled in comparison to the mass of previous documentation testifying to their existence.

The courts required the CDA to show convincingly that the impugned documents were not produced according to correct procedures, which the CDA could not do. The CDA has even lost in court when it has impugned its own records with the testimony of the DC–CDA, ADT, and subengineers, all of whom have declared in depositions that they signed none of the hundreds of CDA documents that appear to bear their stamps and signatures. These claims are almost certainly false, but they are made defensible by the rumored existence of a forgery ring specializing in Land Directorate signatures. But the CDA investigations that attempted to trace documents through the actual process by which they were produced—to identify documents with individuals—were not enough to disqualify the documents, for they had risen to the level of corporate or collective authorship (Hull

2003). In their circulation, the documents had received numerous signatures other than those of CDA functionaries accused of perpetrating the fraud. These documents were the contemporary equivalent of what diplomatic historians call “chancery forgeries,” that is, forgeries produced by the same social process as genuine documents, with the exception of correct reference; they are authentic but false (Petrucci 1995:247).

The National Accountability Bureau (or, as it is frankly known, NAB) brought this fraud to public view in 2000 and, with the summary authority of the new military government, stopped the payments on remaining claims. But the BQB settlement continues to grow as officials and the courts try to sort genuine from “fake” (Dawn 2000) awardees.

### Transparent solutions

Today, some officials, like the special magistrate I quoted in the beginning of this article, see the solution to this predicament in the more effective deployment of the bureaucratic techniques that have failed the organization so thoroughly. Veterans of the dispute, however, are more pessimistic about the prospect of resolving the issue through more secure and more accurate documentation. They recognize the strength of the collective of artifacts, affectees, corrupt functionaries, and, now, courts. In 1993, a committee headed by a CDA official with an unassailable reputation for honesty and long experience in the Lands Directorate was formed to investigate fraudulent compensation claims in the G–11 to G–12 area, including BQB. After reviewing the documentary evidence, the committee attempted to conduct site inspections to measure land holdings and enumerate and measure houses. As on other similar occasions, the residents of the settlement met the CDA inspectors with guns and barred them from the site. Because the ostensible referents of the records were inaccessible, the committee, like the affectees, focused on the records themselves.

One finding of the committee’s confidential English-language report was that the fraudulent award had itself become a genre. The report noted that the fraudulent awards were almost identical in terms of their prose, down to the central vague, idiosyncratically ungrammatical justification for accepting petitions for compensation: “The houses of the petitioners were missed from the relevant award due to some mistake/overlook.” The report concluded that “the current chaotic situation is a direct result of the lists of residents prepared from time to time. In each successive list, the number of affectees increased in a manner which defied the laws of mathematical progressions.” Recognizing that the CDA had lost control of the bureaucratic process through which records are generated, the committee warned that the “preparation of fresh survey lists will compound the current complicated situation.” In

a startling finding, the committee strongly advised that there be no more investigations and, especially, “no fresh lists.” The committee recommended that current claims, although largely fraudulent, be paid as soon as possible, because continued efforts to dispute them would only result in more legally incontestable claims. The committee recognized that written materials were the artifacts around which collusive networks of staff, officials, and brokers formed. To break these networks, the artifacts would have to be dispensed with.

Bureaucratic semiotic technologies are usually described as the means by which government dominates the populace. In this case, these technologies have been turned against the government. CDA officials pursuing the interests of the CDA have been forced to renounce them. Many officials no longer consider lists, maps, or property records useful for the resolution of expropriation disputes. For a brief period, one financial officer even refused to sign his department’s checks to disburse court-ordered compensation.

In his excellent study of the consequences of British-colonial land-registration practices in India, Richard Saumarez Smith writes, “Reduction of field patterns to paper lay at the heart of the new idiom of the records, the new works of reference which could only be consulted individually, serially, and according to the procedures laid down by the Government: the venue for settling points of information, and of dispute, was transferred from the open fields to the closed courtroom” (1996:252). In contemporary Islamabad, the venue for settling points of information and of dispute remains the courtroom, rather than the open fields, but the government does not control the records carried out of the fields and into the courtroom. If, as Saumarez Smith writes, the British “ruled by records,” today, the CDA *is* ruled by records.

Although the CDA continues to struggle to gain possession of the land it has already paid so much to acquire, in 1993 it rezoned nearly a third of the Islamabad territory slated for government development under the original master plan. This land has now been left to private corporations and housing societies to develop, which are faring no better than government planners in wresting land from villagers. It is likely that much of western Islamabad will develop from existing villages and resemble the “organic growth” of Rawalpindi so vilified by Doxiadis. The future lanes and streets of this urban area will almost certainly follow the banks, footpaths, and property lines that have long divided the agricultural fields of the region.

The expropriation process is the most dramatic example of official attempts to curtail documentation, but there are others. To prevent ownership disputes and sales of plots in the redevelopment and regularization of one squatter settlement, the CDA refused to provide titles or any other documentation of plots. Instead, the plots were awarded to

people in public ceremonies of ostensive reference. Officials pointed out to each allottee a plot outlined and numbered in chalk and publicly pronounced the plot to be his or hers. The only government documentation the new owners received was a large sign fixed in concrete at the entrance to the development that listed their names and plot numbers in Urdu. An official list of allocations was kept under lock and key by the deputy director in charge of the project. Another instance relates to mosques. The illicit distribution of planning maps showing the future layout of new sectors has fueled sectarian conflicts and altered the relationships between mosques and residential settlements. Sectarian groups, with surveyors in tow, locate planned mosque sites in empty fields and take possession of them through regular prayer broadcast through loudspeakers. To prevent this practice, planners have begun to disguise mosque sites on new CDA drawings as schools (Hull in press).

However, such efforts to reduce the role of graphic artifacts have been ad hoc and limited. Initiatives for systemic change have faced determined opposition. This is illustrated by the fate of an expensive computer system the CDA acquired to run an electronic database of property holdings in the city. The dispirited manager of this idle system complained that no one would give him any information to put into it. Departments refuse to surrender information to the electronic records division, as they are loath to disrupt the relations of influence and the system of illegal payments organized through files and other paper artifacts.

Islamabad is the most highly regulated city in Pakistan. Yet the CDA might be, as one former chairman described it to me, “the most corrupt government division in the country.” In Islamabad, as elsewhere, the paper basis of regulation is widely recognized as central to activities characterized as corruption. This recognition has fueled recent initiatives within both India and Pakistan for “e-governance.” Discussion of electronic government systems is saturated with the theme of “transparency,” the watchword of a broad movement against state corruption supported by states, international institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, multinational corporations, and NGOs.

The deployment of electronic information systems as an anticorruption measure can be seen as a development in the line of signatures and stamps. The goal is to broaden the role of physical causation within the bureaucracy, to give artifacts greater agency in the human affairs of government. Eyes, minds, and hands are to be replaced by scanners, computers, and printers in an attempt to restrict the human role in referential practices to interpretation only. The promise of such electronic documentation to curb corruption remains uncertain. Historically, new communications technologies have supplemented and transformed, rather than replaced, older ones, as, for example, the “delay” in the arrival of the paperless office indicates. Furthermore,

electronic forms of representation build historically on discourse genres, means of distribution, and concepts of authorship and ownership that were developed through the medium of paper. An understanding of paper practices enables recognition of both the genuine novelty and the continuity of electronic technologies that are obscured by the rhetoric of technological revolution. My account of the expropriation process in Islamabad suggests that insofar as transparency is pursued through intensified paper documentation, the result can be an opacity created by more tangled and broken chains of reference.

Transparency is an ideal that can undercut itself in practice. As political projects of civil society, transparency initiatives are attempts to turn the modernist regime of surveillance on government itself, not only to see the state but also to see like a state. The proponents of transparency strive for an immediate relation between representations and objects, even while their efforts to establish this relation reveal it to be a contraction of a complex series of discursive and material translations, for example, between marks on paper and a house in an expropriated village. It has become a commonplace of science studies that the workings of a machine are often ignored and poorly understood until the machine begins to act in unpredictable ways. Similarly, this extraordinary story of government has much to say about its common functioning. Veena Das (2004) and Emma Tarlo (1997) both describe situations in which state power is strengthened by the manipulation of documents. My point, therefore, is not to link manipulation of documents with any particular project or kind of actor. Rather, I aim to show that, between state representations and their objects, there is no ontological gap (Latour 1999) but complex series of transactions among people and things that are basic to routine government.

## Notes

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1. Used by government officials, the term expresses the authoritarian power of state institutions; it is invoked by the subjects of that power as a moral claim against it.

2. A graphic ideology can be seen as a particular form of what Webb Keane (2003) describes as a “semiotic ideology,” which defines what counts as a sign and how signs are understood to function in the world.

3. Jeremy Bentham (1932), to cite one of the earliest proponents of an organization of institutions that people now call “bureau-

cratic,” based his proposals for efficient collective action on a thoroughgoing individualism and nominalism that denied the reality of all but individual persons, acts, events, and experiences.

4. With a few exceptions, I quote from “active” files, written on by current officers and staff members of the CDA and Islamabad Capital Territory Administration (ICTA). As I describe below, files are normatively confidential and inaccessible to anyone not part of the official bureaucracy. However, before I realized it, I fit into the very networks of informal circulation of files that I was studying. Although I have full documentation for the writers, dates, and official file numbers of the files I quote, I do not include this information in the references for two reasons. First, publishing reference information might expose the writers or those who kindly gave me access to the files to charges of wrongdoing as their actions or writings are recontextualized in a public forum. Second, although the lack of identification of these sources may lessen the scholarly authority of my account, such identification would, in any case, not serve the usual function of providing others with the possibility of evaluating my work in light of the actual sources. The active files I examined are never likely to find their way to “the archive,” and many of the inactive files were, unfortunately, destroyed after I read them.

5. Those who were granted lands in other areas of Punjab often faced harassment from residents in those areas who tried to prevent them from farming the new land to pressure them to sell the land cheaply.

6. Although the CDA, under the Cabinet Division since 1981, has its own small police force, it relies for larger operations on the forces of the ICTA, which is part of the Interior Ministry. As might be expected, relations between the ICTA and the CDA have often been rocky. There has been little coordination between the two organizations, and the ICTA chief commissioner and the CDA chairman have often not been on speaking terms. The ICTA frequently refuses CDA requests to provide it police support. The ICTA also frustrates the regulatory efforts of the CDA by issuing so-called No Objection Certificates (NOCs)—documents approaching permission—for activities the CDA prohibits. Because chains of command of the two organizations converge only at the level of the prime minister, such disputes often go unresolved.

7. The obvious solution—to acquire both sectors over which a village spreads—would push the problem to the border of the next sector, where a different village would be bifurcated by the sector border. The problem could be minimized by acquiring all the sectors at once, thus reducing the number of villages straddling sectors. However, money for compensation is generated by the sale of developed plots, so there would not be enough funds for such a comprehensive acquisition. Furthermore, the master plan called for the city to expand indefinitely, so total acquisition is theoretically impossible as well.

8. In the 1980s, the number of claims increased as exponentially as the land values of Islamabad. Doubts that the new capital might not fly disappeared with the break-off of East Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, through the 1970s, Islamabad remained a rather small, empty city, populated almost exclusively by government functionaries unlucky enough to have been moved up from Karachi. In the early 1980s, several factors made the city more popular and sent land values spiraling upward. The Afghan war brought the prosperity of a profitable export market and the lucre of U.S. civil and military aid, which entered the Pakistani economy in many forms, legal and illegal. The drug trade flourished as Pakistan and the United States looked the other way in the interest of financing the mujahideen campaign against the Soviets. The Iran–Iraq war brought Iranian businessmen looking for a secure base of operations. Finally, Islamabad offered a secure, if dull, haven to wealthy Pakistanis escaping the growing violence in

Karachi. As market values increased, so did villagers' unwillingness to part with their land, which accelerated the inflation created by growing demand.

9. The Planning Wing has faced this problem more squarely in its resettlement of squatters in G-8, who are being awarded developed plots on the site of their current settlement. Possession of a house in the current settlement entitles the possessor to a developed plot. The awards of plots are based on a rigid physical definition of the house as a four-walled enclosure with a single door, and the CDA adjudicates competing claims of occupants to the award of the plot. This definition, of course, has led to the rapid proliferation of walls and doors!

10. The new definition became "the affectee, his or her spouse and unmarried children at the time of acquisition" (Capital Development Authority 1996).

11. The very title for headman, an English-Persian hybrid, points to the inadequacy of the term *tradition* to capture the peculiar relation such figures have had to state authority under the colonial and postcolonial states. The most spectacular beneficiary of the expropriation process is probably the current *pir* (hereditary spiritual and temporal leader) of the Golra Sharif shrine. A descendant of the first *pir* and considered a saint by devout followers, the current rather worldly *pir* has enriched himself through extensive land dealing and favorable CDA land exchanges and compensation packages. His strong influence within the bureaucracy has also strengthened his influence over residents of the area.

12. Similar newspaper accounts of these events can also be found in *Muslim* 1988, and *Nawa-i-Waqt* 1988.

13. Reza Sajjad is a pseudonym.

14. *Approach* is a term of South Asian English referring to the ability to access influential people. *Wala* is a generative Hindi-Urdu suffix that can be added to almost any lexical unit to form a noun indicating a person who possesses something or does the action conventionally associated with the referent of the lexical unit.

15. See the anonymous fictional account *Revelations of an Orderly* (Khan 1866) for a British view of how effectively even such lowly staff could shape bureaucratic activities during the colonial period.

16. He was later convicted of illegally allocating plots to friends, relatives, and himself. However, he was never charged for the much more remunerative activities under discussion here.

17. Of course, the lists are not "decontextualized" in the broad semantic sense that this term is sometimes used. That is, their significance does depend on the context of use.

18. This unique capacity of the list was recently highlighted in congressional hearings on the firing of U.S. attorneys by the Bush administration's Department of Justice. Here is Senator Diane Feinstein questioning Attorney General Alberto Gonzales:

I may be very slow. But I don't understand how this list was compiled. . . . Kyle Sampson, your former chief of staff—I'm going to talk about the senior so-called leadership of the department—and the person you said you delegated this task to testified that he didn't put people on the list. He said, quote, "It wasn't like that. It wasn't that I wanted names on the list. I was the aggregator." That's page 184 of his transcript. Mike Battle, director of the Executive Office of the United States Attorneys, said, "I had no input. Nobody asked me for my input." That's the interview, page 82. Bill Mercer, acting associate attorney general and number three at DOJ, said, "I didn't understand there was a list. I didn't keep a list. It was just that any time I had a particular concern, I made that known to different people." And you testified this morning that you didn't know the reasons U.S. attorneys were put on the list until after you

decided to fire them. . . . And to this time, we do not know who actually selected the people to be put on the list. [*Washington Post* 2007]

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