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Contesting access to power in urban Pakistan

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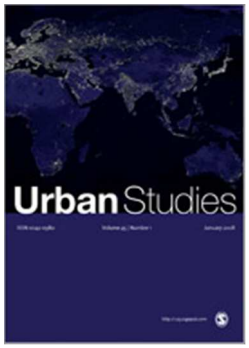

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Title

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Abstract

Studies of informal housing and urban citizenship in South Asia frequently link the precariousness of squatter life with the struggle to formalize engagement with the state. However, this article argues that the transition to a more formal mode of making claims on the state is a shift in terrain that is no less negotiated and contested. Through an ethnography of access to electrical power in Islamabad, Pakistan, this article explores the pervasiveness of informality in access to service delivery for a squatter settlement and its bourgeois neighbors. The politics of access to urban infrastructure reveal a state of pervasive predation and a collective imaginary which puts little credence in formality.

Keywords

Informality; governance; Pakistan; electricity; infrastructure

Introduction

Securing access to infrastructure is a central theme in the considerations of precariousness and informality of the lives of the urban poor in the global south. This is most evident in the large – and growing – squatter settlements, where the absence of property ownership is typically grounds for denying basic services such as electricity to residents (Appadurai, 2002: 26-27). The politics of squatter settlements are invariably bound up in their fight to secure those rights (Roy, 2009), neoliberal approaches to poverty reduction focus on how secure property rights enable economic growth (de Soto, 2000), and proposed relocations of squatters from urban centers offer secure tenure on compensatory plots as an incentive (Weinstein, 2014). This paper challenges the assumption that more formal rights are always better for the urban poor. Despite the fact that urban upper and middle classes almost always enjoy more secure property rights, it does not necessarily follow that the urban poor can improve their lot by transitioning to a formal rights-based engagement with the state. Why should a state with which the urban poor have inescapably conflictual relations (Watson, 2009), a state whose operations are a congealing of networks of power (Ferguson, 1990), welcome new claims on it from previously marginalized groups without resistance of its own? The cusp of formality is a boundary where processes of state formation are revealed (Mitchell, 1991). Formality is not an objective condition, but rather negotiated and contested (Schindler, 2014). On the basis that 'infrastructures are lived as contingent, power-laden, processes' (Graham and McFarlane, 2014: 12), this paper considers formal and informal claim-making on the state in terms of the multiple levels on which infrastructures operate (Larkin, 2013).

This ethnography follows several analyses of infrastructure and citizenship that outline infrastructure's often 'splintering' effects (Graham and Marvin, 2001) and the response of the urban poor across South Asia as they renegotiate infrastructural and property arrangements through a range of formal, informal, agitational and operational approaches (author withheld). A paradigmatic example comes from Chatterjee's (2004) account of how a squatter settlement in Calcutta mobilized around a collective moral claim to

acquire shared electricity meters. Other forms of claim-making in this literature range from Benjamin's (2008) depiction of street level bureaucracies as unruly spaces for subversive negotiation where the poor resist the imposition of capital, to Bayat's (2013) 'quiet encroachment' which is not political but a silent and persistent redistribution of public goods in favor of ordinary people over the propertied. Anand (2011) describes a 'hydraulic citizenship' varying in proportion to the pressure that groups can exert on a dual socio-technical system of administrators and water infrastructure. Ranganathan (2014) presents a more subtle form of claims making with her account of how Bangalore's lower middle classes voluntarily pay for expensive but unnecessary water infrastructure in an insurgent attempt to claim greater symbolic recognition and more secure land tenure from the state.

The ample South Asian ethnographic literature on the politics of urban infrastructures is often critical of Chatterjee's dichotomized division of claim-making into two terrains of political and civil society. Chatterjee contrasts 'the lofty political imaginary of popular sovereignty' against 'the mundane administrative reality of governmentality' (2004: 36) in political society. Civil society is inhabited by middle and upper class elites, and is the domain of fully equal rights-bearing citizens as conceived in the Indian constitution. Political society is a condition of tenuous and ambiguous citizenship inhabited by the poor, including residents of squatter settlements. The debate over political society is a rich and textured account of the innovative and inventive ways that the urban poor secure their rights. By contrast, civil society is not conveyed through empirical examples, but rather remains more of a conceptual reference. Both in the literature and in the argument to be made in this paper, the realm of formal rights is weakly realised at best in people's lived experience and their collective imagination.

Informality is pervasive and not limited to Chatterjee's political society. Ananya Roy takes up this point in arguing that 'paralegality is a generalized condition,' and thus the distinction between formal and informal which lies at the heart of the civil and political society dichotomy must be questioned (2015: 344). The evidence from governance scholars painstakingly demonstrates that states routinely adopt formal structures as myth and ceremony (DiMaggio

and Powell, 1983) while retaining their existing – chiefly informal and paralegal – practices (Pritchett et al., 2013). Studies of the everyday state in India and elsewhere (Ismail, 2006; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Roitman, 2004; Fuller and Harriss, 2000) have provided rich evidence from across the global south on the informalities of the supposedly formal state.

Ursula Rao's careful ethnography of squatters who are resettled to an area where they have more secure formal rights attends to an important and rarely explored theme within this larger literature: that of the individual who successfully formalizes their previously informal existence. Rao describes how many of them fall victim to a scam and have their houses demolished; the former squatters had managed paralegality for decades, but were unhoused after resettlement with a more formal set of tenure rights. Rao notes that 'Buying, selling, possessing or defending a plot is a condition of negotiation,' and that the vulnerability of the resettled population was a function of their continued poverty (Rao, 2010).

Interactions with the infrastructure of electrical power present a window on urban governance (Angelo and Hentschel, 2015). The urban bourgeoisie's use of the same electrical power infrastructure is a necessary backdrop to understanding the experience of the urban poor. The urban poor in squatter settlements and those transitioning to formal status have to be understood as occupying the same urban world as the rich, whose own systematic informalities are so often ignored despite informality being 'a routine tactic of the powerful' (Tonkiss, 2013: 96-99). The informalities of the rich mirror the informalities of the poor in bringing social ties and power relations to bear on access to services (Tonkiss, 2013: 105-107). The prevalence of informality amongst the rich brings into question the validity on any conceived improvements to the life of the poor that might be achieved by transitioning to claim-making on the basis of formal rights.

The 'lofty political imaginary' of civil society proposed by Chatterjee evokes the modern social imaginaries of Charles Taylor (2002). Taylor argues that the collective imaginary is shared, unlike theory and ideology which lie in the hands of a few. The imaginary is 'not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society' (91). The proposition that middle-class rights holders enjoy a set of practices of formal

claim-making which the poor are denied is at the heart of Chatterjee's dichotomization, but there is also a distinct affective component which speaks to Larkin's (2013) poetics of infrastructure. In looking at the experiences of formal rights holders in engaging the Pakistani state, I seek out the imaginary which informs how Pakistanis make sense of the practices of claim-making on the electrical power infrastructure.

The next section introduces the field site of my ethnography in Islamabad, Pakistan. The paper proceeds to describe how residents of a squatter colony have historically obtained their electricity supply, as well as their orientation towards and attempts to obtain more formal rights. For comparison, the paper then considers the experience of Islamabad residents who have the formal rights sought by the squatter colony residents. The last two empirical sections look at the perspectives and experiences of formal rights holders, and then the experience of those few squatter colony residents who have attempted to transition to making claims based on formal rights. The paper concludes with a discussion of claim-making across the different styles and contexts, and challenges the assumption that the poor can necessarily benefit from a transition to making claims based on formal rights.

An Ethnographic Study of Electricity in Islamabad

The research for this article was part of an ongoing study consisting of about 18 months of active fieldwork across four years of residence in Islamabad, from 2008-2011. Islamabad is a planned city, the federal capital, and markedly less violent than the major metropolis of Karachi (See Gazdar and Mallah, 2013). The state, in various forms, is much more present than is the case in other Pakistani cities. State services in general are above average, electricity supply more regular, and residents have more personal connections to the state. By studying Islamabad one sees Pakistani state institutions at their highest level of effectiveness. If claim-making based on formal rights is going to work anywhere in Pakistan, it will be in Islamabad.

The primary site for my ethnography was at multiple Sub-Division offices of the Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) where I followed the employees through all aspects of their work and observed their interactions with citizens who came to the office. The Sub-Division is the

lowest level of the IESCO organizational hierarchy and fulfills most of the public facing requirements concerning electricity supply including new connections, billing, maintenance, and disconnections. In addition to working with the IESCO employees, I interviewed and spent time among the residents of Islamabad in their capacity as electricity consumers, including from the *katchi abadis* such as 44 Quarter in Islamabad.[1]

Islamabad has 34 *katchi abadis,* 11 of which are notified for regularization per the Punjab Katchi Abadi Act 1992. The criteria for regularization under the Act is that they had more than 40 households before 23rd March, 1985. Regularization leads to a formal lease of the land and access to all state services for the occupants of the *katchi abadi*, but is not without some drawbacks. For the Capital Development Authority (CDA, the public agency which provides municipal services in Islamabad) to regularize the 44 Quarter *katchi abadi* where I did most of the fieldwork presented in this paper, regularization would involve planning the housing of the *katchi abadi* so that it would conform to building standards and thus contain fewer housing plots. Which households would not be accommodated, and where the surplus households would be relocated, are points of contention that have stalled the regularization process, since the proposed relocation site is much further from Islamabad. However so long as 44 Quarter is not regularized, the residents will be denied a document called a No Objection Certificate (NOC) which is issued by the CDA to certify that the applicant for the electricity connection is the legal owner of the land. Without an NOC, the residents of 44 Quarter cannot get legal connections.

Mobilizing Collective Claims

One of my key informants in 44 Quarter is Liaqat, who, like almost all the residents of 44 Quarter, is Christian[2]. His home in 44 Quarter is a three storey brick and cement building which has not seen any new paint in some time. Liaqat and his wife and children live on the ground floor of their house, and other members of his extended family live on the upper two stories. The two rooms on the ground floor are a living room and a bedroom. The floor is bare cement. The ceiling is perhaps seven feet high and gives me a distinctly

claustrophobic feeling when I stand. There is a small fridge in the bedroom – that is the only visible appliance. Located in the middle of an affluent residential area, 44 Quarter is well-situated for access to employment and municipal services. The same electricity lines that serve the well-off neighborhoods run through 44 Quarter. For most of its history, 44 Quarter was served by undocumented connections (often termed electricity theft, or *kunda*).

According to Liaqat, the type of theft occurring in *katchi abadis* in Islamabad occurs with the participation of the distribution company employees. Liaqat tells me that 'The same money, instead of going to IESCO's treasury went to police and IESCO staff.'[3] Liaqat says that the distribution company employees were paid off to leave illegal connections alone, as were the police. Although I found no distribution company employees admitting to their participation in this specific case, many of them accepted such arrangements as being relatively common.

Some 11 years prior to the time of this study, in 1998, 44 Quarter's illegal connections were forcibly taken down in an army-backed intervention. The army's role in power sector management came about at the invitation of the elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. In an admission of his government's incompetence at public administration, which foreshadowed his own government's removal in a coup the following year, Nawaz Sharif asked the Pakistan army to take over the management of electricity distribution companies in order to reduce theft. IESCO and the other distribution companies had serving army personnel assigned to them, including at senior management levels. The chief executives of the distribution companies were replaced by brigadiers on deputation from their usual military assignments.

The residents of 44 Quarter responded to the disconnection of their electricity supply by forming a committee to approach the brigadier in charge of IESCO. The gist of the argument they put to the brigadier was that if they were not allowed *kunda* connections, they should be allowed legal connections. My informants at 44 Quarter feel no qualms about the *kunda* connections. Liaqat tells me that 'It's our right [to electricity]. If you won't give it to us, then we'll take it like this.' ('*Hamara right bunta hai. To aap nahin dain gain, to hum is taran lain gain.')*[4] Another informant states that it is 'inevitable,

in this heat,'[5] that people will get electricity connections however they can. The 44 Quarter residents see electricity as something fundamental for decent living to which they too should have access, and their appeal to the brigadier was on largely humane rather than legalistic grounds.

The meeting of the 44 Quarter residents committee with the IESCO brigadier went well. The compromise reached by the parties was that 44 Quarter would be served by a few documented meters, but that all the wiring and management of the system beyond the meters would be the responsibility of the residents.[6] This decision served IESCO by ensuring that 44 Quarter residents would pay for their electricity consumption, and met the needs of 44 Quarter residents by ensuring their electricity supply.

The arrangements are distinctly an exception to the rules, which define a consumer as 'a person or his successor-in-interest who purchases or receives electrical power for consumption and not for delivery or re-sale to others, including a person who owns or occupies a premise where electrical power is supplied' (Islamabad Electric Supply Company, 2010: 4). The provision of electricity for delivery and resale to others is the job of a distribution company. The brigadier's decision contravenes these rules, but IESCO's consumer services manual limits service provision to applicants who can provide 'ownership proof of the premises' (Islamabad Electric Supply Company, 2010: 8) and thus cannot be provided to individual *katchi abadi* residents so long as the regularization process is incomplete. In the absence of NOCs and legal individual connections the committee representing residents of 44 Quarter accepted the compromise of communal metering. The residents of 44 Quarter would be allowed to a single communal connection at commercial rates (higher than domestic rates).

The committee managed the process and the money for connecting the several hundred households of 44 Quarter to the communal meter. Shoaib was a member of that committee (he mentions that the brigadier was a 'very nice person'[7]) and tells me that his inclusion was on the grounds that he is considered educated (*purray-likhay*). Shoaib lives in 44 Quarter and is employed by the residents' committee to manage the billing and maintenance of the electrical system. He says:

> The committee met for 2-3 days [prior to the negotiation with IESCO]. They formed a constitution for the committee (I asked to see this later in our conversation, he smiled and said that they made it once upon a time and that no one knew anything about it now).[8]

The committee members are the respected elders (*bozurg*) of the community. Shoaib has in fact taken on many of the functions of the distribution company. He manages billing, collects the money, gives receipts, keeps records, and also handles maintenance of 44 Quarter's electricity system. Shoaib does many of the same tasks a sub-division officer would. He also handles situations where there is difficulty in paying bills. 44 Quarter prints its own bills with instructions on the back for making payments. Paying in installments is not unusual, and sometimes the committee can reduce the bill somewhat. Strictly commercial arrangements are also not observed for churches and those individuals whom the committee deems needy and worthy of help. Instead, the moral underpinnings of the collective organization for service delivery are reflected in the departure from commercial logics. Each household is charged a fixed amount based on an assessment of the household's consumption:

> I ask how they determine the charges for each household. Shoaib says he knows every house on every street. They are 'like a family.' He knows everyone's name, and his paternal grandfather's (*dada*) name. We have no formality in going to each other's houses. Paying for extra facilities (fridge, a motor for pumping up water) costs up to extra 300 per month.[9]

Shoaib is confident that he knows the ins and outs of every household. His deep local knowledge is essential to keeping the communal system going.

The residents of 44 Quarter have mobilized on the basis of collective solidarity and make their claim for service delivery on a moral basis. They do not exercise purely commercial reasoning in determining how much each household must pay. Instead, assessments are based on Shoaib's intimate knowledge of each household. Shoaib attributes his position to his good character and reputation.

Imagining rights

Sharing of a common meter is also present in 75 Quarter and 50 Quarter (two other *katchi abadis* in Islamabad where I interviewed residents), but their committees have been less scrupulous than Shoaib. Collection for

the municipal electricity bill is handled by a leadership committee comprised of *katchi abadi* residents. Neither in 75 Quarter nor in 50 Quarter was anyone able to explain how the current leaders obtained their position or describe what was entailed in being a 'leader.' Their inability to explain the nature of a leadership position suggests a lack of formalized process for selecting and changing leaders. Rates in 75 Quarter are higher than in 50 Quarter, but 50 Quarter has accumulated arrears worth approximately two months of billing.[10] One resident of 75 Quarter suggested that members of the *katchi abadi* leadership committee were embezzling some of the money. Another informant chided me for being so naïve as to think that the 44 Quarter leaders were not also embezzling the committee funds.

Even in 44 Quarter, the communal system has not always worked out well. The communal meter must be put in someone's name, which creates the opportunity for that person to take advantage of their position. Liaqat told me the following story based on 44 Quarter's earlier experience with communal metering which predated the current solution:

> A committee of about 20 people got together to choose the person whose name the meter would be put in. 'That man had not even a cycle to his name. He was a government employee (*mullazim*), went to work wearing slippers. Now he has cars. He's become a big-shot (*Choudhry bun giya hai)*.'
> 'This is Pakistan. (*Yeh Pakistan hai*). Who has money is king (*badshah*).' 44 Quarter residents brought legal suits against him, but 'we'd talk and he'd use his money to get away free'[11]

Liaqat sees how the communal system which now serves them well was once an opportunity for a member of their own community to exploit the residents of 44 Quarter. In his eyes, the legal system offered them no recourse to justice against someone with substantial resources.

In their quest to formalize their land tenure rights and secure service delivery, the residents of 44 Quarter have engaged with various political actors in a very pragmatic manner. Liaqat tells me that 'We're not with any political party. We work with whoever is in power.' Through their different contacts – activists, academics, politicians, and also foreign embassies – the *katchi abadi* dwellers bring to bear whatever pressure they can on the CDA to complete the regularization to which they are already committed. Liaqat proudly tells me of how the 44 Quarter residents secured a majority of votes

for the candidate they backed at their local polling station. The delivery of votes is an exchange for political representation in a purely transactional sense, as Chatterjee describes for political society, with no regard to party platforms.

The residents of the *katchi abadis* used the language of rights more than anyone else I spoke with in Pakistan. In the blunt terms of Liaqat 'With a meter you get rights.'

> 'We've spend hundreds of thousands of rupees (*lakhs*) on our houses, but there's no benefit. When you have rights, you benefit if you invest in your house. With a proper road you could get a car in. That would be very valuable.'
> After plotting only 300 houses would be possible. Some people would be moved way. The Capital Development Authority initially offered [the outskirts of Islamabad], but that is too far away. Each HH has 3-4 earners to sustain it. Their jobs are in Islamabad, the commutes would cost too much. The Capital Development Authority board has the plan for approval. It's almost done. ("*Takriban tai ho giya hai*.") Liaqat thinks it will go through in a week.
> After plotting [regularization], everyone will get No-ObjectionCertificates. Each plot will have value. No problems with authorities in getting gas and electricity connections on our own.[12]

Liaqat is conscious of the material benefits that can accrue from formal land title. He hopes that the shady dealings with state officials will cease. His approach is entirely consistent with neoliberal arguments for the importance of property rights which draw on Hernando de Soto (2000). Far from challenging the status quo structures of power and domination, it is a middle class aspiration.

The *katchi abadi* residents have shown themselves more likely to internalize and perpetuate misrule rather than repurpose it in the form of insurgent citizenship. In some instances, *katchi abadis* leaders exploit institutional failures to extract rents of their own, adding one more obstacle to service delivery for the squatters. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the world of formal rights exemplified by a personal electricity connection takes on the appearance of an escape from these webs of exploitation and patronage. However, a more careful look at the experiences of those with established formal claims on electricity services exposes just how unreal the social imaginary of citizenship with recognized rights is.

'This is Pakistan'

Focusing on the *katchi abadi* residents alone gives an incomplete picture of claim making on the electricity infrastructure of Islamabad. Examples taken from those who have more substantiated formal claims for service as well as more wealth, connections, and education reveal the tenuousness of formal claims and the pervasiveness of informality.

Industrial consumers are some of the most prized consumers for a distribution company as they are very easy to monitor and service. Zeeshan's family owns an industrial facility in one of Islamabad's industrial sectors, which he and his brother run. Zeeshan has a Masters in Business Administration from the United States and drives a very expensive car. His industrial facility is served by a legal connection, but even in this situation his experience is that the formality of the relationship is not relevant:

> 'To have a relationship (*taluqat*) with a government officer here means that you are giving them money. Nothing else (*Bus.*)'
> At every level they take money. To get a new connection you have to give money. Else you'll wait 10 years. Since Pakistan was made, you have to pay to get work done. Everything's foundation (*bonyad*) is money. They won't do for you an unpermitted (*najaiz*) thing, but you have to pay for your rights.[13]

Zeeshan's view is that one's rights may or may not exist on paper, but it is money which determines whether you can enjoy those rights. As an industrialist, Zeeshan's main concern (along with cost) is the predictability of the electricity supply so that he can schedule his shifts, and it is on this topic that he meets regularly with the IESCO staff. He needs their cooperation for the success of his business, and in those relationships with IESCO officers he has to pay for the predictability of his supply.

My personal experience as an Islamabad resident also speaks to the nature of paralegality and the urban bourgeoisie. When the house I lived in developed some electrical problems I called the local sub-division office to register my complaint. I lived in an unremarkable suburban neighborhood where I rented the top half of a two-story house. The residents of this neighborhood were typically college graduates, professionals with good salaries, and relatively well off. After six attempts over three days, I succeeded in having an IESCO lineman come to my house to look at the electrical problems. He found a loose connection in my distribution box[14] and

tightened it, but the problem reoccurred two days later. I then had the problem fixed by Bilal, an independent electrician, with whom I had the following exchange:

> Bilal: Everything after the meter is done by the electrician, everything before is IESCO's responsibility. We aren't allowed to touch it. If I had dropped my pliers and it had touched two wires then the transformer back there could have blown up.
> IN: I asked if he could do it and he said that it was my responsibility to arrange for it, but that he could do the work for me if I wanted.
> Bilal: He wanted to get some money from you. This is Pakistan. This is how things work here. Don't give him any money for this, or else he'll loosen it every time he goes by so that you'll call him and he can get a little more money for it.[15]

The source of the fault is located in the distribution box. As Bilal states, that can only be attended to by the IESCO staff because any errors on Bilal's part could have damaged equipment which served my neighbors as well as me. The lineman misinformed me in an effort to get some money from me. Bilal feared (rightly) that my naiveté would cost me money. Even though my relationship with IESCO is based on the formal rights of a contract for electricity supply, in practice those formal rules form the basis for transactions of favors, money, and power relations. To secure the electricity supply I needed, I employed a private contractor to do the work of the electricity company. The work was dangerous and completely against IESCO rules, but the alternative was to pay the IESCO lineman to do the same task in his personal capacity even though it was actually in his official job description.

Having a meter is by no means a complete solution to electricity woes as it opens up a new relationship with the distribution company based on the legal obligation to pay. The primary school next to the *katchi abadi* upgraded its electrical system and had a new meter installed, but the first bill was for an exorbitant amount because the new meter didn't have a zero reading. The headmistress refused to bow to pressure from IESCO officers, who eventually dropped the matter without explanation. [16] Separately, IESCO officers describe government facilities such as schools, street lights, and water pumps as 'parking lots' for spurious charges through which they seek to offset losses incurred elsewhere – including theft in which they may be complicit.

The school was able to see off the attempt at extortion from the distribution company employees, but without a resolution to the case there is

every chance that a future headmistress will have to respond to the same outstanding bill. Even for a government school – well established in the formal system – formal rights and an individual electricity meter are new opportunities for predation rather than a solution.

The school, the industrial facility, and my own encounters with the electricity utility all show the pervasiveness of informality even in the public sector, for wealthy businesspeople, and a relatively well off resident of a good neighborhood.

The Challenging Transition to Formality

Unfortunately, many of the 44 Quarter residents who have succeeded in getting a toe-hold in the world of formal rights via an electricity meter in their name have come to regret it. Although IESCO's compromise with the residents' committee to provide electricity to 44 Quarter through communal metering is a functional solution (every household in 44 Quarter has electricity), it is viewed as second-best by the 44 Quarter residents. The communal arrangements notwithstanding, the 44 Quarter residents have continuously pushed to try and regularize their *katchi abadi* and secure the right to have individual meters for electricity supply. A local NGO has been at the forefront of these efforts, chiefly in engaging with politicians and activists in putting pressure on the CDA to complete the process in a timely manner. 44 Quarter has been surveyed twice by the CDA. Households identified in the survey are noted by the CDA as residences with rights to municipal services. Liaqat tells me that for meters approved after the second survey, the demand notices (the distribution company's equipment orders for the connection of new premises) were issued in five years later, and that it was 18 more months until the meters were finally installed. The money for these demand notices was given by a member of the National Assembly out of their official budget for development projects. Liaqat's explanation for the delay is that the distribution company employees resisted because it would reduce their monthly earnings from the communal meters. Nonetheless, Liaqat and the 44 Quarter residents' fight for individual meters had partly been won by the time of our meetings.

As some individual meters were installed in 2009, 44 Quarter residents were told by an IESCO officer that they would regret it and that they would want the old shared meters back. That prediction was borne out in 44 Quarter in many cases. An individual meter can be a mixed blessing as it requires a greater degree of direct dealing with the distribution company. The buffer from a communal meter is gone, and so are the protections which come with it.

The experience of having an individual meter for a house is described to me by Adam, a young man of about 21 who is working in a community based organization at 44 Quarter. Adam's family had received an unreasonably large bill exceeding 10,000 rupees.

> IN: What happened in the [IESCO] office?
> Adam: The first man I went to see sent me to another one. The next one sent me to another one. He told me that there was no meter assigned to our house. I said then how are we getting a bill? He told us that they'll check it out. That they'll come and see if the meter is working properly. They said there's a leak in our house, that the electricity is being wasted.
> Liaqat: How can you have a leak with electricity? This isn't a gas pipe.
> Adam: They are taking the money from us in installments. And the next bill came to 7000. So we switched back to the shared meter, which is 1200 per month. And now our bill from the meter - which we aren't using - is 75 rupees.
> …
> Adam: We aren't the only ones. Our neighbors have complained about high bills too.
> IN: There must be a form you have to fill in to complain about your meter.
> Adam: I don't know what form it is. They didn't give me any form.
> 'We aren't educated enough' ('*hum itnay purray likhay nahin hain*') that we can deal with IESCO.[17]

Adam and his family were poorly equipped to handle the challenge of dealing with the state on its terms. Although Adam describes himself as insufficiently educated to deal with IESCO, he tells me that he passed his Matriculation (10^{th} grade) and, in conversation with me, is reasonably confident and able to express himself. Nonetheless, the opacity of the process at the distribution company office and the behavior of the distribution company staff is enough to deter him. Adam tells me that his family is resigned to paying this bill that they cannot afford and did not incur. Their retreat to the communal system is a retreat to a system where they will be protected from state officials' efforts at predation by Shoaib and the other committee members.

A related experience to the abandonment of an individual electricity meter comes from some households from Islamabad *katchi abadis* who were relocated as a result of the regularization process. These families were given small plots of land in the residential sectors of Islamabad, including the relatively well-off area of F-10. These families took possession of the land, but most of them sold their properties and returned to *katchi abadis* in Islamabad (Rasool, 2010: 20).

The choice to sell the land to which they had formal title in order to return to *katchi abadis* throws a different perspective on the value of formal rights and also the state's responsibility to continue to provide such regularization programs to *katchi abadi* residents. Matthew Hull (2012) reports a similar set of circumstances with villagers on the outskirts of Islamabad being compensated when they are relocated as a result of the city expanding, only to move to the next area where expansion will take place to seek out further compensation. The decision of the relocated *katchi abadi* residents to return to informality suggests that the program for their relocation was poorly conceived. On the other hand, these families were best placed to judge how to manage their resources, and their actions suggest that living with a cash windfall and returning to informality can be preferable to formal rights. In all the fieldwork and other interactions I had concerning electricity in Pakistan, the *katchi abadi* residents were the only people to regularly invoke a language of rights.

What are rights worth in this context? Formal rights seem to be worth very little. Claim-making on the state through formal channels is an exercise in frustration. Power relations (sometimes reduced to wealth) dominate proceedings, making it difficult to claim an entitlement regardless of the black letter law underlying the claim. The natural right to basic necessities is more compelling in achieving a compromise solution to the impasse between the electrical utility and the squatters who are prevented from formal access to a service they are ready and willing to pay for.

Discussion and conclusion

The phrase 'this is Pakistan' is inevitably followed by a view of the conditions of life in Pakistan, both in the *katchi abadi* and elsewhere, of a

Hobbesian state of nature where law offers little respite from a dog eat dog world. The social imaginary (Hall and Lamont, 2009) invoked is one in which dangers abound and must be navigated carefully. Formal rights are relevant in this collectively imagined Pakistan, but formal rights do not protect one nor are they on their own sufficient to secure access to crucial state services. Somewhat shockingly (given that Islamabad is Pakistan's capital city), Paul Brass' account of villages in Uttar Pradesh sums up the situation in Islamabad quite well: formal law is weak in the face of power relations, and there exists 'a set of formal rules and practices obeyed by a few, a set of informal rules and practices followed by most, and a lack of legitimacy attached to both' (Brass, 1997: 273-279). The fact that claim-making based on formal rights is so ineffective in Islamabad implies that the challenges faced by 44 Quarter residents will only be worse in squatter colonies elsewhere, and suggests that the writ of the state is still remarkably weak even where it is strongest.

Liaqat, who talked about securing rights through a meter, also says 'This is Pakistan. (*Yeh Pakistan hai*). Who has money is king (*badshah*)' in the context of legal suits brought by 44 Quarter residents against an individual accused of embezzling the fees for a shared electricity meter. Liaqat described the lawsuits by saying 'we'd talk and he'd use his money to get away free.' In the collective imaginary of Pakistani citizenship articulated around access to electricity, outcomes in the formal justice sector can be bought and sold.

At the other end of the social ladder from the *katchi abadi* residents, Zeeshan – the industrialist – states that you have to 'pay for your rights,' and that it has ever been thus since Pakistan's founding. Zeeshan has all the advantages of wealth and power that one can imagine, and he uses them to secure his rights in terms of the access to electricity he needs to run his business. At my rented accommodation somewhere between these two points, the electrician repairing the electricity supply to my house invokes the phrase 'This is Pakistan' as a cautionary injunction against trusting the honesty of street-level bureaucrats. The shared imaginary invoked by the phrase 'This is Pakistan' is a harsh and hostile setting in which the state is just one more battleground. The people who invoke this phrase span all social settings and speak from personal experience. The idea of formal rights as

having much purchase is unsentimentally dismissed. Street-level bureaucrats will take advantage of naïveté, rights must be secured through payments, and the courts serve those who can buy justice. The shared web of meaning around the phrase 'this is Pakistan' constitutes an unsentimental and cruel imaginary (Taylor, 2002).

In many respects, Chatterjee's (2004) description of political society closely corresponds to the experience of 44 Quarter residents. The 44 Quarter residents obtain a communal meter after meeting with the electrical utility and arguing that they are neither being allowed to steal electricity nor to pay for it. They describe access to electricity as a right, but the use of the word right (in English) is semantically vague and more moral than legal. The establishment of the squatter settlement as a moral community is reflected in how Liaqat describes his knowledge of the residents and his description of them being 'like a family.' The sentiment that underlies this claim is that the 44 Quarter residents are human too, and to deny them electricity is unjust. The 44 Quarter leadership is aware of their legal rights and actively pursues the regularization of their land tenure. They use their vote instrumentally and align themselves with such politicians as will support them. More recently, the Awami Worker's Party won 3 seats in the 2015 local government elections in Islamabad by fielding candidates from *katchi abadis*, but this is not an insurgent movement in the sense of generating a 'counter-politics that destabilizes the dominant regime of citizenship, renders it vulnerable, and defamiliarizes the coherence with which it usually presents itself to us' (Holston, 2009: 15).

The 44 Quarter residents who secure a personal meter merit further consideration because they have moved from the moral claim of the community in political society towards the individualized claims of civil society. Chatterjee does not discuss individual or communal movement from one terrain to another, but in 44 Quarter the transition to civil society is not straightforward for some. Engaging with the state with a contract on the basis of individual rights is also a contested and negotiated terrain, and very much subject to predation. That the electricity bill is the vehicle for this particular form of predation underscores how it is targeted at formal rights holders. To contest this predation requires a facility with bureaucracy (or power and

resources) that Adam and his family can't muster. Their response, to retreat to the communal metering engagement, is driven by the assessment that they are better equipped to deal with the vagaries of a familiar informal system than the unfamiliar realm of formal rights.

Formal rights and an individual electricity meter bring with them new opportunities for predation. This category of claim-making exposes distinct vulnerabilities because it is individually exercised. The poor are unlikely to manage these vulnerabilities successfully because they may be socially disadvantaged due to their minority status, lower levels of schooling, or lower incomes. The implication is that effective claim-making for the poor is more likely to be informal – such as the moral claims of political society or even through quiet encroachment. Even wealthier individuals, state actors, and businesses have reason to be wary of the predations of the state and put little stock in the protections of law. Local governance regimes are themselves highly resistant to rule based governance imposed on them from above, and also resist when it is imposed on them from below.

Both among the residents of 44 Quarter and the international development agenda following de Soto, formal rights are assumed to be preferable to informal claim-making. The bourgeois urban residents have a greater degree of formal rights, and there is a palpable inequality in life chances which corresponds to the apparent availability of formal rather than informal modes of claim-making. But, as Zeeshan explains, when he does use his wealth influence the electricity bureaucracy, it is to ensure delivery on his formal claims rather than to have the street-level bureaucrats exceed their job-scope. Nonetheless, It is certainly the target of squatters to achieve formal status. State agencies, aided by development actors, both deny services to squatters on the basis that they do not own property and have formal documentation, and undertake reforms – at least on paper (Pritchett et al., 2013) – to eliminate informality in their own ranks and in their engagement with the society around them. Yet as the examples in this article show, formal rights come with their own challenges that must be contested and negotiated. As Rao (2010: 413) observes, 'Buying, selling, possessing or defending a plot is a condition of negotiation.' The predation is of different varieties, but individuals and organizations in civil society are very much subject to

predation. After all, 'this is Pakistan' where predation is a universal condition. In political society, much of the work of resisting predation is managed through collective mobilization. Amongst the wealthy and middle classes, the work of managing predation is a more individual function. In both cases, these are contested and negotiated processes. Capital, personal networks, and education are key factors for dealing with the state for everyone – regards of the type of claim that they make. The transition to formal claim making may create new vulnerabilities for the poor and take away their most successful strategy for dealing with the state.

Engagement with the everyday state has great similarity for rich and poor alike in terms of process, though the impact of predation on the poor is of course much greater and it is much harder for them to negotiate those same processes. The desire for formal rights animates much of the engagement with the state in *katchi abadis*, but can be unrewarding for them when it is achieved. Formal rights do not end the practices of rent-seeking and personalistic relations which make up the encounter with the state. Where subordinate groups in *katchi abadis* have succeeded in achieving some level of service delivery, they have done so by internalizing many of the functions of the distribution company and organizing to deal collectively with public officials and elected representatives.

This study produced little evidence in support of an insurgent citizenship. Instead, the neoliberal logics of property rights were internalized by *katchi abadi* residents in their focus on formal rights. Misrule was more likely to be perpetuated than repurposed. Much as described by Chris Fuller and John Harriss in their introduction to the influential edited volume on the everyday state in India, ordinary people are 'using the 'system' the best they can' rather than resisting it (Fuller and Harriss, 2000: 25). The ideal-typical form of political society and its central dynamics were largely borne out in the examples of the urban poor of the global south explored here. However, civil society remained elusive in this study, and the holders of formal rights also described contestation and negotiation in securing the benefits of those rights while avoiding the predations of the state and others. The experience of those holding formal rights and the challenges faced by the squatters who attempted to transition to individual meters suggest a poorly understood

condition in which formal rights must be continuously secured through struggle. In this vision of the global south, a regime of formal rights is more illusionary than imagined. Even for those who have formal rights, there is no shared imaginary of how these might effectively translate to service delivery. The transition from being a squatter to holding and enjoying the benefits of formal rights is poorly understood, and is a worthy topic for further research on service delivery to the urban poor in the global south.

[1] A *katchi abadi* is a squatter settlement. All individual and place names used here are pseudonyms.
[2] Christians constitute 1.59% of the total population of Pakistan. *Katchi abadis* in Islamabad are both Christian and Muslim. Without making any claims of representativeness, the analysis in this paper proceeds on the basis that the processes and power relations at work in 44 Quarter are not an artifact of the residents' belonging to a religious minority. That view has been validated through fieldwork and accepted at presentations of this research at academic conferences in Pakistan and elsewhere. However, Pakistani Christians are undoubtedly a persecuted minority.
[3] Field notes March 19, 2010.
[4] Field notes March 19, 2010.
[5] Field notes July 28, 2010.
[6] While the distribution company's responsibilities always end at the consumer's meter, it is not usual for there to be anything other than household wiring at the other side.
[7] Field notes July 28, 2010.
[8] Field notes July 28, 2010.
[9] Field notes July 28, 2010.
[10] Field notes March 10, 2008.
[11] Field notes March 19, 2010.
[12] Field notes March 19, 2010.
[13] Field notes April 9, 2010.
[14] A distribution box is a junction point at which the electricity meter serving a home can be connected to the underground electric cables supplying a street. Islamabad is unique in Pakistan for its underground electricity supply.
[15] Field notes July 6, 2010.
[16] Field notes June 11, 2010.
[17] Field notes June 8, 2010

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