

**Globalization: Theoretical Perspectives**  
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**The Regional Identity Politics of India's New Land Wars: Land, Food and Popular Mobilisation in Goa and West Bengal**

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The regional identity politics  
of India's new land wars: Land, food, and  
popular mobilisation in Goa and  
West Bengal



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Welcome back to the class; and this is the penultimate class for this week and this whole course in which we are trying to look at the questions of popular resistance against government decisions to establish special economic zones. This article is written by Kenneth Bo Nielsen, who has done a lot of work in this field related to development and development related the displacement, and Heather Plumridge Bedi. It's titled the regional identity politics of India's new land wars, land food and popular mobilisation Goa and West Bengal.

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- To attract industrial investments, boost economic growth, and create a world class infrastructure, India passed a new Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act in 2005.
- The initial response from investors was enthusiastic, and by 2016 there was a total of 416 formally approved SEZ projects across India, of which 205 were operational.
- Many of these land transfers have been highly controversial as groups faced with dispossession and displacement organised to put a stop to the state-led expropriation of their land. As a result, India has over the past decade been home to thousands of big or small 'land wars'.



So, what is he trying to say in that? To attract industrial investment, boost economic growth, and create a world-class infrastructure India passed a new economic zone act in 2005. And we know that now these acts have been quite popular, and the investors' initial response was enthusiastic. By 2016 there were 416 formally approved SEZ projects across India, of which 205 were operational, and numbers must have gone up by now.

And you must have seen that there are similar kinds of spaces or places which are de-marketed, how come up in almost every state in India. And that special economic zone is declared by the laws and acted by the state and state governments. They make doing business much more accessible in this area, liberalise many rules and regulations, and ensure basic infrastructural facilities.

And one of the significant promises of establishing this land in this particular policy is that this entire geographical area is made available, its land is made available to a prospective company, or it is declared as special economic zones in which different companies can come and then set up their industries and there another kind of activities. So, they were seen as a significant impetus for industrialisation, investment, and attracting foreign direct investments and other stuff.

Many of these land transfers have been highly controversial as groups faced with disposition and displacement organised to stop the state level exploitation of their land state-led exploitation of

their land. As a result, India has been home to thousands of big or small land wars over the past decade. And is the term that they have become a kind of quite popular in academic circles, so this land war refers to the type of attempt by the state to take over the land of people by paying compensation and the people resisting that people saying that we do not want to be dispossessed of this land, we do not want to leave this particular land. Your compensation is inadequate, your promises have been hollow, and we do not want to part with the ground.

And that goes on for some time and many times through coercive activities through even using brute force many times by using police the state government forcibly acquires the land. And what happens to these people who are displaced forcibly? It is a very bleak picture, there is quite a lot of literature on that about forceful displacement and people who are substituted for the sake of developmental activities and their plight how been quite miserable.

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- There is academic writing on broader critique of India's current regime of dispossession that sees the control of land gradually move into the hands of the corporate sector and real estate developers. Alongside this literature, another strand that has focused on the mobilising identities that anti-dispossession activists have sought to tap into as they work to build a larger, public support base.
- Exploring how land, and its produce, are mobilized in anti-dispossession campaigns in the Indian states of Goa and West Bengal.



There is academic writing on the broader critique of India's current regimes of disposition that sees the control of land gradually move into the hands of the corporate sector and the real estate developers. And this is something that we are witnessing throughout the ground throughout the country. The agricultural land is being converted into real estate properties; the land value goes relatively high; the farmers find it much more profitable to sell off the ground in many places.

And in many other places where they do not want to sell and continue to cultivate their land are being forcibly evicted, whether in the form of special economic zones or the state of dams or the

state of highways, if you open the newspaper and any part of the country, you will see a similar kind of stories coming up alongside this literature, another strand has focused on the mobilising identities that anti disposition activists have sorted of tapping into as they work to build a more extensive public support base.

So, these attempts are to acquire land has been met with very stiff resistance in many places I was telling you, whether it is farmers or other people many local communities do not want to part their land with, they know that the compensation that the government is providing, may not be adequate, it may not be sufficient and more or less than liquid money will be lost very soon and a host of other things.

So, they come together, spike alliances with other people, and try to put up a resistance. It is essential to look at what kind of idioms and slogans, what kind of images, what sort of imageries are used in this anti dispossession movement, and why these symbols are essential? And in the previous lecture, we saw how framing takes place in advertising a particular land for tourism purposes.

So, similarly, every social movement has this particular kind of framing; they frame their demands through certain specific languages and prepare their right over the land by evoking certain types of symbols, ideologies, and sentiments. And that is something significant for us to understand that.

So, Kenneth Nelson and his co-author are examining how land and its production are mobilised in anti-dispossession campaigns in the Indian state of Goa and West Bengal. So, this is a study based on empirical data, so they look at two incidents in West Bengal and the kind of general opposition against SEZ and other things in Goa. So, they are looking at how land and its produce are mobilised in anti-disposition campaigns.

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- The SEZ as 'new enclosure movement' and as evidence that advanced global capitalism has decisively moved from a phase of expanded reproduction to one of accumulation by dispossession, a process in which the Indian state is crucially involved. The basic claim is, that land is being taken from the poor, for the rich, with the collusion of the state.
- Stiff resistance from various communities by invoking diverse identities- tribal, dalit, indigenous etc.
- Social movement scholars approach such identity appeals through the prism of 'framing' to bring out how the strategic deployment of particular symbols and identities contributes to mobilising potential adherents and constituents; reinforce particular identities; garner bystander support; and affect 'changes in hearts and minds'.



So, the SEZ has the new enclosure movement. As evidence that advanced global capitalism has decisively moved from a face of expanded reproduction at accumulation by dispossession, a process in which the Indian state is crucially involved, the primary claim is that land is being taken from the poor for the rich with the cooperation of the state. So, this particular term is significant, accumulation by dispossession; there is a lot of interesting literature on how capitalism expands in this late capitalistic field.

Capitalistic, you know, face, is not through expansion, or it is not again through intensification of the production process. Still, mainly through the accumulation by dispossession, you disperse people off their land and then utilise them to increase your profitability. So, the primary claim is that land is being taken over from the poor for the rich with the cooperation of the state. And this is a grave allegation seriously charged because the state is not supposed to do that because this is seen as something so basically against the whole notions of justice. Still, the scholars and activists argue that this is what exactly the state is doing, the state is de-notifying, notifying certain areas as industrial land or areas earmarked for SEZ or some sure other industrial thing and then brings in low or brings in policy decisions are to asking the people to leave by taking some compensation.

And this land moves into the hands of wealthy companies or organisations and multinational companies. And so, it also has raised stiff resistance from various communities by invoking


diverse identities, whether it is tribal or Dalit or indigenous identities and other things. Again, you know that hundreds of similar struggles are currently happening in India, so you can look at how they invoke tribal identity Dalit identity indigenous identity in host follow things.

So, social movement scholars approach such identity appeals through the prism of the frame; we have seen this term framing in the previous class as well, but to bring out how the strategic deployment of particular symbols and identities contribute to the mobilising of potential adherents and constituents, reinforced distinct identities, garner bystander support and effect changes in hearts and minds.


So, how do different people involve in movements? What kind of symbols do they use? What kind of stories do they tell? How do they try to garner the support of the bystanders or the wider society? In any place, the affected people would be limited, and no struggle can be successful if only they are concerned and only fighting against the state.

Any movement requests more comprehensive public support, broader popular support, and only when the campaign will be successful if it will all become successful. So, to appeal to the broader public, to appeal to the state, to stake plane, a host of imagination symbols, language, emotions, and these people utilise other things.

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- how the Goa and West Bengal anti-dispossession movements sought to frame their campaigns by appealing to broader, more inclusive regional identities that promised to transcend questions of tribe, caste, or clan. They have done so, we argue, largely through the symbolic evocation of land and food as key identity markers.
- The Singur agitation against TATA car company in 2006.
- Nandigram agitation in 2007 where several people were killed in police firing.
- In activist discourse, the industrial projects planned for both Singur and Nandigram were framed as the displacement of "peasants" that is, as causing the displacement of rural people earning a living as small farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers, and others who 'still identify with farming as their primary form of identity and occupation'



So, how the Goa and West Bengal anti-disposition movements sought to frame their campaign by appealing to broader, more inclusive identities that promised transcend Tribe cast and clan

questions. So, this is the specific argument of this article by Nielsen and Dev. So, there is quite a lot of literature that talks about how the particular identity of the indignity of tribe or Dalit or being invoked, but here they are talking about two processes in two places where the people are using much broader categories to address much larger constituents. They have done so; we argue mainly through the symbolic evocation of land and food as crucial identity markers.

So, land and food are usually its they are not kind associated with such a variety of symbols. Still, here in their empirical studies in Goa and West Bengal, the author identifies the use of land and food as two key identity markers. And the two examples that the authors examine are the Singur agitation against Tata motors in 2006; we all know that these two hesitations played a vital role in reducing the popularity of the communist party of India Marxist and overthrowing their government with by that of Trinamool Congress led by Mamata Banerjee.

So, the Singur, a very fertile area, was earmarked for Tata Motors to start their new plant, especially the Tata that a Nano was supposed to be built there and there were people. There was a massive protest because people were not consulted, and finally, Tata had to remove their plant from there. And similarly, in Nandigram in 2007, there was a significant agitation by the people against the declaration of their SEZ, and for some time, they could say they were even victorious. They could push back the police and government officials and then declare it a liberated Zone.

But later, police came back, and there was a firing, and the official figure of death is around 20, but people say that more than 50 people have been killed in the police firing. So, that created a massive uproar across the country, not only in West Bengal but across the country, against us insensitivity of the state, against the high handedness of the state, against the cooperation of a communist party with that of the multinational companies and other stuff.

So, the others are looking at the usage of or the use of this framing in these two examples. In activist discourse, the industrial project plan for both Singur and Nandigram were framed as the displacement of peasants that is as causing the displacement of rural people earning a livelihood as small farmer's, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and others who still identify with farming as their primary form of identity and occupation. So, agriculture was the per cent of the farmers. This particular term was presented as the catchword to bring everybody around this specific issue of a Singur and the Nandigram.

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- The images of 'the peasant', 'the village', and 'the land' that are visible in the representations invoke, in the popular imagination, powerful images of Sonar Bangla, a 'Golden Bengal' of fields of plenty. The idea of Sonar Bangla has its roots in the anti-colonial struggle and 'conveys to the mind the image of a rich fertile and prosperous land inhabited by a peaceful agrarian community, living in harmony with its pastoral surroundings'.
- In popular representations of both land wars, the trope of 'the land' as mother, and of motherhood more broadly, figured prominently. 'The village' was, in the romantic nationalist imagination, part of a gendered chain of signification that linked the pastoralised landscape of rural Bengal to the sacred motherland of the Bengali nation, iconised by the figure of the idealised mother.



The image of the peasant, the village, and the land that were visible in the representation invoke in the popular imagination powerful images of Sonar Bangla, a golden Bengal of the field of plenty, so through this use of farmer of the land of the area what they successfully invoked was the image of a Sonar Bangla or the golden Bengal, which is a rich imagination among the ordinary Bengalis.


So, it is not only the people who could connect with the affected people, but then ordinary Bengali could connect with this imagination of a Sonar Bangla and imagination of much older kind of a story. The idea of Sonar Bangla has its root in the anti-colonial struggle. It conveys to the mind the images of a rich fertile, and prosperous land inhabited by a peaceful, agrarian community living in harmony with its pastoral surroundings.

So, this particular notion goes back to the colonial period; it was a critical imagination used by many literary figures like Tagore and others. So, this is a compelling image that this activist used in these two places. In popular representation of both land wars, the top as mother and motherhood more broadly figured prominently. Yet, another trope cultural trope that was used to equate these two lands as that of mother, the village was in the romantic nationalist imagination part of a gendered chain of significations, the link the pastoralist landscape of rural Bengal to the sacred motherland of the Bengali nation iconised by the figures of the idealised mother.

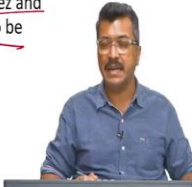



So, there was a historically constructed figure of the rural land as that of a mother that is equated with the motherland of Bengal, so these imaginations are very powerful, they are deeply entrenched in the collective psyche of the Bengalis through literature, through films, through short stories through, you know through novels, through popular myths, this idea something compelling and the protesters try to make use of that.

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- By mobilising the symbolism of land and food to tap into the potent imagery of Sonar Bangla, the Singur and Nandigram land wars could connect with a sympathetic and very influential urban intellectual elite who want 'the Sonar Bangla of Tagore be preserved and protected'.
- Agitations against SEZs in Goa began in 2007, following the passage of national and state-level SEZ legislation.
- The anti-SEZ resistance in Goa may be characterised as a struggle of self-defined 'average citizens' to defend land, assert identity, and challenge perceived government corruption and irregularities in land matters.
- The key organising tropes prominently represented by references to Goan pez, a rice gruel staple food, and to 'Goan identity'. In the context of Goa, pez and Goan identity allude to familiar ideas and resources that are claimed to be shared by all Goans, seemingly across class and religious divisions.



And by mobilising the symbolism of land and food to tap into the potent imagery of Sonar Bangla, the Singur and Nandigram land could connect with a sympathetic and very influential Urban intellectual elite who wanted the Sonar Bangla of Tagore to be preserved and protected. So, that is what I was mentioning. Even though these were kind of localised issues in Singur and Nandigram, they were able to mobilise the support of the city dollars successfully, the upper-middle class or the upper class or the intellectuals in cities like Kolkata or in across the globe to come in support of their land because they were seen as people who are trying to safeguard some of the critical symbols of Bengali culture, the idea of Sonar Bangla and others.

So, and when you come to the scenery of Goa, agitations against SEZs in Goa begin in 2007 following the passage of national anti-national and state-level SEZ legislation. So, they are not looking at one or two singular instances, but Goa's agitations are so rampant that the others have looked into several cases.

The anti-SEZ resistance in Goa may be characterised as a struggle of the self-defined average citizens to defend land asset identity and challenge perceived government corruption and irregularities in the land matters. So, in Goa, this resistance movement was presented as a movement to safeguard the interest of an average citizen; he need not be a farmer but an average citizen who has their every right to live peacefully in his own or her land.

Goa prominently represents the critical organisation tropes of Mez rice gruel staple food and Goan identity. So, they were very successfully able to invoke the image of this rice gruel, which, you know. Still, all of us are familiar with which is known in different names, so this rice gruel, which is ordinary food, the staple food of most rural India, so they were able to invoke that especially in South India. In the context of Goa Mez and Goan, identity alludes to familiar ideas and resources claimed to be shared by all Goans, seemingly across class and religious divisions.

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- The foregrounding of Goan identity as centred around agriculture, fish and music.
- Both in West Bengal and Goa, movement activists and supporters worked to emphasise particular discourses, symbols and identities to encourage solidarity internally, and to mobilise the sympathy of a larger public. As social movement scholars have long argued, such attempts to construct identities reflect efforts to assign meanings to 'the struggle', and to connect it to broader social processes.
- What is of interest here is how movement organisers, who articulate the discursive space of opposition, have more specifically presented and projected the movement's distinct regional identities by invoking land and food as salient regional identity markers.



So, as I mentioned, this particular food that is the gruel rice gruel is a staple food for almost everybody, everybody's familiar with that, so cutting across the class divisions, cutting across the caste divisions, these people were able to present this as a symbol of a unity that combines people from across the state. The foregrounding of Goan identity is centred around agriculture, fish and music.

In West Bengal and the Goa movement, activists and supporters work to sympathise, so we emphasise particular discourses, symbols, and identities to encourage solidarity internally and

mobilise a large public's sympathy. So, one of the essential requirements is to find a slogan so that your internal solidarity is intact; you must be able to develop a language through which you will combine everybody who is directly affected into a particular group.

And the second essential requirement is to raise public support from external people. As social movement scholars have long argued, such attempts to construct identities reflect efforts to assign meaning to the struggle and connect to the broader social processes. So, no isolated movements of ever succeeded. So, you need to devise measures and means to communicate with the larger population, communicate through mutually intelligible language, and be seen as standing for a more extensive course.

So, even people who are not directly affected by this particular project field and necessary to support and that is how every significant social movement are succeeded across the globe. So, what is of interest here is how movement organises? Who articulate the discursive spaces of opposition? How most specifically presented and projected the trends distinct regional identities by invoking land and food as salient regional identity markers. So, this is what the authors claim is the very significant contribution of this paper. They are talking about how these movements invoked the significance of regional identity in this whole process.

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- Organising opposition in both geographies thus involved creating connections and forging solidarity across disparate actors at the regional scale. Idealised and distinctly regional visions of land, food, identities, and belonging generated the visual and sensory means for people to feel connected to their place, thus underscoring the place-specific orientation of identity formation in social movement campaigns and symbolic vocabularies. Place specific processes and organising potentials mediate these identities and shape movement agency.
- 'The primacy of the local' in India's new land wars, that is, their inflection by specific and distinctive regional identities and concerns.



So, the organising opposition in both geographies does involve creating connections and forging solidarity across desperate actions actors at the regional scale, idealised and distinctly regional visions of land food identities and belonging generated the visual and sensory means for people to feel connected to their place, thus underscoring the site-specific orientation of identity formation in social movement campaigns and symbolic vocabularies. Place specific processes and organising pretentious mediate these identities and shape movement agency; this is a fundamental argument.

And we are coming back to the notion of place-specific because we have had elaborate discussions about whether globalisation makes this place a since significant and irrelevant or its only flows as per se castles we were told that businesses are losing their significance and spaces are becoming more essential and not even spaces it's becoming the flows of areas becoming critical, so these studies argue that globalisation also happens through specific places.

Places regain their relevance or relevance of sites geographical locations situated areas are reimagined and maybe recrystallised at the time of such kind of movements; it is not that you know the regional identities regional you know specificity is. The regional context is becoming relevant in a globalised world that is not happening.

So, here it is an exciting paper, why I decided to include in this discussion is to show how the global expansion of capitalism global flow of foreign direct investors of foreign capital is

successfully challenged, at least in many places, by evoking particular local language, particular imaginations of the local. So, this is the kind of relevance of this specific paper.

The importance of the locals in India's new land was that is their inflexion by specific and distinctive regional identities are a concern. So, the core argument of this particular paper is how the local emerged as a prominent figure in this whole movement to fight the transformational for capital are a global expansion of the capitalist system.

So, let us conclude here, and that means this is the final session where we discuss certain academic themes specific themes related to the course and we are left with the one more session that we will that will be the kind of a concluding session for the system which I will meet you for which I will meet you in the next class. Thank you.