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Globalization and Postcolonial States

by Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma

The experiences of two programs aimed at poor rural women in India suggest that postcolonial contexts might give us reason to reconsider commonly accepted characterizations of neoliberal states. An anthropological approach to the state differs from that of other disciplines by according centrality to the meanings of the everyday practices of bureaucracies and their relation to representations of the state. Such a perspective is strengthened when it integrates those meanings with political economic, social structural, and institutional approaches. Although the two programs examined here originated in different time periods (one before and the other after neoliberal "reforms") and embodied very different ideologies and goals (the earlier one being a welfare program that provided tangible services and assets and the later one an empowerment program aimed at helping rural women to become autonomous rather than dependent clients of the state waiting for the redistribution of resources), they were surprisingly alike in some of their daily practices. In a postcolonial context with high rates of poverty and a neoliberal economy with high rates of growth, what we witness is not the end of welfare and its replacement with workfare but the simultaneous expansion of both kinds of programs.

The changing nature of the state in an age of globalization is the topic of considerable debate in scholarly circles and in public discussion. The sharp differences among analysts about shifts in the role and status of the state are closely connected to their perceptions about what the functions of the state should be in these changed circumstances. Normative cultural ideals undergird the factual descriptions of scholarly work. We point to this not because it is surprising but because it forms one of the many places where considerations of culture might enable a different conversation about states such as the one we advance here. We take as our example the postcolonial Indian state and use case materials from two government-sponsored development programs that belong to different epochs. Comparing these materials allows for a perspective that complicates and contextualizes some of the necessarily schematic macrosocial characterizations of the transformation of states under globalization.

The present era of globalization is sometimes glossed as one of "neoliberal governmentality." Governmentality (Foucault 1991) is the direction toward specific ends of conduct which has as its objects both individuals and populations and which combines techniques of domination and discipline with technologies of self-government (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991; Dean 1999). Governmentality offers a way of approaching how rule is consolidated and power is exercised in

society through social relations, institutions, and bodies that do not automatically fit under the rubric of "the state."¹ Recent scholarship, much of it focused on the West, has used this concept to clarify the nature of rule under neoliberalism (see Burchell 1996; Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996; Hindess 2004; Rose 1996; Rose and Miller 1992). Neoliberal governmentality is characterized by a competitive market logic and a focus on smaller government that operates from a distance. Neoliberalism works by multiplying sites for regulation and domination through the creation of autonomous entities of government that are not part of the formal state apparatus and are guided by enterprise logic. This government-at-a-distance involves social institutions such as nongovernmental organizations, schools, communities, and even individuals that are not part of any centralized state apparatus and are made responsible for activities formerly carried out by state agencies. Neoliberalism thus represents a shift in the rationality of government and in the shape and nature of states.

In this article we elaborate on the *particularities* of state reformation under neoliberalism by using the example of the postcolonial Indian state. Undertaking an ethnographic examination of the state against the backdrop of economic re-

1. Despite its expansion of the space in which to examine rule and governance, the concept of governmentality has often been caught in the framework of the nation-state (see Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Sharma and Gupta 2006). Foucault's notion of governmentality is grounded in a world of European nation-states. This world, which saw the emergence of a new rationality of government based on the care of the population, was also a world of colonial conquest and rule. Yet Foucault does not invoke colonialism when delineating the logic and modalities of governmentality (see Scott 1999; Stoler 1995).

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structuring entails broadening our perspectives for studying states. We argue that cultural and transnational approaches to the states can add something valuable to the institutional and political economic perspectives that have dominated state theory (Sharma and Gupta 2006). By considering everyday practices of bureaucracies and representations of the state, we obtain new insights into states as cultural artifacts. When these insights are articulated with the political economy of transnational ideologies, institutions, and processes of governance, we get a much richer understanding of the emerging nature of states in conditions of neoliberal globalization. We will illuminate these broader concerns by focusing on two development programs implemented by the postcolonial Indian state. Doing so allows us to arrive at a much more nuanced interpretation of the modalities and effects of neoliberal globalization on the state than would be possible otherwise.

The two programs we examine here are very similar in their objectives but quite different in philosophy and plan. The Integrated Child Development Services (henceforth ICDS) program, studied by Gupta, was started in 1975. It fits well into the classic mold of a welfare program run by a paternalist state for indigent women and children. The other program, the Mahila Samakhya (Women Speaking with Equal Voice), studied by Sharma, began a decade and a half later and in many ways exemplifies the concerns with empowerment and self-help characteristic of neoliberal governmentality. Our contrasting fieldwork materials enable a conversation about how postcolonial developmentalist states are being reshaped in the context of global neoliberalism. Rather than beginning with the assumption that neoliberal regimes represent a revolutionary transformation in forms of government, our materials allow us to ask if there are significant continuities between welfare programs before and after the introduction of neoliberal policies and where exactly the differences between them lie.² We intend to highlight the dialectic between global economic transformations and localized reconstructions of the state and governance in India and thus demonstrate the specificity of neoliberal processes in particular locations.

The market-friendly reforms implemented by the Indian government in 1991 under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are widely interpreted as having opened up the Indian economy to the forces of globalization (Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Khilnani 1999). Therefore, choosing two programs situated on either side of this temporal divide would appear to serve to isolate the effects of globalization on the Indian state, but there are at least two reasons that such a hypothesis may be mistaken. First, the ICDS program from its very start was part of a *transnational* set of ideas and policies that were global in their reach and effects. By extension, it would be hard to argue that before

the market reforms of 1991 the Indian state was outside an arena of globalization. We argue instead that the *form* of globalization changed after liberalization, and we therefore refer to the post-1991 period as one of *neoliberal* globalization. Reformulated, the question becomes one of the shifts that occurred after neoliberal reforms within an already transnational state.

Second, while market reforms may have had a great impact on some bureaus of the state at the federal level, their influence on lower levels of government and on agencies not directly connected to industry or consumer goods is much less obvious. An approach to the state that looks at it in a disaggregated frame makes it easier to see that major policy shifts at the federal level were not necessarily transformative for lower levels of the bureaucracy. Once again, this observation points to the importance of studying everyday actions of particular branches of the state to understand what has in fact changed and at which levels and to account for the conditions in which discrepant representations of “the state” circulate.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The next section discusses some of the literature that deals with everyday practices and representations of the state. It is followed by a more detailed description of the ICDS and Mahila Samakhya programs, demonstrating how they exemplify different modes of globalization. The penultimate section will compare the two programs by looking closely at the self-perceptions of workers and some of their everyday functions. The concluding section will bring the different strands of the argument together, arguing that any understanding of globalization requires theorizing it as a conjunctural phenomenon situated in particular histories and contexts.

Cultural States in Transnational Contexts

The chief problem confronting the anthropological analyst of globalization and postcolonial states is theorizing the state as a cultural artifact while simultaneously positioning it in a transnational context. This entails several complex and interlinked tasks. First, a cultural framing of the state means paying attention to everyday practices of state institutions and of the representations that circulate through such practices (Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Fuller and Benei 2000; Mitchell 1999; Gupta 1995; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Herzfeld 1992; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Scott 1998; Steinmetz 1999). The state has to be imagined no less than the nation, and for many of the same reasons. The state system is a congeries of functions, bureaus, and levels spread across different sites. Given this institutional and geographical dispersion, an enormous amount of culture work has to be undertaken to construct “the state” as a singular object (Abrams 1988; Trouillot 2003). Not all such efforts are successful. A great deal of this work of imagining the state takes place through the everyday practices of government bureaucracies, but such signifying practices are by no means the sole arena for the task. There are explicit government and popular representations of “the

2. In the Indian case, the implementation of neoliberal policies corresponds to widespread public perception of the origins of “globalization.”

state” that circulate through the mass media, political mobilization, and rumor. One thinks, for example, of the representations engendered by elections, wars, and national crises.³ Everyday material objects like money, medicines, and certificates that bear the stamp, seal, or signature of the state also help construct and represent “the state.”⁴

Fuller and Harriss (2000, 1–2) argue that until recently anthropology had paid scant attention to the cultural dynamics of modern states (but see Bourdieu 1999; Coronil 1997; Geertz 1980; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Stoler 2004; Taussig 1997). The study of the state was dominated by political scientists and sociologists who brought their own disciplinary perspectives to their imaginings of “the state.” Marxist approaches, for instances, focused on its structural and functional aspects as an instrument in the hands of the capitalist classes (Lenin 1943; Miliband 1969; Poulantzas 1973). Political systems theorists (Almond, Cole, and Macridis 1955; Almond and Coleman 1960; Easton 1953, 1957) argued for abandoning the study of states because of the difficulty of identifying the boundaries of the object of study (Mitchell 1999). Neo-Weberian theorists (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985; Krasner 1978; Skocpol 1979) focused on the state as an autonomous actor and as a set of institutions distinct from society. Steinmetz (1999) contends that all these approaches tended to treat culture as epiphenomenal to states. Whereas states purveyed particular ideas of culture, they were not themselves seen as products of cultural processes.⁵ Relegating the problem of the cultural production and cultural embeddedness of states to the background allowed theorists to treat modern states as essentially similar and to compare them using categories such as liberal democratic, autocratic, weak, or strong. Such classifications stripped states of their cultural moorings and implicitly normalized Western liberal democratic states as ideal types with which other states were compared.

Abrams (1988) asks us to suspend belief in the state as an

3. Representations critically shape people’s imaginings of what the state is and what it does (see Hall 1986; Mbembe 1992; Navaro-Yashin 2002). For instance, people learn about particular state agencies and officers at local and national levels through newspapers (Gupta 1995); they read government reports about topics such as population control, as Anagnost (1995) demonstrates in her work on China; they discuss their experiences of particular bureaucracies and officials in various forums; they watch election-related propaganda on television or listen to speeches by elected officials at public rallies; they observe military parades, activities, and violence (Lutz 2002; Taylor 1997); and they participate in rituals staged by state officials, for example, to inaugurate a dam (Tenekoon 1988), initiate a village housing scheme (Brow 1996), or celebrate national independence.

4. In this article we emphasize the everydayness of the state, produced through routine practices and representations. A contrasting approach, with very different insights, is to be found in the work of those who have examined “states of exception” relating to issues such as violence and the law (see, e.g., Das and Poole 2004; Hansen 2000).

5. Steinmetz (1999, 17–19) notes that even when culture was addressed in neo-Weberian analyses of the state it was often seen as a static and essentialized system of elite ideas.

ontological reality that stands *behind* what he calls the “state system” (the institutional apparatus and its practices) and the “state idea” (the concept that endows “the state” with its coherence, singularity, and legitimacy) and direct our attention to how the state system and the state idea combine to legitimize rule and domination. What becomes central here is how the idea of the state is mobilized in different contexts and how it is imbricated in state institutions and practices. Such an approach to states goes beyond similarity in functional form to emphasize their historical context and conjunctural specificity. It also urges us to find an analytical structure in which functional and institutional approaches to the state can be articulated with its cultural and ideological construction through bureaucratic practices and representations. This is not a matter of balancing different approaches to the study of the state as much as it is a call to recognize the integral connections between political economy, social structure, institutional design, everyday practice, and representation. We are not thereby advocating that every study of the state has to do all these things in equal measure—a requirement that would be impossible to satisfy. Rather, what we propose is that a study deeply informed by the co-imbrication of these phenomena will, even if it focuses on a single task, yield insights that are qualitatively different from those of approaches that do not acknowledge such intertwining, such as those that begin with the premise that culture is epiphenomenal or, conversely, those that assume that the organizational structure of bureaucracies is irrelevant.

Finally, any interpretive paradigm for the state needs to be situated within a transnational frame (Clarke 2004, 72–87; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Trouillot 2003). The study of states, we argue, needs to be disentangled from the territoriality of the nation-state. The mobility of capital and communications in this era of globalization is challenging and “unbundling” (Sassen 1998) the territorial sovereignty of nation-states. The increased velocity of the circulation of money, images, goods, and people has made national borders more porous and states’ control of territories increasingly tenuous. States now have to adopt new strategies for a postterritorial concept of sovereignty and a postsovereign version of territoriality.⁶ As states become transterritorial and citizenship transnational (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Coutin 2003; Ong 1999), the category of the “nation-state” may itself need to be rethought, and the assumption

6. The effort to include in the nation people who no longer reside within the territorial boundaries of the state is being played out in different ways in contexts as different as Haiti and India. States are, not surprisingly, eager to incorporate populations whose ability to remit money to the “homeland” is well established. In the Haitian case, a separate department has been created within the state which in contrast to the others represents not a territorial unit but the diaspora (Schiller 1998). Similarly, the Indian government has invented the category of the “Non-Resident Indian (NRI),” who enjoys many of the privileges of citizenship while not residing within the territorial borders of the nation-state.

that the nation and the state map onto the same social space may need to be reconsidered.

Challenges to state sovereignty are being led by global capitalism, but major changes (e.g., in fiscal, labor, or environmental policies) are not confined to the sphere of business and its regulation. Sovereignty is being disentangled from the nation-state and mapped onto supranational regulatory institutions and nongovernmental organizations like the World Trade Organization and OXFAM. Such statelike institutions govern the conduct of national states and economies and manage the welfare of people living in different territories. Transnational governance is apparent in the large and rapidly growing number of global agreements regulating everything from trade and labor to the environment, endangered species, development, violence, and human rights (Larner and Walters 2004; Frank 1994, 1997). Responses to these emergent global forms of governance and inequality are also being organized as transnational networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; O'Brien et al. 2000).

Whereas this points to the need for a new theoretical vocabulary to respond to changes in the world, a transnational approach to the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Khagram and Levitt n.d.; Trouillot 2003) highlights the need to go farther. A transnational analytical frame can be productively used to study the high-sovereign nation-state as well as the state that is thoroughly embedded in neoliberal globalization. Development planning in India, for instance, has been the hallmark of the postcolonial sovereign national state and yet has always been inflected by transnational processes and ideologies. Whereas Nehruvian centralized socialist planning dominated roughly the first four decades of independent India,⁷ the postliberalization Indian state's development planning agenda is shaped by global neoliberal ideas and policies. Taking a transnational approach to studying the state not only reveals the extent to which the high-sovereign national state is always already transnational but also helps uncover the shifts and overlaps in the nature of national state formation across different moments of globalization.

Our fieldwork experiences fall on the two sides of a particularly important historical conjuncture in the life of the Indian state. Gupta first started fieldwork for this project in the summer of 1989 but began intensive research in 1991, just a few months after then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh had announced a new program for the liberalization of the Indian economy but before the reforms had made any real impact. By contrast, Sharma's fieldwork took place from 1997 to 1999, when the liberalization program was firmly in place.⁸ The decision to liberalize is now freighted with the extraordinary weight of having set off the changes that enabled the Indian economy to "take off" into a period of unprece-

dent growth (Chaitanya 2004; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Khilnani 1999). Further reforms in subsequent years consolidated the direction as well as the pace of the transition. Cumulatively, these changes have had a dramatic impact on the Indian nation-state, seen most clearly in the completely altered landscape of consumer goods. Another highly visible change is attributable to the new jobs that are associated with globalization, from call centers and the information technology industry to services in fields such as medicine and finance. These far-reaching transformations are seen as having been accompanied by or resulting from a shift in the regulatory and developmental roles of the state.

If one were to ask how the state has been remade by the economic policies initiated in 1991, the answer would vary with the sector, level, and branch of the state that one was considering (Brahmbhatt, Srinivasan, and Murrell 1996; Patnaik 2003). For example, in industrial policy, the changing role of the state was made visible by the dramatic dismantling of the "license-permit raj," the elaborate system of controls and licenses that closely regulated private industry (Sinha 2005). Changes in other spheres were less obvious, and even in the industrial sector the absence of change in labor laws and policies with regard to small-scale industries that many fault for the failure of India's ability to compete with China in manufacturing is striking. If we consider sectors other than industry, finance, and high-end services, liberalization's impact on production is much less obvious. This is particularly true of agricultural production and the small-scale sector in which the vast majority of workers are employed. In terms of state branches and levels, the administrative branch was probably affected more than the legislative and the judicial, the federal level of the state more than the regional state or local levels, the industrial and globally influenced service sectors more than welfare programs or policies aimed at agriculture, and regional states in South India more than northern states such as Uttar Pradesh.⁹ If one's view of the state were based primarily on the activities of the lowest levels of government as opposed to the center of power in New Delhi, one would probably get a very different picture of the kind of state transformation that is taking place.

Comparing the ICDS program with Mahila Samakhyas serves well to illustrate these points about the state and globalization for several reasons. ICDS had many of the hallmarks of a classic welfare program run by a sovereign nation-state; by contrast, Mahila Samakhyas exemplified the concern with empowerment and self-actualization associated with neoliberal governmentality. It is not surprising that the former program was started and fully developed well before the sea change in economic policy whereas the latter came into being

7. The reliance on five-year plans for national self-sufficiency was modeled on the Soviet strategy of planned development.

8. The exact date of Singh's speech presenting the new reforms was July 24, 1991. He was appointed prime minister on May 22, 2004.

9. We are by no means suggesting that there have been no changes in these other sectors, levels, and branches of the state or that there have been no important changes in Uttar Pradesh. It is unclear, however, to what extent these changes can be causally connected to liberalization in particular.

in a world context dominated by neoliberal policies and shortly before the imposition of a liberalization program. In other words, the question of the relationship of the state to globalization is placed in sharp relief by juxtaposing these programs. Does Mahila Samakhyā represent the retreat of the state as compared with ICDS? Or does it represent the reconstruction of the state to make it compatible with market forces and the requirements of global capitalism? Or is it perhaps something else entirely—a response to the felt need for reform of the state in light of its failure to deliver goods and services to the poorest?

Many of the analytically neat distinctions between these programs that initially seem obvious become problematic when we consider the state at the level of everyday practices and representations. What globalization means to the state and how “the state” responds to globalization become vexed questions when we look at the state through an anthropological lens. Such an approach problematizes the unity of the state by looking at different levels, sites, and scales, weighs the enormous amount of cultural work that goes into efforts to represent “the state,” its legitimacy, and its authority, and, finally, by considering the interplay between political economy, social structure, institutional design, and everyday practices and representations, allows for a nuanced appreciation of continuities across seemingly historic transformations.

Welfare versus Empowerment

Comparing ICDS with Mahila Samakhyā proves apt for a variety of reasons. The two programs had very similar target groups—poor rural women—and relied on their rural clients to provide “altruistic” labor for the betterment of themselves and their communities; Mahila Samakhyā, in addition, was dependent on a small staff of nongovernmental employees to do empowerment work. Moreover, both programs actively recruited indigent women (separated, widowed, abandoned, divorced, or never married) who were heads of households as workers. Finally, the two programs had some similar unintended effects in that they brought women into state and transnational projects of governmentality through enumeration and classification and through their recruitment as workers and targets of these programs.

These similarities made the contrasts between the two programs even sharper. The chief contrast that we wish to highlight here is that these two programs were the product of two different periods in the history of India’s post-Independence development, with their respectively divergent philosophies. ICDS had the goal of reducing population growth rates and speeding up the nation’s development; its goal was to deliver entitlements to a group of recipients, women and children, that had hitherto been ignored because of the biases built into (implicitly androcentric) development interventions. Mahila Samakhyā, while relying on a philosophy of community development and radical social change, was skeptical of the utility of delivering entitlements and instead built

around the idea that poor women’s own agency had to be mobilized through empowerment to make long-lasting change. Thus, it was not only that ICDS had its genesis in a period when the model of the sovereign national state was paramount and Mahila Samakhyā in a period when neoliberalism was the dominant global ideology: the two programs embodied correspondingly different ideas in their basic design, structure, strategies, and goals.

Liberal Welfare and Governmentality: ICDS

The ICDS program was launched in 1975 in response to the fact that India had some of the world’s highest rates of infant mortality, morbidity, and malnutrition and extremely high rates of maternal mortality in childbirth.¹⁰ Implemented by the Department of Women and Child Development,¹¹ it provides a set of services consisting of supplementary nutrition for pregnant women and young children and education, immunization, and preventive medicine for poor and lower-caste children. It has been one of the fastest-growing development programs of the Indian state. Launched with only 33 projects in 1975, it had expanded to 1,356 projects in the next ten years and to 5,652 projects by 2004 (Government of India 1985, 4; NIPCCD 1997, 3; Government of India 2005, 41). It has grown even as the government has reined in expenditures on other budget items in the postliberalization era. In fact, allocations for ICDS in the Tenth Plan (2002–7) increased by 458% compared with the Eighth Plan (1992–97) (Government of India 2005).¹² As one of the first interventions to attempt to control population growth by paying attention to the quality of the population, ICDS provides us with a nearly perfect example of the regulation, care, and documentation of the population, especially those parts of the population (women and children) that are poorly represented in official statistics. Such attention to the welfare of the population is a form of bio-power, one of the hallmarks of Foucault’s (1991) governmentality.

Gupta studied the ICDS program in a single block—the smallest administrative unit, consisting roughly of 100 villages—in 1991–92. To characterize his research as a study of the state at the local level would be misleading, however, because of issues of funding, its relation to transnational discourses on population, and its relation to other goals of the Indian nation-state. The ICDS program in any one block was

10. According to the UNDP *Human Development Report* for 2003, the infant mortality and under-five mortality rates were still 67 and 93 per 1,000 respectively, and the maternal mortality rate stood at 540 per 100,000 live births. For purposes of comparison, the UNDP report puts the infant mortality rate in 1960 at 165 per 1,000 live births, indicating that it has been more than halved in the past 40 years.

11. The department is part of the Ministry of Human Resources Development.

12. Expenditures were Rs. 268 crore in 1990–91 versus Rs. 603 crore in 1998–99 (approximately \$151 million). In the Eighth Plan expenditures were Rs. 2,271 crore, compared with Rs. 10,392 crore in the Tenth Plan (approximately \$2,165 million over five years).

considered a “project,” and each project received funding independently from many different sources, including different government agencies, multilateral organizations such as UNICEF, and bilateral aid agencies.¹³ Although these organizations did not directly give money to the ICDS office at the block level, projects were clearly associated with one source of funding or another, and this resulted in a fair amount of divergence in the kinds of resources that were available to ICDS officials. For example, projects that received funding from foreign donors were able to purchase larger quantities of food for supplementary nutrition than projects in which the government supplied the food component.

Not only was the funding for ICDS transnational but the idea for the program was itself part of an international movement. The government had come up with the idea in the wake of the failure of more draconian measures of population control some years before the development of an international consensus that emphasized the same themes, but by 1991 the strategy of population control embodied in ICDS was the globally dominant approach to the problem. This helped explain why the program was so enthusiastically supported by so many different international aid agencies.

The relationship between ICDS and other development goals of the nation-state is apparent in the way in which supplementary nutrition was supplied to ICDS centers. In Mandi Block, where Gupta conducted fieldwork, the program has depended since the late eighties on wheat allocated to it by the Food Corporation of India, which purchased wheat from farmers in the area at support prices set by the government. This policy of buying all the wheat that farmers could sell at preannounced prices was one of the cornerstones of the green revolution and had led to the accumulation of large surpluses in government warehouses. The state’s use of this surplus wheat for ICDS thus took the results of agricultural development policies and quite literally fed them into its welfare policies. The development of agriculture and the development of human resources, in other words, were placed in a synergistic relationship that would lead to the development of the nation. The wealth of the nation was thus tied to the welfare of its population.

The origins of ICDS are not simply to be found in transnational discourses and strategies of population control but must be situated in a historical context in which other national efforts to control population had failed. Rapid population growth, it was argued, dissipated the gains of development because the growth rate had to be that much higher to outpace it. Policy makers were fond of drawing the contrast with China, saying that they could not use force to control the rapid growth of population because they lived in a democracy. When these approaches to population control failed, however,

13. The government has subsequently taken over the financing of the program. In 2004–5, of the 5,652 projects that had been sanctioned, only 922 were being financed externally, that is, with a World Bank loan (Government of India 2005, 41).

draconian measures were attempted, and it was this policy more than any other that resulted in the defeat of Indira Gandhi at the polls in 1977, leading to the formation of a non-Congress government for the first time in India’s post-Independence history. It was in this context that the ICDS program emerged as the only credible population program remaining. At the same time, transnational organizations began promoting similar policies that focused on all aspects of the health of children and pregnant women. The idea was that the reduction of child mortality would prevent poor people from having more children as a form of insurance. It was for this reason that immunizations for pregnant women and children were supplemented by preventive medicine and supplementary nutrition. The nature of the ICDS program at the “local level” was thus critically shaped by the interaction of ideas, agencies, and organizations at the transnational, national, regional state, district, subdistrict, and block levels.¹⁴

The subdistrict of Mandi District¹⁵ in which Gupta did his fieldwork had two ICDS programs, each headed by a child development project officer who reported to the district program officer. The program in Mandi Block had been operating since 1985. Its project officer supervised a clerical staff which included an account clerk, another clerk who did other jobs, a peon, and a driver and was responsible for overseeing the work of four supervisors, 86 *anganwadi* (courtyard) workers, and their 86 helpers. The *anganwadi* workers were responsible for the day-to-day functioning of centers in villages. The centers were supposed to be open daily from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Since it was not feasible for a single worker to run a center, take care of as many as 45 children, teach them, feed them, supervise their medical care, and maintain the records, each worker was provided with a helper whose duties included all the odd jobs associated with the center, rounding up the children to attend it, doing the cooking, and cleaning the “school.” In Mandi Block, the project officer and all the helpers, workers, and supervisors were women; the other members of the staff were men. ICDS was the only bureaucracy at any level of the state, apart from primary schools, that was run and staffed largely by women.¹⁶

We have called the ICDS a welfare program, but that term needs qualification. What a “welfare” program means in a

14. The organizational structure of the Indian state consists of a pyramid with a constitutionally mandated separation of powers between the center (the federal government) and the regional states (in our case, Uttar Pradesh). The block is the lowest level of this pyramid, above which stand the subdistrict (*tehsil*) and then the district (*zilla*) levels. The head of administration for the entire district is the district magistrate, usually a junior official in the elite cadre of the Indian Administrative Service (which, in its self-image, method of selecting officers, and style of operation, follows in the footsteps of the “Indian Civil Service,” the “steel frame” of the British colonial government). Above the district level stands the government of the state of Uttar Pradesh.

15. Gupta uses the pseudonym “Mandi” for the block, the subdistrict, and the district.

16. In rural areas in Uttar Pradesh even the primary schools were staffed largely by men.

Third World context is affected by the fact that the state operating such a program is not a welfare state. The logic of the program was never one of providing a safety net for the poorest parts of the population, for there were far too many vulnerable people for the state to provide for all of them. Rather, the justification for the program arose from the need to invest in human capital for the development of the nation-state. The idea was that investing in the reduction of child mortality, improving the life chances of infants and young children, especially girls, and providing them with a basic education would help improve the quality of the nation's human capital. Especially if it helped bring down the birthrate, such a program could contribute more to the development of the nation-state than any other government intervention. Nowhere in the design and implementation of the ICDS were justifications employed that relied on a logic of the market. The program was entirely about strengthening the sovereign nation-state.

Neoliberal Governmentality and Empowerment: Mahila Samakhya

Mahila Samakhya, a one-of-a-kind government-sponsored rural women's empowerment program, was launched as a pilot project in three Indian states (Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Gujarat) by the Department of Education of the Ministry of Human Resources Development in 1988–89 with Dutch government funds. It now covers 9,000 villages and 60 districts in ten states (Jandhyala n.d.). It continues to receive Dutch assistance (expected until 2007), which is augmented by government funds and, in the case of the Uttar Pradesh program, World Bank monies (through bank-funded education projects such as the District Primary Education Program).

Mahila Samakhya was designed and implemented to translate the government's goals regarding women's education, set forth in the 1986 National Policy on Education, into action (Government of India 1997). The National Policy on Education highlighted the dialectical relationship between education and women's empowerment. Empowerment was seen as a prerequisite to addressing women's marginalization from educational processes, and education was seen as an agent of empowerment and change in women's lives (Jandhyala n.d.). Mahila Samakhya carried this thinking forward. The program views social inequalities and women's lack of awareness of their rights and of government programs as barriers to gender-equitable education and development. Collective empowerment is seen as the key to challenging gendered and other forms of oppression and thus overcoming the obstacles to meaningful education and development. Empowerment here is regarded as a process of radical conscientization (Freire 1970) entailing critical reflection on oppressive situations and action directed toward altering those situations. Mahila Samakhya works through organizing women into village-level collectives (*sanghas*), raising their consciousness, and mobilizing them for self and social change and development.

Several factors make Mahila Samakhya unique among government-implemented development initiatives. Its empowerment agenda, for one, is different from the goals of other large-scale development programs that seek to deliver tangibles to individual beneficiaries among specially targeted groups. It is not, however, a service delivery program. Instead it seeks to capacitate women by raising their awareness and confidence and giving them information regarding their rights and development-related entitlements and the skills to access these entitlements so that they can better their status and lives. Further, in contrast to other government schemes, rather than a target-driven, top-down approach to development planning and delivery it involves a bottom-up, flexible approach that allows clients to define the nature and pace of change. Program planning, in other words, happens *with* and not *for* clients and is based on a "worm's eye view and not a bird's eye view" (Ramachandran 1995:20) of women's lives at the grassroots level.

Other aspects that contribute to the program's uniqueness are its location within the ministerial structure of the government and its hybrid organization, which integrates the experience and active participation of women's groups and development activists into a government-initiated program. As a Department of Education program, it differs from most government schemes that target women, which are generally located in the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD). WCD, as a senior civil servant, Amita Rao, explained to Sharma, is an underfunded department that lacks "collective clout and bargaining power" and tends to view women as "recipients of favors" and to focus on the vulnerable, "women who are single [or] widows." Mahila Samakhya's location in the Department of Education is therefore significant in that it signals a move away from the ghettoization of "women's issues" and a naturalized linkage of these issues with child development agendas and a move toward mainstreaming "gender issues" across the ministerial structure.

Furthermore, in contrast to ICDS, which is directly implemented by a government agency (WCD), Mahila Samakhya can be characterized as a government-organized nongovernmental organization (GONGO). While its national office is part of the Department of Education, the program is implemented through registered societies or NGOs in each of the ten states in which it operates. Each state office (or "Mahila Samakhya Society") is responsible for managing various district-level program offices, which in turn oversee the work of several block-level offices. The block or grassroots level is where program strategies are developed on the basis of the needs and demands of the clients in the area. Whereas a government-appointed bureaucrat heads the national office in New Delhi, the staff at the state, district, and block levels is drawn from the nongovernmental sector. Program advisory bodies at the national and state levels consist of a mixture of ex-officio and nongovernmental representatives, with the latter accounting for at least 51% of the membership. The feminists, development activists, and bureaucrats who designed

the program consciously chose this hybrid structure and sizable nongovernmental representation in an attempt to ensure critical and continuous feminist and activist input into the program and to prevent a governmental takeover of program goals and strategies.¹⁷

However, this uneasy location both inside and outside the formal state apparatus is not without its problems. Bureaucratic suspicion of and sometimes hostility toward Mahila Samakhyas underscores the extent to which empowerment is misunderstood and seen as a threat in state circles. Nina Singh, a high-ranking civil servant, told Sharma,

The element of struggle [which] is the basis of empowerment programs . . . is not internalized by bureaucrats. . . . [They] reduce everything to a safe thing called “development.” . . . Struggle is not understood in a government lexicon. . . . The point is that the bureaucratic environment is the biggest hurdle to cross. . . . If an average politician [or bureaucrat] doesn’t understand [the program] and thinks that it is bad for women, [then] how do you sustain this in a governmental context?

The inception of the program and the government’s deviation from the “business-as-usual” model of development in favor of the language of empowerment is a reflection of its education-related agenda but goes beyond it. The state’s sponsorship of empowerment strategies is an overdetermined result of the confluence of several translocal processes, among them national policy priorities, Indian women’s movements for change, transnational shifts in development discourse and economic ideologies, and interventions by supranational regulatory bodies such as the World Bank and the IMF (Sharma 2006). Placing this state-sponsored program at the intersection of these spatially differentiated factors and examining it in transnational terms reveals how its goals and practices intersect with state agencies and policy making, with local and regional social movements, and with the global regime of neoliberal governmentality. This multilayered spatial optic thus also illustrates the extent to which national development planning practices and the state are always already translocally shaped (see Sharma 2006).

The empowerment agenda articulated by both the state’s policy statement on women’s education and the Mahila Samakhyas program owes a great deal to the cross-border influence of Paolo Freire’s work on conscientization and praxis-oriented education (see Batliwala 1997; Townsend, Porter, and Mawdsley 2004). Feminist engagements with state structure and development thinking also contributed in great measure to centering empowerment as a development goal and method. At the national level, Indian women’s movement activists’ critical engagements with government agencies during the 1970s and ’80s over women’s marginalization and oppression laid the groundwork for tackling gender inequal-

ities through alternative means such as empowerment. These activists highlighted the failure of the government’s modernization policies to address women’s needs and to reduce poverty (Government of India 1974) and struggled to make laws relating to dowry, custodial rape, and domestic violence and development policies more supportive of women (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995; Gandhi and Shah 1992). These movements also articulated with translocal feminist thinking on gender and development issues through transnational feminist networks and UN-sponsored international conferences on women’s issues. By the late 1980s feminist networks such as DAWN, dominated by Southern feminist activists, were arguing for a shift from modernization-based development models toward empowerment-based strategies that centered on gender justice and equality (Sen and Grown 1988). This “gender and development” perspective played an important role in focusing attention on gender and empowerment issues within the development world (Kabeer 1994). Since the 1994 UN-sponsored Cairo conference, empowerment has become firmly entrenched as a mainstream strategy of development, lauded and implemented by development agencies working at various spatial levels.

It is interesting though not entirely surprising to note the rise of empowerment strategies during the era of global neoliberal governmentality. On the one hand, supranational regulatory bodies such as the World Bank are promoting empowerment as a crucial aspect of development; on the other hand, these same institutions are asking developmentalist states to reduce interventions in the market and in welfare provisioning. The fact that the very institutions whose structural adjustment policies have had intensely disempowering effects on marginalized people across the globe are encouraging and funding grassroots empowerment efforts begins to make sense when one sees empowerment through the lens of neoliberal governmentality. As Sharma (2006) has argued elsewhere, empowerment fits in with the neoliberal agenda of small government, participatory governance, and market-based competitiveness. It enables developmentalist states to shift away from directly providing for the basic needs of their marginalized citizens to helping these citizens to govern themselves and take care of their own development needs.

While empowerment-based development strategies in India and the Mahila Samakhyas program are not products of neoliberal thinking, the coincidence of the government’s move into empowerment territory with its implementation of liberalization policies offers a striking example of empowerment’s role as a key axis of neoliberal governance (Dean 1999; Hindess 2004).¹⁸ Empowerment programs help reduce gov-

18. NGOs of various ideological bents, including Gandhian, Marxist, and feminist, have been involved in empowerment-based initiatives in postcolonial India; empowerment as a state project, however, is relatively recent. It began with the implementation of the Women’s Development Programme in Rajasthan in 1984. This project, which has empowerment as its explicit goal, was developed by the state government with help

17. For a discussion of the thinking that went into Mahila Samakhyas’ structure, see Sharma (2006).

ernment spending on welfare provision. As compared with welfare-based programs such as ICDS, which distribute material resources to particular groups, empowerment programs are relatively low-cost because they do not deliver any goods or services. Implementing programs that empower marginalized populations to meet their own needs facilitates the attainment of neoliberal goals of leaner and more efficient government. Furthermore, linking these populations to the project of self-governance and self-development makes rule more decentered and diffuse and thus more “participatory.”

The coincidence of state participation in empowerment efforts with the initiation of liberalization policies and with the global dominance enjoyed by empowerment as a liberalization strategy of self- and community improvement points to some ways in which the postcolonial Indian state is being transformed during the era of neoliberal governmentality. Rather than simply being a welfare provider (albeit not in the classic sense of the Western welfare states), the postcolonial developmentalist Indian state is being reframed as a facilitator of development and an empowering agent. This does not mean that the state can stop providing for the poor. In fact, it cannot renege on its welfare obligations, since its very identity is closely tied to the project of national development. The neoliberal developmentalist state, however, is now able to farm out its welfare tasks to empowered agents and communities, who can secure their own livelihoods through competitive market strategies rather than depending on the state.

ICDS and Mahila Samakhyas are government programs that work with similar groups of women, but they belong to different moments of globalization, represent different national policy agendas, and have dissimilar organizational structures, strategies, and goals. We now analyze how these two programs compare in terms of everyday practices at the local level.

Globalization and the Everyday Practices of State Bureaucracies

Close ethnographic observation of the everyday practices of ICDS and Mahila Samakhyas reveals further differences and similarities between them in the self-perceptions of functionaries and the signifying functions of two very different technologies of administration.

Bureaucratic Functioning and Self-Perception

One fascinating tussle about the meaning of work in the ICDS centers concerned the component of schooling. Contrary to the state’s efforts to portray them as volunteer workers, most of the workers whom Gupta interviewed referred to themselves as “teachers.” The state, in contrast, employed the discourse of motherhood in representing their efforts; what the workers did in the village centers was deemed an extension

of what a good mother would have done at home, the only difference being that they performed that function for more children than would normally be found in a household. By the state’s logic, therefore, their work differed in scope from but was qualitatively equivalent to mothering. By referring to themselves as teachers they emphasized the similarity of their work to that performed by teachers in elementary schools and its qualitative difference from work in the home. Center workers were proud of the students who had either refused to leave their centers to go to a “Montessori” (the name for any school that charged tuition and claimed to teach English as a subject) or returned to the centers because they had learned so much there. When, toward the end of January 1992, Gupta visited the center in Alipur, the Brahmin woman who was the worker there pointed to one of the girls in her class and explained that she had formerly walked a fair distance to a Montessori in an adjacent village and when she started attending the center regularly had discovered that her classmates knew more than she did. Sharmila commented that because the Montessori charged Rs.15 a month as tuition and the center taught children free, people in the village assumed that the education students received at the Montessori was better. “They don’t value this education because it is free.”

At one of their monthly meetings, the workers complained that, ironically, the superior education provided at the centers actually created problems. They claimed that as soon as the children learned a little bit at the center, their parents felt that they were too bright to stay there and would transfer them to a Montessori or a government-run primary school. The workers added that this was bad for the children because in the government schools they were packed 80 to a class and the teachers were usually found sipping tea in the courtyard instead of teaching. They pointed out that teachers in the government schools were paid thousands of rupees for their “efforts,” whereas center workers were compensated little for giving children individual attention.

The tension between “volunteer worker” and “teacher” was symptomatic of a more general contradiction that underlay the design of the program. On the one hand, it was clearly built on the notion that women, as the “natural” caregivers for children, would be best suited to introducing health and educational interventions to young children and to pregnant women and nursing mothers. On the other hand, its workers were expected to be professional in carrying out their duties and were bound to an even more impressive array of bureaucratic procedures and record keeping than better-paid counterparts in government service.

Like ICDS workers, Mahila Samakhyas functionaries were not considered government employees even though they worked for a government-sponsored program. In material terms this meant that they were hired on limited-term contracts (*anubandh*) and paid honoraria (*maandey*). In other words, they lacked the job security, status, employment benefits, and incomes enjoyed by government workers. Even though many women who worked for Mahila Samakhyas were

from local women’s groups and educational institutions, and it served as an inspiration for Mahila Samakhyas.

single and effective or actual heads of their households and even though economic self-reliance was defined by many program and government representatives as a key axis of empowerment, the survival needs of the program's personnel were not fully addressed. The fact that the material requirements of women functionaries of a program that targets women were overlooked reveals the welfarist logic that underpins this empowerment program. Empowerment was supposed to have signaled a move away from the welfare approach, but welfarist ideologies about women's reproductive work seem to underlie the program (see also Brown 1995). Along with ICDS workers, the women employed by Mahila Samakhya were seen as providing altruistic, voluntary service in helping move their disadvantaged sisters forward. One could argue that empowerment work done by and with women is considered a naturalized extension of women's reproductive work, which is economically unproductive and therefore deserves less remuneration.

How did employees engage with these ideologies about their work and their lack of economic self-sufficiency? As did ICDS workers, they saw their work as qualitatively different from their tasks at home. For instance, field-level workers (*sahyoginis*) often told Sharma that the program had allowed them to "emerge from their houses" (*ghar se bahar nikala hai*). They explained that their work had given them new access to public spaces and helped them develop new abilities, such as report writing, talking in public with men and women, leading training workshops, riding a bicycle, understanding bureaucratic hierarchies and procedures, and interacting with government representatives at all levels. Their work with Mahila Samakhya was therefore unlike the caretaking work they did at home as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters-in-law. They saw their work in mobilizing women's collectives as absolutely necessary for equitable national development. They often talked about how, for example, many large-scale development schemes failed because of corruption in the official ranks or because people were not given proper information about these programs. They saw their empowering interventions as not only important in and of themselves but also crucial to the success of other government development projects. It was through their efforts that rural women became aware of their rights and entitlements (rationed food, subsidized housing, employment, and income generation) and developed the skills to access these benefits. Sharma often observed field-level workers asking their clients about the regularity of health workers' visits or how the local ICDS centers were operating. Their job involved teaching rural women to monitor and question the work of various development functionaries in their area and hold them accountable. For them it was not ancillary "women's work" but central to development and change and therefore deserved better remuneration.

Although most Mahila Samakhya functionaries with whom Sharma spoke desired better economic benefits for their work, they did not necessarily want to be seen as government em-

ployees. Where the center workers that Gupta worked with identified themselves as teachers whose skills were on a par with or better than those of teachers, the workers that Sharma interviewed generally identified themselves as NGO activists rather than employees of a government-sponsored program. There were two main reasons for this. First, state functionaries are commonly described, in Indian public cultural discourses, as lazy, inefficient, corrupt people who rarely do any meaningful work. Mahila Samakhya employees distanced themselves from such images and highlighted their efficient, enthusiastic, and dedicated approach to their work. In the words of one activist, "People who work for Mahila Samakhya do not treat it like [a] government job. The salaries [we] get are not enough for survival. So the people who work in Mahila Samakhya do so only because they have a certain devotion toward their work. You don't see that in government departments [where] people come only for the sake of their salaries." Second, identifying themselves as government workers would have limited their ability to challenge other government agencies in their empowerment-related work. As Seema Singh explained, "The police belong to the government, the courts belong to the government. . . . When we take up [an empowerment-based] fight, we have to fight at all these levels. If we start believing that we are working for a government project and that we are government workers, then how will we fight [other] government people?" While they often dissociated themselves from the government, they commonly used governmental techniques in their everyday work and enacted statist authority when the situation demanded it.

Materializing the State: Traveling Signifiers and Enumeration Practices

Examining how jeeps were used in the two programs reveals the importance of the signifying effects of everyday practices and gives us a good idea of the programs' positions in and as "the state." A jeep is not merely a vehicle that can be used for rapid travel; it is above all a signifier of the official's rank in the hierarchy. Only some ICDS officials were entitled to use a jeep, and none of the officers at the block level except the project officer could do so. Of course, being allocated a jeep did not mean that one could use it; use was minutely regulated by government rules and by the yearly budget for such things as fuel and repairs. When Asha Agrawal took over as the head of the ICDS office in Mandi, she could not use the jeep that had been allotted to her because it had broken down and the money needed for repairs had not been authorized. As a result, she could not go on inspection trips to see how the centers were functioning. The workers, realizing that their supervisor was not going to conduct surprise inspections, stopped going to work, but Asha surprised them all by using public transportation to conduct inspections. When she found none of them working, she decided to give them all a warning at the next monthly meeting and then

resumed her inspections using the bus service. Her traveling by the same means that her workers and subordinates employed was most unusual. An officer was expected simply to wait until the socially appropriate mode of transport—the jeep—was back in operation.

Government jeeps usually had the name of the relevant department painted on their sides; when the vehicle belonged to someone relatively high up in the administrative hierarchy, it was even equipped with a flashing red light on the roof. Many lower-ranking officials, especially those in the town, were good at spotting these vehicles from a distance. As they were sitting in roadside tea stalls observing vehicles going past, they would speculate on why a certain official was heading in a particular direction that day.

Center workers were used to people arriving in jeeps to inspect their center. Once when Gupta showed up at a center, the helper anxiously inquired if he had arrived in a jeep. Sharmila, the center worker, explained that she had wanted to take a leave of absence that day, as she had some guests visiting from out of town, but her leave application had been denied by the project officer, who told her that an inspection by the head of the program for the entire state was expected. The project officer later told Gupta that she had to deny Sharmila's application because she did not know which project the joint director might suddenly decide to visit. The jeep was therefore not just a central signifier of authority and rank but also the chief mechanism for inspection, surveillance, and evaluation. It brought not only program officials but also representatives of foreign agencies aiding the program. For the workers, then, visitors who came in jeeps represented the multiple layers of authority to which they were subject, stretching from the district to foreign lands. As a normal and recurring practice, the inspection instantiated the transnationalism of the ICDS program for its staff and for villagers.

Mahila Samakhya offices at the state and district levels also used jeeps in their daily work. These jeeps were standard government-issue vehicles and prominently displayed both Mahila Samakhya boards and Government of India license plates. Each district office was given one jeep, which was primarily used by district program coordinators for program activities. Diya Verma, the coordinator of the Begumpur District, where Sharma conducted her fieldwork, used the jeep to meet clients, to oversee the operations of collectives and block offices, and to travel to special events such as training sessions, health camps, and women's courts (*nari adalats*) in the three program blocks in her area. She also used it to check on her field-level staff. She scheduled her visits according to the monthly work plans drawn up by the staff, which provided her with details about where *sahyoginis* were expected to be and what they would be doing on particular days of the month. While she generally planned her field visits in consultation with the *sahyoginis*, she also made surprise visits, and if she did not find them where they were supposed to be, she sometimes instructed the jeep driver to take her to their homes. However, overseeing field staff and disciplining

them was not easily accomplished. Verma complained that the jeep was too conspicuous and made too much noise to allow her surprise visits to be entirely unannounced—people would either see the jeep or hear it and inform the *sahyogini* concerned, giving her enough time to “pretend” to be just on her way to or back from her routine field visits. At times family members would cover for *sahyoginis* and tell Verma that they were out on their rounds when they were elsewhere.

The jeep was not only a marker of the superior rank of the district program coordinator but also symbolized the vertical authority and disciplinary power of the state. Some Mahila Samakhya personnel used the jeep when they wanted to enact statist authority and get their clients to comply with their wishes. For instance, Leela Vati, a *sahyogini*, accompanied by two of her colleagues, visited some villages in which the program was being phased out and told clients in these villages that they had to return the few things that their collectives had received from the program, such as pails, rugs, and storage trunks. (She had no explicit mandate from her superiors to demand these things from the clients.) Mahila Samakhya participants in Bilaspur village told Sharma that when they had refused to do as ordered she had threatened them—“If you don't return the things, the government jeep will come tomorrow, forcibly take everything, and dishonor you in front of everyone!” She also asked the leader of the Bilaspur collective to sign a blank sheet of paper. Residents alleged that she did so in order to cover her tracks—she could easily write a note on that piece of paper stating that the village women had voluntarily returned the things to her and thus avoid any accusations of wrongdoing. Leela Vati effectively used statist symbols and practices, such as the jeep and written proceduralism, to enact official authority and played on the clients' fear of state disciplinary and coercive power.

While the jeep was useful when surveillance, authority, or discipline was required, it could also hamper the functionaries' work. The presence of the jeep highlighted Mahila Samakhya's connections to the government in situations when staff members needed to delink themselves from the state (see Sharma 2006). For example, the Mahila Samakhya office in Nizabad Block was housed in a private home, and the landlady was not only charging a higher rent than she had originally asked but also threatening further increases. The local political party functionary who had helped them secure this office space explained to the program's representatives and Sharma that the landlady was doing this because she saw that the program staff was operating “like government workers” and assumed that she could therefore extract “more *maal* [money]” from them. When local team members sought alternative office spaces, a middle-level farmer in the area showed them a large grain facility which had earlier doubled as a bank office and quoted a rent of Rs. 740. Danu Bai, a block-level team member, pleaded with him to lower the rent. Mahila Samakhya was an NGO, she told him, and could not afford market rents: “Even Rs. 500 is too much for us.” But the landlord was unwilling to negotiate. As the team was

leaving his house, its driver speculated that the landlord had demanded a higher rent because it had arrived in a government jeep.

These instances are indicative of how people imagine the state. Two landlords appear to have believed that Mahila Samakhyā was a government program (on the basis of the program jeep and the daily work practices of its functionaries) and could therefore be “milked” for money. The program’s rural clients also constructed the state as giver (Sharma 2006). In their experience, most development programs promised tangible resources to their participants, and they expected the same from Mahila Samakhyā. The program was not, however, a service delivery program, and its functionaries had to position it as an NGO when introducing it to potential clients. Because it was an NGO, they explained to village women, it did not have much to give. In so doing they played on the apparent association between the state and material resources and reinforced the state’s image as a provider.

In other instances, however, when functionaries introduced Mahila Samakhyā as a government program to enact statist authority, rural subalterns contested it.

Although enumeration was not a stated goal of either program, it ended up being an important function for both. As in all government programs, the collection of data, whether or not those data served any purpose, was built in, and ICDS in particular was incessantly evaluated. There were literally hundreds of evaluation reports of ICDS prepared for different blocks and regions, quite out of proportion to the resources that were then being invested in the program. One of the reasons for this may have been the heavy involvement of transnational actors, for whom evaluation was a critical tool for measuring the performance of their development portfolio. One way to measure performance was to record the numbers of beneficiaries, and therefore the government required center workers to document that they were indeed meeting the program’s targets. Finally, since women and children were poorly represented in official statistics, village surveys helped determine whether a new center was needed and also provided better information about local residents.

In fact, ICDS produced a quiet revolution in the generation of rural statistics. In villages where centers operated, records were being kept on births and deaths in rural areas for perhaps the first time in the history of the nation. This amounted to a quantum leap in data collection, particularly with respect to fertility and infant mortality, on a segment of the population whose low level of literacy and lack of participation in the formal economy had kept it relatively insulated from state surveillance. What differentiated the center worker from the census taker was her familiarity with the village. Even when she kept her distance from the social life of the village, its politics and divisions, she still knew a great deal more about individuals and families than any other state official could possibly know. More important, she learned a great deal about women.

When center workers were required to do a village survey,

however, they often encountered unexpected resistance. At one of the monthly meetings of workers that Gupta attended, several of them reported the difficulties that they were experiencing in collecting information. One said that villagers refused to allow their children to be weighed. One day, as part of her duties, she had weighed some children, and the next day one of them had fallen ill. His sibling told the rest of the family that he had been weighed the previous day. Weighing children and pronouncing them healthy was considered reason enough to attract the “evil eye.”¹⁹ After that day, none of the households in the village would allow their children to attend the center. “When you don’t feed the children,” they asked, “why do you weigh them?” She could not convince them that no harm would come to the children by weighing them. Similarly, some workers reported that when they went from door to door to do a survey of the population, people often refused to cooperate with them. “Why do you come to our house to do the survey when we have to come to you for inoculations and injections?” they were asked. “You should just sit at the center and do the survey there.” When they asked questions about all the members of the family, they were again challenged: “When you feed only the children, why do you want to take a survey that includes everyone? Why do you want to find out who has died—are you going to feed the dead, too?” The workers said that they had no good answers to such questions and were sometimes unable to carry out their survey work.

For the agencies funding and supporting ICDS, monitoring the weight of children was important both because it helped provide the justification for the program in areas where a large proportion of children were malnourished and because it could demonstrate the effectiveness of supplementary nutrition as an essential component of the program. Similarly, surveying the entire population could provide helpful data on the proportion of the population that was composed of children under five, the sex ratio, and the size and composition of families. But such surveys provided no tangible benefits to recipients, who may have had good reason to be wary of knowledge collected about them that appeared to have no relation to the services provided.

In the Mahila Samakhyā program enumeration techniques were used in a slightly different way. Since it was not a target-driven program, the purpose of enumeration was not so much to count the women reached through various initiatives as to document empowerment processes. Field staff regularly submitted reports that detailed and critically evaluated their interventions with various collectives on different issues over a particular period. These documents were consolidated into quarterly and annual reports drawn up by program functionaries at the district and state levels. They sought to capture, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the empowering effects of the program’s strategies for participants. While pro-

19. Belief in the “evil eye” is common in large parts of the South Asian subcontinent.

gram personnel and designers viewed the qualitative dimension of these efforts as the most important way of ensuring critical program feedback and recording change, they complained to Sharma in 1999 that targets were beginning to creep into the program. Some bureaucrats, for instance, wanted “hard” evidence on the effects of literacy efforts (for instance, how many women and adolescent girls trained were able to pass different grade-level examinations). Even though they understood the importance of numbers for the government and funders, they were uncomfortable with such superficial quantification of empowering education, which did nothing to highlight the more meaningful and to some extent unquantifiable changes that had happened in their clients’ lives through the program.²⁰

The qualitative and largely non-target-driven focus of the program did not, however, mean that techniques such as surveys and participatory rural appraisals were not used. In order to get a sense of the status of their potential clients and of the daily issues these women faced and to make strategic interventions in women’s lives, functionaries periodically conducted baseline household surveys in villages. Sharma observed one such survey encounter in the village of Banipur, where staff members hoped to initiate the program. A survey team consisting of *sahyoginis* and teachers from village-level preschools prepared a questionnaire that included general indicators such as poverty, literacy, and family size and specific questions about women’s socioeconomic status.²¹ Rani Kumari was selected to be the team leader.

One day in December 1998, the survey team, along with Sharma, set out for Banipur in the program’s jeep. The driver parked the jeep outside the Dalit hamlet of the village, and the team walked to the middle of the hamlet, which proved deserted. When an older woman holding a sickle in her hand appeared from around the corner, Rani walked up to the woman and, without introducing herself, asked her where everyone was. The woman told us that everyone was working in the fields. Rani took out her pen and questionnaire and asked the woman her name. The woman eyed her suspiciously. “First you tell me why you are here, and then I will tell you my name.” Bindu, a Mahila Samakhya preschool teacher, walked up to the woman and said, “Sister, we are here to start a school for your children. We have come here

to listen to your problems.” The woman looked at Bindu, unconvinced, and replied, “Are you here for votes?” Rani shook her head and said that they wanted to conduct a survey of the village and write down residents’ names. The woman paused for a moment and then said, “It is your job to write our names down. You will write our names for the purpose of your job and leave. Meanwhile we will continue to live our lives of drudgery and servitude.” At this Rani said, “All right, I will tell you my name.” But the woman interrupted Rani: “What will I do with your name? Go and tell your name to the government!” As an afterthought she added, “Are you writing our names in order to give us money?” Rani said no and introduced herself as a representative of the Mahila Samakhya program. She explained that it was a government program that worked with poor women and gave them information on their rights. After listening to Rani, the woman said, “If you want to write my name down, then give me a piece of paper with your name on it.” Purba chuckled softly and remarked, “This one knows about her rights!” The village woman ignored Purba and continued, “You can write my name down only if you give me money.” Rani seemed a bit irritated. “All right, then,” she said, “we will leave. It was nice meeting you. Let us shake hands.” But the village woman had caught the sarcastic undertone in Rani’s voice and refused to shake hands. “Why should I shake your hand? I will do it only if you offer it with love,” she said defiantly. Everyone said, “Yes, of course, with love,” and shook hands. The Mahila Samakhya representatives still had not learned the woman’s name.

As the members of the team walked back toward the jeep, they ran into a group of women and men. Upon finding out that they were residents of Banipur, Rani told them that her team represented Mahila Samakhya, a government program, and wanted to conduct a survey. One woman stated, “Sure, write down the names of all 11 members of my family—maybe we will get some food in return for telling you our names.” Accordingly, staff members started conducting the survey. An old man approached Purba. “What are you writing, *sarkar*?” he asked. *Sarkar* is a Hindi word for the state or government and is also used to address powerful people. “We do not have any facilities here,” he continued, without waiting for Purba’s reply. “We don’t even have water. . . . You people should help us.” Meanwhile Prema was trying to persuade a man to participate in the survey. “People have come here before and taken our names, and then nothing happens,” he said, and declined to answer any questions. Other residents agreed to be surveyed. When asked about their household income, some specified that they belonged to the “below the poverty line” category, indicating that they were familiar not only with survey exercises and categories but also with the special government benefits available to people living below the official poverty line. Once the survey was over, the team members walked back to the jeep. There they were approached by four men, one of whom remarked, “This jeep is from the Department of Education.” He looked at us and said loudly,

20. Other staff members expressed relief that Mahila Samakhya was a Department of Education program and they were forced to report only literacy-related figures. Had it been a program of the Health Ministry, they told Sharma, they would have had to meet family-planning targets imposed from above.

21. Mahila Samakhya operates village-level alternative preschools in program villages that do not have ICDS centers so as not to duplicate efforts. In 1998 full-time *sahyoginis* drew honoraria that were nearly equivalent to the prevailing government-stipulated minimum daily wage for skilled work. The minimum wage of Rs. 54 per day amounted to a monthly earning of Rs. 1,350 (approximately \$30, based on a 25-day work-month). *Sahyoginis* earned Rs. 1,500 per month for working longer hours. In addition to their honoraria, they received a travel allowance of up to Rs. 300 per month (approximately \$7).

"All development programs have failed in this village," and walked on.

The Banipur census encounter illustrates several things about "the state," authority, and subversion. Routine activities of recording such as the census are critical governmental practices that help reproduce the state and its vertical authority. The Mahila Samakhya jeep, Rani's identification of the program as a government one, and her manner were perceived as markers of statist authority by the Banipur villagers, who also associated data-gathering activities with the state. Surveying was a familiar bureaucratic method of intervention in their lives. Government workers had previously surveyed them for development purposes, and party workers had visited Banipur during elections and made promises. But these vote- and development-related data collection exercises had not resulted in any material gains for the residents. Some villagers were therefore wary of a group of urban, official-looking women who dressed differently, spoke a different dialect of Hindi, arrived in a government vehicle, asked questions, and recorded the answers on paper. They associated all these symbols and practices with statist power, and some of them even referred to staff members as *sarkar*, thus underlining the power inequalities between themselves and the surveyors.

The encounter also illustrates how representations of the state are bound up with both power and material need. It shows the extent to which those who are outside state institutions, such as the purported beneficiaries of government development schemes, challenge the inequalities inherent in everyday state procedures such as information gathering and demand entitlements in exchange. The two residents who refused to be surveyed underscored the fruitlessness of survey efforts. The first woman the Mahila Samakhya team encountered said, "You will write our names for the purpose of your job and leave. Meanwhile we will continue to live our lives of drudgery." This was more than just a bitter comment about unfulfilled promises—it was clearly an attack on the privilege and power of others. This woman also asked for the staff members' names in exchange for revealing hers, thereby attempting to reverse the power equation and demanding accountability where usually none exists.

While the governmental practice of data gathering ostensibly allows the state to produce particular kinds of knowledge about targeted populations and regulate these people's lives (Appadurai 1993; Cohn 1987), the Banipur incident shows how disciplining and the reproduction of state power through surveys is neither unproblematic nor complete. While some residents refused to participate, others pointed to the lack of government-provided development facilities in the village. An elderly man, for instance, asked for the team's help in getting development goods, and a woman agreed to participate in the survey in the hope of receiving food for her family. By refusing to be surveyed, lamenting the lack of development, and demanding money and other material benefits in return

for answering questions, these villagers contested governmental practices and disrupted their regulatory reach.

By placing its stress on operational similarities, this comparison of ICDS and Mahila Samakhya may give the mistaken impression that there is little to distinguish the two programs. Our point is simply that, given what the two programs symbolize about the state and globalization, an ethnographic examination reveals unexpected and surprising parallels. Looking at practices that materialize the state for employees and beneficiaries and thinking about how employees themselves represent the state and their own role within it helps us to evaluate the changing relation of the state to neoliberal globalization.

Conclusion: Globalization, Welfare, and Empowerment

We began this paper by arguing that an anthropological approach to the relationship between globalization and the state which pays attention to the cultural and transnational dynamics of state formation yields distinctive insights for several reasons. One powerfully marginalizing view of anthropology among other social sciences and in some policy circles is that the insights provided by anthropologists are merely "local" and cannot be generalized.²² We contend instead that an ethnographic examination of the state in the context of globalization helps broaden the scope of state theory while underscoring the particularities of specific cases and contexts.²³ One way in which we have demonstrated this broadening is through our focus on the everyday practices of two development bureaucracies of the Indian state. We have shown that analyzing particular state bureaucracies complicates the picture of state reform during the neoliberal era. Clearly the issues of neoliberal government and state reform can be approached through different lenses. Much work on contemporary state reform in India has in fact focused on tracking changes in trade and finance regimes, the deregulation of markets, and the dismantling of subsidies and of the license-permit raj, etc. Many scholars have commented on the dangers of the retreat of the state for the lives and survival of marginalized populations such as rural women, but few have actually conducted detailed investigations of precisely how neoliberal globalization is transforming the redistributive functions of the Indian state or affecting its legitimacy and identity as an agency of social welfare.

In addition, by juxtaposing the everyday practices of state agencies at different levels with the broad shifts in national

22. This criticism comes from a certain obsession with "scaling up" that is itself often dependent on the erasure of history and a gridlike view of space that sees it as homogeneous and empty, hence susceptible to aggregation in this manner.

23. By appearing to use the terms "anthropological" and "ethnographic" as synonyms, we do not intend to reduce the former to the latter, recognizing fully that not all anthropological approaches are necessarily ethnographic. However, in this particular case, such a substitution is justified.

policy, we further complicate the notion of state “reform.” Changes at the national level may or may not be reflected in the everyday practices of government officials and agencies at the level of the regional state, district, or subdistrict. Our analysis shows that neoliberalism impacts various state sectors and levels differently and thus marks the specificity of global neoliberal processes. Our intention is to complicate overarching notions of state reform that are in fact based largely or exclusively on Western liberal democratic state policies. For example, the commonplace that neoliberalism results in cutbacks to welfare is hard to “generalize” for states that have never been welfare states. We contend that the approach we take to the study of global neoliberalism—which emphasizes the cultural and transnational—is generalizable. This approach, when applied to different contexts, may yield important insights into the nature, extent, spatial location, and contradictions of neoliberal transformation of rule and states. It may help reveal the unevenness of neoliberal transformation and perhaps point to unexpected overlaps across contexts through which a more nuanced picture of global neoliberalism can be achieved.

A cultural and transnational perspective allows one to go beyond the institutions, official policies, and plans that are often placed at the center of the analysis to consider the multiple ways in which such institutions and policies are contested. In the case of the two programs we have examined, a vast gap separated them in terms of institutional design, policy objectives, the ideologies embedded in them, and the global political-economic context in which they were conceived. However much they differed in these important dimensions, they were similar in many of their everyday practices. In the eyes of villagers, these continuities were often more important than the structural and ideological distinctions. If we were to ignore such facets of states, we might well conclude that epochal changes were taking place when they might not have been perceived as such by the targets and beneficiaries of such programs or even by some government officials. For this reason, the articulation of everyday practices and representations with political economy, social structure, and institutional design provides us with a wider lens with which to examine the continuities and discontinuities in states.

Perceptions of the state are critical in mediating the relationship of citizens and officials to the state as an institution. We have argued that to the degree that “the state” is represented *as if* it had coherence and unity, an enormous amount of cultural work has to go into securing that coherence. The legitimacy and authority of the state are critically dependent on the success of this cultural labor, and much of this labor is done without calling attention to itself. In other words, the routine, everyday practices of state bureaucracies perform a critical cultural function in helping to represent the state as coherent and unitary even when (perhaps especially when) they are not overtly seeking to do so. It is through such practices that the state becomes a material force in people’s lives and through which domination is legitimized. For ex-

ample, when ICDS and Mahila Samakhya employees claimed or rejected identification as government workers, they conveyed certain ideas about what it means to work for the state and about the social and economic capital associated with this kind of work. Further, when Mahila Samakhya workers rebuffed demands for entitlements by saying that they were merely an NGO, not a government organization, they were endorsing and perpetuating a belief that it is and should be the government’s job to distribute entitlements and to take care of the indigent. In other words, in the very act of distinguishing their own activities from those of state employees, they were creating an image and expectation of legitimate state action.

An anthropological approach highlights the different levels, sites, and scales of the state and the conflicts between and within them. Fieldwork forces anthropologists to situate themselves within the complex organizational structure of “the state.” This is not because fieldwork is best carried out at the local level of a bureaucracy; participant-observation can in fact be conducted equally well in cabinet meetings. For example, Sharma conducted fieldwork at several different levels of the Mahila Samakhya program. However, no matter what the site of it, ethnographic fieldwork makes one acutely aware of why the organizational and spatial dispersion of the state matters. Theoretically, a focus on the cultural construction of the state makes its unity a problem to be explained rather than a point of departure for the analysis. Disagreement and dissension characterize these bureaucracies, and there may be systematic tendencies pulling in different directions at each level of the organization or in particular offices and individual locations.²⁴ For example, some politicians and bureaucrats, across various institutional levels of the state, tended to view the Mahila Samakhya’s program’s aim of empowering women to challenge social and state hierarchies as a threat. The program’s personnel often criticized the ignorance, suspicion, or overt hostility they encountered from block- and district-level officials. Bureaucrats sometimes expressed distrust of a program that threatened their authority and the status quo by questioning the very meaning of women’s empowerment, while others went so far as to ask Mahila Samakhya workers if they were trying to break up families. These reactions demonstrate that the state is neither a singular actor nor a perfectly integrated, Weberian ideal-type machine but a multilayered and conflictual ensemble. Policy agendas set at the national level are not necessarily endorsed and understood across the various institutional levels of the state. Some initiatives, in fact, are actively subverted by state representatives and therefore never properly implemented. These inconsistencies, conflicts, and “corruptions,” revealed through careful ethnographic analysis, are not incidental but lie at the

24. We are not assuming that systematic pulls in one direction or another will be found. We merely posit that this is a possibility that requires empirical study.

very heart of the institutional organization and reproduction of states.

Thinking about the different levels, sites, and scales of the state also directs us to the role of transnational ideologies, institutions, and processes of governance. National policies and programs have historically emerged in articulation with transnational ideologies and the agendas of transnational institutions. For example, one could ask to what degree support for the rapid expansion of the ICDS program was dependent on the emergence of the Cairo consensus on population policy. Similarly, what is one to make of the coincidence of the timing of the start of the Mahila Samakhya program with the global promotion of neoliberal ideologies by multilateral institutions that are dominated by powerful Western states such as the United States and the UK?

Even as one examines the articulation of transitional ideologies with national policy-making processes, however, one should be wary of arguments that appear to “read off” trends in India from dominant global processes. Despite the influence of transnational institutions and ideologies on the Indian experience, it would be a mistake to assume that welfare or empowerment programs in India are simply a reflection of global trends. The two programs we have looked at almost stereotypically represent two different moments of globalization and modes of government. ICDS is a “classic” (albeit not in the Western sense) welfare program in which a paternalist state promises to look after indigent women; by contrast, Mahila Samakhya seems to exemplify the neoliberal emphasis on self-government and self-actualization. And yet a closer look reveals paradoxical and contradictory processes at work within each program and across them. For example, embedded within the Mahila Samakhya program are not just ideas about the self promoted by neoliberal capitalism but concepts from transnational feminist movements for social change and from methods of radical pedagogy. The program explicitly draws upon the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as well as on national and transnational feminist movements which problematized the view of women as passive recipients of charity. Empowerment as a goal is thus the result of specific historical conjunctures with many different and unlikely partners. One outcome of this is that instead of a purely neoliberal emphasis on individual agency and responsibility, Mahila Samakhya exhibits a contradictory commitment to empowerment as a *collective* goal. This points to the need for greater attention to the historical and conjunctural nature of neoliberal governmentality and “the end of welfare” in different places and times.²⁵

An argument that is often proposed to explain the rise of empowerment programs under neoliberalism is that they serve the important purpose of transforming the state. Neoliberal thought sees large-scale redistributive programs as unproductive because they increase recipients’ dependency on

the state rather than helping to make the state “leaner” and more efficient. By contrast, empowerment programs that do not deliver goods and services to various client groups cost very little. Further, they help reduce social-sector spending and enable the state to shrink. The shift to neoliberal governmentality in the West has seen the dismantling of “welfare as we know it” and its replacement by empowerment programs such as “workfare” (Clarke 2004, 21–25). In this context, neoliberal policies follow and replace welfare programs—these constitute modes of governmentality that are sequential.

What we see in the Indian case is that these two modes of governmentality are not sequential but propagated simultaneously. For instance, the empowerment focus of Mahila Samakhya was supposed to have replaced welfare approaches to women’s development, but Sharma’s work on its employment practices reveals the extent to which welfarist ideologies of women’s reproductive work underlie it. Furthermore, the initiation of empowerment programs did not mean an end to welfare programs. In fact, ICDS was not scaled down; on the contrary, it was extended to every one of the 5,380 blocks in the country. In order to understand a move such as this that appears to run contrary to global trends, one has to situate these programs in the political and economic context of contemporary India. In the context of populist democratic politics, the growth of ICDS is attributable to the efforts of ruling coalitions to build and maintain legitimacy after the opening of the economy to global markets. Liberalization in this sense is largely interpreted as a project by urban elites for urban elites. There is an ever more visible and growing gap between participants in global circuits of exchange and employment and those outside it who constitute a majority of the population and who are unable to benefit from liberalization because of a lack of global markets for what they produce or because they lack the appropriate education or familiarity with English.²⁶ Politically, there are therefore strong democratic pressures on the government to intervene in favor of those being left behind by the market liberalization.²⁷ Distributive programs contribute in important ways to the legitimacy of governments. Sushil Chakrabarty, a former bureaucrat, told Sharma that while the Indian state should certainly implement more programs like Mahila Samakhya, it “is under a major, major constraint—and that is the constraint of democracy. . . . The state will face a continuous

26. Even though such people benefit from more rapid growth, the income and wealth gap between them and people such as software engineers and call-center workers is increasing.

27. The present government has been especially attentive to these issues, as it is widely perceived that the previous coalition government was defeated at the polls because it did not pay enough attention to distributive concerns. The poster boy for the political cost of neglecting the unwired majority was Chandrababu Naidu, the computer-savvy chief minister of Andhra Pradesh. Naidu achieved a high profile on the national and international stages by championing the information technology sector, the fastest-growing sector of the Indian economy. Despite this, and despite the fact that his state achieved some of the highest growth rates in the country, his party was soundly defeated in the last elections.

25. Clarke (2004, 15–19) points out that the end-of-welfare argument is hard to sustain even for the West.

demand to expand ICDS, to do more of service delivery, because expansion of service delivery sustains governments and Members of Parliament. So I don't think that the state can ever stop doing programs like ICDS." Another bureaucrat stressed the complementarity of the two programs: "Welfare activities are helpful because they make it possible for women to 'be,'" but they "do not help women acquire a voice, much less a say in the affairs of the family and the social system." This is where empowerment programs that "influence [women's] minds become important."

Large government programs create their own support in political and bureaucratic circles, and this makes them hard to dismantle or replace. Inexpensive empowerment programs are less attractive for some political representatives and bureaucratic functionaries precisely because they do not help their implementers achieve political clout or electoral support. Many senior administrators in the central government in New Delhi, for instance, supported Mahila Samakhya. It was in fact a farsighted civil servant, Anil Bordia, who developed the program with critical input from women's groups and development activists. But Sharma's informants said that as a relatively underfunded "women's" program it was at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other programs in a context in which the socioeconomic capital and power of state officials is associated with their capacity to distribute material benefits. Anu Chopra, a New Delhi-based development activist, told Sharma that it could never compete with the large-scale government development programs that distributed resources. "If you do not have anything to give, in the government's eyes . . . you are not important. Your mandate . . . is not significant at the government level." The relative lack of authority and significance accorded to a state-initiated program that targets women, employs primarily women, has a relatively small budget, and does not distribute tangibles to its clients also underscores the hierarchical and gendered ideologies congealed in statist structures and policies (see also Brown 1995; Fraser 1989; Menon and Bhasin 1993; Sunder Rajan 2003).

All these issues point to the various reasons that the Indian state has not dismantled its welfarist identity and bureaucracy. Interestingly, the government's continued implementation of welfare interventions such as ICDS might not have been possible without the transformation of the economy after liberalization. Because liberalization has led to higher rates of growth, government revenues have been increasing despite cuts in tariffs and taxes, and this has made more resources available for redistributive purposes. Once again, we see contradictory forces at work to create this particular conjuncture: the ideology of neoliberal governmentality supports cutting back, not increasing, welfare programs, but the pressures of the pursuit of legitimacy in a democratic politics and the growing economic resources that allow for this possibility have resulted in an expansion of ICDS.

Our ethnographic analysis of two Indian government-sponsored development programs enables us to see how the historically contingent nature of neoliberal governmentality

and the "end of welfare" result in a different outcome for a postcolonial state than for welfare states in the West.²⁸ Neoliberal empowerment programs in India do not follow and displace welfare programs. What we see instead is the rapid expansion of both types of programs. Neoliberalism as a global phenomenon articulates with the specific histories and policies of nation-states to produce outcomes whose meaning and shape can be revealed only by a conjunctural analysis. We have shown that a cultural and transnational approach to the state allows us to see continuities at the level of everyday practices that may cut across ideological and institutional frameworks. What agencies of the state actually do in their daily operations, what such actions signify to the population and to officials, and how all of this cultural work enables the idea of "the state" as a singular object to emerge are essential questions that can be illuminated by an anthropological approach. Such an approach, by integrating political economic, social structural, and institutional approaches with the meanings generated by everyday practices and representations, allows us to understand transformations in states in a complex, historically nuanced, and meaningful way.

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Comments

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Gupta and Sharma's paper is valuable because it focuses on neoliberal governmentality through comparative ethnographic analysis in a non-European context. Both in its comparative focus and in its deployment of a governmental approach for a developing country, the paper occupies ground that is relatively sparsely populated. Because I find so much

28. In fact, the current government is now proposing a massive expansion of welfare through the expansion of an employment guarantee scheme under which every rural household, no matter what its economic status, is to receive 100 days of employment a year.

to like and admire in the paper (as I suspect will many anthropologists), it is perhaps unnecessary to record the particularities of my admiration. Nor does it seem useful to enumerate specific quibbles with elements of the paper that appear to me less central to its overall argument about neoliberal governmentality and more related to the fact that it is a paper written by anthropologists for (mostly) anthropologists. Instead, let me suggest three ways (there are surely others) in which the important domain of analysis and practice signaled by Gupta and Sharma needs to be and can be further enriched.

The first of these concerns the mechanisms through which government-at-a-distance works. Gupta and Sharma borrow the term from other observers of neoliberal government, probably for its evocative power and analytical possibilities, but the term has important limitations when applied to various forms of government—limitations that were presumably not the concern of those who coined it. In suggesting that government works at a distance by appealing to our general sense, even knowledge, that it often does, the phrase both obscures *how* it works and occludes the instances in which it does not. Therefore, the basic and important mechanisms that either presuppose government-at-a-distance or must be created and cultivated by it need greater and more systematic elaboration. We particularly need to understand better the conditions under which such mechanisms produce their effects and the forces that undermine their effectiveness. Relatedly, we need to be able to trace better not only the filaments of reason that allow the power of government to become part of the social body but also the contingent crystallizations of social practice that are leveraged as projects of government.

A second theme, flowing from the first, concerns the relationship between power and subjectivity. Even if neoliberal government is about shaping the subject's conduct in the light of reason, the emergence of the subject and the workings of reason are never innocent of power. Therefore, an elaboration of the means through which government overcomes obstacles and reconfigures conduct must involve an examination of the processes at play in the constitution of the self. Ethnographic approaches to the workings of government are perhaps uniquely equipped to uncover the development of selves. But although ethnographic work has begun to demonstrate a preoccupation with subject formation, ethnographies of government can usefully focus on this process far more insistently and insightfully. Of course, to do so, ethnography will have to become seriously historical, with all the costs that such seriousness will entail, but what better reason can there be for going not just "native" but also historical?

Finally, the very force of critiques that use the optic of government to create "complex, historically nuanced, and meaningful" understandings of states and their projects leads to a question that scholars of government have grappled with too little. What is the relationship between critique and its object? The question is especially pertinent for studies of government that are concerned with state actions in such fraught

fields as development or environmental conservation. Complexity, historical nuance, and meaning are standards that when invoked here have the effect of situating critique perpetually in a relationship of exteriority to its political object. The marginalization of anthropology or ethnography may or may not be about its preoccupation with the local (and, I must confess, I find Gupta and Sharma's defense insufficiently developed on this score), but it is certainly in large measure a result of the terms in which and the objectives toward which ethnographic analysis is rendered. Let me suggest that these terms, "complex, historical, nuanced, and meaningful" are actually code words that serve primarily to maintain a distinction—to set particular kinds of analyses apart from others. Thus, development policy analyses and papers without any interest in governmentality can be as complex, nuanced, historical, and meaningful as those relying on governmentality—of course, in very different ways. The question, then, is what exactly scholarship on government accomplishes by situating itself as critique. Without a satisfactory or at least an adequate engagement with this question, the field of governmental studies will certainly fail to influence what happens to those with whom it is presumably most concerned—the subjects of government.

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Few anthropologists today would disagree with Gupta and Sharma's claim that "by considering everyday practices of bureaucracies and representations of the state, we obtain new insights into states as cultural artifacts." The point has been well established in the past decade. Gupta himself has offered a pioneering example of how to study the state in its mundane and cultural aspects (Gupta 1995). Here, however, Gupta and Sharma go farther, articulating these insights "with the political economy of transnational ideologies, institutions, and processes of governance." Such an articulation indeed provides a "much richer understanding of the emerging nature of states in conditions of neoliberal globalization." Their respective studies of two projects conducted under different auspices and at different moments of economic liberalization in rural India reveal unexpected similarities and, more important, *continuities*—structural and ideological—between welfare-driven assistance programs and neoliberal empowerment ones. This is an important point that they address at length and one that contributes richly to current debates about economic liberalization. Yet there are at least three directions which an anthropological study of "globalization and postcolonial states" might take farther.

First, one could interrogate the very notion of "globalization" and ponder its current neoliberal and even transna-

tional conceptual framework. Is “globalization” only about economic liberalization and neoliberal governmentality in and across nation-states in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? Gupta and Sharma seem to suggest so when they say, “The present era is sometimes glossed as one of ‘neoliberal governmentality.’” Yet envisaging a historical perspective in the *longue durée* questions such a claim to uniqueness. The contributors to Hopkins’s (2002) illuminating volume, for instance, show that flows of goods, capital, ideas, and populations are not a recent phenomenon. Rather, the national formations emerging over the past 200 years reconfigured and constrained these already existing—although to varying extents—flows in many parts of the world.

Drawing attention to the historicity of “globalization” renders more salient its factitiousness today. Drawing on Abrams (1988) and Mitchell (1999) and acknowledging, as Gupta and Sharma do, the illusory character and contested nature of the “ensemble” of the state, one might ask whether, just as the state apparatus and institutions are producers of the “state’s effects,” globalization might be better understood as a “discursive effect” primarily produced by the neoliberal rhetoric of nation-states (Ferguson 2005) and international and transnational institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and others). Consequently, we may want to address “globalization” as the product of an ideological discourse, that of neoliberalism itself. Of course, this discourse is a performative one that produces real effects on people’s lives, as Gupta and Sharma show. Yet, by bringing to the fore the unexpected *continuities* existing between the two projects under consideration, they are providing the beginning of an argument about the “effects of globalization” that might be made more explicit.

Secondly, one might emphasize the last four syllables in the phrase “neoliberal governmentality,” although the concept of “mentality” has suffered an irrefragable blow since G. E. R. Lloyd’s (1990) work. At stake is obviously not a different “mentality” accounting for the working of the state in India. Rather, it is the way bureaucracy—the backbone of “the state”—operates within particular confines that, though situated at the intersection of transnational projects, are culturally produced. Drawing on a recent genealogy of works on “the state,” including Steinmetz’s (1999) seminal volume, Gupta and Sharma rightly draw attention to the “enormous amount of cultural work” that has to be undertaken “to construct ‘the state’ as a singular object.” Regardless of what goes on within the state pyramid, what most social actors experience is the *fragmentary* nature of the nation-state’s project in the production of the nation, the region, or the locality. The latter fragmentary and protean production gets entangled in webs of cultural meaning and quotidian interactions with local social and historical actors as much as mass media and other forms of public culture. Yet for all the theoretical emphasis on the cultural dimension of these processes, they remain in need of fuller documentation. It is unclear how the surveillance practices described (surprise checks, etc.) or the

continuities uncovered are “culturally specific,” as the phrase goes. Similar kinds of continuities and surveillance practices have been documented across the subcontinent and elsewhere, which would rather suggest a structural similarity of state practices. What is therefore needed is a documenting of how these practices form part and parcel of local, cultural understandings of hierarchy, power and authority, gender, caste, and class.

Congruently, an anthropological study of “globalization and postcolonial states” would benefit from documenting what the notion of “globalization” means for social actors locally reconstructing the state and governance in India. To what extent do understandings of “the state” and of “globalization” differ, oppose, or complement one another? For instance, for Marathi-speaking actors in western India, the notion of “globalization” encapsulates complex bundles of ideas about socioeconomic opportunities and technological progress coupled with anxieties about cultural and linguistic loss which “the state” is called upon to enable and placate respectively (Benei 2005). Finding out more about the cultural and other registers that villagers’ and development workers’ understandings play into would again illuminate the “cultural work” that Gupta and Sharma seek to document.

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This article makes an important contribution to analyses of the state in three critical ways. First, it provides an approach to disaggregating the state in empirical and theoretical ways, breaking up the monolithic conception of the state that has dominated the social sciences. Secondly, it decentres the state in analytical terms, placing it in a more processual and relational frame of analysis. Thirdly, it challenges the conventional temporal and spatial models or typologies of state-centred studies. Any one of these would be a worthwhile contribution. To discover all three in one article is a rare pleasure.

In this comment I want to touch on the significance of these three breaks with convention for studies of the state beyond anthropology. Within anthropology, it is possible to trace the lineage of the arguments here in the authors’ own works and in many of the studies cited. Elsewhere—in politics, sociology, and my own field of social policy—state-centred scholarship has struggled to break out of a structuralist conception of the state and to escape from the typologies of time (periodization) and space (normative comparison) that frame studies of states and welfare states. In this context, the disaggregation of the state proposed here opens up the relationship between ideas of the state and their enactment in multiple institutions and practices. The ethnographic examples examined show how this approach might be productive for studies of the idea and enactment of the “welfare state” in

European and other settings. The idea of the “welfare state” has been mobilized in different institutional forms and practices, but it has rarely been interrogated as an idea or “keyword” in Raymond Williams’s sense. The analytic frame offered might provide a more insightful approach to the multiple, shifting, and contested ideas of the “welfare state” (or how the ideas of welfare and state have been combined) in place of the formalized typologies of comparison.

Secondly, the ethnographic foundation for Gupta and Sharma’s approach moves us out of a narrowly institutionalist conception of the state. This institutionalism delivers strangely disembodied and inert visions of states set apart from society or the economy. Here we are invited to think of states processually (in motion, in action, and in practice) and relationally. One of the telling points of the article is the encounter between a Mahila Samakhya survey team and Banipur residents. Here are subjects negotiating their relationships with the state—materializing its habitual practices, its reach, and its limits in the encounter—and the state’s “arm’s-length” agents in the programme are not the only knowledgeable or expert actors. On the contrary, the residents appear highly capable of deploying expertise about “the state” and its categories. So, too, in studies of welfare states we might build on more ethnographic approaches that reveal how “policy” is constructed in the encounters between state agents and different sorts of citizens. At the same time, the problems of enacting and embodying the idea of the state in more ambiguous organizational forms such as the Mahila Samakhya programme raise difficult questions about how to theorize new formations that are constructed as more dispersed or disaggregated. An “arm’s length” is a difficult distance over which to exercise authority.

Finally, Gupta and Sharma’s insistence on making visible the transnational conditions that underpin different formations of the nation-state offers the chance to escape from the stranglehold of the global-versus-national binary. For the study of Western welfare states, such a viewpoint reveals the colonial relations that made possible the imagined territorial, cultural, and political unity of the nation-state. We might also overcome the logic of sociological time which splits the world into a past of coherent, stable, and integral nation-states and a present of globalized, open, and dynamic/unstable post-national systems. Reworking both time and space in these ways is profoundly exciting and poses new analytical problems. I look forward to the challenges of thinking “aggregatively” about these disaggregated state formations. What sorts of ensembles are these, strained by different institutional and practice tendencies, containing (often uncomfortably) different political strategies and governmental logics, and combining different temporalities? What sorts of ideas of the state are being enacted, challenged, and resisted in the process of “reform”? What sorts of relationships are being put into place and practised in these processes? Gupta and Sharma’s work may enable some of us outside of anthropology to pursue

such questions and to escape from the exhausted categories, binary systems, and classificatory typologies that have dominated studies of welfare states.

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Gupta and Sharma’s investigation of the everyday practices of India’s state bureaucracy challenges conventional analysis of the state in the era of neoliberal globalization. Gupta and Sharma problematize the unity of the state, highlight the cultural work involved in constructing the legitimacy and authority of a unified state, and argue that analysis of everyday practices and representations promotes a properly nuanced understanding of the complex transformations of states that have occurred in the era of globalization. I would like to assess these claims from the standpoint of a political scientist. The growing appreciation of ontological complexity in political science has renewed political scientists’ interest in “thick description” and spurred them to develop methodological approaches that may enhance the analytical rigor of anthropological studies.

Gupta and Sharma are right to point out that anthropologists have much to contribute to studies by political scientists, who until now have paid little attention to the cultural dimensions of the state. Their contention that the global ideology of neoliberalism has given rise to new social welfare programs that promote values of individual empowerment and self-actualization rather than being designed for resource transfer is an insightful observation that is made eminently plausible by the elective affinities between the global ideology of neoliberalism and the cultural values that underpin the new programs. However, also plausible is the contention that neoliberalism curbs state intervention or that, despite the spread of neoliberalism, globalization creates incentives for productivity-enhancing state interventions such as investment in human capital and infrastructure. There is too much causal space between global neoliberalism and programs like the Mahila Samakhya to allow Gupta and Sharma’s observation to be more than a provocative hypothesis.

Many political scientists urge the development of more rigorous arguments focusing on causal mechanisms that illuminate the microfoundations of causation and more closely link *explanans* and *explanandum*. In doing so, they attempt to strike a middle ground between positivist social science, with its deductive-nomological covering laws, and postmodern hermeneutical approaches that disdain causal arguments. The new “qualitative” methodology in political science advocates “middle-range” causal explanations that highlight the contingency and contextual limits of their application (Brady and Collier 2004).

Process tracing is one method that political scientists employ to identify the intervening causal process linking independent and dependent variables (George and Bennett 2005). It differs from the rich, inclusive accounts associated with ethnography in that its analysis is structured by the search for the microfoundations of causation. Process tracing is especially adept at improving the internal validity of causal claims by revealing excluded causes, eliminating spurious variables, and accounting for the specificity and complexity of causal processes. It enables rigorous testing of rival explanations and is especially well-suited to the generation of new causal hypotheses.

Gupta and Sharma endeavor to generalize about the impact of globalization on the postcolonial state, but their success in demonstrating the specificity of the impact of global neoliberalism on Indian welfare programs highlights the inadequacy of their efforts to situate it in the broader realm of neoliberal globalization. Qualitative methodologists, while recognizing the complementarity between the capacity for generalization provided by quantitative methods and the capacity for specific, detailed knowledge-generation offered by case studies, are not ready to concede authority for theoretical generalization to quantitative studies. They argue that understanding the general implications of a particular case requires that the case be properly situated in relevant empirical and theoretical bodies of knowledge.

To understand the broader implications of the Indian case for the impact of global neoliberalism on postcolonial societies we need to know about the relative distinctiveness of the case. To what extent is India typical of postcolonial societies, and to what extent might it constitute a theoretically seminal deviant case? We would also want to know whether India presents a “most-likely” or “least-likely” case in which its empirical traits would incite strong expectations that a given theory would be confirmed or refuted (Eckstein 1975). Recently, political scientists have argued for using typological theory to locate their cases in the universe of relevant cases (George and Bennett 2005).

Gupta and Sharma’s theoretical insights about the complex and historically nuanced transformations of postcolonial states in an era of globalization should be sharpened by locating them in the broader theoretical literature. Alternative arguments should be explored, if only to highlight the scope of their theoretical contributions. Especially relevant is the recent work on institutional change, since its concepts of “institutional layering” (Thelen 2004; Schickler 2001) and “path dependence” (Pierson 2004) simultaneously complement and contradict Gupta and Sharma’s observations.

Gupta and Sharma’s illuminating study makes a valuable contribution by inviting the engagement of social scientists from other disciplines. Advancing this engagement will prove richly beneficial for all.

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This lucid and engaging analysis builds on an established and fertile approach to challenge North-Atlantic-centered perspectives on neoliberal governmentality and the charge that anthropology can provide only localized ethnographic insights. Yet I did find lacunae in its efforts to explore “the integral connections between political economy, social structure, institutional design, everyday practice, and representation.”

Despite their account of the difficulties Mahila Samakhya workers faced as a result of others’ expectations about what state agents should be doing (and paying), here Gupta and Sharma’s “anthropological moves to enculture states” focus mainly on constructing the state *to* people, with emphasis on the production of state or statelike effects through bureaucratic practices short-circuiting ethnographic insights into the life-worlds and subjectivities of the actors. We learn that *anganwadi* workers tried to professionalize themselves (to escape the “motherist” construction of their role) by claiming the status of teachers while Mahila Samakhya “functionaries” identified themselves as NGO activists to escape the negative image of state officials and construct spaces from which they might continue to challenge government. Yet the workers not only resorted to the jeep as a coercive move against their own “clients” in the (tactfully related) example of Leela Vati but seemed as much in need of surveillance to keep them on the job as the ICDS personnel. A more sociologically rich account, not to mention consideration of what any of us might do faced with the same combination of salary and aspirations, could further understanding of how professionalization and “self-development” projects lead activists-turned-GONGO-functionaries along these contradictory paths, reinforcing rather than undermining the systems of social distinction that separate them from their “clients.” On the other side of the interface, when we get to the moment of refusal in the context of the team’s visit to the Dalit village, the ethnography neither reports their response to these reverses (beyond the joke—supercilious or nervous?—that “this one knows about her rights”) nor pursues the deeper implications of Dalit efforts to reverse the power relations and demand accountability. Doesn’t the focus on disruption of regulatory projects through negation here just leave the abject in their abjectness, trapped in an image of supplication to a state that fails them? The account shows that they know their entitlements and have no illusions about their political value, but it does not tell us what they are doing at the everyday level in response to these understandings. Looking at that may take us into the realm of “resistance,” but it can also reveal less attractive social “unintended consequences” that may powerfully assist the

reproduction of chronic inequality and injustice even where regulatory projects appear to be “failing.”

Emphasis on the way in which everyday bureaucratic practices make the state a material force in people’s lives “through which domination is legitimized” also seems limiting. The up-scaling of ICDS alongside the development of empowerment-focused programs is explained by the need to preserve legitimacy in a democratic polity which enjoys enough economic growth to fund redistributive programs. I prefer the alternative perspective offered, which focuses on the advantages of big-budget service delivery programs for the political class. Brazil is another democratic country with a very large economy in which a more extensive embrace of the neoliberal empowerment model is nevertheless accompanied by a residual emphasis on state regulation and redistribution: here too the state’s patterns of “inconsistencies, conflicts, and ‘corruptions’” become far more intelligible if one understands how the party political system works and its changing articulations with elite and corporate power in a transnational frame.

The argument that the “high sovereign” national state was always already “transnational” offers a useful way of rethinking what difference states can still make in the era of neoliberal globalization, though the history of India’s political “left” in regional government could have been another topic worth exploring here, and I am uncomfortable with the analytically indecisive description of the Indian government’s move into empowerment territory as “coincident” with global trends. In other contexts, the embrace of “empowerment” and “participation” generally followed extensive social mobilization, the emergence of “new actors” (also linked to transnational developments), and the socially catastrophic effects of the Washington Consensus. The paper shows why and how rights-based models remain more marginalized in India than in some other countries but only partially explores their implications. As Charles Hale (2002) has observed, the incorporation of this kind of agenda draws a line between acceptable “rights” and excessively radical “demands.” Yet such containment soon comes to be contested from below, even if, as happens with essentializing brands of indigenous politics, this generates further contradictions. By focusing principally on refusals of the practices through which centralized or dispersed agencies seek to construct government, we risk missing the more subterranean processes of social change that will shape future state transformations.

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How one makes sense of the state depends as much on disciplinary lexicons and protocols as on what manner of thing “the state” is taken to be. Throughout much of its history,

cultural anthropology has conflated the *space* of fieldwork with the *subject* of inquiry and, except among practitioners specializing in political economy, largely deferred serious consideration of the state. Only recently, spurred by questions about the aftermath of colonialism and the impacts of globalization on statecraft and territoriality, have cultural anthropologists imagined the state as a site of ethnographic inquiry and theorization. Indeed, it is now clear, as Gupta and Sharma ably document, that ethnography, especially in conversation with the cultural turn in political science, can offer significant insights about how the state is constituted both as system and as idea.

The article’s conceptual clarity, nuanced ethnography, and insistence on the historicity of so-called global institutions and processes invite a host of questions, and my comments are organized around two. The first concerns decentralization; the second focuses on citizenship. In assessing the impact of neoliberal globalization in India, Gupta and Sharma are most attentive to deregulation, using case materials that document the effects of enrolling of private, nongovernmental bodies in distributive welfare programs. They demonstrate the articulation of competing modes of governmentality, neoliberal and liberal, in the wake of deregulation. Their materials also reveal continuities in the ways in which the state is imagined and engaged on the ground despite the ongoing reorganization of its territoriality and sovereignty under globalization.

The “state” whose cultural formation most concerns them is the nation-state and the central government associated with it. The privatization and deregulation of central government institutions have reworked the context within which the state is now imagined. In a federal system such as India’s, however, the territoriality of subnational units, also called “states,” imposes other administrative maps on the nation-state’s territory. The spaces of statecraft thus delimited are often produced with different and competing sets of signifiers and practices inflected by subnational ethnic and linguistic idioms. (This is especially important because many of these subnational states are linguistic states.) These are relevant matters in any discussion of the effects of neoliberal globalization because, in tandem with the liberalization that has swept across much of the postcolonial, postsocialist (and socialist) world, political decentralization has occurred and, with it, the devolution of regulatory authority from national to subnational governments. Moreover, in a separate but partially articulated process which has unfolded over the past three decades, regional populist parties, often defined as oppositional with respect to the central government, have gained political power. They now control several states, including several of those most deeply enmeshed in market “reforms.” How does “the state” as imagined by and enacted through the bureaucratic apparatus of individual states compare and intersect with that which is engaged in the space of central administrative projects? And what of party activities, images, and cadres? Particularly relevant for India and for other postcolonial nation-states organized as federal systems is the cultural

work associated with political party membership and activity. Parties, crucial units in the formal apparatus of democratic states, are also spaces of informal participation and of practices framed by tropes of kinship and corruption. In short, along with the transnational analytic that Gupta and Sharma have introduced it may be necessary to consider a subnational analytic in dealing with the cultural constitution of the postcolonial state.

I finished the article wanting a richer sense of what rural subalterns imagined the state to be and how they imagined themselves as “citizens.” Granted, Gupta and Sharma have not specifically problematized “citizenship.” I would argue, though, that any consideration of neoliberal governmentality entails attention to citizenship, particularly if, as Mitchell (1999) argues, the sites of popular engagement with state actors are also theorized as contexts for imagining the “exterior”—be it society, economy, or religion—against which the “state” coheres. In what ways does the cultural labor of state formation involve actors’ self-recognition as “citizens,” and what does citizenship mean, particularly in the context of the class differentiation enacted in welfare? Gupta and Sharma relate the overlaps and continuities between different distributive programs, in part, to the pressure on governments to intervene in favor of those being left behind by market liberalization. At same time, the programs enact the very class differences that neoliberalization has widened—simply consider the different cultural capital associated with being a “beneficiary,” an “activist,” or a “teacher.”

My comments touch on but two of the issues with Gupta and Sharma wrestle in their article. Ambitious in scope and concise in execution, their work is instructive and important both for its demonstration of how the state might be “encultured” and for its thought-provoking analysis of the implications of global capitalism and neoliberal governmentality for the postcolonial state.

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The call to approach the state ethnographically, although not new, remains timely and will be so as long as the study of the state retains its preponderantly top-down focus on institutional structures rather than on the practices that they engender and that in turn modify their operations. Gupta and Sharma have provided an illuminating comparative analysis that also illustrates the unclear separation between the state and organizational arrangements that coexist with it. By contrasting cases across a notional divide that is both chronological and ideological—from welfarism to neoliberalism—they also underscore how misleading its apparent clarity can be, especially inasmuch as it occludes the elements that the two ideological traditions share.

They are less critical, however, in addressing another binary opposition in that they posit a surprisingly essentialist contrast between the Third World and the West. A reading of Zabusky’s (1995, 204) fine ethnographic study of the vicissitudes of “cooperation” in the European Space Agency or of Shore’s (2000, 200–203) whimsical tales of mutual bafflement among the constituent national groups within the European Union’s economic policy-making apparatus would quickly dispel the illusion of a well-defined West. In fact, the negotiable balance of entrenched forms of clientelist civility against the modalities of civic participation in Italy, among other European states, invites the further comparative enrichment of the very important points teased out from the Indian data presented here.

That modification would be consistent with Gupta and Sharma’s wise insistence on the heterogeneity of social experience. It is this cultural messiness that bureaucratic regulation so often seeks to conceal or undo (see Scott 1998, 328). Gupta and Sharma illustrate ethnographically the variability of the responses elicited by the demands of visiting officials, seen as representing a hostile state, for “data.” Yet this variability is itself part of the problem; state and even NGO power seizes on such apparent evidence of disarray. Moreover, the hostility—the lack of civility—of those who do openly dare to challenge authority directly locks them into the marginality they are presumably trying to challenge no less than the too-obvious venality (sometimes in the same individuals) of those who emphasize expectations of monetary rewards.

That venality suggests a commodification of “data” that recalls what puristic religions sometimes recognize as the fetishization of discourse (see Keane 2003, 157). Modernist rationalization reaches its apogee in neoliberal policy: “audit culture” (Strathern 2000) requires a positivistic understanding of “data,” and therefore struggles over the ownership of these increasingly objectified “goods” implicate all the social actors concerned, from the bureaucrats to the most recalcitrant of marginal citizens. Statistics serves both the state and its critics (e.g., Urla 1993), but it thereby also enmeshes both in a reductionist enterprise that ultimately serves to reinforce the phenomenon with which Gupta and Sharma begin but to which they do not return as strongly: the international (or global) entailments of the so-called nation-state. While they are right to reject the rhetoric whereby the nation-state defines itself as an ideologically irreducible monad, they do not then, except in very general terms, connect the contest between citizens and state over the control of data with the superordinate logic of neoliberal economics.

That connection is, however, a key social component of the processes they recognize as governmentality. In tussling over the control of data, NGO activists and local residents alike confirm that data have become the coin of the new economic realm. As Gupta and Sharma note, “empowerment,” however benignly intended by some of the actors concerned, often has the effect of increasing rather than reducing

the socioeconomic disparities of the new, technologically dominated order. Thus, villagers who cling to the ownership of data marginalize themselves from a world defined by idioms of civic participation, while those who surrender control thereby lose the power to affect the ways in which the data will be instrumentally reified and deployed. Neoliberalism offers them choice: here, the choice between uncompromising punishment and compromising reward.

Gupta and Sharma nicely expose activists' and bureaucrats' professional intimacy with each other and with local actors and show that this cultural and administrative familiarity is also a trap. Collusion that resists global forces, while it confers partial solidarity, also marks players as potentially incapable of playing a central role in the new economy because their interests are too parochial. Conversely, globalization does not affect the cultural specificities of particular states. Instead, it further strengthens locally inflected patterns of dependence that hide behind but do not easily dissolve in the new rhetoric of empowerment and agency.

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Gupta and Sharma's important article builds upon the seminal insights of Abrams (1988) about the "difficulty of studying the state." Their research highlights the concrete historical processes that contribute to the production of particular ideas of the state, including the diverse forces—transnational, national, and local—that intervene as they can be observed at different levels in practice. In addition to this the article tackles a specific object: the transformation of forms of government in the context of expanding neoliberal ideologies. The authors seek to explore the shifts in responsibility between citizens, states, supranational regulatory bodies, and NGOs that develop with a "postterritorial concept of sovereignty and a postsovereign version of territoriality." The two aid programs that they compare are superficially similar in that they both target poor rural women. On closer examination they are quite distinct in their general ideological backgrounds: ICDS is supported by a welfare idea of the state's responsibility to deliver entitlements while Mahila Samakhyia hinges on the idea of empowering women through education. Other differences appear in the implementation of the programs: ICDS is directly run through government agents while Mahila Samakhyia has a hybrid GONGO structure. Gupta and Sharma are careful to highlight the continuities present in the everyday practices of state bureaucracies involved in the two programs, however. After they have masterfully exposed the nuanced field of forces at play in the production of the state in these two programs, an issue of theoretical import is left unresolved. Is the coincidence in time between the empowerment-oriented development program and the global neoliberal agenda

part of a new kind of transnational governmentality project? And, more important, what do these shifts represent in terms of the real capacity to earn a livelihood for the poor rural women targeted by the different (welfare/ empowerment) aid programs?

In my opinion, the rise of "empowerment" as a development strategy is tied to similar concepts such as "social capital" or "civic community" (World Bank 2001; Putnam 1993) and to the structuring of a post-Washington consensus (Fine 2001). Critiques of these concepts have shown that these new development strategies need the support of public policies and structures to enhance the economic well-being and civic participation of those deprived of material and political resources (Putzel 1997; Portes and Landolt 1996; Lopez and Stack 2001; Fox 1997). At the same time, anthropologists and other social scientists have attempted to describe this ubiquitous process of decentralization of distributive and regulatory practices as an emerging political structure that represents a major political-economic organizational change (Lovering 1999; Humphrey 1991; Supiot 2000). Some propose that we shift our perspective from one that emphasizes the demise or destructuring of the nation-state in the new globalized context to one that underlines the emergent structural qualities of the fragmented polities of multifarious power holders that Duffield (1998) calls "post-adjustment states." But what does this mean in terms of the livelihood capabilities and legal rights that citizens of nominal states can now claim?

Gupta and Sharma's article could have provided an answer to this question, but it lacks a comparison of the two programs in terms of "hard facts" that would allow an assessment of how the different structural models of the state (liberal, neoliberal, postcolonial, or postadjustment) deliver access to a livelihood and enforcement of claims to formal entitlements. If, as the authors say, the empowerment development strategy is low-cost because it does not deliver goods or services and shifts the responsibility of getting hold of the actual goods and services through competitive market strategies to the empowered "agents," then we need to know how this second part of the story proceeds. What is the structure of the labor market, of the credit market, of state provisioning? What are the movements of capital and labor as they affect people locally and nationally? If the Indian state has shifted from a function of provider to a function of facilitator but retained its function as welfare provider because this aspect legitimates the national project and secures electoral power, then we need to get a clearer idea of how the articulation of empowerment strategies and classical welfare development strategies takes place locally.

The study of the practices that contribute to the cultural unity of the state cannot be dissociated from the material forces at play. Gupta and Sharma point to this repeatedly in their theoretical and methodological sections, but the ethnographic material that is presented is essentially focused on the cultural production of the state. This leaves the reader

wanting to know more about “the changing nature of the state under conditions of globalization.”

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The authors of this article have done a masterful job of showing why both cultural and institutional approaches to the state matter and how close attention to everyday practices and representations “can add something valuable to the institutional and political-economic perspectives that have dominated state theory.” Gupta and Sharma encourage us to examine the ways in which people’s everyday encounters with bureaucracies and with government and popular representations may produce a “state effect”—the illusion that the state is a real, concrete entity that has not only autonomy but also agency and will. They emphasize the complexity and contingency of the bureaucratic and representational fields referred to as “the state” and urge us to focus on the enormous cultural labor involved in reducing this complexity to an “it.” The state, they suggest, is a peculiar kind of fetish.

Gupta and Sharma thus engage in a far-reaching and original effort to rethink the state as a category of analysis. In addition to representing a major contribution in its own right, the analysis presented here raises fascinating comparative questions. For example, it would be very interesting to extend it to contexts in which “globalization” has taken other forms. In some parts of the world historical change in political-economic configurations has resulted in major shifts in the organization and control of armed force that have been highly disruptive to the everyday operation of government bureaucracies. In some cases bureaucracies have collapsed completely, while in other cases alternative organizations—from shadow states to cross-border activist organizations to NGO networks—have emerged alongside “the state,” complicating the process of state formation by claiming the right to govern, attempting to order society on their own distinctive terms, and projecting their own “state effects.”

The variable effects of contemporary translocal power arrangements on bureaucracy highlight the fact that the ability to engage in everyday bureaucratic practice is *itself* an expression and result of power relations. Bureaucracies are not simply there. They must be brought into being in particular forms by concrete activity and reflect a precarious and contingent balance of unequal forces among actors with divergent interests located in regional, national, and transnational arenas. Further, bureaucracies are created with particular goals in mind—military conscription, land titling, taxation, distribution of birth control devices, etc. While it is important to distinguish between the purposes for which bureaucracies are ostensibly created, their rules of operation, and their impact, these dimensions of bureaucracy are not entirely unrelated.

How people experience “the state” as they interact with bureaucracies is partly a function of what the bureaucracy wants of them and vice versa. Similarly, potential disconnects between representations of “the state” and people’s experience with bureaucracies stem in part from what bureaucracies attempt to do. The efforts of national police to force minorities from their homes at the point of a bayonet to provide *corvée* labor for “the state” while other citizens remain exempt, for example, clearly offer different kinds of potential for disconnect from the attempts of bank personnel to distribute leaflets to wealthy farmers about the availability of loans from a state agrarian bank. One of the great virtues of Gupta and Sharma’s article is that it focuses our attention on the contingent nature of particular bureaucracies and on the complex field of local and global forces involved in enabling or disabling particular forms of everyday bureaucratic practice.

It is striking that the processes that create a state effect in postcolonial India are so secular and bureaucratic in nature—involving, for example, the everyday production, circulation, and consumption of fetish objects (currency, certificates, official seals) that are nonetheless represented and regarded as neutral, objective markers of state office, rank, and authority. As Gupta and Sharma put it, the legitimacy and authority of “the state” is critically dependent on representational labor that “goes without saying.” They suggest that everyday practices are often most effective in representing the state as coherent and unitary when they are not overtly seeking to do so. What makes this so interesting is that in many other contexts the political and cultural work involved in producing the illusion of the state is effective only to the extent that it *does* draw attention to itself. Rather than being based on the mundane and routine, states are often constructed by drawing explicit attention to things out of the ordinary—to the seemingly magical, inhuman, or superhuman abilities of particular persons, places, and processes. In such contexts, it could be argued, power is not so naturalized, and the processes that breathe life into the thing referred to as “the state” involve *some* form of agency. In other words, there appears to be a variety of “state effects” that are produced by different kinds of everyday practices and representational strategies. This is a problem that the discipline has yet to explore systematically, but Gupta and Sharma’s analysis opens a window onto this important area of research.

Reply

We feel very fortunate to have had such a diverse group of distinguished commentators engage our article so productively. The article represents an ongoing engagement with ethnographic approaches to the state that pay attention to institutional, structural, and political economic processes. We examined the shifts and continuities between liberal and neo-

liberal forms of governmentality through two development programs undertaken by the postcolonial Indian state that target marginalized women. We situated these programs in the context of efforts at liberalization being made by the Indian state and transnational discourses on population and development. We were careful to indicate that these two programs should not be read as paradigmatic examples of welfare-state projects and neoliberal dismantling of the state respectively. Neither ICDS nor Mahila Samakhya simply reflects trends in Britain, France, or the United States. We showed, for example, that a complex history of events led the Indian government to establish the ICDS program before such an approach to population had achieved global consensus. Similarly, Mahila Samakhya was the overdetermined result of national and local histories and processes of engagement with state agencies led by movements of women, students, left parties, and peasants, the growth of NGO-based politics in India after the sixties, the transnational feminist rethinking of development, and radical translocal pedagogical projects inspired by the work of Paolo Freire (see Sharma 2006). Gledhill is troubled by our characterization of the emergence of Mahila Samakhya as “coincident” with the current regime of neoliberal state restructuring. Yet our employment of that term is far from wishy-washy in that we do not erase these other local, national, and translocal histories but analyze their contingent articulation and examine the connotations that state-initiated projects of grassroots empowerment assume in the context of neoliberal restructuring. If we leave open the question how deterministically the relation between neoliberalism and Mahila Samakhya is to be interpreted, it is because we do not think the current state of scholarship on neoliberalism allows for a definitive answer.

Furthermore, in focusing on two central-government programs we do not wish to occlude the devolution of authority to subnational levels of bureaucracy and regional political parties that has been a critical part of India’s liberalization in India (Hancock). In fact, it is important to analyze the conflicting agendas and points of tension that arise across various levels of the bureaucratic apparatus where the everyday workings of the ICDS and Mahila Samakhya programs are concerned. Mahila Samakhya representatives, for instance, often used their program’s affiliation with the national government to establish their legitimacy and authority vis-à-vis local (district and block-level) bureaucrats who were either hostile or apathetic toward a women’s empowerment program, but they were not always successful in their efforts. The extent to which regional political parties affect the workings of these programs is not as readily apparent because relatively large and well-known centrally administered programs like these are largely shielded from electoral changes in and power realignments between political parties at the central and state levels. Mahila Samakhya staff members, for example, were careful to dissociate themselves from national and local party representatives. In 1999 some senior staff members expressed concern that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party might try to co-opt the

agenda of women’s empowerment into its Hindutva-style politics. They worked hard to prevent political intervention in the program through such measures as carefully planned national- and state-level program advisory bodies. At the field level, too, staff members did not overtly align themselves with any particular party platform, although they worked in a context of heightened mobilization of “backward” castes and dalits (especially in the plains areas of Uttar Pradesh, where we conducted our respective ethnographies) and trained their clients to participate in local elected bodies (such as village panchayats, which reserved 33% of their seats for women). The elected political apparatus remains an important variable that overdetermines the context in which bureaucratic programs operate, and the articulation between the mobilizations of subaltern political society (Chatterjee 2004) that such programs engender and formal political processes needs further exploration.

The argument that we have pursued in this paper points to some other themes which we were not able to develop or which await future work. Of the many fascinating observations contained in the responses, we wish to comment on a few in particular.

A number of the discussants would have liked us to do more with subject formation and citizenship (Agrawal, Benei, Gledhill, Hancock, Herzfeld, Narotzky, Nugent). They remind us that governmentality is not simply a way of studying practices of government but also a way of analyzing the modes of subjectivity that these practices enable. Admittedly, we have focused primarily on the first axis of this problematic. Our analysis of state formation in liberal and neoliberal regimes of governance does, however, point to the ways in which subaltern women, both as program representatives and as participants, are constituted as subjects and negotiate their subjectivity. Their counteridentifications, shifting positioning, refusals, critiques of state failures, and rights-based demands illustrate how citizenship is rearticulated vis-à-vis a reimagined state (see also Gupta 1995, n.d.; Sharma 2001). We fully accept Hancock’s suggestion that the ideas of citizenship that are implicit in our paper need further elaboration and development.

More space would have enabled us to delineate subject formation better, but our discussants may be pointing to a methodological dilemma as well. Fieldwork on bureaucracies forces one to make choices as to how intensively one studies different aspects of the relation between bureaucrats and their clients. Agrawal, Benei, and Gledhill might have preferred us to shift the emphasis toward the subjectivities of subaltern people positioned as clients by bureaucrats to uncover “how these practices form part and parcel of local, cultural understandings of hierarchy, power and authority, gender, caste, and class” (Benei) in order to achieve a sociologically richer account in which subaltern resistance could be seen as shaping the state (Gledhill). Given that any choice of where to focus participant-observation brings particular insights but also reveals areas of blindness, our choice was influenced by the fact

that anthropologists have been rather better observers of subaltern subjectivity (as Agrawal notes) than of state institutions and of the subjectivity of bureaucrats. The distinctive contribution of this particular article lies in this choice of subject matter.

Elsewhere Sharma (2001, 2006) has contended that the project of broad-based social transformation through empowerment programs must entail a rethinking of the state, of governmental structures and practices, of rights (as entitlements), and thus of citizenship. Mahila Samakhya has mobilized subaltern women to struggle against entrenched local power nexuses that implicate, for instance, development bureaucrats, upper-caste landowners, and the police and to demand citizenship-based entitlements from the state; such programs have, perhaps, increased the interfaces between subaltern women and state officials. Furthermore, women's demands for entitlements and material benefits from the state have to be made in particular "governmental" idioms, which requires that they learn bureaucratic languages and practices. Subaltern women's participation in programs like Mahila Samakhya enables them to gain knowledge of and deploy bureaucratic proceduralism as a strategic practice. The occasional use of these very procedures by staff members to discipline their clients also engenders hierarchies between program representatives and participants. One way to interpret these processes is to argue that the deployment by the state of empowerment as a category and strategy of governance and its professionalization are subverting empowerment's potentially radical agenda (Gledhill; see also Nagar and Raju 2003). The other way to look at it is to examine the unintended politicization that ends up happening in the context of state-initiated empowerment (Sharma 2006). Subaltern women's struggles, in the context of programs like Mahila Samakhya, in fact point to the critical ways in which subaltern women redefine empowerment; they also illustrate how the state and power hierarchies must be altered for any kind of meaningful empowerment and social change to occur. The effort by poor women to reposition the state as a vehicle for the delivery of material benefits in a neoliberal context in which states are redefining themselves as "facilitators," for example, contains a critique of the state and the possibility of reimagining it (Sharma 2006). Grassroots empowerment must therefore entail a transformation of the conduct of government itself (Gupta n.d.). It needs, as Narotzky suggests, the support of public policies and structures to enhance the economic well-being and civic participation of subaltern subjects.

The two political scientists, Agrawal and Echeverri-Gent, raise important questions about the political utility and generalizability of the analysis. Our discussion of these issues was far too brief and therefore may bear elaboration here. A skeptical position on such work is the one that Agrawal points to, namely, that such critiques have little impact on the political object being studied—the state. One of the implications of our analysis is that if one begins to see policy not simply

as something formulated by bureaucratic and political elites but as something that emerges at the interface between planners and subaltern people (who shape the meaning of policies and their interpretation), then an exercise such as this may well be politically useful. The hegemonic model of policy as "advice to the prince" constrains our political imagination by suppressing the problem of meaning in the interpretation and application of policy—precisely what a study that emphasizes everyday practices and representations helps us to excavate. Similarly, Echeverri-Gent voices skepticism about generalization from one case study. Some of what he suggests as being explicitly thematized in political science, such as process-tracing, is already implicit in much of the finest work in anthropology: it has never been true that anthropology consists of the piling up of description until it forms a thick and dense layer as an end in itself (Geertz's own work is exemplary in this respect of being argument-driven). We might think more carefully about the construction of the series that enables "the case study" to emerge as an object of knowledge. Does asking a question, as Echeverri-Gent does, about the relative distinctiveness of a case such as postcolonial India necessarily bracket the question of meaning that we have identified as being central to the comparison of states?

Rather than consider whether or not India serves as a typical or paradigmatic example of the kinds of shifts that are being engendered by neoliberal forms of globalization in postcolonial contexts and the liberal continuities that remain, we compared two bureaucratic programs targeting marginalized women in India to suggest how contextually specific analyses might broaden the scope of state and governmentality studies. Clearly, the two programs that we examined operate in a particular political and historical context—one that is shaped by transnational discourses of development, nation-level politics, and subnational regional histories of political mobilizations. The extent to which our situated analysis of the restructuring of state and rule in contemporary India constitutes a representative case of neoliberal reform in the postcolonial world is a conclusion that can only be reached through comparative studies of neoliberal state reconfiguration and the meanings attributed to it in other contexts. While part of our motivation in writing this article was to complicate the generalizability of analyses of neoliberal governmentality based in the West (itself a complex term, as Herzfeld points out), the other part was to make a case for more located studies of postcolonial state reformation under neoliberalism. We hope that the cultural and transnational approach we take to the study of states, when applied elsewhere, will yield important insights about the unevenness of the processes of neoliberal transformation and perhaps reveal surprising overlaps across contexts through which a more nuanced picture of global neoliberalism can emerge.

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