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

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ABSTRACT

Struggles over land dispossession have recently proliferated across the developing world. In India, the unwillingness of farmers to give their land for increasingly privatized industrial, infrastructure, and real estate projects has resulted in widespread "land wars." Collectively, these struggles are posing a very serious obstacle to India's market-led growth model. However, this paper argues that existing social-science theories of political agency are inadequate for understanding the specificity of this politics of dispossession. Based on two years of ethnographic research on anti-dispossession movements across rural India, I argue that the dispossession of land creates a distinctive type of politics and I outline its main features and sources of variation.

KEYWORDS: accumulation by dispossession; land commodification; countermovements; Polanyi; India

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BIO

Michael Levien is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of California-Berkeley. His dissertation, based on an ethnography of a Special Economic Zone in Rajasthan, examines the political economy of land dispossession in India.

INTRODUCTION

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, infrastructure and real estate projects has in recent years generated widespread agrarian resistance in what have been popularly dubbed "land wars." While these conflicts over the control of land have moved to the center of Indian politics and are attracting greater scholarly interest globally, it is the argument of this paper 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.

The need for a sociological theory of dispossession has never been greater. Though the dispossession of agrarian land for diverse forms of capitalist development is familiar across most parts of the developing world, its economic and political significance appears to be generally increasing. This is perhaps most visible in the two rapidly growing countries that together constitute over one-third of the world's population. 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,[2] and possibly of "mass incidents" more generally.[3] The efforts of local governments to cheaply acquire farmland for private developers has triggered a series of hi-profile standoffs with farmers, such as in the village of Wukan in 2011, that appear to be drawing inspiration from each other. These proliferating land struggles have forced Wen Jiabao to give speeches about protecting farmers' land rights,[4] and prompted some limited efforts to reign in the land brokering of local governments.[5]

In India, the accelerating dispossession of land in the post-liberalization period, combined with a relatively open democracy, has made the land question even more politically explosive. While it is estimated that 60 million people have been displaced from their land for development projects since independence, the rate of dispossession has by all accounts increased post-liberalization.[6] Its character, moreover, has changed as Special Economic Zones, hi-tech cities, real estate and privatized infrastructure have joined dams, mining, heavy industries 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 14 farmers in Nandigram, West Bengal were massacred, and many more raped and severely injured, for refusing to give their land for a petro-chemical SEZ promoted by an Indonesian conglomerate. The resulting public outcry catapulted land dispossession to the center of Indian politics and forced the central government to limit land acquisition for SEZs and introduce amendments to the Land Acquisition Act. 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 Maharasthra. Many more, in all parts of India, continue to be bogged down in land acquisition purgatory. India's largest proposed Foreign Direct Investment ever—the twelve mega-ton POSCO Steel Plant 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 strong opposition by local farmers and an opposition party. In Orissa, strong 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. While 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. The relatively politicized struggles are, moreover, underlain by widespread legal opposition to routine government land acquisition. In the words of Prime Minister Manhoman Singh, land acquisition has become a "very sensitive" issue, and is increasingly seen as a critical bottleneck for industrial, infrastructure, and real estate development.[7] The Indian state appears to be caught between the land requirements of its liberalized growth model and the exigencies of electoral democracy.[8]

The question, then, is how to understand this increasingly significant politics of dispossession. David Harvey has advanced the theoretical framework of "accumulation by dispossession," which provides a useful 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 pre-conditions for, advanced capitalism. Harvey makes a good case that Marxists have focused too exclusively on the politics of exploitation to the neglect of the politics of dispossession.[9] 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,"[10] the "multitude,"[11] or "political society,"[12] accumulation by dispossession provides a useful sociological 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,[13] his brief 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,[14] and worrying that in some instances they may, in their parochialism, obstruct real progress,[15] 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.[16] 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 "counter-movements" for social protection.[17] 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.[18] 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."[19] 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 subset 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) relationship to the state; 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.

My data is drawn from over two years of ethnographic and interview-based research (spread over six years) on anti-dispossession movements across rural India, as well as secondary materials. This research includes both an intensive ethnography of over a year focused on villages dispossessed for a Special Economic Zone (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 probably overly expansive definition of accumulation by dispossession that Harvey provides, and while my material is limited to India, 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 kinds of assets. In the conclusion, I will briefly suggest that many of the features identified here also appear valid for land struggles in China, suggesting that dispossession politics can take similar forms across very different political regimes. While only comparative research will bring out the similarities and differences in dispossession politics across multiple axes of variation, I offer the following as parameters for research into this increasingly significant domain of contemporary politics.

DISPOSSESSION IN PEASANT POLITICS

In arguing that the experience of land dispossession creates 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."[20] 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. As is well known, this theory focused on the way the development of capitalism forged a class with an interest and ability to overthrow the existing mode of 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.[21] To the extent that the urban working classes could find allies in the countryside for a revolutionary project, it was in the "depeasantized" rural proletariat as the development of capitalist agriculture polarized the agrarian class structure.[22] 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 20th century in response to the emergence of communist revolutions and anti-colonial peasant insurgencies in what were considered "backward" agricultural societies. A tidal wave of ambitious comparative studies re-evaluated the role of peasants in social revolutions, past and present.[23] It also prompted a generation of scholars to study the changing agrarian class structures in "developing countries" and their political implications.[24] 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."[25] Despite these differences, the objective cause of peasant rebellion and resistance in the 20th 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 in immense debate beginning in the 1960s and lasting over 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.[26] 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.[27] 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 even land reform but remunerative prices.[28] 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 in inter-locked markets, squeezing the peasantry through unequal terms of exchange, or the general process of making peasant agriculture unviable, but was always situated in reference to the development of commercial agriculture.[29] A form of political agency arising from the dispossession of land for other forms of capitalist development was not on the radar of agrarian political economy.

Dispossession was a theme, however, in the historiography of the Subaltern Studies school. Several contributions focused on how commercial pressures introduced by colonialism led to the enclosures of common lands and debt-induced land-alienation, precipitating peasant revolt.[30] Das documented more contemporary, Maoist-tinged resistance to landlord enclosures in Bihar.[31] Other scholars originally associated with this school focused on struggles between peasants and the state over forests.[32] 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 distinct political idiom that was specific to subaltern politics generally.[33] 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.[34]

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."[35] 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.[36] 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.[37] As critiques of capitalist development, they also illuminated the forms of politics emerging not from the proletariat, but those resisting proletarianization.

While these scholars provided excellent critiques of the developmental state and 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.[38] This paper tries to identify the common or "elementary forms"[39] of dispossession politics that cut across their examples and mine. Many of my examples are drawn from a newer generation of anti-dispossession movements which have emerged to resist not "high-modernist" development projects of the Nehruvian state (dams, steel mills, mines, scientific forestry, etc.), but the increasingly privatized and less strictly industrial forms of dispossession of the neoliberal era (real estate projects, SEZs, IT office buildings and privatized infrastructure).[40] 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."[41] This paper tries to establish the existence of a distinct domain of dispossession politics defined by both generic features and identifiable axes of variation.

DISPOSSESSION POLITICS AND THE STATE

The defining feature of dispossession is the direct and transparent intervention of the state into the process of accumulation. In contrast to the expropriation of surplus in the labor process, accumulation by dispossession involves the use of routine and highly visible *extra-economic coercion* to expropriate means of production, subsistence or common social wealth.[42] While such coercion can be exercised in a decentralized manner by non-state actors such as landlords, paramilitaries, mafias, etc., in countries like India and China it is overwhelmingly the state that has taken on this role (in countries or instances where this is not the case, the kind of politics outlined here will be less applicable). 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 various 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 by the Nehruvian development state, and are being used even more extensively post-liberalization to broker land for private capital.[43]

The consequence of this direct, extra-economic intervention into accumulation is to establish an immediate antagonism between the dispossessed and the state. Resistance to dispossession thus 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.[44]

Anti-dispossession struggles are born with the state as their target.[45] While this was obviously the case with state-led development projects like dams, it is still true for today's neoliberal projects[46]: 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 anyway 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 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.[47] 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 are made (of jobs and compensation), 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."[48] 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, than the unprecedented public support and policy traction that they have gained in the last five years.[49]

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."[50] 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.[51] 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 perhaps ways of life.[52] That dispossession entails the expropriation of not just surpluses but means of production or subsistence themselves thereby raises the stakes of dispossession politics; 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.[53]

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.[54] 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 use[55]—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),[56] 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 began on the very day the Orissan government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the company; the movement in Nandigram, West Bengal, against a petro-chemical 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.[57] Dispossession of land is not only existentially threatening, but its one-off nature makes it impossible to stop except through overt opposition. 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 the land the state and capital want; if they do not want to give it, they must do everything possible 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* (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 petro-chemical 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.

These spatialized, defensive tactics elicit counter-tactics 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 the coercive route of 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.[58] 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.[59] 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 counter-tactic 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 the 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.[60] 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.[61] 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 anti-dam movement 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.[62] 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.[63] 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.[64] 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).[65] 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."[66]

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 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."[67] 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.[68] A constant refrain in my interviews with officials at industrial development corporations and urban development authorities in seven states is that 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 nuisances is creating a greater collective headache for 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,[69] its centrality to land struggles is inescapable, and perhaps a general historical fact.[70]

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 accumulation[71]—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: 14 people massacred in Nandigram, many more raped and beaten by police and CPI(M) cadre; 14 more people killed in Kalinga Nagar and many more wounded by 27 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 pillaging of their homes and villages.

When it is not possible to keep possession of the land, a fall back 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.[72] 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.[73] 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 chambers 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."[74]

Finally, in the context of defeat where organized opposition fails or never coheres, various "everyday forms" of anti-enclosure resistance may follow. This takes the time-honored forms of petty sabotage, encroachments, pilfering and re-appropriations of enclosed space. 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 over-turned 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 resumptions 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 that 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 come under the threat of dispossession, there are usually no pre-existing political vehicles at hand that are suitable for resisting it. Unions and 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 the Left, has ever seriously taken up the issue of "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 towards electoral politics.[75] 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,"[76] Harvey has called place-based struggles "militant particularisms,"[77] and worries that the parochialism of anti-dispossession movements may prevent them from forging more universalistic political programs.[78] This is in line with the long-held assumption of Marxists and non-Marxists alike that strong supra-local organization is a necessary pre-requisite for both revolutionary consciousness and political efficacy.[79] 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.[80] 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, moreover, been among the worst perpetrators of violent dispossession in the pursuit 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.

However, while 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, "*hamaare gaon mein, hamaare raj*" ("our rule in our villages"). The task is extremely difficult given the heterogeneity of these movements, their internal contradictions, and the overwhelming imperative felt by each movement of stopping 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.[81]

But the non-violent, non-party Left is no longer the only actor on the stage of dispossession politics. The 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 swathes of territory from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal.[82] 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 "semi-feudal" agrarian social structures (the failures of downward land redistribution),[83] 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).[84] Indian Maoism has, in practice, evolved from being an insurrection against the grinding exploitation of semi-feudalism into also being a counter-movement against the dispossessions of neoliberal capitalism.[85]

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. While 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% 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.[86] 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."[87] 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) lead by Mamata Banerjee, that was looking for a wedge issue against the communist Left Front government that had ruled West Bengal for over 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 Front's own land reforms in the 1970s—to private companies for building the Tata Nano car factory and a petro-chemical 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,[88] 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* seats in the 2008 local elections and finally the state assembly in May 2011. After 34 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.[89]

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 (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, U.P., where farmers opposed to land acquisition for the Delhi-Agra expressway—which involved the forceful transfer of large amounts of land to private developers for real estate colonies—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 UP'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 *Bhartiya Kisan Union* (BKU)— which was intended to upstage the Congress' proposed amendments to the central Land Acquisition Act.[90]

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,[91] and become an electorally salient issue at the state and national level. This has a lot to do with the fact that the 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. Most farmers in India—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.[92] 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.[93] It is unclear how she will balance these demands. While 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 who 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.[94] While greater national-level coordination—through, for example, a stronger NAPM—would clearly help to advance a legislative agenda promoting "land sovereignty,"[95] 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. Accumulation by 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. While no one would underplay the internal diversity of labor on multiple axes,[96] 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,[97] which has now endured 25 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:[98] dispossession only 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 antagonism based on exploitation (within the agrarian class structure).[99] What kind of politics follows the prevention of dispossession is a separate question, to which I will return later.

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.[100] 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.[101] In other cases, as in Singur, small farmers, tenants and even laborers lead the resistance while the larger landholders accepted compensation.[102] 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.[103] 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.[104] 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.[105] 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.[106]

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 it cannot bridge—particularly with the large farmers movements. This was evidenced at its Action 2007 protests, where a movement of lower-caste and *adivasi* "forest-dwellers" 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 were protesting against land dispossession, such an antagonism is too sharp to be bridged, and working together is out of the question.[107] 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 which 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.[108] On the other side is the view that all farmers, and especially their kids, are more than happy to leave a moribund agriculture for urban pursuits.[109] 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, social and cultural 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 fundamental 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.[110] 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."[111] 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 re-selling it to developers at a minimum of Rs. 35,000 ($778).[112] 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 goals are limited: to get the market price of the land. They have been supported by the powerful farmer's 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, U.P. Chief Minister Mayawati invited BKU representatives to talks on a new land acquisition policy. After being wined and dined and chauffered around Lucknow on air conditioned buses,[113] the BKU announced their support for Mayawati's new policy,[114] which gives farmers annuities, a percentage of the project's developed land, and requires that the government reconsider a private project where 70% of landowners do not approve.[115] 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 ground-breaking compensation policy into place, high land prices have become a deterrent to new industrial investment.[116] 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 six times 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 remains to be seen.

Higher compensation will not, however, dissipate all of India's land wars. While Partha Chatterjee seems to collapse all of dispossession politics into a negotiation over its terms,[117] 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."[118] In Gorai, Maharashtra, fisherman and farmers are still refusing to give their land for a tourist SEZ, unmoved by an enhanced compensation package. 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."[119] 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."[120] 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 Hindu caste farmers in the plains and near cities. That does not necessarily imply that *adivasis* (or "indigenous people") are primordially attached to their landscapes; this distinction collapses several potentially important variables. The first is that the astronomically hot real estate markets that can align the interests of farmers 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 will make available. The third is greater dependence on natural resources beyond private fields and grazing lands—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 lifeworld 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.[121] A final and clearly important factor is political history, or more specifically "popular memories" of *adivasi* resistance to various forms of state extractions dating back to before colonial rule.[122] 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 Sundar for movements fighting dispossession in Chattisgarh.[123] 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.[124] If one were to accept Scott's view of "hill peoples as state-repelling . . . or even antistate societies,"[125] 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 were areas with long histories of radical political agitation, including the anti-landlord Tebhaga rebellion of the 1940s,[126] and both areas had benefited from Left Front land reforms that the proposed land acquisition would effectively reverse. While Singur 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 monsoon-dependent and many were dependent on migrant labor in the off-season, but the farmers' 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.[127] 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.[128] 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* towards land and labor that become manifest under the threat of dispossession. The simple point here 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 fundamental distinction between two broad strands of counter-movements: those who reject commodification altogether,

and those who 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.[129] 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."[130] 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 in a poor country, 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 direction 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.[131] 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 onwards, Ramachandra Guha identified three main ideological currents: Gandhianism, appropriate technology, and ecological Marxism.[132] 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."[133]

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 *adivasi* and Dalits) in the decades after Independence,[134] as well as the neoliberal model that is accelerating dispossession for all manner of privatized industrial, infrastructure and real estate projects. 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.[135] Rather than rejecting development, NAPM envisions

a society in which "non-destructive development" will be decided upon and controlled by decentralized democratic institutions that will have autonomy over the natural resources at their disposal. [136] 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 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"[137] 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.[138] The BKU has incorporated dispossession into its familiar agrarian populist frame of urban India exploiting the (undifferentiated) rural *Bharat*, eliding the intense exploitation and caste domination affected by its base of mostly 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 (in some areas mostly private holdings, in others large commons) and relations of production (small-scale commodity production, or labor-exploiting capitalist farms). 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. In effect, the disintegration of a uniform market economy is already giving rise to a variety of new societies.[139]

What types of societies these "countermovements" might cumulatively create in the wake of successfully resisting accumulation by dispossession will depend, combining Polanyi and Gramsci,[140] on a "war of position" among them.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to show that the experience of dispossession creates a distinct domain of politics with certain generic features as well as identifiable axes of variation. The use of extra-economic state force to achieve dispossession logically 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 become crucial for the traction that anti-dispossession movements achieve. 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 re-appropriation are ways of mitigating defeat not achieving success. Because they emerge in the sparse organizational field of rural India and in a political context where few have cared about dispossession, these overt struggles tend to be organized through local, ad-hoc, autonomous organizations created specifically for the purpose. This, and the fact that dispossession is experienced in many different forms, means that the result is a proliferation of localized "single-issue" movements. In India, these movements have, for years, been forming alliances with each other (NAPM), but are now increasingly being absorbed into the armed Maoist insurgency, and 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 counter-movement 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 on to the major political tendencies that organize Indian politics.

While 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.[141] Further, while land acquisition in India is a *fairly* rationalized state procedure (*eminent domain* laws have been on the books since the 19th 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,[142] corporate security forces, drug cartels or rural elites with what Marx calls, "their little independent methods."[143] 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 and becoming politically explosive in enough countries that the framework suggested here should be relevant to a large domain of politics in many countries.

A brief glance at the politics of land dispossession in contemporary China, most thoroughly studied to date by You-Tien Hsing in her book *The Great Urban Transformation*, illustrates remarkable parallels. The scale of land grabs in China is even more staggering than in India; if the estimates for each country are roughly correct, then China has displaced more people in a span of just over twenty years than India has in the sixty-five years since independence.[144] The Chinese state is, of course, the main instrument of this dispossession, though intense intra-bureaucratic competition to acquire and sell leases to ambiguously owned land means that protest gets directed at multiple administrative levels (township, municipal and district) rather than India's mostly state-level parastatal agencies.[145] In the 2000s, the motor of land dispossession shifted from industrialization to urbanization,[146] analogous to the transition to what I have called a new neoliberal "regime of dispossession" in India.[147] As in India, while the Chinese state has historically justified dispossession with ideologies of national development

("development is the absolute principle"), these have become less persuasive to farmers as they watch party officials and real estate development companies cash in on their land.[148] Farmers have turned to overt and increasingly militant protest,[149] which, as in India, is organized in a fragmented and localized fashion through ad-hoc groups that often dissolve after the disputes are over.[150] Unlike India, however, there are no autonomous organizations (like NAPM) and no opposition parties to take up the issue on more than a local scale. Farmers deploy similar tactics, including physical squatting and encampment on disputed fields, with more than half of clashes with police occurring on the fields themselves.[151] The Chinese state, however, seems to be particularly adept at individualizing farmers and breaking their solidarity with compensation measures, which prompts many farmers to adopt individualized strategies like refusing to vacate homes (so-called "nail households").[152] Media censorship, of course, also inhibits the ability of farmers to attract outside support during a siege. While dispossession affects villages as a whole and therefore creates cross-class resistance, it seems that the major factor of differentiation that the Chinese state exploits is based on household registration (*hukou*).[153] While we await more ethnographic research to establish the diversity of goals within anti-dispossession movements in China, it seems that the majority of farmers only hope to modify the terms of dispossession through political negotiation. There appear to be fewer movements in China which realistically expect to stop dispossession altogether.[154] In the place of the multiplicity of alternative ideologies one finds in India, opposition appears to be more often articulated, at least strategically, *within* the terms of the state's hegemonic ideology—as seen, for instance, in the frequent chants of "long live the Communist Party" in the recent protests against land grabs in Wukan[155]—whose subversion is attributed to corrupt *local* officials.[156] While there is much more to learn from an India-China comparison, this brief sketch based on Hsing's study reveals that

the kind of politics outlined here is not unique to India and that the framework suggested above identifies many of its common features and important axes of variation.

I have thus far tried to outline some of main features of a particular kind of politics formed though processes of land dispossession that is increasingly important in India and other parts of the developing world. What will be the ultimate effect of these struggles? It can be argued that in resisting the transfer of agricultural land to "higher value land uses," these movements are obstructing the material progress of poor countries in defense of an anachronistic, unequal and moribund rural life. Harvey himself worries that anti-dispossession struggles might lend themselves to a "politics of nostalgia" which overlooks the fact that, "primitive accumulation may be a necessary precursor to more positive changes."[157] Marxists (if not Marx himself) [158] have long held that primitive accumulation is an ugly, but necessary and inevitable stage of capitalist development, and have traditionally dismissed movements such as these as retrograde agrarian populism.[159]

However, dismissing resistance to dispossession as a populist subversion of class struggle is based on a theory that now seems to have little basis in the reality of most "developing" countries—that "primitive accumulation" creates a modern proletariat that is absorbed into capitalist development in a way that develops its class consciousness, facilitates its organization, and results in a modern industrial society controlled by the formerly dispossessed. In a country like India, this is pure fantasy as the forms of rentier, non-labor absorbing capitalism that much dispossession is feeding,[160] and the heterogenous classes of informal labor that are resulting,[161] look nothing like classical notions of capitalist transition.[162] Nor is it clear that, in the more near term, the types of development being generated by dispossession are producing significant livelihood improvements, not just for the dispossessed, but for the rural poor more generally. While the failure of large dams and extractive industries to create livelihood improvements for

the rural poor is well-documented,[163] the beneficiaries of the privatized real-estate, infrastructure and knowledge-intensive accumulation that is fuelling much dispossession in India today are even more narrow. Even when the peasantry is included in the spoils, it is inevitably the dominant agrarian classes which find ways to benefit from the accumulation unleashed by dispossession, often leaving the semi-proletariat, small-holders and tenants further impoverished.[164] While there is substantial empirical evidence that dispossession entails an upward redistribution of wealth (often, literally, at the point of a gun), it is an unsubstantiated assumption that dispossession will usher in a better life of industrial modernity for the majority. So while it is true that anti-dispossession struggles are typically reactive, local, single-issue in character, rife with internal class contradictions, and put forth ideologies that are across the political spectrum, it is also true that they are struggles containing many poor rural people defending their means of production and subsistence against a state willing to violently redistribute them at meager prices to large corporations for projects that have weak claims to being a "public purpose."

What is empirically clear, at least, is that anti-dispossession movements in India are effectively using the levers of democracy to impede the state's ability to transfer land to capital. In hundreds of villages across India, they are making themselves a significant obstacle to capitalist development. Almost all of the movements mentioned above have succeeded in stopping or significantly stalling their dispossession and the projects that are premised upon it. Some have no interest in the forms of development proposed for their land; others are fighting to be incorporated into it on better terms. While the latter may brought into a hegemonic class compromise with the fruits of accumulation by dispossession, the former will most likely continue to be met with brutal state violence. Combined, nevertheless, they have achieved limited success in "re-embedding" land within social and political controls in the face of a

neoliberal state trying to commodify it through violence force. Beyond making it difficult for capital to, literally, find a place on earth, the ultimate political direction of these movements will depend on struggles between them. What we can say, for now, is that peasants continue to make self-conscious interventions in history, and that these are increasingly shaped by the process of dispossession.[165]

NOTES

[1] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[2] See You-Tien Hsing, *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 182, 183.

[3] 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].

[4] 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/ [Access August 15, 2012].

[5] Hsing argues that the central government's moves to prosecute corrupt officials, cancel development zones, and concentrate power over land stems just as much from macro-economic concerns about over-heating. See Hsing, 213. However, in 2011 the Chinese government passed a new law on forced evictions, and is now considering a reform to its land "takings" law.

[6] 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% of India's population, they make up 40% of the displaced, with Dalits comprising another 20%. See Walter Fernandes, "Sixty Years of Development-induced Displacement in India," in *India Social Development Report 2008: Development and Displacement*, ed. H.M. Mathur (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008): 91-92.

[7] 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].

[8] While Ashutosh Varsney 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 and Society* 37(2009): 397-427.

[9] Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 169-171.

[10] See, for example, Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); Steven Buechler, *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[11] 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).

[12] Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[13] See Michael Levien, "Special Economic Zones and Accumulation by Dispossession in India," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, no. 4 (2011): 454-483.

[14] Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 168, 174.

[15] Ibid., 169, 179.

[16] 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 and Society* 31, no.2 (2003): 193-261; Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver, "Polanyi's 'Double Movement': The Belle Epoques of British and US Hegemony Compared," *Politics and 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 and Society* 36, no.2 (2008): 271-305; Ayse Bugra and Kaan Agartan, eds., *Reading Karl Polanyi for the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

[17] See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation.*

[18] See Michael Burawoy, "Sociological Marxism," 213.

[19] See Michael Burawoy, "From Polanyi to Pollyanna: The False Optimism of Global Labor Studies," *Global Labour Journal* 1, no. 2 (2010): 308.

[20] See Andrew G. Walder, "Political Sociology and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 393-412.

[21] 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).

[22] See Vladimir I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967); Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question* (London: Zwan Publications, 1988).

[23] 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: University of Oklahoma Press, [1969] 1999); Jeffery 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).

[24] See Terrence J. Byres, "The Journal of Peasant Studies: Its Origins and Some Reflections on the First Twenty Years," in *The Journal of Peasant Studies: A Twenty Year Volume Index 1973-1993*, edited by Henry Bernstein, Tom Brass and Terrence J. Byres, (1994): 1-12; Utsa Patnaik, ed. *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The 'Mode of Production' Debate in India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[25] 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).

[26] See Patnaik, *Agrarian Relations.*

[27] See Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1987).

[28] 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* (Portland: Frank Class, 2005); Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke, 1998).

[29] See Amit Bhaduri, *The Economic Structure of Backward Agriculture* (London: Academic Press, 1983).

[30] See Swapan Dasgupta, "Adivasi Politics in Midnapur, c. 1760-1924," in *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings and South Asia History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford, 1985), 101-135; Ravinder Kumar, "The Deccan Riots of 1875" in *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings and South Asia History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford, 1985), 153-183.

[31] See Arvind Das, "Agrarian Change from Above and Below: Bihar 1947-78," in *Subaltern Studies II: Writings and South Asia History and Society*, edi. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford, 1985), 180-227.

[32] 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).

[33] See Guha, *The Unquiet Woods*, 4.

[34] See 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 *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge*, ed. James C. Scott and Nina Bhatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 206-231. If there ever was a common, subaltern political consciousness that stood opposed to land commodification and dispossession—a hypothesis thoroughly critiqued by Ludden and Sivaramakrishnan among others—it certainly no longer holds, as there is significant, class-inflected heterogeneity in the goals and idioms of contemporary anti-dispossession movements in rural India, as we will see.

[35] See Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40.

[36] 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).

[37] See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*; Guha, *Unquiet Woods.*

[38] 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 some insightful observations, Guha did not formalize what was generic to the politics of forest enclosure, much less land dispossession more generally.

[39] This construction is inspired by Ranajit Guha, *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

[40] See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[41] Michael Levien, "Regimes of Dispossession: From Steel Towns to Special Economic Zones," paper currently under review at *Development and Change*.

[42] While Harvey remains vague in his own definition, refusing to define accumulation by the use of extra-economic force (see David Harvey, "Comment on Commentaries", *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 4 (2006), 159), the dispossession of land, at any rate, requires a coercive agent and this is highly consequential for dispossession politics. Moreover, 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 Michael Levien, "The Land Question: Special Economic Zones and the Political Economy of Dispossession in India," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3-4: 933-969.

[43] See Levien, "Special Economic Zones."

[44] 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 towards which they evolve, but an immediate and defensive necessity.

[45] 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.

[46] 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, nos. 2 and 3 (2008): 377-407. In a very different 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.

[47] Sanjeev Khagram highlights the significance of transnational activism to anti-dam movements in *Dams and Development: Transnational Struggles for Water and Power* (Cornell University Press, 2004). However, with international lending institutions like the World Bank less central to many projects involving land dispossession, 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 "Is an Alternative Globalization Possible?"). Their focus is overwhelmingly on the national and sub-national state.

[48] 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.

[49] See Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, ed. *Social Movements in India: Povert, Power and Politics* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Levien, "Regimes of Dispossession."

[50] Ideology is, in this sense, *internal* to accumulation by dispossession, just as Perry Anderson sees it as being internal to pre-capitalist surplus expropriation. This is a consequence of both being based on extra-economic coercion. See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974), 403-404.

[51] See Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 8.

[52] See Scott, *Moral Economy.*

[53] See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 242.

[54] 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).

[55] Everyday resistance to curtailments of customary rights to commons—through poaching, petty arson and sabotage of physical enclosures—has a very long history and the accounts of E.P. Thompson and J.M. Neeson support Scott's argument that it can be an effective form of class struggle over the long-run. 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). However, this repertoire of resistance is 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 more effective against dispossession serving agrarian accumulation than against dispossession for urban-industrial land uses.

[56] For example, many commentators attribute the relative lack of 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:Duke University Press, 2007), 140. I argue elsewhere that such a broad-based public consensus does not exist for the neoliberal regime of dispossession: dispossessing farmers for entirely privatized infrastructure, resource extraction or real estate projects has far less public legitimacy, creating a more favorable political climate for farmers to resist their dispossession. See Levien, "Regimes of Dispossession."

[57] Parthasarathi Banerjee, "Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur," *Economic and Political Weekly* 18 (2006): 4718-4720

[58] See Levien, "Special Economic Zones,"454-483.

[59] Fieldnotes, Govindpur, 11/14/10.

[60] 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].

[61] This fits awkwardly with Chatterjee's emphasis on the extra-legal nature of resistances to primitive accumulation. See Partha Chatterjee, "Democracy and Economic Transformation in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 16 (2008): 57-58.

[62] See Usha Ramanathan, "The Land Acquisition Act 1894: Displacement and State Power," in *India Social Development Report: Development and Displacement*, ed. H.M. Mathur (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27-38.

[63] This allows land to be acquired within 14 days of notification with very limited public consultation.

[64] See "Land Acquisition Act Has Become an Engine of Oppression: Court," *The Hindu*, July 6, 2011.

[65] See Michael Levien, "Rationalizing Dispossession: The Land Acquisition and Resettlement Bills," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 11 (2011): 66-71.

[66] Interview, 12/19/09.

[67] See Aseem Srivastava, "Raigad, Maharashtra: Anti-SEZ Movement Stalls Reliance," *Tehelka*, July 18, 2009.

[68] 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."

[69] Kenneth Nielson, for example, dismisses entirely the utility of the law in anti-dispossession movements in India. See Kennneth Bo Nielson, "Land, Law and Resistance" *Economic Political Weekly* 46, no. 41: 38-40.

[70] See E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), 258-269.

[71] 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 1* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 875.

[72] 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 34 years of CPI(M) 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.

[73] Fieldnotes, 12/20/09.

[74] Interview, 1/19/11.

[75] See Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution*; Rajni Kothari, "The Non-Party Political Process," *Economic and Political Weekly* 19, no. 5 (1984): 216-224.

[76] See Leon Trotsky, *1905* (New York: Random House, [1909] 1972), 48

[77] David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

[78] Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 169.

[79] See James C. Scott, "Hegemony and Peasantry," *Politics and Society* 7 (1977): 267-296.

[80] 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.

[81] See Levien, "India's Double Movement."

[82] 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 Chhattisgarh, 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 "Walking With the Comrades," *Outlook*, March 29, 2010.

[83] This underlying cause of Maoist insurgency was recognized clearly by the Indian government. See Ministry of Home Affairs, "The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions," in *Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence*, ed. A.R. Desai (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36-43.

[84] The Government of India's Planning Commission report, *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas: Report of an Expert Group to Planning Commission*, worries that, "The trauma of displacement for which the state does not provide succour creates space for violent movement[s]" (New Delhi: Government of India, 2008), 50.

[85] 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.

[86] 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."

[87] See "Careless Land Acquisition Will Fuel Extremism," *Deccan Herald,* August 26, 2011.

[88] 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.

[89] 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.

[90] See "Mayawati Land Policy: UP CM Upset's Rahul's 'Mission UP' Plan with Pro-Farmer Land Policy," *India Today*, June 3, 2011.

[91] 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. His opposition was both anomalous, and appears to have gotten little political traction. See Paul Brass, *An Indian Political Life: Charan Singh and Congress Politics, 1937-1961* (New Delhi: Sage, 2011).

[92] Because of small and fragmented holdings, the inclination of enough farmers to holdout, 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 post-liberalization era, propelling state governments to restructure themselves as land brokers for private capital. See Levien, "Special Economic Zones," 462-463.

[93] 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). Available at: http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-2487357461.html [Access October 20, 2011).

[94] See William Sewell, "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25, no. 6 (1996): 841-881.

[95] See Jun Borras 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).

[96] 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."

[97] See Baviskar, "Belly of the River," 220.

[98] Ibid.

[99] In an analysis of anti-mining movements in Guatemala, Urkidi also 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.

[100] Fieldnotes, 1/16/10. Connected landowning politician 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.

[101] See Usha Seethalakshmi, *Special Economic Zones in Andhra Pradesh: Policy Claims and People's Experiences* (Hyderebad: ActionAid, 2009), .

[102] 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 Acquistion and Protest in West Bengal," *Forum for Development Studies* 37, no. 2 (2010): 157.

[103] 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.

[104] 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 further differentiates the interests of farmers vis-a-vis a project. See Seethalakshmi, *Special Economic Zones*, 45-54.

[105] Fieldnotes, 11/14/10.

[106] See Levien, "Special Economic Zones," 470-473.

[107] For an analysis of the challenges inherent to forging cross-class cooperation against dispossession, see Levien, "India's Double Movement."

[108] 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

[109] 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.

[110] This, of course, is not specific to India. You-Tien Hsing observes the same phenomenon in China, reporting that the Chinese state re-sells acquired land to private developers at many more times the price paid to farmers as compensation. See Hsing, *The Great Urban Transformation*, 73, 191.

[111] See Levien, "Special Economic Zones," 459.

[112] See Jyotika Sood, "Road to Disaster," *Down to Earth*, June 15, 2011.

[113] See "BKU Expresses Discontent Over UP Government's New Land Acquisition Policy," *United News India*, June 2, 2011.

[114] See "Bharatiya Kisan Union Hails New Land Acquisition Policy by Uttar Pradesh Government," *United News India*, June 3, 2011.

[115] See "Mayawati Announces New Land Acquisition Policy," *The Hindu*, June 2, 2011.

[116] Interview, 2/21/11.

[117] In *Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee argues that much of contemporary politics in "most of the world" takes the form not of citizens demanding rights in civil society, but of governed subjects engaging in ad-hoc, extra-legal negotiations on the terrain of governmentality in what he calls "political society." In his subsequent article, "Democracy and Economic Transformation," he argues that much of the content of political society in India arises from government interventions aimed at maintaining a surplus population that is being dispossessed by "primitive accumulation" but is not needed by the new economy. However, while ad-hoc negotiation with governmentality may fit one category of dispossession politics (those demanding more compensation from the government), it simply does not fit the others. As a blanket concept, political society does not helpfully illuminate the specific and heterogeneous field of dispossession politics—a point made by Amita Baviskar and Nandini Sundar, "Democracy Versus Economic Transformation?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 46 (2008). Illuminating the latter requires understanding how *specific* political economies of dispossession (and not simply a vaguely defined "primitive accumulation") are refracted through social structures and political histories to produce a great diversity of political forms that nonetheless cohere into an identifiable domain of politics—of dispossession, not "the governed."

[118] See "Niyamgiri: The Mountain of Law," Undated Documentary (Bhubaneshwar: 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.

[119] Interview, 11/26/09.

[120] Fieldnotes, 12/20/10.

[121] See, for example, Baviskar, *Belly of the River*, 88-91.

[122] 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, *Belly of the River*.

[123] See Baviskar, *Belly of the River*, 49-84. Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns*, 249.

[124] Fieldnotes, 12/19/09.

[125] James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 128.

[126] See Sunil Sen, "Tebhaga Chai," in *Peasant Struggles in India*, ed. A.R. Desai (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1979): 450.

[127] See People's Tribunal on Nandigram, *Nandigram: What Really Happened?* (Delhi: Daanish Books, 2007): 6.

[128] Fieldnotes, 11/14/10.

[129] See James C. Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution, " *Theory and Society* 7, no. 1-2 (1979): 97-134.

[130] Baviskar, *Belly of the River*, 213.

[131] See Ibid.; 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.

[132] See Ramachandra Guha, "Ideological Trends in Indian Environmentalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 49 (1988): 2578-2581.

[133] 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 *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics*, ed. Raka Ray and Mary Katzenstein (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005): 161-178.

[134] See Fernandes, "Sixty Years of Development-induced Displacement in India," 91-92.

[135] For the political significance of identity-based claims to territory, see Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 278-333; and Richard Peet and Michael Watts, eds. *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements.*

(London: Routledge, 2004): 25.

[136] 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," *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements,* ed. Richard Peet and Michael Watts (London: Routledge, 2004): 371-393.

[137] See Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).

[138] Fieldnotes, 12/20/09.

[139] Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 260.

[140] See Burawoy, "Sociological Marxism."

[141] 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.

[142] Grajales documents the role of Colombian paramilitaries in violent land grabs, though 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.

[143] 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.

[144] See Fernandes, "Sixty Years of Development-induced Displacement," and Hsing, *Great Urban Transformation*, 182, 183. A survey conducted by the Landesa Rural Development Institute found that 43% of Chinese villages had experienced compulsory acquisition of land since the late 1990s. See Landesa Rural Development Institute, *"*Summary of 2011 Seventeen-Province Survey's Findings," 2011. Available at: http://www.landesa.org/china-survey-6/ [Accessed February 25, 2012].

[145] The extra-legal nature of much land dispossession in China also seems to introduce a greater role for non-state agents of coercion such as mafias and "relocation companies," though in the service of the state or often state-owned

development companies. See Katherine Le Mons Walker, "'Gangster Capitalism' and Peasant Protest in China: The Last Twenty Years," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 33, no. 1 (2006): 1-33.

[146] Hsing, *Great Urban Transformation*, 18.

[147] Levien, "Regimes of Dispossession."

[148] Hsing, *Great Urban Transformation*, 16.

[149] See Katherine Le Mons Walkers, "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.

[150] Hsing, *Great Urban Transformation*, 184.

[151] Ibid., 200.

[152] Ibid., 192, 200, 18.

[153] Ibid., 197.

[154] Hsing's example of "success" is where farmers organize to commodify their land collectively before the state is able to grab it. See Hsing, 122.

[155] See "China's Wukan Village Stands up for Land Rights," *BBC*, December 15, 2011.

[156] The peasant strategy of blaming "wicked" local officials for undermining the "benevolent" intentions of rulers is an old one in China (see Hung, *Protest with Chinese Characteristics*, especially chapters 3 and 5), and elsewhere (see Guha, *The Unquiet Woods*, 65-66). Ethnographic research on anti-dispossession struggles in China will be necessary to understand what Scott calls the "private transcript" underlying the strategic, public one. See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[157] Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 178, 177, 164.

[158] Theodore Shanin and Kevin Anderson both make the compelling argument that Marx's thinking matured towards a multi-linear concept of capitalist development, and the letters to Vera Zasulich (reprinted in Shanin) make clear that he did not consider primitive accumulation as a universal and necessary stage in the development of capitalism (towards socialism). See Shanin, *Late Marx*; Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[159] For critiques of agrarian populism, 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, 1902-87: An Assessment," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 15, no. 2 (1988): 139-189; 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.

[160] See note 135.

[161] While they may not all draw the same conclusions about its political implications, for illustrations of the complex terrain of informal labor, see Jan Breman, *Footloose Labour*; Harriss-White and Gooptu, "Mapping India's World of Unorganised Labour"; Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

[162] For a critique of teleological theories of agrarian transition in general, and their applicability to India in particular, see Anjan Chakrabarti and Stephen Cullenberg, *Transition and Development in India* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[163] See, for example, the significantly critical reports commissioned by the World Bank itself: World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2000); World Bank, *Extractive Industries and Sustainable Development: An Evaluation of World Bank Group Experience* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2005).

[164] See Levien, "Special Economic Zones"; Matilde Adduci, "Neoliberal Wave Rocks Chilika Lake, India: Conflict over Intensive Aquaculture from a Class Perspective," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 9, no. 4 (2009): 484-511.

[165] This is a reformulation for the politics of dispossession of Burawoy's thesis about the politics of production: "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: Verson, 1985), 5.