

INTRODUCTION

The Great Agrarian Conquest

THIS BOOK IS BUILT on the premise that the notion of the agrarian we take for granted has a history that we need to explore. It traces the processes through which – in colonial India – the agrarian was naturalised as the universal rural, and the landscape of settled peasant agriculture was projected as normative. It seeks to unpack the organising concepts of the agrarian economy whose legitimacy we so often unquestioningly accept. Agrarian colonisation could not possibly have proceeded without the creation of spaces that conformed with the needs of such colonisation, nor without the establishment of a regime of appropriate categories – tenancies, tenures, properties, habitations – and the framework of customs and laws that made such colonisation possible.

Agrarian colonisation was in this sense a deep conquest. It did not simply happen through some inexorable economic process that displaced earlier forms of livelihood and work. It proceeded by developing a new and enabling imaginary whereby the rural universe could be made afresh: revisualised, reordered, reworked, and altogether transformed. The process entailed refiguring the terms used for describing social relations and for the ties that bound communities together. It altered perceptions of space and time, of the legal and the permissible, the ideal and the normal. It defined the telos towards which rural history was to move; it produced specific notions of development and growth; it made the repression of certain practices and subsistence forms appear necessary and desirable; it celebrated specific patterns of life and devalued others. By naturalising this new framework, it shaped the way the rural could be imagined. In positing

settled peasant agriculture as the norm within the rural – creating the “normative rural” – it denied the legitimacy of other forms of rural livelihood and landscape. The changes brought about were, at the same time, cultural, discursive, legal, linguistic, spatial, social, and economic. So, to understand the several layers of meaning compacted within the term “agrarian”, we need to analyse this great conquest and the seemingly silent and unobtrusive way in which it was brought about.

To focus on imaginaries is, at one level, to discuss ideas and discourses, their constitutive structure, the intellectual resources they are built on, and the ways in which they are appropriated, reworked, and deployed. But imaginaries are neither just ideas, nor come into being simply at the level of ideas. They are formed through material processes and embodied in material things: records, manuals, settlement papers, cadastral maps, village boundaries. They are encoded in laws – property acts, codes of custom, rules of inheritance, the rights of tenants. They are embedded in and fashioned through practices of mapping, writing, classifying, categorising, demarcating individual fields, bounding villages, adjudicating conflicts, planning irrigation, introducing crop varieties, planting trees, clearing scrubs, and restricting access to the commons. If imaginaries, in this sense, are constituted by history, they are also constitutive of history.¹ This is the sense in which I talk of the making of an agrarian imaginary.

My primary focus is neither on the grand schemes of state engineering nor the dramatic programmes of high modernisation.² These are important, and I do discuss through one case study how they might unfold in the colonial context. But my central concern is to understand how a new taken-for-granted world comes into being under colonialism, refiguring the old and normalising the colonial modern. I focus on the seemingly routine, the undramatic,

¹ Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.

² In some ways my concerns in this book resonate with those of James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State*. But Scott's focus is primarily on the grand projects of state engineering, the high modernist schemes that have often failed. My primary focus is on small projects of social engineering by the colonial state that produced the colonial agrarian order.

the everyday, on acts that organise life and institutionalise practices, integrating people and things into a new order of the normative within the rural. What I discuss was a conquest of phenomenal proportions. But the deep and profound is not always grand and dramatic.

This conquest was not driven by a unitary vision. There was no pre-scripted plan of social engineering that the colonial state put into effect, no definite scheme of colonial reordering that British officials unquestioningly endorsed. Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence, the Marquess of Dalhousie, and James Wilson – some of the individuals this book focuses on – were all colonial officials who affirmed the logic of colonialism; but they acted in dissimilar ways, imagined power diversely, and often played out their differences – privately and publicly – with great polemical vigour. And these differences mattered. They tell us about the elasticity and even contradictions in imaginings of the colonial agrarian, the formulation of policy, and the nature of governance. It is important to scrutinise this heterogeneity within officialdom, the diversity of voices and specificity of each, and the inner tensions within official minds. In this search for the heterogeneous, however, it is equally important not to ignore the overarching unity which, with all its constitutive inner differences, is recognisable as unity nevertheless. Dissonance does not mean paralysing discord, ambiguities do not freeze decisions, and conflicts of opinion do not block the possibility of confident action. I try and explore how such differences are articulated, negotiated, and transcended, how the authority of imperium is expressed.³

The mere assertion of an authoritative voice, however, does not necessarily make it effective. The sovereign can command a norm which may be subverted by his subjects. There is a distinction between intent and effect, between desire and its realisation. How did people come to accept the colonial regime of laws and categories, its redefinition of what was normal and permissible? How was the

³ Bhabha's productive comments about ambivalence and ambiguity in "Of Mimicry" (and elsewhere in *The Location of Culture*) have often been fetishised into meaningless concepts, dissolving the notion of imperial command. See Cooper and Stoler, ed., *Tensions of Empire*, for creative explorations of ambivalence in colonial discourse and the anxieties of rule.

new habitus constituted and naturalised? What, indeed, signifies a general acceptance and normalisation? In exploring such questions, I build on Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" but rework his formulation. For Bourdieu, habitus is the taken-for-granted world within which subjects live; it defines the way people act spontaneously without being conscious of the social norms that regulate their behaviour, their dispositions. Bourdieu's notion is, however, underpinned by a structural determinism, regardless of the fact that one of the intentions of his oeuvre is to transcend the opposition between structure and practice, objectivism and subjectivism. Within his frame, the habitus produces unquestioning and spontaneous action, endorsing the sanctity of a pre-given and pre-scripted normative world – the one within which individuals are located.⁴ My idea of habitus, on the other hand, shows the prefigured taken-for-granted world as continuously reworked by human beings and classes through everyday actions; the norm is undercut by its persistent transgression.⁵ So, apart from arguing that colonial power was never able to create a regulatory regime that seamlessly incorporated the subjects within it – in other words that the subjects subsumed within the disciplinary order were always capable of defining their distance from it – I try to show that the operations of the state and practices of power created spaces of conflict and negotiation that people refigured. By manoeuvring, transgressing, and negotiating, people questioned the meaning of new norms and reworked their implications. The order that acquired legitimacy came into being through such refigurations. The normative is constituted through the working of this dialectic between the norm and its transgression, the code and its subversion. There is no taken-for-granted world that does not bear the imprint of those who inhabit

⁴ See Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; idem, *The Logic of Practice*. For a critique, see de Certeau, "Foucault and Bourdieu"; Bouveresse, "Rules, Dispositions, and the Habitus".

⁵ My ideas here are close to those of Michel de Certeau though he tends to separate disciplinary and transgressive spaces too sharply. Such a separation becomes difficult if we explore their mutual entanglement and the way each space redefines the other. See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; idem, *Heterologies*.

that world.⁶ My object is to explore the agrarian vision as well as its reworkings, and the constitutive connection that tied the two together.



To argue this is to question the very frame within which I myself began understanding agrarian studies. In the mid 1970s, New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, where I was a student, was an enchanted place. It buzzed with political activity, intense intellectual discussion, polemic, and theoretical debate. All forms of radical thought wafted through its corridors, capturing the imagination of students, shaping the questions they posed. Intellectual activity, even historical writing, it was widely felt, had to be socially relevant and politically meaningful; they ought to help social transformation. The Emergency of 1975–7 managed to prevent public discussions but not silence thought. Inspired by the ideals of socialism and the dreams of a better future, many at the Centre for Historical Studies, including myself, began researching the histories of peasants and workers, and the agrarian and industrial economies within which they were located.

The agrarian question – always central to the nationalist and socialist imaginary – had become an obsession in the decades after Independence. The troubles of the rural sector and the problems of backwardness, it was widely agreed, could not be addressed without resolving the agrarian problem. While the state pursued its project of high industrialisation and the green revolution, economists spoke of the social barriers to development and the constraints on agrarian growth. To know these barriers, Marxist economists argued, it was essential to study the internal structure of the agrarian economy and identify the modes of production in agriculture.⁷ Within the

⁶ In this sense, E.P. Thompson's use of the productive notion of "moral economy" remains problematic. He conceives moral codes as pre-constituted, as inherited tradition: they shape crowd action but are not refigured through that action. See Thompson, "The Moral Economy".

⁷ The important contributions to the debate are now collated in Patnaik, *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation*; see also Banaji, "Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture"; idem, "Capitalist Domination and the Small Peasantry".

debate, the problems of conceptual definition and the question of characterisation were never resolved, and differences persisted, but the antagonists shared one assumption – that to discuss the mode of production was to focus on the agrarian, not spaces beyond the bounds of settled agriculture. However the rural was characterised – feudal, semi-feudal, capitalist – the object of analysis was the settled peasant economy.

The categories deployed in these debates became part of the intellectual habitus of the time, providing the frame within which other discussions unfolded. Many of us, who saw ourselves as critical Marxists, felt the need to define a dialogic relationship with the debates of the time. But there was no getting away from the mode of production debate. The narratives of transition – from feudalism to capitalism – shaped our vision, even as we resisted the power of this frame. Moving away from an exclusive focus on the post-Independence decades, we were keen on a *longue durée* examination of the agrarian economy. To explore the colonial agrarian, we began mapping forms of labour, looking at the logic of tenancy cultivation, the interlinkages of different markets, the movements of prices and rents, and the consequent transformations they reflected.⁸ We questioned unilinear teleologies as well as the mechanical application of terms drawn out of Western debates, but still focused on transformations within the agrarian, not beyond it.

In doing agrarian history we saw ourselves as engaged in making a radical shift from the revenue histories of earlier decades and from nationalist readings of the agrarian crisis.⁹ Levels of revenue extraction had no doubt affected peasant lives, but a singular focus on revenue appeared myopic. It could not tell us all that was worth knowing about

⁸ Bhattacharya, “The Logic of Tenancy Cultivation”; idem, “Agricultural Labour and Production”; Guha, “Commodity and Credit in Upland Maharashtra”; idem, *The Agrarian Economy of the Bombay Deccan*; Mohapatra, “Land and Credit Market in Chota Nagpur”.

⁹ Some of the finest senior historians of the time had worked on British revenue policies in India, and it was widely assumed that the study of the colonial agrarian had to be a study of revenue policy in its diverse incarnations. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*; Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*.

the working of the colonial agrarian economy. Moving away from the nationalist idea of a homogeneous agrarian – uniformly ravaged by colonial expropriation – we were looking for variations – between and within regions. The colonising process had to operate within different social contexts, confront embedded structures that were diverse, and environmental regimes that were dissimilar. From the homogeneous colonial there was thus a turn to the heterogeneous agrarian.¹⁰ Elsewhere too, agrarian historians were conceptualising such variations, operating with different frames, ending up with diverse answers. The distinctions between wet and dry zones, eastern and western India, Bengal and Punjab, were being carefully examined.¹¹ But the focus of all this research was on the inner working of the colonial agrarian economy. The search for heterogeneity remained bounded within the agrarian frontier.

By the mid 1980s, it was evident that there were problems with this focus on the agrarian. It was exclusionary. It blocked the historian's vision in many ways. It provided a frame within which only peasants – poor, middle, rich – mattered. The rural, it was assumed, was synonymous with the agrarian. There were others outside the space of the urban who did not figure in this focus. Whatever, for instance, happened to pastoralists, forest dwellers, food gatherers, and itinerant cultivators who refused to settle? Why did their stories and lives stay outside the frame of our concern, excluded from the subjects that interested us? Why did they not appear in the pages of our histories?

Part of the problem lay with the way longer-term transformations had been identified in India's pre-colonial past. Within the accepted *longue durée* narrative of the time – one that is widely shared even today – historians tracked a transition from tribal to settled peasant society in the later-Vedic period, when pastoralists settled down, took to the iron plough, developed the agrarian economy, and expanded

¹⁰ Bhattacharya, ed., *Essays on the Agrarian History of Colonial India*.

¹¹ Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*; Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*; Charlesworth, *Peasants and Imperial Rule*; Washbrook, "Economic Development and Social Stratification in Rural Madras"; Islam, *Bengal Agriculture, 1920–1946*.

the agrarian frontier.¹² Subsequent history was mostly read as the gradual unfolding of this agrarian economy in different forms and historical contexts, with its ups and downs, its phases of expansion and contraction. As settled agriculture expanded on the fertile plains, surpluses were produced which could finance the state and sustain social groups – the upper castes – that did not work on the land. Keen on tracking the transitions within settled peasant agriculture, historians ignored the non-agrarian within this rural realm. It was as if forest dwellers and pastoralists were fading figures within a bygone past and thus, ironically, not worth the while of historians – who needed to focus on trajectories that presaged the future.

Within this transition narrative of the Indian rural, history moves inexorably towards a settled peasant society. This teleology is assumed to be normative, as if it referred to a natural and inevitable process. The focus of this history was the alluvial tracts and the fertile settled peasant belts, not so much the dry zones, the scrublands, the forests, and the pastures.¹³ The extraction of *agrarian* surpluses – land revenue and rent – was foregrounded, while overlooking the significance of other forms of exactions that related to non-agrarian rural spaces. A natural corollary was for the village to be seen as the universal rural, to the exclusion of other habitations and settlements. To talk of the rural was to focus on the village. Caste – the social order of the alluvial agrarian tracts – was consequently considered a universal institution. This was an agrarian-centric, state-centric, peasant-centric framework for looking at the past. As always, the limits of the frame inevitably structured the nature of the occlusions.

Dissatisfied with such erasures, some historians of India turned their gaze to forests and pastures, to the history of “tribals” and pastoralists, food gathering and shifting agriculture. They tracked the way the colonial state extended its control over forest resources, established a new regime of “scientific” forestry, and integrated forest

¹² See Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formation*; Thapar, *From Lineage to State*. On iron technology and agrarian change, see the collection of essays in Sahu, ed., *Iron and Social Change in India*.

¹³ For the turn to pastures and forests in studies of pre-colonial India, see Ratnagar, ed., *On Pastoralism*; Thapar, “Perceiving the Forest”.

economies with the structures of colonial exploitation.¹⁴ Others explored the implication of state policies on pastoralists and pastoral economies.¹⁵ As environmental history acquired intellectual prestige, forests and pastures slowly displaced the peasant's field as the object of historical concern.¹⁶

This turn away from the agrarian was, at one level, immensely productive, opening up many new arenas of research. Historians began exploring the history of shifting agriculture and scientific forestry, rivers and mountains, animals and insects, dams and canals, minerals and plants.¹⁷ But in the process, something was lost. Now, agrarian history was seen as antiquated, the remnant of a bygone time. Constituted as a distinct field and defined in opposition to the agrarian, environmental history sought, at least in its early articulations, to recover a state of nature untouched by the settled agrarian. Nor did it query the agrarian, look at the way its life and history were shaped by its connection with what was seen as non-agrarian. The intimate and troubled history of these interconnections remained unexplored.¹⁸

¹⁴ In India two books pioneered the shift in focus: Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, and Grove, *Green Imperialism*. More internationally, Worster's *Ends of the Earth* and Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* became the foundational texts of environmental history. See also Cronon, *Changes in the Land*.

¹⁵ Bhattacharya, "Pastoralists in a Colonial World"; Singh, *Natural Premises*.

¹⁶ The fecundity of the new field of environmental studies in India can be seen in the many collections that were published in the 1990s: Arnold and Guha, *Nature, Culture, Imperialism*; Grove, Damodaran, and Sangwan, *Nature and the Orient*. See also Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest*; Prasad, "The Political Ecology of Swidden Cultivation"; Skaria, *Hybrid Histories*; Rajan, *Modernizing Nature*.

¹⁷ See the essays in Arnold and Guha, *Nature, Culture, Imperialism*; Grove, Damodaran, and Sangwan, *Nature and the Orient*. A large selection of essays published over the years is now collected in Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan, *India's Environmental History*, 2 vols. For a sweeping transnational environmental history of the early modern world, see Richards, *The Unending Frontier*.

¹⁸ This frame came under question in the 1990s. See Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan, *Agrarian Environments*; also Bhattacharya, ed., *Forests, Fields and Farms*. See also Prasad, "Forests and Subsistence in Colonial India".

It is not enough, however, to explore these interconnections. It is not enough to look at the way different livelihoods, spaces, and histories intermesh, constituting their mutual forms. We need to push the argument further. The important point is to explore how the agrarian came into being as the universal rural. The very idea of the agrarian, I emphasise, has itself to be problematised and historicised.



In developing my arguments I am also arguing against two orthodoxies. When I began research, doing economic and social history was exciting. “Economic” and “social” were seen as foundational categories. It was as if their materiality was pre-constituted, only their working had to be grasped. We were critical of schematic Marxism and reductive explanations, but did not probe the constituted nature of the categories we operated with. We were aware of the need to be sensitive to questions of culture, but did not adequately reconceptualise the object of our study – the economy – to take account of cultural mediation.¹⁹

As the discursive turn swept through academia in the late 1980s and '90s, the seduction of economic history faded rapidly. Historians turned to the study of discourses and texts, signs and symbols, images and representations.²⁰ What followed was a radical rethinking of

For fine examples of subsequent works that look at these connections, see Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1991*; D’Souza, *Drowned and Dammed*; Cederlof, *Landscapes and the Law*; Kar, “Framing Assam”; Goswami, “Rivers in History”.

¹⁹ While Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class* had an immediate and powerful influence on studies of the working class, it did not have the same transformative effect on the study of the “economy”. Thompson himself moved increasingly towards the study of popular cultural practices and rituals, law, and custom. See Thompson, *Customs in Common*. In his great series on the modern age, Hobsbawm wrote separate chapters on culture, economy, and politics without exploring their mutual mediations. See Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*; idem, *The Age of Capital*.

²⁰ In India, the essays published in *Subaltern Studies* – especially after the first four volumes – express this shift most clearly.

the idea of the archive, critical explorations of the notions of truth and history, and an opening up of new arenas of research. Disturbed by this cultural turn, many economic historians pleaded for a return to old economic history. They saw in the intellectual currents of the time the dissolution of all they valued.

In a sense both these trends shared something in common. The discursive and cultural turn moved away from the realm of the economic, as though the study of the economy itself did not have to be rethought, as if the domain that economic historians had focused on earlier was irrevocably sullied. It was as if to talk of the agrarian was to return to something archaic. On the other hand, the desperate plea of economic historians to return to economic history was not simple hostility against the discursive turn. It assumed that the domain of the economic could and should be studied only in the way it had been before, untainted by the critical and discursive turn.

This book is a product of my effort to negotiate these oppositions.²¹ I do not believe that opening oneself to the discursive turn means renouncing the agrarian as a subject of study. Nor do I feel that a study of what was earlier seen as the sphere of the economic can, and ought to, be through a revival of economic history as it was practised earlier. To rethink the agrarian we need to unpack it as a category and subject it to critical scrutiny. We can do this, I think, through a productive and dialogic engagement with insights provided by the discursive turn.



The site of my enquiry is Punjab, though the arguments I offer have a much wider valence. As a historian, I develop my arguments through a dialogue with records and sources, so the archive does define certain spatial limits to my enquiry, as it does for other historians. But my effort is to move beyond the parochial limits of the local, to

²¹ I have for long emphasised the need to reconcile these oppositions in some of my general conceptual essays. See Bhattacharya, “Rethinking Marxist History”, and idem, “Lineages of Capital”. For a similar emphasis on the need to rethink the category “economy”, see Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*.

connect – as is often said – the local to the global. One could turn the argument around to make the opposite point. The global can exist historically only through the many locals. Capital, for instance, can be conceptualised as a universal category, but it operates in local contexts, confronts embedded structures, is refigured through historically specific processes, and personified in “real” human beings. As a universal category, capital is an abstraction, but historically it exists in concrete forms, as specific capitals. There is no understanding the abstract universal in its historical forms without looking carefully at its concrete articulations. Similarly, the history of colonisation forces us to reflect on a seemingly universalising process; but colonialism operates in different forms, is articulated in dissimilar ways at diverse sites, and is refigured by local histories. Only the local can imbue the abstract universal with density and thickness, fashion its distinctive forms. My narrative focuses on one such local history that can also tell us about wider processes of agrarian colonisation.

The book is organised in four parts. I begin in Part I with a discussion of the specific style of colonial governance that took shape in nineteenth-century Punjab. What developed there, I suggest, was masculine paternalism as an ideal of governance. This ideal emerged through an embattled negotiation with an alternative utilitarian vision of rule, and its contours were shaped by these conflicting ideals. Masculine paternalism defined the vision within which the agrarian society of Punjab was imagined and its framing categories developed. Without an understanding of the constituent elements of this vision, I argue, we cannot explore the way the agrarian came into being.

In Part II, my effort is to explore the agrarian imaginary as it evolved in Punjab. Over four chapters, I track the lineage of a set of categories and institutions that provided the grand frame of agrarian reordering. These became the basis of a dramatic reorganisation of the rural landscape, a radical reworking of how social groups were perceived and the forms in which relations between people and things were legally constituted. I unpack the category “village” to show how villages were consecrated as the universal form of rural settlement. By mapping villages over the entire landscape, the British displaced alternative forms of habitation and livelihood. The whole terrain was

taken over and bounded as a space within which the agrarian frontier would be expanded, pastoralists and nomadic communities displaced, and settled agriculture established. Marking village boundaries became an act of agrarian conquest, an act of enclosure on a massive scale.

I then look at the remaking of customs, the constitution of tenures, and the production of categories through which social relations in the countryside were ordered and the landscape made legible. My effort is to look at the inner logic of these processes of remaking – the conceptual resources they drew upon, the inner tensions within the discourses of property, customs, tenures, and tenancies, and the implications of the establishment of this codifying regime.

However, the desire for legibility does not necessarily create a legible world; projects of simplification often end up in classificatory convolutions. What we need to see are the ways in which schemes and plans work on the ground, the manner in which visions are concretised, laws read, notifications received. So, in Part III I shift from the exploration of models to strategies, from codes to practices, from discourses of power to the activities of everyday life. These were neither hard binaries nor absolute oppositions. We cannot understand the making of a code without looking at the way it is reordered through practices; we cannot explore discourses of power without probing the discursive practices within which they are embedded, without examining the ways in which they are interpreted, questioned, and refigured in everyday life. But the central focus of analysis can shift. If in Parts I and II I touched on practices while keeping my central focus on the making of the ideals of governance and the colonial agrarian vision, in Part III I look more closely at the working of the codifying regime on the ground – the everyday practices which are both shaped by and which reshape the regime of rules, codes, laws, and categories.

I look next at the ways in which the redefinition of rights was perceived by the peasants who cleared the commons and settled the land, expecting that their rights would be undisturbed, as had been the custom in the countryside. Through the verses of a peasant poet and the protests that unfolded in one part of Punjab, I reflect on how peasants experienced the process of colonisation. A new regime

of rights does not simply become part of the habitus once rules are legally codified. People understand and react to the new codes in their own ways, drawing upon notions and ideals they are familiar with, thus creating spaces of conflict and negotiation. I look at the troubled history of such encounters that mediated the constitution of this new regime of rights and customs.

If codes seek to fix the meaning of customs and rights, battles in courts reveal the ambiguities in their definition. And so the book moves to the courtroom. It was here, through the judicial process and struggles over interpretation, that notions of rights unravelled and were remade. Practices of inheritance, rules of adoption and gift, and notions of patriliney and primogeniture were persistently reformulated and re-specified through litigation. The new property regime that came into being was a product of such histories. Tenants and landlords, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, did not operate within a pre-scripted legal habitus whose scripts they had to unquestioningly follow. In contesting the codes, they both affirmed its power and subverted its fixity.

Beyond the court, in everyday life, codes are negotiated in a variety of ways. No rule has predictable consequences. Historically, we see individuals and groups in different contexts, confronting rules creatively, refiguring their implications. I proceed to look at the ways in which peasants negotiated the implications of primogeniture, confounding official perceptions. Drawing on the experience in England, colonial officials deprecated the custom of equitable male inheritance as an irrational practice that accounted for all the ills of the countryside: fragmentation of holdings, parcellisations of land, the proliferation of uneconomic plots that blocked all possibilities of improved agriculture. To reveal the colonial premises of these common assumptions, I track the history of individual holdings, explore the strategies deployed by landowners to consolidate their fields, and examine the logic of scatter.

In Parts II and III, thus, I examine the many different ways in which the agrarian was constituted through discursive, legal, and social processes. Everything was now supposed to happen through the terms established within this agrarian regime. In Part IV, I go on to

explore a more dramatic form of agrarian conquest. By the late nineteenth century, the process of agrarian conquest had pushed beyond the limits of the old agrarian settlements in Central Punjab to transform the vast highland pastures further west.

In the colonial imagination, pastures and scrublands were unproductive wastes, empty spaces waiting to be settled and cultivated. They had to be surveyed, mapped, and bounded. The rights of commoners had to be restricted, the movements of mobile people regulated, pastoralists turned into peasants, large-scale farming established, canal irrigation introduced, and “scientific” agriculture encouraged. On the highlands in Punjab west of the River Sutlej, we see a new experiment in state engineering, a more aggressive form of agrarian colonisation. I now shift focus to the way these pasturelands of west Punjab – the *bārs* as they were called – were first taken over and then radically transformed. I look both at the colonisation project as it was imagined and initiated, as well as the ways in which peasant settlers and nomadic pastoralists experienced this process.

I conclude by distinguishing two distinct but related forms of agrarian conquest: one that operates from below, slowly and silently transforming the world of peasants, and another that is implanted more dramatically from above, forcibly displacing earlier life-worlds. The meaning of colonial violence differed within these two processes. My effort in the book is to understand that meaning.