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### Publication Date

2013

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Regimes of Dispossession: Special Economic Zones and the Political Economy of Land in India

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Michael Burawoy, Chair

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Spring 2013



## Abstract

Regimes of Dispossession: Special Economic Zones and the Political Economy of Land in India

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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The aim of the present work is to advance a theoretical framework for the comparative study of dispossession by explaining how the political economy of land dispossession has transformed from state-led developmentalism to neoliberalism in India. The dissertation compares the archetypical forms of dispossession in each period and argues that they constitute different *regimes of dispossession*. A regime of dispossession is an institutionalized way of expropriating landed assets from their current owners or users. Each regime of dispossession is distinguished by: 1) a set of purposes for which a state is willing to dispossess land and 2) a way of producing compliance to that dispossession. Under different regimes, dispossession facilitates different kinds of accumulation with variable developmental consequences. These consequences crucially effect the long-term political stability of a regime of dispossession.

Between independence in 1947 and economic liberalization in the early 1990s, India operated under a *developmentalist regime of dispossession*. Under this regime, the Indian state dispossessed land for state-led industrial and infrastructural projects, ensuring compliance through coercion and powerful ideological appeals to national development. This dispossession facilitated productive agrarian and industrial accumulation that disproportionately benefited the industrial bourgeoisie, big farmers, and the public sector elite, but also delivered some benefits to other classes. This development was, however, based on the impoverishment of tens of millions of people that it dispossessed. For many decades, this regime was able to convince a wide public that such dispossession constituted a necessary sacrifice for “the nation.” Social movements in the 1970s and 1980s challenged this view, but they could not substantially impede dispossession before the developmentalist regime gave way to economic liberalization.

Economic liberalization in the early 1990s generated a transition to a new *neoliberal regime of dispossession* in which state governments restructured themselves as land brokers for private capital. No longer just dispossessing land for state-led industrial and infrastructural projects, states turned to dispossessing peasants for private real estate. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are the archetype of this regime. Based on 19 months of ethnographic research on one of the first large SEZs in North India, this dissertation illustrates the character and consequences of this neoliberal regime of dispossession. First, it argues that dispossessing land for SEZs lacks

legitimacy, fuelling “land wars”; however, states may be able to generate material compliance among some farmers by absorbing them into real estate markets. Second, it argues that dispossessing land for SEZs facilitates real estate and knowledge-intensive accumulation that benefits a narrow set of class interests, while *disaccumulating* agrarian assets and marginalizing rural labor. Third, it argues that the major economic effect of this accumulation is real estate speculation, which generates unequal and involutory agrarian change that leaves the majority of the dispossessed impoverished. The result is “dispossession without development.” The dissertation concludes that India’s neoliberal regime of dispossession will remain politically tenuous. It ends by outlining a comparative research program on the sociology of dispossession.

By integrating land dispossession into theories of capitalist development, the theory of regimes of dispossession fills an absence in development sociology and reconstructs Marxist theories of “primitive accumulation,” enhancing our understanding of states, economic development, agrarian change, and rural politics.

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## Preface

This project has grown from a long-standing interest in the dispossession of land from rural people for economic development, often known as “development-induced displacement,” and a growing hunch about how it was changing in post-liberalization India. When I first arrived in India in 2003, the locus of land dispossession still appeared to be remote river valleys where indigenous groups (*adivasis*) continued to be displaced for Nehruvian-era dams. Struggles against dams and other state-led industrial and infrastructural projects had emerged relatively late in the developmentalist period (picking up steam in the 1980s), remained largely marginalized despite often heroic efforts, and were only rarely successful in preventing their dispossession. The pioneering “people’s movement” in the Narmada Valley against the displacement of tens of thousands of people for the Sardar Sarovar dam project was, despite tremendous efforts, in the process of losing successive battles to prevent further construction. The tragic flooding of dozens more villages with each passing monsoon had come to symbolize the destructive underside of “development” and the bleak prospects for successfully opposing it. In hindsight, however, I had arrived at a moment of transition.

By the mid-2000s, it became clear that a new constellation of land struggles was emerging, increasingly in the plains rather than forests and river valleys, and in response to projects that clearly bore the stamp of free-market capitalism rather than state-directed development: hi-tech parks, real estate colonies, privatized infrastructure, factories for multinational corporations, and Special Economic Zones. Above all, the Indian government’s strategy from 2005 onwards of acquiring land for private developers to build hundreds of Special Economic Zones unleashed widespread and militant farmer protest across the country. Not only were so-called “land wars” becoming more prevalent, but they were actually forcing the cancellation and delay of countless projects. While these new agrarian struggles had similarities with the older struggles against dams, their character, scale, and success were indicators that a transformation had occurred in both the politics and economics of dispossession in the neoliberal age. This dissertation was conceived as an attempt to understand precisely what had changed in the political economy of land dispossession with the transition to neoliberalism in India, and in the process advance a sociological framework for the comparative study of dispossession. I call this framework *regimes of dispossession*, and this dissertation tries to illuminate the consequences of India’s move from a developmentalist to neoliberal one.

By arguing that dispossession is organized through socially and historically specific regimes, I hope to provide a theoretical framework for understanding dispossession that is less functionalist and economistic than existing frameworks of “primitive accumulation” or “accumulation by dispossession,” and that consequently elevates the politics of dispossession to the center of analysis. I hope this effort is not only analytically illuminating, but politically empowering. Once we recognize that dispossession is fundamentally a political process that looks very different across time and space, we can finally leave behind notions of its necessity and inevitability.



## Acknowledgements

Most of my fieldwork took place in a village I call Rajpura, a village in Rajasthan that lost most of its land for the Mahindra World City Special Economic Zone. This involved many conversations with farmers, laborers, land brokers, contractors, and local government officials at homes, *chai* stalls, fields, and offices. I watched the melancholy and often tragic aftermath of dispossession play out in the lives of many people, some of whom I became particularly close with. My desire to protect their anonymity prevents me from mentioning their real names here. But my deepest gratitude goes to “Lada” and “Mahesh” and their three children for offering me not just a room but a home in Rajpura. The other residents of the Balai *mohallah*, after a period of getting to know me, also welcomed me into their daily routines and confidences. In Rajpura as a whole, and several surrounding villages, hundreds of people shared their reflections along with some painful details of their lives with me; their stories are what make this dissertation. I am deeply grateful for their time and the countless cups of *chai* that they forced upon me. In this last respect, I must also thank my favorite *chaiwalas* in Rajpura and Shivpura—a good deal of my ethnographic “data” was collected at their stalls. I only hope that life in Rajpura, particularly for its poorer members, takes a turn for the better.

My first tutorial in the politics of dispossession took place in the very different context of the Narmada Valley, for which I am deeply grateful to the many people who have been struggling there for the past twenty-five years. Medha Patkar, Kailash Awasya, Kamla Yadav, Devram Kanera, Dipti Bhatnagar, and the late Ashish Manloi taught me a tremendous amount and inspired by their example. In the larger National Alliance of People’s Movements, many individuals have shaped my thinking over the years. I would particularly like to thank Mukta Srivastava for not only teaching me a great deal, but for being a good friend over the last decade.

In Rajasthan, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), including Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey, and Shankar Singh not only shared their considerable insight into rural Rajasthan, but provided needed inspiration among depressing circumstances. They also, along with Mukesh Goswami at the RTI Manch in Jaipur, helped to file Right to Information petitions that allowed me to present a much finer-grained analysis of what I have called the land broker state. Bunker Roy and his colleagues at the Social Work and Research Centre also extended much appreciated hospitality. I am also grateful to the Institute of Development Studies in Jaipur for the several good discussions I had there, and for the occasional use of their library. The American Institute of Indian Studies in Jaipur was a great place to improve my Hindi; I am thankful to Kumarji and all the teachers there.

A number of other villages across India welcomed me to visit and learn about their struggles for shorter periods of time. I thank the people in Jagatsinghpur, Orissa; Polepally and Tada, Andhra Pradesh; Nandigram and Singur, West Bengal; Keri, Goa; Sadhopur and Dadri, Uttar Pradesh.; Gorai and Karla, Maharashtra; and in the villages surrounding the Mangalore SEZ in Karnataka for taking the time to speak with me. Amita Bag, Vidya Dinker, Sampat Kale, Ulka Mahajan, Prashant Paikray, Sudhir Patnaik, Prafulla Samantray, and Usha Seethalakshmi all provided much appreciated insight on these struggles.

My interest in dispossession became a sociology of dispossession at Berkeley, where I have had the privilege of working with Michael Burawoy. His intellectual influence on this project is not easily summarized, as it permeates beneath the level of particular ideas. Above all, I am deeply grateful for his unreasonable generosity, his always penetrating criticism, and his unfaltering faith that there was a valid sociological hunch driving this project. Raka Ray has also

been an exceptional mentor from the moment I arrived in Berkeley. She has not only tolerated but warmly encouraged me to pursue the project's more idiosyncratic aspects, and provided great support throughout. Peter Evan's expansive intellect has shaped my understanding of development since my first semester in Berkeley and his incisive feedback greatly helped at several critical stages. There is no better guide to the study of dispossession and all things agrarian than Michael Watts. Many of the ideas in this dissertation were first developed in his "Primitive Accumulation" seminar, and have been greatly pushed forward by conversations with him since. Amita Baviskar not only graciously sponsored my affiliation with the Institute of Economic Growth at Delhi University, but provided invaluable advice throughout the course of my fieldwork.

My friends and colleagues have provided both intellectual ferment and personal support throughout my time at Berkeley. Abigail Andrews, Ariel Aron, Dan Buch, Ryan Calder, Jennifer Carlson, Jia-Ching Chen, Julia Chuang, Fidan Elcioglu, Eli Friedman, Asher Ghertner, Daniel Immerwahr, Marcel Paret and Alina Polyakova have not only been great friends, but have read and thoughtfully commented on many versions of this project. I have greatly benefited from discussions with other Berkeley faculty over the years, including Gillian Hart, Dylan Riley, Cihan Tugal, Loic Wacquant, Laura Enriquez, Tom Gold, Lawrence Cohen, and You-Tien Hsing. Usha Jain was a venerable mentor in Hindi. Fred Block at nearby Davis provided particularly valuable feedback on my conception of the politics of dispossession. Tom Rosin has kindly shared his considerable knowledge of land tenure in rural Rajasthan. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph have provided very generous advice and feedback over meals at their homes in Jaipur and in the Bay Area. Elsewhere, I have greatly benefited from discussions with Henry Bernstein, Amit Bhaduri, Jun Borrás, Sharad Chari, Massimo De Angelis, Madhumita Dutta, Charles Geisler, Manu Goswami, Bret Gustafson, Jens Lerche, Arup Mitra, Jonathan Parry, Ian Scoones, and Wendy Wolford. In Delhi, I enjoyed many long discussions with Aseem Srivastava about SEZs and much else. Between Berkeley and Delhi, Satendra Kumar has been both a good friend and an intellectual inspiration. Between Brighton and Delhi, Jamie Cross has also been a most fun and stimulating interlocutor. Colin Pace instigated many good discussions in Jaipur and thoughtfully commented on a chapter. Jack and Meg White provided much needed adrenaline through all stages of this project. The Social Science Research Council, the Land Deal Politics Initiative, and the University of California-Berkeley Institute of International Studies, Center for South Asia Studies, and Department of Sociology provided much needed funds, for which I am most grateful. The Institute of Economic Growth at Delhi University provided a much enjoyed intellectual climate, as well access to their library. I also thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for *Journal of Agrarian Change*, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Development and Change*, and *Politics and Society* for their valuable comments on published versions of this research.

Great thanks go to my parents, Bill, Rach, my grandparents, and my aunts and uncles for providing me with a splendid life outside of sociology. I am also deeply grateful to the late Chuck Matthei for both his friendship and early mentorship in the political economy of land. Phil Campanile, exceptional philosopher of land and property, has been like a brother for over a decade now. Not only have I discussed many of the ideas in this dissertation with him over the years, but he thoroughly read and commented upon every page of this dissertation. Finally, Suchi Pande entered my life at the most disheartening moment of my fieldwork; she has heartened every moment since. Her Right to Information petitions were the least of her contributions to this dissertation, which I dedicate to her.

## Chapter 1. Introduction: Regimes of Dispossession

### INTRODUCTION

A specter haunts the emerging centers of global capitalism; it is the specter of “land wars.” As countries like India and China ascend the global division of labor and achieve growth rates of unprecedented magnitudes, they are increasingly confronted with a seemingly mundane but practically monumental problem: how to transfer land from vast rural populations dependent on agriculture to private firms for economic growth. As economic liberalization in these countries unleashes explosive demand for land, the role of states in forcibly dispossessing it from large peasantries has greatly increased in scale and expanded in scope. The result has been widespread and unprecedented “land wars” in rural areas across the developing world. With the political and economic significance of land dispossession increasing globally, the aim of the present work is to explain how the political economy of land dispossession has transformed from state-led developmentalism to neoliberalism in India, and, on that basis, advance a theoretical framework for the comparative study of dispossession.

Although the dispossession of agrarian land has long been a foundational aspect of capitalist development, its economic and political significance is generally increasing. So-called “land grabs” are now a major global issue and are attracting significant scholarly attention in Africa,<sup>1</sup> Southeast Asia,<sup>2</sup> and Latin America.<sup>3</sup> However, it is in the two rapidly growing countries that together contain 45% of the world’s rural population that the “land question” has become most acute.<sup>4</sup> In China, it is estimated that 50 to 66 million peasants were dispossessed of their land between 1980 and 2003, and that, since 2000, “land grabs” have become the single largest cause of peasant protest (Hsing 2010: 182, 183). Over 43% of Chinese villages have experienced compulsory land acquisition since the late 1990s (Landesa 2011), and several well-publicized standoffs between villagers and the Chinese state, such as in the village of Wukan in 2011 and Shangpu in 2013, have attracted international media attention (Wines 2011; Patience 2011). Even where land grabs do not generate “mass incidents,” individual hold-outs—so-called “nail households”—are a ubiquitous feature of a transforming Chinese landscape (Hsing 2010).

In India, the combination of accelerating land dispossession and a relatively open democracy has made the politics of dispossession even more combustible and consequential. While no official data exists, the most comprehensive quantitative study of what is often called “development-induced displacement” estimates that over 60 million people have been displaced from their land since independence, and that the rate of displacement has increased post-liberalization (Fernandes 2008). Government planners anticipated that India’s economic liberalization, beginning in the 1990s, would entail a larger state role in acquiring land from farmers (Government of India 1994); what they did not foresee was the breadth and tenacity of

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<sup>1</sup> See the collection of articles in the 2011 special issue on “Land: A New Wave of Accumulation by Dispossession in Africa?” *Review of African Political Economy* 38(128). See also Amanor (2012); Woodhouse (2012); Lavers (2012); R. Hall (2012); Burnod, Gingsembre and Ratsialonana (2013); Buckley (2013); and Fairbairn (2013).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Li (2007); Hall, Hirsch and Li (2011); Kenney-Lazar (2012); Dwyer (2013).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview, see the 2012 special issue on “Land Grabbing in Latin America,” *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 33(4); and also Borrás et al. (2012), Grandia (2013), Grajales (2013), Oliveira (2013), Graef (2013), and Sullivan (2013).

<sup>4</sup> For the rural population of these countries, see World Bank (2012). One should also note that whereas “land grabs” in Africa and Latin America appear to be primarily driven by agribusiness, bio-fuels, and to a lesser extent mineral extraction, in India and China they are primarily driven by urban-industrial development.

the resistance that this land acquisition would generate. By the 2000s, India's growth rate began to approach an unprecedented 9 percent, a newly liberalized real estate market entered a dramatic boom, foreign direct investment was liberalized and courted through Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and the federal and state governments initiated massive infrastructure projects to be financed on a public-private partnership (PPP) basis. Just when this vision of "India, Inc." seemed triumphant, it ran into an unexpected and seemingly pedestrian stumbling block: thousands of small farmers who refused to surrender their land.

India was no stranger to land struggles. Since the 1970s, India had produced some of the world's most well-known and ground-breaking anti-displacement struggles—most famously the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, the anti-dam movement originating in central India's Narmada Valley (Baviskar 1995), and the Chipko movement against forest enclosures in the Himalayan regions of Garhwal and Kumaon (Guha 1989). However, the small handful of relatively isolated—and typically unsuccessful—struggles against the high-modernist projects of the Nehruvian state were, in the 2000s, joined by endemic resistance across India to projects of an increasingly private and less productive character. While the more high-profile struggles might number in the dozens, the national and regional press increasingly confronted readers with daily coverage of opposition to privately-built highways, real estate projects, factories, power plants, urban expansion and, above all, to Special Economic Zones. Most remarkably, farmers were not always losing.

On March 14, 2007, India's simmering "land wars" exploded into the center of national attention. In an orchestrated early morning attack, police and party cadre of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) massacred fourteen farmers, raping and assaulting many more, in the villages of Nandigram, West Bengal. The farmers of Nandigram, mostly Muslims and lower-caste Hindus cultivating small parcels of rice-paddy, had been refusing to relinquish their land for a private Special Economic Zone promoted by the (Suharto-linked) Salim Group of Indonesia. The announcement by the Communist-led (Left Front) West Bengal government that it planned to acquire 10,000 acres of land for the SEZ prompted farmers to dig up the entry-roads to their villages and to refuse access to government officials and CPI(M) party cadre. What followed was asymmetrical trench warfare, culminating with the fatal March assault.

The ensuing uproar shook the state government, which came under attack by the media, civil society organizations, and opposition parties at the state and national level. On the defensive, the Left Front government not only abandoned the project but suffered grave political damage, which contributed to its subsequent defeat in the 2009 local elections and—after thirty-four years of continuous rule—its ultimate ousting from state power in 2011 (Bag 2011; Vinayak 2011). The central government, for its part, felt compelled to issue a temporary moratorium on land acquisition for SEZs, to limit their maximum size, and to introduce amendments to India's Land Acquisition Act that would provide greater compensation to farmers whose lands are acquired through eminent domain. While many of these measures would subsequently be reversed or diluted, the Indian government acknowledged that it was faced with a very delicate problem: namely, how, under the auspices of an electoral democracy, to acquire large amounts of land from poor farmers for large domestic and multi-national corporations. And the farmers of Nandigram were hardly alone in their refusal to cooperate.

In coastal Orissa, several villages of forest cultivators had erected bamboo barricades with which they were obstructing India's largest proposed Foreign Direct Investment to date—a 12 million ton steel plant and captive port of South Korea's Pohang Steel Company (POSCO). Also in Orissa, indigenous (*adivasi*) cultivators were opposing the transfer of their sacred

Niyamgiri Hill to London-based Vedanta to mine bauxite for its aluminum smelter, while in Kalinga Nagar police fired upon farmers who refused to relinquish land for a Tata Steel plant, killing fourteen people. Outside of Mumbai, farmers along Maharashtra's Konkan coast fought and eventually defeated the land acquisition for Reliance Industries' Maha Mumbai Special Economic Zone, slated to be the largest in the country. Outside of Gurgaon in Haryana, Reliance's other mega-SEZ was losing a slow war of attrition. A struggle pre-dating Nandigram in the villages of Singur, West Bengal, eventually succeeded in shutting down a Tata car factory that planned to manufacture the much-hyped "Nano." In Uttar Pradesh, farmers were fighting land acquisition for the privately-built Yamuna Expressway, which entailed large transfers of land to private builders, and successfully challenged land acquisition for residential development around Greater Noida. SEZs were being held up near Mangalore, Hyderabad, along the Andhra Pradesh coast, and across Maharashtra. Many were being scrapped, including two outside of Pune, and all of the SEZs proposed for the state of Goa. Others were bogged down in costly delays and had to seek extensions of their approval (Business Standard 2009). Even in Gujarat, often heralded as the most successful state in facilitating land acquisition for industry, the press reported in 2009 that, due to land acquisition problems, no work had commenced on fifteen approved SEZs (Arora 2009). As my later interviews made clear, beneath these more visible conflicts, government agencies charged with industrial and peri-urban development were besieged by more prosaic legal challenges to almost every project they undertook. Added to all of this, India was facing a growing Maoist insurgency that now controlled large swathes of mineral-rich territory from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal, and which, by the government's own admission, was clearly being fuelled by land dispossession for mining and industry (Government of India 2008: 50).

In sum, what came to be known as "land wars" were not only becoming much more widespread, but farmers were, in an unprecedented fashion, starting to win. By the late 2000s, land acquisition had become, in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's words, "a very sensitive issue" (DNA 2011), and the government and business classes voiced acute concern that farmers were becoming the largest obstacle to India's emergence as a "world class" economic power. With the vast majority of approved SEZs stalled or not yet underway, the Indian Chamber of Commerce bemoaned the poor state of land acquisition (PWC-Assocham 2009). Delays plagued roads, power plants, and other infrastructure projects. One consultancy estimated that in 2011-2012, uncertainties in land availability contributed to stalling capital investments worth Rs. 2.7 trillion (\$54 billion, or about 3% of India's GDP) (CMIE 2012). The Indian Government's Economic Survey of 2010-11 announced that the timely completion of infrastructure projects was a top priority, proclaiming "the urgent need to streamline land acquisition and environmental clearance" (Economic Times 2011). Prime Minister Manmohan Singh repeated this mantra in the context of India's recent economic slowdown. In the hopes that higher compensation could buy peace with farmers, the government proposed amendments to the Land Acquisition Act. However, stuck between industry lobbies on one side and powerful farmers' movements (that are increasingly backed by opposition parties) on the other, the bill has been stalled for six years.

The international press took notice of India's land acquisition woes, with headlines such as these from the *New York Times*, *Globe and Mail*, *BBC* and *Washington Post* respectively: "India Grapples with How to Convert its Farmland into Factories" (Sengupta 2008), "India's Biggest Industrial Barrier? Farmers" (Chopra 2008); "India's Divisive Economic Zones" (BBC 2008); and "In India, Fresh Clashes Over Rural Land as Farmers Stand up to Government" (Denyer 2011). With India's "economic miracle" in seeming jeopardy, land dispossession was no

longer a marginal issue taken up by isolated social movements but at the center of Indian politics.

The present work attempts to explain how land dispossession came to occupy the center of contemporary Indian political economy. It asks: what has changed about land dispossession from the developmentalist to neoliberal periods in India? Its answer, in brief, is that economic liberalization has fueled a transition from an ideologically powerful Nehruvian “regime of dispossession,” which dispossessed land for state-led projects of productive industrial and infrastructural transformation, to an ideologically tenuous neoliberal regime of dispossession, which dispossesses peasant land for increasingly private and decreasingly developmental purposes. It arrives at this answer by comparing the archetypical forms of dispossession in each period: dams and public sector industrial projects for the first, and Special Economic Zones for the second. While it treats the Nehruvian regime of dispossession through primary and secondary historical sources, the analysis of the neoliberal regime is based on an ethnographic case study of one of the first large Special Economic Zones to be built in North India—the Mahindra World City in the state of Rajasthan. Using the extended case method (Burawoy 1998, 2009), the present work uses this historically and comparatively situated case to advance a theory of the relationship between land dispossession and capitalism, a theory I call “regimes of dispossession.” This theory provides a way of understanding the socially and historically specific forms this relationship takes, how it changes over time, and how these changes effect economic “development” and politics. By integrating land dispossession into theories of capitalist development, “regimes of dispossession” fills an absence in development sociology, reconstructs Marxist theories of “primitive accumulation,” and has implications for how both understand states, economic development, agrarian change, and rural politics in large parts of the world.

## DISPOSSESSION IN DEVELOPMENT SOCIOLOGY

There does not yet exist a sociology of dispossession. While dispossession has floated at the margins of several sociological sub-fields, this particular form of social relationship has no field of its own equivalent to the sociology of labor, race, or gender. Consequently, sociology failed to anticipate the contemporary centrality of land dispossession to the political and economic life of many countries. This omission of dispossession characterizes not only the sociology of the West, where dispossession has played a relatively limited contemporary role, but also the sociology of developing countries, where dispossession has been a significant phenomenon for many decades. The major macro-sociological approaches to the study of development largely neglected the state-mediated dispossession of rural land that accompanied national “development projects” (McMichael 1996) of the mid-twentieth century. While differing in their specific analyses of the prospects and conditions for capitalist development in the non-Western world, modernization theory, dependency theory, and comparative political economy have all tended to overlook dispossession as a condition or consequence of achieving such development.

While a strand of modernization theory focused on how rapid economic growth in developing countries created profound social dislocations in the countryside with “destabilizing” political effects, its theorists only vaguely specified these dislocations. These theorists conceived modernization as a cluster of interrelated social changes—industrialization, urbanization, the commercialization of agriculture, and technological advance—that produced a deepening differentiation of social structure (Hoselitz 1952; Lerner 1958; Parsons 1964; Eisenstadt 1966; Smelser 1968). They saw the countryside—the repository of “tradition”—as a socio-cultural

obstacle to such differentiation, and as a potential site of political disorder if the “strains” and “anomie” it generated were not managed by new forms of social and political integration (e.g. Coleman 1960; Bendix 1968: 341; Smelser 1968; Shils 1965; Huntington 1968). While dispossession implicitly lurked behind concepts such as “urbanization” and “sectoral transfer,” modernization theorists did not specify this in any detail. Most modernization theorizing occurred on a highly abstract level with little empirical illustration of concrete process of economic change in the countryside and their consequences for different social groups (Bernstein 1971). Proponents of this theory construed the political movements generated by modernization not as reasonable responses to grievances created by economic changes, but in the collective behavior model, as “mass hysteria” (Smelser 1968: 127), “mob outburst” (Eisenstadt 1966: 24) or expressions of “oppositional mentalities” rooted in non-individuated personality types (Shils 1965). If not controlled, these movements would facilitate the spread of communism.

Of the modernization theorists, Huntington (1968) was the most forthright in identifying the concrete political economic causes of “Green Uprisings” in rural areas of the developing world. Among these causes, he singled out the commercialization of agriculture, the privatization of collective land tenures, and the consequent concentration of land (Huntington 1968: 296-297).<sup>5</sup> Huntington’s *realpolitik* thus lead him to recognize the explosiveness of land control as a political issue in the countryside. At the time, however, the burning political issues centered on the ability of states to forcibly dispossess *landlords* not peasants. Land reform was seen as key to checking communism in the countryside, and this required a powerful political elite willing and able to push reform through. That in many countries this state elite was already using the same methods to dispossess land from peasants for industrial modernization largely escaped notice, though it was well under way at the time. In India, by the 1950s, the same legal instruments used to institute half-hearted land reforms were already being used more effectively to dispossess millions of people for dams, steel plants, mining, industrial townships, and public infrastructure.

The subsequent dependency critique of modernization theory recognized, to its credit, the distinct conditions of capitalist development in peripheral countries. Nevertheless, while the school argued that capitalist development entailed the transfer of surplus from periphery to core, it only vaguely specified the exact mechanisms of this transfer. While the plunder of natural resources was part of Frank’s analysis of colonialism (Frank 1979: 146-168), he paid little attention to exactly how colonizers and their intermediaries expropriated land for mines and plantations, as he assumed that this flowed from the “needs” of the world economy (Brenner 1977: 87). In their analyses of the post-independence period, dependency theorists focused almost exclusively on “unequal exchange” through trade or the repatriation of profits within multi-national corporations (Baran 1957; Frank 1966; Emmanuel 1972; Amin 1974; Mandel 1978)—in other words, on the lateral transfer of surplus from periphery to core, *irrespective of how it was generated*. Because of this focus on the transfer of surplus across countries, the role of large-scale land dispossession in import-substituting national industrialization largely escaped critical scrutiny. With its overriding focus on the *external constraints* to industrialization and the ability of peripheral countries to move up the global division of labor, dependency theory deflected attention from a major internal basis of such ascent.

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<sup>5</sup> Although from the opposite political perspective, his analysis thus dovetailed with many Marxists scholars of the “agrarian question,” who saw the dispossession and/or differentiation of the peasantry as part of the process of “primitive accumulation,” and looked to the proletarianization of Third World peasantries as a source of revolutionary potential. We will turn to these theories shortly.

While returning attention to the internal conditions for capitalist development, “comparative political economy” (Evans and Stephens 1988) also neglected the significance of land dispossession in post-independence development. While providing a more optimistic view of the ability of peripheral countries to move up in the global division of labor through deliberate state action, these scholars saw the dispossession of land neither as an important condition for this industrial transformation nor as a significant determinant of how its benefits were distributed. While scholars sometimes considered agriculturalists an obstacle to development, this derived from their advocacy for investment-retarding subsidies (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Varshney 1995), not because of their control over land. The primary task of developmental states was thus to forge constructive relationships with capital (e.g. Johnson 1982; Amsden 1989; Evans 1995; Chibber 2003; Kohli 2004) and sometimes with labor (Heller 1999; Chibber 2003), but state dispossession of land from peasants was never considered a significant aspect of this relationship. This is an oversight: the “high-modernist” (Scott 1998) projects that concretely instantiated these developmental states entailed profound transformations of the physical environment, demanding significant dispossession of rural land. Dams, steel towns, industrial estates and even Information Technology Parks do not float in the air; producing physical space for them in highly-populated agrarian countries—and providing them with infrastructure—has historically required the large-scale dispossession of peasantries. From the point of view of those forced to give their land and homes for such projects (rarely with adequate compensation), even developmental states can look predatory.

It is in one sense surprising that the dispossession of tens of millions of people for capitalist modernization largely escaped the attention of development scholars within sociology. Regardless of their different views on the conditions under which countries can industrially modernize and enter the more advanced sectors of global capitalism, few noticed the dispossession that accompanied these efforts. This omission may in part reflect the classical tendency to approach political economy as the abstract interplay between various classes and the state over wages, prices, subsidies, and taxes. It may also reflect the neglect of rent in Marx’s “trinity formula” in favor of the wage-profit binary (Lefebvre 1991; Coronil 1997). The consequence of these perspectives, as Lefebvre observes, is that “the space of social practice is imperceptible” (Lefebvre 1991: 324). I will argue, however, that there is also a sociological explanation for the neglect of dispossession in sociology.

The major theoretical approaches to the study of development formed during a period in which, as I will argue, the forcible acquisition of land (in India and many other developing countries) served a state-led project of national development that had significant legitimacy among a broad public—including scholars of different political orientations. Projects to build heavy industries and public infrastructure consumed significant amounts of land, but such dispossession was justified as necessary “sacrifices for the nation.” These appeals were particularly strong in countries just emerging from colonial rule that were trying to overcome “underdevelopment” and build autonomous national economies. While it is unclear whether such justifications were always compelling for the dispossessed, what is clear is that the overwhelming public support for such projects made them very difficult to oppose. The absence of any strong resistance to land acquisition in India or many other developing countries until the 1970s and particularly the 1980s (and their continuing marginalization after that) helps to explain why social science largely neglected the phenomenon of rural land dispossession for non-agricultural development. It is political struggles that often attune us to significant social and



economic phenomenon, and dispossession was a wheel that did not squeak. In discouraging resistance, developmentalist regimes of dispossession also deflected sociological attention.

### *The Emergence of Displacement and Land Grab Studies*

It was not until the 1970s and 1980s—when well-organized social movements emerged to resist dispossession for dams and other development projects—that scholars began to take some notice, albeit on the margins of sociology. In India, critical scholars and activists began to document the plight of those displaced for development projects, particularly large dams (e.g. Fernandes and Thukral 1989; Thukral 1992; Fernandes and Paranjpye 1997; Parasuraman 1999).<sup>6</sup> Pioneering struggles like the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Movement), the people's movement that arose to oppose the Sardar Sarovar Dam in India's Narmada Valley, forced displacement onto the agenda of both scholars and international development agencies. Projects like the Sardar Sarovar became potent symbols of the growing disillusionment with top-down efforts at economic modernization. The World Bank, under widespread criticism for funding socially and environmentally destructive projects, was forced to develop policies on what it called "involuntary resettlement." It employed sociologists and anthropologists to develop "resettlement and rehabilitation safeguards" (see Cernea 1999), contributing to a growing policy-oriented literature on "development-induced displacement." More critical sociologists in India, part of a growing current of Marxist political-ecology (e.g. Peet and Watts 2004a[1996]; Peluso and Watts 2001), also began to shift attention from the traditional focus on "conflict in the factory and the field" to "conflict around forests and rivers" (Baviskar 1995: 40; see also Guha 1989). This literature emerged in the wake of anti-dispossession struggles against projects of the Nehruvian state (dams, mining, state forestry, public sector industries) and its counterparts elsewhere in the 1970s and 1980s; it provides the historical benchmark against which to compare my own study of dispossession in the neoliberal period. While these scholars often stressed the continuities between dispossession in the colonial and developmentalist eras (Guha 1989; Baviskar 1995; Sundar 2007), this project will emphasize the discontinuities between the developmentalist and neoliberal eras. With the benefit of this comparison, I try to develop a more general theoretical framework for the relationship between dispossession and capitalism than was attempted in this literature.

In the neoliberal era, the proliferation of "land grabs" and protests against them has started to command broader public and scholarly attention. Somewhat orthogonally to those who had been studying dispossession for decades in different countries (e.g. Baviskar 1995; Watts 2004a[1996], 2004b, 2008; Hart 2002; Moore 2005), a large literature has recently emerged around the efforts of private investors and even sovereign countries to acquire immense tracts of land, particularly in Africa and Latin America, for agricultural and bio-fuels plantations.<sup>7</sup> Most of these studies do not attempt to develop a theory of the relationship between dispossession and capitalism, but deploy the term "land grab" descriptively. However, two tendencies mark those that have advanced theories of the relationship between such land grabs and contemporary capitalism. First, they over-generalize from this particular form of dispossession without placing it within a larger social and historical context of dispossession for various economic purposes, which leads to erroneous conclusions. Thus Zoomers (2010) argues that the current upsurge of cross-border agricultural land grabs is part of a larger contemporary phenomenon of the "foreignization of space," of which she cites India's SEZs as another example. Sassen (2013)

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<sup>6</sup> This literature soon became huge; these represent only a few prominent examples.

<sup>7</sup> See notes 1-3.

similarly concludes that land grabs are part of “the disassembling of national territory.” We will see that India’s SEZs are primarily domestically developed and financed. But the important point is that in building a general theory of dispossession, focusing on the origin of the capital driving it is a distraction: it is simply one factor—and of secondary importance to the *kind* of capital—that helps to explain variation in the character and consequences of dispossession at different times and places. Second, scholars have so far focused on the global economic forces thought to be driving dispossession without considering the *political* means of achieving dispossession. In other words, they have given much attention to changes in global agricultural capitalism that appear to be behind these particular land grabs but very little to the precise ways in which states achieve dispossession for these or any number of purposes—and how these might be changing from previous state practices.<sup>8</sup> While transformations in the global “food regime” might help to explain *one* impulse behind “land grabs” (McMichael 2012, 2013), only a theory of domestic regimes of dispossession can help us understand why and how particular states respond to that impulse with the forcible expropriation of peasants. The growing “land grab” literature has, in general, failed to link this new concern with transnational agricultural investments to a more general theory of land dispossession.

The first step to building a more satisfying theory of the relationship between capitalism and land dispossession is to return to the main theoretical tradition that *has* had a theory of dispossession. Marxists, to be sure, have shared with sociologists a relative neglect (in theory and practice) of the problem of displacing rural people for capitalist *industry*. Marxism does, however, have a theory of the relationship between dispossession and capitalism. While this theory is in need of substantial reconstruction before it can be used to understand contemporary forms of land dispossession, it is necessary to clarify this theoretical heritage before illustrating how the concept of regimes of dispossession departs from it.

## PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

### *Dispossession in the Transition to Capitalism*

There are essentially two Marxist approaches to the study of dispossession, and both derive from Marx’s theory of “primitive accumulation.” The first strand has built on Marx’s analysis of the English enclosures, in which he famously argued that the origins of capitalism lie in “the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” (1977: 875). For Marx, this bloody and violent process of expelling peasants from the land generated the *pre-conditions* for capitalism in rural England by effecting the “two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-laborers” (Marx 1977: 875). In contrast to the “nursery tale” of capitalism’s origins advanced by Adam Smith, Marx argued that capitalist social relations were created “under circumstances of ruthless terrorism” (1976: 895). Landlords, the crown, and eventually parliament used brute force to enclose commons, clear the estates of cottages and retainers, privatize state and church property, and create a destitute proletariat that was “free” to sell its labor power, and compelled to do so by being “freed” of all possessions. For Marx, the birth of capitalism was thus far less idyllic than political economists like Smith would have it; capital

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<sup>8</sup> This might partly have to do with the fact that the more theoretical literature has often lacked strong ethnographic grounding in processes of dispossession at the local level.

came into the world “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (1976: 926).<sup>9</sup>

Commentators have observed that Marx’s “primitive accumulation” was more of a contingent historical account of capitalist development in England than a well-worked out theory grafted on to his otherwise refined conception of capitalism as a system (Balibar 1979: 279). This contingent accounting has left two important ambiguities in how to conceive primitive accumulation. On the one hand, this section of *Capital* offers an origin story about how the pre-conditions for capitalism came into being.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, primitive accumulation is defined by its *function* in the development of capitalism: it is those historical processes that inaugurate capitalist social relations. If we extract a theoretical definition from this account, then “primitive accumulation” can be *anything* that generates those relations by proletarianizing peasants and forging a capitalist class with a “stock” of capital to employ them, with or without the “blood and dirt.” However, one can also interpret Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation as making a *means*-specific distinction between those (non-capitalist) processes that give rise to a capitalist mode of production in which “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, played the greatest part” (1976: 874), and a mature capitalist system that, once developed, can dispense with extra-economic coercion and rely on the “silent compulsion of economic relations” (1976: 899). In the first definition, it is the *function* that distinguishes primitive accumulation from capitalist accumulation proper—it generates capitalism’s *pre-conditions* before capitalism takes over and re-creates its own conditions internally. In the second, it is the extra-economic *means* of primitive accumulation that separate it from capitalist accumulation proper.

From this arises a second ambiguity: how much emphasis should one place on each of the “two transformations”: turning the land into capital, and turning the peasantry into a proletariat? Marx devotes somewhat less attention to the economic forces motivating the gentry to turn the commons into sheep walks compared to its (unintended) consequences: creating a class of wage laborers “freed” from their means of production. This emphasis is logical given Marx’s conception of capitalism and the historical role he assigns to the proletariat. If, however, one emphasized the first transformation, would not primitive accumulation be a continuous process as a growing capitalism—with an already ample supply of wage laborers—required ever more land and natural resources? Although some have argued otherwise (De Angelis 2007), it is fairly clear that Marx himself confined primitive accumulation to an early chapter in the development of capitalism. Marx thus calls it, “an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure” (1976: 873).<sup>11</sup> Primitive accumulation creates the presuppositions of capital; once established, capitalism re-creates its own conditions of existence

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<sup>9</sup> Weber largely agreed with Marx on the significance of land expropriation in the dissolution of the manorial economy and the rise of capitalism (2003: 83-85, 92-93). However, in his view, the eviction of the peasantry was, as subsequent scholarship would confirm (Byres 1991), only one path to get there—another was the eviction of the landlord and the establishment of a free peasantry (as in South and West Germany) (2003: 276-288). Moreover, the creation of a free labor market was, for Weber, only one of capitalism’s preconditions, along with calculable law and the requisite spirit of rational accounting (2003: 276-288).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it has been pointed out that “primary” or “original” is a better translation of the German than “primitive” (Perelman 2000).

<sup>11</sup> In the more Hegelian idiom of the *Grundrisse*, Marx states, “The conditions and presuppositions of the *becoming*, of the *rising*, of capital presuppose precisely that it is not yet in being but merely in *becoming*; they therefore disappear as real capital arises, capital which itself, on the basis of its own reality, posits the conditions for its realization: (1973: 459).

on the basis of wage labor. To the extent that it continues, it does so *serially* as different countries *transition* to capitalism.

Marx's "classic case" of the English enclosures could, in fact, conceal the "function versus means" ambiguity because both possible definitions coincided: in Marx's view, extra-economic force established capitalism's pre-conditions. But as historians took up Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation in England and as social-scientists applied it to subsequent "capitalist transitions" in other historical conditions, this ambiguity has had serious repercussions for the theoretical coherence of primitive accumulation.

First, there arose significant debate on the role of enclosures in the development of capitalism in England. Maurice Dobb (1947) and Robert Brenner (1976, 1977) maintained and elaborated its significance. However, their arguments were critiqued not just by Whiggish English historians, but by other Marxists who rejected locating the origins of capitalism in the agrarian class relations of England (Sweezy 1978; Wallerstein 1974, 2011 [1989]). Perhaps more consequential for the theoretical cogency of primitive accumulation, however, is that ambiguity emerged over the specific significance of land enclosures *within* the camp that *did* locate the origins of capitalism in 16<sup>th</sup> century rural England. In subsequent refinements of the Brenner position, it was not necessarily wholesale land dispossession but rather reduction to "market dependence" that signaled the rise of capitalist social relations (Brenner 2001; Wood 2002). This argument raises the question of whether primitive accumulation necessarily involves the dispossession of land at all.<sup>12</sup>

The question also arises in the vast literature on transitions to capitalist agriculture in other parts of the world. Decades of research on the "agrarian question" demonstrated that the widespread enclosure of land constitutes only one historically specific pathway to capitalist development (Byres 1991). Primitive accumulation, consequently, came to mean one of two things in this literature: first, it could refer to any process that separated peasants from their means of production and transformed them into a proletariat, typically while also forging a class of agrarian capitalists. This often proceeded not through wholesale eviction from land but through a gradual process of class differentiation generated by commercial agriculture (Lenin 1967; Kautsky 1988: 17; Adnan 1985: 57). Economic processes like debt came to be seen as equally effective levers of primitive accumulation as the extra-economic enclosure of land (Bhaduri 1983). Second, primitive accumulation could refer to the general process of diverting agricultural surpluses for capitalist industrialization (Byres 1991: 11). In this sense, primitive accumulation did not necessarily mean establishing capitalist social relations in agriculture, but transferring surpluses from agriculture to industry.<sup>13</sup> In this usage, primitive accumulation was a necessary condition for economic growth in all "backward" countries, including socialist ones (Preobrazhensky 1965; Ka and Selden 1986; Byres 1991:11).<sup>14</sup>

In sum, the vast research on the origins of capitalism and agrarian transitions in Europe and the Global South has amplified the original ambiguities in Marx's concept of primitive accumulation. It is no longer clear if primitive accumulation refers to the dispossession of land through extra-economic means, to any process that generates the pre-conditions of capitalism, or

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<sup>12</sup> Wood writes, "People could be market dependent . . . without being completely dispossessed. To be market dependent required only the loss of direct non-market access to the means of self-reproduction. In fact, once market imperatives were well-established, even outright ownership was no protection against them. Market dependence was a cause, not a result, of mass proletarianization" (2002: 95).

<sup>13</sup> Of course, the two were connected to the extent that capitalist agriculture generated larger surpluses that could be used to subsidize industrialization.

<sup>14</sup> For a critique of this argument, see Gerschenkron (1962).

even to any process that provides surpluses for industrialization. It is not my intention to assess whether land enclosures were in fact central to the origins of capitalism or to subsequent capitalist transitions, or to question whether these uses of primitive accumulation are useful or warranted. We can also bracket the difficulty that has accompanied its empirical use, a difficulty arising from the problem of demonstrating where non-capitalist modes of production give way to capitalist ones (Roseberry 1994: 162; Hall 2012). Rather, the purpose of this discussion is to illustrate that the conceptual lens of “primitive accumulation” is inadequate for understanding the relationship between capitalism and ongoing forms of land dispossession. This is principally because today’s dispossessions cannot be understood in the old functional sense of creating the pre-conditions for capitalism: they do not necessarily inaugurate capitalist social relations and do not mark transitions between modes of production. They often have little to do with agriculture, and are not about resolving the “agrarian question.” They often involve dispossessing land—sometimes already held within capitalist social relations—for *non-agricultural* development. They reflect not an early stage of capitalism but advanced capitalist demands on land and natural resources. They take a myriad of sectorally-specific forms—whether dams, highways, mines, steel plants, Special Economic Zones or housing—that do not resemble the “classic” pattern of the enclosures. They must be understood within a new problematic: not what is the role of land dispossession in transitions to capitalism, but what is the role of land dispossession within capitalism itself? This requires, I will suggest, shifting attention from “modes of production” to “regimes of dispossession.” Before developing this framework, however, we must turn to the limitations of the second “externalist” approach to primitive accumulation.

### *Dispossession as Imperialism*

In addition to the enclosures, Marx’s catalogue of “primitive accumulation” included a number of other processes that had less to do with England’s domestic agrarian structure and more to do with its relationship to the rest of the world:

the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation (Marx 1977: 915).

In this *external* conception, primitive accumulation refers not the establishment of capitalist social relations in England but to an early amassing of wealth through colonial plunder, slavery, and genocidal conquest. As with Marx’s analysis of domestic enclosures, it is not clear if these processes constitute primitive accumulation because they fulfill the *function* of creating the pre-conditions for capitalism (here the emphasis is more on repatriating a “stock” of capital to jumpstart capitalist accumulation, rather than creating a proletariat) or because they involve violent and extra-economic *means*. In any case, subsequent Marxist theories of imperialism took up this *external* side of primitive accumulation (Luxemburg 2003[1913]). While minimizing the significance of internal processes of primitive accumulation, dependency and world systems scholars further advanced this external focus (Sweezy 1978; Wallerstein 1974, 2011[1989]; Arrighi 1994). If the internal conception of primitive accumulation does not provide us with a

useable theory of the relationship between capitalism and the ongoing dispossession of land, do these theories of imperialism and inter-state plunder provide an alternative?

To start, we should understand that early Marxist theories of imperialism were attempts to explain why the internal dynamics of capitalist development in “advanced” countries led to the export of capital, territorial expansion, inter-imperialist rivalry, and war (Hildferding 1981[1910]; Bukharin 1973[1917]; Lenin 1939[1917]).<sup>15</sup> They gave scant attention to the “colonial” areas that marked the object of this competition (Brewer 1990), and there was significant disagreement about their precise economic significance (Arrighi 1978). While the need for natural resources gained occasional mention, theorists put more emphasis on the need for national capitalist monopolies to gain access to new markets. Because it is political control over territories that enables national capitalists to expand their protected markets, this—*rather than the actual dispossession of land within those territories*—is what animates “classical” Marxist theories of imperialism. Rosa Luxemburg was the prominent exception: her theory of imperialism very explicitly connected the dynamics of capitalist accumulation to the ongoing “primitive accumulation” of land held by non-capitalist societies. Stemming from a theory of “under-consumption”—the inability of capitalist surplus value to be realized within capitalism because of ineffective demand—she proposed that capitalism needed to continually use force against non-capitalist societies to access their markets and means of production:

It is an illusion to hope that capitalism will ever be content with the means of production which it can acquire by way of commodity exchange. In this respect already, capital is faced with difficulties because vast tracts of the globe’s surface are in the possession of social organizations that have no desire for commodity exchange or cannot, because of the entire social structure and the forms of ownership, offer for sale the productive forces in which capital is primarily interested. . . . Hence derives the vital necessity for capitalism in its relations with colonial countries to appropriate the most important means of production. . . . Force is the only solution open to capital; the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day (Luxemburg 2003 [1913]: 351).

Capitalism, according to Luxemburg, thus depends on the ongoing use of extra-economic force against a non-capitalist outside, which it must progressively consume as a condition of its existence. The plunder of India, the opium wars, and the destruction of the American small farmer are Luxemburg’s major examples of this ongoing primitive accumulation. Luxemburg believed that it was only a matter of time before capitalism devoured the entire non-capitalist social medium which sustained it, sending it into a cascading series of crises and political convulsions (2003 [1913]: 447).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> These Marxist theorists, particularly Lenin, relied heavily on the work of the non-Marxist Hobson (1965).

<sup>16</sup> Luxemburg’s theory of imperialism deeply influenced Hannah Arendt’s *Imperialism*, in which she argued that “the original sin of simple robbery . . . had eventually to be repeated lest the motor of accumulation suddenly die down” (1968: 28). What may be surprising, however, is the remarkably similar analysis of territorial expansion in the thought of Max Weber. That capitalism, once developed, might involve an ongoing element of coercive land expropriation does not, at first glance appear consonant with Weber’s theory of a sober, modern rational capitalism—as opposed to his depiction of an earlier phase of “booty” capitalism, or his remarkably Marxist analysis of the slave economy of ancient Rome, which he saw as dependent on continual territorial expansion to plunder land and slaves (1997: 394-396). There are nevertheless suggestions that territorial expansion played an important role in

While Luxemburg's theory of "under-consumption" has been thoroughly critiqued and her portrayal of pre-capitalist societies dominated by a "natural economy" proven inadequate, her conclusion stands: capitalists would scour the globe in search of cheap means of production and use force to get them. Significantly, Luxemburg was the first to graft Marx's contingent historical account of primitive accumulation onto a theory of capitalist accumulation proper, transforming it from an "original sin" to an ongoing process. We will see that this provides the direct inspiration for David Harvey's theory of "accumulation by dispossession," from which my own theory departs.

If subsequent dependency and world systems theorists focused even more intently on the exploitative political and economic ties between advanced capitalist countries and the rest of the world, the role of land dispossession in these theories is more ambiguous than in Luxemburg. On the one hand, this tradition has famously minimized the significance of land dispossession to the development of capitalism within countries (Wallerstein 2011[1989]) and questioned its link to long-term economic development (Arrighi and Pisselli 1987; Arrighi 2007; Arrighi, Aschoff and Scully 2010). Since these theorists do not define capitalism by the wage-labor relationship, they do not consider domestic processes, like the English enclosures, significant for locating the origins of capitalism or even for facilitating capitalist accumulation. On the other hand, many of its theorists contend that incorporation into the world system and its division of labor entails the transformation of property relations (Wallerstein 2011[1989]: 148-179), and they have catalogued inter-state resource plunder as a dimension of wealth transfer from periphery to core (Frank 1979: esp. 10, 23, 146, 160-161; Arrighi 1994: 54). It remains unclear how prominent a place resource plunder and the physical dispossession of land take for these theorists, particularly when compared to other mechanisms of surplus transfer such as "unequal exchange." Nevertheless, if the first "internalist" theory of primitive accumulation focused on the function of dispossession in establishing capitalist social relations, the "externalist" theory focused on dispossession as a function of absorption into a global capitalist market and its division of labor.

There are several strengths to this "externalist" approach. First, it identifies inter-state plunder as a significant historical axis of dispossession. Whether or not this plunder was crucial to the development of capitalism in the West, it emphasizes the first of Marx's "transformations"; that is, it accents the economic forces driving the dispossession of land rather than focusing narrowly on its incidental consequence of creating a proletariat. This would appear to provide a basis for seeing primitive accumulation as an ongoing process (and not just in one-time transitions to capitalism). Second, the "externalist" theory de-links the process of primitive accumulation from a conception of economic progress. The dependency and world systems approach highlighted the fact that the political economic relations linking core and periphery, including the primitive accumulation of natural resources, were not a progressive stage in the development of capitalism, as some Marxists maintained (Warren 1980). Rather, they generated development in the core and underdevelopment in the periphery. While not restricting my analysis of dispossession to inter-state plunder and not insisting that the result is underdevelopment, I do insist—along with Arrighi and co-authors, albeit for different reasons—

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his understanding of capitalism and its limits. There is his cryptic gesture towards natural limits in his prediction about the "iron cage" persisting, "until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt" (1958: 181). More significantly, Weber's comparison of Germany and the United States shows profound concern for the importance of a "frontier" and the threat of social stagnation and agrarian authoritarianism that arises from fixed territorial limits (1946: 383-385). Weber's support for German imperialism may have been an expression of that concern (Mommsen 1990).

that dispossession has no necessary relationship to economic progress. *The contribution of dispossession to development is, rather, an historical variable*; I will argue that it varies across regimes of dispossession.

Nevertheless, the role of dispossession in capitalism never reached the level of a theory in dependency or world systems analysis, and several shortcomings plague the propositions that do exist. First, as Brenner (1977) argues, Frank and Wallerstein cannot explain transformations in social property relations around land but presume that they flow from the “needs” of the world system. They provide no account of the domestic political processes and class struggle required to enact far-reaching changes in property relations. While I argue, contra Brenner, that dispossession has a significant role under fully developed capitalism (and not just at its origins), I develop his conception of dispossession as a deeply political process contingent on the balance of class forces. Second, dependency/world systems theorists view extra-economic plunder as an external relation between core and periphery. They do not analyze dispossession as an ongoing process internal to capitalist development within any given country. As we will see, land dispossession is just as much an aspect of capitalist development under relatively autonomous conditions of import-substituting industrialization as it is under colonialism or neoliberalism. The political economic forces driving dispossession can just as easily arise from domestic capital as from global capital. The origin of capital is a variable in shaping processes of dispossession, but remains inessential to a general theory of dispossession’s role under capitalism.

In sum, the externalist approach to “primitive accumulation” properly identifies the existence of ongoing dispossessions that arise from already developed capitalism and helpfully divorces these dispossessions from a conception of progress. However, it confines dispossession to a relation between countries within the world system and neglects its role in the internal development of capitalism within any particular country (peripheral or not). Most crucially, it does not examine the extant political mechanisms within particular states that facilitate land dispossession for a variety of economic purposes and that transfer of wealth from rural classes to different capitalist classes, national or foreign.

Combined, the internal and external approaches to “primitive accumulation” fail to fully account for land dispossession’s role in capitalist development. The internalist position remains ambiguous on the role of land dispossession in primitive accumulation, and, moreover, confines primitive accumulation to the initial establishment of capitalism within countries. The externalist position descriptively identifies ongoing dispossessions between countries but neglects its internal role; further, it remains ambiguous on dispossession’s overall significance in the cross-national transfer of wealth. In focusing on whether impulses towards dispossession come from domestic or global sources, neither flush out the political relations that make dispossession possible, whatever the time, place, or purpose. Neither give us a way of understanding the ongoing efforts of states to dispossess land from rural people for industry, infrastructure, and real estate. Into this breach enters David Harvey’s theory of accumulation by dispossession.

### *Accumulation by Dispossession*

In *The New Imperialism* (2003), Harvey argues that “accumulation by dispossession” has become the predominant mode of accumulation under neoliberalism and that the traditional Marxist focus on labor must be complemented with greater attention to proliferating struggles over the dispossession of various forms of public and private wealth. Harvey’s examples of accumulation by dispossession include the expropriation of land and natural resources from peasant populations; the conversion of common or state property into private property; the



extraction of rents from intellectual property rights; the privatization of collective social assets (such as pensions, healthcare, and other social entitlements); and the various predations of finance capital. Harvey sees the resurging importance of these mechanisms relative to “expanded reproduction” as a response to the problem of over-accumulated capital in the core economies of the North.

To its tremendous merit, Harvey’s theory of accumulation by dispossession provides a distinct term for the expropriations emanating *from within* advanced capitalism. Accumulation by dispossession unmoors the notion of primitive accumulation from the interstices of modes of production, making it a more versatile concept capable of explaining very diverse forms of dispossessions that have little to do with agriculture and that do not necessarily inaugurate capitalist social relations: for example, dispossessions for factories, dams, Special Economic Zones, slum demolitions, mining projects, privatized infrastructure, and real estate developments. While some have treated primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession synonymously (Arrighi, Aschoff and Scully 2010: 411), accumulation by dispossession marks a significant advancement on primitive accumulation precisely in its ability to capture diverse contemporary dispossessions that take sector-specific and geographically dispersed forms, and whose significance for capital, at least in the proximate sense, lies more in the expropriated asset than in the dispossessed owner (the first of Marx’s transformations). It is not that a name change is necessary for this reconceptualization—other scholars before and since Harvey have advanced conceptions of “ongoing primitive accumulation” that mark a similar break (Luxemburg 2003[1913]; Perelman 2000; De Angelis 2001; Hart 2002; RETORT 2005; De Angelis 2007; Sanyal 2007). The term does, however, give the concept a contemporary valence, making it clear that it no longer refers to the “pre-history” of capital (Marx 1977: 875) or to one-time agrarian transitions in the Global South.

But what exactly defines accumulation by dispossession? While freeing primitive accumulation from its function of generating capitalist social relations, Harvey redefines the concept through another, more contemporary function: namely, absorbing over-accumulated capital in the global economy. In the closest he comes to providing a definition that encapsulates the diverse processes he describes, Harvey states, “What accumulation by dispossession does is release a set of assets (including labor power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Over accumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use” (Harvey 2003: 149). No longer referring to processes that create the pre-conditions of capitalism, accumulation by dispossession indicates a set of processes that allow global capital to find new outlets. In a self-conscious extension of Luxemburg’s analysis of imperialism, Harvey attempts to locate the need for ongoing dispossessions within the contradictory logic of capitalist accumulation itself. However, whereas Luxemburg saw this contradiction as a problem of “under-consumption” (which is problematic because it would point towards the need for markets not access to means of production), Harvey sees it as a problem of over-accumulation: the slackening of opportunities for profitable investment in the advanced capitalist countries has necessitated that surplus capital search for new outlets. Dispossession provides an outlet for this capital by bringing uncommodified, previously decommodified, or undervalued assets into the orbit of capital accumulation.

What Harvey has done, then, is to take both the internal and external aspects of primitive accumulation described by Marx, and argue that they continue under advanced capitalism, not because they create the pre-conditions for capitalism, but because they are conditions for its ongoing expansion. Accumulation by dispossession represents a partial welding of the internal

and external approaches in that it includes processes of agrarian enclosure undertaken by domestic states (for dams, SEZs, etc.) while rooting them in a logic of global capital in which northern states remain the dominant players (leaving it, ultimately, a theory of imperialism). Nevertheless, while Harvey attributes to dispossession a new and more contemporary function than Marx, he leaves intact Marx's fundamental ambiguity: is accumulation by dispossession defined by its function for capital or by the means specific to it?

We might expect Harvey to further specify accumulation by dispossession as those processes that provide outlets for capital through *extra-economic* means—as in Marx's characterization of primitive accumulation as involving, “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force” (1977: 874) or as in Luxemburg's assertion that capitalism “employs force as a permanent weapon” (2003 [1913]: 369 ). Defining accumulation by dispossession as accumulation through extra-economic means (see Glassman 2006)<sup>17</sup> would capture many (though not all) of the examples that Harvey provides: dams, SEZs, slum demolitions, and various forms of state-mediated enclosure, privatizations and transfers of public wealth. However, not only does Harvey fail to anywhere provide a clear definition of accumulation by dispossession, but he explicitly rejects this definition, claiming that it is “primarily economic rather than extra-economic” (Harvey 2006a: 159). Without this means-specific distinction, however, it is not clear what these different processes share, nor what separates accumulation by dispossession from other “fixes” to the problem of over-accumulation or from the “normal” expanded reproduction of capital (see Brenner 2006; Levien 2011a, 2012). The concept's boundary is vitiated and this undermines its analytical utility.

The consequence is that Harvey underemphasizes the most significant aspect of dispossession: namely, that it is a deeply political process in which owners of the means of coercion transparently redistribute assets from one class to another. Although he recognizes that state force can be central to dispossession (Harvey 2003: 154), he overextends the concept to include so many diverse phenomena—including those like finance capital that have an indirect or unclear link to state force—that he cannot explicitly incorporate the state into his theory. As a result, Harvey's framework misses the crucial and distinguishing feature of accumulation by dispossession as it applies to land: its fundamental and transparent reliance on state force. This prevents him from grasping the distinctive *politics of dispossession*.

As a process of transparent and coercive redistribution, land dispossession is a contingent political process whose outcome is determined by class struggle and not the circuits of capital (Brenner 1977; De Angelis 2007).<sup>18</sup> There is nothing automatic about capital (over-accumulated or not) finding outlets in land or in any other asset; by reading every instance of dispossession as a result of the global impulses of capital, Harvey fails to answer the question of why impulses

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<sup>17</sup> In his overview of the movement from primitive accumulation to ABD, Glassman (2006) suggests that accumulation through extra-economic means provides the continuity—a point I wholeheartedly endorse.

<sup>18</sup> De Angelis provides an original and generative conception of ongoing primitive accumulation that is coherently differentiated from “expanded reproduction” and that more forcefully than Harvey emphasizes class struggle as the animating force of, and limit to, primitive accumulation. What prevents me from adopting his theoretical framework more fully is that it is structured around the idea of enclosures whose referent is always the commons, defended by “commoners” (see also Linebough 2008). The problem is that accumulation through dispossession can target multiple property forms, including private property, and may even entail the dispossession of more “traditional” capitalist forms by more “advanced” ones (Sassen 2010: 24). Consequently, I believe that we should see the enclosure of commons as a sub-category of accumulation by dispossession, a concept that has the merit of not prejudging the property forms targeted for dispossession.

towards accumulation translate into *dispossession* in a particular context? Why do capitalists need states to dispossess land for them? Why don't they simply purchase it on the market? And why do states do it for them? Dispossession requires a state that is willing and able to use its monopoly on the means of violence to expropriate land from certain classes for the benefit of others. In part, we will see, dispossession arises from the desire of states to help capitalists overcome barriers to accumulation, such as rural land markets dominated by small-holding peasantries. But, in different times and places, we find that states have been willing and able to dispossess land for *different* classes (or class fractions) for *different* economic purposes. In India, the colonial state dispossessed land for railroads and natural resource extraction to benefit metropolitan capital; the Nehruvian state dispossessed land for public sector industry and infrastructure; and the neoliberal state dispossesses land for all forms of private accumulation including real estate. Today, India and China largely dispossess land for urban-industrial purposes, while Africa and Latin American states tend to dispossess land for agricultural plantations. Harvey's concept offers little basis for understanding this variation. While it may be true, as he argues, that the quantity of dispossession is increasing with the institution of neoliberal economic policies (I will provide evidence that it is in India), it is unclear and probably impossible to show that over-accumulated capital in the Global North is the cause. Again, the accumulators by dispossession are very often domestic (as they are for India's SEZs). More fundamentally, what the social scientist must explain—and what Harvey cannot—is how and why states restructure themselves to dispossess land for different purposes and different classes in different periods.

One must also explain how states *succeed* in dispossessing people for any given set of purposes and what accounts for variation in this success. The most significant feature of land dispossession is that it entails the direct and transparent intervention of the state in the process of accumulation. Politically, this direct, extra-economic intervention into accumulation creates an immediate antagonism between the would-be dispossessed and the state. Farmers clearly see what is happening when the state tries to evict them from their land; land dispossession is universally and immediately transparent (De Angelis 2007: 139). Unable to rely on the mystification common to the exploitation of labor under capitalism, states are typically compelled to justify such blatant land expropriations with ideological claims to be serving “a public purpose” or the “national interest”; in the past century, they have typically done this through the language of “development.” The persuasiveness of these claims rest considerably on whether the economic purpose driving the dispossession can be aligned with a widely accepted concept of national progress. Where ideological justifications and/or material compensations prove inadequate and resistance emerges, the ability of the state to dispossess gets decided by the domestic balance of political forces.

With accumulation by dispossession, then, the state, politics, and ideology are—as Perry Anderson argues for *pre-capitalist* modes of production (1974: 403-404)—*internal* and *constitutive* features of accumulation itself. This is the enormously significant implication of the insight that extra-economic coercion, which is thought to subside with the transition to capitalism, is an intrinsic and ongoing aspect of accumulation under advanced capitalism. It means that the character and outcome of dispossession in different times and places will be shaped by heterogeneous and nationally specific political, economic, and ideological factors that cannot be read off of global circuits of capital. Their specific configuration in any given place and time can be understood as a regime of dispossession.

## REGIMES OF DISPOSSESSION

If the effort to define dispossession by its functional role in capitalism renders the concepts of primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession vague and unusable, then the concept of “regimes of dispossession” pushes us to *start* by appreciating the distinctive *means* of dispossession. Rather than beginning with a theory of dispossession’s historical role, or whether it is internally or externally driven, let us begin with what characterizes dispossession as a social process in any context. *Principally, dispossession is the use of extra-economic coercion to expropriate non-labor assets from one group for the use of another.* Who suffers dispossession, who receives the dispossessed asset, and how the asset is used for accumulation take many different forms across time and place; establishing this variation should be the object of comparative research. When owners of the means of coercion consistently dispossess certain groups for the benefit of certain other groups for a fairly coherent range of purposes, we can call this a regime of dispossession. Because, in most circumstances, states are the main agents of dispossession, and, moreover, are most likely to exhibit consistency in their patterns of dispossession, the concept of regimes of dispossession is probably most useful for understanding state-mediated dispossession, as opposed to dispossession enacted by less centralized owners of coercion—mafias, militias, armed gangs, or landlords “with their little independent methods” (Marx 1977: 885).

If a regime of production (or factory regime) is an institutionalized way of extracting surplus labor from workers (Burawoy 1985), a regime of dispossession is an institutionalized way of expropriating assets from their current owners or users. It has two essential components: a state willing to dispossess for a particular set of economic purposes that are tied to particular class interests; and a way of generating compliance to this dispossession. These two aspects are intrinsically linked.

### *Dispossession and the State*

At any given time states have a set of economic purposes for which they are willing to dispossess land. When it comes to dispossessing privately held land, this is partly a legal matter of what is considered a “public purpose” under relevant eminent domain statutes and domestic case law (common land is often dispossessed with little legal impediment). However, it remains primarily a political question since, as we will see, states amend (and sometimes flout) these laws to suit their purposes at any given time; and, further, because states might not choose to dispossess land for all the purposes allowed to them by law. Some might consider this a *non-question* under the assumption that states are always instruments of the dominant class and are therefore always willing to dispossess whatever that class desires. Indeed, the class basis of a state is nowhere more transparent than in the process of dispossessing means of production from one group and giving them to another. However, assuming that state willingness to dispossess flows automatically from the “needs” of capitalism elides important variation. First, most states have historically limited the forcible dispossession of land from their own citizens to “public purposes,” construed narrowly as projects of the state (Reynolds 2010). While some classes inevitably profit more than others from state projects, one must distinguish between dispossessing land for public infrastructure and dispossessing land directly for private capital. We will see that the latter characterizes distinct historical regimes, whose emergence we must explain. Second, dominant classes and class fractions change during different phases of capitalism; as such, the kinds of accumulation they propose to undertake with dispossessed land change along with them. *This variation matters.* Dispossessing land for industrial capital yields

quite different results (economically and politically) than dispossessing land for finance capital. Each is likely to have different subsidiary consequences for non-dominant classes, including the dispossessed. In order to understand different regimes of dispossession, the social scientist must examine the precise class configurations underlying dispossession in any particular context. The “externalist” camp of Marxists might object that this focus on domestic regimes of dispossession misses the global nature of capitalism. Clearly, global economic forces shape the economic purposes for which different classes want the state to dispossess land. Nevertheless, those global forces interact with domestic social structures to produce different sectoral compositions of economic growth tied to different class alignments in different countries at different times. Regimes of dispossession forces us to *begin* not with a global political economic explanation for all dispossession everywhere but with the particular economic purposes driving dispossession in particular times and places; from there the sociologist must work up through the more cumbersome process of comparative research. As the sociology of dispossession advances, we will be able to say more about transformations in the character of dispossession at a global scale.

Finally, we must always keep in mind that states face *political* limits to their ability to dispossess land for whatever they choose; and what they choose to dispossess land for has significant implications for their ability to carry it through.

### *Compliance and the Politics of Dispossession*

Every regime of dispossession must have a way of compelling those who presently control the desired means of production or subsistence to relinquish them. We must begin by differentiating this power relation from other types—and principally from labor exploitation—to which sociologists have given far more attention. To start, we should recognize precisely what a dispossessor requires of the dispossessed and how this differs from what a capitalist requires of the worker: whereas labor exploitation requires that the worker continually work to produce more surplus value, dispossession requires that a land user vacate their land once and for all. So, whereas a regime of production requires a mechanism to ensure the enduring appropriation of work from workers (Burawoy 1979, 1985), a regime of dispossession requires a mechanism to ensure the one-time enclosure of land and the removal of its owner-users. Because labor exploitation makes different demands on the exploited than dispossession makes on the dispossessed, their relationship to subjective power (or “ideology”) is distinct in several ways.

First, whereas the expropriation of surplus in the labor process may be mystified, *the expropriation of land is always transparent*. While a worker may not directly perceive their surplus value being extracted in the labor process (as “necessary” and “surplus” labor intermingle in the wage, which appears as compensation for the entire workday), no farmer misapprehends the snatching of his/her land. The inescapable transparency of dispossession, which arises from the direct intervention of *extra-economic* coercion, makes mystification impossible. Without the benefit of invisibility, the state must ensure dispossession through *explicit* forms of persuasion: whether that involves normative appeals, material concessions, or the threat of violence.

Second, whereas Western Marxists and critical theorists have sought to explain the *reproduction* of social property relations, dispossession requires a theory of power that can explain acquiescence to dramatic *transformations* of social property relations. The question is not: why does the worker keep working and thereby reproduce his/her non-ownership of the means of production? The question is: what, ultimately, compels someone to give up their means of production in the first place? If doing so constitutes a large and typically irreversible threat to

one's established way of life, how can the state accomplish this aside from brute force? In this sense, producing acquiescence to dispossession appears more like convincing people to opt for socialism—with its inevitable disruption of existing property forms and associated ways of life—than maintaining their allegiance to capitalism. Whereas the role of ideology in capitalist exploitation is to ensure smooth social reproduction, the role of ideology in dispossession is to enable traumatic social change.

The third distinction follows from the second: whereas the reproduction of capitalist social relations requires an ongoing form of submission, dispossession requires very short-term (though typically irreversible) acquiescence. As a singular and discrete process—the state need only take a farmer's land once—dispossession does not require (and may not be able to produce) sustained domination. The question, from the point of view of the state and capital, is not: how do I create an enduring capitalist subject? It is rather: how do I get the farmer off his land tomorrow and put a fence around it? The dispossessor often has no interest in the dispossessed once they have successfully separated them from their means of production. As we will see, in a labor-surplus country following a non-labor intensive path of growth, this is especially the case. The important point, however, is that it is the interest of capital in land—and *not* in labor—that drives land dispossession: once it has appropriated their land, transforming farmers into docile capitalist subjects is largely irrelevant.

In sum, while Marxian theories of ideology have purported to address the problem of capitalist ideology in general, they have actually confined themselves to the ideological requirements of capitalist exploitation (or “expanded reproduction”). If, as I have argued, accumulation by dispossession is a significant, ongoing and thoroughly capitalist phenomenon, then we have to accept that these theories are partial. They appear ill-fitted—indeed perhaps too sophisticated—for the problem of dispossession.

Instead, we should think of dispossession as a problem of *compliance*. The sociology of compliance emerged from a quite unrelated mid-twentieth century concern with the function of large-scale organizations in the West (cf. Bendix 1947; Etzioni 1961). Building on Weber's theory of domination, its most prominent expositor defined compliance as “a relation in which an actor behaves in accordance with a directive supported by another's power, and to the orientation of the subordinated actor to the power applied” (Etzioni 1961: 3).<sup>19</sup> There are three main forms of power that can be used to generate compliance: coercion, material remuneration, and normative persuasion. While attempting to generate compliance through coercion typically generates *alienation*, one might motivate more willing compliance through either material calculation or normative legitimacy. The question is: under what circumstances and among what groups do different forms of power produce differently motivated (non)compliance? While Etzioni provides a static typology of compliance (see Burawoy 1985: 9), I give it a more dynamic use by examining the historically specific means available to different regimes of dispossession to expel people from their land. While compliance was probably an inadequate concept for the enduring submission required of the labor process (to which it was originally applied), it corresponds to the requirements of dispossession.

It holds two advantages for the study of dispossession. First, it does not rely on a concept of mystification, by which I mean the production of a “gap between experience and reality for all who enter a specific set of social relations” (Burawoy and Von Holdt 2012: 179). While

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<sup>19</sup> While similar to Weber's conception of domination as “the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Weber 1978: 212), it departs from Weber by recognizing non-legitimate forms of domination and by trying to differentiate their subjective bases (Etzioni 1961: 14-15).

compliance does not necessarily mean rational consent either, it does imply an explicit response to an explicit command, rather than an “automatic” or hidden operation of power.<sup>20</sup> This makes it more appropriate to the study of dispossession, with its inescapable transparency, than to its original use in the study of the workplace. Second, compliance to dispossession *assumes* no more about the subjectivities of individuals than that they leave their land. *Whereas exploitation requires enduring consent at the point of production, dispossession only requires one-time compliance at the point of enclosure.* While the individuals who ultimately comply or not to dispossession may have been subjected in the totality of their lives to many forms of long-term socialization, such processes are orthogonal to dispossession and their consequences for compliance can only be incidental. While engrained submission to state authority might clearly be useful, capitalist socialization into respect for private property can only work against compliance to dispossession.

While assuming little about the depth or endurance of its effects, compliance does allow for variation in the three modes through which states try to achieve compliance to dispossession and in the subjective reasons for (non-)compliance. Etzioni’s typology of coercive, normative, and remunerative compliance corresponds with my analysis of the means available to regimes of dispossession. If no regime of dispossession can rely on mystification, all rely to some degree on the actual or threatened use of coercion. This fact highlights the critical distinction between dispossession and exploitation. When a state notifies farmers that it seeks to acquire their land, the potential use of state force always backs this intent (while this is not always the case when a capitalist tells a worker to work). Ultimately, if farmers refuse to vacate their land, the threat of coercion becomes actual violence—the “blood and fire” of Marx’s primitive accumulation. Of course, given the social and political costs of violence—particularly in electoral democracies—states typically prefer to achieve dispossession through other means. Regimes of dispossession vary in the extent to which they must rely completely on brute coercion for generating compliance, or can additionally draw on normative and material inducements.

States almost always find it necessary to justify their use of coercive power to redistribute property. This is not simply the case in liberal democracies; even if they can use relatively more coercion, authoritarian governments still typically feel compelled to justify dispossession as serving the public or national interest. If the early English enclosures relied on a Lockean (1952[1690]: 37) conception of “improvement” as their justifications, contemporary forms of dispossession have typically relied on the derivative language of “development.” A major determinant of the success and stability of a regime of dispossession is the extent to which its appeals to the public interest are convincing to the plurality and to the dispossessed. This will hinge crucially on the economic purposes justifying dispossession and their anticipated beneficiaries. It appears, for example, that English peasants hardly accepted the legal-moral arguments made for enclosure (Thompson 1975), which relied rather heavily on what E.P. Thompson calls “the ascendancy of the gallows” (1975: 23). In the West, compliance was greatly aided by the fact that large-scale enclosures of land almost universally occurred *before* the institution of electoral democracy—or were directed at disenfranchised populations, as in the United States (Banner 2005). Even though governments often found it necessary to appeal to efficiency or civilization and to make dispossession consistent with their laws and self-understandings (Banner 2005), dispossession proceeded with relatively more force than persuasion. The same is true, more obviously, of dispossession by colonial authorities. The near universal role of violence in “modernizing” the countryside led Barrington Moore to observe

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<sup>20</sup> Such as in Althusser’s ideology, Bourdieu’s misrecognition, or Foucault’s subjectivation.

that, “there is no evidence that the mass of the population anywhere has wanted an industrial society, and plenty of evidence that they did not. At bottom all forms of industrialization so far have been revolutions from above, the work of a ruthless minority” (1966: 506). Nevertheless, in many post-colonial “developing” nations, that ruthless minority had to, and were often able to, draw on greater normative force than colonial and pre-democratic regimes as they went about “modernizing the nation.” As we will see, what I will call the Nehruvian regime of dispossession in India enjoyed strong and fairly broad ideological support for many decades after independence; the neoliberal regime is, however, another story.

The other basis for compliance is appealing to the material interests of the dispossessed. Given the zero-sum nature of land possession, this is no easy task. While there were scant incentives for English peasants to relinquish the commons—they were driven off without compensation and transformed into a destitute proletariat—most contemporary societies require that those forcibly dispossessed of their private property be given some form of compensation. States sometimes base this compensation on an assessment of a property’s “fair market value” (though determining this in the absence of a voluntary transaction poses something of a problem), and, in recent decades, they have sometimes augmented this compensation with explicit policies for the “resettlement and rehabilitation” of those displaced by development projects. Occasionally this includes a guarantee of employment in the economic activity proposed for their land; sometimes it includes replacement land irrigated by the dam for which they are being flooded. Both are historically rare, and we will see that the track record of “compensation” and “resettlement and rehabilitation” in India is largely abysmal. However, the dispossessor almost always makes some sort of material promises to the dispossessed, trying to convince them that they will be given some stake in the “development” that their dispossession makes possible. Both the types of promises made and the ability of states to deliver on these promises depend crucially on the particular kind of accumulation that is driving dispossession. In other words, different regimes of dispossession are able to offer different kinds and degrees of material incentives to get peasants to comply with their own dispossession.

Compliance to dispossession is thus achieved through historically specific combinations of coercive, material and normative power. Does this mean that regimes of dispossession are *hegemonies*? In Gramsci’s use, hegemony refers to the ability of dominant classes to convince subordinate classes that dominant class rule serves more universal interests. It involves “the combination of force and consent,” with the latter being built through both cultural persuasion and material concessions (Gramsci 1971: 80, 161, 181; Burawoy 1979, 1985; Przeworski 1985). The concept of hegemony, however, aligns neither socially nor temporally with the politics of dispossession: hegemony refers to relatively enduring political alignments between classes (“historical blocs”) whereas dispossession is, in any given instance, a short-term process that cuts across both classes and political alignments. When the state indiscriminately dispossesses all those in a specific geographic area, it affects multiple and contradictory agrarian classes with diverse political allegiances developed around other—more constant—social processes. If someone complies with dispossession, this does not necessarily signal that they *consent* to it, much less that they endorse the larger political program of the class fraction it benefits: both are unnecessary to compliance. Conversely, just because someone resists dispossession does not mean they reject that form of development and the class interests it stands for (whether it is finance capital for an SEZ; industrial capital for a steel plant; agrarian capital for a dam); they might just not want to give their land for it. So, while it has a class nature, the politics of dispossession does not clearly map onto established hegemonies and their class inflected visions



of development. Hegemonies and dispossession are orthogonal social phenomenon. As the common minimum denominator of dispossession, (non)compliance is a better starting point. At rock bottom, regimes of dispossession need not produce consent, enduring political allegiance, or transformations in the subjectivities of the dispossessed; they just need them to get off the land.

### *The Outcomes of Dispossession: Accumulation and “Development”*

Only once they are off the land can accumulation proceed, realizing (and illuminating) the class interests driving dispossession, and triggering socio-economic changes that effect the dispossessed and society as a whole. To understand accumulation by dispossession, consequently, one must empirically examine what, in fact, happens on dispossessed land, what kinds of economic changes this unleashes, and who benefits from these changes. If regimes of dispossession vary in the types of economic purposes they dispossess land for, then the relationship between dispossession and development is not constant, but changes with these historically specific regimes. Therefore, the dispossession of direct producers is not a necessary stage of economic development: it is *neither a stage nor necessarily generative of development*. The concept of regimes of dispossession invites us to see dispossession as an ongoing form of coercive redistribution that serves different purposes and class interests in different periods but whose relationship to economic progress is always an open question.

How then should we study this empirically? If Marx identified two aspects of primitive accumulation, the transformation of land into capital and the transformation of direct producers into a proletariat, scholars of primitive accumulation have, until now, given much more attention to the second. The concept of regimes of dispossession forces us to emphasize the first. Rather than asking whether a completely dispossessed labor force is structurally good or bad for an economy, we ask: what is done with dispossessed land, what are its larger economic effects, and what happens to those immediately dispossessed? What differentiates the *kind* of accumulation generated by dispossession for a dam from that for a Special Economic Zone? How do the economic changes generated by each—in their surrounding areas, and in their linkages with a national economy—differ? Are there differences in the extent to which this accumulation compensates for the *dis*-accumulation of the agrarian economy previously supported by the land? And is there a difference between being dispossessed for one or the other? If so, what are the political implications of these differences? If some regimes of dispossession are more or less “developmental” than others, that is, if people *perceive* their economic payoff to be more or less beneficial, how does this effect their long-term ability to generate compliance and thus political stability? By pursuing these questions on the variable political economic effects of dispossession through comparative research, we can shed light on the distinctiveness of contemporary regimes of dispossession, assess their relative durability, and pinpoint their sources of weakness.

### *India’s Regimes of Dispossession: From Dams to Special Economic Zones*

The purpose of this dissertation is to compare what I call the developmentalist and neoliberal regimes of dispossession in India. The dispossession of land for large dams and public sector industry exemplifies the first, which dates from independence in 1947 to economic liberalization in 1991. The second, which started to emerge after neoliberal reforms 1991, reached maturity after 2000 with the large-scale dispossession of land for private Special Economic Zones. I base my analysis of the first on a large body of historical research along with my own archival and interview-based research on industrial development corporations. I base the

second on nineteen months of multi-method research into Special Economic Zones, which centers on my ethnographic case study of a large Special Economic Zone in the state of Rajasthan but also includes interviews and brief visits to SEZs in eight Indian states. To illustrate the point by point distinctiveness of each regime, the structure of the dissertation mirrors the sequence of dispossession itself: first the state establishes the purposes for which it will dispossess land; then it must produce compliance to that dispossession; then accumulation can proceed on the dispossessed land; and then the “developmental” consequences for the dispossessed can be assessed. When this sequence is repeated for long enough in enough places, one can begin to assess the long-term political dynamics of the regime of dispossession as a whole. Chapter 2 covers this entire sequence for the Nehruvian regime of dispossession; each of the remaining chapters is devoted to one part of this sequence for the neoliberal regime of dispossession.

Chapter 2 examines the regime of dispossession that prevailed in India between independence in 1947 and liberalization in the early 1990s. I call this the developmentalist regime of dispossession. Examining the major forms of land dispossession during that period—public sector dams, steel towns, industrial estates and mining—I argue that this developmentalist regime was defined by the dispossession of land for state-led projects seeking to expand the industrial and agricultural productivity of the country, for which it achieved compliance through coercion and a powerful ideological appeals to the national interest. The result of this dispossession was accumulation that disproportionately benefited the industrial bourgeoisie, dominant agrarian classes, and public sector elites. Although this accumulation had some beneficial spillover effects for a broader public, it came at the cost of the impoverishment and proletarianization of approximately 50 million rural people who were typically already among the country’s most poor and marginalized. While the ideological strength of this regime of dispossession compelled farmers to fairly reliably comply with their dispossession for 30 years, the emergence of anti-dispossession struggles in the 1970s and 1980s began to challenge this model of development and the “displacement” it required. However, this development model would itself give way before these political movements could significantly impede its ability to dispossess land.

Chapter 3 presents a theory of the transition from this developmentalist regime of dispossession to its neoliberal successor. I explain why the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the early 1990s led to the emergence of a new regime of dispossession characterized by the dispossession of land for increasingly privatized and decreasingly productive purposes. I show why the process of economic liberalization, in conjunction with the supply barrier of rural land markets, pushed Indian states to restructure themselves as land brokers for private capital. The emergence of “land broker states” signaled the transition to a neoliberal regime that not only dispossesses quantitatively more land, but does so for a much wider range of purposes. No longer confining itself to the dispossession of land for state-led projects of productive material expansion, states have turned to dispossessing peasants for any private economic purpose that constitutes “growth,” including real estate speculation. As a short hand, we can characterize this as a shift from a regime of “land for production” to one of “land for the market.” No longer is land dispossessed just for the production of commodities, but increasingly for its own commodification. This makes what I call the “rate of accumulation by dispossession”—the discrepancy between the price paid to farmers and its ultimate market value—the end of dispossession itself. I conclude by showing how this neoliberal regime of dispossession is proving more ideologically tenuous and politically explosive than its predecessor. In response to

widespread farmer opposition, which is successfully using the legitimating ideologies of the Nehruvian regime of dispossession against them, land broker states are attempting to orchestrate a class compromise with farmers through material concessions in the rate of accumulation by dispossession.

Chapter 4 begins my ethnographic study of the village I call Rajpura where the Rajasthan state government has successfully utilized real estate values to elicit farmer compliance to the dispossession of 3,000 acres of land for the Mahindra World City SEZ. The Mahindra World City is a rare case of an SEZ that has avoided strong farmer opposition, and this chapter explains how this happened. Drawing on ethnographic observation, interviews, and my random-sample survey of 93 families in four villages, I show how, through a truly neoliberal compensation model, the Rajasthan government tried to turn small farmers into petty speculators by giving them small plots of commercial-residential land adjacent to the SEZ. This gave farmers a small stake in the speculative land commodification generated by the project. I argue that it is not so much that the Rajasthan government bought the “consent” of farmers with higher land prices; rather, by transforming the experience of coercive dispossession into a “social game” of market participation, the policy successfully individualized farmers’ relation to the project, thereby utilizing existing inequalities in economic, cultural and social capital to divide and diffuse any potential opposition at the point of enclosure. Having fractured their interests and solidarities, the Mahindra World City acquired the private farmland and public grazing land of nine villages and became operational in 2008.

Chapter 5 examines the accumulation that this dispossession made possible. Using interviews and government documents obtained through India’s Right to Information Act, this chapter takes us inside the Mahindra World City SEZ to illustrate the synergistic combination of real estate speculation and “knowledge” intensive growth that is driving dispossession (here and in the majority of India’s SEZs). I show that SEZ developers are real estate investors who arbitrage on the differentials in land values made possible by state-mediated dispossession—what I call the rate of accumulation by dispossession. While they use half of the dispossessed land to build luxury real estate developments, they sell most of the remainder to Information Technology and Business Process Outsourcing companies, who construct office buildings and campuses and, in the process, bring the middle-class workers who can provide the demand for their housing colonies. The second half of the chapter begins to analyze how this accumulation intersects with the livelihoods of people in Rajpura. I show how accumulation inside the SEZ derives from the *disaccumulation* of agrarian assets in the surrounding villages—assets that even in the context of monsoon-fed agricultural and animal husbandry are highly significant to the dispossessed. I then show how the knowledge-intensive growth enabled by the dispossession of Rajpura’s residents has no chance of absorbing their newly “freed” labor. This disjuncture between the accumulation driving dispossession and the three quarters of Indians that live in rural India is, I argue, even greater than what occurred under the developmentalist regime of dispossession—and Chapter 7 will develop the political significance of this fact.

Chapter 6, the longest and most important of the dissertation, examines the process of agrarian social change generated by SEZ-induced real estate speculation and its developmental implications for Rajpura and the other surrounding villages. If the SEZ destroyed productive agrarian assets and only minimally absorbed local labor, its incidental byproduct was a dramatic land boom driven by domestic and global investors. We saw in Chapter 4 that local farmers were given a small stake in this land boom by the Rajasthan government’s compensation scheme: this makes the MWC probably the best possible SEZ in India to be dispossessed for. However, I

show that the developmental consequences of the SEZ remain bleak. I illustrate how inequalities of economic, cultural and social capital—rooted in the pre-existing agrarian class-caste structure—have shaped the highly unequal ability of farmers in Rajpura to benefit from land markets. While a certain measure of contingency is inherent to speculative processes, I show that in the aggregate, the upper castes have been far more successful at speculating on their plots and at appropriating rents as petty land brokers. The lower castes, faced with economic compulsion and operating with lesser education and market savvy, have sold their assets quickly and cheaply, and often been cheated by these brokers. Overall, the distribution of income from land sales corresponds closely with the semi-feudal caste hierarchies of the pre-existing agrarian structure. I then show how in the absence of a productive transformation of the local/regional economy by the SEZ, real estate earnings have been recycled into what Marx would call antediluvian forms of capital: land rent, merchant's capital, and usurer's capital. Instead of the productive ancillary economic transformations generated by dams and industrial projects, I show how the SEZ has instead triggered a process of economic *involution*. This has created a rather novel form of class differentiation based on people's uneven ability to transform their uneven returns from land speculation into niches in this involutory informal economy. Some farmers have ascended into a neo-rentier class; some tenuously hold on to small niches in the informal economy; others have dramatically descended into proletarianization and destitution. While the outcome is more differentiated than the fairly uniform proletarianization of those dispossessed for projects of the developmentalist era, the result is still impoverishing for the majority, and particularly for the already poor lower castes. It is also particularly disastrous for women, who have been entirely marginalized from this process but must cope with its assault on household reproduction. Without even the fairly broad transformative effects of the developmentalist era's dams or steel towns in its favor, we can characterize this outcome as "dispossession without development." The transition from a developmentalist to neoliberal regime of dispossession signifies *not* the ascendance to a higher stage of economic production, but merely the emergence of a new regime of redistributing wealth upwards—for purposes that are more narrow in their beneficiaries and with even more tenuous claims to the "public interest."

Chapter 7 broadens out from Rajpura to consider whether the compensation methods deployed there will be successful in dissipating India's "land wars" more generally, and thus rescue the neoliberal regime of dispossession from its present political difficulties. Since the neoliberal regime of dispossession has little hope of overcoming its ideological tenuousness—as few can be convinced that giving land to private companies for real estate speculation is a worthy "sacrifice for the nation"—its only chance is to build a class compromise based on concessions in the rate of accumulation. However, this chapter illustrates the substantial obstacles that exist to building a formidable and reliable class compromise around land values. The first obstacle is the inability of India's capitalist class to recognize its own interests in concessions and the seeming inability of the Indian state to autonomously impose concessions that are ultimately in the best interests of capitalists themselves. The second obstacle is the greater difficulty of negotiating a class compromise over land dispossession than over labor exploitation, which arises from the serial nature of dispossession and the absence of stable negotiating partners. The third and most fundamental obstacle is that building a class compromise on the basis of real estate values assumes what must be explained: which is how farmers come to value their land at its exchange value in the first place. Surveying India's land wars, I show that there remain substantial sections of India's rural population that refuse to engage in negotiations on the terrain of commodification. Their non-commodified orientations to land are ultimately the largest obstacle

to the neoliberal regime's attempt to substitute land prices for legitimacy. While material compliance will produce more Rajpuras (particularly in the peri-urban plains), it will be not be effective everywhere. The use of coercion will continue and perhaps expand, but its effectiveness is already decreasing. The upshot is that India's "land wars" are unlikely to end anytime soon, and farmers refusing to relinquish their land will likely constitute the single largest obstacle to the continuance of a neoliberal growth model in India. I conclude by projecting several possible political economic trajectories that might emerge from efforts to resolve these contradictions of a flailing neoliberal regime of dispossession.

Chapter 8 broadens out from India to consider how regimes of dispossession might be applied to other countries and contexts, and contribute to an emerging *sociology of dispossession*.

### *Regimes of Dispossession and the Extended Case Method*

It remains to explain the methodological approach of this dissertation and its relationship to the theoretical framework it seeks to develop. The question can surely be posed: how can one develop an argument about an entire regime of dispossession from one case? Surely, any generalizations extracted from one case will be partial and biased. Moreover, based on an analysis of two regimes of dispossession, how can one develop a theory of the relationship between dispossession and capitalism? In response to such objections, let me be clear about the relationship between method and theory that guides this dissertation.

The study uses the extended case method (Burawoy 1998; 2009), which attempts to reconstruct theory through the extended empirical observation of large processes in typically small places. In the present study, the theory is Marx's "primitive accumulation," and the place is a small village in East-Central Rajasthan that I call Rajpura, which has had its land dispossessed for one of North India's first and largest private Special Economic Zones. My argument does not ground its claims to "generalization" in the assumption that Rajpura or the Mahindra World City are "representative." While the economic activity taking place inside the Mahindra World City largely reflects that occurring in the majority of India's SEZs, it would be foolish to claim that all SEZs are alike; it would be even more preposterous to argue that any village in India can be "representative." In fact, the main criteria motivating my selection of this case is that it was an "anomaly": it was one of the few Special Economic Zones to overcome farmer opposition and actually become operational. The benefit of this is that I could actually study the entire sequence of accumulation by dispossession that was being interrupted by farmer opposition elsewhere. One of the purposes of this study is to assess whether Rajpura is in fact an anomaly, or a prototype of things to come. In Chapter 7, I address the question of the conditions under which the experience of Rajpura is likely to be replicated.

Rather than ground generalizations in claims to representativeness, the extended case method seeks to generalize principally by making two "extensions": by extending from the micro case to the macro context, and by extending from the empirical case to theory. The presumption underlying the first extension is that "there can be no microprocesses without macroforces, nor macroforces without microprocesses" (Burawoy 2009: 9). Tracing the link between the two is the job of contextualized ethnography. In this study, I trace rather large changes in the lives of different people in a Rajasthani village to the larger social forces of Indian capitalism. However, rather than reify these social forces with an exclusive focus on the village (Burawoy 2009: 247), I also try to give them empirical specificity (turn them into macro processes rather than macro forces) through interview-based research with government officials and corporate executives in

eight Indian states, and government documented obtained through the Right to Information Act. Moving between state structures, the economic strategies of capitalist firms, and the stories of individual farmers caught up in the process of accumulation by dispossession, I hope to show not only how a “great transformation” (Polanyi 2001[1944]) in Indian capitalism plays out in the micro-processes of village life, but to also show how these micro-processes themselves constitute this great transformation. Accumulation by dispossession is a social process that plays out—and is fought out—on the ground. Understanding its dynamics, its contingent outcomes, and its consequences for ordinary people is only possible through the prolonged observation of those people as they grapple with, adjust to, and fight back against dispossession in their daily lives. Capturing this requires another set of extensions: of the observer into the life of participants, and of observations of over time (Burawoy 2009: xv). Prolonged ethnographic studies of the micro-processes of dispossession in specific sites will raise the objection that they are “particular.” But instead of treating particularity and generality as opposites, the extended case method holds that “every particularity contains a generality” (Burawoy 1985: 18). In the particularity of dispossession in Rajpura, we can discern more general forces that characterize the new political economy of dispossession in India—macro forces that can only be understood by studying places like Rajpura. While I have taken care to situate this case within a macro-analysis of the new political economy of dispossession in India, only further comparative research of other seemingly particularistic sites of dispossession across the Indian sub-continent can advance and complicate our understanding of what I have called its neoliberal regime of dispossession. Similar studies in other parts of the world can tell us the extent to which this regime resembles those elsewhere. We return to these questions in Chapter 8.

This leads to the final extension: from case to theory. While some philosophies of science hold that knowledge progresses through the inductive accumulation of empirical facts, the extended case method holds that “facts” are only comprehensible through a prior theoretical framework. While we all unavoidably carry explicit or tacit theories in our heads, the extended case method proceeds through the deliberate improvement—or reconstruction—of existing theories. It is only in the context of a theoretical problematic that facts take on meaning. My study of Rajpura, which I take to be a case of India’s neoliberal regime of dispossession, takes on theoretical (rather than personal or political) significance not only from its comparison with a prior regime of dispossession studied by other scholars, but by the work this comparison does in advancing existing theories of the relationship between dispossession and capitalism. My hope is that this study makes headway in advancing a more satisfactory theoretical framework for the comparative study of dispossession; and that an emerging “sociology of dispossession” advances this theory much farther.

## Chapter 2. The Developmentalist Regime of Dispossession (1947-1991)

“If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the nation.”

—Jawaharlal Nehru to the villagers dispossessed for the Hirakud Dam

### INTRODUCTION

In the mid-twentieth century, governments across the so-called Third World embarked on ambitious programs of national development that have been variously described as statist, *dirigiste*, high-modernist or simply developmentalist. Though each had its national peculiarities, what these efforts typically shared was the explicit objective of alleviating grinding poverty and replacing colonial and neo-colonial dependence with autonomous and growing national economies. To achieve these objectives, mid-century economic planners pursued roughly similar strategies: they gave the state a large role in catalyzing economic modernization; they prioritized rapid development of the forces of production in industry and agriculture; and they made at least moderate commitments to equitable growth and redistribution.<sup>21</sup> In those countries just emerging from centuries of colonial rule, this “development project” (McMichael 1996) drew legitimacy from the aspirations of nationalist movements and the trust placed in their leaders, now ensconced in state power.

The Indian version of this development model is often termed “Nehruvian socialism,” after India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The term is somewhat misleading. While Nehru elicited the Indian parliament’s commitment to a “socialistic pattern of society,” in practice little socialization or redistribution of property occurred aside from modest land reforms and the nationalization of several sectors (several of them under Nehru’s daughter, Indira). India’s post-1947 economic model can more accurately be described as state capitalism: private industry was tightly regulated through a complex licensing system, the “commanding heights” of the economy were left to the public sector, and the imperative of rapid economic growth was leavened with modest schemes and policies to eliminate poverty and limit inequalities (Frankel 2005).

Scholarly debates about the effectiveness of this development model, the character of the state that pursued it, and the dominant class coalitions that supported it have largely drawn their evidence from the nature of state-managed capital-labor relations (Chibber 2003) and the distribution of state subsidies and expenditures (Bardhan 1984; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). In these debates, as in political economy more generally, capitalist development often appears as an abstract interplay between classes and the state over wages, profits and rents. But, as Lefebvre observes, the consequence of such abstraction from the physical world is that “the space of social practice is imperceptible” (Lefebvre 1991: 324). If every phase of economic development, following Lefebvre, produces its own space, how was space produced for state-led capitalism in the decades after independence?

Concretely, rapid industrialization entailed the construction of large factories, industrial townships for public sector firms (most prominently India’s steel towns), and government-run industrial estates. Such industrialization required raw materials extracted from mines in India’s mineral rich interiors and electricity from power plants and hydro-electric dams. Agricultural modernization meant the construction of ambitious river valley projects anchored by large dams

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<sup>21</sup> The various permutations of these elements depended on domestic class structures, geo-political ties, the legacies of different nationalist movements, and the idiosyncrasies of their leaders.

and extensive irrigation canals. Connecting all of these activities into a national economy entailed large investments in roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure.

These physical forms of Nehruvian development did not float in the air; creating space for them in a densely populated agrarian country entailed the large-scale dispossession of land from rural agriculturalists. By one estimate, approximately 50 million people—as many as the population of Spain—were displaced from their land for “development projects” between 1947 and the onset of economic liberalization in the early 1990s (Muricken et. al. 2003: 9). If extensive expropriation of land from peasants was both a pre-condition for state-led capitalist development and a significant axis of the economic redistribution it entailed, how then should we rethink this Nehruvian period of state-led capitalist growth?

Principally, we need to understand not just how the Nehruvian state mediated capital-labor relations, manipulated agricultural prices or distributed subsidies, but how it managed to secure the large-scale transfer of land from peasants to the “modern sector.” We need to understand, in other words, how it operated as a regime of dispossession. To reiterate, whereas a regime of production is a way of organizing the extraction of surplus labor from workers, a regime of dispossession is a way of organizing the expropriation of assets from their owners/users. I have argued that it has two components: a state willing to dispossess land for a set of economic purposes tied to particular class interests; and a way of generating compliance to this dispossession. Drawing on the examples of large dams, industrial complexes, and mining, this chapter will illustrate the distinct regime of dispossession that formed under the Nehruvian state and its developmental consequences for different classes in Indian society.

Rather than proceed through discrete case studies of each major form of dispossession in the post-independence period, this chapter provides a thematic treatment of the developmentalist regime of dispossession as a whole. My argument is that underlying the distinct sectoral forms of the Nehruvian development project was a fairly coherent and effective regime of dispossession, distinct from that which preceded and followed it. Since the purpose of this discussion is to assess the distinctiveness of this regime *vis a vis* the current neoliberal regime, the structure of this chapter will mirror the structure of the remainder of the dissertation. This structure follows the sequence of dispossession itself: first that state establishes a set of purposes for which it wants to dispossess land; then it must produce compliance among the dispossessed in order to get them to peacefully surrender their land; then accumulation can proceed on the dispossessed land; and only then can the developmental consequences of this accumulation for the dispossessed and “the nation” be assessed.

In brief, I argue that the developmentalist regime dispossessed land for productive and largely public industrial and infrastructural projects for which it achieved compliance through a combination of coercion and powerful appeals to national progress. Its consequence was to facilitate agrarian and industrial accumulation (albeit sometimes ineffectively) that disproportionately benefited India’s “dominant proprietary classes” (Bardhan 1984) of large farmers, the urban bourgeoisie and government employees, while typically impoverishing and proletarianizing the dispossessed. Although this regime of dispossession was relatively successful in producing compliance to dispossession for thirty years, I conclude by breaking our sequential treatment of dispossession as a process and moving through historical time to the 1970s and 1980s when organized anti-dispossession struggles finally began to gain strength. While scattered and only occasionally successful in stopping their own dispossession, these movements challenged the legitimacy of “destructive development” and pioneered anti-dispossession politics in India. Yet, their comparative lack of success compared to contemporary



“land wars” serves to underscore the enduring strength of the developmentalist regime of dispossession compared to its neoliberal successor.

## THE DEVELOPMENTALIST STATE AND DISPOSSESSION

The ultimately political question that defines a regime of dispossession is this: what kinds of economic purposes are considered sufficiently public to justify state expropriation of land? This is, to be sure, partly a legal question as to what constitutes a “public purpose” under eminent domain statutes or other laws enabling the compulsory purchase of land. Nevertheless, the question is ultimately one of political will rather than judicial interpretation for two reasons. The first is that the definition of public purpose can be changed through legislative amendments, as has been done several times in India to suit changing interests and circumstances. The second is that there may be a mismatch between law and practice: eminent domain laws may allow the state to acquire land for private corporations while the state seldom exercises this right in practice, as was the case for many decades after independence. Or the state might start acquiring land for purposes that place it at the boundaries of existing law, as is currently the case with private real estate projects. So while noting the changing legal context for dispossessing land in India, I will focus on state practices of dispossession: what the state actually did acquire land for in the four decades between independence and economic liberalization.

To understand the practice of dispossession under the Nehruvian developmentalist state, it will help to briefly contrast it with the practices of its colonial predecessor. Under colonial rule, the dispossession of rural land largely served the imperatives of extraction, circulation and repatriation that guided colonial political economy (Goswami 2004; Ahuja 2009). If one compares the main forms of dispossession under the Raj against those of the Nehruvian state, two features of the first stand out: its focus on extraction rather than production, and the greater scope given to the private than public sector. Though the late colonial period marked a shift towards more significant investments in “public works” (particularly dams and irrigation projects) (Goswami 2004; Ahuja 2009), comparatively more attention was given to enclosing forests for timber extraction, and implanting the infrastructure for transporting the natural wealth of the sub-continent: canals, roads, ports, and most significantly, railways. Notwithstanding a later turn to more direct state involvement, the railways most clearly illustrated the willingness of the colonial state to acquire land for the direct benefit of private capital: the Indian railways (as with railways elsewhere) were one of the first and grandest examples of what would now be called “public-private partnership” in infrastructure development. To build India’s extensive railway network, the colonial state granted private companies publicly condemned land along with a guaranteed rate of return, much to the enrichment of London stockholders (Goswami 2004: 51-53; Ahuja 2009). Early ports and irrigation projects were similarly built by private investors through this “guarantee system” (Goswami 2004: 53). Without equating the periods, we will see that this direct dispossession for private capital accumulation has more in common with the neoliberal than developmentalist regime of dispossession. Nevertheless, in building these “public works,” the British bequeathed to the post-colonial state its legal framework for dispossessing land. While natural resource exploitation entailed exerting state authority over forests held in various forms of customary tenure (Guha 1989), and the taxation of the peasantry required establishing private property in land at the expense of customary tenants (Guha 1996), infrastructure creation required the legal means to condemn private property itself. Beginning with the Bengal Regulation Act of 1824, the British introduced the principle of eminent domain to India, establishing the means to forcibly acquire private land for a “public purpose.” This

culminated, after a series of amendments, in the Land Acquisition Act of 1894—which remains to this day the chief legal instrument for expropriating private land in India.

But a legal apparatus does not make a regime of dispossession. If the independent Indian state utilized the legal-coercive instruments of dispossession bequeathed by the colonial state, it did so for post-colonial ends. As Goswami shows, nationalist political economy sought to replace the colonial disjuncture between the generation and realization of capital with a “strongly autarkic” vision of capital accumulation on a national scale (2004: 280). While the dispossession of land in the colonial period served extraction by metropolitan capital, in the post-independence period it served the project of national industrialization. The principal spatial forms of this national industrialization were river-valley schemes and public sector industrial projects.

In post-independence India, and indeed throughout the Third World, large dams and multi-purpose river valley projects were paradigmatic forms of national development. While they were in many cases initiated under colonial rule, their execution by post-colonial governments became high priorities of post-independence planning and politically potent markers of national progress. They promised to generate power and food, raise incomes and create employment, contribute to national self-sufficiency and, indeed, to national security. But damming large river valleys was not possible without flooding the homes, fields and forests of millions of people living along their typically fertile banks. This made dams by far the largest source of dispossession in post-independence India (Fernandes 2008: 91) and indeed in the developing world. While the Indian government never kept track, the estimates are that between 20 and 50 million people have been displaced for the over 4,000 dams built in India so far (Thukral 1992: 13-14; Banerji et al. 2000; Muricken et al. 2003: 8; Fernandes 2008).

Aside from dams, the largest sources of dispossession in the Nehruvian period were the industrial projects to which the dams provided water and electricity. India’s Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961), reflecting the famous Mahalanobis-Nehru planning model, called for rapid industrialization with an emphasis on heavy industries in the public sector. The Indian state, through an array of public sector companies, directly undertook the responsibility of catalyzing industry in a variety of sectors, including metals and alloys, capital goods, chemicals and fertilizers, transport, defense, and engineering. The most grandiose of these endeavors was the construction of India’s public-sector steel towns. The Bhilai, Rourkela, Durgapur, and Bokaro steel plants, and the “industrial townships” built to house their employees, were the archetypical spatial form of Nehruvian industrialism. They were also a tremendous source of dispossession. Establishing steel plants in remote rural areas where there were iron-ore deposits entailed acquiring very large chunks of land, in many cases from *adivasi* (indigenous) populations who often had unrecognized, customary claims to their forests and fields (Roy 2007: 140). The Bhilai Steel plant in Madhya Pradesh (now Chhattisgarh), with its captive mines and residential township, occupied 17 km<sup>2</sup>, for which 96 villages had their lands acquired (Parry 1999a: 132; Parry and Struempell 2008: 55). At least thirty villages containing approximately 2,500 families were displaced for the Rourkela Steel plant in Orissa (Burman 1968: 26).

Beginning in the First Five-Year Plan, the Indian government also began acquiring land for the creation of “industrial estates,” initially with the purpose of catalyzing small-scale, labor-intensive industrialization. The idea of assembling, developing, and subdividing tracts of land to be sold or leased to multiple industrial occupants dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to stand-alone factories, company towns, or industrial districts, industrial estates were comprehensively planned areas developed by a single organization for multiple industrial users who would benefit from shared infrastructure and often ready-made factory “sheds.” The first

industrial estate was created in 1896 at Trafford Park, Manchester and the second shortly thereafter at the Clearing Industrial District near Chicago. While these were private ventures, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, European governments built industrial estates to spur industrial development, create employment in depressed regions, and to decongest cities. In the 1950s, the industrial estate gained new impetus as a tool to industrialize developing countries; it was widely promoted by the UN and the United States International Cooperation Administration (UN 1961: 1; Bredo 1962). In India, the Nehruvian state embarked on the most ambitious program of industrial estate construction in the developing world.

By the late 1960s, industrial estates had lost their association with the small-scale industries program and, renamed “industrial areas,” had become the main means of promoting medium and large-scale industry at the state-level; acquiring land for them was the main activity of state industrial development corporations (IDCs) across the country. Since their inception, most of the land acquired and allotted to medium and large-scale industries that do not require stand-alone locations near natural resource deposits (like steel mills or cement factories), has been within industrial areas.<sup>22</sup> The Rajasthan Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation (RIICO), for example, had, by 2010, acquired over 60,000 acres of land for 322 industrial areas across the state (RIICO 2010: 5). By 2002, the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation had acquired 130,000 acres of land for 225 industrial areas (MIDC n.d.). The Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation had acquired 130,000 acres for industrial areas by 2010 (Interview, APIIC official, 11/24/10). By 2011, the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation had acquired over 79,000 acres for 184 industrial areas (GIDC n.d.). Large industrial areas can be as big as 1,500-2,000 acres, but many measure in the hundreds of acres – bigger than the earlier industrial estates, but smaller than the steel towns and today’s multi-purpose SEZs. Because of their sheer number, however, they cumulatively became the largest source of forcible land acquisition for non-extractive industries. IDCs became the main instruments for acquiring private agricultural land and public grazing land for industrial purposes, developing, by the 1990s, highly rationalized land banks with yearly acquisition targets.

Finally, of course, there was mining. Rapid industrialization depended on coal, iron, bauxite and many other minerals that often lay beneath the home and fields of *adivasis* living in remote forest areas. Large-scale mineral extraction had begun under the British, and accelerated after independence as public sector companies sought to provide the nation’s industries with the requisite minerals and energy and reduce its dependence on imported raw materials. This mining was integrated with the above industrial projects and hydro-electric dams in regional complexes, such as in Singrauli (the “Ruhr Valley” of India), providing the raw materials that would be transformed by labor, power, and science into industrial production. Standing in the way, however, were the inhabitants of the typically remote forest areas under which the nation’s mineral riches lay; they would have to be removed in larger numbers for this natural wealth to see the light of day. As with industrial and hydro-electric projects, mining in the post-independence decades entailed the dispossession of millions of people—Fernandes (2008: 91) provides an estimate of 1.2 million for just eight states.

Why should we think of these sectorally-specific causes of dispossession in the Nehruvian period as cohering into a regime? Principally because they had two things in

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<sup>22</sup> A RIICO official told me that at most 2% of the land they have acquired has been outside of their industrial areas (Interview, 12/24/10).

common: they were state-led projects that were typically managed by the public sector, and they were focused on production narrowly understood. As these features critically distinguish the developmentalist from the neoliberal regime of dispossession, they require some emphasis and elaboration.

### *State-led*

In all of the above cases, dispossession served state-initiated projects that were typically controlled by the public sector. In comparatively few cases did the state acquire land and directly hand it over to private industrialists. While land dispossession did serve to facilitate private accumulation, this happened indirectly through the use of public infrastructure rather than the direct transfer of land to private hands. Until economic liberalization, dams were state projects controlled by public agencies such as the Central Water and Power Commission, or river-basin parastatals modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority, such as the early Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) (Klingensmith 2007). While irrigation would ultimately be provided to individual farmers, and electricity to private (as well as public) industrialists and individual consumers, dams were nevertheless built and maintained by arms of the state. These authorities and the engineers and technocrats they employed embodied what James Scott (1998) has called “high-modernist” state planning, which was premised on *centralized* control over natural resources (Baviskar 1995). Those flooded from their villages for these projects were, in a proximate sense, dispossessed for public infrastructure—indeed, the most prestigious public works of the post-independence state.

Industrial towns were similarly archetypal state spaces: the land acquired for them rested with public-sector firms that managed not just the factories but the industrial townships that housed their employees. In steel towns, Hindustan Steel was the owner, employer, landlord, town planner, and local political authority (Roy 2007: 138). Steel towns were the product of a “high-modernist” state (Scott 1998) pushing through an ambitious project of industrial transformation with a good dose of social engineering. The less grandiose industrial estates were also developed and operated by government undertakings who, as landlords, collected the ground rent from industrial tenants to whom they leased the land. Many of the tenants were private sector corporations, though others were in the public, joint or assisted sectors (parastatal industrial development corporations even held equity in many of them). The crucial point is that *land rent accrued to the state not private capitalists*, who were allotted leased land on the condition of engaging in industrial production. Early administrators of these programs even observed that it would be inappropriate for the government to help acquire land for industrial estates set up by private entrepreneurs who would resell the land at a private profit (Alexander 1963: 36). Indeed, many state governments were apparently even reluctant to let private companies own their own factories in the industrial estates, “on the ground that independent free holding will destroy the group character and usefulness of the Estate” (Alexander 1963: 37).

While the Indian state inherited a mining sector largely controlled by private companies, post-independence exploration was controlled by the Geological Survey of India and extraction and processing dominated by public sector companies such as Coal India Limited, the National Aluminum Company (NALCO), and the National Mineral Development Corporation. State governments legally owned the minerals in their jurisdictions, while the central government owned offshore resources. In 1973, coal production was completely nationalized by Indira Gandhi.

In sum, the Nehruvian state largely dispossessed land for its own projects. As Isher Judge Ahluwalia observes of this period, “Infrastructure was naturally seen as the exclusive responsibility of the public sector” (Ahluwalia 1998: 257). While particular classes benefited from this dispossession, as we will discuss shortly, it was typically not by taking direct possession of the land.

### *Productive*

It was also not by capturing the ground rent on dispossessed land. Whether for the public or private sector, dispossession during this period served a development model that can be described as “productivist.” Whatever the diverse intellectual strains that went into post-independence economic planning, and their divergent positions towards the role of private capital, all but the quickly marginalized Gandhians agreed on one thing: economic independence required a rapid development of the forces of production (Zachariah 2005). This emphasis of Nehruvian economic planning was essentially anti-neoclassical: it did not seek to increase economic activity in general, but rather to prioritize the expansion of those sectors—heavy industry and agriculture—that were most essential to national self-reliance.<sup>23</sup> Dams would increase the agricultural productivity and food self-sufficiency of the country while also providing power for industrialization. Steel towns would provide the basic building block of an industrial society. While slightly more “low-modernist” (Gilbert 2003) in their initial small-scale industry avatar, industrial estates were resolutely focused on modern technology. When land was leased to private companies within them, stipulations were built into their leases to limit speculation. Mineral extraction was also not a matter of asset stripping to sell on global markets, but was made subservient to the needs of domestic and particularly public sector industrialization. Mineral exports were limited, prices controlled, and priority allocation given to public sector enterprises. Even in the context of urban planning, land acquisition on peri-urban fringes was done with the purpose of *limiting* the scope of land speculation (Merrilat 1970: 224), which we will see is quite the opposite from the case today.

Overall, we can call this a regime of “land for production.” Land was largely dispossessed in the Nehruvian period for state-led projects that sought to expand economic accumulation through the production of commodities. This statist and narrowly productivist orientation of the development model for which land was dispossessed in the Nehruvian period only seems remarkable from the standpoint of today as the Indian state expropriates land for private Special Economic Zones and other projects that provide land to private corporations for real estate development. What bears emphasizing is that this would have been unthinkable under the developmentalist regime. The Nehruvian state did not consider it its responsibility to force peasants to surrender their land for projects that did not fit the goals of state-led industrialization and agricultural modernization. In the next chapter, we will see how this restrictive regime of dispossession crumbled after liberalization in the early 1990s.

### *Social Principles in the Production of Space*

Finally, while inessential to my conception of a regime of dispossession, it is worth noting how the Nehruvian state’s control over the economic development enabled it to insert various social commitments into the way it appropriated and produced space. Since the earliest

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<sup>23</sup> For neoclassical economics, any form of economic exchange is equivalent with respect to the growth of the economy; Nehruvian planning placed emphasis on the development of strategic sectors. The language of “self-reliance” as an explicit planning objective is first mentioned in the Third Five Year Plan (Ahluwalia 1998: 257-259).

meetings of the National Planning Commission in the 1930s, there was an abiding concern to spread economic development evenly across the country and to promote the industrialization of “backward areas” (Zachariah 2005: 218). As Goswami observes, “The post-colonial developmentalist regime, particularly its Nehruvian avatar, sought to overcome the inherited colonial geography of uneven development by extending infrastructures and capital investment to so-called backward regions understood to have temporally lagged behind the nation as a whole” (2004: 130). In post-independence planning documents, including India’s Five Year Plans, there is a repeated concern with promoting “balanced regional development,” generating employment, and “uplifting” the “weaker sections” (Ahluwalia 1998: 262).<sup>24</sup> These commitments, no matter how successful in practice, did shape the way that agrarian land was transformed into industrial space.

A large argument in favor of steel plants was that, though relatively capital intensive, they would bring industrial jobs to India’s “backward areas.” As Jonathan Parry (2003) notes, planning priorities of the time emphasized employment rather than profit in the public sector. The Bhilai Steel Plant retained higher staffing levels than European steel mills of comparable size, employing 65,000 regular employees at its peak in the 1980s, not including contract workers and employees of ancillary industries (Parry 2003: 222). The result was that at least some of the dispossessed became, by the 1970s, part of the Indian public sector’s labor aristocracy (Parry 2003).

Industrial estates, as we noted, were initially built for the sole purpose of supporting small-scale and rural industrialization that would “provide immediate large-scale employment” (Government of India 1956). They were, moreover, invested with the idealism of post-independence nation-building. The literature of the time is peppered with high-minded intentions like “ensuring a more equitable distribution of the national income” (Government of India 1956) and “fostering a spirit of cooperation and joint enterprise” among entrepreneurs (Alexander 1963: 49). Their successor industrial areas also reflected the moderate commitments to geographical equity and social welfare of the post-independence Nehruvian state. As an official of Rajasthan’s Industrial Development Corporation (RIICO) contrasted their industrial areas with private SEZs, “Business will only acquire land in fast-moving regions. But being a government agency, we also have to look at slow-moving regions” (Interview, 24/12/10). Trying to bring investment to “backward areas” often involved providing liberal equity, cheap credit and land rebates on investments in “tribal areas” and “no industry districts” (RIICO 1988). RIICOs newsletters up until the early 1990s also routinely advertise rebates of up to 50% on industrial land for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, the handicapped, ex-servicemen, war widows, women, and small industries. Labor-intensive industries were given priority in land allotment into the early 1990s (RIICO 1993).

The limited success and paternalistic nature of these efforts makes it tempting to retrospectively dismiss them as another form of Nehruvian window-dressing on otherwise capitalist policies. Yet, they stand in marked contrast to the post-liberalization relinquishing of these commitments in favor of giving free reign to the private sector. These social commitments, no matter how successful in practice, combined with the state-driven and productivist character of industrial areas, place them squarely within a development model that enjoyed significant public legitimacy among significant sections of the populace. We will see that the public legitimacy of this form of state-led national industrialization, slightly leavened with

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<sup>24</sup> This is similar to what Neil Brenners (2004) calls “spatial Keynesianism,” but which we might call in this context “spatial Nehruvianism.”

commitments to social justice and poverty alleviation, was consequential for the Nehruvian state's ability to compel people to relinquish their land for it. Let us turn then to how the Nehruvian state produced this compliance.

#### COMPLIANCE: SACRIFICING FOR THE NATION

I have argued that there are three possible bases for building compliance to dispossession: coercion, normative persuasion, and material compensation. While dispossession is an inherently and transparently coercive process, in most circumstances it operates through some mixture of all three, with their relative weight varying across regimes. While both democratic and non-democratic countries have often relied heavily on coercive force to take land from peasants, the stability of any regime of dispossession rests on its ability to go beyond mere force and mobilize normative appeals and/or material compensation. In this section, I will assess the extent to which the developmentalist regime of dispossession was able to call upon material and normative inducements to get farmers to relinquish their land for the state-led and productivist development projects described above. I should be clear that it is not my intention to separate the ideological and material realms into air-tight containers. As E.P. Thompson reminds us, "every contradiction is a conflict of value as well as a conflict of interest.... Every class struggle is at the same time a struggle over values" (1995: 231). Moreover, we should heed Weber's caution that, "the causal chain extending from the command to the actual fact of compliance can be quite varied" (1978: 946). Without delving into psychology, which is anyway quite difficult given the historical sources available, the sociologist is more likely to be successful in distinguishing between the different modes through which authorities try to establish compliance to dispossession and the extent to which their commands are "heeded to a socially relevant degree" (Weber 1979: 948).

Making the most out of the historical sources that are available, I will argue that the material inducements offered to dispossessed farmers in the post-independence decades were modest to slim; however, the characteristics of the Nehruvian development model outlined above gave it relatively broad public legitimacy. This sometimes persuaded farmers to give their land for "the nation," and more often probably convinced them that resistance would be futile. The evidence is unfortunately unsatisfactory. What we can say is that critiquing the Nehruvian development model was not an asset to these struggles. On the contrary, Nehruvian developmentalism constituted a powerful ideological formation for many decades, which made it relatively easy to brand opposition to it as self-interested and particularistic obstructions of national progress. In any case, where material and ideological appeals failed to convince farmers, swift repression ensued and was itself successfully legitimized by the overriding public support for economic development. It was only in the 1970s, and particularly in the 1980s, that substantial cracks started to appear in this regime's ideological power; however, these cracks were not enough to fundamentally obstruct its operations before the regime itself went through a transition.

#### *Material Incentives*

The material incentives for surrendering one's land for a dam or industrial project during the Nehruvian era were at best modest. With few exceptions, the extensive literature on development-induced displacement is very clear that for many decades the displaced were shoved off their land with scandalously little compensation and little regard for their

“resettlement and rehabilitation” (e.g. Fernandes and Thukral 1989; Thukral 1992; Mathur 1995; Cernea 1999; Parasuraman 1999; Fernandes 2008). We must keep in mind, however, that the development made possible by dispossession is always prospective at the time of dispossession: nobody really knows how it will actually turn out. Many farmers may have believed in promises of compensation, jobs, facilities, and other improvements—promises that were almost always subsequently broken. It must also be emphasized that those who were dispossessed for these development projects were rarely consulted or adequately informed (and in fact often misinformed), and typically only learned what was happening when government officials came to survey their land (Baviskar 1995: 201) or Prime Minister Nehru arrived with great pomp to lay a foundation stone (Thukral 1992: 22-23; Bhanot and Singh 1992: 109). Some residents of the Narmada Valley recalled unwittingly carrying the instruments of the first surveyors, only learning of their purpose later (Sangvai 2002: 39). In the absence of good information, rumors and misinformation fill the vacuum. Eventually, government officials and politicians would appear in the villages—sometimes with armed guards—to promise compensation or other benefits from the project. But in comparatively few cases was the decision of whether to voluntarily accept compensation and vacate one’s land a well-informed and free decision. Let us nevertheless examine what was offered to dispossessed farmers in this period.

We can start with the compensation awarded for acquired land for which ownership rights were recognized. According to India’s Land Acquisition Act (LAA), private land owners are to be compensated for forcibly acquired land at its “fair market price” plus a “solatium” of fifteen percent in recognition of the involuntary nature of the transaction. How to determine the fair market price of land in the absence of a voluntary sale is, however, a problem that plagues the use of eminent domain anywhere; in India, it has preoccupied courts and utilitarian-minded government officials since colonial times and prompted multiple amendments to the LAA.<sup>25</sup> The system that has evolved in practice creates an assessment of the value of different categories of land based on an average of previous land sales in the area. This government assessed rate is invariably much less than the actual market rate. In part, this is the case today because government officials deliberately keep it low to minimize the Stamp Duty assessed on land sales (keeping much of real estate transactions in the black). More significant, however, is that under India’s land classification system, agricultural land is only assessed at its agricultural value, not taking into account its prospective use after acquisition. In fact, the LAA *prevents* the government from considering the prospective value of the land given its intended use when calculating compensation. Where land prices are rising because of development projects or urbanization, this creates large discrepancies between actual and assessed market value. In particularly remote areas, meanwhile, there are often few land transactions to base assessments on, and these assessments invariably fall below the land’s replacement cost in neighboring areas. With the abiding concern of keeping the costs of state-led industrialization low, the Indian state has always been content to maintain miserly compensation rates, even fighting courts cases (Bhanot and Singh 1992: 112) and introducing legislative amendments (Merillat 1970) to keep it that way. While initially this reflected concerns to keep down the cost of land reforms by minimizing compensation to landlords, this gave way to the imperative of keeping down the cost of public sector industry and infrastructure.

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<sup>25</sup> This is evident from a reading of the various colonial-era legal commentaries on the Land Acquisition Act (1894) and its predecessors, which are available at the India Office archives of the British Library, London. See, for example, Beverly (1888), Donogh (1913), and Venkataraman (1938).



The result is that those dispossessed for Nehruvian development projects were often given scandalously low compensation. For example, those dispossessed for the Nagarjunasagar Dam in the 1950s were offered Rs. 100 to 150 (about \$2-3 at the time) per acre of land (Singh and Samantray 1992: 69). As late as the 1990s, oustees of the Tehri dam in what is now Uttarakhand were offered Rs. 12,000 (\$274 at the time) per acre of *irrigated* land (Kedia 2008: 121). Such miserly cash compensation, some of which also made its way into the hands of corrupt officials (Viegas 1992: 40), was often not enough to allow the displaced to buy alternative land. Moreover, those who could not prove formal title to their land—a common occurrence in “tribal areas”—did not receive compensation at all, even though they may have been cultivating the land for generations. Very rarely were people compensated for common pool resources such as forests, grazing lands and water bodies that were crucial to rural livelihoods; in their country study for the World Commission on Dams (WCD), Banerji et al. (2000: 220) found that out of forty-seven large dams in their study, in only two did the government even try to value these. It was probably transparent to most that cash compensation would be an inadequate substitute for their land and was therefore not a compelling incentive to surrender it.

Aside from cash compensation, there were case by case efforts to offer farmers replacement agricultural land for their dispossessed land. Banerji et al. find that this was attempted in fourteen of the forty seven dams in their study (2000: 222). This “land for land” compensation typically came in the form of barren waste or forest land that had to be reclaimed (by the oustees) for cultivation, and it was usually smaller in acreage than what farmers previously owned (usually fixed at 2-5 acres). In some projects, farmers were offered irrigated land in the command area of the dams they were being dispossessed for, such as in the Upper Kolab Project in Orissa (Patnaik 1996: 131), the Pong Dam in Himachal Pradesh (Bhanot and Singh 1992) and the Sardar Sarovar project in the Narmada Valley. Often this was only offered after farmer agitation (Bhanot and Singh 1992: 102; Parasuraman 1999: 162). We will see that these offers very often did not materialize in practice except when organized social movements began to enforce it in the 1970s and 1980s. However, when the promises were credible, they could sometimes entice farmers to leave their land, or at least serve to divide potential opposition (Burman 1968; Patnaik 1996: 145-149).

In the case of public sector industrial projects, one significant promise to the dispossessed was that they would receive employment for at least one family member. In 1967, the Government of India issued a directive that all public sector industries should provide one job to each family that lost land for them (Parasuraman 1999: 55). Some state governments also passed policy circulars enshrining this practice (Ramanathan 2008). In some cases, such as the Rourkela Steel Plant, offers of employment only came after farmer agitation (Ramanathan 2008: 32-33; Burman 1968). Those displaced before these resolutions, however, were not covered; and very often those who were covered had to fight court battles for decades to get the promised employment (Ramanathan 2008: 30-33). Offers of public employment did, however, become a significant component of compensation packages for industrial projects and often became a bargaining point between the state and oustees—at least until courts started to frown upon such preferential employment in the 2000s (Ramanathan 2008: 30-33).

We should keep in mind, however, that wage labor was not always an enticing option for peasants and indigenous cultivators. In their early study of those displaced for the Koyna Dam in Maharashtra in the 1960s, Karve and Nimbkar found that the displaced were not interested in construction at the dam site, which they considered “beneath them” (1969: 73). While preferential employment was a large demand of those displaced for the Rourkela Steel Plant in

Orissa (Burman 1968), Parry notes that many of the *adivasis* dispossessed for the Bhilai Steel Plant in then Madhya Pradesh were less interested, partly because they were scared of the massive buildings and furnace (Parry 1999b: 112-113). It remains hard to assess the significance of employment in motivating people to relinquish their land: for most, it seems to have been a secondary concern to replacement land, though public sector employment would have been far more enticing than casual construction labor.

We should further note that aside from compensation, there was hardly any framework in place at this time for “resettlement and rehabilitation:” the first term referring to the mere provision of an alternative living site, and the second to a more substantial effort to restore the dispossessed to something like their previous quality of life (Cernea 1999). The Indian government did not have a national resettlement and rehabilitation policy until the 2000s, and only a few states started to introduce them in the 1970s after farmer agitations started to emerge. While some of the steel plants seem to have taken a bit more care to provide resettlement sites, Banerji et al. found that fewer than a quarter of dam projects in their study offered the displaced replacement land for housing (2000: 221). When there were resettlement provisions, it usually consisted of building materials or cash compensation for houses, or in some cases hastily constructed sheds on poorly equipped sites that often lacked even the basic amenities like water, schools, health clinics and decent road access. Less than half of the large dams in Banerji et al.’s sample provided for any of these amenities (2000: 222). In some cases, farmers refused to even move to these sites, preferring to shift their homes to marginal hill land above the reservoirs until that became unviable, or in other cases living with family or making the inevitable migration to cities or other areas in search of wage labor. Viegas observes that only 11% of those dispossessed for the Hirakud Dam opted to settle in the resettlement sites (1992: 49). The resettlement sites for the Sardar Sarovar Project, which had a more progressive R&R policy than most dams, were depressingly bleak, consisting of bad land and tin sheds without schools or hospitals. While this is partly the consequence of broken promises, the sorry nature of resettlement packages would have been immediately apparent to many.

In sum, with some significant exceptions, there was not a tremendous material incentive for farmers to relinquish their land for industrial and infrastructure projects in the Nehruvian period. The exception was offers of irrigated land or public sector employment where those were possible and offered to the displaced. These could tempt some farmers, and sometimes divide them. When farmer agitations did emerge, they often bargained over these terms. But, even without the benefit of hindsight, it was apparent to all that the dispossessed were not going to experience an immediate economic benefit from their dispossession. They were being asked, as Nehru put it, to “sacrifice” for the nation.

### *Normative Persuasion*

If material incentives were slight, to what extent were normative appeals to the national interest effective in compelling farmers to vacate their lands? There is little doubt that such appeals had considerable strength in the Nehruvian period, at least among *some* sections of the Indian public. Gunnar Myrdal observed of India in the 1960s that, “The modernization ideals were, and still are, proclaimed as a sort of state religion” (Myrdal 1968: 276). It has often been repeated that in the decades after independence, there was an “overwhelming consensus in favour of a heavy industry-oriented, state-supported model of development” (Guha 2007). Historians have amply documented how this developmentalism emerged out of anti-colonial nationalism, which invested economic modernization with the moral imperative of overcoming

colonial exploitation (Goswami 2005; Zachariah 2005). Others have argued more specifically that this association lent widespread public legitimacy to projects like large dams (Khagram 2004: 35; Guha 2007: 224-225) and steel towns (Roy 2007: 140) that required massive displacement. Khagram (2004: 34), for example, speaks of the “overwhelming political consensus behind big dam building.” Others have amply highlighted the central place of large dams in the nationalist imaginary of political leaders, administrators, engineers and intellectuals (Klingensmith 2007). The nagging question remains: outside of the urban educated classes, how widespread was this “consensus” on economic modernization? Did those dispossessed for these projects agree with this vision of development and comply with dispossession out of a recognition of its legitimacy?

Aside from the general sociological difficulty of separating and weighing different motivations for action, the limited historical evidence makes any answer to this question incomplete. Unfortunately, many who gave their land for dams and steel towns in the decades after independence were never asked their opinion on the matter and their voices are not well documented in the historical record. Most studies of development-induced displacement only emerged in the 1980s, once agitation by affected populations and an emerging environmental and indigenous rights discourse started drawing scholarly and activist attention to the issue. Of those studies which did emerge, the vast majority addressed the ultimate socio-economic consequences of dispossession, and only tangentially reconstructed people’s opinions about the process at the time (perhaps out of their own assumption that displacement was inevitable and legitimate so long as the displaced were properly compensated).

What we do know is the following. First, the post-colonial Indian state made some significant attempts to spread the gospel of economic modernization among peasants and workers who were often taken to be traditionally minded and impervious to the appeals of scientific technological progress. This took the form of propagandizing government publications such as the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting’s “Projects of Plenty,” popular films such as the twelve-part series “Building the New India” funded by the United States Information Agency, and even postage stamps bearing the photos of large dams (Klingensmith 2007). There were also the numerous speeches of Prime Minister Nehru who seemed to relish the opportunity to engage in Socratic dialogues at dam sites with peasants and workers on their contributions to national progress. Visits of foreign dignitaries usually included trips to dams and steel plants, which provided occasions for speeches that were widely covered in the Indian press. Agencies responsible for particular projects also sometimes devised promotional literature and organized meetings to “educate” peasants on their value (Burman 1968; Klingensmith 2007).

Nevertheless, what we also know is that much of this message probably never even reached the *adivasis* or “tribals” living in remote areas who were often illiterate, had little contact with popular media like film or even radio, and spoke tribal languages rather than Hindi or the dominant regional languages. Zachariah’s (2005) intellectual history of Indian development emphasizes the fairly narrow circles in which development ideas were circulated and debated. In his study of dams and “engineering nationalism,” Klingensmith doubts that such discourses ever had much appeal outside of the educated urban middle class, and concludes that, “The extent to which spectacular projects like Bhakra Nagal or the DVC . . . actually conferred legitimacy on the state in the eyes of its subjects always had class limitations” (2007: 274). Of course, the general thrust of the Subaltern Studies school of historiography is to doubt the extent to which nationalist discourses were shared by the non-elite populations of the sub-continent (e.g. Guha 1982; Chatterjee 1986).

Direct evidence about the perceptions of the dispossessed, however, is hard to come by and at times ambiguous. We do know that dispossession during the immediate post-independence decades was occasionally resisted. This includes fairly well-documented opposition to two of the most prestigious showpieces of post-independence development: the Hirakud Dam (Viegas 1992) and the Rourkela Steel Plant (Burman 1968; Parry and Struempell 2008). Neither opposition was successful and, though the initial Rourkela opposition seemed more dogged, both were quickly reduced to negotiations over the terms of compensation. Whether this expressed the “true” desires of the dispossessed, or whether it was simply a practical accommodation to what seemed politically possible we may never know.

One indirect piece of evidence about limited and ultimately temporary acceptance of dispossession comes from Suresh Sharma’s description of the displaced for the Rihand Dam in 1961. Evidently writing from sustained experience among those repeatedly dispossessed for dams and industry in the Sringauli region of Madhya Pradesh, Sharma writes:

In those moments of numbering uncertainty, Nehru’s presence was comforting and reassuring. People felt that their suffering would not be in vain. Their instinctive sense of nobility was stirred when Nehru spoke of the Nation and Development. They believed in his promise of a future of plenty to be shared by all. And they half accepted the trauma of displacement believing in the promise of irrigated fields and plentiful harvests. So often have the survivors of Rihand told us that they accepted their sufferings as sacrifice for the sake of the nation. But now, after 30 bitter years of being adrift, their livelihood ever more precarious, they ask: ‘Are we the only ones chosen to make sacrifices for the nation?’ (1992: 78).

Whether rhetorical or not, it seems plausible that on some occasions people were partly moved by a sense of patriotic duty, along with the “the promise of irrigated fields and plentiful harvests,” to sacrifice for the nation’s development—even if they later regretted it.

Probably more significant, however, was the way the Nehruvian development model’s broader public legitimacy constrained the political options of the dispossessed regardless of what they felt. The overwhelming public support for state-led economic modernization would have greatly constrained the terms on which farmers could articulate opposition to dispossession, and severely limit their ability to attract outside support to their cause. Of those cases where resistance did emerge, they rarely received outside support. When local political representatives or parties did take up their cause, it was always to help them advocate for more generous compensation packages. Even Gandhian NGOs, one quarter from which one might expect support, often seem to have accepted the necessity of displacement and encouraged people to accept compensation (Mankodi 1992: 95; Dwivedi 2006: 158). Gandhi himself disapproved of the agitation by Hirakud oustees, prompting Congress members to withdraw their support (Dwivedi 2006: 147). With Gandhi, Nehru and the entire Orissa assembly behind the project (Ibid.), the prospects of achieving anything but increased compensation must have seemed dim indeed. The same goes for public sector industrial projects. There was simply not the discursive means at the time for articulating opposition to the Nehruvian development model. It was not until the 1970s, when activists, intellectuals, and non-profits armed with discourses of indigenous rights and environmental protection started to raise concerns about displacement and “destructive development” (particularly for large dams), that local resistances started to become

articulated in a way that challenged the legitimacy of large development projects themselves (Khagram 2004).

So while it remains unclear whether the dispossessed ever complied out of their own belief in the legitimacy of the Nehruvian development model (something on which more historical research is necessary), its broader legitimacy created a very unfavorable climate for resisting dams, steel towns, or other projects of the era. Nehruvian developmentalism, based on post-colonial aspirations to overcome economic “backwardness” and “catch up” with the West, represented a formidable ideological apparatus that was remarkably successful at dispossessing land for many decades.

### *Coercion*

This ideological strength does not imply, however, that the Nehruvian state shied away from deploying its *repressive* apparatus in the service of development. The above discussion of the ideological and material inducements that were mobilized to separate peasants from their land under the developmentalist regime of dispossession should not obscure the pervasive violence that remained central to the process. While Indian states may have tried to persuade farmers to leave their land peacefully, this persuasion was also accompanied by the implicit and explicit threat of armed force. As one Paraja *adivasi* recalled their eviction for the Upper Kolab Dam project in Orissa, “we are small people and very helpless whereas the government is very strong. We had the fear of being beaten, had we not shifted” (Patnaik 1996: 160). If farmers refused to move, that threat often became actualized as brutal state violence. Protests against the Hirakud dam were suppressed through police force, and people were ultimately evacuated from their homes and forced onto trucks with baton charges (Viegas 1992: 45-46). The Andhra Pradesh government called in the army to make villagers vacate their land for the Nagarjunasagar Dam (Singh and Samantray 1992: 66). When anti-dam movements started to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s, many were met with brutal beatings, shootings, rapes, arson and the pillaging of homes. Protests by *adivasis* in Madhya Pradesh against the Subarnarekha Dam project in Madhya Pradesh were fired upon by police, killing four people (Khagram 2004: 51). Villagers in the Narmada Valley were repeatedly subjected to mass arrests and brutal police terror (Sangvai 2002). Dam builders, moreover, always had a powerful weapon to fall back on: once a dam site was established and militarized, the government could conserve on police violence by simply filling the reservoirs. Addressing those to be submerged by the Pong Dam in the 1960s, Morarji Desai, then Finance Minister and later Prime Minister, warned them, “[W]e will request you to move from your houses after the dam comes up. If you move, it will be good; otherwise, we shall release the waters and drown you all” (quoted in Bhenot and Singh 1992: 101). This turned out to be no idle threat: many of the displaced were forced to quickly abandon their homes and possessions when the reservoir was impounded without warning, quickly flooding their villages (Bhenot and Singh 1992: 110). Those dispossessed for the Koyna and Rihand dams were similarly caught unprepared by rising water (Thukral 1992: 15).

This dark and coercive underside of the Nehruvian developmental state should be emphasized, if for no other reason than that it has been treated somewhat rosily by western social scientists (Brass 2006). In the end, farmers were not asked what the country’s development priorities should be nor whether they thought their dispossession was a reasonable means of achieving them. With or without actual violence, dispossession remains an inherently coercive process. Some are told to surrender their means of production because those with the means of coercion decide that it is in the public interest for them to do so. What distinguished the

Nehruvian state (at least in its first several decades) from the present neoliberal state, however, was its relative ability to convince others—if not necessarily the dispossessed—that such dispossession did serve the public interest. State-led efforts to increase industrial and agricultural productivity had significant legitimacy in a country that was emerging from colonial underdevelopment and poverty and trying to achieve national autonomy and self-sufficiency. Those who refused to sacrifice for this vision could be labeled as “backward-looking” or as particularistic interests that were obstructing the more universal interests of the nation. Both Marxists and capitalists alike agreed on the need for economic development, and there was no discursive means by which to critique the projects themselves. Not until the 1970s and 1980s did there emerge independent “civil society” actors who took up opposition to “development-induced displacement” in a way that challenged the legitimacy of top-down economic modernization. Until then dissent could be safely repressed and ignored by the larger “public,” significant sections of which had a vested interest in the accumulation such dispossession made possible.

#### ACCUMULATION: INDUSTRIAL AND AGRARIAN

We have argued so far that in the post-independence decades, the Nehruvian state established a regime of dispossession that was characterized by the expropriation of land for state-led projects of productive industrial and infrastructural development, to which it produced compliance with a combination of coercion and formidable ideological appeals to the national interest. It is now time to turn to the concrete results of this regime of dispossession. While large dams and industrial projects were projected as being in the service of “the nation,” what did they actually deliver and to whom? Claims to represent the “public” are, as Gramsci (1971) reminds us, always attempts to project the interests of a particular section of that public as universal. What were the actual economic benefits of these large land-consuming projects and who among the “public” were the beneficiaries? In short, what kind of accumulation did dispossession make possible during the Nehruvian period and to whom did the capital accumulate?

The main claim behind large dams was that they would provide irrigation to India’s farmers that would increase yields, incomes and employment. Moreover, they would generate power for industry and domestic consumption. While large dams are generally recognized as having underperformed on all counts (Paranjpye 1988; Singh 1997; World Commission on Dams (WCD) 2000; McCully 2001; Dwivedi 2006), they did make contributions towards these ends. Their power contribution is fairly straightforward: at independence, India’s hydropower capacity was 508 MW; as of 2000, it was 27,891 MW, which was a bit less than a third of India’s total power capacity of 89,000 MW (Banerji et al. 2000: iv). The irrigation provided by large dams and its economic effects remain more controversial. According to the India Country Report of the World Commission on Dams, India’s large dams increased the country’s irrigation potential over three-fold from 27.6 million hectares in 1951 to 89.6 million in 1997 (Banerji et al. 2000: iv). While it is hard to separate the effect of dams from that of “green revolution” technology, the most authoritative estimate is that this increase in irrigation potential contributed approximately 10% percent to the quadrupling of India’s food production in the fifty years after independence (Duflo and Pande 2007). In their statistical study of the effects of dams on district economic indicators Duflo and Pande (2007) find that districts that received this irrigation experienced increases in employment and decreases in aggregate poverty. This is in line with studies showing that the combination of canal irrigation and “improved” crop varieties generate higher yields, increases agricultural investment, and also increases labor absorption per unit of land—at least

for some duration (Gidwani 2002, 2008: 103). The sustainability of these yields has now come under question as the effects of intensive irrigated agriculture on water-logging, salinization and soil degradation are increasingly appreciated (Goldsmith and Hildyard 1984; Goldman 1994; WCD 2000: 66-68; McCully 2001; Gidwani 2008: 110-113). We must also note that dams in India—and in general—have consistently failed to meet their targets in irrigable area and agricultural yields, and that the gains they did achieve have come at an escalating cost, generating increasingly negative cost recovery rates (Banerji et al. 2000: ix; Singh 1997; WCD 2000). Added to this is the question of their inevitable siltation and need for decommissioning (McCully 2001). Nevertheless, whether or not large dams were efficient, met their goals, or were the only or best way to achieve these results (all are fiercely disputed), they deserve *modest* credit for India's post-independence expansion in agricultural productivity that moved the country from chronic food shortages to domestic self-sufficiency within a few decades.

Who were the primary beneficiaries of the accumulation generated by dams? In the case of irrigation projects, farmers who received irrigation in the “command” area of the dam. The debate is whether such benefits are typically monopolized by rich farmers or are also shared by poor marginal ones. The question has two aspects: the first is which farmers get the water onto their fields in the first place, and the second is whether small farmers have the wherewithal to make the necessary investments in “improved” agriculture or are ultimately out-competed and proletarianized by larger farmers. To take the first question, it is generally recognized that those towards the “head” rather than “tail” end of the canals receive more benefit. Of course, who is at the head or tail of the canal is part geographic accident and part deliberate planning. In his study of the Sardar Sarovar Project, Ranjit Dwivedi argues that large Gujarati farmers and their cooperatives (controlled by upper caste Patidars) are the biggest beneficiaries, while smaller farmers in water-scarce Kutch and Saurashtra at the tail end of the canal will receive little of the water promised to them (2006: 24-25). In his study of “accumulation by dispossession” for the Sardar Sarovar Dam, Nilsen concurs that the dam serves the interests of “agro-industrial capitalists” in Gujarat, particularly the politically influential Patidar caste (2010: 21-25). In this case, geography corresponds in a rough aggregate sense with the “richness” of farmers, but a number of studies have also shown how more powerful farmers within a given location are able to appropriate the lions share of the water sent through irrigation canals (Harriss 1987: 231; Singh 1997: 165-182). There is, however, the second question of whether irrigation and the commercial agriculture it facilitates inherently favors large farmers over small. This question is tied up with a large and incredibly complex debate over the more general implications of commercial agriculture for the agrarian class structure (for some notable contributions to the India debate, see Harriss 1987; Patnaik 1990). I will not pretend to resolve it here. It is generally observed that large farmers have been more capable of capturing the benefits from the “green revolution” agriculture introduced in the 1960s. I will note, however, that contrary to Dwivedi and Nilsen, Gidwani's in-depth empirical study of the effect of canal irrigation in a different region of Gujarat shows that it is largely scale-neutral: all sizes of farmers benefited from irrigation to some degree (Gidwani 2002, 2008: 104). This is consistent with Pande and Duflo's (2007) finding that aggregate poverty was reduced in irrigation-receiving districts. Harriss' study of Tamil Nadu shows that while the adoption of an “improved” agricultural package is not “resource neutral”—large farmers have greater resources, including access to labor, credit, inputs, and political power, to create commercially profitable agricultural enterprises—this does not mean that poor farmers are *necessarily* marginalized, out-competed, dispossessed or proletarianized from this process and may even wind up better than before (Harriss 1987).

Regional variations in agrarian structures, agro-ecology, and irrigation systems makes generalization incredibly fraught. It is, however, probably safe to conclude that if small farmers did benefit from the irrigation of big dams, large farmers benefited the most—and were, moreover, the most vocal and influential proponents of the projects themselves. Perhaps more important to keep in mind for our purposes is that given that the majority of those displaced for large-dams were typically cash-poor *adivasis* in remote river valleys, most farmers receiving irrigation in the plains would have been somewhat better off than them to start with. The dispossession of the former to provide water to the latter was still in most cases an upward redistribution of wealth, if not always that far upwards in the scheme of things.

In addition to farmers, agro-industrial and industrial capitalists also benefited from the water and power of large dams. In anticipation of large-scale sugar cultivation, sugar cooperatives and factories have located near the Sardar Sarovar canal, which has also apparently been aligned to benefit several industrial estates and Gujarat's "Golden Corridor" (Dwivedi 2006: 124). Because the bulk of India's electricity is consumed by industry—which accounted for between 50 and 60 percent of all energy demand between independence and the 1990s (Singh 1997: 97)—we can say they have been the biggest beneficiaries of hydro-power. Many of India's hydro-electric dams were in fact specifically constructed to provide power for energy-intensive aluminum or steel factories. Urban consumers—principally the middle classes—were also significant recipients of this power, while the pace of rural electrification moved sluggishly. Aside from farmers and industrialists, large dams also created opportunities for the third leg of what Bardhan (1984) famously termed India's "dominant proprietary class coalition": these were the thousands of educated middle class engineers and civil servants to whom they provided good and high status employment (Khagram 2004: 35). Finally, there were the powerful interests behind the actual construction of dams: the national capitalists who supplied the cement, steel and other components; the international capitalists providing heavy machinery and turbines; and the World Bank and private western bankers that financed many of them (Dwivedi 2006: Khagram 2004).

The industrial accumulation generated by dispossession during this period is a bit more straightforward. India's steel towns, industrial estates, and mining were much less ambiguously in the service of industrial accumulation in a "mixed economy" and, by extension, the urban bourgeoisie and public sector employees. While the state did not often directly sell acquired land to private companies, it did allot them leases to land in industrial estates and areas, and occasionally gave them acquired land in stand-alone locations. Mines, dams, and power plants provided them with the necessary inputs. While some industrial estates (especially those in "backward" areas) failed and some steel towns were more successful than others,<sup>26</sup> overall industrial growth in this mixed economy was more "successful" than today's neoliberals allow. Though industrial output consistently fell short of Plan targets, it undoubtedly expanded faster than under British colonialism, if not as fast as those of other East and Southeast Asian countries in the same period (Ghosh 1997). Industrial output grew at particularly robust pace in the 1950s and 1960s, and after a period of relative stagnation, reached 8 percent in the latter half of the 1980s before the introduction of neoliberal reforms (Ahluwalia 1998: 286). While the public sector has come into disrepute and undeniably had inefficiencies, by the 1980s India's 220 plus public sector corporations were collectively producing a significant net profit, and were responsible for 25% of India's GDP (Ahluwalia 1998; Bagchi 1998). In the four decades after independence, the public sector had, moreover, expanded employment at a much faster rate than

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<sup>26</sup> On the difference between the Bhilai and Rourkela Steel Plants, see Parry and Struempell (2008).



the organized private sector (Bagchi 1998). Perhaps India's most notable planning accomplishment, however, was the substantial diversification of the country's industrial base in the four decades after independence, which saw the emergence of a capital goods industry and a transformation in the structure of exports from primary goods to manufacturing and engineering (Ahluwalia 1998; Ghosh 1997: 167). All of this was done, until the late 1980s, without large external deficits of the kind seen in Latin America (Ghosh 1997: 167). Nevertheless, it remains true that India's industrial performance in this period remained modest, that industrial infrastructure remained poor, and objectives like expanding employment and equitably distributing growth through small-scale industries were not incredibly successful. In particular, in the absence of any significant redistribution of property, the benefits of this industrialization remained relatively concentrated in geographic and class terms, leaving in tact huge pockets of absolute deprivation (Ghosh 1997).

The purpose of this discussion, however, is less to assess the overall "success" of India's development in this period, and more to highlight two aspects of the accumulation generated by dispossession under the developmentalist regime that distinguish it from the present neoliberal regime of dispossession. The first concerns the qualitative type of accumulation that dispossession facilitated. As we have pointed out, this accumulation came through the expansion of productivity in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Dispossession provided, literally, the ground upon which commodities could be produced—what Marx calls capital's "spatial basis of operations" (Marx 1982: 916). Dispossession did not serve the commodification of land itself, which as we will see shortly, is the case with SEZs and many other large-land consuming investments today. Following Arrighi's (1994) periodization of Marx's M-C-M' formula into distinct phases of material and financial expansion—C-M' and M-M' respectively—we can insert dispossession (D) into the formula and define this as a period in which dispossession served the expansion of capital through the production of commodities, or: M-D-C-M'. The classes or class fractions that disproportionately benefited from dispossession were, in this sense, "productive classes." *They accumulated through their role in putting dispossessed land to productive uses.* This is not a normative justification of accumulation by dispossession in this period, but an analytical distinction of some importance. I will argue in the next chapter that the neoliberal regime of dispossession is defined by the emergence of M-D-M', or the use of dispossession to facilitate financial rather than productive accumulation. The Nehruvian state, as we have seen, would not use its means of coercion (the "D") to facilitate this type of accumulation nor, we can speculate, would most of its citizens have recognized it as congruent with the "development" model that was so vigorously proselytized in the post-independence decades.

The second distinction is that while many consider the benefits of these projects to have been distributed narrowly and unequally, *from the point of view of today* they seem relatively broad in their impact. To be sure, the main beneficiaries of this regime of dispossession were the "dominant proprietary classes" that controlled the post-independence state: the industrial and agrarian bourgeoisie, and the holders of public office themselves (Bardhan 1984). Nevertheless, we will see in Chapter 5 that the kinds of economic changes generated by irrigated agriculture and public sector industrialization now appear to have benefited a much broader range of people compared to the enclaves of real estate and information technology that are being built with dispossessed land today. While dominant agrarian classes may have gotten the lion's share, small farmers did receive irrigation from dams while workers received more employment on their farms. All types of employment-generating enterprises arose in irrigated areas, entirely

transforming regional economies and generating agro-industrial centers (Goldman 1994). Public sector industrialization not only created employment for middle class managers and engineers, but also relatively well-paying jobs for semi- and unskilled laborers, giving rise to a relatively comfortable “labor aristocracy” (Parry 2003). It also often had very significant ancillary effects: the Bhilai Steel Plant, for example, gave rise to a nearby industrial estate with over 200 manufacturing units (Ibid.). Industrial estates did not just provide land and infrastructure to large industrialists, but also to middle and small entrepreneurs who often ran more labor-intensive enterprises. The economic transformations generated by these types of industrial and agricultural projects may have been very unequal, but we will see that from the point of view of today’s neoliberal growth model, they seem relatively broad in their impact. While it is a mystification to say this development model benefited the “public” or “the nation,” in Chapter 5 we will see that the public it did benefit was comparatively large compared to the types of accumulation fuelling dispossession today.

The question remains: what happened to the dispossessed, and to what extent did they share in this accumulation?

#### DEVELOPMENT BY DISPOSSESSION?: PROGRESS AND ITS VICTIMS

What most analysts of India’s post-independence development, even those otherwise attuned to its distributive failures, have failed to account for is its effective subsidization by the tens of millions of people who were forced to give their land for it. While the Indian government never kept track, our best estimates indicate that somewhere between 30 and 60 million people were dispossessed for development projects between independence and liberalization in the early 1990s. The dispossessed were, moreover, disproportionately from the most marginalized groups in Indian society: over 40 percent were *adivasis* (“tribals”), who constitute 8.6 percent of the population, and 20 percent were Dalits who constitute approximately 15 percent of the population (Fernandes 2008: 91-92). There have been dozens if not hundreds of studies on the outcome of “development-induced displacement” in post-independence India, ranging from policy-oriented surveys, to anthropological ethnographies, to NGO-sponsored studies. While their methodologies vary, they almost unanimously find that those who gave their land for these projects were impoverished in large numbers (for overviews, see Mahapatra, 1999; Cernea, 2000; Fernandes, 2004, 2008). As we have already seen, the compensation packages offered to displaced farmers during this period were miserly to start with. Their implementation, however, was even worse, suffering from pervasive inefficiency, ineptitude, callousness and corruption. The results have often been catastrophic.

According to Walter Fernandes’ study of the record in seven states, less than 18% of families displaced by development projects were even resettled, much less “rehabilitated” with an alternative livelihood (Fernandes 2008: 92). In most cases they received cash instead of replacement land and this cash was typically too paltry to buy replacement agricultural land; much of it was squandered away on expenses. When land was allotted, it was typically waste land that was unirrigated, infertile, or required tremendous reclamation efforts on the part of the dispossessed. Promises to the unemployed often went unfulfilled, or covered only a small portion of the dispossessed; in many situations this became the subject of litigation that lasted decades (Parasuraman 1999: 126; Parry and Struempell 2008; Ramanathan 2008). Those without titled land were excluded from compensation, while common pool resources that provided a substantial part of people’s livelihood went unaccounted. Resettlement sites, when they were even provided, typically consisted of no more than tin sheds on barren land, far from people’s

old villages, and often without basic facilities like water and power, much less schools and clinics. Even when they gave their land for hydro-electric dams, the dispossessed were themselves often left without electricity. Often the resettlement sites were in the midst of unknown and culturally alien environments amidst hostile villagers upset about losing grazing or forest commons to the newcomers (Singh and Samantray 1992: 72). To the extent that any of these sites are habitable today, it is largely because of the hard work and initiative of the displaced villagers themselves. Studies almost unanimously show that the dispossessed wound up with less income and food security, and that they were reduced to landless laborers in large numbers. While Duflo and Pande (2007) found that incomes went up and poverty went down in the districts that received irrigation, they found the opposite in the districts that were flooded. Studies have further shown that the health of the displaced often worsened (Kedia 2008), that women were disproportionately affected (see Dewan 2008 for a summary of the literature), and that relocation often imposed tremendous cultural, social and psychological strains on the dispossessed. As many of the dispossessed were from “indigenous” groups, some have called the process “cultural genocide” (Padel and Das 2008). Examining this record, Shekhar Singh concludes, “Forcible displacement is perhaps among the worst forms of violence that innocents can be ‘legally’ subjected to” (2008: 39).

Were there exceptions? To some extent, those dispossessed for India’s steel towns seem to have fared somewhere better. While noting that many families were not restored to their original level, Parasuraman (1999: 110) found that two-thirds of the households displaced for the Durgapur Steel Plant (DSP) in West Bengal received one permanent public sector job in the plant, making them part of the public sector “labor aristocracy” for at least for one generation. These jobs were high-paying, secure and came with substantial perks like housing, healthcare, education, transportation allowances, and access to subsidized consumer items. Another 24% were employed by informal sector industries or services. It seems that this better outcome has in part to do with the efforts of the Communist Party of India (M), which was active in the area and advocated for the displaced to receive employment. The CPI(M) also convinced the DSP to redistribute 2,500 acres of unused acquired land to landless families (Parasuraman 1999: 112-114). In other circumstances, strong political agitation also seems to have been the crucial factor. Parasuraman provides another example where farmers from the politically influential Maratha caste in Maharashtra were relatively successful in forcing the government to use the (typically un-enforced) Land Ceiling Act to acquire replacement land for them in the command area of the Dom Dam. Approximately 82% of the displaced received land, although it comprised only 33% of the original land area (1999: 157-158). Aside from these relatively less disastrous cases, there were also individual exceptions within otherwise “bad” cases: in many instances political or economic elites have been able to manipulate the processes to their advantage or at least better cope with displacement (Patnaik 1996; Parasuraman 1999).

Does this mean that things could have been better for the dispossessed as a whole? Theoretically, yes. Being included in the fruits of public sector industrialization or irrigated agriculture could, as the above examples show, significantly cushion the blow of dispossession. More effort could have been made to allot public sector jobs and irrigated land to the dispossessed. In reality, this happened only where the dispossessed has strong political support or were themselves from politically powerful groups. But the crucial point for our purposes, which will stand out more after examining the case of today’s SEZs, is that the type of economic development (agricultural and industrial capitalism) that dispossession served in this period was better suited to a dispossessed peasantry than what is driving dispossession today (notably real

estate and non-labor intensive services). Had there been more political will, it might have been structurally possible to more satisfactorily include the dispossessed in this growth.

Nevertheless, we should also keep in mind the inherent limitations of “resettling and rehabilitating” large numbers of dispossessed in any period. While the government often used it as an excuse to give paltry cash compensation, it remains true that there was clearly not enough vacant arable land in India to make available to the millions being dispossessed by development. Moreover, while industrial undertakings during this period were more labor-intensive than today (sometimes deliberately so), many of the dispossessed came from very marginalized areas without the skills and education that were required. In some cases, they were entirely unfamiliar with modern industry. Thirdly, the prospect of uprooting entire communities and relocating them elsewhere without serious and traumatic disruption to livelihoods, social networks, families, and symbolic lifeworlds is utopian in any period. In general, one should keep in mind the limitations of bureaucracies to satisfactorily manage grandiose projects that seek to transform entire river valleys and re-engineer the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. While not understating the degree of incompetence, inefficiency and neglect displayed by government authorities, such “high-modernist” projects are bound to inadequately foresee, much less cope, with the myriad social and environmental complications that fall outside their simplified models (Scott 1998). The Faustian hubris that underlay these grand development undertakings of the twentieth century no doubt gave them intrinsic limitations.

If things might have been marginally better, they were not. India’s modest developmental accomplishments in the four decades after independence were subsidized by the impoverishment of tens of millions of its poorest citizens. While their means of production were diverted to factories or dams to facilitate accumulation by other classes, they were transformed into propertyless wage laborers and largely excluded from the resulting economic growth. Given that the existing research almost unanimously shows that the dispossessed wound up worse off than before, it is safe to say that few of them experienced this process as “development.” As Braudel remarked on the “public works” of another place and time, “Progress was assured—but at the price of social misery” (1972: 74).

## CRACKS IN THE REGIME: THE EMERGENCE OF ANTI-DISPLACEMENT STRUGGLES

This rather straightforward and brutal impoverishment of those dispossessed for development could not go unchallenged forever. While the Nehruvian regime of dispossession was quite successful at generating compliance and thwarting resistance when it arose for many decades, by the 1970s people started to more aggressively question and challenge large development projects on the grounds of both displacement and environmental destruction. We have observed that even some of India’s early and prestigious post-independence projects encountered resistance by the local populations they were to dispossess, most notably the Hirakud Dam and Rourkela Steel Plant. However, these agitations were quickly reduced to conflicts over compensation and did not pose effective challenges to the projects themselves. The movements that begun to emerge in the 1970s, however, were more organized, politically self-conscious, and succeeded in attracting greater attention and support, both domestic and international.

Large dams were the main target of these struggles. In the 1970s, militant resistance emerged to several large dams that were part of the Subarnarekha Project in what was then Bihar (now Jharkhand). The *adivasi* protesters were subjected to brutal police violence and murder

(Omvedt 1993: 130), attracting international attention and, very belatedly, forcing the World Bank to suspend subsequent loan disbursements (Khagram 2004: 50-52). Domestic and international advocacy by NGOs against the Silent Valley Dam in Kerala, inspired by environmental rather than displacement concerns, was successful in stopping the project in the 1970s in what was a galvanizing victory for India's environmental movement (Khagram 2004: 42-49). In the Garwhal region of present day Uttarakhand, local farmers and Gandhian activists who first took up opposition to commercial deforestation in the famous "Chipko" movement (Guha 1989), subsequently organized a non-violent campaign against the Tehri Dam that would last over twenty years (Khagram 2004: 52-58; Routledge 1993). Most notably, in the mid-1980s opposition to the Sardar Sarovar Dam in India's Narmada Valley—which was to flood 247 villages in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra—began to crystallize into the world's most famous anti-dam movement, the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA). The most creative pioneer of anti-dispossession politics in India, the NBA used a variety of non-violent techniques, most famously vowing to drown in the rising reservoirs rather than leave their land, in support of a staunch anti-dam stance. Their bold refusal to limit their opposition to the terms of compensation was captured in the slogan, "No one will be moved, the dam will not be built (*Koi nahi hatega, bandh nahi banega*)" (Baviskar 1995; Sangvai 2002).

Large dams were not the only targets of anti-displacement struggles. In Baliapal, Orissa, local farmers organized against displacement for the National Test Range of the Indian military (Routledge 1993); in Kerala, fishworkers started to organize against commercial appropriation of traditional fisheries; and in Uttarakhand and Jharkhand protests against commercial forestry escalated (Omvedt 1993). These movements started to make links with each other and in September 1989, many of them gathered in Harsud, Madhya Pradesh—a town in the intended submergence zone of the Indira Sagar Dam—for a "National Rally Against Destructive Development." Out of this emerged the short-lived *Jan Vikas Andolan*, known in English as the Movement Against Destructive Development; this was the precursor to the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), which remains today the biggest alliance of movements fighting dispossession and displacement in India. The declaration from the Harsud Rally provides a good sense of the ideological critique they launched against the development model that had driven dispossession for the previous four decades:

Since independence a preference for gigantism has come to dominate our development paradigm. Our planners, politicians and experts have opted wholesale for large dams and gigantic industrial units, and have dug mines and exploited forests in pursuit of their elitist vision of progress and development. The cumulative ill-effects of all this "development" are now assuming disastrous proportions for a large section of the population, particularly for its most depressed strata—the tribals, the peasants and labourers—along with the already depleting natural resource base and our scarce financial resources (Action Committee for National Rally Against Destructive Development, quoted in Dwivedi 2006: 161).

The statement encapsulates the ideological assault that these movements initiated in their efforts to deligitimize the development model that called for the large-scale dispossession of India's most marginalized citizens. No longer simply raising questions of compensation, these movements began to question the legitimacy of the developmentalist regime of dispossession

itself, using a combination of Gandhian and socialist idioms as well as emerging discourses of indigenous rights and environmental protection (Guha 1988; Omvedt 1993; Khagram 2004; Levien 2007).

Many scholars have written about these movements (e.g. Kothari 1984; Omvedt 1993; Routledge 1993; Khagram 2004; Dwivedi 2006; Levien 2007; Nilsen 2010), and for present purposes I only wish to make two points regarding them. First, they are both product and cause of a significant waning in the ideological strength of the Nehruvian developmentalism in its twilight years. They represented persistent efforts to delegitimize the form of top-down, socially and ecologically destructive modernization that guided development planning, feeding off and contributing to global critiques that were emerging at that time. Second, however, is the sad fact that even after struggling for many years and even decades, enduring brutal violence, and sacrificing the better years of many brave and committed activists, very few of them actually succeeded in stopping the projects they were fighting. This is not to say that they were not “successful”: individually, many of the movements stalled dam construction for years or decades and their pressure ultimately ensured better compensation and rehabilitation for the dispossessed than would have otherwise occurred. Collectively, they raised the issue of “development-induced displacement” to national and global attention. They forced the Indian government and World Bank to institutionalize norms around involuntary displacement, and were probably responsible for an at least temporary deceleration in large dam building (Khagram 2004). They politicized an issue that was ignored by both Left and Right, and raised the question of what development means, who decides it, and who should pay its cost. These debates continue and are fed by the platforms and political space created by these movements. Their pioneering of anti-dispossession politics has left a substantial if incalculable legacy for contemporary land struggles against neoliberal forms of dispossession in India, which many of these movement leaders have now turned their attention to.

It remains the case, however, that the large stretches of the Narmada Valley are now under water. As of writing, only the spill gates remain to be constructed before the Sardar Sarovar reaches its full height and submerges the last of the 247 affected villages. The 700 year old town of Harsud, site of the 1989 Rally Against Destructive Development, now lies beneath the reservoir of the Indira Sagar Dam; in a chilling scene, its inhabitants were forced to personally dismantle their houses in order to receive compensation. The town was submerged in July 2004. The Tehri Dam became operational in 2006. Overall, very few of these movements were successful at averting dispossession, with the anti-forestry Chipko struggle and the Silent Valley Dam (a middle class environmental cause) being the chief exceptions.

This relative inability to prevent dispossession despite tremendous efforts indicates the enduring political and ideological strength of the Nehruvian regime of dispossession right up until the end. Although increasingly embattled and forced to show more sensitivity to social and environmental issues, it continued to be able to compel farmers to sacrifice their land for large state-led development projects. The “overwhelming public consensus” (Guha 2007) behind this development model may have started to dim, but not that greatly and, perhaps most significantly, not because of its track record on displacement (the burgeoning pro-market advocates had no quarrel with large dams!). Critical voices became bolder, but were still largely speaking from the margins. Land dispossession never became an electorally salient issue, but was confined to NGOs and autonomous “people’s movements.” The relatively broad and powerful class interests behind dams and industrial projects remained. The Nehruvian regime of dispossession was aborted before its strength was significantly attenuated. As the next chapter will show, it was

only with the transition to a new regime of dispossession that the political tide began to turn, and widespread farmer opposition to dispossession began to pose a serious obstacle to accumulation.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of what I have called the developmentalist regime of dispossession that operated in India from independence until economic liberalization in the early 1990s. I have argued that it was defined by the dispossession of land for state-led projects to expand the industrial and agricultural productivity of the country, for which it achieved compliance through coercion and a powerful ideological appeals to the national interest. The result of this dispossession was accumulation that disproportionately benefited the industrial bourgeoisie, dominant agrarian classes, and public sector elites. Although this accumulation had some beneficial spillover effects for a broader public, it came at the cost of the impoverishment and proletarianization of approximately 50 million rural people who were typically already among the country's most marginalized. Let us briefly emphasize the significance of these characteristics of the Nehruvian regime of dispossession by foreshadowing the comparison with the neoliberal regime of dispossession that occupies the remainder of this study.

The crucial starting point is that the Indian state(s) in this period dispossessed land for a fairly restrictive set of purposes: projects that were state led or public sector controlled, and that were productive in a very narrow sense. The embodiments of these purposes were dams and steel towns, which were efforts to expand the agricultural and industrial productivity of the country. When private industrialists received land, it was almost exclusively within government-run industrial estates. It was, moreover, unthinkable to acquire land for less productive investments like real estate. Private and public sector corporations were given land to produce upon, not to speculate upon. The next chapter will show how this regime of "land for production" gave way after liberalization to one of "land for the market" as state governments restructured themselves as land brokers for private capital. The Special Economic Zones of the last ten years represent a dramatic transition to a new neoliberal regime defined by the dispossession of land for private and increasingly real estate driven accumulation.

The second major point is that these purposes for which the Nehruvian state dispossessed land gave it a significant ability to make agriculturalists comply with their dispossession. If compliance to dispossession can generally be produced through coercion, normative persuasion and/or material compensation, the Nehruvian regime relied particularly heavy on the first two. This was possible because large dams and industrial projects reflected a development model that had significant legitimacy in the post-independence years. This allowed the Nehruvian state to skimp on material incentives and ask farmers to "sacrifice for the nation." It is unclear whether farmers themselves ever found this compelling, but it is rather clear that many other Indians did and that this created a very unpromising political environment in which to oppose dispossession for "development." When resistance did emerge, it was coercively repressed without significant political repercussions, which itself is a reflection of the regime's formidable legitimacy. Beginning in the next chapter, we will see that the neoliberal regime of dispossessing land for private real estate accumulation has enjoyed no such legitimacy and has been embattled almost from its inception. In the absence of legitimacy, it is left with coercion and material incentives. As the first becomes more difficult in the face of increasing influential opposition, Indian states are gradually being forced to build material compliance on the basis of real estate values. Chapter 4 examines this process of producing material compliance in the absence of legitimacy

through a case study of one of the first SEZs to be successfully constructed in India. Chapter 7 considers to what extent this formula may work to stabilize the neoliberal regime more generally.

The third point is that while the Nehruvian regime legitimized dispossession as being in the “public interest” of development, it nevertheless facilitated accumulation that disproportionately accrued to the “dominant proprietary classes” of the period: industrialists, rich farmers, and government employees. Nevertheless, in comparison to the accumulation driving dispossession today, dams and public sector industrialization unleashed productive economic transformations that reached broader sections of the Indian public. By examining the type of accumulation generated by dispossession for today’s Special Economic Zones, Chapter 5 will show how its beneficiaries have narrowed to class fractions who have even less to offer the majority of people living in rural India. SEZs, in fact, represent a retraction from the Nehruvian ambition to economically transform the nation and a withdrawal into elite enclaves of high-end real estate and the “knowledge economy” that marginalize dispossessed rural labor.

The fourth distinction is more subtle. As we saw, those dispossessed for the Nehruvian development model were brutally impoverished and hardly included in subsequent growth. The exceptions were a few instances in which public sector employment was forthcoming or farmers were given decent land irrigated by dams. This impoverishment of the dispossessed remains a widespread reality today. Nevertheless, we will see that the political tenuousness of the neoliberal regime of dispossession is gradually pushing state governments to offer better deals to farmers. These “better deals” are made possible by the increasingly hot real estate markets that are driving much dispossession today. Chapter 6 shows what happens when farmers are included in this process of real estate speculation. We will see that the uneven ability of farmers to play the game of real estate markets produces a much more differentiated outcome than the more uniform impoverishment that characterized the Nehruvian period. However, the result is highly unequal, impoverishing for the majority, and in few senses “developmental.” While the Nehruvian regime of dispossession was structurally more capable of including farmers in industry and irrigated agriculture, the neoliberal regime has little to offer except land values.

Finally, while resistance to the Nehruvian regime only started to gain traction by the 1970s and was still relatively unsuccessful, resistance to the neoliberal regime has been immediate, widespread, and unprecedentedly successful. This is a reflection of the transition from an ideologically formidable regime in which dispossession plausibly served development to the cynical and naked land grabs for private profit that constitute today’s neoliberal regime of dispossession. We will see, in fact, how still powerful discourses of the developmentalist regime are being used against its neoliberal successor with good effect. Chapter 7 will conclude the dissertation with a discussion of the relative frailty of the neoliberal regime of dispossession, and the novel historical possibility that farmers struggling to keep their land may now constitute a significant obstacle to capitalist accumulation in India.

The remainder of this dissertation is devoted to fleshing out this comparison by examining the neoliberal regime of dispossession and its embodiment by Special Economic Zones. The first step is to explain the transition between these regimes of dispossession, which requires understanding why Indian states began to dramatically transform what they would dispossess land for in the aftermath of economic liberalization.



## Chapter 3. The Land Broker State (1991- )

### INTRODUCTION

In an earlier period of free-market enthusiasm, Karl Polanyi argued that the idea of a self-regulating market was a “stark utopia.” Rather than representing a return to a spontaneous order stifled by government interference, the “*laissez-faire* economy was the product of deliberate state action” (Polanyi 2001: 147). In this chapter, I explain why the implementation of “free market” policies in India since the early 1990s has required an expansion of the state’s role in dispossessing rural property. Despite its apparent valorization of private property, economic liberalization has not meant a withdrawal of the state’s role in forcibly acquiring land, but precisely the opposite: it has prompted state governments to dispossess greater quantities of land for increasing privatized and less strictly “productive purposes.”<sup>27</sup> This restructuring of state governments into what I call land broker states marks the transition between the developmentalist regime of dispossession described in the last chapter and the neoliberal regime of dispossession that is the subject of the remaining chapters.

My explanation of this transition has three components. First, I show that the process of economic liberalization that began in the early 1990s has generated an unprecedented demand for land that cannot be met through private purchase in rural land markets. Second, I argue that the fierce interstate competition for investment generated by liberalization has pushed state governments to expand their use of coercive dispossession to help private capital overcome this barrier. Third, I argue that this expansion of the state’s role in dispossessing land has been further incentivized and reinforced by the licit and illicit rents that this role makes available to the state and its officer-holders.

After presenting this theory of transition, I examine the scale and character of this new, neoliberal regime of dispossession. While it is generating dispossession on an unprecedented scale, it importantly represents a qualitative shift in the character of state-mediated dispossession. Whereas in the last chapter we saw that dispossession under the developmentalist regime was largely driven by state-led projects of industrial and infrastructural transformation, in this chapter we will see how dispossession has come to be driven by private investments of an increasingly financial and speculative nature. I characterize this as a shift between a regime that dispossessed “land for production” to one that dispossesses “land for the market.” To illustrate this transition, I examine the transformation of the government industrial estates described in the last chapter into Special Economic Zones, which provide the focus of the remaining chapters. The chapter concludes by analyzing why this new regime of dispossession is proving to be more ideologically tenuous and politically explosive than its predecessor.

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<sup>27</sup> There is a large literature in institutional economics which holds that the protection of private property is the cornerstone of economic growth (e.g. North 1990). As a more recent statement puts it, “a cluster of institutions ensuring secure property rights for a broad cross section of society, which we refer to as the *institutions of private property*, are essential for investment incentives and economic performance” (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2002: 1235). However, as we will see, facilitating large private investments in a country where the majority of available land is in the hands of a small holding peasantry has proven to be dependent on a growing state willingness to dispossess rather than protect the private property of rural agriculturalists. The accelerating use of eminent domain in India and elsewhere suggests that rapid economic growth appears to be based on the *selective* protection of private property.

## THE TRANSITION

### *Liberalization and the Land Rush*

After tentative steps towards deregulation in the 1980s, a balance of payments crisis in 1991 pushed the Indian government to begin a thoroughgoing—if phased and stealthy (Jenkins 1999)—program of neoliberal reforms. In addition to macro-economic stabilization, this included structural adjustment measures that began to fundamentally dismantle the model of state-regulated capitalism that had prevailed since independence. The complex system of industrial licensing was largely abolished, giving the private sector a free-hand to enter new sectors and expand capacity. Trade was significantly liberalized and foreign investment courted. Perhaps most consequentially, the financial sector was gradually liberalized: private investors were allowed into the previously nationalized banking sector, liquidity requirements and interest rate controls were relaxed, priority sector lending reduced, and non-resident Indians (NRIs) and Foreign Institutional Investors were allowed into Indian capital markets for the first time (Joshi and Little 1996; Jenkins 1999; Chandrasekhar and Gosh 2002).

There is considerable debate over the contribution of these reforms to India's economic growth, which had already begun to accelerate in the 1980s (Byres 1998; Bardhan 2010). While I do not wish to wade into this debate here, what is clear is that opening multiple sectors of the Indian economy to private and foreign capital created a new wave of economic activity that began to translate into an increasing demand for land for industrial, infrastructural and real estate purposes.

While economic liberalization did not substantially stimulate India's manufacturing sector (whose share of GDP remained stagnant), the sector did continue to grow and several states (such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat) saw notable spurts in industrialization and foreign direct investment in the 1990s. More significant, however, was the explosion of India's service sector, particularly Information Technology and Business Process Outsourcing (Bardhan 2010; Gupta and Kumar 2012). Between 1998 and 2012, revenues from the IT/BPO sector expanded from 1.2% to 7.5% of GDP, and the sector's share of India's exports ballooned from 4% to 25% (NASSCOM 2012). One consequence of this phenomenal growth was a boom in demand for commercial real estate (Searle 2010; Goldman 2011). Given the lack of "world-class" office space and infrastructure within older cities, much of this demand became channeled into campuses and high-tech parks on their rural peripheries, transforming cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad, and helping to produce satellite cities like Gurgaon (Goldman 2011). By the mid-2000s, as we will see, the IT industry was leading the rush to carve Special Economic Zones out of peri-urban farmland.

This phenomenal growth of the IT Industry dovetailed with a second generation of reforms that liberalized India's infrastructure and real estate sectors, and it was these sectors, more than anything, that gave impetus to the land rush of the past decade. Until the early 1990s, the creation of infrastructure was assumed to be a public sector responsibility financed by government spending. India's Eighth Five Year Plan, formulated in 1992, anticipated that "the public sector will continue to play a dominant role" in infrastructure creation, but for the first time opened the door for private participation:

if private initiatives come forward to participate in creating such infrastructure like power plants, roads, bridges, social housing, and industrial estates on reasonable terms and with full protection of peoples interest such initiatives must be positively encouraged (Government of India 1992: para 1.4.26).

As the decade wore on, there was increasing recognition that sustaining India's growth rates (which eventually topped 8%) would require dramatic expansion in infrastructural investment. Increasing doubt that this expenditure could be met by the public sector, combined with a growing preference for private investment, prompted more aggressive privatization of the infrastructure sector (Ahluwalia 1998; IDFC 2008). The central government introduced a series of policies to attract private investment in power (1992), roads (1997), and ports (1997). By the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), it was projected that India would need an investment of \$320 billion in infrastructure to avoid bottlenecks, and the Planning Commission expected that 75% of this investment would come from private sources (Rastogi 2008: 1). While falling short of these goals, overall investment in infrastructure almost quadrupled over the 2000s, increasing its share of GDP from 4.8 to 7.97%. By 2010-11, 37% of that investment was coming from the private sector (Gulati 2011: 380). Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) became the preferred method for attracting this investment into power, telecom, roads, railways, and all manner of physical and "social" infrastructure. Crucially, compensating private infrastructure investors with excess land and/or development rights also became an increasingly common form of cost recovery in these arrangements—whether for roads, airports, or affordable housing (Ahluwalia 1998; IDFC 2008, 2009). The introduction of privately developed Special Economic Zones in 2000, which we will return to shortly, simply represented an application of this principle to industrial infrastructure. The ability to make real estate profits through infrastructure investment has contributed significantly to its attractiveness to private investors, buoying the value of infrastructure assets that are now bundled and sold to global investors.<sup>28</sup>

The privatization of infrastructure has thus been synergistic with the liberalization of India's real estate sector. Until the late 1990s, urban development was a state-dominated affair. Public housing boards and urban development authorities undertook the majority of residential construction; the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act allowed the government to expropriate private landholdings exceeding a certain limit; regulations sought to check land speculation and assure housing for the poor; and formal credit from a nationalized banking sector was unavailable to private builders (Searle 2010: 28). However, as Searle writes, "Since the mid-1990s, the model of state-dominated urban development crumbled nationally as states and municipalities, urged by the central government, opened urban development to private corporations" (Searle 2010: 29).

In the 1990s, the government loosened restrictions on bank lending to private developers. By 2002, private developers were allowed to obtain financing (for construction, though not land purchases) from foreign investors. This policy was further liberalized after 2005 (Searle 2010: 30). This credit expansion, combined with the booming demand for commercial office space by India's IT industry and the pent-up demand for housing by a burgeoning middle class, precipitated a dramatic real estate boom by the mid-2000s. Between 2001 and 2011, housing finance expanded by a factor of eight and real estate values increased by a factor of five (2.5 times the rate of inflation)—the latter a conservative estimate given the quantity of black money involved in real estate transactions in India (Kumar 2002; Chakravorty 2013). Flat prices in cities

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<sup>28</sup> The Indian government has been eagerly looking for ways to attract more investment into infrastructure. In 2010, the Reserve Bank of India created a new category of Non-Banking Financial Companies called Infrastructure Finance Companies (Gulati 2011: 394). Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has made attracting infrastructure investments a large priority (see, for example, Hindustan Times 2012).

like Mumbai, Bangalore, and Delhi rivaled or surpassed those in Western metropolises,<sup>29</sup> while smaller cities and large towns also experienced dramatic and unprecedented booms. The constrained supply of land in urban areas meant that much of this demand spilled into peri-urban and rural areas where global, national and regional builders began to buy up farmland to construct housing colonies, and middle-class and non-resident Indians bought up plots for residences and as speculative investments. The result has been rural land values that rival those in the United States (Chakravorty 2013).

In addition to real estate, economic liberalization has unleashed a mineral rush across central and eastern India. Beginning in 1993, India began to liberalize its largely nationalized mining industry. The “New National Mineral Policy” of 1993 and subsequent revisions over the next decade facilitated private and foreign investment in prospecting, extracting and processing of most minerals. After changes in 1997 and 2000, foreign private equity investments of up to 100% were granted automatic approval. Royalties and “dead rent” were substantially reduced, export restrictions relaxed, and the formerly administered pricing regime decontrolled (Singh and Kalirajan 2003). By the 2000s, mineral prices were increasing with the Indian and Chinese construction booms driving up demand. While the mining sector has not grown exceptionally fast, the number of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) signed with private mining companies has accelerated and several states (such as Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, and Orissa) have been particularly pro-active in handing over large mining concessions to private investors. That these concessions have not yet translated into higher economic growth can in part be attributed to the growing resistance to them, not least by the burgeoning Maoist insurgency.

To sum up, the process of economic liberalization that began in the 1990s has created “a voracious appetite for space to meet the demands of industrialization, infrastructure building, urban expansion and resource extraction” (Ghatak and Ghose 2011: 65). This demand grew steadily over the 1990s, receded somewhat during the East Asian-triggered recession between 1997 and the early 2000s, and ascended new heights in the mid-2000s as India’s growth rate reached 9% and a liberalized real estate market entered a dramatic boom. While for David Harvey the existence of “surplus capital” looking for realization in land is enough to explain an acceleration in “accumulation by dispossession,” the unanswered question remains: why would increasing demand for land translate into forcible dispossession rather than just a boom in private land sales?

### *Constraints on the Supply of Rural Land*

The first step in the explanation is to realize the barriers to capitalist investment posed by rural land markets in a country whose land mass is largely controlled by a small-holding peasantry. To begin with, there is the generic and long-recognized fact that land is a finite and non-produceable asset with location-specific qualities. This means that land, unlike other commodities, is imperfectly substitutable. For development projects that are “site-bound” (cf. Hirschman 1967), *particular* parcels of land are required for their bio-physical or locational properties. Even with “footloose” projects, for which there is some latitude in location, there arises the need for contiguity. From the demand point of view, then, this peculiar property of land as a means of production implies that an investor in a land development project cannot simply locate a project wherever they find willing sellers.

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<sup>29</sup> By 2011, an average flat in Mumbai and Delhi was selling for the equivalent of 100 and 75 years of average income respectively (Chakravorty 2013).

From the supply point of view, there is the converse problem that for a landowner, his or her particular parcel of land with its specific location and physical properties can never be replaced with an exact equivalent (as, for example, a wrecked car can be replaced by a new one). Not only are two pieces of land never the same, but the social embedding of land makes it difficult to replace through cash. As Polanyi observed, land is a “fictitious” commodity in the sense that it is valued in multiple ways (for example, as habitation, patrimony, long-term security, and source of status and identity) that are not easily reducible to exchange value (Polanyi 2001: 187). In the chapters that follow, we will encounter examples of the diverse and varied ways in which farmers value land as part of their lives and livelihoods. While such valuations of land are often glibly described as “emotional attachments,” we will see that they are also often quite reasonable from a purely economic perspective. Even where farmers would in principle like to exit agriculture, they are often reluctant to surrender land where non-farm economic opportunities appear unpromising (a reluctance, we will see, that is well-founded under India’s current model of economic growth). The upshot is that possession of alienable private property is no guarantee that people will *value and treat* their land as a purely financial asset, which makes its supply particularly “inelastic.”<sup>30</sup> While a capitalist looking to purchase hundreds of acres for a large factory or SEZ will surely find some sellers, they will also surely find some hold-outs that will prevent contiguity.

This difficulty of consolidating large tracts of land for industry or urbanization—the so-called “holdout problem”—is compounded by the fact that even when there are willing sellers, a high degree of land fragmentation means that a buyer might have to negotiate with hundreds or even thousands of potential sellers. Landholdings in India are among the smallest in the world, averaging 1.06 hectares, and are only shrinking with the relentless march of generational subdivision. Of the 101 million operational holdings in rural India in 2003, 70% were “marginal” (less than one hectare) (NSS 2006). In the village of Rajpura, Rajasthan (to be introduced in the next chapter), the land acquired for the Mahindra World City SEZ was previously divided into 2950 parcels (*khasras*) owned by 391 different people.<sup>31</sup> Rajasthan is the least densely populated state in India with larger than average landholdings; the difficulties are much greater in states like West Bengal that have higher population densities and extremely small holdings. The 1,000 acres of land acquired for the Tata car factory in Singur was reportedly divided between 12,000 owners (Ghatak and Ghose 2011: 71). The complexities and transaction costs of negotiating with so many land-holders is prohibitive for any private investor.

This is particularly so because land fragmentation multiplies the likelihood of legal disputes in the context of shoddy land records and a creaking judicial system. While a comparatively large portion of India’s rural land is surveyed and settled as private property, land records are in many cases ambiguous enough to invite contestation. Various forms of joint ownership complicate titles and, for various historical reasons (including lack of farmer literacy and corruption among land records officials), past generations sometimes did not register subdivisions or even sales. It is a common phenomenon, particularly where land values are

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<sup>30</sup> The barriers to capitalist development posed by these specific qualities of land as a means of production, particularly when it is held as small-holding private property, has long been recognized within agrarian political-economy; however, it was seen as being a constraint on the development of capitalist agriculture that was not applicable to industry (Kautsky 1988: 147; Adnan 1985: 58). In today’s context of increasing demand for large land development projects, these peculiar features of small-holding peasant property in land have become above all a significant barrier to industrial and commercial capitalism. On the distinction between alienability and valuation in the process of commodification, see Castree (2003).

<sup>31</sup> Rajpura land records 2004.

rising, for outside parties or extended kin to claim rights to land, even after it is sold to another party. The World Bank estimates that 28% of land parcels in peri-urban areas are subject to such legal disputes (World Bank 2007: 2). While investors in relatively small projects might be able to purchase the required land without litigation, as a project increases in size to over a few hundred acres, legal disputes are a practical certainty. These disputes can last decades in India's backlogged courts, during which time construction or further sale can be frozen by court injunction, delaying projects indefinitely. It is for these reasons that the World Bank and pro-market reformers have been vociferous proponents of updating and modernizing land titling systems, which would, "make available a huge amount of high-value peri-urban land for productive investment and development" (World Bank 2007: 2). Nevertheless, even if land titling programs prove successful at reducing transaction costs and litigation, which is far from clear (Benjamin et al. 2007), they would not resolve the other obstacles (enumerated above) to consolidating large contiguous chunks of rural land for capital investment.

In sum, the growing demand for land initiated by liberalization in India has confronted the supply barrier of rural land markets that do not provide "an open field" for the circulation of capital (Harvey 2006b: 271). While these features of land markets existed under the developmentalist regime, and are among the generic reasons that eminent domain exists anywhere, the problem has intensified post-liberalization as private demand has accelerated while peasant landholdings have only gotten smaller. Though rural land markets work sufficiently well for small private purchases, it is almost impossible for private investors to acquire large contiguous chunks of land (say over a few hundred acres) for development projects through market negotiation.

Thus arises the demand and rationale for state involvement in land acquisition. Any capitalist looking to establish a large greenfield project in rural India will insist that the government acquire land for them. As the developer of the Mahindra World City SEZ explained:

[Purchasing land] is always difficult.... You have to negotiate with too many people and you always find a maverick. Say you want to buy 100 acres, if you find someone who is smart and educated, he says, "I'm not going to sell my land." So government has to take it.... You have to do it through government. They are the necessary evil" (Interview, 7/14/10).

This view was common to every private developer, consultant and industry representative I interviewed over the course of my research. It is why the Confederation of Indian Industries, in the context of debates over India's Land Acquisition Act, has insisted that, "Government cannot absolve its responsibility in land acquisition" (CII 2011).

This analysis is largely shared (and indeed assumed) by government officials. As the official in charge of SEZs for Andhra Pradesh's industrial development corporation frankly explained:

If they have to talk to farmers, it will be a problem for industrial people to procure the land. If you go and ask the farmer, can it happen? No! They will come and cut your head [off]! If someone comes and asks for 500 acres for industry, of course they will deny it.

ML: Even if they offer a good price?

Even if they want to pay the [market] price to him, it is a problem (Interview, 3/20/10, Hyderabad).

This analysis was repeated in less colorful terms by all the industrial development officials I interviewed in seven other states. The then Industries Minister of West Bengal, whose government was soon to fall over controversial land acquisitions, maintained that, “State government’s intervention is extremely crucial for providing land for large and medium sized industries” (Interview, 2/28/11, Kolkata).

Nevertheless, the fact that state dispossession is necessary *if* large-scale private land development projects are to go forward does not explain the state’s belief in their necessity and their willingness to mobilize state coercion to make them possible. That such willingness should not be taken for granted as a structural feature of capitalist states was illustrated by the previous chapter, which showed that in the four decades after independence, the state considered the exercise of *eminent domain* for purely private purposes to be, while legal, not necessarily consonant with Nehruvian principles of development and social justice. The state exercised its ability to dispossess land for a restrictive set of purposes: mostly for projects that were in the public sector or were otherwise productive in a narrow industrial sense. Private companies may have gotten land to produce on, but not capture rents on. Privatized infrastructure was not contemplated, and dispossessing land for real estate projects was unthinkable. To understand why state governments began, post-liberalization, to help private capital overcome the barrier of rural land markets on an unprecedented scale and for an expanded range of purposes, we need to understand the way economic liberalization restructured the relationship between capital and sub-national states.

#### *Inter-state Competition and the Pressure to Dispossess*

Many scholars have noted that economic liberalization has greatly intensified inter-state competition for investment in India (Jenkins 1999; Rudolph and Rudolph 2001). The abolition of industrial licensing—the process by which the central government approved and determined the location of new industrial undertakings—gave private investors the freedom to determine where to invest. In this new dispensation, state governments had to compete for private investments, ratcheting up the pressure to offer increasingly liberal and concessionary terms to footloose capital. Responding to the policy changes coming from New Delhi, state governments in the early 1990s issued new industrial policies that outlined these incentives. Chief Ministers such as Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh and later Narendra Modi of Gujarat styled themselves as CEOs of their states, which they proclaimed to be “open for business” (Rudolph and Rudolph 2001; Sud 2012). Less industrially dynamic states followed suit, albeit with uneven success. By the 2000s, signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with private and foreign companies became high-profile affairs that signaled the ability of political leaders to bring “development” to their constituents.

What is less appreciated, however, is the critical role of land dispossession in this competition.<sup>32</sup> Given the barrier to amassing large chunks of land through market purchase, companies making large enough investments insist on a government commitment to acquiring it. Such a commitment is an invariable item in the MoUs signed between companies and state

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<sup>32</sup> On the broader significance of land liberalization and new forms of urban governance, see Sud (2012) and Goldman (2011).

governments. According to both government officials and industry representatives, the ability of state governments to furnish this land has become of critical importance in the inter-state competition for investment. According to the former Chief Secretary of Rajasthan (the highest ranking bureaucrat in the state), land was “the number one factor” in attracting industry (Interview, 2/17/11, Jaipur). An official of a major industry association confirmed: “It is the most important factor in deciding where to invest” (Interview, 1/19/11, New Delhi).

The relative ability of states to dispossess their peasantries for private capital has thus become a key criteria of their economic competitiveness. This criteria has only increased in importance as land acquisition has become more difficult in the face of farmer opposition. Most famously, the opposition to land acquisition for Tata Motors’ Nano car factory in Singur, West Bengal led to the project being shifted to Sanand, Gujarat, where Chief Minister Narendra Modi was able to make available the required 1,000 acres within a few weeks at a concessionary price. The then Industries Minister of West Bengal, a key proponent of the project explained in an interview:

Providing land is one of the most important things, you see, because until and unless you get a hold of the land, there is no question of setting up industry.... That is the most important input. If you don’t get it, if you cannot provide it, then they will seek somewhere else where they can get that land (Interview, 2/28/11, Kolkata).

The high-profile relocation of the Nano project reinforced perceptions of West Bengal as hostile to business, while shoring up Gujarat’s sterling image as an investment destination. As the former Rajasthan Chief Secretary observed:

Of course the state which gives land, industry will prefer to go over there....Nano had all these problems in West Bengal. Then Gujarat gave them land in one week’s time with all the approvals. That is the way you promote industry..... Giving land early, converting it early [is] very important (Interview, 2/17/11, Jaipur).

Narupama Sen, the former West Bengal Industries Minister, conceded, “there are certain negative perceptions of West Bengal, particularly after the exit of Tata Motors” (Interview, 2/28/11, Kolkata).

By contrast, Gujarat’s star has only risen and its model of land acquisition has been helped up as a model for other states to emulate. One official in charge of promoting SEZ development for a major industry association argued that Gujarat has been so successful:

Because they are easily providing land. They are not creating any kind of agitation. They don’t have any kind of local problems. They don’t have any law and order problems...[Land] is the most important factor in deciding where to invest. And second is law and order.... If you have good law and order, you can control the agitations (Interview, 1/19/11, New Delhi).

While Gujarat also has the advantage of considerably more public land to allot than West Bengal (which must rely almost exclusively on acquiring private land from farmers), this official’s explicit connection between land and public order highlight the extent to which creating an attractive investment climate involves the ability of states to execute dispossession and manage



its political fallout (a subject we will return to in Chapter 7). One of this official's main responsibilities is to help the states with less impressive track records learn "best practices" in land acquisition from states like Gujarat.

However, inter-state competition not only creates pressure for state governments to expropriate land for private investors; it also creates pressure for them to do so cheaply. As we saw in the previous chapter, acquiring land at less than its market value is made possible by India's system for assessing land. While India's Land Acquisition Act requires that private land owners be compensated at the land's "fair market price," we have seen how the assessed value is always less than its actual market value. The acquisition of public grazing and forest lands—for which the government is under no legal obligation to compensate users—can be done even more cheaply through administrative fiat. All of this leaves a large gap between the cost of government acquired land and its actual and potential market value, creating massive opportunities for arbitrage. I call the ratio between the artificially low cost of government acquired land and its ultimate market appreciation the "rate of accumulation by dispossession." While in the next chapter, I will show how this can actually be calculated (or at least estimated) in the context of a Special Economic Zone, Figure 3.1 provides a conceptual illustration. The lower value (P1) is the compensation the state pays to farmers. As we saw, this compensation is determined not by the market but by a state's legal/administrative apparatus for acquiring land. It is also, however, politically determined in the sense that it reflects the lowest price at which the state can reliably undertake dispossession without generating revolt (as we will see, political struggle can raise this lower limit and thus reduce the rate of accumulation by dispossession). The upper value (P3) reflects the ultimate market appreciation of the land after it is acquired and handed over to a private capitalist. This value can only be provisionally calculated as it depends on the state of the market at any given point in time.

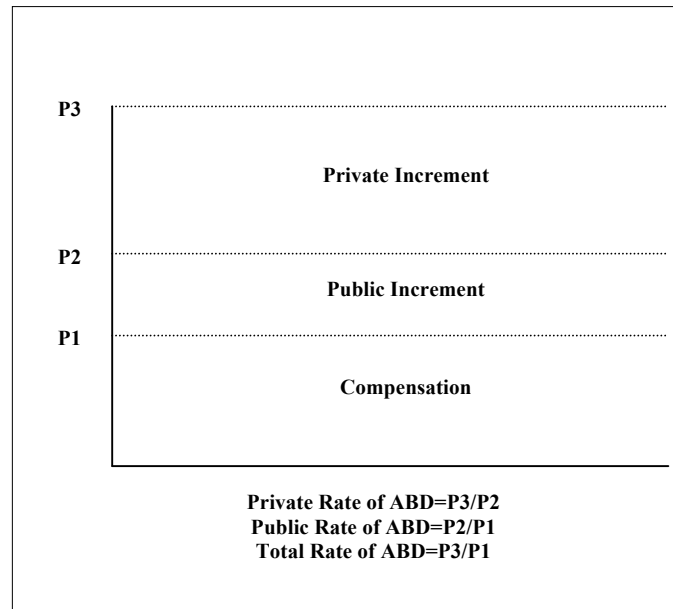
But the difference between P1 and P3 is not a mere analytical distinction: as the state gets into the business of dispossessing land for private real estate rather than factories or infrastructure, this discrepancy is becoming visible to farmers themselves—and thus politically explosive. While theoretically the analyst could calculate the rate of accumulation by dispossession for projects of the developmentalist regime by looking at the extent to which cheaply acquired land provided subsidized rent to industrial undertakings or irrigated water contributed to the profits of farmers, in practice this was not readily visible or easily calculable. The contribution of dispossession to accumulation was buried in the bottom line of factories, the household accounts of farmers, or the "internal rate of return" of infrastructure projects: the quantity of this contribution was not readily graspable at the level of everyday perception. It is only with the emergence of a regime of dispossession in which expropriated land is resold on the market that the rate of accumulation by dispossession achieves an "objective appearance"<sup>33</sup> and thus becomes politically consequential. While farmers have always known what they were being compensated (P1), when private companies receive that dispossessed land and re-sell it on the market, farmers need only know current market values to roughly estimate the rate of accumulation by dispossession, which now becomes a terrain of political struggle. The point for now, however, is that inter-state competition militates towards an expansion in the rate of accumulation by dispossession as states jockey with each other to provide private capitalists with the cheapest land possible.

The question remains, however, of how much of the rate of accumulation by dispossession is made available to private investors (the private increment), and how much

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<sup>33</sup> For a gloss on this Hegelian concept, see Jameson (2011: 26).

Figure 3.1: The Rate of Accumulation by Dispossession



retained by the land broker state itself (the public increment). Inter-state competition for investment, as we said, militates towards keeping the price to private companies (P2) low and thus maximizing the *private rate of accumulation by dispossession*. Industrial development corporations explicitly advertise land rebates that escalate with the size of investment, providing cheaper land to larger capital. With very large and prestigious investments, land prices can be negotiated in private MoUs. As an official with the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) explained, “[MIDC] has to ensure that the cost of acquisition and the cost of providing infrastructure thereon, is reasonable enough to attract industrialists to whom land has to be offered at a reasonable rate” (Written interview, 9/25/10). The land acquisition officer for RIICO put it more bluntly: “If we give market price, then industrialists won’t come” (Interview, 10/21/2009, Jaipur).<sup>34</sup> While land was also acquired cheaply in the period of state-led growth, it was done to facilitate the industrialization of a poor country that had limited public resources. Under the new dispensation, it is kept low to attract private investors looking to profit from artificially cheap land.

Nevertheless, using the state machinery to enable private arbitrage on land creates opportunities for the state itself. One aspect of this—what we might call the *public rate of accumulation by dispossession*—is perfectly legal and reflects the difference between the compensation paid to farmers (P1) and the price charged to capital (P2). Government and parastatal agencies—principally industrial development corporations and urban development authorities—often “develop” the land they acquire, adding basic infrastructure like water, electricity and drainage to “raw” farmland, and pass on these costs with various fees to the ultimate buyers. The increment kept by the public agency itself varies significantly. Promotional

<sup>34</sup> As we will see in Chapter 6, this prediction has been born out in Haryana, which was forced to introduce the most generous compensation package in India after escalating protests by influential farmers’ groups. An official with the Haryana Industrial Development Corporation told me that since this policy has been put in place, industrialists have been going to other states where land is cheaper (Interview, 2/21/11, New Delhi).

agencies like industrial development corporations keep this increment relatively low in order to attract investors, particularly large ones. Nevertheless, when land is acquired at its agricultural value, there is still significant room to raise its prices to investors while keeping it well below the market value. The income from such land development and conversion charges constitutes a significant and growing source of government revenue. For example, one year into liberalization in 1992, RIICO—which derives most of its revenue from acquiring and developing land for industry—announced its “highest ever profit” (RIICO 1992) and reported new record profits almost every year for the rest of the decade. Its net before-tax profit in 2009-2010 was over \$36 million (RIICO 2010).

Urban development authorities, which are mainly in the business of selling acquired private and public land to real estate developers, appear to keep more of the increment for themselves. The Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA)—which started as an industrial promotion agency but has become an urban planner—has been acquiring massive amounts of land on the peri-urban fringe at Rs. 820 (\$18) per square meter and re-selling it to developers at a minimum of Rs. 35,000 (\$778) (Sood 2011). While it still delivers land to private real estate investors at less than it would cost through private negotiation, agencies such as GNIDA have seen their revenues explode in the real estate boom of the mid-2000s.

The Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) derives approximately one-half to two-thirds of its annual revenue from selling plots of acquired land on the peri-urban fringe. The JDA is the legal owner of all public land within its jurisdiction, which in the context of a real estate boom, has incentivized it to continually expand the Jaipur city limits. As the JDA commissioner explained, “The only resource the JDA has is land. We need to use that land for revenue and to plan for the city” (Interview, 1/28/11, Jaipur). In 1997, it added 153 villages to its jurisdiction, and added another 247 at the height of the real estate boom in 2005, bringing thousands of hectares of village grazing land into its land bank for auction to private investors.<sup>35</sup> As Figure 3.2 shows, the combination of more land and higher prices produced a nine-fold increase in its annual revenue, from just over \$15 million in 2001-2002 to over \$134 million in 2006-7. “With extension of [its] land bank, JDA was making gold” observed one of its officials (Interview, 2/19/11, Jaipur). The enclosure of village commons—which, as we will see in the next chapter, are highly significant for rural livelihoods—provides the bulk of JDA’s operating budget and subsidizes its other activities such as providing urban infrastructure to the city of Jaipur. This is a very significant organizational incentive to dispossess as much land as possible and broker it to whoever desires it, for whatever purpose. But it is not only official government coffers that are stuffed by an expansion of the state’s role in dispossessing land.

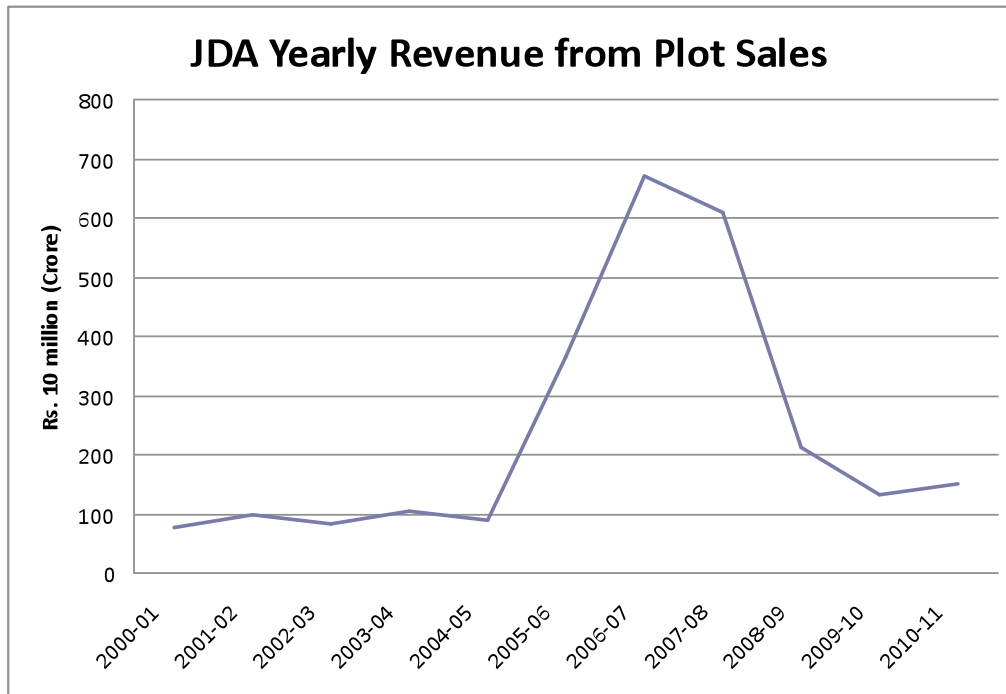
### *Illicit Rents and the Incentive to Dispossess*

The incentive to transform state governments into land brokers does not arise merely from the sincere motivations of politicians and bureaucrats to “bring development” to their states nor from the need for government revenue. It also arises from the lucrative opportunities for illicit rents that a deepening state role in land dispossession makes possible. While attracting private companies to one’s state might in itself create opportunities for graft, the magnitude of unofficial rents that can be extracted through the acquisition and allocation of land may be greater than anything that was possible under the much-maligned “license Raj.” Robert Jenkins has argued that discretionary power over land allocation to private industries is one of the

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<sup>35</sup> The JDA’s (2011) Master Plan 2025 calls for further expansion: from encompassing 478 villages and a total urban area of 1959 sq. km to 725 villages and 2939 sq. km.

Figure 3.2: The Growing Public Rate of Accumulation by Dispossession (Land revenues of the Jaipur Development Authority)



compensatory forms of rent appropriation that politicians and bureaucrats have gained while losing others to economic liberalization. Jenkins provides the examples of state governments acquiring more land than is necessary for projects and then redistributing it to cronies, and demanding kickbacks in return for land allocation (Jenkins 1999: 102-106). Since the time of his writing, the windfalls available to private officials within the land broker state have only expanded as real estate values have hit historic highs. These windfalls can, moreover, be attained in more numerous ways than his examples suggest.

The first and perhaps most lucrative opportunity to appropriate rents derives from early information about where projects will be sited. Politicians and bureaucrats involved in the private negotiations and planning that precede the public announcement of projects possess a very valuable commodity: knowledge about where land prices will suddenly escalate exponentially by the mere fact of a project being announced in their vicinity. There are several ways to cash in on this knowledge. The first is to buy land in the area for oneself, suitably disguised by registering it in the name of extended kin, cronies, or *benami* (front; literally “without name”) companies in which one is a silent partner.<sup>36</sup> The second is to distribute this information to private investors, lower level officials, friends and family in return for kickbacks and favors.<sup>37</sup> As one official of

<sup>36</sup> While difficult to prove, it is often alleged that Chief Ministers and politicians are silent partners in such companies. As one JDA official himself explained to me, “all politicians and bureaucrats buy *benami* land” (Interview, 2/19/11, Jaipur).

<sup>37</sup> There is of course some uncertainty in this process, which arises from the possibility that the information one receives is not accurate. As one real estate developer explained to me, “Sometimes rumors make the price go up. Sometimes bureaucrats have good information. Sometimes a government project changes and the price goes down” (Interview, 3/22/10, Jaipur). This of course puts a premium on information obtained from reliable and well-connected sources.

the Jaipur Development Authority explained, “The information starts with the commissioner and seven to eight people, then eventually gets to everyone” (Interview, 2/19/11, Jaipur). While hard empirical evidence about specific instances of this type of “corruption” are difficult to come by for obvious reasons, one way to demonstrate its existence in the aggregate is to examine village land records for the year preceding the announcement of a large project. I have done this for the village of Rajpura, whose land was acquired for the Mahindra World City SEZ after the project was publicly announced in 2005. I found that while there were only ten land transactions in the village in 2003 (and less than that in all preceding years), in 2004 there were sixty nine (see Figure 6.1). A suspiciously large number were by companies whose names do not come up on any internet search.

A second opportunity for capturing elicited rents comes from demands to re-draw project boundaries. Slightly shifting the layout of a highway or SEZ in one direction or another has huge implications for landowners in the vicinity. A hundred yards this way, and one’s land is acquired at a below-market rate; a hundred yards the other way and one can reap the windfall of highway- or SEZ-front property. Allegations of manipulating project boundaries are legion, though difficult to prove. In Karnataka, the alleged shifting of the Bangalore-Mysore Industrial Corridor project to favor connected politicians, along with other irregularities in land allocation, has resulted in a special court probe against the last three Chief Ministers (Mondal 2012). In the case of the Mahindra World City SEZ, government documents obtained through the Right to Information Act reveal that the project’s exact boundaries were shifted several times. One hotel-owner whose land was acquired has filed litigation accusing the government of shifting the project’s boundary to benefit a large private developer. An independent commission formed to investigate this and other alleged irregularities in land deals under then Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje directed pointed questions at the JDA to this effect—until the commission was unceremoniously folded down by a court order.<sup>38</sup> My conversations with farmers in villages on the outskirts of Greater Noida (near Delhi) revealed a retail market for exempting land from acquisition by the Greater Noida Development Authority. Farmers there revealed that the going rate was common knowledge, though out of reach for the majority (Fieldnotes, 1/16/10, Sadhopur, U.P.).

A third and extremely lucrative source of illicit rents arises from the real estate speculation that such large development projects generate on surrounding farmland. While land might be forcibly acquired for the project itself, those buying up land in its vicinity must go through government agencies to have it converted from agricultural to commercial or residential status, and to obtain various building permits. This is reputedly the single largest source of illicit revenue for urban development authority officials and the politicians who appoint them. By some accounts, it provides the bulk of campaign finances in Indian elections. One real estate investor from the city of Jaipur described to me delivering a briefcase stuffed with cash to the Jaipur Development Authority so that they would convert agricultural land on the city’s periphery for residential development. As one Haryana official explained to *The Hindu*, such Changes in Land Use (CLU) are the “mother source of all land scams” as “CLU permission granted on agricultural land escalates its value manifold, resulting in a premium for a nexus of realtors, politicians and bureaucrats” (Hindu 2012). And this is only the higher-level corruption: village, sub-district and district land record officials (*patwaris*) routinely demand bribes from those wishing to register land transactions or resolve problematic titles. Village heads (*sarpanches*), as we will see in Chapter 6, also find numerous ways to get a piece of the pie.

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<sup>38</sup> The commission’s head and several of its members refused to be interviewed.

The magnitude of illicit rent made possible by the government's role in dispossessing and allocating land is unquantifiable but can only be immense. At the Congress party's annual plenary in 2010, after a spate of several high-profile land-related scams had rocked the Congress and opposition parties in several states, Congress President Sonia Gandhi urged her party to reign it in: "We have ample evidence that all discretionary powers, particularly in land allocation, breed corruption. I would like all Congress CMs [Chief Ministers] and ministers, at both Centre and states, to set an example by reviewing and relinquishing such powers" (Times of India 2010). There is little indication that this has been heeded. Shortly afterwards, Gandhi's own son-in-law became mired in allegations of corrupt land dealings in Haryana (Dogra 2012).

I would suggest that we not view these illicit appropriations from a legal-moral perspective as the corruption of errant officials.<sup>39</sup> Instead, we should view them more sociologically as part of an undifferentiated and expanding chain of rentiership that is made possible by, and that helps to sustain the post-liberalization emergence of land broker states. The expanding role of state governments in dispossessing agrarian land has greatly expanded the scope for both public and private, legal and illegal accumulation through dispossession. The main point, for present purposes, is that the broad range of actors with a stake in this game is a key factor in the emergence and reproduction of land broker states.

### *Reprise*

To sum up, the transition from a developmentalist to neoliberal regime of dispossession has hinged on the transformation of state governments into land brokers for private capital. Land broker states have emerged out of a conjuncture of several forces: the problem posed by an escalating demand for land confronting the supply barrier of rural land markets; the pressure exerted by inter-state competition on state governments to overcome this barrier by forcibly dispossessing land and providing it cheaply to private capital; and the licit and illicit revenue that such a role can provide to state institutions, their office-holders, and politicians. With this theory of the *transition* between regimes of dispossession, I now turn to a fuller consideration of the scale and character of the neoliberal regime itself.

## THE NEOLIBERAL REGIME OF DISPOSSESSION

### *Scale*

We should start by appreciating the expanded scale of dispossession generated by the forces outlined above. That economic liberalization would create pressure for increasing government land acquisition was anticipated early on by government planners. A 1994 Draft Rehabilitation Policy by the Ministry of Rural Development states:

It is expected that there will be large-scale investment, both on account of internal generation of capital and increased inflow of foreign investment, thereby creating enhanced demand for land to be provided within a shorter time span in an increasingly competitive market-ruled economic structure (Government of India 1994: 1.1-2).

The expectation that a liberalized economy would require a greater scale of land acquisition than under state-led development has proven accurate. While the absence of official government figures makes precise quantification challenging, Walter Fernandes, who has overseen the most

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<sup>39</sup> This is how, for example, the recent India Against Corruption campaign has tended to view the matter.

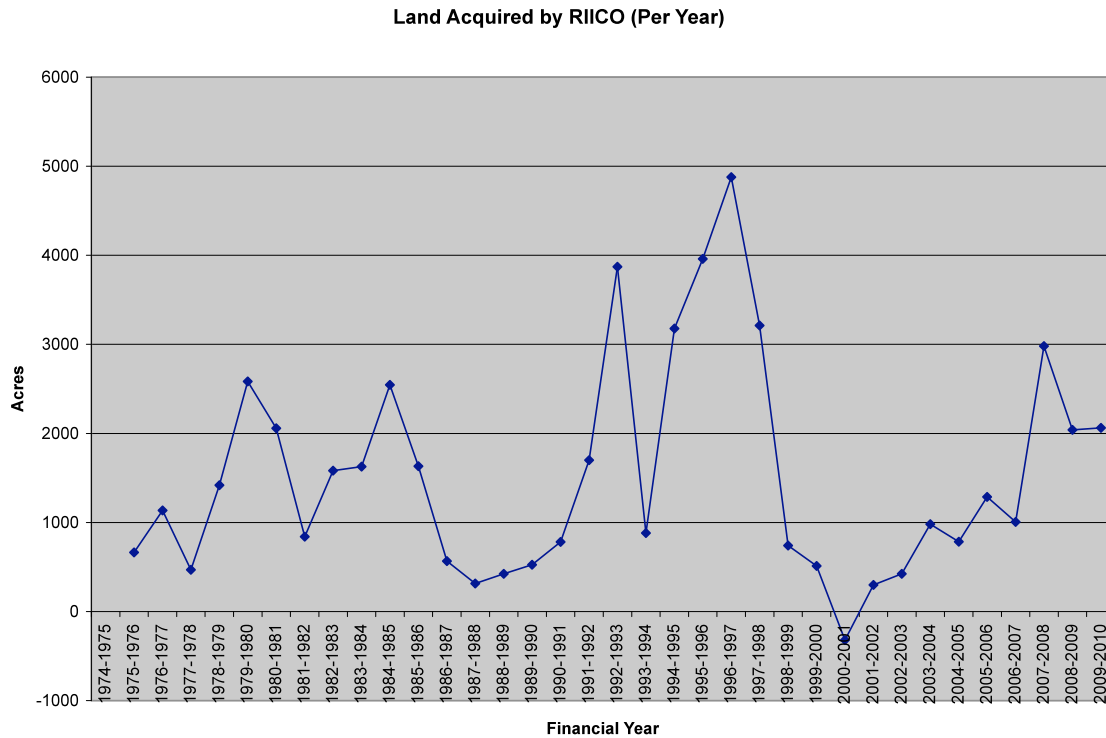
comprehensive state-by-state analysis of “development-induced displacement” in India, argues that there has been an increase post-liberalization (Fernandes 2008: 95). Nevertheless, the nature of the data (post-independence totals) does not allow for precise year-by-year analysis.

In the absence of time-series data at the state or national levels, we are left with the option of assembling data on an agency-by-agency basis (or district by district basis) where it is available. By scouring forty years of newsletters and annual reports of the Rajasthan Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO), I was able to plot the yearly acreage acquired by the agency between 1975 and 2010. As Figure 3.3 shows, there has been a secular post-liberalization increase in RIICO’s yearly land acquisition, with short-term decreases corresponding to business cycles (see Figure 3). The data, however, requires interpretation. When analyzing yearly land acquisition totals, it must be remembered that there is a lag between the demand for land (which can increase or decrease quite quickly) and the ability of the state to supply it. Land acquisition is a slow process, which means that increasing demand for land might translate into higher acquisition 1-2 years later. Moreover, a recession can set in quite unexpectedly leaving the government, which is expecting continued growth, with an unusable surplus. Finally, land acquisition totals reflect not how much land it hopes to acquire, but how much it is able to acquire. This means that lower land acquisition totals can reflect not a slackening in efforts to dispossess but an increasing ability of farmers to resist. So, while the data shows that RIICO acquired twice as much land in the 1990s as in the 1980s, land acquisition dipped in the late 1990s following the East Asian crisis, and remained low in the early 2000s due, according to RIICO officials, to an excess inventory acquired just before the recession. This inventory was depleted and land acquisition started to go up again during the boom of 2005-2008, though not as high as we might expect. From my interviews with RIICO officials, this seems to reflect both the excess inventory of land acquired in the late 1990s and increasing opposition from farmers. Nevertheless, if RIICO has its way, land acquisition will soon increase exponentially with the initiation of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor which will be lined with SEZs and “new manufacturing zones.” According to RIICO’s general manager, the agency plans to acquire almost as much land in the next five years as they have in their entire 40 year history (Interview, 12/15/10, Jaipur). Whether they will be successful at that remains to be seen.

While I was unable to obtain comparable quantitative data for other agencies, industrial development corporation officials in seven other major states—Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Haryana, West Bengal, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu—unanimously told me that they have substantially increased their acquisition of land after liberalization, and particularly in the past five years. All started to build “land banks” in 1990s in order to amass land for investors in advance of specific projects. Tamil Nadu’s industrial development corporation (SIPCOT) built a very large land bank in the 1990s, which was then made available for SEZs and other projects in the 2000s (Vijayabaskar 2010: 39; Interview, SIPCOT, 11/30/10, Chennai). With this land bank now almost depleted, SIPCOT is beginning a large round of fresh acquisitions. In Andhra Pradesh, the head of its industrial development corporation (APIIC) told me that, “Since 1995, we are seeing an annual growth of 20%,” which became 30% after 2000 (Interview, 11/24/10, Hyderabad). Similarly, an official with the Haryana Industrial Development Corporation told me that the agency’s yearly land acquisition has doubled since 2005 as demand for land in the National Capital Region (around Delhi) has exploded (Interview, 2/21/11, New Delhi).

Given that the real estate sector is growing faster than industry, we might expect the land acquisitions of urban development authorities to have increased even more than that of industrial development corporations. As the Jaipur Development Authority’s Land Acquisition Officer

Figure 3.3: Increasing Scale of Dispossession: Time Series of Land Acquisition by the Rajasthan Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO)



flatly stated, “Land acquisition has increased dramatically” (Interview, 2/18/11). While the data does not allow for an equivalent acre-per-year metric, we saw in the last section that JDA has drastically expanded its land acquisition over the past decade, adding the public lands of hundreds more villages to its land bank. It has also acquired thousands of acres of private land for mega-projects like the Jaipur Ring Road and the Mahindra World City SEZ, two of the biggest projects the agency has ever undertaken. By all accounts, land acquisition in India’s larger cities is increasing even more dramatically than in Jaipur. In Maharashtra, a high-level urban development official confirmed, “land is getting scarce and requirement is going up like anything” (Interview, 9/26/10, Mumbai).

While it would be ideal to have concrete time-series data for more states and government agencies, it is uncontroversial that the scale of forcible land acquisition has increased post-liberalization, and particularly in the 2000s. What is perhaps more interesting, and what justifies periodization into a distinct regime, is the qualitative shift in the *character* of dispossession.

### *Land for the Market*

In the previous chapter, I argued that in the period of state-led development, land dispossession largely served state-led projects of productive industrial and infrastructural development. As will have already become clear, economic liberalization has prompted state governments to dispossess farmers for a much broader range of purposes, as private companies in general, and finance capital in particular, have entered into sectors previously dominated by the public sector. So while the state’s exercise of eminent domain is supposed to be limited to projects that serve a “public purpose,” the working definition of public under this regime has been stretched to the point of being indistinguishable from private. As the last chapter argued,



the “public” of the Nehruvian development model was always a mystification of the dominant class interests that it disproportionately benefited and that rarely bore the costs of dispossession. Nevertheless, the practice of dispossession under the developmentalist regime had an ideological coherence that limited its scope. Even when land was dispossessed for the direct use of private industries, it was in the service of production; it was inconceivable that the state would dispossess land for the real estate interests of private companies. The neoliberal regime of dispossession, by contrast, is defined by the removal of such limits, and the willingness of states to dispossess land for any private purpose that contributes to economic growth, no matter how speculative and immaterial.

To understand this shift in theoretical terms, I build again on Arrighi’s (1994) novel periodization of Marx’s M-C-M’ formula into distinct phases of material (MC’) and financial expansion (CM’). Whereas Marx’s general formula of capital accumulation described a singular sequence (the expansion of money through the production of commodities), Arrighi disaggregated the formula to capture historically distinct phases in which capital expanded predominantly through the production of commodities and those in which it expanded on the basis of financial gains (1994: 8-9). Arrighi further proposed the formula MTM’ to capture specifically capitalist form of *external* territorial conquest (1994: 33). While remaining agnostic on Arrighi’s *longue durèe* theory of “systemic cycles of accumulation,” and how a semi-peripheral country like India fits into them, I propose to modify his formulas and turn them inwards to clarify what I see as the distinct roles of *internal* state coercion in the two regimes under question.

We can understand the developmentalist regime of dispossession described in the last chapter as M-D-C-M’, where “D” signifies the use of dispossession to facilitate material expansion. Under this regime, dispossession is largely used to provide the space upon which commodities can be produced through the labor process. In contrast, the neoliberal regime introduced in this chapter is defined by M-D-M’: the use of dispossession to facilitate financial expansion. Under this regime, the sequence of dispossessing land to produce commodities has been short-circuited as states have become willing to dispossess land for the commodification of space itself. As a shorthand, we can understand this as a shift from a regime of “land for production” to one of “land for the market.” I am not arguing, to be clear, that dispossession for production has ceased or that financial profits are totally divorced from the production of things. What I am arguing is that whereas under state developmentalism land was largely dispossessed to produce commodities upon it, since economic liberalization in the 1990s, land is increasingly dispossessed for its own market value. This chapter has tried to show that this reflects not simply a transformation in the circuits of capital, but above all a transformation of the state. In the transition between regimes of dispossession, it is the “D”—a state willing and able to expropriate land for a new set of purposes—that ultimately must be explained. Without this, there is only land demand, not land dispossession.

This transition can be seen across the board in almost all sectors of the economy. Dispossession for large dams, as we saw in the last chapter, historically served the private (though “productive”) interests of industrialists and large farmers, but indirectly; the state maintained the infrastructure and reservoirs and controlled the distribution of water and electricity. With the privatization of dam building, the state’s role is now limited to dispossessing the land; the infrastructure and water itself has become the property of private companies and transnational finance capital (Nilsen 2010: 33-38; Bosshard 2002). Likewise, dispossession for mineral extraction was, until the 1990s, undertaken by public sector mining companies that had

to sell their minerals at a regulated price to domestic industries with a significant percentage reserved for the public sector. With the privatization of the mining sector, land is now dispossessed directly for multi-national companies and their global investors to extract minerals for sale on global markets. The acquisition of land for state and national highways no longer rests with national and state transport companies, but is auctioned off to private companies who make their profits not just from hefty tolls but by re-selling excess land as residential and commercial real estate. The same procedure is used for the privatized construction of airports, which have turned into opportunities for building satellite cities. This is not to say that the dispossession of land for production has ceased, only that it has been joined and perhaps quantitatively eclipsed by the dispossession of land for the market.

A full account of the current regime of dispossession would include a detailed analysis of these transformations in all sectors of the economy. This is, however, beyond the scope of this project. What I attempt to do instead is analyze in greater detail the post-liberalization transformation of land dispossession for putatively “industrial” purposes as seen in the transition from the public sector industrial estates analyzed in the last chapter, to Special Economic Zones. I will argue that Special Economic Zones, which have been at the center of India’s recent “land wars,” represent the full realization of the regime of dispossession that started to emerge after liberalization in the early 1990s. In the remainder of the chapter, I trace the historical transformation of industrial estates into SEZs and then examine how SEZs have exposed the political fragility of this new regime of dispossession.

### *The Transformation of Industrial Estates*

As we saw in the last chapter, public sector industrial estates (later known as industrial areas) were the predominant form in which state governments acquired land for industry (public and private) in the decades before liberalization. Industrial estates were developed and managed by parastatal agencies—industrial development corporations—which leased plots of land to industrialists. Land was allotted for strictly productive (manufacturing) activities, and the ground rent was captured by the government. However, after liberalization in the early 1990s, this old spatial form began to mutate in ways that anticipated but did not fully realize the regime of dispossession embodied by SEZs. To illustrate these changes, I draw extensively on the archives of the Rajasthan Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO) and dozens of interviews with its officials.

First of all, beginning in the late 1980s there were a series of moves to privatize aspects of RIICO’s operations. In 1994, the Rajasthan Government adopted a liberalized industrial policy, which offered various concessions and subsidies to attract footloose capital (Government of Rajasthan 1994; RIICO 1994a). Among these inducements was simplified procedures for the conversion of agricultural land<sup>40</sup>, and the decision “to allow [the] private sector to establish and maintain industrial areas” (RIICO 1994a). This policy, which would have entailed the state acquiring land for private builders to re-sell at a profit, was never effectively carried out, and RIICO continued to be the sole developer and landlord of industrial areas. However, declaring that “the thrust is now on privatization in Rajasthan” (RIICO 1994b), RIICO began to bring in private builders to construct housing and other facilities in and around their industrial areas (RIICO 1995a).

Second, industrial areas started to become less exclusively industrial. In 1994, RIICO approved a five-star luxury hotel in its Jaiselmer industrial area (RIICO 1994c) and began to

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<sup>40</sup> See Sud (2012) for an analysis of the same process, which she terms “land liberalization,” in Gujarat.

place more emphasis on tourism and real estate-related industries. In 1995, it advertised that it was looking for investors in “hotels, motels, golf courses, gyms, sports complexes, health centres, zoos/botanical gardens, skating rinks, educational institutions . . . housing colonies, New Townships” (RIICO 1995b). In the same year it acquired land for two amusement parks for “water related games, artificial sea waves, fast food, conference hall, golf course and resort” (RIICO 1995c). It announced that “apart from industrial infrastructure, a new drive has been launched to develop social infrastructure” like housing townships around industrial areas with the help of private sector builders (RIICO 1996). The line between industrial production and real estate was becoming blurred under the euphemism of “social infrastructure,” and the state was increasingly acquiring land for any private purpose that represented “growth.”

Industrial areas also became more outward-looking as the emphasis on attracting outside and foreign investment and promoting exports became more pronounced. The Chief Minister and head of RIICO started going on trips abroad to attract non-resident Indian (NRI) and foreign investment (RIICO 1994a). Beginning in the late 1980s and increasingly in the early 1990s, RIICO started signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with foreign companies. After the new investment policy of 1994, RIICO announced 8 proposed “export promotion industrial parks” (EIPs), a central government scheme in which export-oriented companies would receive special concessions like liberalized enforcement of labor laws,<sup>41</sup> anticipating features of SEZs (RIICO 1994a). In 1998, RIICO also started to provide land for export-oriented software technology parks (RIICO March 1998). The industrial space produced through land dispossession was thus becoming increasingly oriented towards external investments and markets.

Along with this, the Nehruvian social commitments embedded in the way RIICO produced industrial space attenuated. Beginning in the 1990s, subsidized land prices for small entrepreneurs and “weaker sections” gave way to subsidies for favored industries (Information Technology and Biotechnology) and a graded system of land rebates that provided the cheapest land to the biggest investors—for example, offering land rebates of 60% to “very prestigious investments” of over Rs. 100 million or to any Fortune 500 company (RIICO 1994d; RIICO 2006a, 2009). Land was now being dispossessed and given to capital without even the veneer of Nehruvian social justice.

As liberalization progressed, an old spatial form thus began to mutate in ways that shed its association with the developmentalist regime of dispossession and pre-figured the SEZ. Aspects of industrial area development were privatized as state governments became facilitators rather than direct undertakers of investment. The strong emphasis on productive, labor-intensive manufacturing became diluted, and land was increasingly expropriated for real estate and tourism. Industrial areas began to focus less on promoting homegrown entrepreneurship, and more on attracting external investment and promoting exports. Finally, the social commitments that had previously guided the development and allocation of industrial land started to wane, and were replaced by the overriding purpose of attracting large corporate investments.

Nevertheless, industrial areas never fully realized the radical privatization that characterizes SEZs. Industrial areas are still built and owned by government agencies. With liberalization, the ground rent generated from industrial areas even became a significant source

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<sup>41</sup> Like the later SEZs, they were given status as “public utilities,” which limits strike activity and empowers a government administrator to arbitrate labor disputes.

of government revenue.<sup>42</sup> Notably, housing projects remain subservient to manufacturing. It was only the introduction of privately developed SEZs that fully realized the changes that began within industrial areas, and completed the transition to a new regime of dispossession.

### *Special Economic Zones*

SEZs are, on one level, industrial estates governed by more liberal economic policies than what applies to the rest of a country. In this respect, India's SEZs have an antecedent in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), which were born out of US Cold War policy towards Latin America in the 1950s and subsequently spread throughout Asia (Moore and Schrank 2004; Kranakis 2008). EPZs evolved as a way to enable foreign companies to exploit cheap labor in Third World countries by creating islands of political stability, good infrastructure, and business friendly economic policies where these otherwise did not exist. According to the ILO, by 2006 there were 3,500 EPZs (or derivatives thereof) in 130 countries (ILO 2007). India developed its first EPZ in Kandla, Gujarat in 1967, followed by 6 more over the subsequent decades. But EPZs remained a marginal experiment at promoting exports and garnering foreign exchange at a time when India's trade policy was overwhelmingly oriented toward import-substituting industrialization (ISI) (Chibber 2003). India's EPZs were government-developed,<sup>43</sup> remained small in size (93-700 acres), attracted more domestic than foreign investment, and contributed only marginally to India's exports, employment, and foreign exchange (Kundra 2000; Banumathi 2010). When the Indian government passed an SEZ Policy (2000) and the SEZ Act (2005), it sought to correct for these "deficiencies" with a more liberal set of financial incentives—income tax holidays, tariff waivers, and duty-free imports—and a streamlined regulatory environment.

For our purposes, however, the real novelty of India's SEZ Act (2005)—and the preceding SEZ Policy (2000)—was that it encouraged private companies to develop, maintain, and effectively govern economic zones on a for-profit basis. In contrast to the Chinese model of government-built SEZs, India's SEZs represented a radically privatized way of building industrial infrastructure in which corporate developers would replace government agencies. The state's role would be limited to forcibly acquiring the land while private companies would capture the rent from developing and reselling it. This policy was justified by the argument that the Indian government—unlike its Chinese counterpart—could not itself build the infrastructure on the scale envisioned, and reflected the overall push (discussed above) towards developing infrastructure on a public-private partnership (PPP) basis (IDFC 2008). However, as a Commerce Ministry official pointed out, India's SEZ model "is not strictly PPP because the government is not putting a single penny in. It's purely privatized" (Interview, 1/17/10, New Delhi).<sup>44</sup>

Privatizing SEZ development was pushed forward by private real estate companies who saw in SEZs an opportunity for windfall returns at a particular moment in India's neoliberal growth trajectory. While the manufacturing sector lobbied for the liberal concessions that were made available to exporting companies within SEZs, real estate companies and large corporate

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<sup>42</sup> A year after liberalization in 1992, RIICO announced its 'highest ever profit' (RIICO, 1992) and announced new record profits almost every year until the late 1990s. Its net before-tax profit in 2009-2010 was over \$36 million (RIICO, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> The only one that was privatized (in Surat, Gujarat) was built in 1994 and thus reflects the transition I have documented for industrial areas.

<sup>44</sup> Though some private SEZ developers do enter into PPPs with state governments (to help secure land and regulatory approvals), the SEZ Act does not require it.

houses actively lobbied for the opportunity to privately develop them. An official overseeing the SEZ unit of a major Indian industry association explained to me that real estate developers lobbied for SEZs because they would be “very low cost” as the government would “provide some benefits like basic infrastructure facilities . . . as well as [the] cheapest land” (Interview, 1/19/11, New Delhi).

Crucially, the SEZ Act only required that 35% of the land acquired for SEZs be used for “processing,” giving the developers freedom with the rest (after protests, this was later raised to 50%). Since the highest value land use is housing, most developers saw SEZs as an opportunity to build satellite cities on cheap government-acquired land at the urban periphery in the midst of an unprecedented real estate boom. Some profit could be made by reselling agricultural land as industrial plots; more profit would be made on developing housing and other urban amenities. Consequently, SEZs became outlets for speculative real estate capital, which explains the scale and speed with which they spread across the country—464 were approved in the first 16 months, and the total now stands at 588.

In contrast to the developmentalist regime of dispossession (reflected in steel towns, industrial estates and EPZs), SEZs represented a definitive transition into a regime of dispossession in which the state was willing to forcibly redistribute very large chunks of land from farmers to private companies for real estate activities. Earlier, land was acquired for private companies to produce upon—as their “spatial basis of operations” (Marx, 1982: 916)—while the state collected the ground-rent. With SEZs, the state is reduced to a mere land broker for private capitalists who themselves capture the ground-rent from industrial producers and from ancillary real estate activities. One upshot of this privatization is that, whereas in industrial areas state agencies had an incentive to acquire the minimum amount of land required for industrial production (to minimize their sunk capital), private SEZ developers have the incentive to make their zones as large as possible to maximize their profit from cheap land acquired by the state. The result is a proliferation of mega-projects like the 12,000 acre Sri City in Andhra Pradesh or Reliance’s proposed SEZs outside of Gurgaon and Mumbai, both of which were originally planned to cover 25,000 acres.<sup>45</sup>

SEZs thus definitively break from the productivism that defined state-developmentalism and that helped to justify forcible land dispossession. While the SEZ rules require that half the land be used for some form of “processing” that generates positive net foreign exchange, the other half can be used for any purpose whatsoever. While a few private SEZs are simply captive shells for a single industrial manufacturer to take advantage of the tax breaks, most are developed as sector-specific or multi-purpose zones by real estate companies or real estate subsidiaries of large Indian corporations whose incentive is to turn farmland into real estate. As the Vice Chairman of Mahindra Lifespaces—developer of the SEZ introduced in the next chapter—put it, “You make money on the housing and not on the infrastructure” (quoted in Sarkar 2008). Housing is not secondary and instrumental to production, as it was to the townships attached to public sector steel mills and industrial areas, but of primary interest and intended for open sale, not employee housing. Most of the SEZs are being located on the rural periphery of growing metropolitan areas with hot real estate markets. Two-thirds of India’s SEZs are in the IT sector (Government of India n.d.), which means that developers can simply build office buildings (already a real estate activity) adjoined by luxury housing. In this way dispossession is increasingly delinked from capitalist production and used freely to produce

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<sup>45</sup> However, Reliance’s Maha Mumbai SEZ is scrapped and its Haryana SEZ greatly reduced and facing an uncertain future.

capitalist space (Lefebvre 1991). Any economic activity that can generate a higher-value land use than agriculture—no matter how unproductive or speculative—now constitutes a “public purpose” that warrants the forcible expropriation of land from farmers. SEZs thus epitomize the shift from a regime of dispossessing “land for production” to one of dispossessing “land for the market.”

Contrary to popular belief, this does not mean that SEZs represent neo-imperialism or are “exceptions” (Ong 2006) to the national economic space.<sup>46</sup> While India’s SEZs allow 100% FDI in both their development and productive units, it would be a stretch to say that they represent “the foreignisation of space” (Zoomers, 2010) or are a “strategy of global capital” (Banerjee-Guha 2008: 51). Nor are they a product of US foreign policy, as were EPZs in Latin America (Moore and Schrank 2004). The role of the World Bank in India’s SEZ policy is notable by its absence. Rather, SEZs are largely the product of a mature Indian capitalist class—and particularly its real estate and IT/service fractions. With very few exceptions, almost all of the private SEZs have been developed by Indian companies, most relying on internal accruals and domestic bank loans for financing. FDI in their productive units has been significantly lower than domestic investment and disappointing to Indian planners (Interviews, Ministry of commerce, 1/17/11, New Delhi; private SEZ consultant, 11/19/10, Gurgaon; SEZ regulator, 1/28/11, Greater Noida). So while they are more externally-oriented than industrial areas and are clearly buoyed by the contribution of foreign capital to India’s real estate market in general, SEZs are much more notable for their privatization than foreignization of India’s land surface.

SEZs do, however, represent the total abandonment of the social commitments embedded in how the Nehruvian state produced industrial space. Gone are the commitments to rural industrialization and “balanced regional development.” With privatization, the location of SEZs is left to private capitalists whose sole criteria is to maximize the post-acquisition appreciation of land. They are designed—with large plot sizes—for the large corporation, not the small entrepreneur. They also provide little impetus to labor-intensive industrialization—two-thirds are being built for the IT/BPO sectors, which largely employ middle-class, educated urban youth (Upadhyaya, 2007; Radhakrishnan, 2011) and, as we will see, hold little promise of absorbing the labor of dispossessed farmers.

Nothing about SEZs, consequently, fits the Nehruvian ideology of state-driven development that enjoyed such widespread acceptance in the post-independence years and that justified (if not justifiably) large-scale dispossession. How, then, do land broker states elicit compliance to dispossession for SEZs and similar projects?

### *(Non-)Compliance to the Neoliberal Regime of Dispossession*

The first answer to this question is that they are still trying to figure it out. The neoliberal regime of dispossession, as we saw in the beginning of Chapter 1, has proven remarkably tenuous in rural India. While we saw in the previous chapter that it took decades for strong organized opposition to emerge against forced displacement by projects of the Nehruvian state, SEZs have generated immediate and widespread “land wars” across the subcontinent. These new land struggles are not only more widespread but are achieving concrete results much more quickly than the old ones ever did. While the anti-dam movements were, despite tremendous

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<sup>46</sup> See Cross (2010) for a critique of the proposition that SEZs can, with respect to labor, be characterized as “spaces of exception” (Ong 2006). Cross argues that they are entirely unexceptional from the generally precarious labor regimes that prevail across the subcontinent.

efforts, rarely successful in stopping projects, the new anti-SEZ struggles have already succeeded in scrapping or terminally stalling many of the largest SEZs in India.

Why is resistance to land dispossession not only more widespread but also more successful today than it was under the period of state-led development? It is probably impossible to answer this question in a positivist sense of isolating variables to produce a satisfying causal explanation. First of all, the struggles in each period are not totally independent from each other. The new agrarian uprisings are able to build upon the struggles against forced displacement that emerged in the 1980s and that first brought the issue to public attention. Second, many things other than the character of land dispossession have also changed during the period under question that could have implications for land politics. Congress hegemony has declined, and regional parties proliferated in the states, increasing the likelihood that an opposition party might take up the issue. Rural education has progressed (albeit slowly) and there has been a greater penetration of the media and NGOs into rural areas, all of which could have enabling effects on rural movements.<sup>47</sup>

Instead of attempting to explain success, then, I would like to pose the question somewhat differently: if any regime of dispossession must ultimately have a way of making people vacate their land, what means of producing compliance are available to the neoliberal regime? I have argued that because of its very nature, a regime of dispossession does not have at its disposal one of the weapons of a production regime: the ability to *mystify* expropriation. Given dispossession's inescapable transparency, its successful accomplishment must rely either on brute coercion, explicit normative justifications, and/or material inducement. In the last chapter I argued that while coercion remained important, dispossession in the period of state-led growth was enabled by the significant legitimacy of the post-independence state and its development project. I would like to conclude this chapter by illustrating the ideological frailty of the neoliberal regime of dispossession, and its demonstrable inability to achieve compliance by appeals to "national development" or "the public interest." I will then argue, however, that the very feature of the neoliberal regime of dispossession that undermines its ideological legitimacy simultaneously creates an alternative, material basis for compliance.

#### i. Crisis of Legitimacy

Politicians never publicly state that farmers should give up their land so that private investors can speculate upon it. As Sud notes in the case of Gujarat, "ideas of development through economic liberalization, including the liberalization of land, are not necessarily being projected prominently and independently at the public level" (Sud 2012: 104). Instead, dispossession continues to be justified in the old language of "development," while the term is invested with new meaning. Ideological justification for dispossessing farmers for SEZs and other projects of the neoliberal regime thus rests on a slippage in which: 1) "development" is stripped of its Nehruvian connotations and reduced to economic growth through private investment; and 2) economic growth through private investment has become a "public purpose" justifying the use of *eminent domain*. Consequently, any private land use—whether it is a luxury housing colony, golf course, amusement park, or Formula 1 racetrack—that generates profits higher than agriculture now warrants the forcible expropriation of land from peasants. Asher

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<sup>47</sup> While Khagram (2004) argues that the 'success' of anti-dam movements is attributable to new transnational networks (Khagram 2004), these are largely absent from these new land wars. While it is questionable how central transnational networks were to previous struggles (and how successful they were in India), the absence of familiar targets like the World Bank in the political economy of SEZs makes them even less relevant today.

Ghertner has provocatively argued in the context of urban slum demolitions that, more than explicit rationalization, the “world class” aesthetic itself—the shiny surfaces of shopping malls, IT parks, and American-style housing—has become its own self-evident justification (Ghertner 2010). Whatever *looks* modern vis-à-vis a slum (or farmland) constitutes development and justifies evictions. Whatever its aesthetic appeal, it seems clear that dispossession under the neoliberal regime lacks the explicit and compelling narrative that justified dispossession in the developmentalist period.

What is more, the new character of dispossession under neoliberalism makes it vulnerable to critique by the still extant standards of the preceding regime. To put it crudely, for most people, it is a very dubious proposition that expropriating land from farmers for private real estate is a legitimate “public purpose.” Whereas industrial and infrastructure projects undertaken by the Nehruvian state enjoyed significant public legitimacy, it is a much harder sell that expropriating land from the “common man” (*aam admi*) so that Reliance or multi-national companies can build office buildings, shopping malls and housing for the rich constitutes a similarly legitimate *raison d’État*. As a RIICO official frankly explained the greater opposition to land acquisition for SEZs than industrial estates, “Because it’s private companies, they [farmers] think you’re taking land from us poor people and giving it to the rich (*paisewalas*)” (Interview, 10/21/09, Jaipur).

Such perceptions resonate and have significant political salience in a country where over 68% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day (World Bank 2010) and where the state has long upheld a (discursive) commitment to socialism. While the Nehruvian state was in fact committed to capitalist industrialization, it nevertheless held the private sector in some suspicion while investing greater ideological legitimacy in the public sector. Moreover, it placed great emphasis on the expansion of the country’s *productive* capacities. This *productivism*, which privileged labor-absorbing industrial and agricultural growth, justified the allocation of land to both public and private sector firms. The legacy of these discursive commitments is that it still appears more legitimate to dispossess land for the public than private sector, and for industrial activities than real estate or other commercial uses.

So while government officials have sought to portray SEZs as engines of employment-generating industrialization, anti-SEZ movements and their supporters have more successfully framed them as “real estate scams” and “corporate land grabs.” A leader of the farmer agitation against Reliance’s Maha Mumbai SEZ clarified to the press, “We are not opposed to setting up industries. But it (MSEZ) is a real estate scam in the name of industrialization.... The land acquired for industrialisation has to be used for setting up industries only” (quoted in Reddy 2011). While this distinction is used instrumentally by activists, its very use reflects a recognition of its political saliency.

In the wake of Nandigram and proliferating “land wars” across the country, opposition politicians also took up the distinction. Sharad Yadav, president of the Janata Dal (United): “SEZ is purely a real estate scam and nothing to do with export promotion and foreign capital inflow” (Financial Express 2006). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was responsible for the original SEZ policy in 2000, deposed before a parliamentary committee that SEZs amounted to “real estate exploitation” (Parliament of India 2007: annexure III) and claimed in its 2009 economic resolution that, “The UPA [United Progressive Alliance] converted the SEZ policy into a naked land grab for real estate firms and corrupt politicians” (BJP 2009). The General Secretary of the CPI(M)—the party responsible for the carnage in Nandigram—argued that, “The current market-led model of SEZs ... has become an instrument of reckless real estate



development and land speculation” (Parliament of India 2007: annexure II). AB Bardhan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) warned that in the name of SEZs, “Large tracts of farmers’ land are being grabbed by big business houses actually for real estate purposes” (CPI 2011). To be sure, none of these parties dissented to the original passage of the SEZ Act, many of them have pushed for developing SEZs while in power, and some of these criticisms might be dismissed as electoral opportunism. The crucial point, however, is that there is an opportunity to exploit: in the wake of the widespread land wars against SEZs, all parties recognize the political danger of forcibly redistributing land from farmers to private companies, especially for non-industrial purposes.

The distinction that industrialization and not real estate constitutes a legitimate “public purpose” justifying forcible land acquisition is also making limited headway in the judiciary. In a case where farmers challenged the acquisition of their land by the Greater Noida Development Authority (outside of Delhi), a Supreme Court judge dismissed the developer’s arguments that the project would serve the poor:

Do you think judges live in a fool’s paradise? Look at your own brochure. It is saying about swimming pool, spa, tennis court, badminton court, beauty parlour, Ayurvedic massage, etc. All these are for poor people? Land is given for development which must be inclusive. The State is taking advantage of the law against the poor... [The] Land Acquisition Act has become an engine of oppression for the common man. You [State] have virtually demolished every area for the benefit of a particular society for which you work (quoted in Venkatesan 2011).

Coming from India’s highest court, this is a strong indictment of the state’s role as land broker for private capital. The court overturned the land acquisition, underscoring the ideological if not judicial tenuousness of the neoliberal regime of dispossession. What Ray and Katzenstein (2005) call the “master-frame” of Nehruvian developmentalism—with its twin emphases on state-led industrial production and poverty alleviation—clearly still has some purchase in public and official discourse, and it is proving to be a resource for anti-SEZ movements.

In sum, it is difficult to convince many farmers and a sizeable public that dispossessing land for private developers constitutes a public purpose. The neoliberal regime of dispossessing land is thus proving ideologically tenuous and is failing to compel farmers across the country to surrender their land for SEZs and other projects. Ironically, the more powerful Nehruvian ideology of state-led development, which justified dispossession for dams and industrial development for many decades, is now being successfully used against the current neoliberal regime of dispossession.

## ii. Material Compliance?

If the neoliberal regime of dispossession is ideologically weak, what are its prospects for generating compliance based on the material interests of the dispossessed? To begin with, there are two material factors that further work against the neoliberal regime of dispossession. The first, which will become more apparent in the succeeding chapters, is that the increasingly financialized and non-labor absorbing forms of growth driving dispossession in India today have less prospect for absorbing the labor of dispossessed farmers. Whereas steel towns and industrial areas provided significant unskilled and semi-skilled employment (and dams provided irrigated agriculture if the dispossessed could negotiate a stake in it), many farmers can see quite clearly

that the “new economy” of real estate and information technology offers few employment opportunities for people with their skills and education. After examining the actual consequences of dispossession for an SEZ in Chapters 5 and 6, Chapter 7 will show how this feature of India’s post-liberalization growth model is a large structural factor underlying contemporary land wars.

The second material feature is an increasing rate of accumulation by dispossession. When their land is dispossessed for SEZs and other real estate oriented projects, farmers are seeing unprecedentedly large gaps between the compensation offered to them and the land’s market value as urban real estate. In this sense, the rate of accumulation by dispossession has for the first time become a visible and politically salient reality for farmers. As we will see in Chapter 7, some are not opposing this forced commodification of their land, but merely want a higher stake in it (to, in effect, decrease the rate of accumulation by dispossession). This raises the question: can their compliance be bought with a higher stake in the accumulation generated by their dispossession?

This is what central and state governments are trying to figure out. In the face of historically unprecedented resistance to land acquisition, they are not giving up on the neoliberal regime of dispossession, but are rather trying to turn its weakness into a strength. While the real estate character of dispossession under the neoliberal regime is what makes it ideologically tenuous, it is also what generates an unprecedented surplus that can be used for building material compliance. By sharing some of the surplus with farmers (increasing P1 in Figure 1)—and thus marginally reducing the rate of accumulation by dispossession—policy makers are hoping to substitute material for ideological compliance and dissipate these now endemic land wars. In the wake of Nandigram, the Indian government introduced amendments to India's Land Acquisition Act (1894), whose details are still being fought over, but whose basic purpose is to establish a class compromise: while sanctifying a broad definition of “public purpose” and thereby rationalize (legally and ideologically) the new regime of dispossession, it will offer farmers higher compensation and better rehabilitation (Levien 2011b). Not waiting for the central government, state governments in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Rajasthan have meanwhile introduced their own policies to increase compensation in the face of farmer resistance. Will these policies succeed? In the next chapter, we will turn to a “successful” case of building material compliance to dispossession for a Special Economic Zone by incorporating farmers into real estate markets. Chapter 7 will broaden out to India as a whole to consider the extent to which this model is replicable and capable of diffusing the simmering land conflicts that are besieging India’s neoliberal regime of dispossession.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced the emergence of a new regime of dispossession in post-liberalization India. It has tried to explain the transition from a Nehruvian to neoliberal regime of dispossession as the product of: a dramatic post-liberalization increase in the private demand for land; the supply barrier posed by small rural property and “insufficiently” capitalist land markets; the pressure of accelerating inter-state competition on states to overcome this problem with dispossession; and the licit and illicit rents such a role makes possible for state institutions and their office-holders. The result has been the restructuring of state governments into land brokers for private capital. I argued that this new neoliberal regime of dispossession is defined not just by an increasing scale of dispossession but by a qualitative expansion of the economic activities for which states will forcibly dispossess land from farmers. No longer just dispossessing land for state-led projects of productive material expansion, states have turned to

dispossessing farmers for private real estate capital. As a short hand, we can characterize this as a shift from a regime of dispossessing “land for production” to one of “land for the market.” No longer is land dispossessed just for the production of commodities, but increasingly for the commodification of land itself. This makes the “rate of accumulation,” the discrepancy between the price paid to farmers and its ultimate market value, the main motivation of dispossession and, for the first time, a socially transparent phenomenon.

This new regime of dispossessing “land for the market” is, however, proving ideologically tenuous and politically explosive. While it took decades for strong organized opposition to emergence against the developmentalist regime of dispossession, the neoliberal regime—most notably in the form of SEZs—has generated widespread and unprecedentedly effective land wars across the subcontinent. In response to this opposition, which is successfully using the legitimating ideologies of the developmentalist regime of dispossession against them, land broker states are attempting to orchestrate a class compromise through material concessions in the rate of accumulation by dispossession.

Will these efforts succeed? If they do, what will be the nature of this “success”? Will SEZs bring the prosperity and overall development promised by their supporters, or, as their opponents predict, the same impoverishment and inequality generated by development projects of the Nehruvian period? There have so far been few empirical studies of actually existing SEZs that would enable us to answer these questions. In the next chapter, then, we begin our in-depth examination of the Mahindra World City SEZ, one of the first large Special Economic Zones to successfully acquire land and become operational in North India. We will follow the process of accumulation by dispossession sequentially, from the generation of compliance, to the accumulation made possible by dispossession, to the social and economic consequences for a handful of Rajasthani villages.

## Chapter 4. A Stake in the Game: Real Estate and Compliance to Dispossession

### INTRODUCTION

The arrival of the Mahindra World City to Rajpura was widely experienced as a surge in land prices, accompanied by rumors, fear and misinformation. A dusty village of about 400 families in east-central Rajasthan, Rajpura had until 1947 been a minor feudatory in the Princely State of Jaipur. In the fifty eight years between independence and the SEZ, Rajpura had undergone significant, though not radical, socio-economic changes. In the 1950s, half-hearted land reforms transformed feudal tenancies into private landholdings, but left in place large caste-based inequalities in ownership. High-yielding seeds arrived and agriculture was partially commercialized, but water scarcity limited the emergence of capitalist social relations. Cash exchange gradually replaced the *jajmani* system of services for grains, though the caste-based division of labor remained significantly in tact. By the early 2000s, many of Rajpura's residents had diversified into wage labor or small businesses, though most still largely depended on cultivating monsoon-fed fields of millet, legumes and dryland vegetables and rearing livestock on the village's ample grazing land. With the arrival of (more or less) all-weather roads and bus service, the twenty-five kilometers to Jaipur was close enough to sell milk and undertake a cumbersome commute to work, but far enough that the Rajpura market consisted of little more than a handful of village enterprises. The government was expanding the nearby national highway to six lanes as part of the country's Golden Quadrilateral project, but that was still five kilometers away. With water levels only declining, it was not immediately clear why outsiders would want to buy Rajpura's farmland. But in 2004, the brokers started to trickle in by the handful, and then stream in by the dozens.

The arrival of real estate brokers (known as *dalals* in Hindi), investors from Jaipur, and a steady increase in land prices indicated to Rajpura's residents that changes were afoot, but the nature of those changes were far from clear. It was later claimed in the Indian press that the ability of Mahindra to acquire land for its SEZ with relative peace—while land wars raged in Nandigram and elsewhere across India—was due to their willingness to negotiate with farmers. Arun Nanda, Executive Director of Mahindra Lifespaces, explained to NDTV that the land acquisition was “done on a negotiated basis with the farmers” and that the state government “sat down and talked with the farmers,” resulting in a “fair deal for the landowners” (NDTV 2008). No one in Rajpura or any surrounding village remembers a negotiation or even a consultation, and whether it was a fair deal was fiercely disputed. In fact, Rajpura's residents did not even learn of the SEZ through government announcements. Their first inklings of the project came from rumors and misinformation circulated by brokers who sought to acquire cheap land before the project's arrival. As one of Rajpura's small shopkeepers recalled the sequence of events:

Outsiders started coming to buy the land, all of a sudden! They were looking for farmers, asking “whose land is this?” Night after night the market was a carnival (*mela*). Some were giving food and liquor. People didn't know about the SEZ, they found out after. It came in the newspaper, later. Later notices [of land acquisition] came.... These came *after* the brokers (Fieldnotes, 6/30/12).

The first wave of brokers that appeared in 2004, the year before the SEZ was publicly announced, had presumably been dispatched by those with illicit insider knowledge looking to

Figure 4.1 Location of the Mahindra World City SEZ



acquire cheap land that would soon dramatically appreciate (as discussed in the last chapter, this included government officials, politicians and whoever they tipped off). The village land records indicate that sixty-nine farmers in Rajpura sold their land that year, compared to ten the year before. These were mostly poor farmers under financial stress who were enticed by an unprecedented though retrospectively modest increase in land prices, an increase that would seem paltry within months. After rumors spread that a government project was coming, brokers spread misinformation and stoked fear to entice farmers to sell cheaply. One rumor circulated that an airport was coming, and that the government would give farmers nothing.

Eventually, a sign-board for the project was posted in the village. As one young farmer recalled, “We saw a board that said SEZ. But we didn’t know what an SEZ was. Then it started coming in the papers” (Fieldnotes, 6/29/12). After announcements in the local Hindi dailies, farmers came to understand that an SEZ (pronounced “sej” locally) was coming, even if they still had little idea what it was. Eventually, notices arrived in legalistic Hindi telling them that their land would be acquired by the Jaipur Development Authority for an SEZ and that, as compensation, they could either receive cash (the usual below-market government rate) or plots of developed commercial-residential land adjacent to the SEZ that would be 25% the size of their original farmland.

Outside investors, brokers, and some savvy farmers had already calculated that these plots would be more valuable than the original farmland once multi-national companies came to the village and therefore that, if one could afford to wait long enough, the compensation would be economically beneficial. Most farmers, however had no idea what an SEZ was, much less what it would do to local land values, and what this compensation scheme would mean for them. Once land acquisition proceedings started (and sales of the original farmland could no longer be registered)<sup>48</sup>, brokers started persuading farmers to quickly sell the rights to their compensation plots through “power of attorney” contracts. Soon there was a burgeoning market for the rights to these not-yet-constructed plots and by the time I arrived in 2009, approximately three-quarters of them had already been sold to outside investors.<sup>49</sup> In selling their compensation plots, many farmers had tacitly acquiesced to having their land dispossessed for the project and had no further incentive or standing to oppose it. Others, who were shrewdly waiting for their compensation plots to develop and appreciate, or were otherwise earning commission by brokering the land and plot sales of others—were active supporters. No organized opposition emerged to the land acquisition, and the Jaipur Development Authority was able to transfer 2,000 acres of private land and 1,000 acres of common grazing land from nine villages to Mahindra for what was billed to be the largest SEZ in North India.

How should we understand the process through which compliance to dispossession was produced in Rajpura and the eight other villages that gave their land for the Mahindra World City? I concluded the last chapter by arguing that in the absence of legitimacy, the only way aside from brute coercion for the neoliberal regime to produce compliance to dispossession was through material concessions in the rate of accumulation by dispossession. While real estate driven private investments like SEZs do not appear to many as a legitimate public purpose, they

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<sup>48</sup> It is common practice to “freeze” registration of land once it is slated to be acquired. This means that deeds for those properties can no longer change hands. However, it seems that there was some delay—approximately a year—in doing this after the announcement of the SEZ. Nevertheless, because of the ingenuous practice of selling power of attorney contracts, which transfer farmers’ rights to future compensation plots, the freezing of registration did not constitute an obstacle to the seamless progression of real estate speculation.

<sup>49</sup> That was the consistent estimate given to me by land brokers.

create unprecedented real estate surpluses that can, in principle, be used to buy off farmers. This was precisely the intent of the Rajasthan government in devising the compensation policy of giving farmers small plots of developed land instead of the usual, meager cash compensation. According to the head of the Rajasthan Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO), the policy was intended to “buy peace.” A former Chief Secretary of Rajasthan who was originally involved in formulating the policy, explained that it, “promotes acquiescence to negotiation. [It] softens them up” (Interview, 8/19/10, Jaipur). We can see Rajasthan’s compensation policy as part of a more widespread attempt of land broker states to orchestrate a class compromise with farmers to prevent disruptive land wars.

I would like to now complicate the argument based on more fine-grained observations of how the process actually works in practice. I will argue that it is not so much that the state bought the conscious “consent” of farmers by offering them a higher price; rather, by turning coercive state expropriation into a process of market participation, they individualized people’s relationship to the project and thereby produced compliance through unequal desires and capacities to “play the game” of real estate speculation. In what follows, I will draw on ethnographic interviews and survey data to show how, in the absence of legitimacy and with only moderate reliance on coercion, Rajpura’s inhabitants were separated from their means of production by being absorbed into what I will call the social game of real estate speculation.

#### PRODUCING COMPLIANCE IN RAJPURA

I arrived in Rajpura four years after land acquisition was initiated, and one year after the SEZ had become operational. The benefit of this was that I was able to study the SEZ itself and the consequences of dispossession for the village (Chapters 5-7); the shortcoming was that I had to reconstruct the initial process through which compliance to dispossession was achieved from people’s recollections of events and their thinking at the time. Nevertheless, through interviews, surveys and, perhaps paradoxically, observations of processes that had emerged at that time of the SEZ’s arrival, I was able to construct a convincing interpretation of the process of compliance. To be clear, I do not claim that the Rajasthan government’s compensation policy was the sole variable producing compliance. There were important background factors that clearly facilitated compliance to dispossession in Rajpura.

First, water levels had been declining for thirty years and, with only 27% of the land irrigated (Census of India 2001), most farmers were dependent on erratic monsoon rates for their livelihoods. While agriculture was still central to people’s livelihoods, these livelihoods were not as lucrative as in irrigated multi-cropping regions and many families were already significantly diversified and/or semi-proletarianized. Second, the agrarian social structure was characterized by large class and caste inequalities, the legacy of only half-hearted post-independence land reforms. While this is common across rural India, it does differentiate Rajpura from villages in states that implemented more thorough land reform (like West Bengal), where the British established peasant (*ryotwari*) rather than landlord (*zamindari*) tenure (in much of South India); it also differentiates Rajpura from relatively more egalitarian hill and forest settings. Inequalities on the scale of Rajpura—which we will specify shortly—magnify the difficulty of building local solidarity against dispossession. Third, there is little history of autonomous political organizing and there remains a strong legacy of feudal authority. The region participated minimally in the independence movement and only emerged from feudal princely rule in 1952 (it took five years to reorganize the state after independence). While patterns of political leadership in Rajasthan shifted after independence (Sharma 1974; Chakravarty 1975; Rudolph and Rudolph 1984; Rosin

1987), this has predominantly entailed the assertion of Jats—the dominant agricultural caste—as political rivals to the traditionally ruling Rajputs (Sisson 1969; Jaffrelot and Robins 2009). With the main Jat settlements lying in a neighboring *panchayat*, Rajpura’s political leadership alternated between the family of the former Rajput *thakur* and his main Brahmin challenger for fifty years, interrupted only by a single Dalit *sarpanch* elected when the seat was reserved for a Scheduled Caste woman (and even she, according to villagers, was controlled by the political elite). There has been almost no organized lower-caste political assertion, and relatively little formal “civil society” organization.

It is impossible to know whether dispossession would have gone as unchallenged in Rajpura if any of these factors were different. Many farmers I interviewed claimed that “if there was water, we wouldn’t give the land” (“*Agar pani hota to sej ko jamin nahi dete*”). Indeed, I am sure that if Rajpura’s fields were flowing with water and three annual crops, the story would have been different. Nevertheless, there are other examples of villagers protesting the acquisition of unirrigated land (the land in Nandigram was largely unirrigated, though it received two crops), including nearby villages outside of Jaipur where farmers have been opposing the JDA’s acquisition of land for commercial development around a privatized Ring Road. There are also others examples of villages bridging social inequalities that are just as pronounced, at least momentarily, to fight collectively against dispossession (Baviskar 1995). And there are examples of resistance to dispossession emerging in former princely states (including those nearby). So, while all these factors surely had a role in making Rajpura’s farmers’ more susceptible to complying with their dispossession, we must understand how the Rajasthan government’s compensation policy absorbed them into the process of real estate speculation and produced this compliance. Without the individualizing inducement of real estate values, acquiring land for the SEZ would have been much more difficult. To highlight its importance, and draw out the contrast with the preceding regime of dispossession, we should first establish that Rajpura’s residents were not ultimately compelled to relinquish their land by powerful legitimating appeals to the public or national interest.

### *Illegitimacy*

While people’s evaluations of the SEZ four years after land acquisition largely reflected the benefit they had received from it, my fieldwork revealed that both winners and losers were critical of the *principle* of forcible land acquisition for the SEZ. Consider the views of Haldiram Sharma<sup>50</sup>, a Brahmin whose father and two brothers collectively had eight-and-a-half *bighas* (1 bigha = .25 hectares) of land, along with their houses, acquired for the SEZ. Sitting under a tree by his demolished house and bulldozed fields, Haldiram brought out the undemocratic nature of dispossession: “The government should have *asked* us. The government didn’t *ask* us anything. Like you’re asking us, they should have asked all of us before” (Fieldnotes, 2/18/10). Even farmers who ultimately got more benefit from the project than Haldiram still did not view forcible acquisition favorably. Manglal Seini, who was able to buy twenty-two *bighas* of land with the cash from ten *bighas* of acquired land (but felt undercompensated for his house), pointedly asked: “They take from us and give to others. They kick us out and sell to other people. What meaning is there in this? (*is mein kya matlab hai?*)” (Fieldnotes 4/8/10). When referring to the government’s land acquisition, farmers commonly used words like “snatched” (*chin liya*), “stole” (*chor liya*), “looted” (*luta*) or “encroached” (*kabza kiya*) and emphasized that it was done “by force” (*zabardasti se*) rather than consensually. As one farmer explained, “People don’t want

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<sup>50</sup> All names have been changed.



to sell, so they took it *by force*.” Another: “There was no negotiation. They took it by force” (Fieldnotes, 4/13/10). That it was done for a private company created the feeling that the government was working for the “rich” (*paisewalle*) and not the farmer or “common man” (*aam admi*). Motilal Sharma, who had had ten and a half *bighas* acquired for the SEZ, sharply observed, “The JDA acts like a broker (*dalal*), and gives benefit to the capitalist class. The farmer hasn’t received any benefit.” Motilal was not the only farmer to sound Marxist in the face of such transparent upward redistribution. As I walked away from a heated discussion at his *chai* stall in the village of Shivpura, a young friend yelled at me: “Write this Mike: the capitalists are looting the poor” (Fieldnotes, 3/10/10).

Farmers not only questioned the private interests being served by dispossession, but also perceived and were critical of the state’s licit and illicit interests in the project. As the Rajpura *sarpanch* Mahinder Singh, himself a large beneficiary of the SEZ, observed, “JDA is a moneymaking machine for government and the bureaucracy... And for the bureaucrats.... It is the biggest land grab agency” (Fieldnotes 7/9/10). On one of my first days in the village, a group of farmers similarly quipped, “everyone from the peon to the head of the JDA is getting commission” (Fieldnotes, 12/9/09).

The illegitimacy of forced land acquisition was often contrasted with the legitimacy of market purchase. While buying and selling land for gain was not common before the SEZ, and selling land historically connoted negative symbolic capital, farmers nevertheless saw it as far preferable to forcible acquisition. As Haldiram pondered, “They *take* land from us, why did they *take* it?...If Mahindra bought it directly from us, we’d get good money and buy [land] elsewhere, and we’d be happy” (Fieldnotes, 2/18/10). The distinction literally divided the nearby village of Premdani in half. On one side of the road that ran through the village, farmers had their land acquired for the SEZ and received compensation plots equivalent to ¼ of their land; on the other side, many farmers had sold their land to a private real estate developer for a flashy residential colony called Omaxe City. While farmers on the SEZ side were generally unhappy, those on the private developer side were now happily building rural mansions. Contrasting the prices paid to farmers by private developers—in some cases \$140,000 per *bigha*—to the compensation for the SEZ, Haldiram concluded, “Better if it was Omaxe.”

Of course, legitimacy here was inseparable from material interests, and Haldiram’s critique really boiled down to his estimate of the rate of accumulation by dispossession (the difference between his compensation and the market value of the land).<sup>51</sup> Farmers like Haldiram carried decent estimates of the rate of accumulation by dispossession in their heads, as the emergent land market in their village provided a basis for questioning the legitimacy of dispossession. Of course, the speculative real estate market would not have emerged in Rajpura in the first place if it were not for the SEZ and the dispossession that made it possible. But the simple point is that many farmers were not convinced of the legitimacy of the government forcibly acquiring their land for a large private company, and there was widespread cynicism regarding the motives of the state itself. What ensued was not consent based on legitimacy, but compliance based on calculation—albeit of different kinds and degrees of accuracy.

### *Real Estate as a Social Game*

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<sup>51</sup> It should be pointed out that when farmers say market price, they mean the market price after the SEZ came (or was in the process of coming). Before that, land prices were much lower, and it was only the massive land speculation created by the SEZ that created the high land prices that farmers compared favorably to their compensation for forcible acquisition.

This chapter began by describing how the SEZ arrived as a wave of real estate speculation that Rajpura's residents were given a small stake in by the Rajasthan government's compensation policy. I would now like to examine in more depth how such material compliance operated as a *social process*. I specify that this is a social process because it was not simply a matter of individual market subjects rationally responding to the incentive of higher prices with consent. First of all, farmers were never asked for their consent, initially had very limited information about the project, and mostly wound up selling their compensation plots and thus tacitly acquiescing to the project for a mixture of reasons, including fear and uncertainty. Second, many farmers—41% of farmers in my survey—reported being against the project when it came, while only 22% said they supported it. So, while the achievement of compliance relied on the availability of higher prices, what it achieved was not material “consent” so much as material fracturing of the villagers' interests vis-à-vis the state and SEZ. What was crucial about being absorbed into the process of real estate speculation was the way it individualized people's relation to dispossession and thereby allowed pre-existing inequalities to shape people's orientations towards it.

Normally, when the government acquires land, it gives farmers a uniformly low cash compensation—in Figure 3.1, we labeled this P1. This common subjection to low compensation can often, as we will return to in Chapter 7, create an instrumental solidarity even across antagonistic classes and castes. What was significant about Rajasthan's market-based system of compensating the dispossessed was not just that it increased P1, but that it made everyone's P1 different. Instead of offering the whole village the same deal and thus giving them a common interest vis-a-vis the state and SEZ developers, the Rajasthan government's policy left it to each farmer to calculate if and how much they could benefit from the project. *Instead of facing the state as a collectivity, they were facing the market as individuals*. Each family had to determine on their own, based on their objective assets and subjective means of calculation, how successful they would be at leveraging that compensation plot into money and a livelihood.

I will propose, following Burawoy and Bourdieu, that we understand the process of real estate speculation that swept through Rajpura as a *social game*. To use the metaphor of a game is not to trivialize the process, which as we will see, had quite serious consequences. It is rather to suggest several things about a land market: that it is a *field* of activity governed by a set of rules (albeit more uncertain than most); that mastering these rules provides access to a set of rewards or *stakes*; and that there exist *players* with a desire and ability to pursue these rewards by playing the game (they thus have a “stake in the game”). The analogy of the game also helps to capture some of the ludic desire that eventually drove many farmers into the process of land speculation. However, while some games may be equally absorbing for diverse individuals or groups (Burawoy 1985), what I will show is that land markets constitute a social game that people have uneven desires and abilities to play based on their endowments of economic, cultural and social capital. We will examine the ultimate class and caste-wise outcome of this game for different fractions of Rajpura's inhabitants in Chapter 6. In this chapter, I will try to show how the transformation of coercive dispossession into a social game of real estate speculation created enough initial division to undermine potential solidarity and facilitate compliance.

### *A Stake in the Game.*

To have a stake in the game of land markets one must, of course, have land. Although one need not own land to broker it, possession of land is the basic token of the game (and we will see that it was largely those with land that possessed the other forms of capital necessary for

Table 4.1 Caste-wise Distribution of Land in Four SEZ-affected villages (Rajpura, Shivpura, Neempura and Jatpura)

Caste Category	Number and proportion of families in sample	Average size of family landholding (Ha.)	% who are landless
General	24 (26%)	4.6	0
Jat	16 (17%)	7.3	0
OBC	21 (22%)	3	10
SC/ST	33 (35%)	2.2	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>94 (100%)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>

brokerage). Table 4.1 shows the caste-wise distribution of land in Rajpura and three surrounding villages, based on a random-sample survey of 93 families. Seven percent of families—entirely from the lower “Scheduled Castes” (SC) and “Otherwise Backward Castes” (OBCs)—were entirely landless, including agricultural and industrial laborers, various artisanal castes, and those depending on village common lands but with no private property. While some of these groups were dispossessed of homes and access to commons, they were completely excluded from the ensuing game of real estate speculation. We will return to them in the following chapters.

Among those with land, ownership was highly skewed along caste lines, the legacy of an incompletely transformed feudal social structure. At the time of independence, the former Rajpura lord, or *thakur*, owned the entire village as his personal demesne (*jagir*). During the early 1950s, land reform in Rajasthan abolished feudal intermediaries (*jagirdars*) and brought former tenants into a direct relationship with the state as small-holding cultivators (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984). However, as in most parts of India, the main beneficiaries were the larger cultivating castes (in this region, the Jats) and other upper castes (mostly Brahmins, though also a few *baniyas* or merchants) that were better able to manipulate land reform procedures to their advantage (Singh 1964; Chakravarti 1975; Rosin 1987). Meanwhile, the former Rajput lords evaded land ceilings and retained very large holdings by registering their land in the names of extended family members and loyal retainers (Singh 1964; Rosin 1987). The result was an incomplete reform of the feudal agrarian structure and a legacy of large inequalities in land holdings between upper and lower castes. As seen in Table 4.1, when the SEZ arrived, Jat families in the four villages surveyed held on average 7.3 hectares of land, general castes (mostly Brahmins) 4.6 hectares, “Otherwise Backward Castes” 3.3 (with 10% landless), and the lower “Scheduled Castes” 2.2 (with 15% landless).<sup>52</sup> The large outlier not included in the survey was the single family of the former Rajput lord (*jagirdar* or *thakur*), which, by the admission of its main heir Mahinder Singh, still controlled at least 375 hectares when the SEZ arrived.

But it is not just enough to have land; to participate in the game of land markets, one must orient to one’s land as a commodity. This is what it means to have what Bourdieu would call a libidinal interest or “stake in the game.” Economists, of course, assume that individuals always already have a stake in the game—that people are market subjects willing to relinquish their assets at the right price. Indeed, economists have been trying to figure out how to calculate the optimal price at which farmers will forego resistance to land acquisition (Ghatak and Mookherjee 2013). The problem is that this assumes what needs to be explained, which is how

<sup>52</sup> After effective political organizing, Jats succeeded in having themselves recognized as “Otherwise Backward Castes” in Rajasthan, entitling them to reservations in government jobs and other welfare benefits. However, because of their vastly better economic position than other OBCs, here and elsewhere I separate them from OBCs for analytical purposes.

farmers come to relate to their land as a purely financial asset—in other words, as a commodity—to begin with. *Homo economicus*, as many sociologists and anthropologists have argued, is the product of historically specific social relations and not a timeless generality. We will see in Chapter 7, that in many parts of India, farmers are for various reasons extremely reluctant to treat their land as a commodity. Even in Rajpura, where there is little water and astronomical land prices, commodification did not come “naturally” to most, and it came quicker to some than others.

An examination of the village’s land records indicate that before the arrival of the SEZ, there were very few land sales in the village and, according to Rajpura’s residents, these mostly occurred under duress. Economically, land was reckoned in *maunds* of grain per *bigha* and not in rupees per square foot. As in most agrarian settings, land was not only the most important means of production but the major source of honor and status in the village. Perhaps the best way to illustrate valuations of land is what people complain about when they lose it. As we will see in the following chapters, dispossessed farmers complained not only of lost income, but of their loss of home and habitation for themselves and future generations, of access to use values like food, water, and privacy, and the security and autonomy it provides. While I do not wish to romanticize this relation or suggest that it is non-rational (“emotional” in the words of middle class pundits), it is true that farmers valued their land in multiple ways that were irreducible to the singular rationality of exchange value. So, while land was held as private property, it was not treated as a purely financial asset to be bought and sold. This relationship of peasants to land has been often remarked upon (though being “attached” to one’s home and land is hardly confined to “Third World” peasantries), and as we saw in the last chapter, it is what creates a large barrier to fully capitalist land markets. The question is how were these non-market relations to land unhinged in Rajpura in such a way that its farmers were absorbed into a social game of land commodification?

In Rajpura, the obvious answer is that they were forced into it unwillingly. Under the threat of acquisition, farmers had little choice but to relate to their compensation land as a purely financial asset. The developed plots they were allotted could not be used for agriculture and, while farmers could build houses on them, they mostly had commercial value. As Dirdarshan Choudhary, a young Jat farmer remarked, “you can only sell your 25% land. You can’t feed your children with it” (Fieldnotes, 2/22/10). It is thus impossible to completely separate the effect of coercion (from the state) and the material incentives offered by the compensation model (which is always the case with dispossession). There was, however, the tremendous temptation of unprecedented land prices, which increased from \$4,000 per *bigha* before the SEZ to \$14,000 per *bigha* within a year, and eventually reached the astronomical proportion of over \$70,000 per *bigha* (or \$280,000 per hectare) for those who were shrewd enough to wait. If farmers were pushed and pulled into treating their land as a commodity, some nevertheless took to it with greater eagerness and alacrity than others. It is this *unevenness* in farmers’ willingness and ability to play the game that ultimately fractured their interests *vis-à-vis* the state and SEZ, thereby removing any basis for organized resistance.

### *Uneven Abilities to Play*

While real estate markets constitute a highly uncertain game, as the world and Rajpura found out in 2008, there are nevertheless uneven capacities to master and manipulate its rules to one’s advantage. So long as markets are ascending, real estate is a waiting game. The ability to wait is, of course, distributed unequally. It depends above all on one’s ability to keep economic

necessity at bay while waiting for land to appreciate; that is, it depends on a certain level of economic capital going into the game. It also depends on one's understanding of how land markets function and what types of economic activities are likely to drive prices up; that is, it also depends on cultural capital. While such an aptitude can be acquired, what is crucial to success is the speed with which farmers learn to play the game: slower learners might sell too quickly, while fast learners and those who already know the game will wait for land to appreciate and even move with alacrity into the work of land brokerage. Finally, it also depends on social capital, by which I mean unequally distributed social networks that convey real or potential advantages—in this case, access to information and opportunities for brokerage. An agrarian class structure like Rajpura's is defined by the unequal (and related) distribution of all three forms of capital, and Chapter 6 will examine in detail how these inequalities influence people's abilities to profit from land markets. The key point I want to emphasize now is that by turning the experience of coercive state dispossession into one of market participation, the Rajasthan government's compensation policy successfully utilized these inequalities at the point of enclosure.

To illustrate, let us examine the class inflected ways in which different fractions of Rajpura experienced the coming of the SEZ. The poor and disproportionately low caste marginal farmers faced the novel emergence of a speculative real estate market in their village with the pressure of poverty and debt and the handicaps of illiteracy, all of which made quick cash in the face of fear and uncertainty enticing. Rajpura's lower caste marginal peasantry and semi-proletariat almost universally carried heavy debts, and unprecedented land prices carried a heavy temptation. Moturam Kumar, a 55 year old potter in Rajpura, was in debt to the tune of eight *lakh* or \$40,000 (1 *lakh*=Rs. 100,000; Rs. 50=\$1) when the SEZ arrived. With sick parents and four marriages to finance, he decided to sell the compensation rights to his 5 *bighas* of land in 2006 for a tidy Rs. 10 lakh per *bigha*. Similarly, Kailash Raegar, a 50 year old Dalit semi-proletariat with only 5 *bighas* between two brothers, sold his plots quickly in 2006 for a less good Rs. 6.5 lakh to pay off medical debts for his mother who has a bad heart (all the money went on expenses). Bhura Naik sold the rights to his 1.5 *bighas* within 2005 itself to pay off debts. The story was common in the *mohallahs* (neighborhoods) of the Beirwa and Raegar sub-castes (among the lowest in the Dalit hierarchy).

Still, all of these informants explained that they were uneducated (*unpad*) and that they would have waited longer if they knew what an SEZ was. Bhura contended, "I didn't know what kind of a thing an SEZ is. Otherwise, I would not have sold." Rajesh Raegar, a forty year old Dalit, and his two brothers sold their combined 6 *bighas* of land for a paltry 9 *lakh*. Rajesh explains that they are illiterate (*unpad*) and "the broker deceived us." There are many examples like Rajesh, and we will return to some of them in the Chapter 6. What is key to understand, however, is that by turning dispossession into a market process of each looking out for themselves, the state created the opportunity for more savvy farmers to take advantage of others. Local farmers (disproportionately, from upper landed castes), who were more educated and had more contacts, exploited the asymmetry in information by spreading misinformation and inciting fear among less savvy farmers. As one lower-caste farmer explained, "They [brokers] said they're [the government] going to give you only 25%. The village didn't understand this. So they all sold through brokers." A *chaiwala* (tea stall proprietor) elaborated, "We're poor people. We don't understand these things. We farm, and pass time. What the meaning of an SEZ was, who knew?" Ramlal Sharma, a Brahman *dalal*, himself explained, "The farmers got very little, they didn't know what the price was. In the beginning, people didn't even know about the SEZ and

were getting only Rs. 1-2 *lakh* [\$2,000-\$4,000 per *bigha*]. Twenty-five percent sold without knowing that the SEZ was coming.” Anyway, he explained matter-of-factly, he and the Jaipur *dalal* he worked with, “would each take 2%” (Fieldnotes 2/23/10).

Lada Bhunker, a Dalit woman of the Balai sub-caste, explained the mixture of compulsion, desire, fear and uncertainty that propelled many lower-caste farmers to accept the compensation. Lada and her husband Mahesh sold their land through a *dalal* for a retrospectively cheap Rs. 7 *lakh* per *bigha* shortly after the SEZ was announced. I stayed with Mahesh, Lada and their three children for most of my fieldwork. Sitting in their concrete courtyard five years after the sale, Lada explained how she learned that the SEZ was coming:

Before the price of land was Rs. 20,000 [per *bigha*]. . . . This was four years before the SEZ. Later, people were selling land for Rs. 5 *lakh* (Rs. 500,000). Everyone started selling. Before there weren't *lakhs* here, just *paisa* (meaning small change). And slowly, slowly we learned. People from outside began to buy. Brokers came and said “the SEZ is nothing, you should sell. . . .” They were saying, “the SEZ will come, the SEZ will come, and they will give you less. We'll give you 7 *lakh*.” So we sold. We didn't know what benefit would come from an SEZ. We didn't understand what an SEZ was (Fieldnotes, 6/29/12).

But, she added, “the *sarpanch* knew what it was, and he bought everything.”

The *sarpanch* Lada was referring to was Laduram Meena, the elected village head of Rajpura when the SEZ first arrived in 2005. At that time, he was a moderately large landholder and had a small real estate partnership operating in areas closer to Jaipur. While it is alleged that he took large bribes for not opposing the transfer of village grazing land to the SEZ, what is definitely true is that he was very quick to perceive and take advantage of the SEZ's implications for Rajpura's property market. His contacts from his previously existing real estate business, buttressed by his extra-village connections through the Congress party, gave him a rich set of ties with which to broker deals in the village. By his own estimation, at the height of the boom between 2005 and 2008, he was brokering fifty deals a month and bought up 50 hectares of new farmland for himself (including the land under the *chaiwala*).

Similarly well-positioned to take advantage of the SEZ's arrival was Mahinder Singh, the grandson of Rajpura's last feudal lord (*thakur*), a highly educated former investment banker with CitiGroup, and Laduram's successor in 2010 as acting *sarpanch* (his mother was actually elected). While his family owned over 375 hectares of land (where the average is four), Mahinder sold none of the family's compensation plots, bought more land to develop a real estate colony next to the SEZ, and has become a significant broker to boot. I put the same question to Mahinder as I put to Lada:

ML: How did you find out about the SEZ?

MS: There was a notification in the newspaper that your land is being acquired.

ML: *You* found out that way?

MS: I knew it, but everyone else found out like that.

ML: People told you before?

MS: Yes. . . . Look, there are two categories, illiterate and educated men. The first didn't know what to do with the land, the second did. Those who knew took advantage.

We will return to the advantages taken by Laduram and Mahinder in the next chapter, but for now their examples simply illustrate the other pole in the asymmetrical distribution of knowledge about the SEZ's arrival, and the alacrity with which the upper fractions of the village took advantage of it.

In between the ideal types of savvily profiteering and being completely cheated are a variety of intermediate cases. Beneath Laduram and Mahinder, dozens of farmers—in 14% of the families I surveyed—saw the opportunity to obtain commissions brokering the land of their fellow villagers. Many of these were “small brokers” who only did a few deals, but the opportunity for fast cash certainly aligned their interests with the SEZ. Other farmers calculated that they could ultimately profit from the compensation and anticipated that the project would bring employment and other facilities. Ram Gopalji Bora, a Brahmin with significant land, explained, “We were for it because we thought ‘development’ would come. The government promised 25%, we’d get employment, the kids would get education.” Aseem, a schoolteacher explained, “People thought ‘we’ll get rich, get jobs, and all the facilities. The city will come here” (Fieldnotes, 2/16/10). Many say the government promised that they would get jobs, twenty-four hour electricity, and better schools and clinics. Many others had their doubts, but did not have information and/or felt like they didn’t have a choice in the matter.

Drawing on my survey of 94 households in four villages, Table 4.2 illustrates the caste-wise distribution of responses to the question, “when the SEZ first came, were you for it or against it?” While such a retrospective question has its limits, the data suggests three things. First, that the village’s upper castes (Brahmin’s and the large landholding Jat castes) were evenly divided about the project. 50 percent of Jats supported the project while 50 percent opposed; 44 percent of Brahmins supported while 44 percent opposed. Second, the data shows that the upper castes nevertheless supported the project in much greater numbers than the lower castes. While 50 percent of Jats and 44 percent of general castes (mostly Brahmins) supported the project, only 6 percent of SCs and 8 percent of OBCs did. Third, the survey suggests that the distribution for “fors” and “againsts” might be less important than the distributions of opinions themselves. The table most clearly illustrates that the upper castes knew enough about the project to have an opinion, whereas a majority of OBCs and Dalits (SCs) did not feel like they knew enough to formulate one. Only 12 percent of general castes and no Jats said they “didn’t know,” compared to 59 percent of SCs and 50 percent of OBCs.

When the Mahindra World City arrived, it thus encountered an entirely fragmented peasantry. If the Rajasthan government had given farmers a uniform deal, it is very unlikely that it would have produced such varied opinions. If compensation was uniformly low, the upper castes would not have supported it in the way that they did. If it was uniformly high, it likely would have also produced divisions but might still have enabled collective protest, at least to raise compensation rates. What absorption into the process of real estate speculation produced was not consent and certainly not consensus, but rather compliance through highly effective individualization.

As we will see in Chapter 7, as this process of real estate speculation continued, it exacerbated inequalities, undermined trust, and created a symbolic or “everyday” class struggle within the villages between the “winners” and “losers” of this process. Anger was particularly directed against the local farmers-turned-brokers, who emerged with great alacrity to facilitate land deals for commission and who many blame for colluding with outside investors in cheating local farmers. While that is getting ahead of the story, it is significant that these divisions already

Table 4.2: Initial Caste-wise Support for the SEZ

Caste Category	% who supported SEZ	% who were against SEZ	% who didn't know
General	44	44	12
Jat	50	50	0
OBC	8	42	50
SC/ST	6	35	59
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>37</b>

began to emerge at the outset of the project. Some supported the SEZ, some were against, many did not now, but the village's interests were effectively fractured. Those who were quickly enticed or scared into selling out had left nothing to fight for. Those opposed to it could not find allies because too many either sold or actively supported the project. When I asked the many angry farmers why they did not form a *sangathan* to fight the project, the common answer was there was no "unity" (*ekta*). We will see in Chapter 7 how this lack of unity only got worse as time went on and compromised the subsequent ability of villagers to press claims on the SEZ and government after their dispossession.

#### *Coercion, in the Last Instance*

Though the Rajasthan government's compensation policy of transforming farmers into petty speculators was highly effectively at diffusing protest, not everyone was persuaded to leave their land peacefully. While almost all the land was legally acquired on paper (one parcel was under litigation), there was still the issue of achieving actual possession. Since the SEZ acquired much more land than it could use in the near-term, this has proceeded in a piecemeal fashion. In Rajpura, one family in particular has refused to vacate their land.

This is the family of Goverdhan Seini, his wife Rada, and the families of their four sons. Of the Mali (gardener) OBC sub-caste, the Seini's owned 11 bighas (2.75 hectares) of partially irrigated land, where they also kept their home, and substantial herds of buffalo, cows and goats. I heard of the Seinis on my first trip to Rajpura, before I had settled there to live, and I subsequently read about them in the Jaipur edition of the *Dhainik Bhaskar*, a Hindi newspaper. Their land, on the southern flank of the SEZ, had been acquired for Mahindra and was to be the site of the regional headquarters for the State Bank of India. The Seinis, however, were refusing to vacate their land and expressed no interest in compensation. On December 12, 2009, Jaipur Development Authority officials arrived with a squadron of police to take possession of the land, but the entire Seini family held their ground and confronted the police with fists and stones. In the ensuing fight, twelve family members, including six women, were arrested, brought to the jail on the highway in Bagaru, and charged with obstructing government work. Within the day, JDA officials had erected a fence around the property. When I arrived the next morning, the posts had been pulled up and the fence overturned.

The Seini's standoff is a good reminder that no matter what material and normative inducements are used, dispossession is ultimately backed by state violence. Its use against the Seini's had the affect of reminding other villagers of this fact. The lesson was not lost on Manshilal Sharma, who took from the arrest of the Seini family that, "When people fight against the government they get thrown in jail. The police are also with them. Whatever the government wants to do, they do" (Fieldnotes, 2/20/10).



However, the violent standoff at the Seini's also illustrates how *successful* the Rajasthan government's compensation policy was at diffusing opposition. Having effectively divided the village with material inducements, it could economize on force and easily repress the isolated holdouts. No one in Rajpura came to the Seini's defense. As one of the Seini brothers remarked, they fought entirely alone because "the people of this village are brokers" (Fieldnotes, 1/29/11). A group of Dalit youth in one of the smaller nearby villages perceptively articulated the government's effective combination of coercive and material compliance: "What can you do against the government?... They have guns.... And those who got plots are happy" (Fieldnotes, 4/13/10).

Nevertheless, the Seini's battle also illustrates the difficulties of land acquisition under India's neoliberal regime and the substantial ability of farmers to disrupt the process. As of June 2012, the Seini's battle was still going on. They had retained possession of their house and a small plot around it and, by filing a case in the Jaipur Sessions Court, had prevented construction on the acquired land. It was being guarded by local security guards employed by the Mahindra World City, who Goverdhan regularly abused as he walked by. The Seinis have punched holes in the wall and the women freely graze their livestock inside. The State Bank of India and Mahindra officials staged a ceremonial groundbreaking on the Seini's land in 2010, for which security guards formed a cordon at the boundary with the Seini's house to prevent a scene in front of the assembled VIPs. Yet, they have still not been able to start construction. The land remains locked behind a gated boundary wall, upon which the Seini's have graffitied, "There is a stay on this land in the Jaipur sessions court." With one family holding up the regional headquarters of India's venerable state-run bank, Mahindra seemed anxious to make a deal, but it was unclear whether the Seinis were going to take the bait.

The Seini's standoff with the government was not the only instance of state violence in defense of the SEZ. In 2009, when the Jaipur Development Authority had still not physically developed the compensation plots, those who had not already sold and a few angry about the lack of employment staged a few protests in front of the SEZ gates and were met with police violence. However, at that point, the land was already acquired and the protester's demands were largely confined to making the government fulfill its compensation obligations. The Mahindra World City had already become one of the first SEZs in all of north India to acquire several thousand acres of land and become operational.

## CONCLUSION

Every regime of dispossession requires a way to make people vacate their land. Since a dispossessor does not require lasting transformations in the subjectivities of the dispossessed—it simply needs to get them off their land long enough to erect a fence—its minimal requirement can best be described as compliance. I have argued that regimes of dispossession use socially and historically specific combinations of means—coercive, normative and remunerative—to achieve that compliance. While some regimes of dispossession, especially in pre- and non-democratic settings, rely more heavily on coercion, most contemporary ones involve a mixture of coercion with normative appeals to public interests and/or material incentives. We saw in Chapter 2 that while India's developmentalist regime of dispossession often imposed its will by brute force, it also had the benefit of substantial ideological legitimacy. Chapter 3 argued that the transition to a neoliberal regime of dispossession has eroded this legitimacy as it became difficult to argue that private and increasingly real estate driven projects were sufficiently "public" interests to justify the dispossession of farmers. This has left the neoliberal regime with brute coercion or material

compensation as the only means available to achieve compliance. While coercion remains on the table, we have seen that increasingly powerful farmer resistance to land acquisition has forced Indian states to respond with material concessions—which we might think of as reductions in the rate of accumulation by dispossession. This chapter has analyzed a case in which, by giving farmers a higher stake in the land commodification generated by dispossession, the Rajasthan government has rather anomalously produced compliance to dispossession for a Special Economic Zone.

I have argued that this compliance worked not just by giving farmers more money, but by transforming the experience of coercive dispossession into a game of market participation. Through a truly neoliberal compensation model, the Rajasthan government tried to turn small farmers into petty speculators and entrepreneurs. Whether this transformed Rajpura's residents into "neoliberal subjects" is questionable—the whole project remained illegitimate in the eyes of many and, we will see, many of them did not become *successful* neoliberal subjects at any rate. But what *is* clear is that this absorption into real estate markets was quite successful at individualizing farmers' relation to the project and, thereby, utilizing existing social inequalities to divide and diffuse any potential opposition. Instead of collectively fighting dispossession, Rajpura's farmers turned on each other as they scrambled, with very uneven success, to capture a piece of the real estate bonanza. With any potential "land war" averted, the Mahindra World City acquired 3,000 acres of land and became operational in 2008. In Chapter 7, we will turn to the question of whether this outcome in Rajpura represents an anomaly or a prototype for the neoliberal regime of dispossession. In other words, we will put Rajpura into the comparative context of India's land wars more to examine whether, and under what conditions, this "success" might be replicable and represent an alternative basis for the stability of the neoliberal regime of dispossession as a whole.

But first we will follow the process of accumulation by dispossession in Rajpura and examine the developmental consequences of this compliance. In a segment entitled "Building a SEZ in harmony," an NDTV anchor gushed, "What you see behind me is India's biggest SEZ project. Though many have failed to launch their projects in [the] North and other parts of the country, Mahindra has managed to implement and launch a *huge* SEZ project in Rajasthan... Taking land away from farmers will always remain a contentious issue, but if they are compensated rightly and rehabilitated in a proper manner, SEZs could be big growth drivers for India" (NDTV 2008). It is now time to assess the nature of this "success." In the next chapter, we move inside the Mahindra World City to examine the accumulation that the dispossession of nine Rajasthani villages has made possible.

## Chapter 5. Special Economic Zones and (Dis-) Accumulation by Dispossession

### INTRODUCTION

After a twenty kilometer drive west past the peri-urban sprawl of Jaipur on National Highway 8, a large sign for the Mahindra World City SEZ now stands opposite the Pink Pearl Hotel and Fun City. With a new connector road still under construction, one must travel the remaining five kilometers south, breaking occasionally for livestock, on a narrow village road lined by fields, *chai* stalls, a few clusters of small shops, and a profusion of advertisements for property dealers. A few kilometers down the road, a strikingly ornate entrance for the Jaipur Greens residential colony, with gabled towers of vaguely Mediterranean appearance, opens up to a vacant expanse of sparsely vegetated earth. After passing the small settlement of Jatpura, with its *chai* stall and tire puncture shop, the glass and steel campuses for Infosys and Deutsche Bank rise incongruously from an expanse of semi-arid grazing land. A guarded entrance welcoming you to the Mahindra World City leads to a newly paved four-lane road divided by perfectly aligned solar lampposts and bordered with landscaped beds of flowers and shrubs. A barbed wire fence cordons off the Mahindra World City from the surrounding villages, and from India's Domestic Tariff Area.

The plan to establish the Special Economic Zone here began in 2004, when the Government of Rajasthan privately invited the then \$7 billion (now \$16 billion) Mahindra and Mahindra Company, one of India's oldest industrial houses, to establish an Information Technology Zone near Jaipur. While Mahindra was better known for its automobiles and tractors, the diversified conglomerate had moved into real estate in the late 1990s with its subsidiary Mahindra Gesco Developers Ltd. (later changed to Mahindra Lifespaces). India's SEZ Act of 2005 was still a year away, but Mahindra had already taken advantage of the government's SEZ policy of 2000 to build the first private SEZ in India, the 1300 acre Mahindra World City Chennai. Rising from the rice paddies of rural Tamil Nadu, MWC Chennai is a self-contained private city with over 33 companies as tenants, including BMW and most of India's IT giants. Its centerpiece is a 13,000 employee campus for Infosys.<sup>53</sup> Vasundhara Raje, Rajasthan's aggressively pro-business Chief Minister of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was keen to establish something similar in Rajasthan and was reported to be closely involved in the negotiations.

On July 4, 2005, the Government of Rajasthan signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Mahindra and Mahindra to establish the Mahindra World City Jaipur as a joint venture with the parastatal Rajasthan Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO). Under the terms of the agreement, Mahindra would be solely responsible for developing and running the SEZ and obtaining most of the financing, though RIICO would retain a minority stake in the project (subsequently established as 26%). Anticipating the project to bring \$3 billion of investment to the state, the Rajasthan government committed to building new roads for the project, supplying it with adequate power and water (estimated at 5 million gallons per day), and helping it to obtain all the necessary regulatory approvals.<sup>54</sup> Most importantly, it committed to

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, Mahindra World City Chennai, 12/1/10.

<sup>54</sup> Mahindra executives made clear that the primary incentive to involve RIICO in a joint venture was to facilitate its business with the government: "in day-to-day operations, RIICO has no role. Its role is to ensure government support...Assure that government commitments move at right speed" (Interview, 10/26/09).

transferring 1,050 acres of government land and acquiring 2,000 acres of private land for Mahindra near the Jaipur-Ajmer highway (Government of Rajasthan and Mahindra and Mahindra 2005). The Mahindra World City would be the biggest public private partnership in Rajasthan's history, and was planned to be the largest Information Technology SEZ in India.

The plan for the "multi-purpose" SEZ included five sector-specific zones for information technology and services (IT/ITES), light engineering, gems and jewelry, handicrafts, and apparel. However, the 700 acre IT/ITES zone was the heart of the project and the only portion in operation at the time of my arrival. India's IT giant, Bangalore-based Infosys, was courted as the anchor investor. The other zones were moving very slowly, with only one textile plant and one small engineering shop setting up during my last stretch of fieldwork in July 2012. The State Bank of India and ICICI, India's largest public and private sector banks respectively, had each bought land in MWC's 500 acre Domestic Tariff Area (DTA), an adjacent industrial park for non-exporting companies. However, neither had started construction, in part, as we saw in the last chapter, because of the Seinis' refusal to surrender their land. For most of my fieldwork, only Infosys and Deutsche Bank were operational, conducting their business process outsourcing (BPO) from slick modern buildings that now stand on the former village grazing land.

As the name suggests, however, the Mahindra World City was no mere business park. Once the zone attained a critical mass of industries and employees, Mahindra would use 1,000 acres to build a "Lifestyle Zone." The Lifestyle Zone would make the SEZ a complete satellite city with upscale residential colonies, shopping malls, schools, hospitals and recreational space—all the amenities for the white-collar employees working in the zone. More than an old-fashioned export processing zone, the SEZ would be a privatized "integrated industrial city" where one can, in Mahindra's motto, "work, live, learn and play." In place of the drab instrumental aesthetic of an industrial estate, the MWC was designed by a Singapore architectural firm with a hyper-modern feel, including, thanks to support from the Clinton Foundation, the latest in green technology.

While the last chapter illustrated how the Rajasthan government successfully transferred land to the Mahindra World City, in this chapter we move into the hidden abode of the SEZ to examine what kind of accumulation this large scale land dispossession has made possible. If the Mahindra World City was a rare case of an SEZ success, it is now time to examine the nature of this success. At the center of the burning political controversy surrounding land acquisition for SEZs has been the question of what they will contribute to India's economic growth, and whether they will serve "development" more broadly. Supporters have touted SEZs as drivers of economic growth that will create employment, infrastructure and foreign exchange. Critics, meanwhile, have called them "real estate grabs." Yet, in part because so few large SEZs have actually been built, there has been little empirical evidence to evaluate these claims. As one of the first of the new private SEZs—as opposed to the old public-sector EPZs (see Cross 2009, 2010)—to become operational in North India, the Mahindra World City offers a good case study with which to wade through the rhetorical debates with empirical research.

As it happened, it was not very difficult—at least at first—for me to get inside the SEZ. I was able to conduct repeated interviews with Mahindra executives and managers, as well as executives of Infosys and Deutsche Bank. The first part of this chapter will largely draw on these interviews, my interviews with officials at the Rajasthan Industrial Development and Investment Corporation, and particularly revealing project documents obtained through India's Right to Information Act. I use this research to illustrate the distinct economic strategies of: 1) the private SEZ developer who accumulates through real estate development on dispossessed land, and 2)

the IT/BPO companies who buy the land as a basis for producing offshore services with the labor of educated middle class youth. I will show how SEZs have become convenient legal containers for a synergistic marriage between these two sectors of the Indian economy.

The second half of the chapter will then put these two forms of accumulation into relation with the surrounding villages, using ethnographic, interview and survey research to begin analyzing the developmental implications of dispossessing land for such purposes. I will show how the flipside of accumulation by dispossession in the SEZ is the *disaccumulation* of productive assets within the surrounding villages, and the marginalization of dispossessed peasants from the “knowledge economy.” The result is a pernicious combination of dispossession and under-exploitation, as Rajpura’s residents are expelled from the old agrarian economy but only marginally absorbed into the “new economy” that has arisen on their former land.

### SEZ DEVELOPMENT AND THE RATE OF ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION

An SEZ developer is a capitalist landlord. Its role is to take dispossessed land, “develop” it with infrastructure, and resell it to companies who want to set up export-oriented units. With 3,000 acres of farmland in its possession, Mahindra has thus employed construction companies to level it, build roads, and install water, electricity, and data connectivity. It is then re-selling this land by the square meter on a long-term lease basis to companies looking to establish office buildings or factories that can take advantage of the various tax, tariff and regulatory concessions provided by the Indian government. As one MWC official succinctly put it, “You can say our product is developed land parcels” (Interview, 10/29/10).

Because the SEZ Act only requires that an SEZ developer use fifty per cent of the land for productive purposes, Mahindra can sell half of those land parcels as luxury residential space in its Lifestyle Zone. This incentive, an increasingly popular cost-recovery mechanism in PPP infrastructure, is designed to attract private investment into infrastructure projects that have long gestation periods and that might otherwise have low returns. There is little debate about where the profits of SEZ developers come from. In interviews, MWC managers made it clear that while they might make moderate profits on reselling industrial land, the Lifestyle Zone “will be our bread and butter” (Interview, 7/14/10).

It is thus no coincidence that SEZ development comes under Mahindra and Mahindra’s real estate development subsidiary<sup>55</sup> and that so many of India’s SEZs are being built by real estate companies (Palit and Bhattacharjee 2008: 55-57). Because residential real estate is by far the highest-value land use in India today, the freedom that the SEZ Act (2005) gave developers with fifty per cent of the land (which would typically be acquired by state governments) provided the major incentive for companies to go into SEZ development. This is what is responsible for the SEZ boom of 2005-2008. The SEZ Act simply created a new legal opening for real estate companies to negotiate with state governments for cheap access to unprecedentedly large chunks of land on the urban periphery in the midst of a real estate boom. For SEZ developers, building the infrastructure for industrial plots was the necessary cost for the ability to develop a satellite city on cheaply acquired farmland. *It is for this reason that SEZs marked the full emergence of a neoliberal regime of dispossession: they signaled the willingness of state governments to dispossess large amounts of land for what amounted to private real estate development.* Most of this investment, I should point out, was coming from domestic sources. Mahindra Lifespaces is financing the MWC through internal accruals and loans from the

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<sup>55</sup> According to an MWC executive, about 15-20 percent of Mahindra Lifespaces portfolio is in SEZs.

State Bank of India. The available data suggests that very little foreign investment has come into SEZs in general.<sup>56</sup>

The business of an SEZ is thus to capture the windfall between the artificially low price of dispossessed agricultural land and its ultimate value as industrial, commercial, and residential real estate. I have called this ratio between the cost of state-acquired land and its ultimate appreciation the *rate of accumulation by dispossession*. In Chapter 3, I suggested that with the emergence of India's neoliberal regime of dispossession, in which private companies are given dispossessed land to profit from its appreciation, this rate has for the first time become a visible and politically salient phenomenon. While intended mostly as an analytical concept, I argued that it could also be provisionally calculated if one could obtain the compensation paid to farmers (P1), the price at which the state transfers the land to the capitalist (P2), and the ultimate price at which the capitalist resells the land (P3). While the ratio between P1 and P2 constitutes the public rate of accumulation by dispossession, the ratio between P2 and P3 constitutes the private rate of accumulation by dispossession. Of course, so long as all of the dispossessed land has not been sold, the rate can only be provisional because of the uncertain and fluctuating nature of land prices (P3).

Through interviews and government documents obtained through India's Right to Information Act,<sup>57</sup> I have obtained the necessary values to provisionally compute Mahindra's private rate of accumulation by dispossession.<sup>58</sup> The Government of Rajasthan charged Mahindra on average \$22,679 per acre of land. I arrived at this P2 by calculating the weighted average of the price charged to Mahindra for public grazing land (1,000 acres) and private farmland (2,000 acres). They must be averaged because the public grazing land was transferred to Mahindra at about half the cost of the private farmland, meaning that the rate of accumulation by dispossession is much higher on enclosed commons than on privately titled land.<sup>59</sup> To be

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<sup>56</sup> Almost all of the private SEZ developers are Indian companies. While a high-level Department of Commerce official admitted to me that, "honestly, we don't know where the finance is coming from," he said that the level of FDI had been disappointing (Interview, 1/17/11), and the relatively incomplete DoC data given to the author shows very little—only 11 of 42 "notified" SEZs for which there is data list any FDI at all, in either their development or in their productive units. Another top official in charge of regulating SEZs in 9 states told me that there had been "very little" FDI and that most of the SEZs were being financed by internal accruals and domestic bank loans—which is the case with the Mahindra World City SEZ. Of the 100 approved SEZs in his region, he added that perhaps only three or four had FDI in their development, with maybe 20% of units in the IT sector having some FDI and very little in other sectors (Interview, 1/25/11).

<sup>57</sup> It was only through the help of the Rajasthan people's movement, the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS), its affiliated RTI Manch in Jaipur, and Suchi Pande in particular, that I was able to obtain this information.

<sup>58</sup> I cannot compute the public rate because Rajasthan's compensation policy gave farmers small plots of land instead of a uniform price. As a P1, one could substitute the Jaipur Development Authority's per acre development cost of the compensation plots; however, I was unable to obtain that information (my interviews and the evidently sorry state of those plots suggest that it was rather small). Nevertheless, because we are concerned here with the profits of Mahindra as private SEZ developer, we only need P2 (the price at which they received it from the government) and P3 (its resale cost).

<sup>59</sup> The price at which the government sold the land to the company is taken from correspondence between the Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO) and the Jaipur Development Authority (RIICO 2006b) and between Mahindra World City and the Government of Rajasthan (Mahindra World City 2007), obtained through Right to Information petitions. This price per acre is an average of the price of the private acquired farmland (Rs. 245 crore for 2000 acres) and state (grazing) land (Rs. 61.17 crore for 1000 acres). 1 crore=10,000,000. Thus, the total cost for the 3,000 acres was Rs. 306.17 crore or Rs. 1,020,567 (\$22,679) per acre. It should be noted that the government rates for state land (used as commons) is cheaper than private land, making the rate of accumulation by dispossession steeper for commons than private land. (Note: from here onwards, I have converted all rupees amounts into dollars assuming an exchange rate of Rs. 45 per dollar).

generous to Mahindra, and separate how much of their profit is pure arbitrage on land acquisition, and how much a return to an investment in infrastructure, we can add to this initial land cost their per acre investment in land development. According to Mahindra executives, their land development costs amount to about \$66,000 per acre (Email correspondence with author, 7/29/10). While these development costs seem high, we will take Mahindra at its word and add this to Mahindra's P2 to produce a conservative estimate of their rate of ABD. As for P3, in 2010, Mahindra was selling long-term leases for developed industrial land to companies for \$55 per sq. metre, or \$224,000/acre (Interview, 7/14/10). While the residential zone is not yet developed, the current rates in the nearby Jaipur Greens residential colony are \$137 per square meter or \$554,420 per acre. By developing land parcels, Mahindra is thus making over \$135,000 per acre on industrial leases (they will eventually raise the rates when the zone hits a critical mass) and, barring a real estate bust, at least \$465,000 per acre in the residential area. We can conclude, then, that the rate of accumulation by dispossession (the ratio of the final sale value of the land to its cost of acquisition and development multiplied by 100) will be 253% on the industrial land and 625% on the residential land, or a simple average rate of 439%. Given that the P3 was taken amidst the post-2008 real estate correction, and prices appear to be going back up, the ultimate rate on unsold land is likely to be much more.

An SEZ developer is thus essentially a rentier. While it creates some value added such as infrastructure creation, design, and maintenance (all subcontracted out), its profits derive from the mere fact that the state is willing to transfer it cheap land and rezone it for non-agricultural purposes. SEZ developer profits represent an arbitrage on this state-mediated discrepancy in land prices.

Nevertheless, an SEZ is not a real estate colony pure and simple: the SEZ Act requires that the Mahindra World City attract exporting companies who can generate net foreign exchange earnings. Its residential real estate business, moreover, needs a sufficiently proximate white-collar work force to buy its high-end flats. At 25 km from Jaipur, it is not clear that this demand could, in the near term, come solely from the city's peri-urban expansion. If Mahindra is a capitalist landlord, it needs some exporting companies as capitalist tenants. With a business model predicated on selling housing to the middle-classes, India's rapidly growing "knowledge economy" provides the natural synergy. As Mahindra Gesco Developers' 2006 annual report noted, "IT and IT enabled services have been major drivers of growth for the real estate industry" (Mahindra Gesco Developers 2005: 7). It is for this reason that the Mahindra World City, like two-thirds of India's SEZs, is focused on India's much heralded "knowledge economy."

## SEZs AND THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

The ascendance of India's Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) sectors is now a well known story. Building on early gains in software development, in the 1990s India became a popular off-shoring destination for "back-office" business services. In the 1990s, major Western corporations, beginning with American Express, British Airways, and General Electric, began to offshore various parts of their business operations to India to arbitrage on labor costs, which were typically 70% cheaper than in the West. In addition to MNC subsidiaries, a range of independent (Indian and foreign) service providers, including software technology firms, moved into the market. The ITES sector grew rapidly in the 1990s and ever faster in the 2000s, becoming a major driver of India's economic growth (Arora et al. 2001; Kapur 2002; Dossani and Kenney 2007; Bardhan 2010). By the

2000s, so-called Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) was a standard business practice for western corporations. While India's SEZ policy was meant to catalyze the more sluggish manufacturing sector, it is the more dynamic services sector that has disproportionately taken advantage of it and populated India's SEZs (Palit and Bhattacharjee 2008).

This has certainly been the case with the MWC, as its 700 acre IT/ITES zone is the largest part of the SEZ and the first to become operational. The MWC was designed in large part to attract the IT giant Infosys—the inspiration for Thomas Friedman's motto that “the world is flat.” As of 2011, Infosys had bought 190 acres (flattening Rajpura's grazing land, at least). Its business services division—Infosys BPO—was employing approximately 600 English-speaking youth with bachelors degrees to do back-office finance, accounting, human resource, and insurance work for corporations in the US, EU and Australia. In addition to expanding its BPO operations, the parent company Infosys Technologies has plans to set up a major software campus on the site (Interview, Infosys, 4/2/10). In the Silicon Valley/Bangalore model, the campus would be a sprawling and self-contained enclave with its own food courts and recreational space. Even before Infosys could get up and running, in 2008 Deutsche Bank's in-house BPO division moved into a campus (built for them by Mahindra) to undertake the back-office accounting work for its global investment banking business. As of 2010, it was employing approximately 500 people, mostly youth with bachelors, MBA or accounting degrees, to do the necessary manual accounting for Deutsche Bank's transactions in global equity, debt, foreign exchange and commodities markets (Interview, Deutsche Bank, 10/24/09). While other large IT companies had bought land in the MWC, the 2008 financial crisis prompted them to delay construction, and also prompted Infosys and Deutsche Bank to expand more slowly than planned.

If it is clear why an SEZ developer would want to attract companies from India's rapidly growing IT sector, why do IT sectors want to come into SEZs? There are a variety of strong incentives for exporting companies to set up offices or factories in SEZs, including income tax holidays, duty-free imports, exemption from sales, service, and the minimum alternative tax, and “single-window clearance” for all state and central approvals. While India's labor laws are technically still applicable inside SEZs, they are executed and arbitrated by a single and typically industry friendly bureaucrat called the “development commissioner.” However, because the IT/ITES industry is generally not unionized anyway, it is the tax and tariff incentives that are most important. While the IT industry already enjoyed similarly generous tax and tariff incentives as part of the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) policy, that policy was set to expire and the SEZ concessions are even more generous. As a consequence, almost all new investments by the big players in the industry started going into SEZs (Interviews, Deutsche Bank, 10/24/09; Infosys, 4/2/10; NASSCOM 10/18/10). As a Mahindra manager told me, while some “visionaries” appreciate the SEZ for its “beautiful buildings” and think of it as, “a Silicon Valley where the neighbors have class to showcase for your buyers,” about 80 per cent of the companies were purely interested in the income-tax benefit (Interview, 7/14/10).

As for why some of India's biggest IT/ITES firms are investing in an SEZ on the periphery of a second-tier city in a state traditionally known for tourism rather than industry, the main factor is the availability of low-cost educated labor. The main operating cost for IT service companies is the moderately skilled middle-class youth who do data-entry, accounting, and various “back office” work on night shifts corresponding to the markets of their US, EU and Australian clients. It is on their cheap labor that the entire offshoring enterprise rests. However, while over 90% of employment in the sector is captured by seven leading cities—Bangalore,



Mumbai, the National Capitol Region of Delhi, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai and Kolkata—increasing costs of living in these larger metros are driving up labor costs and eroding profit margins. The result is that second-tier cities that have a sufficient pool of labor skilled in computers and rudimentary accounting—and, if they are working directly with clients, proficient in English—are increasingly attractive (NASSCOM and A.T. Kearney 2008). Currently, 58 per cent of the total IT-BPO workforce comes from non-tier 1 cities (NASSCOM 2010), so it is cheaper to capture them at their source where companies can capitalize on their desire to be near their families and pay them 75 per cent of the wages offered in the large metros (Interview, Mahindra, 7/14/10). Labor recruited from elsewhere need only be paid according to local costs of living (Interview, Infosys, 4/2/10).

Aside from labor costs, the other major factor for these companies in locating to MWC was the availability of land with supporting infrastructure. With Infosys and Deutsche Bank both looking to expand operations, Mahindra was able to offer them sufficient land with high-quality “plug-n-play” infrastructure—roads, water, power, electricity, connectivity, etc.—that they could quickly move into with plenty of room to expand. The MWC is close to a major expressway linking Mumbai and Delhi, a new ring road under construction, and the newly renovated Jaipur International Airport. Land prices are much lower than in or around the major cities and Infosys, as the anchor of the project, was given land at a concessionary price. The Rajasthan government further offered stamp duty exemption for land bought in SEZs, which amounts to a 7 per cent discount on the purchase price of the land. IT companies have thus become lessees of the Mahindra World City to avail themselves of the various tax concessions on plots of (relatively) cheap developed land near pools of cheap educated labor. With the state and central incentives available to exporters in SEZs, and the economic rationale of shifting to a city like Jaipur, the Mahindra World City has sold out the first phase (383 acres) of its IT zone (Interview, 7/14/10).

If Mahindra is a capitalist landlord, IT companies are its capitalist tenants. These companies accumulate on the basis of labor arbitrage rather than land arbitrage, though they provide demand for the (industrial) land as their “spatial basis of operations” (Marx 1982: 916). By expropriating agrarian land with the help of the state, “improving” it with modern infrastructure (through contractors), and making it available by the square foot in a fully capitalist land market inside the zone, Mahindra is able to command a portion of their profits as rent, which is capitalized as the land price. This is a peculiar variation on the three-class model of agrarian capitalism that emerged in England after the enclosures (Byres 1996; Brenner 1976), though one that has nothing to do with agriculture. Instead of gentry leasing enclosed land to capitalist yeoman farmers who exploit dispossessed peasants, capitalist developers rent expropriated farmland to IT companies employing middle-class professionals. The “improvement” offered by the capitalist landlord is the transformation of farmland into a developed enclave in which entirely capitalist land markets prevail and producing companies can acquire unencumbered land with the necessary infrastructure. If Mahindra’s accumulation can be described as M-D-M’, the IT companies’ profits can be described as M-D-C-M’. It is not, consequently, that dispossession for land commodification has completely eclipsed dispossession for commodity production. However, real estate has become the major driving force of the dispossession for SEZs, while the actual production has become immaterial and knowledge-intensive. We will see shortly that this peculiar composition of the economic growth driving land dispossession is quite consequential for the dispossessed.

All of this creates a peculiar scene outside of the gates of the Mahindra World City every evening. Around 5pm, dozens of SUVs ramble through the villages carrying middle-class youth

from Jaipur to do their night shifts of back-office work for global clients in the middle of the Rajasthan countryside. These SUVs, some of them driven by former farmers, fly past villagers having their end of the day *chai*, children and women herding their livestock home, construction workers and gardeners leaving their shifts, and finally past entrances staffed by local security guards paid to protect the SEZ from their fellow villagers. It is time now to turn to the intersection of these worlds, and examine where the former uses of this land fit into the real estate and knowledge accumulation that their dispossession has made possible.

## DISACCUMULATION

On my first trip to the SEZ, a group of Mahindra managers described the land in Rajpura as “barren,” and joked that when they first arrived there was “nothing but goats, camels and prickly bushes” that got caught in one’s pants (Interview, 10/26/09). The representation of the semi-arid agrarian landscape around Rajpura as “barren” or “waste” was also common among government officials. Anthropologists and geographers have now spent considerable energy deconstructing such categorizations, illuminating the complex livelihood practices supported by supposedly “barren land,” and questioning the agendas animating such reductions (Robbins 1998; Mehta 2001; Gidwani 2008; Baka 2013). I build on such analyses here by illustrating the livelihood practices that the land now inside the SEZ once supported, practices whose significance becomes only clearer in their absence. While in conventional economic accounting, IT campuses and “world class” real estate undoubtedly represent “higher value land uses” than single-cropped agriculture and livestock (higher land prices would be taken as proof enough), we must now begin to understand how this change in land use appears from the point of view of the dispossessed. While the dispossession of private farmland and common grazing land has created the basis for accumulation within the SEZ, it has unleashed a cascading *disaccumulation* of productive assets within the village. By this I mean the destruction of productive assets tied to the land that served as means of production and reproduction. Such disaccumulation is the necessary, though often neglected, flipside of any process of accumulation by dispossession.

We can group the dispossessed agrarian land into two categories: private agricultural land owned by individual families and village grazing lands owned by the state or local *panchayat*. To begin with the first, the agricultural land of Rajpura and surrounding villages was, like three-quarters of India’s farmland (Harriss 1984: 6), largely monsoon-dependent. Though Jaipur district is the fourth-most irrigated in Rajasthan (Government of Rajasthan 2009: 187), only 27% of the farmland in Rajpura was irrigated according to the Census of India (2001). Annual precipitation had been declining for several decades, the water table was receding, and tube-wells were being drilled deeper and deeper. Nevertheless, farmers had long adapted techniques and crop mixes to hedge against meteorological volatility. The single-crop that most families in Rajpura received from their land provided them with much of their grain requirements for the year (varying, of course, by landholdings), and often left them with a marketable surplus. The bulk of land was sowed with pearl millet (*bajra*), which provided a staple of local diets and fodder for livestock. Lesser acreage was devoted to other course grains like corn and sorghum (*juvar*), various lentils and pulses, peanuts (a large cash crop in Jaipur district),<sup>60</sup> oil seeds such as mustard and sesame, and various non-water intensive vegetables that could be sold to the nearby Jaipur market. Prices for vegetables like *tindi* (“apple gourd”) and *guar-ki-phalli* (guar)

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<sup>60</sup> Jaipur is the largest peanut producing district in Rajasthan in terms of both area sown and total production (Government of Rajasthan 2009: 162).

were increasing—the latter ironically because it is being used in the process of natural gas “fracking” in the United States<sup>61</sup>—and, with a decent monsoon, could provide substantial cash income. For those with enough water for a second crop (32 percent of families in my survey), winter wheat and vegetable cultivation could be quite remunerative.<sup>62</sup>

In the classic pattern of dryland agriculture (see Harriss 1984; Brara 2006), cultivation of coarse grains was synergistic with the rearing of livestock, which grazed on the post-harvest stubble and the village’s large tract of grazing land (a 1,000 acre expanse shared with several neighboring villages). Formerly consisting of official *panchayat*-controlled grazing land (*gocher*) and state-controlled “unculturable waste” (*savai chak*), this de facto commons was, as elsewhere in Rajasthan, crucial to local livelihoods (cf. Jodha 1985; Robbins 1998; Brara 2006). While some villagers remembered a time when the *panchayat* regulated access, most villagers and the current *sarpanch* told me that farmers had open and unlimited access.<sup>63</sup> Aside from furnishing wood for cooking fuel and several edible shrubs (not to mention ingredients for country liquor), the commons was above all crucial for supporting the livestock economy. While animals were (like land) distributed unequally, families in the four villages surveyed owned on average 7 buffalo, 2.3 cows, 5.4 goats, 2.4 sheep, and .3 bullock (Survey by author). Five families owned camels, while a few others (of the OBC Kathik sub-caste) traditionally raised horses for weddings. The larger landholding upper castes could support substantial buffalo herds—averaging 15 head per family among general castes, and 7.5 among Jats—and undertake significant commercial milk production for the nearby Jaipur market. Some were also milk middlemen, bringing the village’s milk to dairies or retailers in Jaipur. The lower Scheduled Castes, by contrast, averaged only 1.6 buffalo per household, though they kept larger herds of less-expensive and more fodder-efficient goats (5.3 per family). Their livestock largely produced milk for home consumption, though some families also had surplus to sell through middle-men. Several sub-castes, particularly the Gujjars (OBC), were pastoral specialists, and held substantial herds of goats and sheep from which they produced milk, wool and mutton (OBCs on average held 6 buffalo, 11 goats, and 7 sheep per family). In addition to the relatively sedentary pastoralists that the village commons supported, multiple categories of transhumant families—ranging in itinerancy from part-time village residents to relatively more “nomadic” grazing families from elsewhere in the state (see Robbins 1998)—spent part of the year grazing their animals there, and on the post-harvest stubble that was, by informal custom, a “seasonal common property resource” (Jodha 1985: 252).

Proximity to the Jaipur market allowed many families to participate in the “white revolution” that has made Jaipur the top buffalo milk producing district in the state, and the fifth out of thirty two districts in goat milk production (Government of Rajasthan 2009: 201). One buffalo costs over \$1,000 to purchase and can generate \$40-60 in net income per month (roughly equivalent to the monthly wage of one unskilled worker). With a lower upfront investment, a family raising a dozen or so goats could meet their dairy consumption needs and fetch a modest income equivalent to the going wage for manual labor. For many families, this added needed

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<sup>61</sup> For newspaper coverage of this crop boom, see Harris (2012) and Rowley (2012).

<sup>62</sup> Calculating farm incomes among semi-subsistence farmers is notoriously difficult, and I did not have much luck trying to establish reliable figures through interviews or surveys.

<sup>63</sup> In her remarkable study, Rita Brara (2006) details the complex regulation of grazing commons by informal village committees in Rajasthan. Perhaps because of its unusually large size, the grazing commons shared by Rajpura appeared less regulated. Nevertheless, because the SEZ was already sitting on most of the grazing land (*gocher*) by the time I arrived, it was not possible to observe how the land was utilized and managed. While the land was probably somewhat over-grazed, it still clearly made a very large contribution to village livelihoods.

diversification to a local diet otherwise heavy on coarse grains and provided some cash while utilizing the labor of otherwise unemployed family members. With Rajpura's proximity to the Jaipur market, livestock production also probably contributed more to economic accumulation than the direct sale of agricultural produce.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, since livestock are mobile and relatively liquid assets, they also provided some insurance against drought and crop failure (Jodha 1985: 248).

The loss of both private farmland and grazing land for the SEZ has destroyed this agrarian economy. Most obviously, people have lost their modest farm incomes and direct access to grain, lentils (*dal*) and vegetables. This loss of non-market access to the means of subsistence could not come at a worse time, as it has coincided with a period of drastic inflation in basic foodstuffs. Moreover, the combined loss of stubble and fodder from people's own land and the expropriation of the village commons has decimated the livestock economy by commercializing access to fodder. Those still wishing to raise buffalo or cow must now purchase fodder at Rs. 200 per 40 kg *maund*, significantly increasing costs and lowering profits. Without access to the trees and herbs of the grazing land, goat herders must now purchase access to trees on other farmers' land. With its lower milk price and small margins, goat rearing is hardly viable if one has to pay for fodder. Aside from fodder concerns, many families, now confined to small house plots, simply do not have the *space* to keep animals even for stall-feeding. All this has precipitated a massive selling off of animals—over 66 per cent of the total livestock population according to my survey.<sup>65</sup> Many complain that they had to sell at fire sale prices.

Yet aggregate figures do not capture the disproportionate costs of enclosure for the poor. While the number of buffalo, the profitable asset of the middle and rich farmer, has been reduced by 56 per cent, the number of goats, the low-investment, moderate-yield source of nutrition and income for the poor, has gone down by 76 per cent. Enclosure has been particularly devastating for Gujjar herders who specialize in goat and sheep rearing as their main occupation. For example, Ranadevi and Gopal Lal Gujjar head a landless family who live in an earthen (*kaccha*) hut on village land in Shivpura. Gopal Lal is infirm and, without adult children, the two are entirely dependent on their 18 goats, from which they extract approximately 8 kg of milk per day, which they sell at a local dairy for Rs. 15 per kg. While they used to receive free fodder from the village grazing land, they now have to rent trees from nearby farmers at about Rs. 200/tree. They estimate that they now spend Rs. 50 in fodder per day, reducing their daily income from an already meagre Rs. 120 (\$2.66) to a precarious Rs. 70 (\$1.60) per day (Fieldnotes, 2/8/10). Like Ranadevi and Gopal Lal, many other goat-rearing families have either had their incomes reduced, must travel farther a field for fodder (hurting school attendance), or have had to sell their flocks altogether.

The dispossession and enclosure of land has thus decimated the villages' major sources of accumulation and subsistence, with particularly devastating consequences for the poor. While agrarian incomes have been reduced or eliminated, consumption needs have been commercialized at a time of rampant inflation; the consequence is that 50 per cent of those who had land acquired—and 75 per cent of Scheduled Castes and Tribe families—report having “less food.” This was daily apparent to me in the undernourishment of Mahesh and Lada's three

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<sup>64</sup> In 2001-2002, “the livestock sector” accounted for 33 percent of the total value of agricultural output in the state (World Bank 2006: 22).

<sup>65</sup> To provide some historical perspective (though for obvious reasons the events are not comparable), the 1899-1900 famine that struck Rajasthan decimated only 40% of the livestock in Jaipur district (Kachhawaha 1992).

young-children, who, without their fields and livestock, now lived off *roti* made with Public Distribution System grain and market-bought vegetable dishes (*sabzis*), with little *dal* (currently Rs. 80 per kg) and almost none of the dairy products—curd (*dahi*), buttermilk (*chaach*), or clarified butter (*ghee*)—that usually complete the Rajasthani diet.

In addition to the loss of food is the fuel to cook it with. Almost all families fired their earthen stoves (*chulas*) with wood collected from the grazing land, or with cow dung from their livestock. Both are now in short supply, increasing the daily household burdens for women who must search longer and harder for fuel (though families that received enough compensation have opted out of the problem with gas stoves). The gendered effect of enclosing commons and privatizing means of reproduction is well documented, and in Chapter 6 we will consider it along with the changes wrought by the real estate economy. But in addition to its gendered aspects, castes dependent on raw materials for their traditional occupations have also suffered. The village potters (*Kumhars*) have lost direct access to the wood, cow-dung, and soil they used to collect from the grazing land. Having to purchase these inputs on the market has now halved their returns from one working day to an almost-not-worth-it \$1.

Dire as it is, the assault on accumulation and social reproduction does not stop at agriculture, animal husbandry and raw materials. While most of the land acquired for the SEZ was agricultural and skirted the dense village settlements, those families living on their farmland and in the more scattered hamlets (*danis*) have also lost their homes. Houses are being compensated at significantly below their replacement cost, creating widespread disaffection among farmers. For example, Banshilal Sharma, introduced in the last chapter, is being compensated \$2,000 for his big stucco house that accommodates a large joint family. That will cover only a fraction of constructing another concrete house in today's market. Moreover, he will have to use one of his compensation plots for the house. Such a situation has imposed a large opportunity cost on families who must devote their small compensation plots for a non-income generating use like housing. With land prices spiraling, buying new plots in the village is prohibitive and the displaced are effectively priced out of the local market. Motilal Kumavat, who along with his brothers will have to use his compensation plot to build a house for his growing family, explained, "There is a housing problem (*rehene ka samasya hai*). *Space is necessary for living (jagha zaruri hai rehene ke liye)*" (Fieldnotes, 4/18/10).

Even more serious than Banshilal or Motilal's situation is that of the lower-caste families living "illegally" as "encroachers" on the village grazing land. In Rajpura, there are multiple families living on *panchayat* land that has now been transferred to the SEZ. Farther into the forested grazing land in the village of Moti Dani, twelve extremely poor families of the Bavariya caste—previously stigmatized by the British as a "criminal tribe" and now officially classified as a "denotified and nomadic tribe" (Radhakrishna 2001)—have lived on *panchayat* land for at least seven generations without title. In the old caste-based division of labor, they made their living by hunting and chasing animals from the fields of the upper-castes, but they now depend on episodic wage-labor, a handful of goats, and chickens that they raise around their homesteads. The SEZ boundary wall is being constructed through their hamlet, the trees have been cut down all around them for the JDA compensation plots, and they are waiting to be evicted with no compensation. These families are already living in extreme poverty, are almost entirely illiterate, and have been told nothing about the project. They face eminent, total, and uncompensated dispossession of their habitation and modest means of subsistence, which provide the slightest of cushions against total penury.

In addition to land, livestock and housing, land dispossession has also seriously

undermined water access, always a critical issue in water-scarce Rajasthan. While there are government hand-pumps in the village, the ones that are not dry are saline. In Rajpura, farmers used to get “sweet water” from a pipeline that came from a better endowed village on the other side of the SEZ. That connection has been severed (though the *sarpanch* claims it went dry first), while many farmers also lost functioning wells along with their dispossessed farmland. The village water-catchment tank (*talab*), built generations ago on *panchayat* land to recharge ground-water and provide drinking water for livestock, has been transferred to Mahindra and is being paved over. To further the process of water mining, families who still have some land and the means of investing \$2000 (usually the fruits of land sales) have now installed private tube-wells, not for agriculture, but to sell already scarce ground-water to Mahindra at \$3 per 500 liter tanker, and to fellow villagers who have lost their wells. Faced with MWC’s huge demand for water (which will eventually be ½ million gallons/day), and a seemingly questionable future for agriculture, these villagers (as we will see, disproportionately the landed upper caste) are seeking moderate profits by commodifying the village’s sparse underground aquifers. The water tankers passing through the market everyday give the impression of a last ditch effort to mine what little natural endowments are left.

The consequence is that most families now have to purchase water for household use from tankers, commercializing yet one more necessity of life. Aside from the economic hardship this imposes, the water they are purchasing is of questionable quality. A large part of domestic water needs, including that provided free by the *panchayat* during the summer months, is now being met by tankers coming from a village closer to the town of Sanganer. This village only has water because its aquifers are recharged by industrial effluents from Sanganer’s several hundred block-printing mills. These industries release toxic dyes without mitigation into ravines from which they seep into the groundwater of neighboring villages. Sanganer’s waste water has been shown to contain higher than permissible levels of heavy metals and various toxic chemicals (Joshi and Kumar 2011). This waste-water provides local farmers with the mixed-blessing of tube-well irrigation and a winter crop, along with the surplus that some farmers are selling to water-deficit villages like Rajpura. However, the inhabitants of this village complain that the “dirty water” is making them sick. The long-term health consequences for them and Rajpura’s residents are frightening to contemplate. While Rajpura’s water problems pre-date the SEZ, dispossession has clearly exacerbated them. In the process of being dispossessed of their land, farmers have been further dispossessed of non-market access to safe water.

Aside from losing means of production and consumption that are only slightly easier to tally, Rajpura’s residents have also been dispossessed of other incalculable social goods. Sacred groves (*oran*), the cremation grounds of several Hindu castes, and a Muslim burial ground (*khabarstan*) have fallen into the SEZ, creating significant distress for locals. Rajpura’s fair (*mela*) ground, abutting the Hanuman temple and the site of the annual Hanuman *mela*, was acquired for the SEZ (though after some agitation, it may be excluded). On a more pedestrian level, farmers complain of losing access to private space for defecation—a seemingly mundane concern, though try telling that to those who did not get enough land money to build concrete houses with indoor plumbing and must look for a private spot every morning amidst fields that are turning into real estate colonies.

In sum, the people of Rajpura and the eight other villages dispossessed for the Mahindra World City have been deprived of direct access to means of production, subsistence, and common social wealth. The dispossession of land has forced a disaccumulation of villagers’ other productive assets (livestock), impeded social reproduction by threatening habitation and

water, endangered health, and infringed on other social goods. Of all of these values, only privately titled land has been compensated.

As is already clear, this dispossession is refracted in various ways through the agrarian class structure. Of course, the upper-castes with the most land have had the most land acquired. On the other hand, they were already more diversified and, as we will see, are also better positioned to profit from the developed land given as compensation. The lower-caste semi-proletariat has little else to fall back upon. Those castes specializing in livestock raising are particularly hurt by the enclosure of the grazing land, as are the village potters. All those directly or indirectly dependent on land have suffered losses to varying degrees.

There is nevertheless a relatively small subsection of Dalits who were not only landless but from the beginning did not even have livestock to graze on the village commons. These families with no agrarian assets, and with their house plots in the village, are largely indifferent to the SEZ. Since most wage labor is non-agricultural, they are not dependent on relationships with particular farmers for their livelihoods. In interviews, several of the village sweepers from the Sangat caste, who are considered the lowest of the Dalit castes in terms of ritual purity, expressed hope that their social position would be improved by the SEZ. The women of this caste sweep the open gutters every morning for *rotis* that are dropped into their hands from above to prevent “pollution.” Most have no land or animals and their children are receiving some work—albeit low-paying and temporary—in the SEZ. We will return to their situation in this and the following chapters, and assess to what extent the SEZ can be judged as having liberating effects on caste domination. Nevertheless, while some advocates argue that the landless also lose from land dispossession, I did not find that to be the case among the completely proletarianized lower castes.

The remainder of Rajpura’s residents have, however, been separated from means of production and reproduction. While the upper castes have lost access to means of significant accumulation, the lower-caste semi-proletariat has lost vital access to means of reproduction. Women in general, given their responsibility for most social reproductive work, have seen their work burdens increase (though in a class-inflected way). In the next chapter, we will see to what extent these losses have been compensated by the government’s compensation policy. Some farmers, “freed” entirely from any form of property, have become proletarians with nothing to sell but their labor power. Others have leveraged their compensation into rentiership, petty mercantilism and usury. But all of them, whether out of utter necessity or desire for diversification, express the hope for employment in the SEZ. We now examine the extent to which the SEZ has been able to utilize the labor of those it has dispossessed.

## PEASANTS IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

When industries come to a rural area characterized by underemployment and poverty, it is often the hope of local residents that they or their children will receive employment. This is naturally the promise given to them by government officials and industrialists who want to acquire their land. Some Rajpura residents, as we saw in the last chapter, complied with land acquisition in part out of the hopes that such employment would be forthcoming. If the SEZ has separated Rajpura’s residents from their means of production and subsistence, to what extent has it absorbed their newly “freed” labor? Where do farming families fit into India’s “knowledge economy?”

The main answer is that farmers are marginalized more than exploited by this new economy. With the Mahindra World City largely devoted to the IT/ITES sector, the majority of

jobs available in the SEZ are for those with educational credentials far in excess of what can be found in rural Rajasthan. The core jobs as back office workers (known as “executives”) in the IT/ITES firms require BA or MA degrees in business or accounting. Employees for Infosys must speak English to engage with overseas clients. As other studies have shown, the IT/BPO workforce is largely urban, middle-class, and upper caste (Upadhyay 2007; Radhakrishnan 2011). In Rajpura, only 56 per cent of the population over 6 years of age is literate (Census of India 2001) and only 50 per cent of households contain someone who has passed the 10<sup>th</sup> class (Survey by author). While increasing numbers of young people are obtaining undergraduate degrees, the majority of these degrees are from the new, second-rate private colleges that have proliferated around Jaipur.<sup>66</sup> Others earn certificates from vocational training programs, including in computers, that do not carry much weight with MNC employers. Almost no one in the village speaks more than a few phrases of English, including the teachers in the “English-medium” schools. As a result, I did not find a single case of a local village resident employed *directly* by Infosys or Deutsche Bank. Even the canteen operator preferred to hire urban youth who had the “manners” to serve the zone’s middle-class employees (and particularly the women employees). Overall, my survey found that only 18% of families who were dispossessed (and 14% of families overall) received any employment at all for some duration in the SEZ. As many of these families—and in particular women—pointed out, this was one job (typically for a male son) when the whole family was rendered “unemployed” (*berozgar*) by dispossession.

Without exception, the employment that this minority has received is low-paid and temporary contract work as security guards, gardeners, janitors, “office boys,” or drivers. Interestingly, almost all of the research on labor in India’s IT/BPO economy has focused on its relatively well-paid regular workforce, to the total neglect of this low-paid “support” staff. But this support work is the only employment most rural families are likely to receive in India’s “knowledge economy.” These jobs are not direct with the larger multi-national companies in the zone, but are—as per common practice—sub-contracted out to a network of local contractors (*thekedars*) (see also Breman 1996; Cross 2010). The jobs are low-paying at around \$60 to \$80 per month, and are based on 1-2 year contracts that provide little security. The various contractors, medium-sized companies with names like “Tops Security,” are based in Jaipur, Delhi or beyond. Flying beneath the state’s regulatory radar, they have very little accountability to their employees. They can hire, fire, and change the terms of employment at will. For example, suddenly in the course of my fieldwork, the monthly wages of security guards in the SEZ were slashed from Rs. 4500 to Rs. 3000 as shifts were reduced from 12 to 8 hours, much to the chagrin of young men from the village. While car-driving is better paying if one owns the car, this is beyond the reach of most, and those who have accomplished it on credit have found it to be less than lucrative. Sub-contracted drivers earn between Rs. 4,000 and Rs. 5,000 per month for working long night-shifts.

Aside from the service jobs necessary for the ongoing work inside the SEZ, there is of course the temporary construction work to build the zone itself. This work is subcontracted by Mahindra and the other companies to outside construction companies, who then hire dozens of labor contractors to mobilize workers. A small number of people from the surrounding villages are doing daily construction work for these fly-by-night contractors, earning approximately \$3 (Rs. 135-150) per day. A small number of skilled locals have gotten work as plumbers or

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<sup>66</sup> In the wake of central government initiatives to privatize higher education, the number of higher education institutions in Rajasthan more than doubled between 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 (Government of Rajasthan 2009: 85a).



electricians. However, as is common across India, the vast majority of workers—by most estimates three-quarters—are more easily disciplined migrants shipped in from other states or far-flung districts of Rajasthan (see Breman 1996). Several contractors explained to me that migrants do not have the family and social commitments of locals and therefore do not miss work for weddings, festivals and family matters. As a foreman for one company explained, “Local people will fight (*jhagarda ladai karte hai*). They [employers] think that if something happens, they will come back with 10 people. So they’d rather hire people from outside” (Fieldnotes, 6/27/12). No matter where one is, the preference is always for non-locals. At the Mahindra World City, I encountered work-gangs from Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and West Bengal. My interviews with these migrants, the poorer of whom live in flimsy tent encampments near the SEZ boundary, suggest that they are typically land-poor or landless, though a few are better-off young men wanting to leave their villages for some excitement. They are often recruited by fellow villagers or even family members, who as contractors, capture the difference between their wages and what is paid by the construction companies for their work (on a per meter basis for road work, in other cases by the worker day). There are no safety precautions or liability—after one Rajpura youth had his leg crushed under a stone slab, his contractor ran off to avoid paying hospital bills. It is common for children to labor with their parents. And there are no unions. Indeed, the challenge of organizing dozens of work gangs from different states, speaking different languages, and under contracts of different duration is formidable, if not impossible (see Agarwala 2006, 2008). For these “wage hunters and gatherers” (Breman 1994), the SEZ is just one more temporary construction site, no better or worse than any across the subcontinent. For Rajpura residents, however, their presence is another sign of all the SEZ’s benefits going to “outsiders” (*baaharwale*).

If far from ideal or large in number, what contribution did these jobs make to people’s livelihoods in Rajpura, and how did people feel about them? To understand this, we need to understand the prior relationship of different classes of agriculturalists to waged work. Only seven percent of families in these villages were landless laborers before the SEZ, and 90% of farming families cultivated exclusively with family labor. A combination of decreasing rains, growing families, and the relentless march of subdivision gradually pushed Rajpura’s farmers to diversify into waged employment outside of the village as a supplement to agriculture. Given the generally low levels of education, only 24% of families found such employment in the formal sector (public or private). Despite reservations for lower castes in government jobs, the upper castes disproportionately captured formal sector jobs in general: 50 percent of general castes (such as Brahmins) and 31 percent of Jat families had one member with such employment before the arrival of the SEZ, compared to 14 percent of OBC families and 9% of SC families. Without access to more stable and higher paying work, most of the lower caste small-holder were dependent to varying degrees on informal wage labor. Eighty-five percent of Scheduled Castes and 48% of OBCs had at least one member doing such work, which was typically hard manual labor (*beldari*, or “oxen work”) in construction or small informal industries. While a few found employment in a nearby RIICO industrial estate in Bagaru, and a small number in the block-printing mills of Sanganer, the majority undertook the bus commute to Jaipur where they went from one temporary job to another. Such work typically paid Rs. 125-150 per day (approximately \$2.5-3 dollars), but was erratic.

While Rajpura’s semi-proletarianized peasantry was more accustomed to treating their labor power as a commodity than they were their land, their relationship to waged work nevertheless resembled the “traditional” orientation to work described by Weber. That is, farmers

typically sought such wage labor only when they needed it, and withdraw from the labor market when they could. They mostly looked for labor in the agricultural off-season, and the better the monsoon, the less wage-labor they performed. As one young man remarked, “If there is water, people like working less” (Fieldnotes, 3/10/10). No one preferred doing exhausting manual labor for low wages when they could be working their own land, which required only periodic intensity. Of course, we should point out that this intensity was reduced *for men* by the gendered division of labor which relegated women to the most difficult tasks like weeding. We will return to the gendered effects of the SEZ. For now, the point is that men put a high premium on working for themselves and avoiding strenuous manual labor. As we will also see in the next chapter, we can comprehend much of their economic strategizing as guided by the desire to avoid the fully proletarian condition.

With this background, it becomes more comprehensible why the shift from farming and grazing to being a security guard in Infosys did not strike many as “progress.” Before the SEZ, these jobs would have been welcome enough as supplementary income that could absorb the labor of a family member, no better or worse than similarly bad paying jobs in Jaipur, but with the advantage of being closer to home. Indeed, this is how farmers from surrounding villages whose lands weren’t acquired felt about these jobs. However, for those who were dispossessed for the SEZ, these jobs were inadequate recompense for the loss of land. In my many conversations with security guards, janitors and gardeners working in the SEZ, very few said they liked their jobs, but dissatisfaction was particularly high among those whose land went in the SEZ and for whom the job appeared as a direct tradeoff with agriculture. This was in part a very straightforward economic calculus. As one Jat youth, Mangalchand Choudhary pointed out at a *chai* stall conversation in Rajpura, you can get Rs. 2,000-3,000 per month selling the milk from one buffalo. If you have two buffalo, that is more income than working for a month as a security guard. “Whoever has two buffalo, they won’t do it, they’ll take it easy” (Fieldnotes, 7/10/10). Gopal Bora Sharma, talking with me in front of the MWC gates, made a similar calculation. Though he is relatively lucky to have a skilled job as an electrician, which pays a marginally better Rs. 5,000 month (still temporary and through a contractor), he is still unhappy with the deal. His family had 1.5 of their three *bighas* acquired, and had to sell three buffalo. He says, “It’s a big loss and the loss is bigger than the benefit.” The monthly income from those three buffalo was Rs. 7,000-8000, more than his job. “Income has gone down,” he complains. His friend added: “If we have land, we can do anything. Start a business, farm. Without land we can’t do anything” (Fieldnotes, 4/14/10).

Aside from a straightforward economic calculation, there was also a widespread sense of alienation among the freshly proletarianized youth working in the zone. Jaisingh, a young Gujjar whose family lost land and cattle, summed up the feeling of many youth working as security guards: “It seems strange. Our land is in there. They took our grazing land (*gocher*), so people can’t keep animals. High-level people work in there on computers. We’re not educated, so we can’t work in there.” While he and his friends would rather do the computer work, “we aren’t educated and don’t speak English.” Of the “high-level people” working in the zone, he says he would “like to speak to those people, some day” (Fieldnotes, 4/12/10). Mangalsingh’s feelings reflect not only the transition to a proletarian condition in which “the objective conditions of living labor appear as separated, independent values opposite living labor capacity” (Marx 1973: 452), but where one’s living labor becomes materially and symbolically dominated *on the very land* that once united it with the objective means of its realization.

While it is often argued that youth in particular do not value farming and want to leave it (Gupta 2009; Bardhan 2011), I found the reality to be more complicated in Rajpura. Take, for example, this conversation with Mangalchand and another Jat youth. I asked them what was better, farming or working as a security guard in the SEZ. They said, “Farming is better. It is work of the home (*ghar ka kam*), one’s own (*khud ka*). With that work [as security guard], you have to go and stay there nine hours, spend one hour going and one hour coming. You go home and sleep, that’s it” (Fieldnotes, 7/10/10). In their estimation, that was no way to live, having no time to enjoy life. While these youth were from the Jat agriculturalist caste, the view was fairly widespread. On another occasion I was sitting with about a dozen unemployed young men (mostly OBC and SC) at the Rajpura chai stall, and asked them if they like farming. Ravinder Kumar responded for the others, “Yes. We like farming.... If they had land with water, they would farm” (Fieldnotes, 2/18/10). Sherpal Naik, a young OBC man who has not been able to find work in the SEZ remarks, “When we had land, we were happy. We got grain, kept animals, got milk, butter, and buttermilk. Ever since the land was sold, we have had trouble” (Fieldnotes, 10/9/10).

It is not that youth did not want employment outside of agriculture, many certainly did. The problem was that they wanted better work than what was available to them and wanted their families to keep their land. Doing wage labor for Rs. 3,500 per month could not provide the same subsistence level for the family as farming, and the rest of their family was still unemployed and had to eat. While many did want an exit route from agriculture, such low-paying temporary work was not a sufficiently attractive one to outweigh the costs of giving land. As we will discuss further in the next chapter, the majority who did not leverage their compensation plots into a new livelihood outside of wage labor have wound up in a much worse position than before. It is this reality of the semi-proletariat condition that renders meaningless surveys that purport to show that, “the overwhelming majority of farmers’ children want to leave agriculture” (Bardhan 2011: 56). What matters is not what youth want to be in the abstract when asked on a survey (of course they would rather be a millionaire), but rather what they prefer and choose to do given the constrained options available to them.

What most youth wanted was to hang on to their land, and in addition to have their own business, a government job, or regular high-paid private work like that in Infosys or Deutsche Bank. They made a distinction between *naukri* (employment) and *mazduri* (casual wage labor). I asked Sanjay Bhunker, an entrepreneurial young Dalit man in Rajpura, whether people were slowly getting *naukri* from the SEZ. He responded, “What *naukri*? People here are getting *mazduri*.... In the SEZ, they make us security guards” (Fieldnotes, 6/30/12). What made this work *mazduri* was that it was low-paying and mediated by a chain of contractors who “ate” part of their salaries as commission. As one farmer complained, imitating a contractor, “I take twenty. I give someone else fifteen. He gives someone ten. All the way down to six and a half.” Another young man from Shiv’s sub-caste said, “Tell the Mahindra people (*Mahindrawale*) to get rid of the contractors and give us direct employment. If we get *naukri* with the company, then there will be benefit” (Fieldnotes, 2/3/11). Another farmer, a Brahmin, concurred with this common sentiment: “They should give us one permanent job per family. We should be able to join the company permanently” (Fieldwork, 2/20/10). While formal and permanent *naukri* in the SEZ may have tilted the cost-benefit calculus in its favor, no one could be persuaded that trading agriculture for *mazduri* was a good deal.

Consequently, not only did *mazduri* fail to compensate for land loss, but it exposed an unhappy disjuncture between the needs of India’s new economy and the skills and education of

rural youth. The result of such a disjuncture, analyzed elsewhere by Jeffrey (2010), can best be described as melancholy. Whether poorly employed or unemployed, many ruefully observed that, “The work is only for educated people (*pare-likhe logo ke liye*). Here there are few educated people.” Because the work was for “hi-fi” people, it was all going to “outsiders” (*baharwale*). While Rajpura’s poor and uneducated knew that these jobs were far beyond them, those with college degrees felt particularly pained at not getting them. Kana Ram Choudhary, a Jat farmer who had 13 of his 30 *bighas* acquired, pointed to all of his children in whose education he had invested. One has an MA, another a BA and the other has passed 10<sup>th</sup> grade. He pulls a young boy over and says, “Look at him, he’s educated. He has no occupation (*dhandha*). What’s he going to do?” “Time pass is happening,” said the boy. I asked if he would do *mazduri* in the SEZ if it was given to him. His father replied that he will do it, but added, “educated people won’t do jobs cleaning the bathroom. How can someone educated in computers clean gutters?” (Fieldnotes, 2/18/10). In a similar situation was Sherpal Naik, introduced earlier, who has studied to 10<sup>th</sup> and knows how to do computer data entry on Excel. He would like to find work doing that, but instead he had just come back from doing pipe-fitting work in New Delhi, and was now working as a security guard at a factory in Bagaru. He complains, “They open up here. They don’t give us any jobs. We have to go 15 to 25 kilometers away for work” (Fieldnotes, 10/9/10). Ram Gopal Bora, a large Brahmin farmer with three educated but unemployed children similarly complained, “Everyone wants to do something according to their qualification” (Fieldnotes, 2/17/10). The problem was that the qualifications that Rajpura residents thought should entitle them to jobs in the SEZ (BAs in private colleges, or computer training certificates at vocational institutes) did not carry the same value for the “hi-fi” companies operating in the SEZ’s “knowledge economy.”

Of course, one of the policy responses to this disjuncture—which is often mooted in debates over land acquisition—is to expand education and provide vocational training that would narrow this gap between the employment needs of industries and the capacities of rural youth. While remedying the historic failure of post-independence India to provide quality rural education would indeed be helpful, there is no sign of this happening in the near future. Moreover, given the relatively small number of jobs being created by India’s service-led growth, it is not clear that more education would result in more jobs rather than just deflating the value of existing credentials as employment in this sector becomes more selective. While vocational training is unobjectionable in itself, I have already pointed out that vocational degrees are not adequate for obtaining the “core” jobs in the IT/ITES sector. Nevertheless, vocational training is still promulgated by those who argue that such development can be beneficial to rural youth under the right circumstances. As part of its “Corporate Social Responsibility” initiatives, Mahindra helped to fund the establishment of a vocational training institute in Rajpura.

At Mahindra’s behest, a national NGO, which I will call the Youth Foundation, established classes in a compound adjoining Rajpura’s main temple to train approximately 100 students at a time in customer care, reception and marketing. They gave a priority to families who had their land acquired for the SEZ. While many youth paid the tuition of Rs. 500 in the hopes of career advancement, most were sorely disappointed. By the foundations own estimate, it was unable to place its students in the SEZ as, in the words of one employee, their “mental levels were very low.” Instead, it tried to place youth in lower-paying service jobs in Jaipur that, he complained, the farmers often quit. Students, for their part, complained to me that they received no benefit while wasting time and money. By December 2010, I found that the institute had closed its doors in Rajpura and moved elsewhere. While another Corporate Social

Responsibility initiative sponsored by Mahindra was ostensibly intended to help youth become entrepreneurs, it turned into a vocational training exercise whose primary role was to inculcate the right manners and conduct to be security guards in the SEZ. Its director explained to me that its purpose was “moral education” and that practically it taught the security guards “how to salute, how to deal with people at the gate, and what to do in case of a fire” (Fieldnotes, 10/12/10). At their graduation, presided over with fanfare by Mahindra executives, security guards in the class explained that they did not learn anything except “how to stand up straight and salute,” along with some yoga and meditation; but they needed to get the certificate to maintain their employment (Fieldnotes, 10/13/10).

Nevertheless, those who found such work in the SEZ unrewarding were still relatively lucky. The majority were simply marginalized and unemployed. In the next chapter, we will examine the unequal ability of farmers to profitably navigate land markets and use their compensation money to springboard into a business or other livelihood. For the most part, however, those livelihoods were unconnected to the actual work happening in the SEZ. Lives and livelihoods unfolded in the village as if the SEZ was a large and foreign object, affecting them but not including them. The village *chai* stalls were full of unemployed men passing time, while the National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme became the village’s largest employer. While Rajpura’s residents were literally depeasantized for the SEZ, they were now, metaphorically speaking, peasants in this “knowledge economy.” Having relinquished the needed land, their labor was superfluous. To paraphrase Joan Robinson, the only thing worse than being dispossessed and exploited, is being dispossessed and not exploited.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has tried to illustrate, through the case of the Mahindra World City SEZ, the nature of the accumulation driving dispossession under India’s neoliberal regime. I have argued that this accumulation is a synergistic marriage of real estate capital and India’s knowledge economy. SEZ developers are real estate investors who arbitrage on the differentials in land values made possible by state-mediated dispossession. I have shown that this rate of accumulation by dispossession can, with sufficient data, be provisionally calculated. But the important analytical point is that under India’s neoliberal regime dispossession, this rate becomes the goal of dispossession itself. SEZs signal the willingness of Indian states to dispossess farmers’ land for real estate speculation. If India’s developmentalist regime dispossessed farmers to produce commodities on their land, India’s neoliberal regime dispossesses farmers to commodity their land itself.

This does not mean that no commodities are being produced. The SEZ requires some generation of net foreign exchange on half of the land. Because it is more dynamic than India’s manufacturing sector and has natural synergies with real estate, India’s “knowledge economy” has filled this role. SEZ developers can sell their “developed land parcels” to IT/ITES companies to construct office buildings and campuses, in the process bringing the middle-class workers who can provide the demand for their housing colonies. It is not that India’s knowledge economy is “unproductive.” But it is non-labor intensive, and has no chance of absorbing the labor of dispossessed farmers.

The remainder of the chapter thus analyzed how this *sectoral composition of dispossession* has intersected with the livelihoods of the surrounding villages. I argued that the result is a pernicious scissor effect of disaccumulation on the one side and labor marginalization on the other. Dispossession for the SEZ has destroyed land-based assets that enabled

accumulation and social reproduction and provided various public goods. At the same time, the accumulation enabled by the dispossession of Rajpura's residents has no chance of absorbing their newly "freed" labor. While the SEZ will continue to grow, the pattern is in place and relatively clear: there is a huge disjuncture between the SEZ and Rajpura's residents, a micro-cosmic reflection of the large disconnect between India's knowledge-intensive growth and the three quarters of Indians that live in rural India. This contradiction becomes particularly visible at the point of enclosure, when farmers are asked to relinquish their land for this new economy and where accumulation and disaccumulation are weighed against each other by the dispossessed. In Chapter 7, I will argue that this characteristic of the accumulation driving dispossession in India today makes its benefits *for farmers* less attractive than maintaining the assets it would disaccumulate. This is a huge factor underlying contemporary land wars in India as it makes it quite rational for India's semi-proletarianized peasantry to tenaciously defend their land even while trying to diversify from agriculture.

Theoretically, we should observe that while Marxists have traditionally seen the creation of a class of propertyless wage laborers as the key *function* of primitive accumulation, the driving force of dispossession is the commodification of land while the labor power of peasants is largely superfluous. The surplus value fueling the rent of the SEZ developer comes from moderately educated middle-class youth, while many of those dispossessed without the means of acquiring other land or livelihood assets have joined the ranks of the *under-exploited* rural proletariat. From the point of view of capital, the main value lies in rural land not the labor of its dispossessed owners.

Without significant absorption of rural labor, the main source of value that the Mahindra World City injected into the surrounding villages was via dramatic real estate speculation. I now turn to this process of real estate driven agrarian change and its developmental consequences.

## Chapter 6. Dispossession without Development: Real Estate and Agrarian Change

“What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man’s institutions. To isolate it and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors” (Karl Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 187).

### INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, we examined how accumulation by dispossession for the Mahindra World City was based on the disaccumulation of agrarian assets and the marginalization of rural labor. In this chapter, we turn to the SEZ’s major *contribution* to the local economy outside of its gates: dramatic real estate speculation. The prospect of multi-national companies setting up in a rural area previously characterized by rain-fed agriculture generated a dramatic boom in the price of Rajpura’s farmland and in the developed plots that were allotted as compensation to farmers. While this was largely an incidental byproduct of the economic activity taking place inside the SEZ, it is this process of land commodification outside the SEZ that injected the most value into the local economy and unleashed a rapid and peculiar process of socio-economic change in Rajpura. As we saw in Chapter 4, the Rajasthan government included dispossessed farmers in this process, utilizing land appreciation to produce compliance to dispossession. By turning the process of coercive dispossession into a “social game” of real estate market participation, the state was able to individualize farmers’ relationship to the project and undermine potential opposition. In this chapter, we examine the unequal ability of Rajpura’s farmers to play the game of land markets and the ultimate effect of this process on the agrarian social structure, on the local economy in general, and on the livelihoods of the dispossessed in particular.

In brief, the argument of this chapter is that this process of land commodification has, along with the processes discussed in the last chapter, magnified existing class, caste, and gender inequalities; generated an involutory rather than productive transformation of the local economy; and led to aggregate impoverishment and food insecurity. I begin by showing how the process of land commodification refracted through the pre-existing inequalities of the agrarian social structure. First, I examine how these pre-existing inequalities in economic, cultural and social capital originate in the failures of post-independence land reform. Second, I show how these inequalities, which congeal around caste, shaped the ability of Rajpura’s residents to benefit from land speculation, including their ability to get good prices for their land, to appropriate commission as land brokers, and to reinvest their earnings into profitable avenues. Third, I will show how these reinvestments of land money, in the absence of productive linkages from the SEZ, have almost universally gone into rentiership, petty trade and usury. In contrast to the ancillary productive transformation entailed by dams and public sector industrialization, this has unleashed an *involutionary* process of agrarian change as agricultural production has been replaced with antediluvian forms of market exchange. The result is a novel form of class differentiation based on people’s uneven ability to tap into speculative land rents and recycle them into this informal economy. This has produced a stratum of extremely wealthy neo-rentiers, but left a majority of farmers—and particularly the lower-caste semi-proletariat—more proletarianized, impoverished, and food insecure. In the wake of this grand slam of disaccumulation, labor marginalization, and real estate driven agrarian involution, corporate

social responsibility and NGO sponsored self-help emerge as feeble attempts to ameliorate this process of dispossession without development.

### A LAND BOOM IN RAJPURA

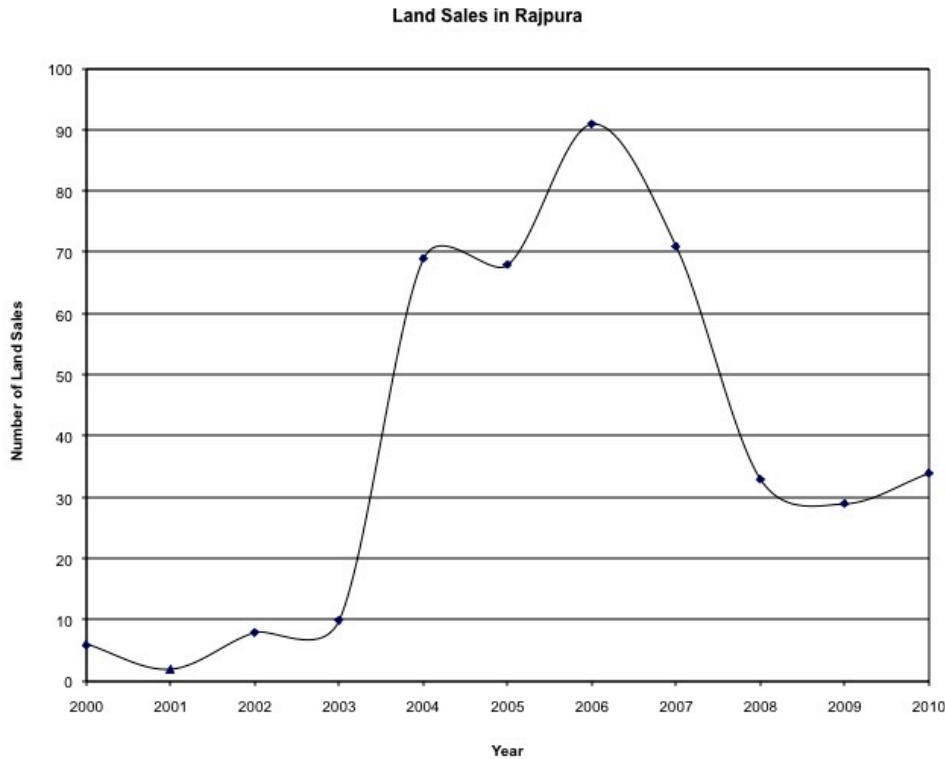
As we saw in chapter 4, even before the SEZ was officially announced, real estate companies and individual investors tipped off by government officials flooded into Rajpura and surrounding villages to buy up cheap land that would appreciate many times over with the arrival of the SEZ. Once the announcement came, an avalanche of investors descended on Rajpura from Jaipur, Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and beyond. Large national real estate developers, including a joint venture between Delhi-based MGF and Dubai's Emaar (builder of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building) bought farmland to build luxury housing colonies adjacent to the SEZ. The roads around Rajpura became littered with signs for luxury residential developments with names like Jaipur Greens, Omaxe City, Aastha SEZ View, and Unique Dream's "Symphony" and "Harmony" towers. Smaller individual investors, including many middle class families from Jaipur and non-resident Indians (NRIs), bought up plots and flats inside the residential complexes. Small brokerage offices proliferated, and the brick and concrete walls of Rajpura became plastered with advertisements for property dealers such as "JV Associates: A House of Property Affairs," and "Baser Properties: Buy/Sell Commercial and Residential near SEZ Mahindra."

As Figure 6.1 shows, land transactions in Rajpura increased out of all proportion to anything that had happened before. From a pre-SEZ high of ten transactions per year in 2003, land sales exploded to 69 in 2004 and reached a peak of 91 in 2006 (we will return to the post-2008 dip later). This nine-fold increase in land sales drove a surge in land prices from roughly \$16,000 per hectare before the SEZ to over \$280,000 per hectare for farmland near the SEZ in 2008. Vacant plots in the Jaipur Greens residential colony were selling for as high as \$123 per square meter (or over \$1.2 million per hectare of land), and 2 bedroom flats in the Unique Dreams apartment towers were going for \$56,000. By the admission of managers in each, many of the buyers were not end-users but investors looking to flip the properties. Everyone was banking on the SEZ driving residential demand (or at least land prices) in the vicinity. As one of the developers explained their decision to build upscale residential colonies in the middle of the Rajasthani countryside, "The SEZ has 3,000 acres, high-profile people, multinational corporations will come over there." Another added, "Without the SEZ who will live in this jungle? It's a desert" (Fieldnotes, 4/12/10).

While developers speculated on this "desert," a market also quickly emerged for the rights to the not-yet-constructed compensation plots. Under the Rajasthan government's policy, as you will recall, farmers were to be allotted developed "urban" plots that would be zoned for residential and commercial use and built by the Jaipur Development Authority. Each farmer would get plots that would cumulatively total  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the acreage of their former farmland. The JDA was supposed to install the plots with the basic infrastructure of road, water, and power connection. At the time of my last round of fieldwork in July 2012, the plots were still not much to look at, consisting of no more than vacant scrubland demarcated by small white boundary-posts. Nevertheless, even before these plots had a physical existence, a vigorous market developed for their exchange value. Brokers used power of attorney contracts to allow farmers to sell the rights to these spectral assets before specific plots were even assigned to specific farmers. During the time of my fieldwork, the plots were selling for about \$60 per square meter (or \$600,000 per hectare) and most brokers estimated to me that two-thirds to three-quarters of them



Figure 6.1: Land Sales in Rajpura, 2000-2010.



Note: The numbers are taken from the official village land records kept with the village *patwari* (2005-2010) in Sanganer and at the district collectorate in Jaipur (before 2005).

had already been alienated to outside investors.

For selling both these plots and the remaining farmland in the general vicinity of the SEZ, a whole stratum of local land brokers (*dalals*) emerged to facilitate these transactions for 2% commission in coordination with Jaipur-based brokers. As I will explain in more detail shortly, these brokers were local farmers needed by outside investors to provide local knowledge and establish trust with local sellers. With possible commissions in the thousands of dollars in an area where most waged labor typically pays less than \$100 per month, many young and middle-aged farmers jumped at the opportunity. While it was a common joke in the village that “every family has a *dalal*,” my survey showed that 14% of households had a broker (though, for reasons that will become clear, there was assuredly underreporting). At the height of the boom, these brokers mobbed the local district headquarters from morning to night trying to register land sales.

This speculative land boom, like those across the world, went bust in 2008. The US financial crisis rippled through India and made its way to rural Rajasthan. The SEZ, which became operational that year, started to move slowly as companies who bought land postponed their investments. Around the SEZ, residential demand dried up, prices froze or dipped, and, as Figure 6.1 illustrates, land transactions declined dramatically from the previous year. The result was a suspended landscape of half-built residential colonies being grazed upon by goats. While the bust was not as bad as in the United States—prices did not decline precipitously and demand was starting to pick up by 2012—this dramatic interruption of the process of land commodification was an unwelcome eventuality to those who had now staked their livelihoods on its continuation. Some brokers found themselves exposed with purchase agreements for land

they could not find buyers for at the agreed upon price. Many other brokers dropped out of the market, retreating to their new homes to live off their commission. Meanwhile, those who were waiting for a good time to liquidate their compensation plots or farmland decided they would have to wait longer until the “market returned.” Things were in a state of suspension and some voiced doubts that the SEZ would develop at all. Elsewhere across the country, many SEZs were seeking cancellations of their approvals. In Rajpura, this global financial crisis-triggered bust (or at least major “correction”) came, like the boom, as a kind of exogenous shock that reinforced the fragility of the whole enterprise. The SEZ’s claim to development rested on replacing an agrarian economy of single-crop agriculture with a commercial-industrial economy. But 2008 came as an early sign to Rajpura’s residents that the meteorological uncertainty of farming had just been replaced by the volatility of speculative land markets.

Nevertheless, much money was made in the three to four booms years before the crisis and continues to be made at a somewhat slower rate. Explaining his early decision to move into the brokerage business, Ramlal Sharma of Shivpura recalled, “The wind was blowing” (Fieldnotes, 2/23/10). Indeed, the process of real estate speculation that descended on Rajpura was most analogous to a meteorological event, albeit a more sudden and extreme one than Ramlal’s euphemism: real estate speculation hit Rajpura like a typhoon, sweeping up much in its path. It is hard to overstate its impact on the village and the centrality that it assumed in the economic and social life of the village. Where one stood in relation to land speculation became the chief determinant of one’s socio-economic trajectory. Land prices and the details of land transactions were ubiquitous features of ordinary conversation at homes and *chai* stalls, which were peppered with “*bighas*” and “*lakhs*.” Decisions over land sales and people’s unequal success in profiting from them become the main point of tension within and between families. Every day, brokers would go about their work in the village, while the occasional BMW or Audi carrying urban middle class investors from Jaipur would incongruously make its way through the village market. Meanwhile, the landscape was rapidly changing all around as farmland was bought and staked out for plots; real estate developments started to arise; property brokerages and shops proliferated; and successful speculators and brokers erected magnificent concrete and marble bungalows in the middle of their old caste *mohallahs* that a few years ago contained only earthen homes. In sum, Rajpura was undergoing a period of very rapid and compressed social change, and this was driven by its speculative land market.

This speculative land market refracted in complex ways through the village social structure. Villagers responded to the burgeoning demand for land with greater or lesser willingness, alacrity and aptitude. Some managed to play the game well and secure a piece of the vast rents being generated on the land, others were cheated or marginalized, and many fell somewhere in between. Understanding the variegated outcomes of this process of land commodification now requires a more in-depth examination of the agrarian social structure before the arrival of the Mahindra World City.

## PRE-EXISTING SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Prior to 2005, Rajpura’s class structure consisted largely of a petty commodity producing peasantry that was significantly differentiated by a semi-feudal distribution of land. At the top was the former Rajput lord, or *thakur*, who before independence owned all the land in Rajpura (and several surrounding villages) and extracted various taxes, cesses and corvée labor (*begar*) from his peasant tributaries. By the early 1950s, post-independence land reforms had abolished the *thakur*’s role as tax intermediary, redistributed “land to the tiller,” and imposed land ceilings.

While these reforms brought Rajpura's cultivators into direct relationship with the state as land holders (*khatedars*) and ended the *thakur's* various exactions, they fell short of establishing an egalitarian distribution of property. First of all, the *thakur's* family itself held on to a very large amount of land by distributing it among extended family and trusted retainers. This allowed them to prevent a large portion of their former *jagir* (demesne) from being resumed and redistributed: by the admission of its own heir, at least 375 hectares (1500 bighas). Residing in their magnificent compound (*haveli*) in Jaipur, where they also own several surrounding city blocks, the *thakur's* family continued to extract rent from sharecropping tenants on this huge holding for the fifty plus years between independence and the SEZ's arrival.

The second shortcoming of the post-independence land reforms was that the land redistribution that did occur favored the large upper caste cultivators. The largest cultivating caste at the time of independence, the Jats, received the most land followed by what are called Haryana Brahmins (while the Jats populated Neempura and Jatpura on either side of Rajpura, the Brahmins made up most of Shivpura). This established both as substantial yeoman farmers, though given the lack of irrigation most are better described as petty commodity producers than capitalist farmers. Over 90% of Brahmins and 100% of the Jats in my sample self-cultivated, while 38 percent of Jats and 18 percent of Brahmins hired in additional labor, mostly at harvest. Ten percent of Brahmins leased out some land (often because their non-agricultural work left them with too few hands), while 31% of Jats leased-in land to help consolidate larger holdings for their main business of agriculture. Besides Brahmins, the other major "general caste" in the area, the Jain merchants (*banias*), received less land at independence, though they would acquire some more over the years through money lending (the two families in my sample had 7 and 20 *bighas*). Occupied with their village provision shops, they mostly leased their land out to sharecroppers.

Among the OBCs, a few sub-castes such as Mali's (gardeners) and Kumavats (cultivators) received a significant amount of land (again, as a dominant caste, I excluded Jats from the OBC category for analytical purposes). The other OBC service castes—including Kumars (potters), Gujjars (herders), Lakhera (bangle-makers), Soni (goldsmiths), Nai (barbers), Raona Rajput ("illegitimate" Rajputs), and Muslims (here: quilt makers)—received significantly less. While ten percent of OBCs were entirely landless, most became marginal farmers and semi-proletariat who supplemented their "traditional" trades with agriculture and, eventually, wage labor.

Schedule Castes, which in these villages include the Balai (weavers), Nayak (guards), Khatik (butchers), Raegar (leather workers), Beirwa and Sangat (sweepers) sub-castes, received the least land. Among the Scheduled Tribes, some Meenas had significant land while the Dhankas had very little. While SC/STs constituted 35% of the population (Census of India 2001), they owned just 15% of the land.<sup>67</sup> Fifteen percent were entirely landless and thirty three percent leased in land from the upper castes. While internally differentiated themselves, we can say that the Dalits and Scheduled Tribes largely comprised the village semi-proletariat. Overall, as the first few columns of Table 6.1 reiterate, land reforms left intact a highly unequal distribution of land that corresponds very tightly with caste hierarchies.

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<sup>67</sup> This is based on the census data and land records for the three villages (Rajpura, Shivpura, and Neempura) for which complete data was available to the author. In the village of Rajpura alone, SC/STs were 41.4% of the population and owned 20% of the land.

Table 6.1: Distribution of Socio-economic Attributes of Households by Caste in Villages Rajpura, Jatpura, Shivpura and Neempura Before the SEZ.

Caste Category	Number and proportion of families in sample	Average size of family landholding (Ha.)	% who are landless	% who own a shop or business	% who have formal sector employment	% who have a business or formal employment outside of village	% doing informal wage labor	% with family member educated to 10 <sup>th</sup> class or higher
General	24 (26%)	4.6	0	54	50	58	8	83
Jat	16 (17%)	7.3	0	44	31	44	13	69
OBC	21 (22%)	3	10	43	14	19	48	43
SC/ST	33 (35%)	2.2	15	15	9	6	85	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>94 (100%)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>50</b>

Note: These figures are based on a household level survey (N=94) and thus the percentage of households not individuals with these characteristics (i.e. column six shows the percentage of families that have at least one member with formal employment). Landholdings are the undivided family holdings, not the stake of individual siblings. Education levels reflect the attainment of the most educated adult person (over 18 in 2005) in the family. An earlier version of this table appeared in Levien (2011).

Such unequal landholdings provided the basis for the uneven ability of different agrarian classes/castes to diversify from agriculture between independence and the arrival of the SEZ.<sup>68</sup> Following Bourdieu, I find it useful to understand this diversification as constituting *reconversion strategies*: farmers converted agrarian economic capital into cultural (education) and social capital (networks), which could often be reconverted back into economic capital (agrarian or commercial). The *thakur*'s family, of course, had substantial economic, cultural, social and political capital from the beginning. While perhaps only a minor tributary of the Jaipur Court, they nonetheless had high-powered social and political relations in Jaipur and recycled the rent extracted from their tenants into businesses and an elite private education for their main heir, Mahinder Singh, who went on to do a stint as an investment banker in Mumbai. Beneath the *thakur*, the dominant castes have, as elsewhere in India, used the surpluses from their more extensive agricultural operations to start small businesses, invest in education, and obtain non-farm employment (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Jeffrey 2001). As Table 6.1 shows, the large landholding Jat caste invested substantially in small businesses (with 44% of families having a shop or business before the SEZ arrived), many of which were extensions of their agricultural enterprises (such as becoming milk-middlemen or setting up tractor parts or repair stores). They also invested significantly in education, converting this economic capital into cultural capital. Cultural capital, in turn, allowed them to be moderately successful in obtaining formal sector employment (defined as salaried employment in either the public or private sector as opposed to temporary manual labor), with 31% of families having one such position in the household. All told, this diversification provided 44% of Jat families with a non-menial foothold in the city, which as we will see, provided social capital that would come in useful with the arrival of the SEZ.

<sup>68</sup> The average landholdings per caste presented above represent the distribution of land at the time of the SEZ in 2005. While land was subdivided and occasionally sold in the period between independence and the arrival of the SEZ, interviews, analysis of land records, and other studies of land distribution in Rajasthan suggest that the overall-caste-wise distribution of land has not changed appreciably since land reforms.

Brahmins were even more successful in diversifying, with 54% of families having a shop or business and 50% having a formal sector job. The latter reflects a more substantial investment in education than Jats, with 80% of general caste families having a member educated past the 10<sup>th</sup> standard (compared to 69% of Jat families). This gave 58% of general caste families a non-menial economic foothold outside of the village. Like the Jats, Brahmins transformed economic capital into cultural and social capital. All of these would serve them well with the arrival of the SEZ.

While lower-castes also diversified out of agriculture, they did so mostly out of necessity as unskilled wage laborers. While 43% of OBCs had a small business, which was on par with the Jats, these were mostly village shops that reflected their traditional caste occupation (barbers, potters, bangle-makers, ironmongers, carpenters, etc.): they were typically less lucrative and much less likely to be in the city. With only 43% of families having a member educated past the tenth grade, the OBCs were less educated and had a much lower incidence of formal sector employment (14%). Almost half of OBC families were dependant to some extent on informal waged labor. With only minimal agricultural employment, most of this was casual manual labor in Jaipur or nearby towns.

The OBCs were, nevertheless, still significantly better off than the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.<sup>69</sup> With little land to start with, SC/ST families were neither able to significantly diversify their economic assets nor reconvert them into cultural or social capital. Only 15% of families had some form of business, only 24% of families had someone educated past the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and only 9 percent had formal sector employment. This gave only 6% of SC/ST families some economic foothold outside of the village besides casual wage labor, which 85% of families were dependent upon. The lower castes thus had little economic, cultural or social capital. Their relatively dominated position in each sphere, as we will see in a moment, would significantly handicap their ability to profit from land markets after the arrival of the SEZ.

In sum, an incomplete transformation of a feudal social structure left in place large inequalities in land, which provided the basis for inequalities in other forms of economic capital (business and employment), as well as cultural and social capital. While intra-caste inequalities existed (there were some relatively poor Jats and Brahmins, though almost no rich Dalits), in the aggregate, class aligned very strongly with caste. This is not to say that caste only operated as class: it also continued to operate as a means of social and symbolic domination. The village remains organized in caste-segregated neighborhoods, caste endogamy in marriage prevails, inter-caste dining is very limited, and untouchability still operates with particular force against the village sweepers (derogatorily known as *bhangis*), whose compensation of leftover *rotis* is dropped into their hands from above to prevent “pollution.” However, the failure to sufficiently break the feudal social structure with land reforms has left caste tightly correlated with the distribution of the principal means of production as well as cultural and social capital. Because it is the most parsimonious way to summarize class, I will mostly disaggregate the effects of land commodification by caste.

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<sup>69</sup> The prominent exception to this were Meenas, a Scheduled Tribe, but one that had somewhat larger landholdings in this village, and that has been quite successful at building political power and advocating for government employment at the state level. While many Meenas in these villages remained fairly poor, we will see one spectacular example of Meena “success” in Rajpura’s post-SEZ land markets shortly. While this outlier was not in my sample, if Meenas were treated separately, the socio-economic indicators for SC/STs would be slightly more depressed.

Before turning to how these inequalities shaped the ability of different families to profit from the process of land commodification, we must also recognize the inequalities *within* families that cut across caste. It is generally observed that Rajasthan ranks below the national average in most indicators of gender disparity (World Bank 2006: 11). In Rajpura, there are 897 women to every 1000 men, which is even below the state average of 906, which itself is well below the national average of 927 (Census of India 2001; World Bank 2006: 11). While this provides some indication of the generally low symbolic status of women, I would like to specifically focus on several components of male domination that have a bearing on the process of land commodification. In particular, I would like to emphasize that the forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) described above as an attribute of families are to a large extent an attribute of the men within them. To begin with economic capital, women did have some control over agricultural earnings, and particularly earnings from livestock. However, they also carried a heavy burden of productive and reproductive work. Aside from the usual responsibility for overseeing the reproductive needs of the household, women did the most exhausting work in the gendered division of labor in agriculture. While men plowed and sprayed pesticides, women did much of the labor intensive weeding and often a disproportionate amount of the planting and harvesting. As we observed, one consequence of this is to help make agriculture more attractive to men than waged labor—the latter appeared as relative “rest” in part because women did the most tiresome work. However, what will be even more consequential for our story of land commodification is that women in Rajasthan, as in most regions of India, typically do not have legal title to land (Agarwal 1994). This puts the decision of whether to buy or sell land ultimately in the hands of men, who therefore also have more discretion over how to use the proceeds of land sales. This gendered distribution of economic capital is, moreover, matched by a highly unequal distribution of cultural capital. According to the 2001 Census, only 29% of women in Rajpura were literate compared to 59% of men. This, in addition to social strictures, limited the workforce participation of women to household, agricultural, and manual work. This prevented women from having independent work and business relations that would allow them to participate in the real estate economy or, more generally, in the new economy created by the SEZ. While much of this is rather obvious, it is important to keep in mind that the economic, cultural and social capital we will be discussing in this chapter largely rested in the hands of men. We will see that this gendered distribution of assets had significant implications for the outcome of land dispossession and commodification not just for women but for the entire family. While the transformation of gender domination could be a good argument in favor of the SEZ, unfortunately we will see that the processes of land dispossession and commodification reconstituted more than it undermined gender inequalities.

To summarize: Rajpura’s pre-SEZ agrarian structure consisted of an unequal distribution of economic, cultural and social capital that corresponded with caste and had its roots in the failures of post-independence land reform. This caste-wise distribution of class attributes was, moreover, cross-cut by universal gender domination that made most forms of capital within the family the property of the men within them. I now turn to how these aspects of the agrarian social structure influenced the ability of different fractions of Rajpura to “play the game” of real estate speculation that was the main byproduct of the Mahindra World City coming to their village.

## PLAYING THE GAME: CLASS-CASTE AND LAND MARKETS

Economic, cultural and social capital are all features of an underlying class inequality, which I have shown congeal around caste and have their origins in the unequal distribution of land. However, their proximate effects on people's ability to profit from land markets can be analytically separated. If real estate is a social game, each species of capital influences people's ability to play it in slightly different ways. In what follows, I will first isolate these effects, before showing how they come together to produce inequalities largely along caste lines.

Economic capital is important for real estate speculation in obvious ways. Those with more land have more assets to speculate upon. Moreover, since real estate investment in a rising market is a waiting game, those with a greater ability to keep necessity at bay can wait longer for their assets to appreciate. We will see that the greater diversification of the upper caste landed farmers allowed them to ride out the process longer and not sell their plots at the first opportunity, while the poorer lower castes with nothing to fall back upon had to liquidate their plots quickly in the face of economic necessity. Economic capital, then, affects not only the "hand" one has to play with, but also one's ability to *stay in the game* long enough.

But economic capital is not the whole story. Participating in any market also requires some amount of cultural aptitude. From the point of view of an advanced capitalist society with fully functioning land markets, the ability to competently engage in real estate transactions might appear to be natural and universal. In situations where land transactions have been historically limited, however, this cannot be assumed. While land markets existed in Rajpura before the SEZ, land was sold mostly under duress, and there was little to prepare most residents for the kind of commercial real estate speculation that ensued after the arrival of the SEZ. In particular, the ability to comprehend what an SEZ was, what it would do to land values, how one could maximize one's advantage from the government's compensation scheme, and, most basically, the ability to read documents, were very uneven. Treating land as a commodity is a learning process, and what is key to real estate speculation is the *speed* with which one learns. As we saw in Chapter 4, many of Rajpura's residents were enticed or duped into selling their land very early at, retrospectively, very low prices. While some adapted to the game with great alacrity and shrewdness, many of Rajpura's poorer and less educated started to learn the game too late. Inequalities in cultural capital have allowed the more savvy members of the village to, in collusion with outside investors, exploit the less savvy.

Finally, besides the distribution of land and education, the possession of social networks spanning the village and city—what we might call social capital—also had a significant bearing on the outcomes of forcible land acquisition. By "social capital" I do not mean normative bonds adhering to groups that enable cooperative action for collective benefit (e.g. Putnam 1993; Krishna 2002), but on the contrary an unequally distributed form of power based upon access to networks that convey real or potential advantages (Bourdieu 1986). I found that social capital in the form of high-quality connections outside of one's village was the key proximate factor in allowing farmers to become *dalals*. While these connections were not necessarily within-caste (Harriss-White 2003), I have shown that the upper castes have much more of them. It is these networks formed through non-menial diversification outside of the village that determined the ability of farmers to become brokers.

These three forms of capital shaped the ability of Rajpura's residents to profit from land commodification and to launder those earnings into alternative livelihoods. All three forms of capital, as Table 6.1 illustrated, were distributed unequally by caste. While the next section will

Table 6.2: Ability of Different Castes to Profit from Land Markets

Caste Category	% who sold compensation plot	Median price received for plot (US \$ per ha.)	% who became brokers
General	19%	\$ 64,000	21%
Jat	25%	\$60,000	25%
OBCs	58%	\$56,000	10%
SC/ST	82%	\$52,000	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>\$56,000</b>	<b>14%</b>

show ethnographically how each affected the trajectories of different families, for the sake of simplicity, Table 6.2 illustrates the caste-wise outcome of people’s ability to profit from land markets (for a disaggregated analysis of the survey data based on each form of capital, see Levien (2012)). Again, we should note that this table excludes the outlier of the Rajput *thakur*, who sits atop the process and who we will treat ethnographically shortly. What is immediately apparent from this table is that at the time of my survey in 2011, the majority of lower castes had already sold their plots while the majority of upper castes were shrewdly hanging on to them. While 82% of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and 58% of OBCs had already sold out, only 25% of Jats and 19% of Brahmins had done so. When they did sell, moreover, the upper castes received more money per hectare than their lower-caste counterparts. The general castes received a median sale price for their plots that was \$12,000 more per hectare than the SC/STs, and every step down on the caste groupings depicted in Table 6.2 is associated with a \$4,000 decrease in per hectare land price. These disparities are even more pronounced in the sale of un-acquired farmland, though I do not include this data here because government restrictions on SC/ST land alienation artificially depress the sale price for SC/ST farmland (but not urban plots).<sup>70</sup> Finally, the data shows that the upper castes were over-represented among the land brokers “eating commission” (in the words of local farmers) off the plot and land sales of others. 21% of Brahmin families and 25% of Jat families contained a broker compared to only 10% of OBC families and 6% of SC/ST families. So not only were the upper castes better able to profit from the sale of their own land, but they were also better able to capture rents from the sales of other villagers’ land. In sum, by every indicator the upper castes were far more able to make money from the speculative boom that swept Rajpura. The next question is what they did with the money.

#### INVOLUTIONARY REINVESTMENT

While farmers also reinvested their earnings with highly unequal success, what is first of all striking is the generally non-productive character of almost all of their investments. Because the SEZ remained an export enclave of the knowledge economy, whose main inputs (computers, high-end office furniture, etc.) were largely imported and could not be made in rural Rajasthan, it

<sup>70</sup> Note that these restrictions do not in practice prevent the sale of SC/ST land, as brokers and investors have evolved ingenious methods for evading them. While the Rajasthan Tenancy Act (1955) prevents SC/ST land alienation to non-SC/ST people, this restriction applies only to land classified as agricultural. In interviews, land brokers and real estate investors told me that the way to get around this is either to form a trust with SC/ST members on the board, or, more commonly today, to sign a private right-to-purchase contract with the SC/ST landholder, get the urban development authority to convert the land to “urban” on their behalf (which requires substantial bribes), and then formally conclude the purchase.



had few productive linkages with the surrounding economy. There was nothing like the ancillary industrialization that accompanied India's steel towns, or the agro-industrial activities that would accompany a large irrigation project. In the absence of these linkages, farmers who had any surplus after paying of debts and meeting expenses allocated their money to rentiership (capitalist and pre-capitalist), petty trade, and usury. In my survey, I asked every family who received any amount of land money—whether through sale of compensation plots, farmland, or brokerage commission—what they reinvested it in. Table 6.3 illustrates what percentage of families within each caste allocated their money to different purposes. Figure 6.2 illustrates the percentage of farmers as a whole who allocated money to different categories of investment. While the survey was only able to capture the incidence of investment in each category and not the amount of money, it provides a glimpse of the overall pattern of reinvestment.

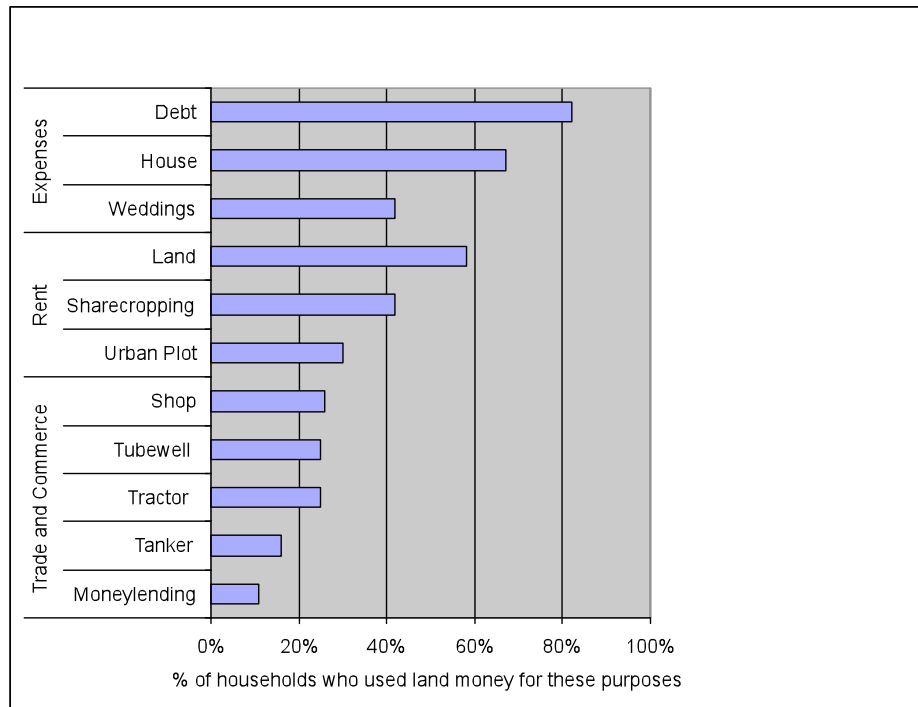
The first things most farmers did with their money was to pay off debts and build a concrete house. While many farmers of all castes had some debts to pay off, 92% of SC/STs had to allocate money to this purpose compared to 56% of general castes. While I do not have statistical data, I observed repeatedly that the lower-castes in these villagers operated under a crushing burden of debt and, in the next section, we will see that many of the lower-caste poor were forced to devote much of the proceeds from land sales to paying them off. This was another way in which the feudal legacy of unequal land distribution impacted the ability of farmers to use land commodification as a springboard to another livelihood. The second most common use of money was to upgrade earthen huts to concrete houses. While such investments did not yield any income, land money allowed farmers to upgrade their living accommodations and allow for “modern” amenities like indoor plumbing. Along with marriages, houses became a new marker of status within the village, which had the negative effect of stimulating a competition of sorts to see who could have the biggest house or throw the most lavish wedding. This put a squeeze on the poorer members of each caste to keep up with those in their referent group.

After these expenditures, the most common investment was in land rent as farmers bought agricultural land in more remote areas, where land is cheaper, or bought urban plots. Overall, 58% of farmers bought land, though Jats (80%) and general castes (67%) were much more successful at it than OBCs (54%) and SC/STs (48%). Since most cannot or do not want to shift their houses to far off villages, the majority of those who bought land (and 42% of farmers overall) become absentee landlords expropriating 1/3 of a monsoon millet crop from local tenants. For the small holders, this has in many cases been quite an inconvenience and net loss as they receive less grain than they previously had when they were cultivating less land with family labor and now have to incur substantial transportation costs. Moreover, the available cheap land in remoter parts of Rajasthan is typically more marginal and less productive. But some of the bigger farmers (particularly Jats) have become quite large absentee landlords, receiving not insignificant rent-in-kind from sharecroppers. For many, however, their share of the millet crop is only part of the calculation; they have bought land where they think the forces of urbanization will eventually drive up land prices. Expropriating grain as landlords (pre-capitalist ground rent) is thus a short-term strategy until they can reap the gains of real estate speculation (capitalist ground rent). With a similar logic, 30% of farmers have also bought urban plots in some of the many residential colonies that began sprouting around Jaipur or outlying towns during the real estate boom. Others have made additions to their houses to rent rooms to construction laborers and, very recently, to the first batch of students at for-profit colleges that have been founded on land around the SEZ (the latter being more significant than the former for the rental market). Significantly, there is almost no investment in agricultural production. While 25% have used the

Table 6.3: Percentage of Farmers Within Each Caste Who Allocated Real Estate Earnings to Various Purposes

Caste Category	Paid off debt (%)	Built house (%)	Married children (%)	Bought land (%)	Became absentee landlord (%)	Bought urban Plot (%)	Started shop/small business (%)	Drilled tubewell (%)	Bought tractor (%)	Bought tanker (%)	Gave loans (%)
General	56	78	78	67	33	22	44	44	33	22	22
Jats	80	60	40	80	40	30	50	70	40	30	10
OBC	85	61	46	54	46	30	23	0	15	8	0
SC/ST	92	68	28	48	44	32	12	12	2	12	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>

Figure 6.2: Percentage of Farmers Who Allocated Real Estate Earnings to Various Purposes



money to drill tube-wells on remaining land (almost all of them Jats and Brahmins), most have done so in order to sell scarce groundwater in tankers to Mahindra for construction and to their fellow villagers for consumption (this is what most of the tractors are used for). Water is thus being diverted from production to exchange, and ultimately diminished in quantity. Overall, investment in land is largely of a rentier nature (in capitalist or pre-capitalist ground-rent) and is not accompanied by an investment in its productivity. We may note the irony that the entry of the most advanced sectors of the Indian economy into rural Rajasthan has led to an *expansion* of rent-in-kind sharecropping as previous self-cultivators become large or petty landlords.

After land, the next most common investment (26% of those receiving land money) is in small shops (*dukans*) selling daily provisions or various consumer items. The market in Rajpura has been transformed from a handful of shops run by the traditional *baniyas* and artisanal castes to a bustling profusion of sometimes redundant enterprises run by non-traditional merchants. These shops include general provision stores, cell-phone and photo shops, *chai* and juice stalls, small vegetable carts, tire-puncture stalls, motor-cycle parts and repair shops, and two small eateries (*dhabas*). Most supply the newly commercialized needs of the dispossessed farmers or the growing consumer aspirations of those with land money in the bank (or dresser: most avoid putting substantial money in the bank to avoid taxes). Some report being quite profitable (over \$200/month), others yield only the equivalent of wage labor but with the benefit of avoiding hard manual work, and a significant number go out of business. The overall result is a growing stratum of shopkeepers, though one that is internally highly stratified and whose lower echelons scarcely qualify as a “petty bourgeoisie.” For the upper castes these enterprises often yield substantial mercantile profits, while for the lower-caste semi-proletariat they are often “strategies of minimal survival” (Burawoy 2001: 47).

Finally, those with remaining liquidity lend it out to other villagers at the prevailing rate of 2%-3% per month or 24%-36% annually. Eleven percent of respondents and 21% of the general castes reported becoming money lenders (though because of the stigma attached to this activity, there was likely substantial under-reporting). Many of the small shops also provide merchandise on credit, which adds to their margins. The infusion of cash has thus expanded the pool of village moneylenders who usuriously fill the credit gap created by land loss and the general drying up of rural credit following the liberalization of India's banking sector (Shah, Rao, and Shankar 2007).

Consequently, the unequal returns from land commodification have been unevenly reinvested into an informal economy of land rents, petty trade and usury. Following Burawoy's (1996, 2001) adaptation of Geertz's (1963) concept of involution<sup>71</sup> to understand the economic collapse of post-reform Russia, we might call this an involutory process of economic change in which the sphere of exchange cannibalizes production and "antediluvian" forms of capital are not transformed but reproduced on a greater scale (see also Harriss 1991). The result of this process can be analyzed from the perspective of inequality, aggregate economic transformation, and poverty. From the point of view of the first, it is the uneven recycling of land rents into this involutory informal economy that has created a new and complex form of class differentiation in the villages, one that is quite novel compared to those that typically develop from the commercialization of agriculture. From the point of view of the second, it signals a failure of the SEZ to generate a productive transformation of its surroundings, a failure that looks all the more pronounced in comparison to the steel towns or dams of the developmentalist regime of dispossession. Third, it can be analyzed from the perspective of its effects on poverty. As Figure 6.3 shows, the SEZ has impoverished the majority of those it dispossessed. 65% of families, and 88% of lower castes reported having less income after having their land dispossessed for the SEZ. Even more disturbing is that 50% of families and 75% of the lower castes reported having less food. In terms of subjective well-being, 76% of farmers and 88% of lower castes said that they received more loss than benefit from the project. For a majority of Rajpura's residents, then, India's new economy has paradoxically been experienced as a step *backward* from animal husbandry and dry-land agriculture.

We will return to these concerns at the end of the chapter. But, now that we have the aggregate picture, we must examine ethnographically how this real estate driven agrarian involution has shaped the life trajectories of different farmers.

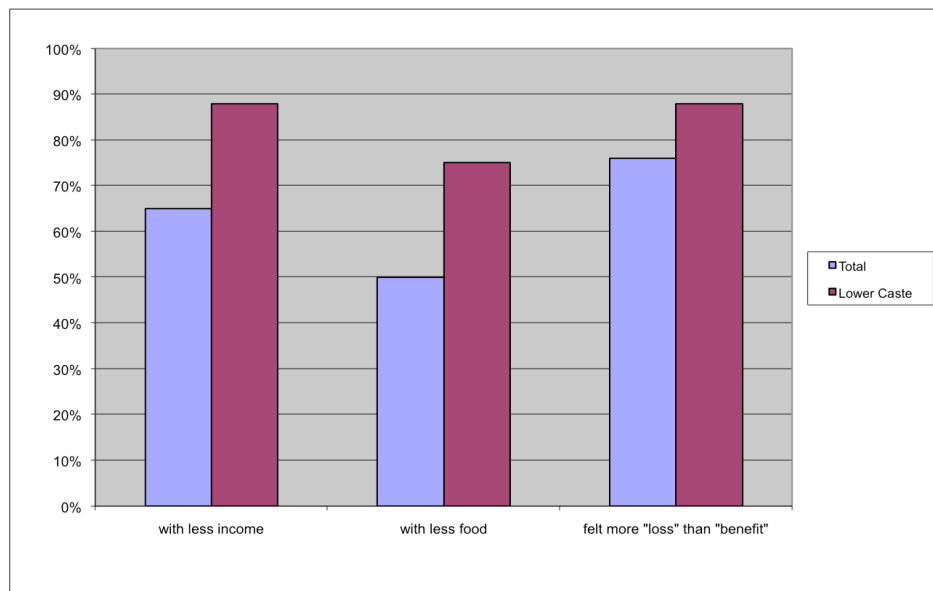
## FAMILY TRAJECTORIES

While dispossession has historically often meant the complete pauperization of the dispossessed, we have seen that increasing political opposition to dispossession across India has forced state governments to look for ways to include dispossessed farmers in the subsequent process of land commodification. By turning dispossession into a market process, the Rajasthan government's compensation policy has allowed for a much more differentiated outcome. As differently endowed farmers do their best to obtain cash for their compensation land and reinvest

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<sup>71</sup> Geertz (1963) originally coined the term involution to describe how Javanese peasants adapted to the twin pressures of the Dutch agro-export industry and increased population on existing land by intensifying rather than transforming the existing pattern of agriculture. Geertz saw this as a 'stagnant' over-elaboration of detail. The empirical basis of Geertz's argument was subsequently called into question by White (1982). However, Burawoy gives the concept a more general and dynamic meaning as a situation in which economic change is not accompanied by transformation and in which production degenerates while the sphere of exchange expands (2001: 270).

Figure 6.3: Percentage of Families and Lower Caste Families that Experienced a Decrease in Income, Food Security, and Subjective Well-Being



money into profitable avenues, the result of their heterogeneous reconversion strategies is a bewildering array of very complex and diverse economic trajectories that defy easy categorization. While the above analysis has illustrated that there is an underlying logic to these outcomes—in the aggregate they are deeply shaped by class-caste position—there is also some fluidity to the process. Some Brahmins have been impoverished, while a few Dalits have become wealthy. Both the impoverished and the wealthy are, moreover, often poor and rich in different ways and thus occupy heterogeneous class positions. Beyond noting their complexity or contradictoriness (Wright 1985), we may not yet even have the vocabulary to describe some of the resulting class positions that have emerged from this real estate driven social differentiation. What I do below, then, is group the trajectories of different farmers into four broad categories.

The first includes those who can clearly be described as being on an upward economic trajectory since the arrival of the SEZ. These are the significant minority of local land holders who, although heterogeneous and internally stratified, have been able to paradoxically accumulate through the process of dispossession by successfully playing the game of commodification. Since most of them have invested in non-productive avenues, we might call them a neo-rentier stratum (see Adduci 2009).<sup>72</sup> The second category is those who are neither on a straightforward upward nor downward trajectory, but have been able to leverage land values into a livelihood that is just above or below the status quo ante. They have replaced their previous means of production with some roughly equivalent means of production, but it is as yet

<sup>72</sup> Adduci uses “neo-rentier class” to identify a particular caste of traditional landlords in Orissa who now appropriate rent by virtue of their control over the state apparatus (2009: 492). In this case, however, the rentiers arise from multiple class-caste positions and capture rent in a variety of ways (though they all became rentiers by virtue of their ability to tap into the land speculation created by the SEZ). Neo-rentier *stratum* might be a better term for these heterogeneous agrarian groups who have been able to get a small piece of the chain of rentiership that extends from global real estate investors to the village broker.

unclear whether it will be sufficient to stave off a downward slide into the landless proletariat. We might call them tenuous reproducers. The third category includes those who have experienced a clearly downward trajectory from marginal farmer or semi-proletariat to propertyless or nearly propertyless wage laborer. This constitutes the majority of the land-poor lower castes. For them, the earnings from land commodification have not been sufficient to counter the process of disaccumulation. The vast majority are unambiguously poorer and hungrier than they were before. We can call them the proletarianized. Finally, there is the excluded: those who could not play the game of land commodification at all because they had no landed private property to begin with. This group is distinct from the proletarianized because they were already largely proletarianized before the SEZ and are indifferent to the dispossession of private land. However, they are internally stratified on the basis of their dependence on non-private land. Those whose livelihoods or habitations in some way depended on public or common land have been further impoverished without compensation. However, those whose livelihoods were entirely divorced from landed assets have lost nothing, and may therefore be proponents of the SEZ even if it delivers the slightest of benefits. Neither, however, has the option of upward mobility through land values.

While these four categories are broad, I will try to illustrate the significant quantitative and qualitative diversity within each. Reducing the hundreds of stories I collected during fieldwork to a dozen or so necessities a rather selective presentation of that diversity. Nevertheless, with the survey data providing the aggregate contours, I have tried to select trajectories that are broadly representative, instructively anomalous, or otherwise significant for an understanding of the village's post-SEZ social structure.

### *The Neo-Rentiers*

#### i. Feudal Lord to Capitalist Real Estate Mogul

We can start at the top, with the current acting village-head (*sarpanch*), Mahinder Singh. We have seen that he is the grandson of the village's last *thakur* (feudal lord), obtained an elite English education and, before assuming his duties as village *sarpanch*, was an investment banker with CitiGroup in Mumbai. He returned to Rajasthan when managing village affairs became lucrative with the arrival of the SEZ and, most likely, to get his start in state politics. I first met Mahinder when I got his phone number several months into fieldwork and he told me to meet him "at my fort," where he holds council on village affairs. The fort is a beautiful old sandstone construction in the Rajput style, with high walls enclosing a several story palace and a grassy lawn maintained by an old family retainer. I had often admired the structure from my room in the Dalit Balai *mohallah*, which faces the stone latrines perched on its back wall. Over this and subsequent meetings, the only during my village fieldwork that were conducted in English, Mahinder matter-of-factly explained his many business interests. From expropriating ½ of a millet crop from his tenants since independence, he was now much more profitably turning his former feudal demesne into real estate. While part of his land was acquired for the SEZ, he has received so many compensation plots in return, he says, "it's crazy." He has, of course, not sold any of them; he has no immediate need and knows that they will appreciate, perhaps even spectacularly if the SEZ develops. As for his remaining land outside the SEZ, he is still collecting rent on it from sharecroppers until he decides to do something else with it. He has also bought additional land on the outskirts of Rajpura where he is building his own real estate colony. I often passed it on my evening walks, rows of empty plots demarcated with posts and signboards. Aside from this, he had become a substantial broker of village land, facilitating deals

between his high value urban contacts and other villagers. He also has a construction company, which according to other villagers, has a contract to build the SEZ boundary wall. In the summer of 2012, he even made a deal for an undisclosed amount to let a Bollywood film starring Sanjay Dutt shoot in his old fort.

Mahinder has thus mobilized his substantial legacy of economic, cultural and social capital to springboard from decaying feudal lord to booming capitalist real estate mogul. He sees no conflict of interest between his business activities and his role as village *sarpanch* (a post his mother was actually elected to, but which he fulfills). Indeed, being *sarpanch* was clearly helpful to his brokerage business, as his predecessor Laduram Meena knew well.

## ii. Village Chief to Broker in Chief

Laduram Meena was the elected village head (*sarpanch*) of Rajpura when the SEZ arrived in 2005 (he was elected on a ticket reserved for Scheduled Tribes). At that time, he was a moderately large landholder—according to him, he owned 50 *bighas* of land. But in 2000, he had started a small real estate partnership with Shiv Choudhary, a young Jat whose family held 100 *bighas* of land. There was no land market in the village at that time, and the two brokered land in areas closer to Jaipur. While it is alleged that as *sarpanch*, Laduram took a large bribe for not opposing the transfer of village grazing land to the SEZ (his nephew estimated it to be as much as Rs. 10 *crore*, or \$2 million), what is definitely true is that he was very well placed to take advantage of the SEZ's effects on Rajpura's property market. His contacts from his previously existing real estate business, buttressed by his extra-village connections through the Congress party, gave him a rich set of ties with which to broker deals in the village. By his own estimation, at the height of the boom between 2005 and 2008, he was facilitating fifty deals a month. He explained to me that all of the real estate companies in Jaipur knew him, and his real estate partnership—which opened a formal office in the village market—was a nodal point in the network, bringing in smaller *dalals* to share in the commission when they needed someone who had a closer acquaintance with the seller. Other villagers claim that he used these property deals as a form of political patronage, distributing commission opportunities or information to gain the political support of key people in different castes. Indeed, a former Brahmin *sarpanch* now living in Jaipur showed me what appeared to be less-than-legal deeds to parcels of *panchayat* land that he distributed prior to his re-election campaign in 2009 (which he lost).<sup>73</sup> But what is clearly true is that his possession of contacts and associated information about the real estate business (current prices, potential buyers, the plans of the SEZ) were assets that led many villagers to seek out his company and patronage, or “to sit near him” in village parlance. This expansion of his social capital will be useful in the re-election bid that he admitted to be contemplating.

While he dissimulates on the size of his newly gained wealth, Laduram has recycled these real estate earnings into the purchase of at least 50 *bighas* (12.5 hectares) of new farmland, commercial and residential plots around the SEZ and Jaipur, a petrol pump license, a water tanker business, a large building he rents out as small shops and migrant labor accommodation in the Rajpura market, several more shops in a nearby town, and an expansion of his already large house. He has bought another piece of well-situated village land (to be discussed later), which he has turned into a marriage garden (and which he was able to rent out as a parking lot to the Bollywood film crew). He also launders cash here and there as a moneylender. His sons, nephews, and extended family helped to operate different parts of his business. He is easily a dollar millionaire.

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<sup>73</sup> He had obtained these through the Right to Information Act.

Laduram, then, has used social capital (networks) derived from economic (land and business partnership) and political capital (party connections) to generate an “expanded reproduction” of economic, social and political capital (Bourdieu 1993: 33). We will see that Laduram’s performance as both village chief and chief broker earned him many detractors who felt that he cheated them and betrayed the village. Dinesh Raegar, a Dalit man who was convinced to sell his land cheaply, bitterly complained of Laduram, “the biggest *dalal* of them all,” that “he cuts people’s throats after robbing their pockets” (Fieldnotes 7/16/10). Before getting to those like Dinesh, and their experiences at the hands of Laduram and other village brokers, we first turn to more intermediate cases.

### iii. Farmers Turned Successful Speculators

While Laduram and Mahinder were the big fish in the local real estate market, there are many examples of large-landholding families who have done quite well selling their compensation plots and land, and have become successful rentiers or businessmen. As the survey data made clear, most, though not all, of these successful speculators were from the Jat and Brahmin castes. Several landed Meena families have also done quite well. These farmers have generally speculated successfully on compensation plots, are shrewdly selling off land outside of the SEZ (typically in small pieces), and have then recycled these earnings into further speculation and/or businesses.

Sitting on a bench in Jatpura, I was introduced to a spectacular exemplar of such success, Jagdish Choudhary. I often explained my research to farmers as being about what benefits (*fayda*) and losses (*nuksan*) people had received from the SEZ. Sanjay, a young Jat man, had just been expressing his misgivings about the SEZ, but called Jagdish over and said, “Talk to him... They got benefit.” Jagdish is a Jat youth whose family had 6 hectares of land acquired for the SEZ. His family waited a few years until their compensation plots had appreciated and then sold them for a magnificent Rs. 2.9 crore (\$576,000). With this money, they built a large concrete and marble house in the village, and purchased 42 hectares of land 10km away, which they lease out to tenants. Jagdish explained that they will collect one-third of a crop in the near term, but they really purchased the land because it is 10 km from the national highway where its real estate value will surely go up. Jagdish’s family has thus gone from yeoman farmers to large absentee landlords and speculators. In the meantime, they have other sources of income such as his brother’s work in the diamond business in Jaipur, while Jagdish studies (Fieldnotes, 2/22/10).

Jagdish’s family was far from alone in shrewdly playing real estate markets. In neighboring Shivpura, Ramesh Sharma, a Brahmin, overheard that I was studying the costs and benefits of the SEZ and cornered me at the *chai* stall I frequented there. Ramesh works for an insurance company in Jaipur and his family had 18 of their 30 *bighas* acquired for the SEZ. He says they will wait for their JDA plots to get developed and appreciate, sell some of them, and start a shop (*dukan*) on the rest. They have another 12 *bighas* that sit adjacent to the Omaxe City residential colony and he says that the Omaxe people come nearly every day to ask about it. But he says they’re not going to sell for a while, not until the market reaches its peak. He then makes a graph with his hand and goes into an elaborate explanation about how they will wait to sell until the slope of the curve representing the land price hits 90 degrees. While I didn’t entirely comprehend what the slope of the line signified, Ramesh confidently asserted, “Until the graph reaches 90%, we won’t sell” (*Jab tak graph 90% ho jata to nahi bechenge*). If they sold before that, he says that they would have to buy land in a “backward area” where the price won’t increase. Educated, and with a good income, Ramesh embodies those who are reluctant to sell



not because of an attachment to their farmland, but because they are shrewdly calculating how to maximize its exchange value. He can wait, make entrepreneurial use of some of their compensation land, and sell the rest for very good money when the market peaks again. His ability to formally visualize a trajectory of prices over time bespoke a familiarity with market mechanisms that was not shared by many fellow farmers, and that will allow him to leverage his family's land into substantial economic gains (Fieldnotes, 2/22/10).

While statistically small in number, there were also a few cases of Dalits who did very well through land speculation. In the Rajpura market, Kanaram Raegar and his two sons run a vegetable stand where I often spoke with them. They had 13 *bighas* of land, more than most Raegars, and had almost all of it acquired. They sold most, though not all, of their compensation plots for a good price of Rs. 10 *lakh* (\$20,000) per *bigha*. They used that money to buy land in three or four places, and already sold one parcel for a small profit (they bought it at Rs. 4.5 *lakh* per *bigha* and sold it at Rs. 6.25 *lakh* per *bigha*). They also bought the vegetable stand, one of the small handful in the market that now caters to dispossessed farmers and to the general traffic of people created by the SEZ. They also bought a van to transport produce from the wholesale vegetable market that is about 15 kilometers away, and distribute it to other vegetable vendors in the market. All told this vegetable business makes them about Rs. 40,000 (\$800) per month. The older brother was also a labor contractor for a while, managing a team of workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh constructing the SEZ boundary wall. Kanaram's family is thus one of the few Raegar families to have thrived in the new post-SEZ dispensation. While Kanaram's story of lower-caste entrepreneurial success is the kind of case that would warm the hearts of World Bank officials, we will see shortly that he is an outlier, and that the vast majority of Raegar's have been further impoverished by the SEZ. When I asked Kanaram's son whether other Raegars were doing as well as them, he observed, "No, they have no land and are unemployed" (Fieldnotes, 6/27/12). Nevertheless, the ability of even a small handful of Dalits to make their way up through land speculation attests to a modicum of fluidity that did not exist within a village economy dominated by agriculture.

The previous three examples are of farmers who have had their land forcibly acquired and who have successfully navigated land markets with their compensation plots. While I have focused on those dispossessed for the SEZ, we should also recognize that there are many farmers whose lands lay just outside the SEZ and who have been able to engage freely in land speculation at their own leisure. In one of the beautiful outlying hamlets of Neempura, Chimanlal Choudhary and his brother sit on top of a goldmine in the form of 80 *bighas* (20 hectares) of land. When I approached their house at midday, the two were leaning against one of a dozen neat *bolis* of fodder, surrounded by their twenty some buffalo. In 2008, they sold 12 *bighas* of land for a staggering Rs. 96 *lakh*, or \$192,000. They used that money to build an extension to their house and buy 15 *bighas* of land in a village ten kilometers away. In one of the only truly capitalist investments that I encountered, Chimanlal's son has used that land to start a brick kiln that employs 300 laborers. While the fathers are illiterate, one son has a BA and another is a tractor mechanic in Barka Balaji, a commercial agglomeration along the highway. While their savvy decision to sell a small portion of their farm has paid off massively, those returns pale in comparison to their current net worth. With land prices in Neempura at around \$40,000 per *bigha*, they are sitting on land that is worth approximately \$2.7 million dollars! While they were prosperous farmers before, they are now rich beyond belief and clearly ecstatic. Chimanlal explains, "Before we had bitter water and the price of our land was Rs. 50,000 (\$1,000). Now its twenty to thirty *lakh* (\$40,000 to \$60,000) and we can buy sweet water." Sitting in their white

kurtas and orange turbans, faces withered from decades of agricultural work, they do not hide their happiness. They have a beautiful old homestead with plentiful fields and livestock, and can sell off small portions of this massively appreciated land as they please.

Following a similar path to wealth is Sitaram Meena, whose magnificent row of eight pink houses in Shivpura attracted my attention. Sitting across the road from the small earthen hut of a goat grazing family, their garish compound resembled a southern California subdivision. Sitaram was a farmer and retired employee of the state electricity board where he used to work on the poles before being switched to a desk job after a bad fall. His son also now works for the electricity board, which is a prized government job (Meenas, though a Scheduled Tribe, have been quite successful at obtaining government employment in Rajasthan). Their 20 *bighas* of land fell outside of the SEZ and they sold it to the MGF-Emaar developers in 2007. They said that at the time MGF was paying approximately Rs. 30 to 50 *lakh* per *bigha* (\$240,000 to \$400,000 per hectare), so we can estimate that the land sale earned them roughly Rs. 8 *crore* or \$1.6 million! With this huge sum of money, they bought these 4 *bighas* of land near the SEZ (where most locals have been priced out of the market) to erect these magnificent houses for each member of the family. The houses are truly grand, with marble floors and pillars, and impressive gates enclosing grassy lawns. They have kept a small patch of land next to it to grow vegetables and keep buffalo. Sitaram also bought land elsewhere, which he leases out to sharecroppers, and which, he predicts, will be a good real estate investment. I asked him what he thought of the SEZ. While admitted that it had not benefited many other local people, he said, “The SEZ is excellent, for us.... It will be an excellent place. It was just jungle before” (Fieldnotes, 2/18/10).

The above examples illustrate the ability of the mostly—but not exclusively—landed upper castes to profit wildly from land speculation. Those who had their farmland acquired had the economic means and market savvy to play the game well, selling their plots for good prices, and often keeping some in reserve. Those who did not have their land dispossessed can freely speculate at their leisure without the handicap of having it reduced to  $\frac{1}{4}$  its original size. Both categories have recycled this cash into more land, establishing themselves as large absentee landlords, land speculators, and business proprietors.

#### iv. The Brokers

Partially overlapping with the successful land speculators are the land brokers, who have become rich not through selling their own land but through facilitating the sale of others'. Brokers are ubiquitous agents in the process of transforming rural land into real estate. Their role arises because of the social distance and deficit of trust between farmers and outside buyers. Outside investors worry that farmers might not relinquish the land after a sale or a purchase agreement is concluded (or might demand more money), while farmers worry that outside investors will cheat them and not hand over all of the money. Any dispute can take years and even decades to solve in India's backlogged courts, immobilizing either party. In this situation of deficient structural trust, land brokers use their social connections to bridge this social gulf and reduce this deficit of trust (at least until the transaction is concluded) in order to gain commission. The local *dalal* must have contacts in the city to make the acquaintance of outside buyers or their brokers. And crucially, they must be someone trusted by the farmer, or they must build this trust through the daily symbolic work of visiting the homes of potential sellers, drinking *chai*, smoking *beedis* (country cigarettes) and building confidence in the farmer that he is a trustworthy person (not unlike an ethnographer). While a broker need not have significant

money or even education, they must have social connections—a fact that they themselves often repeated, and that was incidentally reinforced by their numerous attempts to enlist *me* into land deals (when I protested that I had no savings and was not a businessman, they assured me that neither was necessary, I just needed to bring in an “excellent outside party”). Beneath the *meta-dalals* like Laduram and Mahinder are a stratum of medium sized brokers, disproportionately Jats and Brahmins, who have used their social capital—contacts outside of the village built through gradual off-farm diversification—to make good money alienating the land of fellow villagers.

Lalsingh Choudhary is a fifty year old farmer from Neempura who had 60 *bighas* of land between him and two brothers. While uneducated, he was a milk middleman and also worked in the telephone business before the SEZ’s arrival. Using contacts from his milk distribution operations in Jaipur, he became a large broker during the real estate boom, cutting 50 deals, sometimes on commission, and sometimes advancing the money himself. He has reinvested his significant brokerage earnings into twenty-five additional *bighas* of land in a village twenty kilometers away (which he leases to sharecroppers), urban plots, a cold storage business in Jaipur, a tubewell, tractor and water tanker to sell groundwater. He also uses some of it to give loans and has bought himself a car. Meanwhile, his original land, which wasn’t acquired, has appreciated to between \$40,000 and \$60,000 per *bigha*. Just beneath him in scale is his fellow villager, Gangaram Choudhary, a young Jat from a family with 50 *bighas* of land. Gangaram had been working as a driver in Jaipur and used those contacts to cut about 20-25 deals, netting, in his estimation, \$12,000 (though this is probably an under-estimate). Smaller than him is Mahinder Choudhary, also a Jat who leveraged his contacts from his previous line of work as a milk-middleman to do 4-5 deals, netting approximately \$10,000. He reinvested some of that money in a cold drink shop in Rajpura’s market, which now fetches him approximately \$500 per month. I could also provide many Brahmin examples, but the details are largely the same. Both castes had already begun to diversify from their significant agricultural holdings before the SEZ, and used the social capital from that diversification to make economic capital in the real estate boom, which they have now invested in other enterprises. Many of them are now applying their experience and contacts gained through brokering land around the SEZ to brokering agricultural land near other peri-urban development projects, such as Jaipur’s new “ring road.” While there were also OBC and SC brokers, they were fewer in number and typically operated on a much smaller scale, brokering a small handful of deals, which they were typically brought into when they were needed to build a connection with a seller from their own caste. I did not encounter a single broker among the “lower” rungs of the scheduled castes: the Beirwas, Raegars, or sweepers.

These brokers have thus converted their social capital, itself the byproduct of prior reconversion strategies that leveraged agrarian economic capital into urban economic (shops and formal sector jobs) and cultural capital (education), which, in turn, they leveraged into much greater economic capital. They have used their social networks to tap into the chain of rentiership generated by the SEZ, appropriating substantial commission from the alienation of village land. As we will see in the next chapter, this alacrity at turning their social relations into capital made brokers highly controversial figures, which unleashed a politically divisive struggle over village norms. For now, we should simply note that brokerage was one of the main vectors of an upward economic ascent during Rajpura’s land boom.

The brokers, along with the successful land speculators, have thus established themselves as a neo-rentier stratum in the village. While most were comparatively well-off farmers before,

they have now become wealthy beyond dreams. Instead of cultivating land (or in addition to it), they are now make most of their money through capitalist or pre-capitalist ground-rent, interest from loans, profits from small businesses, or commissions from land sales. They have made it; in village parlance, they are “sitting in the A.C.”

### *The Tenuous Reproducers*

We now turn to those who have neither become fantastically wealthy through land speculation nor dropped into the landless proletariat, but who fall into a less-easy-to-categorize middle ground. By way of many specific routes through land commodification and involutory economic change, they have replaced their dispossessed land with alternative assets whose capacity to forestall ultimate proletarianization remains uncertain. This category includes many marginal farmers that took cash compensation for their modest acquired holdings, but lacking either the money or business savvy for other investments, bought agricultural land in far-off villages. This land is often less fertile and the distance between their homes in Rajpura (if they were not demolished) and their new fields means that they either have to put it out on lease (and thus receive only 1/3 of the harvest) or incur very large transportation costs. With their land dispossessed by the SEZ, their labor marginalized by the knowledge economy, and without the savvy to engage in other forms of business, they have been expelled further into the rural periphery as small landlords or long-distance cultivators. Others have also tried to make a go at small informal businesses of marginal or as yet uncertain profitability. While those in this admittedly residual category represent heterogeneous trajectories and often occupy complex and contradictory class positions, what they have in common is that they are neither on a clear upwardly mobile path towards a stable livelihood, nor are they clearly descending into the landless precariat. Both, and especially the latter, remain a possibility, but only time will show whether they will be able to reproduce themselves through means other than unskilled wage labor. While a few in this category are relatively poor or uneducated Jats and Brahmins, the majority are from Otherwise Backward Castes or the marginally better-off sections of the Scheduled Castes.

#### i. Marginal Farmer to Petty Landlord and Driver

My first example is Prakash Bhunker, a Dalit of the Balai sub-caste who, at the time of the SEZ's arrival, was a semi-proletarianized farmer-laborer. His father and three uncles had 18 *bighas* of land between the four of them, and Prakash spent some of his youth in Madhya Pradesh, where his father had migrated to do construction labor. His time outside of Rajasthan gave Prakash a certain cosmopolitanism and acerbic political perspective on village affairs, which he often shared with me over glasses of *chai* and the occasional country liquor. After moving back to Rajpura, Prakash's family cultivated their small piece of land, while he, for the past fifteen years, worked in the block-printing mills of Sanganer. It is slightly better paying than construction labor, paying Rs. 2.5 for each colorfully printed sheet that eventually makes its way into the domestic and global handicraft market (Prakash says he typically made about Rs. 200-250 per day). However, it is back-breaking piece work that eventually wears men out and leaves them physically impaired. Their family was poor by most standards and, before the SEZ arrived, Prakash's father had to sell off some of their land very cheaply, at Rs. 66,000 per *bigha*. When the SEZ arrived, they sold the remaining 10 *bighas* for a much better, if retrospectively low, Rs. 9 *lakh* per *bigha*. Prakash explains, “Outside investors came at that time and told us that if we don't sell, the government will acquire it and who knows what we'll get. People were scared and

sold quickly” (Fieldnotes, 12/10/10). After paying off debts, the brothers collectively bought 20 *bighas* of land that is a very distant 140 kms away. They collect 1/3 of a crop from tenants in that village, but the income is minimal as the land has no water and it is difficult to supervise tenants. Whatever they do get is divided between four brothers, who each have multiple children.

In addition to the land, Prakash at first bought an old jeep to use as a taxi, but did not seem to be getting much work. Eventually, he decided to sell the jeep and buy a new Chevrolet SUV that would allow him to get into the business of chauffeuring the employees of Deutsche Bank from Jaipur to the SEZ. The car costs Rs. 9 lakh (\$18,000), of which he obtained formal financing for Rs. 5 lakh and paid the remaining Rs. 4 lakh in cash. The cash partly came from selling his jeep, and the rest was a high-interest loan from a village moneylender, himself recycling land earnings into usury. With the village moneylender helping to finance the bank loan, Prakash had high interest payments that made chauffeuring for Deutsche Bank less remunerative than he had hoped. During my first spell of fieldwork, I watched Prakash inaugurate the car with a ceremonial *puja* (prayer worship) for good luck; when I returned one year later, he was disappointed with the business. He was driving nights from 8pm until 7am, making about four trips back and forth to Jaipur (his nephew would drive the car during the day shift while Prakash slept). I asked him if he was making good money. He said, “Money? What money? Exploitation is happening (*Shoshan ho raha hai?*)?” He gets paid Rs. 7 per kilometer and has to pay for gas and maintenance. When we sat down with a calculator to work out his monthly costs and income, we concluded that he was making Rs. 4,909 (a little less than \$100) per month, after paying Rs. 16,000 in interest. This was just above the income of manual wage labor. While driving will be better on his body than working in the mills, without their land, their expenses have gone up. Prakash says, “We don’t save anything.” Neither on a clear upward trajectory nor on a steep downward trajectory, Prakash is treading water; time will only tell what will happen to his family. While Prakash is uneducated, he hopes his son will not have to do the hard manual labor that has been his lot in life.

## ii. Marginal Farmer to Long-distance Marginal Farmer

There are many other examples of farmers who are in a roughly similar position of treading water, though many of them have not been able to even make the kind of business investment Prakash has just managed. Prabhu Balai, a Dalit of the same sub-caste as Prakash and probably in his late sixties, had his 12 *bighas* of land acquired for the SEZ. He sold the rights to his compensation plot through a broker for Rs. 6-7 lakh per *bigha* and used the money to buy 12 *bighas* of land in another village 10 km away. Like the old land, the new land has no irrigation and only gets a monsoon crop. However, it is also less fertile and 10 km away from his house, making it very inconvenient to cultivate. Having started with 12 *bighas* of land, he has wound up with 10 *bighas* of less fertile land far from his house and further into the interior. Besides farming that land during the monsoon crop, he’s unemployed and so is his only son. Of the SEZ, he says, “It is a loss (*nuksan*). How will we eat? We’re all unemployed.... they’ve given no work to people.” While Prabhu has been able to replace his previous land with a not-quite-equivalent means of production, he has lost ground and emerged relatively poorer due to the SEZ. While he hopes for employment inside the zone to offset this decline, this has not been forthcoming (Fieldnotes, 2/22/10).

While Prabhu dipped slightly below his pre-SEZ status, Kallyan Gujjar’s family took a similar route to wind up slightly above. Kalyan is 19 year old and in his first year studying for a bachelors of commerce. His family had their very small holding of approximately two *bighas*

acquired but sold half of it to a broker for a total of Rs. 15 *lakh* (\$30,000) and retained a small compensation plot of 200 square meters. With the cash, they bought 10 *bighas* of land 7 km away. Kalyan explains that the SEZ has given them a benefit because they have more land, though their situation is still precarious. He's the only educated person in his family; the rest are illiterate. His brother drives a tractor carrying construction supplies into Mahindra, for which he makes approximately Rs. 10,000-12,000 per month. I asked him, "That's pretty good isn't it?" Like a good business student, he explained that if you take into account the interest and opportunity cost, it is not so great. They had to invest \$4,000-6,000 into the tractor, for which they needed to take out a loan. He said, "if you compare it to investing [that money] in something else, the profit is not that much." He hopes to finish studies and get a good job of Rs. 10,000 to 15,000. If he succeeds in fulfilling that dream, it would undoubtedly help to shore up his family's prospects (Fieldnotes, 4/9/10).

### iii. The Complex Potter

The process of land commodification has put Ram Kishore Parjapat, an OBC potter in Rajpura, onto a trajectory that is somewhat more up than down, but that has landed him in a complex class position that defies easy categorization. In addition to his traditional occupation of making he pots, he owned four *bighas* of land across the lane from the Balai *mohallah*, and which now abuts the new "250 foot" road that the government is building between the SEZ and the Jaipur International Airport. Ram Kishore was lucky that his land fell outside of the area that was forcibly acquired for the SEZ, and he sold that land on the open market for a total of \$50,000 dollars. That seller has since sold the land to Laduram Meena. When I first spoke with him, he was a tenant for Laduram on his former land, putting up half the costs in return for half of the harvest. But he was also the absentee landlord of twenty-two *bighas* of land that he had bought in a village near Diggi. He was both an absentee landlord in a faraway village, and a tenant in his own. He still makes pots for several months of the year, though as we saw in the last chapter, returns from this occupation have decreased since the enclosure of the village common land has commercialized his access to raw materials. He also does casual manual labor for a good chunk of the month, and has bought a small shoe-box portable shop (typically used to sell tobacco), which at the time sat empty.

Because his land was not dispossessed, Ram Kishore is doing better than most of those from his class-caste whose lands went into the SEZ. While he has lost income from the enclosure of the commons, he has clearly gained by turning four *bighas* of land into twenty-two, even if it is in a distant village. In this sense, we might almost classify him among the accumulators. But questions remain: Will the rent from the land in Diggi keep him afloat, or its real estate value appreciate? Will something come of his shoe-box storefront? Or will these all come to naught, forcing the uneducated potter to do more and more manual wage labor? It is too soon to tell. But Ram Kishore's case illustrates the ability of a small-holding OBC that by luck escaped the burden of dispossession to engage land markets for a modest, though complex and contradictory ascent.

### iv. In Compensation Plot Limbo

Aside from those who have already sold their plots and reinvested their money are a large number of farmers who are in limbo, currently in difficult straights while waiting for the Jaipur Development Authority to fully physically develop and deliver their plots, but who, given their lack of education and business experience, are more likely to set themselves up as farmers

elsewhere than to ascend into the neo-rentier class. Mohanlal Sharma, a fifty-year old Brahmin, had his 24 *bighas* of irrigated land acquired for the SEZ. He has managed to avoid selling out to a *dalal*, and has received a reservation letter from the JDA but still doesn't have his compensation land. He says, "It's been four years and only unemployment." When he gets it, he says he will have to sell it and use the money to buy farmland far away (local land prices are now too high). He will also have to sell his house to build a new one near the new land. He said his main occupation (*dhandha*) was farming and raising animals and he has no other land, work, or business. He does wage labor and complains, "Before we applied our labor on the land (*jamin par lagaye*). We didn't do wage labor (*mazduri*)." He continues, "We believed their promises and that with the 25% we would be able to get more land and money for the kids to have an occupation (*dhandha*)." But he says the SEZ has been "a loss, loss, a total loss (*nuksan, nuksan, pura nuksan*). There is a benefit happening: for the government, for the ministers" (Fieldnotes, 4/8/10; survey).

It is possible that Mohanlal's fortunes will turn out to be better than he predicts, and his current difficulties transitory. He has been temporarily proletarianized by land acquisition, and, without farmland or stable employment, he has definitely experienced a dramatic dip in his well-being. However, his ability to hold out against the pressure of selling his plots may ultimately prove wise, and the significant acreage of compensation plots due to him for his 24 *bighas* remain a significant ace up his sleeve. If the real estate market goes back into a climb, they may allow him to do more with it than just getting replacement land in a faraway village to farm. However, without significant education or business experience, his ability to leverage cash into another livelihood remains uncertain. While Mohanlal's trajectory is too early to call, we should note that it is to a large degree contingent on the SEZ's future performance and its affect on the market value of his compensation plots.

#### v. Borderline Case: Semi-Proletariat to Unsuccessful Rentier

I now turn to a more borderline case that helps to illustrate the threshold between tenuous reproduction and proletarianization. Mahesh Bhunker, an uneducated lower-caste small-farmer and laborer, represents those have been swept up into the temptations of land speculation and rentiership but do not have the requisite capital to be successful. While not immediately thrown into the landless proletariat, Mahesh's attempts to forestall impoverishment with various forms of rentiership are already proving to be insufficient to prevent a downward spiral for his family.

I lived with Mahesh, his wife Lada and their three young kids for most of my fieldwork. Mahesh and his two brothers lost their combined 24 *bighas* of land for the SEZ, but were only compensated for 8 because 16 did not have a clear title. Poor and in debt, they sold their compensation plots quickly and thus rather cheaply. They used the money to replace their earthen homes with concrete houses and bought 10 *bighas* of much less productive farmland 20 km into the interior. It has proven difficult to supervise the tenant in the village, and the crops they have received so far are very meager. While Mahesh has in the past tried his hand at vegetable selling and labor contracting, he is currently unemployed and, because of a surgery, unable to do hard manual labor. While the family used some of the money to build a concrete house with some modern appliances and to buy a motorbike, that money has run out and the family is deeply in debt. The loss of their farmland and livestock has greatly reduced the family's diet, which consists mostly of market-bought vegetables and *rotis* made with grain from the Public Distribution System. They have lost all the dairy products they used to receive from their

livestock, and consume very little protein. This is visible in the undernourishment of their three young children.

While only partially literate and not particularly business savvy, Mahesh thought he found a solution to his family's problems when Lada's cousin from another village invited him to help broker a land deal in Rajpura. Rajesh, who had established himself as a small-time broker, wanted to invest some of his earnings into a plot in Rajpura, for which he would provide an advance and then try to re-sell to an outside investor. Mahesh could act as his local *dalal*, making a connection with a seller in the village, and earn 1% commission on the deal. As Rajesh's broker, Mahesh helped to find a seller, an older lower-caste widow from his sub-caste and her son, who in turn were represented by another *dalal* from the village. After many meetings and affirmations of good will expressed over cups of *chai* and shared *beedis*, a purchase agreement was struck between the parties and their brokers—though the widow herself sat on the floor outside with the women of Mahesh's family—to buy the plot for \$26,000. Within a few months, before Rajesh had to deliver the full amount to the seller, he had found an outside buyer willing to take it for \$46,000, netting \$14,000 after registration costs and bribes to the land records official (*patwari*). However, the cousin refused to pay Mahesh 1% of the full purchase price, arguing that the transaction costs that he advanced should be subtracted from the total. Mahesh earned much less than he anticipated. After the exaggerated professions of good faith, kinship and camaraderie, Mahesh ruefully observed, “the relationship has been ruined” (*rishta barbad ho gaya*) (Fieldnotes, 1/30/11). His family ate better for a month or two, adding some milk products back into their diet, but given the size of their existing debt, the income was not very significant.

While land brokerage did not work out for him, Mahesh had another strategy, which was to invest his remaining compensation money in a residential plot on the outskirts of an urbanizing small town. However, Mahesh did not have the economic ability to wait out his investment: his cash flow problems forced him to sell the plot at a loss. He then tried to become a landlord, borrowing \$8,000 from a village moneylender to add an extra story to his house so he could rent out rooms. By the spring of 2011, two private colleges had sprouted up nearby and students were looking for rooms to rent. In the summer of 2012, four students were living in the unfinished second story of his house, but he was only receiving \$100 per month in rent, which did not even pay the interest he owed to the moneylender. While my own premium rent was a momentary help, it was only momentary.

With Mahesh's experiments in rentiership largely failing, the family's only income was Lada's periodic income from the central government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which itself was only being fitfully implemented in the *panchayat* and paying workers less than the guaranteed Rs. 100 (\$2) per day. The family was sliding deeper into debt and Mahesh was struggling to keep moneylenders at bay. Mahesh's last resort was to look for work in the SEZ, where he thought a contact would be able to get him work as a security guard. However, the job turned out to be a janitorial one cleaning toilets, which his pride made him turn down as it would represent a slide back into the stigma of caste impurity. That is where things remained when I left the village.

What Mahesh's melancholic situation illustrates is the fragile line between a stable foothold in an involutory informal economy and a precarious descent into proletarianization. While tempted by the possibility of living from rents instead of wage labor, Mahesh lacks the prior endowments of economic, cultural and social capital that would allow him to make the multiple translation of land into cash and cash into significant forms of economic capital. While



his and Lada's house looks much nicer than the average earthen rural home—which lead the government to classify them as an above poverty line family—they have very little income and are increasingly food insecure. They have not been able to come out of the process of land commodification with income-generating assets of much value. As prophylactics against proletarianization, Mahesh's small forays into rentiership have proven to be of transitory and dubious value. It seems doubtful that he will be able to hold out against the pull of proletarianization; in a sense, his wife Lada has already made that transition, providing both the reproductive and waged labor that keeps the family afloat. While the economic changes sweeping the village might throw a lucky break their way, it appears likely that time will pull their family fully into the precariously employed proletariat.

### *The Proletarianized*

Mahesh's trajectory nevertheless remained better than that of most land poor Dalits, especially those of the Raegar and Beirwa sub-castes whose starting economic situation was on average worse than the Balais'. The median experience in these caste *mohallahs* has been a much more straightforward process of proletarianization and impoverishment. While they were already semi-proletarianized before the SEZ, their small pieces of land provided their families with crucial means of subsistence to supplement their meager and irregular wages from manual labor. For these families, already poor and often on the brink of penury, these small pieces of land made a large difference, if not in their income, than in their nutrition, dignity and ability to minimize grueling manual labor. With their small holdings dispossessed for the SEZ, they have lost crucial non-market access to grain, vegetables, milk products, as well as a small amount of cash. With micro-holdings, often divided between multiple brothers, and little cultural or social capital, they have typically sold their land the fastest, received the lowest prices, and have been least able to convert that money into an alternative livelihood. They have been thrown entirely into the landless proletariat. While they had the smallest amounts of land dispossessed, they are arguably the biggest losers of land dispossession for the SEZ. Their downward trajectories are depressingly similar, lacking the diversity of the upward ones.

Chitramal Raegar's case epitomizes this straightforward impoverishment of the already poor. He is a forty year old bullock cart driver of Rajpura, and his family had less than 4 bighas of land divided between six brothers, all of which was acquired for the SEZ. In need of money, the family sold their compensation plot early to a village broker for \$42,000. Divided between six brothers, the money was not enough to buy new land after paying off their substantial debts and meeting current expenses. Chitramal now regrets selling the plot, and explains that they are illiterate and didn't know what an SEZ was and what it would do to land prices. He is bitter at the broker who he says "sold us cheaply." Before he at least got food from the land, but now he relies solely on his meager income transporting goods between villages in his bullock cart, a dying business with the influx of trucks and tractor-trolleys. He is sliding deeper into debt, and wishes he had the land back (Fieldnotes, 2/18/10).

Dinesh Raegar's story is similar, although it more clearly illustrates the malevolent role of upper caste brokers in ripping off the lower caste poor. Dinesh and his three brothers together had 6 *bighas* of land, and all of it was acquired for the SEZ. They sold their compensation plots quickly, but Dinesh says they were tricked by a broker into selling all 6 *bighas* for a very cheap Rs. 9 *lakh* (\$18,000) when they thought they were only selling 3. He explained that he is illiterate (*anpad*) and "the broker deceived us.... Just like you writing in English. I don't understand it. Like that." Before they farmed and kept five buffalo, which they have had to sell for want of

fodder. While he did waged labor (*mazduri*) before, he says, “Now I have to do a lot more.” He says they don’t get work in the SEZ, so he does work for a contractor in Jaipur. I asked him what he did with his share of the proceeds from the land sale and he said, “What is three *lakhs*? We had to spend it on marriages.” He concluded, “It’s been a complete loss for us” (“*Bilkul muksan hamare ko*”) (Fieldnotes, 7/16/10).

Mangal Ram Raegar is a forty year old who shared 6 *bighas* with 6 brothers. Five of these were acquired and they sold the compensation rights quickly and cheaply for Rs. 4 *lakh* per *bigha*, which translated into a little over three *lakh* per brother. He said this went on expenses and marriages. There wasn't enough to build a house, much less buy other land. He and all his brothers do *mazduri*. If he doesn’t get it in the village, he goes to Jaipur. He estimates he only gets work for about 15 to 20 days of the month, earning Rs. 100-150 per day, from which he has to subtract Rs. 20 for the bus. When he doesn’t get work, he sits at home. When they had land, he did less *mazduri*. While they have one *bigha* left, which they are cultivating, he says he’ll have to give the whole crop to the Jain shopkeeper who he’s in debt to for about Rs. 2000. They don’t have enough money to buy food, so small debts of Rs. 50 here and Rs. 100 there have accumulated. His brother’s wife works on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, but his wife is too weak to do it and he takes private *mazduri* because it pays more. He had five goats before, but because of the fodder problem, he had to sell them to the Kathik (butcher) for Rs. 200 each (they had become weak because of the fodder problem). The goats provided milk for the house; now their one cow only provides enough milk for chai. While he is totally illiterate, his two boys, aged 10 and 11, are both studying (his daughter is not). I asked him how far they will study and he said, “If there is money to study, they’ll keep studying. If not, they’ll quit” (Fieldnotes, 8/16/10).

In the Beirwa *dani* (hamlet) outside of Rajpura, where land was not forcibly acquired, there are many families who nevertheless were pushed by debt and induced by brokers into selling their land on the market at very cheap prices. Gopulal Beirwa is an illiterate sixty year old man who, faced with mounting debts and expenses, was induced into selling all of his meager 3.5 *bighas* of land to a broker for a pathetically small \$3,500 per *bigha* (about one-tenth of the values at the time). He seems to have not been aware of the new post-SEZ land prices, and sold that land at the old pre-SEZ rate. He used the money to pay off debts, build a modest concrete house, and drill a tubewell for drinking. But he is now left with no land, three fewer goats, and less food. He has to do more wage labor than before. He is angry at the brokers who, he belatedly recognized, deceived him (Fieldnotes, 2/16/11).

There are many more cases like Chitramal’s, Dinesh’s, Mangal Ram’s, and Gopu Lal’s that are different only in the details. They constitute the majority of families in the land poor lower castes who have been pushed further into proletarianization and poverty. They are hard to find during the day because they are off in Jaipur and environs, part of the precarious class of “wage hunters and gatherers” moving from one temporary construction site to another. I typically found them in the evenings, dusty and exhausted from a day of hauling stones or other “oxen work” (*bheldari*), or on days when they were not lucky enough to have work. While they used their compensation money to pay off debts, those debts are piling up again. They have less food than before, their wages unable to provide the equivalent nutrition to what they received from their land. Their hope is in their children, but many of them are eventually forced to drop out of school before the 10<sup>th</sup> standard to help support their family. It is these lower caste semi-proletariat, who lost the little separating them from landless penury and who were ill equipped to profit from land markets and the new economy, who were the biggest losers from the SEZ.

As depressing as the above examples are, I conclude with one final case that illustrates another gradation within what Breman (2010: 64) calls the “various layers of deprivation” generated by land dispossession for the SEZ. The case also illustrates the borderline between those proletarianized by land dispossession and commodification and those who are entirely excluded from the process of commodification altogether. I came across Nathuram Balai when, surveying the JDA’s compensation plots with a friend on a motorcycle, I noticed a lone earthen compound sticking out like a sore thumb amidst a bulldozed expanse of earth. I reproduce my field notes from this encounter in full:

When we approached the old man, a Balai (dalit) at least in his 70s, he was squatting on the concrete embankment of an old well. Sandwiched in between this large swath of bulldozed land and the barbed wire fencing marking the beginning of the SEZ, he lives by himself in a small and very modest earthen *joppardi* with a few goats in the yard. To say that he was gaunt would be an understatement; the man was starving. His eyes were squinty, dilated, and cloudy. He refused to give his name, but he told me that he had his 3.5 *bighas* of land acquired. He used to farm it and then gave it out on lease (tenancy) when he could no longer do it himself. Now he has no income, no land, and only 2 to 3 goats that don't give much milk. His wife died years ago and his three brothers and their families, who used to live with him, ran off somewhere (he gestures towards the horizon) and abandoned him. It is unclear whether they may have taken his compensation too. Some people from the village occasionally give him a few *rotis* to eat, but other than that he is completely alone. He is unable to see very much, which makes him prone to being cheated. He also has a bad cough that keeps him from sleeping at night unless he takes medication, which he pulls out of a plastic bag to show us. He has to buy them with loans. He seems withdrawn and his words come out slowly and from far off.

He is illiterate and says he never signed his name or gave a thumbprint on anything. He is vaguely aware that he is supposed to get some plot of land, but he doesn't know where. It is immediately obvious how absurd this form of compensation will be for him. He's too weak and has no money to build a new house or utilize plots of developed land. No one has come to tell him anything or help him. He seems to not really understand what's happening around him, except that his land has been bulldozed. He says he has “high tension,” which is palpable.

The man is starving, alone, illiterate, and physically weak, unable to fully understand what is happening as the ground around him is prepared for “modern” industry and housing. Much less can he navigate the system of land compensation with its paperwork, bureaucratic procedures, and the assumption that people have the entrepreneurial ability to utilize commercial land or fend for themselves in land markets. The planning of SEZ and government authorities seems to in no way anticipate these consequences, based as they are on aerial maps, formal bureaucratic procedures, and a conception of land as a commodity divorced from its social milieu. The inhumanity of the situation is staggering (Fieldnotes, 2/20/10).

It remains difficult to talk about Nathuramji, who on a subsequent visit felt comfortable enough to share his name and talk somewhat more freely. I found him with some itinerant goat herders, who were using his well in exchange for some fodder they were extracting through a deliberate puncture in the SEZ's boundary wall. He told me, "Before we had millet (*bajra*) to eat and for the animals. When the rains came, we had grain and fodder." Now he had almost nothing. Three or four of his goats died because of lack of fodder; they ate bad grass and died of dysentery. It seemed clear that his brother ran off with the Rs. 60,000 compensation for his house; the status of his compensation plots remained unclear. No one from Mahindra, the government or even a social worker had come to talk with him. It felt absurd explaining to him that I was writing about whether people were getting a benefit or loss from the SEZ. "It's a loss, only a loss (*nuksan hi nuksan*)," he said (Fieldnotes, 7/13/10). During my last brief visit to Rajpura in July 2012, Nathuram's house was still an island in a large expanse of bulldozed earth. It was unclear if the JDA would be callous enough to evict him and, if not, what kind of resolution might possibly emerge to his grim situation.

Dispossession has pushed Nathuram from semi-proletariat poverty to complete penury. His situation illustrates the calamitous consequences of land loss not just for the semi-proletariat but for vulnerable populations (widows and widowers, the elderly, infirm and disabled) for whom it provided minimal but important security against destitution. Blind, illiterate, ill, and alone Nathuram is entirely unable to navigate the process of real estate speculation that is supposed to compensate him for his loss, illustrating the fallacies of a market-based compensation model premised on an assumed entrepreneurial subject. Having spent most of his long life toiling in poverty under conditions of caste domination, he now has to live out his last days in even more abject misery in order to make way for a "world city."

### *The Excluded*

Up until now I have focused on those who were dispossessed of their private land and thrust into the game of land commodification to very uneven effect. Nathuram, of course, has lost private land that would theoretically entitle him to engage in land markets, but he is *practically* unable to do so. It is now time to turn our attention to another category of rural residents who could not play the game of land speculation at all because they had no privately titled assets to begin with.

This includes sixteen families of the Bavariya caste who have been living on the village grazing land for at least eight generations without title. I only came across the small Bavariya hamlet, far outside any of the village settlements and in the middle of the forested grazing land, when Mahesh and I decided to return to Rajpura on a back route after a visit with Nathuram. The hamlet consists of a few scattered earthen (*kaccha*) houses without electricity, a chicken pen, and a small bivouac, which an old man was lying underneath on a rickety charpoy when we approached. The man was extremely skinny, his bones noticeable. Most of the men were out doing waged labor, but a son, grandson, several women, and children gathered around. An infant with a big sore on her head played amongst the chickens. Over this and subsequent visits, I learned that they are part of an extended family descending from seven brothers, approximately sixty eight people in all, who have lived here on village land for at least 7-8 generations. Bavariyas are one of the communities who were designated as a "criminal tribe" under the British, and who still carry the residual stigma of "denotified and nomadic tribes" (Radhakrishna 2001). Under the old caste division of labor, they chased animals from the Jats' fields and hunted in return for grain. Now they raise chickens, rabbits and goats, and do wage labor where they can

get it. They still live under the caste domination of the Jats who control their *panchayat* (which is separate from Rajpura's).

Now they are facing eminent eviction for the Mahindra World City. The village land underneath them has been transferred to the SEZ, the boundary wall is being constructed through their hamlet, and the trees have been cut all around them. Their cremation ground has also gone inside the SEZ. They have had to sell the majority of their herd of 60 odd goats because of lack of fodder, and most of their chickens mysteriously got a disease and died. They have no good water source and claim that the Jats who control the *panchayat* diverted a well that was sanctioned for them into the main village and do not let them drink from it. Instead, they must use scarce cash to buy water from a tanker. Only eight of the families have a ration card entitling them to subsidized grain, and four of them are ridiculously categorized as "above poverty line," likely because the Jats have distributed part of the "below poverty line" quota to themselves. Not a single family has a job card, or received work under NREGA. Many do not even have voter identification cards. No one has given them any information except for the daily threats from the SEZ's security guards. They are waiting to be evicted—with no compensation and no idea of where they will go.

The grandfather looks about 90 years old; he is clearly distressed, almost in tears. I asked them what they want from the government. They said that the best thing would be to let them stay where they are, and give them electricity and water. "It would be best to stay here. If not, somewhere they should give space (*jagha*) to live." Breathing heavily, the grandfather said, "Please write that they should give us a place to live" (Fieldnotes, 6/28/12). A reasonable request that they are nevertheless not legally entitled to, and which will require outside intervention to achieve.<sup>74</sup>

The Bavariyas are being dispossessed from their habitation and means of subsistence with no compensation and no stake in the land commodification that has been the SEZ's major contribution to the rural economy. They are not alone in suffering from the dispossession of *de facto* commons that they have no legal claim to. There are other families in Rajpura, mostly SC and OBC families, who are living on *panchayat* land that they do not own and that falls within the SEZ boundary. The government has not yet made moves to take possession of the land. We have already seen that a number of sedentary and semi-nomadic goat herding families have lost access to the grazing commons, commercializing their access to fodder, and reducing their incomes and diets. They are not entitled to any compensation for this loss.

Then there are those who depend not on official public grazing land, but on marginal spaces that are typically unclaimed in an agrarian economy, but that are being squeezed out with land commodification. Rajpura *chaiwala* Ranjan Gujjar, for example, is landless and obtains his entire livelihood of about Rs. 150 per day from his *chai* stall, which has always sat on an unused narrow strip of land between the village road and the Kumar's land. But Ranjan's straw and stone *chai* stand, from which he also fixes tire punctures and sells small quantities of petrol, is on tenuous footing as the land beneath it now belongs to Laduram Meena, the former village *sarpanch* and chief land broker. While I started most mornings there during my fieldwork in 2011, when I returned to the village for a follow-up visit in the summer of 2012, there was a concrete wall where Ranjan's *chai* stall used to stand: Laduram had kicked him off the spot to turn the plot into a marriage garden. The stall was now standing on another marginal strip between the same piece of land and the "250 foot road." Madan explained, "He can also throw

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<sup>74</sup> Members of the social movement *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS) took up their case with sympathetic government officials; at the time of writing, it is not yet clear what kind of resolution this might produce.

me off from here. The land is his up to the road” (Fieldnotes, 6/27/12). The process of land commodification is thus encroaching on previously unvalued spaces that by custom allowed for the landless poor to make a livelihood.

Another category of excluded are those who owned or cultivated private land but who have not been able to receive compensation because of unclear titles. We have already observed that Mahesh and his brothers have not received compensation for their full holdings because of an ambiguity in the title that dates back fifty years. Many farmers, for various reasons that include illiteracy, corruption, and distance from government administration, did not successfully register transfers of property deeds in decades past. This is coming back to haunt present generations, who are denied compensation unless and until these can be settled, a process which can take a lifetime in backlogged courts, and often entails hefty bribes. A lawyer told Mahesh that his case could be resolved with a bribe of Rs. 1 *crore*, an amount clearly out of his range. But it is not just the poor and lower castes that are stuck in this legal limbo. Some of the priestly Brahmin families are now finding that their land is being claimed by temple trusts. In Shivpura, the family of my *chai* stall proprietor friend has received no compensation for their acquired farmland because a temple trust emerged to claim title after the SEZ arrived. In Rajpura, the family of Hariram Sharma, proprietors of a small village temple (which doubles as their home) that no one from the village visits anymore,<sup>75</sup> have also been excluded from compensation because they have been told that their eight *bighas* of land belongs to the Rajasthan government’s Devasthan (holy land) Department. They claim the land was theirs, but the confusion arises because their grandfather’s name was the same as the god the temple was dedicated to. They have thus lost their land and continue to live in the small stone temple, excluded from the process of land commodification that has allowed most of their neighbors to build large concrete houses. In general, the property boom has prompted all kinds of people, including extended family who have long emigrated to the city, to come out of the woodwork and claim newly valuable property, tying up land and compensation plots in legal disputes. Such situations of legal ambiguity are opportune for land mafias, who try to exploit such disputes and force sales at bargain prices. According to the local police, land disputes are now the single largest source of crime in the area (Fieldnotes, 3/11/10).<sup>76</sup>

There is however another category of the excluded who have a more ambiguous relationship to the SEZ. These are the village sweepers, who self identify as Sangats, but who are commonly called “bhangis.” Almost none of these sweeper families had any land and most had no cattle. They are mostly laboring poor, though the father of one family has a government job in an Ayurvedic hospital. They are totally excluded from the process of land commodification that many of their fellow villagers have cashed in on. However, they also have not been dispossessed of much as they did not depend on agriculture or livestock. A few of their sons have gotten sub-contracted work inside the SEZ, though they are slotted into positions as janitors earning a paltry Rs. 3,000 per month (\$60). The sons do not think that these jobs are big boons: they are no better or worse than any wage labor, and they claim they are still not respected inside the glassy buildings, suffering similar caste indignities (like not being able to drink out of the same water jug as others). But some express hope that at least urbanization of the village will diminish the caste practices that still treat them as untouchables. As one mother who sweeps the villager

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<sup>75</sup> After the arrival of the SEZ, a private philanthropist funded a new, quite large and ornate temple devoted to Hanuman.

<sup>76</sup> I obtained this piece of information after being brought to the local police station for questioning about my presence and research in the village. I used the occasion to strike up a conversation with several friendly officers.

gutters wishfully asserted, “In the new settlement, the old practices won’t continue” (*Purani riti nayi basti mein nahi chalegi*) (Fieldnotes, 4/15/10). The validity of this Ambedkarite thesis—that modernization will break the caste system—while require more time to be adequately assessed. While it seems plausible that urbanization will dilute some of the symbolic forms of caste domination in Rajpura, this has to be complicated by the continuance of old forms of caste domination (like that against the Bavariyas) and the remarkable ability of the upper castes to monopolize most of the benefits emerging from the new economy.

Finally, cutting across all the categories of families, is the exclusion of women. While women clearly had a burdensome role in the gendered division of labor in agriculture, this has been replaced with total exclusion from the real estate economy. Selling and brokering land falls in the male domain and even when a widow has land in her name, she typically sits on the floor while male relatives negotiate over the sale. While women often retained some control over earnings from animal husbandry, they now have much less control over real estate earnings—which are often spent in predictable ways. While they did not understate the previous degree of alcoholism and domestic abuse in the villages, many women told me that it had increased as men had no work but had an unprecedented amount of cash in their pockets. Sitting with a group of eight women, Ganga Devi Nayak observed, “It was less before. Before they were doing work. Now, if they make Rs. 100 it’s only with a fight that they give Rs. 50” (Fieldnotes, 4/5/10). While men engaged land markets and spent money, women’s domestic reproductive work increased as they had to go farther afield to obtain fuel and fodder. While women in dispossessed families were in one sense liberated from difficult agricultural work, most did not rejoice in this liberation but deeply felt the loss of grain and dairy products that fed their families, and repeatedly complained that they were rendered “unemployed” (*berozghar*). Thus Anita, a Brahmin woman in her twenties, observed, “There is both loss and benefit. We’ve gotten some rest, but it’s a bigger loss. We used to get grain, fodder, everything else from the fields” (Fieldnotes, 2/16/10). However, women in poor lower caste families did not receive any rest. While the men of newly wealthy families withdrew women from the labor force to increase their own status, in the impoverished families, household dependency on female wage labor often increased. With men like Mahesh trying unsuccessfully to become rentiers, their families increasingly relied on female labor in NREGA or in private construction work. I sadly observed one neighbor who stayed at home drinking while his wife did wage labor, beating her in the evenings to appropriate her wages for more booze.

As with caste, economic “modernization” has not undermined but reconstituted gender domination. Without land titles, women are excluded from the real estate economy, as men make the decisions about whether to sell land and how to spend its proceeds. Unfortunately, this does often happen in stereotypical ways, feeding alcoholism and domestic abuse. Meanwhile, this exclusion from the real estate economy is accompanied by increased reproductive work for most women, but class inflected consequences for women’s waged work. While women in wealthy families are withdrawn from the labor market, women in poor houses are in many cases picking up the slack for unemployed and depressed men. How things might have turned out differently if land titles rested in the hands of women is an interesting counterfactual to ponder.

## CONCLUSION: DISPOSSESSION WITHOUT DEVELOPMENT

This chapter has examined the process of agrarian social change generated by SEZ-induced real estate speculation and its developmental implications for several Rajasthani villages. While the previous chapter juxtaposed the real estate and IT accumulation taking place

inside the SEZ with the immediate fallout of disaccumulation and labor marginalization for the dispossessed, this chapter has focused on the explosive effects of land commodification outside of the SEZ's gates. Although the SEZ destroyed productive agrarian assets and only minimally absorbed local labor, its incidental byproduct was a dramatic land boom that brought a torrent of domestic and global finance capital into the surrounding villages. Rather than simply being thrown off the land with below-market compensation, as has been the typical lot of dispossessed farmers in India, local farmers were given a small stake in this land boom by the Rajasthan government's compensation scheme. This makes the MWC an anomalous but ideal case to assess the developmental consequences of a Special Economic Zone: it probably represents the best possible outcome for dispossessed farmers. Now that the dust has settled on this fantastic land boom, how should we evaluate the SEZ's claim to bring "development" to this region of rural Rajasthan?

The starting point might be to recognize that real estate is a flimsy basis for broad and inclusive economic transformation. Aside from the fact that it is by nature speculative and is (increasingly) vulnerable to swings in global financial markets, the distribution of land is almost everywhere unequal in ways that reflect arbitrary historical legacies. Its unequal distribution is, moreover, the basis for other inequalities—such those in cultural and social capital—that shape the ability of farmers to profit from land markets. I have shown how these agrarian inequalities, which correspond tightly with caste, have shaped the ability of farmers in Rajpura to profit from the land commodification generated by the Mahindra World City. While a certain measure of contingency is inherent to speculative processes, which, in turn, introduces some fluidity into economic trajectories, in the aggregate, it is the upper castes who have let their plots appreciate, sold at higher prices, and become brokers. The lower castes, faced with economic compulsion and operating with lesser education and market savvy, have liquidated their assets relatively quickly and cheaply, more often cheated by brokers than becoming them. Overall, the distribution of income from land sales corresponds closely with the semi-feudal caste hierarchies of the pre-existing agrarian structure.

The second problem with a real estate driven process of economic change is that it does not create the kinds of productive economic linkages that provide avenues in which land money can be reinvested. In the absence of a productive transformation of the local/regional economy, real estate earnings have been recycled into what Marx would call antediluvian forms of capital: land rent, merchant's capital, and usurer's capital. If dams and steel towns unleashed a productive transformation of their surroundings (with dams only in their command area), which the dispossessed could have theoretically been included in (though most often they were not), I have shown how the SEZ has instead triggered a process of economic involution. Paradoxically, the entry of the most advanced sectors of India's "new economy" into rural Rajasthan has led to an expansion of rent-in-kind sharecropping, petty mercantile activities, and money-lending (while also, I should add seriously ratcheting up dowry levels). After removing the productive assets of the agrarian economy, the SEZ breathed new life to its rentier and mercantile elements—while adding new forms of rentiership into the mix. The impact of the SEZ on the surrounding economy was perhaps best summed up by the government official in charge of the local sub-district, headquartered in the nearby town of Sanganer, famous for its block-printed textiles. When I asked him what the region's main industry was before and after the SEZ, his response was, "It was printing, and still is printing. The SEZ hasn't made any difference... Besides the artificial property boom, nothing has changed" (Fieldnotes, 2/23/10). Rather than



dispossession serving a form of broad-based economic transformation, it has created a narrow island of high-end real estate and services, surrounded by a sea of speculation and involution.

This has created a rather novel form of class differentiation based on people's uneven ability to transform their uneven returns from land speculation into niches in this involutory informal economy. It is the upper castes who have disproportionately become the neo-rentiers and the lower-castes who have been further proletarianized and impoverished, cheated by brokers and caught in involutory webs of exploitation that channel rent, interest, and earnings upwards. When we compare it to the fairly uniform proletarianization of those dispossessed for dam projects, the absorption of the dispossessed into the process of real estate speculation has produced a much more differentiated outcome. What we observe is a rather novel recomposition of the agrarian social structure as people have striven with uneven ability to tap into speculative land rents and recycle them into rent, mercantile profits, and usury. Rather than simply impoverishing everyone (as in many historical cases of dispossession) or polarizing the class structure (as has sometimes happened with the commercialization of agriculture), we have instead an explosion of pre-existing inequalities into a complex pattern of stratification that is no longer principally organized around agriculture.

While the outcome may be novel, it is still developmentally pathological. While it has allowed some farmers to become unimaginably wealthy, the SEZ has impoverished the majority. Moreover, it has particularly impoverished the already poor. That half of all farmers and three quarters of the lower castes report having less food after the SEZ's arrival is a damning indictment of the project's claim to serve development or the "public good." If the slippery but difficult to discard notion of development contains any component of fairness or assigns any priority to improving the lives of the poorest, then the SEZ has been an abject developmental failure. The further immiseration of the already poor low-caste semi-proletariat, such as Nathuram and the entire Raegar *mohallah*, the expulsion and exclusion of the landless Bavariya hamlet, and the gendered effects of dispossession and land speculation on women, are not consonant with any notion of development except a narrow doctrine of "growth at all costs." If one is to give any consideration to class, gender or caste equality, then we can characterize the outcome of the SEZ for these Rajasthani villages as "dispossession without development." We might add that the idea that this is a necessary stage on the road to some more productive society that can be socialized at a later date appears to be little more than wishful thinking with no grounding in immanent political economic trajectories. What dispossession for SEZs signifies is not the transition to a higher "mode of production," but more simply the emergence of a new regime of dispossessing and redistributing wealth upwards.

As we saw in Chapter 3, dams and industrial projects under the developmentalist regime of dispossession also impoverished the dispossessed, perhaps more uniformly than the case we have just examined. They disproportionately targeted *adivasis* who live in the remote natural resource-rich areas targeted by dams, mines and many heavy industries. Their costs were also disproportionately born by women. Is there any difference, then, between the developmental outcomes of dispossession under each regimes? At the risk of making the previous era appear better than it was, I maintain that there is an important distinction that remains quite consequential for the contemporary politics of dispossession in India. While under both regimes the dispossessed were impoverished so that other (typically better off) classes could reap the disproportionate rewards of the resulting accumulation, there are nevertheless important differences. The first is this: while many have persuasively critiqued the social and economic soundness of dams and other development projects of the modernizing state, such projects

promised, and to some extent delivered, productive transformations of the country's economic base whose benefits were *relatively* widespread. Hundreds of thousands of farmers received irrigation from India's dams, while hundreds of thousands of more received employment in India's public sector steel towns. This is not to say that these projects were necessary, that they were effectively implemented, nor, most importantly, that these justified the brutal pauperization of the dispossessed. It is to say, however, that compared to today's SEZs, they did deliver to many more non-elite people something that resembled their conception of development. This takes on significance in comparison to today's SEZs, which, if anything, reflect an abandonment of the project of broad-based economic transformation and a retreat into elite enclaves in which a "knowledge economy" and real estate profiteering can proceed without the hindrance of the rest of the country. While dams and steel towns provided fairly broad benefits, in which the dispossessed could have been theoretically included if there had been the political will, SEZs like the Mahindra World City have comparatively little to offer the nearly 70% of India's who live in rural areas. The "public purpose" in all this is more elusive than ever.

Whatever conclusions the analyst might draw about the "costs" and "benefits" of dispossessing farmers for SEZs and similar projects, more consequential is the conclusions that farmers themselves are drawing. Without putting the results of this analysis retrospectively into the heads of farmers, it does appear that farmers are reaching their own conclusions about their prospects in this "new" economy. Notwithstanding the exhortations of economists and policymakers that they give up their land for higher-value land uses, from a micro-economic perspective, the reluctance of farmers to do so appears less emotional than eminently reasonable. Given the non-inclusive growth proposed for their land, it is undoubtedly preferable for any farmer—even the semi-proletarianized cultivators of single-cropped land—to keep their few *bighas* of land and livestock rather than surrender it to capitalists. While the inhabitants of Rajpura were enticed off their land through the mechanisms described in Chapter 4, the Indian government has not been so successful elsewhere. The question, to which we now turn, is whether Indian states will be able to nevertheless replicate the kind of real estate-based compliance achieved in Rajpura, and thus diffuse the now endemic challenges to the neoliberal regime of dispossession.

#### CODA: SELF-HELP GROUPS TO THE RESCUE?

*"They reduce the Man to want, then give with pomp and ceremony" William Blake (1915: 58).*

Having taken their means of production and subsistence and offered them little in the way of employment, as a good corporate citizen the Mahindra World City wanted to give back to the local community. We saw in Chapter 4 how one form of this, vocational training, failed to bridge the gulf between the local population and the regular jobs available inside the SEZ. However, this did not exhaust MWC's "corporate social responsibility." Through NGO intermediaries, it introduced self-help groups with the purpose of promoting "self-sufficiency" among the local women. While it is perhaps too easy to point out the absurdity of that ambition after having just removed the most significant means through which "self-sufficiency" might be achieved, I will nevertheless take a moment to do so. The lesson is all the more important given that Mahindra, in the world of corporate cupidity, is no Reliance: it maintains an image of greater social responsibility and its managers appeared, from what I could tell, earnest in their intentions.

Mahindra had brought in two representatives from a government-sponsored institute to promote "entrepreneurship" and "technological business incubation" in the villages. Their efforts to transform the young men of Rajpura into technology entrepreneurs quickly failed, and

collapsed into “training” them to become security guards. Undeterred, the two men from Uttar Pradesh, also members of a large Hindu spiritual and social work organization (the *Akhil Vishwa Gayatri Parivar*), proceeded at the behest of Mahindra to organize self-help groups among the women (it was unclear under which capacity). This had two components: training women to make soap, sew and become beauticians; and helping them pool savings into a collective account from which they could take small business loans (micro-credit). The women had to pay Rs. 600 (\$12) for the training, and make an initial deposit of Rs. 50 to start the credit fund from which they could borrow at 2% percent monthly interest. The two self-help groups, one organized in the Balai (Dalit) *mohallah* where I stayed, were inaugurated with much fanfare. First, at a “graduation” for the security guards, several women were trotted onto a temporary village stage to recite what they had learned and how much money they had saved to the assembled Mahindra executives and other VIPs who had arrived late in their SUVs. One woman said, “Fifty rupees.” Seemingly heartened by this accomplishment, the organizers announced that the company would be providing their group with a sewing machine. A string of speeches followed. The NGO organizer gushed about the companies Mahindra was bringing to the area. Though new to the area, he proclaimed, “The condition was that there was no development here before,” and concluded confidently that “local people will be included in the development.” The Mahindra executive confirmed, “We will do everything we can for these villages.” Young women handed bouquets of plastic flowers to the Mahindra executives amid clicking cameras, and the ceremony broke for *chai* and *samosas* as the VIPs filed back into the SUVs (Fieldnotes, 10/13/10).

The following day the house next door to Mahesh and Lada’s was abuzz with preparations for the arrival of Mahindra executives for an official inauguration of their group. They would be joined by a Mr. Agarwal, the owner of a Rajasthan-based textile company that was in the process of constructing a factory inside the SEZ. When I walked in, Sanjay, one of the male NGO organizers was busily instructing women on the remaining preparations and tutoring them on the names of the different executives, and in what order they should be given the *tika* (vermilion colored paste applied to the forehead to welcome guests). The women had prepared a big “welcome” sign on the ground with the colored sand used to make *rangolis* during Diwali. A chart on the wall read “Self-Help Group” in Hindi and listed the contributions of the women to the savings pool. The teenage daughter of the house, Meera, appeared to be the most enthusiastic of the group. Her father sat in a chair looking bemused; when I asked him what he made of it, he said, “No clue.” Sanjay was telling someone to go fetch water, then suddenly barked, “Stand up. They’re coming.” The SUVs had pulled up the narrow lane of the *mohallah*, and the same executives from the day before, with the addition of the textile industrialist, walked onto the verandah where *namastes* were given and *tikkas* applied. All filed into a modest concrete room where the men sat on plastic chairs and, with great confidence, issued forth on the condition of rural women in Rajasthan, as the women sat quietly on the floor. One of the Mahindra executives was speaking of the value of women having work they could do from home, when the impatient Mr. Agarwal, who had been occupying himself by talking on his cell phone, finally got to the point: what kind of machines had they learned to use? What kind of stitching could they do? The Mahindra executive explained that Mr. Agarwal’s company was exporting abroad, so the work had to be very good quality. The meeting concluded with Mahindra reiterating the promise of a sewing machine (Fieldnotes, 10/14/10).

Whether training the local women to become a sub-contracted workforce for the coming textile factory was the original motivation behind the self-help group or was a later tack-on remains unclear. If the factory ultimately does sub-contract piece-rate stitching through the self-

help groups, which had not happened before I left, a whole new set of research questions will arise. For now, I would simply like to observe the substantial disconnect between the promotional discourse of “development” and “self-help” proclaimed by NGO organizers and corporate sponsors and the understanding of the women themselves. This disconnect becomes clear as soon as the SUVs pull away. Pushpa, a middle aged mother who lives across the lane from Mahesh and Lada and who was officially part of the self-help group, asked me what it was all about. “We didn’t understand. We’re illiterate. All those who were sitting in there are educated.” I explained what I understood. She said, “I’m not going to sew. If I can’t sew, will I lose my money to the group?” She thought that the main benefit would be taking loans, which she could use to pay the wedding expenses of her daughter. I explained that the interest rate is 2%, the same as the moneylender, and it has to be paid off within 6 months. She said you can’t pay back a wedding loan in six months; her daughter’s wedding had cost Rs. 3.5 *lakh* (\$7,000). As for the training to become entrepreneurs, I asked Pushpa and Lada what benefit they got from their training as beauticians. Does anyone go to a beautician in the village, I asked? “No,” they said, but they used the course to apply “fairness cream” to each other. As for the other suggested routes to entrepreneurship, Lada very shrewdly cut to the point:

Tell me one thing: if all the women in the village are going to be selling clothes, then who will buy them? And then they told me that I should learn to make soap. But you can get soap in the store. Who will buy it from me? They say they will bring us work, but I don’t believe them. For how long? I’ll learn to sew, for my family. And to teach my daughter when she gets old. But someone [from the *mohallah*] can teach me, I won’t pay money.

She withdrew from the course after 18 days. She says the organizers told her she can still get the “certificate” if she pays the remaining money, but she asks sincerely, “How can I get a certificate? I didn’t learn to sew?”

While the women used the self-help group for their own purposes, only in the minds of its organizers did their participation represent “development.” It would not even have occurred to them that the “group” (*samuha*) compensated for their loss of land and livestock and everything that came from it, or even that these were in the same category of reality. Blake’s verse, with its gender modified, could not capture it better.

## Chapter 7. The Politics of Dispossession and the Future of India's Land Wars

### INTRODUCTION

Because accumulation is always hypothetical at the time of dispossession, the distribution of its benefits always takes the form of a promise. It was, consequently, hard for the residents of Rajpura to anticipate the ultimate consequences of surrendering their land to the Mahindra World City. Many now feel the outcome to be disastrous and we have just outlined the socially-differentiated dimensions of this disaster. In Chapter 4, we placed ourselves in the position of Rajpura's farmers at the time of the SEZ's arrival and saw how a mixture of fear, uncertainty, need, interest, and inadequate information at the bottom, along with savvy profiteering at the top, compelled farmers to comply with their dispossession. Such class-differentiated compliance was enabled by the Rajasthan government's market-based compensation model, which individualized people's relation to the project and thereby fractured their interests. Combined with the background condition of water-scarcity, this individualizing absorption into real estate markets allowed the village's pre-existing inequalities to undermine potential solidarity at the point of enclosure. The Rajasthan government was consequently able to establish one of North India's first and largest SEZs in Rajpura, without generating the type of land war seen elsewhere. The question remains: what lessons should be drawn from the case of Rajpura? In the context of widespread land wars across the subcontinent that have successfully stopped most large SEZs and show no sign of abating, should we consider Rajpura an anomaly or a prototype? Is the Rajasthan government's successful utilization of real estate markets to produce compliance in Rajpura a replicable model that signals an emerging class compromise? Or is this success limited to the particular conditions of Rajpura? This chapter places Rajpura in the broader comparative context of India's land wars to assess the political prospects of India's neoliberal regime of dispossession as a whole.

In brief, this chapter argues that the neoliberal regime of dispossession may prove capable of building a class compromise through real estate values among *some* farmers in *some* places and for certain kinds of projects. However, there are several significant obstacles to institutionalizing widespread material compliance to the neoliberal regime of dispossession. Some of these obstacles are generic to land dispossession as a social process; others have to do with the specific character of India's neoliberal regime of dispossession. Ultimately, these obstacles are substantial enough that it appears unlikely that India's neoliberal regime of dispossession will ever have the durability of its developmentalist predecessor. I conclude that land wars will continue to be an enduring and significantly disruptive force in Indian capitalism for the foreseeable future. After making this assessment of the *politics of dispossession* across India, we will return to a post-script on the *politics after dispossession* in Rajpura.

### A CLASS COMPROMISE?

*Can the Capitalists See Beyond Their Nose (And Can the State Make Them)?*

The first obstacle to putting the neoliberal regime of dispossession on a firmer basis of material compliance is the inability of private capitalists to agree on the need for concessions, and the questionable will and capacity of the Indian state to force them into a compromise. We saw in Chapter 3 that proliferating land wars across India have forced several state governments to increase their compensation policies to farmers: aside from Rajasthan, the most notable

examples are Uttar Pradesh and Haryana which were pressured into it by politically influential large farmers. Maharashtra has also adopted a policy similar to Rajasthan's for industrial projects, while West Bengal has also introduced more generous compensation policies after the Nandigram and Singur fallout. However, 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 investors who are going to other states (Interview, 2/21/11). Similarly, Mamata Banerjee, who came to office on the back of anti-dispossession struggles in Nandigram and Singur, has struggled as Chief Minister to convince industrialists that they can still do business in West Bengal. Meanwhile, several states, such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat appear to be relatively more successful at pushing land acquisition through with less generous compensation, although Andhra Pradesh has seen strong resistance to two SEZs. With states facing uneven political pressure to raise compensation and with footloose capital free to migrate to the cheapest land prices, national legislation to uniformly raise compensation rates is the only way to offset a race to the bottom.

Indeed, since the Nandigram carnage of 2007, the central government has been trying to pass amendments to the Land Acquisition Act that would significantly increase compensation (to a constantly shifting multiple of its assessed agricultural value) and put other resettlement and rehabilitation measures into place. The tradeoff is that the definition of "public purpose" justifying the use of forcible land acquisition would be expanded to the point of being indistinguishable from private interest, thus putting the neoliberal regime of dispossession on a firm legal basis. It attempts to reduce the legal recourse of farmers to bargaining over compensation and to shift the arena of bargaining from the courts to bureaucratic dispute procedures. Explicitly framed as a compromise between the needs of industry and the interests of farmers, the legislation intends to orchestrate a class compromise that would overcome endemic land wars and ensure a predictable supply of land for capital by giving farmers a larger stake in the accumulation generated by dispossession (Levien 2011b). It seeks, in other words, to ensure compliance to an ideologically tenuous neoliberal regime of dispossession by making material concessions in the rate of accumulation by dispossession. However, the inability of the Indian state to pass the legislation after six years and the diluted form in which it now appears likely to pass are object illustrations of Lukac's observation that individual capitalists cannot see beyond their own nose to recognize and act upon their long-term interests as a class.

While some industry associations have recognized the need to increase land prices in exchange for assuring predictable access to land, others are less ready to make concessions. In an interview, I asked an official from a major Indian industry association what they wanted from the amendments to the Land Acquisition Act. His answer was, "The main thing is that [our] members want to easily get the land without any hurdles.... This is the main concern. It is a law and order issue." When I asked whether this would require giving farmers high compensation, he responded, "As of now, we are not talking about any compensation amounts, we are just talking about how we can easily get the land" (Interview, 1/19/11). Others seem to recognize the need for higher prices, but want to make sure higher prices ensure that they will get predictable and timely access to the land. They fear that certain draft provisions—pushed by farmer's groups and

social movements—that require a certain percentage of landholders in an area to approve of any land acquisition for a private company will create unnecessary “bureaucratic hurdles.”<sup>77</sup>

With different industry organizations disagreeing on the need for more liberal compensation, and with certain sections of industry lobbying vigorously against the most robust provisions being advocated for by farmers’ organizations, it appears that India’s self-styled maverick Minister of Rural Development—who appears to want a more generous bill—has been cowered into submission. With Ramesh under heavy pressure from the neoliberal wing of the Congress party (Manmohan Singh and the Commerce and Finance Ministries) to appease industry at a time when concern is mounting over an economic slowdown and lagging infrastructural development, the latest redrafting of the bill left it significantly more business-friendly with several of its more liberal provisions watered down (Datta and Saikia 2012; Bhattacharya 2012). Various compensation measures (like guaranteed employment, shares in companies, or assigning farmers rent from projects) have been left optional, while the minimum compensation rates for land (pegged at six times the assessed rate in the previous draft) were left to states to determine. The latter not only fails to ensure a better deal for farmers, but entirely defeats the purpose of overcoming the race to the bottom produced by interstate competition. If passed in this less liberal form, it will decrease the likelihood that this legislation will be effective at quelling farmer opposition, to the detriment of the long-term interests of capitalists themselves. While individual capitalists may be successful at acquiring land in the less generous states, their access to entire regions of the country will be hampered (particularly damaging for site-bound projects), growth as a whole will slow and this will eventually effect everyone’s profitability. The Indian state does not appear capable of acting autonomously enough to cement a class compromise that might give it a degree of insulation from popular anger while also looking out for the long-term interests of the capitalist class as a whole.

Let us suppose, however, that the capitalist class does get its act sufficiently together or that the Indian state, pushed by the liberal wing of the Congress party on the eve of elections, asserts some autonomy from this class and is able to impose legislation giving significantly higher material compensation to farmers. Even if this succeeds, there remain significant obstacles to institutionalizing such a class compromise around real estate values.

### *The Serial Nature of Dispossession and The Absence of Durable Negotiating Partners*

Another set of obstacles to the Indian state’s ability to orchestrate a class compromise between farmers and capital based on land values arises from the nature of dispossession as a social process and the way this shapes the political organization of anti-dispossession struggles. For several reasons, the very nature of dispossession makes establishing a class compromise between farmers and capitalists over the rate of accumulation by dispossession inherently more difficult than establishing one between labor and capital over the rate of exploitation.

First, unlike the exploitation of labor, the dispossession of land is a series of singular and momentous events rather than a daily mundane process. What this means is that dispossession (usually) occurs only once for any particular farmer; for each new instance of dispossession, bargaining has to begin afresh with new individuals. While capitalists might establish relatively enduring contracts that persist beyond the entry and exit of particular workers, each instance of dispossession requires absorbing new individuals into the compromise. This is somewhat

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<sup>77</sup> These grievances were outlined in a *Hindu Business Line* article entitled, “India Inc. Feels Land Bill is ‘Unfair’” (The Hindu 2012).

equivalent to a capitalist having to negotiate a new contract with each worker that walks in the door.

Except that the decision over whether to give up your land at a given price is much more consequential than the decision of whether to sell your labor at a certain price. This raises the second issue that makes establishing a class compromise around land more difficult than labor: land is an incredibly valuable and zero-sum asset. Because dispossession entails the expropriation of not just surpluses but means of production or subsistence themselves, the stakes of dispossession politics are greater. While exploitation allows for ongoing, incremental struggles over the distribution of surplus, which can take “everyday” forms, dispossession politics entails a one time struggle over the distribution of assets. This makes it much more difficult to negotiate with farmers over dispossession than workers over exploitation.

Thirdly, this difficulty of repeated negotiations with new individuals over what is for each a momentous decision is compounded by the distinctive political organization of anti-dispossession struggles. Whereas labor unions have in most parts of the world become relatively stable and enduring organizations with institutionalized relations to the state, anti-dispossession struggles are typically organized in ad-hoc, autonomous and often transient organizations that makes it impossible for states to forge long-term relations (analogous to those with unions) that would facilitate stable compromises. We need to understand why this is the case.

When one or multiple villages suddenly 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. Furthermore, because dispossession cuts across other forms of political cleavage, the potentially dispossessed will usually belong to more than one political party. In India, none of the mainstream parties in India, including the Left, has anyway ever seriously opposed “development-induced displacement.” Because of this historic neglect, the movements that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to resist dams, mines and forest enclosures did so as “autonomous” people’s movements and developed a strong skepticism towards electoral politics (Kothari 1984; Omvedt 1993). While dispossession is now for the first time becoming an electorally salient issue in India, 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.” The main exception to this is the Maoists who are channeling anti-dispossession sentiment into a revolutionary army that aims to over-throw the Indian state—hardly more ideal negotiation partners. In sum, while anti-dispossession movements are sometimes criticized from the left for their localism and lack of organization, it is precisely these qualities that make them relatively difficult to co-opt—and thus dangerously disruptive for capitalism.

For all the above reasons, which derive from the specificity of dispossession as a social process, there are reasons to be less than sanguine about the ability of Indian states to replicate the compliance achieved in Rajpura with a high degree of probability. The need to repeatedly negotiate with new individuals and their informal organizations multiplies the likelihood of opposition and greatly decreases the predictability of compliance. While the Rajasthan state had the benefit of dispossessing land in an area with a thin history of peasant political agitation or civil society organization of any kind, which allowed it to diffuse resistance before it even could begin, we have seen elsewhere in India that resistance has emerged at the mere announcement of projects. The struggle by forest cultivators against the Korean POSCO Steel Project in



Jagatsinghpur began on the very day the Orissan government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the company; the movement in Nandigram, West Bengal, against a petrochemical SEZ began at the mere report of the proposed project in the newspapers; and the agitation against the Tata Nano car factory in Singur, West Bengal, began when government and Tata Motors officials paid a surprise visit to the villages (Banerjee 2006). Once these informal organizations arise to press their claims, they will not be so easy to buy off. At least it will take for each instance of dispossession repeated and painstaking work that cannot rely on enduring pacts with their representatives. There remains, moreover, an even more fundamental obstacle to buying compliance with real estate values.

### *Barricades and Bargains*

Most significantly, the idea of utilizing the exchange value of land to build a class compromise between capital and farmers assumes what needs to be explained, which is how farmers come to value their land at its exchange value in the first place. As Polanyi reminds us, land is a fictitious commodity in the sense that is valued in multiple ways that are not easily reducible to its exchange value. While some romantics appear to believe that Indian peasants are always primordially attached to their land (Shiva et al 2001) and some overly hasty skeptics suggest that they are mostly just waiting for a good price (Chatterjee 2008), if we survey the land wars that have proliferated across India in recent years what we actually see 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 their lifeworld. These valuations are also not independent of how farmers with different endowments of economic, cultural and social capital weigh their concrete options outside of agriculture, as we will see shortly. However, we can make a preliminary but fundamental distinction between two broad categories of resisters: those who are fighting for higher compensation and those who refuse to give their land at any price.

Many farmers' struggles on the peripheries of expanding cities are, no matter how tactically aggressive, actually just bargaining over prices. Outside of Delhi, for instance, the farmer agitations over privatized expressway projects and peri-urban development have mostly focused on the large differentials between compensation prices and current market values—i.e. the rate of accumulation by dispossession. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Greater Noida Development Authority, now a notorious land grab agency, has been acquiring massive amounts of land at rock bottom prices and reselling it to private developers at forty times that value (while the developers themselves re-sell it by the square meter at even higher rates). While farmers there have been fighting militantly and even violently, their goal is limited: to get the market price of the land. They have been supported by the powerful farmer's organization, the *Bharitya Kisan Union* (India Farmer's Union or 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 agitations in Greater Noida and a violent standoff in Bhatta Parsaul, then Chief Minister Mayawati subsequently invited BKU representatives to talks on a new land acquisition policy. After being wined and dined and chauffeured around Lucknow on air conditioned buses (United News India 2011), the BKU announced their support for Mayawati's new policy (Rawat 2011), 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 (Khan 2011). Significant sections of farmers on the peri-

urban plains appear, like the farmers of Rajpura, amenable a class compromise on the terrain of commodification.

However, while analysts like Partha Chatterjee (2008) want to collapse all of dispossession politics into a negotiation over its terms, there is a second category of anti-dispossession movement that appears entirely uninterested in compensation. 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 *adivasi* from the Dongaria Kondh tribe 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” (Samadrasti n.d.).<sup>78</sup> In Gorai, Maharashtra, fisherman and farmers are still refusing to give their island for a tourist SEZ, unmoved by an enhanced compensation package (Fieldnotes, 11/26/09). 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” (Interview, 11/26/09). 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” (Fieldnotes, 12/19/10). 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, of course, is what factors make different groups of farmers more or less willing to compromise with dispossession. I will simply suggest some variables that, though difficult to separate, are clearly at work in many cases. First, there is the inescapable observation that many of the more militant, non-compromising movements are emerging from *adivasi* areas in more remote and often mountainous areas, while the compromising movements are more common among non-*adivasi* farmers in the plains and near cities. That does not necessarily imply that *adivasis* are primordially attached to their landscapes; this distinction collapses several potentially important variables. The first is that the astronomically hot real estate markets that can align the interests of agriculturalists with capitalists through higher compensation are absent in the more remote areas inhabited by *adivasis*, who are more often displaced for dams and mining projects than SEZs, IT parks, or housing colonies. The second factor is the even greater mismatch between the skills and education of *adivasis* and the type of employment that extractive-industrial projects 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 (Bavskar 1995: 88-91). 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 (Sundar

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<sup>78</sup> 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” (Government of India 2010: 39, 34).

2007).<sup>79</sup> The connections between such long histories of *adivasi* resistance and contemporary anti-dispossession politics have been amply documented by Baviskar (1995: 49-84) in the case of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and by Sundar (2007: 249) for movements fighting dispossession in Chattisgarh. 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 (Fieldnotes, 12/19/09). If one were to accept Scott's (2009) view of "hill peoples as state-repelling . . . or even antistate societies," 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 (Sen 1979: 450), 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 (Peoples' Tribunal 2007: 6). 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 (Fieldnotes, 11/14/10). 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. On the basis of these 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. So while economists and policy makers are trying to calculate the minimum price at which farmers will forego resistance (Ghatak and Mookherjee 2013), this assumes what needs to be explained, which is the

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<sup>79</sup> Sundar (2007: 249) in particular emphasizes the significance of "popular memories" of resistance. For other accounts of *adivasi* resistance, see Hardiman (1987), Baviskar (1995), Sivaramakrishnan (1999), and Guha (1999).

willingness of rural agriculturalists to relate to their land as a commodity. Just as a class compromise can only be built with workers once they have accepted the principle of exchanging their labor for a wage, a class compromise around land dispossession requires that farmers accept the principle of exchanging their land for a price. Whether all farmers have their price remains to be seen; what is clear is that India's land wars provide numerous examples of farmers refusing to relinquish their land even when offered significant sums of money. So long as they refuse to treat their land at its exchange value, they cannot be brought into a class compromise over the rate of accumulation by dispossession. Until and unless such non-market orientations to land are significantly unhinged, which at present seems remote, it is unlikely that states will be able to institutionalize material compliance to dispossession among a large swath of rural agriculturalists.

### *Neoliberal Growth and the Semi-Proletarian Condition*

The final obstacle to the Indian state's ability to pacify anti-dispossession struggles with land values arises specifically from the neoliberal regime of dispossession: namely, the large developmental contradictions of the neoliberal growth model itself. The previous two chapters illustrate, above all, the tremendous gulf between the accumulation driving dispossession in India today and the two-thirds of the population that live in rural areas. We have seen that the non-labor intensive and real estate driven growth that characterizes India's SEZs—and India's growth model as a whole—has little to offer most farmers aside from land values. If the Nehruvian state dispossessed land for economic purposes that farmers could at least be *theoretically* included in—irrigated agriculture and public sector industrialization—the neoliberal regime of dispossession does not even offer this possibility. India's much heralded "knowledge economy," as we have seen, is hardly capable of absorbing the labor of those dispossessed for it. To the extent that it does absorb rural labor, it is invariably in temporary sub-contracted jobs that, as we have seen in Rajpura, do not even provide the equivalent income of two buffalo. In the absence of more significant absorption into this "new economy," farmers are left with little but land prices and their unequal chances at transforming that money into a niche in India's informal economy. While economists justify forcible land acquisition by the macro-level efficiency of transferring land from agriculture to "higher value" land uses, what they fail to understand is the micro-level rationality that is behind farmer's opposition to this transfer.

In this sense, the currently polarized arguments about land dispossession and the fate of rural India miss the point. On the one hand, the romantic vision of peasants living in harmony with "mother earth" with no desire to enter a commercial industrial economy (e.g. Shiva et al 2011) is clearly false. On the other side is the equally simplistic disenchanted view that all farmers, and especially their children, are more than happy to leave a moribund agriculture for urban pursuits (Gupta 2009; Bardhan 2011). In defense of the necessity of acquiring land for industry, Pranab Bardhan, for example, cites surveys showing that "the overwhelming majority of farmers children want to leave agriculture" (2011, 56). The question, however, is clearly *not* what farmers and their children would like to do in theory—if asked on a survey, most would surely state that they prefer being a millionaire than a cultivator. The real question, however, is what choices they would make with their land *given the other options available to them*. In a situation where the trajectory of economic growth is not creating sufficiently remunerative opportunities for people like them, then even the semi-proletariat condition is immensely preferable to the proletarian one. We have seen in Rajpura how keeping even a few *bighas* of single-cropped land to ensure household reproduction while making forays into irregular and

low-paying labor markets is highly preferable to being a landless wage-laborer. We have also seen that many youths themselves hold this view, even though they are trying to find a foothold in the urban economy. The results of this study clearly show the easy slide into greater poverty and food insecurity when land is removed from the diversified livelihood strategies of the poor semi-proletariat, even when compensated at higher levels than normal.

While we can not retroactively insert the results of dispossession in Rajpura into the heads of farmers facing the prospect of dispossession elsewhere, there is reason to believe that in many instances farmers themselves quite shrewdly perceive that this economic model has little to offer them. As we have seen, many of the hot-spots of land conflict today, from Nandigram to POSCO, are places where farmers' stances have been hardened by a previously disappointing experience with land-consuming industrialization. While some of these prior experiences were with projects of the Nehruvian era, examples like that of Rajpura will only multiply and serve as a demonstration effect for more and more farmers as time goes on.

So while the Indian peasantry is being chastised in some quarters for its "emotional attachments" to the land, we have seen that their reluctance might also reflect a very sober assessment of the consequences of forfeiting land in the current political economy of India. The point of enclosure is a condensation point where the disjunctures and inequalities of an economic model emerge with great clarity, forcing farmers to explicitly evaluate their chances in a new economic milieu. While one could imagine a less disarticulated pattern of economic growth in which the slots being created by accumulation were within greater reach of those being dispossessed for it, there is in India today a gaping chasm between the character of growth and the social position of its still vast rural population. Without attractive exit options from agriculture, for many farmers keeping their few *bighas* of land and buffalo will continue to seem like a much better option than handing it to capital. Whether or not high land prices can compensate for their structural marginalization from the neoliberal growth model remains to be seen, and, moreover, depends on the continued existence of a booming land market. What is clear, however, is that the ability of India's neoliberal regime to produce compliance to dispossession is handicapped by the type of accumulation it seeks to make possible.

## COERCION AND ITS LIMITS

If the neoliberal regime is short on legitimacy and faces several obstacles to building compliance on a material basis, there remains the time-honored route of intimidation and violence. Undoubtedly, the neoliberal regime of dispossession has, like its predecessor, relied significantly on brutal state violence. When farmers refuse to succumb to concessions or intimidation, the violent force lurking behind dispossession—what Marx called the "blood and fire" of primitive accumulation<sup>80</sup>—comes into the open as the state attempts to violently separate them 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 gruesome: 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. If we also consider the staggering counter-insurgency violence—including

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<sup>80</sup> Writing of the enclosure of the English peasantry, Marx writes, "And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (1977: 875).

through “popular” militias like the *Salwa Judum*—being directed against the Maoist insurgency, which is itself being fuelled by land grabs for mining and industry in East-Central India, then the scale of the violence appears immense. While it is hard to quantify violence, to which the developmentalist regime of dispossession was no stranger, it does appear that the Indian state has responded against the proliferating opposition to its brazen corporate land grabs with a greater scale and degree of violence than anything we have seen in the past. This has led more than one commentator to link India’s increasingly predatory economic model to its increasingly authoritarian democracy (Srivastava and Kothari 2012; Roy 2009).

What does seem clear, however, is that it is increasingly difficult to be successful at dispossession through brute coercion. First of all, it is more difficult to hide this violence than in the past. The spread of media and the relentless work of civil society groups are making it increasingly difficult for the state to inflict violence on remote rural people without a larger public at least noticing. To be sure, it is still far easier to get away with it in the remote forested areas of central India than in the peri-urban plains of Delhi—and it continues with despicable frequency in Kashmir, in the Northeast, and in the “Naxal belt” of central India, whether its victims are actually Naxalites or not. But when we consider that much of the violence of the early developmentalist regime has probably vanished without even adequate documentation, it is clear that the state’s ability to hide its violence is diminishing. Where anti-dispossession struggles have in recent years succeeded in attracting significant outside attention, it has often prevented the massive use of violence to definitively break their blockades. The determined opposition to the POSCO Steel Plant in Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, is a good illustration: while the local villagers have suffered repeated violent attacks, they have managed to maintain the blockade of their villages for eight years now. Every time the police amass outside their gates, they form a human chain and defend their bamboo fences. The large network of supporters the movement has attracted has undoubtedly helped to prevent the all-out military assault that would be necessary to remove them.

Second, it is increasingly difficult to legitimize this violence with appeals to national progress. When land is being grabbed for private companies—some of them foreign—for purposes that are not as convincingly in the public interest as government dams and steel towns, it is much harder to justify state coercion. Aside from the sheer brutality of the attacks, this undoubtedly played some unquantifiable role in the outrage generated by Nandigram, where the state was attacking poor farmers to grab their land for a foreign company. Not only does the neoliberal regime’s lack of legitimacy make it rely more on violence, but that lack of legitimacy makes it harder to legitimize the violence itself.

Finally, what the Maoist insurgency above all shows is how this state violence can backfire on a massive scale. The accelerating dispossession for mining and natural-resource based industries in India’s mineral-rich forest areas, combined with the state’s heavy-handed response to any opposition, is now clearly one of the major contributing causes to the burgeoning Maoist insurgency that currently controls large swaths of territory from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal (Sundar 2006, 2007).<sup>81</sup> Described by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as “India’s largest internal security threat,” Indian Maoism has, in practice, evolved from being an insurrection

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<sup>81</sup> 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” (Roy: 2010).

against the grinding exploitation of semi-feudalism into also being a counter-movement against the dispossessions of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>82</sup> Aside from embroiling the state in a civil war, the Maoists have significantly impeded the state's ability to extract natural resources and build industry in its most-mineral rich regions. By taking large swaths of territory out of the effective control of the Indian state—establishing so-called “liberated zones” or the “red corridor”—the Maoists have placed geographic limits on the state's ability to dispossess and capital's ability to safely accumulate. Recognizing the political limits of a purely coercive response, and thus the necessity of material concessions in the land acquisition bill, Jairam Ramesh frankly observed, “Land acquisition could acquire Naxalist overtones if not properly dealt with” (Deccan Herald 2011).

This is not to say that state violence against rural people who refuse to be dispossessed will cease any time soon. The most likely scenario is that the Indian state will fumble towards a class compromise with more politically influential farmers in the plains, and continue to use substantial force against marginalized *adivasis* in remote areas. However, it is far from clear that the sum total will be anything resembling a stable regime of dispossession.

#### CONCLUSION: LAND WARS AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF INDIAN CAPITALISM

The Indian state finds itself caught between the land requirements of its neoliberal growth model and the exigencies of electoral democracy. Trying to push forward a model of economic growth that requires farmers' land but not their labor—and that otherwise has little to offer them—it is caught in an unexpected bind. While rural people have often been considered impediments to economic modernization, they are turning out to be so in an unexpected way and with an unexpected degree of leverage. The crux of the matter is that India's vast rural population, the second largest in the world, controls the land that is needed in ever greater quantities for the country's neoliberal growth model. Whereas in the period of post-colonial developmentalism the Nehruvian state was able to mobilize its substantial legitimacy to help transfer land from peasants to public sector projects, the neoliberal regime lacks the normative power to compel farmers to “sacrifice for the nation.” Its remaining hope, aside from increasingly illegitimate and counterproductive violence, is in the unprecedented real estate values that dispossession is being used to manufacture and capture. We have seen in Rajpura how absorption into real estate markets can be incredibly effective at undermining resistance, at least in the particular conditions of a water-scarce region, with large social inequalities and little history of peasant militancy. There surely will be more Rajpuras. However, this chapter has also illustrated the substantial obstacles that exist to building a formidable and reliable class compromise around land values. The first obstacle lies in the inability of India's capitalist class to recognize its own interests in concessions and in the incapacity of the Indian state to achieve enough autonomy from that class to impose those concessions. The second obstacle is the generic difficulty of negotiating compliance to dispossession: not only is each negotiation very high stakes for the farmers involved, but each and every negotiation involves new farmers. When farmers do form organizations, they are typically localized and ephemeral, making enduring co-optation difficult or meaningless. There is little chance of relying on long-term relationships with representative organizations (like unions) to tame rank-and-file militancy. Third, building a class compromise based on real estate values presumes away the main issue: namely, how to get farmers to value their land at its exchange value in the first place. India's land wars show that

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<sup>82</sup> 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” (2012: 222).

although there are significant sections of farmers (predominantly in the plains and near cities) who might be willing to negotiate, there remain substantial sections that refuse to engage in negotiations on the terrain of commodification. Their non-commodified orientations to land are ultimately the largest obstacle to any attempt to rescue the neoliberal regime of dispossession by substituting land prices for legitimacy.

The upshot is that farmers are making themselves the most significant obstacle to capitalist growth (or at least its neoliberal variant) in India, and will probably continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Across India, from Nandigram, West Bengal to Raigad, Maharashtra, they have effectively stopped most of the largest SEZs from being built. In Orissa, forest cultivators are using bamboo barricades to hold up India's largest proposed Foreign Direct Investment to date. The opposition is not, however, limited to a few dozen high-profile movements. By one estimate, capital investment projects worth Rs. 2.7 trillion (\$54 billion) were stalled in the 2011-2012 fiscal year, mostly due to uncertainties in land availability (CMIE 2012). Aside from high-profile "people's movements," land acquisition in India is now beset with more prosaic but simply endemic legal challenges. A constant refrain in my interviews with officials at industrial development corporations and urban development authorities in seven states is that they are all besieged by numerous small cases (like the Seini's) in almost every project they undertake, leading to chronic delays. A hypothesis worth exploring is that the sum total of these small legal challenges is a greater collective nuisance to the machinery of accumulation by dispossession than the smaller number of well-organized political movements. Then, of course, there is the Maoist insurgency, India's "largest internal security threat," which limits the ability of the Indian state to resolve the problem through brute force and thus risk pushing even larger sections of India's rural population down the path of revolutionary class war.

If the neoliberal regime of dispossession is likely to remain politically tenuous, then what comes after it? Will the Indian state persist in trying to rescue it through a combination of material concessions to the bargainers, and increasingly ineffective violence against the barricaders? If so, the likely consequence is pockets of pacification surrounded by continued "land wars" that will generate significant disruptions to capital, while increasing the political alienation of rural people from the Indian state, its anti-poor growth model, and the affluent classes it benefits. The latter will retreat into guarded enclaves to shield themselves from popular anger while the Maoist insurgency metastasizes into an even more intractable civil war. Such a prolonged "muddling through" will be optimal for no one, but is probably the most likely scenario. Another scenario, however, is that this political alienation, already being seized upon by opposition parties, actually propels a more populist political coalition into power that, although still wedded to a neoliberal growth model, will limit the state's willingness to dispossess peasants for private capital (or at least its finance/real estate fractions), and re-instate something closer to the developmentalist regime of dispossession. Limiting dispossession to state infrastructure projects is, however, inconsistent with the two decades long-thrust of attracting private capital into industry, infrastructure, and real estate. Additionally, there remains the enduring fact that there is limited space on the Indian subcontinent outside of farmers' fields to put all this stuff. Such an effort to pursue a neoliberal growth model without being able to provide the land for it would probably collapse under its own economic contradictions, if not a revanchist political assault from capital. A third possibility, perhaps lead by a revitalized left with a reconstructed position on the necessity of "primitive accumulation," is a wholesale withdrawal from the neoliberal growth model itself and a reorientation of development efforts towards improving dry-land agriculture, fostering labor-absorbing rural industrialization, and



investing in rural education and social well-being. Even if such a program of “accumulation from below” still required some transfer of land from agriculture to other purposes, it is possible that over time the combination of more rural friendly economic growth, higher rural education, and more promising labor markets could blunt the pain and trauma of a more limited and selective use of the state’s power to dispossess. The semi-proletariat condition might become less existential, and the “land question” less contradictory. Perhaps the coercive arm of the state might even be put to use in achieving long overdue redistributive land reform. This path, however, entails a very radical reorientation of India’s political economy, one which seems remote at present given current political alignments and the sad (and disgraced) position of the CPI(M), the largest party of the traditional left. A final possibility is the realization of something more akin to the vision put forward by the National Alliance of People’s Movements. Instead of a transition to a new regime of dispossession, widespread unwillingness of rural people to surrender their land to either the state or capital puts an effective break on capitalist accumulation. While this triggers a massive accumulation crisis for Indian capitalism, rural communities de-link and forge alternative, democratically-managed economic systems in its place. The result is something the world has never seen before. Such a possibility is clearly remote, and probably not even that attractive without a prior leveling out of the agrarian class structure and some plan to prevent total economic collapse. However, it is worth mentioning, if for no other reason than it is the explicit goal of some of the most prominent movements fighting dispossession in India today.

These multiple possible trajectories out of the contradictions of the neoliberal regime of dispossession are of course highly speculative. This must be the case once we recognize that dispossession is not a tragic but inevitable stage in the progression of capitalism and that it has no necessary relationship to something called development. Once it loses its anchoring in a teleology, dispossession is simply a process through which those with means of coercion transfer means of production from one class to another. The purposes that motivate it, the means available for producing compliance to it, and the political and economic consequences that arise from it take historically and socially specific forms. We have called these regimes of dispossession. While there is nothing about India’s neoliberal regime of dispossession that points inexorably towards either a capitalist or socialist end of history, what is clear is that it has made the politics of dispossession a key contradiction of Indian capitalism. Struggles over its resolution will remain central to India’s political economy for the foreseeable future.

#### POSTSCRIPT: THE POLITICS AFTER DISPOSSESSION

In this last chapter, we broadened out from our corner of Rajasthan to consider the broader politics of dispossession in India. By politics of dispossession, we mean politics at the point of enclosure: political struggle over whether or not to give up land in the first place. But however widespread and unruly India’s land wars become, there will undoubtedly be many more Rajpuras where farmers, for a variety of reasons, do not prevent their dispossession. So what of the politics *after* dispossession? How have Rajpura’s residents responded to the inequality, involution and destitution that I described in Chapter 6?

As we saw in Chapter 4, a significant section of Rajpura hoped that they would benefit from the SEZ—whether from land values, employment, better infrastructure, or other forms of development that the SEZ promised to bring. And we saw that a significant minority of Rajpura did in fact do quite well in the real estate markets generated by the SEZ. As the years went by, however, grievances mounted and discontent grew as the promised “development” failed to

arrive. In the first place, the compensation plots had still not physically materialized with the promised electricity, roads, and water, much to the displeasure of those who had still not sold them. While money had been sanctioned for their construction, one Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) official admitted that there was “no political will” to finish the job, perhaps because the JDA wanted to use the money for other things and perhaps because the current Congress government led by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot was not that interested in the flagship project of its predecessor (Interview, 2/19/11). Not only was the JDA moving sluggishly, but it was even demanding that farmers pay expensive lease fees to take possession. Meanwhile, after surrendering their farm and grazing land to Mahindra, the majority were sitting in the village with less income and less food. To the disgruntlement of almost everyone, very few people were getting jobs in the SEZ, and most complained that they were going to “outsiders.” To add insult to injury, the village had seen almost no infrastructural improvements. While the Mahindra World City had 24 hour electricity, Rajpura still suffered from painful day-long blackouts. As my survey conducted in 2011 illustrated, a majority of people were objectively worse off than before—and subjectively they felt that to be the case.

These mounting grievances did lead to one briefly-lived attempt at collective action, albeit one that was limited in its aims and hardly grassroots. The former *thakur*'s grandson, Mahinder, and the heads of the few surrounding *panchayats* organized a briefly-lived *sangarsh samiti* (struggle committee) to protest against Mahindra and the JDA, demanding the speedy construction of their plots and the cancellation of the lease fees. Mahinder made no pretense that this was a grassroots uprising, explaining, “The *samiti* functions since I am coordinator. Most of the things I do. I believe in decentralization. But for this you need groups that have mental capabilities like you.... Which is a problem in our area” (Interview, 2/16/11). The *samiti* did, however, mobilize some angry farmers into one or two protests. In one instance, they blockaded the MWC gates and overturned government vehicles. A few farmers were badly beaten; one had his arm cut open. After this flare up, however, the government made promises, things calmed down, and the *samiti* become inactive. Mahinder explained that he was letting things take their course through the system; many farmers felt that the leaders were “bought off” by being allocated nice JDA plots. Whatever the case, any protest led by the SEZ's chief village beneficiaries was bound to be restricted to their goals (getting their compensation plots) and of limited benefit to the poor and lower-caste villagers who already sold their compensation plots at low prices—through the very brokers organizing the protest. Unsurprisingly, the situation of people like the Bavariyas who were being evicted from village land without compensation, and Nathuram who was facing absolute destitution, were never raised. When I asked Mahinder what would happen to such families, he responded, “Who asked them to build on *panchayat* land in the first place?”

Discontent continues to brew in the villages but the possibility for collective action has receded even farther as the process of real estate speculation and the resulting inequalities have taken their toll on village solidarities. When I asked farmers why they do not start a *sangathan* (organization) to press some of their demands (whether for compensation plots, preferential employment in the SEZ, or the promised village facilities like 24-hour electricity), their common response is that it is impossible because all unity (*ekta*) in the village is gone. While I was hesitant to overstate the prior unity of a caste and class divided village, the observation that “unity” (*ekta*) and “relations” (*rishta*) in the village were dissolved by the SEZ and the process of selling land was incredibly widespread among villagers. Inequalities between castes, within castes, and even within families have multiplied jealousies and feuds. As one farmer described it

at once literally and allegorically, “There is no unity, everyone just makes their own house (*Koi ekta nahi hai. Sab apne apne ghar banate hai*)” (Fieldnotes, 7/10/10). Noting the fracturing of the village’s material interests, one young woman observed, “There should be a protest organization (*sangathan*) but “[some] people got money and aren’t interested” (Fieldnotes, 4/4/10). Sitting with two young Jat farmers in nearby Jatpura, Jagidsh Choudhary explained, “The government has made some tension between the village.” His friend Sanjay confirmed, “relations have become less” (Fieldnotes, 2/22/10). Another lower-caste farmer described it as, “complete animosity” (*bilkul dushmani*). Whatever solidarity may have existed before dispossession for the SEZ is no longer available today.

Many villagers apportion a significant amount of blame for this to the village’s farmer-turned-brokers. There is great anger towards the *dalals*, who are seen as having benefited massively from the SEZ at the expense of their fellow villagers. Phrases such as “the *dalals* looted us,” “sold the village cheaply,” “fooled people,” “ruined us,” “snatched land,” and “took advantage of the common man,” were very common in ordinary conversations, particularly with the poor and lower caste. Of the former village *sarpanch*, “the biggest *dalal* of them all,” Dinesh Raegar expressed a common sentiment: “He cuts people’s throats after robbing their pockets. He completely takes advantage. The *dalals* have benefited, not the farmers” (Fieldnotes 7/16/10). Brokers were seen as guilty of violating social norms of reciprocity and fairness, which was particularly egregious in such a serious matter as people’s land, the ultimate economic asset and source of honor in any village setting. As one youth put it, “They sold off the whole village’s land [to others] . . . and ate commission” (Fieldnotes, 4/8/10). *Dalals* had taken advantage of their fellow villagers for their own enrichment and that of “outsiders” (*baharwalle*) who were now reaping fortunes from their former land.<sup>83</sup>

Such interpretations of the situation were not, of course, accepted by *dalals* themselves. To begin with, most brokers used the English term “property dealer” to refer to themselves rather than the more stigmatized Hindi term *dalal*. In their eyes, they were not mere middlemen or fixers, but legitimate businessmen. While many of them privately admitted to me that they facilitated land sales at “very low prices,” they publicly dismissed the hostility of their fellow villagers as the envy of those who do not work hard and do not know how to get ahead. The licitness of brokerage earnings was thus the subject of a symbolic struggle between brokers who sought to portray their activities as normatively legitimate, and other villagers (especially the “losers” from land sales) who saw them as self-seeking and exploitative.

An exchange at a Rajpura *chai* stall is illustrative. On this particular day, I was sitting with a group of mostly lower-caste farmers who were unanimously criticizing the government for forcibly acquiring the land from them, the SEZ developers for failing to give them employment, and the *dalals* for cheating them when they went to sell their compensation plots. The *dalals*, they said, “take advantage of the common man.” Then a plump farmer named Kalaram Choudhary got out of a new white Maruti-Suzuki car and walked over to the *chai* stall. As he approached, others gave me a sly look, and for my benefit asked him the same question I had been asking them: “Is there loss or benefit because of the SEZ?”

KC: The SEZ is good. There’s excellent work inside it. . . . It’s good for everyone.

Farmer 1: It’s good for him because he gets rent (*kiraya*).

KC: No, it’s good for *everyone*.

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<sup>83</sup> For a similar example of brokers attracting the resentment of those at their mercy, see Wacquant’s (1998: 23) analysis of boxing matchmakers.

Farmer 2: He's a rich man (*paisewalla*). A big man (*bara admi*).

Farmer 1: He's a property dealer.

KC (with raised voice): The SEZ is good for everyone. It's not bad for anyone. Very good work has been gotten.... Hard workers (*mehanat karnewalle*) get work. The rest are sitting here (gesturing to the *chai* stall benches).

Farmer 3: He got money from being a commission agent and selling people's land. Then he used the money to buy a JCB machine and rent it out to Mahindra.

At this point one of the critical farmers turned to me and, in answer to another question I had asked earlier, said, "*These people* don't let us start a protest organization (*sangathan*)" (Fieldnotes, 2/22/10).

What this exchange first of all shows is the simmering and dissimulated class struggle that the SEZ has generated among the *dispossessed*. While the local "winners" from this process tried to morally launder their economic gains as normatively legitimate, these efforts largely failed among the "losers." Nevertheless, the latter were under no illusion that old village norms had any sway and that their griping had any sanctioning power. As the village economy shifted away from agriculture, there was anyway little need for economic cooperation across classes, making compliance with a peasant "moral economy" (Scott 1976, 1985) largely irrelevant for those doing well in the new dispensation. While they might still be sensitive to *chai* stall slander that eroded their symbolic capital, they were now starting to keep different company and had large houses to retreat behind. While village norms were inevitably challenged by the general process of economic change in the village, brokers' alacrity in turning their social relations into capital certainly expedited the process.

As the statement of the last farmer suggests, brokers also helped to prevent collective action among the majority of farmers who felt aggrieved by the SEZ. Not only are many of the brokers "big men" who many villagers do not feel capable of challenging, but the work of these *dalals* has left a trail of bitterness that has undermined any subsequent potential for making collective claims on the SEZ and state government. In what is perhaps the SEZ's biggest victory, the individualized absorption of the dispossessed into the process of real estate speculation has crushed whatever prior solidarity did exist in a caste and class divided village, and eliminated any basis for translating collective grievances about their dispossession into collective action.

In the absence of collective action to mitigate the consequences of dispossession, some of the aggrieved have turned to "everyday forms" (Scott 1985) of *re-possession*. We have seen how the Seini's have prevented JDA officials and police from taking possession of their land, and continue to let their cattle into the disputed field. In several other places, the perimeter fencing around Mahindra's 3000 acres has been torn open and people freely graze their livestock inside. Some people also continue to cultivate their legally acquired land inside the fencing where Mahindra has yet to start any construction. Yet, in a sobering twist to this politics of re-possession, I found that some of those cultivating inside the MWC boundary were actually share-cropping the land of landlords (like Mahinder and Laduram Meena) who no longer possessed title but are still able to expropriate rent from the landless tenants willing to cultivate it. The tenants explained that they did not know anything about these legal technicalities and that if they did not give the landlord his share he would create problems for them. Thus, local relations of domination found their way even into what appears to be an "everyday form" of anti-enclosure resistance. Such everyday resistance anyway promises no more than marginal and temporary resummptions of previous land uses; in dispossession politics, it is an adaptation to defeat not a

recipe for success. As one grazer ruefully observed when I asked him about the hole in the SEZ fencing through which he was leading his goats, “Now they’ll make one out of steel” (Fieldnotes, 7/13/10).

Whether the simmering anger among a significant section of Rajpura will be channeled into further acts of organized opposition remains to be seen. One potentially explosive issue is the SEZ’s plan to eventually block off the main road now connecting the national highway to the village market. If they do carry this through, it would mean much longer commutes for those working outside the village, and create a significant blow to the growing Rajpura market—thus potentially uniting the village’s workers and neo-rentier and mercantile classes. If the *samiti* re-awakens it will most likely be for this, or to push the JDA again to speed up the construction and delivery of the compensation plots to those savvy enough to still own them. Absorption into the game of real estate has fractured people’s interests and effectively kept opposition within the terms of state and capital: i.e. receiving a stake in the commodification made possible by their dispossession. The SEZ expands slowly and Rajpura residents adjust, according to their ability, to the peculiar transformation sweeping through their village.

## Chapter 8. Conclusion: Towards a Sociology of Dispossession

There is growing recognition that the way societies expropriate labor is not the only relevant fact for understanding their socio-political structures and demarcating their axes of class conflict. The ways societies expropriate land and natural resources, and the way they produce space for any given political-economic configuration are no less central; indeed, they are politically explosive in many parts of the Global South today. Spurred by a proliferation of movements and insurgencies against various forms of dispossession and enclosure, scholars are now considering whether the “primitive accumulation” that Marx identified with the dawn of the capitalist era may not in fact be one of its ongoing and constitutive features (Perelman 2000; De Angelis 2001; Hart 2002; RETORT 2005; Arrighi 2007; De Angelis, 2007; Sanyal 2007; Sassen 2010). Harvey’s (2003, 2005) formulation of “accumulation by dispossession” provides a useful and less anachronistic sounding label for the diverse forms of contemporary land dispossession that emanate from, rather than generate transition towards, mature capitalisms. However, with both the scale of dispossession and research on it accelerating at an unprecedented pace, there is a need to cut through the theoretical confusion surrounding these terms and evolve a framework more conducive to comparative research. This dissertation has suggested that a theory of regimes of dispossession could provide a better starting point for a *sociology of dispossession*.

The concept of regimes of dispossession is meant to counter economic theories of dispossession by foregrounding the irreducibly political nature of dispossession as a process. It suggests that the starting point for understanding dispossession is not its *function* in capitalism, but the distinctive *means* of producing various forms of property loss in different contexts.<sup>84</sup> It encourages use to move away from global abstractions about the “logic of capital” to the concrete study of particular relations of dispossession between people in different contexts. At bottom, dispossession is a process through which those with means of coercion force those with some means of production or subsistence (common or private) to relinquish them to others. The study of dispossession should begin here, at the point of enclosure. From this starting point, one can examine the variable economic purposes and class interests driving dispossession in different times and places; how these determine the ability of the state to produce compliance to dispossession; the type of accumulation this ultimately facilitates; and the consequences of all this for the dispossessed. Because dispossession is a political relation of redistribution that is grounded in different class configurations and carried out by states with their own particular means of generating compliance (including context-specific idioms of justification), we should expect it to exhibit incredible heterogeneity. *The inseparability of politics from accumulation ensures this heterogeneity*. So, while beginning with the generic features that define dispossession as a social process in any context, regimes of dispossession leaves flexibility to capture its heterogeneity across time and space. Comparing regimes of dispossession is not only analytically more satisfying than reducing all forms of dispossession to a global logic of capital, but is also politically more empowering; it can help to yield predictions about the relative tenuousness or durability of different regimes and identify the points at which the politics of dispossession might disrupt “accumulation by dispossession.”

This dissertation has tried to demonstrate the fruitfulness of this approach by comparing India’s present neoliberal regime of dispossessing rural land with its developmentalist

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<sup>84</sup> I thank Michael Watts for this formulation.

predecessor. This is not the place to speculate on the applicability of this theory to the dispossession of urban land, or to the dispossession of assets other than land. Rather, in this conclusion I want to focus on how the concept might contribute to the growing literature on rural “land grabs,” and how comparative and historical research might further reconstruct the concept. I focus principally on two axes of comparison: within nation states—including both diachronic and synchronic variation—and across nation states. I conclude with a discussion of what a cumulative understanding of regimes of dispossession might “add up to.”

## REGIMES OF DISPOSSESSION WITHIN NATION STATES

First of all, there is significant room to refine and reconstruct the concept of regimes of dispossession through comparative research within nation states. I will use India as my example, although the research program is easily transposable. There is, to begin with, the need to extend the analysis of regimes of dispossession farther back into time. An obvious omission of this dissertation is a more than cursory analysis of India’s colonial regime of dispossession. Although I suggested that the privatized dispossessions of the colonial and neoliberal periods share some resemblance, there is need to systematically compare the liberal and *neoliberal* periods. This would undoubtedly also sharpen our understanding of the developmentalist interregnum.

Second, there is a need to pay more attention to sub-national variation and consider whether regimes of dispossession should be specified at the level of central or federal states. In general (outside of India), variation in national political structures will dictate this choice of scale, but it may also vary over time. While there is good reason to treat India’s developmentalist regime of dispossession at the national level—as the central government was in charge of industrial policy and overall economic planning—and still good reason to treat the neoliberal regime of dispossession at that level, there is an argument to be made that the decentralization and competition generated by economic liberalization warrants a more disaggregated analysis. Most obviously, the last chapter demonstrated that there is important sub-national variation in the ability of states to produce compliance to dispossession. While some Indian states have moved down the path of material concessions, others continue to rely on coercion to dispossess on the cheap. A very important set of research questions centers around the causes of sub-national differences in the politics of dispossession. This research would look at how different states deploy different means of compliance to facilitate dispossession for different forms of accumulation and how this interacts with regionally specific agrarian structures, political histories and sub-national political alignments to produce different—and differentially successful—political responses to dispossession.

Such an effort must consider important geographical variations in the *sectoral composition of dispossession*. The current work has struggled to determine whether regimes of dispossession are sector-specific or cut across sectors. I believe that one can abstract from specific economic sectors to specify a broader regime of dispossession. This specification is aided by comparison: a new regime is characterized by a significant qualitative shift in the overall character of dispossession. I have argued that the transition to a neoliberal regime of dispossession in India is, above all, evidenced by the increasingly privatized and decreasingly productive nature of the economic purposes driving it. While I believe that this basic transformation in the purposes driving dispossession applies to India as a whole in the last two decades, there is significant variation in the specific sectors driving dispossession in different parts of the country. The most obvious distinction is between the mineral rich forested areas of East-Central India, where dispossession is being driven by mining and extractive industries, and

the peri-urban and coastal plains where dispossession is being driven SEZs, infrastructure, and real estate. A large omission of this dissertation is a more satisfactory analysis of the changing political economy of mining, which is central to the Maoist insurgency that now controls a large swathe of India. While it is plausible to characterize both the dispossession of land for privatized real estate speculation and for privatized natural resource stripping (increasingly de-tethered from national industrialization) as examples of M-D-M', this clearly does not exhaust their characteristics. In this respect, more consideration should surely be given to the particular natural properties of different kinds of landed resources, and how this affects the political economy of their dispossession and commodification (e.g. Watts 2001). This was beyond the scope of this dissertation, but is very worthy of further research and theoretical reflection.

Related to this sectoral variation is the fact that a new regime of dispossession does not neatly supplant the previous one, but rather incorporates and extends it in qualitatively new directions. The fact that Indian states are increasingly acquiring land for privately developed real estate projects does not mean that they have stopped acquiring land for large dams and public-sector industry. This spatial "synchronicity of the non-synchronous" (Ahuja 2009: 38) is reflected in contemporary politics as the movements still resisting Nehruvian-era dams are now joined by those resisting SEZs and real estate projects. This uneven eclipse of one regime of dispossession by another raises a further set of interesting research questions. If this theory of dispossession is right, we should be able to observe some differences in the politics of dispossession between contemporary movements fighting projects that, to be crude, are not quite contemporaneous. Specifically, all things being equal (which they rarely are), we might expect farmers resisting privatized and real estate driven projects to be the most successful (where they cannot be bought off), followed by those resisting privatized industrial projects, followed by those resisting public sector projects of all kinds. Qualitatively, we should see different combinations of means available to the state for producing compliance for each, and also different discursive means available to farmers for articulating their non-compliance. It becomes more complex, however, because it is not just that new sectors of dispossession (real estate and SEZs) have eclipsed old ones (dams and industrial estates); those old sectors have also undergone transformation. While public sector dams continue to be built, they are joined by privatized ones. The present work's focus on the transformation in the way the Indian state dispossesses land for urban-industrial uses must be complemented by more in-depth research on the transformation in the character of dispossession across all sectors since economic liberalization.

Finally, when dispossession is carried through for different sectors in different regions, another set of research questions centers around how these variables shape the ultimate "development" outcome for the dispossessed and for other classes. While it is largely impossible to "control" for all the relevant sources of variation, we want to learn more about how the economic purposes of dispossession, the means of generating compliance (particularly the form of compensation), and pre-existing agrarian structures interact to produce different patterns of agrarian change and developmental outcomes for different classes, castes and genders. These dispossession-induced changes do not look like the more studied patterns of agrarian change generated by the commercialization of agriculture. Studying how different regimes of dispossession, different industries within regimes, or even different projects within the same industry, intersect with diverse pre-existing agrarian structures to produce different development outcomes could absorb the lifetimes of many researchers. Indeed, it already has: what regimes of dispossession might contribute to the already vast literature on "development-induced



displacement” is a way of thinking more explicitly about the political economic causes of variation in its findings.

#### REGIMES OF DISPOSSESSION ACROSS NATION STATES

Then there remains comparing regimes of dispossession across countries. Many of the same questions apply. First, what are the overriding economic purposes for which different states dispossess land? Have all moved towards the dispossession of land for private capital accumulation, or have others restricted land dispossession to government purposes? What are the political economic consequences of this restraint? How does the sectoral composition of dispossession vary in different countries? Judging from existing research and news coverage, it would appear that agriculture and biofuels drive land dispossession in most African and Latin American countries, while in China and India, it is overwhelmingly urban-industrial purposes (Hsing 2010). What accounts for this variation?

Second, what are the consequences of this variation? How do these cross-national differences in the type of accumulation driving dispossession affect their ability to generate compliance? Is it the specific kind of accumulation that is driving dispossession in India and China that is making the “land question” so explosive? Or is it factors such as the scale of dispossession combined with greater population densities and smaller landholdings? How do differences in national political regimes and class structures affect the ability of states to carry out dispossession? Are there significant differences in the way that authoritarian and democratic regimes carry out dispossession? If so, is the difference one of kind or primarily one of relative success in overcoming opposition?

Third, how do the particularities of national regimes of dispossession intersect with distinct agrarian social structures to produce different patterns and consequences of agrarian change? How do differences in the rate of economic growth, its degree of labor-absorption, and the pre-existing educational and social status of the peasantry affect the developmental outcomes and politics of dispossession? What is the consequence of differences in local political ecologies, property forms, and types of land tenure?

These are only a few of the questions that a comparative sociology of dispossession could illuminate. Some of these questions have been pursued in specific contexts for some time, others are just being taken up now, and some await future dissertations. What regimes of dispossession might provide is a conceptual framework for making this existing and future research mutually intelligible in a way that helps to draw out comparative insights. I conclude by considering what these comparative insights might cumulatively become.

#### FROM REGIMES OF DISPOSSESSION TO COMBINED AND UNEVEN DISPOSSESSION?

An objection to this approach to the study of dispossession will surely be that in focusing on domestic regimes of dispossession, one loses sight of the global political economy. This global context is provided by the nature of capitalism as a system and its combined and uneven development across the globe. This is a reasonable objection. The purpose of focusing on domestic regimes of dispossession is not to minimize the significance of political economic processes that operate on a global scale. Its purpose is rather to link those global economic forces to more observable macro and micro processes occurring in different places and times—differences that are indeed very significant for almost everything we should care about, but that are not discernible from the lofty heights of abstraction. It argues that the inescapably *extra-economic* nature of accumulation through dispossession makes it necessary to think in terms of

regimes, and that these regimes must be specified at the level at which the means of coercion are applied. Except in the few remaining cases of true imperialist plunder—Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. (see RETORT 2005)—this remains the nation state or its subunits. Once the immediate political relations of dispossession are established, they can be connected to global political economic forces as they refract through domestic social structures.

These differences are to some extent methodological. All agree that capitalism operates simultaneously on multiple scales; differences arise on where one should begin the analysis. If nation states cared enough to keep data on those they dispossess for economic growth, there would surely be a lot we could learn through macro statistical analysis. If we knew how many people in different regions, states, or countries were dispossessed for different purposes and we could construct a measure of dispossession protests (perhaps coded into various qualitative categories), we might be able to “test” some of the specific arguments about regimes of dispossession advanced here, and surely push the concept forward. Nevertheless, this would still leave the most important questions unanswered: why do people oppose dispossession or not in different times and places? How do states sometimes avert or overcome that opposition? What happens to people when they are dispossessed? How do they feel about it? Dispossession is a social process not a static variable. The concept of regimes of dispossession is built around that recognition, and thus has affinities with the extended case method. It insists that the macro forces of global capitalism play out in macro processes within particular states, and that these macro processes are always simultaneously micro processes in places like Rajpura. If we lose sight of that, then we are liable to continue confusing power for progress and missing the contingency behind claims to necessity.

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