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Corruption as power:

Caste and the political imagination of the postcolonial state

ABSTRACT
In this article, I examine the ways in which a politics of caste empowerment that became central to democratic politics in much of north India in the early 1990s altered the ways in which the state was popularly imagined. Many people began to perceive state institutions as inherently corrupt sources of political patronage that, having long served to perpetuate upper-caste dominance, could now be used in the same way by a new class of political leaders to empower lower-caste groups. Within this context, corruption was tolerated, sometimes even celebrated, as a means to lower-caste empowerment. [*caste, politics, the state, corruption, postcolonial, India, Bihar*]

There is a hospital in Patna—the capital of the north Indian state of Bihar (with a population of more than 90 million)—where numerous jailed members of the Bihar state legislative assembly, and even locally jailed members of the Indian parliament, arranged to be transferred, purportedly on "medical grounds." I first went to this hospital in 2002 after meeting Rajan in the state assembly. Rajan, a member of the assembly from north Bihar, is a self-styled Brahmin caste leader who has a reputation for being what people locally refer to as a "mafia don." I had spent a few weeks in a village in Rajan's constituency in 2001, and his reputation was well known to me.

Rajan was in his early thirties when I first met him and was dressed in expensive slacks and a dress shirt giving the appearance of a businessman. As he introduced himself, he casually listed the warrants against him—"six, across four states, all for murder"—almost as if providing a resume. Even though violence is a well-known aspect of political life in Bihar, I was surprised at this openness about criminal activities from a member of a body as official as the legislative assembly, activities that one might assume could hurt his legitimacy as a public figure. Intrigued by the presence of an unapologetic mafia figure within the legislature, I took up an invitation to visit him at his hospital jail cell, from which he had been granted temporary leave to attend assembly sessions. The hospital housing this cell was located on the banks of the Ganges and, although certainly not luxurious, was greatly preferable to the overcrowded jails and afforded a degree of freedom of association and even movement. Rajan's two assigned "guards" effectively served as his paid personal bodyguards/gunmen. On one occasion, I even accompanied Rajan and his "guards" as he nonchalantly walked out of his cell to a nearby sport utility vehicle, in which he drove us to his home to meet his mother, returning a few hours later.

Rajan was not the only elected politician staying in this prison hospital ward; two other jailed assembly members were staying on the same floor, and the three spent most of their time together dramatically recounting

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tales of their exploits. The entire floor above was occupied by Papu Yadav, an even more feared "mafia don" and self-styled lower-caste leader who was then a member of the national parliament. Caste-based mafia networks have flourished in Bihar, especially since the 1990s, and most important mafia figures are elected representatives of the state assembly or, if bigger players, parliament. Elections are often contested from jail, and it has not been unknown for some of Bihar's mafia politicians to be ministers in the state or even central government.[1] Although shadowy backroom relationships between politicians and criminal figures are not uncommon in many countries, in India elected office and the domain of criminality—popularly referred to with the word *mafia*—are often embodied in the same individuals. While spending time with Rajan and other imprisoned politicians at the hospital, I always observed at least two or three attendants answering cell phones. The official work of a member of the assembly and criminal activities were being conducted simultaneously.

How can one explain such loose boundaries between the legislature and illegality, and what does this mean for the ways in which the state is imagined and experienced in postcolonial contexts? I seek to show that popular support for self-affirming "mafia" figures like Rajan reflects both the particular nature of postcolonial governance in Bihar and the tensions between this mode of governance and the emergence of a radical democratic imaginary (Laclau and Mouffe 1988) centered on a politics of lower-caste empowerment.[2] The image of a postcolonial state based on the promises of nation building, development, and rule of law but governed through networks of patronage that reinforced upper-caste dominance (effectively undermining these promises) clashed with a politics of caste empowerment that sought to weaken development and law-and-order-related institutions thought to be controlled by upper castes, replacing them with alternate networks of lower-caste politicians, mafia figures, and an emergent class of political brokers. I argue that these two radically divergent modes of governance reflect very different ways of imagining the postcolonial state, representing alternative forms of political subjectivity.

These subjectivities are associated with changes in the ways in which caste is experienced in contemporary India. Anthropologists have long tried to understand the changes that electoral democracy has effected in local experiences of caste (Bailey 1960; Béteille 1971; Carter 1974; Mayer 1960).[3] Many scholars have observed that, in the wake of the penetration of the democratic imaginary, caste as hierarchy has been progressively displaced by a view of castes as discrete groups in competition (Gupta 2000; Tanabe 2007). Lucia Micheluti (2008), for example, documents the ways in which the "indigenization" of democracy has altered the experience of caste, with members of the Yadav caste viewing themselves as a "caste of politicians" and their patron deity Krishna as the "originator of democracy." I argue that, because the experience of "the state" in India is intimately connected with the experience of caste, the changes associated with the politics of lower-caste empowerment have transformed the ways in which people imagine the postcolonial state.

Conceptualizing the postcolonial state

Recent ethnographic studies of the state have provided invaluable accounts of the ways in which state institutions, practices, and discourses interact with cultural registers and modes of practice that lie outside formal institutional structures, thereby extending the influence of state institutions into everyday life but also transforming the experience of the state in the process (see, e.g., Das and Poole 2004b; Fuller and Bénéï 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). This has significantly expanded our understanding of how "the state" actually manifests itself within local contexts. At the same time that I draw from this work, I also suggest that our theoretical frameworks for studying the state need to take more account of the ways in which political practice shapes people's experience of the state—a move that necessarily leads to an awareness of the multiple ways in which the state is imagined and the temporal dynamics of political subjectivities ("the state" is a moving object). I suggest that the specifically postcolonial ways in which state power is experienced in India, although wrought with insidiously direct forms of oppression and violence, have also opened spaces for potentially radical democratic challenges to established power based on very different concepts of popular sovereignty and "social justice."

Partha Chatterjee (2004) provides a useful starting point for exploring the ways in which people imagine and experience the postcolonial state. He has argued that in postcolonial contexts such as India, where state institutions and governmental practices predate the nation-state, there remains a distinction between an elite-inhabited "civil society" and what he terms "political society." Although civil society revolves around the juridical–constitutional structure that every citizen is, in theory, part of, in practice the interaction between most people and the Indian state is mediated by political society, made up of networks and groups, like slum dwellers' associations and, in my example, caste mafias, whose very existence is predicated on illegality. Following this logic, one can differentiate between elite conceptions of "the state" emphasizing law-bound institutions of governance imagined as separate from "society" and imaginings of the state generated from political society.

In practice, the boundaries between civil society and political society are elusive; there is no "civil society" empirically distinct from "political society" in most of India, as my case of mafia legislators dramatically testifies. This

analytical distinction remains, however, useful for capturing the divide between the ways in which bureaucrats, technocrats, and academics involved with implementing the project of development conceptualize the state (see, e.g., Scott 1998) and the ways in which most people do, thereby destabilizing dominant social scientific frameworks such as "state–society" and "good governance" approaches. In asking what conceptions of the state emerge from "political society," furthermore, one also must be wary of uncritical application of critiques of state-centric approaches that implicitly contain some of the assumptions drawn from the frameworks that they are critiquing. One such assumption is that people necessarily have a conception of an autonomous, rule-bound state (even if, in reality, this is a fiction) that the ethnographer has simply to uncover—an assumption that I suggest obfuscates the specific character of power in postcolonial contexts, the dynamics of political change, and the agency of postcolonial subjects.

I follow Achille Mbembe (2001) in arguing that, although universalized concepts of Western social theory such as "the state" cannot be ignored in postcolonial contexts (because they have themselves served as part of the epistemological underpinning of the European domination that has so profoundly shaped postcolonial histories), these concepts have to be particularized by "bending" them to reflect postcolonial realities (see also Chakrabarty 2000). Instead of seeking insights into, or even a critique of, a universalized concept of "the state," then, I attempt here to delineate the specificities of modes of governance and the ways in which these modes of governance are popularly experienced and imagined. From this perspective, it is necessary not only to "unmask the state" but also to show the ways in which there may be distinctively postcolonial ways of doing so.

Popular experience of the postcolonial state in Bihar is profoundly conditioned by the continued prevalence of relations of dominance and subordination that were articulated through colonial strategies of governance. In colonial Bengal, which included present-day Bihar, land tenure was regulated through the legal framework of the permanent settlement, enacted by Charles Cornwallis in 1793. The permanent settlement intentionally produced a class of feudal zamindars with vested interest in the Raj, who were given the legal right—a right that could be bought and sold—of revenue collection and who thus exercised a great deal of control over villages.[4] The desire of the East India Company to maximize profits discouraged the costly expansion of an internal security apparatus. Rather, alliances were made with agents of local power who were allowed a significant degree of control over their own territories of operation. The zamindars who enjoyed this legally sanctioned territorial control tended to be from locally dominant caste groups or, if not resident in an area, made their own alliances with locally dominant caste groups. The colonial state encouraged and legalized relations of dominance and subordination reinforced by, but extending well beyond, bureaucratic state institutions, resulting in an indirect rule that Anand A.Yang (1989) refers to as a "Limited Raj."

Colonial governance supplemented indirect rule with the strategic use of caste representations, constructed from formerly fluid and localized caste identities that became central to the workings of colonial institutions. This was especially the case in the judiciary (where certain caste categories were ruled "criminal"), the army (where caste categories influenced recruitment), the civil services (where the caste of officers was prominently displayed), and the colonial census (where broadly defined caste categories were enumerated) (see Appadurai 1996:114–139; Bayly 1999; Cohn 1987; Dirks 2001). Upper-caste landed elites reinforced their dominance by using these colonial caste representations to consolidate their control of key public institutions, a process that continued after independence with a proliferation of upper-caste networks linking bureaucrats and Congress Party politicians with landlords in the countryside. The colonial legacy of a form of governance combining bureaucratic institutions with more direct forms of dominance in village contexts continued in the postcolonial period, with caste networks extending the reach of otherwise ineffective state institutions deep into the social relations of everyday life but also colonizing state institutions by putting them into the service of locally dominant groups.[5]

As Chatterjee notes, the colonial experience meant that, in contrast to the West, "techniques of governmentality often predate the nation-state" (2004:36–37), with citizenship based on popular sovereignty coming a century and a half after the classification, description, and enumeration of population groups had been established by a powerful administrative apparatus that continued, and even expanded, after independence in the name of a national project of development. The specificities of what could be meaningfully termed "postcolonial governmentality" in India are reflected in the ways in which these techniques of governance—exercised in relation to development discourse—are combined in practice with relations of dominance and subordination articulated in relation to caste, forming a hybrid mode of governance wherein the exercise of violence outside of the legitimated routines of "the state" is a standard aspect of political life. It is therefore not surprising that caste identities have profoundly shaped the ways in which people imagine the state, and vice versa.

Postcolonial governmentality did not rely extensively on the types of disciplinary power (Foucault 1977) that emerged with such force in the West (and actually served to constrain the emergence of many forms of disciplinary power).[6] As Chakrabarty puts it, "A large part of the everyday politics of Indian democracy is marked by the operation of a form of power that works on principles very different

from—and often opposed to—those of disciplinary society" (2007:55). Instead, this mode of governance extends into the capillary networks of the social through what I refer to as the "political mediation" of state institutions (see below), its micropractices playing out as relations of dominance and subordination within local sites.

If one accepts Timothy Mitchell's (1999) important insight that disciplinary power is instrumental in creating the appearance of a transcendent organizational apparatus, which he terms the "state-effect,"[7] then the reverse must also be true; the partial and hybrid nature of disciplinary power in postcolonial contexts such as Bihar means that any "state-effect" must also be produced through other means. One must search elsewhere to understand the subjectivities associated with postcolonial governmentality and how people reconcile a patently self-contradictory mode of governance.

My argument here hinges on an examination of changing perceptions of corruption *(bhrashtaachaar)* within political life in Bihar as a window onto popular experiences of postcolonial governmentality. Akhil Gupta (1995) insightfully argues that popular critiques of government corruption in India paradoxically serve to imaginatively construct the idea of a rule-bound, impartial state, without which allegations of corruption would have little meaning. Gupta's analysis of discourses of corruption relates to what Philip Abrams (1988) referred to as the "state-idea"—the idea of "the state" as a unified and autonomous agent—which Abrams argues is a fiction masking the complex ways in which internally conflicted state institutions actually interact with one another and with various entrenched interests. Complaining about corruption implies an uncorrupt state-idea at the same time that it acknowledges the ways in which acts of corruption serve to undermine the state's impartiality and autonomy in practice.[8] In Gupta's account, people generally saw corruption as originating at lower-level state institutions and despite the benign intentions of a national leadership perceived to be dedicated to the goals of development.

A state imagined through discourses of corruption exhibits specificities that need to be unpacked. I suggest that the prevalence of discourses of corruption in contemporary India, and their role in articulating a "state-idea" even while exposing the illegitimate practices of local state actors, reflects the particular nature of postcolonial forms of governance.[9] Because everyone in India is aware that state institutions serve as tools of personalized authority and are intertwined with local power relations, the postcolonial "state-idea" had to be formulated at a higher level. The Indian national leadership, beginning with Jawaharlal Nehru, anchored the legitimacy of the postcolonial state on the national project of state-directed development, which was, as it were, coded over a colonial mode of sovereignty (Mbembe 2001). The ideology of planned development became "a constituent part of the self definition of the postcolonial state ... [and] connected the sovereign powers of the state directly with the economic well-being of the people" (Chatterjee 1993:121), enabling the legitimized expansion of the very administrative apparatus that the independence struggle had been contesting. At the same time, the continued dominance of landed elites within village contexts could be contrasted with the progressive intentions of a central leadership, and the "implementation failures" of planned development were attributed to the reactionary or corrupt tendencies of provincial-level government and party leaders (Kaviraj 1988). Discourses of corruption, therefore, represented the realities of upper-caste control over state institutions while at the same time implicitly invoking the promises of development, the eradication of poverty, and the goals of socialist transformation that the Congress Party claimed to be pursuing; the legitimacy of the postcolonial state depended on a national leadership popularly believed to be above the corruption and vested interests of local state institutions.

Practices of corruption were rooted in the continuation of forms of economic exploitation that had been legitimized by the colonial state but that contradicted the constitutional principles on which the postcolonial state was founded, and their pervasiveness reflected at least a partial continuation of a social order that the anticolonial movement had promised to transform. Considering this fundamental contradiction, it is crucial to recognize how potentially unstable this mode of governance was. The continuation of upper-caste dominance for four decades after independence depended on three key factors: one-party rule by a Congress Party with a predominantly upper-caste leadership, state-directed development that entailed control of key economic resources by an overwhelmingly upper-caste bureaucracy, and a continuation of the dominance of mostly upper-caste groups within the agrarian economy. This mode of governance, however, in many ways contradicted the other source of legitimacy of the postcolonial state: popular sovereignty embodied in elections with full adult franchise. By the early 1990s, Congress–one party rule had ended amid a proliferation of caste- and ethnicity-based regional parties, economic liberalization began to dismantle state control over the economy, and the emergence of a politics of caste empowerment based on an alternate project of "social justice" *(samajik nyay)* weakened upper-caste political dominance in many parts of north India (Corbridge and Harriss 1999). This lower-caste political upsurge was not manifest in a national movement but, rather, through regional parties, such as the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar and the Sawajwadi Party and Bahujan Samati Party in Uttar Pradesh, whose electoral successes have been almost entirely confined to their respective states. I focus here on the changes associated with the RJD, headed by Lalu Prasad Yadav, which arguably

represented the most intense manifestation of this politics of caste empowerment. I now turn to a brief account of the political changes that swept Bihar during this period.

Lalu Yadav's Bihar

The politics of caste empowerment, as well as what many people believed to be the rampant corruption of the Bihar government, became, for many people, embodied in the political success of Lalu Prasad Yadav, a charismatic lower-caste leader who challenged the dominance of Bihar's upper-caste elite. In 1989, the Congress Party lost national power in the wake of Rajiv Gandhi's alleged implication in a scandal involving kickbacks from a Swedish defense firm (the "Bofors scandal"). Allegations of corruption at the highest levels of government seriously weakened the populist credentials of the Congress national leadership and marked the beginning of an era of coalition politics at the national level that has continued for two decades. Lalu Yadav became chief minister of Bihar in 1990 amidst an anti-Congress electoral wave that had established the National Front in Delhi with V. P. Singh as prime minister in 1989 and, then, a Janata Dal–led coalition government in Bihar four months later.

Lalu aggressively espoused the Janata Dal's philosophy of social justice. He was a strong supporter of the Mandal Commission's recommendations that employment quotas be established in the central civil services for members of the "Other Backward Classes," which Prime Minister Singh decided to implement in 1990. This decision had an explosive political impact marked by violent protests, including a number of self-immolations by upper-caste students as well as an ensuing upsurge of lower-caste political mobilization.[10] Within this charged context, Lalu's militant campaigning for caste empowerment earned him a reputation as the foremost leader of a "backward caste" state government fighting against a perceived upper-caste dominance. Lalu built a mass base of support for himself in villages across Bihar, using a helicopter (which he called his "flying machine") to access remote villages, many of which had never been visited by a prominent politician. Instead of visiting the upper-caste sections of villages, where many politicians in the past had been received, Lalu made a point of visiting lower-caste areas.

In 1997, Lalu was imprisoned on charges related to what became known as the "fodder scam," involving illegal withdrawals of 9.5 billion rupees from the Animal Husbandry Department. Just before surrendering to the police, he resigned as chief minister, split from the national Janata Dal to form the RJD, and called for a party vote in which Rabri Devi, his wife, who had no previous political experience or ambition, was elected chief minister. Lalu become the first chief minister in India to go to jail, effectively running the Bihar government from his jail cell in what has been described as his "cell-phone raj" (Thakur 2000). Rabri Devi's government, with a periodically imprisoned Lalu widely held to be the de facto chief minister, survived for another eight years by successfully projecting the charges against it as an attack by an upper-caste establishment determined to retain dominance at the expense of the RJD's lower-caste supporters.[11] Note the shift that occurred within the electorate during RJD rule: People had supported the earlier Congress regime because of a national leadership believed to be above the corruption of local government, but they supported Lalu despite believing him to be corrupt. By the 2004 parliamentary elections, a survey found that 64 percent of all respondents thought that Lalu had "encouraged criminals personally" and 56 percent believed that Lalu was "corrupt." Forty-nine percent agreed, however, that "Lalu is a true messiah of the poor," and 46 percent agreed that "there is no alternative to Lalu in Bihar" (Kumar and Yadav 2004). Although people generally believed that law and order had collapsed and that corruption had increased—and that Lalu was implicated in both—many continued to support him, reflecting popular acceptance of corruption as a means to caste empowerment.

In April of 2002 in Patna, Lalu Yadav was sitting in the office of the speaker of the assembly, surrounded by fawning ministers. He had sent Rajan, the Brahmin mafia politician introduced above, to fetch me, probably foreshadowing what he wanted to say. After I sat down, Lalu dramatically declared in semifluent English, "The forward castes used to rule Bihar. I have finished them off." He then pointed to various upper-caste leaders in the room, including Rajan, and named them by caste, "Brahmin, Bhumihar, Rajput." The implication was clear; they now served him. Lalu then raised a foot from his leather sandals and said, "Look at my foot. See, I am missing a toenail ... *This is democracy*." After a dramatic pause to let this bewildering statement sink in, he continued,

> I lost this toenail when I was a poor boy living in my village. We barely had enough to eat and I used to herd buffaloes all day, sometimes so late that I would fall asleep on the back of a buffalo on my way home. One day, a buffalo that I was herding stepped on my foot and I lost the toenail ... now look at what a tall chair I am sitting in [the chief minister's chair]! I have proven that ballot boxes are more powerful than machine guns. Votes can decide whether a man will be in the dust or riding in an airplane. I am a true Naxalite [militant, communist revolutionary], from birth, a democratic Naxalite.

Lalu here invokes a very particular conception of a radical democratic project. Democracy is not linked to the "rule of law" or to notions of accountability. Also absent here are ideas of "good governance" or "development." For Lalu, democracy is about the ways in which gaining control of

the state can level inequalities in the social field. This is all metonymically actualized in his own person—here, as his missing toenail—as himself moving from the position of a poor Yadav buffalo herder to become the most powerful man in Bihar through democratic means, an embodiment of democracy's radical potentiality.

In Lalu's discourse, politics is described in explicitly caste terms and local power relations are directly connected to control of the state government. It is instructive to contrast Indira Gandhi's famous slogan "gharibi hatao" [destroy poverty] with a slogan that came to define Lalu's politics, "bhurabal hatao" [destroy the *bhurabal*]. *Bhurabal* is an acronym for the four dominant upper castes in Bihar: Bhumihars, Rajputs, Brahmins, and Lals (Kayasths). Indira's slogan sought political legitimacy by invoking the welfare projects of the developmental state.[12] Lalu's slogan, by contrast, sought political support by calling for resistance to a caste domination imagined as extending well beyond the boundaries of formal state institutions. During the first term of Lalu's government, for example, another popular Janata Dal slogan was "vikaas nahiñ, samaan chahiye" [we need dignity, not development] (Jha and Ahmed 1995:54). Rather than treating the state as an agency for development, Lalu's rhetoric considered the state to be a tool of political struggle, understood in caste terms. This rhetoric was grounded in his childhood village experiences of caste oppression, which formed the core of his populist agenda for social justice.

The election of lower-caste politicians, however, did not easily translate into their control over state institutions, the higher positions of which continued to be held overwhelmingly by officials from upper-caste backgrounds.[13] From the beginning of Lalu Yadav's tenure as chief minister in 1990, the relationships between his government and the higher levels of the state bureaucracy were fraught with tension and internal conflict, as the centrality of caste in Bihari politics also politicized caste divisions within, and between, state institutions. Although the class character of the bureaucracy has been intensely debated by theorists of the state (see, e.g., Poulantzas 2001), the caste identities of bureaucrats are readily apparent. Lower-caste politics highlighted the social character of the bureaucracy, undermining its already weak popular legitimacy.

This conflict between elected leaders and bureaucrats further weakened public institutions that were already under severe stress. Bihar and many other state governments in the early 1990s faced a deepening fiscal crisis caused by overstaffing of many public institutions by politicians eager to provide patronage to their caste constituencies, burgeoning pension and debt-servicing costs, and more-adverse lending terms from the central government to the states as a result of IMF-sponsored structural adjustment following a balance of payment crisis in 1991. Faced with severe fiscal constraints caused by neoliberal reform and a long history of upper-caste corruption, the newly elected lower-caste leadership in Bihar had little incentive or capacity to undertake the difficult institutional reforms that would be required to dislodge upper-caste control of public institutions or to promote a private sector that was also owned and staffed almost entirely by upper castes. Instead, state institutions thought to be controlled by upper castes—who had themselves discreetly plundered them for years—were now openly undermined and pillaged.

As the bureaucracy and police force were progressively weakened, politicians assumed larger-than-life personas, none larger than Lalu Yadav. Lalu's Bihar was a regional political world, only possible within India's federal political system.[14] For most of the period of RJD rule, Lalu positioned his party in opposition to the central government (construed as part of a larger upper-caste "system") and vehemently opposed the Hindu-nationalist movement that was a strengthening political force for most of this time (significantly, it was after Lalu became a minister in the central government and the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party had suffered a surprise defeat in the 2004 parliamentary elections that the RJD was defeated in 2005). Through the force of his populist charisma, for many people Lalu came to personify the state. As represented in the figure of Lalu Yadav, the state penetrated village life in an entirely new way. It was not, however, a state imagined in relation to a national project of development but a lower-caste state government seeking "social justice" through caste empowerment. In the following sections, I examine the ways in which this alternative state-image was constructed, as well as contested, within Rajnagar, the fictitious name of a village in Bhojpur district where I lived in 2002 to 2003. The Hindi word for state, *sarkaar*, can be used to signify both the central and the state government, but in most cases when I heard people use the word *sarkaar* they were referring to the specific political regime of the state government. This reflects the regionalization of political power that had begun in India in the early 1990s and also the centrality of the state government—the level of administration that people routinely interact with—in peoples' imaginings of "the state."

The political village

From the perspective of many lower-caste villagers, the landlord historically has been in much closer proximity than state institutions but has also often enjoyed close relationships with state officials. In Rajnagar's colonial past and well into the postindependence period, Rajput *tola*, the residential area of the upper-caste Rajpur ex-zamindars, occupied the political, social, and ritual center of the village. When officials visited Rajnagar, they stayed in Rajpur tola, reinforcing the perception of the landlord as "the state." At the center of Rajpur tola is Rajnagar *ghar*, a relatively

wide hill about a hundred feet high that villagers claimed was manmade and that was at one time considerably larger. Around Rajnagar ghar the remains of a sizable moat are still visible, and some Rajput villagers told me that in the past a second moat surrounded the perimeter of the village. Rajnagar was the site of a Rajput chiefdom with Rajnagar ghar as its military center. The earlier presence of such a visible military establishment within the heart of the village emphasizes the historical use of direct force to establish and maintain territorial caste dominance. During the colonial period, Rajput zamindars "owned" most of Rajnagar as well as sizable land in nearby villages. There was clearly a long history of Rajput power in Rajnagar, making the present decline of Rajput dominance in Rajnagar quite dramatic.

The families with the largest landholdings in Rajnagar built two enormous pillared houses positioned to overlook the contiguous agricultural fields. These houses are now both almost empty, the younger generation having left the village to find employment in urban centers. The older generation does not consider this to be a positive development. As I sat with Dharam Singh on the veranda of his sprawling house, he reminisced about the power that his family enjoyed in the past. He referred to the Yadav villagers, whom most people consider to be politically dominant in Rajnagar: "They used to be our servants! Our position here has now become very bad." He said that his ancestors had considered landholding and the control of cultivation, performed by others, of course, to be the source of Rajput status. He explained why almost all of the Rajput landlords had given up direct cultivation. It seems there had been widespread "theft" of crops by laborers in the early 1990s and agitations for increased wages. "We all decided to give up farming, it had become too difficult." I asked how the laborers had been mobilized. He referred to the politics of caste empowerment associated with Lalu Yadav: "Everyone thinks that they are Lalu . . . control of the village has slipped from our hands."

Until recently, Rajput families dominated the political and economic life of the region in which Rajnagar is situated. Even after independence, Rajput landlords owned a significant portion of agricultural land; they have generally enjoyed strong relationships with local administrators and police, exercising what could be termed a "regional hegemony." After the coming to power of Lalu Yadav and the RJD in the 1990s, however, rival centers of power emerged. By the time of my fieldwork in 2002, there were two large rice mills and two higher-end hotels in Bhojpur, one with upper-caste ownership and the other with lower-caste. There were two big government contractors, two important caste leaders known as mafia musclemen, two major drug-smuggling gangs, and two prominent arms dealers, all split between upper and lower castes. Two paramilitary groups had a substantial presence in Bhojpur at the time of my fieldwork; the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist), whose activists are mostly drawn from lower-caste agricultural laborers, and the Ranvir Sena, a private militia almost exclusively drawn from Bhumihar landowners formed to fight the communists (neither was very active in Rajnagar).[15] Whereas Rajput landlords had, until a few years before, controlled all of the sand mining from the banks of the Sonne River (the most important nonagricultural enterprise in the region surrounding Rajnagar), an RJD-affiliated lower-caste group, locally referred to as the "Baloo mafia" (sand mafia), now controlled a substantial portion of this activity. This regional context provided a catalyst for caste empowerment within local sites, as many lower-caste people now had access to muscle and protection that, previously, only upper castes had enjoyed. The changes in power that occurred during RJD rule did not result so much from lower castes "capturing" state institutions as from a systematic weakening of institutions in which upper castes exercised influence (such as the bureaucracy and police) and the strengthening of informal sources of power. Perhaps most decisively, perception of power had changed; many lower castes now felt that their fortunes were on the ascent.

In the village, these changes were also reflected in the emergence of multiple power centers. Rajnagar, like other Indian villages, is spatially organized around the residential areas, or tolas, of different caste groupings. There are three Yadav tolas, a Koeri tola, what people referred to as the "Harijan tola,"[16] two Musahar tolas, a Rajput tola, and so on. The impact of lower-caste politics is perhaps most apparent at the local level in the changing caste and class background of local political leaders *(netas)*. In almost every section of the village, there are now at least one or two local netas who represent the interests of their caste and residential community. When people in Rajnagar referred to "politics," either using the English word or the Hindi *raajniti*, they usually were referring to these local netas. Most netas in Rajnagar were people with the ability to mobilize sections of their own caste and residential community, articulating the immediate interests of their surrounding section of the village.

Many people with whom I spoke commented on the increased number of these local leaders. As one villager in Rajnagar put it, "There is only politics here. In this village even children are politicians [*bache log bhi neta hai*]. There is only politics here, nothing else." Another person, referring to the rise of backward-caste politicians said, "Forward-caste people no longer like to wear *kurta* pajamas [the attire associated with politicians in India; see below], they consider politics dirty. Now mainly backward-caste people wear these clothes, especially Yadavs."

At the local level, the most distinctive site of local government is the block office. Rajnagar's block office is located in Koilwar, a semiurban block headquarters located five kilometers away, on the road to Patna. The division of India's districts into development blocks, each containing

around one hundred villages, is the result of development-based bureaucratic expansion in the period immediately after independence. The block office and the adjoining circle office (concerned with land records and land taxes) are a nexus for the different government departments that operate at the local level through the block's organizational structure. The overall manager of the block's activities is the block development officer.[17]

Spending time at the block office, I constantly encountered numerous individuals whose livelihoods seemed to depend on block-related activities but who did not hold any official post. Most of these people were easily identifiable by their distinctive white *khadi kurta* pajamas, a style of clothing made famous during the 1920s anticolonial movement and which subsequently became identified with the Congress Party and then with politicians generally (see Chakrabarty 2002). This clothing identifies these men as politically active, as local netas. When I asked these people questions about their occupation, they would usually describe themselves as "thekadars" or, in English, as "contractors." Other people would sometimes refer to these people as "netas" or as "media-men" or would occasionally use the more derogatory term *dalal* (usually translated as "broker").

Prior to the 1990s, brokers, usually only one or two from a village, were mostly members of the locally dominant landlord caste. Even though they were from a single caste, they served as brokers for entire villages, reinforcing patronage links between landlords and their tenants and attached laborers. At the same time, these middlemen were members of the Congress Party, a party that claimed to represent the nation and especially the lower-caste poor, even though its own political structure perpetuated the dominance of a small minority of upper-caste elites.[18] Now, every village has a small number of thekadars—there were five in Rajnagar—and almost all of these people are connected to the block development officer, the local member of the state assembly, and also village netas. Because most of these brokers typically demand either illegal "commissions" or commitments for future votes, corruption is the oil that facilitates the everyday interaction of villagers with public institutions. Thekadars mediate between villagers and various officials in conducting development works and distributing welfare schemes and other public resources, enabling everyone, including themselves, to take their respective cuts or "commissions." In addition, they often serve as organizers and campaigners during elections, collecting relevant electoral information and brokering deals, thereby serving as mediums for the local distribution of development patronage and enabling parliament and assembly members to gain politically from these works.[19]

When most villagers in Rajnagar interact with state institutions, then, it is not through bureaucrats located in government offices but through brokers and local leaders. Although brokers necessarily interact with bureaucrats, like the Koilwar block development officer, their most important relationships tend to be with higher-level politicians. The block office is located outside the village, and block staff enter the village only periodically, as outsiders. The politician, in contrast, lives next door and is embedded in local histories, power relations, and social networks. The politician, not the bureaucrat, was the most recognizable face of the state in Lalu's Bihar. And, whereas people are usually aware of the caste identity of bureaucrats, politicians' caste identities explicitly serve as the basis of their support.

The broker is the key channel through which the influence of state institutions is extended into the social, and, conversely, he effectuates the colonization of state institutions by dominant groups (see Corbridge et al. 2005:192–206). Because many of these characters enjoy considerable power and discretion within their respective areas of influence, they embody the arbitrary and often violent ways in which state power operates in postcolonial contexts, what Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004a)—modifying Agamben 1998—identify as "states of exception" operating within everyday practices at the margins of the state (Bihar's mafia legislators are even more stark examples of this phenomenon). It is perhaps more important, however, to recognize that political mediation of state institutions reflects a specifically postcolonial mode of governance that has meaningful implications for understanding not only people's political subjectivities but also the microdynamics of political change. The political mediation of access to state institutions, which often reinforces the influence of dominant groups, can also undermine this influence if, as in the case of Lalu's Bihar, a new class of brokers emerges. In fact, a political history of postcolonial India could be written from the viewpoint of the changing social backgrounds of political brokers and their shifting relationships with both local power configurations and larger political structures and discourses. And if, as I suggest, political mediation is crucial for the ways in which people imagine the state, then these changes are reflected in new political subjectivities; the state as the local landlord was not at all the same state as that represented by Congress Party members promising development or that mediated by lower-caste brokers claiming allegiance to Lalu Yadav and his project of social justice.[20]

The weakening of state institutions controlled by upper castes, and the displacing of upper-caste brokers by an emergent class of lower-class netas did succeed in at least partially eroding upper-caste dominance. Under RJD rule, upper-caste landed elites found themselves without access to subsidized credit from cooperative banks (most of which became effectively insolvent), cut off from sources of patronage and "commissions" that they had long enjoyed through the control of development funds, and, above all, deprived of the connections with politicians and the

police (the latter seriously weakened) that had enabled them to effectively control labor, protect standing crops from theft, and enforce exploitative sharecropping arrangements. Within this changed political context, lower-caste peasants, and especially Yadavs, progressively took over much of the active cultivation that upper-caste landlords were increasingly abandoning. This profoundly altered local perceptions of who controlled the village, of everyday honor and respect. On one typical occasion, for instance, I observed a Dalit laborer leisurely sitting in the middle of a village path while a Rajput landlord was forced to walk around him in the mud, a scene that would have been unthinkable a few decades earlier (when the laborer would have been expected to stand to the side and bow as the landlord walked past). As a Dalit activist friend in the village put it, "They [Rajputs] used to beat us frequently. Now they are scared of us."

Yadav Raj

One day, as I often did, I was sitting at Bhagawan's shop, participating in a conversation that included my friend Bhagawan and two other Yadav men whom I did not know well, one from Rajnagar and another, Sanjay, from a nearby village. We were discussing the corruption of various RJD politicians in the region and the immense amounts of money the men believed were being illegally appropriated. Sanjay then narrated a much-repeated joke about Lalu Yadav: "The Prime Minister of Japan came to Bihar and told Lalu, 'Give me four years and I will turn Bihar into Japan.' Lalu replied, 'You are so inefficient. Give me four weeks and I will turn Japan into Bihar!'"

After everyone finished laughing, I asked my three interlocutors, all of whom support the RJD, why they vote for people whom they believe to be corrupt. Sanjay, sounding surprised and perhaps irritated by the naïveté of my question, replied as if it were self-evident, "This is Yadav Raj." He then discussed how easy it would have been to loot booths in his village during the previous local elections, in which he had been a candidate (losing to a member of a Rajput ex-zamindari family whose members had won every village election since independence). "They were completely unguarded. Next time . . ."

In Sanjay's narrative, corruption signifies the possession of power. There was an air of awe and even a strange respect in Sanjay's tales of political corruption; the ability to appropriate through corruption was seen as an indicator of power and a means to achieve power. The "Yadav Raj" to which Sanjay referred was not local. Sanjay comes from Ranabhigha, a village that was the site of the largest Rajput estate in the region during the late colonial period, whose family members continued to enjoy a great deal of influence after independence.[21] Although the fortunes of this family are now in decline, nobody would refer to Ranabhigha as a Yadav-dominated village; there is no "Yadav Raj" in Ranabhigha. The "Yadav Raj" to which Sanjay referred was imagined to exist at a higher level, related to the RJD state government.

Compare this narrative with Gupta's (1995) argument that the widespread presence of discourses of corruption in India indicates the underlying imagination of an uncorrupted, ideal state. Parry (2000) has gone so far as to argue that the apparent increase in the theme of corruption in Indian public discourse is an indication of the deepening penetration of the state-idea. In Sanjay's narrative, however, corruption is related to power and appropriation, not an ideal state. In fact, I found many Yadav villagers hard pressed to criticize the RJD-led state government. They often referred to the government using kinship metaphors emphasizing "Yadav Raj." Lalu Yadav was commonly referred to as "Lalu bhai" [brother Lalu]. When I asked one petty cultivator why he votes for the RJD, he pointed to his house and replied, "I vote for my own family. Why would someone from another house help me?"

Contrast this situation with frequent ethnographic accounts of poor people in India conceiving of the state as "maa-baap," as a maternal–paternal patron. For example, Gupta quotes a backward-caste villager as saying, "We consider the government which supports us small people as if it were our mother and father. If it weren't for the Congress, no one would pay any attention to the smaller castes. Not even God looks after us, only the Congress" (1998:390). Although this account also uses the kinship terms *mother* and *father (maa-baap)*, these terms refer to a patronage relationship that connotes verticality. In this account, the government "looks after" its supporters and is therefore conceptualized as a separate entity.

When Yadav cultivators in Rajnagar referred to "Lalu bhai" (brother), in contrast, the relationship was conceived horizontally. Instead of supporting the government because it "looks out" for them, Yadavs in Rajnagar frequently commented to me that the government was their government and so they would support it regardless of what it delivered. This is not to say, however, that all Yadavs in Rajnagar imagined the state in the same way. Wealthier Yadavs who lived in the western part of the village, who had previously been tenants of the Rajput zamindars, and who had a much longer history of political activism than other villagers, saw their struggle through the lens of earlier caste movements that had sought to affirm an upper-caste *kshatriya* status (Michelluti 2008; Pinch 1996). The majority of poorer Yadav households, whose members had been laborers, however, did not attempt to use their newfound political capital to emulate upper-caste values, instead, reveling in their newfound status of empowered subalterns.[22] Thus, lower-caste politics did not simply replace corrupt upper-caste elites with corrupt lower-caste elites but also reflected the emergence of radically divergent political subjectivities.

Lalu Yadav's incomplete revolution

The shift described above involved political subjectivities predicated on notions of caste-based social justice that did not always correspond with social realities. Lalu Yadav's democratic revolution remained incomplete in many ways. First, as the case of Sanjay illustrates, 15 years of RJD rule was unable to displace upper-caste dominance in many contexts (although Sanjay was elected headman of his village in 2006); in the media, judiciary, and bureaucracy and in thousands of villages, upper castes remained dominant, reflecting a varied and uneven political topography.

During one of my many long conversations with him on the veranda in front of his house, Mitilesh, a Rajput farmer, expressed critiques of the RJD state government that were common among upper castes in the village. While sipping *chai*, Mitilesh declared, "Rajputs are *naya priyak*, 'lovers of justice' [implicitly criticizing the RJD's 'social justice'], Yadavs are professional thieves ... even the British had written this [referring to the colonial practice of designating some castes as 'criminal']." Mitilesh also referred to a recent and much discussed incident: A train carrying wheat had stopped at the edge of Rajnagar and had been looted—the police believed by one of the nearby Yadav households. Mitilesh also frequently referred to the theft of his crops from the fields at night as another example of Yadav theft. Mitilesh often juxtaposed these caste stereotypes at the local level with larger-level political discourse. Local Yadav theft was connected to state-level political corruption. Mitilesh stated, for example, that the local assembly member "is just like a Yadav. There is no difference; they are all thieves ... Lalu Yadav is the chief."

Mitilesh's statements, containing themes that I encountered many times while speaking with upper-caste people in Bihar, conceptually linked the local and the state on caste lines. Local theft was connected with state corruption in an attempt to challenge the legitimacy of an implicitly recognized Yadav Raj. In Sanjay's comments, by contrast, corruption served as an indicator of power and legitimacy. Here, this was clearly not the case. By discursively associating local with state corruption, Mitilesh sought to expose a blurring of boundaries that he considered illegitimate, at least as long as people of his caste were not the ones doing the blurring. This critique of corruption, then, represented a reactionary upper-caste discourse that is really about the displacement of people who felt that they were the legitimate holders of power.[23]

This type of critique of both local and state corruption during RJD rule became central to the political platform of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) opposition in the state. Upper castes who had been displaced from power were not the only people dissatisfied with RJD rule. As upper-caste dominance within village contexts and within public life in Bihar was weakened, it was increasingly replaced by Yadav dominance. So, although upper castes lost much of the status that they had previously enjoyed, especially within the realm of politics, the negative influences of caste dominance did not dissipate. As Yadavs and other populous and well-organized lower castes strengthened their respective positions, weaker and less populous castes were subjected to new forms of caste dominance at the same time that they were now being deprived of the landlord-mediated development patronage that they had earlier received. In Rajnagar, for example, small castes, and especially members of the Musahar caste (literally, rat eaters; the poorest and most exploited Dalit caste in the village) became increasingly opposed to the new forms of exploitation to which they were subjected.[24]

In the November 2005 state assembly elections, these disaffected lower castes consolidated around the NDA, in alliance with upper castes who were seeking to regain their lost position or at least stem the decline. The NDA won a decisive victory, capturing 143 seats in the 243-seat assembly (also reportedly winning a majority in Rajnagar).[25] This ended the long period of RJD rule and once again profoundly altered Bihar's political geography.

Conclusion

Corruption embodies the contradictions of postcolonial governmentality in India; although the Indian constitution espouses the principles of equality and justice, the everyday functioning of state institutions riddled with practices of corruption has tended to perpetuate the dominance of mostly upper-caste, landed elites. I have argued, however, that in the wake of the emergence of a politics of caste empowerment, corruption came to be a naked signifier of power, now wielded by lower-caste leaders. More than implying the ideal of an uncorrupt state (Gupta 1995), the widespread theme of corruption within popular discourse now reflected popular awareness of the role that practices of corruption played in reinforcing elite dominance. This awareness was associated with a radical democratic imaginary that unclothed the postcolonial "state-idea" based on a national project of development by revealing the social character (in caste terms) of state institutions and that replaced this state-idea with an image of a state centered on the personality of Lalu Yadav and committed to a project of caste-based "social justice." Lalu Yadav's "social justice," however, in practice, contained a strong residue of that which it was contesting because it was articulated through the same medium of caste representation that had long served to reinforce elite dominance. Corruption became power, and caste dominance continued in new forms and with new entrants (such as Yadavs in Rajnagar).

Within this context, many people supported politicians not only despite perceptions that they were corrupt but

also precisely because they were perceived as corrupt and therefore capable of using their positions for the benefit of their supporters. For Yadavs who felt that their caste group had become empowered during RJD rule, the ability to employ practices of corruption was an affirmation of this empowerment, a demonstration of "Yadav Raj." For upper-caste groups who felt that their dominance had weakened, charges of corruption reflected what many perceived as the illegitimacy of RJD rule. For many people from lower-caste backgrounds, the charges reflected a perception that they had not benefited as much as Yadavs had from the RJD's "lower-caste" empowerment. These different interpretations of the theme of corruption reflected different ways of imagining the state. They also reflected the contradictions that had emerged within the RJD's political base, which eventually resulted in the electoral defeat of the RJD government.

I have tried to point to the divergent ways in which people imagined the state—a diversity of political subjectivities that I have only begun to document.[26] Recognizing this multiplicity of ways of imagining the state is crucial for an understanding of the specific modalities of postcolonial governance as well as the microdynamics of political change. If we had simply interpreted the expansion of state institutions and development projects in India during the 40 years after independence as the progressive penetration of an abstract "state-idea," as the production of a universal "state effect," or as an example of a singular governmentality (instead of a hybrid "postcolonial governmentality"), we would have been unable to comprehend how rapidly this was all displaced by radically divergent political subjectivities associated with the politics of lower-caste empowerment. Rather, it is the specificities of a mode of governance that combined the project of development (including the entire assemblage of development-related institutions, forms of knowledge, and techniques of intervention) with relations of dominance and subordination in local sites—connected through politically mediated caste networks—that provides the necessary context for understanding the political transformations that have swept across much of north India over the last two decades.

I have sought to show not only the specificities of political subjectivities associated with postcolonial forms of governance but also the ways in which the conflicts between different ways of imagining the state are key drivers of political change. The tensions between these different visions of the state, then, characterize political modernity in Bihar. Ethnographic examination of the multiple ways that people imagine "the state," and the relationship of these images to the specificities of modes of governance, of which state institutions are a necessarily important part, but only a part, holds the potential to better reflect the dynamism, and the varied political subjectivities, that are definitive aspects of political life in the postcolonial world.

Notes

1. In the 2005 state assembly elections, for example, 34 percent of candidates fielded by the major parties had criminal cases pending against them (India Together 2005). See Jha 1996 for an account of the "criminalization" of politics in Bihar.

2. See Witsoe 2009 for an analysis of the politics of case empowerment as radical democracy.

3. For compilations relating to caste published in recent years, see Fuller 1996, Gupta 2000, and Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 1994.

4. See Guha 1996, Mitra 1985, and Yang 1998. See Prakash 1990 for an account of the distinct forms of debt bondage that emerged in Bihar during the colonial period.

5. The same also applies to urban contexts in India, where modes of governance are not necessarily organized around caste networks. For example, Hansen 2001 describes the ways in which the Siv Sena maintains control over much of Mumbai not only through public spectacles of violence but also through informal political networks that penetrate state institutions.

6. This is amply attested to by considering those sites in which disciplinary power would be expected to be most manifest. One finds, for instance, an astonishingly weak educational system (Bihar's literacy rate remains 50 percent), a dilapidated health system (whose limited successes have been achieved by relinquishing sovereignty to the vaccination programs of multilateral institutions such as UNICEF and the WHO), a minuscule industrial sector, and a limited capacity of understaffed local government (at the "block" level) to handle even minimal governmental services let alone serve as a conduit for disciplinary power. Even the prison system in Bihar operates in a remarkably unsystematic way (as the example of Rajan illustrates). As James Ferguson (1990) noted of international development projects in Lesotho, however, the development failures of this mode of governance are "productive" in the sense that they reinforce relations of dominance and subordination.

7. For example, at the same time that the modern army minutely disciplines the physical movements, daily schedule, and spatial environment of individual soldiers, it also creates the appearance of an autonomous organization that is more than the sum of its parts.

8. Jonathan Parry (2000) has also argued that the theme of corruption in Indian public discourse signifies an increasing penetration of the "state-idea."

9. For an example of how "corruption" can signify a specific mode of governance, see Jean-François Bayart's (1993) account of "the politics of the belly" in sub-Saharan Africa.

10. See Dirks 2001:275–276 for a graphic account of these protests. The decision was stayed by the Supreme Court but eventually implemented in 1992.

11. A state government remaining in power for 15 years is remarkable in India, where governments are routinely voted out of power for poor performance, especially for failing to provide what is often termed the "BSP" of Indian politics: *bijli* (electricity), *sarak* (roads), and *pani* (water). Many people continued to vote RJD and support Lalu and other RJD leaders despite widespread perceptions, supported by opinion polls, that the RJD government was corrupt, ineffective in implementing development works, and encouraged criminality.

12. Although there, arguably, were caste implications in this gharibi hatao rhetoric, they were effectively clothed in the image of the developmental state. See Bayly 1999:285–286.

13. In 2002, out of a total of 244 Bihar cadre officers, 135 were from upper-caste groups, and only seven came from the three largest backward caste groups (Witsoe in press).

14. Although many middle-class Indians considered Lalu to be the embodiment of an "antimodernity," this view overlooks

the centrality of the concepts of "social justice" and "popular sovereignty" during this period; Lalu's Bihar could perhaps more plausibly be considered a politically articulated "regional modernity" (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003).

15. See Louis 2002 and Mukherji and Yadav 1980 for accounts of the long history of agrarian struggle in Bhojpur. Neither of the major militias operating in Bhojpur at the time of my fieldwork had a significant armed presence in Rajnagar or Koilwar, where their operations were confined to electoral practice (as political parties fielding candidates in elections).

16. *Harijan*, meaning "children of God," was a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi to refer to former untouchables. Many people now consider this term patronizing and, instead, use the term *Dalit*, "the oppressed," or the governmental category "Scheduled Caste."

17. The block development officer (along with the circle officer, in charge of land revenue) is part of the Bihar Administrative Service and is admitted into the service through competitive examinations.

18. Gupta (1998), for example, describes a shift in the reproduction of the dominant caste from a patronage based on the control of land to a "brokerage" based on control over the distribution of development resources.

19. See Wade 1985 for a classic account of the ways in which corruption in public canal irrigation in India is driven by a system that redistributes a portion of the associated illicit income to politicians.

20. David Nugent (2001) similarly examines three temporally distinct "states of imagination" in postcolonial Peru, reflecting the specific political history of Chachapoyas.

21. This family founded an important college in Patna, and a relative had been a High Court judge.

22. For example, Yadavs in West Tola had constructed a large Krishna temple, held wrestling competitions (evidence of a martial kshatriya ethic), and kept their women out of public view in a classic pattern of "sanskritization" (see Michelluti 2008). Yadavs who lived in the southern part of Rajnagar, in contrast, were proud that their women worked as laborers and milk sellers, openly consumed alcohol, and even consumed pork during ritual occasions—which embarrassed the more sanskritized Yadavs. And it was the Yadavs in the southern part of the village whose fortunes had changed the most dramatically during RJD rule.

23. See Jeffrey 2002 for an interesting examination of how "public cultures of anticorruption" in Uttar Pradesh obscure class differences in the ways in which corruption is privately perceived and of the role of corruption in reproducing class inequalities.

24. This contrasts with Akio Tanabe's (2007) observation of a "subaltern sacrificial ethics" emerging through increased lower-caste political involvement in rural Orissa, the difference perhaps reflecting the antagonistic militancy of lower-caste politics in Bihar.

25. See Witsoe (in press) for a fuller account.

26. See Corbridge et al. 2005:109–114 for a fascinating mapping of diverse ways that villagers "see the state."

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