

Preface

This work has been many years in the making and is primarily the outcome of my Ph.D. research. Reflecting upon the long journey through which this work came into existence, it is difficult to locate its beginnings. Serendipity has played a large part in my progression through this research. It perhaps began as a glimmer of interest at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi when I heard Rohan D'Souza talking about his work on the Mahanadi river. Reading more of his work only deepened this interest. In South Africa, I first became interested in the process through which humans exercise control over others and discovered Michel Foucault, for which Monique Marks deserves my thanks. She also became a supervisor of my M.A. Thesis with Boike Rehbein who was at the time in Freiburg University. Jan Nederveen Pieterse provided an excellent foundation for the research on development that is so closely connected with large dams. All of them encouraged my then uncertain plans to pursue a Ph.D. and thus helped me begin the formal part of this process.

I was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship from the Graduate Programme of Transcultural Studies, then in its first year, to pursue my doctoral research. The freedom and resources, both financial and structural, at the “Cluster of Excellence: Asia and Europe in a Global Context”, were invaluable in supporting my research plans. Amongst other benefits I was able to undertake extensive field trips and international conference travel, which would have otherwise been almost impossible. Professionally, the cluster has been no less supportive, and my inclusion in the funding process of the Excellence Initiative, in spite of my inexperience, fear, doubt and occasional terror, is the perfect example of this. My colleagues in the Graduate Programme all contributed to the early development of my ideas, and their occasional perplexity was always a spur to refine my ideas. My conversations with other members of the Earth Systems Governance Project were invaluable in drawing my attention to the role dams and embankments play in producing the Anthropocene.

All this would have been for nothing had I not received wise and timely advice from many people. Of the numerous such people, I would particularly like to single out Rohan D'Souza at JNU whose insights were invaluable in focusing my research

efforts. Ashis Nandy at CSDS took time out of a very busy schedule to talk about his research and listen to my ideas, which went a long way in helping me avoid many pitfalls. Himanshu Thakkar shared his immense knowledge of river control in India and answered all my questions patiently and in depth. Ramaswamy Iyer, Shripad Dharmadhikary and D. K. Mishra gave me all their time and discussed their entire lives with me, a complete stranger. For this, I cannot thank them enough.

Marcus Nüsser has been the best supervisor I could ever have wished for, and that feeling has only grown with time. Apart from supervising my dissertation and being my co-author on several occasions, he has been my mentor and deserves acknowledgement for his manifold contributions to my professional growth. My colleagues in the Geography Department of the South Asia Institute have always been helpful and have read my abstracts and drafts at short notice and with patience. My friends Anna Mayr, Sridevi Padmanabhan and Birte Herrmann, as fellow travellers on the doctoral journey, have always offered excellent company and good cheer.

During this journey my sons, Jai and Yash, joined me and have been a fountain of joy and wonder in my life ever since. Ramona naturally needs to be thanked for being a substantial source of support. Although my mother and I live on separate continents, she has never let me feel it and has always supported my efforts. There were also those who left rather unexpectedly during the journey. My colleague Martin Gerwin is not here today, but his comments and his support enrich this work. My father passed away shortly before I could complete my dissertation, leaving behind only a sense of loss and his memories to accompany me.

I dedicate this work to all the wonderful people I have met on this journey, all those who have joined me during it and those who are not here today, but whose memories shall always remain with me.

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Ravi Baghel



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