**How might accountability issues bias the state in favor of the migrants?**

Accountability is one of the fundamental principles of modern democracy. It allows for the citizenry to pass judgement on the actions of the people in power and holds public interest as a cornerstone of a participatory state. However, as institutions of power and bureaucracies become bigger and more complex, it becomes more difficult to pinpoint who to hold accountable in the case of discontent for a policy or action of a state, effectively creating an accountability gap. Even though the concept of accountability might seem illusive, it is still an important factor that all governments have to keep in mind in order to hold on to power. In a democracy this is the entire electorate, which passes judgement on the success and failure of the state through elections, protest or petitions. In an authoritarian state the leader might be held accountable to a small group of stakeholders that ensure the leader can hold a tight grip on power.

Furthermore, there might be incentives for states to try and minimize the role they play in the effectiveness of a policy in the case that the policy is a failure and or capitalize on it in the case that it is a success. In the case that a certain policy creates conflict due to its nature or implementation, states can evade accountability by blaming others, being secretive or, in the case of resettlement programs for example, take a side in the conflict that is most likely to have the least repercussions.

Internal migration is a phenomenon where the notion of accountability plays a big role. More specifically in resettlement programs, where large groups of people are displaced to different parts of the country on the basis of development, due to infrastructure projects, to civilize “backwards people” and so on. A lot of the times, the resettlements programs might have negatives consequences in the form of conflict between the settlers, or the migrants, and the host community supposed to receive them. In the case that such a conflict emerges, the state has to make a decision on whether to accept responsibility for causing it, which might lead to being held accountable for the program’s failure or take a side with the migrants causing the conflict and denying any wrongdoing or political mishap. This paper will examine the case of the Indonesian policy of transmigration and how it has repeatedly supported the migrants in favor of the host-communities in order to justify the massive scale and costs of the program and not to bear responsibility for the human rights violations resulting from it.

Indonesia is country of over 17,000 islands out of which approximately 6,000 are inhabited. Due to the fragmentation, policies rooted in the preservation of national unity have always been a priority to the state. The transmigration program had the aim of resettling millions of Indonesians from the overcrowded islands of Java, Bali, Madura and Lombok to less populated areas and islands of Sumatra, Sulawesi, Indonesian New Guinea and Kalimantan.[[1]](#footnote-1)The program, which itself is a continuation of Dutch colonial policy of population resettlement, was driven by the goal of spreading the population of mostly ethnic Javanese through which an expansive integration of the country could occur by homogenizing the national culture of Indonesia.[[2]](#footnote-2) The unification of the country through a well-disbursed common Javanese culture can be seen as a tactic of nation building as it allowed for the spread of authority of the central government. Cultural diversity was seen as an impediment to these nation building efforts and thus necessitated its reduction through the promotion of a singular national langue and national symbols.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The goal of the Indonesian government already clearly indicates the bias towards the migrants being resettled over the host communities, as the goal of the government is less so to increase the well-being of the migrants as it is to consolidate Javanese power over the Indonesian islands. This is well illustrated by the fact that the people who were a part of the general transmigration, also called sponsored transmigration, were provided with transportation to the new settlement, a living allowance until the first harvest, a house and a piece of land to live off of. They were resettled with the aim of lowering the overpopulation pressure of Java as well as to act as model farmers who would teach the natives of the outer islands farming techniques. However, according to surveys in the 1970s between one third and one half the transmigrants had never owned or managed land before.[[4]](#footnote-4) Thus instead of teaching farming to the indigenous people of the outer islands, they ended up learning how to farm from them.

In essence the responsibility of a government should encompass the well-being of all of its citizens. As we seen in the case of Indonesia preference is given wholly to the Javanese, independent of the fact whether they are more vulnerable than other ethnic groups or not. However, as accountability for programs is measured based on the success of the initial intent and aim, we see an overwhelming bias towards the migrants compared to the host populations. Thus, things that can be measured are: whether the family or individual was successfully resettled? Are they benefitting from all the social benefits meant for them? Are they contributing towards the national unity of Indonesia? If the answer to all of these questions is “yes,” then the state can be considered successful in its sponsored resettlement program, even though it comes at the cost of deterioration of the host community’s standards of living and culture. As this is the criteria by which they are evaluated it is also the criteria by which the state leaders are considered to be held accountable.

However, let us take a step back from the example of Indonesia in order to explore alternative scenarios. Although the case of Indonesia lends itself as a great illustration of how accountability issues might bias the state in favor of the migrants, it also has limitations for understanding the complexity of the problem. This is due to one of the program’s aims being the consolidation of the Javanese power over the outer islands through cultural assimilation and homogenization. Not every resettlement program has the aim of deliberately disrupting the host community’s way of life, consequently playing havoc with their cultural and ethnic heritage. Rather, the “clients” might be resettled with the aim of protecting them from natural disasters, like the case in Sri Lanka as part of a flood risk reduction strategy,[[5]](#footnote-5)or because of grand infrastructure projects such as the Sardar Sarovar dam,[[6]](#footnote-6) effectively trying to improve the livelihood of the people displaced, be it voluntary or not.

Let us say that government x comes up with a large-scale development program to help with the improvement of living standards of people living on the periphery of said country. As a part of this program, the state decides to resettle tens of thousands of people from the impoverished areas of the country to a region where the government is able to provide them with better social services such as but not limited to healthcare and education. Furthermore, the government is going to provide a piece of land to the migrants for them to provide for themselves through agriculture. Now, country x is very ethnically diverse, and the clients of the program do not share cultural similarities with the host community. Violent clashes between the groups break out because the displaced people are perceived as a security threat, they compete for limited resources and the host community claims they contribute to the growth of an informal economy. Who is held accountable for the breakout of violence and what should be the stance of the state?

In order to answer the question, it is important to consider what the government being held accountable for. The aim of the program was to expand access to public services through resettlement. The government has succeeded in moving thousands of people to a host community where they have increased access to the aforementioned programs. Even though there is violent conflict due to the resettlement, the basis on what the success of the program is judged upon is to a large extent independent from the violent aftermath. The state is held accountable for the established aim of the program and in this hypothetical case, this has been fulfilled.

In the case that the violent conflict that emerged between the clients and the host community becomes significant enough that there is public backlash, it is in the interest of the state to support the migrants compared to the host community. This is due to the legislators being aware of the possibility of being held accountable for creating the environment for a violent clash to break out, directly affecting the integrity and credibility of the government resettlement program. By blaming the host community for the breakout of the violence, the state would effectively detract from the culpability of the state and the migrants in contributing to the outcome. Furthermore, the state could take further actions such as arresting people and or holding show trials in order to shift blame on to the host community lessening the issues related to accountability as it would seem that the host community was behind the “unnecessary” violence.

A connection can be drawn between the state’s response and attribution theory, which posits that when things go wrong, people's bad behavior is often attributed to their traits, while one's own actions are attributed to circumstances.[[7]](#footnote-7) In this case the state would be saying that these circumstances were unexpected and not it’s fault but rather it is the general animosity and aggressiveness of the host community that has led to the violent conflict between the two sides. This can confirm a sincere, if mistaken, conviction that the government's policy and actions were appropriate.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Through the example of Indonesia and the hypothetical proposed, it becomes clear, why the state may favor the migrants over the host community. The key reason in accountability, as it is a constant concern for statesmen in the type of decisions they make and in the way they act in moments that they consider to be crucial for their livelihood as elected or appointed officials.

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