

The Politics of Dispossession: Theorizing India's "Land Wars"

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Abstract

While struggles over land dispossession have recently proliferated across the developing world and become particularly significant in India, this paper argues that existing theories of political agency do not capture the specificity of the politics of dispossession. Based on two years of ethnographic research on anti-dispossession movements across rural India, the paper argues that the dispossession of land creates a specific kind of politics, distinct not just from labor politics, but also from various other forms of peasant politics that have been theorized in the social sciences. It illustrates how the process of land dispossession itself shapes the targets, strategy and tactics, organization, social composition, goals, and ideologies of anti-dispossession struggles. It concludes with reflections on why land conflicts are less easily institutionalized than labor conflicts and may therefore constitute a significantly disruptive force in the emerging centers of global capitalism for the foreseeable future.

Keywords

accumulation by dispossession, land grabs, social movements, agrarian change, peasant politics, Polanyi, India

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There is a growing recognition that frameworks of political agency premised on the position of wage laborers in capitalist production do not capture many of the most significant political struggles against neoliberal capitalism. In many parts of the world, labor struggles have been overshadowed by social movements, insurgencies, and resistances that do not originate from the proletariat—strictly speaking—and that are fighting not exploitation but innumerable forms of dispossession of private and common wealth: what Harvey has called “accumulation by dispossession.”¹ Rural land has become a major locus of such dispossession in many developing countries, bringing the state and metropolitan capitalists into direct confrontation with rural agriculturalists. In India, the use of eminent domain and other state powers to expropriate land from farmers for increasingly privatized industrial, infrastructural, and real estate projects has, in recent years, generated widespread agrarian uprisings, popularly dubbed “land wars.” While so-called land wars have moved to the center of Indian politics and are attracting greater scholarly interest globally, this paper argues that existing theories of political agency do not capture the specificity of the politics of dispossession. Based on a broad mapping of anti-dispossession movements across India, this paper advances some parameters for such a theory.

Although the dispossession of agrarian land has long been an aspect of capitalist development in most parts of the world, its economic and political significance appears to be generally increasing. This renewed significance appears to be global, and “land grabs” are now attracting significant scholarly attention in Africa,² Southeast Asia,³ and Latin America.⁴ However, it is arguably in the two rapidly growing countries that together contain 45 percent of the world’s rural population that land struggles have reached the greatest scale and political explosiveness.⁵ In China, scholars estimate that between 50 and 66 million people were dispossessed for various kinds of development projects between 1980 and 2002, and that land grabs now constitute the single largest source of peasant protest,⁶ and possibly of “mass incidents” more generally.⁷ The efforts of local governments to cheaply acquire farmland for private developers has triggered a series of farmer protests, including high-profile clashes in the villages of Wukan in 2011 and Shangpu in 2013, which appear to be drawing inspiration from each other. These proliferating land struggles have forced Chinese leaders to pay some obeisance to protecting farmers’ land rights,⁸ and prompted limited efforts to rein in the land brokering of local governments.⁹

In India, the accelerating dispossession of land for private investment in the post-liberalization period, combined with a relatively open democracy, has made the land question perhaps even more politically consequential than in China. While it is estimated that 60 million people have been displaced from their land for development projects since independence in 1947, the rate of dispossession has by all accounts increased after liberalization in the early 1990s.¹⁰ Its character, moreover, has changed as Special Economic Zones (SEZs), high-tech cities, real estate, and privatized infrastructure have joined dams, mining, heavy industry, and commercial forestry as causes for dispossessing peasants. Since 2005, privately developed and real-estate driven Special Economic Zones have become the epicenters of “land wars,” with farmers across India refusing to give land for them. In 2007, India’s land wars boiled over

when fourteen farmers in Nandigram, West Bengal, were massacred, with many more raped and severely injured, for refusing to give their land for a petrochemical SEZ promoted by an Indonesian conglomerate. The resulting public outcry catapulted land dispossession to the center of Indian politics, forcing the central government to limit land acquisition for SEZs and to introduce amendments to the Land Acquisition Act (LAA). It also contributed directly to the eventual defeat of the communist Left Front government that had ruled West Bengal for thirty-four years. And Nandigram was only the tip of the iceberg.

Across India, farmers have been opposing the efforts of state governments to forcibly transfer their land to private companies. Most surprisingly, they have started to win in an unprecedented fashion. Farmers have effectively stopped the two largest proposed SEZs in India (promoted by Reliance Industries near Gurgaon and Mumbai), all of the SEZs in Goa, and four in Maharashtra. Many more, in all parts of India, are stuck in land acquisition purgatory. India's largest proposed Foreign Direct Investment ever—the twelve megaton POSCO Steel SEZ to be built in coastal Orissa—has been stalled since 2005 due to fierce resistance by local forest cultivators. The factory that was to produce Tata Motors' flagship Nano car had to be relocated from West Bengal to Gujarat in the face of a strong protest movement by local farmers with the support of an opposition party.¹¹ In Orissa, resistance by indigenous (*adivasi*) groups to having their mountain turned into a bauxite mine for London-based Vedanta forced the central government to cancel the project.

Although the government keeps no record of these land struggles, by the late 2000s they were clearly endemic across most of India. While several dozen of them have achieved a relatively high profile, daily reports in Indian newspapers suggest that their numbers are easily in the hundreds (Figure 1 illustrates the locations of those that will be discussed in this paper). The relatively politicized struggles are, moreover, underlain by widespread legal opposition to routine government land acquisition. It is not just that protest is increasing as the scale of dispossession increases; also farmers appear to be responding more aggressively to being dispossessed for private corporations under India's neoliberal growth model than they did to public sector projects in the period of state-led development.¹² With India's liberalized growth model dependent on the state's ability to make large tracts of land available to private investors,¹³ this increasing noncompliance of farmers is now seen as a critical bottleneck for economic development.¹⁴ Land acquisition has become, in the words of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a "very sensitive" issue that has exposed a contradiction between the land requirements of India's liberalized growth model and the exigencies of electoral democracy.¹⁵

To assess the long-term significance of this contradiction, we need to better understand the politics of dispossession. David Harvey's framework of "accumulation by dispossession" provides a starting point. By freeing Marx's "primitive accumulation" from its narrow role in the transition between modes of production, Harvey has created a versatile concept that is better able to capture diverse forms of contemporary dispossession that emanate from, rather than create the preconditions for, advanced capitalism. Harvey makes a strong case that Marxists have focused too exclusively on the



Figure I. Locations of Land Struggles Discussed in This Article.

politics of exploitation to the neglect of the politics of dispossession.¹⁶ Further, by providing a political-economic foundation for a variety of contemporary movements that have often been assimilated into broad categories like “new social movements,”¹⁷ the “multitude,”¹⁸ or “political society,”¹⁹ accumulation by dispossession provides a useful lens for this large domain of contemporary politics in many countries.

Nevertheless, Harvey himself does not follow through on the opportunity he creates. While his concept of accumulation by dispossession remains vaguely defined,

overly expansive, and ultimately functionalist,²⁰ his comments on dispossession politics are cursory and ambivalent. Beyond noting how the diverse forms of dispossession create a “stunning variety” of “inchoate” and sometimes “contradictory” movements, which tend to be more anarchist than Marxist,²¹ and worrying that in some instances they may, in their parochialism, obstruct real progress,²² Harvey himself provides little in the way of an empirically grounded theory of dispossession politics. What the concept of accumulation by dispossession demands, but what Harvey does not provide, is a positive theory of how accumulation by dispossession creates a distinct kind of politics.

Polanyi-inspired scholars have meanwhile been walking a parallel path by shifting attention from the politics of exploitation to the politics of commodification.²³ Polanyi famously argued that dis-embedding an economy from its social foundations through the commodification of “fictitious commodities”—land, labor, and capital—produces large-scale societal “countermovements” for social protection.²⁴ Polanyi’s concept of a countermovement points to forms of political agency arising not from shared relationships to the means of production, but from variegated experiences with market dislocations.²⁵ Michael Burawoy has recently argued that commodification has become a politically more salient experience than exploitation, and hypothesizes that in the current wave of market expansion, “the (de)commodification of nature will ultimately take the lead.”²⁶ However, while a Polanyian “countermovement” provides an elastic concept that captures many contemporary struggles against neoliberalism, Polanyians have not tried to separate the different kinds of politics generated by the commodification of different fictitious commodities: How is the politics of land commodification distinct from that of labor and capital? Further, the Polanyian approach to land commodification is incomplete: it is not the commodification of land per se that produces countermovements (people do not protest against *voluntarily* selling their land), but its *coercive* commodification—in other words, accumulation by dispossession.

The main intent of this paper, then, is to show that the dispossession of land creates a specific kind of politics, distinct not just from labor politics, but also from various other forms of peasant politics that have been theorized in the social sciences. After reviewing these theories, I draw on an extensive overview of anti-dispossession struggles in rural India today to illustrate how the nature of dispossession itself shapes the character of anti-dispossession movements with respect to their: 1) targets; 2) strategy and tactics; 3) political organization; 4) social composition; 5) goals; and 6) ideologies. I argue that these six fundamental features of any form of politics take on a particular character because of the nature of land dispossession itself. I then conclude with reflections on why struggles over land dispossession are less easily institutionalized than labor struggles and may therefore constitute a significantly disruptive force for capitalist development in many countries for the foreseeable future.

My data is drawn from more than two years of ethnographic and interview-based research (spread over six years) on anti-dispossession movements across rural India, as well as from secondary materials. This research includes an intensive ethnography focused on villages dispossessed for a SEZ in Rajasthan, and shorter, extensive visits to sites of land struggles in eight states across India as well as national-level protests.

While it is unclear whether a theory of dispossession politics can be constructed for the overly expansive definition of accumulation by dispossession that Harvey provides, I hope that the framework suggested here for the dispossession of agricultural land in India can stimulate a discussion on its applicability to the dispossession of land in other countries, across land tenure types, in urban areas, and perhaps on the dispossession of other natural resources. Only comparative research will bring out the similarities and differences in dispossession politics across multiple axes of variation. My aim, however, is to distill some theoretical propositions from this broad mapping of rural land struggles in India that can be tested, reconstructed, or rejected by future research.

From Peasant Politics to the Politics of Dispossession

In arguing that the process of land dispossession generates a specific form of politics, I depart, first of all, from the sociology of social movements, which has abandoned the idea of grounding qualitatively distinct kinds of politics in the analysis of social structures, focusing instead on universal variables that seek to explain successful mobilization around any pre-given set of “grievances.”²⁷ This paper starts from the premise that different social forces create qualitatively distinct kinds of politics with particular dynamics and conditions for success.

Marxists, of course, have always adopted this method, situating their understanding of political agency within a theory of the dynamics of capitalist production. However, classical Marxism did not anticipate transformative political agency coming from anywhere but the urban proletariat. The peasantry was considered politically backward and their destruction through so-called “primitive accumulation,” while tragic, was inevitable.²⁸ To the extent that the urban working classes could find allies in the countryside for a revolutionary project, so the theory went, it was in the “depeasantized” rural proletariat as the development of capitalist agriculture polarized the agrarian class structure.²⁹ It was not anticipated that rural movements against primitive accumulation might actually pose a strong challenge to capitalism.

This thesis had to be reconstructed in the mid-twentieth century in response to the emergence of communist revolutions and anticolonial peasant insurgencies in what were considered “backward” agricultural societies. A tidal wave of ambitious comparative studies reevaluated the role of peasants in social revolutions, past and present.³⁰ It also prompted a generation of scholars to study the changing agrarian class structures in “developing” countries and their political implications.³¹ In addition to debates over which agrarian classes might be potentially revolutionary and under what circumstances, further disagreements centered on whether “objective” economic changes were mediated by a peasant “moral economy” and whether a focus on overt revolutionary organization missed more widespread and ultimately more effective forms of “everyday resistance.”³² Despite these differences, the objective cause of peasant rebellion and resistance in the twentieth century was generally agreed upon: the intrusion of capitalist commodity relations into peasant agriculture.

In India, the extent of capitalist penetration into the countryside and its political implications was the subject of an immense debate beginning in the 1960s and lasting more than two decades. At stake in the so-called “modes of production” debate was whether the process of class differentiation and polarization predicted by Lenin and Kautsky was occurring in the Indian countryside, producing a potentially revolutionary rural proletariat, or whether the development of capitalist agriculture was stunted by “semi-feudal” social relations.³³ Meanwhile, scholars from non-Marxist traditions argued that the peasantry was not in fact polarizing, and that the middle-peasants (or “bullock capitalists”) provided the backbone of “political-centrism” in rural India.³⁴ While the prospects of a revolutionary peasantry receded, attention shifted to the new “populist” agrarian movements that emerged from this middle-peasant strata, demanding not revolution or land reform but remunerative prices.³⁵ Despite these differences, most scholarship situating peasant politics in a process of political-economic change did so with respect to their role as producers. When dispossession entered these debates, it was as part of a generic—and often vaguely specified—process of primitive accumulation, which could mean anything from land alienation through debt to the general process of making peasant agriculture unviable, but was typically related to the development of commercial agriculture.³⁶ A form of political agency arising from state dispossession of land for economic development was not on the radar of agrarian political economy.

Land dispossession was a theme in the historiography of the Subaltern Studies school. Several contributions focused on how commercial pressures introduced by colonialism led to the enclosure of common lands as well as debt-induced land alienation, precipitating peasant revolt.³⁷ Das documented more contemporary, Maoist-tinged resistance to landlord enclosures in Bihar.³⁸ Other scholars originally associated with this school focused on struggles between peasants and the state over forests.³⁹ However, with the partial exception of Ramachandra Guha (to whom I will return shortly), the Subalternists were not concerned with identifying particular logics of protest arising from the experience of dispossession, but rather with identifying a political idiom that was specific to subaltern politics generally.⁴⁰ For the Subalternists, it was not different political-economic forces that generated different kinds of politics, but rather different groups—divided into a simplistic binary of elites and subalterns—who practiced different kinds of politics regardless of the particular issue.⁴¹

The emergence, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, of social movements resisting “development-induced displacement” for dams and forest enclosures led to a shift in academic attention in India from the traditional focus on “conflict in the factory and the field” to “conflict around forests and rivers.”⁴² A number of historically situated ethnographies, such as those by Ramachandra Guha, Amita Baviskar, and Nandini Sundar, examined the struggles between rural groups and the state over the control and use of natural resources.⁴³ These scholars illuminated the complex regional political ecologies—the “landscape of resistance”—that shaped opposition to state practices of dispossession, juxtaposing the competing claims on natural resources of peasant subsistence and commercial exploitation.⁴⁴ As critiques of capitalist development, they

illuminated the forms of politics emerging not from the proletariat, but from those resisting proletarianization.

Although these scholars provided excellent analyses of the specific local factors that gave rise to particular kinds of anti-dispossession movements (illustrating many of the variable features of dispossession politics), they did not attempt to identify the *generic* features of anti-dispossession politics.⁴⁵ This paper builds on their studies of resistance to dispossession, mostly for “high-modernist” projects of the Nehruvian state (public sector dams, mines, forest management, and industry), and combines them with my own overview of contemporary movements against the more privatized and less strictly industrial forms of dispossession in the neoliberal era (SEZs, real estate projects, and increasingly privatized forms of infrastructure, industry, and extraction).⁴⁶ This emergence of a new generation of anti-dispossession movements allows us to see what is constant and what changes with shifting “regimes of dispossession.”⁴⁷ The first two-thirds of the paper, then, illustrates how the process of dispossession shapes the targets, strategies, organization, and class composition of anti-dispossession movements in general.

If these pioneering studies focused on the diversity of anti-dispossession movements, more recent theorizations of India’s land wars by Partha Chatterjee and Ananya Roy have tended to flatten out that diversity—while also classifying dispossession struggles under broad labels that miss their specificity. Partha Chatterjee has, most prominently, folded contemporary land struggles into his concept of “political society.” In *Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee defines political society as the realm in which subaltern groups that are excluded from civil society engage the state not as citizens, but as governed populations. He argues that this engagement takes the form not of citizens demanding rights, but of subjects negotiating ad-hoc, unstable and paralegal arrangements with state agencies.⁴⁸ In a highly cited article, Chatterjee has argued that much of political society in India now centers around government welfare policies—including those that seek to rehabilitate those displaced by industrial projects—that seek to “reverse” the effects of primitive accumulation by keeping alive a surplus population that is not needed by “corporate capital.”⁴⁹ For Chatterjee, the new struggles against land dispossession cannot be understood through the old rubric of peasant solidarity because many are, in fact, only interested in negotiating with the state and can thus be dealt with through the mechanisms of political society.⁵⁰

Although Chatterjee’s observation that *some* farmers are willing to accept dispossession in exchange for compensation is entirely accurate, as we will see, many of these farmers are advancing their claims for higher compensation not through Chatterjee’s “extra-legal” negotiations but through courts and political pressure to change the laws themselves.⁵¹ More fundamentally, Chatterjee’s attempt to collapse land struggles into his concept of political society neglects a second category of farmers that has proven unwilling to negotiate over land prices. While the first group—what I will call the “bargainers”—might be brought into a class compromise with the fruits of accumulation by dispossession, the second—the “barricaders”—are proving much less amenable. By refusing to treat their land as a commodity and asserting their right to determine its use, they are significantly impeding the ability of Indian states to

transfer their land to capitalists. As a blanket concept, then, political society not only fails to illuminate the specificity of dispossession politics as a whole, but it cannot differentiate between these two main categories of anti-dispossession struggles and their heterogeneous goals, much less explain why such differences arise. The latter requires sociological analysis of how different forms of dispossession—rather than Chatterjee’s vaguely specified primitive accumulation—intersect with the social structures and political histories of diverse agrarian milieus to produce distinct political responses that nonetheless cohere into an identifiable domain of politics—of dispossession, not of “the governed.”

If Chatterjee’s political society flattens out the goals of anti-dispossession movements, Ananya Roy’s recent characterization of their politics as “pastoral radicalism” flattens out their ideologies.⁵² Roy criticizes the struggles against land dispossession in Nandigram and Singur, West Bengal, for deploying a “romantic nostalgia for dispossessed peasant-owners” that she argues “mount a defense for a...Bengal of fields of gold.”⁵³ This characterization, however, does not appear to capture the multiple ideological strands within the Nandigram and Singur movements themselves, nor does it differentiate between the understandings of leaders and ordinary participants.⁵⁴ More significantly, however, the label of “pastoral radicalism” obscures the distinctiveness of dispossession politics in general while failing to illuminate the diversity of its ideological expressions. First, it collapses the distinction between dispossession politics and the politics of the farmers’ movements organized around remunerative agricultural prices and subsidies, which are more typically given that label (or its synonym, agrarian populism). I have already argued, and it will become clearer, that the politics of dispossession has its own dynamic that is quite orthogonal to other forms of agrarian politics. Historically, “agrarian populist” farmers’ movements have actually been vocal proponents of large dams, putting them at loggerheads with anti-dispossession struggles.⁵⁵ Further, we will see that even when farmers’ movements do take up the issue of land dispossession (when it affects farmers in their constituency), there can be substantial political tension between them and other anti-dispossession struggles. Second, while Roy’s critique of these movements presumes that resistance to rural land dispossession could be motivated by something other than a concrete defense of agrarian livelihoods, her analysis neglects how this defense is ideologically articulated in *heterogeneous* ways both within and across locales. Old labels like “pastoral radicalism” or “agrarian populism” fail to illuminate how the process of dispossession refracts through diverse agrarian structures and political histories to produce highly divergent ideological articulations of anti-dispossession politics.

So while Chatterjee and Roy flatten the goals and ideologies of anti-dispossession movements, the last third of the paper analyzes the major determinants of their variation. Although Roy and Chatterjee’s analyses are largely theoretical, I use ethnographic fieldwork and the research of other scholars to illustrate the major cleavages in the goals and ideologies of anti-dispossession movements and their origins in the encounter between processes of dispossession and the diverse agrarian milieu of the Indian subcontinent.

In sum, this paper makes the case for something we might call a politics of dispossession. It does this by trying to illustrate how the process of land dispossession accounts for certain generic features of the political movements it generates while also systematically producing variation along several discernable axes. With a better understanding of the particular dynamics of the politics of dispossession, we will be in a better position to understand its long-term political and economic significance.

Dispossession Politics and the State

Accumulation by dispossession involves the use of routine and highly visible *extra-economic coercion* to expropriate means of production, subsistence, or common social wealth. Although Harvey remains vague in his own definition—refusing to define accumulation by dispossession by the use of extra-economic force—the dispossession of land requires a coercive agent and this is highly consequential for dispossession politics.⁵⁶ While such coercion can be exercised in a decentralized manner by non-state actors such as landlords, paramilitaries, mafias, etc., it is most often the state that takes on this role—in countries or instances where this is not the case, the kind of politics outlined below will be less applicable. Where this is the case, the most significant feature of land dispossession is that it entails the direct and transparent intervention of the state into the process of accumulation.

In India, where government procedures for land acquisition are highly rationalized, the specific mechanisms for dispossessing land are the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, which authorizes the state to acquire private land through *eminent domain* for “public purposes,” and various administrative procedures for transferring different categories of public grazing and forest lands. While these coercive measures for requisitioning land originate in British rule, they were briefly used after independence to implement half-hearted land reforms, were used more vigorously to acquire land for industrial and infrastructural projects of the Nehruvian developmental state, and are being used even more extensively post-liberalization to broker land for private capital.⁵⁷

The political consequence of this direct, extra-economic intervention into accumulation is to establish an immediate antagonism between those targeted for dispossession and the state. Resistance to dispossession does not begin, as with labor struggles, as economic conflict against particular capitalists and only then, potentially, mature into political struggles directed against the state.⁵⁸ Anti-dispossession struggles are born with the state as their target.⁵⁹ While this was obviously the case with state-led development projects like dams, it is still true for today’s privatized projects:⁶⁰ the capitalists for whom the state is acquiring land are, tactically, secondary targets since, in the early stages of a project, they may have no presence on the scene and their fate depends on the ability of the state to acquire land for them.

Which *level* of the state comes under attack is dictated by the legal-bureaucratic mechanisms for expropriating different categories of land. In India, land acquisition is done at the (provincial) state level. Consequently, most opposition to land dispossession is directed at state governments and, most proximately, their parastatal arms—industrial development corporations, urban development authorities, state transport

corporations—responsible for land acquisition. Agitation at the national level occurs mostly in projects involving the conversion of forest land—such as the Vedanta project in Niyamgiri and the POSCO project in coastal Orissa—which require central government approval, or sporadically where movements have joined together to fight national land acquisition legislation. Activism at the transnational level, while more common in the days of World Bank-funded projects like dams, is both less common and rarely effective with these new, privately funded projects, and mostly limited to cases where it can be framed as an “indigenous rights” issue.⁶¹ It is this opposition to the state as the immediate instrument of dispossession that gives these movements the somewhat anarchistic hue noted by Harvey.

This opposition to the state, it should be emphasized, is conditioned by a highly significant aspect of dispossession: its inescapable *transparency*. Unlike the appropriation of labor, the dispossession of land cannot be obscured, and therefore must be *explicitly justified*. When the state comes to take a farmer’s land away or signals its intention to do so, any farmer can see perfectly clearly the threat this poses to his or her existence; it must be explained publicly why it is appropriate for the state to violate his or her property rights. While material promises (of compensation, jobs, and “resettlement and rehabilitation”) are made, ideology takes the form of explicit appeals to the “public” or “national” interests that are served by this coercive redistribution of property.

These appeals have varying persuasiveness in particular times and places, depending on the use to which the land will be put and its likely beneficiaries. We can think of the constellation of state roles, economic logics tied to particular class interests, and ideological justifications underpinning a pattern of dispossession in any given time and place as a “regime of dispossession.”⁶² Whereas the developmentalist regime of dispossession for state-led projects of productive industrial transformation had significant legitimacy in the Nehruvian era, as people were asked to sacrifice for the greater good of “the nation,” the neoliberal regime of dispossession, in which the state has become a mere land broker for increasingly real estate-driven private capital, is proving much less persuasive. With Nehruvian discourses of social justice and state-led development still retaining some purchase, the difficulty of justifying the expropriation of land from small farmers and transferring them to large, and sometimes foreign, corporations for increasingly real estate-driven projects no doubt helps to explain, if not the emergence of anti-dispossession movements, then the unprecedented public support and policy traction that they have gained in the last five years.⁶³

In short, dispossession struggles are first and foremost struggles between farmers and specific arms of the state. The transparent use of state force to dispossess peasants requires explicit justification, and the stability of a regime of dispossession depends greatly on the extent to which these justifications resonate with widely held notions of “development.”⁶⁴ When these do not resonate, and material concessions prove inadequate or unacceptable, we can expect anti-dispossession struggles to multiply and become more powerful. The resulting struggles then confront the state with a set of strategic options that are also shaped by the nature of dispossession.

Politics at the Point of Enclosure

The strategy and tactics of anti-dispossession struggles are shaped by another fundamental difference between the exploitation of labor and the dispossession of land: while the former is an ongoing expropriation of surpluses within limits, the latter constitutes a total and one-time threat to people's means of production and subsistence. State-led dispossession of land is thus also distinct from the more ongoing exploitative nexus of the state, moneylenders, and landlords that has historically been at the root of peasant rebellions in India.⁶⁵ While *excessive* expropriation of peasants' surpluses can endanger subsistence and generate revolt, dispossession of land always poses a *sudden*, exogenous and irreversible threat to people's livelihoods, homes, and ways of life.⁶⁶ That dispossession entails the expropriation of not just surpluses but means of production or subsistence themselves thereby raises the stakes of dispossession politics;⁶⁷ in Scott's terms, we might say that it almost always violates peasant "moral economies." As Scott recognizes:

Some varieties of change, other things being equal, are more explosive than others—more likely to provoke open, collective defiance. In this category I might place those massive and sudden changes that decisively destroy nearly all the routines of daily life and, at the same time, threaten the livelihood of much of the population.⁶⁸

Dispossession of land epitomizes such a "massive and sudden" change, which is perhaps why enclosures have historically generated some of the most explosive peasant rebellions.⁶⁹ While exploitation politics allows for ongoing, incremental struggles over the distribution of surplus, which can take "everyday" forms, dispossession politics—especially where it involves the irreversible transfer of land rather than reversible restrictions on use⁷⁰—entails a one-time struggle over the distribution of assets. While this struggle can *sometimes* be averted with high levels of compensation (a point we will return to later) or discouraged by overwhelming public support for a project (as we just pointed out),⁷¹ dispossession nevertheless presents the unwilling farmer with a singular opportunity to save his or her land. This partly accounts for the rapidity and urgency with which movements against land dispossession often emerge: the struggle by forest cultivators against the Korean POSCO steel project in Jagatsinghpur began on the very day the Orissan government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the company; the movement in Nandigram, West Bengal, against a petrochemical SEZ began at the mere report of the proposed project in the newspapers; and the agitation against the Tata Nano car factory in Singur, West Bengal, began when government and Tata Motors officials paid a surprise visit to the villages.⁷² Dispossession of land is not only existentially threatening, but its one-off nature makes it impossible to stop except through overt opposition.⁷³ If and when such opposition emerges, its strategic leverage also springs from the process of dispossession itself.

We can start with the simple observation that the sites of land dispossession struggles are not workplaces but dispersed rural fields and forests. The leverage of those

resisting dispossession arises not from their position in the process of production (their labor is often irrelevant to the proposed project), but from their occupation and control of the means of production desired by capitalists. The crux of the matter is that people are sitting on land the state and capital want; if they do not want to give it, they must devise means to physically retain possession. In place of the strike are various tactics of counter-enclosure, adapted to particular geographies, designed to prevent the acquisition and transfer of land.

This often begins with the obstruction of preliminary land surveys that are necessary for land acquisition proceedings, and the refusal of entry to government or company officials. While anti-dam movements like the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* ("Save the Narmada Movement" or NBA) were sometimes successful in turning back officials, the great physical distance between dam sites and the farther reaches of their reservoirs means that once a government establishes and militarizes a dam site, it can flood people's land from afar (a difficulty to which the NBA responded creatively by threatening to drown themselves in the water). However, with factories, SEZs, and other infrastructure projects, the physical removal of people must precede any construction. Politics at the point of enclosure then becomes a pitched battle to prevent that removal. In Nandigram, West Bengal, where the state government wanted to acquire approximately 10,000 acres of land for a petrochemical SEZ, farmers dug up the roads entering their village; in Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, farmers opposing the POSCO steel plant erected bamboo gates. Each had to defend their barricades through what essentially amounted to trench warfare. In open terrains with too many approach roads, erecting physical barriers is impossible. In Kalinga Nagar, Orissa, farmers resisting a Tata steel plant confronted bulldozers and police in their open fields with bows and arrows.⁷⁴

These spatialized, defensive tactics elicit countertactics on the part of the state and capital, who may first try to persuade people off the land with material concessions (higher compensation, jobs, or village facilities) or proceed directly to intimidation and violence. A key figure in the concessionary strategy is the *dalal* (broker), which usually refers to a land broker, often dispatched by company officials, who tries to purchase land from individual farmers by offering a higher compensation rate than the government. Faced with stiff resistance to its SEZs in Jhajjar, Haryana and Raigad, Maharashtra, Reliance Industries dispatched hundreds of local *dalals* to purchase land from farmers and thereby circumvent or divide the opposition (unsuccessfully, it turned out). The relentless work of private *dalals* was much more successful in dissolving any organized resistance to the Mahindra World City SEZ in Rajasthan.⁷⁵ In other contexts, such as with the POSCO project, people use the term *dalal* to refer to political agents dispatched by the company or ruling party who try to buy support with liquor, chicken, and cash.⁷⁶ In either case, *dalals* are collaborators within the local population who act as solvents of real or potential solidarity; rebuffing their efforts is a major challenge for anti-dispossession movements.

Another countertactic of the state is to turn the barricades against their makers and transform blockaded villages into open-air prisons. With the POSCO project in Orissa, the police momentarily stopped trying to get inside the village gates, but would not let

anyone out to go to school, work, or market. The farmers protesting the Tata steel plant in Kalinga Nagar were similarly locked inside their villages for several months, which tragically prevented them from accessing medical care, leading to several deaths.⁷⁷ This counter-barricading is often reinforced by filing hundreds of cases against farmers, which effectively prohibits them from leaving their villages in daylight, and by imposing Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code, which prohibits public assemblies. These measures can be enhanced by dubbing resisting farmers “*Naxalites*,” thereby legitimizing more draconian measures. However, these last two techniques are ubiquitous for controlling protests of all kinds in India and not specific to dispossession politics.

Meanwhile, farmers may pursue a parallel strategy of filing legal challenges against the acquisition proceedings.⁷⁸ Many movements and individual farmers file cases challenging applications of the Land Acquisition Act, either on procedural grounds, over compensation amounts, or over the project’s claim to be a “public purpose.” The first can work if there is a procedural mistake; the second can lead to higher compensation amounts but cannot stop a project (more on this later); the third has only rarely worked. As the Supreme Court judgment against the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* showed, the courts have proven reluctant to question the state’s prerogative in setting the development agenda, and, as Usha Ramanathan has argued, the power of eminent domain has consequently evolved into an almost absolute power of the state over land.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in some recent court cases, judges have started looking askance at the acquisition of land for private real estate projects, particularly where the “urgency” clause under the Land Acquisition Act is invoked.⁸⁰ Outside of Delhi, the Supreme Court has overturned several land acquisitions by the Greater Noida Development Authority on the grounds that land acquired for an “industrial purpose” was being transferred to private real estate developers.⁸¹ The neoliberal regime of dispossession for unrestricted private accumulation appears to be on more tenuous legal standing than the developmentalist one (something which pending amendments to the Land Acquisition Act seek to remedy).⁸² Nevertheless, as Prashant Bhushan, the prominent Supreme Court lawyer who argued the Narmada case, remarked, “You need very good luck to win this way. A political strategy is better.”⁸³

Legal strategies can, however, help to buy time for other strategies to work, particularly if they are successful in winning temporary stays on construction. Time is on the side of the farmers, as delays are costly to capitalists, especially if they already have large sunk costs on which they are paying interest. As Aseem Srivastava remarks, “It is a battle of patience between the State and the people. And sometimes, people do hold out longer than the state expects them to.”⁸⁴ Or, we might add, longer than capitalists can afford to wait. Many SEZ developers have thrown up their hands and abandoned projects that were stalled over land acquisition, with many more bogged down in land acquisition purgatory.⁸⁵ A constant refrain in my interviews with officials at industrial development corporations and urban development authorities in seven states is that they are all besieged by numerous small cases in almost every project they undertake, leading to chronic delays. A hypothesis worth exploring is that the sum total of these small legal challenges is a greater collective nuisance to the machinery

of accumulation by dispossession than the smaller number of well-organized political movements. While some dismiss the utility of the law in anti-dispossession politics,⁸⁶ its centrality to land struggles is inescapable, and perhaps a general historical fact.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, if and when legal strategies fail and farmers refuse to succumb to concessions or intimidation, the violent force lurking behind dispossession—what Marx called the “blood and fire” of primitive accumulation⁸⁸—comes into the open. If people refuse to be moved, accumulation by dispossession requires that people be violently separated from their means of production. This is done either by police, by thugs (*goondas*) in the employ of companies or political parties, or often by both together. The results are typically brutal and tragic: fourteen people massacred in Nandigram, many more raped and beaten by police and CPI(M) cadre; fourteen more people killed in Kalinga Nagar and many more wounded by twenty-seven platoons of armed security forces along with Tata supporters; one woman raped and burnt alive by party cadre and a young boy beaten to death in Singur. In too many cases to enumerate, people defending their land have faced brutal assaults, sexual harassment, and the pilaging of their homes and villages.

When it is not possible to keep possession of the land, a fallback strategy is to create a sufficiently hostile environment that subsequent construction or business operations become untenable. In Singur, West Bengal, where farmers were unable to prevent the government from acquiring their land for the Tata Nano car factory, they staged numerous protests outside factory gates, the decisive one lasting twenty days. They were able to garner enough political pressure to make their forcible removal untenable; the project was subsequently cancelled.⁸⁹ In Goa, farmers resisting the establishment of a pharmaceutical SEZ on enclosed common land stormed the factory gates and destroyed construction equipment—they were also eventually successful.⁹⁰ With physical possession lost, the strategy in these instances is to undermine the security and order necessary for accumulation to proceed. That this can be effective was underscored by a national chamber of commerce official, who repeatedly emphasized to me that the problem was not just the ability of state government to acquire land, but to impose “good law and order” to “control the agitations.”⁹¹

Finally, in the context of defeat where organized opposition fails or never coheres, various “everyday forms” of anti-enclosure resistance may follow. These take the time-honored forms of petty sabotage, encroachments, pilfering, and marginal repossession of enclosed land. Outside of Jaipur, Rajasthan, where farmers were unable to collectively organize against the dispossession of 3,000 acres for the Mahindra World City SEZ, some of the many who remained aggrieved overturned fence posts and punched gaps in boundary walls to allow livestock to graze freely inside the SEZ’s vast and as-yet-unutilized acreage. Others continued to cultivate their old holdings inside the SEZ as the company turned a temporary blind eye. But when agricultural land is dispossessed, these tactics amount to only temporary and marginal resummptions of previous land uses. In dispossession politics, everyday resistance is a sign of defeat—not a recipe for success.

In sum, the dispossession of land privileges overt resistance. The leverage of anti-dispossession movements is physical possession of the means of production desired by

capital. The strategy of dispossession politics involves devising physical, political, and legal means to maintain possession against the dissipating force of brokers, and the coercive force of the state.

Dispossession and Political Organization

The character of land dispossession shapes not only the tactics and strategies, but also the organization of anti-dispossession struggles. In this section, I will argue that the context of dispossession privileges local, ad-hoc, single-issue forms of organization that are autonomous from party politics. From this starting point, however, these struggles can be painstakingly formed into alliances, contingently absorbed into revolutionary armed struggle, and find limited support from opposition parties as dispossession gains electoral salience.

When one or multiple villages suddenly come under the threat of dispossession, there are usually no pre-existing organizational vehicles at hand that are suitable for resisting it. Unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), even in the comparatively few rural areas where they have a presence, are typically irrelevant or politically too moderate, and, because dispossession cuts across other forms of political cleavage, the potentially dispossessed will usually belong to more than one political party. Anyway, none of the mainstream parties in India, including those on the left, have ever seriously opposed “development-induced displacement.” Because of this historic neglect, the movements that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to resist dams, mines, and forest enclosures did so as “autonomous” people’s movements and developed a strong skepticism toward electoral politics.⁹² While dispossession is now for the first time becoming an electorally salient issue in India (more on this shortly), today’s land agitations still almost always *emerge* as independent “people’s movements,” with ad hoc organizations of varying formality put together specifically for the purpose. This is reflected in movement names, which often follow the modular form of: “Save the (Place Name) Movement” or “Anti- (Project Name) Struggle Committee.”

This single-issue, locally situated kind of politics is often looked upon with skepticism. While Trotsky spoke of “local cretinism” being “history’s curse on all peasant riots,”⁹³ Harvey has called place-based struggles “militant particularisms,”⁹⁴ and worries that the parochialism of anti-dispossession movements may prevent them from forging more universalistic political programs.⁹⁵ This is in line with the long-held assumption of Marxists and non-Marxists alike that strong supra-local organization is a necessary prerequisite for both revolutionary consciousness and political efficacy.⁹⁶ However, as Harvey himself recognizes, this single-issue form of politics arises out of the phenomenology of dispossession, which people experience in different ways—a dam here, an SEZ there, a shrimp aquaculture project somewhere else.⁹⁷ These immediately pressing threats cut across pre-existing forms of political organization in any locality, which are built (however indirectly) around more ongoing, historically sedimented power relations. Moreover, the issue of dispossession has always been neglected by organized left parties, which have shared with more mainstream parties an enthusiasm for industrial modernization (which requires “breaking a few eggs”)

and have, more recently, been among the worst perpetrators of violent dispossession in the service of neoliberal economic policies (especially in West Bengal). Anti-dispossession struggles have emerged in a political void, and evolved organizational platforms to take up an issue that no one else would.

Although dispossession politics in India is still driven by a panoply of local resistance movements, it is also increasingly being organized on other scales and by new kinds of actors. Beginning in the 1990s, the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA) was instrumental in forming the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), a platform for bringing together various autonomous people's movements to oppose India's neoliberal reforms. NAPM consists of a diverse array of groups from across the country, most of them resisting various manifestations of accumulation by dispossession, whether for dams, SEZs, power plants, slum demolitions, or Coca-Cola plants. Medha Patkar, leader of the NBA and NAPM, spends her time in a continual state of motion between various sites of dispossession across the country, supporting local struggles while trying to tie them together into a national-level, non-party political force. NAPM has organized multiple national-level protests against the Land Acquisition Act and to push for a comprehensive legislation on development-induced displacement with the principle that development projects should be subjected to the approval of local assemblies (*gram sabhas*), captured by the slogan, "our rule in our villages" (*hamaare gaon mein, hamaare raj*). The task is extremely difficult given the heterogeneity of these movements, their internal contradictions, and the overwhelming imperative felt by each movement to stop their particular project, which, as we observed, often necessitates focusing on the state level. However, NAPM has achieved some success in building these solidarities and in bringing a critique of development-induced displacement to national attention.⁹⁸

But the nonviolent, non-party left is no longer the only actor on the stage of dispossession politics. Accelerating dispossession for mining and natural resource-based industries in India's mineral-rich forest areas is now clearly one of the major contributing causes to the burgeoning Maoist insurgency that currently controls large swaths of territory from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal.⁹⁹ While the so-called Naxalite movement, described by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as "India's largest internal security threat," received much of its early impetus in the 1960s and 1970s from lower caste agricultural laborers and tenants exploited by "semifeudal" agrarian social structures (the failure of downward land redistribution),¹⁰⁰ it has received much of its recent impetus in mineral-rich East-Central India from *adivasis* (indigenous groups) being dispossessed for mining and extractive industries (the success of upward land redistribution).¹⁰¹ Indian Maoism has, in practice, evolved from being an insurrection against the grinding exploitation of semifeudalism into also being a countermovement against the dispossessions of neoliberal capitalism.¹⁰²

The experience of dispossession from land and forests is thus being channeled organizationally into a guerilla army, people's militias, and mass front organizations, which aim to overthrow the Indian state. Although that project is unlikely to succeed, the growing pressure of this armed insurgency is giving political impetus to policies that seek to ameliorate the impact of dispossession: for example, a proposed mining

policy that would share 26 percent of profits with affected people, and a reformed Land Acquisition Act that, while facilitating dispossession for the private sector, would increase resettlement and rehabilitation measures for the dispossessed.¹⁰³ Explaining the need for amending the Land Acquisition Act, Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh frankly observed, “So far 50 million people were displaced in the name of development....Land acquisition could acquire Naxalist overtones if not properly dealt with.”¹⁰⁴ In addition to building pressure for concessionary reforms, the Maoists have also, by taking large swaths of territory out of the effective control of the Indian government—so-called “liberated zones” or “red corridors”—placed some geographic limits on the state’s ability to dispossess and capital’s ability to safely accumulate. However, the tactic of armed struggle has been met with a degree of state violence that is creating a human tragedy of staggering dimensions.

The Maoists are not the only party getting political mileage out of dispossession. In West Bengal, the Singur and Nandigram struggles were championed by a regional opposition party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) led by Mamata Banerjee, which was looking for a wedge issue against the communist Left Front government that had ruled West Bengal for more than thirty years. They found this issue when farmers in Singur and, then, Nandigram refused to give their land—which many had acquired through the Left government’s own land reforms in the 1970s—to private companies for building the Tata Nano car factory and a petrochemical SEZ. The violence unleashed on farmers by CPI(M) party cadre and police, especially in Nandigram, backfired massively, creating an uproar at both the state and national level. While the movements remained autonomous,¹⁰⁵ the TMC supported the farmers in both places—with Banerjee participating in a twenty day sit-in (*dharna*) at the factory gates in Singur—and kept the pressure on the CPI(M). Both projects were ultimately cancelled, and the Left Front government—which had built its rural base through its redistributive land reforms—lost a tremendous amount of credibility. The TMC capitalized, capturing many *panchayat* (village-level government) seats in the 2008 local elections and finally the state assembly in May 2011. After thirty-four years of continuous rule, the Left Front fell on its sword, sending Banerjee to the chief minister’s office and demonstrating that land acquisition had arrived as an electorally salient issue.¹⁰⁶

But it is not just in the particularly explosive circumstances of West Bengal that land acquisition has become a potent political issue taken up by mainstream parties. The ferocity of farmer resistance to Special Economic Zones, privatized highways, and various other kinds of projects—coming now not just from marginalized *adivasis* in remote areas, but from powerful farmers’ groups in the peri-urban plains—has pushed several state governments to increase their compensation policies (notably Haryana and UP) and some to back away from SEZs altogether (Goa). Providing a “fair deal” to farmers has now become a point of competition between parties, as seen in the sparring between the (now former) Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati of the *Bahujan Samaj Party* and the Congress’ Rahul Gandhi over the land acquisition agitations surrounding the Yamuna Expressway Project. This began in the village of Bhatta Parsaul, Uttar Pradesh, where farmers opposed to land acquisition for the Delhi-Agra expressway—which involved the forceful transfer of large amounts of

abutting land to private developers for real estate colonies and a “Sports City” with a Formula 1 racetrack—kidnapped two officials of the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation in May 2011. A gun battle ensued between farmers and police, leading to the death of two farmers and two policemen, with many more civilians injured. Rahul Gandhi rushed to the scene, and held a protest with the local farmers, denouncing Mayawati’s callousness and Uttar Pradesh’s poor compensation policies. A heated exchange followed in which each party claimed to be offering better compensation policies than the other. By June, Mayawati had unveiled a new, more generous land acquisition policy with the support of the state’s biggest farmers’ movement—the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* (BKU)—with the intent of upstaging the Congress’ proposed amendments to the central Land Acquisition Act.¹⁰⁷

While all this can be seen as electoral opportunism, the remarkable thing is that there is an opportunity to exploit. This is the first time in India’s history that land acquisition has become more than a fringe issue raised by marginalized people’s movements, or maybe a sympathetic politician or two,¹⁰⁸ and become an electorally salient issue at the state and national levels. This has a lot to do with the fact that dispossession is no longer concentrated in remote areas inhabited by *adivasis*, but is accelerating in the plains (for SEZs and peri-urban development) where it is affecting more politically powerful farmers. This creates opportunities for anti-dispossession movements—farmers in Singur would probably not have won without Banerjee’s support, and more generous compensation policies are slowly coming into place—but also has its limits. Most of the major parties do not oppose land acquisition per se, but, at most, think that fertile (meaning irrigated) land should be avoided and farmers should be amply compensated. The majority of Indian farmers—and by definition the poorer ones—depend on rain-fed agriculture for survival, and, as we will see, many do not want higher compensation, but refuse to part with their land at any price. Further, all the major parties want to attract private investment to the states where they are in power, and this depends on using coercive acquisition to make land available.¹⁰⁹ The fierce inter-state competition for investment limits the extent to which they can actually oppose forcible dispossession or raise its costs for capital once in power. After coming to office on the momentum of the Singur and Nandigram struggles, Mamata Banerjee has struggled to return land to the farmers in Singur while trying to reassure industry that West Bengal can make land available to investors.¹¹⁰ It is unclear how she will balance these demands. Although movements will always seek to make allies where they can, it is hard to see political parties themselves becoming the main organizational vehicles for anti-dispossession movements. Dispossession politics will—outside of Maoism in certain pockets—continue to be led by local, autonomous, single-purpose organizations that will make strategic use of supra-local alliances as expediency demands.

While it may be tempting to locate their chances for success solely in the strength of such extra-local organization, we should remember that isolated struggles in hundreds of locations across rural India are effectively stopping or stalling efforts by state governments to forcibly broker their land to capitalist firms. The determined blockade of a few villages in Nandigram, West Bengal, succeeded in scrapping the

SEZ they were fighting, elicited a national moratorium on land acquisition for SEZs, and was the proximate impetus for amendments to the Land Acquisition Act. It also inspired countless other movements and placed land acquisition squarely at the center of national politics. In this sense, the Nandigram battle of March 2007 might be seen as a Sewellian “event” that restructured the political economy of land dispossession in India.¹¹¹ While greater national-level coordination—through, for example, a stronger NAPM—would clearly help to advance a legislative agenda promoting “land sovereignty,”¹¹² or what Polanyi would call the socio-political “re-embedding” of land, it is far from clear that the success of anti-dispossession movements depends entirely upon it.

The Class Composition of Dispossession Politics

To understand the conditions of success, and ultimate political direction, of anti-dispossession struggles it is also necessary to appreciate how the process of dispossession shapes their social composition. Dispossession indiscriminately expropriates those with any interest in the immovable assets of a particular geographic space. It consequently creates political struggles that are inherently cross-class, but that take their specific shape from local class structures. While the process of labor exploitation produces classes, dispossession cuts across already formed ones. Thus, without understating the internal diversity of labor on multiple axes,¹¹³ anti-dispossession movements arguably contain more divergent and more contradictory class positions than labor unions, whose participants by definition share some similar relationship to the means of production. There are few differences *among workers* that would approximate that between a large landlord and his tenant, or a capitalist farmer and the semi-proletarianized farmer-laborer who works for him, all of whom may be on the same side of a dispossession struggle. This unavoidably cross-class character of anti-dispossession movements is what accounts for, in Harvey’s words, their “inchoate” and “contradictory” appearance. While Polanyians might see this cross-class composition as a strength of dispossession politics, and Marxists as a weakness, what is empirically clear is that it creates challenges to forging anti-dispossession movements within particular localities and in building alliances across them.

The *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA) is one of the most successful cases of building solidarity across potentially antagonistic class—as well as caste—divides. The NBA was able to bring together Bhil and Bhilala *adivasis* from the mountainous stretch of the Narmada—who had their own internal hierarchies that had to be overcome—and large, upper-caste Hindu farmers from the alluvial plains of Nimad into a remarkably cohesive movement,¹¹⁴ which has now endured for twenty-five years. It is true that the landless laborers employed by the farmers of Nimad were, as in many instances of land dispossession, not centrally involved in the movement:¹¹⁵ dispossession largely affects those who have something of which to be dispossessed. That laborers are dispossessed of access to employment seems, except perhaps where triple-cropped land provides very stable agricultural work, to be an insufficiently compelling motivation for them to actively defend land they do not own. They are more

likely to become involved if they are also highly dependent on common grazing or forest land. Agricultural tenants, on the other hand, are often involved in anti-dispossession movements because their loss of tenure through land acquisition is sparsely if at all compensated. While some critique these movements for their internal class contradictions, this is an inescapable, structural feature of dispossession politics. It is not that these movements do not engage in class struggle, but rather that in order to prioritize immediately threatening class antagonisms based on the dispossession of land (between agriculturalists as a whole and capitalist firms), they must de-emphasize ongoing class antagonisms based on exploitation (within the agrarian class structure).¹¹⁶

In many cases, however, class contradictions are too sharp to enable a united front against dispossession. In the first place, rich farmers are in some instances able to bribe their way out of land acquisition altogether. In villages outside of Greater Noida, I found that the going rate was common knowledge among farmers.¹¹⁷ Sometimes, large farmers take the lead in resistance, but not with the best interests of everyone in mind. In the Sri City SEZ in Andhra Pradesh, for example, upper-caste Reddy landlords protested only for more compensation, while leaving their tenants and those dependent on common lands and ponds (that would not be compensated for) in the lurch.¹¹⁸ In the Singur struggle against the Tata Nano car factory, small farmers, tenants, and even laborers led the resistance while many larger landholders accepted compensation.¹¹⁹ While there was sufficient solidarity among the small landowners, tenants, and laborers in Singur to make a powerful movement, no sooner had Banerjee become chief minister and passed a bill to return the land to farmers than tenants and laborers issued a press note complaining that they were excluded from the settlement.¹²⁰ The difficulty of building cross-class solidarity against dispossession is compounded by the patchwork of land tenure forms and the different entitlements to compensation these afford.¹²¹ Further difficulties arise in uniting cultivators and other displaced populations: in Jagatsinghpur, there appeared to be a fair amount of cross-class solidarity against POSCO within several villages; however, the *bhetal* leaf cultivators being displaced from the forest for the steel plant told me that they were unable to forge a common front with the fishermen being displaced for the project's captive port.¹²² Market-based compensation models can also help to individualize farmers and divide potential opposition: in the Mahindra World City SEZ in Rajasthan, collective resistance was diffused altogether by giving farmers a greater stake in the land's appreciation through small compensation plots, which rich farmers were much more capable of exploiting.¹²³

There is also a spatial contradiction: while those within the acquisition area of a project stand to lose through forcible land acquisition, those in the surrounding areas often stand to benefit. Except where projects are highly polluting (as with mining, thermal power plants, aluminum factories, etc.), adjacent landowners stand to gain from appreciating land values and, while they may or may not gain employment, they have less to lose. Often project authorities or companies can recruit supporters from these surrounding areas and use them as brokers or thugs against the resisters.

Where there is sufficient local solidarity to produce a movement, there is then the question of building solidarities across movements. NAPM has had some success in

bringing together movements of *adivasis*, fishermen, and small farmers for collective actions against the legal-political apparatus of dispossession at the national level. However, there are certain contradictions that have proven difficult to bridge—particularly with the large farmers’ movements. This was evidenced at its Action 2007 protests, where a movement of lower-caste and *adivasi* “forest people and forest workers” left the protest after NAPM leaders addressed an adjacent protest of the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* (BKU). The latter is comprised of middle-to-large, dominant caste (Jat) farmers who exploit lower-caste laborers and usurp common land in the same region where the former is based. While both movements were protesting against land dispossession, such an antagonism is too sharp to be bridged, and working together is out of the question.¹²⁴ This points to the limits of subjective cooperation among the diverse classes objectively faced with dispossession.

In sum, anti-dispossession struggles are inherently cross class, though the degree of their internal contradictions varies with local social structures. This creates challenges to forming strong local movements and building alliances across them. It also generates movements of different political character, a point we turn to next.

Barricades and Bargains: The Goals of Anti-dispossession Politics

While Polanyi assumed that countermovements ultimately aimed to re-embed and decommodify fictitious commodities, the goals of anti-dispossession movements are in fact quite diverse. This diversity belies the polarized debate surrounding land dispossession, and rural India more generally, around two equally untenable positions. On the one hand, there is the romantic vision of peasants living in harmony with “Mother Earth” with no desire to enter a commercial industrial economy.¹²⁵ On the other side is the view that all farmers, and especially their children, are more than happy to leave a moribund agriculture for urban pursuits.¹²⁶ The truth is that there is incredible variation within and across localities, classes, and social groups in the way people value their land both tangibly as part of a livelihood strategy, and intangibly as a part of life. These valuations are also not independent of how farmers with different endowments of economic, cultural, and social capital weigh their concrete options outside of agriculture. The goals of anti-dispossession movements reflect this diversity and complexity. We can, however, make a preliminary but important distinction between two broad categories of resisters: those who refuse to give their land at any price, and those who are fighting for higher compensation. While both might use the same methods and with equal militancy, they do so with different objectives. While the first evince no interest in their land being used for an industrial or commercial project, the latter do not object per se, so long as they receive its market value rather than a depressed government-fixed price.

In India, land acquisition typically involves acquiring land from farmers at a low price that hardly reflects its agricultural value and transferring it to companies that can profit from its appreciation as industrial or commercial land.¹²⁷ I call this ratio between

the cost of government-acquired land and its ultimate appreciation in the hands of a capitalist the “rate of accumulation by dispossession.”¹²⁸ I have found that many farmers carry a good estimate of it in their heads. While some do not oppose dispossession itself, they want a larger stake in its subsequent commodification—in effect, to lower the rate of accumulation by dispossession.

Many struggles in the peripheries of expanding cities take this form. Outside of Delhi, for instance, the farmer agitations (like that in Bhatta Parsaul) over privatized expressway projects and peri-urban development have focused on the large differentials between compensation prices and current market values. The Greater Noida Development Authority, now a notorious land grab agency, has been acquiring massive amounts of land at Rs. 820 (\$18) per square meter and reselling it to developers at a minimum of Rs. 35,000 (\$778).¹²⁹ The ultimate value of the high-end residential flats built on the land is many times more. While farmers there have been fighting militantly and even violently, their goal is limited: to get the market price of the land. They have been supported by the powerful farmers’ organization, the BKU, which has taken up the issue of land acquisition in its areas of operation—especially western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana—largely with the goal of ensuring higher land prices for farmers. After the violence in Bhatta Parsaul and other nearby villages, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati invited BKU representatives to talks on a new land acquisition policy. After being courted, fed, and chauffeured around Lucknow on air-conditioned buses,¹³⁰ the BKU announced its support for Mayawati’s new policy,¹³¹ which gives farmers annuities, a percentage of the project’s developed land, and requires that the government reconsider a private project where 70 percent of landowners do not approve.¹³² In response to similar agitations by powerful Jat farmers, the Haryana government had already put into place the most generous compensation package of any state to date. Similarly, the Rajasthan government has for years tried to head off confrontations over land acquisition by giving farmers small developed land parcels next to its projects. Many state governments, responding to political pressure, are gradually moving in this direction.

The implication is that for this category of anti-dispossession movement, states may prove capable of orchestrating a real estate-based class compromise and thereby make dispossession hegemonic rather than merely coercive. While the real estate-focus of the neoliberal regime of dispossession is what makes it more ideologically tenuous (few are convinced that an upscale housing colony is a “public purpose”), it is also what creates the possibility for building material consent to dispossession. By giving farmers a greater share in post-development land rents, it may be possible in some instances to avoid intractable, zero-sum conflict and align the interests of farmers and capital. Whether states can find the point on the graph where farmers forego protest and capital does not flee remains, however, an open question. While political compulsion is pushing compensation amounts up, inter-state competition for capital pushes in the other direction. An official with the Haryana Industrial Development Corporation told me that since they put their groundbreaking compensation policy into place, high land prices have become a deterrent to new industrial investment.¹³³ National legislation appears to be their answer, with the central government currently

trying to pass amendments to the Land Acquisition Act that would compensate land at above its assessed agricultural value and put other resettlement and rehabilitation measures into place. Whether this will be successful in dissipating some of India's land wars is a subject we will return to in the conclusion.

Higher compensation will not, however, dissipate all of India's land wars. Although Partha Chatterjee seems to collapse all of dispossession politics into a negotiation over its terms,¹³⁴ there is a second category of anti-dispossession movement that is not interested in compensation at all. In Nandigram, farmers began protesting before compensation amounts were even discussed. In the proposed area of the POSCO steel project, farmers held a public burning of their compensation packages. In Niyamgiri, as one Dongaria Kondh put their opposition to a Vedanta bauxite mine, "Even if we have to die or go through hell...we will not give them Niyamgiri Hill."¹³⁵ In Gorai, Maharashtra, fisherman and farmers are still refusing to give their island for a tourist SEZ, unmoved by an enhanced compensation package.¹³⁶ In Raigad, Maharashtra, where Reliance Industries was offering farmers \$20,000 per acre plus a job, as one farmer told me, "Most people don't want to sell at any cost."¹³⁷ The project was subsequently cancelled. Similarly, in Singur, the farmers protesting the Tata car plant were unwilling to discuss compensation. As one woman from the successful struggle against a pharmaceutical SEZ in Goa flatly stated, "We don't want any industrialization in our village."¹³⁸ This outright refusal to give land for projects was pioneered by the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, which adopted a firm anti-dam stance captured in the slogan, "No one will be moved, the dam will not be built (*Koi nahi hatega, bandh nahi banega*)." By refusing to value their land at its exchange value, these farmers cannot be brought into a class compromise on the terrain of commodification.

The complex question is what factors make different groups of farmers more or less willing to compromise with dispossession. I will simply suggest some variables that, though difficult to separate, are clearly at work in many cases. First, there is the inescapable observation that many of the more militant, non-compromising movements are emerging from *adivasi* areas in more remote and often mountainous areas, while the compromising movements are more common among non-*adivasi* farmers in the plains and near cities. That does not necessarily imply that *adivasis* are primordially attached to their lands; this distinction collapses several potentially important variables. The first is that the astronomically hot real estate markets that can align the interests of agriculturalists with capitalists through higher compensation are absent in the more remote areas inhabited by *adivasis*, who are more often displaced for dams and mining projects than SEZs, IT parks, or housing colonies. The second factor is the even greater mismatch between the skills and education of *adivasis* and the type of employment that extractive-industrial projects typically make available. The third is greater dependence on natural resources beyond private fields—forests, rivers, and fishing commons—that are not valued in compensation policies based on private property. Related to this, though perhaps more controversial, is a cultural identity and life-world that corresponds to this form of subsistence, and that leads to ways of valuing land and place that are more resistant to commodification and alienation.¹³⁹ A final and clearly important factor is political history, or more specifically "popular memories"

of *adivasi* resistance to various forms of state extraction dating back to before colonial rule.¹⁴⁰ The connections between such long histories of *adivasi* resistance and contemporary anti-dispossession politics have been amply documented by Baviskar in the case of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and by Sundar for movements fighting dispossession in Chattisgarh.¹⁴¹ In the agitations against the Cipla SEZ in Goa, the local *adivasi* population drew on both older memories of participation in the state's anti-Portuguese independence struggle and more recent opposition in the 1990s to a DuPont nylon factory proposed for the same land.¹⁴² If one were to accept Scott's view of "hill peoples as state-repelling...or even antistate societies,"¹⁴³ we might hypothesize that long histories of state evasion and resistance have left *adivasis* with a higher than average unwillingness to compromise with dispossession.

However, there have also been several, high-profile non-compromising movements arising from non-*adivasis* in the plains. The resisting farmers in Nandigram were mostly lower-caste Hindus and Muslims; those in Singur largely mixed-caste Hindus. But, crucially, both areas had long histories of radical political agitation, including the anti-landlord Tebhaga rebellion of the 1940s,¹⁴⁴ and both areas had benefited from the communist government's previous land reforms that the proposed land acquisition would effectively reverse. Although Singu's farmers were closer to the city and relatively more educated, the high fertility of their triple-cropped land may partly explain the tenacity with which they defended it. In Nandigram, the land was largely unirrigated and many cultivators were dependent on migrant labor in the off-season, but their relatively low economic and educational status may have contributed to their pessimism regarding the benefits they might derive from industrial development. This seems to have been reinforced by a previous disappointing experience with an industrial project for which land was acquired by the same Haldia Development Authority: 142 families were dispossessed for a ship-building factory in 1977, very few got jobs, and the plant closed after five years.¹⁴⁵ A disappointing experience with land-consuming industrial development also seems to have played an important role in hardening the stances of farmers in other locations. In Jagatsinghpur, the villages resisting the POSCO steel project had previously seen an Indian Oil Company refinery consume nearby land and fail to deliver employment to the dispossessed.¹⁴⁶ In Kalinga Nagar, Orissa, the land in question was initially acquired in 1994 for an industrial estate for which people received some cash compensation; but when benefits from this failed to materialize, those who were still occupying their land decided that they had better keep it rather than relinquish it for a Tata steel plant.

It is difficult to single out any of these hypothesized explanations as the key determinant in people's unwillingness to part with land; many logically go together and the diversity of agrarian social structures, political histories, and types of development offer few natural experiments in which they can be isolated. We might say that these various factors congeal in different *dispositions* toward land and labor that become manifest under the threat of dispossession. The simple point is that when accumulation by dispossession becomes refracted in different localities through different agrarian social structures and political histories, it creates movements with different goals. I have highlighted the important distinction between two broad

strands of countermovements: those that reject commodification altogether, and those that want a higher stake in it. As we will see next, the same processes also produce movements with different ways of understanding these goals.

Defense of the Land and its Ideological Expressions

James Scott has observed that even in revolutions, peasants and workers have almost always fought for immediate issues of livelihood and security while it is left to intellectuals, activists, and party members to fight for ideological abstractions.¹⁴⁷ This may be even more true of anti-dispossession movements, which emerge to achieve a single purpose: stopping the expropriation of land and the potentially devastating effect on one's livelihood this usually entails. As Baviskar observes in the Narmada Valley, people generally eschew romantic metaphors to describe their resistance in favor of "more prosaic descriptions of the threat to their land and livestock."¹⁴⁸ I have similarly found that when asked why they do not want to give up their land, most people start with a long list of all the things that they get from it: grain, fodder, different varieties of pulses and vegetables, milk, butter, and curd. They pose straightforward questions: What will we eat? Where will we go? They also place value on an autonomous lifestyle in which they can, to varying degrees, provide many of their needs without, or with minimal, wage labor. In some instances, there are also strong attachments to ancestral or sacred land. As much as it violates assumptions about the benevolence of industrial modernization, some express complete indifference to a steel plant or an SEZ.

So, while the motivation for resisting dispossession tends to be the concrete defense of land-based livelihoods, this motivation can be incorporated into very different political ideologies. The ultimate ideological directions in which these motivations become channeled are both socially structured and politically contingent. Because struggles against dispossession emerge in an organizational void around an issue historically neglected by political parties, there is no tailor-made political ideology equivalent to Marxism for proletarian struggles. Given their internal diversity, members will often disagree in their broader political perspectives. The political ideology that becomes articulated in these movements is shaped by local social structures, political histories, and the contingent ties that farmers build with urban activists and other political organizations. Even then, it is an open empirical question to what extent the explicit political ideologies advanced by urban supporters or political leaders are shared by the majority of participants.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, we can identify several ideological strands that constitute the "public face" of dispossession politics in India.

Among the movements resisting dams, scientific forestry, and other development projects from the late 1970s onward, Ramachandra Guha identified three main ideological currents: Gandhianism, appropriate technology, and ecological Marxism.¹⁵⁰ The first emphasized decentralized village development and a rejection of industrial modernization; the second was less strident in its rejection of modern technology but sought to develop alternatives within it; the third emphasized the primacy of class struggle in the control of natural resources. While Guha recognized that most peasants

themselves saw their movements as straightforward struggles over subsistence, these strands combined in various ways to form the “public face” of a distinct Indian “environmentalism of the poor.”¹⁵¹

Many of the contemporary anti-dispossession movements that become affiliated with NAPM are, more or less, operating in this broad ideological universe. They reject both state-led modernization, which led to the displacement of tens of millions of people (predominantly *adivasis* and Dalits) in the decades after Independence,¹⁵² as well as the neoliberal model that is accelerating dispossession for all manner of privatized industry, infrastructure, and real estate. While an environmental discourse is present, it is subordinated to an overriding concern with people’s control over land and natural resources. This often involves, especially in *adivasi* areas, identity-based claims to territory.¹⁵³ Rather than rejecting development, NAPM envisions a society in which “nondestructive development” will be decided upon and controlled by decentralized democratic institutions that will have autonomy over the natural resources at their disposal.¹⁵⁴ This is captured by slogans such as “our rule in our village” and “we want development not destruction.” NAPM has pushed—so far unsuccessfully—for changes to the Land Acquisition Act that would subject people-displacing development projects to the “prior and informed consent” of local assemblies (*gram sabhas*). NAPM does not overlook the power inequalities within villages—raising issues of class, caste, gender, and communalism—however, its efforts have remained focused on supporting resistance to dispossession. Some of its constituent movements are active not just in resisting various forms of dispossession, but in building “constructive alternatives” or “real utopias”¹⁵⁵ at the local level, including local cooperatives, alternative energy, watershed management, organic agriculture, and fair-price shops. While rejecting any monolithic alternative to capitalism, they envision a plurality of place-based alternatives arising out of democratically determined priorities.

However, many contemporary anti-dispossession movements do not subscribe to this pluralistic, anarcho-socialist vision. The Naxalites have incorporated anti-dispossession politics into an unreconstructed Maoist/Marxist-Leninist ideology of revolutionary class war. In other places, resistance to dispossession can take on a regionalist character, such as in the successful movement against SEZs in Goa, which played upon a “Goa for Goans” discourse that captured anxieties about influxes of both outside capital and migrant labor.¹⁵⁶ The BKU has incorporated dispossession into its familiar agrarian populist frame of urban India exploiting rural *Bharat*, eliding the intense exploitation and caste domination affected by its base of medium-to-large Jat farmers.

As Polanyi observed, “countermovements” can point in very different political directions. While all, except those looking for a higher stake in its commodification, are trying to keep land embedded within various forms of social relations, those social relations are incredibly heterogeneous. They involve different mixes of property forms (private holdings, government land, and commons) and relations of production (petty commodity production, labor-exploiting capitalist farms, etc.). The movements are also different in the extent to which they want to preserve or

transform existing social relations beyond resisting the forced commodification of land. As Polanyi observed:

To remove the elements of production—land, labor, and money—from the market is thus a uniform act only from the viewpoint of the market, which was dealing with them as if they were commodities. From the viewpoint of human reality that which is restored by the disestablishment of the commodity fiction lies in all directions of the social compass.¹⁵⁷

What types of societies these “countermovements” might cumulatively create in the wake of successfully resisting accumulation by dispossession will depend, combining Polanyi and Gramsci,¹⁵⁸ on a “war of position” among them.

Conclusion

I have tried to show that the process of land dispossession creates a distinct form of politics with certain generic features as well as identifiable axes of variation. The use of extra-economic state force to achieve dispossession creates movements that target first and foremost the state, and specifically the particular administrative level where expropriation is enacted. The transparency of the state’s role means that it must justify its expropriations by aligning them with a concept of development whose persuasiveness will crucially affect the emergence and success of anti-dispossession movements. Because the dispossession of land is both more existentially threatening than the expropriation of surpluses, and one-off in nature, it is impossible to fight it successfully through “everyday” means. Resistance tends to be overt and takes the form of spatial struggles at the point of enclosure in which various means—physical, legal, and political—are brought to bear to defend land against co-optation and violent removal. With dispossession, everyday forms of repossession are ways of mitigating defeat, not achieving success. Because dispossession is orthogonal to, and neglected by, existing forms of political and social organization, these overt struggles tend to be organized through local, ad-hoc, autonomous organizations created specifically for the purpose. Combined with the fact that dispossession is experienced in many different forms, this creates a proliferation of localized “single-issue” movements. In India, these movements have, for years, been forming alliances with each other (NAPM), but some are now being absorbed into the armed Maoist insurgency, and others are eliciting limited support from political parties. Anti-dispossession movements are by nature cross-class; however, their exact composition and degree of internal contradiction vary massively. Locally distinct agrarian social structures, political histories, and different geographies of dispossession combine to create movements with diverse goals and ideologies. Some constitute a non-compromising countermovement against the forcible commodification of land; others are fighting for concessions on the terrain of commodification itself. Among both we find highly diverse political ideologies that do not neatly map onto the major political tendencies that organize electoral politics.

Although these features of dispossession politics are not exhaustive, I offer them as basic coordinates to stimulate refinement or reconstruction based on further

comparative research. Though drawn from the experience of dispossession politics in India, a few words are in order about their applicability to other contexts. While we can expect great variation in the specifics of dispossession politics across countries, I believe that the features presented above are sufficiently general—and genetically linked to the experience of land dispossession—that they should have fairly wide applicability to movements fighting state-led dispossession of agricultural land in other countries. We can expect to see significant differences in struggles over forest rights (in which poaching, arson, and “everyday forms” of resistance are common) and in the piecemeal “intimate dispossessions” that occur when local actors struggle over insecure or ambiguous property rights in the absence of state involvement.¹⁵⁹ Further, while land acquisition in India is a *fairly* rationalized state procedure (eminent domain laws have been on the books since the nineteenth century), in other countries and perhaps especially in conflict situations, the state can be relatively less central to land dispossession compared to non-state wielders of coercion, such as paramilitaries,¹⁶⁰ corporate security forces, drug cartels, or rural elites with what Marx calls “their little independent methods.”¹⁶¹ Such circumstances of rampant non-state violence are hardly conducive to the kinds of politics illustrated above. Nevertheless, the type of state-led land dispossession described here is sufficiently widespread that the framework suggested here should be relevant to a large domain of politics in many countries.

Having sketched the contours of a particular kind of politics formed through processes of land dispossession, I would like to conclude with some observations about its likely significance for India and, perhaps, other emerging centers of global capitalism. Given the above, it should already be apparent that states will face several obstacles to institutionalizing conflict around land in a way that is analogous to collective bargaining for labor. Unlike labor, land is essentially a zero-sum asset. Its supply is finite, it is currently in high demand for both agricultural and non-agricultural uses, and these uses are not compatible. While the surplus created by labor can be shared between a capitalist and laborer in a way that might align their interests, land can either stay with a farmer or be given to a capitalist. As we have seen, the loss of land constitutes a large, transparent, and irreversible threat to farmers’ livelihoods and even ways of life. To get farmers to comply with dispossession, states must either mobilize coercion, normative persuasion, or substantial material inducements. Coercion will continue to be used, especially in remote areas inhabited by the most marginalized groups. However, this is likely to further alienate agriculturalists and increase opposition; its use will become more difficult as the issue attracts more media attention and achieves greater political salience. India’s burgeoning Maoist insurgency is good evidence of how such a strategy can backfire. The second option, persuading farmers that it is their patriotic duty to sacrifice their land for national development, is increasingly difficult as the state dispossesses land for private and sometimes foreign companies for increasingly real estate-driven purposes. I have argued here and elsewhere that India’s proliferating land wars are, to a large extent, a consequence of a neoliberal regime of dispossession that lacks the ideological legitimacy of its predecessor.¹⁶² Apart from abandoning this neoliberal regime, the third strategy of securing compliance through material compensation is probably the only option available. This is the strategy that

India's central and state governments are currently pursuing as they devise amendments to the central Land Acquisition Act and institute state resettlement and rehabilitation policies. The intention of these legislative and policy interventions is to dissipate land wars and ensure a predictable supply of land for capital by giving farmers a larger stake in the accumulation generated by dispossession.¹⁶³

There are, however, significant obstacles to such a class compromise. One obstacle is the ability of private capitalists to agree on the need for concessions, which has not been the case so far in India. With different industry organizations disagreeing on the need for more liberal compensation,¹⁶⁴ the current draft of India's amendment to the central Land Acquisition Act has seen its more liberal provisions watered down.¹⁶⁵ If passed in this less liberal form, it will decrease the likelihood that this legislation will be effective at quelling farmer opposition, to the detriment of the long-term interests of capitalists themselves.

A second obstacle is the lack of enduring organizational vehicles that can be co-opted as negotiating partners. As we have seen, dispossession is a serial process that usually occurs only once for any particular farmer; for each instance of dispossession, bargaining has to begin afresh with new individuals. The ad-hoc, autonomous, and often transient nature of the organizations farmers create to fight dispossession makes it impossible for states to forge long-term relations (analogous to those with unions) that would facilitate stable compromises. The need to repeatedly negotiate with new individuals and their informal organizations multiplies the likelihood of opposition and greatly decreases the predictability of compliance.

Finally, there is a third and more fundamental obstacle. The idea of utilizing the exchange value of land to build a class compromise between capital and farmers assumes what needs to be explained: how farmers come to value their land at its exchange value in the first place. As we have seen, this cannot be taken for granted. Just as class compromise can only be built with workers once they have accepted the principle of exchanging their labor for a wage, a class compromise around land dispossession requires that farmers accept the principle of exchanging their land for a price. Whether all farmers have their price remains to be seen; what is clear is that India's land wars provide numerous examples of farmers refusing to give their land even when offered significant sums of money. So long as they refuse to treat their land at its exchange value, they cannot be brought into a class compromise on the terrain of commodification. Until and unless such nonmarket orientations to land are significantly unhinged, which at present seems remote, it is unlikely that states will be able to institutionalize material compliance to dispossession in the near term.

It is more likely that farmers will continue to effectively use the levers of democracy to impede the state's ability to transfer land to capital. In hundreds of villages across India, farmers are currently using the strategies and tactics discussed in this paper to make themselves significant obstacles to capitalist development. Almost all of the movements discussed in this paper have succeeded in stopping or significantly stalling the projects that are premised upon their dispossession. Some have no interest in the forms of development proposed for their land; others are fighting to be incorporated into it on better terms. Combined, nevertheless, they are making it

increasingly difficult for capitalists to obtain that seemingly mundane but crucial condition of accumulation: a physical place on Earth. Beyond disrupting accumulation by dispossession, the ultimate political direction of these movements is varied and their ability to articulate compelling and viable alternatives remains uncertain. What we can say, for now, is that peasants continue to make significant interventions in history, and that these are increasingly shaped by the process of dispossession.¹⁶⁶

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Notes

1. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
2. See the collection of articles in the special issue on "Land: A New Wave of Accumulation by Dispossession in Africa?," *Review of African Political Economy* 38, no. 128 (2011). See also Kojo Sebastian Amanor, "Global Resource Grabs, Agribusiness Concentration and the Smallholder: Two West African Case Studies," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 731-750; Philip Woodhouse, "New Investment, Old Challenges: Land Deals and the Water Constraint in African Agriculture," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 777-794; Tom Lavers, "Patterns of Agrarian Transformation in Ethiopia: State-mediated Commercialisation and the 'Land Grab,'" *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 795-822; Ruth Hall, "The Next Great Trek? South African Commercial Farmers Move North," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 823-844; and "Large-scale Land Deals from the Inside Out: Findings from Kenya's Tana Delta," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 1039-1076.
3. See, for example, Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch, and Tanya Li, *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Nus Press, 2011); Derek Hall, "Land Grabs, Land Control, and Southeast Asian Crop Booms," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 4 (2011): 837-857; Tania Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Miles Kenney-Lazar, "Plantation Rubber, Land Grabbing and Social-Property Transformation in Southern Laos," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 1017-1038.
4. For an overview, see the special issue on "Land Grabbing in Latin America," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 33, no. 4 (2012); and Saturnino M. Borras Jr., Jennifer C. Franco, Sergio Gomez, Crisobal Kay, and Max Spoor, "Land Grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 845-872.

5. See "Rural Population," *The World Bank* (2012). Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL>. Accessed March 15, 2013. The intersection of exceptionally fast growth rates and large peasantries with very small holdings may be partly responsible for the particular significance of land dispossession in India and China. One should also note that whereas "land grabs" in Africa and Latin America appear to be primarily driven by agribusiness, biofuels, and to a lesser extent, mineral extraction, in India and China they are primarily driven by urban-industrial development.
6. See You-Tien Hsing, *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 182-183.
7. See Landesa Rural Development Institute, "Summary of 2011 Seventeen-Province Survey's Findings" (2011). Available at: <http://www.landesa.org/news/6th-china-survey/>. Accessed February 25, 2012.
8. In a visit to Guandong in February 2012, Jiabao made farmers' rights a central theme and acknowledged the problem of land grabs, saying, "The root of the problem is that the land is the property of the farmers, but this right has not been protected in the way it should be." Quoted in Elizabeth C. Economy, "A Land Grab Epidemic: China's Wonderful World of Wukans," *Council on Foreign Relations* (2012). Available at: <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2012/02/07/a-land-grab-epidemic-chinas-wonderful-world-of-wukans/>. Accessed August 15, 2012.
9. Hsing shows that the central government has made some efforts to prosecute corrupt officials, cancel development zones, and to take some power away from local governments. However, she also argues that this is motivated not just by political considerations, but by concerns about macroeconomic overheating. See Hsing, *Greater Urban Transformation*, 213. In 2011, after Hsing's study, the Chinese government passed a new law on forced evictions, and is now considering a reform to its land "takings" law.
10. The most comprehensive study to date, led by Walter Fernandes, has put the total number of displaced for development projects in India between 1947 and 2004 at 60 million people. According to Fernandes, while *adivasis* constitute 8.6 percent of India's population, they make up 40 percent of the displaced, with Dalits comprising another 20 percent. See Walter Fernandes, "Sixty Years of Development-induced Displacement in India," in H. M. Mathur, ed., *India Social Development Report 2008: Development and Displacement* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91-92.
11. For an analysis of this shift, see Devparna Roy, "Gujarat's Gain and West Bengal's Loss? 'Development,' Land Acquisition in India, and the Tata Nano Project: A Comparison of Singur with Sanand" (paper presented at the Land Deal Politics Initiative Conference on Global Land Grabbing, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, United Kingdom, April 6-8, 2011).
12. For a more complete analysis of how the changing character of dispossession in post-liberalization India is contributing to the proliferation and success of land wars, see Michael Levien, "Regimes of Dispossession: From Steel Towns to Special Economic Zones," *Development and Change* 44, no. 2(2013): 381-407.
13. There is, of course, a large literature in institutional economics, which holds that the protection of private property is the cornerstone of economic growth. See, for example, Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). As a more recent statement puts it, "a cluster of institutions ensuring secure property rights for a broad cross section of society, which we refer to as the *institutions of private property*, are essential for investment incentives and economic performance." See Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James. A. Robinson,

- “Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107(2002): 1235. However, facilitating large private investments in a country where the majority of available land is in the hands of a small-holding peasantry has proven to be dependent on a growing state willingness to dispossess rather than protect the private property of rural agriculturalists. The accelerating use of eminent domain in India and elsewhere suggests that rapid economic growth appears to be based on the *selective* protection of private property.
14. One private consultancy has estimated that in 2011-2012, capital investment projects worth Rs. 2.7 trillion (\$54 billion) were stalled, mostly due to uncertainties in land availability. See Center for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd., “Sharp increase in projects getting shelved,” (2012). Available at: <http://www.cmie.com/kommon/bin/sr.php?kall=wclrdhtm.php&cmienvdt=20120704101759176&pc=099000000000&type=INSIGHTS>. Accessed August 15, 2012.
 15. While Ashutosh Varshney argues that a democratic system introduced before an industrial revolution empowers the countryside, his main example is the new farmers’ movements demanding subsidies and higher prices. That land rather than agricultural surpluses would be the source of conflict between urban capital and the countryside was anticipated by no one—until the land wars of the last five to seven years. See Ashutosh Varshney, *Democracy, Development, and the Countryside* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). In an urban context, Liza Weinstein also observes how democratic institutions, combined with the concern of investors to avoid political snags, has forced authorities in Mumbai to at least consult with those being evicted for slum redevelopment. See Liza Weinstein, “Democracy in the Globalizing Indian City: Engagements of Political Society and the State in Globalizing Mumbai,” *Politics & Society* 37, no. 3 (2009): 397-427.
 16. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 169-171.
 17. See, for example, Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).
 18. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
 19. Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
 20. See Michael Levien, “Special Economic Zones and Accumulation by Dispossession in India,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, no. 4 (2011): 454-483.
 21. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 168, 174.
 22. *Ibid.*, 169, 179.
 23. See Fred Block, “Introduction,” in Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, [1944] 2001): xviii-xxxviii; Michael Burawoy, “For a Sociological Marxism: The Complementary Convergence of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi,” *Politics & Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 193-261; Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver, “Polanyi’s ‘Double Movement’: The Belle Epoque of British and US Hegemony Compared,” *Politics & Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 325-355; Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers’ Movements and Globalization Since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Peter Evans, “Is an Alternative Globalization Possible?” *Politics & Society* 36, no. 2 (2008): 271-305; Ayse Bugra and Kaan Agartan, eds., *Reading Karl Polanyi for the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).
 24. See Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

25. See Burawoy, "Sociological Marxism," 213.
26. See Michael Burawoy, "From Polanyi to Pollyanna: The False Optimism of Global Labor Studies," *Global Labour Journal* 1, no. 2 (2010): 308.
27. See Andrew G. Walder, "Political Sociology and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 393-412.
28. Though in his late writings, Marx himself backed away from this position. See Theodore Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the Peripheries of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
29. See Vladimir I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967); Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question* (London: Zwan Publications, 1988).
30. See Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Jeffrey Paige, *Agrarian Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1975); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
31. See Terrence J. Byres, "The Journal of Peasant Studies: Its Origins and Some Reflections on the First Twenty Years," in H. Bernstein, T. Brass, and T. J. Byres, eds., *The Journal of Peasant Studies: A Twenty-Year Volume Index 1973-1993* (London: Routledge, 1994): 1-12; Utsa Patnaik, ed., *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The 'Mode of Production' Debate in India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1990).
32. See James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
33. See Patnaik, *Agrarian Relations*.
34. See Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
35. See *ibid*; Terrence J. Byres, "Charan Singh, 1902-1987: An Assessment," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 15, no. 2 (1988): 139-189; Tom Brass, *New Farmers' Movements* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).
36. For a prominent use of primitive accumulation to describe processes other than coercive land expropriation, see Amit Bhaduri, *The Economic Structure of Backward Agriculture* (London: Academic Press, 1983). For discussions of the difficulty of applying such conceptions of "primitive accumulation" to ongoing forms of land dispossession, see Michael Levien, "The Land Question: Special Economic Zones and the Political Economy of Dispossession in India," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4 (2012): 933-969; and Derek Hall, "Rethinking Primitive Accumulation: Theoretical Tensions and Rural Southeast Asian Complexities," *Antipode* 44, no. 4 (2012): 1188-1208.
37. See Swapan Dasgupta, "Adivasi Politics in Midnapur, c. 1760-1924," in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford, 1985), 101-135; Ravinder Kumar, "The Deccan Riots of 1875," in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford, 1985), 153-183.
38. See Arvind Das, "Agrarian Change from Above and Below: Bihar 1947-78," in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford, 1985), 180-227.

39. See Ramchandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
40. See Guha, *The Unquiet Woods*, 4.
41. For critiques of the Subaltern Studies project, see Vivek Chibber, *Post Colonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013); K. Sivaramakrishnan, "Situating the Subaltern: History and Anthropology in the Subaltern Studies Project," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8, no. 4 (1995): 395-492; David Ludden, "Subalterns and Others in the Agrarian History of South Asia," in J. C. Scott and N. Bhatt, eds., *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 206-231.
42. See Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40.
43. See Guha, *The Unquiet Woods*; Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*; Baviskar, *Belly of the River*; Nandini Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar, 1954-2006* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
44. See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*; Guha, *The Unquiet Woods*.
45. In *Unquiet Woods*, Guha compared movements against commercial forestry in two different regions of the Himalayas, tracing differences in their "idioms of protest" to differences in their "structures of domination" (colonial versus princely). Despite insightful observations, Guha did not formalize what was generic to the politics of forest enclosure, or land dispossession more generally.
46. See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
47. Michael Levien, "Regimes of Dispossession."
48. See Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*.
49. See Partha Chatterjee, "Democracy and Economic Transformation in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 16 (2008): 53-62. His argument borrows heavily from Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2007).
50. See Chatterjee, "Democracy and Economic Transformation," 60. For a more comprehensive critique of Chatterjee's argument, see Amita Baviskar and Nandini Sundar, "Democracy Versus Economic Transformation?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 46 (2008).
51. In their critique of Chatterjee's essay, Baviskar and Sundar sharply observe, "Chatterjee inverts what is actually the case: generally, it is members of the so-called civil society who break laws with impunity and who demand that the rules be waived for them, whereas members of political society strive to become legal, to gain recognition and entitlements from the state." See Baviskar and Sundar, "Democracy Versus Economic Transformation?" 88.
52. See Ananya Roy, "The Blockade of the World-Class City: Dialectical Images of Indian Urbanism," in A. Ong and A. Roy, eds., *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (Malden: Blackwell, 2011).
53. *Ibid.*, 271. Strangely, Roy states that these movements exhibit a "Marxist nostalgia for dispossessed peasant owners" (*Ibid.*, emphasis added). This is strange because Marxists have been the most vociferous critics of a "nostalgic" orientation toward the peasantry, which they always assumed would be dispossessed by primitive accumulation and transformed

into a proletariat. As we saw in Singur and Nandigram, this theoretical assumption has often translated into practice. Roy's "pastoral radicalism" is simply another word for the agrarian populism that Marxists have long themselves criticized. See Tom Brass, *Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Terence J. Byres, "Of Neo-populist Pipe Dreams: Daedalus in the Third World and the Myth of Urban Bias," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 6, no. 2 (1979): 210-244; Terence J. Byres, "Charan Singh"; Henry Bernstein, "'Changing Before Our Very Eyes': Agrarian Questions and the Politics of Land in Capitalism Today," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4, no. 1-2 (2004): 190-225. Roy further argues that by framing their resistance in this way, the Singur and Nandigram movements fail to challenge "world-class city-making" and "trivialize the brutality of urban development and the displacements thus engendered" (Roy, "The Blockade," 71.). It is not clear, however, why a car factory or a petrochemical SEZ should be described as "world-class city-making," much less why one would expect farmers to articulate their resistance in that language. It is even more puzzling why farmers' defense of their land should be construed as trivializing someone else's displacement. Nevertheless, as it happens, the National Alliance of People's Movements, to be discussed later, has had some success at bringing together movements resisting rural and urban dispossession; representatives of Singur and Nandigram have even attended some of these protests.

54. For an analysis of the multiple understandings of the Singur movement among its different participants, see Kenneth Bo Nielson, "Four Narratives of a Social Movement in West Bengal," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 448-468.
55. See Gail Omvedt, "Farmers' Movements and the Debate on Poverty and Economic Reforms in India," in Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, eds., *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 192-193.
56. See David Harvey, "Comment on Commentaries," *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 4 (2006), 159. I argue elsewhere that the concept of accumulation by dispossession has no conceptual boundary and loses its specificity without this means-specific definition. See Levien, "Special Economic Zones," and Levien, "The Land Question."
57. See Levien, "Special Economic Zones."
58. My point, of course, is not that labor movements do not target the state; as Rina Agarwala shows, informal laborers in India are increasingly bypassing struggle at the workplace to demand benefits directly from the state. See Rina Agarwala, "Reshaping the Social Contract: Emerging Relations Between State and Informal Labor in India," *Theory and Society* 37 (2008), 375-408. For dispossession struggles, however, targeting the state is not a strategic option toward which they evolve, but an immediate and defensive necessity.
59. Dispossession protests are thus necessarily what Ho-Fung Hung calls "state-resisting." See Ho-Fung Hung, *Protest With Chinese Characteristics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 58-59.
60. Peluso, Afiff, and Rachman make a similar argument about the centrality of the state to land struggles under neoliberalism in Indonesia; see Nancy Lee Peluso, Suraya Afiff, and Noer Fauzi Rachman, "Claiming the Grounds for Reform: Agrarian and Environmental Movements in Indonesia," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 2-3 (2008): 377-407. In a different historical context, E. P. Thompson shows in *Whigs and Hunters* (New York: Pantheon, 1975) the centrality of the law to class struggle over common rights in early

- capitalist England. Though he frames it as a question of income-source dependency, Paige also observes that agrarian conflict over land tends to become politicized and directed at the state (see *Agrarian Revolution*, 25). We may go so far as to argue that in any historical period, when it comes to land dispossession, law and the state come to the immediate foreground of political struggle.
61. Sanjeev Khagram highlights the significance of transnational activism to anti-dam movements in *Dams and Development: Transnational Struggles for Water and Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). However, with international lending institutions like the World Bank becoming less central to many projects involving land dispossession in the post-liberalization period, this transnational element of anti-dispossession politics has become much less significant (as it did in the Narmada struggle itself once the World Bank withdrew funding). Thus, while these movements are opposing the dispossessions emanating from neoliberalism, they are not what Evans describes as “counter-hegemonic globalization” (See Evans, “Is an Alternative Globalization Possible?”). Their focus is overwhelmingly on the national and subnational state.
 62. Harvey’s overly economic focus on circuits of capital and his consequent failure to theorize the significance of extra-economic coercion cause him to neglect the fundamentally political and state-centered nature of accumulation by dispossession. This, in turn, prevents him from seeing the defining features of the politics of dispossession outlined here.
 63. See Levien, “Regimes of Dispossession.” For an analysis of the lasting ideological strength of Nehruvian developmentalism, see Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, “Introduction: In the Beginning, There was the Nehruvian State,” in R. Ray and M. F. Katzenstein, eds., *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 1-31.
 64. Ideology is, in this sense, *internal* to accumulation by dispossession, as Perry Anderson argues it is to *pre-capitalist* surplus expropriation. This is a consequence of both being based on transparent extra-economic coercion. See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974), 403-404.
 65. See Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 8.
 66. See Scott, *Moral Economy*.
 67. Whereas most of twentieth-century Western Marxism has seen the role of capitalist ideology as ensuring the smooth *reproduction* of social property relations, the role of ideology in dispossession is to produce compliance to the traumatic *transformation* of property relations. In this sense, producing compliance to dispossession is more akin to convincing people to opt for socialism—with its inevitable disruption of existing property forms and associated ways of life—than maintaining their allegiance to capitalism.
 68. See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 242.
 69. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York: Norton, 1959), 67; Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).
 70. Everyday resistance to curtailments of customary rights to forest and grazing commons—through poaching, petty arson, and sabotage of physical enclosures—has a very long and well-documented history. The works of E. P. Thompson and J. M. Neeson support Scott’s argument that these acts can be an effective form of class struggle against restrictions on land use. See Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters* and *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993); J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1993). For exemplary studies of overt and covert resistance to restrictions on forest access, see Nancy Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) and Guha, *Unquiet Woods*. However, everyday repertoires of resistance are not available—or at least cannot be effective—when land is to be permanently paved over or flooded with water. We might conclude that everyday resistance is only effective when the use values being dispossessed are preserved in some way post-dispossession and are thus retrievable, as opposed to being irretrievably destroyed—as is the case when land is dispossessed for industry, infrastructure, or urbanization.

71. For example, many commentators attribute the relative lack of effective resistance to dispossession for projects like large dams or steel towns in the post-independence years to what Guha calls the “overwhelming consensus in favour of a heavy industry-oriented, state-supported model of development.” See Ramchandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 231; Khagram, *Dams and Development*, 35; Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Post-Colonial Nationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 140. I argue elsewhere that such broad-based public support does not exist for the neoliberal regime of dispossession. See Levien, “Regimes of Dispossession.”
72. Parthasarathi Banerjee, “Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 18 (2006): 4718-4720.
73. Katherine Le Mons Walker uses the escalating land protests in China as evidence that “everyday” peasant resistance has become increasingly overt in the post-reform period. See Katherine Le Mons Walker’s, “From Covert to Overt: Everyday Peasant Politics in China and the Implications for Transnational Agrarian Movements,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 2-3 (2008): 462-488. A more specific hypothesis would be that peasant protest in China has become more overt partly because peasant protest has become more about land dispossession.
74. For a discussion of the role of place in struggles over development in India, see Paul Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance: Nonviolent Social Movements and the Contestation of Place in India* (Westport: Praeger, 1993). In his chapter on the Baliapal movement against displacement for the military’s National Testing Range, Routledge notes the use of barricading tactics very similar to those being used today against the POSCO project.
75. See Levien, “Special Economic Zones,” 454-483.
76. Fieldnotes, Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, November 13, 2010.
77. See Prasanta Patnaik, “Kalinganagar: Repression Continues Even When People are Dying for Want of Medical Care,” *Sanhati* (2010). Available at: <http://www.countercurrents.org/patnaik210410.htm>. Accessed January 2, 2012.
78. This fits awkwardly with Chatterjee’s emphasis on the extralegal nature of resistances to primitive accumulation. See Chatterjee, “Democracy and Economic Transformation,” 57-58.
79. See Usha Ramanathan, “The Land Acquisition Act 1894: Displacement and State Power,” in H. M. Mathur, ed., *India Social Development Report: Development and Displacement* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27-38.
80. This allows land to be acquired within fourteen days of notification with very limited public consultation.
81. See “Land Acquisition Act Has Become an Engine of Oppression: Court,” *The Hindu*, July 6, 2011.
82. See Michael Levien, “Rationalizing Dispossession: The Land Acquisition and Resettlement Bills,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 11 (2011): 66-71.

83. Interview, December 19, 2009.
84. See Aseem Srivastava, "Raigad, Maharashtra: Anti-SEZ Movement Stalls Reliance," *Tehelka*, July 18, 2009.
85. See "The Great SEZ Rush Skids on Slowdown, Land Issues," *Business Standard*, June 18, 2009; "RIL's Haryana SEZ, 10 Others Asked to Seek Fresh License," *Business Standard*, December 26, 2010. In her analysis of slum evictions in Mumbai, Weinstein also highlights the extent to which "the high risk nature of land speculation" puts pressure on the state to "facilitate as smooth and uncontested a development process as possible." See Weinstein, "Democracy in the Globalizing Indian City," 401.
86. Kenneth Nielson, for example, dismisses entirely the utility of the law in anti-dispossession movements in India. See Kenneth Bo Nielson, "Land, Law and Resistance," *Economic Political Weekly* 46, no. 41 (2012): 38-40.
87. See Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, 258-269.
88. Writing of the direct producers dispossessed by the enclosures, Marx writes, "And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire." See Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 875.
89. As I will discuss later, the struggle helped to propel the opposition Trinamool Congress Party—whose leader Mamata Banerjee supported the protests—to power in West Bengal after thirty-four years of communist party rule. Upon assuming office as West Bengal's chief minister, Banerjee passed a legislation returning the remaining land (that had not already been built upon) to the farmers, though Tata is currently challenging it in court.
90. Fieldnotes, Keri, Goa, December 19, 2009.
91. Interview, January 19, 2011.
92. See Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution*; Rajni Kothari, "The Non-Party Political Process," *Economic and Political Weekly* 19, no. 5 (1984): 216-224.
93. See Leon Trotsky, *1905* (New York: Random House, 1972[1909]), 48.
94. David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).
95. Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 169.
96. See James C. Scott, "Hegemony and Peasantry," *Politics & Society* 7, no. 3 (1977): 267-296.
97. See Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 174. See also Michael Levien, "India's Double Movement: Polanyi and the National Alliance of People's Movements," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 51(2007): 119-149.
98. See Levien, "India's Double Movement."
99. See Nandini Sundar, "Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 29 (2006): 3187-3192; and Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns*. Arundhati Roy, one of the few writers to go behind Maoist lines, writes, "Over the past five years or so, the Governments of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal have signed hundreds of MOUs with corporate houses, worth several billion dollars, all of them secret, for steel plants, sponge-iron factories, power plants, aluminum refineries, dams and mines. In order for the MOUs to translate into real money, tribal people must be moved. Therefore, this war." See Arundhati Roy, "Walking With the Comrades," *Outlook*, March 29, 2010.
100. This underlying cause of Maoist insurgency was clearly recognized by the Indian government. See Ministry of Home Affairs, "The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions," in A. R. Desai, ed., *Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36-43.

101. A report by India's Planning Commission worries that, "The trauma of displacement for which the state does not provide succor creates space for violent movement[s]." See Government of India, *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas: Report of an Expert Group to Planning Commission* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2008), 50.
102. As Srivastava and Kothari put it, "If one places the mineral map of India on top of the areas where Maoist insurgency holds sway, the overlap is very precise." See Aseem Srivastava and Ashish Kothari, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2012), 222.
103. See Government of India, *Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2010); Government of India, *Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill 2011* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2011). For an analysis of the latter, see Levien, "Rationalizing Dispossession."
104. See "Careless Land Acquisition Will Fuel Extremism," *Deccan Herald*, August 26, 2011.
105. In my interviews with farmers at both places, it was clear that the movements had members from all parties. In Nandigram, previously a CPI(M) bastion, farmers would have voted anyone into power after the CPI(M) cadre brutally attacked them. While the CPI(M) controlled all ten *panchayats* of Nandigram before the incident, all ten went to the TMC in 2008. However, the *Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee* remained autonomous. In Singur, where the TMC had a greater presence, farmers were grateful for Banerjee's support, and hoped that if elected she would return the Tata land to farmers (which she has tried to do). However, the *Singur Krishi Jami Rakshi Committee* had members from all parties, including the CPI(M) and Socialist Unity Center of India (SUCI).
106. For an analysis of the TMC's 2011 electoral victory in West Bengal, and the role of land acquisition politics in it, see Kheya Bag, "Red Bengal's Rise and Fall," *New Left Review* 70 (2011): 69-98; Achin Vinaik, "Subcontinental Strategies," *New Left Review* 70 (2011): 100-114.
107. See "Mayawati Land Policy: UP CM Upset's Rahul's 'Mission UP' Plan with Pro-Farmer Land Policy," *India Today*, June 3, 2011.
108. In his biography of the U.P. agrarian populist politician Charan Singh, Paul Brass devotes a chapter to his ultimately ineffective opposition to forcible land acquisition for the urban expansion of the city of Ghaziabad in the 1950s. His opposition appears to have been relatively anomalous, and got little political traction. See Paul Brass, *An Indian Political Life: Charan Singh and Congress Politics, 1937-1961* (New Delhi: Sage, 2011).
109. Because of small and fragmented holdings, the inclination of enough farmers to hold out, and sufficiently unclear land titles, it is very difficult to purchase large contiguous plots of land on the market in India. Therefore, any large development project requiring more than a few hundred acres of land has very little chance of obtaining it on the market. Corporations thus depend on the state to forcibly acquire land for them. This dependency has become more acute as demand for land has increased in the postliberalization era, propelling state governments to restructure themselves as land brokers for private capital. See Levien, "Special Economic Zones," 462-463.
110. See, "Mamata Woos Industry, Says Land Acquisition Not an Issue," *Firstpost*, November 24, 2011. Available at: <http://m.firstpost.com/politics/mamata-woos-industry-says-land-acquisition-notissue-139780.html?sz=m&rfh=1>; and "Mamata Hosts Dinner for Industrialists," *Hindustan Times*, October 18, 2011.
111. See William Sewell, "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25, no. 6 (1996): 841-881.

112. See Jun Borrás and Jennifer Franco, "Towards a Broader View of the Politics of Global Land Grab: Rethinking Land Issues, Reframing Resistance," *Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies*, Working Paper Series 001 (2010).
113. For good illustrations of this complexity, see Barbara Harriss-White and Nandini Gooptu, "Mapping India's World of Unorganized Labour," *Socialist Register* 37 (2001): 89-118, and Agarwala, "Reshaping the Social Contract."
114. See Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*, 220.
115. *Ibid.*
116. In an analysis of anti-mining movements in Guatemala, Urkidi observes this bracketing of internal contradictions within Mayan "communities" to meet the external threat of dispossession, writing, "the community is being reclaimed beyond its internal injustices, in order to fight larger ones." See Leire Urkidi, "The Defense of Community in the Anti-Mining Movement of Guatemala," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, no. 4 (2011): 574-575.
117. Fieldnotes, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, January 16, 2010. Connected landowning politicians also often try to get project boundaries relocated to skirt their land (while driving up their property value). Allegations to this effect emerge in many projects, and are often reported in the press. In the Mahindra World City SEZ in Rajasthan, such allegations were the subject of a special commission set up to investigate corrupt land deals in the state; however, the commission was unceremoniously dissolved before its findings could be announced.
118. See Usha Seethalakshmi, *Special Economic Zones in Andhra Pradesh: Policy Claims and People's Experiences* (Hyderabad: ActionAid, 2009).
119. The accounts of Banerjee and Nielson make clear that small-farmers and tenants were in the forefront of the Singur movement. The movement's claim that the majority of those who accepted compensation instead of joining the struggle were large, absentee farmers seems probable but has not been definitively documented. Nevertheless, the allegation itself suggests the saliency of local class antagonisms and their relevance to dispossession politics. See Banerjee, "Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur," 4719; Kenneth Bo Nielson, "Contesting India's Development? Industrialisation, Land Acquisition and Protest in West Bengal," *Forum for Development Studies* 37, no. 2 (2010): 157.
120. See PBKMS (*Paschim Banga Ket Majoor Samity*), "Press Release: The Farmers Will Get Back Their Land, but What About the Agricultural Workers in Singur?" June 3, 2011.
121. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, those cultivating "assigned" lands received from land reforms are tenants at will of the state and can be evicted without compensation. The wealthier and typically higher-caste farmers with formal title can at least claim compensation, which differentiates their interests *vis-à-vis* a project. See Seethalakshmi, *Special Economic Zones*, 45-54.
122. Fieldnotes, Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, November 14, 2010.
123. See Levien, "Special Economic Zones," 470-473.
124. For an analysis of the challenges inherent to forging cross-class cooperation against dispossession, see Levien, "India's Double Movement." While leaders of NAPM and BKU might be able to share a platform, which itself requires some work given the historic support of the farmers' movements for large dams, it will be difficult to build solidarity between the rank-and-file members of the BKU and the lower-caste or *adivasi* movements within NAPM.
125. For a particularly romantic version of this argument, see Vandana Shiva, Shreya Jani, and Sulakshana M. Fontana, *The Great Indian Land Grab* (New Delhi: Navdanya, 2011), vii.

126. Versions of this argument can be found in Dipankar Gupta, *The Caged Phoenix: Can India Fly?* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009); and Pranab Bardhan, "Industrialization and the Land Acquisition Conundrum," *Development Outreach*, April 2011: 54-57.
127. According to India's Land Acquisition Act (LAA), private land owners are to be compensated for forcibly acquired land at its "fair market price." How to determine the fair market price of land in the absence of a voluntary sale is a problem inherent to any process of compulsory acquisition. This problem has preoccupied government officials since colonial times and prompted multiple amendments to India's LAA. The system that has evolved in practice is to constitute District Level Committees (of government officials and state legislators) that determine the value of different categories of land based on an average of previous land sales in the area. This so-called DLC rate is invariably much less than the actual market rate. This is in part because government officials deliberately keep it low to minimize the Stamp Duty assessed on land sales (keeping a large portion of real estate transactions in the black). It is also because, under India's land classification system, agricultural land is only assessed at its agricultural value, not taking into account its prospective use as industrial, commercial, or residential land—which would be reflected in the actual market price. When the state forcibly acquires a farmer's land, it pays him or her the DLC rate for agricultural land—regardless of the actual market price. In fact, the LAA prevents the government from considering the prospective value of the land given its intended use when calculating compensation. The acquisition of public grazing and forest lands—for which the government is under no legal obligation to compensate users—can be done even more cheaply through administrative fiat. In the period of state-led growth, this system allowed the government to industrialize with a minimal drain on revenue; in the period of market-led growth, it allows private companies to arbitrage on the differential between the price of acquired land and its market value. This, of course, is not specific to India. You-Tien Hsing observes the same phenomenon in China, reporting that the Chinese state resells acquired land to private developers at many more times the price paid to farmers as compensation. See Hsing, *The Great Urban Transformation*, 73, 191.
128. See Levien, "Special Economic Zones," 459.
129. See Jyotika Sood, "Road to Disaster," *Down to Earth*, June 15, 2011.
130. See "BKU Expresses Discontent Over UP Government's New Land Acquisition Policy," *United News India*, June 2, 2011.
131. See "Bharatiya Kisan Union Hails New Land Acquisition Policy by Uttar Pradesh Government," *United News India*, June 3, 2011.
132. See "Mayawati Announces New Land Acquisition Policy," *The Hindu*, June 2, 2011.
133. Interview, February 21, 2011.
134. See Chatterjee, "Democracy and Economic Transformation."
135. See "Niyamgiri: The Mountain of Law," Undated Documentary (Bhubaneswar: Samadrasti TV). Another woman told the Ministry of Environment and Forest Committee sent to investigate the project, "Even if they cut our throats, we cannot be separated from Niyamgiri." Another said, "We can never leave Niyamgiri. If the mountains are mined, the water will dry up. The crops won't ripen. The medicinal plants will disappear. The air will turn bad. Our gods will be angry. How will we live? We cannot leave Niyamgiri." See Government of India, *Report of the Four Member Committee For Investigation into the Proposal Submitted by the Orissa Mining Company for Bauxite Mining in Niyamgiri* (New Delhi: Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2010), 39, 34.

136. Fieldnotes, Gorai, Maharashtra, November 26, 2009.
137. Interview, November 26, 2009.
138. Fieldnotes, Keri, Goa, December 19, 2010.
139. See, for example, Baviskar, In *the Belly of the River*, 88-91.
140. Sundar, in particular, emphasizes the significance of “popular memories” of resistance in *Subalterns and Sovereigns*, 249. For other accounts of *adivasi* resistance, see David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Guha, *Elementary Aspects*; Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*.
141. See Baviskar, *Belly of the River*, 49-84; Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns*, 249.
142. Fieldnotes, Keri, Goa, December 19, 2009.
143. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 128.
144. See Sunil Sen, “Tebhaga Chai,” in A.R. Desai, ed., *Peasant Struggles in India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1979), 450.
145. See People’s Tribunal on Nandigram, *Nandigram: What Really Happened?* (Delhi: Daanish Books, 2007), 6.
146. Fieldnotes, Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, November 14, 2010.
147. See James C. Scott, “Revolution in the Revolution,” *Theory and Society* 7, no. 1-2 (1979): 97-134.
148. Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*, 213.
149. See Ibid.; Kenneth Bo Nielson, “Four Narratives of a Social Movement in West Bengal.”
150. See Ramachandra Guha, “Ideological Trends in Indian Environmentalism,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 49 (1988): 2578-2581.
151. While more critical of the discrepancy between its public and private face, Baviskar similarly saw the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* as essentially a class struggle over subsistence rights that was publicly portrayed as an “environmental” and “indigenous rights” movement. See Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*; and Amita Baviskar, “Red in Tooth and Claw?: Looking for Class in Struggles over Nature,” in Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, eds., *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 161-178.
152. See Fernandes, “Sixty Years of Development-induced Displacement in India,” 91-92.
153. For the political significance of identity-based claims to territory, see Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 278-333; Richard Peet and Michael Watts, eds. *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 2004), 25; and Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance*.
154. That movements fighting dispossession in India should not be seen as “post” or “anti-development,” but rather as motivated by a discourse and conception of development (however different from the one actually delivered by the Indian government), is made forcefully by Rangan in her revisionist history of the Chipko movement against commercial forestry in the Himalayas. See Haripriya Rangan, “From Chipko to Uttaranchal: The Environment of Protest and Development in the Indian Himalaya,” in R. Peet and M. Watts, eds., *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 2004), 371-393.
155. See Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).
156. Fieldnotes, Goa, December 20, 2009.

157. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 260.
158. See Burawoy, "Sociological Marxism."
159. Hall, Hirsch, and Li, *Powers of Exclusion*; Hall, "Land Grabs, Land Control."
160. Jacobo Grajales documents the role of Colombian paramilitaries in violent land grabs, though he observes that a state role is still necessary to title and formally recognize land that is violently grabbed by private violence. However, in these situations of violent conflict, many of the forms of political resistance described here will clearly be unviable. See Jacobo Grajales, "The Rifle and the Title: Paramilitary Violence, Land Grab and Land Control in Colombia," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 4 (2011): 771-792.
161. See Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, 885. For a discussion of the role of even smallholding farmers in grabbing ambiguously titled land during crop booms, see Hall, "Land Grabs," 838, 841, 844.
162. See Levien, "Regimes of Dispossession."
163. See Levien, "Rationalizing Dispossession."
164. While some industry associations have recognized the need to increase land prices in exchange for assuring predictable access to land, others are less ready to make concessions. In an interview, I asked one chamber of commerce official what the organization wanted from the amendments to the Land Acquisition Act. His answer was, "The main thing is that [our] members want to easily get the land without any hurdles.... This is the main concern. It is a law and order issue.... As of now, we are not talking about any compensation amounts, we are just talking about how we can easily get the land" (Interview, January 19, 2011).
165. See "India Inc. Sees Land Bill as 'Unfair,'" *The Hindu*, October 21, 2012; "Land Bill Gets More Business Friendly," *India Realtime*, October 29, 2012.
166. This is a reformulation of Burawoy's thesis "that the industrial working class has made significant and self-conscious interventions in history," and "that these interventions were and continue to be shaped by the process of production." See Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985), 5.

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