D Society and Space

Victim, broker, activist, fixer: Surviving dispossession in working class Lahore

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Abstract
Recent debates in urban geography and anthropology have urged a rethinking of 'marginal' groups, viewing them not only as intimately connected to the state and its power, but also as offering a lens into alternate modes of dwelling, endurance and political change. We reflect upon the conceptual possibilities of such forms of endurance by examining how those residing in urban margins utilise, enable and inhabit connections to centres of power when faced with dispossession. Focusing on evictions that took place in Lahore (Pakistan) between 2015 and 2017, to acquire land for the Orange Line Metro Train, we follow the actions and narrations of one interlocutor, as he confronted the loss of his home. Unravelling how survival at the margins depends upon tactility and a continuous shifting between roles and modes of actions, we highlight the unique and particular ways in which evictions are lived and embodied. Including such shifting modes of negotiating in conceptualisations of the 'political' in the Global South does indeed offer potentialities, but we urge caution in over-reading into these possibilities. Shape-shifting and movement in embodied roles allows for a certain kind of thriving in precarity but rarely allows inhabitants – as they so aspire – to override it altogether.

Marginality, as anthropologists and historians have long argued, is not so much an absence of connections but, rather, about the kind of relations to centres of powers. As Edwin Ardener (1989: 221–222) classically noted, 'remoteness' is not produced through disconnect

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or distance and, instead, through an 'imperfect attachment'. Much of the anthropological conversation on such relations has predominantly focused on rural or tribal populations and explored the ways in which such groups are able to evade state control (Scott, 1998), live between and in half-states (Brachet and Scheele, 2019; Scheele, 2019). There have been, however, extensive debates on conceptions of marginality within the field of urban studies (see Bayat, 2012). More recent work outlines the ways in which groups that are termed 'marginal' or 'off the grid' are, in fact, intricately connected to the state (Chatterjee, 2006; Evans, 2002; Rolnik, 2019) and that, in some instances, it is these very connections that produce marginality (Nunzio, 2017). Simultaneously, others (Lancione, 2019a, 2019b; Simone, 2016) – including in this special issue – urge us to think of endurance in marginal spaces as a form of dwelling, of inhabiting and being in the world, that often goes unnoticed in dominant narratives of political change but offers new possibilities for conceptualising politics and building horizontal solidarities. Similarly, others (Bayat, 2013: 80) view activities in the urban margins as the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary', referring to 'the discreet and prolonged ways in which the poor struggle to survive and to better their lives by quietly impinging on the propertied and powerful'.

In this article, we examine how those residing in urban margins utilise, enable and inhabit connections to centres of power when faced with the threat of dispossession. We unravel the various performative modes through which residents enter and mobilise various networks in their attempts to affect change. We are guided by recent debates on dispossession marginality and resistance across urban studies, anthropology and political sociology and, within them, calls for greater attention towards individual lives. For instance, in their review of work on urban displacement, Hirsh et al. (2020) find resistance as a common feature across varied geographies. They suggest that it is critical to 'further investigate resistance through in-depth work with displaced people in order to unravel their challenges in resisting' (p. 401) and better understand their views of favourable outcomes and everyday pressures. Likewise, Lees et al. (2018) argue that it is important to pay greater attention to 'survivability in everyday practices of resistance', particularly at the individual level (p. 351). This emphasis on individual life in relation to resistance in geography and urban studies matches recent interventions in anthropological theory on resistance (Hale, 2006; Juris, 2008). In reflections on a division between 'dark' and 'good' anthropology, Ortner (2016) argues for an ethnography that moves between, on one hand, everyday relationships, ethical dilemmas and moral concerns and, on the other hand, larger political inequalities and violence (p. 60). In addition, she calls for an anthropology of critique, resistance and activism where researchers are involved in the struggles they study to open discussions on the contradictions and conundrums experienced in fieldwork and, moreover, reflect on the ethics of possibilities that emerge in these moments. We take inspiration from this to focus on a personal experience of dispossession and survival to add texture, life and urgency to larger histories of neoliberal land regimes, structural violence and civil activism in South Asia.

We draw upon fieldwork conducted between January 2018 and April 2019 on evictions resulting from the construction of the Orange Line Metro Train, a 27-km mass transit line, to focus on the life-history, actions and narrations of one interlocutor, Hassan.[1] Following his story as he confronts state-led eviction from his residence in the city of Lahore, we unravel how survival at the margins depends upon tactility and a continuous shifting between roles, methods and modes of actions. In being led by Hassan's account, we strive for a narrative form that overcome the disconnect between the deeply personal and evocative experiences of homelessness and the impersonal metanarratives usually favoured by academic and policy research (Christensen, 2012; Lancione, 2017). Such an approach allows us not only to connect everyday struggles with larger structural processes but also to draw

attention to what it means – in an experiential or embodied sense – to survive. We highlight the unique and particular ways in which evictions are lived and inhabited in different contexts. As Lancione (2019b) reminds us that although displacement has become 'the modality through which the urban itself – and city life – become assembled, in ways that encompass usual tales of capitalist accumulation by dispossession, the experience and meaning of eviction is more complex' (p. 218). Both evictions and resistance take on colours and forms that encompass local histories, patriarchal modalities of homing and forms of everyday endurance (Lancione, 2019b).

As the story unfolds, Hassan appears – in his own narration as well as of those around him – in several guises: a victim, an activist and community leader, a broker and a fixer. It is through intimate knowledge of and contact with various government wings and offices – of their varying motivations, reach and limitations – that Hassan deploys differing positions and tactics. He relies equally upon, depending on the context, political protest and legislative activism as he does on personal connections, mediations and opaque deals. This kind of shape-shifting is characteristic not only of dwelling in liminal spaces but also of inhabiting a mode of existence that takes uncertainty – in the face of little state security – as given. Such ways of being were not viewed as 'political' or particularly agential by civil society activists, who had become involved in organising the protests against the Orange Line route, and some of whom started to view Hassan as a 'sell-out'. Including such shifting modes of negotiating in conceptualisations of the 'political' in the Global South does indeed offer potentialities, as Simone (2016) has argued, of envisaging 'more judicious modalities of viable urban development' (p. 135). At the same time, however, we are cautious of over-reading into the futures such modes of enduring offer. Hassan, and others, like him, scattered across cities in the Global South may thrive in these roles, but such skills rarely allow them to override the continuous precarity they are aspirant to escape. We argue, therefore, that it is critical to ground our conceptualisation of marginality within existing systems of power and inequality.

Our focus on this article is one individual, Hasan, but it stems from a wider interest and longer histories of encounters with people like him in our research endeavours. Within urban Pakistan, scholars and public activists often come from a different class background to those affected most acutely by social and political inequalities and rely on members of these communities for access and information. In such instances, individuals, such as Hasan who are articulate and known to both the local neighbourhood and activists, become both key informants and gatekeepers of knowledge and access. This has been our experience in previous work (Maqsood, 2019; Sajjad, 2009) and certainly in this research on the Orange Line, where we come across several such persons in different neighbourhoods and groups. As we elaborate in this article, these individuals are liminal figures who not only take on different roles depending on the context but also perceived in contradictory terms by others around them. In our research encounters with them, they sometimes drag us, however fleetingly, into a liminal space. Although researchers often occupy a relatively more secure position than their interlocutors, especially when working with disenfranchised groups, encounters with liminal figures, such as Hasan, sometimes shakes their certainty of knowledge, facts and roles. For us, this resulted in an ambiguity about how to best write and account for these dilemmas. Our interactions with him exemplified these changing positionalities. We were, at once, more privileged and viewed as in a position to help and also largely reliant on Hasan for access to information and other community members. By focusing on Hasan, our aim is to shed light on liminal figures like him that are often encountered in research on disenfranchised groups and

community activism, as well as to lay bare our own roles and the micropolitics of access, gatekeeping and knowledge production in such contexts.

The Orange Line: Evictions, patronage and politics

The politics and struggles that are the focus here are grounded in the larger process of mass evictions in Lahore that took place between 2015 and 2017. Lahore is the capital city of the prosperous Punjab province, and Pakistan's second largest city, with an estimated population of 11 million. The evictions, led by the Lahore Development Authority (LDA), the city's planning and regulatory authority, were carried out to acquire land for the construction of the Orange Line Metro Train. Although first conceived of in 2006, as part of a wider network of transit lines to meet the city's growing demand for transport, funding for the Line was acquired in 2015, by the (then ruling) provincial government of Pakistan Muslim-League-Nawaz, through a USD 1.6 billion loan from China.[2] While the original plan included a combination of elevated and under tracks, the new agreement increased the kilometres underground and, in addition, decided to use cut and cover technology, which although faster and cheaper, causes immense destruction above ground.[3] With the initiation of groundwork for the project in late 2015, the LDA started marking homes and businesses for demolition, often without giving any prior notice to the residents and owners. This sparked concerns among not only residents and the affected but also several civil society activists who learnt that the construction of the Line will severely impact a number of heritage sites in the city, as well as cause irreparable environmental damage. Over the next two years, there were numerous protests, petitions filed in court, letter-writing campaigns to political representatives and several attempts to garner media attention. One such petition, filed by activists concerned about the impact on heritage, was accepted by the provincial High Court, and construction was halted around some sites for nearly two years but was ultimately overturned by the Supreme Court.

Hirsh et al. (2020) find that it is common for affected populations to resist displacement through multiple channels. These range from demonstrations to 'turning to court, submitting petitions, and conducting meetings with various municipal workers' (p.400). A number of petitions were also filed by residents of affected areas to stop the demolition of their houses including by those in Basantnagar, a community of 50–60 households where Hassan also resided. Like many residential spaces in the Global South, Basantnagar is an unplanned settlement, initially formed by incoming refugee families at Partition, in 1947, settling on land owned by the federal government. In the early 2000s, Basantnagar was formally recognised[4] by the state as a *katchi abadi* or informal settlement, although, similar to other katchi abadis in the city (over 200 settlements), many of the residents still do not possess ownership documents. Hassan had moved there a few years ago, but most other families have been living there since Partition, giving the settlement a close-knit and community-like feel. In 2015, when the LDA came into mark spaces, the residents learnt that 18 houses were due to be demolished for the construction of the Orange Line, and the affected households would be offered a flat-rate as compensation: PKR 1 million (roughly USD 6450) regardless of house size, condition, location or number of family members. This would effectively force them to become renters as they would be unable to purchase alternative housing with this amount. As we detail in the next section, some of the residents, including Hassan, were able to get a stay that halted the demolition of their homes but ultimately decided to withdraw their petition in favour of receiving compensation at an agreed rate by the government. After negotiations, households were given between PKR 1 million – PKR 3.6 million (roughly USD 6,450–23,300), depending purportedly on the physical size and state of

each house. While most households were able to find alternative housing close by, others moved into rental housing, and some moved further away from the city. Although most households received full compensation, we learnt that at least one household did not get the full promised amount.

From the perspective of many of the activists involved in the struggle, the residents' decision to agree to compensation instead of continuing to resist evictions represented failure, yet another instance of the difficulty of staging mass protest and resistance in Pakistan. As several activists reflected woefully, the state was able to override the initial resistance through a combination, on one hand, of physical intimidation and coercion – such as LDA tractors and bulldozers blocking the way into the colonies, playing on fears of lack of ownership documentation and cutting of water and electricity supply – and, on the other hand, creating room for underhand deals and offering increased rates of compensation with minimal required paperwork. Indeed, our interlocutors often articulated a sense of impossibility; 'you cannot fight the state' was an oft-used phrase we heard in discussion on why the resistance to evictions had transformed into accepting compensation. The broader perspective of civil society groups, to some degree, dovetails with recent academic work on patronage, and the ways in which it impacts mass politics (Akhtar, 2018; Auyero, 2012; Gayer, 2014; Javid, 2011; Mohmand, 2014; Nelson, 2016). Patronage here refers to a form of politics that emerges in contexts where patrons drawn from the ruling elite perpetuate their hold on power through the use of their official position and access to the state, to provide voters and constituents with goods and services in exchange for the latter's continued support (Javid, 2019).

As Akhtar has highlighted, that intricate – and continuously evolving – networks of patronage not only disincentivise political activism but are also deployed by the state to quell resistance movements. As a result, politics has become nothing more than 'the imperative of getting things done' – a mode to 'navigate' rather than 'transform everyday reality' (Akhtar, 2019: 71).

At the same time, however, other recent perspectives remind us that patronage is a form of 'doing politics' and view the relationships and networks that surround it as offering possibilities of 'vernacularising' and expanding democratic politics (Michelutti, 2007, 2008; Michelutti et al., 2018; Piliavsky, 2014). By arguing that 'political patronage is an expression of the broad moral sense that shapes the ways in which people relate across social levels and contexts' (Piliavsky, 2014: 29–30), these latter perspectives ask us to reconsider patronage as a 'transactional network' (Piliavsky, 2014: 22). In other words, this work suggests that the 'exchanges, obligations and bonds' between politicians and citizens 'forces the torpid bureaucracy to do its citizens' work' (Piliavsky, 2014: 20). These ways of 'doing politics' are certainly visible in our ethnography; it was precisely through utilising personal relations with politicians who had previously helped regularise their abadi that our interlocutors were able to secure at least some compensation for their lost residences and shops. Yet, our aim is not to privilege this account of the role of patronage over others that view it was detrimental to mass resistance. Rather, it is to underscore how both types of transactional and intimate relations, processes and formal and informal methods are visible in struggles to survive marginality in cities of the Global South. If evictees, such as Hassan, utilised relationships and willingness on the part of local government officials to strike deals and informally negotiate compensation rates, these pathways were only opened after following legal pathways, such as petitioning, and mass protest. Although activists and civil society groups have been quick to see their efforts as failed, they did, to some degree, allow for greater space for manoeuvring and obtaining higher compensation.

What we are ultimately pointing towards, thus, is a 'messiness' – an inability to pin down the role and positionality of those at the heart of the struggle, and the methods and processes that they utilise – that does not lend itself to straightforward and mainstream narratives of political change (see also Lancione, 2017; Simone, 2016). This messiness is often erased from 'official' accounts of resistance, even as involved activists and academics often make use of the same practices as they navigate everyday hierarchies and power structures within the field. For us, for instance, writing about and gathering accounts of evictions has been made possible through the same fluidity and movement in roles and positionality that we centre on in this article. While, on one hand, Hassan and others that we interviewed stand at the margins, vulnerable to any sudden change in circumstance and policy, they are, on the other hand, our gatekeepers and middlemen in the field – our access to affected families and knowledge of the internal politics is controlled by the very people that we write about – and, rightly so, in this context – as marginal.

In shedding light on these contradictions and on this overall messiness, between formality, informality and the fluidity of positions, we are therefore also cognizant of the limitations and relevance of our research and interpretation for our interlocutors. To address some of these limitations, we follow calls for narrative forms and academic practices that acknowledges (Gayer, 2018; Lancione, 2017, 2019a, 2019b), rather than sanitises, the complexity of our interlocutors' experiences, with a twofold aim. We do this to, first, highlight the intimacy, and the ways in which it unfolds, between the state and those at the margins and second, to respond to recent calls for southern urban theory that is grounded in and grows out of practice, and thereby understand how groups at the margins survive dispossession (see Bhan, 2019; Simone, 2018). An acknowledgement and investigation of this messiness and fluidity of boundaries is not evidence of failure. Instead, we suggest that these are starting points for elaborating an 'ethics of possibility' that Ortner (2016) talks of in relation to developing a new anthropology of critique, resistance and activism. She draws here on Appadurai's use of the concept, who thinks of them as grounded in those 'ways of thinking, acting and feeling that increase horizons of hope', and for anthropologists, and researchers more broadly, to act as 'mediators, facilitators and promoters of ethics of possibility . . . which can offer a more inclusive platform for improving the planetary quality of life and can accommodate a plurality of visions' (Appadurai in Ortner, 2016: 65). An attention to the contradictions that comes out of Hasan's account presses us to consider what it means to live a life at the margins, and how it is made meaningful. Although it may not increase horizons of hope that Appadurai talks of, it presses us to acknowledge the choices that only those bearing the brunt of dispossession face. The shifting stances we have illustrated do not fall into neat categories of resistance but are ways in which the structural violence of the state and neoliberal land regimes is negotiated and managed. In this sense, these tactics and flexibilities offer an 'ethics of possibility' that studies of resistance often dismiss.

Who is Hassan? Sell-out or community leader?

Basantnagar was a small and tightly-knit locality. The majority of the families who had migrated there at the time of Partition were Urdu speaking and felt that, living within a larger Punjabi-dominated area, they had to stick to one another. Hassan was, in fact, a more recent arrival to the colony but had, in the time he had lived there, quickly become ensconced into the everyday life and politics of the neighbourhood. It appeared, from our interviews with neighbourhood families and listening to conversations between them, that Hassan had been the go-to person for solving neighbourhood problems and settling family

disputes. Such incidents were often drawn upon by Hasan himself when explaining his connection to a particular family, or by an interviewee when discussing neighbourhood life. Broadly speaking, Basantnagar had been a colony where most households were familiar with one another. As we explain, these histories and relations were frequently discussed in our interviews and were used to both attest to Hasan's place as a community leader and to cast doubt on his actions.

We first met Hassan after he had, along with his family, moved to a new residence about 2 km away from Basantnagar. Suffering from a disease, that has led to progressive vision loss, he can barely see anymore, but he can still make his way to familiar places relying on people to help him along the way. He had, once, owned a small shoe-making business, but it collapsed due to his declining health and some intra-family differences. Since then, he had held a food service contract at a local institution, but it had not been renewed and so, when we met him, he had no source of income in that year. Although he openly talks of these problems, what comes to mind on first meeting him is not his destituteness but the skill and confidence with which he comports himself and communicates. He is very articulate, with poetic but purposeful speech – hearing him, one can easily imagine him as taking centre stage in mediating neighbourhood matters. Agreeing to introduce us to other former residents of Basantnagar, he immediately slips into a role of a community leader and a gatekeeper. His version of events that we detail shortly suggests that he had been fully committed to resisting the government's plan of acquiring the land that housed Basantnagar for constructing the Orange Line. It was only when he realised that these efforts were futile and that the state would acquire their land, regardless of the consequences, that he abandoned this approach. Then, he concentrated on brokering between the government and residents to ensure that everyone got the maximum compensation.

Hassan thus portrays himself as a community leader and negotiator, a view that some residents also share but others disagree. A couple of residents and activists claim that Hassan had started colluding with the government. In fact, they believe that it was he who had started spreading fear, doubt and uncertainty in the minds of the residents, encouraging them to take what they can get and leave. One activist, in particular, speculates that if the petitioners of the stay had held on, it would have been difficult for the government to build the line, but Hassan convinced them to act otherwise. All of this was done, as the allegations go, because Hassan had been 'bought' and that he received additional monetary compensation for his assistance. Others also pointed out that Hassan's sister-in-law worked at a powerful government office and that he used this connection to meet officials 'through the backdoor' and managed to increase the rate of his land. For instance, one resident – who had been equally involved in mobilising the community – told us that Hassan had received PKR 3,600,000 (roughly USD 23,300) for his 681 square feet property, a rate that is significantly higher than what was used for others. What condemned Hassan even more, in this and other residents' eyes, was that he had gone on to buy a property worth PKR 5 million (roughly USD 32,352) – proof that he had been given far more money that he let on. While these residents and activists were incensed that Hassan had sold out, some also said that they understood his reasons. His children, especially one of them, were bright and hardworking and, understandably so, Hassan wanted to ensure that they could attend and do well in university. Others hinted towards resentments and bitterness within the family, stemming from the change in financial circumstances after Hassan lost his business.

Similar tensions and contradictions were visible in the narratives and accounts of other figures such as Hassan that we encountered in other neighbourhoods affected by the Orange Line. Ahmad, a public-sector employee who was one of the community leaders representing residents from his neighbourhood during negotiations with the government, shared that he

had played a crucial role in securing compensation for all residents, even those who the government was hesitant to offer compensation to because they did not have necessary proof of residence. Yet, he found that many residents who he had 'helped' spread rumours that he had received 10 times the compensation that they had received, an entirely baseless and hurtful allegation, in his view. On occasion, we also encountered or heard of individuals who were talked of as local community leaders by some but were dismissed by other activists for selling out on the sly.

It is difficult to know whom to believe and whose version of the event comes closest to what really happened. As Michael Jackson reminds us, it is impossible to 'intellectually grasp all the variables that are at play' in an event or 'all the repercussions that follow from it, partly because they are variously and intricately nuanced, and partly because they are embedded in singular biographies and social histories' (Jackson, 2005: xxv). The time at which we interacted with the residents was perhaps the lull after a turbulent event, a moment to 'take stock of the situation, come to terms with what has happened, and begin anew' (Jackson, 2005: 1). Eviction, as these residents experienced, is sudden, crippling and devastating and, in this respect, an extraordinary occurrence. Yet, at the same time, even such events are not removed from the fabric of everyday life and are interpreted and made sense through past histories, experiences and relations between individuals and families. If others used their prior knowledge of and relationship with Hassan to explain his motives, he too relied on the past to dismiss their claims. According to him, others were jealous that he, a recent incomer, had become a spokesperson for the community over others who had lived there for generations when, in fact, he had only wanted to secure the best deal for all affected households.

Were the accusations against Hassan an instance of past jealousies and differences coming into play to dominate over the present? Or, did the frustrations of a man limited by his physical disabilities, blamed by his family, force his hand? Or was he simply trying to help the community obtain adequate compensation? We have no definite answers to these questions, all that is possible for us to take these interpretations to illuminate 'what is at stake for the actors, and how they experience the social field in which they find themselves' (Jackson, 2005: xxv). Yet, what can be said, however, is that, irrespective how one views Hassan or his motivations, his actions – the way in which he conducts himself, whom he approaches when and how – demonstrate an intimate awareness of the working of the state and ways of accessing its different offices. Nowhere is this intimacy, and the quickness to adapt to different modes of power, illustrated more as is it is in the way he describes his role in attaining compensation for the evictions, to which we now turn.

Politics at the margins: Intimacies, oppositions and survival

So, Usman Director from LDA and the police SHO Mohsin Sheikh came to us with the police. The police were holding batons and guns. Of course, people living in informal settlements were scared and terrified. The police SHO started yelling at everyone, telling us to take money for rent and leave. I kept quiet and listened at first. Then I spoke up and asked them to listen to me and not speak to us like that. We give taxes through which their positions are funded – such threats would not work with us. Then everyone from the neighbourhood started speaking all at once. I turned to them and asked them why they had been unable to say a word before when they were being yelled at? I said fine speak now, I will keep quiet. But only one person should speak at a time. Then they were quiet and asked me to speak.

In many of our conversations with Hassan, both on our own and with other residents present, he described the above incident as the beginning of his role as the spokesman for the community, as the only daring resident who had the courage to fight on behalf of all affected residents for better treatment from the state as well as fair compensation for their loss. Hassan shared that he told LDA officers in that meeting that they would not accept compensation that was less than what affected families were getting in other neighbour-hoods. The correct rates, he claimed, had been published in the newspaper, and they would only accept those rates. In taking on the role of the spokesperson, Hassan emphasises on his ability to speak in a language that the state understands, unlike others who did not possess the requisite knowledge. Here, Hassan underscores the need to 'play by the rules' of the state in order to be heard. Yet, in other instances, he creates impact precisely by transgressing these rules and hierarchies. For instance, in a meeting with the committee that had been set up to look at land acquisition for the Orange Line, Hassan disregarded the decorous and polite tones that he usually adopted in his role as spokesperson.[5] The convenor of the meeting, as Hassan indignantly recalled, asked the residents to give up their home as charity. Incensed, on behalf of his community, Hassan retorted that perhaps the convenor should give up his home for charity. Through this transgression, Hassan questioned the morality of the official and, as a result, asserted both the residents' vulnerable position and the apathy of the state.

Whether speaking in the language the state recognises or transgressing established rules, these instances portray a vulnerable community standing alone against a powerful state. These neat divisions between state and society were visible when Hassan talked of his spokesperson role but broke down in other instances to reveal intricate networks and con-nections. Hassan simultaneously played up the impact of his talks with government officials while also maintaining that they were unresponsive and viewed them as a 'troublesome social group' (Corbridge et al., 2005). Therefore, with other residents in tow, he approached the politician[6] that had – ahead of a provincial election – helped them regularise their *katchi abadi* back in 2004. As others have also written and described (Ali, 2018; Hull, 2012; Sarwar, 2016; Van der Linden, 1994) in exchange for electoral support, the politician had utilised state machinery to rapidly improve services in their settlement which had otherwise suffered from long periods of neglect. Writing about informal settlements, Rolnik (2019) asserts that 'the inconsistency of these settlement's processes of formation, consolidation and eviction have been and still are strongly constituted and mediated by the state' (p. 136). The state, she argues, is very much 'present' within the margins. For Hassan and other affected residents, given their previous experience, political elites such as this politician offered one way to approach and access the state. The said politician was now also a prominent member of the main opposition party, and influential in the city's politics. At that meeting, both the pol-itician and the local Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) from the same political party assured them of their support and offered them the services of a lawyer to fight their case in the court which they accepted.

Utilising existing patronage networks and going to court went hand in hand with mobi-lising other forms of support and, in particular, organising large demonstrations. While LDA staff were repeatedly instilling fear in residents through show of force and threats, a handful of local activists also got involved and allied themselves with affected residents. They, too, asked Hassan to speak at seminars and protests and Hassan agreed. He spoke to the media, made various speeches appealing to the government and asked for their right to fair compensation and housing. In doing so, he was pleased that the media representatives preferred to speak to him because he could clearly and succinctly describe their predicament and their demands, a role, as we earlier discussed also made other community members feel

left out. Hassan was aware of the pitfalls of becoming the face of the community and also alluded to the difficulties and material risks associated with such forms of resistance. Yet, at the same time, he also felt that it was precisely this kind of mobilisation that forced the government's hand into negotiation and that, ultimately, it also raised the compensation rates from what was initially offered. Unlike the activists, who saw the protests as ending in failure, for Hassan and other members of the community, they were important in carving out some space – however miniscule – from an ever-encroaching and threatening state.

Drawing on Dwivedi (1999), Lancione (2017) and Brickell's (2014) work, Hirsh et al. (2020) make note of the varied risks affected populations face while resisting, including disagreements among community members, compromises with the state and a breakdown of solidarities with other outside activists who support communities with resistance efforts yet singularly oppose new projects. Dwivedi (1999) argues that initial uncertainty can 'drive people to resistance', yet households that are at risk of being displaced face 'restricted choices', and some may find it difficult to continue to resist due to mounting uncertainty, deliberate attempts by the state to divide communities and 'development resistance fatigue (because of state violence)' itself, creating a gap between outside activists and local communities. Focusing on evictions in Delhi over two decades, Bhan (2016) similarly finds evidence of divisions among 'institutional groups' and 'residents, workers, and community groups' (p. 203), with the latter feeling that they have the 'most to lose' (Bhan, 2016: 203). Decisions to negotiate or outright resist, as well as the mechanisms of negotiating, he argues, also depend on 'layers of security and vulnerability within the residents' (p.205) that are aggravated by evictions. Divisions of this nature were also visible in Basantnagar, although some activists also reflected on their positions of privilege. Hassan's account reflects not only his shifting roles but also the various avenues that were explored – and accessed simultaneously – to obtain fair compensation. Hassan told us that they explored all possible avenues to secure fair compensation. When their lawyer was not paying attention to their case, they visited sympathetic politicians to complain and were offered further support. When the convenor would make them wait for meetings, they would keep trying for alternative meeting times until they were given a slot. When the government attempted to scare them, he would remind the residents that it was only in power because of their votes. Hassan and other residents attempt to explore different options, and avenues speak both of their desperation and of their knowledge of various government offices and tactics, and when to push where. They were knowledgeable of the tensions and contradictions between offices, and the personal and institutional rivalries, as well as the motivations and ambitions of politicians who could help and tried to use this information to their advantage. In this respect, they were aware that the state was not a monolith and that its various representatives were, by no means, united in their motivations and actions. Paradoxically, however, and precisely because of their previous and current dealings with the state, they viewed it as a homogenous entity that could not entirely fight against. Parallel to Matthew Hull's (2012) elaboration of how materiality of the file becomes a way for different state actors to engage with one another and assert a unified authoritative voice of the state, we suggest that efforts for resistance by those residing in the margins produce a similar effect. Resistance efforts at the margins involve engagement with disparate parts of the state – politics, bureaucracy, executive agencies and the court – and require considerable skill in manoeuvring and role-playing. This is similar to what Gayer (2018) refers to as 'civility' or 'the social relationships through which disenfranchised individuals strive to survive and possibly to improve their condition by establishing connections with various others' (p. 384). Yet, this form of engagement seeks small leeway and spaces for change, as each office or position that is approached can only offer so much. Meanwhile, in the minds of our interlocuters, the state as a

'collective' remains ever threatening, unapproachable and unwilling to change. Marginality draws upon and is limited by the intimacy with state actors.

We argue, following Levien's (2018) lead, that compliance – perhaps, resignation – of this kind is created as the state retains the political authority to use direct or implicit modes of coercion. Fear, as we saw, was a common theme through this period shaping perceptions of the state itself. In addition, existing laws, such as the colonial-era Land Acquisition Act 1894, offered no room to question the public purpose or the need for acquisition but offered some room to negotiate compensation rates. As residents living in the margins, having 'seen' the state through prior interactions, they also were cognizant of the limitations of this response, hoping to obtain the best possible 'deal' for themselves through networks of patronage – what Akhtar (2018) refers to as the 'politics of common sense'.

Conclusion

In this article, we have highlighted the ways in which those dwelling at the margins live and survive vulnerability. Following the narrative of Hassan, as he struggled to attain fair compensation for dispossession, we focused on the variety of roles, methods of opposition and ways to access the state that people continually move between. As we have shown, often there is disagreement between community members on the approach to take, and on the role played by their spokesperson(s), even as they continue to present a united front to others. We have focused on the 'messiness' within this larger struggle for evading eviction, precisely to draw out the lack of clarity and ambiguity that is inherent in such movements within the margins. This 'messiness', we have argued, supports no straightforward narrative of change and is often erased in the accounts of academics and activists interested in studying and driving resistance. This messiness is neither an indication of failure nor of successful resistance. Rather, it is symptomatic of the ways and means available to bring about an outcome that makes life liveable on the margins, even as it does not allow for escape altogether.

We are, by no means, condoning these ways of being but nor are we interested in erasing them from accounts of resistance in the Global South. Rather, our hope is that in telling such stories of ambiguity, role-changing and messiness, we are able to draw attention to the challenges, limitations and options available to those at the margins facing the very real threat of dispossession while also reflecting on our own positionalities. We seek to actively illustrate the ethics of possibilities in such moments of resistance within the wider context of 'neoliberal, market-oriented restructuring' (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 349). Our hope is to support horizontal solidarities as described by Lancione (2019a) and also push towards a southern urban theory that 'recognizes the contexts that they come from' (Bhan, 2019: 11) that starts from practice – from the politics as they exist in the here-and-now rather than how they ideally should have been. Such stories also allow us to acknowledge forms of resistance and endurance that complement, rather than oppose, mainstream notions of political change. They also raise critical questions on how the interests and concerns of affected populations can be better understood and represented (Dwivedi, 1999). The outcomes we have documented are important in that they demonstrate an instance where evicted residents – facilitated by the shifting tactics of Hassan and others – were able to obtain, somewhat, favourable terms of compensation, when compared with what was originally promised. This is a rare occurrence in recent episodes of infrastructure-led dispossession in the Global South, and especially in Pakistan, and it is important to recognise and acknowledge the methods through which it was achieved. Nevertheless, at the same time, as academics interested in social justice and change, we remain mindful of not propagating such modes of endurance or of casting them in an optimistic light. While Hassan was able to

obtain fair compensation, he continues to live in a state of precarity and uncertainty, with limited means to access the state in a more meaningful manner. This is a present that he is making do with but not the future that he hopes for himself and his family.

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Notes

1. Names of persons as well as of neighbourhoods have been changed to protect identities of interlocutors. Our findings are based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Lahore with residents whose homes were demolished in two neighbourhoods in the city to make way for the Orange Line Metro Train. This included 40 semi-structured interviews with affected residents (in old and new neighbourhoods), civil society activists, lawyers, local- and state-level politicians, as well as mapping, photo documentation and observations.
2. Financing for the Orange Line has been provided by the Exim Bank of China as a soft loan at a 3% interest rate and a 20-year return period (Government of Punjab, 2015). CR-NORINCO, the joint venture of China Railway Corporation and China North Industry Corporation, is the contractor for the project, responsible for 'engineering, procurement and construction of electrical and mechanical equipment, and part of the civil works equipment' (Express Tribune, 2018). The Orange Line is said to have the capacity to transport 30,000 passengers per hour (Government of Punjab, 2015). After significant delays, it has been operating in the city of Lahore since October 2020, although ridership has been lower than expected due to the pandemic.
3. In 2005, the Government of Punjab commissioned a private consulting company, MVA Asia, to carry out a feasibility study for a mass transit system for the city of Lahore. The following year, MVA Asia proposed a four-line transit system for the city comprising of Green, Orange, Blue and Purple Lines (in order of priority). In 2006 and 2007, feasibility studies were completed for the Green and Orange Lines, respectively. Both were to be constructed as medium-capacity metros. As per the MVA Asia Orange Line feasibility study, the Line would cover 27.1 km, with 20 elevated stations and 6 underground stations (over 6.9 km). For construction of the underground stations, Tunnel Boring Machines, rather than cut and cover construction, would be used to avoid

disruption to the environment. In 2012, recommendations for the mass transit network were updated under the Lahore Urban Transport Master Plan (LUTMP). The Plan proposed a mass transit system comprising of eight metro and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Lines. As per the Plan, the Green Line would be constructed as a medium-capacity metro, while the Orange and Blue Lines would be constructed initially as BRTs, and later as medium metros. The Purple Line and four other Lines would be built as BRTs. In the same year, however, the Government built the Green Line in the form of a BRT Line/metro bus. In 2015, the federal government signed an agreement with CR-Norinco, and a decision was made to build the Orange Line as a metro train, covering 27.1 km, with 24 elevated stations and 2 underground stations (over 1.7 km), using cut and cover technology, purportedly to save costs.

4. As per the Punjab Katchi Abadis Act 1992 and Punjab Katchi Abadis Amendment Act 2012, a settlement can officially be recognised as a katchi abadi if: (a) it is located on state land, (b) has a minimum of 40 dwelling units, (c) residents have been living there before 31 December 2011 and (d) the land is not required by the public purposes/is not hazardous.

5. The Committee was formed by the Chief Minister of the Punjab province to look into matters of land acquisition for those without property ownership documents. It comprised of seven politicians from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

6. This politician had previously served as their representative in the provincial assembly (2003–2007).

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