RESEARCH ARTICLE

Establishing Trustworthiness. Studying Leaders and Mobilisation in Two Social Movements in India

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ABSTRACT:

This paper enhances social movement studies by offering a strongly relational understanding of leader-follower relations for a better understanding of social movement mobilisation. It offers a conceptual framework around leadership styles, conflicts over roles, and normative moral values. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and intensive interactions with leaders and supporters of two social movements in India (the Gorkhaland movement in northern West Bengal, and the farmers' movements groups in Vidharba), we claim that especially leaders' trustworthiness is a necessary element in social movement mobilisation. We use the concept of trust work to highlight the various strategies that leaders employ to generate trust between themselves and their supporters and to analyse their outcomes of their efforts. Especially important is leaders' boundary work of establishing and transcending differences between an anticipated virtuous movement and dirty politics. Epistemologically, we propose that a relational approach is best suited to highlight the contested and dynamic nature of leader–follower relations. The generation of trust, we show, can best be understood at local and covert sites where leaders combine their commitment for movement issues with support for their prospective followers' struggles for survival.

KEYWORDS:

Agrarian crisis, boundary work, Gorkhaland, leadership, farmers' movement, relational ethnography

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1. Introduction

The important role of leaders and leadership for social movements is increasingly, yet slowly becoming acknowledged in social movement studies. Various authors criticise the limited theorisation of leadership, a limited understanding of the relationships between structures and leaders' agency, or the tendency to view leaders as instruments rather than independent agents of change (Morris and Staggenborg 2004; Ganz and McKenna 2019; Aminzade, Goldstone, and Perry 2001). We propose that particularly research from South Asia, where leadership has been widely studied (Price and Ruud 2010; Manor 2000; Jeffrey 2010; Reddy and Haragopal 1985), is helpful to illuminate the role of leaders in social movements. Establishing a dialogue between social movement studies and studies on leadership in South Asia not only helps to understand leaders' roles in mobilising followers for social movements but also inspires new approaches to study leadership in general. Accordingly, we ask two questions: First, what do leaders do to mobilise followers for social movements? Second, how can outsiders to the movement understand what leaders and followers do and why, while accounting for culturally specific meanings and expectations?

Drawing on ethnographic data and discussions with leaders and supporters of two ongoing social movements in India, we claim that especially leaders' trustworthiness is a necessary element in social movement mobilisation. Certainly, participation is strongly inspired by ideas of justice, development, belonging, fairness, and imaginations of a better life (Ray and Katzenstein 2005), and it is influenced by factors such as the framing of grievances, the availability of resources, and political context. Yet, we argue that these factors alone do not sufficiently explain mobilisation and why support is lent only to certain leaders. A few studies acknowledge the importance for leaders to convince people of their credibility (Benford 1993), commitment, willingness to suffer, and working for a public good more than for personal gain (e.g. Aminzade et al. 2001). However, these studies are less clear on how leaders win or lose trust from supporters and where this takes place. Our research helps fill this gap by combining insights on leadership from South Asia with our own fieldwork to illuminate social movement leaders' painstaking work of building trust. We observe what practices leaders use to generate trust and reflect on the outcome of their efforts. Our focus is mainly at the local, everyday scale of leader–follower interaction, although we also include more visible, public events. Our second aim relates to the epistemological question of what concepts and methods help us to understand the practices of social movement leaders and followers, especially in places where we are not part of the local community.

We define leaders as people who have considerable authority in a movement (Bob and Nepstad 2007, 1372). Leaders exist at various levels of a movement including top, intermediate, and local levels. Robnett (1997) describes the latter as "bridge leaders", those who "carr[y] both the ideology and the organisational tasks of mobilising down to the grassroots level. Bridge leaders are those neighbourhood and community organisers who mediate between top leadership and the vast bulk of followers, turning dreams and grand plans into on-the-ground realities" (Goldstone 2001, 158).

Research in South Asia is useful for approaching leader–follower relations since it usually describes leadership as a relational concept (Gorringe 2010) that accounts for various forms of exchange between those who aspire to be leaders and their potential supporters. Accordingly, we followed a "relational" approach (Desmond 2014) that foregrounds the dynamic and contested relations between leaders and followers more than political opportunity structures or leaders' framing of grievances. Such relational understanding not only questions the quality of relations between different actors (dependence, conflict, etc.) but also analyses how such relations come into being, are maintained, or broken (Desmond 2014, 554). This understanding is attuned to the concept of "transactional leadership" (Purdue 2001; Hollander 1993) in which leaders and supporters

are viewed as rational, active, and mutually dependent agents who are involved in symbolic exchanges and who evaluate each other's actions according to a set of expectations and moral values (Hollander 1993).

Mirroring the importance of relations, our research shows that especially the generation of trust (through what we call trust work) is essential for leaders to perform tasks such as mobilisation and negotiation with non-movement actors. This renders leadership an "interactional achievement, the product of the actions and reactions of leaders as well as their followers" (Einwohner 2007, 1310). To understand how leaders and followers construct and enter such a "space of relations" (Desmond 2014, 554), and to grasp different views, concerns, and opinions, we followed two movements in India over long period of time and at different sites. The first, the Gorkhaland-movement demands regional autonomy in northern West Bengal. The second movement consists of different groups mobilising around the agrarian crisis in Vidarbha, Eastern Maharashtra. This required interactions with different and at times rival stakeholders. While we tried to understand leader–follower relations in day-to-day settings, our study sites also included larger demonstrations, public and indoor meetings, private homes, or public offices. Ethnography enabled us to account for the culturally specific meanings and bases of trust.

Despite trying to look at social movements from a perspective as emic as possible, both authors—being female and European—remained clear outsiders. While this allowed us to speak to many different people and to critically reflect on our own and our interlocutors' points of views, it was challenging to understand culturally specific meanings and to gain respondents' trust while dealing with the irrefutable power relations at play during research.

The following section shows how studies on leadership in South Asia enhance our understanding of leaders' role in social movement mobilisation. Drawing on the concepts of styles, trust work, and transactional leadership, we then show how leaders generate trust from their followers in two recurrent social movements in India. The discussion highlights factors that contribute to the success or failure of trust work, and outlines the benefits of our relational, ethnographic approach. The conclusion summarises the contributions of our approach to studies on social movement leadership in general.

2. The Role of Leaders for Mobilisation

While leadership does not play a role in the political opportunity structures branch of social movement research, theories on collective behaviour, resource mobilisation, the political process model and framing have all acknowledged the role of leaders. Yet, various authors criticise a general lack of attention to the role and importance of leadership in explaining mobilisation and movement outcomes (Ganz and McKenna 2019; Morris and Staggenborg 2004). Only few studies explicitly focus on the relations between leaders and their prospective followers (e.g. Fiedler 1981), and hardly any point to the importance of trust in generating support (e.g. Benford 1993). This is also reflected in studies on social movements in India that, while acknowledging the importance of leaders, do not explore how exactly leaders *do* their work (Nepal 2009; Subramaniam 2011; Bhirdikar 2020).

Most of the research on leaders in South Asia is concerned with how leaders at different levels of a polity gain influence and authority. Existing studies are broadly based on an understanding of leadership as relational—for instance, understanding leadership as the interface between the leaders and the led, thereby removing the spotlight from leaders to focus on the "painstaking work [on the ground], which is the essence of political mobilisation" (Gorringe 2010, 122).

In explaining leaders' authority, various authors point to the different styles that leaders perform and the contradictions in the simultaneous performances of these roles. According to Price and Ruud (2010), leaders can adopt different leadership styles, two of which, the "boss" and the "lord", are relevant to this study. The "lord" style has more pronounced normative elements. Lords strongly rely on maintaining a reputation of honesty. The "boss" refers to leaders with political ambitions who, in an amoral imperative of maintaining primarily their own interests, redistribute resources. They might be associated with a political party and act as middlemen between supporters on the ground and powers higher up. Bosses incorporate qualities of a "fixer", a person who successfully promotes personal and others' interests by mediating between people and higher levels of a movement, group or government (Manor 2000; Reddy and Haragopal 1985). Price and Ruud (2010) argue that people who try to become successful in the social or political sphere need to prove their abilities as fixers first. This suggests that "fixing" qualities are also an element for the establishment of trust between leaders and supporters. Importantly, these different types of leadership are not clear-cut but rather merge into one another.

Also social movement research points to different roles or leadership styles (Roche and Sachs 1955; Aminzade et al 2001). Some draw on Weberian categories to identify leaders' bases of authority (Bob and Nepstad 2007), including charisma (Eichler 1977; Della Porta and Diani 1999 for a critique). These studies, however, lack a pronounced relational understanding of leadership that accounts for perceptions and expectations of potential movement followers and that contextualises leader–follower relations in daily life as experienced at local sites where movement mobilisation is carried out (see Gorringe 2010).

In South Asian scholarship, the relationship between leaders' practices and followers' expectations is often explained in relation to the contradictions of a combination of different leadership styles. Usually, these conflicts arise from leaders' simultaneous need to present themselves as fixers capable of gaining benefits for their supporters (and themselves), and as social reformers, or secular lord-type leaders who fight against corruption. While the former requires closeness to the powerful and active involvement in party politics, the latter is supposed to work for the good of all people and to be nonpartisan and incorruptible (Jeffrey 2010; Alm 2010). However, supporters tend to see politics as an "unprincipled game of dishonesty and corruption morally upright people should never engage in" (Nielsen 2012, 436; see also Ruud 2000, Wenner 2018a). Accordingly, social reformers emphasise their separation from conventional politics and make sure that their involvement in political mobilisation is perceived as impartial (Price and Ruud 2010). Alm (2010) concludes that ultimately the local leader will have to decide between improving his/her reputation of honesty as a social worker or sharpening his/her capabilities as a fixer.

This points to an important contradiction: in pursuing different styles, leaders need to manage a balancing act between the perceivably "dirty" (but resourceful) domain of politics and the domain of "honest" and selfless community work (Wenner 2018b). We will later explain this as boundary work. Our research suggests that such conflicts over roles result in tensions that put leaders' trustworthiness at stake. Especially social movement leaders need to present themselves with lordly attributes of honesty, sacrifice, and selflessness while being required to achieve certain goals in the domain of politics.

In sum, research on leaders in South Asia helps to better understand leaders' various roles within a movement, the possible tensions between these roles, and how leaders deal with such conflicts in order to maintain their image as reliable and trustworthy persons while often facing challenging situations. It also offers a conceptual framework that highlights the relational aspects of leadership and contextualises it with a view on normative readings of politics and social movements. This is not only helpful in highlighting the importance of trust in leader–follower relations but also in identifying the processes through which trust is generated or lost.

3. Trust Work and Leadership in Two Indian Social Movements

Understanding leaders' trustworthiness, achieved by what we call "trust work", is important for explaining participation in social movements. Similar to what Einwohner (2007) has described as "authority work" (or leaders' efforts to "establish their credibility in the eyes of potential followers") (1310) in her research on the mobilisation of resistance, we use the concept of trust work to highlight that leaders aim at establishing trustworthiness in addition to credibility. To describe how we came to understand trust based on the emic views of our interlocutors, we first detail our research methods and then describe what makes leaders trustworthy in the eyes of their followers before analysing leaders' trust work and how they deal with role conflicts.

3.1 Context: The Gorkhaland and Farmers' Movements

Our discussion is based on empirical data derived from two social movements in India. We broadly understand social movements as loosely formed collectivities whose identity is based on "temporarily perceived and articulated ideals and common interests" (SinghaRoy 2010, 155). The first movement, the "Gorkhaland" movement, is an ethno-regionalist movement for subnational autonomy in form of a separate union state to be carved out of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts and attached areas at the southern fringe of Bhutan (Dooars) in northern West Bengal. Many people believe that the reason for their impoverishment was the West Bengal government's ostensibly discriminatory rule. Further, being part of the Nepali-speaking ethnic "Gorkha" minority in the state, many believe that the creation of Gorkhaland would facilitate their recognition as Indian citizens by putting an end to the false allegations of being Nepali citizens (Middleton 2013). The original demand for a separation of these areas stems from the early 20th century, but the struggle for statehood became more organised since the 1980s when a new regional party and its popular leader began to organise an armed struggle for autonomy that was strongly opposed by the West Bengal government. After achieving some concessions in the form of a regional development council that was established in 1988, the movement for Gorkhaland regained strength in 2007 with the emergence of a new leader (Bimal Gurung) and a new party (the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, GJM, or Gorkha People's Liberation Front). It has since oscillated between phases of violent agitation (e.g. in 2007/08, 2013 and 2017) and relaxation (e.g. through the establishment of a new regional council in 2012). The dream of statehood continues to inspire regional politics and imaginations of a better life.

The second movement consists of diverse mobilisations around agricultural issues in Vidarbha in Central India, in the east of the state of Maharashtra. Vidarbha has gained a reputation of having a particularly high number of so-called "farmer suicides", which is indeed affecting marginal small- and mid-sized farmers in particular. The agrarian crisis is a combination of structural factors, most of all class, caste and gender oppression, and liberal economic policies of opening the markets and withdrawing state support (Mishra 2020). In this context, a number of groups portray themselves as farmers' movements that stand up for the farmers and their demands for remunerable prices or irrigation infrastructure. Here, we focus on three groups that all have strong presences in certain localities. The Kisan Adikar Abiyan (KAA) is a relatively small movement group that is not affiliated to any political party and is also not involved in electoral politics, though some of the leaders are close to the Congress Party of India. The second is the Svabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS), a larger farmers' movement that is involved in electoral politics with its own party. The third is the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), the peasant wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). While these are distinct

groups, they understand each other as part of one broad farmers' movement. Cooperation remains limited mostly because of the limited geographical reach of the respective groups. Only recently, in the end of 2020, did these and other groups mobilise thousands of farmers for large-scale protests (Sridhar 2021).

While the movement for Gorkhaland is largely led by regional political parties (that occasionally fight over the right to represent the movement to the government), the relationship of the farmers' movement groups with party politics is far more ambiguous. Both the Gorkhaland and the farmers' movement groups are active mostly at a regional scale (i.e. at district levels), which means that even the higher-level leaders interviewed can maintain personal networks with their local-level activists and constituents, for example by regular visits to their villages.

3.2 Methods

Our discussion is based on qualitative data that were generated during various extended field stays between 2011 and 2017 in Darjeeling and between 2011 and 2015 in Maharashtra.[1] To capture ongoing movement activities that are often fluid and exist in shifting conditions, ethnography as a methodological approach has particular relevance (Plows 2008, 1524) because it enables the researcher to "understand what is going on 'upstream'; at the grassroots, in often hidden, 'latent' (Melucci 1996), social conditions" (ibid., 1524). While trustworthiness of leaders was not our initial research interest, its relevance became apparent during our discussions.

To better understand the practices and concerns of leaders and their followers, we shadowed four leaders (one male, middle-aged "zonal president" and later councillor of the autonomous body in Darjeeling, and three men in Vidarbha, all in their late twenties: two village-level activists and one district-level leader) during their day-to-day interaction with (potential) followers (or opponents). This enabled us to closely observe the leaders' trust work at local sites. We also observed various rallies and meetings that these leaders had with both their fellow activists or followers. In total, both authors spent several months in villages (Maharashtra) or on tea plantations (Darjeeling) to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic context of (prospective) movement supporters (i.e. farmers, workers) and the local dimensions of political dynamics. Both authors conducted semi-structured and informal interviews with movement and party leaders, supporters, non-followers, opponents, intellectuals (such as lawyers or journalists), or representatives of the local government. Interviews were conducted in Nepali (which Miriam speaks) or Marathi and Hindi (for which Silva involved an interpreter) and were later translated and transcribed into English. Following Plows (2008, 1529), we aimed at identifying how the interviewees frame issues "in their own terms". These data, complemented by newspaper articles and recorded speeches, were evaluated using qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000) and inductive coding using the software ATLAS.ti. The leaders we observed included mainly local and medium-level leaders; in addition, the Darjeeling case also includes references to the (then) top-level leader Bimal Gurung.

Research on the farmers' movement in Maharashtra started with interviewing the higher-level leaders of the three groups with a certain base in rural Vidarbha. For each of the three groups, one village was studied to understand the processes of mobilisation on the ground. In the villages, Silva first talked to the local level leader from this and other, often neighbouring, villages (see Table 1). Additionally, Silva chose interviewees according to different landholdings. The majority had between 2.5 and 10 acres of land. Despite attempts to talk to women, all leaders and most interviewees in the Vidarbha case were men; only 11 were women. The

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[1] The part on the farmers' movements in Vidarbha is based on the dissertation of Silva Lieberherr (2017); see the chapter on "Mobilizing with Trustworthiness". Part of the interviews with AIKS were conducted by the then-master student Andrea Wynistorf under supervision of Silva.

caste composition of interviewees differed across villages but included predominantly land-owning castes. All three villages had a high proportion of one particular caste that was mirrored in the sample.

Table 1: Interviews conducted in Vidarbha between 2011 and 2015

Type	Specification	Number	Method
Leaders beyond the village level	State-level general secretary (1); members of core committees (3); regional organisations' presidents (4)	8	Semi-structured interview
Leaders on the village level	Activists (mostly village level): 3 SSS, 2 KAA, 4 AIKS	9	Semi-structured and informal interview
Supporters in the villages	31 SSS, 34 KAA, 40 AIKS	105	Semi-structured interview
Experts	Journalists, academics	5	Semi-structured interview

Table 2: Interviews conducted in Darjeeling between 2011 and 2013

Type	Specification	Number	Method
Top-level political leaders	Party presidents, spokespeople, general secretaries, core committee members, presidents of different regional parties and organisations	15	Semi-structured interviews
Mid-level political leaders	Councillors/zonal presidents, members of central committee (all GJM), candidates from different parties for the legislative assembly	18	Semi-structured interviews
	GJM Councillor		Shadowing
Lower-level political leaders	Local unit representatives, local union representatives (11 GJM, 6 Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists, 1 Gorkha National Liberation Front, 1 All India Trinamool Congress)	19	Semi-structured and informal interviews
Tea plantation workers	Male	15	Informal interviews
		2	Group interviews
	Female	11	Informal interviews
		7	Group interviews
Other	Shopkeepers, restaurant owners, drivers, teachers, urban and rural residents	24	Informal interviews
Experts	Lawyers, journalists, academics	7	Semi-structured interviews

Research on the Gorkhaland movement began with semi-structured interviews with prominent top-level movement leaders of different regional parties in Darjeeling. Except for leaders from the women's-wing, all leaders were male. Later, also middle- and local-level leaders were included, as well as group and individual interviews with male and female residents (aged between 24 and 50) mostly from four different tea plantations (see Table 2). Most of the interviewed were plantation workers and had similar socio-economic backgrounds. While some of them were active movement/party-supporters, others only occasionally participated in movement activities. The extended stays helped identifying the close intertwinement of local leaders' trust work with existing social and political relations. These insights were combined with observations of regional-level, larger political rallies, demonstrations and party-meetings that shed light on the performances of political leaders.

3.3 Expectations Towards Leaders and Experiences

We now discuss what movement followers expect from their leaders and what criteria for trustworthiness they establish, before describing how leaders respond to such demands and what contradictions emerge from these responses. To operationalise trust, we highlight statements that explain why people lent (or did not lend) support to leaders. We understand support in terms of participating in rallies, demonstrations or other forms of activism or electoral support for parties or leaders. As our data suggest, trust expresses itself as a form of justified belief that a personal investment (e.g. participating in a rally or taking a personal risk) will lead to an achievement (either on the personal or group level). Interestingly, despite the structural and historical differences between the ethnic- and class-based movements we studied, there are striking similarities regarding the creation of trust in leader–follower relations.

It is not easy to generalise what prospective social movement supporters expect from their leaders since such expectations not only differ between different groups but are also situational. We here present accounts from persons with mostly a rather poor economic background, namely small farmers and tea plantation workers and residents. Both groups form an important base for the social movements we studied. However, not all workers/farmers actively support the social movements or their respective leaders. Rather, as statements from Darjeeling suggest, and in distinction to the farmers' movement, many tea plantation workers pledge loyalty to the ruling party out of fear or the need to be protected by the party's labour union. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees expressed clearly what they expect from party leaders.

In the opinion of female plantation workers in Darjeeling that Miriam interacted with in 2012, a "good" leader should be generous, share his/her wealth, listen to them and understand their problems. Others praised leaders for helping them with administrative work, with mediating between themselves and government agencies or the plantation management, or—once—for their help in re-opening a closed tea estate. This includes accessibility: "We spoke personally to Bimal Gurung. We were so impressed that he spoke to us" (local activist, 6.4.2012). In addition, physical strength and youth were mentioned as characteristics that underlined a leader's capability of getting things done (by any means), thus underlining his/her "fixing" qualities. By contrast, selfishness and the failure to share wealth (presumably acquired through the position as leader) were considered bad attributes. For instance, some explained that they initially supported the ruling party but stopped when it was clear that they would "not get anything" in return (interview, female tea worker, 14.5.2012). Also, leaders' lack of respect of followers or recognition of their contributions to the movement were cited as reasons to change the political party.

Besides providing personal benefits as fixers or social workers, good leaders were also expected to keep promises to the ethnic group, as the following quote indicates: "*Netas* [leaders] say they would create

Gorkhaland. They are using us…. What would *netas* do without the people? But then they forget us and that what they had promised to us" (female tea worker, 14.5.2012). Indeed, various accounts suggested that due to GJM president Bimal Gurung's failure to deliver Gorkhaland, many of the initial followers withdrew their active support. Various persons expressed their disappointment by saying that leaders had transformed the statehood movement into a "movement for money" (interview, GJM activist, 6.4.2012), using it as a "begging bowl" to exert pressure on the West Bengal government in turn for personal benefits. These allegations express deeper concerns about the need to keep the "pure" social movement for statehood away from the perceivably "dirty" realm of party politics (Wenner 2018a). Thus, leaders' honesty, commitment and endurance were seen as important preconditions for supporting them.[2]

In the farmers' movement, supporters consistently emphasised that they support leaders because they were worth trusting as they are able to get things done and are honest. Supporters shared stories about how the leaders helped them get access to government schemes, for example compensation for families of farmers who committed suicide or compensation for pensions or irrigation schemes. A supporter of SSS described how the village-level leader had helped him in a conflict with the Maharashtra State Electricity Board. He explained that the village leader "had done such activities for the farmers—therefore we have trust on him" (Buldhana district, Dec 2011). Besides such material support, consistent emotional support was also important to supporters. One supporter of KAA said that the district-level leader "is fighting. They [the movement group] … have motivated me, given me emotional support" (Wardha district, Feb. 2012). One crucial aspect of this emotional support was to assure the farmers that all their problems, mostly indebtedness, were not their own but the government's failure.

Since these groups are rather small, their leaders did not have considerable wealth to distribute. However, supporters drew a virtue out of this comparable powerlessness of the groups. Supporters of SSS donated to them because they knew that the group worked on resolving their issues. One village-level leader said that SSS did not have "too much money, no vehicle, but only bullock carts—but we have good ideas" (Buldhana district, Feb. 2015). Supporters also felt that working with a comparatively small group would make the leaders more accessible. One exemplified this saying that if SSS leaders came to power, they would be able to personally visit each house in Vidarbha and listen to the farmers' problems without the need of appointments or security guards.

The story of Sharad Joshi, the famous leader of Shetkari Sanghatana (of which the SSS is a faction) who became a politician in Vidarbha, has shaped many of his former supporters' perceptions of whom to trust. After having entered party politics, he lost the trust of the farmers. One supporter of AIKS stated that "to join politics, this man created drama. He made use of poor people and then left these people alone" (Wardha district, Jan. 2012). Later this supporter added that such a problem also existed in AIKS and "when they [the leaders] get a post they forget everything, like Sharad Joshi did" (Wardha district, June 2013).

These examples suggest that (potential) supporters trust leaders whom they perceive as honest, accessible, and selfless. Further, leaders need to prove their fixing qualities and deliver valued goods, such as access to finance or government services. Finally, leaders are trusted when they convincingly present themselves as committed fighters for the greater cause (i.e. Gorkhaland or farming conditions). This suggests that mobilisation for social movements is not only based on larger group aims such as economic justice, belonging or autonomy, but it is very much situated in the mundane struggles for basic needs (cf. Subramaniam 2011).

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[2] Only supporters of the minority Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM) stressed that leaders should be humble and follow the Communist principles.

The emphasis on fixing qualities and past successes in delivering goods is attuned to what Purdue (2001) had called "competence trust", or the belief that the leader has the capability to control risk based on reputation and past experience. Qualities such as honesty, accessibility and selflessness (mirrored in the social-worker style of leadership) reflect "goodwill trust", or the "emotional acceptance of the moral commitment of the other not to exploit vulnerability" (ibid., 2014). Purdue explains that while competence and goodwill trust are both based on past experience and the reputation of the trusted person, goodwill trust relies more on the assumption of shared values and goals and implies reciprocity. Thus, attuned to the model of transactional leadership, supporters closely monitor whether leaders fulfil their promises. The leaders themselves, being aware of these expectations, pursue their strategies to generate and maintain trust among their followers.

3.4 Leaders' Trust Work

So how do leaders live up to these differing demands? How did they establish trust between themselves and their followers? In both cases we researched, leaders at different levels presented themselves as generous and capable social workers who delivered access to finance, government welfare schemes, or contract work. Local-level leaders in Darjeeling praised themselves for organising state-sponsored public work schemes in the villages, and a zonal president (and later elected councillor of the autonomous body) stressed the importance of providing infrastructure or jobs. To prop up the image of himself as a social worker, he regularly stressed his closeness to the party president (and the financial assets associated with him). Besides, he regularly attended social functions such as funerals, saying that people respected him for doing so. He clearly acknowledged the mutual dependence of leaders and supporters. Similarly, the GJM president Bimal Gurung regularly initiated welfare campaigns throughout the district, where he distributed money to chosen persons or road projects and channelled food rations.

In the farmers' movement, leaders have less access to material resources. Their trust work focusses on mediating between supporters and the state or the markets. For example, a supporter of the AIKS reported that a leader helped him with paperwork and got in touch with the owner of a sugar factory who had earlier refused to buy his produce, which had left him in a desperate state of indebtedness. Neither government officials nor a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader (who was notably the same sugar factory's owner) had helped him. The supporter shared that "looking at me, other people also came to know that if my problem was solved by Kisan Sabha, theirs was too. … From that moment, I was in All India Kisan Sabha only" (Wardha district, Jan. 2012). There are many other examples where leaders, using their skills, network or the strength of their group, supported farmers in getting support from the state or boosting their power vis-à-vis the power of traders in the market place. Beyond that, village leaders asserted that they try to help supporters with medical treatment and with collecting donations during difficult times.

In Darjeeling, especially middle- and higher-level leaders complemented their image as a social worker with a self-portrayal as a "boss" or a "strongman", based on masculine attributes such as physical strength or the use of *goondas* (thugs) to intimidate alleged enemies of the cause (including rival party members). Often, they displayed strength by using a loud and aggressive voice during speeches or by knocking their fist on the dais. Through this, leaders not only attempted to intimidate their respective audiences but also to present themselves as strong and capable, ready to go to any extent to deliver on what they had promised to their followers. Also, the organisation of general strikes and other forms of public protest signalled the strength and commitment of leaders.

The leaders of the farmers' movement show these strongman behaviours less distinctively. Of those groups, it is SSS where these practices are seen most. For example, when officials of the Maharashtra State Electricity

board had come to a village to cut off the electric supply, villagers shared that the SSS supporters threatened the officials and banned their entry into the village. The village leader claimed that the officials "are afraid, because this village belongs to Svabhimani Shetkari Sangathana and the farmers won't let them enter. … And the result of this was that the farmers are not facing any problem." (Buldhana district, May 2013)

For middle- and higher-level leaders in Darjeeling, the regular expression of commitment to the cause of Gorkhaland and the display of symbols of sacrifice also served as important strategies in their trust work. During an indoor meeting aimed at addressing upcoming rival party units in his area, the zonal president, for instance, highlighted his participation in hunger strikes for Gorkhaland and the police cases that he took in his name (also to protect his followers). Especially the GJM president Bimal Gurung regularly presented himself as a kind of messiah, directed by some divine inspiration and the only person capable of achieving the goal of Gorkhaland, thus drawing on religious bases of authority (Bimal Gurung, speeches, 7.10.2007 and 7.5.2008 in Darjeeling and Siliguri). To avoid conflations of his position as a movement leader with party politics, he even claimed he would not take any post in the newly created autonomous council (speech, Darjeeling, 21.7.2011). Yet, after elections, Gurung became the chairman of that very council.

For leaders of the farmers' movement, the reputation of being honest was paramount—even more so because the groups are small and can hardly compete with the established political parties in terms of fixing qualities. The leader of KAA argued that if he would ever join electoral politics, this would be entirely dependent on the support of other members of his group. He assured that "I don't want to be MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] or MP [Member of Parliament]. Working for the welfare of the people is not an easy task. But if it is a felt need by the people, I am ready" (Wardha district, Feb. 2015). Other leaders made similar arguments, and the supporter of AIKS even often told how the group's leaders had taught them how important it is to fight selflessly and not work for one's own benefit. One SSS leader even tattooed the group's emblem on his arm to show devotion.

In sum, leaders tried to establish trustworthiness by (i) proving themselves capable of keeping their promises and delivering valued goods and services to their followers, for example as fixers or social workers, and by (ii) showing their uncompromising commitment to the larger cause of the social group, for instance by using symbols of sacrifice. The latter strategy was more applied by middle- and upper-level leaders. The adoption of different leadership styles helped them to frame themselves as generous, strong and honest, while the practical initiation of development schemes, the mediation between followers and state agencies or markets, and the organisation of events such as general strikes and demonstrations underlined their capabilities.

3.5 Contradictions and Conflicts

For leaders in both movements, the adoption of different leadership styles was necessary to present themselves as capable agents in different domains, including social movements and party politics. However, similar to observations by Nielsen (2012) and Ruud (2000), our data clearly highlight the contradictions inherent in leaders' need to get involved in these different realms. In order to deliver developmental schemes or to mediate between the public and state organisations, leaders need to get involved in the domain of party politics, for instance, by establishing networks with party leaders or by becoming party workers themselves. Since involvement in politics is commonly associated with deception and selfishness, it clearly contradicts the simultaneous need for leaders to present themselves as honest and uncompromising fighters for the larger cause of the social movement.

In the farmers' movement, this contradiction was omnipresent. For instance, an SSS leader had left the movement to join a local BJP politician. After the politician lost elections, the leader returned to the movement—but having lost a lot of trust from other leaders and supporters, he held many press conferences and meetings to justify his move, arguing that he had been blinded by the big party. Indeed, supporters of all three groups repeatedly said that the move into politics should be avoided. A supporter of AIKS explained that "if it [AIKS] is connected to politics, the leaders do not do anything for the farmers; they just look out for their political career" (Wardha district, Jan. 2012). On the other hand, however, supporters and leaders alike acknowledged the necessity of being involved in politics in order to achieve something. A supporter of the KAA who appreciated a local village leader who was considered honest and accessible said that "he is a good leader, but he is not a political leader, only a movement leader. A political leader is needed to fight for the issues of the farmers" (Wardha district, Feb. 2015). While leaders constantly established a border between themselves and politicians, the same leaders also explained the importance of being involved in politics. An SSS leader was convinced that "it is better to be in the political system than to try to change it from outside. Because in the parliament is the place where things are decided" (Buldhana district, June 2013).

Leaders in the mostly party-led Gorkhaland movement were less concerned with their involvement in party politics. However, potential supporters' allegations of corruption, violence, and deception posed common threats to their authority. When Bimal Gurung initially founded the GJM, he clearly distanced himself from the "dirty" political practices of his predecessor by claiming that he was honest, committed, non-corruptible, democratic and non-violent (speech, Bimal Gurung, 7.10.2007). But negotiating movement aims with the state and national governments also required top-level leaders to make compromises. One way to mend the moral contradictions between making deals with the very government that they were challenging was to present themselves as mediators without the final authority over the distribution of state-sponsored development (speech, Bimal Gurung, 14.6.2012). Another strategy was to highlight the temporal nature of any deals made with the government (including the autonomous council) (speeches, Bimal Gurung and Roshan Giri, 21.7.2011). Practically, these leaders were switching between a strategy of confrontation (visible in the regular revival of protests and demonstrations) and one of relaxation (expressed in the agreement on the autonomous councils). Thereby, leaders not only had to navigate the differing demands of their followers (for developmental patronage and/or statehood) but also had to deal with the pressure from the state government, which got itself involved in local politics by offering alternative routes to patronage (e.g. by establishing its own rival party units or by granting tribal-based development councils outside of the purview of the GJM-run autonomous council) or by involving regionalist leaders in criminal cases.

4. Discussion

We now summarise our findings to highlight the importance of leaders' trust work, outline factors that contribute to a success or failure of their strategies, and sum up the contributions of our approach for social movement studies. Not surprisingly, people are more likely to lend support to a movement when they trust the leader/s. Trust is an important basis of leadership that emerges from the dynamic interactions between leaders and followers. Given the deeply relational nature of trust and credibility, the image that leaders want to create for themselves needs to resonate with the expectations of followers and to be appropriate in the given cultural settings (cf. Einwohner 2007). To create and maintain trust, leaders need to engage in trust work. This trust, once achieved, has to be re-established continuously in a dynamic relationship between leaders and potential supporters. Trust can be won as well as lost. Our case material shows that an important element of this trust work is playing different roles (fixer, social worker, strongman, etc.) to meet various demands of potential

supporters. Our identification of reputational aspects related to caring, trustworthiness, reliability and capability to get things done resonates with studies on the importance of leadership for winning national-level elections in India (Shastri and Syal 2014). At first glance, these observations resemble Hollander's (1993) idea of an "idiosyncrasy credit" which he uses to describe "a dynamic process of interpersonal evaluation" (33) between leader and supporters. A leader can earn such credits by proving his/her competence in achieving a group's goals, conformity to group norms, duration of participation in the movement, or prior good reputation (ibid.). Once earned, the credits give a leader some latitude for innovation or even for deviating from the movement's aims. However, the failure to fulfil supporters' expectations or negatively viewed behaviour (e.g. selfishness) can result in the loss of credits (Hollander 1993).

Our observations from India and similar studies on leadership in South Asia complicate this reading by showing that followers' different (and indeed high) expectations of leaders requires them to function in different domains that privilege different moral values. Accordingly, their playing of different roles requires a continuous balancing act. To be successful in the domain of a social movement, leaders are expected to be virtuous, honest, committed and uncompromising. However, to be successful fixers delivering material benefits to supporters or establishing access to state agencies, leaders must get involved in the negatively associated domain of politics. Thus, instead of (only) asking how leaders acquire "idiosyncrasy credits", one needs to ask how leaders mend these conflicts and manage the balancing act between different demands of their supporters.

Leaders' trust work reveals two seemingly contradicting strategies: one the one hand, leaders engage in boundary work. Rhetorically, they clearly distance themselves from the domain of politics by investing in their reputations as honest, trustworthy and committed fighters for the larger movement's cause and for social welfare. On the other hand, however, leaders need to be able to effectively cross the very boundaries between movement and politics, honesty and deception, commitment and compromise. Practically, this includes the transformation of movements into political parties, movement leaders' acceptance of posts as elected representatives or chairpersons, electoral coalitions with powerful parties, or the acceptance of concessions from the government. In this sense, the struggle over "idiosyncrasy credits" is also a struggle over (re-)interpretations of leaders' practices.

Certainly, the involvement with politics puts leaders' trustworthiness at stake. Yet, an incapability to deliver material benefits also makes leaders appear less reliable in the local context. Trust, as our data show, is generated in different domains, including the access of local villagers to government services, contract work or agricultural markets, the protection through union representatives, or the struggle for recognition, justice and rights through the movement. This underlines the local anchoring of trust in existing social and economic relations that is often overlooked in classical social movement research. Certainly, loss of trust in one domain can be compensated through trust work in another domain. For instance, when the achievement of Gorkhaland in Darjeeling became more unlikely, political leaders invested more in providing access to material resources from the development state. Beyond this, findings from the farmers' movement suggest that trustworthiness and honesty serve as advantage when competing with resourceful (but "dishonest") political parties.

Although leaders can try to cover up these transgressions by camouflaging their involvement in politics as something virtuous (see Wenner 2018a), there are limits to these transgressions. For instance, when the SSS leader mentioned earlier joined the BJP, he clearly lost the trust of his earlier supporters. Although an informal involvement with the BJP might have been acceptable to them, a full-fledged change of flags was not. Further, leaders face structural constraints, including changing state policies or the availability of material resources. Finally, to be successful, leaders need to have access to networks of powerful people, including top-level

movement leaders, party or other political leaders and state representatives. Without such networks, even honest leaders will face difficulties in keeping promises to their local supporters. Leaders' trust work at the local level is thus clearly circumscribed by larger political, economic and social structures.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the importance of leaders, particularly bridge leaders, in mobilising supporters for social movements. It also contributes to the debate on Northern/Southern perspectives on social movements by highlighting the value of studies on leaders in South Asia. Methodologically, the paper addresses the question of what concepts and methods help us to understand the practices of social movement leaders and followers. Conceptually, we argued that especially leaders' efforts to generate and maintain trust between them and their followers are an important basis for mobilisation. We viewed leadership as relational, and considering leaders and supporters to be engaged in a transactional relationship based on material and symbolic exchanges, to introduce the concept of trust work to describe leaders' rhetorical and practical efforts at presenting themselves as trustworthy persons to their potential supporters. Here, the conceptual lenses of leadership styles, conflicts over roles and normative distinctions between different domains inspired by studies of leadership in South Asia were useful to understand the potential and limits of such trust work. Our studies show that especially low- and mid-level leaders have to actively manoeuvre between different, contradicting expectations and manage the difficult balancing act between gaining supporters' "competence trust" by being a good fixer and gaining their "goodwill trust" by being an honest social worker and movement fighter.

Such contradictions suggest that trust work is also boundary work. Leaders need to function in different domains, including both politics and social movements, thus transcending the boundaries between the two domains while keeping distinctions intact. They regularly have to justify their transgressions, for instance by framing them as temporal or by camouflaging them as "non-political". They thereby try to redefine the very perception of what is to be counted as political or not. An understanding of the interplay between larger social, cultural, political and economic structures (e.g. the availability of resources and moral values) and leaders' trust work requires a highly context-specific analysis of mobilisation for each case.

We propose that—epistemologically—such a context-specific analysis is best started from the local level where mobilisation happens in ways that are not directly related to social movement issues at first glance, but rather embedded in day-to-day struggles of survival. Our multi-sited and relational approach allowed us to see that it is not only at large, visible political rallies or meetings but mainly in everyday village life that relations between leaders and followers are forged, changed and contested.

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