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Accountability Bargains in Pakistan

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Danyal Khan and Mudabbir Ali**

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Summary

Poor and marginalised citizens rarely engage directly with the state to solve their governance issues in fragile, conflict and violence-affected settings, as these settings are characterised by the confrontational nature of state–citizen relations. Instead, citizens engage with, and make claims to, intermediaries some of them public authorities in their own right. What are these intermediaries' roles, and which strategies and practices do they use to broker state–citizen engagement? We argue that in Pakistan intermediaries make themselves essential by: (1) being able to speak the language of public authorities; (2) constantly creating and sustaining networks outside their communities; and (3) building collectivising power by maintaining reciprocity relations with their communities. In doing so, households and intermediaries engage in what we are calling 'accountability bargains'[1]: strategies and practices intermediaries and poor and marginalised households employ in order to gain a greater degree of security and autonomy within the bounds of class, religious, and ethnic oppression.

By accepting the system and nurturing personalistic accountability relations instead of developing systematic ones, intermediaries make poor peoples' lives less difficult in the short term, while reinforcing a system of oppression. The decision by all to conform to the demands of an unjust system in order to gain some individual benefit is not new, accountability bargains are as entrenched in local governance systems as the historical mistrust of the state. While these governance networks and the distribution of public authority appear quite durable, often with deep historical roots that can be traced back to the colonial era (Gilmartin 1994), we also see instances of dynastic mediation being contested and challenged by newer intermediaries.

Keywords

Governance, intermediaries, accountability, empowerment, conflict, leave no one behind.

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[1] Borrowing from Kandiyoti's (1988) 'patriarchal bargain'.

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Acronyms

A4EA	Action for Empowerment and Accountability
CDA	Capital Development Authority
DSP	Deputy Superintendent of Police
FCVAS	fragile, conflict, and violence-affected settings
FIR	First Information Report
ILGI	informal local governance institution
MNA	Member of the National Assembly
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NOC	no objection certificate
SHO	Station House Officer
SOP	standard operating procedure

1. Introduction

Chronically poor and marginalised citizens rarely engage directly with the state to solve their governance issues in fragile, conflict and violence-affected settings (FCVAS), as these settings are characterised by the confrontational nature of state–citizen relations. Instead, they engage with and make claims to intermediaries, some of them public authorities in their own right. Who are these intermediaries, and which strategies and practices do they use to broker state–citizen engagement? In the Governance at the Margins project, part of the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA)[2] programme and the focus of this paper, we studied the role that intermediaries play in mediating state–citizen relations and helping people to solve their problems in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence in Africa and Asia. We developed it as a follow-up to the Governance Diaries project (the first phase of this research). In the Governance Diaries we aimed at understanding the meanings of empowerment and accountability from the point of view of chronically poor and marginalised people and how that changes over time based on their experiences with governance.[3]

We used Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall's (2008: 6) work as a starting point as we tried to conceptualise empowerment: not only when they argue that empowerment is all about power – the power to redefine possibilities and options, and to act on them – but also its subjective element, 'when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty'. We conceptualise empowerment as both an action or process – the act of gaining power and control over decisions and resources that affects lives – as well as a state of being (objective and subjective), where people have a greater voice over decision-making that affects their lives that allows them to expand their choices (as well as the possibility of making those choices), and that eventually gives them increased control over their own lives. We used Schedler's (1999) conceptualisation of accountability as a broad two-way relationship between two parties A and B, denoting both answerability and enforcement: where answerability is A's obligation to inform and justify its actions to B; and enforcement is B's capacity to sanction or reward A for its actions. In this paper, answerability is framed as an intermediary's obligation to inform and justify their actions to poor and marginalised households, and enforcement is the households' capacity to sanction or reward the intermediary for their actions.

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2   Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) is a five-year research programme (2016–21) which seeks to understand how social and political action can contribute to empowerment and accountability in FCVAS.

3   See Loureiro *et al.* (2020) for our conceptualisation of 'chronically poor and marginalised households' and 'public authority'.

In this project, Governance at the Margins, we followed intermediary individuals, roles, or organisations empirically identified from the first phase. In the initial set of fieldwork our respondents – chronically poor and marginalised households – all pointed out the role of governance intermediaries to whom they always go to for help when they need to contact public authorities. By governance intermediaries we mean people who for diverse reasons are approached by, and play a mediating role between, chronically poor and marginalised citizens and public authorities. This role may be more or less formal or institutionalised. For the purposes of the research, we were interested in intermediaries with some distance from the person seeking assistance, so this excluded family members who might play an *ad hoc* mediation role for some people. There are many layers of potential intermediation in a governance chain. We were specifically interested in the closest link to ordinary people – their 'first port of call' in trying to address a governance issue.

Although many different terms are used to describe the kind of processes that we are studying, the one that works best is mediation. This has two meanings, as it can refer both to connecting citizens and public authorities, and to resolving disputes among citizens. As the examples we explore include many episodes where intermediaries' role is about dispute resolution, this second meaning also seems appropriate. The literature identifies a range of concepts that are used to analyse both the process of mediation and its outcomes. In this paper we focus on the process of mediation – that we analyse in our discussion of local governance systems, as well as strategies and practices – and its outcome regarding accountability relations.

Using a Governance Diaries approach (Loureiro *et al.* 2020), from November 2019 to December 2020 we followed a set of intermediaries with bimonthly interviews in four locations in Pakistan. Two of the locations were in informal settlements or *katchi abadis*[4] in Islamabad, one where there is an active conflict between residents and the local authorities over land use, the other where the conflict has subsided over the years. The other two locations were in Punjab, one a village where there is an active conflict between residents and the state over land ownership, the other peri-urban where there is no active conflict with public authorities.

We started with 20 intermediaries, roughly divided across the four locations. While we only managed to conduct most of the planned interviews with about half of these, we did still carry out a significant number of interviews with those remaining (ranging from one to four interviews). The first three interviews were

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4   In this paper we choose to call these locations *katchi abadis*. Not only is this the name our respondents use, but also all the alternative terms are negatively defined by a lack of: lack of formal planning (informal settlement), lack of land tenure (squatter settlement), lack of water and sanitation (slum) – and yet they are so tightly integrated economically, spatially, and socially with their urban contexts that the lack of *katchi abadis* would make these cities unsustainable to live in (Dovey and King 2011).

conducted as planned, but when Covid-19 emerged and Pakistan went into lockdown on 21 March 2020, we switched our physical visits and interviews to phone and voice over IP services.[5] The Covid-19 pandemic and the associated government-decreed lockdown gave us an opportunity to witness how intermediaries across different locations dealt with the same crisis: how they interacted with citizens and public authorities, their roles, practices and strategies, and how they make themselves essential to the functioning of the local governance systems.

We argue that intermediaries make themselves essential by: (1) being able to speak the language of public authorities, (2) constantly creating and sustaining networks outside their communities (physically and online), and (3) building collectivising power by maintaining reciprocity relations with their communities ('I solve your problems, you give me numbers'). In doing so households, intermediaries, and the state engage in what we are calling 'accountability bargains'. Joshi and Fox (2017) characterise accountability bargains as explicit engagements of embedded social groups (seen as legitimate by public authorities) which may occur through formal or informal channels, traditional (e.g. *panchayats* – village councils) or non-traditional (social media), and enabled by alliances across institutional and social/class lines around issues of immediate concern. According to Joshi and Fox, if bargains hold, they can lead to virtuous cycles of improved levels of trust and accountability. Yet, because these bargains are fragile – evolving in contexts of uncertainty and tenuousness – they require constant engagement to be kept alive. We take this concept a step further and, borrowing from Kandiyoti's (1988) 'patriarchal bargains', redefine it as the strategies and practices intermediaries and poor and marginalised households employ to gain a greater degree of security and autonomy within the bounds of class, religious, and ethnic oppression.[6] By accepting the system and nurturing personalistic accountability relations, instead of developing systematic accountability relations, intermediaries make households' lives less difficult in the short term, while reinforcing a system of oppression. In other words, there is an individual gain, but a collective loss.

The decision by all parties to conform to the demands of the system in order to gain some individual benefit is not new: accountability bargains are as entrenched in local governance systems as the historical mistrust of the state. And while these governance networks and the distribution of public authority appear quite durable, often with deep historical roots that can be traced back to the colonial era (Gilmartin 1994), we see instances of it being contested and

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5   The increased flurry of activity in all intermediaries' lives – as they were essential in assisting citizens and public authorities in navigating the first lockdown, both dealing with the hazard (pandemic) and peoples' loss of livelihoods – meant many of them did not have the time or patience to talk to us.

6   On the other side of the interface, that between intermediaries and public authorities, we posit that these bargains would resemble Tendler's (2002) 'devil's deal'.

challenged by newer intermediaries. Accountability bargains are deeply embedded in the social structures of Punjab: they happen through caste-like politics, dynastic mediation, and reciprocity relations. As such, context is essential to understand and unpack intermediaries' strategies and practices when helping poor and marginalised households in FCVAS access public authority, make claims, demand justifications. Where many practices and strategies of intermediation are common across societies – such as speaking the language of the state, networking, and collectivising – these are strongly embedded not only in the local governance systems but also in its vernacular. Possibly because of this entrenchment, these practices and strategies do not challenge the system, but instead perpetuate it.

This paper is divided into five parts. Following this introduction, we describe some of the key intermediaries involved in this study, the different local governance systems where they operate, and highlight some of the key characteristics that make them intermediaries. In section 3 we explain how intermediaries make themselves essential using a set of strategies to solve people's problems in their locations. The three most common are: speaking the language of public authorities, constantly networking outside their locations, and building collectivising power. Within the last one, we highlight the importance for intermediaries to maintain reciprocity relations – through accountability bargains – with 'their' people as a way of gaining legitimacy in their role. In section 4 we show that the different local governance systems where intermediaries operate are actually the networks they are composed of, and that their thickness helps us explain both the nature of the accountability relations between households and intermediaries and the diversity across locations. How thick or thin the connections are within these networks is related to the locations' historical structures, including the strength of parallel governance systems to that of the state, the history of conflict, and level of political competition amongst intermediaries. We show how two networks in particular, the *biradari*[7] and dynastic mediation, are used in accountability bargains. We conclude in section 5, highlighting three interconnected observations regarding intermediaries and accountability relations: that accountability needs to be understood in relation to citizens' expectations relative to public authorities, that both citizens' and authorities' expectations of who should be accountable to whom is influenced by intermediaries, and that individual accountability relations on their own do not advance the accountability of the system.

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7   Caste-like kinship group.

2. Who are the intermediaries?

The intermediaries in our study do not have a common profile. There are some similarities, inasmuch as the overwhelming majority are men who became intermediaries in their early 20s, despite being of different ages during our research. There is also a clear distinction between locations, with all intermediaries in Punjab being born and living where they operate (autochthonous) and inheriting their role from their fathers (dynastic). On the other side of the spectrum, the Islamabad locations are more recent,[8] with all residents migrating between 15 to 30+ years ago to the conflict and non-conflict locations respectively, and only one intermediary having inherited his role from his forefathers.[9] Many of the similarities and differences in the intermediaries relate to their individual characteristics. These are connected to their personality (courage, generosity…), their abilities (persuasiveness, political cunning…), their identity (gender, religion, ethnicity…), their resources (money, land, education, kinship/other networks…), and their history (dynastic intermediation, record of military service or government office…). Political party membership is especially important because unlike other collective bodies, political parties can take the role of governing beyond the community level and therefore provide a stronger link between communities and public authority. In multi-party contexts there is a greater number of intermediaries and more competition among them, as helping to solve local people's problems is a valuable way of securing political support.[10] Party-based mediation can be disrupted by a change in who holds power at the city, provincial or national level, with incoming governments refusing to engage with the mediation efforts of intermediaries who are linked to the previous ruling party.

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[8]   The capital itself was built in 1960.

[9]   Most residents in the conflict location resettled from a village in Punjab where they fell victims of a religious pogrom. This intermediary had already been their community head there.

[10]   For a good overview on the role of intermediaries as political brokers in the subcontinent, see the edited volumes by Price and Ruud (2010) and Piliavsky (2014).

Table 1.1 Intermediaries' main features

Location	Name	Gender	Age	Religion	Dynastic mediation	Years as intermediary	Political activism	Land ownership
Islamabad (conflict)	Baba Gilli	Male	> 50	Christian	Yes	> 10	Opposition party	–
	Haseeb	Male	< 35	Sunni	–	< 5	Left-wing party	Yes
	Talha	Male	< 35	Shia	–	< 5	Left-wing party	–
	Pastor Shamshad	Male	< 35	Christian	–	< 5	–	–
Islamabad (non-conflict)	Zayan	Male	> 50	Christian	Yes	5-10	Left-wing party	–
	Jon	Male	35-50	Christian	–	< 5	–	Yes
	Pastor Amanat	Male	< 35	Christian	–	5-10	–	–
	Paul	Male	> 50	Sunni	–	5-10	Opposition party	–
Punjab (conflict)	Amir	Male	35-50	Sunni	Yes	> 10	Ruling party and tenants' association	Yes
	Aapa	Female	> 50	Sunni	Yes	> 10	Tenants' association	Yes
	Arshad	Male	35-50	Sunni	Yes	> 10	Tenants' association	Yes
	Siraj	Male	< 35	Sunni	Yes	5-10	Rival association	Yes
	Shafi	Male	> 50	Sunni	Yes	> 10	Rival association	Yes
Punjab (non-conflict)	Rayan	Male	35-50	Sunni	Yes	> 10	Ruling party	Yes
	Nawaz	Male	< 35	Sunni	Yes	5-10	Religious party	Yes
	Doctor	Male	> 50	Sunni	Yes	> 10	Religious party	Yes

While at first glance an important differentiation between intermediaries appears to be the formality of their role, in reality this distinction is not that clear: whether a role is formal or informal is often ambiguous or contested. For instance, a religious or traditional leader can be seen by members of their group as having a formal role, but not be recognised in this way by government; an opposing political party can refuse to recognise the formal role of government-appointed intermediaries; or people who participated in a meeting to establish a community association can consider it formally established by that meeting, but local officials can refuse to recognise it as a formal organisation until it has been registered with a specific government office. Some intermediaries have authority at the neighbourhood or village level, which may be conferred by the government, by the neighbourhood/village (often a specific group within), or by both. This authority status gives intermediaries an important role in mediating disputes[11] that occur within the locations as well as in organising local self-provision, whereas other intermediaries only mediate between local people and actors outside the location, rather than claiming the right to decide on neighbourhood/village-level issues. A few intermediaries operate as individuals while most use a collective identity in their mediation work. This collective identity can refer to a community-based organisation (such as the tenants' association in Punjab) or to a structure established by an external authority (such as the Corona Relief Tiger Force). In some cases, intermediaries operate as individuals but their membership of a collective body (such as a social movement, a political party, or a government body like the CDA[12] in Islamabad) is what makes the mediation role possible, because their contacts with actors beyond the community are made through this body.

A common trait across all locations is the centrality of land in conflict. Yet, there are differences related to the intensity, main actors involved, and what people are actually contesting for. While in Islamabad residents are fighting with the city's administration for their right to settle, in Punjab people are fighting the armed forces and retired officers for their right to land they claim is theirs. This is explained in more detail in Sections 2.1 and 2.2.

All our intermediaries in Punjab are also *panchayat* members in their locations. *Panchayat* membership is usually reserved to groups of village elders and other local influentials. Despite all our respondents stating that *panchayats* are not as active as they used to be, again and again we learn from their interviews that most of the issues are being dealt with by *panchayat* members in Punjab and elders in both Islamabad and Punjab. Chaudhry and Chaudhry (2010) also record *panchayats* as becoming less powerful than power brokers – which they call *deraydar*[13] – in rural Pakistan's power structure. In other words, it appears

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[11] Dispute resolution is one of the main services demanded by Pakistani citizens (Acemoglu *et al.* 2020).

[12] Capital Development Authority.

[13] From *dera*, the men's room, where men of the village gather to discuss village affairs.

there is a trend developing where *panchayat* membership matters more than the *panchayat* itself. Still, the role of elders and *panchayats* is very important, and most issues are still resolved through them, using 'a combination of mediation, compromise, and penalties, including social ostracism, boycott, and sometimes even physical retaliation' (Acemoglu *et al.* 2020: 3098). To enforce *panchayat* decisions, members and the overall community make use of sanctions and penalty fees. While in Punjab we see penalty fees attached to people who transgress the decisions made by the elders and *panchayat*, in Islamabad we do not see any mechanism that can ensure compliance to the decision. For instance, when one intermediary, Baba Gilli, as the elder of the location decided to install water pumps to provide water for free and people started selling it, he had no power to enforce his decision. In Islamabad, although respect of elders and religious figures is very important that does not mean people will not disobey their decisions, as if they disobey the only likely penalty is that they will be disliked by the community.

2.1 Intermediaries in Islamabad

There are 52 *katchi abadis* in Islamabad with more than 200,000 people living there. One third of the residents – the largest group – belongs to the country's Christian minority. These *katchi abadis* are densely populated urban areas with substandard living, inadequate infrastructure and services, with sewage water overflowing nearby, and lack of tenure security. Of the 52, the local government (CDA) only recognises ten as legal, which means that there is constant conflict over the right to live in these settlements, with CDA and the police pitted against the residents. The two locations we researched fall under the 42 non-recognised *katchi abadis*: one is an older (about 30 years old) more congested location, where conflict with the state has diminished, while the other is more recent and is therefore bearing much more of the brunt of anti-encroachment drives. In this conflict location, residents had escaped from a pogrom in their villages after a Christian woman was accused of blasphemy. The area of the *katchi abadi* was largely a forest when they arrived, so the households removed all the plants and trees. With a winter season looming, they started to build shelters on their own. That is how gradually they made an *abadi* as a community, without any help from other people or public authorities.

In the older, non-conflict location members of the Christian community migrated from various areas of the country. The first settlers lived in tents covered with plastics. Slowly and gradually, amid fights with the CDA, people succeeded in making their settlement permanent against all odds. The government stance is that the land belongs to the government and these people are illegal occupants. Residents in Islamabad *katchi abadis* state that they do not have any other place to go, and the state must provide shelter to them. The major issue in the Islamabad locations is the haphazard way that the CDA harasses residents.

They either come at any time to demolish the residents' shelters in what they call anti-encroachment drives, or individuals within the CDA come to take money from the residents with the promise of not demolishing their abodes that day. To assist the Islamabad *katchi abadi* residents, a left-wing party (described below) filed a case in the Supreme Court saying that until these people were provided with alternative homes, their houses could not be demolished. The Supreme Court granted a stay order and since then incidents of harassment have reduced. While over the last year we did not record any major CDA action in either location, the situation is still quite volatile. For instance, when we started our research in 2017 the location we selected as 'non-conflict' had not been part of any anti-encroachment drive by the CDA for over a decade;[14] in 2019, the situation flipped and suddenly there was a CDA anti-encroachment drive in the non-conflict location and nothing in the conflict location.

2.1.1 The movement/party members (political workers)

Several of the intermediaries in Islamabad belong to a left-wing party that emerged as a union of smaller left-wing parties and working-class movements. One of these movements was an association of slum-dwellers created in the late 1990s to protect the rights of *katchi abadi* residents and to campaign against forced evictions, which has remained very active in our study locations. Zayan joined this slumdwellers association in 2003 when he moved to a *katchi abadi* in Islamabad from his village in Punjab. He had started his political activism back in his village in 1982 through the Pakistan Christian Association. He draws his legitimacy as an intermediary not only from the party, but also from his status as an elder in the community. Both these positions have helped him develop personal links with other influential people such as lawyers and local body chairmen, as well as a temporary job implementing a water and sanitation programme for a national non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Besides being a party member, Talha is also a teacher in a nearby government primary school. Belonging to a poor Shia migrant family, he has faced a lot of discrimination and hardship. His migrant religious minority status and firm belief in the left-wing party's ideology is what he says makes him work in *katchi abadis* where Christian migrants form the majority. Since 2015, he has been the party member in charge for one of our locations. He uses his party networks and social media to solve people's issues, namely education, health, labour issues, and CDA harassment.

Haseeb uses the same networks and social media platforms as Talha, as well as his education and status. He is a graduate of one of Pakistan's top private universities, mainstream Sunni middle class, and does not live in a *katchi abadi*.

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[14]   While it was constant in the conflict location.

Yet, that did not prevent him from being arrested when legally protesting against the state for arresting someone else.[15] He was a strong advocate of his party ideology, even before joining officially in 2017.

2.1.2 Religious leaders

In our first phase research – Governance Diaries, several households identified religious authorities as important intermediaries, particularly in helping them solve issues within the locations. Shamshad is a pastor who leads the oldest of the two churches in the conflict location in Islamabad. He came from a village near Lahore in 2010, where he was serving under another pastor, and settled as the first pastor in this location. He has also created a primary school within the church premises. He uses his church and his personal links which he has established over time to assist the people of his location mostly with issues related to education, health, and domestic disputes.

In the non-conflict location in Islamabad, Amanat is the eldest serving pastor of the two existing churches. In his youth he was a devotee of Islamabad's patron saint's Sufi shrine. In the initial stages of the non-conflict location (when there was active conflict between the residents and the CDA), Amanat decided to get his religious education and became the pastor of the location. While formally he says he draws his legitimacy from being one of the two pastors, informally it is his personal connections with several local government officials that help him mediate people's problems. For instance, in the initial Covid-19-related lockdown he joined forces with a police inspector friend to form a youth group to assist with relief distribution. Amanat is also often the first person in his locality from whom people borrow small amounts of money.

Baba Gilli has lived in Islamabad for at least 20 years. For most of this time he was a political worker for a mainstream party, but his *pir*[16] motivated him to help people differently. Since then, he has followed the teachings of his *pir*, spreading his message, and providing people with free traditional medicine as a local *hakeem* (traditional healer). Besides his connections with the *pir* and the office holders of his political party, he also has family links with the leadership of another mainstream political party, and he is an elder of his location. All of this makes Baba Gilli well known in the Christian community for solving people's issues, particularly related to health, education, housing, and water supply.

2.1.3 CDA links

Another set of important intermediaries in Islamabad are those that have strong connections with the CDA. One of them is Jon, a retired civil servant who worked

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15   Although it did help with getting him released.
16   Spiritual guide.

in the CDA for over 20 years and before that, during Zia's military regime, in the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). He is one of the few residents who built his own concrete home and owns a car. Jon is an intermediary on a voluntary basis; he is of the view that local residents are helpless and that is unfair, so he wants to help them as much as he can. According to him, residents of *katchi abadis* do not have access to basic facilities nor land security: CDA gives them NOCs (no objection certificates), but they have no legal value. Besides, the NOCs state that the CDA can take the land back from the residents whenever it wants to. Although Jon has no formal legitimacy as an intermediary, he is comparatively strong financially and his background and networks in government offices are key sources of his informal legitimacy.

Paul is the elected chairman of the CDA's labour union council. He was a very senior political worker in one of the mainstream political parties for most of his life, and it is only in the recent labour union elections that he ran independently. As such, he enjoys good links inside the CDA, as well as with politicians and Members of the National Assembly (MNAs). Despite living in a government-allotted house, Paul spends most of his time around *katchi abadis* constantly canvassing votes for the union elections and offering his help as this is where most of the (unskilled and low skilled) CDA labourers live. A Muslim, he has developed over time a reputation in Christian *katchi abadis* as someone who is concerned with poor people and can be trusted. He believes that it is the state's responsibility to provide basic necessities to citizens and that people living in *katchi abadis* are equally entitled. Because of their marginalisation, he feels his responsibility increases with respect to the rights of people living in these locations. Often, he tries to stop anti-encroachment operations by contacting relevant people in the CDA department.

2.2 Intermediaries in Punjab

The conflict in Punjab has its roots in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century when the British Raj initiated the Punjab irrigation system and established canal colonies. The vast expanse of land that these colonies comprised was sparsely inhabited by nomad tribes and mostly forested. The farmers from east Punjab that now constitute India were encouraged to make this land arable, resulting in the internal migration of thousands of farmers, ultimately responsible for huge demographic changes in Punjab. This land was used by the British Raj to reward the elites who had helped them in the 1857 War of Independence.[17] A big swath of the land in our research location and some adjoining districts was leased out to the British Indian Army to be used for stud farming and horse breeding.

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[17] The logic of land grant allocation – with the aim of bringing wasteland under cultivation – was considerably more diverse, with the creation of Proprietary villages (*zamindari*, *pattidari*, and *bhaichara*) and Crown villages (*chak*) (see Khan Mohmand 2019).

The lease agreement in 1913 was signed for 20 years, expiring in 1934, after which the tenants were to get ownership rights. The British Raj decided to let the arrangement linger and none of their promises were kept: the land continued under the ownership of the British Indian Army without any legal lease agreement. In 1947, with the country's independence, the land was given to the Pakistan Army along with the sharecropping system (*battai*). In our location, more than 7,000 hectares of this land is governed by the Pakistan military.[18]

In 2000, during General Musharraf's dictatorship, the military suddenly changed the nature of the lease so that tenants paid an annual rent instead of in kind, thereby turning them to contracted labour with no occupancy rights. According to Pakistan's Tenancy Act of 1887, sharecroppers are either 'occupancy tenants' who have the statutory rights to occupy the land, or 'simple tenants' who occupy the land on the basis of a contract with the landlord and no occupancy rights. While simple tenants are obliged to leave the land when the landlord so desires, occupancy tenants can only be made to vacate the land with court orders. In 2000, the army turned these farmers into simple contract holders, contracted labour with no occupancy rights (HRW 2004). This triggered a strong resistance amongst the farmers who organised themselves into a representative body, a tenants' association, to fight their case in a peaceful but assertive way. The tenants' association started a civil disobedience movement and refused to pay the 50 per cent share of the harvest whereon the military started using pressure tactics.

2.2.1 The tenants' association members

Aapa, the only female intermediary in this study, is a member of the tenants' association and leader of the women's wing. She is actively involved in solving and mediating a vast array of issues related to land, welfare, labour rights, education, and family issues. Along with that, she is the first port of call for women in this location. Even though *panchayat* meetings are less common now in her village, as an elder and active member[19] she plays a key role in these meetings bringing in women's voices.[20] She has good contacts with government employees, other prominent politicians, and activists in the area, as well as activists in cities like Lahore and Islamabad. Aapa is also actively involved in politics. Recently, she was in touch with Nawaz and Doctor (intermediaries in the Punjab non-conflict location) to use female spaces in her village to strengthen support for their political party.

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[18]   There are also tracts of land that have been allotted to retired army officers.

[19]   She inherited this role from her schoolteacher father.

[20]   Indirectly though. As a woman she is not physically present in these meetings, sending her eldest son to represent her or to hold his mobile so she can speak.

Amir is a young father of four who, despite having no formal education and being a daily wage worker in the nearby city, has very good contacts almost everywhere in the area and keeps on building them. When he is in the village, he is an active member of the tenants' association and *panchayat* member. He has been an intermediary for the last 15 years[21] dealing with issues related to land, labour rights, family, and finances. He is one of the most active people in the area, including being at the forefront of the location's struggle with the state for land rights. He says his resistance towards state authority is because we live in a system of injustices, where people who do not own anything are discriminated against – and if he does not support them today the same can happen to him tomorrow.

On the other side of the spectrum Arshad is a landlord, a well-to-do businessman, member of the tenants' association, and member of the village *panchayat*. Although he has moved to the nearby city for his children's education he is still fully involved in the affairs of his village. In fact, the *panchayat* usually gathers at his village house. Because of his financial background, he is considered a very important voice in the *panchayat* and a source of financial assistance even for other intermediaries. He has been an intermediary from more than 25 years and got very active after the land dispute between farmers and the state. He fought unsuccessfully at the last union council elections as an independent candidate but has now joined the ruling party.

2.2.2 The rival association

Siraj was originally part of the tenants' association. Over time, he started developing strong connections with different government authorities and joined the rival association that claims to represent tenants' voices. He comes from an influential family and inherited his intermediary role from his father 15 years ago. He is also a *panchayat* member and despite some animosity towards members of the tenants' association,[22] when an issue concerns the whole community, he coordinates with other intermediaries in the area – including rivals. His good relations with civil administration and security agencies make him very influential as an intermediary, as most important issues in the area tend to involve these authorities. So besides helping with family disputes (divorces and marriages) and financial issues, people ask him for help when they have issues that involve the government authorities. Siraj is also planning to contest the upcoming local elections.

Shafi is a local landlord with a very stable life. He is a member of both the rival association and the local *panchayat*. He inherited his role of intermediary from

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21 A role inherited from his father.

22 For instance, together with Shafi, he is publicly siding with a person trying to take over part of Aapa's land.

his father more than 20 years ago. According to him, he tries to help everyone and never lets anyone feel indebted to him. He tries to solve people's issues – particularly daily labourers – by lending them money for fodder and other immediate needs and accompanying them to the police station whenever there is a security issue. Shafi has developed good relations with the police over time by visiting them often. He is also part of the local mosque committee, responsible for religious affairs as well as social welfare work. Similar to Siraj, although not the best of friends with members of the tenants' association, when there is an issue that affects them all he coordinates and cooperates with them.

2.2.3 In the city

Rayan has been an intermediary for more than 20 years, after taking over from his father. He is an official party officer with the ruling party which takes most of his time,[23] despite also running his own small business in the city. Both his family history and political affiliation make him an effective intermediary. He is on good terms with the MNA for this constituency (who is also a member of the ruling party) as well as with government officers. As is the case with other intermediaries, he deals with all types of issues: from family issues (including divorce and dowry), to financial and legal issues – and anything which involves police and courts.[24] Also very importantly, he is part of a *biradari*-based association that protects the rights of their group. Together with people from other political parties and across villages of the district, they use each other's contacts to improve the lives of 'their' people (their *biradari*), which in turn helps them gain further influence and power over the area.

2.2.4 The religious party members

Nawaz is the district chairperson of a mainstream religious party and president of the party's local youth branch. He works on social causes through a faith-based NGO linked to the party and looks after affairs of his nearby village as a *panchayat* member. Although he comes from a wealthy landlord family, he believes the class system is a highly unjustifiable social construct that needs to be fought. The mixture of family links, his formal position in the party, and his social status makes him a very effective intermediary not only in his village but throughout the district. He is heavily involved in promoting his party and associated NGO for the upcoming local elections through face-to-face campaigning and active use of various social media platforms.

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[23]   He is involved (formally and informally) with both the Ehsaas Relief Programme and the Corona Relief Tiger Force.

[24]   *Thana* and *kacheri*.

Doctor is a medical doctor by profession. A member of the same mainstream religious party as Nawaz, he has contested and lost both provincial and national elections recently. He has been an intermediary for more than 30 years. Before being an official party member, he was already active through the party's student wing during his university days. According to him, he helps resolve all kinds of disputes in the area. His party has a well-coordinated network of volunteers in every district and every village of the country, so he uses those contacts to resolve people's issues. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Doctor has worked tirelessly to assist the most vulnerable in the city and nearby villages, both as a medical expert and as a party leader.[25]

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[25] Sadly, Doctor caught Covid-19 in late January 2021 and died a month later due to Covid-19-related complications.

3. Intermediaries' strategies and practices

Intermediaries make themselves essential by using a set of strategies to solve people's problems in their locations. The most common strategies involve: (1) learning and speaking the language of public authorities and in particular the state, (2) networking – by constantly creating and sustaining networks outside their communities both physically and online, and (3) collectivising – building collectivising power by maintaining reciprocity relations with their communities, a sort of give and take[26] where poor people give them legitimacy through numbers (being present in protests when called on by the intermediary), in return for intermediaries' help solving their problems.

3.1 Speaking the language of public authorities

Foremost, intermediaries speak the language of public authorities, giving them a direct channel to the latter. Their ability to communicate with public authorities, whether formal or informal, sets them apart from the people they represent. This goes beyond literal communication: not only are intermediaries fluent in Urdu and/or Punjabi as well as being able to speak and read some English, but they are also well versed in legal or procedural technicalities that bolster their case. When a *katchi abadi* in Islamabad was at risk of being demolished by the authorities, residents turned to their left-wing party's intermediaries; the latter filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court, ultimately obtaining a stay order. When the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) officials refused to issue birth certificates, Pastor Shamshad relied on his network to persuade a lawyer to tell the officials that if they did not issue the birth certificate, they would be infringing on the family's rights and would risk a court case.

Literacy and language facilitate access to public authorities at the highest level. One intermediary, who wished to help the residents of an Islamabad *katchi abadi* who were living in tents in far from salubrious conditions, contacted his party members and asked for their help. They suggested he write directly to the Prime Minister. Although nobody responded to his request, he was ultimately able to arrange loans (through another contact) to purchase raw material for the households; the community managed to build over 100 houses in his location.

Through language, intermediaries can bridge the gap between the state and citizens, with the former relying on intermediaries to disseminate public service messages. In one case, it was the authorities, a police inspector, who asked an

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[26]   *Lena dena* – in Urdu, taking and giving.

intermediary to help convey Covid-19 protocols to the people in his area because the authorities had done so less effectively. This is not to suggest that intermediaries are always successful, regardless of whether they 'speak the same language'. In a nearby *katchi abadi*, they were unable to persuade the authorities to clear litter in the area and ultimately relied on mobilising the community itself to do so after the authorities simply refused.

The extent to which intermediaries rely on their access to public authorities differs considerably and being in direct contact with the latter does not mean that intermediaries adopt their approach. Indeed, those associated with the political opposition use the language of public authority differently, even oppressively. In one case, Nawaz, an intermediary in Punjab, felt that the district administration was not doing enough to control the spread of infection during the Covid-19 crisis, to the extent of favouring the use of force to impose standard operating procedures (SOPs). Noor, a village *numberdar*,[27] on the other hand, praised the work of the Tiger Force in attempting to redistribute resources, saying they were 'trained very well' and would 'help reduce the injustices around us'.

Intermediaries' access to language also translates into their access to information. Amir, an intermediary, explained that he relied on press conferences and social media to remain apprised of the government's Covid-19 SOPs – and the associated narrative surrounding the crisis.

Intermediaries' use of language to negotiate outcomes may differ depending on whether they are operating in a conflict or non-conflict location and, if the former, on the nature (and history) of that conflict. Intuitively, non-conflict settings enable better relations between intermediaries and public authorities. In Islamabad, for example, the Supreme Court's stay order prohibiting the demolition of *katchi abadis* has diluted the extent to which this might be considered a conflict setting and intermediaries have learned over time what course to take if the CDA launches an unannounced anti-encroachment operation. As Shamshad, an intermediary in a conflict location said, 'Nowadays, if somebody encroaches on the land and the CDA gets involved, [it is possible to] negotiate with the residents and resolve the issue'. This contrasts with earlier when, in the absence of the stay order, residents had no legal grounds to prevent eviction and would resort to bribing the CDA for permission to remain.

In Punjab, some intermediaries have managed to challenge the authorities successfully. In the city, both Doctor and Nawaz became involved in a dispute with a local retired army officer allottee who had ill-treated sharecroppers.[28] They lodged a complaint at the police station, but not before an altercation with the army officer and the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP). It was only after

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27   Landowner with hereditary state powers (mostly revenue collection).
28   See Episode B (Figure A2) in the Annexe.

their supporters took to the street in protest that the DSP agreed to negotiate. It was, for the intermediaries, 'a big win for the people as we stood up against the powerful!' In Aapa's case, she was asked to leave the polling station during the local elections because the Station House Officer (SHO) said her presence might cause trouble because the opposition claimed voters would vote for her candidate out of fear. She did not leave but kept a low profile, saying that voters would 'vote for me if they want and they will not vote for me if they don't want'.

Their relationship with public authorities determines how intermediaries choose to present themselves in public. Those who have strong, reliable or formal relations with public authorities are more likely to be assertive because they are perceived as being 'trustworthy' by the authorities. Should an intermediary's relationship with public authorities weaken or become unreliable, his or her importance also fizzles out. A good example of this is Jon's episode when he attempted to raise a compound wall on an empty lot in Islamabad which he felt could be put to good use as a *janazgah*[29] and the CDA objected. Aapa said she was not in a position to challenge a corrupt public official in her area because, in her words, 'a fish cannot challenge the crocodiles while living in the same pond'.

The thickness of a network is a key factor that differentiates conflict locations from non-conflict ones. Intermediaries' significance and functions are directly correlated with the network(s) they use to resolve people's problems. Those with a thick networking presence inevitably become more important than others. For example, in the conflict location in Islamabad, Jon's and Baba Gilli's social and political capital – which enabled them to write directly to the Home Minister and CDA Chairperson and to solicit material help from friends in the construction business – played a central role in the resettlement of a significant population displaced from another *katchi abadi*. In Baba Gilli's case, his membership of a political party meant he became a natural focal point for complainants and government officials. Some intermediaries augment this by building alliances preferably with the ruling party so that they become part of the government system and can maximise benefits for their settlement. In Punjab, both Nawaz and Amir relied on their contacts in the district administration to access and distribute food rations during the Covid-19 emergency.

3.2 Networking

Intermediaries make themselves important by constantly creating and sustaining physical and online networks outside their communities. In Islamabad, the left-wing party's intermediaries are connected to *katchi abadi* residents predominantly through social media; they will often film the site or circumstances of a problem – the threat of eviction, for example – and share it across different

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[29] A place to perform funeral rites. See Episode C (Figure A3) in Annexe.

social media platforms as a way of mobilising public awareness and opinion or material help, based on video evidence and survivors' testimonies. This strategy was successful enough to elicit a response from higher government officials, including material support from the Human Rights Ministry. It also generated additional networks linked to the state and to non-government organisations that became involved in relief efforts, thereby creating a thicker and more effective network.

In the case of intermediaries in Punjab, Aapa has cultivated contacts within and outside her community while conveying to her community that she has made a concerted effort to do so, whether to obtain funds for food and clothing or to help lodge a police report against a rights violation; this has bolstered and legitimised her own relationship with the community.

In conflict locations, such networks are less stable and are rooted in short-term results, whereas non-conflict locations enable relatively stable networks that last longer. Moreover, the nature and history of the conflict are important when it comes to sustaining and creating new networks. For example, when the left-wing party workers (including the study's intermediaries) were arrested at a protest in support of a civil rights movement, this created enough of a sense of fear that, even after they were released, a subsequent movement protest did not attract party workers in the numbers it was expected to. It is not uncommon for the state to use such tactics to intimidate citizens, thereby damaging intermediaries' networks.

The thickness of an existing network can also give people access to alternative intermediaries. In Punjab, for example, one intermediary pointed out that 'Everyone knows everyone else here. We all are interconnected. We know what's happening in each other's lives'. Not only do intermediaries tend to connect with their own networks, but they also attempt to create new networks to sustain their existing role. One intermediary in Punjab explained that she had approached a doctor at a government hospital through her sister (a nurse), and on the doctor's advice, was motivating pregnant women to have regular check-ups to avoid having to pay hefty fees closer to delivery.

3.3 Collectivising

As a rule of thumb, intermediaries solve small issues and collectivise (aggregate voices and numbers) when dealing with bigger issues. Intermediaries largely deal with small issues themselves or with the help of other intermediaries within their locations, for instance, for domestic problems, accessing health facilities, schools, getting financial loans, etc. For bigger issues though, such as land disputes and conflict, or recently to deal with the lockdown and people's loss of livelihoods as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, intermediaries collectivise not

only the people they claim to represent, but also other intermediaries including intermediaries from different political parties. We also notice this mobilisation happening when they have to deal with local authorities, particularly security agencies. Intermediaries build collectivising power in two ways: (1) by maintaining reciprocity relations with the community ('I help you, you vouch for me'), and (2) by maintaining accountability relations that inform and justify their actions to both above and below them.

In the first instance, their collectivising power is a function of the community they claim to represent. Thus, the moment an intermediary loses this connection by failing to engage in the community's cause, he or she becomes more dispensable. In the case of one intermediary, this occurred over time: so long as he served as a bridge between the community and the state in helping people shift from one *katchi abadi* to another, he was 'essential'. Once the community settled down, it had less need of him, and Jon found his role diminishing. Reciprocity relations also give intermediaries the legitimacy they need to hold onto power, to the extent that intermediaries such as Aapa and Amir say, 'If not us, then who?', effectively indicating to their communities a quid pro quo, a *lena dena* – if you do not support us today, then we may not be able to support you when the time comes. Aapa has collectivised action in this way by speaking up against arrests and evictions and urging the community to stand together. In turn, when she felt she was being harassed by security agencies, she could rely on the community to help keep her safe by lodging with different households every night.

In conflict settings, intermediaries' collectivising power becomes even more important because they are better positioned to tackle frequent encounters with the state, as is the case in Islamabad, where intermediaries can take on the CDA where the community, on its own, cannot. Intermediaries who have better relations with influential public authorities are also better able to gain communities' trust, making their collectivising power more effective. The thickness of existing networks is also a factor: intermediaries with thicker networks tend to command higher expectations from their communities. For example, those who were involved in relief efforts during the Covid-19 crisis found that, if they skipped a household during distribution because it was already on a social security programme relief list, the household would tell the intermediary directly that any relief it had received had nothing to do with the latter, thereby diminishing the intermediary's role.

In the second instance, accountability relations stem from a tacit understanding between intermediary and community. In Jon's case in Islamabad, when the community did not support his attempt to claim vacant land as an area to create a *janazgah*, he was ultimately compelled to stop his efforts despite his justification that it was for the good of the community. Amir explained that he

relied on a system that helped him identify people who needed access to food and other supplies, based on the interconnectedness of the community. Nawaz noted that, when it came to distributing food rations, he would give donors the option of either donating to them directly or using their list of households. Volunteers are held accountable too, with Nawaz keeping a check on the teams that collected and distributed food rations through Al Khidmat Foundation officials.

In conflict settings, however, accountability relations may be affected adversely: public authorities may be less likely to trust intermediaries, while intermediaries may be less ready to represent the community's problems. Additionally, people may be motivated by self-interest. For example, when Baba Gilli sought his bishop's help to install two water pumps in the area, he discovered that the people installing one pump were charging more than the anticipated cost. When this practice was halted, they began 'selling' the water from the pump instead. 'Imagine how shameless they are', exclaimed Baba Gilli, 'people are fraudsters, they do not need an honest person at all'.

Intermediaries' relationships with public authorities shape the accountability pattern they adopt with the community. Intermediaries are accountable to the public authorities with whom they are involved; if this relationship is informal, then their collectivising power may be more arbitrary, while relatively formal relations are associated with a more defined process of accountability. In Jon's case,[30] the community was unwilling to support his attempt to claim vacant land for use as a *janazgah* because they felt that, if anything were to go wrong, they risked being arrested for illegal land grabbing.

Collectivisation can mean: (1) creating a collective, (2) being part of a collective, or (3) satisfying a collective. An implicit function of intermediaries is to encourage collective action, which may be born out of a personal initiative driven by adversity or with the intention of social service. One intermediary, Gufran, said that he had been involved in community work, which included helping flood victims, even before he launched his NGO. Intermediaries also encourage collective action outside their community where possible. As Pastor Amanat explained, the community had a number of members employed at government hospitals who helped others outside their community access health care based on the information they were in a position to provide. Other instances of creating collective action include intermediaries' efforts to: (1) document *katchi abadi* evictions in Islamabad and mobilise public opinion until the state was compelled to take action; (2) organise contested agricultural land in the conflict location in Punjab to be sown such that the allottee could not legally reclaim it; and, (3) mobilise large crowds in the non-conflict location in Punjab against rights

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[30] See Episode C (Figure A3) in the Annexe.

violations perpetrated by an army officer and to successfully get a police report registered against him, despite his influence.

Being part of a collective can also translate into mobilising and enhancing collective action. This is clear in the case of Baba Gilli, when he initiated community-led construction work in his location; many of the area's intermediaries are from outside the location and often organise protests to protect the rights of people living in precarious conditions in other contexts. In Punjab, Rayan and Amir were both able to mobilise action as part of a collective by raising funds for households that needed food rations and other supplies during lockdown because they were part of the collective. Finally, intermediaries may have to satisfy the collective because they are 'stuck' with them. Similar to the politics of *majboori*[31] which Khan Mohmand and Javid (2014) and Malik and Malik (2017) discuss in their analysis of voting behaviour and clientelistic political exchange in rural Punjab, 'clientelism is not simply a negotiated relationship between two groups of unequal power, but one that is based on obligations and embedded exchanges' that residents and intermediaries 'have come to interpret as helplessness' (Malik and Malik 2017: 1822). In rural Punjab, dynastic intermediation is more than just a tradition; it is a *majboori* (of the obligation kind) that follows every intermediary family. In Jon's case in Islamabad, his efforts were unsuccessful: once certain community members began to sell the land they had been allotted in the location, resulting in disputes, the entire community was affected adversely and Jon lost his capacity to intervene, ultimately retiring from his position as chairman. 'We tried to distance ourselves from the affairs of the *abadi* because I think that violence is not a good thing to deal with' he explained. Yet, despite all that, he remains an intermediary; he is 'stuck' with them.

3.4 Solving peoples' problems

What do poor households get in exchange for giving intermediaries legitimacy through numbers? In return, intermediaries play a key role in poor households' lives by solving internal disputes within their localities, they try to deal with external threats (to a certain extent) and help households access public goods. There is some variation across our four locations, which we will unpack in the following section, but first we quickly describe here how this variation plays out.

In Islamabad, in both conflict and non-conflict locations, pastors of all churches play an essential role in solving disputes internal to the location. Whenever some issue arises, people go to them for guidance before going to the police or other state institutions. Because of their religious office, pastors have a respectable status and people listen and follow their instructions. In addition to the pastors, intermediaries who have connections with the various political parties and

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[31]   Best translated as helplessness *and* obligation.

movements also use their networks to resolve the issues of inhabitants of *katchi abadis*. In both conflict and non-conflict settings in Punjab we also see intermediaries playing an important role in resolving internal issues peacefully. Often the first point of reference are the elders: Arshad mentioned that any internal issue that arises in the village is referred to the *panchayat*, who then meet either at his father's house (*dera*) or at the *bethak*,[32] rather than going to the police or courts. 'We, as mediators prefer resolving issues internally first'. As every intermediary is well-connected and respected, they often come forward themselves to offer help in internal dispute negotiations, particularly to poorer households who lack contacts and status. For instance, Aapa and Amir use their strong networks and links with intermediaries outside their village to try to solve peacefully people's issues, as these outside intermediaries – if trusted by all parties – bring a neutral voice to the negotiations. Nawaz and Doctor are also called to help solve internal issues in the city without going to the police, since they belong to wealthy families and have a trusted political background due to their affiliation with a mainstream religious political party.

Many issues are typically resolved at the local level,[33] often involving intermediaries acting in lieu of, or as public authorities either individually or as part of a collective such as a group of elders and *panchayats*. Preference for solving issues locally, particularly dispute resolution, is the trend across South Asia. Khan Mohmand *et al.* (2010) observe across rural Pakistan and India that citizens are more likely to go to the state when they are wealthier, from higher-ranked *biradaris*, and with less faith in what they call informal local governance institutions or ILGIs.[34] They posit that ILGIs remain relevant and popular with the poor as a substitute for the state, because it gives them an opportunity to access quick, easy, and cheap justice (even if unjust). This is because for most poor households and women in particular it is hard to access formal justice institutions, partly because the process is time consuming, lawyer fees are high, and courts are far away (Acemoglu *et al.* 2020), and partly because in FCVAS state justice is equated with oppression and punishment.[35] The same applies to urban settings: intermediaries in the capital, such as Shamshad, claim that most people prefer to solve their disputes locally rather than going to the police. Once there a was domestic abuse case in his street. While the husband was beating his wife one of the neighbours came to the house and tried to stop the husband. That quickly escalated into a fight between the men. In that fight, the husband was seriously injured and had to be admitted to the hospital. Rather than going to the police station and registering a police case, family members of both parties went to the pastor to ask him to resolve the issue. Shamshad struck a deal in

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[32] Collective male sitting space in the village.

[33] By local we mean at the neighbourhood (*mohallah*) in urban settings and within the village (*gaon*) in rural settings.

[34] See Ananth Pur (2007).

[35] *Panchayat* decisions tend to be restorative rather than punitive (Acemoglu *et al.* 2020).

which the neighbour had to pay the expenditures of the injured person's household for three months. He stated that it was a voluntary process, and nobody was forced during the process. 'Most people avoid going to the police because they do not trust the police', he added.

Acemoglu *et al.* (2020) show that part of that avoidance is directly linked to state institutions' effectiveness and that, despite the deep-rooted mistrust of the Pakistani state, credible information can change people's beliefs and behaviour. They find that improving the quality of state dispute resolution improves people's beliefs about state courts while simultaneously making them more pessimistic about the effectiveness of ILGIs and therefore reducing people's trust in these. Yet, there is a pull and push dynamic in the power relations between formal and informal actors that we cannot ignore: informal institutions at times also make sure the state does not get involved. According to Rayan, people and intermediaries try their best to solve issues by themselves or with the *panchayat*, as:

> Parties will have to visit police, local courts, spend time and money on legal fees etc., so the *panchayat* prefers that issues should be resolved within the elders of the village. People understand that and *panchayats* put on the penalty fee on parties to resolve their issue. The fees are set according to the intensity of the issue.

Even with police reported cases, *panchayats* call the police and ask them to step aside, so that they can resolve the issue within the community. If need be, then they themselves inform the police to take action.

Cooperation between intermediaries largely occurs when dealing with external threats. In fact, although these events are less common as compared to everyday internal disputes, these are the moments where we witness households and intermediaries coming together to defend their ground. For instance, in the Punjab conflict location, intermediaries from different political backgrounds and associations came forward to protect the people from the allottees who they believe will take over their lands one day.[36] We also see households and intermediaries coming together to defend each other, such as the case when Doctor and Nawaz fought with the DSP on behalf of sharecroppers, got arrested, and then the sharecroppers barged into the police station to protect Doctor and Nawaz.[37] While quite often intermediaries in Punjab referred to 'all of us' when discussing mobilisation against external threats, in Islamabad there were particular names brought forward. In the non-conflict location, many households and even other intermediaries mention Zayan as the person who they approach in matters related to external threats to the location.

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36   See Episode A (Figure A1) in the Annexe.
37   See Episode B (Figure A2) in the Annexe.

Not only because he is one of the first settlers, but also because his name is always associated with the left-wing party who helped them petition the Supreme Court of Pakistan for the stay order. Whenever there are external threats in the conflict location, most often CDA's anti-encroachment drives or individual CDA officials coming to harass residents, Baba Gilli and Shamshad are the ones playing a more active role in defusing the situation. Baba Gilli through his political connections, and Shamshad through his religious networks that spread way beyond Islamabad.

Accessing public goods and services is not easy for poor households, particularly in conflict settings. As Aapa said referring to receiving government supplies during the Covid-19 lockdown, 'the only thing that is free here is a baton charge'. Thus, the common route to access public goods and services is through intermediaries who have good connections with public officials. Yet, this access is not free; according to Amir even intermediaries with good connections with officials must pay them for any task they want them to perform. In the *katchi abadis* of Islamabad, the situation is not better: many intermediaries highlight that whenever they have contacted public officials for the provision of collective goods and services, public officials have always refused them stating that 'it is an illegal settlement in Islamabad, and we cannot provide basic services in the area'. To fill the gaps, intermediaries such as the pastors in both locations and political workers such as Baba Gilli and Talha engage with NGOs, charity organisations, and rich people to assist marginalised people. As far as health care is concerned, intermediaries in Islamabad have a contact list of the people living in the *katchi abadis* who work as cleaners or nurses in different hospitals of the city and ask them to facilitate the process. In rural Punjab rarely do intermediaries take people to urban hospitals, instead relying on local healers, local dispensers and untrained staff. Accessing official documentation is a big problem for *katchi abadis* residents in Islamabad, as officials they do not have a valid physical address. Whenever NADRA's officers refuse to issue identity cards or birth certificates to residents, Baba Gilli and Shamshad play an active role: the former using his political contacts, the latter his religious network.

The biggest headache for intermediaries is how to provide clean water and adequate sanitation. For instance, Zayan and others have tried for years to get a water connection for their location using personal links inside the CDA but have failed. In urban Punjab, even Rayan, a local influential and ruling party worker, has been requesting the government to develop a new sanitation system and not got very far. Quite often connections are not enough: Nawaz activated all his political and personal channels to deal with unsafe drinking water in the village but ended up co-funding and installing various filter plants himself. Amir mentioned that every time he has to raise a request related to public services and utilities, he has to use his connections. But while in hospitals a good relationship with the concerned person might be sufficient, in other public offices

he has to grease officials' palms. That leaves the job of intermediary limited to people who can afford it, which explains why overwhelmingly our intermediaries are relatively well-off compared to the people they work with.[38]

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[38]   Or, at least, less badly off.

4. Contextualising local governance systems: explaining variation

As we start seeing from the previous section, the thickness of connections not only plays a role on the diversity across locations, but also on the nature of accountability relations. This thickness is related to each location's historical structures – including the strength of parallel governance systems to that of the state, the history of the conflict, and level of political competition amongst intermediaries. For instance, the Islamabad locations are mostly occupied by religious minorities who found safe exit from persecution. While in the non-conflict location residents carried along some of their old networks and connections as they often moved within the city; residents in the conflict location overwhelmingly came directly from rural Punjab so their connections and networks are less useful in a new context. A large population of Islamabad still comes from the rural areas of Punjab bringing along their social structures and hierarchies (Khan Mohmand and Gazdar 2007). Most intermediaries and households mentioned that they came to know about the location where they live today from someone either in their extended family or *biradari*.

In Pakistan, the extended family and *biradari* are the main social protection mechanisms particularly for poorer and marginalised households, as state-mediated social protection was until recently largely confined to the formal economy and a small percentage of the urban working class (Sayeed 2004; Kabeer, Mumtaz and Sayeed 2010; Loureiro 2013). As households move from rural to urban settings though, the usefulness of these connections loses strength. Residents and intermediaries in the Punjab locations, however, have been there for several generations predating the country's independence. If, on the one hand, they have inherited land and tenancy problems with the state, they have on the other, access to more stable and stronger *biradari* connections. Traditionally, *biradari* leaders use their power to make decisions on marriage, exclusion, and mediate access to services (Khan Mohmand and Gazdar 2007). While the key mechanism that holds a *biradari* together is endogamy (marriage within the *biradari*), this is not enough on its own: active membership needs to be maintained, often through gift exchange rituals during ceremonial occasions, where the aim is not the gift itself, but the obligation to reciprocate on the next occasion therefore creating a continuous give-and-take bond: *lena dena*.[39] Still, *biradaris* are highly hierarchical and discriminatory (Martin 2014; Javid and Martin 2020), blending intra-*biradari* competition – where the focus is to 'keep the

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[39] Next time though, the receiver has to give an amount slightly higher than received, so the debtor becomes a creditor keeping the link alive. See Loureiro (2015) for a review of the literature on *biradari* and reciprocity in Pakistani Punjab.

Jones down' (Wakil 1970: 703) – and inter-*biradari* cooperation, where the focus is on protecting 'our' people (*apna*) versus the 'others' (*paraya*). It is no surprise then that all our intermediaries in Punjab belong to mid- and higher-ranked *biradaris*, with some helping lower-ranked *biradaris* and others only helping their *biradaris* to the detriment of lower-ranked ones.

Being physically close to the state does have its benefits. In Islamabad, the *katchi abadis* are just a few kilometres away from the central government and all the concerned ministries, the prime minister, and main courts. Thus, in theory, whenever they need something, they can approach the concerned authorities. Intermediaries from both locations in Islamabad mention several examples of local representatives (including some of them) meeting ministers and other state officials with, for instance, lists of people eligible for minority quota schemes in state employment or welfare programmes. We also witness geographical advantage within Islamabad: while networks and connections play a big role in accessing government menial jobs, the location closer to government institutions (including CDA) has a higher proportion of residents working as cleaners, peons, and at times even clerks within these government departments, in contrast to residents in the other location, on the outskirts of the capital. Still, physically close does not necessarily mean automatic access. Intermediaries and households in both locations kept reminding us the irony of the state being simultaneously close and far: they can see public services, but not access them because of where they live[40] – and the frustration and feelings of disempowerment this creates.

In Punjab, distance from state authorities is even more problematic, both in terms of intensity and breadth. Not only connections with state actors are fewer, but also these tend to be largely through a smaller district administration and security forces. As we mentioned previously, in Islamabad if people disobey the informal rules and decisions taken by elders, the social ostracism and boycott they suffer is not as significant as in the case of Punjab. Here, being considered a pariah has a direct impact on accessing the state, as this is always mediated by those that set and implement the rules of the game.

Finally, the level of political competition amongst intermediaries also plays a role on the thickness of connections. Similar to Auerbach and Thachil's (2021) findings in urban slums in India, we also witness that affiliation with mainstream party networks gives intermediaries access to influential elites, helping them fulfil residents' requests 'from a dismissive and discretionary state' (*ibid.*: 3). This political competition gives opportunity for party workers to prove their role as an effective intermediary, which gives poor people the chance of choosing

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40   Two good examples are energy and water supply: residents in *katchi abadis* point out that they see the electricity wires passing above their houses and water mains on the side of their locations but cannot access them legally.

intermediaries they want to be associated with. Political competition acts as a variable more clearly at specific moments. For instance, for mainstream political parties it is only around election times that intermediaries in the different *katchi abadis* are identified as important party workers to be paid attention to, and it is during this time that intermediaries also get a chance to present themselves to a wider audience. Both residents and party workers focus their use of accountability practices around political representation in these pre-election times, as these locations are seen as vote banks. Even amongst party workers of the same party there can be competition. One such case emerged in the Islamabad non-conflict location, where Zayan and his neighbour got into a fight to prove who deserved to be the left-wing party representative for their location. While both in Islamabad and Punjab, we see people trying to align themselves with the intermediaries working for the ruling party, this becomes more obvious in Punjab with fewer parties contesting,[41] and where vote blocs (*dharas*)[42] are more stable.

4.1 Governance system as networks

If we go deeper, we notice that local governance systems are not populated by networks, but in fact the networks **are** the system. It is pertinent to notice that life in Pakistani society is strongly built on personal linkages from the private spaces of the family to the public spaces of the state and the market. In fact, Pakistan is a country of networks based on personalistic linkages: in politics (Khan Mohmand 2014); in business (Nadeem and Kayani 2019); and even within the bureaucracy (Islam 2004). Everybody networks, and informal networking is always the first step to access any good or service, even when people know the formal actors involved in the process. And a big informal institution permeating society (particularly Punjabi society) is *biradari* – the largest elephant in the room. Javid and Martin (2020) highlight both its pervasiveness and visible invisibility when comparing Indian and Pakistani Punjabs, noting that despite marriages, vote blocs, *panchayats*, employment, and nepotism in the bureaucracy being often based upon *biradari* relationships,

> There is barely any official recognition of the existence of [*biradari*] amongst the population, in Pakistan's political discourse, in the pronouncements of its governments and political parties, the protests of its social movements and activists, and the analyses of its experts and commentators.
> (Javid and Martin 2020: 143)

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41   In the Islamabad locations on average 15 parties and 15 independents contested the 2018 elections, while in the Punjab locations the average was six parties and seven independents.

42   For more on vote blocs and *dhara* politics see Khan Mohmand (2019).

Equally, Khan Mohmand *et al.* (2010) note that while *biradari* (caste) and land are no longer relevant predictors of behaviour in rural India, both continue to impact how rural citizens behave and interact with one another in Pakistan, particularly in how they resolve their disputes, because of the state's continuing disregard for both land and caste inequality as an issue.

It is not surprising then that there is a blurriness of formal and informal networks: public authority is built and exercised through networks that bring together official and unofficial actors and institutions, in which intermediaries are embedded and which intermediaries to varying degrees build and sustain. Pastor Shamshad's engagement with NADRA officials is a prime example. Often children living in *katchi abadis* do not have birth certificates which makes it harder for them to access limited state services, such as public education. Shamshad helps children and their parents to get birth certificates and provides support with school admissions. It started when he once went to the NADRA office for the birth certificate of a child, but the NADRA officer refused to issue one, as the child and parents did not have a legal address. He then contacted a Christian friend who is a lawyer and member of the Islamabad Bar Council and asked for help. His lawyer friend went with him to the NADRA office and told the officers that a birth certificate is the fundamental right of a child and if they did not issue the birth certificate then he would have to file a case in court against the NADRA officials. After hearing this, NADRA officials issued the birth certificate and since then do so whenever Shamshad goes to their office. As we can see in this example, quite often the difference between being excluded or included is connected to the strength of a person's network – or their intermediary's network.

Whilst there are formal institutions that are recognised as holding some public authority in each location, it is better to think of public authority as residing in networks between these and other informal or unofficial powerholders, built and activated by individuals, including intermediaries. As we mentioned previously, these networks look different in different locations, more or less dense at village/neighbourhood level, and extending outside of the immediate location to different degrees. For example, pastors in both conflict and non-conflict locations have established their networks within their locations and beyond: Pastor Amanat works with people in his neighbourhood as well as with other pastors (including Shamshad), charities, NGOs, political party workers, and government officials – including police officers. In fact, it was precisely with a young police officer that Amanat created the youth group we mentioned in the previous section to assist with the distribution of rations during the initial Covid-19-related lockdown. The assistance households received during this period gives us a good example of public authority residing in these blurred networks: being in beneficiary lists, getting relief packages from either state or non-state sources all depended on a mixture of state authorities and intermediaries working together, where it is not always easy to see where one's authority ended and the other

started. In one case, government officials came to intermediaries and asked them to spread the Covid-19-related awareness messages in the *katchi abadis* acknowledging the state's limited reach.[43] In another case, even CDA officers and police asked the left-wing party's intermediaries, more often foes than friends, to help them identify struggling households in need of relief packages.[44]

4.2 Dynastic mediation

Networks and the distribution of public authority appear to be quite durable or 'sticky', often with deep historical roots. Some people might think that contexts labelled as fragile, conflict, and violence-affected would have high levels of fluctuation and unpredictability in terms of who holds power. Our data suggests this is not typically the case in our locations. There are long-standing and embedded power structures and structures of authority that pre-date recent or current conflict. None is more significant nor resistant than *biradari* and *biradari*-ism.[45] According to Gilmartin (1994) whilst powerful *biradari* identities in Punjab predate the colonial era, they obtained political importance as a counterpoint to the politics of bureaucratic centralisation under British colonial rule, to the extent that the unique political roles *biradaris* play in contemporary politics reflect the legacies and contradictions established between the colonial state and Punjabi society.[46] Part and parcel of *biradari*-ism is the position some *biradaris* continue to have, particularly in rural Punjab, sustained through dynastic politics.[47]

Dynastic politicians have extensive family networks, using them to dispense patronage and mobilise voters and supporters (Malik and Malik 2017). Yet, because dynastic politicians care about and work to promote the success of their entire families and not just the individual, they create very different relationships with their voters, supporters, and their party (Yadav 2020). Interestingly, studies (Ali 2016; Cheema, Javid and Naseer 2013; Yadav 2020) show that dynastic politicians are not necessarily better for their constituencies. Ali (2016), studying the impact of dynasties on public spending in flood-affected districts of Pakistan finds that dynastic politicians spent less on development than non-dynastic politicians, and dynastic politicians belonging to *biradari* spent even less when compared to other dynastic politicians. Yadav (2020), using survey data with 150 Pakistani politicians finds that dynastic politicians are significantly more

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43   Ironically, the same intermediaries have been approaching the same government officials to help clean the *katchi abadis*. Possibly those initial complaints made the officials select these intermediaries to help with the campaign.

44   See Episode D (Figure A4) in the Annexe.

45   Caste and kinship politics.

46   Javid (2011) notes that the administrative set up of colonial Punjab was similar to that of pre-colonial regimes, needing local groups to support it, which explains the cooperation between local elites and the colonial state. Gilmartin (1994) does not deny this, he simply highlights that the colonial state increased the level of power and patronage local elites have had since then.

47   See Cheema, Javid and Naseer (2013).

supportive of institutions and practices that mediate political competition and access to political and policy power such as free and fair elections, an independent judiciary, and a free media when compared to non-dynastic politicians. Yet, she finds no differences when it comes to support for human rights (which is low across all politicians).

Every intermediary in Punjab has inherited his or her role from their forefathers, a sort of dynastic intermediation. As some of our intermediaries said, it is something that runs in the family. Some, like Shafi, Doctor, and Nawaz, mentioned that if God has blessed them with adequate resources and connections then why should they not help poor and marginalised people. We can see a good example of this passing of the baton in Aapa's relationship with her eldest son. Although she is the member of the *panchayat* (inherited from her father) and a very active member of the tenants' association, as a woman she does not physically attend *panchayat* meetings. Instead, she sends her son to represent her. While doing so, she is also training him to become the next in line within her family.

There is an expression we heard several of our intermediaries say in our interviews when discussing their role as intermediaries for the poor and marginalised: 'If not us, then who?' The extended version of this expression is actually 'if not us, then who would help them?' After several rounds of analysis,[48] we notice that this expression has three meanings: one, that because there is little or no state presence in these locations – a lack of direct state–citizen engagement – if it was not for the presence of intermediaries poor and marginalised households would have no access to services and goods; two, the importance of the role of intermediaries on its own as compared to non-intermediaries (for solving people's problems, for linking them with the state, for challenging the state on their behalf…); and three, it reasserts their claim for dynastic mediation. We are the sons and daughters of intermediaries, we have generations of intermediaries behind us, we are entitled to be the real intermediaries: 'If not us, then who?'

Yet, dynastic mediation is also challenged and contested, including by other intermediaries. At times we see challengers to long-standing power structures, such as political activists and new intermediaries or intermediary organisations that try to work within these systems. While the emergence of new leaders to challenge traditional leaders – or new public authority – appears limited in Pakistan, there is some evidence that public authority networks at times struggle to respond to shocks and threats, creating opportunities for change.[49] During the first Covid-19 lockdown we saw how public officials across all locations

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48   For thick description, see Geertz (1973).
49   See Khan Mohmand (2019) for the impact of decentralisation on Punjabi rural politics and redistribution policies.

depended on intermediaries to provide them with lists of households to be enrolled in the different state-funded social protection mechanisms. This created an opportunity for both cooperation and competition amongst intermediaries, as well as for newer intermediaries to challenge old ones. In Islamabad, one of the main intermediaries became ill, lost his livelihood, and his party position (he had managed to get his son appointed as the party contact person for the location, although he did not live there). When he tried to continue his dual role of intermediary and public authority, guiding and dictating people in his location, one of his neighbours immediately contested his role: 'This is not the way of doing *Chaudrahaht*!'[50] he said. The neighbour stated publicly that the intermediary's position as a *chaudhry* did not give him automatic leadership and just because he was an elder, he was not necessarily a ruler. His economic condition needed to be better, so he could help residents of the location. In other words, they should not accept *chaudhrys* just because they are (hereditarily) a *chaudhry* – they need to give patronage as well.

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[50]   From *chaudhry* (traditional head of the community), meaning the way of being a *chaudhry*.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we argue that in Pakistan intermediaries make themselves essential by: (1) speaking the language of public authorities; (2) constantly creating and sustaining networks outside their communities; and (3) building collectivising power by maintaining reciprocity relations with their communities. In doing so, they engage in accountability bargains. Joshi and Fox (2017), while characterising accountability bargains, posit that if bargains hold, they can lead to virtuous cycles of improved levels of trust and accountability. Yet, they are fragile (evolving in contexts of uncertainty and tenuousness) and as such require constant engagement to keep them alive. We posit that because of the individualistic nature of these bargains in FCVAS they do not lead to virtuous cycles of improved levels of trust and accountability – at least not of the system. By accepting and navigating the existing system, nurturing personalistic accountability relations instead of developing systematic ones, intermediaries and households make households' lives less difficult in the short term, while reinforcing a system of oppression.[51]

We can draw out three observations from our work for future discussions on accountability relations.[52]

Intermediaries being accountable to the residents of the locations does not mean the system is accountable. One of our initial Governance at the Margins research questions asked what forms of accountability surround the practices of intermediaries. Our data shows that intermediaries report various practices of accountability that they follow. If we unpack it further (Schedler 1999), there is a lot of *answerability* in particular – intermediaries informing, explaining, and justifying what they have done (or not done) to try to resolve a problem. However, accountability practices of intermediaries do not mean an accountable system overall. Where decisions are taken above the heads of intermediaries then they are more likely to say that matters are out of their hands. As we previously stated, networks are personality-based (personalistic). To make a claim, people always think first of who they know within the state, even if they are entitled to it without knowing anyone. Even the state works through personalistic networks. As such what we often witness are 'fleeting' moments of accountability, which exist in the absence of a generally accountable system of governance.

Intermediaries play a part in shaping expectations of citizens and of authorities of who should be accountable to whom. Because intermediaries are channels for

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[51]   Just like women do when engaging in patriarchal bargains (Kandiyoti 1988).

[52]   Thanks are due to Colin Anderson and the Governance at the Margins team for helping to synthesise them.

access to wider authorities, they play a role in shaping and reinforcing norms and expectations of them. This can be by **actively communicating about other authorities:** for example, intermediaries talking to people about how bad the state is, and how unresponsive. In several cases we see how intermediaries play a role in **re-interpreting guidance from above** to fit their locations: for instance, Amir's agreements with widows in rural Punjab about how *zakat*[53] will be distributed locally. Intermediaries also affect expectations in more subtle ways. One puzzle we have not solved yet, relates to the origin of state–intermediary–citizen relations in our locations: do intermediaries exist because state authorities are historically distant, or are state authorities distant because historically there have been intermediaries between them and citizens? It looks like in urban settings it is the former, and in rural settings the latter. At least it appears that local governance networks and the distribution of public authority are more durable in rural settings, largely due to their deep historical roots that can be traced back to the colonial era (Gilmartin 1994), with state authorities wilfully outsourcing governance functions to intermediaries as a way of social and political control. Yet, we also see instances of dynastic mediation being contested and challenged by newer intermediaries. At the end of the day though, at least in FCVAS, accountability bargains are as entrenched in local governance systems as the historical mistrust of the state.

Accountability needs to be understood in relation to the expectations and experiences of citizens *vis-à-vis* authorities, and norms around these. If accountability relationships are rooted in expectations that people have of authorities (at whatever level) and the ways they see authorities' obligations to them, then these become central. If there is little sight or relevance of higher-level authorities, then accountability relationships may not extend to them in the first place. If the prevailing norm is not to see provision of services or protection as rights but as gifts, then accountability relationships are weaker. If experiences are that authorities, particularly more distant and centralised authorities, do not respond to requests and are so powerful that their actions cannot be questioned, then people are unlikely to consider claiming accountability. In our conflict locations people expect little from higher authorities, and actively avoid them at times (particularly security actors). That does not mean they do not at times collectivise to resist. One way of thinking about this is where there might be a **social contract** of some kind in place, which is a way of saying that people expect certain things of authorities in exchange for something else (compliance with rules, allowing authorities to have a degree of decision-making power…). We have some evidence that where money is involved more questions are asked or more expectations are in place. But often financial exchanges are at a

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[53] One of the five pillars of Islam, it is a percentage of a person's total wealth to be given to the poor as almsgiving. In Pakistan the state collects 2.5 per cent of a person's cash and bank balance and distributes it through the Zakat and Ushr Departments in each province.

very local level, not with these further away authorities. There is perhaps more thinking to do about **moral obligations** that people perceive, which are different from this understanding of contracts. Interestingly, in Pakistan the reflection is that intermediaries have a greater sense of the obligations on authorities than households did in our initial phase.

It's not the people who need us, it's the other way round.

The dependency relation between poor households and intermediaries is not one-sided and both sides know it. It is visible in this quote from Doctor when he was explaining the link between patronage and legitimacy. Intermediaries constantly make themselves important: they are always on the phone either with people from their location or with public authorities, they are always receiving visitors, they regularly update their social media profiles either to inform people of their activities or to demand rights from the state on people's behalf. Yet for most of them, their importance and legitimacy in the eyes of public authorities is directly linked to who and how many people they claim to represent – their collectivisation power. That power though, is dependent on people's willingness to be mobilised by particular intermediaries and by how much the people trust them. Legitimacy then comes from the give-and-take relation intermediaries sustain with people. People expect something from intermediaries; if they do not give them anything, they lose legitimacy. The minimum they can give is information and justification about their own actions: answerability.

Annexe 1

Figure A1. Episode A: Fighting for the right to land in rural Punjab
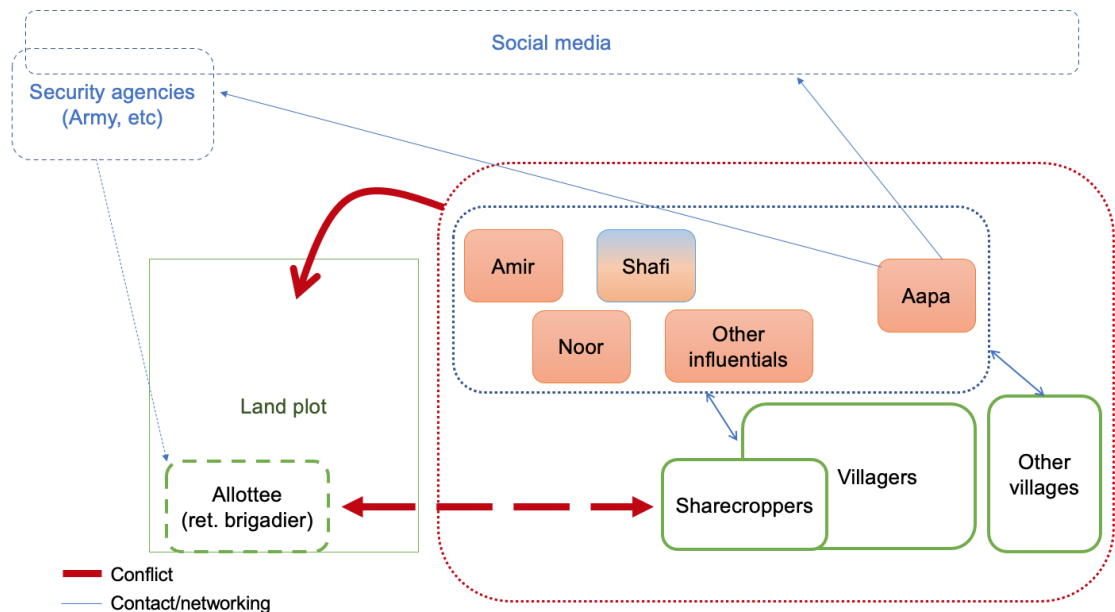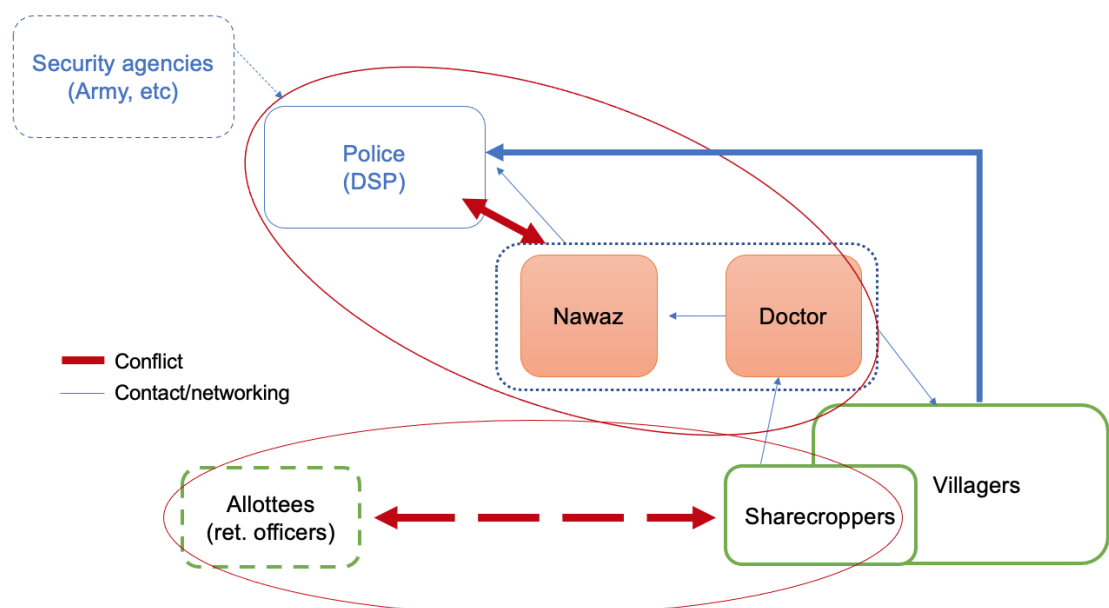

Source: Authors' own

In January 2020 in the Punjab conflict location, the conflict between allottees and villagers grew up once again pertaining to land use. One allottee, a retired army brigadier, tied up a few sharecroppers who he claimed did not pay him full *theka*[54] and hurled abuses at the village women. The sharecroppers felt that the *theka* he was asking for was against the pact signed between them because an increase was not due until the end of 2021. This was when all the intermediaries of the conflict village and other influential people started to plan how to get the land back from the allottee. They strongly believed that if they did nothing, next time any one of them could be the target of the wrath of the allottees. They sat at the *bethak* and planned how to do it in order to regain possession of the land. Part of the plan was to spread the message and mobilise others from neighbouring villages as well. It was then decided that after morning prayers they would take six tractors and all the available labour to the site so that they could sow the land and legally make it their own. It is accepted as customary law that once someone sows a field, then the harvest of that field is theirs and they have the legal share in that land during that period.

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[54] Land lease contract.

While in the men's space the men were planning and discussing strategies, in the female section Aapa was using social media to convey her message to the concerned authorities: if any use of force against these peaceful people was to be taken, they should prepare themselves for a repeat of the protests that happened around 2003.[55] She told them in a video message that the memories of those days had not faded and would be easily refreshed.

The next morning around 200–300 people went to the allottee's land. Amir believes that such an empowering scene had not been seen in his village for a long time. He said initially he did not expect such a massive turnout, but because there were so many of them, they managed to achieve their target of sowing the whole plot by 8am. They successfully and peacefully claimed the land back into their possession. Neither the allottee nor any of his staff members came out to confront them.

Figure A2. Episode B: Fighting the police

Source: Authors' own

In early 2020, an influential allottee (a retired army officer) accused some local poor sharecroppers of not paying *theka* on time and, using his influence with the police, launched a FIR[56] against them. Meanwhile the sharecroppers complained that he had increased the rate of *theka* and that therefore he was at fault and referred the case to Doctor. Doctor then asked Nawaz to join him on his visit to the police station so that they both could talk to the DSP. His rationale was that two equally influential people would make more of an impression than one.

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55   The beginning of the clashes between peasants and the army and the birth of the peasants' movement, the tenants' association.

56   First Information Report, the first document the police prepare to start criminal procedures.

While there, the DSP made them wait outside for quite some time, despite having sitting capacity inside the station. After a couple of hours, Doctor walked in through the DSP's office demanding to know not only why he was not meeting them but also why they were not allowed to sit inside in his office or waiting room. The DSP replied, 'It's my office and I do whatever I want to do'. Doctor said, 'Well, it is a public office and you're supposed to serve us at any cost'. The DSP stood up and shouted at them to get out of his office immediately. Both Nawaz and Doctor shouted back at the DSP and a physical fight broke out between the three of them along with abuses from both sides. The DSP's team quickly intervened: they arrested both Nawaz and Doctor on the DSP's orders and launched a FIR against the two.

As Doctor and Nawaz were there initially to voice the demands of the poor sharecroppers, some of these sharecroppers were outside the police station when the incident happened. The sharecroppers went out and spread the word with the people of their respective villages and in the constituencies of both Nawaz and Doctor. Within a few hours, many people gathered outside the police station and blocked the main road of the city – they even blocked the roads outside the military cantonment. People stood there the whole day and even blocked the roads for 2–3 days, chanting slogans *'DSP kutta haye haye!'* (the DSP is a dog). The situation was so volatile that the security agencies and army officers had to intervene in order to pacify the matter and resolve it amicably. This is very unusual in the area for security agencies to get involved in resolving civilian issues with the police. Doctor and Nawaz eventually got bail, but also because of their connections in mainstream politics. The DSP eventually even had to apologise to Nawaz and Doctor. 'At the end of the day', Nawaz said, 'the power of the public and the power of mobilising people works.'

In November 2019, Jon, a retired employee of CDA and one of our intermediaries in Islamabad, tried to make a *janazgah* because there was no place in the location to perform the last rites before burial. He did so by raising a compound wall around a vacant piece of land. While Jon was doing this, the CDA's director and a magistrate came by. They asked Jon what his intentions were, and how dared he build something without permission. Jon told them they were making a *janazgah* in an empty plot of land and that he did not wish to own the land; he was not part of a *qabza* group.[57] It was not for any individual, but for the whole community and not for profit. Jon told them that CDA could take the land back whenever it wanted to, trying to make sure he did not antagonise the CDA officials. The CDA officials told him to stop raising the compound wall and asked for his name and his ID card. Although Jon had his ID card with him, he told them he did not have it: he is a retired CDA employee, and he knew that they could use that information to lodge a criminal case against him.

[57] A group of people illegally possessing property through fraud, intimidation, or assault.

Figure A3. Episode C: Land for a *janazgah* in Islamabad
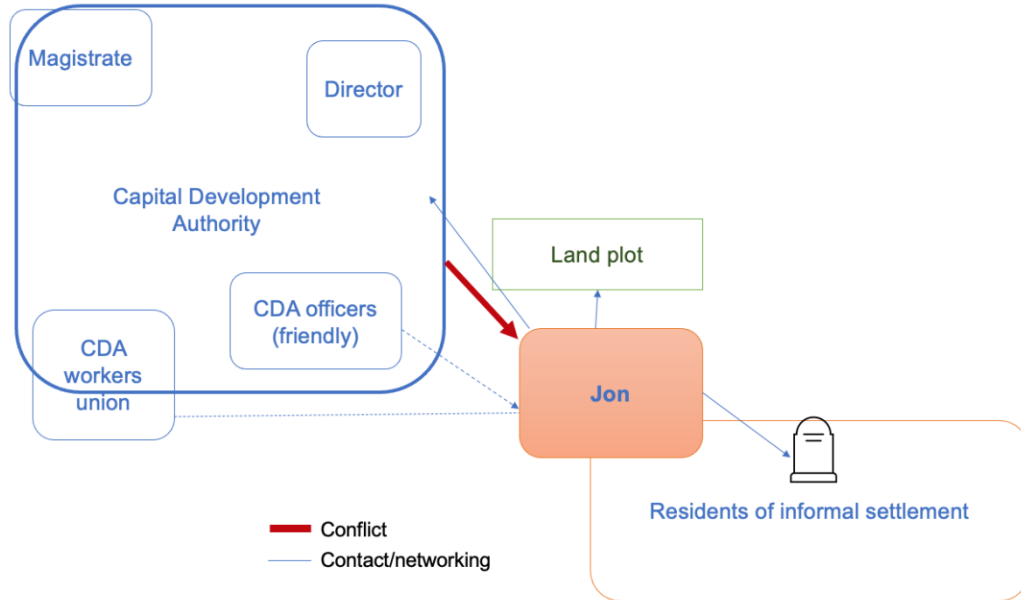
Source: Authors' own

As the director left for his office, two CDA officials who recognised Jon stayed a bit longer and told him to go after the director to apologise. Jon and two people from the *abadi* went to the director's office to tell him again that they did not have any ill intentions. The CDA director did not utter a word and told them to go back home. As they were leaving, one of the director's office staff told Jon that it had been a good idea to come and talk to the director, otherwise he would have registered a FIR against him. While an employee of CDA, Jon was an active member of the CDA labour union and created his network amongst officials close to his rank, which explains why so many people within CDA were advising him what to do. When Jon came back to the *abadi*, he asked the residents to protest against the CDA action as the empty plot was within the settlement. 'We do not have a *janazgah*', he said, 'We should claim this land!' Yet, nobody supported him, so he had to stop the construction of the *janazgah*.

Figure A4. Episode D: Evictions under Covid-19 lockdown in Islamabad
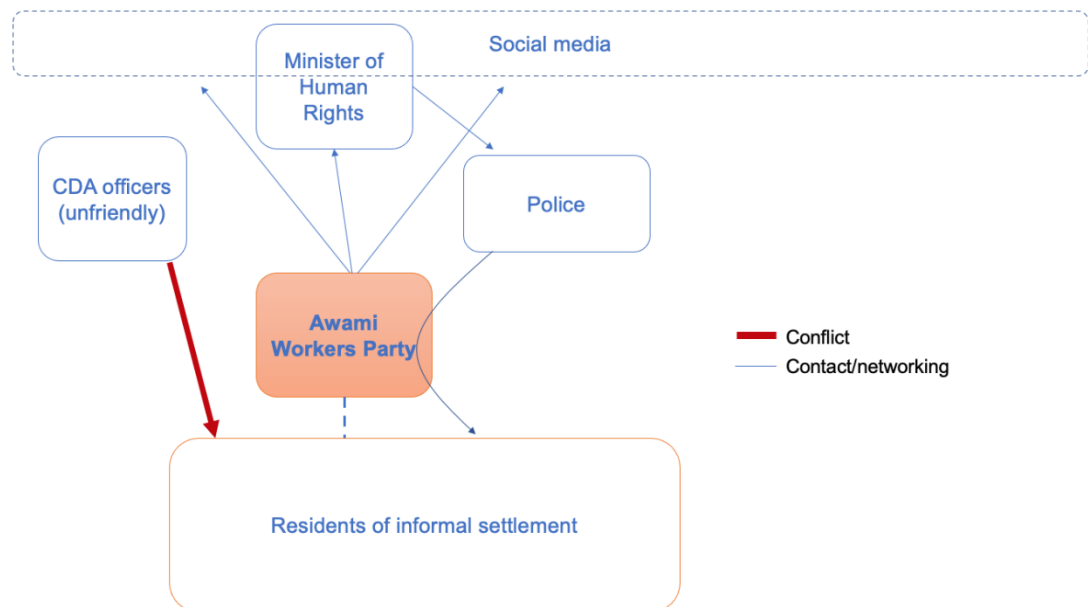
Source: Authors' own

Even during the start of the Covid-19 pandemic the government used its force to frighten people living in *katchi abadis* in the capital. During the pandemic's earlier months, some CDA officials used to come to poor neighbourhoods and confiscate all the possessions of people working as informal vendors in the workshops in front or adjacent to the main roads of the city. A key incident happened in April 2020, when the CDA demolished 75 huts in a *katchi abadi* without any legal notice. As the demolition was taking place, workers from the left-wing party reached the spot and started taking pictures, making videos, and posting them on different social media platforms. They particularly used Twitter, tagging the Human Rights Minister's account as well as the Minister's children's Twitter accounts. The Minister soon responded saying they were not aware of the eviction operation by the CDA and that they would do what they could in their power to call it off.

The operation was stopped within a day. Later that night, a police van came to distribute food among the people who were stranded under the open sky. It was a goodwill gesture from the Minister's side: to send quick support through the respective local MNA. Talha, who was part of the social campaign, stated that the police officials were unable to identify who needed their limited support the most. Therefore, the intermediaries belonging to the left-wing party volunteered to help the police officials with identifying the poorest of the poor to give assistance to. These party workers and the police rarely work together; in fact, often the interaction is of the police arresting left-wing party workers. Yet, besides that initial supply of food, the state did nothing else. The left-wing party's

intermediaries had to buy plastic sheets and tarpaulins so that the people who were left without shelter could be saved from the heavy rain that followed in the next two days.

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